

took leave of her parents-in-law, and got on to the feather mattresses in the bottom of the carriage. Old Nichifor jumped on to the box, whipped up the mares, and left Master Shtrul and his wife behind in tears. Old Nichifor drove at a great pace through the town, the mares seemed to be almost flying. They passed the beach, the villages, and the hill at Humuleshti in a second. From Ocea nearly to Grumazeshti they went at the gallop.

But the other side of Grumazeshti old Nichifor took a pull from the brandy flask which had come from Brashov, lit his pipe, and began to let the mares go their own pace.

"Look, Mistress Malca, do you see that fine, large village? It is called Grumazeshti. Were I to have as many bulls and you as many sons as Cossacks, barbarians and other low people have dropped dead there from time to time, it would be well for us!"

"God grant I may have sons, Mosh Nichifor."

"And may I have bulls, young lady--I have no hope of having sons; my wife is an unfruitful vine; she has not been busy enough to give me even one; may she die before long! When I am dead there'll be nothing left but this battered old carriage and these good-for-nothing mares!"

"Don't distress yourself, Mosh Nichifor," said Malca, "maybe God has willed it so; because it is written in our books, concerning some people, that only in their old age did they beget sons."

"Don't bother me, Mistress Malca, with your books. I know what I know; it's all in vain, we never can choose. I have heard it said in our church that 'a tree that bears no fruit should be hewn down and cast into the fire.' Can one have anything clearer than that? Really, I wonder how I can have had patience to keep house with my old woman so long. In this respect you are a thousand times better off. If he does not give you a child you'll get some one else. If that does not do--why then another; and in due time will come a little blessing from the Almighty. It's not like that with us who see ourselves condemned to live with one barren stock to the end of our life with no prospect of children. After all the great and powerful Lord was not crucified for only one person in this world. Isn't it so, young lady? If you have anything more to say, say it!"

"It may be so, Mosh Nichifor."

"Dear young lady, it is as I tell you. Houp l'ri! We have gone a good part of the way. Lord, how a man forgets the road when he's talking, and when one wakes up who knows where one has got to. It's a good thing the Holy God has given one companionship! Hi! daughters of a dragon, get on! Here is the Grumazeshti Forest, the anxiety of merchants and the terror of the boyars. Hei, Mistress Malca, if this forest had a mouth to tell what it has seen, our ears could not hear more terrible adventures: I know we should hear some things!"

"But what has happened here, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Oh, young lady, oh! God grant that what has been may never be again! One used to have some trouble to pass through here without being robbed, thrashed or murdered. Of course this happened more often by night than by day. As for me, up to now, I have never spoken in an unlucky hour, God preserve me! Wolves and other wild beasts have come out in front of me at different times, but I didn't hurt them; I left them alone, I pretended not to see anything, and they went about their own business."

"Ah, Mosh Nichifor, don't talk about wolves any more, for they terrify me."

I have told you how amusing old Nichifor was; sometimes he would say something that made you hold your sides with laughing, at other times he would bring your heart into your mouth with fear.