CHAPTER LXI.

Zagloba and Volodyovski were standing on the rampart next morning among the soldiers, looking carefully toward the tabor, from the side of which masses of peasants were approaching. Pan Yan was in counsel with the prince; but they, taking advantage of the moment of quiet, were talking about the preceding day and the present movement in the enemy's tabor.

"That forebodes no good for us," said Zagloba, pointing at the dark masses moving like an enormous cloud. "They are surely coming to an assault again, and here our hands will not move in their joints."

"Why should there be an assault in the clear day? They will do nothing more this time," said the little knight, "than occupy our rampart of yesterday, dig into our new one, and fire from morning till evening."

"We might stir them up nicely with our cannon."

Volodyovski lowered his voice. "We have n't much powder. With our present use it will not last six days probably; but by that time the king will come surely."

"Let him do what he likes. If only our Pan Longin, poor man, has got through in safety! I could not sleep the whole night. I was thinking only of him, and whenever I dozed I saw him in trouble; and such sorrow seized me that sweat stood out on my body. He is the best man to be found in the Commonwealth, looking with a lantern for three years and six weeks."

"And why did you always jeer at him?"

"Because my lip is worse than my heart. But don't make it bleed, Pan Michael, with remembrances, for as matters are I reproach myself; and God forbid that anything should happen to Pan Longin! I should have no peace till my death."

"Don't grieve so much. He never had any ill feeling against you, and I have heard him say himself, 'An evil mouth, but a golden heart.'"

"God give him health, the worthy friend! He never knew how to talk in human fashion, but he made up for a hundred such deficiencies by great virtue. What do you think, Pan Michael, did he pass through?"

"The night was dark, and the peasants after the defeat were terribly tired. We had not a good watch; what must it have been with them?"

"Praise God for that! I told Pan Longin to inquire carefully whether our poor princess had been seen anywhere, for I think Jendzian must have taken her to the king's headquarters. Pan Longin will be sure not to rest; he will not come back without the king. In that case we shall have news again soon."

"I have faith in the wit of that lad Jendzian, and think that he saved her somehow. I should know no peace if harm met her. I did not know her intimately, and I believe if I had a sister she would not have been dearer to me."

"She was a sister to you, but to me a daughter. From these troubles my beard will grow white altogether, and my heart break from sorrow. When you love some one, — one, two, three, and that one is gone; then you sit, console yourself, worry, grieve, meditate, — having besides an empty stomach, and holes in your cap through which the water is falling on your bald head like rain through a broken thatch. Dogs have at present a pleasanter life in the Commonwealth than the nobles, and we four are the worst off of all. It is time to go to a better world, Pan Michael, what do you think?"

"I have thought more than once whether it would not be better to tell Skshetuski all; but this restrains me, that he himself never speaks of her, and when any one utters a word he just quivers as if something pierced his heart."

"Tell him, open the wounds dried up in the fire of this war, while now some Tartar maybe is leading her by the hair through Perekop! Flaming fires stand in my eyes when I think of such a thing. It is time to die, it cannot be otherwise; for there is torture alone in this world, nothing more. If only Pan Longin gets through!"

"He must have more favor in heaven than others, for he is virtuous. But look! what are the rabble doing?"

"There is such a glitter from the sun to-day that I cannot see."

"They are cutting up our rampart of yesterday."

"I said there would be an assault. Let us go, Pan Michael; we have stood here long enough."

"They are not digging to make an assault; they must

have an open road to return, and besides they will surely bring machines to shoot from. Just see how the shovels are working; they have levelled the ground about forty yards already."

"I see now; but there is a terrible glare to-day." Zagloba covered his eyes with his hand, and looked.

At that moment through the cut made in the rampart rushed a stream of people who scattered in the twinkle of an eye along the space between the ramparts. Some fell to firing; others, digging the ground with spades, began to raise a new mound and trenches to enclose the Polish camp with a third ring..

"Oh, ho!" cried Volodyovski, "the word is scarcely out of my mouth, and they are rolling in the machines."

"Well, there will be an assault soon. Let us leave this place," said Zagloba.

"No; this is another kind of tower," said the little knight.

Really, the machines which appeared in the cut were built differently from the ordinary moving-tower. The walls were composed of ladders fastened together with hasps, covered with cloth and skins, from behind which the best marksmen, sitting from half the height of the machine to the top, struck the enemy.

"Come away! Let the dogs gnaw on where they are!"

"Wait!" answered Volodyovski. They began to count the machines, as new ones appeared in the cut.

"One, two, three — it is evident they have no small supply — four, five, six — they are coming yet — seven, eight — they can kill a dog on our square, for there must be splendid marksmen there — nine, ten — evident as on your hand, for the sun shines on it — eleven —" All at once Pan Michael stopped counting. "What is that?" he asked, in a voice of amazement.

"Where?"

"There on the highest one — a man is hanging!"

Zagloba strained his glance. Indeed, on the highest machine the sun was shining on the naked body of a man, swaying on a rope with the movement of the machine, like a great pendulum.

"True," said Zagloba.

Then Volodyovski grew pale as a sheet, and cried with a terrified voice: "Almighty God! it is Podbipienta!"

A murmur rose on the ramparts like wind through the leaves of trees. Zagloba bent his head, covered his eyes with his hands, and whispered with blue lips, groaning: "Jesus, Mary! Jesus, Mary!"

The murmur changed into a noise of confused words, and then into a roar as of a stormy sea. The men on the ramparts saw that by that infamous cord was hanging the comrade of their sufferings, a knight without reproach. All knew that that was Pan Longin Podbipienta, and terrible anger began to raise the hair on the heads of the soldiers.

Zagloba at last took his hands from his eyes. He was a terror to look at. On his mouth was foam, his face was blue, his eyes bursting from his head. "Blood! blood!" roared he, with such a voice that a quiver passed through those standing near him.

He sprang into the ditch. After him rushed everything that had life on the ramparts. No power — not even the commands of the prince — could have restrained that outburst of rage. They climbed out of the ditch, one over the shoulders of the other; they seized the bank of the ditch with their hands and with their teeth, and when one sprang out he ran without looking, not turning to see whether others were following. The machines were smoking like tar-factories, and trembled from the roar of musketry, but nothing availed. Zagloba rushed on in advance, his sabre above his head, raging like a mad bull. The Cossacks sprang forward too with scythes and flails on the assailants. Two walls, as it were, struck with a crash. But fat dogs cannot defend themselves long against hungry and raging wolves. Pushed from their place, cut with sabres, torn with teeth, beaten, crushed, the Cossacks could not withstand the fury; they were soon confused, and then fled to the cut. Zagloba, raging, rushed into the thickest crowd, like a lioness whose cubs are gone. An opening was made before him; and at his side went, like another devouring flame, Volodyovski, wild as a wounded leopard. The marksmen in the machines were cut to pieces; the rest pursued to the cut in the ramparts. Then the soldiers mounted the machine and freed Pan Longin, letting him down carefully to the ground.

Zagloba fell on his body. Volodyovski's heart was rent in like degree, and he was covered with tears at the sight of his dead friend. It was easy to see how Pan Longin had perished, for his whole body was covered with spots from

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the wounds inflicted by arrows. But the arrows had not injured his face, except one, which had left a long line on his temple. The few drops of blood had grown dry on his cheek; his eyes were closed, and on his pale face was a quiet smile, and had it not been for the azure paleness of the visage, the chill of death in the features, it might have seemed that Pan Longin was sleeping calmly. His comrades took him at last and bore him on their shoulders to the rampart, and then to the chapel of the castle.

Before evening a coffin was made, and the funeral celebrated by night at the Zbaraj cemetery. All the clergy were present except the priest Jabkovski, who, shot in the back during the last assault, was near death. Having given the command to Sobieski, the prince had come; also Konyetspolski, Pshiyemski, Skshetuski, Volodyovski, Zagloba, and the officers of the squadron in which the dead man had served. The coffin was placed at the newly dug grave, and the ceremony began.

It was a starry night. The torches burned with an even flame, gleaming on the yellow planks of the freshly made coffin, on the figure of the priest, and the stern faces of the knights standing in a circle. The smoke from the censer rose slowly, spreading the odor of myrrh and juniper. The silence was broken only by the stifled sobs of Zagloba, the deep sighs of the strong breasts around, and the distant roar of discharges on the ramparts. But the priest Mukhovetski raised his hand in sign that he was about to speak. The knights therefore held their breaths. He was silent a little longer; then fixing his eyes on the starry heights, he began at length as follows:—

"'What knocking do I hear at night on the door of heaven?' asks the hoary warden of Christ, springing up from sweet slumber. 'Open, holy Peter, open! I am Podbipienta.' But what deeds, what offices, what services embolden you, O Podbipienta, to trouble so important a doorkeeper? By what right do you wish to enter where neither birth, though as honorable as your own, nor senatorial dignity, nor offices of the Crown, nor the majesty even of the purple, of themselves alone give free entrance, since men cannot drive there by the broad highway in a carriage and six, with haiduks, but must climb by the steep and thorny path of virtue? Ah, open, holy Peter, open quickly, for by just such a steep and thorny path did our fellow-soldier and dear comrade Podbipienta pass, till he

came to your presence like a dove wearied after long flight; came naked, like Lazarus; came like Saint Stephen, torn with Pagan arrows; like poor Job; like the virgin who has never known a husband,— pure, obedient as a lamb, patient and quiet, without a spot of sin, with a sacrifice of blood joyfully shed for his earthly fatherland. Admit him, holy Peter; for if you do not admit him, whom will you admit in these days of corruption and ungodliness? Admit him, holy warden! admit this lamb; let him pasture in the heavenly meadow; let him nip its grass, for he came hungry from Zbaraj."

In this manner the priest Mukhovetski began his discourse; and then he depicted the whole life of Pan Longin with such eloquence that every one acknowledged himself wicked in the presence of the silent coffin of the knight without reproach, who had surpassed the lowliest in modesty and the loftiest in virtue. All then beat their breasts. Every moment greater sadness seized them, and they saw more clearly what the country had suffered and Zbaraj had lost. The priest took a lofty flight, and when at last he described the passage through the enemy and the martyr death of Pan Longin, he forgot altogether his rhetoric and quotations; and while taking leave of the mortal remains in the name of the clergy, the officers, and the army, he broke into weeping himself, and said, sobbing like Zagloba: "Give us your blessing, brother; give us your blessing, comrade! Not to an earthly, but to a heavenly king — to the surest tribunal — have you carried our groans, our famine, our misery and sufferings. You will gain for us there a more certain salvation. But you will never return yourself; therefore do we weep, therefore do we pour tears upon your coffin,— for we loved you, dearest brother!"

All wept with the worthy priest,— the prince, the commanders, the army, and most of all the friends of the deceased; but when the priest intoned for the first time, "Requiem æternam dona ei Domine! (Grant him eternal rest, O Lord!)," there was a universal outburst, though all were men hardened against death, and long accustomed to it, through their daily service.

When the coffin was placed on the ropes it was as difficult to tear Zagloba away as if his father or brother had died. But at last Skshetuski and Volodyovski drew him aside. The prince approached and took a handful of earth; the

priest began to say, "Anima ejus;" the ropes rattled; the earth began to fall, — it was thrown in with hands, with helmets; and soon above the remains of Pan Longin rose a lofty mound, shone on by the pale sad light of the moon.

Three friends were returning from the town to the square, from which came an uninterrupted sound of firing. They walked in silence, for neither wished to speak the first word; but other groups were speaking of the deceased, giving him unanimous praise.

"It was a splendid funeral," said an officer passing at the side of Skshetuski; "they did not give a better to Serakovski, the secretary of the Crown."

"For he deserved it," answered another officer; "who else would have undertaken to break through to the king?"

"But I heard," added the third, "that among Vishnyevetski's men there was a number of volunteers; but after such a terrible example the desire will surely desert them all."

"Besides, the thing is impossible. A snake could not creep through."

"As I live, it would be pure madness."

The officers passed on. A new moment of silence followed. Suddenly Volodyovski said: "You heard, Yan, what they said?"

"Yes," answered Skshetuski; "it is my turn now."

"Yan," said Volodyovski, seriously, "you know me of old, and you know that I am not quick to withdraw before peril; but peril is one thing, and downright suicide is another."

"And you, Michael, say this?"

"Yes, for I am your friend."

"And I am your friend. Give me your word of honor that you will not go third if I perish."

"Impossible!" cried Volodyovski.

"Ah, you see, Michael! How can you ask that of me which you will not do yourself? Let the will of God be done."

"Then let me go with you."

"The prince has prohibited that, — not I. You are a soldier, and you must obey."

Pan Michael was silent, for he was a soldier first of all; then his mustaches only quivered violently by the light

of the moon. At last he said: "The night is very clear; don't go now."

"I should prefer a darker one, but delay is impossible. The weather is, as you see, settled for a long time, our powder is almost gone, our provisions are at an end. The soldiers are digging through the square, looking for roots; the gums of some of them are rotting from the rubbish they have eaten. I will go to-night, — at once; I have taken farewell of the prince already."

"I see that you are simply desperate."

Skshetuski smiled gloomily. "God guard you, Michael! It is certain that we are not swimming in luxury, but I shall not seek death of my own will, for that is a sin; besides, it is not a question of perishing, but of getting through, going to the king, and saving the camp."

Volodyovski was suddenly seized with such a desire to tell Skshetuski all about the princess that he almost opened his mouth; but he thought to himself, "His head will be turned by the news, and they will catch him the more easily." He bit his tongue therefore, was silent, and then asked: "Which way are you going?"

"I told the prince that I should go through the pond, and then by the river till I passed far beyond the tabor. He said that this was a better road than others."

"There is no help, I see," said Volodyovski. "Since death is predestined to a man, it is better on the field of glory than in bed. God attend you, God attend you, Yan! If we do not meet in this world we shall in the other, and I shall surely keep my heart for you."

"As I shall mine for you. God reward you for all the good you have done! And listen to me, Michael! If I die, they will perhaps not put me up as they did Pan Longin, for they have received too severe a lesson; but they will be sure to boast of it in some way, in which case let old Zatsvilikhovski go to Hmelnitski for my body, for I do not wish that dogs should drag me through their camp."

"Rest assured!" said Volodyovski.

Zagloba, who from the beginning had listened in semi-consciousness, understood the conversation at last, but he felt unable to restrain or dissuade; he only groaned deeply: "Yesterday that one, to-day this one. My God, my God, my God!"

"Have faith," said Volodyovski.

"Pan Yan —" began Zagloba, and he could go no further.

His gray, suffering head rested on the breast of the knight, and he drew up to him like a helpless little child.

An hour later Skshetuski sank into the water of the western pond.

The night was very clear, and the middle of the pond looked like a silver shield; but Skshetuski vanished straightway from the eye. The shore was thickly overgrown with rushes and reeds; farther on, where the reeds were thinner, was a rich growth of pond-weed and plants. That mixture of wide and narrow leaves, slippery stalks, snaky stems winding around the legs and body to the waist hindered his advance greatly, but at least concealed him from the patrol. To swim across the clear centre of the pond was out of the question, for any dark object would have been seen easily. Skshetuski determined therefore to pass along the shore of the pond to the swamp at the other side, through which the river entered the pond. Patrols of Cossacks or Tartars were likely to be there; but the place was overgrown with a whole forest of reeds, only the edge had been cut down to make cabins for the mob. The swamp once attained, it would be possible to push on through the reeds, even in the daytime, unless the quagmire should be too deep. But that road also was a terrible one. Under the sleeping water, not farther than a yard from the shore, the mud was an ell or more in depth. After every step Skshetuski took there rose to the surface of the water bubbles, the gurgling of which could be heard distinctly in the stillness. Besides, in spite of the slowness of his movements, ripples were formed which ran every moment farther from their source to the open water, in which the light of the moon was reflected. In time of rain Skshetuski would have swum straight across the pond, and in half an hour, at most, would have come to the swamp; but there was not a cloud in the sky. Whole torrents of greenish light fell upon the pond, changing the leaves of the lily into silver shields, and the tufts on the reeds to brushes of silver. No breeze was blowing. Happily the gurgling of the bubbles was lost in the noise of the guns, noticing which, Skshetuski moved only when the discharges on the ramparts and trenches became more lively. But that calm, pleasant night caused another difficulty, — legions of mosquitoes rose from the reeds and swarmed over the head of the knight, fastening on his face and eyes, biting him, buzzing and singing above his ears their mournful vespers.

Pan Yan in selecting this road did not deceive himself as to its difficulties, but he did not foresee everything. He did not foresee, for instance, its terrors. Every depth of water, even the best known, has in it something mysterious and terrifying, and involuntarily urges the question, What is down at the bottom? And this pond of Zbaraj was simply awful. The water in it seemed to be thicker than common water, and exuded the odor of corpses, for hundreds of Cossacks and Tartars had decayed there. Both sides had drawn out corpses, but how many of them might be hidden among the reeds, the plants, and the thick growth! The cold of a wave embraced Pan Yan, and sweat stood on his forehead. What if some slippery arm should seize him suddenly, or if greenish eyes should look at him from under the leaves? The long stems of the water-lily wound around his knees, and the hair stood on his head, because that may be the spirit of a drowned man to keep him from going farther. "Jesus, Mary! Jesus, Mary!" whispered he unceasingly, pushing ahead. At times he raised his eyes, and at the sight of the moon, the stars, and the silence of the sky he found a certain rest. "There God is," repeated he, in an undertone, so that he might hear himself. Then he would look on the shore, and it seemed to him that he was looking on the ordinary world of God from some condemned world beyond the earth, — a world of swamps, black depths, pale moonlight, ghosts, corpses, and night. Yearning took such hold of him that he wanted immediately to rush forth from that net of reeds.

But he pushed along the shore unceasingly, and he had already gone so far from the camp that on that God's world (outside) he saw at some paces distant from the shore a Tartar on horseback; he stopped then and looked at the figure, which, nodding with uniform motion toward the neck of the horse, seemed to be sleeping.

It was a strange sight. The Tartar nodded continually, as if bowing in silence to Skshetuski, and the latter did not take his eye from him. There was something terrible in this; but Skshetuski breathed with satisfaction, for in presence of that definite fear fancies a hundred times more difficult to be borne disappeared. The world of ghosts fled somewhere, his coolness returned at once; and only questions like these began to crowd into his head: "Does he sleep, or not? Must I go on, or wait?"

At length he went on, moving still more quietly, still more