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The sad ballad of the noble lady Hasan Aginica

What’s shining white up on the high green hill?
Say, are they drifts of snow, or are they swans?
If they were drifts of snow, they would have thawed;
If they were swans, they would have taken wing.
No, they’re not drifts of snow, no, they’re not swans,
That white is warrior Hasan Aga’s tent.
Lord Hasan, badly wounded, lies there sick,
His mother and his sister sitting by,
But his dear wife is too demure to go.
When in a while the Aga’s wounds have healed,
He sends a letter to his loyal love:
“Don’t wait in my white manor till I come,
In my white hall, nor with my family.”
And when she grasps the meaning of his words,
The wretched lady stands there, lost in thought,
Till round the manor rings the noise of hooves.
Then, headlong, Hasan Aginica flees
Down past the windows of the high white hall,
With her two daughters dashing after her:
“Oh mam, come back to us, oh mam, come back,
It’s not our Daddy Hasan Aga here,
But Uncle Pintorović Beg!”

So Hasan Aginica hurries back
And flings her arms about her brother’s neck:
“I’m banished, brother, from my five young bairns.
For shame! And where’s he sending me away?”
The Beg her brother does not breathe a word,
But slips his hand inside his pouch of silk
And draws straight forth the deed divorcing her:
With all her alimony authorized,
Now he must take her to her mother’s home.
The noble lady reads the letter through,
Then both her boys she kisses on the brow
And both her daughters on their dimpled cheeks;
But she can’t bear to leave her baby son
Who’s lying in his little cradle, till
The Beg her brother pulls her hands away:
No sooner has he separated them
Than he sets her before him on his horse
And rides back with her to their high white hall.

She stays a while there with her family,
She stays a little while, a week or more.
A gracious Lady, of good family,
She’s soon beset by suitors, and a Judge,
The Qadi of Imotski, courts her most.
The lady asks her brother, begging him:
“Don’t make me marry, for our mother’s sake,
Don’t send me off to some new husband’s hall,
Because my wretched heart would rive in two
If I saw all my orphan bairns again!"
But her hard-hearted brother takes no heed
And gives the Qadi his consent to wed.
The lady begs her brother once again,
This time to take up pen and ink, and write
On fine white paper to the worthy Judge:
“With all best wishes from your bride to be:
She writes to ask just one request of you –
When you have gathered all the wedding guests,
Please give the bride a long embroidered veil
For when she’s going past the Aga’s gate,
To hide the sight of all her orphan bairns!”
The learned Qadi reads the letter through,
And then he gathers all the wedding guests.
The wedding party goes to get the bride:
The guests are welcomed in the bride’s white hall,
And set off safely back again with her.
But as they’re riding by the Aga’s hall,
Her daughters, at the window, watch her pass,
And both her bigger boys come running out.
They stride up to their mother, and they say:
“Oh mam, come back to us, oh mam, come back,
Or step inside and share our midday meal!”
When Hasan Aginica hears these words,
She asks the oldest guest, “For love of God,
As Master of the Wedding give the word
To halt the horses by the manor gate,
So I can give my orphan bairns some gifts!”
He halts the horses by the manor gate,
So she can give her orphan bairns these gifts:
She gives two golden slippers to each boy,
She gives each girl a dress down to her feet,
And as a gift for her small baby son
She sends some frocks wrapped up inside a scarf.
When warrior Hasan Aga, watching on,
Sees this, he calls out loud to both his lads:
“Hey, both of ye, come back right here at once!
When will that haughty Hagar – aye, your mam –
Show a bit feeling for her orphan bairns?”
When Hasan Aginica hears these words,
She sinks and strikes her white face on the ground,
At which her soul slips suddenly away
In sorrow, seeing her poor orphan bairns.

Anonymous 18th century, translated by Francis R. Jones