



KRALYEVICH MARKO



FUR-LINED helmet low over his scowling brow, his bushy black moustache spreading wide above his mouth, jet-black eyes which looked daggers at whoever dared to cross him—and he was easily crossed, his temper being at its worst when he was roused from sleep—his fur-lined surcoat turned inside out when he was angry, Marko was a terrifying sight indeed. Endowed with extraordinary physical strength, he had an extraordinary appetite too: very fond of good red wine he was, but he seldom drank it out of a cup. Basins had to be brought out, golden or silver ones if possible, and Marko would enjoy himself by drinking the red wine and giving half of it to his inseparable companion, his brave steed, the huge piebald Sharats, or Sharin, as he was often called. There must have been a perfect communion between the two of them, and great love too, for neither of them failed to notice the slightest change in the other's mood, to inquire for the cause of it, and to try to put matters right again. The

six-knobbed golden mace hanging on the side of the saddle—the mace whose light touch put many a villain to eternal rest—these complete the portrait of Kralyevich Marko, King Vukashin's son.

'King' in Serbian is 'Kral', and 'Kralyevich' means 'Prince Heir to the Crown', which Marko was.

Alas, he never inherited his father's crown, for the Turkish victory over the Serbs on the Field of Kossovo put an end to Serbian Kings, Tsars, and their heirs for five whole centuries.

Although terrifying to look at, Marko was loved and admired by all Serbs, for he was a true knight: he put his prowess and all his earthly possessions in the service of the poor and wronged. He would always seek revenge for wrongs inflicted either upon him personally, or upon anyone else—it was all the same to him.

He was an upright man with a kind heart which made him ready to help not only people but also animals and birds, as illustrated by the ballad about the eagle and his young ones.

Among people to whom he did good turns in this way or that was, according to the legend, the Turkish Princess, daughter of Sultan Bayazeth. Her father had to acknowledge Marko's noble service, although Marko was a Serb, the vanquished enemy and now his vassal, and he came to call him 'my foster-son'. Marko in his turn called him 'foster-father'. Many, however, were the occasions when the Sultan was only too eager to see the back of his beloved foster-son, who had a strange habit of coming into his presence armed, and sitting close to the mighty Sultan. If their conversation took a ticklish turn—which it most often did, for Marko was summoned only when complaints about his behaviour annoyed the Sultan beyond endurance or when an otherwise invincible enemy had to be dealt with—Marko was wont to move closer and closer, his mace or sabre across his knees, until the Sultan was cornered and had nowhere to move to escape him. Which, in fact, made the result of the conversation quite unexpected—for the Sultan, at least.

Besides being strong, proud, and righteous, Marko was also known as a man with a great sense of humour—as he showed when he brought his mother the fruits of his first ploughing.

A legendary figure, whose likeness to the man of that name actually living in those days remains vague and hard to ascertain through the mists of unruly times, Kralyevich Marko looms high above the many other knights and heroes, as though the anonymous poets wanted him

to embody all the salient traits of the Serbian character—several times larger than life of course. Also, his prowess, his quarrelsome temper and his many victories in individual contests, as sung of in these ballads, may be the expression of a conquered people to justify and explain his position as a Turkish vassal which, no doubt, must have hurt and worried them.



KRALYEVICH MARKO AND THE VILA



WO sworn brothers were riding over the beautiful mountain of Mirotsch. One of them was Kralyevich Marko, and the other was Duke Milosh. Their horses were abreast, and their lances in line: pleased with the day, they talked gaily as they rode. After a while, however, feeling sleepy on his horse Sharats, Marko turned to his companion, saying:

‘O my brother, Duke Milosh, I can hardly keep my eyes open; sing a song for me to keep me awake!’

Duke Milosh answered him: ‘O my brother, Kralyevich Marko, I would sing to you, but dare not because of Vila Raviyoyla; last night I drank too much wine with her in the mountain and she threatened that she would send her arrows into my throat and pierce my heart if she ever should hear me singing again.’

Kralyevich Marko urged him nevertheless: ‘Do sing, brother, and do not fear the Vila as long as I, Kralyevich Marko, my far-seeing horse, Sharats, and my golden six-knobbed mace are at your side!’

Milosh yielded to his brother’s entreaty and started to sing. A beautiful song it was, one of the best and oldest songs, about the Kings of Macedonia, about churches they built for the peace of their souls. Marko enjoyed the song so much that he leaned aside on his saddle and dozed as he listened. So Marko was sleeping and Milosh was singing as they rode on.

Vila Raviyoyla heard him in the mountain and sang back; Milosh was singing and the Vila answered singing in her turn, but Milosh’s

voice was stronger and clearer than Vila's. This angered her so much that she leapt up in the midst of Mount Miroitch, took her bow and two white arrows, and shot them at Milosh: one of them hit the Duke in his throat and the other pierced his brave heart.

Milosh cried out: 'Woe is me! Woe is me, Marko, my sworn brother! Woe, my brother: Vila has struck me with her white arrows! Did I not tell you that I ought not to sing in Mount Miroitch?'

Marko, startled from sleep, saw with horror what had befallen his sworn brother Milosh. He tightened the reins on his piebald horse Sharats, coaxing and kissing his noble steed:

'O, Sharo, my own right wing! Carry me now to Vila Raviyoyla, catch her as she flees, and I shall make you horseshoes of pure silver, of pure silver and glistening gold; I shall make you knee-long silken trappings with fine fringes reaching to the ground; I shall plait golden threads into your mane and shall adorn it with precious pearls. But if you do not reach the Vila, I shall pluck out both your eyes, break your legs, and leave you here in the woods to end your days crawling from one fir tree to the other, miserable and restless as I shall be without my sworn brother Milosh.'

He lay low on Sharats's shoulders and sped up Mount Miroitch. Vila was flying over the peaks and Sharats sailed like a whirlwind over the mountain, but without ever catching sight of her. When at last he caught a glimpse of Vila, Sharats leapt three spears in height and four spears in length and caught up with her. Seeing what danger she was in, Vila flew up in the sky, just under the clouds, but Marko swung his mace and hit her mercilessly between her shoulder-blades. He very soon brought her down on to the black earth. As she lay there, he continued to beat her with his golden six-knobbed mace.

'Why, Vila—may God kill you now!—why did you murder my sworn brother? Go and find herbs to restore him to life, or you will not carry your head on your shoulders much longer.'

Vila started to plead: 'Be by God and Saint John my sworn brother, Kralyevich Marko, and let me go to the woods of Miroitch to pluck the herbs which will heal the young Duke's deadly wounds.'

Marko, honouring God and being gentle at heart, let Vila go into the woods. She went about, plucking herbs on the Mount of Miroitch and calling sweetly to Marko every now and then: 'Here I am, my sworn brother; I shall soon return to you!'

She plucked all the herbs which she needed and took them to Duke

Milosh. She rubbed them in and healed the young Duke's wounds so well that Milosh's sweet singing throat sang even better than before, and his brave heart was even stronger.

The Vila then departed to Mount Mirotch, and Marko rode on with his sworn brother to the country of Poretch; afterwards they crossed the river Timok, near a village, and rode off to the country round Vidin, in Bulgaria.

The Vila, however, stayed on the mountain and said to her friends: 'Listen to me, all you other Vilas! Let not your arrows fly at any young knight as long as Kralyevich Marko lives, as long as he has his far-seeing Sharats and his golden, six-knobbed mace! For hear what I have suffered from him! I barely escaped with my life, O my dear sisters!'

KRALYEVICH MARKO AND THE EAGLE



MARKO was lying by the roadside, his body covered by his green cloak and his face by a thin, gold-embroidered handkerchief; by his head he had stuck his lance into the ground, and Sharats, his horse, was tethered to it. On the top of the lance an eagle was perching, his wings spread so wide as to make shade for the wounded warrior. From time to time he would fly down to the stream and bring back cool water in his beak to refresh the knight. Seeing this, a Vila spoke from the mountain:

'I beseech you in the name of God, tell me, grey eagle, what did Kralyevich Marko do for you that you should try so hard to make shade for him and to give him cool water to drink?'

The grey eagle answered her:

'Be silent, Vila! How can you ask what Kralyevich Marko did for me? But hear me, if you wish to know and be wiser for it: when the two hosts clashed on the Field of Kossovo, where so many were slain, and when both Tsars, the Serbian Tsar Lazar and the Turkish Sultan Murat, lost their lives in the battle, blood rose so high on the Field that horses and soldiers floated upon it as if on a stream flooding over the fields. We birds, hungry and thirsty, flew hither and thither to feed and drink our fill. My wings dipped in the blood and the fiery sun from the clear skies shone on them and my feathers soon grew sticky and rigid. I could not flap my wings to fly away and, as my companions had gone, I was left alone on the Field, trodden over by maddened horses and fierce warriors.

'God sent Kralyevich Marko to me then; he picked me up out of the brave men's blood, put me on Sharats, on the saddle behind him, carried me to the green mountain and left me on the branch of a fir-tree. Rain came down from the sky and washed my wings clean. Soon afterwards I was able to spread my wings again and fly away to join my companions.

'The second good deed Marko did me was this—take heed of it and be wise, Vila: when the town in the Field of Kossovo was burnt to ashes, and in the town a tower, on whose ruins my young ones were, Marko came and saved them. He put them inside his shirt and carried them to his white mansion, feeding them and caring for them for a whole month and then a week more. As they grew strong, he let them go and they returned to me in the mountain.

'That is what Marko did for me, Vila!'

And that is how Kralyevich Marko's name is remembered: by his good deeds—the same as a happy day in a troubled year.



KRALYEVICH MARKO RECOGNIZES HIS FATHER'S SABRE

A TURKISH maiden rose at the crack of dawn one morning and went down to the river Maritsa to bleach her linen. The water was clear till the sun came out, but afterwards it grew suddenly dark, and red with blood; flowing by, the water bore with it horses and warriors' helmets. Before noon-time, wounded warriors were floating down the river too. One of them drew near to the Turkish maiden and started to turn in the whirlpool.

Seeing her, he shouted:

'Be by God my sworn sister, fair maiden, and throw me a sheet of linen! Save me out of the river Maritsa and I shall reward you richly for your good deed!'

The kind-hearted maiden threw the end of a sheet to him, dragged him to the river-bank and helped him to climb out of the water. The warrior had seventeen wounds on his body, which was covered by strange clothes the like of which the maiden had seen never before; he had also a fine sabre with a triple golden hilt adorned with three precious stones. The splendid sabre was worth three whole towns of the Tsar.

The wounded warrior spoke to the Turkish maiden: 'Sworn sister, O fair Turkish maiden, who lives with you at your white mansion?'

'My old mother and my brother, Mustaf-Aga,' answered the maiden.

'Turkish maiden, oh my sworn sister, go and bid your brother Mustaf-Aga to carry me over to your white mansion. I have with me three purses, each with three hundred golden ducats; I shall give you one of those purses, the other I shall give to your brother Mustaf-Aga, and the third I shall keep for myself, to have my wounds healed. If God wills it and if I recover, I shall reward again both you and your brother.'

The maiden left him and, returning home, said to her brother:

'O my brother, beloved Mustaf-Aga, I dragged a wounded warrior out of the river Maritsa; he has three purses full of golden ducats—one for you, one for me, and one for himself to have his heavy wounds healed. Do not make the mistake of slaying him, dear brother; go and bring him here to our white mansion.'

The Turkish youth went to the river, and found the wounded warrior and his precious sabre. Dazzled by it, he brandished it wildly and cut off the warrior's head. He then took the splendid clothes off his body and returned to his white mansion.

His sister walked to meet the two men, but seeing her brother return without the wounded warrior, she wailed: 'Why, in God's name, O why did you slay my sworn brother? What made you commit such a sad mistake, such a dreadful sin? It was his fine sabre, no doubt, O brother! May it cut off your head, too, one day!'

Saying this, she ran away and up the tall tower.

After some time, Mustaf-Aga was summoned by the Turkish Sultan to join his army. He hung the splendid sabre at his side and rode away,

obeying his lord's orders. As soon as he joined the army, he caused a great stir by his unusual weapon: everybody admired it and many tried to draw it out of its scabbard, but without success. Going from hand to hand, the sabre came to Kralyevich Marko's and—lo! What a wonder!—the sabre came straight out of its scabbard!

Marko looked at the sabre and saw on it three Christian letters: one of them was the initial of the smith, Novak, who had wrought it, the second was that of his father, King Vukashin, and the third was his own, Kralyevich Marko's.

Turning to the Turk, Mustaf-Aga, Marko asked: 'Tell me, by God, Turkish youth, how did you find this sharp sabre? Did you buy it with gold? Did you win it in battle? Did your father leave it to you, or did your wife perhaps bring it to you as her dowry?'

'What you ask me, I shall truly answer, Marko,' said the Turk Mustaf-Aga, and, indeed, he told him all that had happened not long ago, on that day by the river Maritsa.

'Why, Turkish youth, why, in the name of God, why did you not attend to his wounds; why did you not help him to recover? Had you done so, I would have made the Sultan give you lands and riches of all kinds,' said Kralyevich Marko.

The Turk smirked: 'Don't brag and be foolish, you Serb, Marko! If you could bestow lands and riches, it is for yourself that you would have won them first. Stop that idle talk and give me back my fine sabre!'



But Marko just brandished the sabre in the air and—off came Mustaf-Aga's head. The other Turks ran to the Sultan to tell him what Marko had done. The Sultan sent a servant to summon him into his imperial presence. Marko heard the order, but behaved as if he had not—he remained sitting just where he was, frowning and drinking the dark-red wine. One servant after another called him in vain, till at last, annoyed at being disturbed, Marko put on his fur-lined jacket, turning it inside out, as he did whenever he was angry, and repaired to the Sultan, carrying his heavy mace in his right hand. He walked into the Sultan's tent, sat down on the costly rug still wearing his boots—a thing nobody else would dream of in the Sultan's presence—and looked at the Sultan from the corner of his bloodshot eyes.

Seeing him in that mood, with his mace so nearby, the Sultan moved a little farther away on the cushions, but Marko drew nearer to him. The Sultan moved away once again, but Marko kept moving too until, finally, the Sultan was sitting by the wall and could move no farther. He put his hand into his silken pockets and drew out a hundred ducats which he handed to Kralyevich Marko, a wry smile on his face:

'There, Marko, my son, go and drink some wine; who made you so angry and why, I wonder?'

'Do not ask me, O Tsar, my foster-father! I recognized my dear father's sabre; I only wish it had been in your own hands, for I would have been as angry as I now am and would have done the same thing again.'

Saying this, Marko rose, frowning darkly, and walked out of the Sultan's tent without once glancing back.

KRALYEVICH MARKO'S PLOUGHING



ONE day Kralyevich Marko was sitting with his old mother, Yevrossima. They were drinking wine and talking together. After a while his mother told him: 'O my son, Kralyevich Marko, give up your fighting—it is evil, and from evil no good can ever come; besides, your old mother is weary with washing your bloodstained clothes. Take instead a plough and a pair of oxen and go to work the fields in the vales and on the mountain slopes. Sow the white wheat to feed me and yourself.'

Marko obeyed his mother: he took a plough and a pair of oxen, and went to plough the Sultan's high roads—instead of the fields in vales and on the mountain slopes. Suddenly the Turks appeared on the road, carrying three loads of treasure; they said to Kralyevich Marko:

'Listen, Marko, do not plough the high roads!'

'Listen, you Turks, do not walk over my ploughing!'

'Listen, Marko, do not plough the high roads!'

'Listen, you Turks, do not walk over my ploughing!'

Very soon Marko lost patience: he heaved his plough and oxen and with them killed the Turks. He took their three loads of treasure and gave them to his old mother, saying:

'This is what I ploughed for you today, mother!'



KRALYEVICH MARKO DRINKS WINE DURING THE RAMADHAN



ERALDS proclaimed Sultan Suleyman's order throughout his Empire, announcing that during the Moslem fast, the Ramadhan, nobody should drink wine, wear fine green surcoats, carry sabres hung on their belts, or dance the *kolo* with their wives.

But—Marko danced the *kolo* with the women folk, Marko carried his sabre, hung on his belt, Marko wore a fine green surcoat and Marko drank wine during the Ramadhan. Moreover, he urged the Turkish muezzins and effendis to drink wine with him. The Turks, offended, could not stand this and they went to their Sultan: 'Sultan Suleyman, who are both father and mother to us,' they said,

bowing low to him, 'have you not forbidden us to drink wine during the fast of Ramadhan, to wear fine green surcoats, to carry sabres on our belts, and to dance the *kolo* with our wives? Yet Marko does all this, and, what is worse, he urges our muezzins and effendis to drink wine with him!'

The Sultan summoned two of his messengers at once. 'Go now, my two young messengers, go and tell Kralyevich Marko that the Sultan asks him to come and talk with him.'

The messengers departed in all haste. They found Marko sitting beneath a tent with a huge cup of wine before him, and gave him the Sultan's message. Marko was very angry at being disturbed; he struck the messengers with his cup, one after the other, and they were both lying unconscious on the ground when Marko walked out and rode away to see the Sultan.

He walked straight into the Sultan's presence and sat on the cushions at his right. Marko's fur-lined helmet was low on his brow; he put down his mace beside him and laid his sharp sabre across his knees.

'My foster-son, Marko,' said the Sultan Suleyman, 'have I not issued an order by which nobody may drink wine during the Ramadhan, wear a green surcoat, carry a sabre, or dance the *kolo* with his wife? Some good men came to me and told me evil stories about you, saying that you have disobeyed my order, and, moreover, that you were urging our muezzins and effendis to drink wine with you! Why are you pulling your fur-lined helmet down lower on to your brow? Why are you drawing your mace nearer? And why are you handling the sabre on your knees, Marko?'

'Sultan Suleyman, O my foster-father, if I drink wine during the Ramadhan, my Christian faith allows me to do so. If I force the Moslem muezzins and effendis to drink with me, I do it because my honour would not let me enjoy a good drink whilst others just sit by and watch me—let them not come to the inn where I drink wine, Sultan, my foster-father, if they are not going to join me.

'If I wear a fine green surcoat—I am a young warrior and it is seemly that I should do so!

'If I carry a sharp sabre hung on my belt, it is mine—I bought it dearly and may well do so.

'If I dance the *kolo* with the women, I may well dance it, being still a bachelor—you know well how one feels then, for you, too, my Sultan, must have been a bachelor once!

‘If I pull my helmet lower over my eyes, it is because my brow is burning—talking to a Sultan is no joke, believe me.

‘If I draw my mace closer to me, and handle the sabre on my knees, it is because I fear a quarrel might flare up any moment now, and if that should happen, let him next to me beware!’

The Sultan glanced around quickly and saw that no one was nearer to Marko than he was himself. He quickly moved away, but Marko drew closer to him again. The Sultan moved still farther, and Marko pressed nearer until he cornered the Sultan against the wall so that he could move no farther.

Glancing once more at the fearful, scowling warrior, the Sultan drew a hundred golden ducats out of his pockets and handed them to Kralyevich Marko, doing his best to appear at his ease.

‘There, Marko, take this and go; drink some more wine,’ he said, heaving a sigh of relief and mopping his brow as Marko walked out of his presence.



KRALYEVICH MARKO'S WEDDING



NE evening, as Marko sat down to supper with his mother, she spoke to him:

‘O my son, Kralyevich Marko, your mother is getting old, very old indeed: she cannot prepare your supper for you as she used, she cannot serve you your red wine, nor can she hold the torch to light this hall

for you any longer. Marry a wife, my dearest son, so that I may give over my duties to her whilst I am still alive and able to teach her your ways.’

‘I have been through nine kingdoms, my dear old mother,’ answered Marko, ‘and I went into the tenth, the Turkish Empire, too; but where I found a maiden to my liking, I did not find her family suitable for you, and where her family would have been to your liking, the maiden was not to mine. There was just one who would have suited us both, my dear old mother: I saw her by the water near the palace of the Bulgarian King Shishman. As I looked at her the earth seemed to turn around me! That is the bride for me and a good family for you. Prepare bread-cakes for me and I shall be off to ask for the maiden’s hand.’

The old mother was so pleased by his words that she could not wait for the morning; she baked the cakes that very night, and when Marko rose the next morning they were all ready for him to take on his journey. This he did, after preparing himself and his horse Sharats; he hung a skin full of wine on one side of his saddle and his heavy mace on the other. Now he threw himself on Sharin’s back and rode away

straight to the country of Bulgaria, to the white palace of her lord, Shishman. The King saw Marko from afar and rode out to welcome him. They embraced warmly and kissed as old friends do, each of them inquiring after the other's health.

Faithful servants took their horses and led them to the stables; the King led Marko up into his white tower and sat with him at the table. They ate, and drank the good red wine. After some time, when they had drunk to their hearts' content, Marko leapt up quickly, took off his cap, and bowed very low, asking the King to give him his daughter in marriage. The King was delighted and agreed at once to let her marry Marko, who, according to custom, now gave the maiden his ring and an apple, in sign of betrothal. By the time he had had the costly clothes for his bride prepared, and had purchased splendid gifts for his sisters-in-law and their mother, he had spent three whole loads of treasure.

The wedding was to be in a month's time, both parties agreed, for Marko would need as much time as that to collect his wedding-party and come back for the bride. Before he left the King's palace, the maiden's mother, the Queen, spoke to him:

'My son-in-law, Marko of Prilep, do not bring as your witness at the wedding, your *koom*, somebody who is no kin to you; bring your brother or one of your nephews, for our daughter is much too beautiful. We fear that her beauty might tempt your *koom* to be unfair to you and try to commit some shameful deed.'

Marko spent that night in the palace, and early next morning he rode on his Sharats' back to the white town of Prilep. His mother, who had been waiting impatiently for him, spotted him from her high tower and walked out to meet him. When Marko came near, she opened her arms wide, embraced him, and kissed his forehead, whilst Marko kissed his mother's white hand.

'O my son, Kralyevich Marko, have you travelled unmolested? Have you proposed, and have you been promised a faithful bride who will be also a dear daughter to me?' the mother asked as they walked together to the palace.

'Yes, dear mother, I have had a good, peaceful journey and have betrothed the maiden to be my bride before long. I spent three loads of treasure on gifts to the bride's family. But that is not what worries me, mother; I am greatly worried by something else: that is by the Queen's warning. She said I ought to bring as my *koom* either a brother or

nephew, for the beauty of my betrothed is such that it might easily tempt any other man and lead him to betray me. Alas, Mother, I have no dear brother, either brother or dear young nephew to take with me to the wedding now.'

His old mother stroked his hand and said to him: 'My dear son, Marko of Prilep, do not let that trouble you. Write a letter to the Duke of Venice: ask him to be your *koom* at the wedding and to bring five hundred men for the festivity. Send another letter to your friend Styepan Zemlyich; ask him to be your *stari svat*, your best man, at the wedding, and to bring another five hundred men. If you do that there is nothing for you to fear, as both of them are worthy, honest men, I trust, and true friends, my son.'

Marko obeyed his mother and wrote letters to the Duke of Venice and to his sworn brother Styepan Zemlyich, inviting them to his town of Prilep. Before long they both came, each leading five hundred men. When the wedding company was thus assembled, they rode all together to the Bulgarian King Shishman. The King received them joyfully and led them to his white castle where the noble guests feasted with their host for three whole days and nights. On the fourth morning, however, heralds cried, calling the wedding guests to make preparations for their journey home. 'The days are short and the nights long, and we all want to return to our homes,' they said.

The King came out of his palace and presented the wedding gifts, as the custom required: some men of the party received fine handkerchiefs, some others shirts; all the gifts were embroidered with golden thread. The Duke of Venice, as the *koom*, was given a large dish of pure gold, and the *stari svat* a splendid, gold-embroidered shirt; the King gave him also a good steed, mounted by the young bride, and said: 'Here is the young maiden and the horse; take my daughter safely to Marko's white mansion and this brave battle horse is yours, dear friend.'

The wedding-suite started on its way home, riding across the great Bulgarian plain. But, where there is good luck, misfortune is not very far away: a wind started blowing all of a sudden and lifted the veil which was hiding the young bride's face. The Duke of Venice, who was at her side, saw her and at once fell passionately in love with her. He could hardly wait for their night's rest; as soon as the wedding-train was settled for the night, and tents set up in the field, he went to Styepan's tent and whispered to him: 'O *stari svat*, bridegroom's best

man, my friend Styepan, let me spend the night by your charge, the young Bulgarian maiden; just to look at her face I should be happy, and I would reward you by a bootful of ducats.'

Styepan was greatly surprised at this request; he answered sharply: 'Do not talk like this. Be quiet, my Lord Duke; may God turn you into a stone for your sinful thoughts! Do you want to lose your head?'

His words sobered the Duke and he remained quiet, but not for long, though. As they settled for the second night, he walked over to Styepan's white tent and whispered again, more urgently: 'Let me spend the night near the young bride, Styepan, and I shall give you two of my boots full of golden ducats.'

Styepan retorted bitterly: 'Go away, Duke, may God's wrath strike you this very minute! How can you ever nurse thoughts like that about the bride, your *kooma*, who should be more sacred to you than your own sister!'

The Duke returned to his own tent in shame. However, the beautiful face he had glimpsed but for a brief moment made him restless as soon as night fell for the third time.

'Let me be near her, Styepan, and I shall give you three bootfuls of golden ducats,' he almost wailed in his friend's ear, coming into his white tent.

This temptation Styepan could not resist. Dazzled by so much gold, he agreed to let the Venetian have his way. The Duke took the maiden by the hand and led her to his own tent. Coming in, he asked her to sit down and began to speak sweetly to her. As he bent over to kiss her, the Bulgarian maiden exclaimed:

'How can you think of kissing me, Duke of Venice! Do you not know that it is such a terrible sin that the earth would open beneath us and the sky would crush us if we, *koom* and *kooma*, started kissing!'

The Duke only smiled and answered after a while: 'I have done it before, I have kissed many a bride to whom I was *koom* before you and, believe me, the earth never opened, the sky never crushed us and nobody was any the wiser for it! So let me kiss you, fair maiden!' he pleaded urgently, coming close to her.

The bride shrank back again, saying: 'All that may be as you say, my Lord Duke, but my old mother made me swear that I should never kiss a bearded man—I may caress only the clean cheek of a young warrior—such as Kralyevich Marko's.

Hearing her words, the Duke called the barbers at once, for that at

least was something which could easily be put right. The barbers shaved him quickly, and the young bride bowed to him and collected his shorn beard in a handkerchief. The barbers left the tent and the Duke pressed nearer to the maiden again.

'Sit down and let me kiss you, fair maiden,' said the Duke.

'Oh, my *koom*, Duke of Venice, if Marko hears you, we shall both lose our heads,' the bride shied away.

'Do not worry about that, dear maiden—there is Marko, sitting under his tent in the midst of the wedding party. Can't you see his white tent? There is a golden apple with two precious stones on the top of it, shining so brightly that you can see far and wide around it!'

The maiden rose from her cushion and smiled at him: 'Let me, please, go out to see what kind of weather there is tonight—I want to know whether the sky is clear or clouded.'

The Duke let the girl step out, but as soon as she was outside his tent, she ran away on her light young feet and was in Marko's tent in no time. Finding him asleep, his betrothed wept. Marko woke up, startled, and frowned, seeing her in his tent.

'Why did you come here, you heathenish Bulgarian maiden? Do you not know that the old customs do not allow the future bride and bridegroom to be in the same tent together before they have been lawfully wedded in church, as good, faithful Christians?'

In his sudden anger, Marko put his hand on the hilt of his sabre. The maiden bowed low to him.

'I am no heathen, my lord Kralyevich Marko. I am of noble Christian birth, the same as you—which cannot be said for your companions who are heathens indeed! Your *stari svat* sold me to our future *koom* for three bootfuls of golden ducats. In case you do not believe me, Marko, here is the Duke's shorn beard.' She opened her handkerchief and spread the beard before her betrothed.

'Sit down, fair maiden,' said Marko, stretching himself on the rug again. 'Sit down and try to sleep, for I am very weary; I shall see about this in the morning.' Almost before he had uttered these words, Marko fell asleep.

As the sun rose next morning, Marko arose, put his fur-lined surcoat on inside out, as he did whenever he was angry, took the heavy mace in his hand, and walked straight to his *koom* and *stari svat*.

'Good morning, my friends!' he greeted them. 'Where is your charge, my betrothed, Styepan? Where is she, my *koom*, Duke of Venice?'

The *stari svat* kept silent, not daring to utter a word, but the Duke of Venice smiled: 'Strange days have come about, Kralyevich Marko, strange days when people are so odd that you cannot even crack a joke safely.'

'A poor joke indeed, Duke of Venice,' said Marko through his clenched teeth. 'Your shorn beard is no joke at all, though! Where is the beard that was on your face yesterday?'

The Duke was about to answer, but Kralyevich Marko did not let him: he drew out his sabre and slew the Duke on the spot.

Meanwhile Styepan ran down the field, fast as lightning, but Kralyevich Marko caught up with him in no time, and cut off his head, too. Having thus settled his account with his unfaithful friends, he returned to his tent, mounted his brave steed, Sharin, and gave a sign to the wedding-suite to start on the last lap of their journey. And indeed, the bridegroom and his bride reached the white town of Prilep on that very day, riding at the head of the festive wedding-train. Marko's old mother was happy and proud as she welcomed them to their white mansion, where many friends were waiting to celebrate Marko's wedding.



KRALYEVICH MARKO AND ALIL-AGA



Two sworn brothers, Kralyevich Marko and lord Kostadin, were riding in the streets of Constantinople. Marko turned to his good friend: 'My sworn brother, lord Kostadin, I shall pretend to be very ill; seeing me like that maybe somebody will dare to challenge me to a fight. I wish they would, for I feel a little rusty, having lived a quiet life for several days now.'

Saying this, he bent low on his horse Sharats, almost lying on the saddle, and rode on through the crowded streets. Nor for long though, for they soon came face to face with the Sultan's favourite, Alil-Aga, accompanied by thirty retainers.

The Turk reined in his horse and spoke to Marko: 'Brave warrior, Kralyevich Marko, come out to try your luck in archery with me today. Should you win at the contest, I shall give you my white mansion with all that is in it, including my faithful wife. But if I should prove better than you, I do not ask either for your palace or your wife, but shall be content just with hanging you and taking over your brave steed Sharats.'

'Let me alone, you accursed Turk! I am not fit for shooting arrows, for I am ill, very ill with a bad ague. I can hardly sit in my saddle, let alone shoot arrows with you!'

However, the Turk was not to be put off easily and he caught an end of Marko's surcoat. Marko drew out the knife from his belt and cut off the piece of cloth in Alil-Aga's hand. The Turk now caught Sharin's halter with his right hand and Marko's chest with his left.

Blood rushed through Marko's veins and he sat up, all flaring with wrath. He suddenly drew in the reins of his steed. Sharin started prancing madly about, leaping over horses and horsemen. Marko shouted:

'My sworn brother, lord Kostadin, go to my rooms and bring me my Tatar arrow, the one with nine white falcon feathers in it, whilst I go with the Aga to the *Cadi* who will write in court the terms of our shooting contest, so that there shall be no cause afterwards for any quarrel between Alil-Aga and me.'

Kostadin went to Marko's rooms, and Marko rode with Alil-Aga to the Turkish judge, the *Cadi*. As they entered the court room, Alil-Aga took off his slippers, walked to the *Cadi* and, sitting down at his side, discreetly put twelve golden ducats under the judge's knee.

'There, Effendi, there are the ducats for you; do not write a valid testimony of our agreement for Marko,' he whispered.

But Marko knew Turkish, and understood all the Aga said. As he had no ducats with him at the time, he put his heavy mace across his knees:

'Listen to me, you Effendi *Cadi*! Take care you write a valid agreement, for here is my gilded six-knobbed mace: if I should start beating you with it, you will need no herbs to cure you! You will forget all about law and court-trials. As for those ducats, if I were just to touch you gently with this mace, you would soon see the last of them.'

Effendi *Cadi* shook as with a dreadful ague just by looking at Marko's six-knobbed mace and his scowling face; he wrote down the testimony slowly with trembling fingers.

Thereupon the two lords betook themselves to the battlefield, the Aga followed by his thirty retainers, and Marko almost alone but for several Christians, Greeks and Bulgarians who had gathered around him.

'Well, knight, go, shoot your arrow! You boast that you are a fine warrior, and brag to the Sultan and his high dignitaries that you are able to shoot down the eagle flying high up in the sky, leading the clouds in his wake,' said the Turk, jeeringly, when they reached the field.

'True, Turk, I am a brave warrior, but you are entitled to take precedence over me, for yours is the empire and you Turks are the lords now. Besides, you asked me to come and shoot arrows with you, so put in your arrow, Turk, and shoot first.'

The Turk shot his first arrow and far it fell indeed: they measured the distance and found that it had fallen a hundred and twenty arshins

away; Marko shot his arrow now, but his fell two hundred arshins from the starting mark. The Turk shot a second arrow—three hundred arshins off, but Marko's second went five hundred arshins from the mark. The third of the Turk's arrows spanned the distance of six hundred arshins. At that moment lord Kostadin came to the field and handed Marko his Tatar arrow, with nine white falcon's feathers in it.

Marko shot his Tatar arrow now and it flew so high, and far, far, so far that nobody could see it, let alone measure the distance to the place where it fell to the ground.

The Turk was so desperate that he began to weep and beseech Marko: 'By God, my sworn brother Marko, by God and by your Saint John, take my white mansion, take my faithful wife and all my other earthly possessions, but do not hang me, for the love of your God and ours, do not hang me, Marko!'

'Oh, you foolish Turk—you make me your sworn brother and in the same breath you give me your wife! I do not need her. Besides, with us Serbs it is not the same as with you Turks: a sister-in-law (as your wife is to me now, since you asked me to be your sworn brother), is the same to any of us as our own dear sisters. I have my faithful wife at home, the noble and virtuous lady Yelitsa.

'I would have forgiven you all you did to me today, but there is just one thing I cannot forgive you: you tore off a wing of my surcoat. Give me three loads of gold to have it patched and I shall forgive you everything.'

The Turkish Aga leapt with joy, embraced Marko and kissed him with gratitude. He took the Serbian Kralyevich to his lordly mansion then and feasted him for three whole days. When the time came for Marko to return to his home, Alil-Aga gave him the three loads of treasure, whereas his wife, now Marko's sworn sister, gave him a gold-embroidered shirt together with a beautiful, costly handkerchief. Then, in order that Kralyevich Marko, noble prince as he was, should travel in state and unmolested, Alil-Aga gave him a retinue numbering three hundred men who saw him safely to his own home.



KRALYEVICH MARKO AND MINA OF KOSTUR



ONE evening, as Marko sat at dinner with his mother and his wife, Yelitsa, eating bread and drinking his favourite red wine, messengers brought him three letters. The first letter was sent by the Turkish Sultan, Bayazeth, who was summoning Marko to come and fight at his side against the bitter, dark soldiers in Arabia; the second came from the Hungarian King in Budim, inviting Marko to come to his wedding and be his wedding *Koom*. The third was from his friend, Yanko of Sibin, who asked Marko to come and be godfather at the baptism of his two infant sons.

Marko read the three letters and turned to his mother, perplexed: 'Tell me, dear mother, what is my first duty now: should I go with the Sultan's hosts, to the King's wedding, or to the christening of Yanko's infant sons?'

'O my son Marko, to go to a wedding means to go to a joyful, gay occasion; going to the baptism of somebody's children is what old customs order us to do, but going to join the Sultan's hosts is doubtless something one *must* do. I therefore advise you to go to the Sultan, for

God will certainly have understanding for us and forgive you neglecting your other duties, whereas the Turks would never understand or forget you if you disregarded their summons.'

Kralyevich Marko made his preparations and, before riding out of his castle with his faithful servant Goluban, he took leave of his old mother, and warned her:

'Remember my words, my dear old mother now! Shut the gates of the castle early in the evening, and open them late in the morning; I have quarrelled with the accursed villain, Mina of Kostur, and fear now that he might come and ransack the castle in my absence.'

Thereupon he took leave of his mother and his wife and rode away, with the servant Goluban in his wake.

After the third day's journey, Marko sat down to his supper; Goluban was serving him his food and red wine. Marko took a cup of wine, but sleep suddenly overcame him; the cup fell out of his hand and the red wine spilled all over the table. Goluban shook him by the shoulder.

'Wake up, my lord Kralyevich Marko; you have been to wars before, but you have never fallen asleep like that; never has the full cup dropped out of your hands!'

Startled from his sleep, Marko rubbed his eyes and said to the youth: 'Goluban, my faithful servant, it is a strange dream that I dreamed during this brief spell of sleep: I saw a wisp of fog rise above the castle of Kostur and sail across the sky, increasing greatly, until it enveloped the town of Prilep and my castle in it. Hidden by the dense fog, Mina of Kostur ransacked my castle, took everything away, and set fire to the despoiled fortress, taking with him my faithful wife and trampling with his horsemen over my poor old mother. He also led away all the horses from my stables and emptied my treasury.'

His servant Goluban comforted Marko: 'Do not fear, Kralyevich Marko; being a brave, adventurous warrior you had a dream befitting your nature. Dreams are just idle lies, and God is the only truth on this earth.'

Somewhat comforted by these words, Marko continued his journey until at last he reached Constantinople. Soon after his arrival, the Sultan raised his numerous, powerful hosts and sailed with them across the deep-blue sea to the rebellious Arabian lands. The Sultan's army took one town after another until the number of the vanquished cities rose to forty-five. But when they came to the city of Kara-Okan,

their warriors' luck changed. They set siege to the city and tried by means of all tactics they could think of to conquer it, but the city firmly resisted all their attacks for three whole years.

Meanwhile, violent battles were fought outside the city; violent battles in which Marko slew many a well-known Arab champion. Whenever he did so he cut off his head and took it to the Sultan who, greatly pleased by his prowess, always rewarded him richly.

The Turkish warriors grew envious of Marko: they could not bear the thought that a miscreant (as they called Christians and all those whose religion was other than Islamic) should rise so high in their own Sultan's esteem, and, what is more, become so rich by it. They therefore said to the Sultan one day:

'Our lord Sultan Bayazeth, Marko is not the hero you think: he cuts off the heads of warriors who have already been slain, and brings them to you as his own trophies, expecting your generous reward.'

Kralyevich Marko soon learned about their slander and went to the Sultan, as if he had no inkling of it.

'My lord Sultan, my foster-father, tomorrow is Saint George's day, my patron saint's day, which I wish to celebrate according to our old Serbian customs. Give me leave to absent myself from the battle-field and let me take with me my sworn brother Alil-Aga, for I wish to celebrate and feast in his company.'

The Sultan could not refuse Marko's request. He let him go to the mountains, to celebrate his patron saint's day in the company of his sworn brother, Alil-Aga.

The two warriors went some distance from the Sultan's hosts, pitched their white tent in a pleasant clearing in the woods, and started to drink the dark-red wine which the faithful servant Goluban had brought with them, and was handing them, cup after cup.

However, as soon as daylight came, the Arab watchmen noticed that Marko was no longer in their enemy's ranks.

'Charge and attack for all you are worth, you fierce Arabs! The terrible knight on the big piebald horse is not with the Turks today!' they shouted to their warriors. Their words had such an effect that the Arabs charged like a mighty hurricane and slew thirty thousand of the Sultan's soldiers.

Greatly worried by the day's losses, the Sultan hastily dispatched a letter to Marko: 'Hurry back, my foster-son Marko! I have lost thirty thousand soldiers today!'

Marko perused the letter over a cup of wine and wrote back: 'Why, what need is there for such hurry, my lord Sultan and foster-father! I have hardly drunk any wine yet, let alone risen to my feet to give homage to my patron saint as our customs require me to do!'

The Arab watchmen shouted on the second morning again: 'Charge and attack, you fierce Arabs! The fearful knight on the big piebald horse is not in our enemy's ranks today!'

The Arabs attacked for all they were worth again, and as the consequence of their ardour, the Sultan lost sixty thousand warriors.

'Hurry back, my foster-son Marko! I have lost sixty thousand men today!' wrote the Sultan sending his fastest Tatar to the mountain.

'Wait a little, my lord Sultan and foster-father! I have not yet feasted my friends and servants according to our old customs,' were Marko's words in answer to the summons. He stayed on in the mountain clearing, enjoying his wine and his friends' company.

How glad the Arab watchmen were when they discovered that on the third morning Marko was still missing from the Turkish side!

'Charge and attack, you fierce Arabs!' they shouted from the top of their high posts, imparting to their army once more the good news.

Encouraged by their two previous victories, the Arabs swept like a gale across a field, turning it into a desert in no time. A hundred thousand Turks fell on that day and the Sultan almost wailed writing to Marko: 'Come back in all haste, my foster-son, Marko! Come back, hurry to your foster-father quickly! The Arabs are almost at the door of my tent and I am in great peril myself!'

Only then did Marko mount his horse Sharats. On the third evening he rode back to join the Sultan's hosts.

Next morning the enemy's watchmen cried, piercing the air: 'Now retreat, you fierce Arabs! The fearful knight on the big piebald horse is on the field again!'

Marko charged among the Arabs and in no time divided their hosts into three parts: one of them he slew with his mighty sabre, the other he destroyed trampling over it with his brave Sharats, and the third part he drove to the Sultan's tent where they were all captured as slaves. But that brave exploit cost Marko seventy wounds which he won in fighting the Arabs. As he came into the Sultan's tent, he fell on the cushions, his body leaning partly over the Sultan's knees.

'My foster-son Marko, are your wounds mortal? Or do you think

you will recover from them? Shall I send for doctors and medicines to cure you?' the Sultan asked, worried about his most valiant knight.

'I do not think my wounds are mortal, Sultan, my foster-father, and I believe that they can be cured.'

The Sultan took a thousand ducats out of his pockets and gave them to Marko to find a doctor who would heal his wounds. He ordered two servants to stay at Marko's side, fearing the worst.

However, Marko did not even ask for a doctor: instead he went from one inn to another, trying to find the inn which sold the best wine. After tasting the wine in many places, he found some to his liking in one of the inns, and sat down to drink. When he had drunk his fill, the wounds were healed, but he was not allowed to enjoy his good health for long. A letter brought him sad news from Prilep: his castle was ransacked and burnt, his old mother had met her death under the robbers' horses, and his faithful wife was enslaved.

Kralyevich Marko went back to the Sultan and complained: 'My lord Sultan, my foster-father, my white castle has been plundered, my dear old mother murdered, my wife enslaved, and all my treasures taken by Mina of Kostur.'

'Do not despair, Marko my foster-son,' said the Sultan, wishing to comfort him; 'if your castle has been burnt, I shall have another one built for you, next to my own palace. It shall be as big and beautiful as my own. If your treasury has been ransacked, I shall make you my tax-collector and you will soon be richer than you ever were; if your wife has been taken away, I shall find another, better one for you.'

'Thank you, Sultan, my foster-father, but when your masons start building a new palace for me, all the poor will curse me, saying, "Look at that Kralyevich Marko! His old castle has burnt down; may his new one be deserted with not a soul in it!" As for your offering to make me your tax-collector, I would not be able to collect any taxes unless I pressed hard on the poor and humble who would then curse me again: "Look at that Kralyevich Marko! The treasures he once had have been taken away from him; may his new ones remain without him, their owner, or any heir of his!" And why should you want to find another wife for me when my own wife still lives? I do not want any of this, but I beg you, my lord, give me three hundred soldiers, *yaniccharis*, arm them with small curved scythes, and give them light picks. I shall take them to the white castle of Kostur and shall try to win my wife back.'

The Sultan heard his plea and gave him the three hundred *yanicharis*, armed as Marko requested.

‘Listen, brothers, *yanicharis* of the Sultan, go now to the Greek town of Kostur. When the Greeks see you, they will rejoice, saying, “What good fortune! There are workmen who will hoe our vineyards cheaply!” Do not listen to them, my dear brothers, but go straight to the castle of Kostur, surround it, and drink wine and brandy until I arrive there too.’

The *yanicharis* obeyed their new master and went to the town of Kostur. Marko, meanwhile, rode to Mount Athos where he confessed his sins and received the holy communion. He was forgiven for having shed so much blood in his lifetime. His sins absolved, he was ready to go to the town of Kostur, but before departing he donned the black robes of a monk, and let his black beard grow. It grew very fast and soon it was falling down over his chest. On his head he put a monk’s tall cap, and, thus dressed, he threw himself on his Sharin’s back and rode to Kostur.

Presenting himself at the gate as a monk, Marko had no difficulty in being received by the servants and ushered into the chamber where Mina sat, drinking wine. Marko’s own wife was serving him.

‘Tell me truthfully, you black monk, how did you come to own that piebald steed?’ Mina asked, eyeing the horse through the window.

‘I have been with the Sultan’s hosts in the Arab lands, my lord Mina; there was a big fool by the name of Kralyevitch Marko with us too. He fell in a battle there and I buried him, performing all my Christian duties over his grave, and that is why I have been given his horse.’

Mina leapt to his feet joyfully. ‘Well done, black monk!’ he exclaimed. ‘For a long time now I have been expecting such good news: I have ransacked Marko’s castle, ransacked and burnt it to ashes, and I have taken his wife and brought her hither, but I could not take her for my wedded wife whilst Marko was still alive. I have been waiting for him to fall in one of his many battles, and now, since he is no more among us, you shall perform the wedding rites and marry me and his wife.’

Marko took a prayer-book out of his pocket and performed the wedding rites, thus marrying Mina to his own wife!

After the wedding they sat down to feast and rejoice. Mina turned to his wife: ‘Listen, Yela, my sweetheart! So far you have been Marko’s wife, but henceforth you are Mina’s beloved. Go down, my dear wife, go to my treasury in the vaulted cellar and bring three cupfuls of ducats, for I want to reward this black monk.’

Yela went down and brought back three cupfuls of ducats, but she carefully took them not from Mina's chest, but from that in which Marko's plundered treasures were stored. With the gold, she handed the monk also a sabre, rusty with lying idle in the damp cellar.

'Take this too, black monk, take it and pray for the peace of Kralyevich Marko's soul.'

Marko took the sabre and looked at it thoughtfully, turning it in his hands.

'My lord Mina of Kostur, may I dance on this joyful occasion? Would it be seemly to execute a monk's gay dance here?' he asked, looking up, his dark eyes glittering.

'Yes, of course you may; why should that be unseemly?' answered Mina.

Marko jumped up to his light feet and quickly turned about two or three times. The whole tower shook beneath him. He suddenly drew the rusty sabre out of its sheath, swung it around and chopped off Mina's head.

'Advance now, my good *yanicharis*! There is no more Mina of Kostur!'

The *yanicharis* charged on the castle, ransacked it in no time, and finally set it on fire. Marko, meanwhile, had taken out of the cellar his own treasure and that belonging to Mina, and was now on his way home with his faithful wife. He rode back to Prilep with a light heart, singing happily.



KRALYEVICH MARKO AND THE ARAB



BLACK Arab had a castle with a high tower built by the sea. When the building was finished, the Arab had glass put in all the windows; he had all the floors covered by costly rugs and the walls hung with silk and velvet. Looking at his new castle and pacing up and down the silent rooms, he spoke to it:

‘What is the good of you, here by the sea, my lovely tall tower? What is the good when there is no one to live in you? I have no mother or sister, and I have not married yet, so I have no wife either to walk upon your soft carpets. But, may I not be the Arab I am if I do not ask the Sultan to give me his daughter in marriage! He will have to give her to me, or to come out to the battlefield and fight with me!’

No sooner said than done! The Arab sat in one of his quiet, empty rooms and wrote a letter to the Sultan.

‘My lord Sultan of Constantinople, I have had a castle built with a high tower by the blue sea; there is nobody to walk in it, nobody but me. Give me your daughter to be my wife, my lord. If you refuse, come out to fight a battle with me!’

When the letter reached the Sultan, he inquired for someone to stand as his champion, promising great wealth and riches of all kinds to him who would slay the black Arab. Many youths went to try their luck, but none of them was seen in Constantinople ever again.

The Sultan grew worried, as time went by; not only was the Arab still alive, but many of the Sultan’s best knights and warriors had perished fighting with him. Even that was not the worst, for something even more terrible happened before long.

One day the black Arab put on his best costly clothes, hung his sharp sabre on his belt, prepared his grey mare, putting golden reins on her, folded his tent and tied it to the saddle behind him. He hung his heavy mace on the saddle, and, taking his dangerous spear, mounted his steed and rode straight to Constantinople. Reaching the city gate, the Arab stuck his spear in the ground, tethered his mare to it, and pitched his tent. He then sent word to the Sultan’s city, saying that the citizens were to give him every night a good sheep, a cartful of white bread, a barrel of hot brandy and two of red wine; also, a fair young maiden to serve him. If they did not do his bidding, a worse evil would soon befall them.

Before long he grew very rich, for he sold to Italy all he did not need for himself. Even that was not the worst, as they soon realized. The mighty Arab, dizzy with power, mounted his slender grey mare again and rode into the white city of Constantinople, straight to the Sultan’s palace. He stopped in front of it and shouted:

‘Bring out your daughter, Sultan of Constantinople! Bring out your daughter and give her to me!’

He then threw his heavy mace at the Sultan’s windows and broke all the glass in them.

Seeing that there was nobody to fight for him now, the Sultan agreed shamefully to give him his daughter in marriage.

‘I shall return in a fortnight,’ said the Arab, ‘for I must go back to my castle on the gentle coastland and collect my friends and guests for the wedding.’

He rode home happily, whilst the young maiden, learning what the future had in store for her, started to wail and cry bitterly. Her mother,

the Sultaniya, tried to comfort her, but without much success. She fell asleep at last. In her dream she saw a man who spoke thus to her:

‘There is a wide field in your Empire, my lady Sultaniya, and in that wide Field of Kossovo there is the town of Prilep, where Kralyevich Marko lives. They say that Marko is a brave, valiant knight. Send him a letter, my lady Sultaniya; ask him to be your son by God, promise him a rich reward and call him hither to save your daughter from the black Arab.’

As soon as she awoke, the Sultaniya ran to the Sultan’s chamber and told him of her dream. The Sultan quickly took a quill-pen and wrote at once to Kralyevich Marko:

‘Be by God my son, Kralyevich Marko; come to my white city of Constantinople and slay my foe, the black Arab, to save my fair daughter. I shall give you three loads of treasure.’

When Kralyevich Marko read the epistle, he said to the Tatar who had brought it:

‘Go back, Tatar of the Sultan! Give my greetings to the Sultan, my foster-father, and tell him I dare not fight with the Arab. He is known as the best fighter there is in this country, and when he cuts off my head what good are the three loads of treasure to me?’

The Tatar rode back on his swift horse and repeated Marko’s words to the Sultan.

The Sultaniya thought for a while and, believing that she would move him by her plea, sent him her own letter this time:

‘By God, my son Kralyevich Marko, do not let my dear daughter marry the black Arab! I shall give you five loads of treasure.’

Marko perused the letter and said, shaking his head, to the Tatar: ‘Go back, Tatar of the Sultan, go back and tell my foster-mother that I dare not fight with the Arab. He is the best warrior in this vast Empire and will cut off my head. And I, tell her, Tatar, I prefer my own head to all the Sultan’s treasure.’

Back went the Tatar and reported Marko’s message. Hearing him, the fair maiden ran to her room, took a sharp quill and wrote a letter with her own blood instead of ink:

‘My sworn brother, Kralyevich Marko, I beseech you by God and by your Saint John to be a true brother to me. Do not give me to the black Arab! I shall give you seven loads of treasure, seven fine shirts, embroidered with golden thread; I shall also give you a golden dish encircled by a golden snake which holds its head high; in its mouth the snake holds a precious stone which shines so brightly that mid-

night is as bright as noon when you eat your supper by its light. I shall also give you a beautifully wrought sabre with three golden hilts, each of them adorned by a precious stone. That sabre alone is worth three of the Sultan's big cities. Moreover, I shall have a seal made on it so that no Vizier or other high dignitary can slay you before asking his lord, the illustrious Sultan, whether he may do so.'

The Tatar carried the third letter to Marko. 'Woe to me, my sworn sister! It is bad to go where you ask me to, but it is worse to remain here,' Marko mused after reading her words. 'If I fear not the Sultan and the Sultaniya, I do fear God and Saint John. Go I will; whether I come back or not does not matter to me any longer.'

He gave no message to the Tatar, but as soon as the Sultan's messenger was gone he climbed up his tower, put on his riding clothes, and on top of them a jacket made of wolf skins; on his head he wore a fur cap, made of wolfskin too. Marko then took his sabre and spear, saddled his valiant Sharats, and hung a sheepskin full of wine on the right side of his saddle, the heavy mace on the left, to keep balance, and then jumped on to Sharin's back and rode straight to the white city of Constantinople.

Reaching it, Kralyevich Marko did not go to pay homage to the Sultan or any of his Viziers. He stopped instead at the New Inn and, after telling the innkeeper to prepare a room for him, he took his horse to the nearby lake to let him drink cool, fresh water. But the horse seemed unwilling to drink, although he must have been thirsty; yet he would not go back either and kept restlessly glancing around.

After a while a young Turkish maiden walked slowly to the edge of the lake. She bowed humbly to the quiet green waters and spoke, without lifting the gold-embroidered veil from her face:

'God be with you, you cool green lake! God bless you, my eternal home! Henceforth it is here that I shall dwell, for I shall be your bride, my green lake, rather than marry the black Arab.'

'What misfortune drives you to this lake, unknown Turkish lady?' Kralyevich Marko asked, stepping up to her.

'Let me alone, you poor dervish! Why do you ask me when no help can ever come from you?'

Yet her misery was weighing so heavily on her heart that she had to tell him her sad story from the beginning. 'And as a last resource I wrote to Kralyevich Marko, whom many praised as one of the most valiant knights of our Empire, hoping that he would free me from the

black Arab! I even pledged him to be my sworn brother, but he neither came nor sent any answer. May he never return to his mother, wherever he may be at this hour!' she ended with a heavy sigh.

'Do not curse me, my sworn sister! I am Kralyevich Marko.'

The Turkish maiden ran to him and folded her white arms round his neck, imploring him:

'My sworn brother, Kralyevich Marko, do not let me be married to the black Arab!'

'Do not fear him whilst I am alive, sworn sister. I shall not let you be married to the black Arab,' Marko promised. 'Go back to your palace, but do not say a word about me to anyone except your parents, the Sultan and the Sultaniya. Ask them to send me something for dinner, and remind them not to stint on the wine,' he said, feeling his throat go dry with thirst. He mused, looking at her, and said:

'When the Arab comes, welcome him and his wedding-train as you would any other bridegroom. Tell your parents to let you go away with him, so that there shall be no fight in the palace. As for me, I know where and how to welcome him.'

The young maiden returned home contented, and Marko rode back to the New Inn. A princely dinner was brought in before long, with the best wines from the Sultan's own cellars. Marko sat down, enjoying himself after the long journey. He was drinking cup after cup of the heavy red wine, looking out at the passers-by. Suddenly, the innkeeper hurried to the door and shut the inn.

'Why are you shutting your inn so early?' Marko asked, surprised.

'To tell you the truth, unknown warrior, we are all shutting our doors early this evening, for fear of the Arab who has forced our Sultan to give him his daughter in marriage. The hateful bridegroom arrives tonight, and that is why we want to be safe within our homes.'

Marko firmly ordered him to let the door stay open, wishing to see the Arab and his wedding-train. After a while the whole town resounded with shrill pipes, and the walls shuddered with the beating of many drums. Into the town rode the Arab on his slender grey mare, followed by five hundred black Arabs, his wedding-suite. The mare was prancing madly along the streets, and stones flew from under her hoofs, breaking many a window and door in the merchant quarter.

As the Arab entered the street where Marko was, he stopped in front of the New Inn, amazed.

'Isn't this a great wonder!' he exclaimed. 'All the doors of Con-

stantinople are shut for fear of me; only this inn stayed open! Is there nobody in it? Or is there some foolish youth sitting inside who never yet heard of me?

But he was eager to reach the palace and so he did not go in to inquire. He spent the night with his suite in luxurious rooms, hardly able to sleep with impatience. In the morning the Sultan led his daughter from her rooms and gave her to the Arab. Horses were saddled again; there were many more leaving the palace than there had been coming in the previous night: twelve packhorses were loaded with treasure the Sultan had given his son-in-law, and several others were carrying chests with the bride's dowry.

The wedding-train rode past the New Inn again and the Arab could not bridle his curiosity any longer. He stopped and, looking in, saw Marko sitting all by himself in the middle of the inn, drinking red wine not out of cups, but out of a big basin! He would drink half of it himself and give the other half to his horse Sharats.

The Arab was willing to pick a quarrel, but Sharats barred his way and did not let him enter the inn.

The Arab bridegroom returned to his wedding-suite and they all rode through Constantinople in state, with the music louder and shriller and the drums wilder than ever before.

Kralyevich Marko now arose, put on his fur-lined jacket, turning it inside out, drew the fur cap lower on to his brow, hung the wineskin and the mace on the saddle once more, and mounted his Sharats. He reached the wedding-suite soon after they had left Constantinople and he started to quarrel and fight with them; those at the rear ran madly ahead, past the head of the wedding-suite. Marko was now near the fair maiden; he hit with his mace the two young men at her sides, and they both fell off their horses, never to rise again.

The bridegroom was some distance ahead of the others, but a swift youth galloped up to him.

'I have bad news for you, black Arab! A strange knight rode in among your wedding-suite: his horse is unlike any other horse—piebald like a cow rather than a horse, and he himself looks frightening, with his wolfskin coat, his furry cap, and terrible black moustache. The moment he reached us he started dealing blows right and left, making way for himself. Whoever was touched by his mace is not likely to see daylight ever again. He slew the two knights who were guarding your bride, unfortunate black Arab!'

The Arab turned his mare round and reined her in only when he was face to face with Marko.

‘Bad luck to you, unknown warrior!’

‘What devil told you to ride among my suite and slay my two best men? Are you such a fool as to know nothing about me? Are you powerful and has your power turned your head? Or are you sick of your life?’ the Arab hissed and, after drawing a deep breath, went on:

‘I give you my word of honour now, I shall pull in the reins of my mare, shall leap over you seven times, and shall then cut off your head.’

‘Do not boast foolishly, you black Arab! If God and good luck will so, you will not leap near me, let alone over me!’ said Marko.

The Arab drew the reins in furiously, whipped his mare’s flank and was about to leap over Marko, but the brave Sharats stood up on his hind legs, hit the mare with his front legs and she landed, neighing fiercely.

Oh, if one could have stood there and watched the two brave warriors rushing at each other! They were of equal strength and prowess and neither of them could break the other. Their steeds pranced, sabres clanked, spears flew, and the air was full of the din of battle for nearly four hours. At last the Arab realized that Marko was still as fresh as he had been at the beginning of their fight, whereas he himself felt weariness stealing upon him. He rushed back through the city gate, into the merchant quarter of Constantinople. Marko spurred his Sharats, but the mare was swifter, swift as a mountain Vila. She nearly saved the Arab, but Marko remembered his mace, swung it once or twice and hurled it at the Arab. The mace hit him between the shoulder blades and the Arab fell off his horse. Marko ran to him, cut off his head, and led the mare back through the city gate.

He found the Princess alone on the road waiting for him, surrounded by the packhorses loaded with treasure and her dowry. All the Arabs from the wedding-party had disappeared and there was not a trace of them on the road, except the marks their horses had left in the dust.

Kralyevich Marko took the maiden back to the Sultan, her father. ‘Here is your fair daughter, my lord Sultan, and there are your packhorses loaded with treasure and with her dowry.’

Saying this, Kralyevich Marko departed from Constantinople without further ado, eager to return to his white city of Prilep.

The next morning, however, the Sultan had seven horses loaded

with gold and jewels; his daughter packed the seven gold-embroidered shirts, the golden dish with the snake holding a precious, shining stone in its mouth, and, most precious of all, the fine sharp sabre with three golden hilts and the Sultan's seal, warning everybody, whoever he might be, that its owner was not to be slain without special permission from the Sultan in person. All this was sent to Kralyevich Marko, and with it the Sultan's message:

'Here is some gold for you, Marko. When you have spent it all, come to your foster-father to ask for more, Marko.'

KRALYEVICH MARKO ABOLISHES THE WEDDING-TAX



NE day, early in the morning, Kralyevich Marko rode down the vast Field of Kossovo. As he came to a river, he saw a maiden coming his way. He stopped and greeted her: 'God be with you, maiden of Kossovo!'

The maiden bowed low and said in answer: 'May God grant you good health, unknown warrior.'

Marko looked closely at her and wondered aloud. 'My dear sister, maiden of Kossovo, how beautiful you must have been when you were younger! What a fine figure and proud bearing you have; how rosy your cheeks are, and what a noble look in your eyes! But your grey hair spoils your looks, for you are certainly still not as old as all that! What has happened to you that your hair should have turned grey so early? Has a misfortune befallen you, your mother or your old father, fair maiden of Kossovo?'

Tears ran down the maiden's rosy cheeks before she answered Kralyevich Marko. 'No personal misfortune has befallen either me or my dear parents, my dear brother, oh unknown warrior, but it is nine years now since an Arab has come from across the sea and taken lease of the Field of Kossovo, granted to him by the Turkish Sultan. He it is who makes us all unhappy, for we all have to provide for his meals, his drinks, and all sorts of whims. Moreover, he decreed that all those who want to be married must pay for it: maidens, future brides, must give thirty golden ducats, and bridegrooms thirty-four. Those who are rich enough give him their ducats, and they alone can be married. As for me, my brothers are poor and, try as we might, we could never

scrape enough money together for me or my brothers to marry; that is why I could not have a home and a family of my own, and that is what makes me unhappy. Still, I would not regret that so much—his not letting us young people be married as we would like to—were it not for yet another, worse misfortune: the Arab has ordered his men to bring him a maiden each evening. After spending the night with her, he gives her over to his servants and many of our good maidens have had to obey that hateful order. It is my turn tonight. I do not know what to do now, and I am trying to make up my mind between jumping into the river and drowning, or hanging myself. I much prefer to die, oh brother, than to be a mistress to my country's most bitter enemy.'

Having heard her woes, Kralyevich Marko said: 'My dear sister, maiden of Kossovo, do not, in the name of God, do anything so rash and senseless. Do not burden your soul with such a heavy sin! You should just tell me where the Arab's mansion is, for I wish to speak to him.'

'Why are you asking about the Arab's mansion—may it soon become deserted and empty as wasteland!—my dear brother, unknown champion? Have you found a bride for yourself? Are you taking the tax to him now? You might be your mother's only son and you might perish there! What would your poor, lonely mother do then?'

Marko took thirty golden ducats out of his pocket and handed them to the maiden. 'Take these ducats, my dear sister, and go back to your white home; eat well and take care of yourself, waiting for the bridegroom whom fate has decreed for you. Only show me now where the Arab's mansion is, for I shall pay your wedding-tax for you. Why should the Arab kill me when I have money enough to buy the whole Field of Kossovo, let alone pay my wedding-tax?'

'He has no mansion, dear brother; he and his servants live in tents. Look down the Field of Kossovo now; can you see the silken flag flapping in the breeze? That is the black Arab's tent. It is surrounded by a green lawn, but it is a sad and unhappy lawn, covered with Serbs' heads stuck on the poles. A whole week has not yet gone by from the day the Arab slew seventy-seven unfortunate bridegrooms-to-be from Kossovo. The Arab is accompanied by forty servants who guard him day and night and watch like eagles all who approach him.'

Marko waved to the maiden and rode down the field, causing his good Sharats to be very angry: live flames leapt from under his hoofs and blue fire issued out of his nostrils. Angry was Marko too, riding

down the field and, shedding tears down his manly face, he spoke wrathfully:

‘Woe to you, unhappy Field of Kossovo, woe to you that you should have lived to see this—that Arabs should rule over you after our honourable Tsar Lazar! I cannot bear the shame, nor stand such dreadful grief as this when I think of the Arabs doing such evil deeds here and kissing our young maidens and newly wed brides!

‘I shall revenge you today, my brothers, revenge or die, I promise!’ Marko shouted angrily, but there was nobody to hear him.

As he approached the tents, the Arab’s sentry saw him and said to his master: ‘Oh, my master, lord from across the sea, there is a strange knight riding down the Field of Kossovo, a strange knight and a piebald horse yet stranger, with live flames leaping from under his hoofs and blue fire issuing out of his nostrils. It looks as if he is going to attack us!’

‘My children, my forty brave servants, the knight will not dare to attack us,’ said the black Arab, smiling. ‘He has probably found a sweetheart and is bringing his wedding-tax to me; he may be angry because he is sorry to part with his golden ducats. Go out, brave servants. Give him a fine welcome in front of our pleasant lawn: bow low to him and receive his horse and arms as he dismounts. Usher him then into the tent to me: I shall not take his gold but shall behead him, in order to gain a horse which befits *me* better than him.’

The Arab’s servants hastened out to obey their master’s orders, but when they saw Marko at a few paces’ distance, they scurried back under the tent, frightened, trying to hide behind their master, and covering their sabres beneath their cloaks so that he should not see them.

Marko rode into the enclosure alone, dismounted his horse in front of the tent, and said: ‘You walk up and down this paddock, Sharats, whilst I go in to see the Arab, but do not go far from the entrance of the tent in case I should need you.’

Marko walked into the tent; he saw the Arab sitting and drinking the cool wine, handed to him by a maiden and a young woman.

‘God help you, my dear lord,’ said Marko by way of greeting.

‘God be with you, unknown champion! Come, sit down and drink some wine with me. Later on you might, perhaps, tell me what has brought you here,’ the Arab answered courteously.

‘I have no time for drinking wine with you, my lord. As for my

‘Where there is a young maiden who has reached the marriageable age, let her look for a bridegroom, and let her get married whilst she is still fair and young.

‘Where there is a young man, let him look for a bride and let them marry in peace, for there is no more wedding-tax to be paid now.

‘Marko has paid it for all of them, once for all time.’

Thanksgiving was heard from young and old alike: ‘May God grant long life to Marko who saved his country from a sad fate and slew the villain! May both his soul and body rest in peace!’



KRALYEVICH MARKO AND MUSSA KESSEDZHIYA



MUSSA, the Albanian Turk, was drinking wine in a Constantinople inn. After a while he said, drunk with too much wine:

‘It is nine years now that I have been serving our Sultan in Constantinople, and yet I have not been given a horse and arms or any clothes, either new ones or old. I have had enough of this. I give you my word of honour,’ he said, turning to his friends, ‘that I shall go down to the coast and become an outlaw: I shall close the roads and ways to my castle and build a tall tower with gallows underneath. All the Sultan’s men who come my way shall be hanged.’

What the Turk declared when drunk, he accomplished later, when he was sober: he went to the coast and closed all the roads and ways leading from the coastland to the Sultan’s town, the roads along which three hundred packs of treasure were carried every year. All the gold and treasure which by right belonged to other people or to the Sultan, Mussa now captured and kept for himself. Moreover, he had all the Sultan’s dignitaries who happened to pass his way hanged beneath his tower.

The Sultan received complaints about this behaviour from all sides, and he finally decided to put an end to Mussa’s robbery by sending his own Vizier, Chuprilich, at the head of three thousand soldiers to restore peace and order in the coastland.

However, the result was disastrous: most of the Sultan’s soldiers fell in the battle, and the Vizier was captured by Mussa, who sent him

to the Sultan, his hands tied behind his back and his feet bound under his horse, to tell him what happened.

The Sultan was fuming with rage now: he started to look for a brave man who would slay Mussa, and promised unheard-of rewards to him who should prove successful in the exploit. Many were tempted, and they rode down to the coastland, but none of them returned.

The Sultan was greatly disturbed. Seeing him downcast and desperate, the Vizier Chuprilich said to him: 'My lord Sultan, if Kralyevich Marko were here now, he is the only one who could slay Mussa.'

The Sultan looked at him angrily, hardly managing to withhold his tears. 'Let me alone, my Vizier! Why do you have to mention Kralyevich Marko to me! Don't you know that his bones must have turned to rot and dust by this time! Three years ago I threw him into a dungeon—and I have not opened the door of it since. He must have been dead long ago.'

'What would you give to him who told you Kralyevich Marko was alive, my gracious lord?' the Vizier asked.

'What! I would give him Bosnia to rule over for nine years, without paying me a farthing in taxes or anything else,' the Sultan said wistfully.

The Vizier leapt to his feet and ran down to the dark dungeon. He opened the door and, taking out Kralyevich Marko, led him into the Sultan's presence. Marko was a strange sight to behold, no doubt: his hair was so long that it fell down to the ground (for while he had been in prison, he was wont to lie upon one half of it, using the other half as a covering over his body); his nails were so long that he could easily have ploughed the soil with them. The damp, cold dungeon had made his face dark and sallow, and he was a sad sight if there ever was one, thought the Sultan.

'Are you alive, Marko?' the Sultan asked him, hardly believing his eyes.

'I am, my lord Sultan, but am not well at all,' Marko answered him.

The Sultan asked him to sit down and listen to his tale of woe. When he had finished, he asked:

'Could you go to the coastland now, Marko, could you go there and slay Mussa? I would give you all you could wish for if you would put an end to the villain.'

'No, my lord Sultan, I cannot do so now! The damp and cold dungeon has almost deprived me of my sight. I can hardly see now, let alone fight a battle with Mussa! Let me stay for a while in one of the

Constantinople inns; give me plenty of wine, brandy, good mutton, and white bread. After some time I shall let you know whether I am fit for battle or not.'

The Sultan summoned three young barbers: one of them washed Marko's face and cut his hair, the other shaved him, and the third cut and trimmed his nails. He was then taken to an inn, with, at his elbow, wine, brandy, meat, and bread, of which he might eat and drink as much as he wished. Marko spent three months there and the Sultan called him one day again:

'Could you trust yourself to go to the coastland now, Marko? I am weary with listening to all the unfortunate people complaining of the accursed Mussa.'

'Give me dry wood which has been lying in the attic for nine years, my lord Sultan; only then shall I see whether I am fit or not.'

The Sultan had such wood brought down from his attic. Marko took it into his right hand and pressed it hard: the wood broke into two or three pieces, but not a drop of water came out of it.

'In truth, my lord Sultan, the time has not yet come,' Marko said and walked out. Another month went by and Marko spent his days at the inn, much as before, eating and drinking. When he felt his old strength returning, he asked for the dry wood to be brought to him again. The servants rushed to the attic and fetched it for him: Marko pressed the wood in his right hand and it broke into two or three pieces, but, also, two drops of water fell out of it.

'The time has come for the fight, my lord Sultan,' Marko said, and he walked to Novak the smith.

'Forge a sabre for me, Novak the smith, forge a sabre better than any one you have ever yet forged!' He gave the smith thirty golden ducats and went to another inn, to wait for his sabre. After three or four days he returned to Novak.

'Is my sabre ready for me, smith Novak?'

The smith brought it out of his workshop and gave it to Marko. Kralyevich Marko looked at it, 'Is it good, smith Novak?'

'There is the sabre and there is the anvil, Marko—try it and you will see what it is like,' Novak answered in a low voice.

Marko swung the sabre in his right hand and hit the iron anvil, cutting it in two.

'Tell me truly, Novak the smith, have you ever made a better one?'

'I shall truly answer you, Kralyevich Marko: indeed I have forged

a better one, for a warrior better than you. When Mussa decided to go back to his coastland I made a sabre for him and when he hit the anvil, he cut in two not only the anvil, but also the stone underneath.'

This angered Marko so much that he cut off Novak's arm, saying: 'There now, Novak the smith, this is for you so that you shall never forge another sabre, better or worse than this one. And here are a hundred golden ducats to support you for the rest of your life.'

He then mounted on his Sharin's back and rode down to the gentle coastland, inquiring for Mussa all the time.

Early one morning Marko was riding up a narrow mountain gorge when whom should he see riding towards him but Mussa himself; his legs crossed on his horse, he was throwing his mace up in the sky and catching it in his hands as it fell back, just for amusement. As they came face to face, Marko said:

'Make way for me, Mussa of Albania; make way or pay due respect to me!'

'Go by, Marko, and do not seek to quarrel with me, Marko, or better, dismount your horse and come to drink wine with me, for I shall not make way for you. You may well have been borne by a Queen in a King's palace on soft mattresses, you may well have been wrapped in pure silk and linen with golden thread woven in it, you may well have been fed on honey and sugar; as for me, a bitter Albanian woman gave life to me, lying on a cold stone by her sheep; she wrapped me in rough, black cloth and tied it with the supple twigs of the blackberry; I have been fed on oats' brew; moreover my mother often made me swear to her that I should never in my life make way for anybody.'

Hearing this, Marko threw his spear, aiming at Mussa's chest, but the Albanian received it on his mace and threw it behind him. It was his turn to throw his lance at Marko, but the Serb was as quick as his enemy. He, too, put his mace forward and broke the lance.

Both sabres were drawn out quick as lightning now, and the two foes charged at each other: Kralyevich Marko swung his sabre but Mussa put out his mace and shivered the sabre to pieces. When Mussa waved with his sabre, Marko met it with his mace and knocked it out of his enemy's hand. They fought with their maces now, but they, too, were soon broken. Dropping them on the green grass, the warriors dismounted and started wrestling in the little clearing by the roadside. Brave, fierce warriors both of them, they fought until noon-time without either proving to be the better of the other.

Raging with anger and fury, they continued fighting until Mussa shouted: 'Strike me hard, Marko, or I shall strike you to put an end to all this!'

Marko tried, but all in vain; Mussa finally succeeded in hitting him hard and throwing him on the green grass. He sat on his chest and was about to kill him, but Marko cried:

'Where are you now, Vila, my own sworn sister? Where are you today? May you be nowhere from now on! Why did you lie to me, swearing that you would be at my side if I ever should need your help?'

Vila's voice was heard from the clouds above them: 'Why, my brother, Kralyevich Marko! Did I not tell you so often never to fight on a Sunday? Moreover, it would be a shame for the two of us to attack one foe; but where are your secret snakes?'

Mussa looked up to the clouds, hoping to see the Vila. Marko, meanwhile, drew a knife out of his belt and gored Mussa from his throat down to the waist. The dead Albanian lay so heavily on Marko in the grass that the Serb could hardly breathe. After a while, however, he freed himself and rose, looking down at his enemy and marvelling at his strange body: there were three sets of ribs in his chest, and three hearts beneath them: one of them was weary, the other was prancing madly, whilst on the third a poisonous snake lay asleep. The beast woke with a start and spoke to Marko: 'You should thank God, Kralyevich Marko, that I did not awake while Mussa was still alive—had I not been asleep, you would have perished instead of him today!'

As he saw this, Marko wept bitterly, saying to himself: 'Woe to me, unhappy that I am; I have slain a hero mightier than I!'

Thereupon he cut off Mussa's head, put it in Sharin's oat-bag and rode back to Constantinople. When he was ushered into the big hall, he threw the head before the Sultan, who leapt up, terribly frightened.

'Fear nothing, my lord Sultan!' rumbled Marko. 'How would you face him alive when you so shake at the mere sight of his severed head?'

The Sultan gave him three packhorses loaded with treasure. Marko rode back to his city of Prilep, and Mussa stayed in his mountain gorge, never to disturb travellers or the Sultan again.



KRALYEVICH MARKO'S DEATH



EARLY of a Sunday morning Kralyevich Marko was riding up a mountain, not far from the seaside. Suddenly the horse began stumbling under its rider, and Marko asked him, greatly worried: 'What is it, Sharats, my brave steed? It is now a hundred and sixty years that we have been companions, for better for worse, and you never stumbled before! Here you are now stumbling, and moreover shedding bitter tears. God grant I may be wrong, but I

fear this portends no good! One of us two is going to lose his head today—you or I, Sharats.'

Hardly had Marko uttered those words when a Vila cried from the mountain top, calling to Kralyevich Marko:

'Sworn brother, Kralyevich Marko, do you want to know why your horse stumbles beneath you today? Hear me now—he is mourning you, his master, for the two of you are going to part very soon, Marko.'

'O white Vila, may your white throat burn with pain! How can you speak like that? How could I part with Sharats when we have seen so many places and towns together, when we have been through this country from east to west, and I know that there is no better horse than Sharats and no better champion to ride him than I! I do not intend to part with my Sharats as long as I carry my head on my shoulders, Vila!'

'Sworn brother, O Kralyevich Marko, nobody will take Sharats by force from you, and you cannot perish by any warrior's hand, by his sharp sabre, heavy mace, or deadly lance. There is no man on this earth you ought to fear, but God who has decreed you to die. If you do not believe my words, look round when you climb up to the mountain top; you will see two slender spruce-trees, taller and more beautiful than any other tree in the woods; between them there is a deep well. Dismount your Sharats there, tether him to one of the spruce-trees, and bend over the well: you will see your face reflected in the clear water, and you will then learn your hour of death.'

Marko obeyed Vila, though with a heavy heart, and did as she had bidden him. Seeing the slender, tall spruce-trees, he dismounted from his brave steed and tethered him to one of them. He bowed over the well; as soon as he saw his face reflected in the calm water, he knew that his hour of death was very near. He wept bitterly, saying:

'O how false you are, world, my beautiful flower! Beautiful you have been but I have trodden over you such a brief time; woe is me! Such a brief spell, just three hundred years! And the hour of parting with you has already come, my hour of changing this world for another.'

Thereupon he drew out his sabre and cut off his brave Sharats's head so that Sharats should never be taken and used by the Turks, or be degraded by carrying water or any other burden. Marko buried him in a grave—deeper than the one he had dug before for his own brother, Andria. Heaving a deep sigh, he broke his sabre into four so that no Turk should be able to boast of possessing it, should he, by any chance, find it on the mountain. He did this also lest the Christians might

curse him for leaving his glorious sabre to the heathen, who would use it against them. Then Marko took his lance and broke it into seven pieces of wood, which he threw high up among the branches. As for the six-knobbed mace, Marko hurled it mightily towards the deep-blue sea, saying:

‘When my mace comes up to the surface of the sea, may a warrior of my stature and strength come into this world again!’

Having thus disposed of his weapons, Marko took a piece of paper, a pen, and a small golden inkpot which he always carried in his belt, and wrote as follows:

‘Let him who should come up this mountain and find Marko lying by the well between the two spruce-trees know that Marko is dead. Marko has three purses of treasure with him. What treasure? Golden ducats, all of it! Let him who finds me take one purse for himself and may he be blessed for burying me; let him give the second purse to the churches that they may be repaired and adorned with new icons and ornaments; as for the third, let it be given to the crippled and the blind, so that they may walk through this world, singing their songs and speaking of Marko in them.’

Marko took the letter and threw it high up into the branches, and the paper stuck to one of them, easily visible from the road. Kralyevich Marko threw the golden inkpot into the well, took off his green surcoat, spread it on the grass under the spruce-tree, crossed himself and sat down, drawing his fur-lined helmet lower on his brow, and then stretched himself down, never to rise again.

Marko lay dead by the well for a whole week. Those going up or down the road saw him lying there and, believing him to be asleep, walked far around so as not to rouse his anger by awaking him from his sleep. Marko was known to be very quarrelsome if suddenly startled.

Finally, one day the abbot of the Serbian monastery of Hilendar, on Mount Athos, happened to be passing by with his deacon Isaiya. The old man saw Marko, and motioned his companion, whispering: ‘Hush, my son, walk softly hither, for fear of rousing him. Marko is always angry when he first wakes up: he might easily behead us both before we know where we are.’

Still the monk glanced sideways at the sleeping Marko, full of curiosity, and looking up, he noticed the letter flapping on the branch. His younger companion climbed up, brought it down, and handed it

to him to read. The abbot now learned that Marko was dead and hurriedly dismounted to touch him but—alas!—the letter had told the truth.

The monk thought for some time where to bury Marko and, finally, made up his mind: he put the dead champion on his horse and covered him with the green surcoat. He then took Marko down to the sea and carried him, helped by his deacon, on board a ship. The dead warrior sailed down the Adriatic sea to Mount Athos, where he was carried in state into the white monastery of Hilendar. The abbot said the prayers for the rest of his soul, weeping over the dead hero. He then buried him in the middle of the church and put the flagstones carefully back exactly where they had been before, leaving no mark by which Kralyevich Marko's grave could be found later on. This he did in order to ensure the warrior a peaceful rest, undisturbed by his enemies who might wish to take revenge even upon his dead body.