



South of
Sarajevo by
Fred F. Fleischer-

Author of "The Bandit of Banyaluka"

IT IS an old saying, effendi: "When the Gipsy comes to the village, guard thy horses and thy women." This is not written in the Koran, but is a saying of the people of Bosnia and there is much truth in these words, as I shall tell thee.

I would rather smoke one of thy cigarets, effendi, one of those thou hast brought from Istamboul. There is good tobacco, Anatolian tobacco, in them and the smoke is blue. Those which I must buy from Stefanopoulos, the Greek, are bad. Since the war began, he has mixed tea and laurel leaves with cheap Drama tobacco. His cigarets are poor and so am I. But he is rich.

Ayee, effendi, give me one of thy cigarets and listen to this tale:

My father's *han* stood on the plateau of the Konir Mountains, not far from the city of Banyaluka. He was a well-to-do man, and the plum crops which he sold to the traders of Slavonia brought him many Austrian eagles. Yes, effendi, it is true that I am a poor man, for I was a second son, and in those days, as it is now, the oldest son inherited the estate.

But in the time of which I speak I was contented to look after my father's horses, for there were many, and to look forward to the day when my brothers and I would drive many wagonloads of plums across the Save River to Hungarian Brod where the traders would buy them and make a handsome profit by reselling them to the distillers who made a brandy from the juice, called *slivovic*.

It is a drink of *sheitan's* make, and the faithful do not touch it. It was upon one of our visits to Slavonia that my older brother bought a horse from a trader.

I can not tell thee, effendi, how an Arabian stallion had found its way into the hands of an Hungarian infidel, but it was there and for sale, and Murzuk bought the horse. It was named El Ghaleb, which in thy language means the Conqueror, for few men if any had ever ridden the brute, and this was the reason why it was for sale.

My father was pleased, not only because the price was low, but also because he knew that the Pasha of Mostar was willing to pay a goodly sum for an Arabian stallion and that every horse trader in Bosnia and in the Hercegovina was on the lookout for such a horse and many high bids had been made.

I, as I have told thee, effendi, was taking care of my father's horses, and it fell to my lot to train the animal so that the Pasha could ride him. A spirited horse, which would have thrown Abu Sharval. Nay, effendi, such was not his name, but Ahmet Agha. He was called Abu Sharval by the people who always bestow a nickname upon those whom they do not care to call by their proper names. Abu Sharval, effendi, means Father of Wide Trousers, and the pasha was a Turk from Istamboul, who ruled the *sandchak* of Hercegovina for the Sultan ul Islam a long time before the Austrians came to Bosnia.

Do ask thy questions when I have finished this

tale, effendi, and leave thy cigarets on this tambouret so I will not have to ask thee for another one.

My days were spent in training El Ghaleb. There were times when I was willing to give up in despair, for he would not permit me to mount him. But I knew my father had given me this task and I had to finish it, for my father was a stern man and his punishments were frequent and quick.

One day I had led El Ghaleb into the road which follows the Verbas River and leads from Bosna Seray into Banyaluka. There was little travel in these days, and if the horse would run away, it could be in two directions only, for on one side there were the mountains and the river was on the other.



As I reached the road, from the path which led down from my father's *han*, the cavalcade of the Turkish governor from Bosna Seray passed me, and as was the custom in these days, I salaamed and shouted the greeting—

“*Tchok Yasha Padishahim.*”

With this shout, a change came over the horse. The brute had been restless and dancing, and now he had become docile. I had heard it said that the Arabs talk to their horses and that they had certain phrases with which to pacify them, but I had never seen it done nor had I believed it. This came into my mind, and I quickly took the opportunity to mount the horse. I had to ride him bareback and I did ride him back to the *han* on the plateau of the Konir Mountains.

Have patience, effendi, I know I spoke of Gipsies. I shall come to this presently. *Inshallah*, but these cigarets are good.

From then on, ere I would mount El Ghaleb, I

would whisper the greeting into his ear and he would become as docile as the lambs on the plains of Dolna Douzla.

Seeing that the period of training for the horse had passed and that the pasha would be able to ride him, my father bid me to take the horse to Mostar and to sell it to the pasha.

Quickly I was on my way. On the second day I reached Bosna Seray and spent the night with my uncle Husref Beg, and in the morning I was on my way to Mostar, which is South of Sarajevo.

It was on the evening of the third day when I came upon a camp of Gipsies, and as I was tired and needed food, I decided to stop with them. I was young then, effendi, and the Gipsies are musicians and dancers and their women are comely.

Just ahead of us was the town of Konitza on the Narenta River on the borderline between Bosnia and Hercegovina which countries were separate *sandchaks* in these days. I did not care to go to Konitza for I knew no one in the town, and the people there were not friendly inclined to strangers. So I stayed with the Gipsies.

Their king was Zulfikar, and he was a strong man. Well should I know later on. The women were cooking *pillaw* in iron kettles and the men were sitting around the fires making music. Some were playing the *tamboora*, which is a guitar played with a quill and others used the *gûsla*, which is a one-stringed fiddle, played with a bow.

They played well and I liked the music. Zulfikar accepted the ten *piastres* which I offered to pay for food and my share of a tent, and his eyes, while he talked to me, strayed often to El Ghaleb. I knew the love a Gipsy bears for a good horse and I understood. But I decided to be watchful, for most Gipsies are horse thieves, and the Turks were quick in their justice only when no gold tickled the palms of their hands.

No Kadi would hang a Gipsy for stealing a horse if the Gipsy had a price to pay for his life. And not only were the Gipsies quick with gold to free one of their tribe, but also with their daggers, and every Turkish Kadi knew it.

THE night was cool, and after I had eaten my fill of *pillaw* I decided to retire. I rolled myself into the covers which Zulfikar had provided for me, and lay down near the entrance of the tent so that I could see El Ghaleb where I had tied him to an olive tree.

Even before I had dozed off, two Gipsies had entered and lain down to sleep in the tent. As I had ridden hard all day, I was tired, and I believe I had fallen asleep. The next thing I knew, I was laying on my back and one of my tent-mates was kneeling on my chest, while the other tied my hands to my sides and then proceeded to strap my ankles together with his belt.

When they had finished—I was too dazed to make much of a resistance—they called for Zulfikar. But he did not enter the tent. He ordered the men to bring me out into the open. They carried me out and placed me against a tree. Then Zulfikar approached me and said—

“Wilt thou sell me thy horse, Moslem?”

Just then my senses returned. I knew that Zulfikar would surely take El Ghaleb and that I would receive just punishment from my father’s hands for having lost the horse. I also knew that Zulfikar would not be able to ride the horse and that I could trace him and his tribe until I would find him and bring him to justice. No Kadi would be lenient with him if I used my father’s name, and it was a well-known name in these days, *effendi*. So I merely shook my head and said:

“No, I will not sell thee El Ghaleb, for he is too good a horse to be ridden by a Gipsy; besides the horse is destined for Ahmet Agha, Pasha of Mostar.”

As soon as I had said this, I wished I had bitten off my tongue ere I had spoken. For instead of frightening the Gipsy with the pasha’s name, I only had increased the Gipsy’s desire for the horse. He, too, must have known of the pasha’s quest for an Arabian horse and since the pasha’s harem was always well-filled, due to the efforts of Gipsies, I should have known that Zulfikar and Abu Sharval were not strangers to each other.

In this I was correct, for Zulfikar began to laugh.

“So it is for Abu Sharval, that thou art taking this horse to Mostar. We are also going there, and the Father of Wide Trousers would rather take the horse from the hands of Zulfikar, his friend, than from a Bosnian Moslem whom he likes none too well. I ask thee again, wilt thou sell me the horse, before I am compelled to buy it from thee?”

Well did I know what the Gipsy meant by buying the horse. Quite well did I know this old Gipsy trick, and I shall explain it to thee, *effendi*, as I continue this tale.

I was helpless, and I cursed myself for a fool for having camped with Zulfikar’s tribe. I knew that I could not return to my father’s *han* should I lose the horse, and I had no desire to betray my father’s trust. So I decided to rely upon my wit and use it in the course of the affair.

They took me into Konitza when the morning came and made straight for the Kadi’s house.

The Kadi was an old man, and when the Gipsies brought me before him, still tied, he was already sitting in his chair of justice, fingering his beads and mumbling prayers into his long, white beard. He asked me no questions, but bade Zulfikar to state his case. Thus he did it:

“This man came to our camp last evening and offered to sell me the horse which thou wilt see tied to yon post outside this window, O father of all wise men. I offered him a decent price, but he wished to take advantage of a Gipsy, calling me vile names. I shall pay him a just price and thou wilt enter the purchase contract into the book, for I shall have protection. It shall not be said that I have stolen his horse. Lend me thy ear, O wise one, and take heed, for he is a violent man and harmful. He would have killed me had we not bound him.”

It was useless for me to even open my mouth. There were no calls for witnesses, nor the incantation of the Kadi to Allah to send him enlightening so that he might make a just decision. The Kadi’s palm was already red with gold, and I knew beforehand what would happen. It did.

The Kadi ordered his scribe to enter the purchase into the book of records, and Zulfikar laid down ten Austrian gold eagles* upon the desk in front of the Kadi.

“Note thou, wise one, that I shall pay him well and have this sum entered into the book. See thou with thine own eyes that I am going to place these coins into his pocket and give me a paper saying that I have honestly bought the horse.”

So saying, Zulfikar picked up the gold again and pretended to place the coins into my pocket. Gipsies are clever with their hands and fingers. Remember, *effendi*, they are experts in all trades of thievery, and Zulfikar expertly placed the coins back into his own belt from whence they had come.

Why did I not remonstrate? I have told thee, *effendi*, there were no witnesses and the Kadi was bought. Oh, Turkish justice in Bosnia! It was

* 10 guilder pieces.

different when the Austrians came. Then many Gipsies were hanging from the gallows. But then the Austrians also might have bought the horse legally and paid with a price set by a military court. I have seen this done, too, but this is another tale.

The Kadi's scribe entered the sale into the book of records and made out a paper for Zulfikar and the Kadi impressed his ring into the sealing wax. Then they turned me loose.

I cried, effendi, when the Gipsies led El Ghaleb away, for I was young then and the fear of my father's punishment was strong in my heart. Zulfikar stopped and saw me crying. This made him laugh and he came over to where I stood.

"Would it not have been better for thee to have sold me thy horse, Moslem?" he asked. "A searching dog will find bones, and I have looked long for a horse which I could take to Ahmet Agha. I shall give thee this cloth to dry thy tears in addition to the eagles in this pocket."

He stuffed a piece of cotton into my pocket and his eyes opened wide:

"Hast thou lost the gold which I have given thee in exchange for thy horse?" he asked in surprise.

These Gipsies are not only musicians and thieves, effendi. They are actors as well.

SO I stood in front of the Kadi's house and looked after the caravan which took my horse away. There came one of the soldiers, who in these days were doing police duty, and asked me if I had money. I told him I had not. He then arrested me on the Kadi's orders for being a vagrant in the town of Konitza, and threw me into jail. This, too, was part of the game, so that I could not follow the Gipsies and see where my father's horse was taken to.

Two days I stayed in the jail of Konitza, and after I was released, I had to spend another day in the willows along the Narenta River, picking the vermin out of my clothes. Thus I had lost three days, and then I decided to go straight to Mostar and make a plea to Abu Sharval himself.

The pasha's palace stood on the hill overlooking the city and many gardens were laid out on the hillside. Through these I had to pass before I would reach the palace, and there I saw several of the pasha's *yanitchari* who were trying to tame a horse.

They were out on the lawn, and while two were holding the horse, another one was using a long whip unsparingly.

There are two things, effendi, which make me

mad. Men who beat horses and Greeks who sell bad cigarets. Yes, effendi, I will have one more of these good ones. So I ran across the lawn and, with anger in my heart, began to shout at the soldiers. I did not recognize El Ghaleb at first, for the horse had been badly treated, but I would have acted thus for any other horse, for I love them. When it came to me that my father's horse was thus beaten, I forgot where I was and used my fists on the men. They in turn began to tussle and wrestle with me and the noise rang to heaven.

The man who wielded the whip used it on me as well as on the horse, and my cries brought out the pasha to see what all the tumult was about.

Well was Ahmet Agha named Abu Sharval. He could have carried many of his children in his wide trousers. Ahmet Agha was a fat man and, as he approached us, he seemed to roll over the lawn rather than walk. He was out of breath when he reached us, and I was a sorry sight, for my clothes had been torn and my face was bloody where the rawhide whip had cut the skin.

I tore myself from the grip of the *yanitchari* and salaamed deeply. Then I kissed the hem of his coat and spoke to him in reverent tones. I did not wish to have him speak first, for I knew that his words would have been an order to throw me into the tower of his palace. I had to state my case ere the opportunity was lost forever.

So I told Abu Sharval how my father had obtained this horse for him from Slavonia and that I had been robbed by the Gipsies while traveling to bring the horse to him. That I had seen the soldiers beat the horse and that I had come to prevent them from doing so.

There I had made another mistake, effendi, for the soldiers were carrying out the pasha's orders and I had no right to interfere. Abu Sharval's brows wrinkled, and he was about to berate me for my daring, but I gave him no time to open his mouth.

"This horse is strong, and a fitting animal to be ridden by the Governor of Hercegovina, and should not be beaten, for it will lose its beauty," I said to Abu Sharval. "Were it not for this thief, Zulfikar, I would have brought this horse to thee in good shape and ready for the Hadshi procession in which thou wilt ride."

There were numbers of Moslems in Bosnia in these days, effendi, who took the trip to Mekka, and when they returned, they wore the green *tourban* of the Prophet, and were called Hadshi.

They assembled for their pilgrimage in the residence towns of the pashas who governed the *sandchaks*, and the pasha would lead the procession. All this is passed now, effendi, and the faithful are few in this land where only the Servians and the Greek get fat.

So Abu Sharval stroked his beard and looked thoughtful. "Tell me," he finally spoke, "how canst thou prove to me that thou hast not sold the horse to Zulfikar and that it is thy father's animal? I have bought this horse from Zulfikar, it is true, but the Gipsy has not told me that he had bought it from thee. It was thy own tale that this sale had taken place at Konitza. Zulfikar has told me that he had bought the horse in Bosna Seray, and that he had ridden it to Mostar."

"Ridden it?" I cried. "O Ahmet Agha, did Zulfikar tell thee that he has ridden this horse? Then I can prove to thee that the Gipsy is a liar and a thief and that I speak the truth. Has the Gipsy left this city?"

"Nay, he is sitting within the palace drinking *moccha* and smoking a *narghileh*," replied the pasha. Then, turning to the soldiers, he ordered, "Omar, Yussuf and thee, Hamid, fetch me Zulfikar, but tell him not of this affair."

THE three *yanitchari* soon returned with the Gipsy and brought him before the pasha. I was standing behind El Ghaleb, stroking his neck, and Zulfikar did not see me. He would not have recognized me at once, for I was disfigured from the cuts on my face.

"Zulfikar," the pasha said, "is this the horse which thou hast bought in Bosna Seray and ridden to Mostar?"

"Ay, O Ahmet Agha, it is the very same animal."

"But this man," the pasha continued, pointing to me, "tells me that it is his horse which thou hast stolen from him at Konitza."

The Gipsy looked at me and recognized me after awhile.

"This man is a liar," said Zulfikar. "Look at him and then consider if a beggar would have enough gold to purchase such a horse of Araby. They do not raise such horses in Bosnia. I have paid one hundred Turkish pounds for this horse, Ahmet Agha, and I made but ten pounds profit, for thou hast only paid me one hundred and ten."

At this I spoke for the first time since the Gipsy

had been called:

"Ask thy *yanitchari* to search this thief, Excellency," I said, "and in his pocket they will find the paper the Kadi's scribe at Konitza had made out for ten Austrian gold eagles. And then, O Ahmet Agha, ask this liar to ride El Ghaleb in thy garden. If he has ridden him from Bosna Seray to Mostar, he should be able to do it again, but heed my words, Excellency, he cannot sit this horse, for El Ghaleb's back has never been weighed by any other man but thy servant."

Abu Sharval spoke a short command, and ere Zulfikar could gather his wits, two of the soldiers held him while a third one took from his belt the paper I had spoken of. This he handed to the pasha. Abu Sharval took one look and the furrow between his brows deepened.

"Verily, thou art a liar, Zulfikar," he said, "but then a lie is a stock in trade of every Gipsy. I will give thee one more chance. Ride thou this horse, and I will forget for the sake of the Circassian maiden which thou hast brought me this day. Mount this horse, Gipsy, and stay on his back. For if thou art thrown, thou wilt not arise before Yussuf has finished tickling the soles of thy feet with fifty lashes."

At this Zulfikar's face went white. But he was willing to try. He waited until the soldiers had saddled the horse and then tried to mount. He never straddled El Ghaleb. He was thrown as soon as his foot touched the stirrup. And while he was lying on the ground, Yussuf sat on his head, holding him down, and Omar on his belly, for the Gipsy showed fight.

I walked over to El Ghaleb. The horse, having been beaten, showed no desire to run away, and I whispered into his ear—

"*Tchok Yasha Padishahim.*"

Then I mounted the horse and rode around the garden. When I brought him back to the pasha, the soldiers were busy preparing for the bastonade which Zulfikar was to receive.

Yes, effendi, the pasha paid me the price I asked for the horse, and after I had told him of the words which would induce El Ghaleb to permit any man to mount him, he sent me safely back to my father's *han* with an escort of two mounted *yanitchari*, for there were robbers in the mountains South of Sarajevo before the Austrians came.

Zulfikar never forgot the bastonade he received at the hands of the pasha's soldiers and that I had

outwitted him and deprived him forever of the pasha's protection. He swore vengeance, but I paid no heed then, and not now. I was young then, effendi, and reckless and not afraid of any man.

I am an old man now, and poor, it is true, compelled to smoke bad cigarets. I thank thee, effendi, this will be the last one, for my tale is ended. But still, I am not afraid of any man. Nor am I afraid of Zulfikar who has sworn that he would cut my throat. He, too, is old now, and the Servians

have made him a policeman here in Bosna Seray. I see him once ever so often, but I stand my ground for, as I said, effendi, old as Mehemet Ali might be, he is not afraid of any man.

There sings the muezzin from the minaret, it is time for the evening prayer.

"Allah il Allah, Mohamet rassoul Allah!"

Inshallah, effendi. Be quick and lock the door, here comes Zulfikar, and he carries a saber on his belt!

