

Marcu Flori Cucu was a sensible man. He liked to stay and talk to the priest. Cozonac cleared the osiers, the priest plaited them, while Marcu lay upon his stomach with his head in his hands and idly watched.

"This osier is a little too long," said the priest, measuring the osier with his eye. "Here, Marcu! Give me the hatchet to make it shorter."

The hatchet was at Marcu's feet. Marcu raised the upper part of his body, supported himself on his elbows, stretched out his legs, and began feeling about for the hatchet, trying to draw it up by his feet.

"Make haste!" said the priest, and gave him a cut with the osier.

Marcu jumped up and assured the priest that he was much more nimble than he thought. In the end, this assurance was of great use to him. By Whitsuntide the priest had a cart-load of baskets ready to take to the market, and Marcu knew very well that if the priest sold the baskets he would have a cheerful holiday.

The priest had had help for some weeks, and the help had always brought a reward to the man who had given it.

Just before Whitsuntide the rain began, and seemed as though it would never cease.

"I do not know what I shall do," said the priest. "It seems as though I must leave the market until after Whitsuntide. I do not like going in the rain. If it does not stop raining by Thursday, I just shall not go."

Marcu scratched himself behind his ears and said nothing. He could see that it did not suit the priest to get soaked.

"Here," he said a little later, ceasing to plait, "couldn't we weave an awning? There are reeds and rushes and osiers in the valley."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the priest. "It could be made the same way as we are making these."

Through helping him, Marcu had learnt to make better baskets than the priest. The awning did Marcu great credit, the priest did not get wet and came back from the market with a full purse.

This time Whit-Sunday was fine. The priest's wife had a new gown, the three eldest children had dolls bought in the town; the tiny one, Mary, had a straw hat with two pink flowers, the walls were white both inside and out, the windows were whole, the house was light, and the Icon of the Holy Virgin could be seen very well placed high up between the windows, decorated with flowers grown along the edge of the vegetable-beds. The priest had brought white flour, meat, butter, and even sugar, from the town. The priest loved his wife, but it was not his way to kiss her at odd times. But, this morning, the first thing he did was to embrace her. His wife began to cry--I don't know why--when Father Trandafir entered the church he felt inclined to cry; he had seen people in front of the Icon and there were tears in his eyes when he went up to the altar. The people say he had never sung more beautifully than he did that day. The saying remained: "To sing like the priest at Whitsuntide!"

The parishioners went to see the priest; they passed through the gate before they crossed the door-step; they wiped their boots, put their hats on their sticks, leaned their sticks against the wall, smoothed their moustaches and their beards, and stepped inside. When they came out of the house again, they took a look round, nodded their heads, and said nothing.

The years come, the years go; the world moves on, and man is sometimes at peace with the world, and sometimes at odds with it. The high road