

"Look, my dear young lady, how necessity teaches a man what to do. With old Nichifor of Tzutzuen no one comes to grief on the road. But from now on sit tight in the bottom of the carriage, and hold fast to the back of your seat, for I must take these mares in hand and make them gallop. Yes, I warrant you, my old woman won't have an easy time when I get home. I'll play the devil with her and teach her how to treat her husband another time, for 'a woman who has not been beaten is like a broken mill.' Hold tight, Mistress Malca! Houp-lá!"

And at once the mares began to gallop, the wheels to go round, and the dust to whirl up into the sky. But in a few yards the sapling began to get hot and brittle and--off came the wheel again!

"Ah! Everything is contrary! It's evident I crossed a priest early this morning or the devil knows what."

"Mosh Nichifor, what are we to do?"

"We shall do what we shall do, young lady. But now stay quiet here, and don't speak a word. It's lucky this didn't happen somewhere in the middle of the fields. Praise be to God, in the forest there is enough wood and to spare. Perhaps some one will catch us up who can lend me an axe." And as he spoke he saw a man coming towards them.

"Well met, good man!"

"So your carriage has broken the road!"

"Put chaff aside, man; it would be better if you came and helped me to mend this axle, for you can see my heart's breaking with my ill luck."

"But I am in a hurry to get to Oshlobeni. You'll have to lament in the forest to-night; I don't think you'll die of boredom."

"I am ashamed of you," said Nichifor sulkily. "You are older than I am and yet you have such ideas in your head."

"Don't get excited, good man, I was only joking. Good luck! The Lord will show you what to do." And on he went.

"Look, Mistress Malca, what people the devil has put in this world! He is only out to steal. If there had been a barrel of wine or brandy about, do you think he would have left the carriage stuck in the middle of the road all that time? But I see, anything there is to do must be done by old Nichifor. We must have another try."

And again he began to cut another sapling. He tried and he tried till he got that, too, into place. Then he whipped up the mares and once more trotted a little way, but at the first slope, the axle-pin broke again.

"Now, Mistress Malca, I must say the same as that man, we shall have to spend the night in the forest."

"Oh! Woe is me! Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, what are you saying?"

"I am saying what is obvious to my eyes. Look yourself; can't you see the sun is going down behind the hill, and we are still in the same place? It is nothing at all, so don't worry. I know of a clearing in the wood quite near here. We will go there, and we shall be just as though we were at home. The place is sheltered and the mares can graze. You'll sleep in the carriage, and I shall mount guard all night. The night soon passes, we must spend it as best we can, but I will remind my old woman all the rest of her days of this misfortune, for it is her fault that things have gone so with me."

"Well, do what you think best, Mosh Nichifor; it's sure to be right."

"Come, young lady, don't take it too much to heart, for we shall be quite all right."