

open the door.

"The door is open," he murmured, "the lady is not nervous."

In the dark corridor his footsteps and his spurs echoed as in a church. A noise was heard in one of the rooms, and a bright light shone into the passage. The Sultana appeared in the doorway, dressed in white with her hair unplaited, with frowning brows and the scimitar in her right hand.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she cried.

"I have come to fetch you," said Racoare shortly, "and take you to Boyar Nicola."

"Ah, you are not burglars?" said the lady, and raised her scimitar. "See here, you will meet the same fate as your Nicola!"

Racoare took a step forward, calmly seized the scimitar, squeezed the lady's fist, and the steel blade flew into a corner. The lady sprang quickly back, calling:

"Gavril! Niculai! Toader! Help!"

Voices were heard, and the servants crowded into the passage, and stood by the door. Racoare approached the lady, and tried to seize her. She avoided him, and caught up a knife from the table.

"What are you doing, you boobies? Help! Seize him, bind him!"

"Don't talk nonsense--I see you are not frightened; I cannot do other than I am doing!" said Racoare.

Then the servants murmured again:

"How can we bind him? It is Racoare. He is here! Cozma Racoare, lady!"

"Cowards!" cried the lady, and threw herself upon Cozma.

The highwayman took her arm, pressed her hands together, tied them with a leather strap, and lifted her under his arm like a bundle.

"Get out of the way!" he said then, and the people fell over each other as they scattered to either side.

"What a pearl among women!" thought Cozma, while he strode along the corridor with the lady under his arm, "he has not bad taste, that Boyar Nicola! Proud woman!"

The sultana looked with eyes wide with horror at the servants who gave way on either hand in their terror. She felt herself held as in a vice. At last she raised her eyes to Racoare's fierce face. The light from the room was reflected in the man's steely eyes, and lit up his weather-beaten face.

"Who are you?" she gasped.

"I? Cozma Racoare."

The lady gave another glance at the servants huddled in the corners, and she said not another word. Now she understood.

Outside, the highwayman mounted the bay, placed the lady in front of him, and set spurs to his horse. Once more the sound of the galloping horse broke the silence of the night.

"What a pearl among women!" thought Racoare, and the horse sped along the road like a phantom.

The lady turned her head, and studied Racoare by the light of the moon.