

"Eh! Mistress Malca, here we are near the top of the wood. Won't you walk a little while we go up the hill? I only say it because I am afraid you will get stiff sitting in the carriage. Look at the lovely flowers along the edge of the wood, they fill the air with sweetness. It is really a pity for you to sit huddled up there."

"I am afraid of the wolf, Mosh Nichifor," said Malca, shaking.

"Let's have done with that wolf. Have you nothing else to talk about?"

"Stand still that I may get down."

"Wo! Step gently here on to the step of the carriage. Ah, now I see for myself that you are sturdy; that's how I like people to be, born not laid."

While Malca gathered some balm to take to Itzic, old Nichifor stood still and tinkered a little at the carriage. Then he called quickly:

"Are you ready, young lady? Come, get in and let us get on with the help of God; from here on it is mostly down hill."

After Malca has mounted she asked:

"Are we a little late, Mosh Nichifor?"

"If we meet with no obstacles I shall soon have you in Peatra."

And he whipped up the mares, saying:

"White for the leader, white for the wheeler
The pole lies bare on the one side.
Heigh! It's not far to Galatz. Heigh!"

He had scarcely gone twenty yards when--bang! An axle-pin broke.

"Well, here's a to-do!"

"Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, we shall be benighted in the wood."

"Don't take it amiss, Mistress Malca. Come, it's only happened to me once in my life. While you eat a little something, and the mares put away a bit of fodder, I shall have replaced the axle-pin."

When old Nichifor came to look at the hook, the little axe had disappeared!

"Well, what has been had to be," said old Nichifor, knitting his eyebrows, and getting angry as he thought of it. "If God punishes the old woman, may he punish her! See how she takes care of me; there is no axe here."

When poor Malca heard this she began to sigh and to say:

"Mosh Nichifor, what are we to do?"

"Now, young lady, don't lose heart, for I have still a ray of hope."

He drew his pocket-knife out of its sheath, he went to the side of the carriage, and began to cut away at a young oak of the previous year. He cut it as best he could, then he began to rummage about in a box in the carriage to find some rope; but how could he find it if it had not been put in? After looking and looking in vain, he cut the cord from the nose-bag, and a strap from the bridle of one of the mares to tie the sapling where it was wanted, put the wheel in position, slipped in the bit of wood which ran from the head of the axle to the staff-side of the carriage, twisted round the chain which connected the head of the axle with the shaft, and tied it to the step; then he lit his pipe and said: