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WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

Works by 19-20th Century
Ukrainian Writers



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Panas Mirny

THE MOTHER TONGUE



The greatest and dearest possession of every people—is their mother tongue—that living reservoir of the human spirit, that rich treasure into which a people store their past, reflect their aspirations, their learning, experience and perceptions.

Together with the words we learn to speak from childhood, we acquire an understanding of what these words mean—the name of some item, or an idea about something. That is to say—that together with words we gain intelligence, accept other opinions, learn to think for ourselves, and expound these thoughts in words. Our children, in their turn, add to the language heritage left by us new words, which their life dictated they should learn, think over, experience. It is in this manner that the human language develops, growing and expanding with each succeeding generation.

And when humanity worked out a method of putting these words on paper, when people learned to write, it helped to further expand their language, for among them were those who dedicated their whole life to this work. Some composed ringing verses, adding beauty and eloquence of expression; others wrote outstanding works of fiction, enriching the language with immortal phrases; still

others—the thinkers—explained the mysteries, of which many exist on earth—and so expanded human knowledge.

These master writers helped every people a great deal in the development of their mother tongue, and in so doing raised high its stature among other peoples, for much respect is accorded that people whose language has been developed and enriched by works of literary merit.

If we approach our own mother tongue from this angle, we must admit that while we have acquired quite a number of writers who enrich our language with their work and who labour unceasingly in the already partly-tilled soil of our native field of literary endeavour—the position of our language does not yet reach the heights from which other peoples could avail themselves of its treasures.

This is not to be wondered at, because our writers have only practised their craft with our mother tongue for just over a hundred years, while the literary heritage of other peoples goes back over a thousand years. And it must also be pointed out, that in the beginning, the development of our mother tongue was the concern of only individual humanists, whereas the rest, educated in schools where our mother tongue was not even allowed to enter—regarded it as an awkward, peasant language, that had for some time to serve the inner needs of the country, but not as a language of broad stature in the field of education and science. And even now, there are still not a few of our own wiseacres who, forgetting their origin and ancestry, deny their mother tongue, prophesying a short life for it, until ordinary people become enlightened through education, and will cast it aside as useless, neglect it as something unnecessary.

Such talk we've been hearing for a long time. But it hasn't stopped those truly concerned for the people from loving their mother tongue, hasn't suppressed their faith in the future of our word, which even without a literature, and only with the creative force of the people's spirit, accomplished brilliant examples of sensitive song, epic poetry, folklore and proverbs. This same creative force incited sincere humanists to an appreciation of their mother tongue, inspired them in their work, helped them to fulfil their artistic responsibilities.

Time passed, and the number of writer-humanists,

notwithstanding all the pressures and prophecies made by our own and foreign wiseacres, grew larger and larger. Their work wins ever greater recognition, and we now see that other peoples are beginning to show an interest in the work of our more outstanding writers, translating it into their language so as to become acquainted with its creative strength and originality, and those achievements which are included in that universal possession learned men call culture.

This shows that we have finally roused ourselves, after a long sleep, and are beginning to look around us, demonstrating to the world that we, like others, want to live, to make our contribution to that universal treasury of culture. And no prophesying on the part of our wiseacres will hinder us, for the creative urge has re-awakened and resurrected our mother tongue.

And so that our wiseacres will know what a "mother tongue" is, we must here give a translation of a small in measure, but immeasurably deep in meaning, work of a great writer of a brother people, Turgenev, who had this to say about the mother tongue:

"On days of doubt, on days of painful ponderings on the destinies of my country, you alone sustain and support me, you the great, powerful, truthful and free Russian language! If it were not for you, surely I could not help falling into despair at the sight of all that is being perpetrated at home? But one cannot believe that other than a great nation has been given so great a language! "

1906

QUEEN OF THE MEADOW

From the novel *Do the Oxen Low When Mangers Are Full?*



Spring was everywhere. Wherever the eye turned—nature met it with a sumptuous riot of colour and luxurious blossom. The bright sun,

warm and friendly, not powerful enough as yet to sear the earth, acted like a young girl showing off her new Easter finery. The fields—an endless ocean; wherever you look—a spreading green carpet spilling over with laughter meets your gaze. Over them the blue tent of sky—not a spot, not a cloudlet, clean and clear—drowning the eye in infinity. Out of it, the glittering rays of the sun played in a golden stream of waves over the meadows, flowing over the ripening fortunes of the husbandman...

A light wind, breathing softly from a warmer clime, crossed gently over the fields, nourishing and refreshing each growing blade, and carrying on a quiet, secret conversation, heard only in the rustle of grain and grass... High above, the song of the skylark gushed forth like the silver voice of a bell—vibrating, pouring over, and losing itself in the heavens... The high sharp voice of the quail interrupted from time to time, momentarily drowning out the monotonous chirping of the grasshoppers—all of which, blending together into a miraculous hum, sinks deep into the soul and awakens it to goodness, generosity and love toward all living things... And one feels so good and so happy! The heart rejects all ugliness, the mind is free of all worries: hope wraps you in its finest thoughts and desires. You want to live and love and you extend these good wishes to all. Is it any wonder, then—that on a Sunday or another holiday—the tiller of the soil goes out into the fields to rejoice in the growing harvest!

* * *

It was on just such a day, an early Sunday morning after breakfast, that a young man wended his way along the curving path between the large village of Pisky and the once famous trade highway, Romodan.

“Not of wealthy folk”, proclaimed the modest jacket, flung rakishly over one shoulder, —“but a neat character”, answered his clean, white embroidered shirt, peeping out from under the jacket. A red-tasseled sash swung from around his waist down to his knees, while a tall, grey sheepskin cap, perched well over to the side of his head, hinted at a cheerful, gay disposition.

A manly youth. At first glance you'd guess his age at

twenty. The fine down was just beginning to show on his upper lip, the chiselled chin also boasted a few thinly scattered soft hairs. His nose was small, fine and slightly pointed; the dark hazel eyes looked out at the world keenly; the face a long oval, the body of medium height, only broad-shouldered and high-chested—a fine figure of a Cossack.

So much for his appearance. You could meet lads like this one in any number of Ukrainian towns and villages. Only one exceptional quality made him stand out from the rest—an ardent, spirited glance, quick as a lightning flash. It faced the world with unusual courage and strength of will, combined with some wild, untrammelled longing in its depths.

The boy sauntered along leisurely with his hands behind his back, his bright gaze missing nothing of the landscape. Occasionally he stopped to look long at the fields, then he would go on, then stop again. He crossed the small tattered bridge laid across the swampy gully, where the spring streams had dried into mouldy green puddles and frogs held their choral meetings morning and night. Stopping again on a gentle knoll on the other side, he turned his gaze back at the swamp, then at the lush spring rye growing along its edge. “This is a finer crop than those by the village,” he thought, “there must have been a heavier rainfall here...” and slowly continued on his way.

Descending into the shallow dell, he left the dusty, beaten path to walk through the green patches of rye. On reaching one of the fields he bent over, pulled out a handful of the growing grain, looked at it, then back at the fields, his face glowing with pleasure. “This is the result of my work,” his eyes said with pride, “and it was not in vain, it has made a man of me, a person of substance and property!”

Playing with the green blades in his hands, he turned to look at the neighbouring field, then back at his own, as if measuring the difference.

“My crop is better than Uncle Kabanets’s,” he spoke aloud, “my grain is thicker and higher, while his has barely managed to pull itself up out of the earth—it’s short and yellow and stubby...”

He had barely finished speaking when somewhere, from beyond the field, he heard someone singing. Breathlessly he stopped to listen... The voice was high, clear and bell-like, echoing in every direction: rising first to the heavens, then floating to earth to radiate across the green waves of grain, only to die out on the outer reaches of the broad fields, pouring into the soul with unconscious sweetness.

The boy stood as if bewitched. It seemed to him that he had never before heard such a clear, enchanting voice. His eyes sparkled with delight, his face brightened like the sky after a fresh shower, his heart missed a beat as if someone had accidentally touched it.

“Who could it be?” he thought in wonder, starting toward the delightful sound.

He had barely taken a few steps, however, when the song died away—only a tiny echo remaining to quiver a moment in the spring air. A moment later the rye rustled, broke into waves ... another moment, and the rye parted to let her through.

The girl emerged gracefully as a quail skimming along the edge of the field. Tiny and dark, her hair crowned with the flowers of the forest and field, she in no way resembled the average peasant girl, tall, sun-burned, and often clumsy of movement. Small and dainty, quick and vivacious, clothed in green among the lush verdure of the spring season—she rose out of it like a water nymph.

Appearing as she did, unexpectedly, she seemed, to the boy, like a creature from another world, a fairy queen, and he stood rooted to the spot, his mouth open and his eyes staring wide in amazement...

The girl dashed away and then stopped also. She looked at him over her shoulder with merry eyes, her face lighting up in a fresh, youthful smile. The boy was able to see her more clearly. Curly dark hair, wreathed with flowers ringed her white forehead enchantingly, and fell in tendrils around her rosy cheeks, fresh as polished apples; eyes like black velvet sparked with flame ... the eyebrows, slender twin wings framing the eyes, ringed with the longest, thickest lashes he had ever seen. Small, lively and spirited, face lit up with a smile, she was youth incarnate. A green baize kaftan trimmed with red embroidery, a red flowered

skirt, her neck ringed with coral beads, gold cross and coins—all served to heighten her natural beauty.

She stood before him like a painting come to life, luring him with her astonishing loveliness. He could not keep his eyes off her face as he approached.

“What are you doing here?” she spoke first.

“And why are you trampling the grain?” he asked in a not altogether friendly tone.

“Perhaps this is your grain.”

“Certainly... What about it?”

“Get away with you, how you frightened me! ” and she fell silent.

He also remained silent.

After a strained moment he asked, with an unbidden tremor in his voice:

“Who are you? Where did you come from? Who do you belong to?”

The girl sensed, as only a girl can sense, the agitation behind the words, and her eyes lit up with flirtatious mischief...

“Why do you want to know?” her eyes sparkled.

“Why are you here, walking in strange fields?” he asked again, breathlessly. “Who are you? What do you want here?...”

“I won’t tell you! ” she drawled out slowly, folding her arms across under her elbows. “I came here because I live close by... And who are you?”

“Come here! ” he asked, smiling—begging with his eyes. “Let’s sit down ... and talk a while ... and I’ll tell you who I am...”

The girl leaped as if she was shot. Clapping her hands and laughing heartily, she fled across the field... Reaching the grassy meadow abloom with spring flowers, she turned suddenly and running across the gully, sped up the hillside like a squirrel up the branch of a tree. Stopping to catch her breath, she turned her laughing face back to him, waved a hand as though calling him after her, then disappeared on the other side like a vision that had never known existence...

The boy did not move. He stood and looked after her with even more wonder in his eyes—as if following her down the other side of the hill. His ears still seemed to

hear that fresh, clear voice, her bell-like laughter; before his eyes she still seemed to stand, bright and lively, her white and rosy face lit up with a smile, her sparkling eyes bordered with the winged eyebrows; all of her, with her green kaftan and red skirt appeared before him undimmed...

“What is this?” he thought. “Did it happen, or was it only a dream? Where did she come from? Was she *moskal’s*? But *moskal’s* daughter was supposed to have died... Maybe Khomenko’s—but they live too far for her to be taking walks here... She must be from some hamlet nearby—although outside of the priest’s daughter there were none in their village like her. But she wasn’t the priest’s daughter because he knew her—she didn’t look like that and he couldn’t imagine her going for long walks out of the village. Then where did she come from?”

With these thoughts running riot in his mind he climbed up the hilltop over which she had disappeared. It was getting late. There was no trace of the girl whatever. All he could see were the scattered orchards surrounded by green fields and looking like luxurious flower-beds. Among the green leaves and blossoms of cherry, pear, plum and apple trees, shone the trim white cottages.

Feasting his gaze on the beauty of the scene, the boy’s eyes went from one cottage to another, recognising their owners and mentally counting out their daughters—then, confused and exasperated by his thoughts, he turned back home.

He walked slowly, even more slowly than when coming out—and thought and thought... His heart was full of uncertainty and strange sensations: one moment it was heavy and the next light, then sad, and then happy. One moment he felt like singing, the next like bursting into tears... the tears stuck in his throat, strangling his voice. Unexpected depression gripped him; thought followed thought—there was nowhere to stop—nothing to hold on to—pursuing the spectre. And before the eyes—a green kaftan, a red skirt, a laughing glance, carmine lips outlining pearly teeth... He shuddered as with a chill. “This must stop! ” he spoke aloud. “I must be mad or going insane. The cattle are at home untended and I am wandering here with my mind going around in circles! ” So saying, he

resolutely lifted his head and made all speed for home.

And here was the village. At its very edge, by the pasture, stood a small cottage, its windows facing the road. A group of outbuildings and sheds peeped out from behind it; behind them the barnyard, and after that the garden; all fenced in with a fence of thin palings. It was obviously the home of a poor husbandman. Not wealth, but heavy labour met the eye. But the house, though old, was trim and white—tended by loving hands—the yard was swept clean, the fence well tended, and the boarded gate neatly fastened.

Not far from the doorway stood a middle-aged woman, poorly dressed, throwing grain to the chickens. In answer to her calls, the pigsty erupted precipitously with two young pigs, who rashly nuzzled the earth for the succulent grain, scattering the squawking hens right and left. The woman at first tried to chase them away by shouting, then by clapping her hands and pushing at them with her feet—but when she saw that this didn't help—she seized the broom and started swinging at them...

“You accursed animals, you jail-birds! ...To think that I ruined a broom because of you,” she shouted in her irritation, and threw the broom handle after them.

That was when the boy appeared at the gate. He hardly had time to close it properly before the angry woman descended on him.

“Where on earth have you been, Chipko? What have you been doing?” she reproached him. “You've been away most of the day! Neither the cow, nor the horse have been looked after, and you go off somewhere...”

“I was out in the field, Mother, looking at the rye,” he answered.

The mother looked him closely in the eye to verify the truth of this statement. But her son had already turned his back on her and made for the pen.

“Well, don't waste any more time. Water the cow, because she still has to be milked,” she chided after him from the doorway.

The son did not stop to listen. He let the cow out, released the horse from its stall and took them both out to water. He worked hurriedly and was soon back. Having settled them into their places, he picked up a fork of fresh

green hay... It reminded him of green kaftan, and again the vision appeared before him.

He hastened to dump the armful into the crib for he fancied he saw two black eyes flash in the grass like two live coals. "Be gone, Satan!" he exclaimed, snatching his hands away. "Leave me alone!"

He quickly finished his work and went into the house.

They supped silently and in silence retired for the night.

"Do you know, Mother, if the *moskal* has a daughter?" he asked, after some time.

"Which *moskal*, son?" asked the mother.

"The one who lives near our field, beyond the village."

"I don't know, son. I know there was a daughter, but they say she died. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I'm just asking... It's nothing."

The silence settled again. The mother fell asleep quickly. The son lay quietly, sleep eluding him completely. He felt too hot, faint, the bench was uncomfortable, and before his eyes, she came and went.

"The devil take you, you mad creature!" he whispered fiercely into the dark, turning over and drawing the covers over his head. It didn't help ... nothing helped...

"No, I won't! It will be a long time before I go for a walk again in the field!"

1872-1875



Marko Vovchok

THE COSSACK GIRL

I



here lived in our village a Cossack Khmara; a wealthy man! The land he had, the cattle—not to speak of other properties. He was not rich in children, however, the Lord gave him but one daughter—one alone—like that sun in the sky. They cherished and brought her up, beautiful and good, and intelligent too. Olesya's sixteenth birthday had barely passed when suitors were beginning to turn up in the house... The old folks thanked for the honour, they entertained their guests, but would not give their daughter away. "Let her dance a little, then she'll have something to remember her girlhood by. It's still too early for a young head to be troubled by housewifery; let her play a little longer," they said.

And what a number of suitors she had, dear God! Wherever she went, she was surrounded, like that queen bee! And what a girl she was! Dignified, beautiful, friendly and affectionate, passed no one without a friendly word, a smile or a joke; yet whenever she saw something she disapproved of she would give a look that was a douche of cold water and turn away.

She lived with her father and mother, knowing no sorrow or grief. It is said that when one is young, one

doesn't stop to reflect, one only thinks about having a good time. But with all the happiness and security of her days, there came a time when she too had to taste life's sorrows. First her mother fell ill; quite old she was, and after a couple of weeks of growing steadily weaker, she passed away. Soon, the father died of loneliness and grief for the faithful helpmate with whom he had spent the best years of his life.

Olesya was left an orphan. She grieved and wept, but she had to accept her new situation. Good people didn't forget her; her old auntie dropped in to cheer her up, or the girls would run in to chatter, and even drag her out of the house with them. So it was until autumn. In the meantime the young men continued to press their suit in Olesya's house; one no sooner went out of the door, when another stepped over the threshold. She thanked them and refused them all, giving one reason or another.

"Why don't you get married, Olesya?" asked her old auntie. "You have as many suitors, praise God, as flowers in the garden. Why are you so unassailable? Our lads are like eagles: lively, young! Looking at them, my old heart rejoices, and for a young maid's heart to remain unmoved and without response to one of them—just don't know what the world is coming to now! "

"Auntie, dear heart! Let me have a bit more fun! "

"It's time, my child, it's time! Listen to an old woman. You are happy by yourself, but you will be happier with a beloved husband. If you are worried about being a housewife, then don't be afraid. You won't be working for anyone but yourself, you'll even enjoy it. You're not, thank the Lord, a serf, your work will not go to waste."

"Not a serf! As if when you're a serf, your world is tied! After all, people live! "

"Yes, they live, Olesya, but what a life! "

"If the landlords are good, then the people live well."

"So what if the landlords are good? What will their children be like? The good ones have to be humoured too, and with them perhaps you can earn yourself three feet of earth for a grave. But with a cruel master ... may God prevent us from even hearing about them! But let's not even talk about it! Listen to me, Olesya, and we'll dance at your wedding! And what will give me the most joy and

pleasure is when God blesses you with a family, when your children, like little bees around a flower, will hum around you.”

“No, I’ll have a bit more fun as a girl, Auntie, and then I’ll decide.”

II

But here Ivan Zolotarenko sent matchmakers. Olesya honoured the pleasant guests and presented them with towels.

But Ivan Zolotarenko was a serf. So handsome, so lively, so alert was he, that one would never guess that he had grown up in the bitterness of serfdom.

Everyone then realised, of course, who Olesya had awaited, and the whole village erupted in talk, bubbling as though from a well-spring: “How can she do that? Where does such a thing start? Whoever heard of a free Cossack girl marrying a serf?”

The talk finally reached the ears of the old auntie and slapping her hands against her thighs, she told Olesya:

“That I should live to hear such things! My dear child, Olesya! Come to your senses! If your father and mother were alive, they would rather have drowned you in a deep well! They’re probably turning over in their graves from the shock and sorrow as it is! What are you thinking of? Somebody must have bewitched you! ”

So the auntie carried on with Olesya, alternately begging and crying.

“Enough, dear Auntie, enough! ” said Olesya finally. “Nothing you say will change my mind. I will marry Ivan! ”

The aunt went to Petro Shostozub. But he had gone to the market. Disaster! For Petro Shostozub was an elder in the community—and so old, Lord! His hair was white as milk.

Then to Andriy Honta—not at home. To Mikhailo Didych—out also: all had gone to the market.

“Oh what an evil hour and what misfortune! I’ll dash over and try Opanas Bobryk! ”

This one was at home. He was lying under a pear tree in the orchard puffing at his pipe. Seeing Olesya's aunt: "Good health to you," he greeted, "and God love you! Are you by chance rushing to a fire?"

"God be with you, Master Opanas! I've come to you for help. Advise me. An unexpected calamity has come up. Call the council! "

"Hear, hear! I'm to call a special council meeting for the women! Now that would be a council as empty-headed, as that tomtit! Meet by yourselves, and whichever one of you outshouts the other, hers will be the truth."

"Oh, Master Opanas, this is not a woman's whim, a great misfortune has befallen us! "

And she told him the whole story. Though by nature gay and carefree, he was, nevertheless, quite upset by what was happening.

"Ehe! "he said. "Such is the foolishness of a maid. When asking for misfortune, it's not for someone else, but for herself."

"Come, Master Opanas, maybe she will listen to you."

"And if she won't, we'll make her listen! Here is your hat, let's go! "

They started out, and all the roads leading to Olesya's home were filled with people, crowding against each other—old and young, and even children, all offering advice and begging of Olesya: "Don't marry a serf, don't! If such is the case, then better to jump off a bridge into the river! "

And the young men also surrounded the house.

"We won't let her do it! " they shouted. "We won't! A free Cossack girl should not allow herself to become enslaved for people to laugh at and to bring shame to the village! "

But though they all tried, nothing helped. They only caused the girl to grieve more. Listening to their generous and reasonable counsel, she answered by assuring them that she was not after riches, she had her own, nor after freedom. "What of it if you're free," she asked, "when there is no love?" though saying all this with tear-flooded eyes.

"Well, my girl, I can see that we couldn't convince you even if we took a year, or outtalk you in two," said

Opanas Bobryk. "It is said: what good is a woman's mind? She loves him! She loves him, and that's that! It seems you won't marry any other lad? Well. Why must I waste words for nothing! Good health to you, and look before you leap off the bridge or you'll drown! "

So saying, the old man bent his way home and back to the shade of the pear tree.

Finally the other people also left. The only one who remained in Olesya's house was her weeping old auntie.

III

Night fell and embraced the earth; the moon rose and lit the white cottages with its bright beams. Olesya, sad and restless, opened the window to look at the lads of the village seated all around her home; some talking quietly, others looking downcast, sat with their heads lowered. Seeing this, Olesya thought a bit, then closed the window and went out, her aunt following her.

Standing on the doorstep, Olesya addressed the young Cossacks: "My dear lads," she said, "I have known you from childhood and know that in all your actions you have always been polite and considerate, so that I didn't expect of you, Cossacks, such dishonourable treatment of myself! Why are you, like enemies, guarding my doorstep, bringing disgrace to an orphan girl? If you were at least challenging an equal, but I'm just a helpless girl... You won't get any fame from this, lads."

"We didn't expect, either, Olexandra," spoke up a big, tall lad, "we didn't expect that the daughter of old Khmara would be married to a serf! "

"If our boys are not to your taste, you could have said so," began another Cossack, lively as a flame, "we would have found you someone ourselves; travelled all of Ukraine, but would have found one! "

"It would be a pity to hunt when God has already sent me one that is not only lovable but a good match. Whatever fate has in store for me, so it will be, I won't blame anybody. Though you sit here a year, in the next year I will still marry Ivan Zolotarenko and no one else. Go your ways, Cossack lads, I beg of you, don't grieve me, a maid,

any further. Listen to my aunt, heed her years and sound words! ”

“Yes, leave us, my bright falcons! ” sobbed the old woman. “There’s nothing can be done, it seems, about the evil upon us! An indulgence of God, children! ”

The young men argued among themselves for awhile, then finally left.

Zolotarenko’s matchmakers also became angry.

“We’ve never heard of anything like it among good people,” they cried. “The towels have been given, they have come to an agreement, is it right to dissuade them? Cossacks—yet they don’t know the customs! Even though we’re serfs we can stand up for ourselves! ”

“Who would advise an orphan,” the old Cossacks defended themselves, “if we didn’t? It would be a great sin before God if we didn’t try to stop her from committing this disaster. She won’t listen—so God be with her! She’ll be bitterly sorry, foolish girl—then she’ll think of us! ”

IV

In the morning Olesya went to ask her friends to act as bridesmaids. But wherever she stopped she was dissuaded from marrying a serf, with sobs by some. Some of the mothers forbade their daughters to be her bridesmaids, some girls refused themselves. Those who accepted kept sighing deeply and pitying Olesya. “An unhappy betrothal night it will be for our bride,” they grieved.

So they were engaged. Now they walked the village inviting people to the wedding. And here, approaching them, came a string of carts—the men were returning from the market—Petro Shostozub, Andriy Honta, Mikhailo Didych and a few others. Petro, with his grey team, was in the lead. He was a very old, completely gray grandad, but in spite of his age very quick, tall and straight as a sycamore, his eyes bright as stars; he walked along slowly and asked of a passer-by on meeting:

“And whose wedding is this we are having?”

“Why,” answered the other, “it’s the late Khmara’s daughter who got engaged to Ivan Zolotarenko.”

“With Zolotarenko? And who is this Zolotarenko?”

“A serf, Master Petro, that’s what. Bonded to Landlord Sukhomlynsky.”

Old Shostozub was saddened, very saddened, and didn’t say anything, but the others exclaimed with concern and grief.

Here the young couple met them face to face. It was first necessary to greet them as custom decreed. They bowed low, inviting them all to the wedding.

Petro lifted his tall hat.

“God help you! ” he intoned. “May the Lord grant you good fortune, happiness and health! ”

The young couple thanked him.

“We invite you, respected good sir, to our wedding! ”

“No, young princess, I will not attend your wedding. It is not fitting for me, a granddad, to dance around at weddings. I thank you for your courtesy! ”

Honta Andriy, a good man, who had so far kept quiet, said to the groom:

“Eh, Ivan—Ivan Zolotarenko! What have you done, my friend? Do you, perhaps, have the mind of a young maid that thinks only of the present without a thought of what happens later? You’ve ruined the girl and her entire family! As they say about orphans: you’re free to even drown yourself! ” And he shook his hoary head.

“But why not dance at the wedding?” spoke up Opanas Bobryk, standing with arms akimbo. “What’s done is done! We can at least dance! ”

“You heedless old head! ” said Petro. “Come to your senses! You’d be willing to dance even where good people are grieving and weeping much! ”

“So what, brother! You weep and weep, and then you don’t give a damn! ”

“It is no time for jokes, Master Opanas,” cried the men, “when such things are going on! Have some respect for your own grey locks if you have none for cossackdom! ”

“Oh come now, enough! Really, what a fuss, as if I was really stupid! If we’re not going, then we’re not going, and I won’t go either; but she is the daughter of a Cossack, and at least there should be Cossack dances at her wedding—but there’s no talking to you—too bad! ”

The young couple stood through all this with their eyes downcast.

“May God give you good fortune and success; that you may have the strength of water and be wealthy like the earth, with a long life and a healthy mind, young people! ”

Saying this, the old men bowed low and moved on homeward, leaving Olesya and Ivan to make their own way.

Saddened, the young couple gazed at each other. His face had paled, her eyes were heavy with tears—tenderly, they embraced.

“My love,” he spoke with quiet desperation, “I’m thinking that I will bring you nothing but grief! ”

“My dearest, my beloved husband! ” answered Olesya, “whatever God wills, so it will be, as long as we’re together for the rest of our lives! ”

V

On the following day they went to the manor house to pay their respects. Olesya heard no greeting, nor advice, nor did she see a friendly face or a merry glance. The gentry seemed so irritable, and as for pride they were nearly bursting with it. “You must be humble,” they exhorted, “and generous in your duties to us! ”

It was so queer, and so depressing for Olesya to listen to this. And then it became frightening. She would really become a slave! ... Her youthful years would waste away! Her proud beauty would wilt with each day’s heavy burden—in slavery! ..

Walking back home along the roadway, the village seemed so quiet and gloomy—dear God! Olesya remembered how walking through the village in the past she was greeted by one, her health was asked by another, a joke would be shared with a third, and still another would share with her the day’s sorrows. The old folks filled the air with the hum of conversation; the children shouted and laughed at play. Once the sun came up the village resounded with the clamour and bustle of movement—with living people! And now, whoever she met looked sullen, uncommunicative, sad.

Her mother-in-law loved Olesya like her own child, couldn't do enough for her, but wasn't able to lighten the burden in her heart. She was old already, and exhausted and worn from a lifetime of hard work and poverty, so that her daughter-in-law heard no cheerful chatter from her lips. She spoke of some mishap in the village, or complained of her own misfortunes, convinced that in this world—this whole magnificent, beautiful world, there was no good, no beauty, no truth.

If she could at least exchange a word with her husband, but there never seemed to be a free moment; he was either at work on one thing or another, he was going or driving somewhere, coming home only like some visitor.

And it grew worse as time went on. The landlord laid claim to the house; he had bought a family somewhere and they needed a roof over their heads.

“You can move into the manor quarters,” he told Zolotarenko, “you don't have a large family; or you can build yourself a house, you married a rich girl.”

So they were moved into the manor quarters, and here God gave them a child, a baby boy. Folding her infant to her breast, Olesya showered its face with her tears: “My son, my darling child! Would that you could enjoy yourself in this world, delight in its beauty and splendour, experience its joys and luxuries, but you will know only the bitterness of slavery! You will be shouted at while still in swaddling clothes, knocked about from childhood. You will not unfold, my dearest flower, you will wilt before you have blossomed! ”

VI

A year passed, a second, a third and a fourth. God blessed them with more children: three sons in all—like three falcons. What torments Olesya lived through—what tears she shed on their behalf—dear God! It is said that a child need only hurt its finger tip for a mother's heart to ache. So it was with Olesya. She spent each day in serf labour, leaving them at home. And the children—one was yet unable to speak, the other unable to walk, and the third was still a babe in arms—helpless, and no one to

look after them while she was gone. The mother-in-law died in the same year they were married. Somehow she got through her depressing day, and in the evening would rush home—how were the children, how had they got through the day? The heart quailed with the uncertainty of whether she would find them alive and well. For had it not happened that one woman's two sons drowned playing by the pond while she was at work?

The children grew, and she was rid of this anxiety, but another took its place: not a day passed but that little Semenکو, or Ivas or Tyshko ran afoul the anger of the lord, or the lady of the manor or the young masters. Each God's day found them beaten, like those drums. And though a day sometime passed without punishment there was always the anxiety, the heart always filled with dread, always anticipating grief and disaster.

Just as the boys grew to the stage when they became a mother's comfort and assistance, they were taken into the manor house. From that moment Olesya had not a happy minute nor a night's peaceful rest. Day and night, in her mind's eye she saw her dark-haired youngsters, pale and exhausted, sitting by themselves, without speaking, without toys, without moving—quiet, for if they moved or spoke a word to each other the gentry would thunder: "Stop that noise! We'll show you how to keep still!" And the frightened lads would subside.

Each day Olesya bathed her face in tears: "O, my children, my flowers! You've wilted before you had a chance to blossom!"

Whatever goods they had were sold, and the money just seemed to roll away. One needed a lot for a family as big as theirs. The lady of the manor refused to provide anything, saying in anger: "You should have your own, your father was well off, there was enough of everything! If you're sorry for the children then dress them yourself, I have enough expenses without worrying about them!"

Her husband Ivan's health began to fail from exhaustion. His senses became dulled somehow—he seemed to feel no fear, no pain, when earlier he fairly swooned from his suffering. More than once Olesya begged him with tears to pity his children, to prevent their loss, and he, forgetting himself in his sorrow, would throw himself out

of the house, pale, eyes burning, so that it was frightening to look at him—and she would rush after him to comfort him with loving words and affection, so that he would embrace her and the children, overflowing with tears.

VII

Somehow they lived in their grief, when unexpectedly and quietly came an event that was even harder to bear—the master prepared to journey to Moscow and decided to take Ivan Zolotarenko with him. And there was no use in pleading, for he was so cruel and merciless that one would grovel and bow before him in vain.

“My children!” Ivan was leaving, “farewell my fair falcons! Farewell! Honour your mother and love each other, never wrong anyone... Farewell, by beloved wife, do not remember ill of me, an unfortunate who drowned you in an abyss and then left you. My tears are added to yours.”

Olesya didn't cry. She stood, white as a kerchief, without taking her eyes off Ivan, her hands refusing to release him. Here the landlord shouted, “Hurry, hurry!” and Ivan embraced her for the last time and ran.

Only then Olesya, recovering her senses, rushed after him—but he was gone, far away—only the dust rose in the distance, and the children crying beside her.

“My children!” she shrieked, “my children! There is no one to defend you now, no one to help, we are alone, completely alone in the world!”

And truly: when there had been someone to exchange a loving glance with, to embrace, to share sadness with, a sympathetic spirit, a faithful heart to depend on—it was much easier—now she was left like a lone blade of grass on a field. Though the village was not without kind people, each family was struggling with its own misfortune, bemoaning its own misery. It was understood that under serfdom, if it wasn't one, it was another torment, so that there was no time to worry over another's lot. Unless her old auntie came for a visit. Though very old, and wrinkled as a dried apple, she still kept going and talking—she would hobble over and shed a few tears with Olesya and bless her children.

So Olesya lived, working without respite, without rest. A whole year passed like one hour, always in service, always at work. The mistress was such that she gave her no rest—just work and continue working! Wherever they were working, she would show up and a table would be fetched for her. There she would sit playing cards, this was her main pastime. But her eyes would move sharply over her serfs and she would shout out from time to time: “Keep working, now, no loitering! I won’t have any laziness!”

One day Olesya managed to get away and visit her auntie who was ill. It was the day of the village market, Olesya saw some of her friends; what handsome young women they had turned out to be! Dressed well and proud as full-blown roses, they were with their husbands and children, some of whom were playing, some eating nuts, while the older ones in squeaky new boots, gazed bright-eyed at passers-by. Olesya stood in her old jacket, all alone, separated from her husband, her children a cause for weariness and anxiety, catering to a feudal gentry like to a miserable boil. Her children had no playthings, no toys, not even clothes for sacred holidays; their mother would return with nothing to bring them cheer, to bring them a little joy! Such were the thoughts that gripped Olesya while Hannah, then Motrya, then Yavdokha, came up to speak with her, all old and familiar friends, her girlhood companions. They spoke pleasantly, asked about her children, one passing on some buns, another a honey cake.

“Thank you, thank you,” responded Olesya, bursting into tears, “may God remember you as you haven’t forgotten me!”

VIII

A second year went by—there was no word from her husband. It was as though the waters had swallowed him up. Olesya sorrowed and grieved, then finally decided to go to the mistress, because she often received letters.

She entered the parlour: her mistress was fortune-telling at cards and did not notice her. Olesya looked about her: this was the same room with the clocks where she had

come as a girl, dressed well, adorned with flowers—herself like a flower, and now? Dear God! Could this be the same person? This aged, exhausted, saddened, timorous person?... It all came back to Olesya. “My youth is gone forever! ” she despaired.

Bowing low to her mistress she said:

“Gracious lady! Would you be so kind as to tell me how my husband fares in a foreign land, if he is well?”

“My God! ” shouted the mistress. “You’ve thrown me off my cards! May you never live to see good fortune! What are you doing here? What do you want?”

“You get letters from the master ... I would like to know about my husband Ivan?”

“How bright of you! As if the master has nothing better to write about than your husband, eh? What is he doing and how is he? He is fulfilling his duties in service, and that’s that! ”

“Has he become accustomed to the place, gracious lady, is he well?” persisted Olesya.

The young masters had come in and were listening, grinning, while the mistress burst into derisive laughter.

“What can you be thinking of?” she cried. “The master would write to me whether your husband was well? You must be drunk or naturally stupid! Get out of here! ”

The two young men seized Olesya and pushed her out of the door.

“I’ll never see Ivan or hear of him again,” thought Olesya. “It was an unfortunate hour when we met and fell in love with each other.”

Two or three weeks passed when the unexpected happened. A letter came from Ivan.

“Are you alive and well,” he wrote, “my dear children and you, my beloved wife? I am always ill and I think I would be dead already except that I’m sustained by the hope of seeing you and my native Ukraine once more. How are you? How are you getting along? Honour your mother, my beloved sons, and love each other sincerely! May God bless you all! I have nothing to send you as a gift. Though I wear silver buttons, I have nothing of my own. Sometimes when the master is visiting, I have to wait and go hungry unless good people offer some food. What else is there to say? When you’ve known nothing but

privation from childhood, you can expect it to the end.”

“Your fortune is like my own, my Ivan! ” wept Olesya. “If only I were literate, I would immediately write you a letter. I’d send one out every day. As it is I have to humble myself and beg someone to do it for me. Will he write it with the sorrow and with the sincerity I feel in my heart?”

She went to the cantor.

“Very well,” said the cantor, “I’ll write it. But what’s in it for me?”

Olesya looked at him—red-faced, chubby, carefree; no doubt he liked to enjoy himself and drink as well. There was no hope that he would be reasonable.

“What would you want, Sir?” she asked.

“What would I want? How about two zlotys and a quart of vodka?”

“Sir, if you would be so kind...”

“Then go to someone else and don’t bother us! ”

“Oh, write it, do write it, God be with you! He is waiting for our letter...”

She began to speak and the cantor wrote. More tears were shed than words spoken, and her misery was so great that the cantor kept shaking his head, and finally said:

“Listen, young woman! Are you going to give me two zlotys and a quart of vodka?”

“Oh good Sir, do be kind, there is more to write... I haven’t said everything yet.”

“I’ll write it, I’ll write, enough. And don’t worry about bringing money, you don’t have to! ”

“What do you mean, Sir? What will you take?”

“Nothing! ” the cantor cried out as if vexed, but then said more quietly, “I’ll finish and then we’ll go and drink a glass down to drown our misery and woe.”

“I thank you for your kindness, Sir, but I don’t drink. May the Holy Mother bless you and give you good health and fortune! I thank you.”

“Well then, young woman, let’s finish and I’ll go and mail it for you. You’ll hardly know how. ”

“What will I have to pay for it?”

“Nothing. The people are friends and they’ll take it for nothing.”

IX

The cantor sent the letter to Ivan, but whether he ever saw it was not known, for shortly there was a message from the master that Ivan had died. He also wrote that his oldest son should join him and that some lad be sent along in attendance. His younger son he ordered to be sent to the capital.

There was much bustle in the manor as the two young masters were being readied for their journey. Then they began to choose who to take with them as their servants and struck upon the two Zolotarenko lads. Olesya was sent for. Only then did they think of her, for no one even mentioned up to that time the heavy blow God had laid upon her.

When she arrived, the mistress said:

“Get you sons ready for the road, they will accompany the young gentlemen.”

Olesya stood gazing into the eyes of her mistress as if she hadn't understood; she turned pale as chalk. The mistress became angry:

“What are you, deaf,” she cried, “or dumb?”

Olesya sank to the floor unable to utter a word, only lifting her arms with a wail.

The mistress went into a rage and threw herself at her.

“Why you so and so, I'll show you! ”

It was as if in showing concern for her children, as God himself willed that a mother should, she had committed an unpardonable act for which she must be reviled, shamed and driven out of the manor. That her heart was broken, nobody cared to know, or even to ask.

The sons had to be made ready for the journey. Would they return to bury their old mother, or would they, like their father, die in a foreign land with no one to even weep over their grave? Maybe they would learn evil ways, her beloved young falcons that were now being sent away so handsome, so good and generous; maybe she would one day, on seeing them again, regret that meeting? Who would advise them? Who would teach them wisdom? And then there was the poverty and misery of her life that made her unable to give them anything for the road; not a shirt or a decent bit of clothing. She had sold what was left of

the little they had, and had divided it between them, leaving nothing, not even for her own burial.

On their last night at home she sat by their bedside all night long, weeping silent, bitter tears. Their last night at home! How much time would pass before she would see their beloved faces again, or would she ever see them again?

The sun finally rose... the bell clanged... Olexandra led the two boys out, her tears overflowing, blessing them and praying for their welfare...

"Young masters!" she bowed low before the two young men, "be kind to my sons!"

But the young men turned away.

"Holy Mother!" Olexandra wept, "I leave my sons in your keeping! My sons, my sons..." and she sank to the ground like that grass before a sharp scythe.

X

For those whose life is one misfortune, time lies heavy, they say. So it was with Olexandra. She struggled along for another few years with her youngest son, Tyshko. She heard nothing about the older boys. Perhaps the young masters wrote of them to their mother, but she told Olexandra nothing.

In the meantime her mistress sold the village and moved into the city, taking Olexandra with her as well as a few others. If someone had known or wanted to advise her, she could, as a widow, have gained her freedom again, but no one did, and what would she have done with that freedom now?

Her health became so bad that she was hardly able to work, much to the annoyance of her mistress who told her that she wasn't doing enough to pay for her bread and keep. Finally, in anger, she told her to leave the manor. "If you are too ill to work," she cried, "then don't ask for food. Go away, and take that son of yours along with you too!"

So Olexandra left the manor, taking Tyshko with her. Leaving the courtyard for the last time she thought bitterly: "May nothing good step into this courtyard again, ever!"

For nearly a week they slept outdoors under hedges until she found employment with a blacksmith. This blacksmith was such that he could have been a landlord, so quarrelsome and spiteful he was, merciful God! He abused his wife and his daughter; and when he got drunk everyone escaped the house; he was ready to fight, shouting meanwhile:

“And why shouldn’t I beat my wife or anyone else for that matter? Everybody should be beaten because I was beaten!”

“Am I to blame for that?” wept his wife.

“And why not? Someone has to pay for the other!”

Such was the blacksmith they forged for themselves.

If someone had noticed an old, wretched woman, carrying pails of water up the hill followed by a skipping, ragged, dark-eyed boy, would they have recognised Olexandra, the once well-to-do, once beautiful, Cossack girl?

She hadn’t worked a month before she fell ill again. The blacksmith drove her from his household. Where to go? She wove her way back to the manor, but no sooner entering the gate than she was met with abuse from the mistress.

“So!” she cried. “You’ve brought up your son to be a thief! Your Semenکو has robbed the young master! Just wait, just you wait! And why have you come here? Not feeling well, ey? Get her out of here—out!”

Driven out into the roadway again and thrown down beside the hedge without any help, Olexandra tried to quiet her sobbing son Tyshko.

“Dear God!” she prayed. “My Semenکو a thief! O Semyon, my Semyon, my good and generous child! To think that I would have to listen to such things about you! ... Your father taught you differently... My unfortunate son, think of your old mother!..”

Tyshko, not understanding what had happened, kept embracing and trying to comfort her.

“Don’t worry, Mother, don’t cry. Semenکو will come back. Semenکو and Ivas—they’ll both come back...”

So comforting his mother, he fell asleep beside her.

XI

Daybreak came: Tyshko woke up and went begging. Olexandra watched her son approach passers-by with

hands outstretched; watched how one threw a penny, another a bun, another pat the dark head, and still another push the child aside—Olexandra saw it all.

Seeing her by the roadside a man walked up and asked her why she was lying there, and where she belonged. She told him the whole story.

“Come,” he said, “you will stay with me until you are better,” and he led her and Tyshko to his home.

A widower with a small child, a daughter, he lived with his mother. They were town people, well-to-do, there was plenty of everything in their household. And as for their kindness, there was no question about it. In a week Tyshko had filled out like a rosy apple and was tumbling about in the yard. Olexandra, happy in her child, began to feel better and look younger. If only she hadn't her dark thoughts.

“Why not hire out to us to look after our child?” asked her kind benefactors, and she agreed with a happy heart. Life with them was quiet and uneventful; all was well except for her nagging worry over Semyon...

“Now, now,” said the master of the house, “why worry? Maybe it isn't as bad as you think. Go and ask where he is serving. If he is still with the young master, then he must have been forgiven.”

In the evening, secretly, so the mistress wouldn't find out, Olexandra went to see the manor servants.

“We've just heard,” they told her, “that Semyon was given a heavy beating, but that the young master kept him.”

“Well,” asked her employer when she returned.

“The news is good, sir,” Olexandra wept. “I couldn't hear any better.”

“Enough of crying then, poor woman! The young masters won't remain in a foreign land all their lives. They'll return and you'll see your sons again. What you should do is put something by for them for when they return, so they can thank their mother.”

Of course! Olexandra bought a small chest, sewed herself a small purse and began putting her coins away in it. “This will be for my children,” she thought.

Whenever her employer returned from the market-place he would shout out: “Come here, my good woman! Here's

a bright new coin for you! I'll trade you for one of your old ones! ”

And Olexandra would run out to exchange her coin and thank him, radiant as a child. She would then gloat a moment over the gleaming new coin before hiding it away for her children.

When her employer had occasion to drive out to another town, he asked Olexandra if she wouldn't like to go with him. This she could do only with the consent of her mistress and a signed pass. She went to ask for permission and a pass, but her mistress refused:

“I won't permit you, and I won't give you a pass. You should be paying me something, anyway. How much are you earning?”

“Two rubles a month, Madam.”

“Then you must give me those two rubles and I will let you go.”

“But I must have something so I can dress myself and my son! ”

“I need to do that more than you do. You can put on any old overcoat and nobody will think anything of it, while I have to live in a civilised fashion. If you don't give me the two rubles, I won't let you go! ” And she didn't give her the pass.

“Give her the two rubles,” urged her employer, “and we'll make it up to you.”

But the mistress then said: “The two rubles aren't enough, I want three rubles, and maybe even then I won't let her go and that's that! ”

Olesya's employer went to her himself, but the mistress refused again.

“I won't let her go and that's that.”

So he drove away by himself.

“Better,” he said in anger, “not to know or see the likes of such as your mistress! ”

XII

Olexandra was again recalled to the manor. Tyshko was taken into service in the household and not allowed to see his mother unless he was able to steal out secretly for an hour now and then.

Very ill now, Olexandra lay alone, without even anyone to hand her a drink of water; she lay there and awaited death. Her only companion in the house was an old and infirm steward of the estate.

“Kind brother of mine,” begged Olesya one day, “please call Tyshko so that I may bless him before God sends death to take me away...”

“Your Tyshko isn’t here, sister. I saw him drive away with the mistress.”

“Then let the Holy Mother of God bless him! ” Olexandra sobbed, “my dear child! O, my children, my children! You are like those blossoms scattered over the earth, but not with your tired and weary mother at the end of her days! I’ve brought you up to be preyed on by evil people... Where are you, my doves, my falcons fair?”

Somehow the old steward found the strength to gather up the people. They came into the house.

“Raise me up, good people! ” asked Olexandra on seeing them.

They helped her sit up; then she took her little purse from around her neck and gave it to them.

“This is for my children... There are six rubles here—give it to them. Whomsoever among you has a kind heart, teach my Tyshko to be a good lad! .. Don’t scorn a poor orphan,” she broke down, “be kind to him! I am at death’s door... I’ve raised my three sons, like three grey doves... and not one of them is beside me now... My sons! My children! ”

And as she had lived, weeping, so she died, weeping.

Her mistress was such that she wouldn’t even consent to a decent burial, let alone say a good word. The people buried her themselves and said a good word for the unfortunate woman.



Marko Cheremshina

THE CURE



have brought, if you please, Master Doctor, Pasemkiv's Mytro, because it looks as if he wants to get away from us."

"I don't know any Mytro, who is he?"

"Why that Mytro who works in the sawmill for your father-in-law. Something has happened to him, and he's practically falling off his feet."

"Yes, but who is he, and does he have anything to pay with?"

"Well, I'm telling you that he works for your father-in-law, Mayorko, so he can't pay."

"I don't know him. Where is the note from the master?"

"A note? Your father-in-law said he would visit you on market day and tell you everything. You see it will all go into the account, stand in the books, so to speak, and then you know me, I'm Prokip Senchuk. Your father-in-law has to pay him a fiver, but he won't do it till you have a look at him. I myself have only one horse and I've brought him here without charge. Your father-in-law said he would look after it, but do I know?"

The doctor put a finger to his forehead as if trying to remember something, pulled out a notebook, wrote

something into it rapidly, then in a hurry to get into the house, unwillingly agreed that the sick man be led into his office.

“If he must be led, I’ll lead him, but the old Christian can still make it on his own.”

Prokip grabbed the wagon shaft with one hand and the horse’s halter in the other, and urging the animal got the vehicle right up against the fence into a corner of the doctor’s yard, so as not to be in the way of passers-by. He then freed the old nag, stuck his whip into its holder, plucked a handful of rusty swamp grass from under the wagon seat and laid it on an old rag before the animal, which gave its master a hoarse whinny of thanks.

“And now, old crony, let’s get up slowly,” he turned back to the wagon and spoke soothingly.

From the depths of the dirty litter of straw rose a bony yellow-skinned face belonging to a grey-haired work-worn Hutsul, who had up to then lain on his back covered with a blanket right up to his neck, looking straight ahead with colourless, sunken eyes. Silently he rose, and putting his arms around his friend’s offered neck, lowered himself to the ground like a dried-up log of wood. His crony put his hands up under his armpits and slowly urged him along into the doctor’s house, reminding him on the way to kiss the doctor’s hand, and to speak clearly and logically. The doctor entered and began to hurriedly look him over.

“How many years have you, Grandpa?”

“I’ve been around, if you please, honourable Doctor, I’ve been around since the Advent.”

“I’m asking you how old you are?”

“How old? Well, I’m old, if you please, Sire, and I’m not old. I’m really old before my time. There’s Nikifir Hrypiniuk who hasn’t a grey hair on his head, and he’s of the same age as I am. My mother, now deceased, used to tell how we were exorcized together, oh yes, together, and what of it?”

“Tfui, do you mean to tell me you don’t know how old you are?”

“Well, I’m telling you, Nikifir Hrypiniuk is of the same age, if you please, Sire; yes, the same age.”

“Ekh, how stupid this is! Do you have any children?”

“The Lord gave and the Lord took away. There were

three, and they were swept away as if with a broom. First of all Afiyka, but we didn't regret her as much as we did Petryk and Vasyl. And they were nicely grown already when they departed, yes, if you please Master Doctor. There were no such disasters for other people, nor for cattle, but my boys were taken away to no purpose. Now I would have had some help, and what kind of help!"

"So your children aren't living?"

"Ah, if only our enemies, if you please Sire, were alive like that. But they aren't. If only they were, heigh-heigh!"

"What illness did they die of?"

"Well, whatever it was that took them, took them one after another, yes, one after another."

"Your name is Dmytro Oliynyk, yes?"

"Yes, Pasemkiv's Mytro, from the hamlet, surname Oliynyk."

"Um-hm! Now wait a minute, didn't your children die of consumption?"

"Ah, consumed they were, the dear departed, what else could you say but consumed, they dried up like those rusks. Well, what can one do, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. But I'm ill, if you please Sire, very ill. Something has happened to me and I'm dying, the way one dies. There is a seething around my heart and when I walk it is as if my feet were tied to a stake. I have no breath, I have no strength, if you please honourable Sire, not even a penny's worth."

"It could be, if you please, Sire, that my friend has hurt himself at the sawmill, because there are all kinds of logs, one light enough that two or three could lift, and another—even ten couldn't lift it," broke in Prokip, helpfully.

"Don't talk foolishness," said the doctor sharply, taking the sick man's hand.

"Well, I don't know, if you please, Sire," questioned Prokip. "I am not a fortune-teller, I'm just saying that this is not the first day that this man has spent among the logs. One could dam a river with the logs he has lugged and cut up. And now the time has come, and I'm saying it, but you, esteemed Sire, will know better than I."

Dmytro nodded his head in accompaniment to his crony's remarks, but the doctor didn't listen at all, just told him to remove his shirt, then began to tap at his back and chest.

"If you please, Sire, you won't find my heart. It's like that worn-out shirt, all tattered within me, and there's no blood."

"Breathe! "

The old man opened his mouth to take a deep breath but broke into a fit of coughing.

"Once more! "

Again he began to cough.

"Easy now, try again."

The chest heaved.

"Enough. You are seriously ill, understand?"

"I understand, if you please, honourable Doctor.

"You have to take good care of yourself, understand?"

"I understand, yes."

"You must drink a lot of milk, understand?"

"I understand."

"That is most important, understand?"

"I understand."

"I'll write out a medicine for you. The pharmacy will give you a powder for this slip of paper, and you are to take a glass of water with a spoonful of this powder, and drink it once, every morning. It will be like milk, understand?"

"Why shouldn't I understand, if you please, esteemed Sire—there were times when I've worked for other masters and I've drunk milk from more than one cow."

"And now the time has come to drink milk from the pharmacy," comprehended Prokip, also.

"It's just like milk, understand?" repeated the doctor, to make sure.

"Yes, just like milk, it is quite clear, excellent and beloved Sire," assented the two men, trying to convince the doctor that, indeed, they understood.

"And maybe, by your grace, Sire, and your mercy, you wouldn't take that fiver from your father-in-law?" begged Dmytro humbly.

"The fiver is already accounted for, and I am no servant to a peasant! Go in good health."

"And you remain in good health, good and honourable Sire."

Having made their way out slowly, Prokip hoisted his sick friend up on the wagon muttering fiercely under his breath:

“May this be his final hour, may God grant that he himself should have to drink that milk. He’s likely an evil soul! A man has no food to put between his teeth and he sends him to a pharmacy for milk! Go and give a couple of lev* to the pharmacist because you’re bloated with them, because you have so many. There’s where they’ll issue you milk! ”

The sick man’s eyes agreed with his crony, but he held the doctor’s prescription tightly in his hand.

“Maybe there, brother, it’s written that Mayorko owes me a fiver?”

“Yeah, I don’t even want to tell you what’s written there,” ground out Prokip, snatching the piece of paper from his friend and stamping it into the ground with his feet.

People along the roadway fell into step with Prokip’s wagon and inquired about the doctor’s advice to the sick man and whether he would, or wouldn’t get better. Prokip waved his hand and, cursing, related what had happened at the doctor’s.

Dmytro, straining his neck, gazed at how the people reacted and also waved their arms about. It seemed to him that those hands were pushing him into the next world, driving him to his grave. But the people, after considering a bit, came up to him, heaping him with advice and their own cures.

“Thank you, good Master and good Mistress, I will try. Maybe it will help.” He rid himself of them with this answer, though he didn’t believe it himself. He thought, and thought again, about where he would get the money to pay for his funeral. He searched in his mind for a warm spot where he could at least find shelter for the last time in his life. But his hopes dimmed, as in a cold fog, as his head rolled from one board to another of the squeaking, dilapidated wagon.

But when they were driving alongside the cemetery, Dmytro, as if awakening from sleep, lifted an arm to point at the graves:

“Brother Pro’, there’s where I’ll find my cure! ”

* A Romanian coin.

“That’s where we’ll all end up, there’s plenty of room,” affirmed Prokip, and continued to first curse and then plead with his old horse to get them home faster, so that the whole day wouldn’t be wasted.

1901

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



It isn't the same as any other night, that night before Christmas. It is as if it walks and talks, like a church on its feast day. It is as if heaven comes down to caress the earth, as if something whispers to the village. So do those frosts beat their fists against the cottages of the husbandmen; it's as if they are scolding them for some reason. The distant stars seem to be nearer, as if to peer into the cottage windows, as if to convince themselves that the master and mistress of the household have wheat on their table as they partake of their Christmas Eve supper.

The stars are somehow different; they wink as if they want to say something, one only has to understand them.

Perhaps it was they who were guiding the seven carollers through the village, lighting up their carolling. Having seen them through the village, they brought them, finally, to the forester's cottage by the river.

Strolling under the stars, the carollers climbed over all three stiles leading to the forester's household, then standing beneath its windows began to carol:

Grieving are the hills and the valleys over
the poor yield of the harvest;

Grieving are the meadows that the cold
winter is nigh;

Grieving also are the husbandmen that the
world has changed for the worse,

That there is no truth on God's earth, that people are
being destroyed in their prime,
that the dark prison is reigning supreme,
that the good word is met with a bullet to
the brain. For the dark work, for the black
betrayal are asked to the table, a handshake
supplied. For the dark word is the worm in
the apple, rust in the iron, yes, and sand in
the eye.

Hey, but betrayal sits in the village,
it can be recognised, hey,
poison herbage. For he drinks mead,
eats salted meat, yet after nightfall
stalks through the night,
selling his brother,
selling his mother,
selling his children and wedded wife.

Handsomely dressed and also merry,

Two powder-horns on his chest he carries,

Walks he so lightly, acts he so sleekly,
bringing his brother to betrayal neatly,
into strange prisons the village leading,
see it and recognise his evil dealing.

Give him, O Lord, your vengeance in plenty,
And to the household, bread in the pantry,
Let falseness perish, faithfulness flourish,
Let people know the heart undernourished.

Give to the wolves, Lord,
pain in their fangs, in their
eyes cataracts, thorns in their sides;
noses unsmelling, ears without
hearing—as long as the fruits of man's
labour they're stealing.

Give them rivers that are frozen over,
forests burned out, mansions ablaze;

give them grainfields that will not produce,
keys they will lose, cannons defused;
give them hills that have been pushed aside,
and let their prisons be opened wide.

The carollers were singing to blind windows because the forester had closed all his shutters before he sat down at the head of his table to eat with his guests.

However, the light broke through the chinks in the shutters, catching the silver breath of the carollers and playing on the Christmas star they were carrying.

The house was melting with heat, so much so that the visiting gendarmes had unbuttoned their uniforms and the host himself had flung his sheepskin vest over one shoulder and mopped his red, sweating face with a kerchief.

The mistress of the house had placed all the Christmas dishes on the oak table and filled the beakers with drink. But she had spread too much hay under the tablecloth and the beakers kept rocking and spilling their contents on the uneven surface, which the gendarmes predicted would bring good fortune to the house.

The forester put a merry look on his fox-like face and said with a flourish:

“Never has this house played host to such agreeable, handsome and distinguished guests. These dishes and bowls have never held food for such delicate and red lips to consume, and these beakers have never been held by such white, plump and lordly hands. Come now, help yourselves, my dear and welcomed guests, worthy guardians of the law! ”

The steam rising from the dishes on the table beat against the gendarmes' plump faces, clouding their eyes and getting in the way of their eating and drinking.

The shutters suddenly rattled with the sound of peasants' hoarse voices.

The house shuddered to its corners.

When the commandant heard the carolling outside the window he became quite agitated and threw himself at his companion:

“What is this all about? I thought I gave orders to the village that there was to be no carolling, except by Kazik Tshetsesky to whom I gave permission! ”

"Your orders have been carried out, Master Commandant," answered the gendarme.

"Then what's this?"

"What you are hearing."

"That's not Kazik's voice, and the carol is not one of ours either! "

"Kazik is there, among them, because Ivan Havrysh formed a partnership with him. I met them at the magistrate's who was also as surprised as you are, Commandant. I faced them with my musket, but Kazik waved your permission before my eyes: 'Don't dare,' he said, 'to arrest these boys, for they are my partners. I have permission and they are going to carol with me, so that there will be treats for me and for them.' I read it, and sure enough, he spoke the truth."

"What a mischief he is! " the commandant marvelled, softening up.

The host interjected timidly at this point:

"If you please, Master Commandant, that Kazik Tshet-sesky is not accustomed to any work, not even to carolling. Even under Austria, when he was a cobbler, he wouldn't lift a finger. He wouldn't even look in the direction of work, but would lie all summer in the shade and do nothing but whistle. For him it was enough to catch fish in the stream, to kill a hare in the woods, or to beg a chicken off someone, and that's how he lived among the people of the village. If I may say so, Your Honour, he was a kind of blockhead, and now that he's a big man in the village, how could he go carolling all by himself. Just between you and me, to tell you the truth, he doesn't deserve to be a Pole, because—with all respect to God and to you Christians—he is a dissolute idler, and that's all."

"Who has he become partners with?" asked the commandant.

"With criminals, who else?" answered the host, and explained: "Last Wednesday Ivan Havrysh was released from prison; he's that rebel who was the head of the library and the co-operative, and when he heard that Kazik had permission to carol, he went after him. 'Let's form,' he said, 'a small co-operative: you give your permission and I'll get the carollers together. Half of what comes in will be for you, and half will go toward the school.' And that's

just what Kazik wanted, and now they are holding their service."

"Who else has joined them?"

"Who else but those riflemen, you know, those highwaymen, the *Oprishki*. There are only five of them, yet they run the whole village."

"Those who were imprisoned under Magistrate Poremb-sky?"

"The same."

"Well maybe, then, we should shut them away now?"

"Not at once, but perhaps later, before dawn."

"But why so late?"

"Because after our supper you will want, Master Com-mandant, to go somewhere to play a bit, and Havrysh's daughter Marichka is the prettiest girl in the village. So let the old widower Havrysh carol for the school and we'll go and carol to his daughter. I'll plant an old musket in their passage and when he comes home, your master gendarme will know what to do: a chain on his wrists and off with him..."

The plump hostess didn't hear these last words because she noticed that the carols had ended, so she carried her present outside, while the commandant slapped his host on the back and praised him for his advice.

The gendarme, delighted, grabbed his revolver and dashed out into the yard where he fired three shots so that the village and the carollers would know that the gen-darmes were not asleep and that they should have fear.

The sound flew over the heads of the carollers and over the village, hit the icy peaks of the mountains and reverberated through the valleys, letting the wolves know that the village was singing them a new carol.



Yuriy Fedkovich

LILEYA'S GRAVE OR DOVBUSH'S TREASURE



here is a rumour about that Olexa Dovbush, the noted peasant rebel and chieftain over all the Hutsul hills, buried a large treasure in the ground. There is supposed to have been so much gold and silver that even sixty horses could not carry it. But where he buried it, nobody knows. Some say that it's by the Black Mountain lake, others that it's by the Coloured Boulder between Biloberezka and Yavoriv, while a third group maintain that it's near Sokilske. Whether the story is true or a fable, who can tell? What is true is that to this day people are found, mostly young, who go seeking this treasure. The story I'm going to tell you is about one such lad.

I

There was in our village a very wealthy and respected husbandman, Petro Kosovan by name; a man who was good and honest and wise, but who had one fault—he was very proud. It wasn't his wealth that he bragged about, however, but about his great and wonderful family tree which was adorned by a considerable number of priests,

civil servants, village elders and even army officers.

Now Kosovan was a widower and had no children except for a one and only daughter, like an only soul. Olena was her name. Gentle she was, fair of face, a slender handful of a girl, delicate as a bird of paradise, modest and fearful, so timid that she would sometimes be afraid to utter a word, not only to strangers, but even to her own father. Therefore the people nicknamed her Lileya, for really she looked so like that saintly and pure white lily.

Kosovan loved his one and only daughter more, it seemed, than the Lord God Himself, but he was too wise not to think of his daughter's future, and he understood that it was time for her to enter the world and to mingle more with people; something that our Lileya never even thought about, as she was interested in only two things: her father, whom she loved more than life itself, and those beautiful songs of ours, which she would sometimes warble so enticingly in her silvery little voice that your heart would sing in unison, be you a young or even an old man. Such a maid was our saintly and beautiful Lileya.

When her seventeenth birthday had passed and she had entered her eighteenth year, Petro Kosovan began to visit here and there, calling on his numerous relatives, consulting, arranging, questioning, looking over the young men, then finally, a week before the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, turning to Olena with these words:

“Olesya, my child! You know that you are my only joy on earth and that I would be happy to keep you by my side till death takes me. But it isn't God's will that this be so. It is time you should wed and so I have arranged for the matchmakers to come a week from today, just before the Feast of Our Mary. I have invited our large and distinguished family for this occasion, and I would ask you, my daughter, to arrange things so that we need feel no shame before them. I have hired cooks and bakers from town, our cellars are full, our pantries not empty, and as for the rest, I leave it to you, my dear!”

So saying, Petro left for the village, leaving his poor daughter deep in thought and much disturbed.

II

Lileya was, as I have already mentioned, a gentle, timid girl. Having been left an orphan in the cradle, she had grown up with her father, had seen nothing beyond her village, and had ventured out only to church and back with him on Sundays or holidays. She had very few girl friends, for her father's house was open to very few; he got along well with people, but remained distant. So Lileya had grown up, knowing neither sorrow nor happiness, and occupied mainly with pleasing her father whom she loved and respected above all.

When Petro spoke to her about marriage, the unfortunate maid barely understood what it was all about. She had heard that other girls married, so why shouldn't she? But after all there wasn't much time for reflecting on all this, for three days later the cooks and the bakers, the spongers and the older aunts came flocking in, so that the poor girl really had no time to question what was happening, as she had to personally see to their comfort and this was not as easy as it may sound. It wasn't until the very eve of the holiday, when everything was ready and so well-prepared that even the ancient single-toothed Aunt Varvara had nothing left to complain about, that the exhausted Lileya was able to get out into the large garden for a few moments of peace. The garden was a lovely spot, thick with sycamore, rowan and guelder rose trees.

Walking through the garden, Lileya began to warble one of those beautiful songs of ours, which flow like those heavenly streams through blossoming meadows. Then a wonderful thing happened! No sooner had the girl raised her silvery voice in song, when she was suddenly accompanied by a ringing male voice from behind a rowan tree, so sweet and agreeable that Lileya nearly fainted. Should she stop to listen? Should she run? These thoughts passed through her mind momentarily, but there was no time to decide, for a young man, handsome to behold, suddenly appeared before her, and so beautifully dressed that one could take him for a knight or even a son of the tsar.

"Who are you?" asked the startled girl.

"One who has fallen deeply in love with you, my little bird of paradise, the only sunshine of my youthful life!

O, Lileya... You are destined for me, and I for you! .. I can read it in your angelic eyes! .. Have you fallen in love with me, Lileya?

“What do you call yourself?” asked the girl, hastily, blushing in all the colours of the rose, for it was the first time in her life that a handsome lad had guessed, like that clairvoyant, at all the confusion that suddenly stirred in her innocent heart.

“I?” answered the young man sadly and unhappily. “Why must you know? At least, why must you know today?”

“But I must know exactly today!”

“And what for, my sweet rose of May, why exactly today?”

“Because my father wants to betroth me tomorrow, probably to some wealthy young man of distinguished family, and I cannot go against my father’s wishes, having no important reason to do so. Perhaps you are poor and do not have the family background that my father would wish and that is why you are afraid to tell me your name? Don’t be afraid, my dear! My father is not as bad as he is painted, and he loves me too well to stand in the way of my happiness. And as far as property is concerned, it doesn’t matter, because he is wealthy, as long as your family...”

“Ha, ha, ha! ..” laughed the young man, but with such bitterness that it pierced the girl’s heart. “So it’s tomorrow, you say?”

“Tomorrow afternoon our whole family will be here and the young man will arrive with the matchmakers.”

“Do you love me?”

“Why would I stand here and talk with you if I didn’t love you?”

“Then tomorrow afternoon you will hear my name and I will satisfy myself as to whether you truly love me, even a hundredth part of how I love you!”

Saying this, the young man heaved a deep and painful sigh, bowed low to Lileya, and disappeared among the trees, while the girl, as though completely reborn, returned to the house.

III

The next day, on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, the entire distinguished Kosovan clan arrived. There were

priests, civic officials and authorities, and also among them an elderly captain, very mustached and corpulent. This was Petro's own brother. And what an array of aunts and uncles of every size and description, long of tooth and toothless, hook-nosed and red-nosed, but then nobody could really describe them all on paper.

In the afternoon, after her numerous aunts had spent the morning in Lileya's room dressing her and adorning her with flowers, came the prospective bridegroom with the match-makers. A fine young man he was, handsome and comely enough, though red-headed as a fox but for all that, a wealthy man's son and from a distinguished family some three or four villages away. Kosovan greeted him like a son, and when the matchmakers had finished with their traditional ceremonies, he commanded that Lileya be brought into the room. Finally the girl came in, but now not at all as timid as the family expected, but confident, proud and dignified, so much so that even Petro marvelled and was a little startled. Only after Lileya had bowed before him and kissed his hand did he venture to speak, and said:

"This is the deserving young man, Pylyp Kolomeychuk, who would take you as his wife. Will you accept him?"

Lileya answered not a word, but glanced at the door to see if the one whom she loved above life, had appeared. The doorway was empty. Petro continued to press the suit:

"She is a timid child, my dear daughter, but don't wonder at it, my boy, for she grew up beside me as in a monastery. Come along, son, and kiss your affianced bride! "

"Whoa! " shouted the mustached captain. "One must keep to the rules! Your daughter, brother, must first clearly state her desire to marry this young man! "

"Then say it, daughter! " said Kosovan, displeased at the captain's interruption.

"Tell your father that you are mine! " came a voice from the door, and the young man who had spoken to her in the garden came up to stand beside Lileya.

"And what do you want here, you vagabond?" thundered Petro, taken aback.

“Your daughter for my wife,” answered the young man proudly, taking Lileya by the hand.

“You, you tramp?” shouted Petro. “You, you beggar?” responded the family. “You have the nerve to insult Petro Kosovan?”

“Whoa! ” shouted the captain, louder than the rest. “There is no disrespect in wishing to take even a tsar’s daughter as a wife. Let the maid speak for herself.”

“Speak up! ” shouted Petro at his daughter, angry now beyond reason.

“I love only this young man, and will marry only him! ” answered Lileya bravely, clinging to the lad.

“Do you know him?” asked Petro, now more astonished than angry. “Do you know his name and who he is?”

“I’m Marko Zolotar,” answered the young man respectfully, “born in this village of honest, but poor parents. My father, Nikolai, now deceased, bequeathed on his deathbed that I seek Dovbush’s treasure which is buried near Soksilske. I have now spent three years hunting for it, and I must find it this year, for my father’s spirit gives me no rest, even in sleep. In the meantime I have found an even more precious treasure—your daughter, Petro Kosovan—and I ask your permission for her hand in marriage. Don’t pay attention to the fact that I am now poor. In a year, with God’s help, I will be wealthier than you are!”

“Very well, Marko,” said Petro, “I’ll give you a year. If, in a year from today, on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, you will come and count out for me three thousand gold pieces on this table, then the girl is yours. If not, then leave this village, so that we never need hear of you again. Do you agree?”

“My word! ” answered Marko, giving Petro his hand. “A year from today, midnight at the latest.”

“Bravo! ” shouted the captain, shaking hands with Marko. “A year from today, if I’m still around, I will be here also! ”

IV

From that day on Marko worked far beyond his strength, looking for Dovbush’s treasure. Day and night he was seen

with shovel, pick or drill, either near Sokilske or by the Coloured Boulder or on the Black Mountain sweating blood. More than once he was almost driven to doubt the success of his work, and more than once he felt his strength giving out, but for Lileya, whom love had transformed into a brave, courageous girl. She constantly comforted him and supported him in his efforts. But to what purpose? There was no treasure, none whatever, and tomorrow was the Feast of the Virgin Mary. Marko must produce three thousand gold pieces by midnight for Petro, or forever bid good-bye to his sweetheart and his beloved hills.

Marko spent the whole day digging, wiping the perspiration and tears off his face; and the night was so cold, so hostile, a rare happening in those mountains. But the boy did not notice it, he kept digging till suddenly a light appeared in the darkness and a female form in white approached him.

“Lileya, Lileya! What are you doing here? You’ll freeze!” cried Marko on recognising his beloved carrying the lantern and shivering from the cold.

“Do go on, go on digging, Marko! It must be here, Dovbush’s treasure, for so my dream told me tonight, and so distinctly that I had to get up and search you out. Dig, Marko, because my father and the captain await your coming. I’d help you, but I don’t feel at all well, because the cold has pierced me to the bone and I can barely stand. But dig, Marko, keep on digging! The Holy Virgin will help you! Dig!”

Saying this, the poor girl with her lantern left for home, shaking with cold, and feverishly repeating over and over: “Dig, Marko, dig!”

And the unfortunate Marko dug to exhaustion. But to what end? Where there is no treasure, no treasure appears, and the first roosters were already crowing in the village when he finally gave up. He threw down his pick and his shovel and went into the village to keep his word to old Kosovan. Out of breath, and white as a sheet, he stood before Petro.

“I came, Petro, on the hour that we agreed upon, to give you my thanks and to tell you that Lileya is free because I cannot fulfil my promise. As God is my witness,

I tried ... without success. He must have willed it that Lileya will never be mine! .. If only heaven would grant her a happy fate! ..”

“My son! ” answered Petro, in tears, “I know about your trials and about your untiring work through the past year. Forgive me for my obstinacy, which has caused you so much sorrow and suffering. Because of this I am giving you all my property and my daughter Olena, who is as deserving of you as you are of her. Hey! Girls! Go and fetch my daughter here to greet her friend and suitor! And don’t thank me, my lad, but this worthy brother of mine who brought me to my senses, for if it wasn’t for him, who knows where my thinking would have led me! ”

While Marko was thanking the captain and the captain embracing Marko, the girls, in fright, returned and informed them that Lileya was nowhere in the house.

“Lanterns! ” shouted Marko. “Lanterns! Torches! Quickly, for God’s sake! My heart fears the worst! ”

While the servants bustled about lighting the lanterns and kindling the torches, Marko told the half-conscious Petro how Lileya had come to him in the night and how, half-frozen and trembling with cold, she had left him to return home.

“After me! ” shouted the captain, and all of them, with Marko in the lead, ran after him with all the strength at their command.

But they didn’t have to go far, for they found Lileya near Petro’s hut lying lifeless where she had sat down on a white boulder to rest. Only the lantern beside her flickered with life.

On the third day following, Lileya was laid to rest. Marko disappeared without a trace, only his fur cap was found, floating down the Cheremosh. Dovbush’s treasure continues to lie in its hiding place in the earth to this day, and the white boulder, where Lileya stopped for her final rest, the people named Lileya’s Grave. May her memory live eternal!



Hrihoriy Kvitka-Osnovyanyenko

STRETCHING THE LIE



very evil thing it is to lie! “You can travel around the world on a lie,” goes the saying, “but you can never come back.” A liar is his own worst enemy and an enemy to other people too. Everyone recognises the truth, but everyone also lies. Not equally: one lies constantly, without a qualm, another lies less, and cautiously—but both are equally bad. Even though you may tell only half a lie, you can create enough misery to last a lifetime. Look around you and see who is in difficulties. That one, when courting, bragged that he owned two villages and closets full of money; lied to the girl and she married him to weep: for not, only was there nothing for them and their children to live on, there was also barely anything to bite on! Another, borrowing money, swears: “I’ll repay you within a year”, and a year passes, and you’ve kissed the money good-bye! And still another says: “Give me the money in advance, and I’ll write some clever books for you.” He spends the money, and there’s no use even looking for the books. “The devil takes such fools,” he says, “so I fooled you, that’s what I did, what a comedy...” If one wanted to tell it all, how and when, and who lied, one would never get to the end of it. What we must remember is that it’s an evil thing to lie—

bad for you, and what it can do for another may never be repaired. Listen to this!

Parkhim begged Ostap to act as matchmaker for him to Khivra, a fine girl, thrifty and hard-working. She even had a cow in her dowry. Parkhim was also a fine lad—none better. Ostap, unable to refuse, agreed, saying: “Very well, I’ll go, but I must find someone to accompany me.”

Meeting Samiylo, he begged: “Do me a favour, Petrovich Samiylo, be my second as matchmaker to Khivra for Parkhim.”

“But will I be able to do it?” questioned Samiylo, “never in my life have I done anything like it.”

“It’s not hard at all,” assured Ostap. “I’ll start the lying and you back me up by adding to it. It is understood that matchmakers stretch the truth a little about the lad they are sponsoring in courtship, and it is accepted. So I’ll tell a little lie, and you just stretch it a bit, then we’ll seal the bargain with a drink and leave the young people to live on as best they know how.”

“Fine, Ostap, I’ll give it a try. I’ll go and get my cane and stop in for you,” agreed Samiylo, and continued on his way home.

The matchmakers, after preparing themselves as was the custom, with holy bread under the arm and canes in their hands, showed up at Khivra’s.

Entering the house, they crossed themselves, bowed low to the master of the household and went into the established routine about snow, the prince, the hunt for the marten, and ended up with the beautiful maiden.

Everything went well. The parents listened, than finally began to ask questions about the young man and his assets.

“Oh, he is really quite well off,” assured the first matchmaker.

“What do you mean, quite well off?” said the second. “He is very well off indeed! ”

“He has oxen.”

“And what oxen! The biggest you can find! ”

“There are also lambs,” continued the first matchmaker.

“What do you mean, lambs? They’re full-grown sheep! ” stretched his companion.

“There is a house.”

“And what a house! A real house, new and roomy.”

“And as a husbandman he is second to none.”

“Absolutely none! He manages everything himself and answers to no one.”

Khivra’s parents, practically smacking their lips at their daughter’s good fortune, asked who the young man was.

“Why, you know him, to be sure—it’s Parkhim,” said Ostap.

“Tereshkovich, Ponura,” added Samiylo. “Oh, you mean the one with the limp?” asked Khivra’s mother.

“Well, yes, he does limp a little on one leg,” answered the first matchmaker.

“What do you mean, limp a little? Not only does he limp on one leg, he barely gets around on both feet! ” corrected the second.

“And isn’t he a little squint-eyed?” asked Khivra’s father.

“Well, yes, just a little, in one eye,” said the matchmaker.

“What do you mean, in one eye? They both squint, and he can barely see at all! ” filled in his friend.

“And haven’t I heard that he is fond of his drink?” asked the father.

“Yes, he drinks a bit now and then,” conceded Ostap.

“Now and then! Why he drinks every day, and not just a bit, he keeps at it till he’s knocked off his feet! ”

“Uh, the talk is that he has gotten into some trouble lately. Won’t that create some difficulties for him?” pursued the father.

“No difficulties at all! Just enough to teach him a lesson,” assured the matchmaker.

“A lesson he’ll surely get! Just wait till he feels the knout on his back! And it will be Siberia for him, for sure! ” wound up his friend.

After such a conversation what could Khivra’s father and mother do but conduct the dishonest matchmakers to the door, stopping short of threatening them with a lawsuit and disgrace for even agreeing to represent such a suitor for their daughter. As for the lad, he gained a reputation that stayed with him his entire lifetime!

A very evil thing, it is, to lie!



Yevhenia Yaroshynska

FAITHFUL LOVE



It was a beautiful Sunday in May. I had come home from church, and having lunched, went into the garden and seated myself on a bench to await old Yelena. I was fond of writing down songs and Yelena knew a countless number of them, that is why I had sent for her. She was late, and just as I was thinking she wouldn't come, the gate creaked and there she was.

"A good day to you, Miss! "

"God give you good health," I answered. "Do sit down. I heard that you know many songs. Would you be so good as to tell me a few of them? I would like to write them down."

"Akh, I'm past the singing stage now; I'm old and whatever I knew, I've forgotten."

"Oh, I'm not asking you to sing them, just recite and I'll write down the words."

She smiled.

"Very well, and what kind of songs would you like, Miss, sad or happy?"

"Whatever you know—both sad and happy."

I picked up a pencil and began to write. The songs were beautiful, full of poetry, like all our Ukrainian songs.

What I noticed, however, was that they were all about the parting of loved ones.

“These are all sad songs,” I remarked to her, “the lad is always dying of love for his sweetheart. It seems to me that happens in songs only, and that he marries the girl who has the most land.”

“And do you think, Miss, that land makes for happiness?”

“No, I don’t think so, but I see that this is generally what happens.”

“True, but I know how unhappy I was when I had to marry someone because he had a lot of land.”

“Why?”

“Because I loved another.”

“Then why didn’t you marry him?”

“Why? Because he was recruited into the army and I didn’t see him for ten years. I always loved him, though I was made to marry another. And though I buried three of my children, my first love never left my thoughts.”

This confession from the lips of the peasant woman aroused my interest, and I asked her to tell me her heart’s story.

“You’ve given me enough songs,” I said, “now please tell me what happened with your first sweetheart?”

“There’s much to be said, but little to listen to.”

“Why? I do so love to listen. Please, do tell me!”

She lowered her gaze to the ground for a moment, as though she needed to think back, then raising them back to me, she began her story:

The two of us, Stefan and I, grew up together, and even as children loved each other dearly. The homes of our parents and our yards were side by side. Often, in the morning, when I would run out into the orchard, Stefan was already waiting for me, and we played together. This went on day after day. He never went out into the roadway to play with the other boys, but stayed with me carving out a cradle, making a distaff, or other necessary articles for my family of dolls. After he had grown a bit and was old enough to go out to pasture the cows in the fields, I really missed him! As the day declined I would stand at the gate to wait for him, and no sooner did he appear in the distance, I would run out to meet him.

One evening he was late for some reason or other and I asked another shepherd, also the son of a near neighbour, if Stefan was far behind. He, as a joke, answered, "Oho, you'll never see him again! He climbed on a rock overhanging the Dniester and it broke away from the cliff and Stefan fell into the river and was drowned." I was so frightened I couldn't move. I seemed to see Stefan lying before me with his shattered body. While I stood petrified, Stefan appeared. A terrible scream rose out of my throat; I rushed toward him, and sobbing loudly, threw myself around his neck. Seeing my terror, he asked me what had frightened me so much. I told him what Vasyl had said. God, when Stefan seized that lad and began to beat him, I thought he would kill him, and I'm sure he would have if I hadn't begged him to stop.

So he grew up into manhood and I into a young woman, and we were always together. Our parents approved and were not against our getting married, but asked us to wait until Stefan was through with his army service. I was seventeen at the time and Stefan was nineteen.

One evening my friend Vasylyna came to see us and begged my mother to allow me to go to their place the next day and take part in a harvest bee to gather in their wheat. Mother said I could go.

Next day I got up early and taking the sickle I set out toward the wheat field. On the way I ran into Stefan and a few other lads and girls who were also on their way to Vasylyna's to help. We formed a long line across the field and began. Stefan, as usual, worked along beside me. The day was very hot with the sun burning down on us, and it wasn't long before I got very thirsty. I told Stefan and he picked up a pitcher and ran for water. Not far from us Vasyl, the same one who had frightened me so by telling me Stefan had fallen into the river, was also helping to cut the crop. He was also in love with me and had recently sent matchmakers to my parents. He was older than Stefan and had already been released from military service, but I didn't even want to hear about him. Because of this he was very angry with me and did his best to discredit Stefan at every turn. Now, when Stefan had gone for water, he left his place in the line and came to reap beside me without saying a word. After a while he spoke up:

“Yelena, why are you fooling around with that Stefan?”

All my blood rushed up into my face. “What’s it to you?” I said, angrily, “I love him and I’m going to marry him! ”

“And when he goes into the army? Think, Yelena. It’s not for a year, or even two, but for eight years. You’ll be old by that time.”

“So I’ll be old,” I answered, but I grew so weak that I would have fallen if Stefan hadn’t shown up with the water right then. He began to ask me what was wrong with me, but I wouldn’t tell him because I didn’t want to upset him. However, a girl who was working not far away had heard what Vasyl had said to me and she told him. Stefan paled, and turning to Vasyl, asked:

“Why are you frightening my Yelena that I’ll be recruited into the army?”

“Don’t call her your Yelena, because she’ll belong to whomever God assigned for her,” answered Vasyl, and that’s where it ended.

Stefan returned to work by my side, but the incident had spoiled our day; we were both sad and unhappy. I already saw him in his soldier’s uniform, saw his beautiful curls shorn and lying on the floor before the gentry. I barely made it to the end of the day. In the evening Vasylyna’s father came out to meet us with music, and the whole group followed him to the house. There we were given supper, and after supper came the dance, as was usual after a harvest bee. I ran home right after the first dance. I stopped by the gate and waited for Stefan, for I knew that when he saw I was gone he would understand and come right after me. Ah, and when I remembered his having to go into the army, my blood froze. I also remembered how sad he was once when I refused to let him kiss me.

It had happened one beautiful evening. We were both standing at the gate. Stefan had come to say good-bye because he had to drive into town. The wagon was already loaded and waiting and his father shouted for him to get going. He put his arms around me and wanted to kiss me, but something got into me at that moment and I turned my head away. His father shouted again, but he held me closer and stood, as if waiting for me to turn my face back

to him. Seeing that I didn't respond, he dropped his arms and walked slowly away toward his home. I looked after him and saw him wipe his sleeve across his eyes. "How could I have done such a thing to him?" I asked myself now, standing at the gate, waiting. Finally, he showed up in the distance. He came up and wanted to ask me why I had left the dance, but I gave him no chance to speak. I threw my arms about him and pressed him to me. He held me tightly against his heart, though remembering, perhaps, that I hadn't let him kiss me before, he hesitated now. But I lifted my head and kissed him myself, for it seemed to me that if I kissed him, then the tsar himself couldn't take him from me.

"My Yelena, my little dove, don't worry, God will grant that they won't take me into the army," whispered Stefan. And it seemed to me that everything would be the way he said.

It was late when we parted. On the next and the following days I walked about as if dead. I couldn't forget Vasylko's words, "He'll be taken into the army". Mother saw that I was beside myself.

"What's wrong, Yelena?" she asked. "Have you, perhaps, quarrelled with Stefan?"

"No, Mother," I answered.

"Then why are you going about like that brooding hen that has lost her chicks?"

"Oh, it's nothing! "

But Mother persisted in her questions and finally I broke down and told her all my woes.

"Now there's a problem," said Mother. "Before you know it you'll be the talk of the village. I heard yesterday that a lady in the neighbouring village is looking for a maid that would do the cooking for the servants. I'll go and hire you out to her."

I started to cry and scream about how could I live in a strange village and not see Stefan when I couldn't live a day without him at home. Mother refused to listen, just repeated that people would start to talk and that when Stefan was taken into the army nobody would even look at me.

That very same day Mother went to the neighbouring village and hired me out in service to the manor. In the

evening I told Stefan about this new misfortune and wept bitterly. He tried to cheer me up and told me that he would also go and seek work there so as to be near me. And he did go the next day and also hired himself out to the manor.

On Sunday Mother took me to the manor. There was a great deal of work, so much that there was barely time to turn around. Only in the evening was I able to tear myself out of the kitchen for an hour or so to talk with Stefan. The housekeeper noticed our meetings and began to scold me. I blurted something rashly back and she came at me with a whip. Here Stefan ran in, white as a sheet, and stayed her hand.

“You’ll have to kill me first,” he shouted at her, “before you touch my Yelena! ”

She raised such a clamour at this that the master came out to see what was the matter.

“This fellow won’t let me punish this girl because she is in love and meeting him and neglecting her work,” she gabbled out.

“Is it true that you love this girl, Stefan?” asked the master, smiling.

“True, Sir, and I won’t allow anyone to beat her, unless over my dead body.”

“Now that’s love for you,” laughed the master, “but she’s worth it, for she’s a lovely maid. Now then, leave them alone, let them love each other,” he said to the housekeeper. And there the matter rested; she never again tried to prevent me from meeting Stefan for a talk.

The fast of Pilypivka passed, and the Shrovetide fast, and during the big fast Stefan was to apply for inspection. I walked about, lifeless, and Stefan himself became pale. When barely a week was left before he had to report, I begged my mistress to allow me a few days leave at home. Stefan left with the other lads for the levy and I, after bidding him good-bye at the gate, refused to leave it, but stood there hour after hour awaiting his return. Both Mother and Father begged me to come into the house, but I wouldn’t. So for three days and three nights I stood there waiting for my lover. At last, on the evening of the third day, the rumble of wagons returning from the levy was heard in the distance. My heart beat heavily, and then

seemed to stop altogether, I barely breathed. When the wagons neared our gate, I saw that Stefan wasn't among those returning. When the first one came alongside I shouted frantically:

"Where is Stefan, where?"

"Oho, you won't see him anymore; he's already been clipped and taken the oath to serve the tsar," the boys shouted back.

I collapsed to the ground on hearing this, and had to be carried into the house. I was ill for a long, long time. I lay unconscious, but God didn't allow me to die, for further suffering had to be lived through. When I finally got up people were hoeing their corn, that's how long I was ill. He was taken before Easter, and now the gardens were ready for hoeing. But what did it matter that I was better, when I didn't want to live, or do anything. Often I would sit and think and think, and about whom, if not my Stefan. Mother was angry, Father worried about me for there was no time for such things when I had to go out into the field and to help about the house. Somehow the time passed till the Feast of the Virgin Mary. On that day I came home from church and sat outside our cottage. Father and Mother weren't at home. Sitting there, thinking, I suddenly noticed a soldier coming toward me. I nearly fell off my seat from grief because he reminded me of my Stefan. But looking closer—it was Stefan, my beloved, my only one.

"Yelena, my darling, what have they done to you that you have become so thin?" were his first words as he took me in his arms and began to kiss me. I was speechless from surprise and joy, and could only look at his dear face, which was even thinner than mine.

"Stefan, my Stefan," I finally gasped out incoherently, "why are you so pale, my dear, my sweetheart, tell me, did you miss me so much?"

He didn't answer, but tears appeared in his eyes. We sat there for a long time, saying not a word, just looking at each other. Only after my parents came home did he begin to tell us how he had begged for a leave for three days to say good-bye to me, for his regiment was being moved far, very far from us. During those three days the two of us did nothing but cry. Stefan didn't try then to

comfort me with the words, "You will be mine", because how could he say them? Eight years away from each other—what an endless time! Yet I lived through that bitter period without seeing him. When he left, after three days, he didn't ask my parents not to marry me off, for he knew very well that his request wouldn't help.

Shortly after he left, Vasyl, who had already wooed me once, again sent his matchmakers to my home. I wouldn't listen, but my parents insisted that I marry him. After all, he was an only son, and there was much land in the family. I refused, and Father and Mother got very angry, claiming that I would be the death of them if I didn't marry Vasyl.

"There is not another like Vasyl in the whole village," argued Mother, "And we have other children besides yourself to think about. Do you realise we can't support you for the rest of our lives?" and she turned away from me.

Father said that the bans would be read in church on Sunday. Oh God, how I wept and begged that they would not do this to me. Nothing helped. My engagement was announced and the wedding date was set for St. Dmitrius' Day, for it was a holiday. Vasyl visited us often, but I wouldn't even look at him. He talked to me and I wouldn't answer. But he never got angry, he just kept coming, and always spoke to me kindly.

One evening he came and sat down beside me outside our cottage.

"Yelena," he said, so sadly that I almost felt sorry for him, "why do you try to keep away from me? What harm have I ever done you?"

I didn't reply.

"It's time you forgot him," he continued, and moved closer to me. He tried to put his arms around me, to kiss me, but I tore myself away and ran into the house, closing the door. He complained to my father, but he reassured him that once we were married I would forget Stefan.

The wedding day arrived. I don't know if there was ever a sadder bride than I. They dressed me and adorned me and I submitted woodenly. My thoughts were ever with Stefan—what would he say when he heard that I had married Vasyl.

It is after our local ceremony that in the evening the bridegroom comes to take his bride home. First he must

buy her away from the bridesmaids, then the young couple are seated at the festive table and they must kiss each other. When it came to that I quickly got up from the table and ran out into the pantry. There I sat till I heard the matchmakers leaving. Then I came out and they put me on the wagon that would take me to Vasyl's home. There his mother greeted us with bread and salt. The wedding dragged on for four days, my head was dizzy all the time and I couldn't think at all. After it was over and the guests had gone, Vasyl came up to me and said:

"Enough, Yelena, of this trifling, you are now my wife," and he embraced me fiercely and kissed me. I was overcome with sorrow for my Stefan—for here I was, allowing a man I didn't love to kiss me.

True, Vasyl was very good to me, like an angel. He hired a maid so I wouldn't have to work myself, and did everything he could to give me every comfort. But I couldn't forget my Stefan, day and night his image stood before me.

I bore two lovely children, but they became ill and within a week I had buried them both. Oh God, I thought at the time that I would go out of my mind, so grieved I was at their loss. For the first time the thought struck me that perhaps God was punishing me; that having such a good husband as Vasyl, I still thought of nobody but Stefan. But I rejected the thought, for how could God be punishing me when it was He who filled my heart with love for Stefan. Again I gave birth—to a little girl this time, but she also died when she was two years old. This, I said to myself, must be God's punishment, and from now on I would cease to think of Stefan. But do you think it was easy? I no sooner got up in the morning when he was there in my mind—and when I went to bed, there he was again. God gave me another son, and I begged Vasyl that we call him Stefan, then maybe he would live. And I believe that God heard our entreaty, for the boy grew as if watered, and is now married. After him another daughter was born and she also grew and was raised lovingly. Our farming was successful and I could have been happy if I had only been able to find out what had happened to my Stefan. The years passed, his army friends returned to the village, but there was no sign of him. People began to say that

probably he had died in some foreign land, but I felt here, in my heart, that he was alive and would return. Ten years had gone by since he left and still there was no word of his whereabouts.

One day I went to the Dniester to do my washing. Returning, I sat down by the stove bed to warm myself and, as ever, started thinking about Stefan, where he might be, among what people he may be living? Vasyl was out in the fields and the children had gone to the neighbours to play. I sat there thinking till the door creaked open, and there was Stefan's sister on the doorstep. I sprang to my feet asking:

"What is it? Is there a letter, maybe, from Stefan?"

"No," she replied. "He hasn't written. He is here, himself, and is waiting for you in his house."

In a twinkling of an eye I flew out of the house. If someone had asked me then, "who are you going to choose — your husband and children, or Stefan?" I wouldn't even have looked at the children, but would still have rushed to my Stefan. Having reached his home, I stood on the doorstep and saw him, dressed in his soldier's uniform, leaning against the wall. At the squeak of the door he turned his head and, seeing me, stretched out his arms. I flew toward him, but he no sooner embraced me than he began to laugh hysterically and fainted in my arms. His sister and I began to work over him, splashing water on his face, and he slowly returned to consciousness.

I sat beside him with his sister till evening. He told us how sorry he was for me and for his family, but he didn't ask if I was happy, if Vasyl was good to me, if we had any children. When it started to get dark and I said that I had to go home to my children, I saw him tremble but he didn't say anything. When I got home Vasyl was already there. Someone had already told him that Stefan was back and that I had gone to see him. He was standing by the table as white as the wall behind him.

"Where have you been?" he asked, sternly. It was the first and last time that I had ever seen him angry with me.

"Stefan has returned," I answered.

"And what is he to you? Why did you go to his house? The entire village is afire with gossip and talk about you. I couldn't cross the road."

I was frightened at his voice, it was so severe and at the same time grieved.

But here the door opened and Stefan entered. Seeing Vasyl's angry face, he seized his hand.

"Man, for the love of God, don't scold her. I'm to blame for her coming to my home; kill me, but don't say anything to her! "

I stood there and had no idea what to do. I was sorry for Stefan, but I was also sorry for my husband and for the heartbreak he was suffering. He stood and made no answer to Stefan's plea.

"Are you going to forbid me to see her?" Stefan spoke again. "Tell me the truth and I will leave now to the world's end, as long as it will be good for her."

"No, I don't forbid you to see her. You may come into our home, but I don't want people to spread evil rumours," answered Vasyl, quietly.

"Thank you, Vasyl," said Stefan, and sat down on the bench. Vasyl sat down beside him and they began to talk. I began to prepare supper. Stefan supped with us and stayed late into the night telling us about the foreign lands to which army life had taken him.

So he came to us every day. He loved the children, and especially little Stefan, because, he said, he resembled me. After a few weeks I saw that Vasyl wasn't happy with these constant visits, so I begged Stefan not to come any more. Now we didn't see each other except accidentally when crossing the road. Once when I went to the well for water, there was Stefan getting water for his sister-in-law. He told me he was leaving home next week because he found it difficult to live in the same village with me without able to see me. When he told me that, I was terribly distressed and sorry, but it was for the best that he should leave. He also came to see Vasyl and told him too, and Vasyl was happy with the decision.

It was just three days before Stefan was to leave that Vasyl made a trip to the market. He returned home in the evening, wet to the bone; the rain had caught him in the open fields with nowhere to hide. That night he became feverish and suffered much pain. This went on for three days. On the third day, feeling much worse, he asked that Stefan be called to see him, and begged that he not leave

the village till he was better. He suffered another two days before he asked for the priest so that he might confess and receive the Sacrament. After the priest had gone he told everyone to leave the house, except Stefan. I sat outside by the window and heard what he said to him.

“I see,” said Vasyl, “that I will not recover from this illness. I don’t want to die, for I’m still a young man, but so God wills. I have to make way for you. I’ve lived with Yelena through our youthful years, you will be with her for the rest of your lives. Respect her, look after my children, and see they have everything.”

I didn’t hear any more because my heart was breaking and I cried bitterly. Vasyl had been so kind to me, he loved me so dearly, and now he was to die.

Vasyl died that same night and left me a widow. I grieved for him so much that it seemed to me that I didn’t love Stefan any more, that my love for him had flown away with the soul of Vasyl. I gave my husband a grand funeral, so grand that it was long remembered in the village.

It was so hard to be a widow, especially when your deceased husband used to do all the work on the farm. Now I had to look after everything myself and make all the decisions. True, if I’d agreed to it, Stefan would have done it for me, but I had heard gossip in the village which suggested that Stefan had poisoned Vasyl so that he could marry me. Dear God, when I heard the shame that had fallen on Stefan, and all because of me, I was bewildered. It seemed to me that the only way I could lift that shame from him was to tell him not to come to my house and to refuse to marry him. So I told him not to visit me anymore.

“Why not, Yelena?”

“Because I don’t want people to talk about us.”

“Then perhaps that stupid rumour going around the village has reached you too, and you believe it, Yelena?”

“No, I don’t believe it, but I won’t marry you so that people can say: ‘See, he poisoned the husband so he could marry the widow.’”

Stefan, dejected and angry at my attitude, went home and didn’t show up for several days. Then he came again and pleaded with me to marry him, but again I refused. It

seemed to me that all the people in the village would chide me if I did.

A year passed since Vasyl died. Stefan sent match-makers to my home, but once more I refused to marry him. A week later he came himself, sat down on the bench, and said:

“If that’s what you’re like—refusing to marry me because you’re afraid of what people may say, then good-bye—I’m leaving the village and you will never again lay eyes on me.”

He got up then and started to leave. I jumped up and barred his way, throwing myself into his arms. What did I need of people, of the whole world, when I realised that I might never see Stefan again.

“Don’t go, my dearest, don’t go, I’ll marry you!” I told him.

“I knew you would,” he said, embracing me warmly. “I knew that my Yelena would not let me go away to lead a life of suffering.”

The next day he went to announce the bans and in three weeks we had the wedding. It’s now twenty years we’ve been married and we have two children of our own. But Stefan loves Vasyl’s children like his own and always says that he’ll divide all our property into four—for both his and Vasyl’s children. Vasyl, if he is looking down from heaven, must surely bless him for his goodness to all of us.



Mikhailo Staritsky

BULANKO



The still young husbandman and village elder, Stepan Zhvaviy, was harnessing his horse beside the cattle shed, seething with anger.

“Now where? You don’t like it? Indeed! Well, even though you’re tired and have a sore foot, we’re going! You think that I’m happy having to look after public affairs?.. Why are you snorting? And why the twitching of the ears? It won’t help! .. Now give me your head! ” shouted Stepan finally, pulling the collar roughly over the horse’s neck. “Now then, you devil! ” And Stepan raised his foot and jabbed the horse.

The animal lunged in terror, banged her abscessed foot against the shaft, and contorting her leg, shuddered with the pain, her master’s actions totally incomprehensible to her. She had served him for some five years, steadily and faithfully, knowing no luxury for this service, and though often as not underfed, it was made up by a warm and friendly word—and a friendly word meant more to her than tit-bits... But for a number of days now her master kept venting his anger on her, and she didn’t know why. Now he had started to beat her...

“Where are you off to, Stepan?” his wife Orishka ran out of the house followed by his little daughter Hannulka

holding onto her sheepskin jacket.

“To Motsokivka,” answered Stepan reluctantly.

“What for? Always away from home...”

“Well, what can I do? I’m an authority... because of this devil,” he added through his teeth. “But I won’t be gone long. I’ll be home before dark...”

“Don’t be later, dear, don’t get held up... It looks as though a storm is coming up... Look the clouds are gathering...”

In the meantime Hannulka had run up to her beloved Bulanka and offered her a piece of bread from her little hands. Bulanka, delighted by this attention from her adored little mistress, stretched her neck toward her and whinnied softly, then very lightly picked up the bread in her palm, with her soft mouth and began to chew. Hannulka patted her and chattered at her in her high little voice:

“My beautiful Bulanka, my pet! How wonderful you are, like a doll.”

Bulanka was so overcome by these caresses that she gave Hannulka’s little face a lick with her tongue.

“Oh, Bulanka!” the little girl shrieked with laughter, wiping her face on her sleeve. “Go away!”

Bulanka obediently gave a few lively taps with her hooves and Hannulka noticed the blood on her left foot.

“Oh, Daddy, Mother! There’s blood on Bulanka’s foot!”

“So there is!” observed Orishka. “Where did she hurt herself like that?”

“Ekh! She stumbles... Grown lazy! I’m going to sell her in Motsokivka.”

“What are you saying?” said his wife, distressed. “Sell Bulanka?”

“Daddy!” His only daughter Hannulka threw herself at Stepan. “Don’t sell Bulanka, don’t sell her! I love her...” she wept, throwing her arms around her father’s boots. “Sell me and not Bulanka!”

“Don’t cry!” Stepan stroked his little favourite. “I’ll buy another little horse, a young one, fleet-footed...”

Bulanka turned her head and bobbed it at him reproachfully.

“I don’t want any other horse, I want Bulanka... There

is not another like her in the world..." Hannulka sobbed bitterly. "She loves me... and I love her..."

"Well, enough, enough! I'll bring you a present..." Stepan said as he fastened the traces.

"I don't want a present... I'm sorry for Bulanka!" Hannulka threw herself at her mother.

"Truly, don't sell Bulanka! She is such a good worker..."

"Good worker! She was a horse, but she's become an old wreck..." answered her husband, drawing the hood over his cap and getting into the sleigh.

"Come back early, love, don't delay... and Bulanka too..."

"I'm sorry..." sobbed Hannulka, now in her mother's arms.

"Well, you've certainly found yourselves a kinsman to lament for!" Stepan called back in a softer voice as he glided out through the gate with Bulanka.

"Don't cry, calm down now!" Orishka kissed and consoled her little daughter. "Daddy was just joking... He won't sell Bulanka, of course he won't!"

Stepan turned the horse across the steppe toward Motsokivka and gave her her head, while he himself fell into troubled thought.

Nearly eight years had gone by since he married Orishka and God had given him not a woman, but happiness—a quiet and faithful union, a good mother and a wonderful housekeeper; they lived as if by God's grace, agreeably and lovingly, and though they weren't wallowing in money, neither did they know want... God had blessed them with but one daughter and she was the delight of both Father and Mother. She was adored and petted—and no wonder—she was a happy child, gentle and obedient, as good and kind as an angel... So the father, though he had decided to sell Bulanka, remembered Hannulka's tears and began to feel sorry for his little pet, at the same time that his annoyance with the horse did not diminish.

But what had Bulanka done to so offend? She loved her master and whether on the road or in the field, or as one of a collective group helping a neighbour, she worked with zeal, and tried to anticipate what was wanted. When, to her misfortune, her master was elected elder, she began to

drive him around to the farmsteads and other villages on administrative matters. Well, on entering a village, where would they stop if not at the tavern: there it was warm and quiet, there was hay for the horse and in bad weather there was even a shed for her. Stepan would go in and sit at the table waiting for the district policeman, or any other important people who would remind that taxes had to be prepared, dams built, roads repaired... By the time they all arrived the tavern-keeper, or some other guest would have treated him to a drink and, of course, when all the authorities came they had to be toasted, and one couldn't refuse—they would be offended! Well, another little drink won't hurt, Stepan would say to himself, but the second would lead to a third, then a fourth, and before Stepan knew it, the alcohol would poison his mind and heart. He would lose all sense of his responsibilities; he would also have to justify himself by lying to his dear wife while anger and remorse would grow in his heart and his head would buzz and his body ache... It was bad—he had to clear his mind, try to solve the odd problem, and again Stepan would start out, and again end up in a tavern...

Bulanka, observing her master's pleasure, had only to see a tavern, either in the country seat, or a village, or out in the fields—than she immediately flew toward it at full speed and stop at its very porch. Stepan would usually give a laugh and say: "Clever animal, clever!" On the return home Bulanka would love to listen to her master's long, endless monologues ... listen and make her way lazily, slowly, and when she made up her mind to stop for a while, feed on some new wheat shoots, or turn into a grove and nibble at the fresh grass speckled with wild strawberries ... and after all this make her way home. Her master, in the meantime, having slept it off, had time to think of some excuse for his lateness.

To tell the truth, this bothered him very much, and he found it difficult to look into his wife's clear eyes, couldn't even respond with joyful sincerity to the hugs and kisses of Hannulka, the little angel. The more he drank, the harder became his heart and mind.

The summer passed and autumn went, and with the fasts before Christmas came the frosts. Bulanka now derived no pleasure in meandering through stubble and

groves, so she returned quickly from their journeys—some-time bringing her master home still quite intoxicated.

His wife realised the trouble, but said not a harsh word, only shed a few tears and began to tenderly, lovingly implore... Ah, how those tears and humble endearments hurt the heart of the man, how he hated himself at that moment: but to carry such anger and hatred against oneself in one's heart—was too difficult; one had to find something or someone to share at least half, if not all the blame. In Stepan's case, of course, it became Bulanka—for wasn't she the one who brought him to the taverns and exposed him to the drink? And of late he had even committed crimes against the authorities; some of the tax money collected had somehow slipped through his fingers, and twice now he was thrown into the cooler for being disorderly and had to sneak at least two measures of wheat from his wife to sell...

Bulanka had long ago dropped into a walk. Stepan's farmstead had vanished behind the hill and the broad steppe surrounded them on all sides, white and flat like a tablecloth. The distance was muffled in grey mist which the eye could not penetrate. It was cold and melancholy, only the squeaking of the sled on the snow and the occasional cawing of the rooks broke the dumb silence of the steppe.

"You devil! Gone to sleep already?" Stepan suddenly aroused himself and lashed Bulanka with the reins.

The horse flinched and broke into a trot. The mist grew thicker as they advanced and the wind stronger. Flurries of snow blew about them as they sped along... Stepan urged the horse on and in an hour or so arrived at the four willows from where the road descended to the village of Motsokivka, which stood on the bank of a small river. Now one could see the snow-covered roofs of the cottages which flocked like little white hillocks down the incline to the broad surface of the river, only here and there showing a bare expanse of ice. Smoke from the cottage chimneys rose in curling clouds into the frosty air; among the hillocks and along the river stood silver trees etched enchantingly against the dark sky; snowflake butterflies began to fill the air...

Stepan allowed the horse to descend at a leisurely pace,

without giving her the reins, though he had in mind to drop in to the district office on official business and then to visit his godfather. Bulanka, unaware of her master's plans, trotted down the hill and straight down the road to the tavern where she stopped, as usual.

"Ah, the devil take you!" swore Stepan, but he got out of the sleigh and went through the door. Here he found his relative and chum, who had been sitting and drinking with his friends since early morning.

"Ah, Master Elder! To see is to hear, to hear is to see!" said that one with great cheer.

"Greetings!" Stepan shook the snow off his overcoat, stamping his feet. "Good thing I met you. I was going to drop in to your place."

"Why, that's wonderful! Come and join us! Hey, Shlyoma!" shouted Stepan's chum into the other room. "Two quarts, and a bit of something to bite on too!"

"Well, you see ... that poison ... perhaps not..." protested Stepan feebly, warming his hands at the stove.

"What nonsense! It's a marvellous brew, just made, such a bracer..."

"Well, if only to warm me up..." Stepan began to approach the table. "The wind out there is so cold it cuts through you like a knife, it's like stinging needles..."

"There's going to be a storm!" said the men.

Stepan sat down and the drinking began. The tavern-keeper brought some fish, herring and some pickled cucumbers. Stepan took his first two or three shots with some embarrassment and discomfort; he had already twice promised his beloved wife not to drink, and as for himself he had vowed and given his solemn oath never to touch a glass again. And here he was... Ekh! —he downed a fourth out of sheer misery and the fifth went down much easier, while the sixth wiped it out altogether, soothed his heart and dimmed his mind.

When the friends had lifted quite a few—and all are friends when the bottle goes round—Stepan's chum turned to him and said:

"That's a fine horse you've got there."

"Wonderful," agreed Stepan. "If you like I'll sell her to you. To you only for I wouldn't sell her to anyone else in

the world, and I won't be sorry... Only for you—all I've got... You mean a lot to me! ”

“Oh! ” His godfather was delighted. “Sell her! I'll buy her right now! I'll pay you tomorrow and today we'll drink to the bargain.”

They didn't bargain long: their friends helped. All, you see, wanted to seal the bargain as soon as possible... They finally shook hands and Stepan sold his good worker, his faithful friend, forgetting his loving wife and the tears of Hannulka, the star of his life.

It began to grow dark, but Stepan and his friends were still sealing the bargain; night looked through the windows with its bottomless eyes, but Stepan continued his drinking bout... Finally his godfather fell asleep at the table, and his companions rose unsteadily to leave, so that Stepan also had to go.

In the meantime a terrible storm raged outdoors. The wind howled and swirled in all directions; the snow came down in heavy waves from above, from below, blowing into the face, into Stepan's back; the frost grew heavier with each passing minute. Bulanka, half-covered with snow and trembling with the cold stood stamping her feet...

“Phew, but it's hot out here! ” it seemed to Stepan, and taking off his overcoat, he got into the sleigh.

“Well, you devil, did you get a good rest? Now, let's get going home! ” He cracked the whip at Bulanka and off they tore—not homeward, but further out, beyond Motsokivka. “You won't be doing me any more mischief now,” he lashed at Bulanka, “I've sold you, sold you for money... Just try for some kindness from my chum, just try! You'll remember me more than once! ”

Bulanka dashed off with all her might for hadn't the freezing horse been offended at her master's whip, she would have started out at a gay trot anyway. Stepan quickly drove through Motsokivka, went up a low hill and rode on not knowing where. The storm was even stronger outside the village. He could hardly see anything; for all around, above and below, there was a white raging darkness. There was not a single sign of a road or a path.

If Stepan had relaxed his hold on the reins and allowed Bulanka her head, the horse would instinctively have found the way home. But Stepan, poisoned with the vile

liquor, thoughtlessly drove the horse on, wielding the whip unmercifully. At first Stepan drove into the biting wind, which almost froze him stiff, so he turned to the right—but even here he got it on his left cheek and ear—he turned again to get the wind at his back and drove the horse even more rapidly forward.

The unfortunate Bulanka was fast losing strength; her sides were freezing, her back steamed... but she kept on running erratically through the snowdrifts... which with every step grew higher and higher, while the horse was getting weaker and weaker...

The frost finally got through to Stepan, cleared his head of the vapours... He realised that he was lost in a terrible storm in the deep of the night in the middle of the steppe... and he was terrified...

“I’m lost, lost!” he moaned through paled lips. “If Bulanka stops, it’s sure death!”

In desperation he again began to lash Bulanka. “Dear wife, dear daughter! Help me, God!” But the moaning wind drowned out his cry... He became confused, his heart ached with wretchedness and burning reproach; he saw in his mind’s eye the pale, tearful face of his wife and the frightened big eyes of Hannulka...

The horse suddenly began to stagger downhill; before Stepan could come to his senses, the sled had flown out onto the ice, the ice cracked and he was thrown into the river... “Death!” the word flashed through his mind; “What’ll become of my family!” and he convulsively reacted by holding as tightly as he could on to the reins...

Luckily, when Stepan left home, he hadn’t fastened the traces to the sled properly. On their way to Motsokivka they had slackened considerably, and while wandering about the steppe they had almost dangled off altogether. When the horse fell down the hill into the river, the jostling and thrust of her descent unharnessed her completely, so that the sled separated from the horse when they hit the ice...

Bulanka, sensing her end, started to snort frantically. She strained with all her might, breaking up the ice with her breast and finally pulled Stepan, holding onto the reins, out on the opposite shore. Bulanka stopped over the numb body of her freezing master.

Stepan dragged himself to his feet, crossed himself and threw his arms around the neck of his rescuer. The horse nudged him gently, covering him with the steamy warmth of her breath. The warmth of the horse's body took the chill out of Stepan's hands and he was able somehow to get up on his back, leaving the reins free. Bulanka shook her head, dilated her nostrils and pulled in several deep breaths of the frosty air, then stepped forward into the white wilderness, into the darkness.

Orishka awaited her husband all evening; going out with Hannulka far beyond the farmstead to look for him, but to no avail. Her heart ached—he had broken his word, but when the storm came up she asked God but for one thing, that her husband wouldn't start for home in this weather.

Having fed her daughter, she sent her to sleep on the oven bed.*

"Mommie! I won't sleep, let me stay up a bit... Let me wait for Daddy and Bulanka ..."

"It's late, dear, you must go to sleep!" the mother coaxed. "I'll wake you up when Daddy comes."

"Daddy won't sell Bulanka, will he?"

"No, he won't. Of course he won't! Don't worry... If only he would come home safe himself!"

"Why, Mommie?" Hannulka opened wide her tear-filled eyes.

"Because there is such a storm outside, God help him!"

"Mommie, I'll pray for Daddy...," Hannulka sat up and prepared to get off the oven bed.

"No, no, say your prayers here," her mother stopped her. "It's cold on the floor."

"But God won't hear me up here!"

"He'll hear you, my little flower," Orishka kissed her little daughter, "God is everywhere... and if he listens to anyone, he certainly listens to little children."

Hannulka solemnly put her little hands together, lifted her eyes to the icons in the corner and began to speak in her childish treble:

"Dear beautiful, lovely God! I love you... I'll make you doves, flowers ... and a little candle, a yellow one ... only bring Daddy and Bulanka home safely... And I want

* Oven bed—clay oven with a flat top, used for sleeping on.

Bulanka should stay with us, and that the sore on her foot should heal... Please God, dear God, listen to me! ”

Hannulka crossed herself, bowed low, then threw her arms around her mother's neck. Orishka kissed the curly head of her beautiful child...

Hannulka was fast asleep and her mother sat on the stove embroidering a shirt, but she couldn't work...

It was sad and gloomy in the cottage. The night-lamp glimmered on its stand; fantastic shadows wavered over the walls and on the ceiling; melancholy darkness lurked in the corners; the windows, drifted over with snow, gleamed whitely; something groaned in the doorway, wailed in the chimney...

The mother's heart ached, her thoughts scattered... How happy she had been when they had lived-happily with her husband, when she had worked hard and their fortunes began to slowly improve... And now... her husband was not the same man at all, he had forgotten his home, had estranged completely from her... and all because of his position: he had become addicted to the taverns and descended to the depths... What was going to come of it all?

Her tear-filled eyes stopped in silent entreaty on the image of the Blessed Virgin; large teardrops like pearls ran down her long lashes, while her lips whispered soundlessly: “Our Lady, protect him! Have mercy! ”

The dog began to bark in the doorway and scratch on the outer door. Hannulka woke up and raising her head from the pillow asked:

“Mommie, is that Bulanka?”

“I don't know, I don't know! ” her mother said, hurriedly throwing sheepskin coat over her shoulders..

But the door opened suddenly and Stepan appeared in the doorway, blue with cold, covered with ice and snow...

“Stepan, you! ” she cried with joy stopping in her tracks.

“Right out of the jaws of death...” groaned Stepan hoarsely, and barely breathing, “It was a miracle, God's grace ... and Bulanka ... that saved me.”

Although Stepan was strong and healthy, that night really made itself felt: he was laid up from the shock and with a bad cold.

From that time onward, however, he forever gave up taverns and running for office, which often leads to sinfulness and temptation. As for liquor—it never again passed his lips.

Stepan made up with his wife and they were a happy couple again. Things went fine on their farm and Hannulka was the joy of their life. Bulanka, of course, stayed with them to her dying day, luxuriating in affection and respect—they all loved her as their most devoted and faithful friend.

1894



Stepan Vasylchenko
TO FOREIGN LANDS



Tranquil and melancholy, like a young nun, was the spring night. Neither sound nor song was heard in the village. All was wrapped in shadow. Brightened by moonlight, the white cottages gleamed against their dark windows—either dozing, or deep in their own thoughts.

Perhaps they were thinking about the coming morning when the village would be filled with sad festivities, after which many of them would be left empty, with the foul-weather winds whistling in their chimneys, the screech owl with its bulging eyes a frequent visitor, and their interiors cheerless and frightening.

Not two, or even three families, but practically half the community would depart their native village that morning, leaving for a far, unknown foreign land—there, where in the middle of the wild steppe, as people say, they might, at last, chance upon their good fortune.

Today the people had packed their possessions, and all day the village had hummed with hustle and bustle. Now all was silent. In the yards, the carts stood loaded, ready for the road, and the travellers were lying asleep, for the last time, in their homes. But were they really sleeping?..

The screech of a latch in someone's door resounded across the village.

Out of his cottage came old man Zhuk. He was bare-foot, capless, and all in white. All day his head had been full of anxiety—now all that had faded away somewhere, calmed down, but his heart was filled with sorrow.

Quietly, like a ghost, he stalked his property—the yard, the garden—walking, pausing from time to time, as if to think... His sad white figure visible far in the light of the moon.

What was the old man thinking about? Perhaps he was remembering his father and his grandfather, both of whom had lived their entire lives in this cottage. Perhaps he was recalling some of the long-ago adventures of his lifetime, or maybe he just wanted to look for the last time on his native hearth, so as to remember it fully, so as not to forget it in a foreign land... An old ash tree, with broad spreading branches, stood before the cottage, keeping the entire house and half of the yard in shade. There wasn't another tree as tall in the entire village. On approaching the village its bushy green crown was visible above the horizon from several versts away.

Zhuk stopped in the middle of the yard, clasped his hands to his chest, and gazed up at the tree. He remembered himself as a small boy and that even then the ash had been as venerable and as big. At that time it had seemed to Zhuk that its branches reached up into the clouds.

“And who was it that planted you and raised you like this!” thought Zhuk. “My grandfather, my great-grandfather, or some other long-ago ancestor?”

Someone had once wanted to buy and cut it down.

“If you'll give me two hundred rubles and then after I've wept two hundred times, I'll sell it!” said Zhuk at the time.

Now he sold it altogether, for almost nothing at all.

Zhuk had begged the new owner not to cut the ash down, and he had promised he wouldn't, but who knew how it would be... Zhuk would leave and the tree would be felled—he wouldn't even know it had happened. And on this spot one would then see only the naked sky—it would be a bare and sad place...

Zhuk came up to the ash, embraced it like a brother,

pressed his hoary head against its trunk and wept.

“Farewell, my comrade, my faithful old friend! ” he murmured as if to a living being. Then he sat down at the foot of the tree, leaned on his arm and fell into deep thought. He knew that this would be the last time he would sit beneath the ash; he didn’t expect he would ever return, even for a visit; he was too old.

Another white figure emerged from the doorway, came up to Zhuk and silently sat down beside him. It was Zhuk’s elderly wife. They sat there in silent melancholy.

What was there for them to talk about? They couldn’t dream about happiness, for it wasn’t happiness, in truth, that they were seeking in a strange land in the decline of their years!

The moon, now high in the heavens, sparked the glittering cross and the blue windows of the old wooden church with silver dust. Beyond the church stood rows of cross after cross ... and the sad white figures in the shadow of the ash appeared to be bending in their direction.

* * *

In the garden at the Manor, the nightingale laughed and sobbed, the melody echoing and re-echoing through the night. Where the paths and flower-beds ended and the less-tended area of the garden began, a young lad and maid, wrapped in darkness, stood before a thorn bush.

It was not the first time that after nightfall, when the landlord and his family had retired for the night, a maid would stealthily enter the garden to meet a lad—there to talk or sometimes even stand in embrace until morning. Now the jesting was over, the laughter subsided; silent and sad they stood, a boy and a girl, not looking into each other’s eyes, reproaching each other for past meetings.

“As if you didn’t know that this was going to happen! ” the girl spoke through tears. “Why did you court me, drive me out of my mind?.. Now you are going away, leaving me to gossip—to be avoided by people. For who will be interested in a servant girl who was left behind by a suitor? Kissed, embraced, and abandoned! .. You are silent, you haven’t a word to say? Didn’t I, myself,” the girl continued, her tears now coming in a flood, “reject all

others... thinking that I didn't need them? I waited, believing that we would spend the rest of our life together. I never thought that because of you, I may have to continue wearing a braid throughout my lifetime.* So I will braid my hair and bewail you to my dying day; my orphan's tears will prevent you from finding happiness in a foreign land."

"Why are you saying these things?" answered the boy, quietly. "I am not going because I want to—misfortune is driving me away, you know that. Even if I were to remain here and we were to marry—where would we go, the two of us, to whose house could I take you?"

"I told you—hire out to the master, I would work in the kitchen... We would manage somehow..."

"And spend our whole life in servitude?"

"We would work, earn money, save for our own home."

"Those bitter earnings have already dried out my heart."

"We would have to work hard and suffer, but we would be on our own native soil, not in a foreign land."

"Somehow, I've even lost my love for my native soil."

The girl stopped speaking, continuing to sob as she mutilated a white blossom she had plucked from the thorn tree.

"Did I not tell you, did I not implore you," the boy spoke up again, "to leave service and to come along with me. Do you find it more agreeable to live in servitude, to cater to the landlord than to work for yourself? What can your native land mean to you, when you cannot make a life here? There we would have our own land, our own house, and the foreign land would in time become our own!"

"A foreign land could never in my life become my own!"

"People leave, become accustomed—and so would we!"

"I would never feel at home in a strange land till the day I die. I would never even get there. I'd fade away during the journey like that mown grass by the wayside."

"What is it you would pine for? The landlord's wealth and estate?"

*Wearing a long braid denotes an unmarried woman—an old maid.

“Better to be buried alive in a coffin, than have to leave this village.”

The moon came out from behind the poplars. It peeped into the corner where the unhappy couple sorrowed, but what did it care; the world was full of happenings! “Not all those who love each other, get to marry one another,” says a song.

The night grew silent. Only the quiet sobs of the girl were heard. The thorn bush grieved, and as if in tears, shed its white blossoms over the tragic pair.

* * *

It was a cheerful, bright spring morning; close to half the eastern sky was alight with the flaming rays of the rising sun. In the splendour of its rosy glow the orchards proudly displayed their abundance of blossom, like snow. The young grass greened in the meadow and along the roadway. The village seemed dressed and decorated as if for a holiday.

It was still early, but everyone in the village was up and about; the old, the young and the children—all were gathered on the village common to bid farewell to the emigrants.

It wasn't the usual din and clamour that accompanied the market-place—it was different somehow, awakening in people a somber, emotional mood; something serious and apprehensive could be sensed in its elevated tone.

On the common, people sat and stood on and around the loaded carts. Red, white and blue kerchiefs and skirts, black and gray cloaks, rumped hair—all mingled restlessly in a changing riot of colour lit by the sun.

Among the crowds the carts could be seen loaded with their owners' possessions: barrels, chests, ploughs and all manner of domestic articles.

The people began to gather about the various carts. The boys and girls, huddled together at a distance in a separate group, conducted their own conversation. Beside the carts and between the groups of people the sun caught the glint of bottles and glasses of vodka being passed around.

Every face reflected a festive and at the same time sad state of mind; the eyes shone with a quiet light, the faces were flushed and tearful.

The oxen lowed; here and there voices rose in sorrowful song or women weeping, but rising above all this was the conversation—musical, resonant, deeply emotional.

“I will not go! ” the passionate words burst out of the sea of voices. “If I am dragged, I’ll hold on to the doorpost, but I won’t leave my homeland! And I won’t allow my sons to go either. Let the house burn down—I’ll fall on the ashes, die on them, but won’t move out of my nest! ”

“Eh, brother, brother,” came a calm, sad reply, “you can’t have known much grief in this world if you talk like that.”

Among the carts, in the bosom of her family, a slightly drunk and tearful old woman was dancing and singing:

*Bom, Bom,
We are travelling to Tambov,
In Tambov the life is great,
We’ll drink vodka every day...*

Then she stopped dancing, and leaning her head against the side of the cart, began to mourn:

“Where is it that we’re going, where are we travelling! They’ll carry my bones to the end of the earth—where winters are bitterly cold, where there are no people, only animals. The sun doesn’t rise there, neither do the stars shine, and even the wind from our native hearth couldn’t find its way there! ”

“Mother... Mother! .. Do be quiet; there’s no turning back now, nothing will help! ” begged a fair-haired man with blue tear-filled eyes, taking her by the shoulders.

At the other end of the common a drunk peasant with a red, dust and tear-streaked face, was trying vainly to climb into his cart. His wife tried to help him by pulling at his coat, but he kept breaking away, then trying again. Finally, he was successful in his efforts.

“Good people!” he shouted, standing in the cart. “Listen, people: say a prayer for my sinful soul and bid me farewell forever!” His wife grabbed at his coat-tails and sat him down forcibly on some sacks.

A tall old man stood hatless, holding a glass of vodka and in a tremulous voice, sang with feeling:

*Why do I need all that wealth—
Just a little bit will do:
They'll give me six feet of earth,
Adding to it four boards, too.*

His grey hair lifted in the breeze, the tears streamed down his cheeks.

Time was passing. The hour to leave was approaching fast. It was felt in the general hubbub. The conversation became more shrill, more hurried, as though everyone were trying to say all there was to say in time. The clamour rose higher and higher.

Cutting through the sea of sound and echoing over the heads of the throng came a resonant, stern voice, striking a blow at every heart. It was difficult to comprehend just exactly what was said, but all knew that it was the signal to depart.

“It’s time, harness up!” came in several voices. “We mustn’t be late for the station!”

The sea stirred and swayed in agitation.

The entire multitude moved and swarmed in a broad sweep from the village and up the hillside. They formed a long ribbon which, stretching in the centre, became thinner, and thinner, till it broke away entirely. The whole living organism broke into two parts—one returning to the village, the other continuing its journey up the roadway.

Far, far near the top of the hill now, the carts receded.

“Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!” screamed those on top of the hill to those below.

The emigrants were now all on top of the hill. The village lay below them, like in the palm of their hand, in all the greenery of its grass and trees, its white blossoms, the golden rays of the sun.

In the village the groups of people broke up to return to their homes, tearful, emotionally spent, talking loudly.

The village had suddenly become a half-forsaken desert.

1910

THE STONE KINGDOM



Prokip's mother began preparing her red-headed son early in the morning. She washed and ironed his shirt, and spent almost half the time darning his torn pants. One patch over another, all done in fine seams—but all making a whole, no bare skin showed. There were strange children out there, and though she wasn't sending the boy out to play with them, her mother's heart wouldn't allow him to go about in tatters. Though ill—she got out of bed, sat herself down on the bench, and darned. While darning she instructed:

“You'll walk up, wish them good health, and then you will beg.”

“But how will I beg, Mother? Shall I say ‘give me alms’, or what?” asked the emaciated—nothing but bones under the skin—freckled youngster.

Prokip's mother herself didn't know. She was silent a moment, then said firmly:

“You'll say: a kopek for bread, because Mother is ill and the children are small...” And she went on and on with a long explanation as to why she must send her child begging.

The boy interrupted her:

“No, Mother, I'll forget all that.”

His mother saw that indeed she had given him too much to remember, yet didn't know how to teach him otherwise.

“Well, however you beg, will do! ”

“And what if they laugh at me—call me a ‘beggar’?”

“What is there to laugh at? It’s not from pleasure that I am sending you...” And she again began to explain that it was nothing to be ashamed of, but evading a direct answer.

“And if one should happen to laugh, then God be with him,” she added.

“God will punish him, won’t he, Mother?” the boy resolved his own doubts.

He was afraid, and yet he wanted to go where there were other people, where there would be much that was new and interesting.

There were some three versts from the village to the summer villas—across the stubble in the fields.

Prokip walked along, full of thought. The sun burned down, the wheat rustled, flaunting its beauty. A slight breeze softly caressed the boy’s damp forehead. Prokip would pause from time to time before a roadside willow or bush, remove his cap and move his lips in a whisper. He was practising.

Now the shadowy pines were quite near. Among them houses, windows, verandas.

The boy’s heart beat fast, he coughed to clear his throat... The tips of his ears reddened, his eyes shone resolutely...

He strode on...

Not far from the villas, hidden among the wheat fields, was a small lake—overgrown with bushes along the shore and in the middle, and with all sorts of flowers and water lilies. Hovering over it all, like many-coloured precious stones, were the darting dragon-flies... He sat down... So beautiful... A place for dreaming, and to move on was so difficult, like going into a fire...

He thought: a gentleman would give him a rouble. It was easy to dream, joyful, but he still hated to move, it was like going into fire.

Life in the summer villas ... ladies in low summer dresses ... dogs gnawing bones ... the smell of cooking fruit ... someone singing a jolly song. A violin ... hammocks ... books ... children playing tennis ... volleyball.

Walking up, he cleared his throat and said loudly, in a

voice like that of a shepherd asking a match from a passer-by:

“Give me a kopek! ” It sounded rather rude, not at all as he wanted it.

Immediately, as if someone had slapped one cheek, then the other, he hung his head, caught his lip between his teeth, and tightly closed his eyes. Head down, it was as if he waited to be beaten again on his cheeks, his head, all over his body.

“What do you want?”

“Mother said, to give me a kopek! ”

He gritted his teeth, but went on approaching other people...

Every time he took a deep breath, as if expecting new blows to fall on his face. Returning home he felt as if he were beaten. But he managed to collect seven kopeks.

Two, three days—he was getting used to it, was bolder in his approach. He didn't blush as often, and added the word, “please”.

Still, it was difficult, and even frightening, when Prokip turned to anyone and they were silent, as though deaf. The moment they heard his plea or saw him—it was as if a lifeless breeze wiped out all feeling in their faces—turning them to stone. There was no answer, no response, no matter how long he stood, how long he begged. It was unbearable and his heart became heavy and sweat broke out on his brow. He turned away feeling low and disgraced. And that how it was in the majority of cases.

“Truly, Mother,” he would explain at home, “it would be better if he had beaten me up... But this way... maybe he thinks that I'm approaching someone else... Maybe he's dead—or something! Maybe I'm talking to thick pine trunks?”

He learned to look at all those people, as if they were puppets.

They all came in on Saturday—and right away they were out on the verandas, eating, like so many dogs.

He got used to looking at them as if they were living puppets which had appeared in the forest from somewhere

and started to lead their illusory life there.

The children in shorts, in gaudy caps, smooth and tanned, played with a large ball. The adults hit wooden balls through wire hoops with wooden mallets. Hammocks were slung between the trees and in them they lay like fish in a net, reading books. Sometimes Prokip would sit in the sand beside the children and gaze at their play; sometimes he forgot why he had come there. Sometimes he interfered in their conversation, then jumping up with a deep sigh he'd leave.

In his cap, which he carried folded up under his arm, he already had seven kopeks in money, four lumps of sugar, and a piece of bread. He was quietly happy that he had something to go home with. He was even proud. He saw himself sharing the sugar among his little sisters, thought about how the seven kopeks could be spent. "I must try for at least ten kopeks," he decided.

"Give a kopek!" The man was thin, with a cropped head.

"Get lost!" he answered.

"Good, at least he's not silent," thought Prokip, and smiled back at him.

"Give me a kopek!"

"Why you've already been here today!"

He looked around—to be sure. For heaven's sake! Perhaps over there. But there were dogs there. All kept assuring him that the dogs didn't bite, only barked. But still he was afraid... There was that large one, a shepherd—already pricking up his ears. No, he wouldn't go.

There was a flutter, as of wings, in his chest. And the dog was looking at him as at an evil man: "Aha, you're afraid ... just you wait..." and it picked itself up growling and glaring fiercely.

The boy turned away amid laughter.

"He won't bite... Don't be afraid... Jimmy! Back! .."

But Jimmy wasn't listening. He threw himself at the youngster, knocking him off his feet.

The desperate, frightened cry of a child pierced the forest. Gone was the shrewd and thrifty breadwinner: a child was screaming. A child's cry has a terrible power. All who were close by came alive and threw themselves to his defence.

“Jimmy! Jimmy! ”

“Get away! ...” They pulled the dog off.

“What could have happened to it, it’s never attacked anyone before! ”

“Did it frighten you?”

The boy lay on the grass, pale, in tears and terror-stricken. His cap was lying some distance away, the kopeks and lumps of sugar scattered all over the ground.

“Hey! ” someone had looked closer. “Look, his chest is all bitten up! ” His shirt was covered with blood.



Mikhailo Kotsyubinsky

WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE



Grandmother had to get off the stove where she slept: her grandchild was ill and needed the warmth. Since there was no room on the benches in the crowded cottage, the old woman made her bed on the floor. Her son and the daughter-in-law seemed not to notice this, so there she stayed.

From the corner, between the door and the shelf for dishes where she lay—old and waiting for death to come—everything looked queer. Up till now she had spent years on the oven bed and was accustomed to looking at things from above. Then her son's children had seemed small, her dim-sighted eyes always rested on their flaxen heads, or caught sight of the angry dejected faces of her daughter-in-law and her son when they passed by, or heard their voices muttering from behind the stove.

Now everything had suddenly grown enormously big. The children who paused above her at the cupboard and strewed her with bread crumbs and other litter; her son's boots—old, covered with snow and heavy like mountains; the bare feet of her daughter-in-law, which stopped right before her face and shut out the entire world. Now she was able to see the gleam of the fire as it greedily consumed the firewood in the stove, yet was always eager for more,

the dark corners under the benches, gaping wide like toothless mouths and breathing rotten dampness. Sometimes, when the door opened, a cloud of white steam, like a mist, would spread across the floor, covering all, and it seemed to her that death might be like that, turbid, sightless, breathing cold across the feet.

Where was death? Why didn't it come? For all her pleading the old woman got no answer. It had taken her husband, strangled seven children, and any moment now would come for her grandchild. It had mowed them all down, laid low the entire family, but had forgotten about her. It was strange and terrifying that it was so difficult to die.

Through the long days and even longer nights, when the mice scampered around in the rotting potatoes and over her body, and the cockroaches rustled around her as though she were an old dish rag, the old woman lay quietly. From time to time only, a mournful sigh would escape her dried-out chest, sounding like the thin whine of a newborn pup.

“O-okh! .. Where had that death of mine gone! ..”

“There'll be no death for you! You give us no rest...”

The daughter-in-law grumbled in anger, the bench squeaking with the weight of her body.

“None, none! ”, the old woman echoed, passing her tongue over her toothless gums and licking her dry, sunken lips.

She would have loved something tart, sauerkraut or the brine of dill pickles. Her dreams wove reality with sleep: snatches from old folk tales, prayers and her son's boots, heavy as mountains, leaving wet little puddles behind them.

The dream would suddenly break, washed away as if by water, and the grandmother would become conscious of her tiny body, lying on the cold, hard floor, on thin bedding, in a damp corner.

Why did she exist? Who needed her? Life had eaten her strength and then thrown her, like potato peelings, into a corner. But the soul held strongly to its little shell and refused to leave it.

Grandmother did not take up much space in the world,

a little corner under the shelf for dishes, but she was in everybody's way. She ate little bread, but even that bit was too much for that poverty-stricken household. And again the withered lips rustled like those dry leaves:

“Ah, death ... death... Where are you?”

But the body still had its cravings. Out of that bundle of skin and bones, out of that emaciated stomach, the empty breasts, there sometimes came an unconquerable, fantastic desire that overpowered the mind:

“Milk... Milk! ”

The daughter-in-law was then overcome with mirth. She didn't say anything, just shook with laughter: her breasts, her face, her stomach; all her molars gleamed white through her grimacing mouth.

Grandmother would be deeply grieved. They wouldn't give her milk... There was no milk for her...

She pouted and grumbled in her grief. She desperately wanted some milk, though she knew that even the sick child would not have it.

The daughter-in-law, exasperated, would grab the broom and sweep the grandmother under a cloud of dust.

“Pull up your feet! Or I'll sweep them out together with the dust! ..”

Grandmother would pull up her feet and for a long time would crouch, unseen, from under the dish shelf.

In the daytime she was assailed by children. Like five yellow-beaked sparrows the row of eyes gazed in expectation at her...

“Tell us a story! ”

Her mouth would yawn open in response, like an empty purse, and words hissed out—something about a prince, gold, and groaning tables of food. But the tongue was uncontrolled, licking away all that was started, and the old woman ended with something else entirely—something about a mare's head, about a mother lynx. She used old words which the children didn't understand. They became bored.

“Grandma! When are you going to die?”

Their fingers poked at the wrinkled seams of her neck, which fell into folds like the leg of an old boot; examined with interest the two little bags that were her breasts, and between which a bronze cross had sunk; picked up her

apron and felt her feet: thin, veined and black like branches that Mother used to kindle the fire.

They were full of curiosity and very much wanted to see Grandma's soul leave her body.

"Grandma, will your soul fly out like a bird?"

Then they would stand up and try to reach the dish shelf, trampling her chest with their little feet and dropping crumbs into her eyes.

The daughter-in-law and son also discussed her death, loudly, angrily, as though it were an unpaid tax.

"What will we bury her with when she dies?"

The son would snort at this and glance bitterly toward the corner. During these moments grandmother was afraid to call for death. What if it came? Where would they get the money for the funeral? The priest must be paid, boards for the coffin were expensive, and the amount of food and wine the people would eat and drink at the funeral repast...

Grandmother had one consolation. When they forgot to close the door, a small, speckled hen would dart headlong toward her. She would crane her short neck and in a sideways motion look at her with a round eye, lifting her leg in anticipation. And when grandmother would stretch out her emaciated arm with a few crumbs of bread in her palm, the speckled hen would peck at them, nipping her with her beak.

That poor little hen really got it. She was beaten and kicked till she crouched under the blows, chased out and cursed:

"May you croak, thrice accursed bird! "

Better if they cursed her, thought the grandmother, then maybe she would die sooner.

Grandmother had a great deal of time to think—days and nights, secretly and alone. Her mouth moved, her eyes looked inward, her lips shaped to form a word and then slackened uncertainly. Sometimes she whispered "Son! ", then hushed immediately in fear that he may have heard her. Her weakened arms and legs would then become damp with sweat and her clothing clung to her while she lay as if dead.

Finally she overcame her fears:

"Son! .."

He was patching something and probably didn't hear.

"Potap! "

"What is it?"

"Come here."

"What for?"

"Come and sit beside me."

Reluctantly he got up and sat on the bench by the shelf. A large and wet boot was directly opposite her eyes, casting its shadow over her face.

"It's time to die."

"What, call the priest again? You've said you were dying before and all that happened was that I paid him for nothing."

Irritated Potap turned away from her.

"Ekh, Grandmother... Mother," he corrected himself.

His lips closed in a harsh line and froze, hiding something unspoken behind them.

"There is no need for a priest... God will forgive us our sins without him. But I can't seem to die..."

"I've heard you. You've said it before."

"Death has forgotten about me... There seems to be no end... You could, perhaps, help."

The old woman stirred in her bed on the floor. He heard the creak of her bones as she moved, the asthmatic breath wheezing in her chest. His anguish struggled out of his throat:

"Well?"

But the old woman had subsided, mumbling something under her breath, as if in a dream:

"...the son took the sled, put the old man in it and carted him off to the gully..."

Potap raised his eyebrows.

"What did you say?"

But the old woman had come to her senses.

"I have... become a burden and in the way. I take up so much space in the cottage... I eat bread that is needed for the children... I'm a burden for everyone and a burden for myself... Take me out into the forest..."

He didn't understand and stared at his mother askance.

"Help me, son... Take me into the forest... It's winter now, I'll die quickly... Does an old woman need much? A breath or two, and that's that..."

Something swept over him at these astonishing words, a remembrance of some long-forgotten dream that touched his consciousness lightly and was gone.

He listened, though he didn't want to.

"There will be no sin... The forest is clean and white... The trees like candles in the church... I'll fall asleep and when I wake up I'll say: 'Mother of God, don't condemn my son, but the human misery that brought us to this...'
Don't pay attention to what people will say. When trouble comes, where are they then? Not there... You go to your death alone..."

His mother's words sank into his consciousness like grain into a ploughed field; he heard every word and a false, strange and insincere anger arose within him.

He got up from the bench and shouted angrily, more at himself than at her:

"Don't babble heaven knows what... God gave you life—he'll give you death as well... You should better go to sleep."

But when the light had been put out and they were all lying down, his thoughts roamed about the room, sluggish, agitated, dark as a storm cloud through which a touch of brightness gleamed from time to time.

God?

Are you looking from heaven? Then look.

Angry and cold were these thoughts.

Sin?

The whole world was sunk in sin. Wasn't his hunger the sin of the well-fed?

He battled with his thoughts, especially those of what the old woman had said. But there kept emerging stubbornly in his memory something he had heard from his mother, or his grandmother—how at one time, in the ancient past, children killed their aged parents. They took them out into the woods, or out into the field, and there they left them to die. There was no sense in their living anymore. The old had to die, the young to live. That was the way with everything in this world. The old leaves fell, the young budded and grew. Winter perished when spring came, the seeds in the earth rotted away while sprouting new shoots. That was the way it had always been, since the world began.

The old woman had lived long, but couldn't die. She begged for death—but God refused. Would it really be a sin to help?

And again something dismal rose within him, like vapour over a bog, wiping out his thoughts, dulling his senses and covering his forehead with cold, irritating sweat. Tfu! Good Lord! To drag a living mother out of the house! ...

The full weight of the dark night lay on his chest, hindering his breathing, while thoughts again timidly entered his mind, stirred and expanded.

He tried to chase them away! "Whatever will be, will be... But what will people say? People! They will disapprove. But when you and your children are dying of hunger, when you are howling like a dog in distress, when you are being tormented—they are not there—the people. There is no greater wilderness on earth than which is called people. People! Ha! .."

Potap couldn't fall asleep. He twisted and turned, lifted his head, straining his ears in the direction of the corner under the dish shelf. It was quiet there. And suddenly it seemed to him that it was all over. His mother was in the forest, there was more room in the house, there was no more groaning, less people to feed in the family, no further worry about where to get money for the funeral. Unexpectedly he felt lighter in spirit.

But there was a rustle of mice under the shelf and the annoying, plaintive voice once more rose from its corner: "Oh death, my death ... where are you?"

He got up late.

It was an oppressively quiet day. The grey overcast sky seemed to smother the earth, overhung with wisps of mist, floating about like unrepentant souls.

The manure had to be taken out into the field. He worked at it, striding heavily alongside the sled, himself grey as the mist and pondering deeply over the thoughts that had settled and hardened during the night.

For some reason he left his work early, before dark. He entered the cottage, tramped about in silence, then went out again. He returned again, stood on the threshold, but avoided looking into the corner. He wanted to say something, but could find no words.

The mother was silent.

Finally he addressed the corner painfully, half in anger:

“Have you come to your senses then?”

“What? What are you saying?”

“Have you forgotten last night’s foolishness?”

“Ah ... do help me, son...”

“You persist again?”

“Take me into the forest...”

He suddenly squatted beside her, lowering his face to that of the old woman, so that she felt his hot breath, and whispered quickly:

“Tell me, is this what you really want for yourself?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Have you thought it out carefully?”

“Yes, I have.”

He stood up sharply and sat down behind the table. He made as if to cut himself a slice of bread, but didn’t, putting the loaf where it was.

He didn’t look at anyone, but clearly sensed that everyone already knew, so he wasn’t surprised when his wife calmly said:

“We’ll have to warm some water.”

That meant preparing the old woman for death.

He began to look at all the bustle with indifference. He observed how busily his wife filled the stove with straw, how the children whispered in the corner as though glad that “Dad would take Grandma out into the woods at last”, when the old woman stretched an arm out from under the shelf.

“Give me a clean shirt.”

“And a candle, I don’t think we have one! ..” his wife’s voice rang out, and he himself climbed up to the icons where they usually hid the Palm Sunday candle.

It didn’t seem right that he should watch his mother being prepared, so he went outdoors.

When he returned, she was lying on the bench ready, bony and tiny, like a plucked chicken; with the cross on her breast and her clean heels protruding from below her black woolen overskirt, as if already lifeless.

He wanted to ask whether the preparations were over but didn’t, because he saw that they were already waiting for him.

He approached the bench.

“Maybe you’ve...”

She shook her worn face which was already tinted with fresh shadows.

Then he stepped boldly closer, kissed her hand and lips, and she blessed him with those wasted hands, so like the dry twigs of autumn.

Now they all came up—the daughter-in-law and the children—to kiss the grandmother.

The grandmother moaned lightly; it was pleasant to feel the warm lips on her face.

Even the daughter-in-law gave a sob, but quieted immediately when Potap asked for a rug.

“What do you want it for?”

“She must be covered...”

“Well, see that you bring it back.”

Potap picked his mother up in his arms gently and carried her out. A wave of cold air entered the cottage when the door opened and he left the smoky darkness of the doorway followed by the wailing of the children.

There was hay in the sled. Potap made his mother comfortable, covered her with the rug and taking up the reins, asked:

“Are you comfortable, Grandmother?”

Again “grandmother”, he thought, but didn’t have the courage to correct himself.

“Don’t forget to bring back the rug!” his wife reminded again as he climbed up on the sled.

The horse moved—and grandmother glided away.

They had to cover some three versts across the fields which began immediately outside the cottage. The night came down suddenly and obscured the horizon. Only the close-by snowdrifts shone whitely and a descending mist clad the trees in hoar-frost for the night.

They were silent. What was there for them to talk about? Poverty had long ago sealed his lips and he could speak only with his heart, and besides something frightening and mysterious arose between the living body on the sled and himself, something he didn’t have the courage to drive away with words.

He stared at the mare’s switching shaggy tail, already covered with rime, and thought about how he must cut up

some fodder and when it would be best to take the threshed wheat-sheaves to the village straw chopper. Should he do it after he returned, or maybe tomorrow? Then he remembered that he had forgotten his mittens, that he hadn't washed the manure, now congealed in a crust, off his hands.

It seemed to him that the old woman was saying something, so he turned around and shouted:

"What do you want?"

He had some difficulty understanding her, but finally made out that she was asking if they were going through Mykyta's field.

"Mykyta's? Ha! Mykyta's been dead a long time. His sons have already sold his land."

"Who did they sell it to?"

"Oh, it's a long story."

He livened up at this point, turned around and shouted, so that his mother could hear; swung his whip against the sled, waved his arms—glad that he could, with his shouts, drive away that frightening and mysterious thing that had arisen between them.

The sled rocked through the frozen ruts, bumping over the hard lumps, while he hung one leg over its edge from time to time steadying it as it swept along, just as he did when he carted manure. He urged the mare on... "Giddy-yap!" and turned to his mother again.

They were happy in the moment, as they had been in the past when she was younger and able to get about.

The old woman listened avidly to the news. She knew nothing, for what could she know, abandoned as she was under the dish shelf? And Mykyta had once courted her... He, he!

They didn't even notice when they entered the woods. Potap stopped the mare.

"Are you cold?" he climbed down and came around to her.

"No."

"Well, we've arrived."

The old woman tried to lift herself, but fell back.

"Wait a bit. Just lie there a moment."

He walked away from the sled, sinking deep into the drifts, looking for a good spot. He chose a smooth mound under an oak and said aloud:

“This is a good place.”

Then he looked about him.

In the deep silence the trees wove the white net of their frozen twigs as if preparing to cast it into the deep sea of the heavens where the stars glimmered faintly like the scales of a golden fish.

“Far better than in a church,” he thought.

He carried some hay to the spot, spreading it carefully, then laid the old woman down on it. He wanted to cover her legs with the rug, but she resisted.

“There is no need... Take it home, it will be more useful there.”

“Yes, it would,” he thought, and put it aside. But he immediately reconsidered and picked it up again, covering her up to her chin. She accepted it submissively, pulling her hands out from under it, and he crossed them across her breast as on a corpse. Then he lit a candle and put it between her fingers.

“What else can I do?” he paused, then went down on his knees in the snow, leaned over and touched the folded hands with his forehead.

The warm odour of the melting wax, which trickled down the candle, stirred something bitter and disturbing in his breast, something he couldn't define.

Here in this silence where the trees stood like candles in church, he pressed his lips to those toil-worn hands, so soon to testify of their labour before God, wanting to tell them of his life, of its injustices toward him but he merely said:

“Forgive me, Mother...”

“May God forgive...”

He was going to get up and finish with it, when his mother's whispering voice reached up to him. He turned his eyes to her face, which seemed to be melting in the shadows, like the yellow wax of the candle.

“What is it, Mother?”

She smacked her lips as the aged do, twisting her mouth so that her bluish gums were visible, and moaned out as a tear trickled out of her dimming eye:

“Don't kill the speckled hen... She'll lay eggs...”

He promised. “Kill the hen! .. As if chicken was a peasant's fare?” Was that all? He rose to his feet, bowed

over her, then crunched away across the snow.

Flinging himself on the sled, he lashed out at the mare. It plunged forward, banging the sled against the trunks of the trees and jarring it over the frozen hollows. Looking back, as they jolted along, he saw the candle quietly and evenly burning among the trees, as though a star had descended to earth with the hoar-frost and came to rest in the snow.

An immense relief swept over him. He was rid of the burden on his shoulders. Taking a deep breath of the crisp air, he felt a void in his chest, and released it by giving a wild, angry shout at his horse:

“Gid-dy-yap! ... You old carrion! ”

He rocked back and forth on the sled as if drunk returning from the fair after having lifted a few. He was wildly indifferent to everything, there was nothing he was afraid of, come what may.

The horse, having emerged from the forest into the field, slowed down to a weary walk.

Potap suddenly remembered a day from his childhood.

It was Sunday. The cottage was flooded with sunlight. He was eager to get away and join the boys, but hated to take the time to change his shirt. His mother caught him, however, and made him put on a clean, white and cold shirt. She combed his hair and before he stepped over the threshold, thrust a hot pie down into his shirt front. The pie burned against his chest, but he took it out only after he had joined his friends outside. It gave him great pleasure to have them stare at him as he savoured its goodness and pulled the plums out of its centre with his fingers.

He couldn't remember anything else.

His father's death was also unforgettable. There was a large crowd at the funeral feast. They ate cabbage, the boiled wheat smelled of honey and the raisins shone like flies on its surface.

He had certainly stuffed himself then.

They moved further and deeper into the fields. The mare was so white that she blended with the snow; the sky, however, stretched clean and black above them...

Mykyta's field... Mykyta had courted me... Khe-khe!

A lonely cloud floated across the sky, like the shadow of a dove's wing.

He lowered his eyes and crumpled up. Something cold had settled in his chest. Maybe it wasn't a cloud, maybe it was his mother's soul soaring up there?

And his thoughts turned back. She was lying there in the woods alone, on a cold bed, like a wounded bird, looking up at the heavens through tears. There was only the candle to weep over her, dripping its hot wax on her wasted hands, folded in death.

Why had he taken her out there?.. She had wanted it herself, and he obeyed, but it could have been different. It could have been... As if under a magic spell the fields, the sky and the horse vanished. A vision had gripped his imagination, erasing all else.

... They had just carried Mother out to the graveyard, with icons, with priests, as was the Christian custom. Their cottage was full of people. There was the steaming aroma of food. "Drink, kinsman, for the soul of the departed..." "May God rest her soul..." The vodka burned in the throat and in the stomach... The hubbub grew... The honest folk exuded warmth, as did the steaming platter of meat. Another drink... "She was a good woman." They clattered their spoons against their plates, smacking their greasy lips in appreciation. A full stomach seems to reveal the soul for all to see. One wants to weep, or sing... "Let's drink, dear friend, for the souls of the departed..."

He broke into a sweat.

"I could make a loan on half the garden," he spoke out loud and shuddered.

Who had said that?

He looked around. The horse was barely putting one foot before the other; the mist had come back again from somewhere, blotting out the sky and fields, and sowing darkness and gloom.

He must drive away this evil vision. He tried to remember something of what the priest had said in the church, what people would say for appearances' sake. He thought about sin, about the soul, about church prayers, about Christian ritual. "Honour thy father and thy mother..." But all this bleakness molted away in the warmth of the enticing pictures projected by his imagination.

"We have but one mother and there is only one death," said he to himself, and again heard the voice: "Help

yourself, friend... let's drink for the souls of the departed..." He was submerged in the hubbub and the warmth of conversation, in the relish of savoury food; in the pleasure and joy of being alive.

The cottages had now become visible in the distance.

He rose suddenly on the sled, looking ahead. Then he glanced behind him and turned the horse sharply around, shouting:

"Gid-dy-yap! You old carrion! "

They dashed through the mist amid flying clumps of snow thrown up by the mare's hoofs—back to the forest to the old woman.

1910

LAUGHTER



allid from a sleepless night, Madame Natalia opened the door of the bedroom off the dining-room where Varvara was already dusting. Buttoning up her white morning coat as she entered, she quietly, and with some fear in her voice asked:

"You haven't yet opened the shutters?"

Varvara threw down the duster, ready to comply.

"I'll do it right away."

"No, no, it's not necessary... Let them remain closed all day!" Madame Natalia ordered hastily and in panic.

Sturdy Varvara raised her broad, sallow face in astonishment.

"The town is very unsettled today. There are evil people out on the streets. Let's hope they won't break in here. Don't go out to the market today. Do we have anything to eat in the house?"

"There is no meat."

"Never mind. We'll manage. Prepare whatever there is. Don't go out on the street and don't let anyone into the house. We are not at home ... understand? Everyone is

away. Unless it's one of our friends, of course."

Madame Natalia spoke in a low voice, almost in a whisper, close to Varvara's ear, her bright, short-sighted eyes, peering about anxiously.

When Varvara had left the room, Madame Natalia went cautiously through the house. The rooms were in twilight, and only the yellow rays of light, piercing through the slats in the closed shutters and diffusing into hazy streaks, broke through the gloom. Madame Natalia tried the bolts of the shutters and adjusted the screws, moving from room to room bent over like a pale apparition. Inspecting the shutters opening out into the street, she put her ear to the window from time to time, listening intently. From beyond came the muffled sound of inarticulate shouting that sounded to her both unusual and alarming.

She thought of the day before them. How would it end? It wasn't enough that the people had been trampled by horsemen, with much shedding of blood—now these same ignorant people had been stirred up against the intelligentsia. How she had begged her husband—let's leave at this time, take the children—he wouldn't listen... And now look what was happening... Dear God! And what for?

She involuntarily recalled the contemptible, stupidly written, senseless leaflets that had in the past few days deluged the city. They called for the massacre of all the enemies of the government, and their name had been written clearly among the others. Yes, Attorney Valerian Chubinsky... The name was hated by the police, and now it, too was placed in the line-up.

There was a burst of children's laughter from the next room. Madame Chubinska rushed there immediately.

"Hush, quiet! Oh my God! Stop shouting! "

She flapped her wide white sleeves desperately, like the wings of a bird, while lines of inexpressible anguish lined her colourless lips. She shushed the children, gazing at the windows as if in terror that their carefree laughter would somehow pierce the glass and be heard outside.

Varvara came to the rescue. The self-possession with which she moved through the house, gathering up the clothing and helping the children on with their stockings; the confident, heavy tread of her bare feet, her calm expression—all helped to soothe Madame Natalia. It

seemed safer somehow, with such a loyal, sensible person around.

“Have you been out on the street, Varvara?” she asked.

“No, but I stood at the gate for a while.”

“How was it ... quiet?”

“Well, yes... But some people came up and asked for the master.”

“People came? What kind of people?”

“Who knows ... just people.”

“Did they have anything ... in their hands?”

“In their hands? Yes, they had sticks.”

“Sticks?”

“I told them the master wasn't home, that all were away.”

“You did the right thing, Varvara. Good... Remember Varvarochka, that there is no one in the house, only yourself... Dear God! ”

“Varvara, Varvara!” the irritated voice of master Chubinsky broke through the conversation from the dining-room. “Why are the shutters still closed?”

Madame Natalia placed a quick hand on Varvara and flitted into the dining-room herself.

Her husband stood there half-dressed, blinking his short-sighted eyes. He hadn't yet put on his glasses, and having poor eyesight, his face framed by his fairish hair, seemed crumpled and confused.

“Valerian, my dear, let the shutters remain closed... I gave the order... You know what kind of a day it is. I'm not letting you go out anywhere...”

“What nonsense! Let the shutters be opened at once! ”

“Oh my God! .. I beg of you ... for my own peace of mind ... for the sake of the children...”

Madame Natalia's cheeks broke out in red spots.

Master Valerian was angry, what foolishness! Where are they going to run? But in the depths of his heart he realised that his wife had done the right thing.

Varvara shortly brought in the samovar and the family sat down to breakfast.

The room seemed very strange in the half-darkness. Yellow patches of light quivered over the walls and the buffet, the shutters shook and rattled in the gusts of wind. The children—a boy and a girl—awed by the unusual

circumstance, spoke to each other in whispers. Master Valerian drummed his fingers on the table in an irritated fashion. His glass of tea grew cold before him as he impatiently gnawed at his sparse blonde beard and gazed vacantly over his spectacles. For some days now he had noticed some suspicious characters trailing him wherever he went. During the night indistinct figures loomed in the darkness outside the windows, shrinking against the shadows of the fence if they were noticed. And yesterday, walking along the street, he had heard curses and abusive words behind him, clearly aimed at himself. "Orator, orator," hissed a swarthy giant of a man angrily, raking him with his eyes when he had turned around to look. He had said nothing about this to his wife, because he didn't want to disturb her. Then again, before his eyes, there flashed a whole ocean of heads ... heads, and more heads ... sweating, flushed faces and thousands of eyes that gazed at him out of a steaming, vaporous mist. He was speaking. Waves of heat beat at his face, entering his chest, as he spoke. The words flew out of his mouth like birds courageous, truthful. His speech, it seemed to him, was a success. He was able to simply and vividly describe the conflict of interests that existed between those who gave the work and those who had to work—so much so that he had understood it much better himself. And when he was applauded, he knew that the clapping palms were those of an awakened conscience... Yes, but what would happen today? Would something really happen today?

Chubinsky glanced at his wife. She was sitting rigidly upright, tense and listening. The expression on her pale face was like that of a frightened bird.

Those closed shutters were really maddening. What lay beyond them on the streets, those unknown rivers along which passed waves of strangers, who at any moment could overflow into a sea of passions and flood the banks?

There was a sudden bang on the shutter.

Madame Natalia jumped, and all momentarily stiffened with fear.

"What are you afraid of?" Master Chubinsky asked, angrily. "Some children up to mischief, no doubt, hit them in passing and you imagine heaven only knows what."

Varvara rushed in from the kitchen.

“What’s happened, Varvara?” Madame Natalia gasped.

“Master Horbachevsky has come... He came through the yard to the kitchen door.”

“Ah! Then let him in, let him...” But student Horbachevsky was already in, thrusting his head over Varvara’s shoulder.

“What is happening, do tell us! ...” greeted the host.

“It’s pretty bad, it seems. The Black Hundreds have been meeting all night at Mykyta’s, they say. They were drinking and talking about whom they should beat up. First on their list, I understand, are to be the “orators” and “democrats”.

“Oh God! ..”

“Don’t be frightened, Madame. Perhaps nothing will come of it. The movement on the streets seems rather erratic. They are wandering about in groups of three or four. Their faces are angry, stern, and their eyes cruel, full of ill-will, especially when they see an intellectual... May I have some tea?”

With trembling hands Madame Natalia poured out a glass of tea, splashing it over the edge as she handed it to the student.

“Go on, go on, what else?” asked Master Valerian, rising impatiently to pace the room.

“Thank you. I passed by the market. It was crowded. Free vodka was being passed around. Some secret meetings are being held, but what is being decided, it’s hard to say. I only heard a few names mentioned: Machinsky, Zalkin, yours...”

“Oh God! ”

“Don’t be frightened. There’s generally a bigger crowd on Sunday drinking vodka... May I have some bread, please? Thank you. Still, I’m surprised that you haven’t left the city at this time. Hurrying here I saw that the shutters were closed, which meant to me that you were away. I ran in only to find out where you had gone and for how long. And here you are, sitting around. You’re taking a risk, you know, you’re taking a great risk...”

“You see. How many times have I told him, pleaded with him: ‘Let’s go away, take the children...’” Madame

Natalia was almost in tears, pressing her hands against her heart and gazing with pleading eyes at her guest as she had before at her husband.

“Well, it’s too late to discuss it now!” said Master Valerian in exasperation, still pacing the room. He was furiously smoking one cigarette after another and breaking the blue clouds of smoke with his head as he dashed to and fro, leaving them trailing in wisps behind him, like a fog in the mountains.

“Oh dear, the things that are happening ... the things that are happening!”

The words were spoken by someone else in a high-pitched, feminine voice.

All turned to the kitchen door through which a small, plump woman darted in, bringing in a shaft of light behind her. Her hat was askew, and her red hair in disarray, flamed as if she had brought in a fire from the street.

“How dark it is in here! Where are you all?” Greeting no one, she hurried to the table and collapsed on a chair.

“My dears, my darlings... You are still alive? And I thought ... it has begun... The mob is going through the streets carrying the tsar’s portrait. I just saw them beating up Sikach.”

“Which one?”

“The young one, the student. He didn’t bare his head before the portrait. I saw him, bareheaded already, bloodied, his jacket torn, bent double. He was tossed from hand to hand and being beaten. His eyes were staring, red and wild. I was horrified! I couldn’t look. And do you know who I saw in the crowd? Just ordinary people ... peasants in their grey Sunday jackets and high boots: just plain, honest farm workers. There were people there from our village, quiet, peaceful, hard-working.”

“Those are the worst of the lot, Tetyana Stepanivna,” commented the student Horbachevsky.

“No, don’t say that. I know them. I’ve taught school in that village for five years. Now I’ve run away from there because they wanted to beat me up as well. It’s the age-old savage hatred toward the gentry, whoever it might be. They’ve ruined everyone about us. If it were only the rich... But I’m really sorry for my neighbour, an old widow, poor. One son’s in Siberia, another in prison. All

she had was an ancient cottage and an orchard. All was destroyed. The house was taken apart log by log, the orchard cut down, the sons' books torn up. She didn't want to plead as others did, you see. Some came out to meet the mob with icons, falling on their knees before them with their little children, kneeling in the mud for hours begging for mercy and kissing their hands. And these were spared."

"How horrible!" whispered Madame Natalia mechanically.

She still sat rigid, tense, as if awaiting something.

"Shush, quiet!" she interrupted the conversation impatiently.

Shouts could be heard from the distance.

Everyone grew still, turned to the windows, and with necks outstretched, froze to attention.

The noise seemed nearer. It resembled somewhat the rumble of a far-off flood, or the distant roar of beasts. "A-a-a... a-a-a-ah...", the high walls carried the echo of the turbulent sound, and from somewhere close by came the swift rush of feet over cobblestones.

"The villains... the scoundrels... I'm going out!" Chubinsky started up and darted about the room as if in search of something.

But they all threw themselves at him and with unrecognisably strained, hushed voices, urged him not to go out because he was the one the mob was looking for, that he would do no good, that he mustn't leave his wife and children. His wife declared that she would die if left alone.

In the meantime the noise outdoors had died down and soon all was quiet again. Only the frightened children were heard sobbing, ever more loudly, in the corner.

"Varvara! Varvara!" shouted Master Valerian. "Take the children into another room and quiet them down somehow."

In came Varvara, broad and placid, with her reddened arms bared to the elbows. A few words from her quieted the children at once. She embraced them with her large, bare arms and led them out of the room. Stillness returned to the dining-room.

"How fortunate you are, to have such a good maid,"

remarked Tetyana Stepanivna.

Madame Natalia was pleased that at least one bright spot had been found in all the gloom of the day's events.

"Oh, my Varvara is a golden treasure ... she is a true friend. Calm, sensible, devoted. And would you believe it, we pay her only three rubles a month."

"A fine character," added Master Valerian. "She's been with us four years. We've become used to each other in that time. And she's fond of the children too."

After chatting of this topic for a time, the guests prepared to leave, but here Tetyana Stepanivna suddenly remembered why she had come. She felt that it would be dangerous for Master Valerian, after his speeches at the meetings, to remain at home. It would be better if he waited out this evil day with some friends in a safe place.

Horbachevsky disagreed. To the contrary, he insisted, it would be better to stay home and not go out of the house. Their house was not too well known because they had just recently moved in, and when people saw the closed shutters they would think the place empty.

"No, no. I'll remain at home... What will be, will be," assured Chubinsky as his guests took their leave.

Husband and wife were left. He continued to pace to and fro amid clouds of smoke, as if fleeing from anxiety. Madame Natalia sat, dejected, till finally he stopped and sat down beside her.

"Don't worry so much," he tried to calm her and regain his own composure. "Nobody will hurt us. They'll shout a bit and then go their separate ways."

"I'm feeling much better... Don't pay any attention to me, it's only nerves... I also think nothing will happen."

She made a valiant effort to stop trembling.

"I'm sure that there are very few hooligans among them, the people will not be led by them."

"Yes, of course there are few hooligans..."

"And it surely won't come to bloodshed."

"Oh God, of course, it cannot come to that..."

Now that they had been left alone in this dark room, surrounded by forces ominous and unknown, and trying to hide their thoughts and fears from each other, their alarm increased and gathered over them like clouds of detonating gas.

How could he, unarmed, do anything against the blind fury of the savage mass, people who had no idea of what they were doing?

She was very well aware of this.

And when they finally got to them? Well, they would move furniture against the doors and defend themselves to the end. They would barricade...

“R-r-ring... R-r-ring! ”

The sharp, shrill sound of the doorbell startled them. Chubinsky leapt up.

“Don’t go... Don’t open it,” Madame Natalia pleaded, wringing her hands.

The bell danced, rattled and stormed.

Chubinsky rushed into the kitchen.

“Varvara, Varvara! ”

“Hush... don’t shout so! ”

But Varvara wasn’t there.

What to do? Something must be done. Where was Varvara?

At last the maid hurried in.

“It’s the doctor ringing... He’s coming in through the kitchen.”

The doctor swept in. Tall, rangy, he waved his long arms about like a windmill, shouting as he advanced:

“You’re sitting here, my pigeons, and haven’t the faintest idea of what’s going on. Beating, killing. They’ll slaughter us like those chickens. Dr. Garnier’s apartments have been broken into, his furniture smashed, his instruments destroyed. His wife was dragged about by the hair and Garnier himself was taken away. He’s now carrying the tsar’s portrait at the head of the mob. That’s one! ”

“Oh God! ”

“Ivanenko was pulled out of a cab and his head bashed in. That’s two! Zalizko had to swear allegiance to the autocracy, he was beaten so badly. Now you have three. The midwife Rashkevich, they say, was beaten to death. The police seem to have disappeared. They’ve given us up to the drunken mob. We must all meet in the square by the city council. Do you hear? Immediately! We must go immediately and defend ourselves with arms! ”

The doctor shouted all this out loudly, as if at a meeting before a crowd.

The fury of his voice seemed to beat at the walls of Madame Natalia's heart. Not so loud, please, not so loud! her eyes and agonised expression pleaded.

She pressed her hands to her chest and whispered in despair:

“Doctor, please, Doctor, do be so kind... Oh God! ”

But the doctor was past hearing.

“Take your revolver,” he shouted, “and let's go! ”

“I don't have a revolver! ” retorted Chubinsky, angrily.

The doctor whistled in astonishment. “What, you have no arms? Then all you can do is make speeches, and when it comes to more... No, my dear Sir, that won't do... You just go on sitting here till they catch you, like that hen in a coop. I'm going! ”

“Where?” Master Valerian began to shout also. “This is madness! You won't be able to do a thing! ”

But the doctor brushed him aside and, still shouting, ran out of the house.

Now Chubinsky was truly frightened. Abjectly, shamefully frightened. He realised it, but what was he to do? Where to go? He didn't wish to die in this wretched, terrible fashion. Should he hide? Not himself only—oh no—but all of them. He looked around the room. His wife was moaning, barely conscious, holding her head between her hands. Varvara padded around the table. Run away? Where? Dozens of plans struggled through his mind, like flickering will-o'-the-wisps, and were as suddenly extinguished. No, not that... not that! Animal fear drove him in a fury about the room, from door to door. He tried desperately to suppress his trembling. “Don't lose your head... Don't lose you head,” something seemed to be saying to him, while his thoughts darted about like in a wild animal, newly-captured, in cage. What? Varvara was speaking. What was she saying?

“Shall I serve lunch?”

Ah, that Varvara. The sound of her voice brought him to his senses.

“What did you say?”

“I'm asking if I should serve lunch?”

“Lunch? No, no, it isn't necessary. You heard what is happening?”

“Why, of course I heard! Ha-a! ”

The "ha" brought him up short. He noticed a tremor in the maid's face, like that of a still surface of water after the movement of a fish. One of the ripples had reached him.

"They're beating the gentry," he explained piteously, and watched in surprise as Varvara's heavy body shook, as though with suppressed laughter.

"What is it?"

"I... I..."

And suddenly the laughter broke through.

"Ha-ha-ha! Beating them! Well, let them! Ha-ha-ha! Enough of their lording it... Ha-ha-ha! Glory be to God, that people have lived to see the day! "

She even crossed herself.

Her face turned crimson, her eyes flashed. She stood with arms akimbo, her reddened, bare to the elbow arms, and rocked with laughter, as though drunk, her large breasts threatening to break out from under her grease-stained blouse.

"Ha-ha-ha! A-ha-ha! " She could not stop the gusts of irresistible, drunken laughter that boiled up within her breast and like froth, bubbled up in words:

"Ha-ha-ha! All of them... They should all be rooted out! Ha-ha-ha... Their seedlings too... all of them! A-ha-ha! " She subsided into sobs.

Her wild laughter resounded through the house and was as painful and frightening as a frenzied dance of sharp, cold, glittering knives. It was like a torrent of lightning, that laughter, wounding and deadly in its unrestrained peal upon peal.

Chubinsky seized at the table to prevent himself from falling. The laughter beat at him, whipping at his face. What was she saying? Something impossible, preposterous!

Madame Natalia was the first to react.

"Out! " she shrieked in a high, shrill voice.

"Out! She'll slaughter my children! Get her out of here!"

Varvara stopped laughing. Her breasts still heaved, but the head was bowed. She glanced sideways at her mistress, and then, collecting an armload of dishes, trod heavily out to the kitchen.

They could hear her bare feet tramping about on the kitchen floor.

Chubinsky felt stifled. He shook all over. He took a few steps after Varvara, then stopped. Something impossible... some kind of nightmare...

He dived to the kitchen door and opened it. The room was bright with daylight. Varvara was standing by the table, bent, wilted. She was wiping something

“Var...,” he wanted to say something, and couldn’t. He just stood and stared, his eyes wide, anxious, searching, and suddenly unveiled. They embraced the entire room in all its smallest detail, seeing that which he had passed by every day like a blind man. Those bare feet, red, dirty, and cracked from chapping, like those of an animal. The rags on her back that could not have kept out the cold. The sallow features, the deep blue smudges under the eyes. “We’ve devoured her, like we’ve eaten our dinners.” There was the heavy pall of blue smoke that hung constantly over the kitchen, the hard bench on which she slept—among the slops and the squalor, barely covered—like an animal in its lair. Her strength sapped from her to feed others. A sad, disordered existence, a life in a yoke. A life without radiance, without hope... just work... work... work... and always for others... for someone else’s comfort... always for someone else. And he had wanted her sympathy!

He couldn’t say a word. What for? everything was so clear and simple.

He turned and dived back into the dining-room.

“Have you seen?” he demanded of his wife. “You haven’t? Then go and take a good look! ”

“Why doesn’t she go on strike?” he cried in a voice that wasn’t his own.

“Why doesn’t she go on strike?” he cried as though lashed by a whip; he couldn’t breathe, he was suffocating.

Turning to a window and without thinking of what he was doing, he began quickly and frantically unscrewing the bolt.

“What are you doing?” screamed his wife in a paroxysm of fear.

He ignored her. Tearing at the bolt with all his strength he finally pried it loose. It struck the shutter with a clang that echoed up to the high ceiling. The windows flew open, hitting the jambs on each side, and flooded the room

with hazy yellow light. An autumn breeze flung a cloud of fine dust into the room, followed by a discordant explosion of sound.

“Why doesn’t she go on strike?”

He gulped deep breaths of air into his lungs, oblivious to the continuing, menacing, distant roar of the street.

The roar continued to mount.

“A-a-a...” The sound advanced like water through a burst dam.

“A-a-a-a...”—it rolled closer, articulating in shattered glass, and individual cries of despair and terror, the heavy tramp of thousands of feet... A cab bounced rapidly over the cobblestones, pursued by an insane echo from the rumble of its own wheels. Blown by the autumn wind, the yellow clouds scudded across the sky, also fleeing the city.

“A-a-ah... A-a-ah! ...”

1906



Vasyl Stefanyk

MAPLE LEAVES

I



he bed was covered with linen, the godfathers sat on the front and back benches at the table, the children perched along the edge of oven bed. They sat with their sleeves lowered, like a covey of quails at rest, but ready to fly at the slightest alarm. The godfathers, on the other hand sat as if rooted, only their hands moved out to reach for the bread or the glass, but they did this unwillingly, as if they would rather have rested curled up into fists on their knees. The bread and vodka were being consumed without joy. The night lamp glimmered on the stove, turning their figures into huge, dark shadows stretching up into the ceiling where they curved around the beams, also immovable.

By the table stooped Ivan, the master of the house and the father of the child that had just been christened.

“Be so kind, *kumi**, and have another round. This isn’t vodka, it’s swamp water, but that’s how it is with a poor peasant: that which is the worst in the world, that is for him to consume, that which is the most difficult task, that is for him to fulfill...”

“That’s what we were born for,” replied the godfathers

**Kum*—godfather; also “chum”, “friend”.—*Ed.*

devoutly. When the vodka had gone around again full circle, Ivan leaned the glass alongside the bottle, for he was afraid it would fall, so small it was, to the floor.

“Do have a bite,” he urged. “Wouldn’t you know that trouble like this would find me right in the harvest season, in the very heat of it?! I haven’t the slightest notion of what to do. Am I supposed to leave the harvest and look after my sick wife, cook the meals for the children, or am I supposed to leave them here in God’s keeping and pull the scythe in hunger? For that’s what it looks like, doesn’t it? Nobody will come into a house at a time like this whatever the money. Here’s a child for you, Ivan, and be happy, because you haven’t enough of them yet!”

“Don’t complain, *kum*, and don’t anger the Lord, for it is his will, not yours. And children—they are like froth on the water—something will snap and you may have to carry them all to the grave.”

“Nothing will snap for me. It only snaps where there is one child. If you’re poor, don’t hanker after the woman, don’t even look her way, if you know what’s good for you. Then God won’t bless you...”

“Now, cousin, that won’t do, people must beget children.”

“People might, but not paupers. That’s why I say: if you’re a pauper, don’t multiply like a mouse, don’t beget a brood of children, but be glad that you have a shirt on you back and a chunk of bread to eat, and that nobody hits you in the teeth. If you have all these things, what more can you want? Keep away from the woman.”

“Now Ivan, give it a rest! Your wife, as is the custom, is in a condition where she shouldn’t be listening to such talk. It won’t help her health. Leave it for another, better time.”

“I do beg your pardon for carrying on like this, but do you think that I care about her, or about the children, or about myself, for that matter? So help me, I don’t! Let them be snatched away this moment and me along with them! Ha, and what would we lose but this paradise on earth and all our possessions!”

The godfathers were silent. They didn’t argue because they saw that they wouldn’t convince Ivan. They wanted him to quickly talk himself out, for then he would let

them go sooner to their beds.

Ivan got up from the table, stopped in the middle of the room, dropped his sleeves down over his arms like the children sitting on the oven bed and began to talk to them.

“Why don’t you fly out of my mind? I’ll open both the door and the windows for you. Out! ..”

The children crouched back against the wall of the oven so they couldn’t be seen.

“Ha, you locusts! Only bread, and more bread, and more bread! And where am I going to get all this bread?! One has to do a lot of tying for that twelfth sheaf, and a good deal of bending—and the pain in one’s back eats like a flame into one’s chest—and every straw stabs at your heart! ”

This was to the children. Now he turned to his guests.

“And in the evening when you show yourself at the door of the house like a wisp, like a wrung-out washcloth, they are at you immediately, both your wife and the children: ‘There’s no bread!’ So that you don’t go, poor man, to take your well-earned rest, but drag out that flail and swing it far into the night so that tomorrow there would be something for the millstone. And finally that flail fells you down into the straw and there you lie like a wooden thing till morning when the dew soaks you to the skin. You’ve just opened your eyes and there it is eating at you, for it isn’t enough that misery eats at you, this also has to find you in the night! You wash your face and off again to the fields, so wretched that the sun dims before your eyes! ”

“Don’t worry about your children, Ivan, you are not alone. God is also their father.”

“I’m not about to seize God by the scruff of the neck, but why does He allow them to come into the world, naked into its thorns? He brings them into this world without talent, allows them no manna from heaven, and the whole world cries: ‘The peasant is a thief, a robber, a murderer!’ They stand there, either one or another, in church; so smooth, even a fly couldn’t crawl on them, and all they do is reproach and rebuke! ‘You do not teach your children the fear of God,’ they say, ‘you yourself send them out to steal.’ Ah, I couldn’t possibly shame anyone like that! If my child were looked after by

a wet nurse and a nanny and a housekeeper, and if people kept bringing me tributes, then I too, my priest, would know how to teach my children! But my children are growing up among the weeds, together with the chickens, and when something happens, like what has happened today, then no one knows whether they had a bite to eat all day. Have they stolen, or begged, have they eaten, I don't know! I reap your fields and forget not only my children but myself as well! You want me to cultivate your fields and to teach my children too? And where do you come in? That's it, you yourselves know what our life is like..."

"We know, neighbour, we know. How couldn't we know when we ourselves are stranded in the same way?"

"I look at my child, and give no thought to its growing up a good person, knowing how to do things well. I just watch to see if it can already keep on its feet, so that it can be put out to work—that's what I wait for. I don't wait till it grows strong enough, till it gets a little sense in its head, that it lives a little beside me. Once the rich man or landlord open their jaws, I throw it to them just to get rid of it! After that it rounds up the cattle—it's feet one great bleeding wound. It is chilled by the morning dew, stung by the stubble, crying as it suffers through its days. You could go and round up the cattle for him and kiss his little feet, for you brought him into this world and remorse eats at your soul, but you pass by, even hide from him, so he wouldn't see you! "

Ivan grew purple in the face and began to gasp.

"And so it grows in the manger, or under the table or under the bench, chews on its tiny fists, washes itself in its tears. And when it grows up a little it will steal something, for it never knew good and the stolen article gives it a little joy. Here then, enters the gendarme. He puts you in chains, beats you up like an animal, for you are the father of a thief, therefore you are an accessory... You too, are a thief for life! But that isn't all; the end is not yet. Let your son—your child, and a thief—let him rot in prison, for you can't be sorry for a thief! Let him! But they will take his health, then send him to the hospital for curing, then send a letter to the reeve for the father to pay the costs. They throw you out of the house and under the fence like garbage. You pick yourself up, go to the reeve,

kiss his hands and beg: 'Get me out of this punishment.' 'You are a poor man,' he answers, 'and I could let you go. But what advantage would that be to me?' You humble yourself, curling up like that worm, and reply: 'I'll work a month for you without pay...' Am I right, folks, or am I not?! Am I telling the truth, or am I lying like a dog?!"

"You're right! The whole bit is exactly like that, not a word of what you've said is wrong!"

Ivan shook all over, feeling the entire weight of his terrible words.

"And don't say, folks, that I'm cawing over the heads of my children like that raven over carri^on. Don't say it, folks, don't! I'm not just cawing, I'm telling the truth. It's my sorrow that you hear, my heart speaking!"

His eyes burned and a deep, terrible love for his children glowed there as he looked from one to the other around the room.

"Because it looks as if I've ill-treated my children worse than an evil enemy. But you can see that I haven't, can't you? I have just unfolded before my eyes their today, their tomorrows, a year, and another, and I've looked at my children, at what they'd be doing there. I went to them for a visit, as it were, and my blood rans cold at what I saw in store for them..."

He paused a minute.

"If only there were no oceans to that Canada, I'd put them all in a sack and walk there with them, no matter the distance—carry them far away from this wretchedness. I would walk the shores around those oceans..."

The godfathers who almost had forgotten about their rest, now, suddenly remembering, rose and left the house.

II

Morning.

The children were eating on the floor, scraping with their spoons and splattering their shirts. Beside them lay their mother, emaciated, yellow-skinned, doubled up, with her knees drawn up to her chest. Through her dark, uncombed hair flowed suffering and pain, her lips were tight with holding back her groans. The children, with

spoons in their mouths, turned to their mother, looked at her, then turned again to the bowl.

“Semenko, have you finished eating?”

“Yes,” answered the six-year-old lad.

“Then take the whisk broom, sprinkle the floor, and sweep it up a bit. Mummy can't bend because she has a bad pain in her tummy. And don't raise too much dust.”

“Now get out of my way, I can't sweep because of you!”

The mother picked herself up and dragged herself to the bed.

“Now Semenko, wash yourself nicely, and Katrusya and Maria, you wash also, and go to the well and get a jug of water, but don't fall in, watch how you bend over!”

“Semenko, go and pick a few cucumbers. Mother will pickle them, for I see that I'm going to be ill and you won't have anything to eat with your bread. Pick some dill too, and a few leaves off the cherry tree. Now mind, don't break the vines, pick the cucumbers close to the stem...”

“Semenko, take the shirts off the peg and hand them to me so that I could darn them. You're all walking around as black as a bunch of crows.”

Semenko ran around and did everything his mother told him to do, pushing the younger children out of his way from time to time, complaining that the girls didn't know how to do anything except eat.

“They're still small, Semenko, when they grow up they'll wash your shirts for you.”

“I'll hire myself out and my shirts will be washed for me. I won't need them.”

“Don't look forward to working, my son, you'll weep through many a day.”

“But Daddy grew up a servant and there's nothing wrong with him!”

“And you'll grow up a servant too, and your very skin will crack with the growing. But you're talking too much, Semenko, get ready to take your father his lunch. He must be so hungry by now, that his very eyes are aching from looking for you.”

“I'll have to take Daddy's cane to chase the dogs away”.

“And if you lose it, Daddy'll beat us both. Now don't go out bareheaded, at least take Daddy's hat.”

“That hat always falls over my eyes and I can’t see where I’m going! ”

“Wash the jug and ladle some of the borshch into it.”

“You don’t have to teach me so much, I know what to do! ”

“And Semenko, do be careful that the dogs don’t bite you...”

III

The little feet pattered over the heavy layer of dust, leaving behind them a track like flower petals.

“Phew, this sun will burn me up before I get there. I’ll push my hair up like a soldier, and then it will be much cooler.”

He put the jug carefully on the road and gathered his hair up to the top of his head, then covered it up with the hat to look like a cropped soldier. The eyes shone with mischief and he skipped and hopped a few steps before the hair flopped down from below the hat into his eyes. “This is a very bad hat. Just wait till I hire out, I’ll get myself a nice little hat...” He ran his tongue over his lips.

Walking on a little further, he again stopped and set the jug down on the road.

“I’m going to draw myself a large wheel with spokes.”

He sat down in the middle of the dust and, using his father’s cane, drew a large circle around himself. Then he began to fill in the spokes with himself as the hub. Having done this he gleefully jumped out of the circle and, picking up the jug, started off again.

Every gate merited his attention. He peered through them all to make sure there wasn’t a dog in the yard, then slipped hurriedly by. Finally a dog bounded out from one of the yards and started after him. Semenko screeched with fright and sat down with the lunch. The cane also fell on the road. For a long time he sat there, huddled over, waiting for the dog to bite. After a while he got up enough courage to peer out over his knees to see a large black dog sitting peacefully beside him.

“Here, Gypsy, here take some of my cornmeal cake, only don’t bite because it hurts a lot, and your master will

have to pay a large fine. Why he'll break your legs for you for that fine! ”

He pinched pieces off the cake and threw them to the dog, laughing when he caught them in mid-air as they flew toward him. The dog's mouth was wide open and the lad opened his mouth wide as well.

“And who are you, you little rogue, feeding dogs along the road? What will you have left to take to the field?”

And some woman slapped him across the back of his neck.

“What else could I do when the dog wanted to tear me apart? And now you are beating me too?”

“And whose, my polite lad, might you be?”

“I'm Ivan Petrov's boy, but Mother had a baby and she's sick, so I have to carry the lunch, and the dogs bite me, and on top of that you hit me...”

“Oh, oh, and what a beating I gave you! ... Where are you taking the lunch?”

“I'm taking it to Daddy, to the field by the pond.”

“Then come with me, you little disaster, I'm also taking a lunch there.”

They went on together.

“And who cooked the lunch?”

“Mother cooked it because I don't know how yet, and Maria and Katerina are even smaller than I am.”

“Isn't your Mother sick?”

“Of course she's sick! She rolls on the floor and groans, you've no idea! I'm doing all the work...”

“What a worker you must be! ”

“You don't know so you're talking nonsense. Go and ask my mother how smart I am! I know the whole Lord's Prayer, I do...”

The woman laughed and Semenko shrugged his shoulders and fell silent. The dog panted after him and he made as if he threw him bits of the cornmeal cake to keep him following them.

IV

Three days later.

Semenko and his sisters sat in the centre of the floor

where a trough holding a tiny baby also stood. Beside them was a bowl of sliced cucumbers and bread. Mother lay on the bed, surrounded by green willow branches. A swarm of flies hovered above her.

“When you’ve finished eating sit quietly, because I have to take the baby to Vasilikha’s to be fed. Daddy said I should take it in the morning, at noon and in the afternoon, and he will take it himself in the evening.”

“Semenko, don’t break the baby’s back! ”

“I thought you were asleep. Daddy said I should give you a drink of cold water and a bun to eat. But Maria was such a quick girl that she grabbed that bun and has already taken a bite out of it. I gave her a licking and took it away. Will you eat it now?”

“No, I don’t want it.”

“Daddy also left a candle and said that if you were dying I should give it to you to hold in your hands and light it. But I don’t know when I should do that...”

The mother looked at her son with her large, feverish dark eyes. An abyss of sadness, all her grief and helpless fear found expression in them, giving birth to two large, glittering tears. They rolled out onto her cheeks and froze.

“Daddy also cried this morning. How he beat his head against the wall! He was still crying when he took the scythe and left.”

He picked up the baby and went out.

“Semenko, don’t allow the stepmother to beat Katrusya and Maria and Vasilko. Do you hear? Because the stepmother will beat you, she’ll chase you away from food, won’t give you clean shirts.”

“I won’t let her and I’ll tell Daddy.”

“That won’t help at all, my dearest son, my most precious child! When you grow up, you must love each other very much, very, very much! .. And you must help them, don’t let them be hurt.”

“When I go to work I’ll be very strong and I won’t allow it. I’ll come and visit them every Sunday.”

“Semenko, and please tell Daddy that Mother said that he must love you...”

“Eat the bun, Mommy...”

“Sing for baby so he won’t cry...”

Semenko rocked the baby back and forth, but couldn't sing. So the mother wiped her dry lips with the palm of her hand and began.

Her whole soul flowed through her weak, broken voice, hovering tenderly over the children, caressing their little heads. The quiet, indistinct words spoke of maple leaves scattered over a barren meadow, with no one to pick them up, and they would never turn green. The song struggled to leave the house and fly out over that empty meadow after the leaves...

1900

THE STONE CROSS



or as far back as the villagers remembered Ivan Didukh as a farmer, he had always had only one horse and a small wagon with a tongue of oak. He harnessed the horse on the near side and himself next to the furrow. For the horse he had a breast-band collar of leather, and for himself Ivan had a small breast-band of rope. He didn't need a collar, because he was better able, perhaps, to brake with his left hand, than with a collar.

When pulling sheaves from the field, or the manure to the field, the veins stood out on the horse and Ivan alike. When going uphill, the traces on both, equally, were strung tautly, like chords; going downhill, they dragged equally over the ground. Going up the horse strained, as though walking on ice, and Ivan's forehead looked as if someone had hit him across it with a whip, so big and livid was the vein that swelled across his temples. Coming down, the horse looked as if Ivan had hung him by the collar for some offence, while Ivan's left hand was enlaced in a web of blue veins, like chains of blue steel.

Often in the morning, before the sun had even come up, Ivan would be on his way out to the field over the dusty roadway. He didn't wear his breast-band then, but

walked alongside the horse and held the wagon tongue, so to speak, under his arm. Both the horse and Ivan walked with vigour, for both had rested during the night, and when it happened that they had to go downhill, they trotted. Running down, they left behind them the imprint of wagon wheels, horseshoes and Ivan's broad feet in the dust.

The roadside weeds and grasses swayed and shook as the wagon passed, sprinkling dew over their tracks. But sometimes, just as they gained their greatest momentum, right in the middle of the incline, Ivan would begin to limp and stop the horse. He would seat himself by the roadside, take his foot in his hands and spit on it, looking for the spot where the thorn had entered.

"One should really scrape this foot with a hoe, not wash it with spittle," he would fume in angry frustration.

"Grandpa Ivan, how about taking a whip to that furrow nag? Make him run, since he eats oats..."

This was from someone who, watching Ivan's difficulties from his own field, poked fun at him. But Ivan had long ago become accustomed to such jokers and calmly continued to pull at the thorn. When he couldn't get it out, he would pound the spot with his fist, and getting up, would say:

"Don't worry, you'll rot in there and come out by yourself. I haven't the time to fool around with you..."

Another name for Ivan in the village was *Perelomaniy*.* He had a problem with his back and always walked bent over, as if two steel hooks were pulling his body down to the ground. The wind, he said, had done this to him.

When he came home from army service, both his mother and father had died, leaving him only a broken-down cottage. As for property, all his father had left him was a slice of hillside, the highest and worst land in the entire village. The women of the village went up there to dig for sand, and the entire hill yawned with ravines and caves into the heavens, like some frightful giant. Nobody ploughed or planted there, nor were there any boundaries dividing it up. Ivan alone began to work and seed his plot. Together with his horse he pulled the load of manure to the bottom of the hill, then Ivan would carry it up in a

* *Perelomaniy* – the broken one.

sack the rest of the way. Sometimes his voice could be heard in the lower meadows shouting loudly:

“Ekh, you, I’ll throw you down so hard that you’ll fall apart a thread at a time, you’re so heavy! ”

But he never did throw it, for he couldn’t spare the sack, and always lowered it gently from his back to the ground. One evening he told his wife and children the following story:

“The sun is burning hot and not only burning, but throwing fire, and I’m crawling up the hill with the manure, practically pulling the skin off my knees. The sweat is pouring out of every hair, and my mouth is so salty that it tastes bitter. I barely made it to the top. But on the top such a sweet breeze swept over me, so light, you wouldn’t believe it. But do you know, a minute later, it was as though a knife were stabbing me across the middle—I thought it was the end! ”

It was after this happened that Ivan began to always walk bent over in the middle, and people began to call him *Perelomaniy*.

But even though that hill bent his body, it gave good results. Ivan hammered in stakes and poles, carried up solid squares of turf, laying them around his holding so that the autumn and spring rains wouldn’t wash away the manure and carry it into the gullies. His entire life was spent on that hill.

The older he got, the harder it was for him, broken as he was, to come down the hill.

“Such a doggone hill, that it pushes you down headlong! ” he complained.

Many a time, when the setting sun still found Ivan on top of the hill, it carried his shadow with the hill far out into the lower meadows. The shadow portrayed Ivan as a huge giant, bent in the middle. Ivan then pointed his finger at his shadow and said to the hill:

“Well, by God, you’ve really crippled me! But as long as my feet can carry me, you’ve got to produce bread! High time you earned the sun you eat and the rain you drink.”

On other fields, that Ivan had bought with money earned in the army, his wife and sons worked. The task of working the hill Ivan left mainly for himself.

Ivan was also known in the village for the fact that he attended church but once a year, at Easter, and because of the way he trained his chickens. He trained them so well that not one of them ventured to step into the yard and scratch in the manure pile. If one so much as scratched once, she perished by a blow from the shovel or whip. And even if his wife prostrated herself before him, it didn't help.

And then there was also the fact that he never once ate at the table. He always sat on the bench.

"First I was a hireling, then I served ten years in the army, and never knew a table. Food just doesn't seem to taste right for me at a table."

Such was Ivan, odd in his nature and in his work.

II

Ivan's house was full of guests—neighbours, villagers and their wives. Ivan had sold everything he had because his sons and his wife had resolved to go to Canada, and the old man had finally given in.

Ivan had invited the entire village.

He stood before his guests, holding a measure of vodka in his right hand, petrified it seemed, for he couldn't utter a word.

"Thank you kindly, *gazdi* and *gazdinyi** that you are treating me, as a *gazda* and my wife as a *gazdinya*..." He got no further, and he didn't drink to anybody, only stared dully ahead of him, nodding his head as though saying a prayer and confirming each word as he said it.

Sometimes a deep undercurrent forces a large stone out of the water and places it on the shore, and it remains there, heavy and lifeless. The sun scales away fragments of ancient silt and slime and paints tiny phosphorescent stars on its surface. The stone glimmers with lifeless gleams reflected by the rising and setting sun, and with stony eyes gazes at the living water and grieves that it no longer feels its weight as it had for ages. It gazes at the water from the shore as on lost happiness.

**Gazda*, *gazdinya*—master and mistress of a household.—*Tr.*

So Ivan looked at his guests, like that stone at the water. Shaking his grey hair, like a mane forged of steel threads, he continued:

“Yes, I thank you kindly, and may God give you whatever you ask of him. May God give you good health, *did** Mikhailo...”

He handed old Mikhailo a glass and they kissed each other’s hands.

“*Kum* Ivan, may God grant you a long life in this world, and may the merciful Lord carry you successfully to your destination and help you to establish yourself anew!”

“If only God would grant it... Friends, please help yourselves... I thought I’d seat you at my table at my son’s wedding, but it’s not to be. The time has now come that what our grandfathers and fathers didn’t know, we have to know. So God wills! But do help yourselves, friends, and forgive if anything’s lacking.”

He picked up a glass and approached the women who sat at the other end of the table near the bed.

“*Kuma* Timofiykha,** I want to drink to you. I look at you and, as someone said, I’m reminded of my youthful years. Ho, ho! But you were a mighty strong girl, just like a man! Many’s the night I wasted dancing, and you beside me,— straight as a spinning rod! Ah, *kuma*, where have they gone, those years of ours! Come now, let’s have a drink and forgive me for recalling the dancing in my old age... Please...”

He glanced at his old woman, weeping among the other women, and pulled a handkerchief from out of his shirt.

“Come, old girl, here is a handkerchief. Wipe your tears, for I don’t want to see any crying here! Look after our guests, there’ll be time enough to weep, so much that your eyes will leak out.”

He returned to the men shaking his head.

“I’d say something, but better to stay silent, in respect of the holy pictures in this house and of you, too, my friends. But just the same, God forbid that any good soul should ever lapse into a woman’s way of thinking! See, just look how she’s crying, and against whom? Why me, of

* *Did*—grandfather, old man.

** *Kuma*—godmother; Timofiykha—wife of Timofiy.

course! Why against me, wife of mine? Am I uprooting you out of your house in your old age? Keep quiet and stop whimpering, or I'll pull your grey locks and you'll go to that America looking like a Jewess, with your hair cropped."

"Friend Ivan do leave your wife alone, after all she's not an enemy of yours, nor is she an enemy to her children, she's sorrowing for her family and for her village, too."

"Timofiykha, if you don't know what you're talking about, then don't talk foolishness! So she's grieving and I, I suppose, am going there, skipping?"

He ground his teeth, like millstones together, shook his fist like a bludgeon at his wife, and beat his chest.

"Take that axe and strike me here in my liver, and maybe it will break that bitter spleen, for I cannot stand it! People, I am full of such sorrow, such grief, I can't take in what's happening to me! "

III

"Please, good friends, help yourselves without ceremony and do forgive, because we are already on our way. And don't be surprised at me an old man, that I'm a bit hard on my wife, but it's not for nothing, no, not for nothing. This would never have been, if it wasn't for her and my sons. My sons, take note, are literate, and when they got some kind of paper into their hands, some map, they got after my old woman, and sawed away, and sawed away at me, till they cut me down. For two years we heard nothing else in this house but Canada, and more Canada. And when they began on me, I saw that they would eat at me in my old age if I don't go, so I've sold everything to the last crumb. My sons don't want to be hirelings after I'm gone, and they say: "You're our father, so take us to land, and give us bread; for if you divide between us, there'll be no going anywhere for us." Let the Lord help them eat that bread, to me it's the same where I die. Yet, how can I, broken as I am, go anywhere? I'm worked out, my bones are brittle, by the time I pull body and soul together in the morning, I've groaned at least ten times!

“It’s past, Ivan, and what’s gone is gone, don’t allow the grief to go to your head. And maybe, when you’ve shown us the road, we’ll all follow you. This country is not worth letting grief take over your heart. This land can’t support so many people nor take so much misery. The peasant can’t do it, the land can’t do it—neither can. There are no locusts, but neither is there any wheat. But the taxes pile up: when once you paid a *lev**, now it’s five, when once you ate a bit of salted pork, now it’s potatoes. Oh, they’ve got us, they’ve so got us in their clutches that no one will ever be able to get us out of them. There’s nothing left but to run. But one day this land will see disaster because the people will end up slaughtering one another. You, Ivan, have nothing to grieve for! ..”

“Thank you for these words, but I cannot accept them. Certainly the people will slaughter one another. For isn’t God angry at those who would sell the land? Nowadays nobody needs land, give them bills of sale and give them banks. The young landowners are smarter, they’re not in such a hurry to take over the land. Just look at that old fiddle, my wife, could she be allowed to look after any venture?! She’s like that hollow tree, give it a poke, and it keels over! And do you think she’ll make it to where we’re going? She’ll fall over somewhere by the wayside where the dogs will tear her to pieces, and we’ll be driven along without even being allowed to stop and take a look at her! How could God bless such children? Come here, old woman! ”

His wife, old and withered, stepped forward.

“Katerina, what are you thinking about, poor woman? Where will I lay you into your grave? Or will the fish eat you? But there isn’t even enough of you to give a decent fish a bite. Just look! ” And he stretched the skin on his wife’s hand and showed it to the people.

“Just skin and bones. And where, my friends, could this go from the oven bed? You were a fine home-maker, you worked hard and weren’t wasteful, and now, in your old age, you’re taking to the road. Look, look where your road is and where your Canada is? There! ”

And he pointed through the window at the cemetery.

* *Lev*—silver coin.

“You didn’t really want to go to that Canada, but here we are, going out into the world, drifting about in our old age like those leaves out on the field. God knows what’s awaiting us ... so I’d like to ask your forgiveness here, before our people. We took our marriage vows before them, and I’d like to ask your forgiveness before them before we die. Maybe they’ll throw you into the sea when I’m not looking, or maybe they’ll throw me in, and you won’t see, so forgive me, old woman, for any sorrow I may have caused you, or if I wronged you at any time; forgive me for the first time, the second time, and the third time.”

They kissed. The old woman fell into Ivan’s arms, and he said:

“Poor woman, I’m taking you to a far-away grave...”

But nobody heard these words, because from the women’s side of the table the sobbing rose like a gust of wind from among sharp swords and bowed the peasants’ heads to their chests.

IV

“And now, old woman, look after your women-friends. See to it that they have everything, and have enough yourself, so that I’d see you drunk at least once in your life.

“And you, my friends, I’ve two more favours to ask of you. Someday, perhaps, my sons will write through the post office that my wife and I are gone. So I’d beg of you to arrange for mass for us, and to gather together, as you have today, for a dinner, and say the Lord’s prayer for us. Maybe the Lord will write off a few of our sins. I’ll leave the money with Yakiv, because he is a young and honest man, and won’t pocket an old man’s pennies.”

“We’ll arrange mass, of course we will, and we’ll say a prayer, too...”

“Don’t be amazed and don’t laugh at an old man. I’m a bit ashamed to tell you this, but it seems to me it would be a sin if I didn’t tell you. You know, I’ve erected a stone cross on my hilltop for myself. It was a bitter journey getting it to the hill, and equally bitter getting it to the top, but there it is. It’s so heavy that the hill will never

throw it off, it will have to hold it up there, as it held me. I wanted to leave some memory of myself behind.”

He folded his hands and pressed them against his lips.

“I’m grieving so for that hill, like a child for a mother’s breast. I gave it my life and crippled myself on it. If I could, I’d put it under my arm and take it with me into the world. I yearn over the smallest thing in the village, over the smallest child, but I’ll never get over yearning for that hilltop.”

His eyes clouded over with grief, and his face trembled like the black ploughed earth trembles under the rays of the sun.

“Lying in the barn last night, I thought and thought: merciful God, have I really sinned so deeply that you see fit to drive me out on the world’s waters? All my life I’ve only worked, and worked! More than once, when the day ended, I would fall on my knees in the field and pray fervently to God! Lord, don’t ever desert me without a piece of black bread, and I will always work, unless I can no longer move hand or foot...

“Then I was overcome with such grief that I gnawed at my knuckles and tore my hair, rolling about in the straw, like that animal. The devil himself must have got into me, for I don’t know how or when I found myself under the pear tree with a rope. Another moment and I would have hung myself. But the merciful Lord knows what he is doing. I remembered my cross, and came to myself. Oh, did I run, did I ever run to my hill! Within an hour I was sitting under the cross. I sat there for a long time—and after awhile I felt somehow better.

“You see, I’m standing here before you, talking to you, and that hilltop never leaves my mind. I keep seeing it and seeing it, and I will keep on seeing it to my dying day. I’ll forget everything, but I’ll never forget that hill. The songs I knew—I forgot on that hilltop, the strength I had—I left it up there, too.”

A tear rolled down his cheek, like a pearl down a cliff-side.

“I would beg of you, friends, that when you bless your fields on Holy Sunday, that you shouldn’t pass up my hilltop. Let one of the younger ones run up and sprinkle the cross with holy water, for you know that the priest

will not climb up there. I beg this of you most sincerely, that you should never leave out my cross. I'll remember you to God in the other world, if you'll carry out an old man's bidding."

He spoke as though he would like to prostrate himself before them, as though with his kind, grey eyes, he would forever fix his entreaty in the hearts of his guests.

"Ivan, godfather of my child, do put your grief aside, throw it off. We will all remember you, for now and always. You were a decent man, you never offended anyone, never ploughed over or sowed over into anyone else's land, never took a kernel that didn't belong to you. No, never! People will always remember you and will never forget your cross on the Holy Sunday."

So Mikhailo cheered Ivan.

V

"Well, my good friends, I've already told you everything, and now, let those who care for me have a drink with me. The sun is already over the hill and you haven't had a measure of vodka with me yet. As long as I'm still in my house and have guests at my table, I'll drink with them, and those who don't dislike me will drink too."

So the drinking began, the kind of drinking that turns grown men into foolish boys. Later Ivan, already drunk, asked for musicians to play for the young folk, who had by this time filled the entire yard.

"Hey now, all of you, you've got to dance so that the earth rumbles, and so that not a blade of grass is left on the threshing ground! "

In the house all drank, all talked, and nobody listened. Everybody spoke at once, for there were words that had to be said; they had to be said, even if they vanished with the wind.

"When I groomed it, then it was groomed; when it was black, it shone as if I'd sprinkled it with silver, when white, it was as though I'd polished it with butter. My horses were always looked after, the Kaiser himself could have sat on them. And money, did I have money! "

"If I should find myself in the middle of some de-

sert—where only God and myself would be there! I'd go about like a wild beast, if only I didn't have to see those tavern-keepers, the gentry, or those priests! I could then be called a gentleman myself! Then this land could collapse. Let it collapse right now and I wouldn't care. What for? Our fathers were tormented and beaten and harnessed into the yoke of slavery, and for us there isn't even a piece of bread to eat... Ekh, if I only had my way..."

"A tax collector hadn't yet been found who could drag anything in taxes out of him, oh no! There was the Czech, the German, the Pole—shit, if you'll excuse the word, is what they got from him! But when the Mazur* came, he even found the coat off his back under the cherry tree. I'm telling you, the Mazur is disaster, burn his eyes out and it wouldn't be a sin..."

There was a lot of all kinds of talk, but it scattered itself in every direction like rotting trees in an old forest.

Over the hubbub, the uproar and wailing, and the plaintive merriment of the violin, broke the voices of Ivan and old Mikhailo raised in song. It was the kind of singing often heard at weddings after the old men had reached the urge to express themselves in singing the old songs. The words of the songs rise out of the old throats with some difficulty, as though not only their hands, but their throats too, had grown callouses. They emerge, those words, like the yellow leaves of autumn which are blown about by the wind over frost-covered ground, and from time to time get caught up along the gullies, where their ragged edges quiver in anticipation of death.

That is how Mikhailo and Ivan sang—about their youthful years which they overtook on a cedar bridge, and which wouldn't come back to them even for a visit.

Whenever they raised their voices on a high note, they clasped hands, but so tightly that their joints crackled, and when they came to a very mournful part, they leaned toward each other, forehead to forehead, and grieved. They flung their arms about each other's necks, kissed, beat their fists against their chests and on the table, their rusty voices burdening them with such sorrow that finally,

*Mazur—native of one of the north-eastern Polish provinces.

they couldn't utter a word except: "Oh Ivanko, my brother! ", or "Oh, Mikhailo, my friend! "

VI

"Father, do you hear, it's time to go to the station and you're singing as if you had all the time in the world! "

Ivan opened his eyes wide, but in such an odd manner that his son paled and took a step backward. Then Ivan put his head in his hands and went, it seemed, into deep thought. Rousing himself, finally, he got up from the table, went up to his wife and took hold of her sleeve.

"Come along, old woman, march—one, two, three! Come, we'll get dressed up like the gentry, and go and live like the rich! "

They both went out.

When they re-entered the house, the entire company broke into sobs. It was as though a cloud of tears hanging over the village had burst, as though human misery had broken through a dam on the Danube—that is how they wept. The women wrung their hands, holding them over Ivan's old wife as if to shield her from something that might fall from above and crush her on the spot. Mikhailo seized Ivan by the shoulders and shook him violently, shrieking as though mad.

"Hey, if you're a *gazda* throw those tatters off yourself, or I'll wallop you like a whore! "

But Ivan didn't even look at him. He seized his wife around the neck and began to whirl her in a dance.

"Play me a polka, the way you do for the gentry. I've got the money! "

The people stood, stupefied, while Ivan swung his wife around as if he had not thought of releasing her alive from his embrace.

His sons ran in and forcibly carried them both out of the house. Outside in the yard Ivan continued to dance some kind of polka, and his wife clutched at the doorpost with her hands, saying:

"How many times have I stepped over this threshold, how often have my feet worn you down! "

And she lovingly stroked the old threshold she had stepped over so many times.

VII

The fences along the roadside shuddered and fell—the whole village had turned out to see Ivan off. He walked beside his old wife, bent over, dressed in a cheap grey suit, continuing every moment to break into a polka.

Only after they had all stopped before the cross that Ivan had put up on the hill, did he recover somewhat and showed it to his wife:

“See our little cross, old woman? Your name is carved on it, too. Don’t worry, they are both there, yours and mine...”

1899



Olga Koblyanska

IMPROMPTU PHANTASIE



Every time I hear the exultant, grand peal of bells, I am reminded of years gone by and of one person, when still a child.

Tender, sensitive, like a mimosa, with mournful eyes...

For hours she would lie on her back in the grass and listen to the ringing bells of some ancient monastery—listen and weep until weak from exhaustion.

That is how it went on for some time.

And then at another time—she would once again be a passionate, deeply emotional being that reminded of young Arabian steeds: for instance when other children harnessed and drove her, as though a horse, before them. This was her most beloved play. Harnessed in rope she sped across fields and ditches as though under a lash, wild and in high spirits, willing to go on till death if her drivers didn't restrain her.

I am always reminded of this when I hear the exultant, grand peal of bells.

One gloomy midday, when the horizon had adorned itself with menacing clouds, she started out on the road to town to buy a thimble. The storm caught up with her, turned her umbrella inside out, blew her hat down the nape of her neck, yet with her face drenched with rain she

bravely and courageously continued toward her destination;

“Aren’t you afraid?” they asked at the store. “Stay here and wait till the storm passes, or it may blow you off somewhere, you little fledgeling!”

The small mouth curled proudly and disdainfully.

“No, I’m not afraid,” she answered, and turned back into the storm, as she had come.

The small breast heaved with courage, and the mournful, wide open child’s eyes were fixed somewhere into the distance. Did she want to guess at the movement of the clouds? Or to recognise in the wails of the storm some harmony, or melody? Did she see the unusual forms and appearance of the trees that bent under the gale?

Always I am reminded of this when I hear the exultant, grand peal of bells.

It was a sunny, hot summer day. She was spending her holidays in the village with her grandfather and grandmother. Lying over the edge of the pond, she gazed deeply into its depths, or across its smooth, mirror-like surface with nervous impatience. Millions of small insects danced and flickered over the water. Large, bug-eyed frogs raised their four-cornered heads out of the water, lying motionless, then flicking out their tongues for flies for want of something to do. Others splashed noisily out of the grass into the pond. These plunking noises remained in her memory as she tried to recapture the sound.

Blue-black swallows flew low-low over the surface, bathing their rosy-white breasts in their flight in such a reckless fashion that she laughed with delight. All of this she took in with joyous delight.

Not far from the pond stood a row of beehives against an imitation paling fence built especially for them. The hum of the bees was heard all around. They flew in and out of the beehives quickly, nimbly, humming—one after another, if you watched them carefully—but seemingly quite disorganised if glanced at only in passing.

She hummed along with them, lying on her stomach and leaning on her elbows, her chin in her hands. The sound was ever new, and unanimously they buzzed in higher or lower tones—to her it didn’t really matter what the tone...

Later, putting her head down in the grass, she lay

silent, as if in deep slumber. But she wasn't asleep. The hum of the bees created visions in her imagination, filling her senses and emotions: dreamlike, fantastic, unbelievable—she wept from desolation caused by the unexplainable...

* * *

Cursing and grumbling, the boys ran over the fields lying beyond the house and garden, trying to catch a colt that refused to be caught, and seemed to be mocking at them and making an aggravating game out of the chase.

Up to the moment that they were within a few feet of him he stood quietly, nibbling at the rye that reached up to his neck. But just as they would stretch out a hand to grasp the bridle that was trailing behind him, he shied away like lightning, kicking out with his hind legs so that his horseshoes flashed, then galloping wildly through the undulating grain, shaking his luxurious mane and trampling everything under foot like some sinister force...

Like a small kitten she bent over and crept to the frenzied animal, and in a moment when it once again stopped to graze, grasped the bridle unobserved...

The small heart pounded in terror and the little body trembled with fear! What if the horse should turn and kick out at her with its heels?

But the impossible happened.

He did not kick at her. He walked along quietly and, led by the tiny hand, followed obediently, like a child, until he was handed over into responsible hands.

Then she almost got a spanking for doing such a thing and for putting herself into such danger.

“You little fool! You could have been killed!”

But she didn't cry.

Fixing her eyes on one spot and biting her nails, she thought of God knows what!

Within, she was strangely, strangely agitated. She felt as if she was stifling, everything seemed so vivid, so overwhelming, something that conjured visions and passed into sound...

When she was ten years old a travelling piano tuner stopped by to tune the family piano. He was young, handsome and very aristocratic in bearing. There was some whispering going around that he was an immigrant and that he came from a noble family.

She sat in a corner all that time, directly across from him, gazing at him attentively and listening to the heavy chords he drew out of the instrument.

They were alone in the room.

He looked around for a clock, and seeing none in the room, asked her what time it was, and as he did so his eyes were turned on her in gentle regard.

All her blood seemed to rush to her face, her heart beat painfully and she couldn't utter a word. For some moments he looked at her in wonder and waiting, then when she didn't answer, turned again to the piano, allowing a melancholy smile to light up his face momentarily. She was so embarrassed that she couldn't move from her place.

The next day he came again, and she again sat in her corner, watching him intently.

He played, going through various chords, hitting the keys strongly and elegantly as only an expert can do it; tuning and then playing, doing one and both at the same time. Every movement of his hands on the keys and every animated motion of his electrified her and filled her with turbulent emotions.

At last he seemed satisfied with the instrument, for he started to play. At first, carelessly, as if amusing himself, and with one hand only, mostly "piano". The music emerged somewhat like constrained, intense laughter, the laughter of a woman, but not a happy laughter... Then—with both hands. And now the music resounded in a passionate, non-descriptive, almost chilling, beauty... That which he played was full of passion, but how he played—betrayed him as a man.

At the beginning she was chilled, but later—she didn't know herself how it happened—she began to cry. Quietly, but with her whole being. She was overcome again by that something that recalled visions, that became part of the music, and seemed to stifle...

Seeing that she was crying, he stopped playing and looked at her in astonishment. Then he asked her to come to him.

She didn't move... He came up to her... She pressed her hands to her face and sat motionless, as if lifeless... He bent over her.

"You're crying?"

Silence.

He pulled her hands away from her face gently and looked into her eyes.

"What is the matter?"

She didn't answer.

"Why are you crying?"

"Because..."

"Did you like the music?" he asked in a slightly changed voice.

"I... I don't know..."

"But you like to listen to music ... is that right?" he continued as gently as if he had a frightened bird before him.

"I... I don't know... Yes, I do, I do! "

"The piece that I was playing just now is called *Impromptu Phantasie* by Chopin. Will you remember the name?"

"Once I repeat it I will remember."

"When you start to study music you'll be able to play it, but remember—play it only after you've grown up ... only after you are twenty years old... You hear me?"

"Yes."

"Only then will you understand what every sound in the piece means."

Then he took her little head in his hands and gazed long into the big, mournful, tear-stained eyes.

An ineffably sad smile played for a moment over his lips.

"I think," he said, mostly to himself, "that you will be able to play it much better than I do, much better..."

He picked up her hands, looked at them, then kissed them.

"You'll allow me to do this," he said, "to future fame."

* * *

When she grew up she was almost beautiful.

She loved more than once, passionately, generously,

almost with a wild love. But hers was a fickle nature—she didn't love anyone long. She didn't seem to appeal to men for long either—none of them wanted to marry her. She was intelligent, witty, and exceptionally versatile character. She tried painting, wrote, attempted with all she had within her to appease her insatiable longing for beauty.

Why then, was she never successful?

To answer this question would be as difficult as to answer why it was that no man loved her for long. Perhaps she did not have within her that which binds two ordinary people together for a long time. She was too original, too unusual; there was nothing of the plebeian about her.

But maybe it was something else?

Maybe...

She became only half of what she promised to become as a child.

* * *

I myself—am that “unfulfilled promise”.

I await good fortune every day, every hour.

I sense that life stretches before me, not as something sad, cheerless, difficult to endure, but as one beautiful holiday, pulsing hotly, attractive—a sweeping impassioned image, or like a sonata.

Yes, like music.

Sweet, intoxicating, mournful sounds. Teasing, impetuous, appealing, overwhelming... However! .. however...

I have never studied music.

I was never, never able to play *Impromptu Phantasie* myself! But whenever I hear it, my heart fills with tears. Why? Why is it that through all that brilliance that so richly moves my spirit ... coils something like a mourning silk crepe? And that I, in spite of the fact that in my veins flows the blood of the future, have no future, have no mid-day in my life.

* * *

When I hear music—I am ready to die.

I become madly courageous; become great, proud and loving...

All this becomes part of me, when I hear music! ..

1894

“ON SUNDAY MORNING SHE GATHERED HERBS...”

An Excerpt from the Novel



Every Sunday, when the weather was fine, Tetiana, dressed in her best, would walk through the forest to the Chabanitsya hill above the ravine to visit with her old friend, Mavra.

This Sunday was no exception.

Having plucked two exquisite red poppies out of the garden and tucked them into her hair above the golden half-moon ear-rings given her once by Mavra (and because of which from childhood, the villagers had called her *Turkenya**), she did, indeed, look beautiful.

And looking thus she set out on her walk.

Pausing at last before Mavra's house and having convinced herself that Mavra's door was carefully closed, she guessed that Mavra had either gone to the neighbouring village or into the forest, as she often did, to search for wonder-working herbs. To wait for her return was senseless, for having once left the house, she often amused herself in this way all day.

Tetiana followed the white path further into the forest, thinking that she might just meet the old lady along the way. Walking alongside the family pasture, she gazed with pleasure into the deep ravine on her right, animated by a deep-flowing stream that enlivened the whole deep, silent valley, and whose silver path divided Chabanitsya from its steep and forest-grown neighbour on the other side.

Tetiana loved this particular walk... On this side of Chabanitsya there was a wonderful echo: if you shouted across the ravine the sound would come back reverberating deeply, as though from a human chest. Sometime, though rarely, her mother's friends also crossed here. Of course, it was out of bounds to complete strangers. Tetiana knew every tree in the area, the flowers, where the finest grasses

**Turkenya*—a Turkish girl.

grew, the spots where the wild strawberries and raspberries were thickest, the quickest way to the White Rock which offered a vista of the neighbouring village as though it were in the palm of your hand. Everything was familiar. So, unhurriedly, she descended from the very top of Chabanitsya, looking about in every direction till her attention was captured by the sound of rapid hoof-beats behind her. Astonished, she stepped out into the middle of the white path, wondering who could be riding here on a horse ... and stopped. Galloping toward her on a coal-black, thick-maned steed, was Hryts, from the village of Tretivka. Seeing the girl, her head adorned in large red poppies, who came out of the forest looking as amazed at his presence as he was at hers, he also stopped, and they stood there for some moments gazing silently at each other.

He was the first to recover, and raising his hat, he bid her a good day.

She answered without moving from the spot where she stood, looking at him with her radiant eyes, her dark brows still raised in momentary astonishment.

“Are you going on?” asked Hryts, and without knowing why, slid off his horse.

“No,” she answered quietly, indifferently, then added, “Go round me.”

“Ride around you?” he asked, looking at her with surprise, yet with unconscious respect.

“Yes. Go round me. I am going no further, either forward or back. I have to wait here.”

“Why do you have to wait?”

“Because! ”

“Are you expecting someone?” he continued.

“Well, hardly, today. I’ll go home later.”

“Is this where you always wait?”

“Of course not! ” she said, impatiently. “It just happened today. I was to meet a woman here and she didn’t come.”

“So instead of a woman you met me, ” he smiled slightly, his gaze unwavering on her face with its dark, arched eyebrows.

“Ride around me.” Again she spoke quietly, and, with a hint at pleading in her voice, repeated, “Ride around me.”

“But why?”

“Because! ”

“You won’t move off the path for me?” he asked, with resignation.

“I don’t know. Well, maybe. The whole thing is so foolish,” she added lightly, and stepped off the path.

“Who are you?” he asked, suddenly noticing her half-moon ear-rings, which swung lightly with each move of her head as if to accentuate the beauty of her face.

She didn’t answer immediately, but looked at him with lifted eyebrows as if with scorn.

“What village are you from?” he pressed further and stepped closer to her, noticing that she looked as if she might turn away or even disappear into the woods.

“Don’t go! ” he begged, grasping her by the hand.

“Why?” she asked, impatiently.

“Tell me your name! ”

“I’m *Turkenya*,” she answered, looking squarely into his truly beautiful blue eyes, like the sky, which she found somehow disconcerting.

“*Turkenya*?” he repeated, baffled, for he had never heard of any Turkish woman in the district.

“*Turkenya*,” she repeated coolly and turned away, because she couldn’t bear his bright and interested gaze on her any longer.

“Do wait, beautiful *Turkenya*! ” he implored, and without thinking put his arm around her shoulders. She slid out from his embrace, and again raised her eyebrows.

“You don’t know me and you have the nerve to flirt,” she spoke dryly and pushed him away with quiet resistance. “Do you think that I am available for anyone? I am not for anyone! I’m telling you, I’m not for just anyone! ”

He became serious.

“I see that you are as beautiful as a nymph, and I love beautiful girls.”

“There’s nothing clever about that.”

“And I could easily fall in love with you.”

“Just try. Do you think, as I have already said that I’m available to *anyone*? No, I’m not for just anyone! ”

“But maybe for me?” he bowed low very humbly, holding his hat in both hands as he did so.

“Then go ahead, love me! ” she answered coolly, as before, but looking at him with a bright, startled gaze, and moving back a few steps.

“You’re going away! ” he accused her again.

“Why not? Nobody stands in one spot for long”

He fell into step beside her, silent, noticing that she was almost as tall as he was, then asked:

“Your parents are Turkish?”

“No,” she answered.

“Where do you live?”

“Where do I live?” she repeated. “Well, as you see, I’m in the forest, so...” she didn’t finish, but waved her arm vaguely ahead, then behind her.

“Somewhere here in the forest?” he pressed, not understanding her gesture.

“No,” she answered, and suddenly burst into laughter, so hearty and spontaneous, that he felt he had never heard such laughter before. But not knowing why she laughed, his sensitive nature was offended.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because you’re a fool! ..”

He flared up... “You-u-u! ” he snapped and with blazing eyes waved his hand before her face. “Take care, you wretched girl, watch what you say, for I am not the fool you take me for! ”

She held her head proudly, her brows high, as if measuring him from head to foot, and drawled out lightly, disdainfully, “You don’t say! ”

Now he was furious. His eyes blazed.

“You! ” his voice threatened as well as his body.

“You just say something like that again and you’ll see who is the fool! ”

“You don’t say! ” she dared again, taking a step toward him.

His eyes burning, he raised his hand, but she bent toward him with lightning speed, facing him with eyes half-closed, as if expecting a caress, her lips smiling. “You’re a fool,” she said softly, caressingly. “You’re a fool, and I, I’ll have you know, am *Turkenya!* ”

He was dumbfounded.

“You little devil! ” he said finally, suddenly and deeply excited. “You little devil! Even if you are a Turk,

when I get my hands on you, you won't live to tell about it. Do you know who I am? I'm Hryts, from near the Hungarian border, the son of a wealthy man! ”

“Ov-va! ” she answered, measuring him with her eyes, her dark brows, and it seemed, with her whole tall, slender and captivating figure.

Hryts spat. He was agitated and didn't notice the stubborn set of her mouth.

“You're so brave that you're afraid of no one?”

“Who should I be afraid of?”

“Not someone like me, of course?”

“Not at all of someone like you.”

“Then just look at what someone like me can do! ” He pointed to his beautiful horse. “Just watch! ”

He turned and picked up the horse by its front legs, like a pup, and held it standing on its hind legs for a good minute.

“See how strong I am! ”

“Yes, I see. But what's that got to do with me?”

“Everyone in the village knows of my strength. All are afraid of me, and I'm afraid of no one! ”

“What that got to do with me,” she answered and moved on with unusual pride and assurance, walking beside him and his horse.

“I'm the son of a wealthy...” he persisted, proudly.

“And I'm *Turkenya*...”

“My father owns pastures, herds of horses, hundreds of sheep and cattle, and much, much more! ” he ended on almost a singing note and whistled.

“Am I asking you for this information?” she answered again.

“You're so ... the devil only knows! ” He was angry again.

“My mother is wealthy,” she answered. “She has the finest pastures here on this hill, horses, sheep, cattle ... and rolls and rolls of linen—and I, you son of a wealthy father from the Hungarian border, am *Turkenya*. See?”

Hryts gave another whistle.

“She walks around the forest waiting for someone, she doesn't know who—like a fool,” he added contemptuously, then stopped.

“And meets a fool,” she finished calmly, and again

lifted her brows and looked him directly in the eye.

He laughed. "Just look who's overfed with Turkish wisdom!"

"I'm the way I was born and as you see me. I told you to ride around me. Why are you bothering me? I am not for just anyone at all."

"And what if I should beat you, right here on this spot?" He eyed her fair, beautiful face piercingly.

"I've never once been beaten in my life. You would be the first, and at the same time, the last to do so. You want to try? Go ahead, beat me! ! You'll have something to brag about later, same as you just did with your horse."

Hryts didn't seem to hear her last words. He looked at her askance, pulling at his mustache. She looked back at him, calm and silent, without expression, thoughtfully.

Time passed and neither spoke, each hiding their inner feelings. Something had momentarily grown between them and kept them silent. Tetiana became enveloped in painful sadness over what had just passed; he was deeply moved.

Suddenly she spoke. "Go your way with God, I'm late because of you."

He looked at her with his large, candid blue eyes. He wanted to say something, but was afraid of her. She was so beautiful, but she was also strange. He was confused. He had never met anyone like her. Where had she come from? Lord!

Finally he gathered up his courage.

"Do you love anyone?" he asked.

"I don't love anyone," she answered quietly, and saying it she looked at him openly and honestly, a little startled by the question. Then she added, "Do you love someone?"

"I don't love anyone either," he answered, and as if some of her generosity had rubbed off on him for a moment, gave her the same open and honest look.

"As you wish," she said, and again added seriously, "go your way with God, I am late because of you."

He was saddened. Her last words hurt him deeply.

"Why are you in such a hurry?"

"And why waste my time standing here with you?"

He clenched his teeth, but didn't move aside.

"So, then, what is your name?" he couldn't stop himself

from asking again.

“I’ve already told you. Can’t you guess yourself?”

“You haven’t told me anything, and I can’t guess.”

“*Turkenya!*” and saying this she turned from him and bent down to pick up the reins of his horse, which he had dropped to the ground and which the horse had stepped on. She lifted them and threw them over the horse’s mane with a sure hand.

“You should take better care of your horse,” she remarked, and saying no more, she turned away, and pushing aside the thick branches of a couple of neighbouring firs, seemed to disappear before his very eyes...

He stood, as if consumed by fire, looking after her.

Where had she disappeared? Where did she go?

She had offered a moment of enticement, then vanished like the wind...

* * *

His horse lowered its head to the ground where a large red poppy lay and began to nibble at it. Hryts angrily, almost jealously, jerked the horse’s head up, picked up the red flower, looked it over, then tucking it into his hat, he mounted his horse and rode on.

1908



Ivan Franko

ZAKHAR BERKUT

A Picture of Life in Thirteenth-century Carpathian Ruthenia

Events of long departed days
From ancient legends and
traditions...*

Alexander Pushkin

1



Sad and unfriendly now is our Tukhlya countryside. True, the Stry and the Opir rivers continue to wash its gravelly and verdant banks, spring continues to cover its meadows with grasses and blossom, and the mountain eagle—the berkut—floats through its pure, azure skies as in days of yore. But how everything else has changed! The forests, the villages and the people! The dense, impassable forests that had long ago covered almost the entire area, except for the higher mountain meadows, and descended to the very banks of the rivers, now melted like snow under sunlight; they were sparse, diminished, or had even vanished altogether, leaving behind bald patches. In other spots all that is left are the scorched remains of stumps, among which, here and there, a timid and forlorn fir raises its branches, or even a more forlorn little juniper bush. Where long ago silence reigned, no voice was heard, except perhaps the call of the shepherd's *trembita* on some far-off meadow, or

*Translated by Dorian Rottenberg.

the roar of the wild bison or stag in the thickets—now the mountain meadows are filled with the cries of the ox-drivers and the ravines and woods resound to the hallooming of the woodcutters, sawmill workers and shinglers, who without pause, like imperishable faggots, gnaw away and bring down the beauty of the Tukhlya hills—the centuries-old pines and firs—either sending their trimmed logs down the swift-flowing rivers to new steam sawmills or cutting them up into boards and shingles right on the spot.

But it's the people who have changed most of all. At a glance it might seem that "culture" has developed among them, but in reality it is their number that has grown. There are more villages and hamlets, more cottages, but at the same time there is greater poverty and misery among them. The people are wretched, low-spirited and depressed, timid and awkward in the presence of strangers. Each cared only for himself, not realising that this attitude dissolved their strength, weakened their community. That't not the way it used to be at one time. Though there were fewer people, but what a people they were! How life seethed in these mountains, among these impenetrable forests, at the foot of the mighty Zelemen! For centuries on end fate had dealt cruelly with these people. Its heavy blows had undermined their well-being, poverty had broken their free, stalwart spirit, and today only vague, misty recollections of the happier life of their ancestors are recalled by their descendants. And when sometimes an old grandmother, sitting in the ingle-nook spinning the coarse wool, would begin to tell her grandchildren about the old days, about the attacks of the dog-headed Mongols and about the Tukhlya chieftain Berkut—the children would listen with alarm, tears glistening in their grey eyes. When the wonderful tale was finished, then both old and young, sighing, would whisper: "Oh, what a beautiful fairy tale! "

"Yes, yes," Granny would nod her head in agreement, "yes, yes, children! For us it is a fairy tale, but once upon a time it was the truth! "

"I wonder if such times will come again?" interrupts one of the older listeners.

"Old people say that one day they will return, but it probably won't happen till just before the end of the world."

Sad and unfriendly now is our land of Tukhlya! The

stories of those ancient times and people seem like a fairy tale. Today's people, who grew up in poverty and oppression, under thousands of years of slavery and subjugation, do not believe these tales. However, let that be as it may! The imagination of the poet soars into those long past days, brings those ancient people back to life, and those who are pure of heart and have sincerely human feelings, see in them their brothers, a living people, and in their life, though far removed from ours, find much that could be desirable for our "civilised" times.

It happened in 1241. Spring had arrived to the Tukhlya mountains.

One beautiful day the wooded foothills of Zelemen resounded with the sound of hunter's horns and the shouts of numerous hunters.

It was the new Tukhlya boyar, Tuhar Vovk, conducting a great hunt for big game. He was celebrating the beginning of his new life, for not long ago Prince Danilo had granted him vast pasturelands and a whole side of the Zelemen foothills in Tukhlya. He had come to these mountains and built himself a beautiful house and now, to get acquainted with his boyar neighbours, he was holding his first feast. After the feasting they went into the Tukhlya forests to hunt.

Hunting for big game is not a play, but a difficult sport, often bloody and a matter of life and death. Bison, bears and wild boars—all were dangerous opponents; an arrow rarely brought down one of these animals, and even a spear aimed at the animal from a short distance did not always help. Therefore the final and decisive weapon was the heavy lance, which had to be used against the animal by hand, at close quarters, with full strength and at one blow. If the hunter erred in his thrust, then his life was in the greatest peril, especially if he wasn't able, at that moment, to find a safe hiding place and draw his sword or use his battle-axe in his defence.

It wasn't strange, therefore, that Tuhar and his guests set out for the hunt as if to war; provided with a large supply of arrows and spears, with servants and extra food supplies, and even a sorcerer adept at incantations against wounds. It wasn't surprising either that Tuhar and his guests were arrayed in full battle dress except for their shields, for these would have interfered with their progress

through thicket and underbrush. What was surprising was that Tuhar's daughter Miroslava, refusing to remain behind, had boldly ventured on the hunt with their guests. The good people of Tukhlya, seeing her riding to the hunt among the guests, proud and fearless, like a slender poplar among sturdy oaks, followed her with admiring eyes, saying:

“What a maid! She ought to have been born a man, and for sure she'd make a better man than her sire! ”

This, to be sure, was no small praise, for Tuhar Vovk was a man like an oak. Broad of shoulder, thickset, with heavy features and coarse black hair, he looked somewhat like one of those savage bears of Tukhlya forests which he was hunting. But his daughter Miroslava was also a maid whose equal would be hard to find. We do not speak here of her beauty, or of her goodness of heart—many of her peers could vie with her in this respect, though few could surpass her. What really placed her above her peers was the natural freedom of her bearing, the unusual strength of her body and her resolute courage—a characteristic of men who had grown up in constant struggle against adverse circumstances. It was immediately obvious that Miroslava had grown up with much freedom, that her upbringing had been masculine, and that her beautifully-formed maiden body contained a strong and highly-gifted spirit. She was the only child of her father and added to this, had lost her mother at birth. Her nanny, an old peasant woman, had accustomed her to performing all kinds of needlework from earliest childhood. When she grew up her father, in order to assuage his loneliness, took her with him everywhere. To gratify her spirited temperament, he taught her the arts of knightly combat, to endure all kinds of discomfort and to fearlessly face all danger. So it was, that the greater the difficulties she had to overcome, the more eager she was to overcome them, thus demonstrating her strength of body and her resolute, direct character. Yet with all this Miroslava never ceased to be a woman: gentle and good, quickly sympathetic, modest and shy. All this blended within her in such rare and charming harmony that anyone seeing her once, hearing her speak, forever remembered her face, her walk, her voice, recalling them vividly and clearly during the finest moments of his life,

just as spring recalls even to the oldest of old men his youthful love.

The hunt was already in its third day. Many antlered stags and black-maned bisons had been laid by the boyar spears and arrows. The hunting party had pitched their tents on a grassy meadow above a rushing mountain stream. The smoke of huge open fires curled upwards as the steaming kettles hanging over them boiled and the roasting spits broiled the day's kill for the guests. This day, the last of the hunt, was to be devoted to the most important and at the same time the most dangerous action of the event—the bear hunt.

The main lair of the animals had long been situated on a precipitous hillside, separated from the others by a terrible deep gorge densely overgrown with large beeches and firs, and littered with fallen trees and branches. Here, as the young Tukhlya guide and mountaineer, Maxim Berkut, asserted, was the lair of the mother bear. It was from here that these savage beasts terrorised the entire district and the mountain valleys. And though the brave herdsmen were often successful in killing a bear or two with arrows and axes, or snare one in a trap, where a heavy falling log would break its back, still their number was so great that these efforts did little to bring relief to the neighbourhood. So it was no wonder that when the newly-arrived boyar, Tuhar Vovk, announced to the Tukhlya folk that he wished to organise a big bear hunt and would they supply him with guides, they not only gave him the finest young guide in the Tukhlya highlands, Maxim Berkut, the son of the Tukhlya spokesman, Zakhar, but also of their own volition, provided him with an entire detachment of volunteers, armed with arrow and spear, to help the assembled boyars. All of them together were to surround the bears' den and wipe out the ugly beasts for all time.

At the first hint of dawn the hunter's camp was filled with a great deal of commotion and anxious expectation. The boyars' servants had been busy since midnight, preparing a whole day's food for the guests and filling the drinking flasks with effervescent mead and apple cider. The Tukhlya volunteers were also getting ready, sharpening their knives and axes, pulling on their strong, ox-hide

footwear and filling their knapsacks with baked meat, bread, cheese, and all else that would come in handy during the difficult all-day journey. Maxim Berkut, faced with this very important and difficult task, and who today felt himself completely in charge of this small army, directed the preparations in all their detail with true leadership and dignity, forgetting nothing, unhurriedly, and yet not falling behind. All was done in its proper time and place, without fuss and confusion; he was there where he was needed, restoring order where there was chaos. Whether he was among his Tukhlya comrades or among the boyars or the servants, Maxim Berkut was always the same—calm, free in movement and speech, like an equal among equals. His comrades treated him as he treated them, freely, without constraint, laughing and joking with him, but carrying out his orders precisely, quickly, and so cheerfully and willingly as if they could have done everything exactly like this without orders. The boyar servants, though far from being of like nature and much less free in their conduct, more ready to mock and deride some and fawn at others, nevertheless respected Maxim Berkut for his unpretentiousness and good judgement, and while not without some scoffing and joking, did what he told them to do. The boyars, for the most part warriors and proud, were not really pleased to have a *smerd** in their midst, especially one who seemed to consider himself their equal—did not too obviously show their unwillingness, but carried out the orders of their young guide, at every step having the opportunity to be convinced that these orders were fully sensible and just what was necessary.

The sun had not yet shown itself above the horizon when the company of huntsmen moved out of the camp. A deep silence reigned over the mountains; the shadows of night still slumbered under the dark green crowns of the firs; the heavy fronds of fringed fern were covered with dew drops; crawling green vines coiled underfoot, tangled among the roots of huge uprooted trunks of trees, and wove into impassable whorls with shrub and thorny bramble bush, and garlands of climbing wild hops. A mist rose in grey clouds above the black bottomless pits of the

*Peasant.—Ed.

ravines—a sign that small forest streams flowed below. The forest air was saturated with the mist and the scent of resin; it caught at the throat as though broader chests were needed to breathe it freely.

The detachment of hunters silently made their way through impassable forest, thickets and fallen trees. There wasn't a path or a single guiding sign in this gloomy wilderness. Maxim Berkut walked ahead and after him came Tuhar Vovk and the other boyars. Tuhar's daughter, Miroslava, walked by her father side. The Tukhlya men brought up in the rear. All looked about and listened intently as they walked.

The forest began to stir with the coming day. A gaudy-feathered jay sounded raucously in the fir-tops, a green woodpecker, clinging to a tree-trunk right above the heads of the passers-by, picked at the bark with its steel beak; the bellows of bison and the howling of wolves sounded from distant ravines. The bears, at this time of day, having fed, lay in somnolent slumber beneath the upturned tree-trunks on beds of moss. A herd of wild boars grunted somewhere in the gully, cooling themselves in some cold, slimy pool.

For perhaps an hour the company struggled through the difficult, untrodden wilderness. All breathed heavily, barely able to catch enough air into their lungs, and all wiped beads of sweat off their faces. Maxim often glanced back to the rear. At first he was opposed that a woman should accompany the men in such a dangerous venture, but Miroslava was adamant. It was the first time she had taken part in such a big hunt and she was determined to participate regardless of the difficulties, especially now that they were approaching the best part of it. Nothing Maxim could say about the perils of the road, the danger once they reached their destination, the fierceness of the bears, convinced her to remain behind. "So much the better! So much the better!" she kept repeating with such confidence and with such a sweet smile that Maxim, as if bewitched, could say no more. Her father, who at first also advised Miroslava to remain in camp, had to give in to her pleading in the end. Maxim now gazed in wonderment as this extraordinary woman overcame all the difficulties of the arduous march equally to the strongest men, at how

lightly she leaped over the rotting deadwood and large fallen trees, with what confident strides she walked the edge of the precipices and up the steep cliff-sides, slid between the uprooted trees with such assurance and so indefatigably, that it seemed to Maxim that she must rise upwards on magic wings. He watched her and couldn't get enough of watching.

"A strange girl!" he thought time and again. "I have never seen anyone like her before!"

Finally, they reached their destination. The bears' lair was situated on a tall hill covered with huge beeches and firs and choked up with uprooted trees and fallen branches and accessible with difficulty only from the southern side. On the north, west and east the entry and exit were barred by tall craggy walls that looked as if they had been split away from the body of the mighty Zelemen with an axe, and then pushed away from it several yards. At the bottom of these walls a cold mountain stream foamed and frothed through a narrow crevice. The situation made the task of our hunters easier; all they needed to do was line themselves up along the narrow foot-path on the southern slope and move along it up the hillside, while the bears, having no means of escape, would inevitably fall into their hands and on their lances.

Having arrived at this momentous, though very dangerous point, Maxim Berkut bade the company to spread out and rest a bit, to gather strength for the difficulties ahead. The sun was rising, but the branches of the firs and the neighbouring hills screened its rays. After a short rest, Maxim began to place the hunters in two rows so that the pathway would be completely covered. While the path was narrow, it was necessary for each hunter to stand some five paces from each other; but further up, where it widened into a broad slope, the hunters would have to stand further apart. He was troubled by only one thing: what to do with Miroslava who insisted on standing on her own, rather than with her father.

"Why, am I worse than these young men of yours?" she asked Maxim, her face flushed rosy red. "You are positioning them separately, but you refuse to do the same for me... No, I won't agree to it. It would also embarrass my father if we both had to stand in the same spot! Isn't that

true, Father?"

Tuhar Vovk could not oppose her. Maxim began to explain to her about the danger; warning her of the strength and ferocity of the enraged beasts, but she would not listen.

"Do I not have the strength? Do I not know how to use the bow and arrow, the lance or the axe? Just let one of your young men try to better me—we'll see who will be the stronger! "

Maxim finally fell silent and let her have her way. How could he oppose this astonishing and bewitching girl? He would have liked, at least, to place her in a less perilous position, but unfortunately, this was not possible, because every position was equally dangerous. Having arranged the entire company, Maxim gave the final instructions.

"Now let us pray to whomever one knows, and then we will all blow our horns together. This will be the first signal and will frighten the beasts. Then we will ascend the path till we get up to where it widens. There, my comrades will remain to watch the exits, so that not one bear should escape, and you boyars will continue to the very den of the she-bear! "

A moment later the forests and valleys echoed to the hoarse bellows of bison horns. Like a huge wave the sound rolled through wood and ravine, spreading out, dying out, then doubling in volume. The forests awoke. A kite shrieked above the fir-tops; a frightened golden eagle, spreading wide its wings, rose high into the sky; some animals scampered through the thickets, trying to find a safe hiding place. Finally the horns ceased their blowing and the hunters set off up the hill along the foot-path. All hearts were beating more rapidly in anticipation of unknown dangers, combat and conquest. They moved carefully in rows; the boyars in the first line, then the young men; Maxim strode ahead, listening attentively as he tracked the beast. The monarch of the windfalls, the bear, had not yet shown himself!

They had already reached the narrowest point of the path after which it broadened into a large open slope. Here they stopped at Maxim's instructions, and again their horns thundered out, with even greater force, spreading alarm in the twilight of the bear's lair. There was a

sudden crackling in the underbrush, not too far away, behind a tall mass of heavy, rotting, uprooted trunks.

“Take care!” shouted Maxim. “The beast is approaching!”

He had hardly uttered these words when a huge shaggy head was thrust through a large cleft between two upturned stumps, and two grey eyes, half in curiosity, half in fright, fixed their gaze on Tuhar Vovk who stood at his post some ten paces away.

Tuhar was an old warrior and an old hunter—he didn’t know the meaning of fear. So without a sound, or a word to anyone he snatched a heavy steel arrow out of his quiver, fitted it into his bow, and aimed at the animal.

“Aim for his eye, boyar!” whispered Maxim from behind.

There was a moment of anxious silence, then the arrow whistled—and the animal roared as if maddened, and threw itself back. And though he disappeared from the sight of the hunters, hidden by a pile of windfall, his roars didn’t cease, nor did his savage threshing about lessen.

“After him!” called Tuhar Vovk and threw himself into the opening where the bear had disappeared. At the same time two of the boyars scrambled up to the top of the upturned tree, and raised their lances, trying to put all their weight behind them in a thrust to finish off the beast. Tuhar Vovk, standing in the opening, aimed another arrow at him. The animal gave a tortured bellow and turned to flee, but his eyes were flooded with blood, and not being able to find the exit, he rammed into a tree. The lance of another boyar sank between his ribs, but the wound wasn’t fatal. The savage roars of the wounded bear resounded ever more strongly. In desperation he raised himself on his hind legs, wiped the blood away from his eyes and tore at the branches and threw them ahead of himself, but to no avail: one of his eyes had been pierced by an arrow and the other was kept blinded by the flowing blood.

While threshing around blindly, the animal again drew near to Tuhar Vovk. The latter threw his bow aside and sheltering behind an overturned trunk of a tree, grasped his heavy axe with both hands. When the bear, feeling his way, approached the familiar opening, he swung it down on his head with such force that the skull was split in two, like a

broken pumpkin shell. The bloodied brains splashed on the boyar, and the animal sank to the ground without a sound. The boyars sounded their horns joyfully to hail this first victory.

The beast was pulled out from among the bushes and skinned. Then the boyars, continuing their hunt, plunged deeper into the thickets. The sun was already high in the sky and its rays glimmered through the leafy branches like skeins and streaks of golden thread. The hunters now marched along in a much gayer mood, bragging about their courage and strength.

"Though I'm but a wolf*, and a small animal, I can still manage to overcome the Tukhlian bear," Tuhar Vovk exclaimed joyfully.

Maxim Berkut listened to the bragging and didn't know why, but was suddenly sorry for the Tukhlian bear.

"Well, why not?" he asked, "the bear is a foolish beast; he lives in solitude. If they would only get together, who knows, even a pack of wolves would probably have trouble with them."

Tuhar glanced at him angrily, but said nothing. The hunters moved ahead cautiously, scrambling over the windfalls, jumping from stump to stump, sometimes sinking waist deep into the rotting wood and fallen branches.

Among these grand ruins of nature were visible bear trails, beaten down from ancient times, narrow, but well-trodden, thickly strewn with the bleached bones of mountain goats, deer and other animals. Maxim dropped back behind the boyars; again and again he reviewed all the positions, checked the bears' tracks to see if they were recent or not, helped and encouraged those who were getting tired—while he himself showed no weariness at all. Miroslava kept glancing at him with amazement whenever he passed by her. Though she had hitherto met many young men, both strong and bold, this was her first meeting with such a one as Maxim, who combined within himself the qualities of a forceful worker, warrior and leader.

There was a sudden crackle of branches and a huge bear

* *Vovk*—wolf in Ukrainian.—*Tr.*

appeared in menacing fury before the hunting party. He approached first on all fours, but seeing the enemy before him, he rose on his hind legs, and with his front paws seized a storm-splintered branch off a beech tree and twirling it around himself, emitted an ominous deep growl in his throat from time to time, as though in challenge.

Standing right in front of the advancing animal were two boyars. They had been among those who boasted the loudest, wanting to present themselves as great hunters. Seeing the terrible enemy immediately before them, they paled visibly and shuddered. But to hide or to escape was impossible—they had to face the beast, come what may. Two arrows sped simultaneously from two bows, but one missed, whistling past the bear above his ears, while the other landed in his side, wounding him slightly, but serving to drive him into extreme rage. With a huge bound, the bear advanced with his weapon—the beech branch, which he threw with fearful strength at one of the hunters, but hit a tree with a loud thump. Then, without pausing even for a second, and giving his enemy not a moment for thought, the bear threw himself toward one of them, who stood right on his beaten path. The lance flashed in the trembling hand of the boyar—he wanted to throw it at the animal.

“Don’t throw it!” shouted Maxim in alarm, running up and bringing help to the menaced boyars—Tuhar Vovk and another boyar. “Don’t throw your lance, hold on to it and defend yourself!”

But the boyar wasn’t listening and threw the weapon at the bear. The throw was weak because of the boyar’s trembling arm, and the bear was but five paces away—so it was no wonder that the lance only lightly wounded the animal in the shoulder. The bear seized the lance, broke it, then with a terrible roar threw himself at his enemy. The latter now held in his hands a straight sabre, sharpened on both sides, called a bear-sabre, and was preparing to plunge its length into the bear’s chest. But the point of the sabre slid along the ribs and got trapped in the bear’s shoulder. The animal seized the boyar into its terrifying steel embrace. There was an awful scream from the unfortunate victim; then the sound of crushing bones under the bear’s teeth. The whole appalling and spine-

chilling episode happened so quickly and unexpectedly, that before Maxim could run up with help, the boyar, breathing hoarsely and convulsively in final agony, was lying on the ground with the bloodied bear standing over him, baring his terrible teeth and filling the forest with pain-filled roars.

The boyars stood riveted to the spot, their bodies quivering from shock at the sight. Only Maxim quietly placed an arrow into his horn bow, took a couple of steps toward the bear and, taking careful aim, shot the arrow straight into the animal's heart. The roars of the animal stopped as if cut by a knife and he dropped, dead, to the ground.

There was no blowing of horns, no joyous shouts after this new victory. The boyars, leaving their positions, hastened to the spot of the disaster. Though all had been inured in battles, accustomed to seeing death around them, the sight of the bloodied, broken and torn body, drew a heavy groan from all breasts.

Miroslava clasped her hands to her breast and turned her eyes away. The Tukhlian lads placed the corpse on a lifter of woven boughs, and dragged the bear along after it. A gloomy silence fell upon the company. A large puddle of blood, glistening in the sun, reminded them that a living man, a father to his children, cheerful, willing and full of hope, had stood here a moment ago. Now all that was left of him was a formless mass of bloody flesh. The greater number of boyars had lost all desire to continue the hunt.

"To the devil with the cursed beasts!" said some. "Let them live here or die! Why must we expose our lives to them?"

But Tuhar Vovk and Miroslava, and Maxim in particular, insisted that by all means they must finish what they has started. The boyars finally agreed, but none were eager to return to their positions.

"Allow me, boyars, to say a word," spoke up Maxim. "My Tukhlya comrades have blocked up the exit and won't let a single beast out of here. Therefore we won't need to spread out too far from one another. It would be best, I think, if we divide into two parties and proceed along the very brink of the ravine on both sides. In this way we can

drive them all into the centre and there, together with the Tukhlya lads, surround them in a deep line and shoot them all to the last one."

"Of course, of course, that's the best way!" shouted some of the boyars, not noticing the mocking smile that flitted across Maxim's face.

The company then divided into two parties. One was led by Tuhar Vovk, the other by Maxim. Miroslava, of her own accord, joined the second party, though she couldn't explain to herself why she did it. Perhaps she sought danger, because Maxim clearly stated that the path to be followed by the second party was more dangerous.

Again the horns were sounded and the two groups parted. Some of the hunters stalked in two's, some alone, coming together, then separating, seeking the path. It was impossible to proceed in a group. They were getting close to the top. The top itself was bare, but just below it were great heaps of fallen rock and ruins of uprooted trees. To get through this barrier was the most difficult and most dangerous part of the expedition.

In one spot a heap of this forest debris rose like a tower. The uprooted trees, fallen branches, stones and drifts of leaves blown down through the ages, was an obvious barricade to any access to this natural stronghold. Maxim crawled along the very brink of a deep precipice, clinging here and there to hanging moss or jutting rock, trying to find a through passage. The boyars, unaccustomed to such inaccessible and break-neck treks, continued along the edge of the barricade, hoping to find an opening at some point, and so get around it.

Miroslava paused, as though something held her close to Maxim; her observant gaze roved intently over the bristling wall of fallen trees, trying to find some, no matter how difficult, throughway. She didn't look long, but with great daring began to ascend the large slabs of rock and windfall that obstructed their way. She reached the top and looked about her proudly. The boyars were already some distance away. There was no sight of Maxim, while before her lay an even greater wall of disorder and confusion, of boulder and windfall which seemed, at first glance, impassable. But no! Yonder, just a short distance away, lay a huge fir, like a foot-bridge over this underworld—one

could quite safely get to the top! Without thinking long, Miroslava stepped on the fallen fir. Then she again glanced back, and proud of her discovery, placed her beautifully carved horn to her coral lips and sounded it through the forest. The sound reverberated across the mountain meadows and broke against the mountain-sides and ravines into ever-lessening echoes, until it died somewhere in far-off, impassable forest jungle.

Miroslava's horn was answered from a distance by her father's horn, and then by the horns of the other boyars. For a moment Miroslava, standing high on the fallen fir, hesitated. The fir was very old and decayed, and far below in the impassable denseness of the underbrush, it seemed to her that she heard a slight rustle and a low growling. Listening more closely, she heard nothing. So she confidently stepped forward on her foot-bridge. But she had taken barely five steps, when the rotted fir log cracked under her feet, and the daring girl, together with the decayed fragments of the broken tree, fell into the depths of the underbrush.

She landed on her feet, her weapons still with her. In her hands she clenched a silver-clad spear; across her back hung a strong bow and a quiver of arrows, while in the beautiful leather belt that hugged her slender waist, was thrust an axe and a wide hunter's knife with a bone handle. Having fallen unexpectedly into this murky abyss Miroslava, nevertheless, felt not a moment of fear, but immediately began to look around to find some way out. At first she was unable to see anything clearly, but her eyes soon accustomed themselves to the gloom, and she saw a sight that would have put the fear of death into the most courageous of beings. Five steps away from her lay a huge she-bear with her cubs, gazing with enraged, glittering green eyes at her unexpected guest. Miroslava shuddered. Should she attempt an attack on the terrible beast, or should she seek escape and bring help? But escape was impossible—she was surrounded by bristling underbrush and fallen rock, and though it would have been possible, with great difficulty, to climb over them, doing it in the very presence of the wild beast would be a dangerous undertaking. Making up her mind quickly, Miroslava decided not to provoke the beast, but to defend

herself if attacked, and in the meantime sound an alarm on her horn and call for help. But no sooner did she blow the horn, than the she-bear sprang from her resting place and growling, threw herself at the girl. There was no time for Miroslava to get at her bow—the beast was much too near. She grasped her spear in both hands and bracing herself against a rock wall, aimed it at the oncoming bear. The animal, seeing the glittering spearhead, stopped. Both enemies stood thus for a long moment, without taking their eyes off each other or making a move from their positions. Miroslava didn't dare make an attack on the bear; the bear shifted her eyes, trying to find a way of assaulting her enemy. Suddenly, the she-bear grasped a large rock in her front paws, and raising herself on her hind legs, prepared to throw it at Miroslava. But in that moment, when she-bear was lifting herself on her hind legs, Miroslava, with one mighty heave, thrust her spear into the bear's chest. The bear gave a loud outraged growl and fell backward, her breast drenched with blood. But the wound was not fatal and she quickly sprang to her feet. The blood flowed, but disregarding her pain, the she-bear again threw herself at Miroslava. The girl was in terrible danger. The raging beast advanced toward her, this time with teeth bared. Miroslava's only escape was to try and climb up the rock she had been leaning against. One moment—and she stood on top of the rock. She gave a deep gasp of relief—her position was safer, for if the beast continued to attack she would be able to hit it from above. But Miroslava had barely grasped her new situation when the bear stood close beside her on the rock, growling fiercely, her bloodied jaws open wide. Cold sweat covered Miroslava's forehead; she saw that this was a crucial moment, that this narrow ledge of rock would see a struggle of life and death, and that victory would depend on which one of them would be able to stay on the rock and hurl the adversary down. The she-bear was now very close; Miroslava tried to keep her at a distance with her spear, but the bear seized the point of the weapon between her teeth and gave it such a strong tug that she almost threw Miroslava off the rock; the spear slid out of her hands and the bear threw it down into the thickets.

“I'm going to die!” the thought flashed through

Miroslava's mind, but her courage did not fail her. She grasped her axe in both hands and readied herself for the final encounter. The animal came ever closer; Miroslava could feel its hot breath on her face; a hairy paw, with claws unsheathed, menaced her breast; another moment—and she would fall from the rock, tattered and bloodied, for the axe wasn't long enough to counter the longer paws of the mighty beast.

"Help!" shouted Miroslava, in mortal fear, and in that moment a spear flashed over her head, sinking into the bear's throat, and knocking it, like a log, off the rock. In an opening among the rock piles above Miroslava's head, beamed the joyous, vividly alive face of Maxim Berkut. The deep look of gratitude aimed at him by the girl he rescued, touched him to the heart, but not a word passed between them. There was no time. The she-bear, still alive and roaring, had lifted herself up. One leap brought her to her cubs who, not understanding the terrible struggle that had taken place, were playing and tumbling about in the lair. Having sniffed them and assured herself of their safety, the bear turned and again threw herself at Miroslava. But Miroslava was prepared, and lifting her axe with both hands, she split the bear's head asunder with one blow. The wounded beast fell and heaving convulsively from side to side a few times, perished.

In the meantime Maxim had broken through the underbrush and reached Miroslava's side. Two pearly tears glittered in the girl's eyes, and without a word, she ardently pressed the hand of her rescuer. Maxim, for some reason, appeared quite disconcerted. He flushed, lowered his eyes and stuttered: "I heard your call for help... But I didn't know ... where you were... Thank God that I was able to break through!"

Miroslava stood where she was, holding the handsome lad's hand in her own and looking at his fine, sunburned face, illuminated by the ruddy glow of good health, open and generous. At that moment she felt nothing but gratitude for her escape from a terrible death. But when Maxim, gaining a little courage, pressed her small, yet so strong hand, Miroslava felt a sweet ache in her heart, and her face flushed with a shy glow. She lowered her eyes and the words of thanks trembling on her lips died away and

her face lit up with the wondrous charm of awakening, tender emotions.

Maxim was the first to recover. In his heart, courageous and pure like true gold, there flashed a happy thought, which immediately turned into firm resolve. It returned to him all his courage and confidence in his future course. He placed his horn to his lips and blew the joyful call of victory. From beyond the wall of rock and dead trees, came the answering calls from the horns of Tuhar and other boyars. Agile as a squirrel, Miroslava scrambled swiftly back up to the heap from which she fell, and from its top announced her adventure and rescue by Maxim to the entire company. Tuhar Vovk scrambled up to her side with great difficulty, followed by other boyars. Tuhar held his daughter in a long embrace and shuddered at the sight of the blood on her clothing.

“And you, my daughter, were in such danger!” And he embraced her again and again, as though afraid that she might disappear.

Then he lowered himself down to Maxim who was busy around the carcass of the she-bear and the cubs. The baby bears, unconscious of their enemy in man, growled playfully as they tumbled about in their nest like pups, allowing themselves to be petted and stroked without any fear of people. Maxim picked them up in his arms and put them down before Miroslava and Tuhar.

“Here is your booty,” he said. “You will, I’m sure, be happy to welcome such guests in your home.” The gathered boyars gazed either with delight at the cubs, or with horror at the killed she-bear. They examined her wounds and marvelled at Miroslava’s strength and courage in facing such a terrible beast in battle.

“Oh no,” Miroslava laughed, “without the help of this upright young man I would have been lying here just like this beast, my body torn and bleeding! He deserves my deepest gratitude!”

Tuhar Vovk reacted somewhat unhappily to these words of his daughter. Though he loved her dearly, and was overjoyed at her rescue from great danger, he would rather she had been rescued by a boyar’s son, and not by a common Tukhlya peasant, this *smerd*, even though, after all, he had made a good impression on him. Still, for

him, a proud boyar, who had grown up and won great honour in the service of the prince, it was difficult to publicly give thanks to a common peasant for his daughter's rescue. But there was nothing else to be done... The obligation of gratitude was so deeply ingrained in our knightly ancestors, that Tuhar Vovk could not shirk this duty. He took Maxim by the hand and led him forward.

"Young man," he said, "my daughter, my only child, tells us that you saved her life from great danger. I have no reason to doubt her words. Accept the sincere thanks of a father whose love and hope lie entirely in this one child, for your honorable deed. I don't know how to repay you for your bravery, but you may be sure that as soon as it is in my power to do so, the boyar Tuhar Vovk will not forget what he owes you."

Maxim stood listening to these words as if on coals of fire. He was unaccustomed to such public praise and had neither hoped for nor desired anything like it. He was confused by the boyar's praise and didn't know whether to answer in any way or not. In the end he said, shortly: "There is nothing to thank me for, boyar! I only did what anyone in my position would have done—so there is no need for thanks! Let your daughter live in good health, but I have done nothing to earn such thanks!"

Having said this, he went to call up his Tukholian comrades. With their help the she-bear was quickly skinned, and the small cubs carried to the hunter's gathering place, from which the whole company was to move back to camp after the hunt.

The sun had risen to mid-day and threw its hot golden rays over the Tukholian mountains; the heated resin spread its fragrance through the forest; proudly and only from time to time flapping its broad wings, soared the hawk across his blue ocean, high above the meadows. Silence reigned. Only the horns of the hunting party and shouts of the hunters sounded across the Zelemen mountain-side. The hunt was ended, though not entirely successfully. The Tukholian lads carried three bear skins on poles before the hunting party, and two bear cubs in a sack, and the boyar servants brought up in the rear with a stretcher, carrying the bloodied and already rigid body of the unfortunate boyar who died from a bear's attack.

The company, under Maxim's guidance, reached their camp quickly. The hunt was ended. The boyars wanted to return home, today, immediately after lunch. The distance back was great, but Maxim promised to lead the company back to Tukhlya by an easier forest path, and from there to Tuhar Vovk's home. The Tukholian lads, having supped, immediately left for home. Maxim remained behind with the boyars till the servants had dismantled the camp, put out the fires, and cleared the cooking utensils and weapons of the hunt. Then the boyar company also took to the road homeward.

2

The ancient village of Tukhlya was a large mountain settlement, which together with two or three other large hamlets, had close to fifteen hundred inhabitants. The village and the hamlets around were not situated on the site of present-day Tukhlya, but much higher in the mountains, in a broad, long valley, which is now covered with forest and is called Zapala valley. In those ancient times, of which we are speaking, the Zapala valley was not overgrown with trees, but to the contrary, was a cultivated area, feeding its inhabitants with adequate harvests of grain. Stretching over half a mile in length and about a quarter of a mile in width, level and slimy, surrounded on all sides by steep rocky cliffs three or even four fathoms high in spots, the valley was like the bottom of a huge kettle which had been emptied of water. And certainly that's what must have happened. A fairly large mountain stream fell into the valley from the east in a waterfall some one-and-a-half fathoms high, it broke a path through narrow, harsh cliffs and wound snake-like through the valley, flowing westward through a similar narrow gateway, dashing between the smooth rock walls and roaring down a few more waterfalls before it tumbled into the Opir river some quarter of a mile lower down. The high steep banks of the Tukholian hollow were overgrown with dark-hued evergreens, which gave the impression of greater depth to the valley and a certain air of wilderness, tranquillity and isolation from the rest of the world. In truth

this was a huge mountain hideaway, accessible on all sides only with the greatest difficulty—but nearly all the mountain villages were like that in those days of incessant warfare, quarrels and raids. It is only thanks to their inaccessibility that they were able, longer than the plains villages, to protect their free Ancient Rus community life, which in some places the war-enriched boyars more and more endeavoured to undermine.

The people of Tukhlya made their living mainly from raising cattle. Only the valley where the village itself lay, and a few smaller stretches of land along the river, which were free of forest, were suitable for growing grain and each year yielded fine crops of oats, barley and millet. In the mountain meadows, however, which were like all the surrounding forests, the property of the Tukhlya community, there grazed great herds of sheep, in which reposed the main wealth of its people; from them they obtained their clothing and nourishment, edible fat and meat. Cattle and oxen grazed in the forest around the village; but the locality, mountainous, rocky and unapproachable, prohibited the cultivation of large numbers of cattle. Another important source of affluence for the Tukhlya folk were the forests. Not to speak of the wood which was free for both fuel and for building, the forests also provided the Tukholians with wild animals, forest fruits and honey. True, life in the forest and in the impassable mountain wilderness was hard. It was a continuous battle with nature—with floods, snows, wild beasts and an untamed, impassable terrain—but the struggle producing strong, courageous and enterprising people was the foundation and well-spring of its strong free communal order.

The sun had already dipped far past mid-day when our already familiar hunting party, guided by Maxim Berkut, descended from the heights into the Tukhlya valley. Tuhar Vovk, with his daughter and Maxim, led the way; the rest of the company straggled after them in small groups, discoursing on the hunt and its adventures. The Tukhlya valley, flooded with the hot rays of the sun, unfolded before their eyes like a large green lake dotted with small, dark islands. Around it rose the mountain walls, like a tall fence, over which combings of green bramble and hazel bushes clambered here and there. At the

entrance to the valley the waterfall roared, dashing its silvery foam against the rocks. Alongside of the waterfall a narrow trail, which led up and further along the shore of the river, over the cliffs and mountain meadows right up to the Hungarian land, was hewn out of the rock. This was the well-known "Tukhlya Pass", the easiest and safest after the Duklya Pass. Ten neighbouring communities from the Halych and the Hungarian side had worked almost two years on building this pass. The people of Tukhlya put in most of the work on it and proudly considered it their own.

"Look, boyar," said Maxim, pausing above the waterfall at the entrance to the winding pass carved out of solid rock, "look at the work of the Tukhlya community! This Pass stretches away off there, over the Beskidy ranges, the first such road in the highlands. My father himself supervised the work on it for a distance of five miles; every bridge, every curve, every rock removed within this distance was carried out under his direction."

The boyar reluctantly looked up at the mountain where the trail, following the stream, wound into the far distance. Then he looked down the pathway and shook his head.

"Does your father have great power in the community?" he asked.

"Power, boyar?" answered Maxim in surprise. "No, there are none among us who have power over the community. The community, boyar, is a power in itself. But my father is a man of great experience and willingly serves the community. When he speaks at the community council there are few who can equal him in the highlands. The community takes my father's advice—but my father has no power over it, nor does he desire it."

Maxim's eyes shone with pride and admiration as he spoke of his father. Tuhar Vovk bent his head thoughtfully as he listened, but Miroslava could not take her eyes off Maxim. Listening to his words, she felt that Maxim's father was momentarily becoming near and dear to her, as if she had lived her whole life under his paternal care.

But Tuhar Vovk grew more and more morose. He frowned deeply and turned his eyes on Maxim with an expression of long-suppressed fury.

“So it is your father then, that is stirring up the Tukh-olian people against me and against the prince?” he asked suddenly in a harsh, bitter tone. The words struck Miroslava like a painful blow; she turned pale and looked helplessly from her father to Maxim in turn. But Maxim was not in the least confused by these words and answered calmly:

“Stirring up the people, boyar? No, you have been told an untruth. The entire community is angry with you for appropriating the community forest and meadows without so much as asking the community if it agrees or doesn’t agree to your doing so.”

“Ah, so I must ask the community yet! The prince granted me that forest and that meadow, and I’m not obliged to ask anybody for permission.”

“That’s exactly what my father is telling the community, boyar. My father is trying to keep the community calm and is advising them to wait till the community tribunal where this matter will be examined.”

“A community tribunal?” cried Tuhar Vovk. “And I am expected to stand before such a tribunal?”

“I should think that you would wish to do this yourself. You will be able, then, to prove your rights to everyone, and calm down the community.”

Tuhar Vovk turned away. They continued descending down the Pass which twisted in circles to make the trail less steep and dangerous. Maxim, dropping behind, could not take his eyes off Miroslava. But his face no longer glowed with such pure happiness as it had such a short time ago. The darker the clouds of anger and dissatisfaction on her father’s face, the more clearly did Maxim realise that a deep chasm was opening up between him and Miroslava. Besides that, he was a child of the mountains, ignorant of the wider world and of the extent of the boyar’s ambitions, and didn’t even suspect how wide and deep the chasm actually was.

They reached the bottom of the valley. Below the waterfall the stream widened into a large pool, calm and clear as a tear. Caps of pearly, frothing foam, converged along its banks, its bottom bristled with large and small rock boulders. Swift as arrows, the trout flashed their pearly-yellow, red-dotted sides among the rocks; at the far

end of the cove the waterfall roared down the stone wall like a living silver pillar, sparkling in the sun with all the colours of the rainbow.

“What a wonderful spot! ” cried Miroslava, gazing up at the waterfall and the wildly scattered heaps of fallen rock reaching down into its depths and fringed at the top with the deep green blanket of evergreen forest.

“This is our Tukhlya countryside, our paradise! ” said Maxim, sweeping his gaze around the valley, up the mountain-sides and over the waterfall with such great pride that few monarchs could equal in looking over their domain.

“Only you are poisoning life for me in this paradise,” said Tuhar Vovk angrily.

No one replied to his words; all three continued silently on their way. They neared the village which lay in densely-massed rows of orderly, shingled houses surrounded by thickly-planted mountain ash, willows and spreading pear trees. The people were out working in the fields; only the old men, grey-bearded and grave, ambled about the houses, sat whittling or weaving snares for animals or fish, or exchanging talk on community affairs. Maxim bowed and greeted them loudly and cordially and soon after Miroslava also began to greet the oldsters who stood by the roadside. Only Tuhar Vovk continued to walk along, sullen and silent, refusing to even look at these *směrds* who dared to oppose the will of the prince.

As they approached the centre of the village they were met by an odd group. Three oldsters dressed in holiday attire were walking along the road carrying a tall, carved and silver-ornamented pole with a large, also silver-bound chain, carved entirely out of one piece of wood in the form of a ring, indissoluble and interlocked. Above the chain fluttered a crimson, silver-embroidered banner. The three old men walked slowly. They stopped before each courtyard and loudly called out the master by name, and when he or someone else appeared, they said:

“Tomorrow to the assembly! ” and went on.

“What kind of freakishness is this?” asked Tuhar Vovk when the old men drew near.

“Have you never seen anything like it before?”asked Maxim in surprise.

“Never. We have no such customs in Halych.”

“They’re calling people to the assembly, the community council,” explained Maxim.

“I thought they were priests with icons,” Tuhar Vovk scoffed. “When we call an assembly we do it quietly, passing the assembly standard from house to house.”

“With us the assembly banner is carried through the village by these heralds; they must call every citizen to the assembly by name. And you will also be called, boyar.”

“Let them call, I won’t go! Your assembly is of no interest to me. I am here by the will of the prince and have the authority to call an assembly myself, if I should feel it necessary.”

“You yourself ... call an assembly?” asked Maxim, amazed. “Without our heralds? Without our standard?”

“I have my own heralds and my own standard.”

“But no one from our community would go to your assembly. And our assembly, whatever it decides, so it will be.”

“We’ll see!” said Tuhar Vovk, angrily and stubbornly.

At this point our company approached the heralds. Seeing the boyar the heralds set down the standard and one of them spoke:

“The boyar Tuhar Vovk!”

“Here I am,” answered the boyar sullenly.

“Tomorrow to the assembly!”

“What for?”

But the heralds did not answer him and continued on their way.

“It’s not their concern, boyar, to answer you,” explained Maxim, trying as well as he could to pacify the boyar’s ill-will to the Tukhlya people’s assembly. After a long silence, during which they continued their way through the village, Maxim again began to speak:

“Allow me, boyar, an inexperienced youth, to tell you something.”

“Speak,” said the boyar.

“Come to the assembly tomorrow!”

“And submit to your underling tribunal?”

“So what, boyar. The Tukhlya community passes judgement with justice and surely there is no shame in submitting to a just court?”

“Father! ” Miroslava intervened in the conversation. “Please do as Maxim advises. He is right in what he says. He saved my life—and he wouldn’t give you bad advice; he knows the native customs well.”

Tuhar Vovk smiled reluctantly at this truly feminine logic, but his forehead soon creased back into its habitual frown.

“Now you are wearying my ears with this Maxim! ” he said. “So he saved your life and I am grateful to him for it, and if you say so I’ll give him a couple of oxen. But here is a matter in which neither you nor Maxim should get involved.”

“No, boyar,” replied Maxim to this, “you are trying, I think, to belittle me by paying for my insignificant act. Neither I nor my father will accept any reward. As to my begging you to come to the assembly tomorrow, I am doing it only from sincere good will. I would be pleased, boyar, to see harmony between you and the Tukhlya community.”

“Well, let it be so,” said Tuhar Vovk finally. “I’ll come to this assembly of yours tomorrow, but not to submit to them, but to see what this assembly is all about.”

“Come, boyar, come! ” cried Maxim, overjoyed. “You’ll see for yourself that the Tukhlya community knows how to be just.”

Tuhar Vovk’s promise eased Maxim’s heart. He became happy, talkative, showed Miroslava all that was beautiful and interesting on the right and the left, and there was much that was beautiful and interesting. Our walkers had reached the very centre of the village and the centre of the Tukhlya valley. The sheer rocky sides of the valley gleamed in the distance like straight and tall marble walls. The stream flowed through the village right alongside the roadway, foaming and frothing, breaking against the gravel that seeded the bottom and spreading cool freshness throughout the valley. On both sides of the river whose banks were quite steep, driven into the slime of a long-ago lake there were dams built from rocks and thick fir logs and stumps to protect the village from floods. All along the stream there were convenient railed foot-bridges and immediately beyond the dams were garden plots of beans and peas, which wound up their stakes, beets and cabbage.

Following were fields of wheat stretching in neat and bright green strips far beyond the houses. The houses were neatly fenced in and well-looked after; the walls of smooth square beams were not coated with clay, but scraped and rubbed with river gravel a few times a year. Only when one beam didn't properly fit in with another and there were narrow strips between them, the walls were caulked with clay and whitewashed, looking very lovely among the green willows and pear trees that surrounded them. Two linden trees stood at the entrance to every courtyard, between which hung gates, beautifully woven in various decorative patterns. Some bird of prey hung on a rack over practically every gate—an owl, a magpie, a raven, a hawk or an eagle—with their wings widespread and head down. These were tokens of spirits—the protectors of the home. Beyond the houses were the barns and other outbuildings, all built of stout hewed logs and covered with shingle; only a few were straw-thatched, their golden yellow cone-shaped crests protruding here and there over the high ricks.

“Here is my father's house,” said Maxim, pointing toward a dwelling that in no way differed from the others. There was no one in the courtyard, but the door into the hallway was open, and in the wall facing the south two large square openings had been cut through which, in the summer, were left either completely open or covered with thin and half-transparent ceramic squares. In the winter these openings were closed up with wooden shutters. These were the windows of the time.

Miroslava looked with interest at this nest of the Berkuts', over the gate of which hung, in fact, a recently-killed huge mountain eagle—a berkut—who even in death seemed to threaten with his mighty steel claws and his black, heavily-curved beak. The atmosphere in this courtyard was peaceful, quiet and bright; the stream with a foot-bridge separated it from the roadway; it murmured quietly and splashed its crystal waters against a rock dam. Tuhar Vovk looked about him.

“Aha, so this is where the Tukhlya chief lives. Well, I'm looking forward to meeting him. We'll see what sort of a bird he is! ”

Maxim wanted to bid farewell to the boyar and his

daughter and turn into his home, but something seemed to urge him to accompany them further. Miroslava seemed to sense this.

“Are you not going in?” she asked, turning away so as to hide her confusion.

“I was going to, but let it be. I’ll see you through the passage to your home.”

Miroslava was delighted without realising why. And so they went through the village chattering, looking about, enjoying each other’s voices, their proximity and forgetting all else about them, Father and community. Though they said not a word about themselves throughout their entire conversation, about their hopes and desires, their young hearts glowed and trembled with first love, revealing that secret force that attracted to itself these two young, healthy and beautiful creatures. Pure and unspoiled, they never gave a thought in their innocence, to the obstacles their young love would have to encounter.

Tuhar Vovk, who was walking ahead of them in deep, gloomy thought, pondering on how he would stand before the *smerns* in all his dignity and splendour tomorrow and show them his importance and superiority, didn’t notice what was happening between the two young people. One thing only angered him—that this young man was so confident, that his conduct with him and his daughter was that of an equal. But in the meantime and up to a point, he was prepared to control his anger.

They had already passed the village and were nearing the spot where the Tukhlya valley closed, allowing the stream to escape from it through a narrow rocky portal. The sun had gone down into the late afternoon and was hovering over the top of the forest, bathing its slanting rays in the foaming waves of the stream. The crags that narrowed the flow of the stream out of the Tukhlya valley were already casting long shadows. The passage itself was gloomy, cold and slippery. Lower down, the waters of the stream broke against a pile of huge boulders, while the tall firs and beeches murmured high above. Above the stream trails laid by the Tukhlya folk broke through the cliffs on both sides. Miroslava shivered as she entered this strange “stone portal”, and whether it was from the reigning chill, the dampness, or God knows what—she took her father by the

hand and pressed against him.

“What a terrible spot! ” she said, pausing in the middle of the passage and looking back and above. In truth, it was an unusually wild spot. The stream was narrow, about three fathoms wide and no more, and so smoothly did its waters cut through the slate cliffs that one would be tempted to swear that this was the work of man. Before the very entrance stood a massive stone pillar, washed at its foot by the water and therefore thinner at its base and weightier at the top where it was overgrown with fern and dwarfish birches. This was the widely-known Guardian who, it was considered, kept watch over the entrance into the Tukhlya valley and was prepared to fall on anyone who would seek to break into this peaceful, happy corner, with hostile intent. Tuhar Vovk himself felt a chill go down his back after looking at this fearsome Guardian.

“What a dangerous rock! ” he said. “Hanging over the very entrance and threatening to fall at any moment! ”

“This is a sacred rock, boyar,” said Maxim with dignity. “In the spring we lay wreaths of flowers at its foot—it is our Tukhlya Guardian.”

“Eh, everything here is yours, everything here is sacred, everything here is Tukholian—I’m sick of listening! ” shouted Tuhar Vovk. “It’s as if there is nothing in this world beyond your Tukhlya! ”

“In truth there is no other world for us,” answered Maxim. “We love our little corner above everything—if everyone would love his little corner in the same way, then for certain all people in this world would live happily and peacefully.”

Maxim, in his innocent sincerity didn’t realise how sharply he pierced the heart of the boyar with these words. He didn’t notice, either, the malice in Tuhar Vovk’s eyes when he looked at him. Turning to Miroslava, Maxim continued to speak in a calm, warm voice:

“Now about this rock, our Guardian. I’ll tell you the story as I heard it from my father. It happened long ago—very long ago—when the giants still lived in our mountains. Here, where our Tukhlya now stands, was a very large lake; this basin was yet completely closed and the water flowed over it. The lake was bewitched—there wasn’t a

living thing in it—neither fish, nor worm. Any animal drinking of its waters had to die, while the birds who had to fly over it, fell into its waters and drowned. The lake was under the protection of Morana, the goddess of death. It happened though, that the king of the giants quarrelled with Morana, and in order to thwart her, he hit the mountain with his magic mallet and split it so that all the water from the bewitched lake flowed out and lost its miraculous power. The whole district suddenly came to life; the bottom of the lake became a fertile valley, turned green with lush grasses and flowers; fish appeared in the stream, all kinds of reptiles among the rocks, animals in the forest, birds in the skies above it. Morana was furious, for she hated all living things, so she laid a curse on the king of the giants, turning him into this stone pillar. But she could do nothing to the valley itself, because she couldn't return the deadly waters that had flowed out of the lake. If she had been able to return all that water, to the last drop, and close the passage hewn along this cliff, then she would again have become the queen of these mountains. But now, though the king of giants no longer lives, Morana also has no power over the area. The king, however, did not completely die. He lives in that rock and watches over the valley. They say that some day Morana will again gather in strength and try to conquer our Tukhlya, but then this bewitched Guardian rock will topple over on Morana's power and crush it with its weight."

Miroslava listened to this story with deep emotion; with all her heart she ached to stand under the arm of this good and life-giving king of the giants and give battle to Morana's power. The blood flowed swifter in her young heart at the thought of it. How deeply and passionately she loved Maxim at this moment!

Tuhar Vovk, though he listened to Maxim's tale, didn't believe it, for he turned but one glance at the rock Guardian of Tukhlya and smiled contemptuously, as though thinking: "What foolish *smerts*, to place their pride and hope in such nonsense! "

Our strollers had now passed the narrow gorge of the Tukhlya stream and emerged into the bright world. Before their eyes there now appeared the long, restricted by steep mountains, valley of the Opir River, which far in

the distance joined the Stry River valley. The sun was going down in the west and its hot, purple rays were reflected in the broad waves of the Opir. The Tukhlya stream roared downward in wild leaps and angry foam to bathe in the Opir. Its waters, sharply reflecting the last of the sun's rays, looked like blood gushing out of a huge wound. All around sounded the murmur of the already darkening forest.

Our strollers paused for a moment, drinking in that immortal and vital beauty of nature. Maxim seemed to be hesitating over voicing some thought that had come into his mind and was forcing itself to be heard. He finally mustered up his courage and approached Tuhar Vovk, flushed and quaking.

"Boyar," he said in an unusually soft and timid voice.

"What do you want?"

"Allow me to be your most sincere servant..."

"Servant? Why that wouldn't be difficult. Come with your father and hire yourself out if you wish to be of service."

"No, boyar, you don't understand... Allow me to become your son! "

"My son? But you have a father of your own and I hear he is much better, more just and a wiser man than I, especially as he will try me tomorrow! "

The boyar smiled bitterly and venomously.

"I wanted to say..." Maxim corrected himself, "No, that's not the way I wanted to say it. Boyar, allow me to have your daughter, whom I love more than life itself, more than my own soul, for my wife! "

Thunder out of a clear sky wouldn't have startled Tuhar Vovk as much as these passionate, yet simple words, uttered by the young man. He took two steps back and in a piercing glance mixed with anger and contempt, measured poor Maxim from head to foot. His face was malevolent, blue; his lips trembled over his clenched teeth.

"You *smerd!* " he suddenly shouted, so that the surrounding mountains re-echoed that vicious cry. "How dare you utter those words to me? Repeat them again, for it can't be that I really heard what I seemed to hear! "

Maxim's natural courage and decisiveness awoke at the boyar's menacing shout. He stood tall before the boyar,

like a proud young oak, and said in a friendly, yet confident voice:

“I said nothing ill to you, boyar, nothing that would bring dishonour to either you or your daughter. I asked for your daughter’s hand, your daughter whom I love as no one else in this world would love her. Is it possible that between your boyar and my common extraction there is such a big chasm that love cannot bridge it? And in what way, really, are you so much superior to me?”

“Silence, you *smerd*!” Tuhar Vovk interrupted savagely. “My hand is poised to grasp the handle of my sword that I might curb your foolish mouth. One thing only saves you from my revenge, and that is that you did save my daughter from danger this day. Otherwise you’d be lying a corpse for those words. You fool, you could think, you could dare to raise your eyes to her, to my daughter?... This because we have both been talking to you in a friendly manner and not kicking you like a dog! You thought, that in saving her from the claws of the bear, you had gained her for yourself, like a captive? Or no! If it had to come to this, she would rather have perished in the bloody embrace of the wild beast, than fall into your hands!”

“No, boyar, don’t say it that way! I’d rather die in the embrace of the bear than see one hair of her head harmed.”

Miroslava turned away at these words to hide the long-restrained tears, that now gushed from her eyes.

But Tuhar Vovk paid no heed to this, and continued:

“And you, you vile offspring of a villain, have the audacity to think yourself my equal? With me, who has all his life consorted with princes, has earned the praise of a prince and been rewarded for knightly deeds! My daughter can choose herself a husband from among the most eminent and illustrious young men in the country, and I am being asked to give her to you, a *smerd*, to your Tukhlya nest where she would wilt, dry up, and perish in misery? No, no, go your way, you miserable young man, you are not in your right mind, you have uttered your words under an attack of madness.”

Maxim saw that his hopes were shattered, that the boyar had thought of himself exceedingly high and looked at him with great contempt. No matter how difficult to accept this, there was nothing he could do.

“Boyar, boyar,” he said in a sad, fervent voice, “You have elevated yourself much too high on the wings of pride—take care! Fate usually raises to the heights those whom she has in mind to destroy. Don’t scorn the lowly, don’t scorn the toiler, boyar, for no one knows at what well he may himself be brought to drink! ”

“You yet have the gall to try to teach me, reptile?” cried the enraged Tuhar Vovk, and his eyes flashed in insane anger. “Out of my sight or as God is my witness, I’ll not pay attention to anything, but will strike you down with this sword as I did the bear this morning! ”

“Don’t be angry, boyar, at the words of a foolish lad,” Maxim again spoke calmly. “Farewell! Farewell you also my star, that flashed before me so miraculously for a day, and now must forever disappear for me! Farewell, and good fortune to you! ”

“No, I won’t remain silent,” Miroslava suddenly spoke up, turning back decisively. “I will not disappear forever from your sight, young man, I will be yours! ”

Tuhar Vovk stared at his daughter, dumbfounded, and now didn’t know what to do.

“What are you saying, my daughter?” he cried.

“What you are hearing, Father. Allow me to marry Maxim. I will marry him.”

“You foolish girl, it cannot be! ”

“Try it, and you’ll see that it can.”

“You are feverish, my daughter—you’ve been frightened by a wild beast, and you’re not well! ...”

“No, dear Father, I’m well and I will say it again and swear before that bright sun that this young man will be mine. Be my witness, O sun! ”

And she took Maxim’s hand in hers and bent forward to kiss him passionately on the lips. Tuhar Vovk was scandalised, he could make no move, nor say a word.

“And now, my lad, go home and don’t be afraid. Miroslava has vowed that she will be yours and Miroslava will keep her vows. And now, Father, let us hurry home! See, there it is, in the valley. And there are our guests coming up.”

Saying this, the brave girl took her bewildered father by the arm and led him down the hillside. Maxim remained long where he was, bemused and happy. Recovering

finally, he fell prone to the ground and sent up a prayer to the setting sun, just as his grandfathers and great grandfathers did before him and as his father still did, secretly. Then rising he walked slowly home.

3

Beyond the village of Tukhlya, in the centre of a field close to the waterfall, stood a huge linden tree. No one remembered when it had been planted and when it had grown to such height and breadth. Tukhlya was not a very old settlement and the trees that grew in the Tukhlya valley were much younger than the linden, so that it was no wonder that the Tukhlya folk regarded it the oldest witness to the ancient past and invested it with great esteem.

The Tukholians believed that the linden was a gift from their immemorial benefactor—the king of the giants, who had planted it in the Tukhlya Valley with his own hands as a symbol of his victory over Morana. A spring of pure water gushed from its roots and, murmuring quietly over small pebbles, flowed into the stream. This was the place of the Tukhlya assemblies, of the village meetings, which from ancient times were the one and only authority in the Rus communities.

Around the linden was a broad, level common. Smooth-surfaced blocks of stone, arranged as seats for the elders of the community, the family fathers, stood in rows in this open spot, facing the sun. There were as many of these flat stones as there were elders. Beyond these stone blocks there was free space. Under the linden, right over the spring, was a four-cornered stone with a hole in its centre. Here, during the meeting, the assembly standard was placed. A little to the side was another elevation for the speaker—for anyone who was to address the assembly on one or another matter; he would leave his place and come to this elevation so that all might hear him.

The second day after the boyar's hunt, the Tukhlya people thronged to the assembly common. The noise of their discourse could be heard throughout the valley. The community elders entered the grounds with dignity, one

after another, and took their places. The younger members of the community, with a great deal of noise, arranged themselves behind them in a broad semi-circle. The women came too, though not in large numbers: no fully-grown member of the community, man or woman, was excluded, and though the final decisive vote remained with the elders, all could freely take part in the discussions, the young people and the women, giving their opinions for consideration. The sun was already high in the heavens when out of the village, and last among those attending, came the heralds bearing the Tukhlya assembly standard. Their appearance evoked a general murmur in the crowd, but when they came near, all fell silent. The heralds after bowing three times to the assembled people, removed their hats and stood under the linden tree. The entire assembly did the same.

“Good people,” the heralds spoke up, “is it your will that we hold council this day?”

“Yes, yes,” murmured the crowd.

“Then may God help us!” they intoned, and lifting high the assembly standard, they placed it upright into the hole in the stone. This signalled the opening of the assembly.

The eldest of those assembled, Zakhar Berkut, then got up and with a slow, but firm tread, walked up to the linden and touched it, then going to the spring flowing out of its roots, he knelt down and anointed his eyes and lips with its water. This was a customary ancient ceremony which signified the cleansing of the lips and the clearing of the eyes, necessary for such an important occasion as the people’s assembly. Following this ritual he sat on the speaker’s elevation with his face turned toward the people, that is, to the east.

Zakhar Berkut was a grey-haired, like a dove, over ninety-year-old patriarch, the oldest man in the Tukhlya community. The father of eight sons, three of whom were already sitting with him among the elders, with the youngest, Maxim, like a mighty oak among maples, standing out among the Tukhlya youth. Tall dignified in stature, stern of countenance, rich in life’s experience and knowledge of people and circumstance, Zakhar Berkut was a true portrait of the ancient patriarchs, elders and leaders of the people,

spoken about in our centuries-old songs and tales. In spite of his venerable age, Zakhar Berkut was still a strong and robust man. True, he had long ceased working in the fields or driving the sheep to the mountain meadows, nor did he join the hunt in the depths of the forest—still he never stopped working. The orchard, the apiary and the gathering of herbs—these were his beloved pastimes. No sooner did spring arrive in the Tukhlya mountains that Zakhar Berkut was in his orchard—digging, clearing, pruning, grafting, and replanting. The village inhabitants were amazed at his knowledge of orchard culture and were even more amazed that he didn't hide his knowledge, but gladly shared it with everyone, teaching encouraging all who were interested. His apiary was in the forest and every nice day found Zakhar Berkut among his hives, though the road was difficult and rather far. But for the villagers it was his knowledge of herbal remedies that won for Zakhar Berkut their greatest regard. During the period between Whitsuntide and the Feast of Ivan Kupal Zakhar Berkut with his youngest son Maxim would go into the mountains for a few weeks to gather medicinal herbs. True, the clean and simple customs of the people of the time, the fresh Tukhlya air, the spacious and healthy dwellings and the continuous, though by no means excessive work—all these together protected the people from frequent and contagious diseases. More often there were injuries and wounds that positively no healer could as quickly or effectively remedy than Zakhar Berkut.

But it wasn't to these things that Zakhar Berkut gave the main attention of his declining years. "Life has value only to such time as man is able to help others," he often said. "When he becomes a burden to others and brings with him no benefits, then he ceases to be a man, he becomes a hindrance and is not worthy of further life. Deliver me, God, from ever becoming a burden to others and eat benevolent, even though 'well-deserved' bread." These words were the guiding golden thread in Zakhar Berkut's life. All that he did, said and thought, he did, said and thought with the view of the greatest good and benefit for others, and first of all—for the community. The community was his life, the whole purpose of his being. While yet a young man he saw that the bears and wild boars

very often mutilated and crippled cattle and people, so he decided to learn how to heal these wounds. Leaving his father's home, he set out on a far, unknown journey, to one celebrated sorcerer who, rumour had it, was able to magically charm away an arrow and blood. The magical incantations of this healer, however, turned out to be useless. On arrival, Zakhar Berkut promised this man ten martens as payment for teaching him his incantations. The sorcerer agreed, but it wasn't enough for Zakhar to learn blindly, he wanted to be convinced, first of all, that the sorcerer's remedies were good. He drew out his knife and gave himself a deep wound in his thigh.

"Now, charm it well!" he said to the astonished healer.

The incantation didn't work.

"Ha," said the sorcerer, "it isn't successful because you inflicted the wound on yourself. One can't cure wound like that!"

"Well, it's obvious that your incantation is nonsense and I want none of it. I must have a formula that wouldn't ask if a wound is self-inflicted, but would heal it however it happened."

And then and there Zakhar Berkut left the sorcerer and went on to search out better healers. For a long time he wandered through mountain and valley until a year had passed and he came across a group of roving hermit monks.* Among them was one, a centenarian, who had for many years lived on Mount Athos in Greece and had there read many ancient Greek manuscripts. This monk was able to miraculously heal wounds and was prepared to teach his art to anyone who would live with him a year in good harmony and would prove himself a man of generous heart and purity of spirit. Many students had already come to the ancient, always melancholy, and continuously mournful monk, but he liked none of them, and none had lived with him the specified year to learn the secrets of

*By hermit, monks, I do not mean the historic Manyavsky hermitage, founded by Job of Kniaginitza in the early 17th century; what I am referring to is the folk tradition about the first apostles in the Carpathian foothills—monks from the Kiev Cave Monastery. Their pilgrimage and settlement in the mountains of Kolomiya is described by Anton Mogilnitsky in his long poem *The Manyavsky Hermitage*; the author based it partly on his own fantasy, and partly on folk tradition.—*Ivan Franko*.

healing. Zakhar Berkut, on hearing of this doctor, was determined to serve this trial. Arriving at the monastery, he begged to be taken to the old man Akintiy and frankly told him the reason for his coming. The grey-bearded, morose ancient, accepted him without argument and Zakhar stayed not one year, but all of three years. He returned from his wandering a new man. His love for the community became more fervent and strong, his words flowed in a clear, crystal wave, calm, wise, strong as steel and sharp as a razor against all falsehood. During the four years of his travels Zakhar Berkut got to know the world, was in Halych and in Kiev, saw the princes and their deeds, got acquainted with warriors and merchants. His simple, open mind absorbed all that he saw and heard, seed to seed, into the treasury of his memory as material to be meditated upon. He returned not only a doctor but a citizen. Having seen how the princes and boyars exerted themselves to weaken and undermine the system of free communities in the villages so as to more easily turn the disunited and divided people into servants and slaves, Zakhar Berkut was convinced that there was no other deliverance or hope for his brother peasants, except in good laws and wise leadership, in the development of community affairs, community friendship and in unity. On the other hand, he had heard much from the old man Akintiy and other men of experience about the community order in Northern Rus, in Novgorod, Pskov, and about the prosperity and well-being of the people there. All this inflamed his ardent spirit with desire to give his whole life to the improvement and strengthening of good community relations in his native Tukhlya.

Seventy years had passed since those days. Like an ancient and mighty oak stood Zakhar Berkut among the younger generations and could now see the fruits of his many years of labour. And certainly, he could not look at them without pleasure. The Tukhlya community stood as one man, together in work and in sharing joy and sorrow. The community made its own laws and settled its own affairs in all matters. Community land and community forests needed no watchmen—the community itself, together and always, guarded its possessions with care. There were no poor among them: the land supplied food

for all, while the community granaries and barns were always open to those who needed anything. The princes and their boyars looked at this life in which they had no place, and in which they were unnecessary, with an envious eye. The prince's tax collector descended into the Tukhlya valley once a year and the community went to great pains to rid themselves of this unpleasant government guest as soon as possible—within a day or two he left, loaded with all kinds of goods—because the Tukholians paid their taxes, for the most part, with natural produce. But in Tukhlya the collector of the prince's taxes did not have such absolute power as in other villages. The Tukhlya people carefully considered what belonged to the tax collector, and what to the prince, and didn't allow him to take mean advantage of them.

Zakhar Berkut's influence, however, was not evident and notable only in Tukhlya; he was known for several miles around on both the Rus and Hungarian sides of the border. And he was known not only as an excellent doctor who cured wounds and other ills, but as an excellent orator and adviser who "when he spoke it was as though God himself stepped into the heart", and when he gave advice to one man or to the whole community, a whole common of elders could give none better. For a long time Zakhar Berkut had been convinced that just as a man alone within the community was weak and helpless, so a community in itself was weak, and only in the mutual understanding and mutual action of many neighbouring communities could they be strong and individually strengthen their independent community life. So that always, while working in the interests of his Tukhlya community, Zakhar also remembered neighbouring settlements. While still a young man he often visited these communities, attended their assemblies, and endeavoured to understand their needs and their people. Always his advice and suggestions had one aim—the strengthening of friendly, comradely and brotherly relations between the people and the communities in the neighbourhood. The ties at this moment were vital and strong; the corrosive schemes of the princes and boyars were as yet unable to tear them apart entirely—so that it was no wonder that under the leadership of a dedicated and greatly beloved man like Zakhar Berkut,

experienced in community affairs, these ties were regularly renewed and strengthened. The ties with the Rus communities situated in Hungary were of particular importance for Tukhlya, indeed for all the Stry highlands, rich in wood and sheepskins, but poor in grain which was plentiful beyond the mountains. One of Zakhar's main efforts, therefore, was the construction of a safe and straight road from Tukhlya to the Hungarian side. He pondered this matter for many years, crossing the length and breadth of the Tukhlya mountain meadows, deliberating where it would be best, safest and least costly to build such a road. At the same time he sought, slowly and unceasingly, to convince the highland communities on both sides of the Beskidy ranges of this idea. At every opportunity, at every community assembly, he argued the advantages and necessity of such a road, till in the end he was successful.

More than ten communities of the district, near and far, sent their chosen representatives to Tukhlya for a community council, where the building of the new road was to be decided. It was a joyful day for Zakhar. He not only gladly agreed to draw up the plans as to where the road should go, but for the whole period of the road building, took upon himself the supervision of the work. What's more, he sent four of his sons to work, and the fifth son, a blacksmith, was constantly present with his travelling workshop to keep all the necessary tools in repair. Every community sent several workers supplied with their own bread and food, and under the untiring direction of Zakhar, the road was built within a year. Its benefits were immediately evident to all. The ties with the still wealthy, at the time, Hungarian-Rus communities revitalised the entire highlands. There was a lively and mutually beneficial exchange in the abundance of labour: sheepskin coats went over there, cheese and whole flocks of sheep for slaughter, while in return came wheat, rye and cloth. It wasn't only for these exchanges in trade, however, that the Tukhlya road was convenient; it was also the conveyor of all kind of news about the communities on both sides of the Beskidy ranges, a living link that brought together the children of one people, broken up into two nations.

True, the Tukhlya road was not the first such thread. An older, and once more famous, highway was the Duklya

road. But for many reasons it was not popular with the Halych-Rus princes, less perhaps because it maintained a vital link between the communities on both sides of the Beskidy and strengthened in one or another group the laws of their free communities, but rather because the Magyar kings and princes and their armies very often used it to invade Red Rus. That was why the Halych and Peremyshl princes attempted to at least fortify this entrance into their borders, if not close it completely. Of course, such "fortifications", carried out by the state and for the aims of the state, could only turn out to be harmful to the people and to the autonomy of their communities. The princes established their boyars all along the Duklya road, granted them vast areas of community land and possessions, and gave them the responsibility of guarding the Duklya Pass. In case of military attack they were to detain the foe with their troops, enlisted from the surrounding settlements, and with barricades constructed of stone and cut down trees to obstruct the road and make it, in one way or another, impassable for the enemy troops.

It is quite understandable that the whole burden of these obligations fell on the peasantry and their communities. They not only lost a portion of their ages-long holdings of land, which was being settled by the boyars, but also had to, besides this, supply the boyars with guards, soldiers and servants, build the barricades, and in times of strife be completely subjected to boyar command and boyar justice. It was natural that the boyar, having been given such broad privileges, became a power in the village, and quite naturally concerned with the strengthening of that power. To extend their holdings, the boyars put up their own barricades over the roadway and demanded, even in peaceful times, payment from all travellers for its use. This, in time, almost stopped the traffic along the Duklya road, thus weakening the link between the communities. At the same time it led to the decline of the free meetings and councils within the communities themselves. The boyar rule couldn't and wouldn't suffer another power in the community, so that it was inevitable that this state of affairs led to long and heavy struggles, which in the end, brought no advantage to the area. True, in the

period being written about, the struggle was far from terminated, and in some places, in far-removed villages, had not even started. These were, one can say positively, the most fortunate corners of the Rus land in that day. To these fortunate, secluded corners belonged the Tukhlya valley, and the road built over the Beskidy to Hungary, insured their well-being for a long time. The Tukhlya road had not yet fallen into the hands of the boyars, it was free to all, though the people in its neighbouring villages, both in the Rus and on the Hungarian side, were diligent in guarding it from any enemy attacks. They notified each other about any threatening danger, and in this way it was promptly and quietly repelled by the united action of all the interested communities. It was not surprising, therefore, that Tukhlya, lying as it did along the roadway between Hungary and Pidhirye, continually improved the well-being of its people, as well as its association with the free communities. It stimulated and supported, by its example, the entire surrounding highlands and particularly those villages where the boyars had settled and in which the ruinous struggles between the old settlers and the new overlords had already begun. Zakhar Berkut's fervour and great authority contributed much to the fact that the greater number of the communities stood firmly in this struggle. The boyars were unable to consolidate their power as rapidly as they wished and were forced to live in good relationships with the people, subordinating themselves in times of peace to their village tribunals, sitting alongside the elders as equal among equals. This situation, however, was very disagreeable to the boyars; they awaited a wartime situation with all the eagerness of awaiting a festival, because then hope smiled at them—they could then immediately grasp all power into their hands and seize this opportunity to destroy completely the hated community system, and having once seized power, it would remain in their hands. But there were no wars. The ruler of Red Rus, Prince Danilo Romanovich, though favourable toward the boyars—not as his father was—was unable to give them much help, occupied as he was in the struggle for the king's crown or in wrangles with other princes who had designs on the Grand Dukedom of the Kiev throne. Least of all could he help with the security of his land against a

new enemy, unknown until now— the Mongols—who some ten years ago had appeared like a terrible thunder cloud on the eastern borders of Rus, in the Don steppelands, and defeated the assembled Rus princes in a terrible, bloody battle on the Kalka River. From the Kalka, however, as though suddenly frightened by the bravery of the Ruthenes, they turned back, and now, though ten years had passed, there was no sign of them. But a quiet anxiety remained among the people,—as if a hot breeze flew over the ripening rye and no one knew whether it would die down or bring with it the dread hailstorm. Those who knew least about it or least expected it were the princes and the boyars. After their defeat at the Kalka they went on with their past activity—wrangling about succession to the throne and undermining the free and self-governing community social order. Foolish! They were uprooting the oak that fed them with its acorns! If they had turned their power and their forces toward the strengthening of these self-governing communities instead of weakening them, strengthening the vital links between them, our Rus would not have fallen under the arrows and axes of the Mongols, but would have withstood their invasion like a deep-rooted giant oak withstands an autumn gale.

Fortunate was Tukhlya, for the insatiable eyes of the princes and boyars had somehow overlooked it as yet. Was it because it was so far removed from the world, among the mountains and cliffs, or perhaps because there were no great riches within its boundaries. Be that as it may, the boyars seemed to have little desire to crowd themselves into that secluded place. But even this good fortune was not to last. One fine day, the boyar Tuhar Vovk suddenly appeared in the Tukhlya mountains, and without saying a word to anyone, began to build a home for himself on the hill over the Opir River, at some distance from Tukhlya, but on Tukhlya community land. The Tukholians, out of surprise, were silent at first and did nothing to stop the new visitor, but later began to ask him who he was, where he was from and what was he here for?

“I’m a boyar of Prince Danilo,” he answered proudly. “I have been granted the lands and forests of Tukhlya in return for my services to the prince.”

“But these lands and forests belong to the people!” the

Tukholians answered.

“This has nothing to do with me,” the boyar returned, “go to the prince and seek a claim. I have his decree—and that’s all I want to know! ”

The Tukholians shook their heads at these words and said nothing. In the meantime the boyar did everything arrogantly bragging of the prince’s kindness and the prince’s behest, though he didn’t, in the beginning, oppress the Tukhlya people or interfere in their community affairs. The Tukholians, and especially the young people, whether from curiosity or from their customary hospitality, met the boyar quite often at first and rendered him some small services; then suddenly, as though cut off by an axe, their visits ceased and they very obviously avoided him. The boyar was surprised at this and finally angered, and he began to perform all kinds of malicious acts against the Tukholians. His manor stood just above the Tukhlya road, and taking example from other boyars, he erected an enormous barrier across it and demanded payment of a toll from all passing through. But the Tukhlya folk were a stubborn people. They immediately sensed that this was the beginning of a decisive struggle and determined, on Zakhar Berkut’s advice, to stand firmly and persistently by their rights. A week after the barricade was erected the Tukhlya people’s council sent their representatives to Tuhar Vovk and they asked him a short, but firmly put question:

“What are you doing, boyar? Why are you barricading the road?”

“Because I wish to do so! ” answered the boyar haughtily. “If you have a grievance then go and complain about me to the prince.”

“But this is not the prince’s roadway, it’s a community road! ”

“That is none of my concern! ”

With this the representatives had to retreat, but immediately after they left, a whole band of village youths with axes arrived from Tukhlya and quietly dismantled and cut up the barrier into small pieces, piled it up and set up a huge bonfire not far from the boyar’s manor. The boyar fumed inside the house, cursed the dirty *smerds*, but didn’t have the courage to oppose them and didn’t immediately put up another barrier. The first attack on community

rights, was repulsed. But the Tukholians did not rejoice betimes—they well knew that this was but the first attack and that they could expect others. And that is exactly what happened. One day the herdsmen came running into Tukhlya proclaiming the sad news that the boyar's servants were driving their sheep off the best community meadows. The herdsmen had barely told their story when the community foresters arrived and said that the boyar was measuring and staking out a huge piece of the finest community forest. Again the community council sent their representatives to Tuhar Vovk.

“Why, boyar, are you mistreating the community?”

“I'm only taking that which the prince has granted me.”

“But these forests don't belong to the prince, they belong to the community. How could he give away something that isn't his to give away?”

“Then go and complain about the prince,” said the boyar and turned away.

From that time on there was truly a war between the boyar and the Tukholians. One day the Tukholians would drive the boyar's flocks out of their mountain meadows, another day the boyar's servants would drive the Tukhlya flocks out. The forest seized by the boyar was guarded by both the village and the boyar's foresters, among whom quarrels and fights broke out more than once. These occurrences angered the boyar more and more and he finally gave an order to kill the Tukhlya cattle found on the meadows he had appropriated, and a forester found in the appropriated forest he ordered to be bound to a tree and beaten with thorn switches till he was nearly dead. This last incident was already too much for the Tukhlya villagers. Many voices spoke up that the boyar be accused, by law of ancient custom, of being an insubordinate and malevolent citizen, a bandit and a thief; that he be banished beyond the borders of the community lands and his manor be destroyed completely. A notable number of the villagers agreed to this, and it would have been difficult indeed for the boyar, if Zakhar Berkut hadn't expressed his opinion that it wouldn't be correct to condemn anybody without a hearing, and that justice demanded that the boyar be called before the people's assembly, and be given the opportunity of explaining his

actions. Then the community could deal with him in complete calmness and with deliberation. The Tukholians accepted this advice.

Certainly nobody at today's meeting realised the significance of this moment as did Zakhar Berkut. He saw that his life's work was being weighed in the balance of the people's verdict. If this verdict was concerned only with justice, then Zakhar would have been peaceful and would have placed his confidence completely on the good sense of his fellow villagers. Here, however, they were faced with deliberate—for the first time in a people's assembly—foreign, completely different, and immensely critical circumstances which complicated the affair almost to hopelessness. Zakhar well understood that the verdict, favourable or unfavourable for the boyar, threatened the community with great danger. A favourable verdict meant the acceptance, not so much of the right, but of the power on the boyar's side, once and for all it would mean the abasement of the community before him, give into his hands not only the appropriated forests and meadows, but the entire community. It would be the first painful breach in their free community social order over whose re-establishment and strengthening he had unceasingly laboured throughout seventy years. An unfavourable verdict, which would decree the banishment of the boyar, threatened also with great danger. What if the boyar was able to incite the prince, awaken his anger, convince him that the Tukholians were rebels? This could bring down a great storm and even the complete ruination of Tukhlya, similar to other verdicts that had already ruined a number of communities whose princes had recognised them as rebels and handed over to the boyars and their armies for plunder and destruction. Either of these difficult decisions before the assembly filled old Zakhar's heart with great sorrow and he prayed with deep sincerity to the great Dazhboh, the Sun, that he enlighten him and his community, and help them find the true path out of these difficulties.

“Good citizens!” so Zakhar began his speech, “I will not conceal from you—and by the way you are well aware of it yourselves—that difficult and important decisions await us in today's community tribunal. When I see what is happening around us and the threats we are facing, then it

seems to me that our hitherto peaceful community life has been lost, never to return, that the time has come for all of us to show by our deeds, in struggle, that our community system is truly strong and good, and that it is able to withstand the coming great storm. The kind of storm is approaching us, and from more than one direction, that you know and will hear more about at today's assembly, so there is no need for me to talk about it at this time. I would only like to reveal to you and fix forever in your memory, the position which, in my opinion, you should take, firmly, to the very end. But then, neither I nor anyone else has any control over you—you will listen, or you won't—it's your will! I'll only say that today we stand at a crossroads, today we will have to choose: do we go here or there. Therefore it behooves us, mature and experienced people that we are, to clarify for ourselves that choice, the paths down which it might lead us, and the situation in which we find ourselves right now.

“Take a look, good citizens, at our assembly standard, which has for fifty years now heard our words and witnessed our deeds. Do you know what the symbols on it mean? Sainly and dignified old men, our fathers, designed it and passed its meaning on to me. ‘Zakhar,’ they said, ‘one day, at a time of threatening disaster, when life will turn a hostile face to the community and threaten its ways, then you reveal to the people what this standard means. At the same time reveal that our blessing and that of our spiritual guardian rests upon it, and that a retreat from the path that this standard points out will bring the greatest misfortune to the community and the beginning of its downfall.’ ”

Zakhar paused for a moment. His speech had made a great impression on all those present. All eyes were turned on the standard which hung on its tall pole in the stone in front of them, its silver chains of interlocking rings shining, its crimson folds fluttering as if being transfused with living blood.

“I haven't said anything to you about this before,” continued Zakhar, “because the times were peaceful. But the time has come to tell you today. Look at it, this ensign of ours! The chain was carved out of one solid trunk, strong and locked within itself, yet free in each of the

links that hold it together and ready to accept other links. This chain—it is our Rus family, which emerged from the hands of good, creative spirits. Every link in that chain represents one community, forever naturally connected with all the others, yet free within itself, living its own life and satisfying its own needs. Only this integrity and freedom within it of each individual community gives their totality its unity and freedom. Let but one link be broken, fall apart of itself— then the whole chain will fall apart, its unity shattered. This is how the downfall of free community relations in one community becomes a wound which brings illness, let alone infection, to the whole body of our sacred Rus. Woe to the people who would willingly allow themselves to become such a wound, who would not use all their strength and resources to remain healthy! Better that such a people disappear from the face of the earth, sink into a bottomless pit! ”

Zakhar’s final words, spoken in a loud, stern voice, deafened the ears of his listeners to the noise of the waterfall, which was dashing itself against the rocks just a short distance away. Like a living pillar of crystal, sparkling in the sun’s rays in all the colours of the rainbow, it appeared like a blazing streak above the heads of the assembly. Zakhar continued:

“Look again at this standard! Every link of this chain has been bound with silver into a beautiful design. These bindings do not burden the circles but decorate them and give them durability. In the same way every people have their own treasured customs and rules born of necessity, regulated by the sagacity of our wise fathers. These laws are sacred not because they are ancient or that they were established by our ancestors, but because they are free, because they do not bind any good person doing good deeds; they are binding only on those who are evil, who want to injure the community. These laws do not bind the community either, but give it the strength and the power to defend all that is good and beneficial, and destroy all that is evil and harmful. If it wasn’t for those silver bindings, the wooden links could easily be broken apart and the completeness of the chain would be lost. The same with our sacred community laws; if they are broken, the whole community would perish. Take heed then, good

citizens! Thieving hands are stretching out to tear the silver bindings off our chain, to weaken and trample the social order under which we have lived so well, under their feet! ”

“No, we won’t allow this! ” shouted the crowd, unanimously. “We’ll defend our freedom to the last drop of our blood! ”

“Good, my children! ” Zakhar Berkut was deeply moved. “That’s the way it should be. Believe me, this is the spirit of our Guardian speaking through you! It is through his influence that you have guessed the meaning of the symbols fluttering in our banner. Why is it red? It represents blood. The community must defend its freedom, its sacred system, to its last drop. And believe me, the moment that blood will be demanded from us is not far! Let us be prepared to shed it in our defence! ”

At that moment all eyes, as though at a signal, turned in the direction of the village.

There, on the roadway leading out of the village alongside the waterfall toward the mountains, came a group of magnificently uniformed, armed people. It was Tuhar Vovk and his consort coming to the assembly in all their splendour. The boyar, disregarding the warm spring day, was arrayed in full battle dress; he wore a coat of mail of shining steel, and the same encased his hips and legs, while a shiny bronze helmet with a waving plume of cock feathers adorned his head. A heavy combat sword swayed at his side, a bow and a quiver of arrows hung across his shoulder and an axe with a broad, glittering blade and bronzed butt protruded from his belt. Over all these fearsome weapons, and as a sign of his good intentions, he wore a wolfskin cape, with the wolf’s head made into a clasp across his chest, and the paws with their sharp nails encircling his waistline. Surrounding him walked ten soldiers, archers and axemen, dressed in like wolfskins, but without armour. The assembled Tukholians instinctively recoiled on seeing the approaching wolflike soldiers; all understood that this, precisely, was the enemy that had pretensions to their freedom and independence. While they were still approaching, Zakhar concluded his speech:

“Here comes the boyar who is boasting that the prince, out of kindness, granted him our lands, our freedom,

ourselves. See how arrogantly he steps forward so proud of the prince's kindness, in the understanding that he is a servant to him, that he is his slave! But we don't need kindness from the boyar, and there is no reason for us to become slaves—that is why he hates us and calls us *smerds*. We know, however, that his arrogance is absurd, and that arrogance does not become a man who is truly free, but rather a calm dignity and reason. Let us preserve our dignity and reason in our dealings with him, so that we do not humiliate him, but that he himself will feel humiliated in the depths of his conscience. I have finished."

A quiet murmur of satisfaction and spirited decisiveness rippled through the crowd. Zakhar sat down in his place. For a moment silence reigned on the common as Tuhar Vovk neared the assembly.

"Good health to you, people! " he greeted, touching his hand to his helmet, but leaving it on his head.

"Good health to you, too, boyar! " answered the crowd. Tuhar Vovk stepped forward with a proud, confident step, till he stood before them, and then, barely sweeping his gaze over them, said:

"You called me to appear before you—and here I am. What do you want of me?"

The words were uttered in a sharp, contemptuous tone, by which the boyar obviously wanted to show the gathering his superiority. At the same time he didn't look at the people, but played with his axe as if delighting in the glitter of its sharp edge and its butt, clearly showing his deep contempt of the assembly and its importance.

"We have called you, boyar, before this people's tribunal, so that before we pass sentence on your conduct, you would be given an opportunity to speak. By what right and to what purpose are you seeking to harm our community?"

"Before the people's tribunal?" Tuhar Vovk repeated as if astonished, and turned to face Zakhar Berkut. "I am in the service of the prince, and I am a boyar. Nobody has the power to try me, other than the prince himself and boyars equal to me."

"As to whose servant you are, boyar, we will not dispute, it is not our concern. But as to your right, we will discuss that later. For now, if you will be so kind, tell us

from whence you came into our village?"

"From Halych, the capital city of the prince."

"And who ordered you to come here?"

"Your overlord and mine—the prince Danilo Romanovich."

"Speak for yourself and not for us, boyar! We are a free people and know no overlord. And why did your overlord send you into our village?"

The boyar's face flushed red with anger at Zakhar's words. For a moment he hesitated, as if debating whether he should continue answering his questions, then restrained himself and answered:

"He ordered me to be the protector of his lands and his subjects, administrator and commander of Tukhlya, and rewarded me for my faithful service by giving me and my descendants the Tukhlya lands in perpetuity. Here is his decree with his seal and signature." With these words the boyar, with a proud toss of his head, removed the prince's decree from behind his wide belt and held it aloft to show the assembly.

"Put away your decree, boyar," said Zakhar calmly, "we cannot read it, and the seal of your prince is not a law as far as we are concerned. Better that you yourself tell us, who this prince of yours is."

"What is this?" cried the boyar, amazed. "You do not know of the Prince Danilo?"

"No, we do not know any prince."

"The ruler of all the lands, all the settlements and cities from the San to the Dnieper, from the Carpathians to the mouth of the Buh River?"

"We have never seen him, and he's not our ruler. The shepherd is the ruler of his flock, he guards it from the wolf, drives it to a cool stream in the heat of the day, and to a warm, secure sheep-fold in the cool of the evening. Does the prince do this for his dependents?"

"The prince does even more for them," answered the boyar. "He gives them wise laws and wise judges to administer them, sends them his faithful servants to defend them from their enemies."

"You are not telling the truth, boyar," observed Zakhar sternly. "See, the sun in the sky has hidden its bright face so as not to listen to your dishonest words! Wise laws

came to us not from your prince, but from our fathers and grandfathers. The prince's wise judges we have yet to see, and we have lived peacefully, in harmony and with order, ruling ourselves with our people's wisdom. Our fathers taught us long ago that one man is a fool, and a people's court is a just court. Our fathers lived without princes' administrators and as you can see, our homes are not lying waste and our children have not been taken into slavery by any enemy."

"That's the way it has been till now, but it won't be like that from now on."

"How it will be from now on we don't know, and you, boyar, don't know either. But tell us one more thing— is your prince a just man?"

"The whole world knows and marvels at his fairness."

"And he sent you here, I suppose, so that you would dispense justice in our mountains?"

The boyar was confused by this straightforward question, but after a moment of indecision, answered:

"Yes."

"And what do you think, boyar, would a just man unjustly harm his subjects?"

The boyar was silent.

"Can he, with unjust deeds, plant justice in their hearts, and in injuring them, win for himself their love and respect?"

The boyar remained silent, playing with the tip of his axe.

"You see, boyar," concluded Zakhar, "your lips are silent, but your conscience tells you that it cannot be. Yet your so just prince is doing exactly that to us, whom he has never seen and doesn't know, whose welfare and happiness do not concern him, who have never done him any harm but to the contrary, pay him a rich tribute every year. How could he do this, boyar?"

Tuhar Vovk flashed an angry glance at Zakhar, and answered:

"You are prattling foolishness, old man. The prince would not wrong anybody! "

"But he has harmed us with that same decree of which you boast so much! Just think, wouldn't I be wronging you if against your wishes I were to take off your coat of

mail and give it to my son? This is exactly what your prince has done to us. What your coat of mail is to you, so our land and forest is to us. We have used them and guarded them like the eyes in our head for centuries—and now suddenly you arrive in the name of the prince and say: ‘This is mine! My prince gave it to me as a reward for my great service on his behalf!’ and turn out our herdsmen, kill our forester on our own land! Tell me, can we then consider your prince a just man?”

“You are mistaken, old man!” said Tuhar Vovk. “All of us—we are all the property of the prince, with everything that we own, with our cattle and our land. Only the prince is free, and we are his slaves. His kindness—that is our freedom. He can do with us as he wills.”

Like the blow of an axe to the head, so these words stunned Zakhar Berkut. He lowered his grey head and was silent for a long moment, not knowing what to say. The whole assembly stood in deathly gloom. Finally Zakhar stood up. His face was bright. Raising his hand up to the sun, he said:

“O bright Sun! Kind and beneficent free body of light, don’t listen to these terrible words this man has dared to utter before your face! Don’t listen! Forget that they have been said on our earth, so far undefiled by such thoughts! And don’t punish us for them! Because you won’t let this go by without punishment, that I know. If there, in Halych, there are many such people around the prince, then wipe them off the face of the earth. But in punishing them, don’t destroy the whole of our people along with them!”

Saying this, Zakhar was appeased. He sat down and turned again to the boyar:

“We have heard your views, boyar,” he said. “Don’t repeat them before us again, let them remain with you. Now listen to what we think of your prince. Listen and don’t get angry! You can see and hear for yourself that we do not see him as a father and guardian. A father knows his child, his needs and desires, but he doesn’t know us, nor does he want to know. A guardian protects his subjects from the enemy and from all other harm—the prince protects us neither from rain, nor from tempest, hail, nor from the bear—and these have been our worst

enemies. He does, however, proclaim that he protects us from the Magyar armies. But how does he protect us? By sending us enemies who are still worse—his greedy boyars and their soldiers. The Magyars attack, plunder whatever they can, and go away; when the boyar attacks, he remains, and is not satisfied with whatever spoils are available, but would be happy to turn us all into his slaves for eternity. Neither as father or protector do we see your prince, but as God's punishment sent to us for our sins, and for which we have to pay with our annual tribute. The less we know about him and he about us, the better for us. But if the whole of our Rus could somehow rid ourselves of him and his chiefs today, then it would certainly be fortunate and great! *

Tuhar Vovk listened to the passionate words of the old speaker with strange feelings. Though brought up in the prince's court and spoiled by corruption and baseness, he was after all a warrior, a soldier and a man, and must have felt, in his heart, at least a spark of that feeling that so strongly moved the heart of Zakhar Berkut. At the same time he was far from sincere in his words about the limitless power of the prince; his soul also rebelled against this power from time to time, but now he wanted to conceal, behind the might of the prince, his own desires for like powers. No wonder, then, that the words of Zakhar Berkut sank more deeply into his heart than he wished. For the first time, he looked at him in sincere wonder, at the same time feeling compassion for this giant of a man whose defeat, in his opinion, was close and inevitable.

"Old man," he said, "I grieve for your grey hair and youthful heart. You have lived a long time in this world, perhaps too long, it seems to me. Living in the past with

*The views expressed by Zakhar Berkut here could be considered typical of the views of the people of the period about the princes and their bloody intermediaries at the beginning of feudalism. We recall that similar opinions were also voiced by our chronicler in a story about the singer Mytusa, whom Prince Danilo ordered to be arrested and put to death for his mutinous speeches and rebelliousness. It is understood that in preparing these viewpoints and in characterising the period and its people, we don't want to belittle the consequence and importance of Prince Danilo, who among all the princes of the Halych-Rus lands was distinguished as an unusual man, sympathetic and in his own way, and for his time, quite humane and endowed with political wisdom.— *Ivan Franko*.

your heart and in the fervent thoughts of youth, you have ceased to understand our new, contemporary times, their ideas and requirements. That which was in the past does not have to be in the present, nor forever. All that lives—passes. Outlived also are your youthful ideas about freedom. Difficult times are coming, old man! They inevitably demand a single, powerful ruler in our land, a man who would unite and grasp in his hands the strength of all the people for their defence against the enemy which is nearing from the rising sun. You don't know all this, old man, and you think that the old times are still here."

"You are again mistaken, boyar," answered Zakhar Berkut. "It is not seemly for an old man to sink into youthful dreams and close his eyes to the present. And it would be three times worse for him to disregard what is good, because it is old, and grasp what is bad, because it is new. This is the custom of the young, and that of poorly brought up young. You are intimating that I don't know what is going on about us. In the meantime it isn't yet known which one of us knows it better or in greater detail. You hinted to me about a terrible enemy who threatens us from the rising sun and expressed the opinion that the approach of this enemy demands the gathering of the entire strength of our people into one pair of hands. Now I will tell you what I know about that enemy. True, boyar, yesterday you received a messenger from the prince, who informed you of a new attack on our land by the terrible Mongols and about how, after a long resistance, they occupied Kiev and destroyed it completely. Now like a heavy cloud, they are spreading out toward our Rus lands. We knew this, boyar, a week ago, and we knew about the prince's messenger sent into this territory, and about the news he was bringing. The prince's messenger came a bit late—our messengers travel much faster. The Mongols have long ago conquered our Red Rus, destroyed many cities and towns and are now divided into two streams. One has gone to the west, probably to Sandomierz, into Poland, and the second is coming along the Stry Valley in our direction. Isn't it true, boyar, that you didn't know this?"

Tuhar Vovk looked at old Zakhar with amazement, almost with fear.

"How do you know all this, old man?" he asked.

"This I'll tell you also, so that you know what strength there is in the community and in its free association. We are united with all the mountain settlements; they are obligated to us, and we to them to bring each other all news important to our lives as quickly as possible. The Pidhirye settlements are associated with further settlements in the Pokutye and Podilya, so that everything, in one way or another important to us, whatever happens in our Red Rus, goes like lightning from community to community."

"What good are these news when you can't help yourselves?" blurted the boyar, haughtily.

"What you've said is true, boyar," answered Zakhar, sadly. "The Podilya and Pokutye communities cannot help themselves because they've been stripped and weakened by the princes and the boyars who do not allow them to have their own arms, or learn how to use them. So you see, boyar, what this means: unite the strength of the people under one ruler! To unite the strength of the people under one ruler means to weaken the strength of the people. To give one man complete power over the people means that every community must be deprived of its freedom, all ties between them must be broken, the community disarmed. Then the road into our country is made open to all kinds of Mongols. Take a look at our Rus land now! Your ruler, your mighty Prince Danilo has disappeared somewhere without trace. Instead of turning to his people, giving them back their freedom and making them into a vital, undefeatable barrier against the Mongol invasion, he has run to the Hungarian king to beg for help while the Mongols are ruining his country. But the Uhryns* are in no hurry to help us, though they themselves are being threatened by the same invasion. Now your Danilo has disappeared somewhere and who knows, maybe in a short while he'll turn up in the camp of the Mongol Khan as his faithful vassal, and at the price of slavery and humiliation before a stronger, buy himself power over the weaker."

The boyar listened to these words, his head already

*Magyars.—*Ed.*

making plans. What to do? How to take advantage of this situation?

“You say the Mongols are threatening invasion of these mountains?”

Zakhar smiled knowingly at this question.

“Yes, boyar.”

“And what are you thinking of doing? Will you give up or fight?”

“We can’t give up, because all who give up are driven into their army, and that into the front lines, into the thick of the battles.”

“That means that you will defend yourselves.”

“We’ll try with all our strength.”

“If so then accept me as your commander. I’ll lead you into battle against the Mongols! ”

“Wait a moment, boyar, we haven’t arrived at choosing a commander as yet. You haven’t yet cleared yourself of your conduct against our community. Your generous gesture of service to the community we will accept, but our ancestors taught us that one must approach a clean action with clean hands. Will your hands be clean for such an action, boyar?”

Tuhar Vovk was somewhat confused by this unexpected turn, and finally said:

“Old man, citizens, let us forget old offences. The enemy is approaching, so let us unite our forces against him! In seeking justice for your wrongs you can only harm the cause and gain no good for yourselves! ”

“No boyar, don’t say that! We are not seeking justice for our wrongs, we are seeking the truth. You came to us on a lie, boyar, and have conducted yourself with us deceitfully—so how can we trust you to command us in a war against the Mongols?”

“Old man, I see that you have determined to irritate me! ”

“Boyar, take care! This is a people’s tribunal and not an entertainment! Tell me—having settled on Tukholian land, did you wish to become a member of the community?”

“I was sent here by the prince as a commander.”

“We have told you that we don’t acknowledge your proclaimed right over us, and particularly your right to our

lands. Don't touch, boyar, our lands or our people and then, maybe, we'll accept you into our community as an equal among equals."

"So that's it!" cried Tuhar Vovk in anger, "so this is your justice! So I would have to disregard the favour of the prince and beg favours of the *smerds*?"

"Well, boyar, there is no other way in which you can become our citizen, and one who doesn't belong to our people, the people do not wish to tolerate among themselves!"

"Don't want to tolerate?" Tuhar Vovk cried derisively.

"Our ancestors told us: a harmful and unnecessary member of the community, a robber, a horse thief, or a stranger who would take lands against the will of the people, must be driven out with his family beyond the borders of the community, his home destroyed and razed to the ground."

"Ha-ha-ha!" the boyar gave a forced laugh. "You would dare to equate me, a boyar of the prince, rewarded by his kindness for my services, with robbers and horse thieves?"

"Well, boyar, you tell us in good conscience—are you treating us any better than a robber? You are taking our land, our greatest and only wealth; you are driving away our people and killing them, shooting our cattle! Is this the action of an honourable man?"

"You must cease such talk, old man! I cannot listen to it for this is an insult to my honour."

"Stop, boyar, I have not yet finished," said Zakhar Berkut calmly. "You have mentioned your honour, and time and again, you have talked of your great services. Be good enough to tell us about them so that we may also respect them."

"I shed my blood in twenty battles!"

"To shed your blood, boyar, is not yet a service. A robber also sheds his blood more than once, and he is hung for it. Tell us, against whom and for whom did you battle?"

"Against the Kiev prince, against the Volhynian, Polish and Mazowsze princes..."

"Enough, boyar! These wars—they are a disgrace, not a service, either for you or for the princes. These were

nothing but predatory wars.”

“I also fought against the Mongols on the Kalka.”

“And how did you fight against them?”

“What do you mean, how? I fought the way I was supposed to fight, without retreating from my position until I was wounded and taken into bondage.”

“Now that was a good thing you said, but we don’t know how true it is.”

“If you don’t know then don’t mix into what you don’t know.”

“Wait, boyar, don’t jeer at our ignorance. We will try to be convinced.” With these words Zakhar rose and turning to the people, said:

“Good people, you have heard the boyar’s confession?”

“Yes.”

“Can anyone bear witness for or against him?”

“I can,” came a voice from the throng.

The boyar jumped as if struck by an arrow on hearing that voice, and for the first time he looked closely, and in some alarm, at the assembled.

“Anyone who can give evidence, let him come before the assembly and do so,” said Zakhar.

A man, not yet old but crippled, without an arm and a leg, came out of the crowd. His face was furrowed with deep scars. This was Mitko Voyak, as the people called him. A few years ago he had come into this community on a crutch and told them a terrible tale about the Mongols, about the battle on the Kalka, the defeat of the Rus princes and the death of those who were captured, and suffocated, under the boards on which the Mongolian military commanders sat down to feast. He, Mitko, had been in that battle in the company of one boyar and had, together with him, been taken into bondage from which by some miracle he escaped. For a long time he had wandered through the villages and towns of sacred Rus, till finally he came to Tukhlya. The place appealed to him and he remained to live here. Because with his one hand he could weave beautiful baskets, and knew many songs and stories about far-off lands, the people accepted him among them, looked after him and clothed him in turn, liking and respecting him for his wounds, acquired in the war against the invaders, and for his honest, happy character. It

was this Mitko who came out of the crowd to give evidence against the boyar.

"Tell us, soldier Mitko," Zakhar began, "do you know this boyar against whom you want to give evidence?"

"Yes, I know him," answered Mitko firmly. "I served in his company and was in the battle on Kalka."

"What evidence do you wish to present against him?"

"Be silent, you vile slave!" cried the boyar, grown somewhat pale. "Be silent, or this will be the end of your miserable life!"

"Boyar, I am a free citizen and no longer your slave. Only my community can tell me to be quiet. I have been silent, but now I have been given the right to speak. Honest citizens! My evidence against boyar Tuhar Vovk is important and terrible. He is a trai..."

"If you have kept quiet to this day, then continue keeping quiet!" roared the boyar swinging his axe, and Mitko Voyak, his head slashed asunder, fell bleeding to the ground.

The crowd groaned and sprang to their feet. A terrible cry resounded through the common.

"Death to him! Death! He has disgraced the sacred tribunal! He has killed one of our men at the community council!"

"You filthy *smerds*!" shouted the boyar. "I have no fear of you! The same will happen to everyone who dares to touch me either by word or deed. Hey, my faithful servants, come here, beside me!"

The archers and the axemen, though pale and fearful, surrounded the boyar. Menacing, crimson with rage he stood among them with the bloodied axe in his hand. At a sign from Zakhar the crowd quieted down.

"Boyar," he spoke, "you have committed a mortal sin against God and the people. You have killed a witness on the tribunal, a citizen of our community. The evidence he wished to present against you, we haven't heard, and we don't wish to know—let your conscience be your judge. But with this murder you have acknowledged your guilt and have committed another crime. Our community can tolerate you no longer on our land. Leave us! In three days our people will come to raze your house and erase all trace of your living among us."

“Let them come! ” shouted the enraged boyar. “We’ll see who will erase whose trace. I spit on your tribunal! I’ll be glad to see whoever will approach my home! Come, my servants, let’s leave this filthy assembly! ”

So saying, the boyar and his servants left. For a long time the assembly stood silent. The younger men removed the body of Mitko Voyak.

“Good citizens,” said Zakhar, finally, “is it your will that we proceed with Tuhar Vovk as our fathers willed that we proceed with such as he?”

“Yes, yes! ” cried the crowd.

“Whom do you choose to carry out the community’s verdict?”

Ten young men were chosen, among them Maxim Berkut. It was difficult for Maxim to accept this assignment. However hateful the boyar was, he was still the father of her who had charmed his heart and his mind. She also was condemned, though innocent of her father’s guilt. But Maxim did not refuse the community’s choice of himself, for however hard it would be to carry out the assembly’s verdict, in the depths of his heart he was happy; it would give him the opportunity to see her! Maybe he could comfort her, amend in some way with his sympathy the harsh verdict of the community! ..

In the meantime the community council continued its meeting.

The messengers from the neighbouring villages were called that they might take counsel with them on how to best defend themselves against the Mongol invasion.

“We are ruined,” said the messenger from the Pidhirye settlements. “Our villages have been burned down, our cattle taken, our youth killed. Fire and destruction raged through Pidhirye. The prince gave us no help, and the boyars who oppressed us in times of peace, betrayed us in our need.”

The messengers from Korchin and Tustan said:

“We are already threatened by the enemy assault. The tents of the Mongols are seen on the plain down by Sinevidskov. They are countless in number, and we cannot even think of battle or opposition, we are fleeing into the forests and the mountains. Our boyars have started to build barricades on the highway, but are dragging their

feet. There are rumours that they want to sell our roadways to the Mongols.”

Messengers from other highland communities said: “Our harvests are poor, and now we have many refugees from the lowlands. The times are hard. Help us and our guests to live through this black hour! ”

The messengers from the Uhro-Rus communities said: “We heard that the Mongol invasion is flooding toward the Hungarian lands. Before God and the gods of our fathers, neighbours and brothers, we implore you to stem this terrible avalanche and stop it from rolling over our land! Your villages are fortresses; every cliff, every ravine represents a thousand soldiers. But once they get across the mountains no power on earth can stop them, and all of us will perish in vain. We are ready to give you all the help you will ask for—in bread and in people—only don’t give up, don’t lose hope, stand up and fight this terrible invader! ”

Then Zakhar Berkut said:

“Good people, and you good neighbouring ambassadors! All of us here are aware of the terrible cloud that is approaching our land. Our military forces fought the enemy and perished. Their strength is great and the unhappy situation in our lowlands allowed them to enter into the heart of our country, to the very threshold of our home. The princes and boyars have lost their heads or are obviously betraying their country. What must we do? How do we defend ourselves? I would think that it would be impossible for us to seek help outside our Tukhlya borders. We will defend our roadway with your help, our faithful friends. But we cannot defend other roads. That will be your task, faithful Tustan citizens, and if we should succeed in our defence, then we will gladly come to your aid.”

The Tustan messengers replied:

“We know, father Zakhar, that there is no way that you can come to defend us, and that in this dark hour it is necessary that each of us should first of all stand up for ourselves. But reflect on this. Our communities are not as fortunate as yours, because the boyars have taken over, and they are keeping watch over the barricades and passes. If they decide to hand them over to the Mongols, then

what can we do? We have but one hope and it may save us—that the Mongols won't come to your road, and in that case, after safeguarding your roadway with sentries, you will be able to come to our help."

"Eh, citizens, citizens," said Zakhar sadly and with some reproach, "there's strength in your hands, it appears, and wisdom in your heads, but your talk is childish! You are putting all your hopes in 'maybe' and in 'who knows'. You may be sure of this, that no sooner you are threatened that our whole community will come to your aid. But first of all you must protect yourselves against your own enemies—the boyars. As long as the barricades and mountain passes are in their hands, so long nobody can take a secure breath. At any moment this crafty species could sell us. It's time to awaken, sound the bells and throw off the chains in which the boyars' greed and princes' power has put your communities. As long as this isn't done, so long will we not be able to help you."

The Tustan messengers listened to Zakhar with sadly bend heads.

"Eh, father Zakhar," they said, "you know our people, and yet you talk as if you didn't. Their courage has long been broken, their freedom downtrodden. We thank you for your advice and will pass it on to our people, but will they follow it? Eh, if only you could be among them and speak to them yourself! "

"Could it really be, good neighbours, that my word would carry more weight among your people than their own needs, their own wisdom? No! If that were so, then my words would be of no help to you. It means the end of our communities, the end of Rus! "

The sun had long sunk into late afternoon when the Tukhlya people ended their assembly and returned to the village. They went without songs or shouts, sadly, both old and young, full of gloomy thoughts. What would the coming day bring them? The messengers from the neighbouring villages, invigorated in spirit and encouraged, departed. Only the council standard, the symbol of the people's strength and unity, swung high and gayly in the breeze, while the spring sky glowed with immaculate blue, as though unseeing of the earth's sorrows and anxieties.

Fire, ruin and death flowed in a broad stream across the Rus lands. The terrifying Mongol horde from the far-away Asian steppe invaded our land, and for many centuries sapped the strength of our country from its very roots, destroyed its national life. The major cities—Kiev, Kaniv and Pereyaslav—fell and were completely ruined; following them went thousands of villages and smaller towns. The Mongol general Batu-Khan, nicknamed Batyi, marched at the head of his one-hundred-thousand-man horde, driving before him four times as many prisoners, whom he forced to fight for him in the front lines of the battles. They advanced across the Rus lands in a broad sweep, wading knee-deep in human blood. There could be no thought of any kind of resistance; especially since Rus was divided and torn by strife. Here and there the towns gave some resistance from within their walls, and because the Mongols were unaccustomed to laying siege, they had to waste a great deal of time storming the gates and the walls with their axes. But the weak citadels fell more from treason and corruption than really overpowered by the enemy. The target of the terrible horde was Uhry*, a wealthy land settled by a tribe related to the Mongols, from which the great Mongol ruler Genghis Khan demanded surrender. Uhry refused, and the terrible campaign of the Mongol horde was organised to show the vengeance of the great Genghis Khan. According to the plans of Batyi, the horde was to advance on Hungary from three directions: from the east through the land of Semihorod, from the west through Moravia, and from the north, through the Carpathians. To this end the horde was divided into three armies—one, under the leadership of Kaidan, went across the Bessarabian steppe into Wallachia; the second, led by Peta, separated from the main army on the Volyn lands. It crossed Red Rus through Plisnesko, battled its way to the upper reaches of the Dniester, forded the river and spilled across the foothills, seeking passes through the Carpathians. The captured local people and some of the traitor boyars guided the Mongols along the Stry River to

*Hungary.

the Tukhlya Pass and as the Korchin messengers had just reported, their tents were already gleaming on the plain below Sinevidskov.

The day was declining. Dense twilight fell over the Pidhirye. The wooded hills of Tukhlya misted over like numberless volcanoes preparing to erupt. The Stry murmured over its rocky fords and foamed in its recesses. The stars rose and flickered in the sky. Here and there lights began to appear on earth also, scarce and timid at first, and then in a multitude—until finally the entire plain, as far as eye could see, was covered with them, the blazing blood-red flames. Like the sea, moved by a fair wind, so did the fires glow across the plain, either blazing up animatedly, or bellowing in different directions in the darkening infinity of space. These were Mongol camp-fires.

But far away in the distance, where the glimmering sea ended, other fires were blazing—terrible, extensive eruptions of dazzling flames; these were the burning towns and villages surrounding the Mongol camp in a wide, flaming holocaust. Detachments of the Mongol army were raging there, pillaging and murdering the people, taking them into captivity and razing to the ground what they couldn't carry away.

As twilight fell, two people on sturdy mountain horses rode a narrow path over the Sinevid Mountain. One of the riders, a man of age, was dressed in full armour and armed with sword and axe; a helmet on his head and a spear attached to the horse's saddle. Long, and thick grey hair hung from below his helmet down to his shoulders. Even the deep shadows which lay like clouds over the mountains, and coiled in huge mists from the ravines and forests up the hillsides, couldn't hide the deep dissatisfaction, anger and spite that played across his face and from time to time, spilled out in ironic laughter, then sullen despondence—as though something was jerking his limbs in unexpected spasms that in turn irritated his handsome steed.

The second rider was a young, beautiful maid, dressed in silk-embroidered linen attire. A small pointed cap of beaver skin on her head couldn't contain her rich, abundant golden locks. Across her shoulders hung a bow of wild ox horn and a quiver of arrows. Her dark, lively

eyes moved like swallows, delighting in the even, bellowing contours of the highlands and the rich deep green shades of the forests and meadows.

“What a beautiful country, Father!” she cried in a ringing, silver voice, when the horses paused for a moment on a steep hillside, which they were negotiating with some difficulty, so as to arrive at their destination before complete darkness settled. “What a truly beautiful land!” she repeated in a lower, softer voice, looking around behind her, her gaze drowning in the depths of the dark, bottomless gullies.

“But what infidels live in this country!” her father cut in angrily.

“No, Father, don’t say such things!” she answered fearlessly, but immediately stopped, confused, and lowering her voice considerably said, after a moment, “I don’t know, but the people here appeal to me very much...”

“Oh, I know that they appeal to you!” her father cried, reproachfully, “or rather that one among them appeals to you—that cursed Berkut! Oh, I know that you are ready to abandon your father for him. But what can I do—such is the nature of a young girl! But I’m warning you, young woman, don’t be taken in by that outer glitter. Don’t believe that snake, even though he changes colours!”

“But, Father, what thoughts you have! And with what harsh words you reproach me! I’ve admitted to you that I love Maxim and that I’ve sworn to the sun that I’ll be his. But I am not yet his, I am still yours. And even though I become his, I will never stop loving you, Father, never!”

“But, my foolish child, you will never be his, there cannot even be any thought of it! Have you forgotten that you are a boyar’s daughter and that he is a peasant, a herdsman?..”

“No, Father, don’t say such things! He is a knight, just like other knights—no, he is better, braver and more honest than any young boyar that I have so far met. And by the way, Father, it is too late to talk me out of it now—I have taken an oath!”

“What does a foolish, blind young girl’s vow mean?”

“Father, I am neither blind nor foolish! I am not impelled by deep passion. I have not done this without some

thought and hesitation. Not even without some higher will, Father.”

These last words were said by her in a semi-whisper, with a hint of mystery in her voice.

The boyar turned to her with curiosity:

“Now then, what is this again? What kind of higher will guided you to this folly?”

“Listen, Father,” said the girl, reining in her horse and turning to him. “On the night before the day we went on the hunt for the bears, I dreamt of Mother. She was exactly as you described her to me; dressed in white, with her hair down, but with a face rosy and glowing like the Sun, with a happy smile on her lips and boundless love in her bright eyes. She came up to me with outstretched arms and embraced me, holding me tightly to her heart.

“‘Mother!’ I said, and couldn’t say any more, out of the joy and bliss that filled my whole being.

“‘Miroslava, my child, my only child,’ Mother said in a gentle, soft voice, which still sounds in my heart, ‘listen to what I have to say. A great moment is approaching you, my daughter! Your heart will awaken and speak. Listen to your heart, daughter, and follow that voice!’

“‘I will, Mother!’ I answered, trembling with some inexpressible joy.

“‘Bless your heart!’ said Mother, and saying this, disappeared in a fragrant flurry, and I awoke. But my heart truly spoke, Father, and I followed its voice. I have been blessed by my mother!”

“But that was just a dream, you foolish girl! What you think about during the day, you dream about at night. Still,” the boyar added after a slight pause, “still, you won’t ever see him again!”

“I won’t?” cried Miroslava, startled. “Why won’t I see him? Has he died?”

“Even if he lived to be a hundred, you won’t see him again, because ... because we won’t be returning to that accursed land.”

“We won’t return? But why not?”

“Because,” said the boyar with feigned reserve, “those good people of yours and first of all that old devil, the father of your beloved Maxim, decided at their council meeting to banish us from their village, to destroy our

home and raze it to the ground! But just you wait, you villainous tribe, you'll yet see who you have to content with! Tuhar Vovk is not a Tukholian wolf, he can show his teeth even to Tukholian bears! ”

Miroslava's heart beat painfully at these words.

“They have banished us, Father? What for? It must be because of that forester that you ordered beaten so mercilessly, even though I begged you in tears to let him go?”

“That's your understanding of these things! ” Tuhar responded angrily, though his heart was deeply pierced at his daughter's reproach. “Oh, I know that if you had been at that assembly you would have sided with them against your father! What can I do—I'm old, gloomy, can't flash my eyes or sigh, I am not the companion you desire! So what if your father has aged prematurely in trying to secure a happy future for you and that the new, dearer, younger friend you desire, can even now be ruining our home with his Tukhlya mates, our last and only shelter in the world! ”

Miroslava couldn't endure these bitter reproaches, her eyes filled with hot tears.

“No, it's you, you who don't love me,” she said, weeping uncontrollably, “and I don't know what has turned your heart against me. I have given you no reason! You yourself taught me and bid me to live in truth and to tell the truth! Could it be that truth has suddenly become repugnant to you?”

The boyar was silent, his head bowed. They were nearing the top of the hill and riding along a narrow roadway between tall beeches which completely hid the sky. The horses, allowed to move freely, sought their own path through the darkness and, snorting frequently, trotted slowly up the rocky incline to the top.

“Where are we going then, since we've been banished from Tukhlya?” asked Miroslava suddenly, wiping her eyes with her sleeve and raising her head.

“To the ends of the earth,” answered her father.

“You told me that we were going to visit one of your boyar friends.”

“The truth has become repulsive to me—I told you a lie.”

“Then where are we going?”

“Wherever you wish to go. It’s all the same to me. Maybe we should go to Halych, to the prince who was vexed with me and was glad to get rid of my presence? Oh, he was a sly one, that prince! He uses a man’s strength, squeezes him like a ripe cherry, then throws away the pit—that’s him exactly. And how happy he was when I begged him to grant me some land in Tukhlya! ‘Go,’ he said to me, ‘as long as I don’t have to see you any more! Go and, snarl with those *smerds* over that miserable strip of land, just don’t come back here!’ Well, shall we go back to him and complain about the Tukholians, ask him for help against them?”

“No, Father!” disagreed Miroslava. “The help of the prince won’t undo the harm that was done, it will only make it worse.”

“You see,” continued the boyar, paying little attention to his daughter’s last words, “then maybe we should go back to Tukhlya, to those accursed peasants, to that fiend, Berkut, and beg their goodwill, accept their punishment, renounce our boyardom, implore them to accept us into their community, as equal among equals, and live with them as they do—together with their sheep, between the oats and the manure?”

Miroslava’s bearing imperceptibly, involuntarily straightened, her face brightened at these words.

“What do you think, Father, would they accept us?” she asked quickly.

“Who knows!” fretted the boyar. “That would depend on the good graces of their peasant highness and on their supreme highness, Zakhar Berkut!”

“Father, why can’t we try it? The Tukholians hate deception. They have condemned us, but maybe they are right in their own way? Or maybe ... maybe, Father, you have in some way ... with some harsh move, brought all this about? But maybe a gentle and friendly way...”

“Oh my God, what is this?” Miroslava suddenly cried out, interrupting her flow of reflecting thought. They had reached the top of the mountain and before them, as though by magic, stretched the broad Stry Valley, flooded with a sea of fire and flame. The sky glowed red in its reflection. Strange voices rose up from the valley, as though out of hell, the whinnying of horses, the clatter of

arms, the shouts of sentries, the murmur of the dark, shaggy men seated around bonfires, and away off in the distance—the heart-rending cries of the tortured old men, women and children, of men bound and being led into slavery, the lowing of cattle and the crashing of burned-out timbers, after which great cascades of embers, like swarms of golden midges, rose into the sky. In the blood-red gleam of the fires, and clearly visible along the river, stood long, endless rows of quadrangular tents divided by wide passages. People, like ants, wove about between them and gathered about the bonfires. Miroslava gazed at this scene, stunned. She couldn't tear her eyes away. Even the old, morose boyar, was rooted to the spot, his eyes drowning in that frightening bloody sea, his nostrils catching the smell of the bitter smoke and blood, his ears listening to the clamorous blend of sound—the cries, the groans, the joyful shouts of victory. Even the horses carrying out riders responded with trembling bodies, their ears pricked up, and with snorts, as though fearful of going further.

“Father, in the name of God, what is this?” cried Miroslava again.

“Our allies,” answered Tuhar Vovk morosely.

“Ah, these must be the Mongols about whose arrival the people talked with such alarm?”

“That's who they are! ”

“The destroyers of our Rus lands! ”

“Our allies against those accursed *smerds* and their communities.”

“Father, they are our certain death! If the peasants are destroyed who will nourish the boyars?”

“Don't worry, the storm hasn't yet been born that is strong enough to destroy that vile seed! ”

“But, Father, the Mongols spare neither house, nor mansion, nor prince's palace! You've often told me yourself how the princes were crushed under boards! ”

“And that's good! Let them crush them, those cunning fools! But they haven't killed a single boyar. I'm telling you again, they're our allies! ”

“But, Father, how could you wish to ally yourself with these savages, stained as they are with the blood of our people?”

“Why should it concern me who they are and what they

are like? Without them there is no hope for us. Let them be the most evil of spirits, as long as they help me! ”

Miroslava, deathly pale, looked at her father with alarm. The blood-red flames, casting their reflection through the whole area, made his face look cruel and savage, and shimmered on his helmet as if encircling his face with a bloody wreath. They both dismounted their horses, and standing on that high summit, gazed at each other.

“How terrible you look, Father,” whispered Miroslava, “I do not recognise you! ”

“Speak out, my daughter, speak out! ” said her father with savage derision. “I know what you want to say! You want to say, ‘I cannot go with you any further, I will leave you, a traitor to your homeland, and return to my beloved, my faithful Berkut! ’ Say it, say it frankly—and leave me. I’ll go where my destiny takes me, but to the end of my days I’ll be concerned with your welfare! ”

The boyar’s voice, venomous when he began, ended on a softer, tremulous, moving note, so much so that Miroslava burst into loud sobs and threw herself at her father’s neck, weeping bitterly.

“Oh, Father,” she gulped, “how you tear at my heart! In what way have I offended you so terribly? I know that you love me! I ... I won’t ever leave you! I’ll be your servant, your slave to my dying breath, just don’t go down there, don’t bring eternal disgrace to your honoured name! ”

Still weeping, she dropped to her father’s feet, and embracing his knees, covered his hands with her tears. Tuhar Vovk couldn’t endure her tears and his own eyes overflowed. He picked up Miroslava and folded her tightly to his breast.

“My daughter,” he said tenderly, “don’t complain against me! Misfortune has filled my heart with bitterness, my thoughts with anger. But I know that your heart is pure gold, that you won’t abandon me in these days of anxiety and struggle. We are now alone in the world, there is no one to whom we can turn, no one from whom we can get help, only ourselves. We have no choice. Let’s get this help wherever we can find it! ”

“Father, Father! ” Miroslava spoke through her tears. “Your anger against the Tukholians has blinded you and is thrusting you into disaster. Let it be as you say, that we

are unfortunate—but do we have to be traitors to our own land because of this? Better we should die of hunger by the roadside! ”

“You are still young, my daughter, passionate, emotional, and you don’t know the taste of hunger, the taste of misery. I do, and I want to protect you from them. Don’t argue with me! Come, let’s go to our objective, What will be, will be, we cannot avoid our fate! ”

And he leaped up on his horse and used his spurs. Miroslava tried to stop him in vain—he dashed on down the mountainside. Weeping, she followed. In her unshaken, childish faith, she still believed that she could save her father from disaster, from eternal disgrace—from treason, against his homeland. Poor girl, she didn’t know how deep her father had sunk into this vile swamp, how irrevocably he had fallen into the abyss, so far that there was truly no return, except to sink deeper, to the very bottom.

The lower they descended into the valley, the thicker the darkness surrounding them, the less they were able to see, except the flickering bonfires and the glow of the distant fires. The noise and roar of the huge throng, however, grew ever louder and more deafening. The smoke burned their eyes, caught at the breath in their throats. The boyar advanced straight to the first bonfire which was burning in the centre of the field. This was where the Mongolian sentries were situated. Approaching, they saw five men in sheepskin coats, the fur on the outside, and sharp-pointed fur caps, armed with bows over their shoulders and axes in their hands.

As they neared Miroslava caught up with her father and grasped him by the sleeve.

“Father, I beg you in the name of God, let’s turn back from this place! ”

“Where to?”

“Back to Tukhlya! ”

“No, it’s too late! We’ll go, but not with humiliating pleas. We’ll go as guests—and I’am looking forward to see whether your Berkuts will dare to banish us again! ”

At that moment the Mongols noticed the approach of the strangers and with wild shouts they surrounded them, their bows at the ready.

“Who goes there?” they shouted in various voices, some

in Russian and some in their own.

"An admirer of the great Genghis Khan!" answered Tuhar Vovk in Mongolian. The Mongols stopped and stared at him.

"Where are you from, who are you, and what are you here for?" asked one, obviously in command of the sentries.

"It's none of your affair," the boyar answered sharply in Mongolian. "Who is in command here?"

"The grandsons of the great Genghis Khan, Peta-Behadir and Burunda-Behadir."

"Go and tell them that the 'Kalka River flows over mud and falls into the Don'. We'll wait here by the fire till you return."

With slavish respect the Mongols stepped aside from the strange arrivals who talked their language in such a confident way, a way to which they had become accustomed from their own khans and commanders. In one moment the head of the sentries assigned another to take his place and mounting a horse, sped off to a camp that was about a quarter of a mile away from their bonfire.

Tuhar Vovk and Miroslava dismounted from their horses and these were immediately led away by a couple of sentries, curried, watered and tethered in one of the peasants' rye fields. The guests then came up to the fire where they warmed their hands, chilled by the cold. Miroslava's whole body shook as if with fever. She was very pale and hadn't the courage to raise her eyes to look at her father. It wasn't till this moment, when she heard the Mongolian language coming from her father's lips, and seeing with what respect the Mongols carried out his wishes, that she realised that this wasn't the first time her father had met with these terrible destroyers of their native land, and that the rumour that had been whispered about in Prince Danilo's court, that Tuhar Vovk had betrayed Rus to the Mongols during the battle at the Kalka River by informing them of the entire plan of battle prepared by the Rus princes, must be true. However went the stories, there was no definite proof of this, for if there was, the boyar would have had his head laid on the block; at the time the boyar had been in the front line of battle and had been taken prisoner in the very first skirmish.

What caused the speculation and wonder was his quick release without any demands for ransom, though he swore that the Mongols released him out of respect for his courage. The whole incident was very mysterious, but what was certain was that all at the prince's court began to avoid Tuhar Vovk, and the prince himself didn't trust him as he had before. The boyar finally felt this change in attitude and begged the prince to grant him land in Tukhlya. Without enquiring why the boyar had decided to leave Halych to bury himself in the forests of Tukhlya, and with a young daughter besides, Prince Danilo acceded to his request—clearly glad to get rid of him. When the time of departure from Halych came, the parting with the other boyars—long-time comrades in battle—was also somewhat cool. All this Miroslava suddenly recalled, and everything that had surprised and angered her at that time was now clear and understandable. Then the rumours and whispers were true! It meant, then, that her father had for a long time, for some ten years, had an understanding with the Mongols, was a traitor! Miroslava lowered her beautiful head as if crushed, as if mowed down by her thoughts. Her heart ached painfully; she felt, how one, after another, the strongest and most sacred ties—the ties of childhood love and respect—were breaking. How terribly alone, like a complete orphan, she felt at this moment, even though her father sat beside her. How truly ill-fated she now felt, even though her father had so recently assured her that everything he did was for her happiness.

But the boyar himself was also sitting there, looking unhappy; his heart was oppressed, it would seem, by heavy thoughts. One couldn't know what he was thinking, but his eyes were fixed unwaveringly on the flames of the bonfire, following carefully how the red logs, like glowing steel, were consumed by fire, how they crackled in the licking flames. Was this the quiet meditation of a man who had reached his objective, or was it some anxious awareness of the future that seized his heart in its cold clasp and placed the seal of silence on his lips. An old and deliberate man, he now avoided Miroslava's gaze, but stared and stared into the fire, at the gleaming sparks and the dying embers.

“Daughter! ” he finally said quietly, without raising his eyes.

“Why didn’t you kill me yesterday, Father,” whispered Miroslava, forcibly holding back her tears. Her voice, though quiet, touched the boyar like an icy wind. He could find no answer to the question, so he remained silent, and continued staring into the fire till the sentry returned from the camp.

“The grandsons of the great Genghis Khan convey their greetings to their new friend and invite him to their quarters for military council.”

“Let’s go! ” said the boyar shortly, and rose to his feet.

Miroslava got up also, but her feet refused to move. Yet this was no time to hesitate. The Mongols brought their horses forward, helped Miroslava up on her mount, and surrounding them both, led them to the camp.

The Mongol camp had been erected in a large quadrangle and ringed by a deep moat. There were twelve entrances into the quadrangle, each protected by armed sentries. Although no enemy threatened the camp, it was guarded with great vigilance—such were the Mongol military regulations, completely in contradiction with the Christian knighthood, who didn’t compare with the Mongols either in military drill, military tactics, or in the leadership of large armies.

The sentries at the entrance to the camp shouted greetings with those who were accompanying the boyar and his daughter, then took over their unusual guests and led them to the tent of their commanders. Though Miroslava was crushed and her youthful cheeks burned with pain and shame she was, nevertheless, of courageous disposition. Brought up as she was, in a very independent and knightly spirit, she couldn’t help being interested in the disposition of the camp and all that was new and extraordinary about it. Her quick eye went over the sentries who were escorting them. Their short, thickset figures in sheepskin coats, over which hung, on all of them, a bow and a quiver of arrows, gave them the appearance of bears or some other wild animal. Their beardless features, with high cheekbones and small, deep-set eyes, which barely glittered from between their narrow, slanted eyelids; their short, flat noses looked somehow ugly, and their

yellow skin which, reflected in the firelight, shone with a green tint, somehow made them seem even more terrifying and forbidding. With their bent heads and their guttural, sing-song voices, they looked like wolves on the look-out for something to devour. Their tents, after Miroslava had observed them closely, were made of the felt which had been stretched over four poles, tied together on the top, and covered over with large caps of horse skins for protection against rain. Before the tents, on poles, hung human heads, bloody and congealed in expressions of pain and horror on pale, blue, and in the light of the fires, strangely illuminated faces. Miroslava's forehead broke out in cold sweat at this sight; a heroic, courageous girl, she wasn't tormented by the thought that soon her head might also be hung somewhere before some Mongol commander's tent. No, she would rather at this moment smoulder and hang as a bloody trophy before the tent of the victor, than see these trophies of other people with her living eyes, trophies that just a short time ago were living men, who thought, worked and loved—than be walking along the length of this terrible camp on a dishonourable and traitorous mission!

“No, no!” she thought, “I won't do it. I will go no further! I won't be a traitor to my homeland! I'll leave my father if I can't, dissuade him from his accursed intention.”

In the meantime they had arrived at the tent of Batyi's favourite, the commander Peta. The tent was not distinguished from the rest on its outside, except for its roof which held three standards. It made up for it inside, however, where it was quite magnificently arrayed in Oriental style. But neither the boyar nor Miroslava entered the tent, because they found the Mongol commanders before their tent beside a bonfire, on which their captives were roasting two rams. Seeing their guests, the commanders jumped to their feet and snatched up their weapons, though they didn't move from their places to meet them. Knowing the Mongol custom, the boyar signalled to his daughter to remain behind while he, removing his helmet and his bow from his back, advanced with a deep bow and stood, silent, his eyes lowered to the ground, three paces before the head commander, Peta.

“From which tsar do you bring us a message?” asked Peta.

“I know no tsar except the great Genghis Khan, the ruler of the whole world!” answered the boyar. This was the accustomed formula indicating submission. Peta then gladly, and with great dignity, extended his hand.

“You have arrived at the right time,” he said. “We were awaiting our ally.”

“I know my obligations,” answered Tuhar Vovk. “In only one thing have I transgressed from your customs, I have brought my daughter to your encampment.”

“Your daughter?” asked Peta, astonished. “Don’t you know that our custom forbids women from coming into a soldiers’ camp?”

“I know. But what was I to do with her? I have no house, no family, no wife. Outside of myself and the great Genghis Khan, she has no protection. My prince was happy to be rid of me from his town, and those accursed *smerds*, my slaves, rebelled against me.”

“But just the same she cannot remain here.”

“I beg of the grandsons of the great Genghis Khan to allow her to remain here this night and tomorrow’s day, until I find a safe place for her.”

“We are hospitable to our friends,” said Peta, and turning to Miroslava he said in broken Russian:

“Come closer, maid!”

Miroslava trembled at these words addressed to her by the terrible Mongol chief. With eyes full of hatred and contempt she looked at this destroyer of Rus, not even listening to his words.

“Come closer, Miroslava!” said her father. “The great commander of the Mongol army is friendly to us.”

“I don’t want his friendship!” answered Miroslava.

“Come closer, I’m telling you!” said the boyar sternly. Miroslava moved forward unwillingly.

Peta looked at her with his small, glittering eyes.

“A beautiful girl! Too bad she can’t stay. Listen to your father, girl. Be faithful to the great Genghis Khan. There will be much favour! Here, girl, take this ring which belonged to your Prince Mstislav. It be your security. Show it to a Mongol soldier—all will be well, will do nothing bad. And now to the tent.”

With these words Peta gave Miroslava a huge gold ring off his finger, taken by him from Prince Mstislav at the battle on the Kalka. On the ring was a large golden-green beryl with carved figures. Miroslava hesitated as to whether she should take the gift from the enemy—maybe even as payment for her father's treason.

"Take it, daughter, this token from the great grandson of Genghis Khan," urged the boyar. "This token of his great favour toward you will give you safe passage in the Mongol camp. We'll have to separate, the two of us, daughter. Their military custom forbids women in the encampment. But with that ring you can safely leave the camp and come back whenever you have to."

Miroslava still hesitated. But a new thought entered her head suddenly—she took the ring and turning aside said with a break in her voice:

"Thank you! "

Peta then ordered that she be taken to a separate tent which had been hurriedly prepared for her father, while Tuhar Vovk remained behind with the Mongolian commanders to take military council.

The first to speak was Peta—the chief commander of this detachment, a man of some forty years, a real Mongolian type—small in stature, restless, with sly, small, mouselike eyes.

"Do sit down, guest," he said to the boyar. "When we tell you that we were awaiting you, then take this as the highest commendation of your loyalty to the great Genghis Khan. Still, you have come a little late. Our army has already been waiting here three days and the great Genghis Khan, in despatching us on our journey west to the land of our subjects, the Arpads, advised us not to stop anywhere unnecessarily for more than three days. Our brother Kaidan-Behadir, who went through the land of the Wallachs, will reach the Arpady lands before us, take their capital city, so what glory will we get out of this campaign?"

The boyar replied:

"I fully understand your concern, great Behadir, and here is my answer. The faithful servant of the great Genghis Khan was unable to arrive at your encampment sooner, for he only heard of your campaign yesterday, but

having heard he set out immediately. Don't worry about the delay. Our roads, though narrow, are safe. The gate to the kingdom of the Arpads will be open. All we need do is to knock."

"In whose hands are the roads?" asked Peta, shortly.

"One is the Duklya road, above the San River and then over a low mountain ridge. The road is wide and convenient and more than once travelled by the Rus and Hungarian military forces."

"Is it far from here?"

"From here to Peremyshl two days of march, and from Peremyshl to the mountain ridge yet another two days."

"Who is guarding the road?"

"It's being guarded by the boyars of our prince who have made barricades across it. But they serve our Prince Danilo Romanovich unwillingly, and unwillingly guard the barricades. A small favour will bend them in the direction of the great Genghis Khan."

"But why haven't we seen any of them in our camp to date?" asked Peta.

"They do not dare, Behadir. The people among whom they live, and who must supply the armed sentries for the defence of the barricades, unwillingly tolerate their power over them. The spirit of rebellion and disobedience lives in these people. Their hearts yearn for the old order when there were no princes, no property owners and every community lived for itself, freely elected or removed their elders, but united with each other against their common foe. There is one old man in these mountains who has been named the Sage, and he arouses the flame of rebellion in the name of the old order. The people regard the boyars as the shepherds regard the wolves, and as soon as they see that the boyars are openly on the side of the great Genghis Khan, they would stone them. When you have drawn near with your forces, the boyars will surrender and give up the barricades, then the people will scatter like that chaff before the wind."

Peta listened to the boyar's words with attention. A smile of spite and derision flitted across his thin lips.

"What strange customs you have!" he said. "The prince rebels against his servants, the servants against the prince, the prince and his servants against the people and the

people against all authority! Strange customs! When our lesser chiefs wanted to rebel against the great Genghis Khan he drove them all into his village, and surrounding it with his faithful sons, he ordered them to place eighty huge kettles on bonfires and fill them with water, and when the water had boiled, he ordered, without examining their individual guilt, that two of the rebels be thrown into each kettle and boiled long enough that their flesh should fall from their bones. He then ordered that their naked bones be removed from the kettles, placed on their horses and carried to their dependent tribes that they may, from the example, learn obedience and submission to the great Genghis Khan. That is how you should be taught! And we will teach you! Thank the Gods that they have sent us to this land, for if it wasn't for us, then you would surely, like those hungry wolves, devour each other."

The boyar's blood ran cold at the Mongol's story, but he said not a word against it.

"Well, and what other road is there?" asked Peta further.

"The other road is through the Tukhlya Pass," answered the boyar. "Though it is narrower and less even, it is closer and equally safe. There are no barricades along it, nor are there any boyars. The peasants themselves guard it."

"We are not afraid of your peasants," said Peta arrogantly.

"There is nothing there to be afraid of," agreed Tuhar Vovk quickly. "They are without weapons and have no military experience. I myself could lead you along that roadway."

"But it could be that on the Arpad side this road is strongly blockaded?"

"The Tukhlya Pass is not blockaded at all. The Duklya road is, but not too strongly."

"Is it far to the Arpad lands along the Tukhlya road?"

"For the armed men it's a day's march to Tukhlya. They would spend the night in Tukhlya and be on the road again at dawn. By evening you will be on the plain."

"And by the Duklya road?"

"If you consider the amount of time it would take to destroy the barricades, three days."

“Well then, guide us along the Tukhlya road!” decided Peta.

“Allow me to say a word, great Behadir,” said one of the Mongol chiefs, a man of great height and herculean proportions, a dark olive complexion, and dressed in a steppe tiger skin—all of which bore witness to his origin from a Turkmenian tribe. He was recklessly brave and bloodthirsty warrior Burunda-Behadir, a rival for glory with Kaidan. The Mongol detachments he led left terrible destruction in their wake, the greatest number of corpses, the widest rivers of fame. He was vastly superior to Peta in courage—there were double the amount of freshly-impaled heads before his tent every evening than there were before the tent of any other warrior. But Peta didn’t envy him his boldness, knowing well his superiority over Burunda in leading large armies and in directing large battles and campaigns. He gladly allowed Burunda into the more dangerous areas, kept him in reserve for the most difficult, decisive moments, like an invincible steel battering ram, and then set him free with his detachment of “bloody Turkmen” to complete the victory.

“Speak, brother Burunda!” said Peta.

“Allow me, with a ten-thousand-man detachment to go the Tukhlya road, and you go along the Duklya road. After crossing to the Arpad side I’ll immediately attack those who defend the Duklya road and clear it for you.”

Peta looked at Burunda in wonder, as if this was the first time that a wise word passed through the lips of that veteran. And truly, Burunda’s plan, though bold, was also wise, and Burunda was the one man who could carry it out.

“Good,” said Peta, “let it be as you propose! Choose your warriors and start out with them tomorrow.”

“Allow me to say a word, great Behadir,” said Tuhar Vovk.

“Speak,” said Peta.

“If it is your will to send part of your forces along the Tukhlya road—for because of its narrowness I would not advise sending the whole force—then allow me to go ahead with a small detachment and occupy the entrance to the road before the Tukholian *smerds* find out about your arrival and blockade it.”

“Good, go! ” said Peta. “When do you wish to start?”

“Immediately, so that by tomorrow afternoon I will have achieved my purpose.”

“If that’s what you want, then I suggest that we end our council and may the Gods bring success to your arms! ” said Peta, standing up. The others also rose to their feet. Tuhar Vovk begged Peta to assign him a detachment of bold warriors and then went to his tent to refresh himself and to bid farewell to his daughter.

In the dark tent Miroslava was sitting on the bed covered with soft, looted, feather-down pillows, and weeping bitterly. After all the terrible and unexpected happenings of this evening, it wasn’t till now that she had time to collect her thoughts, to examine well the situation into which her father had placed her. Her predicament was truly terrifying and seemed quite hopeless. Her father was a traitor, a Mongol servant; she herself was in a Mongolian military camp, a half-guest, half-prisoner, and however you looked at it, a complete orphan. For even her last support—her unswerving belief in her prognosticating dream, in her mother’s blessing and in her fortunate love with Maxim—even this belief, after cold appraisal, was somewhat shaken, breaking her heart. For how could she now face Maxim? In what words could she explain to him her voluntary, or involuntary, stay in the Mongolian camp? Like serpents these questions coiled in her thoughts, and she gave way to tears and wept as if parting with her life.

Her father approached her quietly and cautiously, putting his hand on her shoulder. She didn’t lift her head, didn’t move, didn’t stop weeping.

“My daughter—Miroslava,” he said, “don’t cry! God grant that all will yet be well! ”

Miroslava sat as if she heard nothing—immovable, cold and indifferent.

“Forget that *smerd!* You have a beautiful future ahead of you, but he. .. What is he? Tomorrow at noon he will fall a corpse from my sword.”

“Who?” cried Miroslava in a heartbroken voice.

Frightened by her tone, the boyar stepped back from his daughter, who had sprung to her feet.

“Who will fall a corpse?” she repeated. “Maxim? You are leading an attack on Tukhlya?”

“Why no, no! ” denied the boyar. “Who told you such a thing?”

“You told me yourself! ” said Miroslava. “Father, tell me the truth, what are you doing? Don’t be afraid for me! I now see for myself that I can never be Maxim’s. Because of you, I cannot be! Oh, you are clever and cunning! You have led it all to this! I cannot belong to Maxim, not because I am his superior by birth—oh no! I’m actually inferior to him, I feel myself vastly inferior, because he is a pure, honest heart, while I’m the daughter of a traitor. Maybe I’m also a traitor? Yes, Father! You are cunning, so cunning that you have outwitted yourself! You say that you desire my happiness above all, but you have destroyed my happiness. But let that be! What does it profit me? Just tell me what you are planning against him?”

“But nothing, absolutely nothing! He is now probably somewhere far in the mountains.”

“No, no, no, I don’t believe you! Tell me what you and the Mongols have decided?”

“We spoke about the best way to get to Hungary.”

“And you have proposed that they take the Tukhlya road, so that you can revenge yourself on the Tukholians! ”

“You foolish girl, why do I need to revenge myself against them? They are too trivial for my revenge. I want to guide the Mongols to Hungary because the sooner they leave our land, the less they will leave in ruins.”

“Oh, of course, of course! ” cried Miroslava. “But on their return they will finish ruining what they will now leave whole! And you are leading them on Tukhlya now, right away?”

“No, not on Tukhlya, I’m taking only a small detachment so as to occupy the entrance to Tukhlya.”

“He who has a gate has a house! But now I understand. You yourself said just recently, up there on the hill, that Maxim and the Tukhlya lads will raze our home tomorrow. Now you with your Mongols want to attack him, kill him...”

The boyar stared at her with surprise; he began to be afraid. Could she be a witch that she so quickly guessed his intent.

“Forget about him, daughter! ” he said. “Whatever fate has in store for him, so it will be.”

“No, Father, you won’t deceive me with that! I’ll go, I’m going to ride to Tukhlya and warn him, save him from your planned ambush. And if he should fall into that ambush, I will stand beside him, and will defend myself alongside of him to the very end, against you, Father, and your evil allies! ”

“Young woman, you are insane! ” shouted the boyar. “Beware that you don’t drive me to anger! This is a decisive moment! ”

“What concern of mine is your anger?” answered Miroslava coldly. “And what more harm can you do me after what you’ve already done? If you should kill me, then you’d only be doing me a favour, for there is no further life for me. Let me go! ”

“You’ll remain here, you fool! ”

“Yes, stay here while you calmly murder the one who is dearer to me than my life! Oh no, I won’t remain! ”

“Stay! I swear to God that I won’t raise a hand against him! ”

“Oh, I know what that means, I know! ” cried Miroslava. “But of course, you’re a boyar, how could you lift a hand against a *smerd*? But you will order your savage companions to aim all their poison arrows at his breast! ”

“No! If your compassion for him is such, then I again swear to you that neither I nor any member of my company will touch him, even if he should attack us! Is that enough for you?”

Miroslava stood, torn by terrible heartfelt anxiety, and couldn’t think of anything else to say. How could she know if that was enough, or if it wasn’t? How happy she would have been if she could have flown, like a bird, to his side, and with her fervent song warn him of the danger! But there was no way. Her father picked up his weapons and leaving the tent, said:

“Daughter, I am telling you again and pleading with you. Stay in the camp till I return, then do what you wish. And now, farewell.”

He walked out and the flap of the tent which served as a door moved restlessly after him. Miroslava stood in the middle of the tent, her hands clasped and her face a

picture of misery and deep anxiety, speechless, bent forward with open lips, listening to the dull and muted receding clatter of horse's hooves as the company of Mongols, led by her father, left for Tukhlya.

5

With a heavy heart Maxim Berkut walked among the small group of Tukhlya lads to carry out the will of his people. He had grown up from childhood with a deep feeling of solidarity with the community and the sacredness of the people's will, so that even now, when it went completely against the wishes of his heart, he went along as the people's choice had been to banish the boyar, whom the Tukholians considered an enemy of the people, from the community lands. He couldn't refuse this commission though his heart was torn and breaking at the very thought that he would have to meet with Miroslava and with her father as with enemies; that he would have to, perhaps, fight with the boyar's men or even with the boyar himself, to shed human blood before the eyes of her, for whom he was prepared to shed his own blood. True, he was determined to carry out this task as calmly as possible and try to avoid the spilling of blood. But who would guarantee that the boyar, knowing his weak spot, wouldn't provoke aggression himself? This was most likely to happen.

"But no," thought Maxim, "if he should want my blood I will not defend myself. I'll bare my breast voluntarily, let him kill me! He refuses to give me life, so let him give me death! Farewell, my Tukhlya! Farewell, my father, you grey falcon! Farewell my brothers and comrades! You will never again see Maxim, and after hearing of my death you'll sorrow and say: 'He died for the good of the people!', but you won't know that I myself wanted and sought death!"

Such were Maxim's thoughts as they neared the boyar's estate on the hilltop over the Opir River. The boyar's house was built of thick pine logs, rough-hewn, planed, and tightly joined at the corners, similar to the way many peasant homes are still built today. The roof was covered with laths heavily coated with red water-proof clay. The

windows, as in all the houses, were turned to the south, and instead of glass panes, the frames were covered with the skin of ox bladders, which allowed a weak yellow light into the house. The entry and exit doors in the front and back led into a roomy passage whose walls were hung with various weapons, deer and ox horns, and skins of the wild boar, wolf and bear. Doors on both sides of this passage led into large and high-ceilinged rooms with clay stoves without chimneys, and with wooden, beautifully carved shelves for holding all kinds of utensils. The boyar's personal chamber was on one side of the hall, his daughter's on the other. At the back there were two large premises—the kitchen in one, and the other for the servants. The walls in the boyar's room were lined with bear skins except over the bed where a beautiful and expensive foreign rug was hung—acquired by the boyar on one of his campaigns. Here also were his bows, axes and other hand weapons. Apart from the soft furs and rugs that lined its walls, Miroslava's chamber was also decorated with flowers. On the wall opposite the windows, over her bed, hung an expensive metal mirror and beside it a wooden, silver-studded four-stringed *torban*, a beloved confidante of Miroslava's dreams and girlish thoughts. The barns and the stables and other buildings of the household were in a small hollow some distance from the house. There was also a small cottage for the herdsmen. But today the boyar's roomy house was empty and gloomy. The boyar and Miroslava weren't home, the servants had been sent away, and the cattle had been ordered to be driven to join the herds of a neighbouring Korchin manor. Only the archers and axemen had been left behind and these, for some reason, were unhappy and silent—not talking, joking or singing as was their wont. It was quite likely that more important matters were on their minds, for they handled their axes and spears silently and sadly, as though preparing for death. What was it all about?

But a sentry standing in the middle of the roadway soon gave a signal on his horn, and the whole company immediately drew up in a row in front of the boyar's house with lifted spears and bows at the ready for battle. As the Tukhlya company approached along the roadway and saw the armed men drawn up before the boyar's

house, they too, prepared for battle. Maxim eyed the armed men with some alarm, seeking the boyar among them. As luck would have it, he wasn't there. Maxim took a deep breath, as if a heavy weight had rolled off his back, and began to prepare his men for battle with more confidence. This didn't take long. Silently, with bows poised, shining spears and axes ready, the Tukhlya lads approached the boyar's men in a row. Some fifty paces from them, they stopped.

"Boyar Tuhar Vovk! " called Maxim loudly.

"The boyar Tuhar Vovk isn't here!" answered his men.

"Well, then you, his faithful servants, listen to what I have to say in the name of the Tukhlya community! We have been sent by the people to banish you, willingly or unwillingly, from Tukhlya's lands, according to the verdict passed. We ask you—will you leave voluntarily, or not?"

The boyar's men stood silent.

"We ask a second time," said Maxim.

The men remained silent, their weapons ready.

"We ask a third time," Maxim raised his voice.

The men continued silent, but stood unmoving in their hostile stance. Maxim wondered what this was supposed to mean, but waiting no longer, he signalled to his lads to shoot their arrows over the boyar's men. The arrows hissed through the air like dragons, flew over the heads of the boyar's men and sank into the wall behind them. At that moment, as if at a signal, the boyar's warriors dropped their weapons to the ground and with outstretched hands stepped forward toward the Tukhlya lads.

"Comrades, brothers! " they said, "don't be angry with us for our silence. We gave the boyar our word that we would greet you with hostility, but we didn't give him our word to spill your blood, and to spill it for deception. We were present at your people's court. We know that the boyar has wronged your community and that the people's verdict was just. Do as you have been ordered, and if your elders would be so kind, we will beg them to accept us into your community. We don't want to serve the boyar any more! "

The joy of the Tukhlya lads, and especially Maxim's, when they heard these words, knew no bounds. All immediately cast their weapons down in a pile before the

boyar's house, and with loud and merry shouts began to kiss and embrace their new and unexpected friends, with whom but a moment ago they were ready to battle to the death. Maxim was most happy that his fears hadn't been realised, that he hadn't been forced to fight Miroslava's father before her eyes and banish her, with whom he would have been happy to never separate. His joy at the peaceful ending to this unpleasant task drowned out, for a moment, all other uncertainties. In the companionship of the happy men from the boyar's company, the Tukhlya lads entered the boyar's house, looked over everything with great interest, but did not touch anything. With beating heart Maxim approached Miroslava's room, hoping to meet her there in tears or in anger, and wanting to reassure and soothe her with sincere words. But Miroslava wasn't there and Maxim was disturbed. Where was she, he wondered, and immediately thought to ask the boyar's men who, in the meantime, were bustling around happily preparing a hospitable repast for their Tukhlya brothers. But their answers to his question did not satisfy Maxim, nor did it appease him. The boyar left yesterday morning with his daughter, but where, what for, and when he was to return—no one knew. He had commanded them to be hostile toward the Tukholians, but whether he had noticed their gloomy, reluctant faces, or whether he had something else in mind, he cut short his discourse with them and rode away. This was all Maxim was able to find out from his new allies. The news immediately disturbed his happiness and even threw a shadow of suspicion toward the boyar's men. What did this mean? Could there be treason behind their move? Did the boyar, perhaps, want to catch them in some kind of trap? Not wishing to reveal his suspicions by speaking out, however, Maxim whispered only to some of his comrades that they remain alert. He himself began to closely and attentively look over the house from end to end, ignoring not the smallest detail, nor a single corner. There was nothing suspicious anywhere.

"A nice building," he said to the soldiers who were laying the tables, "but we have to take it apart. Of course we won't raze it or burn it, we'll just take it apart, and pile everything up neatly so that the boyar, if he wants to, can

take it all away. And all the goods within it have to be preserved as they are.”

In the meantime the soldiers had brought large wooden tables into the passage, covered them with white cloth and laid them out with all kinds of food and mead. Amid joyful shouts and singing the feasting began. But the longer the Tukhya lads sat behind the tables, the more they ate and drank, the more their joy and happiness seemed to fade. And though the mead foamed in the carved wooden steins, though the meat, roasted on skewers, steamed on the wooden plates, though sincere and brotherly words passed from one end of the table to the other, their hearts were filled with a secret worry, as if in expectation of some terrible news. A strange, unspoken anxiety, sensed by all, hung in the atmosphere. Were the walls of the boyar mansion suffocating to a free people?

One of the boyar's men got up and raised his wooden cup, filled with mead, to drink a toast.

“Brothers! ” he said, “this has been a joyful day for us and let no evil mishap...”

He didn't finish. He turned pale and trembled with his whole body. All the banqueters leaped to their feet, jumping in all directions and overturning the table with all that was on it.

“What is it? What is it?” they asked each other, making for the door. However hard of hearing, it could be heard—the dull beat of horse's hooves, but what fear it caused in the boyar's house! For a moment all hell broke loose in the passage. One went in one direction, another in the opposite, one looked for this one, that one for another; all dashed about senselessly, stepping into the spilled food, on the cups and the plates, the white tablecloth and the overturned tables. Maxim was the first to tear himself out of the mêlée and outdoors, and having once looked around, realised the full magnitude of the danger.

“To your weapons, brothers, to arms! It's the Mongols, the Mongols! ” His shout was like an unexpected thunderclap. All stood as though paralysed, the disorder and confusion had changed to confused immobility. But this also lasted but a moment. The beat of horse's hooves was heard, coming nearer and nearer, and the inevitable danger woke them all from their stupor. They were all brave,

strong young men! Every one of them, from childhood into youth, had seen himself in battle, in danger, in a deadly struggle with the enemy, and had hoped and prayed that his dream would come true, that he would one day stand in defence of his country. Now the moment had come—and why should they be frightened of it? That dread message, the fearful word “Mongols” had momentarily stunned them—a moment later they had returned to what they normally were—each holding his weapons, standing in line next to another, ready for battle.

“The most important thing to remember, comrades, is to stay close to these walls. Till the enemy pries us loose from this house and surrounds us in an open field, we have nothing to fear. This house—it will be our fortress!”

Maxim then placed the archers at the windows, two or three by the doors, depending on the importance and access to the spot. Some were to remain within doors to supply the fighters with arrows and spears from the boyar’s store of weapons. The main force would stand at the entrance door so that if necessary they could break through the line of attackers and ward them off from the house.

In the meantime, the Mongols had stopped on the gravelly bank of the Opir, dismounted their horses, separated into three groups and began their approach to the house along three paths. They were clearly being led by someone familiar with all the paths and trails, because the entire maneuver was being carried out swiftly, without hesitation, without any waste of time. The maneuver clearly showed also, that the Mongols wanted to surround the house from all sides at once.

But who is it that so audaciously walks at the head of the central and most important company of Mongols? They all couldn’t believe their own eyes. It is none other than the owner of the house, the proud boyar, Tuhar Vovk.

“It’s our boyar! Our boyar!” some of his men cried out. These Maxim had placed among his own lads, not trusting them completely.

“Yes, your boyar—a servant to the Mongols, a traitor to his homeland! Could it be that even now you wish to remain faithful to him?”

“No, no! ” cried the boyar’s men in one voice. “Death to the traitor! We’ll destroy the enemy or die ourselves in the defence of our country! ”

Delighted with this declaration, Maxim said:

“Forgive me, brothers! For a moment I was judging unfairly, thinking that you might be in collusion with your boyar. But now I see that I have done you an injustice. Let’s stay together, close to the walls, so that they can’t surround us, and try to give them the greatest losses. I have heard that the Mongols are not good at conducting a siege and there are not that many here in this company. I’m sure that we’ll be able to repel their attack.”

Poor Maxim! He tried to build hope in the others when it had begun to fade in himself the moment he saw the Mongols, and even more when he saw the full strength of their approaching forces. Still, his words carried a great deal of weight with his comrades who had more than once had the opportunity to be convinced of his presence of mind and his caution in times of great danger. Blindly accepting his words and directions, each was concerned only with the defence of his position to the end, knowing full well that the neighbouring position would be defended likewise.

The Mongols had now in a wide circle and in three rows surrounded the house, and their flinted arrows fitted into bows, were already aimed at the brave, besieged young men. They waited only for their chief to give them the signal to start the battle. The chief, it seemed, wished first of all to enter into some discourse, for he stepped forward out of the main company of Mongol ranks and said:

“Faithless slaves! Infidel *smerds*! Is it possible that your insolence is as boundless as your stupidity, that you would pick up arms against the great Genghis Khan who is today, without a doubt, the overlord of all the Rus? Surrender without fighting and he will pardon you. But those who would oppose his power will be mercilessly crushed, like those worms beneath the wheels of a wagon.”

Maxim, on hearing this diatribe, spoke up boldly:

“Boyar! You have very inopportunately called us, the sons of a free people, slaves! You take a good look at yourself! Maybe this title would be more fittingly applied to you rather than to us? Why only yesterday you were a

slave to the prince, and today you are already a slave to the great Genghis Khan and more than likely have licked the milk spilled over the back of a horse belonging to one of his commanders. If it was to your taste, that doesn't mean that we also crave it. The might of the great Genghis Khan does not frighten us. He can make corpses out of us, but never slaves. But all the great strength of the Genghis Khan will not make you, boyar, either a free or even an honest man! ”

Maxim spoke sharply and severely. At any other time he would have considered the fact that it was Miroslava's father that stood before him, but now he saw only an enemy—no, a traitor, a man who had trampled his own honour into the mud, though to be sure, he had no claim to honour at all. His comrades rejoiced loudly at Maxim's speech, but the boyar was foaming with rage.

“You filthy peasant! ” he exclaimed. “Just wait, I will show you that you have bragged of your freedom prematurely! Today you'll find chains binding your hands and feet! Today you will be lying in the dust before the chief of the Mongol forces! ”

“Sooner to die! ” answered Maxim.

“Then you won't die! ” shouted the boyar. “Hey, children! ” he cried, turning to the Mongols in their own language. “At them! Just make sure you avoid this one—this one must be taken alive! ”

And he gave the signal to start the battle. The call of the horns reverberated over the mountains and forests and broke. Silence fell around the boyar's house, but it was a terrible silence. The Mongol arrows hissed like snakes and fell like hail on the boyar residence. True, the attackers were a little too far for their arrows to hit the defenders, and when they did they didn't wound them seriously. Besides this, Maxim had ordered his comrades not to shoot as yet and to save their arrows and weapons till such time that they would be able to accurately hit the foe and do the greatest damage. So as not to allow the foe to advance closer immediately he, together with a chosen few, took up positions in the yard some twenty paces from the entrance, behind a strong wooden wall, part of an unfinished plank fence. The fence was exactly the height of a man and the arrows fired by the Mongols floated harmlessly

overhead. The arrows of Maxim's lads, however, though fewer in number, made serious inroads into the Mongol strength and prevented them from advancing closer. On seeing this, Tuhar Vovk became still angrier.

"Charge them!" he shouted, and a dense mass of Mongols under his command made a running charge, with loud shouts, toward the fence. All was quiet behind the palisade, as if all had died out. The Mongols had almost reached their objective when suddenly over the edge of the fence, as if growing out of the ground, appeared a row of heads and mighty arms—and a mass of steel arrows whistled into the advancing foe, who roared with the pain of inflicted wounds. Half of them fell as if mowed down and those left swayed back, paying no heed to the shouts and curses of the boyar.

"Hurrah! Great lads! Hurrah, Maxim! Hurrah for Tukhlya!" screamed the defenders, their spirits high. But the boyar, out of his mind with anger, had gathered together another company for a fresh attack. He was teaching the Mongols how they must charge and not scatter under the first counter-attack of their adversary, but continue advancing over their fallen and wounded. In the meantime Maxim was also directing his lads on what to do, and with weapons ready they awaited the next Mongol attack.

"At them again!" shouted the boyar. But before charging the Mongols let loose a whole cloud of arrows against their adversaries and then charged once more against the wooden barricade. As they approached they were again greeted with an effective fusillade from Maxim's lads, and again a large number of the attackers fell with terrible screams to the ground. But this time the rest did not waver, but continued advancing with deafening shouts toward the wall. It was a terrible moment. Only the thin wooden fence divided its defenders from a vicious foe who, having reached the wall, was still unable to get at their adversaries.

For a moment both were silent, only their rapid harsh breathing could be heard on both sides of the barrier. Suddenly, as though at a signal, the Mongol axes battered against the fence, but at the same moment the Tukhlya men, with a mighty heave, lifted the barrier and knocked

the leading Mongols down. While the weight of the fence was stopping the front line of Mongols, the Tukhlya lads jumped forward, striking at the heads of the Mongols with their long-handled axes. The blood flowed—there were shouts and groans from the enemy—and again the attacking mob scattered, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Once more the delighted shouts of the defenders greeted this victory of their brothers. They were answered again with a fusillade of arrows from the Mongols and angry curses from the boyar. But the Tukhlya lads now had to desert their earlier position—and they sorrowfully parted with the spot from which they had so successfully repelled the first attacks of the Mongols. Without a single loss, without a wound, fully armed and in good order, they retreated to the walls of the boyar's house.

While the Tukhlya lads were so successfully repelling the attacks of the Mongols on the south side, the defensive battle on the north side was somewhat less successful. Here also, the Mongol arrows whistled over without any damage to the besieged. But here the Mongols immediately charged into the attack and the situation became very heated for the defendants. They threw themselves in a mass against the enemy, but were met with arrows and had to retreat, losing three wounded, whom the Mongols immediately slashed to pieces.

The first task facing Maxim now was to inspect all his positions and review the situation. The Mongols had formed a living chain around the house and kept up a continuous shooting. The besieged answered, but less heavily. Maxim saw immediately that the attackers were endeavouring to drive them into the house. Having done this, the Tukhlya lads would not be able to keep up heavy shooting, and victory would then come quite easily to their enemy. That meant that they must keep their positions outside the house at all costs. But here they were also in full view of the Mongol archers. To shelter themselves to some degree, Maxim ordered that the doors be removed, that the table tops be taken off and placed before every position like large shields. From behind these barriers Maxim's men safely and conveniently shot at the Mongols. Maxim went from position to position, thinking out new methods of defence and encouraging his comrades by

words and example.

“Hold on comrades! ” he urged. “They’ll soon hear the shouting in Tukhlya, or someone may see what is going on here and help will come! ”

The siege had already lasted a half-hour. The Mongols continued shooting and cursing terribly at the “Rus dogs”, who had not only refused to surrender, but had the audacity to so courageously and successfully defend themselves. Tuhar Vovk called their more able commanders together for council, to plan one decisive and final blow.

“We must charge them all at once,” suggested one.

“No, it will be difficult to charge. We must keep shooting till we have shot them all,” said another.

“Wait a moment,” said Tuhar Vovk, “there will be time for everything. The important thing now is to drive them away from their lesser positions. We’ll assemble our greatest number as if preparing for attack and so distract their attention. In the meantime our smaller forces will advance from both sides to the windowless walls, the unguarded part of the house. Once we’ve taken possession of them, we can do a lot of damage.”

The commanders agreed to this advice because they had little experience in such tactics and wouldn’t have been able to think of such a plan themselves. The Mongol forces stirred, their weapons clashed, their spears and axes flashed in the sun. On seeing this the Tukhlya lads courageously clenched their weapons in their hands, preparing for serious battle. But while the Mongols took council and prepared for the feigned attack, Maxim also wasn’t dreaming. A happy thought came into his mind. In the plank roof of the boyar’s house were small windows facing all four directions, and into each of these windows Maxim placed two of his weaker men. From this vantage point they could watch all the moves made by the enemy and from these secure positions injure them either by shooting or by stones. While one stood at the window, the other was to supply him with whatever necessary, and another was assigned to bring back any news to their comrades down below.

The horns sounded again and the Mongols, with savage yells, threw themselves against their adversaries. They

didn't have in mind, however, to meet them face to face, but stopped at the half-way point and aimed a shower of arrows at the besieged. When the attacked, who were prepared for the final, decisive battle, greeted them with a hail of arrows in return, wounding many and killing some, the entire Mongol line retreated as one. The Tukhlya lads greeted this retreat with loud jibes.

"Now what, boyar," called Maxim, "the might of the great Genghis Khan, I see, has the heart of a rabbit; they take a run, then retreat! Aren't you ashamed, an old warrior like you, to command such a spiritless company that is only brave as a mob, like those sheep, but not a single one makes up a man on their own?"

The boyar answered to none of these jeers; he saw very well that Maxim was laughing prematurely, and Maxim very quickly saw this for himself.

Shouts of joy from the Mongol side resounded at that moment from both the right and left side walls of the house at the same time. During the feigned Mongol attack the others had moved against those walls as had been planned. These were the walls without windows or doors, and the Tukhlya lads had neglected to watch them as carefully. True, the sentries at the windows on the roof had seen their approach and had fired some successful shots at them, but this didn't deter them, particularly after they had reached the house, for the overhanging roof shielded them from any danger from above.

Maxim paled on hearing these ominous shouts so close, and on learning from the sentry up on his perch, what they meant.

"We're lost," he thought, "there can now be no hope of help. Now we must fight not for life, but to the death."

Tuhar Vovk, seeing the success of his maneuver, loudly proclaimed his delight.

"What now, peasants! " he shouted, "we'll see now how long your pride will last. Look, my warriors are already at your walls. Set fire to those walls! We'll soon smoke them out of their nest, and once they're in the open field, they'll be like mice against our cat."

Maxim saw that this was no jesting matter, so he called his comrades together, for there was no way in which they could fight in individual positions when the Mongols were

lighting fires beneath the walls of the building.

“Brothers,” he said, “it seems we may have to die, for there is little hope of rescue. The Mongols, and you know this as well as I do, will have no mercy on any one who falls into their hands, just as they showed no mercy to our wounded comrades. If we are to die, then let us die like men—with weapons in our hands. What do you think: will we take a stand and defend ourselves to our last breath, protected at least partly by the walls, or should we, all together, make an attack on the Mongols? Perhaps we’ll be successful in breaking their ranks?”

“Yes, yes, let’s attack the Mongols!” cried his comrades as one. “We’re not foxes that the hunter smokes out of their lair.”

“Good, if that’s the way you want it,” said Maxim. “Now stand in three rows, throw your bows and arrows away, and take your knives and axes—then after me!”

Like a large boulder fired out of a catapult at a fortress wall, so did our young men charge the Mongol ranks. True, by the time they reached the Mongols they were met by a hail of arrows—but these didn’t harm anyone, for the first line carried the tops of the tables hammered into two spears as shields and the Mongol arrows sank harmlessly into the wood. On reaching the Mongols the men threw down their wooden shields and hurled themselves at the enemy with reckless despair. The Mongols were immediately thrown into confusion and began to fall back, but Tuhar Vovk arrived with his company and surrounded the Tukhlya lads with a whole crowd of Mongols, just as hunters would surround an enraged boar with a pack of dogs. A veritable slaughter took place. The courageous young men laid about them and mowed down large numbers of the Mongol warriors, but Tuhar Vovk kept sending up ever new reserves against them. Blood flowed in torrents. Men struggled insanely. The wounded groaned, and the laments of the dying mixed with the savage yells of the killers. It was like a diabolical symphony which pierced the ear and the heart and reverberated under the smiling bright sun and against the background of pine forests and the incessant roar of cold mountain streams.

“To the right, comrades! Together and in unison, press them hard!” shouted Maxim, fighting back three Mongols

who were trying to knock his weapons out of his hands. With awesome persistence the comrades pressed to the right where the Mongol line was the weakest and the spot for defensive action most suitable. After a moment of opposition the Mongols retreated.

“Forward, forward, chase them ahead of you!” shouted Maxim, throwing himself with his bloodied axe after the retreating Mongols. His comrades followed and the Mongol retreat quickly turned into terrified flight. The Tukhlya lads pursued at their heels, knocking down one after another from the rear. Before them lay the open field and beyond it, close by, a dark and fragrant forest. If they could but reach it, they would be safe, for no Mongol force would have the power to do anything to them there.

“Forward, comrades, forward, to the forest!” shouted Maxim, and without stopping for breath—silently, bloodied and terrible, in fact like wild animals—the comrades drove the fleeing Mongols before them in the direction of the forest. Tuhar Vovk, in a glance saw the situation from both sides and burst into laughter.

“A safe journey!” he called after the Tukhlya lads. “We’ll meet again on this road!”

And he quickly separated a group of Mongol warriors and sent them up the hill to the Tukhlya road to meet the Tukholians face to face on the other side. He knew that his Mongols would get there in good time. He himself, with the remainder of the Mongol company, set out to overtake the Tukholians from the rear.

Three clouds of dust rose in the air over the field above the Opir—three groups of people sped after each other across that field. The first runners were the group of frightened, shattered Mongols; behind them and catching up, our Tukhlya lads led by Maxim, and after them the main company of Mongols led by Tuhar Vovk. The third company of Mongol warriors, sent by Tuhar Vovk up the hill to cut across them from the front, quickly disappeared from view without being observed by the hotly pursuing Tukhlya lads.

Suddenly the fleeing Mongols slowed up and stopped. An unexpected barrier had shown up before them—the deep passage forged out of the cliff—the entrance to the

Tukhlya road. The passage here was almost two fathoms deep, its walls steep and smooth, so that it was impossible to get down into the valley. To jump was too dangerous, especially for those ahead, who feared that those behind them would land on top of them. In mortal fear which often, in the final moments, brings out the courage in the most frightened, the Mongols stopped and turned to face their adversaries. For a moment they were buoyed up with sudden hope; following their adversaries and overtaking them were their own men—and their hands automatically went to their weapons. But this sudden burst of courage was unable to save them. Like a hurricane the Tukholian lads fell upon them—breaking down and overcoming all obstacles—they pushed them over the precipice.

With screams the Mongols in the rear dropped down the cliff-side, while those in front agonized under the blows of the Tukhlya axes and swords. Now the Tukhlya lads found themselves standing over the steep wall of the precipice and shuddered. Behind them came Tuhar Vovk and his company, before them lay this terrible chasm! What to do? A moment of thought was enough for Maxim. The sight of the broken bodies of the Mongols lying at the bottom of the precipice gave him a good idea.

“Let the last row turn to face the Mongols and break their advance, and the front row throw the Mongol dead over the precipice and then jump down on them, breaking your fall,” he shouted.

“Hurrah! ” the young men shouted and carried out his directions. The Mongol corpses dropped over the cliff-side with a hum and the hope of deliverance rose high in the hearts of the Tukhlya lads. But here were the Mongolian pursuers with Tuhar Vovk in the lead.

“No more! ” he screamed. “This time you won’t escape my hands! ” And he felled his first adversary, one who had only the day before been one of his finest archers, with a blow from his heavy axe. The mortally wounded soldier shrieked as he fell at the boyar’s feet. A friend swung his axe at Tuhar, hoping to revenge the death of his comrade, but in that same moment he himself was lifted on Mongolian spears from both sides. The whole first row of defenders fell after a short skirmish. These were the weakest and those who were wounded in battle, who had been in

the rear of the chase. However they were able to stop the Mongols for a moment while their more fortunate comrades reached the safety of the bottom of the cliff.

“Stop!” cried Maxim, “line up against the wall of the precipice! If they wish to pursue us further, then this is where we’ll arrange for them a bloody bath!”

“Let the first row jump after them!” commanded Tuhar Vovk from above, in the thoughtless heat of the battle. The first row followed his command, but did not land alive, in fact many were killed before reaching the ground, having been met in mid-air by the axes of the Tukhlya lads.

“Hurrah!” they shouted again. “Come on, let the second line jump down also!”

But the second line stopped at the top of the precipice and was in no hurry to jump. Tuhar Vovk had seen his mistake and quickly sent a strong group lower down the hill so that they would close the exit from the passage.

“Now you won’t escape us, you rogues!” he rejoiced. “Here are my hunters coming! Come, children, at them again!”

A savage shout rose from the passage right below Tuhar Vovk’s feet. This was the company that had been sent uphill to cut off the Tukhlya lads. Now in the passage, they attacked the young Tukholians.

“Escape down the passage!” they cried, but one glance showed them that their hope of escape was lost. Another group of Mongols had darkened the lower entrance and was advancing toward them, shutting them off completely in this stone cage.

“Now will be our death!” said Maxim, wiping his bloodied axe on the sheepskin jacket of a dead Mongol. “Comrades, bravely into this final battle!”

With great courage they fought. Drawing on all their strength, they attacked the Mongols, and in spite of sloping terrain, which helped the Mongols, were able again to confuse them and inflict a lot of damage. But the Mongols with their superior number were able to drive them down the passage and break up their ranks. Heroically defending themselves, the Tukhlya lads fell one after another, and only Maxim, who fought like a lion, did not yet have a wound on his body. The Mongols avoided him

and when they did attack it was with the hope of disarming him and taking him alive. This was the clear command of Tuhar Vovk.

Now that the second company of Mongols had come up from below, the young men were hopelessly caged in the passage. They were pressed against the wall, with the only clear spot before them what they could achieve with their axes and swords. But their arms were beginning to weaken, while the Mongols pushed and pushed against them like the waves of a flood. Some, who had already lost all hope and seeing the impossibility of further defence, blindly threw themselves into the thick of the battle and perished immediately, hewed to pieces by the Mongol axes. Others, whispering a prayer, pressed against the cliff walls as though they might give them some help; the third, even though continuing to defend themselves, did so unconsciously, waving their axes mechanically and the mortal blows of the Mongols caught them already as corpses, unfeeling and spiritless. Only a small group of the strongest—five in all—surrounding Maxim, still held themselves straight, like spires, in the middle of a shouting flood. This small group, standing on a pile of corpses as though on a tower, had already beaten back three attacks; the swords and axes in the hands of these heroes were already dulled, their clothes, hands and faces completely covered with blood. But Maxim's voice still rose strongly and clearly, encouraging his comrades in defence. Tuhar Vovk, half in rage, half in wonder, gazed at them from above.

“By God, what an amazing young man!” he said to himself, “No wonder he charmed my daughter. He could charm me also with his knightly courage!”

Then turning to the Mongols who were standing on the edge of the precipice beside him, he shouted:

“Come, jump down on them and let's finish with this carnage! But don't touch that one!” and he pointed at Maxim.

All together, like some heavy boulder, the Mongols leaped down on the as yet unconquered group of heroes and felled them to the ground. Again there was a roar of savage shouting, a few half-hearted skirmishes with the remaining Tukholians, but not for long. A whole mass of Mongols rushed at each of the heroes—and all perished.

Only Maxim now stood alone like an oak in a meadow. He sliced in half the head of a Mongol who jumped at him and raised his axe against another when an iron hand grasped him by the throat from the rear and threw him to the ground. Maxim fell, a victim of cunning, and over him, scarlet with rage and strain, bent the face of Tuhar Vovk.

“Well, *smerd!*” jeered the boyar loudly, “can you see now that I can keep my word? Come, children, put him in chains!”

“Even though in chains, I’m still a free man. My chains are on my hands, while yours are on your soul!” said Maxim.

The boyar burst into laughter and walked away to bring order into the Mongol ranks, which were heavily thinned out in the bloody slaughter. He then went into his house with the main body of the Mongols who were left. The others he ordered to occupy the unfortunate passage, littered with corpses. Separating all who were well to guard the passage, he himself, with a smaller group and his prisoner Maxim, were to return to the encampment.

“Accursed peasants!” the boyar grumbled, totalling his losses. “All these people killed! Well, the devil take these Mongols—I’m not sorry for them! If only I can get to power over their corpses, I’ll turn my face against them too. But this scoundrel, this Maxim—there’s a fighter! Who knows, maybe he will be of service to my purpose. I’ll have to use him now that I have him in my hands. He must serve us as a guide through the mountains, for the devil only knows what this road of theirs is like and if there aren’t any traps along it. Now that he is in my hands, he must be won over, appeased a bit. Who knows what else he may turn out to be useful for.”

In the meantime, the Mongols were preparing their horses for departure. Maxim, bound hand and foot in heavy chains, bloodied, hair wet with perspiration and with clothing torn to shreds, sat on a rock by the river, silent, with his teeth clenched and despair in his heart. In the field above and in the passage lay the not yet cold heaps of tattered and blood-spattered bodies of his comrades and enemies. How fortunate were those corpses! They lay so quietly, so peacefully on their bloody bed—without anger, without suffering, without hostility.

They were laughing now at all fetters, at all the power of the great Genghis Khan. As for him, this piece of iron made him an inanimate instrument in the hands of savage wilfulness, a victim of bloody revenge. How fortunate were those corpses! Though mutilated, they carried the image and form of human beings—while in one moment these shackles had made him into an animal, a slave!

“O blessed Sun! ” cried Maxim in his pain. “Could it be that it is your will that I die in chains? Could it be that you so often greeted the days of my happiness with your bright smile only so that today you could greet my bottomless misery? Could it be, O Sun, that you have stopped being the good God of Tukhlya and have become the guardian of these mad savages?”

And the Sun laughed! Its bright, hot rays shone in the puddles of blood, kissed the livid lips and the deep wounds through which the brains of the dead leaked out, the human bowels, still warm. These same bright, hot rays flooded the green forest, the beautiful, fragrant flowers and the far-off mountain meadows which bathed in the clear azure air. The Sun smiled and with its divine, indifferent smile, more deeply wounded Maxim’s torn heart.

6

Zakhar Berkut was dreaming a strange dream. It seemed to him that it was the day of their annual festival of the Guardian and the whole community had gathered around the rock at the entrance to the Tukhlya Pass—the girls with wreaths, the young lads with music, all dressed in their holiday clothes. He was also there, the oldest member of the community, approaching the sacred rock and praying before it. Strange, anxious and painful feelings took possession of his heart as he prayed—something ached deep in his soul—and he didn’t know what it was. He prayed passionately. After two or three words of the customary prayer he abandoned the ritual established into custom through the ages; a new, more passionate, more impetuous prayer flowed from his lips. The entire community, deeply moved, fell prone to the ground, and he did the same. But the words continued to come. It grew dark, black clouds

covered the sky, thunder rolled across the valley, lightning flashed and flitted across the entire horizon with blinding flame, the earth trembled. At the same time, slowly inclining, the sacred rock moved from its place and with a terrible crash fell toward him.

“What could it have meant?” Zakhar asked himself, thinking about the dream. “Fortune or misfortune? Happiness or sorrow?” But he could find no answer to these questions, except that the dream left him with a deep sense of foreboding, a cloud of sadness on his brow.

This foreboding was quickly realised. Immediately after the noon hour the terrible, unexpected news came to Tukhlya. Herdsmen from a neighbouring meadow rushed breathless into the village, shouting out that they had seen a battle of some kind by the boyar’s house, a crowd of unfamiliar dark people, and heard an incomprehensible language and much shouting. Nearly all the young men of Tukhlya, arming themselves in whatever was at hand, ran to the site of the battle, but stopped at a distance when they saw the bloody and corpse-strewn field and the boyar’s home surrounded by a swarm of Mongols. There was no doubt about it—all the young men who had been sent out to dismantle the boyar’s house had died in an unequal struggle with the invaders. Not knowing what to do, the young men returned to the village, carrying the terrible news with them. Old Zakhar, on hearing it, shuddered, and a bitter tear slid down his old cheek.

“So my dream has come to pass,” he whispered. “My son Maxim has fallen in defence of his village. So it had to be. If one has to die, let one die honourably—it doesn’t happen to everyone. I mustn’t grieve after him, but rejoice in his fate.”

So old Zakhar comforted himself, but his heart was filled with pain, for he loved his youngest son too deeply, with all the strength of his heart. But his strength of spirit soon came to the fore. His people turned to him, for they needed his advice. They walked in a crowd, old and young, out of the village to the Tukhlya Pass, beyond which, so close, stood their terrible foe.

For the first time in the history of Tukhlya the community council met without its traditional ceremony, without its standard, among the clash of axe and scythe, in a

half-terrified, half-militant clamour. The old and the young mixed without order, armed and unarmed, and even women were seen wandering here and there in the crowd, asking for news of the enemy, or loudly bewailing the loss of their sons.

“What to do? Where to start? How to defend ourselves?” The words hummed through the crowd. One thought prevailed over all others—to go together to the pass and defend themselves against the Mongols to the last drop of blood. The youth, especially, insisted on this.

“We want to die as our brothers died, in the defence of our land!” they shouted. “The enemy will enter our Tukhlya Valley only over our corpses!”

“Let’s make barricades in the pass and harrass the Mongols,” counselled the elders.

Later, after the clamour had died down a bit, Zakhar Berkut spoke up:

“Though this is a question of war and it is not for me, an old man, to advise about something that I cannot do anything about myself, still, I would think that our service would not be so great if we only repel the Mongols, especially as we consider it won’t be too difficult for us to do so. Our sons have died at their hands, their blood had stained our earth and calls on us for revenge. Will we have revenged ourselves on our foe, on the destroyers of our land, if we repel them only from our village? No, for after being repelled from our village they will attack others with even greater savagery. Not to repel, but to defeat them completely—that must be our aim!”

The crowd listened attentively to the words of their speaker and the youth, flexible to anything new and unexpected, were ready to accept this advice, though they didn’t know how it could be achieved. But many voices among the elders spoke up against it.

“It’s not with anger that we are saying this, father Zakhar,” spoke up one countryman, “but your advice, though wise and promises great glory, is impossible for us to carry out. Our forces are too weak, while the Mongol strength is great. There has been no help as yet from other highland communities, nor from communities beyond the highlands. Even if it comes, we will still be too weak to even surround the Mongols, let alone defeat them in open

war. And without that, how can we defeat them? No, no! We are not strong enough! We'll be lucky if we can repel them from our village and turn them away from our pass; there is no hope of our defeating them at all! ”

Seeing the entire truth of these words, Zakhar Berkut was ready to give up his youthfully impetuous thought, though with aching heart, when two completely unexpected events considerably raised the morale of the Tukhlya community and changed all their plans.

One after another, from the lower part of the village, heralded by the sound of horns and wooden *trembitas*, came three companies of armed young men. Each company carried a military standard and their enthusiastic, courageous songs reverberated far into the hills. This was the promised help from the highland villages and villages from beyond the highlands. Man by man, like fully-grown maples, the three companies stood in long rows before the gathered Tukholians and lowered their banners in greeting. It was a pleasure to look at these strong, brown faces, warmed by manly courage, and pride that they were being called upon to lay down their lives for what was dearest to them on earth; that on their weapons there lay a great responsibility. Thundering, joyous shouts, greeted their arrival; only the mothers who had only that day lost their sons wept at the sight of these young men in the flower of their manhood, who tomorrow might also lay down their heads, be mown down and trampled on just as their sons, their brave eagles had been today. Old Zakhar Berkut's heart also filled with pain when he looked at these young men and thought about how splendid his own son would have looked among them. But no, enough! One cannot return the dead, but the living live, and dream...

The joy at the arrival of the awaited help had not yet faded away; the community had not yet had time to return to their meeting, when from the opposite wooded glade, which was above the Tukhlya Pass, came a new and also totally unexpected guest. On a foaming horse, its skin torn by branches and brambles, and almost lying on its back so that he might ride faster and more securely, rode someone as fast as the horse could carry him. It was difficult to tell who the rider was from a distance. The

rider was dressed in a sheepskin jacket, turned woolside out, and on his head he had a lovely beaver peaked cap. The young men took the rider to be a Mongol messenger and stepped forward to meet him with their bows ready. But having left the forest behind and neared the steep precipice by which one descended into the Tukhlya valley, the supposed Mongol dismounted his horse, took off his sheepskin jacket and to everyone's surprise, turned out to be a woman in a white linen mantle interwoven with silk thread, with a bow hanging on her back and a glittering axe in her belt.

"Miroslava, the daughter of our boyar!" cried the young men, staring. They couldn't tear their eyes away from this beautiful, courageous girl. She, however, didn't even look at them, but left her horse where she had dismounted and began quickly to look for a path by which she could descend into the valley. Her quick eyes soon found such a path, almost completely concealed by the wide, long-fringed leaves of the ferns and thorny bramble bushes that grew on both sides of it. With confident stride, as though accustomed to this from childhood, she came down the path into the valley and approached the crowd.

"Good health to you, good people," she greeted them, blushing slightly. "I have rushed here to inform you that the Mongols are on their way, will be here before nightfall, and that you should prepare to meet them."

"We knew this," called several voices from the crowd. "It's not news to us."

The voices were sharp and unfriendly toward the daughter of the villainous boyar through whom so many of their young men had lost their lives. But she wasn't offended by this hostility, though she obviously sensed it.

"So much the better for me, that you are prepared," she answered. "And now please tell me where among you is Zakhar Berkut."

"Here I am, young woman," answered Zakhar Berkut, approaching. For a long moment, attentively and with respect, Miroslava gazed at him.

"Allow me, good Father," she said in a voice trembling with agitation, "to tell you first of all that your son is alive and well."

“My son! ” cried Zakhar, “Alive and well? Oh God! Where is he? What is happening to him?”

“Don’t panic, Father, from the news I am going to give you . Your son was taken captive by the Mongols.”

“In bondage?” cried Zakhar, as though hit by lightning. “No, it cannot be! My son would rather allow himself to be cut to ribbons than be taken captive. It cannot be! You want to frighten me, you bad girl! ”

“No, Father, I’m not trying to frighten you. It’s true. I have come here straight from the Mongol encampment. I saw him, talked with him. They took him by force and through deceit, bound him in chains. Though not wounded, he is covered with the blood of the enemy. No, Father, your son didn’t dishonour your name.”

“And what did he say?”

“He told me to come here, Father, to comfort you in your loneliness and sorrow, to become your daughter, your child, because I, Father,” and here her voice trembled even more, “I ... am an orphan, I have no father! ”

“You have no father? Could it be that Tuhar Vovk is dead?”

“No, Tuhar Vovk is alive, but Tuhar Vovk stopped being my father when he ... betrayed ... his country and began ... to serve the Mongols.”

“We could have expected this,” replied Zakhar morosely.

“Now I cannot consider him my father, because I don’t want to betray my homeland. Father, please be my parent! Accept me as your child! Your unfortunate son begs you to do this through my lips.”

“My son! My unfortunate son! ” groaned Zakhar, he was not looking at Miroslava. “Who will comfort me when he is gone?”

“Don’t worry, Father, it may be that he is still alive, that we may be able to save him. Now listen to what Maxim told me! ”

“Speak, speak! ” said Zakhar, now looking at her again.

“He advises the Tukhlya people not to try and stop the Mongols before they get to the pass, but to allow them to enter and then be caged within it. There they can be surrounded and be demolished to the last man and if not, they can be starved to death. But barricades must be

built at the outlet over the falls and everything must be taken out of the village, all the community property, the grain, bread, cattle, and then the Mongols must be locked in there from all sides. 'Here,' said Maxim, 'they can be defeated, and nowhere else!' That's what Maxim advises."

The crowd listened to Miroslava with tense attention. A deep silence lay over the throng when she finished speaking. But Zakhar, straightened up proudly and approached Miroslava with open arms.

"My daughter!" he said. "Now I can see that you are worthy of being the daughter of Zakhar Berkut! These are the true words of my son—they show his militant spirit! With these words you have captured my father's heart! Now I will find it easier to console myself at his loss, when heaven has sent me such a daughter to take his place!"

Sobbing loudly, Miroslava threw herself into his arms.

"No, Father, don't say such things," she said. "Your son won't be killed, he'll return to you. He will be here this evening with the Mongol horde, and if God would help us to destroy them, then we will be able to free him too!"

At that moment shouts were heard from the sentinels at the pass: "The Mongols! The Mongols!" and they appeared before the people crying out that large numbers of Mongol forces had invaded the valley by the Opir River. Now it became crucial to decide quickly what to do, how to defend themselves. Zakhar Berkut again insisted that the Mongols be allowed into the Tukhlya hollow and there, having surrounded them, they could destroy or starve them out to the last man.

No voice was raised against this advice now—and the gathering made a swift decision. All rushed back to their homes to take their possessions into the forest. The young men from other communities moved with great speed to the upper part of the valley, to the waterfall, to make barricades at the entrance and prevent the Mongols from entering at that point. The village became the scene of concentrated action. Shouts, directions, questions, the lowing of oxen and the creaking of the wooden two-wheeled carts echoed on every side, deafening the ears and rolling across the mountains. The Tukholians took sad

leave of their cottages, yards and gardens, the cultivated fields which yet today would be trampled and ruined by the terrible Mongol flood. Mothers carried their weeping children, fathers drove the cattle, transported the family possessions, bags of grain and clothing, in the carts. The dust rose above the village; only the silvery waters of the stream continued to murmur as always and the ancient, huge Guardian rock at the entrance to the Tukhlya Pass, stood gloomy, forsaken and sad, as though sorrowing over his children who had to leave their beautiful valley. It seemed to lean forward toward the pass as if to bar the enemy from entering with its huge, stone body. The linden in the centre of the common beyond the village also seemed to droop with sorrow, and the roaring waterfall, transfused with the crimson rays of the setting sun, stood like an immovable pillar over the deserted Tukhlya hollow.

The village was now completely deserted. The houses sank into the evening darkness; the dust settled on the roadway; the voices and shouts were stilled, eternal wilderness seemed to have devoured all life in the valley. The sun set beyond the Tukhlya mountains, sinking into light, rosy clouds; the dark forests around Tukhlya whispered quietly, secretly, as though notifying each other of some ominous news. Only the earth, for whatever reason, roared dully and groaned; the air, though clear and mild, trembled with an odd, confused hum which caused even the boldest to shiver. And far, far away in the forests, in the deep, dark ravines with their inaccessible windfalls, the wolves howled, the foxes barked in fits and snatches, the stags bleated, the bison lowed. But the village was silent, lifeless! And the skies so clear, so fair! But no! The sun set suddenly behind a dark cloud which had come up like a wall from the west, filling the air with wild clamour, and descended on Tukhlya. These were the prophets of doom and constant companions of the horde—the rooks and the ravens—in their countless numbers, sensing food. The ominous birds beat their wings through the air, broke into patches, then threw themselves in all directions like clouds scattered by a storm. The peaceful roofs of Tukhlya were soon covered by the black guests, their clamour bubbling like boiling water in a huge kettle. Silent, unmoving, standing on the steep shoreline of their valley, the Tukho-

lians looked down on, and in their hearts cursed these evil harbingers of death and ruin.

But the scene soon changed. Like an autumn flood through a break in a dam, that's how the dark spectres, with terrifying shouts, poured into the valley. Row followed row, without end and without break, like water below the waterfall—so they paused after emerging from the narrow mouth—then formed into long lines, and moving slowly, without opposition, flooded the deserted valley. front, along the roadway, rode the terrible giant Burunda-Behadir on a white horse, and alongside rode another, smaller rider—Tuhar Vovk.

They advanced slowly as though expecting an attack from the village at any moment. But the attack didn't come, the village lay as though after a plague. Shrieking and screaming, the first rows of Mongols threw themselves at the houses to kill and pillage in their traditional manner—but there was no one to kill, the houses were empty. With cries of anger the Mongols dashed from house to house, breaking down doors, ruining gates and fences, breaking up casks and hedges, demolishing the stoves. But all their anger was in vain—there was no one in the village.

“The cursed dogs!” fumed Burunda to Tuhar Vovk. “They heard us and have hidden themselves!”

“Will we spend the night here, Behadir?” asked Tuhar Vovk, without replying to the commander's remark.

“Until we meet with those dogs we can't sleep,” answered Burunda. “Lead us to the exit of this hole, we must secure our exit!”

“The exit is safe,” appeased his anger Tuhar Vovk, though even for him it was somewhat confusing to see how the Tukholians had so swiftly cleared the village. And though he tried to calm the Mongol commander, he begged him to direct the soldiers to stop looking for booty and hasten to the exit. Very unwillingly the front ranks of the Mongol horde went toward the exit, while the back rows were still squeezing through the pass, ever more densely filling the Tukhlya hollow.

The leading detachment had already left the village and hurried toward the exit hewed out in the cliff-side. Nothing could be seen in the pass from below and the Mongols

stepped confidently right up to the steep wall of the cliff through which the pass had been hewed. Suddenly, a mass of rock came down on the Mongols from above, wounding and destroying many. The cries of the invaders, wounded and fallen, filled the air. The birds of prey cawed and wheeled above their victims. The invaders began to withdraw backwards and to the sides when Burunda and Tuhar Vovk threw themselves forward with drawn swords to stop them.

“Where are you going, fools! ” bawled Burunda enraged. “There is the entrance to the pass. After me! ”

And pushing the whole throng before him, he threw himself into the mouth of the pass. But here the invaders were again greeted with a hail of stones from above and more than one of Genghis Khan’s warriors’ eyes were blinded by blood and their brains splashed against the stone walls from a crushed skull. Shouts and groans emerged out of the dark passage as though out of hell, but above them the voice of Burunda rose even louder:

“Forward, rabbit hearts, forward after me! ”

And new masses, disregarding the falling rock, surged into the passage.

“Further up the passage! ” urged Burunda, protecting his head from the falling rock with his shield.

In the meantime, Tuhar Vovk, seeing a mass of young men on the top of the cliff, directed the Mongols standing at the entrance of the pass to rain a shower of arrows at them. Screams of pain came down from above and the Mongols shouted loudly with joy at the sound. But in revenge for their three wounded comrades, the Tukhlya lads, with doubled anger, began to throw large slabs of stone at the invaders. Even this wouldn’t have stopped Burunda if in the bend in the passage, in its centre, a new unexpected obstacle hadn’t appeared. The passage was obstructed, right to the top, with huge rock boulders. Here the Tukholians attacked even more fiercely, with the rocks coming down like hail. The Mongols fell, one after another, and Burunda saw, finally, that his persistence was for nothing because they couldn’t get through until they could successfully bring the Tukholians down from above.

“Back! ” he shouted, and the remaining few Mongols from the storming troops, dispirited, flew out of the pass

like a rock out of a sling.

“The pass is barricaded!” said Burunda to the boyar, breathing heavily and wiping the sweat and blood from his face.

“Let’s leave them now, let them rejoice!” said Tuhar Vovk.

“No!” shouted Burunda, looking arrogantly at the boyar. “The warriors of the great Genghis Khan don’t know how to postpone matters till tomorrow when they can be done today.”

“But what can we do here today?” asked Tuhar Vovk, looking with fear into the dark mouth of the pass, from which the groans and cries of the mortally wounded and dying Mongols could still be heard.

“Those dogs must be brought down from the cliff!” cried Burunda angrily, pointing at the ridge of the precipice. “Bring the ladders! Those in front shall go up while those behind will shoot to keep them away! We’ll see who will win!”

Ladders were brought up from the near-by houses and under Tuhar Vovk’s directions they were girded together with poles and connected to form something like a wall. The Tukholians looked calmly at this activity from above. Now the Mongols, with much shouting, lifted this assembled ladder and pushed it forward toward the wall of the cliff. The Tukholians greeted them with stones, arrows and spears, but were unable to restrain them, for when one or another of them fell wounded, others immediately took their place and moved ever closer. At the same time the rear ranks of the Mongols kept up a steady stream of arrows, forcing the Tukholians to fall back. The terrible ladder was quickly drawing nearer. The Tukholians began to panic.

Not far from the field of battle and protected by a huge boulder, sat Zakhar Berkut on a pile of straw, ministering to the wounded. He removed the arrows from their wounds, washed them with Miroslava’s help, and was preparing to bind them after applying some prepared resin, when several frightened warriors ran up and told him of the danger threatening them.

“What can I advise you, children?” asked the old man, but Miroslava jumped up and ran over to see the danger for herself.

“Don’t worry,” she told the Tukholians, “we’ll quickly tell them their fortune! Let them shoot and you take your spears and lie prone. When the first of them show themselves over the top of the rock, then all together at them! They themselves will be your protection against their arrows and having shaken off those at the top, you’ll stop those below as well. The darkness will help us and beating them back now will leave us in peace for the rest of the night.”

Without a word of opposition the Tukholians fell down on the ground, their spears in their hands. The arrows still kept coming for a while then stopped—a sign that the first row had begun to climb up the ladder. Holding their breath, the Tukholians lay there, awaiting their enemy. Now they could hear the squeaking of the rungs of the ladder, the hard breathing of the climbing men, the rattle of their weapons—and slowly, before the eyes of the lying men emerged the fur caps and under them the black, fierce faces with small glittering eyes. The eyes looked anxiously, unerringly, as though bewitched, at the lying Tukholians, but the heads rose higher, ever higher; one could already see the shoulders under them, the shoulders covered with the fur jackets, the broad chests. At that moment the Tukholians sprang up with fearful cries and thrust their spears deep into the chests of the invaders. Shouts, roars, confusion—here and there convulsive movements, here and there a short struggle, curses and groans—and like a heavy avalanche the enemy tumbled down the ladder toward the bottom, knocking down those coming up behind them. Then down on that chaotic pile of living and dead, bloody and shivering and wailing bodies, there descended an avalanche of rock—and above all this confusion, partially veiled by the coming night, rose the joyous shout of the Tukholians, the pitiful laments of the Mongols and the thundering, terrible curses of Burunda-Behadir. This one leaped about as though mad, tearing his hair and finally completely lost his head in his anger. He drew his sword and faced Tuhar Vovk.

“You white-skinned cur! ” he shouted, grinding his teeth. “You twofold traitor, this is your fault! You brought us here to this cavity out of which we now can’t get out! ”

Tuhar Vovk grew hot with anger at this accusation. His hand automatically went to his sword, but at that moment something so deep, so heavily pained his heart, that his arm weakened and fell and he, with head bent and clenched teeth, said in a smothered voice:

“Great Behadir, you are unjust in your anger against a faithful servant of Genghis Khan. I am not to blame that the *smerds* oppose us. Order the warriors to retire for the night and rest, and tomorrow morning you will see for yourself that they will disintegrate before our arrows like those dry autumn leaves before a puff of wind.”

“Hah, yes!” cried Burunda, “so that in the night they can attack us in their houses and slaughter our warriors!”

“Then have them burn the houses and sleep beneath the open sky!”

“You are speaking with great cunning so as to turn aside my anger, so as to cast away your guilt! No! You brought us here, you have to get us out, and immediately, tomorrow, without any waste of time or people! Are you listening to what I’m saying? That’s the way it has to be, or woe betide you!”

In vain Tuhar Vovk tried to convince the savage Behadir that he was not to blame, that he had advised what to his mind had been for the best, that the council of Mongol commanders had agreed to his proposals, that no commander could guarantee against unexpected mishaps that happen along the way. All this was in vain.

“Very well, boyar,” said Burunda finally, “I’ll do as you say, but tomorrow you will still have to find us a way out of this trap, and if not, then woe to you! This is my final word. I’m waiting action, not words, from you!”

And he turned arrogantly away from the boyar and stalked off to his men, commanding in a loud voice that they set fire to the village from all sides immediately, and to clear the area of everything that could serve the enemy as a cover for a night attack. The Mongols gave a shout of joy—they had been waiting for just this command. Tukhlya went up in flames from every side, breaking the darkness that had fallen with tongues of flame rising into the sky. The smoke rolled densely and covered the valley. The thatched roofs crackled under the licking red flames. The fires burst up, then receded, then jumped up again, as

if wanting to reach the sky. Occasionally, again from a puff of wind, the flames spread flatly, erupted in golden sparks, glimmered, then undulated like a flaming sear. The noise of falling rafters and walls rolled dully across the valley; stooks of straw and hay looked like piles of smouldering coal with flaming white streaks appearing here and there out of their centres. The trees burned like candles, their burning glowing leaves rising high in the air, like a swarm of golden butterflies. The whole Tukhlya valley now looked like a blazing inferno. The Mongols danced and ran among the flames, shouting savagely and throwing everything that they came across into the fires. With deep groans, the ancient linden—witness to countless community meetings—fell heavily to the ground, felled by the axes of the Mongols. The air in the Tukhlya hollow grew so hot that it felt as if it were really in a kettle. A sudden wind from the mountains whirled the sparks about, tore at the burning straw and sticks and threw them like flaming arrows in all directions. The Tukhlya stream, seeing such glitter for the first time in its existence, warmed up for the first time in its cold, rocky bed. The fire lasted some two hours while the Tukholians, with expressions of helpless grief, watched from above. Then the Mongols began to put out some of the smouldering timbers by throwing them into the stream and began to busy themselves with digging a deep trench around their camp. Very quickly a tent for the commanders was set up in its centre. The rest of the army were to sleep under the open sky, on the ground heated up by the fire.

Once again darkness fell in the Tukhlya hollow. The Mongols would have been glad to light some bonfires in their camp, but were unable to do so. Only now they realised that they had created a desert with their fires and that everything that could possibly be burned had gone up in flames or had floated down the stream. The soldiers were therefore obliged to sleep and the sentries to stand watch in complete darkness—they couldn't even dig their trenches deep enough, as was necessary, because it grew so dark. Angry and dissatisfied, Burunda walked about the camp like a dark cloud, reviewing the trenches and the sentries placed beside them, shouting back and forth with his commanders and issuing orders on how to watch out

for night attacks. Night had fallen when the camp finally quieted down somewhat and only the shouts of the sentries and the roar of the waterfall broke the general silence.

There was only one glimmer of light in the entire Mongol camp—this was the flickering pitch torch in Tuhar Vovk's tent. The whitish flame flickered and hissed and smoked, devouring the melted tar and throwing an uncertain light around the boyar's tent. It was empty and cold in the tent, just as it was in Tuhar's heart. He walked about the tent deep in heavy thought. Burunda's arrogant words burned his proud soul. They were like a slap in the face. The boyar finally realised what a slippery path he was treading.

"Peta promised me the friendship of Genghis Khan," he muttered, "and this scoundrel is treating me like a dog. Could it be that I am their servant, lower than the servants of this bondsman? Peta promised me these mountains as an inheritance, a large Carpathian kingdom, and Burunda is threatening me with who knows what. And he could carry out his threats, confound him! What then—must I subordinate myself to him? Of course! I'm in his hands! I'm a slave, just as that scoundrel Maxim said! Now that I've thought of Maxim—where is he? Would it be possible to do what Burunda wants done by using him? Would it be possible, for instance, to exchange him for a free exit out of this hollow? It's a good idea! "

He called in two Mongols who were lying down close by and told them to find and bring the slave, Maxim, to him. Unwilling and complaining, the Mongols went—it seemed that the Tukhlya atmosphere was not conducive to sharp Mongol discipline...

But where was Maxim? How was he faring in captivity?

Maxim was sitting in the middle of a Tukhlya road, bound in heavy chains, opposite his father's house. His face was turned toward the yard where he had played as a boy, where he had walked only yesterday, a free man, busy with everyday chores, and over which today groups of the hated Mongols had prowled. He had been brought here on a horse and when the order came for them to stop here and set fire to the village, he had been taken off the horse and left in the roadway. No one paid attention

to him, no one watched him, but there was no thought of escape because groups of Mongols kept prowling around him—shouting, destroying and hunting for booty. Maxim didn't know what was happening about him and sat immovable on the road, like a stone road marker. His head seemed empty, his thoughts were incoherent and refused to set into one integral whole, wavered and flitted like frightened blackbirds. One thing he was aware of—that the chains that bound him were like cold iron serpents draining the strength from his body and all thoughts out of his head.

Suddenly there was a glow all around him—then dense, black smoke came down and covered Maxim, burning his eyes and choking the breath in his body. It was Tukhlya burning. Maxim sat in the middle of this conflagration and didn't move. The wind whirled the smoke around him, covered him with sparks, spouted him with heat—Maxim didn't seem to feel any of this. He would have been glad to have died with the village, to have flown into the air like one of those golden sparks and to fade away into that bright, cold blue, close to the golden stars. But the chains, the chains! How terribly heavy they were! .. Now his father's house was on fire, the flames erupted under the roof, wound like fiery serpents before the windows, looked into the house through the door and expelled a huge cloud of smoke so as to better establish themselves in the Berkut dwelling. Maxim watched the fire lifelessly; it seemed to him that here, in his chest, something was also being broken, something was blazing and pining away. And when the fire roared and the roof caved in, and the corners of his house fell, and a whole sea of sparks erupted out of this glowing, burning mass into the sky, Maxim cried out painfully and jumped up to his feet to run away somewhere, to save something—but taking but one step, helpless, as though mown down, he fell to the ground and fainted.

The fire had already gone out and the breeze blew the hot bitter smoke across the valley. The militant shouts of the Mongols who had been led by Burunda and Tuhar Vovk in the fight with the Tukholians in the pass had died down, the night sky over Tukhlya was now brighter with the starlight, and silence had settled over the camp, but

Maxim still lay as if lifeless in the centre of the roadway, opposite the burnt-out skeleton of his home. The stars looked mournfully down at his pale, blood-streaked face. His breast barely moved and this was the only indication that a live man was lying there and not a corpse. The Mongols found him lying there in this condition and immediately panicked, thinking him dead and that he had been suffocated by the fire. Only after they had doused him with water, washed his face and given him a drink, did he open his eyes and looked about him.

"He's alive, alive!" howled the Mongols, delighted, and picking up the half-conscious, weakened man under the arms, they rushed off to the boyar's tent.

Tuhar Vovk was struck with fear when he saw the hated young man in such a deplorable condition. His washed face was colourless, almost green, his lips cracked with fever and heat, his eyes reddened from smoke and glassy from exhaustion and inner pain, his knees shook like those of an old man, and after standing on his feet for a moment, he couldn't hold out and sat down on the ground. The Mongols moved away, and the boyar, silently and in deep thought, looked at Maxim for a long time. Why did he so hate this man? Why did he invoke such terrible grief on his young head? Why didn't he have him killed immediately, but delivered him to a slow, but still certain death—for it was certain that the Mongols would not let him escape alive, but would slaughter him like an animal and leave him on some roadway as soon as they were tired of dragging him around with them. Why had he come to hate the poor lad so? Was it because he had saved his daughter's life? Or was it because she was in love with him? Or perhaps for his truly warrior-like courage and sincerity? Or maybe because he wanted to be equal to him? Well, now they were equal. Both were now enslaved and both were unfortunate. Tuhar Vovk felt that his anger toward Maxim was burning out, like fire that had run short of wood. He had even earlier, after he'd taken Maxim captive, tried to ingratiate himself to him, not from sympathy, but from cunning, but Maxim had refused to say a word to him. True, the boyar had advised him in such a way that Maxim couldn't accept it. He advised him to go into service to the Mongols, to lead them across the mountains, promising him a big

reward, otherwise, he threatened, the Mongols would kill him. "Let them!" was the only answer that the boyar heard from Maxim's lips. It was surprising though, that far from angering the boyar, this proud answer which testified to the strength of Maxim's character pleased him. Now he clearly felt that something like a block of ice was melting in his heart; now on the ruins of free Tukhlya, he began to understand that the Tukholians had acted wisely and correctly, and in his heart, though blinded by greed for power, he wasn't so altogether deaf as not to admit it. All this the boyar had thought about today and now looked with different eyes at the half-dead, miserable Maxim, sitting in his tent. He stepped up to him, took his hand to raise him and seat him on a bench.

"Maxim," he said kindly, "what has happened to you?"

"Let go of me!" groaned Maxim weakly, "allow me to die in peace!"

"Maxim, my boy, where do you get these thoughts of death? I'm thinking about how I could get him freed, and he talks of death! Get up and sit here on the bench, rest a bit, I want to have a talk with you."

Though Maxim only half-understood and half-disbelieved the boyar's words and kindness, his weak state, hunger and exhaustion too loudly demanded refreshment for him to refuse the boyar's offered hospitality. A cup of fiery wine immediately refreshed him, as if awakening his vital strength to new life; a piece of roast meat quieted his hunger. While he ate, the boyar sat opposite him, giving him courage and the desire to live with friendly words.

"Foolish boy," he said, "such as you have got to live and not think of death. Life is a precious thing and no amount of wealth can buy it."

"Life in slavery is worth nothing," answered Maxim. "Death is preferable!"

"Well ... of course ... that's understood," said the boyar, "but I'm telling you that you can be free."

"By betraying my people, by leading the Mongols across the mountains... No, better to die than to so earn my freedom!"

"That's not the question," said the boyar smiling. "The question is that even without your, as you call it, betrayal, you can be free ... even today."

“How?” asked Maxim.

“I knew you’d listen,” the boyar smiled again. “Now then, this is how it is. Your Tukholians have surrounded us in this valley—barricaded the exit. Of course their opposition is only worth a laugh, for they cannot stop us. But we regret the time. That’s the point.”

Maxim’s eyes lit up with pleasure at this news.

“The Tukholians have surrounded you, you say?” he cried joyfully, “and you can’t get out of here? Well, thank God! I hope that you won’t get out. The Tukhlya people are firm—once they have someone in their hands, they don’t like to release them.”

“Tut, tut, tut!” the boyar interrupted. “Don’t rejoice too soon, my boy. We are not so weak that a small handful of your Tukhlya folk could keep us! I’m telling you that it isn’t important that you have stopped us here, but the time, every minute of time! We are in a hurry.”

“But in what way can I help you?”

“Well then, I am planning to approach your Tukhlya men for negotiations today. I want to promise them your life in return for free passage out of the valley. So then, I’m hoping that you will tell me how I can reach the hearts of your people and your father and get them to agree to my proposal.”

“Your efforts are in vain, boyar! The Tukhlya people won’t accept such an exchange.”

“They won’t accept?” cried the boyar. “Why won’t they accept?”

“The Tukholians will fight to the end to make sure you won’t cross these mountains. Did you expect that for such a mean exchange as myself, they would betray their fellow highlanders and brothers from beyond, whose villages would then be ruined just as our Tukhlya?”

“And they will be ruined, you foolish boy!” said the boyar. “Your Tukhlya forces are too weak to stop us.”

“Don’t brag, boyar, on the day before nightfall! Great forces are not necessary when nature itself, with its walls and cliffs, is stopping you.”

“But still and all, tell me how to speak to your father and to the Tukholians to reach their hearts.”

“Speak sincerely and truthfully—that’s the only sor-
cery.”

“Oh it’s not so simple, my boy, not so simple!” answered the boyar, dissatisfied. “Your father is an old sorcerer, he knows the words that reach to everyone’s heart, he must have taught these words to you. Without this knowledge you wouldn’t have been able to induce my archers, who so savagely fought the Mongols for nothing, on your side; they wouldn’t have fought better for greater rewards.”

Maxim laughed.

“What a strange man you are, boyar,” he said. “I know no such words, but I will tell you explicitly, that even if I knew them, I wouldn’t tell you, just so that you wouldn’t be able to convince the Tukholians to make such an exchange.”

The proud boyar exploded in anger.

“Be careful, boy. Take heed of who you are and where you are!” he shouted. “Remember that you are a prisoner, that your life depends on the will of any Mongol.”

“What’s my life?” answered Maxim calmly. “I’m not concerned about my life. Anyone who has known enslavement even for a moment has known worse than death.”

At that moment the tent flap was opened and Miroslava quickly entered.

She gave a rapid glance around the tent, and paying no attention to her father, threw herself toward Maxim.

“He’s here, he’s here!” she cried. “It was as if something pulled me here. Maxim, dear heart, what has been happening to you?”

Maxim sat immovable, his eyes fixed on Miroslava, who had grasped his hand and held it strongly. Her words sounded like the Easter bells to his ear; like invigorating dew to a wilted flower. Like shining hope, she knelt beside him, weeping over his heavy chains, her tears washing the dried blood from his hands. Warmth and joy crept into Maxim’s heart at her presence, at the touch of her soft hand. How warmly the blood coursed through his veins! How strongly his love of life asserted itself! But the chains that bound him were unmercifully tight, reminding him of his captivity, that a bloody Mongol knife hung over his head. This recollection at such a happy moment crept like a serpent into his heart, and his eyes filled with tears.

“Miroslava,” he turned away, “why did you come here to make my agony even worse? I had already accepted the idea of death and now you have again awakened in me the desire for life! ”

“My dear! ” answered Miroslava, “don’t lose hope. That’s why I am here, coming through all kinds of danger to the enemy camp to tell you so—don’t lose hope! ”

“Why do I need hope? Hope won’t break these chains.”

“But my father will.”

“Ah, your father! He says that he’s prepared to do it, but in return he asks a service that I cannot fulfill.”

“What kind of service?”

“He wants to go to the Tukholians and propose an agreement that in exchange for me they release the Mongols from this valley, and desires that I give him the magic words that would win the hearts of the Tukhlya people.”

Miroslava looked at her father in wonderment for the first time since she entered the tent, and as she looked, her wonder turned to delight.

“Father,” she asked, “is this true?”

“True,” he answered.

“And you think Maxim know such words?”

“He must know them. Didn’t he bind you to himself from the first moment you met him? He couldn’t have done this without sorcery.”

Miroslava, with a smile full of love, glanced back at Maxim, then turning again to her father, said:

“Do you have permission from the commander for negotiations?”

“Not yet, but that will only take a moment. His tent is next to mine.”

“Then go. In the meantime I’ll prevail on Maxim to tell you these magic words.”

“You’ll prevail?”

“You’ll see! Now go! ”

“The maid’s bewitched! ” muttered the boyar to himself as he left the tent. “Bewitched, nothing else! She throws herself at him! ”

“Maxim, dear heart! ” said Miroslava, after her father had left, twining her arms about his neck and kissing his pale, feverish lips. “Don’t worry! The Mongols will never get out of here—this is where they’ll perish! ”

“Oh Miroslava, my star! ” answered Maxim sadly. “I’d gladly believe it, but their strength is too great. Our Tukhlya forces are too weak.”

“The highlanders and men from beyond the mountains have come to help us.”

“Their weapons are very poor.”

“Don’t worry about that either. Listen, there are hundreds of chopping axes in the woods, in a short time hundreds of fires will be lit up around the valley, and around them our craftsmen will be making machines with which we will be able to catapult rocks right into the centre of the enemy camp.”

“And whose idea was this? Who taught our craftsmen?”

“I, dear heart. I have often watched these machines. They stand on the walls of Halych. Before the sun rises above the Zelemen, fifty such machines will be catapulting rocks on the Mongol heads.”

Maxim joyfully embraced Miroslava and held her tightly to his heart.

“My life! ” he said. “You will be our Tukhlya’s saviour! ”

“No, Maxim! ” answered Miroslava. “I won’t be Tukhlya’s saviour, your father will. What are my miserable machines worth against such an enemy force? Your father will face them with an even greater force, a force no army could withstand.”

“What kind of force?” asked Maxim.

“Listen! ” said Miroslava.

It was very quiet all around, only from somewhere far, far in the mountains came the dull sound of thunder.

“Thunder,” said Maxim, “so what of it?”

“What of it?” said Miroslava quickly. “That is the death knell of the Mongols! This is a greater destroyer than they are, and a destroyer that will hold hands with us... Just listen! ”

And she looked about the tent, though it was completely empty, then, as if distrusting the silence and emptiness, she leaned toward Maxim and whispered a few words into his ear. As though lifted by a mighty hand, Maxim leaped to his feet so suddenly that his chains clanked.

“Young woman! You, bewitched apparition! ” he cried,

looking at her half-anxiously, half in deep respect. "Who are you and who sent you here with such a message? Because now I see that you can't be Miroslava, the daughter of Tuhar Vovk. No, you must be the spirit of the Guardian, who is called the protector of Tukhlya."

"No, Maxim, no dear one," said the amazing girl. "It is I, myself, that same Miroslava who loves you so dearly, who would gladly give her life to make you happy!"

"As if I could be happy without you! .."

"No, Maxim, listen to what I'm telling you. Get away from this camp, right now!"

"How can I get away? The sentries are certainly not asleep."

"The sentries will let you through. Can't you see that they've let me through? Now this is what you must do—dress up in my clothes and take this golden ring; it was given to me by their commander as a sign of freedom and secure passage—show it to the sentries and they'll let you through."

"And you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'll remain here with my father."

"But the Mongols will realise that you helped me escape and will show you no mercy. Oh no, that's not what I want."

"Don't be afraid for me. I can manage very well."

"So can I!" said Maxim stubbornly.

The boyar entered at that moment, flushed and sullen. A cloud of anger and dissatisfaction hung over his forehead. Burunda had revealed himself to be even more unfriendly toward him and met his advice about exchanging Maxim with reproaches and barely agreeing to it. The boyar more and more clearly began to feel bound, as though at any moment there would be bars about him that would become an ever tighter cage.

"Well?" he asked sharply, without looking at either his daughter or Maxim.

A happy thought flashed through Miroslava's mind.

"All is well, Father," she said, "except..."

"Except what?"

"Maxim's words are such that they have no influence coming from someone else's lips. Only if he says them

himself, do they have any power.”

“Well then, the devil take it!” muttered the angry boyar.

“No, Father, wait. Listen to what I say. Tell them to release him from his chains and let him go with you to the Tukholians. Here is the ring from Peta. With this ring, the sentries will let him through.”

“Well thank you, my daughter, for your so good advice! Lead him to the Tukholians, you say. That means taking our last guarantee of success out of my hands. The Tukholians will take our captive and drive me away! No, that won’t happen. I’ll go myself and without his words.”

Saddened, Miroslava’s eyes filled with tears.

“My dearest!” she said, turning again to Maxim. “Do as I advised. Take this ring!”

“No, Miroslava, don’t worry about me,” answered Maxim. “I’ve already decided what I will do. Go and help our people, and may our Guardian help them.”

It was hard for Miroslava and Maxim to part. She was leaving him to almost certain death, though she tried hard not to show her anxiety. Furtively, she kissed him and grasped his hand warmly, then ran out of the tent after her father. Maxim remained behind, his heart beating with some unclear mixture of joy, fear and hope.

7

“What is that knocking in the forest?” asked the boyar of his daughter as they walked together across the Mongol camp.

“They’re cutting wood,” answered Miroslava shortly.

“Now? At night?”

“It will soon be day.”

And truly, no sooner did Miroslava say this, than flashes of light appeared here and there on the high rocky crags that encircled the Tukhlya hollow. It was the Tukholians striking flint and lighting bonfires. Within a short time long rows of bonfires flared on the hills surrounding the valley, like the glowing eyes of wolves shining in the darkness, ready to leap into the valley and devour the Mongol forces. Dark forms prowled about each fire and

the sound of axes rose with twofold vigour.

“What are they doing?” asked the boyar of his daughter.

“Hewing wood.”

“What for?”

“When you get there, you’ll see.”

They continued their way across the camp. Here and there they were stopped by the sentries and it was necessary to show the commander’s ring to be let by. The sentries eyed the bonfires with anxiety, then awakened their commanders, but these, seeing that the Tukholians were conducting themselves quietly, told the sentries not to raise any alarms, but to be on the alert. That there were so many fires burning, the Mongols considered a plus—there could then be no secret attack. They could sleep peacefully as long as the fires were burning, because they would be faced with important task in the morning.

Tuhar Vovk and his daughter had now passed the camp, and having crossed a not too wide strip of land came up against the steep wall of the cliff. For a long time they walked, looking for a path that would take them up, till finally Miroslava found one hidden between some stumps and tall ferns. With some difficulty they began to make their way up.

“Who’s coming?” shouted voices from around a fire above them.

“Friends! ” answered Miroslava.

“What friends?” called the Tukholians, standing across the path. They soon recognised Miroslava, who was walking in front. “Who is that with you?”

“My father. The Mongolian commander has sent him to conduct peaceful negotiations with your elders.”

“What the devil do we need negotiations for? If only the sun would come up soon, we’ll show them how we’ll negotiate.”

“Aren’t you the brave ones! ” sneered Tuhar Vovk. “Well, you won’t have to wait long for this pleasure. One doesn’t know, however, if this pleasure will extend to your mothers when they see your heads hung on the Mongol lances! ”

“The deuce take your words, you raven! ” cried the Tukholian lads surrounding the boyar.

“Now, now,” Tuhar Vovk was conciliatory. “I don’t

wish this misfortune on you. I'm only saying that it wouldn't look good. And it's because I wish to spare you this fate that I came to negotiate with your elders. It's because I'm sorry for you, you young and thoughtless children! You're prepared to go blindly to your death without questioning whether any good will come out of it. But the elders should consider these things."

Speaking thus, the boyar approached the fire around which a number of craftsmen were planing a log, while others were boring holes in already planed logs, and still others hollowing them out.

"What are you doing?" asked the boyar.

"If you're wise, you can guess!" answered they, bantering, and began to join the planed logs together in the shape of a gate with strong crossbars, then joining two of them together at the top and bottom with long, heavy planking. The boyar looked, then slapped his hands against his sides.

"A catapult!" he shouted. "Who taught you peasants to make such a conveyance?"

"There were those who taught us," answered the craftsmen, and began working on the heavy trunk of a beech, hewing out something that looked like a huge spoon which was to be thrust on a handle into a thick, strongly-wound rope, tightened between the posts of the aforementioned gates, then turned tighter and tighter with the help of two winches attached to the posts. The broad, hollowed spoon at the other end was to hold rocks and the spring from the twisted rope would then throw these rocks out of it far out at the Mongols.

Tuhar Vovk took a good look around. Beside every fire there was a group of craftsmen—and in Tukhlya every peasant was a craftsman—making the same type of conveyance, while the younger boys, women and children, wound the ropes.

"Well, it's going to be pretty hot for our Mongols to gain their exit out of this hole under such fire," thought Tuhar Vovk, going further into the forest with his daughter, along a beaten path that ended in a clearing with a huge fire in its centre, around which a gathering of Tukhlya elders sat in council.

"Miroslava," said Tuhar Vovk, after a moment of silence,

“did you teach them how to make catapults?”

“Yes,” said Miroslava, looking closely at her father and expecting an eruption of anger. But no. The boyar’s face lit up with something like satisfaction.

“Very good, my dear! ” he said shortly.

Miroslava was surprised, not knowing what this change in her father’s attitude meant; not knowing that his belief in the successful ending of the Mongol march, and still more in the observance of Mongolian promises was much shaken, so that the boyar, in this case, had to be on good terms with the Tukholians and his daughter’s action was for him a welcome support.

They were now close to the clearing where the Tukhlya elders had spent a sleepless night in council. It was a large clearing, sloping to the south, and closed from the north by a steep cliff of soft Carpathian slate rock. Tall firs surrounded the clearing in a half circle from the east, south and west, so that the sun reached it only at its highest, at noonday. The clearing had at one time been completely covered with rock slabs which were now overgrown with soft, down moss and bushes of long-fringed fern. There was only one beaten path across the centre of the clearing and this led to a deep cave, dug out in the cliff in the form of a crypt and completely open to the south. The walls in this crypt were bare, without a single decoration, but on its floor were benches and concavities beaten out of the rock. Within them the rock was red with traces of fire still to be seen in the pits. Only the ceiling had a decoration, and only one—a hammered convex stone hemisphere about the size of a good loaf of bread, encircled with a shining gold hoop, as though crowned.

This was the ancient sacred Tukhlya sanctuary, where the elders of the present generation sent their prayers to the highest creator of life—Dazhboh, the Sun, whose image was the hammered out, gold-encased hemisphere in the ceiling. Although the Christian monks had long ago converted the people of Tukhlya, they still, for a long period of time, though praying in the Korchin church to the Christian God, did not abandon their ancestral gods. The road to the clearing was never overgrown, the eternal fire in its centre was never extinguished—that’s how it got its

name, Yasna Polyana*—and even in front of the small altars to the gods Lada and Did, there was often the fragrant smoke of juniper and the sacrificed, palpitating bodies of doves—the offerings of the young men and maids of Tukhlya. But the people were gradually forgetting their Gods of olden times. Christian priests were ever more watchful lest people worshipped old deities; young people no longer offered sacrifices to Lada and Did; children were brought up with old customs never as much as mentioned to them. Only the very old, here and there, conserved what remained of the ancient, free, purely people's religion, which allowed every community to have its own God (like Tukhlya had its Guardian), who didn't frighten people with punishment and torment after death, but considered death itself the greatest punishment, the death of the body and the soul of the people debased. The new religion, born in the East, prevailed in our land, or rather became mixed with our ancient religion, and only this mixture gave it the possibility of peacefully becoming part of the people's beliefs. The old people who remembered the ancient beliefs passed slowly away, and even though some still lived, they didn't dare to openly proclaim them or teach them to the younger generations, but hid their beliefs in their hearts with the sad conviction that they would follow them into the grave.

Zakhar Berkut was one of the last supporters of the old religion in our Rus. And wonder of wonders! His dedication to the ancient faith had been strengthened in the hermit's monastery, where he met the old monk Akintiy. Did this old and remarkable sorcerer relate to his pupil stories about the ancient religion, so close to nature and its forces accidentally, or was it that his own heart was more closely drawn to this faith in opposition to the sterner Byzantium Christianity? It is enough that after his sojourn with the old monk, Zakhar emerged with a great sympathy to the old faith and vowed to be true to it till death. He knew about Yasna Polyana in his Tukhlya; there the eternal fire had long ago died out and the fragrant juniper had stopped smoking. The Korchin priests had declared it a cursed and unclean spot. But however neglected, no one

*Bright Meadow.

to date had dared to touch the image of the Sun, nor the golden hoop that bound it. That golden image still shone on the ceiling of the sacred crypt, awaiting the rays of the noontide sun, so as to flash with a thousand sparks. With good will, Zakhar Berkut had taken upon himself the care of the ancient sacred crypt; the pathway to the cave, which was visible across the clearing, had been beaten down by his feet over a period of fifty years. Making his way to the forests for medicinal herbs, he would stay at the crypt for a week at a time and through prayer and thought returned to the village strengthened in spirit. More than once, during these periods, the Tukhlya folk would see from their valley the blue puffs of fragrant juniper smoke circling the tall firs that surrounded the clearing and would say among themselves: "It's the old man praying to the ancient Gods." They said this without derision, without contempt, because Zakhar, though he didn't teach anyone the old faith, did teach all of them to respect other convictions and other religions.

It was here then, at Yasna Polyana, that the Tukholian elders met on this terrible night. A large bonfire burned in the centre of the clearing; the ancient firs murmured secretly among themselves, as though recalling old times; the golden image of the sun in the crypt glowed with a fiery splendour in reflections from the fire; the old men sat in deep thought, listening to the chopping of the axes in the forest and to old Zakhar's stories about the old days. The old man was filled with a strange spirit today. He, who had never loved talking about the old faith, was very talkative now, and that with heartfelt sorrow—a tone that he would only have used when talking about the closest and dearest things to his heart. He spoke about the deeds of Dazhboh, about the victories of Svitovid, about how three sacred doves—Dazhboh, Svitovid and Perun—had created the earth out of a seed of sand, how Dazhboh had searched in a bottomless abyss till he found three seeds—one of wheat, the second of rye and the third of barley—and presented them to the first man, Did, and his wife Lada; how Perun presented them with the spark of fire and Svitovid—with a single hair, out of which, after his blessing, came a cow and a herdsman who was named Volos. And further, Zakhar told about the life of the first people,

about the great flood from which the people hid in the mountains and caves, about the ancient giants and their king—the Tukhlya Guardian, who had opened the dike of lake Tukhlya. The Tukhlya elders listened to these tales as if they were about some new, unfamiliar world; much of what they had talked and sang about in their songs without having understood, now became a clear and integral whole before their eyes. Zakhar Berkut seemed to be the last of the great giants—the guardians of Tukhlya, about whose good deeds the future generations would also talk.

The dry twigs on the pathway crackled and Miroslava and Tuhar Vovk appeared out of the forest gloom. Miroslava immediately came toward old Zakhar, while the boyar stopped by the fire.

“Father,” said Miroslava to Zakhar, “I saw your son! ”

“My son?” said Zakhar calmly, as though speaking of the dead.

“Yes! With the help of this ring I walked through the Mongol camp and saw him. Let us have hope, Father, that he will soon be a free man again.”

“It’s hard, daughter, hard. But who is this that came with you?”

“It’s me, old man,” said Tuhar Vovk, stepping forward, “Do you not recognise me?”

“I remember your face. You are the boyar Tuhar Vovk. What brought you here, to us?”

“I have come to you, Tukhlya elders, as an ambassador from the great Burunda-Behadir, the commander of the Mongol forces.”

“What does Burunda-Behadir want from us?” asked Zakhar.

“Burunda-Behadir has asked me to tell you that his power is great and invincible, that you are wasting your time making barricades in your exits, making catapults to throw rocks—you will not be able to diminish his strength.”

“It’s obvious that your Burunda is beginning to fear us, when he decided to frighten us. That’s a good sign. Continue speaking.”

“No, old man, don’t take the words of the Mongol commander lightly. His threat is but half of his punishment, and his punishment is terrible, like the punishment of God! Listen further to what Burunda-Behadir has

asked me to tell you. The purpose of his march is the land of the Magyars, the principedom of Arpad, who was subject to the great Genghis Khan, and now refuses to acknowledge his superiority. The great Genghis Khan has sent his huge army toward the setting sun to punish the rebel. Is it up to you to stop this army in its march? Burunda-Behadir, who is commander of but one detachment of this army, wishes to part from you with good will. Your son is now a captive in his hands, old man. This is what he has asked me to tell you—destroy your barricades and allow the Mongol army out of your valley, and in return for this he is prepared to return his captive to you alive and well. Deliberate well on how useful Burunda's friendship will be for you! Your opposition will be in vain—in one way or another the Mongols will demolish your barricades and continue on their journey. But they don't want to waste time in your valley, don't wish to shed your blood, and are ready to return you their captive for free passage. If, to the contrary, you refuse, then it is understood that he will die, and that under terrible torture, and you will be faced with bloody slaughter, in which, in spite of all your plans, you will be defeated. Choose, what is the best road for you to take."

The Tukhlya elders listened to the words of Tuhar Vovk with attention, and they really made an impression on some of them. Zakhar saw this and said:

"Good brothers, do you wish to consider the proposals advanced by Burunda, or perhaps unanimously agree in one voice?"

"We'll consider, we'll consider!" said the elders. Zakhar then asked Tuhar Vovk to withdraw for a moment. The boyar did so proudly, accompanied by his daughter.

"Zakhar," said one of the elders, "this whole matter rests on the life or death of your son. Wouldn't it be better if we retreated from an unequal battle and save the boy?"

"The question before us is not my son," said Zakhar decisively. "If it was definitely a question of him only, then I would say to you: 'I have no son, my son died in battle.' But here the question has to do with our neighbours, the highlanders and those beyond, who depend on our defence and would now all have to, unprepared, die at the hands of the Mongols. This is why I say to you, don't

worry about my son, but decide as if he were already buried.”

“Still, Zakhar, a battle with such a large detachment of Mongols is unequal.”

“Well, then, we’ll all die in battle, to the last man, and then the Mongols can go over our corpses wherever they want. At least we will have fulfilled our duty. But to make an agreement with them now, and what an agreement—to exchange one boy for the ruin of our neighbours—it would be a disgrace, would be treason. But who really knows whether to battle with the Mongols will be in vain. Our position is strong, the Mongols are locked in our stone cage. With minor losses we can repel even the most persistent of their attacks. We won’t even need to do this, however. Tonight we’ll unleash our ally against them, against whom no human force can withstand, even if ten times greater than the Mongolians.”

“So you advise against accepting Burunda’s offer?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“And leave your son to certain death?”

“Don’t mention my son!” cried Zakhar painfully. “Whoever in this situation reminds me of him, stands in league with a father’s heart against my reason. Reason tells me—refuse the agreement. But what my heart says is my affair and no one else’s!”

“Let it be as you say!” said the elders. “If God has decided that he die, then we can do nothing to stop it; if not, then he will be saved from the jaws of our implacable enemy.”

The boyar was summoned and Zakhar got up to tell him their decision. Miroslava looked at him with her heart filled with fear; poor girl, she still hoped that the Tukholians would want to redeem her Maxim.

“Very cleverly, to be sure, in your own way, very cleverly, boyar, did you praise the agreement put forth by your commander. We are not surprised, because it was your obligation to speak that way, to fulfil the command of the one you serve. Now listen to what we, in our peasant people’s judgement, have decided. If this was a matter only between myself and your *behadir*, I would gladly give him everything I have, even my own hoary head, to free my son. But you are asking us to make an

unequal exchange, one that would profit only me and my family, but would be a loss not only to one community, but to all communities through which your march would pass. Should one go along with such an exchange? What would the highland people and those beyond profit from my son? For in letting you out of this valley we would be releasing disaster on our neighbouring and united with us communities. We have obligated ourselves to defend them against your invasion, and because of our word, they have sent us help—five hundred chosen young men. We are obligated to resist you here to the final moment—and this we will do. It could be that God has destined that you triumph over us, in that case we will not be able to stop you; but we're letting you know that you will leave this valley only over the corpse of the last Tukholian. But who knows, perhaps victory is destined to be ours and then you must know that by entering our valley you have entered your grave, that even your corpses will never be able to leave it. Either we will all perish, or you will—there is no other way out. That is our answer.”

Zakhar's face lit up with a wondrous light as he spoke these formidable words, so that the boyar, looking at this tall old man with his outstretched arm, couldn't find a word to say in answer. He saw that any further talk would be useless, so he turned away in silence and started his journey back. Dead silence reigned in the council—only the crackling of the fire and the ringing sound of axes preparing the deadly apparatus against the Mongols was heard.

“Father!” cried Miroslava suddenly in a pain-filled voice. “Father, come back!” and she ran after him and grasped him by the arm; a child's love again revived in her heart with a mighty, overpowering voice. “Father, come back! Stay here, among your own people! Stand beside them in battle against the invaders, like a brother, and they'll forgive you for the past! What hope do you have over there? They'll betray you, feed you with promises, then slaughter you! Father, don't go back to the Mongols, only death awaits you there!”

The boyar obviously hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he embraced Miroslava and said quietly, half-sternly and half-kindly:

“Foolish girl, it is not yet time for me! The Mongols

have not yet lost all hope. One has to profit by what is at hand. But if it shouldn't be successful..."

"No, Father," whispered Miroslava through tears, "abandon such thoughts! Who knows, it may be too late then."

"Don't worry, it won't be too late. You stay here and fraternise if you wish, with the Tukholians, but I have to go back. Don't forget, child, that ... your Maxim is over there, and who knows, maybe we could still be useful to one another. Be of good health! "

Tuhar Vovk disappeared into the glade, hurrying along the path to the bonfire over the cliffside to go down its slope into the Mongol camp. At the fire, he again examined the nearly finished catapult, tested the rope, and shaking his head, said it was "weak", then escorted by the Tukhlya sentries, he went down the slanting path into the valley.

In the meantime silence reigned at Yasna Polyana—heavy, sad, as if a dear departed lay among the gathering of elders. Only Miroslava was heard sobbing loudly, wiping the tears that rolled down her cheeks. Finally she came up to Zakhar and said:

"Father, what have you done?"

"What I had to do. Anything else would have been dishonourable," he replied.

"But your son, your son! What will happen to him?"

"Whatever God wills, my daughter. Now stop crying. We must think about the matter at hand. See, the Dipper is already inclined to the west and the cocks are crowing in the thickets—morning is near. Come, my friends, we must prepare for our defence—no, for the attack, for the final battle with the invaders! Remember the answer I gave them! Come, let no one remain behind! The old and the young, all will be useful. Let's show those savages what a community can do! "

The elder Tukholians rose with much clamour and moved out of Yasna Polyana in a mass to the cliff-top to inspect the work of the craftsmen—the catapult machines. These were all finished and stood ready everywhere, primitively made out of heavy wood, joined and held together with wooden pegs, made not to last but for the need of the moment. But Zakhar had not brought them

there for inspection. They paused but a moment by the machines, then began to go down the steep hillside in groups, down to the spot where the Tukhlya stream flowed through the narrow passage out of the valley and where the massive rock pillar, four-cornered, huge, the Tukhlya Guardian, stood leaning over the river. Toward it, led by Zakhar and Miroslava, sped the entire Tukhlya population; the young men carrying long, heavy fir trees and ladders, the girls, huge wreaths of leaves and fir branches, the elderly long rolls of rope and lines. The fires in that area had been extinguished so that the enemy would not be aware of what was happening. Slowly, carefully, without a sound, like a quiet stream, the people moved down the curving path along the hillside. A strong detachment of young men marched ahead to form into three lines at the bottom of the valley, facing the Mongol camp situated some one thousand steps away. After them came the young men with the ladders, ropes and firs. The ladders were placed against the cliffs and the firs slid lightly down into the valley. The girls passed their wreaths over to the young men—they were not allowed to go down into the valley where the enemy could attack at any moment. At the end, the elders with Zakhar Berkut, also descended, and having inspected the position of the armed detachment and all the implements, they hurried to the passage through which the Tukhlya stream flowed its clear waters noisily into the valley.

Zakhar stopped before the Guardian and began to look at it closely. It was very quiet. Zakhar began to pray:

“Great Guardian! You whom our ancestors considered our protector and whom we have also honoured with annual festivals! For three nights now, night after night, you have appeared in my dreams as though you are falling and crushing me in your fall. I believe that you are good and kind, and when you summon me into your presence, I rejoice in your request and will gladly follow you. But when you yourself wish to move from your eternal resting-place, then, Our Father, destroy with your weight this evil enemy, the children of Morana, who have again today overrun your sacred patrimony—the Tukhlya valley! Destroy for a second time this evil power, just as you destroyed it the first time, when with your mighty hand you smashed

this stone wall to give the waters a passage and presented our people with this beautiful valley! Dam it up again, and let the arrogant enemy might, which is torturing us, perish! ”

At that moment a flash of lightning tore the dark heavens from the south to the north and a roll of thunder sounded in the far-off hills.

“Yes, this is your mighty voice! ” said Zakhar joyfully. “Come, children, crown this sacred rock with the wreaths for the last time.”

Four young men climbed up the rock on a ladder and entwined its peak with the green wreaths. Again the thunder sounded from the south.

“It is his will, children! ” said Zakhar. “Now entwine him with rope! And the rest of you, get on with the spades! Undermine him from below and lay the livers! Quickly, children, quickly! ”

Scores of hands worked quickly and noiselessly around the Guardian. The rock was encircled from the top with rope and cord, its foundation undermined by spade and shovel, and in the cavity that appeared below it, the fir logs were placed slantwise. They were to serve as levers to topple the rock across the passage. The young men worked quickly at their tasks, then removed the ladders and put large rocks under the levers.

“Now everybody that can reach them, grab the ropes! To the levers, lads! ” commanded Zakhar, and a hundred hands moved to do his bidding.

“Now, altogether! ” shouted Zakhar, “Pull, pull! ”

The crowd groaned from the strain, the levers creaked loudly, but the rock held firm.

“Once again! Pull stronger! ” shouted Zakhar, and seized a rope himself. The great rock trembled.

“It’s moving! It’s moving! It moved! ” cried everyone joyfully.

“Now, pull hard, again, with all your strength! ”

Once again the crowd strained—and the ropes suddenly yielded as the huge rock moved from its base, teetered a moment, then fell to the ground with a terrible, dull crash, across the stream and the passage. The Tukhlya valley groaned and shook from the terrible blow and the pearl drops from the stream splashed far into the distance

as the air was filled with the loud, joyous shouts of the Tukholians. The sleeping Mongols stirred in their camp, the sentries screamed, the commanders shouted orders, the weapons clashed, then after a moment all was silent. The Mongols expected an attack and stood prepared for battle, but the Tukholians had no thought of attacking them. They were carrying out an entirely different attack.

Zakhar ran up quickly, like a young man, to inspect the position of the fallen rock. It had fallen so well, as though it had been especially created to fit just there. Its sharp corners had wedged into the protruding horns of the precipice which created the passage, and its whole massive weight had fallen in a bridge across the stream. True, it had not dammed the waters of the stream, because the water flowed in a deep trough—but the young Tukhlya men were already dragging huge slabs of rock toward it, while others were clearing the bottom of silt and pebbles, so as to hermetically seal the flow of water. Others were busy walling up the other side, the passage beyond the fallen rock, building a thick wall of stone, some three fathoms thick, from one side of the passage to the other. This wall, with the huge Guardian as its base, could withstand the strongest pressure of water securely.

“Quickly, children, quickly!” encouraged Zakhar, standing above the stream and helping the work with either advice or with his own hands. “Close the stream, dam it well, before the water begins to rise. There have been heavy rains in the mountains and the waters will begin to flood. Then it will be difficult to carry out our purpose. The barrier must be made as high as these ravine walls—then we will see how the might of Genghis Khan will stand up to the might of water.”

The work went swiftly. In a short time the stream was dammed up completely. The restrained waters swirled in an angry whirlpool below, as though not understanding why they should have been stopped in their course. Wave upon wave splashed angrily against the huge rock, throwing themselves as though wishing to gnaw their way through the slabs of rock that had been placed lower down and seek a passage through them, but all in vain—there were rocks everywhere—tightly packed and fitted together into one solid wall. The water seethed. It stirred

through the entire river bed—then stopped in astonishment, seemingly quiet to the eye, but with anger in its crystal depths. Like the bison preparing to attack stands with head lowered and horns bent to the ground, growing calm, to later tear himself out of his humiliating situation by casting himself with all his strength at his enemy, so did the water of the Tukhlya stream, unaccustomed to chains, become calm for a moment, as if grown sluggish and dreamy between its level banks, but in the meantime gathering strength and courage for a new, decisive attack, while quietly straining itself against the wall as if testing its back to see if it couldn't move aside the unexpected barrier. But the barrier held fast, cold, smooth and proud of its immovability, its invincibility. The diligent hands of the Tukholians continued to strengthen it, piling stone slab on slab and joining them tightly with sticky, impenetrable clay. Like a new, omnipotently created cliff, so did the stone dam rise higher and higher under the hands of the Tukholians. The armed contingent of young men has long ago left their positions facing the Mongolians in the valley, had exchanged their bows for axes, stakes and hammers for breaking up the rocks. Zakhar looked on, rejoicing in their work and in their concern, the light of victory in his eyes.

In the east, over the Mongolian camp, the clouds shone rosy in the sunrise. Day was breaking. The rosy rays bathed the high peak of the Zelemen and scattered in sparks down the hillside. Then the clouds moved aside, and slowly, as if timid, the sun rose into the sky and glanced at the Tukholians busily at work. Full of sincere happiness, Zakhar looked to the east and with outstretched arms proclaimed in a loud voice:

“O Sun, great and resplendent ruler of the earth! Eternal guardian of all that are good and pure in spirit! Look at us! See that we have been attacked by a savage enemy who has destroyed our homes, ruined our land, slaughtered thousands of our people. In your name we stand prepared for mortal combat, and before your light we vow that we will not give in to the final moment, to the last breath in our bodies. Help us in this terrible struggle! Give us resolve, skill and unity! Give us courage to be fearless before their might and faith in our own strength!

Give us the friendship, the harmony and wisdom to defeat the pillagers! O Sun, I bow before you as our ancestors did and pray to you with all my heart to give us victory! ”

He stopped. His words—passionate, powerful, trembled in the morning air. Not only the Tukholians listened. The mountains listened also and carried their echo from one peak to another. The dammed-up waves of the stream also listened, and, as if having decided, abandoned casting themselves against the stone barrier, and turned back.

8

Before the boyar returned from his unsuccessful mission, Maxim sat in his tent, alert to every sound, and pondering what he should do. His short meeting with Miroslava was like a ray of sunlight in the darkness of his imprisonment. Her words, her glances, the touch of her hands, and the news that she brought, all acted as if to snatch him from a murky grave, restoring him to life. He felt his former courage and hope returning. Quietly, and with more optimism, he awaited the return of the boyar.

“So you’re still here?” cried the boyar, entering the tent. “Poor lad, it was all in vain, my efforts to obtain your freedom. Your father is so obstinate! Though gray-haired, he’s like a child.”

“But didn’t I tell you, boyar, that your efforts would come to nothing?” answered Maxim. “Still, what did my father have to say?”

“He said they would fight to their last breath, and that was his final word. ‘Either we will all be destroyed,’ he said, ‘or you will...’.”

“My father never speaks lightly, boyar. He’s accustomed to think matters over very thoroughly, before he speaks.”

“I can see now that while he doesn’t talk much, he speaks the truth when he does,” admitted the boyar, unwillingly. “But what can we do? For all that, the battle of the Tukholians against the Mongols is an uneven one. Force will break the straw, whatever you may say! ”

“Ah, boyar! There are ways to deal with force, too! ” Maxim answered.

“Yes, yes, I saw how they’re trying to do it! My

hot-headed daughter—you've bewitched her, that's certain—has taught them to make trebuchets. We'll get a hail of stones here tomorrow, but it won't be too damaging, because they haven't yet learned to plait good strong ropes for the slings."

"And the trebuchets, you think, will be their only weapons?"

"I don't know, it seems as if they haven't any other. Besides, we haven't long to wait—we'll see what happens in the morning. My problem is Burunda. He is insistent that I find a way out of this valley so that by morning we can leave without going into battle and wasting any time. And here the Tukholians have dug in their feet like those stubborn goats with their horns lowered. So what can I do? If it can't be done, it can't be done! "

"Now, boyar, don't be discouraged! At the moment you are, after all, in Mongolian hands, just as I am. You've got to do as they say."

"But what can I do for them?"

"Perhaps I can help in some way, boyar. I'm grateful to you for the kindness you've shown me today. If you wish, I can return that kindness."

"You? Help me?" cried the astonished boyar. "What can you do for me?"

"I know a path out of this valley, a safe and secret path. Nobody in Tukhlya but my father and myself know this path. It is unguarded. The Mongol troops can be led to the top and there surround the trail. Then it would be an easy matter to destroy the fortifications and march out of the valley."

The boyar was stunned. He couldn't believe his own ears. "Is this possible?", the question sped like lightning through his mind, then faded as a pain shot through his heart. Even though he had, until recently, regarded Maxim as his enemy, he couldn't help admiring his noble courage and determination. Now, on hearing his words, he felt, in his heart, as if something deep and sacred had been assaulted, the final strand of his belief in the integrity and loyalty of man.

"Young man! " he exclaimed. "What are you saying? You mean you would actually do something like that?"

"Well, boyar," said Maxim half-smiling, "you yourself

told me that force could break a straw.”

“But you, you who so recently vowed that you’d rather die than turn traitor?”

“You can’t help it,” again replied Maxim, “if a vow can’t be kept, it can’t be kept.”

“And you, a character so easily influenced and susceptible have the audacity to think that my daughter could love you!” cried the boyar, angrily.

“Don’t remind me of her, boyar!” replied Maxim, bitterly.

“See how it hurts!” cried the boyar. “You realise that what I say is true!”

“Who knows, boyar, who knows! We are at war, and war teaches us all kinds of tricks. Now, what if...”

“What if what? Why don’t you finish?” cried Tuhar Vovk.

“It’s nothing, nothing! I just want to ask you again: do you accept my proposal?”

“But are you honestly thinking of leading the Mongols against your own people?”

“Honestly, if it’s at all possible...”

“What do you mean by this? You mean if the path is unguarded?”

“I can guarantee that the path will be unguarded and we can get through in broad daylight, unseen, as long as there will be no other obstacles.”

“What other obstacles could there be?”

“I ... don’t know...”

“In that case, let’s not waste any time. Let’s go to Burunda!”

“No, you go alone, boyar, and tell him what I have told you. Don’t mention the possibility of any obstacles, because I swear, that neither my own people, nor any other armed people will hinder us, and any other obstacle wouldn’t frighten your daredevils.”

“Let it be so,” agreed Tuhar Vovk.

“And ask him to have my chains removed, otherwise I won’t be able to do anything.”

“Of course, that’s understood,” answered the boyar, and went out in an utter confusion of thoughts.

What anxious, fearful and painful moments Maxim lived through while the boyar was out informing Burunda of his

plan! With his head in his hands, he sat, in terrible uncertainty, responding to the slightest sound as if awaiting the coming of someone near and dear. His body shook and quivered as if with fever, and his teeth chattered, as if with cold. The minutes passed so slowly, so peacefully, so lazily, that each one tore into his heart like the claws of a bear. What if things didn't turn out as Miroslava told him, and the boyar would insist on his carrying out his promise? Well, it stood to reason that death was unavoidable, he had prepared himself for it for a long time; but to die, not having kept his word to the man who believed in that word, whose future, maybe even whose life depended on it; to die a traitor, even in the eyes of a traitor—that was terrible, was torture, was worse than death itself.

And now after he had seen Miroslava death too seemed far worse than it did an hour earlier, when he had sat by the roadside and stared listlessly at the fire that had destroyed his home... But what was that? The earth trembled and shook with terrible reverberations. The camp was in an uproar, there were shouts and the clanging of weapons—what had happened? Maxim leaped to his feet and clapped his hands, so that his chains jangled. Joy! Joy! The Tukholians were working! They were building the obstacle that would stop the Mongols and prevent him from being a traitor! Now he could die peacefully, for he would not have to break his word, even to his enemy! His heart beat loud and fast—he couldn't sit still and began pacing up and down the tent. The hubbub in the camp began to subside, and in that moment the boyar re-entered the tent. His face was alight with happiness and satisfaction.

“Young man,” he began excitedly, “your proposal came just in time. It saved me a great deal of trouble. Did you hear that noise? Very crafty, your Tukholians: they're making palisades behind us, too. Come quickly to the commander, he's already assigned a detail to go with you. We must leave in a hurry—it isn't safe here! ”

The words cut into Maxim's heart like sharp knives. Whatever happened, he must find some way to detain their departure to the moment when it would be impossible.

“Since when, boyar, have you begun to fear peasant

barricades? I don't think the Mongols are in any immediate danger. Let the Tukholians amuse themselves with their palisades—we'll quickly handle them. There's really no need to hurry, as you can see it's still dark. And until there's daylight I won't find the passage I told you about."

"What kind of a passage is it, that it can be found only by daylight?"

"Have patience, boyar, and I will explain. In a spot in our garden, under a covering of earth, lies a giant flagstone. We must find this spot, uncover the flagstone and lift it out. This is the entrance to a narrow underground passage under the hills which will lead us out of the valley to the meadow, Yasna Polyana, at the top, where you earlier saw my father."

"But why must we wait? Why not go immediately and find it?" cried the boyar.

"It's easier said than done, boyar. You've forgotten one thing. The village has been burned down with all its buildings and fences, and the mark that indicated where the passage is was also destroyed. It would be impossible for me to find it in the dark. So I say again, why hurry, when we will be able to do it quite safely in broad daylight?"

"Well, let it be as you say, then," the boyar agreed at last. "I'll go and tell Burunda about this and immediately send someone to free you as well. But remember, you'll still remain under guard, because, and I'll tell you the truth, neither Burunda nor I trust you, and the moment you try any trickery, it's certain death for you."

"I realised that from the very beginning," replied Maxim calmly.

The boyar again left and shortly after two Mongolian blacksmiths entered the tent to remove Maxim's heavy manacles. As if born anew, so light he felt on removal of those heavy iron weights that had, for nearly twenty-four hours, eaten not only into his flesh but into his soul as well. Light of heart and full of hope, he followed the Mongols to Burunda's tent. Measuring Maxim with his cruel eyes, Burunda spoke to him through an interpreter—in this case Tuhar Vovk, fulfilling the task for both of them.

"Slave," he said, "I hear that you know a secret exit from this valley?"

“Yes,” replied Maxim.

“And that you’re prepared to show it to us?”

“I am.”

“And what do you expect in payment for this service?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why are you doing this?”

“As an indication of my goodwill.”

“Where is this exit?”

“In my father’s garden.”

“Can you find it right away?”

“No, I cannot. All the traces marking its location have been burned out, and the entrance is deeply covered with earth. I can only find it by daylight.”

“The day is already breaking. Go and search for it now! And listen! If you are telling the truth and the passage is there, you will be set free and rewarded as well. But if you are misleading us with empty promises you will die by terrible torture.”

“I rely on your word, great Behadir,” said Maxim, “and you can depend on mine.”

“Then go and search for the passage. Here is your help, and I myself will accompany you.”

Maxim walked slowly and cautiously. How carefully he examined every little corner, every stone, as if trying to remember the exact location of the outlet, changed by yesterday’s fire. Though still some distance away from his father’s garden, he stopped several times to lie on the ground, tapping and digging a bit, all the while glancing ahead to the stream from which his help was to come. The Mongol detachment followed his snail-like pace until Burunda began to lose patience.

“Don’t be angry, great Behadir,” soothed Maxim. “Yesterday’s fire erased all traces of life in this valley. It’s difficult for me to place things at once. In a moment now, we should be in my father’s yard.”

Maxim’s eager eyes again turned to the stream. God be praised! The water had risen up to the banks—another moment and it would begin to flood the valley! Yes, and there in the lower reaches of the valley, rivulets and little pools had already appeared, like red blood, reflecting the rays of the rising sun. Now, he could go ahead! Quickly he led the Mongols to his father’s property, and as quickly

found the spot where the earth reverberated hollowly and where Burunda, in a fever of impatience, shouted the order to dig. Only then, on glancing around, did he notice the rising waters of the stream.

“Ha, what’s this! ” he shouted, gripped by a sudden unexplainable fear.

Tuhar Vovk also gave a shudder. Only Maxim stood by, calm and careless.

“It’s nothing, Behadir! There were heavy rains in the mountains last night, and when that happens the stream always overflows a little. But it never rises this far.”

“Ah, so! ” Burunda accepted the explanation, relieved. “In that case, dig on! ..

But Maxim had not told the truth. The water rose higher and higher, and only the ignorant and frightened Mongols didn’t realise that this was not a natural flooding from the rains, that the rising water was clear and did not flow forward and foam, but swelled higher and higher over the banks.

In the meantime the digging proceeded slowly, though the Mongols expended every effort. Finally their spades did strike a hard surface. The flagstone! But it revealed itself to be much wider than the dug-up area, so that more digging was required to remove or break it. Maxim watched the rising water with anxious eyes. The entire lower end of the valley was already flooded, and heavy waves of water were rolling into the upper reaches of the valley in exactly the opposite direction from that in which they naturally flowed since the beginning of time. Cries of panic suddenly rose from the Mongolian camp. The water had risen to overflow the camp in a thousand rivulets.

“Slave, what does this mean?” shouted Burunda to Maxim.

“Well, Behadir,” replied Maxim. “It looks as if there’s been a cloud-burst in the mountains, because the stream is overflowing more than usual. But surely you’re not afraid of water that reaches only to your ankles? Now get at that flagstone,” he shouted at the Mongols, “let the great Behadir see that I wasn’t deceiving him! ”

The Mongolian axes thundered against the rock, but it was solid and strong and resisted their attacks.

“Harder! Beat harder! ” shouted Burunda, unable now

to control his fear of the rising tide which had already engulfed the greater part of the Tukholian valley and was now rolling straight towards them. But the rock had the Tukholian character and held solid. At last it gave way, and a final blow shattered it to bits, carrying the Mongols on it down into the cavern below. The dark underground passage revealed itself to the gathered company.

“You see, Behadir!” said Maxim. “Now tell me, have I deceived you?”

But Burunda was not overjoyed at the open tunnel. The long, rolling waves were splashing at their feet. Another swish and the water was joyfully cascading into the newly uncovered opening.

“Stop the water, stop that water!” screamed Burunda, and the Mongols threw themselves into the task of shoring up the water around the opening. But it was too late. The water pressed on, turning the clay into mud in the hands of the Mongols. Ever stronger, it poured into the hole, splashing and gurgling as it disappeared into its depths, until finally it had filled it entirely. The Mongols watched, stupefied, as the water inundated their last remaining exit from the valley.

“Slave!” Burunda turned to Maxim, “is this your way out?”

“Behadir, can I command the water?” answered Maxim.

Burunda made no reply, but gazed at the water which rose in an ever heavier tide across the valley. Its mirror-like surface shone, and only here and there now, shoals of dry land, like little islands, peeped above the flood. The tumult in the Mongolian camp continued, though the water had as yet barely reached their ankles.

“Behadir,” said Maxim to Burunda, seeing that he had made up his mind to return to his tent, “I would remind you of your promise. You said that if I showed you this exit, you would set me free. I have done what I promised.”

“And the exit had not come up to expectations. You will be freed only after we have all left this valley, and no sooner!”

And Burunda, followed by his company, went to restore order among his confused men.

The Mongol army stood in military formation, up to its ankles in water, worried and helpless. Though shallow,

smooth and clear like melted glass, the water that covered the valley, and the waterfall that poured down the slope, adding more and more water to the growing lake, frightened the Mongols. But standing still was not the answer! Fear itself, and the threat of further danger, awoke these people to action, however futile, to save themselves. It was necessary to do something, Burunda realised, or else the whole mass would panic, pursued by its own fears. Burunda ordered the whole army to band itself into a tight group.

“What are you, men or cats, that you are afraid of a few drops of water? Have we not crossed greater rivers? What is this stream in comparison to the Yaik, the Volga, the Don, or the Dnieper? Have no fear, water up to the ankles will not drown you! Forward to the corridor! We’ll attack in a mass and disregard the consequences. Victory must be ours! ”

So shouted Burunda, leaping forward to lead the march. The might of the Mongol army moved after him, tramping through the water with noisy splashes that echoed to the hills and reverberated through the forests. But barely a hundred paces from the corridor they were met by a deadly hail of stones, hurled by the trebuchets. Large boulders, sharp slabs and gravelly pebbles from the river bottom rained down into the dense crowd of Mongols, breaking bones and shattering skulls. The water beneath their feet began to flow crimson with blood. Disregarding Burunda’s shouts, the Mongol ranks broke up, the greater number retreating to a point where the stones couldn’t reach them. Finally, Burunda himself, with his more courageous following, was forced to retreat, because the hail of stones continued to fly in ever greater numbers, and against them the Mongol arrows were helpless.

Tuhar Vovk, carefully observing the enemy positions, saw that the most active and largest trebuchet was being directed by his daughter Miroslava with several older Tukholians. Maxim had noticed her some time earlier and couldn’t keep his eyes off her. How happy he would have been to be at her side at this moment, listening to her courageous, intelligent commands, helping defeat the enemy under her direction. But this was not to be! Here he stood, alone, among the enemy, free of his chains, true, but unarmed, a slave, and wishing that a stone,

thrown at her command, might end this torture and his life.

Tuhar Vovk gave a tug at his sleeve.

“There’s no point in staring up there, boy,” he said. “My daughter has gone completely mad. Look at what she’s doing. And it’s certainly not helping our situation. Is your valley often flooded like this?”

“Like this? Never! ”

“What do you mean, never?”

“Because this isn’t flood, can’t you see that the water is clear?”

“Not a flood? Then what is it?”

“Haven’t you guessed yet, boyar? The Tukholians have dammed up the stream in order to flood the valley.”

“Dammed it! ” cried the boyar. “Then that means...”

“It means that the water will continue to rise, until...”

“Until what?”

“Until we are all drowned, that’s what! ”

The boyar hit his head with his fist: “And you knew about this all along?”

“Yes, your daughter told me. It was all my father’s idea, boyar.”

“Curse it! Why didn’t you tell me about this sooner?”

“Why?”

“We could have at least saved ourselves.”

“There is still time for that,” answered Maxim calmly. “Just stay beside me, boyar, and if anything should happen, don’t let them harm me, unarmed as I am.”

“That’s understood, of course! ” said the boyar. “But what shall we do?”

“At the moment there’s nothing to fear,” replied Maxim. “The stream is narrow and the valley is wide. The water will rise very slowly, but this won’t last too long. In a half-hour or so, a real flood will come down from the mountains and that will quickly fill up the valley. By evening the water will be higher than the tallest man. We must hold out till then, for while the Mongols are still alive, it stands to reason that they won’t let us leave them alive.”

“But by that time they can cut us up to pieces! ”

“Don’t worry, boyar. A man in danger thinks first of himself, and not about another’s death. What we must do

now is find a reasonably safe spot for ourselves, where the waters won't reach us when the flood does come."

While this discussion was going on between the boyar and Maxim, the Mongols had retreated beyond the line of fire and stood irresolutely in the water, which by this time was swirling about their knees. Burunda was glaring in fury at this unexpected enemy which showed no fear of his angry voice or his warrior's might. He kicked at it, spat on it, cursed it with all the imprecations at his command, but the enemy quietly, calmly splashed gently higher and higher across the valley. It obstructed their movements, sapped at their desire to fight, weakened their morale. What did all this mean? Was it possible that the water would continue to rise? If it came up to their waists, then all movement would be impossible, and the Tukholians would be able to shoot them down like ducks with their stones! But the water was still clear, translucent; only where the Mongols floundered around were there broad muddy pools.

Tuhar Vovk approached Burunda:

"Great Behadir," he said, "I fear we are in grave danger."

"Why?" asked Burunda, harshly.

"This water will not recede, because our enemies have dammed the stream so as to drown the entire Mongolian army in this valley."

"Ha!" shouted Burunda. "And you, you dirty slave, dare to tell me this after having led us into this trap yourself?"

"Consider, great Behadir, that I couldn't have brought you here out of treachery, when your danger is a menace to me also."

"Oh, I know you! You were with them last night, negotiating our destruction."

"If I had gone to them with this in mind, do you think, Behadir, that I would return to be destroyed along with the Mongols?"

Burunda quieted down somewhat.

"What are we to do, then?" he asked. "Must we really die like this?"

"No, we must try and save ourselves. Any moment now, Behadir, the real flood will sweep down from the mount-

ains, and it will rapidly fill the entire valley. This must be our first concern, to prepare for it.”

“But how?”

“Order your army, while the water is still clear enough, to gather rocks from the bottom and pile them up in heaps as high above the water level as they can. Standing on them, we can defend ourselves against the weaker foe, the Tukholians.”

Without thinking long, Burunda issued the order to gather the stones and pile them up, each company for itself. The order, involving no danger for themselves, pleased the Mongols, and the hope of standing on dry land instead of in water up to their knees, raised their morale. They threw themselves into the task with whoops of joy.

The Tukholians, seeing their activity, stood on the walls of their palisades around the hilltops, laughing loudly at their labours.

“Closer, closer! ” they shouted. “There are plenty of stones here, and we’ll gladly divide them among you! ”

But when any of the Mongols ventured too close to their positions, the trebuchets again rained a hail of stones at the unfortunates who, floundering about in the deep water to avoid the missiles, went on with their difficult task, but were unable to run away. Like it or not, the Mongols had to keep to the centre of the valley, out of range of the trebuchets.

Burunda nearly went mad from fury and helplessness in the face of the derisive laughter of the Tukholians.

“No, we can’t allow this! ” he finally shouted. “Come, gather around me, my faithful Turkmen! ”

The most courageous of the Mongol soldiers gathered around him—men sturdy like oaks, like the tigers of the steppe whose skins they used for ornament. He led them against one of the Tukholian positions which had been placed forward, on its own, on a sharp overhanging cliff. A small group of Tukholians stood there, manning the new trebuchet.

“Use your poisoned arrows on them! ” shouted Burunda, and the arrows like a swarm of hornets, buzzed through the air.

The wounded Tukholians screamed in pain and re-

treated in confusion. The Mongols, with joyous shouts, pressed ahead.

“Don’t allow them to assemble again! ” cried Burunda. “Don’t let them shoot! Hold them so we can strengthen our position here! ”

And he divided his men into two companies: one to keep shooting at the enemy position, the other to continue gathering stones to pile up against the rising waters. Tuhar Vovk and Maxim, whom Burunda kept constantly by his side, also helped to heap up the stones. But the task got more difficult as the water rose above their waists. There was also a shortage of stones, and the heaps had still not reached the surface of the water. Burunda turned his entire attention to commanding his archers, who had already wounded some ten Tukholians who were dying from the terrible effects of the poisoned arrows. Zakhar Berkut’s healing skills were to no avail.

“Give up this position, youngsters! ” said Zakhar. “Let the enemy keep this spot here, beneath cliff! He certainly won’t be able to save himself here, especially with the water rising up around him! ”

The Tukholians retreated from their post, while the Mongols happily continued to plough through the water heaping up stones. Finally, there was not another stone to be found.

“Enough of the stones, boys! ” said Burunda to his men. “The archers will now stand on the piles and continue shooting at this scum! The rest of you follow me! We’ve got to take this position and get up this cliff, even though the heavens fall upon us! And you, slaves, are coming too! You’ll show us the way! ”

“Behadir,” said Maxim, through Tuhar Vovk as interpreter, “It’s useless to try and scale that cliff. There is no path up that hill.”

“There has to be! ” insisted Burunda, throwing himself into the water with the Turkmen following behind him.

The ground below the water was uneven, so that the Mongols slipped and slid, falling into the water which, driven by a light breeze, splashed in huge waves against the wall of the cliff. Though only some two hundred paces from the bank, it took the Mongols nearly half an hour to traverse the distance. The water just below the cliff was

much deeper, reaching up to their armpits, with no trace of a path leading up to the top. A continuous barrage of stone missiles from neighbouring Tukholian positions, though beating, for the most part, harmlessly against the cliff-side, added to the discomfort and disadvantage of Burunda's daredevils, who vainly attempted to find a foothold in the steep wall.

"Maybe your fine men can crawl better," mocked Maxim inwardly, "then it would be no trouble at all for them to clamber to the top."

But none of them were able to get even a toehold in the wall.

"If that's the case," said Maxim, finally, "then allow me, Behadir, to be the first to climb up and show them the way."

But Burunda was past listening to anything. He had worked out another plan. Again dividing his men into two groups, he left one manning the newly gained position under the protective overhang of the cliff, and with the other group, led by Tuhar Vovk and Maxim, set out to find a better spot. But no sooner did they show themselves beyond the wall of rock, up to their waists in water, than the entire might of the Tukholian trebuchets greeted them with another volley of stones, felling half of their number. The rest were forced to retreat.

"Let's return to our safer post, Behadir," advised Tuhar Vovk. "Do you hear the shouts and screams coming from down valley? It must be that the flood waters are drawing near."

The boyar was right. The roar of the waterfall had increased so that the very earth trembled, indicating that the waters were sweeping into the valley. Huge, muddy waves, surged down the precipice, covering the entire surface of the broad lake with large caps of foam. The water beat against the hillsides and swirled in mad whirlpools in the centre. The entire valley became a nightmare of screams and curses. All traces of military discipline disappeared as the Mongolian army rose in groups here and there, like islands among the swirling waters. Like chaff blown before the wind, their strength was scattered across the valley. Struggling with the waves, and here and there reaching a temporary haven, they paid no attention to

each other, each was concerned only with his own safety. Some stood on the piled-up heaps of stones, fortunate in finding a temporary foothold against the raging tide, others sank into the water up to their shoulders and to their necks, holding themselves up on their spears or waving their bows aloft. But most of them threw their bows away, and they, like straw, whirled about in the eddies. Some took off their sheepskin coats, their teeth chattering with cold, hoping to lighten their burden of clothing. Those who were short in height caught at the shoulders of the taller ones, knocking them off their feet, and sputtering and splashing, they went down together. Some attempted to swim, though having no idea which direction to take to find a safe port in the sea of water. The heaps of stones gathered earlier were only able to hold a few fortunates, and these became the target of deadly envy and senseless curses from the drowning. They pressed in thousands around their fellow men, maddened with fear, and demanding a spot on the place of safety. Vainly did those standing on the piles argue that the stones wouldn't hold them all, that somebody had to die—none wanted to die and each did his best to pull down the other, with those standing on the rocks defending themselves against the pressure. Mallets and axes of Mongols came down on the heads of Mongols. Brother fought brother in this terrible moment of near death; friend murdered friend with greater fury than he ever showed an enemy. Those of the drowning on the outskirts of the struggling mob pushed forward; those closest to the safety of the rocks and exposed to the deadly rain of blows from their comrades, pressed backward, screaming; those caught in the middle between the two movements, shrieked in pain and terror, caught in the vice and trampled down into the water to drown in the squeeze. Some already under the water snatched the stones from the piles. Five piles of stones gave way under the pressure, and all those who stood on them sank into the water, finding themselves in the same predicament as those against whom they were defending themselves. And those unfortunates, maddened by fear, whooped joyously each time a pile of stones went down and new victims fell into the maw of the terrible, unmerciful foe. Some were seized with a mad frenzy of killing and destruction. One

of these, a giant of a man, blue in the face and teeth clenched over bleeding lips, blindly hacked away at his comrades with his axe. All who came near were felled under his blows and when there was no one near, he just as furiously vented his wrath on the foaming and bloody waves. Another, laughing hysterically, kept pulling down into the water any who happened to find a place of temporary safety—be it a rock or the fallen body of a comrade. A third, roaring like a bull, butted the sinking in the back. Still another, holding his hands folded over his head, wept and whimpered like a child. Some, seeing nothing but the inevitability of death, clung to their comrades, hanging on to their shoulders, clutching at their hair, and finally dragging them down to the bottom with them.

Like a school of fish in a hatchery, up against the barrier of a small waterfall, fighting, splashing, coming up above water, then sinking again, threshing about and gasping for air—the Mongols drowned in their hundreds and thousands.

Stunned and motionless, the Tukholians stood on the banks; even the most hardened and courageous among them found it difficult to watch the terrible spectacle of mass drowning without shuddering or crying out.

As though paralysed, Burunda-Behadir watched the scene of horror. Though he himself was threatened by the same danger, though the waters had reached the shoulders of his own company and the swift currents of the stream tugged at their feet, reminding them of the urgency of returning to the safety of their former position—Burunda stood for a long moment, tearing at his hair, uttering wild, uncontrollable shrieks of despair as he gazed at his army's destruction. No one dared to speak to him at this awful moment; all stood about him, silent and shivering, struggling to keep their footing against the buffeting waves of their enemy—water.

“Come,” said Burunda at last. And they started to make their way to the heap of stones which the Turkmen had gathered before the overhanging cliff left by Tukholians. They were just in time! The water rose higher. Between them and their destination a wide whirlpool suddenly appeared, which they were only able to cross by holding

hands and sticking close to each other. Only the giant Burunda strode ahead breaking the turbulent waves with his broad chest.

Like a tiny island in the centre of the sea stood the group of soldiers on the stone pile, up to their waists in water, their bows and arrows still drawn and aimed at the deserted Tukholian position. Their military discipline remained even in the face of peril. Fortunately the stone pile they stood on was stronger and more solid than the others, having been made up of larger rocks which it had been possible to lift because of the pressure of the water from below. More than a hundred men could stand on it comfortably, and there were just that many around Burunda, in addition to those he had left below the cliff.

Having reached safety, their first concern was for their companions left behind, some forty men in all. There was not a sign of them. Where they had stood the waves whirled and dashed madly against the cliff, splashing their silvery foam high up the wall of rock. In a moment of calm, something black appeared on its face, the only living man left of the company. With a paralysing grip he held on to an outcropping of rock, disregarding the tug and pull of the buffeting waves. He did not scream or call for help, only swayed with each surge of the tide, till finally even he disappeared, like that leaf washed away by the stream.

Burunda, mute, his face blue with strain and fury, glanced around the valley. The terrible cries and screams had ceased. Only the whirlpools, here and there, threw up the drowned bodies to the surface, giving a momentary glimpse of clenched fists, heads, or feet. Only ten groups of men, like ten black islands, stood alive on their piles of rock, but it was not an army any more. It was a frightened, unarmed and helpless remnant of an army, shivering and broken by despair. Though they were able to call to one another, they were unable to give each other help, for together, or alone, they were equally impotent, awaiting the same inevitable end.

9

“What do you think, boyar?” asked Burunda suddenly of Tuhar Vovk. “What will happen to us?”

"We'll all perish," answered Tuhar Vovk calmly.

"That's what I think, too," agreed Burunda. "But what angers me most of all is that we will die without fighting, without glory, like kittens thrown into the water! "

The boyar didn't answer. The new events had turned everyone's attention. The Tukholians, it was clear, did not wish to wait till the water rose high enough to drown the miserable, remaining Mongols. They were in a hurry to finish the enemy. In the forest above the stream the young men were cutting down the larger firs, sharpening their logs at both ends like palings, then tying them down with heavy stones so that these new style battering rams would flow below the surface of the water; at the right moment, when in the centre of the lake a strong current from the waterfall had formed, they began to send these logs toward the Mongol positions. Now the first of them hit with tremendous force a pile on which a group of Mongols stood. The pile of rock shifted and rumbled below the surface and pressured from above by the Mongols' feet, moved from its position and fell apart. The Mongols hit the water with loud shouts. Two or three fell near the traitorous log and grabbed it. The current caught them along with the log and carried them far out into the open water where they hit a whirlpool which caught the tree and stood it up vertically. The Mongols fell into the water and were lost from sight. The other Mongols who were so unexpectedly thrown off their island, floundered about on the spot, pushing each other under the water, or begging others to save them. Two or three, clearly good swimmers, began to swim to the shore, but even here death caught up with them; a few large rocks thrown from the shore ended their swim. Only a few were accepted by their comrades on neighbouring positions. But even here they were not secure for long. The Tukholians, seeing the success of their first venture, began to send battering ram after battering ram. These, however, did no damage to the Mongolian positions, the current carried them past the islands.

Miroslava then offered them a new idea—to hammer a few of those logs together and send the rafters down by rope over the waterfall and then pull them into shore,

where ten of the strongest and best-armed young men would get on. Two would then guide the raft toward the Mongol positions with log poles. Two such rafts were put together swiftly and lowered over the waterfall, which had become half the height it was originally, now that the water had risen. Twenty courageous young men were soon floating down to battle with the Mongols. This was a light, though decisive struggle. The first group of Mongols they attacked were almost without weapons, frightened and powerless. These unfortunates were quickly pushed into the water with poles and those who resisted were knocked off with arrow and spear. The Mongols on neighbouring positions shouted in distress, seeing their inevitable doom. Burundā, watching the enemy and their tactics ground his teeth and grabbed his weapons, but his anger was in vain—even the poisoned arrows of his Turkmen archers failed to reach the courageous Tukholians. The stubborn Behadir was compelled to stand in the water up to his chest and watch how the Tukholians broke up the last of the Mongolian islands, one after another.

In the meantime, the Tukholians stormed about over the water. With clenched teeth and crouched down on their rafts, they neared the Mongol positions. Here and there they were met with strong opposition; blood flowed, groans were heard from both sides, the dead fell from both the rafts and the rock turrets, but the strength of the Mongols was broken, their resistance short-lived. Like a fire set in a mown meadow, creeping from swath to swath and swallowing stack after stack of dry hay—so the Tukholians thrust the Mongols into the water from one position after another and into death's cold embrace. All perished, to the last man, not one of the few black islands in the middle of the lake remained. Only a little further, to the side and not far from the shore, stood one more group, like a last black crag protruding from the centre of the flood. This was Burundā's detachment. One hundred Turkmen and Tuhar Vovk—these were all that was left of the great Mongolian might that was to travel the Tukhlya road to the Hungarian lands. Here, in the middle of the mountains, they found chilling grave in water, though they had safely crossed the Yaik, Volga, Don and Dnieper

ivers. The last victims, a fearless handful, stood in the centre of the water with no hope of rescue, but with one desire—to pay dearly for their life in the battle. Maxim was also among them.

The whole Tukhlya community had now gathered before this last enemy bastion. Two more rafts were lowered so that the enemy might be surrounded and disturbed from the rear as well as from the front which suffered a constant hail of Tukholian arrows and stones from the shore. The biggest number of these shots didn't even reach Burunda's position; others, though they covered the distance were unable to do the Turkmen much damage. The Tukholians were afraid to come any nearer because of the poisoned arrows, but seeing that their own attacks did the enemy no harm, they quickly gave them up and stood quietly on the shore. High up on the cliff stood old Zakhar, his eyes never leaving his son, who stood among the enemy skillfully dodging the heavy stream of arrow and stone fired at them. A little distance from those who were shooting stood Miroslava, her gaze glued to the group on the island, among whom stood all that was nearest and dearest in her life—her father and Maxim. Her heart grew faint with every volley of Tukholian arrows.

The young men of the rafts soon grew bored with shooting from a distance. They gathered up their courage and moved closer. The Turkmen met them with arrows in return and wounded a few, but the Tukholians quickly noted that the enemy had few of their more effective weapons and with menacing shouts threw themselves into an attack. The Turkmen awaited their attack in silence. Tightly packed against one another, they were defending themselves not only from the Tukholians, but from the billows of surrounding water. The Tukholians, however, having approached till they were but a couple of fathoms away, attacked by throwing their javelins which they had attached with long leather thongs to their wrists. Ten of the enemy cried out at the same time; ten bodies fell into the water. Again the Tukholians threw their javelins—and again a number of the enemy fell.

“May they be accursed!” fumed Burunda. “They’ll pick us all off in this way, the dirty villains!”

But his rage was now like that empty wind, which

makes a great deal of noise, but harms no one. The Tukhlya lads, with much shouting, circled the enemy position like crows, dealing a blow at one or another with a well-aimed javelin. It became impossible for the Mongols to defend themselves. They were forced, finally, to stand still, as though tied up, and await death.

“Behadir,” Tuhar Vovk turned to Burunda, “could we not in some way come out of this alive?”

“What for?” asked Burunda, sullenly.

“Life is still better than death! ”

“That’s true,” agreed Burunda, and his eyes gleamed not with a strong desire for life, but rather with a desire for revenge. “But what can we do? How can we save ourselves?”

“Perhaps they might be willing now to exchange our prisoner for our life and a free departure?”

“Let’s try! ” said Burunda, and grabbing Maxim by the chest he pulled him forward in front of him. Tuhar Vovk stood beside him and began to wave a white kerchief.

“Tukholians! ” he shouted to those on the shore.

Everyone suddenly quieted down.

“Tell them that if they want to have this slave alive among them, they must grant us our lives and allow us to leave freely. If not, we are quite capable of dying, but he too will die, right here before their eyes.”

“Tukholians! ” shouted Tuhar Vovk again. “The Mongolian commander promises to return your prisoner alive and well and asks, that in return, you would allow us, the few of us that are left, to leave this valley alive and well! If you won’t agree then the prisoner will meet certain death.”

As though wanting to prove to the people the truth of this threat, Burunda lifted his huge axe over the head of unarmed Maxim.

The whole throng stood holding their breath. Old Zakhhar trembled and turned his eyes away from the scene that cut into his heart.

“Zakhhar,” said the Tukholian elders surrounding him, “we think that we should accept this proposal. The Mongol might has been destroyed, and those few who are left cannot be dangerous to us.”

“You don’t know the Mongols, my brothers. The most terrible of their commanders is among those few who are

left, and he will never forgive us the destruction of his army. He'll bring new forces into our mountains and who knows if we will be able to defeat them for the second time."

"But your son, Zakhar, your son! Consider that death awaits him! Look, the axe is over his head! "

"Better that my son should die than to allow even one of the enemy to leave our land! "

Miroslava approached old Zakhar in tears.

"Father," she wept. "What are you thinking of doing? Why do you wish to destroy your son, and ... and me, Father? I love your son and I vowed to live with him and serve him! The moment of his death will be mine also! "

"Poor girl," said Zakhar, "how can I advise you? All you see are dark eyes and a handsome body, but I'm concerned for the good of all. There is no choice here, daughter! "

"Zakhar, Zakhar," the people spoke up. "All of us feel that there has been enough of destruction, that the enemy strength has been broken, and we don't wish the death of those left. We are putting their fate and the fate of your son in your hands. Have compassion for your own blood! "

"Have compassion on our youth, on our love," sobbed Miroslava.

"You can promise them anything in words, if only they will return your son," said one of them. "As soon as Maxim is safe, give us the signal and we'll send the rest of them to the bottom to feed the crabs."

"No! " Zakhar was incensed. "That would be dishonourable! The Berkuts keep their word even to their enemies and to traitors. The Berkuts have never soiled their hands nor their hearts by shedding blood through deceit! Enough of this talk, children! I'll send them an answer by my own hand."

And turning away he walked up to a catapult whose ladle held a large rock. With a strong, steady hand he seized the cord that held the ladle in a lying position.

"Father, Father! " screamed Miroslava, throwing herself toward him. "What are you doing?"

But Zakhar calmly, as if he didn't hear her cries, aimed the catapult at the enemy.

In the meantime, Burunda and Tuhar Vovk awaited the

Tukholian answer. Maxim stood quietly under Burunda's uplifted axe, prepared to accept what came. Only Tuhar Vovk, knowing not why, trembled with anxiety.

"Eh, why are we having to wait so long?" Burunda cried, finally. "A mother gives you birth but once, and one only dies but once. But before I do, you'll die, you vile slave!" And he swung with all his might to split Maxim's head with his axe.

But at that very moment Tuhar Vovk's sword flashed over Maxim's head and Burunda's menacing, deadly hand, together with the axe, was cut off with one swing from the shoulder, and dropped dripping with blood, like a log into the water.

Burunda roared with pain and anger. With his left arm he held Maxim against his chest while his eyes, full of diabolical hatred, turned to the traitorous boyar.

But Maxim also responded quickly. Momentarily he bent over and hit the terrible Turkman with all his might in his left side with his head and shoulder, so that Burunda lost his balance and rolled into the water, pulling Maxim in with him.

At the same time there was a hum in the air and a huge rock, thrown from a Tukhlya catapult by Zakhar Berkut fell with a loud thump among the enemy group. The water rose high into the sky, the rocks on which the enemy stood heaved and screams to tear the heart rent the air. In a few moments the surface of the lake lay quiet and smooth and not a sign of Burunda's company remained.

The Tukhlya people stood above the shore, stunned and immovable. Old Zakhar, hitherto so strong and unbreakable, now trembled like a child and wept heavily, covering his face with his hands. At his feet lay Miroslava, motionless, in a faint.

Suddenly a joyous shout sounded from below. The lads who were floating about on the rafts, on nearing the spot where Maxim had sunk with Burunda, suddenly saw Maxim emerge on the surface of the water, sound and strong, and greeted him with a joyous shout. Their joy was soon shared by the whole community. Even those who had lost their own sons, brothers and husbands, rejoiced over Maxim as though with his return all those near and dear, who had fallen in the fray, had come back.

“Maxim is alive! Maxim is alive! Hurrah for Maxim! ”
The thunderous welcome resounded far across the forests and mountains. “Father Zakhar! Your son is alive! Your son has come back to you! ”

Trembling in great agitation, Zakhar rose to his feet with tears in his eyes.

“Where is he? Where is my son?” he asked in a weak voice.

Soaked through, but with his face alight with happiness, Maxim leaped to the shore from the raft and flung himself at his father’s feet.

“Father! ”

“Maxim, my son! ”

Neither the one nor the other could say more. Zakhar swayed and fell into Maxim’s strong arms.

“Father, what is the matter with you?” cried Maxim, seeing the deathly pallor of his face and feeling the continuous trembling that shook his father’s body.

“Nothing, my son, nothing, ” said Zakhar quietly with a smile. “The Guardian is calling me to him. I can hear his voice, son. He is saying, ‘Zakhar, you have done your duty, it is time to rest!’”

“Father, Father, don’t say such things! ” sobbed Maxim, falling on his knees beside him. Old Zakhar, calm and smiling, lay on the grass, his face serene, his eyes turned to the noon-day sun. He lightly lifted his son’s head from his chest, and said:

“No, son, don’t lament for me, I am happy! Better you should look just over there. There is one there who needs your help.”

Maxim looked around and went numb. Miroslava lay on the ground, pale, and with a look of anguish on her unconscious, lovely face. The lads had already brought some water and Maxim hastened to his beloved’s side to help restore her to consciousness. Finally she sighed and opened her eyes, then closed them again.

“Miroslava, Miroslava, dear heart! ” cried Maxim, kissing her hands. “Awaken! ”

Miroslava aroused herself slowly and gazed at Maxim with wonder.

“Where am I? What has happened to me?” she asked in a weak voice.

“You are here, here among us! Beside your Maxim! ”

“Maxim! ” she cried, sitting up.

“Yes, yes! Look, I’m alive, I’m free! ”

Miroslava was silent for a long, long time, unable to overcome her wonder at this miracle. Then suddenly, she threw herself into Maxim’s arms with hot tears streaming from her eyes.

“Maxim, my heart! ”

She couldn’t say anything more.

“But where is my father?” she asked, after a moment. Maxim turned his face away.

“Don’t think about him, dear heart. He, who weighs truth and falsehood, is now weighing his good deeds and his evil deeds. Let us pray that the good will prevail.”

Miroslava wiped her tears and looked at Maxim with eyes full of love.

“But come, Miroslava,” said Maxim, “here is our father, and he too is leaving us.”

Zakhar looked at the young couple with bright, happy eyes.

“Kneel beside me, children,” he said quietly, in a voice already weak. “Daughter Miroslava, your father fell—let us not judge whether he was guilty or not—he fell like thousands of others. Don’t mourn, my dear! In place of a father, fate has given you a brother...”

“And a husband! ” added Maxim, holding her hand tightly in his.

“Let the Gods of our fathers bless you, children! ” said Zakhar. “Fate has brought you together in troublous times and united your hearts. You have shown yourself worthy of enduring the most terrible of hurricanes. May the bonds you have formed on this day of victory be a guarantee that our people will also overcome their misfortunes and won’t break their heartfelt ties with integrity and humane custom! ”

And with lips that were already cold he kissed Miroslava and Maxim on the forehead.

“And now, children, rise and lift me up a bit. I would like, before I go, to say a few words to the community which I have tried to serve sincerely all my life. Fathers and brothers! This day’s victory is of great importance to us. How did we win? Was it due to our weapons? No! Was

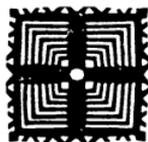
it, then, our cleverness? No! We won because of our communal order, our harmony and friendship. Remember this well! So long as you live in a community order, remaining together in friendship, staunchly standing all for one and one for all, so long no enemy force will be able to defeat you. But I know, brothers, and I feel in my soul, that this will not be the last blow at our community stronghold, that there will be others, and that in the end our community will be destroyed. Evil days will descend upon our people. Brother will deny brother, sons will be alienated from their fathers, and great quarrels and conflicts will rend this land of the Rus, destroying the strength of our people and consigning them to bondage to both their own and to foreign invaders, transforming them into meek slaves of their caprices and turning them into beasts of burden. But in all this misery, the people will again recall their ancient community life and it would be good if they recall this soon and vividly—it will save them a whole sea of tears and bloodshed, whole centuries of slavery. But whether sooner or later, they will recall the life of their ancestors and will wish to follow in their footsteps. Fortunate are they who will live in those days! They will be beautiful days, spring days, days of renaissance for the people! So pass on the story of these olden times and customs to your children and grandchildren. Let the memory live with them through all the harsh and difficult times like a living spark that will not die out in the ashes. The time will come when the spark will burst into new flame! Farewell! ”

Old Zakhar sighed heavily, looked up at the sun, smiled, and in a moment was no more.

They did not weep for him, neither his sons, nor his neighbours, nor his fellow countrymen, because they well knew that it was sinful to weep for one who was happy. With joyful songs, they washed his body and carried it to Yasna Polyana, to the ancient home of the Gods of their ancestors, and placing it in the stone crypt facing the golden image of the sun in the ceiling, they closed the entrance with a huge slab of rock and walled it up. Thus old Zakhar was laid to rest, among those Gods that lived in his heart, who had spoken to him and who had inspired him to honourable and upright ideas and actions throughout his life, ideas for the common good of his people.

Much has changed since those times. The prophecy of the old community elder came only too true. Great calamities passed like hail clouds over the lands of the Rus. The old community was long forgotten, and it seemed, forever buried. But no! Perhaps it was fated that it should be revived in our times? Are we not living in the happy age of rebirth spoken of by Zakhar as he lay dying—or at least in the dawn of that happy age?

Naguyevichi, October 1-November 15, 1882.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PANAS MIRNY (Afanasy Rudchenko) (1849-1920) was born in Mirgorod into the family of a civil servant.

The main theme of his writing is the Ukrainian village with its irreconcilable social contradictions and sharp class stratification. He published the first of his numerous short stories *It's the Work of the Devil* in 1872, his story *Evildoers* in 1877, and then, in 1880, his first novel *Do the Oxen Low When Mangers Are Full?* (with another title *Wasted Strength*) written together with his brother whose pen name was I. Bilyk. This novel was acclaimed one of the highlights of the new Ukrainian literature. The short stories *Water* and *Hungry Freedom* are linked with the novel in subject matter and ideology. An embracing picture of Ukrainian reality unrolls in the story *Grief Past and Present* (1897) and the socio-psychological novel *The Strumpet* (parts 1 and 2 published in 1883-1884, and the complete novel in 1928). Panas Mirny was also a gifted playwright (his drama *Limerivna* written in 1883 was published in 1889).

MARKO VOVCHOK (Maria Vilinska-Markovich) (1833-1907) was born in Yekaterinovka, a village in Orel Gubernia. From 1851 to 1859 she lived in Ukraine with her husband A.V. Markovich, an Ukrainian folklorist and ethnographer. She collected folk legends and studied the life of the peasantry. From 1859 to 1867, the future authoress lived abroad where she came to know many scholars, writers and artists. Her first literary effort was the collection *Folk Stories* (published in 1857), among which *The Cossack Girl* is generally considered the best. In 1859, the book came out in Russian under the editorship of Ivan Turgenev, her great contemporary. The profoundly truthful stories, imbued with compassion for the common people and protest against serfdom, were given a rapturous

reception by the progressive public. After that, Marko Vovchok published a cycle of novellas: *Stories of Russian Folk Life* (1859), *Three Fates* (1861), *Marussya* (1871), *A Cosy Nest* (1873), *In the Backwoods* (1875), and others. Marko Vovchok has published many translations of fiction into Ukrainian, and also a considerable number of articles.

MARKO CHEREMSHINA (Ivan Semanyuk) (1874-1927) was born into a peasant family in Kobaki, a village in Western Ukraine. He went to a grammar school, and then on to the University of Vienna from which he graduated in 1906 with the degree of Doctor of Law. He returned home and worked as a lawyer, earning great esteem from the peasants who regarded him as *their* solicitor.

Marko Cheremshina's first story *Kormchy* (Helmsman) appeared in the newspaper *Bukovina* in 1896. His subsequent stories paint a dramatic and convincing picture of the ruinous and demoralising role played by capitalism in the life of a West Ukrainian village, in which one of the best stories is *The Cure* (1901), they strongly denounce war and its grievous consequences for the ordinary working man (the collection *The Village Is Dying Out*, 1925, and *Verkhovina*, 1929).

YURIY FEDKOVICH (1834-1888) was born into the family of Polish gentry in Bukovina. His mother and elder brother were involved in the revolutionary movement of 1848, and he had to emigrate together with them to Moldavia where they lived until 1852. From 1852 to 1863 Fedkovich served in the army, and it was then that he began to write. In 1861 he published his cycle of verses entitled *A Soldier's Reflections*, and in 1862 his collection *Poems by Ossip Fedkovich* which brought him renown.

His prose writing (the first story *Love and Perish*, 1863) furthered the development of critical realism in Ukrainian literature. In his short stories *Tragic Love* (1867), *Stefan Slavich* (1863), *The Italian Woman* (1864), and *Lileya's Grave or Dovbush's Treasure* (1885), written in plain spoken language, made a penetrating study of the characters' thoughts and feelings and gave them a dramatic rendering. A collection of stories, published in Kiev in 1876, was acclaimed by both Russian and Ukrainian writers.

HRIHORIY KVITKA-OSNOVYANENKO (Kvitka was his real name, and Gritsko Osnovyanenko his pen name) (1778-1843) was born into a nobleman's family of ancient lineage in Osnova, outside Kharkov. The boy was educated by tutors at home. In 1816-1817 he was one of the editors and publishers of the journal *Ukrainsky Vestnik* (Ukrainian Herald), and at the same time presided over a professional theatre in Kharkov.

He began writing in 1816, and earned renown for his plays: *A*

Newcomer from the Capital, or Havoc in a Small Town (1827), *The Nobility's Elections* (1829), *The Nobility's Elections, Part 2, or Electing a District Police Officer* (1830), *Shelmenko—the Volost Scribe* (1831), *Shelmenko the Orderly* (1840), and *Match-Making in Goncharovka* (1836).

Two books of short stories under the general title of *Ukrainian Tales Told by Gritsko Osnovyanenko* came out in 1834 and 1837. Many of the stories were written in the satirical trend, for instance *The Witch of Konotop* and *Stretching the Lie*. Later, he published his stories *Pan Khalyavsky* (1839) and *The Life and Adventures of Pyotr Stepanov, Son of Stolbikov* (1841), and also some philological essays and historico-ethnographic works.

YEVHENIA YAROSHYNSKA (1868-1904) was born in Chunkiv, a village in Chernovtsy Region. Her father was a teacher. She herself became a school-teacher, and in the 1880-1890s was an active campaigner for the equality of women. Yevhenia Yaroshynska was also an ethnographer, and her hobby was collecting folk songs. Renown came to her for her short stories, essays, and books for children.

She wrote her first story, *Imaginary Illness*, in 1886. The plots of Yaroshynska's best stories are taken from the life of the working people of Bukovina (*Faithful Love*, 1887, *Brothers*, 1891, *Addressee Deceased*, 1902). The main characters in *Above the Dniester* (1895) and *Turncoats* (1903) are Ukrainian intellectuals.

MIKHAILO STARITSKY (1840-1904) was born into the family of a small landowner in Kleshintsy, a village in Poltava Gubernia. Orphaned in childhood, the boy was brought up by his uncle, and educated at Kiev University. In 1883 he became the director of the first professional Ukrainian theatre. He wrote a large number of verses, some of them earning the popularity of folk songs. He was widely known for his *In the Dark*, 1893, *Oh, Gritsu, Don't Go Out to the Evening Parties* (1890), and the historical dramas *Bogdan Khmelnytsky* (1887) and *Marussya Boguslavka* (1899). Late in his life he wrote the novels *Wind-Fallen Wood*, *The First Black Kite* and the trilogy *Bogdan Khmelnytsky* about the liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people in the 16th-17th centuries, and also a number of short stories. Mikhailo Staritsky's Ukrainian translations of major West European writers and the Russian classics deserve special mention.

STEPAN VASYLCHENKO (Stepan Panasenko) (1879-1932) was born into the family of a village cobbler in Ichnya, Chernigov Region, and was educated at a teacher's seminary. In 1898 he began to teach at school, and in 1906 was arrested for revolutionary agitation

among the peasants. When he was released from prison, he made his living by giving private lessons, and that was when he began writing.

His first stories appeared in print in 1910. For his main theme he chose the life of peasants and rural intellectuals. In 1911, he published his collection of short stories entitled *Sketches*, and another one in 1915 called *Stories*. After the Great October Socialist Revolution, Stepan Vasylichenko joined in the work of building up a Soviet culture. In his stories *Aircraft Circle*, 1925, *The Stray*, 1925, *The Tin Ring*, 1927, and others he showed the establishment of a new pattern of life, a new moral code. Vasylichenko wrote several plays, and in 1912 published rendering of Ossetian folk tales.

MIKHAILO KOTSYUBINSKY (1864-1913) was born into the family of a civil servant in Vinnitsa, and was educated at a theological college. Upon graduation in 1881, he taught in a village school and then worked as a statistician of the Rural Board. On one of his trips abroad, to Italy in particular, he made the acquaintance of Maxim Gorky. Kotsyubinsky was arrested for revolutionary propaganda in 1882, and after his release was placed under police surveillance. He was an innovator in Ukrainian literature, introducing the psychological novel, and greatly influenced the development of Soviet Ukrainian prose.

His work was first published in 1890. He showed the angry unrest among the people in his best novellas *How We Went to Krinitza* (1911) and *Written in the Book of Life* (1911); the small towns ravaged by pogroms in *Laughter* (1906) and *Coming* (1911); the heroes of the revolutionary underground and the hideous masks of the reaction in *On the Road* (1907), *Persona Grata* (1907), *A Birthday Present* (1912), *Horses Are Not to Blame* (1912), Kotsyubinsky's story *Fata Morgana* (1904-1910) prompted writers to develop the "village theme" in Ukrainian literature. One of his last stories *Shades of Forgotten Ancestors* (1912) was indeed a masterpiece, written to last.

VASYL STEFANYK (1871-1936) was born into a wealthy peasant family in the village of Rusiv, now Ivano-Frankovsk Region. From 1892 to 1900, he studied at the medical department of Cracow University. When Austro-Hungary was split up, Stefanyk found himself living on Polish territory. He maintained close contact with the literary circles of Soviet Ukraine where several books of his were published. Beginning from 1928, the writer was paid a pension by the government of Soviet Ukraine. When Western Ukraine was reunited with Soviet Ukraine, a museum commemorating the writer was founded at his birthplace.

Stefanyk began publishing his works in 1897. First, it was poems in prose, and then short stories. The first collection of novellas *The*

Little Blue Book came out in 1899, followed by collections *The Stone Cross* (1900), *Road* (1901), *My Word* (1905), *Land* (1926).

An outstanding master of the psychological story, Stefanyk brought into sharp focus the complex emotions of his personages and constructed his narrative on glaring socio-psychological contrasts. The finest examples are his stories *Maple Leaves* (1900), and *The Stone Cross* (1899).

OLGA KOPYLYANSKA (1863-1942) was born in Southern Bukovina, into the family of a civil servant. She was a self-educated woman, as her formal education ended with the primary school. Since a child she loved reading Russian and Ukrainian books, and literature became her life-long infatuation.

Olga Kobylyanska's novels and numerous short stories are centred on the hard lot of the Bukovina peasants, and on women's right to work and to civic independence. Her first work, the story *Man* was written in 1886-1891 and published in 1894. Her most merited stories are: *Tsarevna* (1888-1895), *He and She* (1892), *Impromptu Phantasie* (1894), *Village Bank* (1895), *In the Fields* (1898), and *Across the Foot-bridge* (1911). Her novel *Land* (1901, published in 1902) is considered one of the best books about land and peasants in Ukrainian literature. Her psychological novel, inspired by a popular folk motif, "*On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs...*" (1908), was widely acclaimed. In 1915-1923, Olga Kobylyanska wrote a cycle of anti-war stories, then the story *She-Wolf* (1923), the novel *Apostle of the Rabble* (1923), and also a great number of short stories from the life of the peasantry.

IVAN FRANKO (1856-1916) was born in the village of Naguyevichi which has been named in his honour—Ivano-Frankovo. His father was a blacksmith.

Ivan Franko was educated at Lvov University, department of philosophy, and after that at the Vienna University where he presented his doctor's thesis in 1893.

He propagated socialist ideas among the masses, peasant masses mainly, for which he was arrested time and again and put behind bars. He edited and published various periodicals—*Drug obshchestva* (A Friend of Society), *Narod* (People), *Khleborob* (Tiller of the Earth), *Zhizn i slovo* (Life and the Printed Word) and others.

To Ivan Franko belongs the leading role in developing Ukrainian literature and social thought at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. He blazed new trails for Ukrainian journalism, poetry, prose and dramaturgy. His first collection of mature poetry, entitled *From the Summits and the Lowlands*, came out in 1887. Altogether, he published more than forty poems. His prose writing advanced the development of realism in

Ukrainian literature on to a new and higher stage. In his essays, short stories and novels he introduced new themes (the proletarianisation of the peasantry, the shaping of the working class and its transition to organised class struggle), new conflicts, and new heroes—people whose cause was to defend the interests of the workers. His most significant works in this respect are the short stories *Boa Constrictor* (1878) and *Borislav Laughs* (1881-1882), the historical story *Zakhar Berkut* (1882), and the socio-psychological novels *Lel and Polel* (1887) and *Crossroads* (1900). His best-known play is *Stolen Happiness* (1894). Ivan Franko was a man of wide interests: he did research into the history of literature, collected medieval literature and folklore, and translated many books by authors of world prominence into Ukrainian.



NOTES

PANAS MIRNY. *Queen of the Meadow*

Moskal—the usual word for people who had done their service in the tsarist army.

MARKO CHEREMSHINA. *The Cure*

Hutsuls—and ethnographic group in Ukraine; prior to World War I, the territory they lived in was part of Austria Hungary.

YEVHENIA YAROSHYNSKA. *Faithful Love*

The fast of Pilypivka—Christmas fast in the Russian orthodox Church.

MIKHAILO KOTSYUBINSKY. *Laughter*

Black Hundreds—Russian monarchist gangs organised by tsarist police at the turn of the century to fight the revolutionary movement. They assassinated revolutionaries, assaulted progressive intellectuals, and organised pogroms against the Jews. This story depicts the situation after the 1905-1907 revolution, with the ignorant poor in town and country joining Black-Hundred pogrom-mongers.

IVAN FRANKO. *Zakhar Berkut*

Pidhirye—northern slopes of the Carpathian mountains.
The Opir and *Stry*—tributaries of the Dniester crossing Carpathian northern slopes.

Trembita—a folk musical instrument: wooden trumpet two or three metres long, also used to signal various important events, deaths included.

Zelemen—a mountain in the Carpathians.

Prince Danilo Romanovich (1201-1264)—Prince of Halych and Volhynia; since 1254, King of Halych. An outstanding political figure in medieval Russia, who united the Carpathian country, the adjacent territories and Volhynia under his rule.

Duklya Pass—one of the oldest and most convenient passes to Hungary in the Carpathians.

Beskidy ranges—a cluster of mountain ranges in the Western and Eastern Carpathians.

Halych—a township on the Dniester, which was the capital of the Halych Principality in 1140-1255.

Feast of Ivan Kupala—St. John's Day, or Midsummer Day (24 June Old Style), rooted in pagan mysticism.

Mohilnitsky, Anton Lyubich (1811-1873)—a Ukrainian romantic poet.

Red Rus—a name for Halicia.

"...not as his father was..."—Prince Danilo Romanovich's (see above) father, Roman Mstislavich (d. 1205), Prince of Novgorod, Vladimir of Volhynia and Halych, successfully opposed the boyar aristocracy and the Church to consolidate the central princely power, and eventually became one of the most influential princes in Russia.

"...the bloody battle on the Kalka River..."—the Kalka (now Kalchik), a tributary of the Calmius, a river flowing into the Sea of Azov. The site of the first encounter of the Russian armies with the hordes of Genghis Khan (31 May 1223), where the Russians were defeated.

The San—a tributary of the Vistula in Western Ukraine.

"...they occupied Kiev and destroyed it completely..."—the troops of Batu-Khan, Genghis Khan's grandson, seized Kiev in December 1240.

Pokutye—a part of Western Ukraine in its south-east, on the border of Pidhirye (see above), between the Dniester and Cheremosh rivers.

Korchin, Tustan, and Sinevidskov—settlements in Pidhirye existing to this day.

Batu-Khan, or Sayin-Khan (1208-1255)—Genghis Khan's grandson; founder of the Golden Horde. Leader of the 1237-1240 invasion disastrous for the Russian lands.

Genghis Khan (originally Temujin; c.1155-1227)—founder of a vast early-feudal empire; a renowned conqueror of great territories. Moving westward, his advanced detachments reached South Russia in 1223 and first clashed with the Russian troops in the Kalka battle (see above).

Prince Mstislav Mstislavich the Brave (d. 1228)—a prominent political figure of medieval Russia; one of the leaders of the Russian armies fighting the Genghis Khan hordes. His troops were defeated in the Kalka battle.

The Arpads—that is, Hungarians (after Prince Arpad, the first Hungarian prince and founder of the Arpad dynasty).

Torban, or teorban—a musical instrument.

"...have licked the milk spilled over the back of a horse..."—a gesture of submission.

Perun—in pagan Slav religion, god of thunder, lightning and storm.

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Контрольный редактор *Т. Н. Пельц*

Художник *Ю. Ф. Копылов*

Художественный редактор *И. В. Киселевская*

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