

PUBLIC MEDIA SERVICE RTV VOJVODINE

KOSINGAS - THE ORDER OF THE DRAGON

EPISODE 1: PROPHECY

GABRIEL 89 (OFF): Monday, 15th of June Anno Domini 6896

If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable, Roman philosopher Seneca once said. This also concern travellers who find themselves at crossroads, at which every road leads somewhere and beckons in its own way. Here, on the crossroads of two forest pathways on the Radan mountain, I, Monk Gabriel, found myself thinking that it would have been better to have taken the wrong path, as I knew where the one on the right led. The left road led around the mountain, then to the river Toplitsa and onward to St. Procopius, while the right one went to Devil's hamlet and fortune-teller Dragushla. The one do not visit her fortuitously, nor with foul motives, but merely when a terrible scourge forces. The robbers in hope of finding some hidden treasures inside the old stone hut, ceased travelling hither long ago. With time, even they gained awe to this place and the forces that guard it. Since olden times have indigenou and even foreign noblemen and rich merchants reached here for advice and unravelment of their qualms.

Prince Lazarus with his retinue and in my presence, arrived thither on Monday to inquire counsel about the jeopardy that hovered over the Serbian people. An old prophesy, which refused to outflank us, regardless how much we wanted it to, began its fulfilment. We arrived there somewhat before noon, reposed and refreshed, although the sun was high and the day warm. The forest can preserve morning cool for longer under its thick shade, and when a man finds himself besides a cold murmuring stream which further cools the hot air, then the soul is at peace and tranquil. To my joy, Lazarus left me on that crossroads to wait for King Marko, while his Majesty, with retinue of thirty, some lancers and some servants, took the right road to Devil's hamlet to set up the bivouac. Although we arrived on time, the Prince was in ire with me, as we had travelled for ten days via Prishtina and New Hill. This he blamed on my stubbornness, as I did not want to ride a horse but doggedly treaded leading my donkey behind me.

Now, I found myself sitting under an old beech on a stone indented in such a way as if it had the backrest of a chair, smooth as if taken out of water.

To this very day, I think that it was ordained hither to greet and farewell travellers. A thick forest lay on the left side of the road, and on the right side, down the slope, you could hear the stream murmur hidden among the willows which spread their branches longingly towards it. Beside the crossroads proper was a small dell, which the stream flowed, showing itself fleetingly to curious

glances. On that thick grass my donkey was grazing peacefully, free of all the baggage that he carried for days. Watching him so and listening to the murmur and birds' song in the forest, I felt myself relax and replenish from the long trudging. Even the foul thoughts that followed me throughout the journey began to fade, and I felt peace like I have not felt for a long time.

I was then forty three years of age, in full strength, both physical and spiritual, and some found fault with the fact that I did not resemble a priest. Maybe mostly because of my garment which was not a plain priest's - it widened from the waist down, with slits on either hip, thus serving to make it easier for me to fling it over my shoulder like a cloak. The undiscerning would eye me, while the priests used to glower at me, even though they knew who I was, they disapproved of my distinctive dress. I had no intention of differing from the other brothers, but circumstances obliged me to, and the Church reluctantly pretermitted. By that time, twenty years had passed as everybody deflected of my way, some out of jealousy, others out of hatred, because of my special privileges, but all out of reverence. Affection of undesirable guest among my own kind as evil doom grew within my soul. Verily, they unclenched their ports for me, and often placing me at the head of the table to dine with them, but in their eyes I could see disdain for me and for what I had become. As if it has not been required of me. Nobody could conceive what my life had become during the past twenty years, and what was known of it, would never bid unto another. About these trials of mine, much will tell of later, for every good story, needs to be told without haste and at proper time.

GABRIEL (43) OFF:

The sun moved across the sky and I was pleased that King Marko was late, that I could enjoy the peace a little longer, when in the distance a horseman appeared behind the bend. I sighed deeply as if I was going to dive into the water, for in that very instance all my mischievous thoughts recoiled. Wretched apprehensions endless beget one another, until a man loses thread of the beginning and the end.

My intuition, which had previously saved my life several times, now whispered in my ear that after this day, nothing will ever be the same again. The changes will carry us like a river surge in which a man can only endure to hold his head above water, while the current relentlessly carries him away.

The rider approached slowly.

GABRIEL (43) OFF:

And straight away I recognised a knight's armour and cloak. If I could not perceive the face of the rider because of the distance, at least the horse was well known to me. The Serbs do not breed such burly horses as Sharatz, who given to Marko as a present by Sultan Murat for being his liege. Marko had to formally accept the horse in order to preserve his land's boundaries, as he had no intention in partaking in the Sultan's assault on Serbian lands. The Sultan was not naive, thus he pleased himself with the fact that if King Marko would not succour

him, at least he would remain neutral and will neither help Lazarus. If the Sultan had known what Marko was preparing himself for, he would probably have sent his army that very moment on Marko's town Prilep.

King Marko rode up slowly.

GABRIEL OFF:

Marko and I had never met before, but we knew of each other. He halted his horse a few paces away from me, raised himself a bit in the saddle and looked around.

MARKO *Still glancing around, he said to me:* Who are you and what are you doing here?

GABRIEL *solemnly:* For you I am waiting, my King. I am the monk from the monastery Gornyak.

MARKO: You don't resemble a monk to me. And aren't you by chance a burglar dressed as a monk, with your horde lurking in hiding?

GABRIEL: If it was so, we would have already attacked you and we wouldn't be talking now. My name is Gabriel. LAZARUS left me thither to wait for you.

MARKO: I have heard tidings of you, dragon clergyman. All kind... bad tidings. You don't look like a monk to me. You are not pale, gaunt, slender. You look more like a robber, a warrior. And even your name doesn't suit you.

GABRIEL *Grinning:* Verily, my physique isn't of clergyman's, but in my heart I am. My name was given to me by the monks in Banyska. Though it is true that I am not scared of robbers either.

MARKO *Relaxing a little:* I believe you.

GABRIEL: Why are you coming without a retinue, my King? Aren't you afraid of burglars either?

MARKO: It was a long and perilous journey. I arrived with an escort, but they are lagging behind, and my horse Sharatz is always in a haste seeking for battle. Which lane do we take? I have never been thither before. The one say it is always right to choose the passage on the right.

GABRIEL *Thoughtfully:* Which path? That is what I often ask myself. This time, we will take the upper one, and you are right, it is the one on the right. The fortune-teller is not far. Prince Lazarus is up there with his retinue, setting up a bivouac, waiting for us to come.

At that moment, behind the bend, Marko's escort appeared. There were knights, twenty of them and a few loaded carts.

MARKO: Is this your monkey, monk?

GABRIEL: Yay, it is my faithful companion Tsoka.

MARKO *Laughed*: What kind of a name for an ass is that?! How did you come up with such a name!?

GABRIEL: He is not an ordinary donkey, and the name suits it as much as mine suits me.

MARKO: Not ordinary, is it? What can it perform? Can it do the tricks?

GABRIEL *Getting up*: How did you guess?

MARKO's retinue approached slowly.

MARKO *Cried*: Let's go!

He pulled the reins of his horse and started uphill. Behind his armed escort, three fully loaded carts with all kind of supplies and tents were slowly moving. Following them, walked the tired servants. GABRIEL burdened Tsoka and started after them.

GABRIEL OFF: The more we climbed, the denser and darker the forest became. The air became heavier and the silence overbearing. Soon, one could not even hear birds' songs. Nobody from the escort noticed this, apart from me and Tsoka.

Every now and again Tsoka would shake his head in bereavement and snort.

GABRIEL: Calm yourself. There is no danger. We will arrive soon.

SCENE 3 – DEVIL'S HAMLET. DAY.

GABRIEL 89: It wasn't long before our company arrived at the top. Sprawled before us was the ancient Devil's hamlet, founded in the dark ages when the Fates' of humans and creatures were closely intertwined. The hill that rose before us was almost bare, steep and rocky, with its middle part slid off, giving it the appearance of a huge quarry. At the roots of the hill, peculiar sand towers jutted with big stones at the pinnacle, some ten fathoms high. Who have hewn it and when, was not known, but it caused travellers' amazement and perplexity.

Many tales were told about this place, but all and sundry agreed on one: the old woman Dragushla, who dwelt thither, from the beginning knew the truth. She would tell it to no one, wanting this place to remain the frontier between the two worlds. The sand towers rose from the scattered stones at the bottom of the landslide all the way to the first trees by the stream, where the old woman's stone hut was settled. Squatting among the trees, with a small window on each wall, the cottage wasn't longer than ten paces and seven-eight wide. With smooth stone walls, eroded by rain and wind through the time and a wooden roof, it fitted well into the surroundings, reeking of old age and constancy, as if it was part of the landscape. Perhaps there was some truth in the tales that the cottage and the old woman abode here from the very foundation of Devil's hamlet, as tales about the old woman Dragushla were passed on from generation to generation. Although many knew of her, few had seen her. Only the bravest and most desperate dared to go for her advice, as it was well known that the old woman did not charge for her council in gold or silver, but asked for a favour which the petitioner did not dare to refuse. Tidings spoke that the sand towers were petrified petitioners who refused to fulfil Dragushla the requested favour. Some wanted to trick her, others simply refused to do what was asked of them. That is why whoever visited the old woman had to be clear that he should be ready to do what she bade of him in exchange.

Down by the torrent, not far from the cottage, on the meadow encircled by old beech trees, Lazarus' escort was unpacking and setting up bivouac. The horses were tied on the side. Lazarus immediately came to greet Marko, and the latter dismounted his horse and cordially greeted and kissed the Prince.

MARKO: Noble Prince LAZARUS!

LAZARUS: King Marko, how are thou?

MARKO: Fine, thank thou.

LAZARUS: I am glad to see thou.

GABRIEL was slowly approaching from the rear of the procession.

LAZRUS *asked in ire*: For heaven's sake GABRIEL, when art thou finally going to get thy a horse? How much longer art thou going to trudge like that?

GABRIEL: When I find a horse capable of saving my life fifty times.

LAZARUS: Let us sit under a tree and rest, while we wait for the old woman to call us. It'll give us a chance to talk a while.

Lazarus took them to the side, further away from the throng formed by knights and servants who had started unloading the carts.

LAZARUS: How is thy wife Jelitsa and son Matthew? I hear that thy son has grown up to your shoulder and that he is a real warrior.

MARKO: I am teaching him everything I know. He is smart and is learning fast. *MARKO smiled pleased.* His mother praises him and says that he is dragonly like his father and uncle.

LAZARUS: It is surely so, MARKO. He can choose who to look up to. Both his father and uncle are heroes. And how is thy brother-in-law Dragonblaze?

MARKO: Well. Both him and his father are in good health.

LAZARUS: How could it be otherwise for Master Draco! He is the oldest of us all and still has a stronger grip of the sword than any of us.

MARKO: Nobody knows how old he is, nor how many heads he had severed. And by my heart, it is said that nobody could count all the women he has bedded. A peculiar man. It seems as if time has stopped for him.

LAZARUS: May he live long!

GABRIEL: Regarding the times that are approaching his succour will be worth gold to us.

LAZARUS: What gold, he helps where gold is of no use.

MARKO: I was very surprised when I received your note, Lazarus, notably for it was delivered to me by Dragonblaze. Up to then, I did not know that he was a knight of the Order of the Dragon.

MARKO took out of his bosom a scroll.

MARKO: I haven't seen this since the death of my father at the battle of Maritsa. The seal of the two headed white eagle on a shield entwined with a dragon. Ere, I knew almost nothing about the Order of the Dragon, save folk's tidings - that ye art guarding the border between the two worlds and that ye defend the Holy Cross. On that very day when my father departed to battle, he left me a letter sealed with badge like this one. There he explained everything to me: that I was born with the wolf's whip token and that my weird was to become a knight of the Order of the Dragon when the time came. But something about a prophecy which he mentioned quite puzzled me...He called it the Fiery omen - after an Age of Fire which should onset next year, and make Hades to overflow.

He stopped for a moment, choosing his words.

MARKO: If I didn't know my father, I would have thought he went insane. He was a reasonable man, a true Christian Orthodox, and that's why his words flummoxed me. In his letter, he apologised for not being able to tell me earlier, as he was forbidden to do so by the knights of the Order, who feared for my life. He said, that if the word got out about me, I would probably have been slain very soon after my birth, and that my secret must be kept until the beginning of the Age of Fire... What do you know about this?

GABRIEL: No knight of the Order of the Dragon was permitted to utter your name from the day you were born, MARKO. Your secret was the best kept secret until now. A significant number of our knights fell over the past fifty years of your life guarding it, for the foul creatures crave to ascertain the name of the mortal who, according to the prophesy, is to quench the overflowing of Hades. They are eager to slay him expedite, so the prophesy cannot be fulfilled. We, from the Order of the Dragon, are mere familiar with it, for small or none tidings are known to men. Murmurs about the Lapidary book are coming from somewhere deep in Hades, where Fates' scribble the weird of the people and the World,. It is said that the three Fates' came on the third day after your birth to assign your fate and they conceded that you were the Warrior from the Prophecy. It is said that Hades is boiling with hatred and ire, for your name is unrevealed yet. Your father had the formidable errand to uphold this arcanum until his demise, and you have guarded it well until today.

MARKO: Is my name revealed to the foe from this day?

GABRIEL: Yes, and they will endure to slay you expedite.

We were silent for a while.

MARKO: Are my wife and son safe? Or they are in peril?

GABRIEL: There is peril to them, but they are already on their way to the castle of your father-in-law escorted by Dragonblaze, where they will be safe.

MARKO: My wife said nothing about departure.

LAZARUS: MARKO It was kept in secret until you started thy voyage. Now that thy name is revealed and can no longer be hidden, thy family ought to be protected. The spool has started unravelling. There is no point of return now

MARKO *Puzzled*: But, I never revealed anybody about this meeting.

GABRIEL: It is enough that you are hither with us now. The forest knows. Then everybody knows.

MARKO started gazing around himself.

MARKO: Are you saying that the spies are lurking on us?

GABRIEL: The spies from Hades have been watching the knights of the Order of Dragon since their upraise.

MARKO: Is there any relation between this prophesy and the Ottomans that are preparing to attack us next year?

GABRIEL: There is some bond, but for us still unaware.

MARKO: Are they all in collusion and conspiracy against all of us?

GABRIEL: No, they are not. Regardless our opinion of the Ottomans, they pray to their illuminative god and they are in combat against the hordes of Hades as well. Maybe Dragushla will bring spotlight to this conundrum of ours.

MARKO: I am a Christian Orthodox, my grandees. It is a privilege for me to be among you, as much as it is perplexing to comprehend all this.

LAZARUS: Verily! It is not simple to perceive all this, and when thou do so, thou will become Kosingas.

MARKO: Are you all knights of the Order of the Dragon? And Dragonblaze and Master Draco?

GABRIEL: They are far beyond. We'll tell you about them another time. Too much wine is mischievous – will cause a headache, regardless of how potable it is. All in good time, King MARKO.

At that moment, one of Lazarus's soldiers who was left to wait in front of Dragushla's cottage came.

SOLDIER 1: The old woman will see you now.

All three of us looked at each other and got up to go.

MARKO: I don't know how wise it is that we came thither. I've heard tidings about her, but I ought to admit that I do not believe in pythoness and sorcerers, for there are too many of them. Every village has its own. Take heed Lazarus, and better deal yourself with martial chores instead of hearing some old woman's humbug.

LAZARUS: Nay, MARKO. We ought to hearken from her what she knows about this prophesy or about the war that will occur next year. Maybe she has a canny counsel for us. In this foul times, we ought not decline whoever's succour.

GABRIEL: From what she might tell us, your life may depend upon it foremost, my King. You are the gist of the Prophecy. We came thither for your benevolence chiefly. To beseech how to proceed further.

MARKO: Is that so? Well, what are we waiting for, then? We ought not allow the old woman to bide for us, she may curse us for that.

LAZARUS: Wait, MARKO! When we come in, kneel and regard her. It is proper to do so and also it will help us.

DRAGUSHLA OFF:

*Throughout tempestuous nyghte b'rn wilt be the knyghte
And creed with that gent wilt bringeth,
Whereas the Dragonite shinet with all his might
Remaineth firm maleficence shall beest.*

DRAGUSHLA OFF: Cometh in, children, cometh in.

SCENE 4 – HAMLET. DAY

Lazarus pushed the door made of planks, stooped a while lest could enter and paced into the mild gloom of the cottage. Marko and I accompanied him.

DRAGUSHLA *With a kind and gentle voice:* Cometh in LAZARUS. Receiveth up, Prince. Welcometh to mine own home.

MARKO found himself beside Lazarus, and bent qawky himself.

DRAGUSHLA *Smiled:* Receiveth up, MARKO. Welcometh to mine own home. Thee, GABRIEL, nev'r boweth to anybody, only to thy God. What thy eyes has't seen, and what thy corse hast exp'rienc'd in Hades des'rves admiration. Many has't gone down to Hades, but only thee hath returned. Thy corse is full of t'rrible scars, sothee might not but encave those und'r thy garment forev'r. Mine own eyes seeth ev'rything, and nothing can beest encshielf. I seeth the scars on thy corse, I seeth the scars on thy soul, but I eke seeth thy most wondrous heart which beats only f'r thy God and f'r Jesus Christ. If I wast a dram younger, it shouldst beest me yond is kneeling ere thee.

Nevertheless, he went down on one knee:

GABRIEL: I bow before your wisdom, that shines upon me like the sun.

DRAGUSHLA: Receiveth up, GABRIEL. Welcometh to mine own home. I seeth thee doth want not in wisdom eith'r.

She turned and sat on a small wooden tripod beside a plain stone which served her as a table. Dragushla sat facing us, and we stood a few paces away in front of her, one beside the other.

DRAGUSHLA: Thy visiteth is in valorous hour, dragonly knights. Dark clouds art gathering in the east. All and sundry is getting eft f'r the decisive battleth. Ye, S'rbs until anon success-fully did resist the onslaught of Allah's w'rri'rs, and by doing so, did endure most wondrous casualties. Ye art weakened, and the foe is bringing in new f'rces. How art ye going to prepare f'r the next battleth? *She stopped and looked to each of us in turn.* Ye art outnumb'r'd. And yond is not all. The Prophecy of the Lapidary booketh begun its fullfilment. It is cleareth to thee and yond is wherefore thee cameth to me, f'r thee doth not knoweth what to doth next. Events art unravelling one aft'r anoth'r, multiplying, and each one leads to some outcome, consequent to pri'r. Th're art nay rules. In this turmoil of causes and consequences, somewh're at length looms the vict'ry of one man ov'r the hordes of Hades, which has't again begun multiplying and gath'ring as to ov'rcome this w'rd. Aft'r Mother hath sent the flote to punisheth the humans and vile creatures f'r countless wars, Mother did foretell yond Hades shall finally remaineth seclud'd at which hour the Age of Fireth cometh. Since then, the foul creatures shall not pose any threat to the people, and the gods of the und'rw'rd shall finally wither and vanisheth with timeth, f'r those shall beest forgotten and nay soul shall belongeth to those. The Age of Fireth begins next year. Yond is wherefore Hades hast been boiling f'r a longeth timeth waiting f'r the right moment to ov'rflow this w'rd. Yond moment hast been ordain'd. It tally with the invasion of the Ottomans. Yond is nay coincidence, but don't bethink they art in collusion with those. Those shall attacketh simultaneously, f'r Hades is acknown yond und'r very circumstances, shall those beest able to ov'rcome the Christian Orthodox S'rbs and the honourable Ord'r of the Dragon which leads them in secrecy. Hades hast wonneth one battleth 'gainst Christianity at which hour it thrived in its sev'rance into two Churches, f'r the Roman Church did get greedy f'r the earthly wealth and gaveth up the Kingdom of Heaven, and th're is nowh're m're gold than in Hades. Yond is wherefore they doth not feareth much the Roman Church, but those didst not expecteth the f'rmation of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople which did remain faithful to the Holy Crosseth and to thy martyr. The demons knoweth yond they shouldst not beest afraid of the sw'rd, but of the handeth holds it, f'r weird is what gives strength and valour which empower men to doth what he hast to doth.

Dragushla stopped for a moment while we listened to her mesmerised. We stared at her. She slowly looked at the ground and continued in the same flat voice:

DRAGUSHLA: Oft I bethink yond Mother in all h'r wisdom hast settl'd ye, S'rbs, on purpose 'round the biggest Node. For ye art Orthodox, but still the fusty faith is stout in ye, hence brav'ry hast been forg'd out of defiance and stubb'rnness from which coequal Hades frets, since those art waiting f'r the Ottomans to attacketh how wouldst those weaken ye more. Alloweth this bringeth pride to ye, but knoweth yond this is eke the causeth of thy troubles, f'r ye shall beest unabl'd of mutualtreaty. I has't been watching ye f'r a longeth timeth. The nobility square 'mongst themselves: they steal, killeth, poison, slaught'r each other's children, coequal the son attacks the fath'r and the fath'r doth take vengeance on the son, but when a foe attacks, all of ye in the teeth of the diff'rences, standeth unit'd to buckler thy landeth. Ye art, then, keen coequal to haste onto dead. Hades p'rceives yond. They ought to infringe ye, and then all the oth'r Orthodox peoples in the East... It is far m're f'rmidable when such peoples art hath led by Dragon Knights. It is much easier f'r those to dealeth with the Crusad'rs of the West. One just has to throweth them gold and they will becometh greedy. They anon yond Templars w're did mislead by the Demon Bafomet and who wast did destroy once their faith wast shaken. There the Roman Pope chooseth the kings, and here the Church just blesseth him. And th're art nay bett'r knights than the Dragon Knights. Yond is wherefore next year blood shall swamp S'rbian lands and again the S'rbs shall taketh the Fury into battleth. Oh, joy!

Dragushla sighed deeply, turned around and lifted the oval copper platter leaned against the stone table.

DRAGUSHLA: Anon I shall f'recast thy weird. I shall seeth what is 'rdain'd f'r thee.

The old woman got up and put out the copper platter, plain and without any decorations.

DRAGUSHLA: Spiteth on it. Each of thee shouldst spiteth onto one side of this platt'r.

She served it to Lazarus and he spat on it. Then she brought it to Marko, then to me. Again she sat on the tripod and with the unusually long nail on the small finger of her right hand, she begun smearing the spit across the platter, quietly murmuring some prayer.

DRAGUSHLA: The wat'r shall raiseth ye to et'rnal gl'ry! I seeth vict'ry, but what a vict'ry?... I seeth none on the battlefield... Wh're art the armies?... Only the dead. Ye banner is standing alone, but wh're art the living ones? The water hast taken them. On wast beheded, the oth'r becrowned, and third did remain

faithless. But the water shall not beest able to washeth all the blood. Yond soil shall beest soak'd with blood f'r ev'r. Coequal bloody flowers shall growth.

The fortune-teller said some more invocations in some inarticulate tongue, then put the platter down.

DRAGUSHLA: It hast been writ in the Lapidary booketh yond thee shall arresteth the Hades.

MARKO: What? How?

DRAGUSHLA: Readeth the Lapidary booketh!

MARKO: What is the Lapidary book? Where can I find it, old woman? And why me?

DRAGUSHLA: F'r the prophesy to cometh true, thee ought to readeth it. Neither I n'r anybody else can bid thee.

MARKO: I do not understand these things of yours, old woman. I am a warrior. I know how to fight, but I do not know how to cast spells.

DRAGUSHLA: MARKO, mine own son, at thy birth the Fates' f'retold yond Hades shall spilleth at the endeth of the middle age, and yond thee shall putteth Dragonite on thy girdle.

MARKO Sighed yet ferocious, but asked blankly: Where can I find that book and that, what you call, Dragonite? What is it anyway?

DRAGUSHLA: Gobina shall help thee with yond. Findeth him. Asketh him. I cannot bid thee any m're.

LAZARUS *Cried out*: How are we to defend ourselves from so many foes? We can scarcely endure Murat, but how are we to confront those others? And who are them?

DRAGUSHLA: Seeketh allies. Who is't is in God's grace? Asketh Gabriel. He is full of wisdom. He did acquire it through deep scars. Taketh them by the handeth, GABRIEL. They doth not see the tree from the forest. Thee knoweth all the known and unknown paths and ways. But others knoweth them as well. Guard thy life, because without thee they art like children. Thou art wise, GABRIEL. Thus, writeth down the events yond shall befall. Writeth down the tales and the happenings, because one era is finishing and a new one beginning, and the trail ought to beest left behind thee, f'r how else shall it beest known who is't and how wenteth ere his God. It hast to beest known which soul goeth whither. And this time GABRIEL, doth not writeth hymns to thy God, for His glory is eternal,

but writeth about people, great and small, who is't shall reacheth the sky with their heroism and acquire fame on which coequal the gods shall envy those folk! *Then she turned to Lazarus.* One day I shall bid something from all of ye. I shall appeareth to ye in thine dream, and then ye might not but tryeth to maketh mine own wish cometh true.

Lazarus flinched from out of thoughts, went down on one knee and said:

LAZARUS: Whatever thou may wish, we will fulfil it.

DRAGUSHLA: I believeth thee, Lazarus. Ye art honourable and pious knights. Before all, and above all, doth not forget yond ye art the knights of the Ord'r of the Dragon, combated f'r centuries to defend the holy cross from the vile creatures. Taketh the Fury to the battlefield with pride again. Square f'r the S'rbian people, and then every sacrifice is insignificant. Wend with mine own blessing and ye art welcome to spendeth the night by the torrent.

All three of them bowed and went out.

SCENE 5 – THE FOREST. DAY

MARKO: The air is more pleasant here.

LAZARUS: Let's sit under that beech tree. *Lazarus sighed and directed himself there.*

MARKO: I'm quite perplexed.

MARKO took his armour off his bosoms. He laid it down on the grass together with his sword. Then sat himself and continued:

MARKO: What did the old woman recite? What is the Lapidary book?

GABRIEL: *Throughout tempestuous nyghte b'rn wilt be the knyghte
And creed with that gent wilt bringeth,
Whereas the Dragonite shinet with all his might
Remaineth firm maleficence shall bees*

GABRIEL: Were you really born during a stormy night, Marko?

MARKO: It was stormy night, that is true. My mother would often speak to me how she was scared of the terrible storm which was howling outside merely before my birth.

Lazarus's cupbearer brought a tankard with wine and goblets.

LAZARUS: There comes my cupbearer with wine for the heroes, just in time!

MARKO cheered up at once:

MARKO: Now I can wash the dust from the road and banish the odour of the old woman's herbs from my nose.

LAZARUS: As Dragushla said, thy presence is substantial, GABRIEL. The old woman mentioned Gobina. Do thou know where we can find him?

MARKO: And who is Gobina?

GABRIEL: I don't know where he is now, but I know who does. Yonder, we will be told about the Lapidary book.

MARKO: I am ready to go where it's ought to. I am a knight of the Order of the Dragon and I'll accept this boldly. My father has spent entire life preparing me for this, and he didn't even dare tell me the secret. He took it to his grave. Seems it was a great burden to him. In my father's and in Order's homage, I will stand by you 'till the end.

GABRIEL: We're going to visit somebody who will steer us onto the proper road. A Lady.

MARKO: Again some old hag? Does our preparations for war comprise fortune-tellers' visiting and incantation practice? Are we to snipe our enemies with herbs and spells, instead of buying some of those canons from the Venetians? Or to mould them ourselves. Tidings say they are dangerous weapons. Even the Ottomans possess them. And we are visiting sorcerers!

He laughed loudly as if the wine had already stroke his head.

MARKO: Did the old woman talk about Fury which is at my father-in-law's on Yastrebats? He told me about that golden sword and iron shield of old, and that our ancestors used to carry those into battle.

GABRIEL: Fury is the sword from the times before the Christianity's arrival. It belonged to the god of war Yarilo, defeated by Trojan, aforetime hidden by Yarilo himself in one of his temples lest that dickens couldn't seize it. Thus his sword and shield fell into the hands of us, Serbs, on Yastrebats. Our people, worshipping god Yarilo, conserved it there, in the same temple. But, they couldn't strip the sword off the wall, for, even to them, it was forbidden touching it, unless they were off to war. Then, the chosen one could take it down and fasten it across his back, for this two-handed sword is too long to be worn at the

girdle. But, since the Serbs became Christians and renounced Yarilo, nobody else managed to take Fury off the wall.

MARKO: I know that in our shires, Kupalo feasts are still celebrated in homage to Yarilo, nevertheless priest are preaching about that rituals.

GABRIEL: The old faith is struggling, but its withdrawal is evident.

MARKO: "And what is that... Dragonite?"

GABRIEL: No one knows promptly what Dragonite is. It is merely known of its might, and that is of faerie armours kind. It has been forged before the flood and ordained to the Warrior from the Prophecy. To you, MARKO. With Dragonite, you will be able to destroy the hordes of Hades. Those are the tidings that last since the origine of time. But me thinks therewithal Dragonite, we will require another tool of power, whatever it may be.

MARKO *Grinned*: Well, I would very much welcome another one chunk of that, as you say, faerie arms. *Then, like a child eager for knowledge*: Is anything known about the Node which gammer mentioned?

GABRIEL: The Node is a spot where many underground tunnels intersect, and through which the wraiths pace. There are but a few nodes in the entire world. Tidings murmur that only two are left. The first one of well-known was in Italy, by the seaside, glorified much by the ancient Greeks for that was a place where Orpheus descended into Hades. The other one was on the opposite side of Drina, in Tvrtko's Bosnia. But, terrified under eventual threat of wraiths who once in a while burst out, Romans buried both nodes. A minor one persists on the Irish island... The other, major...

MARKO: The gammer said that the Node was settled somewhere near us.

MARKO yawned.

GABRIEL: In the mountains of Uomulle.

LAZARUS: I hearkened about Uomulle. Tidings say that without desperate need no one ever goes thither. Even the burglars avoid those mountains.

GABRIEL: One doesn't go there even in desperate need, but we're out of choice, and ought to go thither. The highlanders that abode yonder are pernicious warriors, and they should be in your army, LAZARUS.

LAZARUS: I know, I was there... a short while. Those highlanders are stockbreeders, known as Vlaches. Hardy and strong people. They are not knack with sword nor spear, but are made for the axe, pike and mace. They could be

trained to use the shield as they are used to constant fighting to survive in the rugged mount of Uomulle. Avail would be to compel them to fight on our side, GABRIEL.

GABRIEL: And they worship Svetovid...

LAZARUS: Who is in our Church's grace.

MARKO was already asleep.

GABRIEL: Dragushla probably alluded on Svetovid. Hades will spill over throughout our Node, in Uomulle. We ought to cease them hither.

LAZARUS: Ireland is an island and it is unsuitable to start an invasion there. And that Node is the minor one. Incapable for great army to pass through. They will spill out in Uomulle. We must get the Vlaches on our side.

GABRIEL: We will know better after we visit them. Mandatory is to find their chieftain or main vicar. We ought to warn them of what is being prepared. But prior to that, we must find out more about the Prophecy. We should visit the Elven Forest. *Quietly*. I will inform MARKO later about that, when the time comes.

LAZARUS: Thou art right, if whoever knows about the Prophecy, that would be the Vlaches. It seems that we have already ordained the errands. I ought to make ready to meet Murat, and thou will have to make an alliance with the tribes of Svetovid, as best you can. It is ordained once more to me to deal with demons and thou, GABRIEL with demons. Take Marko with thee, train him the secrets of Kosingas and start ye journey to Uomulle as soon as possible. The journey is aloof and perilous, but thou art quite familiar with it.

GABRIEL: Verily. *He sighed, overwhelmed by dire memories*, but it will be heavy burden both for Marko and me.

LAZARUS: May he not concern thou much, my friend, merely train him how and whence to blow those wraiths and provide him hands unleashed.

GABRIEL: If rather anything else was plain as that. But how will MARKO govern his court afar? He ought not to vanish without rhyme or reason.

LAZARUS: He has made an agreement with his brother Andriyash, to be his deputy in Prilep, and MARKO, as an Orthodox and pious man went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

GABRIEL: Canny. He didn't lie much, indeed. Verily, he is off to go on some kind of pilgrimage.

SCENE 6 – BIVOUAC. NIGHT.

GABRIEL 89 (OFF): The sun was slowly setting behind the west hills. The air was becoming fresher. The Prince went to his men, and I to my donkey. I took the saddle bags off it and chose a place somewhat secluded from the others for the night's resting place. I spread my rug on the grass and laid down to rest. My thoughts quickly wandered away and as if on wings, they covered the entire journey which stood before me and MARKO. I started planning the route. We ought to stay away from roads and towns, and merely visit villages to supply our provisions. We should travel merely during the day time, and at dusk we would set up camp. The night was the most perilous. Of great importance was to arm myself properly and to fit out Marko, for his armour and sword would not even daunt the wraiths. In the Elven Forest we should be informed, where and how am I to accoutre my companion with Dragonite. And then... God help us. I consoled myself that, leastwise, we will not have to descend to Hades. I've been solacing myself with that for the past twenty years, and it seems as if it has happened to me yesterday.

The servants began splitting the wood and preparing dinner. The fire was burning. The good mood, murmuring and laughter. The noise woke Marko up and he vivaciously shuffled to the big tent where provisions were served. As he appeared at the entrance, all the knights inside welcomed him with cheers and acclamation.

GABRIEL OFF: Unladed, I was glancing at my Tsoka, who was calmly grazing, approaching me slowly. It could fell asleep only in my presence, so this rapprochement at night time was its habitual practice. It was my faithful companion for twenty years, and the one could see the age on him. Hoary hairs around its muzzle were the trail of many years. I didn't know exactly how old it was, for one day I bumped into it in an underground tunnel. The donkey saved my life then, for the first time. It took me out onto the surface after forty days spent in Hades. Since then, we are inseparable

LAZARUS: Thou should join us, GABRIEL. Come and dine with us.

GABRIEL: You know me, I am not keen of feasts and throng. I do not get on well with people like I used to. Repose my king, and leave me with my Tsoka here. Don't know any better.

MARKO swaying, with a goblet in his hand.

MARKO: Here we have a monk who prefers the company of a donkey to the company of men! *He exclaimed.* You should join us and bless our table and the men around it.

GABRIEL: I shall send you my blessing from here. I'm fed up with heavy food.

MARKO: At least, sleep over in the tent, and not under the stars.

LAZARUS: Let him be, MARKO. GABRIEL has not slept for twenty years now and is unable even to rest his eyes. At least not since he returned from Hades.

GABRIEL: You surprise me even more every time, monk. You are the chosen one, the sorceress wants to kneel before you, then you haven't slept for twenty years, what else will I hear?

GABRIEL *Grinned:* I don't dare tell you everything at once lest you don't get scared.

MARKO *Exclaimed:* Well, I believe it is so. Hence, better hold your words! *MARKO walked towards the tent.*

LAZARUS: Tell me, GABRIEL, thou art mostly familiar with, what are the chances of those Vlaches accepting an alliance?

GABRIEL: They will accept it eagerly. I am just perturbed of what will they bid in return, and whether we can afford the claimed.

LAZARUS *Frowned:* Thou always do this to me. First thou lift me on my feet, and then thou throw me on my knees.

GABRIEL: At least, you are on your feet once in a while, LAZARUS. I had been on my knees for a long time now.

LAZARUS: No withdrawal for thou, GABRIEL. We are in dire need of thy presence. Thou ought to train Marko to carry on with thy errand. Afterwards, thou wilt be allowed to succumb, or to be sheltered into some hermitage.

GABRIEL: Put your mind at ease. MARKO will become Kosingas, but you ought to welcome Murat properly, so that he never again thinks of invading Serbia.

LAZARUS *Smiled:* Now thou art speaking, monk. Thou art again the steadfast and fearless warrior that roamed through Hades!

GABRIEL: Ah, Lazarus, I wasn't a warrior in Hades, let alone steadfast and fearless.

LAZARUS: I know, my old friend, but now I need thou all strengthened.

GABRIEL *Confidently*: You can rely on my word.

GABRIEL OFF: I dozed beside the fire with Tsoka, gnawing a piece of dried meat till my jaw tired, and my hunger got fed up and stopped bothering me. Of yore I ceased to hope that I will ever sleep and dream again. I haven't slept for twenty years, and brief snoozing and squinting are the uttermost of my reposing, for the scenes from Hades would come back to haunt me and I'm not capable to get rid of them ever. That is why my only rest was to lay down calm minded.

The bivouac became even more lively. New fires were mended. Men have already ate and drunk, all that with a lot of tumult and songs.

GABRIEL OFF: I did not expect to see Lazarus or Marko longer that night. Let them be merry and rest, and the morning is always wiser than the evening. After a few hours the tumult quietened, the laughter stopped and the fires slowly died out. Everybody who could, went to sleep. Only the guards crawled through the darkness. I remembered the words of the old woman Dragushla, and took out my parchment from the saddlebag, a goose quill and ink. Leaned on my elbow beside the fire and started writing about today's events. As remembered the old woman's words: "alloweth it beest known to whom which soul goeth". I will continue tomorrow, God willing.