

The Three Comrades eBook

The Three Comrades

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Page 1

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*** Start of this project gutenber EBOOK the three comrades ***

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THE THREE COMRADES

by Kristina Roy

of Stara Tura, Slovakia.

Translated by Charles Lukesh

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THE THREE COMRADES

CHAPTER ONE

In the whole wide world there were no comrades who loved each other better than Petrik,[1] Ondrejko,[2] and Fido. All three were orphans and had had a hard time in the world thus far. Both parents of Petrik had died of a malignant fever. He became a public charge and was sent from place to place, till finally he was placed in charge of "Bacha"[3] Filina, who was his father's uncle, and had charge of the sheep pasturing on the mountain clearings of the estate of Lord Gemer. There was but a poor hut, but to mistreated Petrik it was like a paradise. Ondrejko, whom they called at home Andreas de Gemer, came to the old "Bacha" at the order of the doctor, that he might grow stronger in the mountain air, drinking whey and eating black bread. As it was, Ondrejko did, and did not, have a father—at least he could not remember him. He was but two years old when his parents separated for ever. His mother took him with her when she left, but even then he did not live with her. She left him with strange people whom she



paid to keep him, and went alone into the world. The people talked about her; said that she was a famous singer, and that many went from distant places to hear her.

[Footnote 1: Diminutive for Peter.]

[Footnote 2: Diminutive for Andreas.]

[Footnote 3: "*Bacha*"—shepherd overseer.]

Ondrejko remembered only one of her visits, and that she was very beautiful, and brought him a box full of chocolates, a rocking-horse, a trumpet—and who knows what more? After that he never saw her again, and probably would never see her any more. The lady with whom he stayed talked about a law-suit, at the conclusion of which it came about that he belonged neither to the mother nor the father. Finally, he came to the castle of Lord Gemer, and from there the doctor sent him to the mountains because he was like a candle that was ready to go out. About his father he knew only that he was somewhere far away, and had already a second wife and two boys. It seemed to him he was as much of an orphan as Petrik. The dog Fido didn't remember his mother either, because he had hardly begun to run about the kennel when a wild boar killed her. Thus it is not surprising that all three loved each other.



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For Ondrejko they built a special room beside the shepherd's hut. There were three large sheepfolds, and "Bacha" Filina had charge of them all. Ondrejko had in his room a real bed, and a spare one prepared for the doctor when he came to see him; but, because he was rather lonesome, he preferred to sleep with Petrik on the hay, and because Fido couldn't follow them to the loft up the ladder, he at least guarded the ladder so nothing would happen to the boys. Bacha Filina was a large man like a giant. His face was aged and stern; all his teeth were still perfectly white and he had not a single gray hair; but, strangely, his eyebrows began to get gray. But, when he creased his forehead above his eagle-like black eyes which could see everything far and wide, it seemed as if storm-clouds were gathering. Not only both the boys, but everybody else was afraid of these storm-clouds, even the herdsmen and the sheep, as well as the longhaired, fourfooted guards of the sheepfold. Bacha Filina did not get mad easily, but when he did, it was worthwhile. Though Ondrejko was the son of his lord, Bacha Filina didn't let him get by with anything. The boy had not been taught to obey; however, Filina taught him this hard lesson without scolding him or touching him with even one finger. When the doctor brought him to the mountains he said to Bacha, "What this boy needs is to eat black bread and drink whey. He has been raised on fancy foods and they do not agree with him. It would be good for him to wash in cold water, but he is afraid to get wet. You must not worry about him being a Lord Gerner because it is a question of his health."

"Oh, that!" said the Bacha, wrinkling his forehead, "I am able to handle such a little brat"—and he was. The first few days Ondrejko did not dare resist this big man in anything, and now he would not even dream of it. The boys did not know a more noble man in the whole world than Bacha Filina. He didn't bother much the whole day what they did, but in the evening before the sheep were gathered, he sat with them in God's beautiful nature before the cabin, and there they could, even had, to tell him everything. They sat near him, one on the one side, the other on the other, and Fido laid his great hairy head on the knees of his master and looked on so wisely, that it seemed he, too, would want to tell all that happened during the day. He was still a young, lively fellow. You could see by his nose and ears he was not trained very much; his fur was often quite tangled because he started quarrels with the older dogs, Whitie and Playwell.

The first time Bacha found the two boys sleeping together on the hay he frowned and they were afraid of what was going to happen—but nothing at all happened; he only ordered Ondrejko to spread his sheet on the hay and cover himself with a blanket; so they both covered themselves and slept very well in the fragrant hay.

CHAPTER TWO



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It was on a Sunday afternoon. The quiet of the holiday was noticeable even on the mountains where, hand in hand, the little comrades walked. They were nicely washed and arrayed in Sunday clothing, because Bacha Filina would not suffer anybody to desecrate Sunday. Everyone who could, had to go to the next town to church, though it was almost two hours' walk. He himself seldom went; he was not able to take long walks. Once a timber fell on his foot in the woods and from that time on he had pains in it, but since he did not go down to church, he read in his large old Bible. Today he had gone to church and the boys went to meet him. They missed him very much. He ordered them to memorize the reading of the Gospel for the day and each had to recite separately.

Suddenly Petrik became silent; he drew his comrade aside and pointed with a silent nod of the head toward a cut-down tree lying in the woods. There sat Bacha Filina with his head resting in the palms of his hands as if something were pressing him down to the black ground.

"Let us go up to the Bacha," advised Petrik; "he seems to be sad."

"Truly very sad," worried Ondrejko. "Perhaps the sadness will pass from him when we come to him."

The crackling of dry branches under the bare feet of the boys roused Bacha. He looked around. The children stood a short distance off. Should they go to him—or not?

"Where are you going?" he called to them. They came running. "Only to meet you, Bacha."

"Well, why did you come to meet me?" His usually rough voice seemed to sound different. "We were lonesome without you," haltingly admitted Ondrejko, and presently they sat on the moss carpet at the feet of Bacha.

"And why, Bacha, were you sitting here so sadly?" Petrik looked surprisedly at Ondrejko, that he dared to ask. Would not Bacha be angry?

"Did you think that I was sad?" Bacha stroked the golden hair surrounding the pale face of the child, which in the sunshine looked like a halo on a saint.

"And were you not?" The blue eyes of the boy, like two lovely blue flowers, gazed into the black eagle-like eyes of the man.

"Well, child, I was sad, and you have done well that you came to meet me. While I rest a while, recite to me the Gospel that you have learned."

Both boys, one after the other, recited the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.



“May I ask you, Bacha, to tell me why the rich man did not help Lazarus?” Petrik dared to ask.

“Why? Because his heart was like a stone. The dogs were better than he. Remember that, children, and never do any harm to birds or animals; they are better than we. Now let us go.”

Bacha took Ondrejko by the hand and giving his book to Petrik they walked through the woods toward home. High above them in the clearing sounded the bells of the flock, and off and on the impatient barking of Whitie and Playwell, and in between sounded the trumpet of the youngest herdsman, Stephen. He played with such an ardor that it seemed the notes were running over;

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“Come, come, ye gentle sheep,
Keep out of waters deep;
Pasture on meadows green
Where grass grows sweet and clean.”

How the trumpet resounded as if some one were weeping in the woods! Even the echo seemed to answer in the same way.

The boys liked the beautiful tune. They knew the words of this song, but Bacha bowed down his proud head as though some great burden were pressing him down.

After they had finished their simple supper, they sat again as usual in front of the hut, Bacha on a stump and the boys at his feet. They were looking one at the other, wondering if they dare ask for some story. He knew so many of them, and when he was in good humor he knew very well how to tell good stories.

“I beg, Bacha, will you not tell us something?” Ondrejko finally asked, and looked at the same time in such a way at Bacha that he would have to be a very hard man to refuse.

Disturbed from his meditation, Bacha looked for a while into the beautiful inquiring eyes, then with a deep breath he began:

“Many years ago I was a boy like you two. I’m telling you this that you may know what you should never become, if the Lord God is not to be very angry at you. I will tell you today something about myself which I have not yet told anybody on earth,” began Filina. He stopped a moment and the boys waited eagerly for him to go on.

“When I was five years old my mother died. My father brought another mother in the house. She was a young, beautiful woman, a widow. With her came a son from her first marriage. We called him Stephen, and when I look at you, Ondrejko, I always have him before me as he entered our hut for the first time. On his head he had a hat with a long band, a cloak thrown over his shoulder, an embroidered shirt, and narrow trousers. He was like a picture of a saint—so beautiful and so lovely.

“I was my father’s youngest child. The older ones died, so I never had a brother, and suddenly he came—and was to be my brother. You love each other—I know. That also reminds me of my childhood. I began to love him more than I could my own brother. We were of equal age, but I was strong and he weak; I was wild and he tame; I was ugly and he beautiful. In spite of this we loved each other, and our parents were well satisfied. They could leave him under my care—because they knew I was able to defend him—and could leave me under his care, because when he was with me I was much more tame.



“Would that it had remained so always. But a proverb says, not in vain, that ‘Where the Devil cannot go himself he will send an old woman.’ And he sent her to us. It was your father’s Aunt, your great-aunt, Petrik. She came once to us and asked me aside if the new mother liked me, and was sorry for me that I was a poor orphan. Said she, ‘Who has a step-mother has also a stepfather. Your father doesn’t love you as much as he does Stephen.’ She didn’t



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stay long with us. Just as she came, so she went, but she took with her my love for Stephen. Because I was so wild and always did something wrong, my wise father had to punish me often; but Stephen was never punished because he always did what was pleasing in the sight of father and mother. From that time on I always remembered the words of the great-aunt that I was punished and he not because they loved him, and his mother interceded for him, and there was no one to stand by me. But my step-mother quite often interceded for me. She was a kind woman and never did me any harm, but I wanted her to show more love to me than to her own boy. But that could not be. This wrong thought grew in my heart, and my envy increased from year to year till we were about as old as you two boys; and now comes the sad part which I never shall forget, and that is what is pressing me to the earth unto today.”

Bacha pointed over to the mountain opposite them.

“Do you see yonder mountain?” The boys nodded.

“There we used to live at the foot of the mountain. Look toward the West, where the sun is lying down to sleep; there in the valley lived the weavers, to whom from all our homes, the wool was carried to be woven. Two paths led to those huts; the one up and down over the rocks—the other through the valley, easier but more dangerous, because there was a stretch of swamp into which, if somebody fell, he could never get out by himself. One who knew how, could get over by jumping from rock to rock and to clumps of grass, but it seemed as if some black power wanted to pull one down.

“Once our parents had us carry our wool. Going, we went the upper way, as we were told, but after we delivered the wool to the weavers, Stephen handed me an apple, which the weaver’s wife had given him, saying he had another in his bag from his mother. Mother gave me nothing for the journey because I didn’t take leave of her, and she didn’t even see me when I grabbed my bag. And now, even the weaver’s wife had not given me anything. It made me sad. I got angry, threw the apple away, and would rather have cried. Here was evidence, I thought, that what the great-aunt said was true. Nobody cared for me, at home, nor anywhere else. Everybody liked Stephen, and it always would be so.

“I used to hear some people say that the Devil is walking on the earth, though we do not see him, and whispers to us what we should think and do. If it is true, I don’t know, but that he was with me that time and gave me bad, gruesome advice, is sure. Only he could have told me that. When we left the weavers, I said to Stephen, ‘Going over the mountain is too far. Let us go by the lower and more convenient path; it is nearer.’

“‘But mother said we must go only over the hill,’ objected Stephen, ‘and father called also from the yard, ‘Do not go by the lower way.’”

“Well, however it was, when we came where the paths divided we went on the lower path anyway. I claimed that my feet hurt, I had stubbed my big toe, and had a thorn in my heel. Stephen was sorry for me, and thought that when we explained it to mother she would see the reason, and father also, why we took the lower path after all.



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“Truly it was fine to run there, like on carpets, till we came to the swamp. ‘You must now jump from rock to rock,’ said I, and I ran ahead. We came near the opposite side.

There was only one more jump. Because I was larger, and my feet longer I managed to jump over, but I knew that Stephen could not jump over. There were bunches of grass and I advised him to run over them. He listened to me, came over two or three, but the third one began to move under him and he jumped back on the rock.

“‘Stay there,’ I called to him. ‘Not far from here lives the forester; I will run for him and he will help you.’ I ran as fast as I could but not to the forester’s house.

“‘Petrik, do not leave me. I am afraid,’ called Stephen after me, and right after that followed a cry:

“‘Mother mine!’

“Thus I have heard him day and night, as in the past years, so even till today, and I shall perhaps in the hour of death and in the whole of eternity. I was still a small boy, but a bad one, and at that moment hard as a rock. ‘Surely he will fall in and will drown,’ I consoled myself. ‘Nobody will give him any more apples, and people will love me and me only.’ No old criminal could have felt worse than I felt then. I began to run still faster till my legs broke down under me and my breath failed. Yes; I ran through the woods alone, forsaken, as once Cain did when he killed his brother and ran away from the face of God. Suddenly a great pain gripped me that could not be expressed, because the voice that whispered to me before, ‘Drown him in that swamp,’ now whispered to me, ‘You dare not go home. What will you say when they ask you about Stephen?’ Tired and hungry as I was I threw myself on the ground and started to cry bitterly till I fell asleep.

“At day-break the drivers passed by with their wagons for lumber. They found me and, recognizing me, laid me sleeping on a wagon and took me as far as our hut. There they awakened me, laid me down, and half-sleeping I didn’t realize at once what had happened the day before. I ran to the hall and opened the door.

“The rays of the rising sun struck our bedroom first—the same that day. It lit up the bed of my father, and ...” Bacha stopped and tears ran down his cheek.

“And what, Bacha? Oh, what, Bacha?” with bitter cries both boys exclaimed. The tears were already running down Ondrejko’s pale face.

“There on the bed in the rays of the sun like a holy picture, rested our Stephen, sleeping. Mother sat beside the bed. There was a humming in my ears and blackness before my eyes, and if father had not jumped and caught me I would have fallen over. It was long before they brought me back to consciousness.”



“So he didn’t drown?” both boys were astonished and rejoicing.

“Didn’t he fall into that swamp?”

“He fell in it, children. Oh, he fell in, and there was no man who could have saved him. But we had a large dog called Whitie who went around always with us, as Fido with you. When we left home we left him behind, but he followed us, and the Lord God Himself sent him in that moment when the stone under Stephen gave way, and he lost his balance and fell. Whitie caught him by the hair and dragged him to the shore, and whined and barked till the forester came.



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“He carried Stephen to the brook, washed off the mud, and revived him, for he was almost dead, and then carried him home. I expected father would punish me but he did not. Mother kissed me crying, and gave me breakfast. They were afraid something had happened to me. They thought I had been drowned because I couldn’t be found anywhere. I saw clearly that they both loved me very much, but it did not please me, I was afraid it would become known what I had intended to do. My parents are already in eternity, and I can not now ask them for forgiveness because after death there is no more forgiveness.

“Stephen never let it be known that I made him go that way, and from that time on we loved each other as from the beginning. I was no longer jealous of the love of father and mother to him. I knew and felt now that they loved me also, and that I didn’t deserve this love.

“From that time I couldn’t look at the dog Whitie. It was always painful to me that he, a dog, saved Stephen, when I wanted to drown him. But though he didn’t drown that time the Holy God took him to Himself. He must be angry at me, a sinner, to this day. Thus I say, ‘Never do any harm to animals; they are much better than people; they are God’s creatures; they never do wrong things before God but obey always.’ And now, boys, run and go to sleep.”

Though the boys had many questions on their hearts they obediently bade him “good night” and went. For a long time, lying on the hay, they spoke together about Stephen, how he jumped over the bunches of grass, how the rock turned under him, how he fell, and how Whitie saved him.

“I am very sorry for Bacha Filina,” said Ondrejko. “I can never forget it. It must pain him—could it be that God is still angry with him?”

“But where is this Stephen?” worried Petrik. “They were the same age, so he must be just as old now. Perhaps he will tell us some other time about him.” They were stopped from further talking by Fido. Somehow he had managed to get to them and they were rejoiced. They told him once more about the hero Whitie and enjoined upon him to follow him. He wagged his tail, licked their hands and faces, whining for joy as if he were promising it all, and when the boys slept, he slept with one eye open because he had to stand guard over his comrades.

CHAPTER THREE

The following week Bacha Filina had much work to do, so he could not look much after the boys, though they did all they could; they obeyed him and tried to please him in every way. On Tuesday the doctor came to look at Ondrejko. He was told where Ondrejko slept, but he only laughed: “Good for you, boy, that will help you; though your



father is a great lord and a proud Magyar, everything serves in its time. Thus I trust we shall live to see that the Tatra Mountains will belong to the Slovaks and also these woods. Because your grandfather lived there as a great Slovak, you also as a good Slovak will be living. Just learn the language of your father and draw near to that soil which they once cultivated.” The boys didn’t grasp what he meant. They only felt that he was their friend.

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The evening came. They had to make a bed for the doctor beside themselves on the hay. In the morning he drank the good milk and ate the black bread with cheese. Then the boys took him as far as the “Old Hag’s Rock.” On the way Ondrejko asked about his father. He learned that he now lived in Paris and did not purpose to come that year for the summer. The boy breathed more freely because he felt that if his father came he would have to go to him, away from Bacha Filina and away from Petrik. That would not please him; he did not want to go at all. When the doctor took leave of the boys they followed him with their eyes as long as they could see his straw hat, then they climbed the rock to see him better, but in the meantime he had disappeared altogether. Instead of that they saw on the other side of the “Old Hag’s Rock” a beautiful little valley, and in it a solitary house with small windows which was made of wood and covered with shingles, standing there by the brook. It looked like a fairy-story house set among the springs coming out from the rocks. The herder Steve had told the boys several times about witches who lived in solitary huts, and it seemed to them that one of them might be living there. A large white dog sunned himself in front of the hut. If Fido had been with them, he surely would have started a fight with him. As the boys were looking at the cottage the door opened, but no old woman came out, only a boy who was a little larger than themselves, in a cape and belt, sandals, and with a hat on his head. The dog jumped up, wagged his broad tail, and stretched himself, yawned and barked happily. The boy stroked him on the head and smiled at him, then both began to walk up toward the great rock.

The dog spied our comrades first and stopped. They could see he was not as young as Fido, but that he was wise and did not bark uselessly at anybody, so they knew that he must be friendly to people. Soon the boys stood face to face, and the strange boy, whose dress indicated that he was not from that section, greeted them in a friendly manner. He asked them what they were doing and where they were from. They told him that they had accompanied the doctor that far. Ondrejko dared to ask him if he lived in that little house.

“The hut belongs to us, but I am from Trenchin. I came only a week ago with my father. A distant uncle of my mother died, and because there is no nearer relative my mother inherited this hut. Father wants to sell it, but a nice bit of woods with fine timber belongs to the hut, which we could use very well in our business. Therefore we shall stay here for some time, cut the wood and take it along.”

“And the dog is yours?”

“Yes, it is our Dunaj. He did not want to stay at home; we had to take him along, though we had to pay for him on the railroad.”

“Surely you didn’t have him along in the carriage?” ventured Ondrejko.



“Oh, no; and he did not like where they locked him up, at all. He almost knocked me down when he regained his freedom. Isn’t that so, Dunaj?” The dog whined and cuddled down at his master’s feet.

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“We too have a dog which is still young, but he also will be big when he grows up,” Ondrejko said, appraisingly.

“And where are you going?”

“Only up here on the rock to see what is behind it. In our country we also have a large rock, but much higher and broader, and when you look down from it it seems as if you look down into Sunshine Valley, as the story goes. And after the storm a rainbow appears, like Heaven’s gate which appeared once to Jacob in a dream. Once upon a time I believed that Heaven’s gate was only there, but today I know that Heaven is everywhere open that the Lord Jesus might come to us where and when He wants to. Do you know Him too?”

“Who?” wondered the boys.

“The Son of God, the Lord Jesus. But I see already that you do not know Him, and He surely sent me to you, so that I could tell you all that I know. Do you have time?”

“We can spend about an hour,” said Petrik, who felt the new stranger was very friendly and he would like to have him for a comrade.

“Let us then sit down here on the rock, and I will tell you how it was that I came to the Sunshine Valley the first time, and what kind of book I found there. I have it even here with me because I could not be without it. But tell me first your name. I am called Palko, though they once baptized me in the name of Nicholas. But this is a long story.”

“My name is Petrik, and he is called Ondrejko. At home they call him Andreas de Gemer in the Magyar tongue, but Bacha Filina says, ‘Why should we break our tongues with foreign names?’ Anyhow, Ondrejko is much nicer,” zealously spoke Petrik.

“That is a nice name. It was the name of one of the disciples of the Lord Jesus who brought to Him the boy with the loaves and fishes. I have it beautifully written in this book.”

In the meantime the boys climbed the rock, sat down, and the new comrade drew out a book carefully wrapped up in paper and began to tell them the beautiful things about it. If one would want to repeat them it would take a whole book.[A]

[Footnote A: See first part of “Sunshine Country.”]

Among other things, he told them that whosoever takes this book into his hands dare not read it otherwise than word for word, from the beginning to the end, because only in this way will he get to know the Way which leads to the true Sunshine Country, where, through the Heaven’s gates, the Lord Jesus went to prepare a place for all those who obediently went that way.



The boys would not have tired listening till the evening, but suddenly Fido came, and as if he knew that with such a dog as Dunaj he mustn't start a fight, just licked his comrades and was friendly to the stranger. His arrival reminded the boys of Bacha, and what he would say if they stayed too long. They rose, and Palko promised to accompany them that they might show him where their hut was standing, and when he had time he would come to visit them.

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He ran down to close his house and they had to wait a while. When he returned he carried a large piece of bread which he divided equally into five parts, and then they followed the narrow path over the meadows to the sheepcotes.

The newcomer told them many things on the way. They could hardly part from him.

When Bacha came to supper they endeavored to out-do one another in telling him about it. He listened intently, and said he would be glad when the strange boy, who it seemed was very decent, would visit them. They all hoped that he would come the next Sunday.

CHAPTER FOUR

It is a true saying that, "People keep with people, and mountains with mountains." How one person gets used to another you can scarcely believe until you have seen it yourself. What is it that draws one to another? Long lived our three comrades with Bacha Filina without Palko, and nothing was lacking, but now if a day passed without seeing him it seemed as if they could not stand it. Though it may seem strange, Bacha Filina would have missed him most. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he always had in mind the moment when the bushes parted on that beautiful Sunday afternoon, and, like a picture in a frame, stood the strange boy so clean and neat with his cape over his shoulder, small hat in his hand, resting his hand on a shaggy white dog. It would truly be a fine picture for a painter to paint in those wide mountains, if he could but make it so true to nature—you could not look at him enough. And he remembered again how Palko sat with them in front of the hut with the Holy Book in his hand, reading word for word, chapter for chapter. Such beautiful and good things. So must Jesus have looked when He sat amongst the Jewish teachers. Oh, how did he understand the Word of God! No sermon had moved old Bacha as did the talks of Palko the boy, though he had heard many in his life. Bacha had a whole Bible which he read sometimes on Sunday. He had also a big book with sermons, but since the time that Palko Lesina came every evening to them it was as if a veil had been removed from the man's eyes. The Bible became to him the living Word of God.

"The Lord Jesus used to walk by the Sea of Gennesaret," said the boy seriously. "Now He walks through these mountains of yours. Sometimes He passed through our mountains to seek us, and now He seeks you."

* * * * *

Again it was Sunday. Filina got the boys ready to go to church, but he himself remained in front of his hut. Fido who was not permitted to run with the comrades, lay at his feet. Suddenly he pricked up his ears, jumped up, and like an arrow flew into the nearby thicket. Bacha paid no attention. He sat with his head bowed down. He did not even

hear someone speak to the dog, nor hear any greeting; he did not arouse himself till he heard close to him the pleasant young voice which he loved so much.



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“Good morning, Uncle Filina. Why are you so sad and so lonely? Where is everybody?”

“Welcome, Palko,” gladly replied the man. He held out his brown hand to the boy. “If I had known you would come, I would not have sent the boys to the church. Everywhere is the house of God. And I suppose you are bringing the Bible, about which you spoke yesterday?”

“Yes, I do. My father went away for a few days. He asks you kindly if you will let me stay with your boys that I may not have to stay alone in the hut. Will you take me?”

The beautiful eyes of the boy gazed longingly on the face of the man.

“Why, surely. We will be only too glad if you stay with us,” answered Bacha. “But why did your father go home?”

“He went with some wood. He could not take it all at once. The balance we shall put on a float, and so carry it to our destination. Thus I could bring the Bible to show it to you.”

“Is that the one from Pastor Malina?”

“Yes, Uncle, and I esteem it very much. There are many notes in Latin which I do not understand, and also some in Slovak. When I look at the writing I see the pastor in front of me. I would like to show you what he wrote the last Sunday when he became so seriously ill. Do you have time for it, Uncle?”

“Oh, yes, my son; it is Sunday. Just read on.”

“You will understand it better than I because you are older. There is something very good: ‘I have missed very much; my whole life is wasted,’ began the boy, and his voice sounded so solemn, almost as if he were reading the Word of God. ‘Even though I would, I cannot improve anything. It is too late; it is too late! Souls passed into eternity—it may be I did not bring salvation to them. They never come back that I may ask them forgiveness and love them. Oh, how glorious are the words, ‘By grace ye are saved ... it is the gift of God.’ In this holy gift I take my refuge, my holy God and Saviour. I know that You have pardoned me and have even taken the punishment that I merited on Yourself. I cling to Thy cross; I fall at Thy wounded feet, and thank Thee—Oh, so thank Thee; yes, I will praise eternally Thy holy name, O Jesus!’” read Palko.

“Thus believed Pastor Malina ...” but the boy stopped because the Bacha sat with his head bowed down, and cried aloud.

“Even if I would, I couldn’t make anything good. It is too late. The souls went on to accuse me,” he repeated in his crying. “That is what is pressing *me* down to the ground, and all my good life since that time doesn’t help anything ...”



The boy rested his curly head in the palms of his small hands.

“Uncle, will you not tell me what is worrying you so much? It could not be the sin that you wanted to drown your Stephen, as Petrik told me?”

“Stephen didn’t drown. I, when something is pressing me, confess it and feel easier at once.”



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“The Apostle James says, ‘Confess your sins one to another.’ It is true I am only a boy, but I know already how the soul and the heart ache—and there is no comforter. But the Lord Jesus will grant it to me that I may be able to understand and to help you.”

The man looked at the boy. He stroked his whiskers. “If I have to tell somebody about it as I have wished for years, it will suit me best to tell it to you. The Lord God gave you more wisdom than me, an old man, just as Samuel the boy had more than the old priest Eli.”

Bacha strode over to his stump where he usually sat. Palko lay beside him on the grass. He drew the Bible near him, and laid his hand on the head of Fido who cuddled close beside. Thus he waited patiently.

“Since Petrik told you what kind of a boy I was, I do not have to retell it again,” began the man presently. His whole appearance did not fit into that beautiful Sunday morning.

“Thus we both grew up, and I can say with a good conscience that Stephen and I loved each other very much. I could never forget that he did not tell our parents how I forsook him in his plight. He convinced me that our parents loved us both. All was well now and might have remained so always, had not mother after her sister’s death brought to us her niece, Eva. She was a small beautiful girl. From the beginning she seemed to be afraid of me, but with Stephen she was at once, friendly, until I once saved him from vicious dogs. From that time she clung always to me. Thus it was as we grew up together, and after we were grown up. You cannot understand more now, therefore I can only tell you this much. When we became young men, there was no more beautiful girl to us in the whole wide world. It seemed to me that her black eyes shone brighter than all the stars, and that such lilies and roses as were on her face did not bloom on any bush. At that time there was a large immigration to America. Many times I wondered how people, just for the sake of mammon, could go so far into the world when in spite of our poverty it was so beautiful and lovely here. To me, the woods and meadows were like a paradise and in my heart all was song—like the heavens; but there is no paradise upon this earth and the heavens are too high. Once when I returned from work—it was already evening—mother and father sat in front of the house in consultation about us children, as they often did. I did not want to disturb them, therefore I sat down not very far away and listened.”

“Do you think, then,” said mother, “that one of the children will have to go to America?”

“You see, my wife, there the people achieve something quicker than we do here. We suffer bravely and yet barely live,” sighed father. He was a good man but already worn out by hard labor.

“‘And which one do you think should?’ mother asked with a sigh.



“That we will leave for them to decide. I think thus: Let one stay at home and take Eva for his wife, so you have some help. Let the other one go to America for a few years, and after he has made some money and God granting that he will return safely, then they may live together. I would not like that after our death they should be separated. It is well for them to be together.’



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“I noticed how mother gave a sigh of relief, but to me it seemed as if someone stuck a dagger into me. They surely expected me to go. Stephen would remain at home and take Eva. That night I did not sleep at home. A similar trouble overtook me as in my childhood, only stronger and much more terrible. Where I gathered strength to return in the morning I do not know. Eva ran to meet me, and as soon as I saw her I told myself that verily, I would never go to America, and Eva must never belong to anyone else but to me. Since that hour I could hardly give a kind look to Stephen though he gave me no reason for anger.

“We had a meadow beyond the swamp. There I went with Eva the next day to turn over the cut grass, and I asked her to be mine. I did not have much luck at first, but since I pleaded so much and promised so much, she finally promised that she would not take anyone else.

“After the affair was settled, Eva bound up a bundle of grass, and looking around I noticed Stephen departing along the pathway. He had heard us without us noticing him.

“The following week we had some work in the city and Stephen said that he would go. Mother tried to prevent him. She had rather I should go because Stephen did not look very well. Really he looked thin and pale, as if after a serious illness or before one. But I insisted that I would not go this time, and father agreed. He had some work for me.

“‘Come with me part of the way,’ said Stephen the following day, after he had taken leave of our parents and Eva. So I went. We took the steep path to the cross above, on top of the hill. There he stopped. We looked at each other.

“‘Mother told me what plans father had for us. One of us must go to America,’ he began. ‘It cannot be you. I saw you and Eva not long ago on the meadow. Father wants one of us to take Eva. Now that she is yours what should I do here any longer? Once before in childhood I was in your way, so that you wanted to get rid of me in that black watery grave. The second time I shall not stand in your way. It would be difficult for mother to part with me. You must realize that, because she has only me. So I want to spare her the leave-taking, but I want to tell the truth to you that you may be satisfied and not begrudge me anything more. I am really leaving everything to you: parents, home, and Eva too. She cannot belong to both. Those were hard moments for me on yonder meadow. If you had to bear what I went through in those moments you could not stand it. Thus it is good that she chose you. To me it was as if I was drowning again, only the swamp into which you threw me this time was much deeper than the one before. Mother said I seem to be ill. Here I shall never get well—over there far away, I can recover sooner. I give you my hand in parting, and you give me yours without any bitterness. Let us part like brothers.’



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"I clasped his hand silently. He took his things, then ran down along the path into the thicket. Bending over beside the cross I tried to see him once more—and I did. He lifted his beautiful face marked with deep sorrow toward the valley where he could see our hut for the last time. Suddenly tears gushed from his eyes. I wanted to make a step forward, wanted to call him back, to leave everything to him, and I go to America. But there was no strength in me. So I let him go for ever. We never saw him again."

Bacha cried aloud again, and Palko with him.

"Uncle, tell me all, to the end," he begged after a while. "Then what about his poor mother? How did you tell her about it?"

"I didn't have to tell her, my boy," said Filina as he calmed down. "He took care of all that. Mother had a distant relative who came to us the third day and brought everything that Stephen should have brought from the city; also a letter from him, wherein he begged our parents not to be angry with him because he was thus leaving for America. In that letter he again made no mention that it was I who drowned him in the depths of sorrow. It was a very beautiful letter. We treasured it as a keepsake, and when mother was dying the poor dear asked me to have it placed in her coffin. I endeavored to make good to her the son she lost. After father passed away, mother blessed me many times for the good care she enjoyed, but it did not bring peace to my heart.

"The distant relative who brought to us Stephen's letter intended to go to America himself. He had already bought the ticket, when circumstances hindered him from going. He complained to Stephen that he could not go, and Stephen asked him to sell the ticket to him. He borrowed some money from him on his part of the inheritance. This we had to repay later, because that ship never reached its goal. It sank in a storm. Thus you see, Palko, that after all, I had drowned my brother. If he had not run away from my presence he might have found another girl and could have lived till today. Thus he died, and his death accuses me before God's face for my selfishness. Verily, God's punishment came upon me soon. I enjoyed my happiness but a short time. From the time that the message reached us about the sinking of the ship, Eva just pined away, and after the death of our son, she died. In her fever, not knowing what she said, she told how she loved Stephen, and I realized that her longing for him made her perish by my side. Well, now they are both gone and I only am here—all alone."

"And your son, where is he?"

"Him also the good Lord took. When his mother died there was no one who could give him the necessary care. He took cold, and in three days he was also with God. Now I have told you everything, my boy. I have confided all to you, but you do not understand."



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“Do not think that I do not understand, Uncle. I know that your heart is sad because of the injustice Stephen suffered because of your envy. I know that you have sinned grievously. Why could you not like the priest, Malina, grasp the cross and the feet of Christ? You understand, in the Spirit, by faith, and receive the gift of God—salvation. There further is this quotation: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,’ and here again it is written, ‘It seems to me I am the one, the most sinful of the sinners, but I believe, I believe, O Lamb of God, that Thou hast died for me also, and I am casting my heart at the foot of Thy cross, that Thy blood pouring over me may cleanse it also.’”

“I see there are very good things written there, Palko. Leave this book with me for some time that I may be able to read it at leisure, and see if also on me the Son of God will have mercy and forgive my grievous sins. Now continue to read where we left off last time.”

“Now I will also bring the song-book and we shall have a song. This will be our Sunday worship.” Bacha brought the book and they had a lovely time in worshiping God. Christ came to them through His Spirit and made the Word of God living, to the young soul who walked with Him continually like Enoch, and also to the one who could say, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant” (Ps. 119: 176).

CHAPTER FIVE

Verily, verily, this quotation is true, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). Bacha Filina and those in his household proved it. It was just as if God’s blessing had moved to them with Palko Lesina. They all had success in everything they undertook. The boy was ready to help everywhere, and set the house in such order as it never had been before.

“You see, the Lord Jesus lives here,” Palko explained sweetly. “He is here, and we don’t know when He comes and where He would like to sit down. We would not have any place to receive Him.”

Stephen taught him how to play the shepherd’s horn and he played on it beautiful Christian songs, so that the mountains fairly resounded. When he played tag or blind man’s buff with the boys he was the most joyful of them. But as soon as he was invited to read from his precious Book, he obeyed at once and sat among them, as once his Lord did among learned old men in Jerusalem. On Petrik especially he had a good influence. Petrik was often self-willed and disobedient, so that Bacha had to punish him.

“Why should you make Uncle Filina cross? Just tell it to the Lord Jesus when the Devil is tempting you, and He will deliver you, He will help you,” advised Palko.



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Ondrejko became more quiet and thoughtful. He liked the talks with Palko very much. He believed everything, even that the Lord Jesus is constantly present. Therefore it is necessary to be always washed and clean and dressed decently, and also that it is necessary to give one's heart to the Lord Jesus when He wants it, and that He takes the heart and cleanses it. Before Palko realized it, the Lord Jesus had one servant more. And thus His Holy Word was fulfilled; "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). No one can find out how it happens; it passes human understanding, how the caterpillar in the dried-up cocoon takes a new life with the arrival of Spring. Before they reached that part in that precious Book where it begins to tell of the sufferings of and, finally, the death of the Lord Jesus, Ondrejko felt in his heart that all happened for him also. He could not quite explain it, and no one expected him to, but he knew it in his heart.

Once, when he went with Palko to his hut, he prayed that the Lord Jesus would forgive him everything and asked Him to come into his heart. Ondrejko thereupon believed without fail that it happened, because it is still true today, "If thou shalt believe, thou shalt see the glory of God." Therefore what he believed, he also had. Ondrejko de Gemer already had suffered much on this earth. He suffered many heart-aches for the want of a father or mother. Many nights he cried about it when no one heard him. Very few realize how much pain a little child may suffer from sorrow and hopelessness from lack of love. Before Ondrejko came to Filina he often used to wonder what would become of him, since he had nobody, although both of his parents were living. Would he always have to live with strange people? A book could be written of the thoughts of that forsaken little soul while he was building castles and bridges, and when people thought he was deeply interested in his play. Fortunately Palko Lesina arrived, and through his daily talk made it plain to his little comrade that Someone good and beautiful lives, and that this beautiful and good One also loved him, little forsaken Ondrejko de Gemer, whom even his father did not love, and He wanted to live with him always, that Ondrejko need not feel forsaken anymore. Now he had Someone to bring his complaints to, and he could confide everything to Him, yea, everything. How beautiful that was! Yes, verily, the Lord Jesus now had one servant more.

Even the herdsmen sighed to Bacha, "How shall we ever get along without Palko Lesina? Ever since the boy has been with us, it seems that the sunrise looks more beautiful and the dew is richer on the ground."

"He is a blessed boy," admitted Filina with a sigh. Oh, how very much he needed this boy! Therefore when, instead of Lesina, a letter came, he was much relieved. Lesina wrote that he would not be able to come back till six weeks later, and asked Bacha to keep Palko with him in the meantime, that he would be useful in every way. He didn't want to let the boy come home alone because it was so far, and he was his only child. When that letter came, the boys jumped for joy, and Fido helped them, but the greatest joy after all was that of Filina himself.

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In the evening of that day, while they were sitting before the hut and Palko was blowing on the horn, suddenly Dr. H. stood before them. With evident pleasure he noticed the strange boy. Fido wagged his bushy tail in a friendly manner because more than once he had received a good bacon-rind from this kind gentleman. Dunaj, stretched out by the feet of his master, lifted his head also, but made no sound. He knew already whom to let alone and whom not. Formerly he would have jumped up and barked, and tested the long coat of the doctor to see if it was made of good material or not. Today, he would rather snap at a fly which paid with her life for daring to buzz around his nose. Well, the dogs did not give it away and the people did not notice that they had a listener, neither then nor even after Palko began to read in his Book, where there was written about the great man who was the captain of the taxgatherers, who had great riches and many friends, but did not have peace or happiness in his heart because he did not know the Lord Jesus. Palko read how the Lord Jesus spoke to him while he sat in the sycamore tree and invited Himself as his guest.

“Uncle Filina,” suddenly Palko interrupted, when he came to the words of the Lord, ‘The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost’—“If you simply do just like Zaccheus; and say to the Lord Jesus, ‘This day is salvation come to this house,’ that would be first, the house of your heart and then the whole hut. Uncle, I beg of you, receive Him today. Zaccheus received Him at once with joy, and how much greater joy did he find afterward when the Lord Jesus forgave him all his sins.”

Surprised, the doctor looked at the strange boy and also at Bacha who arose and without a word entered the hut. Then Petrik noticed the guest; both the boys ran to welcome him and each one wanted to be the first to tell him who Palko was and what he was doing among them. The Doctor liked Palko, like everyone else who came in contact with him. Then the boys found out why the doctor had come that day. He wanted to find a cottage near the hut where he could place one of his patients for a week, whom only quietness and air and sun could heal.

“Palko, do you hear?” whispered Petrik, but so loud that all could hear him. “That cottage of yours is empty, your father will not come for six weeks, and you could live here with us; that would be a good place for the lady.”

“What did you say, boy?” asked the doctor.

Ondrejko began to explain that Lesina had a cottage at the very foot of the “Old Hag’s Rock,” where the path led to town, and that at the present it was empty.

“Do you think, Palko,” asked the doctor, “that your father would agree to lend us the cabin, if it would suit us?”



“Why would he not agree?” said the boy with shining eyes. “Does not the Lord Jesus say, ‘I was sick, and ye visited Me?’ If the cabin suits you I will give you the key. Just let the sick one come.”



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It was too late in the evening to go to see the place; so the boys prepared to go with the doctor early in the morning to the cottage.

This time the doctor did not sleep with the boys in the hayloft, because he spoke a long time with Filina. When Filina went to look at the boys, as it was his custom to do every evening, he stood above them a long time in deep thought, then he carefully covered Ondrejko, and sadly stroked his forehead, gently, as if he was very sorry for the boy. But why? Did he not look very lovely, somewhat browned from the sun, with beautiful roses on his velvet-like cheeks, and his small mouth as red as a poppy-flower. It was plainly noticeable how the mountain air and plain food were strengthening and healing him. His face also betrayed his inner happiness which the Lord Jesus had put in his heart. Why then was Bacha sorry for him?

During the night, a thunderstorm of short duration passed over the mountain. The spring morning broke very beautifully, as it can only after a storm. On the grass hung large pearls, and the leaves of the trees were full of diamonds as the sun shone on them. Everything sang praises to the Creator—every bird, every insect, and fly. The vapor rose like the smoke from a great sacrifice. No wonder then that Palko, leading their expedition, began to sing. Petrik gave a sigh, glanced at the doctor, thinking, “What will he say to that?” Ondrejko joyfully joined him, with his clear voice ringing like a golden bell. And thus it sounded over the mountains:

“Let us give thanks to God our heavenly King;
To Him who loved and kept us, let us sing.
To Him be given honor, glory, praise;
To God, Eternal, let our voices raise.
We pray, 'Be constantly with us this day
And guard us from all evil by the way,
That we may to Thy glory ever live,
And blessings to our neighbors ever give;
And when at last we reach the glory shore
We know that we shall praise Thee evermore.”

The doctor knew that song. He had learned it in his childhood. It made him add his own voice to those clear notes of the children. It may seem strange, but it is true, that nothing will refresh the mind like such an early morning song, sung whole-heartedly on such a beautiful morning, when all nature is joining in praises to the Creator, and at every step man feels His holy, pure, and shining nearness.

“Listen, Palko,” the doctor said after a moment's silence when the song was finished; “do you understand what we have sung?”

“That song?” wondered the boy; “Isn't every word quite clear?”



“Do you think so? Then you explain it to us,” smiled the doctor good-humoredly.

“Explain it? Why, we know well what the good Lord sent us during the past night, and we can walk sound and refreshed through this world, and that He is our King. We also know that He is the everlasting God.”

“Well, that is so, but little children know that much. Go on.”

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“The third verse I like very much. He is already on the earth, always present with us, even now He goes with us, and so will protect us from evil all day long. I am very glad to see at least a small piece of His garment.”

“Where do you see it?” asked Ondrejko.

“Just look how the rays of the sun shine around us. On every drop of dew you see a piece of the rainbow. That is the hem of His garment, and in that soft breeze, His Spirit is touching us. He is very near to us. Verily, He is a good Father. We cannot see Him just because we could not bear the full glory. What a man was Daniel! Yet he almost died when he saw Him. But also this verse is beautiful, ‘That we may to Thy glory ever live.’”

“And how do you do that, you little doctor of theology?” said the doctor.

“I think,” said Palko, “that just what we do today is pleasing to the Lord Jesus; we are going to look for a place for one of His sick sheep, and if you should like the cottage we will gladly take care of the necessary wood and flowers. It is clean already, even the windows are washed.”

“You little wise man, and lo, surely there is that cabin of yours.”

“Yes, yes,” cried the boys. And Dunaj, as if he would confirm it, ran directly to the door.

“Listen, boy, that cottage of yours is just as if it had been built for that patient of mine,” admitted Dr. H., after he had looked the cottage over inside and out. “I shall have some furniture brought here, carpets shall cover the floor, that it be not cold, and your bed and table we will put in the kitchen, that will be for her nurse. Though the windows are small there are three of them, so there will be plenty of sun all day long. And what surroundings! This beautiful valley with the background of green woods and high mountains! The spring is close to the house, and, too bad there is no bench beside it!”

The three boys cried, “We shall ask Bacha, and he will send Stephen.”

“He can make a very beautiful bench,” said Ondrejko. “We can go and watch the sheep for him in the meantime.”

The doctor stroked the boy’s golden hair. “I would like to see you turn in the sheep.”

“But he would not have to do that,” remarked Palko; “for that purpose we have Whiteie and Playwell. They are very wise dogs.”

“Well, now; we shall see what can be done. But the bench must be put here. I would like to taste that water.”



Palko ran for the flowered pitcher and a cup. They all drank their fill. The water was excellent. Then they sat beside the brook, and the doctor pulled cheese and bread out of his pocket. Each of the boys had his own bread—and quite a big piece at that. When Bacha cut the bread, he counted also on the appetites of Dunaj and Fido. The doctor divided the cheese. They ate the cheese and bread, and drank water. It tasted good to all of them.

Dunaj did not move his eyes from Palko, who shared with him faithfully. Greedy Fido ran from one comrade to the other and even sat down in front of the doctor, and not in vain. But when he came near Palko, Dunaj growled at him, which certainly in a dog's language meant, "Are you not ashamed?" So Fido did not try it a second time.



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The doctor saw how the children enjoyed their food and noticed that Ondrejko also ate with a good appetite. He suddenly began to say, "Palko, you said that you would carry wood to the cottage. That will not be necessary. I will have a cord of wood brought and cut, but if you would take care of bringing the flowers that would be very good. The lady is to drink whey. As long as she is weak you could also bring that to her every morning. As soon as she is strong enough she will have to go to the sheepfold herself, and ask for it at the hut. Now, what do you say? Will you help me so that she will get better soon?"

They all heartily agreed that they would do it.

"I will tell you what is the matter with her. For a long time she made day out of night, but she could not change the day into night. Thus she lacked many nights' rest. Now she would like to sleep, but she cannot! She is a sad, unhappy person, and has lived to see much sorrow. It will be well if you help me to cheer her up; then she will recover sooner."

"And does the lady understand Slovak?" fearlessly asked Palko. The doctor smote his forehead.

"You are a wise little fellow, boy. I didn't think of that. But wait! I overheard when she bought oranges, she spoke in Czech. Then you will be able to understand each other. Do you want to help me, boys?"

"We would like to very much," said Ondrejko.

"If Bacha will permit us," added Petrik. Palko thought that nothing would hinder him as long as he was there.

In good spirits the boys returned to the sheepcote. The doctor left them at the "Old Hag's Rock." They took from him a closely-written note for Bacha Filina, who readily enough agreed to everything. He even sent Stephen to build the bench, and also gave permission to the boys to carry whey and flowers to the sick lady.

CHAPTER SIX

Again it was Sunday. That day no one from the hut went to church. Very early in the morning they read a part of the Word of God, sang a song, prayed, and everybody went his way. Filina had an invitation from the manager of the Gemer estate. He had to go to the castle, and the boys said they would go to Palko's cottage, not to enter, because the doctor had the key, but to see if the wood had been already brought and where the draymen had stacked it. But who can describe their surprise when they reached the cottage. They saw all the windows open and on the kitchen-table sat a large white cat. The fur around her head looked like a cap. Her eyes were blue and round like those of



an owl. Her long broad tail hung out of the window. Around her neck she had a band decorated with small pearls, and a small gilt bell was hanging from it. When they saw her they were glad they had not brought the dogs along. Fido went with his master and Dunaj was somewhere roaming in the woods.

“Someone must live here already,” remarked the surprised Ondrejko.



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“Really, so it is. The cat would not be sitting there by herself,” added Palko. They walked carefully around the cottage. In the yard they found the wood already cut and stacked. Then they took counsel together. If the ladies had already come, they must find flowers for them. The boys calculated that by the time they would return, the new inhabitants of the cottage would be up.

When they returned, in about an hour, each one had a large bouquet of flowers and foliage. Palko arranged them for all three. He was already a master in that work. Ondrejko carried his bouquet before him with both hands, so that he could hardly see the path in front. Petrik carried his bouquet over his shoulder. He was the first to notice that the door was open and smoke was coming from the chimney.

The next moment an elderly lady with a black dress and white cap stepped into the doorway. Her otherwise good-looking face bore evidence of much care, and she looked distressed, seeming to say, “What shall I do now?”

“She certainly needs something,” said Palko, as the boys ran toward the cottage.

To their greeting, the lady answered in the Czech language. Her kind face brightened as she looked at the boys and their large bouquets.

“Are you the nurse of the sick lady?” Palko began. “We promised the doctor that we would bring flowers, so we have brought them now. They are wilted, but if you put them in the brook they will freshen up.”

“Thank you very kindly. My lady will be glad.”

Taking the flowers from the boys, the lady placed their ends in the brook.

“Since you are not familiar here, perhaps you will need something that you cannot find in the woods,” Palko said thoughtfully. “We shall be glad to serve you; just let us know.”

“I shall be very thankful, boys, if you will help me. We have brought everything except salt and bread, which we do not have, because the bag in which the eatables were, must have been left in the coach. We came late last night instead of this morning, so the doctor did not accompany us, and my surroundings are still strange.”

“We will bring some salt and bread. Our hut is near by,” Petrik cried zealously. “Also the whey will be ready. Come on, Ondrejko.”

“Are they to bring us milk and bread from the hut?” inquired the lady.

“That will be from us,” Ondrejko assured her. “But we have to go at once so that we can return soon.”



“I will stay with you,” decided Palko, “because the cottage belongs to my father. Although you may be used to having things arranged differently, I may be able to show you where you can put one thing and another.”

“So this is your cottage? Then you can advise me where to put everything that we have brought along. What shall we call you?”

“Palko Lesina. The other boy is Petrik Filina, and the third one is Ondrejko de Gemer.”



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“What is his name?” asked the lady, startled.

“De Gerner. The sheepfolds belong to his father. The doctor sent Ondrejko to Bacha Filina because he was weak. Here he thrives well. From the time that he has lived as we live and not like a gentleman, he has been getting well and strong. And how about your lady; could she sleep last night?”

“Oh, my poor lady!” sobbed the elderly woman. “If she only knew. I don’t know whether she slept in the night, but now she sleeps as she has not slept for a long time. Come, Palko, enter softly.”

It was good that there was a hall between the bedroom and the kitchen, for thus the sleeper was not disturbed. Palko proved to be a very good helper. From the kitchen which looked like a county fair, they carried away trunks, bags, coverings, raincoats, and towels, into the clean storage room, which the lady had not yet discovered. Some things they laid on the shelves which Lesina had already put up, and others were hung on nails on the wall. One of the trunks, the lady emptied. In it were the china and all the kitchen utensils. These Palko carried at once to the new kitchen cupboard. Some things he hung up near the stove. One of the table-cloths he spread over the table. After he had found the broom which his father had made from the branches that he had cut and brought, he swept the kitchen, for with the carrying in of so many things, much dirt had accumulated. He ran with the pitcher for water, and placing one of the bouquets in it, set it on the covered table. Just as he had finished, his comrades came running, hot and perspiring. Ondrejko carried the crock with a narrow neck, completely covered with braided straw, and the covered can of milk. Petrik carried quite a heavy bundle on his back.

When the nurse returned from the storeroom she could hardly believe her eyes. On the table on a wooden plate lay the black-bread, salt was in a new wooden bowl, cheese in a dish, on a plate there was fresh golden butter, and in a can, milk. The fire that had gone out in the kitchen stove, was burning brightly now. The boys sat on the bench by the window, Palko standing in front of them.

“Are you already here, my children?” asked the nurse; “and what have you brought?”

“Bread and salt, as you have asked. The whey is in the crock. The milk we brought for you, because you are not sick,” explained Petrik.

Ondrejko added, “It may be that your lady will not want to drink the whey today, and that you will make coffee instead, for yourself.”

“For you,” Petrik added, “there is also butter and cheese. Palko is able to do this because some day all this around here will be his.”



The boys were surprised when the eyes of the nurse suddenly filled with tears. She wiped them off and kissed the small messengers.

“You are right, Ondrejko, today I will fix coffee, and you all will take breakfast with me. In the meantime perhaps my lady will be up.”



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Before the coffee was finished, the boys found out that the nurse's name was Moravec and that they could call her Aunty; that she was born in the mountains of northern Bohemia in just such a cottage as this. She went to America with her parents, and was married there, but when her husband died, and not having her own daughter any more, she had served this lady ten years, and took care of her like her own child. Before the boys realized it, each had in front of him a beautiful cup with a golden edge, full of fragrant coffee, and a big piece of Bohemian bun. After all, they had found the seemingly lost bag, and really, it would have been a pity if the good Bohemian buns had been lost!

Just as their breakfast was finished, the sound of a silver bell was heard from the room. Aunty ran in quickly, like a young girl.

"Perhaps it is time for us to go," advised Petrik. Ondrejko looked at Palko to see what he would say. He had succeeded in attracting the beautiful cat to him. She sat beside him on the bench, and with her front paws, like a squirrel, took the dipped bun from him. Now she was even sitting on his knees and was purring.

"We cannot leave these dishes thus, when they were dirtied by us. She has no help here," said Palko.

So he ran with a tin bucket for water, and Petrik ran to bring wood. In the meantime Ondrejko remained alone in the kitchen, when the doors of the bedroom opened. At first he heard the voice of Aunty—and then another. The blood rushed to his head, the voice was so clear and so beautiful. Oh, such mysterious recollections, as from times so distant, very distant, as if from the secrets of long past remembrances! What they said he did not understand. The cat wriggled out of his hands, lifted its long tail and jumped to the door. The door was not fully closed and she opened it with one paw and disappeared before the eyes of the surprised boy. He was not even aware of it. He was so fully taken up with the voice that he did not hear any more. The boys' coming disturbed and awakened him.

Palko washed the dishes, Petrik dried them; they put everything away, and disappeared as quietly as they could.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Seven days passed. How short! but sometimes how long seven days may be! How much one can live through, experience, and suffer! Time passes; you awaken, wipe your eyes, and wonder if it is true that it has passed already.

Even thus Ondrejko de Gemer, wandering through the woods, wondered if all was true that had passed in the last seven days, or if it was merely a dream. Oh, it was no



dream, really. She came, the sick lady. Truly, she lived in Palko's cottage and though Ondrejko had carried the whey there already three times he had not seen her. Aunty always said that she was asleep, and must sleep very much. Ah, why did she always sleep just when he came? She had spoken already to Petrik, and gave him a box full of candy. Palko had already read to her from his Book, and had told her that she was almost as beautiful as his mother at home; Ondrejko, alone, had not seen her yet.



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How much he had prayed already, especially that morning, that she might not be asleep again when he went there, that he also might welcome her to those woods and mountains. Formerly Ondrejko didn't think of it, but he did now, when the herdsman, especially Stephen, again and again reminded him that these sheepfolds were his father's, and therefore his also, and that he had a rightful claim to everything. When they gave him cheese and butter for the lady, they gave him plenty, saying, "Just take it; it is yours." This thought seemed to appeal to him—all is ours. If Palko could say "our cottage," why could not Ondrejko say, "our sheepfolds, our land, and our woods? Oh, then she came to us though she lived in the cottage of Palko. When she gets stronger she will come to us to drink whey from our sheep."

Lost in his meditation, the boy did not realize that he had come to the parting of the paths, one of which turned above to the "Old Hag's Rock," and the other, below to the cottage in the valley. The weather was again so clear that from the green clearings in the woods you could hear the great bells of the rams and the little ones of the sheep.

"There is the ringing of the bells of our sheep," smiled the happy Ondrejko. He ran quickly to the bench, intending to sit upon it and rest, but he did not do so for it was occupied by someone like one of the fairies from the woods of which Stephen often told him, that on St. John's Night came out of the "Old Hag's Rock" and danced on the meadows. None of them could be more beautiful than the lady sitting on the bench, with its firm back covered with a flowery blanket; a similar cushion lay on the arm-rest, and on the cushion rested a white arm. On the small narrow palm a forehead was resting, and beautiful dark-gray eyes looked far away above the mountains.

The boy set down the crock and folded his arms.

Thus he looked at the lily-white face, and the lips which seemed as if the Lord God had made just for song. And again his heart felt as if someone carried him far, far away, into the land of remembrances. It is too bad that the lady, covered with a light yellow Cashmere shawl does not look at the boy. Is he not also good-looking? and how beautiful! On Saturday the doctor sent him a new suit, almost the same kind as Palko had, but the shirt was embroidered with flowers, with broad sleeves, narrow pants, decorated sandals, a round hat with bands, and a small embroidered bag. Petrik also received a new suit, the kind that he used to wear. Ondrejko was very glad that now he would be altogether like his comrades. When they were all three in the church yesterday, the people looked around at them.

If the lady would only look this way! Surely she never saw such a beautiful little Slovak! But she did not look. At last, the boy came to himself. Oh, surely, it must be she!—surely, herself! Who else would be sitting on his bench? And she had that beautiful cat beside her. Here she was, already up, and he was just bringing her breakfast. He was late! Oh, he knew it was necessary for the whey to be warm. When, then, will she eat her breakfast?



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He took courage and greeted her. The lady aroused herself, opened her big eyes, and in surprise looked at the boy timidly drawing near.

“Good morning,” greeted Ondrejko. “I am bringing you the whey, but surely too late. However, I have hurried quite a bit, therefore please do not be angry at me.”

“Do you bring me my breakfast?” the lady asked astonished. She arose and took the heavy crock out the hand of the boy. “It must be very heavy for you.”

“It was not,” said Ondrejko, more at ease, as he fastened his beautiful eyes on the lady’s face. Oh, how happy he was that finally he too could see her, and that she talked with him and even took him by the hand.

“And what is your name?”

“Ondrejko,” he replied.

“And do you live here at these sheepfolds?”

“Yes,” said he, “I live with Bacha Filina. I like it very much.”

The lady walked with the boy and he carried the crock. She was small in stature, but every movement reminded one of a princess.

“Why did not Petrik or Palko bring this whey?” she asked, to start a conversation with Ondrejko.

“We change about,” said he.

“Change about? But I have never seen you before.”

“I have carried the whey already three times, but you have always been asleep,” said Ondrejko.

“So, I have always been asleep during your visits? Therefore I will not leave you quickly today. You must rest with us. Look, Aunty is already waiting.” The lady stopped and almost joyfully handed the crock to Aunty Moravec.

“Look who brought the whey for us today, but you are already acquainted. We have seen each other for the first time now! Please prepare a good breakfast for my guest.” The hands of Aunty shook somewhat when she received the crock, and she hastened to heat the whey at once.

Who could have told Ondrejko how the Lord Jesus would answer his prayer? Petrik saw the lady only in the kitchen, but she took him into her room. How beautifully she



had things arranged there! A plush sofa and arm-chair, and many such things as they had in the castle de Gerner were in the room. He was permitted to sit with her on the sofa and look over a large book with photographs, all of beautiful lands and cities. She pointed them out and named them.

“And you have been in all these places?” he dared to ask.

A sad expression clouded her face. “Yes, I have, Ondrejko, but now I have only one wish—to remain forever in these mountains and never again have to look at that evil, deceitful world outside.”

After a while Auntie brought breakfast. Ondrejko had to sit down at the beautifully-covered table. He was used to praying before eating in the hut, so he did it now also, and in the joy which overflowed his heart, he added, “I thank Thee, dear Lord Jesus, that You have so kindly answered me.”



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The lady had already lifted the cup to her lips, but she set it down again, and as if ashamed, bowed her head too. A tear appeared on her golden eyelashes. When the boy had finished eating, she asked him what he had asked Jesus Christ for. He confessed how much he had desired to see her, and that he almost envied his comrades. Then he asked permission to look also into the other book which lay on a small table. It was full of photographs of people. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye, because about ten of them were pictures of herself, but she was dressed in all kinds of strange costumes. In one of the pictures she had on a loose dress like a cloak and a crown on her head. Under the picture was printed, "Mary Slavkovsky as Marie Stuart." The boy rested his curly head on his small palms, and thought.

"Why do you look so much at that picture?" said the lady, stroking his golden curls.

"Is this really you in all these pictures? Have you perhaps played in a theatre?" said Ondrejko.

She was astonished. "What do you know about theatres? Have you perhaps been in one of them?"

"No," he shook his head. "That could not be possible. I have not been." The boy's face saddened.

"What do you mean, Ondrejko?" said the lady, drawing him nearer to her.

"Oh, my mother also is pictured in photographs, but I shall never see her again."

"Your mother?" said she, wonderingly. "Is she not a country woman?"

"Oh, no!" The eyes of the boy glowed. "She is a famous singer, but I shall not see her again, because she has forgotten me long ago—and so I have nobody to look after me, no mother, no father, although I was adjudged to him. I used to be very sad about it, but since Palko came to us, and I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and received Him in my heart, I am no more just a forsaken orphan, because He loves me, and He it with me." The boy stopped because the lady became very pale, and the arm with which she had caressed him, fell down and a deep sigh escaped her lips.

"Aunty!" cried the scared boy, and not in vain. Aunty Moravec ran into the room. She washed the deathly-pale face of the lady with some kind of fine-smelling water. She placed a cushion under her head and put her feet on the sofa. After a while, the lady began to breathe better again. Aunty took the boy by the hand and led him to the kitchen. At his anxious questioning she told him only that the lady was still very weak and must rest. Ondrejko repeated to her what they had been speaking about together. At hearing this, Aunty sighed and caressed him, and said, "It is all in vain. It had to



come and the sooner the better.” She did not hinder Ondrejko from going home, but did not allow him to carry the crock.

“Send Palko, in the afternoon. He promised to take the lady to you. From tomorrow on, she is to come to your sheepfold to drink the whey. The doctor ordered that.”



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“But is she not sick?” the boy said, showing some anxiety.

“She is not sick any more, only weak, and this weakness she must overcome by walking,” responded Aunty.

In this world there is no sweetness without bitterness. If something strange had not happened, that boy would have returned home very proud and happy. Thus Bacha Filina found him not far away, all in tears, and when he took him into his strong arms like a little lamb, the boy threw both arms around his neck and told him everything.

“Bacha, I have surely said something bad, though I really don’t know what, and she became very sad about it,” cried Ondrejko.

“Do not cry,” the man comforted him. “You said only what the Lord God put in your mouth. Anyway, when the lady comes in the afternoon, all will be well again.”

With these words, the Bacha carried the tired boy to his wooden hut, laid him on the bed, and sat beside him. He stroked his arm and forehead, and before long he had put his little charge to sleep. Then he looked at him once more, sadly, and left. About half-an-hour later the herdsmen found him dressed in his Sunday suit going in the direction of the “Old Hag’s Rock.” They thought he was going to town, and wondered why, because he had been there only yesterday.

At the same time, bitter crying sounded in Palko’s cottage, which Aunty Moravec could in no way silence. There the weeping lady said, “He was here; he, my beautiful golden-headed child, and I did not know him. The heavy crock he brought to me himself. He wanted to see me, but did not recognize me. How could he, when I myself did not know him? That his own mother forgot him long ago is not true. All the glory of the world could not replace my lost treasure. Oh, my father, my father! If you only knew what became of your daughter! You taught her to fold her hands in prayer, but she forgot everything—even that. Unfortunate, betrayed wife, craven mother! If you only knew how your warnings have been literally fulfilled!”

The lady cried bitterly. There was no comfort for her. Usually there is none for the son or daughter who has trampled the good advice of his parents under his feet and after that has had to suffer everything which has been foretold them.

Finally Aunty went out. She heard steps in the hall. After a while she returned asking if Bacha Filina might enter, that he would like to speak of something important with the lady.

In a moment Bacha was in the room. “I have come, Madame Slavkovsky, to talk with you,” he began seriously. “It is time to make an end to the sin, which for years you have already committed as to my little charge. The doctor told me that you are his mother,



and my lord is his father. Now is this tender, sensitive child to grow up as somebody said: "Whether father or mother, whether sister or brother, nobody comes to welcome me'?" The man spoke seriously.



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The lady stretched out her hands towards him imploringly. “What can I do? They took him away from me and adjudged him to De Gerner. My lawyer did everything that he could, but in vain.”

“But would you love him, would you like to take care of him as it behooves a decent mother, if my lord would return him to you?”

“Why would I not! I deserve that you ask me that. Whether you believe me or not, Bacha Filina, I would give everything if I could only get him back again. I see he loves me, unworthy though I am.”

“Yes, he loves you as only forsaken children know how to do. Therefore I came to you, lady—today or never God gives you an opportunity to get your treasure back again. Your former husband fell deeply into debt. His administrator received the order to sell the estate of the De Gerner family. If you have enough money—the doctor told me that you have—buy it out of the first hands before the Jews get hold of it. When your lawyer writes him that you will have the estate turned over to the boy, if Lord de Gerner will give it to you in black and white, he will be glad to do so, I know, and will give you the boy. He always boasted that the ‘De Gerner’ estate shall belong to Ondrejko, his first-born. Everybody in the neighborhood knows about it. It would not be such a great shame on the family, that they had to sell the family castle, if, after all, the property remained in his son’s hands. It is a beautiful estate, and it is wisely managed. It will bring a much larger income later on, than it does today. Even if you had to borrow some money to purchase it, it would be worthwhile to do so.”

“Oh, Bacha Filina!” The lady took the man’s hard right hand into her small ones. “How can I thank you enough for this good and beautiful advice? I don’t know if my ready money will suffice, but I have beautiful jewelry, and when I sell that, we will have something to start with at least. I am not altogether so unfamiliar with managing as you may think; I am the daughter of a farmer. But who will buy this for me? My lawyer is not here.”

“Leave Ondrejko with the doctor. Ride to the administrator’s office and buy the estate yourself. He has orders to sell it. Do not begin to deal about the boy before the estate is yours. At least, that is what I think. But today let Ondrejko know that you are his mother, that the boy may not suffer longer. Come to us in the afternoon. I will send Palko for you.”

Filina arose. “I would not have come to you while you are still weak, but we must hurry with the buying, and Ondrejko cared so much that he shook all over, thinking that surely he had said something bad to you so that you fainted. The boy is very tender. He needs not only strengthening with me—that is only for the body—but his heart needs a mother. The God in the heavens has become his Father. Good-bye, then.”

“Bacha Filina,” the lady stopped the man. “Do you know why I parted with De Gemer? Or do you think that because I am a singer, I have left him like an unfaithful wife?”



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"The doctor told me that my lord had wronged you. I do not ask more. Everyone of us has enough of his own sins. God sees us and knows us. Do not judge that ye be not judged." The deep voice of Filina sounded almost gentle. He shook her hand and left.

* * * * *

"Uncle Filina! Did you already return from the city?" sounded a voice from the clearing where he went to look at the flock. Palko ran to meet him. In his hand he carried a basket full of beautiful mushrooms.

"I was not in the city, Palko; but what are you doing here?" Filina was cheered with Palko's presence and sat down on an old log overgrown with moss. The boy joyfully threw himself down on the deep mossy cushions.

"I carried a letter to Stephen which the forester's boy brought for him from his mother. It cheered him very much. She had been sick, but now she writes to him herself. Praise the Lord!"

"I am very glad of that; she is a good woman. And the son which has no mother has no home anywhere," said Filina. "Where did you find these mushrooms?"

"They are beautiful, aren't they? Oh, I just happened to see them. Joe said he would cook the stew for supper. They will fit in well."

"Yes, they will. Pick out the best ones, and take them to the ladies this afternoon, in your cabin. Perhaps they will like them."

"Shall I really go for the lady? Will it not be too far for her yet?" thoughtfully asked the boy.

"I think not, but you must go slowly."

"But she is still so weak, Uncle."

"I know it; I have just left her."

"Is that so? You saw her? And you just came from there? Did you stop there on the way from town?"

Bacha was silent for a moment as if deciding something. Then he fastened his eagle eyes on the boy's face. "Palko, I am going to tell you something. God grant that you may help me in a very difficult thing."

"I would love to, Uncle. Just tell me."



“The master of these sheepfolds is Ondrejko’s father. You know that; do you not?”

“Yes, I know it.”

“And the beautiful lady there, is his mother.”

“What did you say!” Palko jumped up at once and sat down again. “But how is it that they are not together, and that Ondrejko is not with them?”

“They had parted, and he took another wife many years ago.”

“And the Lord Jesus permitted that? It seems to me that He said, ‘It should not be so.’”

“You know, Palko, the world does many things that the Lord God forbids—even this. I know it is a sin, but it is already that way and it cannot be changed now. The lady, before De Gerner took her, was a famous singer in America. She must have been very beautiful because she is still so today. He brought her to Europe to his family. They were displeased with him because the lady was not of noble birth. They did not treat her well,

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and he did not stand by her as would have been his duty. Because as far as I know him, he is not the man to guard his wife against the whole world. It may also be that he has been sorry already, that he had shut himself out of the world because of her, while on the other hand, many noble ladies were offered him. How it was among themselves, I do not know. I only know that once, when he was not at home, she took the boy and fled away. Then they lived in Budapest. She did not know how to make a living any other way—so she gave the boy into the care of strange people, and went again to the theatre. Then came the law suit. He charged her with leaving him, and she did not want to return to him, so the court separated them. They adjudged the boy to his father, and so he came to us. While Ondrejko was with those people, where she cared for him, they told him all good things about her, but when he came to where his father put him you can imagine that they did not speak well of her. So the poor boy has heard all kinds of stories about his mother, and yet he longs for her, and so I visited the lady today. I wanted to advise her how she could take the boy herself and acknowledge him today. Therefore I tell you, Palko, everything, that you may tell Ondrejko who it is that is coming to us today.”

There was silence in the mountains. Bacha looked at the boy deep in thought. “Will you tell him, Palko?”

“Yes, Uncle. But I must first ask the Lord Jesus for help, for that is not a small thing. It is good that Ondrejko is already God’s lamb. He will even help his mother to find the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, we will do that part. But, Uncle Filina, when will you tell me that you have received Him?—that you are His?” The question from the boy, put with so much loving concern, brought the tears into the man’s eyes.

“I do not know myself, what to tell you, my boy. It is all so strange to me. From the time that I took the Lord Jesus, like Zaccheus, it seems to me there is no more of that great burden that always oppressed me. Sometimes it seems to me as if the Son of God was actually with me, and when I read the Bible it seems as though He is living in my heart and opens my eyes. Now I don’t know, my boy, what more can I do.”

“Oh, Uncle,” Palko began to jump for joy. “Really, you have already accepted Him. He came and took away your load, and threw it behind God’s back.”

“What do you say, boy?” said the surprised man. “Is that all?”

“Yes, that is all. We are only to believe Him. You know well how He said, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Don’t you believe He means what He says?”



“I do believe, my boy, and already believe, and even understand all like Zaccheus. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to seek even me, the lost sinner, and I let Him find me.”

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When the next moment they kneeled before God, the man and the boy, there was great joy in heaven that again a sinner had received the Lord Jesus Christ. Because to those who receive Him, to them gave He power to be the sons of God. Thus the angels wrote His name in the Lamb's book of Life. They wrote that Peter Filina believed, and that Jesus of Nazareth took his heavy burden of sin upon His cross, there suffered for him the penalty of death, and thus it was that Filina was forgiven all, and received the Son of God for ever and ever. So for the first time Filina prayed with his whole heart to God as his Father. He thanked the Lamb of God for His death, and thanked Him also for Palko whom He had sent to those mountains.

When they were done, the boy sighed deeply. Said he, "Since I am finished with you, I don't have to ask the Lord Jesus any more for you, but can ask so much better for Ondrejko's mother. Surely He will grant to me that she will soon accept Him too."

They went together a little way, but Bacha turned to the clearings and Palko ran back again to the hut at the sheepfold. On the way, he sang until the echo rang everywhere.

There was much stirring in the hut that afternoon. The boys cleaned and arranged everything so that no particle of dust could be found anywhere. They brought flowers to Ondrejko that he might braid a chain of them. It was a very long one. Bacha himself afterwards draped it over the door.

"Well, it is time for me to go," announced Palko. "Ondrejko, come with me part of the way. I saw some nice flowers not far away and you can pick them. These we will place on the table afterwards."

"Verily it is time that you go," agreed Bacha, "and go together."

Ondrejko obeyed very gladly. Merrily the boys went into the woods and soon found the flowers they wanted.

"Let us sit down a while," said Palko when they had picked the flowers and placed them in the nearby spring. "I would like to tell you something. Do you remember anything about your mother?"

"About my mother?" said the surprised Ondrejko. That kind of question he did not expect. "I remember but a little, that she was very beautiful, and had a very fine voice."

"And if she suddenly came for you, would you be glad?"

"For me?" and the boy's beautiful eyes opened wide. "She cannot come for me any more, because I do not belong to her, but to father."

"And what did the lady where you lived formerly tell you about her?"



“That she left father and me because she loved the theatre more than us, and because sometimes the people hitched themselves to wagons instead of horses, and gave her beautiful jewels.”

“And you believed it?” retorted Palko, with clouded face.

“No, I did not believe it, because I loved her, loved her very much.”



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“You are right; don’t you believe it. Bacha Filina told me that she went away because your father’s family did not like her because she was not of noble birth as themselves. But she went to the theatre only because she could not make her living otherwise. Your father brought her from a very great distance to which she could not return. What could she do? What the theatre is, I do not know. Only that she sang there beautifully. Perhaps that would not have been so bad if she had known the Lord Jesus as we know Him. He would surely have advised and helped her otherwise, and if that which she did was wrong, when she once knows Jesus and asks Him to forgive her, He will do so. But we must tell her about Him, you and I.”

“We? But she is far away, very far.”

“Do not believe it, Ondrejko. The Lord Jesus sent her back as far as here. The lady at our cottage—that is she.”

“You say that is she?” Ondrejko jumped up.

“Yes, yes; that is she.”

“She was just like her, and had the same kind of a voice! And so it aroused in my heart remembrances of long ago when she spoke and when I looked at her. It seems to me I recognized her, but she didn’t know me,” sadly sighed the boy, and his eyes filled with tears.

“But how could she have recognized you in those farmer’s clothes? We too, Petrik and I, hardly recognized you.”

“Do you think so?” Ondrejko calmed down. “Palko, take me to her; she doesn’t know that I am her Andreas. She doesn’t know me.”

“She knows already. Uncle Filina was there. He told her the truth.”

“Oh, then take me with you, because I have made her very sad—till she almost died.”

“I don’t care. Come, then. Surely the Lord Jesus wants it so.”

* * * * *

No matter how long Ondrejko Gemersky lives he will never be able to forget how it was when the doors in the cottage opened and a beautiful lady in a light blue dress, the color of forget-me-nots, stepped out. In her hands she carried a broad hat, but she dropped it with a cry, “My Ondrejko!” as she ran toward them. He flew like an arrow to meet her.

“Mother, my mother!”—and already held her around the neck. She, kneeling, hugged him to her breast. They both cried, and Palko with them.



“Oh, mother, my mother, how I love you! Verily I am yours, and surely you will keep me now,” begged Ondrejko with tears. He stroked the beautiful face and forehead of the lady.

“Yes, you are mine.” She jumped up. “I will not give you up any more to anyone, anyone in the world. But no, come, my son, we have to go to Bacha Filina. He will take care of it, that no one can take you away from me.”

Surely Ondrejko will never forget this, nor how they walked together to the sheepcote, how well they were received there, what a good time they had that afternoon and evening, because Ondrejko’s mother slept together with Aunty Moravec in his hut. Bacha counted on that. He took counsel with Aunty and sent Stephen to the cottage to bring whatever was necessary for the lady, especially sheets, covers, *etc.* Thus Ondrejko sat beside his mother in the evening when Joe roasted the lamb over the fire, and Petrik helped Aunty to cook soup in the pot.

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Bacha told them about the life at the sheepcotes, and many interesting things from his experiences with the flocks. Then they had supper together, there in the open. Then they sang the evening song, prayed, and Palko read from his Book. At Filina's request he read the 15th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, about a good shepherd, about a woman who lost her coin, and about a prodigal son who had a good father, but nevertheless ran away from him, and how badly he fared in the world until he returned to his father. During the reading Palko made many beautiful remarks, as he usually did. They all loved to hear him. When he closed, only the fire crackled, and the stars in the heavens were sparkling like a multitude of eyes. The moon lit up the tops of the mountains and woods. Often one of the sheep rang its bell in the fold.

Bacha suddenly lifted up his bowed head, and spoke with a voice such as they had never heard before: "That lost and found sheep am I, my children. The gracious Lord God forgave all my sins. The Lord Jesus sought and found me, and I have surrendered myself to Him altogether, including our huts. Let us pray."

He took his hat off, folded his hands, and prayed thus, "Our Father," in such a manner, that nobody had ever heard such a prayer before. Never will Ondrejko de Gemer forget that moment, but I think that none of the others present there will ever be able to forget it either.

When in the huts everything quieted down—not even the dogs barked that night—Bacha, as his custom was, walked all around to see if there was any danger anywhere, before he betook himself to rest. He walked also around the wooden hut and suddenly stopped. There on Ondrejko's little bench, under the window, wrapped up in a shawl, Madame Slavkovsky sat in the moonlight. Her hands were twined around her knees, and she was thoughtfully looking into the beautiful starry night. He coughed, that she might not be startled. She turned her head, and with a motion indicated her wish that he should take a place beside her. He obeyed.

"You said, Bacha Filina, that that lost and found sheep was you," she began in her sweet, sad voice. "That woman who lost that coin is also I. More than that even, I am the prodigal daughter."

"What do you mean by that, lady?" asked Filina seriously.

"When Palko explained how good that father was and how the naughty boy left him, I thought that I did just that to my good dear father; and therefore, from that time on, what sad experiences I have had!" She sighed deeply.

"Tell me all about it. I am an old man and could be your father. I shall understand you."

"Yes, I will tell you everything, because if you had not saved my poor child he would not have had anybody. Did you not care for him like a father?"



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“We lived on a beautiful farm in America,” she went on. “My grandfather and grandmother came from Bohemia as a young couple. They bought a small farm and worked diligently, and God blessed them. They were good people, who trusted in God. They had one son and a daughter. Their son wanted to study, so they sent him to school. As he did not work on the farm they had to take a helper, and he also came from the old country. They took a liking for him at once because he fitted in so well in the family. Once when grandfather was so seriously ill that he thought he would die, he called his helper and asked him, since he was single and without relatives in the land, if he would marry his daughter. He would be more easy if he knew in whose hands he had left his daughter and wife. That the daughter liked the good-looking and good-hearted young man, they knew well. But the young man asked for some time to think it over, and then told their daughter his history from the old country. What it all was I don’t know, and when she, in spite of it all, was willing to take him, he acceded to my grandfather’s wish, and none of them were ever sorry for it. My father was very kind to my mother. She had no reason to be sorry that she had married him. Grandfather recovered from his illness. For many years after that he worked together with his son-in-law and everything went well, so that with his help the small farm became a large one. My recollections are only of the big farm. I was their only child. My uncle Vojta was at that time a professor in New York, was married, and advised my parents to send me to him there, that I might go to school and become a lady. Grandfather approved of this; thus I was at home only in the summer, and over the winter at Uncle’s in school till I was really trained. My Uncle noticed that I had a talent for singing, and the teachers confirmed it. Without the knowledge of my home folks he sent me to learn to sing. I loved to sing, but loved still more the praise showered upon me by the audiences at the school-concerts.

“In the meantime, so great a change transpired in my home that I hardly recognized it when they called me to grandfather’s deathbed. Our farm was not far from the mountains. In those mountains was a mission conference for several weeks. Our whole family used to go to listen to those speakers who held religious lectures there—and all of them, as it was well-known about there, turned to Christ. I shall never forget how happy grandfather died, how he blessed us all, and with what fortitude grandmother bore her loss. For the first time I was really glad to be able to run away from my dear parents to my Uncle’s. My beloved ones started a family altar at home. They sang songs to the honor of the Lamb who, they claimed, had delivered them from their sins. Well, I did not like to sing those songs. It seemed to me as if even the walls of our house would fall down on me.



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“My splendid, kind father let me go sadly. I had half-a-year more school to complete, and one more examination. My dear parents rejoiced that then I would be wholly their’s, because they had only me, and for me they worked and saved. My Uncle agreed with me in everything. Like me, he did not want to enter the narrow path which leads to glory. With the conclusion of the school-year, my study of singing also ended, and I returned home with the intention of persuading my parents to permit me to enter the opera—that means, to become a singer. More than half-a-year I fought at home with pleas and tears, but in vain. My father was wonderfully patient and kind to me. Mother and grandmother were often not so patient, but, like these grand mountains, they would not move, nor could anyone move my father to break his word that he would never give me permission to go. Well, what he did not give me, I took myself.”

“What did you do?” compassionately asked Bacha. The lady broke out crying.

“I left home, leaving a letter behind saying that I loved the world, in which and for which, I wanted to live, and I loved the glory of the world and did not want to bury myself on the farm. I ran away to my Uncle’s. My dear father came at once for me. He begged and pled, but I didn’t want to go back with him, and did not do so.

“‘When you find out that the world is as vain as soap-bubbles, and your heart is full of disillusionment, ready to despair, then remember that you have a father and a home to return to,’ said father. ‘Until that time you cannot count yourself one of us. We are standing on two different paths: the one we go on is narrow and leads high; the other, which you have chosen, is broad and will lead you from the heights to a deep abyss. Our prayers will surround you always like a fiery wall. I know that you will have to suffer much evil and much sorrow, but our prayers will prevent you from sinning as grievously as you will see others do around you.’

“Those were his last words. Oh, Bacha Filina, I went over that broad path. In a short time I was a famous singer. The people carried me on their arms. Though I was a simple farmer’s daughter, because of the courses of the good schools which I had attended, the doors of high society opened to me, and I, like the prodigal, very soon forgot my parents, and especially my good father. Then Lord Gerner came into my life, and I married him, being ready to leave everything for him, even my fame. He promised me that even when I was his wife, he would agree to my keeping on with my singing. He kept that promise while we were in America and Italy. But in his native country it was impossible.

“And then everything began to turn out just as my dear father foretold. But I don’t want to talk about that. I just wanted to say that I am that prodigal son.”

“That you are, my lady, but only half-way; because the son returned, and you haven’t returned yet.”



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“No, you are right. I haven’t returned yet. When I had forsaken the man who betrayed me, I was ashamed, for I was forsaken, betrayed, and robbed of all means to return home. When I asked my uncle to help me, though he sent me some money, he also sharply admonished me either to return to my husband or to go back to my parents and do penance, but this I did not want to do. It seemed to me that all sinned against me, and I only was innocent. I had to live. And so I began to sing again, though with a broken heart. In a short time I had the world again lying at my feet, but, being so forsaken, I soon recognized its whole rottenness. How right my father was; I could not sin as I saw others around me doing. Therefore I had to suffer much till I could go on no longer. Since my health broke down, I cancelled my contract and betook myself to search for my son. I wanted to see him, at least once more, before I died. That is all.”

“That is not everything,” said Filina kindly with a smile as he rose. “The end will be only when the daughter returns, first to her heavenly, and then also to her earthly father. He that received me, will surely receive you too. But now come and go to rest, and think how perhaps in a distant land your father is praying just now for you, and that the heavenly Father loved us so much that He gave His only Son for us. Goodnight!”

In a little while the stars shone down upon a quiet place while the people slept.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The doctor came the next day, just as Bacha Filina had expected him. He came in his coach as far as the sheepcotes, and before Ondrejko realized it, he carried away his mother, and also Bacha Filina. Before they went they arranged for Ondrejko to remain longer with Bacha, and he would go to his mother only for visits.

“Palko, take the boys,” commanded Bacha, “and go with them somewhere in the woods where nobody will interfere, and pray that the Lord God may help us to successfully arrange for what we have before us.”

So they prayed, and believed that the Lord Jesus heard them.

Late in the evening, Bacha returned. The boys were already asleep. In the morning he told them that everything that could be done yesterday was carried out successfully, but that there was another matter which would take about a week before they could know how it would turn out, so they must keep on praying.

And what a week it was! The boys never lived through another like it. Sometimes they were with Ondrejko at his mother’s. Again she came to the sheepcotes, and when she remained till the evening she loved to spend the night in the wooden hut. Aunty used to return before the evening in the company of Petrik. He loved to do this, because he

always got a very good supper there. Then Ondrejko slept with his mother. How beautiful that was! She sat on his bed, told him many good



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things, petted, and kissed him till he fell asleep. In the morning again, he woke her up early. He jumped from his bed, threw his arms around her neck and timidly kissed her beautiful lips. What beautiful moments these were! Ondrejko was allowed to accompany his mother even when Bacha Filina took her to show her all three sheepfolds. They walked together over the clearings, looked at the herds of sheep, and spoke with the herdsmen. She was so friendly and kind to them. On the other hand, this helped to improve her health. After such a walk she ate and slept very well. Ondrejko was glad that she liked Bacha Filina. He treated her very nicely, just like a lady, as if she were his own daughter. On Saturday Ondrejko went with his mother to the cottage. There he was to have dinner with her. Both of his comrades were invited for the afternoon, and with them, of course, came Dunaj and Fido, but the cat was not afraid of them, and when they saw this they let her alone.

The boy ran joyfully into the room, but on the doorstep he halted, because his beautiful mother sat at a table. In her hand she held a long letter ready for the mail, and she cried. Oh, how bitterly she cried! She was cheered up when he ran to her and began to hug and kiss her; she returned his kisses but did not stop crying. "Why do you cry so much, my mother?" he said sadly. "What is it about?"

"About myself, my loved one, because I am very bad."

Ondrejko would not admit that. To him, a mother seemed like an angel, but Palko had read only yesterday the saying: "*They all have sinned and come short of the glory of god,*" and added that so long as one does not realize this and thinks himself good enough, the Lord Jesus cannot save him, because only sick ones need a doctor; and Bacha Filina had added that only the Holy Spirit can bring a soul to such conviction. It must be then, that the Holy Spirit had begun to teach his mother also. Surely the Lord Jesus would soon find her!

"Why do you think, mother, that you are bad?" the boy timidly asked.

"Because I have a very good father, and have grieved him very much. Look, Ondrejko; I have written now for the first time in many years."

"And surely you have asked his forgiveness? Have you not?"

"Yes, I did; but is it possible to forgive such a sinner?"

"The father forgave his prodigal son because he loved him," the boy said seriously. "Did your father love you also, my mother?"

The lady sighed sadly, but did not cry any more.



“He would surely receive you if you would return home.”

“I will see if he will answer me, and what he will say.”

“Mother, was not your father my grandfather?”

“Yes, my darling; and if the good Lord grant that I may be able to count you all my own, and you will be only mine, then we will go together, and you will help me to ask him. He will surely not refuse you; you will understand one another better, because you both love the Lord Jesus and you are His sheep.”



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The boy rejoiced. The grandfather loved the Lord Jesus! “How glad I am! Oh, then he will surely forgive you.”

They could not continue their talk because Aunt Moravec called them to dinner, which was very good. Joe came after dinner; he was carrying cheese to town and stopped to ask if there was anything to be mailed. The lady gave him her letter, and Aunt a slip and money to buy various things at the stores, with a big piece of cake to eat on the way. From the lady he received money to buy cherries for himself and the boys, if there were any good ones.

That afternoon it was quite jolly in and about the cottage when the comrades came. Ondrejko was glad that his mother was so joyful. She taught them all kinds of nice games. She even went with them on the “Old Hag’s Rock,” and there Palko had to tell her also how he found his Sunshine Country. That interested her very much. He recalled twice, how he was lost as a small child and grew up with strange people, and how the Lord Jesus took care that he came again to his parents. A whole book could be written about how he fared in the world.[A] Madame Slavkovsky was very much interested in that. When they later walked to the sheepcotes, all along the way she asked about Palko’s mother, who in her sorrow for the lost boy also lost her reason till she finally found him and the Lord Jesus returned her son to her. They did not realize how quickly they came to the huts.

[Footnote A: See the first part of “The Sunshine Country.”]

It was a beautiful evening; the sunset covered the sky with its rosy curtains. The sun sank behind the mountains, and as if in parting kissed the valleys and the people, and especially seemed to kiss the beautiful lady who sat by the open fire in deep thought.

“If you can sing so beautifully,” begged Palko, “and many people went to hear you, we also would like you to do so. Sing for us, if you please.”

“Oh, Palko.” The lady shook her head. “You wouldn’t like my song. Besides you wouldn’t understand me. I sang mostly in English, Italian, but also in Czech, but the text of these songs would not fit in with this sacred evening closing around us. But because I would like to reward you, Palko, for so beautifully relating your experiences, let me just think a moment.”

They waited; and it was so quiet around them that they could almost hear one another breathe; and in the distance the bells of the flocks tinkled.

Finally, she lifted her head. “After all, I remember something, and it is in the Slovak language. Once I learned this song about the sea, and when I sang it, thousands of people wept. It is a ballad about a shipwrecked vessel. Would you like to have me sing it?”



“Yes, yes,” they all cried. Bacha had just arrived and sat among them. What a beautiful thing it is when the Creator puts such a voice in the human throat that no bird or instrument can equal it! You can hear everything in such a voice: the ringing of gold and silver, the moaning in the tops of the pines when they move in the wind; the babbling of the brooks as well as the roar of a great cataract—yes, everything!



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“Master, the tempest is raging!
The billows are tossing high!
The sky is o’ershadowed with blackness,
No shelter or help is nigh;

“Carest Thou not that we perish?
How canst Thou lie asleep,
When each moment so madly is threat’ning
A grave in the angry deep?”

Sweetly, yet mysteriously and sadly, the notes of the song floated on the evening breeze down to the valley. Once, when the lady tried the song for the first time, thousands of people cried. Today only a small company of listeners cried, but I think that even the woods and the brooks and everything round wept also. Above all of them wept Bacha Filina. Palko who sat next to him laid his arm around his neck and cried with him. He understood him. Thus perished once the ship that carried Stephen. It sank in the terrible depths with him. In vain they waited, in vain they called. Uncle Filina would never see him again.

The boys did not dream, nor the helpers of Bacha, that anything existed as beautiful as that which was hidden in the lady’s throat. You could almost hear the crashings of the breaking ship, and feel the hopelessness of the situation. It ended like sad, soft wailings of the perishing ones. The lady noticed the weeping her song had awakened. She realized that it would not be easy to stop it. Then she did something which that very morning she would have been in doubt that she would be able to do. She sang a song hidden in her memory from her old home, and which she had hated with her whole heart, because she could not forget it.

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour Divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
Take all my guilt away,
Oh, let me from this day
Be wholly Thine!

“May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,
My zeal inspire!
As Thou hast died for me,
Oh, may my love to Thee,
Pure, warm, and changeless be,
A living fire!



“While life’s dark maze I tread,
And griefs around me spread,
Be Thou my guide;
Bid darkness turn to day,
Wipe sorrow’s tears away,
Nor let me ever stray
From Thee aside.

“When ends life’s transient dream,
When death’s cold, sullen stream
Shall o’er me roll;
Blest Saviour, then, in love,
Fear and distrust remove;
Oh, bear me safe above,
A ransomed soul!”

Perhaps nowhere and never before, were those beautiful lines sung so impressively. When she stopped, Bacha Filina stood near her and very seriously said, “Thank you, Madame Slavkovsky, for that precious song. You have shown me great kindness thereby. Your beautiful ballad opened a deep wound in my heart which was not quite healed. It almost seemed that I must die because of it, but this holy song healed it again. God bless you for it! But one thing I must ask you: let us write this song down, and you must teach us the melody that we may cheer ourselves with it in life and death.”



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The lady promised, but asked that they might now read the Word of God, as she felt tired. They did this very gladly, and in a little while a wonderful quietness reigned.

“Listen, Steve,” said Joe to his comrade; “In the castle they said that when the lady went home after singing in the theatre that gentlemen unhitched the horses from her carriage, and hitched themselves to it and thus drew her along. I am not surprised. Really, when she sings, she can do anything with a person.”

CHAPTER NINE

On Sunday morning the doctor brought some papers. They all had met at breakfast in the hut. When the lady read the letters, she folded Ondrejko in her arms, and half-crying and half-laughing said, “My dear son, now you may really say, ‘our woods,’ ‘our sheep,’ because I have bought it all for you, my Ondrejko, and all this ground. Only I don’t know if I dare say: ‘Our Bacha Filina.’ I cannot, if it were not for you. He himself must decide if he will stay with us. Do tell him that he must stay.”

“Do not ask, Ondrejko,” smiled Bacha. “If you are at all satisfied with me—yes, if you are satisfied with all of us—we all will be glad to stay; isn’t it so, boys?”

“Surely we will be very glad to stay,” answered the herdsmen.

Soon it was known at all three sheepfolds that Madame Slavkovsky had bought Lord Gemer’s estate and that she would deed it to Ondrejko if Lord Gemer would give up her son to her. No one doubted that he would do this, and since the present manager gave notice to leave, because he had been called to manage a different estate, the lady hoped that she would find some other responsible man. She promised everyone a raise in wages as soon as the change of ownership of the estate was recorded and improvements made. Everybody rejoiced. It almost seemed that even the sheep knew that Ondrejko had become their master. It was lovely how they rang their bells.

Over the sheepcotes every once in a while sounded the song which they called the lady’s: “My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary.” The boys taught it to everybody who wanted to learn it, and what Slovak would not like to learn a new song? When Aunty Moravec noticed how they all liked it, she confided to Palko that she still had a whole book of such songs from America. Thereupon, Ondrejko begged his mother to sing one of them once in a while. She made no excuses. Every day she taught them a new one, each more beautiful than those before. They did not realize that she taught them the very songs from which she ran away in the home of her parents, and which she would neither hear nor sing there. Bacha permitted the herdsmen from the other sheepcotes to come over to his hut. They loved to come for those songs. They had good voices, clear as the evening bells. The lady even taught them to

sing one in four parts. When Sunday came, they practised the whole afternoon, and sang in the evening, so that it sounded over the mountains like a beautiful melody.



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That Sunday Palko read and explained how the Lord came from Nazareth to live in Capernaum, since they did not want Him in Nazareth, and that even today the Lord Jesus did not want to compel anybody, even as He had not compelled those in Nazareth, but went away and left them forever. Then he begged everybody not to send the Lord Jesus away, but permit Him to live with them. "It would be very sad if our sheepcotes would be like those of Nazareth, and if He had to forsake us and go farther on to Capernaum. Where He is, there is heaven and there is life. He heals every sickness. Just notice how many people He healed in Capernaum. But where He is not, there is darkness, just as in that song it says: 'Oh, there is no more salvation.'"

With serious thoughts they all departed to their rest. Ondrejko slept very soundly, but in spite of that it seemed to him that he heard his mother crying. In the morning he saw from her eyes that she had not slept very much. He dared not wake her up. So he stole out on tiptoe with his suit and dressed outside.

Once when Joe brought things from the city and Aunty Moravec gave him a good meal, he began to praise his new lady and asked sincerely, "But why did Lord de Gerner part with her? He will not find another like her in the world."

"He did not part with her, but she parted with him," said the old nurse with clouded face. "He is a bad, unfaithful man. The poor woman loved him so much and believed everything. When she took him, she had much money; and he just lived on her money and wasted it. He played cards and did all kinds of evil things. By the time we came to Budapest she was robbed of everything. He wanted her to continue to sing there. She had beautiful jewels; he told her he would deposit them in a bank, but he pawned them, because at the horse-races he had lost a big bet and needed much money. When he said that I warned her not to let everything go out of her power, through false accusation he separated me from her, accusing me of causing trouble between them. When there was no one else to defend her and she was robbed of everything, they began to look down upon her—his mother, his sisters, and he himself. She was born in America; there they treat women differently. In spite of it she suffered a whole year because she loved him very much. Once she saw her jewelry on another lady, and asked where she had bought them. Thus she found out that they were pawned and had been sold for the charges on them. There were many evil-minded people around her; they opened her eyes after that to what kind of a husband she had, how he fooled and robbed her, that he loved only her money. That was most insulting to her. Not an hour more would she stay with him under the same roof. She got together the last things she had—above all her little son—and went to Vienna. There I found her dangerously sick. She asked her husband to send her her things, for she was sick.



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He again asked for the boy but she would not give him up. In order that they might not take him away, I, myself, took him to northern Bohemia, to my own family, where it was well with him. In the meantime the lawsuit ended, and they took him away from her because he was assigned to his father. Because she did not give the boy up at once, he sent her, from her clothing and laundry, only what was old and shabby. His relatives divided her beautiful, valuable garments among themselves. Thus they dealt with her because nobody would protect her. In those hard days, her uncle from America, who had arranged for her training in singing, helped her. Thus she could pay for the upkeep of the boy, and we went first to Berlin, then to Rome and Paris. She sang to make her living, but also that she might regain the honor of which Lord Gerner wanted to rob her, when he had parted with her and had told all kinds of evil about her, which he could not prove. Later we went to England, and finally to Russia. There she fared the best. There she might have become a rich princess, but she would not look at any man again. How glad the gentlemen there would have been if she would have spoken to them as kindly as she speaks here with you. But the purer the life she led, the more they bothered her, and the more she did not want to live. She said she wanted to see her boy once more before she died. For a long time we could not find out where the boy was. Finally, she got sick on the railroad, and by God's direction Dr. H. helped her. From him she learned all the truth, and after that he brought her here. And now you know why she left the Lord de Gerner."

"That robber, that gypsy, that deceiver, how he fooled and robbed her! If one of us steals a chicken or the like he is put at once behind the bars. Such a gentleman can do everything, but if she would just go to law he would have to return her everything," said Joe angrily.

"Yes, he would have to, but she doesn't want to. She is not concerned about mammon. All she wants is to have peace from him forever. But that he should not make any trouble about the child, I wrote to our lawyer who was to make the arrangements for her, to threaten him with a lawsuit for the jewelry and money if he would not give up the boy willingly. My lady will never know what I did. Our lawyer is a good friend, and a decent and honest man, not such an one as we had before."

That Joe did not keep this news to himself is true. Thus Filina's helpers found out what kind of a master they had only after he ceased to be their lord. To the last one all took the lady's part. All were sorry for her and wished her to have the record very soon in black and white, that the boy was hers only, and the father had no more claims on him. Everyone greeted her very respectfully wherever they met her. She walked sadly and in deep contemplation. Only among the boys was she cheerful.



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In the sheepcotes also they were once in a while in sad contemplation. They counted the days before Lesina would come for Palko and take him away. When Ondrejko with tears in his eyes confided this to his mother, her cheeks turned pale with fright. It had never occurred to her that Palko would leave, and she could not even imagine those surroundings without him. One day he accompanied her to the cottage. She had promised him a nice song; he had come in to get it.

“Palko, do you want to go away from us?” she began suddenly, and took the boy by the hand.

“Verily, even next week my father is coming,” he said seriously. “Then we will have about five days’ more work with the timber, and then we shall leave.”

“But you will be glad to go home; will you not?”

“Really very glad,” he confessed sincerely. “Since I have not seen my mother for weeks, nor grandfather nor grandmother and all, nor have they seen me. They will be glad when I come, and I more than they all, because we all will be together again.”

“And will you not be sorry for your comrades? They will miss you sadly.”

“Yes, indeed; I will be very lonesome without them and Uncle Filina. I love him very much, like my old pastor Malina. I am thankful to the Lord Jesus that Uncle is healthy and will not yet die, but will tell his helpers about the Lord Jesus, and everybody else. Only one thing worries me; it is that when I go away, I shall not find out what you, lady, will do with the Lord Jesus. You taught us such beautiful songs; till my death I shall be thankful to you for them. You have sung so beautifully for us, like an angel from heaven; but you do not believe what you have been singing. I am sorry for that, and the Lord Jesus is sorry also. Yesterday you taught us the song:

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There by His love o’ershadowed,
Safely my soul shall rest.”

“It would fit you so beautifully if you would give yourself in His hands just as the shepherd carries the lost sheep. It would be so good for you in His arms; I know that best of all. While here among you, more than once homesickness for my mother threatened to overcome me; but when I considered that He is with me, it was well with me at once, and I was right at home. You have met already much evil in the world and more than once you were sad, were you not? But He would console you. However, if you would let Him go away like the people of Nazareth, He will go on, but you would remain alone. Ondrejko told me that you have a very good father, that your father



already belongs to the Lord Jesus. Ondrejko belongs to Him also; sometime they both will go to Him, and you will be left alone,” and Palko broke out crying.

“Do not cry,” said the lady in a peculiar voice. “I don’t want to be like the people at Nazareth. I would like to go on that narrow path, but I cannot find it. I am too full of sin for God to receive me. So long as my earthly father does not forgive me, I cannot seek the face of God.”



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Their talk was broken off when they came to the bench, because Aunty Moravec came to meet them, all pale, "A special messenger brought a telegram. Please sign here."

The lady's knees began to tremble. She sat on the bench, signed the paper, and handed it to Aunty, then quickly she opened the telegram and read. Dark spots formed before her eyes. Unable to see, she handed the telegram to the boy. "Palko, read me that," and Palko read:

"New York. I am embarking. Coming to see you. Your loving father."

"Is it really so, Palko?"

"It is."

"Oh, my father, my father! He is coming to us. He still loves and forgives. Palko, pray for me, for something will happen to me," bitterly crying, the lady fell on her knees.

Palko prayed, "Thank Thee, Lord Jesus, that her father is coming, that he has forgiven her, though he is still far away, yet Thou art here. If she will just ask Thee, Thou wilt forgive her, because Thou dost love her so much, I know. Amen."

Life and death is in the power of the tongue. In the words of Palko there was life. The lady believed that the Good Shepherd was really there, that He came to meet her. Once she had run away from Him; today she did not want to run away. Today she confessed her transgressions to Him. She knew well that it was against Him she had sinned most, that she had gone from Him, to her own destruction. She had despised Him when He had stretched out His pierced hands to her, though they had been nailed on the cross for her sake. She had not wanted to sing to His honor and glory; and had hated the songs of the Lamb. She had wanted to sing for the people and had—but they had repaid her by breaking her heart. But He, whom she despised, had followed her here. She had not wanted to hear famous preachers; but He had sent a child along her path that he might lead her to the feet of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd did not despise her; at last He had received her. Palko did not understand what the lady prayed, for she prayed in English, but he understood the tone. The Lord Jesus was with her and she knew it and talked with Him. Palko rose silently and respectfully, and left the place which now belonged to the lady and the Good Shepherd.

CHAPTER TEN

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou knowest not what the day may bring forth," says the Word of God, and that truly. Even at the sheepfolds they did not dream what the next day would bring to them, the serious illness of Ondrejko's mother. The doctor, very much worried, said that the unexpected message about the arrival of her beloved father, whom she had not seen for years, shocked her so much, that she fell into a nervous

illness, which he had wanted to prevent by bringing her here to the mountains. Only Palko and Bacha Filina knew that there was something more which overcame her. They spoke about it



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only between themselves and prayed for the lady very much. She seemed to recognize no one. She lay in her bed like a beautiful flower broken from its stem. In vain did Ondrejko whisper to her, and stroke and kiss her. She looked at him but did not answer. Only one thing consoled her poor child, that she had an expression, whether she slept or not, as though she were very happy. At times she sang beautiful songs to the honor of the Lamb; other times again, a sea ballad, and after that always the song, "My faith looks up to Thee." Thus two weeks passed by without any change.

In the meantime Lesina came; he finished what was necessary and went away, but did not take Palko with him. He could not do that to Ondrejko, who nestled to his comrade like a little bird driven out of its nest. The doctor said Ondrejko would surely be sick if his comrade left him just at this time. Bacha promised Lesina that he himself would take Palko home when the lady got better, because he believed that the lady would get well, although the doctor gave no hope that she would not die or that she would not lose her mind. For this reason also, Lesina could not take Palko away, for it seemed that the sick lady knew him. When he read in his Book she looked at him as if she listened, and though she did not say anything, she was always so quiet and happy.

In the meantime the answer came from Paris, and the unfortunate lady did not know that the boy who sat beside her bed so pale, now belonged only to her, and that no one else had any right to him. Neither did she know about another message—yes, even two; one coming from Hamburg in which her father announced that he had arrived safely; the other announcing his coming on Saturday evening to the nearest railway station. The Bacha very sadly stood at the foot of the lady's bed with both messages in his hands, and Aunty Moravec cried bitterly.

"What shall we do, Bacha Filina? He is coming from such a distance and knows nothing. How will he take it, when he finds her thus, and will hear that because of his telegram this sickness overcame her? Previously, in Russia, the doctors had told her that some day her nerves might give way. Oh, what will the poor father say? He wanted to give her joy, and it has turned out like this."

"What God does and permits, is always good," Filina said, nodding his head. "Do not worry; I am going for her father, and on the way will prepare him for what he will find here."

"Bacha Filina, take me along to meet Grandfather," begged Ondrejko, when Bacha was getting ready in the afternoon.

"I am going on foot; that would be too far for you, my boy," said Bacha, stroking the boy's head. "You just remain with your mother and wait for your grandfather here. At

the station I shall take a carriage; I think that in the evening, about eight o'clock, we shall be here."



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Bacha kissed the boy, though he usually did not do so, and in a moment his giant-like figure disappeared in the thicket by the clearing. He picked the shortest way over paths well-known to him, but still it took about two hours before he reached the main road leading to J—. There he suddenly stopped. He turned to the east, where on a steep rock stood an old, recently repaired cross. Oh, human memory, how strange thou art! Bacha needed only to look at the cross, and at once, as if the years flew back, it seemed to him as if he was standing there like a nineteen-year-old youth. A desire overtook him to go up to the cross, bend over its side and look again on the path on which, on that summer morning, his brother, Stephen, had left, never to return again. He went on that “breaking” ship to a “cold grave.” Bacha Filina could not resist that desire. For about a quarter of an hour he kneeled at the cross, and rested his forehead on the stone step. Inexpressible sorrow shook him. It wanted to rob him of his assurance of forgiveness, but in and around him it was suddenly as if somebody sang:

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour Divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
Take all my guilt away;
Oh, let me from this day,
Be wholly Thine!”

His heavy load of sin had been cleansed by that precious blood! The Lord Jesus took his guilt with Him on the cross and the Holy God had forgiven him! But what was he doing here now? What had he come here for? What did he waste the time here for? Yonder in the cottage, Ondrejko’s mother was half-alive and half-dead, and from afar her father from beyond the ocean was coming to his child. If he, Filina, would delay here, they might miss each other at the station.

Bacha stood up, dusted off his Sunday clothes, put his firm arm around the cross and bent over, as once many years ago! It was good that the cross was firm and also the arm that clung to it. Bacha saw on the sloping path a man of slim figure, in a gentleman’s suit, drawing near. Just then he stopped. He turned round; he took his hat from his head and looked in the direction where once stood Filina’s hut. All that marked the place were a few half-burned timbers, now overgrown with weeds. Oh, that face! There was only one like it, never forgotten, younger—but nevertheless!

Bacha closed his eagle eyes that they might not fool him. He opened them only when the steps drew nearer to him from below. He let go the cross and crossed his arms on his chest. Looking up he stood face to face with the stranger.

“Good evening,” said he.

“Oh, Stephen!” It came out of the chest of Bacha. Half cry, half terror.



“Peter! Is it you!” Two arms twined around Filina’s neck.

“Stephen! You live? Really? It is not possible!”

“I live, Peter, and at last, I am coming. It is rather late, it’s true, but I did not know before that the loved one who once separated us, had passed away long ago, and that you and I would not have any more heartaches. I am coming to you for my treasures, which are in your care.”



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“Your treasures?” Bacha was surprised still, not knowing whether it was a beautiful, but impossible dream. He could not get enough of the voice that was speaking to him. The face was older, changed, but the voice was the same. It always sounded to Peter Filina like music. And so it was today.

“We are expecting the father of Madame Slavkovsky today, and I am going to meet him.”

“I am that father.”

“You, Stephen?” Bacha released the stranger. “I do not understand that.”

“I believe you, my Peter. Well, how you have changed, how strong you have gotten, how giantlike, like the beautiful mountains all around! I would not have recognized you, if it were not for the voice—no one has called me thus since—and by your eagle eyes under those heavy eyebrows.”

“Stephen, tell me, how is it possible that you live? Was not that ship wrecked?”

“Yes, Peter, she went to the bottom of the sea; but I was among the few immigrants which another ship saved. God does not want the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live; so He saved me. The first steady work that I had in America was on the farm of Mr. Slavkovsky. My daughter wrote me that she told you everything about us. Thus you know what Slavkovsky asked of me and that I agreed to do as he wished. When he heard from me that I did not want you to know that I still lived, he advised me to adopt his name and thus disappear forever from this world. His wife and son, and even my good wife, agreed with it. Thus Stephen Pribylinsky died and only Stephen Slavkovsky remained. I could not return home and live with you, as our father planned. Eva was your wife and I loved her. I did not really know God and the Lord Jesus then, nor understood His Holy Law; but this much I knew, that it would have been a constant and a great temptation for us all. Thus, I chose to die to you.”

Slavkovsky finished, and out of Bacha’s breast came a deep sigh. “You died for us, and until recently I worried very much about it, that I had become a murderer and was like Cain.”

“You? And why?”

“Did I not drown you the second time in that swamp, by driving you to America? Eva loved you more. Had it not been for me, you could have lived as happily as in Paradise. You would have been mated much better. At my side, she perished of sorrow. My father did not live long; I took care of mother, but could not replace her son to her. See yonder the burnt remains of our hut, where we once lived so happily. Years ago, when I took up this service which I have held ever since, I rented it to a neighbor.



He did not take good care and it burned down. I could, but would not rebuild it. What would it have been good for to me? I was forsaken in the world, like a stick.”

Sudden quietness prevailed on the step at the foot of the cross, where both men sat. It seemed that the popular song could be applied to them:



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“Mountain, green mountain, Ahoy!
My heart is hurting, sadly I cry!
Painful, so painful is my woe,
My heart is fainting, my joy is gone.”

“Forgive me, Peter,” suddenly said Stephen Slavkovsky. “It was not right that I hid myself from you. I have caused you much sorrow. While I imagined that you were living with Eva in our mountains, which I never could forget, perhaps surrounded with children, and our parents were happy with you—you have lived alone for years. It was not good that I did not let you know about myself. Once some one from this neighborhood came to America but did not know me and told me that father died. I had already written a letter to mother, to send her my love, but I did not send it. I thought how good I was to you, but that heart of ours is deceitful and perverse, full of self-righteousness and pride. I have done wrong both to mother and to you, but I was repaid when my only child forsook me, and after ten years I must come as far as here to find her.”

Bacha roused himself, “Come, Stephen, let us delay no longer; but if we go on foot we shall arrive very late.”

They both arose. “I am on foot. I have a coach; however, I told the driver to feed the horses a bit. Now I hear them; they will be ready. Let us go; on the way we can tell one another more.”

Thus among the Slovak mountains rode two brothers, who had grown up among them, and were so closely united to them, that one of them in a distant land almost died of home-sickness, and the other could not have lived without them at all. Now they did not think about the beauty around them, because Stephen Slavkovsky found out his child was waiting for him, and that only the Heavenly Doctor could save His sheep which had returned to Him.

The proverb says that bad luck does not wander among the mountains but among the people. Now it was among the mountains. Who can describe the moment when the father stopped at the bed of his only child and saw her so broken and read on her beautiful face the confirmation of all of which he had once warned her. The setting sun shone upon the broken flower and on the man who was kneeling at her bed, his head laid on his crossed arms. No one dared to disturb him in his sadness and prayer. Suddenly the lady opened her eyes; she turned them to the window and began to sing softly the song which she had recently taught the boys:

“Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the billows o’er me roll,
While the tempest still is high;



Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life be past;
Safe into the haven guide;
Oh, receive my soul at last.”

Her father cried silently and the others with him. But she sang on, and as Joe said sometime ago, “She could do anything with them when she sang.” The weeping stopped, and the small room seemed to be full of the presence of Him who is the King of Glory, the Prince of Peace, and the only Healer.



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“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, oh, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.”

Palko believed and felt that his Lord was there, and the lady sang on:

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick and lead the blind:
Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
Vile and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.

“Plenteous grace with Thee is found—
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within;
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.”

The song concluded. A silence followed during which the lady turned her look away from the window and fastened it upon the face of the man who bent over her.

“Mary, dear, my golden darling, do you not recognize me?” asked the trembling lips of the man, so tenderly, as only a good father can speak to his only child. For a moment the beautiful eyes of the lady fastened themselves on the man’s eyes. The doctor entering the room at that moment, with a quick movement of his hand tried to hinder this critical situation, but it was too late. The lady’s pale face glowed suddenly, as after the dark night the day breaks over the mountains.

“My father! Oh, my father!”

She sat up, stretched out her arms and would have sunk back, had not her father’s arms clasped her; her head was resting on his breast, her arms twined around his neck,



and the lady clung closely to him like a little chick pursued by the hawk, when the hen spreads over it her protecting wings.

“Did you come? Did you forgive? Do you love? Oh, at home, home! No more in a strange land. I am not fleeing any more—the Lord Jesus was merciful, He received me.... Now I can die!” Thus whispered the lady, crying softly, returning her father’s kisses.

“Indeed not! Who would die now?” the doctor interrupted at this tender moment. “You haven’t even shown Ondrejko to your father, and the poor boy can hardly wait any longer.” It was as if a new life had been poured into her.

“My Ondrejko!” She stretched out her hand to the boy, still crouching beside her. “Just look! Grandfather has come, and you don’t have to beg him any more. Just welcome him!”

Ondrejko found himself in the arms of his grandfather and was very surprised. He had expected to see an old man with a gray beard, but grandfather was without beard and still quite young and handsome. The boy felt, what he had never known before, what a joy it is to be kissed and hugged by a father. His saddened heart rejoiced, and he was filled with a feeling of protection and safety.



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Some things happen in this world at which we cannot wonder enough. Thus it was at the sheepfolds of the Gemer estate. There still lived people in that neighborhood who had known old Filina, the father of Bacha, very well. They remembered how he had told them that one of his boys had prepared to go to America, and the other one had married at home, and when Stephen had made some money across the sea, he would return home and they would all live together. They also remembered how the message came that the ship was wrecked, and that Stephen would never see his homeland again. But that did not happen! Thirty years passed and Stephen Pribylinsky came home after all. He appeared to them as if he had been raised from the dead, and the resurrection had come when the sea had given up her dead and returned him. They spoke about his coming for his daughter and grandchild. But when the fragrance of his beloved Slovak mountains filled him, would he be able to go again far across the sea? Will he not fear that he was like a stranger, for years in a foreign land? He fared there very well, but he was not at home. Only in the homeland on that black ground was there sweet sleep.

Who can describe the surprise of all three boys when they learned who it was that came with Bacha Filina—that it was his Stephen. Palko, when he heard it, could not stay with the others. He ran away to the woods and cried there for joy. He thanked the Lord Jesus that He had comforted Bacha Filina forever. There was still salvation possible, even though the ship was wrecked. After all, he had lived to see his brother, Stephen. The Lord Jesus had given him back to Bacha.

There was something more, very good for Palko. It was not necessary for him to read to the people out of his Book. He could himself sit down at the feet of Uncle Stephen, whom he loved greatly, and listen to the truth of God from his lips. That was a joy for the boy.

Ondrejko rejoiced again that Bacha Filina belonged to his family and Petrik also. The boys hugged each other for joy that they would not now have to part any more till death. And who can describe the joy of Madame Slavkovsky when they took her again for the first time to the sheepfold. "It seemed to me at once that I was among my own, that I had come home," she said to Bacha, "and you, Bacha Filina, I loved at once like a daughter."

Then she found out all about the small and big Stephen. Bacha, himself, told her, and her father even said, "I am sorry about it, my daughter, after considering it all, that I did not let those at home know where I was, but now I see it all. The Lord Jesus in His love turned all this evil for our good. For me there in America and for Peter here at home, it is a true saying, 'He brings them to the desired haven.'"



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Then Bacha Filina showed Ondrejko's estate to his brother. Since the lady had already had the deed recorded, they all rode to the castle. Petrik and Palko had to go with them also. The boys played there in the park with the rubber balls which grandfather had brought from America. The servants brought a folding-chair for the lady, since the doctor ordered her to rest in the shadow of the horse-chestnuts. She watched the play of the boys and took pleasure in their joy. Ondrejko left his comrades once in a while, ran to her, laid his curly head beside hers, kissed his mother, and on receiving her kiss, ran again with a loud "hallo" after his ball. Who could understand how much joy now filled the once-forsaken heart?

In the meantime the assistant manager showed the lady's father all the buildings and those cattle which were not in the pasture. He noticed that Mr. Slavkovsky understood the affairs of the estate, and when he pointed out one thing and another that should have been different, Mr. Slavkovsky said seriously, "I see it." Finally he spoke up, "There will have to be a different management from the bottom up, in order that everything may prosper."

In the meantime the cook prepared a splendid repast for the new owners. She set it outside under the horse-chestnuts, so the lady would not have to enter the house. The castle had been bought with all its furnishings. If the proud Lady de Gerner, the grandmother of the last lord, could have awakened from the dead and seen how her porcelain dishes and table-covers were spread before the despised Slovaks, she would have turned over in her beautiful casket. But now that could not be helped. Bacha Filina arranged his matters with the housekeeper. At the repast he ate very little because he could not take his eyes from the boys, how they ate, and how Ondrejko urged his comrades to eat. The lady also rejoiced very much over them. Even the doctor laughed heartily about it, but at the same time took care that his patient did not forget to eat. He did not urge her to take the various sweets served, but he did the fruit. Only Mr. Slavkovsky was somewhat buried in thought. They almost had to force him into conversation.

After their meal the boys again began to play, and asked the two boys of the assistant manager to help them. Mr. Slavkovsky walked along the lane till, from a turn in it, he could overlook the beautiful, but now neglected garden. Suddenly he took off his hat and prayed. By the time he ended, Bacha stood beside him.

"Is there something which does not suit you, my brother?" he asked thoughtfully. "Do you think we have paid too much for the estate, since everything is so neglected?"

"I do not think so, Peter. It is really cheaply bought in spite of all its neglect." He smiled kindly on his brother.

"Nevertheless you seem to be troubled by something."



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“Certain cares trouble me. Just now I laid them all at the feet of our heavenly Father. Now I do not worry more about anything. He surely will arrange everything. I will tell you, my brother, what it was. But for the time, keep it to yourself. I cannot take my daughter to America now, since she is so weak. Here in our homeland she will get well sooner. My beloved grandchild I need not take there, since he has enough here to live on. Now when my daughter takes this estate over, she needs a manager. It is hard to find one that would not cheat her. Then I thought, why does she need a manager, if she still has a father young enough, and who knows how to run a farm in Europe?”

“Oh, Stephen!” Filina was astonished.

“But, you know, there is a great hindrance. My farm is deeded to me. My brother-in-law I can settle with, and thus that would not hinder me. But my beloved wife was born in America. Will she want to leave her home and go to a foreign land? I would not like to constrain her in anything. I will first have to write to her about all that has happened, and if I see from her answer that it would not be too great a sacrifice for her, I will go for her. I will then sell the farm and deposit the money, because I would not want to add to this estate. It is big enough for us to make a living, and I could earn, as a manager, bread for myself and my wife, and she could rest; she has worked enough.”

“Day and night will I ask the Lord Jesus about it,” said Filina, “that He will lead your wife to agree, because round about us is only darkness. No one cares for these souls. They do not know the Lord Jesus. I have not been able to imagine how we could live here when the boy would leave us. But you could take his place.”

“That hardly, Peter. The Lord Jesus has in Palko a faithful servant. That measure of the Holy Spirit that this child has, I do not have. But instead I have experiences with my Lord. The last ten years of suffering united me very closely to Him who saves. I know your sorrows. Considering the situation, I long to be the witness of God’s grace here in my homeland, where there is no one else. That also draws me here to my beautiful homeland. Therefore I hope that my Agnes will agree that we shall come, and it will happen after all as your father used to say to the people; ‘When Stephen shall have made some money beyond the sea and comes back again, we shall live together.’ Now there is no more all of us, only we two. And if the Lord grants me to come again, do you know what is the first thing that I will do?”

“I do not.”

“I will rebuild our hut. It shall lay waste no longer. I will prepare it for Petrik. You shall raise him and give him the ground and the fields. So if he lives, we can take care of him together.”



CHAPTER TWELVE

Sometimes the days pass as quickly as a thought, and the weeks like a dream. In the following weeks which just flew by, Bacha Filina took Palko to his home. He became acquainted with his family. Just then Juriga's son and daughter-in-law came from America, and Lesina had to find a place to move to. They all rejoiced in Palko. His mother and grandmother could hardly stop caressing him. Old Juriga had a good cry when the boy hugged him.



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Lesina complained to Bacha that he was worrying about his wife living with the wife of Juriga's son. Juriga's daughter-in-law was a gossiping, noisy person, and had two small children who were disobedient cry-babies. It was because of those two little ones that Juriga's son had returned to the home country. His older children had been dying one after the other. Here was Filina's opportunity to give Lesina good advice, namely, to take his wife, her mother, and Palko, and move before the winter to his cottage in the Gemer mountains. He told him also that Madame Slavkovsky meant to give him some trees from a piece of land that needed to be replanted. In the meantime he could find some other place where he would like to stay. All they would have to take with them would be their clothing and small belongings, because any other things needed they would find in the castle: bedsteads, tables, chairs, and all that was necessary for the kitchen. They were all very thankful for this good advice.

In those weeks that had passed so quickly, Madame Slavkovsky moved with her father and Aunt Moravec to the castle. Every morning she rode to the sheepcotes and remained till the evening. Once in a while she also stayed overnight in Ondrejko's hut. At other times, she took the boys along. In the castle under the supervision of Mr. Slavkovsky, many changes were made, and when the gardener had the means at his disposal and the advice of his master, he went joyfully to work. In two weeks you would not have recognized the garden nor the castle. The masons repaired broken places, the painters painted everything, the joiners repaired doors, window-frames, and hardwood floors. In the course of the repairs, chairs, bedsteads, and tables, and more that was necessary in the cottage of Palko, was set aside, in order that when the Lesinas came they might have plenty on hand to settle and feel at home. Even for Dunaj they fixed a nice dog-kennel, so he wouldn't have to suffer in rainy weather.

* * * * *

It was again a beautiful summer evening. In front of the sheepcotes everything was ready for a big bonfire. Bacha Filina called all his helpers and told them they would have a celebration such as none of them had seen before. Through the woods in the direction of the cottage wandered Petrik, Ondrejko, and between them, Palko. Ahead of them, chasing one another, ran Dunaj and Fido. They also rejoiced to see each other. The boys returned from a visit at Lesina's and carried with them all kinds of gifts. A water-gun, by which you could squirt the water to the top of the highest trees; singing tops which could spin almost a quarter of an hour. From Palko's mother they got a whole box full of prunes filled with nuts, which Ondrejko thought were better than figs and dates.

"My mother is very glad today!" Ondrejko told Palko, "because a letter came at last from my grandmother in America. They gave me a letter written especially for me, in which grandmother writes very nicely. I will show it to you afterwards, Petrik."



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“They even sent greetings for me,” said the comrade.

“What they wrote to mother, I don’t know, but mother ran to grandfather, threw herself into his arms and cried and laughed. I am sure they did not want me to understand, because they spoke English, but they will tell us all about it. Bacha Filina said we shall have a celebration.”

“We also have a song, such a beautiful one, and that will be sung tonight, and I am sure your parents will like it,” said Petrik.

It really was a beautiful celebration. First of all, on two spits they roasted two lambs. Bacha Filina portioned out large pieces of the best kind of cheese to everybody. Madame Slavkovsky handed out pears and large plums. Stephen brought two large crocks of mineral water to wash down the roasted mutton. Aunty Moravec divided rolls and cookies among all. They all served Palko’s quiet, lovely mother, and his good old grandmother, and his father as well. Then they sat around the bonfire. Mr. Slavkovsky prayed, opened the Holy Writ, read Psalm 103, and spoke very nicely about the great forgiving love of God. Then they sang the beautiful songs which the lady had brought. But Palko also had to read in his Book. He read about Cornelius who, with his whole house, received the Lord Jesus. Palko spoke so beautifully about how sad it was that in the house of the great man, though he often prayed and did much good, he did not know the way to the true Sunshine Country, since he did not know the Lord Jesus. How happy he was afterwards, when he and his devout knights and his obedient soldiers welcomed the Apostle Peter there, and with him also, the Lord Jesus, whom they forever received in their house and heart. Then on a sign from the lady they started a beautiful song which Palko had not heard before, but which was very fitting to his story.

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast,’
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad.”

As that song sounded over the woods, it was noticeable from the faces of the hearers around the camp fire, that they all had experienced it, but especially from the serious face of Filina. Then it was so silent that you could hear the distant bells of the sheep. Though the sky was covered with storm-clouds, and the lightning was to be seen in the west once in a while, and in the distance the rolling of the thunder was heard, the storm was nevertheless very far away, and would not yet come there.



Suddenly Bacha Filina arose, and after he had first thanked the Lord Jesus in an audible prayer that He came and also sought and saved that which was lost, he began to explain what they were celebrating, and which pleased him most—not only Madame Slavkovsky, but her father also was remaining in the Gemer mountains. He said, “Tomorrow Mr. Slavkovsky will leave for America to bring his wife here. When he has sold his farm there, he will at once return to his birthplace to leave it no more.” Bacha’s eyes were full of tears when he gave the message, but added, “Is not that very joyful news?”



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Who can describe the joy that prevailed after that? Ondrejko hugged his mother and grandfather and nestled next to Bacha Filina. "We shall all stay at home, at home with Bacha Filina. We shall not go into the distant foreign world. Oh, we remain in our mountains. Even Palko will be here with us," he said.

"Yes, my son." The grandfather drew the boy close to him. "We shall remain at home. We shall live here together with the Lord Jesus and He with us."

After a while the campfire began to die down. The voices subsided. Only in the distance the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, but above the sheepcotes shone the clear stars. Around the buildings Bacha Filina made his rounds, watching that no danger threatened anywhere, and again at the bench—as once long ago—he stopped. This time, the father and daughter sat there together; no longer a prodigal, she had returned first to the heavenly, and then to the earthly father. She had come home and was accepted. He wanted to step aside, but they had been waiting for him.

"We knew that you would pass by," said Slavkovsky, and made room for his brother beside himself. "Mary has a request to make of you."

"Me?" Bacha was surprised.

"Yes, you, my dear Uncle. Cease to be 'Bacha.' Come among us. You shall have the supervision of things; be one family with us," the lady begged with her whole heart, but Bacha shook his head.

"I thank you, my daughter," he spoke, deeply moved, "I would love to make one family with you because you are all very dear to me; but do not take me away from my calling. Once I started as an unhappy man, and this occupation cheered me in my sorrow. I grew up with the sheep, with the work and with nature about me. Now when the heavens have opened above me, leave me at this heaven's gate. Do not let it vex you that you have a rich estate and I am but a poor 'Bacha.' All that I need for my living, I shall earn honestly. I have somewhere to live, and you love me; I am no more alone. You will come to visit me and I will visit you, especially when you, my brother, return. Only one thing I ask of you, if you have more than you need for your living, send Palko to school. His father grieves that he is not able to do it for him. God has given him what no school can supply, but if people with such faith could stand in the pulpits there would be a real awakening in our nation."

"Oh, Bacha Filina, I thank you. I have been thinking about the same thing, only did not dare to speak with Lesina about it." The lady grasped Bacha's hand in hers.

"Believe me, we will gladly do anything for Palko. He brought us life and salvation; let him in the future carry it to thousands."



The quiet mysterious night settled upon the world, its silence broken only by the soft sound of the shepherd's flute. Stephen had the night watch and thus he played to himself:

“If I but knew where she abides,
Where to the night so quickly glides,
I would like an arrow run,
And thus compel it to return.”

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But the night was passing, never more to return; but what about it? After it a new morning will arise, and with it the fresh grace of God for those who receive the Lord Jesus, and to whom He gives the right to be the sons and daughters of God.

Would that all souls would receive Him!

—*The end*—