

"Come down! If you don't, we will skin your head and throw you head-first into the dung-heap."

Zagloba was as deaf to threats as to coaxing, sitting in the dark like a badger in his hole, preparing for a stubborn defence. He only grasped his sabre tighter, panted a little, and whispered his prayers.

Lances were now brought, three of them tied together, and placed with their points to the opening. The thought flashed through Zagloba's mind to grasp and draw them up; but he thought that the roof might be too low, and he could not draw them up entirely. Besides, others would be brought at once. Meanwhile the stable became crowded with Cossacks. Some held torches, others brought from wagons all kinds of ladders and poles, every one of which turned out to be too short; these they lashed together hurriedly with straps, for it was really difficult to climb on the lances. Still they found volunteers.

"I'll go," called a number of voices.

"Wait for the ladder!" said Golody.

"And what harm is it, father, to try on the lances?"

"Vassily will climb; he goes like a cat."

"Let him try."

But others began to joke immediately. "Be careful! he has a sabre; he will cut your head off. Look out! he will grab you by the head, drag you in, and treat you as a bear would."

But Vassily did not allow himself to be frightened. "He knows," said Vassily, "that if he should lay a finger on me the ataman would give him the devil to eat; and you, brothers."

This was a warning to Zagloba, who sat quietly, and did not even mutter.

But the Cossacks, as is usual among soldiers, got into good humor, for the whole affair began to amuse them; so they kept on teasing Vassily.

"There will be one blockhead less in the white world."

"He won't think how we shall pay him for your head. He is a bold hero."

"Ho, ho! He is a werewolf. The devil knows into what form he has turned already. He is a wizard! Can't tell, Vassily, whom you will find there behind the opening."

Vassily, who had already spat on his palms and was just grasping the lances by the stem, stopped suddenly. "I'll go against a Pole," said he, "but not against the devil."

But now the ladders were lashed together and placed at the opening. It was difficult to climb them, too, for they bent immediately where they were tied, and the slender round cracked under the feet, which were placed on the lowest one to try. But Golody himself began to ascend; while going, he said, —

"My dear noble, you see that there is no joking here. If you have made up your mind to stay up there, stay; but don't fight, for we will get you anyhow, even if we have to pull the stable to pieces. Have sense!"

At last his head reached the opening and went through it slowly. All at once the whiz of a sabre was heard. The Cossack screamed fearfully, tottered, and fell, with his head cut in two.

"Cut! slash!" roared the Cossacks.

A fearful tumult began in the stable. Shouts and cries were raised, which were overborne by the thundering voice of Zagloba, —

"Oh, you scoundrels, you man-eaters, you basilisks! I'll cut you to pieces, you mangy ruffians! You'll know a knightly hand. Attacking honest people by night, shutting a noble in a stable! Scoundrels! Come to me by ones or by twos, only come! Come along; but you'll leave your heads on the dung-heap, for I'll hew them off, as I live."

"Cut! cut!" shouted the Cossacks.

"We will burn the stable."

"I'll burn it myself, you ox-tails, and you with it."

"Several, — several at a time!" shouted an old Cossack.

"Support the ladder, prop it with lances, take bundles of hay on your heads and go on! We must get him."

Then he mounted, and with him two comrades. The rounds began to break, the ladders bent still more; but more than twelve strong hands seized them by the sides propped by the lances, others thrust the points of lances through the opening to ward off the blows of the sabre.

A few moments later three bodies fell on the heads of those standing below. Zagloba, heated by his triumph, bellowed like a buffalo, and poured out such curses as the world had never heard, and from which the souls of the Cossacks would have died within them, if fury had not begun to possess them. Some thrust their lances into the loft; others hurried on the ladders, though sure death waited them in the opening. Suddenly a shout was heard at the door, and into the stable rushed Bogun himself. He

was without a cap, in trousers and shirt; in his hand was a drawn sabre, and in his eyes fire.

"Through the thatch!" he shouted. "Tear the thatch apart and take him alive!"

But Zagloba, seeing him, roared: "Ruffian, just come up here! I'll cut off your nose and ears. I won't touch your neck, for that belongs to the hangman. Well, are you afraid, my urchin?" Then Zagloba said to the Cossacks: "Tie that scoundrel for me, and you will all be pardoned. Well, gallows-bird! well, Jews' picture! I am alone here; only show your head on this loft! Come, come! I shall be glad to see you. I'll give you such a reception that you'll remember it with your father the devil, and your mother a harlot."

The poles of the roof now began to crack. It was evident the Cossacks were up there and tearing through the thatch.

Zagloba heard, but fear did not deprive him of power; he was as if drunk with the battle and with blood. "I'll spring to the corner and perish there," thought he.

But that instant gun-shots were heard in the yard. A number of Cossacks rushed to the stable. "Father! father!" they shouted. "This way!"

Zagloba at the first moment did not understand what had happened, and was astonished. He looked down through the opening; there was no one there. The rafters were not cracking.

"What is it? what has happened?" he cried aloud. "Ah! I understand. They want to burn the stable, and fire from pistols at the roof."

Then was heard the uproar of people, more terrible every moment, and the tramp of horses. Shouts mixed with howls and the clatter of steel.

"My God, that must be a battle!" thought Zagloba, springing to the opening in the thatch. He looked, and his legs bent under him with delight.

In the yard a battle was raging, and soon Zagloba beheld the terrible defeat of Bogun's Cossacks. Attacked on a sudden, struck with fire from pistols placed at their heads and breasts, pushed to the fences, to the cottage and out-houses, cut with swords, thrown down by the rush of horses, trampled with their hoofs, the Cossacks perished almost without resistance. The ranks of red-uniformed soldiers, cutting furiously and pressing on the fugitives, did not

allow them to form, to use their sabres, to draw breath, or to reach their horses. Only detached groups defended themselves. Some, favored by the disturbance, uproar, and smoke, succeeded in reaching their loosened saddle-girths, and perished before they touched the stirrups with a foot; others, throwing away lances and sabres, disappeared under the fences, got stuck between the posts, or jumped over the top, shouting and crying with unearthly voices. It seemed to the unfortunates that Prince Yeremi himself had fallen upon them unexpectedly, and was shivering them with his whole power. They had no time to come to their minds to look around. The shouts of the victors, the whistle of sabres, and the rattle of shots chased them like a storm. The hot breath of horses was on their necks. "Save yourselves, men!" was heard on every side. "Slay! kill!" was the response of the assailants.

At last Zagloba saw little Volodyovski as, standing near the gate at the head of a number of soldiers, he gave directions with his baton and voice, and sometimes rushed on his gray horse into the whirl, and then the moment he turned or struck, a man fell without uttering a sound. Oh, but he was a master beyond masters, little Volodyovski, and a soldier, blood and bone! He did not lose sight of the battle, but making a correction here and there, returned again, looked and corrected, like the director of an orchestra, who at times plays himself, at times stops, watching carefully over all, so that each man may fill his part.

When he saw this, Zagloba stamped on the floor of the loft till the dust rose. He clapped his hands and shouted, —

"Slay the dog-brothers! Kill them! Flay them! Cut, slash, hew, kill! On to them, on! Sabre them to a man!"

Thus he shouted and jumped till his eyes were inflamed from exertion, and he lost vision for a moment; but when he regained his eyesight he saw a still more beautiful spectacle. There, at the head of a number of Cossacks, was Bogun, rushing away on horseback like lightning, without a cap, in his shirt and trousers, and after him, at the head of his soldiers, little Volodyovski. "Slay!" shouted Zagloba; "that's Bogun." But his voice did not reach them. That moment Bogun with his heroes was over the fence, Volodyovski over the fence. Some remained behind; horses fell under others in the leap. Zagloba looked. Bogun is on the plain, Volodyovski is on the plain. Then the

Cossacks scatter in their flight, and soldiers in their pursuit; individual pursuit begins. Zagloba's breath died within his breast, his eyes were almost bursting through his lids; for what does he see? Volodyovski is almost on the neck of Bogun, like a hound on a wild boar. The chief turns his head, raises his sabre; they fight. Zagloba shouts. Still another moment, and Bogun falls with his horse; and Volodyovski, leaving him, hurries after the others.

But Bogun is alive; he rises from the ground and runs to a pile of rocks surrounded with bushes.

"Hold him! hold him!" roared Zagloba. "That's Bogun!"

Then a new band of Cossacks hurry on, who till that moment had been hiding on the other side of the rocks, but now discovered, seek a new way of escape, pushed by soldiers who are about half a furlong behind. This party comes up to Bogun, bears him away, disappears from sight in the turns of the ravine, and after it disappear the soldiers.

In the yard it was silent and empty; for the soldiers of Zagloba, rescued by Volodyovski, chased after the Cossacks and pursued with the others the scattered enemy.

Zagloba let down the ladder, slipped from the loft, and coming out of the stable into the yard, said, "I am free!" Then he began to look around. In the yard lay a number of Zaporozian bodies and some Poles. He walked slowly among them, and examined each carefully. At length he knelt over one of them. Soon he rose with a canteen in his hand. "It is full!" he muttered; and placing it to his mouth he raised his head. "Not bad!" Again he looked round, and again he repeated, but with a much clearer voice, "I am free!"

He went to the cottage. On the threshold he came upon the body of the old cooper, whom the Cossacks had killed there. He disappeared inside. When he came out, around his hips, over a coat soiled with manure, glittered Bogun's belt, thickly embroidered with gold; at the belt a knife with a great ruby in the hilt.

"God has rewarded bravery," he muttered, "for the belt is pretty full. Ah, you wretched robber, I have hope that you will not escape! That little hop-of-my-thumb — may the bullets strike him! — is a lively piece, just like a wasp. I knew he was a good soldier; but to drive Bogun as he would a white-faced mare, I did not expect that of him.

That there should be such strength and courage in such a little body! Bogun might carry him on a string at his belt. May the bullets strike Volodyovski! — but better, may God give him luck. He couldn't have known Bogun, or he would have finished him. Phu! how it smells of powder here, enough to pierce the nose! But if I did n't get out of a scrape this time such as I have never been in before! Praise to God! Well, well, but so to drive Bogun! I must examine this Volodyovski again, for it must be there is a devil sitting inside of him."

Zagloba sat on the threshold of the stable in meditation, and waited. Presently there appeared at a distance on the plain soldiers returning from the victory, and at their head rode Volodyovski. When he saw Zagloba, Volodyovski galloped up, and springing from his horse, came to him.

"Do I see you once more?" called he, at a distance.

"Me, in my own person," said Zagloba. "God reward you for coming with reinforcements in time!"

"Thanks be to God that I came in time!" said the little knight, pressing the palm of Zagloba with joy.

"But where did you hear of the straits in which I was?"

"The peasants of this place gave information."

"Oh, and I thought they betrayed me."

"Why should they? They are honest. The newly married barely got off with their lives, and what happened to the others they know not."

"If they are not traitors, then they are killed by the Cossacks. The master of the house lies near the door. But what of that? Tell me, is Bogun alive, did he escape, — he without a cap, in the shirt and trousers, whom you threw with his horse?"

"I hit him on the head; but it is too bad that I did n't know him. But tell me, my good Zagloba, what is the best you have done?"

"What have I done?" repeated Zagloba. "Come, Pan Michael, and see." He took him by the hand and led him into the stable. "Look at that!"

Volodyovski saw nothing for a while, for he had come in from the light; but when his eyes had become used to the darkness he saw bodies lying motionless on the dung-heap. "And who cut down these men?" asked he, in astonishment.

"I!" said Zagloba. "You have asked what I did. Here it is before you!"

"But," said the young officer, "how did you do it?"

"I defended myself up there. They stormed me from below and through the roof. I don't know how long it was, for in battle a man doesn't reckon time. It was Bogun, with a strong force and chosen men. He will remember you; he will remember me too. At another time I will tell you how I fell into captivity, what I passed through, and how I settled Bogun; for I had an encounter of tongues with him. But now I am so wearied that I can scarcely stand."

"Well," repeated Volodyovski, "it is not to be denied you defended yourself manfully; but I will say this, you are a better swordsman than general."

"Pan Michael," said the noble, "it is no time for discussion. Better thank God, who has sent down to us to-day so mighty a victory, the memory of which will not soon vanish from among men."

Volodyovski looked with astonishment at Zagloba, since it had appeared to him hitherto that he alone had gained that victory which Zagloba evidently wished to share with him. But he only looked, shook his head, and said, "Let it be so."

An hour later the two friends, at the head of their united parties, moved on to Yarmolintsi.

Almost no one was missing from Zagloba's men; for sprung upon in their sleep, they offered no resistance. Bogun, being sent specially for informants, had given orders not to kill, but to take prisoners.

CHAPTER XLI.

BOGUN, though a brave, clear-sighted leader, had no luck in this expedition against the supposed division of Prince Yeremi. He was merely confirmed in the belief that the prince had really moved his whole force against Krivonos; for this was the information given by the captives from among Zagloba's men, who believed most sacredly that the prince was marching after them. Nothing remained then for the unfortunate ataman but to withdraw with all speed to Krivonos; but the task was not easy. Scarcely on the third day was a party of two hundred and a few tens of Cossacks collected around him; the others had either fallen in the fight, were lying wounded on the field of struggle, or were wandering yet among the ravines and reeds, not knowing what to do, how to turn, or where to go. Besides, the party left to Bogun was not good for much; for it was beaten, inclined to flee at every alarm, demoralized, frightened. And it was made up too of chosen men; better soldiers it would be difficult to find in the whole Saitech. But the heroes didn't know with what a small force Pan Volodyovski had struck them, and that, thanks only to the unexpected attack on sleeping and unprepared men, could he inflict such a defeat. They believed most sacredly that they had been fighting, if not with the prince himself, at least with a strong detachment several times more numerous than it was. Bogun raged like fire; cut in the hand, run over, sick, beaten, he had let his inveterate enemy out of his hands, and belittled his own fame. For now those Cossacks who on the eve of the defeat would have followed him blindly to the Crimea, to hell, and against the prince himself, had lost faith and courage, and were thinking only how to carry their lives out of the defeat. Still Bogun had done everything that a leader was bound to do; he had neglected nothing, he had established pickets at a distance from the house, and rested only because the horses which had come from Kamenyets almost at one course were altogether unfit for the road. But Volodyovski, whose youth had been passed in surprising and hunting Tartars, approached the pickets like a fox