

MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

A HERO OF OUR TIME



■ RUSSIAN CLASSIC LITERATURE ■

Русская классическая литература
на иностранных языках (Каро)

Михаил Лермонтов

**A Hero of our time / Герой
нашего времени. Книга для
чтения на английском языке**

«КАРО»

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Лермонтов М. Ю.

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Предлагаем вниманию читателей роман великого русского писателя и поэта
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Печорин – представитель последекабристского поколения, образ главного
героя раскрывает особенности современной ему эпохи.

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Mikhail Lermontov

A Hero of our Time

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The preface is the first and at the same time the last thing in any book. It serves either to explain the purpose of the work or to defend the author from his critics. Ordinarily, however, readers are concerned with neither the moral nor the journalistic attacks on the author – as a result they don't read prefaces. Well, that's too bad, especially in our country. Our public is still so immature and simple-hearted that it doesn't understand a fable unless it finds the moral at the end. It fails to grasp a joke or sense an irony – it simply hasn't been brought up properly. It's as yet unaware that obvious violent abuse has no place in respectable society and respectable books, that education nowadays has worked out a sharper, almost invisible, but nevertheless deadly weapon, which behind the curtain of flattery cuts with a stab against which there is no defense. Our public is like the person from the sticks who, overhearing a conversation between two diplomats belonging to hostile courts, becomes convinced that each is being false to his government for the sake of a tender mutual friendship.

This book recently had the misfortune of being taken literally by some readers and even some reviewers. Some were seriously shocked at being given a man as amoral as the Hero of Our Time for a model. Others delicately hinted that the author had drawn portraits of himself and his acquaintances... What an old, weak joke! But apparently Russia is made up so that however she may progress in every other respect, she is unable to get rid of foolish ideas like this. With us the most fantastic of fairy tales has hardly a chance of escaping criticism as an attempt to hurt our feelings!

A Hero of Our Time, my dear readers, is indeed a portrait, but not of one man. It is a portrait built up of all our generation's vices in full bloom. you will again tell me that a human being cannot be so wicked, and I will reply that if you can believe in the existence of all the villains of tragedy and romance, why wouldn't believe that there was a Pechorin? if you could admire far more terrifying and repulsive types, why aren't you more merciful to this character, even if it is fictitious? Isn't it because there's more truth in it than you might wish?

You say that morality will gain nothing by it. Excuse me. People have been fed so much candy they are sick to their stomachs. Now bitter medicine and acid truths are needed. But don't ever think that the author of this book was ever ambitious enough to dream about reforming human vices. May God preserve him from such foolishness! It simply amused him to picture the modern man as he sees him and as he so often – to his own and your own misfortune – has found him to be. It's enough that the disease has been diagnosed – how to cure it only the Lord knows!

PART I

I BELA

I was traveling along the military road back from Tiflis. the only luggage in the little cart was one small suitcase half full of travel notes about Georgia. Fortunately for you most of them have been lost since then, though luckily for me the case and the rest of the things in it have survived.

The sun was already slipping behind a snowcapped ridge when I drove into Koishaur Valley. The Ossetian coachman, singing at the top of his voice, tirelessly urged his horses on in order to reach the summit of Koishaur Mountain before nightfall.

What a glorious spot this valley is! All around it tower awesome mountains, reddish crags draped with hanging ivy and crowned with clusters of plane trees, yellow cliffs grooved by torrents, with a gilded fringe of snow high above, while down below the Aragva River embraces a nameless stream that noisily bursts forth from a black, gloom-filled gorge and then stretches in a silvery ribbon into the distance, its surface shimmering like the scaly back of a snake.

On reaching the foot of the Koishaur Mountain we stopped outside a tavern where some twenty Georgians and mountaineers made up a noisy assembly. Nearby a camel caravan had halted for the night. I saw I would need oxen to haul my carriage to the top of the confounded mountain, for it was already fall and a thin layer of ice covered the ground, and the climb was a mile and a half long.

So I had no choice but to rent six oxen and several Ossetians. One of them lifted up my suitcase and the others started helping the oxen along – though they did little more than shout.

Behind my carriage came another pulled by four oxen with no visible effort, though the vehicle was piled high with baggage. This rather surprised me. In the wake of the carriage walked its owner, puffing at a small silver-inlaid Kabardian pipe. He was wearing an officer's coat without epaulets and a shaggy Circassian cap. He looked about fifty, his tan face showed a long relationship with the Caucasian sun, and his prematurely gray mustache did not match his firm step and vigorous appearance. I went up to him and bowed. He silently returned my greeting, blowing out an enormous cloud of smoke.

“I guess we're fellow travelers?”

He bowed again, but did not say a word.

“I suppose you're going to Stavropol?”

“Yes, sir, I am... with some government baggage.” “Will you please explain to me how it is that four oxen easily manage to pull your heavy carriage while six animals can barely haul my empty one with the help of all these Ossetians?”

He smiled wisely, casting a glance at me as if to size me up.

“I bet you haven't been long in the Caucasus?”

“About a year,” I replied.

He smiled again.

“Why do you ask?”

“No particular reason, sir. They're awful goodfor-nothings, these Asiatics! you don't think their yelling helps much, do you? You can't tell what the hell they're saying. But the oxen understand them all right. Hitch up twenty of the animals if you want to and they won't budge as soon as those fellows begin yelling in their own language. . . Terrific cheats, they are. But what can you do about them? They do like to skin the traveler. Spoiled, they are, the robbers!... you'll see they'll make you tip them too. I know them by now, they won't fool me!”

“Have you served long in these parts?”

“Yes, ever since General Aleksey Yermolov was here,” he replied, drawing himself up. “when he arrived at the line i was a second lieutenant, and under him was promoted twice for service against the guerrillas.”

“And now?”

“Now I’m in the third line battalion. And you, may I ask?”

I told him.

This brought the conversation to an end and we walked along side by side in silence. On top of the mountain we ran into snow. The sun set and night followed day without any interval in between as is usual in the South. Thanks to the glistening snow, however, we could easily pick out the road which still continued to climb, though less steeply than before. I gave orders to put my suitcase in the carriage and replace the oxen with horses, and turned to look back at the valley down below for the last time, but a thick mist that rolled in waves from the gorges blanketed it completely and not a sound reached us from its depths. The Ossetians loudly pestered me, demanding money for vodka. But the captain shouted at them so fiercely that they went away in a second.

“You see what they’re like!” he grumbled. “They don’t know enough Russian to ask for a piece of bread, but they’ve learned to beg for tips: ‘Officer, give me money for vodka!’ Even the Tatars are better – at least, they don’t drink alcohol...”

About a mile remained to the stage coach station. It was quiet all around, so quiet that you could trace the flight of a mosquito by its buzz. A deep gorge yawned black to the left. Beyond it and ahead of us the dark blue mountain peaks wrinkled with gorges and gullies and topped by layers of snow loomed against the pale horizon that still retained the last glimmer of twilight. Stars began to twinkle in the dark sky, and, strangely enough, it seemed that they were far higher here than in our northern sky in Russia. On both sides of the road naked black boulders jutted up from the ground, and here and there some shrubs peeped from under the snow. Not a single dead leaf rustled, and it was pleasant to hear in the midst of this lifeless sleepiness of nature the snorting of the tired stage coach horses and the uneven tinkling of the Russian carriage bells.

“Tomorrow will be a fine day,” I observed, but the captain did not reply. Instead he pointed to a tall mountain rising directly ahead of us.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Mount Gud.”

“Yes?”

“See how it smokes?”

Indeed, Mount Gud was smoking. Light wisps of mist crept along its sides while a black cloud rested on the summit, so black that it stood out as a blotch even against the dark sky.

We could already make out the stage coach station and the roofs of the huts around it, and welcoming lights were dancing ahead when the gusts of cold raw wind came whistling down the gorge and it began to drizzle. Barely had I thrown a felt cape over my shoulders than the snow came. I looked at the captain with respect now...

“We’ll have to stay here overnight,” he said, annoyed. “You can’t get through the hills in a blizzard like this. Seen any avalanches on Cross Mountain?” he asked a coachman.

“No, sir,” the Ossetian replied. “But there’s a lot just waiting to come down.”

As there was no room for travelers at the inn, we were given a place to stay in a smoky hut. I invited my fellow traveler to join me for tea, since I had with me a cast-iron tea-kettle – my sole comfort on my Caucasian travels.

The hut was built against a cliff. Three wet, slippery steps led up to the door. I groped my way in and stumbled upon a cow, for these people have a cow shed for an entry room. I couldn’t figure out where to go. On one side sheep were bleating and on the other a dog growled. Fortunately a glimmer of light showed through the gloom and guided me to another opening that looked like a

door. Here a rather interesting scene confronted me: the spacious hut with a roof supported by two smoke-blackened posts was full of people. A fire built on the bare earth crackled in the middle, and the smoke, forced back by the wind through the opening in the roof, hung so thick that it took some time before I could see anything around me. By the fire sat two old women, a swarm of children and a lean Georgian man, all of them dressed in rags. There was nothing to do but to make ourselves comfortable by the fire and light up our pipes, and soon the tea-kettle was singing happily.

"Pitiable creatures!" I observed to the captain, nodding toward our grimy hosts who stared at us silently with something like stupid shock.

"A dull-witted people," he replied. "Believe me, they can't do anything, nor can they learn anything either. Our Kabardians or Chechens might be bums and tramps, but at least they're brave fighters. However, these guys take no interest in weapons or war: you won't find a decent knife on a single one of them. But what can you expect from Ossetians!"

"Were you long in the Chechen region?"

"Quite a while – ten years stationed at a fort with a company, out by the Stone Ford. You know the place?"

"Heard of it."

"Yes, sir, we had enough of those gangs – now, thank God, things are quieter, but there was a time when you didn't dare go out a hundred paces beyond the rampart without some hairy devil stalking you, ready to put a noose around your neck or a bullet through the back of your head the minute he caught you napping. But they were brave men anyway."

"You must have had a whole lot of adventures?" I asked, with burning curiosity.

"Aye, many indeed..."

He began to pull at the left tip of his mustache, his head drooped, and he sank into deep thought. I very badly wanted to get some sort of tale out of him – a desire that is natural to anyone who travels about taking notes. In the meantime the tea came to the boil. I dug out two travelers' glasses from my suitcase, poured out tea and placed one before the captain. He took a sip and muttered as if to himself: "Yes, many indeed!" The exclamation raised my hopes, for I knew that Caucasian old-timers like to talk and tell a story: they seldom have a chance to do so, for a man may be stationed a full five years with a company somewhere in the back woods without anyone to greet him with a "Hello" (his sergeant always says, "Good morning, sir.") And there is so much to talk about: the wild, strange people all around, the constant dangers, and the remarkable adventures – one can't help thinking it sad that we write down so little of it.

"Like to add a little rum?" I asked. "I have some white rum from Tiflis, it'll warm you up in this cold."

"No, thanks, I don't drink."

"How come?"

"Well... swore off the stuff. Once when I was still a second lieutenant we went on a brief spree, you know how it is, and that very night there was an alert. So we showed up before the ranks a little bit high, and there was hell to pay when old Yermolov found out. Lord preserve me from seeing a man as furious as he was. We escaped being court-martialed by a whisker. That's the way it is: sometimes you spend a whole year without seeing anyone, and if you get drunk you've had it."

On hearing this I nearly lost hope.

"Take even the Circassians," he went on, "as soon as they drink their fill of booza at a wedding or a funeral the knife fight begins. Once I barely managed to escape alive although I was the guest of a neutral prince."

"How did it happen?"

"Well," he filled and lit his pipe, took a long pull on it, and began the story, "you see, I was stationed at the time at a fort beyond the Terek with a company – that was nearly five years back. Once in the fall a supply convoy came up, and with it an officer, a young man of about twenty-five.

he reported to me in full dress uniform and announced that he had been ordered to join me at the fort. He was so slim and white, and so fashionably dressed up that I could tell at once that he was a newcomer to the Caucasus. 'You must've been transferred here from Russia?' I asked him. 'Yes, sir,' he replied. I took his hand and said: 'Glad to have you here, very glad. It'll be a bit dull for you... but we'll get along real good, I'm sure, us two. Just call me Maksim Maksimich, if you like, and, another thing – please don't bother wearing full dress uniform. Just come around in your service cap.' he was shown his quarters and he settled down in the fort."

"What was his name?" I asked Maksim Maksimich.

"Grigoriy Aleksandrovich Pechorin. A fine man he was, I assure you, though a bit odd. For instance, he would spend days on end hunting in rain or cold – everybody else would be chilled and exhausted, but not he. Yet sometimes a mere draft in his room would be enough for him to declare he had caught cold – a banging shutter might make him jump and turn pale, yet I myself saw him go at a wild boar single-handed. Sometimes you couldn't get a word out of him for hours on end, but when he occasionally did start telling stories you'd split your sides laughing... Yes, sir, a most odd sort of young man he was, and, apparently, rich too, judging by the load of expensive trinkets he had."

"How long was he with you?" I asked.

"Just about a year. But it was a year I won't forget. He caused me plenty of trouble, God forgive him! – though that's not what I remember about him. But after all, there are people who, when they are born, the big book of life has it already written down that all sorts of amazing things will happen to them!"

"Amazing things?" I exclaimed eagerly as I poured him some more tea.

"I'll tell you the story. Some four miles from the fort there lives a loyal prince. His son, a boy of about fifteen, got into the habit of riding over to see us. Not a day passed that he didn't come for one reason or another. Grigoriy Aleksandrovich and I really spoiled him. What a daredevil he was, good at everything: he could pick up a cap from the ground at full gallop, and he was a crack shot. But there was one bad thing about him: he had a terrible weakness for money. Once for a joke Pechorin promised him a gold coin if he stole the best goat from his father's herd, and what do you think? The very next night he dragged the animal in by the horns. Sometimes, if we just tried teasing him, he would flare up and reach for his dagger. 'You'll come to a bad end, Azamat,' I would tell him.

'Yaman¹. You won't keep your skull on your shoulders!'

"Once the old prince himself came over to invite us to a wedding. He was giving away his elder daughter and since we were kunaks² there was no way to say no, of course, Tatar or not. So we went. A pack of barking dogs met us in the village. On seeing us the women hid themselves – the faces we did catch a glimpse of were far from pretty. 'I had a much better opinion of Circassian women,' Grigoriy Aleksandrovich said to me. 'You wait a while,' I replied, smiling. I had something up my sleeve.

"There was quite a crowd assembled in the prince's house. It's the custom among those Asiatics, you know, to invite to their weddings everyone they happen to meet. We were welcomed with all the honors due to us and shown to the best room. Before going in, though, I took care to remember where they put our horses – just in case, you know."

"How do they celebrate weddings?" I asked the captain.

"Oh, in the usual way. First the mullah reads them something from the Koran, then presents are given to the newlyweds and all their relatives. They eat, and drink booza, until finally the horsemanship display begins, and there is always some kind of filthy clown dressed in rags riding a mangy lame nag playing the fool to amuse the company.

Later, when it grows dark, what we would call a ball begins in the best room. Some miserable old man strums away on a three-stringed... can't remember what they call it... something like our

¹ Bad!

² blood brothers

balalaika. The girls and young men line up in two rows facing each other, clap their hands and sing. Then one of the girls and a man step into the center and begin to chant verses to each other, improvising as they go, while the rest pick up the refrain. Pechorin and I occupied the place of honor, and as we sat there the host's younger daughter, a girl of sixteen or so, came up to him and sang to him... what should I call it... a sort of compliment."

"You don't remember what she sang by any chance?"

"Yes, I think it went something like this: 'Our young horsemen are strong and their caftan robes are encrusted with silver, but the young Russian officer is even stronger still and his epaulets are of gold. He is like a poplar among the others, yet he shall neither grow nor bloom in our orchard.' Pechorin rose, bowed to her, pressing his hand to his forehead and heart, and asked me to reply to her. Knowing their language well I translated his reply.

"When she walked away I whispered to him: 'Well, what do you think of her?'

"'Exquisite,' replied he. 'What is her name?' 'Her name is Bela,' i replied.

"And indeed, she was beautiful: tall, slim, and her eyes as black as a gazelle's looked right into your soul. Pechorin grew thoughtful and did not take his eyes off her, and she frequently stole a glance at him. But Pechorin was not the only one who admired the pretty princess: from a corner of the room another pair of eyes, fixed and flaming, stared at her. I looked closer and recognized somebody I knew, Kazbich. He was a man you couldn't say was loyal, though there was nothing to show he was hostile towards us. There were a good many suspicions but he had never been caught at any tricks. Occasionally he brought sheep to us at the fort and sold them cheap, but he never bargained: you had to pay him what he asked – he would never cut a price even if his life depended on it. It was said of him that he'd ride out beyond the Kuban River with the bandits, and to tell the truth, he did look like a guerrilla: he was short, wiry and broad-shouldered. And nimble he was, as clever as the devil! The embroidered shirt he wore was always torn and patched, but his weapons were ornamented with silver. As for his horse, it was famous in all Kabarda, and indeed, you couldn't think of a better horse. The horsemen all around had very good reason to be jealous, and time and again they tried to steal the animal, but never could. I can still see the horse as if he were before me now: as black as tar, with legs like taut violin strings and eyes no less beautiful than Bela's. He was a strong animal too, could gallop thirty miles at a stretch, and as for training, he would follow his master like a dog and always came when he called him. Kazbich never bothered to tie up the animal. A regular bandit horse!

"That evening Kazbich was gloomier than I had ever seen him, and I noticed that he had a coat of mail under his shirt. 'there must be a reason for the armor,' thought I. 'He is evidently plotting something.'

"It was stuffy indoors, so I stepped out into the fresh air. The night was settling on the hills and the mist was beginning to weave in and out among the gorges.

"It occurred to me to look into the shelter where our horses stood and see whether they were being fed, and besides, caution never hurt anything. After all, I had a fine horse and a good many Kabardians had cast fond glances at him and said: 'Yakshi tkhe, chek yakshi!'³

"I was picking my way along the fence when suddenly I heard voices. One of the speakers I recognized right away: it was that good-for-nothing Azamat, our host's son. The other spoke more slowly and quietly. 'I wonder what they're up to,' thought I. 'I hope it's not about my horse.' I dropped down behind the fence and cocked my ears, trying not to miss a word. It was impossible to hear everything, for now and then the singing and the hum of voices from the hut drowned out the conversation I was so interested to hear.

"'That's a fine horse you have,' Azamat was saying. 'Were I the master of my house and the owner of a herd of three hundred mares, I'd give half of them for your horse, Kazbich!'

"'So it's Kazbich,' I thought and remembered the coat of mail.

³ Good horse, excellent!

“‘You’re right,’ Kazbich replied after a momentary silence, ‘you won’t find another like him in all Kabarda. Once, beyond the Terek it was, I rode with the guerrillas to pick up some Russian horses. We were unlucky though, and had to scatter. Four Cossacks came after me – I could already hear the infidels shouting behind me, and ahead of me was a thicket. I bent low in the saddle, trusted myself to Allah and for the first time in my life insulted the horse by striking him. Like a bird he flew between the branches, the thorns tore my clothes, and the dry elm twigs lashed my face. The horse leapt over tree stumps and crashed through the brush. It would have been better for me to slip off him in some glade and take cover in the woods on foot, but I couldn’t bear to part with him, so I held on, and the Prophet rewarded me. Some bullets whistled past overhead! I could hear the Cossacks, now dismounted, running along on my trail... Suddenly a deep gully opened up in front – my horse hesitated for a moment, and then jumped. But on the other side his hind legs slipped off the sheer edge and he was left holding on by the forelegs. I dropped the reins and slipped into the gully. This saved the horse, who managed to pull himself up. The Cossacks saw all this, but none of them came down into the ravine to look for me – they probably gave me up for dead. Then I heard them going after my horse. My heart bled as I crawled through the thick grass of the gully until I was out of the woods. Now I saw some Cossacks riding out from the thicket into the open and my Karagyozy galloping straight at them. With a shout they made a dash for him. They chased him for a long time. One of them almost got a lasso around his neck once or twice – I trembled, turned away and began praying. Looking up a few moments later I saw my Karagyozy flying free as the wind, his tail streaming while the infidels trailed far behind in the plain on their exhausted horses. I swear by Allah this is the truth, the truest truth! I sat in my gully until far into the night. And what do you think happened, Azamat? Suddenly through the darkness I heard a horse running along the edge of the gully, snorting, neighing and stamping his hoofs – I recognized the voice of my Karagyozy, for it was he, my comrade! Since then we have never separated.’

“‘You could hear the man patting the smooth neck of the horse and whispering to him all kinds of pet names.

“‘Had I a herd of a thousand mares,’ said Azamat, ‘I would give it to you for your Karagyozy.’

“‘Iok, No, I wouldn’t take it,’ replied Kazbich indifferently.

“‘Listen, Kazbich,’ Azamat coaxed him. ‘You are a good man and a brave warrior; my father fears the Russians and doesn’t let me go into the mountains. Give me your horse and I’ll do anything you want, I’ll steal for you my father’s best musket or sword, whatever you wish – and his saber is a real Gurda. Lay the blade against your hand and it will cut deep into the flesh. Mail like yours won’t stop it.’

“Kazbich was silent.

“‘When I first saw your horse,’ Azamat went on, ‘prancing under you, his nostrils open wide and sparks flying under his hoofs, something strange happened in my soul, and I lost interest in everything. I have nothing but contempt now for my father’s best horses, I’m ashamed to be seen riding them, and I have been sick at heart. In my misery I’ve spent days on end sitting on a hill, thinking of nothing but your fleet-footed Karagyozy with his proud stride and sleek back as straight as an arrow, his blazing eyes looking into mine as if he wanted to speak to me. I’ll die, Kazbich, if you will not sell him to me,’ said Azamat in a trembling voice.

“‘I thought I heard him sob; and I must tell you that Azamat was a most stubborn lad and even when he was younger nothing could ever make him cry.

“‘In reply to his tears I heard something like a laugh.

“‘Listen!’ said Azamat, his voice firm now. ‘You see I am ready to do anything. I could steal my sister for you if you want. How she can dance and sing! And her gold embroidery is something wonderful!

The Turkish Padishah himself never had a wife like her. If you want her, wait for me tomorrow night in the gorge where the stream flows. I’ll go by with her on the way to the next village – and she’ll be yours. Isn’t Bela worth your steed?’

“For a long, long time Kazbich was silent. At last instead of replying, he began softly singing an old song:

‘Many fair maids in this village of mine,
Their eyes are dark pools where the stars seem to shine.
Sweet flits the time making love to a maid,
Sweeter’s the freedom of any young blade.
Wives by the dozen are purchased with gold,
But a spirited steed is worth riches untold;
Swift o’er the plains like a whirlwind he flies,
Never betrays you, and never tells lies.’

“In vain Azamat pleaded with him; he tried tears, flattery, and profanity, until finally Kazbich lost patience with him: ‘Get away with you, boy! Are you crazy? You could never ride my horse! He’d throw you after the first three paces and you’d smash your head against a rock.’

“‘Me?’ Azamat screamed in a fury, and his child’s dagger rang against the coat of mail. A strong arm flung him back and he fell against the corral fence so violently that it shook. ‘Now the fun will begin,’ thought I and dashed into the stable, bridled our horses and led them to the yard at the back. Two minutes later a terrific uproar broke out in the hut. This is what happened: Azamat ran into the hut in a torn shirt shouting that Kazbich had tried to kill him. Everybody rushed out and went for their rifles – and the fun was on! There was screaming and shouting and shots were fired, but Kazbich was already on his horse spinning around like a demon in the midst of the crowd swinging away with his saber. ‘It’d be big trouble to get mixed up in this,’ said I to Grigoriy Aleksandrovich as I caught him by the arm. ‘Hadn’t we better scam as fast as we can?’

“‘Let’s wait a bit and see how it ends.’

“‘It’s sure to end badly – that’s what always happens with these Asiatics, as soon as they have enough drink they go slashing each other.’ We got on our horses and rode home.

“‘What happened to Kazbich?’” I asked impatiently.

“‘What can happen to these people?’” replied the captain, finishing his glass of tea. “‘He got away, of course.’”

“‘Not even wounded, was he?’” I asked.

“‘The Lord only knows. They’re tough, the bandits! I have seen some of them in engagements; a man may be cut to ribbons with bayonets and still he will continue brandishing his saber.’” After a brief silence the captain went on, stamping his foot: “‘There is one thing I’ll never forgive myself for. When we got back to the fort, the devil prompted me to tell Pechorin what I had overheard behind the fence. He laughed – the fox – though; he was already cooking up a scheme.’”

“‘What was it? I’d like to hear it.’”

“‘I suppose I’ll have to tell you. Since I’ve begun telling the story, I might as well finish.

“‘Some four days later, Azamat rode up to the fort. As usual, he went in to see Grigoriy Aleksandrovich, who always had some tidbits for him. I was there too. The talk turned to horses, and Pechorin began to praise Kazbich’s horse; as spirited and graceful as a chamois the steed was, and, as Pechorin put it, there simply was no other horse like it in all the world.

“‘The Tatar boy’s eyes lit up, but Pechorin pretended not to notice it; I tried to change the subject, but at once he brought it back to Kazbich’s horse. This happened each time Azamat came. About three weeks later I noticed that Azamat was growing pale and wasting away as they do from love in novels. What was it all about?

“‘You see, I got the whole story later. Pechorin egged him on to a point where the lad was simply desperate. Finally he put it point-blank: ‘I can see, Azamat, that you want that horse very badly. Yet

you have as little chance of getting it as of seeing the back of your own head. Now tell me what would you give if someone were to present it to you?

“Anything he asks,” replied Azamat.

“In that case I’ll get the horse for you, but on one condition... Swear you will carry it out?”

“I swear... And you must swear too!”

“Good! I swear you’ll get the horse, only you have to give me your sister Bela in exchange. Karagyozy will be the bride money! I hope the bargain suits you.”

“Azamat was silent.

“You don’t want to? As you wish. I thought you were a man, but I see you’re still a child: you’re too young to ride in the saddle.”

“Azamat flared up. ‘What about my father?’ he asked.

“Doesn’t he ever go away anywhere?”

“That’s true, he does... .”

“So you agree?”

“I agree,” whispered Azamat, pale as death itself. ‘When?’

“The next time Kazbich comes here; he has promised to bring a dozen sheep. The rest is my affair. You take care of your end of the bargain, Azamat!”

“So they arranged the whole business, and I must say it was a rotten business indeed. Later I said so to Pechorin, but he only replied that the primitive Circassian girl ought to be happy to have such a fine husband as himself, for, after all, everybody would regard him as her husband, and that Kazbich was a bandit who should be punished anyway. Judge for yourself, what could I say against this? But at the time I knew nothing about the conspiracy. So one day Kazbich came asking whether we wanted sheep and honey, and I told him to bring some the day after. ‘Azamat,’ Grigoriy Aleksandrovich said to the lad, ‘tomorrow Karagyozy will be in my hands. If Bela is not here tonight you will not see the horse...’

“Good!” said Azamat and galloped back to his village. In the evening Grigoriy Aleksandrovich armed himself and rode out of the fort. How they managed everything, I don’t know – but at night they both returned and the sentry saw a woman lying across Azamat’s saddle with hands and feet tied and head wrapped in a veil.”

“And the horse?” I asked the captain.

“Just a moment. Early the next morning Kazbich came, driving along the dozen sheep he wanted to sell. Tying his horse to a fence, he came to see me and I regaled him with tea, for, scoundrel though he was, he nevertheless was a kunak of mine.

“We began to chat about this and that. Suddenly I saw Kazbich jump – his face twisted and he dashed for the window, but it unfortunately opened to the backyard. ‘What’s wrong with you?’ I asked.

“my horse... horse!” he said, shaking all over.

“And true enough I heard the beat of hoofs. ‘Some Cossack must have arrived.’

“No! Urus yaman, yaman,”⁴ he cried and dashed out like a wild panther. In two strides he was in the courtyard; at the gates of the fort a sentry barred his way with a musket, but he leaped over the weapon and began running down the road. In the distance a cloud of dust whirled – it was Azamat urging on the spirited Karagyozy. Kazbich drew his pistol from its canvas bag and fired as he ran. For a minute he stood motionless until he was certain he had missed. Then he screamed, dashed the gun to pieces against the stones, and rolled on the ground crying like a baby... People from the fort gathered around him – but he did not see anyone, and after standing about for a while talking it over they all went back. I had the money for the sheep placed next to him, but he did not touch it; he only lay there face down like a corpse. Would you believe it, he lay like that the rest of the day and all through the night? Only the next morning he returned to the fort to ask whether anyone could tell

⁴ A bad, bad Russian!

him who the thief was. A sentry who had seen Azamat untie the horse and gallop off did not think it necessary to conceal the fact. When Kazbich heard the name his eyes flashed and he set out for the village where Azamat's father lived.'

"What did the father do?"

"The whole trouble was that Kazbich didn't find him. He had gone off somewhere for six days or so. If he hadn't done that, could Azamat have carried off his sister?"

"The father returned to find both daughter and son gone. The lad was a smart one – he knew very well that his head wouldn't be worth anything if he got caught. So he has been missing ever since. Most likely he joined some guerrilla band and perhaps ended his mad career on the Russian side of the Terek, or maybe the Kuban. And that's no more than he deserved!"

"I must admit that it wasn't easy for me either. As soon as I learned that the Circassian girl was in Pechorin's quarters, I put on my epaulets and strapped on my sword and went to see him.

"He was lying on the bed in the front room, one hand under his head and the other holding a pipe that had gone out. The door leading to the next room was locked, and there was no key in the lock; all this I noticed at once. I coughed and stamped my heels on the threshold, but he pretended not to hear.

"Ensign! Attention!" I said as severely as I could. 'Don't you realize that I've come to see you?"

"Ah, how do you do, Maksim Maksimich. Have a pipe,' he replied without getting up.

"I beg your pardon! I am no Maksim Maksimich: I am captain to you!"

"Oh, it's all the same. Would you care to have some tea? If you only knew what a load I've got on my mind!"

"I know everything,' I replied, walking up to the bed.

"That's all the better, then. I am in no mood to go over it again.'

"Ensign, you have committed an offense for which I too may have to answer..."

"Well, why not? Have we not always shared everything equally?"

"This is no time to joke. Will you surrender your sword?"

"Mitka, my sword!"

"Mitka brought the sword. Having thus done my duty, I sat down on the bed and said: 'Listen here, Grigoriy Aleksandrovich, you'd best admit that it's wrong.'

"What's wrong?"

"That you kidnapped Bela. What a crook that Azamat is! Come now, admit it,' I said to him.

"Why should I? She happens to please me.'

"Now what could I say to that? I didn't know what to do. Nevertheless after a moment's silence I told him he would have to give the girl back if her father insisted.

"I don't see why I should!"

"But what if he finds out that she is here?"

"How will he?"

"Again I was in a blind alley.

"Listen, Maksim Maksimich,' said Pechorin, rising, 'you're a good soul – if we give the girl to that barbarian he'll either kill her or sell her. What has been done cannot be undone, and it won't do to spoil things by being overzealous. You keep my sword, but leave her with me..."

"Supposing you let me see her,' said I.

"She's behind that door; I myself have been trying in vain to see her. She sits there in a corner all huddled up in her shawl and will neither speak nor look at you; she's as timid as a gazelle. I hired the innkeeper's wife who speaks Tatar to look after her and get her accustomed to the idea that she's mine – for she will never belong to anyone but myself,' he added, striking the table with his fist.

"I agreed to this too... What would you have had me do? There are some people who always get their own way."

"What happened in the end?" I asked Maksim Maksimich. "Did he actually win her over or did she pine away in captivity, longing for her native village?"

“Now why should she have longed for her native village? She could see the very same mountains from the fort as she had seen from the village, and that’s all these barbarians want. Moreover, Grigoriy Aleksandrovich gave her some present every day. At first she proudly tossed the gifts aside without a word, whereupon they became the property of the innkeeper’s wife and stimulated her eloquence. Ah, gifts! What wouldn’t a woman do for a little colored cloth! But I’m getting off the subject... Pechorin tried long and hard to win her. In the meantime he learned to speak Tatar and she began to understand our language. Little by little she learned to look at him, at first sideways, but she was always melancholy and I too couldn’t help feeling sad when I heard her from the next room singing her native songs in a low voice. I’ll never forget a scene

I once witnessed while passing the window: Bela was seated on a couch, her head bowed, and Grigoriy Aleksandrovich stood before her. ‘Listen, baby,’ he was saying, ‘don’t you realize that sooner or later you must be mine – why then do you torment me so? Or perhaps you love some Chechen? If you do, I’ll let you go home at once.’ She shuddered barely perceptibly and shook her head. ‘Or,’ he went on, ‘am I altogether hateful to you?’ She sighed. ‘Perhaps your faith forbids your loving me?’ She grew pale but did not say a word. ‘Believe me, there is only one Allah for all people, and if he permits me to love you why should he forbid you to return my love?’ She looked him straight in the face as if struck by this new thought: her eyes betrayed suspicion and sought reassurance. And what eyes she had! They shone like two coals.

“Listen to me, sweet, kind Bela!’ Pechorin continued. ‘You can see how I love you. I am ready to do anything to cheer you: I want you to be happy, and if you keep on grieving, I will die. Tell me, you will be more cheerful?’ She thought for a moment, her black eyes searching his face, then smiled tenderly and nodded in agreement. He took her hand and began to persuade her to kiss him. But she resisted weakly and repeated over and over again: ‘Please, please, no, no.’ He became persistent; she trembled and began to sob. ‘I am your captive, your slave,’ she said, ‘and of course you can force me.’ And again there were tears.

“Pechorin struck his forehead with his fist and ran into the next room. I went in to him: he was gloomily pacing up and down with arms folded. ‘What now, old man?’ I asked him. ‘A she – devil, that’s what she is!’ he replied. ‘But I give you my word that she will be mine!’ I shook my head. ‘But you want to bet?’ he said. ‘Give me a week.’ ‘Done!’ We shook on it and separated.

“The next day he sent off a messenger to Kizlyar to make some purchases, and there was no end to the array of various kinds of Persian

“‘What do you think, Maksim Maksimich,’ he said as he showed me the gifts, ‘will an Asiatic beauty be able to resist a bunch of stuff like this?’ ‘You don’t know these Circassian girls,’ I replied. ‘they’re nothing like Georgian or Transcaucasian Tatar women – nothing like them. they have their own rules of conduct. Different upbringing, you know.’ Grigoriy Aleksandrovich smiled and began whistling a march.

“It turned out that I was right: the gifts did only half the trick; she became more friendly and confiding – but nothing more. So he decided to play his last card. One morning he ordered his horse saddled, dressed in Circassian fashion, armed himself, and went in to her. ‘Bela,’ he said, ‘you know how I love you. I decided to carry you off believing that when you came to know me you would love me too. But I made a mistake. So, farewell, I leave you the mistress of everything I have, and if you want to, you can return to your father – you are free, I have wronged you and must be punished. Farewell, I will ride away: where, I don’t know. Perhaps it will not be long before I am cut down by a bullet or a saber blow; when that happens, remember me and try to forgive me.’ He turned away and extended his hand to her in parting. She didn’t take the hand, nor did she say a word. Standing behind the door I saw her through the crack, and I was sorry for her – such a deathly white had spread over her pretty little face. Hearing no reply, Pechorin took several steps towards the door. He was trembling, and do you know, I quite believe he was capable of actually doing what he threatened. The Lord knows that’s the kind of man he was. But barely had he touched the door when she sprang up,

sobbing, and threw her arms around his neck. Believe me, I also wept standing there behind the door, that is, I didn't exactly weep, but – well, never mind, it was just silliness.'

The captain fell silent.

"I might as well confess," he said after a while, tugging at his mustache, "I was annoyed because no woman had ever loved me like that."

"How long did their happiness last?" I asked.

"Well, she admitted that Pechorin had often appeared in her dreams since the day she first saw him and that no other man had ever made such an impression on her. Yes, they were happy!"

"How boring!" I exclaimed involuntarily. Indeed, I was expecting a tragic end and it was a disappointment to see my hopes collapse so suddenly. "Don't tell me the father didn't guess she was with you in the fort?"

"I believe he did suspect. A few days later, however, we heard that the old man had been killed. This is how it happened..."

My interest was again aroused.

"I should tell you that Kazbich had the idea that Azamat had stolen the horse with his father's consent, at least, so I think. So he lay in ambush one day a couple of miles beyond the village when the old man was returning from a futile search for his daughter. The old man had left his cohorts lagging behind and was plunged deep in thought as he rode slowly down the road through the deepening twilight, when Kazbich suddenly sprang catlike from behind a bush, leapt behind him on the horse, cut him down with a blow of his dagger and grabbed the reins. Some of his men saw it all from a hill, but though they set out in pursuit they couldn't overtake Kazbich."

"So he compensated himself for the loss of his horse and took revenge as well," I said in order to draw an opinion out of my companion.

"Of course he was absolutely right according to their rules," said the captain.

I was struck by the ability of this Russian to reconcile himself to the customs of the peoples among whom he happens to live. I don't know whether this mental quality is a virtue or a vice, but it does reveal a remarkable flexibility and that sober common sense which forgives evil

Meanwhile we had finished our tea. Outside, the horses had been harnessed long since and were now standing shivering in the snow; the moon, becoming pale in the western sky, was about to immerse itself in the black clouds that trailed like tattered bits of a torn curtain from the mountain peaks in the distance. We stepped out of the hut. Contrary to my companion's prediction, the weather had cleared and promised a calm morning. The dances of stars, intertwined in a fantastic pattern in the distant heavens, went out one after another as the pale glimmer of the east spread out over the dark lilac sky, gradually casting its glow on the steep mountainsides blanketed by virginal snow. To right and left yawned gloomy, mysterious abysses, and the mist, coiling and twisting like a snake, crawled into them along the cracks and crevices of the cliffs as if in fearful anticipation of the coming day.

There was a great peace in the heavens and on earth as there is in one's heart at a morning prayer. Only now and then the cool east wind came in gusts, ruffling the hoary manes of the horses. We set out, the five lean nags hauling our carriages with difficulty along the tortuous road up Mount Gud. We walked behind, setting stones under the wheels when the horses could pull no longer; it seemed as if the road must lead straight to heaven, for it rose higher and higher as far as the eye could see and finally was lost in the cloud that had been resting on the mountain summit since the day before, like a vulture awaiting its prey. The snow crunched underfoot; the air grew so rare that it was painful to breathe; I continually felt the blood rushing to my head, yet a feeling of elation coursed through my being and somehow it felt good to be so far above the world – a childish feeling, I admit, but as we drift farther away from the conventions of society and draw closer to nature we become children again whether we wished to or not – the soul is unburdened of whatever it has acquired and it becomes what it once was and what it will surely be again. Anyone who has had occasion, as I have, to roam in the desolate mountains, feasting his eyes upon their fantastic shapes and drinking in the

invigorating air of the gorges, will understand my urge to describe, to portray, to paint these magic canvases. At least we reached the summit of Mount Gud and paused to look around us; a gray cloud rested on the mountain top and its cold breath held the threat of an imminent blizzard; but the east was so clear and golden that we, that is, the captain and I, promptly forgot about it... Yes, the captain too: for simple hearts feel the beauty and majesty of nature a hundred times more keenly than do we, rapturous tellers of stories spoken or written.

"You are no doubt accustomed to these magnificent scenes," I said to him.

"Yes, sir, you can get accustomed even to the whining of bullets, I mean, accustomed to concealing the involuntary acceleration of the heartbeat."

"On the contrary, I have been told that to some old soldiers it is sweet music."

"Yes, it is sweet too, if you please – but only because it makes the heart beat faster. Look," he added, pointing to the east, "what a country!"

Indeed it was a panorama I can hardly hope to see again: below us lay the Koishaur Valley, the Aragva and another river tracing their course across it like two silver threads. A bluish mist crept over it, seeking refuge in the neighboring gorge from the warm rays of the morning. To the right and to the left the mountain ridges, one higher than the other, crisscrossed and stretched out into the distance covered with snow and shrubs. Mountains as far as the eye could see, but no two crags alike – and all these expanses of snow burned with a rosy glow so merry and so vivid that one wanted to stay there for ever. The sun barely showed from behind a dark-blue mountain which only the experienced eye could distinguish from a storm cloud, but above it stretched a crimson belt to which my comrade now drew my attention. "I told you," he exclaimed, "there's bad weather ahead. We'll have to hurry or it may catch us on the Mountain of the Cross. Get going, there!" he shouted to the coachmen.

Chains were passed through the wheels for brakes to prevent them from getting out of control. Leading the horses by their bridles we began the trip down. To the right of us was a cliff, and to the left an abyss so deep that an Ossetian village at the bottom looked like a swallow's nest. I shuddered at the thought that a dozen times a year some courier rides through the dark night along this road too narrow for two carts to pass, without getting off his jolting carriage. One of our drivers was a Russian peasant from Yaroslavl, the other an Ossetian. The Ossetian took the leading horse by the bridle after unhitching the first pair in good time and taking every other possible precaution, but our happy-go-lucky Russian didn't even bother to get down from the box. When I suggested that he might have shown some concern, if only for my suitcase, which I had no desire to go down into the abyss to recover, he replied: "Don't worry, sir! With God's help we'll get there just as well as they. This is not the first time we've done it." And he was right – true, we might not have got through safely, yet we did. And if all men gave the matter more thought they would realize that life is not worth worrying over too much...

Perhaps you wish to hear the story of Bela to the end? Firstly, however, I am not writing a novel but simply travel notes, and hence I cannot make the captain resume his story sooner than he actually did. So you will have to wait, or, if you wish to do so, skip a few pages; only I do not advise you to, for the crossing of Mount Krestovaya, Mountain of the Cross (or le Mont St Christophe as the learned Gamba calls it) is worthy of your interest. And so we descended from Mount Gud to Chertova Valley. There's a romantic name for you! Perhaps you already visualize the den of the Evil Spirit among the inaccessible crags – but if you do, you are mistaken: Chertova Valley derives its name from the word *cherta*⁵ and not *chort*⁶, for the boundary of Georgia once passed here. The valley was buried under snow drifts which gave the scene a rather strong resemblance to Saratov, Tambov and other spots dear to us in our mother country.

⁵ line or boundary

⁶ devil

"There's Krestovaya," said the captain as we came down to Chertova Valley, pointing to a hill shrouded by snow. On the summit the black outline of a stone cross was visible, and past it ran a barely visible road which was used only when the road along the mountainside was snow bound. Our drivers said that there were no snow slides yet and in order to make it easier for the horses they took us the long way. Around a bend in the road we came upon five Ossetians who offered us their services, and, grabbing hold of the wheels and shouting, they began to help our carriage along. The road was dangerous indeed. To our right masses of snow hung overhead ready, it seemed, to crash down into the gorge with the first blast of wind. Some sections of the narrow road were covered with snow, which here and there gave way underfoot; others had been turned to ice under the action of the sun's rays and night frosts, so that we made headway with difficulty. The horses kept slipping, and to the left of us yawned a deep fissure with a turbulent stream at the bottom that now slipped out of sight under a crust of ice, now plunged in frothy fury amidst black boulders. It took us all of two hours to go around Mount Cross – two hours to negotiate barely one mile! In the meantime the clouds came lower and it began to hail and snow. The wind bursting into the gorges howled and whistled like the Nightingale Robber, and soon the stone cross was blotted out by the mist which was coming in waves from the east, each wave thicker than the last. Incidentally, there is a queer but generally accepted legend that this cross was raised by Emperor Peter I when he traveled through the Caucasus. Yet, in the first place, Peter was only in Daghestan, and, secondly, an inscription in big letters on the cross said it had been put up on the orders of General Yermolov, in 1824, to be exact. Despite the inscription, the legend had taken such firm root that one is at a loss to know what to believe, all the more so since we are not used to putting our faith in inscriptions.

We had another three miles to go down along the ice-coated rocky ledges and through soft snow before reaching the station at Kobi. The horses were exhausted and we were thoroughly chilled, while the blizzard blew harder and harder much like our native, northern snow storms, except its wild refrain was sadder and more mournful. "You too are an exile," thought I, "mourning your wide, boundless steppes where there was space to spread out your icy wings, whilst here you are choked and hemmed in like the eagle who beats against the bars of his iron cage."

Looks bad," the captain was saying. "Nothing visible but mist and snow. If we don't take care we'll find ourselves falling into a gorge or getting stuck in some hole, and the Baidara down there will probably be running too high to cross. That's Asia for you! The rivers are as unreliable as the people."

The drivers shouted and swore as they whipped the snorting, balking horses which refused to take another step in spite of the eloquence of the whips. "Your Honor," one of the drivers finally said, "we can't reach Kobi today. Had we not better turn to the left while there is still time? Over on that slope there are some huts, I believe. Travelers always stay over there in bad weather." Then he added, pointing to an Ossetian: "They say they'll guide us there if you give them some money for vodka."

"I know it, buddy, I know without you telling me!" said the captain. "These crooks! They always think up something to pick up a tip."

"All the same you have to admit that we'd be worse off without them," said I.

"Maybe, maybe," he muttered, "but I know these guides! They can tell by instinct when to take advantage of you – as if you couldn't find your way without them."

So we turned to the left and somehow after a good deal of trouble made our way to the scanty refuge consisting of two huts built of slabs and stones and surrounded by a wall of the same material. The tattered inhabitants gave us a cordial welcome. Later I found out that the government pays and feeds them on condition that they take in wayfarers who are caught by the storm.

"It's all for the best," said I, taking a seat by the fire. "Now you'll be able to tell me the rest of the story about Bela; I'm sure that wasn't the end of it."

"What makes you so sure?" replied the captain, with a sly smile and a twinkle in his eye.

"Because things don't happen like that. Anything that begins so strangely must end in the same way."

“Well, you guessed right...”

“Glad to hear it.”

“It’s all very well for you to be glad, but for me it is really sad to recall. She was a fine girl, Bela was! I grew as fond of her in the end as if she were my own daughter, and she was fond of me too. I ought to tell you that I have no family. I haven’t heard about my father or mother for some twelve years now, and I didn’t think about getting a wife earlier – and now, you’ve got to admit, it would no longer be quite right. So I was happy to have found someone to spoil. She would sing to us or dance the Lezghinka... And how she danced! I’ve seen our provincial fine ladies and once some twenty years ago I was at the Nobles’ Club in Moscow, but none of them could hold a candle to her. Pechorin dressed her up like a doll, petted and fondled her, and she grew so lovely that it was amazing. The tan disappeared from her face and arms, and her cheeks grew rosy... How gay she was! How she used to tease me, the little vixen... May God forgive her!”

“What happened when you told her about her father’s death?”

“We kept it from her for a long time, until she became accustomed to her new position. And when she was told, she cried for a couple of days and then forgot about it.

“For about four months everything went splendidly. Pechorin, I must have already told you, had a passion for hunting. Some irresistible force used to draw him to the forest to stalk wild boar or goats, but now he scarcely ventured beyond the ramparts. Then I noticed he was growing restless again – he would pace up and down the room with his arms folded behind his back. One day without saying a word to anyone he took his gun and went out, and was gone all morning. That happened once, twice, and then more and more frequently. Things are going badly, I thought, something must have come between them!

“One morning when I dropped in to see them – I can visualize it now – I found Bela sitting on the bed wearing a black silk beshmet and looking so pale and sad that I was really alarmed.

“Where’s Pechorin?” I asked.

“Hunting.”

“When did he leave? Today?”

“She did not reply, it seemed difficult for her to speak.

“No, yesterday,” she finally said with a deep sigh. “I hope nothing has happened to him.”

“All day yesterday I thought and thought,” she said, her eyes full of tears, “and imagined all kinds of terrible things. First I thought a wild boar had injured him, then that the Chechen had carried him off to the mountains... And now I’m beginning to think that he doesn’t love me.”

“Truly, my dear, you couldn’t have imagined anything worse!”

“She broke into tears, and then proudly raised her head, dried her eyes, and continued: ‘If he doesn’t love me, what prevents him from sending me home? I am not forcing myself on him. And if this goes on I will leave myself! I am not his slave, I am a prince’s daughter!’

“I tried to reason with her. ‘Listen, Bela, he can’t sit here all the time like he’s tied to your apron strings. He’s a young man and likes to hunt. He’ll go and he’ll come back, but if you’re going to mope around he’ll only get tired of you quicker.’

“You’re right,” she replied. ‘I’ll be happy.’ Laughing, she picked up her tambourine and began to sing and dance for me. But very soon she threw herself on the bed again and hid her face in her hands.

“What was I to do? You see, I’d never had dealings with women. I racked my brains for some way to comfort her but couldn’t think of anything. For a time we both were silent. A most unpleasant situation, I assure you!

“At length I said: ‘Would you like to go for a walk with me on the rampart? The weather’s fine.’ It was September, and the day was really wonderful, sunny but not too hot, the mountains as clearly visible as if laid out on a platter. We went out, and in silence walked up and down the ramparts of the fortress. After a while she sat down on the turf, and I sat next to her. It’s really funny to recall how I fussed over her like a nanny.

“Our fort was on a big hill, and the view from the parapet was excellent: on one side was a wide meadow crossed by gullies and ending in a forest that stretched all the way to the top of the mountain ridge, and here and there on this expanse you could see the smoke of villages and herds of grazing horses, while on the other side flowed a creek bordered by dense bushes that covered the flinty hills merging with the main chain of the Caucasus. We were sitting at a corner of a bastion and so we had a perfect view of either side. As I scanned the landscape, a man riding a gray horse emerged from the woods and came closer and closer, until he finally stopped on the far side of the creek two hundred yards or so from where we were and began spinning around on his horse like mad. What the hell was that?”

“Your eyes are younger than mine, Bela, see if you can make out that horseman,” said I. “I wonder whom he is trying to impress with that display.”

“She looked and cried out: ‘It’s Kazbich!’”

“Ah, the bandit! Has he come to mock us?” Now I could see it was Kazbich: the same dark face, and as ragged and dirty as ever. ‘that’s my father’s horse,’ Bela said, grabbing my arm; she trembled like a leaf and her eyes flashed. ‘Aha, my little one,’ thought I, ‘bandit blood talks in you too.’

“Come here,” I called to a sentry, ‘take aim and knock that fellow off for me and you’ll get a ruble in silver.’ ‘Yes, Your Honor, only he doesn’t stay still...’ ‘tell him to,’ said I, laughing. ‘Hey, there!’ shouted the sentry waving his arm, ‘wait a minute, will you, stop spinning like a top!’ Kazbich actually paused to listen, probably thinking we wanted to negotiate, the insolent beggar! My grenadier took aim... bang!... and missed, for as soon as the powder flashed in the pan, Kazbich gave a jab to the horse making it leap aside. He stood up in his stirrups, shouted something in his own language, shook his whip menacingly in the air – and in a flash was gone.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” I said to the sentry.

“Your Honor! He’s gone off to die,” he replied. ‘Such a cursed crowd they are you can’t kill them with one shot.’

“A quarter of an hour later Pechorin returned from the chase. Bela ran to meet him and threw her arms around his neck, and not a single complaint, not a single reproach for his long absence did I hear... Even I had lost patience with him. ‘Look here,’ said I, ‘Kazbich was on the other side of the river just now and we fired at him; you could easily have run into him too. These mountaineers are revenging people, and do you think he doesn’t suspect you helped Azamat? I’ll bet he saw Bela here. And I happen to know that a year ago he was sure attracted by her – told me so himself, in fact. Had he had any hope of raising a substantial bride-price he surely would have asked for her in marriage...’ Pechorin was serious now. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘we have to be more careful... Bela, after today you mustn’t go out on the ramparts any more.’

“That evening I had a long talk with him; it made me sad that he had changed toward the poor girl, for besides being out hunting half the time, he began to treat her coldly, rarely showing her any affection. She began to waste away visibly, her face grew thin, and her eyes lost their glow. Whenever I asked her, ‘Why are you sighing, Bela? Are you sad?’ she would reply ‘No.’ ‘Do you want anything?’ ‘No!’ ‘Are you homesick for your family?’ ‘I have no family.’ For days on end you couldn’t get more than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ out of her.

“I decided to have a talk with him about this. ‘Listen, Maksim Maksimich,’ he replied, ‘I have an unfortunate character. Whether it is my upbringing that made me like that or God who created me so, I don’t know. I know only that if I cause unhappiness to others I myself am no less unhappy. I realize this is poor consolation for them – but the fact remains that it’s so. In my early youth after leaving my parents, I plunged into all the pleasures money could buy, and naturally these pleasures grew distasteful to me. Then I went into high society, but soon enough grew tired of it; I fell in love with beautiful society women and was loved by them, but their love only aggravated my imagination and vanity while my heart remained desolate... I began to read and to study, but wearied of learning too. I saw that neither fame nor happiness depended on it in the slightest, for the happiest people were

the most ignorant, and fame was a matter of luck, to achieve which you only had to be clever. And I grew bored... Soon I was transferred to the Caucasus – this was the happiest time of my life. I hoped that boredom would not survive under Chechen bullets – but it's no use. In a month I had become so accustomed to their whine and the breath of death that, to tell the truth, the mosquitoes bothered me more, and life became more boring than ever because I had now lost practically my last hope. When I saw Bela in my quarters, when I held her on my lap and first kissed her raven locks, I foolishly thought she was an angel sent down to me by a compassionate Providence... Again I was mistaken: the love of a savage girl is little better than that of a well-born lady. The ignorance and simplicity of the one are as boring as the coquetry of the other. I still love her, if you want to know. I am grateful to her for a few rather blissful moments. I am ready to die for her even, but I am really bored with her... I don't know whether I am a fool or a scoundrel, but the fact is that I am to be pitied as much, if not more than she. My soul has been warped by the world, my mind is restless, my heart insatiable – nothing satisfies me. I grow accustomed to sorrow as readily as to joy, and my life becomes emptier from day to day. Only one thing is left for me, and that is to travel. As soon as possible I'll set out – not for Europe, God forbid – but for America, Arabia, India – and maybe I'll die somewhere on the road! At least I'm sure that with the help of storms and bad roads this consolation won't soon cease to be a last resort.' He talked long in this vein and his words seared themselves in my memory for it was the first time I had heard such talk from a man of twenty-five, and, I hope to God, the last. Amazing! You probably were in the capital recently; perhaps you can tell me," the captain went on, talking to me, "whether the young people there are all like that?"

I replied that there are many who speak in the same way, and that most likely some of them are speaking the truth; but that disillusionment, having begun like all vogues in the upper strata of society, had descended to the lower, which wear it out, and that nowadays those who are really the most bored try hard to conceal that misfortune as if it were a vice. The captain didn't understand these subtleties, and he shook his head and smiled shyly. "It was the French, I suppose, who made boredom fashionable?"

"No, the English."

"Ah, so that's it!" he replied. "Of course, they've always been habitual drunks!"

Involuntarily I recalled one Moscow lady who claimed Byron was nothing more than a drunkard. The captain's remark, however, was more excusable, for in order to abstain from drink he naturally tried to reassure himself that all the misfortunes in the world are caused by intemperance.

"Kazbich did not come again," he went on with his story. "Still, for some unknown reason, I couldn't get rid of the idea that his visit was to some purpose and that he was scheming something evil.

"One day Pechorin persuaded me to go hunting wild boar with him. I tried to resist, for what was a wild boar to me, but finally he did drag me with him. We set out early in the morning, taking five soldiers with us. Until ten o'clock we poked about the reeds and the woods without seeing a single animal. 'What do you say to turning back?' said I. 'What's the use of being stubborn? You can see for yourself it's an unlucky day.' But Pechorin didn't want to return emptyhanded in spite of the heat and fatigue... That's how he was: if he set his mind on something, he had to get it – his mother must have spoiled him as a child... At last around noon we came upon the cursed boar-bang!... bang! ... but no: the beast slipped into the reeds... yes, it was indeed our unlucky day. After a short rest we set out for home.

"We rode side by side, in silence, reins hanging loose, and had almost reached the fort, though we couldn't yet see it for the brush, when a shot rang out. We looked at each other, and the same suspicion flashed through our minds. Galloping in the direction of the sound, we saw a group of soldiers huddled together on the rampart, pointing to the field where a horseman was scooting off into the distance at breakneck speed with something white across his saddle. Pechorin yelled not a bit worse than any Chechen, drew his pistol from its holster and dashed in pursuit, and I after him.

“Luckily, because of our poor hunting luck, our horses were quite fresh. They strained under the saddle, and with every moment we gained on our target. Finally I recognized Kazbich, though I couldn’t make out what he was holding in front of him. I drew up next to Pechorin and shouted to him: ‘It’s Kazbich!’ He looked at me, nodded and struck his horse with the stick.

“At last we were within gunshot range of Kazbich. Whether his horse was exhausted or whether it was worse than ours I don’t know, but he wasn’t able to get much speed out of the animal in spite of his efforts to urge it on. I am sure he was thinking of his Karagyozy then...

“I looked up and saw Pechorin aiming on the gallop. ‘Don’t shoot!’ I yelled. ‘Save the charge, we’ll catch up with him soon enough.’ But that’s youth for you: always foolhardy at the wrong time... The shot rang out and the bullet wounded the horse in a hind leg. The animal made another dozen leaps before it stumbled and fell on its knees. Kazbich sprang from the saddle, and now we saw he was holding a woman bound in a veil in his arms. It was Bela... poor Bela! He shouted something to us in his own language and raised his knife over her... There was no time to waste and I fired impulsively. I must have hit him in the shoulder, for his arm suddenly dropped. When the smoke blew away there was the wounded horse lying on the ground and Bela next to it, while Kazbich, who had thrown away his gun, was scrambling up a cliff through the bushes like a cat. I wanted to pick him off but my gun needed reloading now. We slipped out of the saddle and ran toward Bela. The poor girl lay motionless, blood streaming from her wound. The villain! Had he struck her in the heart, it all would have been over in a moment, but to stab her in the back in the foulest way! She was unconscious. We tore the veil into strips and bandaged the wound as tightly as we could. In vain did Pechorin kiss her cold lips – nothing.

“Pechorin mounted his horse and I raised her up from the ground, somehow managing to place her in front of him in the saddle. He put his arm around her and we started back. After several minutes of silence, Grigoriy Aleksandrovich spoke: ‘Listen, Maksim Maksimich, we’ll never get her home alive at this pace.’ ‘You’re right,’ I said, and we spurred the horses to full gallop. At the fort gates a crowd was awaiting us. We carried the wounded girl gently into Pechorin’s quarters and sent for the surgeon. Although he was drunk, he came at our summons, and after examining the wound said the girl could not live more than a day. But he was wrong...

“She recovered, then?” I asked the captain, hanging onto his arm, glad in spite of myself.

“No,” he replied, “the surgeon was wrong only in that she lived another two days.”

“But, tell me, how did Kazbich manage to kidnap her?”

“It was like this: disobeying Pechorin’s instructions, she had left the fort and gone to the river. It was very hot, you know, and she had sat down on a rock and dipped her feet into the water. Kazbich crept up, grabbed and gagged her, dragged her into the bushes, jumped on his horse and galloped off. She managed to scream, however, and the sentries gave the alarm, fired after him but missed, and that’s when we arrived on the scene.”

“Why did Kazbich want to carry her off?”

“My dear sir! These Circassians are notorious thieves. Their fingers itch for anything that lies unguarded. Whether they need it or not, they steal – they just can’t help themselves! Besides he had long had his eye on Bela.”

“And she died?”

“Yes, but she suffered a great deal, and we too suffered enough watching her. About ten o’clock at night she regained consciousness. We were sitting at her bedside. As soon as she opened her eyes, she asked for Pechorin. ‘I am here, beside you, my dzhanechka,’ (that is, “darling” in our language) he replied, taking her hand. ‘I will die,’ she said. We began to reassure her, saying that the surgeon had promised to cure her without fail, but she shook her head and turned to the wall. She didn’t want to die!

“During the night she grew delirious. Her head was on fire and every now and then she shook with fever. She was now talking incoherently about her father and brother. She wanted to go back

to her mountains and home... Then she also talked about Pechorin, calling him all kinds of tender names or reproaching him for not loving his dzhanekha any more...

“He listened in silence, his head resting on his hands. But throughout it all I didn’t notice a single tear on his lashes – whether he held himself in deliberately, I don’t know. As for myself, I had never witnessed anything more heart-breaking.

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