

"Good Vasile, I am undone! A terrible woman, good Vasile--she has burnt my heart and turned it to ashes! What is to be done? Do not leave me! Look, you understand, you shall have two of my ducats."

"I know what you have been through, master. She is a proud lady, there is no denying it! If I knew you would give me five ducats, or even six--but there, it's only an idea----"

"Speak, Vasile, good man, I will give you---- What eyes! Woe is me!"

"Then I understand, master," says Vasile, "that you give me seven ducats, but you'll have to give seven times seven if you get her here at your hand--don't be afraid, master, it is not much--only seven times seven to have her here at your hand! I'll bring Cozma Racoare to you! As sure as you put the ducats into the palm of my hand, so sure will he put the Sultana into your arms, that's that."

Boyar Nicola was rather alarmed when he heard talk of Cozma Racoare, but afterwards he sighed and said:

"Good!"

Three days later Racoare came. Nicola was sitting on the stone bench in the garden under the lime-tree, smoking a pipe of fragrant tobacco. When he caught sight of the highwayman he sat gazing at him with startled eyes. Cozma came calmly along with his horse's bridle in his left hand. He wore top boots up to his knees with long steel spurs. A long gun was slung across his back. On his head was a black sheepskin cap. He walked unconcernedly as usual with knitted brows; his horse followed him with bent head.

Vasile, the boyar's agent, came up to the stone seat, scratching his head, and whispered with a grin:

"What do you say to this, master? Just take a look at him. He could bring you the devil himself!"

Boyar Nicola could not take his eyes off Cozma. The highwayman stopped and said:

"God be with you!"

"I thank you," replied Vasile. "God grant it!"

The boyar remained persistently silent.

"H'm!" murmured Vasile. "You have come to see us, friend Cozma?"

"I have come," responded Racoare.

"On our business?"

"Yes."

Cozma spoke slowly, frowning; wherever he might be no smile ever lit up his face.

"Ah, yes, you have come," said the boyar, as if awaking from sleep. "Vasile, go and tell them to prepare coffee, but bring wine at once."

"Let them make coffee for one," said Cozma, "I never drink."

Vasile went off grinning, after a side-glance at his master.

"Ah, you never drink!" said the boyar with an effort. "So, so, you have come on our business--how much? Ah, I am giving fifty ducats."

"Good!" said Racoare quietly.

Vasile returned, smiling knowingly. The boyar was silent.