

you see Costa's wife as pink as a girl? How can a woman of her age paint herself?"

"Never mind her, my dear, there are others-----"

"I don't seem to have heard of them."

Then a little later on:

"I don't know how it is but Costa is an ill-natured man and a regular chatterbox."

"You say truly, it's the talk of the town."

"But he has become a little more careful, he's not as he was a while ago. He has begun to shrug his shoulders only and keep his tongue quiet."

"He pretends to, my dear, but you have not heard him--it's better for me not to tell you, not to make you unhappy, especially on a feast day."

"Of course, you must tell me," Mistress Veta raised her voice and her eyes flashed.

"I would sooner you heard it from other lips."

"Now, Lena, either you tell me, or-----"

Lena knew Mistress Veta too well not to tell her that Costa was saying how he had seen Ana going down to the Timish with warm wine for Sandu, and how she had stood in the cold for two hours talking to him, and a great deal more besides.

Red was the wine, but Mistress Veta's face was redder still. She might have had an apoplectic stroke.

"Ah! He said those words?"

Lena did not know how to calm her.

"My dear, really I did not know how much it would upset you or I should never have told you. Why do you get so angry? Every one knows he is a liar and a mischief-maker without his equal in the empire, and who pays attention to all his tales, and all the world knows how you have brought up Ana. What tanner's daughter can touch her? Your Ana--come, leave it."

"I will not leave it," cried Mistress Veta, somewhat calmer. "I'll show him. To whom did he say these words?"

"I don't know to whom he said them; I heard of it in Trifu's house."

"In Trifu's house! Trifu is his cousin. Don't listen, Lena; do you believe his lies?"

"How could I believe him, my dear, how could I believe him? Neither did Trifu believe him. He said he would blush to invent such lies."

"Lies, Lena, lies. But let him see me! My daughter-----"

"Say no more about it, Veta. May God keep Ana well, and you see her happy. Costa--but who's Costa? Everybody laughs when he opens his mouth."

"You heard it in Trifu's house! Who knows in how many places he has spit out his libels, for that man spits, Lena, he spits worse than any cat; but I am not I if I don't pay him out."

Lena agreed with her, and sympathized with her and urged her not to be so angry, for the whole town knew what Ana's behaviour always