

They learned on the road that the commanders had concentrated at Zbaraj, and intended to defend themselves there. They went to that place, expecting justly that Prince Yermi would come to the commanders with his division, since a part of his forces (and that a considerable one) had its permanent post at Zbaraj. The swarms grew thinner on the road, for the country occupied by the squadrons of the Crown began only fifty miles beyond. The Cossack parties did not dare therefore to push on farther; they preferred to wait, at a safe distance, the arrival of Burlai from one and Hmelnitski from the other side.

"Only fifty miles now! only fifty miles!" repeated Zagloba, rubbing his hands. "If we could but reach the first Polish squadrons, we might go to Zbaraj in safety."

But Volodyovski determined to supply himself with fresh horses at Ploskiri, for those which he had bought at Berek were already useless, and it was necessary to spare Burlai's steeds for a black hour. This precaution became imperative, since news came that Hmelnitski was already at Konstantinoff, and the Khan with all his hordes was moving from Pilavtsi.

"Jendzian and I will remain here with the princess near the town, for it is better not to show ourselves on the market-place," said the little knight to Zagloba, when they came to a deserted house about two furlongs from the town, "and you go and inquire if there are horses for sale or exchange. It is evening now, but we will travel all night."

"I'll return soon," said Zagloba.

He went to the town. Volodyovski told Jendzian to let out the saddle-girths a little, so that the horses might rest; then he conducted Helena into the house, begging her to strengthen herself with some wine and with sleep.

"I should like to pass those fifty miles before daybreak to-morrow," said he; "then we shall all rest."

But he had scarcely brought the wine-skin and food when there was a clatter in front of the house. The little knight looked out through the window.

"Zagloba has already returned," said he; "it is evident that he has found no horses."

The door opened that moment, and Zagloba appeared in it, pale, blue, sweating, puffing. "To horse!" he cried.

Volodyovski was too experienced a soldier to lose time on inquiries. He did not lose it even in saving the skin of wine,

— which Zagloba carried off nevertheless, — but he seized the princess with all haste, took her out, put her on the saddle, gave a last look to see if the girths were drawn, and cried, "Forward!"

The hoofs clattered, and soon horses and riders had vanished in the darkness like a party in a dream. They flew on a long time without rest, till at last nearly five miles of road separated them from Ploskiri. Before the rising of the moon darkness became so dense that every pursuit was impossible. Volodyovski drew near Zagloba, and asked, —

"What was the matter?"

"Wait, Pan Michael, wait! I am terribly blown. I came near losing the use of my legs. Uf!"

"But what was the matter?"

"The devil in his own person, — the devil or a dragon! If you cut one head off him, another will grow."

"But speak plainly!"

"I saw Bogun on the market-square."

"Are you mad?"

"I saw him on the square, as I live, and with him five or six men, for I nearly lost the use of my legs. They held torches for him, and I thought, 'Some devil is standing in our road.' I lost all hope of a successful end to our undertaking. Can this imp of hell be immortal, or what? Don't speak of him to Helena. Oh, for God's sake, you slew him; Jendzian gave him up! That was not enough; he is alive now, free, and stands in the way. Oh, my God, my God! I tell you, Pan Michael, that I would rather see a ghost in a graveyard than him. And what devilish luck that I am the first to meet him everywhere! It's luck to cram down a dog's throat. Are there no other people in the world? Let others meet him. No! always I, and I."

"But did he see you?"

"If he had seen me, Pan Michael, you would not be looking at me now. That alone was wanting."

"It would be important to know whether he is chasing after us, or is going to Valadinka to Horpyna with the intention of seizing us on the road."

"It seems to me that he is going to Valadinka."

"It must be so. Then we shall go on in one direction and he in the opposite; now there are five miles and more between us, and soon there will be twenty-five. Before he hears about us on the road, and returns, we shall be not only in Zbaraj, but in Jolkvi."



"Your speech, Pan Michael, thank God! is like a plaster to me. But tell me how it can be that he is free, when Jendzian gave him into the hands of the commandant of Vlodava?"

"Oh, he simply ran away!"

"The head of a commandant like that should be struck off. Jendzian! Jendzian!"

"What do you wish, my master?" asked the youth, reining in his horse.

"To whom did you deliver Bogun?"

"To Pan Rogovski."

"And who is this Pan Rogovski?"

"He is a great knight, a colonel of an armored regiment of the king."

"There it is for you!" said Volodyovski, snapping his fingers. "Don't you remember what Pan Longin told about Skshetuski's enmity with Rogovski? He is a relative of Pan Lashch, on account of whose disgrace he has a hatred for Skshetuski."

"I understand, I understand!" shouted Zagloba. "He is the one who must have let Bogun out through spite. But that is a capital offence, and smells of death. I'll be the first to report it."

"If God lets me meet him," muttered Volodyovski, "we shall be sure not to go to a tribunal."

Jendzian did not know yet what the trouble was, for after his answer he pushed forward again to the princess.

They were riding slowly. The moon had risen; the mists, which since evening had settled upon the land, fell away, and the night became clear. Volodyovski was sunk in meditation. Zagloba was digesting for some time yet the remnants of his astonishment; at last he said,—

"Bogun would have given it to Jendzian now if he had caught him."

"Tell him the news; let him be afraid too, and I'll go immediately to the princess," answered the little knight.

"Here, Jendzian!"

"Well, what is it?" asked the youth, reining in his horse again.

Zagloba came up with him. He was silent for a while, waiting for Volodyovski and the princess to ride far enough away. At last he asked: "Do you know what has happened?"

"No."

"Pan Rogovski set Bogun at liberty. I saw him in Ploskiri."

"In Ploskiri? To-day?" asked Jendzian.

"Yes. Why don't you drop from the saddle?"

The rays of the moon fell straight on the round face of the youth, and Zagloba saw on it not terror, but, to his utmost astonishment, that expression of stern, almost brutal stubbornness which Jendzian had when he killed Horpyna.

"Well, are you not afraid of Bogun?"

"My master," answered the youth, "if Pan Rogovski has let him go, then I must seek revenge on him again myself for the wrong done me and the insult. I do not forgive him, for I took an oath; and if we were not conducting the lady, I should turn back on the road at once. Let what belongs to me be mine."

"I am glad not to have offended this young fellow."

They spurred their horses, and soon came up with the princess and Volodyovski. In an hour they turned through the Medvédovka and entered a forest extending from the very bank of the river in two black walls along the road.

"I know the neighborhood well," said Zagloba. "There will soon be an end to this forest; after it is about a mile and a quarter of level land, and then another forest still larger extending to Matchin. God grant us to find Polish squadrons there!"

"It is high time that rescue came," muttered Volodyovski.

They rode awhile in silence over a road clearly lighted by the rays of the moon.

"Two wolves have run across," said Helena, suddenly.

"Yes," said Volodyovski, "and here is a third."

The gray shadow shot across a little more than a hundred rods in front of the horses.

"There is a fourth," said the princess.

"No, that is a deer. Look,—two, three!"

"What the devil!" cried Zagloba. "Deer chasing wolves! The world, I see, is overturned."

"Let us go a little faster," cried Volodyovski, with a voice of alarm. "Jendzian, come this way and go ahead with the lady!"

They shot on; but Zagloba bent forward as they rode to Volodyovski's ear, and inquired: "Pan Michael, what tidings?"

"Evil!" answered the little knight. "You have seen



wild beasts rushing from their lairs and escaping in the night."

"But what does that mean?"

"It means that they are frightened."

"Who frightens them?"

"Troops, Cossack or Tartar, are coming toward us from the right hand."

"But it may be our squadrons?"

"Impossible, for the beasts are fleeing from the east, from Pilavtsi. Doubtless, then, the Tartars are marching in a wide body."

"Let us flee, Pan Michael, in God's name!"

"There is no help. Oh, if the princess were not here, we could go quite near them; but with her the passage will be very difficult if they set eyes on us."

"Have the fear of God, Pan Michael. Shall we turn to the woods and run after the wolves, or what?"

"Impossible; for though the enemy would not reach us at once, they would deluge the country in front of us, and then how should we escape?"

"May brimstone thunderbolts shake them! This alone was wanting to us. Oh, Pan Michael, are you not mistaken? You know wolves follow an army; they do not run before it."

"Those at the flanks follow the army and gather in from every side, but those in front get frightened. Look! on the right, between the trees, there is a fire."

"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!"

"Silence! Is there much more of this forest?"

"We shall be at the end in a moment."

"And then a field?"

"Yes, O Jesus!"

"No noise! Beyond the field there is another forest?"

"Extending to Matchin."

"We shall be all right if they don't overtake us in this field. If we reach the second forest in safety, we are at home. Let us go together then. Luckily the princess and Jendzian are on Burlai's horses."

They put spurs to the horses, and joined the princess and Jendzian.

"What fire is that on the right?" asked the princess.

"There is no use in hiding it from you; that may be Tartars."

"Jesus, Mary!"

"Have no fear. My neck for it, we shall escape them, and our squadrons are in Matchin."

"For God's sake, let us be off!" said Jendzian.

They were silent, and sped on like ghosts. The trees began to grow thinner; they were reaching the end of the forest, and the fire was somewhat dimmer too. Suddenly Helena turned to Volodyovski.

"Swear to me, gentlemen," said she, "that I shall not go alive into their hands."

"You will not," said Volodyovski, "while I am alive."

They had barely passed the end and come into an open field about a mile in width, and on the other side of it another line of forest stood dark. That bald space of earth open on every side was all silvered over from the rays of the moon. All things were as visible on it as in the daytime.

"This is the worst piece of road," whispered Volodyovski to Zagloba; "for if they are in Chorni Ostroff, they will pass between these forests."

Zagloba gave no answer; he only pressed the horse with his heels.

They had run to the middle of the field, the opposite forest was growing nearer each moment and more distinct, when suddenly the little knight stretched out his hand to the east. "Look!" said he to Zagloba; "do you see?"

"Some kind of branches and thicket in the distance."

"Those branches are moving. Now on, on, push on! for they see us beyond a doubt."

The wind whistled past the ears of the fleeing; the forest of salvation drew nearer each instant.

All at once out of that dark mass approaching from the right side of the field flew on as it were the roar of sea waves, and the next moment one great shout rent the air.

"They see us!" bellowed Zagloba. "Dogs, ruffians, devils, wolves, scoundrels!"

The forest was so near that the fugitives almost felt its cold, austere breath; but also the cloud of Tartars became each moment more clearly outlined, and from the dark body of it long arms began to push out like the horns of some gigantic monster, and approached the fugitives with inconceivable rapidity. The trained ear of Volodyovski already distinguished clearly: "Allah! Allah!"

"My horse has stumbled!" shouted Zagloba.

"That is nothing!" cried Volodyovski.



But through his head that moment there flew like thunderbolts the questions: "What will happen if the horses do not hold out? What will happen if one of them falls?" They were valiant Tartar steeds of iron endurance, but they had come already from Ploskiri, resting but little on that wild flight from the town to the first forest. They might, it is true, take the led horses, but they too were tired. "What is to be done?" thought Volodyovski; and his heart throbbed with alarm, — perhaps for the first time in his life, — not for himself, but for Helena, whom during that long journey he had come to love as his own sister. And he knew too that the Tartars when they had once begun pursuit would not relinquish it very soon. "Let them keep on, they will not catch her," said he, setting his teeth.

"My horse has stumbled!" cried Zagloba a second time.

"That is nothing!" answered Volodyovski again.

They were now in the forest, darkness around them; but single Tartar horsemen were not farther than a few hundred yards behind. But the little knight knew now what to do.

"Jendzian," cried he, "turn with the lady to the first path leading out of the highway."

"Good, my master!"

The little knight turned to Zagloba. "Pistol in hand!" At the same time, seizing the bridle of Zagloba's horse, he began to restrain his course.

"What are you doing?" cried the noble.

"Nothing! Hold in your horse!"

The distance between them and Jendzian, who had escaped with Helena, increased every moment. At last he came with her to a point where the highway turned rather sharply toward Zharaj, and straight ahead lay a narrow forest-trail half hidden by branches. Jendzian rushed into it, and in a twinkling the two had disappeared in the thicket and the gloom.

Meanwhile Volodyovski had stopped his own horse and Zagloba's.

"In the name of God's mercy, what are you doing?" roared Zagloba.

"We delay the pursuit. There is no other salvation for the princess."

"We shall perish!"

"Let us perish. Stop here right by the side of the road, — right here!"

Both stood close under the trees in the darkness; presently the mighty thumping of Tartar horses approached and roared like a storm till the whole forest was filled with it.

"It has come!" said Zagloba, raising the skin of wine to his mouth. He drank and drank, then shook himself. "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," coughed he. "I am ready for death."

"This minute! this minute!" cried Volodyovski. "Three of them are riding in advance; that is what I wanted."

In fact three horsemen appeared on the clear road, mounted evidently on the best horses, — "wolf-hunters," so called in the Ukraine, for they came up with wolves in the chase, — and two or three hundred yards behind them a few hundred others, and still farther a whole dense throng of the horde.

When the first three came in front of the ambush two shots were discharged; then Volodyovski sprang like a panther into the middle of the road, and before Zagloba had time to think what was done the third Tartar was on the ground.

"Forward!" shouted the little knight.

Zagloba did not let the order be repeated, and they rushed over the road like a pair of wolves hunted by a pack of angry dogs. That moment the other Tartars hastened to the corpses, and seeing that those hunted wolves could bite to death they curbed their horses a little, waiting for their comrades.

"As you see, I knew that I should stop them," said Volodyovski.

But although the fugitives gained a few hundred steps, the interruption in the chase did not last long. Only the Tartars pressed on in a larger crowd, not pushing forward singly.

The horses of the fugitives were wearied by the long road, and their speed slackened, especially that of Zagloba's horse, which bearing such a considerable burden stumbled once and twice. What there was left of the old man's hair stood on end at the thought that he should fall.

"Pan Michael, dearest Pan Michael, do not abandon me!" cried he, in despair.

"Oh, be of good heart!" answered the little knight.



"May the wolves tear this hor—"

He had not finished this sentence when the first arrow hissed near his ear, and after it others began to hiss and whistle and sing as if they were horseflies and bees. One passed so near that its head almost grazed Zagloba's ear.

Volodyovski turned and again fired twice from his pistol at the pursuers.

Zagloba's horse stumbled now so heavily that his nostrils were almost buried in the earth.

"By the living God, my horse is dying!" shouted he, in a heart-rending voice.

"From the saddle to the woods!" thundered Volodyovski.

Having given this order, he stopped his own horse, sprang off, and a moment later he and Zagloba vanished in the darkness. But this movement did not escape the slanting eyes of the Tartars, and several tens of them springing from their horses also gave chase. The branches tore the cap from Zagloba's head, beat him on the face and caught his coat, but putting his feet behind his belt he made off as if he were thirty years of age. Sometimes he fell, but he was up again and off quicker than ever, puffing like a bellows. At last he fell into a deep hole, and felt that he could not crawl out again, for his strength had failed him completely.

"Where are you?" called Volodyovski, in a low voice.

"Down here! It's all over with me,—save me, Pan Michael."

Volodyovski sprang without hesitation to the hole and clapped his hand on Zagloba's mouth: "Be silent! perhaps they will pass us! We will defend ourselves anyhow."

By that time the Tartars came up. Some of them did in fact pass the hole, thinking that the fugitives had gone farther; others went slowly, examining the trees and looking around on every side. The knights held the breath in their breasts.

"Let some one fall in here," thought Zagloba, in despair; "I'll fall on him."

Just then sparks scattered on every side; the Tartars began to strike fire. By the flash their wild faces could be seen, with their puffed cheeks and lips sticking out, blowing the lighted tinder. For a time they kept going around a few tens of steps from the hole like ill-omened forest phantoms, drawing nearer and nearer.

But at the last moment wonderful sounds of some sort, murmurs, and confused cries began to come from the highway and to rouse the slumbering depths. The Tartars stopped striking fire, and stood as if rooted to the earth. Volodyovski's hand was biting into the shoulder of Zagloba.

The cries increased, and suddenly red lights burst forth, and with them was heard a salvo of musketry,—once, twice, three times,—followed by shouts of "Allah!" the clatter of sabres, the neighing of horses, tramping, and confused uproar. A battle was raging on the road.

"Ours, ours!" shouted Volodyovski.

"Slay! kill! strike! cut! slaughter!" bellowed Zagloba.

A second later a number of Tartars rushed past the hole in the wildest disorder, and vanished in the direction of their party. Volodyovski did not restrain himself; he sprang after them, and pressed on in the thicket and darkness.

Zagloba remained at the bottom of the hole. He tried to crawl up, but could not. All his bones were aching, and he was barely able to stand on his feet.

"Ah, scoundrels!" said he, looking around on every side, "you have fled; it is a pity some one of you did not stay,—I should have company in this hole, and I would show him where pepper grows! Oh, pagan trash, they are cutting you up like beasts this minute! Oh, for God's sake, the uproar is increasing every moment! I wish that Yeremi himself were here; he would warm you. You are shouting, 'Allah! Allah!' The wolves will shout 'Allah!' over your carrion pretty soon. But that Pan Michael should leave me here alone! Well, nothing wonderful; he is eager, for he is young. After this last adventure I would follow him anywhere, for he is not a friend to leave one in distress. He is a wasp! In one minute he stung three! If at least I had that wine-skin with me! But those devils have surely taken it, or the horses have trampled it. Besides insects are devouring me in this ditch! What's that?"

The shouts and discharges of musketry began to recede in the direction of the field and the first forest.

"Ah, ah!" thought Zagloba, "they are on their necks. Oh, dog-brothers, you could not hold out! Praise be to God in the highest!"

The shouts receded farther and farther.

"They ride lustily," muttered he. "But I see that I shall have to sit in this ditch. It only remains now for the



wolves to eat me. Bogun to begin with, then the Tartars, and wolves at the end! God grant a stake to Bogun and madness to the wolves! Our men will take care of the Tartars not in the worst fashion. Pan Michael! Pan Michael!"

Silence gave answer to Zagloba; only the pines murmured, and from afar came the sounds fainter and fainter.

"Shall I lie down to sleep here, or what? May the devil take it! Pan Michael!"

But Zagloba's patience had a long trial yet, for dawn was in the sky when the clatter of hoofs was heard again on the road and lights shone in the forest.

"Pan Michael, I am here!"

"Crawl out."

"But I cannot."

Volodyovski with a torch in his hand stood over the hole, and giving his hand to Zagloba, said: "Well, the Tartars are gone; we drove them to the other forest."

"But who came up?"

"Kushel and Roztvorovski, with two thousand horse. My dragoons are with them too."

"Were there many of the Pagans?"

"A couple of thousand."

"Praise be to God! Give me something to drink, for I am faint."

Two hours later Zagloba, having eaten and drunk what he needed, was sitting on a comfortable saddle in the midst of Volodyovski's dragoons, and at his side rode the little knight, who said, —

"Do not worry; for though we shall not come to Zbaraj in company with the princess, it would have been worse if she had fallen into the hands of the heathen."

"But perhaps Jendzian will come back yet to Zbaraj."

"He will not. The highway will be occupied; the party which we drove back will return soon and follow us. Besides Burlai may appear at any moment before Jendzian could come in. Hmelnitski and the Khan are marching on the other side from Konstantinoff."

"Oh, for God's sake! Then he will fall into a trap with the princess."

"Jendzian has wit enough to spring through between Zbaraj and Konstantinoff in time, and not let the regiments of Hmelnitski nor the parties of the Khan catch him. You see I have great confidence in his success."

"God grant it!"

"He is a cunning lad, just like a fox. You have no lack of stratagem, but he is more cunning. We split our heads a great deal over plans to rescue the girl, but in the end our hands dropped, and through him the whole has been directed. He'll slip out this time like a snake, for it is a question of his own life. Have confidence, — for God, who saved her so many times, is over her now; and remember that in Zbaraj you bade me have confidence when Zakhar came."

Zagloba was strengthened somewhat by these words of Pan Michael, and then fell into deep thought.

"Pan Michael," he said after a time, "have you asked Kushel what Skshetuski is doing?"

"He is in Zbaraj, and well; he came from Prince Koretzki's with Zatsvilikhovski."

"But what shall we tell him?"

"Ah, there is the rub!"

"Does he think yet that the girl was killed in Kieff?"

"He does."

"Have you told Kushel or any one else where we are coming from?"

"I have not, for I thought it better to take counsel first."

"I should prefer to say nothing of the whole affair. If the girl should fall again into Cossack or Tartar hands (which God forbid!), it would be a new torture, just as if some one were to tear open all his wounds."

"I'll give my head that Jendzian takes her through."

"I should gladly give my own to have him do so; but misfortune rages now in the world like a pestilence. Better be silent, and leave everything to the will of God."

"So let it be. But will not Podbipienta give the secret to Skshetuski?"

"Don't you know him? He gave his word of honor, which for that Lithuanian is sacred."

Here Kushel joined them. They rode on together, talking, by the first rays of the rising sun, of public affairs, of the arrival at Zbaraj of the commanders in consequence of Yeremi's wishes, of the impending arrival of the prince himself, and the inevitable and awful struggle with the whole power of Hmelnitski.