

"Eh," said Vasile, scratching his head, "how are you getting on?"

"Good Vasile, go and fetch the purse from under my pillow."

"No, there is no need to give me a purse," said the highwayman, "I have no need of money."

"What?" murmured the boyar. "Ah, yes! You do not need? Why?"

"The thing is to put the Sultana of Frasin into your arms--I hand you over the lady, and you hand me the money."

"Let's be brief!" cried Vasile, passing his hand through his hair. "One party gives the lady, the other the money. What did I tell you? Cozma would fetch you the devil from hell. From henceforth the lady is yours."

Racoare turned round, strode to the bottom of the garden, fastened his horse to a tree, drew a cloak of serge from his saddle, spread it out and wrapped himself in it.

"Well! Well!" groaned Boyar Nicola, breathing heavily. "What a terrible man! But I feel as though he had taken a load off my mind."

Vasile smiled but said nothing. Later, when he was by himself, he began to laugh and whisper: "Ha, ha! He who bears a charmed life is a lucky man!"

The boyar started up as from sleep and looked fearfully at Vasile; then he shook his head and relapsed into thought.

"Ah, yes!" he murmured, without understanding what he was talking about.

When night had fallen Cozma Racoare tightened his horse's girths and mounted. Then he said:

"Boyar, wait for me in the glade at Vulturesht."

The gates were opened, the horse snorted and rushed forth like a dragon.

The full moon shone through the veil of an autumnal mist, weaving webs of light, lighting up the silent hills and the dark woods. The rapid flight of the bay broke the deep silence. Racoare rode silently under the overhanging woods with their sparse foliage; he seemed like a phantom in the blue light.

Then he reached Frasin. Every one was asleep, the doors were shut. Cozma knocked at the door: Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat!

"Who is there?" cried a voice from within.

"Open!" said Racoare.

"Who are you?"

"Open!" shouted Cozma.

From within was heard a whispered:

"Open!" "Do not open!" "Open, it is Cozma!"

A light shone through a niche in the wall above the door, and lighted up Cozma's face. Then a rustling sound became audible, the light was extinguished, and the bar across the door rattled.

Cozma entered the empty courtyard, dismounted by the steps, and pushed