

THE POBRATIM

A SLAV NOVEL

BY

PROF. P. JONES



LONDON

H. S. NICHOLS

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TO

HIS HIGHNESS

PRINCE NICHOLAS OF MONTENEGRO

THIS BOOK IS HUMBL Y DEDICATED.

P. JONES

TRIESTE,
17th June, 1895.

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POBRATIM

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 neighbour, 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 Cetinje 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 *Staroscina*, 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 *priřasnjaca*—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 slyly 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 teasing 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 *Staroscina's*, who was also skilled in the art of curing with simples.

Ivo 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 teasing; 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 *guzlar*, 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, clasp-
ing 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 courtesies 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 noon-tide, when swathed by a splendid 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 admi-

ration 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 farthest 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-aphish 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 *jacerna*, 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 bowl 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 weepst 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 slyly 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 slyly 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 befall 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, conical 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 guests 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 copper-smith; 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 blood-thirsty 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 *zaptich’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 life-time; 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 *jacerna* 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 *kleftie*. 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 slyly 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 battle-

mented 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; de-

spair 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. This *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 extra-

ordinary 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 the *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 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 Sternizza, 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's* voice had died away in the distance, he saw the lattice of Ayesha's window open, and he heard the ladder of ropes slowly being let down.

"He had time to say one *rekah*, or prayer, before the ladder reached the ground, and then he seized the ropes and began to go up. The ascent was a long one, for the tower was very high. He had not gone up many steps, when he heard a noise somewhere above his head. He shuddered and listened. It was nothing but an owl that had its nest in some hole in the wall; doubtless it had been frightened by the ladder, and now it flew away with a loud screech, grazing Hussein with its wings as it passed.

"Hussein, though brave, felt his limbs quake with fear; was it not an evil omen? Would not something happen now that he was about to reach the goal of his happiness!

"Was it not possible that the eunuch had betrayed him? No, that could not be; this man had always been so fond of Ayesha. A thousand dismal thoughts crowded through his brain; the way up in the midst of the darkness seemed everlasting. He looked towards the lighted window; he was only half-way up.

"Just then he thought he heard something creak. Was it the rope breaking beneath his weight? Frightened, he

hastened to climb up; if there was any danger it would soon be over.

“He muttered a few verses of the Koran; he looked up again; now he could see Ayesha’s face at the open window; she stretched forth her arms towards him. How beautiful she was! There, in the darkness, it seemed as if all the constellations had hidden themselves before her radiant beauty.

“He stopped one moment to take breath and to look at her, when again he heard the ropes creak, and at the same moment the ladder snapped under the young man’s weight. He lifted up his arms towards her, but alas! she was beyond his grasp. The next instant he fell with a heavy thud upon the rocks, and from those into the yawning precipice over which the castle was built.

“Ayesha uttered a loud cry, which was repeated several times by the surrounding echoes, and then she swooned away in the eunuch’s arms.

“Velagic, who, apparently, had been hidden close by, saw Hussein fall into the chasm, and heard Ayesha’s cry; then he mounted his horse and galloped away.

“When Ayesha, with the help of the eunuch, got over her faintness, she went to the window and looked down, but she could only see the darkness of the chasm below. She listened; she heard nothing but the wind, the rustling of the leaves, and now and then the screech of some night-bird. She pulled up the ladder; she saw that it had been cut in several places, at one of which it snapped. She understood that some foul treachery had been committed, but she could not make out who had discovered their secret and had dealt her this cruel wrong. She could not suspect the eunuch, who was there by her side, her friend to the last.

“She passed a night of most terrible anguish and anxiety, waiting impatiently, and still dreading the morrow. She tried to hope that Hussein might not have fallen down the chasm, that he might have been caught by some of the trees or bushes that grew on the rocks, and thus saved from death; but it was, at best, only a faint kind of forlorn hope.

“Not a cry, not a groan escaped from her lips, as she stood cold and tearless, at her window, almost stupefied by the intensity of her grief. Thus she remained motionless and dumb for hours, until the first rays of dawn lighted the tops of the Veli-Berdo, the mountain over the fortress.

“ Her eyes pierced the faint glimmering of the dawn, and, looking down into the chasm, at the place where the two torrents meet, there she saw three lovely maidens of super-human beauty, tending the remains of her lover. By their garments, of the colour and splendour of emeralds, by their faces shining like burnished silver, she knew that they were celestial houris, and that her lover was already amongst the blessed.

“ When she saw this sight, she wanted to dash herself down into the chasm and rejoin her happy lover, hoping that Allah would be merciful and allow her to meet Hussein in the abode of the blessed; but then one of the houris beckoned to her to stop, and in a twinkling she was by her side, whispering words of comfort in her ear.

“ Her attendants, whom she had dismissed in the early evening, came back to her early in the morning, and they were surprised to see she had fainted by the window.

“ When she recovered from her swoon, every recollection of that terrible night seemed to have passed away; far from being bereaved and forlorn, she was a happy maiden, about to be united to her lover in eternal bliss.

“ Later on in the day her father summoned her to his presence, to tell her that the *Dizdar* of Stermizza had brought the three hundred Christian heads demanded as the price for her hand, and that she was to get ready to receive him as the man who was to be her husband.

“ Ayesha crossed her hands on her breast and bowed; then she uttered, in a soft, slow voice, that sounded as an echo of a distant sound:

“ ‘ My lord, it shall be as Kismet has ordained.’

“ As Kuna Hassan knew nothing of all that had happened, he thought that his daughter meant that she was ready to obey the decrees of the Fates, that had chosen Velagic for her husband; so he answered:

“ ‘ Though he would not have been the man I should have chosen for thee, still, by his bravery, he has won thee for his bride; so prepare yourself to go with him this very evening. But, daughter of my heart,’ added he, taking her hand, ‘ before parting with your father, have you no request to make?’

“ ‘ Yes, father.’

“ ‘ Well, let me hear it, my child, and if it is in my power to grant it, you may be sure that your wish will be gratified.’

“ ‘ My request, though strange indeed, is a very simple one ; it is that my betrothal should take place this evening, on the Poto-devi-Most, just when the sun gilds with its rays the snowy peaks of the Veli-Berdo. This, and nothing more.’ ”

The father looked at his child, astonished.

“ ‘ It is, indeed, a strange request, and were it not for the earnest way in which it is made, I should think that it was merely a joke. Anyhow, it shall be as you wish ; only, may I know why you do not wish to be married in the usual way ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I have had a vision at day-break, and the powers above have decreed that it shall be so ; but I cannot speak about it till this evening, at the appointed place.’ ”

“ The *Aga*, wishing the ceremony to be performed with the utmost splendour, sent word at once to the *Dizdar* of Stermizza to be on the Bridge of the Two Torrents at the appointed time. Similar messages were likewise sent to the other *Dizdars* and *Sirdars*, and to all the gentry of Kuin and of the neighbouring towns.

“ The sun was sinking down below the horizon when Ibrahim Velagic, followed by Mujo Jelascovic, by the old *Bulju Pasha*, who was as yet ignorant of his son’s fate, by the other Mussulman warriors, as well as by a number of *svati*—all came to the bridge, attired in magnificent clothes of silk and satin, laced in gold, with their finest weapons glittering with precious stones. Then came Kuna Hassan Aga, with all his train and a number of slaves, some carrying a palanquin, the others the bridal gifts.

“ When the two parties had met at the bridge, all wondering what would take place next, Ayesha ordered the slaves to put her down.

“ Velagic at once dismounted from his horse, and came forward to help her to alight, offering her his hand.

“ She simply waved him off, and standing up : ‘ How dare you come to me ! Look at your hand ; it is stained with blood ; and not with Christian, but with Moslem blood.’ ”

“ The eyes of the bystanders were all turned upon the *Dizdar* of Stermizza, who got all at once of a livid hue ; still, he lifted up his hand and said :

“ ‘ Ayesha, my hands have often been stained with the blood of our enemies, never with that of our brethren.’ ”

“ ‘ Man,’ said the young girl, ‘ in the name of the Living God, thou liest ! ’ ”

“There was a murmur and a stir amongst the crowd, as when the slight wind which precedes the storm rustles amongst the leaves of the trees.

“Then Ayesha, turning towards Sarè: ‘Father,’ said she to him, ‘your hand.’

“The *Bulju Pasha* rushed forward and helped her to alight.

“As soon as she was on the ground she threw off her veil and her *feredgè*, and stood there in her glittering bridal dress, the costly jewels of which seemed to shine less than her beautiful face.

“All the men were astounded at such an act of boldness from so modest a maiden; but her dazzling beauty seemed to fill them with that awe which is felt at some supernatural sight. They all thought they were looking upon a *hourì*, or some heavenly vision, rather than upon a human being; so that when she opened her lips again to speak, a perfect silence reigned everywhere.

“‘Sarè,’ said she, ‘where is your son?’

“‘My child?’ replied the old man; ‘I have not seen him the whole of this long day.’

“‘Ibrahim Velagic, *Dizdar* of Stermizza, where is Hussein, the standard-bearer?’

“‘How am I to know? Am I his keeper?’

“‘Sarè,’ continued the young girl, ‘when, after the fight of Ostrovizza, my father had promised me as the bride of the warrior who would bring him the head of the brave Christian knight Jancovic Stoyan, or those of three hundred of our foes, Hussein, your son, by the machinations of Ibrahim Velagic and his friends, was excluded from amongst the warriors who could obtain my hand by fighting for our faith and our country. Sarè, I loved your son; yes, father, I say it aloud and unblushingly, for Hussein was as good as he was handsome, and as brave as he was good. I loved him with all my heart, and he loved me, because the Fates had decreed that we should be man and wife, if we lived. Our faith, therefore, was plighted. We waited, hoping that some happy incident would happen to free me from my impending fate. At last I knew that Ibrahim Velagic had got together the number of heads demanded by my father for my dower, and that to-day he was coming to claim me as his bride. Rather than be the wife of that impostor, felon and murderer, I should have thrown myself in yonder chasm.’

“‘You are astonished at such language; but, father, how is it that all the warriors aspiring to my hand cannot put together a hundred heads, whilst Velagic alone has three hundred?’

“‘Well, then, know that those heads are by no means the heads of our enemies; they are rather those of the unhappy beings who of late have been seduced by Nedurè, the witch, into her den, and who after their rash act never saw daylight again. Look at those ghastly heads, and perhaps many of you will find there people that you have known.’

“At these words, stirred to rage at the light of truth which gleamed from Ayesha’s eyes, there was such a yelling and hissing, that it seemed as if all the men there had been changed into snakes. They would have thrown themselves on the *Dizdar* and torn him to pieces there and then, had Ayesha not stopped them.

“‘Forbear,’ said she, ‘and hear me out; wait at least for the proofs I shall give you of his guilt.’

“‘Ayesha!’ cried out old Sarè, overcome by anguish, ‘and my son—where is my son? Is my beautiful boy’s head amongst the three hundred?’

“‘No; brave Hussein withstood long ago the enticement of the witch, and she has been since then his bitterest enemy.’

Sarè heaved a deep sigh of relief.

“‘Hussein was to deliver me from that heinous wretch. Last night we were to flee together. I had the houris to help me, but alas! Ibrahim Velagic had the powers of darkness. It was night, and he won. Hussein yesternight was under my windows, as we had agreed upon. I opened my lattice and lowered him a ladder of ropes, upon which he was climbing joyfully; a moment more he would have reached the window-sill. All at once, an owl screeched, the ropes gave way, and Hussein, my brave Hussein, was dashed down those rocks and into the dreadful chasm. Sarè, my poor Sarè, you have no son. Still, be of good cheer; this morning, when the first rays of the sun were gilding the tops of the Veli-Berdo, I saw the celestial maidens tending him. His mangled body is in the chasm, but his soul is in the blessed abode of peace.’

“‘Ayesha,’ interrupted the *Aga*, ‘is all this true?’

“The girl beckoned to a slave to approach, and then she took a parcel from his hands.

“‘This,’ said she, opening it, ‘is what remains of the ladder; and you will find Hussein’s body in the chasm, smiling in the

happy sleep of death. The houris, who have been praying over him the whole day, have covered him with garlands of flowers. Go and dig his grave in the burying-ground, and dig another one by his side.'

"'But,' said Kuna Hassan, 'how did the accident happen?'

"'Nedurè hated Hussein, but she could not harm him, so she apprised Velagic of what was to happen; nay, she did more, she transformed him into the likeness of a rat, and changing herself into an owl, she deposited the *Dizdar* on the sill of my room, there he came and gnawed at the ropes of the ladder.'

"'This is false,' said the *Dizdar*. 'Whoever can believe such a story? Why, the girl is mad!'

"'Guards,' said the *Aga*, with his hand on the haft of his dagger, 'seize Velagic, and mind that you do not let him escape!'

"'Away!' replied the *Dizdar*. 'A man of my rank can only be judged by the Sultan.'

"'Stop!' cried Ayesha; then, lifting her beautiful arm, naked up to the shoulder, and whiter than the strings of pearls entwined around it, and pointing towards the highway:

"'Do you see there a cloud of dust on the road? Do you see those men coming here? Do you know who they are? You cannot distinguish them, but I can.'

"'Who are they, Ayesha?' cried all the bystanders.

"'The foremost man amongst them, that tall and handsome youth, that looks like Prince George of Cappadocia, is no less a hero. It is Stoyan Jancovic, the man whose back you never saw; the others are but a few of his followers.'

"'Then, turning to Velagic: 'Now, craven, utter your last prayer, if you can and if you dare, then prepare to fight; your hour has come.'

"'Hearing these words, the *Dizdar* grew ashy pale; then he began to quake with fear. Such an overpowering dread filled his soul that he seemed to have been smitten with a strong fit of the ague. Still, trying to hide his anxiety:

"'Yes, we shall fight; Allah be thanked, brothers, that this infidel dog is within our reach. Yes, friends, we shall see the power of the Crescent over the Cross.'

"'No; you shall fight alone,' said Ayesha, authoritatively; 'and it is useless to contaminate the name of the All-powerful. As you are already doomed to perdition, call to your aid Sheytan and Nedurè.'

“Ayesha had hardly uttered these words when Stoyan, having made a sign to his companions to keep back, rode boldly up to where the chiefs were standing, and, when a few steps from Ayesha, he curbed his foaming steed, that, unable to brook control, began at once to paw the ground.

“‘Maiden,’ said he, bowing, ‘I am here at thy behest. I have this night had a strange dream. A *Vila* appeared to me in my sleep, first in the likeness of a nightingale and then in the shape of a dainty, glittering little snake. She told me that for your sake I had to accomplish, this very day, two mighty deeds of justice. The one was to rid this neighbourhood of the evil doings of Nedurè, the powerful witch. This is already done.’

“Thereupon, loosening a silken scarf attached to his saddle, he threw the sorceress’s head at the *Dizdar’s* feet.

“‘Now,’ said he, turning to Velagic, ‘you who have been her accomplice—you who brag to have killed three hundred Christians, who, while skulking away like a cur, dare to say that you have been looking everywhere for me, to slay me—here I am.’

“Appalled at the sight of the witch’s hideous head, terrified by the hero’s words, shaking like an aspen leaf, full of dread and consternation, Velagic looked up at his companions for help; but on their faces he saw nothing but angry scowls, looks of scorn and hatred.

“‘Fight,’ cried the *Aga*, ‘or a worse death awaits thee, the ignominious death of a murderer and a sorcerer! Fight, coward, fight! for if thou fallest not by that brave man’s hand, thou shalt this very day be impaled as a wizard.’

“The *Dizdar*, seeing that there was no escape, plucked up his courage in his own defence, called the powers of darkness to his help, and unexpectedly rushed upon Stoyan, hoping to catch him off his guard, and to despatch him with a treacherous blow of his scimitar.

“‘Fair play! fair play!’ shouted the chiefs.

“‘The laws of chivalry, gentlemen, are not expected to be known by a vile recreant like Ibrahim Velagic,’ quoth Stoyan, whose keen eye forthwith saw the stroke, and whose deft hand not only parried it, but dealt his adversary such a mighty blow that it cut off the *Dizdar’s* head and sent it rolling on the ground by the side of Nedurè’s.

“‘And now, beautiful maiden, the task you have enjoined

me is done; would to God thou hadst called upon me before.'

"'I thank thee, gentle knight,' said Ayesha, who all the time had been standing on the parapet of the old stone bridge. 'Thou hast avenged my lover's death; may Heaven reward thee for thy deed.'

"'Allah, bismillah!' cried out the chiefs.

"Thereupon Stoyan, bowing courteously, wheeled round his horse and, galloping away, was soon out of sight.

"'And now,' said Ayesha, 'I had sworn to Hussein, that flower of youth and beauty, to be his for ever. Now I shall keep my vow. May the Most Merciful unite me to my lover. God of my fathers, God of Mohamed, receive me amongst the blessed.'

"Thereupon, lifting a small dagger which she held in her hand, she plunged it into her heart, and before her father had time to rush up to her, she had fallen into the torrent underneath, dyeing its waters of a crimson hue, just as the last rays of the sinking sun seemed to tinge in blood the lofty tops of the Veli-Berdo.

"From that day the Bridge of the Two Torrents has ever been called the Bullin-Most, or the Bridge of the Turkish Maiden, and every evening, when the day is fine, the sun sheds a blood-red light on the highest peaks of the Dinara, and the wind that, at gloaming, blows down the dell and through the arches of the bridge, seems to waft back an echo of the last moan of the *Aga's* beautiful daughter."

CHAPTER VII

SEXAGESIMA

THE days that followed the departure of the *pobratim* were sad ones indeed. The Zwillievs had gone back to Montenegro; then Milena, not having any excuse to remain longer a guest of the Bellacics, was obliged to go back with a sinking heart to her lonely, out-of-the-way cottage; a dreary house which had never been a home to her.

When the Christmas snow had melted away, a sudden strong gale of wind dried up the sods, so that the grass everywhere was withered and scorched; the very rocks themselves looked lean, pinched-up, bare and sharp. All nature had put on a wizened, wolfish, wintry appearance. The weather was not only cold, it was bleak and gloomy.

After a fortnight of a dull, overcast sky, it began to drizzle; everything smelt of mildew; the mouldy turf oozed with moisture, the rotting trees dripped with dampness. The world was decaying. If at times a ray of sunlight pierced the grey clouds, its pale yellow, languid light brought with it neither warmth nor comfort. Evidently the sun was pining away, dying; our bereaved planet was moaning for the loss of his life-giving light.

During all this time the dull sirocco never ceased to blow, either in a low, unending wail, or in louder and more fitful blasts. Usually, as soon as one gust had passed away, a stronger one came rolling down the mountain side, increasing in sound as it drew nearer; then passing, it died away in the distance.

These booming blasts made every mother think of her sailor boy, tossed far away on the raging mountain waves; wives lighted candles to St. Nicholas, for the safety of their husbands; whilst the girls thought of their lovers by day, and at night they dreamt continually of flowers, babies, stagnant waters, white grapes, lice and other such omens of ill-luck.

For poor, forlorn Milena, those days were like the murky morning hours that follow a night of revelry. She was dull, down-hearted, dispirited; nor had she, indeed, anything to cheer her up. In her utter solitude, she spun from the moment she got up to the moment she went to bed; interrupting herself only to eat a crust of bread and some olives, or else to mope listlessly. At times, however, her loneliness, and the utter stillness of her house, oppressed her in such a way that it almost drove her to distraction.

She mused continually over all the events of her life during the last months, after her merry girlhood had come to an end by that hateful and hasty marriage of hers; she recalled to mind that time of misery with her old miserly mother-in-law, who even counted the grains of parched Indian-corn she ate. Still, soon after this old dame's death, came that fated St. John's Eve. It was the first ray of sunlight in the gloom of her married life. It was also the first time she had seen Uros.

She had not fallen in love with him that evening; she had only liked him because he was good-looking and his ways were so winning. Everybody was fond of him, he was so winsome.

Little by little, after that, his presence began to haunt her, his face was always before her eyes. When she woke in the morning, his name was on her lips. Still, that was not love; she even fancied she only liked to tease him because she was a married woman, a matron, whilst he was but a boy; moreover, he was so shy.

When Radonic came home, she woke to the stern reality of life; she at last found out that she hated her husband and loved Uros, who, though a boy, was, withal, older than herself. That was the time when Radonic's rage being roused by Vranic, he had almost killed Milenko. Then, lastly, shuddering and appalled, she remembered that night when Uros came to sing his farewell song.

She stopped spinning now; the corners of her pretty, childish mouth were drawn down; she hid her face between her hands, whilst the tears trickled slowly through her fingers.

Why had she been so foolishly weak? Now the thought of that night drove her mad. Could she but blot away the past months and begin life anew!

Alas! what was done could never be undone. She rocked

herself on her stool in a brown study. What was she to do? What was to become of her?

Radonic would return in a few months; then he would kill her. That, at least, would put a stop to her misery. But the thought of having to live for months in mortal dread was worse than death itself. The maddest thoughts came to her mind. She would leave Budua, dress up as a boy, go off to Cattaro, embark for some distant town. And then?

Far away the people spoke a gibberish she could not understand, and they were heathens, who even ate meat on fast-days. These thoughts, in her loneliness, were almost driving her to distraction, when, unexpectedly, her husband came back home. His ship, in a tempest, had been dashed against a reef, off the shores of Ustica, the westernmost of the Æolian Islands. Not only the vessel, but also the cargo, and even two sailors, were lost.

On seeing her husband appear before her, Milena felt all her blood freeze within her veins. She had disliked Radonic from the very first moment she had cast her eyes upon him; since her marriage her antipathy had increased with his ill-treatment, so that now she positively loathed him.

Still, when the first moment of almost insurmountable dread was over, she heaved a deep sigh of relief. His return was a godsend to her. Had he not just come in time to save her from ignominy? She even mastered herself so far as to make Radonic believe that she was glad to see him, that she was longing for his return, and for a while he believed it. Still, when his mouth was pressed on hers, as he clasped her fondly in his arms, the kiss he gave her now was even worse than the first one she had received from him on her wedding-day. It seemed as if he had seared her lips with burning, cauterising steel. After a day or two, she could not keep up this degrading comedy any longer; her whole being revolted against it in such a way that Radonic himself could not help noticing how obnoxious his presence was to her.

She was, however, glad about one thing. Her husband, having lost his large vessel and all his costly cargo, for he had of late been trading on his own account, would not be able to settle down in Budua, as he had intended doing; then, being now quite poor, people would not be envying her any more. What good had her husband's riches done to her? None at all.

Even in that she was doomed to disappointment. The widow of one of the sailors who had got drowned at Ustica came to beg for a pittance. She had several little children at home clamouring for bread. Milena gave her some flour and some oil, and promised to speak to her husband.

"But," said she, "we, too, are very poor now."

"Poor!" replied the woman. "Why, you are richer now than you ever were."

"How, if we've lost our ship with all its cargo?"

"Yes, but it was insured."

"Insured? What's that?"

"You mustn't ask me, for I'm only a poor ignorant woman. Only they say that when a ship is insured, you get far more money for it than it was ever really worth."

"And who is to give you money for a few planks rotting at the bottom of the sea, or some stray spars washed ashore?" asked Milena, incredulously.

"Who? Ah! that's more than I can tell. Anyhow, I know it's true, for all that."

Milena, astonished, stared at the poor woman. She asked herself whether grief had not muddled the widow's brain. No, she did not look insane.

"Who told you such foolish things, my poor Stosija?" said she, enquiringly, after a while; "for you know very well that you are speaking nonsense."

"It is no nonsense, for the *pop* himself told me."

Milena's bewilderment increased.

"Moreover, the priest added that insurances are one of the many sacrilegious inventions which lead men to perdition." Then, lowering her voice to a whisper: "They have a pact with Satan."

Milena drew back appalled.

"When a ship is insured the owners care very little what becomes of the precious lives they have on board. The captains themselves get hardened. They do not light any more tapers to St. Nicholas to send them prosperous gales; the priests offer no more prayers for their safety; and, as for silver *ex-votos*, why, no one thinks of them any more. The *pop* is so angry that he says, if he had his own way, he'd excommunicate every captain, even every sailor, embarking on an insured ship."

"Mercy on us!" quoth Milena, crossing herself repeatedly.

“In fact, since all these new-fangled, heathenish inventions, you hear of nothing but fires on land and shipwrecks at sea. People once went to bed as soon as it was dark; at eight o'clock every fire and every light was put out. Now, people will soon be turning night into day, as they do in Francezka and Vnetci (Venice), flying thus in the very face of God Himself. Now all the rotten ships are sent to sea, where they founder at the very first storm. It isn't true, perhaps?”

“Aye, it must be true,” sighed Milena, “if the *pop* says so.”

“Once fires and shipwrecks were sent as punishments to the wicked, or as trials to the good; now, with the insurances, God Himself has been deprived of His scourge. The wicked prosper, the rich grow richer, and as for the poor—even the Virgin Mary and all the saints turn a deaf ear to them.”

Milena shook her head despondingly.

“For instance,” continued Stosija, “would the miser's heart ever have been touched, had his barns been insured.”

“What miser?” asked Milena.

“Is it possible that you don't know the story of ‘Old Nor and the Miser’?”

“Oh! it's a story,” added Milena, disappointed.

“Yes, it's a story, but it's true for all that, for it happened at Grohovo, and my grandfather, who was alive at that time, knew both the miser and the idiot. Well, the miser—who had as much money as his trees had leaves, and that is more than he could count—was one day brewing *rakee*, when an old man, who lived on the public charity, or in doing odd jobs that could be entrusted to him, stopped at his door.

“‘I smell *rakee*,’ said Old Nor” (ninny), “who, by-the-bye, was not quite such an idiot as he was believed to be.

“‘Oh, you do!’ quoth the miser, sneeringly.

“‘Yes,’ said Nor, his eyes twinkling and his mouth watering.

“‘And I suppose you'd like to taste some?’

“‘That I should; will you give me a sip?’

“‘Why not?’

“Thereupon the miser dipped a small ladle in a kettle of boiling water and offered it to Old Nor.

“The idiot drank down the hot water without wincing.

“‘It's good, isn't it?’ asked the rich man.

“‘Delicious!’ and the old man smacked his lips.

“‘It warms the pit of your stomach nicely?’

“‘It even burns it.’

“‘It’s rare stuff, I can tell you; will you have some more?’

“‘It’s of your own brewing, one can see; I’ll have some more.’

“The miser once more dipped the ladle in the hot water and offered it again to the beggar, who quaffed the contents unflinchingly.

“‘You see, bad tongues say I’m a miser, but it’s all slander; for when I like a fellow, I’d give him the shirt off my back, and I like you, Old Nor. Will you have another ladleful?’

“‘Willingly,’ and the ninny’s eyes flashed.

“Thereupon he again swallowed up the scalding water, but not a muscle of his face twitched.

“‘Are you not afraid it’ll go to your head, old man?’ asked the miser, mischievously.

“‘Old Nor’s head isn’t muddled with so little,’ added he, scowling.

“‘Then try another cup?’

“‘No,’ replied the ninny, shaking his head, ‘for to-day I’ve had enough. As soon as the *Cesar*’ (emperor) ‘sends me the money he owes me, and I marry the Virgin Mary—for that was his craze—I’ll give you something that’ll warm the pit of your stomach, too.’

“Then he turned round and went off without any thanks or wishing the blessing of God on the miser’s dwelling, as he was wont to do.

“The miser’s house was all surrounded by sheds, store-houses and stables; barns groaning under the weight of corn, hay and straw; his sacks were heaped with flour and wheat; his cellars overflowed with wine and oil; in his dairies you could have bathed in milk, for he neither lacked cows, nor sheep, nor goats. Well, not long after the beggar had been scalded with hot water, a fire broke out in his granaries at night, and all the wealth that was stored therein was wasted by fire.

“The miser grieved and lamented, but he soon had masons and bricklayers come from all around, and in a short time they built him finer stables, sheds and stores than the old ones; and after the harvest was gathered, and the aftermath was garnered, and all the outer buildings were filled,

with the grace of God, a terrible fire broke out one morning, and before the men could bring any help, for the flames rose fiercely on every side like living springs that have burst their flood-gates, so that the water poured down upon it only scattered the fire far around, and the fine new buildings came crumbling down with a crash, just like houses built upon sand. Then the miser had new masons and bricklayers, and also architects and engineers. Soon they built him stately store-houses of stone and beautiful barns of bricks, higher, vaster and stronger than the former ones. These granaries were like palaces, and a wonder in the land. When the fruits of the field were gathered and the heart of the miser was rejoiced at the sight of so much wealth, then, in the middle of the day, as he was seated at table eating cakes overflowing with honey, and quaffing down bumpers of wine, then the fire broke out in his barns, and, behold, his buildings looked like a dreadful dragon spouting and spurting sparks of fire, and vomiting out volumes of smoke and flames. It was, indeed, a terrible sight.

“The rich man saw at last that the hand of God was weighing upon him, and he felt himself chastened. He cast about for some time, not knowing what to do. So he took a fat calf and two lambs and a kid, and killed them; and he cooked them; and he baked bread; and he invited all his acquaintances, rich and poor, to a feast, where he spared neither wine nor *slivovitz*; and he did not scald their throats with hot water, but with his own strong *rakee*. Then, when they had all eaten and were merry, he said to them:

“‘The Lord, in His mercy, has scourged me—for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth—He has given me a warning and a foretaste of what might be awaiting me hereafter. Therefore, I am humbled, and I submit; but if God has chosen any one among you to chastise me, kindly tell me, and I swear, on my soul, on the Cross of our Saviour, Who died for our sins, not only never to harm him, but to forgive him freely.’

“Thereupon Old Nor rose and said:

“‘*Gospod*, it is I who have burnt down your barns. One day I passed by your door and begged you for a draught of the liquor you were brewing; then you offered me scalding water, and when I gulped it down you laughed at me because you thought me witless. Three times did I

drink down the fiery water you offered me; three times did I consume with fire all the barns that surround your house. Still, I only made you see, but not taste, fire, for I might have burned you down in your house, like a rat in his hole, and then the pit of your stomach would have been warm indeed; but I did not do so, because I am Old Nor, and the little children jibe and the big children jeer at me, and all laugh and make mouths at me.'

"The rich man bowed down his head, rebuked. Then he stretched out his arms and clasped the beggar to his breast, saying:

"'Brother, you are, after all, a better and a wiser man than I am, for if I was wicked to you, it was only out of sheer wantonness.'

"Then he plied him, not with warm water, but with sparkling wine and strong *slivovitz*, and sent him home jolly drunk. From that time he mended his ways, gave pence to the poor, presents to the *pop*, candles and incense to the Church. Therefore, he was beloved by all who knew him, his barns groaned again with the gifts of God, his flocks and his herds increased by His blessings.

"Now, tell me. If the insurance company had paid him for the damage every time his barns had been burnt, would he have been happy with his ill-gotten wealth? No; his heart might have been hardened, and Satan at last have got possession of his soul."

That evening Milena referred to her husband all that Stosija had said to her. Radonic scowled at his wife, and then he grunted:

"The *pop*—like all priests, in fact—is a drivelling old idiot; so he had better mind his own business, that is, mumble his meaningless prayers, and not meddle with what he doesn't understand."

"What! is there anything a *pop* doesn't understand?" asked Milena, astonished.

Radonic laughed.

"Oh! he'll soon see something that'll make his jaw fall and his eyes start from their sockets."

"And what's that?"

"A thing which you yourself won't believe in—a ship without masts."

"And what are its sails tied to?"

"It needs no sails; it has only a big chimney, a black funnel, that sends forth clouds of smoke, flames and sparks; then, two tremendous wheels that go about splashing and churning the water into a mass of beautiful spray, with a thundering noise; then, every now and then, it utters a shrill cry that is heard miles away."

"Holy Virgin!" gasped Milena; "but it must be like Svet Gjorgje's dragon!"

"Oh!" sneered Radonic, "St. George's dragon was but a toy to it."

"And where have you seen this monster?"

"It isn't a monster at all; it's a steamer. I saw one on my last voyage. It came from the other side of the world, from that country where the sun at midday looks just like a burnished copper plate."

"Of course," added Milena, nodding, "if it's on the other side of the earth, they can only see the sun after it's set. But where is that place of darkness? Is it Kitay?"

"Oh, no! it's Englezka."

"But to return to what the *pop* said. Then it's true that you'll get more money for your ship even than what it was worth?"

"Whether I get more or whether I get less, I'm not going to keep all the beggars of the town with the money the insurance company will give me. If sailors don't want their wives to go begging and their brats to starve, they can insure their lives, or not get married. As for Stosija, you can tell her to go to the *pop*, and not come bothering here; though I doubt whether a priest will even say a prayer for you without the sight of your money. Anyhow, to-morrow I start for Cattaro, where I hope to settle the insurance business."

On the morrow Radonic went off, and Milena heaved a deep sigh of relief; for, although the utter loneliness in which she lived was at times unbearable to her, still it was better than her husband's unkindness.

Alas! no sooner had Radonic started than Vranic came with his odious solicitations, for nothing would discourage that man. In her innocence she could rely on her strength, so she had spurned him from her. She had till then never been afraid of any man. Was she not a Montenegrin? She had, in many a skirmish, not only loaded her father's guns, but also fired at the Turks herself; nor had she ever missed her man. Still,

since that fateful night all her courage was gone. Was Vranic not a seer, a man who could peer into his fellow creatures as if they were crystal? Did he not know that she had sinned? He had told her that all her struggles were unavailing; she was like the swallow when the snake fascinates it. She, therefore, had been cowed down to such a degree that she almost felt herself falling into his clutches.

Not knowing what to do, she had gone to Mara, and had confessed part of her troubles to her; she had asked her for help against Vranic. Although Uros' mother did not dabble in witchcraft, still she was a woman with great experience. So she thought for a while, and then she gave Milena a tiny bit of red stuff, and told her to wear it under her left arm-pit; it was the most powerful spell she knew of, and people could not harm her as long as she wore it. She followed Mara's advice; but Vranic was a seer, and such simples were powerless against him.

Radonic came back from Cattaro, and, by his humour, things must have gone on well for him; still, strange to say, he brought no money back with him. He only said he had put his money in a bank, so that he might get interest for it, till such times when he should buy another ship.

"And what is a bank?" asked Milena, astonished.

Radonic shrugged his shoulders, and answered peevishly, that she was too stupid to understand such things. "Montenegrins," he added, "have no banks, nor any money to put in banks; they only know how to fight against the Turks."

For a few days Milena asked all her acquaintances what a bank was, and at last she was informed that it was like insurances, one of those modern inventions made to enrich the rich. Putting money in a bank was like sinking a deep well. After that you were not only supplied for your lifetime, but your children and the children of your children were then provided for; for who can drink the water of a well and dry it up?

For Milena, all these things were wonders which she could not understand. She only sighed, and thought that Stosija was right when she had said to her that this world was for the wealthy; the poor were nowhere, not even in church.

Although Radonic had come back, still Vranic, far from desisting from his suit, became always more pressing; for he seemed quite sure that she would never speak to her husband

against him. Once more she went to Mara and asked her for advice.

"Why not mention the subject to your husband?" asked her friend.

"First, I dare not; then, it would be quite useless. He would not believe me; Vranic has him entirely under his power. In fact, I am quite sure if Radonic is unbearable, it is the seer who sets him on to bait me."

"But to what purpose?"

"Because he thinks that, sooner or later, I'll be driven to despair, and find myself at his mercy. Though I'm no seer myself, still I see through him."

Withal Uros' mother was a woman of great experience, still, she could not help her friend; she only comforted her in a motherly way, and her heart yearned for her.

As Milena, weary and dejected, was slowly trudging homewards, she saw, not far from her house, a small animal leisurely crossing a field. Was it a cat? She stood stock-still for a moment and stared. Surely, it was neither a hare, nor a rabbit, nor a dog. It was a big, dark-coloured cat! How her heart began to beat at that sight!

At that moment she forgot that it was almost dusk, that the days were still short, that the light was vanishing fast. She forgot that it would be very disagreeable meeting Vranic—always lurking thereabout—that her husband would soon be coming home. In fact, forgetting everything and everybody, she began running after the cat, which scampered off the moment it saw her. Still, the quicker the cat ran, the quicker Milena went after it.

Of course, she knew quite well, as you and I would have known, that the cat was no cat at all, for real pussies are quiet, home-loving pets, taking, at most, a stroll on the pantiles, but never go roaming about the fields as dogs are sometimes apt to do.

That cat, of course, was a witch—not a simple *baornitza*, but a real sorceress, able to do whatever she chose to put her hand to.

The nimble cat ran with the speed of a stone hurled from a sling, and Milena, panting, breathless, stumbling every now and then, ran after it with all her might. Several times the fleet-footed animal disappeared; still, she was not disheartened, but ran on and came in sight of it after some

time. At last, she saw the cat run straight towards a distant cottage. Milena slackened her speed, then she stopped to look round.

The cottage was built on a low muddy beach. She remembered having been in that lonely spot once before with Uros; she had seen the strand all covered with bloated bluish medusas, melting away in the sun.

With a beating heart and quivering limbs Milena stopped on the threshold of the hut, and looked about her for the cat. The door was ajar; perhaps it had gone in. For a moment she hesitated whether she should turn on her heels and run off or enter.

A powerful witch like that could, all at once, assume the most horrible shape, and frighten her out of her wits!

As she stood there, undecided as to what she was to do, the door opened, as if by a sudden blast of wind, and there was no time to retreat. Milena then, to her surprise, saw an old woman standing in the middle of the hut. She was quietly breaking sticks and putting them on a smouldering fire. As for the cat, it was, of course, nowhere to be seen.

The old woman, almost bent double by age, turned, and seeing Milena, smiled. Her face did not express the slightest fear or ill-humour, nay, she seemed as if she had been expecting her.

“Good evening, *domlada*,” said the old woman, with a most winning voice, “have you lost your way, or is there anything you want of me?”

Milena hesitated; had she been spoken to in a rough, disagreeable manner, she would, doubtless, have been daunted by the thought that she was putting her soul in jeopardy by having recourse to the witch; but the woman's voice was so soft and soothing, her words so encouraging, her ways so motherly, that, getting over her nervousness, she went in at once, and, almost without knowing it, she found herself induced to relate all her troubles to this utter stranger.

“First, if you want me to help you,” said the old woman, “you must try and help yourself.”

“And how so?”

“By thinking as little as possible of a handsome youth who is now at sea.”

Milena blushed.

“Then you must bear your husband's ill-humour, even

his blows, patiently, and, little by little, get him to understand what kind of a man Vranic is. Radonic is in love with you; therefore, 'the sack cannot remain without the twine.' You must not fear Vranic; 'the place of the uninvited guest is, you know, behind the door.' Moreover, to protect you against him, I'll give you a most powerful charm."

Saying this, she went to a large wooden chest and got out of it a little bag, which she handed to Milena.

"In it," whispered the old woman, mysteriously, "there is some hair of a wolf that has tasted human flesh, the claw of a rabid old cat, a tiny bit of a murdered man's skull, a few leaflets of rue gathered on St. John's Night under a gibbet, and some other things. It is a potent spell; still, efficient as it is, you must help it in its work."

Milena promised the old woman to be guided entirely by her advice.

"Remember never to give way to Vranic in the least, for, even with my charm, if you listen to him you might become his prey. You must not do like the dove did."

"And what did the dove do?"

"What! don't you know? Well, sit down there, and I'll tell you."

"But I'm afraid I'll be troubling you."

"Not at all; besides, I'll prepare my soup while I chat."

"Still, I'm afraid my husband might get home and not find me; then——"

"Then you'll keep him a little longer at the inn."

Saying these words, the witch threw some vegetables in the pot simmering on the hob, and on the fire something like a pinch of salt, for at once the wood began to splutter and crackle; after that, she went to the door and looked out.

"See how it pours!" said she. "Radonic will have to wait till the rain is over."

Milena shuddered and crossed herself; she was more than ever convinced that the old woman was a mighty sorceress who had command over the wind and the rain.

"Well," began the *stari-mati*, "once a beautiful white dove had built her nest in a large tree; she laid several eggs, hatched them, and had as many lovely dovelets. One day, a sly old fox, passing underneath, began leering at the dove from the corner of his eye, as old men ogle pretty girls at windows. The dove got uneasy. Thereupon, the fox ordered

the bird to throw down one of her young ones. 'If you don't, I swear by my whiskers to climb up the tree and gobble you down, you ——, and all your young ones.'

"The poor dove was in sore trouble, and, quaking with fear, seeing the fox lay its front paws on the trunk of the tree, she, flurried as she was, caught one of her little ones by its neck and threw it down. The fox made but a mouthful of it, grumbling withal that it was such a meagre morsel.

"Mind and fatten those that are left, for I'll call again to-morrow, and if the others are only skin and bones, as the little scarecrow you've thrown me down is, you'll have, at least, to give me two.'

"The fox went off. The poor dove remained in her nest, mourning over her lost little one, and shuddering as she thought of the morrow. Just then another bird happened to perch above the branch where the dove had her nest.

"I say, dove,' said the other bird, 'what's up, that you are cooing in such a dreary, disconsolate way?'

"The dove thereupon related all that had happened.

"Oh, you simpleton! oh, you fool!' quoth the other bird, 'how could you have been so silly as to believe the sly old fox? You ought to have known that foxes cannot climb trees; therefore, when he comes to-morrow, ordering you to throw him down a couple of your little ones, just you tell him to come up himself and get them.'

"The day after, when the fox came for his meal, the dove simply answered:

"Don't you wish you may get it!'

"And the dove laughed in her sleeve to see the fox look so sheepish.

"Who told you that?' said Reynard; 'you never thought of it yourself, you are too stupid.'

"No,' quoth the dove, 'I did not. The bird that has built her nest by the sedges near the river told it me.'

"So,' said the fox; and he turned round and went off to the bird that had built her nest by the river sedges, without even saying ta-ta to the dove. He soon found her out.

"I say, bird, what made you build your nest in such a breezy spot?' said the fox, with a twinkling eye.

"Oh! I don't mind the wind,' said the bird. 'For instance, when it blows from the north-east, I put my head under my left wing, like this.'

“Thereupon, the bird put its head under its left wing, and peeped at the fox with its right eye.

“‘And when it blows from the south-west?’ asked the fox.

“‘Then I do the contrary.’

“And the bird put its head under its right wing, and peeped at the fox with its left eye.

“‘And when it blows from every side of the compass at once?’

“‘It never does,’ said the bird, laughing.

“‘Yes it does; in a hurricane.’

“‘Then I cover my head with both my wings, like this.’

“No sooner had the poor bird buried her head under both her wings, than the sly old fox jumped at her, and ate her up.

“But,” said the witch, finishing her story, “if you are like the dove, I’m not like the bird of the sedges; and Vranic would find me rather tough to eat me up. And now, hurry home, my dear; if ever you want me again, you know where to find me.”

The rain had ceased, and Milena, thanking the old woman for her kindness, went off. She had been back but a few minutes when Radonic returned home, ever so much the worse for drink. Not finding any supper ready, he at first began to grumble; then, little by little, thinking himself very ill-used, he got into a tremendous rage. Having reached this paroxysm of wrath, he set to smash all the crockery that he could lay his hands on, whilst Milena, terrified, went and shut herself up in the next room, and peeped at him through the keyhole.

When he had broken a sufficient number of plates and dishes, he felt vexed at having vented his rage in such a foolish way, then to pity himself at having such a worthless wife, who left him without supper, and growing sentimental, he began to groan and hiccough and curse, till he at last rolled off the stool on which he had been rocking himself, and went to sleep on the floor.

On the morrow the husband was moody, the wife sad; neither of them spoke or looked at the other. The whole of that day, Milena—in her loneliness—revolved within her mind what she would do to get rid of Vranic’s importunities, and, above all, how she could prevent him from harming Uros, as he had threatened to do.

The day passed away slowly; in the evening Radonic came home more drunk than he had ever been, therefore maliciously angry and spiteful.

The front room of the house, like that of almost all other cottages, was a large but dark and dismal-looking chamber, pierced with several small windows, all thickly grated; the ceiling was raftered, and pieces of smoked mutton, wreaths of onions, bundles of herbs, and other provisions dangled down from hooks, or nails, driven in nearly every beam. As in all country-houses, the hearth was built in the very midst of this room, and the smoke, curling upwards, found an outlet from a hole in the roof. That evening, as it was pouring and blowing, the gusts of wind and rain prevented the smoke from finding its way out.

Milena was seated on a three-legged stool at a corner of the hearth, by a quaint, somewhat prehistoric, kind of earthenware one-wick oil-lamp, which gave rather less light than our night-lamps usually do, though it flickered and sputtered and smoked far more. She was sewing a very tiny bit of a rag, but she took much pride in it, for every now and then she looked at it with the fond eyes of a girl sewing her doll's first bodice. Hearing her husband's step on the shingle just outside, she started to her feet, thrust the rag away, looking as if she had almost been caught doing something very guilty. After that she began mixing the soup boiling in the pot with great alacrity.

Radonic was not a handsome man at the best of times, but now, besotted by drink, shuffling and reeling, he was positively loathsome. He stopped for a moment on the sill to look at his wife, grinning at her in a half-savage, half-idiotic way.

Milena shuddered when she saw him, and turned her eyes away. He evidently noticed the look of horror she cast on him, for holding himself to the door-post with one hand, he shook the other at her, in his increasing anger.

"What have you been doing all the day?—gadding about, or sitting on the door-step to beckon to the youths who pass by?" he said, in a thick, throaty voice, interrupted every now and then with a drunken hiccough. Then he let go the door-post and shuffled in.

"A fine creature, a very fine creature, a slut, a good-for-nothing slut, not worth the salt she eats! You hear, madam? you hear darling? it's to you I'm speaking."

Milena stood pale, awe-stricken, twisting the fringe of her apron round her fingers, looking at him with amazement. It

was certainly not the first time in her life that she had seen a drunken man; still, she had never known anyone so fiendish when tipsy.

"A nice kind of woman for a fellow to marry," he went on, "a thing that stands twisting her fingers from morning to night, but who cannot find time to prepare a little supper for a hungry man, in the evening." Then, with a grunt: "What have you been doing the whole of the live-long day?"

Milena did not answer.

"I say, will you speak? by the Virgin, will you speak? or I'll slap that stupid sallow face of yours till I make it red with your blood."

Milena did try to answer, but the words stuck in her throat and would not come out. Radonic thought she was defying him.

"Ah, you'll not answer! You were fooling about the town, or sitting at the window eating pumpkin seeds, waiting for the dogs that pass to admire those meaningless eyes of yours. They are dark, it's true, but I'll make them ten times darker."

Thereupon he made a rush at her, but, swift-footed as she was, she ran on the opposite side of the room. She glanced at the door, but he had shut and bolted it, therefore—being afraid that he might be upon her before she managed to open it—she only kept running round the hearth, waiting till chance afforded her some better way of escape.

He ran after her for some time, but, drunk and asthmatic as he was, he stopped at last, irritated by his non-success. Vexed at seeing a faint smile on her lips, he took up a plate, that had been spared from the day before, and shied it at her. She was too quick for him, for she deftly moved aside, and the plate was smashed against an oaken press.

He gnashed his teeth with rage and showed her his fists; then he bent down, picked up a log, and flourished it wildly about. She at once made for the door. He flung the piece of wood at her with all his might. She once more stooped to avoid it, but, in her eagerness to get out, she was this time rather flurried; moreover, the missile hurled at her was, this time, much bigger than the former one, so that the log just caught her at the back of her head. She uttered a shrill cry, and fell on the ground in a death-like swoon.

Radonic, seeing Milena fall, thought he had killed her. He felt at that moment such a terrible fright that it seemed to him as if a thunderbolt had come down upon him.

He grew deathly pale, his jaw fell, he began to tremble from head to foot, just as when he had a fit of the ague. His teeth chattered, his knees were broken, his joints relaxed. He had never in his whole life felt such a fright. In a moment his drunkenness seemed to vanish, and he was again in his senses.

"Milena," said he, in a faint, quivering, moaning tone. "Milena, my love!"

She did not answer, she did not move; to all appearance she was dead.

The muscles of his throat were twitching in such a way that he almost fancied someone had stabbed him through the neck.

Was she now worth her salt to him? he asked himself bitterly; aye, he would give all his money to bring her back to life if he only could.

He wanted to go up to her, but his feet seemed rooted to the spot where he stood; with widely opened eyes he stared at the figure lying motionless on the floor. Was the blood trickling from her head? A moment afterwards he was kneeling down by her side, lifting her up tenderly; for, brute as he was, he loved her.

She was not dead, for her heart was beating still. Her head was bleeding; but the cut was very slight, hardly skin deep. He began to bathe her face with water, and tried to recall her to her senses. Still her fainting-fit, owing, perhaps, to the state of her health, lasted for some time; and those moments of torture seemed for him everlasting.

At last Milena opened her eyes; and seeing her husband's face bent close upon hers, she shuddered, and tried to free herself from his arms.

"*Ljuba*," said Radonic, "forgive me. I was a brute; but I didn't mean to harm you."

"It's a pity you didn't kill me; then there would have been an end to this wretched life of mine."

"Do you hate me so very much?"

"Have I any reason to love you?"

"Forgive me, my love. I've been drinking to-night; and when the wine gets to my head, then I know I'm nasty."

"No, you hate me, and I know why."

"Why?"

"Vranic sets you against me; and when your anger is roused, and your brain muddled, you come and want to kill me."

Radonic did not reply.

"But rather than torture me as you do, kill me at once, to please your friend."

Milena stopped for an instant; then she began again, in a lower tone:

"And that man is doubtless there, behind that door, listening to all that has happened."

Radonic ground his teeth, clenched his fists, snorted like a high-mettled horse, started up, and would have rushed to the door had Milena not prevented him.

"No," said she, "do not be so rash. Abide your time; catch him on the hip."

"Why does he hate you?"

"Can't you guess? Did he not want to marry me?"

Radonic groaned.

"Oh! it would not be a difficult matter to turn Vranic into a friend; but I prefer being beaten by you than touched by that fiend."

Radonic started like a mad bull; and, not knowing what to do, he gave the table such a mighty thump that he nearly shivered it.

"Listen! Yesterday, when you had rolled on the floor, and were sleeping away your drunken rage——"

"Then?"

"I went to sit on the doorstep——"

"Well, go on."

"A moment afterwards Vranic was standing in front of me."

The husband's eyes flashed with rage.

"Knowing that you would not wake, he begged me to let him come in. He saw me wretched and forlorn; he would comfort me."

"You lie!" He hissed these words out through his set teeth, and caught hold of her neck to throttle her. Then, all at once, he turned his mad rage against himself, and thumped his head with all his strength, exclaiming:

"Fool, fool, fool that I am!" Then, after a short silence, and with a sullen look: "And you, what did you do?"

"I got up, came in, and slammed the door in his face."

Radonic caught his wife in his arms, and kissed her.

"Tell me one thing more. Where were you yesterday evening?"

She smiled.

“Where do you think I was? Well, I’ll tell you, because you’ll never guess. I was at the witch’s, who lives down there by the sea shore.”

“What for?”

“Because I’m tired of this life. I went to ask her for a charm against your bosom friend.”

“And what can a foolish old woman do for you?” said the husband, trying to put on a sceptical look.

“I have not been all over the world as you have; still, I know that our blood also is red.”

“And what did the *baornitza* tell you?”

“That a flowing beard is but a vain ornament when the head is light.”

Radonic shrugged his shoulders and tried not to wince.

“Besides, she gave me this charm;” and showing him her amulet, she begged him to wear it for a few days. “It will not do you any harm; wear it for my sake, even if you don’t believe in it,” she pleaded softly.

Radonic yielded, and allowed Milena to fasten the little bag round his neck, looking deep into her beautiful eyes uplifted towards his. She blushed, feeling the fire of his glances.

“And now,” added she, with a sigh of relief, “he’ll break his viper’s fangs against that bone, if our proverbs are true.”

Radonic tried to keep up his character of an *esprit-fort*, and said: “Humbug!” but there was a catch in his voice as he uttered this word.

“Now, I feel sure that as long as you have this talisman you’ll not open your mouth or reveal a single word of what I’ve told you.”

“Whom do you take me for?”

“Yes, but at times our very eyes deceive us; moreover, Vranic is a man to whom everybody is like glass. He reads your innermost thoughts.”

“He is sharp; nothing more, I tell you.”

“Anyhow, that is a powerful charm, and if you’ll only dissimulate——”

“Oh! I can be a match for him if I like.”

“You must promise me one thing more.”

“What is it?”

“No knives; no bloodshed.”

Radonic did not answer for a moment, but cast on Milena an angry look, his hand seeking the handle of his knife.

“ Will you promise ? ”

“ Are you so fond of him that you are frightened I'll kill him ? ”

“ I hate him.”

“ Then——”

“ Still, it is no reason to murder him.”

Radonic seemed lost in his own thoughts.

“ Moreover, he is weak and puny, whilst you are made of iron.” She laid her hand on his shoulder. “ No knives, then ; it's understood ? ”

“ I promise to use no knife.”

The morrow was a beautiful day ; winter seemed already to be waking from its short sleep. The sun was shining brightly, and as the breeze was fresh and bracing, his cheerful warmth was pleasant, especially for people who have to depend upon his rays for their only heat. Spring seemed already to be at hand, and, in fact, the first violets and primroses might have been seen glinting in sunny spots.

Milena was returning from market, and her eyes were wandering far on the wide expanse of glittering blue waters, but her thoughts, like fleet halcyons, dived far away into the hazy distance, unfathomable to the sight itself, and she hummed to herself the following song :

“ A crystal rill I fain would be,
 And down the deep dell then I'd go ;
 Close to his cottage I would flow.
 Thus every morn my love I'd see,
 Oft to his lips I might be pressed,
 And nestle close unto his breast.”

Then she sighed and tried not to think, for hers, indeed, was forlorn hope.

All at once she heard someone walking behind her, coming nearer and nearer. She hastened her steps ; still, the person who followed her walked on quicker.

“ What a hurry you are in, Milena,” said Vranic, coming up to her.

“ Oh ! is it you ? ” she replied, with feigned surprise ; then she shuddered, thinking that she had not her amulet, and was at the mercy of this artful man. “ You frightened me.”

“ Dear me, I'm afraid I'm always frightening you ! Still, believe me, I'd give my soul to the devil for one of your smiles, for a good word from you, Milena.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Children are deceived with cakes, women with sweet words, they say."

He cast a sidelong glance at her.

"You don't look well, to-day; you are pale."

"Am I?"

"Yes; what's the matter?"

"How can I look well, with that brute of a husband of mine?"

"Ah, yes! he got home rather the worse for drink yesterday evening, didn't he?"

"You ought to know; you were with him."

"Well, yes, I was; at least, part of the evening."

"And when he was as mad as a wild bull, you sent him home to me, didn't you?"

"I?"

"Vranic, when will you finish persecuting me? What have I done to you?"

"Milena, it is true I am bad; but is it my fault? has not the world made me what I am? Why have I not a right to my share of happiness as other men?"

"I am sorry for you, Vranic, but what can I do for you?"

"You can do whatever you like with me, make me as good as a lamb."

"How?"

"Have pity on me; I love you!"

"How can you say you love me, when you have tried to harm me in every possible way?"

"I was jealous; besides, I saw that you hated me, therefore you know it was my only chance of success. In love and in war all means are good."

She shuddered; still, she managed to master herself and hide the loathing she felt for him.

"So you thought that, after having driven me to distraction——"

"I should be your friend in need."

"Fine friend." Then after a pause: "Anyhow, my present life is such that, rather than bear it any longer, I'll go and drown myself some day or other."

"You'd never do that, Milena."

"Why not? Therefore, if you care for me ever so little, use your influence over Radonic, undo your work, get him to be a little less of a brute than he has been of late."

"And then you'll laugh at me?"

"Who does good can expect better," and she tried to look at him less harshly than she was wont to do, and did not turn her eyes away from him.

"No, Milena, first——"

"What! first the pay, then the work? It would be against the proverb."

"Then promise me at least that you will try to love me a little?"

"No," said she, with a toss of her pretty head, and a smile in her mischievous, sparkling eyes; "I promise nothing."

He thereupon took her hand and kissed it, saying:

"I am making a poor bargain, for I am sure that your heart is empty."

"If you cannot manage to awaken love in an empty heart, it will be your fault; besides, you can always be in time to undo your work."

"How so?"

"You have me in your power, for Radonic, in your hands, is as pliable as putty, is he not?"

"Perhaps!" and the wrinkles of his cheeks deepened into a grim smile.

"Then let my husband come home a little less cross than he has been of late, will you?" she said, in a coaxing tone, and her voice had for him all the sweetness of the nightingale's trill.

"I'll try," and his blinking, grey-green eyes gloated upon her, whilst that horrible cast in them made her shiver and feel sick; but then she thought of Uros, and the idea that his life might be in danger by the power this man wielded over her husband made her conceal her real state of feelings and smile upon him pleasantly.

He put his arm round her waist, and whispered words of love into her ear, words that seemed to sink deep into her flesh and blister her; and she felt like a bird, covered over with slime by a snake, before being swallowed up.

He, at that moment—withal he was a seer—fancied Milena falling in his arms; his persevering love had conquered at last. Radonic would now be sent away to sea again, perhaps never to come back, and he would remain the undisputed master of Milena's heart.

“Well, love me a little and I’ll change your life from a hell into a heaven. I’ll read your slightest wish in your eyes to satisfy it.”

“Thank you,” she said, shuddering, disengaging herself from his grasp, but feeling herself growing pale.

“What is the matter, my love?” he asked.

“Nothing, only I told you I was not feeling well; my husband almost killed me yesterday.”

“Well, I promise that it’ll be the last time he touches you.”

They had now reached the door of her house, and Vranic, after having renewed his protestations, went off, whilst Milena entered the house and locked herself in.

That evening Radonic came home rather earlier than usual. He was sober, but in a sullen mood, and looked at Milena sheepishly. She set the supper on the table and waited upon him; when he had finished, she took the dish and sat down on the hearth to have her meal.

“Well,” quoth Radonic, puffing at his pipe, “have you seen Vranic to-day?”

“Yes, I met him when I was coming home from market.”

“Henceforth,” said he, “I forbid you going to market again.”

“Very well,” said she, meekly.

“And?”

“He accompanied me home.”

“And what did he say?”

“That you were pulpy, therefore he could do with you whatever he liked.”

“Ah! he said that, did he?” and in his rage Radonic broke his pipe. “Then?”

“He would first undo his work, make you as gentle as a lamb, then he would send you off to sea, and——”

Radonic muttered a fearful oath between his teeth.

“Can’t you understand? Has he not spoken well of me?”

“He has, the villain, and it wanted all my patience not to clutch him by the neck and pluck his vile tongue out of his mouth—but I’ll bide my time.”

CHAPTER VIII

MURDER

A FEW days afterwards Milena heard a low whistle outside, just as if someone were calling her; the whistling was repeated again and again. She went to the open door, and she saw Vranic at a distance, apparently on the watch for her. As soon as he saw her, he beckoned to her to come out. She stepped on the threshold, and he came up to her.

“ Good news, eh ? ” said he.

“ What news ? ”

“ Has Radonic not opened his mouth to you ? ”

“ He has hardly said a single word all these days.”

“ Impossible ! ”

“ May I be struck blind if he has ! ”

“ Strange.”

“ Well, but what is it all about ? ”

“ He told me it was a great secret; still, I did not believe him.”

“ But what is this great secret ? ”

“ He is going off to Montenegro for a day or two, as he has to buy a cargo of *castradina*. Of course, he'll stay a week; and as soon as he comes back, he'll start at once on a long voyage.”

“ I don't believe it ! ”

“ Yes, he is; and it's all my own doing. Now you can't say that I don't love you, Milena, can you ? ”

She did not give him any answer.

“ You don't seem glad. Once you'd have been delighted to have a reprieve from his ill-treatment.”

“ Yes, but now he's only moody. He hasn't beaten me for some days.”

“ I told you he was as manageable as putty. Like all bullies, you can shave him without a razor, if you only know how to go about it.”

“ Yes; only beware. Such men never keep shape—at least, not for any length of time.”

“He'll keep shape till he goes, for that's to-morrow; then——” and he winked at her as he said this.

“Come, Vranic, be kind for once in your life.”

“Has anybody ever been kind to me?”

“‘Do good, and don't repent having done it; do evil, and expect evil,’ says the proverb.”

“I never do anything for nothing; so to-morrow night I'll come for my reward.”

“Leave me alone, Vranic; if not for my sake, do it for your own good. Fancy, if Radonic were to return. Surely you wouldn't shave him quite as easily as you think.”

“I'll take the risk upon myself. I have lulled all his suspicions, so that he has now implicit trust in you. Besides, I'll first see him well out of the town with my own eyes; Vranic is not a seer for nothing,” and he winked knowingly with his blinking eyes.

“You don't know Radonic: if you are a fox, he is no goose. He is capable of coming back just to see what I am doing.”

“I think I know him a little better than you do, and a longer time. We have been friends from childhood; in fact, all but *pobratim*.”

“That's the reason why you are ready to deceive him, then?”

“What business had he to marry you? What would I not do for your love, Milena? Why. I'd give my soul to Satan, if he wanted it.”

I'm afraid it's no longer yours to give away. But come, Vranic, if you really are as fond of me as you pretend to be, have some pity on me, be kind; think how wretched my whole life has hitherto been, leave me alone, forget me.”

“Ask me anything else but that. How can I forget you? How can I cease loving you, when I live only for you? I only see through your eyes.”

“Then I'll ask Radonic to take me to Montenegro with him, and I'll remain with my family.”

“And I'll follow you there. You don't understand all the strength of my love for you.”

Thereupon, forgetting his usual prudence, he stepped up to her, and passing his arm round her waist, he strained her to his breast, and wanted to kiss her. She wriggled and struggled, and tried to push him away.

“Unhand me,” she said, alarmed; “unhand me at once, or I'll scream.”

“ Lot of good it'll do you. Come,” he replied, “ remember your promise. I've kept my part, try and keep yours with good grace or——”

“ What ? ” she asked, alarmed.

“ Or by the holy Virgin, it'll be so much the worse for you! I know——” he stopped, and then he added: “ In fact, I know what I know. Remember, therefore, it is much better to have Vranic for your friend than for your foe.”

“ Mind, you think me a dove.”

“ I only know that women have long hair and little brains. Try and not be like most of them.”

“ Mind, I might for once have more brains than you; therefore, I entreat you, nay, I command you, not to try and see me to-morrow.”

“ As for that, I'll use my own discretion.”

Saying these words, he went off, and left Milena alone. As soon as he had disappeared, she went in, and sank down on the hearth; there, leaning her elbows on her knees, she hid her face between her palms; then she began nursing her grief.

“ They say I am happy,” she muttered to herself, “ because I am rich—though I have not a penny that I can call my own—because I can eat white bread every day. Yet would it not be better by far to be an animal and graze in the fields, than eat bread moistened with my own tears? Oh! why was I not born a man? Then, at least, I might have gone where I liked—done what I pleased.

“ They think I am happy, because no one knows what my life has been; though, it is true, what is a woman's life amongst us?

“ She toils in the field the whole of the live-long day, whilst her husband smokes his pipe. She is laden like a beast of burden; she is yoked to the plough with an ox or an ass, and when they go to pasture she trudges home with the harness, to nurse the children or attend to household work. Meanwhile, her master leisurely chats with his friends at the inns, or listens to the *guzlar*.

“ What is her food? The husks that dogs cannot eat, the bones which have already been picked. If Turkish women have no souls, they, at least, are not treated like beasts during their lifetime.

“ Oh! holy Virgin, why was I not born a man? ”

That evening Radonic came home more sullen and peevish

than usual; still, he was sober. He sat down to supper, and Milena waited upon him. As soon as he had pushed his plate away:

“Have you seen Vranic to-day?” he asked, gruffly.

“I have,” answered the wife, meekly.

“Ah, you have!” and he uttered a fearful oath.

Milena crossed herself.

“And where have you seen him?”

“He came here at the door.”

“May he have a fit to-night,” he grunted. Then, after a puff at his pipe: “And what did he say?”

“That you intended starting to-morrow morning for Montenegro, to buy *castradina*, and——”

Radonic gave such a mighty thump on the table that the *bukara* was upset. It rolled and fell to the ground before it could be caught. Milena hastened to pick it up, but the wine was spilt. The husband thereupon, not knowing how to vent his spite, gave a kick to the poor woman just as she stooped to pick it up. She slipped and fell sprawling to the ground, uttering a stifled groan. Then she got up, deathly pale, and went to sit down in a corner of the room, and began to cry unperceived.

“And what did you answer when he told you that I was starting?”

“I begged him to leave me in peace, and above all not to come to-morrow evening, if his life was dear to him.”

“Ah! you begged him, did you? Well, if ever man was blessed with a foolish wife, I am.”

A moment's silence followed, after which he added:

“What a fool a man is who gets married—above all, a sailor who takes as his wife a feather-brained creature, as you are. May God hurl a thunderbolt at me if I'd marry again were I but free.”

Poor Milena did not reply, for she was inured to such taunts, Radonic being one of those men who pride themselves on speaking out their own minds. She kept crying quietly—not for the pain she felt, but because she dreaded the fatal consequences of the kick she had just received.

“Will you stop whimpering, or I'll come and give you something to cry for. It's really beyond all powers of endurance to hear a woman whine and a pig squeak; if there is a thing that drives me mad, it's that.”

Thereupon Radonic began to puff at his pipe savagely, snarling and snorting as he smoked.

"And may I ask why you begged that double-faced, white-livered friend of yours not to come to-morrow evening?" he asked, after some minutes.

"Vranic was never a friend of mine," said Milena, proudly.

"Admitting he wasn't, still you haven't answered my question; but I suppose it doesn't suit you to answer, does it?"

"Why not? I begged him not to come because I was afraid some mischief might ensue, withal you promised me not to be rash."

"I promised you, did I? Anyhow, I find that you take a great interest in this friend of mine, far more than it becomes an honest woman." Then, with a scowl and a sneer: "If you *are* honest."

Milena winced, and grew deathly pale. She did not give her husband any answer, so he, after grunting and grumbling and smoking for some time, got up and went to bed. She, however, remained where she was seated—or rather crouched—for she knew that she could not sleep.

How could she sleep?

First, she was not feeling well. The kick she had received in her side had produced a slight, dull, gnawing soreness; moreover, she felt—or at least she fancied she could feel—a gnawing pain; it was not much of a pain, only it seemed as if a watch were ticking there within her. She shuddered and felt sick, a cold sweat gathered on her brow, and she trembled from head to foot.

Some women in her state—she had heard—never got over the consequences of a blow; perhaps the kick might produce mortification, and then in a few days she would die. Yes, she felt as if she had received an inward incurable bruise. Well, after all, it was but right; she had deceived her husband; he had revenged himself. Now they were quits.

Still tears started to her eyes, and sobs rose to her throat.

Well, after all, she thought, what did it matter if she died? This wretched life would be over.

Only—

Only what?

Yes, she avowed it to herself; she longed to see Uros'

fond face once more before dying. With her hand locked in his, her eyes gazing upon him, death would have almost been bliss.

With a repressed and painful yearning, her lover's name at last escaped her lips.

Radonic, who had been snoring as if he was about to suffocate, uttered a kind of snorting sound, then he started and woke with a fearful curse on his lips.

Milena, shuddering, uttered a half-stifled cry.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, I was only dreaming. I thought that a young sailor, whom I once crippled with a kick, had gripped me by my neck, and was choking me."

"It must have been the *morina*" (the nightmare) "sitting on you," and Milena crossed herself.

"How is it you are not in bed?" he asked, scowling.

She did not speak for an instant.

He started up to look at her.

"Perhaps that villain is sneaking about the house, and you wish to warn him?"

"Your jealousy really drives you mad."

"Well, then, will you speak? Why are you not yet in bed?"

"I—I don't feel exactly well."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"The kick you gave me," she retorted, falteringly.

"Why, I hardly touched you! well, you are getting mighty delicate; you ought to have had the kick I gave that sailor lad, then you would have known the strength of my foot!"

"Yes, but——" She checked herself, and then added: "Women are delicate."

"Oh! so you are going to be a grand lady, and be delicate, are you? Who ever heard of a Montenegrin being delicate?" Then he added: "If you don't feel well, go to bed and try to sleep."

Thereupon he turned on the other side, and began to snore very soon afterwards.

Milena began to think of what had been and might have been.

She had sinned, foolishly, thoughtlessly; but since that fatal night she had never known a single moment's happiness. As time passed, the heinousness of her sin rose up before her, more dreadful, more appalling.

Still, was it the sin itself, or its dire consequences, that rendered her so moody, so timorous ?

She never asked herself such a question ; she only knew that she now started, like a guilty thing, at the slightest noise, and she shivered if anybody spoke to her abruptly. At times she fancied everybody could read her guilt in her face.

She had been more than once tempted, of late, to tell her husband that, in some months, she would be a mother. Still, the words had ever stuck in her throat ; she could never nerve herself enough to speak.

Though he might probably never have got to know the real truth, could she tell him that *he* was the father of her child, or, at least, allow him to think so ? No, she could never do that, for it was impossible to act that lie the whole of her life. Could she see her husband, returning from a long voyage, take in his arms and fondle the child that was not his, the child that he would strangle if he knew whose it was ?

Although an infant is the real, nay, the only bond of married life, still, the child of sin is a spectre ever rising 'twixt husband and wife, estranging them from one another for ever.

Then she had better confess her guilt at once. And bring about three deaths ? Aye, surely ; Radonic was not a man to forgive. He had crippled a sailor lad for some trifle.

She must keep her secret a little longer—and then ?

Thereupon she fell on her knees before the silver-clad image of the Virgin.

“ Oh, holy Virgin, help me ! for to whom can I turn for help but to thee ? Help me, and I promise thee never to sin again, either by word or action, all my life.” And she kissed the icon devoutly. “ Oh, holy Virgin, help me ! for thou canst do any miracle thou likest. Show mercy upon me, and draw me from this sorrowful plight. I shall work hard, and get thee, with my earnings, as huge a taper as money can buy.

“ And thou, great St. George, who didst kill a dragon to save a maid, save me from Vranic ; and every year, upon thy holy day, I shall burn incense and light a candle before thy picture, if thou wilt listen to my prayer.”

After that, feeling somewhat comforted, she went to bed, and at last managed to fall asleep, notwithstanding the pain she felt in her side.

On the morrow Radonic went away as usual, and Milena was left alone. The day passed away slowly, gloomily. The

weather was dull, sultry, oppressive. The sirocco that blew every now and then in fitful, silent gusts, was damp, stifling, heavy. A storm was brewing in the air overhead, and all around there was a lull, as if anxious Nature were waiting in sullen expectation for its outburst. The earth was fretful; the sky as peevish as a human being crossed in his designs. The hollow, rumbling noise in the clouds seemed the low grumbling of contained anger.

Everybody was more or less unsettled by the weather—Milena more than anyone else. As the day passed her nervousness increased, and solitude grew to be oppressive.

Her husband, before leaving the house, had told her to go and spend the evening at her kinswoman's, as a bee was to be held there; the women spun, and the men prepared stakes for the vines. Bellacic was fond of company, and he liked to have people with merry faces around him, helping him to while away the long evening hours; nor did he grudge a helping hand to others, whenever his neighbours had any kind of work for him to do.

“I'll come there and fetch you as soon as I've settled my business with Vranic,” said Radonic, going off.

Milena, understanding that her husband wanted her out of the way, decided upon remaining at home, and, possibly, preventing further mischief.

The day had been dark and gloomy from morning; the clouds heaped overhead grew always blacker, and kept coming down lower and ever lower. Early in the afternoon the light began to wane. Her uneasiness increased at approaching night. With the gloaming her thoughts grew dreary and dismal. She was afraid to remain at home; she was loth to go away. Unable to work any longer, she went outside to sit on the doorstep and spin. Now, at last, the rain began, and lurid flashes were seen through the several heaps and masses of clouds.

The lightning showed to her excited imagination not only numberless witches, morine and goblins, chasing and racing after each other like withered leaves in a storm, but in that horrid landscape she perceived murderous battles, hurtling onslaughts, fearful frays and bloodshed, followed by spaces that looked like fields of fire and gory hills of trodden snow. It was too dreadful to look at, so she turned round to go in. She would light the lamp and kindle the fire. At a few

steps from the threshold she heard, or, at least, she fancied she heard, someone whistle outside. She stopped to listen. Perhaps it was only the shrill sound of the wind through the leafless bushes; for the wind has at times the knock of whistling like a human being.

She again advanced a step or two towards the hearth; and as she did so, she stumbled on something. She uttered a low, muffled cry as she almost fell. On what had her foot caught? She bent down, and felt with her hand. It seemed like the corpse of a man stretched out at full length—a human creature wallowing in his own blood. A sickening sense of fear, a feeling of faintness, came over her. She hardly dared to move. Her teeth were chattering; all her limbs were trembling. Still, she managed to recover her self-possession, so as to grope and put her hand on the steel and flint. Still, such was her terror, that everything she touched assumed an uncouth, ungainly, weird shape. Having found the steel, she managed to strike a light. That faint glimmer dispelled her terror, and she asked herself how she could have been so foolish as to take a coat lying on the floor for a murdered man.

The thing that puzzled her was how that coat came to be lying there on the floor. It was her husband's old *kabanica*, and it must have been left on some stool.

As all these thoughts flitted through her mind, a loud crack was heard—a jarring sound amidst the hushed stillness of the house. Milena shuddered; a hand seemed to grip her throat. Her heart stopped for a moment; then it began to throb and beat as if it were going to burst. She gasped for breath.

What was that ominous noise? The hoop of a tub had broken!

To the uninitiated this might seem a trifle, but to those versed in occult lore it was a fearful omen. Someone was to die in that house, and this death was to happen soon, very soon; perhaps before daybreak.

She was so scared that she could not remain a moment longer in that house; so, wrapping herself up in her husband's old coat, she hastened out of the house. Just then Uros' last words sounded in her ears:

“If you are alone and in trouble, go to my mother; she will not only be a friend to you, but love you as a daughter for my sake.”

Her husband that morning had sent her to Mara's; she

could not remain alone any longer; it was *Kismet* that she should go. Besides, Vranic might be coming now at any moment, and even if she swore to him that her husband had not started, he would not believe her; then she would only excite her husband to greater wrath if he came and found him alone with her. No, on the whole, it was better by far to obey her husband's behest; therefore, she started off. She ran quickly through the pouring rain, and never stopped till she was at Bellacic's door.

"Oh! Milena, is it you?" said Mara, her motherly eyes twinkling with a bright smile of welcome; "though, to tell you the real truth, I almost expected you."

"Why?"

"Because a big fly has been buzzing round me, telling me that some person who is fond of me would come and see me. Oracles are always true; besides," added she, with a smile and a sly look, "just guess of what I've been dreaming?"

"Of black grapes, that bring good luck, I suppose."

"No, of doves; so I'll surely get a letter from Uros to-morrow or the day after."

Milena looked down demurely; she blushed; then, to turn away the conversation, she added:

"To-day, for a wonder, Radonic has sent me to pass the evening with you; he'll come to fetch me later on—at least, he said he would."

"It is a wonder, indeed—why, what's come over him? He must have put on his coat inside out when he got up."

Milena thereupon told her friend why her husband did not want her at home.

"Anyhow, I'm very glad you've come, for I'm embroidering two waistcoats—one for Uros, the other for Milenko—and my poor eyes are getting rather weak, so you can help me a little with the fine stitching."

"Radonic told me that some of your neighbours are coming to make stakes."

"Are they? My husband did not say anything about it."

After some time, Markovic and his wife, and several other neighbours, made their appearance.

As every man came in, he greeted Milena, and, seeing her alone, asked her where Radonic was. She, like a true Montenegrin, warded off the question by answering with a shrug of her shoulders and in an off-hand way:

“May the devil take him, if I know where he is. I daresay he'll pop up by-and-bye.”

Etiquette not only requires a wife to avoid speaking of her husband, but also to eschew him completely when present, just as more northern people ignore entirely the name of certain indispensable articles of clothing.

When all the guests were assembled, and such dainties as roasted Indian-corn, melon, pumpkin and sun-flower seeds were handed round, together with filberts and walnuts, then the bard (the honoured guest) was begged to sing them a song. The improvisatore, stroking his long moustache and twisting its ends upwards that they might not be too much in his way as he spoke, took down his *guzla* and began to scrape it by way of prelude. This was not, as amongst us, a sign to begin whispered conversation in out of the way corners, or to strike an attitude of bored sentimentality, for everybody listened now with rapt attention.

THE FAITHLESS WIFE.

When Gjuro was about to start for war,
 And leave his wife alone within his hall,
 He fondly said : “ Dear Jeljena, farewell,
 My faithful wife ; I now hie to the camp,
 From whence I hope to come back soon ; so for
 Thine own sweet sake and mine be true to me.”
 In haste the wanton woman answered back :
 “ Go, my loved lord, and God watch over thee.”
 He had but gone beyond the gate, when she
 Took up a jug and went across the field
 To fetch fresh water from the fountain there ;
 And having got unto the grassy glen, she saw
 A handsome youth, who had adorned his cap
 With flowers freshly culled from terebinth.
 And unto him the sprightly wife thus spoke :
 “ Good day to thee, brave Petar ; tell me, pray,
 Where hast thou bought those blossoms fresh and fair ?”
 And he : “ God grant thee health, O Gjuro's wife ;
 They were not got for gold, they are a gift.”
 Then Jelka hastened back to her own house,
 And to her room she called her trusted maid.
 “ Now list,” said she. “ Go quick beyond the field
 And try to meet young Petar Latkovin ;
 With terebinth you'll see his cap adorned.
 Say unto him : ‘ Fair youth, to thee I bear
 The greetings of good Gjuro's wife, and she
 Doth kindly beg that thou wilt sup with her,

- And spend the night in dalliance and delight—
 And give her one fair flower from thy cap.
 The castle hath nine gates; the postern door
 Will ope for thee, now Gjuro is far off.'"
- The handmaid forthwith to the fountain sped,
 And found the youth. "Good day, my lord," said she.
 "Great Gjuro's winsome wife her greetings sends;
 She begs that thou will sup with her this night,
 And grant her those sweet sprays of terebinth.
 Nine gates our manor has; the small side door
 Will be left ope for thee, my handsome youth,
 As Gjuro is away." Then Petar thanked
 And longed that night might come. At dusk, with joy
 He to the castle sped. He put his steed
 In Gjuro's stall, and then his sword he hung
 Just in the place where Gjuro hung his own,
 And set his cap where Gjuro placed his casque.
 In mirth they supped, and sleep soon closed their eyes;
 But, lo! when midnight came, the wife did hear
 Her husband's voice that called: "My Jelka dear,
 Come, my loved wife, and open quick thy doors."
 Distracted with great fear, she from her bed
 Sprang down, scarce knowing what to do; but soon
 She hid the youth, then let her husband in.
 With feigning love she to his arms would fly,
 But he arrested her with frowning mien.
- "Why didst thou not call quick thy maiden up
 To come and ope at once these doors of thine?"
- "Sweet lord, believe a fond and faithful wife:
 Last night this maid of mine went off in pain
 To bed; she suffers from the ague, my lord;
 So I was loth, indeed, to call her up."
- "If this be true, you were quite right," quoth he;
 "Yet I do fear that all thy words are lies."
- "May God now strike me dumb, if all I spake
 Be aught than truth," said Jeljena at once.
 But frowning, Gjuro stood with folded arms:
- "Whose is that horse within my stall? and whose
 That cap adorned with flowers gay? And there
 I see a stranger's sword upon the wall."
- "Now listen to thy loving wife, my lord.
 Last night a warrior came within thy walls,
 And wanted wine, in pledge whereof he left
 His prancing steed, his sword, and that smart cap,"
 Said Jelka, smiling sweetly to her lord.
 And he with lowering looks, then said: "'Tis well,
 Provided thou canst swear thou speakest true."
- "The Lord may strike me blind," she then replied.
 "Why is thy hair dishevelled, and thy cheeks

Of such a pallid hue ? now, tell me why ? ”
 And she : “ Believe thine honest wife. Last night
 As I did walk beneath our orchard trees,
 The apple boughs dishevelled thus my hair,
 And then I breathed the orange blossom scent,
 Until their fragrance almost made me faint.”
 Now Gjuro’s face was fearful to behold,
 Still as he frowned he only said : “ ’Tis well,
 “ But on the holy Cross now take an oath.”
 “ My lord, upon the holy Cross I swear.”
 “ Now give me up the key of mine own room.”
 Then Jeljena grew ghastly pale with fear,
 Still she replied in husky tones : “ Last night
 As I came from your room the key did break
 Within the lock, so now the door is shut.”
 But he cried out in wrath : “ Give me my key,
 Or from thy shoulders I shall smite thy head ! ”
 She stood aghast and speechless with affright,
 So with his foot he burst at once the door.
 There in the room he found young Latkovin.
 “ Now, answer quick : Didst thou come here by strength,
 Or by her will ? ” The youth a while stood mute,
 Not knowing what to say. But looking up :
 “ Were it by mine own strength,” he then replied,
 “ Beyond the hills she now would be with me ;
 If I am here, ’tis by her own free will.”
 Then standing straight, with stern and stately mien,
 Unto the youth he said, in scornful tones :
 “ Hence, get thee gone ! ” Now, when they were alone,
 He glanced askance upon his guilty wife
 With loathsomeness and hatred in his eyes :
 “ Now, tell me of what death thou’lt rather die—
 By having all thy bones crushed in a mill ?
 Or being trodden down ’neath horses’ hoofs ?
 Or flaring as a torch to light a feast ? ”
 She, for a trice, nor spake, nor moved, nor breathed,
 But stood as if amazed and lost in thought ;
 Then, waking up as from some frightful dream .
 “ I am no corn to be crushed in a mill,
 Or stubble grass for steeds to tread upon ;
 If I must die, then, like unto a torch,
 Let me burn brightly in thy banquet hall.”
 In freezing tones the husband spake and said :
 “ Be it, then, as you list,” and thereupon
 He made her wear a long white waxen gown.
 Then, in his hall, he bound her to a pyre,
 And underneath he piled up glowing coals,
 So that the flame soon rose and reached her knees.
 With tearful eyes and a heartrending cry :

"Oh! Gjuro mine, take pity on my youth ;
 Look at my feet, as white as winter snow ;
 Think of the times they tripped about this hall
 In mazy dance ; let not my feet be scorched."
 To all her prayers he turned a ruthless ear,
 And only heaped more wood on the pile.
 The lambent flames now leapt up to her hands,
 And she in anguish and in dreadful dole
 Cried out: "Oh! show some mercy on my youth ;
 Just see my hands—so soft, so small, so smooth—
 Let not these scathful flames now scorch my hands.
 Have pity on these dainty hands of mine,
 That often lifted up thy babe to thee."
 Her words awoke no pity in his heart,
 That seemed to have become as cold as clay ;
 He only heaped up coals upon the pile,
 Like some fell demon who had fled from hell.
 The forked lurid tongues rose up on high,
 Like slender fiery snakes that sting the flesh,
 And, leaping up, they reached her snowy breast.
 "Oh! Gjuro," she cried out, "for pity's sake
 Have mercy on my youth ; torment me not.
 Though I was false to thee, let me not die.
 See how these fearful flames deflower these breasts—
 The fountain that hath fed thine infant's life—
 See, they are oozing o'er with drops of milk."
 But Gjuro's eyes were blind, his ears were deaf ;
 A viper now was coiled around his heart,
 That urged him to heap up the pile with wood.
 The rising flames began to blind her eyes ;
 Still, ere the fearful smoke had choked her breath,
 She cast on Gjuro one long loving glance,
 And craved, in anguish, mercy on her youth :
 "Have pity on my burning eyes, and let
 Me look once more upon my little child."
 To all her cries his cruel soul was shut ;
 He only fanned and fed the fatal flame,
 Until the faithless wife was burnt to death.

A moment of deep silence followed ; the men twisted their moustaches silently, the women stealthily wiped away their tears with the back of their hands.

"Gjuro was a brute!" at last broke out a youth, impetuously.
 Nobody answered at once ; then an elderly man said, slowly :
 "Perhaps he was, but you are not a husband yet, Tripko ;
 you are only in love. Adultery, amongst us, is no trifle, as it
 is in Venice, for instance ; we Slavs never forgive."

"I don't say he ought to have forgiven ; in his place I might

have strangled her, but as for burning a woman alive, as a torch, I find it heinous!"

Milena, who had fancied herself in Jeljena's place, could not refrain her sobs any longer; moreover, it seemed to her as if her guilt had been found out, and she wished the earth would open and swallow her alive.

"Oh, my poor Milena!" said Mara, soothingly, "you are too tender-hearted; it is only a *pisma*, after all." Then, turning to her neighbour, she added: "She has not been well for some days, and then——" she lowered her voice to a whisper.

"I am sorry," said the bard, "that I upset you in this way but——"

"Oh! it is nothing, only I fancied I could see the poor woman burning; it was so dreadful!"

"Here," said Bellacic. "have a glass of *slivovitz*; it'll set you all right. Moreover, listen; I'll tell you a much finer story, only pay great attention, for I'm not very clever at story-telling. Are you all ears?"

"Yes," said Milena, smiling.

"Well, once upon a time, there was a man who had three dogs: the first was called Catch-it-quick; the second, Bring-it-back; and the third, I-know-better. Now, one morning this man got up very early to go out hunting, so he called Catch-it-quick, Bring-it-back, and—and—how stupid I am! now I've forgotten the name of the other dog. Well, I said I wasn't good in telling stories; what was it?"

"I-know-better," interrupted Milena.

"No doubt you do, my dear, so perhaps you'll continue the story yourself, as you know better."

Everybody laughed, and the gloom that had come over the company after the bard's story was now dispelled.

"Radonic is late; I'm afraid, Milena, if you went back home, you'd have to prepare a stake for him," said Markovic. Then, turning to the bard: "Come, Stoyan, give us another *pisma*."

"Yes, but something merry," interrupted Tripko; "tell us some verses about the great *Kraglievic*."

The bard, contrary to his wont, was sipping his glass of *slivovitz* very slowly; he now finished it and said:

"I'll try, though, to tell you the truth, I'm rather out of sorts this evening; I really don't know why. There is an

echo, as if of a crime, in the slightest noise, a smell of blood in every gust of wind. Do you not hear anything? Well, perhaps, I am mistaken."

Everyone looked at one another wistfully, for they all knew that old Stoyan was something of a prophet.

"There! listen, said he," staring vacantly; "did you not hear?"

"No," said Bellacic; "what was it?"

"Only the heavy thud of a man falling like a corpse on the ground," and as he said these words he crossed himself devoutly and muttered to himself: "May the Lord forgive him, whoever he is." Thereupon everybody present crossed himself, saying: "*Bog nas ovari.*"

Milena shuddered and grew deathly pale; though she was not gifted with second sight, she saw in her mind's eye something so dreadful that it almost made her faint with terror. Mara, seeing her ghastly pale, said:

"Come, give us this song, but let it be something brisk and merry, for the howling of the wind outside is like a funeral wail, and it is that lament which makes us all so moody to-night."

"You are right, *gospodina*; besides, one man more or less—provided he is no relation of ours—is really no great matter. How many thousands fell treacherously at Kossoro." Then, taking up his bow, he began to scrape the chord of his *guzla*, in a swift, jerking, sprightly way.

"What is it?" asked Bellacic.

And Stoyan replied, as he began to sing:

MARKO KRAGLIEVIC'S FALCON.

A falcon flies o'er Budua town;
It bears a gleaming golden crest,
Its wings are gilt, so is its breast;
Of clear bright yellow is each claw,
And with its sheen it lights the wold.

Then all the maids of Budua town
Ask this fair sparkling bird of prey
Why it is yellow and not grey?
Who gilded it without a flaw?
Who gave it that bright crest of gold?

And to the maids of Budua town
That falcon shy did thus reply:
Listen, ye maids, and know that I

Belong to Mark the warrior brave,
Who is as fair as he is bold.

His sisters dwell in Budua town
The first, the fairest of the two,
Painted my claws a yellow hue,
And gilt my wings; great Marko gave
To me this sparkling crest of gold.

He finished, and then, as it was getting late, everyone began to wish Bellacic and Mara good-night and to go off. Several of the guests offered to see Milena home, but the *domacica* insisted that her kinswoman should remain and spend the night with her, and Milena consented full willingly, for she dreaded going back home.

When all the guests had gone, Mara took Milena in bed with her; but she, poor thing, could not find rest, for the words of the bard kept ever ringing in her ears. Then she saw again the great-coat lying on the floor, looking like a corpse; and, in the howling wind, she thought she heard a voice calling for help. Who was it? Radonic or Vranic?

It was only the wind howling outside through the trees, creeping slyly along the whitewashed walls of the houses, stealthily trying to find some small cranny wherein to creep, then shrieking with a shrill cry of exultation when it had come to an open window, or when, discovering some huge keyhole, it could whistle undisturbed.

At last, just as Milena began to get drowsy, and her heavy eyelids were almost closed, she again saw the *kabanica*, which had—some hours ago—been lying on the floor, rise and twist itself into the most grotesque and fantastic attitudes, then—almost hidden under the hood—Vranic's face making mouths at her. She opened her eyes widely, and although consciousness had now returned, and she knew that the great-coat had been left in the other room, still she saw it plainly dancing and capering like a monkey. She shivered and shuddered; she closed her eyes not to see it; still, it became ever more distinct. Then she buried her face in the pillow, and covered up her head in the sheet; then by degrees a feeling of drowsiness came over her, and just as she was going off to sleep the *kabanica*, which was standing erect, fell all at once to the ground with a mighty thud that almost shook the whole house, and even seemed to precipitate her down some bottomless hole. In her terror she clutched at Mara, who was fast asleep, and woke her.

“What’s the matter?” asked the elderly woman.

“I heard a loud voice; did’nt you hear it?”

“No, I had just dropped off to sleep.”

Thereupon both the women listened, but the house was perfectly quiet.

“What kind of a noise was it?”

“Like a man falling heavily on the ground.”

“You must have been dreaming; Stoyan’s words frightened you, that’s all, unless the cat or the dog knocked something down. You know, at night every noise sounds strange, uncouth, whilst in the day-time we’d never notice them. Now, the best thing you can do is to try and go off to sleep.”

Alas! why are we not like the bird that puts its head under its wing and banishes at once the outer world from its view. Every endeavour she made to bring about oblivion seemed, on the contrary, to stimulate her to wakefulness, and thereby frustrate her efforts. Sleepiness only brought on mental irritation, instead of soft, drowsy rest. The most gloomy thoughts came into her mind. Why had her husband not come to fetch her? Perhaps Vranic, seeing himself discovered, had stabbed him to death. Then she thought that, in this case, all her trouble would be at an end. Thereupon she crossed herself devoutly, and uttered a prayer that her husband might not be murdered, even if he had been cruel to her. Still, she was quite sure that, if Radonic ever discovered her guilt, he would surely murder her—burn her, perhaps, like Gjuro had done.

Thereupon she heard the elderly man’s slow and grave voice ringing in her ears:

“Slavs never forgive. Adultery amongst us is no trifle, as it is in Venice.”

She shuddered with terror. Every single word as it had been uttered had sunk deep into her breast, like drops of burning wax falling from Jeljena’s gown. Each one was like the stab of a sharp knife cutting her to the quick.

Then again she fancied that Stoyan had sung that *pisma* only to taunt her.

She had once heard the *pop* read in the Bible about an adulteress in Jerusolim who was to be stoned to death.

Had not every word that evening been a stone thrust at her? What was she to do? What was to become of her? Once entangled in the net of sin, every effort we make to get out of it seems to make us flounder deeper in its fatal meshes.

All these thoughts tortured and harassed her, burning tears were ever trickling down her cheeks, her weary head was aching as she tossed about, unable to go off to sleep, unable to find rest; nay, a creepiness had come over all her limbs, as if a million ants were going up and down her legs.

How glad she was at last to see through the curtainless window the first glimmer of dawn dispel the darkness of the night—the long, dreary, unending night.

“You have had a bad night,” said Mara. “I heard you turning and tossing about, but I thought it better not to speak to you. I suppose it was the bed. I’m like you, I always lose my sleep in a new bed.”

“Oh, no!” said Milena. “I was anxious.”

“About your husband? Perhaps he got drunk and went off to sleep.”

As soon as Milena was dressed she wanted to go off, but Mara would not allow her.

“First, your husband said he’d come and fetch you, so you must stay with us till he comes; then, remember you promised to help me with my embroidery, so I can’t let you go.”

“No, I’m too anxious about Radonic. You know, he’s so hasty.”

“Yes, he’s a brute, I know.”

“Besides, I can’t get the bard’s words out of my head.”

“In fact, poor thing, you are looking quite ill. Anyhow, I’ll not allow you to go alone, so you must wait till I’ve put the house in order, and then I’ll go with you.”

As soon as breakfast was over, and Bellacic was out of the house, Mara got ready. She little knew that, though Milena was anxious to find out the dreadful truth of that night’s mystery, she was in her heart very loth to return home.

Just as Mara was near the door, she, like all women, forgot something and had to go in, for—what she called—a minute. Milena stepped out alone. First, as she pushed the door open, the hinges gave a most unpleasant grating sound. She shivered, for this was a very bad omen. Then a cat mewed. Milena crossed herself. And, as if all this were not enough, round the corner came an old lame hag whom she knew. The old woman stopped.

“What, *gospa!* is it you? and where are you going so early in the morning?”

Milena shuddered, and her teeth chattered in such a way

that she could hardly answer her. It was very bad to meet an old woman in the morning; worse still, a lame old woman; worst of all, to be asked where you are going.

The best thing on such a day would be to go back in-doors, and do nothing at all; for everything undertaken would go all wrong.

The old woman's curiosity having been satisfied, she hobbled away, and soon disappeared, leaving Milena more dejected and forlorn even than she had been before.

Mara came out, and found her ghastly pale; she tried to laugh the matter over, though she, too, felt that it was really no laughing matter. Weary and worn, poor Milena dragged herself homewards, but her knees seemed as if they were broken, and her limbs almost refused to carry her.

Soon they came in sight of the house; all the windows and the doors were shut—evidently Radonic was not at home.

"I wonder where he is," said Milena to her friend.

"Probably he has gone to our house to look for you. If you had only waited a little! Now he'll say that we wanted to get rid of you."

At last they were at the door.

"And now," said Mara, "probably the house is locked, and you'll have to come back with me." Then, all at once interrupting herself: "Oh! how my left ear is ringing, someone is speaking about me; can you guess who it is, Milena? Yes, I think I can hear my son's voice," and the fond mother's handsome face beamed with pleasure.

She had hardly uttered these words, when they heard someone call out:

"Gospa Mara! gospa Mara!"

Then turning round, they saw a youth running up to them.

"What! is it you, Todor Teodorovic? and when did you come back?" quoth Mara.

"We came back last evening."

"Perhaps you met the *Spera in Dio* on your voyage?"

"Yes, we met the brig at Zara, but as she had somewhat suffered from the storm, she was obliged to go to Nona for repairs, as all the building yards of Zara were busy."

Thereupon, he began to expatiate very learnedly about the nature of the damage the ship had suffered, but Mara interrupted him—

"And how was Uros? did you see him?"

“Oh, yes! he was quite well.”

Then he began to tell Mara all about the lives Uros and Milenko had saved, and how gallantly they had endangered their own. “But,” added he, “our captain has a letter for you, *gospa*.”

“There, I told you I’d have a letter to-day; I had dreamt of doves, and when I see doves or horses in my sleep, I always get some news the day afterwards,” said Mara, turning to her friend, but Milena had disappeared.

Todor Teodorovic having found a willing listener, an occurrence which happened but very seldom with him, began to tell Mara all about the repairs the *Spera in Dio* would have to undergo, and also how long they would stay at Nona, their approximate cost, and so forth, and Mara listened because anything that related to her son was interesting to her.

Milena had stood for a few moments on the doorstep, but when she heard that Uros was quite well, she slipped unperceived into the house. She felt so oppressed as she went in that she almost fancied she was going to meet her death.

Was it for the last time she went into that house? Would she ever come out of it again?

Her hand was on the latch, she pressed it down; it yielded, the door opened. Perhaps Radonic had come home late, drunk, and he was there now sleeping himself sober. If this were the case, she would have a bad day of it; he was always so fretful and peevish on the day that followed a drinking bout.

How dark the room was; all the shutters were tightly shut, and dazzled as she was by the broad daylight, she could not see the slightest thing in that dark room.

Her heart was beating so loud that she fancied it was going to burst; she panted for breath, she shrank within herself, appalled as she was by that overpowering darkness. She dreaded to stretch out her hand and grope about, for it seemed to her as if she would be seized by some invisible foe, lying there in wait for her.

Just then, as she was staring in front of her, with widely-opened eyes, the *kabanica*, as she had seen it the evening before, rose slowly, gravely, silently, from the floor, and stood upright before her.

That gloomy ghost of a garment detached itself from the surrounding darkness and glided up to her, bending forward

with outstretched arms. No face was to be seen, for the head was quite concealed by the hood. And yet she fancied Vranic's livid face must be there, near her.

She almost crouched down, oppressed by that ghostly garment; she shrank back with terror, and yet she knew that the phantom in front of her only existed in her morbid imagination.

To nerve herself to courage, she turned round to cast a glance at Uros' mother, and convince herself that she was still there, within reach at a few steps; then, with averted head, she went in.

She turned round; the phantom of the *kabanica* had disappeared. She was by the hearth. What was she to do now? First, open the shutters and have some light. She turned towards the right.

All at once she stumbled on the very spot where, the evening before, she had caught and entangled her foot in the great-coat. A man was lying there now, apparently dead. She uttered a piercing cry as she fell on a cold, lifeless body. Then, as she fell, she fainted.

Mara and Todor, hearing the cry, rushed into the house. They opened the shutters, and then they saw Milena lying on the floor, all of a heap, upon an outstretched body. They lifted her up and laid her on the bed; then they went to examine the man, who was extended at full length by the hearth, wrapped up in his huge great-coat.

"There is no blood about him," said Todor; "he, therefore, must be drunk, and asleep."

Still, when they touched his limbs, they found that they were stiff and stark, ankylosed by the rigid sleep of death.

Mara pushed back the hood of the *kabanica*, and then she saw a sight which she never forgot the whole of her life.

She saw Vranic's face staring at her in the most horrible contortions of overpowering pain. His distorted mouth was widely open, like a huge black hole; out of it, his slimy, bloody, dark tongue protruded—dreadful to behold. His nostrils were fiercely dilated. Still, worst of all, his eyes, with their ugly cast, started—squinting, glazed and bloodshot—out of their sockets. The hair of his face and of his head was bristling frightfully; his ghastly complexion was blotched with livid spots. It was, indeed, a gruesome sight, especially seen so unexpectedly.

All around his neck he bore the traces of strangulation, for

Radonic, who had promised not to use a knife, had been true to his word.

Mara, shuddering, made the sign of the Cross. She pulled the hood of the coat over the corpse's face, and then went to nurse Milena; whilst Todor Teodorovic, who had, at last, found a topic of conversation worth being listened to, went out to call for help.

CHAPTER IX

THE HAYDUK

ON the morning of the murder Vranic accompanied Radonic out of the town. He had told Milena he would do so. On reaching the gate fronting the open country and the dark mountains, Radonic stopped, and wished his friend Good-bye. The seer insisted upon walking a little way out of town with him.

"No, thank you; go back. The weather is threatening, and we'll soon have rain."

"Well, what does it matter? If you don't melt, no more shall I," and he laughed at his would-be witticism.

"The roads are bad, and you are no great walker."

Vranic, however, insisted.

Thus they went on together, through vineyards and olive-groves, until they got in sight of the white-walled convent. There Radonic tried once more to get rid of his friend. At last they reached the foot of the rocky mountain, usually fragrant with sage and thyme. Having got to the flinty, winding path leading to the fort of Kosmac:

"Now," said Radonic, "you must positively come no farther."

The road was uneven and very steep. Vranic yielded.

"Go back, and take care of Milena."

"Well, I do not say it as a boast, but you could not leave her in better hands."

"She is young, and, like all women—well, she has long hair and short brains. Look after her."

"Vranic has his eyes open, and will keep good watch."

"I know I can rely on you. Have we not always been friends, we two? That is why, whenever I left my home, I did so with a light heart."

"Your honour is as dear to me as if it were my own."

"It is only in times of need that we really appreciate the advantage of having a friend. The proverb is right: 'Let thy trusted friend be as a brother to you'; and a friend to whom

we can entrust our wife, is even more than a brother. I therefore hope to be able to repay you soon for your kindness."

"Don't mention it. It has been a pleasure for me to be of use to you; for, as honey attracts flies, a handsome young woman collects men around her. So there must always be someone to ward off indiscreet admirers. Moreover, as you know, they say I am a seer, and they are afraid of me."

At last they kissed and parted; the one walking quickly townwards, almost light-hearted, especially after the load of his friend's company, the other trudging heavily upwards.

After a few steps, Radonic climbed a high rock, and sat down to watch Vranic retracing his steps townwards. When he had seen him disappear, he at last rose and quietly followed him for a while. A quarter of an hour afterwards he was knocking at the gate of the white-walled convent. The monks, who are always fond of any break in their monotonous life, received him almost with deference—a sea captain, who had been all over the world, was always a welcome guest. After taking snuff with all of them, and chatting about politics, the crops and the scandal of the town, Radonic asked to be confessed; then he gave alms, was absolved of his peccadilloes, and finally took the Eucharist—a spoonful of bread soaked in wine—although he prided himself on being something of a sceptic. Still, he felt comforted thereby; he had blotted out all past sins and could now begin a new score. Religion, they say, in all its forms always tends to make man happy—aye, and better!

In this merry frame of mind he sat down to dinner with the jolly brotherhood, and after a copious but plain meal, he, according to the custom of this holy house, retired to one of the cells appointed to strangers, to have a nap. No sooner was he alone than he undid his bundle, took out a razor and shaved off all the hair of his cheeks and chin, leaving only a long pair of thick moustaches, which he curled upwards according to the fierce fashion of the Kotor. This done, he took off his soiled, ugly, badly-fitting European clothes and put on the dress of the country—one of the finest and manliest devised by man; so that, although not good-looking, he was handsome to what he had just been.

The monks, on seeing him come out, did not recognise him, and could not understand from whence he had sprung. Then they were more than astonished when they found out the reason for this transformation, for he told them that it was

to surprise his wife, or rather, the moths attracted by her sparkling eyes.

“I thought I should never put on again the clothes of my youth, but fate, it appears, has decreed otherwise.”

“Man is made of dust, and to dust he returneth. Sooner or later we have to become again what we once were. You know the story of the mouse, don't you?”

“No; or at least I don't think I do.”

“Then listen, and I'll tell it you.”

A great many years ago, in the times of Christ and His disciples, there lived somewhere in Asia a very good man, who had left off worshipping idols and had become a Christian.

Finding soon afterwards that it was impossible for him to dwell any more with his own people—who scoffed at his new creed, rated him for wishing to be better than they were, mocked him when he prayed, and played all kinds of tricks on him when he fasted—he sold his birthright and divided all his money amongst the poor, the blind and the cripples of his native town. Then he bade farewell to all his friends and relations, and with the Holy Scriptures in one hand, and a staff in the other, he went out of the town gate and walked into the wilderness.

He wandered for many days until he arrived on top of a steep, treeless, wind-blown hill, and, almost on the summit, he found a small cave, the ground of which was strewn with fine white sand, as soft to the feet as a velvet carpet. On one side of this grotto there was a fountain of icy cold water, and on the other, hewn in the rock as if by the hand of man, a kind of long niche, which looked as if it had been made on purpose for a bed. The Christian, who had decided to become a hermit, saw in this cave a sign of God's will and favour; therefore, he stopped there. For some time he lived on the roots of plants, berries and wild fruit, that grew at the foot of the hill; then he cultivated a patch of ground, and so he passed his time, praying, reading his holy Book, meditating over it, or tilling his bit of glebe.

Years and years passed—who knows how many?—and he had become an old man, with a long white beard reaching down to his knees, a brown, sun-burnt skin, and a face furrowed with wrinkles. Since the day he had left his country, he had never again seen a man, a woman or a child, nor, in-

deed, any other animal, except a few birds that flew over his head, or some small snakes that glided amongst the stones. So one evening, after he had said his lengthy prayers and committed his soul to God, he went to lie down on his couch of leaves and moss; but he could not sleep. He, for the first time, felt lonely, and, as it were, home-sick. He knew he would never behold again the face of any man, so he almost wished he had, at least, some tiny living creature to cherish. Sleep at last closed his eyes. In the morning, on awaking, he saw a little mouse frisking in the sand of his cave. The old hermit looked astonished at the pretty little thing, and he durst not move, but remained as quiet as a mouse, for fear the mouse would run away.

The animal, however, caught sight of him, and stood stock-still on its hind legs, looking at him. Thus they both remained for some seconds, staring at each other. Then the hermit understood at last that God, in His goodness, had heard his wish, and had sent him this little mouse to comfort him, and be a companion to him in his old age. And so it was.

Days, months, years passed, and the mouse never left the hermit, not even for a single instant; and the godly man grew always fonder of this friendly little beast. He played with it, patted it, and called it pet names; and at night, when he crept into his niche to sleep, he took the mouse with him.

One night, as he pressed the little animal to his breast, he felt his heart overflow with love for it, and in his unutterable fondness he begged the Almighty to change this dear little mouse into a girl; and lo, and behold! God granted his prayer, for, of course, he was a saintly man. The hermit pressed the girl to his heart, and then fell upon his knees and thanked the All-Merciful for His great goodness.

The girl grew up a beautiful maiden—tall, slender, and most graceful in her movements, with a soft skin, and twinkling, almost mischievous eyes.

Years passed. The hermit now had grown to be a very old man; and in his last years his spirit was troubled, and his heart was full of care. He knew that he had passed the time allotted to man here below, and he was loth to think that he would have to die and leave his daughter alone in the wilderness. Besides, she had reached marriageable age; and if it is no easy matter for a match-making mother to marry her daughter in a populous town, it was a difficult task to find a

husband for her in that desert. Moreover, he did not exactly know how to broach the subject of matrimony to a girl who was so very ingenuous, and who thought that all the world was limited to the cave and the hill on which she lived. Still, he did not shrink from this duty; and, therefore, he told her what he had read in scientific books about the conjunctions of planets in the sky. Then he quoted the Scriptures, and said that it was not good for man to be alone, nor for woman either; that even widows should marry, if they cannot live in the holy state of celibacy.

The poor girl did not quite fathom all the depths of his speech, but said she would be guided by his wisdom.

"Very well," said the anchorite, "I shall soon find you a husband worthy of you."

"But," said the girl, ingenuously, "why do you not marry me yourself?"

"I marry you? First, my dear, I am a hermit, and hermits never marry, for if they did, they might have a family, then—you understand—they wouldn't be hermits any more, would they?"

"But they needn't have a family, need they?"

"Well, perhaps not; besides, I can't marry you, because——"

"Because?"

"I," stammered the anchorite, blushing, "I'm too old."

"Ah, yes!" echoed the maid sighing; "it's a fact, you are *very* old."

That night, after the hermit and his adopted daughter had said their prayers, she, who was very sleepy, went off to bed, whilst he, who was as perplexed as any father having a dowerless daughter, went out of his cavern to meditate.

The full moon had just risen above the verge of the horizon, and her soft light silvered the sand of the desert, and made it look like newly fallen snow.

The old man stood on top of the hill, and stretching forth his arms to the Moon:

"Oh! thou mightiest of God's works, lovely Moon, take pity upon a perplexed father, and listen to my prayer. I have one fair daughter that has now reached marriageable age; she is of radiant beauty, and well versed in all the mysteries of our holy religion. Marry my daughter, O Moon!"

"Now," said Radonic, interrupting, "that's foolish; how could the old hermit expect the Moon to marry his daughter?"

“First, this is a parable, like one of those our blessed Saviour used to tell the people; therefore, being a parable, it’s Gospel, and you must believe it as a true story, for it is the life of one of the holy Fathers of the Church.”

“I see,” quoth Radonic, although he did not see quite clearly.

Then the Moon replied :

“You are mistaken, old man; I am not the mightiest of God’s creation. The Sun, whose light I reflect, is the greatest of the Omnipotent’s works; ask the Sun to be a husband to thy daughter.”

The hermit sank on his knees and uttered lengthy prayers, till the light of the Moon grew pale and vanished, and the sky got to be of a saffron tint; soon afterwards, the first rays of the Sun flooded the desert, and transmuted the sandy plain into one mass of glittering gold. When the old man saw the effulgent disc of the Sun, he stretched out his arms and apostrophised this planet as he had done the Moon. Then he rubbed his hands and thought :

“Well, if I only get the Sun for my son-in-law I’m a lucky man.”

But the Morning Sun told the hermit that he was mistaken :

“I’m not the mightiest of the Creator’s works,” quoth the Sun. “You see yon cloudlet yonder. Well, soon that little weasel will get to be as big as a camel, then as a whale, then it’ll spread all over the sky and will hide my face from the earth I love so well. That Cloud is mightier than I am.”

Then the hermit waited on top of the hill until he saw the Cloud expand itself in the most fantastic shapes, and when it had covered up the face of the Morning Sun, the hermit stretched out his hands and offered to it his daughter in marriage. The Cloud, however, answered just as the Moon and the Sun had done, and it proposed the Simoon as a suitor to his daughter.

“Wait a bit,” said the Cloud, “and you will see the might of the Simoon, that, howling, rises and not only drives us whithersoever he will, but scatters us in the four corners of the Earth.”

No sooner had the Cloud done speaking than the Wind arose, lifting up clouds of dust from the earth. It seemed to cast the sand upwards in the face of the sky, and against the

clouds ; and the waters above dropped down in big tears, or fled from the wrath of the Wind.

Then the hermit stretched his hands towards the Simoon, and begged him, as the mightiest of the Creator's works, to marry his daughter.

But the Wind, howling, told him to turn his eyes towards a high mountain, the snowy summit of which was faintly seen far off in the distance. "That Mountain," said he, "is mightier by far than myself."

The hermit then went into the cavern and told his daughter that, as it was impossible to find a suitor for her in the desert, he was going on a journey, from which he would only return on the morrow.

"And will you bring me a husband when you come back?" she asked, merrily.

"I trust so, with God's grace," quoth the Hermit, "and one well worthy of you, my beloved daughter."

Then the hermit girded his loins, took up his staff, and journeyed in the direction of the setting sun. Having reached the foot of the Mountain when the gloaming tinged its flanks in blood, he stretched out his arms up to the summit of the Mount and begged it to marry his daughter.

"Alas," answered the Mountain, mournfully, "you are much mistaken. I am by no means the mightiest of God's works. A Rat that has burrowed a big hole at my feet is mightier by far than I am, for he nibbles and bites me and burrows in my bowels, and I can do nothing against it. Ask the Rat to marry thy daughter, for he is mightier by far than I am."

The hermit, after much ado, found out the Rat's hole, and likewise the Rat, who—like himself—was a hermit.

"Oh, mightiest of God's mighty works! I have one daughter, passing fair, highly accomplished, and well versed in sacred lore; wilt thou—unless thou art already married—take this rare maiden as thy lawful wedded wife?"

"Hitherto, I have never contemplated marriage," retorted the Rat, "for 'sufficient to the day are the evils thereof'; still, where is your daughter?"

"She is at home, in the wilderness."

"Well, you can't expect me to marry a cat in a bag, can you?" he answered, squeaking snappishly.

"Oh, certainly not!" replied the anchorite, humbly; "still, that she is fair, you have my word on it; and I was a judge of

beauty in past times"—thereupon he stopped, and humbly crossed himself—"that she is wise—well, she is my daughter."

"Pooh!" said the Rat; "every father thinks his child the fairest one on earth; you know the story of the owl, don't you?"

"I do," retorted the hermit, hastily.

"Then you wouldn't like me to tell it you, would you?"

"No, not I."

"Well, then, what about your daughter?"

"I'll take you to see her, if you like."

"Is it far?"

"A good day's walk."

"H'm, I don't think it's worth while going so far. Could you not bring her here for me to see her?"

"Oh! it's against etiquette. But if you like, I'll carry you to her."

"All right, it's a bargain."

At nightfall they set out on their journey, and they got to the cave early on the following day.

The young girl, seeing the hermit, ran down the hill to meet him.

"Well, father," said she, with glistening eyes, flushed cheeks, parted lips, and panting breast, "and my husband, where is my husband?"

"Here," said the anchorite; and he took the Rat out of his wallet. "Here he is; allow me to introduce to you a husband mightier than the Moon, more powerful than the Sun, stronger than the Clouds, more valiant than the Simoon, greater than the high Mountain; in fact, a husband well worthy of you, my daughter."

The eyes of the young girl opened wider and wider in mute astonishment.

"He's a fine specimen of his kind, isn't he?"

"I daresay he is," said she, surveying him with the eye of a connoisseur; "and cooked in honey, he'd be a dainty bit."

"And he's a hermit, into the bargain."

"But," added the girl, ruefully, "if you intended me to marry a rat, was it not quite useless to have turned me into a woman?"

The hermit stroked his beard, pensively, for a while, and was apparently lost in deep meditation.

“My daughter,” replied he, after a lengthy pause, “your words are Gospel; I have never thought of all this till now; you see clearly that ‘the ways of Providence are not our ways.’”

Thereupon, the old man fell on his knees, for he felt himself rebuked; he prayed long and earnestly that his daughter might once more be changed into a mouse. And, lo and behold! his prayer was granted; nay, before he had got up from his knees and looked around, the girl had dwindled into her former shape, evidently well pleased with the change.

Anyhow, the anchorite was comforted in his loneliness, for he had always meant well towards her; moreover, he felt sure that if the newly-married couple ever had children, the little mice would be so well brought up, that they would scrupulously refrain from eating lard on fast days.

Then the hermit, tired with his journey, went and lay down on his bed of moss, dropped off to sleep, and never woke again on earth.

At dusk, Radonic took leave of the learned and hospitable *kaludgeri*, and went back to town. He reached the gate when the shadows of the night had already fallen upon the earth. Although he fancied that everyone he met stared at him, still many of his acquaintances passed close by him without recognising him.

At last he crossed the whole of the town and got to his house. The door being slightly ajar, he thought Milena must be at home. He glided in on tiptoe, his *opanke* hardly making the slightest noise on the stone floor. There was no fire on the hearth, no light to be seen anywhere. Milena was not in the front room, nor in any of the others. Where could she have gone, and left the front door open? Surely she would be back in a few moments? He crouched in a corner and waited, but Milena did not make her appearance.

As it was quite dark, he groped to the cupboard, found the loaf, cut himself a slice, then managed to lay his hand on the cheese. As he ate, he almost felt like a burglar in his own house. The darkness really unnerved him, and yet he was inured to watch in the night on board his ship; now, however, the hand of Time seemed to have stopped.

The bread was more than tough, the cheese was dry; so he could hardly manage to gulp the morsels down. Unable to

find the *bukara*, he went into the cellar and took a long draught of heady wine.

Returning upstairs, he again crouched in a corner. Milena had not come back; evidently, she had gone to Mara's, as he had told her to. Sitting there in the darkness, watching and waiting, with the purpose of blood on his mind, time hung wearily upon him. The wine had somewhat cheered him, but now drowsiness overpowered him. To keep himself from falling asleep, he tried to think. Though he was not gifted with a glowing imagination, still his mind was full of fancies, and one vision succeeded another in his overheated brain. His past life now began to flit before his eyes like scenes in a peep-show. A succession of ghosts arose from amidst the darkness and threatened him. One amongst them made him shudder. It was that of a beautiful young woman of eighteen summers standing on the seashore, waiting for a sail.

Many years ago, when he was only a simple sailor, he had been wrecked on the coasts of Sicily. A poor widow had given him shelter, and in return for her kindness, what had he done? This woman had three daughters; the eldest was a beautiful girl of eighteen, the other two were mere children. For months these poor creatures toiled for him and fed him. Then he married the girl under a false name with the papers belonging to one of the drowned sailors. Although he had married her against his will—for she was a Catholic and did not belong to the Orthodox faith—still he intended doing what was right—bring her to his country, and re-marry her according to the rites of his own Church. But time passed; so he confessed, gave alms to the convent, obtained the absolution, and was almost at peace with himself. Probably, she had come to the conclusion that he had been swallowed up by the hungry waves, and she had married a man of her own country; so his child had a father. Still, since his marriage, the vision of that woman often haunted him.

Anyhow, he added bitterly to himself, although a Catholic, she had loved him. Milena, a true believer, had never cared for him. And now he remembered the first time he had seen Milena; how smitten he had been by her beauty, how her large eyes had flashed upon him with a dark and haughty look. She had disliked him from the first, but what had he cared when he had got her father into his hands? for

when the proud Montenegrin owed him a sum which he could not pay at once, he had asked him for the hand of his daughter.

Instead of trying to win her love, he had ill-treated her from the very beginning; then, seeing that nothing could daunt her, he had often feared lest he should find his house empty on returning home.

All at once the thought struck him that now she had run away with Vranic. She had, perhaps, confided the whole truth to him, and they had escaped together. He ground his teeth with rage at that thought.

No, such a thing could not be, for she hated Vranic.

"Aye, it is true she hates him, but does she not hate me as much?" he said to himself; "fool that I was not to have thought of this before. Vranic is not handsome; no one can abide him. Still, he clings to women in a way that it is almost impossible to get rid of him. Anyhow, if they have gone away together, I swear by the blessed Virgin, by St. Nicholas, and by St. Cyril and Method that I shall overtake them; nay," said he, with a fearful oath, "even if they have taken refuge in God's own stomach, I shall go and drag them out and take vengeance on them, as a true Slav that I am. Still, in the meantime, they have, perhaps, fooled me, and I am here waiting for them." And, in his rage, he struck his head against the wall.

"Trust a woman!" thought Radonic; "they are as skittish as cats, slippery as eels, as false as sleeping waters. Why, my own mother cheated me of many a penny, only for the pleasure of hoarding them, and then leaving them to me after her death. Trust a woman as far as you can see her, but no farther," and then he added: "Yes, and trust thy friend, which is like going to pat a rabid dog.—What o'clock is it?" he asked himself.

He was always accustomed to tell the time of the day to a minute, without needing a watch, but now he had lost his reckoning.

It was about six o'clock when he came back home; was it nine or ten now?

He durst not strike a light, for fear of being seen from without and spoiling his little game. He waited a little more.

The threatening shadows of the past gathered once more around him.

All at once he heard some words whispered audibly. It was the curse of the boy he had crippled for life. He shuddered with fear. In his auto-suggestion he, for a moment, actually

fancied he had heard those words. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and tried to think of pleasanter subjects.

A curse is but a few idle words; still, since that time, not a decent seaman had ever sailed with him.

He could not bear the oppressive darkness any longer; peopled as it was with shadows, it weighed upon him. He went into the inner room, lit a match, looked at his watch.

It was not yet nine o'clock. Time that evening was creeping on at a sluggish pace.

"Surely," he soliloquised, "if Vranic is coming he cannot delay much longer." After a few seconds he put out the light and returned to the front room.

Soon afterwards, he heard a bell strike slowly nine o'clock in the distance; then all was silence. The house was perfectly still and quiet, and yet, every now and then, in the room in which he was sitting, he could hear slight, unexplainable noises, like the soft trailing of garments, or the shuffling of naked feet upon the stone floor; stools sometimes would creak, just as if someone had sat upon them; then small objects seemed stealthily handled by invisible fingers.

He tried to think of his business, always an engrossing subject, not to be overcome by his superstitious fears. He had been a shrewd man, he had mortgaged his house for its full value to Vranic himself to buy the mythical cargo. Now that all his wealth was in bank-notes, or in bright and big Maria Theresa dollars, he was free to go whithersoever he chose.

Still, it was vexing to think that if he killed that viper of a Vranic, as he was in duty bound to do, he would have to flee from his native town, and escape to the mountains, at least till affairs were settled. It was a pity, for now the insurance society would make a rich man of him, so he might have remained comfortably smoking his pipe at home, and enjoying the fruits of many years' hard labour.

A quarter-past nine!

He began to wonder whether Milena—not seeing him come to fetch her—would return home. Surely more than one young man would offer to see her to her house. This thought made him gnash his teeth with rage.

When once the venom of jealousy has found its way within the heart of man, it rankles there, and, little by little, poisons his whole blood.

And again he thought: "That affair of Uros and Milenko has never been quite clear; Vranic was false, there was no doubt about it; still, it was not he who had invented the whole story. Had he not been the laughing-stock of all his friends?"

Half-past nine!

How very slowly the hours passed! If he could only do something to while away the time—pace up and down the room, as he used to do on board, and smoke a cigarette; but that was out of the question.

Hush! was there not a noise somewhere? It must have been outside; and still it seemed to him as if it were in the house itself. Was it a mouse, or some stray cat that had come in unperceived? No; it was a continuous noise, like the trailing of some huge snake on the dry grass.

A quarter to ten!

Silence once more. Now, almost all the town is fast asleep. He would wait a little longer, and then? Well, if Vranic did not come soon, he would not come at all, so it would be useless waiting. He wrapped himself up in his great-coat, for the night was chilly, and had it not been for the thought that Milena had fled with Vranic, sleepiness would have overcome him.

He thoughtlessly began making a cigarette, out of mere habit, just to do something. It was provoking not to smoke just when a few puffs would be such a comfort.

Now he again hears the chimes at a distance; the deep-toned bell rings the four quarters slowly; the vibrations of one stroke have hardly passed away when the quiet air is startled by another stroke. How much louder and graver those musical notes sound in the hushed stillness of the night!

Ten o'clock!

Some towns—Venice, for instance—were all life and bustle at that hour of the night; the streets and squares all thronged with masks and merry revellers; the theatres, coffee-houses, dancing-rooms, were blazing with light, teeming with life, echoing with music and merriment. Budua is, instead, as dark, as lonesome, and as silent as a city of the dead. The whole town is now fast asleep.

"It is useless to wait any longer," mutters Radonic to himself; "nobody is coming."

The thought that his wife had fled with Vranic has almost become a certainty. Jealousy is torturing him. He feels like gripping his throat and choking himself, or dashing his head to

pieces against the stone wall. If his house had been in town, near the others, Vranic might have waited till after ten o'clock; but, situated where it was, no prying neighbours were to be feared. Something had, perhaps, detained him. Still, what can detain a man when he has such an object in view?

Muttering an oath between his teeth, Radonic stood up.

"Hush! What was that?" He listened.

Nothing, or only one of the many unexplainable noises heard in the stillness of the night.

Perhaps, after all, Vranic had been on the watch the whole day, and then he had seen him return. Perhaps—though he had never believed in his friend's gift of second sight—Vranic was indeed a seer, and could read within the minds of men. Perhaps, having still some doubts, he would only come on the morrow. Anyhow, he would go to bed and abide his time. He stretched his anchylosed limbs and yawned.

Now he was certain he heard a noise outside.

He stood still. It was like the sound of steps at a distance. He listened again. This time he was not mistaken, though, indeed, it was a very low sound. Stealthy steps on the shingle. He went on tiptoe to the door. The sound of the steps was more distinct at every pace. Moreover, every now and then, a stone would turn, or creak, or strike against another, and thus betray the muffled sound of the person who walked.

Radonic listened breathlessly.

Perhaps, after all, it was only Milena coming back home. He peeped out, but he could not see anything. Was his hearing quicker than his sight?

He strained his eyes and then he saw a dark shadow moving among the bushes, but even then he could only distinguish it because his eyes were rendered keener by following the direction pointed out by his ears.

Was it Vranic, he asked himself.

Aye, surely; who else could it be but Vranic?

Still, what was he afraid of? No human eye could see him, no ear detect his steps.

Are we not all afraid of the crime we are about to commit? There is in felony a ghastly shadow that either precedes or follows us. It frightens even the most fearless man.

Slowly the shadow emerged from within the darkness of the bushes and came up towards the house. It was Vranic's figure, his shuffling gait.

Radonic's breast was like unto a glowing furnace, the blood within his heart was bubbling like molten metal within a crucible.

In a moment, that man—who was coming to seduce his wife and dishonour him—would be within his clutches.

Then he would break every bone within his body. He seemed to hear the shivering they made as he shattered them into splinters, and he shuddered.

For a moment, the atrocity of the crime he was about to commit, daunted him.

Still, almost at the same time, he asked himself whether he were going to turn coward at the last moment.

Was he not doing an act of equity? How heinously had not this fiend dealt by him! He had put him up against his wife, until, baited, she was almost driven to adultery. No, the justice of God and man would absolve him; if not—well, he had rather be hanged, and put his soul in jeopardy, than forego his vengeance. He was a Slav.

All these thoughts flitted through his brain in an instant, like flashes of lightning following one another on a stormy night.

Radonic watched the approaching shadow, from the cranny of the door ajar, with a beating heart.

Before Vranic came to the doorstep, he stopped. He looked round on one side, then on the other; after that he cast a glance all around. He bent his head forward to try and pierce the darkness that surrounded him. Was he seeing ghosts? Then he seemed to be listening. At last, convinced that he was alone, he again walked on. Now he was by the door, almost on the sill, within reach of Radonic's grasp. He stopped again.

Radonic clasped his knife; he might have flung the door open, and despatched him with a single blow. No, that would have been stupid. It was better by far to let him come in, like a mouse into a trap, and there be caught with his own bait. Yes, he would make the most of his revenge, spit upon him, torture him.

Slowly and noiselessly he glided back into a corner behind the door. Some everlasting seconds passed. He waited breathlessly, for his heart was beating so loud that he could only gasp.

Had Vranic repented at the last instant? Had he gone back? Was he still standing on the doorstep, waiting and watching? At last he moved—he came up to the door—he

slowly pushed it open ; then again he stopped. The darkness within was blacker than the darkness without.

“ *Sst, pst !* ” he hissed, like a snake. Then he waited.

He came a step onward ; then, in an undertone : “ Milena, Milena, where are you ? ”

Again he waited.

“ Milena,” he whispered ; and again, louder : “ Milena, are you here ? ”

He stretched forth his hands, and groped his way in. Radonic could just distinguish him.

“ Milena, my love, it is I, Vranic.”

Those few words were like a sharp stab to Radonic. He made a superhuman effort not to move ; for he wanted to see what the rascal would do next.

“ Perhaps she has fallen asleep, or else has gone to bed,” he muttered to himself.

He again advanced a few steps, always feeling his way. Evidently, he was going towards the next room ; for he knew the house well. All at once, he stumbled against a stool. He was frightened ; he thought someone had clutched him by the legs. He recovered, and shut the door behind him. It was a fatal step ; for otherwise he might, perhaps, have managed to escape.

How easy it would now have been for Radonic to pounce upon him and dash his brains out ; but he wanted to follow the drama out to its end, and now the last scene was at hand.

Vranic, having shut the door, remained quiet for some time. He fumbled in his pockets, took out his steel and flint, then struck a light. At the first spark he might have seen Radonic crouching a few steps from him, but he was too busy lighting the bit of candle he had brought with him. When his taper shed its faint glimmer, then he looked round, and, to his horror, he saw the figure of a man, with glistening eyes, and a dagger in his hand, standing not far from him. At first he did not recognise his friend, with shaven beard and in his new attire ; still, he did not require more than a second glance to know who it was.

Terror at once overpowered him ; he uttered a low, stifled cry. Retreat was now out of the question ; he therefore tried to master his emotion.

“ Oh ! Radonic, is it you ? How you frightened me ! I did

not recognise you. But how is it that you have come back ? and this change in——”

“How is it that you are in my house at this hour of the night ?” said he, laying his hands on him.

“I—I,” quoth Vranic, gasping, “I came to see if everything was quiet, as I promised, and seeing your door open——”

“That is why you call Milena your love.”

“Did I ? You are mistaken, Radonic—though perhaps I did ; but then it was only to see if she were expecting someone ; you know women are light——”

“You liar, you villain, you devil !” And Radonic, clutching him by his shoulders, shook him.

“Believe me ! I swear by my soul ! I swear by the holy Virgin, whose medals—blessed by the Church—I wear round my neck. May I be struck down dead if what I say is not true !”

“Liar, forswearer, wretch !” hissed out Radonic, as he spat in Vranic’s face.

“I never meant to wrong you,” replied Vranic, blubbing. “I came here as a friend—I told you I would ; may all the saints together blind me if what I say be not true.”

But the husband, ever more exasperated, clutched his false friend by the throat, and as he spouted out all his wrath, he kept gripping him tighter and ever tighter. In his passion his convulsively clenched fingers were like the claws of a bird of prey.

Vranic now struggled in vain ; the candle, which had been blown out, had fallen from his fingers ; he tried to speak, he gasped for breath, he was choking.

Radonic’s grasp now was as that of an iron vice, and the more the false friend struggled to get free, the stronger he squeezed.

Vranic at last emitted a stifled, raucous, gurgling sound ; then his arms lost their strength, and when, a moment afterwards, the furious husband relinquished his hold, his antagonist fell on the floor with a mighty thud.

The bells of the church were chiming in the distance.

Radonic, shivering, shuddering, stood stock-still in the darkness that surrounded him ; he only heaved a noiseless sigh—the deep breath of a man who has accomplished an arduous task.

Vranic did not get up ; he did not move. Was he dead ?

"Dead!" whispered Radonic to himself.

Just then the body, prostrate at his feet, uttered a low, hoarse, hollow sound. Was it the soul escaping from the body?

He looked down, he looked round; black clouds seemed to be whirling all around him like wreaths of smoke. He durst not move from where he stood for fear of stumbling against the corpse.

At last he took out his steel and began to strike a light, but in his trepidation, he struck his fingers far oftener than his flint. At last he managed to light a lantern on the table close by, and then came to look at the man stretched on the floor.

Oh, what a terrible sight he saw! He had till now seen murdered men and drowned men, but never had he witnessed such a terrifying sight before; it was so horrible that, like Gorgon's hideous head, it fascinated him.

After a few minutes' dumb contemplation, Radonic heaved again a deep sigh, and whispered to himself: "It is a pity I did not leave him time to utter a prayer, to confess his sins, to kiss the holy Cross or the image of the saints. After all, I did not mean to kill the soul and body together." Then, prompted by religious superstitions, or by a Christian feeling—for he was of the Orthodox faith—he went to a fount of holy water, dipped in it a withered olive twig, and came to sprinkle the corpse, and made several signs of the holy Cross; then he knelt down and muttered devoutly several prayers for the rest of the soul of the man whom he had just murdered; then he sprinkled and crossed him again.

Had he opened the gates of paradise to the soul that had taken its flight? Evidently he felt much comforted after having performed his religious duties; so, rolling a cigarette, and lighting it at the lantern, he went to sit on the doorstep outside and smoke. That cigarette finished, he made another, and then another. At last, after having puffed and mused for about an hour, he again went into the house and made a bundle of all the things he wanted to take away with him. Everything being ready, and feeling hungry, he went to the cupboard, cut himself a huge slice of bread and a piece of cheese, which he ate as slowly as if he were keeping watch on board; then he took a long draught of wine, and, as midnight was striking, he left the house.

“I wonder,” he thought, “where Milena is; anyhow, it is much better she is away, for, had she been in the house, she might have given me no end of useless trouble. Women are so fussy, so unpractical at times.”

Thereupon he lighted his pipe.

“Still,” he soliloquised, “I should have liked to see her before starting, to bid her good-bye. Who knows when I’ll see her again, if I ever do see her? And how I hope this affair will be settled soon, and satisfactorily, too; he has no very near relations, and those he has will be, in their hearts, most grateful to me.”

He trudged on wearily. When he passed Mara’s house, he stopped, sighed, and muttered to himself:

“Good-bye! Milena. I loved you in my own churlish way; I loved you, and if I’ve been unkind to you, it was all Vranic’s fault, for he drove me on to madness. Anyhow, he has paid for it, and dearly, too; so may his soul rest in peace!”

“And now,” thought he, “it is useless fooling about; it is better to be off and free in Montenegro before the murder is discovered and the Austrian police are after me, for there is no trifling with this new-fangled government that will not allow people to arrange their little private affairs—it even belies our own proverb: ‘Every one is free in his own house.’”

As he left the town, he bethought himself of what he was to do. First he would see his father-in-law, and ask him to go down to town and fetch his daughter, for it was useless to leave Milena alone in Budua; life would not be pleasant there till the business of the *karvarina* was settled. Then, as Montenegro was always at war with Turkey, he supposed that he would, as almost all *hayduk*, have to take to fighting as an occupation, though, thank God, he said to himself, not as a means of subsistence.

It was, however, only at dawn that he managed to get out of the town gate, together with some peasants going to their early work, and so he crossed the frontier long before Vranic’s murder was known in town.

On the morrow, when Milena fainted on the murdered man’s corpse, she was taken up and placed on her bed; she was sprinkled with water and vinegar; she was chafed and fanned; a burning quill was placed under her nose, but, as none of these little remedies could recall her to life, medical help had to be sent for. Even when she came back to her senses,

another fainting-fit soon followed, so that she was almost the whole day in a comatose state.

Meanwhile (Tripko having summoned help), the house was filled with people, who all bustled about, talked very loud, asked and answered their own questions. Those gifted with more imagination explained to the others all the incidents of the murder. Last of all came the guards. Then they, with much ado and self-importance, managed to clear the house.

Though Mara would have liked to take Milena back home with her, still the doctors declared that it was impossible to remove her from her bed, where for many weeks she lay unconscious and between life and death, for a strong brain-fever followed the fainting-fits. Her father and mother (who had come to take her away) tended her, and love and care succeeded where medical science had failed.

CHAPTER X

PRINCE MATHIAS

SAILING from Trieste to Ragusa, the *Spera in Dio* was becalmed just in front of Lissa; for days and days she lay there on that rippleless sea, looking like "a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

It was towards the middle of spring, in that season of the year called by the Dalmatians the *venturini*, or fortunate months, on account of the shoals of sardines, anchovies, and mackerel, which swim up the Adriatic, and towards that eastern part of its shores, affording the people—whose barren land affords them but scanty food—the main source of their sustenance.

At last a faint breeze began to blow; it brought with it the sweet scent of thyme and sage from the rocky coast only a few miles off, and made the flabby sails flap gently against the masts, still, without swelling them at all. Everyone on board the *Spera in Dio* was in hopes that the wind would increase when the moon rose, but the sun went down far away in the offing, all shorn of its rays, and like a huge ball of fire; then a slight haze arose, dimming the brightness of the stars, casting over nature a faint, phosphorescent glimmer; then they knew that the wind would not rise, for "the mist leaves the weather as it finds it;" at least, the proverb says so.

Already that afternoon the crew of the *Spera in Dio* had seen the waters of the sea—as far as eye could reach—bickering and simmering; still, they knew that the slight shivering of the waters was not produced by any ruffling wind, but by the glittering silver scales of myriads of fish swimming on the surface of the smooth waters. In fact, a flock of gulls was soon hovering and wheeling over the main, uttering shrill cries of delight every time they dipped within the brine and snatched an easy prey; then a number of dolphins appeared from underneath, and began to plunge and gambol amidst the shoal, feasting upon the fry. The

fish, in a body, made for the shore, hoping to find protection in shallower waters. Alas! a far more powerful enemy was waiting for them there.

Night came on; the fishermen lighted their resinous torches on the prows of the boats, and the fish, attracted by the sheen, which reflected itself down in the deep, dark water, were lured within the double net spread out to catch them.

When the shoal began to follow the deceptive light, the quiet waters were struck with mighty, resounding thuds, and the terror-stricken sardines swam hither and thither, helter-skelter, entangling themselves within the meshes of that wall of netting spread out to capture them.

Thus the whole of that balmy summer night was passed in decoying and frightening the shoal, in gathering it together, then in driving it into the inlet where the nets were spread.

At last, at early dawn, the long-awaited moment came. Every fisherman, dumb with expectation, grasped the ropes of the net and tugged with lusty sinews and a rare good-will. For the father, the sustenance of his children at home lay in those nets; for the lover, the produce of that first night's fishery would enable him to say whether he could wed the girl he loves that year, or if the marriage would have to be postponed till more propitious times.

The strong men groaned under the weight they were heaving, but not a word was spoken. Finally, the dripping nets were uplifted out of the water. It was a rare sight to see the fish glistening like a mass of molten silver within the brown meshes, just when the first hyacinthine beams of the dawning sun fell upon their glossy, nacreous scales.

The captain and his two mates, the *pobratim*, rowed on shore and took part in the general rejoicings, for nothing gladdens the heart of man as abundance; moreover, they made a very good stroke of business, for, having ready-money, they bought up, and thus secured, part of their cargo for their return voyage.

On the morrow, a fresh and steady breeze having begun to blow, the lazy sails swelled out, the ship flew on the rippling waters, like a white swan, and that very evening they dropped the anchor at Gravosa, the port of Ragusa.

How often the letter we have been so anxiously expecting only comes to disappoint us, making us feel our sorrow more deeply.

As soon as the post-office was opened, the *pobratim* hurried there to ask for letters. They both received several from their parents. Uros read, with a sinking heart, what we already know, that Radonic had killed Vranic, and that Milena was dangerously ill. Milenko received a letter in a handwriting new to him. With a trembling hand he tore open the envelope, unfolded the sheet of pale blue Bath paper, containing an ounce of gold dust in it, and read the following lines:—

“HONOURED SIR,—I take up my pen to keep the promise I so imprudently made of writing to you, but this, which is the first, must also be the last letter I ever pen.

“Perhaps you will be angry with me, and think me inconstant, but alas! this is not the case. Henceforth, I must never think of you, or at least, only as a friend. It is not fated that we be man and wife, and, as marriages are made in heaven, we must submit to what has been decreed.

“You must not think me heartless if I write to you in this way, but the fact is, my father had—even before my birth—promised me in marriage to the son of one of his friends, and this young man happens to be your own friend and brother Uros. My only hope now is, that he, as you hinted, being in love with someone else, will not insist upon marrying me, or else I shall be the most wretched woman that ever lived in this world.

“My father, who is delighted with the marriage, for he has always mistaken you for Uros, has already written to his old friend Bellacic to remind him of his plighted word. Perhaps your friend will get his father to write to mine, and explain the real state of things to him; if not, I shall dearly regret the day you saved me from certain death.

“But why do I write all this to you. Perhaps, as the saying is: ‘Far from the eyes, far from the heart.’ You have already forgotten the wretched girl who owes her life to you, and must therefore love, cherish, and ever be your most obedient servant,

“IVANKA.”

As poor Milenko read this letter, his cheeks grew pale, his heart seemed to stop, he almost gasped for breath. He looked around; the sky seemed to have grown dark, the world dreary, life a burden. Could it be possible that, when the cup of happiness had touched his lips, it would be snatched away from him and dashed down?

The letter which he had read seemed to have muddled his brain. Was it possible that the girl he loved so dearly was to marry his friend, who did not care about her? and if she loved him, would she yield tamely to her father's wish? Alas! what proper girl ever rebelled against her father's decree?

Milenko felt as if a hand of steel had been thrust within his breast, gripped his heart and crushed it.

All at once he was seized by a dreadful doubt. Did Uros know nothing about all this, or was he conniving with his father to rob him of his bride? He looked up at his friend, who was reading the letters he had just received. The tidings they contained must have been far worse than his own, for Uros' face was the very picture of despair.

"What is the matter?" said Milenko; "bad news from home?"

For all answer Uros handed the letter he had just been reading to his friend; it was as follows:—

"MY DEAR SON,—The present lines are to inform you that we are both well, your mother and myself, though, indeed, I have been suffering with rheumatic pains in my right shoulder and in my left leg, as well as occasional cramps in my stomach, for which the barber has cupped me several times. As for your mother, she always suffers with sore eyes, and though she tries to cure herself with vine-water and the dew which the flowers distil on St. John's Eve, which is a specific, as you know, still, it has not afforded her great relief. She is also often ailing with a pain in her side; but these are only trifles. Therefore, I hope that this letter will find you, Milenko and the captain in as good health as that which we at present enjoy, and that you have had a good and prosperous voyage. Here, at Budua, things are always about the same. The weather has hitherto been very favourable to the crops, and, with God's help, we must hope for a good harvest, though the wind having blown down almost all the blossoms of the almond-trees, there will be but little fruit. As for the vines, little can be said as yet; whilst having had a good crop of olives last year, we cannot expect much this autumn.

"Our town is always very quiet. A fire only broke out here not long ago, and it burnt down a few houses. As it was believed to have been caused on account of a *karvarina*,

bloodshed, as usual, ensued. Another fact, which somewhat upset our town, was the death of Vranic, who was found murdered in Radonic's house whilst Milena was spending the evening with us. You may well understand how astonished every one was, for Radonic and Vranic had been friends from their youth. Although no one was ever very fond of Radonic, still nobody regretted Vranic, who, as you know, was gifted with the evil eye; and although I myself, not being superstitious, do not believe that persons can harm you simply by looking at you, still it is useless to go against facts. Poor Milena, who was the first to enter the house after the murder—although your mother had accompanied her thither—was seized by such a terrible fright that she remained soulless for many hours, and has been ill ever since, though with care and good food we hope to bring her round.

“I was marvelled to hear how you fell in with the Giulianics, and that your ship saved them from death. It is certainly a dispensation of Providence, and—not being an infidel Turk—I do not see *Kismet* in everything that happens; still, the hand of the Almighty God is clearly visible in all this.

“Giulianic and I were friends when he, Markovic and myself were poor folk, struggling hard to live and to put by a penny for a rainy day. All three of us have, thank Heaven, succeeded beyond our expectations, for I am glad to hear, by your account as well as his own, that he is in such good circumstances.

“One day—long before you were born—talking together and joking, we made each other a kind of promise, more for the fun of the thing than for anything else, that if we should have, the one a son, and the other a daughter, we should marry them to each other. Not to forget our promises, we exchanged tobacco-pouches. To tell you the truth, not having heard of the Giulianics for so many years, I had all but forgotten my promise, and I daresay he looked at his own pledge as a kind of joke. On receiving your letter, however, I at once wrote to this old friend, sending him back his gold-embroidered pouch and redeeming mine. He at once wrote back a most affectionate letter, saying that he was but too happy to give his daughter to the young man who had saved Ivanka's life, but, apparently, had stolen away her heart. Therefore, my dear son, you may henceforth consider yourself engaged to the

girl of your choice; and may the blessing of God and of the holy Virgin rest on you both for ever.

"Your mother wishes me to tell you not to forget your prayers morning and evening, to try and keep all the fasts, and to light a candle to St. Nicholas whenever you go on shore, so that he may keep you from storms and shipwrecks. Besides, she bids me tell you, that if you want more under-clothing, to write to her in time, so that she may prepare everything you need.

"Your loving father,

"MILOS BELLACIC."

Whilst Milenko was reading this letter, doubt returned several times within his heart, and began to gnaw at it. As soon as he had finished, he handed it back to Uros, and seeing his honest eyes fixed upon him, as if asking for consolation, all doubts were at once dispelled.

"Well," said Uros, "it isn't enough to think that Milena is ill, but all this complication must arise."

"As for Milena," replied Milenko, "she is much better; here is a letter from my mother, written after yours, in which she says that she is quite out of danger."

Comforted with the idea that the woman he loved was better, Uros could not help smiling, then almost laughing.

Milenko looked at him, astonished.

"After all, this is your fault," said Uros.

"Mine?"

"Of course; you would insist in allowing old Giulianic to believe you were myself; now there is only one thing left for you."

"What?"

"To act your part out."

"I don't quite understand."

"Go to Nona, and marry Ivanka at once; when married, Giulianic will have to give you his blessing."

"Oh! but——"

"But what?"

"I don't think Ivanka will consent."

"If she loves you she will. I wish it was as easy for me to marry Milena as it is for you to wed Ivanka."

"But wouldn't it be better to get the father's consent?"

"Old people are stubborn; once they get a thing into their heads, it's difficult to get it out again."

“Yes, but if——”

“With ‘buts’ and ‘ifs’ you’ll never marry.”

“What are you discussing?” said the captain, coming up.

“Oh! I was simply saying that only a daring man deserves to wed the girl he loves,” said Uros.

“Of course; don’t you know the story of Prince Mathias?”

“No,” replied the young man.

“Well, then, as we have nothing to do just now, listen, and I’ll tell it to you.”

Once, in those long bygone times when rats fought with frogs, tortoises ran races with hares and won them, pussies went about in boots, and—I was going to add—women wore breeches, but, then, that would not be such an extraordinary occurrence even now-a-days; well, in those remote times, there lived a King who had a beautiful daughter, as fair as the dawning sun, and as wise as an old rabbi versed in the Kabala. In fact, she was so handsome and so learned that her reputation had spread far and wide, and many a Prince had come from far away beyond the sea to offer his hand and heart to this wonderful Princess. She, however, would have none of them, for she found that, although they—as a rule—rode like jockeys, drove like cabmen and swore like carters, they were, on the whole, slow-coaches; none of them, for instance, were good at repartee, none could discuss German pessimism, and all—on the contrary—found that life was worth living; so she would have nothing to do with them.

She, therefore, sent heralds to all the Courts of Chivalry to proclaim that she would only wed the Prince who, for three successive nights, could sit up and watch in her room, without falling asleep and allowing her to escape.

Every Prince who heard of the proclamation thought it a good joke, and the candidates for the Princess’s hand greatly increased. A host of *Durchlauchten* from the most sacred Protestant empire of Germany, flocked—*Armen-reisender* fashion—and offered to sit up in the Princess’s room for three nights, or even more if she desired it.

Alas, for the poor Highnesses! every one paid the trial with his life. The Princess—who knew a thing or two—provided for their entertainment an unlimited supply of *Lager Bier*, and, moreover—it was a cruel joke—she had a few pages read to them of the very book each one had written, for, in those

literary times, every Prince was bound to write a book. At the end of the first chapter every Prince snored.

It happened that Prince Mathias—the only son and heir of a queen who reigned in an out-of-the-way island, which was believed by its inhabitants to be the centre of the world—heard of this strange proclamation. He was the very flower of chivalry in those days, strong as a bull, handsome as a stag—though rather inclined to be corpulent—brave as a falcon, and as amorous as a cat in spring-time. He at once resolved to risk his head, and go and spend the three nights in the Princess's bedroom.

His mother—a pious old lady, an excellent housekeeper, much attached to her domestics, and known throughout the world as an elegant writer of diaries—did her utmost to dissuade her son from his foolish project; but all her wise remonstrances were in vain. Prince Mathias, who was not the most dutiful of sons, allowed his mother to jaw away till she was purple in the face, but her words went in by one ear and out by the other; he remained steadfast to his purpose. Seeing at last that praying and preaching were of no avail, Her Gracious Majesty consented to her son's departure with royal grace. She doled out to him a few ducats, stamped with her own effigy, and, knowing his unthrifty ways, she said to herself: "He'll not go very far with that." Then she presented him with a shawl to keep him warm at nights, and she blessed him with her chubby hands, begging him to try and keep out of mischief now that he had reached the years of discretion.

Mathias, wrapped up in his shawl, went off to seek his fortune. As he was tramping along the high-road, he happened to meet a stout, sleek-headed man who was lounging on the roadside.

The Prince—who was very off-handed in his ways, and not very particular as to the company he kept, or to the number of his attachments, as the Opposition papers said—hailed the stout, sleek-headed man.

"Whither wanderest thou, my friend?" said Mathias to the loafer.

"I tramp about the world in search of happiness," quoth he.

"You're not a German philosopher, I hope?" asked the Prince, terror-stricken.

"I'm a true-born Dutchman, sir," retorted the loafer, with much dignity.

"Give us your paw," said His Highness.

The friends shook hands.

"What's your trade, my man?"

"Well, I'm a kind of Jack-of-all-trades, without any trade in particular—and yours?"

"I'll be a kind of general overseer some day or other."

"Good job?"

"Used to be much better—too many strikes nowadays."

"I see; it ruins the trade, does it?"

"Our trade especially."

"So?"

"But what's your name?" asked the Prince.

"Well, I'm generally known as 'The Big One.' You see, I can stretch out my stomach to such a pitch that I can shelter a whole regiment of soldiers in it. Shouldn't you like to see me do the trick?"

"Swell away!" ejaculated the Prince.

The Big One thereupon puffed and puffed himself out, and swelled himself to such a pitch that he blocked up the highway from one side to the other.

"Bravo!" cried the Prince; "you're a swell!"

"I'm a sell," said The Big One, smiling modestly.

"A cell, indeed! But, I say, where did you learn that trick?"

"Up in Thibet."

"You're an adept, are you?"

"I am," said the loafer.

Mathias crossed himself devoutly.

"I say, don't you want to accompany me in my wanderings, in a *sans façon* way?"

"And take pot-luck with you?" said the adept, with a wink.

Mathias took the hint. He jingled the few dollars he had in his pocket, counted the six gold ducats his mamma had given him, and reckoned the enormous amount of food his new friend might consume. On the other hand, he bethought himself how useful a man who could swallow a whole regiment might be in case of an insurrection; so he shrugged his shoulders, and muttered to himself:

"There'll be a row at the next meeting of the Witena-gemote, when my debts 'll have to be paid; but if they want me to keep

up appearances, they must fork out the tin." Thereupon, turning to The Big One, he added, magnificently: "It's a bargain."

"You're a brick," said The Big One.

On the morrow they met another tramp, so tall and so thin that he looked like a huge asparagus, or like a walking minaret. His name was The Long One; and he could, even without standing on tiptoe, lengthen himself in such a way as to reach the clouds. Moreover, every step he made was the distance of a mile.

As he, too, was seeking his fortune, the Prince took him on in his suite.

The day after that, as the three were going through a wood, they came across a man with such flashing eyes that he could light a conflagration with only one of his glances. Of course, they took him on with them.

After tramping about for three days, they got to the castle where the wonderful Princess lived. Mathias held a council with his friends, and told them of his intentions. Then he changed his gold ducats, pawned his mother's shawl, bought decent clothes for the tramps, and made his entrance into the town with all the pomp and splendour due to his rank.

As he was travelling *incog.*, he sent his card—a plain one without crown or coat-of-arms—to the King of the place, announcing that he had come with his followers to spend three nights in his daughter's bedroom.

"Followers not admitted," replied the King.

"All right!" retorted the Prince, ruefully.

"You know the terms, I suppose?"

"Death or victory!"

The King made him a long speech, terse and pithy, as royal speeches usually are. The Prince, who listened with all attention, tried to yawn without opening his mouth.

"Yawn like a man!" said the King; "I don't mind it, do you?" said he to the prime minister, who had written the speech.

"I'm used to it," said the premier.

"Well! do you persist in your intention?" asked the King at the end of the speech.

"I do!" quoth the Prince.

"Then I'll light you up to my daughter's door."

Having reached the landing of the second floor, the King shook hands with the Prince and his followers; he wished

them good-night; still, he lingered for a while on the threshold.

Mathias was dazzled with the superhuman beauty of the royal maiden, who was quite a garden in herself, for she was as lithe as a lily, as graceful as a waving bough, with a complexion like jasmines and roses, eyes like forget-me-nots, a mouth like a cherry, breasts like pomegranates, and as sweet a breath as mignonette.

She could not hide the admiration she felt for Mathias, and congratulated him especially on never having written a book.

When the old King heard that Mathias was not an author, he was so sorely troubled that he took up his candle and went off to bed.

No sooner had His Majesty taken himself off than The Big One went and crouched on the threshold of the door; The Long One made himself comfortable on one of the window-sills; The Man with the Flashing Eyes on the other. All three pretended to go off to sleep, but in reality they were all watching the Princess, who was carrying on a lively conversation with Mathias.

"Do you like Schopenhauer?" asked the royal maiden, with a smile like a peach blossom opening its petals to the breeze.

"I like you," said Mathias, looking deep in the eyes of the young girl, who at once blushed demurely.

"But you don't answer my question," she said.

"Well, no," quoth Mathias; "I don't like Schopenhauer."

"Why not?"

"Because we differ in tastes."

"How so?"

"You see, I'm rather fond of the girls; he isn't."

"Of all girls?" asked the Princess, alarmed.

"All girls in general, but you in particular," added Mathias with a wink.

The young girl thought it advisable to change the conversation.

After a while the Princess began to yawn.

"Sleepy, eh?" said Mathias, with a smile.

"I feel as if a rain of poppies was weighing down my eyelids."

"Have a snooze, then."

"I'm afraid you'll feel rather lonely, sitting up by yourself all night."

"Oh! don't mind me," said Mathias; "I never turn in very early; besides, I'll have a game of *patience*."

"But I've got no cards to offer you," said the Princess.

"I have; I never travel without a pack in my pocket."

"You're sharp."

"Sharper than many who think themselves sharp."

Mathias settled himself comfortably at a table and began to play. The Princess undressed, said her prayers, then went off to bed.

The Prince played one, two, three games; then he felt his throat rather dry, and would have given half of his kingdom for a glass of grog; then he began to wonder if there was any whisky in the house.

Just then, he heard the three men snoring, and the little Princess purring away like a wee kitten. He stretched his arms and his legs, for he felt himself getting stiff. He then tried to play another game, but he could not go on with it; for he kept mistaking the hearts for the diamonds, and then could no more distinguish the clubs from the spades. He also began to feel chilly, and was sorry not to have his mammy's shawl to wrap himself up in. He, therefore, laid his elbows on the table, and his head between the palms of his hands, and stared at the Princess, whom he fancied looked very much like the sleeping beauty at the waxworks.

Little by little his eyelids waxed heavy, his pupils got to be smaller and smaller, his sight grew blurred, and then everything in front of him disappeared. Prince Mathias was snoring majestically.

"It took him a long time to drop off, but he's asleep at last," said the Princess, with a sigh.

She thereupon changed herself into the likeness of a dove, and flew out of the window where The Long One was asleep. Only, on making her escape, she happened to graze the sleeping man's hair. He forthwith started up, and, seeing that the Princess's bed was empty, he at once gave the alarm, and woke The Man with the Flashing Eyes, who cast a long look in the darkness outside. That burning glance falling upon the dove's wings singed them in such a way that she was obliged to take shelter in a neighbouring tree. The Man with the Flashing Eyes kept a sharp watch, and the splendour of his pupils, shining on the bird, were like the revolving rays of a lighthouse. The Long One thereupon put his head out of the

window, stretched out his hand a mile off, grasped the dove, and quietly handed her to Mathias.

No sooner had Mathias pressed the dove to his heart than, lo and behold! he found that he was clasping in his arms, not a bird, but the Princess herself.

Mathias could not help uttering a loud exclamation of surprise; the three men uttered the selfsame exclamation. All at once the door of the Princess's bedroom flew open with a bang. The old King appeared on the threshold, with a dip in his hand. His Majesty looked very much put out.

"I say, what's all this row about?" said he; "billing and cooing at this time of the night, eh?" Thereupon His Majesty frowned.

The Princess nestled in Mathias's arms, blushing like a peony, for she saw that the flowing sleeves of her nightgown were dreadfully singed, and she knew that the colour would never go off in the wash.

The King, casting a stealthy look round the room, saw the cards on the little table by the Princess's bed, and pointing them out to Mathias with a jerk of his thumb:

"I see your little tricks, sir, and with your own cards, too; gambling again, eh?"

Mathias looked as sheepish as a child caught with his finger in a jam-pot. The King thereupon snuffed the wick of his candle with his own royal fingers, picked up the ermine-bordered train of his night-gown and stalked off to bed, without even saying good-night again.

"Your father's put out," said Mathias to the Princess.

"He's thinking of the expense you'll be putting him to, you and your suite."

"What! is he going to ask us to dinner?"

"Can't help it, can he?" and the Princess chuckled.

On the second night the Princess flew away in the likeness of a fly; but she was soon brought back. On the third night she transformed herself into a little fish, and gave the three men no end of trouble to fish her out of the pond in which she had plunged.

At last the Princess confessed herself vanquished. Mathias had been the only one of all her suitors who had managed to get her back every time she had escaped; moreover, she had been quite smitten by his jovial character and convivial ways.

The old King, however, strenuously disapproved of his daughter's choice. Mathias was not a *Durchlaucht*, he had never written a book, and, moreover, he played *patience* with his own pack of cards. He, therefore, resolved to oppose his daughter's marriage, and, being an autocrat, his will was law in his own country.

Mathias, however, presented the King with a packet of photographs that he happened to have about him; they were all respectable ladies of his acquaintance, belonging to different *corps de ballet*. So while the King was trying to find out, with a magnifying-glass, what Miss Mome Fromage had done with her other leg—like the tin soldier in Andersen's tale—Mathias ran off with the Princess.

Then the King got dreadfully angry and ordered his guards to run after the fugitives.

The Princess, hearing the tramp of horses' feet, asked The Man with the Flashing Eyes to look round and see who was pursuing them.

"I see a squadron of cavalry riding full speed," said The Man with the Flashing Eyes.

"It's my father's body-guard."

"Hadn't we better hide in a bush, and leave them to ride on?" asked Mathias.

"No," replied the Princess.

Seeing the horsemen approach, she took off the long veil she wore at the back of her head, and threw it at them.

"As many threads as there are in this veil, may as many trees arise between us."

In a twinkling, a dense forest arose, like a drop-scene, between the fugitives and the guards.

Mathias and his bride had not gone very far, when they heard again the sound of horses.

The Man with the Flashing Eyes looked round and saw again the King's body-guard galloping after them.

"Can you dodge them again?" asked Mathias.

The Princess, for an answer, dropped a tear, and then bade it swell into a deep river between them and their pursuers.

The river rolled its massy waters through the plain, while Mathias and his bride strolled away unmolested.

Again they heard the sound of horses' hoofs; again the guards were about to seize the runaways; again the Princess, drawing herself up in all the majesty of her little person, stretched out

her arm threateningly, and ordered the darkness of the night to wrap them up as with a deep shroud.

At these words, The Long One grew longer and ever longer, until he reached the clouds; then, taking off his cap, he deftly clapped it on half of the sun's disc, leaving the royal guards quite in the shade.

When Mathias and his bride were about ten miles off, The Long One strode away and caught up with them after ten steps.

Mathias was already in sight of his own castellated towers, when the clatter of horses was again heard close behind them.

"There'll be bloodshed soon," said the Prince to his bride.

"Oh! now leave them all to me," said The Big One; "it's my turn now."

The lovers, followed by The Long One and The Man with the Flashing Eyes, entered the city by a postern, whilst The Big One squatted himself down at the principal gate and puffed himself out; then he opened his mouth as wide as the gate itself, so that it looked like a barbican. Thus he waited for the dauntless life-guards, who, in fact, came riding within his mouth as wildly as the noble six hundred had ridden within the jaws of death.

When the last one had disappeared, The Big One rose quietly, but at the same time with some difficulty, and tottered right through the town. It was an amusing sight to see his huge bloated paunch flap hither and thither at every step he made. Having reached the opposite gate, he again crouched down, opened his capacious mouth and spouted out all the life-guards, horses and all; and it was funny to see them ride off in a contrary direction, evidently hoping to overtake the fugitives soon, whilst the Prince, his bride and his suite were on the battlements, splitting with laughter at the trick played on their pursuers.

The old Queen was rejoiced to see her truant son come back so soon, and, moreover, not looking at all as seedy as he usually did after his little escapades. Still, she could not help showing her dissatisfaction about two things. The first was that Mathias had pawned her parting gift; the second that the Princess had come without a veil.

This last circumstance was, however, easily explained; and then Her Most Gracious Majesty allowed the light of her countenance to shine on her future daughter-in-law.

The Long One was forthwith sent back to the old King,

asking him, by means of a parchment letter, to come and assist at his daughter's wedding. His Majesty, hearing who Mathias really was, hastened to accept the invitation. He donned his crown, took a few valuables with him in a carpet-bag, fuming and fretting all the time at having to start—like a tailless fox—without his body-guard. Just as he was setting out, The Long One, stretching his neck a few miles above the watch tower and looking round, saw the horsemen riding back full speed towards the castle. The old King hearing this news, shook his head, very much puzzled, for he could not understand how the horsemen, who had ridden out by one gate, could be coming back by the other. The Long One explained to the King (what they never would have been able to explain themselves) that they had simply ridden round the world and come back the other side. His Majesty, who would otherwise have had all his guards put to death, forgave them right graciously, and to show Mathias that he bore him no ill-will, he presented him, as a wedding gift, with a valuable shawl he had just got second-hand at a pawnbroker's. That gift quite mollified the old Queen, and forthwith, as by enchantment, all the clouds looming on the political horizon disappeared, and the nuptials of Mathias and the Princess took place with unusual splendour.

The Princess gave up her freaks of disappearing in the middle of the night, Mathias never played *patience* with his own cards any more, and both set their people an example of conjugal virtue.

High posts at Court were created for the Prince's three friends, and they, indeed, often showed themselves remarkably useful. For instance, if a Prime Minister ever showed himself obstreperous, The Long One would stretch out his arm, catch him by the collar of his coat, and put him for a few days on some dark cloud under which the thunder was rumbling. If a meddling editor ever wrote an article against the prevailing state of things, The Man with the Flashing Eyes cast a look at his papers, and the fire brigade had a great ado to put out the conflagration that ensued. If the people, dissatisfied with peace and plenty, met in the parks to sing the Marseillaise, The Big One had only to open his mouth and they at once all went off as quietly as Sunday-school children, and all fell to singing the National Anthem. Anarchy, therefore, was unknown in a land so well governed, and flowing with milk and honey.

CHAPTER XI

MANSLAUGHTER

THE *Spera in Dio* having reached Gravosa, it discharged the timber it had taken for Ragusa, and loaded a valuable cargo of tobacco from Trebigne in its stead. The ship was now lying at anchor, ready to set sail with the fresh morning breeze.

It was in the evening. The captain was in hopes to start on the morrow; for at night it is a difficult task to steer a ship through that maze of sunken rocks and jagged reefs met with all along the entrance of the Val d'Ombra.

The *pobratim* had been talking together for some time. Uros had tried to persuade his friend to go and marry Ivanka before the mistake under which her father was labouring had been cleared up; but the more the plan was discussed, the less was Milenko convinced of its feasibility.

Uros at last, feeling rather sleepy, threw himself into his hammock, and soon afterwards closed his eyes. Milenko, instead, stood for some time with his arms resting on the main-yard, smoking and thinking, his eyes fixed on the moon, in its wane, now rising beyond the rocky coast, from which the cypresses uplifted their dark spires, and the flowering aloes reared their huge stalks.

The warm breeze blew towards him a smell of orange blossoms from the delightful Val d'Ombra, and the fragrancy of the *Agnus castus*, the Cretan sage, and other balmy herbs and shrubs from that little Garden of Eden—the Island of La Croma. Feeling that he could not go to sleep, even if he tried, and finding the earth so fair, bathed as it was now by the silvery light of the moon, he made up his mind to go on shore and have a stroll along the strand.

What made him leave the ship at that late hour, and go to roam on the deserted shore? Surely one of those secret impulses of fate, of which we are not masters.

He had walked listlessly for some time on the road leading to Ragusa, when he heard the loud, discordant sounds of two men, apparently drunk, wrangling with each other. The men went on, then stopped again, then once more resumed their walk; but, at every step they made, their voices grew louder, their tones angrier. Both spoke Slav; but, evidently, one of the two must have been a foreigner. Milenko followed them, simply for the sake of doing something. When he got nearer, he understood that the cause of the quarrel was not a woman, as he had believed at first, but a sum of money which the Slav had lent to the foreigner.

As they kept repeating the selfsame things over and over, Milenko got tired of their discussion and was about to turn back. Just then, however, the two men stopped again. The Slav called the stranger a thief, who in return apostrophised him as a dog of a Turk. From words they now proceeded to blows; but, drunk as they apparently were, they did not seem to hurt each other very much. Milenko hastened on to see the struggle, for there is a latent instinct, even in the most peaceable man's nature, that makes him enjoy seeing a fight.

By the time Milenko came in sight of the two men, they had begun to fight in real earnest; blows followed blows, kicks kicks; the Slav—or rather, Turk—roused by the stranger's taunts, seemed to be getting over his drunkenness. He was a tall, powerful man, and Milenko saw him grip his adversary by his neck. Then the two men grappled with each other, reeled in their struggle, then rolled down on the ground. He heard the thud of their fall. Milenko hastened to try and separate them. As he got nearer he could see them clearly, for the light of the moon fell upon them. The stronger man was holding his adversary pinned down, and was muttering the same curses over and over again; but he did not seem to be ill-using him very much.

"Leave me alone," muttered the other, "or, by my faith, it'll be so much the worse for you!"

"Your faith! you have no faith, you dog of a giaour!" growled the other.

"I have no faith, have I? Well, then, here, if I have no faith!"

Milenko, for a moment, saw a knife glitter in the moonlight, then it disappeared. He heard at the same time a loud groan.

He ran up to help the man from being murdered, regardless of his own safety.

The powerful man was trying to snatch the knife from his adversary's hand, but, as he was unable to do so, he rose, holding his side, from which the blood was rushing.

"Now you'll have your money!" said the little man, with a hideous laugh, and he lifted up his hand and stabbed his adversary repeatedly.

Milenko pulled out his own knife as he reached the spot, but he only got in time to catch the dying man in his arms and to be covered with his blood.

The murderer simply looked at his adversary, and, hearing him breathe his last, "He's done for," he added; then he turned on his heels and disappeared.

Poor Milenko was stunned for a moment, as he heard the expiring man's death-rattle.

What could he do to help him? Was life ebbing? had it ebbed all away? he asked himself. Was he dead, or only fainting? could he do nothing to recall him to life?

As he was lost in these thoughts he heard the heavy tramp of approaching feet, and before he could realise the predicament in which he had placed himself, the night-watch had come up to the spot and had arrested him as the murderer.

"Why do you arrest me?" said he. "I have only come here by chance to help this poor man."

"I daresay you have," said the sergeant, taking the blood-stained dagger from his hand.

"But I tell you I do not even know this poor man."

"Come, it's useless arguing with us; you'll have to do that with your judges. March on."

"But when I tell you that I only heard a scuffle and ran up——"

"Then where's the murderer?" asked one of the guards.

"He's just run off."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"I hardly saw him."

"And where do you come from?" asked the sergeant.

"From on board my boat, the *Spera in Dio*, now lying at Gravosa."

"And where were you going to?"

"Nowhere."

"Oh! you were taking a little stroll at this time of the night?"

The men laughed.

“Come, we’re only wasting time——”

“But——”

“Stop talking; you’ll have enough of that at Ragusa.”

“But I tell you I’m innocent of that man’s death.”

“You are always innocent till you are about to be hanged, and even then sometimes.”

Milenko shuddered.

Thereupon the guards, taking out a piece of rope, began tying the young man’s hands behind his back.

“Leave me free; I’ll follow you. I’ve nothing on my conscience to frighten me.”

Still, they would not listen to him, but led him away like a murderer. They walked on for a little more than half-an-hour on the dark road, and at last they arrived at Porta Pilla, one of the gates of Ragusa. They crossed the principal street, called the Stradone, and soon reached the Piazza dei Signori. The quiet town was quieter than ever at these early dawning hours. The heavy steps of the guards resounded on the large stone flags with which the town is paved, and re-echoed from the granite walls of the churches and palaces.

Poor Milenko was conducted to the guard-house, and when the sergeant stated how he had been found clasping the dead man, holding, moreover, the blood-stained dagger in his hand, he, without more ado, was thrust into the narrow cell of the prison.

Alone, in utter darkness, a terrible fear came over him. How could he ever prove that he had not murdered the unknown man with whose blood his clothes were soaked?

The assassin was surely far away now, and, even if he were not, he doubtless knew that another man had been caught in his stead, and he, therefore, would either keep quiet or stealthily leave the town. If he had at least caught a glimpse of the murderer’s face, then he might recognise him again; but he had seen little more than two dark forms struggling together. Nothing else than that.

Then he asked himself if God—if the good Virgin—would allow them to condemn him to death innocently? He fell on his knees, crossed himself, and uttered many prayers; but, during the whole time, he saw his body hanging on the gallows, and, with that frightful sight before his eyes, his prayers did not comfort him much.

Then he began to fancy that he must have been guilty of some sin for which he was now being punished. Though he recalled to mind all his past life, though he magnified every little misdemeanour, still he could not find anything worthy of such a punishment. He had kept all the fasts; he had gone to church whenever he had been able to do so; he had lighted a sufficient number of candles to the saints to secure their protection. If, at times, he had been guilty of cursing, of calling the blessed Virgin Mary opprobrious names, he only had done so as a mere habit, as everybody else does, quite unintentionally. The priest—at confession—had always admonished him against this bad habit; but he had duly done penance for these trifling sins, and he had got the absolution.

He asked himself why he was so unlucky. He had not fallen in love with his neighbour's wife, nor asked for impossible things. Why could not life run on smoothly for him, as it did for everybody else? What devil had prompted him to leave his ship at a time when he might have been quietly asleep? Then the thought struck him that, after all, this was only a bewildering dream, from which he would awake and laugh at on the morrow.

He got up, walked about his narrow cell, feeling his way in the darkness. Alas! this was no dream.

Then he thought of his parents; he pictured to himself the grief they would feel at hearing of his misfortune. His mother's heart would surely burst should he be found guilty and be condemned to be hanged. And his father—would he, too, believe him to be a murderer?

He again sank on his knees, and uttered a prayer; not the usual litanies which he had been taught, but a *Kyrie Eleison*, a cry for help rising from the innermost depths of his breast.

The darkness of the prison was so oppressive that it seemed to him as if his prayer could never go through those massive stone walls; therefore, instead of being comforted, doubt and dread weighed heavily upon him. In that mood he recalled to his mind all the incidents of a gloomy story which had once been related to him about a little Venetian baker-boy, who, like himself, had been found guilty of manslaughter. This unfortunate youth had been imprisoned, cruelly tortured, and then put to death. When it was too late, the real murderer confessed his guilt; but then the poor boy was festering in his grave.

Still, he would not despair, for surely Uros must, on the morrow, hear of his dreadful plight, and then he would use every possible and impossible means to save him.

But what if the ship started on the morrow, leaving him behind, a stranger in an unknown town?

The tears which had been gathering in his eyes began to roll down his cheeks in big, burning drops, and now that they began to flow he could not stop them any more. He crouched in a corner, and, as the cold, grey gloaming light of early dawn crept through the grated window of his cell, his heavy eyelids closed themselves at last; sleep shed its soothing balm on his aching brain.

Not long after Milenko had gone on shore, Uros woke suddenly from his sleep. He had dreamt that a short, dark-haired, swarthy, one-eyed man, with a face horribly pitted by small-pox, was murdering his friend; and yet it was not Milenko either, but some one very much like him.

He jumped up, groped his way to his mate's hammock and was very much astonished not to find him there. Having lost his sleep, he lit a cigarette and went to look down into the waters below. The sea on that side of the ship was as smooth and as dark as a black mirror. He had not been gazing long when, as usual, he began to see sparks, then fiery rods whirling about and chasing each other. The rods soon changed into snakes of all sizes and colours, especially greenish-blue and purple. They twirled and twisted into the most fantastic shapes; then they all sank down in the waters and disappeared. All this was nothing new; but, when they vanished, he was startled to behold, in their stead, the face of the pitted man he had just seen in his sleep stare at him viciously with his single eye. He drew back, frightened, and the face vanished. After an instant, he looked again; he saw nothing more, but the inky waters seemed thick with blood.

The next morning Milenko was looked for everywhere uselessly. Uros, who was the last person that had seen him, related how he had gone off to sleep and had left him leaning on the main-yard. At first, every one thought that he had gone on shore for something, and that he would be back presently; but time passed and Milenko did not make his appearance. The wind was favourable, the sails were spread, they had only to heave the anchor to start; everybody began to

fear that some accident had happened to him to detain him on shore. Uros was continually haunted by his dream, especially by the face of the single-eyed man. He offered to go in search of his friend.

“Well,” replied the captain, “I think I’ll come with you; two’ll find him quicker than one alone, for now we have no time to lose.”

They went on shore and enquired at a coffee-house, but the sleepy waiters could not give them any information. They asked some boatmen lounging about the wharf, still with no better success. A porter from Ragusa finally said that he had heard of a murder committed that night on the road, but all the particulars were, as yet, unknown. Doubtless it was a skirmish between some smugglers and the watch.

Anyhow, when Uros heard of bloodshed, his heart sank within him, and the image of the swarthy man appeared before the eyes of his mind, and he fancied his friend weltering in a pool of dark blood.

“Had we not better go at once to Ragusa? we might hear something about him there?” said the captain to Uros.

“But do you think he can have been murdered?”

“Murdered? No; what a foolish idea! He had no money about him; he was dressed like a common sailor; he could not have been flirting with somebody’s sweetheart. Why should he have been murdered?”

The two men hired a gig and drove off at once. When they reached Ragusa, they found the quiet town in a bustle on account of a murder that had taken place on the roadside. The old counts and marquises of the republic forgot their wonted dignity—forgot even their drawling way of speaking—and questioned the barber, the apothecary, or the watch at the town gate with unusual fluency.

A murder on the road to Gravosa! A most unheard-of thing. Soon people would be murdered within the very walls of the town! Such things had never happened in the good olden times!

“And who was the murdered man?” asked one.

“A stranger.”

“And the murderer?”

“A stranger, too; a mere boy, they say.”

“Oh! that explains matters,” added a grave personage; “but if strangers will murder each other, why do they not stay at home and slaughter themselves?”

Such were the snatches of conversation Uros and the captain heard on alighting at Porta Pilla; and as they asked their way to the police station, everybody stared at them, and felt sure that in some way or other they were connected with the murder.

At the police station, the captain stated how his mate had disappeared from on board, and asked permission to see the murdered man. They were forthwith led to the mortuary-chapel, and they were glad to see that the corpse was a perfect stranger.

"What kind of a person is the young man you are looking for?" asked the guard who had accompanied them.

"Rather above the middle height, slim but muscular, with greyish-blue eyes, a straight nose, a square chin, curly hair, and a small dark moustache."

"And dressed like a sailor?"

"Yes."

"Exactly as you are?" said he to Uros.

"Yes; have you seen him?"

"Why, yes; he is the murderer."

Uros shuddered; the captain laughed.

"There must be some mistake," said the latter. "You have arrested the wrong person; such things do happen occasionally."

"He was arrested while struggling with the man he killed. He was not only all dripping with blood, but he still held his dagger in his hand."

"With all that, it's some mistake; for he didn't know this man," said the captain, pointing to the corpse stretched out before them. "If he did kill him, then it was done in self-defence."

"But where is he now?" asked Uros.

"Why, in prison, of course."

Uros shuddered again.

"We can see him, can't we?" said the captain.

"You must apply to the authorities."

The departure of the *Spera in Dio* had to be put off for some days. Uros went on board the ship, whilst the captain remained at Ragusa to look after his lost mate. There he soon found out that, in fact, it was Milenko who had been arrested; and after a good deal of trouble he succeeded in seeing him.

Although he did his best to comfort him and assure him that

in a few days the real murderer would be found, he could not help thinking that the evidence was dead against him. Anyhow, he had him transferred to a better cell, and, by dint of *backseesh*, saw that his bodily comforts were duly attended to.

On the following day, the captain, Uros and the crew were examined; and all were of opinion that Milenko could not possibly ever have been acquainted with the unknown man, and, therefore, had no possible reason for taking away his life. The great difficulty, meanwhile, was to find out who the murdered man really was, from where he had come, whither he was going in the middle of the night.

After that, the captain went to a lawyer's; and having put the whole affair in his hands, found out that he could do nothing more for Milenko than he had already done; so he went and lit a candle for his sake, recommended him to the mercy of the Virgin and good St. Nicholas, and decided to start on the following morning, without any further and unprofitable delay. Had the young man been his own son, he would not have acted otherwise. Uros, however, decided to remain behind, and join the ship at Trieste after a few days.

On the morrow Uros, after having seen the *Spera in Dio* disappear, went to spend a few hours with his friend. A week passed in this way; then, not knowing in what way to help Milenko, he bethought himself to seek the aid of some old woman versed in occult lore, in whose wisdom he had much more faith than in the wordy learning of gossiping lawyers.

Having succeeded in hearing of such a one from the inn-keeper's wife, he went to her at once and explained what he wanted of her.

She looked at him steadily for a while; then she went to an old chest and took out a quaint little mirror of dark, burnished metal, and making him sit in a corner, bade him look steadily within it. As soon as he was seated, she took a piece of black cloth, like a pall, and stretched it around him, screening him from every eye. Having done this, she threw some powder on the fire, which, burning, filled the room with fragrant smoke, or rather, with white vapour, which had a heady smell of roses. After a few moments of silence, she took the *guzla* and played, as a kind of prelude, a pathetic, dirge-like melody; then she began to sing in a low, lamentable tone, Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic's song, entitled—

GOD'S JUSTICE.

Upon a lonely mead two pine-trees grew,
And 'twixt the two a lowly willow-tree ;
No pines were those upon the lonely mead,
Where nightly winds e'er whistle words of woe.
The one was Radislav—a warrior brave ;
Whilst Janko was the other stately tree.
They were two brothers, fond of heart and true ;
The weeping willow-tree that rose between
Had whilom been their sister Jelina.
Both brothers loved the maid so fair and good,
Fair as a snow-white lily fresh with dew,
And good, I ween, as a white turtle-dove.
Once Janko to his sister gave a gift ;
It was a dagger with a blade of gold.
That day Marija, who was Janko's wife
(A wanton woman with a wicked heart),
Grew grey and green with envy and with grudge,
And to Zorizza, Radislavo's wife,
She said : " Pray tell me in what way must I
Get these two men to hate that Jelina,
Whom they love more, indeed, than you or me."
" I know not," said Zorizza, who was good—
Aye, good indeed, and sweet as home-made bread ;
" And if I knew, I should pray day and night
For God to keep me from so foul a deed."
Marija wended then her way alone,
And as her head was full of fiendish thoughts,
She saw upon the mead her husband's foal,
The fleetest-footed filly of the place.
Whilst with one hand she fondled the young foal,
The other plunged a dagger in her breast ;
Then, taking God as witness, swore aloud
That Jelina had done that deed of blood.
With doleful voice the brother asked the girl
What made her mar the foal he loved so well.
Upon her soul the maiden took an oath
That she nowise had done that noxious deed.
A few days later, on a dreary night,
Marija went and killed the falcon grey—
The swiftest bird, well worth its weight in gold.
Then creeping back to bed, with loud outcry
She woke the house ; she said that, in a dream,
She saw her Janko's sister, as a witch,
Kill that grey falcon Janko loved so well.
Behold ! at early morn the bird was dead.
" This cruel deed shall rest upon thy head,"
Said Janko to the girl, who stood amazed.

E'en after this Marija found no peace,
But hated Jelina far more than death,
So evermore she pondered how she could
Bring dire destruction down upon the maid.
One night, with stealthy steps, she went and stole
The golden-bladed knife from Jelka's room ;
And with the knife she stabbed her only babe.
The foul deed done, she put the knife beneath
The pillow white whereon lay Jelka's head.
At early twilight, when the husband woke,
He found his rosy babe stabbed through the breast,
All livid pale within a pool of blood.
Marija tore her hair and scratched her cheeks
With feigned despair ; she vowed to kill the witch
Who wantonly had stabbed her precious babe.
" But who has done this cruel, craven crime ?
Who killed my child ? " cried Janko, mad with rage.
" Go seek thy sister's knife, with golden blade ;
Forsooth, 'tis stained with blood." And Janko went,
And found that Jelka still was fast asleep,
But 'neath her pillow, peeping out, he saw—
All stained with blood—the knife with golden blade.
He grasped his sleeping sister by her throat,
Accusing her of having killed his child.
And she—now startled in her morning sleep—
Midst sighs and sobs disowned the dreadful deed ;
Still, when she saw the knife all stained with gore,
She grew all grey with fear and looked aghast,
And guilty-like, before that gruesome sight.
" An I have done this horrid, heinous deed,
Then I deserve to die a dreadful death.
If thou canst think that I have killed thy child,
Then take and tie me to thy horses' tails,
So that they tread me down beneath their hoofs."'
The maid was led within the lonely mead,
Her limbs were bound unto the stallions' tails ;
They lashed the horses, that soon reared and ran
Apart, and thus they tore her limbs in twain.
But lo ! where'er her blood fell down in drops,
Sweet sage grew forth, and marjoram and thyme,
And fragrant basil, sweetest of all herbs ;
But on the spot where dropped her mangled corse,
A bruised and shapeless mass of bleeding flesh,
A stately church arose from out the earth,
Of dazzling marbles gemmed with precious stones—
A wondrous chapel built by hallowed hands.
Marija, then, upon that day fell ill,
And nine long years she languished on her bed,
A death in life, still far more dead than quick ;

And as she lay there 'twixt her skin and bones
 The coarse and rank weeds grew, and 'midst the weeds
 There nestled scorpions, snakes, and loathsome worms,
 Which crept and sucked the tears from out her eyes.
 In those last throes of death she wailed aloud,
 And bade for mercy's sake that they might take
 And lay her in that church which had sprung out
 Where Jelka's body dropped a mangled corpse.
 In fact, her only hope was to atone
 For all those dreadful deeds which she had done.
 But when they reached the threshold of the church,
 A low and hollow voice came from the shrine,
 And all who heard the sound were sore amazed.
 "Avaunt from here! Till God forgive thy crimes,
 This sacred ground is sure no place for thee."
 Appalled to death, unable yet to die,
 She begged them as a boon that they would tie
 Her to the horses' tails, for dying thus she hoped
 That God might then have mercy on her soul.
 They bound her wasted limbs to stallions' tails;
 Her bones were broke, her limbs were wrenched in twain,
 And where the sods sucked up her blood impure,
 The earth did yawn, and out of that wide gulf
 Dark waters slowly rose and spread around;
 Still, lifeless waters, like a lake of hell.
 Within the mere the murdered foal was seen,
 Just as we see a vision in a dream.
 The falcon grey then flew with fluttering wing,
 And panting, fell within that inky pool.
 Then from the eddy rose a tiny cot.
 Within that cot a rosy infant slept,
 And smiled as if it saw its mother's breast.
 But lo! its mother's claw-like hand arose
 Out of the stagnant waters of the lake,
 And plunged a dagger in the infant's breast.

The old woman, having finished her song, waited for a while till the young man looked up.

Presently, Uros, with a deep sigh, lifted his eyes towards her.

"Always the same man, with that fiendish face of his," quoth he, shaking his head.

"But tell me what you have seen now, that I might help you—if I can."

"That man, who has been haunting me all these days."

"Explain yourself better; did you only see his face, now?"

Uros first explained to the *baornitza* what he had witnessed in the sea the night when Milenko was arrested for murder.

“Have you often seen such things in the sea before?”

“From my earliest childhood, and almost every time I looked; very often Milenko and I saw the very same things.”

“But are you sure you never saw the face before?”

“Oh! quite sure.”

“Now, tell me minutely what you have seen in the glass.”

“First the mirror grew hazy, just as if clouds were flitting over it; then, little by little, it got to be more transparent, and of a silvery, glassy grey. After that it grew greenish, and I could distinguish down within its depths a beautiful landscape. It was a country road seen by night; the moon was rising behind the hills at a distance, and presently the trees, the rocks, the road, were clearer. All at once two men were seen walking on the way. I could not see their faces, for I was behind them; still, I was sure who the shorter man was. They walked on and disappeared, but then I saw one of them come running back. I was not mistaken; it was the man with the single eye. His was, indeed, the face of a fiend.

“He must have been running for some time, for he was panting, nay, gasping for breath. He stopped, looked over his shoulder, then threw the knife he was holding within a bush. It was a bush with silvery leaves, and all covered with flowers. He then wiped his wet hands on the leaves of the shrub, on the scanty grass, then rubbed them with the sandy earth to remove all the traces of the blood. This done, he again took to his heels and disappeared.”

“And that is all you saw?”

“No! the mirror resumed again its real, dark colour, but, as I continued looking within it, hoping to see something more, I saw it turn again milky-white; then of a strong grass green, and, in the midst of that glaring green paint, I had a glimpse of a Turkish flag; then, as the red flag vanished, I beheld two words cut out and painted in white in that garish green background. Those mysterious words remained for some time; then they vanished, and I saw nothing more.”

“Those words were in Turkish characters, were they not?”

“No; some of them were like ours, but not all.”

“Then they must have been either Cyrillic or Greek; but, tell me, are you quite sure you never saw those words before?”

“Oh! quite, they were so strange.”

“You know, we happen sometimes to see things without noticing them, even strange things. Then these objects, of which we seem to have no knowledge, come back to us in our dreams, or when we gaze within a mirror; so it may be that you have seen that face and those words absently, with your eyes only, whilst your mind took no notice of them.”

“I don’t think so.”

“You may think otherwise in a few days. But let’s see; you know where the murder took place, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the two men were, apparently, coming from Gravosa and going up to Ragusa. Now, the spot where the shorter one stopped must have been five, ten or fifteen minutes from the spot.”

“I daresay a quarter of an hour. Sailors are not accustomed to run; besides, that man is not very young.”

“How do you know he is a sailor?”

“By his dress; and a Greek sailor, besides. He wore a dark blue flannel shirt, a white belt or sash, and those rough, yellow home-spun trowsers which they alone wear.”

“Then probably the two words you saw were Greek. Now, the first thing to be found is the knife; the second, and far more important fact, is the meaning of those words. Are you sure not to forget them? Can you, perhaps, write them down?”

“I’ll never forget them as long as I live; they are engraven in my mind.”

“Then go and look for the knife. Come back to me to-morrow; perhaps I may be of further help to you, that is, if you need more help.”

Uros thanked the old woman, and then asked her where she had learnt all the wonderful things she knew.

“From my own mother. Once a trade was in one family for ages; every generation transmitted its secrets with its implements to the other. It is true, people only knew one thing; but they knew it thoroughly. Nowadays, young people are expected to have a smattering of everything; but the sum of all their knowledge often amounts to nothing.”

Uros, taking leave of the wise old woman, went down the road leading from Porta Pilla to the sea. Soon he came to the spot where Milenko had been found clasping the murdered man in his arms. Then he looked at every tree, at every stone he

passed on his way. After a while, he got to the corner where he had seen—in the mirror—the two men disappear. From there he crawled on, rather than walked, so that not a pebble of the road escaped his notice. After about a quarter of an hour, he came to a shrub of a dusty, greyish green—it was an *Agnus castus* in full bloom. He recognised it at once; it was the bush that had looked so silvery by the light of the moon within the magic mirror. His heart began to beat violently. As he looked round, he fancied he would see the murderer start from behind some tree and pounce upon him. He looked at the shrub carefully; some of its lower branches and the tops of many twigs were broken. He pushed the leaves aside, and searched within it. The knife was there. He did not see it at first; for its haft was almost the same colour as the roots of the tree, and the point of the knife was sticking in the earth. He took it up and examined it. All the part of the blade that had not been plunged in the earth was stained with blood. It was a common knife, one of those that all sailors wear in their belts. He put it in the breast pocket of his coat, and walked down with long strides. He was but a few steps from the shore.

Reason prompted him now to go to the police and give them the knife; for it might lead to the discovery of the culprit. Still, this was only a second thought—and Uros seldom yielded to practical after-thoughts; and whenever he did so, he always regretted it.

He had not a great idea of the police. They were only good to write things down on paper, making what they called protocols, which complicated everything.

No; it was far better to act for himself, and only apply for help to the police when he could have the murderer arrested.

As he got down to the shore the sun was sinking below the horizon; the silvery waters of the main were now being transmuted into vaporous gold. As he was looking at the sea and sky, from a meteorological, sailor-like point of view, and wondering whereabouts the *Spera in Dio* was just then, his eyes fell upon a little skiff, which had arrived a few days after they had. It was a Turkish caique, painted in bright prasine green. He had seen it for days when his own ship was loading and unloading, but then it had had nothing particular to attract his attention; he had seen hundreds of these barques in the East. Now, however, he could not help being struck by its vivid green colour. He looked up;

the red flag with the half-moon met his eyes. He had but time to see it, when it disappeared, for the sun had set.

How his heart began to beat! Surely the murderer was on board. He strained his eyes to see the name of the ship, painted on either side, but he could not distinguish it so far. Not a man was seen on deck; the skiff seemed deserted.

A boy was fishing in a boat near there; he called him and asked him to lend him the boat for an instant.

"What! do you want to fish, too?" asked the boy, pulling up.

"No; I'd like to see the name of that caique."

After two or three good strokes with the oars, Uros could see the name plainly; it was *Παναγία*, exactly the name he had read in the mirror.

"Is that the ship you are looking for?"

"The very same one."

"Do you want to go on board?"

"Yes; I'd like to see the captain."

As soon as he was by the side of the caique he called out "*Patria!*" for this is the name by which Greek sailors are usually addressed.

Some one got up at the summons. It was not the single-eyed man that Uros was expecting to see, but a handsome, dark-eyed, shock-headed young fellow.

"Is the captain on board?"

The youth tossed up his head negatively and said some words, but the only one that Uros understood was *Caffene*.

As soon as Uros jumped on shore he went off to the coffee-house by the pier, the only one at Gravosa. There were only a few seamen smoking and sipping black coffee, but the person he wanted was not amongst them.

"Do you wish to be taken on board his craft?" asked a kind of ship-broker, hearing that Uros was asking about the Greek captain.

A few hours before he would simply have answered negatively. Now, as he wanted to hear more of the ship and its crew, he asked:

"Is it the Greek captain whose caique is lying just outside?"

"Yes; the one painted in green."

"Where is he?"

"Just gone up to town. Are you going to Ragusa?"

“Yes.”

“Well, as I’m going up too, I’ll come with you.”

An hour afterwards Uros was duly introduced to the man he had been looking for.

The captain’s first question was why Uros had remained behind, and as the young man was anxious to lead the conversation about the murder, he gave all the details about Milenko’s arrest, and the reason why he himself had not started with his ship.

“What!” asked Uros, “you haven’t heard of the murder?”

“No,” replied Captain Panajotti; “you see, I only speak Greek and a little of the *lingua Franca*, so it is difficult to understand the people here.”

“But how is it you happen to be wanting hands? You Greeks only have sailors of your own country.”

“I’ve been very unfortunate this trip. One of my men has a whitlow in the palm of his hand; another, a Slav, came with me this trip, but only on condition of being allowed to go to his country while the ship was loading and unloading—”

“Well?” asked Uros, eagerly.

“He went off and never came back.”

“Are you sure he was a Slav, and not a Turk?”

“We, on board, spoke to him in Turkish, because he knew the language like a Turk, but he was a Christian for all that; his country is somewhere in the interior, not far from here. Now another of my men has fallen ill——”

“The man with the one eye?”

“What! you know Vassili?” asked the captain, with a smile.

“Yes, he’s ill.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“I really don’t know; he’s lying down, skulking in a hole; the devil take him.”

“Since when?”

“Ten days, I think.”

“But is he really ill?”

“He says he is; but why do you ask—do you know him?”

“I’ll be straightforward with you,” said Uros, looking the captain full in the eyes. “I think the murdered man is the Slav who left your ship ten days ago.”

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed the captain, astonished and grieved.

“ I believe so.”

“ The one for whose murder your friend was arrested ? ”

“ Exactly.”

“ Strange—very strange,” said the captain, who had taken off his shoe and was rubbing his stockinged foot, “ and the murderer ? ”

“ The man who has been ill ever since.”

“ Vassili ? ”

“ You’ve said it.”

“ But have you any proofs ? ”

“ I have.”

“ Then why did you not get him arrested ? ”

“ I’ll do so to-morrow.”

“ And if you can prove your friend’s innocence——”

“ We’ll sail with you to Zara, my friend and I, if you’ll have us, and find you two other able-bodied seamen to take our place.”

“ But, remember, I’ll not help you in any way to have a man on board my ship arrested.”

“ No, I don’t ask you to do so.”

“ I believe he’s a fiend ; still, he’s a fellow-countryman of mine.”

The two men thereupon shook hands and separated.

Uros went to the police, and, after a great ado, he managed to find one of the directors.

“ What do you want ? ” said the officer, cross at being disturbed out of office hours.

“ I’ve found the murderer at last,” replied Uros.

“ And what murderer, pray ? Do you think there’s only one murderer in the world ? ”

Uros explained himself.

“ And who is he ? ”

“ A certain Vassili, a Greek, on board a caique now lying at Gravosa.”

“ And how have you found out that he is the murderer, when we know nothing about it ? ”

“ By intuition.”

“ Well, but you don’t expect us to go about arresting people on intuition, do you ? ” asked the officer, huffishly.

Uros proceeded to relate all he knew ; then he produced the knife which he had found.

“ Well, there is some ground to your intuition ; and if the

murdered man happens to be the Slav sailor who disappeared from on board the ship you speak of, well, then, there is some probability that this one-eyed man is the murderer."

"Anyhow, could you give orders for the ship to be watched to-night?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"At once?"

"You are rather exacting, young man."

"Think of my friend, who has been in prison ten days——"

"I'll give orders at once. There, are you satisfied now?"

"Thank you."

Uros, frightened lest the murderer might escape, hastened down to Gravosa to keep watch on the caique. On his way thither he stopped at a baker's shop and bought some bread, as he had been fasting for many hours. Having got down to the shore, he eat his bread, had a glass of water and a cup of black coffee at the coffee-house, lit a cigarette, and then went to stretch himself down on a boat drawn up on the sand, from where he could see anyone who came out of the Greek ship.

Although there was no moon, still the air was so clear, and the stars shone so brightly, that the sky was of a deep transparent blue, and the night was anything but black. A number of little noises were heard, especially the many insects that awake and begin to chirp when all the birds are hushed. One of them near him was breathing in a see-saw, drilling tone, whilst another kept syncopating this song with a sharp and shrill *tsit, tsit*. In some farmyard, far off, the growl of an old dog was occasionally heard in the distance, like a bass-viol; but the pleasantest of all these noises was the plap-plap of the wavelets lapping the soft sand.

Presently, a custom-house guard came and sat down near Uros, and they began talking together; and then time passed a little quicker.

It must have been about half-past one when Uros saw a man quietly lower himself down from the caique into the sea, and make for the shore. He must have swum with one hand, for his other was holding a bundle of clothes on his head. Uros pointed out the swimming figure to the guard, who at once sprang up and ran to the edge of the shore. The man, startled, veered and swam farther off. The watchman whistled, and another guard appeared at fifty paces from there. The man

jerked himself round, evidently intending to go back to his ship ; but Uros, who was on the alert, had already pushed into the sea the boat on which he had been stretched, and began paddling with a board which was lying within it.

The man, evidently thinking that Uros was a custom-house officer, seeing now that he could not get back on board, put on a bold face and swam once more towards the shore, whither Uros followed him. Three custom-house guards had come up together, and were waiting for him to step out of the water. Uros landed almost at once, and pushing the boat on the sand, turned round and found himself face to face with the dripping, naked figure. It was the fiendish, pitted, single-eyed man he had seen in his visions. He was by no means startled at seeing him ; for he would have been astonished, indeed, if it had been someone else.

Uros, grasping him by one of his arms and holding him fast for fear he might escape, exclaimed : “ That’s the man !—that’s the murderer ! ”

“ Leave him,” said the watchman ; “ if he tries to escape he’s dead.”

“ Oh ! but I don’t want him dead ; do what you like with him, but don’t kill him ; tie him up, cut off his legs and his arms, but spare his life until he has confessed.”

The guards gave another shrill whistle, and presently the policemen came running up.

The naked man, who did not know a word of Slav, and only very little Italian, was taking his oath in Greek that he was no smuggler. He at once opened his bundle, wrapped up in an oil-cloth jacket, and showed the guards that there was nothing in it but a few clothes. The Greek sailor was ordered to dress himself ; then the policemen handcuffed him and led him off to the station, where Uros followed him.

On the morrow the Greek captain was sent for, and he stated that, having accused Vassili—who, for ten days, had been shamming illness—of having murdered the Slav, this sailor had threatened him to go to the Greek consulate on the morrow. The guilty man, however, had, on second thoughts, deemed it more advisable to seek his safety in flight, little thinking to what danger he was exposing himself. The knife was produced and identified as having belonged to the prisoner ; then, being confronted with Milenko, who at once recognised him as the murderer, he—overwhelmed by so many damning

proofs—confessed his guilt and pleaded for mercy, saying that he had only killed his antagonist in self-defence.

Milenko's innocence being thus proclaimed, he was at once set free, whilst Uros was heartily congratulated on his intuition, and the officer who had snubbed him the evening before, strongly advised him to leave the sea and become a detective, for if he had the same skill in finding the traces of criminals as he had displayed in this case, he would soon become a most valuable officer, whilst Milenko was told that he ought to think himself fortunate in having such a friend.

CHAPTER XII

MARGARET OF LOPUD

THOUGH the *pobratim* would have sailed with any ship rather than with the ill-fated green caique, still Uros had pledged his word to the Greek captain to go with him as far as Zara or Trieste, and, moreover, there was no other vessel sailing just then for either of these ports, and they were both anxious to catch up with the *Spera in Dio* without further delay. The Greek captain, likewise—out of a kind of superstitious dread—would have preferred any other sailors to these two young men; still, as Dalmatians only sail with their own fellow-countrymen and never on Greek crafts, it was no easy matter to find two able-bodied men to go only for a short trip, for those were times when sailors were not as plentiful, nor ships so scarce, as they are now.

On the day after the one on which Milenko was set free the *pobratim* set sail with the little caique, and they, as well as the captain, were thoroughly glad to shake the dust off their shoes on leaving Gravosa; Milenko especially hoped never to set his foot in Ragusa again.

The fresh breeze swelled out the broad white sails of the graceful little ship, which flew as fleetly as a halcyon, steered, as it was, with utmost care, in and out the narrow channels and through that archipelago of volcanic rocks which surround the Elaphite Islands, so dangerous to seamen. It soon left far behind the graceful mimosas, the dark cypress-trees and the feathery palms of the Ragusean coast.

After all the anxiety of the last days it was pleasant to be again on those blue waters, so limpid that the red fretted weeds could be seen growing on the grey rocks several fathoms below. It was a delight to breathe the balmy air, wafted across that little scented garden of La Croma. The world looked once more so beautiful, and life was again a pleasure. The sufferings the *pobratim* had undergone only served to

render them fonder of each other, so that if they had been twins—not only brothers—they could not have loved each other more than they did.

The sun went down, and soon afterwards the golden bow of the new moon was seen floating in the hyacinthine sky. At the sight of that slender aureate crescent—which always awakens in the mind of man a vision of a chaste and graceful maiden—all the crew crossed themselves and were happy to think that the past was dead and gone, for the new moon brings new fortune to mortals.

A frugal supper of salted cheese, fruit and olives gathered all the men together, and then those who were not keeping watch were about to retire, when a small fishing-boat with a lighted torch at its prow was seen not very far off. As it came nearer to them the light went out, and the dark boat, with two gaunt figures at the oars, was seen for an instant wrapped in a funereal darkness, and then all vanished. The *pobratim* crossed themselves, shuddering, and Milenko whispered something to Uros in Slav, who nodded without speaking.

“What is it?” asked the captain, astonished.

“It is the phantom fishing-boat,” replied Uros, almost below his breath, apparently unwilling to utter these words, and Milenko added:

“It is seen on the first days of the new moon, as soon as darkness comes over the waters.”

For a few moments everybody was silent. All looked towards the spot where the boat had disappeared, and then the captain asked Milenko who those two men were, and why they were condemned to ply their oars, and thereupon Milenko began to relate the story of

MARGARET OF LOPUD.

Some centuries ago, during the great days of the Republic, there lived a young patrician whose name was Theodor. He belonged to one of the wealthiest and oldest families of Ragusa, his father having been rector of the Commonwealth. Theodor was of a most serious disposition, possessing uncommon talents, and, therefore, taking no delight in the frivolities of his age. His learning was such that he was expected to become one of the glories of his native town.

Theodor, to flee from the bustle and mirth of the capital and to give himself entirely up to his studies, had taken up his

abode in the Benedictine convent on the little island of St. Andrea.

Once he went to visit the island of Lopud—the middle one of the Elaphite group—and there passed the day; but in the evening, wishing to return to the brotherhood, he could not find his boat on the shore. Wandering on the beach, he happened to meet a young girl carrying home some baskets of fish. Theodor, stopping her, asked her, shyly, if she knew of anyone who would take him in his boat across to the island of St. Andrea. No, the young girl knew nobody, for the fishermen who had come back home were all very tired with their hard day's work; they were now smoking their pipes. Seeing Theodor's disappointed look, the young girl proffered her services, which the bashful patrician reluctantly accepted.

The sail was unfurled and managed with a strong and skilful hand; the boat went scudding over the waves like an albatross; the breeze was steady, and the sea quiet. The girl steered through the reefs like a pilot.

Those two human beings in the fishing-smack formed a strong contrast to one another. He, the aristocratic scion of a highly cultured race, pale with long study and nightly vigils, looked like a tenderly reared hot-house plant. She, belonging to a sturdy race of fishermen, tanned by the rays of the scorching sun and the exhilarating surf, was the very picture of a wild flower in full bloom.

Theodor, having got over the diffidence with which women usually inspired him, began to talk to the young girl; he questioned her about her house, her family, her way of living. She told him simply, artlessly, that she was an orphan; the hungry waves—that yearly devour so many fishermen's lives—had swallowed up her father; not long after this misfortune her mother died. Since that time she had lived with her three brothers, who, she said, took great care of her. She kept house for them, she cooked, she baked bread, she also helped them to repair their nets, which were always tearing. Sometimes she cleaned the boat, and she always carried the fish to market. Besides, she tilled the little field, and in the evening she spun the thread to make her brothers' shirts. But they were very kind to her, no brothers could be more so.

He could not help comparing this poor girl—the drudge of the family—with the grand ladies of his own caste, whose

task in life was to dress up, to be rapidly witty in a saloon, to slander all their acquaintances, simply to kill the time, for whom life had no other aim than pleasure, and against whose love for sumptuary display the Republic had to devise laws and enforce old edicts.

For the young philosopher this unsophisticated girl soon became an object, first, of speculative, then of tender interest; whilst Margaret—this was the fishermaid's name—felt for Theodor, so delicate and lovable, that motherly sympathy which a real womanly nature feels for every human being sickly and suffering.

They met again—haunted as he was by the flashing eyes of the young girl, it was impossible for him not to try and see her a second time, and from her own fair lips he heard that the passion which had been kindled in his heart had also roused her love. Then, instead of endeavouring to suppress their feelings, they yielded to the charms of this saintly affection, to the rapture of loving and being loved. In a few days his feelings had made so much progress that he promised to marry her, forgetting, however, that the strict laws of the aristocratic Republic forbade all marriages between patricians and plebeians. His noble character and his bold spirit prompted him to brave that proud society in which he lived, for those refined ladies and gentlemen, who would have shrugged their shoulders had he seduced the young girl and made her his mistress, would have been terribly scandalised had he taken her for his lawful wife.

His studies went on in a desultory way, his books were almost forsaken; love engrossed all his mind.

In the midst of his thoughtless happiness, the young lover was suddenly summoned back home, for whilst Theodor was supposed to be poring over his old volumes, the father, without consulting him, not anticipating any opposition, promised his son in marriage to the daughter of one of his friends, a young lady of great wealth and beauty. This union had, it is true, been concerted when the children were mere babes, and it had from that time been a bond between the two families. The whole town, nay, the Commonwealth itself, rejoiced at this auspicious event. The young lady, being now of a marriageable age, and having duly concentrated all her affections upon the man she had always been taught to regard as her future husband, looked forward with joy to the day that would remove

her from the thralldom in which young girls were kept. Henceforth she would take her due share in all festivities, and not only be cooped up in a balcony or a gallery to witness those enjoyments of which she could not take part.

Theodor was, therefore, summoned back home to assist at a great festivity given in honour of his betrothal. This order came upon him as a thunderbolt ; still, as soon as he recovered from the shock, he hastened back to break off the engagement contracted for him. He tried to remonstrate, first with his father, and then with his mother ; but his eloquence was put to scorn. He pleaded in vain that he had no inclination for matrimony, that, moreover, he only felt for this young lady a mere brotherly affection, that could never ripen into love ; still, both his parents were deaf to all his arguments. Now that the wedding day was settled, that the father had pledged his word to his friend, it was too late to retreat. A refusal would be insulting ; it would provoke a rupture between the two families—a feud in the town. No option was left but to obey.

Theodor thereupon retired to his own room, where he remained in strict confinement, refusing to see anyone. The evening of that eventful day the guests were assembled, the bride and her family had arrived ; the bridegroom, nevertheless, was missing. This was, indeed, a strange breach of good manners, and numerous comments were whispered from ear to ear. The father sent, at last, a peremptory order to his undutiful son to come down at once.

The young man at last made his appearance dressed in a suit of deep mourning, whilst his hair—which a little while before had fallen in long ringlets over his shoulders—was clipped short. In this strange dress he came to inform his father—before the whole assembly—that he had decided to forego the pleasures, the pomp and vanity of this world, and to take up his abode in a convent, where he intended to pass his days in study and meditation.

The scene of confusion which followed this unexpected declaration can easily be imagined. The guests thought it advisable to retire ; still, the first person to leave the house was Theodor himself, bearing with him his father's curse. The discarded bride was borne away by her parents, and her delicate health never recovered from that unexpected disappointment.

That very night the young man went back to the Benedictine convent, and, although the prior received him kindly, he still

advised him to yield to his father's wishes; but Theodor was firm in his resolution of passing his life in holy seclusion.

After a few days, the fire which love had kindled within his veins was so strong that he could not resist the temptation of going to see Margaret to inform her of all that had happened. Driven as he was from house and home, unable to go against the unjust laws of his country, he had made up his mind to spend his life in holy celibacy, in the convent where he had taken shelter. The sight of the young girl, however, made him forget all his wise resolutions; he only swore to her that he would brave the laws of his country, the wrath of his parents, and that he would marry her in spite of his family and of the whole world.

He thus continued to see the young girl, stealthily at first, then oftener and without so many precautions, till at last Margaret's brothers were informed of his visits. They—jealous of the honour of their family, as all Slavs are—threatened their sister to kill her lover if ever they found him with her. Then—almost at the same time—the prior of the Benedictines, happening to hear of Theodor's love for the fair fisher-girl of Lopud, expressed his intention of expelling him, should he not discontinue his visits to the neighbouring island.

Every new difficulty only seemed to give greater courage to the lovers. They would have fled from their native country had it not been for the fear of being soon overtaken, brought back and punished; they, therefore, decided to wait for some time, until the wrath of their persecutors had abated, and the storm that always threatened them had blown over.

As Theodor could not go to see the young girl, Margaret now came to visit her lover. Not to excite any suspicion, they only met in the middle of the night; and, as they always changed their trysting-place, a lighted torch was the signal where the young girl was to steer her boat. Sometimes—as not a skiff was to be got—the young girl swam across the channel, for nothing could daunt her heroic heart.

These ill-fated lovers were happy in spite of their adverse fortune; the love they bore one another made amends for all their woes. They only lived in expectation of that hour they were to pass together every night. Then, clasped in each other's arms, the world and its inhabitants did not exist for them. Those were moments of such ineffable rapture, that it seemed impossible for them ever to drain the whole chalice of

happiness. In those moments Time and Eternity were confounded, and nothing was worth living for except the bliss of loving and being loved. The dangers which surrounded them, their loneliness upon those rocky shores, the stillness of the night, and the swiftness of time, only rendered the pleasure they felt more intense, for joy dearly bought is always more deeply felt.

Their happiness, however, was not to last long. Margaret's brothers, having watched her, soon found out that when the young nobleman had ceased coming to Lopud, it was she who visited her lover by night, and, like honourable men, they resolved to be avenged upon her. They bided their time, and upon a dark and stormy night the fishermen, knowing that their sister would not be intimidated by the heavy sea, went off with the boat and left her to the mercy of the waves. Theodor, not to entice her to expose herself rashly to the fury of the sea, had not lighted his torch; still, unable to remain shut up within his cell, he roamed about the desolate shore, listening to the roaring billows. All at once he saw a light—not far from the rocks. No fisherman could be out in the storm at that hour. His heart sank within him for fear Margaret should see the light and take it for his signal. In a fever of anxiety he walked about the shore and watched the fluttering light—now almost extinguished, and then burning brightly.

The young girl seeing the light, and unable to resist the promptings of her heart, made the sign of the Cross, recommended herself to the mercy of the Almighty, and bravely plunged into the waters. She struggled against the fury of the wind, and buffeted against the waves, swimming towards that beacon-light of love. That night, however, all her efforts seemed useless; she never could reach the shore; that *ignis-fatuus* light always receded from her. Still, she took courage, hoping soon to reach that blessed goal; in fact, she was now getting quite near it.

A flash of lightning, which illumined the dark expanse of the waters, showed her that the torch, towards which she had been swimming, was tied to the prow of her brothers' boat. She also perceived that the Island of St. Andrea, towards which she thought she had been swimming, was far behind her. A moment afterwards the torch was thrown into the sea, and the boat rowed off. She at once turned towards

the island, and there, in the midst of the darkness, she struggled with the huge breakers that dashed themselves in foam against the reefs; but soon, overpowered with weariness, she gave up every hope of rejoining her lover, and sank down in the briny deep.

The sea that separated the lovers was, however, less cruel than man, for upon the morrow the waves themselves laid the lifeless body of the young girl upon the soft sand of the beach.

The young patrician, who had passed a night of most terrible anxiety, wandering on the strand, found the corpse of the girl he so dearly loved. He caused it to be committed to the earth, after which he re-entered the walls of the convent, took the Benedictine dress, and spent the rest of his life praying for her soul and pining in grief.

Milenko did not exactly relate this story in these words, for to be intelligible he had to make use of a mixture of Italian, Slav and even Greek, and even then Captain Panajotti was often puzzled to understand what he meant; therefore, he had to express himself in a kind of dumb show, or in those onomatopoetic sounds rather difficult to be transcribed.

As soon as he had finished, the captain said :

“ We, too, have a story like that, and, on the whole, ours is a much prettier one; for it was the man who swam across the Straits of the Dardanelles to meet the girl he loved, and, on a stormy night, he was drowned.”

“ Only ours is a true story; you yourself have seen, just now, the hard-hearted brothers rowing in the dark.”

“ Ours is also true.”

“ And when did it happen ? ”

“ More than a thousand years ago, when we Greeks were the masters of all the world.”

The *Spera in Dio*, having met with contrary winds and a storm in the rough sea of the Quarnero, had been obliged to cruise about and shift her sails every now and then, thus losing a great deal of time, and she only reached Trieste after a week's delay. The caique instead had a steady, strong wind, and less than twenty-four hours after they left Ragusa they cast their anchor in front of the white walls of Zara.

To the *pobratim's* regret the boat was only to remain there two or three days at most, just time enough to take some bales of

hides, and then set sail for Trieste; so, although they were so near Nona, it was impossible for them to go and pay a visit to Ivanka. The two young sailors had, however, no need of going to Nona to see their friends, for no sooner had the ship dropped her anchor than Giulianic himself came on board, for he was the Sciot merchant about whom Captain Vassili had often spoken to them, and who was to give them the extra cargo.

"What! you here?" said Giulianic, opening his eyes with astonishment. "Well, this is an unexpected pleasure; but I thought you were in Trieste." Then, turning to Milenko, he added: "I had a letter from your father only a few days ago informing me that your ship would be there now. You have not been shipwrecked, I hope?"

"No, no," replied Uros, at once; "we were detained at Ragusa; but we are on our way to Trieste, aren't we, captain?"

"If God grants us a fair wind, we are."

Milenko thereupon opened his mouth to speak, but his friend forestalled him.

"So you had a letter from his father? Well, what news from home? Are they all in good health? And how are the crops getting on?" Thereupon he stepped on his friend's foot to make him keep quiet.

"Yes, all are well. Amongst other things, he says that your father has gone to Montenegro."

"My father?" asked Uros, with a sly wink at Milenko.

"Yes; on account of a murder that had been committed at Budua." Then, turning to the captain: "By-the-bye, you knew Radonic, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, it appears he's gone and murdered the only friend he had."

"That's not astonishing. The only thing that surprises me is that he ever had a friend to murder. He was one of the most unsociable men I ever met."

Afterwards they spoke of the accident that had kept the two young men at Ragusa, at which Giulianic seemed greatly concerned.

"Anyhow," said he, "it's lucky that my wife and Ivanka have come with me from Nona. They'll be so glad to see you again; for you must know, Captain Panajotti, that my bones, and those of my wife and daughter, would now be lying at the

bottom of the sea, had it not been for the courage of these two young men."

"Oh! you must thank him," said Uros, pointing to Milenko.

"I only helped so as not to leave him to risk his life alone."

"They never told me anything about it; but, of course, they did not know that I was acquainted with you." Then, laughing, the captain added: "Fancy, I have been warning them not to lose their hearts on seeing your beautiful daughter."

"And didn't I tell you that my friend had already left his heart at Nona?"

Saying this, Uros pinched his friend's arm. Milenko blushed, and was about to say something, but Giulianic began to speak about business; then added:

"And now I must leave you; but suppose you all three come and meet us at the Cappello in about an hour's time, and have some dinner with us? I'll not say a word either to my wife or Ivanka, and you may fancy how surprised they'll be to see you."

Captain Panajotti seemed undecided.

"No, I'll not have any excuse; you captains are little tyrants the moment the anchor is weighed, but the moment it's dropped you are all smiles and affability. Come, I'll have a dish of *scordalia* to whet your appetite; now, you can't resist that; so ta-ta for the present."

The moment Giulianic disappeared Milenko looked at his friend, whose eyes were twinkling with merriment.

"It's done," said Uros, smiling.

"But what made you take the poor fellow in as you did?"

"I take him in? Well, I like that."

"Well, but ——"

"If he deceived himself, am I to be held responsible for his mistakes?"

"Still ——"

"Besides, if there was any deception, I must say you did your best to let it go on."

"Of course, I did; but who made me do it?"

"I did."

"And now is it to continue?"

"Of course."

"But why?"

"Milenko, you're a good fellow, but in some things you are a great ninny. You ask me why? Well, because, for two days,

you can make love to the daughter under the father's very nose; in the meantime I'll devote myself to the father and mother, and make myself pleasant to them."

"Yes, but what'll be the upshot of all this?"

"'Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof,' the proverb says; why will you make yourself wretched, thinking of the future, when you can be so happy? If I only had the opportunity of spending two long days with——"

Uros did not finish his phrase; his merry face grew dark, and he sighed deeply; then he added: "There is usually some way out of all difficulties; see how you got out of prison."

"Still, look in what a predicament you've placed me."

"Well, if you feel qualmish, we can tell the old man that he's a goose, for he really doesn't know who his son-in-law is; then I'll make love to fair Ivanka, and you'll look on. Now are you satisfied?"

"What are you wrangling about?" said Captain Panajotti, appearing out of the hatchway in his best clothes, his baggy trousers more voluminous than those that Mrs. Bloomer tried to set in fashion a few years afterwards.

"Oh! nothing," said Uros, laughing; "only you must know that every first quarter of the moon I suffer from lunacy. I'm not at all dangerous, quite the contrary; especially if I'm not contradicted. So you might try and bear with me for a day or two; by the time we sail again I'll be all right; it's only a flow of exuberant animal spirits, that must vent themselves. But, how fine you are, captain; I'm afraid you are trying to out-do my friend, and if it wasn't that you are married, I'd have thought that all your warnings for us not to fall in love with the Sciot's daughter ——"

"I see that the lunacy is beginning, so I'll not contradict; but hadn't you better go and dress?"

"All right," quoth Uros, and in a twinkling the two young men disappeared down the hatchway.

Half-an-hour afterwards they were at the *Albergo Cappello*, the only inn of the town, where they found *Giulianic* awaiting them. The two women were very much astonished to see them. *Ivanitza's* eyes flashed with unrestrained delight on perceiving her lover, but then she looked down demurely—as every well-bred damsel should—and blushed like a pomegranate flower. Only, when she heard her father address him by his friend's name, she looked up astonished; but seeing Uros slyly wink

at her, she again cast down her eyes, wondering what it all meant.

After a while the mother whispered to her husband that she had always mistaken one of the young men for the other.

“Did you?” said he, laughing. “Well, I am astonished, for you women are so much keener in knowing people than we men are; for, to tell you the truth, I’ve often been puzzled myself; they are both the same age, they are like brothers, they are dressed alike, so it’s easy to mistake them.”

“Anyhow,” added she, “I’m glad to have been mistaken, because, although I like both of them, still I prefer our future son-in-law to young Bellacic; he’s more earnest and sedate than his friend.”

“Yes, I think you are right; the other one is such a chatterbox.”

“And, then, he displayed so much courage at the time of our shipwreck; indeed, had it not been for his bravery, we should all have been drowned.”

“Yes, I remember; he was the first one to come to our rescue. Still, we must be just towards the other one, for he is a brave and a plucky fellow to boot.”

“And so lively!”

“That’s it; rather too much so; anyhow, I’m glad that Ivanka has fallen in love with the right man; because it would have been exactly like the perverseness of the gentle sex for her to have liked the other one better.”

“Oh, my daughter has been too well brought up to make any objection! Just fancy a girl choosing for herself; it would be preposterous!”

“Yes, of course it would; still, she might have moped and threatened to have gone into a decline. Oh, I know the ways of your model girls!”

In the meanwhile, Milenko explained to the young girl how the mistake had originated, and how her father had, from the first, believed him to be Uros.

Dinner was soon served in a private room of the hotel; and Uros, who, to keep up the buoyancy of his spirits, and act the part he had undertaken to play brilliantly, had swallowed several glasses of *slivovitz*, and had induced Captain Panajotti to follow his example, was now indulging freely with the strong Dalmatian wine. Still, he only took enough to be talkative and

merry ; but, as he exaggerated the effects of the wine, everybody at table believed him to be quite tipsy.

No sooner had the dish of macaroni been taken away than he began to insist upon Captain Panajotti telling them a story.

“Oh, to-morrow you'll be master on board again; but now, you know, you must do what I like, just as if you were my wife!”

“What! Your wife——”

But Uros did not let Mrs. Giulianic finish her question, for he insisted upon doing all the talking himself.

“My wife,” said he, sententiously, “my wife'll have to dance to the tune I play; for I intend to wear the brecches and the skirts, too, in my house; so I hope you've brought up your daughter to jump through paper hoops, like a well-trained horse—no, I mean a girl!”

“My daughter——”

“Oh, I daresay that your daughter's like you, turning up her nose; but I say, D——n it! I'll not have a wife whose nose turns up.”

Giulianic looked put out; his wife's face lengthened by several inches, whilst Ivanka did her best to look scared.

“Come, captain,” continued Uros, “spout us one of your stories. Now listen, for he'll make you split with laughter. Come, give us one of your spicy ones; tell us your tale about the lack of wit, but without omitting the——”

“I'm afraid that the ladies——”

“Oh, rot the ladies! Now, all this comes from this new-fangled notion of having women at table; if they are to be squeamish and spoil all the fun, let them stop up their ears. Come, I told you I'd not brook contradiction to day.”

“Well, by-and-by; let me have my dinner now.”

“What's the matter with him?” asked Mrs. Giulianic of the captain; “is he drunk?”

“Oh, worse! he's moon-struck; he's like that for a few days at every new moon.”

Mrs. Giulianic made the sign of the Cross, and whispered something to her husband.

“Then, if you'll not tell us a story, our guest must sing us a song. Come, father-in-law, sing us a song, a merry, rollicking one, for when I'm on shore I like to laugh.”

“No, not here; we are not in our own house, you know.”

“Do you pay for the dinner, or don't you?”

"I do, but there are gentlemen dining in the next room."

"If they don't like your song, don't let them listen."

Thereupon the waiter came in.

"I say, you, fellow, isn't it true that we can sing in this stinking hole of an old tub?"

"Oh! if you like; only this isn't a tavern, and there are two judges dining in the next room."

"And you think I'm not going to sing for two paltry judges! I'll howl, then."

"No; let's have some riddles," said Giulianic, soothingly; "I'm very fond of riddles, aren't you? Now, tell me, captain, who was it that killed the fourth part of mankind?"

"Why, that's as old as your wife," quoth Uros, at once; "why, Cain, of course. But as you like riddles, I'll tell you one that suits you, though, as the proverb says, a bald pate needs no comb."

Giulianic winced, for his bald head was his sore point, but then he added, with a forced smile:

"Come, let's have your riddle."

"Well, you ought to know what makes a man bald, if anyone does."

"Sorrow," answered the bald man.

"Rot, I say!"

"What is it, then?"

"The loss of hair, of course," and he poked Giulianic in the ribs. "That was good, wasn't it, father-in-law?"

"Well, I don't see much of a joke in it," answered the host, snappishly.

"No; I didn't expect you would; that's the joke, you see." Then, turning to Ivanka, with a slight wink: "Now, here's one for you."

"Let's hear it."

"Why are there in this world more women than men?"

"Because they are more necessary."

"That's your conceit; but you're wrong."

"What is it, then?" asked the young girl.

"Because the evil in this world is always greater than the good."

"So," said she, with a pretty smile, "then, women ought to be called men's worse halves."

"Of course, they ought—though there are exceptions to all rules." Then, after drinking very slowly half a glass of

wine : " Now, one for you, *babica*. This is the very best of the lot ; I didn't invent it myself, though I, too, can say a smart thing now and then, *babica*. Tell me, when is a wife seen at her best ? "

Ivanka's mother, who prided herself upon her youthful looks, winced visibly on hearing herself twice called a granny ; still, she added, simpering :

" I suppose, when she's a bride."

" Oh ! you suppose that, do you ? Well, your supposition is all wrong."

" Well, when is it ? "

" Ask your husband ; surely, he's not bald for nothing."

" I'm sure, I don't know ; I think——"

" You think it's when she turns up her nose, but that's not it, for it's when she turns up her toes and is carried out of the house."

Captain Panajotti laughed, and so did Ivanka ; but her mother, seeing her laugh, could hardly control her vexation, so she said something which she intended to be very sarcastic.

" Oh ! you are vexed, *babica*, because I explained you the riddle."

" Vexed ! there's nothing to be vexed about. I'm only sorry that, at your age, you have such a bad opinion of women."

" I, a bad opinion, *takomi Boga !* I haven't made the riddle ; I've only heard it from my father, and he says that riddles are the wisdom of a nation. So, to show you that I have the best regard for you, here's a bumper"—and thereupon he filled his glass to the brim and stood up—"to your precious health, mother-in-law."

Then, pretending to stumble, he poured the glass of wine over her head and face.

Giulianic uttered an oath, and struck the table with his fist ; Ivanka and Milenko thought he had gone too far. Still, the poor woman looked such a pitiful object, with her turban all soaked and her face all dripping with wine, that they all burst out laughing.

Mrs. Giulianic, unable to control her vexation, and angry at finding herself the laughing-stock of the whole company, forgot herself so far as to call Uros a fool and a drunkard. He, however, went on, good-humouredly :

" I'm so sorry ; but, you see, it was quite unintentional,

Bogami, quite unintentional. But never mind, don't be angry with me ; I'll buy you another dress."

"Do you think my wife is vexed on account of her dress?" said Giulianic, proudly. "Thank Heaven! she doesn't need your dresses yet."

"Oh, yes!" said Uros, mopping up the wine with his napkin, "I know that you can afford to buy your wife dresses; but as I spoilt this one, it is but right that I should pay for it. I can't offer to buy you a yard of stuff, can I? And, besides, a dress is always welcome, isn't it, mother-in-law?"

"Well, never mind about the dress," quoth Giulianic.

"Oh! if you don't mind it, your wife does; but there, don't be angry, don't be wriggling with your nose. When I marry your daughter, my pretty Ivanka——"

"You marry my daughter!" gasped the father.

"You, indeed!" quoth the mother.

"Yes, *babica*; then I'll buy you the dearest dress I can get for money in Trieste. What is it to be, velvet or satin? plain or with bunches of flowers? What colour would you like? as red as your face is now?"

"When you marry Ivanka, you can buy me a bright green satin."

"Well, here's my hand upon it; only you'll look like a big parrot in that dress. Isn't it true, father-in-law?"

"A joke is a joke," answered Giulianic; "but I wish you wouldn't be 'father-in-lawing' me, for——"

"Well, I hope you are not going to break off the engagement because I happened to christen mother-in-law with a glass of good wine, are you?"

"Your engagement?"

"Of course."

"I told you I don't mind a joke, still this is carrying——"

"Don't mind him, poor fellow," said Captain Panajotti. "The poor fellow is daft."

"If anybody is engaged to my daughter," continued Giulianic, "it's your friend there, Uros Bellacic!"

"Oh! I like that," said Uros, laughing. "I'm afraid the wine's all gone up to your bald pate, old man." Then turning to Captain Panajotti, he added: "He doesn't know his own son-in-law any more," and he laughed idiotically.

Giulianic and his wife looked aghast.

Thereupon, thumping the table, Uros exclaimed:

“ I tell you I'm going to marry your daughter, though, if the truth must be known, I don't care a fig for her, pretty as she is. I've got——”

“ And I swear by God that you'll never marry her !” cried Giulianic, exasperated.

“ That's rich,” quoth Uros. “ On what do you swear, old bald-pate ? ”

“ I swear on my faith.”

“ And on your soul, eh ? ”

“ On my soul, too.”

“ With your hand on the Cross ? ” asked Uros, handing him a little Cross.

“ I swear,” answered Giulianic, beyond himself with rage.

“ Well, well, that'll do ; don't get angry, take it coolly as I do. You see, I'm not put out. As long as you settle the matter with my father, Milos Bellacic, I'm quite satisfied. ’

“ Milos Bellacic your father ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ Then you mean to say that you are—— ? ”

“ Uros Bellacic. Although the wine may have gone a little to my head, still, I suppose I know who I am.”

“ Is it true ? ” said Giulianic, turning towards Milenko.

“ Yes ! ” replied the young man, nervously, “ Didn't you know it ? ”

“ No.”

“ Didn't I tell you ? ” whispered his wife.

“ Oh ! you always tell me when it's too late,” he retorted, huffishly. “ And now, what's to be done ? Will you release me from my oath ? ”

Ivanka looked up, alarmed.

“ Decidedly not ; I'll never marry a girl who doesn't want me, whose father has sworn on his soul not to have me, for whose mother I'm a drunkard and a fool.”

The dinner ended in a gloomy silence ; a dampness had come over all the guests, and, except Ivanka and Milenko, all were too glad to get rid of one another.

On the morrow Uros called on Mrs. Giulianic, when her husband was not at home. He apologised for his boorish behaviour, and explained matters to her.

“ Your daughter is in love with Milenko, to whom you all owe your lives ; he, too, has lost his heart on her, whilst I—well, it's useless speaking about myself.”

“ I see it all now,” quoth she, “ and you are too good-hearted to wish us all to be miserable on account of a stupid promise. Well, on the whole, I think you were right.”

“ Then you forgive me for what I did and what I said ? ”

“ Of course I do, now that I understand it all.”

Before the caique sailed off, Uros was fully forgiven, and Giulianic even promised to write to his friend and explain matters to him.

CHAPTER XIII

STARIGRAD

THE caique reached Trieste in time to meet the *Spera in Dio*, which, having discharged her goods, had taken a cargo of timber for Lissa. At Trieste, the *pobratim* bade good-bye to Captain Panajotti; and he, having found there two of his countrymen, was able to set sail for the Levant. From Lissa the *Spera in Dio* returned to Trieste, and there her cargo of sardines was disposed of to great advantage.

The young men had been sailing now six months with the captain, and he, seeing that they were not only good pilots, clever sailors, reliable young men, but sharp in business to boot, agreed to let them have the whole management of the ship, for he was obliged to go to Fiume, and take charge of another brig of his, that had lost her captain. Moreover, being well off, and having re-married, he was now going to take his young wife on a cruise with him.

“And who was the captain of your brig in Fiume?”

“One of my late wife’s brothers, and as he seems to have disapproved of my second marriage, he has discarded my ship.”

“And is he married?”

“Of course, he is; did you ever know any unmarried captain? Land rats always seem to look upon marriage as a halter, whilst we sailors get spliced as young as possible. Perhaps it’s because we are so little with our better halves that we are happy in married life.”

“And when you give up the sea will you settle down in Fiume?”

“I suppose so, though Fiume is not my birth-place.”

“Isn’t it? Where were you born, then?”

“Where the dog-king was born!”

“And where was the dog-king born? For, never having heard of him before, I am now quite as wise as I was,” said Uros.

“Well, they say that Atilla, who was a very great king, was born at Starigrad, the old castle, which, as you know, is not very far from Nona. Starigrad is said to have been built on the ruins of a very old city, which was once called Orsopola, but which now hardly deserves the name of a town. The village where I was born goes by the name of Torre-Vezza, but we in Slav know it as Kulina-pass-glav.”

“What a peculiar name, The Tower of the Dog’s Head,” added Milenko.

“Yes, it is also called The Tower of the Dog-King Kulina-pass-kraljev.”

“And why?” asked Uros.

“Because it was the tower where Atilla was born, and as the king happened to have a dog’s ears, the place was called after him The Tower of the Dog-King.”

“How very strange that a king should have a dog’s ears.”

“Not so very strange either. Once, in olden times, a king actually had ass’s ears; but that was long before constitutional monarchy: I doubt whether people would stand such things nowadays. Some historians say that he had a dog’s head, but that, I daresay, is an exaggeration; and perhaps, after all, he had only big hairy ears, something like those of a poodle. Anyhow, if the legend is to be believed, it does not seem wonderful that Atilla was somewhat of a mongrel and doggish in his behaviour.”

“Let’s hear the legend,” said Uros.

Thereupon, the captain and his two mates, lying flat on their stomachs, propped themselves up on their elbows, and began to puff at their cigarettes. Then the captain narrated as follows:

About four hundred years after the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, there lived in Hungary a King who was exceedingly handsome. The Hungarians are, as you must know, a very fine race; but this monarch was so remarkably good-looking, that no woman ever cast her eyes upon him without falling in love with him at once. This King had a daughter who was as beautiful a girl as he was handsome a man, and all the kings and princes were anxious to marry her. She had a great choice of suitors, for they flocked to Hungary from the four quarters of the globe. She, however, discarded them all, for she could not find the man of her choice amongst them. Some were too fair, others a shade too dark; the one

was too short, the other was tall and lanky. In fact, one batch of kings went off and another came, but with no better success; fair-bearded and blue-eyed emperors were the same to her as negro potentates, she hardly looked upon either.

The King at first was vexed to find his daughter so hard to please, then he grew angry at seeing her throw away so many good chances, and at last he decided that she was to marry the very first man that should come to ask for her hand, fair or dark, yellow or copper-coloured.

The suitor who happened to present himself was a powerful chief of some nomadic tribe. He was not exactly a handsome man, for he was shock-headed, short and squat, with sturdy, muscular limbs, big, broad hands and square feet. As for his face, it was quite flat, with a pug nose, thick lips and sharp teeth. As for his ears, they were canine in their shape, large and hairy.

Though he was not exactly a monster, still the girl refused him, horrified. The man, gloating upon her, said, with a leer, that a time might come when she would lick her chops to have him. Nay, he grinned and showed his dog-like teeth as he uttered this very low expression, rendering it ever so much the more obnoxious by emitting a low canine laugh, something between a whine and a merry bark. The poor Princess shuddered with horror and said she would as lief be wedded to one of her father's curs.

The father now got into a towering passion and asked the Princess why she would not marry, and the damsel, melting into tears, and almost fainting with grief and shame, confessed that she was in love with him—her own father.

Fancy the King's dismay!

He had been bored the whole of his life by all the women, not only of his Court, but of his whole kingdom, who were madly in love with him. Wherever he went there was always a crowd of young girls and old dames, married women and widows, gazing at him as if he had been the moon; grey eyes and green eyes, black eyes and blue eyes, were always staring, ogling or leering at him; and, amidst deep-drawn sighs, he always heard the same words: "Ah! how handsome he is!" His fatal beauty made more ravages amongst the fair sex even than the plague or the small-pox; the cemeteries and lunatic asylums were peopled with his victims. His dreams were haunted by the sighs and cries of these love-sick

females. At last he had decided to live in a remote castle, in the midst of a forest, where he would see and be seen by as few women as possible; but even here he could not find rest, his own daughter had not escaped the infection. That was too much for the poor King. He at once banished the Princess, not only from his sight—from his castle—but even from his kingdom. He wished thereby to strike the rest of womankind with terror.

The poor girl, like Cain, wandered alone upon the surface of the earth; bearing her father's curse, she was shunned by everyone who met her; for the Hungarians have ever been loyal to their kings.

She was, however, not quite alone; for as she left the royal palace she was met on her way by an ugly-looking cur, with a shaggy head, a short and squat body, sturdy muscular legs, big paws, a pug nose, sharp white teeth, and huge flapping ears. He was not exactly a fine dog, but he seemed good-natured enough; and as he followed her steps, he looked at her piteously with his little eyes.

She walked about for three days; then, sick at heart, weary and faint, she sank down, ready to die. She was on a lonely highway, with moors all covered with heather on either side; so that she could see nothing but the limitless plain stretching far away in the distance as far as the eye could reach. In that immense waste, with the bright blue sky overhead, and the brown-reddish heath all around, where not a tree, not a shrub, not a rock was to be seen, she walked on and on; but she always seemed to be in the very centre of an unending circle. Then a feeling of terror came over her; the utter loneliness in which she found herself overpowered her. And now the mongrel cur, which had remained behind, came running after her, the poor beast, which at first she had hardly noticed, comforted her; he was now far more than a companion or a protector, he was her only friend.

She sank down by the wayside, to pat the faithful dog and to rest a while; but when she tried to rise, her legs were so stiff that they refused to carry her. However, the sun, that never tarries, went on and left her far behind. She saw his fiery disc sink like a glowing ball far behind the verge of the moor; then darkness, little by little, spread itself over the earth. Night being more oppressive than daylight, the tears began to trickle down her cheeks; then she lay down on the grass, and began

to sob bitterly and to bewail and moan over her ill-timed fate. She was again comforted ; for the ugly cur came to sniff at her, to rub his nose against her cheeks, and lick her hands, as if to soothe and assuage her sorrow.

Tired as she was her heavy eyelids drooped, shut themselves, and soon she sank into a deep sleep.

That night she had a most wonderful vision. Soon she felt her body beginning to get drowsy and the pain in her weary head to pass away ; then consciousness gradually vanished. Then it seemed that she saw two genii of gigantic stature appear in front of her ; the mightiest of the two bent down, caught her up as if she had been a tiny baby only a few months old, clasped her to his breast, then spread out his huge bat-like wings and flew away with her up into the air. It was pleasant to nestle in his brawny arms and feel the wind rush around her. He carried her with the rapidity of the lightning across the endless plains of Hungary, over the blue waters of the Danube, over lakes and snow-capped chains of mountains, and wide gaping chasms which looked like the mouths of hell. The genius at last alighted on the summit of a very high peak, and from there he slid down, making thus a deep glen that went to the sea-shore. The other genius took up the dog in his arms, transported him likewise through the air, and perched himself on the top of another neighbouring peak. The mountain-tops on which they alighted were the Ruino and Sveti Berdo of the Vellibic chain. Once on their feet again the two Afrites laid down their burdens, and built—till early morning—a huge castle of massive stone, not far from the sea. Their task done, they placed the Princess in a beautiful bed, all inlaid with silver, ivory and mother-of-pearl ; they whispered in her ear that henceforth, and for the remainder of her life, she would have keep to away from the sight of men, for her beauty might have been as fatal as her father's had been. Then they rose up in the air, vanished, or rather, melted away, like the morning mist.

You can fancy the Princess's surprise the next morning when—on awaking—she found herself stretched on a soft couch, between fine lawn sheets, in a lofty chamber, finer by far even than the one she had had in her father's palace. She rubbed her eyes, thinking that she was dreaming, and then lay for a few moments, half asleep and half awake, hardly daring to move lest she might return, but too soon, to the bitter misery of life.

All at once, as she lay in this pleasant sluggish state, she felt something moist and cold against her cheek. She shuddered, awoke quite, turned round and found herself in still closer contact with the cur's pug nose.

The Princess drew back astonished, unable to understand whether she was awake or asleep, and, as her eyes fell on the cur, she was surprised to see a kind of broad and merry grin on the dog's face, for the mongrel evidently seemed to be enjoying her surprise.

The young girl continued to look round, bewildered, for, instead of being on the dusty roadside, where she had dropped down out of sheer weariness, she was lying on a comfortable bed, in a splendid room. She stared at the costly tapestries which covered the walls, at the beautiful inlaid furniture, at the damask curtains all wrought in gold, at the crystal chandelier hanging down from the ceiling; and as she gazed at all these, and many other things, the cur, with his big hairy front paws on the edge of the couch, was standing on his hind legs, looking at the beautiful young girl.

The poor girl blushed to see the cur leering at her so doggedly. She rose quickly, put on the beautiful dresses that were lying on a chair ready for her, and went about the house.

What she had taken for a dream, or a vision, was, in fact, nothing but plain reality. She had, during the night, been carried from the plains of Hungary down to the shores of the Adriatic, and shut up in a fairy castle, alone with the faithful dog. From her windows she could see the mountains on which the two Afrites had alighted, and on the other side the sun-lit, translucent waters of the deep blue sea.

The castle, which seemed to rise out of the steep, inaccessible crags on which it was perched, was built of huge blocks of stone. It had thick machicolated towers at every corner, gates with drawbridges and barbicans. The apartments within this stronghold, the remains of which are still to be seen, were as sumptuous and as comfortable as any king's daughter might wish. Her protectors had provided her with all the necessities of daily life, for every day, at twelve, a dainty dinner, cooked by invisible hands, was laid out in the lofty hall, whilst in the morning a cup of exquisite chocolate was ready for her on the table in her bedroom; besides, she found all that could induce her to pass her time pleasantly, for she had statues, pictures, birds and flowers. She could walk in the small garden in the

midst of the square court, or under the marble colonnade that surrounded it; she could stitch, sew, embroider, play the lute, or paint. Still, she was quite alone, and time lay heavy on her hands. She could see, from the windows of the second floor, people at a distance stop and stare at the wonderful castle that had risen out of a rock, like a mushroom, in the space of a night; but nobody ever saw her. Alone with the cur from morn to night, from year's end to year's end; he followed her, step by step, whithersoever she went, and whatever she did he would wag his tail approvingly. If she sat down, he would squat on his haunches, on a stool opposite, and gloat on her with his little eyes so persistently that she felt her head grow quite dizzy, and she almost fancied that she had a human being sitting there in front of her, watching lovingly her slightest movement; and then the strangest fancies flitted through her brain.

Several times she had tried, as a pastime, to teach the dog some tricks; but she soon gave it up, for he always inspired her with a kind of awe. He was such a knowing kind of a cur, that he invariably seemed to read all her thoughts within her brain, and, winking at her, did the very thing she wanted him to do, before she had even tried to teach him the trick. Then, as he saw her open her eyes wonderingly, he would look at her, grinning, as if he were making fun of her; or else he sniffed at her in a patronising kind of way, as if he would say:

“Pooh! what a very silly kind of girl you are. Couldn't you, a human being, think of something better than that?”

It happened one day that, as they sat opposite each other, looking into each other's eyes—he as quiet as a stone dog on a gate, she with her tapering fingers interlocked, twirling her thumbs as a means of passing her time—the Princess was thinking of her many rejected suitors, whose hearts she had broken; even of the last one, the short, squat man, with sturdy limbs, large hands and feet, a shaggy head and huge ears. And she sighed, for though he was much more of a Satyr than like her Hyperean father, still he was a man.

Thereupon, she looked at the cur, with its sturdy limbs, its shaggy head and huge ears; and she sighed again. The dog winked at her.

“Cur,” she said to herself, “you are ugly enough; still, if you were a man I think I could fall in love with you.”

The cur stood on his hind legs, his head a little on one side;

there was a knowing, impudent look in his eyes. Then he uttered a kind of doggish laugh, something between a whine and a bark ; then, after showing his teeth in a grinning kind of way, he licked his chops at her sneeringly.

The words of her last suitor were just then ringing in her ears. She looked at the cur in amazement, for she almost fancied he had uttered those selfsame words.

The cur was evidently mocking her, as he rolled his shaggy head about, and gloated at her just as her last suitor had done. Thereupon, she blushed deeply, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

The poor dog thereupon came to lick the tears that oozed through her fingers, so that she felt somewhat comforted by the affection which this poor mongrel showed her.

This, thought she, is the end of every haughty beauty who is hard to please and who thinks no one is good enough for her. She rejects all the best matches in early youth, she turns up her nose at every eligible *parti*, until—when age creeps on and beauty fades—she is happy to accept the first boor that pops the question. As for herself, she had not even a boor whom she could love, not even the churlish man with the huge ears.

That evening, undressing before going to bed, the Princess stood, sad and disconsolate, in front of her mirror. She was still of a radiant beauty, quite as handsome as she had ever been ; but, alas ! she knew that her beauty would soon begin to fade in that lonely tower.

What had she done to the gods to deserve the punishment she was undergoing ? Why had the genii shut her up in that tower to pine there unheeded and unknown ? Why had they not left her to wander about the world, or even die upon those blasted heaths of her country ? Death was better than having to waste away in a living death, doomed to eternal imprisonment.

It was a splendid night in early May. The moon, on one side, silvered the placid waters of the Adriatic, whilst it gleamed on the still snow-capped tops of the Vellebic, on the other. The breeze that came in through the open casement wafted in the smell of the sea, and of the sage, the hyssop and lavender that grew all around. A nightingale was trilling in an amorous strain, blackbirds whistled in plaintive notes, just as in the daytime the wild doves had cooed their eternal love-song to their mate.

The poor girl leaned her plump and snowy arms on the

white marble window-sill and sighed. How lovely the world is, she thought, and then she remained as if entranced by an ecstatic vision. Within the amber moon that rolled on high and flooded all below with mellow light, the Princess saw a lover with his lass. Their mouths were closely pressed in one long kiss, as thirsty lips that cleave unto the brim of some ambrosial aphrodisiac cup. Above, the stars were shining forth with love, whilst, down below, the whole earth seemed to pant; the night-bird's lay, the lispings waves' low voice, and the insect's chirp all spoke of unknown bliss. The very air, all laden with the strong scent of roses, lilies and sweet asphodel, was like the breath of an enamoured youth who whispered in her ear sweet words of love. A scathing flame was kindled in her breast, and in her veins her blood was all aglow; her shattered body seemed to melt like wax, such was the unknown yearning which she felt upon that lovely night in early May. With reeling, aching head and tottering steps, the forlorn maiden slowly crept to bed, and while the hot tears trickled down her cheeks, oblivion steeped her senses in soft sleep.

That night the wandering moon, that came peeping through the lofty windows, saw a strange sight. Upon her round disc a broad, sallow face could now be plainly seen, grinning good-humouredly at what she beheld.

That night the Princess had a dream, or rather a vision. No sooner did she shut her eyes and her senses began to wander and lose themselves, than she saw the shaggy cur come into the room, with his usual waddling gait, wagging his tail according to his wont. He came up to her bed, stood upon his hind legs, put his big paws upon the white sheets, and began to look at her just in the very same way he had done that morning when she awoke to find herself shut up within the battlemented walls of that lonely tower by the sea. She was almost amused to see him stare at her so gravely, for he looked like a wise doctor standing by some patient's bed. Until now there was nothing very strange in this vision, but now comes the most wonderful and interesting part, which shows how truth and fancy, the occurrences of the day before and long-forgotten facts, are often blended together to make up the plot of our dreams.

As the Princess was looking upon the dog's paws, she saw them change, not all at once, but quietly undergo a slow process of transformation. They, little by little, grew longer

and shaped themselves into fingers and broad hands. She looked up—in her sleep, of course—and beheld the fore part of the legs gradually lengthen themselves into two sturdy arms. The dog's shaggy head became somewhat blurred, and in its stead a man's tawny mass of hair appeared. In fact, after a few minutes, the last rejected suitor, who, indeed, had always borne a strong likeness to the ugly cur that had followed her in her exile, now appeared before her.

He was not a handsome man ; no, far from handsome ; still, on the whole, it was better to have as her companion a human being than a dog. Still, strange to say, she now liked this man on account of his strong resemblance to the faithful dumb cur, the only friend she had now had for years.

“ You said that if I were a man you could love me,” quoth he, in something like a soft and gentle growl, sniffing at her as he spoke, evidently unable to forbear from his long-acquired canine customs. “ Well, now, do you love me ? ”

The young girl—in her dream—stretched out her hand and patted the man's dishevelled hair as she had been wont to caress the cur's shaggy head ; such is the force of habit.

“ I told you that the time would come when you would lick your chops to have me back ; so you see my words, after all, have come true.”

It was a churlish remark, but the young girl had got so accustomed to the cur's strange ways, that she did not resent it ; she even allowed the man to kiss her hands, just as the mongrel had been wont to lick them, which shows how careful we ought to be in avoiding bad habits.

It was then that the rolling, rollicking moon came peeping through the window with a broad smile on her chubby round face, just as if she was approving of the sight she saw.

On the morrow, when the Princess awoke, she looked for the cur everywhere, but, strange to say, he was nowhere to be found. She ransacked the whole house, but he had disappeared ; she peered through the barbicans, glanced down from the battlements ; she mounted to the top of the highest tower, strained her eyes, and gazed on the surrounding country, but the dog was nowhere to be seen.

A sense of loneliness and languor came over her. It was so dreary to be shut up in those large and lofty halls, that, at times, the very sound of her steps made her shiver. Her very food became distasteful to her.

From that day—being quite alone—she longed to have, at least, a little child which she might love, and which might help her to beguile the long hours of solitude. Every day her maternal instincts grew stronger within her, and every evening, as she stood leaning on the marble window-sill, she prayed the kind genii, who had taken pity on her when she had been wandering on the moor, and almost dying of weariness, of hunger and of thirst, to be kind to her, and bring her a tiny little baby to take the place of her lost cur, for life without a child was quite without an aim.

Months passed; the blossoms of the trees had fallen, the fruit had ripened, the harvest had been gathered, the days had grown shorter, the sea was now always lashed into fury, all the summer-birds had flown far away, the others were all hushed; only the raucous cries of the gulls were heard as they flew past the tower where she dwelt. The days had grown shorter and shorter, the wind was cold, the weather was bleak, when at last her wish was granted.

It was on a dreary, stormy night in early February; the Princess was lying on her bed, unable to sleep, when all at once the window was dashed open, and a huge stork flew in. It was the very stork, they say, that, years afterwards, was so fatal to the town of Aquileja, not very far from there. At that moment the poor Princess was so terrified that she quite lost her senses; but when she came back to herself, she found a tiny baby—not an hour old—lying in bed by her side.

The wind was blowing in a most terrific way. The Quarnero, which is always stormy, was nothing but one mass of white foam. The huge waves dashed together, like fleecy rams butting against each other. The billows ever rose higher, whilst the waters of the lowering clouds overhead came pouring down upon the flood below. All the elements seemed unchained against that lonely tower. The clouds came pouring down in waterspouts upon it; the breakers dashed against it; the two ravines, the big and the little Plas Kenizza—formed by the genii as they had slid down the mountains—were now huge torrents, rolling down with a roaring noise against the white walls of the tower, making it look more like an enormous lighthouse on a rock than a princely castle. The thunder never stopped rumbling; the forked lightning darted incessantly down upon the highest pinnacles and the whole stronghold, from its battlements down to its very base. Such a terrific storm had never

been known for ages; in fact, not since the days when the mighty Julius had been murdered.

By the lurid light of the incessant flashes, the Princess first saw her infant boy; and she heard its first wail amongst the deafening din of the falling thunder-bolts. With motherly fondness, she pressed the baby to her breast; whilst her heart was beating as if it were about to break. What a thrill of unutterable bliss she felt that moment; but, alas! all her joy passed into sorrow when she perceived that her beautiful baby—beautiful, at least, to a mother's eyes—had two dear little dog's ears.

Dogs' ears are by no means ugly—although they are occasionally cropped. Why was it, then, that the Princess saw them with horror and dismay?

Ears, the young mother thought, are the very worst features man possesses. They stand out prominently and look uncouth, or they sprawl out along the sides of the head; they are either as colourless as if they had just been boiled, or as red as boiled lobsters. Anyhow, she was somewhat fastidious about the shape and tint of those appendages, so that now the sight of those huge hairy lobes was perfectly loathsome to her, and as she looked upon them she burst into tears. The poor forlorn baby, feeling itself snubbed, was wailing by her side. After a little while she took up her infant; the disgust she felt was stronger than ever; moreover, she was thoroughly disappointed. She had begged for a baby, not for a little puppy. In her vexation—she was a very self-willed girl, as princesses often are—she took up the babe, got out of the bed, and in two strides she was by the window. She would cast the little monster into the dark night from where it had come. She herself did not want it.

As she reached the open window the two genii, her protectors, stood before her.

“Stop, unnatural mother!” cried the taller of the two. “What are you about to do?”

The Princess shrank back, frightened and trembling. There are a few things at which we do not exactly like to be caught: infanticide is one of them.

“Know,” said the Afrite, in a voice like a peal of thunder, “that the child, though with dog's ears, is not only of royal lineage, but he is, moreover, the son of a great genius. About four hundred years ago another Virgin gave birth to a Child, who, later on, was put to death upon a cross because the

people did not want him as their king. Well, now, the followers of that virgin's child are our bitterest enemies; our only hope is in your son; he will grow up to become a mighty warrior and avenge us. He will waste the towns on which the gold cross glistens, he will make their kings his captives, and all their priests his slaves. The blood of the Christians will run in torrents, even as the rain comes down the ravines to-night; his shafts will be like the thunderbolts that have fallen on your tower to-night. His name—which will be heard all over the world like the rumbling in the clouds—will be *The Scourge of God*, and he will chastise men for their evil deeds. Wherever he passes the grass will wither under his feet, and the waste will be his wake. Only, that all these things might come to pass, thou must well bear in mind that his head be never shorn nor his beard shaven; let the tawny locks of his hair fall about his shoulders like a lion's mane, for all his strength will lie therein. As soon as his arm is able to wield a weapon, the trail of blood flowing from a heifer's wound will show him where the sword of the great god of war lies rusting in the rushes; with that brand in his hand all men will bow before him, or fall like grass beneath the mower's scythe. Love alone will overcome him, and a young girl's lust will lull him into eternal sleep. He will be versed in magic lore, and be able to read the starry skies as a written scroll. From his very infancy he will feel a wholesome hatred for the Nazarenes, his foes as well as ours."

Having uttered these words, the Afrite rose up like smoke and faded away in the dark clouds.

In the meanwhile the child grew up of a superhuman strength, short of stature but square, and with very broad shoulders; and when he was but seven years of age the gates of the castle, hitherto always shut, opened themselves for him. From that time he passed his days in the dells and hollows of the mountains, chasing the wild beasts that abounded in those gorges and in the neighbouring forests, almost inaccessible to man. His mother saw him but little, for he only came back to the castle when heavily laden with his prey.

He was but a youth when he organised a band of freebooters; and with their help he sacked and plundered all the neighbouring towns and villages, and the plains all around were strewn with the bones of the dead. Being not only invincible, but just and generous to his men, he soon found

himself at the head of an army the like of which the world had never seen. He destroyed the immense town of Aquileja, the largest city of the Adriatic coast, and even burnt down the forest which stretched from Ravenna to Trieste. Whithersoever he went the houses fell, the temples and the theatres crumbled down, and he left desolation behind him; so that, before he had even reached the age of manhood, the words of the genius were fulfilled.

At that time the old King of Hungary happened to die, leaving no heirs to ascend his throne. Anarchy desolated the land. The nobles, who were at variance as to whom they were to elect, having heard, in some mysterious way, that their beautiful Princess was still alive, and that the great conqueror who was at that time plundering Rome was her son, sent an embassy to the Princess, asking her to return to her country, and begging her, as a boon, to accept the crown for her child.

The Princess, whose name was Mor-Lak (the Daughter of Misfortune), lived to a good old age. When she died she left her name to the sea and to the channel, the waters of which bathe the town in which she dwelt; therefore, the people who live thereabouts are, to this day, called Morlacchi. If they have no more canine ears, their hair is still as tawny as that of the dog-king, though all the other Dalmatians are dark. Moreover, if you go to Starigrad you can see, as I told you, the ruins of the Torre Vezza, the fairy tower where the virgin's son was born; likewise the huge chasms of the Ruino and the Sveti Berdo, the holy mountain where the Afrites slid down, in remembrance of which the inhabitants still call them the Paklenizza Malo and the Paklenizza Veliko, or, the Gorges of the Big and the Little Devil.

A few days afterwards, the captain bade the young men good-bye, and started for Fiume, whilst they, having their cargo ready, set sail for Odessa. The weather was fine, the wind was fair; therefore, the first voyage during which they were in sole command of the ship was a most prosperous, though a rather rough one. For during four days they had shipped several seas, so that they had the water up to their waists, and, with all that, no water to drink; but these are the incidents appertaining to a seafaring life, which sailors forget as soon as they set foot on shore.

CHAPTER XIV

THE "KARVARINA"

RADONIC had never been much of a favourite amongst his fellow countrymen, for he was of an unsociable, surly, overbearing disposition; still, from the day he had killed Vranic public opinion began to change in his behalf. A man gifted with an evil eye is a baleful being, whom everyone dreads meeting—a real curse in a town, for a number of the daily accidents and trivial misfortunes were ascribed to the malign influence of his visual organs. It was, therefore, but natural that Radonic should, tacitly, be looked upon as a kind of deliverer. Besides this unavowed feeling of relief at having been rid of the *jettatore*, no one could feel any pity for Vranic; for even the more indifferent could only shrug their shoulders, and mutter to themselves, "Serve him right," for he had only met with the fate he had deserved.

As for Radonic, he daily grew in the general esteem. There is something manly in the life of a highwayman who, with his gun, stops a whole caravan, or asks for bread, his dagger in his hand. It is a reversion to the old type of prehistoric man. But, more than a highwayman, Radonic was a *heyduk*, fighting against the Turks, and putting his life in jeopardy at every step he made.

For a man of Radonic's frame of mind, there was something enticing in the life he was leading; struggles and storms seemed congenial to his nature. On board his ship he would only cast away his sullenness when danger was approaching, and hum a tune in the midst of the tempest; in fact, he only seemed to breathe at ease when a stiff gale was blowing.

He arrived at Cetinje on the eve of an expedition against the Turks, just when every man that could bear a gun was welcome, especially when he made no claim to a share of the booty. Having reached the confines of Montenegro, amidst those dark rocks, in that eyrie of the brave, having the sky for

his roof and his gun for a pillow, life for the first time seemed to him worth living. He did not fear death—nay, he almost courted it. He felt no boding cares for the morrow; the present moment was more than enough for him. Though he lacked entirely all the softness of disposition that renders social life agreeable, he had in him some of the qualities of a hero, or, at least, of a great military chief—boldness, hardihood and valour. During the whole of his lifetime he had always tried to make himself feared, never loved. He cared neither for the people's admiration nor for their disdain; he only required implicit obedience to orders given. With such a daring, unflinching character, he soon acquired a name that spread terror whenever it was uttered; and in a skirmish that took place a week after his arrival at Cettinje, he killed a Turkish chieftain, cut off his head, and sent it, by a prisoner he had taken, to the *Pasha* of the neighbouring province, informing this official that he would, if God granted him life, soon treat him in the same way. A high sum was at once set upon his head, but it was an easier thing to offer the prize than to obtain it.

Radonic would have been happy enough now, had he not been married, or, at least, if he had been wedded to a woman who loved him, and who would have welcomed him home after a day's, or a week's, hard fighting—who would have mourned for him had he never come back; but, alas! he knew that Milena hated him. Roaming in the lonely forests, climbing on the trackless mountains, lurking amidst the dark rocks and crags, his heart yearned for the wife he had ill-treated.

A month, and even more, had elapsed since Vranic had been murdered. Zwillievic, his father-in-law, had been in Budua, and he had then come back to Cettinje; but, far from bringing Milena with him, he had left his wife there to take care of this daughter of his, who, in the state in which she was, had never recovered from the terrible shock she had received on that morning when she stumbled upon Vranic's corpse.

All kinds of doubts again assailed him, and jealousy, that had always been festering in his breast, burst out afresh, fiercer than ever; it preyed again upon him, embittered his life. After all, was it not possible that Milena was only shamming simply not to come to Cettinje? Perhaps, he thought, one of the many young men who had tried to flirt with her, was now at Budua making love to her.

He, therefore, made up his mind to brave the *pamdours* (the Austrian police), to meet with the anger of Vranic's brothers, just to see Milena again, and find out how she fared, and what she was doing. He, one evening, started from Cettinje, went down the steep road leading to the sea-shore, got to the gates of the town at nightfall, and, wrapped in his great-coat, with his hood pulled down over his eyes, he crossed the town and reached his house.

He stopped at the window and looked in; Milena was nowhere to be seen. He was seized by a dreadful foreboding—what if he had come too late? Two women were standing near the door of the inner room, talking. He, at first, could hardly recognise them by the glimmering light of the oil-lamp; still, after having got nearer the window, he saw that one of them was Mara Bellacic, and the other his mother-in-law.

He then went to the door, tapped gently, and pushed it open; seeing him, both the women started back astonished.

His first question was, of course, about his wife. She was a little better, they said, but still very ill.

"She is asleep now. You can come in and see her, but take care not to wake her," added Milena's mother.

"Yes," quoth Mara, "take care, for should she wake and see you so unexpectedly, the shock might be fatal."

Radonic went noiselessly up to the door of the bedroom and peeped in. Seeing Milena lying motionless on the bed, pale, thin and haggard, he was seized with a feeling of deep pity, such as he had never felt before in the whole of his life, and he almost cursed the memory of his mother, for she had been the first to set him against his wife, and had induced him to be so stern and harsh towards her.

He skulked about that night, and on the following day he sent for Bellacic, for Markovic, and for some kinsmen and acquaintances, and asked them to help him out of his difficulties. They at once persuaded him to try and make it up with Vranic's relations, to pay the *karvarina* money, and thus hush up the whole affair.

While public opinion was favourable to him, it would be easy enough to find several persons to speak in his behalf, to act as mediators or umpires, and settle the price to be paid for the blood that had been spilt.

Although the Montenegrins and the inhabitants of the Kotar, as well as almost all Dalmatians, are—like the Corsicans—

justly deemed a proud race, amongst whom every wrong must be washed out with blood, and although they all have a strong sense of honour, so that revenge becomes a sacred duty, jealously transmitted from one generation to another, still the old Biblical way of settling all litigations with fines, and putting a price for the loss of life, is still in full force amongst them.

In the present case Vranic's brothers were quite willing to come to a compromise, that is to say, to give up all thoughts of vengeance, provided, after all the due formalities had taken place, an adequate sum were paid to them. First, they had never been fond of their brother; secondly, they knew quite well that Radonic was fully justified in what he had done, and that, moreover, everybody commended him for his rash deed; thirdly, having inherited their brother's property, the little sorrow they had felt for him the first moment had quite passed away.

Markovic and Bellacic set themselves to work at once. Their first care was to find six young and, possibly, handsome women, with six babes, who, acting as friends to Radonic, would go to Vranic's brothers and intercede for him.

It was rather a difficult task, for Radonic had few friends at Budua. All the sailors that had been with him had not only rued the time spent on his ship, but had been enemies to him ever afterwards. He had married a wife from Montenegro, envied for her beauty, and not much liked by the gentler sex. Milena had been too much admired by men for women to take kindly to her; still, as she was now on a bed of sickness, and all her beauty blasted, envy had changed into pity.

After no end of trouble, many promises of silk kerchiefs, yards of stuff for dresses, or other trifles, six rather good-looking women, and the same number of chubby babies, were mustered, and, on a day appointed for the purpose, they were to go, together with Markovic and Bellacic, to sue for peace.

In the meanwhile Radonic had stealthily called on a number of persons, had invited them to drink with him, related to them the number of Turks he had shot, and by sundry means managed to dispose them in his favour. They, by their influence, tried to pacify the Vranic family, and a month's truce was granted to Radonic, during which time the preliminaries of peace were undertaken.

At last, after many consultations and no end of smooth talking, the day for the ceremony of the *karvarina* was fixed upon.

Markovic and Bellacic, together with the six women, carrying their babes and followed by a crowd of spectators, went up to Vranic's house. As soon as they got to the door, the women fell down on their knees, bowing down their heads, and, whilst the babes began to shriek lustily, the men called out, in a loud voice :

“Vranic, our brother in God and in St. John, we greet you! Take pity on us, and allow us to come within your house.”

Having repeated this request three times—during which the women wailed and the babies shrieked always louder—the door at last was opened, and the murdered man's two younger brothers appeared on the threshold.

Though all the household had been for more than two hours on the look-out for this embassy, still the two men put on an astonished look, as if they had not the remotest idea as to what it all meant, or why or wherefore the crowd had gathered round their house.

Standing on the threshold they inquired of the men what they wanted, after which they went and, taking every woman by the hand, made her get up; then, imprinting a kiss on every howling babe, they tried to soothe and quiet it. This ceremony over, the women were begged to enter the house and be seated. Once inside, Bellacic, acting as chief intercessor, handed to the Vranics six yards of fine cloth which Radonic had provided him with, this being one of the customary peace offerings. Then, taking a big bottle of plum brandy from the hands of one of his attendants, he poured out a glass and offered it to the master of the house; the glass went round, and the house soon echoed with the shouts of “*Zivio!*” or “Long life!” and the merriment increased in the same ratio as the spirits in the huge bottle decreased.

When everybody was in a boisterous good-humour—except the two Vranics, for strong drink only rendered them peevish and quarrelsome—the subject of the visit was broached.

Josko Vranic, the elder of the two brothers, would at first not listen to Bellacic's request.

“What!” exclaimed he, in the flowery style of Eastern mourners, “do you ask me to come to terms with Radonic, who cruelly murdered my brother? Do you wish me to press to my heart the viper from whose teeth we still smart? Do you think I have no soul, no faith? Oh! my poor brother”—(he hated him in his lifetime)—“my poor brother, murdered in the morning

of his life, in the spring of his youth, a star of beauty, a lion of strength and courage; had the murderer's hand but spared him, what great things might he not have done! Oh, my brother, my beloved brother! No; blood alone can avenge blood, and his soul can never rest in peace till my dagger is sheathed in his murderer's heart. No, Radonic must die; blood for blood; life for life. I must find out the foul dog and strangle him as he strangled my beloved brother, or I am no true Slav. Tell me where he is, if you know, that I may tear him to pieces; for nothing can arrest my arm!"

Josko Vranic was a tailor, and a very peaceful kind of a tailor into the bargain. It is true that, when his brain was fuddled with drink, he was occasionally blood-thirsty; but his rage expended itself far more in words than in deeds. For the present, he was simply trying to act his part well, and was only repeating hackneyed phrases often uttered in houses of mourning, at funerals, and at wakes.

All his thoughts were bent on the sum of money he might obtain for *karvarina*, and he, therefore, thought that the more he magnified his grief, the greater would be the sum he might ask for blood-money.

Bellacic and Markovic, as well as the other friends of both parties gathered in the house, deemed it advisable to leave him to give utterance to his grief. Then, when he had said his say and the children were quieted, Radonic's friends began to persuade him to forego all ideas of vengeance, and—after much useless talking—many prayers from the women, and threats from the babes to begin shrieking again, Vranic agreed that he would try and smother his grief, nay, for their sakes, forget his resentment; therefore, after much cogitation, he named a jury of twenty-four men to act as arbitrators between him and the murderer, and settle the price that was to be paid for the blood. This jury was, of course, composed of persons that he thought hated Radonic, and who would at least demand a sum equivalent to £200 or £300. He little knew how much his own brother had been disliked, and the low price that was set on his life.

These twenty-four persons having been appointed, Radonic called upon all of them, and got them to meet at Bellacic's house the day before the ceremony of the *karvarina*; he sent there some small barrels of choice wine, and provisions of all kinds for the feast of that day, as well as for the

banquet of the morrow, for he knew quite well that the gall of a bitter enemy is less acrid after a good dinner, and that an indifferent person becomes a friend when he is chewing the cud of the dainty things you have provided for him.

As soon as supper was over, and while the *bucara* of sweet *muscato* wine was being handed round, Bellacic submitted the case to the twenty-four arbiters, expatiated like a lawyer on the heinous way Vranic had acted, how like a real snake he had crept between husband and wife, trying to put enmity between them, and how he had succeeded in his treachery, doing all this to seduce a poor distracted woman.

“Now,” continued Bellacic, “put yourselves in Radonic’s place and tell me how you yourselves would have acted. If you have the right to shoot the burglar who, in the dead of night, breaks into your house to rob you of your purse, is it not natural that you should throttle the ruffian who, under the mantle of friendship, sneaks into your bedroom to rob you of your honour? Is the life of such a man worth more than that of the scorpion you crush under your heel? Vranic was neither my friend nor my enemy; therefore, I have no earthly reason to set you against him, nor to induce you to be friendly towards Radonic. I only ask you to be just, and to tell me the worth of the blood he has spilt.”

Bellacic stopped for a moment to see the effect of his speech on his listeners. All seemed to approve his words no less than they did the sweet wine of the *bucara*; then after a slight pause, he again went on.

“Radonic may have many faults, nay, he has many; are we not all of us full of blemishes? Still, the poor that will be fed for many days from the crumbs of our feast will surely not say that he is a miser. Still—withal he is lavish—one thing he is fully determined not to do, that is to pay more for the blood he has spilt than it is really worth.

“It is true that the heirs of the dead man are filling the whole town with their laments; but do you think that those who mourn so loudly would gladly welcome their brother back, nay, I ask you how many hands would be stretched out to greet Vranic if the grave were to yawn and give up the dead man. Who, within his innermost heart, is not really glad to have got rid of a man who carried an evil influence with him whithersoever he went?

“But speaking the truth in this case is almost like trying to set you against the exaggerated claims of the late man’s brothers; whilst you all know quite well that I only wish you to act according to your better judgment, and whatever your decision be, we shall abide by it. You are husbands, you are Slavs; the honour of your homes, of your children, of your wives is dear to you; therefore, I drink to your honour with Radonic’s wine.”

As the *bucara* could not go round fast enough, so glasses were filled, and toasts were drunk. After that, Bellacic left the room, so that the jury might discuss the matter under no restraint. Although twenty of the men were in favour of Radonic, still four thought that the arguments used in his favour had been so brilliant that Bellacic had rather charmed than convinced them. They were, however, overruled by the many, and the bumpers they swallowed in the heat of the argument ended by convincing them, too.

“Gentlemen,” said Bellacic, coming back, “I shall not ask you now if Vranic’s life was worth a herd or a single cow, a flock or a single sheep, or even a goat, for here is Teodoroff, the *guzlar*, who is going to enliven us with the glorious battle of Kossovo, and the great deeds of our immortal Kraglievic.

The bard came in, and he was listened to with rapt attention during the half-hour that his poem lasted. No one spoke, or drank, or even moved; all remained as if spell-bound; their eyes seemed to seek for the words as they flowed from the poet’s lips. At last the *guzlar* stopped, and after a few moments of silence, shouts of applause broke forth. Just then Radonic came into the room, and the twenty-four men all shook hands with him heartily, and, excited as the audience was with the daring deeds of Marko Kraglievic, Bellacic made him relate some of his encounters with the Turks, and show the holes in his coat through which the bullets had passed.

“And now, Teodoroff,” said Radonic, finishing the story of his exploits, “give us something lively; I think we’ve had enough of bloodshed for the whole evening.”

“Yes,” added Bellacic; “but let us first finish the business for which we have been brought together, and then we can devote the remainder of our time to pleasure.”

“Yes,” retorted one of the twenty-four arbitrators, “it’s time the matter was settled.”

"Well, then," quoth Markovic, "what is the price of the *jettatore's* life?"

"As for me," said one of the younger men, "it's certainly not worth that of a cow!"

"No, nor that of a goat!" added another.

"Well, let's be generous towards the tailor," said Bellacic, laughing, "and settle his brother's life at the price of a huge silver Maria Theresa dollar, eh?"

Some of the arbitrators were about to demur, but as the proposal had come from them, they could not well gainsay it.

"Then it's settled," said Bellacic, hastening to fill the glasses; "and now, Teodoroff, quick! give us one of your best songs; something brisk and lively."

The *guzlar* took up his instrument, played a few bars as a kind of prelude, emitted a prolonged "Oh!" which ended away in a trill, and then began the tale of

MARKO KRAGLIEVIC AND JANKO OF SEBINJE.

Two brave and bonny knights, both bosom friends,
 Were Marko Kraglievic of deathless fame,
 And Janko of Sebinje, fair and wise.
 Both seemed to have been cast within one mould,
 For no two brothers could be more alike.
 One day, as they were chatting o'er their wine,
 Fair Janko said unto his faithful friend:
 "My wife has keener eyes than any man's,
 And sharper wits besides; our sex is dull;
 No man has ever played a trick on her."
 Then Marko, smiling, said: "Do let me try
 To match, in merry sport, my wits 'gainst hers."
 "'Tis well," quoth Janko, with a winsome smile,
 "But, still, beware of woman's subtle guile."
 Then 'twixt the friends a wager soon was laid;
 Fair Janko pledged his horse, a stallion rare,
 A fleet and milk-white steed, Kula by name,
 And with his horse he pledged his winsome wife;
 Whilst, for his wager, Marko pawned his head.
 "Now, one thing more; lend me thy clothes," said Mark,
 "Thy jewelled weapons, and thy milk-white steed."
 And Janko doffed, and Marko donned the clothes,
 Then buckled on his friend's bright scimitar.
 As soon as Janko's wife spied him from far,
 She thought it was her husband, and ran out;
 But then she stopped, for something in his mien,
 Which her quick eye perceived, proclaimed at once
 That warlike knight upon her husband's horse

To be the outward show, the glittering garb
And a fair mirage of the man she loved.
Thereon within her rooms she hied in haste,
And to her help she called her trusty maid.
"O Kumbra, sister mine," she said to her,
"I know not why, but Janko seems so wroth.
Put on my finest clothes, and hie to him."
When Marko saw the maid, he turned aside,
And wrapped himself within his wide *kalpak*,
Then said that he would fain be left alone.
He thought, in sooth, that she was Janko's wife.
A dainty meal was soon spread for the knight.
The lady called again her trusted maid,
And thus she spake: "My Kumbra, for this night
Sleep in my room, nay, in my very bed.
And, for the deed that I demand of thee,
This purse of gold is thine. Besides this gift,
Thou henceforth wilt be free." The maiden bowed,
And said: "My lady's wish is law for me."
Now Marko at his meal sat all alone,
When he had supped he went into the room
Where Kumbra was asleep; there he sat down,
And passed the whole long night upon a chair,
Close by the young girl's bed. He seemed to be
A father watching o'er his sickly child.
But when the gloaming shed its glimmering light,
The knight arose; he went, with stealthy steps,
And cut a lock from off the young girl's head,
Which he at once hid in his breast, with care.
Before the maiden woke he left the house,
And rode full-speed back to his bosom friend.
Still, ere he had alighted from his horse:
"You've lost!" said Janko, with his winsome smile.
"I've won!" quoth Marko, with a modest grace;
"Here is the token that I've won my bet."
And Janko took the golden curl, amazed.
Just then a page, who rode his horse full-speed,
Came panting up, and, on his bended knee,
He handed to his lord a parchment scroll.
The letter thus began: "O husband mine,
Why sendest thou such pert and graceless knights,
That take thy manor for a roadside inn,
And in the dead of night clip Kumbra's locks?"
Thereon, in sprightly style, the wife then wrote
All that had taken place the day before.
And Janko, as he read, began to laugh.
Then, turning to his friend: "Sir Knight," quoth he
"Have henceforth greater care of thine own head,
Which now, by right and law, belongs to me.

Beware of woman, for the wisest man
Has not the keenness of a maiden's eye.
Come, now, I pledge thy health in foaming wine,
For this, indeed, hath been a merry joke."

The greater part of the night was passed in drinking and in listening to the bard's songs. Little by little sleepiness and the fumes of the wine overpowered each single man, so that in the small hours almost all the guests were stretched on the mats that strewed the floor, fast asleep.

On the morrow the twenty-four men of the jury went, all in a body, to Vranic's house. They sat down in state and listened to the tale of the brothers' grievances, whilst they sipped very inferior *slivovitz* and gravely smoked their long pipes. When the tailor ended the oft-repeated story of his grief and grievances, then they went back to Bellacic's house, where they gave ear to all the extenuating circumstances which Radonic brought forward to exculpate himself. After the culprit had finished, the twenty-four men sat down in council, and discussed again the matter which had been settled the evening before.

A slight, but choice, repast was served to them; and Radonic took care that no fault could be found with the wine, for he feared that they might, in their soberer senses, change their mind and reverse their opinion.

The dinner had been cooked to perfection, the wine was of the best, the arguments Radonic had brought forward to clear himself were convincing—even the four that had been wavering the evening before were quite for him now. The majority of these men were married, and jealous of their honour; the others were going to marry, and were even more jealous than the married men. If Radonic could not be absolved entirely, still he could hardly be condemned.

Thus the day passed in much useless talking and discussing, and night came on. At sundown the guests began to pour in, and soon the house was crowded. A deputation was then sent to the Vranic family to beg them to come to the feast. The tailor at first demurred; but being pressed he yielded, and came with his brother.

The evening began with the *Karva-Kolo*, or the blood-dance. It is very like the usual *Kolo*, only the music, especially in the beginning, is a kind of funeral march, or a dirge; soon the movement gets brisker, until it changes into the usual *Kolo*

strain. The orchestra that evening was a choice one; it consisted of two *guzlas*, a *dipla* or bag-pipe, and a *sfiraliza* or Pan's seven-reeded flute. Later on there was even a triangle, which kept admirable time.

A couple of dancers began, another joined in, and so on, until the circle widened, and then all the people who were too lazy to dance had either to leave the room or stand close against the wall, so as not to be in the way. Just when the dance had reached its height, and the men were twirling the girls about as in the mazy evolutions of the cotillon, Radonic, who had kept aloof, burst into the room. A moment of confusion ensued, the dancers stopped, the middle of the room was cleared, the music played again a low dirge. The guilty man stood alone, abashed; around his neck, tied to a string, he wore the dagger with which he might have stabbed Vranic had he not throttled him.

As soon as he appeared two of the twenty-four arbitrators, who had been on the look-out for him, rushed and seized him. Then, feigning a great wrath, they dragged him towards Vranic, as if they had just captured him and brought him to be tried.

"Drag that murderer away, cast him out of the house; or, rather, leave him to me. Let me kill him."

"Forgive me," exclaimed Radonic.

"Down upon him!" cried Vranic.

The arbitrators thereupon made the culprit bow down so low that his head nearly touched the floor; then all the assembly uttered a deep sigh, or rather, a wail, craving—in the name of the Almighty and of good St. John—forgiveness for the guilty man.

"Forgiveness," echoed Radonic, for the third time.

The dancers, who had again begun to walk in rhythmic step around the room, forming a kind of *chassez-croisez*, stopped, and the music died away in a low moan.

There was a moment of eager theatrical expectation. The murdered man's brother seemed undecided as to what he had to do; at last, after an inward struggle, he yielded to his better feelings, and going up to Radonic, he took him by the hand, lifted him up and kissed him on his forehead.

A sound of satisfaction, like a sigh of relief, passed through the assembly; but then Vranic said, in a voice which he tried to render sweet and soft:

"Listen, all of you. This man, who has hitherto been my

bitterest enemy, has now become my friend ; nay, more than my friend, my very brother, and not to me alone, but to all who were related to my beloved brother. All shall forego every wish or idea of revenge, now and hereafter."

Thereupon, taking a very small silver coin, he cut it in two, gave Radonic half, and kept the other for himself, as a pledge of the friendship he had just sworn.

When peace had been restored, and everybody had drunk to Radonic's and Vranic's health, then the *Starescina*, or the oldest arbitrator, whose judgment was paramount, stood up and made a speech, in which he uttered the decision of the jury and the sentence of the *karvarina*, that is to say, that, taking into consideration all the extenuating circumstances under which the murder had been committed, Radonic was to pay to Vranic the sum of a silver Maria Theresa dollar, the usual price of a goat.

"What!" cried the tailor, in a fit of unsuppressed rage; "do you mean to say that my brother's life was only worth that of a goat?"

A slight, subdued tittering was heard amongst the crowd; for, indeed, it was almost ludicrous to see the little man, pale, trembling and almost green with rage.

"No," quoth the umpire, gravely; "I never said that your brother's life was worth that of a whole herd or of a single goat; the price that we, arbitrators named by you, have condemned Radonic to pay is a silver dollar. Put yourself in the murderer's place, and tell us what you would have done."

Vranic shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

"We do not appeal to you alone, but to any man of honour, to any Iugo Slav, to any husband of the Kotar. What would he have done to a man who, pretending to be his friend, came by stealth, in the middle of the night, into his home to——"

"Then," cried Vranic, in that shrill, womanish voice peculiar to all his family, "it is not my brother that ought to have been killed. Was he to blame if he was enticed——"

"What do you mean?" cried Radonic, clasping the haft of the dagger, which he ought to have given up to Vranic.

"Silence!" said the umpire: "you forget that you have promised to love——"

"If you intend to speak of Milena," said Bellacic, interrupting the judge, "you must remember that the evening upon which your brother was killed she was spending the evening——"

“At your house? No!” said Vranic, with a scornful laugh, shrugging his shoulders again.

“Come, come,” said one of the jury; “let’s settle the *karvarina*.”

“Besides,” added another arbitrator, ingenuously, “Radonic has been put to the expense of more than fifty goats. Until now, no man has ever——”

“Oh, I see!” interrupted the tailor, with a withering sneer; “he has bribed the few friends my poor brother had, so now even those have turned against him.”

Oaths, curses, threats were uttered by the twenty-four men, and the younger and more hasty ones instinctively sought the handles of their daggers.

“Gentlemen,” said Bellacic, “supper is ready; the two men have sworn to be friends——”

“I’ve sworn nothing at all,” muttered the tailor, between his teeth.

“Let us sit down,” continued the master of the house, “and try to forget our present quarrels; we’ll surely come to a better understanding when cakes flowing with honey and sweet wine are brought on the table.”

They now carried in for the feast several low, stool-like tables, serving both as boards and dishes. On each one there was a whole roasted lamb, resting on a bed of rice. Every guest took out his dagger and carved for himself the piece he liked best or the one he could easiest reach, and which he gnawed, holding the bone as a handle, if there was one, or using the flat, pancake-like bread—the *chupatti* of the Indians, the flap-jacks of the Turks—as plates. Soon the wooden *bukaras* were handed around, and then all ill-humour was drowned in the heady wine of the rich Dalmatian soil. After the lambs and rice, big sirloins of beef and huge tunny-fish followed in succession, then game, and lastly, pastry and fruit.

After more than two hours of eating and drinking, with interludes of singing and shouting, the meal at last came to an end. The gentlemen of the jury, whose brains had been more or less muddled from the day before, were now, almost without any exception, quite drunk. As for the guests, some were jovial and boisterous, others tender and sentimental. Radonic’s face was saturnine; Markovic, who was always loquacious, and who spoke in Italian when drunk, was making a long

speech that had never had a beginning and did not seem to come to an end; and the worst of it was that, during the whole time, he clasped tightly one of the *bukaras*, and would not relinquish his hold of it.

As for Vranic and his younger brother, they had both sunk down on the floor sulky and silent. The more they ate and drank, the more weazened and wretched they looked, and the expression of malice on their angry faces deepened their wrinkles into a fiendish scowl.

"I think," said the elder brother, "it is time all this was over, and that we should be going."

"Going?" exclaimed all the guests who heard it. "And where do you want to go?"

"Oh, if he isn't comfortable, let him go!" said one of the arbitrators. "I'm sure I don't want to detain him; his face isn't so pleasant to look at that we should beg him to stay—no, nor his company either."

"Oh, I daresay you would like to get rid of me, all of you!"

"Well, then, shall we wind up this business?" said the judge of the *karvarina*, putting his hand on Radonic's shoulder.

"I am quite ready," said he.

Thereupon he drew forth his leather purse and took out several Maria Theresa dollars.

"Shall we make it five instead of one?" he asked, spreading out the new and shining coins on his broad palm. "Now, tell me, tailor, if I am niggardly with my money?" he added, handing the sum to Vranic.

The tailor seized the dollars and clenched his fist; then, with a scowl:

"I don't want any of your charity," he hissed out in a shrill treble. "Five are almost worth six goats, and my brother is worth but one. Here, take your money back; distribute it among the arbitrators, to whom you have been so generous. No, *heyduk*, you are not niggardly; but, then, what are a few dollars to you? a shot of your gun and your purse is full. Thanks all the same, I only want my due. No robber's charity for me." And with these words he flung the five dollars in Radonic's face.

The sharp edge of one of the coins struck Radonic on the corner of the eye, just under the brow, and the blood trickled down. All his drunkenness vanished, his gloomy look took

a fierce expression, and with a bound he was about to seize his antagonist by the throat and strangle him as he had done his brother; but Vranic, who was on his guard, lifted up the knife he had received from the murderer a few hours before, and quick as lightning struck him a blow on his breast.

"This is my *karvarina*," said he; "tooth for tooth, eye for eye, blood for blood."

The blow had been aimed at Radonic's heart, but he parried it and received a deep gash in the fore-part of his arm.

A scuffle at once ensued; some of the less drunken men threw themselves on Vranic, others on Radonic.

"Sneak, traitor, coward!" shouted the chief arbitrator, striking Vranic in the face and almost knocking him down; "how dare you do such a thing after having begged us to settle the *karvarina* for you?"

"And you've settled it nicely, indeed; gorged with his meat, drunk with his wine, and your purses filled with his money."

"Liar!" shouted the men of the jury.

"Out of my house, you scorpion, and never cross its threshold again."

"I go, and I'm only too glad to be rid of you all;—but as for you," said Vranic to Bellacic, "had it not been for you, all this would not have happened."

"What have I to do with it?"

"Did you not come to beg me to make it up? But I suppose you were anxious to have the whole affair hushed up as quickly as possible."

"Fool!" answered Bellacic.

"Oh, Milena is not always at your house for nothing!"

"What did he say?" asked Radonic, trying to break away from the hands of the men who were holding him, and from Mara Bellacic, who was bandaging up his wound.

"What do you care what he said?" replied Bellacic; "his slander only falls back upon himself, just as if he were spitting in the wind; it can harm neither you nor Milena."

"Oh, we shall meet again!" cried Radonic.

"We shall certainly meet, if ever you escape the Turkish gallows, or the Austrian prisons."

And as he uttered these last words, he disappeared in the darkness of the road.

CHAPTER XV

A COWARD'S VENGEANCE

WHEN the *pobratim* returned to Budua they found the whole town divided into two camps, and, consequently, in a state of open war. Since the evening of the *karvarina* two parties had formed themselves, the Vranites and the Radonites. The first, indeed, were few, and did not consist of friends of Vranic, but simply of people who had a grudge, not only against Radonic, but against Bellacic and the twenty-four men of the jury, who were accused of peculation. On the whole, public opinion was bitter against the tailor, for, after having made peace with his enemy, he had tried to murder him; then—as if this had not been enough—he had gone on the morrow and given warning to the police that Radonic, who had cowardly murdered his brother, had returned to Budua, and was walking about the streets unpunished; moreover, that the *heyduk* had threatened to murder him, so he came to appeal for protection.

This happened when Budua had just been incorporated with the Austrian empire, and the people, jealous of their customs, looked upon the protection of the government as an officious intermeddling with their own private affairs, and strongly resented their being treated as children unable to act for themselves.

Although a few crimes had been left unpunished, simply not to rouse at once the general feeling against its present masters, still the new jurisdiction was bent upon putting a stop to the practice of the *karvarina*; and to make this primitive country understand that, under a civilised form of government, people paid taxes to be protected by wise and just laws; therefore, it was the duty of a well-regulated police to discover and punish equitably all offences done to any particular man.

In the present case, where notice was brought to the police of facts that had happened, and aid was requested, steps had

to be taken to secure the person of the offender, and, therefore, to have Radonic arrested at once for manslaughter.

Friends, however, came at once to inform Radonic of what had taken place, advising him to take flight, and put at once the border mountains of Montenegro between himself and the Austrian police.

The officials gave themselves and, what was far worse, everybody else no end of trouble and annoyance with Vranic's case. They went about arresting wrong persons, as a well-regulated police sometimes does, and then, after much bother and many cross-examinations, everyone was set free, and the whole affair dropped.

Milena, who was slowly recovering from her long illness, was the first to be summoned to answer about her husband's crime. Bellacic was after that accused of sheltering the murderer, and threatened with fines, confiscation, imprisonment and other such penalties; then he was also set free. The twenty-four men of the jury were next summoned; but, as they had only acted as peacemakers on behalf of Vranic, they, too, were reprimanded, and then sent about their business.

After this Vranic's partisans dwindled every day, till at last he found himself shunned by everyone. Even his customers began to forsake him, and to have their clothes made by a more fortunate competitor. At last he could not go out in the streets without having the children scream out after him:

“Spy! spy! Austrian spy!”

The clergy belonging to the Orthodox faith looked upon the new law against the *karvarina* as an encroachment on their privileges. A tithe of the price of blood-money always went to the Church; sundry candles had to be lighted to propitiate, not God or Christ, but some of the lower deities and mediators of the Christian creed. The law, which took from them all interference in temporal matters, was a blow to their authority and to their purses. Even if they were not begged to act as arbitrators, they were usually invited as guests to the feast, so that some pickings and perquisites were always to be got.

Vranic obtained no satisfaction from the police, to whom he had applied; he was only treated as a cur by the whole population, was nearly excommunicated by the Church, and looked upon as an apostate from the saintly customs of the Iugo Slavs.

Taunted by his own family with having made a muddle of the

whole affair, treated with scornful disdain by friends and foes, the poor tailor, who had never been very good-tempered, had got to look upon all mankind as his enemies.

Thus it happened, one day, that Bellacic was at the coffee-house with Markovic and some other friends, when Vranic came in to get shaved.

“What! do you shear poodles and curs?” he asked.

The loungers began to laugh. Vranic, whose face was being lathered, ground his teeth and grunted.

“I say, has he a medal round his neck?”

“What! do they give a medal to spies?” asked one of the men.

“No,” quoth Bellacic; “but according to their law, no dog is allowed to go about without a medal, which proves that he has paid his taxes.”

“Keep quiet,” said the barber and *kafedgee*, “or I’ll cut you!”

“Do government dogs also pay taxes?” said another man, smiling.

“Ask the cur! he’ll tell you,” replied Bellacic.

“Mind, Bellacic!” squeaked out Vranic, who was now shaved; “curs have teeth!”

“To grind, or to grin with?”

“By St. George and St. Elias! I’ll be revenged on all of you, and you the very first!” and livid with rage, grinding his teeth, shaking his fist, Vranic left the coffee-house, followed by the laughter of the by-standers, and the barking of the boys outside.

“He means mischief!” quoth the *kafedgee*.

“When did he not mean mischief,” replied Markovic, “or his brother either?”

“Don’t speak of his brother.”

“Why, he’s dead and buried.”

“The less you speak of some dead people, the better,” and the *kafedgee* crossed himself.

“He’s a sly fox,” said one of the men waiting to be shaved.

“Pooh! foxes are sometimes taken in by an old goose, as the story tells us.”

Everybody knew the old story, but, as the barber was bent upon telling it, his customers were obliged to listen.

Once upon a time, there was a little silver-grey hen, that got into such an ungovernable fit of sulks, that she left the

pleasant poultry-yard where she had been born and bred, and escaped on to the highway by a gap in the hedge. The reason of her ill-humour was that she had seen her lord and master flirt with a moulting old hatching hen, and she had felt ruffled at his behaviour.

“Surely, the only advantage that old hen has over me,” she soliloquised, “is a greater experience of life. If I can but see a little more of the world, I, too, might be able to discuss philosophical topics with my husband, instead of cackling noisily over a new-laid egg. It is an undeniable fact that home-keeping hens have only homely wits, and cocks are only hen-pecked by hens of loftier minds than themselves, and not by such common-place females who think that life has no other aim than that of laying a fresh egg every day.”

On the other side of the hedge she met a large turkey strutting gravely about, spreading out his tail, making sundry gurgling noises in his throat, puffing and swelling himself in an apoplectic way, until he got of a bluish, livid hue about his eyes, whilst his gills grew purple.

Surely, thought the little grey hen, that turkey must be a doctor of divinity who knows the aim of life; every word that falls from his beak must be a priceless pearl.

The little silver-grey hen looked at him with the corner of her eye, just as coquettish ladies are apt to do when they look at you over the corners of their fans.

“I say, Mrs. Henny, whither are you bound, all alone?” said the old turkey, with his round eyes.

“I am bent upon seeing a little of the world and improving my mind,” said the little hen.

“A most laudable intention,” said the turkey; “and if you’ll permit me, young madam, I myself will accompany, or rather, escort you in this journey, tour, or excursion of yours. And if the little experience I have acquired can be of some slight use to you——”

“How awfully good of you!” said the gushing little hen. “Why, really, it would be too delightful!”

As they went on their way the old turkey at once informed the little hen that he was a professor of the Dovecot University, and he at once began to expatiate learnedly about adjectives, compounds, anomalous verbs, suffixes and prefixes, of objective cases and other such interesting topics. She listened to him for some time, although she could not catch the drift of his

speech. At last she came to the conclusion that all this must be transcendental philosophy, so she repeated mechanically to herself all the grave words he spouted, and of the whole lecture she just made out a charming little phrase, with which she thought she would crush her husband some day or other. It was: "Don't run away with the idea that I'm anomalous enough to be governed by objective cases, for, after all, what's a husband but a prefix?"

"And are you married?" asked the little hen, as soon as the turkey had stopped to take breath.

"I am," said the old turkey, with a sigh, "and although I have a dozen wives, I must say I haven't yet found one sympathetic listener amongst them."

"Are they worldly-minded?" asked she.

"They are frivolous, they think that the aim of life is laying eggs."

"Pooh!" said the little hen, scornfully.

As they went along, they met a gander, which looked at them from over a palisade.

"I say, where are you two off to?"

"We are bent upon seeing the world and improving our minds."

"How delightful. Now tell me, would it be intruding if I joined your party? I know they say: Two are company, and three are not, still——"

"They also say: The more the merrier," quoth the little hen.

The turkey blushed purple, but he managed to keep his temper.

They went on together, and the gander, who was a great botanist, told them the name of every plant they came across; and then he spoke very learnedly with the turkey about Greek roots and Romance particles.

A little farther on they met a charming little drake with a killing curled feather in his tail, quite an *accroche-cœur*, and the little hen ogled him and scratched the earth so prettily with her feet that at last she attracted the drake's notice.

After some cackling the little drake joined the tourists, notwithstanding the gurgling of the turkey and the hissing of the gander.

As they went on, they of course spoke of matrimony; the gander informed them that he was a bachelor, and the little drake added that he was an apostle of free love, at which the

little hen blushed, the turkey puffed himself up until he nearly burst, and the gander looked grave. The worst of it was, that the little drake insisted on discussing his theories and trying to make proselytes.

They were so intently attending to the little drake's wild theories, that they hardly perceived a hare standing on his hind legs, with his ears pricked up, listening to and looking at them.

The hare, having heard that they were globe-trotters, bent upon seeing the world and improving their minds, joined their party at once; they even, later on, took with them a tortoise and a hedgehog. At nightfall, they arrived in a dense forest, where they found a large hollow tree, in the trunk of which they all took shelter.

The little hen ensconced herself in a comfortable corner, and the drake nestled close by her; the hare lay at her feet, and the gander and turkey on either side. The tortoise and the hedgehog huddled themselves up and blocked up the opening, keeping watch lest harm should befall them.

They passed the greater part of the night awake, telling each other stories; and as it was in the dark, the tales they told were such as could not well be repeated in the broad daylight.

Soon, however, the laughter was more subdued; the chuckling even stopped. Sundry other noises instead were heard; then the drowsy voices of the story-tellers ceased; they had all fallen fast asleep.

Just then, while the night wind was shivering through the boughs, and the moon was silvering the boles of the ash-trees, or changing into diamonds the drops of dew in the buttercups and bluebells, a young vixen invited a shaggy wolf to come and have supper with her.

"This," she said, stopping before the hollow tree, "is my larder. You must take pot-luck, for I'm sure I don't know what there is in it. Still, it is seldom empty."

The wolf tried to poke his nose in, but he was stopped by the tortoise.

"They have rolled a stone at the door," said the wolf.

"So they have; but we can cast it aside," quoth the vixen.

They tried to push the tortoise aside; but he clung to the sides of the tree with his claws, so that it was impossible to remove him.

"Let's get over the stone," said the wolf.

They did their best to get over the tortoise, but they were met by the hedgehog.

"They've blocked up the place with brambles and thorns," said the vixen.

"So they have," replied the wolf.

"What's to be done?" asked the one.

"What's to be done?" replied the other,

"I hear rascally robbers rummaging around," gurgled the turkey-cock, in a deep, low tone.

"Did you hear that?" asked the wolf.

"Yes," said the vixen, rather uneasy.

"We'll catch them, we'll catch them," cackled the hen.

"For we are six, we are six," echoed the drake.

"There are six of them," said the vixen.

"And we are only two," retorted the wolf.

"So they'll catch us," added the vixen.

"Nice place your larder is," snarled the wolf.

"I'm afraid the police have got into it," stammered the vixen.

"Hiss, hiss, hiss!" uttered the gander, from within.

"That's the scratch of a match," said the vixen.

"If they see us we are lost," answered the wolf.

Just then the turkey, who had puffed himself up to his utmost, exploded with a loud puff.

"Firearms," whispered the wolf.

"It's either a mine or a bomb," quoth the vixen.

"Dynamite," faltered the wolf.

They did not wait to hear anything else; but, in their terror, they turned on their heels and scampered off as fast as their legs could carry them. In a twinkling they were both out of sight.

The travellers in the hollow tree laughed heartily; then they returned to their corners and went off to sleep. On the morrow, at daybreak, they resumed their wanderings, and I dare say they are travelling still, for it takes a long time to go round the world.

A few days afterwards Bellacic went to visit one of his vineyards. This, of all his land, was his pride and his boast. He had, besides, spent much money on it, for all the vines had been brought from Asia Minor, and the grapes were of a quality far superior to those which grew all around. The present crop was already promising to be a very fair one.

On reaching the first vines, Bellacic was surprised to perceive that all the leaves were limp, withering or dry. The next vines were even in a worse condition. He walked on, and, to his horror, he perceived that the whole of his vineyard was seared and blasted, as if warm summer had all at once changed into cold, bleak, frosty winter. Every stem had been cut down to the very roots. Gloomy and disconsolate he walked about, with head bent down, kicking every vine as he went on; all, all were fit for firewood now. It was not only a heavy loss of money, it was something worse. All his hopes, his pride, seemed to be crushed, humbled by it. He had loved this vineyard almost as much as his wife or his son, and now it was obliterated from the surface of the earth.

Had it been the work of Nature or the will of God, he would have bowed his head humbly, and said: "Thy will be done"; but he was exasperated to think that this had all been the work of a man—the vengeance of a coward—a craven-hearted rascal that, after all, he had never harmed, for this could be only Vranic's doing. In his passion he felt that if he had held the dastard at that moment, he would have crushed him under his feet like a reptile.

As Bellacic slowly arrived at the other end of the vineyard, he felt that just then he could not retrace his steps and cross the whole of his withering vines once more. He stopped there for a few moments, and looked around; then it seemed to him as if he had seen a man crouch down and disappear behind the bushes.

Could it be Vranic coming to gloat over him and enjoy his revenge? or was it not an image of his over-heated imagination?

He stood stock-still for a while, but nothing moved. He went slowly on, and then he heard a slight rustling noise. He advanced, crouching like a cat or a tiger, with fixed, dilated eyes and pricked-up ears. He saw the bushes move, he heard the sound of footsteps; then he saw the figure of a man bending low and running almost on all fours, so as not to be seen.

It was Vranic; now he could be clearly recognised. Bellacic ran after him; Vranic ran still faster. All at once he caught his foot on a root that had shot through the earth; he stumbled and fell down heavily. As he rose, Bellacic came up to him.

"Villain, scoundrel, murderer! is it you who—? Yes, it could be no other dog than you! Moreover, you wanted to see how they looked."

"What?" said Vranic, ghastly pale, trembling from head to foot. "What?—I really don't know what you mean."

"Do you say that you haven't cut down my vines?"

"I cut your vines? What vines?"

"Have, at least, the courage of your cowardly deeds, you sneak."

Thereupon Bellacic gave him a blow which made him reel. Vranic began to howl, and to take all the saints as witnesses of his innocence.

"Stop your lies, or I'll pluck that vile tongue of yours out of your mouth, and cast it in your face!"

Vranic thereupon took out his knife and tried to stab Bellacic. The two men fought.

"Is that the knife with which you cut my vines?"

"No; I kept it for you," replied Vranic, aiming a deadly blow at his adversary.

Bellacic parried the blow, and in the scuffle which ensued Vranic dropped his knife as his antagonist overpowered him and knocked him down.

Although Vranic was struggling with all his might, he was no match for Bellacic, who pinned him down and managed to pick up the dagger.

"You have cut down all my vines; now you yourself 'll have a taste of your own knife."

"Mercy! mercy! Do not kill me!"

"No, no; I'll not kill you," said Bellacic, kneeling down upon him; then, bending over him and catching hold of his right ear, he, with a quick, firm hand, severed it at a stroke.

Vranic was howling loud enough to be heard miles off.

"Now for the other," said Bellacic. "I'll nail them to a post in my vineyard as a scarecrow for future vermin of your kind."

Vranic, however, wriggled, and, with an effort, managed to rise; then he took to his heels, holding his bleeding head and yelling with pain and fear.

Bellacic made no attempt to stop him, or cut off his other ear, as he had threatened to do; he quietly walked away, perfectly satisfied with the punishment he had inflicted on the scoundrel. Instead of returning home he thought it more prudent to go and

spend the night in the neighbouring convent, and thus avoid any conflict with the police.

Bellacic, who had ever been generous to the monks, was now welcomed by the brotherhood; the best wine was brought forth and a lay servant was at once despatched to town to find out what Vranic had done, and, on the morrow, one of the friars themselves went to reconnoitre and to inform Mara that her husband was safe and in perfect health.

Upon that very day the *Spera in Dio* cast anchor in the harbour of Budua, and Uros reached home just when the police had come to arrest his father for having cut off Vranic's ear; and the confusion that ensued can hardly be described.

For the sake of doing their duty, the guards, who were Buduans, made a pretence of looking for Bellacic; they knew very well that he would not be silly enough to wait till they came to arrest him.

Mara, like all women in such an emergency, was thoroughly upset to see the police in her house. She threw her arms round her son, and begged him to keep quiet, and not to interfere in the matter, lest their new masters' wrath should be visited upon him. Anyhow, as the police tried to make themselves as little obnoxious as they possibly could, and as they went through their duties with as much grace, and as little zeal, as possible, Uros did not interfere to prevent them from discharging their unpleasant task.

The poor mother wept for joy at seeing her son, and for grief at the thought that her husband was an exile from his house at his time of life; but just then the good friar came in and brought news from Bellacic, and comforted the family, saying that in a very few days the whole affair would be quieted, and their guest would be able to come back home.

"And will he remain with you all that time?" asked Mara.

"We should be very pleased to have him," replied the friar; "but for his sake and ours, it were better for him to cross the mountain and remain at Cettinje till the storm has blown over."

"And when does he start?"

"This evening."

"May I come and see him before he goes?" asked Mara.

"Certainly, and if you wish to go at once, I'll wait here a little while longer, just not to awaken suspicion."

Mara, therefore, went off at once, and the friar followed her a quarter of an hour afterwards.

Uros, on seeing Milena, felt as if he were suffocating; his heart began to beat violently, and then it seemed to stop. He, for a moment, gasped for breath. She, too, only recovering from her illness, felt faint at seeing him.

Uros found her looking handsomer and younger than before; her complexion was so pale, her skin so transparent, that her eyes not only looked much larger, but bluer and more luminous than ever. To Uros they seemed rather like the eyes of an angel than those of a woman. Her fingers were so long and thin; her hand was of a lily whiteness, as it nestled in Uros' brown, brawny and sunburnt one.

All her sprightliness was gone; the roguish smile had vanished from her lips. Not only her features, but her voice had also changed; it was now so pure, so weak, so silvery in its sound; so veiled withal, like a voice coming from afar and not from the person sitting by you. It was as painful to hear as if it had been a voice from beyond the grave, and it sent a pang to the young man's heart.

As he put his arm around her frail waist, the tears rose to his eyes, and he could hardly find the words, or utter them softly enough, to say to her: "Milena, *srce moja*," (my heart) "do you still love me?"

"Hush, Uros!" said she, shuddering; "never speak to me of love again."

"Milena!"

"Yes," continued she, sighing, "my sin has found me out. Had I behaved as I should have done, so many people would not have come to grief. Vranic might still have been alive."

"But you never gave him any encouragement, did you?" said Uros, misunderstanding her meaning.

The tears started to her eyes. Weak as she was, she felt everything acutely.

"Do you think I could have done such a thing? And yet you are right; I used to be so light once; but that seems to me so long, so very long ago. But I have grown old since then, terribly old; I have suffered so much."

"I was wrong, dearest; forgive me. I remember how that fiend persecuted you. I was near sending him to hell myself, and it was a pity I didn't; anyhow, I was so glad when I heard that Radonic had——"

"Hush! I was the cause of that man's death. Through it my

husband became an outcast, and now your father has been obliged to flee from his home——”

“How can you blame yourself for all these things? It is only because you have been so ill and weak that you have got such fancies into your head; but now that I am here, and you know how much I love you——”

She shuddered spasmodically, and a look of intense pain and wretchedness came over her features.

“Never speak of love any more, unless you wish to kill me.”

Uros looked at her astonished.

“I know that in all this I am entirely to blame; but if a woman can atone for her sin by suffering, I think——”

“Then you do not love me any more?” asked Uros, dejectedly.

She looked up into his eyes, and, in that deep and earnest glance of hers, she seemed to give up her soul to him. If months ago she had loved him with all the levity of a reckless child, now she loved him with all the pathos of a woman.

Uros caught her in his arms and pressed her to his heart. She leaned her head on his shoulder, as if unable to keep it upright; an ashy paleness spread itself over all her features, her very lips lost all their colour, her eyelids drooped; she had fainted. Uros, terrified, thought she was dying, nay, dead.

“Milena, my love, my angel, speak to me, for Heaven’s sake!” he cried.

After a few moments, however, she slowly began to recover, and then burst into a hysteric fit of sobbing.

When at last she came again to her senses, she begged Uros never to speak to her of love, as that would be her death.

“Besides,” added she, “now that I am better, I shall return to my parents, for I can never go back to that dreadful house of mine. I could never cross its threshold again.”

Uros was dismayed. He had been looking forward to his return with such joy, and now that he was back, the woman he worshipped was about to flee from him.

“Do not look so gloomy,” said she, trying to cheer him; “remember that——”

Her faltering, weak voice died in her throat; she could not bring herself to finish her phrase.

“What?” asked Uros, below his breath.

“That I’m another man’s wife.”

"Oh, Milena! don't say such horrible things; it's almost like blasphemy."

"And still it's true; besides——"

Her voice, which had become steady, broke down again.

"Besides what?" said Uros, after a moment's pause, leaving her time to breathe.

"You'll be a husband yourself, some day," she added in an undertone.

"Never," burst forth Uros, fiercely, "unless I am your husband."

"Hush!" said she, shuddering with fear and crossing herself. "Your father wishes you to marry, and — I wish it too," she added in a whisper.

"No, you don't, Milena; that's a lie," he replied, passionately. "Could you swear it on the holy Cross?"

"Yes, Uros, if it's for your good, I wish it, too. You know that I——"

Her pale face grew of deep red hue; even her hands flushed as the blood rushed impetuously upwards.

"Well?" asked Uros, anxiously.

"That I love you far more than I do myself."

He clasped her in his arms tenderly, and kissed her shoulders, not daring to kiss her lips.

"Would it be right for me to marry a young girl whom I do not love, when all my soul is yours?"

"Still," said she, shuddering, "our love is a sin before God and man."

"Why did you not tell me so when I first knew you? Then, perhaps, I might not have loved you."

Milena's head sank down on her bosom, her eyes filled with tears, there was a low sound in her throat. Then, in a voice choking with sobs, she said:

"You are right, Uros; I was to blame, very much to blame. I was as thoughtless as a child; in fact, I was a child, and I only wanted to be amused. But since then I have grown so old. Lying ill in bed, almost dying, I was obliged to think of all the foolish things I said and did, so——"

"So you do not love me any more," he said, abruptly; but seeing the look of sorrow which shadowed Milena's face, he added: "My heart, forgive me; it is only my love for you that makes me so peevish. When you ask me to forget you ——"

"And still you must try and do so. The young girl your father has chosen for you——"

"Loves some one else," interrupted Uros.

Milena looked up with an expression of joy she vainly tried to control. The young man thereupon told her the mistake which had taken place, and all that had happened the last time he and his friend had been at Zara.

"Giulianic has taken a solemn oath that I shall never marry his daughter, and as Milenko is in love with her, I hope my father will release his friend from the promise——"

Just then the door opened, and Mara came in.

"Well, mother," said Uros, "what news do you bring to us?"

"Your father is safe, my boy. He left this morning for Montenegro; by this time he must have crossed the border. On the whole, the police tried to look for him where they knew they could not find him. He left word that he wishes to see you very much, and begs you to go up to Cettinje as soon as you can."

"I'll go and see Milenko, so that he may take sole charge of the ship, and then I'll start this very evening."

"No, child, there is no such hurry! Rest to-night; you can leave to-morrow, or the day after."

Having seen Milenko, and entrusted the ship for a few days entirely to him, Uros started early on the next morning for the black mountains.

Mara could hardly tear herself away from him. She had been waiting so eagerly for his arrival, and now, when he had come home, she was obliged to part from him.

"Do not stay there too long, for then you will only return to start, and I'll have scarcely seen you."

"No, I'll only stay there one or two days, no more."

"And then I hope you'll not mix up in any quarrel. I'm so sorry you've come back just now."

"Come, mother," said Uros, smiling pleasantly as he stood on the doorstep before starting, "what harm can befall me? I haven't mixed up in any of the *karvarina* business, nor am I running away as an outlaw; if we have some enemies they are all here, not there. I suppose I'll find father at Zwillievic's or some other friend's house. Your fears are quite unfounded, are they not?"

All Uros said was quite true, but still his mother refused to

be comforted. As he bade Milena good-bye, "Remember!" she whispered to him, and she slipped back into her room.

Did she wish him to remember that she was Radonic's wife?

Uros thereupon started with a heavy heart; everybody seemed to have changed since he had left Budua.

The early morning was grey and cloudy, and although Uros was very fond of his father, and anxious to see him, still he was loth to leave his home.

At the town gate Uros met Milenko, who had come to walk part of the way with him. Uros, who was thinking of his mother and especially of Milena, had quite forgotten his bosom friend. Seeing him so unexpectedly, his heart expanded with a sudden movement of joy, and he felt at that moment as if they had met after having been parted for ages.

"Well?" asked Milenko, as they walked along. "Do you remember when we first started from Budua, we thought that we'd have reached the height of happiness the day we'd sail on our own ship?"

"I remember."

"The ship is almost our own, and happiness is farther off than ever."

"Wait till we come back next voyage, and things might look quite different then."

The sun just then began to dawn; the dark and frowning mountains lost all their grimness as a pale golden halo lighted up their tops; drowsy nature seemed to awake with a smile, and looked like a rosy infant does when, on opening its eyes, it sees its mother's beaming face.

The two friends walked on. Uros spoke of the woman he loved, and Milenko listened with a lover's sympathy.

Milenko walked with his friend for about two hours; then he bade Uros good-bye, promising him to go at once to his mother and Milena, and tell them how he was faring.

Uros began to climb up the rugged path leading towards Montenegro. After a quarter of an hour, the two friends stopped, shouted "Ahoy!" to each other, waved their hands and then resumed their walk. Towards nightfall Uros reached the village where Zwillievic lived.

With a beating heart, sore feet and aching calves he trudged on towards the house, which, as he hoped, was to be the goal of his journey. As he pushed the door open he shuddered,

thinking that instead of his father he might happen to find Milena's husband.

The apartment into which he entered was a large and rather low room, serving as a kitchen, a parlour, a dining and a sleeping room. It was, in fact, the only room of the house. Its walls were cleanly whitewashed; not a speck of dust could be seen anywhere, nor a cobweb amidst the rafters in the ceiling. The inner part was used for sleeping purposes, for against the walls on either side there were two huge beds. By the beds, two boxes—one of plain deal, like the chests used by sailors; the other, made of cypress-wood and quaintly carved—contained the family linen. In the middle of the room stood a rough, massive table, darkened and polished by daily use, and some three-legged stools around it. The walls were decorated with the real wealth of the family—weapons of every shape, age and kind. Short guns, the butt ends of which were all inlaid with mother-of-pearl; long carbines with silver incrustations; modern rifles and fowling-pieces; swords, scimitars, daggers, yatagans; pistols and blunderbusses with niello and filigree silver-work, gemmed like jewels or church ornaments. These trophies were heirlooms of centuries. Over one of the beds there was a silver- and gold-plated Byzantine icon, over the other a hideous German print of St. George. The Prince of Cappadocia, who was killing a grass-green dragon, wore for the occasion a yellow mantle, a red doublet and blue tights. Under each of these images there was a fount of holy water and a little oil-lamp.

As Uros stepped in, Milena's mother, who was standing by the hearth, preparing the supper, turned round to see who had just come in. She looked at him, but as he evidently was a stranger to her, she came up a step or two towards him.

"Good evening, *domacica*," for she was not only the lady of the house, but the wife of the head of the family and the chief of the clan, or tribe.

"Good evening, *gospod*," said she, hesitatingly.

"You do not know me, I think. I am a kind of cousin of yours, Uros Bellacic."

"What, is it you, my boy? I might have known you by your likeness to your mother; but when I saw you last you were only a little child, and now you are quite a grown-up man," added she, looking at him with motherly fondness. "Have you walked all the way from Budna?"

"Yes, I left home this morning."

"Then you must be tired. Come and sit down, my boy."

"I am rather tired; you see, we sailors are not accustomed to walk much. But tell me first, have you seen my father? Is he staying with you?"

"Yes, he came yesterday. He is out just now, but he'll soon be back with Zwillievic. Sit down and rest," said she, and let me give you some water to wash, for you must be travel-sore and dusty."

As Uros sat down, she, after the Eastern fashion, bent to unlace his *opanke*; but he, unaccustomed to be waited upon by women, would not allow her to perform such a menial act for him.

He had hardly finished his ablutions when his father and the *gospodar* came in. Seeing his son, Bellacic stretched out his arms and clasped him to his heart. Then they began talking about all that had taken place since they had seen each other; and, supper being served, Uros, while he ate with a good appetite, related all the adventures of his seafaring life, and did his best to keep his father amused. At the end of the meal, when everyone was in a good-humour, the pipes being lit and the *raki* brought forth, he told them how Milenko had fallen in love with the girl who ought to have been his bride, how she reciprocated his affection, and the many complications that followed, until Giulianic swore, in great wrath, that he, Uros, should never marry his daughter. Although this part of the story did not amuse the father as much as it did the rest of the company, still it was related with such graphic humour that he could not help joining in the laughter.

On the morrow, Bellacic, wanting to have a quiet talk with his son, proposed that they should go and see a little of the country, and, perhaps, meet Radonic, who was said to be coming back from the neighbourhood of Scutari.

As they walked on, Bellacic spoke of his lost vineyard, and of his rashness in cutting off Vranic's ear; then he added:

"Remember, now that you are going back to Budua, you must promise me that, as long as you are there, you'll not mix up in this stupid *karvarina* business. I know that I am asking much, for if we old men are hasty, recommending you who are young and hot-headed to be cool is like asking the fire not to burn, or the sun not to shine; still, for your mother's sake and for mine, you'll keep aloof from those reptiles of Vranics, will you not?"

Uros promised to do his best and obey.

"I'd have liked to see you married and settled in life," and Bellacic cast a questioning glance at his son.

Uros looked down and twisted the ends of his short and crisp moustache.

"It is true you are very young still; it is we—your mother and I—who are getting old."

Uros continued to walk in silence by his father's side.

"If Ivanka is in love with your friend, and Giulianic is willing to give her to him, I am not the man to make any objections. The only thing I'd like to know is whether it is solely for Milenko's sake that you acted as you did."

Uros tried to speak, but the words he would utter stuck in his throat.

"Then it is as I thought," added Bellacic, seeing his son's confusion; "you love some one else."

Uros looked up at his father for all reply.

"Answer me," said Bellacic, tenderly.

"Yes," said the young man, in a whisper.

"A young girl?"

"No."

"A married woman?" asked the father, lifting his brows with a look of pain in his eyes.

"Yes."

"A relation of ours?"

"Yes."

"Milena?"

Uros nodded.

Just then, as they turned the corner of the road, they met a crowd of men coming towards them; it was a band of blood-stained Montenegrins returning from an encounter with the Turks. They were bearing a wounded man upon a stretcher.

"Milena would have been the girl your mother and I might have chosen for your bride; and, indeed, we have learnt to love her as a daughter; but fate has decreed otherwise."

They now came up to the foremost man of the band.

"Who is wounded?" asked Bellacic of him.

"Radonic," answered he.

"Is the wound a bad one?"

"He is dying!" replied the Montenegrin, in a whisper.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VAMPIRE

VRANIC, having found out that the Austrian law could do nothing for him, except punish him for his crime in cutting down the vines of a man who had done him no harm, shut himself up at home to nurse his wounded head, to brood over his revenge, and pity himself for all the mishaps that had befallen him. The more he pitied himself, the more irritable he grew, and the more he considered himself a poor persecuted wretch. He durst not go out for fear of being laughed at; and, in fact, when he did go, the children in the streets began to call him names, to ask him what he had done with his ears, and whether he liked cutting people's vines down.

With his bickering and peevish temper, not only his fast friends grew weary of him, but his own family forsook him; his very brother, at last, could not abide his saturnine humour, and left him. He then began to drink to try and drown his troubles; still, he only took enough to muddle his brains, and, moreover, the greater quantity of spirits he consumed the more sullen he grew.

Having but one idea in his head—that is, the great wrong that had been done to him—he hardly fell asleep at nights but he was at once haunted by fearful dreams. His murdered brother would at once appear before him and ask him—urge him—to avenge his death:

“While you are enjoying the inheritance I left you, I am groaning in hell-fire, and my murderer is not only left free, but he is even made much of.”

Masses were said for the dead man's soul, still that was of no avail; Vranic's dreams got always more frightful. The *morina*, the dreadful *mara* or nightmare, took up its dwelling in the tailor's house. No sooner did the poor man close his eyes than the ponderous ghost came hovering over him, and at last crushed him with its weight. The sign of the pentacle was

drawn on every door and window. A witch drew it for him on paper with magical ink, and he placed the paper under his pillow. He put another on the sheets; then the nightmare left him alone, and other evil spirits came in its stead. Not knowing the names of these evil spirits or their nature, it was a difficult task to find out the planet under which they were subjected, the sign which they obeyed, and what charm was potent enough to scare them away.

One night (it was about the hour when his brother had been murdered) the tailor was lying on his bed in a half-wakeful slumber—that is to say, his drowsy body was benumbed, but his mind was still quite awake, when all at once he was roused by the noise of a loud wind blowing within the house. Outside, everything was perfectly quiet, but inside a distant door seemed to have been opened down in some cellar, and a draught was blowing up with a moaning, booming sound. You might have fancied that a grave had been opened and a ghastly gale was blowing from the hollow depths of hell below, and that it came wheezing up. It was dreadful to hear, for it had such a dismal sound.

Perhaps it was only his imagination, but Vranic thought that this mysterious draught was cold, damp and chilly; that it had an earthy, rank smell of mildew as it blew by him.

He lay there shivering, hardly daring to breathe, putting his tongue between his chattering teeth not to make a noise, and listening to that strange, weird blast as at last it died far away in a faint, imperceptible sigh.

No sooner had the sound of the wind entirely subsided than he heard a cadenced noise of footsteps coming from afar. Were these steps out of the house or inside? he could not tell. He heard them draw nearer and ever nearer; they seemed to come across the wall of the room, as if bricks and stones were no obstacle to his uncanny visitor; now they were in his room, walking up to his bed. Appalled with terror, Vranic looked towards the place from where the footsteps came, but he could not see anybody. Trembling as if with a fit of palsy, he cast a fearful, furtive glance all around, even in the furthest corner of the room; not the shadow of a ghost was to be seen; nevertheless, the footsteps of the invisible person grew louder as they approached at a slow, sure, inexorable pace.

At last they stopped; they were by his bed. Vranic felt the breath of a person on his very face.

Except a person who has felt it, no one can realise the horror of having an invisible being leaning over you, of feeling his breath on your face.

Vranic tried to rise, but he at once came in close contact with the unseen monster ; two cold, clammy, boneless hands gripped him and pinned him down ; he vainly struggled to get free, but he was as a baby in the hands of his invisible foe. In a few seconds he was entirely mastered, cowed down, overcome, panting, breathless. When he tried to scream, a limp, nerveless hand, as soft as a huge toad, was placed upon his mouth, shutting it up entirely, and impeding all power of utterance. Then the ponderous mass of the ghost came upon him, crushed him, smothered him. Fainting with fear, his strength and his senses forsook him at the same time, and he swooned away.

When he came back to life, the cold, grey light of the dawning day, pouring in through the half-closed shutters, gave the room a squalid, lurid look. His head was not exactly paining him, but it felt drained of all its contents, and as light as an empty skull, or an old poppy head in which the seeds are rattling. He looked around. There was nothing unusual in the room ; everything was just as it had been upon the previous evening. Had his struggle with the ghost been but a dream ? He tried to move, to rise, but all his limbs were as weary and sore as if he had really fought and been beaten. Nay, his whole body was as weak as if he had had some long illness and was only now convalescent. He recalled to mind all the details of the struggle, he looked at the places where he felt numb and sore, and everywhere he remarked livid stains which he had not seen before. He lifted himself up on his right elbow ; to his horror and consternation, there were two or three spots of blood upon the white sheet.

He felt faint and sick at that sight ; he understood everything. His had not been a dream ; his gruesome visitor was a frightful ghost, a terrible *vukodlaci*, which had fought with him and sucked his blood. His brother had become a loathsome vampire ; he was the first victim.

For a moment he remained bewildered, unable to think ; then when he did manage to collect his wandering senses, the terrible reality of his misfortune almost drove him mad again.

The ghost, having tasted his blood, would not leave him till it had drained him to the very last drop. He was a lost man ; no medical aid could be of any use ; nourishing food, wine and tonics

might prolong his agony a few days longer and no more. He was doomed to a sure death. Daily—as if in a decline—he saw himself wasting away, for the vampire would suck the very marrow of his bones.

His was a dreary life, indeed, and yet he clung to it with might and main. The days passed on wearily, and he tried to hope against hope itself; but he was so weak and dispirited that the slightest noise made him shiver and grow pale. An unexpected footstep, the opening or shutting of a door, slackened or accelerated the beating of his heart.

With fear and trembling he waited for night to come on, and when the sun went down—when darkness came over the earth—his terror grew apace. Still, where was he to go? He had not a single friend on the surface of the earth. He, therefore, drank several glasses of spirits, muttered his prayers and went to bed. No sooner had he fallen asleep than he fell again a prey to the vampire.

On the third night he determined not to go to bed, but to remain awake, and thus wait for the arrival of his gruesome guest. Still, at the last moment his courage failed him, so he went to an old man who lived hard by. He promised to make him a new waistcoat if he would only give him a rug to sleep on, and tell him a story until he got drowsy.

The old man complied willingly, above all as Vranic had brought a *bukara* of wine with him, so he at once began the story of

THE PRIEST AND HIS COOK.

In the village of Steino there lived an old priest who was exceedingly wealthy, but who was, withal, as miserly as he was rich. Although he had fields which stretched farther than the eye could reach, fat pastures, herds and flocks; although his cellars were filled with mellow wine, his barns were bursting with the grace of God; although abundance reigned in his house, still he was never known to have given a crust of bread to a beggar or a glass of wine to a weary old man.

He lived all alone with a skinflint of an old cook, as stingy as himself, who would rather by far have seen an apple rot than give it to a hungry child whose mouth watered for it.

Those two grim old fogeys, birds of one feather, cared for no one else in this world except for each other, and, in fact, the people in Steino said—, but people in villages

have bad tongues, so it's useless to repeat what was said about them.

The priest had a nephew, a smith, a good-hearted, bright-eyed, burly kind of a fellow, beloved by all the village, except by his uncle, whom he had greatly displeased because he had married a bonny lass of the neighbouring village of Smarje, instead of taking as a wife the—, well, the cook's niece, though, between us and the wall, the cook was never known to have had a sister or a brother either, and the people—, but, as I said before, the people were apt to say nasty things about their priest.

The smith, who was quite a pauper, had several children, for the poorer a man is the more babies his wife presents him with—women everywhere are such unreasonable creatures—and whenever he applied to his uncle for a trifle, the uncle would spout the Scriptures in Latin, saying something about the unfitness of casting pearls before pigs, and that he would rather see him hanged than help him.

Once—it was in the middle of winter—the poor smith had been without any work for days and days. He had spent his last penny; then the baker would not give him any more bread on credit, and at last, on a cold, frosty night, the poor children had been obliged to go to bed supperless.

The smith, who had sworn a few days before never again to put his foot in the priest's house, was, in his despair, obliged to humble himself, and go and beg for a loaf of bread, with which to satisfy his children on the morrow.

Before he knocked at the door, he went and peeped in through the half-closed shutters, and he saw his uncle and the cook seated by a roaring fire, with their feet on the fender, munching roasted chestnuts and drinking mulled wine. Their shining lips still seemed greasy from the fat sausages they had eaten for supper, and, as he sniffed at the window, he fancied the air was redolent with the spices of black-pudding. The smell made his mouth water and his hungry stomach rumble.

The poor man knocked at the door with a trembling hand; his legs began to quake, he had not eaten the whole of that long day; but then he thought of his hungry children, and knocked with a steadier hand.

The priest, hearing the knock, thought it must be some pious parishioner bringing him a fat pullet or perhaps a sleek sucking-pig, the price of a mass to be said on the morrow; but

when, instead, he saw his nephew, looking as mean and as sheepish as people usually do when they go a-begging, he was greatly disappointed.

"What do you want, bothering here at this time of the night?" asked the old priest, gruffly.

"Uncle," said the poor man, dejectedly.

"I suppose you've been drinking, as usual; you stink of spirits."

"Spirits, in sooth! when I haven't a penny to bless me."

"Oh, if it's only a blessing you want, here, take one and go!"

And the priest lifted up his thumb and the two fingers, and uttered something like "*Dominus vobiscum*," and then waved him off; whilst the old shrew skulking near him uttered a croaking kind of laugh, and said that a priest's blessing was a priceless boon.

"Yes," replied the smith, "upon a full stomach; but my children have gone to bed supperless, and I haven't had a crust of bread the whole of the day."

"'Man shall not live by bread alone,' the Scriptures say, and you ought to know that if you are a Christian, sir."

"Eh? I daresay the Scriptures are right, for priests surely do not live on bread alone; they fatten on plump pullets and crisp pork-pies."

"Do you mean to bully me, you unbelieving beggar?"

"Bully you, uncle!" said the burly man, in a piteous tone; "only think of my starving children."

"He begrudges his uncle the grub he eats," shrieked the old cat of a cook.

"I'd have given you something, but the proud man should be punished," said the wrathful priest, growing purple in the face.

"Oh, uncle, my children!" sobbed the poor man.

"What business has a man to have a brood of brats when he can't earn enough to buy bread for them?" said the cook, aloud, to herself.

"Will you hold your tongue, you cantankerous old cat?" said the smith to the cook.

The old vixen began to howl, and the priest, in his anger, cursed his nephew, telling him that he and his children could starve for all he cared.

The smith thereupon went home, looking as piteous as a tailless turkey-cock; and while his children slept and, perhaps, dreamt of *kolaci*, he told his wife the failure he had met with.

"Your uncle is a brute," said she.

"He's a priest, and all priests are brutes, you know."

"Well, I don't know about all of them, for I heard my great-grandmother say that once upon a time there lived——"

"Oh, there are casual exceptions to every rule!" said her husband. "But, now, what's to be done?"

"Listen," said the wife, who was a shrewd kind of woman; "we can't let the children starve, can we?"

"No, indeed!"

"Then follow my advice. I know of a grass that, given to a horse, or an ox, or a sheep, or a goat, makes the animal fall down, looking as if it were dead."

"Well, but you don't mean to feed the children with this grass, do you?" said the smith, not seeing the drift of what she meant.

"No; but you could secretly go and give some to your uncle's fattest ox."

"So," said the husband, scratching his head.

"Once the animal falls down dead, he'll surely give it to you, as no butcher 'll buy it; we'll kill it and thus be provided with meat for a long time. Besides, you can sell the bones, the horns, the hide, and get a little money besides."

"And for to-morrow?"

"I'll manage to borrow a few potatoes and a cup of milk."

On the next day the wife went and got the grass, and the smith, unseen, managed to go and give it to his uncle's fattest ox. A few hours afterwards the animal was found dead.

On hearing that his finest ox was found in the stable lying stiff and stark the priest nearly had a fit; and his grief was still greater when he found out that not a man in the village would offer him a penny for it, so when his nephew came he was glad enough to give it to him to get rid of it.

The cook, who had prompted the priest to make a present of the ox to his nephew, hoped that the smith and all his family would be poisoned by feeding on carrion flesh.

"But," said the uncle, "bring me back the bones, the horns, and the hide."

To everyone's surprise, and to the old cook's rage, the smith and his children fed on the flesh of the dead ox, and throve on it. After the ox had all been eaten up, the priest lost a goat, and then a goose, in the same way, and the smith and his family ate them up with evident gusto.

After that, the old cook began to suspect foul play on the part of the smith, and she spoke of her suspicions to her master.

The priest got into a great rage, and wanted to go at once to the police and accuse his nephew of sorcery.

"No," said the cook, "we must catch them on the hip, and then we can act."

"But how are we to find them out?"

After brooding over the matter for some days, the cook be-thought herself that the best plan would be to shut herself up in a cupboard, and have it taken to the nephew's house.

The priest, having approved of her plan, put it at once into execution.

"I have," said the uncle to the nephew, "an old cupboard which needs repairing; will you take it into your house and keep it for a few days?"

"Willingly," said the nephew, who had not the slightest suspicion of the trap laid to catch him.

The cupboard was brought, and put in the only room the smith possessed; the children looked at it with wonder, for they had never seen such a big piece of furniture before. The wife had some suspicion. Still, she kept her own counsel.

Soon afterwards the remains of the goose were brought on the table, and, as the children licked the bones, the husband and wife discussed what meat they were to have for the forthcoming days—was it to be pork, veal, or turkey?

As they were engrossed with this interesting topic, a slight, shrill sound came out of the cupboard.

"What's that?" said the wife, whose ears were on the alert.

"I didn't hear anything," said the smith.

"*Apshee*," was the sound that came again from the cupboard.

"There, did you hear?" asked the wife.

"Yes; but from where did that unearthly sound come?"

The wife, without speaking, winked at her husband and pointed to the cupboard.

"*Papshee*," was now heard louder than ever.

The children stopped gnawing the goose's bones; they opened their greasy mouths and their eyes to the utmost and looked scared.

"There's some one shut in the cupboard," said the smith, jumping up, and snatching up his tools.

A moment afterwards the door flew open, and to everyone's surprise, except the wife's, the old cook was found standing bolt

upright in the empty space and listening to what they were saying.

The old woman, finding herself discovered, was about to scream, but the smith caught her by the throat and gave her such a powerful squeeze, that before knowing what he was doing, he had choked the cook to death.

The poor man was in despair, for he had never meant to commit a murder—he only wanted to prevent the old shrew from screaming.

“*Bog me ovari!* what is to become of me now?”

“Pooh!” said the wife, shrugging her shoulders; “she deserves her fate; as we make our bed, so must we lie.”

“Yes,” quoth the smith, “but if they find out that I’ve strangled her, they’ll hang me.”

“And who’ll find you out?” said she. “Let’s put a potato in her mouth and lock up the cupboard again; they’ll think that she choked herself eating potatoes.”

The smith followed his wife’s advice, and early on the morrow the priest came again and asked for his press.

“Talking the matter over with the cook,” said he, “I’ve decided not to have my cupboard repaired, so I’ve come to take it back.”

“Your cook is right,” said the smith’s wife; “she’s a wise old woman, your cook is.”

“Very,” said the priest, uncomfortably.

“There’s more in her head than you suppose,” said the wife, thinking of the potato.

“There is,” said the priest.

“Give my kind respects to your cook,” said the wife as the men were taking the cupboard away.

“Thank you,” said the priest, “I’ll certainly do so.”

About an hour afterwards the priest came back, ghastly pale, to his nephew, and taking him aside, said:

“My dear nephew—my only kith-and-kin—a great misfortune has befallen me.”

“What is it, uncle?” asked the smith.

“My cook,” said the priest, lowering his voice, “has—eating potatoes—somehow or other—I don’t know how—choked herself.”

“Oh!” quoth the smith, turning pale, “it is a great misfortune; but you’ll say masses for her soul and have her properly buried.”

“But the fact is,” interrupted the priest, “she looks so dreadful, with her eyes starting out of their sockets, and her mouth wide open, that I’m quite frightened of her, and besides, if the people see her they’ll say that I murdered her.”

“Well, and how am I to help you?”

“Come and take her away, in a sack if you like; then bury her in some hole, or throw her down a well. Do whatever you like, as long as I am rid of her.”

The smith scratched his head.

“You must help me; you are my only relation. You know that whatever I have ’ll go to you some day, so——”

“And when people ask what has become of her?”

“I’ll say she’s gone to her—her niece.”

“Well, I don’t mind helping you, as long as I don’t get into a scrape myself.”

“No, no! How can you get into trouble?”

The priest went off, and soon afterwards the smith went to his uncle’s house, and taking a big sack, shoved the cook into it and tied the sack up, put it on his shoulders and trudged off.

“Here,” said the uncle, “take this florin to get a glass of wine on the way, and I hope I’ll never see her any more—nor,” he added to himself—“you either.”

It was a warm day, and the cook was heavy. The poor man was in a great perspiration; his throat was parched; the road was dusty and hilly. After an hour’s march he stopped at a roadside inn to drink a glass of wine. He quaffed it down at a gulp and then he had another, and again another, so that when he came out everything was rather hazy and blurred. Seeing some carts of hay at the door which were going to the next town, he asked permission to get on top of one of the waggons. The permission was not only granted, but the carter even helped him to hoist his sack on top. The smith, in return, got down and offered the man a glass of wine for his kindness. Then he again got on the cart and went off to sleep. An hour or two afterwards, when he awoke, the sack was gone. Had it slipped down? had it been stolen from him?—he could not tell. He did not ask for it, but he only congratulated himself at having so dexterously got rid of the cook, and at once went back home.

That evening his children had hardly been put to bed when the door was opened, and his uncle, looking pale and scared, came in panting.

"She's back, she's back!" he gasped.

"Who is back?" asked the astonished smith.

"Why, she, the cook."

"Alive?" gasped the smith.

"No, dead in the sack."

"Then how the deuce did she get back?"

"How? I ask you how?"

"I really don't know how. I dug a hole ten feet deep, half filled the hole with lime, then the other half with stones and earth, and I planted a tree within the hole, and covered the earth all around with sods. It gave me two days' work. I'll take and show you the place if you like."

The priest looked at his nephew, bewildered.

"But, tell me," continued the smith, "how did she come back?"

"Well, they brought me a waggon of hay, and on the waggon there was a sack, which I thought must contain potatoes or turnips which some parishioner sent me, so I had the sack put in the kitchen. When the men had gone I undid the sack, and to my horror out pops the cook's ugly head, staring at me with her jutting goggle-eyes and her gaping mouth, looking like a horrid jack-in-the-box. Do come and take her away, or she'll drive me out of my senses; but come at once."

The smith went back to the priest's house, tied the cook in the sack, and then putting the sack on his shoulders, he carried his load away. He had made up his mind to go and chuck her down one of those almost bottomless shafts which abound in the stony plains of the Karst.

He walked all night; at daybreak he saw a man sleeping on the grass by the highway, having near him a sack exactly like the one he was carrying.

"What a good joke it'll be," thought he, "to take that sack and put mine in its stead."

He at once stepped lightly on the grass, put down the cook, took up the other sack, which was much lighter than his own, and scampered back home as fast as his weary legs could carry him.

An hour afterwards the sleeping man awoke, took up his sack, which he was surprised to find so much heavier than it had been when he had gone off to sleep, and then went on his way.

That evening the priest came back to his nephew's house,

looking uglier and more ghastly, if possible, than the evening before. Panting and gasping, with a weak and broken voice :

“She’s back again,” he said in a hoarse whisper.

The smith burst out laughing.

“It’s no laughing matter,” quoth the priest, with a long face.

“No, indeed, it isn’t,” replied the nephew; “only, tell me how she came back.”

“A pedlar, an honest man whom I sometimes help by lending him a trifle on his goods—merely out of charity—brought me a sack of shoes, begging me to keep it for him till he found a stall for to-morrow’s fair. I told him to put the sack in the kitchen, and he did so. When he had gone, I thought I’d just see what kind of shoes he had for sale, and whether he had a pair that fitted me. I opened the sack, and I almost fainted when I saw the frightful face of the cook staring at me.”

“And now,” asked the smith, “am I to carry her away again, for you know, uncle, she is rather heavy; and besides——”

“No,” replied the priest; “I’ll go away myself for a few days; during that time drown her, burn or bury her; in fact, do what you like with her, as long as you get rid of her. Perhaps, knowing I’m not at home, she’ll not come back. In the meanwhile, as you are my only relation, come and live in my house and take care of my things as if they were your own; and they’ll be yours soon enough, for this affair has made an old man of me.”

The priest went home, followed by his nephew. Arriving there, he went to the stable, saddled the mare, got on her, gave his nephew his blessing, bade him take care of his house, and trotted off. No sooner had he gone than the smith saddled the stallion, then went and took the cook out of the sack, tied her on the stallion’s saddle, then let the horse loose to follow the mare.

The poor priest had not gone a mile before he heard a horse galloping behind him, and, fearing that it was the police coming to bring him back, he spurred the mare and galloped on; but the faster he rode, the quicker the stallion galloped after him.

Looking round, the priest, to his horror and dismay, saw his cook, with her eyes starting wildly out of their sockets, and her

horrid mouth gaping as black as the hole of hell, chasing him, nay, she was only a few yards behind.

The terrified priest spurred on the mare, which began to gallop along the highway; but withal she flew like an arrow, the stallion was gaining ground at every step. The priest, fainting with fear, lost all his presence of mind; he then spurred the mare across country. The poor animal reared at first, and then began to gallop over the stony plain; no obstacles could stop her, she jumped over bushes and briars, stumbling almost at every step.

The priest, palsied with terror, as ghastly pale as a ghost, could not help turning round; alas! the cook was always at his heels. His fear was such that he almost dropped from his horse. He lashed the poor mare, forgetful of all the dangers the plains of the Karst presented, for the ground yawned everywhere—here in huge, deep clefts, there in bottomless shafts; or it sank in cup-like hollows, all bordered with sharp, jagged rocks, or concealed in the bushes that surround them. His only thought was to escape from the grim spectre that pursued him. The lame and bleeding mare had stopped on the brink of one of these precipices, trembling and convulsed with terror. The priest, who had just turned round, dug his spurs into the animal's sides; she tried to clear the cleft, but missed her footing, and rolled down in the abyss. The stallion, seeing the mare disappear, stopped short, and uttered a loud neigh, shivering with fear. The shock the poor beast had got burst the bonds which held the corpse on his back, and the cook was thus chucked over his head on the prone edge of the pit.

A few days afterwards some peasants who happened to pass by found the cook sitting, stiff and stark, astride on a rock, seemingly staring, with eyes starting from their sockets and her black mouth gaping widely, at the mangled remains of her master's corpse.

As the priest had told the clerk that he was going away for a few days, everybody came to the conclusion that his cook, having followed him against his will, had frightened the mare and thus caused her own and her master's death.

The smith having been left in possession of his uncle's house, as well as of all his money and estates, and being, moreover, the only legal heir, thus found himself all at once the richest man in the village. As he was beloved by everybody, all rejoiced at

his good luck, especially all those who owed money to the priest and whose debts he cancelled.

"You liked this story?" said the old man to Vranic, as soon as he had finished.

"Yes," replied the tailor, thinking of the ghastly, livid corpse, with grinning, gaping mouth, and glassy, goggle eyes, galloping after the priest, and wondering whether she was like the vampire. "Yes, it's an interesting story, but rather gruesome."

"Well, but it's only a story, and, whether ghastly or lively, it's only words, which—as the proverb says—are evanescent as soap-bubbles. Now," continued he, "if you want to go off to sleep, look at this," and he gave him a bit of cardboard, on which were traced several circles; "look at it till you see all these rings wheeling round. When they disappear, you'll be asleep."

The old man put the bit of cardboard before Vranic, who leaned his elbows on the table and his head between the palms of his hands, and stared at the drawing. Five minutes afterwards he was fast asleep.

When he awoke the next morning, his head was not only aching, but his weakness had so much increased that he had hardly strength enough to stand on his feet. He, therefore, made up his mind to go to the parish priest, and lay the whole matter before him.

Priests are everywhere but fetich men; therefore, if they have burnt witches for using charms and philters, it is simply because these women trespassed on their own domains, and were more successful than they themselves. Of what use would a priest be if he could not pray for rain, give little *sacré cœur* bits of flannel as talismans against pestilence, or brass medals to scare away the devil? A priest who can do nothing for us here below, must and will soon fall into discredit. The hereafter is so vague and indefinite that it cannot inspire us with half the interest the present does.

The priest whom Vranic consulted was of the same opinion as the tailor. He, too, believed that probably his brother had become a vampire, who nightly left the tomb to go and suck his blood. For his own sake, as well as for that of the whole town, it would be well to exorcise the ghost. The matter, however, had to be kept a profound secret, as the Government

had put its veto on vampire-killing, and looked upon all such practices as illegal.

It was, therefore, agreed that Vranic, together with his relations and some friends, should go to the curate's about ten o'clock at night; there the curate would be waiting for them with another priest; from there the little party would stealthily proceed to the cemetery where the ceremony was to be held.

The Friday fixed upon arrived. The night was dark, the weather sultry; a storm had been brooding in the heavy clouds overhead and was now ready to burst every moment.

As soon as the muffled people got to the gate of the burying-ground the mortuary chapel was opened to them by the sexton. The priests put on their officiating robes, recited several orisons appropriate to the occasion; then, with the Cross carried before them, bearing a holy-water sprinkler in their hands, followed by Vranic and his friends—all with blessed tapers—they went up to the murdered man's tomb. The priest then bade the sexton dig up the earth and bring out the coffin.

The smell, as the pit was being dug lower down, became always more offensive; but when, at last, the rotting deal coffin was drawn out and opened, it became overpoweringly loathsome. The corpse, however, being found in a good state of preservation, there could be no doubt that the dead man was a vampire. It is true that the tapers which everyone held gave but a dim and flickering light; moreover, that the stench was so sickening that all turned at once their heads away in disgust; still, they had all seen enough of the corpse to declare it to be but seemingly dead. The priest, standing as far from it as he possibly could, began at once to exorcise it in the name of the Trinity, the Virgin and all the saints; to sprinkle it with holy water, commanding it not to move, not to jump out of its box and run away—for these ghouls are cunning devils, and if one is not on the alert they skedaddle the moment the coffin is opened. Our priest, however, was a match even for the dead man, and his holy-water sprinkler was uplifted even before the lid of the loathsome chest was loosened.

The storm which had been threatening the whole of that day broke out at last. No sooner had the sexton begun to dig the grave than the wind, which had been moaning and wailing round the stones and wooden crosses, began to howl with a

sinister sound. Then, just as the priest uttered the formula of the exorcism—when the coffin was uncovered and the uncanny corpse was seen—a flash of lurid lightning gleamed over its livid features, and the rumbling thunder ended in a tremendous crash; the earth shook as if with the throes of childbirth; hell seemed to yawn and yield forth its fulsome dead. As the priest sprinkled the corpse with holy water, the rain came down in torrents as if to drown the world.

Although the noise was deafening, still some of the men affirm that they heard the corpse lament and entreat not to be killed; but the priest, a tall, stalwart man of great strength and courage, went on perfectly undaunted, paying no heed to the vampire, mumbling his prayers as if the man prostrate before him was some ordinary corpse and this was a commonplace, every-day funeral.

The priest, having reached in his orisons the moment when he uttered the name of Isukrst, or God the Son, Josko Vranic, who stood by, shivering from head to foot, and looking like a cat extracted from a tub of soap-suds, drew out a dagger from under his coat, where it had been carefully concealed from the ghost's sight, and stabbed the corpse. It was, of course, a black steel stiletto, for only such a weapon can kill a vampire. He should have stabbed the dead man in his neck and through the throat, but he was so sick that he could hardly stand; besides, his candle that instant went out, and, moreover, he was terribly frightened, for although he was stabbing but a corpse, still that corpse was his own brother.

A flash of lightning which followed that instant of perfect darkness showed him that the dagger, instead of being stuck in the dead man's neck, was thrust in the right cheek.

The ceremony being now over, the priests and their attendants hastened back to the chapel to take shelter from the rage of the storm, as well as to escape from the pestilential stench.

The sexton alone remained outside to heap up the earth again on the uncanny corpse, and shut up the grave.

"Are you sure you stabbed the corpse in the neck, severing the throat, and thus preventing it from ever sucking blood again?" asked the priest.

"Yes, I believe I have," answered Vranic, with a whining voice.

"I don't ask you what you believe; have you done it—yes, or no?" said the ecclesiastic, sternly.

“ Well, just as I lifted my knife to stab, the candle went out. I couldn't see at all ; the night was so dark ; you all were far from me. Besides, as I bent down, the smell made me so sick that——”

“ You don't know where you stabbed ? ” added the priest, angrily.

“ He stabbed him in the cheek ! ” said the sexton, coming in.

“ Fool ! ” burst out the priest, in a stentorian voice.

“ I was sure this would be the case, ” cried out one of the party. “ Vranic has always been a bungler of a tailor. ”

“ You have done a fine piece of work, you have, indeed, you wretch ! ” hissed the priest, looking at Vranic scornfully.

“ You have endowed that cursed brother of yours with everlasting life, ” said the other priest, “ and now the whole town will be infested with another vampire for ever ! ”

“ Do you really think so ? ” asked Vranic, ready to burst out crying.

“ Think so ! ” said all the other men, scornfully. “ To bring us here in the middle of the night with this storm, to stifle us with this poisonous stench, and this is the result ! ”

“ But really——” stammered Vranic.

“ Anyhow, he'll not leave you till he has sucked the last drop of blood from your body. ”

The storm having somewhat abated, all the company wended their way homewards, taking no notice of the tailor, who followed them like a mangy cur which everyone avoids.

That night, Vranic had not a wink of sleep. No one would have him in his house ; nobody would sleep with him, for fear of falling afterwards a prey to the vampire. As soon as he lay down and tried to shut his eyes, the terrifying sight appeared before him. The festering ghost with the horrible gash in the cheek, just over the jaw-bone, was ever present to his eyes ; nor could he get rid of the loathsome, sickening stench with which his clothes, nay, his very body, seemed saturated. If a mouse stirred he fancied he could see the ghost standing by him. He hid his head under the bed-cover not to see, not to hear, until he was almost smothered, and every now and then he felt a human hand laid on his head, on his shoulder, on his legs, and his teeth chattered with fear.

The storm ceased ; still, the sky remained overcast, and a thin, drizzling rain had succeeded the interrupted showers. The dreadful night came to an end ; he was happy to see the

grey light of dawn succeed the appalling darkness. Daylight brought with it happier thoughts.

“Perhaps,” said he to himself, “my brother was no vampire, after all! Perhaps the blade of the dagger, driven in the cheek, had penetrated slantingly into the neck, severed the throat, and thus killed the vampire; for something must have happened to keep the ghost away.”

On the next day Vranic remained shut up at home. He felt sure that his own relations would henceforth hate him, and his acquaintances would stone him if they possibly could. Nothing makes a man not only unjust, but even cruel, like fear, and no fear is greater than the vague dread of the unknown. That whole day he tried to work, but his thoughts were always fixed either on the festering corpse he had stabbed or on the coming night.

Would the ghoul, reeking of hell, come and suck up his blood?

As the light waned his very strength began to flow away, his legs grew weak, his flesh shivered, the beating of his heart grew ever more irregular.

He lighted his little oil-lamp before it was quite dark, looked about stealthily, trembling lest he should see the dreaded apparition before its time, started and shuddered at the slightest noise.

He was weary and worn out by the emotions of the former sleepless night; still, he could not make up his mind to go to bed. He placed his elbows on the board, buried his head within his hands, and remained there brooding over his woes. Without daring to lift up his eyes or look around, he at times stretched out his hand, clutched a gourd full of spirits and took a sip. Time passed, the twilight had faded away into soft, mellow darkness without; but in the tailor's room the little flickering light only rendered the shadows grim and gruesome.

Drink and lassitude at last overpowered the poor man; his head began to get drowsy, his ideas more confused; the heaviness of sleep weighed him down.

All at once he was roused from his lethargy by a sound of rushing winds. He hardly noticed it when it blew from afar, like the slight breeze that ruffles the surface of the sea; but, now that it came nearer, he remembered having heard it some evenings before. He grew pale, panted, and then his breath stopped, convulsed as he was by fear.

As upon the previous night, the wind was lost in the distance, and then in the stillness of the night he heard the low, hushed sound of footsteps coming from afar; but they drew nearer and ever nearer, with a heavy, slow, metrical step. The night-walker was near his house, at his door, on his threshold. The loathsome, sickening smell of corruption grew stronger and stronger. Now it was as overpoweringly nauseous as when he had bent down to stab his dead brother. The sound of footsteps was now within his room; the spectre must surely be by his side. He kept his eyes tightly shut and his head bent down. A cold perspiration was trickling from his forehead and through his fingers on to the table.

All at once, something heavy and metallic was thrown in front of him. Although his eyes were tightly shut, he knew that it was the black dagger that his brother had come to bring him back, and he was not mistaken.

Was there a chuckle just then?

Almost against his will he opened his eyes, lifted his head, and looked at his guest. The vampire was standing by his side grinning at him hideously, notwithstanding the gash in his right cheek.

“Thank you, brother,” said he, in a hollow, mocking voice, “for what you did yesterday; you have, in fact, given me everlasting life; and, as one good turn deserves another, you soon will be a vampire along with me. Come, don’t look so scared, man; it’s a pleasant life, after all. We sleep soundly during the day, and, believe me, no bed is so comfortable as the coffin, no house so quiet as the grave; but at night, when all the world sleeps and only witches are awake, then we not only live, but we enjoy life. No cankering care, no worry about the morrow. We have only fun and frolic, for we suck, we suck, we suck.”

Vranic heard the sound of smacking lips just by his neck, the vampire had already laid his hands upon him.

He tried to rise, to struggle, but his strength and his senses forsook him; he uttered a choked, raucous sound, then his breath again stopped spasmodically, his face grew livid, he gasped for breath, his face and lips got to be of a violet hue, his eyes shut themselves, as he dropped fainting in his chair.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

A FEW days after Radonic had been brought back dying, Uros was walking down the mountain path leading from the heights of Montenegro to the Dalmatian coast. He was even in higher spirits than he was usually wont to be.

His father had accompanied him to the frontier, and on the way he had opened his heart to him, and told him of his love for Milena, and even obtained his consent for his marriage, which might take place as soon as her widowhood was over. Bellacic, moreover, had promised to write to his friend, Giulianic, to release him from his pledge.

The day, as it dawned now, was a glorious one, bright, clear and fresh. After the storm and rain of the day before, the dark crags of the Cernagora seemed but newly created, or only just arisen out of the glittering waters that stretched down below in a translucent, misty mass of sluggish streams flowing through a cloudy ocean.

The breeze that blew from the mountain-tops seemed to him like some exhilarating, life-giving fluid. Exercise—not prolonged as yet—rendered his senses of enjoyment keener; he felt happy with himself and with the world at large. He was in one of those rare moods in which a man would like the earth to be a human being, so as to clasp it fondly to his breast, as he does a child, or the woman he loves.

Although he did not rejoice at Radonic's death, still, as he loved Milena, it was natural that he was glad the obstacle to his happiness had been removed, and a wave of joy seemed to rise from his heart upwards as his nerves tingled with excitement at the thought that in a few months she might be his wife.

Therefore, with his blithe and merry character, ever prone to look on the bright side of life, it is easy to imagine his buoyancy of spirits as he walked down to Budua. Every step

was bringing him nearer her; before the sun had reached its zenith he would be at home, clasping her in his arms; she—Milena—would be his for ever, and he crossed his arms and hugged himself in his excited state of mind.

Then he began to imagine Milenko's delight when he would hear that he, too, could marry the girl he loved.

It is not to be wondered at that he thought the earth a good dwelling-place, and that life—taking it on the whole—was not only worth living, but very pleasant besides. It is true, he said to himself, that man sometimes mars the work of God with his passions; still, *karvarinas* were the clouds of life, enhancing the beauty of the bright days which followed sudden showers. Sullen and malicious men like Vranic and his brood were buzzing insects, more tedious than harmful to their fellow-creatures.

Such were the thoughts that flitted through his mind as he walked briskly along, singing as blithely as a lark. As he had, the day before, sent word to Milenko that he would be back on the morrow, he stopped at every turn of the road, and, shading his eyes with his hand, he looked down the road, hoping to see his friend's graceful figure coming to meet him, as was sure to be the case.

He had never been separated from Milenko for so many days, and now that he was about to see him, his longing seemed to increase at every step.

As for Milenko, being of a more sensitive character, and having remained on board, he had missed his friend even more keenly than Uros had done. He would have started to meet him at early dawn, but he had been obliged to remain behind and look after the ship's cargo, that had been delayed the evening before on account of some trifling incident—for, sometimes, things of no importance in themselves lead to the most dreadful calamities. Likewise, the string of one of Milenko's shoes broke, so he stopped to tie it; after some steps it broke again. He stopped once more, pulled off his shoe, unlaced it, tied the string as well as he could. After a quarter of an hour the string of the other shoe broke too; he had again to stop and mend it. More than five minutes was thus lost; besides, the loose strings not only made him linger, but even slacken his pace.

Uros went down singing snatches of some merry song, little thinking that the delay in meeting his friend would almost cost him his life.

The news of Radonic's death had soon been spread about

Budua, and he, who had never been a favourite during his lifetime, became a hero after death. The Samson-like way in which he had fought was extolled, the number of wounds he had received, the hundreds of Turks he had killed went on daily increasing. His dauntless courage, his bold feats, his cunningness in council were becoming legendary; in fact, he was for some time a second Marko Kraglievic. The Vranite party—especially after the night of the burying-ground affair—had dwindled into nothing. The Radonites ruled the day.

Earless Vranic, as he was called everywhere, was galled by his defeat; his envious, jealous disposition could find no rest. Being, moreover, doomed to a certain death, he found himself like a stag at bay, and he almost felt at times the courage of despair.

The radiant day which followed the dreadful night when the vampire appeared to him brought no change to Vranic's gloom. He was too much like a night-bird now to feel any pleasure at the sight of the sunlit sky. Like an owl he shunned the light, and only prowled about when every man had shut himself up in his house. He dreaded the sight of a human face on account of the scowl of hatred he was sure to see there, for he knew that everyone looked upon him not as a man, but as the blood-sucker he would soon become.

Having recovered from his fainting-fit after the visit of the *voukoudlak*, he almost lost his senses again, seeing the black dagger on the table in front of him. With a fluttering heart, and aching head and tottering limbs, he walked about his room, asking himself what he should do and how he could escape the wretchedness of his present life. Suicide never came into his head, for, in spite of all his misery, life still was dear to him. The best thing would, perhaps, be to leave Budua for a short time, and thus frustrate the vampire.

As he had to go and pay the priest for the ceremony of the exorcism, he decided to ask, and perhaps take, his advice upon what he was to do and where he should go. He went grudgingly, indeed, to pay a large sum of money for a ceremony which had been of no avail, and although it had not been the priest's fault if the ghost had not been killed, still the money was being thrown away, for all that.

Before leaving the house, he took the black dagger, washed and scrubbed it with fine sand to cleanse it from the offensive smell it had, then he put it in his breast pocket, where he had

had it some nights before. With heavy steps he trudged towards the priest's house at dawn, before the people of the town were up and about the streets. The priest, who was an early riser, had just got up. Vranic, with unwilling hands, undid the strings of his purse, and counted out, with many a sigh, the sum agreed upon, for the priest would not bate a single cent. Then Vranic, with his eyes gloating on the silver dollars, told the clergyman how the vampire had appeared to him and overcome him.

"Aye," said the priest, "I was afraid that would be the case."

"And now I'd like to leave the town, for I might thus avoid the vampire."

"The best thing you could do."

"Yes, but where am I to go in order to escape the ghost?"

"I think the best place for you is the Convent of St. George. Surely the spectre 'll not follow you there in those hallowed walls, amongst all those saintly men."

"Yes, but will the brotherhood receive me?"

"Tell them that I sent you. Moreover, I'll call myself during the day and speak to them. May I add that, perhaps, you'll be induced to turn caloyer yourself some day or other. Meanwhile, a little charity to the convent would render your stay more agreeable. You know the brotherhood is poor."

Vranic thanked the priest, and promised to be guided by his advice; still, he could not help thinking of all the money this new scheme might cost him. It is true, if he turned friar, he might get rid of the vampire, but would he not also lose all his money into the bargain?

Which was the greater evil of the two—to be sucked of all his blood, or drained of all his money?

Out of the town gate, far from the haunts and scowling faces of men, he breathed a little more at ease. Were they not all a set of grasping, covetous ghouls, whose only aim was to wrench all he had from him? The dazzling sunshine and the dancing waves, far from soothing him, only irritated him, for he fancied that all the world was blithe, merry and happy, and he alone was miserable. He thought how happy he, too, might have been had that cursed *karvarina* not taken place. He had never felt any deep hatred against Radonic, nor had he any real reason for disliking him; for, to be true to himself, his brother's murder had been an incident, not an accident, in his life. It

was not Radonic's fault if the ghost-seer had become a vampire after his death. All his grudge was rather against Bellacic, who had helped to frustrate him of a good round sum of money, owed to him for his brother's blood. He hated him especially for having inflicted a bodily and moral wound by cutting off his ear, rendering him thus an object of everlasting scorn in the whole town.

Radonic was dead,¹ but Bellacic lived to triumph over him. If he could only wreak his vengeance upon him he might pacify the vampire's rage; if not, he could always make his escape into the convent. With these thoughts in his head, he clutched the handle of the dagger and, as he did so, he shivered from head to foot with a kind of hellish delight.

Just then he fancied he heard a distant chuckle and looked round. He could see nobody. It was only his imagination. Almost at the same time he heard a voice whisper softly in his ear:

"Use this dagger against my enemies better than you did against me, and then, perhaps, you might be free."

Was it his brother ordering him what he was to do? Instead of stopping at the convent, should he go on to Montenegro, waylay Bellacic and murder him?

He had been walking, or rather, crawling quietly on, for about two hours; the sun was high up in the sky, the day was hot, the road dusty, and, worn out by sleeplessness, by worry and, above all, by the great loss of blood, he was now overcome by weariness and weakness. The monastery was at last in sight; still, he felt as if he could hardly crawl any further on; so, undecided as he was, he sat down at the side of some laurel-bushes to rest and make up his mind as to what he was to do.

He had not been sitting there a quarter of an hour, blinking at the sun, like an owl, when he heard snatches of an unknown song, wafted from afar. It was not one of the plaintive lays of his own country, but a lively, blithe Italian canzonet, with trills that sounded like the merry warbling of a lark. The singing stopped—it began again, then stopped once more; after that he heard a light, brisk step coming towards him. A man who could sing and walk in such a way must surely be happy, he thought. Then, without knowing who the man was, he hated him for being happy. Why should some people have all the sweetness, and others all the gall of life?

he asked himself. Is not this world a fool's paradise for him and a dungeon for me? In my wretchedness he seems to taunt me with his mirth. Well, if ever I become a vampire, the first blood I'll suck is that man's; and I'll drain the very last drop, for it must be warm and sweet.

Just then the light-hearted singer passed by the laurel-bushes, without perceiving the owl-like man half hidden behind them. Vranic, lifting up his head, saw the flushed face, the sparkling eyes, the red and parted lips of his enemy's son—the youth who, by his beauty and his criminal love, had been the cause of all the mischief. Had it not been for him, his brother would probably not have been murdered, and, what was far worse, become a *voukoudlak*. Instinctively he clasped the handle of his dagger, and the words he had heard a little while before rang once more in his ears, urging him to make good use of the knife now that an opportunity offered itself. Besides, would not his revenge be a far keener one in killing this young man, his father's only son, than in murdering Bellacic himself? This was real *karvarina*, and his lost ear would be dearly paid for.

Uplifted by a strength which was not his own, urged on almost unconsciously, Vranic jumped up and ran after the merry youth.

Uros just at that moment had perceived Milenko at a distance, and, hurrying down to meet him, he, in his joy, had not heard the fiend spring like a tiger from behind the bush and rush at him with uplifted knife.

Milenko, seeing Vranic appear all at once, with a dagger in his hand, stopped, uplifted both his hands, and uttered a loud cry of terror, threat and anger.

Uros, for an instant, could not understand what was happening; but hearing someone running after him, and already close to his heels, he turned round, and to his horror he saw Josko Vranic scowling at him. The face, with its blinking eyes and all its nerves twitching frightfully, had a fierce and fiendish expression—it was, in fact, just as he had seen it in the glass on New Year's Eve, at the fatal stroke of twelve.

A moment of overpowering superstitious terror came over Uros; he knew that his last hour had arrived. In his distracted state, Uros had only time to lift up his arm in an attitude of self-defence, but Vranic was already upon him, plunging the sharp-pointed blade in his breast. The youth uttered a low,

muffled groan, staggered, put his hands instinctively to the deep gash, as if to stop the blood from all rushing out; then he fell senseless on the ground.

Vranic plucked the poniard out of the wound mechanically; his arm fell heavily of its own weight. Then, struck with a sudden terror, not because he saw Milenko rushing up, but because he was bewildered at what he had so rashly done, he, after standing quite still for a moment, turned round and fled.

Milenko had already rushed to his friend's side; he was clasping him in his arms, lifting him up with the tender fondness of a mother nursing a sickly babe. Alas! all his loving care seemed vain; the point of the dagger must have entered within his heart, and death had been instantaneous.

Milenko did not lose his presence of mind for an instant; nor did he try to run after the murderer. He took off his broad sash which he wore as a belt, tore up his shirt, rolled a smooth stone in the rag, and with this pad (to stop up the blood) he bandaged up the wound as tightly as he possibly could. Then he took up his friend in his arms, and although Uros was a heavier weight than himself, still his life of a sailor had strengthened his muscles to such a degree that he carried his burden, if not with ease, at least, not with too great difficulty, down to the neighbouring convent.

It was well known in town that some of the holy men were versed in medicine, and especially that the secret of composing salves, and the knowledge of simples with which to heal deadly wounds, was transmitted by one friar on his death-bed to another. Still, when Milenko had laid down his friend upon a bed, the wisest of these wise men shook their heads gravely and declared the case to be a desperate one. The head surgeon said that, if life were not already extinct—as Milenko had believed—still the youth's recovery could only be brought about by a miracle, for he was already beyond all human help.

Milenko felt his legs giving way. A cold, damp draught seemed to blow on his face.

"He might," continued the old man, "last some hours; he might even linger on for some days."

"Anyhow," added another caloyer, "we have time to administer the Holy Sacrament and prepare him for heaven."

"Oh, yes! there is time for that," quoth the doctor, shrug-

ging his shoulders; "but, before the wine and bread, I'll prepare the cathartic water with which to wash the wound, for while there is life a doctor must not give up hope."

"Then," said Milenko, falteringly, "I can leave him to your care, and run and fetch his mother; he'll not pass away till my return?"

"Not if you make every possible haste."

"You promise?"

"He is in God's hands, my son."

With a heavy heart, and with the tears ever trickling down his cheeks, Milenko ran down the mountain, and all the way from the convent to the gates of Budua. He stopped to take breath before Bellacic's house, and then he went in, and, composing his face as well as he could, he gently broke the terrible news to the forlorn mother.

Mara was a most courageous woman. Far from fainting and requiring all attendance upon herself, she bethought herself at once of the difficulty in the way, for she knew that no women were admitted into a convent of monks. One person alone might help her. This was her uncle, a priest of high degree, and a most important personage in the town.

She hastened to his house, and, having explained matters to him, she implored him to start at once with her for the Convent of St. George and obtain for her the permission she required. The good man, although he hated walking, was not only very fond of his niece, but loved Uros as his own son, so he acceded at once to her request and set out with her, notwithstanding that it was nearly dinner-time, and not exactly an hour suited for a long up-hill walk. Milenko, having broken the news to Mara, hastened to his own house to inform his parents of the great misfortune. His father, snatching up a loaf of bread and a gourd of wine, started at once with him. He would go as far as the convent, enquire there how Uros was getting on, and then hasten on to Montenegro and inform Bellacic of what had taken place. When they all got to the convent they found that Uros was still alive and always unconscious.

Just when Milenko had got back to the convent he remembered that, in his hurry to go and return, he had forgotten one person, dearer to his friend, perhaps, even than father or mother; that person was Milena.

When the news of Radonic's death reached Budua, Milena made up her mind to return to her father's house. Still,

she was rather weak to undertake the journey, and, moreover, she would not go there until Uros had come back.

On the morning on which Uros was expected she had gone to her own house, to put things in order previous to her departure, and Mara had promised to come and see her that afternoon, and take her home with her.

Time passed; Milena was sitting in her house alone, waiting for her friend. At every step she heard outside, her heart would begin to beat faster, and with unsteady steps she would go to the window, hoping to see Uros and his mother; but she was always disappointed. Her sufferings had told their tale upon her thin pale face, which, though it had lost all its freshness, had acquired a new and more ethereal kind of beauty. Her large and lustrous eyes—staring at vacancy—seemed to be gazing at some woful, soul-absorbing vision. The whole of that day she had been a prey to the most gloomy forebodings.

All at once a little urchin of about four or five summers stood on the doorstep.

“*Gospa* Milena,” lisped the little child, “I’ve come to see you.”

It had been a daring deed to wander all the way from home by himself, and he was rather frightened.

This child was the son of one of Mara’s neighbours, whom Milena had of late made a pet of, and whom she had sometimes taken along with her when coming to her house.

Milena turned round and looked at the little child, that might well have been taken for an angel just alighted from heaven, for the slanting rays of the setting sun shining through his fair, dishevelled, curly locks seemed to form a kind of halo round his little head.

“Have you come all the way from home to see me?”

“Yes,” said the child, staring at her to see whether she was cross. “I’ve come for you to tell me a story.”

Milena caught up the boy and covered him with kisses. She was about to ask him if he knew whether Uros had returned, but the question lingered for an instant on her lips; then she blushed, and feared to frame her thoughts in words. Anyhow, it was a very good excuse to shut up her house and take the little boy back home.

“Will you tell me a story?” persisted the urchin.

“Yes,” said Milena, smiling, “for you must be tired and hungry, too.”

She went into the orchard behind the house, and presently came back with a huge peach, which made the child's eyes glisten with pleasure.

"Now, come and sit down here, and when you've finished your peach I'll take you home."

Thereupon she sat down on her favourite seat, the doorstep, and the child nestled by her side.

"What story shall I tell you?"

"One you've already told me," replied the boy, for, like almost all children, he liked best the stories he already knew.

Milena then began the oft-repeated tale of

THE MAN WHO SERVED THE DEVIL.

"Once a farmer's only son married a very young girl——"

"How old was she?" interrupted the child.

"She was sixteen."

"Last time you told me she was fifteen."

"So she was, but that was a year ago. They had a very grand wedding, to which all the people of the village were invited——"

"Not the village, the town," said the child.

"You are right," added Milena, correcting herself.

"For eight days they danced the *Kolo* every night, and had grand dinners and suppers."

"What had they for dinner?"

"They had roast lambs, *castradina*, chickens, geese——"

"And also sausages?"

"Yes; and ever so many other good things."

"But what had they for supper?"

"They had huge loaves of milk-bread and cakes with raisins——"

"Had they also peaches?" asked the boy, with his mouth full, whilst the juice of his own luscious peach was trickling down his chin.

"Yes; they had also grapes, melons and pomegranates; so when every guest had eaten till he could hardly stand, all squatted on the floor and sucked sticks of sugar-candy. When the eight days' feasting was over, the bridegroom weighed himself and, to his dismay, found that he was eight pounds lighter than on the eve of his marriage."

"Why?" asked the child, with widely-opened eyes.

"Because," answered Milena, with a slight smile and the

faintest of blushes, "because, I suppose, he had danced too much."

"But if he ate till he couldn't stand?"

"Anyhow," continued Milena, "he was so frightened when he saw how much he had lost in weight that he made up his mind to run away and leave his wife at home."

"But why?" quoth the urchin.

"Because he thought that if he kept getting thin at that rate, nothing would soon be left of him. He, therefore, made a bundle of his clothes and went off in the middle of the night. He walked and walked, and after a few days, at early dawn, he got to a bleak and desolate country, where there was nothing but huge rocks, sharp flints, and sandy tracts of ground. Far off he saw a large castle, with high stone walls and big iron gates. Being very tired and not seeing either a tree or a bush as far as eye could reach, he went and knocked at one of the gates. An elderly gentleman, dressed in black, came to open, and asked him what he wanted.

"'I come,' said the bridegroom, 'to see if you are, perhaps, in want of a serving-man.'

"'You come in the nick of time,' said the old man, grinning. 'I'll take you as my cook; you'll not have much to do.'

"'But,' answered the young man, 'I'm not very clever as a cook.'

"'It doesn't matter; you'll only have to keep a pot boiling and be ever stirring what's in it.'

"He then led the young man into a kind of underground kitchen, where there was an immense pot hanging on a hook, and underneath a roaring fire was burning. Then the old gentleman gave the youth a ladle as big as a shovel, and bade him stir continually, and every now and then add more fuel to the fire.

"The youth stirred on and on for twenty-five years, and then he grew tired and stopped for a while. When he was about to begin again he heard a voice coming out of the cauldron, which said:

"'You've been mixing us up for a good long while; couldn't you let us have a little rest?'

"The cook—who was no more a youth, but an elderly man—got frightened. He left the kitchen and went to find his master.

“ ‘Well,’ said the elderly gentleman, who was not a day older than he had been twenty-five years before, ‘what is it you want?’

“ ‘I’m rather tired of always stirring that pot, and I’d like to go home.’

“ ‘Quite right,’ replied the master. ‘I suppose you want your wages?’

“ He then went to an iron box and took out two big sacks of gold coins.

“ ‘You have served me faithfully, and I’ll pay you accordingly. This money is yours.’

“ The man took the money and thanked his master.

“ ‘I’ll give you, moreover, some advice, which is, perhaps, worth more than the money itself. Listen to my words, and remember them. Upon leaving me, always take the high road; on no account go through lanes and byways. Never put up for the night at little hostelries, but always stop at the largest inns. Whenever you are about to commit some rash act, defer your purpose till the morrow. Lastly, when people speak badly of the devil, tell them that he is less black than he is painted.’

“ The man thanked his master and went off. He walked for some time on the highway, and then he met another traveller, who was walking in the same direction. After a few hours they came to a crossway.

“ ‘Let us take this path, for we’ll get to the next town two hours sooner,’ said the traveller.

“ The devil’s cook was about to follow the stranger’s advice, when he heard his master’s words ringing in his ears: ‘Always take the high road, and on no account go through lanes and byways.’

“ He, therefore, told his fellow-traveller how he had pledged his word to his master to follow his advice. As neither could persuade the other, they parted company, promising each other to meet again at nightfall, at the neighbouring town.

“ As soon as the devil’s cook reached the inn where he was to spend the night, he asked for his new friend, and, on the morrow, he was grieved to hear that a wayfarer, answering to the traveller’s description, had been murdered the day before, when crossing the lonely byway leading to the town.

“ The devil’s cook set out once more on his way, and he was soon overtaken by a party of merry pedlars, all journeying towards his native town, where, a few days afterwards, there

was to be a fair held in honour of a patron saint. He made friends with all of them, especially as he bought silk kerchiefs, dresses and trinkets, as presents for his wife. They trudged along the high road, avoiding all short cuts, lanes and byways. In the evening they came to a large village, where they were to pass the night.

“‘Let us stop here,’ said one of the party, pointing to a tavern by the roadside; ‘I know the landlord; the cooking is very good, nowhere can you get a better glass of wine; and besides, it is much cheaper than at the large inn farther down.’

“The devil’s cook was already on the threshold, when he again remembered his master’s words:

“‘Never put up at little hostleries, but always stop at the larger inns.’

“He, therefore, parted from his company, and went off by himself to the next inn.

“He had his supper by himself, and then, being very tired, he went off to bed. In the middle of the night he was awakened by a very loud noise and a great bustle. He got out of bed, and, going to the window, he saw the sky all red, and the village seemed to be in flames. He went downstairs, and he was told that the little tavern by the roadside was burning. It appears that the travellers who had stopped there had all got drunk. Somehow or other they had set fire to the house, and, in their sleep, had all got burnt.

“The devil’s cook was again grateful to his master for his good advice, and on the morrow he once more set out on his way alone.

“In the evening he at last reached his native town. He was surprised at the many changes that had taken place since he had left it twenty-five years before. On the square, just in front of his own house, a large inn had been built; therefore, instead of going at once to his wife’s, he went to pass the night at the inn, and see what was taking place at home.

“From the windows of the inn he saw all his house illuminated, and people coming in and going out as if some wedding or other grand feast were taking place. Then, in one of the rooms of the first floor he saw his wife—now a buxom matron—together with two handsome youths in priest’s attire. To his horror and dismay, he saw her hugging and fondling the young men, who were covering her with kisses. At this sight he got into such a rage that he took out his pistol.”

“No,” said the child, interrupting, “he took up his gun, which was in a corner of the room.”

“Quite right,” answered Milena; “he took up his gun, aimed at his wife, and was about to shoot, when he fancied he heard his master’s voice saying:

“‘Whenever you are about to commit some rash act, put off your purpose till the morrow.’

“He, therefore, thought he would postpone his revenge till the next day, and he went downstairs to have his supper.

“‘Who lives opposite,’ he asked of the landlord, ‘in that house where they seem to be having such grand doings?’

“‘A very virtuous woman,’ quoth the host, ‘whose husband disappeared in a strange, mysterious way on the eighth day of the wedding feast, and has never been heard of since.’

“‘And she never married again?’

“‘No, of course not.’

“‘But who are those two handsome priests that are with her?’

“‘Those are her two boys, twins born shortly after the marriage. The house is illuminated as to-morrow the two young men are to be consecrated priests, and their mother is giving a feast in their honour.’

“On the morrow the husband went home, made himself known, presented each of his two sons with a sack of gold coins, gave his wife all the beautiful presents he had bought for her; then he went to church and assisted at the ceremony of the consecration. After that he gave all his old friends a splendid feast, which lasted eight days; and he told them how, for twenty-five years, he had served the devil, who was by no means as black as he is painted.”

“I wonder,” said the child, “if he got thin again after the feast.”

“I don’t know,” replied Milena, “for the story stops there.”

“No, it doesn’t, for my papa said that many people tried to go and offer themselves as cooks to the devil, but that they had never been heard of since then.”

“And now I’ll take you home. Perhaps we’ll meet *gospa* Mara on our way.”

“No, we’ll not meet her,” said the child, abruptly.

“Why? Because Uros has come home?”

“But Uros hasn’t come home.”

“How do you know?”

“I know, because *Capitan* Milenko came this morning and told *gospa* Mara that Josko Vranic had killed Uros, and so she went off at once to the Convent of St. George, where——”

Milena heard no more. A deadly faintness came over her; she loosened the grasp of the door she had clutched, her legs sank under her, and she fell lifeless on the ground.

The urchin looked at her astonished. He, for a moment, gave up sucking his peach-stone; then he turned on his heels and scampered home to inform his mother about what had happened.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CONVENT OF ST. GEORGE

WHEN Mara reached the convent, it was with the greatest difficulty, and only through the persuasive influence of her uncle, Danko Kvekvic, that she was allowed to see her son. Uros, moreover, had to be transported from the cell into which he had been carried, into a room near the church—a sort of border-land between the sanctuary and the convent. Even there she was only allowed to remain till nightfall.

“Tell me,” said Mara, to the ministering monk (a man more than six feet in height, and who, in his black robes, seemed a real giant), “tell me, do you think he might pass away during the night while I am not with him?”

“No, I don’t think so. He is young and strong; he is one of our sturdy race—a Iugo Slav, not a Greek, or an effete Turk eaten away by vice and debauchery. He’ll linger on.”

“Still, there is no hope?”

“Who can tell? I never said there was none. For me, as long as there is a faint spark of life, there is always hope.”

“Still, you have administered the sacrament to him?”

“You wouldn’t have him die like a dog, would you?” answered the priest, combing out his long white beard with his fingers.

“No, certainly not.”

“Besides, we all take the sacrament when we are in bodily health. Your son came to himself for a few moments, and we seized the opportunity to administer to him the Holy Communion and pray with him; it does no harm to the body, whilst it sets the troubled mind at ease.”

Danko Kvekvic, Mara and Milenko crossed themselves devoutly.

“It cannot be denied,” continued the monk, “that our patient lies there with both his feet in the grave. Still, God

is omnipotent. I have seen many a brave man fall on the battlefield——”

“You have been in war?” asked Milenko, astonished.

“Bearing the Cross and tending the wounded.”

“Still, it is said that at times you wielded the gun with remarkable dexterity,” interrupted Danko Kvekvic, with a keen smile.

“Do people say so? Well, what if they do? I am sure no harm is meant by it; for, if my memory does not deceive me, the very same thing was said about a priest who is no monk of our order, Danko Kvekvic, and who, for all that, is said to be a holy man.”

“Well, well, we all try to serve our God and our country as well as we can; and no doubt we have done our best to save our flag from being trampled in the dust, or a fellow-countryman’s life when in danger. But I interrupted you; tell me what you have seen on the battlefield.”

“Nothing, except blood spilt; but I was going to say that I’ve seen many a man linger within the jaws of death for days together, and then be snatched from danger when his state became desperate.”

“By your skill, father,” said Mara, “for we are all aware that you know the secrets of plants, and that you have effected wonderful cures by means of simples.”

“Aye, aye! perhaps I have been more successful than the learned doctors of Dunaj” (Vienna) “or Benetke” (Venice); “still, shall I tell you the secret of my cures?”

Mara opened her eyes in wonder. “I thought it was only a death-bed secret transmitted from one dying monk to his successor,” said she.

“We are not wizards,” said the old man, with a pleasant smile; “we make no mystery of the herbs we seek on the mountains, and even the youngest lay-brother is taught to concoct an elixir or make a salve for wounds.”

“But the secret you spoke of?” said Mara.

“It is the pure life-giving air of our mountains, the sobriety of our life, our healthy work in the open fields or on the wide sea. Our sons have in their veins their mothers’ blood, for every Serb or Montenegrin woman is a heroine, a brave *juna-kinja*, who has often suckled her babe with blood instead of milk. These are the secrets with which we heal dying men.”

Then, turning to Milenko, he added:

"You, too, must be a brave young man, and wise even beyond your years. You have the courage of reason, for you do not lose your head in moments of great danger. We have already heard how you saved several precious lives from the waves, and now, if your friend does recover—and, with God's help, let us hope he will—it is to you, far more than to anyone else, that he will owe his life. A practised surgeon could surely not have bandaged the wound and stopped the hemorrhage better than you did. Your father should have sent you to study medicine in one of the great towns."

Mara stretched forth her hand and clasped Milenko.

"You never told me what you had done, my boy," said she, while the tears trickled down her cheeks.

"What I did was little enough; besides, did Uros ever tell you how he saved my life and dragged me out of prison at Ragusa?" and Milenko thereupon proceeded to tell them all how he had been accused of manslaughter, and in what a wonderful way he had been saved by his friend.

"In my grief I have always one consolation," said Mara; "should the worst happen, one son is left me, for they are *pobratim*," said she, turning to the monk.

"What has become of the murderer? Has he been arrested?" asked Kvekvic of Milenko.

"He took to the rocks and disappeared like a horned adder. At that moment I only thought of Uros, who would have bled to death had he been left alone."

"Oh, those Vranics are a cursed race! The Almighty God has not put a sign on them for nothing. This one has a cast in his eye, so that men should keep aloof from him. They are all a peevish, fretful, malicious race," said Kvekvic.

"Their blood turns to gall," added the monk.

"Oh, but I'll find him out, even if he hide himself in the most secret recess!" quoth Milenko, turning towards Mara. "I'll not rest till my brother's blood is avenged."

"'Tooth for tooth, eye for eye,' say our Holy Scriptures," and Danko Kvekvic crossed himself.

"Amen!" added the monk, following his example.

Just then Uros opened his eyes. He came to his senses for a few seconds, and, seeing his mother, his pupils seemed to dilate with a yearning look of love. She pressed his hand, and he slightly—almost imperceptibly—returned the pressure. His lips quivered; he was about to speak, when he again closed

his eyes and his senses began once more to wander. The monk bathed his lips with the cordial he was administering him. The patient, apparently, had again fallen off to sleep.

Just then the sound of the convent bell was heard.

"I am sorry," said the old caloyer, turning towards his guests, "but I have to dismiss you now; the bell you have just heard summons us to *vecernjca*. When our prayers are over, the doors of our house are closed for the night—no one comes in or goes out after evensong."

"But we two can surely remain with you to-night," said Kvekvic, pointing to Milenko.

"Surely Father Vjekoslav will readily give you permission to be our honoured guests as long as you like, if he has not already granted it; but——" (here the old man hesitated).

"But what?" asked Kvekvic.

"The *gospa*," said the monk, turning towards Mara, "must return home."

"Yes, I know," added Mara, sighing as she got up.

"Still," quoth the good caloyer, "we shall take great care of him, and to-morrow morning you can come as early as you like."

The poor mother thanked the good old man; she slightly brushed off the curls from her boy's forehead, kissed him with a deep-drawn sigh, and with tearful eyes rose to go.

"Thank you for all the care you have taken of my child; thank you, uncle Danko, for all your kindness," and she kissed the priest's and the monk's hands, according to the custom of the Slavs.

Just then, a young lay-monk came to inform Mara that someone was asking for her. It was Milenko's mother, who had come up to the convent door to ask how Uros was getting on, and to see if she could be of any use, for Milenko, with his usual thoughtfulness, had begged his mother to come in the evening and accompany her friend back home.

"Go, Milos, and join the brethren in their prayers," said Danko Kvekvic. "I shall recite my orisons here, beside my nephew's bed."

The monk and Milenko accompanied the forlorn mother to the convent door, and bade her be of good cheer; then they went to church to take part in the evening service.

When the candles were all put out, and echoes of the evening-song had died away, they all slowly, and with stately steps, wended their way to the refectory, where a simple repast

was spread out for them. Being Friday, the frugal supper consisted of vegetarian food; there were tomatoes baked with bread-crumbs, egg-plants stuffed with rice, and other such oriental dishes. The dessert, especially, was a sumptuous one, not only on account of the thickly-curded sour milk, but of the splendid fruit which the convent garden afforded. There were luscious plums as big as eggs; large, juicy and fragrant peaches, the flesh of which clung to the stone; huge water-melons, the inside of which looked like crimson snow, and melted away as such, and sweet-scented musk-melons; above all, big clusters of grapes of all shapes and hues; rosy-tinted, translucent berries, looking like pale rubies; dark purple drupes covered with pearly dust, which seemed like bunches of damsons; big white Smyrna grapes of a waxy hue, the small sultana of Corinth, and the long grapes that look like amber tears.

Milenko, notwithstanding the grief he felt, made a hearty meal, for, except a bit of bread, broken off as he walked along from his father's loaf, and a draught of wine, he had scarcely tasted food the whole of that day; therefore, he was more than hungry. Supper being over, and a short thanksgiving prayer having been offered, Milenko found himself all at once surrounded by the monks, who pressed him with questions, for childish curiosity was their prevailing weakness.

They were especially interested in the theatrical performances the young man had witnessed at the Fenice of Venice, for they were amazed to hear that the grand ladies of the town, all glittering with costly gems, sat in boxes, where they exhibited to all eyes their naked arms and breasts, whilst they looked at young girls in transparent skirts hardly reaching their knees, who kept dancing on the tips of their toes, or twirled their legs over their partners' heads. Hearing such lewdness the saintly men were so greatly shocked that they crossed themselves demurely, and the eldest shook their heads, and said, reproachfully, that such dens of infamous resort were not places for modest young men to go to.

After that, Milenko told them of the last great invention, the boats that went without sails, but which had two huge wheels moved by fire; at which the monks again crossed themselves, and said that those were the devil's inventions, and that if things continued at such a rate, God would have to send another flood and destroy the world once more.

Milenko would have willingly escaped from his persecutors,

but he still had to answer many questions about his life on board, the hardships he had had to undergo, the storms his ship had met with.

The medical monk had gone to take his place at Uros' bedside, and Danko Kvekvic, after having had some supper, had come out to breathe the fresh air on the convent's terrace, where all the caloyers had assembled before retiring to rest.

The scene was a most lovely one. Behind the terrace the high mountains rose dark against the sky; nearer, the black rocks had furry, velvety, and satin tints, for, under the dark and dusky light of the disappearing twilight, the stones seemed to have grown soft; whilst, on the other side, the broad expanse of the sea looked like a mass of some hard burnished metal.

The utter quietness, the perfect peace and rest which pervaded the whole scene, rendered the sense of life a pleasurable feeling; still, it is doubtful whether most of those holy men—who had never known the real wear and tear of life—felt all the bliss of that beatific rest.

"Now," said Kvekvic to Milenko, "you can come and see your friend, who, I am sorry to say, seems to be sinking; then you must retire to rest; you'll soon have to start with your ship, and you should not unfit yourself for your task."

"No," pleaded Milenko; "it is, perhaps, the last watch we shall keep together; therefore, let me stay by his bedside. But, tell me, is he really getting worse?"

"The fever is increasing fast, notwithstanding the father's medicines."

"Had we not better have a doctor from Budua or Cattaro?"

"I don't think their skill could be of much use, for I really think his hours are numbered here below—although he is young, and might struggle back to life; darkness, albeit, is gathering fast around him."

Milenko, with a heavy heart, went back to the sufferer's cell, where some other monks, also versed in the art of healing, had gathered around him in a grave consultation. They all said to Milenko that there was still hope; but, one by one, they all left the room, making the sign of the Cross, and recommending him to God, as if human aid could do nothing more for him.

Poor Milenko felt as if all the nerves of his chest had contracted painfully; life did not seem possible without the friend, the constant companion of his infancy.

As it was agreed that Danko Kvekvic should stay up with the

old monk, all the other caloyers went off to sleep ; but presently one of the younger brothers came in, bearing a tray of fragrant coffee, cooked in the Turkish fashion.

“ Oh, thank you ! ” said Kvekvic, rubbing his hands, “ I think you must have guessed my wishes, for, to tell you the truth, I was actually pining for a draught of that exhilarating beverage, one of the few good things we owe to the enemies of our creed, for, in fact, I know of few beverages that can be compared to a cup of fragrant coffee.”

“ As far as luxuries go, the Turks are certainly our masters ; not only in confectionery, in sweet-scented sherbet, but even in cooking we are rude barbarians compared to them.”

“ They certainly are hedonists, who know how to render life pleasurable.”

“ Aye,” said the monk, sternly, “ theirs is the broad path leading to perdition.” Then, after a slight pause, he added : “ What is that book thou hast brought with thee, Blagoslav ? ”

“ I thought,” replied the young man, somewhat bashfully, “ I might help you to pass your long vigil by reading to you ; that is, of course, if it be agreeable to you.”

The poor fellow stammered, and stopped, seeing the little success his proposal seemed to elicit.

“ Blagoslav,” retorted the old man, gravely, “ vanity caused the archangel’s downfall, and vanity is thy besetting sin. Blagoslav, thou knowest that thou readest well, for thou hast too often been praised for it, and now thou seizest every opportunity to hear the sound of thine own voice, which, I freely grant, is a pleasant one.”

“ Let us hear it, then,” said Danko Kvekvic, kindly ; “ besides, I firmly believe that brother Blagoslav’s intentions were good and——”

“ Danko Kvekvic,” said the old man, gruffly, “ you are not a general favourite and an important man in Budua for nothing ; you have the evil knack of flattering people’s foibles.”

“ Come, come ! ” said the priest, good-humouredly, “ should we pat a cat on the right side or on the wrong side ? ” Then, turning to Blagoslav, he added : “ I, for myself, shall be thankful to you for beguiling away the long hours by reading something to us.”

The young man, who had stood with his eyes cast down, and as still as a statue, sat down on a stool by the table and opened his book.

“What volume of ancient lore have you there?” asked the priest, pleasantly.

“‘The Lives of the Saints,’ written by a holy monk of our order.” Then, looking up at the old monk, “Which Life shall I read?” he asked.

“Begin with that of our patron saint, Prince George of Capadocia. It is a holy legend, which we, of course, all know, for the peasant often sings it at his plough, the shepherds say it to one another whilst tending their sheep, and”—turning to Milos—“I suppose you, too, have often recited it at the helm when keeping your watch on the stormy sea.”

“Yes, and invoked his holy name in the hour of danger.” Thereupon Milenko crossed himself, and the others followed suit.

“It is one of our oldest legends; still, always a very pleasant one to hear, especially if it is well read. But, before you begin, Blagoslav, let me first set the sufferer’s pillow straight and administer to his wants; then we shall listen to your reading without disturbing you.”

The old man suited his actions to his words—felt Uros’ pulse, gave him with a spoon some drops of cordial, and afterwards sat down.

“Now we are ready,” said he to the young monk.

Blagoslav thereupon began as follows:—

PISMA SVETOGA JURJE.

THE SONG OF ST. GEORGE.

All hail, O Bosnia! fairest of all lands,
Renowned throughout the world since many an age;
The springtide of the year renews thy bloom,
And with the spring St. George’s Day is nigh.
He was the greatest glory of the Cross,
Who taught our fathers Christ’s most holy creed.
Now God again has granted us His gifts—
The life-awakening dews, the greenwood shade,
The sun’s bright rays which warm the fruitful meads,
And melt the snow that lingers still a while
Upon the high and hoary mountain-tops;
The flowers fair that grow amongst the grass,
The blood-red rose that sheds its fragrance far,
The tawny swallows, from the sunny South,
That twitter sweetly ’neath the thatched eaves,
Are all the gifts that God sends every year
To Bosnia. Still He grants a greater boon;

This is the gladsome day of great St. George.
For though our land can boast of valiant knights,
Of warlike princes, eke of holy men,
Still greater far than all was *vojvod* George
Who whilom was of Cappadocia Duke.
He killed the grisly dragon that of yore
Laid waste the land around Syrene's white walls,
And freed the country from a fearful scourge.
Far down a lake full many fathoms deep,
There dwelt this dragon dreadful to behold ;
For from his round red eyes he shot forth flames,
And spouted from his snout a sooty smoke
That burnt and blasted all around the mere.
This dragon daily slew those daring knights,
Who, mounted all on prancing, warlike steeds
Had gone to try their strength against the beast ;
For on his ghastly green and scaly skin
They bent and broke, or blunted, their best blades,
As striking on the dragon's horrid hide
Was worse than hitting at a coat of mail,
Or cleaving some hard, flinty rock in twain ;
So, therefore, like an Eastern potentate,
He reigned and ruled the region round Syrene.
It was a terror-striking sight to see
The horrid beast rise out in snaky coils,
And rear his head with widely-gaping mouth,
As towards the town he hissed with such a din
That shook the strong and battlemented walls ;
Thereon to satisfy his hungry maw.
The craven townsfolk, all appalled with fear,
Would—as a dainty morsel—send the beast
Some lovely maiden in the prime of youth.
If naught was offered to the famished beast,
He lifted up his huge and bat-like wings,
And flapping, leapt upon the town's white walls ;
There, gripping 'twixt his sharp and cruel claws,
Whoever stood thereby within his reach,
He mauled and maimed, and gulped down men by scores,
Until the ground seemed all around to be
A marsh of mangled flesh and muddy gore,
With skulls half split and jagged, splintered bones.
When each and every man within the town
Had offered up his child unto the fiend,
And every mother wept from early morn,
And saw at night her child in dreadful dreams,
They told the King his turn had come at last
To offer up his daughter to the beast—
His cherished child, the apple of his eye,
The only heir of all his wide domains.

Oh! brother mine, hadst thou but seen just then
The hot and blinding tears rush from his eyes,
Whilst cruel grief convulsed his manly frame;
At such a woful sight you would have thought
It was some abject woman, not a King,
Who, crouching low, was sobbing on the ground.
He kissed his child and said: " My daughter dear,
Woe worth the day that thou art reft from me!
For now, alas! who is to wear my crown,
Who is to grace my throne when thou art gone? "
When last he ceased to weep, he bade the maids
To deck his daughter out in richest dress,
With costly Orient pearls and priceless gems,
E'en as she were to wed the mighty Czar;
And then he said: " My daughter as thy suite,
Take thou with thee my dukes, my noblest peers,
And likewise all the ladies of the land,
In sable garments clad to grace thy steps.
Still, let us hope some help may come at last,
And, meanwhile, pray the great god Alkoron.
In dire distress all earthly help is vain;
Alone, thy god may come to thy behest
And free thee from the dreadful dragons's claws."'
The mother hugged her daughter to her heart,
The forlorn father blessed his weeping child,
Who then departed to her dismal doom;
And as she crossed the squares, the crowded streets
The flutes and timbrels played a wailing dirge,
That might have melted e'en a heart of stone.
Behind her walked the lords of high degree,
Then all the noble ladies of the land,
All clad in widow's weeds and trailing veils.
It was, indeed, a grand and glorious sight
To witness all this pageantry of woe,
The stately show of grief, the pomp of tears.
The sun that shone upon the Princess's robes,
Now glittered brightly on the gold brocade;
Her eight rings sparkled all with costly gems,
For each alone was worth at least eight towns;
Her shining girdle, wrought of purest gold,
Was studded o'er with coral and turquoise;
Around her throat she wore a row of pearls,
Iridescent, all brought from far-off seas.
Upon her brow she bore the regal gem,
Which glittered in the sun with such a sheen
That every eye was dazzled by its light.
The maid, moreover, was of beauty rare,
Of tall and slender form, yet stately mien,
And graceful as the topmost bough that bends,

Or branchlet bowing 'neath the summer breeze ;
Within her hand she held some lilies white,
The symbols of a young and modest maid.
She crossed with tearful eyes the crowded streets ;
With grace she greeted every child she met,
And all—whose hearts were not as cold as clay—
Shed bitter tears at such a sight of woe,
And sighing, said : " Alas, her mother dear ! "
At last when she had almost reached the lake,
The mighty dukes, her father's noble peers,
As well as every lady of her suite
Appalled with fear, now bade her all farewell,
And hastened back to town before the beast
Arose from out the mere to seize his prey.
Now, God Almighty chose to show His love
Not only to the crowd that stood aghast,
But unto all the region round Syrene.
He, therefore, sent His servant, saintly George,
To turn them from their evil ways to Christ.
The Knight came to the mere just when the maid
Remained alone to weep upon her fate,
Forsaken as she seemed by God and man.
The Knight, who saw her from afar, sped on
With all due haste ; then leaping from his steed,
He strode up by her side and asked her why
She stood there by the lake appalled, aghast.
For all reply the Princess only sobbed,
And with her hand she bade him quickly go.
" Can I afford no help ? " then asked the Knight.
" Flee fast away, spur on your sprightly steed ;
With all due haste, take shelter in the town ;
Uprising from the waters of the lake,
The hungry dragon now doth take his meal ;
So hie thee hence. Just see, the waters move ;
Thou hast no time to tarry here to speak."
But George, undaunted by her words, replied :
" Fair maiden, dry your eyes and trust in me,
Or rather trust in God, who sent me here."
" What shall I do, fair Knight ? " the maid replied.
" Forswear," he answered, " all thy gods of clay,
And bow with meekness to the name of Christ,
Whose Cross we bear to reach a better life ;
For, with His mighty help, I hope to slay
The hellish beast that haunts this lonely land ;
So, therefore, stand aside and let me fight."
Now, when the girl had heard these words of hope,
She hastened to reply unto the saint
" If God doth grant thee superhuman might,
That wonders as the like thou canst achieve ;

If thou hast strength enough to slay the fiend
And free me from this awful fate of mine,
I shall forsake my god, false Alkoron,
And bow with thee unto thine own true God,
Extolling Him as mightier of the two.
If thou wilt also show me how the sign
Of that most mystic Cross is made, Sir Knight,
I shall then cross myself both morn and eve.
Moreover, thou shalt have most costly gifts,
As well as all the gems I bear on me.”
She had but hardly uttered these few words
When, lo! the waters blue began to heave,
And bubble up with foam, and then the beast
Upreared on high his dark and scaly head,
That looked just like some sharp and jagged cliff,
’Gainst which small shipwrecked smacks are dashed at night.
Then, rising from the lake, the horrid beast
Began to spout the water like a whale,
And bellow with a loud, appalling noise,
Just like the crocodiles that lurk unseen
Amongst the sedges growing by the Nile;
The roaring ended in a hollow moan,
As when the hot simoon begins to blow
In fitful blasts across the Libyan plain.
The Princess stood thereby and shook with fear;
She almost fainted at that dreadful sight.
St. George’s warlike steed began to rear,
And prance and tremble; then it tried to flee;
But curbing it with might, and wheeling round,
The Knight with clashing strokes attacked the beast.
His sabre, striking on that scaly skin,
Struck forth a shower of sparks that glittered bright
Like ocean spray tossed by the wind at night,
Or glowing iron ’neath the smithy’s sledge,
Or when the kindling steel is struck ’gainst flint.
The monster lifted then its leathern wings
And, bat-like, tried to fly. It only looked
Like some old hen alighting from its perch;
With flutt’ring wings outspread it floundered down,
And was about to fall upon the Knight
And crush him ’neath its huge and massy weight;
Or grasp him with its sharp and cruel claws,
Just as an eagle pounces on a lamb.
But George, invoking Mary to his help,
Bent down and wheeled aside; then with one stroke
He plunged his sword within the dragon’s side,
Just near the heart, beneath the massy wings.
A flood of dark red blood at once gushed out,
Which forthwith tinged the water with this gore.

The monster yelled aloud with such a din
That shook the white and battlemented walls
Then, writhing like a trodden newt or worm
It wallowed in the dust and seemed to die.
But still, before the dragon passed away,
The Knight undid his long and silken scarf,
And bound it round the monster's scaly neck ;
He handed then the scarf unto the maid,
Who now drove on the dragon like a lamb.
They both went through the gate within the town,
Between the gaping crowd that stood aside
To let them pass, amazed at such a sight ;
And thus they crossed the streets and crowded squares,
Until they reached the lofty palace gate.
There 'neath the pillared portal stood the King,
Who stared astounded at the sight he saw.
The saintly Knight alighted from his steed,
And bowing low, he said in accents clear :
" Believe in God the Father, mighty King,
Believe in God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ;
Forsake for aye thy lying gods of clay,
And Sire, let all Syrene with bended knee,
Confess the Lord and make the mystic sign
Of Jesus Christ, who died upon the Cross.
If thou provoke the anger of the Lord,
Far greater scourges might then hap to thee."
The King, who saw his own dear child alive,
Shed tears of joy and clasped her to his heart,
And gladly then—and without more ado—
There in the midst of all the gathered crowd,
With all his Court, he made the mystic sign
That scares the foe of man in darkest hell ;
Then bowing down confessed the name of Christ.
Thereon the saint unsheathed the mighty sword,
And with a blow struck off the scaly head.
The dragon, that till then had scourged the town,
Lay wriggling low amidst the throes of death,
And wallowed in a pool of dark red blood,
Emitting a most foul and loathsome smell.
Still, at the ghastly sight all stared well pleased,
Nay, some threw stones and hit the dying beast,
For 'gainst a fallen foe ; the vile are brave.
And during all this time the kind old King
Had tried to show the gratitude he felt ;
He led the saint within his palace halls,
For there he hoped to grant him many a boon.
" Thou art, indeed," said he, " most brave and true,
Endowed by God with superhuman might,
And as a token of my heartfelt thanks

Accept this chain of gold, for 'tis the meed
Of daring deeds, the like of which thou didst.
This diamond ring till now adorned my hand ;
I give it thee. Besides, my gallant Knight,
One half of all my land will now be thine ;
Nor even then can I requite thy worth,
Except by granting thee my only child,
My darling daughter, as thy loving bride."
The saint, however, thanked for all these gifts,
And bowing low, he said unto the King :
" Thy gratitude to God alone is due,
For I am but a tool within His hand ;
'Tis He who sent me here to kill the beast,
That hell had sent to waste and scourge your land.
Without His help, a man is but a reed,
A blade of grass that bends beneath the breeze,
A midge that ne'er outlives a single night ;
To thy distress He lent a listening ear,
And freed thee from that foul and fiendish beast.
Then dash thy foolish gods of stone and brass,
Build shrines and temples, praise His holy name.
Still, for thy gifts accept my heartfelt thanks ;
My task, howe'er, is that to go and preach
The name of Jesus Christ from town to town.
To Persia straightway I must wend my way
And there declare the love of God to man."
Thereon he took his leave and went away
To preach in distant lands a better life ;
Converting men of high and low degree.
To Alexandra, who then reigned in Rome,
He bore the tidings of Christ's holy name ;
And God e'er granted to this *voyvod* saint
The might of working strange and wond'rous deeds.
At last he met a saintly martyr's death,
And shed his precious blood for Jesus Christ.
To Thee, St. George, we now devoutly pray,
To be our intercessor with the Lord,
That He vouchsafe His mercy to us all.

CHAPTER XIX

THE "KARVA TAJSTVO"

THE sun had already set as Mara and her friend left the convent gates and slowly wended their way homewards. The mother's heart was heavily laden with grief, for although the holy men had done their best to comfort and encourage her, still doubt oppressed her, and she kept asking herself whether she would still find her son alive on the morrow. Now the darkness which slowly spread itself over the open country, and rendered the surrounding rocks of a gloomier hue, the broad, blue sea of a dull, leaden tint, only made her sadness more intense.

Dusk softens the human heart; it opens it to those tender emotions unfelt during the struggle of the day, whilst the raging sun pouring from above enkindles the fierce passions lurking in the heart. That dimness which spreads itself over the world at nightfall, wrapping it up as in a vaporous shroud, has a mystic power over our nature. That clear obscure mistiness seems to open to the mind's eye the distant depths of borderland; we almost fancy we can see dim, shadowy figures float past before us. The most sceptic man becomes religious, superstitious and spiritual at gloaming.

The two women hardly spoke on their way; both of them prayed for the sufferer lying in the convent; but whilst they prayed their minds often wandered from Uros to Milena, who had been left at home ailing. When they arrived at the gates of the town night had already set in. Mara hastened home with her friend, but Milena was not there; they both went to Radonic's house to look for her. They were afraid lest, in her state of health, she might have heard of her husband's death.

A dreary night awaited the women there. After the child had left her, Milena, who had fallen into a swoon, had been delivered of a son; but the infant, uncared for, and finding the

world bleak and desolate, had fled away, without even waiting for the holy water and the salt to speed it forth to more blessed regions.

Milena had only been roused to life by the throes of childbirth, and no sooner had her deliverance taken place than she again fainted away.

Mara's neighbour having, in the meanwhile, been informed by her little boy of Milena's illness, hastened at once to her help. Moreover, on her way thither, she called the *babica* (or midwife), but when she reached Radonic's house, she found the new-born infant a cold corpse and the mother apparently dead. The two women did their utmost to recall Milena to life, but all their skill was of no avail. At last, at their wits' end, a passer-by was hailed and begged to go for the doctor at once.

When Mara came, all hopes of rousing Milena to life had been despaired of, but what the skill of the scientific practitioner and of the wise old woman could not bring about, was effected simply by Mara's presence. After Uros' mother had stood some time by her side, stroking her hair, pressing her hand on the sufferer's clammy forehead, and whispering endearing words in her ear, Milena opened her eyes. Seeing Mara standing beside her, the sight of that woman whom she loved, and whose son she doated on, slowly roused her to life. Consciousness, little by little, crept back within her. When she heard from the mother's lips that Uros was not dead, nay, that there was hope of his recovery, she whispered :

“ If I could only see him once more, then I should be but too happy to die.”

After this slight exertion she once more fainted, but she was soon afterwards brought back again to life, and Mara then was able to make her take the cordial the doctor had prepared for her.

A few hours later, when the physician took his leave for the night, prescribing to the women what they were to do, he and the midwife warmly congratulated each other, not doubting that their skill had snatched the young woman out of the jaws of death.

After a night of pain and restlessness, Milena, early on the next morning, exhausted as she was, fell into a quiet, death-like sleep. Mara then left her to return to the Convent of St. George to see if Uros were still alive and how he was getting

on. Milenko's mother went with her. They had not been away long when Milena, shuddering, uttered a loud cry of terror, sat up in her bed and looked straight in front of her.

"What is the matter?" said the midwife, running up to the bedside.

"Don't you see him standing there?" cried the awe-stricken woman.

"There is nobody, my dear; nobody at all."

"Yes! Radonic, my husband, all covered with wounds! He is dying—he is dead!" and Milena, appalled, stared wildly at the foot of the bed.

"It is your imagination; your husband is with your father at Cettinje."

"No, no; I tell you he's there; help him, or he'll bleed to death!" and the poor woman, exhausted, fell back on her bed unconscious.

The midwife shuddered, for, although she saw nobody, she was quite sure that the apparition seen by Milena was no fancy of an overheated brain, but Radonic's ghost, that had come to visit his wife, for the news of the *heyduk's* death had been carefully withheld from Milena.

The midwife went to the fount of holy water, took the blessed sprig of olive which was over it, dipped it into the fount and sprinkled the bed and the place where the ghost had stood, uttering all the while the appropriate prayer for the purpose. Then she sprinkled Milena, and made the sign of the Cross over her. After that she gave her some drops of cordial, and little by little brought her back to her senses, vowing all the while not to remain alone again in that haunted house.

When Milena recovered, "My husband is dead, is he not?" she asked.

"But—no," said the midwife, hesitatingly.

"You know he is. Did you not see him standing there? He had one wound on the head and several in the breast."

The elderly woman did not answer.

"When did he die?" quoth Milena.

"Some days ago; but——"

"He was killed by the Turks, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Why did no one tell me?"

"Because they were afraid to upset you."

"He is dead," said Milena to herself, staring at the spot

where she had seen her husband, "dead!" Then she heaved a deep sigh of relief.

The midwife tried to comfort her, but she did not seem to heed her words.

"My babe is dead, all are dead!"

Presently the doctor came in to see how she was getting on.

"Is Uros dead?" was Milena's first question.

"No, he is still alive; a message came from the convent this morning."

"But is there any hope of recovery?"

"If he has lasted on till to-day he may yet pull through; he is young and healthy."

"Can I get up to-day?" asked Milena, wistfully.

"Get up?" asked the doctor, astonished.

"Yes."

"Did you hear her?" said the physician, turning towards the midwife. "She asks if she can get up. Yes, you can get up if you wish to kill yourself."

A look of determination settled in the young woman's eyes; but neither the doctor nor the midwife noticed it.

"Anyhow, it is a good sign when the patient asks if he can get up, except in consumption," added the physician, taking his leave. "If you keep very quiet, and lie perfectly still, without tossing about and fretting, you'll be able to get up in a few days."

Milena pressed her lips, but did not say anything in reply; only, after a little time:

"Do I look very ill?"

"No, not so very ill, either."

"Give me that looking-glass," she added.

The midwife hesitated.

"Is that the way you are going to lie still and get well; you must know that yesterday you were very ill."

"I know; but please hand me the looking-glass."

The midwife did as she was bid. Milena took up the glass and looked at herself scrutinisingly, just like an actor who has made up his face.

"I am very much altered, am I not?"

"Oh, but it'll be all over in one or two days! Wait till to-morrow, and——"

"But to-day I think people would hardly recognise me?"

"Oh, it is not quite as bad as that! besides——"

Milena opened her eyes questioningly, and looked at the midwife.

"I care very little whether I am good-looking or not ; whom have I to live for now ?"

"Come, you must not give up in that way. You are but a child, and have seen but little happiness up to now ; you are rich, free, handsome ; you'll soon find a husband, only don't talk, take a cup of this good broth, and try to go to sleep."

"Very well, but I know you are busy, so go home and send me your daughter ; she can attend upon me ; besides, *gospa* Markovic will soon be here."

The midwife hesitated.

"Go," said Milena ; "I'll feel quieter if you go."

"But you must promise me to keep very quiet, and not to attempt, on any account, to get up."

"Certainly," said Milena ; "the doctor said I was not to rise ; why should I disobey him ? Besides, where have I to go ?"

The midwife, after having tucked her patient carefully in bed and made her as cosy as she could, went off, saying that her daughter would soon come to her.

Milena, with anxious eyes and a beating heart, watched the midwife, and, at last, saw her go away and close the door after her. She waited for some time to see that she did not return ; then she gathered up all her strength, and tried to rise.

It was, however, a far more difficult task than she had expected, for she fancied that she had fallen from the top of a high mountain into a chasm beneath, and that every bone in her body had been broken to splinters. If she had been crushed under horses' hoofs, she could not have felt a greater soreness all over her body. Still, rise she would, and she managed to crawl slowly out of her bed.

Her legs, at first, could hardly hold her up ; the nerves and muscles had lost all their strength, she fancied the bones had got limp ; her back, especially, seemed to be gnawed by hungry dogs.

Having managed to get over her first fit of faintness, she, holding on to the bed and against the wall, succeeded in dragging herself towards the table and dropped into a chair.

She sat there for a while, making every effort to overcome her faintness, but she felt so sick, so giddy, and in such pain, that her head sank down on the table of its own weight, and she burst out crying from sheer exhaustion.

When she had somewhat recovered, she slowly undid her long tresses, and her luxuriant hair fell in waves down to the ground. She shook her head slightly, as if to disentangle the wavy mass, plunged her fingers through the locks to separate them, and felt them lovingly, uttering a deep sigh of regret as she did so; then after a moment's pause, she shrugged her shoulders, took up a pair of scissors, and, without more ado, she clipped the long tresses as close to her head as she possibly could, carefully placing each one on the table as she cut it off. Then she felt her head, which seemed so small, so cold, and so naked; she took up a mirror with a trembling hand and quivering lips pulled down at each corner. After she had seen her own reflection in the glass, she burst into tears. She had hardly put down the mirror, when Frana, the midwife's daughter, came in.

The young girl, seeing Milena, whom she had expected to find in bed, sitting on the chair with all her hair clipped off, remained rooted to the spot where she was standing.

"Milena, dear, is it you?"

"Yes," replied Milena, mournfully.

"But why did you get up? and why have you cut off your beautiful hair?" asked the midwife's daughter, scared.

"My hair burdened my head; I could not bear the weight any more; besides——"

The young girl looked at Milena, wondering whether she were in her right senses, or if the grief of having lost her husband and her child had not driven her to distraction.

"Besides what, Milena?"

"Well, I am not for long in this world, you know!"

"Do not say such foolish things; and let me help you back to bed."

Milena shook her head, and fixing her large and luminous deep blue eyes on the young girl, she said, wistfully:

"Listen, Frana. Uros is dying, perhaps he is dead! I must see him once more. I must go to him, even if I have to die on the way thither!"

"What! go to the Convent of St. George?"

Milena nodded assent.

"But what are you thinking about? How can you, in your state, think of going there?"

"I must, even if I should have to crawl on all-fours!"

"But if you got there, if I carried you there, they would never let you go in; you know women——"

"Yes, they will ; that's why I've cut off my hair."

"I don't understand."

"I'll dress up as a boy ; you'll come with me ; you'll say I'm your brother, and Uros' friend. You'll do that for me, Frana?"

And Milena lifted up her pleading eyes, which now seemed larger than ever and lighted up with an inward ethereal fire.

The young girl seemed to be hypnotised by those entreating eyes.

"But where will you find the clothes you want?"

"If you can't get me your brother's, then borrow or buy a suit for me ; but go at once. You must get me a cap, and all that is required, but go at once."

"Very well ; only, in the meantime, go to bed, take some broth, and wait till I return."

"But you promise to come back as quickly as you can?"

"Yes, if you are determined to put your life in danger, and——"

"And what?"

"If you don't care what people say."

"Frana, if ever you love a man as I love Uros, you will see that you will care very little for your own life, and still less for what people might say about you."

Frana helped Milena to go to bed again. She made her take a cup of broth, with the yolk of an egg beaten into it ; placed, on a chair by her bed, a bowl of mulled wine, which she was to take so as to get up her strength ; put away the long locks of hair lying on the table, and at last she went off.

Presently, Milenko's mother came to see Milena, and stayed with her till Frana returned, and then she was persuaded to go back home. When she had gone, Frana undid the bundle she had brought, took out a jacket, a pair of wide breeches and leggings, the *opanke* ; lastly, the small black cap with its gold-embroidered crimson crown.

Frana helped Milena to dress, and, in her weak state, the operation almost exhausted her. The broad sash, tightly wound round her waist, served to keep her up, and, leaning on Frana's arm, she left the house.

"I have managed to find a cart for you, so we need not cross the town, but go round the walls, in order that you may not be seen ; besides, the cart will take us to the foot of the mountain, not far from the convent."

"How shall I ever be able to thank you enough for what you have done for me, Frana?"

“By getting over your illness as quickly as possible, for it any harm should come of it my mother ’ll never forgive me, and I don’t blame her.”

The sun was in the meridian when the cart arrived at the foot of the mountain and the two friends alighted. As they climbed the rough and uneven path leading up to the convent, Milena, though leaning on Frana’s strong arm, had more than once to stop and rest, for at every step she made the pain in every joint, in every muscle, was most acute. It seemed as if all the ligaments that bind the bones of the skeleton together had snapped asunder, and that her body was about to fall to pieces. Then she felt a smarting, a fire that was burning within her bowels, and which increased at every effort she made; in fact, had it not been for the young girl, she would either have sunk by the roadside or crawled up—as she had said herself—on all-fours.

Her head also was aching dreadfully, her temples were throbbing, and she was parched with fever. Her limbs sank every now and then beneath her weight; still, her love and her courage kept her up, and she trudged along without uttering a word of complaint. At last they reached the convent. Then her strength gave way. Anxiety, pain and shame overpowered her, and she fell fainting on the threshold. Frana summoned help; but, before the monks came, Milena had recovered, and was sitting down on a bench to rest.

In the meanwhile Uros was lingering on—a kind of death in life; the vital flame was flickering, but not entirely extinguished; the ties that fastened the soul to life were still strong. Towards midnight he had sat up in his bed, and—as the monks thought—the Virgin and Christ had appeared to him, then he had, for some time, not given any further signs of consciousness. Nay, the monks were so sure the sufferer was passing away, that they, in fact, began reciting the prayers for the dying. They did so with much fervour, regarding Uros almost as a saint, for never had mortal man been so highly favoured by the Deity. Little by little, however, life, instead of ebbing away, seemed to return; but the sufferer’s mind was quite lost.

In the morning, first his father had come, together with his friend Janko, and a little while afterwards Mara came.

The monks related to the wondering parents how the Virgin had appeared, bringing with her the infant Christ for him to

kiss. Milenko, however, kept his peace, feeling sure that if he expressed an opinion as to the weird apparition, his words would be regarded as blasphemy.

Coming to himself, Uros recognised his parents, and as Mara bent upon him to kiss his brows :

“ Milena,” whispered Uros, almost inaudibly.

“ Milenko,” said the mother, “ he wants you.”

“ No,” said Milenko, softly to Mara, “ it is not me he wants ; he has been calling for Milena since he has been coming back to life. I am sure that her presence would quiet him, and, who knows ? perhaps add to his recovery.”

The poor mother said nothing ; she only patted her boy’s brown hand, which seemed to have got whiter and thinner in this short space of time.

“ I think it is so hard to refuse him a thing upon which he has set his heart,” said Milenko, pleadingly.

Mara still gave no answer.

“ Perhaps I am wrong in mentioning it—but you do not know how dearly he loved this cousin of his.”

Mara’s eyes filled with tears.

“ Could these priests not be persuaded to let her come in just for a moment ? ”

“ Milena is too ill to come here ; in fact——”

“ Is she dead ? ” asked the young man.

“ No, not dead, but as ill as Uros himself is.”

“ What is the matter with her ? ” asked Milenko.

Mara whispered something in the young man’s ear.

Danilo Kvekvic had left the sufferer to attend to his own duties. All the monks of the convent had, one by one, come to recite an orison by the bedside, as at some miraculous shrine ; then Uros was left to the care of his parents ; even the old monk, after administering to the young man’s wants, had gone to take some rest.

For some time the room was perfectly quiet ; Mara and Milenko were whispering together in subdued tones ; the *pobratim’s* fathers stood outside.

After a little while Uros began to be delirious, and to speak about Radonic and Vranic, who were going to kill Milena.

“ There, you see, she is dying ; let me go to her. Why do you hold me here ? Unhand me ; you see she is alone—no one to attend upon her.” (The remainder of his words were unintelligible.)

The tears rolled down Mara's cheeks, for she thought that her son's words were but too true; at that moment Milena was probably dying.

"She came to me for help, and I——"

"Milenko," added the delirious man, "get the ship ready; let us take her away."

"Yes," said Milenko; "we have only to heave the anchor and be off."

Uros thereupon made an effort to get up, but the pain caused by his wound was so great that he fell fainting on his bed with a deep moan.

The two men standing at the door came to the sufferer's bedside. Mara herself bent over him to assist him. Just then Milenko was called out—someone was asking for him.

The fever-fit had subsided. The sufferer, falling back on his pillow, exhausted, seemed to be slowly breathing his last.

The tears were falling fast from Mara's eyes. The two men by the bed were twisting their bristling moustaches, looking helplessly forlorn. Just then Milenko appeared on the threshold, followed by a wan and corpse-like boy. Bellacic frowned at the intruder. Mara, at the sight, started back, opening her eyes widely.

"You?" said she.

Milena's head drooped down. Milenko put his arm round her waist to keep her up.

"You here, my child?" added Mara, opening her arms and clasping the young woman within them.

Milena began to sob in a low voice.

"The blessed Virgin must have given you supernatural strength, my poor child; still, you have been killing yourself."

Milena did not utter a word. She pressed Mara's hand convulsively; her face twitched nervously as she looked upon her lover lying lifelessly on his bed; then (Mara having made way for her) the exhausted woman sank down upon her chair.

"I told you," said the old monk, coming in, "that in your weak, exhausted state it was not right for you to see your friend, but nowadays," added he, in a grumbling tone, "young people are so headstrong that they will never do what is required of them for their own good. Now that you have seen him, I hope that you are satisfied and will come out."

"Just let me stay a little longer, till he comes to himself

again, only a very few minutes," said Milena, imploringly, and clasping her hands in supplication.

"Please let him stay; Uros 'll be so glad to see him when he opens his eyes. He'll keep very quiet till then."

"Be it so," said the monk; "only the room is getting too crowded. The best cure for a sick man is sympathy and fresh air."

"You are right," said Milenko, "but I give up my place to him; besides, I have some business in town."

As Bellacic accompanied the *pobratim* out—

"Where are you going?" said he.

"To find out Vranic, and settle accounts with him."

"No, no! Wait!" said the father.

"Wait! for what?"

"Let us not think of vengeance as long as Uros lives."

Milenko did not seem persuaded; Bellacic insisted:

"Don't let us provoke the wrath of the Almighty by more bloodshed."

As they were thus discussing the matter, the doctor from Budua arrived, having been sent by Danilo Kvekvic at the request of the monks.

The old practitioner, the same one who had attended Milena, looked at Uros, shook his head gravely, as if he would say: "There is no hope whatever;" then he touched the sufferer's pulse and examined his wound. He approved of the treatment he had received, and then, after a few moments' brown study, and after taking a huge pinch of snuff, as if to clear his head, he said, slowly, that all human effort was vain; the young man could not last more than a few hours—till eventide, or, at the longest, during the night.

"Umph!" grunted the old man, shrugging his shoulders; "he is in the hands of God."

"Of course, of course. We are all in the hands of God."

"I thought," added the caloyer, "he would not pass yesterday night, especially after the Most Blessed appeared to him, holding her Infant in her arms."

"What!" said the doctor; "you mean to say that the Virgin appeared to him?"

"Of course, and I was not the only one who saw her, for, besides, Blagoslav, Danko Kvekvic, and this young man—pointing to Milenko—were also in the room."

"Then God may perform another miracle in his favour,"

said the doctor, incredulously, "for he is beyond all earthly skill."

Uros, in fact, was sinking fast, and, although the old man clung to hope, still the doctor's words seemed but too true. After some time the sufferer seemed to give signs of consciousness, and when Milena placed her thin white hand on his forehead, he felt the slight pressure of her fingers, and, with his eyes closed, said :

"Milena, are *you* here?" and a faint smile played over his lips.

"Yes, my love," whispered Milena, "I am here."

Uros opened his eyes, looked at her, and seemed bewildered at the change which had come over her; still, he said nothing for a while, but was evidently lost in thought, after which he added :

"Milena, have you been here all night?"

"No, I only came here just now."

"You look ill—very ill; I thought you were dying."

Milena kissed his hand, bathing it with tears. Uros once more sank down on his bed exhausted; still, after a few moments' rest, he again opened his eyes and looked round for his father. Bellacic understood the mute appeal, and bent down over him.

"Father," said he, "I don't think I am in this world for a long time. I feel that all my strength is gone; but before——"

The father bent low over his son.

"Before what?" he asked.

"Before dying——"

"Well, my son?"

"Will you promise, father?"

"Yes, I promise; but what is it you want, my darling?"

"To be married to Milena," he said, with an effort.

The tears trickled down the elderly man's sunburnt cheeks.

"I promise to do my utmost," said he.

He at once turned round and explained the whole affair to his wife. Milena, who seemed to have guessed Uros' request, had hid her face in her hands and was sobbing. Thereupon Bellacic left the room and went to find the old monk, who had gone out with the doctor. Taking him aside, he explained the matter to him.

"What!" said the old monk, "bring another woman into the convent, and a young woman besides?"

“ Oh, there is no need to bring her in ! ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ She is already in,” replied Bellacic, unable to refrain from smiling.

“ How did she come in ? When did she come in ? And with whom did she come in ? ” asked the caloyer, angrily.

“ She came in just before the doctor ; you yourself accompanied her.”

The old man stared at Bellacic.

“ She is the one who came in dressed in boy’s clothes ; the midwife’s daughter accompanied her as far as the——”

“ What ! do you mean to say that there are three women, and that one of them is a midwife ? ” quoth the monk, shocked.

Bellacic explained matters. The caloyer consented that Danilo Kvekvic should be sent for to perform the wedding rites *in extremis*, provided Milena left the convent together with Mara that very evening, and did not return again on the morrow. Bellacic, moreover, having promised to give the church a fine painting, representing the Virgin Mary as she had appeared to Uros the evening before, the whole affair was settled to everyone’s perfect satisfaction.

Mara, who had taken Milena into the adjoining room, said to her :

“ Uros has made his father a strange request, and Bellacic has consented ; for who can gainsay a dying man’s wish ? ”

“ I know,” said Milena, whose lips were twitching nervously.

“ He wishes to be married to you.”

Milena fell into Mara’s arms and began to sob.

“ But,” said Milena, “ I am so frightened.”

“ Frightened of what ? ”

“ My husband.”

Mara, bewildered for a moment, remembered that Milena had never been told of Radonic’s death.

“ I know,” continued the young woman, “ that he was killed, for he appeared to me only a few hours ago ; and I am so frightened lest he should be recalled again and scare Uros to death.”

“ Oh ! if incense is burning the whole time, if many blessed candles are lighted, and the whole room sprinkled with holy water, the ghost will never be able to show itself in such a place ; besides, my dear, you know that you were almost

delirious, so that the ghost you saw must have only been your fancy."

"Still, I did not know that he was dead, and I saw him all covered with wounds, and as plainly as I see you now; he looked at me so fiercely——"

Milena shuddered; her features grew distorted at the remembrance of the terrible apparition, and, in her weak state, the little strength left in her forsook her, and she fell fainting into Mara's arms.

It was with great difficulty that she was brought back to life, and then she consented to the marriage.

A messenger was sent to Budua to ask Danilo Kvekvic to come and officiate, and the midwife's daughter went with him to bring Milena a dress, as it would have almost been a sacrilege for her to get married in a boy's clothes.

Danilo Kvekvic came at once; the young girl brought the clothes and the wreaths, and everything being ready, the lugubrious marriage service was performed; still, it was to be gone through once more, when Uros should have recovered, if he ever did recover. The monks crowded at the door, looking on wonderingly at the whole affair, for in their quiet, humdrum life, such a ceremony was an unheard of thing, and an event affording them endless gossip.

The emotion Uros had undergone weakened him in such a way that he fell back fainting. His pulse grew so feeble that it could not be felt any more; his breathing had evidently stopped, a cold perspiration gathered on his brow; his features acquired not only the rigidity, but also the pinched look and livid tint of death.

"I am afraid that it is the beginning of the end."

He began once more reciting the prayers for the dying. Danilo Kvekvic sprinkled him with holy water. All the rest sank on their knees by the bed. A convulsive sob was heard. Milenko, unable to bear the scene any longer, rushed out of the room.

Whilst he was sobbing, and the friars outside were trying to comfort him, the old monk came out.

"Well, father?" said the young man, with a terror-stricken face.

"It is all over," said the old man, shaking his head gravely.

Milenko uttered a deep groan; then he sank on his knees, kissing the monk's hand devoutly.

“Thank you, father, for all that you have done for my brother. If earthly skill could have recalled him to life, yours would have done so. Thank you for your kindness to me and to all of us. Now my task begins; nor do I rest until it is accomplished.”

Unable to keep back the tears that were blinding him, nor the sobs rising to his throat, he rose and ran out of the convent.

Arriving at Budua, he went everywhere seeking for Vranic; but he could not find him anywhere. Nothing positive was known about him; only, it was said that three children had seen him, or someone looking like him, outside the city walls. Later on, a young sailor related that he had rowed a man answering to Vranic's description on board of a ship bound for the coasts of Italy. The ship, a few hours afterwards, had sailed off.

Weary and disheartened, Milenko went home, where he found his father and mother, who had come back from the convent.

“Well,” said the father, “have you heard anything about Vranic?”

“He has fled; my vengeance has, therefore, to be postponed. It might take weeks instead of days to accomplish it; months instead of weeks, and even years instead of months. But I shall not rest before Vranic pays with his own blood for his evil deed,” said Milenko.

“You would not be a Slav, nor my son, if you did not act in this way. Uros had certainly done as much for you.”

“And now,” added Milenko, “as I might be called away from this world before accomplishing this great deed of justice, we must gather, to-night, such of our friends and relations as will take with us the terrible oath of blood, the *karva tajstvo*.”

“Be it so,” said Janko Markovic. “I, of course, will take the oath with you, my son, and will help you to the utmost of my power.”

Milenko shook his father's hand, and added: “Danilo Kvekvic will be the officiating priest. He, being a relation, will not refuse, will he?”

“No, certainly not. He may, of course, demur, but by his innuendoes he led me to understand that he will be waiting for you.”

“He is a real Iugo Slav.”

Milenko and his father busied themselves at once about the

great ceremony. They went to all the relations and friends of the two families, begging them, now that Uros was dead, to join with them in taking the oath of revenge against Vranic, the murderer.

Not a man that was asked refused. All shook hands, and promised to be at Markovic's house that night, and from there accompany him to the priest's.

Night came on. Milenko's mother had gone to sit up with Mara and Milena; Bellacic had remained to pray at his son's bedside, together with the good monks. One by one the friends and relations of the *pobratim*, muffled up like conspirators, knocked at Markovic's door, and were stealthily allowed to enter. *Slivovitz* and tobacco were at once placed before the guests. When they were all gathered together, and the town was asleep, they crept out quietly and wended their way through the deserted streets to the priest's house.

Milenko tapped at the door.

"They are all asleep at this house," said one of the men; "you must knock louder."

Hardly had these words been uttered than a faint ray of light was seen, and, contrary to their expectations, the door was opened by Danilo himself.

"Milenko! You, at this hour of the night? I thought you were at the convent, reciting prayers over my nephew, your *pobratim*."

"A *pobratim* has other duties than praying—the holy monks can do that even better than myself."

"But I am keeping you standing at the door; what can I do for you?"

"We have a request to make, which you will not be surprised at. You must follow us to church."

"To church, at this hour of the night?"

"Yes. We wish—one and all here present—to take the oath of blood against the murderer."

"But, my children, think of what you are asking of me. Our religion commands us to forgive our enemies. Christ —"

"We are Slavs, Danilo Kvekvic," said one of the men.

"But Christians, withal, I hope?"

"Still, vengeance with us is a duty, a sacred duty."

"I am the *pobratim*," quoth Milenko, "the brother of his choice. Did I not swear before you to avenge any injury done

to Uros, your nephew? Do you wish me to forget my oath—to perjure myself?”

“Mind, it is the priest, not the uncle, who speaks,” said Danilo, sternly; “therefore, remember that the *karva tajstvo* is illegal by the laws of our country.”

“By the laws of Austria,” cried out several of the men, “not by the laws of our country. We are Slavs, not Austrians.”

“Come, Danilo, we are men, not children; trifling is useless, words are but lost breath in this matter,” said Janko Markovic. “We are losing time.”

“If you do not follow us with a good will——”

“I see that you mean to carry out your intentions, and that preaching is useless; therefore, I am ready to follow you.”

Saying this, he put his cap on his head, and opened the door.

“And the key?” asked Milenko.

“What key?”

“The key of the church.”

“Why, I happen to have it in my pocket.”

The church being opened, what was their surprise to see it draped in black; but Danilo Kvekvic explained that there had been a funeral service on that very day, and so the church had remained in its mourning weeds.

Thereupon he shut and locked the doors. Some tapers were lighted on the altar, and the priest, putting on his robes, began to read the service.

The few candles shed but a glimmering light in the sacred edifice, and the small congregation, kneeling on the benches by the altar, were wrapt in a gloomy darkness which added a horror to the mystery of the ceremony.

The service for the dead having been read, Kvekvic knelt and partook of the Holy Communion; then, lighting two other tapers, he called the congregation to him. All gathered at the foot of the altar, and knelt down there. He then took up the chalice, where, according to the Orthodox rites of the Communion, bread and wine were kneaded together. Milenko, as the head of the avengers, went up to the altar, and, bowing before the sacred cup containing the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, he made a slight cut in the forefinger of his left hand, and then caused a few drops of his own blood to fall on the Eucharist. He was followed by his father, and by all the other partakers of the oath. When the last man had offered up a

few drops of blood, the priest mixed it up with the consecrated bread and wine already in the cup.

“Now,” said he, with an inspired voice, “lift up your hands to heaven, and repeat after me the following oath.”

All the men lifted up their hands, each one holding a piece of Uros' blood-stained shirt, and then the priest began:

“By this blessed bread representing the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the wine that is His own blood, by the blood flowing from our own bodies, for the sake of our beloved Uros Bellacic, heinously murdered, and now sitting amongst the martyrs in heaven, and from there addressing us his prayers, I, Milos Markovic, his *pobratim*; I, Janko Markovic, his father of adoption; I, Marko Lillic, his cousin” (and so on), “all related or connected to him by the ties of blood, or of affection, solemnly swear, in the most absolute and irrevocable manner, not to give our souls any peace, or any rest to our bodies, until the wishes of the blessed martyr be accomplished by taking a severe revenge upon his murderer, Josko Vranic, of this town, on his children (if ever he has any), or, in default, on any of his relations, friends and acquaintances who might shelter, protect, or withhold him from our wrath; and never to cease in our intention, or flag in our pursuit, until we have obtained a complete and cruel satisfaction, equal, at least, to this crime committed by this common enemy of ours. We swear to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, that not one of us will ever try to evade the dangers his oath may put him to, or will allow himself to be corrupted by gold or bribes of the murderer or his family, or will listen with a pitiful ear to the prayers, entreaties, or lamentations of the person or persons destined to expiate the crime that has taken place; and, though his kith-and-kin be innocent of the foul deed perpetrated by their relation, Josko Vranic, we will turn a deaf ear to their words, and only feel for them the horror that the deed committed awakes within us.

“We swear, moreover, by the blessed Virgin and by all the saints in heaven, that should any of us here present forget the oath he has taken, or break the solemn pact of blood, the others will feel themselves bound to take revenge upon him, even as upon the murderer of Uros Bellacic; and, moreover, the relations of the perjured man, justly put to death, will not be able to exact the rites of the *karvarina*.”

Thereupon, the men having taken the oath, the priest at the

altar sank down on his knees, and, uplifting the chalice, continued as follows :

“ We pray Thee, omnipotent God, to listen to our oaths, and, moreover, to help us in fulfilling them. We entreat Thee to punish the murderer in his own person, and in that of his sons for seven successive generations ; to persecute them with Thy malediction, just as if they themselves had committed the murder. We solemnly declare that we will not consider Thee, O Lord, as just ; Thee, O Lord, as saintly ; Thee, O Lord, as strong ; nor shall we regard Thee, O Lord, as capable of governing the world, if Thou dost not lend a listening ear to the eager wishes of our hearts ; for our souls are tormented with the thirst for revenge.”

When they had all finished this prayer, if it can be called a prayer, they, one by one, went and partook of that loathsome communion of blood with all the respect and devotion Christians usually have on approaching the Lord's Table. After that Danilo Kvekvic knelt down once more, and uplifting his hands in supplication :

“ O Lord, Protector of the oppressed,” said he, “ Thou punishest all those who transgress Thy wise laws and offend Thee, for Thou art a jealous God. Help these parishioners of mine to fulfil an act of terrestrial justice. Punish, with all Thy wrath, the perpetrator of so abominable a crime ; let him have no rest in this world, and let his soul burn for ever in hell after his death ; scatter his ashes to the winds, and obliterate the very memory of his existence. Amen.”

“ Amen,” repeated every man after him.

Thereupon he blessed them all ; and coming down from the altar he shook hands with each one, no more as a priest, but as a relation of the murdered youth, and thanked them for the oath they had taken.

The candles having been put out, the door of the church was stealthily opened, and, one by one, all the men crept out and vanished in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XX

“SPERA IN DIO”

AFTER the ceremony of the *karva tajstvo*, all the men who had taken part in it met together at Janko Markovic's house, so as to come to a decision as to what they were to do in their endeavours to capture the murderer. All the information that had been got in Budua about Vranic helped to show that he had embarked on board of an Italian ship, the *Diana*, which had sailed the evening of the murder. If this were the case, nothing could be done for the present but wait patiently till they could come across him, the communications between Budua and Naples being few and far between.

“Well,” said Milenko, “I'll sail at dawn for Trieste. It is one of the best places where I can get some information about this ship. Moreover, I'll do my best to get a cargo for one of the ports to which she might be destined, and I must really be very unlucky not to come across him before the year is out.”

“And,” replied Janko Markovic, “if our information is wrong—if, after all, he's still lurking in this neighbourhood, or hiding somewhere in Montenegro, we shall soon get at him.”

“We have taken the oath,” replied all the friends.

“Thank you. I'm sure that Uros' death will very soon be avenged.”

Slivovitz and wine were then brought out to drink to the success of the *karva tajstvo*.

At the first glimmer of dawn, Milenko bade his mother farewell and asked her to kiss Mara and Milena for him; then, receiving his father's blessing, and accompanied by all his friends, he left home and went to the ship.

All the cargo had been taken on board several days before, the papers were in due order, and the ship was now ready to start at a moment's notice.

No sooner had Milenko got on board than the sleeping crew was roused, the sails were stretched, the anchor was heaved, and the ship began to glide on the smooth surface of the waters.

"*Srecno hodi*" (a pleasant voyage), shouted the friends, applauding on the pier.

"*Z' Bogam*" (God be with you), replied Milenko.

"*Zivio!*" answered the friends.

The young captain saw the houses of Budua disappear, with a sigh. A heaviness came over him as his eyes rested on a white speck gleaming amidst the surrounding dark rocks. It was the Convent of St. George, where, in his mind's eye, he could see his dearly beloved Uros lying still and lifeless on his narrow bed.

Then a deep feeling of regret came over him. Why had he rushed away, when his friend had scarcely uttered his last breath? He might have waited a day or two; Vranic would not escape him at the end.

Never before—not even the first time he had left home—had he felt so sad in quitting Budua. He almost fancied now his heart was reft in two, and that the better part had remained behind with his friend. Not even the thought of Ivanka, whom he so dearly loved, could comfort him. A sailor's life—which had hitherto had such a charm for him while his friend was on board the same ship with him—now lost all its attraction, and if he had not been prompted by his craving for revenge, he would have taken the ship to Trieste (where she was bound to), and there, having sold his share, he would have gone back to Budua.

The days seemed endless to him. The crew of the ship, although composed of Dalmatians, was almost of an alien race; they were from the island of Lussin, and Roman Catholics besides—in fact, quite different people from the inhabitants of Budua or the Kotor; and, had it not been for a youth whom he had embarked with him from his native town, he would have scarcely spoken to anyone the whole of the voyage, except, of course, to give the necessary orders.

No life, indeed, is lonelier than that of a captain having no mate, boatswain or second officer with him. Fortunately, however, for Milenko, Peric—the youth he had taken with him to teach him navigation—was a rather intelligent lad, and, as it was the first time he had left home, he was somewhat homesick, so, in their moments of despondency, each one tried to cheer and comfort the other.

In the night—keeping watch on deck—he would often, as in his childhood, lean over the side of the ship and look within

the fast flowing waters. When the sea was as smooth and as dark as a metal mirror, he—after gazing in it for some time—usually saw the water get hazy and whitish; then, little by little, strange sights appear and disappear. Some of them were prophetic visions. Once, he saw within the waters a frigate on fire. It was, indeed, a sight worth seeing. The vision repeated itself three times. Milenko, feeling rather anxious, began to look around, and then he saw a faint light far on the open sea. There was no land or island there. Could that light, he asked himself, be that of a ship on fire? He at once gave orders to steer in the direction of the light. As the distance diminished, the brightness grew apace. The flames, that could now be seen rising up in the sky, made the men believe that it was some new submarine volcano. Milenko, however, felt that his vision had been prophetic.

He added more sails; and, as the breeze was favourable, the *Spera in Dio* flew swiftly on the waters. Soon he could not only see the flames, but the hulk of the ship, which looked like a burning island; moreover, the cargo must have been either oil or resin, for the sea itself seemed on fire.

In the glare the conflagration shed all around, Milenko perceived a small boat struggling hard to keep afloat, for it was so over-crowded that, at every stroke of the oars, it seemed about to sink.

The joy of that shipwrecked crew, finding themselves safe on board the *Spera in Dio*, was inexpressible.

Another time he saw, within the sea, the country beyond the walls of his native town. A boy of about ten was leading an old horse in the fields. After some time, the boy seemed to look for some stump on which to tether the horse he had led to pasture; but, finding none, he tied the rope round his own ankle and lay down to sleep. Suddenly, the old horse—frightened at something—began to run, the boy awoke and tried to rise, but he stumbled and fell. His screams evidently frightened the old horse, which ran faster and ever faster, dragging the poor boy through the bushes and briars, dashing him against the stones of the roadside. When, at last, the horse was stopped, the boy was only a bruised and bleeding mass.

“Oh,” said Milenko to Peric, “I have had such a horrible vision!”

“I hope it is not about my little brother,” replied the youth.

“Why?”

“I really don’t know; but all at once the idea came into my head that the poor boy must have died.”

“Strange!” quoth Milenko, as he walked away, not to be questioned as to his vision.

One evening, when the moon had gone below the horizon looking like a reaping-hook steeped in blood, and nothing could be seen all around but the broad expanse of the dark waters, reflecting the tiny stars twinkling in the sky above, Milenko saw, all at once, the white walls of St. George’s Convent. The doors, usually shut, were now opened. Uros appeared on the threshold. There he received the blessing of the old monk who had tended him during his illness, and whose hands he now kissed with even more affection and thankfulness than devotion; then, hugged and kissed by all the other caloyers, who had got to be as fond of him as of a son or a brother, he bade them all farewell. Then, leaning on Milena’s arm, and followed by his father and mother, he wended his way down the mountain and towards the town. Uros was still thin and pale, but all traces of suffering had disappeared from his face. Though he and Milena were man and wife—having been married *in extremis*—still they were lovers, and his weakness was a plausible pretext to lean lovingly on her arm, and stop every now and then to look lovingly within her lustrous eyes, and thus give vent to the passion that lay heavy on his heart; and once, when his parents had disappeared behind a corner, he stopped, put his arm round her waist, then their lips met in a long, silent kiss, which brought the blood up to their cheeks. Then the picture faded, and the waters were again as black as night; only, his ears whistled, and he almost fancied he could hear Uros’ voice in a distance speaking of him.

Of course, Milenko knew that all this was but a delusion, a dream, a hallucination of his fancy, and he tried to think of his friend lying stiff and stark within his coffin; still, his imagination was unruly, and showed him Uros at home alive and happy.

These visions about his friend were all the same; thus, nearly three weeks after he had left Budua, one evening, when sad and gloomy, he was thinking of Uros’ funeral, to which he now regretted not to have remained and assisted, he saw, within the depths of the dark blue sea, Bellacic’s house adorned as for a great festivity. Not only was a banquet pre-

pared ; *guzlars* played on their instruments, and guests arrived in holiday attire, but Uros, who had almost regained his former good looks, was, in his dress of the Kotor, as handsome as a *Macic*. Milena, as beautiful as when, in bridal attire, she had come from Montenegro, was standing by his side. Soon Danilo Kvekvic came, wearing a rich stole. The guests lighted the tapers they were holding ; wreaths were placed on Milena's and Uros' heads. This was the wedding ceremony that would have taken place had Uros recovered from his wound, and of which Milenko had certainly not been thinking.

Milenko at last reached Trieste, where he found a letter waiting for him. The news it contained would have made his heart beat rapidly with joy had Uros only been with him. Now, reading this letter, he only heaved a deep sigh. It was almost a sigh of forlorn hope. Fate but too often, whilst granting us a most coveted boon, seems to feel a malicious pleasure either in disappointing us entirely, or, at least, in blunting the edge of our joy. This letter was from Giulianic, who, having redeemed his pledge from his friend Bellacic, was now but too glad to have him for his son-in-law. Moreover, he urged him to come over to Nona.

Nothing, indeed, prevented Milenko from consigning the ship to the captain, who was waiting for him at Trieste, and selling his share of the brig. Still, he could not think of doing so, or engaging himself, or settling any time for his marriage before Uros' death had been avenged. He, therefore, wrote at once to Giulianic, thanking him for his kindness to him, stating, nevertheless, the reasons which obliged him to postpone his marriage until the vows of the *karvarina* had been fulfilled.

At Trieste, Milenko found out that the *Diana*, the ship on which Vranic was embarked, was a Genoese brig, usually sailing to and from the Adriatic and the Levant ports ; occasionally, she would come as far as Trieste or Venice, usually laden with boxes of oranges and lemons, and sail back with a cargo of timber. It would have been easy enough to have him apprehended by one of the Austrian consuls in the ports where the *Diana* might be bound to, but the vengeance of the *karva tajstvo* is not done by deputy nor confided to the police.

At the shipbroker's to which the *Spera in Dio* was consigned, Milenko also found a letter from the captain, his partner in the ship, saying that, far from coming to take charge of the ship, he was inclined to sell his share ; and Milenko, who was very

anxious to be free and to sail for those ports where he might easier come across the *Diana*, bought the other half, and soon afterwards, having managed to get a cargo of timber for Pozzuoli, he set sail without delay, hoping to be in time to catch Vranic in Naples.

Not far from the rocky island of Melada, which the Dalmatians say is the Melita of the Scriptures, the *Spera in Dio* met with very stormy weather and baffling winds. Thereabouts one rough and cloudy night, when not only Milenko but almost all the men were on deck, they all at once saw a ship looming in the darkness at a short distance from them. The captain had either forgotten to hoist a light, or else had let it go out. When they perceived that dark shadow, only a little darker than the surrounding night, they did their utmost to steer out of her way. The other ship likewise seemed to try and tack about, but driven as she was by a strong head-wind, it was quite impossible to make her change her direction and avoid a collision.

A few moments after the dark phantom was seen a loud crash was heard; it was the groan of a monster falling with a thud upon his adversary, felling him with his ponderous mass. The unknown ship had unexpectedly come and butted against the *Spera in Dio* amidships, like a huge battering-ram, breaking the beams, shivering the planks, cutting the harmless ship nearly in two, and allowing the waters to pour in through the huge cleft.

Some of the sailors managed to climb up the other ship; most of the crew clung to the timber with which the ship was laden. Milenko remained on the sinking wreck until dawn.

The other ship—an Italian schooner—cruised about, and tried to remain as much as she possibly could on the same spot, till early in the morning, so as to pick up all the men of the wreck. Three of the crew, however, must have been washed away, for they were not seen anywhere, or ever afterwards heard of.

The schooner, that had been also considerably damaged, sailed to Trieste as well as she could. Fortunately for Milenko, the *Spera in Dio* had been insured for more than her value, and happening to find another ship for sale, the *Giustizia di Dio*, he bought it, and, on the whole, made a very good bargain. He soon got another cargo for Naples, and, a month after his return, he once more sailed in search of Vranic.

CHAPTER XXI

FLIGHT

VRANIC, having stabbed Uros, remained for a moment rooted to the spot where he stood. When he saw the red blood gush out of the wound and dye the white shirt, he stared at the young man bewildered; he could hardly understand what he had done. A strange feeling came over him. He almost fancied he was awaking from a horrid dream, and that he was witnessing a deed done, not by himself, but by some person quite unknown to him. When he saw Uros put his hand up to the wound, then stagger, he was about to help him; but Milenko having appeared, he shuddered, came to his senses and ran off.

Vranic had always been cursed with a morbidly discontented disposition, as peevish and as fretful as a porcupine. Although he was superstitiously religious, and strictly kept all feasts and fasts, still, at the same time, he felt a grudge—almost a hatred—against God, who had made him so unlike other men; who, far from granting him the boon of health to which he felt he had a right, had stamped him with an indelible sign so that all might keep aloof from him. He envied all the men he knew, for they laughed and were merry, when he himself was as gloomy as a lonely spider in its dusty old web. Still, as he vented the little energy that was in him in secret rancour, he would never have harmed anybody. He had, it was true, cut down Bellacic's vines, but had done so instigated by his friends, or rather, by Bellacic's enemies. If he had stabbed Uros, it was really done in a moment of madness, driven almost to despair by many sleepless nights, by the shame and pain caused by the loss of his ear.

Having done that dreadful deed, he understood that the Convent of St. George was no shelter for him. Besides, seeing Uros fall lifeless, his first impulse was flight. It mattered little whither he went. It was only after a short time when, breath-

less and faint, he stumbled against a stone and fell, that the thought of finding some hiding-place came into his head.

He lurked amongst the rocks the whole of that day, terrified at the slightest noise he heard, trembling with fear if a bird flew beside him, startled at his own shadow. At times he almost fancied the stones had eyes and were looking at him, and that weird, uncouth shapes moved in the bushes below.

He was not hungry, but his lips were parched, his mouth felt clammy with thirst; still, there was not a drop of water to be had, nothing but the hot sun from the sky above, and the glow of the scorching stones from below.

Then he asked himself again and again what he was to do and where he was to go.

Fear evoked a terrible bugbear in every imaginary path he took. If he went back to Budua he would be murdered by his foes or arrested by the Austrian police; Montenegro was out of the question.

He had, by chance, seen during the day an Italian vessel ready to sail. The ship was still at anchor in the bay, for he could see it from his hiding-place. If he could only manage to get on board he might be safe there. Once out of Budua, he cared but little whithersoever chance sent him.

The best thing he could do was to wait till nightfall, then to creep stealthily into town. It was not likely that the murder was known to everybody; if he could only get unseen to the *marina* without crossing the town, he then might get some boatman to row him to the Italian ship.

The day seemed to be an endless one, and even when the sun had set, the red light of the after-glow struggled to keep night away.

At last, when the shades of night fell upon the country, he began to scramble down, avoiding the path and the high road, shuddering whenever he caught the sound of a footstep, feeling sick if a rustling leaf was blown down against him. At last he reached the gates of the town, but instead of going in, he followed the walls, and thus managed to get to the port.

It was now quite dark; some fishermen were setting out for the night, others were coming back home, laden with their prey. He kept aloof from them all.

After some time, he found a sailor lad sleeping in his boat. He shook him and woke him, then he asked him to row him to the Italian ship that was about to sail.

The boy at first demurred, but the sight of a small silver coin overcame all his drowsiness as well as his objections. He consented to ferry him across.

"Do you know what boat she is?" asked Vranic.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"If you are going to her, I suppose you know her name, too."

"Can't you answer a question?" said Vranic, snappishly.

"She's the *Diana*."

"From?"

"Genoa, I believe."

"And bound?"

"To Naples; but Italian ships don't take Slavs on board," said the lad.

Vranic did not give him any answer.

"Are you a sailor?" asked the boy, after a while.

"No. I—I have some business in Italy."

As soon as they were alongside the ship, Vranic called for the captain.

The master, who was having his supper on deck, asked him what he wanted.

"Are you bound for Naples?"

"Yes."

"Can you take me on board?"

"As?"

"As sailor? I'll work my way."

"No. I have no need of sailors."

"Then as a passenger?"

"We are a cargo ship."

"Still, if I make it worth your while?"

"Our accommodation might not be such as would suit you."

The captain suspected this man, who came to him in the midst of the darkness asking for a passage, of having perpetrated some crime. He felt sure that Budua was too hot a place for him, and that he was anxious to get away.

"I can put up with anything—a sack on deck."

"Climb up," replied the captain.

Vranic managed to catch the rope ladder, and, after much difficulty, he climbed on board.

The captain, seeing him and not liking his looks, felt confirmed in his suspicions; therefore he asked him a rather large

sum, as least three times what he would have asked from anybody else.

Vranic tried to haggle, but at last he paid the money down. The lad with the boat disappeared ; still, he only felt safe when—a few hours afterwards—the anchor having been heaved, the sails spread, the ship began to glide on the waters, and the dim lights of Budua disappeared in the distance.

The sea was calm, the breeze fair ; the crossing of the Adriatic seemed likely to be a prosperous one.

A bed having been made up for him in the cabin, Vranic, weary and worn out, lay down ; and, notwithstanding all his torturing thoughts, his mind, by degrees, became clouded and he went off to sleep. It is true, he had hardly closed his eyes when he woke up again, thinking of Uros as he had seen him when the blood was gushing out of his wound ; then a spectre even more dreadful to behold rose before his eyes. It was the *voukoudlak*, from which he was escaping. Still, bodily and mental fatigue overcame all remorse, and, feeling safe from his enemies, he went off to sleep, and, notwithstanding a series of dreadful dreams, he slept more soundly than he had done for many a night.

When he awoke the next morning, all trace of land had disappeared ; nothing was seen but the glittering waters of the blue sea and the glowing sun overhead. He was safe ; remorse had vanished with fear ; he only felt, not simply hungry, but famished.

Everything went on well for two or three days. The smacking breeze blew persistently. In a day more they hoped to reach Naples. The crew had nothing to do but to mend old sails, to eat and sleep. They were a merry set of men, as easily amused as children ; besides, all of them were wonderfully musical and possessed splendid voices. Gennaro, the youngest, especially might have made a great fortune as a tenor. In the evening they would sing all in a chorus, accompanying themselves with a guitar, a mandoline and a triangle.

Vranic, amongst them, was like an owl in an aviary of singing-birds ; besides, he knew but few words of Italian and could hardly understand their dialect. Although his sleep was no more molested by vampires, and he tried not to think of the crime he had committed, and almost succeeded in driving away the visions that haunted him at times, still he was anything but happy. Was he not an exile from his native

country, for, even if the Austrian law could be defeated, would not the terrible *karvarina* be exercised against him whenever he met one of Bellacic's numerous friends ?

In this mood—wrapped in his gloomy thoughts—Vranic kept aloof from every man on board. To the captain's questions he ever answered in monosyllables ; nor was he more talkative with the sailors. Once they asked him to tell them a story of his country, and he complied.

“ Shall I tell you the story of the youth who was going to seek his fortune ? ”

“ Yes ; it must be a very interesting one.”

“ Well—a youth was going to seek his fortune.”

“ And then ? ”

“ The night before he was about to leave his village a storm destroyed the bridge over which he had to pass.”

“ Well—and then ? ”

“ He waited till they built another bridge.”

“ But go on.”

“ There is no going on, for the young man is waiting still,” said he, with a sneer.

After two or three days, Vranic was looked upon by all on board as a peevish, sullen fellow, and he was left to his own dreary meditations.

One of the sailors, besides, got it into his head that Vranic had the gift of the evil eye, and it did not take very long to convince every man on board of the truth of this assertion. Whenever he looked at them, they invariably shut their two middle fingers, and pointed the index and little finger at him, so as to counteract the effect of the *jettatura*. The only man on board who did not fear Vranic was the mate, for he possessed a charm far more potent than a crooked nail, a horse-shoe, a bit of horned coral, or even a little silver hump-backed man—this was a horse-chestnut, which he was once fortunate enough to catch as it was falling from the tree, and before it had touched the ground. He cherished it as a treasure, and kept it constantly in his pocket. It was infallible against the evil eye, and was powerful in many other circumstances. He was a most lucky man, and, in fact, he felt sure he owed his good fortune to this talisman of his.

Although the weather was delightful, still the captain and the crew could not help feeling a kind of premonition of evil to come ; all were afraid that, sooner or later, Vranic would

bring them ill-luck. At last the coasts of Italy were in sight, but with the far-off coasts, a small cloud, a mere speck of vapour, was seen on the horizon. It was but a tiny white flake, a soft, silvery spray, torn from some shrub blossoming in an unknown Eden, and blown by the west wind in the sky. It also looked like a patch worn by coquettish Nature to enhance the diaphanous watchet-blue of the atmosphere. Still, the sailors frowned at it, and called the feathery cloudlet—scudding lazily about—a squall, and they were all glad to be in sight of the land. The breeze freshened, the sea changed its colour, the waves rolled heavily; their tops were crested with foam. Still, the ship made gallantly for the neighbouring coast.

The little cloud kept increasing in size; first it lengthened itself in a wonderful way, like a snake spreading itself out; it also grew of a darker, duller tint. Then it rolled itself together, piled itself up, augmenting in volume, till it almost covered the whole of the horizon. Finally, it began to droop downwards, tapering ever lower, and losing itself in a mist. The sea underneath began to be agitated, to boil and to bubble, seething with white foam; then a dense smoke arose from the sea and mounted upwards as if to meet the descending column of mist from the cloud just above it; both the cloud and the upheaving waves moved with the greatest rapidity, and seemed to be attracted by the ship, which endeavoured to tack about and steer away from them.

All at once, the water overhead met the ascending mist, and then a sparkling, silvery cloud arose in the spout, just like quicksilver in a glass tube.

All the men were on deck, attending to the captain's directions; all eyes were attracted by the weird, beautiful, yet terrifying sight. The master, at the helm, did his best to avoid it, by changing the ship's direction; still, the column of water advanced threateningly in their course. It came nearer and ever nearer; now it was at a gun-shot from the ship; if they had had a cannon on board, they might have fired against it and dissolved it, but they had no firearms. The atmosphere around them was getting dark with mist, the waterspout was coming against them, and if that mass of water burst down on the ship it would founder at once.

What was to be done?

"Leave the ship, and take to the boats," said some of the

crew, but it was already too late; they could not help being involved in the cataclysm.

Some of the men had sunk on their knees, and were asking the Virgin or St. Nicholas of Bari to come to their help.

"There is a remedy," said Vranic to the captain; "an infallible remedy."

"What is it?" asked the master, with the eagerness of a drowning man clutching at a straw.

"If a sailor amongst the crew happens to be the eldest of seven sons he can at once dissolve that cursed column of water, the joint work of the evil spirits of the air and those of the sea."

"How so?" asked the captain.

"Draw, at once, a pentagon, or five-pointed star, or King Solomon's seal, on a piece of white paper, and let such a sailor, if he be on board, stab it through the centre."

The captain called all the men together, and asked if anyone amongst them happened to be, by chance, the eldest of seven brothers.

"My father has seven sons, and I am the eldest," said Gennaro, that curly-headed, bright-eyed Sicilian youth, for whom life seemed all sunshine. "Why, what am I to do?"

The waterspout was advancing rapidly, the sea was lashed by the mighty waves, and the ship, like a nutshell, was being tossed against it.

Vranic, who had drawn the cabalistic sign, handed it to the captain.

"Stab that star in the centre, quickly."

The Slav took out a little black dagger, and gave it to the youth.

"Be quick! there is no time to be lost."

The murmuring and hissing sound the column of water had been making had changed into the deafening roar of a waterfall. It seemed to be whirling round with vertiginous rapidity, as it came upon them.

"Make haste!" added the captain.

"But why?"

"Do it! this is no time to ask questions!" replied the master.

"And then?" quoth the youth, turning to Vranic.

"The waterspout will melt into rain."

"And what will happen to me?"

“To you? Why, nothing.”

“I am frightened.”

A vivid flash of lightning appeared, and the rumbling of the thunder now mingled itself with the roaring of the waters.

“Frightened of what?” said the captain.

“That man has the *jettatura*; I am sure he means mischief.”

“What a coward you are! Do what I order you, or, by the Madonna——”

“What harm can befall you for stabbing a bit of paper?” said some of the sailors.

“Quick! it is the only chance of saving us all!” added the boatswain.

“Only, if you don’t make haste, it’ll be too late.”

The abyss of the waters seemed to open before the ship, ready to engulf it; the waves were rolling over it.

Gennaro crossed himself devoutly, then he muttered a prayer; at last he took up the dagger and stabbed the pentagon in the very middle, just where Vranic had pointed to him with his finger; still, he grew ghastly pale as he did so.

“Holy Mother,” said the youth, “forgive me if I have done wrong!”

All the eyes anxiously turned from the bit of paper to the waterspout, whirling round and coming ever nearer.

All at once the whirling seemed to stop; then, as the motion relaxed, the column of water snapped somewhat above the middle; the lower portion, or base, relapsed and gradually fell; it was absorbed by the rising waves and the bubbling and foaming waters. The higher portion began to curl upwards and to disappear amidst the huge mass of lowering clouds overhead.

“There,” said Vranic, “I told you the spout would melt away and vanish.”

“Wonderful!” said the captain.

“Yes, indeed!” said Gennaro, as he again crossed himself and handed the dagger to its owner, evidently glad to get rid of it.

“Well, you see that you were not struck dead,” said the boatswain to the youth.

“Nor carried away by the devil,” said another of the sailors.

“The year is not yet out, nor the day either,” thought Vranic to himself; “and even if you live, you may rue this day and the deed you’ve done.”

"You have saved all our lives, and we thank you, Gennaro," added the captain. "I shall never forget you; and I hope that, as long as I command a ship, we'll never part."

Thereupon, he clasped him in his arms and kissed him fondly.

"Thank you, captain; and may San Gennaro, my patron saint, and the blessed Virgin, grant you your wish and mine."

"We thank you, too," said the captain to Vranic, feeling himself bound to say something; "you are really a magician, and you know the secret of the elements."

"Oh! it is a thing that every child knows in our country, just like pouring oil in the sea to calm the waves."

The men said nothing, but they were all glad the coasts were near, and that they would soon get rid of this uncanny and uncouth man.

In the meanwhile, the sun had gone down, and dark night spread itself like a pall over the sea. The storm then increased with the darkness. The waterspout had vanished, but in its stead a pouring rain came down; the wind also began to blow in fitful blasts, and as it came in a contrary direction they were obliged to tack about, and to take in the sails. The storm, however, kept increasing at a fearful rate; the wind was blowing a real hurricane; all sails, even the jib, had to be reefed. The sea, lashed by the wind, became ever more boisterous; the waves rose in succession, uplifting themselves the one on top of the other, and dashing against the ship, which ever seemed ready to founder. All hands were now at the pumps, and Vranic, along with the others, worked away with all his strength.

Steering—as the ship had done—to avoid the waterspout, she had been continually altering her course, so that the captain did not exactly know whereabouts they were. In the midst of the darkness and with the torrents of rain that came pouring down, all traces of land had long disappeared.

All at once a mightier gust of wind came down upon the ship, the beams groaned, then there was a tremendous crash and one of the masts came down. There was a moment of panic and confusion; Vranic fell upon his knees and began to pray for help.

Soon after that a light was seen at no very great distance.

"We are saved," said the captain; "there is Cape Campa-nella lighthouse."

All eyes were fixed upon that beacon.

"It is rather too low to be Cape Campanella," added the boatswain.

"Yes; and, besides, it flashes every two minutes," replied the captain.

They thereupon concluded that it was the lighthouse on Carena Point, the south-western extremity of the island of Capri.

Thinking it to be Cape Campanella, they had steered towards the light—the only dangerous part of the island, on account of the reef, which stretches out a long way into the sea. When they found out their mistake it was too late to avoid the danger that threatened them; the ship was dashed against the rocks, which were heard grating under the keel and ripping open the sides, like the teeth of some famished monster of the deep. Fortunately, the brig had got tightly wedged between two rocks and kept fast there, so nothing was to be done but work hard at the pumps, trying to keep out as much water as they possibly could.

The night seemed everlasting. Still, by degrees, the storm subsided, and at dawn the wind had gone down and the sea had grown calm.

At daybreak help came from the shore.

"The ship is very much damaged," said the captain, "and so is the cargo, doubtless; but, at least, there are no lives lost," added he, looking round.

A few moments afterwards, the boatswain, wanting something, called Gennaro, but no answer came. He called again and again, cursed his canine breed, but with no better success.

"Where is Gennaro?" asked the captain

The youth was sought down below, but he was nowhere to be found. All the men of the crew looked at one another enquiringly, and at last the questions that everyone was afraid to ask were uttered.

Had the youth been swept away by one of the huge breakers that washed over the deck? Had he been killed by the falling mast, or blown into the deep by a sudden and unexpected gust of wind? No one had seen him disappear; all looked around, expecting to see the handsome face of the youth they loved so well rising above the waves; but the green waters kept their secret. After that, all eyes turned towards Vranic, as if asking for an answer.

“The last time I saw the youth was when he was working at the pumps by me, just before the mast came down.”

They all muttered some oath, unintelligible to him, and then a prayer for the youth. After that Vranic was only too glad to leave the ship, for every man on board seemed to look upon him as the cause of Gennaro's mysterious disappearance.

Having remained a week in Naples, seeing his money, the only thing he loved, dwindle away, Vranic did his best to find some employment. He for a few days got a living as a porter, helping to unload sacks from an English ship. Still, that was but a very precarious living, and he decided to follow a sea-faring life, not because he was fond of it, but only to keep clear from his enemies and the laws of his country, and the vampire that had haunted him there every night.

He happened to find employment, as cook, on the very ship he had helped to discharge. It was an English schooner, bound for Glasgow. The captain, a crusty old bachelor, was a real hermit-crab; the men, a most ruffianly set. Vranic, being hardly able to speak with anyone, indulged in his morose way of living, and, except for being kicked about every now and then, he was left very much to himself.

From Glasgow the schooner sailed for Genoa, where she arrived just as the *Giustizia di Dio* was about to set sail. The two ships came so close together that Vranic, who kept a sharp look-out whenever he saw an Austrian flag, recognised Milenko standing on the deck and ordering some manœuvres.

Although the young man could not perceive him, hidden as he was in the darkness of the galley, and bending over the stove, still Vranic felt a shock that for a few moments almost deprived him of his senses, and made him feel quite sick.

That day the dinner was quite a failure. The roast was burnt; the potatoes, instead, were raw; the cauliflower was uneatable, and salt had been put in the pudding instead of sugar.

If there is anything trying to human patience, it is a spoilt dinner, especially the first one gets in port. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the captain, never very forbearing at the best of times, got so angry that he kicked Vranic down the hatchway and almost crippled him.

Although the Dalmatian ship sailed away, bound probably towards the East, and he would perhaps never see her captain again, still the shock he felt had quite unnerved him. From that day matters began to go on from bad to worse. Sailing

from Genoa, they first met with contrary winds, and much time was lost cruising about ; after that came a spell of calm weather, and for long weeks they remained in sight of the bold promontory and of the lighthouse of Cape Bearn, not far from the port of Vendres. At last a fair wind arose, the sails were made taut, and the schooner flew on the crested waves. A new life seemed to have come over the crew, tired of their listless inactivity ; the captain cursed Vranic and kicked him a little less than he had done on the previous days.

It was to be hoped that the wind would continue fair ; otherwise their provisions would begin falling short. Ill-luck, however, was awaiting them in another direction.

Opening a keg of salted meat a few days later, the stench was so loathsome, that it reminded Vranic of that awful night when he had stabbed the vampire ; besides, big worms were crawling and wriggling at the top. Vranic at once called the mate and showed him the rotten meat, and the mate reported the fact to the captain. He only answered with a few oaths, then shrugged his shoulders, and said that dogs would lick their chops at such dainty morsels, and were his men any better than dogs ?

“ Wash it well, clean it, and put some vinegar with it,” said the mate, who was the best man on board. “ There is no other meat, and that is better than starving.”

Vranic did as he was bid ; he put more pepper than usual. Still, he himself did not taste it, but lived on biscuit, for even the potatoes had been all eaten up.

A few days afterwards, taking out another piece from the cask, he drew out a sinewy human arm, hacked in several places, and with the fingers chopped off. Shuddering, and seized with a feeling of loathsomeness, he stood for a moment bewildered. Then he almost fancied he had touched something hairy in the cask, and looking in, he saw a disfigured and bearded man's head. Sickening at the gruesome sight, he dropped the arm into the cask and hastened to the mate, trying to explain to him what the barrel contained.

The mate could hardly understand and would not believe him, but soon he had to yield to the evidence of his own senses. The mate, in his turn, reported the horrible fact to the captain, who asked both men not to divulge the secret to the crew. When night came on, the cask and its contents were thrown overboard. The captain was not to blame for what the cask

contained, nor were the ship-chandlers, who had supplied him at other times upon leaving Scotland. The cask bore the trade-mark of a well-known foreign house trading in preserved meat.

The provisions, which had been scarce, now began to fall short; but in a day or two they would have reached their destination. The wind, however, was contrary, and some delay ensued. Hunger was now beginning to be felt. The crew, overworked and badly fed, first grew sullen; the foremost of them, with scowling looks, began to utter threatening words. Orders given were badly obeyed, or not obeyed at all. Long pent-up anger seemed every moment ready to break out—first against the captain, then against the mate, finally against Vranic, who, they said, was leagued against them.

The boatswain especially hated him.

“Since that cursed foreigner has come on board,” said he, “everything has been going from bad to worse. Even the provisions seem to dwindle and waste away.”

“I’d not be surprised,” added one of the sailors, “that he is leagued with the captain to poison the whole lot of us, for, in fact, the meat tasted like carrion, and I don’t know what’s up with me.”

“Nonsense! Why poison us? Starving is much better,” quoth another.

A trifle soon brought on a quarrel, which ended in a tussle. Vranic got cuffed and kicked about; he had been born in an unlucky moment, and everyone hated him without really understanding why or wherefore.

Why do most people dislike toads or blind-worms?

The mate, seeing the poor cook unfairly used, interfered on his behalf, and tried to put an end to the fight. This only made matters worse. The captain, hearing the noise, appeared on deck, and a mutiny at once broke out.

The boatswain, who was at the head of the revolted crew, snatching up a hatchet which happened to be there within his reach, advanced and demanded a distribution of provisions.

The captain, for all answer, knocked him down with a crow-bar; at the same time he showed the crew the coast of England, which was faintly visible at a distance, as well as a man-of-war coming full sail towards them.

A day after this incident, the ship had landed her rebellious crew at Cardiff. The boatswain was sent to jail, where, if he

had been a man of a philosophical turn of mind, he might have meditated on the difference between right and might.

As for Vranic, he was but too glad to quit a ship where he was hated by everybody, even by the captain, who had treated him more like a galley slave than a fellow-creature.

After having earned a pittance as a porter for a short time, he again embarked on board the *Ave Maria*, an Austrian ship bound for Marseilles. This ship had had a remarkably prosperous voyage from the Levant. The captain had received a handsome gratuity, and now a cargo had been taken at a very high freight; therefore, from the captain to the cabin-boy, every man on board was merry and worked with a good will.

Although the weather was bleak, rainy and foggy, still the wind blew steadily; moreover, the *Ave Maria* was a good ship, and a fast sailer, withal she laboured under a great disadvantage, that of being overladen, and was, consequently, always shipping heavy seas.

On leaving Cardiff, the captain found that two of the sailors, who had been indulging in excesses of every kind whilst on shore, were in a bad state of health. A third sickened a few days afterwards, and for a long time all three were quite unfit for work. Still, the ship managed to reach Marseilles without any mishap.

The cargo was unloaded, a fresh one was taken on board; the men received medical assistance, and seemed to be recovering. On leaving Marseilles, matters went from bad to worse; the captain, his mate, and two other sailors fell ill.

"It seems," said the captain, "as if someone has the gift of the evil eye, for, since we left England, ill-luck follows in our wake."

The crew was, therefore, greatly diminished, for the three men, who had been recovering, were now, on account of improper food and overwork, quite ill again.

On leaving Marseilles they met with heavy gales and baffling squalls of wind; the ship began to pitch heavily, then to labour and strain in such a way that, overladen as she was, the pestilence-stricken crew could hardly manage her. For three days the wind blew with such violence that two men had to be constantly kept at the helm. Moreover, she shipped so many seas that hands had to be always at the pumps. The very first day the waves had washed away the coops; then, at last, the jib-boom and the bowsprit shrouds had been broken loose and torn away by the grasp of the storm.

At last the storm subsided, and then the captain ascertained that the ship had sustained such damage as to render her unsafe. In such a predicament, with the crew all ailing, the captain deemed it necessary to go back to Marseilles for repairs.

After a short stay there, the *Ave Maria* set sail again for Palermo, where she arrived without further mishap; only the sick sailors, having had to work hard during the storm, were rather worse than better. On leaving Palermo two other men of the crew had to be put on the sick-list, so that by the time they reached the Adriatic the ship was not much better than a pestiferous floating hospital. In fact, the only ones who had escaped the loathsome contagion were Vranic and the two boys, and they had to do the work of the whole crew.

It was fortunate that, notwithstanding the stormy season of the year, the weather kept steadily fair, for, in case of a hurricane, the crew would have been almost helpless. At last land was within sight; the hills of Istria were seen, towards evening, as a faint greyish line on the dark grey sky. The captain and the men heaved a sigh of relief; that very night they would cast anchor in the port of Trieste. There some had their homes; all, at least, had relations or friends. Vranic alone hoped to meet no one he knew.

“That evening they made a hearty meal, for, as their provisions had slightly begun to fall short, they had scarcely satisfied their hunger for several days; but now—almost within sight of the welcoming, flashing rays of the Trieste lighthouse—they could, indeed, be somewhat prodigal.

The sirocco, which had accompanied them all the way from Palermo, now fell all at once, just as they had reached the neighbourhood of Cape Salvore. That sudden quietness boded nothing good. Soon, the captain perceived that the wind was shifting in the Gulf of Trieste. By certain well-known signs, he argued that the north-easterly wind was rising; and soon afterwards, a fierce *bora*, the scourge of all the neighbourhood, began to blow.

Orders were at once given to reef the topsails; then they began to tack about, so as to come to an anchorage in the roads of Trieste as soon as possible.

With the want of hands, the work proceeded very slowly and clumsily. Night came on—dark, dismal night—amidst

a howling wind and raging billows dashing furiously against the little ship. It was a comfort on the next morning to see the white houses and the naked hills of Trieste ; for they were not far from the port. Every means was tried to get near the land without being dashed against it and stranded, or split against the rocks ; but the fierce wind baffled all their efforts. And the whole of the day was passed in uselessly tacking about and ever being driven farther off in the offing. Still, late in the afternoon, they managed to get nearer the port, and at sunset both anchors were dropped, not far from the jetty ; still, the violence of the wind was such that all communication with the land was rendered impossible. That evening the last provisions were eaten, for they had spent the whole day fasting. The strength of the gale increased with the night. More chain was then added ; but still the anchors began to come home. By degrees, all the chains were paid out ; and, nevertheless, the ship was drifting. In so doing, she struck her helm against a buoy. The shock caused one of the chains, which was old and rusty, to snap. After that, the *Ave Maria* was driven back bodily towards the coasts of Istria, till finding, at last, a better bottom, the anchor held and the ship was stopped at about a mile from Punta Grossa, not far from Capo d'Istria. There was no moon ; the sky was overcast ; the darkness all around was oppressive. The huge surges, dashing against the bows and the fore-castle, washed away everything on deck. The boats themselves were rendered unserviceable. The thermometer had fallen eighteen degrees in two days, and the keen, sharp wind blowing rendered the cold most intense. A fringe of icicles was hanging down from the sides of the ship, the spray froze on the tackle, and rendered the ropes as hard as iron cables.

Then the ship sprung a leak, and the pumps had to be worked to prevent her from sinking. To keep the men alive, the captain opened a pipe of Marsala which had been destined for the shippers. That night, which seemed everlasting, finally wore away, dawn came, and the signal of distress was hoisted ; a ship passed at no great distance, but took no notice of them. Anyhow, help could be expected from Trieste ; the coastguards must have seen them struggling against the storm. That day the wind increased ; not a ship, not a sailing-boat was to be seen in the offing ; what a long, dreary day of baffled hope that was. When evening came on, the fasting crew, now completely

fagged out, began to lose courage, and yet they were but a few miles from the coast. That night Vranic had a dreadful vision. When he took his place at the pump, opposite him, at the other handle, stood the vampire grinning at him, with the horrible gash in his cheek. That gruesome sight was too dreadful to be borne; he felt his arms getting stiff, and he fell fainting on the deck. He only recovered his senses when a huge wave came breaking against the deck and almost washed him overboard.

In the morning the wind began to abate; but now all the sailors were not only thoroughly exhausted, but all more or less in a state of intoxication. The pumps could hardly be worked any more; even Vranic, the boys and the captain, who had worked to the last, hoping to save their lives, were obliged to leave the vessel to sink.

The *Ave Maria* was going down rapidly, and now, even if the men could have worked, it was impossible to think of saving her; she was to be the prey of the waves. As for help from Trieste, it was useless looking out for it. Still, the titled gentlemen, in their warm and cosy offices of the *See-Behörde*, which fronted the harbour, had seen the ship fighting against the wind and the waves. They knew, or, at least, ought to have known, of her distress; but it was carnival time, and their thoughts were surely not with the ships at sea.

At last, at eight o'clock, a ship was seen, and signals of distress were made. The ship answered, and began tacking about and trying to come near the sinking craft. When within reach of hearing, the whole crew of the *Ave Maria* summoned up all their strength and shouted that they were starving.

CHAPTER XXII

THE "GIUSTIZIA DI DIO"

SINCE his departure, Milenko had never received any letters from his parents, for, in those times of sailing-ships, captains got news from home casually, by means of such fellow-countrymen as they chanced to meet, rather than through the post. Lately they had happened to come across a Ragusian ship at Brindisi, but, as this ship had left Budua only a short time after Milenko himself had sailed, all the information the captain could give was rather stale. As for Vranic, nothing had been heard of him these many months.

Peric (the youth sailing with Milenko) heard, however, that the forebodings he had had concerning his brother were but too well founded; the poor boy had been killed while taking care of his father's horse. Still, the man who told him the news did not know, or had partly forgotten, all the details of the dreadful accident, for all he remembered was that the poor child had been brought home to his mother a mangled, bleeding corpse.

Milenko then seemed again to see the vision he had witnessed within the waters, and he could thus relate to the poor boy all the particulars of the tragic event.

Poor Peric cried bitterly, thinking of the poor boy he had been so fond of, and whom he would never see again; then, having somewhat recovered from his grief:

"It is very strange," said he, "that, on the very night on which you saw my brother dragged by the horse, I heard a voice whispering in my ear: 'Jurje is dead!' and then I fancied that the wind whistling in the rigging repeated: 'Jurje is dead!' and that same phrase was afterwards lisped by the rushing waters. Just then, to crown it all, I looked within the palm of my hand—why, I really do not know; but that, as you are aware, brings about the death of the person we love most. At that same moment a cold shivering came over me,

and I felt sure that my poor brother was dead. All this is very strange, is it not ? ”

“ Not so very strange, either,” replied Milenko ; “ the saints allow us to have an inkling of what is to happen, so that when misfortune does come, we are not crushed by it.”

“ Oh ! we all knew that one of our family would die during the year ; only, as I was going to sea, I thought that I might be the one who——”

“ How did you know ? ” asked Milenko.

“ Because, when our grandmother died, her left eye remained open ; and, although they tried to shut it, still, after a while, the lids parted again, and that, you well know, is a sure sign that someone of the house would follow her during the year.”

The youth remained thoughtful for a little while, and then he added :

“ I wonder how my poor mother is, now that she has lost both her sons.”

“ We shall soon have news from home, for, if the weather does not change, to-morrow we shall be in Trieste, where letters are surely awaiting us.”

“ Do you ever have voices whispering in your ears ? ” asked Peric.

“ No, never ; do you ? ”

“ Very often, especially when I keep very still and try to think of nothing at all, just as if I were not my own self, but someone else.”

“ Try and see if you can hear a voice now.”

The youth remained for some time perfectly still, looking as if he were going off into a trance ; when he came to himself again :

“ I did hear a voice,” said he.

“ What did it say ? ”

“ That to-morrow you will meet the man you have been looking for.”

“ Nothing else ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ Is it not imagination ? ”

“ Oh, no ! besides, poets often hear the voice of the moon, who tells them all the stories they write in their books.”

“ Do they ? ” quoth Milenko, smiling.

“ Yes ; do you not know the story of ‘ The Snowdrop,’ that Igo Kas heard whilst he was seated by a newly dug-grave ? ”

“No, I never heard it.”

“Then I’ll read it to you, if you like.”

Milenko having nothing better to do, listened attentively to the youth’s tale.

THE SNOWDROP.

A SLAV STORY.

The last feathery flakes of snow, fallen in the night, had not yet melted away, when the first snowdrop, which had sprung up in the dark, glistened at the dawning sun. A drop of dew, glistening on the edge of its half-opened leaves, looked like a sparkling tear. That dainty little flower, as white as the surrounding snow, had sprouted up beside a newly-dug grave. As I stooped down to pick the little snowdrop, I saw the words inscribed on the white marble slab, and then sorrow’s heavy hand was laid upon my heart. The name was that of the Countess Anya Yarnova, a frail flower of early spring, as spotless as the little snowdrop.

What had been the cause of her sudden death? Was it some secret sorrow? Was it her love for that handsome stranger whose flashing eyes revealed the hunger of his heart?

At gloaming I was again beside the newly-opened grave. The sun had set, the birds in the bushes were hushed; the breeze, that before seemed to be the mild breath of spring, began to blow in fitful, cold blasts.

The round disc of the moon now rose beyond the verge of the horizon, and its mild, amber light fell upon the marble monument of the Yarnova family, almost hidden under a mass of white roses, camellias and daffodils, made up in huge wreaths.

Mute and motionless, I sat for some time musing by the tomb; then at last, looking up at

“That orbéd maiden, with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the Moon,”

I said:

“Tell me, Moon, thou pale and grey
Pilgrim of Heaven’s homeless way,”

didst thou know young Countess Yarnova, so full of life a few days ago, and now lying there in the cold bosom of the earth? Tell me what bitter and unbearable grief broke that young heart; speak to me, and I shall listen to thy words as to the

voice of my mother, when, in the evening, she whispered weird tales to me while putting me to sleep.

A loud moan seemed to arise from the tomb, and then I heard a voice as silvery sweet as the music of the spheres, lisp softly in my ear:—

Passing by the Yarnova Castle three days ago, I peeped within its casements, and, in a dimly-lighted hall, I saw Countess Yadviga, who had just returned from Paris. She wore a black velvet dress, and her head was muffled in a lace mantilla; although her features twitched and she was sad and careworn, still she looked almost as young and even handsomer than her fair daughter.

Presently, as she sat in the dark room, the door was opened; a page stepped in, drew aside the gilt morocco portière emblazoned with the Yarnova arms, and ushered in the handsome stranger, Aleksij Orsinski.

The Baron looked round the dimly-lighted room for a while. At last he perceived the figure of the Countess as she sat in the shadow of the huge fire-place; then he went up to her and bowed.

“Thank you, Countess Yarnova, for snatching yourself away from beautiful Paris and coming in this dismal place.”

The figure in the high-backed arm-chair bowed slightly, and without uttering a single word, motioned the stranger to a seat at a short distance. The Baron sat down.

“Thank you especially for at last giving your consent to my marriage with the beautiful Anya.”

The Baron waited for a reply, but as none came, he went on:

“Although her guardian hinted that Anya was somewhat too young for me, still I know she loves me; and as for myself, I swear that henceforth the aim of my life will be that of making her happy.”

The Baron, though sixteen years older than his childlike bride, was himself barely thirty; he was, moreover, a most handsome man—tall, stalwart, with dark flashing eyes, a long flowing moustache, a mass of black hair, and a remarkably youthful appearance. He waited again a little while for an answer, but the mother did not speak.

The large and lofty hall in which they were, with its carved stalls jutting out of the wainscot, looked far more

like a church than a habitable room; the few fantastic oil lamps seemed like stars shining in the darkness, while the mellow light of the moon, pouring in from the mullioned windows, fell on the Baron's manly figure, and left the Countess in the dark.

As no answer came, the stranger, at a loss what to say, repeated his own words:

"Yes, all my days will be devoted to the happiness of our child."

"Our child?" said the Countess at last, with a slight tremor in her voice.

The Baron started like a man roused in the midst of a dream.

"Your daughter I mean, Countess."

Seized by a strange feeling of oppression, which he was unable to control, the Baron, in his endeavour to overcome it, began to relate to the mother how he had met Anya by chance, how he had fallen in love with her the very moment he had seen her, how from that day she had engrossed all his thoughts, for, from their first meeting, her image had haunted him day and night.

"In fact," added he, "it was the first time I had loved, the very first."

"The first?" echoed the voice in the dark.

The strong man trembled like an aspen leaf. Those two words coming from that dark, motionless figure, sitting at some distance, seemed to be a voice from the tomb, an echo from the past; that past which never buries its dead. To get over his increasing nervousness the Baron began to speak with greater volubility:

"In my early youth, or rather in my childhood I should say," added he, "I did love once ——"

"Once?" repeated the voice.

The Baron started again and stopped. Was it Anya's mother who spoke, or was there an echo in that room? Still, he went on:

"Yes, once I loved, or, at least, thought myself in love."

"Thought?" added the voice.

That repetition was getting unbearable; anyhow, he tried not to heed it.

"Well, Countess, it was only a childish fancy, a boy's infatuation; at sixteen, I was spoony on a girl two years younger

than myself, just about the age my Anya is now. Fate parted us; I grieved a while; but, since I saw your daughter, I understood that I had never loved before, no, never!"

"Never before—no, never!" uttered the woman in the dark.

The Baron almost started to his feet; that voice so silvery clear, so mournfully sweet, actually seemed to come from the far-off regions from where the dead do not return. After a short silence, only interrupted by two sighs, he went on:

"There were, of course, other loves between the first and the last—swift, evanescent shadows, leaving no traces behind them. And now that I have made a full confession of my sins, Countess, can I not see my Anya?"

"Your Anya?"

This was carrying a joke rather too far.

"Well, my fiancée?" said he, rather abruptly.

"No, Aleksij Orsinski, not yet. You have spoken, and I have listened to you; it is my turn to speak. I, too, have something to say about Anya's father."

The Baron had always been considered as a brave man, but now either the darkness oppressed him, or the past arose in front of him threateningly, or else the strange and almost weird behaviour of his future mother-in-law awed him; but, somehow or other, he had never felt so uncomfortable before. Not only a disagreeable feeling of creepiness had come over him, but even a slight perspiration had gathered on his brow. He almost fancied that, instead of a woman, a ghost was sitting there in front of him echoing his words. Who was that ghost? Perhaps, he would not—probably, he dared not recognise it. He tried, however, to shake off his nervousness, and said, with forced lightness:

"I have had the honour of knowing Count Yarnova personally; he was somewhat eccentric, it is true; still, a more honourable man never——"

"He was simply mad," interrupted the Countess; "anyhow, it is not of Count Yarnova, but of Anya's father of whom I wish to speak." Then, after a slight pause, as if nerving herself to the painful task, the woman in the dark added: "For you must know that not a drop of the Count's blood flows in my daughter's veins."

There was another awkward pause; Aleksij's heart began to beat much faster, the perspiration was gathering on his brow in much bigger drops.

“Count Yarnova was not your daughter’s father, you say?” He would have liked to add: “Who was, then?” but he durst not.

“No, Aleksij Orsinski, he was not.”

A feeling of sickness came over the Baron; he hardly knew whether he was awake, or asleep and dreaming. Who was that woman in the dark?

The Countess, after a while, resumed her story: “I was born in St. Petersburg, of a wealthy and honourable, but not of a noble family. I, too, was but a child when I fell in love, deeply in love, with a neighbour’s son. Unlike yours, Baron, and I suppose all men’s, a woman’s first love is the only real one. I was then somewhat younger than my daughter now is, for I had barely reached my thirteenth year, and as for my lover, he was fifteen. We often met, unknown to our parents, in our garden; I saw no harm in it—I was too young, too guileless, not to trust him——”

She stopped.

“And he?” asked the Baron, as if called upon to say something.

“He, like Romeo, whispered vows of love, of eternal fidelity. He believed in his vows just then, as you did, Aleksij Orsinski; for I daresay that with you, as with all men, the last love is the only true one.”

“Then?” asked the Baron.

“Once we stepped out of the garden together; a carriage was waiting for us; we drove to a lonely chapel not far from our house; a priest there blessed us and made us man and wife. Our marriage, however, was to be kept a secret till we grew older, or, at least, till my husband was master of his actions, for he knew that his parents would never consent to our union.”

There was another pause; but now the Baron could not trust himself to speak, his teeth were almost chattering as if with intense cold.

“A time of sickness and sorrow reigned over our country; the people were dying by hundreds and by thousands. The plague was raging in St. Petersburg. My husband’s family were the first to flee from the contagion. We remained. The scourge had just abated, when, to my horror and dismay, I understood that I should in a few months become a mother. I wrote to my husband, but I received no answer; still, I

knew he was alive and in good health. I wrote again, but with no better success. The day came when, at last, I had to disclose my terrible secret to my parents."

The Countess stopped, passed her hands over her brow as if to drive away the remembrance of those dreadful days.

"It is useless to try and relate their anger and my shame. My parents would not believe in my marriage; besides, the priest that had married us, even the witnesses, had all been swept away by that weird scavenger, the plague. I had no paper, no certificate, not even a ring to show that I was married. Contumely was not enough; I was not only treated by my parents with pitiless scorn, but I was, moreover, turned out of their house. When our own parents shut their doors against us, is it a wonder if the world is ruthless?"

"What was I to do? where was I to go? With the few roubles I had I could not travel very far or live very long. I wandered to the castle where my husband was living; I asked for him, but I was told that he was ill."

"But he was ill," said the Baron, "was he not?"

"Perhaps his watery love had already flowed away, and he had given orders not to receive me if I should present myself. For a moment I stood rooted on the doorstep, bewildered, not knowing what to do; then I asked to see his mother. This was only exposing myself to one humiliation more. She came out in the hall; there she called me bitter names, and when I told her that I had not a bed whereon to lie that night, she replied that the Neva was always an available bed for girls like me; then she ordered her servants to cast me out.

"Houseless, homeless, almost penniless; my husband's mother was right—the Neva was the only place where I could find rest. In its fast-fleeting waters I might indeed find shelter.

"With my thoughts all of suicide I directed myself towards the open country, hoping soon to reach the banks of the broad river, for I was not only tired out, but weak and faint for want of food. My legs at last began to give way; weary, disheartened, I sank down by the roadside and began to sob aloud. All at once I heard a creaking noise of wheels, the tramp of horses, and merry human voices singing in chorus. As I lifted up my head I saw two carts passing, wherein a band of gipsies were all huddled together. Seeing my grief

and hearing my sobs, the driver stopped; a number of boys and young men, girls and women jumped, crawled or scrambled down from the carts, as crabs do out of a basket; then they all crowded around me to find out what had befallen me. I would not answer their questions, nor could I have done so even if I had wanted. I was almost too faint to speak. An elderly woman, the chief's wife, pushed all the others aside, came up to me, took my hand and examined it carefully; then she began to speak in a language I did not understand.

“‘Poor child!’ said she at last, patting my hair and kissing me on my eyes; ‘you are indeed in trouble; still, bright days are in store for you; take courage, cheer up, live, for you will soon be a grand lady, and then you will trample over all your enemies—yes, over every one of them. You have no home,’ said she, as if answering my own thoughts; ‘What does it matter? Have we a home? Have the little birds that nestle in the leafy boughs a home? No, all the world is their home. Come with us. You have no family; well, you will be our child.’

“Saying this she gave an order to the men around her, and almost before I was aware of it, half-a-dozen brawny arms lifted me tenderly and placed me on a heap of clothes in one of the carts. Soon my protectress was by my side whispering words of endearment in my ear; and as for myself, weak and starving, forlorn and dejected as I was, I cared very little what became of me.

“The gipsy woman, who was versed in medicine, poured me out some kind of cordial or sleeping draught and made me drink it; a few minutes afterwards a pleasant drowsiness came over me, then I fell fast asleep. I only awoke some hours later, and I found myself lying on a mattress in a tent. I remained for some time bewildered, unable to understand where and with whom I was; still, when I came to my senses the keen edge of my grief was blunted. The gipsy woman, my protectress, kissed me in a fond, mother-like way; then she brought me a plate of food.

“‘Eat,’ said she, ‘grief has a much greater hold on an empty stomach than on a satiated one.’

“I was young and hungry; the smell of the food was good; I did not wait to be asked twice. I never remembered to have tasted anything so delicious. It was not soup, but a kind of

savoury stew, containing vegetables and meat—an *olla-podrida* of ham, beef and poultry. After that, they offered me some fragrant drink, which soon made me feel drowsy, and then sent me off to sleep again. I woke early the next morning, when they were about to start on their daily wanderings. With my head still muddled with sleep, I was helped into the cart, and sat down between my new friend and her husband.

“That life in the open air, the kindness and good-humour of the people amongst whom I lived, soothed and quieted me. All ideas of suicide vanished entirely from my mind. Self-murder is an unknown thing amongst gipsies. Besides, my friend assured me, again and again, that I should soon become a very great lady, and then all my enemies would be at my mercy.

“‘But how shall I ever repay you for your kindness?’ I asked.

“‘The day will come when the hand of persecution will be uplifted against us; then you alone will protect us.’

“In the meanwhile I was treated like a queen by all of them. Moreover, they were a wealthy band, possessing not only horses, carts and tents, but also money. They might have lived comfortably in some town, or settled as farmers somewhere; but their life was by far too pleasant to give it up. Heedless, jovial, contented people, their only care seemed to be where they were to have their next meal.

“A few months afterwards, my daughter was born in a tent, not far from Warsaw.”

“She must have been a great comfort to you,” quoth the Baron, thinking he ought to say something appropriate.

“A comfort? The unwished-for child of a man that had blighted my life, a comfort? No, indeed, Baron. In fact, I saw very little of this daughter of mine; a young gipsy nursed her and took care of her. My own parents had taught me what love was. My husband’s mother—a grand lady—thought that the Neva was the best cradle for her unborn grandchild. Besides, other work was waiting for me than nursing and rearing Anya.

“Count Yarnova one day met our band of gipsies on the road, and he stretched his ungloved hand to have his fate read and explained. My friend—no ordinary fortune-teller—was well versed in palmistry, and a most lucid thought-reader; she told him that before the year was out he would be a married man.

“‘In a few days,’ added she, ‘on Christmas Eve, you will see your young bride in your own mirror; you will see her again after a few days, and she will tend upon you and cure you from

a fever when the doctor's help will be worse than useless. As soon as you get well you will start on a journey; then you will stop for some days in two large towns, both of which begin with the same letter; there you will see again that beautiful child you saw on Christmas Eve.'

"'But when and where shall I meet her, not as a vision, but as a real person?'

"The Baron wore on the forefinger of his right hand a kind of magic ring, in which a little crystal ball was set. The gipsy lifted the Baron's hand to her eyes and looked at the crystal ball for a few seconds.

"'It is spring,' said she; 'the trees are in bloom, and Nature wears her festive garb. In a splendid saloon, where all the furniture is of gold and the walls are covered with rich silks, I see a handsome young girl dressed in spotless white, holding a guitar and singing; behind her there is a mass of flowers; around her gentlemen and ladies are listening to the sound of her sweet voice.'

"Count Yarnova was a Swedenborgian, and he not only believed in the occult art, but had dabbled himself in magic, until his rather weak mind was somewhat unhinged. He, of course, did not doubt the truth of what the gipsy had foretold him; moreover, he was right, because everything happened exactly as she had predicted.

"On Christmas Eve the Count was alone in his room sitting at a little table reading, and glancing every now and then, first at a clock, afterwards at a huge cheval-glass opposite the alcove. All the servants of the house, except his valet—a young gipsy of our band—had gone to Mass, according to the custom of the place. At half-past eleven my friends accompanied me to the Count's palace; the valet opened the door noiselessly and led me unseen, unheard, in the alcove. I was dressed in white and shrouded in a mass of silvery veils. On the stroke of twelve I appeared between the two draped columns which formed the opening of the alcove; the light hanging in the middle of the room was streaming on me, and my image, reflected in the glass, looked, in fact, like a vision. The Count, seeing it, heaved a deep breath, started to his feet, drew back, stood still for an instant, uttered an exclamation of surprise, then made a step towards the looking-glass. At that moment the valet opened the door as if in answer to his master's summons. The Count looked round, thus giving me time to slip away; when he glanced

again at the mirror I had disappeared. Then the thought came to him that the image he had seen within the glass was only the reflection of some one standing in the alcove; he ordered the valet to look within the inner part of the room, and when the servant man assured him that there was nobody, he ventured to look in it himself. The valet swore that nobody had come in the house, and by the time the servants returned from midnight Mass I was already far away.

“The Count had not been well for some days, and the shock he received upset his nerves in such a way that he took to his bed with a kind of brain fever. I attended him during his illness whilst he was delirious, and when he recovered he had a slight remembrance of me, just as of a vision we happen to see in a dream. He asked if a young girl had not tended him during his illness; his valet and the other servants told him that a mysterious stranger had come to take care of him, and that she had soothed him much more by placing her hand upon his brow, than all the doctor’s stuff had done; still, no one had ever seen her before, or knew where she had come from.

“As soon as the Count was strong enough to travel, he decided to go and visit some of the large towns of Europe, thus hoping to find me.

“The vigilant eye of the police had long suspected Yarnova of being an agitator; some letters addressed to him, and some of his own writings on occult lore, had been strangely misinterpreted, and from that time a constant watch had been held over him. No sooner had he started than information was sent to the police that he was conspiring against the Government, and thus I managed to be sent after him and watch over him. Money, passports, and letters of introduction to the ambassadors were handed to me.

“Vienna was one of the towns where he stopped for a few days. A follower of Cagliostro’s was at that time showing there the phantoms of the living, and those of the dead—not for money, of course, but for any slight donation the visitors were pleased to give. The gipsy, who accompanied Yarnova as valet, came to inform me that the Count intended to go to this spiritualistic séance. The medium was also acquainted of the fact, and for a slight consideration I was allowed to appear before the public as my own materialised spirit. How most of the ghosts were shown to the public, I cannot tell;

I only know that I appeared on a dimly-lighted stage, behind a thick gauze curtain, wrapped up in a cloud of tulle, whilst harps and viols were playing some weird funereal dirges. The people—huddled all together in a dark corner—saw, I fancy, nothing but vague, dim forms passing or floating by; but they were so anxious to be deceived that they would have taken the wizard at his word, even if he had shown them an ape and told them it was their grandmother.

“When Yarnova saw me, he got so excited that it was with the greatest difficulty that he could be kept quiet.

“On the morrow the Count started for Venice, this being the nearest town the name of which began with the same letter as Vienna. We got there on the last days of the Carnival; an excellent time for the purpose I had in hand, as the whole town seemed to have gone stark mad. The Piazza San Marco was like a vast pandemonium, where dominoes of every hue glided about, and masks of every kind walked, ran and capered, or pushed their way through the dense crowd, chattering, laughing, shouting. Bands of music were playing in front of several coffee-houses, people were blowing horns; in fact, the uproar was deafening. Dressed up as a Russian gipsy, and masked, I met the Count on the square, and I told him all that had happened to him from the day he had met the gipsies on the road. I only managed to escape from him when he was stopped by a wizard—his own valet—who told him he would see again that evening, at the masked ball of the Venice theatre, the beautiful girl whose vision he had seen in his own castle on Christmas Eve.

The Count, of course, went to the masked ball, followed by his valet and myself, both in dominoes. Seeing a box empty, I went in it, remained rather in the background, took off my hood and appeared in the white veils, as he had already seen me twice. As soon as I appeared, the valet, who was standing behind his master, laid his hand on the Count's shoulder and whispered to him: ‘Yarnova, look at that lady in that box on the second tier—the third from the stage.’ The Count saw me, uttered an exclamation of surprise, turned round to find out who had spoken to him; but the black domino had slipped away amongst the crowd. I remained in the same position for a few moments, then I put on my domino and mask and left the box. I met the Count coming up, but, in the crowd, he, of course, did not notice me.

"A few days afterwards, we left Venice; even before the Carnival was quite over."

"I suppose you were sorry to leave that beautiful town of pleasure?" said the Baron.

"Very sorry indeed; still, there was something to me sweeter than pleasure, young as I was."

"What was it, Countess?"

"Revenge, so sweet to all Slavs."

"And you revenged yourself?"

"I have bided my time, Baron; every knot comes to the comb, they say."

"Did they all come?"

"Sooner or later, all, to the very last; some of my enemies even rotted in the mines of Siberia——"

The Baron shivered, thinking of his father.

"Others——" The Countess, for a moment, seemed to be thinking of the past.

"Well?"

"But it is my own story I am telling you, not theirs. Count Yarnova and I reached Paris almost at the same time. On my arrival, I presented myself at the Russian Embassy. As the Ambassadors happened to be looking for a companion or reader, the place was offered to me; I accepted it most willingly. A few days afterwards, I was informed by the gipsy, that the Count was to call on the Ambassadors the next day. I remembered the prediction; I did my best to bring it about. The room was exactly like the one described by my friend the gipsy; the furniture was gilt, the walls were covered over with old damask; as the Ambassadors was fond of flowers, the room looked like a hot-house. I had put on the same white dress in which he had already seen me three times, and knowing the very moment the Count would come, I spoke of Russian peasant songs; I mentioned the one I was to sing, and being requested to sing it, I did so. Before I ended it, the door was opened and Count Yarnova was announced.

"I do not know whether his could be called love at first sight, but surely everybody in the room thought that his sudden passion for me had almost deprived him of his reason.

"The Count called on the morrow, and asked if I could receive him; I did so, and he at once confessed his love for me. He told me that although he was old enough to be my

father, still, he felt sure I should in time be fond of him, for marriages being made in heaven, I was ordained to be his wife.

“I tried to explain the plight in which I found myself, but he interrupted me at once, telling me that he knew everything.

“‘I am aware that you have been forsaken by a cruel-hearted man,’ said he, ‘but henceforth I shall be everything to you.’

“I summoned my courage, I spoke to him of my child.

“‘The child that was born on Christmas night?’

“‘Yes,’ I answered below my breath.

“‘It is my own spiritual child,’ said he.

“I looked at him astonished.

“‘I know all about it,’ he continued. ‘On that night I saw you in a vision, just as it had been predicted to me; I saw you just as I see you now. That very night I had, moreover, a vision. I was married to you, and—— but never mind about that dream. I have seen you after that—first in this magic ring; then I saw you materialised at Vienna, and again in Venice. Of course, it was not you, but your double, for you were at that time here in Paris, quite unconscious, quietly asleep, having, perhaps, a dream of what your other self was seeing.’

“Then he began to speak of materialisation, of the influence of planets, in fact, of many chaotic and uninteresting things to which I, apparently at least, listened with the greatest attention. I was well repaid for my trouble, for a few week’s afterwards we were married.”

“And your former husband?”

“Was dead to me.”

“Did not the Government give you any trouble?”

“The Russian Government knew that Countess Yarnova could be of great help.”

“And was she?”

“Even more than had been expected.”

The Countess paused a moment. “It happened that my enemies, Aleksij Orsinski, were also those of my country, so I crushed them.”

The Baron trembled perceptibly.

“But that is their own tale, not mine. We came back to Russia, my husband worshipping me as a superhuman creature.”

“And you loved him?”

“I loved but once.”

“Then you still loved the man who——”

“Love either flows away like water, or it rankles in a festering heart and changes into gall. At St. Petersburg I saw again my parents. Their curse had fallen on their own heads; fortune’s wheel had turned—their wealth was all gone—they were paupers. How despicable people are who, having once been rich, cannot get reconciled to the idea of being poor! How mean all their little makeshifts are! how cringing they get to be! You can even make them swallow any amount of dirt for a dinner you give them. They are all loathsome parasites. I might have ignored my parents—left them to their fate, or else helped them anonymously. I went to see them; it was so pleasant to heap burning coals on their heads. I doled out a pittance to them, received their thanks, allowed them to kiss my hands, knowing how they cursed me within their hearts. Gratitude is the bitterest of all virtues; it sours the very milk of human kindness.”

The Countess laughed a harsh, bitter, shrill laugh, and her guest wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“I shall tell you all about them some other time, in the long winter evenings when the wind howls outside and the country is all covered with its pall of snow. It will be pleasant to sit by the fire and tell you all these old family stories, Aleksij Orsinski.”

And the dark figure buried in the big arm-chair laughed again in a mocking, discordant way.

“After some years the Baron died, and then I was left sole mistress of all his wealth.”

“And Anya?”

“Why, I hardly ever saw her. She was brought up here, in this dreary old castle, like a sleeping beauty; you, like Prince Charming, came to waken her up. You found her here by chance, did you not?”

“Yes, Countess; I happened——”

“Count Yarnova, likewise, found me by chance,” said the woman in the dark, jeeringly, and interrupting him.

“What do you mean?” asked the Baron, breathing hard.

“I mean that the last knot has come to the comb.” Aleksij Orsinski covered his face with his hands.

“Perhaps, after all,” he thought, “this is nothing but a hideous dream.”

“Do you not find, Baron, that Anya, *your* Anya as you call her, reminds you of another girl, the girl you——”

“Countess, for mercy’s sake, I can bear this no longer; who are you?”

The Baron, trembling, panting, sprang to his feet and went up to the Countess. She thereupon threw off her mantilla, and appeared in the bright light of the full moon, which was streaming through the mullioned windows.

The Baron stretched out his arms.

“Jadviga!” he said, in a low, muffled tone; then he again covered his face with his hands.

“And now, Aleksij Orsinski, now that my story is at an end,” said the Countess, in a jeering tone; “now that, at last, you have wakened from your day-dream, whom am I to call—Anya your fiancée, or Anya your own daughter?”

A low moan was the only answer.

“Speak, man, speak!” said the Countess, sneeringly.

Another moan was heard; not from the Baron, but from behind one of the thick Arras portières. Then it moved, and Anya appeared within the room. She advanced a few steps, stretched out her arms, just as if she were walking in the dark; then, at last, she sank senseless on the floor. The father ran to her, caught her up in his arms, pressed her to his heart, tried to bring her back from her fainting-fit, called her by the most endearing names; but, alas! she was already beyond hearing him.

“You have killed your daughter!” cried Aleksij, beside himself with grief.

“I?” said the Countess.

“Yes, and you have blasted my life!”

“Have you not blasted mine?” replied the Countess, laughing, and yet looking as scared as a ghost.

The Baron was moaning over his daughter’s lifeless body.

“You are happy, my Anya; but what is to become of me?”

“Aleksij, rest can always be found within the waters of the Neva; its bed is as soft as down, whilst the breeze blowing in the sedges sings such a soft lullaby.”

Orsinski looked up at his wife.

“I think you are right, Jadviga,” said he.

“Oh! I know I am,” replied the Countess, bursting into a loud, croaking, jarring fit of hysterical laughter. The Baron shuddered, but the Countess laughed louder and ever louder,

until the lofty room resounded with that horrible, untimely merriment.

And now, if you pass by the dreary and deserted old Yarnova Castle, you will, perhaps, hear in the dead of the night those dreadful, discordant peals of laughter, whilst the belated peasant who passes by crosses himself devoutly on hearing that sound of fiendish mirth.

The southerly wind which had accompanied the *Giustizia di Dio* to Cape Salvore suddenly shifted, and a smacking north-easterly breeze began to blow. The whole of that night was a most stormy one; still, the ship bravely weathered the gale. At dawn the wind began to abate, still the sea was very heavy.

At about eight o'clock they perceived a ship, not only in distress, but sinking fast. Milenko at once gave orders to reef the topsails and tack about, so as to be able to approach the wreck, for the sea was by far too heavy to allow them to use their boats.

When they managed to get near enough to hear the shouts of the starving crew, they found out that the sinking ship was the *Ave Maria*, an Austrian barque. After much manœuvring they got as close to the stern of the sinking ship as they possibly could. Ropes were then thrown across, so that the sailors might catch and tie them around their bodies and jump into the sea. The weakest were first helped to leap overboard, and then they were hauled into the *Giustizia di Dio*, where they received all the help their state required.

Five men were thus saved, and then the two ships were driven apart by the gale. A scene of despair at once ensued on board the *Ave Maria*, which was sinking lower and lower. By dint of tacking about, the *Giustizia di Dio* was once more brought by the side of the wreck, and then the captain and boatswain were saved; one of the men, who was drunk, when about to be tied, reeled back to the wine, which, apparently, was sweeter to him than life itself.

Milenko, who had remained at the helm, now came to the prow. It was just then that Vranic caught the rope that had been flung to him, and tied it round his waist. He stood on the stern and was about to leap into the foaming waves below. Milenko, who perceived him, uttered a loud cry, almost a raucous cry of joy, just as mews do as they pounce upon their prey.

“Vranic at last!” said he.

Vranic heard himself called; but, when he recognised his foe, it was too late to keep back—he had already sprung into the sea.

Milenko had snatched the rope from the hands of the sailor who had thrown it. His first impulse was to cut the rope and leave his friend’s murderer to the mercy of the waves.

Vranic, who had disappeared for an instant within the abyss of the waters, was seen again, struggling in the midst of the whirling foam. He looked up, and saw one of the *pobratim* holding the rope. Milenko remained for a moment undecided as to what he was to do.

“Let me help you to pull up,” said the boatswain.

The young captain almost mechanically heaved up the rope, and was astonished to find it so light. The rope came home; evidently it had got undone, for Vranic was presently seen battling against the huge billows, trying to regain the sinking ship.

“What has happened?”

“Did the rope get loose?”

“Why did he not hold on?”

“Why does he not try to catch it?”

“Look, he is swimming back towards the wreck.”

“He must have cut the rope.”

These were the many exclamations of the astonished sailors.

“Thank Heaven, he is guilty of his own blood,” replied Milenko, “for this is, after all, the justice of God.”

In fact, as soon as Vranic saw that it was Milenko himself who was holding the rope that was tied round his waist, he pulled out the black dagger that he always carried about him, and freed himself; then he turned round and began to swim back towards the *Ave Maria*. At the same time, a big wave came rolling over him; it uplifted and dashed him against the sharp icicles hanging from the wrecked ship, and which looked so many *chevaux de frise*. He tried to catch hold, to cling to the frozen ropes, but they slipped from his grasp, and the retreating surges carried him off and he disappeared for ever.

The two vessels were parted once more, and Milenko, perceiving that it was useless to remain there any longer and try and save the three drunken sailors who had remained on

board, thought it far more advisable to proceed on to Trieste and send them help from there.

When the *Giustizia di Dio* reached Trieste, the storm had abated, the wind had gone down, and the sea was almost calm. Help was at once sent to the shipwrecked vessel, but, alas! all that could be seen of the *Ave Maria* was the utmost tops of her masts.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WEDDING

MILENKO had been most lucky in his voyages, and had reaped a golden harvest. As steamers had not yet come into any practical use, and the Adriatic trade was still a most prosperous one, ship-owners and captains had a good time of it. In fact, his share of the profits was such as to enable him to buy the ship on his own account. Still, now that the *karvarina* business was settled and Uros' death was avenged, he did not care any more for a seafaring life; and, moreover, his heart was at Nona with the girl he loved.

The time he had been away had seemed to him everlastingly long, and, besides, he had been all these months without any news from his family. He was, therefore, overjoyed upon reaching Trieste to find a whole packet awaiting him.

The very first letter that caught his sight was one in a handwriting which, although familiar, he could not recognise. Could it be from Ivanka? Now that they were engaged, she, perhaps, had written to him; still, it hardly seemed probable. Perhaps it was from Giulianic, for, indeed, it was more of a man's than a woman's handwriting. Looking at it closer, he thought, with a sigh, that if poor Uros were alive, he would surely believe it came from him. At last he tore the letter open. It began:

“*Ljubi moj brati.*”

“Can it be possible,” said Milenko to himself, “that Uros is still alive?”

He gave a glance at the signature; there was no more doubt about it, the writer was Uros himself. In his joy, he pressed the letter to his lips; then he ran over its contents, which were as follows:

“MY BELOVED BROTHER,—You will, doubtless, be very much surprised to get this letter from me, as I do not think anybody has, as yet, written to you; nor is it likely that you

have met anyone from Budua giving you our news. Therefore, as I think you believe me in my coffin, it will be just like receiving a letter from beyond the grave. Anyhow, if I am still alive, it is to you, my dear Milenko, that I owe my life, nay, more than my life, my happiness.

“The day you went away I remained for several hours in a fainting-fit, just like a dead man. My heart had ceased to beat, my limbs had grown stiff and cold; in fact, they say I was exactly like a corpse. I think that, for a little while, I even lost the use of all my senses. At last, when I came to myself, I could neither feel, nor speak, nor move; I could only hear. I lived, as it were, rather out of my body than within it. I heard weeping and wailing, and the prayers for the dead were being said over me. My mother and Milena were kissing my face and hands, and their tears trickled down on my cold lips and eyelids. It was a moment of bitter anguish and maddening terror. Should I lie stiff and stark, like a corpse, and allow myself to be buried? The idea was so dreadful that it quite paralysed me. I again, for a little while, lost all consciousness. Little by little I recovered my senses; I could even open my eyes; I uttered a few faint words. In fact, I was alive. From that moment I began to recover my strength. In less than a fortnight I was able to rise from my bed. From that day my mother’s visits not only were shorter, but Milena ceased to come. They told me that the monks had objected to her presence. I was afraid this was an excuse, and, in fact, I soon found out that she had been at the point of death, and, as she was at our house now, my mother was taking care of her. Her illness protracted my own, and my strength seemed once more to pass away. But Milena returned to me, and soon afterwards I was able to leave the convent.

“Can I describe my happiness to you, friend of my heart? You yourself will shortly be married to the girl you are fond of, and then you will know all the bliss of loving and being loved.

“But enough of this, for you will say that either my illness or my stay in the convent has made me maudlin, sentimental—and, perhaps, you will not be quite wrong.

“Let me rather ask you, captain, how you have been faring, and on what seas you have been tossing. Oh! how I long to hear from you, and to see you. I hope you will soon be back amongst us, where a great happiness is in store for you; but more than that I cannot say.

"I sincerely trust you have not met with my enemy, and that your hands are not stained with blood. God has dealt mercifully towards me; He has raised me, as it were, from the dead. Let us leave that wretched wanderer to his fate. Moreover, the first day I was able to leave my cell I walked, or rather I should say I crawled, to church to hear Mass. It was on Rose Sunday, which, as you know, is a week after Easter, and the convent garden was in all its youthful beauty. The priest recited the Scriptures for the day, and amongst the other beautiful things that he read were these words, which seemed addressed to me; they were: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Hearing them in church, I almost fancied it was God Himself speaking; and they made such an impression upon me, that I swore to forego all thoughts of *karvarina*, feeling sure that the Almighty will, sooner or later, keep the promise He made to me.

"If I did not know you, my dear Milenko, I might imagine you saying to yourself: 'His illness has crushed all manly spirit out of him.' Still, I feel sure you will not say that of me.

"How often I have been thinking of you, especially the day I left the convent; and on my wedding-day my thoughts were more with you than at home.

"Have your ventures been prosperous? Anyhow, do not invest more money in new ships, for our fathers have just bought a very large schooner. It had been built for a ship-owner, who, having laid out more money in his trade than he could afford, was only too glad to dispose of it. The christening will take place as soon as you come back. Of course, the name chosen is *The Pobratim*.

"I do not write to you anything about your family, for your father has written to you several times, although, by the letters we have from you, none of them seem to have reached you as yet. "UROS."

Milenko hastened to open his father's letters, and he found there the "happiness which was in store for him," to which Uros alluded, for Bellacic wrote:

"You will be surprised to hear that we have a new addition to our circle of friends, a family you are well acquainted with. I do not ask you to guess who these people are, for you would never do so. Therefore, I shall tell you Giulianic has come to settle in Budua. The country round Nona, which, as you

know, is rather marshy and consequently unhealthy, never agreed with any of them; for reasons best known to themselves they have chosen Budua as their residence. I had known Giulianic years ago, and I was very glad to renew his acquaintance; your mother is greatly taken up with his daughter, who seems to cling to her as to a mother. It appears that when Uros met them last, he played some practical kind of joke upon them and rendered himself rather obnoxious; but his marriage has settled the matter to everybody's satisfaction, especially to Ivanka's, for she and Milena are already great friends. I need not tell you how much your mother longs to have you back."

Milenko, after reading all his letters, could hardly master his impatience any longer; a feeling of home-sickness oppressed him to such a degree that, in his longing, he almost felt tempted to leave his ship and run away. But as ill-luck would have it he could not find a cargo either for Cattaro or Budua; therefore, having unloaded his ship, he bought a cargo of timber, which then found a ready market everywhere, and sailed at once for his native town.

"The north-easterly wind 'll just last all the way out of the Adriatic," said Janovic, the new boatswain they had engaged in Trieste, "and we'll get to Budua in three days, so we'll have just time to unload and go to Cattaro for the feast of San Trifone and the grand doings of the *marinevezza*, that is, if the captain 'll give us leave."

"Oh, that 'll be delightful!" replied Peric, "for I've not seen it yet. What is it like?"

"The feast of the *marinevezza*," said Janovic, sententiously, "is more beautiful than any kind of pageantry I've seen; why, the carnival of Benetke" (Venice), "the procession of *Corpus Domini* in Trst" (Trieste), "or the feast of the *Ramazan*, at Carigrad" (Constantinople), "cannot be compared to it. So it's useless my describing it to you; it's a thing you must see for yourself."

Five days after their departure from Trieste, the *Giustizia di Dio* was casting her anchor in the roads of Budua. Although winter was not yet over, spring seemed already to have set in; the sky was of a fathomless blue, the sun was warm and of an effulgent brightness, the brown almond-trees were covered with white blossoms; Nature had already put on her festive garb.

His two fathers, his brother of adoption, Giulianic, Danko

Kvekvic, and a host of friends, were waiting on the shore to welcome him back. Then they accompanied him all in a body to his house. His mother, Mara Bellacic and Milena were waiting for him on the threshold. Presently, Giulianic went to fetch his wife and daughter. Ivanka came trying to hide her blushes; nay, to appear indifferent and demure. In front of so many people, Milenko himself felt awkward, and still there was such a wistful, longing look of pent-up love in his searching glances as he bashfully shook hands with her, that, in her maidenly coyness, her eyelids drooped down, so that their long dark lashes kissed her blushing cheeks.

That day seemed quite a festivity for the little town. The *pobratim* had many friends; and besides, all the persons who had taken the awful oath of the *karva tajstvo* were anxious to know if Captain Milenko had met Vranic during the many months that he had been away; therefore, Markovic's house was, till late at night, always crowded with people.

When Milenko related to them how he had tried to save Vranic, and how miserably the poor wretch had perished, everybody crossed himself devoutly, and extolled the God of the Orthodox faith as the true God of the *karvarina*.

A few days after Milenko's arrival, his father went to Giulianic and asked him for Ivanka's hand.

"I am only too happy to give her to the man of her choice," said Giulianic, "for although I had, indeed, accepted Uros for my son-in-law, still I did so only in mistake. Not only was it Milenko who first gallantly exposed his life to save us, but Ivanka, as she confessed to her mother, fell in love with him the very moment she awoke from her fainting-fit and found herself in his arms. Of course, she ought never to have done so, for no proper girl ought ever to fall in love but with the man chosen by her parents; still, young people are young people all the world over, you know," said Giulianic, apoloisingly.

After that, the fathers discussed the dower, and the mothers talked about the outfit, the kitchen utensils, and the furnishing of the house.

Then followed a month of perfect bliss. During that time, they went occasionally to look after the schooner, which was being fitted up with far more luxury than sailing ships usually were; they visited their fields and their vineyards; but most of their time was spent in merry-making.

One day they all went on a pilgrimage to the Convent of St. George, where they left rich gifts to the holy caloyers for Uros' recovery; another day they visited the famous subterranean chapel of Pod-Maini, adorned with beautiful Byzantine frescoes. They also showed Ivanka the tower where Boskovic, the great magician, lived; but she, being a stranger, had never heard of him; and so they told her that he was an astrologer who possessed a telescope with which he read all the names of the stars.

Another time they went for a sail on the blue, translucent waters, and Milenko showed his bride that high rock jutting over the sea, which is situated half-way between Castel Lastua and Castel Stefano, and known as the Skoce Djevojka (The Young Girl's Leap).

"Did a young girl jump down from that height?" asked Ivanka, shuddering.

"Yes. She was a young girl of exceeding beauty, from the neighbouring territory of Pastiovic, and to escape from a Turk who was pursuing her she threw herself down into the abyss beneath. But I'll tell you her story at full length some other time."

Although the hand of time seemed to move very slowly, still the month of courtship came to an end. Now all the preparations for the wedding were ready, for the nuptials were to be solemnised with great pomp and splendour.

On the morning of that eventful day, everyone connected with the wedding had risen at daybreak to attend to the numerous preparations required. The principal room in Giulianic's house had been cleared of all the furniture, so as to make room for the breakfast table, which was to be spread there. At that early hour, already the lady of the house was presiding over the women in the kitchen, who were cooking a number of young lambs and kids, roasting huge pieces of beef, numberless fowls on spits, or baking *pojace* (unleavened bread) on heated stones.

The men, as a rule, fussed about, creating much confusion, as men usually do on such occasions. They fidgeted and worried lest everything should not be ready in time. They delayed everything, and, moreover, kept wanting and asking for all kinds of impossible things. The barbers' shops were all crowded. At a certain hour—when the bridegroom was expected—a number of people had gathered round about the

house to see him come. At the gate, for Giulianic's villa was out of the town walls, two sentinels were placed to keep watch. The elder was Zwillievic, Milena's father, who had come from Montenegro for the purpose; tall and stalwart, with his huge moustache and his glittering weapons at his belt, he was a fierce guard, indeed. The other was Lilic, only a youth, who for self-defence had but a strong stick.

Both of them were very merry, withal they seemed to be expecting some powerful foe against whose assault they were well prepared. The youth, especially, was so full of his mission, that he hardly dared to take any notice of the loungers who crowded thereabouts.

At last there was a bustle, and the guards were on the alert.

"Here they are, here they are!" shouted the children.

The persons expected were in sight, and, except for their rich festive attire, they looked, indeed, as if they were bent upon some predatory expedition, so manly and warlike was their gait.

The persons expected were about twelve in number; that is to say, the bridegroom and his followers—the *svati*, or knights.

Milenko wore the beautiful dress of the Kotor. Like his train, he had splendid bejewelled daggers and pistols stuck in his leather girdle, and a gun slung across his shoulder.

They all walked gravely, two by two, up to the garden-gate of Giulianic's house; there they were stopped by the sentinels.

"Who are you?" said Zwillievic. "Who are you, who, armed to the teeth, dare to come up to this peaceful dwelling?"

"We are," answered the *voivoda*, the head of the *svati*, "all men from this beautiful town of Budua."

"And what is your motive for coming here?"

"We are in search of a beautiful bird that inhabits this neighbourhood."

"And what do you wish to do with the beautiful bird?"

"We wish to take it away with us."

"And supposing you succeeded in finding it, are you clever enough to capture it?"

"All men of the Kotor are clever hunters," answered the *voivoda*, proudly, and showing Milenko. "This one is the cleverest of all."

"If you are not only clever in words, show us your skill."

An old red cap was brought forth and placed upon a stone—it represented the allegorical bird—and the young men fired at

it. As almost all of them were excellent marksmen, the cap was soon afterwards but a burning rag.

Having thus shown their skill, they were allowed to enter within the yard, where more questioning took place. At the door of the house they were met by Giulianic and his wife, by whom they were cross-examined for the last time.

Having once more proved themselves to be a party of honest hunters, they were all welcomed and allowed to go into the house to see if they could find the beautiful bird.

The *svati* were led into the principal room, where the table was laid, and there begged to sit down and partake of some refreshments. All the young men sat down, each one according to his rank, all keeping precisely the same order as they had done in marching.

Milenko alone did not join his friends at table, for he had at once gone off in search of the allegorical bird. The breakfast having at last reached its end, and the company seeing that, apparently, the hunter had not been very fortunate in his search, two of the *svati*—the *bariactar* and the *ciaus*—volunteered to go to his assistance; and soon afterwards they reappeared, bringing back with them the beautiful, blushing girl decked out in her wedding attire. Her clothes were of red velvet, brocade and satin, richly embroidered in gold, heirlooms which had been in the family for, perhaps, more than a century, and worn by the grandmother and the mother on similar occasions.

For the first time Ivanka now appeared without her red cap, which in Dalmatia is only worn by girls as the badge of maidenhood. Her long tresses formed a natural coronet; they were interwoven with ribbons of many colours, and adorned with sprays of fresh flowers.

A universal shout greeted her appearance, and when the congratulations came to an end, the bride got ready to leave her home. Before going away she went to receive her father's blessing; then her mother clasped her in her arms and kissed her repeatedly. Then, after having expressed her wishes for her future happiness in homely though pathetic words, she reminded her of her duties as a wife and as a bride.

"Remember, my daughter," said she, "that you must love your husband as the turtle-dove loves her mate, for the poor bird pines away and dies in widowhood rather than be unfaithful. Milenko might have many defects—what man is

perfect?—but you should be the first to extenuate them, the last to proclaim them to the world; moreover, whatever be his conduct to you, bear in mind that you must never render evil for evil. The heart of a man is moved by patience and long-suffering, just as huge rocks are moved by drops of rain falling from the sky. When a husband comes back to his senses, then he is grateful to his wife, and cherishes her more than before.”

Ivanka was afterwards reminded of her duties to her near relations, for, in those times, and amongst those primitive people, the wit of a nation did not consist in turning mothers-in-law into ridicule.

She then finished her short speech, drawing tears, not only from her daughter, but even from the eyes of many a swarthy, long-whiskered bystander.

Before starting, however, another ceremony had to be performed. It was that of taking possession of the chest containing all the bride's worldly goods, and on which were displayed the beautiful presents the bride had received. Amongst these were, as usual, two distaffs and a spindle, for spinning had not yet entirely gone out of fashion. Still, these were only the signs of the bride's industry.

A little imp of a boy,

“Hardi comme un coq sur son propre fumier,”

was seated on the chest, and he kept a strict watch over it. He had been told to fight whosoever attempted to lay hands on it, and he, therefore, took his part seriously. He scratched, bit, kicked and pummelled all those who attempted to come near it. At last, having received some cakes and a piece of silver money, he was induced to give up the trunk to the *svati*, who carried it off.

The bride then left the house amongst the shouting and the firing of the multitude, and the whole train, walking two by two, proceeded to church.

Lilic and Zwillievic likewise joined the train, for now that the bird had flown away from the nest their task was over.

As they walked along together, the youth said to the old man:

“I am sorry for poor Milenko, after all.”

“Why?” asked Zwillievic.

“Eh! because Ivanka 'll bury him.”

"How do you know that?" quoth the Montenegrin, astonished.

"Because, you see, Ivanka's name has an even number of letters; therefore, she'll outlive her husband."

"I see," replied Zwillievic; "I had never thought of that."

After the lengthy Orthodox service, and its chorographic-like evolutions, Danilo Kvekvic made a short speech to the newly-married couple, whom he blessed, and then the wedding ceremony came to an end.

The nuptial party finally arrived at Milenko's house, followed by an ever-increasing crowd, and when the shouting and the firing began anew, the whole town knew that the bride had arrived at her new home.

Ivanka was received at the door of Milenko's house by his father and mother, and there, after the usual welcome, she was presented with two distaffs, two spindles, and a baby-boy, borrowed for the occasion. The child is to remind her that she is expected to be the mother of many boys, for children are still, in Dalmatia, considered as blessings.

Here, also, the principal apartment had been cleared of all its furniture to make room for the wedding table. At this feast, the givers being people who had seen a great deal of the world and who had adopted new-fangled ideas, married women were also invited.

The banquet, if not exactly choice, was certainly copious, and it reminded one more of the grand Homeric feasts than the modern dinner-parties. It was composed chiefly of huge dishes of rice, whole lambs roasted, fish and fowl; and it was a great joy for the givers of the feast to see that host of friends eating with a good appetite and enjoying themselves.

Before they had sat down a *dolibasa*, or head-drinker, had been chosen. His functions corresponded, in some degree, with those of the symposiarch of the ancient Greeks. He now presided over the table as an autocrat, and ordered the number of toasts which he thought fit should be drunk.

No sooner had they sat down than the *dolibasa* uttered a loud "*Zivio!*" in honour of the beautiful bride; pistols were fired, and forthwith all the guests emptied their glasses. The ladies, however, were excluded from the drinking, for, whenever a "Hip, hip, hurrah!" was uttered, the guests had to drain the contents of their tumblers, and not simply to lift them up to their lips, or, at most, sip a few drops of the wine. As for the

poor wretch who could not comply with the *dolibasa's* orders, he had to leave the table, and some humiliating punishment was invented for him.

As the feast lasted for several days, the dinner did not really come to an end at once. The eating and drinking were, however, interrupted for a short time by the *Kolo*, which took place in the yard, festively decorated with lanterns, flags and greenery. The ball, of course, was opened by Ivanka and Milenko. The *Kolo* they danced this time was the graceful *skocci-gorri*, or the jumping step, which is something like a *Varsoviennne*, only that the couples, instead of clasping hands, dance it holding the ends of a twisted kerchief.

As the newly-married couple danced, the *bariactar*, or flag-bearer, followed every step they made, waving his banner, holding a decanter of wine upon his head, and performing behind them various antics to amuse the crowd.

When the *Kolo* had lasted long enough—for, as the proverb says, “Even a fine dance wearies”—the bride and bridegroom retired into the house, and eating and drinking began again with renewed mirth. At last, when the merriment had become uproarious, the young couple rose and left the table. They went and knelt down before Janko Markovic, who blessed them, holding a small loaf of bread over their heads; then, having given it to them, he bade them begone, in the name of God.

They were then accompanied to their bridal chamber by Uros and Milena, who helped them to undress, though, according to the traditional custom, this office belonged to the *voivoda*, the *bariactar*, and several of the other *svati*.

The *dolibasa* thereupon uttered a loud “*Zivio!*” which was echoed by everyone in the room, and bumpers were again quaffed down.

The *bariactar* thereupon made some appropriate and spicy jokes, the *svati* did their best to outwit him, the youths winked at the girls, who tried to blush and look demure.

The music played, the *guzlars* sang an epithalamium, to which everyone present joined in chorus. At last the *voivoda* and the principal *svati* went and knocked at the door of the bridal chamber, and asked the hunter to relate his adventures and his success. Then the proofs of the *consummatum est* having been brought forth, pistols, blunderbusses, and guns were fired, to announce the happy event to the whole town, and the drinking began again.

Eight days of festivities ensued, during which time—although the eating and drinking continued in the same way—the scene varied from one house to the other.

At last, the new ship being christened and launched, it was soon rigged out, all decked with flags and streamers. Then Milenko and Uros embarked with their wives, delighted at the prospect of seeing something of the world. On a beautiful May morning the white sails were unfurled, the anchor was heaved, and the beautiful vessel began to glide slowly on the smooth, glassy waters, like a snowy swan. The crowd gathered on the beach fired off their pistols and shouted with joy. The women waved their handkerchiefs.

Soon, nothing more was seen but a dim speck in the grey distance. Then the crowd wended their way homewards, for they had seen the last of the *pobratim*.

THE END.