

"Put it out, Mosh Nichifor, if that's the case."

Old Nichifor at once began to put dust on the fire to smother it.

"From now on, Mistress Malca, you can sleep without anxiety till the day dawns. There! I've put out the fire and forgotten to light my pipe. But I've got the tinder box. The devil take you nightingales: I know too well you make love to each other!"

Old Nichifor sat thinking deeply until he had finished his pipe, then he rose softly and went up to the carriage on the tips of his toes.

Malca had begun to snore a little. Old Nichifor shook her gently and said:

"Mistress Malca! Mistress Malca!"

"I hear, Mosh Nichifor," replied Malca, trembling and frightened.

"Do you know what I've been thinking as I sat by the fire?"

"What, Mosh Nichifor?"

"After you have gone to sleep, I will mount one of the mares, hurry home, fetch an axle-pin and axe, and by daybreak I shall be back here again."

"Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, what are you saying? Do you want to find me dead from fright when you come back?"

"May God preserve you from such a thing! Don't be frightened, I was only talking at random."

"No, no, Mosh Nichifor, from now on I shall not want to sleep; I shall get down and sit by you all night."

"You look after yourself, young lady; you sit quietly where you are, for you are comfortable."

"I am coming all the same."

And as she spoke down she came and sat on the grass by old Nichifor. And first one, and then the other was overcome by sleep, till both were slumbering profoundly. And when they woke it was broad daylight.

"See, Mistress Malca, here's the blessed day! Get up and come and see what's to be done. There, no one has eaten you, have they? Only you have had a great fright!"

Malca fell asleep again at these words. But old Nichifor, like a careful man, got up into the carriage, and began rummaging about all over the place, and under the forage bags, and what should there be but the axe and a measure and a gimlet beneath the seat.

"Who would have believed it! Here's a pity! I was wondering why my old woman didn't take care of me. Now because I wronged her so terribly I must take her back a red fez and a bag of butter to remind her of our youth. Evidently I took them out yesterday with my pipe. But my poor, good old wife, difficult though she is, knew all I should want on the journey, only she did not put them in their right place. But the woman tried to understand all her husband wanted! Mistress Malca! Mistress Malca!"

"What is it, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Do you know that I have found the axe, and the rope and the gimlet and everything I want."

"Where, Mosh Nichifor?"