

On the very eve of Austrian occupation, Veliud-din Pasha, nicknamed Circassian, came to Bosnia for the second time – this time as commander-in-chief of all forces on Bosnian soil. He arrived in Sarajevo early in January, without a harem and with little baggage – a fact that immediately attracted notice. In the bazaar they called him a tramp, a rag picker and beggar. “The stuff he brought with him wouldn’t have filled a sack,” said the men in the bazaar, “but when he leaves Bosnia, watch out for the load of trunks.” But in truth, Veli Pasha’s household was disorderly rather than poor. The housekeeping was done by an ailing woman, a Jewess from Bessarabia. She was thin, and bowed before her time; something dusky and melancholy in her eyes was the only trace of her former beauty. The servants were a mixed lot drawn from

all parts of the world, good for nothing, thieving, and lazy. The Pasha's residence was on Alaibeg's property at the top of the steep Logavina Street.

Veli Pasha himself had changed greatly in these last eight years. He drank more, except that now he did it even more furtively and in private. He was moodier and more short-tempered than ever before. Although still agile, he had grown heavier; and the hair on his temples had become streaked with gray. His left cheek bore some kind of a red blemish, the size of a child's palm that imperceptibly but steadily grew larger and thicker, eating more and more into the soft underpart of his eyelid. He often suffered from a pustulant rash in his mouth, and from chest pains. But there was almost no change to be seen in his Circassian profile, on which his forehead, his nose, and his heavy mustache sloped down in one line, tilted as it were at the powerfully carved chin. The eyes, too, were unchanged – dark and symmetrically cut, with a calm and earnest look, the kind one sees in clever children and in truly bold and noble men.

He came from a well-known military family and was an only son. His father had left him a considerable estate. Brave, generous, and handsome, he had advanced very rapidly. However, he had spent the last few years in obscure garrisons along the Russian frontier, returning to Istanbul from time to time to sell his legacy, piece by piece.

Ten years ago, he had been transferred to Bosnia, as a colonel at Bijeljina. But since Hafiz Pasha, the commander-in-chief at the time, had been a good friend of his and also a distant relative, he spent more of his time at Sarajevo than at Bijeljina. He was popular with all the officers and foreign consuls, and well known for his horses and picnics in the hills above the city. Nevertheless, even though his good command of Russian enabled him to learn Bosnian quite well, so that he had no trouble communicating with the local people, they took a dislike to him right from the start, for he could be haughty, brusque, and forbidding. And since those early days the leading Turks of Sarajevo remembered him with anything but pleasure.

In the Provincial Council, where the foremost noblemen of the land bickered interminably with the dawdling civilian governor and with venal high army officers, he often cut short their speeches and threw them into confusion with his curt, practical, army-style questions. And so it came about that he began to feel an increasing contempt for them on account of their foolish jingoism, narrow-mindedness, and idle chatter, while they in turn began to hate him and speak ill of him. Stories were told that he had plundered all the towns in the Caucasus, that he was in debt and a friend of the Russians, that he indulged in drinking orgies with the English vice consul, and swilled wine and ate pork. And he, in his turn, gave them more and more cause for hatred and calumny. Showing no interest for anything in the world except his soldiers and his horses, he was unscrupulous and merciless and, when his army needed something, had no qualms taking it from the Turks and Christians alike. He fined the Sarajevo Jews at every opportunity; but when his soldiers helped themselves to the hay in the Sarajevo

meadow that belonged to an important bey, there was hue and cry among the members of the Council. In vain did the governor, a relative of his, implore and admonish him to keep in mind the touchiness of the beys. Summoned to the Council to explain the incident of the hay, he gave a short speech the likes of which had not been heard before. To the accusations that he was a drunkard and a bully who took what belonged to other people, he answered calmly and with a sneer:

“I like to drink, but no one has ever seen me drunk. I don’t look for squabbles, but, by Allah, I know how to fight. I have no money or credit, not a puppy or kitten to my name. I fear Allah and serve the Sultan – now what do you propose to do about it?”

Here he turned to the dignitaries and, with the practiced sangfroid of an old cavalry officer made an unexpectedly obscene gesture.

Soon after this he was recalled to Istanbul and reassigned to the Russian frontier.

And now, even though he had come back as commander-in-chief of the entire Bosnian army, he no longer showed his old interest

in military affairs, or his former obduracy in his clashes with the civilian governor and the beys. At Travnik, he maintained several detachments of cavalry and two battalions of Albanian foot soldiers. These units were the only ones he was concerned with, the only ones he personally visited and inspected. He utterly neglected the Anatolian troops in Herzegovina, and had not the slightest wish to see the battalion of Turkish regulars at Sarajevo itself. Whenever the commandant of that battalion, a portly major by the name of Uzunić, came to report to him, he would gaze past him with an absent look and invariably leave all his questions unanswered. In this he was so unaffected, adept, and full of dignity that no one knew how to deal with him or dared to break his silence.

Otherwise, among the local people there were only two with whom he occasionally met and talked: Mulaga Merhemić, the oldest of four Merhemić brothers, a reputable merchant and a quiet, upstanding man; and Mullah Suleiman Jakubović, a dervish of the Mevlevi order, a devout monastic but a sincere, outspoken, and