

Chapter VIII: The Marriage of Tsar Doushan the Mighty

Doushan sends Theodor to Ledyen

King Michael of Ledyen had a beautiful daughter, Roksanda, and when Tsar Doushan asked her hand in marriage the king immediately consented. The betrothal was arranged by means of couriers, and Doushan had not seen the princess; he therefore summoned Theodor, his counselor of State: "Listen to me, my trusty Theodor!" said he, "thou shalt go to the white city Ledyen to King Michael, and thou shalt ask him to fix the date for the wedding festivities. Thou shalt also settle with him other customary preliminaries and satisfy thyself that the peerless Roksanda is a fitting tsarina for our Serbian lands." Theodor promised to fulfil his mission faithfully and, having made the necessary preparations, he set out for the Venetian province. When he arrived at the white city Ledyen the king welcomed him courteously and lavished hospitality upon him for a full week.

Then Theodor spoke to the king in this way: "O my master's friend, thou gallant King Michael! My tsar has not sent me here only that I should drink thy wine; he desires that I should arrange his marriage; tell me, when shall my master come? What time of the year will suit you best to receive him? How many svats shall he bring with him when he comes to take from thee the beautiful maiden Roksanda? My master also instructed me that I should desire of thee to be permitted the happiness of seeing the fair princess."

To this the king answered: "O my friend, Theodor! Take my greetings to the tsar and tell him that he is at liberty to bring with him as many svats as he may please; also tell him that he may come for the maiden whenever he may choose; but request him in my name that under no circumstances shall he bring with him his nephews the two Voinovitchs, Voukashin and Petrashin, for indeed I have heard that they are very quarrelsome when in their cups, and I fear that they may disturb the harmony of our festivities. As to the princess, she shall come to thee at due time and receive at they hands the ring of they master, as is the well-established custom."

The Princess Roksanda

At nightfall Theodore was conducted into an unlighted room and while he wondered when the candles would be brought, lo! The princess stood before him, shrouded in the thick gloom. Theodor was grieved at the trick played upon him, but he did not despair. He had with him the magnificent ring of his august master; it was so richly studded with precious stones that as he produced it the whole room was lighted up and the rays shone upon the maiden, who seemed to the ambassador more beautiful than the white veela herself. Theodor present the betrothal ring and gave the princess also one thousand ducats; her brothers then conducted her back to her apartments.

Next morning Theodor took leave of the king and set out upon his homeward journey; when he arrived at Prisrend the tsar asked eagerly: "O my trusty Theodor! Didst thou see

the maiden Roksanda and didst thou give her my ring? What greetings dost thou bring me from King Michael?"

And Theodor answered: "Yea, my Lord, I saw thy bride and presented her with thy ring; but words fail me to describe the enchanting beauty of the Princess Roksanda! Vain would it be to search for her equal throughout Serbia! And fair and well spoke King Michael: "Thou canst go for the maiden whensoever thou chooseth, and thou mayest take as many svats as thou pleasest. But the king prays this one thing of thee: that thou shouldest under no circumstances take with thee the Voinovitchs, thy two nephews, for they are loves of the wine-cup and are quick to take offence; they may enter into drunken quarrels, and it may be difficult to settle their disputes in a peaceable manner."

The Procession Starts

Soon afterward the tsar proceeded to call his svats together and when they had all assembled they presented a brilliant spectacle. The wedding procession rode on its way through the field of Kossovo and as it passed by the walls of the castle Voutchitrn, the two youthful Voinovitchs looked upon the cavalcade and spoke sadly to each other thus: "Our uncle must be angry with us, otherwise he would surely have invited us also to join his wedding party. Some churl must have uttered ill words against us. May a hundred evils befall him who has done so! Our tsar is going to the Venetian land and has not a single hero in his train, neither has he any close relative who might be depended upon in case of dire misfortune. The Venetians are known from ancient times to be very cunning and sly and they may kill our glorious tsar! Any yet to accompany him uninvited is more than we dare do."

Thereupon their aged mother spoke thus: "O my children, ye two Voinovitchs! Ye have a brother in the mountains, Milosh-the-shepherd; though the youngest, he is the greatest hero of ye all and will find some way to uphold the honour of our name. The tsar has never heard about him. I counsel you to send him a message and bid him come to the castle Voutchitrn, mention not the true reason but tell him that his mother, being aged, may die at any moment and that she wishes to give him her blessings. Tell him to make haste if he would find his mother alive!"

This advice seemed good to the two brothers. They wrote a missive and dispatched it with haste to the mountain Shar where Milosh-the-shepherd tarried with his flocks.

As Milosh read the message his countenance change and he shed bitter tears. His grief was observed by thirty shepherds who were around him: "O Milosh, our valiant chieftain!" they exclaimed. "Many messages have reached thee, but never yet have we seen thee shed tears when thou didst read them. Whence came this letter and evil tidings does it bring? Tell us quickly, we beseech thee!"

Milosh sprang to his feet and addressed his shepherds: "Hearken, O shepherds, my dearest brethren! This message comes from the castle. My mother is on her death-bed and she summons me that she may give me her blessing, that damnation should not fall

upon my soul. I must hasten to her side and while I am absent from the mountain I charge ye to watch well the sheep.”

When Milosh came near to his white castle, his brothers saw him from a tower and sallied out to meet him; their aged mother also followed. Milosh was astonished to see her and said reproachfully: “Why, O brothers dear, do ye make misfortune when there is no reason, and when all is well with ye! May the Almighty forgive your deception!” And his brothers answered: “Come within, dear brother, there is nevertheless great misfortune!”

The young men embraced each other and Milosh kissed his mother’s hand. Then his brothers related the story of their uncle’s betrothal and how he was proceeding to the Venetian land without having invited his two nephews to ride in the wedding procession, and they besought him: “O, our dear brother Milosh! Go thou with the tsar, yea, although thou art not invited. Misfortune may befall, and haply thou shalt succour your uncle. Thou canst go and come back again without making thyself known to anyone!”

Milosh was no less eager than his brothers, and he answered gladly: “I will go, O my brothers! Indeed how could I do otherwise? If I were not willing to help our dear uncle, whom else should I be willing to aid?” Thereupon his brothers began to make all the necessary preparations. Peter went to the stables to saddle his steed Koulash, while Vankashin remained to see that Milosh was fittingly attired. He first put on him a fine shirt which was embroidered with gold from the neck to the waist; downward from the waist it was woven of white silk. Over the shirt he placed three thin, elegant ribbons; then a waistcoat adorned with thirty golden buttons; then a golden cuirasse weighing some fifteen pounds. And in all details he attired him with garments worthy of a prince. Finally he hung upon his broad shoulders a coarse Bulgar shepherd’s cloak, which entirely enveloped him, and placed on his head a Bulgarian fur-cap with high point, thus making him look so like a black Bulgar that his own mother would not have recognized him. The brothers now fetched a warrior’s lance and mace and the trusty sword of their old father Voin. Then Peter brought forward Koulash, upon who he had fastened a bear’s skin in order that the tsar might not recognize the well-known steed.

Milosh Joins the Procession

Milosh was now ready to set out, and as he took leave of his brothers they counseled him: “When thou comest up with the wedding-guests they will ask thee who thou art and whence thou comest. Thou shalt answer that thou art coming from the Karavallahian land, where thou hast been serving a Turkish lord, Radoul-bey, who would not pay thee thy wages, wherefore thou art looking for a more generous master. Say, moreover, that having received chance tidings of the tsar’s wedding, thou has ridden to join thyself to the servants of the party, not for any wages, for thou wilt gladly serve for a piece of bread and a glass of red wine. Thou must, meantime hold firmly the reins of thy steed, for Koulash is accustomed to go in the line the tsar’s own chargers, and he may betray thee!” When the brothers had made an end of their counsel Milosh took leave of them and of his mother and turned his steed in the direction of the wedding party, and he came up with them in

the mountain Zagorye. Upon seeing the stranger the svats hailed him: "Whence are thou coming, little young Bulgar?" And Milosh answered from afar as his brothers had counseled. Then the svats welcomed him readily, saying: "Mayest thou be happy with us, little young Bulgar! We are always glad to have one more in our company!"

The princely company, all aglow with the brilliant colours of the resplendent uniforms, their lances and cuirasses gleaming in the sun, rode on until they came to a valley. Now Milosh had a bad habit, acquired in the mountain Shar while watching his sheep, to slumber toward mid-day, and as his Koulash stepped proudly on he fell into a deep sleep and his hand suddenly relaxed on the rein. No sooner did Koulash feel the curb loosen than he arched his neck and flew like an arrow from a bow through the ranks of the horses of the tsar, when he ranged himself in line with them and fell into the same slow, measured pace.

By this time the whole procession had fallen into disorder, and a crowd of Lale¹ would have fallen upon the innocent cause of the commotion, had not Doushan intervened to protect him, saying, "Do not strike this youthful Bulgarian, he is a shepherd, and shepherds have a habit of dozing toward noon while watching their sheep; do not be violent, but awaken him gently." Thereupon the svats awakened Milosh, shouting: "Rise, O foolish young Bulgarian! May the Almighty spare thy old mother who could not give thee a better understanding but thou must needs venture to join the company of the tsar!"

The Leap of Koulash

Milosh awoke with a start, and saw the tsar looking upon him with his deep black eyes, and lo! His Koulash was in the royal line! Not a moment did he pause, but, gathering the reins firmly in his hand, he spurred his steed sharply. Koulash for one brief instant quivered from head to heel, then with a frantic bound he sprang in the air the height of three lances: for the length of four lances sideways did he spring, and as for the number of lengths covered by his leap onward, no one could number them! Fire issued from his mouth and tongues of blue aflame came out from his nostrils! Twelve thousand svats beheld with awe and admiration the wonderful leap of the Bulgar's steed, and exclaimed as one man: "Father of Mercies, what a might wonder!" Then some said to others: "O that so good a horse should be possessed by such a fellow! We have never before seen such a marvel." Others said: "There was, indeed, one charger like this in the stables of our tsar's son-in-law and now is possessed by his nephews the brothers Voinovitchs."

Among the heroes who admired the steed were Voutche of Dyakovitza, Yanko of Nestopolye and a youth from Priepolye; these spake one to another thus: "What a beautiful steed that Bulgar has! There is not its equal to be found in this weeding cavalcade, not even our own tsar has one like it. Let us fall behind and seek an opportunity to deprive him of it."

¹ This is the popular appellation of Serbian's living in Batchka and Banat, which provinces are now under Austro-Hungarian rule.

As they reached Klissoura the three horsemen were far behind the other svats, and Milosh was also riding alone in that place. Then the heroes came near to him and addressed him in seeming courtesy: "Listen to us, thou youthful Bulgar! Wilt thou exchange thy horse for a better one? We shall give thee also one hundred ducats as a bargain-gift, and moreover we shall give thee a plough and a pair of oxen that thou mayest plough thy fields and feed thyself in peace for the rest of thy days!" But Milosh answered: "Leave me alone, O ye three might horsemen! I do not wish for a better horse than the one I have already; for did ye not see that I cannot keep even this one quiet? As to your bargain-gift, what should I do with so many ducats? I do not know how to weigh them, neither am I able to count as high as one hundred. What should I do with your plough and your oxen? My father has never used a plough in his fields and yet his children have never known hunger!"

The Fight for Koulash

At this answer the three horsemen said angrily: "Thou hadst better consider our proposal, O haughty Bulgar, lest we take thy horse by force!" To this menace Milosh answered: "Truly, by force men take lands and cities, and much more easily can three men by force take from me my steed! Therefore I prefer to exchange it, for I am unable to travel on foot." Saying this, Milosh made a pretence to give up his Koulash peaceably, and inserted his right hand under his coarse cloak. They thought he intended to take off his spurs, but they were greatly mistaken, for in a flash out came his six-angled club, and before they had gathered their wits Milosh gave Voutche a gentle tap that tumbled him over and over three times in succession. Milosh then addressed him ironically: "May thy vineyards in thy peaceful estate of Dyakovitza be as fertile as thou art brave!"

Seeing what had befallen his companion, Yanko was in full flight, but it took scarce a moment for Koulash to reach the flying steed, and Milosh let fall upon the shoulders of his rider such a blow that he, too, was hurled to the ground, where he turned over four times ere finding anchorage. "Hold on! O Yanko!" scoffed Milosh, "May the appletrees in thy peaceful estate bear as abundant fruit as thou art brave today! "There now only remained the young man from Priepolye, who by now had fled to some distance. But his horse's speed could not avail against the swiftness of Koulash, and Milosh soon reached him and with his warrior club gave him a tap that tumbled him over and over no less than seven times. Whether he could hear or not Milosh called aloud: "Hold fast, O young man from Priepolye! And when thou goest back to thy Priepolye, I give thee leave to boast before the fair maidens there of how thou hast today taken away by force a Bulgar's steed!"

This done, Milosh turned his charger and soon reached the wedding cavalcade. In due course the procession arrived at the white city of Ledyen, and the Serbians put up their white tents beneath its walls. The equerries gave the horses barley, but none did they give to Koulash. When Milosh saw this he took in his left hand a nose-bag and went from horse to horse, taking with his right hand from each a handful until he had filled the bag of his trusty Koulash. Next he went to the principal winekeeper and prayed that he would

give him a glass of wine. But the keeper of the wine refused, saying: "Go away, thou black Bulgar! If thou hadst brought thy rough Bulgarian wooden cup, I might perhaps have poured in it a draught, but these golden cups are not for thee!" Milosh turned on the churlish wine-keeper a dark look and followed it with a tender blow on his cheek that sent three sound teeth into his throat. Then the man, thoroughly cowed, besought Milosh thus: "Stay thy hand, O might Bulgar! There is wine in abundance for thee, even if our tsar should thereby go short." But Milosh paid no attention to the fellow, and proceeded to help himself. Then, as his spirits mounted with the generous wine, day dawned and the sun began to shine.

The First Test

As Milosh stood drinking in the fresh beauty of the early morning a page of King Michael called loudly from a tower of the royal castle: "Listen, O Serbian Tsar Doushan! Behold, in the valley beneath the walls of the city is the champion of our king! Thou must fight a duel with him, either thyself or by a substitute. If thou dost not overcome him thou shalt not go from this place safely, neither shalt thou take back with thee so much as one of thy wedding guests! Still less shalt thou take with thee the princess Roksanda!"

Doushan heard the haughty message and sent a strong-voiced crier among the wedding guests. Here and there he stood shouting loudly the tsar's message: "Has any mother given birth to a fearless hero who will take up the challenge in our tsar's stead? To him who is brave enough to fight the champion the tsar will grant nobility." But alas! When the crier had gone through the camp no hero had come forward to claim the honour of doing battle for the tsar.

When Doushan heard this, he struck hi knee with his right hand, exclaiming: "Woe is me! O mighty Creator! If I had now my darling nephews, the two Voinovitchs, I should not lack a champion." The tsar had hardly ended his lamentation when Milosh, leading his steed, appeared before the tsar's tent. "O my Lord, thou mighty tsar!" said he, "have I thy leave to fight this duel?" The tsar answered: "Thou art welcome, O youthful Bulgar! But, alas, there is slender likelihood that thou canst overpower the haughty hector of the king. If, however, thou dost succeed, verily I will ennoble thee!" Milosh leaped to his saddle, and as he turned his fiery Koulash from the tsar's tent, he carelessly threw his lance on his shoulder with its point turned backward. Seeing this, Doushan called to him: "Do not carry, O my son, thy lance so! Turn the point forward, lest the proud Venetians laugh at thee!" But Milosh answered: "Attend, O my tsar, unto thine own dignity, and be no anxious concerning mine! If need arise I shall easily turn my lance correctly; if not, I may just as well bring it back in this wrong wise!"

As Milosh rode on through the field of Ledyen, the ladies and maidens of Ledyen looked upon him, and, laughing, they exclaimed: "Saints in heaved! A marvel! What a substitute for a Serbian emperor! The young man has even no decent clothes upon him! Be merry, thou hector of the king, for hardly shalt thou need to unsheath thy sword!"

Meantime Milosh reached the tent in which sat the champion of the Venetian king. Before the entrance he had stuck his lance deep into the ground, and to this he had tethered his grey steed. Milosh addressed the hector thus: "Rise up! Thou little white Venetian gentleman, we will fight together for the honour of our masters!" But the hector answered angrily: "Away with thee, thou ugly black Bulgar! My sword is not for such as thee! I would not soil my steel on such a ragged fellow!" This remark made Milosh very angry, and he exclaimed: "Rise up, haughty Venetian! Thou has indeed richer attire; I shall take it from thee, and then who will have the finer feathers?"

At this the hector sprang to his feet and mounted his grey charger, which he caused to prance and curvet across the field. Milosh stood quietly looking on until suddenly the Venetian fiercely hurled his lance straight to the breast of Milosh. The wary Serbian received it on his golden headed club and jerked the weapon over his head, breaking it into three pieces as he did so. This sleight-of-hand alarmed the hector and exclaimed: "Wait a minute, thou ugly black Bulgar! My lance was faulty, wait till I get a better one!" With this he put spurs to steed, but Milosh shouted after him: "Stop, thou white Venetian! Thou shalt not escape me!" And with this he spurred his Koulash after the cowardly hector and pursued close to the gates of Ledyen. Alas for the fugitive, the gates were closed! For a moment the hector paused irresolute and this moment was his last. Milosh let loose his unerring lance, it whistled through the morning air and hector was transfixed to the gate. Then Milosh alighted from his steed, struck off the Venetian's head and threw it in Koulash's nose-bag. Next he caught the grey steed and rode with him to the tsar. "Here, O might tsar," said he, "is the head of the king's hector!"

Doushan was overjoyed at his prowess and gave him much gold. "Go, my son," said he, kindly, "drink some good wine, and presently I shall make thee noble!"

The Second Test

Milosh had hardly seated himself at his wine when a page again called loudly from the royal castle: "Behold, O Serbian tsar! In the meadow below thou mayest see three fiery horses saddled, on the back of each there is fastened a flaming sword with point upward. If thou wouldst go in peace from here taking with thee the king's daughter, thou must thyself or by deputy leap over these flaming swords."

Again the tsar sent a crier throughout his camp. "O Serbian's," he cried, "has not any mother given birth to a hero who will venture to leap over the three horses and the flaming swords fixed on their backs?"

Again he traversed the entire camp, taking care that his words should come to the ear of every svat, but again no hero came forward to offer himself. Then as the tsar was anxiously meditating on the problem he looked up and, lo! Milosh again stood before him. "O glorious tsar!" said he, "have I thy permission to essay this feat?" And the tsar readily answered: "Thou mayest surely go, my dear son! But first take off this clumsy Bulgarian cloak! (may God punish the stupid tailor who made it so!)" But Milosh said: "Sit in

peace, O mighty tsar, and drink thy cool wine! Do not be anxious concerning my coarse cloak. If there be a heart in the hero his cloak will not be in his way. If a sheep finds her wool too heavy for here there is no sheep in her nor any wool!”

So saying he rode down to the meadow of Ledyen where stood the three steeds tethered side by side fiercely pawing the ground. The young man dismounted from his Koulash and stationed him several paces from the third steed, by his side, then patting Koulash gently on his proud neck, he said :”Thou shalt stay here quietly until I come again to the saddle.” He passed over to the first steed and went on a little distance, then turned, and dancing first on one foot then on the other, he ran like a swift deer and, leaping high, jumped over the three steeds, over the flaming swords, and alighted safely on the saddle of his own Koulash. This done he gathered the reins of the three charges and rode with them in triumph to the Serbian tsar.

The Third Test

Very soon the page of the Venetian king came again to the tower of the royal castle and proclaimed: “Hearken, thou tsar of the Serbs! Under the topmost tower of this castle is a slender lance whereon a golden apple is stuck; twelve paces distant is set a ring. Thou must shoot an arrow through the ring and transfix the apple—thou or thy deputy!”

This time Milosh would not wait for the crier to do his errand, but straightway went to the tsar and obtained his permission to essay the task. Then, taking his golden bow and arrow, he went to the pace indicated, fixed his arrow on the bow string, and the shaft sped straight through the ring to the heart of the apple which he caught in his hand as it fell. Again the tsar bestowed upon him golden ducats beyond number.

The Fourth Test

No sooner was this wonderful exploit completed than the royal page again proclaimed from the castle turret: “Behold, O tsar of the Serbs! The two royal princes have brought out in front of the king’s palace three beautiful maidens, all exactly alike and attired in similar robes. The king bids thee guess which of the three is the princess Roksanda. Woe to thee if thou touchest other maiden but Roksanda! Thou shalt not have the princess for thy bride; neither shalt thou go out with thy head upon thy shoulders; still less shall thy guests leave this place!” When Doushan heard the message he summoned immediately his councilor Theodor and commanded: “Go, Theodor, and tell which is Roksanda!” But Theodor declared that he had seen her but for so brief a time that it would be impossible that he should be able to choose between three maidens all exactly like the one he had seen by the light from his master’s ring.

Hearing this the tsar, in despair, struck his knee with his hand, exclaiming: “Alas! Alas! After performing many wonderful exploits, must we return without the bride and be the shame of our people?” Just then Milosh, who had become aware of the tsar’s difficulty, entered into the imperial presence and spake thus: “Have I thy leave, O tsar, to try to

guess which of the maidens is the princess Roksanda?" And the tsar answered joyfully: "Indeed thou hast, O darling son of mine! But slender is the hope that thou shalt guess rightly, since thou hast never seen the princess before!"

Thereupon Milosh answered: "Be not fearful, my glorious lord! When I was a shepherd in the mountain Shar watching twelve thousand sheep, there have been born in a night three hundred lambs and I have been able to recognize and tell which sheep was dam to each lamb. How much easier will it be to choose Roksanda by her resemblance to her brothers!"

"Go, go then, my darling son! May God help thee to guess rightly! If thou art successful I shall grant thee the whole land of Skender that thou be its lord for thy lifetime!"

Milosh went forth through the wide field until he came to the place where the three maidens stood waiting. With a swift and sudden motion he swept the coarse fur-cap from his head and threw from off his shoulder his heavy cloak, revealing the scarlet velvet and the golden cuirasse which had been hidden underneath. Truly he shone in the verdant field like the setting sun behind a forest! Milosh now spread his cloak on the grass and cast upon it rings, pearls, and precious stones. Then he unsheathed his finely-tempered sword and addressed the three fair maidens thus: "Let her who is the princess Roksanda gather her train and sleeves together and collect these rings, pearls, and precious stones! If any but Roksanda should dare to touch these beautiful things, I swear by my firm faith that I shall instantly cut off her two hands, yea, even as far as her elbows!"

The three beautiful maidens were terrified, and two of them looked meaningfully at their companion who stood in the middle. This was the princess, and after a moment's hesitation Roksanda gathered her silky train and sleeves and began to collect the rings, pearls, and precious stones. The two other maidens were about to flee, but Milosh took them gently by their hands and escorted all three to the presence of the tsar, to whom he presented princess Roksanda together with one of her companions who might be her lady-in-waiting; the third maiden, however, he retained for himself. The tsar kissed Milosh between his fiery eyes, still not knowing who he was or whence he came.

The Departure of the Serbians

The masters of the ceremonies now called aloud: "Get ready, all ye svats! It is high time we should hurry homeward!" And the svats made ready for the journey, and soon they set out, taking with them the beautiful princess Roksanda.

As they departed from the gates of the city, Milosh approached the tsar and said: "O my lord, thou Serbian Tsar Doushan, listen to me! There is in the city of Ledyen a terrible hero name Balatchko the Voivode; I know him and he knows me. Balatchko has three heads: from one of them issues a blue flame, from another rushes a freezing wind. Woe to him against whom these are directed! But if a hero withstands them it is not difficult to slay Balatchko when his wind flame have left him. The Venetian king has been training

him these seven years, for it has been his intention to make use of him to annihilate the royal wedding party and to rescue princess Roksanda, supposing that thou shouldst succeed in obtaining possession of her. Now it is certain that he will send him to pursue us. Go thou thy way and I will remain behind with three hundred well chosen heroes, to stop the monster from pursuing thee.” Therefore, while the svats went on with the beautiful Princess Roksanda, Milosh, with his three hundred comrades, remained in the verdant forest.

The svats had hardly struck their tents when King Michael summoned Voivode Balatchko. “O Balatchko, my trusty servant,” said he, “canst thou rely upon thy valor and go out against the tsar’s svats to bring back my daughter Roksanda?”

And Balatchko replied: “My lord, thou King of Ledyen! First tell me, who was that valorous hero who achieved the great feats to which thou didst challenge the Serbian tsar?” The king of Ledyen answered him: “O Balatchko, our trusty servant! He is no hero; he is only a youthful black Bulgarian.” And Balatchko replied: “Nay, thou art mistaken; no black Bulgar is he. I know him well; he is the Prince Milosh Voinovitch himself, whom not ever the Serbian tsar was able to recognize through his shepherd’s disguise. Truly he is no ordinary hero, and not to be lightly esteemed by any warrior, however fearless.” Nevertheless the king insisted: “Go thou against the svats, O Voivode Balatchko! If thou dost regain the princess, I will give her to thee for wife!”

The Contest with Balatchko

Hearing this promise, Balatchko saddled his mare Bedevia and went in pursuit of the svats, accompanied by six hundred Venetian cuirassiers. When they reached the forest they saw Koulash standing in the middle of the main road and Milosh on foot behind him. Balatchko addressed the prince, saying: “O Milosh, evidently thou hast waited for me!” With this he loosed his blue flame, which, however, only singed Milosh’s furs; whereupon, seeing that he had not greatly harmed the hero, he breathed his freezing wind upon him. Koulash tumbled over and over in the dust three times, but the wind did not affect his master. Exclaiming: “There is something thou didst not expect!” Milosh hurled his six-cornered mace and it gave Balatchko a gentle knock that tumbled him out of his saddle. Then Milosh threw his lance and transfixing the fellow to the ground, after which he cut off all three of his heads and threw them in Koulash’s bag. This done, he mounted his steed and led his three hundred Serbians against the Venetian cuirassiers and cleft three hundred heads, the survivors being put to flight. He then hurried on and soon came up with the tsar, at whose feet he cast the three grim heads of Balatchko. The tsar rejoiced to hear of his victory and gave him one thousand ducats; then the procession resumed its march to Prisrend. In the middle of the plain Kossovo, Milosh’s way to the fortress of Vouchitran lay to the right, and he came to the tsar to take leave of him. “May God be with thee, my dear uncle!” said he. Only then did the tsar come to know that the seeming Bulgarian was none else than his nephew Prince Milosh Voinovitch! Overwhelmed with joy he exclaimed: “Is it thou, my dear Milosh? Is it thou, my dearest nephew? Happy is the mother who gave thee birth and happy the uncle who has such a valiant nephew! Why

didst thou not reveal thyself before? Verily I should not have excluded thee from my company.” Woe to him who overlooks his own relatives!