

The Miller Cano Speaks

I'm the one who brought up Cemo. That's right! And without a mother at that! She's neither blind nor lame. I formed her brave as a wolf, swift as a gazelle. I shielded her as my own eye, kept her as my own word. She was my keepsake of her mother. Her exact copy. The skies shone in her raven hair, dark as her mother's. Her coal-black eyes held flames. Her lips were deeper red than Shirvan pomegranates. When she laughed, pearls seemed to sprinkle down. When she frowned, her eyebrows became daggers to stab at your heart.

She was still a toothless mite when her mother died. Upon my return from the war, I found her toddling like a tiny black lamb. I'm the one ... I raised her docile as a doe, yet savage as a wolf. I made her skin softer than rose petals, her wrists harder than steel.

Her mother, Kevi, was a bey-daughter. I was a serf at another man's door. We, the people of nine villages, were ready to offer our souls for our bey. If he said, 'Die', we'd die right there and then. It had been so since the days of our forefathers. "Work for the able, a sword for the owner" did not apply to us. Our craftsmanship, our horsemanship, our marksmanship existed only to increase the wealth and fame of our bey. We raced each other towards that end, sacrificing ourselves in his service. Some of us toiled in his rice fields, some fought off the wolves of the snowy mountains, and others battled the soldiers of the Ottoman. Some of us were the bey's shepherds and farmers; others his smugglers, his gunfighters, his brigands. Not even at prayer did we think of ourselves.

'My lord, bestow a long life on our bey and increase his wealth!' we beseeched, Whether wrestling, javelin throwing or trailing wolves during feast times, our personal fame did not count. Our sole purpose in striving heart and soul at these contests was to glorify our bey in the eyes of his guests. The bey's honour meant our honour; his fame, our fame. Such was the tradition.

I, Cano, was the bey's favourite servant. It was I who skimmed down the mountains on horseback, who shot the flying birds in the sky. I was the one who was chosen as look-out when we went smuggling, who ambushed the neighbour's caravan of contraband silks and sugar. Whenever there was a difficult task to be done, my bey would call on me first. All he had to do was to pat me on the back and say: 'Show them, Cano!' and I'd become lightwinged as a bird, ruthless as Zaloglu Rustem¹. The rocky mountains would tremble with my roars. I disregarded every danger to serve my master and never once did I hesitate. And yet, the cruel tricks of fate!

Bey had asked for me. I knelt before him and touched my lips to the ground.

'Command me, bey!' I said.

Bey sat cross-legged on his rug-covered divan. Stroking his beard, he seemed deep in contemplation, unaware of my presence.

'Bey, my life for you!' I murmured.

He finally rose to his feet, approached me and struck my back lightly with his whip.

'Cano,' he said, the day has come for you to serve your bey. I intend to set you a difficult task.'

¹ Zaloglu Rustem: a hero of ancient Persia, noted for his bravery and wrestling prowess

'Command me, bey!' I repeated.

"The bey of B... seems to find the bey of E... our better. He has returned our gifts.'

'May there be gloom cast over his fame!' I cried. "The walnuts I ate, the hairy ear I bit were all in vain, then?'

Several months ago, our bey had sent us to the bey of B... to offer his gift of fifty sheep and goats, a dozen cows and two thoroughbred Arabian horses. My bey's uncle had come with us to ask for the hand in marriage of the bey's daughter, Kevi, whose beauty was renowned. For the occasion, we serfs had stepped forward to entertain the beys. Some of us had wrestled, some had turned somersaults on horseback, and others had shot at targets. My task was to girth a wild stallion.

The square was promptly enclosed with fences and a healthy, headstrong stallion was let in. The animal's mane was shapely. The light flickered on his coat. He neighed repeatedly, rearing up on his hind legs then pawing the ground restlessly. On such occasions I had never yet shamed my bey. To entertain the spectators, I shouted : 'This animal has been well fed. I can't master him on an empty stomach. You've got to feed me a bit beforehand !

From the crowd a voice teased : "Shall we fill your nosebag with barley or with wild pears?

'You can keep them both, brother,' I called back in the direction from which it had come. 'You can eat them with your sister and pray for your bey. Our bey has always spoiled us. We are not ourselves unless we eat an ox-head and a sack of walnuts!'

Soon after, a tray bearing an ox-head roasted like a pomegranate and a sack of whole walnuts was put before me. I squatted beside it.

'In the name of God!' I said, reaching for the head. Starting with the muzzle, I cracked and ate it bone and all. At each bite, I shook my head from side to side, then chewed the bones noisily like a wolfhound. The crowd roared with laughter. After I had finished the head, I took the sack and jumped to my feet. Throwing a walnut into the air, I caught it in my mouth, cracked the shell and swallowed the whole thing down. Entertaining the onlookers in this fashion, I finished off half the sack.

'Now come to us, son-of-a-horse, and let's see which one of us is the real brave !' I shouted and charged at the robust stallion. As if he'd understood what I'd said, he pricked up his ears and reared. He wanted to trample me with his front hooves. In one jump, I wrapped myself over his bare back, with another I sat astride him. Now he tried to throw me off by bucking. He arched his back taut as a bow, then sprang from his hind legs. I stayed glued to him while he bucked and kicked in vain. After a while, he began sweating and panting heavily. I then clasped my arms around his neck and lowered myself to the ground. While holding fast to his ears, I forced his head down towards me. With a last effort, he shook his head free and in a split second had bitten my ear! As I felt the blood trickle warmly down my neck, every nerve in my body tingled.

"Miserable beast !' I swore. "I'll teach you a lesson which will make you swear to God that you'll always be obedient,' and clinging to his head, I pulled it down. My teeth caught the tip of his hairy ear and tore it off as he neighed with pain.

My bey had heard about this event from his uncle. That's why when I asked, "The walnuts I ate, the hairy ear I bit were all in vain, then?'," he couldn't help laughing.

Yes, they were in vain, Cano,' he said. "We showed him respect but received insults in return. To taunt us, he has sold his daughter Kevi to the lame son of our enemy, the bey of E.... This coming Wednesday they are taking the bride from B... to E.... Show them what we're made of, Cano. It's time to erase this black smear from our fame!"

'You speak truly, bey,' I answered. "The very time for it."

'If you can take the bride from them safe and sound, and bring her here, I'll see to it that you are rewarded'.

I kissed the floor.

'I offer my life for you, bey. We won't leave the bride to that cowardly cripple. God's witness, bey, we'll bring her to you safe and sound.'

Bey gave me fifty riders. We lay in ambush at Kamorit mountain and waited for the bridal procession to descend to the Euphrates by the Varto road.

Towards evening, the sentries announced the procession's arrival. I took cover behind a rock and surveyed the valley. Along the road a dust cloud rose. Some seventy of the E... bey's riders led the group. Behind them, perched on a sidesaddle, rode the bride. Beside her came the bey's lame son. Some thirty more riders followed. I divided up my men. One group was to attack the riders in front, the other, those in the back. In the turmoil, I was to rush in and snatch the bride away.

We waited for the procession to arrive at the spot we had chosen. When I gave the signal, my men charged. Guns were fired; horses reared up and neighed in alarm. The riders were caught off guard. They broke ranks and scattered before even understanding what had happened. Each escaped in a different direction. Standing dead still, I kept my eye on the bride. The lame bey-son seemed to think only of saving his own skin. He had released the sidesaddled mount and spurred his own horse on. My pride in manhood pricked by his cowardice, I punished him with one shot.

Startled by the gunfire, the bride's horse had begun galloping towards the mountain. I soon caught up with him and pulled the girl to the back of my horse. She was trembling like a bird. I clapped the spurs to my Ceyran and off we flew towards the forest.

Why I left my men behind and chose that direction, I'll never know. The devil's work, you may say. Fate, you may call it. Say what you will. It never even occurred to me to surrender the bride and gain my bey's favour. It was as if I had planned the ambush for my own cause, and the girl I had taken onto my saddle was my own. Her fiery gaze had pierced my heart like a dagger as I pulled her from her mount. The touch of her young body wrapped mine in flames. In spite of the cool forest breeze that fanned my chest, my body burned, my heart pounded, my throat was dry, my tongue tasted bitter.

When the rippling sounds of a stream reached my ears, I pulled in the reins and leaped to the ground. After tying my horse to a tree, I ran towards the spring and, without even bothering to take off my gun, plunged my head into the foaming water, gulping greedily. I then threw some water on my chest and arms. My entire body was steaming.

Suddenly, Kevi's vibrant voice echoed in the forest.

'You drank all the water you wanted, but lost Kevi!' she taunted.

I turned to look. Kevi had undone the reins of my horse and was sitting in the saddle. Under her green gown, her body was as taut as a bow. Her bridal headdress increased her beauty.

Her escape did not alarm me.

"What we take, we hold onto well, bey-daughter! I shouted. 'Unless you can fly, don't try to flee in vain !

I saw her eyes blaze. Without a word, she loosened the reins and dug in her spurs. My Ceyran shot forward like an arrow. I followed them with my eyes, allowing her a few moments to enjoy her triumph. Then, I moved my hands towards my mouth and called to my faithful horse: 'Ho there, Ceyran. Ho!

The hoofbeats stopped. My Ceyran answered me with a neigh. The bey-daughter began to whip the animal, then kicked and spurred him on the belly but my Ceyran stood as motionless as if he were nailed to the ground. I could not help smiling and soon the forest rang with the sound of my laughter as I mocked the bey-daughter.

"Come Ceyran, come!" I finally called to my horse. 'Don't tire the bey-girl.' My Ceyran came to me, trotting. I took a handful of raisins from my saddlebag and fed them to him. Then I filled my hand with walnuts and dried apricots from the other pouch of the bag.

'Bey-girl, jump down and come near. If you heed me like my Ceyran, I'll feed you with my own hands.' I held out the walnuts and the apricots. But she didn't move. So I threw the offering away and pulled Kevi down to me.

I'd been misled by her stubbornness, her defiance. She took to me sooner than my Ceyran had done.

Together we roamed the mountains for three years. And for three years the bey's men trailed us. But who can find Cano's tracks? In my time, I had paced this land inch by inch. The bey-girl didn't disappoint me either. She lay beside me on felt mats spread out in mills during winters and in forests during summers and not a day did she complain. She slept at night while I took guard; I slept during the day and she kept watch. She bore a daughter and gave her a name. Cemo she called her, after her own mother. Cemo girl, tied to Kevi's back, wandered through the mountains with us. Her mother had little milk so we fed her on goat's milk offered by shepherds.

Then, one day, the bey's men stopped trailing us. They'd become tired of it, I thought. In fact, the reason was quite different. The shehs, the aghas and the beys² had other worries. I learned this from a hodja³ who travelled from one village to another.

² Feudal titles used interchangeably by the peasants.

³ Hodja: a Moslem leader, or a school teacher.

'In the land of Romans, in the west," he told me, 'a pasha⁴ has come to power. He is blond, blue-eyed, handsome and brave. He declared war on the Osmanlis' cruel sultan, the accomplice of the foreign enemies. There was a big battle. Once face to face with the sultan, this brave pasha cut him in two with his sword. And thanks to him, the country was wiped clean of infidels. He also saved the caliph, a prisoner in their hands. Women, men, children and the old ones got together and celebrated this joyful event for forty days and forty nights. Soon after, he sent word to our shehs, aghas and beys :

"From now on, you will not smuggle or attack others," he ordered. "You will not oppress the poor. You will treat them as you would the rich. You'd best obey me or I'll drive my army on you and blow out the fire in your hearths like I did with the sultan!"?

Some of the shehs and aghas immediately sent him gifts and asked for mercy. But others united against him. And my own bey was among the latter.

When I heard this, I clasped the hodja's hands and kissed them.

From now on, I'm that pasha's servant,' I said. "I'll give my life for him. I'll swear to serve him until the rebels lay down their arms.'

The hodja patted my back.

'Go then to Sheh Mahmut,' he said, "and give him my greeting. Offer him your services as a volunteer.'

Sheh Mahmut was known as a follower of the pasha. He was a brave fighter, with three hundred riders in his company. His land extended from one horizon to another and no one knew the exact number of his livestock. Those who looked into his dark eyes were struck with admiration.

When I entered his presence, I kissed the floor. Then I kissed his hand and brought him the hodja's greetings.

'From now on, both Cano and Kevi are your serfs,' I said. Much to my surprise, Sheh Mahmut knew our story.

Your bey ought to have known that a human cannot change fate. He shouldn't have rebelled against God. Those who rebel against God Almighty never find righteousness again. And now, he has rebelled against our saviour; against the pasha who brought the enemy to its knees. His end is near! From this day on you are our brother and the beygirl our sister. The life and honour of the guests at our camp are our own life and honour,' he said.

Leaving Kevi was very difficult. We hadn't been parted for three minutes in three years. She was with child for the second time. Had she not been, she would have come along with me to war. Instead she was obliged to remain a guest at the sheh's camp.

'Kevi, till I come back you will stay here with our daughter,' I told her. 'You must remain behind for the sake of our child to come.'

⁴ Ataturk

She curled her fingers in such a way that I thought she would tear her baby from her body for separating us. Then her arms fell, her face crumpled and she dropped to the ground. The bey's servants took her away.

Sheh Mahmut organized a contest, both to introduce me to his men and to test me.

'I've heard a lot about your skills, Cano,' he said. 'Let's see them with our own eyes !

First, I competed with his marksmen. They were all excellent shots. One touched a silver coin with a bullet at a hundred feet; another split a cigarette in two; a third splintered a pine-cone thrown into the air. I bent down and aimed my gun back through my legs, then fired at a lamb bone put up as a target. The knob of the bone shattered into pieces.

For the wrestling, Sheh Mahmut brought forward his most reliable wrestler. Haydaro was a broad-necked, bearpawed warrior. His grip was like the clutch of an enormous steel pincer. When you freed yourself from his grasp he'd shout 'Hooo! My lion !', shake his head, and before you could catch your breath pounce back on you like a hawk.

We struggled in the snow for one hour. Neither of us could win. Drenched in sweat we both tried numerous tricks but we were too closely matched for them to succeed. The crowd watched us breathlessly. Finally Sheh Mahmut said: 'Let that be enough! Your skill and mastery are unmatched. May God increase your strength and bravery, my Inds! May your service to Kemal Pasha merit your courage!' He kissed us both on the forehead. Then Haydaro and I embraced.

'From now on you're closer to me than my own brother, Cano,' said Haydaro.

'You have spoken truly,' I agreed. "So are you to me, Haydaro !

Sheh Mahmut gave us each a pouch of gold.

That night we ate and drank abundantly. The celebration was at its height when a messenger came and whispered in the sheh's ear. Sheh Mahmut jumped up from his seat.

'My braves !' he shouted, "The time has come to serve Kemal Pasha! A group of brainless and arrogant beys and shehs who do not recognize the new laws, who think of smuggling as their born right, who crush the poor and the ignorant, have rebelled against our pasha. One of them, Sorik Agha, has ambushed our brother, Sheh Hasan. We must rush to his aid !'

A blizzard raged outside. Sheh Mahmut gave each of us a white cloak and a white fur cap. We left so suddenly that I couldn't even bid farewell to my Kevi.

We soon scattered Sorik Agha's panic-stricken men but that was far from the end of the matter. We were not to return to camp for many months.

Cano and his companions fought a long but victorious battle against the rebels. When Cano returned to Mahmut's camp, Kevi disappeared before she had even given birth to the child she was carrying and all the search for her was in vain. Mad with grief, he decides to raise his daughter, Cemo, alone.

Time passes and Cemo becomes a beautiful girl. His father, who now has a mill on the land of Sheikh Mahmut, wants to spare him the usual fate of the girls of the region. These, as soon as they are nubile, are sold "to the highest bidder", often men much older than them with whom they will not be happy.

Cano therefore decrees that the fate of his daughter will be decided during a tournament. The young contenders will face each other, and then the winner will face Cemo herself. Broken to all forms of struggle, she will be able to eliminate the one she does not want. Cano sets the date of the tournament: it will be for the first snow.

Summer and autumn passed. The melodies of the millwheel grew fainter. Haze gathered around Suphan mountain and the snow at its peak began inching downwards. The wintry air bore the howls of the wolves across the forests and the plateau and on towards Zozana. For three days piercing winds and blizzards raged above the peaks. Then one morning I woke to a world full of brightness. The day had come to part with Cemo.

Suddenly I felt sick with sorrow. My heart grew heavy; two teardrops rolled down my face. Yet what could I do? Such was the pattern of life and who could change it? Daughters were made for strangers. Brides survived their beatings to bring up their own girls to be sold in turn. What a curious, astonishing pattern!

There was nothing to be done for it, so when I saw the snowflakes, I jumped out of my bed and opened the door. Scooping up handfuls of soft snow, I pressed them to my burning chest and rubbed until I had cooled my body's fire. Then I went in to get dressed. As I was reaching for my gun, keeping that Sorikoglu scoundrel in mind, I called to Cemo. She'd been up for hours, my Cemo girl.

'Yes, Father?' she said, running to me. 'Get ready,' I said. "This is your wedding day.'

Cemo left without a word and was back in no time. She was dressed like a man, in knee-breeches with a wolf skin tossed over her shoulders. A wool scarf was wrapped around her head and neck. Her wrists and arms were covered with bands of felt.

'Ready, my jewel?' Ready, father.' 'Are you afraid?' 'No,' she replied, smiling.

I took her in my arms, pressed her to my chest and kissed her on the eyes. "The light of my life,' I said. 'You must fight for us both! If the brave who takes you from me is not worthy of it, I'll die from my grief!'

I took the mule from the stable and climbed on while Cemo fetched Karakurt from his kennel. She fastened the wolf leash around his neck. What an animal! He'd already

sniffed the competition. He barked happily, put his front paws on Cemo's shoulders and licked her hands and face.

We finally set off down the road.

When we reached the lower outskirts of Karga Duzu, Karakurt, vapour streaming from his mouth, howled lengthily to announce our arrival to the villagers. He moved ahead eagerly, tugging with impatience at the chain in Cemo's hand. His red tongue darted across his sharp teeth As he leaped along.

As we arrived at the village square, I rose up in my stirrups and called to the people who crowded the

'Now hear this! You who have your eyes on Cemo ! Didn't I tell you to be ready on the first day of snow? Cano Is a man of his word! And here we are. We're going up to the plateau. Those of you who are sure of their strength, bring your dogs, your clubs and the bashlik⁵ and come up and win her!'

With this, we slowly crossed the village square, crushing the snow in our path. As we left the village, I turned and looked back. The fever of competition had seized the whole village. People rushed about in all directions. Those lads who were sure of their dogs had begun wrapping their arms and wrists with bands of felt like Cemo had done. What a day to be young! How the braves glowed with life!

When we reached the plateau, a flock of crows who were pecking at the bitim trees rose up, chattering noisily. They too sounded excited about the competition. I jumped off the mule and tethered him to a tree. Then, spreading my goat-hair blanket on the

snow, I sat down and lit my pipe. Delightedly, I watched while Cemo played with Karakurt, twitching his chain and making him leap up around her.

Before long, the villagers turned up. The lads who intended to fight walked along proudly with their dogs. Each was followed by his family and friends, clothed in yellow, green and red shirts and white cloaks. Each group was teasing and encouraging its own brave.

The young men formed into lines under the bitim trees which covered one side of the plateau. They restrained their dogs and stood apart so that the animals could not brawl and bite each other. The dogs barked restlessly, tugging at their chains in mock attacks.

The spectators clustered around me. Everyone had a word to say; each praised a different brave. Those with great faith in the youths they championed, tried to get others to bet on them.

Cemo stood in the middle of the clearing. She leaned on her club with one hand and clutched at her dog's chain with the other.

Fearful of Sorikoglu, no one had come from the other villages, not even to watch. Who would dare to outdo a sheh, an agha? Hadn't the agha asked for her hand? Who then could now step forward and boast of his bravery?

⁵ Bashlik: a sum of money paid by the groom to the girl's father as dowry

Eight young men of Karga Duzu seemed determined to win my Cemo. All of them were the sons of my brothers. Surely then each one was worthy of my girl. I looked at them affectionately. My brave lions! The lads couldn't stand still. From time to time one would throw his club in the air and shout a loud 'hoorah!'

When everyone had arrived, I stood up and stepped forward. The noise ceased immediately.

You lads who want my girl," I said to the young men with the dogs, 'are all the rams of my brothers. God knows, I'd accept any one of you gladly. But you're eight and my daughter is but one. First have it out among yourselves. Then the winner must take on Cemo if she wishes to fight him. If she doesn't want to, that's her choice. Do you all agree?'

'Yes!' they shouted.

'Well then, meet each other two by two,' I said and pulled my Cemo out of the arena. I stayed beside her in case she should be unable to restrain Karakurt during the fighting.

The young men stepped forward in couples. They attacked each other as if they were charging wolves. Those who didn't know how to handle their clubs were mocked by their kinfolk.

'Ho, Hasso ! You milksop! Don't stick your tail between your legs like your dog! Go on. Hit him!

"Gencoooo! Get moving! The way you're fighting you're going to lose the girl for sure.'

'Come on, coward ! If your dog won't bite, what are you waiting for? Bite him yourself! Finish him off !

The lads whipped their dogs into a frenzy and the beasts dashed at the opponents' legs, barking furiously. They were trying to knock the youths down, We train our dogs for that around here. If a lad falls, that means he is eliminated. That's why both sides go after the dogs first. But you must use your club aptly and time your movements with care because while hitting at the dog you leave yourself open to attack by your opponent.

The eight lads fought each other ruthlessly until noon. Some of them collapsed, blood gushing from their mouths, and were dragged away by the legs. The dogs of others escaped from the fighting ground, howling with pain. The cotton-white snow of the clearing turned red; the spectators screamed themselves hoarse. Karakurt was soaked in perspiration. His mouth grew foamy as he watched the fighting enviously.

The strongest lad proved to be Kara Seyit. When all of his opponents finally lay unconscious, he walked over and stood facing Cemo. Kara Seyit was a brave youth. He had some property as well. His father rented meadows from shehs for his livestock.

I was overcome with joy at the thought of Kara Seyit taking my Cemo. But when I glanced over at my daughter, I saw her lips curl disdainfully. Her hands tightened their grip on her club as she gazed at the lad standing there before her. A look of

dislike flitted across her face. My heart sank. Was it possible that Kara Seyit could defeat her? Would she be forced to follow a man she didn't love? God protect us!

I studied Kara Seyit carefully. He had a powerful body, with muscles that looked like a wrestler's. It seemed as though they might burst through his shirt at any minute. His feet held the ground strongly and surely. Kuyruksuz, his dog, was equally impressive. His ears and tail had been bobbed and courage shone from his bloodshot eyes.

I patted Cemo's back. 'May God help you, my girl,' I whispered. "It's your turn.'

Cemo spat on her palms, gripped her club eagerly, tightened her hold on the leash and stepped forward. Karakurt leaped joyfully before her, rattling his chain. Kara Seyit then lifted his club and grasped his dog's leash firmly. But before beginning to fight, he called to Cemo :

'Cemo! You're brave, you're strong, but you're only a female gazelle! You can't hold out for long against a wolf like me! Don't force me to crush you. Don't let the rose of your cheek and the honey of your lips be smeared with blood. Come, give in and let me make you the crown of my head !'

Flames blazed up in Cemo's coal-black eyes like fire in a hearth.

'You think Cano's daughter will give in with the blood of seven braves wet on the ground? You think she'll let people call her a craven female? Take a look at yourself! A dog who thinks he's a wolf! What woman bore you to make you try to talk your way out of battle? Neither the rose of my cheek nor the honey of my lips is for a wretch like you! Take guard and defend yourself well.'

Cemo's words filled my heart with pride. I couldn't contain myself; tears rolled down my cheeks.

"That's my girl!" I cried. The spectators were also moved. 'Ho, Cemo! Kara Seyit deserves a good beating now. Finish him off! Knock him out!'

"Tear off his tail like his dog's. Don't let his tears soften you !'

While the crowd shouted, Cemo prodded Karakurt and charged forward. Kara Seyit then spat on his palms.

'Well, don't blame me afterwards!' he said and started towards the girl.

Suddenly the two sides were locked in fierce battle. Instead of attacking the lad's legs, Karakurt had snatched Kuyruksuz by the throat and flung him down. When Kara Seyit tried to hit Karakurt with his club in an effort to save his dog, Cemo used hers so skilfully that the youth's weapon flew to the other end of the arena. Kara Seyit, caught off guard, stood thunderstruck. He didn't even think to pull at his dog's chain to save him from Karakurt's teeth. Kuyruksuz finally freed himself from Karakurt and fled, whining loudly. Thereupon, Cemo let go of her dog's chain.

The kinfolk of the defeated youths continued shouting, goading Cemo on. 'That's the way! Nice work! But don't just stand there, Cemo. Punish the scoundrel !' The air rang with shouting. Cemo's coal-black eyes blazed. She raised her club but did not strike.

"We now know which one of us is the wolf and which one the gazelle, Kara Seyit !" she shouted. 'If you give in, you can still leave here on your own two feet.'

Those who wanted to see the lad beaten screamed : 'Even if he gives in, don't let him off so easily! He deserves a good thrashing !

In front of the crowd, Kara Seyit could not swallow these insults. Perspiring heavily, he said: 'I wouldn't give in even if I knew I were to die. I'll fight you with my bare hands if I must!'

Cemo lowered her club.

'Go then, fetch your stick! Since you asked for it, at least be beaten like a man !'

For a while, Cemo played with him like a cat with a mouse. Twice she knocked away his club and slammed hers down on his arms and legs. At last, after a final blow to the belly, Kara Seyit fell to the ground. The villagers, happy to see his defeat, dragged him out of the arena.

I ran and took Cemo in my arms.

'My own brave daughter!' I said, and kissed her proudly on the forehead. The crowd was cheering, and Karakurt licked at his mistress' hands between joyful yelps. I turned to the people of Karga Duzu who were beginning to disperse.

'Weaklings!' I shouted sarcastically. 'So that's what you call your bravery, eh? You couldn't handle a mere girl. Just look! You've left my Cemo without a husband. You dogs!'

Not a word came from the crowd. The villagers mumbled among themselves. In my joy, I beat my chest with my fists and cried more fervently: 'Isn't there a single brave among you? For shame!' My voice echoed into the distance. Suddenly we heard a horse neigh and a wolf howl.

'Indeed there is, Cano agha ! Myself !' a voice replied.

The crowd grew silent and heads craned towards the source of these words. I was wondering who could have spoken when Memo, the bell-maker of our region, emerged from the forest. He was dragging a she-wolf by a chain.

Memo was a handsome brave who made the best bells around here. He was everyone's favourite, serf or agha. His voice was melting, his saz⁶ spoke with passion. Many a girl burned for his love yet Memo paid no heed. He was known to be God's poet, an inspired minstrel.

The way he dismounted in one jump, the way he used the chain-leash as a whip to control the wolf, made me envious. What youthful grace! He was as true a brave as he was a poet! The wolf looked like a mere dog in his hands.

⁶ Saz: a round-bodied string instrument with a long neck and usually six strings. It is plucked with a plectrum.

As I watched him drag his wolf towards Cemo, my spirits rose. By God, my girl wasn't going to be wasted after all! I could see fear in her eyes as she watched the lad approach. That was a good omen. A woman loves the man she fears !

The crowd stirred and grew noisier. The villagers had recognized Memo. They all thought highly of him. Joyfully I shouted to the lad:

'Ho, Memo! And just where did you turn up from, anyway? We weren't expecting you.'

"I've just heard that you're selling Cemo. It looks as if had I come a bit later, I could have lost the gazelle !" he answered, smiling.

'Aren't you ashamed to turn a wolf on my little daughter?' I asked.

'How else could I defeat your female wolf, agha? If she were a lamb, I could have breathed my art into my reed flute and fed her raisins.'

The kinfolk of the lads who had lost Cemo began goading the girl.

Come on, Cemo! Go after him!

'Make him sorry to have come into this world! You knock him down. We'll drag him off!'

My eyes searched Cemo's. The hands that clutched Karakurt's chain were tense with alarm. The disgust she had felt for Kara Seyit had vanished from her face. As for Karakurt, he had pricked up his ears and was watching the wolf as if she were a bitch dog. His black fur ruffled and he passed his tongue across his mouth.

Memo whipped the wolf into the centre of the clearing. He held his club firmly. Just then, the female wolf caught sight of Cemo's black-furred dog. Blue lights flashed in her eyes; she began to growl and show her teeth.

The village folk's shouts didn't seem to affect Cemo. She stood motionless. Memo was approaching her slowly. The people continued to call : 'Come on, Cemo! Fight !' But my Cemo girl didn't move. When they had lost all hope in the girl, the villagers began to goad Karakurt. 'Let's go, Karakurt! After her! Get her!'

As if he understood, Karakurt began to paw the ground with his hind legs and bark loudly. But he didn't show his teeth. His bark was not one of battle fury but rather that of a male calling to his mate. The wolf looked defenceless and frightened. She seemed to know that there was no one to side with her here and hunching herself up into a ball, she stood like Cemo, rooted to the ground.

Memo and Cemo were gazing into each other's eyes. Memo's eyes were fiery embers; Cemo's held the same fear as the wolf's. She seemed poised for flight but incapable of motion. A confident smile spread across Memo's face.

Then Karakurt began to sniff at the female, wagging his tail with pleasure. The wolf seemed to grasp his intentions. She stopped showing her teeth and allowed him to explore her body, content to scold at him with soft growls. Karakurt paid no attention

to the children who were shouting to him to fight. His wagging tail showed his delight. Unsatisfied with sniffing the wolf, he began to lick her.

The crowd watched the animals breathlessly. No one thought any longer to urge Cemo to goad on her dog.

The fear in Cemo's eyes had vanished and she stood looking at the handsome youth with affection. Her pale face had taken on the flush of a fresh rose. Her lips were the colour of pomegranate flowers. Unconsciously she and Memo dropped their animals' chains.

The moment she felt herself free, the wolf dashed forward. She made strange sounds as she ran toward the bitim forest, looking behind her as if to make sure that Karakurt was following. And off he went behind his female, leaping up now on her right, now on her left.

Memo and Cemo followed the animals with their eyes for some time. Then they turned to each other and threw down their clubs. Memo suddenly grasped the girl by the wrist and led her towards the whinnying horse. Cemo made no attempt to resist; she followed the brave willingly.

He lifted the girl onto the saddle behind him. Wonderful youth! Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I watched them. I remembered the day I had snatched my Kevi away. As Cemo sat there clinging to Memo's back, she looked so like her mother!

I never even saw the bell-maker toss me a pouchful of money. It dropped down before me into the snow.

'I've put in the entire bashlik, Cano! Give us your blessing ! 'Bless you my children,' I shouted.

The horse reared up impressively as Memo's heels touched his belly. Then off he dashed across the clearing and on down the road. The village folk followed the vanishing couple with eyes full of admiration. I stood there, motionless, marvelling at the strange workings of fate.