

CHAPTER XIX.

Two persons rode quietly and slowly through the woody ravine which skirted the dwelling at Rozlogi. The night had become very dark, for the moon had gone down long before, and besides clouds covered the sky. In the ravine nothing could be seen three steps ahead of the horses, which stumbled over the roots of the trees sticking across the road. They went for a long time with the greatest care, till at length, when they saw the end of the ravine, and the open steppe, lighted a little by the gray reflection of the clouds, one of the riders whispered, "Spur on!"

They shot ahead, like two arrows sent from Tartar bows. Nothing followed them but the sound of hoofs. The dark steppe seemed to fly from under their beasts. Single oak-trees standing here and there by the roadside swept past like phantoms, and they fled for a long time without rest or drawing breath, till finally the horses dropped their ears and began to snort from weariness, their gait grew heavy and slow.

"There is no help for it, the horses must slacken their pace," said one of the travellers, a heavy man.

Just then dawn began to push night from the steppe. Every moment a broader expanse came out from the darkness; the thistles of the steppe were outlined indistinctly, the distant trees, the mounds; every moment more light was diffused in the air. The whitish gleams lighted up the faces of the riders too. They were Pan Zagloba and Helena.

"No help for it, we must let the horses slacken their speed," said Zagloba. "Yesterday they came from Chigirin to Rozlogi without resting. They cannot endure this kind of travelling long. I am afraid they may drop dead. How do you feel?"

Here Zagloba looked at his companion, and not waiting for her to answer, cried out,—

"Oh, let me look at you in the daylight! Oh, ho! are those your cousin's clothes? It must be said you are a splendid Cossack. I've not had in all my life such another waiting-man; but I think Pan Skshetuskii will take him from me soon. But what is this? Oh, for God's sake,

twist up your hair! Unless you do there will be no doubt as to your sex."

In fact, over Helena's shoulders flowed a torrent of black hair, let loose by the speed of the course and the dampness of the night.

"Where are we going?" asked she, winding up her hair with both hands, and trying to put it under her cap.

"Where our eyes take us."

"Then not to Lubni?"

Alarm was reflected on Helena's face, and in the quick glance which she threw at Zagloba reawakened distrust was evident.

"Do you see," said he, "I have my own reason; and believe me I have reckoned everything carefully, and my reckoning is based on the following wise maxim: Do not escape in the direction in which you will be pursued. If they are pursuing us at this moment, they are pursuing in the direction of Lubni; for I inquired yesterday in a loud voice about the road, and before setting out I told Bogun that we should go in that direction. Therefore we shall go to Cherkasi. If they follow us, it will not be quickly, for it will take them two days to discover that we are not on the Lubni road. By that time we shall be in Cherkasi; where the Polish regiments of Pivnitski and Rudomina are stationed; and in Korsun are all the forces of the hetmans. Do you understand now?"

"I understand, and while life lasts I shall be thankful to you! I do not know who you are or whence you came to Rozlogi; but I think God sent you to defend and save me, for I should stab myself rather than fall into the power of that robber."

"He is a dragon, terribly intent on pursuing you."

"What in my misfortune have I done to him that he should pursue me? I have known him long, and long have I hated him, long since has he roused in me nothing but fear. Am I the only woman in the world, that he should love me, and shed so much blood on my account,—that he should kill my cousins? When I remember it my blood grows cold. What shall I do? Where shall I hide from him? Do not wonder at my complaining, for I am unhappy. I am ashamed of such affection; I should prefer death a hundred times."

Helena's cheeks were flushed; tears were flowing over them, forced out by anger, contempt, and pain.

"I will not deny," said Zagloba, "that a great misfortune

has come upon your house; but permit me to say that your relatives are partly to blame. They should not have promised your hand to the Cossack, and then betrayed him. When this was discovered he became so enraged that no persuasion of mine could avail. I am sorry for your two dead cousins, and especially for the younger; for he was still a mere youth, but it was evident at a glance that he would have ripened into a mighty warrior."

Helena began to cry.

"Tears are not proper to those garments which you wear; wipe them away therefore, and say to yourself that this was the will of God. God will punish the outlaw too, who is indeed already punished; for he has shed blood in vain, and has lost you, the one chief object of his desires."

Here Zagloba stopped; after a while he spoke again:—

"Oh, dear Lord, what a dressing he would give me if I should fall into his hands! He would make a lizard out of my skin. You do not know that I have already received the crown of martyrdom from the Turks; but I have had enough, I do not wish another; therefore I do not go to Lubni, but to Cherkasi. It would be pleasant to take refuge with the prince, but if they should catch us while going there! You heard, as I was untying the horse from the post, how one of Bogun's serving-men woke up. But if he had raised the alarm then? They would have been ready for the chase at once, and would have caught us in an hour; for they have the fresh horses of Rozlogi, from which I had no time to select. Oh, I tell you he is a wild beast, that Bogun! I have such a horror of him that I would rather take a look at the devil than at him."

"God save us from his hands!"

"He has ruined himself. He abandoned Chigirin, in spite of the orders of the hetman; he has come into collision with Vishnyevetski. Nothing now remains for him but to flee to Hmelnitki. But he will lose his daring if Hmelnitki is beaten, and that may happen. Jendzian met troops beyond Kremenchug, sailing down the river under Barabash and Krechovski, against Hmelnitki; and, besides, young Stephan Pototski is moving by land with his hussars; but Jendzian waited ten days in Kremenchug to repair his boat. Therefore the battle must have taken place before he reached Chigirin. We were expecting news every moment."

"Then Jendzian brought letters from Kudák, did he?" asked Helena.

"Yes, there were letters from Skshetuski to the princess and to you; but Bogun seized them, and from them learned everything. Then he struck down Jendzian at once, and set out to take vengeance on the Kurtsevichi."

"Oh, unfortunate youth! He has shed his blood on my account."

"Do not grieve; he will recover."

"When did this happen?"

"Yesterday morning. For Bogun to fell a man is no more than for another to toss off a glass of wine. And after the reading of the letters, he roared so that all Chigirin trembled."

Conversation was interrupted for a moment. Daylight had come. The rosy dawn, streaked with opals, bright gold, and purple, was glowing in the east. The breeze was fresh; the horses, now rested, moved gladly.

"Let us go on, in God's name, and quickly! Our horses have drawn breath, and we have no time to lose," said Zagloba.

They went again at a gallop, and rushed on for two or three miles without rest. All at once a dark point appeared ahead of them, which approached with amazing rapidity.

"What can that be?" asked Zagloba. "Let us draw up a little. That's a man on horseback."

In fact, some horseman was approaching them at full speed. Bent forward in the saddle, with face hidden in the mane of the horse, he continued to urge with a nagaika the stallion, which seemed not to touch the ground.

"What kind of devil can he be, and why does he flee so? But he just flies!" said Zagloba, taking out a pistol from the holsters, to be ready in every event.

Meanwhile the courier had come within thirty yards.

"Stop!" thundered Zagloba, aiming his pistol; "who are you?"

The horseman reined in his steed, and sat erect in the saddle; but the moment he looked he cried, "Pan Zagloba!"

"Pleshnyevski, attendant of the starosta of Chigirin! But what are you doing here? Where are you fleeing to?"

"Oh, turn back with me! Misfortune! The anger of God, the judgment of God!"

"What has happened? Speak!"

"Chigirin is taken by the Zaporojians. The peasants are slaughtering the nobles."

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"What has happened? Speak!"

"Chigirin is taken by the Zaporojians. The peasants are slaughtering the nobles."

"In the name of the Father and Son! What do you say? Has Hmelnitski come?"

"Pototski is killed, Charnetski in captivity. The Tartars are marching with the Cossacks. Tugai Bey—"

"But Barabash and Krechovski?"

"Barabash is killed, Krechovski has gone over to Hmelnitski. Krivonos moved on the hetmans last night, Hmelnitski before daybreak this morning. He has tremendous forces. The country is on fire, peasants rising everywhere; blood is flowing. Save yourself!"

Zagloba's eyes were starting out, his mouth open, and he was so astonished that he could not speak.

"Save yourself!" repeated Pleshnyevski.

"Jesus and Mary!" groaned Zagloba.

"Jesus and Mary!" repeated Helena, and burst into tears.

"Escape! There is no time to be wasted."

"Where! To what place?"

"To Lubni."

"But are you going there?"

"Yes; to the prince, the voevoda."

"Devil take it all!" cried Zagloba. "But where are the hetmans?"

"At Korsún. But Krivonos is fighting with them already."

"Krivonos or Prostonos,¹ may the plague consume him! I have no reason to go where he is."

"You are running to your own destruction, as into a lion's mouth."

"And who sent you to Lubni? Your lord?"

"Oh! he escaped with his life; and a friend whom I have among the Zaporojians saved my head, and helped me to flee. I am going to Lubni of my own will, for I don't know where else to take refuge."

"But avoid Rozlogi, for Bogun is there. He also wishes to join the rebellion."

"Oh, for God's sake, save us! In Chigirin they said that the peasants would rise immediately beyond the Dnieper!"

"Maybe! maybe! But go your own way wherever you please, for I have enough to do to think of my own skin."

"That is what I'll do," said Pleshnyevski; and lashing his horse with the nagaika, he rushed on.

¹ *Krivonos* signifies "crooked nose;" *Prostonos*, "straight nose."

"But avoid Rozlogi!" called Zagloba after him. "Should you meet Bogun, don't tell him that you have seen me. Do you hear?"

"I hear," answered Pleshnyevski. "God be with you!" And he raced away as if hunted.

"Well, devil, here's an overcoat for you! I've got out of many a trouble, but I have never been in anything like this. Hmelnitski in front, Bogun in the rear; and since this is so, I would n't give a broken orta for either my front or rear, or my whole skin. I was a fool not to go to Lubni with you, but it is no time to talk of that now. Pshaw, pshaw! All my wit at the present moment is n't fit to grease a pair of boots with. What is to be done? Where am I to go? In the whole Commonwealth it appears there is not a corner where a man can leave the world with his own death, and not have death given him. I would rather be excused from such presents; let others take them."

"Most worthy sir," said Helena, "I know that my cousins Yuri and Fedor are in Zólotonosha; maybe they could save us."

"In Zólotonosha? Wait a moment! In Chigirin I knew Pan Unyejitski, who owns the estates of Krapivna and Chernobái, near Zólotonosha. But that place is far from here, farther than Cherkasi. What is to be done? If there is no other place, why, we will take refuge even there. But we must leave the highway; it is safer to go by the steppe and woods. If we hide somewhere a week, even in the woods, perhaps by that time the hetmans will finish with Hmelnitski, and it will be more peaceable in the Ukraine."

"God did not save us from the hands of Bogun to let us perish. Have courage!"

"Wait a moment! Some spirit enters me anew. I have been in many a trouble. In a leisure hour I will tell you what happened to me in Galáts, and you will see at once that I was in a terrible place that time; still I slipped out by my own wit from those dangers and escaped in safety, though as you see my beard has grown gray a little. But we must leave the highway. Turn, my lady! You ride as well as the best Cossack. The grass is high, and no eye can see us."

In fact, the grass became higher and higher as they entered the steppe, so that at last they were hidden in it entirely. But it was difficult for the horses to move through that

thicket of stalks, both slender and heavy, and at times sharp and cutting. Soon they became so tired that they were completely exhausted.

"If we want these horses to serve us further, we must dismount, unsaddle them, and let them roll and eat awhile, otherwise they will not go on. I see that we shall reach the Kagamlik before long. I should like to be there now. There is no place to hide in like reeds; when you are in them the devil himself can't find you. But we must not go astray."

He dismounted and assisted Helena from the horse, then took off the saddles and produced a supply of provisions which he had prudently provided in Rozlogi.

"We must strengthen ourselves," said he, "for the road is long; and do you make some vow to Saint Raphael for our safe passage. There is an old fortress in Zólotonosha, and perhaps there is some kind of garrison there now. Pleshnyevski said that beyond the Dnieper the peasants are rising. H'm! this may be true, for the people are quick at rebellion everywhere; but the hand of the prince is on the country behind them, and it is a devil of a hand for weight! Bogun has a strong neck; but if that hand should fall on it, the neck would bend to the earth,—which God grant, amen! But eat something, Princess!"

Zagloba took a little knife-case out of his boot-leg and gave it to Helena; then he placed before her, on the saddle-cloth, roast beef and bread.

"Eat!" said he. "'When there is nothing in the stomach, we have peas and cabbage for brains.' 'If you want to keep your head right, eat roast beef.' But we have made fools of ourselves once, for apparently it would have been better to flee to Lubni; but the chance is gone now. The prince will surely move with his forces to the Dnieper, to assist the hetmans. We have lived to terrible times, when there is civil war, the worst of all evils. There will not be a corner for peaceable persons. It would have been better for me if I had joined the priesthood, for which I had a vocation, being a quiet and sober man; but fortune ordained otherwise. Oh, my God, my God! I should be canon of Cracow now, chanting my prayers, for I have a very beautiful voice. But what is to be done? From my youth up, girls pleased me! You would n't believe what a handsome fellow I was; whenever I looked at a woman, it was as if lightning struck her. If I were twenty years

younger now, Pan Skshetuski would have something on his hands. Ah, you are a splendid Cossack! No wonder young men are rushing after you, and battling to win you. Pan Skshetuski is no common warrior. I saw the punishment he gave Chaplinski. True, he had something in his head; but when he took him by the neck and—pardon me—by the trousers, and when he battered the door open with him, I tell you that every bone in Chaplinski came out of its socket. Old Zatsvilikhovski told me too that your betrothed is a great knight, the favorite of the prince. I saw myself in a moment that he was a soldier of uncommon daring and of experience beyond his years. He acts quickly. Though your company may be dear to me, I don't know how much I should give if we were in Zólotonosha now. I see that we must stay in the grass during the day and travel at night. But I don't know whether you will be able to endure such toil."

"Oh, I am in good health. I will endure every hardship. We could start even this moment."

"You have courage beyond women! The horses have rolled; I will saddle them at once, so as to be ready in every event. I shall not feel at ease till I see the reeds and rushes of the Kagamlik. If we had n't left the road, we should have come upon the river nearer Chigirin, but here it is about five miles to it from the road. That is my estimate, at least. We shall cross to the other bank at once. I must tell you that I have a great desire to sleep. The entire night before last I went around in Chigirin, yesterday we drove with the Cossacks at a terrible pace to Rozlogi, and last night you and I rode away from Rozlogi. I want to sleep so much that I have lost all wish to talk; and though I have not the habit of being silent,—for philosophers say that a cat should be a hunter, and a man a talker,—still I find my tongue has grown lazy. Pardon me, then, if I doze."

"Oh, there is nothing to make excuse for," said Helena.

Pan Zagloba had really no need to accuse his tongue of sloth, for it had been going unceasingly since daylight; but in truth he wished to sleep. When he sat on the horse again, he began to doze at once, and soon he was sleeping soundly. He fell asleep from weariness and from the sound of the grass bent apart by the breasts of the horses.

Meanwhile Helena gave herself up to the thoughts which were whirling in her head like a flock of birds in the air. Up to that moment events had followed one another so quickly

that she was unable to render account of all that had happened to her. The attack, the frightful scenes of death, terror, unexpected rescue, and flight, — all came like a storm in the course of a single night. And besides, so many unintelligible things! Who was this who had saved her? He had told her his name, it is true, but that name explained in no way the motives of his action. Whence did he come to Rozlogi? He said that he had come with Bogun; he had evidently kept company with him, was his acquaintance and friend. But in such a case why did he save her, and expose himself to the greatest danger and the terrible revenge of the Cossack? To understand this it was necessary to know Zagloba well, with his unruly head and his kindly heart. Helena had known him only six hours. And that unknown man with his impudent face, a swaggerer, a drunkard, is her savior. If she had met him three days before, he would have roused in her aversion and distrust; but now she looks on him as a good angel, and flees with him — whither? To Zólotonosha or anywhere else, — she herself knows not yet clearly. What a change of fate! Yesterday she lay down to rest under the quiet roof where she was born; to-day she is in the steppe, on horseback, in male attire, without home, without refuge. Behind her is the terrible chief, with designs on her honor; before her conflagration, peasant rebellion, civil war with all its ambushes, alarms, and horrors. And all her hope is in that man? No! it is still in some one more powerful than violence, war, murder, and conflagration. Here she raised her eyes to heaven and said, —

“Oh, do thou save me, great and merciful God! Rescue the orphan, the unhappy, the wanderer! Let thy will be done, but let thy mercy be manifest.”

Indeed the mercy had been made manifest, for she had been caught away from the most terrible hands, and saved by an incomprehensible miracle of God. Danger had not passed yet, but perhaps rescue was not distant. Who knows where he is whom she has chosen with her heart? He must have returned already from the Saitch; perhaps he is somewhere in that same steppe. He will seek her and find her, and then joy will take the place of tears, and rejoicing of grief; alarm and terror will disappear forever, peace and pleasure will come. The brave simple heart of the girl was filled with trust, and the steppe rustled sweetly around her; the breeze which moved the grass

blew at the same time pleasant thoughts to her brain. She is not an orphan, then, in this world, since she has here at her side one strange, unknown guardian, and still another, known and beloved, who is caring for her. He will not desert her, he will take her for good; and he is a man of iron, stronger and mightier than those rising against her in that hour.

The steppe rustled sweetly; from the flowers came odors strong and intoxicating; the ruddy tops of the thistle spread out their purple bunches; the white pearls of the mikalief and the feathers of the steppe grass bent toward her, as if recognizing a maiden sister in that Cossack, with long tresses, milk-white face, and red lips. They bent toward her as if wishing to say: “Cry not, O beautiful maiden! we too are in the care of the Lord.” A calm, increasing every moment, came to her from the steppe. Pictures of death and pursuit were blotted from her mind, and straightway a sort of weakness seized her, but a sweet one; slumber began to close her eyelids; the horses went slowly, the movement lulled her. She dropped asleep.