

Ghicu Sina paused a while. Although he had only told me these things quite briefly, I felt their secret had entered my soul; with my eyes upon the pool where the strange reflections constantly played, I seemed to hear, as one sometimes hears the faint voice of memory from a remote past, the sound of the bells and their metallic words: "Virghea is dead--is dead!"

And then, the story adds, he rose from the pool. Like the wind, he raised her in his arms and carried her deep down to his translucent palace where, to this day, little fiery points of light burn round the head of the dead woman.

OLD NICHIFOR, THE IMPOSTOR

By I. CREANGA

Old Nichifor is not a character out of a story-book but a real man like other men; he was once, when he was alive, an inhabitant of the Tzutzuen quarter of the town of Neamtzu, towards the village of Neamtzu Vinatori.

When old Nichifor lived in Tzutzuen my grandfather's grandfather was piper at the christening feast at the house of Mosh Dedui from Vinatori, the great Ciubar-Voda being godfather, to whom Mosh Dedui gave forty-nine brown lambs with only one eye each; and the priest, uncle of my mother's uncle, was Ciubuc the Bell-ringer from the Neamtzu Monastery, who put up a big bell at this same monastery at his own expense, and had a fancy to ring it all by himself on big feast days, on which account he was called the bell-ringer. About this time old Nichifor lived at Tzutzuen.

Old Nichifor was a cab-driver. Although his carriage was only fastened together with thongs of lime and bark, it was still a good carriage, roomy and comfortable. A hood of matting prevented the sun and rain from beating down into old Nichifor's carriage. In the well of the carriage hung a grease box with a greasing stick and some screws which banged against each other ding! dong! ding! dong! whenever the carriage moved. On a hook below the boot--on the left--was suspended a little axe to be ready for any emergency.

Two mares, white as snow and swift as flame, nearly always supported the pole of the carriage; nearly always but not quite always; old Nichifor was a horse-dealer, and when he got the chance he would either exchange or sell a mare in the middle of a journey, and in that case the pole would be bare on the one side. The old man liked to have young, well-bred mares; it was a weakness with him. Perhaps you will ask me why mares and always white ones, and I will tell you this: mares, because old Nichifor liked to breed from them, white, because the whiteness of the mares, he said, served him as a lantern on the road at nights.

Old Nichifor was not among those who do not know that "It is not good to be coachman behind white horses or the slave of women;" he knew this, but the mares were his own, and when he took care of them they were taken care of and when he did not--well, there was no one to reproach him. Old Nichifor avoided carrier's work; he refused to do any lifting for fear of giving himself a rupture.

"Cab driving," he said, "is much better; one has to deal with live goods who go up hill on foot, and down hill on foot, and only stay in the carriage when it halts."