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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
ST. JOHN'S EVE

There was quite a bustle at Budua, because Janko Markovic and Milos Bellacic had just come back from Cattaro that very morning, and – what was really surprising – they were both getting shaved.

Now, it has always been a most uncommon occurrence amongst us for a man to get shaved on a Friday.

Mind, I do not mean to say that I consider this operation as being in any way unlucky if performed on that day. We, of course, cut our hair during the new moon; but there is no special time for shaving. Cutting one's nails on a Saturday brings on illnesses, as we all know; and I, without being superstitious, can name you lots of people who fell ill simply out of disregard to the wisdom of their elders. Nay, I myself once suffered a dreadful toothache for having thoughtlessly pared my nails on the last Saturday of the year.

Shaving on Saturday, however, cannot be considered as harmful either to the body or to the soul. Still, as we all go to the

barber's once a week, on Sunday morning, it has hitherto been regarded as part of our dominical duties.

There was, therefore, some particular reason that made these prominent citizens shave on a Friday; could the reason be another change in the Government?

Quite a little crowd had gathered, by ones and by twos, round the hairdresser's shop; some were standing, others sitting, some smoking, others eating dried melon seeds – all were gravely looking at the barber, who was holding Bellacic by the tip of his nose and was scraping his cheek with a razor which kept making a sharp, stridulous noise as it cut down the crisp, wiry stubble hair of almost a week's growth. Then the shaver left the nose, for, as a tuft of hair in a hollow spot under the cheek-bone was renitent to the steel blade, he poked his thumb in his customer's mouth, swelled out the sunken spot and cleaned it beautifully. He was a real artist, who took a pride in doing his work neatly. He then wiped the ends on his finger, cast the soap to the ground with a jerk and a snap, then he rubbed his hand on the head of an urchin standing by.

The barber, who was as inquisitive and as loquacious as all the Figaros of larger towns, had tried craftily and with many an ambage to get at the information we were all so anxious to know; but nothing seemed to induce our clients to speak.

"I suppose," said he, with a pleasant smile, "I'll soon have new customers to shave?"

"Yes? Who?" quoth Markovic.

"Why, your sons, Uros and Milenko."

"No, not yet; they'll not be back before some months."

All conjectures and guesses, all suppositions and surmises were at last at an end. The barber, although he had been a long time about it, had finished shaving Bellacic; Markovic was now sitting down with the towel tied round his neck.

"This afternoon we start for Cettinje," said Bellacic, wiping himself.

An "Ah!" of satisfaction and expectation was followed by a moment of breathless silence. The barber stopped soaping his client's face and turned to look at Bellacic.

"On a diplomatic mission, of course?" he asked, in a hollow whisper.

"On a diplomatic mission."

"To the Vladika, eh?"

Everyone looked significantly at his neighbor, some twisted their long moustaches, others instinctively lifted their hands to the hafts of their knives. They all seemed to say: "It is what we have been suspecting from the very beginning. Montenegro will take back Cattaro and Budua." Thereupon every face brightened.

It was natural to surmise such a thing in those times, inasmuch as in the course of a few years we had been shifting from hand to hand. The French had taken us from the Venetians; then we became Russians; the English drove the Cossacks away, and gave us over to the Austrians, our present masters.

"Of course, nobody goes to Cettinje without doing homage to

the Vladika. Still, our mission is not to the Prince."

We all looked at Bellacic and at Markovic in blank astonishment.

"You might as well tell them," said one of the friends to the other.

"Besides, it is a thing that all the town will know in a few days."

"Well," quoth Markovic, "our mission is not a political one. We are deputed by Radonic – "

"By Radonic?" interrupted the shaver. "But he is not in Budua."

"No, he is at Perasto with his ship. We saw him at Cattaro."

"Well?"

"And he is going to get married."

"Married?"

"But he is too old," said a youth, without thinking.

"We have only the age we look," retorted an elderly man, snappishly.

"Well, but Radonic looks old," answered the young man.

"But to whom is he going to be married?"

"To Milena."

"What! Milena Zwillievic?"

"Exactly; to the prettiest girl of Montenegro!"

Many a young face fell, more than one brow grew cloudy, and a bright eye got dim.

"It is an impossible marriage," said someone.

"A rich husband, a horned bull," quoth another.

"But he is much older than she is."

"We marry our sons when we like, and our daughters when we can," added Figaro, sententiously.

"Still, how could Zwillievic consent to take for his son-in-law a man as old as himself?"

"A hero of the *Kolo*."

"And yet Zwillievic is a man with a gold head, a wise man."

"Yes, but he has also gold hands," replied Markovic.

"He did not follow the proverb – " added Bellacic, "'Consult your purse, then buy.' His passion for arms ruined him; debts must be paid."

"We were once on board the same ship with Radonic," said one of the friends; "so he asked me to be the *Stari-Svat*."

"And I," added the other, "as Zwillievic is a kinsman of mine, I must be *voivoda*."

"Ah, poor Milena! the year will be a black one to her."

"After all, she'll henceforth be able to sit in flour."

"And we all have our Black Fridays."

By this time Markovic had been shaved, the two friends wended their way homewards, and the crowd dispersed.

"And now," you evidently ask, "who is this Milos Bellacic and his friend, Janko Markovic?"

Two well-to-do citizens of Budua, the last of all Austrian towns, two*gospodje*, but, unlike most of the Buduans and the other Dalmatians, they were real Iugo-Slavs, Illyrians of the great Serbian stock.

As children they had clung to one another on account of the friendship that existed between their fathers; as they grew older this feeling, of almost kinship, was strengthened by the many trials they had to undergo in common, for Fate seemed to have spun their lives out of the selfsame yarn. At fourteen they had left home, on a schooner bound for distant coasts; later, they got shipwrecked, and swam – or rather they were washed – ashore, clinging to the same plank. Thus they suffered cold, hunger, "the whips and scorns of time" together.

From America, where they had been cast by the waves, they worked their way to Trieste, hoping from thence to return to their native place, ever dear to their hearts. This ill wind, so fatal, not only to the ship, but to the remainder of the crew, proved to be the young men's fortune. Trieste was, at the time, in the very beginning of its mushroom growth, before that host of adventurers had flocked thither from every part of the world with the hopes of making money.

It is not to be wondered that, after the hard life these young men had undergone, they understood the full strength of the Italian proverb – "Praise the sea, but keep to the shore." Sober and hard-working as they were, they made up their minds to try and acquire by trade what they could hardly get by a rough seafaring life – their daily bread and a little money for their old age.

Strongly built, they started life as porters. Like beasts of burden, they were harnessed to a cart the whole of the long

summer days, or else they helped to unload the ships that came in port.

Having managed to scrape a little money together, they began to trade on their own account. They imported from Dalmatia, wine, sardines, carobs, and *castradina*, or smoked mutton; they exported cotton goods. They got to be shareholders, and then owners, of a bark, a*trabacolo*. The times were good; there was, as yet, little or no competition; therefore money begot money, and, though they could neither read nor write, still they soon found themselves the owners of a sum of money which – to them – was unlimited wealth. Had they remained in Trieste, they might have got to be millionaires, but they loved their birthplace even more than they did riches.

Once again in Budua, they added a good many acres of vineyards and of olive-trees to their paternal farms, and, from that time, they lived there in all the contentment this world can afford. They married, but, strange to say, they were not blessed with many children; each of them had only one son. Janko's son was, after his friend, named Milenko; the other infant was christened Uros.

These two children are the *pobratim* of our story.

"But what is the meaning of this strange word?" you ask.

Have but a little patience, and it will be explained to you in due time.

Uros and Milenko had inherited with their blood that friendship which had bound their fathers and forefathers before

them. As children, they belonged to either mother, and they often slept together in the same trough-like cradle scooped out of the trunk of a tree; they ate out of the same *zdila*– the huge wooden porringer which served the family as table dish and plates; they drank out of the same *bukara*, or wooden bottle, for, being rich and having vineyards of their own, wine was never wanting at their meals.

At fourteen they, like their fathers, went off to sea, for lads must know something of the world. Happily, however, they both came back to Budua after a cruise of some months. Though they met with many squalls, still they never came to any grief.

As a rule they staid away cruising about the Adriatic and the Levant from November to the month of August; but when the harvest-time drew nigh, they returned home, where hands were wanted to reap and garner such fruits as the rich soil had yielded. After the vintage was over and the olives gathered, the earth was left bare; then they set off with the swallows, though not always for warmer climes. It was the time when sudden gales blow fiercely, when the crested waves begin to roll and the sea is most stormy.

A few months after that memorable Friday upon which Bellacic and Markovic had got shaved, exciting thereby everybody's astonishment, they themselves were surprised to see their sons return unexpectedly. The fact was that, upon reaching Cattaro, the ship on which they had embarked was sold and all the crew were paid off. As they did not think it worth their while

to look for another ship, they seized this opportunity to go and spend the 24th of May at home, for St. John's is "the maddest, merriest day of all the glad New Year." Moreover, they were lucky, for the year before had been a plentiful one, whilst the new crops promised, even now, to make the *pojata* groan under their weight; for whilst an empty and a scanty larder can afford but a sorry welcome, a hospitable man becomes even lavish when his casks are full of wine, his bins are heaped with corn, his jars overflow with oil; when, added to this, there is a prospect of more.

Uros and Milenko had but just arrived home when a little boy – the youngest son of a wealthy neighbour, whose name's day was on the morrow – appeared on the threshold of their door, and, taking off his little cap demurely, said, in a solemn voice:

"Yours is the house of God. My father greets you, and asks you to come and drink a glass of wine with him. We'll chat to while away the evening hours, and we'll not withhold from you the good things St. John, our patron saint, has sent us."

Having recited his invitation, the little herald bowed and went off to bear his message elsewhere.

The family, who knew that this invitation was forthcoming, set off at once for their friend's house. Upon reaching the gate of their host's garden, all the men fired off their pistols as a sign of joy, amongst the shouts of "*Zivio*"; then, upon entering, they went up to the*Starescina*, the master of the house, and wished him, in God's name, many happy returns of the day.

A goodly crowd of people had now gathered together, all bent upon merry-making, and a fine evening they had of it; though, according to the old men, this was but moping compared to the festivities they had been used to in their youth. Then, hosts and guests being jolly together, they quite forgot that time had wings, and eight days would sometimes pass before anybody thought of leave-taking.

On that mystic evening almost all the amusements had an allegorical or weird character. In every game there was an attempt at divination. Thus the first one that was played consisted in throwing a garland amidst the branches of a tree. If it remained caught at the first throw, the owner was to get married during the year; if not, the number of times the wreath was tossed upwards corresponded with as many years of patient waiting. It was considered a bad omen if the garland came to pieces.

When Uros threw his chaplet of flowers up it came at once down again, bringing an old wreath that the wind and the winter storms had respected.

"Why," said the *Starescina*, turning to Milena, who had come to witness the game, "surely it is your husband's wreath!"

"Yes, I remember," added Markovic; "last year Radonic was with us, and his garland remained in the tree the first time he flung it up."

"Oh, Uros, fie! you'll bring Radonic ill-luck yet."

Uros turned round, and his eyes met those of Milena for the first time. Both blushed. There were a few moments of awkward

silence, and then the young man, touching his cap, said:

"I am sorry, *gospa*, but, of course, I did not do it on purpose."

"No, surely not, and, besides, it had to come down sooner or later."

He tossed his wreath up again, but whether he felt nervous because he had been laughed at, or because the beautiful eyes of the young Montenegrine woman paralysed his arm, he felt himself so clumsy and awkward that he tossed up his garland several times, but he only succeeded to batter it as it came down again.

"Just let me try once," said Milenko to his friend, as he cast his wreath up in the branches of the tree, where it nestled.

Uros made another attempt; down came his garland, bringing his friend's together with it, amid the general laughter.

"Uros is like the dog in the manger," said one of the bystanders; "he will not marry, nor does he wish other people to do so."

"Bad luck and a bad omen!" whispered an old crony to Milenko. "Beware of your friend; nor, if I were Radonic, should I trust my pretty wife with him. Bad luck and a bad omen!"

After garland throwing, huge bonfires were kindled, and the surrounding mountains gleamed with many lights. It was, indeed, a fine sight to see the high, heaven-kissing flames reflected by the dark waters of the blue Adriatic.

But of all the bonfires in the neighbourhood, the *Starescina*'s was the biggest, for he was one of the richest men of the town.

It was thus no easy matter to jump scathless over it. Still, young and old did manage to do so, either when the flames – chasing one another – leapt up to the sky, or else when the fire began to burn low. The stillness of the night was interrupted by prolonged shouts of "*Zivio!*" repeated again and again by the echoes of the neighbouring mountains; but amidst the shouting of "Long life!" you could hear the hooting of some owl scared by this unusual glimmering light, and every now and then the shrill cry of some witch or some other ghostly wanderer of the night, and the suppressed groaning and gnashing of teeth of evil spirits, disappointed to think that so many sturdy lads and winsome lassies should escape their clutches for a whole year; for they have no power against all those who jump over these hallowed bonfires on the eve of the mystic saint's day.

"There, did you hear?" said one of the young girls, shuddering.

Thereupon we all crossed ourselves devoutly.

"It is better not to think of them, they cannot come near us," said the *Starescina*.

"It is not long ago that we saw three witches burnt at Zavojane. When was it, Bellacic?"

"It was in 1823, in the month of August, on the 3rd, if I remember rightly."

"Oh! then they were real witches?"

"Of course."

"Were they very ugly? Had they beards?"

"Oh, no! they were very much like all the other elderly women

of the place."

"And what had they done?"

"No end of mischief. One of them had eaten a child alive. Another had taken a young man's heart out of his body whilst he was asleep. He, on awaking – not knowing what had happened to him – felt a great void in his chest."

"Poor fellow!" said Milena, compassionately, whilst her glances fell on Uros, and he actually felt like the young man who had lost his heart.

"But what was she going to do with it?"

"Why, roast and eat it."

"A friar who had witnessed the whole thing, but who had been deprived of all power of rendering assistance, accused her of witchcraft, and she was made to give back the heart before she had had time to devour it."

"How wonderful!"

"The third had rendered all the balls of the guns aimless, and all weapons blunt and useless. But these are only some of the many evils they had done."

"And you saw them burnt?"

"Yes, in the presence of the Catholic parish priest, two friars and all the local authorities."

The bonfires were now over, and nothing but the glowing embers remained. All then went in the house to partake of the many good things that St. John, or his namesake, had prepared for them.

There was for supper: first, whole lambs, roasted on the spit, then fish, *castradina*, and many other dishes, all more or less stuffed with garlic – a condiment which never fails anywhere. It is said that the gods, having been asked if this bulb was to rank amongst eatables, decreed that no dish should ever remain without it; and the Slavs have faithfully followed out their decree.

When all had eaten till they were crop full, and had drunk their fill, they all raught after their meat as seemly as Madame Eglentine; then, loosening their belts, they remained seated on their stools, or squatted on the ground, chatting, punning, telling anecdotes, or listening to the grave discourses of the old men about St. John.

"Fancy," said a deacon of a neighbouring church, "when we have fasted for a day or two, we think we have done much. St. John, instead, fasted for forty days and forty nights, without even taking a sip of water."

"But why did he fast so long?"

"Because he had committed a great sin; and on account of this sin he always walked with his head bent down. When the people said to him, 'John, why do you not lift up your head?' he always replied demurely, 'Because I am not worthy to lift up my eyes heavenwards; and I shall only do so when an infant, that cannot yet speak, will bid me do it.' Now, it happened that one day John met a young woman carrying a little child, and when the infant saw John, he said: 'John, lift up thine eyes heavenward; my Father has forgiven thee.' The saint, in great joy, knowing that the babe

was Jesus Christ, went at once home; and with a red-hot iron he burnt the initials of the Saviour on his side, so that he might never forget his name."

"And now let's have a story," said the host.

As Milos Bellacic was noted for his skill in relating a good story, he was asked by everybody to tell them one of his very best tales.

Being a man who had travelled, he knew how to treat women with more deference than the remainder of the Buduans. So turning towards his host's wife:

"Which will you have?" said he.

"Any one you like."

"'Hussein and Ayesha'?"

"No," said some. "Yes," added the others, without waiting for the lady of the house to have her choice.

"Then 'The Death of Fair Jurecevic's Lovers'?"

"No, that was an old story."

"Perhaps, 'The Loves of Adelin the Turk and Mary the Christian'?"

"They all knew it."

"Or, 'Marko Kraglievic and the Vila'?"

"No, leave Marko to the *guzlari*."

"Well, then, it must be 'The Story of Jella and the Macic.'"

"Oh!" said the *gospodina*, "I once heard it in my childhood, and now I only remember its name. Still, I have always had a longing to hear it again; therefore, do tell it."

Milos Bellacic swallowed another glass of *slivovitz*, leaving, however, a few drops at the bottom of his glass, which he spilt on the floor as a compliment to the *Starescina*, showing thereby that in his house there was not only enough and to spare, but even to be wasted. He then took a long pull at the amber mouthpiece of his long Marasca cherry pipe, let the smoke rise quietly and curl about his nose, and, after clearing his throat, began as follows:

THE STORY OF JELLA AND THE MACIC

Once upon a time there lived in a village of Crivoscie an old man and his wife; they had one fair daughter and no more. This girl was beyond all doubt the prettiest maiden of the place. She was as beautiful as the rising sun, or the new moon, or as a *Vila*; so nothing more need be said about her good looks. All the young men of the village and of the neighbouring country were madly in love with her, though she never gave them the slightest encouragement.

Being now of a marriageable age, she was, of course, asked to every festivity. Still, being very demure, she would not go anywhere, as neither her father nor her mother, who were a sullen couple of stingy, covetous old fogeys, would accompany her.

At last her parents, fearing lest she might remain an old maid, and be a thorn rather than a comfort to them, insisted upon her being a little more sociable, and go out of an evening like the other girls. "Moreover, if some rich young man comes courting

you, be civil to him," said the mother. "For there are still fools who will marry a girl for her pretty face," quoth the father. It was, therefore, decided that the very next time some neighbours gathered together to make merry, Jella should take part in the festivity. "For how was she ever to find the husband of her choice if she always remained shut up at home?" said the mother.

Soon afterwards, a feast in honour of some saint or other happened to be given at the house of one of their wealthy neighbours, so Jella decked herself out in her finest dress and went. She was really beautiful that evening, for she wore a gown of white wool, all embroidered in front with a wreath of gay flowers, then an over-dress of the same material, the sleeves of which were likewise richly stitched in silks of many colours. Her belt was of some costly Byzantine stuff, all purfled with gold threads. On her head she wore a red cap, the headgear of the young Crivosciane.

As she entered the room, all the young men flocked around her to invite her to dance the *Kolo* with them, and to whisper all kinds of pretty things to her. But she, blushing, refused them all, declaring that she would not dance, elbowed her way to a corner of the room, where she sat down quite alone. All the young men soon came buzzing around her, like moths round a candle, each one hoping to be fortunate enough to become her partner. Anyhow, when the music struck up, and the *Kolo* began, their toes were now itching, and one by one they slunk away, and she, to her great joy, and the still greater joy of the other girls, was

left quite by herself.

While she was looking at the evolutions of the *Kolo*, she saw a young stranger enter the room. Although he wore the dress of the Kotor, he evidently was from some distant part of the country. His clothes – made out of the finest stuffs, richly braided and embroidered in gold – were trimmed with filigree buttons and bugles. The *pas*, or sash, he wore round his waist was of crimson silk, woven with gold threads; the wide morocco girdle – the *pripasnjaca*– was purfled with lovely arabesques; his princely weapons, studded with precious stones and damaskened, were numerous and costly. His pipe, stuck not in his girdle like his arms, but 'twixt his blue satin waistcoat —*jacerma*– and his shirt, had the hugest amber mouthpiece that man had ever seen; aye, the Czar himself could not possibly have a finer pipe. What young man, seeing that pipe with its silver mounting, adorned with coral and turquoises, could help breaking the Tenth Commandment? He was, moreover, as handsome as a*Macic*, aye, as winsome as Puck.

He came in the room, doffed his cap to greet the company like a well-bred young man, then set it pertly on his head again. After that, he went about chatting with the lads, flirting with the lassies, as if he had long been acquainted with them, like a youth accustomed to good company. He did not notice, however, poor Jella in her corner. He took no part in the dances, probably because, every Jack having found his Jill, there was nobody with whom he could dance.

The girls all looked slily at him, and many a one wished in her heart that she had not been so hasty in choosing her partner, nay, that she had remained a wallflower for that night.

At last the young stranger wended his steps towards that corner where Jella was sitting alone, moping. He no sooner caught sight of her than he went gracefully up, and, looking at her with a merry twinkle in his eyes, and a most mischievous smile upon his lips:

"And you, my pretty one? Don't you dance this evening?" he asked.

"I never dance, either this evening or any other."

"And why not?"

"Because there is not a single young man I care to dance with."

"Oh, Jella!" whispered the girls, "dance with him if he asks you; we should so much like to see how he dances."

"Then it would be useless asking you to dance the *Kolo* with me, I suppose?"

"Oh, Jella! dance with him," whispered the young men; "it would be an unheard-of rudeness to refuse dancing with a stranger who has no partner."

"Even if I did not care about dancing, I should do so for the sake of our village."

"Then you only dance with me that it might not be said: 'He was welcomed with the sour lees of wine'?"

"I dance with you because I choose to do so."

"Thank you, pretty one."

The two thereupon began to go through the maze of the *Kolo*, and, as he twisted her round, they both moved so gracefully, keeping time to the music, that they looked like feathery boughs swayed by the summer breeze.

About ten o'clock the dances came to an end, and every youth, having gone to thank his host for the pleasant evening he had passed, went off with his partner, laughing and chatting all the way.

"And you, my lovely one, where do you live?" asked the stranger of Jella.

"In one of the very last houses of the village, quite at the end of the lane."

"Will you allow me to see you home?"

"If I am not taking you out of your way."

"Even if it were, it would be a pleasure for me."

Jella blushed, not knowing what to answer to so polite a youth.

They, therefore, went off together, and in no time they reached her house. Jella then bid the stranger good-bye, and, standing on the door-step, she saw him disappear in the darkness of the night.

Whither had he gone? Which turning had he taken? She did not know.

A feeling of deep sadness came over her; for the first time in her life she felt a sense of bereavement and loneliness.

Would this handsome young man come back again? She almost felt like running after the stranger to ask him if they would meet on the morrow, or, at least, after some days. Being a modest

girl, she, of course, could not do so; moreover, the youth had already disappeared.

"Did you bring me any cakes?" was the mother's first question, peevish at being awakened in her first sleep.

"Oh, no! *mati*; I never ate a crumb of a cake myself."

"And you enjoyed yourself?"

"Oh! very much so; far more than I ever thought."

Thereupon she began to relate all that had happened, and would have made a long description of the young man who had danced with her, but her father woke in the midst of a tough snore and bade her hold her tongue.

On the morrow there was again a party in the village, for it was carnival, the time of the year when good folks make merry. When night came on, Jella went to the dance without needing to be much pressed by her parents. She was anxious to know if the young stranger would be there, and, also, if he would dance with her or with some other girl.

"Remember," said her mother to her as she was going off, "do not dance with him 'like a fly without a head'; but measure him from top to toe, and think how lucky it would be if he, being well off, would marry a dowerless girl like you. The whole village speaks of him, of his weapons and his pipe; still, he might be 'like a drop of water suspended on a leaf,' without house or home. Therefore, remember to question him as to his land, his castle, and so forth; try and find out if he is an only son and from where he comes, for 'Marry with your ears and not with your eyes,' as

the saying is."

"Anyhow, take this tobacco-pouch," added the old man, "and offer it to him before he leaves you."

"Why?" asked Jella, guilelessly.

"Because it is made out of a musk-rat, and so it will be easy to follow him whithersoever he goes, even in the darkness of the night."

Jella, being a simple kind of a girl, did not like the idea of entrapping a young man; moreover, if she admired the stranger, it was for his good looks and his wit rather than for his rich clothes; but being frightened both of her father and her mother, who had never had a kind word for her, she promised to do as she was bidden. She then went to the party, and there everything happened as upon the preceding evening.

The girls all waited for the handsome young man to make his appearance, and put off accepting partners till the last moment, each one hoping that she might be the chosen one. The hour upon which he had come the evening before was now past, and still they all waited in vain. The music had begun, and the young men, impatient to be up and doing, were heavily beating time with their feet. At last the*Kolo* began. They had just taken their places, and all except Jella had forgotten the stranger, when he all at once stepped into the room, bringing with him a number of bottles of maraschino, and cakes overflowing with honey and stuffed with pistachios.

He, as upon the evening before, went round the room, talking

with the young men and teazing the prettiest girls. Then he stepped up to Jella, and asked her to dance with him.

The *Kolo* at last came to an end, the boys went off with the girls, the old folks hobbled after them, and the unknown youth, putting his arm round his partner's waist, as if he had been engaged to her, accompanied her home.

They soon reached her house; Jella then gave the stranger the tobacco-pouch, and, having bid him good-night, she stood forlorn on the door-step, to see him go off. No sooner had he turned his back, than the father, who was holding the door ajar and listening to every word they said, slipped out, like a weasel, and followed him by the smell of his musk pouch.

The night was as still as it was dark, the moon had not yet risen, a hushed silence seemed to have fallen over nature, and not the slightest animal was heard stirring abroad.

The young fellow, after following the road for about a hundred paces, left the highway and took a short cut across the fields. The old man was astounded to see that, though a stranger, he was quite familiar with the country, for he knew not only what lane to take, but also what path to follow in the darkness of the night, almost better than he did himself. He climbed over walls, slipped through the gaps in the hedges, leapt over ditches, just as if it had been broad daylight.

Jella's father had a great ado to follow him; still, he managed to hobble along, like an ungainly, bow-legged setter, as fast as the other one capered. They crossed a wood, where the boles of the

trees had weird and fantastic shapes, where thorny twigs clutched him by his clothes; then they came out on a plain covered with sharp flints, where huge scorpions lurked under every stone. Afterwards they reached a blasted heath, where nothing grew but gnarled, knotty, and twisted roots of trees, which, by the dusky light of the stars, looked like huge snakes and fantastical reptiles; there, in the clumps of rank grass, the horned vipers curled themselves. After this they crossed a morass, amidst the croaking of the toads and the hooting of owls, where unhallowed will-o'-the-wisps flitted around him.

The old man was now sorely frightened; the country they were crossing was quite unknown to him, and besides, it looked like a spot cursed by God, and leading to a worse place still. He began to lag. What was he to do? – go back? – he would only flounder in the mire. He crossed himself, shut his eyes tightly, and followed the smell of the musk. He thus walked on for some time, shivering with fear as he felt a flapping of wings near him, and ever and anon a draught of cold air made him lose the scent he was following.

At last he stopped, hearing a loud creaking sound, a grating stridulous noise, like that of the rusty hinges of some heavy iron gate which was being closed just behind him.

A gate in the midst of a morass! thought he; where the devil could he have come to? As he uttered the ominous word of *Kudic* he heard the earth groan under his feet.

It is a terrible thing to hear the earth groan; it does so just

before an earthquake!

He did not dare to open his eyes; he listened, awed, and then the faint sound of a distant bell fell upon his ears.

It was midnight, and that bell seemed to be slowly tolling – aye, tolling for the dead, the dead that groan in the bosom of the earth.

A shiver came over him, big drops of cold sweat gathered on his forehead. He sniffed the cold night air; it smelt earthy and damp, the scent of musk had quite passed away.

At last he half-opened his eyes, to see if he could perceive anything of the young stranger. The moon, rising behind a hillock, looked like a weird eye peeping on a ghastly scene. What did he see – what were those uncouth shapes looming in the distance, amidst the surrounding mist?

Why was the earth newly dug at his feet, shedding a smell of clay and mildew?

He felt his head spinning, and everything about him seemed to whirl.

What was that dark object dangling down, as from a huge gallows?

Whither was he to go? – back across the wide morass, where the earth, soft and miry, sank under his feet, where the unhallowed lights lead the wanderers into bottomless quagmires?

He opened his eyes widely, and began to stare around. He saw strange shapes flit through the fog, figures darker than the fog itself rise, mist-like, from the earth. Were they night-birds or

human beings? He could not tell.

All at once he bethought himself that they were witches and wizards,*carovnitsi* and *viestitche*, the *morine* or nightmares, and all the creatures of hell gathering together for their nightly frolic.

Fear prompted him to run off as fast as he possibly could, but huge pits were yawning all around him; moreover, curiosity held him back, for he would have liked to see where the damned store away their gold; so, between these two feelings, he stood there rooted to the earth.

At last, when fear prevailed over covetousness, he was about to flee; he felt the ground shiver under his feet, a grave slowly opened on the spot where he stood, for – as you surely must have understood – he was in the very midst of a burying-ground. At midnight in a burying-ground, when the tombs gape and give out their dead! His hair stood on end, his blood was curdling within his veins, his very heart stopped beating.

Can you fancy his terror in seeing a *voukoudlak*, a horrid vampire all bloated with the blood it nightly sucks. Slowly he saw them rise one after the other, each one looking like a drowsy man awaking from deep slumbers. Soon they began to shake off their sluggishness, and leap and jump and frolic around, and as the mist cleared he could see all the other uncouth figures whirl about in a mazy dance, like midges on a rainy day.

It was too late to run away now, for as soon as these blood-suckers saw him, they surrounded him, capering and yelling, twisting their boneless and leech-like bodies, grinning at him

with delight, at the thought of the good cheer awaiting them, telling him that it was by no means a painful kind of death, and that afterwards he himself would become a vampire and have a jolly time of it.

At the sight of these dead-and-alive kind of ghosts, the poor man wished he had either a pentacle, a bit of consecrated candle, or even a medal of the Virgin; but he had nothing, he was at the mercy of the fiends; therefore, overpowered by fear, he fell down in a fainting-fit.

That night, and the whole of the following day, Jella and her mother waited for the old man to come back; but they waited in vain. When the evening came on, her mother persuaded her to go to the dancing-party and see if the young stranger would come again.

"Perhaps," said she, "he might tell you something about your father; if not, ask no questions. Anyhow, take this ball of thread, which I have spun myself, and on bidding him good-bye, manage to cast this loop on one of his buttons, drop the ball on the ground, and leave everything to me. Very likely your father has lost the scent of the musk, and is still wandering about the country. This thread, which is as strong as wire, is a much surer guide to go by."

Jella did as she was bid. She went to the house where the *Kolo* was being danced; she spent the whole evening with the young stranger, who never said a word about her father, and when the moment of parting on the threshold of the door arrived, she deftly fastened the end of the thread to one of his buttons, and then

stood watching him go off.

The ball having slowly unwound itself, the old woman darted out and caught hold of the other end of the string. Then she followed the youth in the darkness, through thorns and thickets, through brambles and briars, as well as her tottering legs could carry her, much in the same way her husband had done the evening before.

That night and the day afterwards, Jella waited for her father and mother, but neither of them returned. When evening came on, afraid of remaining alone, she again went to dance the *Kolo*.

The evening passed very quickly, and the rustic ball came to an end. The youth accompanied her home as he had done the evening before, and on their way he whispered words of love in her ear, that made her heart beat faster, and her head grow quite giddy, words that made her forget her father and mother, and the dreaded night she was to pass quite alone. Still, as they got in sight of the house, Jella, who was very frightened, grew all at once quite thoughtful and gloomy. Seeing her so sorrowful, the young stranger put again his arm round her waist, and looking deep into her dark blue eyes, he asked her why she was so sad.

She thereupon told him the cause of all her troubles.

"Never mind, my darling," said the youth, "come along with me."

"But," faltered Jella, hesitatingly, "do you go far?"

"No, not so very far either."

"Still, where do you go?"

"Come and see, dear."

Jella did not exactly know what to do. She fain would go with him, and yet she was afraid of what people might say about her, and again she shuddered at the thought of having to remain at home quite alone.

"You are not afraid to come with me," he asked; "are you?"

"Afraid? No, why should I be? you surely would take care of me?"

"Of course; why do you not come, then?"

"Because the old women might say that it is improper."

"Oh," quoth he, laughing, "only old women who have daughters of their own to marry, say such things!"

Thereupon he offered her his arm, and off they went.

Soon leaving the village behind them, they were in the open fields, beyond the vineyards and the orchards, in the untilled land where the agaves shoot their gaunt stalks up towards the sky, where the air is redolent with the scent of thyme, sage and the flowering Agnus castus bushes; then again they went through leafy lanes of myrtle and pomegranate-trees and meadows where orchis bloomed and sparkling brooks were babbling in their pebbly beds.

Though they had been walking for hours, Jella did not feel in the least tired; it seemed as if she had been borne on the wings of the wind. Moreover, all sense of gloom and sadness was over, and she was as blithe and as merry as she had ever been.

At last – towards dawn – they reached a dense wood, where

stately oaks and fine beech-trees formed fretted domes high up in the air. There nightingales warbled erotic songs, and the merle's throat burst with love; there the crickets chirped with such glee that you could hardly help feeling how pleasant life was. The moon on its wane cast a mellow, silvery light through the shivering leaves, whilst in the east the sky was of the pale saffron tint of early dawn.

"Stop!" said the young girl, laying her hand on the stranger's arm. "Do you not see there some beautiful ladies dancing under the trees, swinging on the long pendant branches and combing the pearly drops of dew from their black locks?"

"I see them quite well."

"They must be *Vile*?"

"I am sure they are."

"Fairies should not be seen by mortal eyes against their wish. Then do not let us seek their wrath."

"Do not be afraid, sweet child; we are no ordinary mortals, you and I."

"You, perhaps, are not; but as for me, I am only a poor peasant girl."

"No, my love, you are much better than you think. Look there! the fairies have seen you, and they are beckoning you to go to them."

"But, then, tell me first what I am."

"You are a foundling; the old man and woman with whom you lived were not your parents. They stole you when you were an

infant for your beauty and the rich clothes you wore."

"And you, who are you, *gospod*?"

"I?" said the young man, laughing. "I am *Macic*, the merry, the mischievous sprite. I have known you since a long time. I loved you from the first moment I saw you, and I always hoped that, 'as like matches with like,' you yourself might perhaps some day get to like me and marry me. Tell me, was I right?" said he, looking at her mischievously.

Jella told him he was a saucy fellow to speak so lightly about such a grave subject, but then – woman-like – she added that he was not wrong.

They were forthwith welcomed by the *Vile* with much glee, and, soon afterwards, their wedding was celebrated with great pomp and merriment.

"But what became of the old man and his wife?" asked an interested listener.

"They met with the punishment their curiosity deserved. They were found a long time afterwards locked up in an old disused burying-ground. They were both of them quite dead, for when they fainted at the terrible sights they saw, the vampires availed themselves of their helplessness to suck up the little blood there was in them."

"May St. John preserve us all from such a fate," said Milos Bellacic, crossing himself devoutly.

The story having come to an end, toasts were drunk, songs were sung to the accompaniment of the *guzla*, the young people

flirted, their elders talked gravely about politics and the crops, whilst the women huddled together in a corner and chatted about household matters.

After a while, an old ladle having been brought out, lead was melted and then thrown into a bucket of water, and the fanciful arborescent silvery mass it formed was used as a means of divination.

Most of the girls were clever in reading those molten hieroglyphics, but none was so versed in occult lore as an old woman, an aunt of the*Starescina*'s, who was also skilled in the art of curing with simples.

Uros and Milenko, therefore, begged the good old woman to foretell them their future; and she, looking at the glittering maze, said to them:

"See here, these two are the paths of your life; see how smoothly they run, how they meet with the same incidents. These little needles that rise almost at marked distances are the milestones of the road; each one is a year. Count them, and you will see that for a length of time nothing ruffles the course of your life. But here a catastrophe, then both paths branch out in different directions; your lives from then have separate ends." The two young men heaved a deep sigh.

"Anyhow, you have several years of happiness in store for you. Make good use of your time while it is yours, for time is fleeting."

Then, as she was rather given to speak in proverbs, she said to Uros:

"Let your friend be to you even as a brother. Remember that one day, not very far off either, you will owe your life to him."

Drinking and carousing, singing and chatting, the evening came to an end. In the early hours the guests took leave of their host, wishing him a long and happy life, firing their pistols, not only as a compliment to him, but also as a means of scaring away the evil spirits. Upon reaching their houses, they bathed and washed with dew, they rubbed themselves with virgin oil, so as to be strong and healthy, besides being proof against witchcraft, for a whole year.

CHAPTER II
THE BOND OF FRIENDSHIP

"Milenko," said Uros, "have you the least idea how people that are in love feel?"

Milenko arched his eyebrows and smiled.

"No, not exactly, for I've never been spoony myself." Then, after pondering for a moment, he added: "I should think it's like being slightly sea-sick; don't you?"

Uros looked amused. He thought over the simile for a while, then said:

"Well, perhaps you are not quite wrong."

"But why do you ask? You are surely not in love, are you?"

Uros sighed. "Well, that's what I don't exactly know; only I feel just a trifle squeamish. I'm upset; my head is muddled."

"And you are afraid it's love?"

Uros made a sign of assent.

"It's not nice, is it?"

"No."

"And you'd like to get out of it?" asked Milenko.

"Yes."

"Well, then, take a deep plunge. Make love to her heart and soul, as if you were going to marry her to-morrow. Then, I daresay, you'll soon get over it. You see, the worst thing with sea-

sickness is to mope, to nurse yourself, and fancy every now and then that you are going to throw up. It's better to be sick like a dog for a day or two, as we were, and then it's all over. I think it must be the same thing with love."

"I daresay you are right, but – "

"But what?"

"I can't follow your advice."

"Why not?"

"Because – because – " and thereupon he began to scratch his head. "I can't make love to her."

"Can't make love to a girl?"

"No; for, you see, she's not a girl."

Milenko opened his eyes and stared.

"Who is she?" he asked.

Uros looked gloomy. He hesitated for an instant; then he whispered:

"Milena!"

Milenko started back.

"Not Milena Radonic?"

Uros nodded gravely.

"You are right," said Milenko seriously; "you can't make love to a married woman. It's a crime, first of all; then you might get her into trouble, and find yourself some day or other in a mess."

"You are right."

The two friends were silent for a moment; then Milenko, thinking to have caught the dilemma by its horns, said:

"Wouldn't it be the same thing if you made love to some other pretty damsel?"

Uros shook his head doubtfully.

"Darinka, our neighbour Ivo's daughter, is a very nice girl."

"Very."

"Well, don't you think you might fall in love with her?" asked Milenko, coaxingly.

"No, I don't think I could."

"Then there is Liepa, for instance; she is as lovely as her name; moreover, I think she looks a little like Milena."

"No; no woman has such beautiful eyes. Why, the first time I saw Milena, I felt her glances scorching me; they sank into my flesh," and he heaved a deep sigh.

There was another pause; both the friends were musing.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what," said Milenko, after a while; "we'll just go off to sea again. It's a pity, but it can't be helped."

"And the harvest?"

"They'll have to manage without us; that's all."

After having discussed the subject over and over again, it was agreed that they were to sail as soon as they could find a decent vessel that could take them both. In the meanwhile, Uros promised to avoid Milena as much as possible, which was, indeed, no easy matter.

The day of Milena Zwillievic's marriage had, indeed, been a Black Friday to her. First, she knew that she was being sold to pay her father's debts; secondly, Radonic was old enough to be

her father. Added to all this, he was a heavy, rough, uncouth kind of a fellow, the terror of all seamen, and, as he treated his crew as if they had been slaves, no man ever sailed with him if he could possibly get another berth.

Two or three days after the wedding, Radonic brought his girlish bride to live with his mother, the veriest old shrewish skinflint that could be imagined. She disliked her daughter-in-law before she knew her; she hated her the first moment she saw her. Milena was handsome and penniless, two heinous sins in her eyes, for she herself had been ugly and rich. She could not forgive her son for having made such a silly marriage at his age, and not a day passed without her telling him that he was an old fool.

During the first months poor Milena was to be pitied, and, what was worse, everybody pitied her. She never ate a morsel of bread without hearing her mother-in-law's taunts. If she cried, she was bullied by the one, cuffed by the other.

A month after the wedding, Radonic, however, went off with his ship, and shortly afterwards his vixen of a mother died, and Milena was then left sole mistress of the house. Her life, though lonesome, was no more a burden to her, as it had hitherto been, only, having nothing to do the whole day, time lay heavy on her hands.

Handsome and young as she was, with a slight inborn tendency to flirtation; living, moreover, quite alone; many a young man had tried to make love to her; but, their intentions being too manifest, all, hitherto, had been repulsed. On seeing Uros, however, she

felt for him what she had, as yet, never felt for any man, for her husband less than anybody else.

She tried not to think of Uros, and the more she tried the more his image was before her eyes; so the whole of the live-long day she did nothing else but think of him. She decided to avoid him, and still – perhaps it was the devil that tempted her, but, somehow or other, she herself could not explain how it happened – she was always either at the door or at the window at the time he passed, and then what could she do but nod in a friendly way to him?

If she went to pay his mother a visit, she would hurry away before he came home, and then she was always unlucky enough to meet him on her way. Could she do less than stop and ask him how he was; besides, after all, he was but a boy, and she was a married woman.

Soon she began to surmise that Uros was in love with her; then she thought herself foolish to believe such a thing, and she rated herself for being vain. And then, again, she thought: "If he cares for me more than he ought, it is but a foolish infatuation, of which he will soon get rid when he goes again to sea." Thereupon she heaved a deep sigh, and a heaviness came over her heart, at which she almost confessed to herself that she did love that boy.

Milena, after the conversation Uros had had with his friend, seeing herself shunned, felt nettled and sorry. At the same time she was glad to see that he did not care for her, and then her heart yearned all the more for him.

But if he shunned her, was it a sign that he did not care for

her? she asked herself.

Puzzled, as she was, she wanted to find out the truth, merely out of curiosity, and nothing more.

Thus it came to pass that, standing one day on her doorstep, she beckoned to the young man, as soon as she saw him, to come up to her. It was a bold thing to do, nor did she do so without a certain trepidation.

"Uros," said she to him, "come here; I have something to ask you."

"What is it?" said the young man, looking down rather shyly.

"You that have travelled far and wide, can you tell me who speaks all the languages of this world?"

"Who speaks all the languages of this world?" echoed Uros, lifting up his eyes, astonished, and then lowering them, feeling Milena's glances parch up his blood.

"Who can it be?" said he, puzzled.

He tried to think, but his poor head was muddled, and his heart was beating just as if it would burst. He had never been good at guessing, but now it was worse than ever.

"I've heard of people speaking three, four, and five languages, but I've never heard of anyone speaking more than five."

"What! You've been in foreign countries," quoth she, smiling archly, and displaying her pearly teeth, "and still you cannot answer my question?"

"I cannot, indeed. There was a man who said he spoke twenty-five languages, but, of course, he was a humbug. First, there are

not twenty-five languages in the world, and then he couldn't even speak Slav."

"Well, well; think over it till to-morrow."

"And then?"

"Perhaps you'll be able to guess."

"But if I don't?"

"Well, I shall not eat you up as the dragon, that Marko Kraglievic killed, used to do, if people couldn't answer the questions he put them."

"And you'll tell me?" Thereupon he lifted up his eyes yearningly towards her.

"Perhaps," she replied, blushing, "but then, you must promise not to ask Milenko."

"I promise."

She stretched forth her hand. He pressed it lingeringly.

"Nor anybody else?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you to-morrow."

He bade her good-bye, and went off with a heavy heart; she saw him disappear with a sigh.

That whole day Uros thought a little of the riddle, and a great deal of Milena's sparkling eyes; moreover, he felt the pressure of her soft hand upon his palm. But the more he pondered over her question, the more confused his brain grew, so he gave up thinking of the riddle, and continued thinking of the young woman. On the morrow his excitement increased, as the time of

hearing the answer drew near.

Milena, as usual, was on the watch for him, leaning on the door-post, looking more beautiful than ever. As soon as he saw her, he hurried up to her without being called.

"Well," said she, with a nervous smile, "have you guessed?"

"No."

"Oh, you silly fellow! Who speaks all the languages of the world?"

"It's useless to ask me; I don't know."

"What will you give me if I tell you?" said she, in a low, fluttering voice, and with a visible effort.

He would willingly have made her a present, but he did not know what she would like, and, as he looked up into her eyes to guess, he felt his blood rising all up to his head.

"Do you want me to bring you something from abroad – a looking-glass from Venice, or a coral necklace from Naples?"

No, she did not want anything from abroad.

"Then a silk scarf?"

"No, I was only joking. I'll tell you for nothing. Why, who but the echo speaks all the languages of this world?"

"Dear me, how stupid not to have thought of it. Tell me, do you think me very stupid?"

Milena smiled. She did think him rather dull, but not in the way he meant.

"You see how good I am. I tell you for nothing. Now, if you had put me a riddle, and I could not have answered, you surely

would have asked" – here there was a catch in her voice – "a kiss from me."

Uros blushed as red as a damask-rose; he tried to speak, but did not know what to say.

"Oh! don't say no; you men are all alike."

The young man looked up at her with an entreating look, then down again; still he did not speak. Milena remained silent, as if waiting for an answer; she fidgeted and twisted the fringe of her apron round her fingers, then she heaved a deep sigh. After a few minutes' pause:

"Do you know any riddles?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! I know several."

"Well, then, tell me one."

Uros thought for a while; he would have liked to ask her a very difficult one, but the thought of the kiss he might have for it, gave him a strong nervous pain at the back of his head.

"Well," said he, after a few moments' cogitation – "Who turns out of his house every day, and never leaves his house?"

She looked at him for a while with parted lips and eyes all beaming with smiles; nay, there was mischief lurking in her very dimples as she said:

"Why, the snail, you silly boy; everybody knows that hackneyed riddle." Then with the prettiest little *moue*: "It was not worth while leaving your country to come back with such a slight stock of knowledge. I hope you were not expecting a kiss for the answer?"

Uros was rather nettled by her teazing; he would fain have given her a smart answer, but he could find none on the spur of the moment. Besides, the sight of those two lips, as fresh and as juicy as the pulp of a blood-red cherry, made him lose the little wit he otherwise might have had; so he replied:

"And if I had?"

"You would have been disappointed; I don't give kisses for nothing."

"But you do give kisses?" he asked, faltering.

"When they are worth giving," in an undertone.

Uros looked up shyly, then he began to scratch his head, and tried to think of something tremendously difficult.

"Well, do you know that one and no other?" she asked, laughing.

All at once Uros' face brightened up.

"What is it that makes men bald?" and he looked up at her enquiringly.

Had he had a little more guile, he might, perhaps, have seen that this riddle of his was likewise not quite unknown to her; but he saw nothing save her pomegranate lips.

"Oh," said Milena, "their naughtiness, I daresay!"

"No, that's not it."

"Then, I suppose, it's their wit."

"Why?"

"They say that women have long hair and little wit, so I imagine that men have little hair and much wit."

"If that's the case, then, I've too much hair. But you haven't guessed."

"Then come to-morrow, and, perhaps I'll be able to tell you."

"But you'll not ask anybody?"

She again stretched out her hand to him. As he kept squeezing and patting her hand:

"Shall I tell you?" he asked, with almost hungry eyes.

"And exact the penalty?"

Uros smiled faintly.

"Now, that is not fair; I gave you a whole day to think over it."

"Well, I'll wait till to-morrow; only – "

"Only, what?"

"Don't try to guess."

He said this below his breath, as if frightened at his own boldness.

On the morrow he again waited impatiently for the moment to come when he could go and see Milena. The hour arrived; Uros passed and repassed by the house, but she was not to be seen. He durst not go and knock at her door – nay, he was almost glad that she did not expect him; it was much better so.

He little knew that he was being closely watched by her, through one of the crannies in the window-shutters. When, at last, he was about to go off, Milena appeared on the threshold. With a beating heart the youth turned round on his heels and went up to her. With much trepidation he looked up into her face.

"Does she, or does she not, know?" he kept asking himself;

"and if she does, am I to ask her for a kiss?" At that moment he almost wished she had guessed the riddle, for he remembered his friend's words: "It was a crime to make love to a married woman."

"Oh, Uros, I'm like you! I can't guess. I've tried and tried, but it's useless."

There was a want of sincerity in the tone of her voice, that made it sound affected, and she was speaking as quickly as possible to bring out everything at a gush. After a slight interruption, she went on:

"Do tell me quickly, I'm so curious to know. What is it that makes men bald?"

"It's strange that you can't guess, you that are so very clever," he said, in a faltering voice.

"What, you don't believe me?" she asked, pouting her lips in a pretty, babyish fashion.

Uros stood looking at her without answering; in his nervousness he was quivering from head to foot, undecided whether he was to kiss her or not.

"Oh, I see, you don't want to tell me; you are afraid I'll not keep my promise!"

"I can ask to be paid beforehand; give me a kiss first, and I'll tell you afterwards."

Having got it out he heaved a deep sigh of relief, for he was glad it was over.

"Here, in the street?" she asked, with a forced smile.

He advanced up to her and she retreated into the house. He was obliged to follow her now, almost in spite of himself; moreover, he could hardly drag himself after her, for he had, all at once, got to be as heavy as lead.

As soon as they were both within the house, she closed the door, and leant her back against it. Then there was an awkward pause of some minutes, for neither of them knew what to do, or what to say. She took courage, however, and looking at him lovingly:

"Now tell me, will you?" said she.

As she uttered these words they clasped each other's hands, whilst their eyes uttered what their lips durst not express; then, as Uros stood there in front of Milena, he felt as if she was drawing him on, and the walls of the room began to spin round and round.

"Why, it is the loss of hair that makes people bald," he muttered in a hot, feverish whisper, the panting tone of which evidently meant —

"Milena, I love you; have pity on me."

She said something about being very stupid, but he could not quite understand what it was; he only felt the swaying motion and the powerful attraction she had over him.

"I suppose you must have your reward now," she said, with a faint voice.

The youth felt his face all aglow; the blood was rushing from his heart to his head with a whirring sound. His dizziness increased.

Did she put out her lips towards his as she said this? He could hardly remember. All that remained clear to him afterwards was, that he had clasped her in his arms, and strained her to his chest with all the might of his muscles. Had he stood there with his lips pressed upon hers for a very long time? He really did not know; it might have been moments, it might have been hours, for he had lost all idea as to the duration of time.

From that day, Uros was always hovering in the neighbourhood of Radonic's house; he was to be found lurking thereabout morning, noon and night. Milenko took him to task about it, but he soon found out that if "hunger has no eyes," lovers, likewise, have no ears, and also that "he who holds his tongue often teaches best." As for Uros, his friend's reproaches were not half so keen as those he made to himself; but love had a thousand sophistries to still the voice of conscience.

Not long after the eventful day of the riddle, Marko Radonic returned unexpectedly to Budua, his ship having to undergo some slight repairs.

For a few days, Milenko managed to keep Uros and Milena apart, but, young as they were, love soon prevailed over prudence. They therefore began to meet in by-lanes and out-of-the-way places, especially during those hours when the husband was busy at the building yard. At first they were very careful, but the reiteration of the same act rendered them more heedless.

Uros was seen again and again at Milena's door when the husband was not at home. People began to suspect, to talk;

the subject was whispered mysteriously from ear to ear; it soon spread about the town like wild-fire.

A month after Radonic had returned, he was one evening at the inn, drinking and chatting with some old cronies about ships, cargoes and freights. In the midst of the conversation, an old *guzlar* passing thereby, stepped in to have a draught of wine. Upon seeing the bard, every man rose and, by way of greeting, offered him his glass to have a sip.

"Give us a song, Vuk; it is years since I heard the sound of your voice," said Radonic.

The bard complied willingly; he went up to a *guzla* hanging on the wall, and took it down. He then sat on a stool, placed his instrument between his legs, and began to scrape its single gut-string with the monochord bow; this prelude served to give an intonation to his voice, and scan the verses he was about to sing. He thought a while, and then – his face brightening up – he commenced the ballad of "Marko Kraglievic and Janko of Sebinje."

We Slavs are so fond of music and poetry, that we will remain for hours listening to one of our bards, forgetting even hunger in our delight. No sooner was the shrill sound of Vuk's voice heard than every noise was hushed, hardly a man lifted his glass up to his mouth. Even the passers-by walked softly or lingered about the door to catch some snatches of the poet's song.

The ballad, however, was a short one, and as soon as the bard had finished, the strong Dalmatian wine went round again, and

at every cup the company waxed merrier, more tender-hearted, more gushing; a few even grew sentimental and lachrymose.

Wine, however, brought out all the harshness of Radonic's character, and the more he drank the more brutal he grew; at such moments it seemed as if all the world was his crew, and that he had a right to bully even his betters, and say disagreeable things to everybody; his excuse was that he couldn't help it – it was stronger than himself.

"*Bogme!*" he exclaimed, turning to one of his friends; "I should have liked to see your wife, Tripko, with Marko Kraglievic. Ah, poor Tripko!"

"Why my wife more than yours?"

"Oh, my wife knows of what wood my stick is made; you only tickle yours!"

Tripko shrugged his shoulders, and added:

"Every woman is not as sharp as Janko of Sebinje's wife, but most of them are as honest."

"That means to say that you think your wife is honest," said Radonic, chuckling. "Poor Tripko!"

"Come, come," quoth a friend, trying to mend matters, "do not spit in the air, Radonic Marko, lest the spittle fall back on your face."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Radonic, who, like all jokers, could never take a jest himself.

"I? nothing; only I advise you to be more careful how you trifle with another man's wife – that's a ticklish subject."

"Oh, Tripko's wife!" said he, disparagingly.

"Radonic Marko, sweep before your own door, *bogati*!" replied Tripko, scornfully.

"Sweep before my door – sweep before my door, did you say?" and he snatched up the earthen mug to hurl it at his friend's head, but the by-standers pinioned his arm.

"I did, and I repeat it, *bogati*!"

"And you mean that there's dirt before my house?" asked Radonic, scowling.

"More than before mine, surely."

"Come, Tripko, are you going to quarrel about a joke?" said one of his friends.

"My wife is no joking matter."

"No, no," continued Radonic, "but he who has the itch scratches himself."

"Then scratch yourself, Marko, for surely you must itch when you're not at home."

"Hum!" said the host, "when asses joke it surely rains."

Then he went up to the *guzlar*, and begged him to give them a song. "Let it be something lively and merry," said he, "something they can all join in."

The bard thereupon scraped his *guzla*, silence was re-established, and he began to sing the following *zdravica*:

"Wine that bubbles says to man:

Drink, oh! drink me when you can;

For I never pass away,
You albeit last but a day;
I am therefore made for you,
And I love men brave and true;
Then remember, I am thine;
Drink, oh! drink the flowing wine!"

As not one of them cared to see the quarrel continue, and end, perhaps, in bloodshed, they all began to sing the drinking-song; the wine flowed, the glasses jingled together in a friendly way, and, for the nonce, peace prevailed.

Just then, Milenko – unperceived by everybody except the landlord – happened to come in, and the host, taking him aside, said to him:

"Markovic Milenko, tell your friend, Uros, not to be seen fooling about with Milena, for people have long tongues, and will talk; and, above all, do not let him be found lurking near Radonic's house to-night, for it might cost him his life."

"What! has anybody been slandering him?"

"Slandering is not the word; enough, tell him that Radonic Marko is not a man to be trifled with."

Milenko thanked the innkeeper, and, fearing lest his friend might be getting into mischief, went at once in search of him.

As Radonic was about to begin the discussion again, the host stopped him.

"You had better wait for an explanation till to-morrow, for when our heads are fuddled we, like old Marija, do not see the

things exactly as they are.

"What old Marija?" asked one of the men.

"Don't you know the story of old Marija? Why, I thought everyone knew it."

"No; let's hear it."

Well, Marija was an old tippler, who was never known to be in her senses.

One morning she rose early, and, as usual, went into the wood to gather a bundle of sticks. Presently she was seen running back as if Old Nick was at her heels. Panting, and scared out of her wits, she dropped on a bench outside the inn. As soon as she could speak, she begged for a little glass of brandy.

The people crowded around her and asked her what had happened.

"No sooner had I left the roadside and got into the wood," she said, "I bent down to gather some sticks, when, lo and behold! fifty wild cats, as big as bears, with bristling hair, glaring eyes and sharp claws, suddenly jumped out from behind the bushes. Holy Virgin! what a fright I got, and see how scratched and torn I was by those brutes."

"Come, come, Marija," said the innkeeper; "you must have seen double – you know you often do. How many cats were there?"

"Well, I don't say there were exactly fifty, for I didn't count them; but as true as God is in heaven there were twenty-five."

"Don't exaggerate, Marija – don't exaggerate; there are not

twenty-five cats in the whole village."

"Well, if there were not twenty-five, may the devil take me; surely there were fifteen?"

"Pooh! Marija, have another little drop, just to get over your fright, and then you'll confess that there were not fifteen."

Marija drained down another glass, and said:

"May a thunderbolt strike me dead this very moment but five wild cats pounced upon me all at once."

"Come, Marija, now that you are in your senses, don't exaggerate.

Tell us how many wild cats there were."

"Well, I'll take my oath that, as I bent down, a ray of sunlight was pouring through the branches, and I saw something tremendously big moving through the bushes; perhaps it was a cat."

"Or a hare, running away," said the innkeeper.

"Perhaps it was, for in my fright I instantly ran away too."

The men, whom wine rendered merry, laughed heartily, and the innkeeper added:

"You see, we are all of us, at times, like old Marija."

As they were about to part, Radonic asked the man who had told him not to spit in the wind what he and all the others had meant by their innuendoes.

"Oh, nothing at all! were you not joking yourself?"

Still, by dint of much pressing, he got this man to tell him that Uros Bellacic, Milos' son, had been seen flirting with Milena.

"Of course, this Uros is only a boy; still," added he, "Milena herself is young, very young, and you – now, it is no use mincing the matter – well, you are old, and therefore I, as a friend, advise you to be more careful how you talk about other men's wives, for, some day or other, you might find the laughers are against you."

Thereupon the two men parted.

Radonic now, for the first time in his life, understood what jealousy was. He felt, in fact, that he had touched hell, and that he had got burnt. Alas! his countrymen were right in thinking that Gehenna could not be worse.

As he walked on, the darkness of the night and his loneliness increased the bitterness of his thoughts. He that hitherto had felt a pleasure in disparaging every woman, was getting to be the laughing-stock of the town, the butt of every man's jokes.

Meanwhile, Milenko had gone in quest of his friend, his mind full of gloomy forebodings. Passing by Radonic's cottage, he stopped and looked round. The night was dark, and everything had a weird and ghastly look. The leaves shivered and lisped ominously. Was it a bat that flitted by him?

Straining his eyes, he thought he saw something darker than the night itself move near one of the windows of the house, then crouch down and disappear. Had his senses got so keen that he had seen that shadow, or was it only a vision of his over-heated imagination?

He walked a few steps onward; then he stopped, and began to whistle in a low, peculiar way. Their fathers had been wont to

call each other like that; and the two young men had sworn to each other that whatever happened to them in their lifetime they would always obey the call of that whistle. All dangers were to be overcome, all feuds to be forgotten at that sound. They had sworn it on the image of St. George.

Milenko knew that if his friend was thereabouts he would not tarry a single moment to come to him. In fact, a moment afterwards Uros was at his side.

Milenko explained his errand in as few words as possible.

"Thank you," said Uros. "I'll go and tell Milena what has happened, so that she may be on her guard."

"But Radonic might be here at any moment."

"I'll be back in a twinkling."

"Anyhow, if you hear my whistle sneak off at once, and run for your life."

"All right."

Uros disappeared; Milenko remained leaning against the bole of a tree. He could hardly be seen at the distance of some steps. Snatches of songs were now heard from afar; it was the drinking-song Vuk had been singing. The drunkards were returning home. Soon after this he heard the noise of steps coming on the road. Keeping a sharp look-out, his keen eyes recognised Radonic's stalwart though clumsy frame. He at once whistled to his friend, first in a low tone, then louder and louder, as he came out from his hiding-place and walked on to meet the enraged husband, and stop him on his way. Uros in the meanwhile took to his heels.

"*Dobro vetchir*, Radonic Marko," said Milenko to him. "How are you?"

"And who are you, so glib with your tongue?" answered Radonic, in a surly tone.

"What, do you not know the children of the place?"

"Children, nowadays, spring up like poisonous mushrooms after a wet night. How is one to know them?"

"Well, I am Milenko Markovic, Janko's son."

"Ah, I thought so," replied Radonic fiercely, clasping the haft of his knife. "Then what business have you to come prowling about my house, making me the laughing-stock of the whole place. But you'll not do so long."

Suiting the action to the words, he lifted up his knife and made a rush at the young man.

Though Milenko was on his guard, and though the hand of the half-drunken man was not quite steady, still it was firm and swift enough in its movements for mischief's sake; and so he not only wounded the young man slightly on his arm, but, the knife being very sharp, it cut through all his clothes and scratched him, enough to make him bleed, somewhere about the left breast. Had the blade but gone an inch or two deeper, death most likely would have been instantaneous.

Milenko, quick as lightning, darted unexpectedly upon Radonic, grasped the knife from his hand, knocked him down, and, after a little scuffle, held him fast. Although Marko was a powerfully-built man, still he was heavy and clumsy, slow and

awkward in his movements; and now, half-drunk as he was, it seemed as if his huge body was no match for this lithe and nimble youth.

When at last Radonic was fully overpowered, "Look here," said Milenko, "you fully deserve to have this blade thrust into your heart, for it almost went into mine. Now, tell me, what have I done that you should come against me in this murderous way? You say that I have been prowling about your house; but are you quite sure? And even if I had, is it a reason to take away my life? Are you a beast or a man?"

"Well, when you have done preaching, either let me go or kill me; but stop talking," said Radonic, sullenly.

"I'll leave you as soon as I have done. First you must know that I have hardly ever spoken to your wife. May God strike me blind if I have! As for prowling about your house – well, half-an-hour ago I was at the inn."

"You were at the inn?" asked Radonic, incredulously.

"Yes; you were all singing a *zdravica*."

"I was singing?"

"No; at least, I think not. You were, if I remember rightly, talking with Livic. I only looked in. Uros Bellacic, another poisonous mushroom, was with me."

Just then it came to Radonic's head that this Uros, the son of Milos, was the young man who had been flirting with his wife.

"So your friend Uros was with you?"

"Of course he was, and from there I accompanied him to his

house, where I left him. Now, I was going home, and the nearest way was by your house. Had I, instead, been making love to your wife, I should not have come up to you in a friendly way, as I did. I should have hidden behind some tree, or skulked away out of sight. Anyhow, your wife is young and pretty; it is but right you should be jealous."

Milenko thereupon stretched out his hand to help the prostrate man to rise.

The bully, thoroughly ashamed of himself, got up moodily enough, ruminating over all the young man had said, understanding, however, that he had been too rash, and had thus bungled the whole affair. He made up his mind, however, to keep a sharp look-out.

"And now," continued Milenko, chuckling inwardly over his long-winded speeches, made only to give his friend full time to be off, "as your wife is perhaps in bed, let me come in and bandage up my arm, which is bleeding; it is useless for me to go home and waken up my father and mother, or frighten them for such a trifle. I might, it is true, go to Uros, but it is not worth while making an ado for a scratch like this, and have the whole town gossiping about your wife, for who will believe that the whole affair is as absurd as it really is?"

Radonic now felt sure that he had made a mistake, for, if this youth had been trying to make love to Milena, he would not have asked to be brought unexpectedly before the woman whose house he had just left.

"Very well," replied he, gruffly, "come along."

Having reached the cottage, he opened the door noiselessly, stepped in as lightly as he could, and beckoned to Milenko to follow him.

Utter darkness reigned within the house. Radonic took out his flint and struck a light. He was glad to see that his wife was not only in bed, but fast asleep.

He helped the young man to take off his clothes, all stained with blood; then he carefully washed his wounds, dressed them with some aromatic plants whose healing virtues were well known. After this he poured out a bumper of wine and pledged Milenko's health, as a sign of perfect reconciliation, saying:

"I have shed your innocent blood; mine henceforth is at your disposal."

With these words he took leave of him.

Though it was late, Milenko, far from returning home, hastened to his friend to tell him what had happened, and put him on his guard from attempting to see Milena again.

His advice, though good, was, however, superfluous, for Milena, far from being asleep, had heard all that had taken place, and, as her husband kept a strict watch over her, she remained indoors for several days.

When the incident came to the ears of either parent – though they never knew exactly the rights of the whole affair, and they only thought that it was one of Radonic's mad freaks of jealousy – both Bellacic and Markovic thought it better to send their sons

to sea as soon as possible.

"Having sown their wild oats," said Milos, "they can come back home and settle into the humdrum ways of married life."

"Besides," quoth Janko, "in big waters are big fish caught. The shipping trade is very prosperous just now; freights are high; so after some years of a seafaring life they may put aside a good round sum."

"Well," replied Milos, "the best thing would be to set them up in life; let us buy for them a share of some brig, and they, with their earnings, may in a few years buy up the whole ship and trade for themselves."

The vintage – very plentiful that year – was now over; the olive-trees, which had been well whipped on St. Paul's Day, had yielded an unexpected crop, so that the land, to use the Biblical pithy expression, was overflowing, if not with milk and honey, at least with wine and oil. The earth, having given forth its last fruits, was now resting from its labours, but the young men, though they had nothing more to do on shore, still lingered at Budua, no share of any decent vessel having been found for them.

At last the captain of a brigantine, a certain Giuliani, wishing to retire from business in some years, agreed to take them on a trial trip with him, and then, if he liked them and saw that they could manage the vessel by themselves, to sell them half of his ship afterwards.

All the terms of the contract having been settled, it was agreed that the two young men should sail in about a fortnight's time,

when the cargo had all been taken on board.

Before starting, however, these youths, who loved each other tenderly, made up their minds to become kith-and-kin to each other – that is to say, brothers by adoption, or *pobratim*.

As St. Nicholas – the patron saint of the opposite town of Bari, on the Italian shores of the Adriatic – is one of the most revered saints of the Slavs and the protector of sailors, his feast, which was celebrated just a week before their departure, was chosen for the day of this august ceremony.

On the morning of that memorable day, the two young men, dressed, not in their simple sailor-like attire, but in the gorgeous and picturesque Buduan costume – one of the most manly and elegant dresses as yet devised by human fancy – with damaskened silver-gilt pistols and daggers to match, the hafts of which were all studded with round bits of coral, dark chalcedonies and blood-red carnelians. These had been the weapons of their great-grandfathers, and they showed by their costliness that they were no mean upstarts, dating only from yesterday, but of a good old stock of warriors.

Thus decked out, and not in borrowed plumes, they wended their way to the cathedral, where a special Mass was to be said for them. Each of them was accompanied by a kind of sponsor or best man, and followed by all their relations, as well as by a number of friends.

Having entered the crowded church – for such a ceremony is not often seen – Uros and Milenko went straight to the High

Altar, and, bending down on one knee, they crossed themselves with much devotion. Then, taking off all their weapons, they laid them down on their right-hand side, and lighted their huge tapers. The best men, who stood immediately behind, and the relations, lit their wax candles, just as if it had been the ritualistic pomp of marriage; thereupon they all knelt down till the priest had finished chanting the liturgy, and, after offering up the Holy Sacrament, Mass came to an end. This part of the service being over, the priest came up to them, saying:

"Why and wherefore come ye here?"

"We wish to become brothers."

"And why do you wish to become brothers?"

"Out of love," quoth Uros, who was the elder of the two by a few months.

"But do you know, my children, what you really ask; have you considered that this bond is a life-long one, and that, formed here within the House of God, it can never be broken. Are you prepared to swear that, in whatever circumstance of life you may be placed, the friendship that binds you to-day will never be rent asunder?"

"We are."

"Can you take your oath to love and help each other as brothers should, the whole of your lifetime?"

"We can."

"Well, then, swear before God and man to love each other with real brotherly affection; swear never to be at variance, never to

forsake each other."

The oath was solemnly taken. After this the priest administered them the Communion – though no more mixed up with a drop of their own blood; he gave them the pax to kiss, whilst the thurible-bearers were swinging their huge silver censers, which sent forth a cloudlet of fragrant smoke. The two friends were almost hid from the view of the gazing crowd, for, the *pobratim* being rich, neither frankincense nor myrrh had been spared. Then the priest, in his richest stole, placed both his hands above their heads, and uttered a lengthy prayer to God to bless them.

The ceremony having come to an end, the *pobratim* rose and kissed each other repeatedly. They were then embraced by their sponsors and relations, and congratulated by their friends. As they reached the church door, they were greeted by the shouts of "*Zivio!*" from all their friends, who, in sign of joy, fired off their pistols. They replied to their courtesy in the same fashion, and so the din that ensued was deafening.

Holding hands, they crossed the crowd, that parted to let them pass. Thus they both bent their steps towards Markovic's house, for, as he lived nearer the church than Bellacic did, he was the giver of the first feast in honour of the *pobratim*.

Upon entering the house, the young men kissed each other again; then forthwith Uros kissed Janko Markovic, calling him father, whilst Milenko greeted Uros' parents in the same way.

Afterwards presents were exchanged by the *pobratim*, then

each member of either family had some gift in store for their newly-acquired kinsman, so that before the day was over they had quite a little store of pipes and gold-embroidered tobacco pouches.

Dinner being now ready, they all sat down to a copious, if not a very dainty meal; and the priest, who just before had asked a blessing upon the friends, was the most honoured of all the guests.

They ate heartily, and many toasts were drunk in honour of the two young men, and those that could made speeches in rhyme to them.

The feast was interrupted by the *Kolo*– a young man performing sundry evolutions with a decanter of wine upon his head, looking all the while as clumsy as Heine's famous bear, Atta Troll.

Then they began again to eat and drink, and filled themselves up in such a way that they could hardly move from the table any more, so that by the time St. Nicholas' Day came to an end, the hosts and almost all the guests were snoring in happy oblivion.

CHAPTER III
CHRISTMAS EVE

The fierce equinoctial blasts which that year had lasted for more than a month, were followed by a fortnight of fitful, heavy rain, intermitted by sudden gales and stormy showers. Then after a period of dull, drizzling, foggy weather, ending in a thick squall, the clouds cleared up beautifully, the sun showed itself again, and Spring apparently succeeded to Autumn.

The wind fell entirely. Not the slightest breeze was blowing to bring down the dry leaves, or to bicker the smooth surface of the waters. For days and days the sea remained as even as a mass of shining melted lead, with the only difference that it was as fathomably liquid and as diaphanously pure as the air itself, of which it even had the vaporous cerulean clearness. Far away on the offing, the waters blended with the watchet airiness of the surrounding atmosphere, so that the line of the horizon could nowhere be seen, the blueish-grey ocean melting into the greyish-blue of the sky. Nearer the shore, the smooth translucent sheet was streaked and spotted with those sheeny stripes and silvery patches, which Shelley terms a "coil of crystalline streams."

The earth itself had a fleecy look. The shadowy opal greys of the headlands, the liquid amethystine tints of the hills, the light irradiated coasts, all rising out of the luminous waves, looked

lovelier even than they had done in summer, at noontide, when swathed by a splendent haziness, for now the cold opaque clay tints themselves looked transparent, wrapped up as they were in that vaporous pellucid veil of mists.

Nature was wearing now her garishly gorgeous autumnal garment, and the foliage of the trees had acquired the richest prismatic dyes, for the reddish russets and the glowing orange yellows predominated over the whitish blues and the faint greens. The vegetation, but for the funereal cypresses, had the sere hectic hue of dying life.

The seafaring people of Budua had anything but an admiration for that calm, soft, misty weather, or for that placid, unruffled sea; not that they lacked the sense of beauty, but they chafed at being kept at home, when they ought already to have been in distant parts of the Mediterranean, or even returning from the farthermost corners of the Adriatic.

Thus the departure of the *pobratim* had already been postponed for about a fortnight, as every day they waited patiently for a favourable wind to swell their flagging sails; but the wind never came. The friends, however, did not fret at this delay, and now, having stayed so long, they hoped that the calm weather would continue a little longer, so that they might spend Christmas at home with their families.

Radonic had sailed off some time since. Milena, after that, had gone to spend some weeks with her parents in Montenegro. On her return, she kept a good deal at home, for after the fright

she had had on that eventful night when she had seen Milenko all covered with blood, she had made up her mind to give up flirting, either with Uros or with any other young man, and, for a short time, she kept her resolution. Moreover, she felt that she cared for the young man far more than she liked to confess to herself, and that she thought oftener of him than she ought to have done, and much more than was good for the peace of her mind. Another reason now prompted her to be seen abroad as little as possible.

The man who, after the quarrel at the inn, had followed Radonic to his house, and told him of his wife's levity in her conduct towards Uros, was a certain Vranic, one of Milena's rejected suitors. He was more than a plain-looking man; he was mean and puny. Besides this, he had a cast in his eye, which rendered him hateful to all people, and justly so, for does not the wisdom of our ancients say: "Beware of a man branded by the hand of God?" Still, as if this was not enough, Vranic possessed the gift of second sight, if it can be called a gift. He was, therefore, a most unlucky fellow. The priest had, it appears, made some mistake in christening him, so that nothing ever had gone on well with him.

Vranic had, therefore, always been not only shunned by all the girls as an uncanny kind of man who always saw ghosts, but even all the men avoided him. He ought to have left Budua and gone to live abroad in a place where he was not known, but it is a hard thing for a man to leave his own country for ever.

Amongst many defects, Vranic had one quality, if really it can be called a quality. This was the stern tenacity of purpose, the stolid opiniativeness of the peasant, the stubborn firmness of the mule, the ant and the worm, that nothing baffles, nothing turns aside. Once bent upon doing something, it would have been as easy to keep water from running down a hill as make him desist from his obstinacy. He had, in fact, the inert, unreasoning will of the Slovene.

The day after Radonic's departure, Vranic had come again to make love to Milena. Of course, she would not listen to him, but spurned him from her like a cur. He simply smiled, in the half-shrewd, half-apish way in which peasants grin, and threatened to report everything she did to her husband on his return. He told her he would poison Radonic's ear in such a way that her life would henceforth be anything but a pleasure. Milena answered that, as her conscience was quite clear, she allowed him to act as he pleased.

In the meanwhile Uros' love was getting the mastery over him. Milena's presence haunted him day and night; it overflowed his heart in a way that made him feel as if he were suffering from some slow, languishing fever. Looking upon Milena's face was like gazing at the full moon on a calm summer night; only that this planet's amber light shed a sense of peace on the surface of the rippleless waters, whilst this woman's beauty made his heart beat faster and his nerves tingle with excitement. Listening to her voice reminded him of the love-songs he had heard the

guzlari chant on winter evenings – amatory poems which heated the blood like long draughts of strong wine. His love for her had changed his very nature; instead of caring only for fishing and shooting, unfurling the broad sails and seeing the breeze swell the white canvas, a yearning hitherto unknown now filled his breast. At times he even avoided his friend, and went wandering alone, his steps – almost unwillingly – leading him to choose places where he had met Milena, and which were still haunted by her presence. Many a night he would roam or linger near her house, hoping to catch a glimpse of her; but, alas! she seldom came out, and she was never seen either at her window or her door. Her lonely cottage looked deserted, desolate.

On the night when the brig was expected to weigh anchor, Uros slunk away stealthily, when the crew were fast asleep, and went on shore. The inns were already shut, and not a light was to be seen in any window. He, therefore, plucked up all his courage, hastened to reach Milena's lonely house, and there, under her casement, he sang to her the following *rastanak*, or farewell song:

Though cold and deaf, farewell, love;
We two must part.
But can you live alone, love,
If I depart?

From o'er the boundless sea, love,
And mountains high,
From o'er the dark, deep wood, love,

You'll hear me sigh.

If you are deaf to me, love,
Still on the plain
You'll see the flowers fade, love,
Seared by my pain.

Still you are deaf to me, love,
Without a tear;
I go without a word, love,
My soul to cheer.

I send you back those blooms, love,
Which once you gave;
For they are now to me, love,
Rank as the grave.

Amongst those cold, grey buds, love,
A snake doth lie,
As you have not for me, love,
A single sigh.

He finished and listened, then he heard a slight noise overhead; the window was quietly opened, and Milena's face was seen peeping between the cranny as she held the shutters ajar, for her beautiful, lustrous eyes sparkled in the darkness.

"Uros!" she whispered, "how can you be so very foolish as to come and sing under my windows! What will the people say, if

they should happen to see you?"

"Who can hear me in this lonely spot? Everybody is asleep, not a mouse is stirring abroad."

"Someone or other seems always to hang about, spying all I do. For your sake, and for mine, go away, I beg you. After the fright I had upon that dreadful night, I have got to be such a coward."

"No; the truth is, after that night, you never cared for me any more."

"I must not care for you;" then, with a sigh, and faintly: "nor must you for me."

"Would it make you very happy if I forgot you – if I loved someone else?"

She did not give him any reply.

"You don't answer," he said.

"You'll forget me soon enough, Uros – far from the eyes, far from the heart."

"And if I come back loving you more than ever?"

"You'll be away for a long time; when you come back – "

"Well?"

"Perhaps I'll be dead."

"Don't say such things, Milena, or you'll drive me mad."

Then, with cat-like agility, he climbed the low wall, and, with hands clutching at the window-sill, and the tips of his *opanke*, or sandal-like shoes, resting on some stones jutting out, he stood at the height of her head. His other arm soon found itself resting round her unresisting neck. He lifted up his mouth towards hers,

and their pouting lips met in a long, lingering kiss.

But all at once she shivered from head to foot, and, drawing herself away, she begged Uros to have pity on her and to go away.

"Milena, it is perhaps the last time we meet; more than one ship never came back to the port from which it sailed; more than one sailor never saw his birth-place again."

"But, only think, if some one passing by should see us here."

"Well, then, let me come in, so nobody'll see me."

"Uros, are you mad? Allow you to come in at this hour of the night!"

"What greater harm would there be than in the broad daylight?"

"No; if you really love me, don't ask me such a thing."

Uros obeyed, and, after a few minutes, with the tears gushing to his eyes, he bade her good-bye. As he was sliding down, he thought he heard a noise of footsteps on the shingle of the pathway near the house. Uros shuddered and listened. Was it some man lurking there, he asked himself. If so, who could it be? Radonic had, perhaps, come back to Budua to keep watch over his wife – catch her on the hop, and then revenge himself upon her. The sudden fright now curdled his blood. Still, he was not afraid for himself; he was young and strong, and he was on his guard. Even if it was the incensed husband, the night was too dark for anyone to take a good aim and fire from a distance. If he was afraid, it was for Milena's sake. Radonic had, perhaps, returned; he had seen him climb down from his own house at that

late hour. Rash as he was, he would surely go and kill his wife, who, even if she was a flirt, was by no means as bad as what he or the world would think her to be.

"Anyhow," said Uros to himself, "if it is Radonic, he will either rush at me, or fire at me from where he is hiding; or else he will go towards his own house." His suspense would only last a few seconds.

It lasted much longer. Many minutes passed, if he could reckon time by the beating of his heart. In the meanwhile he tried to fathom the darkness from whence the slight sound had come. Not being able to see or hear anything, he went off, walking on tip-toe; but he listened intently as he went. All at once there was again a slight rustling sound. Uros walked on for a while, then, stepping on the grass and crouching between the bushes, slowly and stealthily he came back near the house and waited. Not many minutes had elapsed when he heard the noise of footsteps once more, but he saw nobody.

Oh! how his heart did beat just then! The sound of steps was distinctly heard upon the shingle, and yet no human being, no living creature, was to be seen. What could this be?

"*Bogme ovari!*– God protect me" – he said to himself, "it is, perhaps, a ghost, a vampire!"

Darkness in itself is repellent to our nature; therefore, to be assaulted at night, by any unseen foe, must daunt the bravest amongst the brave.

It is, then, not to be wondered that Uros was appalled at the

idea of having to become the prey of an invisible, intangible ghost, against which it was impossible to struggle. He waited for a while, motionless, breathless. There was not the slightest noise, nothing was stirring any more; but in the dusky twilight everything seemed to assume strange and weird shapes – the gnarled branches of the olive trees looked like stunted and distorted limbs, whilst the bushes seemed to stretch forth long waving tentacles, with which to grasp the passer-by. As he looked about, he saw a light appear at a distance, flit about for a while, extinguish itself, reappear again after some time, then go out as before. Then he heard the barking of a dog; the sound came nearer, then it lost itself in the stillness of the night.

Uros, horror-stricken, was about to take to his heels, when again he heard the footsteps on the shingle. He, therefore, stood stock-still and waited, with a heart ready to burst. He could not leave Milena to the danger that threatened her, so he chose to remain and fall into the clutches of a vampire. He listened; the steps, though muffled, were those of a rather heavy man. The sound continued, slowly, stealthily, distinctly. Uros looked towards the place from whence the noise came, and thereupon he saw a man creep out from within the darkness of the bushes and go up towards Radonic's house.

Uros, seeing a human figure, felt all his superstitious fears vanish; he looked well at it to convince himself that it was not some deceptive vision, some skin all bloated with blood, as vampires are. No, it was a man. Still, who could it be, he was too

short and puny to be Radonic?

Who could this man be, going to Milena's in the middle of the night?

A bitter feeling of jealousy came over him, a steel hand seemed to grasp his heart. Milena had just been flirting with him, could she not do the same with another man. She had listened to his vows of love, he had been a fool to go off when she begged him to remember that she was another man's wife. At that moment he hated her, and he was vexed with himself.

There are moments in life when we repent having been too good, for goodness sometimes is but a sign of weakness and inexperience; it only shows our unfitness for the great struggle of life, where the weak go to the wall.

During the time that Radonic had been at home he had never felt the bitter pangs of jealousy as much as he did now. It humbled him to think that he had left his place to another more fortunate rival, apparently an older man.

Then he asked himself how he could have been so foolish as to love a married woman.

"After all," said he to himself, "it is but right that I should suffer, why have I lifted up my eyes upon a woman who has sworn to love another man?"

He had sinned, and he was now punished for his crime.

When flushed with success the voice of conscience had ever been mute, but now, when disappointment was sinking his heart, that voice cried out loudly to him. Conscience is but a coward at

best, a sneak in prosperity, a bully in our misfortune.

There in the darkness of the night, lifting his eyes up towards heaven, he called upon the blessed Virgin to come to his help.

"Oh! immaculate mother of Christ our Saviour, grant me the favour of seeing that this man is no fortunate rival, that he is not Milena's lover, and henceforth I shall never lift up my eyes towards her, even if I should have to crush my heart, I shall never harbour in it any other feeling for her except that of a brother or a friend."

During this time the man had gone up to the cottage door. Almost unthinkingly and with the words of the prayer upon his lips, Uros stood up, went a step onwards, and then he stopped. The man now tapped at the door. A pause followed. The man knocked again a little louder. Thereupon Milena's voice was heard from within. Though Uros was much too far to hear what she had said, he evidently understood that she was asking who was outside; the young man, treading on the grass as much as he could, stole on tip-toe a little nearer the house.

He could not catch the answer the man had given, for it was in a low muffled undertone.

"Who are you?" repeated Milena from inside, "and what do you want?"

"It is I, Uros," said the man in a muffled tone; "open your door, my love."

"Liar," shouted Uros from behind, and with a bound he had jumped upon the man and, gripping him by the nape of the neck

and by the collar of his *jacerma*, he tugged at him and dragged him away from the door.

As the man struggled to free himself, Uros recognised him to be Vranic – Vranic the ghost-seer, Vranic the spy.

"How dare you come here in my name, you scoundrel," said the young man, and giving him a mighty shake, that tore the strong cloth of the jacket, he cast him away.

"And pray what are you doing here at this time of the night?" asked Vranic, his hand on the haft of his knife.

"And what is that to you – are you her husband or her kinsman? But as you wish to know, I'll tell you; I came to protect her from a dastardly coward like yourself."

"I doubt whether Radonic will be glad to hear that you go sneaking into his house at the dead of night, just to keep his wife from any harm; that is really good of you." And Vranic, standing aloof, burst out laughing. Then he added, "Anyhow, he'll be most grateful to you when he knows it."

"And who'll tell him?"

"I shall."

"If I let you, you spy."

Thereupon Uros rushed upon Vranic so unexpectedly, that the latter lost his balance, slipped and fell. The younger man held him down with one hand, and with the other he lifted up his dagger. Seeing himself thus overpowered:

"What, are you going to murder me like that?" he gasped out, "do you not see that I was joking? If you'll but let me go I'll swear

not to say a word about the matter to anyone."

"On what will you swear?"

"On anything you like, on the holy medals round my neck."

With a jerk that almost choked the man, Uros broke the string and snatched the amulets from Vranic's neck, and presented them to him, saying:

"Now, man, swear."

Vranic took his oath.

"Now," said Uros, "swear not to harm Milena while I am away, swear not to worry her by your threats, or in any other way soever."

Vranic having sworn again, was left free to get up and go off.

When he was at a few paces from Uros he stopped, and with a scowl upon his face he muttered:

"Those medals were not blessed, so you can use your dagger now, if you like, and I shall use my tongue, we shall see which of us two will suffer most; anyhow, remember the proverb, 'Where the goat breathes, even the vine withers.'"

Then, stooping down, he gathered a handful of stones and flung them with all his might at Uros, after which he took to his heels and ran off with all his might.

The stones went hissing by Uros, but one of them caught him on his brow, grazing off the skin and covering his eyes with blood. Uros, blinded by the stone, remained standing for a while, and then, seeing that Vranic had run off, he went up to Milena's door and tapped lightly.

"Milena," said he, "have you heard the quarrel I have had with Vranic?"

"Yes, did he hurt you?"

"Only a mere scratch."

"Nothing more?"

"No."

"Surely?"

"No, indeed!"

Milena would willingly have opened the door to see if Uros was only scratched, but she was in too great a trepidation to do so.

"Well," added she, "if you are not hurt, please go away."

"But are you not afraid Vranic might come back?"

"Well, and if he does? He'll find the door shut as before. Moreover, I'm by no means afraid of him, he is the greatest coward, or at least the only coward, of the town; therefore do not stay here on my account, you can do me no good."

"Then you do not want me?" said Uros, in a lingering way, and with a sigh.

"No; go," quoth she. "If you love me, go."

Uros turned his back on the cottage and wended his steps homewards. The moon was now rising above the hills in the distance. Milena went to the window and looked at the young man going off. Her heart yearned after him as he went, and she fain would have called him back.

Poor fellow, he had fought for her, he was wounded, and now she let him go off like that. It was not right. Was his wound but

a scratch? She ought to have seen after it. It was very ungrateful of her not to have looked after it.

All at once Uros stopped. Her heart began to beat. He turned round and came back on his steps. At first she was delighted, then she was disappointed. She wished he had not turned back.

He walked back slowly and stealthily, trying to muffle his steps.

What was he going to do?

Milena ran to the door and put her ear close to the key-hole.

She heard Uros come up to the very sill and then it seemed to her that he had sat or crouched upon the step.

Was he hurt? Was he going to stay there and watch over the house like a faithful dog?

She waited a while; not the slightest sound was heard; she could hardly keep still. At last, unable to bear it any longer:

"Uros," said she, "is that you?"

"Yes."

"And what are you doing there?"

"I was going to watch over you."

Overcome by this proof of the young man's love, Milena slowly opened the door, and taking Uros by both his hands she made him come in.

The wind did not rise and the brigantine rode still at anchor in the bay. The days passed, and at last merry Christmas was drawing near. The *pobratim*– though anxious to be off – hoped that the calm weather would last for a week longer, that they

might pass the*badnji-vecer*– or the evening of the log – and Christmas Day with their parents.

Their wishes were granted; one day passed after the other and the weather was always most beautiful. Not the slightest cloud came either to dim or enhance the limpid blue sky, and though the mornings were now rather fresh, the days were, as yet, delightfully warm and radiant with sunshine. In the gardens the oleanders were all in full bloom, so were also the roses, the geraniums and the China asters; whilst in the field many a daisy was seen glinting at the modest speedwell, and the Dalmatian convolvulus entwined itself lovingly around the haughty acanthus, which spread out their fretted leaves to the sun, taking up as much space as well they could, while in damp places the tall, feathery grasses grew amidst the sedges, the reeds, and the rushes and all kinds of rank weeds of glowing hues. Not a breath of wind came to ripple the surface of the shining blue waters.

On the 24th a little cloud was seen far off, the colour of the waters grew by degrees of a dull leaden tint, and the wind began to moan. In the meanwhile the cloudlet that had been the size of a weasel grew to be as big as a camel, then it swelled out into the likeness of some huge megatherium, it rolled out its massy coils and overspread the whole space of the sky. Then the clouds began to lower, and seemed to cover the earth with a ponderous lid. The wind and the cold having increased, the summer all at once passed away into dreary and bleak winter.

Christmas was to be kept at Milos Bellacic's house, for though the two families had always been on the most friendly terms, they, since the day upon which the two young men had become *pobratim*, got to be almost one family. Some other friends had been asked to come and make merry with them on that evening. Amongst other guests Zwillievic, Milena's father, who was a cousin of Bellacic's, having come with his wife to spend the Christmas holidays at Budua, had accepted his kinsman's hospitality. Milena had also been asked to come and pass those days merrily with her parents.

At nightfall, all the guests being already assembled, the yule-log, the huge bole of an olive tree, was, with great ado, brought to the house. Bellacic, standing on the threshold with his cap in his hand, said to it:

"Welcome log, and may God watch over you."

Then, taking the *bucara* or wooden bottle, he began to sprinkle it with wine, forming a cross as he did so, then he threw some wheat upon it, calling a blessing upon his house, and upon all his guests, who stood grouped behind him, after which all the guests answered in chorus, "And so be it." Thereupon all the men standing outside the house fired off their guns and pistols to show their joy, shouting: "May Christmas be welcome to you."

After this Uros brought in his own log and the same ceremony had once more to be gone through.

The logs were then festively placed upon the hearth, where they had to burn the whole night, and even till the next morning.

In the meantime a copious supper was prepared and set upon the table. In the very midst, taking the place of an *epergne*, there was a large loaf, all trimmed up with ivy and evergreens, and in the centre of this loaf there were thrust three wax candles carefully twisted into one, so as to form a taper, which was lit in honour of the Holy Trinity. Christmas Eve being a fast day, the meal consisted of fish cooked in different ways.

First, there was a pillau with scallops, then cod – which is always looked upon as the staple fare of evening – after which followed pickled tunny, eels, and so forth. The *starescina*, taking a mouthful of every dish that was brought upon the table, went to throw it upon the burning log, so that it might bring him a prosperous year; his son then followed his example.

After all had eaten and were filled, they gathered around the hearth and squatted down upon the straw with which the floor was strewn – for, in honour of Christ, the room had been made to look as much as possible like a manger, or a stable. They again greeted each other with the usual compliments, "for many years," and so forth, and black coffee was served in Turkish fashion, that is, in tiny cups, held by a kind of silver, or silvered metal, egg-cup instead of a saucer. Most everyone loosened his girdle, some took off their shoes, and all made themselves comfortable for the night. Thereupon Milenko, who was somewhat of a bard and who had studied an epic song for the occasion, one of those heroic and wild *junaske*, took his *guzla*, and gave the company the story of "Marko Kraglievic and the Moor of Primoryé," as follows: —

KRAGLIEVIC MARKO I CRNI ARAPIN

An Arab lord had once in Primoryé,
A mighty castle by the spray-swept shore;
Its many lofty halls were bright and gay,
And Moorish lads stood watching at each door.
Albeit its wealth, mirth never echoed there;
Its lord was prone to be of pensive mood,
And oft his frown would freeze the very air;
On secret sorrow he e'er seemed to brood.
At times to all his *svati* would he say:
"What do I care for all this wide domain,
Or for my guards on steeds in bright array?
Much more than dazzling pomp my heart would fain
Have some fond tie so that the time might seem
Less tedious in its flight. I am alone.
A mother's heart, a sister's, or, I deem,
A bride's would be far more than all I own."
Thus unto him his liegemen made reply:
"O, mighty lord! they say that Russia's Czar
Has for his heir, a daughter meek and shy,
Of beauty rare, just like the sparkling star
That gleams at dawn and shines at eventide.
Now, master, we do wait for thy behest.
Does thy heart crave to have this maid for bride?
Say, shall we sally forth unto her quest?"

The master mused a while, then answered: "Aye,
  By Allah! fetch this Russian for my mate!
Tell her she'll be the dame of Primoryé,
  The mistress of my heart and my estate.
But stop. – If Russia should not grant his child,
  Then tell him I shall kill his puny knights,
And waste his lands. Say that my love is wild,
  Hot as the Lybian sun, deep as the night!"
Now, after riding twenty days and more,
  The *svati* reached at last their journey's end,
Then straightway to the Russian King they bore
  Such letters as their lord himself had penned.
The great Czar having read the Moor's demand,
  And made it known to all his lords at Court,
Could, for a while, but hardly understand
  This strange request; he deemed it was in sport.
A blackamoor to wed his daughter fair!
  "I had as lief," said he, "the meanest lad
Of my domains as son-in-law and heir,
  Than this grim Moor, who must in sooth be mad."
But soon his wrath was all changed into grief,
  On learning to his dread and his dismay,
That not a knight would stir to his relief,
  No one would fight the Moor of Primoryé!
Howe'er the Queen upon that very night
  Did dream a dream. Within Prilipù town,
Beyond the Balkan mounts, she saw a knight,
  Whose mighty deeds had won him great renown.
(Kraglievic Marko was the hero's name);

His flashing sword was always seen with awe
By faithless Turks, who dreaded his great fame;
And in her dream that night the Queen then saw
This mighty Serb come forth to save her child.
Then did the Czarin to her lord relate
The vision which her senses had beguiled,
And both upon it long did meditate.
Upon the morrow, then, the Czar did write
To Marko, asking him to come and slay
This haughty Moor, as not a Russian knight
Would deign to fight the lord of Primoryé.
As meed he promised him three asses stout,
Each laden with a sack of coins of gold.
As soon as Marko read this note throughout,
These words alone the messenger he told:
"What if this Arab killed me in the strife,
And from my shoulders he do smite my head.
Will golden ducats bring me back to life?
What do I care for gold when I am dead?"
The herald to the King this answer bore.
Thereon the Queen wrote for her daughter's sake:
"Great Marko, I will give thee three bags more,
Six bags in all, if you but undertake
To free my daughter from such heinous fate,
As that of having to become the bride
Of such a man as that vile renegade."
To Prilipù the messenger did ride,
But Marko gave again the same reply.
The Czar then summoned forth his child to him:

"Now 'tis thy turn," said he; "just write and try
  To get the Serb to kill this man whose whim
Is to have thee for wife." The maid thus wrote:
  "O Marko, brother mine, do come at once.
I beg you for the love that you devote
  To God and to St. John, come for the nonce
To free me from the Moor of Primoryé.
  Seven sacks of gold I'll give you for this deed,
And, if I can this debt of mine repay,
  A shirt all wrought in gold will be your meed.
Moreover, you shall have my father's sword;
  And as a pledge thereon the King's great seal,
Which doth convey to all that Russia's lord
  Doth order and decree that none shall deal
Its bearer harm; no man shall ever slay
  You in his wide domains. Come, then, with speed
To free me from the lord of Primoryé."
  To Prilipù the herald did proceed
With all due haste; he rode by day and night,
  Through streams and meads, through many a bushy dell;
At last at Marko's door he did alight.
  When Marko read the note, he answered: "Well – "
Then mused a while, then bade the young page go.
  But said the youth: "What answer shall I give?"
"Just say I answered neither yes nor no."
  The Princess saw that she would ne'er outlive
Her dreadful doom, and walking on the strand,
  There, 'midst her sobs, she said: "O thou deep sea,
Receive me in thy womb, lest the curst brand

Of being this man's wife be stamped on me."
Just when about to plunge she lifts her eyes,
And lo! far off, a knight upon a steed,
Armed cap-à-pie, advancing on, she spies.
"Why weepest thou, O maid? tell me thy need,
And if my sword can be of any use."
"Thanks, gentle sir. Alas! one knight alone
Can wield his brand for me; but he eschews
To fight."
"A coward, then, is he."
"'Tis known
That he is brave."
"His name?"
"He did enrich
The soil with Turkish blood at Cossovo.
You sure have heard of Marko Kraglievic."
Thereon he kissed her hand and answered low:
"Well, I am he; and I come for your sake.
Go, tell the Czar to give thee as a bride
Unto the Moor; then merry shall we make
In some *mehan*, and there I shall abide
The coming of the lord of Primoryé."
The Princess straightway told the Czar, and he
At once gave orders that they should obey
All that the Serb might bid, whate'er it be.
That night with all his men the Arab came —
Five hundred liegemen, all on prancing steeds;
The Czar did welcome them as it became
Men high in rank, and of exalted deeds.

Then, after that, they all went to the inn.
"Ah!" said the Moor, as they were on their way,
"How all are scared, and shut themselves within
Their homes; all fear the men of Primoryé."
But, as they reached the door of the *mehan*,
The Arab, on his horse, would cross the gate,
When, on the very sill, he saw a man
Upon a steed. This sight seemed to amate
The Arab lord. But still he said: "Stand off!
And let me pass."
"For you, this is no place,
Miscreant heathen dog!"
At such a scoff
Each angry liegeman lifted up his mace.
Thereon 'twixt them and him ensued a fight,
Where Marko dealt such blows that all around
The din was heard, like thunder in the night.
He hacked and hewed them down, until a mound
Of corpses lay amid a pool of blood,
For trickling from each fearful gash it streamed,
And wet the grass, and turned the earth in mud
Of gore; whilst all this time each falchion gleamed,
For Marko's sword was ruthless in the fray,
And when it fell, there all was cleaved in twain;
No coat of mail such strokes as his could stay,
Nor either did he stop to ascertain
If all the blood that trickled down each limb
Was but that of the foe and not his own.
And thus he fought, until the day grew dim,

And thus he fought, and thus he stood alone
  Against them all; till one by one they fell,
As doth the corn before the reaper's scythe,
  Whilst their own curses were their only knell!
The Serb, howe'er, was still both strong and lithe,
  When all the swarthy Arabs round him lay.
"Now 'tis thy time to die, miscreant knight!"
  He called unto the Moor of Primoryé.
With golden daggers they began to fight;
  They thrust and parried both with might and main;
But soon the Arab sank to writhe in pain.
  Then Marko forthwith over him did bend
To stab him through the heart. Then off he took
  His head, on which he threw a light cymar
(For 'twas, indeed, a sight that few could brook):
  Thus covered up, he took it to the Czar.
Then Marko got the Princess for his wife —
  Besides the gold that was to be his meed,
And from that day most happy was his life,
  Known far and wide for many a knightly deed.

The merry evening came to an end; in the meanwhile the weather had undergone another transformation. The cold having set in, the thin sleet had all at once changed into snow. The tiny patches of ice and the little droplets of rain had swelled out into large fleecy flakes, which kept fluttering about hither and thither, helter-skelter, before they came down to the ground; they seemed, indeed, to be chasing one another all the time, with

the grace of spring butterflies. Even when the flakes did fall it was not always for long, for the wind, creeping slily along the earth, often lifted them up and drove them far away, whirling them into eddies, till at last they were allowed to settle down in heaps, blocking up doors and windows; or else, flying away, they ensconced themselves in every nook and corner, in every chink and cranny.

That evening, when the good Christians went to church to hear the oft-repeated tidings of great joy, uttered by the *vladika*, or priest, in the sacramental words: *Mir Bogig, Christos se rodè*, or "The peace of God be with you, Christ is born"; and when, after midnight, they returned home, while huge logs were blazing on every hearth, they hardly knew again either the town or its neighbourhood, all wrapped up in a mantle of dazzling whiteness; the sight was a rather unusual one, for the inhabitants of Budua had seen snow but very seldom.

The whole Christmas Day was spent very pleasantly in going about from house to house, wishing everyone joy and happiness, or receiving friends at home and drinking bumpers to their health. It was, indeed, a merry, forgiving time, when the hearts of men were full of kindness and good-will, and peace reigned upon earth.

There were, indeed, some exceptions to the general rule of benevolence, for, now and then, some man, even upon that hallowed day, bore within his breast but a clay-cold heart, in which grudge, envy and malice still rankled, and the Christmas

greetings, wheezed through thin lips, had but a chilling and hollow sound.

The very first person who came to Bellacic's house early on Christmas morning was Vranic, the spy. It was not out of love that he came. He had been sneaking about the house, casting long, prying glances from beneath the hood of his *kabanica*, or great-coat, trying to find out whether Milena were there, for he knew that she had not passed the night in her own house.

All at once, whilst he was sneaking about, he was met by several young men, bent on their Christmas rounds of visits; they took him along with them, and, though quite against himself, he was the first to put his foot in Bellacic's house upon that day.

According to the Slav custom, he was asked, after the usual greetings, to tap the yule log with his stick. He at once complied, with as much good grace as he could muster, uttering the well-known phrase:

"May you have as many horses, cows, and sheep as the *badnjak* has given you sparks."

Knowing that while he was saying these words every member of the family, and every guest gathered together around him, would hang upon his looks, trying to read in his face whether the forthcoming year would be a prosperous one, for the expression of the features, as well as the way in which these words are uttered, are reckoned to be sure omens, Vranic, therefore, tried to put on a pleasant look and a good-natured appearance, but this was so alien to his nature that he was by no means sure of success.

Uros and Milena had, however, stood aloof; they had understood that the prediction must be unfavourable, and, though they did not look up, they heard that the voice, which was meant to be soft and oily, was bitter, hard and grating.

A gloom had come over the house just then; it seemed as if that man of ill-omen had stepped in to damp everyone's joy.

Uros remained stock-still, and though his fingers instinctively grasped the handle of his knife, still he was too much of a Slav to harm a guest in his own house. As for Milenko, not having any reasons for being so forbearing, he was about to thrust the fiend out of his adopted parents' house, when Vranic, drawing back from the hearth, caught his foot on the fag end of a log, and, not to fall, stepped over it. This was the remainder of that log which Uros had himself put upon the fire, and, according to the traditional custom, it had been taken away from the hearth before it had been quite consumed, for it was to be kept, as the fire on New Year's Eve was to be kindled with it. Vranic hardly noticed what he had done, but everyone present looked stealthily at one another, and quietly crossed themselves. Vranic, they knew, had come with evil thoughts in his head, but now he had only brought harm upon himself, for it is well known that whoever steps over a *badnjak* is doomed to die within the year.

The seer went off soon after this, and then, when the other well-wishers came, the gloom that he had left behind him was dispelled, and the remainder of the Christmas Day was spent in mirth and jollity.

CHAPTER IV
NEW YEAR'S DAY

On the last day of the year the *pobratim* were sailing on the waters of the Adriatic not far from the island of Lissa, now famed in history for its naval wars. Soon the sun went down behind a huge mass of grey clouds, and night set in when the vessel was about to sail amidst that maze of inlets, straits, channels and friths, which characterise all that part of the Dalmatian coast. But, though the night was dark and wild, their schooner was strong and stout, and accustomed to weather such heavy seas.

A head-wind arose, which first began to shiver amidst the rigging like a human being sick of a fever; then it changed into a slight wailing sound, so that it seemed at times the voice of a suffering child tossing about in its cot unable to find rest. The wind increased, and the sound changed into a howl like the rage of untamed beasts; it was a horrible concert, where serpents hissed, wild cats mewed and lions roared in and out of time and tune; but not without a strange, weird, uncouth harmony. It was the voice of the storm. Great Adamastor, the genius of the foul weather, baffled at not being able to snap all the ropes asunder and break down the straining masts, was yelling with impotent rage. He was, withal, a cunning old man and knew more than one trick, for, after holding his breath for a while, he would whisper

no louder than a mother does when her babe is asleep, and then again, he would begin to snicker slily in a low, snorting way, until, all at once, he broke loose into loud fits of fiendish, hoarse merriment.

Added to this head-wind, a heavy sea rolled its huge waves against the prow of the ship and dashed the spray of its breakers up its very sails; then the strong rain would come down in showers at every gust of wind. The elements seemed, indeed, bent upon overwhelming the poor craft groaning at this ill-treatment.

Eleven o'clock having just struck, Uros went below and Milenko got ready to take up his watch.

Poor Uros! he was not only weary and wet to the skin – for his huge*kabanica*, or overcoat, had been of little avail against the pelting rain – but, worse than that, for the first time in his life he felt home-sick and love-sick. He remembered the pleasant Christmas Eve, the last night but one which he had passed at home. Whilst the wind howled and the waves rolled high he recalled to mind the many incidents of that evening, which had been for him the happiest of his life, and there, in the darkness of the night, Milena's bright and laughing eyes were always twinkling before him. Her sweet looks, which he had drunk down like intoxicating wine, had maddened his brain.

Hitherto Uros had been passionately fond of the sea, and his great ambition was to be one day the master of a ship. Now that his dream seemed about to be realised even beyond his wildest ambition – for the brig was really a fine ship – his heart was

far behind on shore, and the sea had lost its charm. That night especially he wished he could have been back by his own fireside watching the remainder of the yule-logs as they burnt away into cinders.

When Uros came down, the captain brought out a bottle of some rare old genuine cognac, which on some former voyage he himself had got at Bordeaux. Punch was made, Milenko was called down and toasts were drunk to the health of the absent ones, songs were sung about the pleasantness of a life upon the wide, wide sea; but the voice of the waves seemed to jeer them, and then the captain fell a-thinking that he was growing of an age when it was far more agreeable to remain amidst his little brood at home. As for poor Uros, he thought of the woman who lived in a lonely cottage, and he wondered whether harm might not befal her, now that he was no more there to watch over her. He thought that, after all, it was useless to go roaming about the world when he might remain at home tilling his father's fields. Milenko alone was of a cheerful mood; perhaps it was because he thought less of himself and more of those around him.

Milenko came and went up and down like a squirrel, keeping his watch and trying to cheer his friend. Still, each time he went up and looked about, he found that the wind was stronger and the waves rolled higher. Meanwhile the captain, roused to a sense of duty, tried to enliven the passing hours by telling old tales, comical adventures, and strange sea legends.

Soon the storm increased apace, and Milenko had to remain

on deck; but Uros, being tired and sleepy, was about to betake himself to rest. Midnight had just struck, and the hands of the clock were on twelve, a last cup was drained, and the three seamen having thus seen the old year out and the new year in, separated and each one went his own way. The clock withal was rather fast, and it was only some moments after they had separated from one another that the old year breathed its last.

Before going to rest, Uros, who had slightly bruised his forehead just where Vranic had cut him with the stone, went to his chest and took out of it a small round tin looking-glass and opened it. He wished to see what kind of a scratch it had left, and if the scar were healing. He had scarcely cast his eyes upon it when, to his great surprise, lo, and behold! far from seeing his own face in the glass, Vranic's likeness was there, staring upon him with his usual leer!

Uros was startled at this sight; then, for a while he stood as if transfixed, gloating on the image within the glass, unable to turn away his eyes from it. Then, appalled as he was, he almost dropped the looking-glass he was holding.

All at once remembering that it was midnight – the moment when the old year passes into oblivion and the new one rises from chaos – his hand fell, and he stood for a while, pale, shuddering, and staring upon vacancy. But – recalled to himself – he endeavoured to retrace the long string of thoughts that had flitted through his brain, since he had left the captain and Milenko up to the moment that he had looked upon the glass,

and Vranic was not amongst them. His brain had been rather muddled by sleepiness and brandy, and he had hardly been thinking about anything.

Having lifted up the glass to the height of his face, he for a moment held his head averted, for he had really not the courage to look upon it.

After a while he shrugged his shoulders, muttering to himself: "I have always been thinking of Milena, and of the last days I passed at home, so that now this man's face – such as I had seen it on Christmas morning – has been impressively recalled to my mind. It must be this and nothing more."

Still, the moment when he tried again to look upon the glass, a vague terror came over him, and all his courage passed away; it was just as if he were looking upon some unhallowed thing, as if he were indulging in witchcraft. But curiosity prevailed once more, and as he did so, a trepidation came all over his limbs. This time he was surely not mistaken; it was no vision of his overheated fancy, seen with his mind's eye; sleepiness and the effect of the brandy had quite passed away, and still the glass – instead of reflecting his own features – was the living portrait of the man he hated. There he was, with his low forehead, his livid complexion, his pale greyish-green eyes, his high cheekbones and his flat nose.

He was almost impelled to dash down the glass and break it into pieces, but still he durst not do it; a superstitious fear stopped him; it was, as we all know, so very unlucky to break a looking-

glass by accident, but to break it of his own free will must be far worse.

He now kept his eyes riveted upon the tiny mirror, and then he saw Vranic's face slightly fade and then vanish away; then the glass for a few seconds grew dim as if a damp breath had passed upon it; then the dimness disappeared little by little, the glass again grew clear and reflected his own pale face, with his eyes wildly opened, glistening with a wild, feverish look. Now, he was not mistaken; Vranic was not to see another year!

Uros had often heard it said that, if a young unmarried man looks by chance in a looking-glass at the stroke of twelve, just when the old year is dying out, he will perhaps see, either the woman he is to marry in the course of the year, Death, or a man of his acquaintance doomed to die within the year. He had never tried it, because it is a thing that has to be done by chance, and even then the mirror does not always foretell the future. Now, the thing happened so naturally, in such an unforeseen, unpremeditated way, that there was no possibility of a doubt. Vranic, then, was doomed to die.

A week before, his death had been predicted the moment when he stumbled and slipped over the stump of the yule-log – aye, it was his own log – now again his enemy's death was foretold to him.

As he stood there with his glass in his hand, a thought struck him, and in answer to this, he lifted his eyes upwards and begged his patron saint to keep his hands clean, and not to make him the

instrument of his enemy's death.

"He is a villain," muttered he to himself, "and he fully deserves a thousand deaths; but let him not die by my hand. If he dies of a violent death, let me not be his executioner."

Uros stood there for some time as if bewildered and very much like a man who had seen a ghost, afraid to look round lest he should see Vranic's face gloating upon him; then shuddering, he ran upstairs to tell his adoptive brother all that had happened, and the strange vision he had seen.

When Uros went up on deck, he found that the wind had greatly increased, and that from a cap-full, as it had been in the beginning, it had grown into a hurricane. The sky was even darker than before; the waves, swollen into huge breakers, dashed against the prow of the ship, making her stagger and reel as if she had been stunned by those mighty blows.

The captain had now taken command of the ship, for all that part of the Adriatic up to the Quarnero, with its archipelago of islands, its numerous straits, its friths and rock-bound inlets, where the mountains of the mainland – sloping down to the water's edge – end in long ledges and chasms all interspersed with sharp ridges, rocks and sunken reefs, through which the ships have often to wind carefully in and out, is like a perilous maze. The navigation of these parts, difficult enough in the day-time by fair weather, is more than dangerous on a dark and stormy night.

The ship, according to all calculation, had passed the Punta della Planca, and was not very far from the port of Sebenico. It

was useless to try and take shelter there, for the town is most difficult of access, especially during contrary winds.

All that night the whole crew were on deck obeying the captain's orders, for it was as much as they could do to manage the ship, at war with all the elements; besides, as she rode forecastle in, she had shipped several seas, so that, deeply-laden as she was, she wallowed heavily about, and looked every moment as if she were ready to founder.

The storm had now risen to the highest pitch, and the captain, who, as it has been said, was an elderly man, as well as an experienced sailor, acknowledged that he scarcely remembered a more fearful gale in the whole of his lifetime. All waited eagerly for the first streaks of dawn; for a tempest, though frightful in broad daylight, is always more appalling in the dead of the night. They waited a long time, for it seemed as if darkness had set for ever over this world.

At last a faint grey, glimmering light appeared in the east; then, by degrees, towards daybreak, the waters overhead, and the waters underneath, had a gloomy, greyish hue. Light spread itself far and wide, but the storm did not abate.

Milenko, with his spy-glass in his hand, was searching through the veil of mist that surrounded the ship, for some island in the offing, when, all at once, he thought he could perceive a dark speck not very far off. This object, apparently cradled by the waters, was so dimly seen that he could not even guess what it was; but after keeping his eyes steadily upon it, he saw, or rather,

he thought he saw, the hull or wreck of a ship, or a buoy. No, surely it could not be a buoy floating there in the midst of the waters. Was it not, perhaps, some foam-covered rock against which the waves were dashing? His eyes were rooted upon it for some time, and then he was certain that it was not a rock, for it moved, nay, it seemed to float about. He pondered for a while. Could it not be, he thought, the head of one of those huge sea-snakes, upon which ships, having sometimes cast their anchors, are dragged down into the fathomless abysses of the deep, there to become the prey of this horrible monster? It was really too far off for him to understand what it was.

He waited for some time, then he strained his eyes, and he saw that it could be nothing but a boat. He called Uros to him, but his friend's sight being less keen than his own, he could make nothing of it. The captain, having come to them, could not distinguish the floating object at all. As they steered onwards, they came nearer to it, and then they found out that it was indeed the hull of a caique or galley-boat, which, having lost its masts and rudder, was tossed about at the mercy of the breakers, that always seemed ready to swallow it up. The crew on board were making signs of distress, but it was a rather difficult task to lend a helping hand to that crazy ship. It was impossible, with that heavy sea, for the brig to go alongside of her, or to lie near enough for her crew to manage to get on board. Nay, it was very dangerous for the brig to attempt going anywhere near the caique, for the consequences might have been disastrous if the wreck were thrown against her,

as the stronger one of the two would thus have dashed the weaker vessel to pieces.

In this predicament Milenko volunteered to go in a little boat, if any two men would go with him. At first all refused, but when Uros said that he was ready to share his friend's fate, another sailor came forth to lend a helping hand in rescuing those lives in fearful jeopardy.

The *pobratim* having skilfully managed to get near enough to the caique, so as to be understood, they called out to the captain to throw them a rope overboard. This was done, but the hawser, without a buoy, could hardly be got at; it was, therefore, pulled back, a broken spar was tied at its end, and then it was again cast overboard.

After a full half-hour's hard work, Milenko and his mates managed to get to the floating hawser and to haul it up; then they rowed lustily back to the ship with it. The caique was then tugged close to the brig's stern, which steered towards the land as well as she could.

The poor bark, shorn of her masts, was in a wretched state, and one of her men having gone down in the hold to see how much water there was in her, found that she had sprung a leak and that she was filling fast, notwithstanding all the exertions of the men at the pump.

Though the storm had somewhat abated, still the caique was now sinking, so that it was beyond all possibility to reach the shore in time to save her. The two friends again got into the boat,

and went once more beside the wreck. This time they managed to get near enough to save the crew and the few passengers they had. When all were on board, then this little boat, heavily laden with human lives, was rowed back to the brig. After this, the rope which bound the caique was cut off, and she was left to drift away at the mercy of the waves, and, little by little, sink out of sight.

The first person that Milenko had got into the little boat, and who he now helped on board the brig, was a young girl of about sixteen, but who, like the women of her country, looked rather older than she was. After her came her father and her mother, who were passengers on board of the caique; they had come from Scio, and were bound for Nona, a small town near Zara. The young girl had, throughout the storm, shown an extraordinary courage; nay, she had been a helpmate rather than an encumbrance. But when she saw herself safe on board the *Spera in Dio* (Hope in God) – for this was the brig's name – then her strength failed her all at once, and she sank into a deep swoon. Milenko, who had helped her on board, and who was standing by her, caught her up in his arms, carried her downstairs and laid her upon his bed.

Milenko had hitherto never cared for any woman; but now, as he carried this lifeless body, and he saw this pale, wan, childlike face leaning on his shoulder, he felt a strange unknown flutter somewhere about his heart. Then the sense of his own manhood came over him; he knew himself strong, and he was glad to be able to shelter this frail being within his brawny arms.

Having rescued this girl from the jaws of death, she seemed to be his own, and his bosom heaved with a feeling quite new to him. He would have liked to have gone through life with this weak creature clinging to him for strength, just as a mother would fain have her babe ever nestling on her bosom. Now, having to relinquish her, he was glad to lay her upon his own bed, for thus she still seemed to belong to him.

Her mother was at once by her side, her father and the captain soon followed, and all the care their rough hospitality could afford was lavished upon her. As the fainting-fit had been brought on through long fasting, as well as by a strain of the nerves, a spoonful of the captain's rare cognac had the desired effect of recalling her to life.

Coming to herself, she was astonished at seeing so many sunburnt, weather-beaten, unknown faces around her; she looked at them all, from one to the other, but Milenko's deep blue eyes, wistfully gloating upon her own, attracted her attention. She had seen him in the boat when he came to their rescue, he had helped her on board; and now, after that fainting-fit, which seemed to have stopped the march of time for a while, she fancied she had known him long ago. She looked first at him, then at her mother; then again at him. After this, feeling as if she was quite safe as long as her mother and that unknown young man – who still was no stranger – stood watching over her, her heavy eyelids drooped, and she fell into a light slumber.

The captain having persuaded the mother to take some rest,

all went to attend to their duties; still, Milenko softly crept down every now and then to see if the women wanted anything, and to have a sly look at the young girl sleeping in his bed. As he stood there gazing upon her, he was conscious that his senses had grown more mellow – that life henceforth had an aim. This was the dawn of real love in a strong man's breast. Whilst he was looking at her, the young girl woke from her slumbers; she opened her eyes, and her glances fell again upon him.

"Where am I?" she said, half-frightened. Then, recognising the young man, she added: "Yes, I know, you saved my life when I was drowning."

The mother, hearing her daughter speak, yawned, stretched out her arms and woke.

The storm had now abated. The dark clouds were quickly flitting, and the sun, which had risen upon that first day of the year, was now shining in all its splendour on the broad expanse of the blue waters and upon the huge crested waves; and the sight was as exhilarating as it was delightful.

The poor wrecked family having gathered together on deck, breakfast was got ready, and all sat down to the frugal meal which the ship's provisions afforded.

When the breakfast was over, the father of the young girl – who had been questioned several times as to the place from where he was coming, to the port whither he was bound, his occupation, and so forth – related to his hosts the story of his adventures, which can be abridged as follows:

"My name is Giulianic. Our family, though Slav and Orthodox, is said to have been of Italian origin, and that the name, years ago, was Giuliani. Still, I cannot swear as to the truth of this assertion. My father in his first youth had gone to the Levant, and had settled at Chios. He was a coppersmith; and, as far as I can remember, he was very prosperous. He had a large and well-furnished shop, and employed a good many workmen.

"I was the eldest of the family; after me there came a girl, who, happily for herself, died when she was yet quite a baby, and before trouble befel us; for had she been spared, she doubtless would have ended her life in some harem, if not in a worse way, losing thus both soul and body. After her came two boys; so that between myself and my youngest brother there was a difference of about ten years, if not more. I was, therefore, the only child of our family who knew the blessing of a happy boyhood, for my early years, spent either in my father's shop or in our country-house, were passed in bliss; but alas! that time is so far off that its remembrance is only like a dream.

"When I was about ten or twelve years – I cannot say exactly how old I was, as all the registers have been destroyed – a terrible revolution took place. It was, I remember, an awful time, when Christian blood ran in streams through the streets of towns and villages, when houses were burnt down, and the whole island remained a mass of smouldering ruins.

"My father was, if I am not mistaken, the first victim of that bloody fray; like all men of pluck, and indeed like most men of

no pluck at all, he was butchered by the Turks. My mother – "

There was a pause. A tear glistened in the corner of the old man's eye, then it rolled down his wrinkled cheek and disappeared in the long, bristling white moustache; his voice faltered. Though more than half a century had passed since that dreadful day, still he could hardly speak about it. After a moment he added, drily:

"My mother fell into the hands of those dogs. I was separated from my brothers. The youngest, as I was told, was taken by those fiends. He was a bright, handsome boy; they made a Turk of him. My other brother disappeared; for days I sought him everywhere, but I could not find him.

"Before I go on with the story of my life, I must tell you that all the men in the Giulianic family have, since immemorial times, a bright red stain, like a small drop of blood, on the nape of the neck, just about where the collar-bone is bound to the skull. Its peculiarity is that its colour increases and decreases with the lunar phases. Besides this, my father in those troubled times, foreseeing that the day might come when we should be snatched from him, caused a little Greek Cross to be tattooed upon us."

Here, suiting the action to the words, he bared his left breast and showed us the holy sign just near the place where the heart is seen to throb.

"Thus, to resume the story of my life, when I was hardly twelve I found myself an orphan, alone and penniless. The night of that dreadful day I went to cry by the smouldering ruins of our house,

looking if I could at least find the mangled remains of that father whom I loved so dearly. When morning came, I knew that I was not only turned adrift upon this wide world, but that I had to flee, whither I knew not. I lurked about in all kinds of hiding-places, and when I crawled out I always seemed to hear the steps and the voices of those bloodthirsty murderers. The falling leaf, the sudden flight of a locust, the chirrup of an insect filled me with terror, and indeed more than once, hidden within a bush or crouching behind a stone, I saw the tall *zeibeks*, those fierce-looking mountaineers, the scourge of the country far around, in search of prey. For days I managed to live, I really do not know how, but principally on oranges, I think. One day, being on the strand and seeing a vessel riding at anchor at some distance, I swam up to it. The captain, who was a Dalmatian, took pity on me, and brought me to Zara, whither his ship was bound. From that time I managed to drag on through life; still, I should not have been unhappy had I been able to forget.

"After several years of hard struggle, I at last went to Mostar; there fate, tired of persecuting me, began to be more favourable. I was prosperous in all my undertakings; I married; then my restlessness began to wear away, I thought I had settled down for life. Had I only been able to find out something about my lost brothers, I do not think anything more would have been wanting to my happiness.

"Years passed, aye, a good many years since those terrible days which had blighted my childhood, for my eldest child, who

died soon afterwards, was then about the age I had been when I was bereft of kith and kin. It happened that one day – stop, it was on Easter Monday – I was having a picnic with some friends at a farm belonging to my wife's father. We were sauntering in the fields, enjoying the beauty of the country, which at that time was in all its bloom, when looking down from a height upon the road beneath, we saw a cloud of dust. We stopped to look, and we perceived at a few yards from us, two or three panting men evidently running for their lives.

"They were all armed, not only with daggers and pistols, but also with long muskets. At twenty paces behind them came half-a-dozen*zaptiehs*, or guards.

"The highwaymen, for such they seemed to us, evidently tired out, were losing ground at every step, and the Turks were about to overtake them. All at once the robbers reached a corner of the road, just under the hill on which we were standing; there the foremost man amongst them stopped, and after bidding the others to be off, he put his musket to his shoulder. When the *zaptiehs* came nearer, he called to them to turn back if they cared for their lives. There was a moment of indecision amongst the guards; each one looked upon his neighbour, wondering what he would do, when the one who seemed to be their officer took out his pistol and pointed it at the highwayman, calling to him to give up. For all reply, the robber took a deliberate aim at the Turk. Both men fired at once. The guards, astonished, stood back for a trice. The Turk fell, the highwayman remained unhurt; thereupon

he laid by his gun and took out a revolver. The guards came up and fired off their weapons; the robber fell, apparently shot through by many balls.

"The *zaptiehs* stopped for a moment to look at their companion; they undid his clothes. Life was already extinct; the highwayman's bullet had struck him above the left breast, and, taking a downward course, it had pierced the heart. Death must have been instantaneous. By the signs of grief given to him, the man must have been admired and beloved by his companions; but their sorrow seemed all at once to melt into hatred and a thirst for revenge, so that they all rose and ran after the two fugitives, evidently hoping to overtake them.

"I can hardly describe the feelings that arose in my breast at that sight; it was the first time in my life that I had beheld the corpse of a Turk, not only without any feeling of exultation, but even with a sense of deep pity.

"'He was a brave man,' said I to my friends; 'therefore he must have been a good man.'

"As soon as the *zaptiehs* were out of sight, we ran down to see the two men, and ascertain if life were quite extinct in them.

"I went up to the Turkish guard. I lifted up his lifeless head, and, as I did so, my heart was filled with love and sorrow. He was a stalwart, handsome man, in the flower of his years.

"'Is he quite dead?' I asked myself; 'is he not, perhaps, only wounded?'

"I opened his vest to look at the wound, and as I laid his chest

bare, there, to my astonishment, grief and dismay, below the left breast, pricked in tiny blue dots, was the sign of the holy Cross – the Greek Cross, like the one which had been tattooed on my own flesh.

"I felt faint as I beheld it; my eyes grew dim, my hands fell lifeless. Was this man one of my long-lost brothers?

"My strength returned; with feverish hands I sought the mark on the nape of the neck. It was full-moon; therefore the stain was not only visible, but as red as the blood which flowed from his wounds.

"A feeling of faintness came over me again; I knew that I was deadly pale. I uttered a cry as I pressed the lifeless head to my heart.

"This man, no doubt, was my youngest brother, whom those hell-hounds had snatched away from our mother's breast upon that dreadful day, and – cursed be their race for ever – they had made a Turkish guard of him.

"His head was lying upon my lap; I bowed upon it and covered it with kisses.

"My wife and all my friends, seeing me act in such a strange way, unable to understand my overwhelming anguish, thought that I had been all at once struck with madness.

"'What is the matter?' said my wife, looking at me with awe-struck eyes.

"I could hardly speak. All I could do was to point with my finger at the sign of the Cross on the *zaptieh*'s breast.

"'Can it be possible? Is it your brother?'

"I mournfully nodded assent. Then, after a few moments, I added that I had also found the family sign on the nape of this man's neck.

"In the meantime help was given to the highwayman, who, notwithstanding his wounds, was not quite dead, though he had fallen into a death-like swoon. My father-in-law was vainly endeavouring to bring him back to life, whilst I was lavishing my sorrow and caresses upon the man I had so longed to see.

"'Let us take him away from here,' said I, trying to lift him up; 'he shall not be touched by those dogs. Christian burial is to be given him; he must lie in consecrated ground.'

"'But,' said my father-in-law —

"'There are no "buts." They have had his body in his lifetime; they shall not have it after his death. Besides, his soul will have no rest, thinking that its earthly shell lies festering unhallowed. No; even if I am to lose my head, they shall not put a finger upon him.'

"Instead of giving me an answer, my father-in-law uttered a kind of stifled cry of astonishment. My wife, who was by his side, shrieked out, looked wildly at me, and then lifted both her hands to her head, with horror and amazement.

"What had happened?

"I looked round. The highwayman, the man who had shot my brother through the heart, was coming back to life; he was panting for breath. I looked at him. He opened his eyes. A

shudder came over me. There was a strange likeness between the murderer and the murdered man. Perhaps it was because the one was dying and the other was dead.

"My father-in-law, my wife and my friends looked at the robber, then at me; awe, dread, sorrow was seen in all their eyes.

"I looked again at the highwayman. He had moved a little; his *jacerma* was loosened, his shirt was torn open, his breast was all bare.

"Horror! There, under the left breast, I saw the sign of the Greek Cross.

"For a moment I remained stunned, hardly knowing whether I was in my senses or if I was mad.

"A feeling of overpowering fear came upon me; it seemed as if I were in the midst of a mighty whirlwind. For the first time in my life I beheld the sign of the holy Cross with horror and dismay.

"I lifted my hands up towards heaven in earnest supplication.

"A religious man prays, perhaps, two or three times a day; still, those are lip-prayers. Few men pray from the innermost depths of their hearts more than ten times during their life, and that, indeed, is much. At that moment my very soul seemed to be upheaved towards heaven with the words that came from my mouth. I entreated the All-wise Creator of heaven and earth that this *heyduke* might be no kith and kin to me, that his blood-stained hands might not be polluted with a brother's murder.

"During these few instants, my friends had gently lifted the

dying man from the ground, and then they had sought for the family sign on the highwayman's neck. Like my brother's and mine, that stain was there, of a blood-red hue.

"I left the body where life was extinct to tend the one where a spark of life was yet lingering. Slowly and carefully we had the bodies transported to my father-in-law's house.

"The Turkish guards on their pursuit of the robbers did not, on their return, come back the same way. On the morrow a search was made for their officer's body and for that of the highwayman, but, not finding them, they came to the conclusion that they had been devoured by wild beasts.

"With great difficulty, and with much bribing (for, as you yourselves know, even our own priests are fond of *backseesh*) my dead brother was laid low in our churchyard, and Masses were said on his earthly remains. The wounded man lingered on for some days, between life and death, and during all that time I was always by his bedside. He was delirious, and by his ravings I understood that he hated the Turks as much as I did, for he was always fighting against them. We called a skilful surgeon of the Austrian army, who, though he gave us but little hope, managed to snatch him from the jaws of death.

"His convalescence was very slow, but health kept creeping back. When he was quite out of danger I questioned him about his youth, his early manhood, and the circumstances that urged him to take to the daring life of a *klefte*. Thereupon he related all the vicissitudes of his good and bad fortune, which I shall resume

as follows:

"'I was born at Chios; therefore, though I am of Slav origin and I am called Giulianic, I am known throughout all Turkey as the Chiot. You yourself must have heard of me. I remember but little of my family. My life begins with a terrible date – that of the massacre of the Christians in my native island. Upon that day I lost my father, my mother and two of my brothers. Left alone, I was saved by a rich Greek landowner. He had friends amongst the Turks, and was, therefore, spared when almost all our fellow-countrymen were butchered. This gentleman, who had several girls and no boy, treated me like his own son; and when I reached early manhood, I was engaged to my adopted father's eldest daughter. Those were the happiest days of my life, and I should have been far happier still, had my soul not been parched by an almost irresistible desire for vengeance.

"'The day of my wedding had already been fixed, when an imprudent person happened to point out to me the man who had done us a grievous wrong – the man who had torn our baby brother from my mother's breast, the man whom I hated even more and worse than those who had killed my father. Well, as you can well understand, I slew that man. Put yourself in my place, and tell me if you would not have done the same?

"'After that deed it was useless to think of marrying. I fled from Chios; I went to Smyrna. There I put myself at the head of a gang of robbers.

"'My life from that day was that of many *heydukes*; that is

to say, we got by sheer strength what most people get by craft – our daily bread and very few of the superfluities of life. One thing I can say: it is that neither I nor any of my men ever spilt a single drop of Christian blood. It is true that I was the bane of the Turks, and I never spared them any more than they had spared us. I was beloved by the poor, with whom I often shared my bread; treated with consideration by the rich, who preferred having me as their friend rather than as their enemy; regularly absolved by the Church, whose feasts and fasts I always kept. I was only dreaded by the Turks, who set a very great price upon my head. Thus I got to be in some years a rich and powerful man. I left Asia Minor and passed into Europe, and then, feeling that I was growing old, I was about to retire from my trade, when – when you saved my life.'

"'And now,' I asked him, 'what are you going to do?'

"'What! That, indeed, is more than I know.'

"He remained musing for some time, and then he added:

"'When a man is without any ties, when he has drunk deep the free mountain air, when the woods have been his dwelling-place and the starry heaven his roof, when he has lived the lawless life of a*heyduke*, can he think of cooping himself up within the narrow walls of a house and live the life of other men?'

"He stopped for a while, as if lost in his thoughts, and then he added:

"'The girl I loved is married; my brothers whom I hoped to meet again, and for whom I had bought the ground our family

once owned at Chios, are for ever lost to me – doubtless, they perished upon that dreadful day – therefore, why should I live to drag on a life which henceforth will be wearisome to me?'

"'Well, then, what will you do?'

"'There is, perhaps, more work at Chios for me; I might find out the men who murdered my father – '

"'No, no; there is enough of blood upon your hands.'

"'I thought you were a Slav; as such you must know that the men of our nation never forgive.'

"'Listen; if you should happen to meet one of your brothers, if, like you, he were well off, would you not look upon his home as your own, his children – whom you might love without knowing – as your children?'

"'I should love and cherish him, indeed; I should give him the lands I bought for him at Chios. But, alas! what is the use of speaking about such a thing? It is only a dream, so listen: no man, hitherto, has loved me for my own sake, so as to risk his own life for me, as you have done, though, indeed, I have met with great kindness during the whole of my lifetime, and have had a great many friends. Well, then, will you be my brother?'

"'If I consented, would you remain with me, share my heart and my home?'

"'For ever?'

"'For our whole life.'

"'No, do not ask me that.'

"'But should you find your brother after these many years, how

would you know him?'

"'We have each a Cross tattooed on our left breast, as you, perhaps, have seen – '

"'Besides this, a vanishing sign on the nape of the neck,' said I, interrupting him.

"'How do you know? Have you ever met? – or perhaps you – '

"For all answer I opened my vest and showed him the sign of the Greek Cross. His delight upon knowing me to be his brother knew no bounds.

He threw his arms round my neck, kissed me, and, for the first time in his life, he cried like a child.

"Time passed. He recovered his strength, but with it his restlessness, and his craving for revenge. We soon removed from Mostar to Ragusa, on account of his safety, and then I hoped that the change of scenery would quiet him. Alas! this larger town was but a more spacious prison. From Ragusa we went to Zara, and from there to Nona, for Ragusa itself was too near Turkey. The change quieted him for a short time; but his roving disposition soon returned, and then he talked of going to Chios. One day, seeing that he was about to put his words into execution, and feeling that I could not keep him with me any longer, I told him who the Turkish *zaptieh*, against whom he had fired, really was, and what blood was the last he had spilt.

"The blow was a terrible one; for days he seemed to be stunned by it. Little by little, however, it changed the current of his thoughts. He shortly afterwards gave up to the Church his ill-

gotten wealth, except the Chios estate, of which he had made me a gift. Then he became a *caloyer*, or Greek monk, and once a year he went on a pilgrimage to Mostar, to pray upon my brother's tomb. From sinner he turned saint; but he pined like a wild bird in a cage. He lingered for some time and then he died at Mostar, where he was buried by the side of the *zaptieh* whom he had killed.

"We had now been to Chios to look after our vineyards and our orange groves; but I must say that this island, where I was born, is no home for me. I have lived away from it the whole of my lifetime, and the remembrances which it brings back to my mind are anything but pleasant. We were on our way to Nona, and had almost reached the goal of our voyage when that dreadful storm overtook us, and had it not been for your kindness and bravery we should all have been lost."

Evening had set in when Giulianic finished the story of his life, just when the walls of Zara were in sight; but as it was too late to land, we spent New Year's night on board the *Spera in Dio*.

CHAPTER V
DUCK SHOOTING AT NONA

The weather was clear and bright on the second day of the year. The sea was not only calm, but of the most beautiful turquoise blue, not the slightest cloud was to be seen in the sky, and the sun's rays were as sparkling and as warm as if it had been a glowing day in the latter part of April instead of early January. Nature looked refreshed and coquettishly radiant; her beauty was enhanced by the storm of the day before.

The red-tiled roofs of the higher houses, such as convents and public buildings, the domes and spires of churches, peeped slily over the town walls of Zara, and the brig, the *Spera in Dio*, which that morning lay at anchor by the wharf opposite the principal gate, the Porta San Grisogono, or Porta del Mare, as it is also called.

On the pier, along the wharf, on the strand, and within the narrow street, a motley crowd is to be seen; everyone is gaily decked out in festive apparel; this sight is one that would have rejoiced a painter, for few towns present such a variety of dresses as Zara. There were fair *Morlacchi* in white woollen clothes, their trousers fitting them like tights, with their reddish hair plaited into a little pig-tail; tall and swarthy, long-moustachioed *pandours*, handsome warlike men, that any

stranger might mistake for Turks, their coats laced and waistcoats covered with silver buttons, bugles and large coins, glittering in the sunshine, that make them look, at a distance, as if dressed in armour; then there were peasants, whose cottages are built on the neighbouring reefs, clad in tight blue trousers, trimmed in red, red waistcoats laced in yellow, and brown jackets embroidered in various colours; country girls in green dresses, red stockings and yellow shoes. These men and women all wear shirts and chemises prettily stitched and worked in all possible colours of silks and cottons. Some of these embroideries of flowers and arabesques are of the richest dyes, and the cherry-red is mingled with ultramarine blue and leek-green; they are sometimes interwoven with shells or tinsel; their stockings and leggings are bits of gorgeous tapestry, whilst the women's aprons are like Eastern carpets. As for the jewellery, it varies from rows of arangoes to massive gold beads studded with pearls and other precious stones, similar to those which the Murano manufactories have artistically imitated.

Amongst these peasants are to be seen tall, stately white friars, portly grey friars, and stout and snuffy-brown friars; priests in rusty black, priests in fine broadcloth, with violet stockings and shoes with silver buckles, priests of high and priests of low degree. Then Austrian officers in white jackets, Croat soldiers in tight trousers, Hungarians in laced tunics. Lastly, a few civilians, who are very much out of place in their ungainly, antiquated clothes.

On the morrow, it was found that the *Spera in Dio* had been much damaged by the late storm, and that it was impossible for her to sail without being thoroughly repaired. The little ship-yard of Zara was too busy just then to undertake the work, so Giulianic persuaded the captain to proceed onwards as far as Nona, where he could get shipwrights to work for him. Therefore, two days after their arrival at Zara, they set sail for Nona, together with their shipwrecked guests. The captain and his two mates had now become intimate friends with Giulianic and his family, who did their utmost to try and entertain the young men.

Nona, however, offers but few amusements, nay, hardly any, excepting hunting; still, Giulianic being a great sportsman, a shooting party was arranged on the brackish lake of Nona, which at that time of the year abounds in coots, wild ducks, and other migratory birds.

Milenko, though fond of this sport, vainly tried to stay on board, thinking that an hour in Ivanika Giulianic's company was better than a whole day's shooting on the lake; but all the paltry excuses he gave for staying behind were speedily overcome, so he had to yield to Uros and the captain, and go with them.

The lake of Nona, which is just outside the old battlemented walls of the town, is about a mile in length: its waters are always rather salty, on account of two canals which at high tide communicate with the sea.

The little party, composed of the captain, his two mates, Giulianic and some other friends of his, started for the lake about

an hour before sunrise; and towards dawn they all got into the canoes that were there waiting for them, as every hunter had a little boat and an oarsman at his disposal.

They left the shores on different sides, and noiselessly glided towards the place where the coots had gathered for the night, surrounding them on every side, so as to cut away from them every means of escape.

When they had reached the goal, the signal for beginning the attack was given, a musket being fired from off the shore. That loud noise, midst the stillness of early dawn, startled the poor birds from their peaceful slumbers; they at once foolishly rise, fly and flutter about in all directions, but without soaring to any great height. The slaughter now begins. Soon the birds get over their first fright, and the hunters not to scare them away, leave them a few moments' respite; the coots then seem loath to abandon such a rich pasture and turn back to their sedges. Therefore they see the boats appear on every side and hedge them within a narrow circle. They are once more on the wing, ready to fly away. Greed again prevails over fear; the birds gather together, but do not make their escape. Pressed closer by the hunters they at last rise all in a flock. It is too late; death reaches them on every side. All at once, amidst the smoke and the noise, they make a bold attempt to cross the enemy's line, but only do so in the greatest confusion, flying hither and thither, helter-skelter, the one butting against the other, and thus they all kept falling a prey to the keen-eyed, quick-handed sportsmen.

At first the shores of the lake are but dimly seen through the thick veil of mist arising from the smooth surface of the rippleless waters, as from a huge brewing-pan, and everything is of a cold greyish hue, fleecy on the shore. But now the sun has appeared like a burnished disc of copper amidst a golden halo; soon all the mist vanishes beneath his warm rays. The mellow morning light falls upon the numberless feathered carcasses that dye the waters of the stagnant mere.

The pulse of every sportsman flutters with excitement; despair has given courage to the birds, which rise much higher than before, and are making heroic efforts to break through the lines. Soon the flurry that had prevailed amongst the birds, falls to the lot of the sportsmen; they give orders and counter orders to the oarsmen, and the circle of boats has become an entangled maze.

The lake now resounds, not so much with firing as with shouts of merriment and peals of laughter, sometimes because one of the boats has butted against the other, and one of the hunters has lost his balance and got a ducking. The morning being now far advanced, the sportsmen gather together for breakfast, leaving time to the birds to get over their bewildered state and settle quietly again in a flock round about their resting-place.

In an hour's time the shooting begins again, but the head is not so light, the sight so keen, nor the hand so quick as before breakfast; nay, it happened at times that the captain saw two coots instead of one, and fired just between the two; besides, the birds were also in a more disbanded state, so that the quantity

of game killed was not what it had been in the early part of the morning. Mirth, however, did not flag; the mist, moreover, having quite vanished, the beauty of the green shores was seen in all its splendour.

Many of the youthful inhabitants of Nona had come to see the sport, picking up some wounded bird bleeding to death in the fields; whilst many a countryman passing thereby, wearily trudging towards his home, his long-barrelled gun slung across his shoulder, shot down more than one stray coot that had taken refuge in a neighbouring field, hoping thereby to have escaped from the general slaughter.

At last, late in the afternoon, our sportsmen, heavily laden, followed Giulianic to his house, to finish there the day which they had so well begun.

Moreover, the men having risen so very early and being tired out, fell to dozing. Uros had gone to the ship to see how the repairs were getting on, and Milenko was thus left alone with Ivanika, or Ivanitza, as she was usually called. This was the opportunity he had eagerly wished for, to confess his love to her; nay, for two days he had rehearsed this scene over and over in his mind, and he had not only thought of all he would say to her, but even what she would answer.

Although he was said to be gifted with a vivid imagination, now that he was alone with her he could hardly find a word to say. It was, indeed, so much easier to woo in fancy than in reality.

How happy he would have been, walking in the garden

with this beautiful girl, if he could only have got rid of his overpowering shyness. How many things he could have told her if he had only known how to begin; but every monosyllable he had uttered was said with trepidation, and in a hoarse and husky tone. Still, with every passing moment, he felt he was losing a precious opportunity he might never have again.

He did not know, however, that, if his lips were dumb, his eyes, beaming with love, spoke a passionate speech that words themselves were powerless to express. Nor was he aware that – though with maidenly coyness she turned her head away – she still read in his burning glances the love she longed to hear from his lips.

After a few commonplace phrases they walked on in silence, and then the same thoughts filled their hearts with almost unutterable anguish. In a few days the brig would be repaired, the sails unfurled, the anchor weighed; then the broad sea would separate them for ever.

The sun was just sinking beyond the waves, and the shivering waters looked like translucent gold; a mass of soft, misty clouds was glowing with saffron, orange and crimson hues, whilst the sky above was of a warm, roseate flush. Little by little all the tints faded, became duller, more delicate; the saffron changed into a pale-greyish lemon green, the crimson softened into pink. The sun's last rays having disappeared, the opaline clouds looked like wreaths of smoke or pearly-grey mists.

Milenko's heart felt all the changes that Nature underwent;

his glowing love, though not less intent, was more subdued, and though, in his yearning, he longed to clasp this maiden in his arms, and to tell her that his life would be sadder than dusk itself without her love, still he felt too much and had not the courage to speak. Sometimes in the fulness of the heart the mouth remains mute.

Now the bell of a distant church began to ring slowly – the evening song, the dirge of the dying day. Ivanitza crossed herself devoutly; Milenko took off his cap, and likewise made the sign of the Cross. Both of them stopped; both breathed a short prayer, and then resumed their walk in silence.

After a few steps he tried to master his emotion and utter that short sentence: "Ivanitza, I love you."

Then something seemed to grip his throat and choke him; it was not possible for him to bring those words out. Besides, he thought they would sound so unmeaning and vapid, so far from expressing the hunger of his heart; so he said nothing.

Meanwhile the bell kept doling out its chimes slowly, one by one, and as he asked himself whether it were possible to live without this girl, whom he now loved so dearly, the harmony of the bell chimed in with his thoughts, and said to him: "Ay, nay; ay, nay."

All at once, feeling that this girl must think him a fool if he kept silent, that he must say something, no matter what it was, and happening to see a lonely gull flying away towards the sea, he said, in a faltering tone:

"Ivanika, do you like coots?"

It was the only thing that came into his mind. She looked up at him with a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

"Do you mean cooked coots or live coots?"

Milenko looked for a while rather puzzled, as if bewildered by the question. Then, taking the tips of the girl's fingers: "I was not thinking of them, either alive or cooked."

Ivanika quietly drew her hand away.

"What were you thinking of, then?" she said.

"May I tell you?"

"Well, if you want any answer to your question," added she, laughing.

"Please don't make fun of me. If you only knew – "

"What?"

He grasped her hand, and held it tight in his.

"Well, how deeply I love you."

He said this in a tragic tone, and heaved a sigh of relief when it was out at last.

The young girl tried to wrench away her hand, but he held it fast. She turned her head aside, so that he could not see the uncontrollable ray of happiness that gleamed within the depths of her eyes. Her heart fluttered, a thrill of joy passed through her whole frame; but she did her best to subdue her emotion, which might seem bold and unmaidenly, so that she schooled herself to say demurely, nay almost coldly:

"How can you possibly love me, when you know so little of

me?"

"But must you know a person for ages before you love him, Ivanitza?"

"No, I don't mean that; still – "

"Though I have never been fond of any girl till now, and therefore did not know what love was, still, the moment I saw you I felt as if my heart had stopped beating. You may think it strange, but still it is true. When I saw you with my spy-glass standing bravely on the deck of your crazy boat, whilst the huge billows and breakers were dashing against you, ever ready to wash you away, then my heart seemed to take wings and fly towards you. How I suffered at that moment. Every time your boat was about to sink, I gasped, feeling as if I myself was drowning; but had the caique foundered, I should have jumped in the waves and swum to your rescue."

Ivanitza's heart throbbed with joy, pride, exultation at the thought of having the love of such a brave man.

"You see, I had hardly seen you, and still I should have risked my life a thousand times to help you. It was for you, and you alone, that I got into the boat to come to you, though the captain and Uros at first thought it sheer madness; and if my friend and the other sailor had not accompanied me – well, I should have come alone."

"And got drowned?"

"Life would not have been worth living without you."

The young girl looked at him with admiring eyes, and nature,

for a moment, almost got the mastery over her shyness and the stern claustral way in which, like all Levantine girls, she had been brought up; for her impulse was to throw herself in his arms and leave him to strain her against his manly chest. Besides, at that moment she remembered what a delightful sensation she had had when, awaking from her swoon, she had felt herself carried like a baby in his strong arms. Still, she managed to master herself, and only said:

"So, had it not been for you, we should all have been drowned."

"Oh, I don't say that! Seeing your danger, at the last moment someone else might, perhaps, have volunteered to come to your rescue. Uros and the captain are both very brave; only the captain has a family of his own, and Uros – "

"What! is he married?"

"Oh, no!" said Milenko, laughing; "he is not married, but – "

"But what?"

"Well, you see, he is in love; but please do not mention a word about it to him or anyone else."

"Why, is it a secret?"

"Yes, it is a very great secret – that is to say, not a very great secret either, but it is a matter never to be spoken of."

"No? Why?"

"I can't tell you; indeed, I can't."

"How you tantalise me!"

"I'll tell you, perhaps, some other time."

"When?"

"Well, perhaps, when – "

"Go on."

"When we are married."

The young girl burst out laughing. It was a clear, silvery, spontaneous, merry laugh; but still, for a moment, it jarred upon Milenko's nerves. He looked rather downcast, for he was far from thinking the matter to be a joke.

"Why do you laugh?" said he, ruefully.

"Because, probably, I shall never know your friend's secret."

The poor fellow's brown complexion grew livid, the muscles of his heart contracted with a spasm, he gasped for breath; the pang he felt was so strong that he could hardly speak; still, he managed to falter:

"Why, are you, perhaps, already engaged to be married?"

"I?" said she, with another laugh. "No."

"Nor in love with anyone?"

"No."

"Then, don't you think – "

He stopped again.

"Think what?"

"Well, that you might love me a little some day?"

She gave him no answer.

"What, you don't think you could?" he asked, anxiously.

"But I didn't say that I couldn't, only – "

"Only what?"

"A girl cannot always choose for herself."

"Why not?"

"Suppose my father chooses someone else for me?"

"But surely he will not."

"Suppose he has already promised me – "

"Why go and suppose such dreadful things? Besides, he ought to remember that I risked my life to save yours; that – "

Milenko stopped for a moment, and then he added:

"Well, I don't like boasting; still, if it had not been for me – well, I suppose your caique would have foundered. No, tell me that you love me, or at least that you might get to love me. Let me ask your father – "

"No, no; not yet."

"Why not?"

"Well, we hardly know each other. Who knows, perhaps, the next port you go to – "

Here she heaved a deep sigh.

"Well, what?" asked the youth, ingenuously.

"You might see some girl that you might like better than myself, and then you will regret that you have engaged yourself to a girl whom you think you are obliged to marry."

"How can you think me so fickle?"

"You are so young."

"So is Uros young, and still – "

"Still?" she asked, smilingly, with an inquisitive look.

"He is in love."

"With?"

"A woman," said Milenko, gloomily.

"Of course."

"Well, I'll tell you, only please don't mention it – with a married woman. Are you not sorry for him?"

"No, not at all; a young man ought not to fall in love with a married woman – it's a sin, a crime."

"That's what I told him myself."

After a short pause, Milenko, having now got over his shyness:

"Well, Ivanitza, tell me, will you not give me a little hope; will you not try to love me just a little?"

"Would you be satisfied with only just a little?"

"No."

"Well, then – I am afraid – "

"What?"

"I shall have to love you a good deal."

He caught hold of her reluctant hand and covered it with kisses.

"If you think that your father might object to me because I am a seaman, tell him that my father is well off, and that I am his only son. Both Uros and I have gone to sea by choice, and to see a little of the world; still, we are not to be sailors all our lives."

Afterwards he began to ask her whether she would not like to come and sail with him in summer, when he would be master of the brig; then again he ended by begging her to allow him to speak to her father.

"No, not now. It is better for you to go away and see if you do not forget me. Besides, neither your father nor your mother know anything about me, and it may happen that they have other views about you."

"Their only aim is my happiness."

"Still, they might think that you were wheedled – "

"How could they think so ill of you?"

"You forget that they do not know me. Anyhow, it is more dutiful that you should speak to them before you speak to my father."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Only, you see, I love you so; I should be so frightened to lose you."

"It is not likely that anybody will think of me for some years yet."

"Well, then, promise me not to marry anyone else. In a year's time, then, I shall come and speak to your father. Will you promise?"

"I promise."

"Will you give me a pledge?"

She gave him her hand, but he gently pulled her towards him, clasped her in his arms, and kissed her rosy lips. Then they both went into the house.

CHAPTER VI
THE BULLIN-MOST

"I suppose you have been to Knin and Dernis?" said the captain by chance after dinner to his host, speaking about the trade with the interior, whilst puffing away at the long stem of his cherry-wood pipe.

"Of course. Haven't you?"

"Oh, no! we sailors are always acquainted with the coasts of countries, nothing more. What kind of a place is this Knin?"

"Much of a muchness, like other places. The country, however, is fine and picturesque. There is, besides, the Bullin-Most."

"What is that?"

"The name of a bridge at the entrance of the town, and almost at the foot of the fortress which tops the crags. It is called the Bullin-Most, or the Bridge of the Turkish Woman. Formerly it used to be called the Bridge of the Two Torrents."

"Well, and what is there remarkable about it?"

"Don't you know the tale of 'Hussein and Ayesha'?"

"No."

"It is the subject of one of Kacic's finest poems. Would you like to hear it?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, about two hundred years ago, more or less, Kuna Hassan was the governor of Knin and of the neighbouring province. The *Aga*was said to be a man of great wisdom and courage; but his many qualities were marred by his severity towards the Christians, whom he hated, and subjected to all kinds of vexations and cruel treatment.

"This *Aga* had a numerous family, being blessed with many children by his several wives; but Ayesha, the only daughter of his favourite wife, was the child in whom he had put all the fondness of his heart. She was, it is true, a girl of an extraordinary beauty. Her skin, they say, was as white as the snowy peaks of the Dinara, the mountain over against the fort of Knin; her eyes were black, but they sparkled softly, like the star which shines at twilight; her curly hair had the colour of the harvest moon's mellow light.

"All the *vati* of her father's palace were in love with her, only hearing her beauty extolled by the eunuchs of the harem, and seeing her glorious eyes sparkle through her veils, or the tips of her tapering fingers, as she held her *feredgé*.

"The principal lords of Kuna Hassan Aga's Court were, first, Ibrahim Velagic, the *Dizdar* of Stermizza; then Mujo Jelascovic, the governor of Biscupia; lastly old Sarè the *Bulju Pasha*, or lieutenant of the troops. The old Sarè had a son named Hussein, who was the standard-bearer; he was the most beautiful young man of the land, nay, it was difficult to find his like. He was, indeed, as handsome as Ayesha was comely. The one was like a lily, the other like a pomegranate flower.

"At that time, as I have said before, the Christians were groaning under the Turkish yoke, and several attempts had already been made to shake it off; nay, many of the struggles which had taken place between the Turks and the men of the Kotar had been most successful, as they had for their chief, Jancovic Stoyan, or Stephen, known in history as 'the clearer of Turkish heads.' These continual skirmishes had weakened our oppressors in such a way, and spread so much fear amongst them, that Kuna Hassan never felt sure whenever he left his castle walls. Finding himself reduced to this extremity, he determined to muster all the troops he could get together and make war upon the Christians.

"And now," said Giulianic, "I think I can give you some of Kacic's verses on this subject;" therefore, taking a guitar, he sang as follows:

"A letter wrote Hassan Aga
From Knin itself, the white-walled town;
He sent it to the bordering Turks,
To Mujo and to Velagic.

"And in this letter Kuna spake:
'Oh! brave men of my border-lands,
Now muster all your borderers,
And hie to Knin, the white-walled town.

"'For we shall raid upon Kotar,

And there rich plunder shall we get
Both gold and young Molachian maids,
Shall be the prize of all the brave.

"'Kotar will be an easy prey
For you, the warriors of the Cross!
Besides, the Sirdars are away,
And Stoyan is in Venice now.

"'Milikovic has fallen sick,
Mocivana has lost his horse,
Mircetic has sprained his hand,
And Klana to a feast is gone.'

"The Bulju Pasha heard all this,
And wisely answered to Kuna:
'Forbear, Kuna Aga; forbear
To make a raid upon Kotar!'"

Giulianic stopped to take breath. "The poem is long," said he, "and I am old; I shall relate the story in my own words: – Well, Kuna Hassan Aga would not be dissuaded, especially as the *Dizdars* were for it. The expedition took place. Jelascovic and Velagic – called the snakes of the empire, on account of their strength and craft – came to Kuna's castle, bringing each man three hundred men with him. The *Aga*mustered as many men himself, and with this little array they set off for the Kotar. At first they were successful; they fell upon the open country,

plundering and sacking, carrying away young boys and girls as slaves, finding nowhere the slightest opposition. It was not a war, but a military march; thus they went on until they reached the lovely meadows at the foot of the hills of Otre, a most pleasant country, watered by many rivulets.

"There they pitched their tents, and began to prepare their meal and make merry. All at once as the sun went down, a slight mist began to rise from the waters and from the marshes of Ostrovizza, not very far off from there. As the day declined, the fog grew denser, and when night came on Jancovic Stoyan, who had returned from Venice, together with the other *Sirdars*, fell upon them, threw them upon the marshes, and not only obliged them to give back all their plunder, but killed more than six hundred of their men. It was only with great difficulty that the *Aga* and *Dizdars* got back to Knin; they were all in a sorry plight, regretting deeply not to have followed Sarè's advice.

"Shortly after this, Kuna Hassan, having recovered from the wounds he had received, gathered again all his chief warriors together. Then he made them a long speech, saying that it was time that the Christian hornets should be done away with, and their nests destroyed, for, if left alive, they would daily become more troublesome; then he made them many promises, so as to induce them to fight, but without much success. At last he offered the hand of his handsome daughter, who, as I have said, was indeed as beautiful as a heavenly houri, and a bride fit for the Sultan, or the Prophet himself, to the bold warrior who would

bring him the head of Jancovic Stoyan, or those of the three hundred Christians. The prize he requested was a great one, but the reward he offered was such as to inflame the hearts of the greatest cowards.

"However, amongst the warriors that Kuna Hassan had gathered together that day, neither old Sarè nor his son, the handsome standard-bearer, had been requested to attend, doubtless, because the*Aga* had thought the *Bulju Pasha* too old, and his son too young and too rash, for such an undertaking. Perhaps he also felt a grudge against the *Bulju Pasha* for having dissuaded him from the first attack, which had met with such a bad success.

"When poor Hussein heard of the slight he and his father had met with, he was very much grieved, for, though he was the *Aga*'s standard-bearer, he had been treated as a mere boy. Moreover, he was madly in love with the beautiful Ayesha, who returned his affection. In fact, whenever she had an opportunity, she sent him a message by one of the eunuchs, and every time he used to pass under her window she was at the lattice, and she often dropped a flower, or even her handkerchief, if no one was looking on.

"Hussein would have risked his life to try and obtain her; nay, he would even have gone to Zara and fight Stoyan, if he could get her father's consent to wed her.

"As for the *Sirdars*, they were only too glad that Hussein was not amongst the warriors called forth to strive for Ayesha's hand, nor would they now allow any new pretender to come forth and

take part in their raids with them.

"During the many skirmishes that took place round about Knin, Hussein had been left to take care of the castle, and then he had succeeded in bribing the head eunuch to allow him to talk with Ayesha.

"This keeper, knowing how fond his mistress was of the handsome standard-bearer, had consented to allow the lovers to meet, while he watched over their safety.

"At first, when all the Mussulman warriors met with so many losses, the lovers were happy, for they thought it would be years before any of them could ask for their reward; but afterwards, when it was known that Velagic's heap of heads was daily increasing, their gladness of heart changed into the deepest sorrow. Both saw that there was very little chance of their ever being able to marry, and Ayesha, rather than give up the man she loved so deeply and become the wife of the old *Dizdar*, whom she detested, proposed to her lover that they should run away together.

"They waited till the very last moment, thinking that Velagic might be killed, or some other unforeseen circumstance might take place; but they had no *Kismet*, for the *Dizdar* seemed to have a charmed life; he had already got together about two hundred and ninety heads. How he had got them, nobody could understand, for he had never received the slightest wound in any of his many fights.

"The last time the lovers met, they agreed that the day upon

which Velagic brought the ten last heads they would make their escape. Hussein, upon that night, was to be on the rocks at the foot of the castle, somewhere near the place occupied by the harem; then, at midnight, when all the town had sunk into rest, and all the lights were extinguished, Ayesha would put a taper by her window to guide him if everything was ready for their flight. After the *muezzin* had called the faithful to prayers, she would open the lattice and throw out a rope-ladder, by means of which he would climb up into the castle. There he was to be received by the eunuch that had hitherto befriended him – be led to her chamber-door. From there they would pass by an underground passage, the keys of which she had. This passage had an outlet, somewhere beyond the town, near the bridge, where, indeed, there is a kind of den or hole. There Hussein was to have swift horses ready, so that they might at once escape to Zara or Sebenico, and if that was not far enough, they could there freight a ship and go off to Venice.

"Hussein, overjoyed, promised that he would take the necessary steps, so that nothing might hinder their flight.

"Poor lovers! they little knew how all their designs were to be thwarted!

"At about four miles from Knin, and not far from the highway leading to Grab, rises a huge beetling rock about thirty feet in height; it seems to slant so much over the road that all the passers-by shudder lest it should fall and crush them. The name of this rock is the Uzdah-kamen, or the Stone of the Sighs – perhaps,

because the wind which always blows there seems to be moaning, or, as there is a kind of natural cistern, spring, or well of water, which is said to be fathomless, more than one luckless wanderer, going to drink of that icy-cold water, happened to slip into it, utter a moan and a sigh, and then all was over with him.

"Near this fountain there is a deep cavern, which is the dwelling-place of a witch, well known in Turkish and Arabian mythology, as well as Chaldean lore. Her name, which is hardly ever uttered, and never without a shudder of awe, is Nedurè; but she is usually spoken of as The Witch. This Nedurè – for we may well call her by her name without fear – used to take the form of a lovely young female, and come and sit by the spring at the entrance of her cave. There she would sit, combing her long hair, which was of the deepest hue of the night. Then, displaying all the bewitching beauty of sixteen summers, she would press all the handsome youths who passed thereby to come and rest in her den.

"Like a wily spider, she daily caught some silly man to linger and gaze upon her large, languishing black eyes with long silken lashes, like natural *khol*, or to look on the dark moles on her alabaster skin. If he did so, he was lost, and nothing more was heard of him, but his sighs wafted by the wind.

"Now, it happened one day that as Hussein was going to Grab on horseback, he passed by the rock of Uzdah-kamen, and, lo and behold! Nedurè was sitting by the fountain waiting for him. As soon as she saw him she beckoned to him to go up to her; but

he, far from obeying, spurred his horse and turned away from the woman.

"'Hussein,' said she, 'you are warm and weary; come and have a draught of this delicious water and rest a while in my moss-grown cavern.'

"'Thank you, I am neither warm nor weary; so I require neither water nor rest.'

"'Hussein, why do you turn away your head, and will not even deign to cast a glance upon me?'

"'Because I have heard of your enticements and blandishments, and do not wish to fall a prey to such charms.'

"'I am afraid people have slandered me to you,' quoth she; 'but believe them not. I am your friend – as I am, indeed, that of all lovers. I know how your heart yearns for Kuna Hassan Aga's daughter, and I should like to be kind to you, and help you in getting her for your bride.'

"'Thank you, indeed,' replied the standard-bearer, who knew the wiles of the witch; 'you are very good, but I hope to obtain Ayesha by the strength of my love, and not by your wicked art.'

"'Look how ungracious you are. I wish to befriend you, whilst you only answer me by taunts.'

"'Thank you, but your friendship would cost me too dear.'

"'No; my help is only paid by love. You see, I do not ask much.'

"'Still, I should have to remain your debtor. My heart is full of love for Ayesha, and it can harbour none for creatures such as you.'

"'Well, then,' said she, in her sweetest voice, which was as soft as the morning breeze amongst the orange-groves, 'if you hate me in this way, why do you not look upon me? Do you think my charms can have any temptation for you?'

"'We should try to resist temptation, and then it will flee from us.'

"Thereupon he spurred his horse and rode away.

"From that day, Nedurè's heart, which had until then burned with lust, was filled with the bitterest hatred for the young man, who had not yielded to her request.

"Therefore she only thought to bring about his death, and was ever plotting by which way she could harm him, for the Most High would not allow her to do any harm to the faithful, so she strove to find someone who would take up her vengeance for her, and now she was about to reach her aim.

"When Hussein and Ayesha had planned together everything for their escape, Nedurè, the witch, who by her art could read the future, and who, besides, could change herself into the likeness of a bird, a rat, or even into that of any of the smaller insects, managed somehow or other to overhear all that conversation of the lovers, and then she at once sent for Velagic and informed him of what was to take place.

"'Velagic,' said she, 'you are old, and it is true you think yourself a world-wise man, but do you really believe that Ayesha, who is as beautiful as the rising moon, for whose charms all men lose their wits, can fall in love with an old man like you?'

"'I do not ask her to fall in love with me. Now, by your help, I shall have got together the number of heads which the *Aga* requires as the prize for his daughter, and then she will be mine.'

"'Do not be too sure of that. Whilst you are numbering your heads, Hussein, the handsome standard-bearer, has found his way to Ayesha's heart.'

"Velagic winced at hearing this; but soon he shrugged his shoulders, and added:

"'What does it matter if that young coxcomb is in love with her, or even she with him. In a day or two I shall claim her as my bride. Once she is in my stronghold of Stermizza, woe to the flies that come buzzing around my honey.'

"'Velagic, Velagic,' said the witch, 'there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip; to-morrow you may find the cage empty and the bird flown.'

"'What do you mean, Nedurè?'

"'I mean what I say.'

"'Explain yourself, I beg you.'

"The witch thereupon told the *Dizdar* all that was to take place, and then advised him what he had to do.

"That day passed away and night came on; it was even a very dark one, because, not only was there no moon, but the sky was overspread with a thick mass of clouds, and heaven seemed to be lowering on the earth.

"The hours passed slowly for three persons at Knin that night. Two of them repeated their prayers devoutly, and tried to fix

their thoughts towards the holy *Kaaba*; one alone, whose heart was full of murderous designs, could not pray at all.

"Velagic had been a wicked man; he had forfeited the happiness of his future life, but never as yet had he rendered himself guilty of shedding the blood of a Mussulman, nay, of murdering the son of one of his greatest friends. The guilt he was about to commit was beyond redemption; he knew that the Compassionate would spurn him away in his wrath, and that he would be doomed to eternal fire; but what could he do now? it was too late to retreat. He was in the witch's power, nay, an instrument in her hands.

"He tried to pray, but every time he attempted to utter Allah's sacred name, it seemed as if the three hundred heads now gathered upon his tower were all blinking and grinning at him.

"Midnight came; all the preparations were made, every necessary precaution against surprise was taken, the horses were ready for the fugitives at the opening of the cave beyond the bridge.

"Hussein, at the foot of the tower, saw the beacon light at Ayesha's window, and slowly and stealthily he scrambled on to the rocks beneath it, awaiting, with a beating heart, for the given signal.

"All at once, in the midst of the darkness, he heard the *adan*– the chant of the *muezzin*– calling the faithful to the prayers of the*Ramazan*.

"'God is most great,' uttered Hussein faintly, and then lifting

his eyes as the sound of the *muezzin*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.