

good Vasile!"

"If only I knew I was to get two ducats reward!" sighed Vasile, scratching his head.

And that evening Boyar Nicola kept his word. He mounted his horse, took with him five companions from among the grooms, and started out to Frasini.

The forest shuddered with the whisper of the breeze of the autumn night. The men rode silently. From time to time could be heard the trumpeting of the cock, coming they knew not whence. Beyond lay silence. At last the widow's courtyard came into sight, black, like some heap of coal.

Like ghosts Nicola and his companions approached the wall; in silence they dismounted; they threw rope-ladders over the top of the wall, climbed up and over to the other side. The horses remained tied to the trees.

Suddenly they heard cries. Boyar Nicola was not afraid. He hurried to the door--the doors were not shut. He passed along the corridor.

"Aha!" murmured the Greek. "Now I shall have the darling in my arms."

But suddenly a door was opened, and a bright sea of light illuminated the passage. Boyar Nicola was not frightened. He advanced towards the room. But he had scarcely gone two paces when there, on the threshold, stood the Sultana, with her hair undone, in a thin white petticoat and a white dressing-jacket. With frowning brows she stood in the doorway looking at the boyar.

Nicola was beside himself. He would willingly have gone on his knees, and kissed her feet, so beautiful was she. But he knew if he knelt before her she would only mock him. He approached to embrace her.

"Hold!" cried the Sultana. "I thought there were thieves! Ha, ha! it is you, Boyar Nicola?"

And suddenly, there in the light, she raised a shining scimitar in her right hand. Nicola felt a hard blow on the side of his head. He stood still. His grooms started to run, but one fell, yelling, and covered with blood. Just then a great noise was heard, and the lady's servants came in.

Nicola fled towards the exit followed by his four companions. Then on into the yard with scimitars flashing on their right and on their left. And once more they are on horseback fleeing towards Vulturesht.

There he dismounted, feeling very bitter, and entered the garden once more, and once more sat on the stone bench, and hid his face in his hands.

"Woe is me!" he murmured miserably. "How wretched is my life! What is to be done? What is to be done?"

He sat there in the October night tortured by his thoughts. Only the breeze carrying the mist from the fields disturbed him.

"Woe is me! How wretched is my life!" and he bent forward, his head in his hands, his elbows on his knees. "What a terrible woman!" he murmured again as he mused. "What eyes she has! Oh, Blessed Virgin! Oh, Blessed Virgin! Do not abandon me, for my heart is breaking!"

For some time he stayed there dreaming. After a while he rose and moved towards the house.

"What a terrible woman, and what eyes!"

In the house he once more called for Vasile.