cautiously than at the beginning of his journey. He was already half-way to the swamp and the river when the first breath of a light wind rose. The reeds moved therefore, and gave forth a strong sound by striking one another; and Skshetuski was rejoiced, for in spite of all his care, in spite of the fact that sometimes he lost several minutes in taking a step, an involuntary movement, a stumble, a splash might betray him. Now he advanced more boldly, covered by the loud noise of the reeds with which the whole pond was filled; and everything grew vocal about him, the water on the bank began to plash with its rocking wave.

But this movement evidently roused not the plants along the shore alone, for at that time some dark object appeared before Pan Yan and began to move toward him as if preparing for a spring. He almost screamed at first; but fear and aversion restrained the voice in his bosom, and at the same time a terrible odor came to him. But after a while, when the first idea that this might be a drowned person barring his road on purpose disappeared, and there remained only aversion, the knight passed on. The talk of the reeds continued and increased every moment. Through their moving tufts Skshetuski saw a second and a third Tartar patrol. He passed these, passed a fourth also. "I must have gone around half the pond," thought he; and he raised himself a little to look through the reeds and see where he was. Something pushed his legs; he looked around and saw there at his knees a human face. "This is the second," thought he.

This time he was not frightened, for the second body lay on its back, without signs of life or movement. Skshetuski merely hastened his steps so as not to become dizzy. The reeds grew thicker, which on the one hand gave him a safe shelter, but on the other greatly impeded his advance. Half an hour passed, an hour; he went on unceasingly, but grew more and more weary. The water in some places was so shallow that it just reached above his ankles, but in others it came almost to his waist. He was tortured beyond measure by the slow dragging of his feet out of the mud. His forehead was streaming with perspiration, and from time to time a quiver went through him from head to foot.

"What is this?" thought he, with terror in his heart; "is delirium seizing me? Somehow the swamp does not appear; I don't recognize the place among the reeds. Shall I miss it?"

It was a terrible danger; for in that way he might circle about the pond all night, and in the morning find himself at the same point from which he had started, or fall into the hands of the Cossacks at another place.

"I have chosen a bad road," thought he, failing in spirits; "it is impossible to get through the pond. I will return, and in the morning go as Pan Longin did. I might rest till morning."

But he went on, for he saw that by promising to return and rest he was tempting himself; it also occurred to him that by going so slowly and halting every moment he could not have reached the swamp yet. Still the thought of rest grew on him more and more. At moments he wished to lie down somewhere in the reeds, just to draw breath. He struggled with his own thoughts and prayed at the same time. The trembling passed over him oftener; he drew his legs out of the mud with less force. The sight of the Tartar patrol sobered him; but he felt that his head as well as his body was tormenting him, and that a fever was coming upon him.

Again half an hour passed; the swamp was not visible yet. But bodies of drowned men appeared more frequently. Night, fear, corpses, the noise of reeds, toil, and sleeplessness benumbed his thoughts. Visions began to come to him. Now Helena is in Kudák; and he is sailing with Jendzian in a boat down the Dnieper. The reeds are rustling; he hears the boatmen sing. The priest Mukhovetski is waiting in his stole; Pan Grodzitski takes the place of a father. The girl is there looking day after day on the river, from the walls. Suddenly she sees something, claps her hands, and cries: "He is coming! he is coming!" "My master," says Jendzian, pulling him by the sleeve, "the lady is here—"

Skshetuski wakes. It is the tangled reeds that stop him on the way. Visions disappear; consciousness returns. Now he does not feel such weariness, for the fever lends him strength.

"Oh, is not this the swamp yet?" But around him the reeds were still the same as if he had not stirred from the spot. Near the river there must be open water; therefore this is not the swamp yet.

He goes on, but his thoughts return with invincible stubbornness to the pleasant vision. In vain he defends himself; in vain he begins to say, "Oh, Venerable Lady!" in

vain he tries to retain all his consciousness. Again he is sailing down the Dnieper; he sees the boats, the skiffs, Kudák, the Saitch; only this time the vision is more disordered, there is a multitude of persons in it. At the side of Helena are the prince and Hmelnitski, the koshevoi ataman, Pan Longin, Zagloba, Bogun, Volodyovski, — all in gala attire for his wedding. But where is the wedding? They are in some strange place, — neither Lubni nor Rozlogi nor the Saitch nor Kudák, — in unknown waters among floating corpses.

Skshetuski wakes a second time, or rather he is roused by a loud rustling coming from the direction in which he is going; he halts therefore, and listens. The rustling approaches; a kind of grating and plashing is heard, — it is a boat, visible already through the reeds. Two Cossacks are sitting in it, — one is pushing with an oar; the other holds in his hand a long pole gleaming in the distance like silver, and he pushes the water-plants aside with it.

Skshetuski sank in the water up to his neck, so that only his head was sticking out above the lilies, and he looked. "Is that an ordinary picket," thought he, "or are they already on the trail?" But soon he concluded by the quiet and careless motions of the Cossacks that it must be an ordinary picket. There must be more than one boat on the pond, and if the Cossacks were on his trail a number of boats would be assembled and a crowd of men. Meanwhile they passed by, the noise of the reeds deafened their words; he caught only the following snatch of conversation: —

"Devil take them, they have given orders to patrol this filthy water."

The boat pushed on behind bunches of reeds; but the Cossack standing at the prow struck continually with measured blows of his pole among the water-plants, as if he wished to frighten the fish.

Skshetuski hurried on. After a time he saw a Tartar picket standing at the bank. The light of the moon fell straight on the face of the Nogai, which was like the snout of a dog. But Skshetuski feared these pickets less than loss of consciousness. He exerted all his will, therefore, to give himself a clear account of where he was and whither he was going. But the struggle only increased his weariness, and soon he discovered that he was seeing double and treble, and at moments the pond seemed to him the square and the camp, and the bunches of reeds tents. At such

moments he wished to call Volodyovski to go with him, but he had sufficient consciousness to restrain himself. "Don't call, don't call!" repeated he to himself; "that would be death."

But the struggle with himself was more and more difficult. He left Zbaraj tormented with hunger and terrible sleeplessness, from which soldiers there were dying already. That night-journey, the cold bath, the odor of corpses in the water, weakened him completely. Added to this were the excitement of fear, and pain from the biting of mosquitoes which pierced his face so that it was covered with blood. He felt therefore that if he did not reach the swamp soon he would either go out on the shore and let what might meet him meet him quickly, or he would fall among the reeds and be drowned.

That swamp and the mouth of the river seemed to him a port of salvation, though in fact new difficulties and dangers began there. He defended himself feverishly, and went on, taking less care each moment. In the rustle he heard the voices of men, — conversation; it seemed to him that the pond was talking about him. Will he reach the swamp or not? Will he go on shore or not? The mosquitoes sang with their thin voices more sadly. The water became deeper; soon it reached to his belt, then to his breast. He thought that if he should have to swim, he would be entangled in the thick web and drown.

Again an almost irrestrainable, unconquerable desire of calling Volodyovski seized him. He had already put his hand to his mouth to cry: "Michael! Michael!" Fortunately some kind reed struck him with its wet, dripping brush in the face. He came to his mind, and saw in front but a little to one side a dim light. He looked steadily at the light, and went straight toward it for a while. He stopped suddenly; he saw a belt of clear water lying athwart him. He drew breath. It was the river, and on both sides of it a swamp.

"I will stop going by the shore, and will go into that wedge," thought he.

On both sides of the wedge extended two strips of reeds. The knight entered that one to which he had come. After a while he saw he was on a good road. He looked around. The pond was already behind him. He moved parallel with the narrow strip of water, which could be nothing but the river. The water there was cooler also. But after a time

terrible weariness possessed him. His legs trembled, and before his eyes rose as it were a dark fog.

"It cannot be helped; I will go to the shore and lie down. I will not go farther; I will rest."

Then he fell on his knees. His hands felt a dry tuft covered with moss; it was like a little island among the rushes. He sat down and began to wipe his bloody face with his hands, and then to draw long breaths.

After a while the odor of smoke reached his nostrils. Turning to the shore, he saw, about a hundred paces from the brink, a fire, and around it a knot of people. He was directly in front of this fire, and at moments when the wind bent the reeds he could see everything perfectly. At the first glance he recognized the Tartar horse-herds, who were sitting at the fire eating.

Then he felt a fearful hunger. Yesterday morning he had eaten a bit of horse-flesh which would not have satisfied a wolf-whelp two months old; since then he had had nothing in his mouth. He began to pluck the round stems growing about him and suck them greedily. He allayed his thirst as well as his hunger, — for thirst tormented him too. At the same time he looked continually at the fire, which grew paler and dimmer. The people near it began to be hidden by a mist, and seemed to go into the distance.

"Oh, sleep torments me! I will sleep here on the mound," thought the knight.

But there was a noise by the fire. The horse-herds rose. Soon there came to Skshetuski's ears the cries: "Losh! losh!" They were answered by a short neigh. The fire was deserted and went out. After a time he heard whistling and the dull thump of hoofs on the moist meadow.

Skshetuski could not understand why the horse-herds had ridden away. Then he saw the tops of the reeds and the broad leaves of the lilies were somewhat pale; the water received a different light from that of the moon; the air was shrouded with a light of joy. He looked around. The day was breaking. He had spent the whole night in going around the pond before reaching the river and the swamp. He was barely at the beginning of the road. Now he must go by the river and pass through the tabor in the day. The air was filled more and more with the light of dawn. In the east the sky took on a pale sea-green color.

Skshetuski slipped down again from the tuft into the swamp, and pushing toward the shore, after a short interval

thrust his head out of the reeds. At the distance of five hundred yards, perhaps, a Tartar picket was visible; with this exception the meadow was empty, — only the fire shone with a dying light on a dry place at some little distance. Skshetuski determined to crawl to it through the high grass interspersed here and there with tall rushes.

Having crawled to the place, he looked carefully to find some remnants of food. He found in fact freshly picked mutton bones with bits of sinew and fat, then some pieces of roasted turnips thrown into the hot ashes. He began to eat with the greed of a wild beast, and ate till he saw that the pickets stationed along the road which he had passed were approaching him through the meadow on their way to the tabor.

Then he began to retreat, and in a few minutes disappeared in the wall of reeds. Having found his tuft, he put himself on it without a rustle. The pickets rode by at the same time. Skshetuski began at once on the bones which he had brought with him, and which he broke in his jaws, powerful as those of a wolf. He gnawed off the fat and the sinews, sucked out the marrow, chewed the bone-fat, — allayed his first hunger. Such a morning feast he had not had for a long time in Zbaraj.

He felt stronger now. The food, as well as the rising day, strengthened him. It became brighter every moment. The eastern side of the sky from greenish became rosy and golden. The cool of the morning troubled him greatly, it is true; but he was comforted by the thought that the sun would soon warm his wearied body. He examined the place carefully. The tuft was pretty large, rather short, because round, but wide enough for two persons to lie side by side with ease. The reeds stood around like a wall, hiding it completely from the eyes of men.

"They will not find me here," thought he, "unless they go fishing in the reeds; and there are no fish, for they have died of infection. Here will I rest and think what further to do." And he began to think whether he should go on by the river or not. Finally he determined to go if the wind should rise and the reeds tremble; if not, the noise and rustle might betray him, — especially as most likely he would have to pass near the tabor.

"Thanks to thee, O Lord, that I am alive till now," whispered he quietly; and he raised his eyes to Heaven. Then his thoughts flew away to the Polish ramparts. The

castle was visible from that tuft, especially since it was gilded by the first rays of the rising sun. Maybe some one is looking from the tower to the pond and reeds through a field-glass. Volodyovski is there surely; and Zagloba will pass the whole day in looking from the ramparts to see if he can find him hanging on some moving tower.

"They will not see me," thought the knight, and his breast was full of the happy feeling of security. "They will not see me, they will not see me," he repeated several times. "I have passed only a short road, but it had to be passed. God will help me to go farther."

Here he saw, with the eyes of his imagination, beyond the tabor, in the forest, behind which stand the armies of the king, the general militia of the whole country, — hussars, infantry, foreign regiments. The earth groaned under the weight of men, horses, and cannon, and in the midst of this swarm of people is the king himself. Then he saw an immense battle, broken tabors, the prince with all his cavalry flying over piles of bodies, the greetings of armies. His eyes, aching and swollen, closed beneath the excess of light, and his head bent under the excess of thought; a kind of pleasant weakness began to embrace him. At last he stretched himself at full length and fell asleep.

The reeds rustled. The sun rose high in the sky, warmed with its burning glance the knight, and dried the clothing on his body. He slept soundly without motion. Whoever should see him lying thus on the tuft with bloody face, would think that a corpse thrown up by the water was lying there. Hours passed; still he slept. The sun reached the zenith, and began to descend the other side of the sky; he was sleeping yet. He was roused by the piercing cry of horses feeding on the meadow, and the loud calls of the herdsmen lashing the stallions with whips.

He rubbed his eyes, remembered where he was, looked in the sky; stars were twinkling in the red and still unquenched gleams of the sunset. He had slept the whole day. He felt neither refreshed nor stronger; all his bones were aching. He thought, however, that new toil would restore the activity of his body, and putting his feet into the water he moved on his journey without delay.

He went now through clear water by the reeds, so as not to rouse the attention of the horse-herds on shore by the rustle. The last gleams had disappeared and it was quite dark, for the moon had not risen yet from behind the woods.

The water was so deep that Skshetuski lost bottom in places and had to swim, which was difficult to do, for he was dressed, and he swam against the current, which, though slow, still pushed him back toward the pond. But as a recompense the sharpest Tartar eyes could not see that head advancing along the dark wall of reeds. He pushed on therefore rather boldly, swimming at times, but for the greater part wading to his waist and armpits, till at last he reached the place from which his eyes beheld, on both sides of the river, thousands upon thousands of lights.

"These are the tabors," thought he; "now God aid me!" And he listened.

The bustle of mingled voices reached his ear. Yes, these were the tabors. On the left bank of the river stood the Cossack camp with thousands of wagons and tents; on the right the Tartar camp, — both noisy, uproarious, full of conversation, wild sounds of drums and flutes, bellowing of cattle, camels, neighing of horses, shouts. The river divided them, forming a barrier against disputes and fights; for the Tartars could not remain in peace at the side of the Cossacks. The river was widest at this place, and perhaps dug out on purpose. On one side the wagons, on the other reed huts were near the bank, judging by the fires, within a few score of yards; but at the water itself there were surely pickets.

The reeds and rushes became thinner; opposite the camps the banks were evidently bare. Skshetuski pushed on some yards farther, and halted. A certain power and terror came out against him from those swarms. At that moment it seemed to him that all the watchfulness and rage of those thousands of human beings were turned upon him, and in presence of them he felt perfectly helpless. He was alone.

"No one can pass them," thought he; but he pushed on still, for a certain painful, irrestrainable curiosity attracted him. He wished to look more nearly on that terrible power.

Suddenly he stopped. The forest of reeds ended as if cut with a knife; perhaps they had been cut to make cabins. Farther on the clear water was red from the reflection of the fires. Two great and clear flames were blazing there at the banks. Before one stood a Tartar on horseback; before the other a Cossack with a long lance in his hand. Both looked at each other and at the water. In the distance were to be seen others standing on guard in the

same way and looking. The gleam of the piles threw as it were a fiery bridge across the river. Under the banks were to be seen rows of small boats used by the guards on the pond.

"An impossibility!" muttered Skshetuski.

Despair seized him at once. He could neither go backward nor forward. The time had been passing as he was pushing through the swamps and reeds breathing the infected air and soaked in water, only to discover after he had come to those very camps through which he had undertaken to pass, that it was impossible.

But it was impossible to go back; the knight knew that he might find sufficient strength to drag himself ahead, but he could not find it to go back. In his despair there was at the same time a dull rage; for the first time he wished to emerge from the water, throttle the guard, then rush on the crowd and perish.

Again the wind began to move along the reeds with a wonderful whisper, bringing with it the sound of bells from Zbaraj. Skshetuski began to pray ardently and beat his breast, imploring aid from heaven with the strength and the desperate faith of a drowning man; he prayed, but the two camps roared ominously as if in answer to his prayer. Black figures and figures red from fire pushed around like herds of devils in hell. The guards stood motionless; the river flowed on with its blood-colored water.

"The fires will go down when deep night comes," said Pan Yan to himself, and waited.

One hour passed, and another. The noise decreased; the fires really began to smoulder, except the two fires of the guards, which blazed up more brightly. The guards were changed, and it was evident that the fresh ones would remain till morning. The thought came to Skshetuski that perhaps he might be able to slip through more easily in the daytime; but he soon abandoned that idea. In the daytime they took water, watered the cattle, bathed; the river must be full of people. Suddenly his glance fell upon the boats. On both banks of the river there was a number of them in a line, and on the Tartar side the rushes extended to the first boat.

Skshetuski sank in the water to his neck, and pushed slowly toward the boats, keeping his eyes fastened on the Tartar guard as on a rainbow. At the end of half an hour he was at the first boat. His plan was simple. The sterns

of the boats were raised over the water, forming above it a kind of arch through which the head of a man might pass easily. If all the boats stood side by side there, the Tartar guard could not see a head pushing under them. There was more danger from the Cossack; but he might not see it, for under the boats, notwithstanding the opposite fire, it was dark. Anyhow there was no other passage.

Skshetuski hesitated no longer, and soon found himself under the sterns of the boats. He crawled on his hands and feet, or rather dragged himself, for the water was shallow. He was so near the Tartar standing on the bank that he heard the breathing of his horse. He stopped a moment and listened. Fortunately the boats were placed side by side. He had his eyes then fastened on the Cossack guard, whom he saw as on the palm of his hand. The Cossack was looking at the Tartar camp. Skshetuski had passed fifteen boats, when suddenly he heard steps on shore and Tartar voices. He stopped immediately and listened. In his journeys to the Crimea he had learned Tartar. Now a shiver ran through his whole body when he heard the words of command: "Get in and go!"

He grew feverish, though he was in the water. If they should take the boat under which he was hiding, that moment he was lost; if they should take the one before him he was lost too, for there remained an open lighted space. Each second seemed to him an hour. Soon steps sounded on the planks. The Tartars sat in the fourth or fifth boat behind him, pushed it out and began to sail in the direction of the pond. But that movement directed the eyes of the Cossack guard to the boats. Skshetuski did not stir for something like half an hour. Only when the guards were changed did he resume his onward movement.

In this way he reached the end of the boats. After the last boat began the rushes again, and farther on the reeds. When he reached the rushes the knight, breathless, dripping with perspiration, fell upon his knees and thanked God with his whole heart.

He hastened on somewhat more boldly, taking advantage of every breeze which filled the banks with rustling. From time to time he looked around. The guard-fires began to retreat, to be hidden, to glimmer, to weaken. The lines of rushes and reeds became darker and thicker, for the shores were more swampy. The guards could not stand close to one another; the noise of the camp grew less. A kind of

superhuman power strengthened the limbs of the knight. He pushed through reeds, clumps of earth, sank in the swamp, went under water, swam, and rose again. He did not dare yet to go on shore; but he almost felt that he was saved. He could not render account to himself of how long he advanced, wading in this way; but when he looked around again the watch-fires seemed like little points gleaming in the distance. A few hundred yards farther, and they vanished altogether. The moon went down; around about was silence. Now a noise was heard louder and more solemn than the rustle of the reeds. Skshetuski came near screaming with joy, — the woods were on both sides of the river.

He turned then to the bank and came out of the reeds. The pine-forest began here, beyond the rushes and reeds. The odor of rosin came to his nostrils; here and there in the depths shone the fern, like silver. He fell a second time on his knees, and kissed the earth in prayer. He was saved!

Then he entered the forest darkness, asking himself where he should go, where those forests would take him, where the king and the army were. His journey was not finished; it was not easy, it was not safe; but when he thought that he had come out of Zbaraj, — that he had stolen through the guards, swamps, tabors, and almost half a million of enemies, — then it seemed to him that all dangers were passed, that that forest was a clear highway which would lead him straight to his Majesty the King; and that wretched-looking, hungry, shivering man, bespattered with his own blood, with red filth, and black mud, passed on with joy in his heart, and hope that he would soon return in different circumstances and with greater power.

"They will not be left hungry and hopeless," thought he of his friends in Zbaraj, "for the king will come."

His heart rejoiced at the near rescue of the prince, the commanding officers, Volodyovski, Zagloba, and all those heroes confined in the ramparts. The forest depths opened before him and covered him with their shade.

CHAPTER LXII.

In the drawing-room of the Court at Toporoff sat three magnates one evening in secret consultation. A number of bright lights were burning on a table covered with maps of the surrounding country; near them lay a tall cap with a dark plume, a field-glass, and a sword with hilt set in pearls, on which was thrown a handkerchief embroidered with a crown, and a pair of elk-skin gloves. Near the table, in a high-armed chair, sat a man about forty years of age, rather small and slender, but powerfully built. He had a swarthy, sallow, wearied face, black eyes, and a Swedish wig of the same color, with long locks falling on his neck and shoulders; a thin black mustache, trimmed upward at the ends, adorned his upper lip. His lower lip with his beard protruded strongly, giving his whole physiognomy a characteristic mark of pride and stubbornness. It was not a beautiful face, but unusually lofty. A sensuous expression, indicating an inclination to pleasure, was combined in it with a certain sleepy torpor and coldness. The eyes were as if smouldering; but it was easy to guess that in a moment of exaltation, joy, or anger they could cast lightnings which not every eye might meet. At the same time kindness and affability were depicted on his countenance.

The black dress, composed of a satin doublet with lace ruffles, from under which a gold chain was visible, increased the distinction of this uncommon figure. On the whole, in spite of sadness and anxiety evident in the face and form, there was something majestic in them. In fact it was the king himself, Yan Kazimir Vaza, who had succeeded his brother Vladislav somewhat less than a year before.

A little behind him, in the half-shade, sat Hieronim Radzeyovski, the starosta of Lomjin, a thick, corpulent, low-set, red-visaged man with the unblushing face of a courtier; and opposite him, at the table, a third personage, leaning on his elbow, looking at the maps representing the country around, raising from time to time his eyes to the king. His face had less majesty, but almost more official distinction, than that of the king. The cool and reasoning face of the statesman was furrowed with cares and thought, the