

CHAPTER XX.

HELENA was wakened by the barking of dogs. Opening her eyes, she saw in the distance before her a great shady oak, an enclosure, and a well-sweep. She roused her companion at once: "Oh, wake up!"

Zagloba opened his eyes. "What is this? Where are we?"

"I don't know."

"Wait-a moment! This is a Cossack wintering-place."

"So it appears to me."

"Herdsman live here, no doubt. Not too pleasant company! And these dogs howl as if wolves had bitten them. There are horses and men at the enclosure. No help for it; we must ride up to them, lest they pursue us if we pass. You must have been asleep."

"I was."

"One, two, three, four horses saddled, — four men there at the enclosure. Well, that is no great force. True, they are herdsman. They are doing something in a hurry. Hallo there, men, come this way!"

The four Cossacks approached immediately. They were, in fact, herders who watched horses in the steppe during the summer. Zagloba noticed at once that only one of them had a sabre and a gun. The other three were armed with horse-jaws fastened to staves, but he knew that such herdsman were often dangerous to travellers.

When all four approached they gazed from under their brows at the new-comers; in their bronzed faces could not be found the least trace of welcome. "What do you want?" asked they, without removing their caps.

"Glory to God!" said Zagloba.

"For the ages of ages! What do you want?"

"Is it far to Syrovati?"

"We don't know of any Syrovati."

"And what is this place called?"

"Gusla."

"Give our horses water."

"We have no water; it is dried up. But where do you ride from?"

"From Krivaya Rudá."

"Where are you going?"

"To Chigirin."

The herdsman looked at one another. One of them, black as a bug and crooked-eyed, began to gaze intently at Zagloba. At last he asked: "Why did you leave the highway?"

"It was hot there."

The crooked-eyed man put his hand on the reins of Zagloba's horse: "Come down from the horse, come down! You have nothing to go to Chigirin for."

"How so?" asked Zagloba, quietly.

"Do you see that young fellow there?" asked crooked-eye, pointing to one of the herdsman.

"I do."

"He has come from Chigirin. They are slaughtering Poles there."

"And do you know, fellow, who is following us to Chigirin?"

"Who?"

"Prince Yeremi."

The insolent face of the herdsman dropped in a moment. All, as if by command, removed their caps.

"Do you know, you trash!" continued Zagloba, "what the Poles do to those who slaughter? They hang them. And do you know how many men Prince Yeremi has, and do you know that he is no farther than two or three miles from here? And how have you received us, you dog souls! What stuff you tell! — the well is dried up, you have no water for horses! Ah, basilisks! I'll show you!"

"Oh, don't be angry, Pan! The well is dried up. We go to the Kagamlik with our horses, and bring water for ourselves. But say the word and we will run for water."

"Oh, I can get on without you! I will go with my attendant. Where is the Kagamlik?" inquired he, sternly.

"About a mile and a quarter from here," said the crooked-eyed man, pointing to a line of reeds.

"And must I return this way, or can I go along the bank?"

"Go by the bank. The river turns to the road about a mile from here."

"Dash ahead, young man!" said Zagloba, turning to Helena.

The pretended youth turned his horse and galloped on.

"Listen!" said Zagloba, turning to the herdsman. "If the vanguard comes up, say that I went to the road along the river."

"I will."

A quarter of an hour later Zagloba was riding again by the side of Helena.

"I invented the prince for them in season," said he, blinking with his cataract-covered eye. "Now they will stay all day waiting for the vanguard. They shuddered at the mere name of the prince."

"I see you have such ready wit that you will save us from every trouble," said Helena, "and I thank God for sending me such a guardian."

These words went to the heart of the noble. He smiled, stroked his beard, and said, —

"Well, has n't Zagloba a head on his shoulders? Cunning as Ulysses! and I must tell you, had it not been for that cunning, the crows would have eaten me long ago. Can't help it, I must save myself. They believed easily that the prince was coming, for it is probable that he will appear to-morrow or next day in this neighborhood with a fiery sword like an archangel. And if he should only strike Bogun somewhere on the road, I would make a vow to walk barefoot to Chenstokhova. Even if those herdsmen did not believe, the very mention of the power of the prince was enough to restrain them from attacks on our lives. Still I tell you that their impudence is no good sign to us, for it means that the peasants here have heard of the victories of Hmelnitski, and will become more and more insolent every moment. We must keep therefore to the waste places and visit few villages, for they are dangerous. We have got into such a snare that, as I live, it would be hard to invent a worse one."

Alarm again seized Helena. Wishing to get some word of hope from Zagloba, she said: "But you will save me and yourself this time?"

"Of course," said the old fox; "the head is given to think about the body. I have become so attached to you that I will struggle for you as for my own daughter. But, to tell the truth, the worst is that we don't know where to take refuge, for Zólotonosha is no safe asylum."

"I know surely that my cousins are there."

"They are, or they are not; they may have left there and returned to Rozlogi by a different road from the one we are

travelling. I count more on the garrison, if there is only half a regiment in the castle. But here is the Kagamlik and plenty of reeds. We will cross to the other side, and instead of going with the current toward the road, we will go up stream to elude pursuit. It is true that we shall go toward Rozlogi, but not far."

"We shall approach Brovarki," said Helena, "from which there is a road to Zólotonosha."

"That is better. Stop your horse!"

They watered the horses. Zagloba, leaving Helena carefully hidden in the reeds, went to look for a ford. He found one easily, for it was only a few yards from the place to which they had come, — just where the herdsmen used to drive their horses through the river, which was shallow enough, but the bank was inconvenient because overgrown with reeds and soft. When they had crossed the river they hurried up stream and rode without resting till night. The road was bad; for the Kagamlik had many tributary streams, which spreading out toward the mouth formed swamps and soft places. Every little while it was necessary to look for fords, or to push through reeds difficult of passage for mounted travellers. The horses were tired and barely able to drag their legs along; at times they stumbled so badly that it seemed to Zagloba they could hold out no longer. At last they came out on a lofty dry bank covered with oaks. But it was night already, and very dark. Further movement was impossible, for in the darkness it was easy to stumble into deep swamps and perish. Zagloba therefore decided to wait till morning.

He unsaddled the horses, fettered and let them out to graze; then he gathered leaves for a bed, spread the saddle-cloths over them, and covering both with a burka, said to Helena, —

"Lie down and sleep, for you have nothing better to do. The dew will wash your eyes, and that is good. I will put my head on the saddle too, for I don't feel a bone in my body. We will not make a fire, for the light would attract herdsmen. The night is short, and we will move on at day-break. We doubled on our tracks like hares, not advancing much, it is true; but we have so hidden the trail that the devil who finds us will puff. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

The slender young Cossack knelt down and prayed long with eyes raised to the stars. Zagloba took the saddle on

his shoulders and carried it to some distance, where he sought out a place to sleep. The bank was well chosen for a halting-place; it was high and dry, also free from mosquitoes. The thick leaves of the oak-trees might furnish a passable protection from rain.

Helena could not sleep for a long time. The events of the past night rose at once in her memory as vividly as life. In the darkness appeared the faces of her murdered aunt and cousins. It seemed to her that she was shut up in the chamber with their bodies, and that Bogun would come in a moment. She saw his pale face and his dark sable brows contracted with pain, and his eyes fixed upon her. Unspeakable terror seized her. But will she really see on a sudden through the darkness around her two gleaming eyes?

The moon, looking for a moment from behind the clouds, whitened with a few rays the oaks, and lent fantastic forms to the stumps and branches. Landrails called in the meadows, and quails in the steppes; at times certain strange and distant cries of birds or beasts of the night came to them. Nearer was heard the snorting of their horses, who eating the grass and jumping in their fetters went farther and farther from the sleepers. But all those sounds quieted Helena, for they dissipated the fantastic visions and brought her to reality; told her that that chamber which was continually present before her eyes, and those corpses of her friends, and that pale Bogun, with vengeance in his looks, were an illusion of the senses, a whim of fear, nothing more. A few days before, the thought of such a night under the open sky in the desert would have frightened her to death; now, to gain rest she was obliged to remember that she was really on the bank of the Kagamlik, and far from home.

The voices of the quails and landrails lulled her to sleep. The stars twinkled whenever the breeze moved the branches, the beetles sounded in the oak-leaves; she fell asleep at last. But nights in the desert have their surprises too. Day was already breaking, when from a distance terrible noises came to Helena's ears, — howling, snorting, later a squeal so full of pain and terror that the blood stopped in her veins. She sprang to her feet, covered with cold sweat, terror-stricken, and not knowing what to do. Suddenly Zagloba shot past her. He rushed without a cap, in the direction of the cry, pistol in hand. After a while his voice was heard:

"U-ha! u-ha!" a pistol-shot, then all was silent. It seemed to Helena as if she had waited an age. At last she heard Zagloba below the bank.

"May the dogs devour you, may your skins be torn off, may the Jews wear you in their collars!"

Genuine despair was in the voice of Zagloba.

"What has happened?" inquired Helena.

"The wolves have eaten our horses."

"Jesus, Mary! both of them?"

"One is eaten, the other is maimed so that he cannot stand. They didn't go more than three hundred yards, and are lost."

"What shall we do now?"

"What shall we do? Whittle out sticks for ourselves and sit on them. Do I know what we shall do? Here is pure despair. I tell you, the devil has surely got after us, — which is not to be wondered at, for he must be a friend of Bogun, or his blood relation. What are we to do? May I turn into a horse if I know, — you would then at least have something to ride on. I am a scoundrel if ever I have been in such a fix."

"Let us go on foot."

"It is well for your ladyship to travel in peasant fashion, with your twenty years, but not for me with my circumference. I speak incorrectly, though, for here any clown can have a nag, only dogs travel on foot. Pure despair, as God is kind to me! Of course we shall not sit here, we shall walk on directly; but when we are to reach Zólotonosha is unknown to me. If it is not pleasant to flee on horseback, it is sorest of all on foot. Now the worst thing possible has happened to us. We must leave the saddles and carry on our own shoulders whatever we put between our lips."

"I will not allow you to carry the burden alone; I too will carry whatever is necessary."

Zagloba was pleased to see such resolution in Helena.

"I should be either a Turk or a Pagan to permit you. Those white hands and slender shoulders are not for burdens. With God's help I will manage; only I must rest frequently, for, always too abstemious in eating and drinking, I have short breath now. Let us take the saddle-cloths to sleep on and some provisions; but there will not be much of them, since we shall have to strengthen ourselves directly."

Straightway they began the strengthening, during which

Pan Zagloba, abandoning his boasted abstemiousness, busied himself about long breath. Near midday they reached a ford through which men and wagons passed from time to time, for on both banks there were marks of wheels and horses' tracks.

"Maybe that is the road to Zólotonosha."

"There is no one to ask."

Zagloba had barely stopped speaking, when voices reached their ears from a distance.

"Wait!" whispered Zagloba, "we must hide."

The voices continued to approach them.

"Do you see anything?" inquired Helena.

"I do."

"Who are coming?"

"A blind old man with a lyre. A youth is leading him. Now they are taking off their boots. They will come to us through the river."

After a time the plashing of water indicated that they were really crossing. Zagloba and Helena came out of the hiding-place.

"Glory be to God!" said the noble, aloud.

"For the ages of ages!" answered the old man. "But who are you?"

"Christians. Don't be afraid, grandfather!"

"May Saint Nicholas give you health and happiness!"

"And where are you coming from, grandfather?"

"From Brovarki."

"And where does this road lead to?"

"Oh, to farmhouses and villages."

"It does n't go to Zólotonosha?"

"Maybe it does."

"Is it long since you left Brovarki?"

"Yesterday morning."

"And were you in Rozlogi?"

"Yes. But they say that the knights came there, that there was a battle."

"Who said that?"

"Oh, they said so in Brovarki. One of the servants of the princess came, and what he told was terrible!"

"And you did n't see him?"

"I? I see no man, I am blind."

"And this youth?"

"He sees, but he is dumb. I am the only one who understands him."

"Is it far from here to Rozlogi, for we are going there?"

"Oh, it is far!"

"You say, then, that you were in Rozlogi?"

"Yes, we were."

"So!" said Zagloba; and suddenly he seized the youth by the shoulder. "Ha! scoundrels, criminals, thieves! you are going around as spies, rousing the serfs to rebellion. Here, Fedor, Oleksa, Maksim, take them, strip them naked, and hang or drown them; beat them, — they are rebels, spies, — beat, kill them!"

He began to pull the youth about and to shake him roughly, shouting louder and louder every moment. The old man threw himself on his knees, begging for mercy; the youth uttered sounds of terror peculiar to the dumb, and Helena looked with astonishment at the attack.

"What are you doing?" inquired she, not believing her own eyes.

But Zagloba shouted, cursed, moved hell, summoned all the miseries, misfortunes, and diseases, threatened with every manner of torment and death.

The princess thought that his mind had failed.

"Go away!" cried he to her; "it is not proper for you to see what is going to take place here. Go away, I tell you!"

He turned to the old man. "Take off your clothes, you clown! If you don't, I'll cut you to pieces."

When he had thrown the youth to the ground Zagloba began to strip him with his own hands. The old man, frightened, dropped his lyre, his bag, and his coat as quickly as he could.

"Throw off everything or you will be killed!" shouted Zagloba.

The old man began to take off his shirt.

Helena, seeing whither matters were tending, hurried away, and as she fled she heard the curses of Zagloba.

After she had gone some distance she stopped, not knowing what to do. Near by was the trunk of a tree thrown down by the wind; she sat on this and waited. The noises of the dumb youth, the groans of the old man, and the uproar of Zagloba came to her ears.

At last all was silent save the twittering of birds and the rustle of leaves. After a time the heavy steps of a man panting were heard. It was Zagloba. On his shoulders he carried the clothing stripped from the old man and the youth, in his hands two pair of boots and a lyre.

When he came near he began to wink with his sound eye, to smile, and to puff. He was evidently in perfect humor.

"No herald in a court would have shouted as I have," said he, "until I am hoarse; but I have got what I wanted. I let them go naked as their mother bore them. If the Sultan does n't make me a pasha, or hospodar of Wallachia, he is a thankless fellow, for I have made two Turkish saints. Oh, the scoundrels! they begged me to leave them at least their shirts. I told them they ought to be grateful that I left them their lives. And see here, young lady! Everything is new, — the coats and the boots and the shirts. There must be nice order in that Commonwealth, in which trash dress so richly. But they were at a festival in Brovarki, where they collected no small amount of money and bought everything new at the fair. Not a single noble will plough out so much in this country as a minstrel will beg. Therefore I abandon my career as a knight, and will strip grandfathers on the highway, for I see that in this manner I shall arrive at fortune more quickly."

"For what purpose did you do that?" asked Helena.

"Just wait a minute, and I will show you for what purpose."

Saying this, he took half the plundered clothing and went into the reeds which covered the bank. After a time the sounds of a lyre were heard in the rushes, and there appeared, not Pan Zagloba, but a real "grandfather" of the Ukraine, with a cataract on one eye and a gray beard. The "grandfather" approached Helena, singing with a hoarse voice, —

"Oh, bright falcon, my own brother,
High dost thou soar,
And far dost thou fly!"

The princess clapped her hands, and for the first time since her flight from Rozlogi a smile brightened her beautiful face.

"If I did not know that it was you, I should never have recognized you."

"Well," said Zagloba, "I know you have not seen a better mask at a festival. I looked into the Kagamlik myself; and if ever I have seen a better-looking grandfather, then hang me. As for songs, I have no lack of them. What do you prefer? Maybe you would like to hear of Marusia Boguslava, of Bondarivna, or the death of Sierpahova; I can

give you that. I am a rogue if I can't get a crust of bread among the worst knaves that exist."

"Now I understand your action, why you stripped the clothing from those poor creatures, — because it is safer to go over the road in disguise."

"Of course," said Zagloba; "and what do you suppose? Here, east of the Dnieper, the people are worse than anywhere else; and now when they hear of the war with the Zaporojians, and the victories of Hmelnitski, no power will keep them from rebellion. You saw those herdsmen who wanted to get our skins. If the hetmans do not put down Hmelnitski at once, the whole country will be on fire in two or three days, and how should I take you through bands of peasants in rebellion? And if you had to fall into their hands, you would better have remained in Bogun's."

"That cannot be! I prefer death," interrupted Helena.

"But I prefer life; for death is a thing from which you cannot rise by any wit. I think, however, that God sent us this old man and the youth. I frightened them with the prince and his whole army as I did the herdsmen. They will sit in the reeds naked for three days from terror, and by that time we shall reach Zólotonosha in disguise somehow. We shall find your cousins and efficient aid; if not, we will go farther to the hetmans, — and all this in safety, for grandfathers have no fear of peasants and Cossacks. We might take our heads in safety through Hmelnitski's camp. But we have to avoid the Tartars, for they would take you as a youth into captivity."

"Then must I too disguise myself?"

"Yes; throw off your Cossack clothes, and disguise yourself as a peasant youth, — though you are rather comely to be a clodhopper's child, as I am to be a grandfather; but that is nothing. The wind will tan your face, and my stomach will fall in from walking. I shall sweat away all my thickness. When the Wallachians burned out my eye, I thought that an absolutely awful thing had come upon me; but now I see it is really an advantage, for a grandfather not blind would be suspected. You will lead me by the hand, and call me Onufri, for that is my minstrel name. Now dress up as quickly as you can, since it is time for the road, which will be so long for us on foot."

Zagloba went aside, and Helena began at once to array herself as a minstrel boy. Having washed in the river, she