

## **‘The Death of Murad’**

It was in the year 1389 that the plain of Kossova, or, as it is called in the Hungarian tongue, Rigmazen, was covered with the tents and pavilion in which the Ottoman army, under the command of Murad the first, was reposing after a tedious march. The encampment extended along both the banks of the little river Schitiza, the pure waters of which were eagerly welcomed by the wearied camels and the fleet chargers which formed so essential a part of the Oriental armament. On the summit of every tent glittered the crescent and floated the banner of the Mussulmans; and the gorgeous colours of the pavilions occupied by the chiefs of the forces formed a scene at once imposing and magnificent for the eye to gaze upon.

The tent of the Sultan Murad was erected in the centre of the whole encampment, and was surrounded by those faithful Janizaries who had turned the fortune of many a battle in their master’s warfare against the princes of Caramania. Four smaller pavilions were placed at short but equal distances from that inhabited by the sultan, thus forming a square, of which Murad’s tent was the centre. The first of these four pavilions was occupied by the sultan’s harem and the female branches of his family; the second by his elder son, Bajazet; the third by his younger son, Yakoub; and the fourth by the Beglerbeg Timourtasch, the most formidable warrior and accomplished chieftain in the Ottoman army.

It was on the morning after the arrival of the Mussulman forces upon the plain of Kossova that a herald, accompanied by a small escort, demanded an interview with the Sultan Murad, on the part of his master, Lazar, the King of Servia. The audience was accorded; and the herald was speedily ushered into the presence of Murad, who was seated upon a rich ottoman in the midst of his pavilion, and surrounded by the chiefs of his army. The herald beckoned his attendants to wait at the entrance to the tent, while he himself advanced slowly forward, and respectfully saluted the Ottoman sovereign. The following conversation then ensued in the language of the invaders, with which the herald was perfectly conversant.

‘What is your name?’ enquired the sultan, surveying the Servian from head to foot, and secretly admiring the just proportion of his limbs and the extraordinary beauty of his person, to which his extreme youth – for he had scarcely seen one-and-twenty summers – gave an additional interest.

‘Milosch Kabilovitsch,’ was the reply.

‘And your business?’ demanded Murad.

‘The great and mighty Lazar, King of Servia,’ answered the herald, ‘has despatched me with a white flag to propose conditions of peace to the Sultan Murad. Lazar is well aware that the Ottoman army is far inferior to his own in reference to numerical proportion; and he also knows that the European system of warfare must secure him an advantage over the rude discipline of

Oriental warriors. But Lazar is unwilling to lavish the blood of his faithful subjects in an useless combat; and he has despatched me to propose terms of truce which may lead to an eventually permanent peace.'

'Young man,' said the sultan, in a solemn tone of voice, 'thy mission is a rash one. He who talks of peace to Murad, otherwise than as a vassal, insults the glory of the Ottoman banner.'

'My mission, sire, is scarcely more daring than the one on which you have led the troops that obey your call,' was the answer of the undaunted Milosch.

'Were not thine youth a plea in thy favour, insolent Servian,' exclaimed the incensed sultan, 'thy blood alone should expiate the offence offered by the words ! Retire – return to thy master – and tell him that the Sultan Murad knows as well how to conquer as to spare his foe. Thee do I pardon – him will I shortly drag in chains to Brusa. The moment thou hast set thy foot without the limits of this encampment, let a deadly hostility commence between us; and if on the road back to thy master thou dost meet any of my detachments, attack them, and treat them as spies if thou provest thyself their conqueror: but on the other hand, shouldst thou be brought back hither a prisoner by them, then death shall be thy portion. Depart – 'tis thus I deal with thee !'

Milosch would have replied, for his indignant feelings almost burst the bosom in which he was compelled to restrain them: but the Beglerbeg Timourtasch, pitying the young man, and probably anticipating a signal instance of Murad's cruelty and revenge, if more words were bandied on the disagreeable subject, hastily walked forwards, and conducted Milosch from the presence of the sultan back to his attendants, who waited for him outside the pavilion.

'Rash youth,' said Timourtasch, when they were in the open air, 'would'st thou beard the very lion in his den ?'

'He has offered the most deadly of insults to a Servian of noble birth,' returned Milosch, placing his hand upon the hilt of the long sword he wore by his side; 'and, by the God of my fathers, I will be revenged !'

'Deeds, not threats,' young man, said the Beglerbeg, with an ironic smile, 'are what the Mussumlans love. But,' he added in a kinder tone of voice, 'I tell no tales – and your words are safe with me. Haste, then, and depart – here thou standest on the edge of a deep precipice:' and with these words Timourtasch left the incensed herald and his attendants to the direction of a menial, who conducted them beyond the limits of the encampment.

When Milosch was once more in the open country, afar from the temporary city of splendour and magnificence formed by the Turkish encampment, he no longer repressed his emotions, but gave vent to the most bitter invectives against the proud sultan, at whose hands he had experienced so insulting a reception.

‘And now,’ said Milosch to his followers, ‘is the war begun; and by everything sacred I swear, that if we meet a detachment or fall in with an outpost of the invading army, we will attack them, be their numbers double our own; and the same oath shall oblige me either to lay our enemies dead at our feet, or else to die ourselves upon the battle-plain.’

A shout on the part of the followers of Milosch welcomed this determination; and the cavalcade pursued its way through the verdant meadows and fertile fields in which so sanguinary a tragedy was destined shortly to take place.

The herald and his attendants had scarcely proceeded a league, when a party of horsemen was discovered on the opposite bank of the river Schitiza; and the beams of the meridian sun irradiated the crescent which surmounted the staff on which the Ottoman banner floated proudly to the breeze.

‘The foe !’ cried Milosch; and he reined in his steed for a moment to *reconnoitre* their probable strength. ‘There are upwards of a hundred scimitars on yonder bank,’ he added after a moment’s pause; ‘and we are but sixty. The genius who presides over the brave has doubtless thrown in our way this early opportunity of proving our courage, and fulfilling my vow.’

‘Milosch and victory !’ shouted the followers of the intrepid young Servian.

‘Then onward to the attack !’ exclaimed Milosch; and, putting spurs to his horse, he galloped over the fields which separated him from the river, plunged into the rapid stream, and arrived safely on the opposite bank, followed by his gallant troopers at only a short distance from the Ottoman detachment, which he now perceived to be an escort or guard attendant upon several females, who, closely veiled and dressed in magnificent attire, were mounted upon superb Arab steeds.

In the midst of the cavalcade rode a female who, by the superior elegance of her own costume, and the trappings of her horse, and by the attendants that walked on foot by her side, Milosch knew that she must be a person of high rank. He, however, was determined to change that which was evidently an excursion of pleasure into one of misery and distress; and he made signs to the Ottoman escort to prepare for battle. The females screamed when the intentions of the Servian party were manifested by their hostile preparations: but the leader of the Turkish troop, perceiving his numerical superiority, cheered the spirits of those who were entrusted to his charge by the assurance that ‘he would speedily lay the heads of all those Christian dogs at the feet of his mistress.’

And now the crescent and the cross joined in sanguinary conflict. For a time the Ottomans appeared to have the advantage; but at length the superior discipline of the Servians triumphed over their numerical disadvantage, and the Turkish scimitar bounded inefficiently from the steel morions and corselets of the followers of Milosch. The young chieftain ordered a desperate

charge to be made upon the centre of his opponents; and he himself headed the onslaught. This blow was decisive: the Turks disputed every step with firmness, but were at last compelled to give way; and in the course of an hour Milosch had dispersed or slain nearly the whole of the escort, and had taken the princess and her attendants as prisoners.

‘Fear not, beautiful lady,’ said the young conqueror, as he advanced towards the terrified maiden. ‘You are in the hands of generous enemies; and were it not for a sacred vow, which the tyranny of Murad compelled me to pronounce –’

‘Christian, Murad is my father. Speak no ill of him,’ exclaimed the princess, in a firm tone of voice; ‘but respect the misfortune which has placed Niloufer in your power.’

Milosch started, for he had heard of the fame of Niloufer’s beauty, and he knew that a more lovely creature never graced her native clime. This angel of perfection was now in Europe, and was his prisoner: should he conduct her to the presence of his masters, or suffer her to return in safety to her sire? Terrible was the struggle in the bosom of the youthful chieftain: but a sense of honour, and the memory of his oath, prevailed where the obligations of duty could not; and in a sorrowful voice Milosch briefly related the circumstances which compelled him to lead the princess as an illustrious captive to the presence of the King of Bosnia, who commanded the advance guard of the Christian allies. It would then remain for Lazar, the Servian monarch, in his capacity of commander in chief, to decide upon the fate of Niloufer.

‘Generous stranger,’ exclaimed the princess, ‘your courtesy is a sufficient guarantee that I shall meet with respect and attention from your superiors. I know that Europeans are merciful to their prisoners; and in a short time my father may redeem me by a suitable ransom.’

Milosch assured Niloufer that she need be under no apprehensions as to the treatment she would experience at the hands of his superiors; and the princess, in order to show her conqueror how completely she threw herself upon his mercy, raised her veil as the highest compliment an oriental female in those times could pay a stranger of the opposite sex, and one which testified gratitude, respect, and submission. Milosch was prepared to witness a lovely countenance, for report had spoken far and loudly of the charms of Niloufer; but when the invidious veil was drawn from her face, he was suddenly stupefied, as it were, by the transcendent beauties upon which he was thus suddenly permitted to gaze. His imagination could not have pictured the existence of so fair an object: she seemed like a beautiful vision, whose earthly reality was impossible, and whose presence was an illusion which a moment’s reflection would destroy. There were in Hungary many of the loveliest of God’s creatures; but, compared with this celestial being, European charms were abortions, youth was age, grace was awkwardness, and delicacy was coarseness.

Words cannot describe the effect which the sudden apparition of such faultless features, and so exquisitely modelled a form, produced upon Milosch. His followers were engaged in plundering

the slain at a distance; and he stood alone, as it were (for the female attendants of the princess retained their veils, and sate upon their steeds like lifeless statues), in the presence of the greatest ornament which ever embellished the land in any age. But that effect was only momentary – Milosch was ashamed at his own rudeness – and when the princess cast down her eyes and blushed deeply, he withdrew his gaze from her bewitching countenance. Niloufer replaced her veil, and it appeared as if a deep abyss had suddenly separated Milosch from a being for whom he already felt the most indescribable emotions.

The plunder of the slain soon ceased; and the cavalcade moved onwards to the camp of the advanced guard of the allied Christian forces. The journey occupied two days, as Milosch ordered frequent halts to refresh the princess, and enable her to support the fatigue of travelling; and in order to render the task the less irksome to her, he ordered a litter to be constructed, in which she was borne by some of his followers. At night a pavilion was erected for the accommodation of herself and attendants; but no sentries were placed to guard it. Niloufer pledged her word not to attempt an escape, and Milosch was satisfied.

At length the troop arrived at the encampment of the van-guard of the allied army; and Milosch sought an interview with the King of Bosnia. He detailed the failure of his mission of peace to Murad, and succinctly related the circumstances which placed Niloufer and her suite in his power.

‘I have sworn obedience, together with the other allied sovereigns and chieftains, to the commands of Kazar,’ said Twarko, the Bosnian monarch; ‘and to him alone must the matter be referred.’

‘Then, sire, will it please your majesty to dispatch a messenger forthwith to the Servian camp?’ said Milosch; ‘for I have pledged myself to this noble lady that her destiny shall be speedily disposed of. Suspense to one so young were the very refinement of cruelty.’

‘In this case, act thou thyself the part of courier to King Lazar,’ returned Twarko; ‘and I pledge my royal word that in the meantime the princess and her suite shall be treated as becomes their rank and their misfortune.’

‘In the name of Niloufer I sincerely thank your majesty!’ exclaimed Milosch, overjoyed at the mission which was entrusted to him. ‘I require one hour to make my preparations, and shall then be ready to start. By to-morrow evening I shall be here again.’

Twarko intimated that the despatches for the commander-in-chief would be completed by the time Milosch proposed to depart for the Servian division of the army; and the young hero hastened to bid adieu to Niloufer, and communicate to her his hopes and the resolutions of Twarko in reference to her fate and to her comforts. The princess again raised her veil when she bade adieu to her protector, and, for the second time, he gazed upon her heavenly countenance.

Again he drank deep draughts of love at that fountain of everything chaste, lovely, and pure; and again did he feel as if he had lost somewhat essential to his felicity, when the gauze was again spread over that face, in which the charms of a houri, the innocence of an infant child, and the animations of a captive virgin were so sweetly combined.

In an hour Milosch departed, attended by only six of his followers; for he was fearful that a larger escort would only detain him upon the road. Fleet and fast were his courser's paces as he galloped through the meadows which skirt the banks of the Morava, and hastened towards that part of the country where the centre and chief divisions of the army were encamped. Late at night he arrived at the wished-for place of destination, and on the following morning was admitted into the presence of the King of Servia.

Brief was the narrative of Milosch; but great was the disappointment of Lazar when he narrated the reception he had experienced at the hands of Murad.

'The daring Turk will hazard a battle, then,' said Lazar. 'I could have wished it were otherwise; but the will of destiny must be fulfilled. Young man, does the sultan seem confident in his own powers; or did his language resemble the bravado of a reckless adventurer?'

'Murad is as brave as a lion, although he be despotic and tyrannical,' was the reply, 'and, in sooth, did I not serve the mighty King Lazar, I would next don the scimitar worn in the army of the Sultan Murad.'

'Ah! Is it as you say?'

cried the King of Servia; and he conversed in whispers with an old counsellor who sate on a low seat near him. 'Tis well,' added Lazar, after a long discourse with his adviser; 'in an hour, Milosch, you may prepare to return to our brother in arms and respected friend, his majesty of Bosnia, who will see our orders duly acted upon.'

At the expiration of the appointed time, a despatch was delivered to Milosch for King Twarko, and a brevet, which conferred an exalted rank in the allied army upon himself, was handed to him. He was then laden with presents by his sovereign, and urged to return to the van-guard division of the army as speedily as possible. This injunction was scarcely necessary: Milosch burned to know the contents of the packet which was entrusted to him; and he was too anxious to relieve the lovely Niloufer from a state of the most agonising suspense to tarry upon the road.

In four-and-twenty hours he again stood in the presence of King Twarko, to whom he delivered his despatch. The Bosnian sovereign hastened to peruse it; but a cloud passed over his brow as his eye glanced on the document. Milosch awaited an explanation in breathless silence. Twarko said nothing: he reflected for one moment what line of conduct to pursue, and then placed the letter in the hands of the young Servian. Milosch seized the dispatch with avidity, and in mingled horror and doubt read the following words:

‘In the case of the Princess Niloufer, captive in the power of our revered brother in arms, the King of Bosnia, we earnestly command and recommend the following course to be adopted: -- seeing that the interests of Servia, as well as those of Bosnia and the other states of our august allies, require peace; and inasmuch as the blood-thirsty Murad is zealously bent upon refusing conditions of truce or pacification, it only remains for us to make use of those means which are in our power to compel him to evacuate Europe.

Let Niloufer be, therefore, the hostage of her father’s conduct. Let due notice be given to Murad of our intentions; and so soon as the sovereign of Bosnia shall hear of the slightest hostilities committed by the sultan, at that moment shall Niloufer lose her head. The Turks will grant no quarter: we need not set them an example of clemency which they will not follow.’

Scarcely had Milosch perused this terrible mandate, when a messenger, breathless and covered with perspiration, rushed hastily into the tent, and proceeded to inform Twarko that Murad had attacked a small outpost of the allied army, and that (probably believing his daughter was lost to him for ever) in the first ebullition of his rage, he had ordered all his prisoners to be put to death. The work of slaughter was completed, save in reference to the bearer of these sad tidings, who had escaped, in a manner almost providential, from the enemies’ camp.

‘Malediction !’ cried Milosch in an agony of mind better conceived than described; for he too well comprehended the necessity – the stern necessity – under which Twarko lay, to put in force the commands of the cruel Lazar.

‘I have no alternative,’ murmured Twarko. ‘My vow is registered in heaven: so long as I serve the allied cause, I am bound to act according to the directions of Lazar; and in this instance I dare not refuse to obey.’

‘Still, an appeal to his mercy might have some effect,’ cried Milosch, joining his hands together and falling at the feet of the sovereign of Bosnia.

‘Rise, Milosch – rise,’ said Twarko, himself considerably affected ‘the mandate is peremptory; all prayer is useless.’

‘Two days’ delay, sire and I will hasten to the camp of Lazar,’ urged Milosch, his voice almost suffocated with deep emotions. ‘Oh ! only two days’ delay – and I will throw myself at the foot-stool of his throne – and I will implore him to have mercy on an inoffensive maiden – I will beseech him in the presence of his chieftains not to sully a just cause with a deed so foul – oh ! I will obtain her pardon !’

‘Impossible !’ rejoined Twarko, wiping away large tears from his eyes: ‘it is impossible. The troops are already in a disaffected state; and the least subordination on the part of one of the

generals would lead to terrible and fatal results. Milosch, were she my own daughter, she should die.'

'Die – die ! Oh no – I will die for her !' cried Milosch, passionately appealing to a really merciful but now inflexible judge. 'Say not that she must die – Oh ! do not utter so hideous a word, when you speak of her ! To me death is but a phantom – a trivial occurrence – a step from one world to another; but when coupled with the name of Niloufer – that sweet, that dear name – you know not how horribly it sounds !'

'I have no alternative,' repeated Twarko, solemnly.

'There is one method of avoiding the execution of the fatal mandate,' cried Milosch, a ray of hope animating his pale countenance. 'Say that you never received it – I will declare that I lost or destroyed it – any thing, in fine, to gain delay !'

'And that witness to our conversation ?' observed Twarko, pointing to the messenger, whose presence Milosch had forgotten in the turbulence of his emotions.

'Oh ! he is a man of honour – he will not betray us,' cried Milosch, running to the individual who had brought the sad tidings of Murad's barbarity. 'You will keep our secret – oh ! you will keep it as if it were revealed to you by one from beyond the tomb – will you not ? Speak – speak !'

The messenger was about to reply, when Twarko said somewhat sternly, 'Milosch, I have seen the order, and I must act upon it. Remonstrance is useless – I have a duty to perform – that document is my warrant – that document is a command which I dare not disobey, else it would be an existing evidence of my disobedience and my perjury.'

'You act on this order, and upon none other ?' demanded Milosch, hastily as he displayed the letter which he still held in his hand. 'What if I had never delivered it ?'

'Then Niloufer would have lived, and you would have been hanged to the highest tree on the plain of Kossova,' replied Twarko.

'Can it not be lost – mislaid ?' continued Milosch, racking his brain to invent excuses for delay, as zealously as if the lives of his parents were dependent upon his success.

'No – it must remain, I repeat, as a warrant of my proceedings,' said the King of Bosnia; 'for, without it, I dare not act.'

'Then let it perish !' exclaimed Milosch, with tremendous emphasis; and in a moment he tore up the mandate of the commander-in-chief, and threw the scraps upon the fire, where they were immediately consumed.

‘Wretch, what have you done?’ thundered Twarko, darting forward and seizing the arm of Milosch when it was too late.

‘You have no order now,’ was the calm reply.

Twarko paced his tent with hurried footsteps for some moments, and muttered expressions of mingled sorrow and anger to himself. He was suddenly as agitated as Milosch had been a few minutes previously; and the young Servian was now cool and collected as if he were the sovereign, and Twarko the guilty subordinate.

‘Guards!’ cried Twarko, suddenly stopping short near the door of his pavilion.

In an instant the tent was filled with armed men.

‘I am your prisoner,’ said Milosch, drawing his sword, and delivering it to the officer on duty.

‘Keep him in close custody; your lives depend upon your vigilance,’ exclaimed Twarko.

The soldiers surrounded Milosch, and bore him away to a distant part of the encampment, where he was placed in solitary confinement, and so strictly guarded that all attempts at escape, even had he wished to essay any, would have been totally useless.

The insubordinate behaviour of Milosch was of course immediately reported by the King of Bosnia to Lazar: but any instantaneous decision, both in reference to Niloufer and him, was suspended, as the Servian monarch was, when the dispatch reached him, on the march to join the advanced guard -- but action with Murad now appeared inevitable. A few days passed away without bringing any change to the state of suspense in which Milosch and Niloufer were both kept. The princess had been informed of all that had passed; and while she felt the liveliest admiration at the noble conduct of the Servian youth, she could not but experience the utmost anxiety relative to his fate and her own. And yet a sense of the devotion of Milosch to her cause was so sweet to the maiden that she dwelt for hours upon his generous disposition; and then a secret emotion shed its mysterious influence upon her soul, and rendered her more mindful than ever of all the obligations under which she lay to him upon whose image she now delighted to ponder. Alas! the artless bosom of this sweet creature wist not that these were the early germinations and pangs of love.

On the eve before the battle of Kossovo, when the chiefs of both armies were resolved upon deciding the warfare by a general combat of the ensuing morning, Lazar, Twarko, and the commanders of the Herzegovinian and Albanian allies were seated around the banqueting board in the pavilion of the Servian monarch. The revelry and mirth which prevailed in that tent seemed rather to indicate the termination of a successful fight than the anticipation of a dubious one. The wine was not spared; and the toast, the joke, and the gibe went round, as if the partakers of the feast had forgotten that in a few short hours their disfigured corpses might be stretched

senseless and ignoble upon the field of battle. A strange instance of mortal indifference was that men could drink, and be joyful, and pledge each other in brimming goblets, as they trembled upon the verge of the tomb !

‘How fares our young prisoner Milosch ?’ demanded Lazar, his countenance flushed with wine.

‘Alas ! poor youth,’ returned Twarko; ‘I would that your majesty could divine some punishment for him less terrible than death; he is a worthy soldier – and love alone has led him into this excess of insubordination.’

‘Thinkest thou so ?’ said the Servian king. ‘I would fain hold the same opinion; but dare not, as the chieftain of a mighty army, and on the eve of battle.’

‘King of Servia,’ cried Twarko in a firm voice, ‘I implore your clemency for the young man. I know him to be brave – none more so; and I have already detailed to you the circumstances under which he offended against our martial laws, and your dignity.’

‘Appoint him some hard task in to-morrow’s battle,’ said the lord of Albania, ‘and try him thereby. Haply our brother of Bosnia hath not formed a wrong calculation of the stripling’s merit.’

‘Be it as thou hast said,’ ejaculated Lazar; and he ordered his guards to conduct Milosch Kabilovitsch to his presence.

‘Your majesty is my only friend,’ cried Milosch emphatically, as he bowed lowly to the King of Bosnia.

‘Say not so, young man;’ cried Lazar: ‘haply we are all here willing to serve thee.’

‘Give me my life,’ said Milosch, influenced by the hope of one day possessing Niloufer – a hope that made existence still dear to him – give me my life, and name the condition with which I will purchase it.’

‘Provided it be naught connected with the misfortunes of Niloufer,’ observed Twarko, charitably intending to inspire the young man with hope in reference to her he loved.

‘Yes – yes – name aught but that, and I will cheerfully agree to it,’ said Milosch.

‘Let us put the truth of this adventurous youngster to the test,’ exclaimed Lazar. ‘Milosch – so soon as the orb of day shall have proclaimed the dawn of another morning, the forces of the Christians join with those of the Infidels in deadly combat. You have sworn to obey the conditions I shall impose upon you; and on the fulfilment of those terms alone rests the safety of yourself and of the Princess Niloufer.’

‘Speak – speak, sire,’ said the now enraptured Milosch. ‘Name aught that you will, and I shall be only too happy to accept your conditions: and if the most sacred of oaths can enlist me the more faithfully in your service, may the Almighty Judge of us and our fellow-creatures hear my vow, and shower down his direst vengeance if I break it !’

‘This then be your task !’ exclaimed Lazar, a smile of triumph playing upon his lip; ‘and if thou dost well fulfil it, thou wilt refute the calumny of thine enemies, who scruple not to say that the fair face of Murad’s daughter has won the Christian from his allegiance to his king. To-morrow the plain of Kossova must be the scene of bloody battle; but the only chance of success, which the Ottomans can boast of is the skill of Murad. Haste thou at the commencement of the battle to the spot where Murad shall station himself, and kill him in the midst of his chieftains. Their surprise and momentary uncertainty how to act will ensure you a safe retreat.’

A dead silence ensued throughout the pavilion when Lazar pronounced that which all deemed the death-warrant of Milosch; for it was considered impossible to execute the orders of the Servian monarch and escape alive from the Ottoman scimitars. A cloud passed over the brow of King Twarko; and he responded not to the triumphant smile with which Lazar gazed round. Milosch was thunderstruck at the task imposed upon him: but when he had a moment for reflection, he dared not murmur, for his oath’s sake, against the will of a tyrant in whose power he had placed himself. He maintained a moody silence – bowed to the noble guests at that gorgeous banquet – and withdrew to his own pavilion unattended by guards, and no longer watched as a prisoner. Lazar well knew that the vow which Milosch had registered in heaven was as sacred to the young warrior as the image of his guardian saint is to the anchorite in his solitary cell.

Dark and dismal was the morning of the battle. The rain fell in torrents. The allied army, consisting of Servians, Bulgarians, Bosnians, Albanians, Wallachians, Poles and Hungarians was drawn up under the command of Lazar, Twarko and Wulk Brankovich. On the other hand, the right wing of the Ottoman forces was confided by his father to the orders of Bajazet, the left wing to Yakoub, and the centre, as usual, to the part of the sultan himself.

Murad gave the signal of battle, and terrible was the first shock of the encountering armies. Bright blades were steeped in gore – helmets and caftans were soon strewn upon the plain – the cross and the crescent mingled together in dire confusion – and the respective worshippers of the Cross and Mahomet fought with a fury which seemed to indicate that the demonstration of the truth of one creed, and the falsity of another, depended upon the result.

Suddenly a noble Servian, mounted on a charger which no rein could curb, rushed from the ranks of the chieftains, and after incredible efforts and exploits succeeded in forcing his way through the Ottoman ranks to the spot where Murad was posted, and whence he issued his orders to direct the movements of his warriors. The Janizaries in the immediate vicinity of the sultan imagined that Milosch – for it was he – was a herald despatched by Lazar to propose conditions of

surrender on the part of the Servians to Murad; and thus was the young chieftain enabled to approach the person of his enemy unmolested.

The reminiscence of the insult he had received a few days previously from the Ottoman sovereign gave nerve to his arm: he thirsted for vengeance – and he had a vow preserved in the chancery of heaven which he could not break. Murad waited for him to communicate the object of his mission; Milosch seized the dagger which he wore at his side, and plunged it into the sultan's breast. Murad fell – and for an instant the Janizaries, who witnessed the crime of the assassin, were so stupefied that they remained motionless and paralysed, thus affording Milosch an opportunity to escape. And well was his need, as he spurred his gallant charger away from the spot where he had so fearlessly fulfilled his vows, and where the mighty Murad was destined to terminate his career of glory and ambition.

About a mile from the spot where the battle was fought, the lovely Niloufer and attendants occupied a pavilion upon the banks of the Schitiza. Deep was the anxiety of the maiden to the result of the combat; but she dreamt not how terrible a task Milosch had imposed upon himself, nor how faithfully he had fulfilled it. She knew that her own fate depended upon the fortune which attended the Servian arms; and when she thought of Milosch her wishes that her father might prove the conqueror were less sincere than was consistent with her filial love.

Niloufer sate without her veil upon the ample cushions that had been spread for her in the midst of the pavilion; and the melancholy which pervaded her features gave an additional interest to their bewitching beauties. Suddenly the distant sound of a horse's hoof struck upon her ear; and then she became all animation and vivacity. Nearer and nearer still the tread of a fleet charger approached; the steps terminated at the entrance to the pavilion; and in a moment Milosch stood before the princess.

'Angel of beauty !' exclaimed the young man, as he gazed upon the lovely maiden, who smiled kindly upon him, 'thou receivest me with welcome and with pleasure; in another minute thou wilt order me from thy presence with horror.'

'Impossible !' exclaimed Niloufer. 'to you I am indebted for a thousand instances of generosity: to you I owe my life.'

'And if I saved thy life, Niloufer,' said Milosch in a melancholy tone, 'I have taken one equally dear to thee.'

'If in the heat of battle,' cried the Turkish maiden, clasping her hands together, 'thou hast unfortunately slain a relative of mine –'

'I have – and a near one,' interrupted Milosch, solemnly.

‘One of my brothers, perhaps – Bajazet, or Yakoub,’ cried Niloufer, with large tears running down her lovely countenance: ‘but if it were in equal fight – ’

‘No, my victim has fallen by the hand of assassination,’ ejaculated Milosch, striking his clenched fist forcibly against his breast; ‘and, in accordance with a terrible vow, have I stigmatized myself as a cowardly murderer.’

‘And your victim ?’ demanded Niloufer hastily.

‘Is your father !’ returned Milosch. ‘By this time the mighty Murad is no more.’

‘There is, now, no hope for me on this side of the grave !’ said Niloufer, after a moment’s pause; then, as if struck by a sudden idea, she drew a long bright dagger from a sheath of excellent workmanship which was suspended to her girdle, and plunged it with desperate vehemence into her bosom. Milosch rushed forward to prevent the perpetration of the terrible deed: but his aid was administered uselessly – it was too late – and the young and beautiful Niloufer fell back a lifeless corpse upon the cushions on which she had been seated.

In the meantime, the dying Murad, with the certainty of speedy dissolution before his eyes, continued to direct the movements of the battle; and through his extraordinary skill and presence of mind, the manoeuvres of the Ottoman forces were so powerfully managed that towards mid-day the allied army was completely routed. Lazar was taken prisoner, together with his principal chieftains and nobles; and it was only when brought into the presence of Murad, that the Servian monarch was informed of the fidelity with which Milosch Kabilovitsch had fulfilled his vow. The sultan expired as he pronounced the death-warrant of his noble captives.

The body of Milosch was found by the Turkish conquerors, and recognised by some of their Christian prisoners, after the battle was concluded. It appears that he rushed from the pavilion where so dreadful a tragedy had been enacted in a state of mind bordering upon madness or despair, and had found the death he then so much coveted in the thickest of the fight. His armour is still preserved in one of the museums at Constantinople; and amongst the Turks his name is recorded in the annals of the historian as a treacherous assassin, while amongst the Servians he is still spoken of as a patriot and hero, and his memory is revered with an enthusiasm equal to that which the Greeks manifested in their admiration of Aristogiton and Harmodias. Three stones designate the spot upon the plain of Kossova where Milosch fell; and a mosque points out to the traveller the place which was stained with the blood of the sultan Murad.