

And at once old Nichifor unharnessed the mares and, turning the carriage, he drew it as well as he could, till he reached the clearing.

"Mistress Malca, it is like a paradise straight from God here; where one lives for ever, one never dies! But you are not accustomed to the beauty of the world. Let us walk a little bit while we can still see, for we must collect sticks to keep enough fire going all night to ward off the mosquitoes and gnats in the world."

Poor Malca saw it was all one now. She began to walk about and collect sticks.

"Lord! you look pretty, young lady. It seems as though you are one of us. Didn't your father once keep an inn in the village somewhere?"

"For a long time he kept the inn at Bodești."

"And I was wondering how you came to speak Moldavian so well and why you looked like one of our women. I cannot believe you were really afraid of the wolf. Well, well, what do you think of this clearing? Would you like to die without knowing the beauty of the world? Do you hear the nightingales, how charming they are? Do you hear the turtle-doves calling to each other?"

"Mosh Nichifor, won't something happen to us this evening? What will Itzic say?"

"Itzic? Itzic will think himself a lucky man when he sees you at home again."

"Do you think Itzic knows the world? Or what sort of accidents could happen on the road?"

"He only knows how to walk about his hearth or by the oven like my worn-out old woman at home. Let me see whether you know how to make a fire."

Malca arranged the sticks; old Nichifor drew out the tinder box and soon had a flame. Then old Nichifor said:

"Do you see, Mistress Malca, how beautifully the wood burns?"

"I see, Mosh Nichifor, but my heart is throbbing with fear."

"Ugh! you will excuse me, but you seem to belong to the Itzic breed. Pluck up a little courage! If you are so timid, get into the carriage, and go to sleep: the night is short, daylight soon comes."

Malca, encouraged by old Nichifor, got into the carriage and lay down; old Nichifor lighted his pipe, spread out his sheepskin cloak and stretched himself by the side of the fire and puffed away at his pipe, and was just going off to sleep when a spark flew out on to his nose!

"Damn! That must be a spark from the sticks Malca picked up; it has burnt me so. Are you asleep, Mistress?"

"I think I was sleeping a little, Mosh Nichifor, but I had a nightmare and woke up."

"I have been unlucky too; a spark jumped out on to my nose and frightened sleep away or I might have slept all night. But can anyone sleep through the mad row these nightingales are making? They seem to do it on purpose. But then, this is their time for making love to each other. Are you asleep, young lady?"

"I think I was going to sleep, Mosh Nichifor."

"Do you know, young lady, I think I will put out the fire now at once: I have just remembered that those wicked wolves prowl about and come after smoke."