

"You have touched my fame, tried to cast shame on me, I need your blood."

"No dispute on those points," said Volodyovski.

"No harm to the consenting party," added Zagloba. "But who will deliver the letter to the prince?"

"Give yourself no headache over that; it is my affair."

"Fight, then, if it cannot be otherwise," said Zagloba. "But if fortune favors you against this cavalier, remember that you will have to meet me. And now, Pan Michael, come out to the front of the house; I have something important to say."

The two friends went out and called Kushel from under the window of the room.

"Gentlemen, our affair is a bad one. He has really a letter to the prince; if we kill him, it is a capital crime. Remember that the chapter 'propter securitatem loci' has jurisdiction ten miles from the field of election, and he is the same as an envoy. A weighty question! We must either hide somewhere afterward, or perhaps the prince will protect us; otherwise it may go hard with us. And to let him go free again is still worse. This is the only way to liberate our poor young lady. For when he is no longer in the world we shall find her more easily. The Lord himself evidently wishes to aid her and Skshetuski; that's clear. Let us help."

"Will you invent some stratagem?" asked Kushel.

"With my stratagem I have already brought him to challenge us. But seconds are necessary,—strangers. My idea is to wait for Kharlamp. I will undertake to make him yield his first place, and in case of need, to testify how we were challenged and obliged to defend ourselves. We must also find out more accurately from Bogun where he hid the young lady. If he has to die, she is nothing to him; perhaps he will tell if we press him. And if he won't tell, then it is better that he should not live. It is necessary to do everything with foresight and discretion. My head is bursting, gentlemen."

"Who will fight with him?" asked Kushel.

"Pan Michael first, I second," said Zagloba.

"And I third."

"Impossible!" interrupted Volodyovski. "I will fight with him alone, and that will be the end. If he brings me down, it is his fortune. Let him go in peace."

"I've told him already," said Zagloba; "but if it is your wish, I yield."

"If it is his wish, he may fight with you, but with no one else."

"Let us go to him then."

"Let us go."

They found Bogun in the main room, drinking mead. He was perfectly calm.

"Listen," said Zagloba, "for these are important questions which we want to discuss with you. You have challenged this cavalier. Very well. But you must know that since you are an envoy you are protected by law, for you come among civilized men, not among wild beasts; and therefore we cannot meet you unless you state before witnesses that you have challenged us of your own free will. A number of nobles with whom we had to fight a duel will come here, and you will make this statement before them. We will give you our knightly word that if fortune favors you against Pan Volodyovski you will go away at liberty, and no one will hinder you, unless you wish to make a trial with me."

"Agreed," said Bogun. "I will make that statement before those nobles, and I will tell my men to deliver the letter and to inform Hmelnitski, if I perish, that I made the challenge. And if God favors me to vindicate my Cossack fame against this knight, I will ask you to sabres."

When he had spoken he looked into Zagloba's eyes. Zagloba was rather confused, coughed, spat, and said,—

"Agreed! When you have made a trial of my pupil, you will know what sort of work you will have with me. But enough of this! There is another and more important point in which we appeal to your conscience; for though a Cossack, we wish to treat you as a knight. You carried off Princess Helena Kurtsevichovna, the betrothed of our comrade and friend, and you hold her secreted. Know that if we had accused you of this it would not have helped you that Hmelnitski made you his envoy, for this is 'raptus puellæ,' a capital offence, which would be judged here immediately. But since you are going to combat, and may perish, bethink yourself what will happen to that unfortunate lady if you die. Do you, who love her, wish evil and destruction to her? Will you deprive her of protection and give her to shame and misfortune? Do you wish to be her executioner, even when you are dead?"

Here the voice of Zagloba sounded with unusual solemnity for him. Bogun grew pale and asked: "What do you want of me?"



"Tell us where she is hidden, so that we may find her if you die, and give her to her betrothed. If you do this, God will have mercy on your soul."

The chief rested his head on his hands, and thought deeply. The three comrades watched carefully the changes in that mobile face, which was suddenly covered with such touching grief as if neither anger, rage, nor any fierce feeling had ever played upon it, and as if that man had been created only for love and yearning. A long time this silence lasted, till finally it was broken by the voice of Zagloba, which trembled while uttering the following words, —

"If you have already put her to shame, may God condemn you and let her find shelter in a cloister."

Bogun raised his sad, moistened eyes, and said: "If I have shamed her? I know not how you Poles love, knights and cavaliers, but I am a Cossack. I protected her in Bar from death and disgrace, and afterward took her to the desert, and there guarded her as the eye in my head; did no injury to her, fell at her feet and bowed to her as before an image. If she told me to go, I went, and have not seen her since, for war detained me."

"God will remember that for you at the judgment," said Zagloba, sighing deeply. "But is she safe? Krivonos and the Tartars are there."

"Krivonos is at Kamenyets, and sent me to ask Hmelnitski whether he was to march on Kudák. He has surely gone there, and where she is there are neither Cossacks nor Poles nor Tartars. She is safe."

"Where is she, then?"

"Listen to me, Poles! Let it be as you wish. I will tell you where she is, and I will give the order to render her up; but you must give me your knightly word that if God favors me, you will not look for her. You promise for yourselves and for Pan Skshetuski, and I will tell you."

The three friends looked at one another.

"We cannot do that," said Zagloba.

"Oh, as true as life we cannot!" cried Kushel and Volodyovski.

"Is it possible?" asked Bogun. His brows were frowning and his eyes flashed. "Well, why can you not?"

"Because Pan Skshetuski is not present; and besides, you may be sure that none of us would cease to seek for her, even if you have hidden her under ground."

"So you would make this bargain with me: 'Cossack, give up your soul, and then we will sabre you!' Oh, don't wait for it! And do you think my Cossack sabre is not made of steel, that you are croaking over me like ravens over a dead carcass? And why am I to die, and not you? You want my blood, but I want yours! We shall see who gets whose."

"Then you will not tell?"

"Why talk to me? Death to you all!"

"Death to you! You deserve to be cut to pieces with sabres!"

"Try it!" said the chief, rising quickly.

Kushel and Volodyovski sprang at the same moment from the bench. Threatening looks were exchanged, breasts overflowing with anger breathed more violently, and it is unknown what might have happened, had not Zagloba, who had looked through the window, cried: "Kharlamp has come with his seconds!"

The light-horse captain with his two companions, the Selitskis, entered the room. After the first greeting, Zagloba took them aside to explain the affair. He spoke so eloquently that he soon convinced them, especially when he declared that Volodyovski asked only for a short delay, and immediately after his struggle with the Cossack would be ready to meet Kharlamp. Here Zagloba related how old and terrible was the hatred of all the soldiers of the prince for Bogun; how he was an enemy of the whole Commonwealth, and was one of the most desperate rebels; and finally, how he had carried off the princess, a lady of a noble house, the betrothed of a noble who was the mirror of every knightly virtue. "And if you are a noble and have some feeling of brotherhood, you know that the wrong inflicted on one is inflicted on the whole order. Can you let it go then unavenged?"

Kharlamp raised difficulties at first, and said that since matters were in that state, Bogun should be cut to pieces on the spot. "But let Pan Volodyovski meet me according to agreement."

Zagloba had to explain to him again why this could not be, and that it would not be knightly to attack one man from behind in this fashion. Happily the Selitskis helped him, both men of judgment and prudence, so that the stubborn Lithuanian let himself be convinced at last, and agreed to a delay.



Meanwhile Bogun went to his men, and returned with the essaul Eliassenko, to whom he told how he had challenged two nobles, and then repeated the same thing aloud, in presence of Kharlamp and the Selitskis.

"We on our part declare," said Volodyovski, "that if you come out victorious in the struggle with me, it will depend on your will whether you are to fight with Pan Zagloba, and in no case will any one else call you out, and this company will not attack you; you will go where you please. For this I give my knightly word, and I beg you, gentlemen who have just come, to add the same on your part."

"We do," said Kharlamp and the two Selitskis, solemnly.

Then Bogun delivered to Eliassenko Hmelnitski's letter to the prince; and said: "You will give this letter to the prince; and if I die you will tell him and Hmelnitski that the fault was mine, and that I was not killed through treachery."

Zagloba, who had a watchful eye on everything, saw not the least disquiet on the sullen visage of Eliassenko. It was evident that he was too sure of his ataman.

Bogun then turned haughtily to the nobles: "Well, to one death, to another life," said he. "We may begin."

"Time, time!" said all, tucking back the skirts of their coats under their belts, and taking their sabres under their arms.

They went in front of the inn, and turned down to a creek which flowed among a growth of hawthorns, wild roses, and plum-trees. November had stripped, it is true, the leaves from the bushes, but the thicket was so close that it looked black as a mourning-ribbon along through the empty fields to the forest. The day was pale, but pleasant with that melancholy mildness of autumn full of sweetness. The sun embroidered softly with gold the naked branches of the trees, and lighted up the yellow, sandy banks extending some distance along the right side of the creek. The combatants and their seconds went straight to these banks.

"We will stop here," said Zagloba.

"Agreed," answered all.

Zagloba grew more and more unquiet; at last he approached Volodyovski, and whispered: "Pan Michael—"

"Well?"

"For the love of God, Pan Michael, exert yourself! In

your hands now is the fate of Skshetuski, the freedom of the princess, your own life and mine. God keep you from accident! I could do nothing with this robber."

"Why did you challenge him then?"

"The word came out of itself. I trusted in you, Pan Michael. I am old; and my breath is short. I choke, and this beauty can jump like a goat. He is a fleet hound, Pan Michael."

"I'll do my best," said the little knight.

"God give you aid! Don't lose courage!"

"Why should I?"

At that moment one of the Selitskis came up to them. "He is a trim fellow, your Cossack," he whispered; "he acts with us as if he were an equal, if not a superior. What a bearing! It must be that his mother looked on some noble."

"It is more likely," said Zagloba, "that some noble looked on her."

"And so it appears to me," said Volodyovski.

"To our places!" called Bogun, suddenly.

"To our places, to our places!"

They took their places,—the nobles in a half-circle, Volodyovski and Bogun opposite each other.

Volodyovski, as a man experienced in such affairs though he was young, tested the ground first with his feet to see if it was firm; then he cast his eye about, wishing to know all the unevenness of the place. And it was apparent that he did not underestimate the affair. He had to meet with a knight the most celebrated in the whole Ukraine, of whom the people sang songs, and whose name was known through the breadth of Russia to the Crimea. Pan Michael, a simple lieutenant of the dragoons, promised himself much from that struggle, for it was either a glorious death or an equally glorious victory; therefore he neglected nothing to show himself worthy of such an opponent. He had an unusual seriousness in his face, seeing which Zagloba was frightened. "He is losing courage," thought he; "it is over with him, and then it is over with me!"

Meanwhile Volodyovski, having examined the ground carefully, began to unbutton his vest. Bogun followed his example, and both threw off their upper garments, so that they were in trousers and shirts; then they rolled up the sleeves on their right arms.

But how insignificant appeared little Pan Michael before the large and powerful ataman! He was almost invisible.



The seconds looked uneasily on the broad breast of the Cossack, on the great muscles visible from under the rolled-up sleeve, like knots and cords. It seemed as though a little cock had stood up to fight with a powerful falcon of the steppes. The nostrils of Bogun were distended as if snuffing blood in advance; his face was so contracted that his dark foretop seemed to touch his brow, and the sabre quivered in his hand; he fixed his eyes rapaciously on his opponent and waited the word.

Volodyovski looked once more through the light at the edge of his sword, moved his little yellow mustache, and stood in position.

"There will be straight cuts here," muttered Kushel to Selitski.

Meanwhile the voice of Zagloba, slightly trembling, said: "In the name of God, begin!"

## CHAPTER XLV.

THE sabres whistled; edge clashed against edge. The place of conflict was shifted at once; for Bogun pressed on with such fury that Volodyovski sprang back a number of steps, and the seconds had to retreat too. The lightning zigzags of Bogun's sword were so swift that the astonished eyes of those present could not follow them. It seemed to them that Volodyovski was altogether surrounded and covered, and that God alone could snatch him from beneath that storm of thunderbolts. The blows were mingled in one uninterrupted whistle; the rush of the moving air struck all faces. The fury of the Cossack increased; the wild rage of conflict seized him, and like a hurricane he pushed Volodyovski before him. The little knight retreated continually, and merely defended himself. His extended right arm scarcely moved; only his hand described, without stopping, circles narrow but swift as thought, and caught the raging blows of Bogun. He put edge under edge, warded off and again defended and still retreated, fixed his eyes on the eyes of the Cossack, and in the midst of serpentine lightnings appeared calm; but on his cheeks purple spots were coming out. Zagloba closed his eyes, and heard nothing but blow after blow, bite after bite.

"He defends himself yet," thought he.

"He defends himself yet," said the Selitskis and Kushel.

"He is already pushed to the sand-bank," added Kushel, quietly.

Zagloba opened his eyes again and looked. True, Volodyovski was pushed to the bank; but evidently he was not wounded yet. The flush on his face had become deeper, and drops of sweat were on his forehead.

Zagloba's heart began to beat with hope. "Pan Michael is a master beyond masters," thought he, "and this fellow will become tired at last."

In fact Bogun's face had grown pale, sweat stood in drops on his forehead; but resistance only roused his rage, foam shone from under his mustache, and from his breast came the hoarseness of fury.

Volodyovski did not let him out of sight, and defended himself continually. Suddenly, feeling the sand-bank be-