

"Listen, Dinu Talpoane sent to ask whether there was any workman in need of work. Go with the apprentice and he may perhaps engage you. He is a respectable man and does a big trade."

Without a word Sandu got up. It seemed to him he must be dreaming. But when he saw the apprentice with an apron stained yellow and with big boots covered with stale sap, his eyes shone, and he could have kissed the innkeeper's hands for very joy.

Outside he began to talk to the apprentice, who told him that the master was a splendid man, but his wife was harsh and heaven defend you from her tongue; that the workshop was large and the work considerable, especially in the autumn; and that the master sometimes engaged workmen by the day in order to get a set of hides ready more quickly; and many other things he told him. But Sandu was no longer listening.

When the apprentice saw that he asked no further questions, he hesitated to say more, and they walked along together in silence.

Sandu knew where he had to go, but he did not know what to say, or what terms to make--by the year, the month, the week; he could not think what would be best to do. What he knew of the workshop of the master-tanner with whom he had learnt his trade, and all he had heard from the hands working there with him, seemed to be buzzing in his brain until he grew so bewildered that he could not have told how many days there are in a week, or how much money he would earn if he worked for a whole month.

"Here we are," said the apprentice, stopping in front of a doorway with gates.

Sandu felt a cold shiver go through him. For a second he stood still. Three years as apprentice and four years as workman he had worked for one master only, and he would have remained there all his life if he had not been taken to be a soldier, and if the master had not died he would have gone back to him the day he left the army. He felt quite nervous, and if the apprentice had not opened the gate he would not have gone in.

"They are eating," said the apprentice, seeing the big yard was empty, and he crossed to the bottom of it where a small house stood built against the old workshop.

They were close to the window when they heard people talking in the house, and the clatter of knives.

"Look here," said Sandu, "you go on and say I have come but that I am waiting till they have finished dinner."

The apprentice went in and told the master that a workman was outside, but would not come in till the master had got up from the table.

"Tell him to come into the house."

But his wife interrupted him with:

"Leave him out there. Who knows what sort of a creature he is if he does not venture to show his face inside! Let me have my dinner in peace."

The husband, a well-built man, with a round, red face and kind blue eyes, felt if he said any more his wife would snap his head off, so he let the apprentice go.

The apprentice, who knew that one word from the mistress was worth a hundred orders from the master, withdrew to the hearth in the outer room, and waited till he should be called to dinner.

"But what's the matter, Ghitza, you are not eating?" he heard his mistress saying. "Or are you waiting to be invited? Dear, dear,