

THE TSARINA MILITZA AND THE SMAY OF YASTREBATZ

MILITZA TELLS THE TSAR

“O Thou one and indivisible God! Mayest thou be glorified!” Tsar Lazar sat at supper, and with him sat the Tsarina Militza, sorrowful and depressed. This unusual aspect of his beloved consort alarmed the Tsar, and he asked her tenderly: “O Militza, thou my Tsarina! If I put a question to thee, wouldst thou answer me with the truth? Why are thou so gloomy, so sorrowful and pale tonight? Is anything thou desirest lacking in our castle?” The Tsarine replied: “O Tsar Lazar, thou Serbian golden crown! Verily whensoever thou speakest to me I answer by the truth. Nothing is lacking our palace; but true a great misfortune has befallen me, for the Zmay (dragon) of Yastrebatz is accustomed, ever since last year to come my tower each night to embrace me.” Tsar Lazar, astounded, said: “Listen to me, O Tsarina Militza! When thou has retired to thine apartment in the white tower tonight and thy magic lover hath come, ask him if there be any besides God whom he fears, and if there is to be found on this earth a hero whom he deems superior to himself!”

Soon after supper the Tsar went to his narrow and many-storied tshardack (tower), and the Tsarina retired to her tower. And it was seen how the mountain Yastrebatz glowed suddenly as if on fire, and how out of the flames flew the Smay straight over the level plain of Kroushevo to the Tsarina’s tower.

When he entered the Tsarina’s apartment he took of his fairy garment and looked tenderly upon the fair woman. The Tsarina affected to welcome her lover, and after a time she said: “I pray thee, O Zmay of Yastrebatz, since thou comest so daringly to my tower, tell me is there any besides God whom thou darest? and lives there in the whole world any hero whom thou deemest superior to thyself?” Thereupon the Zmay answered in surprise: “Keep silent, O Militza! or mayest thou remain speechless forever! Surely thou askest me this question because thou has been instructed by Lazar!”

But Militza swore to him, saying: “No, not so! May I perish if I speak not the truth! I ask thee because I see thou are such an excellent hero.”

When the Smay heard this he trusted to the false oath, less dangerous it would have been for him if a viper had bitten him, and spoke in this wise: “O Militza, dearest Tsarina! Since thou askest me truly, truly shall I answer thee. On the whole of this earth I dread none but God; neither is there hero whom I fear, save only that on a plain called Sirmia there is a village known as Koopinovo, and in that village lives a Smay Despot Vook; him I fear, for I have known him ever since our foolish childhood. We often used to play together on the summit of the high mountain Yastrebatz, and Vook would always get the better of me in our contests. It is Vook only whom I dread, for he is the champion Zmay on this earth.”

As the Zmay pronounced the last of these words, Danitza, the morning star, appeared on the horizon and the Smay instantly took flight to his castle.

The Tsarine hastened to Lazar's tchardack and informed him of what she had learnt from the Zmay. Hearing the story the Tsar decided to write in 'slender characters' a message to Zmay Despot Vook telling what he had learned beseeching him to come to Kroushevatz and kill his detested enemy the Zmay of Yastrebatz. For rendering that service Vook should receive three tovars of ducats and the kingdom of Sirmia to be his for life.

VOOK AS CHAMPION

The message duly reached the hands of Zmay Despot Vook, and, having perused it he considered for a while as to what he should do. He loved the friend of his childhood, but he could not condone his shameful conduct. Finally he decided to battle with the Smay of Yastrebatz, so he saddled his black steed, presented to him by the veela (fairy queen), and that very night he reached the plain of Kroushevo; there he alighted, spread his tent in the wheat fields of Lazar and drank cool wine.

Meantime the sun rose and as the Tsar slowly paced his balcony, he suddenly noticed a tent in his fields, and a strange and very wonderful knight within it. He immediately called the Tsarina and pointed out to her what he saw. Militza exclaimed that this must be none other than Zmay Despot Vook, for he much resembled her magic lover the Zmay of Yastrebatz.

The Tsar immediately sent a messenger to the stranger bidding him come at once to the palace, where a noble feast awaited him. But Vook sent word that he desired to remain in his tent and he requested that the Tsarina should not close fast the doors to her apartments that night but should quietly await the coming of the Zmay of Yastrebatz and leave the issue to her new protector.

Upon receiving Vook's reply the Tsar ordered a fine repast to be prepared and taken to his tent, not omitting a large quantity of red wine.

The day passed uneventfully, and when night came the fair Militza retired. As usual Mount Yastrebatz burst into its customary light, and its lord flew from the flames straight to the Tsarina's tower and stole into her chamber, where he doffed his magic garment. Suddenly he heard the voice of Smay Despot Vook saying: "Thou who hath presumed to embrace the Serbian Tsarina, come forth this instant from the white tower!"

Greatly alarmed, the Zmay of Yastrebatz cursed the Tsarina thus: "Lo, Militza, may God destroy thee! Thou hast betrayed me to Lazar!"

Saying this he donned his magic garment and made a haste to depart. Instead of as usual, directing his flight to his castle on Yastrebatz, he ascended straight into the

clouds. Vook pursued him very closely and coming up with him at an extreme height, he struck him violently with his heavy club and broke both his wings. Down fell the Zmay of Yastrebatz, swift as a stone to the earth, where he lay writhing like a snake and moaning piteously, "May a similar misfortune befall every hero who entrusts his mistress with his secrets!" He had not a long time in which to indulge his bitter reflections for Vook was following and the instant he alighted he struck off the head of the Zmay. Then he went to Lazar and threw the head upon the ground before him. The Tsar was so terrified at the mere sight of the ghastly object that he was seized suddenly by a severe fever. But he gave the promised gold to Vook as well as an imperial decree empowering him to rule independently over Sirmia for the remainder of his life. Moreover, he promised that should Vook ever be without gold, he need but apply to the Tsar, and he should have his needs supplied. The bard ends: "And they long lived happily, always helping each other, as fellow countrymen should do; and the glory of the hero became a tradition; we now remember the anniversary of the slaying of the Zmay of Yastrebatz as the happiest day in the year!"