

WOMEN'S VOICES  
IN  
UKRAINIAN LITERATURE

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Warm  
the Children,  
O Sun

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VOLUME V

Women's Voices in Ukrainian Literature

# Warm the Children, O Sun

Selected Prose Fiction

by

Olha Kobylianska

Olena Pchilka

Nataliya Kobrynska

Lyubov Yanovska

Hrytsko Hryhorenko

Lesya Ukrainka

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# Women's Voices in Ukrainian Literature

*Lovingly dedicated to  
our mother  
Sonia Melnyk Stratychuk  
whose indomitable spirit inspired this series*

## *Titles in Print*

The Spirit of the Times, 1998  
In the Dark of the Night, 1998  
But the Lord is Silent, 1999  
From Heart to Heart, 1999  
Warm the Children, O Sun, 2000

## *Forthcoming Titles in the Series*

For a Crust of Bread, 2000

## *Introduction to the Series*

The turn of a century marks a pause in time—a pause that impels us to take stock, assess the extent and significance of societal changes, and make sense of our individual and collective experiences. When the end of a century coincides with the millennium, this need to engage in retrospective analyses is intensified.

The purpose of this series is to make selected works of Ukrainian women writers accessible to English readers. The works range from vignettes and sketches to novelettes and novels. Together they constitute an unsystematic but compelling social history of a period when the mortar of social mores, religious beliefs, and gender distinctions began to crumble as the political and ideological cataclysms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wreaked havoc with time-honoured personal and societal relations. History provides us with a temporal account of the past, but it is literature that gives it a human face.

Each of Volumes I to IV features the writings of two authors and comprises a broad array of subject matter. This volume, drawing on the writings of six of these authors, is an anthology of stories that illuminate the lives of children

and adolescents in the class society of the day, a society in which people were rigidly divided into the powerful and the oppressed, the privileged and the poor, and the educated and the ignorant.

Children were born into the status of their parents, and it was this status that constrained the interplay between inherited characteristics and culture, and determined how individual lives would play themselves out. Vertical mobility was not a social value, and although issues of justice and fairness tormented the odd adolescent, maturity was expected to bring with it an unquestioning acceptance of one's fate.

While not equally talented or skilled, what the authors have in common is an appreciation of the power of literature as a vehicle of social activism, and collectively they document the debilitating social structures and mores of the separate worlds of the peasantry and the privileged, address matters of gender that cut across ethnic and social divisions, and explore the power and the often devastating consequences of social conditioning. Moreover, whatever the subject matter, they observe and interpret experience from a female perspective and demonstrate a keen sensitivity to both the promise and human cost of change.

Their voices are loud and strong, what they have to say is worth hearing, and their impact should not be confined to one time or place. Translating their stories into English permits their message to transcend temporal, geographical, and linguistic boundaries.

The process of translation, in and of itself a formidable undertaking, was compounded by archaic forms of Ukrainian; late-nineteenth century stylistic conventions, paragraphing, and punctuation; texts that varied with the era in which they were published; vexing problems of transliteration; and the fact that a number of the works required a judicious editing. Ultimately, it was the criterion of readability that informed the many and difficult decisions that had to be made.

A biographical note about each author anchors her writings in a social and historical context. No other analyses are provided; the works are allowed to speak for themselves.

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Olena Pchilka

1849-1930

## Biographical Sketch

Olha Drahomanova-Kosach, known by her literary name of Olena Pchilka, was born into a privileged family of landowners in Eastern Ukraine—a family that actively opposed the oppressive political and cultural policies of the Russian Empire. Her father, a lawyer, tried his hand at writing, while her mother pursued interests in Ukrainian literature, songs, folk tales, customs, and traditions.

Her older brother, Mykhaylo Drahomanov (1841-1895), an eminent scholar, historian, political publicist, literary critic, and folklorist, served as her mentor. After the death of their father, he enrolled her in an exclusive girls' school in Kyiv, where she studied world literature and mastered German and French. In her brother's home, she met the leading intellectuals of the day.

In 1868, at the age of nineteen, Olha married a lawyer, Petro Kosach. A devoted mother, she instilled in her children—two sons and four daughters—a fervent love of country, a passion for knowledge, and a special interest in the study of languages and literatures. Her eldest son, who became a mathematician and a professor of physics, wrote under the pseudonym of Mykhaylo Obachny; her eldest daughter, Larysa, using the pseudonym of Lesya Ukrainka, became Ukraine's greatest woman poet.

Despite heavy family responsibilities, Olha's favourable financial position enabled her to continue pursuing her intellectual interests. In 1872, she visited her brother in Bulgaria where he was a visiting professor and, a few years later, stayed with him in Geneva, where he had settled as a political emigrant. At this time, she travelled widely in Europe and established contacts with writers in Western Ukraine, among them Ivan Franko, a renowned author, critic, publicist, and political activist, and the feminist author, Nataliya Kobrynska.

The first focus of Olha's national consciousness was Ukrainian folklore and ethnography. During the years that the Kosach family lived in smaller centres outside of Kyiv, she collected local customs, folk songs, and embroidery samples, and in 1876 began to publish articles about Ukrainian folklore.

In the course of her career, she translated literary works from several languages into Ukrainian and wrote original poetry, plays, short fiction, and stories for children. She also published biographies, essays of literary criticism, literary reviews, and commentaries on current affairs.



In addition, she compiled and edited journals, books, and almanacs. Certainly, her pen name “Pchilka,” which in Ukrainian means “little bee,” was a most felicitous choice, for she gave up a life of leisure and assiduously fostered the development of Ukrainian literature.

Her literary activities intersected with her involvement in the Ukrainian women’s movement and her political activism in the cause of unifying Eastern Ukraine (in the Russian Empire) and Western Ukraine (in the Austro-Hungarian Empire). In 1887, she joined forces with Nataliya Kobrynska from Western Ukraine to publish the widely acclaimed *Pershy vinok (The First Garland)*, an almanac that took the bold step of featuring only women contributors.

When the Kosach family settled in Kyiv in the 1890s, Pchilka, by then a well-known writer, became an active participant in the capital’s cultural life and delivered lectures about Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish authors. In 1901, the Ukrainian literary establishment celebrated the 25th anniversary of her writing career.

In 1905, Pchilka participated in a successful effort to lift tsarist bans (1863 and 1876) on Ukrainian-language publications in Eastern Ukraine. This same year, in the province of Poltava, she founded an organization that fought for women’s rights and issued a manifesto demanding autonomy for Ukraine.

The next decade in Pchilka’s life was marked by personal tragedy. Her son Mykhaylo died in 1903; her husband, in 1909; and her daughter, Lesya Ukrainka, in 1913. She also lost a number of her friends and political allies, including the author Mykhaylo Starytsky (1840-1904), and the composer Mykola Lysenko (1842-1912).

During the First World War, Pchilka edited newspapers in her native village of Hadyach in Poltava. In 1924, she returned to Kyiv, where she worked in the ethnographic, literary, and historical sections of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR. Even though she had been persecuted for her anti-Soviet views and activities, in 1925, in recognition of her many achievements, she was made a Member of the Academy. Despite her advanced years and frail health, she continued writing until her death in 1930.

In her thematically fresh depictions of the lifestyles and concerns of the upper classes, Pchilka was among the first Ukrainian authors to record authentically the speech patterns and conversations of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. A highly principled woman, she challenged deeply ingrained norms governing the status of women in society, played a leading role in the struggle for Ukraine’s reunification and independence, and made a noteworthy contribution to Ukrainian literature and the enrichment of the Ukrainian literary language.

## *Help!* (1897)

“It’s so beautiful! Lord, how beautifully they’re singing! It’s as if we were in paradise!”

This is what the more serious young married women were whispering to each other in church. And as they softly recited their prayers, they kept glancing at the cantor’s corner—the source of the clear and moving chanting.

It was the girls who were singing: Orysyia Yaroshenko and Tetyana Bilyk, who had been singing for a good three years, and a few younger ones who followed their lead. Although these two older girls had left school a few years ago, the teacher, Mykolay Semenovych, encouraged them to come and sing in the church on feast days, because they were the best singers in the village.

This was especially true of Orysyia Yaroshenko, who sang with the voice of an angel. Her mother, Yavdokha Yaroshenko, listened with unabashed delight. Her blissful smile never faded as she crossed herself and bowed her head in prayer. After all, she was the mother. It brought such pleasure to her maternal heart! Her soul rejoiced!

“We sing to You, we praise You, O Lord, and we pray to You, O God of ours!” Orysyia intoned vigorously and passionately, oblivious to the people around her.

She always looked straight ahead. Directly in front of her was the icon of the Resurrection. The Lord, having risen from His grave, appeared to be soaring into heaven; and heaven was incredibly bright and blue, with the light of the Lord penetrating it. Wisps of incense wafted under the icon, and the figure of the Lord rose from them as if from behind heavenly clouds.

It was a cold day, the wintry Feast of St. Nicholas, and Orysyia was bundled up in a warm, white cloak. But her head was not covered; it was only tied around with a narrowly folded scarf that left the top of her head almost completely bare. Her braid was also left free. She was thin, or rather, slender, and young—she had turned seventeen on the Feast of St. Mary the Protectress—and quite

attractive. Her delicate face was like an open flower, and her eyebrows, as the saying goes, were finely strung, like beads.

It is quite understandable, therefore, that Orysyia would catch the eye of some people! Take Panko Sakhnenko; he was always admiring her and smiling. He even smoothed his moustache with his hand to hide an affectionate smile, but it was no use. As they say, you can't keep the cat in the bag!

Now the parishioners were coming out of church, and as they advanced down the street, the older people moved along in one line, and the younger ones in another. The young lads pretended not to be walking with the girls, but the dark beauties knew that the talk in the boys' cluster was about them, and nothing else. It was true—the laughter and the conversation centred entirely on the girls.

"We no longer need cantors in our church." Omelko laughed. "The girls can manage quite nicely, ha-ha-ha!"

"Perhaps one of them will even become a priest, and we'll drive her around in a sieve! Did you hear that Tetyana?" Petro shouted.

"I hope you get as many sores as there are holes in a sieve," Tetyana tossed at them, giggling.

The boys continued laughing and joking, not at all offended by her remark. "Well, holy and pious ones, see that you come to Solovyikha's place tonight; we'll bring the musicians," Panko said gently, and he leaned towards Orysyia as he walked by the girls.

Orysyia did not say anything; she did not even look at him, but Panko discerned something in her appearance and her laughter that told him she would be there. He walked swiftly past the girls and set out for his home, which was quite far off to the right. Orysyia, continuing her conversation with Tetyana, arrived home first; her mother Yavdokha followed soon after.

Her father, who was not feeling well, had stayed at home; he had suffered aches and pains since Sunday, when he had gone to town to sell some oats. He asked that dinner be served as quickly as possible, and soon they were all sitting at the table: the parents, Orysyia, two younger teenage girls, and three little boys—quite a large family! They discussed this and that; but what kind of conversation can there be with so many children? This one wanted more cornmeal mush, that one wanted some bread, and still another had to be chastised for fooling around.

After dinner, the second eldest daughter, Sanka, and the two younger boys went to the skating rink, but the father told the eldest

boy, Semenko, to read from the Holy Book. He should be reading, because he was a pupil already; and, after all, the book had been purchased especially for him.

Well, it truly was a momentous occasion! Yavdokha even burned some incense. You see, the potters now make special little pots with perforated covers for this purpose; all you have to do is throw in some coals, add a little bit of incense, put the cover back on, and the incense burns quite nicely.

Semenko read at the head of the table. At first the father leaned on his hand and listened; then he lay down on a pillow on the floor and fell asleep. Yavdokha took some hemp to the priest's wife, who was going to card it. To whom was Semenko supposed to read? He cut short his laborious sounding out of the words and ran off to the skating rink as well.

As Orysyia picked up the Holy Book to put it back on the shelf, she took a good look at it. Even though she had gone to school for a while, she was not able to read this book; she had never attempted anything like it. Her schooling had been cut short, too short, because her mother needed help at home.

The reading Orysyia had done in school was different somehow; it was not at all like this. She took down from the shelf her old primer that Semenko was now using. The words in it were slightly different than those in the Holy Book.

Orysyia grew thoughtful. She began to recall a few things the teacher had said about why this was so, but then she sighed deeply. She couldn't remember now, and even back then it hadn't made much sense. If only she'd been able to stay in school just a little longer . . .

The door creaked open, and Tetyana glanced into the house.

"Are you alone?" she asked, as she walked in and began to take off her outer garments. She had just come in from the frost, and a fresh breeze came in with her and wafted through the house. "I've come," she continued, "to restring my necklace. Maybe you have a finer needle. Is your mother at home?"

The girls sat down, began stringing the beads, and carried on with their conversation.

"There are going to be two violins tonight," Tetyana went on, "because Kalenyk has come back."

Orysyia's face lit up. Everyone knew that no one could play like Kalenyk. Oh, how he played! Orysyia could hear both the sound of

the violin and the clatter of heels and . . . just as sometimes in her dreams, she saw Panko, his smiling face . . . He was bending over, laughing, and tugging at her sleeve . . .

Tetyana was saying something, and Orysyia smiled joyfully—but not at her . . .

## II

One certainly could tell where the young people were gathered that evening. It was not easy to hear the violin, but the drum could be heard from far off! The girls rushed to Solovyikha's house. The children ran there too, and they crowded around the house and kept peeking into the porch and through the windows until they were chased home. The house was filled with noise and dancing. The tables were laden with food and drink. After all, if it's pot luck—then let's have a feast! And if there's music—then let's dance!

Yes indeed, there was Orysyia—flitting about like a butterfly. There was no stopping her! She was dancing opposite Tetyana with such teeny, tiny steps that, when she spun around, her necklace jingled. Her ribbons streamed behind her, and her face was flaming; her eyes were sparkling—she could no longer keep them lowered to the floor. They darted around the room and flashed a brilliant smile at Panko! Then she moved backwards with her arms outstretched, and her girlish figure swayed ever so lithely, while her heels made tapping sounds—tap, tap!

There was bedlam in the house—some couples were leaving the dance, others were joining in. Only the musicians did not rest; they played vigorously, without stopping.

Inflamed and flushed, Orysyia ran out of the house. She felt hot, boiling-hot, and wanted to cool off outdoors. It was dark outside, with only the odd star sparkling in the sky; but the air was exhilarating, and it rushed in a cool stream into her overheated breast.

“Oh!” Orysyia shrieked.

Someone was tugging at the cloak that was flung carelessly over her shoulders. “Are you hot? Silly! You'll freeze to death!”

Oh! It was his voice, Panko's . . . It was he.

“You silly little thing! Silly!” he said. “At least if you'd dress properly!” He adjusted the cloak on her back, all the while drawing her closer and closer . . .

“Let me go! Go away!” Orysyia cried, resisting him.

“Why would I let you go! You see, you can’t escape, and I won’t let you if I don’t want to!” Panko said. “Anyway, what reason is there to escape? And where to?”

He was breathing heavily as he spoke, and his flushed face bent ever nearer. There was no escape! She felt faint . . . Had she really kissed him? Oh! Her head dropped weakly on his chest and, all the while, he was hugging and kissing her!

“Orysyia! Orysyia, where are you?” Tetyana was calling from the porch.

Orysyia fluttered off to the house like a startled bird. At the last moment, Panko tried to stop her by grabbing her hand, but she snatched it away from his burning touch. Someone might see!

### III

“You’re going to marry him, yes you will! I can see that!” Tetyana said to Orysyia in the springtime, as she dug alongside her in the lord’s garden.

Orysyia remained silent.

Tetyana chattered on: “Why, even Solovyikha said that Panko is sending matchmakers. Who would he send them to, if not to you?”

“Why me? There’s no shortage of girls!” Orysyia retorted, and she continued digging diligently.

“It’s true there are lots of girls. There are also many young men in the district, but I know you’ll marry Panko. You might even marry him this spring if he sends his matchmakers.”

“Oh, who’d send matchmakers now, in the springtime! There’s no money or anything else.”

Orysyia had barely finished saying this when a cry resounded in the garden: “Girls! Girls!”

“What is it? Why is Zinka running like mad?” the girls wondered.

They stopped digging and watched as a flushed, chubby girl ran swiftly across the garden towards the female work brigade.

“Girls!” Zinka said, trying to catch her breath after her frantic run. “Over there! They’ve come . . . for girls . . . from the Andronivska farm. They’re calling us to work . . . to weed . . . in the beet fields . . . and so on . . . for the whole summer! Oh, Lord, I’m exhausted!”

There was noise and confusion. The girls, dropping their hoes and gathering into a group, peppered her with questions and deliberated.

“Hey, come on now! Come on! Why have you stopped working?” the lord’s housekeeper shouted. “Is this how you work? I take my eyes off you for a minute, and you declare a holiday? You stand around doing nothing?”

The girls reluctantly began to dig again. They did not say anything to the housekeeper about what had caused them to leave their work—why should they?

As they continued digging, however, they did not stop talking among themselves. After all, was this not an exciting matter?

Before long, they were given a break for lunch. That was when the talking began in earnest.

But it was not only here; there was talk everywhere, even on the other side of the village. The girls conferred, the mothers conferred—should they go to work in the beet fields, or should they not? It was said good money could be earned there. The year before, girls from the village of Petrivka had gone to Yakhnivka. Well, the Andronivska farm was farther away, but what did that matter? If only the wages were good. The way things were now, what was there to live on? How could you buy anything at all—even what you really needed?

#### IV

It was suppertime in the Yaroshenko home. But not all the family was eating. The father and the children were at the table, but the mother was sitting apart on a bench, deep in thought, with her hands resting on her knees. Orysia was standing by the bake oven, leaning on her hand and looking intently at the flickering, dying embers that had been raked out on the hearth.

“Sit down and have your supper, Orysia,” her mother called out. “Why are you standing there? What’s there to worry about?”

“I’m not worrying!” Orysia replied. Frowning, she abruptly stepped up to the table and silently picked up her spoon.

“What in the world should we do?” the mother reflected out loud, remaining where she was, off to one side. “Should Orysia go to the beet fields, or shouldn’t she? What do you think, old man?”

“What’s it to me?” the father responded. “It doesn’t matter to me. Do as you see fit! It’s your business . . .”

“There’s a man for you—honest to God! After all, you’re the father! You should help me decide what and how things should be done.”



“What kind of advice am I supposed to give? It’s for you to decide whether or not it pays.”

“Well, if it didn’t pay, people wouldn’t go!” Yavdokha retorted.

“It’s no big deal to go, but what does one bring back?” the father observed. “What if they cheat the workers?”

“But why should they cheat? After all, there’s an agreement; even an official document is signed. How could they do such a thing? The pay is guaranteed!” the mother argued.

“Well, if it’s guaranteed, then it’s guaranteed,” the father responded curtly.

“There’s only one problem—she’s young, and it’s far away.”

“Yes, she is young. Why should she be going off somewhere to work? She’s kind of sickly, as well.”

“Well, and just what will she accomplish sitting at home?” the mother was annoyed again. “What will she earn here? She certainly could use a penny or two. In the fall, matchmakers may come, and what will she bring to her marriage? What does she have in her hope chest? How will we put on a wedding? Do we have so much as an extra penny?”

“Good Lord! I’ve already told you to do whatever you think is best! I’m not getting involved in this!”

The father, crossing himself, moved away from the table.

“Is Tetyana going?” the mother asked Orysyia.

“Yes, she is,” the girl replied as she went out into the porch.

“Where are you going?” Yavdokha asked.

“I’ll go fetch some water. The children splashed around and used it all up.” Orysyia took the pail and went to fetch some water. She thought that maybe . . . But no, she did not meet Panko anywhere.

She did, however, meet him on the street later that evening. He had not been around for two days, but now he was here.

The girls were singing, some more loudly than ever, but Orysyia did not feel like singing—her throat felt constricted.

“So, are you going to the beet fields?” Panko asked, sitting down on the logs beside her and stealthily putting his arm around her waist in the spring dusk. “Are you going?”

“I’m going,” Orysyia replied quietly.

“And how are things going to work out?”

“What things?”

“Well, everything . . . I wanted to send the matchmakers. Will it have to wait until autumn? That’s what it looks like. It’s true it’s

more convenient in the fall; now, it's hard to know how father will . . . it's not the time for it. There's not much money now."

"Well, that's just it! Money!" the girl interrupted impatiently. "It's all because of money."

Panko fell silent. His arm dropped from the girl's waist. Then he embraced her again, but this time around the shoulders, and said: "But it's so long to wait! Not to see each other for the whole summer. You won't forget about me there, will you?" he asked, smiling and pressing his moustache against her cheek. "You won't stop thinking about me? You won't renounce me?"

"No," Orysyia said softly.

A star rolled across the pale sky, and Orysyia shuddered. It seemed to her that something had brushed against her heart. She felt a cold wave of fear wash over her.

## V

After two weeks at the Andronivska farm, the girls became accustomed to the work, to the people, and to the sheds in which they had to live. They gradually became accustomed to everything.

But all the same, it was, one must admit, a faraway place, not like their own villages. The people here were unknown quantities. Something strange was happening in these villages in matters of faith. There were so many villagers who did not attend church, who did not pray in front of icons. They were even throwing the icons out of their homes! Lord! It was all very frightening. Why were they doing that? What made them do that? What were they thinking of?

"They've gone mad!" some of the villagers said.

But those Khlysts, or whatever they were called, argued their point of view. Orysyia thought a lot about one of the village girls, Kharytyna, who often worked in the beet fields alongside her. She was tall, pale, scrawny, and not that young anymore. When she looked at you with those dark eyes of hers, it felt as if she were gazing right into your soul, and you felt so sad.

She had already borne witness to Orysyia several times. Yesterday, she had even said that she had not married, and never would, because marriage was a sin. After all, do people live only to satisfy and debauch their bodies? Our Lord suffered, endured so much torment, and are we to indulge ourselves like animals and propagate sin as our legacy? It was an abomination, a sin!

“But that’s not so,” Orysya shyly responded. “What kind of sin is it? After all, people enter into an honourable marriage, they stand before the altar in wedding wreaths . . .”

“Marriage! Wedding wreaths! It’s more than a sin!” Kharytyna shouted. “It’s worse. They’ve contrived a deception, and now they’re rejoicing in it—and they’re deceiving both themselves and others.

“When a woman sneaks about furtively with someone, she’s called a prostitute, a whore. But if a priest leads her around the tetrapod before the altar and, instead of a young girl’s wreath, the periwinkle wreath—that shameful cover of marriage—is placed on her head in church, then she may indulge in lewd behaviour with public approval? She can then participate as much as she wants to in that abomination, and she can guide as many children as she desires into the same kind of sin and dissolute behaviour? Did our Lord get married? Did He have children? No! Instead of accepting the marriage wreath, He accepted the cross. Instead of children, He had only brother apprentices and faithful sisters.”

Orysya remained silent. What could she say to Kharytyna? She didn’t know anything.

Kharytyna, seeing that Orysya was silent and deep in thought, gazed ever more intently into her eyes.

One Saturday evening Kharytyna said: “Come, Orysya, let’s go join our people. We’re having a gathering this evening.”

It seemed to Orysya that her heart turned cold; however, in the evening she went with Kharytyna. She was trembling, but she went.

The house was full of people, and a light was burning. Holy Books were being read at the table, and heated discussions were being held.

It was frightening to watch these people; they seized each other by the arms, and their eyes blazed. Then they sang a prayer, or a song—a “psalm,” as they called it. It sounded something like those sung in church; but no, it was not the same. For some reason, your heart trembled from this singing. People were gravely beating themselves on their chests with their fists, and they were singing loudly, with emotion—as if a groan were spreading through the house.

Then, a woman—quite young yet—really did groan. She fell to the ground, clasped her hands to her breast, and lamented loudly: “O Lord, my only Saviour! You’re patient. You’re merciful. Have pity on me, a sinner. Forgive me. Give me the strength to live according to the truth!”

The young woman was weeping, repenting, and everyone was quietly praying with their hands folded.

“Nazar, Nazar has come!” Everyone in the house began to buzz. “Nazar Smaliy has come!”

Orysyia turned around to have a look. In the middle of the room, an elderly man was pushing his way through the crowd. He was emaciated and hollow-eyed, and his feet were wrapped in cloths oozing with blood and pus.

Whispering in fragments, Kharytyna told Orysyia that this man had suffered greatly during the winter at the hands of his fellow villagers. He had been beaten in the district office; everywhere he went, he had been beaten. He had been dragged by his feet through the steppes, with his head scraping the frozen ploughed fields. He had been forced to walk barefoot over the frost, and that was when he had frozen his feet, and the sores were still putrefying. Despite all this, they had not been able to break him. He had not repudiated his way of thinking; he had not betrayed the true Lord; he had not renounced his beliefs.

Orysyia observed the old man silently. He was crushed with grief, and appeared to have a fearful, pleading look on his face, but all the same, he had come! He fell to his knees and, in a broken voice, began to sing a psalm, straight from his heart and his aching soul:

“Oh, our most beloved Saviour,  
It was for us that You suffered on this earth!”

The people in the room immediately joined in: “Our righteous Lord, teach us to be worthy of Your great sacrifice!”

Orysyia did not even know when she began to sing with them in that beautiful, young voice of hers. Kharytyna glanced at her, grabbed her quickly by the arm, and led her into the very midst of the brethren.

## VI

The girls returned home just before the Feast of St. Mary the Protectress. Orysyia walked into the house early in the evening. Her father was threshing at his brother's place, but her mother was fussing by the cradle with the youngest boy. When she glanced up, she almost dropped the child. “Oh, dear mother of mine! Orysyia has returned! How are you? Did everyone come back?”

As Orysyia stepped into the house she glanced up at the icon corner, and a shadow fell across her face. Then, after standing still for a short while, she silently put down her bundle, went to her mother, embraced her, and kissed her hand.

“Well, how are you? How was it?” her mother asked. And then she interrupted herself. “Take off your cloak, my child. Do you want to eat?”

The door creaked as it opened time and again, and various kinfolk and neighbours rushed in, asking about everything and chatting among themselves. All the children also came home. A fire was set in the stove, and Yavdokha began to prepare supper. She was so happy now, so very happy, Lord! She talked and talked . . . and kept glancing at Orysyia. There seemed to be something different about her: she seemed thinner, paler, so much so that her eyes appeared bigger, very big indeed. Even a neighbour began to question Orysyia: “Why have you lost so much weight?”

“That’s right, that’s what I think, too,” her mother picked up on the question. “Perhaps you’re not well, my child?”

“No, I’m fine!” Orysyia replied softly.

“Listen, what do you expect from her?” a kinswoman of Yavdokha’s spoke up. “The poor thing is tired from the trip, and she’s exhausted from the summer’s work. Do you suppose it was easy there? You’d do better to give her something to eat as soon as possible!”

“Of course, right away!” Yavdokha bustled about. “It’s already on the table, Orysyia. There’s also fresh bread; I just baked it today—have some!”

But Orysyia pulled out a piece of cloth from the bosom of her blouse, took out her money, and gave it to her mother: “Here you are, mother, put it away—for the taxes or something.”

“What a thing to say!” her mother said joyously, as she counted the money. “Why should it be for the taxes? Your father will sell our young bull to cover them; we’ve been keeping him for the market. But this money is yours! I’ll put it away in the trunk. Maybe it will come in handy for you.”

“Of course it will come in handy!” the young women chimed in merrily. “You might be receiving matchmakers soon!”

“I swear to God, my dear kinswoman,” the eldest among them said to Yavdokha. “I was washing clothes in the pond yesterday, and old lady Sakhnenko told me that their Panko will send matchmakers to

your house just as soon as the girls come home. And she herself wants this, because she really needs a daughter-in-law: 'I'm not feeling all that well anymore,' she said."

The old kinswoman kept on talking. Orysyia's heart fainted when the old woman mentioned Panko and the matchmakers, and she gripped the table where she was standing . . .

## VII

The next day, Yavdokha tied a new, dark wine kerchief edged with a delicate design on her head. It was the Feast Day of St. Mary the Protectress, and she was going to church.

"Aren't you dressing yet?" she asked her daughter. "The bell is ringing already. Aren't you going to church?"

"No . . ." Orysyia responded quietly.

"Why not?"

"Just . . . because . . . I'm not feeling too well."

Her mother glanced at her. She truly did look quite pale and sickly. The poor girl had really wasted away on that farm. Or perhaps she'd been hexed by someone . . . or put under an evil spell! In any event, old lady Kalynykha should be called in. But maybe it would pass without that. The girl hadn't slept enough yet; she hadn't had enough rest.

The mother left for church, and Orysyia remained behind. She sat in deep thought for a while, then she sighed and went outdoors. She found it stifling in that house. Outside, Orysyia's younger sisters amused her for a while. They chattered away and pointed things out to her.

"Look, the carnations are still blooming."

"And here's the dahlia our godmother gave us in the spring."

Everyone had something to say.

Yavdokha came home from church very happy. May God forgive her, but she had enjoyed watching Panko Sakhnenko today. He kept staring around the church—he'd look at the deacons' corner, glance here and there, walk out of church, and come back in again! Well, she knew only too well what he was looking for—and she found it so amusing! And old lady Sakhnenko had asked about Orysyia, and the two women who expected to be in-laws exchanged a few words . . . Others had inquired about her as well, for everyone knew the girls had returned.

“Everyone was asking about you,” Orysyia’s mother said to her kindly. “The people missed your singing; they said: ‘No one can sing in church for us like your Orysyia.’”

Orysyia only nodded her head silently. After dinner, instead of lying down to rest, her mother opened the hope chest and started going through it, rearranging the bundles of cloth and the *rushnyky* [embroidered linen ceremonial cloths].

“What are you doing, mother?” Orysyia asked. She watched her mother intently out of the corner of her eye.

“I’m just rearranging things a bit,” her mother said seriously. Orysyia’s heart thumped, but she did not dare to say anything.

Towards evening, just as Orysyia was crossing the threshold with pails in hand—she was on her way to fetch some water—some people carrying ceremonial bread came through the gate. She glanced at them and stood dumbstruck for a moment; then, with superhuman strength, she dashed back into the porch, dropped the pails helter-skelter, and raced off into the orchard.

But the matchmakers interpreted her actions in their own way: “Oh, what a clever girl! She didn’t want to cross our path with empty pails. Well, it’s a good thing that she turned back. What a fine girl!”

The old folks welcomed the guests. They talked about this and that, and the matchmakers saw that things would go just fine. Anyone with experience in these matters can tell from the very first word how things will work out. There was no need to engage in long conversations, but they had to talk—for the sake of tradition.

Panko, trailing the matchmakers, wandered about in the yard and peeped into the windows. He walked through the porch and out into the orchard. Oh, my Lord! He had thought Orysyia was in the house, but here she was, standing by the stile! She caught sight of Panko, caught hold of the fence and, like a wounded bird, slumped down on a stump beside it.

“Greetings, Orysyia dearest!” Panko shouted happily.

“Greetings,” Orysyia responded softly, and her heart fluttered so wildly that it threatened to leap out of her breast.

“Well, how are you? You’ve lost weight! But that’s nothing. You’ll get better! I’ve really missed you! I thought you’d never come back! But here you are . . . my little swallow has flown home!”

Orysyia blushed, and a joyous smile involuntarily urged itself to her lips. Twisting her apron in her hands, she got up the nerve to glance at Panko. He was the same, only even more handsome! Either



his eyes had grown brighter, or his moustache had grown darker. And his smile!

“Orysyia, Orysyia darling! Where are you?” her mother called in a dignified manner. “Oh! Here she is! And you’ve come here as well, my boy? Well, if the wind has sent you to us, then you may as well come into the house. There’s no point wandering in the lanes. Just go to the house now—and you too.”

Yavdokha, ever so tenderly, touched Orysyia on the shoulder. She was well aware that Orysyia liked Panko. All three entered the house. The older folks joked and went through the usual ritual. Panko stood there, mashing his cap in his hands. Then he glanced at Orysyia and, appearing to grow happier, he smilingly said something in response to the matchmakers.

But Orysyia stood by the bake oven as if in a dream . . . Where was she? What was happening here? What was happening to her?

Her mother took the *rushnyky* and a kerchief out of the chest and gave them to her to present to Panko and the matchmakers. Panko took the kerchief from Orysyia and began tying it on himself; then he smiled and said to her: “Well, come on, help me!”

Without realising what she was doing, Orysyia, her hands trembling, helped him tie the kerchief. Panko gazed at her tenderly and joyfully. He was so handsome, so good, so dear!

“There, now we’ve been bound,” the matchmakers said. “So now the matter is settled. Thank the good mistress, bridegroom, for having instructed her daughter to get up early and embroider *rushnyky* . . .”

Bridegroom! Panko was now a bridegroom. The bride staggered and fell against the bake oven; but the matchmakers, walking out of the house, thought that, in keeping with the time-honoured tradition, she was modestly averting her eyes and ritually picking at the lime facade of the oven.

She had bound him! She was a bride!

## VIII

Two days went by. At dawn, Orysyia woke from a terrible dream. She rose from bed and, just as she was, in her nightshirt, clasped her hands and knelt on the bench. Once again she’d had that horrible, terrible dream. “O Lord, O Saviour! What has happened? How could it have happened? What will happen now?”

Had she ruined herself completely? Completely? Already? What, oh what, was to be done? She pressed her hands to her face, and hot tears poured down her cheeks.

Morning came, and her mother told her to do this and that, but Orysyia walked around as if she did not have the strength to do anything, as if she were dreaming, or not quite herself.

“What have I done? What has happened?”

A dreadful thought stirred somewhere within her, and then, like a cold stone, it weighed down upon her soul. Orysyia walked and talked, but she had no idea what she was doing, why she was doing it, or what would happen next. It was as if she had drowned, as if a wave were sweeping her along . . .

The days kept passing by. It was Friday already, and the wedding was on Sunday. Mother had already gone into town and bought everything; and she had taken Orysyia with her to buy kerchiefs and presents for everyone, even the priest!

On Saturday evening, Orysyia found herself sitting behind the table. The girls were singing and weaving the wedding wreaths out of periwinkle, but Orysyia was not crying as young brides-to-be are supposed to. No, she could not cry. She sat as if she had been struck by lightning. It would be a sin to cry now. She was a sinner, beyond redemption. She had betrayed her Saviour; she had betrayed the Lord! For what had she betrayed Him? For her sinful love of a young man, Panko. Was she to live with him as others live together? Was she to bear children? How many souls would descend from her into the same sin, into perdition?

Orysyia wrung her hands, but nothing could help her now! The wedding wreath, the last wreath of her girlhood, was being prepared for her head.

On Sunday, the clamour in Yaroshenko's yard and house began very early in the morning. There were the sounds of cooking and baking, and of wagons and horses being readied to drive the young couple to church. There were all kinds of matters to attend to. Everyone had his or her own task to do. Both the old and the young came to watch the bride being dressed for the marriage ceremony.

The bridesmaids had come very early. Orysyia's heart filled with grief when she looked at their happy faces, especially at Tetyana's. She was her true friend, but even she could not save Orysyia, nor could she help her in any way.

More and more people gathered in the yard. The sound of music could be heard. The bridegroom was coming with his best man! And, oh, he was so handsome! His black hair was shining under a grey Persian lamb hat, his face was ruddy, and he was such a vigorous and vibrant young man.

He strode into the house, glanced at Orysa, and gave her a hint of a smile. She looked at him as well, but very piercingly, fearfully, as if she were looking at an enemy. They were seated together on the wedding dais. The bridesmaids were singing, and a heavy tear rolled down Orysa's cheek.

"Don't cry. Why are you crying?" Panko was speaking softly. He wanted to cheer her up with a smile and took hold of her hand under the table.

Orysa removed her hand. For just a moment, she had blushed, but now she was once again as white as the wall. Only her eyes flashed with fear, with despair, like those of a cornered animal.

"Come on, let's go! It's time to leave!" the best man shouted. "The priest told us not to be late!"

Everyone began bustling about. The young couple was led out from behind the table. Her father and mother, holding icons and holy bread in their hands, were sitting on the bench under the icons.

When Orysa came up to her mother, she fell to her knees and could not rise to her feet again. Panko had to help her up. She fell down once again, buried her face in her mother's hands, and began to weep.

Orysa's heart cried out: "Mummy, my dearest mummy, my dearest dove! Save me, save me!"

But that cry did not reach her lips, for Orysa knew her mother would not save her.

Her mother was also crying. She was shedding tears over her child, but not out of sadness. She would not listen, she would not understand the deep grief of her child . . .

"Come on, quickly! Let's go. Honest-to-God! How long is this going to go on?" the best man shouted again.

They began to move out of the house, and Orysa was led away. There was no way out, no turning back. Nothing more could be done.

The church was filled with people. There were three couples that were to be joined in marriage that day. Panko and Orysa were at the head of the line.

Since she had returned, Orysyia had not been in church. Oh, my God! She had come here, into this—as people called it—God’s home, for the purpose of betraying her Lord and Saviour! There He was, over there; His image was painted on the iconostasis, in the place of honour. What a stern face! His eyes appeared to be looking at her, and His hand was outstretched, not as if He were offering a blessing, but as if He were cursing her! Orysyia looked at the icon in terror. Why had they painted Him as being so severe, when it was they who were sending innocent souls to perdition?

Orysyia’s head was swirling; her ears were buzzing. She heard nothing of what was being said, of what was being sung around her. Now their hands were being bound; she could no longer distinguish her hand from that of the one to whom she was being wed forever, to the eternal damnation and ruination of her body and her soul. She walked out of church as if she were drunk. She was lifted up into the wagon, and they set out for home.

The musicians played, and the young women greeted them with raucous singing:

“The cranberry is shredded, it’s shredded,  
And our Orysyia is wedded, is wedded!”

Once again Orysyia was behind the table. Everywhere around her there were people eating and drinking; there was noise, laughter, and singing. And the talk! Such ribald talk! Even Panko lowered his head at times, embarrassed by some of the things that were being said. The young women were already talking about the married woman’s head-dress, and they were bringing it to her.

“What?” she thought in a panic. “Right now? They would remove her young girl’s wreath right now and give it to him—her husband?”

The horses were harnessed; and people began to say it was time to take the bride to the bridegroom’s dwelling. Everyone was moving in, drawing nearer . . .

A last rush of strength, born of despair, filled Orysyia’s heart. Her hot eyes darted about like those of a trapped weasel.

An idea flashed through her mind like a streak of lightning. But no! That thought had occurred to her more than once. Only now, in this last desperate moment, it no longer seemed impossible, but the only way . . .

Yes, there was still time, there was still a moment in which to save herself from this shame, from this betrayal of her Lord.

“My Saviour, save me, help me! You will forgive me, for You know why I’m doing this!”

“Where is the bride? Where is Orysyia?” the young women asked those who were supposed to take her to the bridegroom’s home.

“Why, she was right here. She was standing right here!”

“She ran into the cellar!” Orysyia’s little sister said.

The trapdoor to the cellar was open. During all the commotion, Orysyia had jumped in. Oh, how she hurried!

“Oh, my Lord! Why won’t the sash come undone? There are so many knots! Ah! There . . . it’s undone. Where can it be fastened? Ah, yes! Right here, on the ladder.”

Her hands were tangled in her ribbons, but the noose encircled her neck . . .

“My Saviour! Forgive me! Accept my innocent soul! It is not to blame!”

“Orysyia! Orysyia!” someone was shouting right by the ladder.

“Who is calling? Mother? No, it’s Christ! There’s a light shining in bright broad beams, in golden sparks. It is His kingdom that is shining; it is His wreath! I’m coming to You, I’m coming to You, my Saviour, my World! Oh, where’s the light? Where is the road to Him? It’s dark! Dark! So dark!”

Orysyia was silent, numb.

But her mother was screaming and weeping over her: “Help! Help her, my good people! Save her! My child has hanged herself!”

But no one saved Orysyia.

No one!

*The Chaotic Supper*  
*A Christmas Misadventure*  
(1906)

It was Christmas Eve.

In Khvedir Pavlenko's home the traditional Christmas Eve supper was over, and Khvedir was already sitting in another part of the room. His wife Oksenya, however, was still at the table with her mother, granny Yavdokha, ladling *uzvar* [stewed dried fruit] from a big pot into two small containers. Beside her, engrossed in what she was doing, stood their little son Omelko.

"I'm having Omelko take some Christmas Eve supper to his godparents," Oksenya said to her husband. "I can send it to the district jail, can't I? Omelko's godfather is still there, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is . . ." her husband replied. "Yes, send him something! It's the perfect time to take it to him. He won't have had much of a Christmas Eve supper in jail!"

"Who? Who's in jail? Svyryd? Why?" granny Yavdokha asked, completely bewildered.

"Didn't you know that they took Svyryd away?" Khvedir asked in astonishment. "After the count's estate was sacked, the officials looked into things, accused Svyryd of being there when it happened, and took him away. He's only under suspicion, but they took him nonetheless!"

"Oh, dear mother of mine!" Yavdokha cried softly.

"And just before the holidays!" Oksenya added with a sigh.

"Well, what can anyone say? So far—it's their right!" Khvedir concluded.

Then, turning to his wife, he asked: "What are you doing? Why are you filling two containers with *uzvar*?"

"The other one is for our son's godmother," Oksenya replied softly, bending her head down lower over her work, as if she suddenly felt uncomfortable.

"You're sending some supper to his godmother as well? To the lady?" Khvedir asked.

“Well, so what if she’s a lady?” Oksenya spoke more loudly. “Just because she’s a lady, does it mean she’s not human? After all, she was Omelko’s godmother at the christening, wasn’t she? And she held him at the altar, didn’t she? So isn’t she his godmother?”

“So she’s his godmother,” her husband responded, “but that’s not the point. Why are you sending her all that food? Doesn’t she know what a peasant’s supper is like?”

“She may or may not know—it doesn’t make any difference. Traditions must be honoured.”

“Traditions!”

“Yes, exactly!” Oksenya held her ground. “Even mother says it should be done . . .”

“It should be, Khvedir, it should be,” granny Yavdokha spoke up. “Old people say that when godchildren stop taking Christmas supper to their godparents the end of the world will come.”

“Well, let it come—this end of the world!” Khvedir shouted. “Then—as it’s said—things might be worse, but at least they’d be different. Even as it is, the world is slowly being rebuilt, a few changes are coming about . . . People are growing smarter . . . They’re getting different ideas. And they already know what to do with the lords!”

Oksenya lost her temper. “Why are you going on about ‘the lords,’ ‘the lords’? What about them? Has our lady ever done us any harm? I’ve never seen her do anything bad. Even though I worked in the manor only a short while, the lady blessed me and gave me a lot of presents when I got married. And now she still treats me well. Whenever she sees me—in the manor yard or in church—she always has a kind word for me and never fails to ask about Omelko: ‘How is my little godson doing?’

“And on Easter Sunday, when she strolled through the village with her children, she even walked into our house and gave Omelko a most beautiful *pysanka* [*an intricately designed Easter egg*]. So, where does that leave me? If things are done in a certain way, then that’s how they should be done. If it’s a tradition, then it’s a tradition!”

“Well, I don’t give a damn!” her husband replied, rising to his feet. “Go ahead and stay on kissing terms with your lords. Send them some supper and breakfast as well! Do as you see fit! You’ll do as you please anyway, no matter what I say! There’s no point to me wasting my words. But to my way of thinking, if your lords were



turfed right out of the village—no matter that it's right before the holidays—it would be for the better. Even if the wolves were to make a supper of them out in the fields.”

“What a thing to say! The wolves!” Oksenya mimicked him. “He's prattling nonsense and doesn't even know what he's going on about!”

“I know only too well!” Khvedir concluded the conversation and, slamming the door, went out to look after the cattle.

The Christmas Eve supper for the godparents was carefully arranged in the basket. The containers with *uzvar* and *kutya* [*a mixture of boiled wheat, ground poppy seeds and honey*] were tucked into the fragrant hay in the basket and covered with a kerchief.

This was the first time that Omelko was taking the Christmas Eve supper to his godparents, so his mother was cautioning him: “Be careful, Omelko. Don't tip the basket.”

“But why would I tip it? What a thing to say!” Omelko replied sharply. He was, you see, an only child, his mother's pet, and so he was not accustomed to behaving too humbly. If he did not like what someone said, he fired right back.

But his mother did not let up on her advice: “Be careful, and watch out for the dogs, especially in the lord's yard.”

“Huh! Who cares about dogs?” the boy cried out. “I'll take along a good stick! You won't see me being afraid of them!”

“Well, go ahead and get dressed now,” the mother continued, speaking gently. “Put on my boots. It doesn't matter that they're a little big on you. Once you've put in extra linings and foot cloths, they'll be just fine! And here's a woollen sash for you—tie it tightly around yourself.”

The mother dressed the boy and fussed over him; she even smoothed down his hair as he was putting on his cap. Then she gazed into his eyes, taking pleasure once again in the round little face and the dark eyes of her only son.

And when he set out, she could not restrain herself from following him to the gate and shouting: “Watch out, Omelko! Be careful!”

## II

Supper had not yet been served in the lord's home. The table was just being set by the servants. Old Lavrentiy, a tall, lean man with a grey moustache, had a dignified manner and wore white gloves, for

he was still one of that “ancient breed of servants.” Manka, a short and plump young woman, had a completely different disposition; lively and cheerful, she was always laughing—no matter what happened.

The two of them were setting the table in the dining room. The room was spacious, and a long table was being prepared for fourteen people. The lord’s family was quite large, consisting of the lord, the lady, their three children, and a teacher—the governess. And then there was also the grandmother, Klavdiya Platonivna. Oh, she was a stern old lady. Just let anyone—the children, for example—try calling her granny instead of grandmother!

It went without saying that the table had to be set perfectly for Klavdiya Platonivna, especially on such an important occasion as Christmas Eve. You see, she was of truly noble lineage; more than one estate had passed through her hands in her lifetime and, even though she now had nothing of her own left and had to live with her son—or, more accurately, in the home of her daughter-in-law—she never forgot that she was well-born, and she wanted everyone else to remember this as well. And so, Lavrentiy placed a special elevated chair for her at the head of the table.

In addition to the family members, there were the guests. First, there was the entire family of the neighbouring lord who owned an estate about twenty kilometres away. Because of the proximity of this estate to the land of the count whose property had been sacked and burned, the lady, Oleksandra Ivanivna, and the lord, Ivan Oleksandrovykh, had left their home . . . They did not dare to celebrate the holiday in their own village—it was just too unsettling! And since they knew the lord’s family about whom we are speaking—Oleksandra Ivanivna had gone to school with the young lady who was the hostess—they had come here for the holiday season (after receiving invitations, of course) and had brought along their children, for they could not be left behind “as prey for the rapacious masses.”

But these were not the only guests. Precisely at noon, two gentlemen had driven up on a sleigh—a *kozak* [*Cossack*] officer and an investigator. They were on their way back to the city after conducting an investigation into the ransacking of the count’s estate. Although they had stopped in for only an hour, just to warm up, they had stayed to have coffee. And then, by the time all the civilities were exchanged and all the small talk was completed, they realised

that they would not make it home in time for supper. And so, places were also being set for them.

There was, therefore, an impressive array of guests. And, of course, if in addition to one's own family there are guests present, then everything has to be done up in even a grander style.

This was why the young hostess left the living room and went into the dining room to make sure that everything was in order.

The lady was especially young and pretty; she was fair-haired, delicately built, and slender, like a poplar.

She entered the room and said: "Lavrentiy, please ensure that everything is done properly."

"Everything will be done properly," Lavrentiy calmly replied and continued placing silver plates under the knives.

Suddenly, the lady exclaimed: "My God, what are these awful fumes in here? Ugh!"

The fumes had arisen in the following manner. In keeping with the tradition of the upper classes, a fir tree had been carried into the room to be decorated for Christmas. But the little fir tree was not yet adorned, as trimming it had been put off until the holidays, and so for now, the tree, secured in a wooden stand but unadorned by any pastries or trinkets, had been pushed into a corner of the large dining room. The children, however—both the ones who lived in the manor and their visitors—had been pestering the governess to allow them to fasten a star on the very top of the tree and to light at least two candles on it.

It was these candles that had created the fumes. The children did not notice the smell; they were happily and excitedly jumping about. The lady, however, ordered that the candles be put out, and then, after the children had been taken away, that the dining room window be opened.

The lady returned to the living room. All the guests were gathered there. The grandmother, sitting in a large chair by the table and resting her feet on an embroidered cushion, was telling fortunes with a deck of cards. Some guests were sitting, and some were standing, and all of them were busily engaged in conversations that centred on the turbulent times they were living in—on which estates trouble was already brewing, and on which ones people had to be vigilant. They talked and even argued, because they could not decide what should be done—some said that more rights should have been ceded to the peasants earlier, while others said that the screws should have

been tightened even more. (Of course, the lords talked about this in their own manner, while I'm just retelling it in simple language.) But there was one point on which they all agreed—throughout the country, the mood of the peasants was most ominous.

At that very moment, dogs began barking, and footsteps pattered past the window. They all exchanged glances and fell silent. The young hostess went to the dining room to see what was happening.

In the meantime, Omelko, at whom the dogs had been barking, had already made his way into the kitchen with his basket, and the servants were considering what they should do with him and the food he had brought. Lavrentiy silently eyed the boy up and down; the housekeeper, who was in the middle of deep frying some delicately fashioned sweet pastries—a task that always put her in a bad temper—said that Oksenya must have lost her mind completely, and Manka was turning red with suppressed laughter.

When the lady walked into the dining room, Lavrentiy was just carrying in the herrings.

“Lavrentiy,” the lady addressed the old servant. “Who has come? At whom were the dogs barking?”

“Well, you see, there . . . in the kitchen . . . There's a little boy from the village,” Lavrentiy replied, and he walked out of the room.

Just then Manka, scarcely able to restrain herself from laughing, dashed into the room. A broad smile lit up her face.

“Why are you laughing? What's going on?” the lady asked.

“Well, Oksenya's little boy has come . . . with some Christmas Eve supper.” It was difficult for Manka to talk, for she was choking with laughter. “The peasants have a custom that the godchildren take their godparents some of their Christmas supper on Christmas Eve.”

“Oh!” the lady said. “So he's brought me some supper? Well then, let him come in. Bring him here!”

Manka sped like an arrow into the kitchen. She ran in and, hardly able to breathe, exclaimed: “Listen! The lady said that Omelko should bring the supper into the next room.”

Upon hearing this, everyone responded: “Are you crazy? What are you saying? You're lying!”

“Cross my heart I'm not lying!” Manka swore. “Go on, Omelko! Don't you hear the lady calling you? But wait a moment; I'll just wipe your boots a bit.”

While the lady waited in the dining room, the guests glanced in curiously through the door. The visiting lady walked in first,

followed by the *kozak* officer and the investigator. Here, they found out what was going on—who had come and why.

Manka led in Omelko. Seeing so much light and so many lords, the young boy became confused and, not knowing what to do next, just stood with the basket in the doorway.

“Ah, yes!” the hostess said to him. “Good health to you, my little fellow! So you’ve brought me some Christmas Eve supper, have you? Well, thank you . . . What’s your name? I’ve forgotten. You have such a difficult name to remember!”

Omelko said something very quietly.

“What was that?” the lady asked again, bending closer to him.

“What’s your name? Ivan? Petro?” the lords asked loudly.

“Omelko!” the little boy called out just as loudly.

“Omelko!” the officer mimicked. “What a name! Ha-ha!”

“What kind of a name is it?” the visiting lady inquired.

“I really don’t know!” the hostess responded. “It must be Yemelyan or something like that.”

“Lord! How they twist names around!” the visiting lady remarked in astonishment.

“Oh! You have no idea how they twist them,” the investigator exclaimed. “Omelko, Overko, Yivha, Vivdya. And the kinds of surnames they have! Merciful Lord, what surnames those are!”

“Well, that’s fine, Omelko,” his godmother spoke up. “Give me your supper. Put it over here.”

She pointed at a little table that was standing off to one side.

Omelko gradually became bolder. “These are for you,” he said, taking out two containers, “and these I’m taking to my godfather.”

“Ah, yes!” the visiting lady said. “And who is your godfather?”

“Svyryd Shkuratenko.”

“Svyryd? Ha-ha-ha! Shkuratenko! Ha-ha-ha!” the officer was convulsed with laughter once again.

“Why is he laughing?” Omelko thought. “And what large teeth he has—our bay horse has teeth just like that.”

“Well, you certainly have some fine relatives, Sonya,” the visiting lady said to the hostess. “Svyryd Shkuratenko! Ha-ha!”

“That’s quite enough!” the hostess said, frowning at her. “Well, my little fellow, you may go home now. But wait a minute. I’ll give you something.”

The lady felt her pockets, but she did not have any money with her. And she did not want to look for something sweet, because it

would have taken too long. “I’ll be right back!” she said, and went into the living room.

The lords stayed behind, talking among themselves, and Omelko looked them over. The officer was short and stout; the investigator was also short, but quite skinny—his scrawny legs in his narrow grey pants struck Omelko as absurd.

“How sickly he looks,” Omelko thought. “And as for that lady—what does she have on her head? Some kind of a hairy fur cap, a whole little lamb. . .”

The hostess returned, and her husband came in after her.

“Here you are!” he said quietly to his wife, showing her his open wallet in which he kept his small change. “Here’s a *karbovanets* [dollar] . . . here’s another one . . . and here’s a *pyatak* [nickel].”

“A *karbovanets* is too much,” the lady reflected, “but a *pyatak* is too little.”

“Oh, give him a *pyatak*,” her husband advised her. “That’s enough for him! And the *pyatak* is so pretty—it’s new and shiny like a *chervonets* [gold coin].”

The lady pressed the *pyatak* into Omelko’s hand, saying: “This is for a sweet bun for you.”

“Kiss your godmother’s hand, you impudent little fool!” the officer instructed him.

“Oh, it’s not necessary, it’s not necessary!” the lady cried out.

But Omelko would not have dared to do it. That hand did not look at all like a hand to him—it was ever so white, like chalk, and there was something gold shining on it; sparks seemed to be flashing on one of its fingers. What could it be?

“Well, you’d better go now,” the visiting lady said, “or it will get too late for you. Does your godfather Svyryd live a long way from here?”

“No, he’s not too far away,” Omelko replied. “He’s staying at the district office now.”

“What do you mean, he’s staying there?” the investigator inquired.

“He’s staying there, in the jail.”

“In the jail? What for?”

“They say he was in Petrivka when the people ransacked the count’s estate, and that’s why he was put in jail.”

“Ah, my little dove! So that’s who your godfather is! That’s wonderful!” The *kozak* officer came up to Omelko and placed his hand on his head.

The little boy stepped backwards.

“So, that’s the kind of relatives you have,” the visiting lady turned to the hostess.

“Well, my little friend,” the officer continued. “Run along with your supper to your godfather, but be sure to tell him that if he’s going to stick his nose into lords’ estates, I’ll christen him so hard with a whip that he’ll remember me as long as he lives!”

Omelko looked directly at the officer and stated calmly: “Oh, you won’t be able to beat up my godfather—he’s strong! The bailiff wanted to beat him in the marketplace, but my godfather slapped his face so hard that the bailiff toppled right over! And then he gave him a few more blows with his cudgel, and his cudgel is really something to see—it’s made from a blackthorn tree. Well, good bye!”

Having had his say, Omelko walked out.

The lords were left standing dumbfounded . . . After a moment they came to their senses and began to talk: “Did you see that arrogance! Oh, the scoundrel!” the officer shouted. “A little pup like that, and just listen to the kinds of things he’s going on about! Shouldn’t the hide be torn off their backs? Well, shouldn’t it?”

“It’s truly dreadful!” the host murmured softly.

As they made their way back into the living room, the visiting lord quietly said to his wife: “Well, one can see from what that little piglet was saying that things aren’t too safe here either.”

“Alas! It’s the same all over!” his wife replied with a sigh.

“Who was that?” the grandmother asked her daughter-in-law. She was still in the living room, laying out the cards.

“It was a little boy from the village . . .” the hostess replied.

“Why did you let him come into the dining room?”

Well, the grandmother couldn’t be told everything, could she? The young hostess adroitly changed the conversation and sighed with relief when Lavrentiy finally came in and announced that supper was being served.

The young hostess bustled about, inviting everyone to the table. The visiting lord offered his arm to the grandmother, and everyone went into the dining room. Seating themselves at the table, they soon forgot all about Omelko as they turned their attention to the food.

And there was such a variety of delicious dishes on the table—boiled dumplings, and baked dumplings with all kinds of fillings, ground herrings and other delicacies, stuffed fish, marinated fish, and all kinds of garnishes—and everything was done to perfection!

There certainly was no reason for the hostess to feel embarrassed before her guests! And the mayonnaise was so well prepared that even the grandmother praised it, and she was one who was certainly well versed in such matters, having eaten her way through two estates . . .

In addition to the food on the table, there were liqueurs, cordials, and, of course, wine.

The officer—because fish swim in water—tossed back five glasses or more; then, with some sweet apricot brandy, he drank to the health of the young hostess, and, with a strong raspberry liqueur, to the health of the older hostess, the grandmother; then he toasted the visiting lady with a glass of wine.

“I wish you,” he said with a charming smile, “a happy and safe holiday season!”

“Thank you!” the visiting lady said. “I wish you the same, and most especially—that Svyryd’s blackthorn cudgel does not land on your back! Ha-ha-ha!”

It was in this manner that the supper progressed.

### III

Omelko continued on his way and before long was with his godfather at the district office. The jail was right in the district office, immediately adjoining the meeting hall, and it was quite easy to get into, for it was not kept under tight security. The guard led in the little boy carrying his basket, and then sat down with them and joined their conversation.

When he entered the cell, Omelko saw that his godfather was sitting on a wide bench, eating borshch out of a container. His wife was sitting beside him—she must have brought him some Christmas food as well.

Omelko thought that his godfather, who was dispiritedly slurping the borshch, looked somewhat dishevelled and morose. When Svyryd saw his little godson, however, his face brightened, and he seemed to become more cheerful.

“Why, hello, dear godson, hello,” he called out heartily. “So, you’ve brought me some supper, have you? Thank you very much! And thank your mother for not forgetting about me. Well, sit down, have a rest! Oh . . . but where are you to sit? You’ll have to settle in



beside us, right here on this hard plank bed, for there's no other spot. Well, so what do you think? Does this 'living room' of mine appeal to you?"

Omelko looked around the cell. There was only one tiny window; the walls were high enough, but they were dirty, dark, and covered with cobwebs. The room was gloomy, and there was nothing in it.

"No, it's not very nice here," Omelko replied.

Svyryd and the guard laughed.

"Well, my boy," Svyryd said, "did you think it would be nice in a place like this? Do you suppose they would lock us peasants up in here if it was nice? No, my dear little fellow, they most certainly would not."

Svyryd's wife did not laugh; she was sitting sorrowfully with her head in her hands.

"You've brought me some very fine *uzvar*," Svyryd continued, talking to Omelko. "And the *kutya* is really tasty. Thank you, my son! Where did you get pears for the *uzvar*? From the willow that grows by your gate?"

"No, not from the willow!" the little boy laughed. "They're from the tree that my father grafted a long time ago. There were a lot of pears; we ate most of them, but Mother dried a few for the *uzvar*."

"It's good, very good!" Svyryd said. "But now, my boy, take the containers and go home. It's quite late already."

"We'll go together," Svyryd's wife said; she rose to her feet and started saying her farewells.

"Do you still have some flour—at least for the holidays?" Svyryd asked her.

"Yes, there's still a little . . ." his wife replied.

"Well, go in good health. Goodbye to you as well, my little son. And be sure to thank your mother nicely for me. Enjoy the holidays in good health. And may God let you greet the New Year in good health."

"Will you stay here for the entire holiday season?" Omelko asked.

"It looks like it, my son!" Svyryd smiled. "But then, it's not at all clear . . . a lot can happen. If a mouse doesn't bite my head off, we may still get to see one another during the holidays! Goodbye! Go with God."

Svyryd was joking and trying to make it appear that he was not at all troubled, but as the little boy walked out of the jail, he felt very sad to leave him in the bleak dingy cell.

## IV

For the first while, Svyryd's wife walked alongside Omelko, but then she turned off in the direction of her home.

Omelko walked alone past the lord's yard.

"Just look how brightly lit the windows are!" he thought. "They're probably all sitting around. What do they do there? Why don't I have a look to see how they're eating their supper? They were still preparing it when I was there. But how can I get there without going through the yard? That's where the dogs are, and the servants will come running out. What if I go through the orchard?"

Omelko did go through the orchard. He peeked into a window. The big room was brightly lit, but there was no one in it. But over there, in the next one . . . Omelko went up to another window—they were all sitting at the table, and there were so many of them! This must be the room he had been in. But it was hard to see well, because the window was too high. Perhaps he could crawl up a tree.

Omelko placed his basket on the ground and began clambering up a tree near the window. This was not an easy task, and the *pyatak* the lady had given him made it even more difficult—he was still holding it in his hand because he had nowhere to put it.

"Oh, now I can see very well, and if I push the window open just a little more, I'll be able to hear everything."

The old servant, carrying something white on a big platter, approached the lords and their children. They were all talking about the *kutya*.

"I don't like this *kutya*," the hostess said. "I like the plain, ordinary kind made out of wheat. However, since no one here likes it, I didn't tell the servants to make any. It's too bad!"

"Wait a minute!" the visiting lady said to her. "You have your own *kutya* that your little godson brought you. It's just like the one you want—it's ordinary *kutya*."

"Why yes, that's true," the hostess smiled. "Lavrentiy, bring me some of that *kutya* that's over there on the little table—the one in the container."

Lavrentiy placed the container on a plate before the lady.

"My God! Surely you're not going to eat it?" the grandmother asked her daughter-in-law in consternation.

“But why not?”

The grandmother shrugged her shoulders.

Slowly eating the *kutya*, the lady said: “It’s just ordinary *kutya*. And it couldn’t be anything else; it’s exactly like the one we used to prepare back home.”

At this point, her husband intervened in the conversation: “Well, when it was prepared in your home, at least you knew that it was prepared in a sanitary manner, but as for this—God only knows!”

“There can’t be anything unclean in it,” the lady continued; nevertheless, she stopped eating the *kutya* and stirred it idly with her spoon.

Then the children began pestering their mother to give them some of “her own” *kutya*.

“My God!” the grandmother exclaimed. “At least don’t give the children any of that terrible stuff!”

“What kind of terrible stuff? Why shouldn’t I give them some ordinary *kutya*?” the lady argued.

“No, no, I beg you, don’t do this!” her husband cried once again. “Why would you want to poison the children?”

“Poison them?” the lady smiled.

“Of course, poison them. There may be all sorts of bacilli in it. Perhaps some kind of terrible contagious disease!”

“Forgive me, please,” the officer, who was sitting next to the lady, interjected. “May I have a look?” He pulled the container with the *kutya* closer to himself, looked into it, sniffed it, grimaced, and immediately jerked his head away from it. “Oh, no!” he exclaimed. “It can’t be eaten . . . It smells—it reeks of something!”

“Of the peasantry?” the visiting lady inquired jokingly.

“Ha-ha-ha!” the officer roared. “Exactly—of the peasantry!”

He had scarcely finished saying this, when something strange happened. Something flashed before their eyes, whistled past them, clattered, and knocked the glass out of the officer’s hand.

“Oh!” the ladies screamed.

“They’re shooting!” the lords thought, instinctively bending their heads over the table.

And then there was a thud and a crashing noise. The pane flew out of the window. Everyone panicked and fled from the table in utter confusion.

“They’re shooting! They’re killing us! Help!” the visiting lady wailed as she ran to call the servants.

The others fled in the opposite direction, into the living room.

The grandmother was still trying to get up from her chair after everyone else had left and, as she did so, she snagged the corner of the tablecloth and sent plates and glasses flying to the floor. There was a deafening crash!

Hearing the crash in the dining room, those who had taken refuge in the living room thought that the robbers were already ransacking the house, and fled hastily in all directions.

The servants rushed into the dining room.

“What was that? There’s no one anywhere!” someone shouted.

Gradually, those who were nearer the dining room began to peek into it. The host examined the window; the pane that had been opened was dangling, and the glass in it was broken.

The lord peered out the window. “There’s absolutely no one here!” he said, as he looked around.

Everyone gathered in the dining room once more.

“What was it? What happened?” they asked one another.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” the investigator suddenly shouted. “Look at this! Here, near the broken glass on the table! It’s a *pyatak*!”

“A *pyatak*?”

“Yes. Here, you can see it.”

“Look!” the host said to his wife. “It looks like the *pyatak* that you gave to that . . . boy; it’s new, and it’s exactly the same.”

“The same . . .” the lady said, and she glanced at the pane. So, the pane had not been closed after it had been opened to clear the fumes from the candles on the fir tree. “It could well be that it’s the same one,” the lady said softly.

“Aha!” the officer addressed her. “So it’s your wonderful godson who has played this trick? We owe him a thank you for such a delightful surprise!”

Everyone began talking all at once—about how, and why, and what had happened, and how could it have happened.

Some were still standing; others were sitting down at the table again. Pandemonium reigned. No one even noticed that the ladies’ hairdos—those skilfully contrived hairdos—were all dishevelled and skewed to one side. No one noticed that the gentlemen’s clothing was marked with chalk or dust; as if they had been crawling around in the corners. No one noticed that the grandmother was no longer in the group. Manka had taken her from the kitchen and put her to bed. The grandmother was now sniffing some smelling salts—for

she kept swooning—while the housekeeper massaged the old lady's feet with rubbing alcohol.

Lavrentiy, however, seeing that the lords and ladies had more or less reassembled at the table, went up to the hostess and inquired: “Should I serve the compote that we were going to have instead of the *uzvar*?”

The lady just waved her hand as if to say—who needs any compote now!

## V

Enraged, Omelko walked home.

“They're mean, and bad,” the little boy thought. “They laughed at us, made fun of us! They roared with laughter! But why? We don't laugh at them! When the lady came to our home, mother was so happy she was beside herself—she greeted her, welcomed her, and gave her children some nuts and honey that grandfather had brought. But in their home they only swear and laugh at people.

“Well, we could laugh too! Yes, we could! At Easter, we thought it was funny when their little daughter looked as if she had a sunflower pinned on her head. And the young lordling had pants that only went down to his knees, while his boots only reached up to his ankles, and he walked around flashing his naked calves. But we didn't laugh, did we? Yet they were roaring!

“And they don't want to eat our *kutya*; they say it stinks! Well, they're the ones who stink!”

When Omelko came home and walked into the house, he put down the basket and yanked off his outer clothing.

Granny Yavdokha was already on the bed atop the clay oven, and Khvedir was lying on the sleeping bench. Only Oksenya was still up, doing this and that, putting in time as she waited for Omelko.

She noticed at once that he looked glum, but greeted him cheerfully: “Oh, is it you, Omelko?”

Instead of replying, he complained bitterly: “Why did you send me to the lord's manor? I'll never go there again! May they all go berserk!” The little boy's voice was trembling with sobs—he was ready to burst into tears.

“What happened?” his mother asked timidly.

“They laughed at me and at everything that's dear to us! The lady invited me in, I gave her the Christmas Eve supper, and they all

surrounded me and laughed like you wouldn't believe. And one even threatened to beat up my godfather. Then I looked through the window and saw them eating their supper, and they wouldn't give the children our *kutya*, and they attacked my godmother for tasting it—they said the *kutya* stinks, that there's something bad in it."

"What in the world? Oh, my God!" Oksenya exclaimed.

"I told you that would happen," Khvedir interjected harshly from the plank bed.

"Merciful God!" granny uttered from the oven-bed.

"Oh yes, merciful God! And you kept saying that some Christmas Eve supper should be sent to the lords; you thought they would accept Omelko there as if he were a guest!" Khvedir reproached his mother-in-law.

Omelko interrupted him: "I don't want them to be nice to me! The lady gave me a *pyatak*, but later, when I went back, I threw that *pyatak* at them through the window! Let them choke on it! I hate it when they make fun of us! I won't go there anymore! I'll only take Christmas supper to my godfather! The poor man has to stay in that awful place . . . and they say he should be whipped!"

The little boy began to bawl.

"There, there, my son! That's enough, my child!" the mother consoled him, even though she herself had tears in her eyes. "Well, what can we do? God be with them. Just don't cry, and don't swear—it's a sin."

"When I grow up, I'll give them a good thrashing!" the little boy persisted.

"That's enough, my child, don't say things like that! By the time you grow up things might be different. Surely it can't be that there will never be justice in this world. There has to come a time when justice will prevail!"

The little boy calmed down a bit—his mother's hand was caressing him, and her words were pouring hope into his childish soul—hope that someday there would indeed be justice in the world!





Nataliya Kobrynska

1855-1920



## Biographical Sketch

Nataliya Kobrynska was born in 1855 (1851 in some sources) in Western Ukraine—a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Both her paternal grandfather and her father were priests who participated actively in the development of Ukrainian literature, the former through his involvement in Ukrainian theatre, and the latter by translating and writing poetry and plays. On her mother's side, Nataliya's younger cousin, Sofiya Okunevska-Morachevska—who studied in Zurich Switzerland and, in 1894, became the first female physician in Austro-Hungary—wrote under the pseudonym of Yarena.

In her era, women in the Austro-Hungarian Empire were barred from completing more than an elementary level of education; therefore, Nataliya was educated at home. She learned German, French, Polish, and Russian from her father, and immersed herself in world literature by reading books her brothers brought home from institutions of higher learning.

At the age of twenty, Nataliya married her intellectual soul-mate, a young seminarian, Teofil Kobrynsky. A talented musician and avid folklorist, he actively supported his young wife's feminist and literary aspirations. The couple decided to forego raising a family, formally identified themselves as feminists, and dedicated their lives to ameliorating the position of women in society. Unfortunately, Kobrynsky died a few years after they were married, and Nataliya, left without any means of support, had to return to her parents' home.

After her husband's death, Kobrynska travelled to Vienna with her father, an elected member of the Austrian Parliament. While there, she made the acquaintance of Ukrainian activists who recognised her literary talent and put her in contact with Ivan Franko, Ukraine's leading man of letters. She also travelled to Switzerland, where she met Olena Pchilka's brother, Mykhaylo Drahomanov, the famous Ukrainian scholar, historian, and political publicist, who encouraged her to devote herself to the task of raising the social and political consciousness of Ukrainian women.

Under Ivan Franko's mentorship, she became deeply involved in organising a Ukrainian women's movement. In her articles and speeches she discussed the deplorable social and economic status of women within the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, and encouraged women to attain equality with men.

In the absence of opportunities for formal education for women, Kobrynska firmly believed that literature was the most effective vehicle for convincing women of the need for change. With this goal in mind, she formed a women's association in 1884, which, through an active program of cultural and educational enlightenment, fostered reading circles and promoted an informed discussion of women's rights.

A leading theoretician of feminist thought, her approach to real-life issues, conceptualized within a socialist framework, was pragmatic, and attempted to reconcile radical and conservative points of view. Her concerns cut across what she saw as the artificial and divisive boundaries of social class. In her view, it was only by banding together into secular women's organizations that all women could improve their lot in life.

While actively developing, refining, and propagating these views, Kobrynska continued writing. In her first work, *The Spirit of the Times*, which appeared in 1884, she recognized both the inevitability of change and the upheaval it caused in human lives. In 1887, together with Olena Pchilka, she edited and published *Pershy vinok (The First Garland)*, a groundbreaking almanac of writings by women authors, poets, and publicists from both Eastern and Western Ukraine. It was one of the first such collections in Europe to be produced by women.

In 1890, she headed a delegation of women from Western Ukraine that petitioned the Minister of Education to allow women to enroll in university studies, a move viewed by some of her opponents as an attack on the sanctity of the family. A year later, she organised a women's conference that called for the establishment of high schools for girls. Between 1893-1896, she published three issues of a women's almanac called *Nasha dolya (Our Fate)*.

At this time, Kobrynska tried to establish village day care centres and communal kitchens, urging women from the intelligentsia to convince peasant women of the desirability and possibility of social change. Unfortunately, her ideas, including her advocacy of universal suffrage, were ahead of her time, and her efforts were not always appreciated, even by the women she wished to help. Alienated from much of society because of her strongly held views, she spent the last years of her life in her native village, where she died in 1920. In keeping with her wishes, her final statement to the world was inscribed on her tombstone: "My heart no longer aches."

Kobrynska is acclaimed as a talented writer and a pioneer in the women's movement in Ukraine. Her short stories, written primarily about events that transpired within her family and circle of friends, present a poignantly accurate picture of the social conditions of her day and their devastating effect on women.

## *The Dealer's Child*

(1890)

Hinda Rosenthal was eleven years old. Her father dealt in oxen; he bought cattle from the peasants at the market, then sold them to bigger dealers. The business was doing well.

He had only thirty *rynski* [*dollars*] to his name when he started out, but things had gone so well for him that he was able to care for his wife and five children, and build himself a stone house in the marketplace of the little town.

To tell the truth, his wife, who engaged in a variety of small independent business deals of her own, played no small role in the accumulation of his wealth. When her husband went to buy cattle from the peasants, she bought chickens, geese, and eggs from their wives, and sold them to the townspeople. She did not waste so much as a *kreytsar* [*penny*]; she and the children frequently wore clothing that should have been thrown out long ago, but she paid no attention to things like that and kept wearing the same old rags until she managed to buy some used clothing from the lords in town.

After her husband's business expanded, and they built a house, she could not leave it unattended for any length of time and was no longer able to do her trading. Her husband was rarely at home, for he spent most of his time on the road, travelling from one village and market to another.

Even now, however, whenever he gave her a *kreytsar* or two, she was happy to turn it into ten times as much. She bought only what was cheapest and absolutely necessary, and managed to run the entire household on next to nothing. She would buy a small loaf of bread, dice a few onions, scramble them with two or three eggs, and feed the children. The used clothing that she once bought from the lords, she now purchased from middlemen. If someone was moving away and selling furniture, she would buy something for the house.

In time, her house became filled with all manner of things. One bed was high and wide, another—low and narrow. In one corner there was a sturdy ash cupboard, and next to it stood a dresser with

broken legs and stripped veneer. Instead of a couch, there was a long oilcloth-covered bench, in front of which a polished, one-legged table stood grandly, surrounded by a few chairs—all of a different make. A small mirror in a gold frame hung on one wall, and a paper butterfly was tacked to another one.

The children thrived; there was no doubt about that. They married their son off in a neighbouring town where he bought and sold wheat; the elder daughter was also married already, but the younger ones remained at home and bided their time. The most interesting among them was Hinda.

Hinda was always at the head of her class in school, and her stinginess surpassed even her mother's. Sometimes, when her father came home from the road after making a successful deal, he would give each of the children a *kreytsar*. The two younger ones would immediately go and buy some treats—apples, or nuts. Hinda watched them with a greedy eye, for she would have loved to bite into a delicious apple, but she would not spend her *kreytsar* on it for anything in the world. She kept circling the fruit sellers, sniffing the tantalising aroma of the ripe apples. At the same time, however, she would hold on so tightly to her *kreytsar* that it stuck to her hand.

Nevertheless, temptation occasionally did get the better of her. Before the Jewish Feast of Haman, many goods were brought into the stores—beautiful and terrifying masks, decorations for baking the *hamantaschen* [*Jewish yeast cakes*], and some smaller items that could be bought as gifts for relatives and friends.

Hinda's eyes lit up when she looked at the decorations in the little shop owned by her mother's friend. The latter was unpacking packages of all sizes and pulling out candied figurines—ladies in short dresses; gentlemen in top hats and high collars; jockeys, both with and without horses; and birds, animals, and flowers—and placing all of them in a little glass showcase.

It was a tiny basket with three red berries that Hilda found most appealing. The berries were covered with three green leaves, and they looked so attractive that it seemed as if they truly had just been picked right off a bush. There was only one problem—the basket with the berries cost ten *kreytsary*, and this amount of money constituted half of her capital. Everything that she liked or desired came to naught when compared to this fact. But, whenever she went to the store and saw the little basket from which the berries smiled at her, the sight oppressed her and clawed at her soul.

One day many of the confections were sold. Hinda was seized with anxiety. It was quite possible that the very next day she might come to the shop and find that her splendid little basket was no longer there. And once she even heard a woman inquire about it.

From that moment on, Hinda knew no peace of mind, and she finally decided to buy the little basket.

In a feverish haste, she dashed up to the little chest containing her belongings where she kept her *kreytsary* in a little matchbox wrapped in a few pieces of cloth. She counted them, took out ten, and ran to the little shop. A most unpleasant surprise awaited her there for, even though she knew that the basket cost ten *kreytsary*, the shopkeeper raised the price to fifteen. It was only after some serious bargaining that the price was once again lowered to ten.

Having attained the object of her passionate desire, Hinda's joy was extinguished. The red berries no longer shone as brightly, the green leaves did not look nearly as alluring as before. A strange self-loathing took hold of Hinda; she became painfully aware that she no longer had the money that she had spent to buy the basket.

The more she agonised over the loss of her money, however, the more valuable the purchased article seemed to her. She walked around the house for a long time, trying to decide where it would be best to keep it. At last, it seemed to her that a corner of the cupboard would be the most suitable spot for her treasure.

To her mixed feelings of disgust and joy, a third emotion was now added—anxiety. She noticed that the berries were turning black. And with every passing day, this terrible symptom became more and more pronounced. Finally, there came the day when she walked up to the cupboard and picked up the basket, only to have it crumble in her hands and scatter on a heap of muddy old shoes abandoned behind the cupboard.

Hinda picked up the shattered fragments that were lying in the dust, cleaned them, and began nibbling on the smaller pieces. They did not taste at all special, and the worst part was that the dirt and the sand grated on her teeth. She would have spit it all out, if it had not been such a waste of the money she had spent. When there was nothing left of the basket, her grief for her wasted money became uppermost in her mind. This painful feeling gnawed at her until an unexpected incident turned her thoughts in another direction.

After being away for a few years, a lady who had once lived in their town moved back. Hinda's mother used to buy old clothing

from her, and so the lady called her to her home, because she had a few things she wanted to get rid of—old hairpins, combs, worn gloves, dirty lace, wrinkled flowers, and the like. Even though Hinda's mother was no longer in business, she could not refuse the lady's request; she took away the motley array of goods, with the understanding that she would return what she could not sell.

"Mother, I'll sell these things among my friends," Hinda said, as she looked over the strange combs, the crooked hairpins, and other toiletries.

"Go ahead and try!" her mother answered. "But there won't be any profit from these items, because such things don't sell well."

Hinda took the articles her mother had brought home, put them in her apron, and went downtown in search of her friends. She sold some of the things immediately, while other girls came to her home later to buy up the rest. The mother was surprised that her daughter had done so well, and her heart trembled with joy when she heard how wisely Hinda praised the goods, and how well she bargained.

When the mother wanted to go to settle accounts with the lady, Hinda said she would go herself. She said that the profit belonged to her, and that her mother could have, at best, a commission.

The accounting went well. The lady was pleased that she had rid herself of trinkets she no longer needed, and Hinda made enough of a profit that it more than paid for what she had wasted on the berries. This encouraged her so greatly that she kept dropping in on the lady to see if she had anything else to sell.

"Perhaps this, or this?" she asked over and over again, whenever she caught sight of any of the lady's toiletries.

"Why, you'd sell everything, and I'd have nothing left," the lady laughed more than once.

Business was good; Hinda gained in stature, not only in the eyes of her father and mother, but in the eyes of the entire district. The neighbours smacked their lips, and one of them could not get over her regret that she did not have a son for Hinda to marry, because, with such a smart wife, he would most certainly make a fortune.

But there is nothing in this world that does not bring its own problems. It was turning warm outside. The thick shawl that served both mother and daughter for going outdoors was very worn, and besides, it was time to change into something different for the summer. The mother took out an old summer parasol from the trunk for herself; Hinda's kerchief was handed down to her younger sister;

and Hinda was given a small blue kerchief that became her very nicely.

Even though Hinda was happy with her new kerchief, she could venture into town in it only on an ordinary weekday. On the Sabbath, all her friends decked themselves out in hats and made fun of Hinda because her head was wrapped in a kerchief.

Hinda went to the lady and asked if she had an old hat that she no longer needed. Not only was a hat found for her, but she received it for next to nothing, as part of the payment for other articles she had sold. It was a rather strange looking hat, with an overly tall feather and a very wide brim.

On Saturday, Hinda donned her hat and, because she had grown accustomed of late to receiving compliments, walked slowly and kept an eye out for her friends, hoping to join them as they strolled through the town. But the walk that was supposed to be Hinda's triumph turned out to be something quite different. The hat with its wide brim and tall feather did not become her, and its large size was not in keeping with Hinda's diminutive figure. And so, instead of compliments, she received only sneers and oblique glances from passers-by.

"What kind of tent are you wearing on your head?" her friends asked.

And one relative wanted to tear it off her head at once. "Go and ask your mother to buy you a hat like the other girls have, and throw that one away to the devil!"

Hinda was confused and angry when she returned home. She flung the hat into a corner and started demanding that her mother buy her a new hat. Her mother did not even want to hear about it. "If you want one, buy it yourself; you have the money."

"But I'm not supposed to buy it with my own money; you're supposed to buy it for me!" Hinda remonstrated through her tears.

"If you begrudge the money, then don't buy it."

"But you're the one who has to buy me one."

"You'll have to wait and hope a long time before I ever do that," the mother laughed indifferently. "Besides, your money is really my money, because I let you have my business and even gave you my commission."

This argument shut Hinda's lips; she remembered that she herself had said that her mother should get a commission, and she was afraid that if her mother were to demand it, she would lose more than if

she bought a hat by herself. She began hatching new plans in her head. She knew exactly how much every one of her friend's hats cost, so it was easy for her to decide how much of her money to spend. She could buy a cheaper hat than the others had, or she could earn a few more *kreytsary* from the lady; in addition, she could sell the hat she had flung in the corner.

The worst part about this plan was the fact that the little town in which she lived was so small that it was not possible to buy a hat in it—you had to travel to the bigger neighbouring town. Even though this complicated matters for Hinda, it did not present an insurmountable problem, for her brother lived in that town, and she could visit him and buy herself a hat. And so, because it was too costly to take the train, she began looking for another way of getting there. Quite unexpectedly, a very good opportunity happened to come along almost immediately.

One of her mother's distant relatives, a village teacher who came to see them about some matter, had to go to the neighbouring town that very same day. Hinda could not believe her good fortune when the relative happily agreed that she could go with him. He had a decent carriage and fairly good horses, and it was a real honour for her to ride with him through the town. The relative was in a hurry, so Hinda quickly changed into her summer clothes, put on her blue kerchief, took her mother's little parasol and, tying her money into a knotted cloth, hid it in her bodice.

It was a warm summer day. The wide, beaten road stretched like an unwound roll of cloth among the green trees. It looked as if someone had sown the deep ditches on both sides of the road with wild flowers. Red carnations, blue forget-me-nots, and yellow crowfoots caught one's eyes with their freshness and beauty.

Hinda, who almost never saw anything beyond the dirty houses of the little town, could not get her fill of the beauty of the flowers, the quiet rustling of the forest, and the singing of the forest birds. She was attracted most of all to the yellow crowfoots and, in her mind's eye, she could see a cluster of them adorning the hat she had not yet bought, and for which she had set out on this trip. She firmly resolved to buy a hat that was decorated with these flowers.

When she arrived at her brother's home, she could hardly wait until her sister-in-law found the time to go downtown with her. In the big display windows, Hinda saw many splendid hats, but her sister-in-law, saying that they were too costly, took her to some other



stores. Overcome with amazement when she entered one of the stores that had an exceptionally large selection of hats, she completely forgot about her resolve to buy a hat adorned with yellow flowers. She liked all the hats, but they turned out to be too expensive, even though they were supposed to be cheaper than the ones she had seen in the display windows. After long consultations with her sister-in-law, she finally decided on a white hat with red poppies, because it looked nice and was the least expensive.

Thrilled, Hinda returned to the suburbs carrying a big box. Her brother did not want to let her go home immediately, but Hinda was in a hurry; she wanted to show off her new hat and erase the unpleasant impression she had made by wearing the strange one with the feather.

She knew that every Thursday Jews from her little town travelled to this bigger one to do business, so she walked downtown to find a ride home. She did not have to look long. By one of the wagons, she spotted Mortko Benish. He was a coachman and could be hired to transport almost anything. Right now, he was sitting high up on the wagon, adjusting some sacks of flour. On the ground beside the wagon lay its long top—torn in some spots, and mended in others.

The horses that were loosely tethered to the shaft stretched their long, skinny necks to gather up the last bits of hay scattered on the ground. The shafts rose above the horses' heads and then fell back down, striking the ground and angering Mortko.

"Oh, you damned carrion, may you be struck dead!" he grumbled from the wagon in a harsh voice.

"Are you going to B. right now?" Hinda inquired as she walked up to the wagon.

"What if I am?" Mortko replied ungraciously, fussing with the sacks.

"Perhaps you could take me with you?"

"Sure, if you pay me. I'd take the devil himself, if he paid me."

"How much do you want?"

"Give me twenty-five *kreytsary*, and you can sit right in the middle on a sack of flour, because I have other things to take, as well as the flour."

"Ay-vay, twenty-five *kreytsary*! For some reason you've become very expensive today. You can travel to B. for five *kreytsary*."

"You can even go for three—I'm not stopping you; I didn't ask you to come with me."

"Will you take me for eight?" Hinda asked.

"Why only eight?" Mortko laughed. "Aren't you worth more than eight?"

"Don't ask me what I'm worth, because I'm only paying you for the trip."

"Oh my, what a sharp tongue," Mortko said, as he slid from the wagon to the ground.

He was a strapping man with black hair and broad shoulders. His long, ungainly arms dangled awkwardly from his shoulders, and his large feet in their misshapen boots looked even clumsier. The flour had turned his old red jacket white; it had also settled on the brim of his creased hat and was sprinkled lightly on his long side-curls.

"If I'd known you were going to bargain like this, I'd have begun quite a different conversation with you," Mortko said mockingly, teasing Hinda.

"I won't give you more; if you want it—take it, if not, I'll go look for another wagon," Hinda said, and to add more weight to her words, she pretended to walk away.

Mortko did not believe her and had no intention of calling her back. "Khayim, Khayim! Get down from the wagon and help me put on the wagon top," Mortko shouted so loudly that Hinda jumped in alarm.

Something began moving on the wagon, and it seemed to Hinda that it was not a person, but a sack of flour that was descending from it. It was Mortko's son, and Hinda knew him well. He began working slowly and lazily. Groaning loudly, the two of them lifted the wagon top and, while Mortko was adjusting something on it, Khayim began hitching up the horses.

Hinda, seeing that her pretence was not getting her anywhere, and that they were prepared to leave without her, came back and offered another *kreytsar*.

Mortko silently extended his hand. Hinda was already reaching for the money, when another idea popped into her head. "When you get me home, my mother will pay you for me," she said.

"That's all I need! Give me the money, or stay here."

"But I have only five *kreytsary*."

"Then give me those five, but your mother will have to add another five."

This successful speculation made Hinda so happy that she did not care about the extra *kreytsar*.

“Well, sit down,” Mortko said. “I’m leaving right now.”

Hinda knew that he had to go through the suburb right past her brother’s house. She sat down, and when they were near the house, she asked him to stop so that she could pick up her bundle.

“So, for ten *kreytsary* you want me to drive you and your bundle as well?”

“Well, you could have guessed that I would have some kind of a bundle with me.”

“If you want to take something with you, you’ll have to add two more *kreytsary*.”

“I won’t add a single *kreytsar*.” Hinda stated this so firmly that Mortko did not say anything more, and she settled herself in with her bundle in the best seat.

Along the way, Mortko picked up two more Jews who were dealers, and one Jewess who sat beside Hinda on the sacks of flour under the wagon top. Khayim was sitting with one of the dealers at the rear, and Mortko was with the other one up front. Six people and a heavily loaded wagon were too much for Mortko’s poorly tended horses.

“I guess we won’t be in B. very soon, will we?” one of the dealers observed.

“It’s only like this at first. When they get going, they’ll go faster,” Mortko replied. He cracked his whip and shouted: “Giddy-up!”

It was, perhaps, about eight in the evening. In the daytime it had been warm, even hot, but in the evening a cool breeze blew up. Hinda was wearing just a light blouse and a thin wool kerchief that did not do much to warm her.

The wagon rolled along slowly. Even though Mortko was jerking the reins every minute and yelling “giddy-up” as he cracked his whip, the horses were barely crawling.

Hinda, who was ready to fly home to show off her purchase, was very bored. Moreover, the wind penetrated her clothing more and more sharply.

“Is it far yet?” she asked, sticking her head out from under the wagon top.

“Oh, your ears will hang low by the time we get there,” Mortko laughed, snapping the reins.

“More likely my ears will swell from all the racket,” Hinda reflected. She settled in among the sacks of flour—down where there was a little bit of hay—and it felt a trifle warmer there.

"Well, you know, you really could go a little faster," one of the dealers remarked after some time had elapsed.

"Then you tell them to go faster," Mortko responded, calmly pointing at the horses with his whip.

"But you don't feed them; just look how scrawny they are."

"I myself eat only enough to stay alive, so why should a horse be better off than me?"

The other dealer was telling Khayim about his business ventures. There was not much he did not deal in! He bought and sold calves, sent eggs to Vienna, and delivered hides to a tannery. Now he was planning to set up a tavern.

Khayim listened dully and smiled occasionally, even though there was nothing all that amusing in the stories; finally, in a strong, ringing voice that he probably inherited from his father, he began singing: "*A Glesele Wein [A Glass of Wine]*." His companion began singing with him; then the second dealer joined in, and even Mortko mumbled something as he kept time with his whip.

Hinda knew the song, but it had never seemed as harmonious to her as it did now. "*A Glesele Wein*" rang out broadly; the entire forest echoed with it and carried it far and wide.

Only the old Jewess appeared not to hear anything; she stared straight ahead with bulging eyes, moving her mouth as if she were chewing something. Khayim's companion glanced obliquely at her, and when the last strains of the song about the peasant and the wine faded in the air, he began singing about a slovenly woman. But this song did not go well, even though it started on a merry note, and everyone knew to whom the song was referring. The old Jewess still did not seem to hear anything and, as they were now climbing a hill, Mortko drowned out the singing with his incessant "giddy ups."

The cold was seeping in under the wagon top. It even bothered the dealer, who was sitting up front, and he grew very annoyed with the slow pace. Finally, the horses stopped and could not budge from their spot for a long time.

The furious dealer got down from the wagon and began to walk. The future tavern owner and Khayim continued singing.

"You really are going at a snail's pace," Hinda said, wrapping herself in her thin kerchief.

"If you know what's good for you, sit still," Mortko snarled.

"Oh yes, it's really good for me; I've moved three times, the sacks of flour have spread out, and there's something hard like steel here."

Khayim laughed loudly upon hearing this, and his laughter provoked Hinda even more.

“Such a ride isn’t worth even two *kreytsary*; I’d be foolish to give you five more.”

“If you won’t, then get down right now,” Mortko snapped. “Whoa!” he shouted at the horses, and they were only too happy to avail themselves of the opportunity for a rest.

“Well, get off,” he yelled, turning to Hinda.

Terrified, Hinda fell silent. Even though her ears were ringing from the words “Giddy-up,” she was almost happy when she heard Mortko shout them again. Resolving not to say anything more, she settled in among the sacks and gave in to the will of God and Mortko.

She lay back on the sacks and closed her eyes, hoping, in this way, to shorten the trip. The monotonous rumbling of the wagon and Mortko’s shouts were lulling her to sleep like the clattering of a mill. Suddenly, there was a terrible noise, and something seemed to strike her on the head. Hinda raised herself, and there, before her eyes, stood a tall stream of light.

“What’s burning?” she screamed, frightened half out of her wits.

“It’s a fire! Run!” the dealer who was sitting at the rear said in feigned haste, and Khayim doubled over with laughter.

Hinda was overcome with rage, for she now saw that the light was streaming down from the morning star. Moreover, they were going downhill, and she realised that it was the noise of the wagon that had frightened her.

“May such travelling be damned,” she shouted angrily, gingerly feeling her head for bumps. On one side, where her head had banged against the ladder in the wagon, she found a lump that was bigger than a nut.

At last they arrived.

Mortko stopped by the tavern where he always stayed.

Hinda took her bundle and went home. “You’ll come tomorrow, and my mother will pay you,” she said to Mortko as she walked away.

“Uh-huh, uh-huh,” Mortko mumbled, for he had to go past her house every day anyway.

At home, everyone was still sleeping. Hinda had to knock for a long time before her younger sister woke up and let her in.

Hinda took a pillow, threw it on the folding wooden bench, hid her *kreytsary* under her head, and instantly fell into a deep sleep.

The sun was high in the sky when Mortko's voice woke her; he was demanding that Hinda's mother pay him for her daughter's trip. Hinda dug her head into the pillow and pretended not to hear anything, hoping that the matter would be settled without her.

But her mother shook her by the shoulder. "Hinda, get up. Mortko wants you to pay him five *kreytsary*."

"I don't have them. You pay him," Hinda mumbled, and once again deliberately closed her eyes.

When Mortko went away, there no longer was any need to pretend to be sleepy. Hinda dressed in a flash and quickly pulled out the hat box from under the sleeping bench where she had hidden it so that it could not be opened without her knowledge.

Her mother was not very interested in the hat, because she would have preferred to have Hinda do without hats for a while yet; however, even she could not help admitting that the hat was very pretty. She liked it a bit less, however, when she found out how much it cost; to her, everything seemed too expensive.

But the triumph was all Hinda's when she donned her hat on the Sabbath and paraded in it downtown. Some of her friends could not say enough to praise the hat, while others were green with envy.

A neighbour told Hinda that she had been at the home of a certain rich lady when Hinda walked by in her new hat. This rich lady liked the hat so much that she wanted to buy it at once for her daughter. Hinda was greatly flattered by this proposal, but she did not even consider agreeing to it.

There came the day, however, as she walked uncertainly past the rich lady's home, that it occurred to her that it would not be too bad a deal to sell the hat if the rich lady covered her expenses and let her make something on it. This idea caught hold of her and became more and more appealing.

She had walked around in the hat for two Saturdays now; everyone had seen her and been impressed—was this not enough? Sooner or later, the hat would wear out, but money was money. She had been sorry to spend the money, and she had done so only to be able to boast about her hat. But if she could get her money back now, she would be a fool if she did not take advantage of the opportunity.

"But maybe it's not true; maybe the neighbour was just saying that," the thought kept creeping into her head. "Well, maybe she'll buy it, and maybe she won't, but I can still bargain with her. Why not go and ask her myself?"

The rich woman was truly pleased to buy the hat, because she simply could not travel to the bigger town. Hinda counted up all her expenses and added on twenty *kreytsary*. The rich lady did not want to pay that much, and they bargained for a long time.

When they finally reached an agreement, Hinda, in addition to getting back all the money she had paid out for her expenses, made a profit of five *kreytsary*.

It was a good deal.

## *The First Teacher*

(1892)

“Tetyana! Tetyana! For God’s sake, take the children someplace for awhile. The baby didn’t let me sleep all night, and now I want to take a nap, but the children are so rambunctious that I can’t even close my eyes.”

A short, fifty-year-old woman dressed in a blue skirt, a white shirt, and a fringed red kerchief appeared in the doorway; thick strands of beads attractively set off her swarthy face and burning eyes.

“Quiet, children. Mother wants to sleep,” she said to the youngsters—a girl and three boys who had found themselves a strange form of amusement and were creating a deafening racket with their knocking and clattering.

Two chairs lying in the middle of the room, one on top of the other, were covered with a tablecloth that had been pulled off the table. Romko, the eldest of the boys, had brought a large horseshoe from the smithy and crawled under the tablecloth. Now he was banging the horseshoe with all his might against the arms of a chair, while the two younger boys, Kostunyo and Slavko, shouted at the top of their voices: “Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!” Little Olha was tapping rapidly on the legs of a chair, like a clapper clacking in a mill. This setup was actually supposed to be a mill—the kind that stood not far from their garden, where the children often walked with their nanny, Tetyana.

Tetyana had been with the family for ten years. She had nursed all the children, and so they loved her dearly and eagerly flocked around her.

The children’s father was the village priest and, in addition to his parish duties, managed a large farm. The day-to-day operations of the farm occupied both him and his wife almost full-time, and so it was mainly Tetyana who busied herself with the care of the children.

She was the one who washed, combed, and dressed them; taught them their prayers; and amused them. When the children were old enough, their parents arranged to have the village teacher tutor them.



It then became Tetyana's duty to force them to study and to see to it that they read their books, even though what they were learning did not interest either her or the children.

She had the hardest time with Slavko, who was still just a little tyke. The teacher was often annoyed with him, and Tetyana's heart ached for the child.

"Come on now, pick up your book and study," she would say to little Slavko, who was more likely to listen to Tetyana than to the teacher, and he would pick up his primer and begin to read. Tetyana would listen and frown. What he was reading did not seem to make any sense—even she could not understand it, let alone a little child.

"They're tormenting the children—as if it isn't possible to live in this world without books," she reflected in her unschooled head.

"Let's go! Let's go into the garden!" she now said to the children. "It's not a good idea to pretend you're a mill."

"Why not, Tetyana?" Olha asked.

"I can't tell you here. Mother wants to sleep. Let's go to the garden, and I'll tell you there."

She took Slavko by the hand, and the older children ran after her. They greatly enjoyed Tetyana's stories.

The garden was huge. Divided down the middle, it had a dense orchard on one half, and a vegetable patch on the other half. Paths hedged with gooseberry bushes and currants wound their way through the garden and ran all the way to a small green meadow overgrown with willows. Beyond this meadow, a small mill clattered on a river.

At the far end of the garden, there was a large bed of showy flowers and four acacia shrubs with intertwined branches that formed a large, naturally shaded bower. Sod embankments and small wooden benches nestled close to the acacias.

Tetyana sat down on the raised sod and placed Slavko on her lap; the older children wanted to sit on the sod with her, but she did not let them. Their mother always grew angry with her if she allowed them to sit on the damp sod, saying that it was bad for their health.

"How can it hurt them?" Tetyana often wondered. "However, so be it; if they mustn't, they mustn't."

The boys sat down on little benches, while Olha brought over a stool from under the other acacia and settled in at Tetyana's feet.

"Well, what was I was supposed to tell you?" Tetyana asked, after they had all seated themselves.

“About the mill! The mill!” the children reminded her.

“Oh, yes, about the mill. Yes, indeed! It isn’t good to pretend you’re a mill, because that’s where ‘that one’—may the evil spirit not hear me utter his name—lives.”

“Who is ‘that one’?” Slavko asked.

The older children exchanged glances. They already knew from Tetyana who “that one” was, but they never mentioned him, because Tetyana said it was bad luck to talk about him.

But Slavko could not guess who it was, and so he continued pestering her about “that one.”

“Well, it’s the evil one, may he not be mentioned by name,” Tetyana finally replied.

“But how do you know he lives in a mill?” Romko asked.

“I know, because that’s what people say.”

“So, he’s in our mill as well?” Slavko wanted to know.

“If he weren’t, then the mill wouldn’t have stopped milling the time that it did.”

“So, what if it did stop?”

“Well, it had to have a reason for stopping. A mill doesn’t stop just like that—for no reason at all. And in folk tales it says that a mill stops only when ‘he’ blocks it.”

“Tell us a story! Tell us a story about a mill!” the children shouted in unison. “You promised us you’d tell us something interesting, so tell us a story about a mill.”

Tetyana loosened the kerchief on her head and swept her eyes over the children, as if she wanted to reassure herself that they were all at her side.

“Long ago, in a certain village,” she began, after a moment’s pause, “there lived a man and his wife, and they had a little daughter. Then the wife died, and the man got married for a second time, and once again he and his wife had a little girl. And so the two girls grew up together. The stepmother favoured her own child and made her stepdaughter work very hard—she used her to stop up all the holes, as the saying goes.

“One time, the stepmother needed to have some grain ground into flour. She got the grain ready and sent the stepdaughter to the mill for the night. You see, it was the kind of mill where the miller never stayed through the night. If someone came, he’d get things set up and go away, and you had to stay there by yourself and watch over what was being milled.

“The poor thing was scared to go there, so she stopped at the gate and wept. An old woman happened to be walking by and asked: ‘Why are you crying, my dear?’

“And the girl replied that it was thus and so: ‘Mother’s sending me to the mill for the night, and I’m so scared that I’m shaking.’

“‘Don’t be frightened!’ the old woman said. ‘Just go and pick flowers from a garlic plant, a monkshood, an elecampane, and a valerian-root. If you have them with you, then he—that one—can’t do anything to you.’

“So the girl did as she’d been told—she picked flowers from a garlic plant, a monkshood, an elecampane, and a valerian-root, and then she set off for the mill. When she got there, the miller took the grain, set everything up, and went away.

“Well, she milled and milled; and then, at eleven o’clock, a young gentleman dressed in black and wearing a peaked cap came along and asked her to dance. ‘Fine!’ she said. ‘I’d like to dance with you, but I don’t have a pretty skirt.’

“He turned around, went off somewhere, and a moment later brought her a skirt. ‘But how can I go dancing with you, when I don’t have a pretty apron?’ she said.

“He flew away and brought her an apron. ‘How am I to dance with you, if I don’t have a pretty kerchief?’

“He flew away and brought her a kerchief as well. ‘Fine, I’ll dance with you when you bring me some shoes,’ she said.

“He brought her the shoes and wanted to start dancing with her. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I’ll dance with you only after you’ve brought me seven strands of coral beads, but you must bring them to me one bead at a time.’

“She thought that she would delay him in this way until the rooster crowed, but he started to fly back and forth so quickly that, a short time later, she had all seven strands.

“She didn’t know what to do next, but then she remembered about the flowers, and as soon as she showed them to him, he screamed: ‘Yeeuch! Yeeuch! Yeeuch!’ and fled.

“In the morning, when she came home from the mill, she was dressed like a peacock. The stepmother took one look at her and struck her hands in amazement. ‘Hey, you,’ she exclaimed. ‘Where did you get all those things?’

“The girl told her the truth, exactly as it had happened—how she’d been milling the grain, how ‘he’ had come to her and brought her

everything that she wanted. The stepmother thought to herself: ‘Just you wait! I’m no fool; I’ll send my own daughter next time.’

“So, some time later, she got some grain ready and sent her daughter to the mill with it. At eleven o’clock, ‘he’ flew in and invited her to dance. She was delighted: ‘Fine! I’ll dance with you if you bring me a skirt, an apron, a kerchief, shoes, and beads.’ You see, she asked for everything at the same time.

“He flew away, brought her everything she’d asked for, and she got dressed. And then he grabbed her and began to dance, and he danced so hard that the clattering could be heard throughout the village. He danced for a long time, until the girl was torn to pieces, and then he used these pieces to block the water channel to the mill.

“When the people came in the morning, they saw that the mill had stopped. They took a closer look and saw that the water channel had been blocked with pieces of the girl.”

“But why didn’t the older girl tell her about the flowers that the old woman had told her to take?” Olha asked.

“The tale doesn’t say anything about that,” Tetyana replied.

“Well, we have some monkshood,” Kostunyo observed.

Hearing these words, Romko ran into the garden and brought back a large cluster of monkshood blossoms.

“Give some to me! To me!” the other children shouted. “There are grasshoppers in them.”

The children unfolded the unopened blossoms and peered at the two straight stamens that had rounded little heads.

“They look like two little doves!” Slavko said, pressing the blue flower to his lips.

“Ugh! Don’t put that in your mouth, you can poison yourself with it!” Tetyana became upset. She took the dangerous flower from Slavko and threw it to the ground.

“They do look like little doves, or tiny shoes!” Kostunyo said once again, picking up the flower.

“Some people actually do call them little shoes,” Tetyana agreed.

“Do we have elecampane in our garden as well?” Olha inquired curiously. “We have so many different kinds of plants in our garden.”

“Of course, we do! It’s over there in the corner—the tall plant with the big leaves and the yellow flowers.”

“So, that’s elecampane, is it?” the children said in surprise. “There used to be so much of it, but there seems to be a lot less of it now.”

“It’s getting ready to run away into another garden.”

“What do you mean, run away?”

“That’s the kind of plants elecampane and valerian-root are. If they don’t like one garden, they run away to another one.”

“What does valerian-root look like? We haven’t seen any.”

“Well, there was a big shrub of it, as big as a sheaf, by the fence next to Ivan Havryliv’s yard—if it hasn’t run away.”

“Come on! Let’s go see if it’s there. Maybe it hasn’t run away.”

Tetyana did not want to get up, but when the children insisted, she rose to her feet and went with them through the garden.

They went around the orchard and began to walk through the tall grass next to the fence of their neighbour, Ivan Havryliv. The children, using their little hands to spread apart the grass that reached to their waist, appeared to be swimming in the greenery.

Ivan’s house was decorated as if for a most important feast day. Freshly whitewashed and adorned with sticky blue clay, it stood proudly on display for all to see, and the yard was neat and swept clean like a threshing floor.

“Ivan’s son Mykhaylo is getting married today,” Tetyana said. After a short pause, she shook her head and added: “His first wife’s feet have not turned cold yet, and he’s already taking a second one.”

“Why yes, you’re right! The day before yesterday, he came to our place with some *kalachi* [*braided circular ceremonial bread*] and invited us to the wedding.”

“Why isn’t there any music?”

“They’ve probably gone to fetch the bride.”

Tetyana’s conjecture was right. In a short while, the sound of music and singing drifted in from down the road. The children climbed up on the fence and craned their necks to get a better look.

In the distance they saw a throng of people and a harnessed wagon. On it there were a few pillows, a trunk, and the bride’s dowry. The bride was sitting on top of all this, and beside her stood a green fir tree adorned with feathers, blue cornflowers, and pink carnations.

The bridal party drove up into the yard. Ivan, his wife, and a few women walked out of the house and, catching sight of the wagon, started clapping their hands. The musicians played, and the young unmarried men sang:

“Father, open the wattle gate so new,  
                     we’re bringing a daughter-in-law to you;  
 Mother, open the gate wide out—  
                     we’re bringing a daughter-in-law without a mouth.”

The children climbed up higher on the fence and watched with great interest as the bride got out of the wagon and entered the house. All the pillows were carried in after her.

Some of the guests also went into the house, but others sat down at the tables that were set up in the yard.

Ivan and his wife Ivanykha were hurrying from table to table. Ivan poured shots of whiskey, while his wife invited the guests to partake of the food.

“Just look how happy Ivan and Ivanykha seem to be!”

“Oh, yes, they’re happy, they’re very happy—until they start quarrelling,” Tetyana added sadly.

“But where’s the bride? Why isn’t she in the yard?”

“The poor thing is probably sitting in the house.”

“Why are you calling her a poor thing, Tetyana? Why do you feel sorry for her?”

“Why do I feel sorry for her? Everyone feels sorry for her. They’ve worried one young woman to death, and now they’re starting on another one.”

“Who worried her to death, Tetyana?”

“Who else, but Ivanykha! There’s nothing worse in the whole world than a cruel mother-in-law.”

Slavko, unable to hang on to the fence for such a long time, slipped and tumbled to the ground. Tetyana rushed up to him and checked him over for bruises. There was no mark on him anywhere, but he was frightened and crying loudly.

“Hush now, hush! We’ll go to the Three Groves.”

“To the Three Groves! To the Three Groves!” the children shouted in unison.

Slavko was so happy that he forgot all about crying.

“What about the valerian-root?” Romko suddenly remembered.

“We’ll look for some valerian-root at the Three Groves.”

The children climbed down quickly from the fence. They wanted to set out immediately for the Three Groves. Tetyana, however, held them back. She said they could not go so far in light clothing, because they might not return until evening, and it would be chilly.

So they all went back to the house to get some warmer clothing. The children remained on the porch, while Tetyana quietly opened the door and entered the house. After a moment, she walked out with a bunch of keys in her hand. She opened the wall cupboard, took out a chunk of bread, a piece of a sweet bun, some butter, and fresh

sheep cheese; she placed all this in a basket for the children's late afternoon lunch. Then she took the keys back into the house and returned with outer garments for them.

"I'm going to carry my own coat," Olha said.

"Me too," Kostunyo shouted.

Romko took the food basket from Tetyana, and they were just about to leave when they noticed that there were no glasses in the basket. The children never went to the Three Groves without taking along a few glasses, so that they could drink water from the spring in the forest. Romko had Kostunyo hold the basket while he ran back to the kitchen for the glasses.

To get to the Three Groves, they had to walk through most of the village, and because Tetyana knew almost everyone, she hardly ever crossed a road without stopping to talk to someone.

"Aren't you at the wedding?" she asked one man, who was idly leaning on his gate.

"I'm not wanted there."

"But aren't you related?"

"We were, but now we aren't. They worried our departed sister to death, and now they're starting on another wife."

"That's just what I was saying to the children. Ivan and Ivanykha won't be forgiven for your deceased sister."

"Do you suppose their darling son is any better? Why, he used to beat her up so badly that she fled to my home more than once, and there was always a trail of blood behind her."

"May God give him a good threshing! He'll be reminded about his actions one day."

"Good-bye, and may good health be yours."

They passed a few more houses and then, farther down the road, came across a woman leading a sheep on a rope.

"So you're grazing your sheep?" Tetyana asked.

"I'm grazing it for others, not for myself."

"But it's your sheep, isn't it?"

"So what if it's mine? I still have to sell it."

"But you can't get much money for sheep now."

"You're right, my good woman, you can get hardly anything at all for them now! But what am I to do? I have to pay the taxes—and where am I supposed to get the money?"

"So they're collecting the taxes already, are they?"

"Aren't they always? When don't they skin the hide off people?"

Beyond the house where the woman was grazing the sheep, the path turned uphill. Atop a small hillock, they passed a cemetery surrounded by a tall embankment overgrown with green grass. Low wooden crosses, varying greatly in size and age, peeked through the green cherry shrubs and gnarled apple trees planted by the graves.

When they drew near the cemetery, they heard mournful singing in the distance. Red church banners swayed high over the heads of a large crowd of people. A priest in crimson vestments walked at the head of the procession, followed by a wagon carrying a coffin made of roughly hewed planks.

“Look, there’s daddy!” Slavko said, pointing at the priest.

But no one paid any attention to him. The children gazed sadly at the coffin covered with lengths of homespun cloth.

The husband of the deceased was walking to one side of the coffin, while three girls with unbraided hair were walking behind it, lamenting loudly.

“Oh, mummy, our darling dove, our dear adviser! To whose care have you left us? Who will wake us in the morning? Who will tell us what to do? Who will advise us? Who will call us to come and eat? Did you become angry with us? Is that why you’ve set out on your last journey, why you’re going into the ground where the sun does not shine, the wind does not blow, and no voice can be heard?”

A heavy sorrow descended on the people as they listened to the children’s wailing. The men walked with bowed heads, and the women were wiping tears.

“Oh, the poor orphans are really wailing—they sound like doves cooing,” Tetyana said softly.

Olha cuddled up to her and sobbed, and the boys also felt tears filling their eyes.

“Come on, let’s go! Let’s go!” Tetyana said after a moment.

Gathering up the children, she led them upwards along the path.

Narrow, dry ridges of unploughed land stretched crossways over the wide, sown fields. A gentle breeze was blowing, rippling the ripening grain with its well-filled ears. The children, almost completely hidden in the tall grainfields, picked blue cornflowers, red poppies, and purple pasqueflowers.

A young married woman was walking ahead of them. She was moving along with a brisk, lively step.

“And where might you be going on Sunday? Into the fields?” Tetyana inquired.



“The boys are damaging our field, and my husband told me: ‘Go and have a look; if they know that someone is watching over it, at least they’ll be a bit afraid.’”

“So your husband doesn’t go himself to scare the boys, but sends you instead?”

“He couldn’t go himself, because he’s in the church brotherhood, and all the elders went off someplace—I see now that they’ve gone to a wedding—and Petro’s wife is being buried today, so he had to go to help the priest.”

“Oh, dear me! So she’s gone—just as if she had never lived on this earth. Let’s hope she married off at least her eldest daughter.”

“Well, the elder one’s fine; she can look after herself already. But it’s the younger ones that some woman will be combing now, and blood will flow with every hair that she yanks.”

The woman was in a hurry because she had left a little child at home, so she quickly parted company with Tetyana.

“What was she saying, Tetyana? About combing and blood?” the children asked.

“There’s a song like that about orphans.”

“Do you know it, Tetyana? Come on, sing it for us!”

“I can’t sing it—my throat is choking.”

“Well then, at least tell us about it!”

Tetyana did not usually refuse the children, so she told them about a little orphan girl who had gone out into the fields to search for her mother. God met her there and told her to take three willow branches and strike her mother’s grave three times. And when she took three willow branches and struck the grave, she heard her mother call out and ask: “Who is knocking on my grave?”

“It’s me,” the little orphan said. “Take me to you!”

But her mother said that she should go back home and have her stepmother wash her hair and sew her a shirt. The little orphan did not want to go home, because she was afraid of her stepmother, who, as she sewed a shirt for her, cursed: “May you not live long enough to wear it out!” And when the stepmother combed the little girl, blood flowed out whenever she tugged at a hair.

And then three angels flew down and took the little orphan alive into heaven. The stepmother was taken by three devils to hell. There, they placed her on tables made of yew and gave her hot tar to drink. Then they lifted her way up high and cast her down into the very depths of hell.

“But why didn’t the angels come down and tell the stepmother to be kind to the little orphan?” Olha wanted to know.

“Because everyone should be kind and not harm others, even without being told.”

“And will Ivan and Ivanykha, and those people who want to take away the sheep from the woman you were talking with—will they also go to hell?”

“It’s not for me to judge them,” Tetyana said, changing the topic.

They were almost at the Three Groves. These groves had been given this name because, as the forest meandered over a small hill, it split into three sections.

Next to the groves stretched a wide, grassy hayfield covered with flowers. The freshness of the grass enticed one from afar, and the honeyed fragrance of the flowers filled the air. A crane that was sloshing through the swampy tracts of the hayfield on its tall legs, stopped in a dignified manner and, standing motionless, watched the approaching hikers. Up above, a predatory hawk was circling; he lifted himself high into the air, flapped his wings, flew in ever smaller circles, and vanished in the clouds.

The children raced ahead to pick the enchanting flowers: pink carnations, white lily bells, and golden-yellow buttercups.

Romko was picking some tiny blue flowers that peeked shyly out of the grass. They seemed to be pulling him ever farther into untamed grasslands.

“Romko, don’t go that way; it’s swampy there!” Tetyana said.

“How do you know it’s swampy?”

“Because wherever frogseye grows, it has to be wet.”

“So this is frogseye? It really does peep out of the grass as if it were a frog staring out of the water,” the children said in amazement.

Slavko was attracted by a low plant that resembled a fir, but Tetyana found fault with it as well.

“Ugh, don’t pick that! If you touch it, your hair will fall out.”

“What kind of flowers are these?” Kostunyo asked, giving her a bunch of dark blue-yellow pansies.

“Oh, these are very pretty. God changed a brother and a sister who were very devoted to each other into a single flower.”

“And what’s this? It looks like a wolf, or some other animal! Look, Tetyana!” Kostunyo shouted, tearing off a flower from a long spike thickly sprinkled with blossoms that really did look like the jaws of a dragon or the head of a wild animal.

“These are snapdragons. Girls wash with them to make themselves pretty; but if they do, they won’t have any luck for seven years.”

“Is this also a snapdragon, Tetyana?” Olha asked once again, as she passed Tetyana a flower similar to the snapdragons; however, it was not a yellow flower, but a fragrant purple one.

“No, these are called cuckoo’s tears.”

“But where are the tears?”

“The tears are the black dots on the leaves.”

The children began to examine more closely the flower’s leaves that were, in fact, dotted with black spots that looked like tiny tears.

“Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” The sound of a cuckoo resounded directly behind them, as if it were calling out on purpose.

“It’s a cuckoo! A cuckoo is calling!” the children shouted.

“It’s so late, and it’s still calling out its song!” Tetyana said in astonishment.

“Why shouldn’t it call out now? It’s summer already.”

“It sings only until the Feast of St. John, and then it calls out only occasionally, in dense forests.”

“But why doesn’t it sing after that?”

“That’s how God made it.”

“But who told you that it doesn’t sing?”

“People. And in one song it says:

Oh, a cuckoo called in its voice so spry,  
Until it choked on an ear of rye.”

Olha did not hear much of what her brothers were asking. Her head was bent down low, and she was closely examining the purple flower. Questions were whirling in her head: “Why are these cuckoo’s tears? Why was the cuckoo crying? Why did its tears fall on this flower?”

“Tetyana, tell me, why are these flowers called cuckoo’s tears?” she asked, interrupting the song.

“It was a mother weeping for her daughter.”

“Or perhaps, a daughter for her mother? You said the weeping of the daughters of the dead woman sounded like a cuckoo calling.”

“Many things are said about the cuckoo. Some say that a mother married off her daughter and ordered her not to return home for seven years. Others say that a girl once sat by a window and kept calling out like a cuckoo; her mother told her to stop, but she didn’t listen. She kept on calling: ‘cuckoo, cuckoo.’ The mother grew angry

and cursed her: ‘May you call like a cuckoo the rest of your days.’ The girl changed into a grey cuckoo, broke through the window with her wings, and flew away.”

“Is there a song like that, Tetyana?”

“No, I don’t know a song like that.”

“But there is a song about the girl whose mother told her not to come back for seven years, isn’t there Tetyana? You know the song: ‘My mother married me off and told me what to do.’ It’s true, isn’t it? Come on, let’s sing it together!”

“Fine—let’s sing!”

“Mother married me off and said to me:  
 ‘For seven long years, stay away from me!’  
 But I was young, and couldn’t stay away,  
 And in a year flew back as a cuckoo grey.  
 I flew into the yard, calling out: ‘cuckoo,’  
 From the house came my mother, crying anew:  
 ‘If you’re a cuckoo, fly to the woods to sing:  
 If you’re my daughter, come in, poor thing!’”

Some young herders who were tending cattle nearby left their charges and approached the happy singers. The older children were delighted to see them and wanted to sing more songs. Little Slavko, however, wanted to eat.

They sat down at the bottom of a hill. Tetyana pulled out the basket with the food, left the children a lump of sheep cheese, and gave the rest to the young herders.

“Go and fetch us some water to drink,” she then said to one of the herders, passing him a glass.

The boy ran eagerly to the spring that gleamed like a mirror in the green grass and flowed out as a narrow streamlet over some pebbles. The children raced after the boy, took turns drinking the water, and once again began begging Tetyana to sing with them.

“Which song do you want to sing?”

“The one about an eagle!” Romko said.

“No, not about an eagle, about a peacock!” Olha insisted.

“Or about Sava!” Kostunyo suggested.

“About Sava! About Sava!”

Everyone knew the song about Sava and the *kozaks* [*Cossacks*]. And once again, a song resounded over the fields, but this time it was even louder, because the young herders also knew this song.

When they finished singing, little Slavko asked: “Who were these *kozaky*, Tetyana?”

“They were terrible people!” one of the herders broke in uninvited.

“The *kozaky*—terrible people!” Tetyana laughed. “What are you talking about, you foolish boy? The *kozaky* were terrible people? The *kozaky* were lively, wonderful young men. Have you ever heard anything about the Tartars?”

“The Tartars! The Tartars!” the children shouted almost simultaneously. “It’s the Tartars who were terrible, Tetyana! Tell us about the Tartars—you know so much about them.”

“The Tartars truly were terrible people,” Tetyana began her story. “It used to be that people feared Tartars the way they feared fire. When the Tartars attacked our villages, people hid in the forests and dales, and bedded down in trees. They didn’t know what awaited them the next day. Would the Tartars attack and pillage the villages? It used to be that people tried to protect themselves and kept watch as best they could. They sent out guards with wooden clappers, and as soon as they heard them clapping, they gathered up whatever they could, and either hid it, or just fled into the forest as they were, hoping to save at least their own lives.

“Long ago, our village wasn’t the way it is now; back then, there were huge, dense forests where this grove is; and over there, where there are swampy areas, there were such tall reeds that people could hide in them. One time, an entire family from a certain cottage hid in the reeds—only a baby was left at home in a cradle. A Tartar walked into the home and started taking whatever he could. Then he noticed the baby, lying and gurgling in a cradle. He bent over to get his spear, but he didn’t have the heart to kill the baby from above, so he put the spear under the cradle and killed it from below. The Tartars didn’t just take the people’s possessions—they took the people as well, especially girls and young married women.

“They say that one time all the people in a village hid in the forest—everyone, to the very last person,” Tetyana continued. “The Tartars rode into a deserted village. So they came up with a plan. They harnessed the horses to the wagons, drove up to the forest, and began shouting: ‘Ivanko! Maksym!’ and other names like that. ‘Come on out, the evil hand has passed us by.’

“One woman ran out of the forest because she believed that the Tartars had gone, and they caught her and took her away. A year later, or maybe a little less than that, the husband of that woman

was out in the field mowing hay. He saw his wife and a Tartar approaching him and thought: ‘The Tartar is alone, but there are two of us.’ He attacked the Tartar and told his wife to help him. But she said: ‘May God help the one who overcomes the other.’

“Well, the man had a dog with him, and the dog attacked the Tartar. And so the man was able to overcome the Tartar with the help of his dog. The man took his wife back home with him, but he no longer felt anything for her in his heart.”

“Do you remember the Tartars, Tetyana?”

“No, I don’t. I recall a bit about serfdom, even though I was still little then. But I only heard people talking about the Tartars.”

“What was serfdom like? What do you remember about it?”

“Serfdom—it was when people worked for lords for nothing, and even then, the lords treated them terribly. They locked them in cellars and beat them so hard that the blood gushed out of them.”

“Why did the people work for them?”

“Because they had to; there was a law that said people had to work for the lord who lived in their village.”

“How is it that there’s only one lord per village, and yet there are so many ordinary people in a village?” one of the herders intruded into the conversation again.

Tetyana smiled. “There’s an anecdote about this as well—but I don’t know if it’s true.”

“Come on, what kind of anecdote? Tell us, tell us!”

“The older people say that God didn’t give the lords any names. One day, the lords gathered at a great banquet, and they kept addressing one another as ‘Mr. Benefactor.’ The devil overheard this and asked: ‘Why do you always refer to one another as Mr. Benefactor? If you don’t have any names, I’ll give you some!’ ‘Fine!’ the lords agreed.

“The devil took a large hempen cloth, spread it out, and piled the lords into it. Then he took the cloth, snapped it high up into the air, and the lords flew off in all directions and scattered all over the earth. And whatever each lord landed on, he had to take its name. If it was a stream [*potik*]*—*he became Pototsky, if it was a birch tree [*bereza*]*—*he became Berezovsky, a pantry [*komora*]*—*Komorovsky, a willow [*verba*]*—*Verbytsky. It all depended on who fell where.”

“Ours must have fallen in a trough [*koryto*] because he’s called Korytovsky,” one of the herders observed, and all the children laughed heartily.

“So that’s why there are so many people in a village—and only one lord!” the other herders said in amazement.

“Did people have to work for nothing for Korytovsky?”

“Not for the young lord, but for the old one they sure did!”

“You mentioned once before that you grew up in the lord’s manor, so you must remember him.”

“I do remember him a bit, even though I was still very little. One time, I recall that people were threshing in the stable, and they put the food they brought with them from home in the lord’s bakehouse so it wouldn’t freeze, because it was bitterly cold outside. The girls who worked in the bakehouse became very curious to see what was in the small pots.

“I remember, just as if it had happened today, that in one of the pots there was borshch made with thickly sliced beets, and in another one, there was cabbage with a few potatoes, a piece of dark bread, and cold cornmeal mush. The girls tasted the food, but couldn’t eat it, because it wasn’t salted. When the workers came, they asked them how they could eat unsalted food.

“‘We eat what we have,’ they said. But they did find it hard to eat, and so they asked my mother, who was working with the women servants in the kitchen, to give them a bit of salt.

“‘I won’t give it to you,’ she said, ‘no matter what. Do you think I want to be whipped with branches because of you?’

“‘Maybe we should send this little one to the lord?’ one of them said, pointing at me. ‘Come on, go and tell the lord to give us salt for our food,’ they said to me.

“‘Go, go, he won’t say anything to you,’ the kitchen girls added.

“I walked into the room, and the lord was sitting there, smoking a pipe. I stopped by the door and said: ‘The workers are asking the lord to give them a bit of salt for their food.’

“And the lord shouted and stamp his feet: ‘Who sent you here? Who told you to come here? I’ll give them salt! If they want salt, let them bring it from home!’”

“Was your father working in the manor yard as well?”

“No, father wasn’t there; there was only my mother for the two of us—me, and my older sister.”

“But where was your father?”

“No one knows where he went. The lord took mother into the manor house, but he chased father away because he wouldn’t work for nothing. And so he went away to see the world.”

Tetyana grew thoughtful. She gazed fixedly at a mountain ash, and the children waited in vain for her to tell them anything more.

“Was your mother treated well in the manor house?” they asked.

Tetyana smiled bitterly. “Was she treated well? She probably was at one point, but later things became very bad, and my mother never stopped crying.”

“Is she still there now?” Slavko asked.

“Oh, no, no, no! My mother hasn’t been on this earth for many a year now. The flesh fell off her bones a long time ago.”

“Why didn’t you stay in the manor house?”

“I did stay there for awhile, but not for long. After my mother died, and my sister got married, I remained in the manor for some time, and then they chased me away.”

“Why did they chase you away?”

Tetyana’s face became contorted with a deep, sharp pain, but she did not reply.

“Maybe you didn’t want to work without getting paid—like your father?”

“I told you—there was no serfdom then.”

“But you remember about it?”

“Only as much as I’ve told you. And I also remember that I once heard people saying that they no longer had to work for the lord; they used to work for nothing, and he wouldn’t even give them anything to eat, but now he had to pay for the work and feed them if he’d promised to do so.”

“Maybe he didn’t want to pay you?” Romko asked with the stubborn curiosity of a child.

“Oh, there’s no point talking about that!” Tetyana was unwilling to say more. “It’s late; let’s go home; it will soon be chilly.”

The children stood up. Tetyana began dressing them in their warm clothing. The herders also jumped to their feet and started to drive the cattle back to the village.

After such a long walk, the children slept soundly—and their heads were filled with dreams about forests, flowers, hayfields, grey cuckoos, devils, *kozaky*, Tartars, and human misery.



*Liebesahnung*  
*A Presentiment of Love*  
(1892)

It was a small, three-cornered student's room, with a window looking out into the yard.

Its furnishings were not elegant. The most esteemed spot was occupied by a stove that did not seem to be performing its duties overly conscientiously, as it was not chasing off the damp cold in the small room. The second esteemed spot—or, perhaps, the most esteemed one—was occupied by a yellow varnished bed. Not far from the bed stood a small table and, next to it, a chair with a broken arm. The other corner was furnished with clothes-hooks fastened in the wall. A few articles of men's clothing were hung on these hooks, and beneath them stood a small, antiquated trunk and a tipped-over samovar. The floor was littered with cigarette butts. On the table lay a few books and some crumpled little boxes with pharmaceutical labels. From under a pile of essays peeked a case containing a zither, visible proof of the artistic impulses of the owner and lord of all this wealth—Dennis M., a first-year law student.

Just now, he was lying in bed. His face was graced by a dark, downy moustache of fairly recent vintage, a lock of black hair that tumbled down over his smooth forehead, and large blue eyes that shone from under dark brows.

He was in a peevish mood. It must have been the cold room that was bothering him because, from time to time, he bundled himself more tightly in his bed coverings and glared crossly at the stove that seemed to be justifying itself in all its mute grandeur: "I'm not to blame, my dear. I'm not the cause of this frigid temperature; my organism is functioning quite normally, but insufficient nourishment is casting me in a bad light."

The student's gaze moved on through the room and came to rest on a small painting in a worn golden frame hanging across from his bed. Then it fell lazily on the niche by the window and on more small boxes with pharmaceutical labels.

“That damned woman!” he grumbled irritably. “She’s put those boxes so far away that it’s impossible to take my medicine.”

His hand reached automatically under the pillow where he usually kept his watch—but then it fell away, and his face assumed an even more annoyed expression. This companion of his had forsaken him more than once, but now he had been forced to part with it for a longer time because of those damned little boxes.

He had never been a slave to style, and he was even repulsed by the world that kowtows to fashion, but “influenza”—such a modish illness—had laid him up in bed for a week, and even though he felt better now, the doctor had told him to stay in bed a while longer.

Dennis listened attentively for some movement outside his door, but all was quiet. “It must be nearly nine by now,” he thought.

He seemed to have a sixth sense for knowing what time it was, and he had honed this gift into a curious skill. He would often have his friends ask him to guess the time, and he was almost never wrong. It may well be that he had developed this sense for telling time because he was often parted from his beloved watch, and its absence brought time into a sharp focus. Certainly, at such times, he felt an even greater need for its companionship than when he had it with him.

Finally, a rustling could be heard, and an older woman walked in with a few short pieces of firewood in one arm.

“Why are you so late? It must be nearly nine already!”

“What are you dreaming about, my young gentleman? It’s scarcely eight, and even if it were nine, I couldn’t come any sooner. Everybody keeps bothering the caretaker. Now he’s been summoned to court to be a witness, and I had to sweep everything and take care of all the gentlemen that he usually looks after. You’re lucky I found the time to come at all.”

While she was talking, Mykolayeva lit a fire in the stove.

“It’s really not worth the effort,” Dennis said. “Those few little logs won’t generate any warmth.”

“For more money, there’d be more logs. Do you expect to have a warm room for five *kreytsary* [*pennies*]?”

The young man fell silent.

When Mykolayeva was leaving, he requested her to pass him the medications from the window niche, and she grudgingly did so.

In a short while, she came in again, carrying a tray with a glass of weak tea, two sugar cubes, and a horn-shaped roll. She placed

all this on the crooked chair, shoved it closer to the bed, and walked out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Dennis shuddered involuntarily. The nervous irritability caused by the influenza made it difficult to cope with Mykolayeva's behaviour, which, under normal circumstances, would not have upset him.

He lifted himself up a bit, leaned his head on his elbow, set aside the little box with the medicinal powder in it, and slowly began to eat his breakfast. He dropped the sugar cubes into the tea and broke off a piece of the thin roll. Every morning, he was annoyed by the thinness of the roll, because he viewed it as tangible evidence of his abnormal economic situation, which could not ensure the bare necessities of life. Now, however, the roll seemed too big; after dipping half of it in his tea, he could hardly swallow a bite, and ended up drinking only the tea.

Even though there were only a few small logs, the atmosphere in the room became more pleasant, and the stove now assumed the proud expression of someone that could not be accused of neglecting his duties.

Dennis was beginning to feel somewhat better and healthier; he could freely take his hands out from under the covers to plump his pillow, and he was absolutely delighted when he saw an open book on the chair. Picking it up, he began to read. However, he did not read for too long; he flipped a few pages, and set the book aside. Adjusting his pillow, he scrutinised the painting on the wall. Gazing at the picture invariably brought him a great deal of pleasure—it was his favourite pastime.

On a low bench, in the middle of a luxuriant flower bed, sat a young woman. She was seated under a large lilac bush, with clusters of blossoms swaying above her head. The splendour of the sun's rays flooded the entire painting, penetrating the branches of the lilac bush and the fragrant flower bed, and enveloping the radiant young girl with the golden hair in a luminous light. She was leaning on the arm of the bench on which she was sitting, and, in her delicate little hand, she was holding an unopened rosebud. Under the painting was inscribed: "*Liebesahnung*."

The youth gazed for a long time at the girl's beautiful face, her alluring, half-closed blue eyes, and the dainty foot peeping out from under the folds of her dress. He sighed deeply. Ah! This girl with the golden hair was his ideal. Would he ever find one like her? He was always on the lookout for her. As he walked down the street,

he never passed by hair of a lighter sheen without looking more closely at its owner. He sometimes wasted hours on end in his searches. There were times when he set out for the university, only to return home again, thoroughly confused by his ill-starred pursuit of girls with golden hair.

In his mind's eye, he envisaged blue eyes of varying shades and blond hair whose golden lustre resembled that of his ideal young woman under the luxuriant lilac bush. Oh! He had dreamed, for so many nights, about this girl with the golden hair! And, if the sober morning dispersed his dreams, the evening restored them full-blown, in all their fantastic and enticing power.

Once, in a public garden, he saw a young woman who bore a striking resemblance to the blond girl in the painting. He followed her around for a long time, until she vanished from his sight in a side street of the big city.

From that time on, he often revisited the gardens where he had first seen her, but he waited for her in vain. And then, just when he was least expecting it, he caught a flash of blue eyes and golden locks. His heart jumped. He did not let the girl out of his sight, even though he could see she was not the young woman for whom he had waited all those hours in the gardens, but another one who simply happened to have blond hair and blue eyes.

Once again, different images floated through his mind. He saw a ballroom and heard the sounds of a lengthy waltz; dozens of beautiful girls were circling him, but he saw only those with blond hair and blue eyes.

Now, the final notes of a Beethoven sonata were dying away. An attractive blond girl sat leaning against the back of a chair; her eyes were closed, and her hands were clasped behind her head. In the deep silence, one could hear the rustling of the leaves of a begonia plant near her piano—a muted sound, a murmuring that pierced the soul.

The semester was over, and it was time for his first vacation. A trip to the village! What a delight to leave this stifling city, to breathe the fresh country air. In great anticipation, Dennis conjured up the image of the green willows of his village, the dense orchards, his family home, and Hanya with her pale face, golden curls, and brilliant blue eyes.

At last he was on his way. He was sitting in a narrow train compartment. It was rather warm, but this did not matter, for the

train represented only a temporary captivity, and soon there would be wide expanses, the village, luxuriant stands of grain, hayfields, and Hanya with her blue eyes and golden hair.

At one station, the conductor hastily opened the door, and a striking female figure appeared in the narrow doorway. Her beauty brought with it a fragrance and a bright glow; the walls of the compartment widened, and the entire space was filled with tiny, lively spirits which—like the heads of Raphael's angels—peeped from behind the clouds with shiny blue eyes, while the lustre of their golden tresses blended with the splendour of the heavenly spheres. Yes, it was she—the beauty with the golden hair for whom he had searched so long. It was she—his ideal. He could not take his eyes off her; her beauty agitated and pierced him to the core.

But what about her? She found a seat in a corner of the compartment, leaned her head against the wall, and fell deep into thought. But her thoughtfulness did not last too long; with a swift gesture, she opened the window and gazed into the distance. Her movements betrayed her impatience; it seemed that the train's speed was too slow for her.

Several stations went by in this manner. There were a few times when he wanted to say something, but his voice refused to do his bidding; it stuck in his throat, which seemed to be compressed by the intense pounding of his heart.

The train was drawing near to one of the larger stations. The girl's impatience was getting the better of her. Suddenly, she made some enigmatic signals with her hands, and, a moment later, a young man bounded into the compartment—a young man whom she greeted with great joy.

They sat down side by side and fired questions rapidly at one another. It seemed to Dennis that they were drawing closer to each other. Focussing his attention on them, he strained to listen in on their conversation, but he could not catch any phrases that would explain the relationship between these two people.

How much time he spent observing them and listening to them, he could not say. It seemed to him that he was still listening when everything around him changed and became confused. Finally, everything became quiet. The passengers drifted off into sleep . . .

The wind that had been whispering with the leaves died down and fell silent. Only a nightingale was singing shrilly in the grove at the edge of the village. Someone whistled protractedly through his

fingers; a stream murmured; he was roaming through the reeds with his gun, and the nightingale was calling shrilly, time and time again.

Something alarmed him. Where was he? Oh, yes! The train compartment; the attractive blonde; shrill sounds. But it was not a nightingale—it was two young people kissing passionately, without restraint.

Sorrow, pain, and longing wrenched his heart.

## *The One Left Behind*

(1915)

### I

The hail from the machine guns stopped its clattering, and the din of the canons receded, reverberating with a muffled sound like a passing thunderstorm.

Terrified, and white with fear, people crawled out of their homes and hiding places. They slowly regained their senses and began to look around.

All along the road, covered medical carts stretched endlessly, transporting the wounded to the local school that was transformed into a temporary hospital. Heavy groans tore at the hearts of the onlookers, and tears rolled down their faces.

Some people came up to the forest's edge, where the fiercest battle had raged. Many trees had fallen, including a beech tree so huge that two men could barely encircle it with their arms; sap was already pooling at its foot.

It was dreadful.

Nevertheless, those who are alive think about living. The more prudent people began making their way to the forest to gather broken branches and larger pieces of wood. The youngsters—both boys and girls—ran after them.

Among them was a group of young adolescents: two boys, two girls, and twelve-year-old Mahdunya. They took a cart and set out for the forest to search for firewood. The boys pulled the cart, while the girls tread carefully among scattered shells, fragmented shrapnel, and large patches of congealed human blood.

“That’s blood, blood!” Mahdunya, wide-eyed with fright, cried out from time to time.

And blood, brimming with sorrow, flooded their youthful hearts. The setting sun, seeking shelter behind clouds that glowed like fiery embers, suffused the fresh graves, covered lightly with the yellowish soil of the forest, with a blood-red light.

As they drew nearer to the forest, there was more blood, more graves, bullets, and abandoned soldiers' caps. The ground was churned up, mixed with blood and leaves, and deeply gouged with craters; blood trickled in ruts made by carts.

Near the path, a grey soldier's greatcoat lay spread out. The boys wanted to take it, but feared getting into trouble.

Broken trees lay one on top of the other. A dead doe, her eyes gaping and glassy, leaned against a bush, and a crow, shot in flight, dangled by a wing from a jagged branch.

The girls began piling smaller branches on the cart, while the boys went farther into the forest.

Mahdunya, who had run off a little ways from her girlfriends, suddenly froze in terror. Something blue protruded from a mound of soil expelled from a crater, and she thought she heard a groan. She ran up closer and was struck dumb—directly in front of her lay a soldier, covered in blood, his face deathly pale. His inert eyelids twitched slightly, and he opened his eyes.

"Come here! Come here!" she shouted to her girlfriends.

A soft, painful groan escaped from the wounded man's chest.

"He's alive! He's alive!" the girls shouted as they called the boys.

The youths came running.

"What should we do? We must go and tell someone."

"Shouldn't we put him on the cart and take him to the hospital?"

"The cart's too short."

"It probably is; we'll have to put something under his head and shoulders to raise him."

They ran for the cart, threw off the brushwood, and picked up the wounded soldier. His hands, feet, and chest were caked with soil and congealed blood, but on one shoulder there was a shiny gold star.

Something had to be placed under his head. They recalled the greatcoat that was lying alongside the path, and now they no longer feared to take it.

## II

"Oh, it hurts, its hurts," the wounded man groaned in a faint voice, as the youngsters fussed with him.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked, when they were almost halfway there.

"To the hospital."



“Is there a field hospital here?”

“I don’t know what kind it is, but there’s a hospital in the school, and all the wounded are being taken there.”

He wanted to ask something else, but could not.

When they arrived at the hospital, it was almost dark.

“What is it?” asked a nurse, walking by with some bottles.

“We found a soldier in the forest.”

“Is he dead?”

“No, he’s alive.”

“Really? He’s alive? But our men were there. He must have been left behind.”

“We found him under some earth blown out from a crater.”

The nurse quickly placed the bottles on a windowsill and, calling for help, rushed to the cart. The doctor and several medical aides ran up, moved the soldier to a stretcher, and carried him inside.

The next day, Mahdunya came to ask how he was. The nurse said they had removed the bullet lodged in his body, but he was still very weak.

Mahdunya came by to ask about him every day.

She was told he was improving and regaining his health.

One day, he said he wanted to see her, and when she walked into the room, he was already sitting in a chair.

“So was it you, Mahdunya, who saved my life?” the invalid asked in a cheerful tone of voice.

He grew stronger every day. Mahdunya always found him in the yard, where he sat on a bench waiting for her.

When he regained his strength, he went with her to her home. He was talkative and cheerful, as if he had never been wounded.

But one day he came to say goodbye, because he had to leave. Mahdunya wept loudly.

He smiled sadly, patted her on the head, and promised to write.

Two weeks later, he sent her a postcard—a picture of a wounded soldier, and a nurse holding his hand. He wrote that he was going to the front lines. A short while later, he wrote that he was being sent into battle.

Mahdunya never heard from him again.

## *A Candle Burns*

(1915)

The resplendent sun sinking into the horizon beamed luminous parting rays to the earth, its true friend and faithful beloved.

Clothed in the ethereal violet of the clouds, it shimmered with sparkling tones of the most beautiful colours, and its enraptured beloved glittered in the splendid radiance of its regal purple light.

It departed slowly and, looking over its shoulder for one last time, cast its impassioned, amorous eye on clear waters and dark forests, and lingered on the tips of trees, tall buildings, and towers that appeared to be reaching upwards to the airy, golden clouds.

It said its farewells sorrowfully, constrained by the immutable law of inevitability.

The last rays, the last glance, the last kiss.

And then it was gone.

And with it, the light, the joy, and the warmth of the earth were extinguished. The earth turned cool and enveloped itself in a dark, mournful veil of misty grief and sorrow.

On the opposite horizon, the sepulchral moon, as if frozen in pain, thrust itself forward in silent splendour. It took no notice of either the stars that sparkled around it, or the white clouds that, with bated breath, roamed silently below it like heartless potentates of nature. Majestic, cold, and silvery pale with horror, it looked down mournfully at the unfortunate earth, its human ant hill, and the fate of its inhabitants.

Through the open window of an attractive cottage in a small town, the vibrant tones of a violin, accompanied by a piano, poured forth.

The overture to “William Tell” was being played.

He—young, tall, and dark—grasped a violin firmly in his hands and pressed the strings down confidently with his tapered fingers.

She—like a spring flower in bloom—sat at the piano, passionately attuned to every tone, to every nuance of the violin, as it played the powerful composition, replete with harmony, colour, and rhythm.

Quiet minor tones—full of sadness, weakness, and helpless despair—modulated and changed into firm, courageous, energetic sounds that were drawing closer and growing louder.

A few more resounding, lengthy chords, suited to the mood of the entire composition, led to the finale—the moment of victory, the intoxicating power and intensity of freedom.

“Wonderful!” she whispered rapturously, lifting her hands from the keyboard.

One could almost see the picturesque, mighty Alps, and sense the formidable military spirit, the scraping of weapons, the virile strength and daring, and the tremulous qualms of an uneasy heart.

Only a truly great artist can respond to music and interpret it in this way.

An unusual commotion on the street caught their attention and cut short their rapture. Both of them involuntarily drew nearer the window.

Their first thought was that there was a fire, but there was no blaze to be seen. On the opposite side of the street, a few men were reading an announcement posted on a wall near a street light.

“What is it?” he leaned out of the window and asked one of the passers-by.

“You mean, you don’t know? It’s a general mobilization.”

“A general mobilization?” someone queried from another group of passers-by.

“A general mobilization,” a woman’s choked voice reiterated.

They looked at each other almost in alarm, with the eyes of someone stupefied by a sudden, unexpected event—an event they could neither grasp, nor comprehend.

After a moment, her eyes fell on the opened notes of the overture. Swiftly walking up to the keyboard, she closed it with a nervous gesture. How painful, sad, and terrifying in real life is that which is so beautiful in art.

He also approached the piano and, with calm resignation, put his violin in its case and pushed it away, as if to say: “This is how it will remain.”

And it did remain this way.

It was not only the violin that was left behind. She—the girl who was dearest to his heart—was left behind as well.

A heavy pain and sorrow pierced the girl's heart, and a relentless stream of kaleidoscopic images arose and swirled against the gloomy background of her sorrow.

The world seemed to her like a savage, unjust monster that punishes the innocent.

Oh, how terribly alone she felt! All those nearest to her became distant, like strangers. Everything around her became gloomy, coalescing into an engulfing sorrow. Flowers smiled forlornly; trees bent mournfully in the wind.

The joy of the world faded, and happiness became an empty, meaningless word.

Her heart ached, and tears trembled on her eyelids, but did not lessen her grief. They did not bring comfort to her heart, which seemed to be rent by a dagger, just like that of the Madonna in the icon in her room—the icon before which she poured out her pain, bringing, as an offering, her tears and a candle that burned day and night, and pleading for the return of the one who had captured her heart and, along with her heart, her whole being.

“Will we ever see each other again?” These had been his very last words to her.

Perhaps they truly had been his last words? Perhaps they really would never see each other again?

“No, no!” something shouted within her. “He has to return, he simply has to.”

But why, oh why, was there no news from him?

She sat for hours, gazing with sad eyes at the flickering light. Hopes and dreams from the distant past rose up before her and, along with them, like terrifying spectres, dreadful questions arose. What could she do? What comfort could she find? How could she overcome this cursed reality?

There were moments when her former energy and strength returned. At such times, she asked friends and strangers who corresponded with their kin in the army if they knew where the regiment in which he served was stationed. But her questions were in vain.

Sometimes, she chanced upon newspapers. With inflamed eyes, she searched through the columns of the wounded and the dead, and a grim joy flooded her heart, for it would have been devastating to find his name there.

In the springtime, the unexpected happened. The enemy army retreated like a leaden winter cloud, and blue peaked caps blossomed everywhere, bringing her good news and a long-awaited letter. But her joy soon evaporated.

She still had not received a single reply to the sincere, lengthy letters she had sent him, one after the other—letters in which she told him about the pain in her heart, her lost and regained hope, and the candle that burned both day and night.

And one day, two men came to see her. She knew one of them, as he was from the local militia, but the other was a stranger.

“Is your name Marta M.?” the stranger asked.

“Yes, it is,” she replied anxiously.

“And did you write these letters?” he asked her, showing her the letters she had written.

All the blood from her heart rushed to her face.

“Yes, I did. But how is it that you have them?”

“I have the authority for it,” he said authoritatively, showing her a secret insignia.

She felt as if the hot blood rushing from her heart to her face congealed and stopped flowing.

“I’d like you to provide some specific, trifling explanations,” the stranger continued.

“Explanations? What kind of explanations?” she inquired with trembling lips.

“There are some abbreviations in these letters. And most importantly, what is the meaning of the phrase that is found in every letter: ‘The candle burns day and night,’ followed by three dots.”

The girl stood motionless, as if deprived of all sensation, as if everything she had heard had nothing to do with her. She thought she heard someone’s voice, but she could not make out what was being said.

After a long moment, she moved forward with an effort and opened the door to her room, revealing a candle burning with a flickering flame in front of a Madonna.

Gentle smiles hovered on the lips of both men.

“You needn’t worry,” the stranger finally said. “Everything has been checked out, and your letters will reach the addressee.”

For a long time she could not regain her senses; pressing her hands against the wall, she slid semiconscious to the floor. Everything that lay hidden in the bottom of her soul had been dragged into public

view. With an indulgent smile, they had heaped disdain on her dearest treasure, on the very essence of her existence.

The feelings she had so jealously guarded from the cold and banalities of the external world had been exposed to a chilly draft, to an icy blast, and the down of tenderness had been rubbed off them. It was as if someone's rough hand had plucked a delicate flower and flung it down on the road under the feet of indifferent passers-by.

And pearly tears gushed from the depths of her heart with such a painful intensity that it seemed no matter what she touched, she would destroy it and drag it down with her into an abyss.

This paroxysm carried away with it her innocent dreams about happiness, about the world, about life.

Only the candle flickered with a faint ray of hope . . .

1. The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need. This involves conducting market research to determine what consumers want and what problems they are trying to solve. Once a need is identified, the next step is to develop a concept for a product that addresses that need. This often involves brainstorming and sketching ideas. The third step is to create a prototype, which is a preliminary model of the product. This can be done using various materials and techniques, depending on the nature of the product. The fourth step is to test the prototype, which involves showing it to a group of people and gathering feedback. This feedback is used to make improvements to the design. The fifth step is to create a final design, which is a detailed plan for the product. This includes specifications for materials, dimensions, and assembly. The final step is to manufacture the product, which involves producing a large number of units. This can be done in-house or by outsourcing to a manufacturer. Once the product is manufactured, it is ready to be sold to consumers.



Lyubov Yanovska  
1861-1933



## Biographical Sketch

Lyubov Yanovska was born in Eastern Ukraine into a family with a literary tradition. Her maternal grandmother's sister, who wrote under the pseudonym of Hannah Barvinok, was the wife of the renowned Ukrainian author and activist, Panteleimon Kulish. Lyubov's mother, encouraged to write while growing up under the tutelage of the Kulish family, was sent to France to improve her language skills, so she could translate Kulish's works into French. Lyubov's father, Oleksandr Shcherbachov, was a published author.

Although they shared an interest in literature, Lyubov's parents were diametrically opposed in their national views. The father, a Russian who supported the tsarist policy that stifled all non-Russian languages and cultures, punished the children if they spoke Ukrainian; the mother, determined to raise the national consciousness of the Ukrainian people through educational and cultural organizations, wanted the children to know their native tongue.

The marriage could not withstand the tensions, and when the family broke up, Lyubov's mother took the younger two of their four children to Petersburg in the hope of carving out a new life for herself. Unable to do so, she suffered a mental breakdown and died.

For Lyubov and her siblings life became difficult. Her father was forced to leave a well-paying job in the civil service and was unable to find steady employment. Lyubov received an education only because some benefactors recognized her innate musical talent and encouraged her to embark on a career as a concert pianist.

In school, Lyubov was taught that Russian was the language of intelligent discourse, and that speaking Ukrainian was tantamount to committing intellectual suicide. Fortunately for Ukrainian literature, Lyubov, during a stint as a tutor, met and married Vasyl Yanovsky, an older, well-informed member of the Ukrainian intelligentsia.

After the marriage in 1881, the couple moved to the country, where Lyubov embarked on an intensive program of self-education in Ukrainian language, literature, history, and culture; she also immersed herself in the life styles, customs, and traditions of the peasants among whom she lived.

In 1897, her first short story was published and, before long, she was writing novels and plays. By 1900, she had established herself on the Ukrainian literary scene.

The success Lyubov Yanovska experienced in her writing career did not carry over into her personal life. Her husband, a difficult man who was much older than she, became ill, and she nursed him for more than twenty years. Despite this drain on her time and energy, she kept writing and, propelled by her highly-developed sense of social responsibility, worked actively to improve the life of the peasants.

Admiring the resilience and stoicism of the peasants, but distressed by the barriers they faced in trying to better their lot in life, Yanovska set up literacy classes for adults and children, encouraged the dissemination of books among the peasantry, and organized drama, choral, and instrumental music groups. Under her direction, villagers presented a number of her plays and even staged an operetta for which she wrote the lyrics.

On several occasions when her husband was receiving medical treatments in Kyiv, she met some of the leading writers of the day, including a number of women authors. In 1903, she was invited to attend the unveiling of a monument in Poltava dedicated to Ivan Kotlyarevsky, whose parody of Vergil's *Aeneid*, written in Ukrainian in 1798, earned him the title of the Father of Modern Ukrainian Literature. At this unveiling, she was enthusiastically welcomed into the Ukrainian literary establishment.

After moving to Kyiv in 1905, she actively participated in literary circles, organized women's associations, and joined the world-wide women's movement. Deeply committed to improving women's lives in all levels of society—a goal that she viewed as crucial to effecting social change—Yanovska gave inspiring talks at conferences devoted to women's issues. In recognition of her efforts, she was invited to attend an international women's conference in Stockholm, in 1911, an honour she had to decline due to failing health.

Despite her physical limitations, Yanovska worked tirelessly on committees to assist women and children left destitute by the First World War. As a result of her selfless dedication to these causes, her precarious health suffered a further decline and, after 1916, she was no longer able to write. In 1923, the Ukrainian literary community organized celebrations in honour of the 25th Anniversary of her writing career, but Yanovska was too ill to attend. Later that year she suffered a paralytic stroke; she died in 1933.

Yanovska's writing reflects her deep understanding of and compassion for the peasantry and the intelligentsia of her day, both of whom were caught in the debilitating mores and structures of their separate worlds. Her works bridge the older ethnographic-realistic school of writing and the newer modernistic-psychological movement.

## *The Ideal Father*

(1900)

The lumbering steam threshing machine announced its arrival with a loud blast. Its raucous call to work, spreading rapidly through the village and resounding over the steppe, proclaimed the promise of an assured income to nearby farmsteads. Arguments broke out under thatched roofs. All summer, both the young and the old had waited for the threshing to begin in the manor fields, nursing the hope that they could earn enough either to buy themselves something—a skirt, shoes, or a Persian lamb cap—or to pay off the taxes.

So now, when the threshing machine finally stood on the large threshing floor, it was useless for mothers-in-law to tell their daughters-in-law to stay in the kitchen, and for fathers to send their sons to their own threshing floor or to tend the cattle. Even the most obedient daughters-in-law and sons rose up in rebellion and wilfully went straight to the manor fields where the work that awaited them may have been harder than what they did at home, but it was work for which they were paid—so they thought—good money.

The door creaked open in the last cottage by the pasture, and a tall, exceptionally thin and pale young man of about eighteen appeared on the threshold. He was wearing a black Persian lamb cap that was patched in a couple of spots, a grey, somewhat overly short coat, pants made out of a printed fabric, and old boots with wide uppers; however, his embroidered collar, white as snow, and the neatly mended sleeves on his overcoat testified that his mother did not begrudge any effort to dress her son elegantly, and that she would not have stinted on money to buy him finer clothing if she had the means of doing so.

The young man stood on the threshold for a moment and then looked penetratingly to the right, down the road that stretched like a dark ribbon along the yellow stubble to the next farmstead. Removing his cap, he glanced at it, whacked it on his hand a few times, put it on again with the patches to the back, and walked over to a small heap of straw behind the cottage.

An attractive middle-aged woman with dark hair and a worried, tear-stained face peered through the window. Carefully sliding open one of the glass panes, she watched the young man. He pulled out a pitchfork from the straw, picked up a rake, and placed them on his shoulder; then, after glancing down the road once more, he walked straight to the gate, without so much as a backward look. The woman hurriedly flung a kerchief on her head and dashed out of the cottage.

"Don't go, my son! Don't go, Ivan!" she stopped the young man by the gate. "I've been pleading with you all morning, and I'm begging you now: don't go to the manor fields."

"Why is that?" he asked, half smiling and half grieved. "Why are you afraid to let me go to the lord's fields? Everyone else goes, and they all make good money. Why is it that only I can't go?"

"Don't go, my dear son! Don't go; I'm begging you!" the greatly distressed woman implored him, her voice trembling.

"And I'm asking you, mother, why can't I go and earn money like the others? Why is it that every drunkard and every good-for-nothing can go to the manor, and I'm the only one who mustn't dare to so much as even put in an appearance there?" the young man asked for a second time, and lightning flashed in his blue eyes.

"Is it so difficult for you to do what I'm asking of you? I'm entreating you one last time—don't go!" the woman said without replying to his question—a question that had stabbed her heart like a sharp knife.

"I'm going, mother! I'll go today, and I'll keep on going as long as there's work to be done, and as long as I want to do it. I too want to have a beret, and a belt, and a decent coat to wear to church. And I don't want to see you hopping about in bast-shoes in the winter," Ivan replied.

"We'll go to the melon patch today. They pay cash there as well," the woman reminded him.

"To the melon patch? No, I've had more than enough of that—wasting my life in the melon patch. More than enough! You've brought shame down upon me as it is with that melon patch. Because of you, I'm always called 'spindly legs, or 'watermelon man.'"

"May God punish those who laugh at your poor health, but as for you, my son, you mustn't take on heavy work . . . Surely you remember that last year you fainted when you worked by the winnowing machine? You're frail . . ." the woman sighed.

“There you have it! You’re the one who has defamed me in front of the villagers. You talk to everyone at great length about my health and, as a result, I can hardly show my face among the young people. Do you think it was easy for me to listen to Marko and Maksym make fun of me yesterday? Is it easy for me to know that every child dares to get into a fight with me? And it’s all because of you! I’m the same as all the other young men; I’m the same as the children of other villagers; I’m eighteen years old, but you still want to keep me tied to your apron strings,” Ivan reproached his mother, all the while nervously adjusting the pitchfork and rake on his shoulder.

“I’m going where all the young men of my age are going; I’m going to go and do what they do; I’m going where they pay better money, because I can’t put up with being poor any longer, with walking around the village like a beggar,” he added, growing more and more agitated.

“I’m advising you against going to the manor fields, my dear son, I’m advising you against it . . . Listen to me, Ivan; listen to a mother’s advice,” the woman said, almost breaking down in tears as she tried to block her son’s path to the gate.

“Mother! You didn’t ask my advice when . . .” Ivan did not finish what he was saying. “And I won’t ask your advice now about how I’m to live in this world,” he added, opening the gate.

“You’ll be shamed! They won’t let you . . . The overseer will chase you away!” the woman continued.

“Me?” Ivan asked, and the way he put the question, and the way he looked at her, made the woman’s blood freeze.

Never before had she seen her Ivan in this kind of mood; never before had she heard him speak such hurtful words; and never before had she seen him look so grim. What had happened to him? Who had come between their hearts that, until recently, had understood each other so completely and loved each other so dearly? Who was this cruel enemy that had estranged an unfortunate mother from her only treasure—her son? Was it she who did not know how to convince him today, or was it he who had become hardened? No, she was certain that her words and her fervent tears had penetrated his sensitive heart—she had seen her beloved son’s chest heave as he listened to her in the early morning hours. But, nevertheless, he had not obeyed her . . .

Something terrible, unexpected, must have happened to her son yesterday; something that had bound his thoughts, his soul, and his

heart in a black swaddling cloth, so that now she could no longer understand him.

Yesterday he had come home furious from the village common, flung his cap the length of the room, and gone to sleep without having supper. He tossed around in bed for a long time; then he leapt to his feet, ran outdoors, and wandered for hours in the yard and the orchard, before finally returning to the house and falling asleep just before dawn.

Who knew, who could say, what had happened to him, either on the village common or later that night? Was it a girl's eyes or the bright stars that had touched his soul? Or was it the stinging words of the other young people, or the sound of the restless stream that had awoken new desires, new feelings in the young man's heart? Or was it because he was turning nineteen that he was so irritable?

Ivan walked through the gate without taking his eyes off the road.

At long last, a small group of young people came into view over a rise.

Ivan's heart started thumping, and his cheeks blazed; he had recognised the girl for whom he had been waiting.

The young people—five young herders and three girls—were walking abreast, but a tall stalwart lad, with a new black coat flung over his shoulder, strode a bit ahead, as if he were the leader. Alongside him pattered a short, dark-haired girl with an oblong face and pointy nose. She was trying either to prove something to the young man who was on her left, or to convince him of something, or else she was arguing with him, because she kept glancing at him and gesturing with her hand.

The young man laughingly pointed a few times at Ivan and his cottage, and repeatedly turned around to the youths trailing behind him; in a word, he did not remain still for a moment.

Ivan did not pay much attention to the young man, because he was certain that the youth, instead of voicing his own thoughts, was probably ridiculing both him and his cottage in order to impress his friend Marko and make Onyska, the girl beside him, think more highly of Marko.

It was Marko, a taciturn and gloomy, but confident, young man, that Ivan was much more interested in. He did not say a single word as he walked, and even when he was abreast with Ivan, did not greet him; all the same, Ivan was conscious of the fierce look he gave him—a look that seemed capable of reading all his thoughts . . .

“Good day to you, Ivan,” Onyska greeted him first. “Well, Maksym, didn’t I tell you that Ivan would join us today to work with the threshing gang?” she turned rapidly towards Maksym.

“Can it possibly be true that you—um . . . what is your patronymic?—are coming to thresh with us?” Maksym asked, smiling maliciously. “But will they accept you on the job?” he continued with his questions as he drew nearer to Ivan.

“A spot will be found there for me as well,” Ivan replied, falling in with the group and walking beside Onyska.

“There’s room for everyone—the lord’s threshing floor is huge—but will there be work for you? Can you tell me that?” Marko asked.

“We’ll see,” Ivan replied harshly.

“Just look, my dear brethren, at his pitchfork. Its prongs are twisted like the horns of a carter’s oxen; he’ll stick them into a stack and pick it up in a single stroke . . .” Maksym laughed.

“Is your pitchfork any better? The prongs on it are just like the wormwood in last year’s wreaths,” Onyska defended Ivan.

“It’s a well known fact that you can tell a worker by his pitchfork. Seeing as I’ve never before in my life pitched sheaves or heaped hay into stacks, my pitchfork is a borrowed one as well; but since Ivan is so skilled in pitching sheaves and stacking hay, then his pitchfork is bound to be better.”

“So a pitchfork is borrowed; that’s nothing to laugh at! As long as it isn’t stolen,” Onyska retorted, emphasising the last word.

“My pitchfork truly is stolen,” Maksym responded, not the least bit embarrassed. “And if Ivan weren’t such a scaredy-cat he’d also be quite happy to steal one.”

“I’m not bothering you, so leave me alone!” Ivan spoke up.

“Really, Maksym,” Onyska said, “why are you badgering Ivan? I know that you and Marko are so angry that you could spit that Ivan has come out to work with us and will stand alongside the two of you on the threshing floor. But that can’t be helped—you can’t do anything about it, so your barking is all in vain. And as for you, Ivan, honest to God, I could kiss you for coming to work with the threshing gang today! Yesterday, after you left, these blackguards tried to outdo each other in mimicking you—how you, with your spindly legs, weed the melon patch, how you harvest the watermelons . . . and I . . .”

“Go ahead and kiss him! Go ahead! Just be careful that he doesn’t slobber all over you,” Maksym interrupted her.

“And she isn’t even ashamed to say things like that! Well, go ahead and kiss him as much as you want to, but don’t brag about it, and don’t embarrass the girls,” Marko interjected.

“Don’t glare at me, and don’t shout, because I’m not afraid of you. Everyone knows that no girl will kiss you, but all of them will kiss Ivan. Aren’t I right, girls?” Onyska, winking slyly, turned to face the other girls.

“Of course you’re right!” the girls agreed.

“Of course you’re right!” Maksym chimed in. “Because no one views Ivan as a young man.”

“You’re lying! You’re lying! You’re just saying that because you’re jealous,” Onyska observed.

“Tfu!” Marko spat furiously. “As if there’s nothing better to talk about! May you choke on your Ivan. Satan wore out seven pairs of boots before he brought the two of you together! As if anyone needs you! Let’s walk ahead, Maksym. Come on, fellows—get a move on and leave them alone. God willing, they may manage to crawl to the threshing floor by evening,” he added, forging ahead.

The young people hurried after him, and Onyska and Ivan were left behind.

“See here, Ivan, you better work as hard as you can today, with all your strength, so they won’t laugh at you any more,” Onyska advised Ivan when the others were a few steps ahead of them.

“It doesn’t bother me if they laugh at me; I’ve grown used to being laughed at ever since I was little . . . But yesterday, when I saw you laughing along with the rest of them . . . Well, I still have no idea how I sprang out of the granary.”

“But you were threshing the peas so awkwardly that I still feel like laughing now when I think of it. You raised the flail ever so high, and then slammed it into the peas with all your might; and everyone could see how your arms were trembling from the strain, and you were all out of breath, but the peas just lay there in their shells as if the flail had not even touched them.”

“Do you suppose I was really threshing yesterday? I was just fooling around,” Ivan lied.

“That’s what I told them, but do you think they’d believe me? But you must really try to work hard today, and then they’ll have to shut up. Marko, however, might still badger you, because he’s angry that I’m walking with you . . .” Onyska said softly.

“Do you think I don’t know that?” Ivan responded just as softly.



They did not say another word to each other, but this short conversation left its mark on Ivan. If, up to now, he had still harboured some doubts about himself and his strength, these doubts all disappeared after his talk with Onyska.

## II

Onyska and Ivan walked up a little later than the others, and when they arrived at the threshing floor, the steward, Sydir Stepanovych, was almost finished assigning people to their tasks. Onyska, certain that work would always be found for her, confidently asked where she should go.

“Up there, on the platform,” the steward ordered.

“And where am I to go?” Ivan asked in an overly bold tone as he stepped out in front of the others.

“You? You, my young man, had better wander back to where you came from—and keep in mind what happened last year when the hay was being raked,” the steward laughed.

“I don’t know why we were chased away from the haying field last year, and I don’t understand why you’re chasing me away from the threshing floor,” Ivan said, turning pale.

“You have to ask the lord about it, but I’ve been given an order not to hire either you or your mother, and that’s that,” the steward said, moving away to the steam engine.

“Be so good as to hire me, Sydir Stepanovych,” Ivan pleaded—so softly that Marko and Maksym did not hear him.

“I can’t hire you; leave me in peace,” the steward said firmly, but without any anger.

“He’s asking for work? Then send him to work with the chaff,” Marko advised.

“How can he, such a spindly-legged, wretched watermelon man, work with the chaff? The chaff will choke him in a flash—it’s on a lower plane!” Maksym said, as he followed the steward’s order to pour water from one tank into another.

“Don’t worry, Ivan; we’ll use you instead of a spigot to plug the barrel—we’ve just lost the one we had,” the water carrier, who happened to be Marko’s brother, proposed.

But Ivan pretended he did not hear anything. He stood and waited patiently for the steward to finish telling the drivers from which stack to start hauling the wheat sheaves.

“Where do you want me to go?” Ivan asked once again, as soon as the drivers went away.

“Are you still hovering over my soul?” the steward thundered at him. “I’ve told you more than once that there’s no work for you on the manor fields. What a nuisance!” he turned to the German machinist. “I simply can’t rid myself of this lad; it’s as if he’s intent on annoying me. Make him go away, Karl Khvedorovych!”

The machinist stared at Ivan. “Why he so pale, so skinny?” the German, instead of obeying, asked in his broken Ukrainian.

“That’s just the point; his soul is barely hanging on to his body, but he comes crawling up here to work with the threshing gang.”

“He not eat enough?” the German observed, half asking and half muttering to himself.

“Give me some work to do—any kind of work,” Ivan drew closer to the machinist.

“There’s no work for you here! Get away from here before there’s trouble!” Sydir Stepanovych replied on the German’s behalf.

“Why you say there no work? Oho! There lots of work. There will be work. Lots of work!” the German laughed, amicably slapping the steam engine. “This machine give lots of work. Oho! And there also be work for him,” he said, pointing at Ivan.

“There is no work now, and there never will be any work for you,” the steward said to Ivan. “Go in peace, and don’t bother me.”

“Why he should go? He pale, not have lots to eat; and he want earn some money,” the machinist defended Ivan. “You stand here,” the German pulled Ivan closer in to himself, “and you, big fellow, go pitch sheaves,” he added, vigorously shoving a plump young man away from the firebox.

Ivan smiled happily. Swiftly dropping the pitchfork and rake from his shoulder, he threw off his coat, grabbed an armful of straw, and was about to shove it into the steam engine.

“I’ll beat you up, if you don’t leave of your own free will!” the steward, now thoroughly furious, shouted at him. “You know that the lord forbids you from coming here to the manor, so stay away.”

“Why shout? He work fast,” the German was truly surprised.

“The lord doesn’t let him work in the manor,” the steward said.

“Why he not let? He steal? He drunk? He rude?” the German asked insistently.

“Well, you see . . .” and the steward whispered something in the German’s ear.

“A-a! O-o-o-o?” the machinist drawled, staring at Ivan with bulging grey eyes.

Ivan, unable to bear that look, dropped his eyes to the ground as if he were guilty. A moment passed—a moment that was inexpressibly long and difficult for Ivan. “He’ll chase me away; the German will chase me away as well,” he thought despairingly, with an aching heart, and he did not dare to raise his eyes.

“Go in peace, Ivan! I’d be happy to help you, but I can’t. You’re grown-up now, and you should realise yourself that this isn’t the place for you,” Sydir Stepanovych addressed Ivan in a kinder tone.

“Why he should go? I give Ivan work!” the machinist unexpectedly pulled Ivan closer.

“It can’t be done, Karl Khvedorovych. It just can’t be, so don’t be difficult. It’s . . . well, you know . . . Don’t give him anything to do,” the steward tried to convince him.

“I give Ivan work,” the German said stubbornly, pulling the lad still closer.

“As you wish, Karl Khvedorovych, but take care that the blame doesn’t fall on me.”

“No, no . . . I to blame. I give Ivan work . . . I to blame” the German said cheerfully, striking himself on the chest. “Ivan stoker, and big fellow go pitch sheaves right now,” he ordered and, glancing down at his watch, sounded the whistle for the third time.

The work proceeded at a furious pace. The autumn sun that had barely risen above the horizon greeted the gleaming threshing machine with its first rays. It was the machine’s first day at work, the first test of its capabilities, and it did not hesitate to show its strength. Before an hour had gone by, the workers were exhausted from trying to keep up with the machine’s sharp teeth.

The six girls who were standing on the platform took off their kerchiefs and vests, but they still could not keep up the pace of passing unbound sheaves; the workers feeding the drum were tearing the sheaves out of their hands and throwing them into the drum, shoving in whole armfuls at a time—but the threshing machine demanded that they work even more quickly. The steward was running around, shouting, swearing, and shoving people from one spot to another . . .

A nervous tension gripped the workers; no longer thinking about whether they had the physical strength to do what was expected of them, they overexerted themselves, grew angry, and swore. The

machinist, however, did not sound the whistle and demanded that they hurry even more, because the machine was working at half its capacity. Finally the steward came to his senses.

“Stop the machine for at least a minute, may the devil take it! The straw isn’t piled, there’s chaff scattered all over the threshing floor, and it’s impossible to keep everything going,” Sydir Stepanovych entreated the German.

“Aha! Who have no work?” the German rolled with laughter. “Ivan have no work? Oho! Ivan hair all wet!”

“I’m drenched with sweat as well, not just your Ivan. Stop the damned machine! Never in my life have I seen such a frenzied threshing machine. We have to call in twice as many workers here; I’ll go and get at least a dozen more,” the steward said.

The machinist almost clapped his hands in glee; he was the one who had advised that this particular machine be purchased. Oh yes, let the steward go ahead and call in more workers . . . and he would just fire up the steam engine even more.

“No work? No work for poor Ivan?” the German stopped the machine and turned cheerfully to Ivan. “Now, Ivan, you rest, eat bun; eat it all, and then we thresh some more,” he added as he went off to clean the sieves.

The workers joyfully greeted these first few minutes of rest. The girls sank down on the platform, while the men ran off to shake the prickly chaff from their collars and shirts. Marko was the first one to quit working. Pitching sheaves up to the platform is always a difficult and distasteful job, but this time it seemed ten times harder and more disagreeable. All the time that he was pitching sheaves, Marko did not forget for a moment that not only was Ivan working on the threshing floor, but that he had a much easier job. And it was this thought that lay like a stone in his heart, robbed his arms of strength, and added weight to every sheaf he pitched.

As soon as the threshing machine came to a stop, Marko ran up to the steam engine. “So? Are we still alive and well? We haven’t ruptured ourselves with the fluffy straw, have we?” he immediately attacked Ivan.

“We’re still frisky, praise God; the German has sustained us with a bun,” Maksym, jumping in to support Marko, taunted Ivan.

“Perhaps you would take some pity on us and pitch a few sheaves? Come evening, you’ll get pay that’s equal to ours, so don’t you want to do equal work?” Marko badgered Ivan again.

“A girl or a young boy should be standing over here, by the steam engine—so Ivan should be paid the same as the girls,” Maksym said.

“Are you the one who’s paying me? Is it your money?” Ivan was seething.

“It doesn’t matter that it’s not my money; anyone would be annoyed by such an injustice. We’re working ourselves to death for the sake of a *poltynnnyk* [*fifty cents*], and you’re getting the same wage for fooling around,” Maksym observed.

“But do you know what’s making me most angry, my brothers? He’s shoving straw into the firebox, and in the evening he’ll go to the village common and start bragging: ‘I worked on the threshing floor today and I earned a *poltynnnyk* just like all the other young men,’” Marko said as he lit a cigarette by the steam engine.

“If only Onyska could see him at work,” Marko’s brother added.

“What if she did? She would only say: ‘He’s not to blame that he was placed here; he worked where he was told to work,’” Marko responded.

“Why are you badgering me? What do you want? Get away from here before I crack someone’s head open,” Ivan yelled.

“Well, how about that! He hasn’t been with the threshing machine all that long—it isn’t even time for breakfast yet—but he’s already making threats,” Maksym laughed.

“I’m telling you—go away before I commit a sin,” Ivan grew even more furious.

“What you do here? Why you no rake straw, chaff? Go work!” the German, who came up just then, shouted at the young men.

“Karl Khvedorovych! Ivan is pleading for a chance to pitch sheaves; let him go, and put one of the girls in his place,” Marko turned unexpectedly to the machinist.

“Why Ivan want sheaves?” the German asked in surprise.

“He doesn’t want to stand here any longer—it must be boring for him here.”

“Why boring?” the German was even more nonplussed.

“You see, he’s ashamed that even though he’s such a robust young man, he has to stand by the steam engine. Let him pitch sheaves, Karl Khvedorovych; just look, his eyes are filling with tears,” Marko said without so much as blinking an eye.

The German looked at Ivan’s pale, troubled face that was blotched with red spots. “You bored? Want pitch sheaves, Ivan? Well, go; go on,” the German agreed.

The machinist's last words were drowned by general laughter.

"You happy?" the German read his own meaning into the laughter.

"You happy Ivan work with you?"

"Oh yes, oh yes!" Marko and Maksym picked up on his words.

"We missed Ivan, Karl Khvedorovych."

Ivan picked up his pitchfork and walked over to the stack of sheaves . . .

In the meantime, the steward returned from the village with a dozen or so workers. Before long the threshing floor was cleaned up, and the German started up the steam engine once again. One of the new girls was assigned to help the girls on the platform, and two of the young men climbed up on the stack of sheaves. Marko, trying to ensure that Ivan got the hardest job, purposely stood up front, forcing Ivan to take up a position next to him.

"Girls! Look at the fine worker I've brought you! Now there won't be any time wasted waiting for sheaves. Onyska, have a look! See who I've lugged here!" Marko shouted, delighted with his revenge.

"Ivan is going to pitch sheaves? God help us!" the girls seized on his words.

"What's so strange about Ivan pitching sheaves? Marko, and Dorosh, and Stepan, and even Spyrydon are going to be pitching them as well—and that doesn't surprise you. You're only surprised at Ivan," Onyska defended Ivan. "Begin pitching them now, Ivan, so that you get a head start. You pitch to Motrya, and Marko will pitch to me."

"Do you think I won't be able to keep up, or what?" Marko laughed.

"We'll see," Onyska said haughtily, turning away from Marko.

Ivan stuck his pitchfork into a sheaf and tossed it with all his might. The sheaf flew over the threshing machine and landed on a girl's head.

"Who the devil is flinging them so hard?" screamed the girl that Ivan had happened to hit.

"Hush! Be tolerant, all ye who are baptised—Ivan is pitching sheaves," Marko proclaimed to all the workers on the threshing floor.

"That's enough of your loud-mouthing! Why are you laughing at him? Oh my, you're such a good worker yourself!" said Khvedir, an older man who was turning over sheaves by the stack.

"You'd do better to trade places with Ivan, if you're really such a master pitcher. You stand on this side, and let Ivan stand out of the

wind, so it will be easier for him,” added Stepan, one of the older peasants.

“Well, come on you, whatever your patronymic is; take my place,” Marko, somewhat embarrassed, said to Ivan.

But Ivan did not budge.

“Don’t be foolish, Ivan; don’t pay any attention to Marko. Move over to where the people are telling you to go,” Onyska said, walking demonstratively to the other side of the platform.

Ivan, left with no choice, had to move as well, and took his place across from Motrya.

The work began. Ivan started pitching sheaves. At first, the sheaves did not feel all that heavy; in fact, there were moments when he was so angry that he did not even feel their weight. But, a little later, as the stack grew lower, and his anger abated, the sheaves became noticeably heavier, and occasionally they flipped off his pitchfork. All the same, he kept up with Motrya, and never once did he hear her call out: “More sheaves!”

Marko, however, found himself in a difficult bind. First, it was difficult to pitch the sheaves against the wind, and second, Onyska did not give him a minute to catch his breath.

“Sheaves! More sheaves!” she shouted as soon as she noticed that Marko wanted to rest for a minute.

“Here, stuff yourself with them, you glutton!” Marko laughed, hurling the sheaves, but he felt that his strength was ebbing fast.

“You’re puffing, already? Taking a breather? Resting? You’re fagged out already?” Marko asked Ivan angrily, when he saw that Ivan truly was exhausted and wanted to rest. “I’m not going to work for two people; I’m going to complain to the steward.”

“But Motrya isn’t wasting any time; she has enough sheaves,” Ivan replied, and he himself did not know how he had managed to pitch such a pile of sheaves.

“Sheaves! More sheaves!” Onyska stamped her feet.

Marko could not stop working long enough even to mop his sweaty brow.

Ivan pitched one sheaf, then a second one, and a third, and then again took a breather.

“Resting again?” Marko observed.

“Sheaves! More sheaves!” Onyska shouted.

Marko boiled over. A moment later Onyska was almost covered to her head with sheaves.

“Are you happy now, you glutton?” Marko asked Onyska as he sat down on the stack to rest for a minute.

“Sheaves! More sheaves!” Onyska called out a minute later.

Marko sprang to his feet. “What’s going on? What are you doing with the sheaves? Oh! So that’s it!” he finally realised. “You’re shoving my sheaves to Motrya, are you? Oh no! I won’t let this go on any longer! So that was your plan! Ivan’s lollygagging, and I’m doing his work . . . Come on, you miserable wretch—pitch, pitch the sheaves, if you’ve come here to work!” he attacked Ivan.

“But I am,” Ivan answered, jabbing his pitchfork into a sheaf.

“He’s been pitching the whole time; I always had enough sheaves,” Motrya also came to Ivan’s defence.

“I know; I saw how he was pitching! Well, now I won’t let you get away with so much as a single sheaf! Keep up with me, if you’re earning the same amount of money. Onyska! If you give even one of my sheaves to Motrya, I’ll stop working.”

“As if someone needed your sheaves! Ivan’s pitching enough sheaves to keep us both busy,” Onyska responded, barely able to contain her laughter.

In the meantime, Ivan took off his cap, shed his coat, and began hurling the sheaves as fast as he could.

“What did I say? Huh? Look how many sheaves Motrya has! I don’t have half as many as she has,” Onyska teased Marko, who was, by now, sullen and absolutely infuriated.

“We’ll see how things will be later on!” he muttered. “We’ll see how they’ll be!”

“Everything will be just fine,” Onyska said with certainty.

Ivan was also certain that “everything would be just fine.” Really, why was Marko badgering him like that? After all, he was pitching sheaves! There were six youths standing on either side of the threshing machine and doing the same work; it was more difficult for those who were on the other side, because the stack was lower there . . . Marko also had a more difficult task, pitching sheaves against the wind—and he was pitching almost as many sheaves as two workers could pitch. Nonetheless, everyone was keeping up and doing the same amount of work. Why was it that only he could not keep up with his share of the sheaves?

“So, that’s what you’re up to, my fine fellow,” Ivan thought, “you want to shame me in front of everyone, especially in front of Onyska; but I won’t let you do that.”



About half an hour went by.

Motrya did not have to call out even once to Ivan for more sheaves. Onyska was also silent, but whenever she caught Ivan's eye, she would wink and nod slyly at Marko. Marko was silent—as if he had a mouth full of water; intent on making sure that none of his sheaves ended up with Motrya, he did not turn around or talk to anyone.

Suddenly, something happened to Ivan. His head began to swim, he saw red . . . felt a stabbing pain once . . . and then a second time on his left side . . . and a needle pierced his heart. "I need to rest a bit," the thought flashed through his head.

"Don't puff and snort! Keep on pitching!" Marko hissed.

"Right away . . . I'll keep on pitching," Ivan answered, and he seemed to recover slightly upon hearing these words.

"Pitch! I'm not going to work for you again! Everyone has sheaves, everyone except you!" Marko said again.

Ivan glanced up at the platform and saw that Motrya really did not have any sheaves, and Onyska was looking at him with inexpressible fear in her eyes . . .

"Go on! Pitch!" Marko thundered at him.

Ivan took a deep breath, conquered the stabbing pain, and once again began pitching sheaves; pitching and pitching the detested sheaves . . .

### III

It looked as if the steward had nothing to complain about now; there was no delay with the hempen sacks, or the water, or the straw. The workers, who were spread all over the threshing area, took care of every blade of straw, every bit of chaff, every kernel of grain.

But Sydir Stepanovych was walking about looking quite unhappy. Why had he bothered to rise before dawn, why had he taken the trouble to run around the village and gallop out to the farmsteads looking for workers if the one for whose benefit he was working did not come out for even a minute and thank him for a job well done. It was almost high noon, but the master still had not come out. It was in vain that the steward ran out to the threshing floor to see if he was in sight, and it was all for naught that he sent workers to the manor to fetch this or that, or to remind the lord that the threshing was being done—the lord still did not show up.

But the lord's mind was not on the threshing just now. Pale and immeasurably worried, he was pacing back and forth in his spacious study, and it seemed that he did not see anything, or understand anything, or remember anything, except for the one thought that possessed him.

On a wide Turkish couch covered with a velvet tapestry sat a doctor. He was also silent, but his calm face indicated that he did not share the lord's concerns at all, did not understand him, and was waiting impatiently for the moment when the lord would finally calm down and put an end to this long, unpleasant, and incomprehensible situation.

"Excuse me," the doctor said at last, rising from the couch. "Unfortunately, I am unable to remain here any longer. It's nine o'clock, and I must see to my patients in my clinic today."

"I beg you, my good sir, stay for a little while longer; don't leave me. You can see the kind of mood I'm in. I had placed so much faith in you . . . Moreover, I want to get your advice on a matter that is more important to me than life itself," Petro Ivanovych pleaded.

"I assure you that your son's angina attack will pass in a couple of days. But then, if you don't believe me, consult another doctor."

"That's not what's troubling me; that's not it at all!" Petro Ivanovych interrupted him. "I've forgotten all about the angina."

"In that case, I am at a loss as to how I can help you," the doctor observed.

"I beg you, please be seated and spare me a half hour of your time, and then you'll be convinced that I do have a reason for requesting you to remain, that I have a truly serious matter to discuss with you—a doctor, an intelligent young person."

The doctor put down his cap and sat down again.

"You must have noticed, my good sir, that in the midst of your examination, my son stopped speaking in mid-word and lost consciousness for a brief moment . . ."

"Yes, I did notice that, but I did not attach any great significance to it, because it seems to me that your son is a sturdy lad who cannot complain of any problem with his nerves."

"You're wrong, my good sir, you're wrong!" Petro Ivanovych responded despairingly. "This is the third time that he has fainted, and today I became convinced that what I had feared even to think about is, in fact, the bitter truth—I am certain that my Serhiy is an epileptic."

“Perhaps you’re overly hasty with your diagnosis?” the doctor suggested.

“No, no! To my great grief and misfortune, I am not wrong. Fierce, unmerciful nature did not want to retreat even a step from its laws for the sake of my hapless son, and so it did not spare him, the poor fellow . . .”

“Are you saying that epilepsy runs in your family?” the doctor inquired.

“This illness has been a curse on my family from the time of my most distant ancestors . . . It has not skipped anyone, and it is only rarely that it has not cut a life in half. Our entire family is aware of this. I travelled abroad, sought advice from doctors, took treatments, and, for a long time, I did not dare to marry because I was convinced that the burden of this terrible illness would not spare my children. And then, when I turned thirty, my epilepsy disappeared. I felt as if I were reborn, but I still took care not to get married for another eight years. Finally, however, I stooped to the most dastardly, loathsome act—I got married and sired an unfortunate epileptic. Just imagine how I feel now; try to understand the torments besieging my conscience!”

“Oh!” the doctor hastened to soothe the distraught lord. “It’s quite common! At your age, parents bequeath their children far more illnesses than money.”

“It’s quite common, is it? Well, my good sir, all sorts of crime, and murder, as well, are also quite common; but I’m sure that if I, influenced by vengeance or some other evil instinct, chopped off someone’s leg or arm, or if I harmed an enemy of mine in some way, you would be the first to pass judgement on me and refuse to associate with me any longer . . . And if, for example, you knew that I, having a contagious illness, wanted to go out in public, you would say that it was your obligation to prevent me from doing so. Why do parents enjoy special privileges in this respect? Who gave parents the right to sentence their children to a life of suffering by passing on to them their weak hearts, tuberculosis, or epilepsy? How can you, a doctor, a scientist, refer to such deeds as being quite common?”

“I sympathise with you completely, Petro Ivanovych,” the doctor said. “I did not understand you at first. We doctors, more than anyone else, see the grief and the terrible consequences of parental carelessness, the victims of which fill our hospital prisons and our

homes for the insane. You, at least, together with the illness he has inherited, are also leaving your son a fortune to inherit; you are safeguarding the life of your sick child; you are giving him the possibility to live in circumstances compatible with his weak organism. But there are ever so many parents who, having passed on to their child a weak organism, abandon that child to hunger and to the cold, demanding that the child struggle when it is not even capable of leading an ordinary, untroubled existence.”

“Oh well! That goes without saying!” Petro Ivanovych remarked. “If I did not have the means to ensure the well-being of my own child, I certainly would not have married. But, you see . . .” he continued, “it does not suffice to secure a sick child like my son financially; he requires mental peace above all else.”

“Well, that does not depend on you,” the doctor said.

“To some extent it does depend on me,” Petro Ivanovych observed. “Judging by myself, I know how much our life, the life of intelligent people, depends on this or that ideal, on this or that world view. For example, for my entire life, I was a martyr, thanks to the fact that my father, a man in his forties, raised me according to the ideals of his younger years.”

“And so?”

“I want to protect my son from wasting his strength and energy on a useless struggle with life. I’ve come up with a plan for raising my son, and I will be so bold as to ask you for some help.”

“How can I assist you in this matter?” the doctor asked.

“You’ve finished university quite recently and, more than likely, you stay in contact with some of your colleagues. Be so good as to give me the name of someone who could rear my son. This person must, first of all, raise my son to be an impassive stoic who will always remain calm, be it in times of grief, or of joy. And, even more, for the sake of tranquillity, for the sake of the health of my son—for which I will have to answer to my conscience for the rest of my life—I am prepared to abandon my dearest principles and to greet most happily a person who will teach my son not to notice, or at least, not to pay attention to evil, falsehoods, or any other repugnant behaviour; in a word, to ignore everything that might upset his sick nerves.”

“Well, I can assure you that you won’t find an educated man like that,” the doctor laughed. “It’s highly unlikely that an intelligent, truly educated person would agree to such a program of egotistical

indifference. I think that in time, after you calm down, you yourself will abandon it. But, in any event, no matter what kind of a program your grief might inspire, I shall always recall the pleasure of being acquainted with you, and I say with a sincere heart that you are an ideal father. If we had more fathers like you, people who are so highly principled, with such a confident, clear view of a father's responsibilities with respect to the fate of his child, then within half a century the number of ill people, criminals, lunatics, and generally unfortunate persons would decrease by at least a quarter . . ."

"Serhiy would like to eat . . . Do you wish to have him given something, or shall he wait?" Petro Ivanovych's wife, a young, round-faced woman, asked as she walked into the study.

"No, let him wait until ten o'clock," Petro Ivanovych replied, glancing at his watch.

"Do you also look after his food yourself?" the doctor asked with some surprise.

"His food, his clothes, his temperature—he looks after everything himself. As a mother, I have almost nothing to do." the lady remarked cheerfully.

"I just called your husband an ideal father. To my great joy, I am finding out with every passing minute that I have not erred," the doctor addressed the lady.

"It was his fear of assuming the rigorous duties of a father that kept him a bachelor until he was forty," the lady commented.

"The horses are ready," a maid announced.

The doctor rose to say his farewells.

"I didn't finish the matter we were discussing . . . You're in such a hurry," the lord complained.

"I'll be happy to discuss it with you another time. You have broached a topic about which much can be said. But I can't stay any longer. Forgive me," the doctor said as he headed for the vestibule.

Petro Ivanovych accompanied him to the vestibule. "I beg you, if you have a good book about epilepsy, please lend it to me; I won't keep it for long," the lord requested.

"I wouldn't advise you to read medical books," the doctor jokingly remarked.

"No, no! I have to call upon everything to help me—money, upbringing, medicine—in order to ease my conscience at least a bit," the lord said passionately. "It's hard, you know, inexpressibly hard to see yourself as an enemy of your own child," he added after a

moment, turning to the window, in front of which a pair of marvellous grey horses harnessed to a spanking new landau had been waiting for some time now.

"The machinist has sent for the doctor!" a boy shouted unexpectedly under the window.

"What for?" the lord asked.

"A young man is dying!" the boy said,

"What young man? Where is he?"

"On the threshing floor; he was pitching sheaves; he fainted, fell down, and now he's dying," the boy said somewhat hesitantly.

"What young man?" the lord asked again.

"I don't know . . . It might be Ivan, the son of Stepanyda."

"I'm going to be late in getting to see my patients today, but it can't be helped. I must make haste to the threshing floor," the doctor said, hurriedly donning his coat.

"No, no . . . don't trouble yourself about that lad—it happens quite often with him. He hasn't been well for a long time . . . We have a hospital nearby; I'll have him taken there," Petro Ivanovych hastened to reassure the doctor. "There's no point in your wasting your time with him. And as for you," he turned to the young boy and immediately changed his tone, "call the steward to me! Tell him to drop everything and come here at once!"

The doctor thought that the lord spoke the last few words in far too stern a voice. As the boy raced off to call the steward, the doctor calmly settled into the landau and drove out of the yard.

#### IV

The landau turned to go behind the orchard, passed the threshing floor, and drove out onto the steep bank of a narrow, but deep, clear river. The doctor leaned against the pillows of the equipage and lit a cigarette. He was feeling exceptionally relaxed on this sunny autumn morning. Was it the wonderful panorama of the river, the windmills, and the village with its orchards that stretched in a long ribbon along the river? Or was it the cloudless sky that, blending in the distance with the green forest, appeared to create a frame for this favoured corner where the people most certainly lived peacefully under the downy wing of such an erudite, such a humane person, as the lord, Petro Ivanovych? Or was it the fresh still air of a lovely morning, or the chance encounter and brief chat with the "ideal"

father that made such an impression on the youthful, sensitive soul of the doctor? Most probably it was the father, the lord who, with his words and his philosophical conceptions so rarely heard in these times, had evoked in him this blissful mood; and as for the sky, the air, the village, and the river—they were all simply aesthetic embellishments of the impression made by the lord himself; they were the wreath that nature had created to adorn a person who recognised, admitted, and assumed, as his obligation, the need to keep nature's immutable laws in mind.

“Tprrr!” the driver unexpectedly drew in the reins.

“What is it?” the doctor asked.

“Someone's calling us! I think it's the German who's running over here,” the driver pointed in the direction from where the noise of a threshing machine resounded.

Truly, a man dressed in white and waving a handkerchief was racing to catch up with the landau.

“He's shouting something, but I can't understand anything,” the driver said. “But then, even when he's next to me, I can't understand him,” he added.

“I think he's calling me,” the doctor said.

“Maybe he is; it must be about that Ivan.”

“Mr. Doctor, Mr. Doctor!” the call reached the doctor's ears.

“Yes, he's calling you; things must be bad with Ivan, because the German won't run just for anything at all,” the driver remarked.

The doctor jumped down from the landau and hurried over to meet the machinist.

“Mr. Doctor! Ivan dying! For God's sake, come quick!” the German, flushed and wheezing, gasped after greeting him.

“Petro Ivanovych said that he would be taken to a hospital right away,” the doctor said, trying to get out of the situation.

“Ivan dying! Never you mind hospital . . . Please, Mr. Doctor! Please . . . one second . . .” the German pleaded, breathing heavily and wiping large beads of sweat from his forehead.

“Oh, it's really too bad that I don't have the time!” the doctor seemed to be muttering to himself.

“Please, please, one second!” the German entreated him more strongly and turned to go back to the threshing floor. The doctor followed him. The German went straight through the ditches to the threshing floor and came to a stop by a narrow passageway between two stacks of rye.

“He throw sheaf . . . fall . . . and convulsion . . . Now, thank God, no more convulsion, only faint!” Karl Khvedorovich said, dropping to his knees beside Ivan, who was lying unconscious on the ground.

The doctor examined the lad. “Where have I seen him before?” The thought flashed through the doctor’s head. “I’m positive that I’ve seen this high, slightly sloped forehead, and this slender pointed nose, and this cleft chin, and even this blond curly hair that insists on falling into his eyes. But where? When?”

“He’s doing a little better now; he may have fallen asleep, but, a minute ago it was so terrible that may the Queen of Heaven protect us from it! We thought that he had crippled himself forever; his legs and arms were cramping, and his face was all twisted to one side,” Khvedir said as he pulled sheaves down from a cart.

“Oh! Awful convulsion!” the German added. “Legs, arms, head. He be fine now? No more convulsion?” he asked the doctor after he had calmed down a little.

But, before the doctor could answer, Ivan’s arms and legs jerked once again, his whole body shuddered, his eyes crossed and filled with blood, and a dark ball of foam spewed from his mouth.

“More convulsion!” Karl Khvedorovich shouted in despair.

“Quick! Get some chloroform,” the doctor ordered.

“Chloroform! Run, run quick, lord give you some!” Karl Khvedorovich ordered, passing a scrap of paper with writing on it to the driver, who had just come up.

“He’s probably going to die! Just look—the poor fellow’s shaking even more than before,” Stepan commented from a nearby stack.

“It’s probably happened to him before, hasn’t it?” the doctor asked the older men as he covered Ivan’s face with the machinist’s handkerchief.

“No, we’ve never seen anything like it. He’s been sickly right from birth; if he got upset or worked too hard, he’d faint right away. But there’s never been a sign of the black illness,” Stepan replied.

“Today he worked harder than he could—he wanted to show the young people that he was capable of keeping up with them, but I guess the pace got to him,” Khvedir said.

“And that was some work he did, for God’s sake—did he pitch even as much as a *kopa* [sixty sheaves] to the platform of the threshing machine? My son Opanas is younger, but he’s been pitching sheaves to his heart’s content since early morning,” Stepan spoke up once again.



“Was it only your Opanas who was pitching sheaves? What about Marko, and Korniy, and Tymofiy—they’re all the same age as Opanas and they’re doing the same work. Work’s not a problem, if you’re healthy!” Khvedir responded.

“That’s just the point! But this hapless Ivan doesn’t have any meat on his bones, or any strength, or even a patronymic! Look how skinny he is,” Stepan said, climbing down from the stack.

“Yes, yes! He weak, very weak. No fat, no meat!” the German seized on Stepan’s words, sighed heavily, and pointed at Ivan’s bared, heaving chest.

And, in actual fact, there could be no talk of fat or meat on his bones. His organism, that had to earn every scrap of bread for itself with heavy work, was comprised of exceptionally fine bones—too fine for a simple peasant—that were held in place by a taut sallow skin, dry as parchment, a network of dark blood vessels with venal blood, and ruined, sick nerves.

“Turn the oxen around, Khvedir, and take Ivan to the hospital,” the steward, seemingly angry about something, shouted unexpectedly as he approached the sick young man.

“No, no!” Karl Khvedorovych protested loudly. “He sick; he have convulsion.”

“That’s enough, Karl Khvedorovych! I’ll never listen to you again! Thanks to you, I’ve already had a tongue-lashing from the lord because of Ivan.”

“I take Ivan; I tell lord myself!” the German said, striking himself on the chest.

“Turn the oxen around and take him to the hospital right now,” the steward repeated a second time, paying no attention to either the German’s protests, or the increasing intensity of Ivan’s convulsions.

“I will not permit Ivan to be touched until he calms down completely and comes to,” the doctor said testily.

“There’s Matviy—he’s coming with the medicine,” a little girl spoke up from the crowd of children that had gathered by the stack to stare at the sick young man.

“Well, quick, quick! Give it quick!” Karl Khvedorovych shouted at the boy who was approaching the threshing floor.

“I don’t have anything!” the boy replied, raising his hands up high as if to prove that they were empty.

“What do you mean, you don’t have anything? Why are you lying? Did you lose the paper?” the doctor asked furiously.

"No, I gave the paper to the lord, and he read it, but he didn't give me anything. 'I'm sure they'll give him what he needs in the hospital,' he said. 'Tell the machinist to get back to work.'"

"Did you tell the lord that I was on the threshing floor, that it was I, the doctor, who sent you?" the doctor asked the boy.

"No, I didn't."

"Just as I thought! I beg you, Khvedir, run to the manor . . . I'll write a note to the lord right now. But please hurry, because the lad's getting worse. Tell the lord . . ."

"Stepan is younger—let him go!" Khvedir interrupted the doctor.

"You're being sent, so go!" Stepan also tried to get out of going.

"Both go! Go together, run quick!" the German ordered.

But neither Stepan nor Khvedir would budge.

"What is this? Have you gone deaf, or what? I'm telling you—go quickly to the lord!" the doctor thundered at the men.

The men scratched their heads, exchanged glances, and, as if they had conspired together, vanished behind a stack.

The doctor leapt to his feet in a rage: "Well, really! What is this? These aren't people—they're savage animals! You—steward! Order your workers to go to the manor."

"They won't go," the steward replied.

"What do you mean, they won't go? Then you go. Do you understand that a young man is dying on your threshing floor?"

"I don't have time to go; I have my work cut out for me as well," the steward blurted out before disappearing himself.

"Pig! Beast! I show you! I . . ." Karl Khvedorovych was about to run after the steward, but instantly coming to his senses, he turned back. "I go right now! I quick!" he said to the doctor, and a moment later he was out of sight beyond the stack.

The doctor was left alone with Ivan. The threshing machine was screeching for sheaves; over the entire steppe, people and animals were busy working with long stacks of wheat. A group of tanned, flushed, healthy children, having had their fill of looking at Ivan, went off to play in the neighbouring meadow. Large stacks of straw seemed to be appearing out of nowhere before the doctor's eyes; every minute, carts with hempen sacks, wagons, and drivers passed by him; everything all around was teeming with work, with life. And it seemed to the doctor that Ivan's suffering and his convulsions were nothing more than the response of a weak organism to the mood and the movements of the healthy people surrounding him.

Who was this young man? Did he have any family, or was he an orphan? Was it the father or the mother who had bestowed on their unfortunate son an organism that was so ill-suited for labour? Did they understand the immensity of the sin they had committed against him? It was highly unlikely!

And the doctor recalled the tranquil bed of his little patient, Serhiy; he recalled the anxious, troubled face of Petro Ivanovych hovering over his son's bed, and he recalled every word of his brief but sincere conversation with the "ideal" father. Oh, if only there were more such fathers in this world!

Something rustled in the straw behind him, and the doctor turned around.

A girl was peeking out hesitantly from behind one of the stacks. She cast a single, immeasurably sad and frightened glance at Ivan and, as if embarrassed, vanished instantly.

"Onyska!" someone shouted from the threshing machine.

The straw rustled, and the girl ran off.

Ivan was growing weaker with every passing minute. The convulsions that had abated temporarily returned with an even greater intensity. The doctor spread whatever he could find at hand under Ivan's head, placed unbound sheaves under his arms, and waited impatiently for the German.

"Blow whistle! No more thresh!" the German shouted unexpectedly. He jumped over a ditch and, a moment later, a jar with chloroform flew past the stack and landed right by the doctor.

The threshing machine stopped abruptly. The workers stood as if they were petrified; the girls stood stock-still with sheaves in their arms, the men froze with their pitchforks raised high in the air, the drivers halted as if they were stuck in the ground, and the water haulers stared at their tubs but did not see that they were already overflowing with water.

It was only Karl Khvedorovych who did not appear to notice the effect that his words were having, and so he hollered even more loudly and tried even harder to stop all the work.

"What's going on? What's this all about, Karl Khvedorovych?" the steward rushed up in alarm to the machinist.

"I no thresh! I no more thresh! You no go for sheaves, no dare pitch sheaves!" Karl Khvedorovych, raging as if he had lost his mind, ran among the stunned silent workers and tore sheaves, pitchforks, and armloads of straw from their hands.

“What’s happened? Is the threshing machine broken, or has the master ordered us to stop threshing?” the steward insisted on knowing.

“Karl Khvedorovych no want thresh! Karl Khvedorovych no want work for such landowner! Karl Khvedorovych no take money from such man . . . He nasty man—that lord Maryenkov! Go away! Everyone go away! No one work on threshing floor!” the German yelled even more loudly and rushed up to the scales where some workers were weighing wheat. The men stepped back, and the hempen sack fell to the ground. The German jumped over the spilled grain, ran across a pile of chaff spread on a tarp, and dashed right up to where Ivan was lying.

“He quiet now? He sleep? I take him with me; I make him tradesman, poor Ivan,” the German said as he looked at Ivan, who was lying motionless, stretched out to his full length.

“Ivan is dead; he could not withstand the final convulsions!” the doctor said sadly, laying bare the young man’s face that was all black and blue.

“He die! Ivan die?” the German asked in an altered voice.

“He’s dead,” the doctor repeated a second time.

“O-o-o-o!” Karl Khvedorovych exclaimed, and stood dumbstruck. “Steward! Steward, get cart! Right now—cart! I just from manor. Mr. Doctor! Mr. Doctor! You know? You hear? This Ivan . . . This skinny, this pale . . . this sick Ivan—he son of lord Maryenkov! Yes! Yes! Son of lord!”

The doctor leapt to his feet and ran his eyes in astonishment over the people who were now crowding around Ivan.

“Is this true?” he asked.

“Of course, it’s true! Ivan’s mother Stepanyda served as a chambermaid in the manor before he got married . . . and that’s where she got her son,” Khvedir said.

“And that’s why we were scared to go and ask for medicine for Ivan. Do you think we wouldn’t have gone . . . if it hadn’t been for . . . you know . . . that?” Stepan added.

The doctor did not say another word, but now he knew whose face he was reminded of when he had first seen Ivan as he lay dying. Now he knew which father had endowed his son with such an organism—the “ideal” father had generously shared his weak organism, his ruined nerves, and his unfit heart with his older son; he had even given him his features and his lordly nature, neglecting

to leave only a trifling matter—his wealth and his fatherly obligations, all of which he had left instead to his “legal” children.

“Your horses are ready,” the steward reminded the doctor.

“Thank the master for his kindness—I’ll go on the cart, but first, Ivan has to be taken home.”

Khvedir ran to his cart, spread it with straw, and a moment later the hapless son of the “ideal” father was placed on the cart and taken to the neighbouring cottage where his mother lived.

“Well, it’s time for us to go as well,” the doctor turned to Karl Khvedorovych who was scribbling something on a scrap of paper torn out of his notebook.

“I write landowner . . . I send for luggage tomorrow . . . I leave everything. I leave thirty-five rubles in manor . . . Yes, yes! Karl Khvedorovych no want money of landowner Maryenkov. Let him give money other son!”

“Are you saying he has another son?”

“Yes, yes! Every village—another son!”

## *Darochka*

(1903)

Before a large mirror framed in black wood stood a tall, blond girl of nineteen. Her charming, delicate face was strikingly radiant, her dark grey eyes shone, and a smile trembled on her lips.

She positioned herself directly in front of the mirror, struck a sideways pose, spun around to examine herself over her shoulder and, with every movement, became more and more pleased with her new white dress embroidered with silver. And she smiled with increasing delight at the two bronze cupids that propped up her lamp from both sides and admonished her impishly from the mirror.

A little to one side, leaning on an armchair, stood an older, dignified lady. She too appeared to be immensely pleased and completely satisfied, but her glance fell only rarely and momentarily on the elegant dress. The lady kept her eyes on the delighted face of her beloved only daughter, who truly glowed with an exceptional beauty this evening.

“It’s a marvellous, simply marvellous dress! Mummy dearest, perhaps there’s something you would like to adjust on me?” the young lady finally asked after a lengthy silence. And, taking a few steps backwards on the soft, velvet carpet, she pivoted in front of her mother.

“There’s nothing to be adjusted. Everything is beautiful the way it is, and the dress looks wonderful on you!” the older lady replied.

“Do you think so?” the young lady asked. She walked up to the mirror once again, as if she did not believe her mother’s words and wanted to verify them herself.

“It looks wonderful on you!” the lady repeated as she followed her daughter with her eyes. “It’s even more attractive than the blue dress.”

“Really? That’s very good, because I’m awfully tired of the blue one . . . Mummy dearest, what should I wear on my neck?”

“You’ll put on some pearls and nothing more. Jewels won’t look good with this dress. But your hair will have to be powdered a trifle,

and you'll have to change your earrings," the lady noted, passing a jewellery box to her daughter.

Darochka lifted out the pearls, put on the smallest earrings, just as her mother had advised, smoothed her fine eyebrows, powdered her hair and, finally, after dabbing her face and hands with cologne, turned to the table on which some flowers were lying.

At that very moment, the heavy curtain draped over half of the doorway began to swing.

"Who's there?" both of the ladies asked in surprise.

"It's me," someone replied softly, in a high-pitched, tiny voice.

Darochka raised the curtain.

In the doorway stood a young woman. It was Maryana, the seamstress who had embroidered the dress with silver thread.

"Are you still here?" the young lady asked in surprise. Turning to her mother, she said reproachfully: "Mother, you must have forgotten to thank her."

"No, no, thank you! Your mother has rewarded me most generously," the seamstress hastened to assure Darochka and, stepping forward a few steps, she opened her palm, revealing a gleaming silver *karbovanets* [dollar]. "I didn't come because of that. I simply wanted to have a look at the dress."

"Well, in that case, come closer. Thanks to you, the dress is marvellous. I couldn't imagine a more beautiful one," Darochka said, moving forward into the light.

"Oh, no, don't say that!" the girl sighed unexpectedly. "I wouldn't have sewn it like that, if it were up to me. The veil should have been spread quite widely and caught with only a single embroidered figure, instead of in three places, so that it would encircle the skirt like a wreath. Much more lace trim should have been used on the bodice, and I would have scattered tiny sequins over the entire skirt, so they would glitter like tiny specks of frost on the snow."

"Actually, that would be better," the older lady observed.

"Oh! I would make the most wonderful dress ever, if it were up to me!" the girl added more boldly, delighted that the older lady had understood and approved of her idea. "This dress is worthy of more effort. I did put in extra time, both in the early dawn and late at night, and I really strained my eyes, but I still couldn't get it just right."

Turning to her mother, Darochka urged: "Mother! Give her another *karbovanets*."

The older lady moved her hand towards her pocket.

"No, no, that's not necessary! Thank you! That isn't what I meant! You haven't taken advantage of me, young lady. I was just trying to please my mistress, to finish the dress as quickly as possible . . ."

"Here's something additional for your work. Thank you very much," the older lady said, holding out a *karbovanets* to her.

"I won't take it. Really, I won't take it! Thank you! Really, that wasn't why I said what I did," the girl blushed and put her hands behind her back.

"As you wish," the older woman sounded displeased as she dropped the *karbovanets* back into her wallet.

The conversation ceased abruptly. Darochka began to frown. This unexpected incident with the *karbovanets* had disturbed her.

"I'm going to go and find your aunt now and hurry her along, because it's time you were leaving!" the older lady said, and she walked briskly out of the room.

The atmosphere in the boudoir became even heavier. The seamstress was standing like a statue in the middle of the room; Darochka, still pensive, was selecting a kerchief to wear while dancing the mazurka. Only Dunya the chambermaid broke the silence slightly with the soft rustling of her starched skirts and the squeaking of her new boots.

"Young lady! Do you maybe have three dozen or so small pearls, or a crystal necklace, perhaps?" the seamstress unexpectedly broke the silence in an overly loud voice.

"What for?" Darochka spoke out curtly.

"I would sew them on around the collar, and it would look very special on you."

"I have both pearls and crystal!" the young lady replied slowly. "But it seems to me this would be excessive ornamentation."

"Oh, no, you will see for yourself . . . And it can easily be taken off if it doesn't look right. Give me a needle, some thread, and the pearls, and I'll do it for you right now," the girl insisted, and she walked up to the table where the needle and thread were lying.

"There's a small packet of pearls right here. And there's another necklace in the jewellery box. But I won't take off the bodice for anything in the world."

"Oh no, no. You don't have to take it off. It will be even better to sew them on while you're wearing it: it will be easier to see just how it looks best on you. Don't worry. You won't be late because of me!" the girl said, and she moved a stool up closer to the lamp.



Darochka sat down.

“Later, of course, I’ll embroider all this with silver . . . I’m just doing it this way for today. You’ll send this dress to me tomorrow, and I’ll do it slowly and carefully. Soon the holiday season will be over and, God willing, there will be less work, and then the mistress won’t keep us up any later than midnight . . .”

“No later than midnight?” the young lady interrupted. “Do you mean to say you embroider still later into the night?”

“Oh! Before the holidays we sometimes stay up until three in the morning!” the girl replied, skilfully threading a pearl on the needle.

“It would be better if you went to work earlier, because embroidering under an artificial light spoils the eyes!” Darochka observed.

“We don’t get to sleep in as it is. By seven, or sometimes even by six o’clock, I’m back at work with the needle.”

“So that means you have only four hours of rest?”

“We also get an hour for dinner.”

“Only five hours off from work? How much do you get paid for this?” the young lady wanted to know.

“It all depends . . . You see, I haven’t yet learned how to cut out patterns, and I still don’t sew all that well. But because I know how to embroider with silver and gold thread, I already earn twelve *karbovantsi* a month,” the girl replied proudly.

“Twelve *karbovantsi* a month for working nineteen hours a day? Is that possible?” Darochka was appalled. “I couldn’t have understood you correctly, because it’s impossible to exist on that kind of money . . .”

“Why impossible? Last year my father and I lived on ten *karbovantsi* a month,” the girl smiled.

“You’re feeding your father as well?”

“My father isn’t a problem. A glass of tea, a bowl of soup—that’s all he wants. But I really run into grief with my sister. Much to her own misfortune, she’s very clever, and she just can’t be without books. My father taught her how to read and write a bit, and he would like to teach her more. Next week, however, we have to take her to the mistress. She has to begin learning how to sew.”

“How old is she?”

“She’s quite big already. She’s past her tenth birthday.”

“Only ten years old, and she already has to hire herself out? You should take pity on her!” the young lady said in reproach.

“Do you suppose I don’t pity her? I feel very sorry for her. And to make matters worse, I know she’ll never be a good seamstress. But what can be done if that’s her fate?” the girl sighed. “Now, just look in the mirror. Wasn’t I right?” She abruptly broke off both the thread and her sad story. “It’s as if it were a different dress!” she added joyfully, stepping back a bit from Darochka to view her new trim from a distance.

“It really is much better. Thank you,” the young lady replied, no less pleased than the seamstress. “Now, Dunya, quickly help me put on my shoes.” She turned to the maid who was hovering nearby with white shoes in her hands.

“Well then, I’ll be expecting the dress tomorrow. Don’t forget to send it, for I won’t be happy until I redo it the way I want it done!” the seamstress said, replacing the needle and thread.

“I don’t know. I don’t think it’s worth it. Perhaps we should leave it as it is!” the girl responded.

“No, I beg you. Don’t deny me this. I have never been taken with a dress as I am with this one. I don’t know if I should admit it, but I’ve often dreamed about it. Even when I was still small, I imagined it more than once, for I have been dreaming since childhood about dresses that were out of the ordinary, and about flowers and headdresses that are worn by enchanting princesses.

“And now that I’ve seen you in this dress, I won’t have any peace until I redo it the way I want to. You won’t be wearing it again immediately, and later, I’ll bring it to you, and you’ll get dressed in it . . . and that will be the greatest reward for me. I’ll remember it for the rest of my life, and I’ll rejoice that I had the chance to complete it properly.”

The young lady’s heart contracted. She darted a look at the girl, at her wretched clothing and her swollen eyelids, behind which shone exceptionally beautiful, large, dark eyes, and then she glanced at the silver thread on her dress and became thoughtful. A hitherto unknown feeling touched her heart. The words of the girl impressed themselves on her soul with something resembling reproach, something akin to burning pity, and the festive mood of the evening was shattered.

This unfortunate worker, who would gladly give up a half hour of her sleep to fulfil her dreams, dreams which would delight even a true aesthete, this poor girl who could taste in advance the happiness of seeing someone else in a garment to which she had

devoted so much effort, truly astonished the young lady and, at the same time, distressed her.

“Fine,” she agreed, “I’ll have the dress sent to you, but only on one condition: you will make up a bill indicating how many hours you spend doing this work, and I’ll pay you three times as much as your mistress pays you.”

“I’ll never take even a *shah* [*half-penny*] from you for doing this as long as I live! That would make it look as if I were trying to earn more, but I’m doing this for the love of doing it, for myself. Please don’t mention money to me, and don’t offend me. Perhaps you can give me a little extra for something else that I might do for you in the future, but not for this dress. If you’re willing, I would prefer instead to come over sometime when I have a free moment, and have you give me some books for my sister to read.”

Instead of replying, Darochka jumped up from the armchair, tore her foot out of Dunya’s hands—her maid was buttoning up her shoes for her—and rushed out of the boudoir.

Dashing across the hall, through the living room, and running all the way over to the other end of the house, as if she were racing with her own thoughts, she flew into the bedroom of her aunt, an older, unmarried lady, just as the latter was furiously and loudly berating a seamstress.

“Darochka!” she pounced on her niece. “Just look at what a dreadful creature she’s turned me into. It’s sagging over here, and the bosom is pulled to one side . . .”

“It’s very nice, aunt! Everything is very nice!” the young lady replied unthinkingly.

And, without so much as a glance at the tall, straight figure of her aunt, she dashed up to her mother, who was sitting silently in an armchair, utterly exhausted from trying to placate her overwrought sister.

“Mummy! Mummy dearest! Do me a favour! Do what I’m begging of you!” she flung herself at her mother.

“What is it?” the older lady inquired kindly, smiling warmly at her daughter, who was unusually excited about something.

“Send Maryana’s sister to school.”

“Whatever has come over you, my child?” her mother asked in amazement.

“Are you in your right mind? What’s all this about?” the aunt spoke up.

"I'm not speaking to you; I'm speaking to my mother. So, you'll agree, mummy dear? You must do this!" Darochka said, pressing her cheek against her mother's forehead.

"So now it's even 'you must,' is it? Have you ever seen such impertinence? She's telling her mother what to do as if she were addressing a chambermaid!" the aunt, who could not remain silent, spoke up a second time.

"I'm not addressing you. Do be quiet . . . I know your money will rot along with you!" the young lady flared up angrily.

"Darochka, come to your senses! What are you babbling about? You're forgetting yourself," her mother stopped her.

"I'm babbling the truth. If our conversation isn't to auntie's liking, she shouldn't intrude in it . . . but you, mummy dearest, please grant me what I'm asking of you," the young lady pleaded.

"No, I won't grant it."

"Why not?"

"Because it's one of your foolish whims, and in an hour or so you will have forgotten about it."

"You'll whirl around three times in a waltz, and you'll forget that Maryana's sister even exists!" the aunt added.

"What do you take me for?" Darochka boiled over. "If I'm really so foolish, if nothing but waltzes interest me, then why fuss over me, love me, and protect me? Is it only because I'm your daughter?"

"Good heavens! Why are you so upset? There's no reason to get excited. Just calm down!" her mother smiled.

"No, I won't calm down. I can't calm down," the young lady stamped her foot. "You're offending me, insulting me. Heaven only knows what kind of a fool you take me for . . . I ask you for something, just this one time, and you're refusing me . . ."

"Because your whim is so absurd!" the older lady commented.

"Absurd? Why is it absurd? Is it because I want it? Because I myself have asked for it?"

"Because there is no reason why I should give away . . ." the older lady began.

"Why should one send somebody or other—this sister of Maryana's—to school? Or do you think your mother mints her own money?" the aunt completed her sister's sentence, and added a few words of her own.

"If you minted your money yourself, maybe I wouldn't ask for it, but you don't even have to do that; you just take money that's

already there!” Darochka retorted harshly. “I know how much money we have. I know we can afford the hundred *karbovantsi* a year. If you refuse me, if you won’t grant me my request, then don’t expect any kindness from me. It’s all the same to you. You don’t care about anything, but I can’t stand such injustice, I simply can’t . . .”

“What kind of injustice are you referring to?” the older lady asked in astonishment.

“The injustice that a girl has to feed herself, her father, and a sister on twelve *karbovantsi* a month . . .”

“And it appears to suffice, because your Maryana doesn’t go begging for scraps!” the aunt could not refrain from interjecting.

“I’m not speaking to you! Be quiet, for the love of God! Go on and rejoice quietly that Maryana, who works nineteen hours a day, does not go begging for bread. As for me, however, I’ve had it! Why should such an exceptional girl, such a talented girl, perish while sewing clothes for others? She’s spoiling her eyes and ruining her health, and I will not allow the same fate to befall her sister. She wants to study, and that is her right.”

“Wait a minute, Darochka!” the older lady spoke up. “Just think. She’d have to spend more than just a year or two in school.”

“So, you’ve added it up already? And you’re frightened by the huge sum? If that’s how it is, then I don’t want anything of yours either. You’re playing with me as you’d play with a doll. You throw money away on my whims—as much as I want—and you give in to all my foolish requests. But I don’t want to live as your plaything. If that’s the case, I’ll leave your damn house . . . I don’t want any money from you or anything else . . . I’ll earn it through my own work . . . I . . .” Darochka broke off what she was saying and burst into tears.

“God be with you, my child! What has come over you?” the older lady rushed up to calm down her daughter. “Let me think about it, and perhaps I’ll come up with a way to help Maryana.”

“You’re going to give her alms? No, don’t you dare do that! That *karbovanets* that she almost flung back in your face is more than enough. She’s a poor girl, but as you can see, she’s not greedy for handouts. She has her honour, true honour . . . She’s ten times as honourable as you . . . as any of those . . . And I don’t want that either. I want you to send her sister to school, and if you don’t, I’ll sell all my pearls, my jewellery, even this very dress, and I’ll pay for it myself.”

“First of all, calm down, my dear . . . Let’s talk this over tomorrow when we go for a walk!”

“Not tomorrow. Right now!”

“Right now we have to go to the ball, because we’re late already!” the aunt reminded them.

“I won’t go anywhere. I won’t budge from this spot until I find out what kind of a mother I have!” Darochka insisted stubbornly.

“Oh, God! As if I didn’t have enough trouble!” the older lady clutched her head in despair.

“So this is trouble for you! You should be ashamed to say that,” Darochka, driven to tears with anger, retorted reproachfully.

“Well, the least you could do is tell me what this is all about. What possessed you to dream up such nonsense?” the older lady asked with some annoyance.

“Nonsense?” Darochka screamed furiously. “Nonsense? You’re starting that again? If that’s how it is, then I won’t speak to you any more. I won’t go to the ball!” she added, and she raised her hands to undo her hair.

“Darochka, what are you doing?” the older lady asked, seizing her by the hand. “You’ve raised a ruckus as if I had done something truly unusual, but just stop to think: if all the Halynas in the world were gathered together and sent off to school, there wouldn’t be enough money even to buy bread for you . . .”

“I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t want to listen to anything you have to say. I only want Maryana’s sister to go to school. I begged you, but you . . .”

“Well, I won’t argue any more!” the older lady hastened to placate her daughter. “You can have your wish, only . . .”

Darochka did not give her mother the opportunity to finish what she was saying. She flung her arms around her and, boundlessly happy, kissed her mother’s lips, cheeks, and hands.

“Only,” the older lady continued after a little while, all out of breath from her daughter’s caresses, “I myself am not going to fuss over the girl. I’ll give one hundred *karbovantsi* a year to Maryana and let her do as she sees fit with them.”

“Mummy, dearest, don’t begrudge another twenty *karbovantsi* a year. Let it be one hundred and twenty *karbovantsi* per year,” Darochka pleaded.

“Let it be a hundred and twenty, and to calm you down completely, I’ll give her fifty *karbovantsi* right now.”

A moment later, the young lady was back in her boudoir. Maryana was still there. Quietly chatting with Dunya, she was totally unaware of the unexpected good fortune that was about to befall her.

“Your sister will be able to go to school. Mummy has promised to pay for her. Here are fifty *karbovantsi* right now!” All this was fired off in one breath and, before Maryana could even gather her wits, Darochka was sitting once again in the armchair, and Dunya was fussing with her shoes.

“My dear young lady! Oh, heaven help me! How will I ever repay you? How am I to pray to God for you?” the seamstress finally recovered.

“It’s nothing! It’s nothing!” the young lady blushed. “The girl wants to study, and it’s her right to do so!” she added, recalling her own words—the ones that had especially appealed to her when she had uttered them in her aunt’s room.

“Young lady! Your mother asks you to hurry, and Vasyl asked me to tell you the horses are freezing!” Ustya, the older lady’s personal maid, urged, hurriedly readying a fluffy bonnet and a sable cape.

“You meant to say that Hordiy asked you to tell me,” Darochka corrected her.

“No, it was Vasyl. Hordiy will not be going tonight.”

“What kind of nonsense is this? When have I ever had Vasyl as my driver?” the young lady became annoyed.

“It seems that Hordiy has a headache!” Ustya replied.

“Well, that’s a fine surprise! But I won’t go with Vasyl. Go find Hordiy . . . Tell him to get ready to leave. It’s just to the club, not to the ends of the earth!” the young lady ordered.

“You’ll go with Vasyl, Darochka. He also drives the horses well,” the older lady said as she walked into the room.

“I’ll never go with Vasyl as long as I live. He’s sure to get all mixed up. He won’t know how to drive up to the entrance, and I’ll be embarrassed.”

“But sweetheart, Hordiy is ill!” the older lady reminded her.

“So, I’ll go and ask him myself!” Darochka stated resolutely and, grabbing a kerchief, rushed downstairs.

Hordiy was lying down. His wife Kateryna was sitting at the foot of the bed, holding a little boy of about five on her knees. As soon as Darochka entered the room, she put the child down on the floor, rose to her feet, and went to greet the unexpected guest.

“I’ve come to speak with Hordiy,” the young lady announced.

"He's ill," Kateryna sighed. "He's lying there like a log. The only time he feels some relief is when I put some cool water on his head."

"Hordiy! Are you really sick?" Darochka inquired solicitously as she approached the bed.

"Yes, I am, my young lady," Hordiy replied softly.

"Then what am I to do? How am I to get to the ball if you don't drive me?"

"Vasyl will drive you there without any problem. I've already told him not to drop the reins and not to look around."

"I know he won't tip us over," Darochka impatiently interrupted Hordiy. "But he's sure to embarrass me . . ."

"Hordiy, perhaps you could . . . somehow or other . . ." she pleaded diffidently after a short pause.

"I'd be only too happy to do it, but I can't lift my head. I'm beside myself with anger, but I don't know what to do . . . I curried the horses, took out the new harnesses, prepared the carriage . . . I know that even the governor's family will be at the club today, so I was very careful to see to it that our horses would be as good as everybody else's. I'd really like to drive you myself, but what can be done when such misfortune strikes."

"But perhaps you've only got a headache from the chimney fumes?" Darochka asked.

"Oh, no, young lady. I haven't closed the vent in the roof all day today. He's picked up a cold someplace," Kateryna spoke up.

"But perhaps you would get better in the fresh air?" Darochka suggested.

"How would he get better? He stuck his head outdoors for a moment and got so chilled that he's barely been able to warm up again," Kateryna disagreed.

"I'll send you some of the special water that is used for head compresses, Hordiy. I myself get headaches, and this water really helps me."

"The older lady has already applied vinegar and some of that water, and even put a mustard plaster on the nape of his neck, but nothing has helped," Kateryna sighed.

"Lord! What am I to do?" Darochka clasped her hands in despair and glanced about the wretched room with an absolutely woebegone look.

"If only we knew what was ailing him," Kateryna whispered to herself.



“Hordiy! But perhaps you might nevertheless, somehow . . .” Darochka hesitantly addressed the sick man once again. But she did not have the nerve to complete her request.

“My dear young lady, don’t even bother making such a request. And don’t waste your time. Look at him. He’s almost unconscious already. How is he to go out in this freezing weather?” Kateryna spoke up.

“I’m not asking you.” Darochka cut her off.

“Yes, that’s true. Don’t interfere, Kateryna . . . The young lady is talking to me,” Hordiy managed to say slowly.

“So what will it be then, Hordiy? I can wait another half hour. It’s ten now. We can arrive there at half past ten, and so perhaps, maybe you could somehow . . . And if you can’t, I won’t go at all!” Darochka ended abruptly.

“How would you not go? It’s such a grand ball! All the ladies look forward to it all year. The governor’s family will be there. No, you can’t stay away. You have to go without fail,” Hordiy leaped up and tore the wet towel off his head.

“Where are you going, you crazy man? Look at your eyes! Just look at yourself!” Kateryna stopped him.

“Get out . . . Leave me alone . . . Don’t annoy me!” Hordiy shouted at her. “Fetch me my long cloak . . . Find my mitts . . . Go and get ready, my young lady. I’ll be there right away!” he reassured Darochka.

And truly, by the time the young lady was dressed, he was already holding the reins in his hands.

“Oh, now I’m not worried in the least!” Darochka exclaimed joyfully as she stepped out into the porch.

“Darochka, my dear, wait a moment. I’ve forgotten to tell you something,” her mother stopped her on the steps and whispered something in her ear.

“Do you really think I don’t know that myself?” the young lady was offended.

“I just wanted to remind you.”

“There was no reason to remind me,” she responded impatiently, flouncing petulantly into the carriage where her aunt, bundled up from head to toe, had been waiting for quite some time.

Hordiy shut the carriage door, picked up the reins lightly, and set out for the club. The elegant, black horses pulled the sparkling carriage over the snow as if it were a feather.

## II

Darochka woke up, stretched deliciously under her white silk quilt, and rang the bell. Dunya came in and opened the shutters. A shaft of brilliant, almost blinding, southern sunshine suddenly leapt through the windowpane and fell on the delicate face of the exquisitely beautiful young lady. She closed her eyes and smiled contentedly. Her young body was completely rested after the dancing. It was as if she had not even experienced the exhaustion she had felt so recently. All the hubbub of the previous evening had dissipated during her deep, lengthy sleep, and only the minuet and the quadrille that the military band leader had arranged especially for her still echoed in her head. "For her!" Hm . . .

How strange it was to listen to those timid words that the young band leader had addressed to her, and how pleasant it was to hear that the quadrille was dedicated to her, and that the new minuet was being played for her alone! And he had not been telling a lie; just as none of those young men had lied when they called her the princess of the ball and vied with each other in inviting her to dance.

She had not sat down for even a moment, and she had not stopped talking and laughing. It seemed as if the entire grand ball had been arranged just for her, as if all the other people had come to the club expressly to win a favour or a look from her or, at least, to greet her from afar.

No, there was no denying that a beautiful face was truly something to be treasured. It was a great gift to have a slim, straight nose, a high forehead, large, grey eyes, and a willowy waist. And what good fortune it was to be one of nature's darlings. People do not bow to anyone or to anything as they bow to beauty, and rightly so.

Good looks are not an accident, nor an unexpected gift that nature bestows upon just anyone at all, just like that. No, nature, like a jeweller, will not undertake the thankless task of refining a fragment of rock or a lump of earth. It knows which persons are worthy of an enchanting cover, and which soul to envelop in a shapely body, which face to endow with beauty.

It is no wonder that the old gentleman who presented her with a rose yesterday, said: "When you want to hide your heart from others, lower your eyelashes, so they are not able to see your eyes."

“Are you going to get dressed, my young lady, or do you want to have your breakfast served in bed?” Dunya interrupted the young lady’s reminiscences.

“Breakfast?” she asked, not quite understanding what the maid was saying. “Breakfast? Oh, yes. Bring something here, anything at all,” she added, delighted that she could spend more time in bed in order to relive by herself all of yesterday’s events, including the banquet.

Dunya brought in a cup of coffee. The young lady raised herself, sat up on the bed, leaned her elbow on the little table, and languidly stirred in the sugar. Her delicate head was bent low over the aromatic beverage, and her sleeves brushed against the plate laden with a variety of pastries and biscuits. But she saw only the ballroom in the club, and her thoughts kept flying back to all that had happened yesterday . . .

If there truly are bad luck days, then there are also days filled with good fortune. And yesterday, December 28, was most certainly one of those days that leave an exceptionally pleasant and warm feeling in one’s heart and soul. Every hour, every moment of yesterday, was worthy of being experienced again and again . . . But in what order? What had actually happened yesterday?

First thing in the morning there had been the letter from Katrusya, inviting her to her wedding for the entire three days. Afterwards, she had skated on the river, and never before had she had such a happy time there. Then, there was her dress . . . the ball . . . There was also Maryana, the school, and Maryana’s sister . . . How easily it had all come together! How easy it was, after all, to do something charitable, something good!

“Did you have your fill of dancing?” the older lady inquired as she adjusted her daughter’s hair, which had fallen down on her forehead.

“Mummy dearest, how did you manage to come in so that I didn’t even notice? Yes, I danced! I danced as much as I wanted to!” Darochka replied gaily as she kissed her mother.

“And your head doesn’t hurt?”

“It’s nothing! I didn’t get dressed on purpose. I wanted to relive all my memories of what happened yesterday.”

“Are they happy memories?”

“Very happy. But it’s you who have made me the happiest, my own dear mummy,” Darochka sincerely kissed her mother’s hand.

“How? In what way?”

“Because of Maryana’s sister . . .”

“Oh, yes . . . I’d already forgotten about it! Well, let her study in good health, and let her thank you, because if it hadn’t been for you, I never would have done it, as long as I lived.”

“You truly wouldn’t have done it? You really wouldn’t have taken pity on the young girl of your own accord?”

“Not a bit!”

“Mummy, dearest! How unkind you are! If you’re really telling me the truth and not just teasing me, then we’ll never understand one another,” Darochka stated sadly, and she removed her hand from her mother’s.

“We’ll come to an understanding one way or another!” the older lady sighed gently. “At times, I’ll give in to your generous little heart, and at other times you’ll forgive and indulge me, because I am old. And in this way we will come to an agreement . . . It feels good to do someone a good turn, but one has to stop oneself at times. I know, and I can see that your heart aches for everyone, and that you’re more than happy to share with everyone. But sometimes, my dear child, one has to know what the limits are!”

“Except for having the wherewithal, there are no limits. And as long as we can, we’ll share our good fortune!” Darochka bristled.

“Oh, you’ve flared up again! How upset you are, my dear little heart of gold! But that’s enough, that’s enough. Do as you think best. Finish drinking your coffee, get dressed, and then you’ll go to see Marusya. I’ve asked Vasyl to have the horses ready.”

“Oh, how’s Hordiy?” Darochka remembered about the coachman for the first time.

“Hordiy is very ill,” responded the older lady.

“Did the doctor come to see him?”

“Yes, Holtutsky was here.

“Holtutsky? Why not Bryansky?”

“You know that Bryansky’s fee is ten *karbovantsi* for a house call.”

“Mother! Mummy dearest! Aren’t you ashamed to begrudge money for a doctor? If you’re going to call Holtutsky, it would be better to pack Hordiy off to a hospital. Let them finish him off there by evening!” the young lady leaped from her bed and hurriedly began dressing. “A person is dying, and here you are keeping track of your *karbovantsi* and calling in worthless doctors.”

“But who told you that people are done away with in hospitals, or that Hordiy is dying? Holtutsky has not diagnosed his illness as

yet: ‘It could be typhus perhaps, or influenza, or perhaps, just a common fever.’”

“Perhaps it’s typhus, perhaps it’s influenza, perhaps it’s this, perhaps it’s that . . . perhaps, perhaps. But no one knows anything for sure, and you still haven’t called Bryansky,” Darochka said reproachfully, hurrying to pull on her stockings as quickly as possible.

“If it becomes necessary, Darochka, we’ll call him,” the older lady tried to placate her.

“He must be called now, mother, right now! Hordiy can’t be entrusted to Holtutsky, or to any other doctor except Bryansky. Send for him immediately . . . You don’t know what his sickness is, and every moment could be critical. Send for him, or else I’ll go and fetch him myself.”

“Fine, fine. That’s enough now. Stop worrying. It will be done. I’ll send for Bryansky immediately, and he will come quickly. It’s too bad, however, that you didn’t listen to me yesterday, and didn’t send Hordiy home, as I’d asked you to, instead of keeping him in the wind and the freezing cold all night,” the older lady said as she rose to leave.

Darochka felt as if someone had poured ice-water over her. Her rosy face suddenly turned pale, and her hands involuntarily dropped the straps of her skirt.

Yes, her mother was right. She had asked her to send Hordiy home, and had even reminded her twice to do so, but she had kept him in the wind and the freezing weather the entire night . . .

How had this happened? She had forgotten, completely forgotten about Hordiy. She had forgotten about his illness, about the horrible frost. She was not accustomed to thinking about things like that. She had never had the opportunity to think about them.

It was not at all unusual to have Hordiy wait for five or six hours at the theatre. Sometimes, it’s true, her mother did send him home, but at other times it was not possible to designate when he should return, and more often than not, Hordiy had to wait out in the street. But it was not only Hordiy who had to wait. Almost everyone left their horses by the entrance, for did it not sometimes happen that one had to leave the theatre or some boring ball earlier than expected? Was it not only quite recently that she, Darochka, had to come home from a masquerade at midnight? Furthermore, was it really all that difficult to wait for those five or six hours? Coachmen

had to wait every night from early evening until morning . . . It's true they were not ill . . .

But why had not Hordiy himself requested her permission to return home? He knows very well that auntie has no feelings—she's as insensitive as a log and indifferent to everything. And I'm still young. Yes, Hordiy should have reminded her himself. He should have begged off. And if I am to blame, then he himself is more to blame than I am.

The young lady finally rationalized her way out of the tangled web that the unpleasant incident with Hordiy had spun in her troubled head, and she ran off to see the ailing coachman.

Hordiy was lying alone in the room. Darochka drew near and peered into his eyes. The sick man was staring and muttering something under his breath, but one could see that he was delirious and did not understand anything.

"Hordiy, are you feeling worse?" the young lady asked.

Hordiy's red eyes, fixed straight ahead, did not turn to her.

"Lord! He's unconscious, and there's no one in the room . . . He's lying all alone, and there's no one to give him any water. Where has she gone off to, that Kateryna?" Darochka wanted to know, and she rushed towards the other room, across from the porch, where the clothes were usually washed.

Kateryna was standing by the tub, wringing out something. Her son was sitting in a corner on the wooden floor, happily chipping away at a piece of wood.

"Kateryna, for the love of God! Isn't it a sin to neglect someone who is sick? Leave those clothes and go to your husband . . ." the young lady ordered.

"I won't leave the clothes, because there's no need for me to sit beside my husband!" Kateryna replied emphatically.

"There's no need to sit beside him?" Darochka was shocked. "Your husband is dying, and there is no need to sit beside him?"

"That's right. There's no need!" Kateryna retorted.

"You should be beside your ill husband. This is your duty. Leave the clothes and go to him immediately!" Darochka shouted in anger.

But her anger appeared only to give Kateryna more impetus to carry on with her work. She attacked the clothes even more vigorously.

"Leave them, I said!" the young lady once again shouted, and she approached the tub.

Kateryna wrung out a table runner, unwound it, threw it on the piles of clothing that were lying on the bench, and wiped her hands.

Darochka calmed down. "Hordiy is really very ill, but Bryansky will be here soon, and he will most certainly help him. Of course, it would have been better if he had come sooner, but it's not too late even now. You must see to it, Kateryna, that if Hordiy needs anything, or perhaps, wants something, then either Vasyl or Ustya must be sent for it. You yourself must not leave him!" she said, confident that Kateryna would do her bidding.

But Kateryna had wiped her hand only to put more logs under the andiron. As soon as they caught fire, she dropped her hands into the flat tub.

"Go on, then," Darochka reminded her.

Kateryna pulled a towel out of the tub, silently poured some boiling water into it, and set about her work again.

For a couple of moments, the young lady could not believe her eyes. Kateryna's stubbornness knew no bounds. Her behaviour was most unusual.

"Have you gone deaf, Kateryna? I ordered you to leave them. I'm telling you for the tenth time: leave them!" the young lady said, trying to control her fury.

"I won't leave them!" Kateryna retorted.

"I'm ordering you to do so, and you will!" the young lady yelled at the top of her lungs.

"Don't yell, because regardless of what you say, I'm not going to leave them!" Kateryna said slowly, emphasizing every word.

"No, you will leave them. You must leave them, if I order you to do so," the young lady, now completely out of control, screamed even more loudly, and, grabbing the towel out of Kateryna's hands, flung it to the floor. Kateryna bent over to pick it up.

"Don't you dare! Don't you dare touch it! You're a snake . . . a wild beast! You have no heart . . . you . . ."

"Was it I who kept him out all night in the freezing weather?" Kateryna turned unexpectedly and, confronting Darochka, glared at her, her eyes full of unspeakable hatred.

Unable to utter a single word in reply to that terrible insult, the young lady trembled and blanched. Then, her cheeks blazing, she rushed from the room, completely beside herself.

"Mother! Mother! Where's mother?" she shouted in despair as she ran through the corridors from the kitchen towards her own room.

“Heaven help us! What is it?” the older lady exclaimed. “Darochka, what’s wrong with you? Why are you crying?” she ran after her daughter.

“For what reason? What right does she have? How does she dare?” the young lady burst into tears and flung herself on her pillows.

“Who is this ‘she’? What has happened? Tell me, my dear little daughter, tell me everything,” the older lady pleaded anxiously.

“Kateryna . . .” the young lady began, and then she began weeping even harder.

The older lady, confused and alarmed, ran off to find Kateryna. It was, of course, tactless and difficult for her to interrogate the person who had occasioned the tears. But as she ran to the kitchen, the older lady was certain that Kateryna would anticipate her questions, that she would hasten to help her out by telling her all about the incident. And if, perhaps, she had uttered some thoughtless word, she would have mulled it over by now, and would ask for forgiveness.

But Kateryna did not have any such intention.

She did not even budge when the older lady entered the room. She continued rubbing the clothes so hard on the washboard that the tub creaked under her hands.

“What have you gone and done here? How could you have dared do it? How did you have the nerve?” the older lady attacked her.

Kateryna remained silent.

“What have you done? What did you say to the young lady?”

“I didn’t say or do anything,” Kateryna replied harshly without raising her head.

“So that’s what you’re like! So that’s how you talk to me, as well! Get out, if that’s the way it is! Get out of my home! Don’t ever set foot in my house again,” the red-faced, enraged lady thundered.

Kateryna immediately wiped her hands, took her son, and without saying a word, went off to get ready to leave.

In about an hour, the good Doctor Bryansky came. The haste with which he entered the house testified clearly to the fact that the famous doctor was accustomed to visiting either those who were very ill, or proud patients who were overly impatient, and that he most certainly had no time to waste. Both the older lady and the young lady hurried to meet him in order not to detain him for even a moment.

“Where is the patient?” the doctor asked, hastily greeting both ladies.



“It’s our coachman, Hordiy . . .” Darochka started to say.

“Hordiy is no longer here, my young lady. Kateryna took him to the home of the old woman healer,” Dunya spoke up.

Darochka turned flaming red and bit her lip until it bled.

“What’s this?” the older lady was shocked and frightened to death.

“She’s taken him,” Dunya said.

“Oh, my God! Just imagine, this insane wife of his, this crazy Kateryna . . .” the older lady attempted to justify herself.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“Forgive me, my good sir! For God’s sake, forgive me!” the older lady hastened to plead with the doctor.

But the doctor hurriedly took his leave and, grabbing his hat from the hall table, rushed to the door.

The older lady did not have the strength to see him off.

“Lord! What will happen now? What will he think of us now?” she clapped her hands together in despair, and dropped to the couch as if she had been mown down.

“That was Bryansky! He goes everywhere. He’ll tell everyone! Oh, God, what a disgrace! What an utter disgrace!” Darochka, infinitely worried, clutched her inflamed head and pressed her forehead against the cold windowpane.

“I gave in to your whims, I called Bryansky . . . and now the holiday season is ruined,” the older lady said to Darochka after a little while.

Darochka did not respond.

The red-hot sun cast an inquiring look at the greatly distressed, beautiful young lady, but also received no response, and, astonished, it vanished beyond a mountain enveloped in white muslin . . .

*Anemone*  
*A Recollection*  
(1905)

She was a girl of thirteen or fourteen, very short and thin, with blue eyes, and a cap of thick blond curls on her round little head. Every Sunday, she brought me the shirts that her stepmother laundered for me. And every time that she ran into my room—cheerful, bedecked with flowers, and with a bundle of white shirts in her arms—I rejoiced to see her as perhaps only a prisoner can rejoice when he sees a shaft of bright sunlight fall unexpectedly on the window of his dark dungeon, as we all rejoice on the first day of spring.

I do not remember now what her name was, but I called her “Anemone.” I probably never did know what name she was given at her christening, because even her stepmother did not use it, referring to her instead by a variety of nicknames.

This girl had countless nicknames, an infinite number of them. It may be stated with certainty that she had as many nicknames as she had relatives, acquaintances, friends, or enemies. If anyone had attempted to weave her a wreath to correspond to those nicknames, it would have been woven of wormwood, and shepherd’s rod, and field poppies, and two or three roses, and thistles. Everyone—either out of kindness or out of anger—flung a nickname at this child of the street. Everyone pressed some kind of an epithet upon her; and everyone considered it to be his or her duty either to caress her lightly or to give her a good shove.

She accepted all of this from people without animosity, without annoyance, as well-deserved punishment for her “foolish” and “worthless” nature. And she herself told others about the misadventures that had earned her new nicknames.

“My stepmother calls me her ‘Little Misery,’ and it’s true. My stepsisters have been helping around the house for a long time now, but I’m not good at anything,” she told me.

“But you are helping,” I tried to assure her.

“Oh, sure!” she laughed, as if I had made a foolish remark or were making fun of her.

“Vekla called me a ‘slut’ today because, as you can see, my clothing is really quite ‘flashy,’” she told me another time. “A woman passer-by called me ‘Little Star,’ probably because I’m wearing a new dress. And as I was walking along, Maksym yelled out at me, ‘Mouse’s Mother,’ and Onufriy repeated after him, ‘Mouse’s Mother.’ They’re annoyed with me because I let a little mouse go free. Uncle Spyrydon calls me ‘Blizzard’ because of my hair, and Aunt Ustya calls me ‘Carambola’ because I’m so ugly.”

“Who said you’re ugly?” I asked in amazement as I gazed at her lovely, bright eyes and her high forehead. “You’re not ugly.”

“Oh, sure! Just look at this blizzard!” She filled the room with raucous laughter as she hastily hid her thick curls under her calico kerchief.

No matter how often I assured her that her blond curls did not resemble a blizzard in the slightest, I could not persuade her to change the image she had conjured up of herself.

It was as if this child had spent her entire life in a room lined with crooked mirrors that reflected her face either as widened by a good foot, or elongated over the whole wall, or twisted, or pockmarked, or disfigured in some way or other. When she accidentally did happen to catch a glimpse of her real image—which was actually quite attractive—she did not want to believe her own eyes.

It is true that the shortcomings, seen first by her fault-finding stepmother, and only then by the neighbours, did not make her feel sad. She did not blame herself, and neither did it occur to her to complain to God about the worthless nature with which He had endowed her.

“I am the way I was born,” she sometimes said when people either disapproved of her or praised her.

It was probably only after many bitter tears, after a futile struggle with her inner nature, that she accepted her fate—an acceptance that enabled her to fall asleep peacefully after the reproaches of her stepmother and intensified her inclination to roam the forest, run along the river, and sing and play whenever her stepmother drove her out of the house. It was in this way that she sustained her small, frail body.

For two years, she brought me my shirts every Sunday, and for two years, I treated her to tea and sweets, gave her little pictures

and trinket boxes, and continued greeting her as a child, without giving any thought to the fact that she was coming sixteen.

Finally, one Sunday she did not come. The next Sunday, I once again waited for her in vain. When she suddenly dashed in towards evening, I greeted her joyfully and invited her to have some tea.

"I can't. Mother sent me for only a moment to get the money, and beh-meh-meh told me not to be long."

"What kind of beh-meh-meh?"

"My betrothed. I'm getting married."

"You're getting married, and Behmehmeh is the nickname of your betrothed?"

"That's right. If he hasn't earned a better nickname for himself, then let him get along with the one I've given him."

"Then it's you who has given him this strange nickname?"

"That's right."

"What does it mean—beh-meh-meh? I've never heard of such a thing," I asked in astonishment.

"It's beh-meh-meh and nothing more!" She burst out laughing, enjoying the fact that I could not comprehend it. "Well, if you can't figure it out, then I'll show you something."

She tightened her fists, bulged her eyes out, clenched her teeth and, pounding one fist on the other, began stamping her feet and croaking as if someone had tightened a rope around her throat.

I stood and stared at her, but did not understand.

"You still don't get it? Well then, look."

She went up to the bed, grabbed a pillow, clasped it to her breast and, making a face as if she were going to cry, started caressing it and making mooing sounds.

"Anemone, my dear, I don't understand anything! Sit down and get to the point," I begged her.

"Get to the point?" she sighed gently, and a shadow seemed to flit over her face. "My godmother told me: 'If you were like the others, there wouldn't be any point in it at all, but because you're poor and not good at anything, then maybe it's just as well that at least a mute wants to marry you.'"

"Which mute? Karpo, perhaps?"

"That's the one."

"Do you actually intend to do that? Have you actually agreed to marry that old bachelor who is ugly, full of rage, and a mute as well? Who has arranged this betrothal? How did it happen?"

“How? When I came home from your place on the Sunday before last, I found our house full of people. I had barely crossed the threshold when someone tugged at my sleeve: ‘Where do you think you’re going? Go into your pigsty, comb out your mop, and only then show yourself to people . . .’

“So I went and changed my skirt, wet down my hair with water, and combed it until it was smooth. Then I entered the room. I took a look around. Aunt Ustya was sitting and lamenting in the place of honour. The people were all buzzing. There were empty bottles on the table, and everyone was drunk. Only my godmother wasn’t drunk, and that one . . .”

“Which ‘that one’?”

“Well, ‘that one,’ the beh-meh-meh wasn’t drunk. He was perched on the edge of a bench, puffing and snorting . . .

“I walked in, and my godmother immediately addressed my mother: ‘Can it really be,’ she asked, ‘that she’s sixteen already?’ ‘She’ll be sixteen in exactly two months,’ my mother said. My godmother gave me a three-*kopeck* [*penny*] coin, kissed me, sighed, and walked out of the house.

“Then my Aunt Ustya started up: ‘Well, it appears the Carambola has returned. Look at her, my good people, and tell me what you think. Aren’t I doing her a favour by marrying her to Karpo? What is this poor thing good for? Who has any need of it, such a useless thing?’

“Uncle Spyrydon had already approached Karpo, and was asking: ‘Will you show compassion towards my niece, will you clothe her and feed her? She’s such a foolish thing, just a child, just a . . . nothing, an afterthought, the last child to be born to old parents.’ And he went on making a lot of other comments like that.

“Karpo just sat and stared without blinking. Then my Aunt Ustya rushed out from behind the table and began to point with her fingers, showing him what to do. He figured it out, jumped up from the bench, fell to his knees in front of the icons, started beating himself on the chest so hard that the sound echoed through the house, and kept repeating: ‘beh-meh-meh-meh-meh . . .’

“I burst into laughter and ran out of the house. I thought they were all drunk and playing pranks. But when I came back, they had already given him my *rushnyky* [*embroidered linen ceremonial cloths*] in acceptance of his proposal.”

“But aren’t you opposing this?” I asked angrily.

“Of course. I told them I don’t want to be married.”

“And that’s it?” I flung at her reproachfully. “You mumbled that you don’t want to be married, and then you acquiesced?”

“But whatever could I do to them?” and she glanced at me as if I had said something truly preposterous.

“What are you doing now?”

“What am I supposed to do? At times I laugh so hard that I almost split my sides! If you could only have seen how he scolded the cat! And if you could hear how he sings!” and she roared with laughter once again.

That laughter cut me to the quick. I wanted to say something to her, to stop her, to kindle at least a spark of concern for her unfortunate fate. But she had already launched into song, and what a song it was! I never thought that a human being could produce such tones, and I would never have believed that it was possible to compose such a melody. The misery of a hungry wolf, the mewling of a cat, a death rattle, gurgles, sighs, whistles, and an explosive smacking of lips went into that so-called “song” into which the mute poured the feelings of his lovesick heart.

I laughed as I had never laughed before, and as I probably will never laugh again. Encouraged by my laughter, she was already demonstrating how he scolded the cat after it had eaten the cream, how he presented her with earrings, how he caressed her. However, my laughter was suddenly cut short—just as the tautly tightened string of an instrument snaps when a careless hand strums it—and I came to my senses.

“Anemone! It’s your betrothed you’re ridiculing,” I reminded her.

“That’s right,” she smiled.

“How are you going to live with him, if you despise him?”

“How should I know?” She shrugged her shoulders.

“Have you ever thought about the fact that you’ll have to spend the rest of your life with him, that you’ll have to live side by side with him to the end of your life, until the day you die?”

“But whe-e-en will that death finally come? Just ho-o-ow much lo-o-onger must I wait for it?” she moaned mournfully.

I grew weak all over.

This child was already seeking solace in dreams of death. She desired it and looked to it as the only defender who could free her from the claws of the misfortune whose full impact she was unable as yet to grasp.

An unspeakable sorrow seized me. Vague thoughts, or rather, fragments of thoughts, streaked through my head like meteors, but the trail they left behind them was clear.

I distinctly saw the cruel hawks that circled around the head of the child. I saw them tying a stone around her thin little neck and pushing her into a bottomless abyss. I saw her clutching at shiny little stones, at the sparse grass, at flowers as she fell . . . Those stones rolled after her, the grass broke off, the flowers with their rootlets were left in her hands, and she continued to plunge downwards . . .

She was tumbling down and laughing. Cold water was stopping her breath, tickling her, and she did not see the bottomless abyss below her . . .

My conscience stirred. I did not know as yet what I should do. I realized, however, that if I did not stand up for this child, I would never have any peace of mind—just as I would not be able to live with myself if I walked past a person crushed under a stone and did not free him.

It grew dark outside. The shutters were being closed, and I turned on the light. She jumped up to run home, but I could not let her go. I was afraid to let her go. It seemed to me that, before she went, I had to tell her something interesting, something she needed to hear very much, something urgent. I once again moved the treats up closer to her, poured another glass of tea, and asked her to stay at least a half hour longer.

She was eating and drinking, and I was pacing from corner to corner, collecting my thoughts, and seeking inner counsel, when the door unexpectedly opened, and a tall black fury, with a long face, long arms, and long legs burst into the room. From behind this fury peeked the repugnant, ruddy face of the mute.

“So this is where you are, you filthy slut! You’re visiting! Oh, my Little Misery! May you be damned! May your father’s bones be cast out of the grave just as Karpo has cast away money at the coachmen as he searched for you throughout the city,” the fury attacked my guest.

“Forgive me, for God’s sake, forgive me! Don’t scold her! I’m the one who is to blame! I invited her to have some tea with me. She’s not to blame,” I hastened to plead with the woman.

“She’s cavorting with young men before her marriage, and she’s not to blame? Get out of here, you filthy thing! Your betrothed will

thank you for the gentleman's kindness," the fury screamed. She shoved the girl towards the door with all her strength, and the latter ended up in the arms of her betrothed.

"Beh-meh-meh. . . . hhhkh. . . ." the mute croaked, and I heard the unfortunate victim groan in his arms.

"Listen," I tried once again to persuade the fury. "I swear to you, the girl wanted to go home a long time ago. It was I who detained her. It was my wish."

"It was your wish, you say?" the fury screamed. "Huh, you've found a stupid one to amuse yourself with! When I've finished treating her to the rolling-pin, she'll have her own mind, and her own wishes . . ."

"Why didn't you ask her about her wishes when you gave away her *rushnyky*? Why don't you ask her what she thinks about how you're ruining her life with this cruel animal?" I asked in despair, although whom I was asking I did not know, for they had already disappeared out the door.

I was left alone. On the table lay the scattered little pictures, the unfinished glass of tea, the half-eaten cookie. In my ears resounded the voice of the fury, the echo of the beh-meh-meh . . .

I imagined how they were driving the girl home, what kind of slops they were pouring over her innocent little head, how they were berating her and, perhaps, even hitting her.

Enraged, I felt as if a whole legion of tiny, abominable spiders were surrounding me on all sides, blocking with their bodies all the roads, all the paths to her. I could not kill all of them, but I certainly could not leave her like that.

I could not let her perish. In the last few minutes, she had become twice as dear to me, twice as close to me, just as those who stand together over a grave become closer to one another, as those whose hearts are encircled by a wreath of thorns become dear to us.

I had to help her. But how? It was necessary to know her whole life story, to understand her soul, her nature, to stand in her shoes, to consider her strength . . .

"What is she actually capable of doing?" I asked myself. "In what does her happiness lie? What work can she do to earn the right to live her own life, instead of choking on the bread of the beh-meh-meh, instead of growing numb in his cold embrace?"

I did not know anything. I only knew that she liked to glue together little boxes out of paper . . .



Within minutes, I was knocking on the door of a young lady, scarcely known to me, who only recently had begun a new business—she had founded a school-cooperative for poor young girls. It took only a few words for her to understand what I was saying. I gave her the address of the unfortunate “Little Misery” and began to wait impatiently to see the outcome of my first uncertain step as a defender of another’s fate. Everything worked out as things rarely work out for me. The stepmother coveted the five *karbovantsi* [dollars] to be paid her “good-for-nothing Blizzard,” and so she hired out the girl for a whole month.

When I dropped in at the school before evening, my girl was already sitting in the expansive, cheerful room alongside a dozen or so girls her own age. A whole collection of multicoloured stars lay next to her on the table. They were covered, however, in a clever way, by some folded paper.

“Why are you hiding your work? You’ve done everything nicely,” the young lady said to her. “Even more nicely than the others.”

“Oh, sure!” the girl retorted as she pressed down her improvised cover even more tightly over her stars.

A few days later, I once again visited the cooperative. The girl was happy to see me, but did not greet me as openly as before.

“So now you’re not as happy to see me as you used to be?” I asked jokingly.

“My good sir, please don’t tell anyone what I’m called,” she hastily whispered to me.

“No, no, I won’t tell anyone. It’s nice to hear you’re ashamed of such nicknames now.”

“It’s so good here! No one scolds me, and the young lady always praises me,” she boasted.

“Oh, sure!” I teased her. “They’re fooling you. They’re laughing at you.”

She glanced up at me anxiously, then remembered the past and caught on to my joke. Laughing, she ran off to her table.

One time, almost at the end of the month, I came by at the very moment that the young lady in charge was looking over some new patterns she had been sent. She was worried because they were all similar, commonplace, and uninteresting, and the old patterns had been completed long ago.

“Try not giving them any kind of a pattern, at least for today. Let them make whatever they want to,” I suggested.

The young lady agreed. She immediately told the girls to go ahead and make whatever they felt like making.

One had to be there to see the kind of impression these words made on the girls, and how the nature of every one of them clearly revealed itself in an instant. Some, after listening to the quiet words of the young lady, did not hurry to begin their work. They discussed their ideas among themselves or pondered silently how they should begin. Others—the ones who must have been nursing a favourite idea for a long time—rushed to select suitable paper. The ones in the third group—those who did not even wait to hear the end of what was being said, and who did not understand exactly what was expected of them—were already holding scissors in their hands and, without settling on any kind of an idea, were getting ready to spoil the paper.

Only my girl seemed paralysed with fear.

“Make whatever you wish, do whatever you want to do!”

Such instructions overwhelmed her; she had never heard such a puzzling thing before. No one ever asked her what she wanted to do; no one ever trusted her foolish mind.

“What can I come up with?”

I could read this question clearly on her face. I saw her torment, and I understood the envious glances she cast at her friends, who were already measuring, cutting, and pasting something. I saw the tears of shame or fear that clouded her eyes, but I did not go up to her, and I did not say a word.

A few minutes went by. She was still sitting—pale, sad, and confused—without touching anything . . . Finally, she had an idea. She stood up and approached the young instructress.

“I . . . if only you would . . . suggest something to me, because I . . . I don’t know . . .” she whispered shyly.

“Make whatever you like. Make whatever you wish: a little box, a table, a chair, a pail, a basket . . . In a word, make whatever you want to,” the young lady replied.

The girl became even more troubled. The suggestions of the young lady did not help her at all. They only frightened her more.

“If only you would suggest something . . . If only I knew what to make: a little box, a basket, or a table,” she whispered helplessly, begging the young lady with her eyes to give her at least a hint as to what she should be doing.

But the young lady did not say another word. And with no suggestions forthcoming, my girl sadly returned to her place.

I was extremely interested to see how this first little test of independence would end—even though I was certain that after hesitating and agonizing the whole day she would not accomplish anything. A little while later I glanced over in her direction, and to my great surprise, she was already cutting something, measuring, and pasting things together. But she was doing it all furtively, on her knees, instead of on the table.

When the workers began to turn in their finished products at noon, my Anemone stood behind everyone else, listening fearfully to every critical word of the young lady and glancing anxiously time and again, and from all sides, at some shiny bauble. Finally it was her turn. She handed in her work.

It was a little golden boat with three tiny benches and a silver oar. The boat was so elegantly, so proportionally, and so beautifully crafted, and the oar was lying there so delicately, that all of us—I, the young lady, the workers—sang out our praises in one breath.

The girl did not believe it at first. She stood there pouting, with her eyes lowered, most certainly expecting somebody's ridicule at any moment. But when she saw that her work was indeed far better than any of the others, her happiness knew no bounds. She forgot where she was and who was beside her. She forgot about the painful moments of indecision, fear, and shame she had just experienced and, happier than she had ever been in her life, she clapped her hands, jumped up and down, and kissed her friends.

"I thought of it all by myself . . . I didn't ask anyone . . . I was so afraid. I thought everyone would laugh at me, because I'm all grown-up and I made a little boat . . . I did it on my own, I thought of it myself!" she said proudly to everyone, bubbling over with the kind of happiness that most certainly makes a child's heart beat joyfully as it takes its first independent step.

"I'll make some poppies as well, then a little boot . . . I'll make a tiny bucket," she said proudly.

When she found out that all her ideas were good, she was happy beyond measure.

From that time on, it was as if the girl were reborn. "Her own wish," freed her from her chains. She experienced the happiness of a prisoner found innocent by a court, who is released into the world, into the sunlight. She voiced her opinions more often and more confidently, and she bowed down less frequently to the authority of another person's word.

Soon, the “good-for-nothing Blizzard,” the drudge of her stepmother, the slave of her nicknames, began to make models exclusively “of her own choice and her own desire” for the entire cooperative.

As time went by, she began to recognise her strengths and realize that she was not the lowliest of God’s creatures—as long as she exercised her will, as long as she possessed a desire to live. When her stepmother dared to hint to her about her marriage with beh-meh-meh, she became terrified. It was as if they wanted to commit the greatest sin against her, cause her eternal shame, advise her to commit a crime, and make her sink forever in the mud.

I do not know where she is now, what has happened to her, what she is doing. However, I do not fear for her.

I know that my Anemone has pushed her way up into the light, and that she will always remember that first ray that melted the snow over her head and enabled her to bloom, perhaps not as a magnificent flower, but still—as a flower in her own right, as her very own flower.

*Ivas*  
(1909)

Oh, how pleasant and cheerful it was to be alive in God's wonderful world! Spring had barely arrived, but it was already so warm outdoors, and the sun shone so brightly, and the sky was so clear! There was still some snow in the ravines, but the pond, blue and brimming with water just like the Sula river, had overflowed, and reached right up to the willows. In the middle of the road, spring rivulets trickled down the ruts. The water in them was warm, but still muddy. Seven-year-old Ivas rolled up his homespun pants and waded in the mire.

The water had long since washed all the winter grime off his feet, but he was still splashing about, wading through the water, and gazing happily from one side to the other. To the left there was the lord's orchard, silent, dark, and extending all the way to the pond. To the right, there was the dark steppe.

In Ivas's memory, however, that orchard appeared as it had looked in the summertime when his mother had been weeding the garden there. And he remembered the steppe as it was on that summer day when his mother had woken him before sunrise and taken him with her for the haying: green, fragrant, and thickly covered with sparkling dew. Before long, everything would be like that again.

The snow would soon melt in the ditches, the sun would shine more brightly, the cuckoos would return, the nightingales would begin to sing, the meadow would be covered with a luxuriant green carpet, and the bushes, the willows, and the grove would turn lush and green . . . But what if . . . What if they did not turn green?

Ivas stood dumbstruck in the middle of the slough.

"Really, what would happen if things did not turn green? If nothing turned green?" he stubbornly kept asking himself.

The more he thought about it, the more terrified he became.

"What if the frost comes again, and the pond is once again locked in ice?" he wondered. "What if the cold winds and snowstorms begin to blow, and I'm chased back into the house and not allowed to go

outdoors into the fresh air? What if the meadowlarks do not return from the south? What if the nightingales do not fly back home? What if there is no spring? What if there is no summer, and everything becomes petrified and stays as grey, and as black, and as silent as it is now?"

Ivas became so distraught that he could no longer trust his own ability to think through these questions. He dashed to the house to find his mother.

His mother was just seasoning the borshch, tasting it to see how it could be fixed. The borshch, made out of potatoes and a few half-frozen beets, was not tasty. It smelled sour and lacked salt. But the mother had nothing with which to improve its flavour, for there had not been any suet or oil in the house since Christmas, and as for the salt she had borrowed, there was only a tiny bit left. She tasted the borshch, grimaced, and spit it out. Her heart was seething.

The truth is, her heart was always boiling, seething, or foaming with rage. In it blazed a flame of vehement anger and resentment, and a compelling urge to swear, to curse someone, and to get even.

In her head, there always was an overriding concern that blocked out all others: how was she to go on living? How was she to drag herself through the rest of her cursed, miserable, lonely existence? Autumn posed its question: will the house continue standing, or will one of the walls cave in during the winter? Winter—will there be enough firewood? Spring—where will she scrounge enough grain to make it through until the harvest? Summer—how, with her cursed back, will she be able to earn some grain by reaping? Her entire life had roared by like a conflagration.

The wicked fairy of destruction was not afraid of sullyng her hands with the insignificant fortune of the peasant woman. Indeed, for twenty years this evil spirit had worked unceasingly in that humble abode with greater enthusiasm than in an elegant palace. Six times this fury had torn the rosy dreams of motherhood out of Hannah's heart by casting one child after another into the grave. When there were no children left, she had sent Hannah's husband to war, so that he, to the delight of the Japanese, could lay his head down forever in the Manchurian steppes.

When the evil fairy had finished off both the children and the husband, she began to amuse herself with the farmyard. In the spring, she washed away the earth from under a wall of the house, or toppled over the little shed, or threw a fistful of frost into the old pigsty.

She bared her teeth through the broken panes in the window, rushed out like smoke through the decrepit chimney, cracked the ceiling beam, or ripped the roof to pieces.

Hannah saw all this. That wicked fairy could not hide from her sharp eyes, and when she drew nearer to Hannah and began to make her bones ache in bad weather, or caused a buzzing like that of bees in her head, or stabbed her painfully in her side, or played havoc in her sore stomach—Hannah knew whom to curse, and she cursed her vehemently, viciously, and at the top of her lungs, irrespective of whether she was alone or out in public.

“Mother! What will happen, just suppose, if it doesn’t turn green?” Ivas ran into the house and cut short her cursing for the moment.

The question was so unexpected, so incomprehensible, that the mother, who for a long time now had been accustomed to hearing all sorts of drivel from her idiot-son, was nevertheless, completely taken aback.

“What will happen, mother, if it doesn’t turn green?” Ivas asked for the second time.

“Shoo! You fool! What won’t turn green?” The mother boiled over as soon as she figured out what kind of nonsense he was blabbering.

“If the orchard, the meadow, and the hayfield don’t turn green.”

“Shoo! Get away, I said! What are you prattling about, you dumbbell? Why wouldn’t it turn green? What’s got into your head, you lamebrained half-wit? You’d do better to drain the water away from the house into the ditch, or take out the garbage . . . He roams around, wanders off for the whole day like a stupid oaf, like a Gypsy! Other children obediently sit at home, play near their mother, or make an effort to help out, but it . . . but he . . .”

The tirade was lengthy. But Ivas did not pay the slightest attention to her, even though he waited until she finished.

“What will happen, just suppose, if neither the lord’s orchard, nor the steppe, nor the meadow turns green?” Ivas asked stubbornly for the third time.

Hannah lost her patience and smacked him on the nape of the neck.

“That’s so you’ll know how it turns green. You’ll know, you crackbrained fool, how to babble such nonsense. ‘It won’t turn green! Neither the lord’s orchard, nor the meadow, nor the steppe!’ Have you completely lost your mind, or what? What do you mean, ‘it won’t turn green?’ The sun is shining, the water is flowing, the snow has melted, and he’s saying: ‘It won’t turn green!’”

“Don’t you see, you blockhead, that spring is coming? Don’t you have any eyes in that stupid head of yours? It’s the sixth week of Lent already! And there are only two weeks left until Easter. But who knows whether or not you’ll get to eat *paska* [braided circular Easter bread] this year. If people lend me some wheaten flour, you’ll have some, but if they don’t, you won’t . . .”

Hannah should have stopped at that. The distressing question of whether they would have a *paska* this year, and the no less difficult one as to whether it would be possible to trick the priest into blessing an Easter *paska* made out of rye flour instead of wheaten flour, seemed, to Ivas, worthy of being pondered over. But she was carried away on a wave of violent anger.

“I won’t go begging for your sake, and I won’t begin to steal, and I can’t make a *paska* for you out of thin air. If it weren’t for my damned back, I’d go and polish the floors for the lords, and if it weren’t for my damned eyes, I’d get some shirts to embroider from Mokryna . . .

“Damn my fate! Damn my health! I haven’t lived—I’ve just existed. And all because of you children. I carried six of the likes of you to term, nursed all six, and buried all six in the ground. If only one of them . . . If only one of them . . . If only you were a normal child like the ones other people have . . . Get out of my sight! Don’t make me any angrier! Don’t make me commit a sin! Get out!”

Ivas did not move. His mother was speaking the holy truth, and she was justified in scolding him, because all the children in the village laughed at him. Nevertheless, she had to answer his question, because it was choking him in his chest, and he could not breathe until he heard the answer.

“But mother, what will happen if it doesn’t turn green? What if spring doesn’t come? What if the storks don’t return? What if summer doesn’t come?” he asked.

And his voice was filled with such anguish, and his anxious little eyes gazed so intently into his mother’s face, that Hannah could not utter the words to chase him away.

She stopped husking the millet and stared at her son’s face. It was nice and clean, and his large grey eyes were shining ever so brightly. His little heart was thumping under his wretched, threadbare shirt.

“It just can’t be, my son, that it won’t turn green. For spring will come, and in the springtime everything grows and turns green,” she said quietly, without any anger.



“But mummy, who will make it turn green?” Ivas asked, boundlessly happy to hear his mother’s kind words.

“Who will make it? But don’t you know? You’re a big boy already, you should know that everything happens because of God’s will: the winter, the spring, and the holy summer. Everything is held in place by His holy will. As long as people live honestly and without sin, the Lord has mercy on them, and grants them good harvests for their crops and for all sorts of fruits and vegetables.

“If the people start forgetting about Him, He sends down hail and frost upon them, He destroys the vegetables, the fruits, and the crops in the fields . . . But it never happens that spring doesn’t come, and that nothing turns green. Sometimes it comes earlier, and sometimes it comes later, but nevertheless, it does turn green. It isn’t likely that people could offend God with such a great sin.”

“But what if it doesn’t happen because of a sin?” Ivas interrupted his mother. “What if the Lord . . . What if God just doesn’t feel like it, or forgets about it. Or what if He simply can’t do it?”

Hannah leapt to her feet.

“‘Doesn’t feel like it!’ ‘Forgets!’ ‘Simply can’t!’ Have you gone berserk? Have you lost your senses? Have you . . .? ‘God forgets?’ ‘The Lord simply can’t.’ He’s putting the Lord on the same level as people! I’ll show you! I’ll show you!

“Bow your head to the ground, you accursed one! Bow down! Pray! He’s just turned eight, but he’s acting like the Antichrist! Have you been put on this earth to lead me into sin, to bring shame upon me? Bow to the ground! Drop that stick!”

Carefully placing on the bench the lilac branch he wanted to use to make himself a wonderful pistol, Ivas knelt before the faded, blackened, peeling icon of a saint with a long beard. He prostrated himself sincerely, for, disquieted by his mother’s words, he thought he felt a heavy sin weigh like a stone in his heart. At the same time, however, the troublesome, stubborn question gnawed on his mind, and his earlier fear did not leave him.

“What if the Lord forgets, or simply can’t turn the steppes green?” he thought worriedly. “What will happen then? What will people do then? Where will his mother earn some grain? What will people use to bake a *paska*? What will the sheep, and the horses, and the cows feed on? And then old woman Pylypykha probably would not hire him to tend the pigs, and that would mean that this year he once again would not have either a jacket or a cap.”

The holy one with the long beard gazed severely off to one side and seemed to be pushing the open book on the icon stand behind the table into Ivas's hands. What was written in there? Perhaps it was exactly what he needed . . .

Once he had asked a schoolboy to read it to him, but his mother had come in just then, and she had given both of them a good tongue-lashing, ordering them not to crawl on the table where the bread was placed, and so Ivas had not found out anything.

No matter what, it always turned out that his mother stood in his way just when he was about to find out something interesting, something he really needed to know. She hated his talking, his questions, but he was never silent.

Dozens of questions came to him from heaven knows where. They crept into his head, piled up one on top of the other, and became intertwined there . . .

Ivas continued prostrating himself, and saw no end in sight to his misery, for his mother never forgave lightly.

Fortunately for the boy, old woman Pylypykha dropped in.

"What's going on here? Why is he doing that?"

"Don't even ask. It's as if he had stuck a knife in my heart!"

She told Pylypykha everything.

Pylypykha shook her head and gave the boy a look full of reproach. Nevertheless, she came to his defence.

"Let him go! Just look, his hair is all sweaty. You can't force your understanding on him. Some day he'll figure things out for himself."

"That will be the day! I buried six normal children, and I'm left with this gaping fool, with such an idiot . . ." Hannah began her familiar, lengthy refrain.

"You had no luck when it came to children!" Pylypykha agreed. "Some children may be mischief makers, or whiners, but this one is really strange. He seems docile, but there's more trouble than enough with him."

"It would be better if he would kill me and stop breaking my heart. When he begins to babble and ask questions, it's as if he were sucking the very life out of a person. I tell him: 'Sweep the room.' But he just stares at me and says: 'But why don't the stars fall out of the sky?' I tell him: 'Go and pull some straw out for us,' but he says: 'Why didn't God put out the fire with rain when the church was burning?'"

"He asked me about the church as well," Pylypykha stated.

“There, you see! He’s beginning to bother other people as well, and yet there was Sydir, scolding me yesterday: ‘You’re acting like a viper, like a hangman. Stop beating the child and send him to school instead.’

“But how can I send him, ragged and barefoot as he is? And what will he learn there, if he hasn’t even learned the Lord’s prayer as yet. And why hasn’t he learned it? Because of his wicked mouth. He latches on to every word and won’t let go of it.

“You say the prayer to him, and he begins his usual: ‘What does this or that word mean? Why is this word there? Why is it used?’ He gets you so confused, so rattled, that you get all the prayers mixed up yourself.

“And he’s untrustworthy, restless, lazy, and stubborn. I don’t know how many times I’ve tried sitting him down to the spindle, but he just doesn’t want to: ‘I find it boring to spin. It’s boring. I feel sleepy, and my back hurts.’ You simply can’t get him used to doing any kind of work, even if you bang his head against the wall.

“But when it comes to talking, well now, that’s another matter! He could talk both day and night. Or he’ll take to staring at some beetle, and spend the whole day watching it, following it around the field on his knees.”

“Let me try doing something with him for a while.”

“He’ll repay you just as he repaid Demyan last year. He left the herd and took off after the train. He almost fell under the engine, while the herd grazed on Demyan’s wheat . . .

“Go ahead, hire him, take him, do what you can with him, but it’s unlikely you’ll keep him for the entire summer. I have no hope of that!

“Oh! I won’t live out my days with him. I’ll never get to eat his bread. The Lord has punished me. He’s punished me all my life, but He concealed the greatest woe to the end, so that my bones wouldn’t have any peace even in the next world. What will he do when I die? What is he good for? Who will feed him? Where will he find himself a place to live?”

“Oh, heaven help us!” Pylypykha ran to the window. “Just look! What’s that dark thing in the treetop in my garden? Is it my Opanas? Or is it, perhaps, my Sydir?”

“It’s him! It’s my blockhead, my good-for-nothing! Oh, will he ever get it now! Oh yes, he will! His last pair of pants is ruined!”

They rushed out of the house.

At that very moment, the branch broke under Ivas, and he fell from the very top of the young willow straight down on some beehives. Both his legs bent under him, cracked, and the boy began to lose consciousness.

“Well, what did I say? Has God punished you? ‘Has it turned green?’” he heard his mother’s voice as he blacked out, but he could not hear how she lamented over him.

They took Ivas to the district hospital and placed him in a big, bright room. It did not take him long to adjust to his new surroundings. He carefully examined everything he saw, counted the little tables, the small stools, the beds, and quickly became accustomed to the unfamiliar, regulated, monotonous life.

In the same room in which he was lying, there were nine other peasants who were lying on the same kinds of beds, on the same kinds of pillows, and under the same kinds of quilts as he was. But, because they too had been punished by God for committing a sin—one for hauling grain on Sunday, another one for eating suet on Friday, the third one for stealing—they were interesting to him only as living examples of the terrible words of his mother and Pylypykha: “God punishes a person grievously for his sins.”

The doctor spent more than a month trying to save Ivas’s legs before he was finally convinced that he could do nothing with the boy’s protruding bones, and that this was a life-threatening situation. He sent for Hannah, and told her that her son’s legs had to be amputated.

Hannah began to scream, wail, rage, and curse her fate, the hospital, and all the doctors. She hurriedly tried to make arrangements to have her unconscious son taken to an old woman healer; however, an older man, who had recently had one arm amputated, was able to convince her otherwise and obtained her consent for the operation.

The legs were cut off the next day and buried in the ground. After some time, the stumps healed. The doctor encased the knees in leather at his own expense, and notified the mother that she could take her son home. On Sunday, Sydir took Hannah to the hospital with his own horse, carried Ivas out on his shoulders, and placed him alongside his mother on the cart.

“Should I go straight home, or should I go, perhaps, by way of the farmsteads?” Sydir asked himself.

He headed the horse in the direction of the farmsteads. In a few moments, they had driven through the small, grimy, dust-covered town, descended the hill, and driven out into the steppe.

It was only now Ivas noticed that not only was the sun burning, and columns of dust were rising almost to the very sky, but that it actually was summer outside. Pigs were wandering over the road that had old willows planted on both sides of it; small flocks of sheep were happily nibbling the short tufts of spurred-rye that the horses had left behind; and cows and calves were tearing off the tips of foxtails in the ditches.

Dozens of children, with huge sticks in their hands, were guarding the grain from being damaged by the grazing animals, and a few of them were playing games in the middle of the road.

After crossing a bridge, Sydir turned the cart along a boundary to a village. The cart began to climb upwards quietly and imperceptibly as it headed straight for a white church whose gold cross gleamed on a green hill. To the right swayed a tall stand of luxuriant wheat, its heavy spikes bowing almost to the ground. To the left stretched tall, even stacks of sheaves of golden rye. A freshly-ploughed summerfallow, as black as velvet, gleamed next to a field covered with white buckwheat blossoms. This time, the dear, well-known panorama, so close to the heart of the boy from his infancy, impressed him as something new and unexpected.

He was accustomed to watching nature slowly decorate the steppe, to see it call, in turn, upon various birds to witness its work as it carefully and gradually used up all the paints on its palette. Now he saw everything after it was ready, completed, and the impression was so intense, and so powerful, that he could not tear his eyes away from the scene, nor could he find a word that would express his emotions—feelings of a kindred, organic bonding with all this beauty.

“A stork!” he finally shouted joyously and, jerking his mother’s sleeve, pointed at the sky.

“A stork? A stork won’t carry you, a cripple, into the field. Even now, he’s still thinking about storks!” Hannah cried in utter despair and condemnation.

Ivas’s hand, which had been raised to the sky, fell helplessly to his side. His shoulders sagged, his head bent down, and his eyes filled with tears. And from behind this veil of tears, Ivas could no longer see the luxuriant wheat, or the church, or the orchards on the

horizon. And in his young little heart he understood that his link with the shepherds, the wheat, and the sheep was broken forever.

God had turned things green, covered them with dew, and brought forth a good harvest to the joy of obedient people. But He would not cover his legs with dew, because He wanted to punish him forever with the ultimate punishment. And what was his mother to do with him now? How could she drag him from one field to another during the harvest? They had no horse, and no cart. Who would give him something to eat or drink if she left him alone in the house during the harvest?

These thoughts were more terrible than any that had ever occurred to him before. And it seemed to Ivas that they were not going upwards, that they were not drawing nearer to the white church, but were descending into a dark abyss where only the curses of his mother echoed, and where a hungry death awaited both of them.

Sydir travelled around only until noon. He went through just one village and five farmsteads, but the trip was amazingly successful. They had never dreamed or expected to gather so many rusks and buckwheat groats, so much flour, and cloth, and millet for the poor little cripple.

Hannah wanted to share some of it with Sydir, but he refused to accept any of it, and the entire take, the first income of the idiot-son, was left with his mother.

The villagers from their own village also came to visit the cripple, and they too did not come empty-handed. Hannah accepted flat cakes, suet, barley groats, and shirts. She bowed low to her generous neighbours, and bustled about, trying to show them her gratitude for their kindness.

But Ivas was stubbornly silent. The curious women surrounded him and asked him questions, but it was all in vain. He did not want to show them his legs, or tell them how his legs had been cut off, or admit whether or not he was in pain.

“He’s exhausted, and he’s suffered ever so much!” Pylypykha defended him.

“Oh merciful God! There isn’t so much as a grain of sense in that unfortunate head! He’s just staring, and he doesn’t even realize he should thank the people,” his mother thought and fretted silently.

The people stayed until quite late, but as soon as they left, Hannah laid out everything that had been given to them that day. Then she began putting some of it away, heaping some things together, and

transferring dry foodstuffs into other containers. She had not seen so much food in her home for at least the past couple of years, and, more likely, for the past ten. And she had never known so much kindness from others in her entire life as she had received today.

Her face appeared to have grown brighter, and she looked younger and healthier.

Ivas, covered with a blanket, was lying on the floor. He was watching his mother busying herself with her work, but he did not say a word.

Finally, Hannah tidied up everything, laid out her bedding on the platform on top of the oven, and lay down to sleep. She was already falling asleep and beginning to dream a pleasant dream when she felt someone touch her lightly on the face.

“Mother!”

Hannah opened her eyes.

It was Ivas. He had made his way to the oven on his knees, and his face looked up to hers.

“Mother!”

“What do you want?”

“I want to say something,” he said hurriedly.

“Is there so little time for you to talk during the day that you must blabber the night away as well?” Hannah was angry.

“I want to tell you something very short. I keep thinking and thinking about it.”

“You’ll tell me in the morning.”

“God can’t do everything,” he spoke decisively.

“Let me sleep,” Hannah drawled drowsily.

“God took away my legs because He wanted to punish me,” Ivas said hurriedly, so his mother would hear what he had to say.

Hannah was startled out of her sleep.

“He took away my legs, and yet . . . our life is better now . . .”

## *“The Stranger”*

(1910)

They were sitting together by a small lake in the middle of a wide steppe about five kilometres from the estate on which they both served. Nazar, straddling a surface root of a huge old pear tree that grew all alone on the vast steppe, reclined against its trunk. Odarka, her feet tucked under her, rested on the grass.

A large bonfire blazed brightly between them, and a small iron pot filled with soup hung over it. Next to Nazar lay a loaf of bread and a watermelon; next to Odarka stood a bowl with washed millet, a frying pan with diced fat, and a pile of neatly stacked dry branches.

In front of them, farther down, a little lake surrounded by a dense growth of willows glistened like a framed mirror, and oxen roamed over the hayfield’s second growth. Behind them, on a gentle slope, the freshly ploughed fallow land looked like a gigantic black carpet and, above it, the moon lounged in the luminous sky.

“Just take a look, my dear Nazar, at how much you and I have managed to do in a month. Just take a look! The ploughed black field stretches on and on, as far as the eye can see,” Odarka said, turning around with her whole body and pointing at the horizon with an oak twig; her firm dark face, burned by the sun and the wind, glowed radiantly, and her white teeth glittered like pearls.

“And we haven’t even finished ploughing half of it as yet,” Nazar responded, and a smile lit his face as well.

“No, we haven’t,” the girl agreed. “We’ll be finished with half of it when we reach the burial mounds.”

“We’ll be here a long time yet, if the steward doesn’t send some ploughs to help us.”

“He won’t. He asked me: ‘Are you sick of ploughing?’ And I replied: ‘We’ll plough until we’re done.’”

“If they don’t send out more ploughs, the two of us will have to stay here until the frost comes.”

“Until the ground is completely frozen,” Odarka elaborated. “Because we’ll still be able to plough after the first small frost. The



ground will be slightly frozen in the morning, but it will thaw as soon as the sun warms it up. I'm thinking, however, that it might be cold to spend the nights out here in the steppe."

"I have a warm sheepskin coat," Nazar said.

"Well, I don't have a sheepskin coat, but I won't freeze in my woollen one," Odarka stated confidently, flashing her large blue eyes at Nazar.

"I'll haul in more straw from the manor; if a person crawls into the straw, then it doesn't matter how strong a frost there is, it won't bother him. But you'll be frightened to spend the nights out here."

"Why?"

"The nights will grow darker and longer. And when clouds move in and cover the sky, it becomes pitch dark."

"I'm not afraid."

"And in the fall, wolves prowl around and howl . . ."

"So what? I'm not afraid of anything."

"Then why did you cry when the steward sent you here? You were really upset in the barracks," Nazar reminded her.

"Do you think I cried because I was afraid?"

"Then why did you cry?"

"Because I didn't want to plough with you."

"And do you suppose that I wanted to plough with you?"

They looked at each other and then laughed heartily as they recalled the evening when fate had brought them together so unexpectedly.

One evening, more than a month ago, the steward had come into the barracks and shouted loudly for all the workers to hear: "Hey there, you lazybones—Nazar and Odarka! I want the two of you to go into the steppe at dawn to plough the land by the pear tree. Odarka will take the grey oxen, and Nazar will take a pair of black oxen and a pair of fallow ones. The new ploughs are ready and waiting for you by the barn. Every day you have to plough as much land as two pairs of oxen can plough in a day."

There was nothing terrifying in the voice, or on the face, or in the stance of the steward as he said this. And the work was not at all frightening, because Odarka had long since become accustomed to ploughing; nevertheless, the hand in which she was holding a spoon with a dumpling on it froze in the air.

Nazar also straightened up as if he were choking on a piece of bread and batted his eyelids as if he were just waking up.

The other contract workers were equally stunned by the steward's order. Odarka and Nazar! The steward was free to pair up the fifty workers that he hired on a term basis in any manner that he wished, and he could change the pairs around endlessly, in many different combinations during their eight-month contract, but it seemed to all of them that he could not have come up with a more comical idea than pairing Odarka with Nazar.

“Ha-ha-ha!” Semen was the first to figure out what had happened. “It's all because of Yavdokha the cook. That devil of a woman has certainly come up with a fine scheme. You're in for it, Nazar, and it's all probably because of what you said yesterday about the oil for the fritters. You went on and on about the cook stealing the oil, so now you can have the pleasure of eating nothing but bread out in the steppe.”

“So Nazar's in for it because of the oil, but why is Odarka being punished in this way?” Maryana stood up for Odarka.

“For being foolish enough to learn how to plough,” Semen surmised. “Odarka! Break his plough right off the bat . . .” he wanted to advise the girl, but she was already weeping mightily, wailing at the top of her lungs.

It seemed to her that never, in all her life as an orphan, had she had to experience such grief, such a cruel injustice, such a horrible fate . . . She had bound sheaves for Ivan, raked behind Dmytro, and hauled sheaves with Parkhom; she had worked with and won the approval of all the workers, except for Nazar—with whom she had not exchanged a single word during the whole time of the contract. But now, as if for some sin, or as if she were to be made a laughingstock, they were pairing her up with Nazar and sending her way out into the steppe with him, where there was no living soul, or cottage, or barn nearby.

Odarka cried late into the night, and her heart did not stop aching even during her sound sleep; and when her eyes flew open before dawn and she remembered the steward's order, she wept so bitterly that she did not see what kind of suet bits or how much bread the steward was throwing into her bag.

The herder brought in the cattle. Feeling as if she were still dreaming, she separated out two pairs of grey oxen, harnessed them to a plough, and moved out of the yard as if she were departing for the other world. As for where Nazar was, she neither knew nor cared to know.

She walked down the road behind the plough, seeing in front of her only the cart with the sacks, the dried firewood, and the barrel of water. Her woollen skirt—the only decent article of clothing that she owned—was flung carelessly on top of the sacks, and, to her, it took on the appearance of an unfortunate sister who was being hauled away to be flung into an abyss.

“Where should I drop off the firewood and the food?” asked Yukhym, the herder’s young helper who had been fated to prod the horse for five kilometres today.

“Come and help me drive the plough into the ground,” Oksana called out to him without replying to his question.

The young boy jumped down from the cart, threw the reins on the horse’s back, and took hold of the plough. Odarka cracked her whip, and the oxen stepped forward; at that very moment, however, the plough jerked out of the boy’s hands and flipped over. Odarka flung the whip to the ground and, shoving the boy aside, seized the plough-handles herself. The embarrassed boy scratched his head, adjusted his pants, and then, running off, picked up the whip, and twirled it expertly like a wheel around his head.

The oxen moved forward again, and the plough, now in the trained, confident, and strong hands of the girl, sank deep into the ground.

By the time that Nazar arrived with his plough, Odarka had managed to take the sacks down from the cart and plough her first furrow down the length of the field. Nazar wanted to plough his first furrow right next to hers, but when he heard her call out angrily to the ox next to the furrow: “*Tsob! [Turn left!]*,” he moved farther away. In the meantime, Yukhym disappeared in a cloud of black dust.

It was then that a thought suddenly occurred to Nazar: “Who the devil is going to help me sink the plough into the ground now? I guess I’ll have to call on ‘that one.’”

But the thought of asking the girl for assistance seemed to him to be a much more difficult task than to try and plough the first furrow all by himself in the hard soil. He pushed as hard as he could on the plough with one hand, and waved his whip with the other one. The oxen jerked forward, but the plough barely scratched the surface of the ground. His second attempt brought the same result. The third try was even more embarrassing; the oxen, frightened by his loud hallooing, speeded up, and the plough skimmed over the ground as if it were on a sheet of ice.

“*Tprrrr! [Whoa!]*” he heard the angry voice of his neighbour.

A moment later Odarka was beside him. Without saying a word, she seized the lead rope in her hands. After going down the length of the field with him twice, she just as silently dropped the rope and went back to her plough.

During this whole episode, the two co-workers had not so much as glanced at each other, but, all the same, the first delicate cobweb of harmony was spun between them. They ate their breakfast silently, sitting separately on the beams of their ploughs; their noon lunch they shared out of a common bowl; at suppertime, Nazar muttered a word of praise for the corn meal gruel that Odarka had cooked, while Odarka, of her own accord, ran some water from the barrel into a flask and passed it to Nazar.

By the time they had fed, watered, and driven the oxen to the herder in the night pasture, the first link had been forged in the chain that, with every passing day, bound them more closely together.

On the next piece of land they no longer worked separately. Ploughing together, with one plough following the other, they did not go their separate ways, even though the wind was forever covering the face of the one on the second plough with a mask of black soil; they simply exchanged ploughs and took turns filling each other's eyes with dust.

"This entire ploughed field will be sown with wheat," Odarka continued the conversation, once again glancing with pleasure at the black carpet of soil.

"Yes, of course, with wheat."

"We'll ask the steward to send both of us back here to do the harrowing. Oh, it will be ever so pleasant to see the wheat come up, turn green, and then grow thick and tall. And you and I, Nazar, will reap it. If they send us someplace else to do some other work, we should still try to sneak back here at night and reap at least the first sheaf."

"But will we be lucky enough to at least taste the wheat? The lord will sell all of it . . ."

"So what?" Odarka interrupted him. "Let him sell it. Someone will buy it and mill it into flour; and then someone else will buy the flour and bake some little buns, and we'll go to the market together and buy ourselves one bun each . . ."

"Yes indeed, that's probably the way it will have to be," Nazar laughed. "But just take a look at how your soup is boiling. You'd better quickly throw in the millet."

“Are you in such a hurry? Do you want to eat or sleep so badly? We won’t fall asleep so easily anyway; we’ll be gabbing for a long time yet.”

“That’s true,” Nazar agreed. “There’s no end to listening when you’re around.”

“Are you bored with me?”

“Why would I be bored? If I didn’t want to listen, I’d go and sleep,” Nazar replied calmly, throwing a potato into the lake.

As it hit the water, the potato made a splashing sound.

“Oh, dear mother of mine!” Odarka leapt to her feet.

“It was me—I threw a potato into the lake.”

“And here I thought it was a frog,” Odarka said, tucking her feet under herself once again. “But tell me, my dear Nazar, what if I suddenly turned into a frog, just as it happens in fairy tales?” she asked smilingly.

“Well, my darling, I wouldn’t jump into the water after you—not on your life,” Nazar roared with laughter.

“But if it happened to you, I’d change myself into a frog as well, and jump in after you.”

“Oh sure you would, oh sure,” Nazar said in disbelief.

“I truly would.”

“You’re lying! You’d jump in after me just like you’ve embroidered a shirt for me,” Nazar said.

All at once Odarka fell silent and bent over, as if he had lashed her with a whip.

“See, how quiet you’ve suddenly become. All I did was mention the shirt—and you immediately lost your tongue. You promised a long time ago . . .”

“But there’s never any time to do it,” Odarka responded softly.

“Well, why don’t you embroider at noon? The oxen rest for three hours. I even volunteered to cook the lunch and graze the oxen, if only you would embroider the shirt.”

Odarka bent her head still lower and tried to hide herself from Nazar behind the flames.

“You promised to do it two weeks ago, but you deceived me. At first you said that you didn’t have any cloth or embroidery cotton; I got you both the cloth and the thread. Then the needle wasn’t any good, so I ran five kilometres to get you another one. And then you said that the cuffs weren’t good, so I got another pair. I did everything you wanted me to do, but you still haven’t started on the

shirt,” the young man continued with his reproaches. “All the other girls spend their noon hours embroidering; you’re the only one who’s such a lazybones . . .”

“I’m not lazy, my dear Nazar. I swear to God that it’s not because I’m lazy that I haven’t embroidered a shirt for you,” Odarka cried vehemently.

“Then what’s stopping you?”

“I won’t tell you,” Odarka drawled sadly after a short pause; and then she sighed.

“Why not? Do you think I’ll tell someone? You know I haven’t ever told anyone any of the things that you’ve told me.”

“Everything that I told you up to now—how I was a ragpicker as a little girl, and how I was beaten, and how Sydir badgered me, and how, even now, I still don’t know The Lord’s Prayer—all of that is not very shameful. Even if you told someone about it, you would only bring a sin down on your soul, because you promised not to tell anyone. But as for this secret, it’s so shameful that I’m too embarrassed to tell even you about it.”

Nazar felt sorry for Odarka, but his curiosity overcame his pity. “Shameful! Of course it’s shameful! If you’re too lazy to embroider, then you’ll never live down the shame in a lifetime,” he said.

“It’s not that I’m lazy. I swear to God that I’m not lazy.”

“Then perhaps you’ve sworn off embroidering just like granny Stepanyda renounced spinning? Or maybe you’ve figured it out, just like Vekla, that instead of buying embroidery cotton and straining your eyes, it’s better to buy a ready-made shirt?” Nazar began deriding her.

“I don’t know how to embroider,” Odarka blurted out, as if she had torn the words out with their roots from the depths of her heart.

“Whew!” Nazar exclaimed loudly.

“I swear to God it’s true, my dear Nazar!”

“You’re lying! I’ll never believe that a girl doesn’t know how to cross-stitch.”

“Honest to God, I don’t know how!”

“I’ll never believe that, when even I, a young man, can embroider a collar that’s not all that bad.”

“But I really don’t know how,” Odarka sighed soulfully. “I know how to hem linen and tat lace, but I don’t know how to cross-stitch. It’s shameful, and it bothers me so badly that I’m beside myself—but I simply don’t know how to do it.”

“But how can that be?” Nazar was nonplussed. “That a girl like you . . . that such a young woman . . . who could be getting married, doesn’t now how to cross-stitch!”

“If you only knew what my life has been like up to now, my dear Nazar . . . It was like living in a dungeon . . . I never had a minute to myself. I didn’t have even a *shah* [*half-penny*] to buy embroidery cotton. There was nowhere that I could get a scrap of cloth. This is the first summer that I’m earning money for myself; up to now, I was expected to work and give all my money to my guardian for the food that I ate.

“When I was little, not knowing how to embroider didn’t bother me very much, and so I didn’t make any great effort to learn how to do it, and then, when I grew up, I was too ashamed to admit it to the other girls because I was afraid they would ridicule me. Except for you, I haven’t told anyone in the whole world. I thought I’d learn how to embroider secretly, by having a little girl teach me somewhere in the weeds.”

“Then I’ll be that little girl for you. I’ll teach you how, if you truly want to learn.”

“Would you really?” Odarka was overjoyed.

“Yes, I’m quite good at it. Pass me the cloth, the needle, and the embroidery cotton.”

Odarka leapt to her feet, dashed up to her good skirt that was hanging on the pear tree, and reached into a pocket to pull out the folded cuffs and collar that were wrapped in embroidery cotton; she came back with a cuff, a few strands of cotton thread, and a needle. Her heart was thumping wildly.

“It’s going to be hard to see now,” the youth said worriedly.

Odarka threw a whole armful of dried branches on the fire. The soup began to bubble furiously in the iron pot.

“I guess I should throw in the millet,” Odarka said to herself.

“The devil take the millet—you’ll add it in when I go to graze the oxen; right now, you’d better pay attention here,” Nazar said, all excited about assuming the unusual role of a teacher.

Almost grabbing the needle, the embroidery thread, and the cuff out of Odarka’s hands, he sat down close to the fire to begin cross-stitching. Odarka did not sit down—she hurled herself to the ground beside him.

“Here, look at this. There are three threads here,” Nazar began.

“Yes, I see that, I see it, my dear Nazar . . .”

“And look here; I’ve stuck the needle into the cloth, and now I take the threads . . . Watch how I position the threads. Watch how I cross them.”

“I’m watching, I’m watching . . .”

“Now, I do the same thing again. And so we have another cross. See? And the third is done the same way . . . and the fourth. Now, do you see the little column that we’ve made?”

Nazar passed the cuff to Odarka. She slipped the needle hesitantly into the cloth, and it went in obliquely. Nazar took her trembling hand to steady the needle, and a warm wave flooded the girl’s heart and drowned it.

A feeling of spiritual satisfaction blended with the physical nearness of a person so dear to her, and the girl, without being aware of what was happening to her, gave in completely to an irresistible feeling of happiness—without realising what she was doing, she wrapped her arms around the youth’s neck and kissed him warmly.

Nazar did not respond to the kiss, but he moved in closer to her and tried even harder to teach her.

In a few minutes, a row of stitches appeared in an even red line on the cuff.

“See! You’ve learned how to do it!” the teacher said, rubbing his hands together with real satisfaction. “Tomorrow when it’s light outside, I’ll teach you how to embroider stars; but now, gather up the embroidery, throw the millet into the soup, and in the meantime, I’ll drive the oxen to the night herder.”

“Thank you, my dear Nazar! Thank you for teaching me. Now I’ll keep on embroidering until I learn to do it as well as Manka.”

“That’s when you’ll make yourself a shirt that will be the envy of the entire village.”

“I won’t embroider for myself, but I’ll embroider you a shirt the likes of which no one around here has ever seen. I’ll get some money from the steward, and when you go home on Sunday, I’ll give you a whole *karbovanets* [dollar]. You’ll buy some cloth and some embroidery cotton.”

“I won’t be going home this Sunday. I’m going all the way to Lypnyahy.”

“To Lypnyahy?”

“I haven’t seen Khymka for a long time . . . I’m lonely for her,” Nazar said and, as if buoyed by the happy thoughts about the girl that he loved, or, perhaps, filled with the hopes and dreams of his



anticipated encounter with her, he bounded cheerfully down the slope to the oxen.

Odarka's hands dropped helplessly to her knees as if someone had struck her with a rock, and the cuff fell to the ground. Just as unconscious now, as she was before, of the feeling that gripped her so unexpectedly, she followed the youth with a look of infinite suffering and pressed her hands to her chest, where, it seemed to her, she no longer had a heart, but only a deep, bloody wound that was burning as if it were on fire.

What had happened? She did not know. A powerful force had come up unexpectedly, seized her, and carried her up to the very sky, to the bright stars, to the moon, to God Himself, into paradise, and then it had flung her, just as suddenly, into a wilderness, into hell itself . . .

Nazar would come back, but he would no longer be the same Nazar, the Nazar that she had known up to now. He would bring back with himself something terrible, inevitable, as inexorable as death itself—something huge and powerful, that could neither be avoided, nor conquered. He would be followed by the shadow of Khymka, and that shadow would sit down beside him by the fire, eat with him with the same spoon, lie down alongside him to rest, speak with his lips, sing with his voice . . . Who was this Khymka? A snake, a viper, a witch, a sorceress . . . And if so, that's what he was too . . .

Odarka felt her heart stir once again in her chest. But now that heart seemed heavy, as if filled with lead, and her mind, as if bound in an iron hoop, was paralysed with a single thought: "He's a stranger!"

She must have been insane! All this time she had been planting flowers in a stranger's garden; she had brought cheer to a stranger's happiness with her shame. Now she had to rescue herself, to disentangle herself as quickly as possible. She had come across a snake, and she had to hurl it away from herself as fast as she could, so that it would not coil itself tightly around her and sink its fangs into her heart.

Nazar was already returning from the pasture, cheerfully singing a silly little ditty.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Odarka collapsed with laughter as soon as she heard his voice.

"What's with you?" the youth sped up, intrigued by her laughter.

“Ha-ha-ha!” Odarka laughed still harder.

“Are you crying or laughing? I can’t figure it out . . .”

Nazar now seemed to detect an offensive note in her laughter.

“And you still haven’t added the millet to the soup. You’re so delighted with your embroidery, that you’ve forgotten all about supper,” he jostled her lightly.

“Ha-ha-ha!” she burst out laughing again. “So you still think that I was telling you the truth? So you actually believed me?”

“Believed what?”

“That I don’t know how to embroider.”

“Of course you didn’t know how.”

“Ha-ha-ha!”

“You mean you did know how?”

“Ha-ha-ha! I’ll embroider you a sleeve all in a grape pattern in a day, my darling.”

“You’re lying.”

“Oh, listen to that, my good people! He won’t believe me. Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Then why did you lie to me?” Nazar asked, completely confused.

“Why did I lie? So that you would stop badgering me, my darling, about your shirt. Do you suppose that I don’t have anyone in the whole world other than you? Do you suppose that I don’t have anyone to embroider a shirt for?”

“Then why did you promise me one?”

“So that you, my silly man, would graze the oxen for me . . . Come on now, hurry and throw some firewood under the pot. You went off and stayed away ever so long with the oxen.”

Nazar obediently gathered up some firewood and threw it on the fire. The dried branches caught fire in a flash. Huge red tongues of fire grasped at the small pot from all sides.

“Just like my heart . . .” the girl thought, and she cast a fierce look at the calm, pale face of the youth.

The supper was soon ready. But Odarka did not even come near the corn meal gruel . . .

After wetting her throat with a slice of watermelon, she tore down her black woollen coat from the pear tree, flung it down on the ground, and lay down to sleep.

“Are you going to lie down here?” Nazar asked in surprise. “Let’s go to our usual spot, to the stack of straw. It will be cold here.”

“You have a fine sheepskin coat,” Odarka remarked.

Nazar looked obliquely at her. He truly did not know what she was going on about, and he most certainly did not understand what had happened to her, and so, grasping for a clue, he strained his memory to pick through all the little details of the past few hours. He could not recall having done anything wrong, but it was hard for him to walk away without hearing conciliatory words from her.

“Yes, I do have a fine sheepskin coat,” he said.

“Maybe you have two of them?”

“Maybe I have three, and maybe, if I wanted to, I could have four,” he bantered jokingly, seizing on her words. “And if I wanted even more, I could have as many as five, because my father has more than a dozen sheep in his pen.”

“More than a dozen sheep!” Odarka repeated in her mind, and the words stabbed her heart like a knife. “More than a dozen sheep. And he most probably has a cow, and oxen, and horses . . . A spacious cottage, an orchard, a mill, his own land . . . He’s a duke! He’s the son of a householder! And Khymka is a duchess . . . She wears ribbons, fine coral beads . . . She has a white complexion, and she’s beautiful, the only daughter in her father’s home . . .

“But as for me—I’ll remain a servant forever, burned by the wind, tanned by the sun, blackened, barefoot . . . There’s an abyss stretching between us! A snake can be crushed, a sorceress can be conquered with herbs, but the abyss can never be bridged. And I cuddled up to him, pressed closely to him. I even kissed him!”

Shame flooded her face. She tied her kerchief and turned away from Nazar.

“Come on, Odarka; let’s go sleep in the stack of straw; it’s cold here, and the mosquitoes will devour you,” he said sincerely and kindly.

Hot stinging tears flowed from Odarka’s eyes in answer to this genuine kindness from “the stranger,” but she bit her lips until they bled so as not to make even a single sound that would let him know about her suffering, so that not a single note of pity would resonate for her in his heart.

Nazar stood there for a while longer; he waited until the last embers of the fire were covered with ashes and then walked off gloomily to the pile of straw.

Odarka sprang up. A few last tears still trembled on her eyelashes, but she was no longer crying. Tearing off her kerchief, she flung her heavy braids down to her shoulders and looked all around.

The lake glistened like cold, unmoving ice; the bushy willows were bending over, weeping on the hayfield’s second growth. The proud moon, indifferent to everything on earth, floated slowly way up there, so high above the earth, drifting off into the infinite expanse of the frigid autumn sky.

She gazed at the immense black carpet of ploughed land and could not believe that she had walked over every foot of it, step by step with her bare feet; and then she looked at the grey fallow field, and her heart cramped with fear—it was impossible, beyond all human power, to till such a field with just two ploughs.

## *The Secret of Our Princess*

(1911, 1931)

In the summer of 19\_\_, I visited the village of Nekrasivka where I was a guest in the home of Marta Hryhorivna Mykhaylenko, the mother of my high school friend Kattrya. The village was no more than twenty versts from the provincial capital; surrounded by high mountains on three sides and cut off from the railway station by a wide river and sand dunes on the fourth side, it gave the impression of being the most Godforsaken corner in the district of L. and, in comparison to the neighbouring villages immediately beyond the mountains, appeared to be a gloomy stepchild of fate. Even though there were no diversions for me at home, I was always bored when my mother sent me there for my holidays, every year from the time I was twelve.

That particular summer, however, I travelled to Nekrasivka most willingly, motivated not by the thought of resting in the clean, country air, drinking fresh milk, and enjoying delectable vegetables, but strictly by the prospect of residing for a few months in the same home as Marta Hryhorivna's eldest son Kost, a third-year law student with whom I was head over heels in love. He had vanquished my heart not so much with his comeliness, as with his energetic nature and his exceptional talent as an orator. All the high school girls had long since stopped arguing with him, because he always came out the victor, no matter what paradoxical nonsense he was defending.

"Do you know why I decided on a career as a lawyer?" he once asked me towards the end of an intimate conversation on a small bench in the city park.

"No, I don't," I replied.

"Because I want to be the defender of all who are wronged."

"You're right," I agreed, "because those who are wronged are, for the most part, the finest people."

"Oh, I'm not talking about those foolish sheep who allow anyone and everyone to fleece them; I'm referring to so-called 'criminals.' In my opinion, criminals are the finest people, for they are active

protesters against the current order and laws drawn up on the basis of idiotic customs and, even more to the point, by people who have never experienced hunger, or cold, or any impediments in realising their aspirations.

“Let us say that a criminal steals. He steals—and in doing so he acts admirably because, instead of suffering hunger, cold, and all kinds of deprivations, he simply goes ahead and steals. And let us say that a criminal murders someone! He does the right thing to rid himself of a person who stood in his way, who made him endure torments and prevented him from attaining his goal. To my mind, there is only one writer—Dostoevsky—who is worthy of great respect. And as for all those Lermontovs, Pushkins, and even Tolstoys—they’re sheep, just like all those so-called fine people.”

I attempted to argue with him, to defend these writers and their ideals, but I quickly fell silent, because he struck me down with his words as if they were stones.

Katrya’s father had died a long time ago, and the family, left in the care of Marta Hryhorivna, comprised the following members: Kost, the eldest son; Mariya, the eldest daughter, who was a medical student; eighteen-year-old Tetyana—also called Tanya—the second eldest daughter, who was a drama student; my friend Katrya, a high school student in the seventh form; Halochka, an eight-year-old daughter; and Borys, a high school student in the second form.

In such a large group of companions, I, along with all the others, led an exceptionally merry life. Beginning with little Halochka and ending with the grown-up Miss Mariya, all of us—except for Tanya—lived in friendship and harmony. Equally high-spirited and healthy, and sharing an enthusiasm for all forms of recreation, we spent entire days playing soccer or ninepins in the spacious yard, riding horseback, wandering around, collecting all manner of things, and dreaming up new diversions. And it never occurred to any of us to ask the mother if she required our assistance; or if there was an extra horse that we could use without interfering with the farm work for an unpremeditated trip into the forest, to the monastery, or to the river; or if our excursions added greatly to her troubles, having to prepare food and have clothing ready for so many young rogues.

Even though I lived with Marta Hryhorivna as with my own mother for three months, I do not know what kind of a person she was by nature, origin, or upbringing. I even do not know whether she was educated, or if she took any interest at all in life beyond

the boundaries of her farmstead. Tall, thin, and gaunt, she had probably been attractive once, but now she was worn-out and pale, and her face was heavily etched with deep wrinkles; taciturn and forever deep in thought, she was always attired in a long sky-blue or mottled dressing gown.

Marta Hryhorivna spent time with us only during the dinner and supper hours. In the middle of the day, she dropped in to see us for only a moment in order to place on the table before us a plate piled high with pastries or fruit, and to take this opportunity to listen to our new requests before rushing off once again—to the reapers in the fields, or to the garden, or to the pigs or the cows, or to the cookhouse—but never to her tiny room that was lined with pots, dishes, and bags filled with dried berries, apples, and garden seeds, and to which she retreated to rest only at night.

All the children loved her dearly, kissed her warmly after dinner and at bedtime, never called her anything except “our dear mummy,” but, at the same time, scarcely seemed to notice her. If they ever feared any impediments when contemplating a new project for their entertainment, they had in mind only the protests of their second-eldest sister Tetyana.

Our relations with Tanya were peculiar; we liked her, and yet we did not like her; we were on our guard with her but, at the same time, we did not fear her in the slightest.

Once, during an argument, Mariya called her “Our Most Illustrious Highness,” and Kost added “The Princess of Tetyanivka.” This nickname stuck with her. From that time on, we did not address her as other than “Our Princess,” and we started to refer to all the spots in the forest that were difficult to penetrate, or where one could lose one’s way, as “Tetyanivka,” or “The Domain of Princess Tetyana.”

Strikingly similar to her mother in stature and appearance, she differed so greatly from all her brothers and sisters—who probably resembled their father—that strangers inevitably considered her to be a guest.

Supple and shapely, with luxuriantly soft, light blonde hair, bright blue eyes, a high white forehead, and calm, deliberate movements, she truly did give the impression of a radiant but, at the same time, vexing blot in the nest of uniformly dark-complexioned, dark-haired, dark-eyed, round-faced, plump, noisy, restless, cheerful descendants of the late Mykhaylenko; the difference was even more striking when

you saw the two elder sisters—they were almost the same age—side by side and were privy to their conversation.

The sisters had attended the same high school, had the same teachers and tutors, and used the same textbooks, but their views on life, and their understanding of the conditions of life were so different that almost every conversation they had ended in a misunderstanding. And all of us—with the exception of Borys, Tanya's faithful knight—sided with Mariya.

We liked the fact that Mariya approached all matters confidently, decisively, and directly, and arrived at a decision without any hesitation. Tanya, however, examined the situation at length, looked at it from all sides, tried to figure it out, pondered over it, and brought in her verdict only after measuring it against a single standard—the standard of justice. And once her judgement had been passed, it was never revoked, because, no matter how hard we tried, or how much we argued, it always turned out that she was right. More often than not, this unhappy turn of events caused us some unpleasantness, because we would have to abandon our project or curtail our desires, and so, whenever she grew bored in her private nook and came to join us, we felt constrained.

She had a habit of draping her shoulders with a fine, extremely long white muslin shawl and wrapping the ends of it very tightly around herself, and the more agitated she became, the more tightly she pulled it around her shoulders. Enveloped in this shawl, she would come to us, greet us softly, stand by the door and recline against the door post if we were in a room, or lean against a tree if we were in the orchard, and listen to our conversation.

If she agreed with us, she listened attentively, with great satisfaction, but the moment that anyone, in her opinion, made an error, she would immediately stop that person, correct him or her, and continue convincing, persuading, and explaining, until Mariya would flare up and chase her away to the "Domain of the Princess Tetyana." Tanya would then turn from us and silently walk away, far away, into the orchard or into the fields.

For a brief moment we would feel awkward, but in the depths of our hearts we thanked Mariya for "getting rid" of someone who was almost like a stranger to us.

Tanya isolated herself by retreating to an abandoned granary where she led a solitary existence that was totally incomprehensible to the rest of us.



## II

The granary stood on the boundary between the orchard and the yard, with its door facing the gate. In earlier times, when the master had more grain, it had been a storage bin for fodder, but now, everything that was old and useless was carted off to it—broken tables, couches, chairs, faded paintings, and the like.

The logs on which the granary stood were rotting, and it leaned to one side. Loosely thatched with straw, only its eaves were made of bound sheaves. The straw binding the sheaves had rotted, and the trusses hung down low, giving the granary the appearance of a gloomy old greybeard. All the same, overgrown as it was with wild grapevines, hops, cress, and morning glories, its exterior created quite a poetic impression. Around it, on all sides, stretched long even rows—meticulously edged with sod—of elegant flowers that caught your eye as you walked up to the gate. Tanya watered these flowers herself, and Borys assisted her by filling a kneading-trough with water from the pond on a daily basis.

Yes, on the outside the granary had a poetic appearance, but on the inside . . . Tanya did not permit anyone to step inside it except for Borys, who brought her huge bouquets of flowers every day. She simply shut the door in the face of anyone who, out of curiosity, dared to step on the threshold of her abode.

There was only one time that I was fortunate enough to gain entrance into the granary. Marta Hryhorivna had sent me to fetch Tanya, and I rushed in so quickly that she did not have time to slam the door. I dashed in and, dumbstruck, halted near the threshold. I will never forget the impression that the granary made on me. Built out of thick, roughly hewn slabs, its interior resembled the huge curb of an old well; Tanya, however, had covered the walls of her beloved hideaway with photographs of famous composers, woodcarvers, poets, and artists. All these photographs were nailed to the walls and decorated with wreaths or garlands of field flowers. Garlands also hung on the corner posts.

Now I understood why our days began in such a pleasant, charming, and unusual manner. Every day, Borys would run to the neighbouring meadow and then return, wet to the waist from the dew, carrying a huge sheaf of wild flowers and fragrant herbs. Tanya would go to meet him at the gate, take the flowers, and sit down on

the porch where we, as a group, pulled the flowers apart and piled them into separate bunches of warm and cool colours. Then Tanya would braid them into wreaths and bedeck her marvellous tresses—that reached almost to her heels—with blue cornflowers. Afterwards, she would carry one wreath into the room of her deceased father and take the rest away with her to the granary.

The reed ceiling, supported by slender posts, was plastered lightly with reddish clay, but that clay was already crumbling, and the reeds showed through darkly in large splotches. The wooden floor was level; all the cracks in it had been caulked with hempen hurds and plastered over with clay. It was Halochka and Katriya who had taken it upon themselves to do this—on a day when Marta Hryhorivna had sent Tanya to town to pay off a debt in the store—so that the Princess would not freeze in her palace.

Directly opposite the door stood a couch with broken legs, and a small table. On the table lay an elongated book, much like a child's album, that was bound in a thin layer of filigreed ivory; over the couch hung a cracked mirror. On shelves that had been fastened in the corners of the granary stood busts of Beethoven, Mozart, Shakespeare, Byron, Shelly, and Ibsen. In front of them lay bouquets of multicoloured roses. A bust of Shevchenko stood on a separate shelf, and in front of it lay a sheaf of steppe grass. From this sheaf, the heady fragrance of freshly mown hay filled the entire granary.

“Have a seat,” Tanya invited me, pointing at the couch, “but be careful not to sit on the crepe fabric, because I'll need it soon.”

I glanced at her.

“It's the attire of Mary Stuart, and I'm just in the process of learning her role,” she said.

By the wall right next to the couch lay something that resembled a down-filled quilt; it was covered with a lovely old tapestry.

“Do you sleep here?” I asked her.

“No,” she replied. “It's a straw mattress that's filled exclusively with dried flowers from the wreaths, and it's too hard to be used for sleeping. I need it so that I have something to fall on.”

“To fall on?” I asked, repeating her words.

“Why yes; whenever a heroine in a play has to faint, I practise falling on this straw mattress, because you can't just topple over like a log or a sheaf; you have to fall down in such a way that even your dress lies in orderly folds. Here, take a look—am I falling correctly?”

And she collapsed on the straw mattress.

“And now tell me—does this gesture of mine looks natural?”

She raised her right hand and thrust her head back.

“I’m cursing them now,” she explained. “Tell me the truth, does it look natural?”

“Oh yes, very natural!” I said sincerely.

“What about this?”

She dropped to her knees and placed her hands together as if in prayer. In the south wall, a long narrow opening, the width of one’s palm, had been cut and, through it, a broad shaft of sunlight fell on Tanya. Illuminated by that light, she resembled a magnificent statue.

“Are you pleading?” I asked her.

“Yes, yes!” she replied and fell deep into thought.

“Why are you so gloomy?” I asked.

“Because nothing that I do turns out the way that I want it to. I watch myself in the mirror, and I can see that it’s all wrong, not the way it should be. And it’s so painful, you know, that I want to cry, for I’ve completely renounced my personal life because of its pettiness; I can live only the life of heroes, my glorious heroes. And truly, of what value are petty experiences compared to the tragedies of these illustrious, but unfortunate, people? And you know what? If those great people did not exist, it would not be worthwhile to live in this world or to take pride in being human.

“You know, when I listen to the music of Beethoven, or look at the paintings of Raphael, or read Shakespeare’s works, I pray most fervently. I pray without words, but with every atom of my soul, my heart, my body, and I thank nature for creating me as a human being sensitive to all kinds of beauty. Perhaps you think I want to study singing for the sake of fame and glory? Not at all. I want to study it so that I can perform the works of eminent maestros—that’s the only reason. It is in singing that I see my destiny, the goal of my life, and if I were to lose my voice . . .”

Tears choked her throat, and a few moments passed before she could continue: “I would take my own life, because to just exist, without a goal, without meaning—I couldn’t do it.

“My dearest Vira,” she continued, “have you ever thought about it? Have you ever considered the great good fortune that people have—the ability to experience beauty everywhere, in all places, and in all of its manifestations? We have been given eyes, ears, a nose, and even a tongue, and all for the purpose of enabling us to observe beauty, to experience moments of aesthetic exhilaration. People, for

the most part, do not pay attention to this, but I can't be that way, because everything that is beautiful, everything that we call 'lovely,' touches me to the core, because my eyes, my ears, my nose—all of them bring me the greatest delight, the greatest happiness, even though there may, at times, be conflicts among them."

"And what about the intellect?" I reminded her. "Or do you think that the process of thinking does not bring people pleasure?"

"Oh yes, that too!" she agreed. "But—and I don't know if it's because of my limited intellect, or my lack of education—all the scientific inventions that are so valuable to our culture and civilisation are of absolutely no interest to me and do not impress me in the slightest. I can watch with rapture, for hours on end, a meadowlark or a dove floating in the azure-blue heavens, but I look with complete indifference at an aeroplane that flies over my head, and I am not at all interested either in its construction or in the people who fly it. No, I have nothing for which to thank my intellect, But as for my eyes, ears, nose, tongue . . ."

"Tongue?"

"Yes, even my tongue. There are people who are paid huge sums of money for tasting wines, for assessing their worth and determining their value. And tasty foods give connoisseurs as much pleasure as others receive from masterly paintings or symphony concerts. I know one officer who spent all his income on gastronomic delights, and when the doctors diagnosed him as having an ailing stomach and put him on a diet, he shot himself. And I can understand him. But I can't understand Beethoven—how he could continue living after he turned deaf . . ."

"You mentioned something earlier on about a conflict . . . What kind of a conflict? I don't understand."

"Here's an example. The eyes, gazing upon a chrysanthemum or an aster, say: 'How delightful!' But the nose says: 'Phew! What kind of flowers are these if they smell like weeds?' The eyes, gazing upon a clove pink, say: 'What kind of flower is this? It's just a weed.' But the nose says: 'Because of this weed's fragrance I would call the clove pink the queen of flowers.'

"If you like, I'll relate to you an example of such a conflict from my own life. Some time ago, when Lesya Horobtsiyeva and I were still high school students, we went to a concert. We walked into the hall and took our seats, but, for whatever reason, the concert did not start for quite some time, and we began to scrutinize the audience.

“‘Look,’ Lesya poked me with her elbow as she eyed a certain gentleman who was sitting in an armchair in the front row. ‘What a revolting sight!’

“I glanced in his direction. Truly, something that bore only a terrifying resemblance to a human being was sitting there—with a huge nose, bulging eyes, bushy hair, and a large hump on his back. ‘I’ve seen him someplace,’ I said.

“‘Where? It must have been in your sleep!’ she said.

“‘No, in actual fact; I truly have seen him.’

“‘You couldn’t have seen him, because such an abomination can’t possibly have a double.’

“We stared fixedly at him for a long time, ridiculing every lineament of his face and figure . . . And then he disappeared. After a few more moments, the curtain was raised, and the first chord resounded . . . The abomination was sitting at the piano. He played a short prelude and then moved on, as indicated in the program, to Beethoven’s Sonata. Oh, my dearest, if only you could have heard his performance! He laughed, and cried, and raged, and prayed.

“I first flushed, and then turned ashen . . . I was in the grip of a nervous fever. Up to that time I had not imagined that it was possible for a human being to play as he played. But I was even more upset that I could not remember where and when I had seen him before. And it’s certain that I’ll never forget him as long as I live. I strove with all my might to recall where I had seen him, and finally, quite unexpectedly, I remembered. One time Borys and Halochka dug into the trunk where mother keeps children’s playthings and pulled out this album . . .”

Tanya pointed at the book lying on the table.

“It was then that I recalled my favourite apple tree, and my memory took me back to the threshold of the drawing room where I first had seen this ‘abomination.’ And this is an excellent example of the conflict I was just telling you about. The eyes say: ‘Ugh! What an abomination. He’s not a person, just a repulsive dwarf. How dare he appear in public? It’s disgusting to look at him, let alone sit beside him. He’ll perish in seclusion, because no one will want to marry him.’ But the ears say: ‘You’re lying; Apollo himself is not worth even the little finger of this dwarf, and everyone will go with this dwarf even into hell itself, as long as he keeps on playing.’”

“This is all very interesting,” I said, “but I have to say good bye now. I must go; I’ve already stayed longer than I intended to.”

“Come again, dear Vira,” she invited me.

“I would, but I’m afraid I’d only be in your way.”

“No, you won’t be in my way, because I’ve bared my soul to you. I’m bothered only by people from whom I have to conceal my feelings, like a clucking hen shields her chicks from a hawk. Like Kost, for example . . .”

I blushed furiously.

“My dear Vira, forgive me. I’ve offended you. Do you love Kost? Does he love you? You’re experiencing the most happy days of your life, because love is a most precious pearl. Treasure it, so as not to scratch it, or stain it.”

“What about you, Tanya? You also must love someone, right?”

“At the moment—no. But when I was fourteen, I was terribly in love with Vasya Kucherenko, and I loved him for a whole half year. But then, over the holidays, we were at the club together for the Christmas Tree Party; we danced, talked about our love, and then went up to the Christmas tree where gifts and treats were being distributed. He was given a marvellous Crimean apple. I was certain that he would enjoy its beauty for a long time, but he scarcely had taken it in his hands when he sank his big teeth into it, and you know, from that very moment, he became odious to me, and my love for him vanished to who knows where.

“That’s how it is, my darling—love is a very delicate thing. You have to treat it very gently, like a mimosa flower. And so I once again beg your forgiveness that I offended you by mentioning Kost. He’s a very nice, sensible, and decent person, but he and I are like two birds from different nests, and I forgive him for not loving me.”

“What are you saying, Tanya—he doesn’t love you?”

“Well, in any event, he doesn’t understand me. He doesn’t understand me at all.”

“Well, good bye, Tanya. It’s time for me to go.”

We exchanged kisses. In parting, she held my hand firmly and pleaded: “Do come.”

I promised that I would, but I already knew that I would not come back to see her, because if I did, the rest of our group would be sure to brand me with some epithet like “the Princess’s Underling,” an epithet that would irritate me, even though there really was no basis for any such insult; indeed, there were moments—when she sang—that we all unconsciously soared towards her with our hearts, with our most noble feelings.

Her exceptionally strong, amazingly clear, bell-like, yet mellow voice seemed to be endowed with a magical power. The greatest indignation, the most fierce anger that one felt towards her, dissipated the moment that her voice poured forth, be it from nearby or far away . . . You wanted to abandon everything and rush up to her, sit at her feet, bring her flowers, give her everything that you treasured, and become her slave—just so she would not break off her song, so that your soul, rising upwards on the wings of her aria into the distant, immaculate azure-blue sky, would have a blissful rest from life's petty, nasty troubles.

And when she rejoined us after concluding her singing, her eyes shone, and she appeared to be surrounded by a luminous aureole; she looked taller, more statuesque, and, at those times, it suited her to be silent and unapproachable. It seemed that everyone would accept willingly the irrevocable truthfulness of every word that she might utter at that moment. And indeed, there was one time when the enchanting power of her voice demonstrated itself to us.

### III

The evening before, we had decided to go fishing at sunrise, and so, the next day, the boys leapt up from their beds before dawn to get the wagon and fishing tackle ready, and to dig for worms.

At luck would have it, it was at this moment that Tanya came out of her room to transplant some flowers. Seeing the boys at their work, she inquired why they were up so early, and, finding out that we were preparing to go fishing, she abandoned her flowers and set out after us.

“Are you coming as well?” Mariya greeted her.

“No, I came to remind you that fishing with a hook and line is a cruel form of entertainment, and I'm resolutely protesting against it.” Tanya said.

“Your protest, I hope, is not, as yet, an interdiction?” Mariya commented with a smile.

“Yes, it is. I forbid you to do so.”

“By what authority are you doing so? Permit me to ask you this, Your Most Illustrious Highness!” Kost abruptly approached Tanya. “To the best of my knowledge, the Sula River is not yet within the domain of the Princess of Tetyanivka.”

“By the authority of justice!” she replied in a calm, even voice. “Because jabbing worms on a hook and then sticking that same hook into a fish is a double crime, not a form of entertainment. And so, I resolutely protest.”

“And we protest even more resolutely against your protest, and we will all go fishing, and our consciences will not trouble us in the least, because fishing is a sport that is recognised and accepted throughout the world, except perhaps, in the domain of Your Most Illustrious Highness. I don’t know, however, if that domain is in heaven or in hell.”

“But Kost, just think about it. It’s so unmerciful to torture living creatures . . .”

“You, if you want to know, torture all of us even more unmercifully; you poison all our amusements, add quinine to our sweetest pleasures, criticise everything we do, and protest against even our most ordinary pastimes.”

“I’m entreating you, one last time . . .”

“Oh, get away from here with your entreaties!” Kost interrupted Tanya. “You always stand for the truth, but the essence of your truth lies in the fact that you have absolutely no desire to participate in any of our amusements, that your heart is like ice, that your greatest pleasure seems to be to sit, day in and day out, in the granary.”

“The study of ancient drama is more of an obligation than an amusement,” Tanya observed.

“The study of ancient drama?” Mariya asked.

“Precisely. It is imperative that every actor have a good knowledge of ancient drama.”

“So you’re going to be an actress?”

“I hope so,” Tanya declared.

“Why have you been concealing this from us? Why didn’t you tell anyone about it earlier?”

“No one ever asked me. No one ever took the slightest interest in what I was doing in the granary. I’ve been studying all this time.”

“Aha!” Kost shouted loudly. “Now it all makes sense. All those pompous statements of Her Most Illustrious Highness—they were all excerpts from some ancient dramas. And now our dear sister has rushed here to act out the role of a merciful fairy . . . Ha-ha-ha!”

“Listen, Kost. Hunting and fishing are a very obvious violation of the basic right to life!” Tanya asserted calmly, as if she did not hear her brother’s derisive laughter.



“In actual fact, everyday life, my dear sister, is exactly that—an unending violation of the most basic right to life, because all of life is a struggle . . .” Kost observed.

“What kind of a struggle is there in this case? To take a helpless worm, pin it on a waiting hook . . .”

“Let the worm stop being a fool and learn how to escape from its enemies!” Mariya interjected.

“But if it has been given neither the strength, nor the ability?”

“Then its fate is to be stuck on a hook,” Kost laughed.

“We do not know why living creatures were put on this earth,” Tanya stated sadly.

“What do you mean, we don’t know why? You were put on this earth to be a great actress, and the rest of us—to eat fish, not stones; and so, my dear girls, quickly put on your kerchiefs and climb into the wagon, because Halochka is already waiting in it with our provisions.”

We jumped to our feet and ran to the wagon, leaving Tanya in the house to protest to the empty chairs. A half hour later, far away from her in body, in spirit, and in thought, we settled in on the bank of the Sula River in a charming young grove, seating ourselves on sand so clean that it looked as if it had been washed. Actually, it was Kattrya, Borys, Halochka, and I who arrived by wagon; Mariya and Kost were still making their way on foot, using a short-cut.

Borys—who fortunately had not heard Tanya’s protest and could therefore join us with an untroubled heart—unharnessed the horse, gave him some hay, and pounded in the stakes to hold the cast iron pot. Kattrya, Halochka, and I peeled some potatoes, poured water into the pot, lit a fire under it, and set out into the grove to gather more dry branches to fuel the flames.

In the meantime, Kost and Mariya came up and untied two boats. Moments later, Kost and Borys pulled away from the bank, made their way into the reeds, seated themselves on the edge of their boats, and threw in their lines.

We cooked breakfast and ate it; then Kattrya and I took the boat and went fishing, while Mariya and Borys began cooking the noon meal. When the sun rose in the midday sky, we all gathered to have some tasty soup and baked fish. After we finished eating, we rested, and then we all went fishing again. In a word, everything went along according to our plans—indeed, even better than we could have imagined.

Fortunately, the day was wonderful, and the fish were biting very well . . . It was all so enchanting—the clear sky, without a single cloud in it; the scent of the reeds; the water, clear and blue near the reeds, and shining in the middle of the river as if covered with golden muslin; and the silence in which even the splashing of the fish could be heard, creating a feeling of such a mesmerizing peacefulness that, in the final analysis, the act of fishing became automatic, and the line was pulled out of the water and then lowered again for a new victim in an almost unthinking manner.

By evening we had filled our bag with perch and carp; after that we floated farther down the river, singing and shouting as we drifted aimlessly for an hour or so through narrow passageways among the willows and reeds. After pulling up to the shore, we bathed and got ready to go home.

No one wanted to climb into the wagon, so we told Borys and Halochka to drive it, while we set out on foot by way of the shortcut. Our mood was, of course, the very best, and we were all joking. Kost was drawing up a menu for tomorrow's dinner featuring boiled, baked, stuffed, and jellied fish, while Mariya, Katrya, and I dreamt up garnishes for the varied dishes.

Then, unexpectedly, a sound echoed high above our heads. A sound like a mournful wail. It resounded and vanished. We did not know as yet what the sound was, but our mood was broken; we all fell silent at once and waited tensely for it to recur. And truly, a few moments later a song poured forth. We immediately recognised Tanya's voice and, without conferring, slowed our footsteps and then halted. We stood motionless, as if petrified, until she finished singing. And it was then that something strange happened to us. We felt shame before Tanya for our fishing and for our trophies, and we recalled vividly how the fish had struggled on the hook.

The next day at dinner, neither Katrya nor I, and not even Kost, could muster up the nerve to touch the fish even though, except for the fish, there was no other food on the table.

"You see, Tanya, how malicious you are," Mariya reproached her sister. "You used your tongue to quash people's enthusiasm for eating fish, and yet you yourself are gobbling it up. Just look—our fishermen aren't eating."

"Why?" Tanya was genuinely surprised. "It doesn't hurt a dead fish in the slightest when you eat it," she added, placing another cooked tench on her plate.

“Aha!” Kost picked up on the conversation. “It seems that you think it’s all right to rake hot coals with hands other than your own and take advantage of the crimes of others. Tell me, is that how you see things?”

“Not always,” Tanya answered, after giving the matter some thought.

“Well, in my opinion—one should never do it. I’m not pretending to be a teacher of morals, but I will always say this to everyone: no one has the right to take advantage of the consequences of another person’s crime. If life demands that a crime be committed, do it yourself, and only then take advantage of it . . .”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Tanya agreed. “I’ve never thought about it that way. You’ve given me something interesting to think about.”

“I should also tell you,” Kost continued, “that you will never be a good actress if you are incapable of experiencing the feeling of satisfaction or repentance that a criminal experiences after he has committed a crime.”

“I’ll never play the role of a criminal. And even the director himself selected me for the role of a very benevolent woman for my debut,” Tanya responded.

“Debut? Where? When?” Kost and Mariya asked at once.

“It took place some time ago, in the drama theatre.”

“Well? How was your debut?” Mariya asked curiously.

“It was fine. I was accepted into the school of drama, and later I plan on going to the conservatory. My debut, by the way, was written up in the newspaper.”

“When? In which newspaper? You never said a word about it,” Kost remarked.

“Because it isn’t worth talking about. They were staging the play ‘Nora,’ and I played the part of Nora, and afterwards there was a concert, and I sang two of the Nymph’s arias, and that was all.”

“And you didn’t even tell me about it,” Marta Hryhorivna commented reproachfully. “Really, just think, is it right to conceal such things? You’re attending drama school now, and I’m barely able to pay for your studies as it is; but a singer has to have a piano and a better apartment. It all takes a great deal of money.”

“I know, mummy dearest, I know all that,” Tanya said slowly, with a sad sigh, “but what can be done? I can’t give up the conservatory. Believe me, my dearest mummy, it’s not a whim, but a great, passionate need of my soul.”

"I understand, my dear, I really do, because there are times when I still cry secretly that my voice perished so senselessly. But as for what I am to do, how I can help you—I really don't know."

"Sell a parcel of land," Borys suggested.

"I can't, my son, because the land isn't mine—your daddy simply left it in my care; besides, it's mortgaged both in the bank and to the creditors. Why, even when your father sold the meadow, he didn't think the money he received for it was worth all the fuss and bother of selling it."

"It's true," Kost spoke up. "You don't have the right to sell the land, but you do have property—a large number of children."

"And so?" Marta Hryhorivna stared at him in amazement.

"Well, there's an announcement in today's newspaper: 'I am burdened with an overly large number of children, and I would like someone to assume the task of raising at least one of them; I would ask that the boys be allowed to keep their surnames, but, as for the girls, it doesn't really matter. Because I nursed them, I am asking that I be paid one hundred *karbovantsi* [*dollars*] per child. Domnykiya Kachir, a seamstress by profession.'"

"Oh, what a bitch!" Marta Hryhorivna burst out in indignation.

"Why are you so upset? In my view, she's not a bitch; she's a wise woman. If she can't raise her children herself, then it's better that she give them away."

"A decent mother will never give away her child; she would rather lug stones up a steep hill than give her child to strangers."

"Besides, what child would want to leave its mother and go live with strangers?" Katriya spoke up.

"A wise mother and a wise child will part lovingly, without any tears," Mariya said.

"Oh don't say that, Mariya," Tanya sighed.

"But all the same, what can be done so that Tanya can study at the conservatory?" Borys asked.

"Perhaps Tanya will come up with a solution herself," Marta Hryhorivna turned to Tanya.

"There are moments when something that's not exactly an idea, nor a memory, nor a question, nor a hope, flashes through my mind like lightning. It flashes, then expires like a spark, and I cast it out of my head, because I know you'd never ever agree to it."

"All the same, tell us what it is," Marta Hryhorivna entreated.

"Perhaps some other time."

“Well, fine, if that’s what you want,” Marta Hryhorivna acquiesced.

“But still, why did you do everything in secret? You lock yourself up in that granary and live in the darkness . . .” Mariya said reproachfully.

“Because it’s of no interest to anyone to listen to someone else study how to declaim.” Tanya replied. “Besides, the matter has not been decided once and for all. In the first place, I haven’t consulted with you as yet.”

“With me?” Mariya asked.

“With you.”

“As far as discussing things with me, I’m always ready to oblige; we can talk right now, after dinner.”

“Good,” Tanya agreed.

“Is this a confidential consultation?” Kost inquired.

“No, on the contrary, I would like all my brothers and sisters to participate in it.”

“Oh well, if the discussion is going to be about the future fame of my sister, then I’ll muster all my intellectual powers so that I may be as wise as Solomon.”

“Our Tanya is going to be an actress!” Halochka clapped her hands in glee.

“Tanya has such a beautiful voice that even the peasants like to listen to it,” Borys exclaimed, flushed with surprise and excitement.

“But where’s that newspaper?” Mariya suddenly recalled.

“Somewhere over there, among my notes,” Tanya said.

Borys rushed off to look for it

Tanya rose to her feet, kissed her mother’s hand, gathered up the serviettes from the table, put away the things that belonged in the buffet, and then, wrapping herself in her muslin shawl, leaned against the door frame.

In the meantime, Borys brought the newspaper, and Mariya began reading it out loud. An entire article had been devoted to Tanya. A professor from the Conservatory praised Tanya as a singer, comparing her to the finest talents in the Conservatory. The theatre reviewer predicted that she would become a famous actress.

All of our hearts were bursting with joy in our chests when we heard the praises directed at our Princess, and she herself listened with great satisfaction to the lines that had been dedicated to her. Borys cuddled up to Tanya, wrapped his arms around her waist,

firmly pressed his head against her chest, and appeared to be swooning with happiness.

Marta Hryhorivna stayed and listened until the reading was over; then she crossed herself, rose from the table, and departed.

“And now, Your Most Illustrious Highness, permit us to kiss you, congratulate you, and, taking advantage of this occasion, beg you to crawl out of your granary and move into my room. I’ll set up shelves for your books and bring in the mirror from the living room, because actresses, I think, use a mirror when they study how to walk, sit, and fall,” Kost said as he approached Tanya.

“Why do they need to fall?” Borys protested. “Tanya will fly up high, very high, and she’ll never, never fall!” he added with certainty.

“Did you say you wanted some advice?” Mariya reminded Tanya.

“In that case, let’s go into the orchard,” Kost suggested.

#### IV

The orchard was large, old, and neglected. At some earlier time there may have been pleasant lanes in it, but now only the occasional short row of linden trees made it possible to surmise that someone had laid out lanes here in the past. For many years now, no one had tended the orchard, and all the trees and bushes were free to grow as much as they wished, or as much as they were permitted to grow by neighbouring trees and bushes—the anarchical children of this paradise. But then, no one demanded that the trees bear fruit if they did not want to, and no one made any effort to improve the taste, colour, or quantity of their fruit.

Everyone who desired to eat an apple made his way directly to one of the apple trees, found a fallen apple, bit into it, and, if the apple turned out to be tasty, finished it off; he then searched for a second, a third, and a tenth apple in the weeds, clambered up the tree, shook down as many as he wanted, and came back, thereafter, on a daily basis, leaving dozens of footprints behind in the grass and the weeds. If an apple seemed too sour or too sweet, too hard or too soft, it was thrown away, and no one was the least bit interested in knowing how many apples from that tree rotted or were stolen by the village children.

In the hands of an industrious German landowner, this orchard alone may have yielded three times as much profit as the entire estate

of Marta Hryhorivna. The elderly lady, however, simply did not have the physical stamina to devote as much time and energy to the orchard as it required.

With every passing year it grew more wild, and there was a great increase in the number of wonderfully secluded spots in the undergrowth where it was possible to hide for an entire day, experience complete solitude, actively participate in the adventures of the heroes of Mayne Reid, Jules Verne, and Turgenev, or wander aimlessly through the world with Don Quixote.

For the consultation session, Kost selected a most poetic corner that up to now only he had known about—a knoll near a pond. The rather small area was covered with low-growing silky grass. It was surrounded on three sides by cranberry bushes, and on the fourth by a pond. Immediately beyond this pond, the marvellous panorama of the steppe, dotted with cottages and orchards, spread into the distance.

We sat down in a circle under some cranberry bushes. Tanya leaned against the trunk of an old plum tree.

“Well?” Mariya turned to Tanya. “We’re ready to listen.

“What I want to say, Mariya, is that you have to give up your medical studies,” Tanya came right to the point.

“What? What did you say? Did you actually say that I have to give up my studies?” Mariya shrieked incredulously, as if she could not believe her ears.

“Yes! You must give up your studies.”

“Tanya, come to your senses,” Mariya’s eyes flashed like lightning. “How do you have the nerve to fling these words at me: ‘You must give up your studies’?”

“Seeing as I had the nerve to say it, it means that I’ve thought about it and concluded that I have the right to do so,” Tanya replied slowly and calmly.

This calmness, self-assurance, and, perhaps, Tanya’s statue-like pose, angered Mariya even more.

“You’re insane! You see yourself as a Princess, and the rest of us as your underlings. How did you come up with the idea that I have to give up my studies? Why should I? Who would dare to make me do so?”

“It’s your obligation,” Tanya said softly.

“What kind of obligation? To whom? What do I owe anyone?” Mariya became even more enraged.

“For God’s sake, don’t be angry. I’m sure that if you hear me out to the end, you’ll agree with me,” Tanya pleaded.

“Really, Mariya, control your offended heart and let Tanya finish what she has to say,” Kost spoke up. “Well, Tanya, we’re giving you the floor—no one will utter a single word until you finish.”

“We gathered here to confer, but Mariya’s beginning to quarrel,” Borys muttered, and he sat down demonstratively beside Tanya.

“And you had also better shut up,” Kost stopped him.

Everyone fell silent. Tanya—as if her courage had betrayed her—did not begin to speak immediately. She shifted from one foot to the other, then bent down and plucked a blade of grass, put it in her mouth, bit off the tip, and thought for a little while longer. Then, suddenly throwing away the blade of grass, she tugged at the muslin shawl draped on her shoulders, and only then began to speak.

It seemed to me that her eyes, at that moment, had ignited with the fire of determination, and her voice sounded metallic.

“Our mother,” she said, “is getting on in years. You all can see how greatly she has aged just in this past year, how her health has failed. But she still bears the burden of her children on her shoulders, and her life may well be shortened by her excessively heavy workload, for it is only thanks to her energy and labour that the land has not been sold. But there are debts . . . our ailing father lived to a ripe old age, and we’re all studying . . .”

“And mother has never even had a proper dress sewn for herself,” Katriya observed.

“And she’s spent her entire life in Nekrasivka,” Borys added.

“She’s had to raise all of us by herself, prepare us all for school, and now she’s still not free from her burden. She must be helped, because all the income that is extracted from our small farm is procured through her labour. So, it follows, Mariya, that you must remain with mother, so that there will be someone to look after her, warm her with kindness, and assist her in the work . . .”

“And what about you?” Mariya leapt to her feet and stretched herself to her full height.

“I am a person of great talent,” Tanya said with assurance, but without the slightest hint of pride. “Notwithstanding what other people say to me, I feel my destiny in my heart. I can foresee the heights that I can attain in art, and there are even moments when I am able to create—to compose songs. Such a talent is a treasure, and it would be a sin to neglect it; it must be protected, pampered.”



“Tanya! Come to your senses! How can your tongue twist and turn to sing such praises about yourself?” Mariya attacked her.

“I’m just saying what I think.”

“You can think it, but to say it, to openly admit it . . .”

“I am not ashamed of either my voice, or my artistic talent,” Tanya replied serenely.

“You’re simply dreaming about fame,” Mariya flung at her.

“I would want fame only for our dear mummy’s sake . . . I would place my first laurels at her feet. I would act, I would sing ten times better, if I knew that she was there, listening, and could revel in my fame as a small reward for her many long years of sacrifice and backbreaking labour.”

“And how do you know that I would not give her the same kind of reward with my scientific work? That she would not be equally happy to live to see me as a professor?” Mariya asked.

“You’ll never be a professor!” Tanya said confidently. “You do not like knowledge for its own sake. You enrolled in medical studies simply to have a career and earn a lot of money.”

“That’s not true! You haven’t traversed my soul; you haven’t perused my thoughts.”

“During the entire summer you have not opened a single book; I have never seen you enraptured with any facet of science; and, during the examinations, you yourself said . . .”

“Yes, ‘I said!’” Mariya interrupted Tanya. “I said that my head was spinning, that my head could not take it anymore, that I did not believe in science; but I said all that only because I do not know how to brag about myself like you do; because I have a conscience, a sense of shame, and I do not parade my talent like a fool showing off an empty bag. It is my duty to serve science, just as it is your duty to serve art. And because of that, I will never give up my studies!” Mariya said curtly, and stalked away without so much as a backward glance.

For a few moments everyone remained silent, and then Kost spoke up: “No one has the right to order Mariya to give up her studies. The question regarding Mariya has been settled once and for all, and we do not have the right to return to it without her permission.”

“But what about our dear mummy?” Katriya asked. “Perhaps I should leave school?”

“Not on your life! You youngsters are still children; your strengths and your talents have not yet been revealed.”

“Then what is to be done about our dear mummy?” Kattrya asked a second time.

“As for me, I’ve decided this question for myself,” Tanya said.

“In what way?” Kost inquired.

Tanya did not reply for some time, and then she finally said slowly, in a voice so soft that we could scarcely hear her: “I won’t tell you. Let it be my secret for now, my first secret. Because today I’ve become convinced that it is not wise to share your thoughts with even those who are closest to you . . .”

“But I know!” Borys shuddered, and he looked at his sister with glistening eyes filled with tears.

Tanya bent over and kissed him warmly on the head, pulled her muslin shawl more tightly around herself, and went down the path towards her granary.

“Do you know Tanya’s secret?” I asked Borys.

“Yes!” he hissed through his teeth.

“Then tell us,” Kattrya pleaded.

“No, I won’t,” he snapped.

“Come on, tell us, dearest Borys,” Kattrya begged him again.

“No, I won’t.”

“My darling brother, my dearest Borys, tell us!” Halochka came up to him.

“No, no!” Borys stubbornly shook his head. His lips were trembling, and he blushed so furiously that even his ears turned red.

“Dearest Borys, do tell us; I’ll give you a ball,” Halochka pleaded.

“And I’ll buy you a book,” Kattrya added.

But Borys paid no attention either to their pleading or their promises; he just stubbornly kept repeating: “No, no.”

Kost remained silent for a long time, as if he were thinking very hard about something. Then he turned to us and said: “No, I cannot understand such phenomenal egoism. Mariya will save people from all sorts of microbes, bacilli, and bacteria, but all Tanya is going to do is sing.”

“But what if that’s what she wants to do?”

“Wants to!” Kost mimicked. “Such an expression should not even be used by a mature person. This caterpillar that is crawling near you wants to be a butterfly.”

“And it will be a butterfly!” Borys cried passionately.

“Yes, it will be, it will be, but first let it spend some time as a chrysalis, and let Tanya wait for a while with her singing.”

“Or better yet, let Mariya wait for a while,” Borys retorted.

“Hundreds, or perhaps thousands of people will die without a doctor’s care while Mariya delays her studies for some unknown reason, but no one will turn either cold or hot if Tanya doesn’t sing right away.”

“But what if she loses her voice?” Borys asked.

“Then so be it; at least then Tanya will be a human being and not an actress of some kind.”

“Eh!” Borys said, waving his hand in a gesture of despair. “What’s the use of talking to you; you’re a lawyer and nothing else.”

“I’m not a lawyer at all; I’m a public prosecutor!”

“You’re a public prosecutor already?” I asked.

“Yes, I want to be a public prosecutor. You see, my views on criminals have changed somewhat.”

“Since when?” I asked. “Since the time your rifle was stolen?”

“That may have contributed to it, but I believe that the views of every person can change.”

“It’s because you realised that it’s easier for a public prosecutor to become famous than a lawyer,” Borys said. “Surely you remember how envious you were of the public prosecutor Hrytsay when his speech was printed in the newspaper. And that’s why you want to be a public prosecutor.”

“Want to, want to,” Kost mimicked him. “Perhaps there’s something you ‘want to’ as well? Why are you so stuck on your ‘want to’?”

“I want to be a traveller; I want to travel around the world,” Borys said firmly and confidently.

“Like old Oles?” Kost asked. “But to do that, one must also have the financial resources of Oles.”

“Phooey! What kind of a traveller is Oles?” Borys flung out derisively. “He travels around the world on trains and steamships, and doesn’t see anything except the landscapes that he passes by. But as for me, I want to walk the length and breadth of the world on my own two feet, in order to see everything. I want to wander and wander . . .”

“That’s wonderful,” Kost said. “Go ahead and wander all you want to. But I want to eat. Come, my friends, let’s have lunch.”

We all got up, sent Halochka on ahead to advise Marta Hryhorivna of our imminent arrival, and, continuing our animated conversation, set out for the house.

## V

We walked along in a state of dejection, burdened by a heavy feeling of some terrible, impending disaster. When we reached the veranda, curdled milk and cheese turnovers were waiting for us on the table.

“And where’s Tanya?” Marta Hryhorivna inquired.

“Probably in her studio,” Kost responded.

“Run and fetch her,” Marta Hryhorivna ordered Borys.

When he did not return for a quarter of an hour, Kost began shouting for him to come back.

Borys showed up looking troubled. “The granary is locked on the outside, and Tanya is nowhere to be found. I called and called her, but she doesn’t answer,” he wailed through his tears.

“She’s probably wandering around in the orchard, pretending that she’s the heroine of some drama,” Kost said sharply.

“Perhaps you’re right, but it doesn’t make me feel any better,” Marta Hryhorivna responded.

“Maybe she’s guarding her apple tree?” Halochka asked.

“The apples are still green—no one will come to steal them,” Marta Hryhorivna said.

“No, mummy, they’re turning red already. I picked one up from the ground and ate it—even the seeds are ripening.”

“Is that so? Then we’d better put a guard on them right away,” Marta Hryhorivna said in a concerned tone of voice. “Well, children, draw up a list as to when each of you will stand guard. Who will be on guard until breakfast—you, Mariya?”

“Oh, it’s always Mariya who has to be first, as if there were no one else but me,” Mariya snapped back. “I have enough of my own problems.”

“What problems do you have?” Mariya Hryhorivna asked.

“My studies. Do you really think that they’re so insignificant?” Mariya asked.

“Oh, you don’t seem to be overly anxious to get to your studies. Why, Borys spends more time over his books than you.”

“But mummy, I’m not studying—I’m reading Jules Verne,” Borys frankly admitted.

“Well, you’re still spending time with your books, but Mariya never reads.”

“Oh, did you hear that? Did you hear that?” Mariya turned to us. “Don’t you see now which way the wind is blowing? Isn’t it clear now what Tanya’s secret is? She’s conspiring with mother to stop me from continuing my studies, so that I’ll stay home and weed the potatoes and milk the cows. It’s all clear now!”

“Just wait, wait a minute, Mariya,” Kost stopped her. “You have no grounds for saying that.”

“The grounds are clear. You heard what mother said.”

“What is it that I said? I only asked when you would stand guard by the apple tree,” Marta Hryhorivna said gently.

“When I would stand guard? Never!” Mariya retorted. “It’s Tanya’s apple tree, so let Tanya guard it.”

“The apple tree is Tanya’s, and no one will steal it, but we all eat the apples,” Marta Hryhorivna observed. “So we all have to guard it.”

“Tanya needs the apples to gain the reputation of a good fairy,” Kost interjected.

“I don’t understand what’s going on!” Marta Hryhorivna spread her hands helplessly.

“What’s there to understand?” Kost asked. “Doesn’t Tanya pick all the apples on the Feast of the Transfiguration?”

“Yes, she does,” Marta Hryhorivna agreed.

“And doesn’t she take them to the grave of our late father?”

“Yes.”

“And do you know why? So that the village children will eat the apples and thank Miss Tanya for them,” Kost said.

“No, it’s so the children will thank our late father for planting the apple tree,” Borys said. “I heard her say this myself.”

“Oh, you always hear everything that’s to the benefit of your Princess,” Mariya interjected scornfully.

“Do you think I’m lying? I’ve never told a lie from the time that I gave my word to Tanya that I would never lie.”

“Did you get down on your knees and take a vow?” Mariya derided him again.

“Why are you badgering the child?” Marta Hryhorivna defended Borys. “You’d do better to tell us what hours we should assign to you for guard duty.”

“None whatsoever!” Mariya retorted. “I told you—let Tanya guard it herself.”

“And are you going to eat the apples?” Marta Hryhorivna asked.

“Do you begrudge me them?” Mariya snapped back.

“Why are you so angry, Mariya?” Marta Hryhorivna asked as gently as possible.

“I’m angry because I can see that I’m like a stepdaughter to you. You’ve been conspiring with your Tanya . . . But you won’t have your way! No, you won’t. It’s good that Tanya’s secret was revealed so quickly. Now I understand fully, and everyone understands. But why was it necessary to stage that comedy in the orchard?”

“Come to your senses, Mariya,” Katriya stopped her. “Vira, let’s go into the orchard. Perhaps Tanya really is by her apple tree.”

“Yes, do go, girls; go quickly, because I feel very uneasy that Tanya isn’t here with us.”

“She quarrelled with Kost,” Borys admitted.

“Again, Kost?” Marta Hryhorivna asked him reproachfully.

“What do you mean, ‘again’?” Mariya retorted sharply on Kost’s behalf.

“Well, run along, girls; run along quickly,” Marta Hryhorivna implored them. “I’m about to pour the tea, and it will grow cold.”

Katriya and I got up and set out for the orchard and Tanya’s apple tree. I knew where that particular tree grew. I had noticed it the very first time that I walked into the orchard, because it stood out among the chaos of the broken and twisted trees, shrubs, and weeds that were intertwined with grape vines, young birches, hops, and bramble bushes. Succulent, fresh, and green, trimmed by the hand of an experienced gardener, and smeared with lime from its very tip to its roots, it stood as living proof—to the envy of all the cripples surrounding it—that the soil was not depleted, that it could still feed its children, and that it was not the soil’s fault if the trees, covered with moss and lichen, were rotting. The apple tree looked like a girl, dressed in her all her finery, who had accidentally stumbled into the company of hoary, shaggy, gloomy old men, and was now standing still because she did not know where to flee.

The history of this apple tree is so tightly bound with the fate of our Princess that I must relate it too you, at least briefly. Afanasiy Ivanovych Mykhaylenko, Tanya’s father, grafted and cared for the trees in his orchard. When Tanya was four years old, he began taking her into the orchard to help him. She held the knife, the paste, the rag, and the string, so that they would not get lost in the grass.

One day he brought home a cutting of a special apple tree and said to Tanya: “I will graft this cutting for your good fortune. The tree will be called Tanya’s apple tree, and you will look after it.”

He went into the orchard with Tanya and selected a crab apple tree with young bark that stood out in the open where the sun could warm it. Taking off his leather jacket, he laid it on the ground with its fleece side down, spread his tools on it, told Tanya to sit next to them, and gave her the cutting, wrapped in a wet rag, to hold.

“It’s so tiny!” Tanya observed.

“You’re small, and the cutting is small; you’ll grow, and the cutting will grow,” Afanasiy Ivanovych said.

“I’ll grow, because I eat borshch and buckwheat groats, and everything else that mother tells me to eat, but the cutting has no teeth; it won’t eat anything, and so it won’t grow,” Tanya responded.

“It will eat without teeth. You know that our little Halochka eats, even though she does not have a single tooth,” Afanasiy Ivanovych reminded her.

“Little Halochka sucks mother’s milk,” Tanya said.

“And the cutting will also suck the sap from this crab apple tree when we splice them tightly together.”

“Really?” Tanya said in amazement. “But where will the crab apple tree get the sap?”

Afanasiy Ivanovych stopped working for a moment and began telling Tanya about the function of roots, and how plants in general feed themselves. Seeing how fascinated the little girl was with his story, he gave her an entire lesson in natural science.

After grafting the cutting and pasting it over, he sat down beside his little daughter and said: “I’m finished. And now you have a little friend. When you learn how to read, you’ll come and read to your new friend, you’ll tell her what you’ve learned, what you’ve heard, and she will give you delicious rosy apples.”

Tanya immediately set out to fulfil her duties as the tree’s owner. She ran to see the apple tree several times a day, hoed the grass around it, watered it, and covered it with broad burdock leaves to protect it from the sun. And the cutting grew as if by magic. At times she would read to it, tell it stories and fairy tales, and inform it about the latest happenings in the lives of her dolls, Murko the cat, and Shavka, the dog. And when the apple tree rustled its leaves, she would run to Marta Hryhorivna, proclaiming joyfully: “Mummy dearest, I was reading to the apple tree, and it said: ‘I’m lis-s-s-stening, lis-s-s-stening.’”

When Tanya was ten years old, the apple tree, for the first time ever, bore two marvellous red apples. There were no limits to Tanya’s

joy; she hopped around the apple tree and clapped her hands in glee; but that night someone who was tempted by the apples broke a branch when he tried to pick them. When Tanya noticed that the branch with the apples was dangling, hanging helplessly by a thin piece of bark, she raised such a ruckus, crying and lamenting, that the entire household ran to her, and even the closer neighbours ran in to save the child. They all tried to pacify her, to distract her, but she ignored all of them and continued screaming: "My apple tree hurts, it hurts . . ."

At last, Grandfather Samson recalled that old Oles Trendechenko had a German gardener who could heal any kind of a wound on a tree, and Marta Hryhorivna sent a shepherd to fetch him.

Trendechenko's yard was encircled by a tall brick wall. It was a huge estate, where, after his prolonged travels through Europe, Oles lived alone like a hermit, intent upon saving himself from the endless despair and desperation of being a hopeless cripple. His farmstead was some distance beyond the hill, but his tobacco plantations and his orchard were adjacent to Marta Hryhorivna's dam, and it was there, in a small hut, that the German gardener lived along with his wife and a niece who was a deaf-mute.

The gardener was not long in coming. He did not resemble his fellow Germans at all. Tall, slim, and dark, with closely-cropped hair, he had a small black moustache on his long, clean-shaven face, and clear blue eyes. He pressed the broken branch snugly to the trunk, pasted it over, wrapped it up, and said that the wound would heal in short order.

Tanya jumped for joy.

"And what will be my reward for this?" he asked.

"I'll sing you a song," Tanya replied, and she started singing: "Through the garden the pumpkin strolls. . ."

The German listened attentively to the song until it was finished and then, in a mixture of German and Ukrainian, said: "Wonderful! Oh, it was very beautiful, very lovely. You, my dear young lady, sing like a real singer; but I look after orchards, not gardens. The grafted branch will be healthy, but you must care for it, and I'll come to see it too, from time to time."

And he actually did come a few days later, bringing with him a small bouquet for Tanya. Tanya took the bouquet, pulled out all the carnations, stuck them in every buttonhole of the gardener's jacket, and then decked herself out with the remaining flowers.



“And what about my reward?” the German asked.

Tanya took the German’s hand with its long slim fingers, pressed it to her cheek, and kissed it warmly.

The German, deeply touched, took Tanya’s little head in his hands. “Dear little Tanya, you’re very nice, a very nice little girl; I will never forget you.”

“Do you want me to sing for you?” Tanya asked.

“Yes, please; I’d like that very much.”

Tanya sang another ditty for him, about a *zhuk* [beetle]: “Down the road goes the beetle, the beetle; down the road goes the beetle so black . . .”

“That’s lovely, very lovely,” the German said. “You should study, my dear young lady.”

“I’m going to go to high school next year,” Tanya boasted.

“No, no,” the German waved his hand, “not to high school; to the Conservatory.”

A few days later, the German drove up in a coach with a note from Oles. Oles asked that Tanya be allowed to visit him for a few days. Marta Hryhorivna did not think it was proper to let a young girl visit a gentleman, but, recalling that she might be able to use this opportunity to borrow some wheat from him for the seeding, she permitted Tanya to visit him for one day.

When the German led Tanya into the gentleman’s drawing room, she stopped dumbstruck on the threshold. It was not the velvet couches and armchairs, nor the expensive drapes on the doors that impressed her; it was the marvellous paintings that hung on all the walls of the room, the wonderful statues that stood on all the shelves and on pedestals in the corners of the room, and the elegant flowers in shiny vases on the windowsills.

A short while later, the master, Oles himself, came to meet her. He was a short and thickset middle-aged man wearing a black velvet robe embroidered with mustard yellow and blue silk thread. On his back protruded a huge hump; the midwife had dropped him while taking him out of his bath on the very day that he was born—but she had never admitted it. When his parents realised that there was a hump growing on their son’s back, they took him abroad to cure him, but it was too late, and the boy remained a cripple.

In order to make his life more pleasant, his parents, taking note of his exceptional musical talent, enrolled him in the Prague Conservatory. He returned as a composer and a virtuoso pianist.

Tanya was frightened of him at first, but he came up to her, took her by the hand, and led her to the piano.

“Avgust Karlovych tells me, my dear girl, that you sing most beautifully. I’ll give you a very nice toy if you will sing for me.”

He opened the grand piano, played a few chords, and then ran his hands in an arpeggio over the entire keyboard.

“Sing,” he invited her.

Tanya thought for a moment, and then sang: “Down the road goes the beetle the beetle; down the road goes the beetle so black. Oh, look little girl, oh, look little girl, how briskly I can walk.” The stocky man quickly picked up the tune and accompanied her on the piano. Tanya liked the accompaniment so much that she sang another song: “Oh, my girl, my dear girl.” He accompanied this song as well.

At that moment Avgust Karlovych walked in and began applauding while he was still on the threshold.

“Well, was I right?” he asked Oles.

“Yes, you were; yes, you were,” Oles replied. “This girl will be a famous singer one day, and I swear, sure as I’m Oles, that I’ll see to it that she has the proper training. She’s a precious pearl, a truly original talent. Thank you, thank you ever so much for acquainting me with her.”

Then he played something cheerful and showed Tanya how to strike the keys to play the tune “The Finch.” Tanya caught on immediately and asked if she could try playing “The Beetle.” He permitted her to do so. Tanya kept striking the keys with her finger until, to her great joy, and to the even greater joy of Oles, she played “The Beetle.”

“But there’s one little problem, Tanya; you mispronounce some letters. Your ‘r’ sounds like an ‘l’; but if you want to sing well, you must pronounce every word distinctly,” Oles said.

“I’ll learn how to do it,” Tanya replied, blushing furiously.

“Of course you’ll learn, of course you will. Do you like it here?”

“Very much,” Tanya said.

“Then I’ll ask your mother to give you to me as a daughter. Would you like that?”

“I myself will give myself to you,” Tanya replied.

“Well, mind what you say. And so that you don’t forget that you gave yourself to me today, I want you to write it down,” Oles said, and he passed her a large notepad and a pencil.

“I don’t write all that well yet,” Tanya said bashfully.

“It doesn’t matter, my dear Tanya, it doesn’t matter; I’ll understand what you’ve written,” Oles said, and he showed her where to write on the page.

And Tanya, excited and blushing, scrawled with a trembling hand: “Today I gave myself to Oles. August 10, 1892.”

Then the German picked up a little album with a filigree cover made of ivory and said: “And so that you never forget this day, I’ll write you a verse.” He opened the album, drew a forget-me-not on the first page and wrote:

“O dear little flower, O forget-me-not,  
O dear little friend, forget me not.  
For if you ever should forget me,  
Unhappy always I would be.”

*Avgust Karlovych Enfelbaun.*

“I kept that album hidden and did not give it to anyone,” he said, pressing the album into Tanya’s hand.

Tanya returned home with a basket filled with treats, toys, and a letter to Marta Hryhorivna begging her to allow the girl to visit him at least once a week. But things did not turn out that way.

The very next day Tanya fell very ill with diphtheria, and Marta Hryhorivna was convinced that the humpbacked devil had cast an evil spell on her child. Not only did she not let Tanya visit him; she even refused to borrow any wheat from him. In this way the relationship between Tanya and Oles was broken forever, and Tanya’s visit seemed like a dream to her, all the more so because shortly afterwards, Oles left his estate in the care of Avgust Karlovych and travelled with a composer friend to the Far East in order to write down the motifs of the songs native to that region.

And Tanya had no idea in what countries Oles was travelling or wandering. One day Avgust Karlovych ran in all excited, red-faced, and so excited that his hand trembled, and he almost dropped the violin case he was carrying. “I’m so happy, so delighted—Master Oles has sent me some notes. It’s a Japanese song; he wrote it himself, and later he’ll compose some variations on it.”

He began to play. It was a lovely song that resembled a barcarole. Tanya quickly caught on to it, and there ensued a charming duet. But as for the variations, Tanya did not hear them, because one day, when Avgust Karlovych was grafting a rose bush, he pricked his finger on a thorn, developed a sore that would not heal, and had to

have his finger amputated. After that, Avgust locked his precious violin in its case forever and willed it to his descendants, because he could never play it again.

## VI

It had grown completely dark by the time Katriya and I came back from the orchard. Everyone rushed up to us to ask us where and how we had searched for Tanya. It seemed to everyone that we had not looked carefully enough or not shouted loudly enough. And Kost attacked us as if we had undertaken an obligation to bring Tanya to him and had failed to live up to it.

“Go and look yourself,” Katriya flared at him.

“It’s too late to look for her, but I’ll go and call her,” Kost replied.

“She won’t respond to your voice,” Borys said.

“Why is that?” Marta Hryhorivna asked.

“They had a quarrel,” Borys replied.

“Oh, Kost,” Marta Hryhorivna reproached her son. “You’re always like that.”

“No one quarrelled; we were all just sitting there,” Mariya said.

“Maybe you’ll go and call her, Borys?” Marta Hryhorivna asked.

Borys jumped to his feet, ran into the orchard, and before long we could hear his thin high voice: “Tanya! Tanya! Mother’s calling you. Come quickly—we’re having tea.”

And at the same time, a strong deep bass voice could be heard from the other end of the orchard: “Tanya! Hey, Tanya, where are you? Answer us! Hey, hey there! Tanya!”

The brothers did not return together. Borys limped up a short while later with a sprained ankle, but Kost’s voice resounded until midnight.

Katriya and I shared a bedroom. I could not fall asleep for a long time, and I could see that Katriya was also tossing from side to side.

“Aren’t you sleeping?” I asked.

“No, I simply can’t fall asleep; I can’t stop thinking about Tanya. What do you think? Has she killed herself? How disgusting Kost is—he’s an egotist, a glory-seeker, a cracked bell, an empty barrel.”

It was unpleasant for me to hear that kind of judgement passed on the person I loved, all the more so because I could see there was a lot of truth in that judgement.

“Just let him come home,” I thought. “I’ll call him out on the veranda and tell him exactly what I think.”

Kost’s room was right next to ours, and I always tried to hear what was going on in the adjoining room.

“He’s thinking about our last conversation,” I used to think whenever I heard his footsteps, and I would be glad that I had not said anything foolish.

“He’s sitting by the open window, looking at the stars, and dreaming about our future happiness,” I would rejoice silently to myself when it became quiet in the next room.

“I won’t sleep until he comes back from the orchard,” I thought as I lay there. But sleep overcame me after Marta Hryhorivna went in to see Kost before going to rest in her own room.

I slept soundly until the sun was high in the sky. The cattle had been driven out into the fields, and Borys had already returned with the flowers that he put, as always, on the veranda. But Tanya still had not appeared, and the granary remained locked.

“Come on, let’s at least go and have a swim. I’m completely exhausted,” Katriya suggested.

I agreed, and we went to the pond. A crowd of villagers was gathered near it.

“Why have you come here?” Katriya asked.

“Master Kost asked some fishermen to come here with their largest nets and drag them over the entire width and length of the pond, and we want to buy at least some of the fish they catch,” the people replied calmly.

My heart started to pound. “Kost must be searching for Tanya’s body,” I thought, and we went back to the house without swimming.

In the dining room we happened upon a quarrel between Marta Hryhorivna and Kost.

“I’m the mistress here, and I know perfectly well when it’s time to clean the well,” Marta Hryhorivna was saying.

“But nothing will happen to the well if it’s cleaned an extra time. I called Havrylo, and it would be embarrassing to send him back home now,” Kost said.

“Well, fine. Have it your way. But next time don’t stick your nose into my affairs,” Marta Hryhorivna gave in.

And so Havrylo went to the well.

It is difficult to describe what agonies we lived through until Havrylo crawled out of the well.

“No, my young sir, there isn’t a tub in there; the shepherd must have thrown it away in the fields and then lied to you about it.”

We knew only too well what kind of tub Kost had been looking for, and Havrylo must have been surprised when we all were very happy that he did not find it.

A time of unforgettable agony, a time we will remember forever, passed by—a whole week of searching for Tanya. We combed through all the forests and ravines, and trampled all the grain by the road, but we did not find a trace of her. Kost raced on his bicycle every day to the first aid station to get the newspaper from the doctor, and I secretly observed that he always read the section where unfortunate accidents were written up. I surmised that he was searching for news about a body that might be Tanya’s.

The teacher from the neighbouring village, Mykola Semenovych, ordered his pupils to pick up every scrap of paper they came across, and any article they might find. The villagers also took a most active part in the search for “Miss Canary,” the nickname that Tanya had been given by a courier of one of the officers who had once hunted on Marta Hryhorivna’s land. Someone found the print of a woman’s high heel in the wet sand and measured it; another person found a snippet of a red muslin veil on a telegraph wire; and someone else found, under some leaves, a scrap of paper with handwriting on it. They brought all these items to Marta Hryhorivna, but none of them had anything to do with Tanya.

Tanya vanished without a trace. The public did not wish to remain a silent witness to such a sensational occurrence or to keep the fantastic event within the bounds of reality.

By coincidence, on the day that Tanya disappeared, Rudenko, the leading actor of a theatre group on tour in a nearby town, took a two-month advance in pay, abandoned his wife, and ran off. Everyone put two and two together and created a common, stereotypical romance out of the situation; it was assumed that Tanya had fallen in love with Rudenko, and that he had left his ageing wife, who had already lost her voice, to do a concert tour with Tanya. Fortunately, even though this rumour sped through the entire town, it quickly died down and did not reach the ears of Marta Hryhorivna—who would have been more shocked by a rumour like that than by a report of Tanya’s death.

We all walked around as if our hands and feet were swaddled; there was nothing we could do. As for Marta Hryhorivna—well, she

aged ten years overnight and abandoned all her work on the farmstead. The cream spoiled in pots in the cellar, the berries remained unpicked, the garden was choked with weeds, and the ripened wheat fell to the ground.

Kost walked around and tallied up the losses, while Mariya reproached her mother: “You worked only for Tanya; we’re all stepchildren as far as you’re concerned!”

Marta Hryhorivna had no idea as to what she should do; she wept and worried, and eventually moved into the granary.

“Her soul will be more eager to fly here, because this was her little nest—the home she created for her body,” she said, openly weeping and grieving. We feared she might go mad.

“O merciful God,” she prayed. “Make it possible for me to glance at least once at the grave of my unfortunate daughter, and then I’ll die in peace.”

Her wish was granted sooner than she expected. Not long after Tanya’s disappearance, a nun came to visit Marta Hryhorivna. This nun ran the monastery’s sewing room and travelled among the people to sell all sorts of sewn goods, tatted lace, knitted kerchiefs, velvet slippers, and other articles like that, and, on this day, she had come to see Marta Hryhorivna. After buying a few things, Marta Hryhorivna invited the nun to join us for dinner. The nun—a cheerful young woman—had a talent for telling stories, and everyone enjoyed listening to her.

“Oh, I’ll tell you about a sad event that happened in our monastery. In our forest, the body of a girl was found hanging from a crab-apple tree on a white muslin shawl. The investigator and the medical coroner said that the body was not that of a peasant girl, and that it had been hanging there for more than a week. It isn’t clear if the girl hanged herself, or if someone else hanged her, but she was completely naked, without a shred of clothing except for a wilted garland of blue cornflowers on her head and a few flowers woven into her long tresses.”

“A white muslin shawl, long hair, cornflowers,—it must be Tanya,” I almost shouted—but I managed to restrain myself.

“And where is she now?” Marta Hryhorivna inquired.

“We buried her in the monastery’s cemetery. The treasurer did not want to give any money to have a casket built out of oak; he said that a pine coffin would do. But we all contributed some money and ordered an oak casket—such a solid one that it won’t rot for at least

a hundred years—lined it with golden brocade, and dressed her in brand new nun's clothing."

"I wonder," Kost speculated, "why nothing was written about it in the newspapers?"

"Because the Mother Superior went to see the Archbishop and begged him to ask the Governor to forbid anything to be written about what had happened, because if the pilgrims found out about it, they would be afraid to walk through the forest to come to see us, and our monastery exists only through the offerings of pilgrims."

"And where did they bury her?" Marta Hryhorivna asked.

"Right by the monastery's church—that's what the Mother Superior wanted. We raised a beautiful high mound over it, overlaid it with sod, and planted lilacs on it."

"May God grant you good health," Marta Hryhorivna said sadly. "You have done a good deed to save her soul."

"And here's another adventure for you," the nun continued with her story telling. "A couple of weeks ago, one of our nuns ran away—and not a young one at that; she was really old. What came over her—no one can say; it's true, however, that she was always strange—at Easter she ate horseradish and radishes, and during the Lenten period she devoured *krashanky* [*Easter eggs dyed in one colour*]."

"And have they found her?" Marta Hryhorivna asked.

"No they haven't, because they didn't look for her. The abbot from the Monastery of the Transfiguration came, and so did the archbishop and the metropolitan, and they conferred and decided to curse her and place an anathema upon her."

"For what?" Marta Hryhorivna inquired.

"Well, for bringing such shame on our monastery! No one runs away from something that is good; if she ran away, then it must mean that things are so bad in our monastery that she was forced to flee. The monastery has stood for over fifty years, and, praise God, nothing unpleasant has ever happened before—but this is so humiliating, to be censured us in this way!"

"Did you hear that, mother? Did you hear?" Mariya unexpectedly interrupted what the nun was saying.

I glanced at her in astonishment.

From the time that Tanya disappeared, our group had split into two opposing camps that, while not exactly hostile to each other, nevertheless differed completely in temperament, thought, and



manner of suffering. Borys, Marta Hryhorivna and I grieved for Tanya and worried about her fate; Mariya and Kost kept trying to prove to each other that neither of them was to blame for the terrible tragedy; that neither had said anything to offend Tanya in the orchard—certainly nothing that could have caused her to take such a decisive step. They recalled all the words, all the phrases, even the gestures, and at times called upon Halochka to be their witness.

“Did you hear?” Mariya asked Marta Hryhorivna for a second time after the nun had left.

“Yes, I did, I did!” Marta Hryhorivna replied. “But did you all notice the most important point? The main point is that a nun ran away!” Marta Hryhorivna said.

“It’s not that at all,” Mariya retorted sharply. “The main point is that they cursed her and placed an anathema upon her. And that was someone who fled from total strangers, but Tanya ran away from her own home, from her own mother, from her own brothers and sisters . . . Just imagine what people are saying now about you and about us. And you yourself are to blame for this, because you’re the one who raised her. You have only yourself to reproach, only yourself to censure that your own daughter ran away.”

“Oh, my dear daughter, my dear . . .” Marta Hryhorivna wailed, shuddering so convulsively that she almost tumbled from her chair.

Zinka grabbed her by the arm and led her away to her room. Borys watched her go and then burst loudly into tears.

“Why are you crying, Borys? Maybe it wasn’t Tanya,” Katrya spoke up.

Borys sobbed even more loudly.

“And just why are you bellowing like a cow?” Mariya snapped impatiently. “You have no one to blame but yourself. You knew her secret; you knew that she wanted to run away . . . You should have told us, and we wouldn’t have let her do it. But now you’re to blame that she ran away and hanged herself.”

“That’s not true! That’s not true!” Borys screamed. “I didn’t know anything. It’s because of you, you damned . . .”

“Borys, dearest Borys, don’t swear, because you’re still little, but Kost is big, and he can beat up on you,” Halochka pleaded.

“And I most certainly will beat you up!” Kost shouted.

“You’re lying! You wouldn’t dare to beat me, you damned public prosecutor! You’re a murderer, that’s what you are! It’s because of you that Tanya . . .”

He grabbed a knife and hurled it at Kost, but Kattrya managed to intercept it. After this incident, Borys fell into a hysterical fit, and we had to fuss over him until midnight before we finally managed to calm him down a bit. At dawn, Zinka came to tell us that Marta Hryhorivna was getting ready to travel to the monastery.

## VII

Marta Hryhorivna had both a carriage and a coach. The carriage was almost brand new, because the late Afanasiy Ivanovych was afraid of ruining the springs, and so he let only Mariya travel in it. Marta Hryhorivna also took good care of it, letting it stand in the shed, covered with coarse blankets and horse-cloths, and driving it only on Easter to go to church, or, on occasion, to visit her neighbour, the general's wife.

We hated the carriage, because it was too small for all of us to fit into it, and so, whenever Serhiy harnessed the horses to it, we walked about with downcast faces, because we knew that some of us would have to remain at home. As for the coach, however, we loved it immeasurably, because it seemed to us that it could hold not only our group, but all the people on our farmstead.

It was built by a carpenter, probably more than fifty years ago, and he had constructed it in such a way that it would last a lifetime. Now, broken and dilapidated, it rattled, squeaked, clanged, and even growled in the strangest manner.

Mariya called it her "orchestra," while Kost called the pillow on the seat "the pillow of Loyola," for it truly did bear a resemblance to implements of torture used in the Inquisition. Its springs, contrary to the laws of nature and to all the customs of proper springs, did not bend under one's weight; instead, they jutted out in the spot where a person sat and jammed themselves into one's body like a needle.

As for Prokhir the blacksmith, there was not a curse or a cussword that he did not use to greet the damned the old rattetrap whenever Serhiy drove up in it to his blacksmith shop.

"Again? Again?" the blacksmith would shout, striking his hands together in despair. "You've brought it here again?"

"It only needs to be riveted a little bit over here," Serhiy would attempt to justify himself.

“Oh, I know, I know those ‘little bits.’ Just start working on it, just touch it, and it’s game over for you—you won’t have time to either eat or drink . . . May it be damned! God has inflicted two punishments upon me: the first is my wife, the damned viper, and the second is this rattletrap. I protected myself from my wife with my fists and with whips, and she ran away to her father; but, as for this rattletrap, it looks as if I have no choice but to run away from it myself!” he would complain to the other men. “Only yesterday I checked it out ever so thoroughly, as if I were looking for a needle; I drove in all the screw-nuts, hammered on all the pieces—and, wouldn’t you know it—today Serhiy brought it in again!”

“Well, it just might be that the hoop on the front wheel is loose; the wheel may have dried up, and now the sun is beating down on it,” the men would try to come up with an answer.

“I know that the wheel has dried up . . . But why did it dry up today? Why didn’t it dry up yesterday? No! No matter what you say, it’s a devil’s contrivance, a witch’s gimmick; the devil and a witch have joined forces to aggravate me, to drive me off the face of the earth. No! I can’t, I simply can’t bear to look at it, or to listen to it; when it comes rattling up to my yard, I am immediately overcome by an urge to jump off a bridge into the river . . .”

“Why are you complaining? After all, you get paid for fixing it. How much have you made on it already?” the men would ask.

“But if my heart is bathed in hot blood, and my soul is filled to the brim with sins, then that doesn’t matter at all!” the blacksmith would rage.

Of course, the blacksmith had every reason to rage. But, as for us, we gave thanks to the coach, because it never betrayed us.

When we saw that the “orchestra” was being harnessed that morning, we were as happy as if we were on our way to a wedding, and not to the grave of our dear Tanya. Serhiy was also cheerful; the road was long and went uphill, but still, he would not have to turn the wagon around even once.

“I’d rather travel all the way to America than have to turn this contraption around,” he maintained. And truly, the extremely long pole that seemed to be built for three pairs of oxen made it impossible to turn the coach around on a street.

Marta Hryhorivna, the cook, and the chambermaid had not slept at all. They had spent the entire night preparing food for the trip—roast chickens, geese, turnovers, and stuffed rolls—because not only

did all of us have to be fed for two days, all the beggars also had to be given food to pray for the repose of the soul of Tanya, the servant of God.

We were to set out at dawn, and Marta Hryhorivna cut down all the flowers in the garden by the granary and placed them in a pail of water inside the coach. But we had to wait a long time for Borys; the sun was already quite high in the sky when he finally came up with two large sheaves of wild flowers.

“Why so many?” Marta Hryhorivna asked.

“Well, we’ll have to put a wreath not only on Tanya’s grave, but on all the graves that are near hers in the cemetery.”

Deeply moved, Marta Hryhorivna wiped the tears from her eyes and bent down to kiss Borys.

As soon as we started out, Borys proposed that we begin plaiting wreaths. We pulled the flowers apart and started arranging them into bunches. Halochka placed a few bunches on Mariya’s knees.

“I won’t be making any wreaths,” Mariya hissed through her teeth.

“Why not?” Halochka asked.

“Because this is all a farce. The dead don’t need any wreaths; it’s only being done so that the living will say: ‘That’s the way it should be done, my good people! A coach filled with young ladies and gentlemen drove up, and they all placed wreaths on the graves and distributed turnovers to everyone.’”

“That’s not true! That’s not true!” Borys protested vehemently. “But if you’re too lazy, then don’t make any; in fact, I won’t even give you any flowers.”

And, saying this, he removed the flowers from Mariya’s knees.

“Don’t you dare!” Kost shouted. “Just look at that,” he added derisively, “he’s no bigger than a grasshopper, but he’s already ordering people around.”

As soon as we drove up to the entrance gate of the monastery, a nun glanced out at us through a grating, opened the gate, bowed down low, and inquired: “Why has the Lord brought you to our monastery?”

Marta Hryhorivna replied: “We want to have a requiem served for the newly departed girl that was murdered.”

Within moments, a hundred beggars surrounded us. One old woman beggar walked up quietly to the gatekeeper, softly asked her something, and instantly all the beggars vanished as if the earth had swallowed them. Then a novice came and bowed down low to us

as well; when Marta Hryhorivna told her why we had come, she led us to the grave.

The grave was well maintained and covered with sod. Marta Hryhorivna brought a wreath she had made out of her garden flowers, while we brought one made out of wild flowers. As she placed the wreath on the grave, Marta Hryhorivna fell face down on it and almost fainted. Borys told us to put wreaths on all the other graves in the cemetery. Zinka took up her position by the grave with a basket of turnovers. A baker appeared out of nowhere with a basket of hot, fresh buns, and Marta Hryhorivna bought all of them. Then the beggars came up one by one to the grave, knelt down beside it, kissed it, walked around it and, after receiving their bun and a *kopiyka* [penny], went away.

Marta Hryhorivna had asked Mariya to distribute the buns, but Mariya only muttered: “Another farce!” and so Halochka took over this task. The bag of copper coins had been entrusted by Marta Hryhorivna to Borys.

We waited for more than an hour for the requiem to begin. When the service finally started, Marta Hryhorivna seemed to calm down, but when they began singing “eternal memory to the murdered servant of God,” she once again collapsed on the grave and lamented so piteously that everyone rushed to help her to her feet, asking: “Is she a relative?”

“She’s my daughter, my very own daughter,” Marta Hryhorivna wailed even more loudly.

“What was her name?”

“Tetyana,” Marta Hryhorivna, shaking uncontrollably, was barely able to reply.

They began calming her down, promising her that the name of Tetyana, the servant of God, would be remembered forever in the commemorative services at the monastery.

It was at that moment that something strange happened to me. It was as if a voice were shouting in my very ear: “What colour was her hair?”

And I began to reproach myself and to wonder why we had failed to ask anyone what colour hair the murdered servant of God had, but the priest was already moving away, and we began going up to the grave and kissing it. Now I kissed the grave without any feeling of grief, as if it were not Tanya’s grave, but just a mound of heaped up earth.

Then suddenly it seemed to me that someone sliced through my question, as with a knife, saying: "You're insane! Would a girl with dark hair adorn it with blue cornflowers? She would have woven a wreath out of yellow carnations, or red poppies. The hair must have been blond."

And I was angry at myself for kissing the grave so indifferently. Of course, I did not tell anyone what I was thinking. And when Marta Hryhorivna was troubled all the way home that we had not placed even a small cross on Tanya's grave, I supported her concern and added: "We should have at least made a modest little nun's cross out of some twigs."

We returned home when it was completely dark, and Marta Hryhorivna ordered Zinka to quickly get us some supper. We had given away all the turnovers and buns to the beggars, and over the whole day our group had shared only one roasted chicken.

We sat down at the table, but had not yet managed to have our one good meal of the day when Zinka ran in, saying: "My lady, Avgust Karlovych wishes to see you."

"No," Marta Hryhorivna waved her away. "Don't let him in."

Zinka went away, but returned a moment later: "He's entreating you that you agree to see him . . . He says it's very important."

"Borys, go and find out what it's all about," Marta Hryhorivna ordered her son.

"Mummy, he only wants your permission to take a cutting from Tanya's apple tree," Borys said when he came back.

"Let him cut away; let him take as much as he wants, but just let him never come into the house, because he reminds me of Tanya's singing," Marta Hryhorivna said, and, taking her place at the table, began filling our bowls with borshch.

Borys came up to her and whispered something in her ear.

She shook her head and said: "I don't want anything; I don't want to see him."

But Borys once again began whispering, and he continued whispering until she rose to her feet and walked out of the room. Borys ran after her, hopping on one foot.

They were gone for a long time; we finished eating our borshch and buckwheat groats, and waited for the rest of the food, but Zinka, instead of bringing the food, brought the key to the buffet, along with instructions that Mariya was to look after the food herself.

"But where are mother and Borys?" Mariya asked.

“Marta Hryhorivna, Borys, and Avgust Karlovych all went to the granary,” Zinka said. “They said you should drink your tea without them, and they asked that a candle be brought to the granary.”

No more than half an hour later, we heard Avgust Karlovych drive away in his carriage.

“He’s gone,” Katriya said. “Mariya, pour the tea for mother and Borys.”

Mariya poured the tea, but it was destined for the slop pail, because Marta Hryhorivna remained in the granary and bade Borys spend the night with her there.

In the morning we found out that Marta Hryhorivna had gone into town before dawn. She had dressed in her good clothing, instructed Serhiy to put on a new coat, and driven away in the carriage. She had entrusted all the keys to Zinka, told her what to prepare for dinner, and given instructions that we should eat without her.

She returned after dinner was over, without Borys, but with an armload of parcels. It was all dry goods—fabric to sew dresses for her daughters, shirts for her sons, and even a new robe for herself; there were also kerchiefs for Zinka and the cook.

“Are you in your right mind?” Kost attacked her. “Autumn is coming, the land taxes and the insurance have to be paid, and you’ve gone and spent a whole lot of money on who knows what.”

“It’s fine, my dear son; calm down. There’s enough for everything. I’ve received a windfall from heaven—a great deal of money.”

“At least don’t joke; there’s nothing to joke about. It’s enough to make us weep that you’ve lost your mind in your old age.”

“No, my dear son; praise God, I still have my wits about me, and I’ll tell you in a moment just how wise I am. I sold the thicket in the long ravine for two thousand *karbovantsi*. Hrytsko Bondarenko and Ivan Matushenko were hard pressed to offer me even six hundred *karbovantsi* for it.”

“To whom did you sell it?”

“Well, who else would give so much money for it if not that stupid German, Avgust Karlovych.”

“What does he need it for?”

“Well, he said: ‘I’ll clear the underbrush, graft good cuttings to the wild fruit trees that grow there, and establish an orchard.’”

“So you see, it turns out that the German has outsmarted you—he’ll start up a big orchard and make a huge profit.”

“Well, go ahead and establish an orchard yourself.”

“I’m not a gardener.”

“Neither am I. The thicket didn’t yield ten *karbovantsi* a year.”

“And so you’ve taken all the money and spent it?” Mariya asked indignantly.

“On rags!” Kost once again attacked his mother.

“A little bit of it on rags, but I also ordered a tombstone for Tanya’s grave for sixteen hundred *karbovantsi*.”

“For sixteen hundred *karbovantsi*?” Mariya struck her hands in astonishment. “So, there you have it, the dead Tanya is worth more to you than all of us who are alive. Sixteen hundred *karbovantsi* for a tombstone! But there’s no money to pay for our schooling.”

“Don’t get upset, my daughter, don’t get so upset; I’ve taken care of all of you. I signed a document at the notary’s office that grants all the land up to the creek to Mariya, and from the creek to the road to Kost; and I’m giving the yard, the buildings, and the farmstead to Borys, Katriya and Halochka. I will be the guardian of their property, but you can do as you wish with your land—you can rent it out, or you can manage it yourself.

“Well, have I done all that badly?” Marta Hryhorivna asked when she finished talking.

No one said a word in answer to her question, but I could not refrain from saying: “Marta Hryhorivna, my dearest, no one could have done better, and if I were in the position of one of your children, I would thank you most sincerely.”

At that point Katriya walked up to Marta Hryhorivna and warmly kissed her hand; Borys and Halochka followed her. Finally Kost approached her and, pressing her hand, said: “Yes, yes indeed! You’ve set both yourself and us free.”

Mariya and Kost called together the peasants, reached an agreement with them for leasing parcels of land, and received their first payment.

“Well, Mariya, now you and I are our own masters,” Kost said. “But remember—if there isn’t enough money, there’s nowhere else to get any more.”

“It will be enough for you,” Mariya replied, “but I need ever so many texts for my medical studies, and they’re all very expensive.”

“If things get too difficult, I’ll sell a few pounds of butter and rescue you,” Katriya spoke up.

“And just where do you intend to get that butter?” Mariya snorted derisively.



“She’s a witch,” Borys joked, “and not only a witch; she’s also a charmer—she’s charmed the teacher.”

“How do you know all this?” Mariya asked.

“When I used to go to for flowers, I often saw him laying traps for quails, and he always asked me why Miss Kattrya didn’t come with me. And I would tell him that she’s a lazybones, that she was still sleeping.”

“What teacher is it that you’re prattling about?” Mariya asked curiously.

“The one that’s in Mykolayivka.”

“Oh, the freckled one!” Mariya sneered scornfully.

“So what if he’s freckled, as long as his soul isn’t scarred.” Borys shot back.

Kattrya blushed furiously; she looked very pretty.

“So, Kattrya,” I said to her when we were left all alone, “it appears that ‘still waters run deep.’ You’ve been carrying on a romance in secret.”

“It can’t be called a romance,” Kattrya laughed. “He’s walked me home twice from church and sent me a few letters inviting me to go on a date with him, but I didn’t reply to the letters, and I didn’t agree to see him.”

“But still, does he appeal to you?”

“Why wouldn’t he? He’s a very nice person.”

“Perhaps he’s already asked for your hand in marriage?”

“Perhaps,” she smiled.

“Have you told your mother?”

“No. Mother isn’t in the mood for weddings just now; let her first erect the tombstone on Tanya’s grave.”

“You’re right,” I agreed.

## VIII

Mariya and Kost had never taken any interest in farming matters, and had never become involved in them. Accustomed as they were to living off the money earned by their mother’s labour, they continued to do absolutely nothing after Marta Hryhorivna set them up on their own. Kattrya, Borys, and Halochka, however, approached the task of farming with all the fervour, eagerness, and faith of neophytes.

Katrya assumed responsibility for the dairy, and, following the advice of the teacher, Mykola Semenovych, went to a dairy farm where she was taught how to milk cows and take care of them. She started keeping a daily record book in which she wrote down how many quarts of milk each cow gave. Then she brought in separate pots and milk containers for each cow in order to ascertain which cow brought in the most profit. She bought a textbook about veterinary concerns to learn how to feed cows and how to cure them when they fell ill. Everyone was amazed that such a young mistress could be so knowledgeable about dairy matters.

Borys took on the task of tending to the cattle, pigs, and dogs, and worked most diligently, ensuring that they were all properly watered and fed.

Halochka was left with the task of looking after the chickens and ducks, and she spent entire days running around searching for eggs in the weeds and chasing setting hens off nests that had been made where the rain could come down on them. Hawks became such a terrible enemy for her that she hissed at them and chased them away even in her sleep, and she never went to bed until she, with the help of Granny Lepestyna, had counted all her little charges, and was assured that a hawk had not seized any of them during the day.

The orchard and the garden remained in the care of Marta Hryhorivna, the cook, and Zinka, and the children helped out. Borys guarded the orchard; he built a hut by Tanya's apple tree and yelled at the top of his lungs at anyone who ventured near it. Katrya, of her own accord, took a spade and hilled the potatoes, and Halochka weeded the carrots, radishes, and onions.

Mykola Semenovych, who had become like one of the family, made sure that they all were fulfilling their responsibilities. In a word, life became so much easier for Marta Hryhorivna that there were times when she could actually pick up a book and read it. There was only one thing that bothered her—the tombstone was a long time in coming.

“All I want to do is ensure that Tanya's grave is in proper order; then I won't be afraid to die. I now have someone to whom I can leave my property.”

The vacation period was almost over, and I would soon have to go home and get back to studying. I was very reluctant to leave, because not only had I not rested during the summer, I had exhausted

myself both spiritually and physically. First of all, the tragedy of Tanya's death had greatly affected me; secondly, my broken heart had completely ruined my nerves. No matter how hard I forced myself, I simply could not conquer my love. I clearly saw that Kost was not worthy of it, that I should cast him out of my mind, but nevertheless my heart ached, and the entire world seemed to be shrouded in fog.

Two days before the feast of the Transfiguration, a messenger from the monastery arrived with the news that the tombstone had been delivered to the monastery church.

On the morning of the Feast of the Transfiguration, we travelled to the monastery. This time, Mykola Semenovych came with us, and when we arrived we went directly to see the tombstone.

What a beautiful tombstone it was! On the grey marble slab there was a black table with an open Evangelion on it and, next to the table, leaning on her elbows, stood a woman sculpted out of white and pink marble who, especially from the side, was so lovely, so shapely, and so well formed that it was difficult to believe that it was a cold marble figure and not a live human being.

Quite a few people were already standing by the grave. The news about Tanya's tragic death had sped through the town, and now her friends and relatives had come to look at her grave. Everyone gazed with admiration at the tombstone. Marta Hryhorivna was satisfied that she had not wasted her sixteen hundred *karbovantsi*. As for Mykola Semenovych, he was delighted beyond words.

But who would erect the tombstone? A master craftsman was needed for the task. The nuns said that there was just such a man in the town—Pakhmutiy. Mykola Semenovych saddled up a horse and galloped off to fetch him.

At noon, Mykola Semenovych returned with Pakhmutiy. He was a short, red-haired man who reminded you of a young chick drenched in the rain—a late-maturing chick. But he had such a strong voice that it seemed his mother had brought him into this world just so that he could order others about and tell them what to do, without lifting so much as a finger himself.

“Well,” he shouted at the peasants who were standing there, “where are the ropes, the poles? Level off the grave, move over, get out of the way, try your hardest, that's better, put it on the coach box,” he ordered.

“It's too hard!” the people refused.

“What’s so hard about it? Over there we have tombstones that are three times as heavy, and they were put in place; it’s a trifling matter to erect this one! Come on, all together now! Harder!”

They finally manoeuvred the tombstone on to the coach box and rolled it up to the grave that had already been levelled.

“The base is too narrow!” Pakhmutiy fussed. “The scoundrels were stingy with the grey marble. If only they’d made it a couple of feet wider. Well, that’s not a problem. Go ask the keeper of the storehouse for a couple of rough-hewn logs; we’ll lay them across the grave, place the tombstone on them, and everything will be fine. But the tombstone is truly magnificent! I’ve erected more than one in my lifetime, but I’ve never seen one quite like it.”

“The storehouse keeper won’t give us any slabs; he told us to take some boards.”

“They must be oak boards—really thick ones; well, go and get them—off you go!” Pakhmutiy ordered.

The men brought the boards, and Pakhmutiy indicated where they should be laid down. Then the men brought the tombstone in closer and placed it on the grave.

Marta Hryhorivna fell to her knees and crossed herself.

The next day Kost and Borys left for the city. As for Katriya, Mykola Semenovych convinced her to drop out of school, saying: “If you don’t intend to continue on to get a higher education, then you really don’t need a high school diploma.”

Mariya and Kost went away to study, and I returned home.

Some time later, we heard a rumour that Mariya had dropped out of her medical program, saying that she had no intention “of continuing to rack her brains and waste money.” Having found living quarters in the home of a renowned, wealthy midwife, she decided to join her in her practice and, to this end, completed a short course in midwifery.

The wedding of Katriya and Mykola Semenovych was set for December. Shortly before the wedding, Katriya sent me a lengthy list of people whom she wanted to invite.

“We have to know ahead of time how many people there will be, so that we can buy extra dishes, because we don’t have very many,” she wrote.

My mother and I set out to deliver the invitations. First, we went to Mariya’s quarters, where Kost was also staying at the time.

Mariya's room was large, bright, and furnished like the boudoir of a wealthy lady.

"If they send a carriage for me, I'll go," Mariya said, "but I refuse to be jostled on a coach for twenty-two versts because of some freckled man and his potatoes."

"Mykola Semenovych is a fine, respectable man," I objected.

"And how! And wise to boot—nothing less than a village teacher," Kost hooted with scathing laughter. "If Katriya were getting married in a cathedral with an archbishop in attendance, I'd even be her best man; but I won't go to our church—not to that old hovel. Relay to Katriya my wish that she toss over old Freckleface, and the sooner the better."

I shuddered. "O my God, my God," I thought. "What kind of a person is he? And to think that I loved him!"

Clean-shaven and drenched in perfume, Kost was wearing a new, university-issue double-breasted jacket, a high, stiff collar, shiny cuffs with golden cufflinks, and shoes of the latest fashion, with pointed toes and high heels.

"One could develop an aversion to a man like that! He's only interested in his career," my mother said when, after returning home, I told her my impression of him,

"Yes, he's a careerist and nothing more!" I agreed, and my heart felt very relieved, relieved and cleansed, as if a doctor had lanced a boil that had tormented me for a couple of years.

When father had still been alive, the eleventh of February—my mother's name day and my birthday—was celebrated convivially, with much gaiety and hilarity. Given our present straitened finances, however, we did not bake a festive cake, invite anyone, or expect anyone.

Having finished eating a breakfast that was a just a trifle more special than usual, my mother and I were sitting by the window, looking out at the inclement weather. A storm was raging outside, maddened perhaps by the thought that it had wasted an entire day, that it had neglected to pile up mounds of snow as it always did in January and December, and that now the rain and the spring sun would turn into puddles its last stores of snow.

Quite unexpectedly, at about noon, a coachman driving a pair of horses drove up to our veranda, and from the carriage descended a woman's figure, dressed in light-coloured clothing—a cream cloak,

white winter boots, and white gloves. Because of the wall of snow, it was difficult to discern who it was.

“It must be somebody insane to have dragged herself here in this weather!” my mother said in annoyance. “It’s sheer hell outside, and she’s dressed up as if she were going to a wedding.”

The doorbell rang a few moments later. I dashed into the vestibule, opened the door, and saw Mariya standing there.

“You didn’t expect me, did you?” she asked. “Or perhaps you didn’t recognise me?” she continued, when I did not reply to her first question.

Truly, it was difficult to recognise her. Her hair was swept up high on her head, and on its very tip perched a white hat held in place with two glittering hat pins.

When my mother walked in, Mariya handed me her cloak and followed her into the living room. Her silk gown was of a light grey shade; gold bracelets shone on her arms, gold rings adorned her fingers, and a thick gold chain attached to a gold watch graced her neck. I was walking behind her and observed that she was proudly pushing forward her right shoulder as if it were decorated by the epaulets of a general.

“I congratulate both of you—on your name day . . . and on your birthday! As you can see, I didn’t forget these special dates, and I took the trouble to come here in this wicked weather,” she said, seating herself on the couch. “But where are your guests? Have they not yet arrived, or have they departed already?”

“There were no guests, and there won’t be any,” my mother said. “These are difficult times now for us with respect to money. But I see that God must have sent you some good fortune that you’re able to dress so fashionably. Perhaps your lessees are giving you more money?”

“The lessees?” Mariya repeated after her. “May they be damned! They don’t give me even what they owe me. Of course, it’s true that my mother gave me the worst land.”

“Then perhaps Katrya and Mykola Semenovych have sent you a gift of money?”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!” Mariya burst out laughing. “Mykola Semenovych and Katrya would sooner hang themselves than send me so much as a *karbovanets*. It’s my first job as a practising midwife that has adorned me like this.”

“At whose home?” my mother inquired.

“Well, obviously it was not at the home of a seamstress, or a washerwoman, and certainly not in some basement; it was at the home of Colonel Alatyev’s wife.”

“Ah yes, that family is rich, and they probably were generous in their thanks. Did God give them a daughter, or a son?”

“The devil knows what it was,” Mariya retorted. “I finished what I had to do in the middle of the night and, as for the rest, it’s no concern of mine.”

“What do you mean?” my mother asked in amazement.

“Just that!” Mariya retorted once again, and, to break off the conversation, she drummed her fingers on the table. “But look, my dear Vira, I brought you a gift—a ring. Give me your hand.”

I held out my hand to her, and she slipped a ring on my finger. It was a marvellous ring with a precious gem in it.

“The ring is truly beautiful, but I’ve never worn a ring, and I never will,” I said, and I removed the ring from my finger and placed it on the table.

She spent a long time trying to persuade me to take it. When, at long last, she was convinced that I would not accept it, she threw it in her white velvet purse and said: “Well, as you wish. I’ll give it to Halochka.

“And now,” she turned to my mother, “I’m inviting you, Valentyna Pavlivna, to come to my home with dear Vira for the Feast of the Annunciation. That’s my name day feast, and I’m going to be celebrating it quite festively. Perhaps Vira will take a liking to one of the students who will be there. Be sure to come.”

After we promised that we would be there, she said her farewells and left.

“That’s some guest we lived to see!” my mother laughed after she had seen her off. “But still, it is nice that she didn’t forget about us. You did the right thing, however, in refusing to accept the ring, because now we won’t have to give her a gift. We’ll bake a cake, and that will be the end of that.”

“Yes, of course, mummy,” I agreed. But at the same time I was thinking: “And what am I to wear when I take that cake to her. I don’t have a single decent dress! I should have taken the ring, sold it, and bought myself something appropriate.”

A couple of weeks before the Feast of the Annunciation, my mother found a letter from Mariya in our mailbox.

“My most precious, my dearest bright star, Valentyna Pavlivna! You must already know about the terrible misfortune that has befallen me. Why haven’t you come to see me? I’m dying here from hunger and from the cold, and when they send me to Siberia I’ll most certainly perish. Come with Vira to see me, my dearest. My address is: The Prison, Corridor Five, Cell Sixteen. I’ve included a letter from Kost—let dear Vira know what a reprobate she was in love with.”

On another sheet of thick grey paper embossed with a golden monogram, the following words were written in an elongated, gothic script:

“Mariya Afanasivna! Do not turn to me for any assistance, and do not beg me to come to see you, because I will not give you anything, and I cannot guarantee that I won’t kill you when I see you for dishonouring the entire family and ruining my career.

“With the greatest disrespect, and the most sincere hatred—*K., whom you know.*”

These letters were as unexpected as thunder and lightning on the Feast of Jordan, because we did not know anything and did not understand anything. We had not subscribed to any newspapers since the beginning of January, and had not been anywhere since Christmas. We did not know anything, but the letters led us to think that something truly out of the ordinary must have happened. I dressed hastily and rushed to my godmother’s house to find out more about the matter.

“What? Do you mean to tell me that you don’t know anything about it?” she attacked me. “Why, everyone’s talking about it everywhere, and it’s been written up in all the newspapers, and yet you say you don’t know anything about it?”

I admitted that our material resources had made it impossible for us to go out this winter. It was then that her tone softened and she began to speak more calmly about Mariya.

And this is what had happened. Colonel Altayev had gone abroad for health reasons and, in the meantime, it seems that his wife had taken a lover—a student. When this student found out that the colonel’s wife was pregnant, he demanded that she have an abortion; the colonel’s wife had turned for assistance to Osinska, the midwife in whose home Mariya lived, and Osinska had sent Mariya to her. Mariya had botched the abortion, and the colonel’s wife had died. When the colonel returned, he took the matter to the courts. And



now, Mariya, who had been sentenced to exile in Siberia, was being held temporarily in the local prison.

The prison was located beyond the city, and it was impossible to get there on foot. If we hired a driver, however, we would not have enough money to buy Mariya any treats, and there was no point in going to see her without taking her something. We bought some food—buns, turnovers, and sausage—and had the janitor's wife take it to her, while we put off our visit for a later time.

A few days afterwards, I found in our mailbox the letters that Mariya had sent to Mykola Semenovych and Marta Hryhorivna.

“My dearest brother, Mykola Semenovych, and my darling sister Kattrya! For the love of God, save me! Don't begrudge the money to save me; hire a good attorney and have him initiate a review of my case. I'm certain that they will acquit me, because I'm not to blame for anything; it's that damned Osinska who's to blame. Don't begrudge the money, because the way things are now, the person who has the money has truth on his side. And give Osinska's chambermaid a nice treat.

“Don't be angry with me for not coming to your wedding; it was all the fault of that damned Kost. He told me a pack of lies; he said you were laughing at me, calling me an old maid, and saying that I was jealous that Kattrya was getting married. I'm imploring you: don't begrudge the money. There's a political prisoner here who has fallen in love with me, and he's vowing that even if it costs him his life, he'll see to it that I'm sent back home from Siberia. *Your unfortunate sister, Mariya.*”

And to Marta Hryhorivna she had written:

“My dearest mummy. Don't believe what people are saying and writing about me. You haven't been here a single time, so everyone thinks that I'm a bad daughter, but if you came, the judges would change their minds about me. Come to see me as soon as you can. *Your ill-fated daughter, Mariya.*”

After reading Mariya's letter, Marta Hryhorivna wept bitterly. Then she instructed Serhiy to harness the horses to the coach and drive her into town.

We were still sleeping when the dogs informed us that a coach had driven into our yard. A few moments later, Serhiy tapped lightly on my window with his whip.

I leapt out of bed, ran to the door, and let in Marta Hryhorivna. She embraced me.

“Forgive me, sweetheart, but I couldn’t fall asleep last night; whenever I thought of my poor dear Mariya sitting behind bars, I couldn’t stop crying. Let’s go to see her right away; you must go, and your mother as well, but I don’t think I’ll go with you.”

“Why?” I asked in astonishment.

“I’m afraid to; I have a foreboding in my heart . . .”

She called Serhiy to her, sent him home, and asked that a driver be summoned.

“Let’s go then,” she said in a worried tone.

My mother and I could hardly persuade her to have some tea.

We drove to the baker’s shop, bought up a lot of tasty treats and, at eleven o’clock, drove up to the prison. We were taken first into a general waiting room where our parcels were taken from us and we were searched from head to foot; only then were we allowed to go and see Mariya.

Mariya was sitting on a bench by the window with her back to the door, and she turned around only after we greeted her. She looked silently at us without saying so much as a single word.

“She’s lost her mind,” I thought.

Marta Hryhorivna must have thought the same thing, because she hesitantly approached Mariya and said: “My dear Mariya, don’t you recognise us?”

Mariya jumped up from the bench and rushed at us. “Have you brought me something to eat? I’m asking you, have you brought something to eat? I’m dying of hunger, but you haven’t brought me even a crust of bread. At Katrya’s wedding, the guest were swimming in wine, but Mariya can die of hunger . . . Because that was Katrya—and this is Mariya, a prisoner. One daughter hanged herself, another will be hanged, and then you, my dear mummy, will be free to manage things the way you want to with your beloved son-in-law. You’ll have a wonderful life together . . .

“Tanya’s gone, Mariya’s gone, and Kost won’t stoop to dirty himself with your *kopiyky*. Borys will run away to wander about the world, and Halochka will become a prostitute—and then you and your son-in-law will be in paradise . . . It’s because of your beloved son-in-law that I’m perishing now. If it weren’t for him, I would have finished my medical studies. It’s because of you that I had to abandon my studies, that I almost perished of hunger and had to do what I did to the colonel’s wife . . . Yes, that’s the way it is, my dear mummy. Why are you snivelling? Does the truth hurt?”

“Mariya Afanasivna, what are you saying?” my mother attempted to stop her.

“I’m speaking the truth, only the truth . . . You don’t know what the truth is, so don’t interfere . . . So, my mother has finally come here . . . Do you think she’s come here for my sake? Not a chance! She came here so that people would not speak badly of her, but as for me, she doesn’t care about me at all . . . So, she’s come, but did she bring me anything?”

“A whole basket of food was taken away from us; they said they would bring it to you themselves.”

“Who took it from you? To whom are you saying this? Whom are you trying to fool?” Mariya attacked my mother. “Are you taking her side? She must have brought you a very nice treat, perhaps a couple of chickens, or maybe a whole turkey . . . Oh, our mother is generous to strangers, but she treats her own children as enemies.

“I’m the one who’s been ordered to go to Siberia now, but before long it will be Borys’s turn, and Halochka’s . . . She’ll put all of us away, and then she’ll take over father’s property with her beloved son-in-law, and they’ll run things the way they want to, without any interference from anyone. Nevertheless, that Freckleface has more of a conscience than you do, my dear mummy, because he didn’t dare to come and show his face to me, but you’ve come . . . you’ve come here just as if you’re not to blame in any way at all . . .”

“Mariya, come to your senses,” I tugged at her sleeve.

“I came to my senses a long time ago,” she snapped, jerking her sleeve out of my hand. “I know what I’m saying. She’s not a mother; she’s a bloodsucker, a witch . . . Yes, that’s what she is,” she stamped her feet and came up closer to Marta Hryhorivna. “It’s you, you old hag, who’s ruined me,” she shouted at the top of her lungs.

Marta Hryhorivna shuddered convulsively, clutched at her heart, moaned, and toppled over; her body stretched itself out full length on the floor. The guard saw what happened and ran for a doctor, but the doctor was unable to help; he could only certify that she had died of apoplexy.

The situation in which my mother and I now found ourselves was truly a tragic one. What were we to do with the body?

To our great good fortune, as we walked out of the gate, I spotted Pakhmutiy among the people who were coming to visit at the prison. I called him over to us and told him about our unfortunate misadventure.

“First of all, we’ll have to find a messenger to go to Nekrasivka,” I said.

“I’ll find one,” he responded.

“And a coffin will have to be built.”

“I’ll have it done,” he said curtly.

And so, thanks to him, we felt a trifle easier in our hearts. The next day, Serhiy arrived at dawn with the large coach and fifty *karbovantsi*. And by noon, Marta Hryhorivna was lying in a casket. The coffin was placed in the coach and, so that the body would not travel alone, my mother and I got into the coach as well. Pakhmutiy sat alongside Serhiy, and we set out.

The trip was a most difficult one; the entire road was a sea of mud, broken up here and there by huge puddles. The wheels sank up to their axles in the mud, and the horses could hardly pull their legs out of the black gumbo, so it was evening by the time we finally managed to reach Nekrasivka. Mykola Semenovych at once sent a message to the monastery to have a grave dug, and informed Pakhmutiy of Marta Hryhorivna’s wish to be buried alongside her daughter’s grave.

The next morning, the oxen were harnessed to a cart, and the casket, draped with a black linen cloth, was placed in it. The rest of us travelled in the coach. Serhiy had found out that there was a short cut to the monastery, so we arrived earlier than we had expected. The coffin was not there yet, but the grave was almost dug. The hole was so large that three generals could have lain in it side by side.

We stood waiting, then suddenly something terrible, completely unexpected happened. As we watched, Tanya’s grave collapsed, and the tombstone plunged into it.

Words cannot describe Pakhmutiy’s reaction. Acting as if he had lost his mind, he began shouting, probably without even thinking about whom he was blaming and whom he was cursing. Using all sorts of implements, the men finally dragged the tombstone out of the hole. Then Pakhmutiy jumped into the hole and yelled in a strangled voice: “We need boards, carpenters!”

Mykola Semenovych walked up to the hole and saw that the cover of the coffin had been completely smashed, and that Pakhmutiy was calling for boards and carpenters in order to make a new one. It was now impossible to even think about holding the funeral that day. Marta Hryhorivna’s casket was carried into the church, and efforts were soon underway to pull out Tanya’s coffin. It was a very difficult

task, and it was almost nightfall before it was finally completed. Nevertheless, the carpenters set about making a new cover for the coffin by lamplight, while the rest of us, exhausted both by the trip and all the terrible events that had transpired, went to the monastery to rest.

We went as a group into the dining hall and lay down on the benches adjacent to the walls, placed there for pilgrims. It was damp and cold, the benches were hard, and no one could fall asleep. I did not drop off for even a moment, because I was in a state of terror as I imagined the moment when they would rip off the broken cover from Tanya's coffin, and, instead of seeing my beloved Tanya, I would see either a piece of rotten flesh with thousands of worms busily at work in it, or a denuded skeleton with grinning teeth and gaping sockets instead of eyes.

Borys and Halochka, who were lying head to head, wept the entire night. My mother went up to them a few times and tried to calm them down, telling them that Marta Hryhorivna's soul could see everything and was suffering because her children were crying. Mykola Semenovych did not lie down; he sat and rubbed Katriya's feet all through the night, so they would not freeze.

At seven in the morning, Pakhmutiy ran in, shouting loudly: "It's ready! Get moving!"

It was drizzling, but we went outdoors willingly, because it was warmer outside than in the dining hall. Proceeding directly to the grave, we saw Tanya's coffin standing on the boards and, next to it, the priest, the Mother Superior, the deacon, and a few nuns. A little distance away lay the new cover.

"Who's to be buried first?" the people asked.

"The old lady," Pakhmutiy ordered.

After the service, Marta Hryhorivna's casket was lowered into the hole. Turning to the other coffin, Pakhmutiy then ordered: "Tear off the damaged cover!" Using chisels, the men immediately pried the cover off Tanya's coffin. The Mother Superior, who was standing nearest to the coffin, glanced at the body and fainted; the nuns picked her up and carried her into the monastery.

It was impossible to recognise the deceased, but her long hair, spread alongside her body, was as black as tar. This fact alone was enough for us.

"It's not Tanya! It's not Tanya!" we shouted in chorus, and began to kiss each other and dance around as if we had gone mad.

We felt as if we had found Tanya alive. I still cannot fathom why we were all so delirious with happiness, because the fact that Tanya was not buried in that grave did not prove that she was not rotting elsewhere in the ground, or suffering, hungry and cold, somewhere in this world. There was nothing to prove that we need not worry about the fate of our poor Tanya. But we rejoiced and could not find the words to express our joy.

It was only Mykola Semenovych who grew sad and walked away from the rest of us to sit on a bench by the grave of a stranger.

“Why are you so sad?” my mother asked him.

“How am I to keep my word now to Marta Hryhorivna? I promised to bury her next to Tanya, but Tanya isn’t buried here.”

## IX

A few years went by. The lilac bush grew, branched out, and surrounded, like a wreath, the two graves in the monastery cemetery. Kost succeeded in earning a reputation as a fierce prosecutor who, with an easy conscience and an untroubled heart, could send a person to Siberia for the theft of a mere apple. Mariya established business ties with buyers, providing them with a steady supply of expensive Siberian furs; she succeeded so well in this lucrative commercial venture that she bought a three-storey building in our town and converted it into a hotel.

Mykola Semenovych’s orchard thrived and amazed everyone with its beauty and the bounty of fruit that it yielded. Katriya’s dairy farm won two gold medals at an exhibition; Borys was on his way to becoming a scientific researcher, and his short articles about plants and insects were already viewed favourably by senior scientists. Halochka was almost a grown-up young lady, but even though she was still attending high school, she spent almost all her free time assisting Katriya in the farm work.

I finished my schooling and married Petro Rubets, an engineer. Fate had done me a great favour by sending Petro to me. In addition to being an erudite person, he had an exceptionally fine nature. The only fault I saw in him was his great passion for the arts. He worshipped every person who had even the slightest bit of talent—be it in literature, art, or drama—and he would readily have given that person whatever he or she desired. There were no secrets or

unspoken words between us, and so I admitted to him that he was not my first love, that I had loved Kost Mykhaylenko.

“Ha-ha-ha!” he roared with laughter. “I can imagine what kind of love that was! A kind of sweet fruit punch, a feeling that tickled the heart, that made the heart faint when a nightingale sang. But as for me, I experienced a true passion. It was not the love that adds beauty and spice to life. No, it was something terrible—my heart flamed as if on fire, and it felt as if a panther was ripping it apart. I lost my will, my memory, my mind; I was certain that I would shortly go insane.

“It was a lady singer from Halychyna that I loved so madly—Halyna Zuk. I heard her for the first time in Naples. As I entered the theatre, the entire hall was reverberating with thunderous applause, because it was not the applause of our hired clappers, but of true connoisseurs of art and singing who had been driven into a state of ecstasy. She was wearing a black velvet gown and a diadem of precious jewels on her head, and her bare shoulders and neck shone as if they were carved out of white marble. She was called “The Nightingale of Ukraine.” It seemed to me that she was not only a nightingale, but the sky-blue heavens, the bright stars, a tapestry of flowers from Ukraine, and it seemed to me that she was as unattainable as that sky and those stars, and that she was not even a human being, but a fairy . . .”

“Ha-ha-ha.” It was now my turn to laugh.

“Don’t laugh, my dear Vira, don’t laugh,” Petro sternly stopped me, “because I walked out of that theatre as if I were insane, with a firm resolve not to continue living any longer. I did not know where to go, or what to do. If it had gone on much longer, I most certainly would have committed suicide. One time, however, I saw a humpbacked, limping frog assist ‘the goddess’ into her carriage and kiss her hand. I turned away in disgust. ‘Aha,’ I thought, ‘so she’s sold herself to that Croesus, and that’s where she gets her velvets and diadems.’ I spat again in disgust, and it was as if all my pain and suffering had drowned. My love for her vanished in a flash. My heart cooled, my mind cleared—and I once again felt myself to be a free man.”

On the third anniversary of our marriage, my dear Petro bought me a ticket for a European tour. We set out, and on the first morning, Petro woke me up: “Get up, my darling Vira, we’re approaching Warsaw.”

“Why this surprise? What’s happened?” I asked in astonishment, for we were not supposed to disembark until we reached Berlin.

“I found out from some acquaintances that Halyna Zuk is on tour in Warsaw. You simply have to hear her.”

The viper of jealousy painfully bit my heart, but I conquered my feelings and calmly said: “Fine. I’ll get dressed right away.”

We stopped in a hotel in Warsaw, spent the day touring the city, and in the evening went to the theatre where Halyna Zuk was to perform. We arrived a little late, and when we walked in the second half of the program was already underway.

The singer was performing the song: “The sun rose beyond the window.” Her voice seemed very familiar to me, but I could not recall where I had heard it. I sat down in the loge and kept trying to remember where I had heard that voice.

And suddenly it all came back to me: “My God, it’s the voice of our Tanya.”

By the time she finished the song, I was certain that the singer was Tanya. And, seated at the piano was the abomination she had once told me about. I tore a sheet out of Petro’s notebook and wrote: “My dear Tanya! I’ve recognised you! If your world-wide fame has not dimmed your memory, then call to mind little Vira Hryhorovych and come to see me at noon at the London Hotel, Room 4. You must come. I have much to tell you and much to ask you.”

I handed the note to Petro and asked him to take it to the singer. He complied with alacrity.

Tanya did not come at noon as I had asked her to, but much earlier, before I had finished dressing. She was very excited and, flinging herself at me, began kissing me.

“My dear Vira, my very own precious Vira! How happy I am; I didn’t expect to see you.”

I invited her to be seated, and proceeded to tell her everything that had happened in Nekrasivka—how we had searched for her, and how we had buried her and even erected a tombstone on her grave.

“Oh, I was so afraid, so very afraid,” she said, “that you would track me down right away, because I did everything as I had to do it, logically and psychologically—I simply could not do otherwise. Immediately after we finished conferring, I went into the orchard with the firm resolve of ending my life, because—I thought—if those nearest and dearest to me do not understand me, then no one will



understand me, and to live like a mysterious stone sphinx is both difficult and uninteresting.

“I went into the orchard with the firm resolve of jumping from the dam into the abyss, but the moment that I stepped on the dam, I saw the home of Avgust Karlovych; it looked very alluring in the white moonlight, and a flame flickered cheerfully in a window. I went directly to it. Hector greeted me with his loud barking, and when Avgust Karlovych walked out of the cottage to find out what the ruckus was all about, he saw me. I was trembling and must have had a terrified expression on my face, because Avgust Karlovych and his wife were frightened.

“They led me into the house, gave me hot tea to drink, and made me tell them what had happened. I told them about our meeting, and about what I was thinking. Avgust Karlovych went to the telephone, spoke to someone in German, and then told his niece to harness the horse. When she drove up to the porch, he seated me in the cabriolet, sat down beside me, and drove the horse as fast as it would go. Oles greeted us as a father would greet his wayward son.

“‘Oh my goodness,’ he clapped his hands. ‘Have you forgotten, Miss Tanya, that you belong to me? That you gifted yourself to me? But, let’s forget all that. From this day forth I am your godfather, and you are my godchild. In memory of my mother, I’m giving you the name Halyna, and in memory of the ditty that you first sang to me—the surname Zuk. As for me, I’m taking the surname Motolny, because back then, instead of saying *zhuk* [beetle], you said *zuk*, and instead of saying *motorny* [vigorous], you said *motolny*.’

“When we were about to depart abroad, Oles turned to Avgust Karlovych and said: ‘It is your responsibility, my dear Avgust Karlovych, to make sure that Marta Hryhorivna always has enough money, that she never lacks anything. You yourself will figure out how to do this.’

“Oles and I got into the carriage and, in an hour and a half, we were at the train station; we did not go into the station house, but walked right out on the platform. Oles seated me in a compartment and then sat down beside me.

“‘Now, my little precious,’ he said, ‘I don’t ever want you to forget that you have a friend and a defender in me. I will take you to the Conservatory, and you will graduate from there as a famous singer, and then you will live surrounded by luxury and fame. I will always be ready to assist you at every turn like a father, a friend, a defender.

The only reward that I ask for all my troubles is that you include my romances in your concert programs. Agreed?’

“I nodded and gave him my hand. He kissed it and did not refer to this conversation again during the entire trip. He took me to the Prague Conservatory which I completed as Halyna Zuk. You’ve probably read about my success in the press.”

A moment later she continued: “Everything happened as I had wished, and I feel so fortunate that at times I’m afraid it’s all a dream, and not reality, and I fear that the hour will come when I’ll wake up in my granary. I’m happy, so happy, that if happiness could be cut into slices, it could be given to ten souls, and it would make them all happy.

“But you know, my dear Vira, that the longing for one’s native land—even if that land is an island in the middle of a frozen sea or in the middle of the sands in the Sahara—is very real. It is not just empty words or a figment of the imagination; it is a feeling so overwhelming, so powerful, so real, that I do not know how to compare it to any other feeling. It is as if your heart has sent down innumerable roots into the ground of your native land, as if all your nerves are intertwined with the nerves of your countrymen.

“It is unspeakably painful when you have to cut off these roots and tear apart the nerves; it feels as if the blood is draining out of you, and every day you become more and more exhausted, and grow weaker and more helpless, and no diadems and no garlands can satisfy you, because there are no native cornflowers in them. No applause delights you, because you do not hear the applause of your own brother or sister. A foreign sun does not warm you, a foreign sky does not allure you, your chest aches, and all your happiness seems to turn into suffering.

“Oles does not understand this, and at times, misunderstandings arise between us because of this. Otherwise I would have returned to Ukraine a long time ago.”

“In the final analysis, Oles will admit that you are right,” I said.

“In the final analysis I will not conquer my suffering, I will not vanquish my longing, and I will abandon everything and return home,” she said resolutely.

“Then perhaps you’ll come back with us?” I suggested.

“Fine!” she said.

That very day Petro and I cut short our trip to Europe and decided to return to Ukraine. My dear Petro did not voice a word of protest.

Most likely, a longing had crept into Oles' heart as well, for not only did he not argue, but he went to the station to buy the tickets, and all four of us set out for home with the firm intention of continuing our European tour at the first possible opportunity.

We returned to Ukraine at the end of August and drove to Oles' estate. The very next day Tanya visited the graves of her parents, and then proposed that we all pay a visit to her apple tree. Under Avgust Karlovych's care, the tree had grown amazingly and, as if expecting its friend from long ago, bore more fruit than it ever had.

Avgust Karlovych picked all the apples himself and placed them in a basket. One apple, however, he wrapped in a pink silk cloth, and, placing it in a lace basket, brought it to Tanya.

"There are some sixty kilograms of apples. But this one apple is from the branch that I healed. You must eat it yourself, Miss Tanya."

Tanya, in keeping with her character, refused to mar such beauty with her teeth. Then Avgust Karlovych ran into the dining room and before long returned with a little plate on which lay the apple, cut into five sections, and, next to it, five snippets of rolled paper.

"This is a lottery," he said. "Everyone has to take a ticket, and then I'll take the fifth one."

Tanya, Oles, Petro, and I each took a ticket and gave it to Avgust Karlovych. He examined the tickets closely and gave each of us the section of the apple that we had won.

"Oh, how happy I am, how very happy! My ticket has won the third section—the one with the kernel in it, the seed. I'll plant it in a vase, and transplant it next year; and then I'll replant it again, graft it, and finally I'll plant it in the orchard directly across from Herr Oles' window . . ."

## *Mykolka's Sheep*

(1912)

The little devil wanted to go out and play. After all, anyone would tire of staying put in one place, let alone a fidgety young demon.

"Dearest mummy and daddy," he pleaded, "let me go out to play for a while."

"Go then, my happiness; go, my precious velvety one," the devil's mother said, covering the tiny horns of her little black pet with warm kisses.

"Go, my son," his father said. "But watch out, be careful, don't try to show off, and don't go after a big soul; you're still young, and you wouldn't want to strain yourself."

"No, no, daddy! I'll go after a tiny one, just to have some fun," the young devil hastened to reassure his father. And then he whizzed through a hole in hell to the outside world.

It was a quiet, bright night on earth. The cloudless, clear sky, densely sown with glittering stars, spread over the ground like an enormous tent.

"Wow!" the little demon said, and he joyfully took a deep breath, as he felt the clean, fresh air embrace him.

The little devil was still very young, and so his chest was weak, and his voice was soft, but his "wow!" rolled over the earth like a mighty echo. It raised foaming waves on the sea, rocked a stony cliff, and shattered a twelve-storey building.

"Aha!" the little demon laughed, gazing with great delight at the unexpected result of his first shout on earth.

"Aha!" the sound resounded through the mountains, the forests, and the valleys.

The little devil, his hands poised for clapping, filled his lungs with air to inform the earth of his arrival. Then he suddenly recalled what his father had told him and came to his senses. He silently spread his wings and, using his tail as a rudder, kept flying upwards into the expansive heights, ever so high above the earth; and all the while, he kept an eye out for someone he could toy with.

He flew on and on until he spotted a village. Coming down to the earth, he alighted on the edge of the ragged thatched roof of a widower's cottage. He rested and wondered how he ought go about approaching someone to have some fun.

And then he heard someone call out to him from below: "Devil, O little devil, come and give me a hand."

The devil instantly curled up his tail, drew in his claws, jumped down in a flash, and landed in front of a pale, slight youth who was trying to heave a heavy bundle of straw onto his back.

"Do you want me to help you hoist this bundle on your back?" the devil asked amiably, quickly reviewing in his mind the various tricks that he could play on this young man.

"Yes, I do. Help me, please. I can't do it myself."

The devil grabbed the bundle by the rope that bound it and tossed it, as if it were a feather, onto the young man's back.

"Much obliged!" the youth thanked him, raising his cap to say good night.

But the devil had no intention of parting company so quickly.

"Where are you carrying such wretched straw?" he asked the slight youth, shifting from one foot to the other.

"I'm taking the leftovers from the straw that the steer and the horse haven't eaten to my sheep."

The devil ran on ahead and opened wide the flimsy gate to the sheepfold.

"Ba-a-a!" the hungry sheep bleated as they milled around, trying to get at the straw.

"Right away, right away, my dear ones; right away, my little sheep; don't push, don't hurry—there's enough for everyone," the youth coaxed his flock, trying to calm them down as he hastened to untie the bundle with his trembling fingers.

"Ba-a-a!" the hungry sheep tore the straw out of his hands.

"Oh, my poor little sheep; they're so desperately hungry!"

"You should give your sheep some hay," commented the little devil, standing with his hands on his sides and looking at the flock with the eye of a farmer. "Just look how unkempt, matted, and lean they all are."

The slight youth sighed heavily.

"They should have hay from a meadow," the devil incited the youth. "Then you'd see the kind of fleece they'd have, and the kind of lambs you'd have in the spring."

"Oh dear!" the youth sighed even more heavily.

"There's half a stack of fine hay right over there," the devil pointed at the garden

"There were nine such stacks, but my sheep didn't get a single blade from any of them, and now there's just one left, so . . ." the youth responded sadly.

"They didn't get any hay from those nine stacks, so let the tenth one be theirs!" the devil stood fast.

"My uncle is saving it for the steer and the horse."

"Go ahead and give it to your sheep," the devil advised him.

"I can't; my mother will be angry, and my uncle won't let me."

"So, that's how it is!" the devil roared with laughter. "Some farmer you are! You had ten stacks of hay from your own steppe, and you gave them up without knowing where they went to; and now, when there's only one stack left, you don't have the gumption to give it to your sheep. If I were you, I'd get rid of the steer and the horse rather than torture a flock of living creatures like this! What benefit, what profit do you have from that steer and that horse? Just add up how much fodder they have to eat before they fill their guts. But if you give a sheep an armful of straw like this, you have wool, and milk, and a lamb, and tallow for candles . . . Come on now, let's go and toss at least that useless bull out of the barn . . ."

"Oh dear me! O devil, devil . . ." the slight youth, trembling with fear, raced over to the gate and shielded it with his body before the devil could reach it.

"Ha-ha-ha! What a farmer! What a farmer! You're some farmer! The best farmer in the village! Do you scare so easily? And what would you do if a wolf crept into your pen?"

"May the Queen of Heaven protect me and have mercy upon me!" the youth shouted, and he quickly made the sign of a cross on all four corners of the pen to protect himself and his sheep.

The devil jumped up in fright, ready to flee, but then he realised that the middle of the pen remained unblessed, and so he began to provoke the youth even more.

"Ha-ha-ha! So that's the kind of farmer you are! Your uncle is selling your forest for lumber, and you're protecting your sheep with crosses in a wattle pen that's falling to pieces. What a farmer you are! What a master! Your father must have been a wise man; he knew who should get the farmstead, who should get the sheep—so they'd starve to death . . ."

The youth turned away, blinking back one tear after the other.

He knew very well with whom he was speaking; he had heard more than once about the wily ways of devils and the tricks they played, But he could see that this devil had nothing evil in mind—he was telling him the truth, the honest truth.

“Well, that’s enough!” the devil, noting that a whole puddle of tears had dripped from the youth’s coat, slapped him lightly on the shoulder. “That’s enough crying! Even though I’m only a little devil, I do have some power. I like you . . . People insult us, gossip about us, slander our good name, don’t trust us, and blame us for all sorts of evil, but you spoke to me kindly and pleasantly. If you listen to me, I’ll take care of your sheep. But you must obey me.”

“I’ll obey you forever, as long as the path you set me out on is a good one.”

“Of course! I’m going to take care of your sheep and nothing more. You’ll see!”

“Oh, if only it were true!” the youth sighed, wiping away his tears with his sleeve. “You know, I really don’t have anything against the steer and the horse; they’re also part of my farm, but I don’t concern myself about them, because my mother and uncle can’t do enough for them, but when it comes to my sheep . . .” He broke off and began to snivel once again.

“Oh my! What a weepy fellow you are! That’s enough!” the devil stopped him.

“It’s easy for you to say: ‘That’s enough!’ but my heart sinks when I think about my sheep . . . My mother always says: ‘Don’t worry, don’t fret over your sheep—feed them just enough in the winter so that they don’t die, and in the spring they’ll fatten up on the fresh forage.’ But do you think that I don’t know what delights await them in the spring and in the summer? The steer gets the meadow, the horse gets the pasture, and as for the sheep—they have to graze either on the basil along the road, or gnaw on the dirt up there on the peak that is allotted to them.”

“What peak?” the little devil wanted to know.

“That one,” the youth pointed at a sharp peak above an abyss.

“Phew!” the devil spat in disgust. “To clamber up to such a peak!”

“Oh, that’s nothing. My sheep would climb even higher if there was anything there for them to climb up for. But what kind of forage can there be up there? The sun beats down, and everything dries up; then the rain falls in torrents and kills what’s left.”

"Do you really feel all that sorry for your sheep?"

"Of course!"

"And what would you give me if, on that peak, the spear grass was this high?" And the devil stood on tiptoe to show how high it would be,

"I'd give my soul!" the youth blurted out without thinking.

"Wait for the spring! Spear grass this high will cover that peak."

The devil leapt up to the beam on the roof to show how high it would be, and then he vanished.

Somehow or other, the long, cold, and snowy winter passed, and somehow or other, Mykolka's sheep managed to survive, and somehow or other, they dropped their lambs—slightly bigger than a mouse, but a little smaller than a kitten . . .

The sun veered into spring, the wind blew in softly from the south, and God sent down a warm vernal rain. Mykolka walked beyond the gate, glanced up at his peak, and could not believe his eyes. All the slopes and all the ravines were covered with green rue, and, on the peak itself, a jackdaw was already hiding in the grass.

"Oh, my God, my God!" Mykolka clapped his hands in joy and ran as fast as he could to a lilac bush.

He cut off a small branch, made himself a *sopilka* [*shepherd's flute*], ran to the sheepfold, sat down on the gate, and played and sang:

"It's spring, it's spring —  
 Water's dripping from the roof, from the roof,  
     Water's dripping from the roof.  
 And my dear little sheep  
 Can smell fresh grass  
     Can smell fresh grass.  
 It's spring, it's spring  
 A warm wind blows, a warm wind blows  
     A warm wind blows.  
 In the ravines, on the peak  
 Spear grass grows, spear grass grows  
     Spear grass grows."

He played and sang, and all the neighbours listened.

The uncle heard his nephew's *sopilka*, and the wind carried the words of the song to him. He walked up to the sheepfold, listened, and spat angrily. "Tfu! You fool! You're fooling the sheep, and you



don't know very much yourself. Where in the name of all that is sensible, will you ever find spear grass on your peak?"

"Just go and have a look," Mykolka laughed.

"I won't go to look, and I won't stoop to listen to you—a fool," the uncle replied, and he stalked off to tell Mykolka's mother what a fool her only son was.

The unfortunate mother, shaking her head with worry and grief, went out into the yard and listened; she listened to her son, worried some more, and then—being not only a mother, but also a curious woman—she scurried up to the peak to have a look.

When she arrived, she found that almost the entire village had gathered there.

"That's some spear grass!"

"It's come from God!"

"For untold ages, the peak has been bald as a knee, and now just look at it," the people were absolutely amazed.

The mother took one look and, without waiting to hear what the people were saying, sped home like a bullet.

"You were complaining, my dear brother-in-law, that my only son was foolish, that he was playing a *sopilka*, so go and have a look yourself at the kind of spear grass that has taken root on the peak assigned to the sheep."

"Oh sure!" the uncle did not believe her.

"Go and take a look—it's quite a sight to behold."

The uncle went, looked all around, scrambled up to the very top, walked the length and the breadth of the peak, pulled out a few clumps of grass—and saw that it really was spear grass.

"Hmm . . ." the uncle hummed through his nose.

He came home, but did not go into the house; he went straight to his nephew.

"Are you planning to take the sheep to the peak soon, nephew?"

"Next week, dear uncle."

"Don't do it, my boy! God has sent down his blessing upon you—don't you go and waste it. The grass is still young, the roots are like cobwebs, and your sheep are foolish. They'll gnaw it down to its roots and trample it with their hooves. If you care about your flock, you'll wait a couple of weeks or so; nothing will happen to your sheep, and, in the meantime, the grass will take root."

It was difficult for Mykolka to even consider the thought of feeding his sheep on scraps of straw for another couple of weeks,

but he obeyed his uncle, because the older man seemed to be giving him good advice.

The uncle left the sheepfold, and Mykolka picked up his *sopilka* and continued singing:

“Wait awhile, wait, my little sheep,  
The spear grass will take root, it will take root,  
The spear grass will take root.”

The sheep listened to the song, bleated, conferred among themselves, and began to eat the scraps of straw.

They ate for a week, and then for another one.

When the third week rolled around, Mykolka sprang out of bed, and, without eating or drinking, grabbed his staff and his *sopilka*, and rushed outdoors.

“Where are you off to?” his uncle stopped him on the doorstep.

“To drive the sheep up to the peak.”

“Phew! Come to your senses! The rain came down in buckets last night, the ground is soaked to the depth of your elbow, and you’re going to lug your stupid sheep up there to make a mush of the grass? Herd them along the road. They can graze there for the time being.”

Mykolka sighed and thought about it for a while. Then he jabbed his staff into the ground and struck dry soil at once.

“Oh, my dear uncle, the ground is dry,” the youth rejoiced.

“Don’t tell me that the ground is dry,” the uncle said angrily. “It’s dry down here, because there was no rain here, but the clouds hovered all night long above that peak of yours.”

Mykolka scratched his head, but you can’t take issue with God about a cloud. And so he drove his sheep out to graze along the road. He grazed them there for one day, and for a second day, and for a whole week.

And his uncle repeated over and over again: “Wait for a while. Let the grass dry a little more, and for now, graze your sheep along the road.”

The grass on the peak was knee-high already, and it was billowing like a field of splendid rye, but his uncle still did not stop saying: “Wait for a while.”

As soon as it dawned, as soon as the first rooster crowed, Mykolka would jump to his feet, rush outside, and gaze at the sky.

“Oh, the sky is clear, and there is no dew. I’ll herd my sheep to the peak today.”

“You must not, my son, you must not. Your uncle went up to the peak to have a look, and he said that you must not; so obey him, and graze your sheep along the road.”

The sheep dragged themselves down the road—the blessed soil swirled in dustclouds under their feet, and blades of grass fled down the tilled fields. Flocking around Mykolka like children around their father, they bleated: “Ba-a-a-a . . .” Mykolka rummaged in his bag and gave the sheep whatever he found there—a piece of flatbread, or a turnover, or a little bun. After shaking the crumbs out of his pockets, he turned in grief to his *sopilka*:

“Be patient, be patient, my little sheep,  
 ‘Wait for awhile’ will pass, ‘wait for awhile’ will pass  
 ‘Wait for awhile’ will pass.”

The sheep listened, took courage from his words, plucked at solitary blades of grass, and gnawed half-eaten roots.

And so the obedient youth waited and suffered a while longer. He drove his sheep out to graze in the dark of the night and saved them from dying of starvation. The time came, however, when his patience snapped; moreover, he could not think of any more words to add to his song.

“My dearest mummy! Let uncle scold me, but I’m going to herd my sheep to the peak. You saw how early I drove them out to graze, and what time it was when I brought them home. I herded them far beyond the horizon and wandered all over with them, but they still came home hungry.”

“But you know, my child, you can’t quarrel with God. The Lord gave us this dry summer, and we have to endure it.”

“But look at the lush grass that the steer and the horse are enjoying,” Mykolka reminded her.

“O my dear son, my thoughtless child! Can a steer be compared to a sheep? A steer is a stately animal; if its sides cave in from hunger, the neighbours will laugh and point their fingers at it and if—God forbid—it should perish, they’ll condemn us forever. And if a horse isn’t well fed, he won’t be able to pull you out of the mire. No one has counted how many sheep you have, and if one of them should perish, no one would bat an eyelid.”

“But I feel sorry for them,” Mykolka protested.

“Are you causing trouble again?” his uncle happened to come by. “Like you’ve been doing since spring? Go ahead and herd them to

the peak tomorrow," he cried out to his nephew, and went into the cottage to fetch a fetlock.

"Here's a rope; fetter the steer as well, so that it will be safer," the mother advised the uncle.

The uncle came back, took a rope, and walked away.

Mykolka saw all this, and heard it, but he did not pay any attention to it. He jumped into his soft bed, covered his head with a blanket, and smiled happily.

He did not know if he slept or did not sleep, but he leapt out of bed very early. Nothing was stirring in the village when Mykolka herded his sheep out to graze. He drove them through the gate, from where the peak was barely visible. The sheep ran, and Mykolka hurried after them . . . They finally clambered up the slope and arrived at the peak. There was not a single blade of grass left. All the spear grass had been wiped off the face of the earth, as if it had been licked by a cow's tongue, because whatever his uncle's scythe had missed, the steer and the horse had eaten during the night.

"Ba-a-a-a!" the sheep bleated.

"Oh my dear God, my dear God!" Mykolka collapsed on the ground.

"You're a fool, such a fool!" his uncle said. "Didn't God give you a brain that's at least the size of a mosquito's nose? Are you so foolish that you give in to your heart, bring grief down upon yourself, and don't stop to think how your sheep have to live in the winter? Did the Lord give us summer to have us waste what he gives us? Is the summer day too short, or is the road too short, to let your sheep have their fill of grazing? I'm not an enemy of yours or of your sheep. Do you see the haystack that I've piled up for you? You're crying now, you silly fool, but you'll thank me when winter comes."

What could Mykolka say? Even if he had thought of something to say to him, he would not have said it, because his mother spoke up in support of the uncle.

"Listen to your uncle, my son, obey him, Your late father knew who should be a guardian over you; your uncle is teaching you well, and he wants the best for your sheep. When winter comes, you'll bow down before your uncle in thanks for the hay."

Mykolka turned his sheep back onto the road and herded them slowly towards the horizon. He drove the sheep, grazed them, and sang:

“Wait, wait a bit, my little sheep  
The summer will pass, the summer will pass  
The summer will pass.  
The winter will come, the blizzard will rage  
You’ll have some hay, You’ll have some hay  
You’ll have some hay.”

The sheep, listening to his song, walked down the beaten path; they no longer bleated—they were awaiting the winter. And winter came. In a single night a swaddling cloth of snow about a foot deep fell on the earth. It covered every remaining weed, and if it did not reach to its very top, it bent it over to the ground.

“Goodness but it’s cold,” the mother said as she warmed her hands by the stove.

“It’s fiercely cold,” the uncle added, and he stamped his feet as he walked about the house.

But Mykolka was outdoors in the wind, preparing a hook to pull down some hay.

He sharpened it, straightened it out, and ran straight for the haystack. He ran up to it, took off his belt, added it to the rope, and pulled down one sheaf after another. He pulled down quite a bit of hay, bound it, knelt down, heaved the bundle on his back, and ran up to the sheepfold, almost breaking in two under the weight. The pen was right in front of him.

He had his hand on the door, when suddenly someone tugged him from behind.

Mykolka dropped the bundle.

“So it’s you, you so-and-so idiot!” the uncle danced in rage in front to him.

“But it’s mine . . . the sheep . . . It’s the hay from the peak!” the hapless Mykolka, unable to restrain himself from protesting against such an injustice, raised his voice at his uncle.

“Mine? The sheep? Here’s one for you, you fool! This is for you!” the uncle attacked his nephew, jabbing him on all sides.

“Mine! The sheep!” Mykolka did not give in, protecting himself with his hands, so that his uncle would not strike him in the face.

“Oh my dear son, my dear son! Doesn’t your uncle want what’s best for your sheep? They won’t eat straw once they’ve tasted hay,” the old woman approached her son, pleading with him and calming him down.

In the meantime, some drivers drove up, surrounded the haystack, swept the hay into their sleighs, pressed rubles into the uncle's hands, tied up their bundles, and left.

The uncle counted the money, thrust it in his pocket, took the rake, gathered up the residue left from the stack, and carried it off to feed the steer and the horse.

“Ba-a-a-a!” the sheep bleat loudly in the sheepfold.

“Oh woe is me! Woe is me!” the hapless youth sobs bitterly in the sheepfold.

And all the while the little devil romps and frolics, gleefully tossing Mykolka's soul up to the ceiling.

## *The Ball*

(1919)

Styopa had a good life. His father, a railroad engineer, brought home enough money, and his mother saw to it that her son had everything he needed. He had no brothers or sisters, but in the courtyard of the apartment where he lived there were many children.

Of course, in the morning most of the children were in school, but in the afternoon a boisterous life began. Even in the winter. The courtyard was large, paved with cobblestones, and clean. Granted, the sun had to rise to its zenith before it could peep into the courtyard, but the wind had to swirl around some very tall buildings before it could find a crack through which it could blow on the children, and, if there is no wind, the children do not fear Old Grandfather Frost. He can rage all he wants to; the children keep on making their beloved snowmen with their bare hands, and do not feel the cold at all.

And life got even better when spring arrived. Then there was no need for anything superfluous like a cap, or a coat, and you could run so fast that you could beat everyone except, perhaps, Dmytrus Vanchenkiv. That Dmytrus knew how to do everything. He made—all by himself—a cannon that could shoot peas, and enough soldiers to fill two boxes. And one time, when he made arrows out of paper, even the adults were scared to walk through the courtyard, because the arrows flew like bullets. And everybody, except Petro, liked Dmytrus. But then, Petro hated everyone who was stronger or smarter—that is just the way he was.

Everyone liked Dmytrus, but Styopa was his closest friend. Their friendship had budded about a year ago. In a corner behind a shed stood a large discarded piano box. And one day, Styopa found a tawny mother dog with four black puppies in it. Just as he was running at top speed to tell his mother, he bumped into Dmytrus, and so he took him to the piano box. After giving the matter some thought, the boys decided to shove the box right up against the shed and to feed the mother dog secretly. For a whole week, they managed

not only to feed the dog, but also to hold the puppies in their arms; and then one day, the dog and her puppies suddenly disappeared.

The dog was gone, but the memories of her and the grief they shared remained, and these feelings brought the boys still closer together. Dmytrus invited Styopa to his home and showed him all his possessions. He presented Styopa with the stub of a red pencil and a key that wound an old clock, and, the very next day, Styopa brought Dmytrus a fistful of tin.

Later on, Dmytrus gave Styopa three soldiers—they looked brave enough to be put into battle right away—all his wounded soldiers, a little picture book, five marbles, and three pens; moreover he never ate any candy without sharing it with Styopa. In return, whenever that hateful, long-necked Petro—who only went to school so that he could get into fights—began to badger Dmytrus, Styopa, always ready to defend his friend, blocked him like a sheaf and either hit him on the back with a stick or pushed him so hard that he banged his head on the cobblestones.

The boys revelled in their friendship for almost a year. But then, at Easter, Dmytrus's godfather gave him a ball instead of a *pysanka* [*intricately designed Easter egg*]. It was black, as big as an apple, and really hard—a truly wonderful ball! All the children's eyes danced with delight when they first saw it. As for Styopa, he became enamoured of it. No matter how long he played with the ball, it always seemed too short a time for him, and when he had to pass it on to another boy, his heart ached. Every night when he went to bed, he kept seeing the ball in his mind until he fell asleep, and when he awoke in the morning, the ball was the first thing he thought of, and he could hardly wait for noon.

Whenever Dmytrus brought out a new toy, all the children would surround him to examine it, but Styopa would only glance at it and go off gloomily by himself, as if a new pistol, a pilot, or some other clever contraption simply did not interest him, and as if he did not care at all about Dmytrus.

The ball held the same fascination for Petro—in fact, he seemed to undergo a transformation because of it. He became ingratiating and obedient, and stopped fighting. He even tried to stop other boys from picking fights; and he did all this in an effort to please Dmytrus.

Styopa, observing Petro's behaviour, understood him perfectly; he began to view Petro as the only friend with whom he could talk frankly about the ball and share his thoughts about it.



“I want to tell Dmytrus not to share the ball with anyone, because they’ll bust it,” Styopa confessed to Petro. “Only the three of us should play with it—Dmytrus, you, and I.”

“Dmytrus won’t listen, because he’s a fool; he doesn’t understand that it’s easy to bust a ball, but I saw with my very own eyes how a really big ball burst in school.”

“And he probably does take it to school,” Styopa grew even more upset.

“You should tell his mother not to let him,” Petro advised him.

Styopa sighed heavily; there was little hope that Dmytrus would listen to him, and he did not have the nerve to approach the mother.

“Oh, if only there were just the three of us,” Styopa repeated his importunate thought.

“If only! We could play dodge ball and throw it high up into the air,” Petro continued slowly, and he fell deep into thought. Styopa also began deliberating. And the two boys sat for a long time in front of the gate, brooding and worrying.

Finally, Petro thought of something. He sprang to his feet, ran out into the middle of the courtyard, picked up a brick, and threw it with all his might high up into the air. The brick flew up and, a short time later, came down with a thud not far from the porch. He picked it up and tossed it up a second time; the brick landed by the fence. On the third throw, the brick landed in a neighbour’s yard. Petro dashed up to a garbage can, dug around in it, and found a few more bricks. He tossed one of them high into the air. It fell down close to the shed. Petro threw another one—Styopa could see how high it flew up, and then he heard it fall on some iron, but he did not notice just where it fell. And Petro kept throwing one after the other, and you could hear them thumping as they fell back to earth, but Styopa, absorbed with his own thoughts about the ball, did not listen too hard.

After the children came home from school, they had their lunch and poured out into the courtyard. Dmytrus also came outside, carrying his ball. Styopa ran up to meet him and ask for the ball; he was followed by all the other boys, and they all had the same request. An argument started, and finally the boys resorted to using sticks on each other, in order to determine in what order they would get the ball. Today, it was only Petro who showed no interest in the ball; he did not even want to take part in the stick fight; instead, he went to play hopscotch with the girls.

“What about you, Petro?”

“I can be the last one; I’ll throw the ball up in the air by myself, because I don’t want to argue with all of you,” Petro declined. “You can call me when it’s my turn.”

As it turned out, he had to wait a long time for his turn, because every boy wanted to throw the ball at least one extra time. The boys who were waiting became enraged, arguments broke out, and much time was wasted in the process. Nevertheless, Petro waited for his turn until Dmytrus called him.

Wiping the sweat that was pouring down his forehead after his exertions at hopscotch, Petro came up and took the ball.

“Oh, I don’t seem to have much strength today, my dear brothers. Those disgusting girls tired me out so completely with their hopscotch that I can barely lift my arm,” he said as he tossed the ball into the air. And truly, the ball did not even go as high as the second storey windows.

He did not attempt to toss the ball up a second time and, to the general amusement of the boys, began to play with it like a girl would—bouncing it against a wall. The majority of the boys, losing interest in sticking around to watch such a monotonous game, went along with Dmytrus to see Yakiv, who was fashioning a trap for piglets out of an old pail and some boards.

Only Styopa and two younger boys stayed behind. Petro spent a long time throwing the ball out from under his arm, under his leg, and over his head. And then, suddenly and unexpectedly, he darted away from the shed and threw the ball up with all his might. The ball flew like a bullet straight up into the air.

“Be careful! It’ll slam you on the head,” Petro shouted at the top of his lungs.

The boys instantly ducked, but a minute or two went by, and the ball did not fall in the yard.

“Dmytrus! Dmytrus! Your ball must have landed in a neighbour’s yard,” the boys scurried around.

Dmytrus ran up. “Who threw the ball?”

“I did,” Petro drawled slowly and guiltily.

“Go and look for it then in all the yards; you simply have to find it, or else!”

Petro obediently set out.

But Styopa was standing in the middle of the courtyard, and his face was as white as chalk.

He had clearly seen that the ball had landed on the shed and became stuck behind the brick trim that ran along the roof. He was ready to shout: "The ball is right here!"

But just then he was assailed by an unexpected thought: "I'm the only one who knows where the ball is, and if I find it, it will be mine—because I found it. It won't be long before Dmytrus goes off to the farm, and that's when I'll take the ball, hide it, and keep it hidden until such time as my father moves from here. Let it be a year, or two years, or even more; it doesn't matter, the ball will belong to me; it will be mine."

And this thought seemed to cut off Styopa's tongue. He saw how troubled Dmytrus was, how impatiently all the children were waiting for Petro to return, but he did not utter a single word.

Petro came back crying; his head was hanging down, his back was hunched over, and he looked ever so guilty and unhappy. Styopa looked at him, but remained silent.

Finally, all the children dispersed, and Styopa went home as well. He came home just as his father arrived. His mother had tea ready; the table was laden with sausage, and jam, and sweet pastries. Styopa immediately felt better. He settled in close to his father and began asking him about the steam engines and the trains; and his father related some of his adventures.

"By the way, how's your friend Dmytrus doing?" his father inquired.

"Oh, daddy! He had such a ball that . . ." Styopa abruptly fell silent.

"Well, come on, tell me more; I'm listening. Tell me what kind of a ball it was," his father responded.

"It disappeared, I don't know . . . It fell somewhere . . . I don't know . . ." Styopa flushed and grew upset.

"That's too bad! Most likely one of the boys took it; there are children who have no conscience," his father said.

Styopa felt ashamed; the jam and the sweet pastries no longer tempted him, and he did not feel like talking with his father any more. He went to bed in a bad mood.

When daylight came, his mood did not change. The next day, it was the same; Styopa did not feel like running, and no games appealed to him.

Finally, Dmytrus went away. The minute that he left, Styopa felt as if he had been reborn; he began to run around, jump, and do

summersaults, and then he pulled off his cap and threw it up on the roof of the shed.

All boys are eager to crawl up on roofs, and so now they rushed up, vying with one another, to retrieve Styopa's cap. But Styopa acted as if he were going mad; he was shaking, stamping his feet, and shouting that no one dare to go and get his cap, that the watchman had given only him permission to crawl on the shed's roof, and so, of course, the intimidated boys gave up the idea.

Styopa climbed up on the shed and immediately spotted his cap, but he did not pick it up; he walked over the entire roof, went right up to the brick trim, and searched for something. He walked over the entire roof from one end to the other, and then turned back again to have another go at it.

The boys started shouting. "Why are you wandering around up there for such a long time? What are you looking for?" they wanted to know. "Your cap is right here, on the very edge."

"Ha-ha-ha! I know why!" Petro roared with laughter. "He isn't looking for his cap, my brothers. Styopa!" he shouted. "Here's what you're looking for! I know what it is. Look here. Ha!"

Styopa glanced down.

Petro placed both hands with outspread fingers on either side of his nose.

And Styopa understood everything. Petro had thrown the ball on purpose on the roof and had long since retrieved it.

He crawled down from the roof looking half-dead. But what could he do? He could not tell the boys; he could not complain to Dmytrus; and he could not even scold Petro, because deep within his heart, his conscience was shouting reproachfully at him: "You, Styopa, are no better than Petro!"





Olha Kobylianska  
1863-1942

## Biographical Sketch

Olha Kobylianska was born into the family of a minor government official in a small town in the Ukrainian province of Bukovyna. Despite the modest income of the father, all five sons were able to receive a higher education. The two daughters, however, in keeping with the prevailing view that a woman's place was in the home, were left to their own resources after completing the four-year elementary program.

Fortunately for Olha, the best traits of both her parents were passed on to her. From her father, a self-made man who was orphaned at an early age, she inherited a passion for work and a determination to succeed. Under the guidance of her mother, a kind, gentle woman of Polish-German parentage who was inclined towards the arts, she learned to appreciate beauty, music, and literature.

Growing up amidst the magnificent panoramas of the Carpathian mountains, the sensitive young girl responded intensely to the beauty of her surroundings. Her love of nature was rivalled only by a deep appreciation of music. Both these passions sustained her during many trying periods in her life and are very much in evidence in her writings.

Olha read voraciously from an early age. Having been schooled in German, the official language imposed on Bukovynians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, her reading consisted mainly of the works of German authors and world literature translated into German. Encouraged in her literary efforts by her brothers and older sister, young Olha started out by writing poems and stories in German.

In 1884, Kobylianska came under the influence of Nataliya Kobrynska, the leading theoretician of the women's movement in Ukraine, and Sofia Okunevska, the first female physician in Austria-Hungary, who generously shared with Olha the knowledge and perspectives she had acquired abroad. Recognising Olha's talent, these two women encouraged her to read philosophical works, improve her knowledge of Ukrainian, and devote herself to writing in that language.

Fortunately, Kobylianska listened to their advice. Initially however, she wrote her stories in German, and either translated them into Ukrainian herself, or asked established authors to translate them for her. Over time, some of these translations were edited and published in different versions, with significant stylistic and linguistic variations that give rise to unique difficulties in translating her stories into English.

In 1894, Kobylianska's first works appeared in Ukrainian journals and were received most favourably in both Western and Eastern Ukraine. She quickly established herself as a writer of note, and her works were translated into Russian and other languages by writers such as Olena Pchilka. In turn, Kobylianska translated Ukrainian literature into German, including the works of Pchilka, Kobrynska, and Ukrainka.

Kobylianska won special acclaim from her contemporaries for her novelette *Tsarivna [The Princess]*, written in the form of a diary. This work, published in 1896, is one of the first attempts by a Ukrainian author to write a psychological novel in which events are presented through the inner experiences of the proud, highly moral, intelligent, and sophisticated young woman who is the main character.

This heroine, like many of Kobylianska's protagonists, resembled the author in her philosophy of life, her refined sensibilities, her highly developed aesthetic tastes, and her disdain for the pettiness, vulgarity, and materialism of the society in which she lived. Indeed, it is said that Kobylianska's expectations of people were so high that she had very few close friends, and that she never married because she failed to find her ideal soulmate.

Through her friendship with Kobrynska and Okunevska, Kobylianska became involved in the women's movement in Ukraine, giving speeches and writing articles. In her view, in order to lead harmonious, meaningful, and morally uplifting lives, not only women, but men as well, had to raise themselves spiritually, intellectually, and culturally.

In 1899, after Kobylianska moved to the city of Chernivtsi, she established a close friendship with Yevheniya Yaroshynska, participated actively in Ukrainian literary circles, and developed personal ties with a number of prominent Ukrainian writers such as Lesya Ukrainka, Vasyl Stefanyk, and Mykhaylo Kotsiubynsky.

After becoming partially paralysed in 1903, she could no longer participate in community events. Her health failed during the First World War and, in 1925, she travelled to Prague for medical treatment where she was received warmly by Ukrainian expatriates. Her works influenced Ukrainian women's movements in North America and, in later years, when she found herself in straitened circumstances, she received financial assistance from various Ukrainian women's organizations abroad. She lived to see World War II and died in 1942.

During her long and productive career, Kobylianska, who always remained true to her principles, created a rich treasury of short stories, prose poems, novelettes, and novels. By the end of the first decade in this century, she was acknowledged as one of the best prose writers of the modernist school in Ukrainian literature.



## *At St. John's Monastery*

(1906)

The sun's rays were scorching; the sultry, still air was heavy with dust. It was the beginning of July.

In Suchava, in the province of Bukovyna, huge throngs of people had been flowing for two days now through the ancient Orthodox monastery of St. John, which was adorned with marvellously coloured paintings and resembled a fortress with its encircling high stone walls.

It was a time of pilgrimage, of seeking forgiveness for sins, and of praying for indulgences on the feast day of St. John the Miracle Worker. Many people, from far and near, had gathered at the monastery in the hope of growing stronger in their faith and being miraculously healed.

In the low, richly decorated interior of the church, on a raised platform surrounded by a railing, lay a silver casket. In it, wrapped in golden brocade, reposed the saint's embalmed body—so small that it almost looked like that of a child; it was difficult to see it. Next to the coffin sat a pale, sallow-faced cantor, as emaciated as death itself. Ignoring the great crush of people who were crowding around him, he intoned the customary Orthodox hymns in a monotonous, nasal voice.

Even though it was high noon, a duskiess permeated the church. Innumerable wax candles glimmered, dripped, hissed, and gave off a sweetly oppressive odour that mingled with the smoke of the incense. The people, standing shoulder to shoulder, elbowed their way towards the body of the saint. They shoved, jostled, and trampled each other; some even fought—risking their lives—to get nearer the saint, to gaze upon him, to touch his magnificent garments, to come closer to gaining salvation by reverently kissing him on the forehead . . .

On a purple velvet chair at the head of St. John's casket sat a bearded monk in a golden chasuble, holding a silver tray on his knees. The pilgrims reverently set down their money on this tray for

the privilege of viewing the saint, and it seemed to be buckling under the weight of the coins.

What a terrible crowd in such torrid heat! What a heavy, utterly exhausting atmosphere! Whispers, prayers, and groans mingled with the monotonous singing and the wailing of the beggars and the sick, and all of this was accompanied by the incessant clanging of bells.

The monks, fatigued by all the confessions, slipped furtively out of the side exits and, without being noticed, hid themselves in their rooms near the monastery to recoup their strength. This truly was a tiring, strenuous day for the monks, but it was also a day to reap a good harvest—and there were not too many days like this during the year. Not a single pilgrim came to the church without bringing a gift to St. John.

Rich noblemen from Moldavia, accompanied by their young wives, drew up in carriages drawn by four handsome velvety black horses in silver harnesses that gleamed in the sun, and, standing among the beggars, grandly cast magnificent gifts on the silver tray.

Old crippled beggars in front of the church's entrance constituted a macabre honour guard, begging and bellowing at the top of their lungs. Many different kinds of goods—mainly colourful icons of saints, coral necklaces, candles, perfumed soaps, and all kinds of female adornments—were being sold here in large numbers.

In the vicinity of the usually peaceful House of God, people were now engaged in haggling, cheating, and stealing freely and indiscriminately . . .

And over there . . . another victim of the sweltering air was being carried out—a young girl who had fainted in the crush of the crowd. She had come from distant parts to St. John to find a cure for her illness.

A few minutes earlier, a dead seventeen-year-old boy had been removed. His diseased lungs had not been able to withstand the oppressive sultriness in the church.

And all the while, the bells pealed and the singing resounded unremittingly. The cacophony of sounds stormed through the mute walls of the monastery and reverberated far and wide . . .

In one corner of the churchyard there is a tightly packed group of pilgrims: men, women, and children. They are standing motionless. In the middle, a stooped blind lyre player, sitting on the ground, is playing his lyre. His face is flushed from the heat, but it is calm,

and he is oblivious to the religious fervour surrounding him. His eyes, opened wide, are fixed on one spot; his voice is intense.

And it is strange! Faint though his old voice is, it blends touchingly with the gentle sound of the lyre! His listeners appear to be entranced, rooted in that small piece of soil. They are not distracted by the clamour of the hagglers, or the wailing of the beggars, or the pealing of the bells, or the singing of the hymns . . . The quivering voice of the aged man and the words of his song, repeated over and over again, seem to have mesmerised them with something akin to a demoniacal power:

“There is no justice and there ne’er will be,  
Ponder this, good people, forsooth!  
Injustice reigns among those on high,  
Holy justice is trampled underfoot.”

“Granny! Where is justice?” a nine-year-old village girl asks in a fearful whisper, tugging her grandmother by the sleeve for a second time.

“It is with God, my child,” the old woman replies piously.

“With God!” the child repeats quietly to herself . . .

Her eyes turn involuntarily to the church walls, to the brilliant exotic paintings and, gazing at them, she falls deep into thought.

The taut voice of the lyre player breaks into her reverie:

“There is no justice and there ne’er will be,  
Ponder this, good people, forsooth!”

The child turns once again to her grandmother and this time asks more bravely: “Why is there no justice?”

It seems that the old woman wants to answer the child, to explain something to her. Her gaze wanders off into the distance for a moment, as if she is thinking it over and searching for assistance. Then she shrugs her shoulders, and a scarcely noticeable, helpless smile fleetingly crosses her lips—and she does not respond . . .

The little girl, waiting for a reply, frowns and begins to ponder *by herself* . . .

## *The Diviners*

*(A Sketch)*

*(1910)*

The end of November.

The days grow ever shorter.

From early morning, night appears to loom over an enfeebled day that mournfully looks for summer's sunny rays—rays it is unlikely to catch sight of now. Instead of sunshine, there is only a voluminous greyness, a vague yearning that, spreading over the fields and among the village cottages, crawls towards the forest's edge, rises to the dense, unfriendly clouds, and then moves off into the distance without casting a single backward glance at the autumnal gloom it has left behind.

Foul weather has taken ascendancy. It now has the upper hand.

The wind, the rain, and the snow take turns in lording it over the land, joining forces at times, as if conspiring among themselves. And they do it all to the accompaniment of a penetrating coldness. Everything is unpleasant and filled with an autumnal air of melancholy.

The peasant cottages in the small village near the forest appear to be frowning because of the inclement weather, and their doors open sluggishly in the cold. For days on end, their tiny windows have been bathed in tears, and their thatched roofs have darkened from the rain.

Even though everything may not yet be drowsing, it is muffling itself in a sombre tone—a tone of finality.

Here and there the dark trunk of a solitary tree looms from the boundary, and its leafless branches become a haven for the drenched ravens that wander, like petty thieves, over the fields in late autumn.

Something akin to a heavy mist is also hanging over the soul of old Voytsyekh, the current warden of the lord's forest. But in this case it is not autumn that is to blame, nor the air of finality that is drifting silently through nature and among human settlements.

It is something different.

It is the fear of what might come to pass any moment now. He has been a forester in these parts for more than thirty years. When he first arrived here from far away, he had hired himself out as a forester, even though he was a tradesman. Not all of the large forest that runs alongside the village and stretches beyond it is in his care, only a part of it, the one with the youngest forest growth in it.

Many trees have shot upwards under his loving, diligent care. Many trees rustle on supernal mornings and bow to him reverently, with humility and submission. And it is all due to his zealous eye, his gentle, hard-working hand that clears debris over here, plants a young tree there, and plucks out weeds over there, ensuring that young rootlets have room and freedom to grow; it is a hand that has almost never rested.

His cottage, small and unprepossessing, stands at the edge of the forest. In summer its windows face the forest and the sun, and it is adorned by the foliage of a small orchard, but in winter . . . it looks sad and gloomy.

All the same, Voytsyekh, like many a young tree in his beloved forest, has sent down his roots and those of his family into this small plot of land.

Living among the Ukrainians and Rumanians in this village, he endured much before they finally became accustomed to him, “the intruder.” Everything about him displeases them. He annoys them with his language, which is repugnant to them; with his wife, a good woman, who in their eyes seems too grand, and with his children, who do not differ in any way from their children. He annoys them in every possible way.

Has Voytsyekh ever harmed anyone in the village?

No. He is peaceful, ground down by poverty. As “an intruder,” he fears the peasants. Might is on their side, because they live in their native land . . . He has wandered here from far away . . . far, far away. His wife had died, he had buried her; and now he could not remember all that well how it had come about that he eventually married a second time, drifted into this village, and finally, thanks to the lord’s kindness, ended up being a forester.

That was probably why the villagers came to hate him; they begrudged him his livelihood from the lord and turned hostile. This one stopped giving him any work to do, the next one discovered that his boundary encroached on his land and took him to court, and that one claimed that his children were stealing, at night, the fruits of

other people's labour. There was one problem after another, until, as time went by, Voytsyekh grew weary.

He grew weary, and his hair turned grey.

But even though his tall body never straightened itself and seemed to have forgotten that it was supposed to do so . . . his heart was at peace in his green world. The mighty forest gathered him into its embrace, enfolded him, and secluded him from the village—and he was content.

At times it seemed to him that he was neither the poor cobbler he used to be, nor a forester, but a ruler of sorts. He almost never left this world of his to go into the village. All the necessary contacts with the villagers were assumed by his wife, his son, and his daughters.

He rode through the village only two or three times a year on his way to the city, where he first paid a visit to God's temple, and then went to see his lord. Then he returned home. And that was it—and he would go on living in isolation for another year.

In the *kost'ol* [*Polish Roman Catholic church*] he prays fervently and passionately while addressing the Virgin Mary; raising his arms, he pleads for something. Here, he stands tall, as if he is sure of himself, as if he is in his green domain. Here, there is the same stillness as in the forest, and the same invisible holy power that draws you to itself. And then there is the Virgin Mary . . .

*"Matko cudowna przenajświętsza [O most holy and wonder-working Mother]!"* his lips speak his maternal language, and he kneels down humbly on the flagstones before the miracle-worker. *"Weź ją pod swoją opiekę, gdy zamknę oczy, matko cudowna, przenajświętsza [Take her under your protection when I close my eyes, O most holy and wonder-working Mother]!"*

And that is all he ever asks for—nothing more.

Never anything for himself.

Finally, as if presenting a holy, most valuable gift to the Virgin, he awkwardly places on the altar a handful of white flowers picked by a little hand. And then he returns, his spirit restored and strengthened, to his green kingdom.

At home nothing has changed. His wife greets him with a flood of questions, and the girls, smiling silently, wait for their modest gifts. His young son also has his hopes up; and it is only little Ceciliya, his youngest child, who fastens her angelic blue eyes on the face of her elderly father and looks questioningly at him.

“Were you there? Did you place the white flowers there? If you did, that’s good!”

In his absence, it is she who has taken his place in the forest, going down the same paths and lanes that he walks down . . . that they walk down together. He knows this. She does everything just as he does it. She looks things over, listens attentively, and pulls grass out from among the young fir trees. He need not worry. He knows he can rely on her.

And she does not take her beautiful eyes off him.

Then she accepts his gift.

Usually it is a small picture of some saints. She dearly loves the saints and “heaven.” She even has her own heaven. But only she and her father know about it—no one else! It takes the form of a large white sheet of paper on which are glued the heads of various angels—cut out of holy pictures—and the saints themselves. The saints are placed lower down, on the earth, among the flowers, while the angels are high above them. Where there is a dearth of whole figures, heaven is satisfied with only their little heads . . .

That is what her heaven is like, and it constitutes the entire secret treasure of the nine-year-old Ceciliya.

She contemplates this heaven for hours on end, especially when her father, exhausted by clearing debris from among the trees, naps in the forest, and she sits next to him and “guards” his domain. Who can say what thoughts and feelings preoccupy this dear little head, this precious soul. From time to time, she lifts her little eyes upwards to the green trees and gazes searchingly among their branches.

After his trips, there are only two things that old Voytsyekh bears in his heart and his mind.

The first is the forest and his work, and the second—his youngest child, his “precious little fly.”

Not a day goes by that he does not walk through the entire forest, inspecting and touching nearly every young tree. And not a day goes by that she, little Ceciliya, does not accompany him. At times she flits ahead of him . . . like a butterfly, first off to one side, and then to the other . . . and at other times, she walks slowly, and, holding the stooped old man by the hand, listens attentively, with parted lips, to what he is saying.

Usually, he tells her about the Lord God, the Son of God, or the Holy Mother of God, or teaches her prayers. He relates the Holy

Scriptures to her word by word, and in this way opens the heart of the child, who knows nothing but the forest, to a whole new world.

“Remember what I’m telling you, my child, because I don’t know how many days I have left.”

“Who does know, daddy?” Ceciliya asks seriously.

“The Lord God.”

“The Lord God?”

“Yes! After I die, you will be left with only my teachings. Hold them in your memory for the rest of your life, for we are very poor, my child. And the poor know no other teachings except those that our Saviour left for us all. They alone unite us with the Lord God and with all that is good and beautiful in this world. They alone! Be good, my dear daughter, hold on to them, and if you do, the Mother of God and kind people will take care of you.”

Ceciliya listens most eagerly and most attentively when he tells her about the Queen of Heaven—how She fled with Her Child in the night, and how, faint with worry, She searched for Him, Her twelve-year-old Son, and finally found Him—and everything else that he relates. She knows all the holy days and understands their significance, and she loves the Mother of God with all her heart. It is to Her that she sends white flowers with her father and asks that they be given from her to the Holy Child.

Occasionally she breaks out of the house in the winter to accompany her father into the forest. Bundled in a huge kerchief, shod in her older sister’s shoes, wearing her father’s mitts, and holding a cane that dwarfs her, she follows him, stepping eagerly in his footprints.

The old man, looking ahead at the forest’s snow-laden branches that now and again shake off their downy silvery attire, sees entire scenarios among the white trees. At times he glimpses future events in which his child participates . . . but he is no longer with her. And then he sees the past: scenes of serfdom, bloody images of a rebellion, memories from his personal life, his first wife and her death, and finally his thoughts settle once again on his child.

Voytsyekh—it is true—takes care to see that not even a fly alights on her. But when the time comes to close his eyes forever, she will remain alone in this sinful world, because his older children are leaving his house and preparing their own nests . . . They do not concern themselves about her, and will probably hire her out as a servant. And without paying attention to the tears filling his eyes



and the heavy feeling that presses like a stone on his chest, he sighs and, lifting his hands piously, prays out loud: “*Matko cudowna przenajświętsza—miej ją w swojej opiece [O most holy, wonder-working Mother, keep her in Your care].*”

The child walking behind him is sinking in her own little thoughts—her father has such huge feet, but even though she is not very big, she keeps up to him. Why are people so big? They could just as well be small. But, of course, people are just like trees. There are big ones, and there are small ones. Her father always says: “A human being is like a tree—as he is trained, so he will grow.” That means she also is a tree. She looks all around, trying to find a tree resembling her, but without any success.

“Daddy!” she calls out.

“What is it, my daughter?”

“Where is my tree?”

“Which one, my daughter?”

“My tree; the one that’s like me.”

“I don’t know, my little darling.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know? You’ve said many a time: ‘A person is like a tree.’ So where’s mine?”

The child’s question seems to illuminate the old man’s soul, and he responds, without reflection: “You, my dear, are a white birch.”

“Oh, a birch!” she cries, and laughs with delight. “That’s good,” she says. “I’ll always be a birch tree.”

“And always mind your clothing, so that it is as pure and as white as a birch,” the father added seriously. “Then the Mother of God will not forsake you.”

“I will,” Ceciliya vows and, raising her eyes from the prints left by her father’s boots, searches for a birch.

“Daddy, are all little girls birch trees?” she asks after a moment. Her father does not reply at once.

“Daddy, are they?” she repeats her question.

“The one that’s pure is a birch . . . the one that isn’t . . . is not.”

“Oh, I’ll always be pure!” Ceciliya assures her father, and, tired by the long walk, she takes his hand.

“See that you are, my daughter. It will be your entire fortune. Everyone will respect you if you are pure. Thanks be to God that there are people in this world who value the pure white clothing of a girl even if she has no fortune. They have not yet all disappeared. Glory to honour and to the holy truth—they still exist in this world.”

And they continue silently on their way.

Among the snow-covered white branches Voytsyekh once again sees scenarios from the future; he once again sees his child.

And she, tiny as she is, also seems to see something; her heart senses it among the trees. Something exquisite, alluring; something that is waiting for her. And it is all white and green, filled with angels and saints. But most of all, with angels . . .

A year or so later, old Voytsyekh once again travelled to the city to visit God's temple, and then to see his lord. This time he took little Ceciliya with him. He wanted to be the one to lead her into God's home for the first time while she was still a child.

She took with her a lapful of white flowers.

It is not right to approach the saints without a gift, but they live in the forest and are very, very poor.

They arrive.

"The church . . . is so big . . . almost empty . . . you can hear footsteps on the flagstones . . . it's scary."

She holds her father's hand in a convulsive grip and is not sure what she is seeing. Something is happening to her—something mighty, powerful. Something is seizing her and pulling her upwards. She is not being harmed in any way, but her lips quiver.

"*Matko cudowna przenajświętsza.*" She suddenly hears her father say the words loudly as he kneels before a large statue that appears to be whispering prayers on high.

Then her father pushes her in front of himself up some stairs covered with an expensive floral carpet, and says: "That's our Virgin Mary. Kneel, my child, and pray; surrender yourself to Her care. After I'm dead, keep Her in your heart . . ."

Ceciliya is unable to speak.

Something prevents her from breathing, and she does not even notice when the white flowers tumble out of her lap in front of the altar.

All the white flowers, to the very last one . . .

She finally regains her senses and realises that the Mother of God is standing before her—tall, beautiful, and with an Infant in Her arms. In front of Her, off to one side, kneels a man like her father, old, and with a grey beard, and on the other side, a woman's figure that she does not recognise; and at Her feet are two angels, leaning on their little hands. And behind the Virgin Mary there is a multitude

of angels' little heads . . . it seemed as if it must be all the angels in heaven . . .

Oh, it's "heaven" . . . she must be in heaven . . .

A few intense, powerful moments pass, moments of the deepest possible silence.

Old Voytsyekh glances down at his child. What is wrong with her? She should be praying here with him . . . because who knows if he would ever bring her here again. No one knows the number of days he has left . . .

Ceciliya is not praying.

She stands, pale as the snow, with widely opened eyes.

All the little heads of the angels are turned towards her; their eyes are looking at her.

So is the Mother of God with the Infant.

Ceciliya does not know what is happening to her. It is only when her father bends down over her for a second time, reminding her to pray, that she comes to and regains her senses.

But not to say a prayer—the prayer that her father expected and waited to hear from her lips. No, not to pray. But only to weep. A powerful, shattering weeping. Weeping that is more powerful than a prayer, and which pleases the Mother of God.

And She looks for one last time at the imposing old man and his dear child. She glances at them with the wonder-working eye of Her holy protective love, and along with Her, all her guards—the angels of the heaven. All of them, as many as there are . . .

The father turns to leave with his child.

The *kost'ol* resounds with the dull noise of the ageing man's large heavy boots and the accompanying gentle patter of the little girl's hesitant steps . . .

Voytsyekh seemed to have received a serious message today in God's temple. A deep sorrow settled in his heart.

He was old! He was younger than his lord, but still, he was old. He felt that, ahead of him, gates were opening into an unknown, foggy world . . . and they remained open wide . . .

From God's temple, straight into the green, expansive, exquisite paradise, into the kingdom of his green forest.

His lungs breathe deeply.

This is what life is about! Green foliage is green . . . be it for an old person, or a young one. He takes his child by the hand and, weary

as he is from the trip, enters his domain without even turning towards the house. He knows that he has fulfilled his duty. Whatever life has given him, be it great or small, he has fulfilled his duty. In humble clothing, he is a lord. His soul is pure; he has not harmed anyone, or deceived anyone, and has nothing to fear. And that is why he is not afraid . . .

And once again, it is back to his mundane, humdrum life.

Once again, there is work. Backbreaking, demanding work. At times in the forest, at times in the fields, but, wherever, it is still work.

Little Ceciliya bustles around him like a red poppy, just as untiring as her father. She takes after him. Industrious, kind, with the soul of a white flower, and full of humility and dutifulness towards her elders.

Then autumn came . . . colder and more unpleasant than usual, and, for old Voytsyekh, interwoven with sorrow for other reasons.

His lord fell ill. And everyone feared for his life because he was old—older than Voytsyekh.

What would happen to old Voystyekh if the lord closed his eyes forever? What would happen to his forest? Would Voytsyekh be able to remain here, or would he be ordered to leave his house and the paradise into which he had poured his work and his heart—the paradise that was his whole life?

No one knew.

And the old man walked around silent and gloomy . . . and only now, it seemed, did his beard turn completely white. Only now, in these last few troubling weeks. His broad shoulders stooped even more, his hands, clenched into fists, looked as if they were made solely out of bones . . . and his strength weakened perceptibly as the days went by.

Sitting by the stove in the house and smoking his stubby pipe, he sadly looked through the tiny windows and listened to the sobbing of the autumn rain. He seemed to be waiting for something that had been making him wait for a long time.

At that time he hardly even noticed his “precious little fly,” and only rarely caressed her. Seated on a bench in the long twilight hours, busily working at something, he parted his lips only to speak about his parents and grandparents and great grandparents—all of whom were owned by others; he talked about their backs being bent in

bloody work, and about the terrible cruelty of the Polish lords towards their own people.

At those times, turning to little Ceciliya, he always ended his stories with these words: “You were born in fortunate times, my dear child, and may the Queen of Heaven keep you in Her care. These are golden years for working people, but you have to work and be good. And then you won’t regret living.”

It seemed that never before had he been so preoccupied as he was this autumn with old memories and recollections of family members who had died.

Things stayed this way for some time, until the weather changed. The rain abruptly stopped falling, and the snow came down.

One day Voytsyekh got dressed and went out into the forest. He walked all the way around it as he usually did, sat for a while on the bench under his lord’s old oak tree—a tree before which he automatically bowed down in humility—and then went back home.

The next day, towards evening, he went out again and stood on a hillock from where he could see the village road and the section of his forest with the gigantic oak. The oak, with fresh snow on its branches, looked especially beautiful, like a sublime white vision, and his old eye, just as the lord’s eye, always took delight in the elegant tree.

He stopped and looked.

Perhaps he might see someone he could ask about his lord. The villagers might know, perhaps through the priest. Even though he was greatly troubled, he did not dare go to the lord’s home, and yet it seemed to him that he should be going somewhere—going without stopping, God knows where . . .

He does not see anyone.

The road is empty.

There is only the giant oak tree in the forest, and, over here, he stands like another oak.

Nothing more.

They both wait . . .

Suddenly—what is that? Is it water splashing?

No, it is something in the air.

He lifts his head and sees an incredibly long wedge of ravens flying in from somewhere, gliding into the forest and settling on the trees in undulating black waves.

Are they actually settling on the forest? Yes. They are almost pouring down on it from the heights.

Voytsyekh watches, seems to lose consciousness for what seems to be an eternity, and sees . . . but yet he is unable to see . . . until he finally recovers and sees things with fresh eyes.

His giant oak is covered from its tip to the ground with ravens. Thickly, ever so thickly.

On neighbouring trees, black guests have settled here and there. They have tumbled out of the sky, and are now resting.

The black guests look strange and alluring on the fresh trees that have only recently clothed themselves in white . . .

Voytsyekh crosses himself.

A strange feeling overwhelms him, strange and powerful, and suddenly he recalls the Most Holy Mother of God . . .

He utters his usual prayer: "*Matko cudowna przenajświętsza,*" and gazes intently at the tree all covered with black.

At that moment his little Ceciliya runs up to him. "Daddy, daddy!" she shouts. "Do you see that?"

He sees it.

"I'll go and chase them away. They'll break the branches."

And she leaps forward, towards the oak tree.

Voytsyekh holds her back.

"There's no need to!"

"There's no need to?" the child asks. "But you taught me that they must be chased away. They'll break the branches. I'll go."

"There's no need to!"

Voytsyekh speaks so calmly and decisively, with such a sad submissiveness in his voice, that Ceciliya obeys him.

Then, as if awakening from a dream and coming to his senses, Voytsyekh takes Ceciliya by the hand, and together they walk into the forest.

They walk for a long time, looking at everything, and when they come home, Voytsyekh goes to bed early, without having said a word the entire evening . . .

Has Voytsyekh's lord died, that it is so quiet and sad in his house? His master?

No.

It is Voytsyekh himself who, for three days already, has been lying deathly ill, without saying a word.

He is breathing heavily . . . looking around the room, searching for the windows and for Ceciliya, and suffering . . .  
Until his suffering finally ends.

As Voytsyekh was being buried, a rumour spread rapidly that the giant oak was being cut down, and that Voytsyekh's family was leaving the village.

A decision was made to hire out Ceciliya as a servant, so that she would earn her own living, just as the others were doing. She wept and pleaded so despairingly that her brother and sisters had to beat her in secret before they finally sent her off to serve.

She ran away after a few days.

They found her half-frozen in the forest and sent her away again.

When they were sending her away the second time, she fell into paroxysms of convulsive weeping, succumbed to a fever, and no longer protested.

*"Matko cudowna przenajświętsza, weź ją pod swoją opiekę [O most holy, wonder-working Mother of God, take her into Your care],"* she prayed unconsciously with the words of her father, raising her arms as he was wont to do. *"Weź ją pod swoją opiekę [take her into Your care],"* until finally her voice faded and she fell silent . . .

And the Mother of God looked after her. At night, softly, when everyone in the house was sleeping, and the little girl was lying unconscious and unattended . . . the Heavenly One drew near with Her silent, holy steps . . . and took her into Her loving care . . .

## *To Meet Their Fate*

(1917)

Little Nastka was by nature loyal and sensitive. And so she loved her doll—the one her mother, the peasant woman Marfa, had made her one Sunday afternoon out of rags and combed flax—with a nurturing tenderness, as if she were a grown woman cuddling a living, beloved child to her chest.

“You’re a joy—my joy,” she said earnestly, bending lovingly over her. “My dearest little bird, my precious flower . . . Can’t you be without me for even a moment? Mummy’s calling me, mummy’s scolding me, but you’re keeping me here. You’ve eaten now and had something to drink . . . I’ll put you under this green bush near the tall sunflowers, so the sun won’t shine in your eyes, so it won’t burn your cheeks, and I’m going to take the geese to the pasture for a while. Do you understand? They have to graze on the grass . . . then, when they’ve had their fill, it’s off to the creek with them. And if I weren’t there, they would go farther and farther, all the way to the river Prut. Yes, that’s the way it is, my darling Anisya.”

This was the name that she had given her ill-formed, odd little doll fashioned out of coarse rags and flax. “To the Prut. And now you must go to sleep; I’ll rock you and put you to sleep. Do you know the song the priest’s young son sings? He sings about the Prut, and I learned the song from him.”

She bent over the object of her affections, cosily nestled on her knees in the crook of her arm, as if trying to see if her child’s eyes were closing in slumber, or were still wide open. Then, with lips tightly pursed, she began to hum a well-known Ukrainian song. She lost herself in her soft humming, and her voice took on an unearthly tone; surrounding her like a swarm of buzzing insects, it drifted up and down in an even rhythm around her child’s head.

After a while, she stopped and held her breath. Carefully placing the odd little doll that she thought was now sleeping under a bush of green rue near a row of tall sunflowers, she nodded in the direction of their flat granular faces and addressed them.



“I’m going,” she said in a soft voice. “I’m going to see to the geese. Keep watch over the child. Don’t take your eyes off her. Try to be quiet, and don’t disturb her. I’ll be back shortly.”

The sunflowers obeyed her. They remained silent and did not turn their heads away . . . they did not wake the sleeping doll.

Standing tall, their brown, plate-like faces framed by golden yellow petals, they watched the little girl as she walked away into the sunshine . . . always into the sunshine. The air was alive with a gentle buzzing. Bees flew in and out of three or four dilapidated hives. Insects darted through the air. Moths fluttered and alighted on flowers . . . and one of them, known as “the mourner,” with dark velvety wings edged in white, flew low, almost too low over the ground and rested for a moment, as if to catch its breath, near the sleeping Anisya . . .

“Who christened your doll?” a little boy once asked Nastka.

“The priest,” Nastka replied seriously.

“The priest?”

“Yes. One time, when he came into our yard to see father, he had to wait for him, and asked me what I called my doll. I told him she wasn’t christened as yet. I didn’t have godparents for her.

“He laughed and said: ‘Well, you can call her Anisya without having any godparents for her. Do you want to do that?’

“‘Yes, I do,’ I said. She’s very pretty, isn’t she?” Nastka added, smiling happily at the boy.

“You’re a stupid girl . . . it’s just a bunch of rags . . .”

“It’s not for you to say,” she defended herself. “It’s none of your business. It isn’t true—this is Anisya.”

“Anisya!” the boy ridiculed her. “Anisya—that’s not a name at all. No one in the whole village has a name like that. I’m going to take her away from you.” And he took a few steps towards her.

She screamed. Red-faced with anger and outrage, she hugged Anisya’s waist tightly with one hand, bent down, and threw a stone at the boy. He ran off, and she watched him for a long time. Then she turned to look at Anisya.

“He wanted to take you away from me,” she said in a soothing voice. “But I won’t let him; I won’t let anyone take you away from me—you’re mine, mine, mine . . .”

The enemy army moved out of the capital and withdrew to the other side of the river, and then, after some time, renewed its attack

on the city. Many residents from the village of M. fled beyond the river to city, abandoning, in their fright and mindless terror, all their possessions.

In their haste they took only the most essential items; everything else was left behind. Maybe the enemy would not seize their belongings, maybe they would have no need of them. Or maybe the enemy would be repelled once and for all, and they would be able to reclaim what was theirs. Who else but the enemy would take any of their things? It was unthinkable! This was how the eternally trusting Ukrainian peasant thought and reasoned.

As Nastka's parents were preparing to flee, a rumour spread that the enemy army, positioned close by, would cross the river any day now and try to capture the city in an attack that was sure to call forth a defensive manoeuvre from the Austrians. The confrontation would take place near the enemy's front lines, but also beyond that point. Everyone expected a lot of shooting—with machine guns and cannons—from both sides. Something terrible was bound to happen. And it was going to happen very soon. There would be bloodshed and maiming, and everyone would face death.

The people who lived in the capital and nearby would hear from afar the thunder of cannons and the staccato blasts of machine gun fire. But to see it all *here*, with their own eyes . . . the plundering *there*, in the city—God protect us all from anything like that. The older people crossed themselves . . . the women wept . . . the girls, their faces frozen with terror, walked about soundlessly.

Oh, the dreadful things that would come to pass!

And truly they came to pass. A division of the Russian army, made up mostly of Ukrainians from over there [Eastern Ukraine], received an order to cross the river and attack the capital.

The river raged. In its agitation, it appeared to be trying to overflow its banks. It became unlike anything it had ever been before, and it allowed unheard of things to happen. The Russian army—its cavalry, its infantry—was suddenly churning in the water, trying desperately to reach the other shore, where they knew that the Austrian army was waiting in trenches for them, ready to greet them with bullets or the din of canons. These were difficult moments, filled with suffering, that harboured within themselves something unknown. And the unknown was anticipating its due.

The enemy soldiers, swimming hard, were drawing nearer . . . ever nearer. At any moment now they would reach the overgrown bank.

And then—something happened. Was it in response to an order, or were they all reacting to an inner impulse?

It was to remain a mystery. The swimming soldiers dropped their weapons into the river and, as they neared the bank, raised their hands high in a sign of surrender. The onlookers stopped breathing. What would happen now? The soldiers were pleading, fighting with the waves, shouting.

An unusual moment, full of terrible tension and terror on the banks of the river. But suddenly . . . what was happening? Hundreds of shots resounded directly behind the swimmers—a horrifying scream of pain shattered the air and, almost to a man, the raised hands dropped.

For one last fleeting moment, hands were raised again, seeking salvation. One over here . . . two over there . . . a young head there, another one with a wild expression full of despair—was it in farewell? In a plea . . . while accusing?

No one knew.

On the shore, a terrified division of the Austrian army, that a few minutes earlier had been ready to fight the enemy crossing the river, stood stunned, as if struck by lightning. The swimmers were being shot in the back by their own soldiers. The Ukrainian kozaks had been the first to raise their hands in surrender.

The Russian bullets cut them down first . . . *them* . . .

The river raged more strongly. Steeped in blood, it buried the dead soldiers in its depths. It did not give them up to anyone. They had to come to it from afar. The waves were rushing ever farther, forever onwards, whispering: “To meet their fate. To meet their fate.”

And what about Nastka? And Anisya?

A few days later, Nastka’s parents were preparing to flee from their native village to a neighbouring one. There was talk of a battle once again and, in a state of utter terror, they were packing a few belongings, leaving others behind, and hastily burying still others. Little Nastka was once again rocking her Anisya. And when her mother told her to drive the geese to the home of kinswoman Kalyna, because they were to remain in the other village for a long time, she listened with only one ear to her mother’s instructions to return home quickly.

After Nastka had done as her mother had ordered and was ready to return home, Kalyna detained her a while longer, saying that

Nastka's parents would not be leaving until evening anyway, as they could not gather their belongings together and pack them in such a short time.

"In the meantime, have some fresh borshch that I cooked before you came; and here's a bit of bread to go with it," she added, putting the food on the table.

Nastka, however, was not hungry, and it seemed that her mind was elsewhere. Something very different was troubling her heart.

"I'm going home right away," she said and, hesitating a moment, eyed kinswoman Kalyna up and down. She was slightly afraid of her because she was known to be a strict woman who, even though she lived on good terms with Nastka's parents, lost her temper over the slightest thing and quarrelled vociferously.

"Your parents don't need you just now; you'll just be in their way," Kalyna said, thinking that the parents were burying things to hide them, and that children can unwittingly betray such acts. "Stay here and be glad that you don't have to be there at a time like this."

Nastka did not protest any more; rooted to one spot, she clutched her doll more tightly and looked out from the threshold at the geese that had discovered a small puddle and were happily occupying themselves with it.

After a moment, with the corners of her mouth trembling as if she wanted to cry, she broke her silence and said loudly and firmly: "I must also bury Anisya, or at least hide her."

"What?" the old woman asked, not understanding her.

"I have to bury Anisya."

"What's that?"

And then the old peasant woman suddenly realised what Nastka was talking about and said: "Oh, yes, the enemy will certainly attack her first of all . . . you can be sure of that. So, be sure to hide her well. She's worth a lot of money; they need her."

And she turned around and tended to her own affairs.

Nastka first glanced at the old woman gravely, and then with a look of panic. If Kalyna said this, then it must be true. Mother placed a great deal of trust in what the old woman said. She was not one of those who spoke nonsense.

Without any further ado, Nastka ran out into the garden, found a spot that looked like a safe place, dug a hole in the ground using her hands and a short stick, and hid her prized possession in it. Then she came back.

“I’m going home,” she told the old woman. “I’ve buried Anisya in the garden. Don’t let anyone take her until I come back. No one! Because I will come back.” She spoke the last few words threateningly.

“No, no . . .” the old woman assured her automatically, hardly raising her head. “You needn’t worry. I wish all of you good luck on your journey, and I hope a bullet doesn’t hit you, because in these times no one knows where his death will find him. I’m not running away anywhere, but a bullet could strike me by my oven-stove,” and she sighed heavily and painfully.

A short time later, Nastka was back with her parents. They were still hard at work burying their grain, their farm implements, clothing, a trunk—all the things that they could neither abandon nor take with them. They packed only what was smallest and most important. Even so, it was dangerous to flee now. You could easily fall into the hands of the police, who were arresting people for spying. Even though they were innocent, and were hiding only their insignificant, almost wretched possessions, in times of war danger lurks everywhere, in the very air. No one has to go looking for it.

Nastka watched silently and thoughtfully as her parents worked, helping here and there, as much as her strength permitted. She was a delicate child with a weak constitution and her eyes blazed in her pale face framed by waves of black hair.

“Yes, we’re finished with that . . .” Nastka heard her mother say to her father in the pantry. “Now we’ll just hoist these sacks on our backs, and away we go!”

“Yes, we should be on our way. Has the little one come home?”

“Yes.”

“Give her something to eat. Who knows what may happen to us on the road; she mustn’t be hungry. We’re leaving our home.”

“We’ll come back.”

“Yes, we will. But we’re leaving now. And we don’t know when we’ll return. God is still watching over us.”

The mother walked out of the cottage to look for Nastka. As she crossed the threshold, she saw the little girl running out of the yard.

“Where are you off to, Nastka?” she shouted after the girl.

“To Kalyna’s, to get my doll.”

“But you’ve buried her!”

“I’ve suddenly begun to miss her terribly . . . Who knows when we’ll come back?”

“May the devil . . .” her mother scolded her. “But you better come back here right away. Remember that! All we need is to be late because of you. The cannons may begin thundering any moment now. Don’t you remember what it was like the last time? We won’t wait long for you—you’d better remember that.”

“Fine, fine!” Nastka replied as she ran off.

“We’re going to Aunt Mariya’s in Sadahura; you know where it is, and you can catch up to us there.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back on time,” the soothing childish voice came from farther away now. “I just feel so sorry for Anisya—the enemy might steal her. And if I don’t find you, I’ll just go back to Kalyna’s house. And you’ll come back. But I won’t get lost, don’t worry! I . . .” and her voice faded away in the air.

But she did not return right away. Perhaps it seemed to the parents like too long a time to wait for her. They waited a few moments, blaming each other that they had let the child go, quarrelled, and finally, not wanting to be late, set off.

The mother was close to hating Nastka in her heart for not coming back in time, and the father was angry at his wife because, in his opinion, she cared too little about the child, and now they had to leave her, even if it was not for a long time. God knows when it would be possible to get her back again.

When little Nastka came back home and saw that the door of the cottage was locked, she halted in fear. Where was she to go now? Her parents had gone to Sadahura; they had told her aunt that they would be coming. And now, because she had gone to Kalyna’s to dig up her little friend, she had to run to catch up to them. She set out decisively on the well-known path, hurrying as fast as she could.

After walking for about three-quarters of an hour and finally reaching the pasture, she suddenly heard machine gun fire. Shaken to the depths of her soul, heavy tears clouded her eyes, and she dashed on in terror. The very thing that her mother had said might happen, had happened. Where were her parents?

“Mummy!” she cried out in terror. “Daddy!”

She looked all around and ran even faster.

But the machine gun fire did not abate.

Running blindly, she realised she did not know where she was. From the moment that she had reached the broad pasture, she had lost sight of the road, as if she had suddenly gone blind. Her only

thought was to rush onwards as fast as she could. She wanted to escape the din of the machine gun fire ringing so loudly in her ears that she thought it would strike her down at any moment. She did not think about what might happen to her after that.

She ran without stopping, and the farther she ran, the more her fear grew. When she reached a road that crossed another one, she became totally confused. Her eyes filled with tears, and she did not know which way to turn. She stood still for a moment, staring helplessly straight ahead. Where was she? Where was she going? And why? Oh . . . yes . . . but which road led to her home? She no longer knew . . . Clutching her little doll convulsively, almost unconsciously, she took another look around.

Oh, the terrible din of the machine gun fire. Terror-stricken, she screamed loudly. The outskirts of the village should be somewhere nearby. An orchard . . . Suddenly, she thought she saw the river Prut glistening; but no, it was only an even field, and on it there were soldiers, as numerous as blades of grass or leaves—as her parents usually referred to the size of an army or anything else.

But, oh, dear God! What was that? Something whizzed through the air, wailing and whistling. Something terrible happened. Under her feet, the ground shuddered even more than from thunder . . . Oh! What was she compared to the power of that thunder? A little insect, a tiny beetle . . . a nothing.

Knocked unconscious she lies on the ground. And as she comes to, she has no idea what happened to her and how long she has lain there—she does not know. It had been a cannon shot, a shot that creates bedlam, splatters blood, and rips apart human flesh, strewing it in bits and pieces. Finally, her face pale and bloodless, her eyes glazed, she rises to her feet, pulls herself together, and takes a few steps. What is going on? Where is her cottage? Her house, her door, her windows? Her whole being almost howls the questions. She wants to go home; she groans and does not have the strength to utter a word.

“I want to go home! Mummy!” she suddenly shrieks. “I want to go home!” Then she stops, and her eyes open still wider.

What’s that over here, on *that* side? An army? A countless multitude of men, and it seems to her that they are in clusters, in many, ever so many clusters. They are crowding together, and something is happening. She does not know what is going on, but

she feels that she is being drawn towards the army, closer and closer to it. Not just in the direction of the army, but directly towards it, as if the wind were propelling her. She can already distinguish the colour of their uniforms—a green, earthen colour. These are not Austrian soldiers; this is the enemy.

It's all over for her now. She is facing her death. She feels this and nothing more . . . death . . . death . . . oh, but mummy!

“Mummy!” she cries—and nothing more.

All at once she feels someone grabbing her by the arms as if with iron pliers. Her hands and her shoulders must be bloody. She does not have the strength to turn around. Something is jerking her here and there. What is happening? Is something carrying her? Or is she walking on her own? Oh, yes, she's walking. But at the same time, something is carrying her. Suddenly, something makes her stop, and someone stands before her. In a long coat and, it seems to her, with hands raised upwards, like the saints in icons . . .

“Get up, my child. What are you doing here?”

Oh, it's the enemy. She recognises the colour of his uniform.

Something shrieks within her.

“Home . . . but I don't know where . . . Where . . .”

“Where is your home?” The figure bends over her . . . and, all of a sudden, life flows back into her body, and she bursts into tears.

“Let's go,” the voice of the enemy says. “Maybe God has sent me to you, to protect you—don't you sense it? All hell may break loose again at any moment, and then I won't be able to get away. Perhaps, because of you, I will find favour with God.”

She hears his words, but cannot speak; her whole body is shivering. He moves to stand next to her, and covers her with his coat, so that only her little legs can be seen beside his tall boots. And then he reaches for his weapon.

“Stand still,” he orders, “and don't show your head. God will either save me because of you, or you because of me. Either we'll both die, or we'll both live.”

This all happens swiftly, in a fleeting moment. Then, something like a crash topples her, and he fires. And not just he. Shots rain down from both sides, like heavy hail. From the right and the left.

Twice, it seems to her, she hears that hellish thunder from which shrapnel rains down among the men, one of whom is holding her by his feet, as if ready to give up his life protecting her. She hears the howling of human pain. Groans . . . a desperate plea for help,



but she can see nothing. She cannot move from her spot; she does not dare to move! Half dead with fear and shock, she hardly knows what is happening to her. Some time goes by. Then she feels that she is being carried. Where, and for how long, she does not know. She can hear that she is moving farther and farther away from that terrible place. Gradually, it becomes quieter all around. Finally, it feels as if something has freed itself from the extremities of a horrible tension . . . and the shrieks and groans of human voices now rumble and drift in from afar; they rumble . . . who knows how far, into what distant parts they are drifting?

The enemy soldier carried Nastka home. Her parents had not been able to cross the river. The Austrian guards did not let anyone go across, and so they too were barred from leaving. They returned home, but did not find their lost child, who had been sent so fatefully in the direction of the enemy army.

When the enemy soldier brought Nastka to her parents, he said: “God sent this child to cross my path, so that I might take her into my care and protect her from death, and so that she, having more favour with God, might once again be my guardian angel.”

He visited the little girl and her parents several times, told them much about his homeland, and related many sad stories. He was kind and sympathetic, and they quickly grew accustomed to him.

Sitting silently, he would watch the little girl for hours on end, and one time he finally said: “If I return home alive and healthy, I’ll come back here after the war and take Nastka to live with my mother, among my sisters, and when she grows up—and if she wants to—I’ll marry her. God Himself has designated her for me. I rescued her from death, and she rescued me. Don’t you think we belong to each other?”

The parents laughed.

He tenderly stroked the little girl’s hair and patted her head.

From the time that she had stepped, almost half-dead, into her home once again, she was not as she had been before. Her love for Anisya vanished, and she no longer came near her. She became serious, scared easily, and was withdrawn. She was happy when her young saviour appeared, when he brought her a few lumps of sugar as a treat, and she listened carefully to everything he said. She seemed to mature in his presence, even though, in truth, she was still but a child and remained one.

No one, it seemed, listened as attentively to him as she did. He told her about his kind, rich mother and three sisters who lived in his beautiful distant homeland, waited for him, and prayed for him; and then he told her about his horses, and the steppes.

“Do you know, Nastka, what the steppe is?” he asked her one day, as he looked lovingly at her.

She was warming up to him and dutifully obeyed him when he requested something. Without replying, she shook her head, and looked devoutly and expectantly into his eyes.

“It’s so big, so vast, so boundless, that you probably would find it hard to imagine such a wide open expanse. At night, you can’t see anything except the sky above you, and ever so many stars; and the moon appears to float in the heavens. And there’s an immense stillness that you could never find anywhere, certainly not here in the villages or the towns. But there, you can sing or howl in pain, and no one will hear you, only God Himself. Oh!” the sound escaped mournfully from his lips, and he ran his hand despairingly through his hair. He gnashed his teeth, and a heavy sigh escaped from his chest. This was how he “cried.”

“Should I sing for you?” the little girl suddenly asked him, drawing still nearer and looking at him without touching him.

He raised his head. His eyes were damp. “Oh, my dear little bird! On the steppe, a man becomes like his horse . . .”

“Do you know how to sing? If you do, then sing!” the little girl pleaded.

He did not say anything. Pausing for a moment, he embraced the child with one arm and sang in a restrained voice, as if a wave flooding his chest wanted to force its way out, or as if pain and longing had found a way to flow out of it. And then he stopped abruptly. He could not sing today. Another time, perhaps. His heart felt heavy . . .

Shortly afterwards, Nastka’s mother fell ill and died. Nastka was left alone with her father. One time her saviour came, but hurriedly this time, with an uneasy expression on his face.

“Farewell!” he said to Nastka in a hushed voice. “We have to leave. The Austrians are drawing nearer. Don’t forget Fedir Mykhaylovych, Nastka; if I remain alive, you belong to me and to my mother. I’ll return. Here’s a *kopiyka* [*penny*] for you. Don’t lose it. It’s my very last one.” He extended his hand to her, and her little hand hid in his like a little bird. Turning to Nastka’s father, he said:

“Forgive me for visiting your home. It may well be that now you’ll have to pay for it.” Then he added: “May your Kaiser also forgive you for this. He’s a good man. But it’s your Nastka who is to blame—and it seems God also wanted it to happen.”

“You saved my child, my good man . . .”

“Tell me quickly if there’s one last wish that you have,” the young soldier said hurriedly. “Who knows what will happen next?”

“My only son, Ilko,” the old man said, and then broke off and struck himself on the forehead as if he had just recalled something. “You couldn’t possibly know where he is; even I don’t know. Somewhere . . . somewhere . . . otherwise, you could have told him that now he has only a father, and that . . .” he did not finish his sentence.

“Yes,” the young enemy soldier said bitterly. “It might even happen that I’ll kill him, or he’ll kill me . . . Who can say? Farewell. Death means nothing during a war.”

“Where are you going?” the little girl stood before him.

“To meet my fate,” he responded and, tearing himself away from them, departed.

Silently, as if she did not understand, Nastka watched as her saviour from the steppe departed. Then something occurred to her, and she rushed out of the house without saying a word. After a moment she came back. “I can’t see or hear him,” she said.

Her father did not reply; he pulled his pipe from his belt and fished some embers out of the stove with his finger, but he did not puff on the pipe even once.

She crouched in a corner and stared straight ahead, as if turned to stone. Something had happened; something that filled the entire cottage—a cottage that now seemed abandoned, like a corpse.

“Daddy . . . *Will he come* again? Daddy! Why are you crying?”

“Am I crying?” her father asked instead of replying. “Perhaps I am crying. I’m old.”

“Do you feel sorry that he’s gone?”

“Death means nothing now,” he continued after a moment. “We have a good Kaiser. If I had ten heads, I would lay all of them down at his feet; and our land, thank God, is fertile; but there is something between him and the land and us that obscures us before him,” he said gloomily, striking himself hard on the chest. “Oh, but I’m a stupid peasant . . . sometimes it seems to me that I should tell the lords, all the great lords—tell them with the tears that have fused

with the blood in our eyes—about the long nights that terrify and threaten us, but . . .” And he added hopelessly: “Now they’re throwing us out everywhere . . .”

His head dropped to his chest, and he stopped speaking.

Little Nastka was thinking about her saviour.

“When will the war end, daddy?”

“Do you think I know, my child, how often day will follow night? Don’t ask such painful questions . . .”

Nastka fell silent. But a moment later she asked again: “Where can my brother Ilko possibly be?”

“Don’t grieve me with your questions, my child . . .”

“Because the last time that he was here . . . it was Christmas.”

“Yes. And we could not give him either a *knysh* [*a stuffed loaf of bread*] or a *kolach* [*braided Christmas bread*]. We could not even have a good look at him, because we did not have a candle in the house, and he was in a hurry.”

“Yes, father, and that was when he told us how they had waited in ambush for the enemy in the hills, and the snow was so heavy that their coats turned stiff as tin from the frost and the cold. And he told us about so many other hard times that mother cried until midnight . . .”

“Yes, my child. He told us about the war, about death, about those who went blind in the war and were led away with cotton batting in the sockets where their eyes should have been.”

“Be quiet, daddy! My eyes hurt . . .” little Nastka shrieked.

“I’m keeping quiet; am I of any significance?” the voice of the old man answered in the darkness.

There was a moment of silence that seemed to be lying in wait for something.

“Daddy.”

“What?”

“Look . . . that stray cat is here again. It’s hard to see her because she’s black, and only her green eyes shine. I’m afraid of her eyes. I’m afraid of her, today. Now she’s looking at you and me, and before long she’ll come up to us. What does she want? Something to eat? We don’t have anything to eat ourselves.”

As he listened these words, the father heard the child rustle beside him like a falling leaf. Suddenly they heard a single shot blast through the air. The father shuddered. The silence in the house became heavier and more painful.

“Was that a shot?”

“No, daddy, you just thought you heard one.”

“Thank God.”

“Why are you so scared of shots that ring out all by themselves in the night?”

“I really don’t know. I keep thinking about Ilko; he’s in the war.”

“The cat’s gone . . . she’s no longer staring at us . . . She must have run away.”

“It’s an evil animal . . . but leave it alone. It’s not the worst creature to walk on the earth and violate it. Maybe the door wasn’t shut.”

All at once, little Nastka, as if something had frightened her, slid to the ground from the bench where she had been sitting by her father and ran straight to one of the windows.

“I’m looking at the stars, daddy . . . I’m looking at them,” she said, almost pressing her face to the glass. “Daddy!” she shrieked after a moment. “A *star* fell from the heavens . . . and now another one is shuddering—will it also fall? Daddy!”

“Don’t torment me, Nastka.”

“Ilko also said,” she continued, turning away from the window and cuddling up to her father once again, “that once, after a long march, three soldiers sat down exhausted on the ground and did not get up again . . .”

“Hush, child, hush—it seems to me that I hear someone building a coffin in the next room.”

A few days later, the father took their only cow to the market and did not return. Some people said that they saw the police lead him away, but others said that two Russian soldiers had taken him away—because he protested when they seized his cow, and because he had been friendly with the Austrians.

Whose version of the truth could be trusted?

“But he had so much work to do!” little Nastka lamented, her eyes swollen with crying, when friends and acquaintances came to ask her if her father had come back, and then told her what they thought had happened. “He was rebuilding the fence the enemy had destroyed. He was going to fix the thatched roof that was ruined by the harsh winter. He had taken the cow to market to raise the money they needed to pay for her mother’s funeral. And now what? What will happen now?”

Neighbours, friends, and acquaintances looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. Yes, indeed, what would happen now? And then, one by one, they went away to look after their own affairs.

When little Nastka, whom the kinswoman Kalyna took in out of pity, grieves for her parents and is unable to sleep at night, she begs God to send her father back to her, and then her thoughts wander to her saviour from the steppe.

“Yes, the steppe . . . he said.” His words creep timidly but sunnily into her little heart, and warm her. The steppe is so big, and so vast, and so boundless that she could not possibly imagine such a wide open expanse.

At night she sees only the sky above her and many, ever so many stars. And the moon floats so slowly that it hardly seems to be moving at all. And the stillness is immense, oh, so very immense; it is a stillness that never could be found anywhere here in the villages or the towns . . .

And as little Nastka thinks about the steppe, about the many, many stars in the sky, about the moon that floats slowly, hardly moving at all, and about her saviour, she weeps more softly and gradually falls asleep . . .

She is growing up and going to meet her fate.

## *Warm The Children, O Sun* (1927)

The night that Marta hacked her husband to death and mopped up after him, every sound inside her cottage died away.

And silence reigned around it as well.

There, where she had buried him, in a shallow grave, the ground appeared to be imperceptibly rounded. But that could have been because of the snow that had been piling up incessantly, covering everything, since morning.

The moon, gazing down at the earth, bathed it in its magic glow, but did not warm it.

Apart from that, it was as if the village had been blessed, for everything looked festive and peaceful. The arrival of the snow made it seem that the birth of Christ was drawing nearer—this holy day of peace that did not pass by any corner where true believers lived—and the luminous nights appeared to be announcing the festival of Christmas.

Yes, several nights had gone by since Marta had permanently removed the head of her household from the cottage.

The two orphans that he left behind—nine-year-old Pavlyk and seven-year-old Zonya—huddled together at night on the sleeping platform atop the clay oven, faint with fear that their mother would hack them to death as well, to prevent them from testifying against her and revealing that she had taken their father away from them.

Pavlyk had to help carry his father to a glade where they placed him in the ground among the trees. But his mother had not permitted him to cover the body with earth; she had sent him back to the house and ordered him to go to sleep. He did what she told him to do, because he was terrified of the corpse, his mother's eyes, and the bright night.

When people inquired about her husband, who was a furrier by trade, the mother replied that he had gone off to Bessarabia once again . . . But she did not permit this matter to be discussed in the house.

The father used to drink until he fell into a drunken stupor; he wasted all his earnings, and when he had no money left, mercilessly harassed his wife to sell a parcel of land.

On several occasions he gave her such a thrashing that she had to give in to him and do as she was told.

The father used to sing as he staggered home from the tavern on unsteady feet, but the mother was withering and wasting away, and her large dark eyes sank into their sockets.

Life was bleak for young Pavlyk and his little sister Zonya.

From time to time, their mother's old nanny, who had taken care of her when she still lived with her parents, furtively dropped in to see her, and the two of them held whispered conversations that they did not want the children to hear. What they talked about, Pavlyk did not know, but he did see that his mother pressed her lips tightly together and choked on her sobs, while tears flooded her gaunt, unhappy face.

The days passed by, the fields became barren, and only the occasional raven flew over them. At times, the storks that remained behind stood on the abandoned field like guards . . . on one leg, thinking and grieving about something . . .

"Pavlyk, what does the stork think about when he stands on one leg for such a long time? What kinds of things are going through his head?" Zonya asked Pavlyk one gloomy day.

"Oh, sure . . . He thinks . . . Dummy! How can a stork think? He thinks about as much as you do."

Zonya fell silent and looked seriously at her brother. He was extremely smart, and she loved him because he rarely pushed her around.

A moment later she said: "Not so long ago, when daddy stormed out of the house because mummy wouldn't give him something to sell—so he could buy whiskey—he picked up the rake to hit her with it, but he flung it up so high that it got hooked on the thatched roof and got stuck there."

"So what?" Pavlyk replied.

"Well, daddy was so angry that he couldn't hit mummy that he grabbed a rod from near the house and smashed the stork's nest."

Pavlyk whistled. "Now the stork will set our house on fire to get even," he said.

"Really?" Zonya asked, with a tone of disbelief.



“Well, I can tell you now—that’s what he’s thinking about,” he explained to his sister and, twirling around on one foot, walked away.

Since the loss of their father, the children have not slept for several nights. The mother, silent and morose, goes about her work in the daytime and, as soon as it is twilight, chases both of them to bed.

“But I don’t want to sleep yet . . .” Pavlyk protests.

“Neither do I,” Zonya repeats in the same tone of voice.

“Then sit in the dark, because I don’t have money to buy oil for the lamp. You’ll have to live on what your father has left you. As for me, I don’t need any light; he extinguished my light . . .”

Silence descends.

It is one thing to be silent in the daytime, but it is a different matter altogether to be silent at dusk. Neither Pavlyk nor Zonya say another word.

The twilight deepens, and the mother sits motionless on the bench, resting her head in her hands.

From time to time she raises her head as if she were waiting for someone, or leaps from her spot and rushes to the window to see if someone is coming, and when there is no one to be seen or heard, except, perhaps, the wind that is beginning to blow and wail in the chimney, or a dog barking . . . she sits down again and sinks once more into her deep reverie. It seems that there is not enough work in the house. It is as if it were disappearing somewhere and, without it, she feels dejected and empty.

When her husband was still alive and sewed fur coats at home, he sang—drunkenly or soberly—but he sang continually.

Everything has drifted away with him; and heaven only knows where it has gone.

The winter darkness looms from the nooks and crannies; the children are frightened that something will close in on them, and they stare at the window that still weakly reflects some of the snow’s brightness.

“Get up on the oven!” the mother abruptly orders them. “How long are you going to sit there? It’s warm on the oven now; later it will cool off. It’s enough that I’m not sleeping.”

The children cross themselves without saying a word—for no one has taught them any prayers—and crawl up to their bed on the clay oven.

“What about you, mummy?” the little boy asks timidly when he is already up on the sleeping platform.

“I’ll lie down soon. I just have to go outside for a moment.”

“Don’t be long, mummy . . . It’s so scary . . .”

“It’s so dark, mummy . . .” little Zonya moans with trembling lips.

“I’ll just walk around the house once . . . to see if anyone’s coming. I’ll lock everything up and come right back.”

“Lock the gate as well . . . So the stork won’t come . . . So he won’t bring a live coal in his beak and set fire to the house . . . It’s very scary . . .”

“Hush . . . Sleep . . . What kind of storks are you thinking about? A *stork* . . . I’ll just bring the axe into the house . . . I forgot it by the woodpile . . .”

“I’m scared, Pavlyk . . . It’s so dark . . . Look over there . . . by mummy’s bed . . .”

“You sleep if you want to, but I won’t. She went to get the axe.”

“We’ll keep watch, to see if mummy falls asleep.”

“She went to get the axe, Zonya. Maybe she’ll hack us to death during the night . . . We must not sleep!”

“We won’t sleep!” his sister replies. “And God also doesn’t sleep, Pavlyk . . . Isn’t that true?”

“It’s true. He sends the stars out to stand guard . . .”

And they do not sleep.

They wait silently, without moving, despite the fact that their eyes are forcing themselves shut.

They see their mother come into the house carrying something shiny; she places it next to herself by her bed and finally lies down.

After a while, sleep overcomes them; it seems to them that this happens while their eyes are still open and their breath is still bated, and then they know nothing more.

All at once, Pavlyk hears his father’s voice: “Don’t sleep.”

He awakens with a start, sits up, and listens intently. Yes, it is his father who is speaking. And he forgets that his father is no longer living, that several weeks have gone by since his death.

But there is something white in the room . . . It flashes by under the window, not far from the oven . . . He is shaken by this. He pokes Zonya. She had also awoken, just a few moments earlier.

“Look!” he whispers to her. “Mummy’s by the window . . .”

They both crane their necks . . . and watch . . .

Their mother truly is there. She is kneeling on the floor; her head is lying on the bench as if she is sleeping and, next to her head, an axe gleams in her hands.

The children did not fall asleep again until morning.

And many nights passed in this way.

During the day, first one of them, and then the other, would sleep for a little while, especially when their mother left the house. She went most frequently to visit her old nanny. Leaving them each a small piece of rye bread, she stayed at the nanny's or somewhere else until late into the night, spinning with others in order to earn some money, because the children had to be fed every day.

They obeyed her every command and, during the night, they saved their lives by not sleeping. Whenever she got up at night, either with the axe or without it, Pavlyk would immediately ask: "Why aren't you sleeping, mummy?"

"I can't sleep, sonny, but you go to sleep!" And sighing heavily, she would turn her face to the wall.

One time she did get up from the bed and, after taking a good hard look at the axe, walked away from the bed and placed the axe in a corner.

"Do you sleep with an axe, Mummy?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"To defend myself against murderers. Nanny said that I should protect both you and myself."

And, crossing herself, she wiped what appeared to be sweat from her brow and lay down once again. After saying this, she slept as if she were dead, but the children could not fall asleep. They had almost grown unaccustomed to sleeping at night. Curled up and huddled together, they kept watch over their mother.

Christmas, the Feast of Jordan, and the fierce winter all went by in this way. Then the snow stopped falling, and it was the middle of February, and there was the sun, the warm wind and, now and again, just for a change, heavy rains.

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One day when the sun was very warm, and the children were running in and out of the house in their bare feet, their mother

watched them silently. They were sallow and skinny, their eyes were mournful, and their clothes were grimy.

“Don’t stay outside too long; you’ll catch a cold, and I don’t have the money to buy medicine for you.”

They listened to her and came indoors . . . It seemed that they did not have a will of their own.

Pavlyk came in first, and Zonya followed.

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One time they were sitting on the bed. Their mother had gone to fetch some water—it was a good walk from the house—and they were picking over some beans that were to be cooked that day, just as every other day.

“There’s no sun today as well, Pavlyk . . . Why is that?” Zonya asked and, getting up from the bed, pressed her forehead to the single little pane that was fixed in the wall of the small kitchen like a round little mirror.

“Because . . . You don’t know anything, do you Zonya?” Pavlyk answered rather reluctantly. “But I know.”

He was silent for a moment; then, after rubbing his forehead, he began saying: “Because God has a box, and in that box there’s the sun, and an angel holds this box . . . and when he turns it in the daytime . . . like this, you see.”

He took her kerchief from the bed and, holding it tightly in his fist, he turned his whole arm quickly, as if his hand were a wheel.

“When he turns God’s box in the daytime, the sun shines, and at night—the moon. Now do you know?”

“Yes,” Zonya replied reverently.

“It’s probably like that there . . . in Bessarabia . . . probably, that’s what daddy used to say . . . Yes, probably.”

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The grey days slowly limped along. The holy days had come and gone, but the bitter frosts did not let up until Candlemas Day.

When Candlemas came, the people went to church. Their mother, however, was busy cooking something, and Pavlyk kept running outside every minute to examine the roof.

“Shut the door—don’t let cold air into the house. Don’t you feel the frost in the air? Do you think it’s warm, just because it’s sunny? You’ll have to wait a while yet.”

“I’m not cold,” Pavlyk tried to speak nonchalantly, all the while drawing one leg up closer to the other and hiding his hands under his arms in an effort to stay warm. And he kept glancing out of the window until even his mother noticed.

“Hey you, are you expecting guests or something?” she shouted. “Then go outside to wait for them. Get a kerchief for Zonya and tell her to put it on her head. And get out of here, both of you! I’ve had my fill of you . . .”

She opened the door widely as she said this and, after they both went out, shut it behind them.

“Why were you always running outside, Pavlyk? Mummy’s angry because of you, and now I have to freeze as well.”

“Oh, what does mother know,” Pavlyk responded. “She’s just like all the other women. But I know something, yes I do. And I’ll tell you, so that you’ll know too. Today is Candlemas Day.”

“Candlemas Day,” Zonya repeated mechanically, blowing on her hands to warm them.

“Today, you can see a bear.”

“Really?” Zonya was astonished. Her mouth dropped open, and she looked straight into his eyes.

“Yes, really . . . No, I’m not lying. Just think about what I’m going to say.”

“Well, hurry up. I’m cold.”

“Do you see the sun today?”

“Yes. That’s . . . God’s child with a box . . .” Zonya began to explain slowly, but then she stopped abruptly.

Pavlyk had unexpectedly slapped her on the head, cutting off what she was going to say, and her face crumpled.

“I’m going to tell mummy that you’re hitting me. Why are you hitting me?”

Her eyes filled with tears, and her lower lip jutted out.

“I’ll tell . . .” the little girl complained.

“Go ahead and tell. Then I won’t tell you what I know, but I would have told you. So now I’ll know, but you won’t.”

The little girl begged his forgiveness.

“Tell me,” she pleaded. “I won’t tell mummy, I won’t. It doesn’t hurt any more.”

“Then listen. Do you see the sun?”

“Yes. It’s shining brightly,” Zonya said, speaking the words with pleasure.

“And now, look. Look up at the roof.”

Zonya did what her brother told her to do.

“Is it dripping from the roof?”

“I don’t know.”

“Isn’t it dripping?”

“Yes it is.”

“Then shut your eyes and run into the house, because the bear has climbed out of his den. Quickly!”

Little Zonya gave a frightened gasp and, numb with fear, raced into the house, with Pavlyk hard at her heels.

Their mother, who was holding a pot of boiling water, jumped back in alarm.

“Who’s coming?” she asked through pale lips, sinking down on a bench.

“The bear has climbed out of its den . . . He’ll be here right away! Don’t talk, be quiet,” the little girl shouted and, looking for protection, huddled against her mother.

Pavlyk was silent.

“May God not forgive you, may He not forgive you for giving me such a scare . . .” the mother barely managed to get the words out. “Even my heart stopped . . . even . . . even . . . And it’s all because of that one . . .”

And she did not finish what she was saying.

“Because it’s Candlemas Day, and the roof’s dripping, mummy,” the little boy defended himself. “Take a good look yourself: drip-drip-drip . . .”

“So you heard something about that belief, but you didn’t hear it all, did you? I’ll give you a bear or two! I’ll give you such a bear that you’ll remember . . . You gave me such a scare that my forehead’s sweating!”

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The frost and the cold abated, and snow fell rarely and unexpectedly, either in little stars or in a misty rain that melted the white covering on the ground, the houses, and the trees, leaving only

the odd spots of snow that looked like linen sheets drawn over the fields, meadows, and roofs.

On Marta's small meadow, a white coverlet also remained among the few trees, waiting to be melted either by the sun or by the fine rain that came down not only for hours on end, but for whole days and nights.

Then, one day, the following happened.

A few sunny golden days came to pass. The farmers walked around and looked over their land . . . And they thought and considered what they should do—should they plough and harrow it, or should they rent it out for ready money.

"I'll go to the widow Marta and rent her meadow," one of them said; he was eager to do and learn all sorts of things, and to profit from them whenever possible. "Marta has nothing to plough with, and she'll pay for the ploughing. You know, her meadow borders my field, and a dozen or more plum trees of the good variety grow on it. Perhaps I'll be able to make some money. I'm going to her place now. Will someone come along with me? It's better if two of us go. It's better for her, and it will be better for me."

One of the weaker men, who liked to keep company with Marta's husband—the furrier who seemed to have either died or disappeared—volunteered to go along to be present when the deal was struck to rent the widow's land. This man had been especially happy to chum around with Marta's husband whenever the latter returned from Bessarabia with a pocket full of money and paid for rum at Mendel's tavern. The furrier sang in a loud voice while beating his fist on a table, and he made the others laugh uproariously as Mendel, the owner of the tavern, dressed in dirty white socks and slippers, humbly and seriously fulfilled every wish of the man buying the drinks.

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As they walked into Marta's yard, the two men met the children playing in the sun not far from the house. Their dog, grateful that they had freed it from its chain, was fawning on them and eagerly sniffing the ground in search of food.

When the dog saw the strangers, it began to bark furiously, but after the two men quieted it down, it wagged its tail and fell silent.

Pavlyk and Zonya drew nearer.

“Is your mother at home?”

“Yes, she is!”

Before the two men made their way any farther into the yard, Pavlyk raced ahead to inform his mother that some people had come. Since the death of their father, so few people had visited them that the arrival of these men held the promise of being interesting.

The mother, fiddling with the knots in a piece of cloth in which she had stored some seeds, appeared to snap out of a trance.

“People?” she asked.

Startled, she turned pale and looked around, but there was no time to say anything or do anything, because the men walked in right behind Pavlyk.

They greeted her, but she never did know how she responded; she only felt that the ground was swaying under her feet.

“We’ve come to you to ask you about something, Marta. Are you in good health? How are you getting along this spring? We haven’t seen you for a long time. Since the disappearance of your husband, you seem to have locked yourself up in a nunnery . . .”

The woman sighed, and her large, sunken eyes looked down at the ground. “I go to work. I spin, tear feathers, sew, and then I have to look after the children. What more can I do? You have to accept the fate God gives you. Soon it will be necessary to tend to the land, to dig, sow, and plant. The sun has dried it nicely, and its tugging the greenery out of the earth with its strength—it makes your heart rejoice. For the winter seems to have weighed my soul down with a stone, taken my life away. I was just picking over some seeds. It’s time I started getting to work.”

“Yes, that’s the way it is; you have to get down to work. The two of us have come here to discuss a business matter with you. You were just talking about the land, and that’s why we’ve come to you.”

Having said this, they sat down. One of them, the old friend of the furrier, tamped his pipe and began smoking. The other one, the one who wanted to rent the land, looked with a penetrating eye at the bare walls, the empty corners, and the sallow faces of the children who had grown extremely thin over the winter, and immediately broached the topic that had brought him there.

“It’s thus and so, Marta,” he said, looking closely at the woman who, though still young, had aged noticeably. “I would like to rent your land, and, in payment, I could give you some grain and some



milled flour; or, if you prefer, I could give you cash. You don't have any draft animals, so how are you going to plough, harrow, and seed? It all costs money. And for cash, as you yourself know, you can buy grain, salt, oil for the lamps, and other things . . . Think about it and tell me!

"As for these two," he added, as he nodded his head at the children—for Pavlyk was standing opposite him, hanging on to his every word—"they don't ask if you have anything to give them or not—they just know one thing: give me . . ."

Marta stood still, as if frozen to the ground. She was silent, but her fingers kept moving nervously, continuously, as if she were twisting wool or turning a spindle. The men had caught her off guard. What should she do? What would turn out for the good, and what would not?

"Do you think this would be bad for you?" the man started up again. "But where are you going to find a better deal? If you go into debt to pay for the ploughing and the seeds, who is going to pay back the loan for you, and with what?"

"Think about it, but don't think too long . . ." his companion intervened in the conversation. Having said this, he spit through his teeth into the middle of the room.

"I would take the meadow," the first one began talking again. "I'd leave you the piece of land by the house for your vegetables and herbs, and an acre or so for your potatoes. And, as for the plum trees on the meadow, I would pay you separately for them, or I could give you a bowl of dried prunes for Christmas, if you'd prefer that. Is it a deal?"

Marta looked up. Her large eyes, dark as the night, flashed at the men, and she raised her fist. "And you'd take the plums away from the children? Yes? So that they wouldn't have anything to put in their mouths from the trees that their father planted for them with his own hands? Huh? And the plums as well? Just look what a kind-hearted counsellor has been found for the orphans!"

And she turned to his friend, her lips tightly pursed.

"Why are you angry, Marta? Am I taking something for nothing? Have I come to trick you? Here's my witness . . . I came to have a good talk with you. If you want to—fine! If you don't want to—then good bye! I know where the door is."

These words, uttered without anger and with a conciliatory intonation, immediately created a different mood.

Marta, who had been standing, gloomy and dejected, sat down on the bed. The children stood beside her as if on guard, as if trying to protect her.

And she began to talk—at first, inexpressibly bitterly, as if people envied her that even though her husband had vanished she was left with . . . God alone knew if he were living . . . and if he would return. Then why should she be surprised that . . . and she broke off.

However, the men assured her that, given her difficult situation, they were offering her conditions that were quite acceptable. She recognised that the proposed arrangement would give her a new way to make a living and, after a short conversation, agreed to take half the cash now in return for the meadow and the plum trees, and the other half after the seeding, on Sunday.

After the deal was struck, both parties, satisfied, rose from their seats. The men set out for home, while Marta got ready to go to the nearby store to buy some flour, because she had just run out, and had to buy some to tide her through.

As he walked out into the yard, the new renter stood still for a moment, rolled a cigarette, and lit it. He gazed at the meadow—which began behind the fence and the small barn in the yard, and then stretched evenly for a good piece—and at the trees, the plum trees. The branches, shrubbery, and shoots were still black, and were clearly outlined on the bright backdrop of the horizon. And then something occurred to him.

“I’ll just go down to the meadow and look at the buds on the plum trees to see if there are going to be many blossoms this year.”

And, saying this, he stepped over the stile; his friend went along with him. The children skipped happily after them, and the dog raced after the children like an arrow. As the dog ran, it kept racing ahead, then turning around, and stopping; and it continued amusing itself this way, barking excitedly, never moving too far away from the children.

Marta was the only one who did not go. After seeing her guests out the door, she went back into the house, counted the money again, and hid it under the children’s bed. She took a little sack and, shutting the doors, set out for the meadow after the others, for the children needed a key to the house while she was away.

The spot of white snow among the trees on the meadow gleamed from afar. It glistened in the sunlight, as if sown with brilliant sand.

The children ran ahead to the plum trees, waiting for a moment for the renter who was walking with an even gait with his slower friend. The dog, rejoicing in its freedom, ran ahead of everyone, now and then jumping off to the side, as if trying out its strength, which had weakened during the winter. Suddenly, it stopped by the plum trees and began to sniff the ground frantically. Shortly afterwards, the children and the men walked up.

The renter, stopping by a tree, raised his arm and, bending down a branch, looked intently, with the eye of a sorcerer, at the buds. He looked at them for quite a while . . .

“If God gives us a good summer,” he thought as he looked around, “there will be plenty of fruit. No one will suffer, and I’ll get my money back with interest . . .”

“Feet! Feet!” little Zonya shouted, running up ahead of the others to a plum tree that grew at the edge of the clearing, just where the snow had melted. She pointed at the ground where the agitated dog was digging with its paws. “Look, mummy! Pavlyk! Look, how they’re sticking up.”

There was no need to call Pavlyk; he was already by her side.

The dog stopped its work for a moment, wagged its tail joyously, and then kept on digging. The children exchanged glances silently. What would happen to Mummy? She was still quite far away from them; she was barely moving . . . And here were the feet!

When Marta finally arrived at the spot of snow, she found both men, their eyes gaping, staring at the ground. They were nodding their heads at the hole from which two shod feet protruded.

Then they silently turned to face the woman who was looking fixedly at them.

“Did you examine the buds on the plum trees? Will there be a good crop?” she asked.

“Yes, we’ve looked. God willing, there will be,” they replied. “But take a look over here . . .”

And they pointed at the ground near the children, to the spot from which the dog would not budge.

“Whose feet are these, Marta? Do you know?” the renter finally asked. “Someone’s buried here.”

Marta shifted her gaze to the spot and did not answer.

“It’s very close to the house, and yet someone’s been buried here. And they begrudged the soil to cover the body! And you, Marta, have no idea what happened here? *Marta!*”

“Listen, my good man, leave the woman alone,” his friend spoke up. “It’s not our business! There’s a court for things like this . . . Let’s go!” he said, turning away. He touched the tip of his cap, spat as he had spat in the house—in his usual manner—a long way off from himself, and the two of them went away.

The next day, two policemen in dark uniforms and white gloves showed up on the village road. They were roughly the same height and walked in step, with rifles on their backs. Silently, like two statues, they moved forward, the shiny feathers in their officers’ caps glistening in the sun. The people saw them and fell silent with fear. They looked at one another anxiously, and some crossed themselves in trepidation.

No one knew why the policemen had appeared in the village. Would they go on farther, or would they stop at their place? Would they take someone away? No one knew anything; but when the policemen asked a passer-by where Marta’s house was, and if she was at home, these questions flew through the village like ravens.

Marta was stirring cornmeal mush, and not a word issued from her mouth; the flames shooting from the stove coloured her darkened cheeks, sunken like those of a corpse.

Pavlyk did not take his eyes off his mother for even a minute. It made him uncomfortable that she was not saying anything. At least if she would scold him—but she did not even do that.

“I really like . . . cornmeal mush . . .” he broke the silence slowly, as if to cheer up his mother.

“So do I,” Zonya repeated, stepping closer to her mother.

There was a loud knock at the door, and it swung open. The doorway darkened, and the two policemen entered.

“Are you Marta Klymykha?” they asked Marta.

“Yes, I am,” she answered . . . and collapsed at their feet,

“We have an order to put you in chains and bring you to court. Did you kill your husband and bury him in the meadow?”

“Yes!”

Out of despair, and on the advice of her nanny, she had killed her husband—an incurable drunkard—and buried him in the meadow. It was true. But this was not all. She had also wanted to end the lives of her children, so that they could not testify against her, and because she did not wish them to suffer when she was taken away.

The “kind and honourable” gentlemen could either hang her, or part her forever from the sun, from her children and . . .

And she did not finish . . .

There was no time for talk.

They put her in chains and led her out of the house, away from her children . . . who, their faces white as candles, stared wide-eyed at everything that was happening.

Leaving the house, Marta turned around for an instant, threw herself to the ground, and kissed the threshold.

“Forgive me, my children,” she called out, and bitter tears flooded her face. “Your mummy will no longer touch you, be it in anger or in love . . . But eat the cornmeal . . . so you won’t be hungry.”

“I’ll go with you, mummy . . . so they won’t kill you,” Pavlyk shouted frantically, rushing out behind her.

“Me too,” Zonya shrieked as she dashed after him.

The children were taken in as servants; the meadow was tended to by a renter, and the house was rented out.

Marta readily described every detail of her transgression, saying that it was motivated by her despair over the drunkenness of her husband, her desperation as to their future, and the counsel of her old nanny.

She was sentenced to three years of hard labour in S.

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After three years, she was freed. It was in the autumn, when the sun no longer gave out any warmth. It did not dry the land when it started to snow, and the air was freezing.

She came out of the prison transparently pale . . . emaciated, her chest bowed and wasted, and set out for home on foot. Perhaps the children would accept her—if they had not died. And surely the villagers would not throw her out; everyone knew what she had been like prior to her misfortune, and her land, her very own patch of land, would feed her until she died.

She did not have any money and could not take a train, so she set out on foot. Her trek took a long time, for she had to stop along the way to beg . . .

The autumn was a cold one, and she was covered only with ragged, begged clothing. And she survived on begged bread.

One day, just as she crossed the border and stepped on the soil of her fatherland, a sudden stream of blood gushed from her mouth. She collapsed and did not get up again. Lying on the side of the road, she kept lifting herself up and falling again, like a dying horse that is not able to keep its head up off the ground.

The cold embraced her, and she felt that only warmth could make her feel better. She desired nothing else. She looked around . . . Perhaps someone would find her, would see her . . .

The sun was just inclining to the west; she turned her gaze upon it, and her lips came together, as if in a smile.

*“Warm the children, O sun! Warm me and my children . . .”* her lips whispered . . .

This was her last wish.

And some kind-hearted strangers buried her in her native land.

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Hrytsko Hryhorenko  
1867-1924



## Biographical Sketch

Oleksandra Sudovshchykova-Kosach is known in Ukrainian literature as Hrytsko Hryhorenko, the male literary pseudonym that she chose to use. Her father was a Russian with strong pro-Ukrainian sympathies who taught in a private school in Kyiv and undertook the writing of a Ukrainian grammar. Both he and his Ukrainian wife, Hanna Khoynatska, a student of his, who also became a teacher, were actively involved in collecting Ukrainian folk materials and in working with the underprivileged. Because of their involvement in Ukrainian organisations, they were exiled to northern Russia in 1866, and it was there that Oleksandra was born in 1867.

In 1868, Hanna's husband died, and her brother was able to negotiate the return of the young widow and her infant daughter to Kyiv. Prior to obtaining a tutoring position, Hanna and Oleksandra lived with friends, the Drahomanovs, relatives of Olha Drahomanov-Kosach (literary pseudonym: Olena Pchilka). Little Oleksandra was much the same age as the children of Olena Pchilka, and she became close friends with them. She was able to maintain this friendship during her childhood and adolescent years, as she and her mother spent their summer holidays in the country with the Kosach family.

After completing high school, Oleksandra continued her formal education in Kyiv and joined the *Pleyada (The Pleiades)*, a literary circle that was organized by the two older children of Olena Pchilka: her son Mykhaylo (literary pseudonym: Mykhaylo Obachny) and her daughter Larysa (literary pseudonym: Lesya Ukrainka). This circle was dedicated to promoting the development of Ukrainian literature and introducing Ukrainian readers to the works of foreign authors by translating them into Ukrainian.

It was as a member of this group that Oleksandra became interested in writing. She wrote poetry in Ukrainian, Russian, and French, and translated Ukrainian authors into French. Drawing on her knowledge of European languages, she collaborated with Mykhaylo Kosach (Obachny) in translating Swedish and English authors into Ukrainian. She also translated French authors into Ukrainian, including such works as Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*.

In 1893, Oleksandra married Mykhaylo Kosach who, because of political persecution, was forced to move to Estonia to continue his

university studies. For the next few years, she and her mother lived with Mykhaylo in Tartu, Estonia, where he was a professor of physics and mathematics. It was in Estonia, that Oleksandra began writing prose fiction and, in 1898, she published her first collection of realistic ethnographic narratives, *Nashi lyudy na seli* (*The Lives of Our Peasants*), in which the bleak lives of the Ukrainian peasants were documented.

Oleksandra and her husband returned to Ukraine in 1901 and settled in Kharkiv, where Mykhaylo assumed a position as a professor at the University of Kharkiv. Happy to be back in her native land, Oleksandra continued with her writing and her translations of foreign authors.

In 1903, she had to cope with the tragic loss of her husband. With his death, she lost her soul mate and mentor, and found herself in the same position that her mother had been after the death of her husband. Unable to support herself in Kharkiv, Oleksandra and her young daughter moved to Kyiv where they lived with the Kosach family. During this most difficult period in her life, she received encouragement and support from her sister-in-law, Lesya Ukrainka.

Faced with the task of maintaining herself and her young daughter, Oleksandra completed a law degree and worked for some time in a Kyivan court. At the same time, she became involved in the women's movement, wrote a number of articles supporting the right of women to obtain a higher education, and worked closely with an organization that provided assistance to working women.

During this time Oleksandra became acquainted with many of the prominent writers of the day and embarked upon a new phase of her literary career. Writing in a modern, impressionistic style, she broadened her themes to include stories about the intelligentsia and explored the concept of psychological individualism in her short stories and sketches.

Dissatisfied with her work in the legal profession, Oleksandra supported herself through writing and private tutoring. In 1917, after her daughter completed high school, she moved with the Kosach family to the country, where she lived until her death in 1924.

The greater part of Hrytsko Hryhorenko's literary legacy consists of her early naturalistic works that are devoted to exposing the harsh conditions and moral decay of peasant life at the turn of the century, and to detailing the desperate measures to which the peasants, especially the women, were driven by adversity. Indeed, her works were written with such brutal honesty, that the critics and readers of her day responded negatively to her writing, accusing her of being overly pessimistic and dwelling solely on the dark side of life. Her later writing, in which she examined the impact of technological and social change on individuals from all levels of society, was no less moving and candid.

*It's That Kind of a "Story"*  
(1898)

It was a bright autumn day, and the peasants were threshing. Old Mykyta and his son Mykola were hard at work. Mykola, lifting his flail high into the air, swung it widely and forcefully, while the old man flailed with short, hurried movements that sounded like the pattering of a dove's beak, pecking at kernels of grain.

"Maybe we could rest for a bit? I'm slightly out of breath. I'd like to light my pipe," Mykyta said with a sigh, running his hand through his damp, silvery hair.

This Mykyta was an affable old man; diminutive like a rabbit, he was swift and agile, and his hair, beard, and moustache were completely white.

"Why in the world would we rest already?" Mykola asked in surprise, without breaking the rhythm of his flail. "We'll take a breather once we've finished with this pile."

He was averse to stopping when so little had been accomplished. Well, he was a hefty man, over six feet tall, so it was fine for him to talk. The old man resumed working, and the flails clattered once again. But suddenly there was a rumbling sound by Mykyta's cottage. His dog Sirko, perhaps as old as Mykyta himself, began barking and leapt over the fence into the street.

"Who the devil could that be?" Mykola wondered as he went to take a look.

Mykyta watched from the door of the shed, as his son spoke with someone in a wagon drawn by a pair of horses.

When Mykola returned, his father asked: "Well, who was it?"

"The devil only knows," Mykola replied. "Some snotty little lord who wanted to know how to get to Oak Grove."

"Oh, don't say things like that, my son," Mykyta said. "When we belonged to the lord, we didn't have to worry about anything. If you had a cow or a horse, you could graze it on the lord's pasture without the slightest worry. And not only horses! There were oxen then; we ploughed with oxen, and such fine oxen they were—with large,

twisted horns! You can't buy a pair like that now for even a hundred rubles . . . And if an ox perished, the lord had to buy you another one. If your house caved in, you could go into the lord's forest and take whatever you needed to fix it. If you had no grain, they'd give you some . . . And oh, what grain there was back then—it was pure gold—twenty-five *kip* [sixty sheaves] to a *desyatyna* [2.7 acres], and a *pood* [16.4 kilograms] sold for ten *kopiyky* [cents]. But now you have to buy everything, take care of everything yourself, worry, think, plan . . . pay the poll-tax . . . pay the fines for damage done by your cattle in the fields . . . serve in the army . . . And there's no one to take care of you, or help you—no one! You have to figure things out by yourself, as best you can."

"Well, that's true enough; there's no denying that," Mykola agreed gloomily. "But that's enough talk," he added angrily, swinging his flail again. The old man followed suit.

"Daddy, daddy, come and eat!" a thin young voice called out.

A small boy with dark hair and attractive hazel eyes ran up to the shed. Mykola put down his flail, straightened a couple of sheaves, and walked off with him. The old man trailed after them.

All three entered the house where a blond woman was cursing and swearing as she fished a pot out of the oven.

"May your soul leave your body—you've become hateful to me. Hush now! Because I'll let you have it . . . you'll see!"

Her cursing was directed at an infant lying in a cradle. It appeared to be very ill; its wizened face was yellow, as if made out of wax or spring snow, and its tiny, clouded eyes bulged from the strain of its incessant screaming. There was no one else in the cottage. The woman was Mykola's wife, Onylka; Zakharko, the infant in the cradle, and Andriyko, the little boy, were their children.

She was truly weary of bearing children—there had been ten in all. And, except for these two, Andriyko and Zakharko, all of them had died. Zakharko would also die any day now; in the meantime, however, he was driving her to distraction with his shrieking. If the eldest boy had lived, he would have been married by now, and then she would have had some help. But of what use was this infant?

"Well, what in the world can you say to it? May the devil take you!" Onylka shouted angrily. Leaving the pot where it was, she threw the oven rake on the floor and moved towards the infant.

"Shut up! Here's my titty. Come on—hang on to it!" she snapped, as she took the child out of the cradle and put it to her breast.

“What’s the meaning of this, Onylka? You called us in to eat, and now you’re wasting our time? Give us our food; I’m so hungry that my skin aches!” Mykola, seated at the table with old Mykyta and Andriyko, banged his spoon as he shouted at his wife.

The old man sat quietly, stroking his moustache; Andriyko, wolfing down a piece of bread, swept crumbs off the table and flung them into his mouth.

Responding to her husband’s shouting, Onylka dropped Zakharko and rushed to the oven. Taking out the borshch, she poured it into a large bowl, placed it on the table, and picked up her own spoon. Without saying a word, they all began to eat, slowly raising their spoons to their mouths and wiping them off with pieces of bread.

No one spoke. Only Mykola grumbled: “It should have been taken out sooner, so it could cool off a bit. But she just dumped it in the bowl . . . and now you can scald yourself.”

The sick infant continued wailing; but its crying was in vain. No one paid attention to it; it did not seem to disturb anyone.

They finished the borshch. Onylka went to get the *halushky* [dumplings], and Mykola said: “Well, father, what do you think?”

“Huh? About what?” the old man asked, sounding as if he had been jolted awake. He had been sitting silently up to now, half-heartedly eating the borshch and thinking. It may have been that recollections from his long life—memories from the olden days when the lords were masters—were filling his hoary head.

“See, you’ve forgotten! What about the garden? How much longer is that good-for-nothing Ivan—that lazybones, that tramp—going to reap its benefits? How much longer?” Mykola asked.

“Yes, yes indeed!” old Mykyta came to with a start. “I remember now . . . of course, the garden . . . We really should . . . but what if we don’t win the case?” he added with a note of terror in his voice.

“What a thing to say! Why wouldn’t we win?” Mykola said in amazement. “Praise God, you’re still alive, father, and so it’s up to you how you divide the garden between your sons—either equally or unequally. What’s the problem?”

“Well, you see, I’m saying this because I’ve already divided it once between you and Ivan, so how can I divide it a second time?” the father asked hesitantly.

“Well, so what if you’ve divided it already?” Onylka broke into the conversation. “You divided it once, but now you want to divide it another way. It’s all up to you, daddy dear.”

And then she rattled on: "Ivan is such a disobedient son, such a bad son. He swears at his own father and chases him away; he doesn't want to feed him; he doesn't want to dress him; and he doesn't want to look after him.

"But we feed you; we're happy to have you with us; we respect you. People are wondering: 'Why doesn't old Mykyta Buhay give his son Mykola anything? That son respects him; he's the one who clothes him; he's the one who feeds him; he's the one who'll look after him until he dies—and who knows how many more years he has left to live. But as for that Ivan—he's such a callous son.'"

Mykola listened with smug satisfaction to his wife's pointed remarks.

"But won't people say that I've wronged Ivan if I sign the whole garden over to you?" Mykyta suggested softly.

"What are you saying, father?" Onylka jabbered away again. "People are always saying—honest to God, I've heard them. They're all saying: 'Why doesn't old Buhay give Mykola the whole garden?' Everyone is saying this, absolutely everyone."

"You're lying!"

"I swear I'm not lying! May my arms wither, my lips rot, may I never see my child again, if I'm lying!" Onylka swore.

"If only it doesn't offend Ivan," the old man repeated, glancing fearfully about the house as if he were worried that someone was listening in a corner.

"Why would it offend him?" Mykola butted into the conversation. "Look here, I have two sons, but he has only girls—some big deal that is! And just stop and think how much he rakes in from the villagers and the lords! Because of that cripple of his, he gets as many cucumbers and potatoes as he wants wherever he goes; they give him everything. Do you think he doesn't have any money? You better believe he does! He only pretends that he's poor, so he won't have to look after his father, or bury him, or hold a memorial dinner for him, or pay for requiems on the ninth and fortieth days, or buy any whiskey; he wants to dump everything on my shoulders—that's what he's all about!"

"Yes, yes," the old man said a moment's silence. "You promised to build me a good coffin—you better remember that!—out of the boards that I myself bought from that Lithuanian. Remember that! And you can take over the whole garden for yourself, as long as people don't think badly of me."

“Why would they think badly of you? Everybody will praise you, everybody . . .” Onylka interjected. “Do you want some more hot *halushky*, daddy? I’ll refill the bowl,” she interrupted herself.

The old man did not eat any more.

“But there’s just one thing, father—you have to sign a document of some kind,” Mykola said.

“Oh, no!” the old man became alarmed. “You settle it between the two of you as best you can, but leave me out of it. I care equally for both my sons.”

“What?” Mykola shouted. “How can you stay out of it? What kind of nonsense is this?”

“Well, you see, my son, Ivan is also a dear son of mine; he’s good to me. Why, just the other day, Paraska Bozhkova told me that he always says: ‘I’d take really good care of my father if he lived with me, but he doesn’t want to live with me because I don’t have a woman in the house; but what does it matter that I don’t have a wife? I myself would cook him borshch, and wash his shirts, and . . .’”

It was true that the main reason that the old man did not live with Ivan was the fact that he could not stand the mess and disorder in Ivan’s house. He liked everything to be neat and tidy, and to see that there were horses, and cows, and plenty of grain; in short, to have things just so, exactly as they were at Mykola’s place.

“Aha! So that’s how it is!” Mykola muttered through his teeth.

Onylka struck her hands in dismay: “Do you mean to say you believed her? It’s all lies, nothing but lies! Don’t you know Paraska Bozhkova? She’s such a foxy one, such a gossip that . . . You’d do better to ask the boy over here what Ivan said about you. Go ahead, ask him!” She nodded her head at Andriyko who, all ears, was sitting nearby, listening avidly to the conversation.

“What did Uncle Ivan say about granddad yesterday?” she asked the boy. “Did he swear at him?”

“Yes, he did,” the young boy said, looking up obliquely with his appealing hazel eyes.

“You heard him, so . . . What exactly did he say?” his mother asked him again.

“Yes, I did hear him!” Andriyko replied. But, when he spoke, it was hard to tell if he really had heard something, or was lying: “Yesterday, I was walking and uh . . . yes, I was walking and I saw that Uncle Ivan was standing and talking with—what’s his name? With . . . O God! I can’t remember!”

"With Pavlo Rudyak?" Onylka ventured a guess.

"Yes, yes, with Pavlo Rudyak," Andriyko continued, "and he said . . . No, Pavlo asked him: 'Well, how are things going? How's your father—still living?' 'Of course, he is,' uncle replied, 'he's alive, but may he drop dead. He wants to take the garden away from me and give it to Mykola. But I'll show him,' he said. 'I'll choke him to death!' he said. 'May the worms gnaw at him,' he said."

"That's enough," the old man said, rising to his feet. "That's enough! He's a son-of-a-bitch if he says things like that about his own father! He won't get even a tiny patch of the garden! No, he certainly won't!"

"Let's go to the tavern, father, and we'll sign a document there," Mykola said, jumping to his feet.

"But . . . maybe it's all lies? Tell me right now, you son-of-a-bitch! Would a son dare to say such things about his own father?" the old man came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the room.

"Well, it's not as if the boy would lie to you! He heard it himself," Onylka retorted sharply.

"Let's go to the tavern," Mykola repeated stubbornly. "Let's go!"

"Go, go with God's blessing," Onylka said, sending the men on their way.

Both Mykola and Onylka knew very well that iron has to be forged while it is hot; the threshing could be set aside for a while if it meant that the entire garden would be signed over to them. Why, if tobacco were planted on the half that Ivan controlled, it would yield twenty *poods*, or maybe even more! And, as for the threshing, it would get done sooner or later.

But now, when they had the father all fired up, the deal had to be concluded, because he was like a child's toy windmill that could be turned first this way, then that. Indeed, he might still have been living peaceably with Ivan, if Mykola and Onylka were not as smart as they were. Ivan really tried ingratiating himself with the old man, but they had seen to it that he did not get his way!

"Onylka, close the shed," Mykola said, coming back to the house.

"Yes, yes, I know," she replied. "You go ahead. I'll close it."

"You know, Onylka," he spoke up again, "it would be better if you locked the shed, because when I go, some thief, may the devil take his soul . . ."

"Fine. I'll do it, I'll do it. Get going already. I'll lock the shed," his wife interrupted him.



Mykola left. He hated to see even so much as a single kernel of grain disappear, and he was always afraid of thieves. He was a first-rate farmer; he always managed to do things in such a way that he owned more and more, but it never seemed to be enough for him. He would go off somewhere and buy lime or salt very cheaply, and then turn around and sell it at a good profit; or he would trade in onions, also at a profit. He sowed his crops earlier than anyone else and ploughed so well that even when the grain on other fields was bad, his grain was good. It seemed that God Himself came to his assistance; when others wept because there was no rain, his crops grew just fine, as if they had enough moisture. And people said that he even knew special incantations to ward off mice, so that they never touched his grain. In a word—he was a wise farmer.

After the men left, Onylka stroked Andriyko's coarse dark hair and asked him: "Do you want to eat? Do you want some *halushky*?"

"No," the boy answered, trying to get away.

"Wait a moment," his mother said, and she went into the pantry. A moment later she came back with a slice of bread spread thickly with honey, gave it to the boy, and said: "Go ahead and eat it. Eat it, sweetheart, eat it up!"

The little boy began gulping it down without even chewing it. His mother smiled as she looked at his handsome features—his hazel eyes under fine, even eyebrows—and then she crawled up to the platform on the oven, got some dried pears and, slipping some into the bosom of his shirt, sent him out of the house to play.

Andriyko, tightly clutching the bread spread with honey, sped away to show off in front of the children playing in the street. Onylka was left alone; gathering up the bowls and spoons, she placed them on the bench and walked up to the cradle.

Little Zakharko, exhausted by his crying, had fallen asleep without anyone noticing, and now he was lying with his eyes tightly shut. There were long black smudges under his eyes, and his wizened face and tiny hands seemed even more yellow, so yellow that, as he lay there, he looked as if he were no longer alive. But no, he was still alive; he was sleeping and breathing deeply in his sleep.

"It's a good thing that he's finally fallen asleep," Onylka thought. "I'll just rinse through the dishes and run over and visit Yavdokha. I have to find out what was going on yesterday. Did Stepan Shkarupylo beat up his wife, or what? You see, they said he was a quiet, peaceful man, but just look at what happened. They say he

flogged his wife so terribly, that she was left barely alive. And how is it that I knew nothing, absolutely nothing about it? I didn't hear anything, or know anything. Oh, woe is me! I must finish my work as quickly as I can. Or . . . maybe I should run over now for a while, and wash up the dishes later? Yes, that's what I'll do."

Onylka sprang to her feet and ran over to see her neighbour.

"Well, how's the old man doing?" Yavdokha Kutsa asked Onylka as her opening gambit.

"He's forever bending this way and that, like a branch in the wind—you know what he's like, don't you? But that doesn't matter! As long as we nail him now, then he can do whatever he wants to do—it won't help. Or let him die—he's lived long enough! Mykola has just talked him into going to the tavern to sign a document to take the garden from Ivan . . ."

"Oh, so that's how it is," Yavdokha said, glancing sharply at her.

Onylka instantly began to defend herself: "Well, what good is that garden to Ivan? He hires people to plough it and do the harvesting—they don't have time to look after it themselves with all the travelling that they do, going to markets and collecting alms—so why does he need it? Yes, indeed, that's how it is. But we have a family, right?"

"So that's how it is," Yavdokha repeated, giving her neighbour that same stern look.

"Well, of course, my dear," Onylka babbled on, "we have two boys, and you need a lot of garden for them, and when they get married, they'll have large families. Ivan has only girls; but then, what am I saying, that he has girls? There's only one girl; as for the other one—she's a cripple. What does she need a garden patch for? She won't get married, and she won't have children, so who will she leave it to? It wouldn't do anybody any good."

Onylka now regretted that she had stupidly loosened her tongue; she had been so rattled by Yavdokha's severe look that she had spilled everything. Would Yavdokha now spread bad rumours about them—about her—and vilify them in front of others? It would have been better to say nothing, but the tongue is such a damned thing—it just goes on and on of its own accord!

Onylka was trying to figure out what she should say now to make it seem that she had not told Yavdokha anything at all, when Yavdokha said: "What's true, is true. Why the devil does such a lie—about like Ivan need a garden? Your Mykola, however, knows how to keep order on a farm."

Onylka rejoiced; she was reassured that Yavdokha was a true friend, and that it did not matter that she had told her everything.

Their conversation turned to other village gossip.

Onylka found out a lot of things from Yavdokha, and asked her many questions about the quarrel at the Shkarupylos—who had been fighting, and why, and with what. Apparently, when the debt collectors came to collect the poll-tax, the old woman Shkarupyla had hidden her own possessions—her skirts, jerkins, sheepskin coats—and, instead, had given them her husband's boots. Well, when her husband came home, he began yelling at her: "Why did you give them my boots?" In a fit of anger, he hurled an axe at his wife, but missed her. She took her young infant and went back to live with her father; and now she wanted to sue him.

And Yavdokha also told her that, on Sunday, someone had stolen old woman Peshenkova's cheese and butter from her pantry.

"How did she find out? How?" Onylka asked impatiently.

"Well, you see, old Mosykha was bragging to the women yesterday that it was thus and so; yesterday, you know, was a holy day—I don't know which one—but we were all sitting around, and she started boasting: 'I know who took the cheese and butter from Peshenkova's house.' 'Who?' we asked. 'I won't say,' she said. 'Come on, who was it?' Well, we pleaded with her and swore that we wouldn't tell anyone, so she finally admitted that her son Martyn was the thief. Mosykha was angry at her son because he had stolen from her—along with his father-in-law, in whose home he lives—two sacks of this year's rye, and that's why she told us."

"So, that's it!" Onylka shouted. "O Lord! Oh, why wasn't I there? I heard nothing, absolutely nothing about it!"

"Well, why didn't you join us yesterday?" Yavdokha asked.

"Because of that damned baby! It doesn't give me a chance to breathe, let alone do anything . . . Well, go on, my dear, go on. So, Mosykha admitted that it was her son Martyn—imagine that!"

"Yes, indeed, old Mosykha came right out and told us," Yavdokha continued, "and just then Peshenkova walked out of her house and joined us. We all sealed our lips tightly. She sat down and began nattering about her cheese and butter—how many weeks she'd been saving them. And she cursed the thief and wept, and her tears flowed, just as when the authorities were called in to conduct the search. And we just watched without saying a word, and Mosykha sat right along with us, and she didn't say anything either."

"Well, why didn't you tell her what Mosykha had just told you?" Onylka piped up.

"What a thing to say!" Yavdokha responded. "Heaven only knows what you're blabbing about! How could we have said anything? Would we want Martyn to harm us in some way, as well? Don't you know how mean he is? That's why, no matter how much Peshenkova pressed me, I said I didn't know anything, and that was that. Was I to tell on Martyn? Was I to tell her the whole truth? Besides, we still owe that Martyn some money."

"Well, it's different if you owe him money," Onylka agreed. "Nevertheless, I would have told Peshenkova; I wouldn't have been able to restrain myself. That's the kind of tongue I have," she added as an afterthought.

"You're stupid!" Yavdokha lost her temper. "Do I want him to set our house on fire? You know that Kudryashi were drenched once. And why? That's the way it is!"

"Well, I'll tell them that I know who stole Peshenkova's cheese and butter; I'll tell them, yes, I will," Onylka teased her.

"May you not live to see the evening!" Yavdokha cursed her.

Onylka began cursing as well. And so the two neighbours parted company, swearing at each other. As Onylka walked home, Yavdokha kept yelling that she would tell everyone at the community meeting that Mykola and his wife had got their old father tipsy and made him sign a document to take the garden from Ivan.

Onylka almost fainted from fear, and she felt like going back at once and begging Yavdokha's forgiveness. But then she had second thoughts. Was she to apologise first? No, not on your life! Besides, she was sure that Yavdokha would not say anything at the village meeting, because she would be too afraid of Mykola, and, by then, the garden would be theirs, and her father-in-law would not be able to do anything about it. Let Yavdokha yell all she wanted to! But she hoped that Mykola would not yank her around by the hair, when he found out that she had told Yavdokha everything, blabbed it all out . . . Well, she didn't really care if he did! It would not be the first time.

When Onylka walked into the cottage, she saw that Mykola and the old man had come home. Mykola was sleeping, and the old man was sitting with his head bent so low that it was almost touching the table. Little Zakharko had woken up and was crying once again in the cradle.

“Well, this old man is really useless. He could at least amuse the baby, but he’s just sitting there, pouting like an owl!” Onylka muttered to herself.

She took the infant from the cradle, fed it, and then shoved it at Mykyta, saying: “Go and sit on the *pryz’ba* [*earthen embankment abutting the house*] with the baby, father; maybe he’ll stop his shrieking . . . If only he’d just die! I’m so sick and tired of him!”

The old man obeyed her; he took the infant in his arms and walked out of the house, swaying from side to side. Seating himself on the *pryz’ba*, he began to comfort the child: “My little sweetheart, my little darling, my dearest little one, no one caresses you; everyone wrongs you.”

The baby looked at the old man and fell silent. It was hard to say if he felt any better, but he stopped crying and looked intently at his grandfather and his silvery hair.

The grandfather continued: “My poor little thing, you’re so ill, so scrawny, so small. We’re both unfortunate, Zakharko, because there’s no difference between being old and being little—it’s all the same; people mistreat you!”

Mykyta was so moved by pity for himself and for little Zakharko, that he cried a bit, and then, sitting there on the *pryz’ba*, fell asleep, still holding Zakharko. The child’s big head outweighed his tiny body like a large apple on a small branch, but he remained secure in his grandfather’s arms. The sunlight that warmed his cheeks, making them rosy, and he fell asleep.

How it was that Zakharko did not roll to the ground out of his tipsy grandfather’s arms—God only knows!

Ivan Buhay was sitting down to dinner with his daughters, Vekla and Odarka. But they were not dining as people usually dine—on borshch, gruel, *halushky*, or *varenyky* [*stuffed dumplings*]. No, when the weather was not cold, they did not light a fire in the oven, and no pots were taken out of it. Vekla, a capable twelve-year-old girl with tousled blond hair falling down to her eyes, would simply pull an assortment of foodstuffs out of a big bag and lay them out on the table for their dinner. There was a herring, wet and aromatic, and a slab of old yellow pork fat, and a bit of cheese, and crab-apples, and maybe a couple dozen plums, but, for the most part, there were chunks of bread of all kinds—big, small, long, short, stale, fresh, dry, soft, dark, and white.

While Vekla was emptying the bag, her father Ivan sat with a lowered head, as if he were thinking, but there was not even a glimmer of a thought in his glassy eyes. Next to him sat his other daughter, Odarka the cripple. She was already a young woman of almost twenty, but she looked like a small child, and from behind the table only her small pale face was visible. Her fingertips, which reached for the bread that Vekla was taking out of the bag, were small and childish, but her fingers were long, bony, and hard, as if made out of wood, like the tines of a rake.

When Odarka was fifteen, she had fallen from the attic while climbing after some baby doves, and from that time on her legs hurt; she became as thin and pale as a blade of grass—actually, she had been sickly even before then—and humps formed on her back and chest. She looked as if she had been crushed by a rock and, like a flower broken by a stone, stopped growing and maturing.

Immediately following the accident, Odarka lost the use of her feet and spent three long years on the sleeping platform atop the oven, just below the ceiling. She could not move or even stretch her legs in order to lie down or get up, and so she sat, for three terrible years, with her arms embracing her knees, and her hump pressed against the ceiling. It was a living death! How she longed to see God's world beyond the cottage, to jump about like Vekla, or go outdoors whenever she felt like it. She could not do anything, and she was often jealous as she watched Vekla spin or twirl about the room, sweeping the floor. Oh, God! She would give anything to be able to sweep the floor at least once, to give it a really good sweeping. And the damned Vekla would tease her; she would pass the broom to her and say: "Here, go ahead and sweep."

The only joy she had in life was when her father picked her up in his arms like a little child, took her outdoors, and sat her down by the house. Sitting there for hours on end, she would gaze at the sky and think: "Why is it so blue, so very blue?" And then she would look at the sun and think: "Why is it so golden and so shiny that you can't even look at it?" And she felt happy.

People walked by. She wanted to catch their attention and talk with them, but who needed her? She would call a little girl, have her sit down beside her, and look at her very intently, talking all the while.

"Where's your father? Where's your mother? What's your name? Do you have any brothers and sisters?" And the whole time she would stare at her as if she had never seen a little girl before.

At first the little girl would reply, and then, alarmed by Odarka's piercing look and bored with sitting in one spot, she would run away and not come back again very soon, unless Odarka lured her into returning with an apple or a biscuit. Odarka understood the little girl all too well; it was ever so much better to run freely, to walk freely, to leap, to dance—that was happiness itself!

Odarka began to hate the little girl who was fortunate, who could prance around, jump, and run away from her; she began to hate all the people who walked behind a plough; who walked with a scythe; who walked behind a wagon; who walked as they trimmed the tobacco plants or raked straw out on the fields; who walked to church; who danced at weddings and parties; who walked past her on the street; who walked and walked everywhere.

She cursed her miserable fate and looked up angrily at the sun and the blue sky, as if they had wronged her; and it seemed to her that she was the most unfortunate person in the whole world, and that there never had been a day when she had been healthy and had trimmed the tobacco plants along with the other girls on the lord's fields; she felt as if there had never been a time when she had wandered about until dawn. No, that had never been! Where were her friends?

"They're hopping around over there, may they all drop dead," Odarka cursed angrily and threw a dead branch at the spotted hen strutting busily near her.

At times her father harnessed himself as a horse—they did not have a horse—and pulled her along in a wooden wagon to the manor yards and to the market in town. She felt happy then; she saw a lot of different people and heard human voices. She found even the simplest snippets of conversations interesting.

"How are you, in-law? Have you bought or sold anything?"

"Hey, wife! Look over there! The cow has come untied."

"Well, how about eating some lunch? I feel like having a bite."

"Gypsies, hey there, gypsies! How much for your mare?"

"What do you want for the onions, uncle?"

"Oh, that's expensive, the devil take it!"

"Hey, there! Leave me alone! My these watermelons are sweet!"

"Oh, damn it all to hell! I've forgotten to buy some wagon-grease."

Well, is there anything wise or wonderful in any of that? And yet Odarka listened to it all attentively, gathering up the words as if they were money and repeating them softly, simply because she had not

seen or heard people for such a long time. She was even happier when the wandering lyre players or beggars sang, or when the musicians played. O God! It was so wonderful then. At those times she often had a chance to enjoy the sweets that people gave her, sweets that she quickly crunched up with her tiny, mouse-like teeth. At those times she felt calmer and forgot that other people could walk, but she could not.

Finally, the time came when Odarka's humps were formed, and her legs stopped hurting as much as they had at first. Now she could get up by herself, crawl down from the oven, and even take a few steps. Perhaps the pain had settled in her hump, or perhaps she had been helped by the salve that the doctor from the city had given her—who could tell?—but at long last, Odarka began walking a little. What a joy that was! And Odarka, who had thought that she was no longer capable of laughing, learned how to laugh again, to laugh heartily, to roar with laughter.

Odarka could now sit at the table and watch Vekla. One time, she seized a crust of bread but did not eat it; she just grabbed it, held it for a moment, and then placed it beside herself; then she took another piece and put it down as well; and then she took a third piece . . .

In the meantime, Vekla pulled out a sizeable pastry made out of plums that a neighbouring lady had given her. Odarka, who had a sweet tooth, stretched her hand out for it.

"Oh, no you don't," Vekla said, and did not let go of the pie.

"Give it to me, give it!" Odarka shouted. "Daddy! Make her give me the pastry!"

Ivan, who was cutting up a herring with a blunt fragment of a scythe, glanced at his daughters with his glassy eyes and said: "Yes, indeed, give it to her . . . that is . . . I mean . . . you should divide it . . . Vekla, give it to her."

Vekla sat down on the bench, swung her bare feet, and dangled the pastry in front of Odarka's face; Odarka scrambled to take it away from her, but every time that she stretched out her hand, Vekla swiftly leapt up from the bench, ran farther away, and took a bite.

"Vekla, give it to her," her father repeated.

"Shut up," Vekla shouted at him.

And, the strange thing was that her father instantly fell silent.

Tears filled Odarka's eyes. "The people give me—a cripple—all those things," she wailed, "but she won't let me have them. Daddy, tell her to give me the pastry."



But Vekla kept on eating the pastry; finally, she took one last bite and then, tossing on the table the little bit that was left, said: “That damned woman—she sure gave us a small pastry.”

Odarka took what was left of the pastry and nibbled at it. When she finished it, she started in on the herring, the bread, and the pork fat that her father and Vekla were eating.

After the meal was over, Odarka crawled outdoors, sat down on the *pryz’ba*, and began munching sunflower seeds that she had tucked away in the bosom of her shirt.

Vekla, meanwhile, got all dressed up, putting on a white skirt, stockings trimmed with gold, and worn-out shoes—all hand-me-downs from a young lady. All that she left on of her own clothing were her jerkin and her shirt, both of which were old, made out of coarse fabric, and covered in patches. When she finished dressing she walked outdoors, and, seeing her sister eating sunflower seeds, ran up to her and slapped her face.

“Don’t you dare! Don’t you dare eat my sunflower seeds!” And she whacked the seeds out of Odarka’s hands.

It was true that Vekla had planted the sunflower seeds, weeded the plants, knocked out the seeds, and roasted them.

Odarka formed a fist with her small hand and rose from the *pryz’ba*, ready to attack her sister. Vekla, however, had already run away, disappearing like a flash of lightning.

Just as Vekla was going past Mykola’s house, little Andriyko stepped outdoors and started to taunt her, as he always did

She turned away from him, twisting first one way, and then the other, saying: “Leave me alone, or I’ll rip your eyes out!”

Suddenly Andriyko stopped dead in his tracks and stared at Vekla’s gold-trimmed shoes and stockings. He had never seen anything like them, and he started laughing as if he were demented: “Oh, oh, oh, you could die laughing, honest to God, you could! Our Vekla is a lady; yes indeed, she’s a ‘gardenless’ lady!” He pranced around her. “Because we’re going to have a garden, and you won’t, no you won’t! You’re a ‘gardenless’ lady!”

Heaven only knows how he had come up with the word “gardenless.”

Vekla gaped at him, her mouth hanging wide open. “What? What lies are you telling about the garden?”

“Oh, but didn’t you know? Some lady you are!” Andriyko gloated. “My father and grandfather went to see the Jew to sign a document

about your garden, I swear to God! We're going to take away your garden, I swear to God! That's how it is! Aha! Aha! How about that? You won't have a garden, no, you won't! Phooey on you!"

"I'm going to tell grandfather that you're bothering me, that you're always lying," Vekla said, almost in tears, when she saw her grandfather approaching.

"Go ahead, lady," Andriyko said calmly. He knew very well that the grandfather had no will of his own and was merely existing "until he died." He had often heard his father say: "If only God would help us take the garden away from Ivan before grandfather dies. And then let the old man die—he's really long in the tooth, and he's living way beyond his years."

Andriyko also knew very well that it was his parents who fed his grandfather and clothed him, and that it was they who would build him a coffin when he died, and pay for the funeral dinner, and that, because of all this, the grandfather was supposed to take away the patch of garden from Ivan and give it to them. He knew all this very well, and that was why he was not afraid when Vekla ran to her grandfather. When the old man stamped his foot and yelled at him, Andriyko just stuck out his tongue and raced down the street.

Her grandfather assured Vekla: "Andriyko always tells lies, my little sweetheart."

Vekla, however, did not believe him. "Could grandfather be lying?" she thought. And she ran to tell her father about the garden.

Vekla's father Ivan was a strange man. He rarely spoke, just stared at the world with glazed eyes. And he was lazy, so lazy that it was terrible. He found everything hard to do. His cottage was tumbling down but, instead of supporting it with stakes and fixing it with willow branches from his own swamp, he just looked at it and complained. At one time, he had begged some logs to fix his cottage, but after he got them, they just lay rotting on the ground.

It seemed that he never actually got around to doing anything; he just walked around his house and yard, rushed about here and there, and then either sat or lay down again, his eyes opened wide. He hired people to plough his fields, harvest the grain, and store the sheaves in his ancient shed, and he was even too lazy to thresh it. Every so often, he would thresh a pile of sixty sheaves in two or three days and take the grain to the mill. When they used up that flour—Vekla occasionally baked a couple of loaves of glutinous bread—he would thresh a little more, but most of the sheaves simply rotted and went

to waste. And so he would go begging with Odarka, collect more than enough chunks of bread, feed himself and his daughters, and then go begging once again.

He truly was a lazy man! You never saw him at the village meetings, or at communal work; he lived as if he were not residing in a village, among people, but all alone, somewhere off by himself. Well, to tell the truth, Ivan's lot in life was not an enviable one. Fate had taken away his wife—she had been a good worker who had worked for the two of them—and had saddled him with a cripple.

At first, having a crippled child had been very, very painful for him, and his heart had ached whenever he looked at Odarka. Now, however, he would not have wanted her to be healthy, because then he would have to work hard. As things stood, everyone gave something in the way of alms to a cripple, and thus he and his daughters survived in one way or another.

Vekla was stunned by the news that Mykola was going to take the garden away from them. She always planted flowers in the garden—lovely, full-blossomed yellow carnations, red poppies, and lovage. Other flowers also grew in it every spring, but she did not know their names; she neither sowed nor planted them; they just grew all by themselves and—O God!—how fragrant they were. The blossoms were tiny, blue, dark, and truly ugly, but Vekla adored them and delighted in them . . . And in the corner of the garden there were lilac bushes, and they were ever so wonderful! And where would she sow her sunflower seeds?

For the longest time, Ivan could not grasp what Vekla was talking about when she asked him: “Are they going to take the lilac bushes as well, daddy? Let's move the lilac bushes. And those little blue flowers—surely they won't belong to them, will they?” She tugged still more sharply at the sleeve of her father's grimy shirt. “Daddy, daddy, do you hear what I'm saying? Well, as for the onions, potatoes, cucumbers—they don't matter; we can always beg for those. But what about the little blue flowers, and the ones I planted? I won't let them have them, I won't!”

When Ivan, with great effort, finally understood what his daughter was rattling on about, he turned deathly pale. He grew terribly concerned about hanging on to what belonged to him, but he could not understand who could take away what was his. His brother Mykola? Hardly, because their father's land had already been divided

between them. His father? What did he need it for? And so, in response to what Vekla told him, he simply said: "It just can't be!"

"Listen," Vekla said, getting an idea. "Go at once and tell grandfather that the garden is ours; it's been ours for a long time, and we won't give it up. Oh, my poor flowers," she moaned softly.

Ivan did as Vekla had suggested. The old man Mykyta was sitting on the *pryz'ba*. His silvery hair gleamed like snow shining in the sun. He was taking care of Zakharko, rocking him on his knees.

"Father," Ivan said, looking intently at him. "How can this be?"

The grandfather became alarmed. He stopped rocking the child, stood up, and said rapidly: "What? What are you saying, my son?"

"It just can't be. You've already divided your land between us, and now you're doing it again . . . It just can't be!"

The old man, instantly realising what Ivan was talking about, pretended that he had not understood and said: "Yes, yes. You're right, it just can't be, I, uh . . ." Gradually backing away from his son, he took refuge in Mykola's cottage.

Ivan went home happy; in response to Vekla's questions, he said that the garden would remain theirs, and that "it just never could be that someone would take it from them."

Little Zakharko died. It was most fortunate that the funeral dinner was held on the very same day that the administrator came to the village with the secretary, for Mykola had some whiskey on hand. He invited the men—with whom he had a long-standing friendship—to his home for the memorial dinner, gave them some whiskey, and entertained them. And then the three of them convinced old Mykyta to sign a "paper" that he was giving, in perpetuity, Ivan's half of the garden to his beloved son Mykola. Well, in fact, the old man did not sign the "paper"; they just marked his cross on it for him.

But what need was there of this new "paper," if the "little old white man"—as Vekla called him—had already signed a document at the Jew's place?

Come now! Are you saying you don't know why? Well, because Mykyta had destroyed that first document; he had stolen it from the little chest that Mykola kept hidden behind the icons and torn it into little bits and pieces. Yes indeed, he had stolen it and destroyed it. He had signed that document, but, after Ivan blamed him for wronging him—as Ivan had said in his own words: "It just can't be!"—the old man had understood that truly "it just can't be." It was

not right; it would be an offence against Ivan. And so Mykyta became stubborn again.

In the meantime, Yavdokha Kutsa, like a crow on the wing, had spread the news far and wide that Mykola and his wife had forced the old man to sign a document. Of course, she talked about it only among the women—she had not dared to raise the matter at the village meeting—but she made it clear that Mykyta would never have harmed Ivan in any way, because he was “such a nice man.”

And so the grandfather began to make excuses, saying that he had been drunk and did not remember anything; that the vile Jew had deceived him into making his mark on the document; that he had never intended to do anything like that. He just wanted everything to be as it had been. Let Ivan rule over his garden, and, as for Mykola, he had his garden, and it would remain his.

Well, Mykola was so distraught by his father’s stance, that God forbid! If he had been able to, he would have buried him alive!

He came right out and told his father—almost spitting in his eye—that he could go to the devil; that he had no need of him; that he had a document concerning the matter; and that, no matter what his father did, the garden would still be his!

The old man immediately fell silent and began to live very meekly and quietly, like a mouse in a pantry; he just kept on working and working—threshing, winnowing, or ploughing—and he always went about his work without wearing a cap, letting his silver hair fly in the wind as he bustled about the yard.

One morning, when Mykola was getting ready to plough Ivan’s garden, he noticed that the document was no longer behind the icons. He boiled over with anger and attacked the old man.

Mykyta just kept replying: “I don’t know anything about it; I know nothing about it at all.”

Mykola was sorry that he had not ploughed Ivan’s land earlier, but he had thought things through in his own mind: “I’ll finish my ploughing for the rye crop, and then I’ll finish my threshing, and, after that, there’ll still be plenty of time to plough the garden.”

Well, things had not turned out that way, and there was nothing Mykola could do about it. He had to wait and live in harmony with his father until the time came when he could trick him once again into signing another “paper.” But the “little old white man,” like a sparrow sitting on the chaff, did not let himself be caught; he did not even go to the tavern with his son now, no matter how insistent

the latter was that he join him, and no matter how much he liked his whiskey. At the funeral dinner, however, everyone was drinking, and so he slipped up and had a few shots as well. As a result, his old head became fuddled, and his cross was put on the "paper." Later, when he thought better of it and wanted to say something, Mykola took him by the elbow and led him off to sit in a corner.

There were a lot of people in the house. The air was heavy and reeked of tobacco, wagon-grease, smoke fumes, whiskey, sheepskin coats, food, and sweat. And there was such a racket, that God forbid!

The head of the "little old white man" began to swim, and a single thought kept running through it: "What we did wasn't right." And he wanted to rise to his feet and yell at the top of his lungs: "It wasn't right!" But he had no strength left and so remained seated where he was, almost in a trance. And, mesmerised by the shiny nail on which the *rushnyk* [embroidered linen ceremonial cloth] was hanging, he dreamt that he was shouting and stamping his feet, and that Mykola was on his knees before him, pleading, and that the terrified guests were fleeing from the house.

There was such a din in the house that it was difficult to understand who was saying what to whom.

"What is iron made out of?" a short man with a reddish goat-like beard was asking.

No one heard him or listened to him. He repeated his question, almost shouting this time: "What is iron made out of?"

And then, grabbing the shirt collar of the man sitting next to him, he yelled right into his ear: "What is iron made out of?"

"It's made in a factory, didn't you know that?" the man barked so loudly that the short man drew back.

"Listen fellows," a dark man, scrawny like a tree in the winter, picked up on the question, because he also wanted to know what iron was made out of. "Really, what is iron made out of?"

But no one knew the answer. One man said: "Iron is made out of iron." Another said: "Iron is made out of coal." And a third said: "Iron is made out of clay." But no one could say for sure what iron was made out of.

The women had their own matters to discuss—illnesses and spells cast by an evil eye. And that sometimes, all a person had to do was look at you to cast a spell, and you would instantly "fall ill with the ague," and shake and shudder ever so badly. Onylka, lamenting that someone had cast a spell on her poor little Zakharko, began to cry.

Even though she had cursed Zakharko when he was alive—cursed him abominably—now that he was dead, she grieved over him: “Oh, my darling, my dearest little one, my tiny angel, why are you leaving me, your own dear mother? Why are you abandoning me? Oh, my God, my God! Whom will I now nurse with my breast? Whom will I cuddle to my bosom, now that you, my little innocent one, my tiny sparrow, my dearest, sweetest little one, have left me orphaned? I used to have two sons, like two eagles, but now I have only one. Oh, my child! Oh my fate! Who will grow up and work for me now? Oh, my God, my God!”

It was Yavdokha who comforted Onylka. You see, they were friends again, because Onylka had managed to get even with Yavdokha for spreading the story about the grandfather by telling others that Yavdokha knew who had stolen the cheese and the butter. As a result, Yavdokha had to plead with Onylka to keep quiet about Martyn, and so they had made up, and Yavdokha had stopped talking about the grandfather and Ivan.

So now, it was Yavdokha who consoled Onylka saying: “What would happen if children did not die? What if all your ten children were still alive? What a disaster that would be! There would be nowhere for people to live—it would become so crowded that they would gobble each other up.”

Well, it truly was a comical sight when Mykola took the garden away from his brother Ivan! He came out to do the ploughing with his son Andriyko. Vekla was fussing endlessly, like a cat toying with some fat, over her little blue nameless flowers that had such a wonderful fragrance in the spring. Now, in autumn, they were just little lumps of round leaves. Vekla spent a long time searching for them in the grass under the birch trees at the end of the garden, and then she carried them, one at a time, with clumps of damp earth, to her yard, where she transplanted them.

Andriyko was watching Vekla—he could not understand what would come of all her fussing. He stood gaping at her until his father shouted sternly: “Why are you standing there, you stupid fool?”

Mykola was even more annoyed with himself, because he had been gaping a bit as well; he had been thinking that before long he would have so much money in the chest buried under the floor that he might be able to buy a piece of land to go with this garden. Oh, wouldn’t that be wonderful! On this piece of land, he would sow tobacco, sell

it, add it to the money he already had, and then there would be enough to buy a field that he had coveted for so long, and which was now being sold.

"My goodness, won't it be just wonderful!" he thought.

While he was thinking, the horses veered from the furrow and went off on a tangent. When he saw what happened, he became angry with himself for daydreaming and took out his frustration on his son by yelling at him for not guiding the horses.

Andriyko now turned his full attention to the horses: "Hey, hey, there! Where are you going? Come o-o-o-o-n!" He began whipping them and walked firmly over the damp furrows of "his" garden, without paying the slightest attention to Vekla and her flowers.

While the garden was being ploughed, Vekla's father remained in the house, staring blankly and whispering: "It just can't be!"

It was strange. He still could not believe that it was no longer his garden. He could see that his brother Mykola was ploughing it, but he could not believe what people had been saying to him all along, that the garden belonged to Mykola now. He could not believe it, and he kept on thinking: "It just can't be!"

If Ivan had been brighter, he may have been able to rectify the situation; he might have gone to court, or done something else. But Ivan was afraid of Mykola, and did not know where to begin, where to go, or what to do. He just sat and thought: "It just can't be."

Mykola was very happy. He ploughed the garden, and a smile replaced the normally stern expression on his face. He felt happy, not only for himself, but also for the land—it would finally be ploughed properly, because up to now it had lain abandoned, like a wasteland of some kind! It made you ill to look at it.

"This is really good land! Look how black and rich it is; it sticks to the plough like butter to a knife."

Mykola's wife was even happier that he was. She simply could not remain indoors and kept running out of the house for no reason at all. She would watch her husband ploughing, admire her handsome Andriyko with his hazel eyes, and then, recalling that the borshch had probably run over in the oven, would flap her arms and dash inside—only to rush outside again a moment later.

Like Ivan, old Mykyta also stayed indoors; he did not want to see Ivan; he was ashamed, and afraid of him. And, to the very day that he died, he fled and hid from him, until even little Andriyko noticed and teased him, shouting; "Granddad, look! Uncle Ivan is coming."



Mykyta would instantly run either into the house or a shed, and stay there until he thought Ivan had gone by, or until he realised that Andriyko was just fooling him. Once he even hid himself in the pigpen when he saw Ivan approaching in the distance.

There was nothing that Mykyta could do now for Ivan, even if he had wanted to. Mykola had in his possession a genuine “paper for the garden” with all the requisite seals on it, and it was a document that he kept well hidden. But the unfortunate little old man with the silver hair did not have to hide from Ivan for a very long time. He was buried a couple of years later.

Mykola had sent his father to mow the reeds in the swamp in late autumn when the weather was really bad. A lot of snow had blown in, and there was a lot of water above the ice—it was piercingly cold, like sharp iron, and reached up to the old man’s knees. Mykyta became very ill, and, after that, did not come down from the sleeping platform atop the oven; his legs swelled, and before long, he died.

Mykola did as he had promised. He built a coffin out of the boards that Mykyta had asked him to use, and buried him with all the proper ceremony; there was not much whiskey, however, because Mykola did not like to pay for liquor without any expectation of gain.

Odarka was the least concerned about losing the garden; she could beg enough food for herself, her father, and Vekla; moreover, her thoughts were elsewhere. During the three years she had spent sitting under the ceiling, she had become used to thinking, and now her thoughts did not give her any peace; they tormented her, swarming at her like flies in the summer, and biting her like mosquitoes.

“Why should she live? Why did people live? And how much longer would all this last? What happened to people after they died? Did a girl have to get married? But what about her? Would there be anyone who would want to marry her? Why were people rich and poor, good and bad?” And many, many thoughts like these buzzed around in Odarka’s head.

Oh, it was all sheer nonsense! If she had to work during the harvest as hard as other people worked, she would not think about anything!

Silently, in the safety behind their fences, people censured Mykola for what he had done, but no one dared to say anything out loud, because Mykola was not only a severe man, but a rich one, and he had everyone—the authorities, the secretary, and the village chief—in his pocket.

## *Khivrya the Babbler*

(1898)

Oh, who was it that loved the truth? It was little Khivrya who loved the truth. One time, her mother sold a sack of flour on the sly from her father because she needed soap to wash clothes and lime to whitewash the cottage before a feast day. The father did not like to give her money for such “trifles,” but the mother had to find the money somewhere, because he expected the family’s shirts to be clean and the house to look neat and tidy. And so the mother did what she had to do, but she forgot to tell Khivrya not to say anything about it. When the father came home somewhat tipsy—he was not actually drunk—the empty sack was lying by the door, and he stumbled on it.

“What the devil is this?” he yelled.

The mother wanted to lie her way out of it one way or another, as she always did, but Khivrya spoke up first: “It’s the sack from the flour that we sold to pay for the soap and the lime, yes indeed, for the lime . . .”

“What flour? Damn it! How dare you sell it, you scurvy woman?” the father attacked the mother and began to reproach her, saying that he was the one who produced the grain, working by the sweat of his brow, while she spent it foolishly—yes, she spent all of it foolishly, may she not live to see her children grow up! He shouted for a long time and then beat her with a whip. When Khivrya ran to her defence, she also got a few lashes.

After the father had calmed down and gone to sleep, Khivrya’s mother gave her a good drubbing as well: “And just why, you damned child, did you make him do what he did, by telling him about that flour?”

Khivrya understood why her father had beat her; he was drunk and was beating her mother, and she had tried to stop him. But why had her mother beaten her? She could not fathom that. So that she would not tell him that they had sold the flour to the Jew? And why, when her father had stumbled, had he asked: “What the devil is

this?” Well, she had told him what it was. It would have been different if he had not asked, but he had asked, and so she had told him what had happened. Was she to tell a lie? Why should she lie, and how was she to do it? Her mother lied. She had told her that she should have said it was a coal sack. But the sack was white!

“Your father was drunk,” her mother countered, “and so he wouldn’t have noticed that it was white.”

“But,” Khivrya thought, “I could see that the sack was white, and I knew that it was a flour sack. So, why should I lie? Should I lie so that they won’t beat me? But father would have beat me anyway, because he was drunk . . . And mother said that even if he weren’t drunk, he would have beat her for the flour, so why did she sell it? Well, because she needed some money, and father wouldn’t give her any—that’s why she had to lie.”

Khivrya could not understand why she should have lied, even though her mother tried to beat it into her small, foolish head. Why didn’t she understand? Because she couldn’t, she just couldn’t; she only knew that if her father had not asked: “What the devil is this?” she may not have said anything, but it never would have occurred to her to say that it was a coal sack—how could it be a coal sack if it was white? If only her mother would tell her ahead of time when she should lie, and how she should lie—because, on her own, she simply couldn’t get the hang of it.

Khivrya was not very bright—she did not put her words together properly, always forgot what came next in a song, and, before she spoke, had to stop to think—her finger stuck in her nose, her mouth slack and gaping, and her eyes opened wide—until she finally thought of what she should say.

There were times, however, even when no one asked her anything, that she would interrupt a conversation, become involved in it, have her say, and then fall silent once again, or sit and stare as if she had her own private vision, something new and pleasant that no one else could see, something way up high, or somewhere else . . .

But her mother often lied. For example, when beggars came to the door and asked for food, her mother always said: “I swear to God, my dear old man, there’s absolutely nothing in the house to eat; I didn’t even light the stove today. Go with God.” But what she said was not true, because there was food in the house!

And if a neighbour woman ran over to ask for some beet seeds or cabbage seedlings, she would say that she did not have any and even

swear to it: “May my eyes fall out if I’m lying!” But it was not true—she had both the seeds and the seedlings!

She would lie to her husband that she had weeded the millet, even though she had not even considered doing it. Or she would say: “How would I know who poked the cow’s eye out?” But that also was not the truth, because she knew very well that she herself had accidentally jabbed it with a willow branch.

Khivrya knew that there were many, many times that her mother told lies. She lied as many as ten times a day, or maybe even a hundred. (Khivrya could only count to ten, and, after ten, skipped to one hundred.)

Khivrya observed what was happening around her; she observed how her mother lied, how other grownups lied, and she began to think that all adults, without exception, lied. What did this mean? Why did they do it?

It was her older sister Yavdokha who told the most lies. Oh, that sister of hers really knew how to lie—wonderfully, vigorously, imaginatively, animatedly, at length, and in every situation! If she spoke about her ribbons—she wore so many that it looked as if she had a shopful on her head—she would say that she bought every one of them in the city at twenty *kopiyky* [cents] an *arshyn* [a yard and a quarter]. But, it was not like that at all, because she bought them at the store of the local Jew for five *kopiyky*.

When Yavdokha talked about the *pasky* [braided circular Easter breads] she baked for Easter, she would throw up her hands, press them to her head, her forehead, and her mouth, and then sigh, call upon God as her witness, crouch down, and flap her mouth: “O Lo-o-ord, how wonderful, O Lo-o-ord, how good, how beautiful our *pasky* turned out this year!” But it was not at all true, because they had turned out doughy and heavy.

And when Yavdokha talked about any of the girls, especially about one that she did not like—Motrya, for example—she would say: “Oh, my God, O Lo-o-ord,”—she always drawled out the word Lo-o-o-rd like a cantor in church—“she’s so ugly! She’s ugly, and pockmarked, and lame, and swarthy, and covered with freckles!” But that was not true at all, because people could see for themselves that Motrya was neither lame, nor swarthy, and did not have freckles—so how in the world did Yavdokha see them?

And it was always like that. No matter what Yavdokha started talking about, even if there was absolutely no need for her to lie,

she would still stretch the truth, either by embellishing a story or omitting something from it.

There was the time that she went on and on about Pylyp and Tetyana Burbel, telling everyone that their little child had died, and that they were weeping and grieving ever so terribly.

“They had only this one little baby,” she said, “and it was still so tiny, and they’re both old and won’t have any more children—just listen—I swear to God they won’t have any more. Well, they finally had this one child, their one and only joy, and it died on them. Oh, my God, O righteous God! Yes, it was their one and only child—like a little berry—and it died . . .”

But it wasn’t like that at all. Pylyp had three children, and he certainly wasn’t old—everyone knew that, and Yavdokha knew it as well, but still, she lied. Why did she lie? Who knows? Couldn’t she stop herself? Did she enjoy it? Or was her tongue like a goat that leaps over a fence and lands where it never should have gone?

Oh, Khivrya got a beating more than once for drawing attention to her sister’s lies; nevertheless, whenever she heard her sister begin to talk very rapidly and call on God to be her witness, and then saw her crouch down low and throw her hands up, she would interrupt her at once and ask: “Yavdokha, why are you lying?”

But, O Lord, was it only Yavdokha who lied? All the people around her told lies, honest to God, all of them—and Khivrya knew this very well.

Her father, who did not like lies, told her: “Don’t lie, daughter! Lies may take you far in this world, but you can never return home again.” On occasion, however, even he had to resort to lying.

There was the time, the day after a feast day celebration, that he needed a shot of whiskey to cure his hangover, but did not have the money for it. Khivrya’s mother, however, did have a small stash of money, because she worked as a day labourer. And so her father, after conferring with like-minded men out in the village common about the need to have a snort, called out to Khivrya, who was playing nearby with some children.

“What?” Khivrya barked sharply in response.

“Khivrya,” her father said, and then he hesitated and began again: “Khivrya . . .”

“What is it?” she asked. And because her father was standing silently and thoughtfully before her, she stuck her finger in her nose and fell silent as well.

“Khivrya, it’s like this . . . Will you do something for me? Go and tell your mother that . . . your uncle—her brother—asked her to lend him some money. It doesn’t matter how much . . . just a little bit of money . . . that he needs to pay a man for the garden, for ploughing his garden . . . That’s right, for his garden . . . It’s like I said . . . And uncle doesn’t have any money. That’s right, he doesn’t have any . . . And so you tell her that uncle . . . that it’s uncle who is asking for the money . . .”

Khivrya did not have the foggiest notion what her father was going on about, talking about a garden and her uncle. All she understood was that she had to ask her mother to give her father some money.

“But, my child, be careful. Do not say that this money . . . is for whiskey,” the father added softly, “even though it actually is for whiskey, but see that you don’t, uh . . . don’t say that . . . Just say that it’s uncle—you hear?—that it’s uncle who is asking for money. Do you understand?”

“Of course,” Khivrya replied, staring at her father with her bright eyes opened wide, because now she understood that it was uncle who was asking for money for the garden, and that no money was needed for whiskey, or no, that it was needed, but not needed . . .

“You’re a dear; you’re my big, big girl!” her father said, stroking her face and her little blond head. “Well, run along and do as I said, but be quick about it, or I’ll let you have it, you scurvy little girl! Run along now!”

Khivrya ran away and—what do you suppose happened? At first she repeated everything just as her father had told her to do—that uncle was asking for some money, and that he needed it very, very badly. But when her mother began to ask her very sweetly what he needed the money for, Khivrya became confused and came right out and said: “He needs it for some whiskey.” And then she corrected herself: “Or, I mean, not for whiskey; father said that uncle was asking, that uncle . . . You have to give him the money, mother . . . Uncle . . . Father . . . . The garden . . .”

Khivrya turned red, became confused, and did not know what to say next. Her mother, realising what was going on, ran off to berate her husband. Afterwards, Khivrya’s father, furious that he had not succeeded in getting rid of his hangover, gave her a good beating.

Oh, that foolish Khivrya! What would it have cost her to keep quiet about the whiskey? And now look what had happened to her, what a misfortune had befallen her! But Khivrya did not know how to

lie; there were those who tried to teach her, and she tried to learn, but she still did not know how to do it. If she was not asked about something outright, she could, at times, withhold the information. But if someone asked her a question directly, she would lay out the whole truth. It was as if something tugged at her tongue, and she, forgetting that she was supposed to lie, would tell it just as it was. Well, it could be said that she was still little, that she would grow up and learn to lie, just as she had learned to eat sunflower seeds, but for now, she did not know how to do it.

Khivrya did not know how to lie, and she did not know how to steal. When her girlfriends brought rags to trade with the ragman, each one made off with either a little ring or a cross in addition to what the ragman gave them. They all thought that he gave them too little for their wares, and it was very easy to snatch something from his cart when he was distracted by all the children milling around it. You just grabbed what you wanted, and a moment later the ring, or whatever you happened to take, was in your pocket. Khivrya, however, never dared to steal anything from the ragman, because she was convinced that as soon as she took something, she would become stuck either to it or to the spot where she was standing—that she would undoubtedly become rigid with fright.

The other girls always had a good laugh at her expense: “Well then, why don’t we all become rigid? Why is it that nothing like that happens to us, when we steal something?”

“I don’t know,” Khivrya said. “Nothing happens to you, but I would turn rigid; I just know I would!”

It was probably her late paternal grandmother who taught her that; it was said that the old woman was timid and not very bright. But she had died a long time ago, before Khivrya had even turned five, so how could she possibly have taught her? Perhaps Khivrya took after her grandmother? Yes, that must have been it.

One time, Khivrya’s friends, Lysaveta and Motrya, tried to get her to do something wrong: “Come on, let’s go steal some flowers from the lord’s garden.”

For the longest time, Khivrya refused to go with them, but when they started to laugh at her, taunting her that she was stupid, and that’s why she was afraid, she became angry and said she would go. Perhaps she would not have gone, because she truly was afraid that she would become rigid, but there were no flowers at all growing in their garden at home. They had just sown the asters, clove pinks,

and carnations; and the crocuses, the poppies, and the flowers that they called “don’t touch me because I’ll wilt,” had not yet come up, so nothing at all was blooming in their garden. Khivrya truly loved flowers—who doesn’t love them?—and the girls claimed that the flowers in the lord’s garden were more wonderful than words could describe, and so she went with them.

The three girls waded through the swamp and then crept along stealthily until, quite suddenly, they came upon the flowers. There were so many of them—red, yellow, and white—just standing there on their spindly little legs, and they were ever so beautiful!

“Oh, dear mother of mine,” Motrya struck her hands in amazed delight. Khivrya sighed, but Lysaveta swore, bounded towards them, and a moment later three flowers—a red one, a yellow one, and a white one—were clutched in her hand.

But, which were the fairer flowers—those in the grass, or those picking them?

Lysaveta was a brilliant scarlet; everything that she wore—her jerkin, skirt, apron, and kerchief—was red, and her cheeks and lips were even redder; only her curved eyebrows and her healthy eyes, quick and gleaming, were black. Motrya had a yellow kerchief tied under her chin. Her face was elongated and dotted with tiny freckles, and she was so slender that she appeared to be standing on one leg. Khivrya, who was not wearing either a jerkin or a kerchief, was startling in her whiteness—her shirt was white, her tousled hair was light blond, her eyes were sparkling, and her eyebrows were so fair that she did not seem to have any . . . That’s the kind of flowers they were! But Lysaveta, Motrya, and Khivrya were capable of something that the flowers in the grass did not know how to do; they knew how to quarrel and swear, and, before long, they began railing at each other, vying to see who could pick the most flowers.

Lysaveta started the argument by attacking Motrya: “The devil take your mother, you so and so!” Motrya gave as good as she got, and, forgetting where they were, the two of them started yelling at the top of their lungs. All of a sudden, Khivrya—who did not enter into the fray because she was afraid that someone might catch them in the garden—thought she heard someone coming and shouted: “Oh, my God!” She bolted, and, in her haste, dropped a few flowers. The other girls, seeing that Khivrya was fleeing, took to their feet as well! They ran so hard that they could hardly catch their breath when they got home.



Afterwards, when they were sitting and picking over the flowers, Lysaveta said: “You know, dear sisters, I was once in this big, this huge orchard . . .”

“When?” Khivrya asked.

“Why, just now! And I saw golden apples there; they were hanging high up in the tree, ever so . . .”

“Why are you lying?” Khivrya interrupted her. “Where did you see any golden apples there?”

“Oh, go to the devil’s mother!” Lysaveta swore at her and began telling her story only to Motrya.

Motrya, listening to her with both ears wide open, urged her on: “Well, go on. What happened next?”

“Something was approaching—something black, ever so black, and huge, ever so huge, and it had four legs, or maybe if you counted them well, as many as ten . . .”

“Where was it? Why are you lying?” Khivrya broke in again.

At this point, the girls both lost patience and chased Khivrya away.

Yavdokha, catching sight of Khivrya, asked her where she had found such beautiful flowers. Khivrya replied truthfully that she had picked them in the lord’s garden.

“You shouldn’t ever, ever steal; it’s a sin!” Yavdokha scolded her as she took the flowers from her.

“But it was fine, was it, when you stole seeds from the Russians?” Khivrya asked.

“Shut up! What are you lying about?” Yavdokha retorted, and she slapped her sister.

Khivrya burst into tears and shouted: “I’m not lying; you’re lying. You always lie. Give me back my flowers right now. You hear?”

Yavdokha did not listen to her; she decked herself out in the flowers and went to the village common.

It would have been better not to have stolen the flowers, because Yavdokha got them anyway. Or it might have been better if Khivrya had lied that someone had given her the flowers—but she did not know how to do that.

Khivrya did not know how to lie when she was young, but as she grew older, she started figuring things out. One day, she sold some butter for her mother. She sold it for twenty *kopiyky*, five *kopiyky* more than her mother had told her to, and so she gave her mother a *zloty* [*fifteen kopiyky*] and kept the five extra *kopiyky* for herself, to buy some ribbons.

She would not have done so if her mother had ever given her money, even a single *kopiyka*. But her mother was stingy and would not dream of giving Khivrya money to spend on trifles. Any money that she got she squirrelled away in a chest, and that was that! And then she insisted that there was no money, none at all! But, when Khivrya saw that even the poorest girls wore wreaths with dangling ribbons, she wanted a wreath as well, and so she pocketed the extra money. Yavdokha always did things like that, but even so, the mother was kindly disposed towards her, thought she was very clever, and liked her better than Khivrya.

It was not long, however, before Khivrya admitted what she had done. Well, her mother gave her hair a good tug for being so stupid; she could have just shut up about it—but no, she had to tell her! You see, when her mother asked her where she got the ribbons, she told her the truth. She did not say that a friend had lent them to her, or something like that. No, she felt ashamed and thought that if she confessed right then and there, it would be better for her; but things did not turn out that way. It was as if Khivrya had momentarily forgotten how much her mother loved money.

Well, it did not bother Khivrya that her mother beat her—she deserved it. It did bother her, however, that Yavdokha watched, smirking. And so Khivrya began to complain and reproach her mother that she cared more for Yavdokha, and yet it was Yavdokha who had taught her to keep some of the money, because Yavdokha herself always did so. Why, just recently, Yavdokha had earned twenty *kopiyky* for working in the tobacco fields, but she had given her mother only fifteen, saying that day labourers did not receive more than that.

Khivrya's words infuriated her mother even more; she had always trusted Yavdokha and did not want to know that her elder daughter was cheating her. Besides, she thought Yavdokha was far smarter than Khivrya, and, most importantly of all, she believed that Yavdokha took after her, and that was why she loved her more.

When Yavdokha heard what Khivrya was saying about her, she began to vow and swear before her mother—and no one knew how to lie or swear better than Yavdokha—that it was not true: "May I be crippled, may my eyes crack open, may the earth swallow me, may I never budge from this spot, if there's any truth at all in anything that Khivrya has just said to you." Yavdokha's swearing was so vehement that it frightened Khivrya, and her mother could

not help but believe her, because she wanted to believe her. She thought that Yavdokha, who could “stand up to the father” and “gladden her heart” was truly a wonderful girl.

And so the mother shoved Khivrya one more time: “That’s for you, you scurvy girl; you should know when to shut up!”

Khivrya’s eyes opened wide, but she remained silent and began trying to make sense out of it: “Why didn’t mother believe me? She must know that Yavdokha tells lots of lies. How is it that Yavdokha can lie so glibly? She can come up with such a good lie that no one ever catches her at it, and even when she does get caught, she always wriggles out of it by coming up with another fib, another story.

Where does she get her ideas? Can it be that she really is smarter than I am? Why, take even that money she’s been pocketing. She gave mother a cock-and-bull story about how she was hiding the money so that she could give it all to her when she had collected a lot, and that she was doing this on the sly from father, so that he wouldn’t make her give it to him to buy whiskey. See how smart she is? Phooey on her! And she even said that she lied to me about how much money she was paid because I would tell father, and then father would take the money both from her and from mother . . .”

What did all this mean? Khivrya heard Yavdokha boast to her girlfriends that she went to the Jew every day to change her twenty *kopiyky* into one *zloty* and five *kopiyky*, and that she took the *zloty* home to her mother and kept the five *kopiyky* for herself. And she bragged: “And so, my dear sisters, I clear five *kopiyky* every day, and when I collect a lot of *kopiyky*, o-o-o-oh, ever so many, I’ll buy myself a fancy gold necklace. I have to look out for myself, because mother is so stingy that God forbid! She’s not like the good mothers that others have—she sewed me two skirts and a sheepskin coat, and she thinks that’s enough! But I don’t have a whole lifetime to lead the merry life of a girl—now’s the time to be young and carefree, to show off a bit. Isn’t it shameful that she won’t buy me a necklace, or a wreath, or ribbons? And so I have to get them myself—and nothing can be done about it!”

She had told Khivrya the same things and advised her to do likewise, but just listen to the nonsense she was spouting now! “Nothing like that would ever occur to me,” Khivrya thought. “Where does she get it from? Honest to God, she must be smarter than I am. No matter who asks her what, she always has a ready answer, and her words pour out of her like peas out of a sack; but

as for me, most times I can't think of what to say or do, and who you can talk to one way, and who another." Khivrya was so angry at herself that she tugged at her sleeve and tears rolled from her eyes.

From that day on, Yavdokha stopped giving Khivrya any advice and was very careful not to say anything when she was around. She tried to avoid Khivrya when she was with her girlfriends, and if she saw her running towards them, she would say: "Be quiet! Here comes the blabbermouth."

And she often said to Khivrya: "You won't amount to anything, because you're stupid; you get yourself into a mess like a fish gets tangled in a net, and then you put me on the spot, as if I were stranded on some ice, and so I don't want to have anything more to do with you. Go to the devil!"

Whenever Khivrya tried to get some advice from her, Yavdokha always said: "Leave me alone! Go to the devil! I don't want to talk to you. I have no advice for you, and I don't care what you do . . . All you'll do is spoil things for me, the devil take you!"

Khivrya had the hardest time with her "truth" when she worked as a servant. The other servants hated her because they thought she spied on them for the mistress. But it seemed to her that she never said "anything at all." If the mistress asked her what a certain male or female servant was doing, Khivrya would tell her that the man was sleeping, and the woman was embroidering, or doing something else like that. Of course, the mistress would be annoyed that the household work was not being done, and then the servants would scold Khivrya for getting them into trouble; but they really should not have done that, because Khivrya did not want to get them into trouble. She simply told things the way they were and did not realise she was doing anything wrong.

Occasionally she would remember that she should not say anything, that she should do what others did—stand up for fellow workers before the lords. She had been told more than once that "she would not spend her life with the lords," and that "there was no reason to get on well with them." She would remember what she had been told, but she did not know how to lie, and whenever she was asked directly who or what or where, she laid everything out on a platter. If someone told her in advance what to say, she could usually repeat it, but even then there were times when, because of her truthfulness, she forgot what she was supposed to have said.

In time, Khivrya came to understand that her “actions”—the fact that she worked honestly and did not only pretend to be working—did not do her any good. They simply earned her the epithet “ass-kisser,” because she was seen as cozying up to the lords. She was railed at from all sides and abused in other ways. Paraska the cook did not leave her hot water to wash her hair; the old man by the well did not raise her bucket when she lowered it; the young fellows refused to sharpen her hoe or fix it when the handle broke; and the girls working in the tobacco patch clogged her row with lumps of earth, gave her the worst leftovers to eat, walked off with her kerchiefs and jerkins, broke her string of beads, and stole her ribbons.

And everyone told lies about her, laughed at her, called her stupid and an “eyebrowless” wonder, taunted her that she ran after the boys, and said all sorts of things like that. It was amazing the lies that people could come up with!

And then they began to tease Khivrya that, one time, she took her kerchief with her when she went to work, but forgot to take her head. (It was true that Khivrya often forgot things.) And they went on to say that she then asked Motrya: “Dear sister, where in the world is my head? Oh woe is me! I have nothing to tie my kerchief around!”

They also said that one time when Khivrya had no one to tell her “truth” to, she told it to a spotted cow. She milked it and said: “I would like Semen to send matchmakers to me, but he doesn’t want to.” The spotted cow just said: “M-m-mooo . . . M-m-m-oooo!” And so, she confided in it again.

At that point, the servants would begin to laugh so uproariously that the walls shook. Khivrya, not knowing how to tell anyone off, or save herself with a lie, would immediately begin to cry or swear, and the servants would laugh even harder. Now, if they had been baiting Yavdokha, it would have been a different matter. But Khivrya, not knowing what to say, would just shout: “You’re all lying! You’re lying, you sons-of-bitches!”

And, as it turned out, Khivrya was not allowed to get away with a lie even once. Here is what happened. She was too embarrassed to ask the mistress to let her join the servants in the village merrymaking one Sunday evening, because she had already spent the entire day enjoying herself. But still, she wanted to go. The young men had hired musicians, and the music resounded all the way to the manor, as if it were playing right in her heart. What in the world was she to do? She was drawn to the music, swept away

by it as a straw is blown by the wind, and so she asked the servant Paraska for advice. And Paraska, pretending to be her friend, complied eagerly. Khivrya lied to her mistress that her sister had fallen ill, and that she had to pay her a short visit. She did not tell this lie very well, but did manage to get it out one way or another.

Well, it did not matter that she had not lied well; the mistress gave her permission to go, and off she ran! She made merry all night long, singing—she had the best voice in the village—and dancing, and did not come back until dawn. When she returned she found . . . Oh, what a disaster! Paraska had told the mistress everything—where Khivrya had gone, and what, and how. Everyone was very angry with Khivrya. And Khivrya was annoyed that because of her lie—after all, it had been such a small one—they called her a “liar.”

Paraska roared with laughter and told her: “That’s so you won’t get people into trouble, so that you’ll stop cozying up to the lords, and so you won’t say anything about me taking off with some pork fat to the village. May you never get married as long as you live! May you never step under a bridal wreath, for getting me into such trouble! You got your just desserts, you lousy troublemaker! You see, she wanted to be better than everyone else.”

And so Khivrya slowly began telling lies, like all people do, but usually only if she feared being punished. If she broke or damaged something, she would say: “I swear to God, may the cross strike me down—it wasn’t me.” Then, her eyes popping out of her head, she would blush furiously, not knowing what to say next. If she talked too long with a young man and forgot that she was supposed to be working, she would try to lie her way out of it by saying: “Oh dear me, I forgot what I was to do!”

It was just at that time that crickets began chirping in Khivrya’s head, and that her thoughts were on songs, kisses, flower, stars, and standing by the fence with a dark handsome youth. But she would not admit it and found it more convenient to just say: “Oh, there’s nothing to it!” But there were still times when she did not keep her tongue bridled, and then she got into trouble.

There was the time, for example, when her father wanted to sell a mare. He had bought it for a *bilet* [twenty-five *karbovantsi* (dollars)], and he wanted to sell it to Mytro Dovhopolenko for at least twenty-seven or twenty-eight *karbovantsi* and make a profit of two or three *karbovantsi*; and so he told this Mytro that he had bought it for twenty-seven *karbovantsi*.

Khivrya did not know what her father had told Mytro, and it just so happened that he came over when her parents were not home, and she was busy with the cattle. He asked her if her father was at home, and she replied that he was not.

He watched her work for a while, and then asked: "Is that the mare that your father bought on the Feast of the Transfiguration?"

"Yes, it is," Khivrya said.

Mytro took a good look at the mare and then said: "It's a pitiful creature! How much did your father pay for it?"

Khivrya said: "A *bilet*."

"Oh, you must be lying," Mytro exclaimed. "Are you sure he didn't buy it for less?"

Khivrya, offended that he was accusing her of lying, said: "I'm lying? I'm not lying."

And she began to praise the mare, saying how young it was, and how heavy a load it could pull, how swiftly it could run, and how it soon would have a colt. Khivrya not only sang the mare's praises, but swore that she loved it very much. And, to convince Mytro that the mare was worth a *bilet*, she began relating how the deal went down when they were buying it, because Khivrya had gone to the market with her father that day.

"Father sold our cow—you recall our fine, spotted cow, don't you? Yes, well, we sold it for thirty *karbovantsi*, and then a man appeared, and, after bargaining for a while, father bought the mare for a *bilet*; father gave the man the *bilet*, and mother pocketed the five *karbovantsi*. Father gave them to her, so he wouldn't lose them or spend them on whiskey. Mother tucked the money away in a little bag, hung it around her neck under her shirt, and gave father twenty *kopiyky* to go to the tavern and close the deal with a drink. Well, mother had still another *karbovanets*, and father pleaded with her to give it to him for more drinks, because they had bought a good mare, but mother said: 'That's enough for you, quite enough. Get going, or I'll take back the twenty *kopiyky* I gave you.'

"Father went off, and mother began to bargain for some onions that a man was carrying. He wanted twenty-five *kopiyky* for a wreath, but mother was giving him twelve. He said: 'Twenty-four.' And mother said: 'You can have thirteen *kopiyky*.' And he repeated: 'Twenty-four.' And mother said: 'Fourteen; I won't give any more. Come on, old fellow, take pity on me, a poor woman.' No, no, I think she said: 'On a poor widow.' Then he said . . ."

Mytro, who could not care less how much Khivrya's mother had paid for the onions, interrupted Khivrya: "So, you're saying that your father paid twenty-five *karbovantsi* for the mare?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying—twenty-five; honest to God, that's what it was. And I watched mother hide the five *karbovantsi* that were left over from selling the cow, and . . ."

Mytro walked out of the yard, and when he met up with Khivrya's father, he told him that he would not pay more than twenty-six *karbovantsi* for the mare, because it had cost him only a *bilet* in the first place. When Khivrya's father swore that he had paid twenty-seven *karbovantsi*, Mytro laughed and said: "Your girl told me that you paid twenty-five, and your girl is 'truthful'."

Khivrya's father fell silent, but then began arguing that Mytro had already agreed to pay him twenty-eight *karbovantsi*.

"Well, what if I did?" Mytro asked. "I promised that, but now either take twenty-six, or there won't be a deal. Why were you trying to fool me that you paid twenty-seven for it? I won't give you a profit of three *karbovantsi*. If you don't want to accept my offer, take the mare to the market and sell it there."

And he was so stubborn that Khivrya's father had to give in.

Khivrya's father was very angry and railed at her.

"But I just told him the truth . . . I didn't know . . ." Khivrya mumbled softly.

"Oh, go to the devil's mother with your truth! Because of you, I lost two *karbovantsi*!"

"And yet," Khivrya thought, "he himself used to say: 'Khivrya, don't lie.'" Still, she did not dare remind her father of what he used to say, especially now that she understood the gravity of her mistake. Because of her, two *karbovantsi* had been lost—and that was a lot of money! And her anger at herself increased when her mother yelled at her as well, saying that all the villagers were laughing at them because they had such a stupid daughter who, like a crow, never shut her beak and let everything spill out of her like water out of a sieve.

Her mother was so grieved to have lost those two *karbovantsi* that she wept in frustration, and Yavdokha added fuel to the fire by saying that she would have known what to say to that Mytro. She would have told him how they had bought the mare, and that Mytro Chorny had been ready to give them thirty *karbovantsi* for it, but her father said: "The devil take that Mytro Chorny! I don't like him. But I'll gladly sell it to kinsman Mytro Dovhopolenko for less—just out of



friendship—for twenty-eight *karbovantsi*.” After every utterance Yavdokha added: “It was just great, truly great, O Lo-o-o-ord!”

Her father spat in disgust and said: “Well, you sure would have said a mouthful—both what should be said, and what shouldn’t be.” And he strode out of the house.

Khivrya concluded: “Well, I don’t know how to lie, so it’s best that I don’t say anything—and that’s the end of it! But why didn’t father like what Yavdokha’s said? Did she say too much? I feel sorry for mother because she lost two *karbovantsi*, and for father because he doesn’t have enough money to close the deal with a drink, or to have a shot for his hangover. And, for some reason, I had to let my tongue flap. If only I had known . . .”

And then there was the time that Khivrya got herself into a real mess! Her friend, Lysaveta Kononenko—the girl she had stolen flowers with in the lord’s garden—was about to be betrothed, when Khivrya got wind of the fact that Lysaveta’s young man suffered from gout. As soon as she heard about it, she ran to tell Lysaveta.

“Oh, my dear sister, I found out something terrible about your young man—he has gout! Oh, don’t marry him, my dear! Throw him over! May he go berserk! May the devil take his mother!”

“But maybe it’s all lies! Someone gossips, and you go and do the same,” Lysaveta said. “I don’t want to throw him over. He has a lot of land—four *desyatyny* [*almost eleven acres*—a huge garden, and he lives alone—there wouldn’t be a mother-in-law.”

“Let the devil take him and his garden; if he’s in such poor health, you’d do better to throw him over,” Khivrya was anxious to convince her. “I know it’s not a lie, because I heard Denesykha tell my mother, and she was speaking softly, so that no one would hear, and she begged my mother not to tell anyone—she’s afraid of what Ivan might do to her if he finds out who’s telling people about him. But Denesykha knows what she’s taking about, oh yes she does! He’s her neighbour, and she was his mother’s friend. So, there you have it; just reject him, dear sister!”

Lysaveta thought about it for some time; she was sorry to lose the garden, but it wasn’t easy to live with a sick man, and she knew she could easily find someone better. In the end, she listened to Khivrya and rejected Ivan. When Ivan threatened to beat her up for making a fool of him, she told him it was not her fault; he had wanted to fool her, and that’s why she was rejecting him.

“What are you talking about?” Ivan asked.

Lysaveta told him.

He turned pale with anger: “Who told you this? Tell me at once, or I’ll bash your head in!”

Lysaveta told him it was Khivrya.

Poor Khivrya! Everything that Ivan had wanted to do to Lysaveta for making a fool of him landed on her head.

From that time on, no one wanted to marry Khivrya. The young men laughed in her face or, if they saw her coming, instantly leapt to their feet and fled from her as from a madwoman, saying: “Let’s go!” It hurt Khivrya that they fled from her like sparrows from a scarecrow, and it pained her even more that the girls also avoided her, as if she were truly repulsive, as if it was her fault that Ivan was spreading lies about her.

“Oh, how difficult it is,” Khivrya thought, “for a human being to live according to the truth in this world; it’s just as bad as being made of gold and trying to live in this world. Wouldn’t people instantly tear a gold person to bits? But then, everyone finds gold pleasing, whereas they all see truth as a sharp knife.”

No one sent matchmakers to Khivrya, no one at all. She became depressed and often sat motionless for hours, thinking: “Why do girls get married?” Well, every girl wants to have bridesmaids sing in her honour the wedding songs that she herself learned to shout as a child in the village common; to have them decorate a festive *vyl’tse* [*a ritual wedding tree*] for her; to have everyone watch as she stands crowned with a golden wreath in church; to have her braid unplaited and a *kybalochka* [*woman’s headdress*] placed on her head; and to have special songs accompany all these events.

For that one day in her life, she wants to be the most important person in the village; to promenade through it, beautifully dressed and bound by a *rushnyk* [*embroidered linen ceremonial cloth*], and to invite everyone to her wedding, while all the people look at her, judge her, and praise her. And after that day, she becomes the mistress of her own wealth, and does not have to bow down to anyone, or give her money to her parents, or slave away in servitude; she is a free person.

But girls also got married because that was the way it had to be—a girl got married. If she did not, people would ridicule her to death, and she herself would be miserable, because it would look as if she were a cripple or insane—such girls never marry. Never! But who

in the world ever heard of a girl not getting married if she is young and healthy? They say that lords' daughters do not have to get married; but then, young ladies have a will of their own—they can live either like this, or like that. Among us peasants, however, we have freedom only if we get married . . .

Well no, that too is a lie; there is no freedom then. In fact, after a girl marries, she has to submit even more—to her father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and their children—they all have something to say to her; they all abuse her and even beat her; and they all curse her father and mother for raising such a lazy good-for-nothing.

Before marrying, a girl desires the great thrill of having her own baby and of delighting in it; but, as it turns out, there are six, or seven, or even nine such “tiny bundles of joy,” and they bring her very little happiness, because there is no time to enjoy them. There is no end to the work that has to be done, and every year there is the pain of giving birth, and then there is the feeding and the nurturing, quickly, one after the other; and they bring her more grief than joy, and that is why there are times when she wants the weaker ones to die, and the unborn ones not to be born, because their mother's fate, to suffer and know pain, awaits them as well.

Yavdokha, who was not much older than Khivrya, was married already and had a couple of children. Khivrya's friends—Lysaveta and Motrya—were also married. And Ivan had found himself another girl to marry. All the talk about Ivan's illness had been a lie. Denesykha had wanted to deceive Lysaveta so that Ivan would marry her own daughter and, noticing that Khivrya was listening in to her conversation with Khivrya's mother, had made up the whole story. After Lysaveta's rejection, Ivan became angry and took up the invitation of Denesykha's daughter, who had been making overtures to him for some time now: “Send matchmakers to me, Ivan, and I'll accept you and give you my *rushnyky*.”

By the time Khivrya found out that Denesykha had been lying, it was too late. Afterwards, Lysaveta often reproached Khivrya, complaining that she had lost four *desyatyny* of land because of her. Khivrya did not say anything in reply; she remained dejected for days on end, because once the die was cast there was no changing it—no one courted her, and that was that!

But is it possible for a girl not to get married? Everyone ridicules a girl like that and points fingers at her. What is a girl good for, if

she does not get married? And if she does not get married, then she must be lazy, or not much good for anything. A girl is trained for marriage from childhood. The moment that she starts growing up, she decks herself out in ribbons and strings of beads, and struts outdoors to show herself off; she learns how to tie a kerchief and to adorn herself with flowers—and for whom? For the boys!

Everyone who comes across a little girl teases her, saying: “Oh, look what a fine girl she is! When’s your wedding? We’ll send the matchmakers. It’s time—high time—for this girl to get married! She’s such a big girl already, such a big, big girl!”

Even before she is fully grown, a girl’s dowry is piled up high in a trunk; one *rushnyk* after another, and one shirt after another is embroidered and put away . . . The trunk is full—that’s enough! It’s high time for her to marry! Some girls get married without a dowry, and there is more honour in that. It means that a girl is very beautiful if she is snapped up just like that—without a dowry.

If you ever have the occasion to listen to older women boasting about whose daughter got married first, you would think that some of their daughters have been married for ten years already. These are the women who try to persuade girls to get married, and men agree to go as matchmakers, and, for a glass of whiskey, are prepared to send a girl into a living hell, where a husband beats his wife, a mother-in-law curses her daughter-in-law, and the children—the young brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law—roar with laughter as nasty words roll off their little tongues.

And the young woman has to work—not for herself, but for a stranger’s family—and work so hard that she has no time to breathe. Let’s assume that she worked hard as a girl and was not afraid of work—but now there are children! Well, life is something that has to be endured; it is like pouring water into a barrel without a bottom—you keep pouring the water in, but it keeps leaking out, and tomorrow the same thing happens all over again.

Afterwards, the girl has regrets. “Why did I get married? If only I had known, I never would have married. I could have led a carefree life for at least a little while longer.” Almost every woman says this, but all the same, girls have always got married, get married now, and will continue getting married. As soon as one of their peers marries, the others are fired up with jealousy, and they rush like sheep into a fire to get married as well, without understanding what they are doing, the minute someone sends matchmakers to them.

Every woman wants to see another person's daughter, and her own sister, and most of all, her own daughter, get married as soon as possible, "to make her life miserable with an azure silk cloth"—the words of the first wedding song that a girl learns. Because the most happy event in one's life is the wedding, and everything after that is done in pain. Even though it is at weddings that the most tears are shed—the mother weeps, the daughter weeps, the girls all weep—they give her away in marriage, and she goes.

Maybe she gets married because she thinks: "Even though all the others are unhappy, I'll be happy, because there must be good fortune somewhere—fortune that is as golden as the sun and as red as a rose—and maybe it will be my fate to be fortunate, like the breeze in the field, like a bird on the wing."

Some people marry two or three times. In Khivrya's eyes it's a sin for a widow or a widower to get married for a third time. She has children, and he has children, and then there will be more children, and they keep bringing children into this world, until the earth becomes too small for them, and they cannot grow enough grain to give every child even a small piece of bread each day. Nor can they expand the walls of their cottages to make them bigger, to ensure that everyone has a corner of his or her own; everything is cramped and disgusting, there is quarrelling and fighting, they are mired in poverty—but they exist.

If children did not die, the world would seem still smaller. Even now, there is only half an *arshyn* for every person, but what would it be like if some had not died? And yet, women remarry—a month, a week, after the death of their first husband—because they think that if they were badly off the first time, perhaps they should try it a second and a third time, as if they were playing cards—will they win, or lose? But why keep trying? It is amply clear that what was bad will be still worse. And then they cry and curse their fate, but all in vain! It is said that a woman's tears, like water, dry up as fast as they flow. If it were not so, they would not rush into the flames of their own accord; they would not dig holes under themselves. But they do get married, give birth to daughters, and push their daughters into the same situation. And once again the cycle is repeated, and more people are born. For the most part, they continue to live more because they are unfortunate, rather than fortunate; the people in the villages do not ask: why and what for? And why ask? That is the life God gave them—and that is that!

Although Khivrya thought about a woman's sad fate in life, she did, of course, get married. A young man from a distant village sent matchmakers to her. His surname was Dumenko, but he was called Vasyl Nevdachlyvy—Vasyl the Born Loser—or rather, that was his nickname. Well, he truly was a loser—no matter what he wanted to do, or what he did, nothing worked out for him. He traded a shed for a horse, only to notice the next day that the horse was blind; he wanted to fatten a boar for market but, just when the animal was ready to be sold, it died; he drove a wagon into the swamp so that the wheels would soak, and his mare was maimed as it pulled the wagon back out; he bought onions, planning to trade them at a profit, but the onions froze, and he had to sell them at a loss; he left a field unseeded to harvest a hay crop, but the price of hay dropped, and he lost money on the venture. And that is the way things always turned out for him. One time his house was struck by lightning and burned to the ground; when he built another one, it collapsed.

His family was large: two brothers—one was married and had just been conscripted into the army, leaving behind his wife and an infant—two sisters who were grown girls, and three of his mother's youngest children: two boys and a baby girl that was still nursing. And they all lived together in a one-room cottage.

His mother Oryshka had outlived two husbands, but looked young enough to marry a third time. She was plump and fair, spoke slowly in a buttery voice, and loved to eat and sleep. What else did she like? It was difficult to say, because she was never troubled by anything—it was all the same to her, if things were like this or like that, if her house was clean, or if it was unswept for two days. Her oven was black and peeling, the whey was mouldy in the kneading trough, rain dripped through the roof, and the children crawled around uncombed and unwashed. But she crawled up to the sleeping platform atop the oven and ignored it all!

Khivrya was fastidious; her mother had taught her to keep a house neat and tidy. When she saw the disgusting mess in her mother-in-law's home, she was incensed and, from the very first day, began bustling about and cleaning things up.

Some of the women were jealous of Khivrya because she had a mother-in-law who was not quarrelsome: "Khivrya has it good; her mother-in-law doesn't interfere, but as for mine . . . well . . ."

Khivrya, however, was unhappy that her mother-in-law ignored everything, because it was hard for her to do all the work without

any help. Her brother-in-law's wife was not eager to pitch in with the housework. All she liked to do was harvest; then she became a totally different person, got dressed up as if it were a feast day, and worked swiftly and efficiently from dawn until dusk without ever stopping to rest. Otherwise, she just sat around, gossiping, and fussing and cooing over her little Ignat: "Oh, my precious darling, my little grey-blue dove!" She spoiled the child so badly that if you touched him, he would scream as if he were being murdered; and he was always munching or sucking on something: a gingerbread cookie, or a biscuit, or a lump of sugar, or a candy that his mother bought for him with the money that she earned—once a month, when she slipped away from home—the only work she did.

Frankly speaking, Khivrya could not stand little Ignat with his big belly and tiny grey face that looked like a bubble floating in soapy slops. Occasionally, she gave him a little shove so that he would clear out of her sight and stop shrieking and throwing a fit as if he were being slaughtered—just because his mother had sneaked away to go to the store, or to visit the neighbours.

Khivrya detested Ignat's senseless shrieking and wailing: "A . . . a . . . a . . . !" Nothing would make him stop! The crying infuriated her and made her blood seethe. She was furious at the child for screaming, at his mother for running off, and at herself for not being able to work or make him shut up. And she was angry with her impassive mother-in-law who would just say: "Hush!" a couple of times and then ignore the child as if it did not exist.

Oryshka treated her own children the same way; the crying of a child did not perturb her. After sitting unconcernedly for some time, something would occur to her, and she would rise slowly to her feet and, like a duck, waddle over to the child and feed it. No matter what happened, what kind of a misadventure transpired, she remained completely indifferent. Her only comment was: "That's the way things are," and that was that.

Her older daughter became an unwed mother. The whole family was scandalized; her brothers punched her eyes out, Vasyl was seized by a hatred for his sister, and people laughed at her. Oryshka, however, was not upset; she gave her a mild scolding, mostly for the sake of appearances, and said: "Well, that's the way things are. If only the baby would die! But, if it doesn't, then we'll have to feed it." Another mother would have almost killed her daughter for letting something like that happen, but Oryshka did nothing at all!

And then there was her son, Yarema, who went to market to sell his ewes and drank up all the money. She did not reprimand him, and even laughed when he told her that he had gone to see a “puppet show” and, as he stood there gaping, someone picked his pocket.

That’s what Khivrya’s mother-in-law was like—sluggish and unruffled, like water in a pond that is never stirred by a wave. Seemingly kind to Khivrya, she never said to her: “You’re lying.” But she also never helped or advised her, and when Vasyl occasionally beat Khivrya, she never comforted her. If Khivrya began to wail and complain about her husband, she would calmly say, as if she were eating bread lathered with butter: “Oh, that’s quite enough, my daughter! The pain won’t last a lifetime, and if you want to remain young, you should never worry.” Then she would come up with an anecdote that made a point about what had happened—she knew a lot of anecdotes and loved to relate them.

Khivrya’s married life was so-so, neither bad nor good. Her husband, as noted earlier, was a born loser, and so they had nothing—no cattle and no grain, but the family was large. With Khivrya—and not counting the children—there were seven people. No one wanted to work, and everything was dumped on Khivrya. To make matters even worse, neither her brother-in-law’s wife nor her husband’s sister liked her, because whenever she heard them lying, she would instantly interject, saying: “Mmm . . . was it really like that?” Or: “Mmm . . . so that’s how it was!”

They found Khivrya so annoying! Even her mother-in-law often said: “My daughter, it would be better if you just shut up. If you don’t want to listen, then don’t; just don’t attack people. That’s how things are.” But Khivrya could never refrain from saying something, and afterwards she would curse herself for it.

Well, Vasyl’s family did not like Khivrya, but what about Vasyl? Did he love her? Yes, he did. Well, at times he drank, and at times he beat her. But, so what? If a man were no longer permitted to beat his wife, he would be utterly miserable. At the village meetings he is ordered: “Pay your dues to the village fund; become a tax collector or whatever else you’re told to be; and serve in the army when your turn comes.” And so a man has to relieve his heart at least at home—that’s how the women rationalized the behaviour of their husbands.

Khivrya did not agree with the women, but there was nothing she could do. Vasyl did not beat her too often—indeed, it seemed to her



brother-in-law's wife, her sister-in-law, and her mother-in-law, and to all the women, that he hardly beat her at all: "What kind of beating is that—once or twice a month?" And so they all felt that she should consider herself fortunate.

She had three children already. The eldest, Nataalka, was a girl of five or so—she was born when Vasyl sold the maimed mare, and that was about five years ago—and then there were two towheaded little boys. In Khivrya's opinion, three children sufficed, because, for her, bearing them was difficult. Men, however, think differently, and soon a fourth one was to come into this world.

Khivrya liked little Nataalka best of all. The little girl resembled her—she was fair, had almost no eyebrows, and her eyes were light grey and inconspicuous; she was, as Khivrya thought: "Lively as a little winged sparrow, and white as a small scrap of paper."

Not only was Nataalka pretty; she was smart beyond her years. She noticed everything, understood everything, and drew her own conclusions. During Lent, her mother did not give her or her brothers—not even little Semenko—any milk to drink, because only nursing babies or sick people "could break the fast." Well, that was fine, but Nataalka just had to have some milk, and butter, and cheese; her father had recently bought a cow, and she was enjoying all the dairy products they now had. Well, what could she do? She begged her mother and pleaded with her, but her mother did not give in!

She complained to everyone: "Our mummy is mean, very mean; she gives milk to the dogs and the piglets, and cheese to the chicks, and even to the cat, but she won't give her children even a drop!"

It did not help; her mother still did not give them any milk. What could Nataalka do? Well, her head began to ache—it ached ever so badly. Khivrya became alarmed and wanted to take her to the *khvel'shar* [medical assistant], but Nataalka swore that her headache would disappear at once, "if her mother would only give her some milk to drink or a slice of bread with butter." Nataalka's obvious lie both amused and annoyed Khivrya; she tugged her ear and told her not to lie, because it was a "sin," but inwardly she thought: "How grown-up she is, how wise!" Nataalka amused Khivrya even more when she began to ask what a "sin" was. "Is it an old man with a white beard and green and yellow eyes?" But Nataalka did not lie often, and so she was punished only once.

Vasyl was indebted to the village council and could not find the money to pay off what he owed. No one trusted him; he was so deep

in debt that he once again had to sell his cow and give up all the money he had saved for a new shed. One day, the tax collectors came to his home to take whatever they could get their hands on.

In her trunk Khivrya had a small stash of money that she had earned as a girl, but she did not want to give it to her husband. She thought: "Let him pay it off himself. What business is it of mine that he owes the council money?" Moreover, there was another consideration: "I need a new jerkin, because I haven't had a new one ever since I got married; I've worn out all the jerkins that I had when I was still a girl, and I'm embarrassed to show myself in public. I have nothing to wear, while Tetyana, that scurvy old thing, sews herself three new jerkins every year—jerkins with two pockets, trimmed with velveteen, and decorated with buttons."

And so Khivrya decided not to give the tax collectors her money; she hid her clothes, locked the trunk, and sat down squarely on it. The men seized Vasyl's new boots, sheepskin coats, and jackets.

Vasyl rushed around the house, scurrying here and there, but he could not find any money anywhere. Clutching his head in his hands, he cried: "Oh where am I to find some damned money?"

Natalka called out: "Hey daddy! There's money in the trunk."

It had never occurred to Khivrya that Natalka even knew what money was, but there you had it! She must have seen her with it at some time, and now she had caused her mother's downfall! Despite all her protestations that Natalka did not know what she was talking about, Khivrya had to give her husband the money because he threatened to smash the trunk and kill her if she did not.

Vasyl took the money and went to buy back his clothes, and Khivrya beat Natalka angrily to teach her a lesson—not to say anything, not to cause her mother's downfall, and not to stick her nose into things that were none of her business.

The little girl sobbed and whimpered: "Oh, I won't ever do it again! I truly wo-o-o-on't! Never again!"

After Khivrya's anger passed, she thought: "Why did I beat the child? Was I teaching her to lie, or what? But what if she was born like that—like me, who did not know how to lie when I was little? Oh, why did I beat you, my daughter, my dearest little daughter?"

And Khivrya began to weep and caress her child. The wise little girl understood at once that now she could do as she pleased with her mother, and the first thing that she did was to reproach her: "You're mean, mummy, just like my friend Kharytya's mother;

you're mean, ever so mean, and you beat me, and don't love me. But I know that other mothers say nice things to their daughters: 'Oh, my dearest little daughter, my little sweetheart,' and things like that . . . but you never do that . . ."

These words stabbed Khivrya's heart more sharply than a knife, all the more so because in reality she rarely beat her little Nataalka, only when she was angry at her husband or her brother-in-law's wife, and, not daring to say anything to them, vented her rage on her daughter. Now she felt guilty, caught Nataalka by the hand and, rocking her on her knee, said: "That's enough, my dear little daughter, that's enough; I won't harm you ever again."

"Honest-to-God? Cross your heart?" Nataalka asked.

"Yes, yes indeed," Khivrya smiled.

"Then buy me a ribbon, and I want it right now!"

"There's no money, sweetheart; if you hadn't told father . . ."

Khivrya broke off what she was saying, because she saw that large tears were welling in the child's eyes, and that her little fists were ready to wipe them away.

"There, there now, don't cry. I'll do something; I'll see to it that you have your ribbon; just don't cry, my dearest. You'll have it, yes you will."

Nataalka demanded that her mother swear by God one more time that she would buy her a ribbon, and thus the mother and daughter were reconciled.

A great tragedy struck Vasyl and Khivrya and their children. Oh my God, my God!

One night, Khivrya could not sleep; her husband had gone to the market and had not come home for the night. The grown girls and the young man had gone off to a party, and everyone else had fallen asleep. Her mother-in-law and her brother-in-law's wife were on the sleeping platform atop the oven, the children were bedded down in a row on the wide bench, the bawling infant was in its cradle, and Khivrya was lying on the floor. It was quiet, and all that could be heard was the snoring—the baby's quick breathing and the champing of its tiny lips, the loud snoring of the mother-in-law with its strange whistling and gurgling, and the chirping of the crickets on the hearth, and nothing else . . .

Suddenly, dogs began to bark, and they seemed to be quite close by . . . in the garden, or where? Maybe in the yard . . . As Khivrya

got up, it crossed her mind that a thief might be stealing the heifer that Vasyl had bought recently with some money he had scraped together. Khivrya had really longed to have that heifer. It was a beauty, and she wanted to see it grow into a cow, but she lived in constant fear that she would not live to see this happen, because someone might steal it, or it might die, and either way it would be lost to her, truly lost, because they had no luck with cattle.

The dogs barked again. Khivrya was frightened. What was she to do? Her husband was not at home! She had to go and check it out herself. She dashed outside—there was no one in the yard. She rushed to the shed and groped for the lock—she had begun using a lock to keep her heifer safe; it was undamaged. She listened carefully—no, praise God everything seemed to be fine; the heifer was chewing its cud in the shed, and you could hear it breathing. Khivrya settled down. And the dogs stopped barking—they had been barking quite far away. It had just seemed to Khivrya that it was in their neck of the woods. It grew quiet, ever so quiet, like still water.

And the night was so bright! Khivrya stopped by the fence and stood there for a while. The moon spilled its white light over the earth like milk over a floor. There were a few clouds, but they were small, like white roses; they did not cover the moon, because they were so sparse that you could see through them, and there were as many stars as cornflowers in a field, and they twinkled like huge eyes, either laughing or weeping. Here and there the white blossoms of a cherry tree gleamed like an embroidered insert on a white shirt, and the breeze swooped up their fragrance and spread it far and wide. A nightingale warbled nearby—and the silvery sounds trickled down as if he were counting coins, or stringing beads on a necklace. How wonderful the night was, how warm! It felt as if you were cuddling an infant to your breast.

After standing there for a while, Khivrya was just about to go into the house, when a dark form appeared against the moon; a wagon with two men and some sacks emerged from behind the neighbour's barn that stood in front of the house at an angle to the street.

"What's this?" Khivrya thought. "Is the widow's son going someplace in the middle of the night? And who is the other man?" She peered more closely. "What's this? It isn't the widow's son—it's Ivan Kryvda with his lad. Yes, it is, it is! And now he's turning into his own yard . . . But why is he driving away from a barn that isn't his, as if he had been standing there, and now . . . And the horse

is moving very quietly, as if its hooves were swathed. Oh, my goodness! Can he be . . .? Everyone does say he's a thief . . ."

Khivrya was amazed. She never could understand how a person could steal something; she herself never took even as much as a thread that did not belong to her—except, of course, for the flowers in the lord's garden, and the money from the butter, but she had still been a little girl then. At first she thought she was imagining things. Why would a rich man like Ivan—even though he was called a "thief"—go to the widow Zanudykha's place to steal her flour, or something else? Khivrya was tempted to call out to Ivan and ask him, but by the time she thought of doing so, he had turned into his own yard and disappeared from view. Khivrya went back into the house, but could not fall asleep for a long time.

The next day she told the others in the cottage what she had seen, and they all agreed that he must have stolen something from the widow Zanudykha. It was only Khivrya who said: "But maybe he was just . . . you know . . . Maybe he was hauling something of his own . . ."

"How could it be his own if you say that you saw him come out of the widow's shed? What could he have forgotten there?"

"Well, who knows? Maybe . . . After all, how could he possibly steal something from such a poor widow?"

"She's not all that poor if she still has full sacks and the new grain isn't harvested yet," someone observed.

"But still . . ." Khivrya spoke up.

Khivrya knew very well that almost all people lie when they have to, but she did not know very much about stealing. She knew that children stole, because they were not very wise yet, and they wanted either a few sunflower seeds, or some gingerbread cookies, or strawberries. But for a grown man to steal from another person, and from a poor widow at that—it was not possible. It was not right, and just did not happen among people, unless it was something like vegetables in the summer, or fruit. The older boys and young men stole some every summer, but they did it more as a joke. But to steal grain from a widow . . .

"I don't want things like that to happen, I don't want them to," Khivrya said.

"You're stupid!" Vasyl laughed at her.

And her mother-in-law added: "Be careful, my daughter, don't tell anyone what you saw."

The mother-in-law was a wise woman.

Khivrya believed that Kryvda was a thief only when Zanudykha began to wail and lament out in the street that four sacks of flour, rye, and oats had disappeared from her barn that night. Even though Khivrya had promised her mother-in-law that she would not say anything, she could not resist telling Zanudykha, very quietly, everything that she had seen. She asked her not to tell anyone, but the widow simply had to know the name of the thief in order to give it to Ivan Voyin, who would hold a prayer service, so that God would punish the thief, either by crippling him or ruining him financially.

In actual fact, Zanudykha had not only paid for a prayer service, she also sued Kryvda, but Khivrya did not know about it until one day the bailiff brought her some unwelcome news from the district office—she was being summoned to the courthouse. At first, Khivrya was terrified; who had ever heard of such a thing—she had never been in court in her life!

Her mother-in-law scolded her for not knowing how to keep her mouth shut and her tongue behind her teeth, and her husband beat her, saying: “So now you’re going to be dragging yourself through the courts, are you!”

Despite everything, however, she had to go to court or else she would have to pay a fine, and where were they to get the money?

In court, Khivrya kept repeating: “I don’t know anything; I have no idea what happened.”

That’s what her family had told her to say, so as not to get into more trouble, and she herself did not want to help Zanudykha, because she was annoyed with her. Why had she called her to be a witness without telling her about it, especially since she had sworn that she wanted to know the name of the thief just for the prayer service that she hired Ivan Voyin to hold?

Zanudykha swore up and down that it was not her idea to take the matter to court, that it was her son Stepan who had insisted, and that Stepan had not heard the name of the thief from her. She claimed that he had heard it somewhere else—but she was probably lying about that.

Finally the judge said: “Well, my good woman, we heard that you’re supposed to be very truthful, that there isn’t another truthful person like you in the entire village, but all you keep saying is that ‘you don’t know anything, and that you have no idea what happened.’ and so the widow’s case will be lost . . .”

Khivrya could hear the widow crying and grieving, and she saw that Ivan Kryvda was acting as if he had won—they had not found the sacks at his place when they conducted a search. He was smiling and looking at the judge as if to say: “I’m holy and saintly,” and his fat, shiny mug was beaming.

And Khivrya spat in disgust—tfu! She turned beet red, rose to her feet, and said haltingly, in a loud voice: “Yes, Mr. Judge, I’m not afraid to tell the truth . . . and I’ll tell you everything . . . everything . . . because . . . because I must.”

Stumbling and mumbling, Khivrya continued: “The night was very beautiful, and I came out of the house thinking: ‘I hope he doesn’t steal our heifer!’ And my husband wasn’t at home . . . he had gone to the market . . . I groped for the lock—it was undamaged . . . and I could hear . . . it was chewing its cud—well praise God it was fine . . . Yes indeed . . . and then I saw something moving behind Zanudykha’s cottage, or rather, behind her barn . . . Yes, indeed. I looked, and there was Ivan . . . ‘Oh, my goodness! What’s this?’ I thought.”

Khivrya took a long time to tell her story, leaving out none of the tedious details.

“Oh, thank you, you’re my own dearest darling . . . Now I’ll have enough food to feed my children . . .” Zanudykha could not stop herself from shouting right there in the courthouse.

Khivrya turned away from her, and when Kryvda muttered: “Old bitch!” she smiled. She recalled how Kryvda’s little boy had asked his father to show the girls the kerchief “that you stole, daddy,” and the father had been furious, but could not dispute the child’s words because the people had heard him. Now let him spend some time in jail for all that he had done.

Well, it seemed that everything was going along just fine after the court case; Kryvda did his time in jail and returned the flour to Zanudykha. And, even though he had railed against Khivrya at first, he seemed to have forgotten all about the matter. The villagers, including Khivrya, Zanudykha, and Khivrya’s husband, had gradually begun to forget the whole “incident,” when, quite unexpectedly, Kryvda’s oldest son died, the one who had just recently married, and who had taken over the farm for his father.

Ivan Kryvda walked around looking stunned, as if he had toppled down from a tall tree. He wailed and lamented at the funeral more

than any mother would have, so much so that the people were amazed.

And then his hands went numb, and he stopped working; he would either walk to the tavern or just sit around and drink without stopping; and when he got drunk, he turned into a wild animal, beating his wife and abusing her. He did not let her come into the house, kept her freezing out in the street, and said: “Ha! So that’s how you take care of my children, is it? That’s how you feed them! Go to the devil’s mother! I don’t want you to ever set foot in this house again!”

One time he even lunged at her with an axe. The poor woman either took refuge in the neighbour’s home, or circled around the cottage until her husband fell asleep; she would then creep into the house, lie down, and tremble and shake until dawn, covering herself with a coarse blanket and huddling with her daughter Onylka, who whispered into her ear everything that her father had said and done.

Her father had sworn at Onylka, and when she did not want to eat the small buns he had given the children, he had shouted: “So, you’re like your mother, are you, you devil’s child! So, you’re the one who opens the damn door at night to let that scurvy woman in! Ha! You think I don’t know? I know everything . . . Just you wait, your turn will come . . . Eat the bun right now, or I’ll throw you out into the snow with your mother, you damn bitch!”

His eyes were terrifying, like red-hot embers, and he waved his hand so threateningly that Onylka grabbed the bun and begged: “Oh, daddy, I won’t . . . I won’t . . . I’ll eat the bun!”

The younger children, Ivanko and Motrya, roared with laughter: “Why doesn’t that stupid Onylka want to eat the bun?”

The father caressed the younger children, and he petted Ivanko most of all, calling him Vasyl, like the son he had buried . . .

Occasionally Ivan would sober up, and then his wife would tell him what he had done, and how he had sworn at her. Any other man would not have put up with a woman telling him that—he would have grabbed a whip and let her have it—but Ivan would just lower his head, not wanting to see or look at anything or anyone, and then he would say: “Oh, may it all go to hell! How hateful everything is to me! A man lives and lives, and the devil only knows why!”

One day Khivrya told someone that Ivan Voyin was punishing people because all of them, including herself, had forgotten about Zanudykha’s flour. But, she maintained, Ivan Voyin had not



forgotten, and so he had punished Kryvda for the theft by taking his son away from him. To her great misfortune, someone told Ivan Kryvda, when he was drunk, what she had said. He began cursing Khivrya and recalling how she had caused his downfall because of the widow's flour; finally, in his drunken stupor, he came to the conclusion that she had placed a curse on his son, and he told everyone that he would kill her.

Kryvda should have been angry with Zanudykha because it was she who had sued him and asked that a prayer service be held to bring misfortune down upon him. But he drank whiskey with her son and had not heard her say anything that would stick in his craw. He did, however, take a violent hatred to Khivrya, and the day came when he became so incensed as he ruminated about it, that he set fire to Vasyl's house.

Vasyl's house burned down, and so did Ivan's, and all the houses in that corner of the village. Oh what a terrible calamity it was!

When the authorities learned that Ivan had set the fire because of his hatred of Khivrya—he himself admitted this—they banished him to Siberia. His wife died—she had come down with a cold when he had chased her out of the house; and their children scattered in all directions.

When Khivrya found out about everything, she wept and cried out to her husband: "Oh, my dear Vasyl, what have I done to you and your children? It would have been better if I had been buried alive than to have such a misfortune happen because of me! Kill me! Of what use am I to anyone?"

Khivrya thought that her husband truly would kill her, but he only said: "That's enough, that's enough now! Maybe it . . . maybe it's just that I'm such a born loser," and he lowered his head.

From that day on, Khivrya's life became sheer hell. The entire corner of the village, indeed, the whole village looked maliciously at her and railed at her, pulling out all the stops. They blamed her for their misfortune, and she could not show her face in public. And at home, beginning with her mother-in-law and ending with her little children, all of them, to the very last one, reproached her and called her "a damn blabbermouth." Khivrya wept, but did not argue with them, because she herself felt that she was to blame.

Using the money that the administration gave them, Vasyl and his brother, who had returned from serving his stint in the army, built

themselves a new house. But the family still reproached Khivrya for the fire, and tried to goad Vasyl into beating her. But he, on the contrary, began to treat her more kindly, almost as if she had charmed him in some way. Not only did he not beat her very often, he even rented a house of his own so they could live apart from his brother.

They lived in poverty, but they did not mind, because it was quiet, with no quarrelling or fighting. It was all the more quiet ever since Khivrya had clammed up and remained silent. She would occasionally toss in a word or two, but for the most part she did not say anything, and the women found it boring to be with her. Previously, those who knew how to go about it could find out everything they wanted to from her, but that was no longer the case.

She was always fussing over her children, cuddling them and kissing them until it was disgusting to watch her! She had loved her children before, as well, but at least she had not spoiled them; but now she devoted herself totally to them, as if she had forgotten that life in the real world would be difficult for children who were raised so tenderly.

There was only one thing that she worried about when it came to her children—that they should not be overly talkative, and so she always cautioned Nataalka: “Don’t say anything.” “Be quiet.” “Just say: ‘Who knows?’” “Hush, children, sit quietly in your burrow; if you don’t bother anyone, no one will bother you.”

But do children want to sit in a burrow? They were bored in the house; they were bored when they could not go outdoors; they were bored without the company of other children, without toys, without the sun, and without flowers; and there came a time when they had to learn to lie, so that others would not beat them, or abuse them, or laugh at them. So they could be happy.

*The Migrants*  
(*From Home and Back Home Again*)  
(1900)

Hnat Sobolenko was quiet and industrious, a skilful man who worked at carpentry. Although almost every carpenter is a drunkard, Hnat abstained from liquor, and so he was always in great demand—people prefer to hire a carpenter who does not drink, because you do not have to give him “a shot or two.” In spite of the fact that Hnat did not drink and had a lot of work, he was poor; he had four children, no land, and had recently buried his wife.

People used to say that his wife Khodolya was not much good for anything, but he must have thought she was just fine, because he never beat her and, after she died, said it was hard to be without a wife. He did not remarry; he feared that a second wife would not be as good as the first, and that he would have to humour her. He also dreaded the thought of giving his children a stepmother.

Khodolya had come from a large family, and her stepmother had beaten her and made fun of her, as if the girl existed solely for her amusement. The other children in the family—Khodolya’s brothers and sisters—did not let their stepmother abuse them and were quick to snap back at her, so she picked on Khodolya, who was timid and not very bright.

Often the stepmother would order Khodolya to do something, and the poor girl would not have a clue how to go about doing it. The stepmother would become infuriated and yell: “Do it at once! Are you going to eat your daily bread without earning it, or what?”

She shouted at Khodolya, but never, under any circumstances, showed her how to do it. And Khodolya, who simply could not figure things out, would weep until her older sister Motrya showed her, or helped her, or more often than not, did the task for her.

The stepmother, seeing Motrya take over, would strike Khodolya on the cheek, or the ear, or wherever else her hand happened to land, and yell: “So, others have to do your work for you, you damned lazybones! You’re hopeless!”

And she would continue slapping Khodolya around until her brother or older sister came to her defence. “Really, mother, why are you always beating her? That’s enough now!”

Khodolya clearly recalled an incident that had happened when she was still little; she had let a pig get at a pumpkin in the garden, and the stepmother had come after her with a whip. Khodolya had fled into the village with the stepmother at her heels; the whip struck her on the back, and then on the ear. She ran faster, and so did the stepmother, cursing her all the while. Khodolya was screaming so loudly that all the villagers heard her.

“Ohhhh! I won’t let it happen again! Help!” Khodolya shrieked as she reached the cottage where her aunt lived.

Hearing her screams, the aunt dashed out of the house, shielded Khodolya, and said calmly to the stepmother: “I won’t let you cripple the child, kinswoman.”

The stepmother, flushed and out of breath, was unable to restrain herself; she wanted to lunge at Khodolya, seize her, beat her, maybe even kill her, and thus vent her fury. Without so much as looking at the woman, she rushed straight ahead as if she were blind, snapping her whip in all directions. The aunt slammed the door in her face and did not let her into the house.

Khodolya was trembling like a leaf; she could hardly swallow the turnover that her aunt pressed into her hand, and the pastry turned salty from the tears streaming uncontrollably from her eyes. That day, she refused to go home; finally, when evening came, the aunt had to take her back herself. By then the stepmother had cooled down a bit, but she still gave Khodolya a few good shoves for eliciting the aunt’s pity.

Khodolya’s father never defended her. A drunkard, he rarely stayed at home, drank up all the money he earned, and occasionally took things from home on the sly to sell in the tavern. Whenever he got drunk, he would strike himself on the chest and declare dramatically: “Oh that whiskey—it’s a devil’s brew that destroys a man.”

The stepmother often censured the children for having such a father: “That’s some father you have—may the devil take him!”

Khodolya wept both for her father and for herself. She also wept because she was often cold and hungry, for when the children were still small, there was not much money, and often there was neither enough straw nor grain to last the winter. And so they would all sit, like worms burrowed in the ground, without a fire and without any

food, until the stepmother managed to dupe the father into giving her some money when he was sober, steal it from him when he was drunk, or get it from the man who hired him—he was a thatcher—before he got around to picking it up himself. Some of the householders, knowing that her husband was a drunkard who would spend all that he earned on liquor, would give her the money, but others would not, because they knew that when he was drunk he charged less for his work and did not notice if he was given the full amount owing to him.

The cottage of Khodolya's father was very dilapidated on the exterior—he kept saying he was going to build a new one, but he died without doing so—and, on the inside it was dirty and cramped, and there was always a lot of swearing, shouting, and quarrelling, because so many people were crammed into it. Khodolya had three sisters and two brothers—that added up to six children; the stepmother had two children of her own from her first husband and two from Khodolya's father—that increased the number of children to ten; and then there were the two adults—a total of twelve people under one roof, in one room!

Someone was always refusing to share something: "Don't touch it! That's mine!" or trying to chase someone else away: "Get away from here! Go to the devil's mother!"

And, above the din, the stepmother's voice could be heard: "Shut up, you devil's brood! Just let me grab a whip, and you'll see what will happen!"

Then her own children would start in with their complaints: "He hit me! She won't give me her comb . . ."

When the punishment was meted out there were more tears, more fighting . . . all hell broke loose!

To make matters even worse, the little ones were all equally hungry—although the stepmother's own children may have been a little less hungry—and they were all equally cold.

On the days when all the children were happy because they were neither hungry nor cold, there was such a racket that it almost behooved you to remove the holy icons from the cottage. One child crowed like a rooster, a second meowed, a third barked, a fourth squealed, and a fifth simply shrieked: "Ddyaya-ddyaya-ddyaya!" or "la-la-la-lam!" Some of the children galloped like horses; others chucked onions, sunflower seeds, and potatoes at each other. They laughed and hiccuped; their little legs were jumbled like birch

saplings; their childish voices mingled like the chirping of crickets; their small hands and arms were tangled like cobwebs; their young eyes exchanged glances like lightning bugs, and it was impossible to figure out what was going on.

No matter how often Khodolya's father vowed to stop drinking, he could never keep his word for more than a week. Without fail, someone would bring about his downfall, and he, after getting soused, would chastise himself and others: "You shouldn't drink! It's a shame to drink! Oh, my dear brothers, you shouldn't drink! You know, I have children . . . Yes, I do . . . I have children . . . So why do I drink?"

Then he would go home. As soon as he entered the cottage, the children would scatter like peas into the corners—not so much in fear of their father, as to seek refuge from the stepmother. And he would begin to plead tearfully with his wife.

"Well, wife, go ahead and beat me now, because I'm drunk. Well, can I help it that I'm a wee bit tipsy? My dear children . . . Where are you my little doves? Come and see what your father is like . . . he's worthless . . . a good-for-nothing . . ."

"Oh, lie down, lie down and go to sleep," his wife would say, speaking so softly that Khodolya's eyes would open wide in surprise. Was it her stepmother talking, or was it someone else? Wasn't she the one who had cursed their father just this morning, saying: "Well, it's some father that you have—may his mother be twice cursed! He's dragged himself off to the tavern once again, the drunkard!"

And, before he fell asleep, the father would carry on for a long time: "I'm a skil . . . fu . . . fu . . . ful . . ."—he could not pronounce the word 'skilful' when he was drunk—"man . . . and I have only these . . . only these hands . . . my ten fingers . . . nothing more. Oh, my head, my poor little head . . . Where is it?"

The smaller children would crawl out of their corners and, laughing all the while, bravely clamber up on his knees: "Daddy, daddy, your head's right here!"

The father would clutch his head in his hands and sob: "Oh, my poo-oo-oo-oor little head . . ."

After the father died, the older children went to work for others, and life became somewhat easier; and when the stepmother also died, the situation improved greatly for Khodolya and her brothers and sisters. Khodolya, however, never did become cheerful, or clever, or talkative; she was like a flower that finds it hard to revive after

being nipped in the bud by the frost. And she was not very healthy; she was sallow, her brow was furrowed, and her large grey eyes were terror-stricken; her face was splotched, her lips pale, and her teeth rotten. In a word, she was, as both her stepmother and other people said: “Not much good for anything.” Nevertheless, someone did come along who took her for his own.

If the truth be told, he took her because he knew that she would suit him, and that was why he did not listen when people told him that she was sickly and ugly.

Hnat Sobolenko had also been orphaned at an early age, and so he lived either with his married brother—there were just the two brothers—or with anyone else who let him earn a crust of bread. Having come to know misery at an early age, he did not like cheerful young people, or parties, or girls who made eyes at the boys, threw sunflower seeds at them, and kissed them behind fences.

Hnat also did not like anyone to make fun of him, and that was why he married Khodolya—it seemed that she did not know how to laugh. She was always alone, like a turtle dove among the crows, and he was always alone, like a black poplar in the forest; she was an orphan, and so was he; she was quiet, and he was quiet, but she was even more withdrawn than he was, for he did not like a woman to rule the roost. And so they got married.

Motrya, Khodolya’s oldest sister, had said that she would not get married until all her three sisters were wed, and so, despite the many suitors that she had, remained single until she gave Khodolya in marriage to Hnat. As soon as she discharged her responsibilities, she got married, even though she was getting on in years. Of all her sisters, Motrya cared the most for Khodolya, because she was so quiet and so scared of everything.

Khodolya was timid by nature; she even feared her husband, though there was no need to fear him. She was probably also afraid of her four offspring—children with long necks, faces as round as a *kopiyka* [penny], gaping mouths, and bulging grey eyes—who trailed after her like goslings on spindly legs. Indeed, she must have been afraid of them, for she never told them to go home, despite the fact that she was embarrassed when they followed her everywhere.

She would politely plead with them: “Go home, my dear children; go home, my little darlings. I’ll be back shortly.” But she might as well have been talking to the wind. The two little boys would begin to clamour: “We’re going with you! Yes, we are ! Oh, oh, oh . . .”

Then the two little girls would start to snivel: “We want to go too! Yes, we do . . . we do . . . Take us!”

And so, Khodolya could not go anywhere unless she managed to sneak away. The odd time when she got up the nerve to say: “Get away from me!” the children would all begin to wail and cling to her skirt, and she would have to either stay at home or take them with her, like a goose leading her goslings, because they always walked single file behind her.

It was in this way that Khodolya spoiled her children. They were always cranky, irritable, and clamorous, and they ate a great deal and were often sick. When they fell ill, she was beside herself as she rushed about the house, because her children were all she had, her only purpose in life, and the youngsters, fully realising it, tore at her from all sides, the way wind tears at a shrub.

One would cry: “Mummy, I want to eat!” Another would shout: “Mummy, tell us a story!” And then they would all wail in chorus and tug at her, or, if they became angry, pummel her with their tiny fists. The youngest boy was her pet and the most spoiled of all. He would crawl up on the table or bench and throw things on the floor, and so Khodolya always had to be on guard to ensure that nothing was ever left lying around. As for the older boy, he stole her knives to use them for whittling and invariably lost them.

The girls were not little brats like the boys, but they were always whining and pouting for no good reason. If Khodolya asked them what was wrong, the older girl would burst into tears, scream, fall down on the floor, and kick her feet, shouting all the while: “I want! I want! I want!”

“What do you want?” the mother would ask.

But the girl would just repeat, again and again: “I want! I want!”

“Phooey on you!”

And then the younger girl would tangle the spun yarn, break a string of coral beads, and begin to squeal: “I want! I want!”

Quite understandably, after Khodolya’s death, life was hard for such spoiled children. It would have been difficult to find a good stepmother for them, and so Hnat did not marry a second time.

Even though Khodolya came from a large family and had many neighbours, she had no real friends. Except for Motrya, all her sisters had been married off into neighbouring villages, and Khodolya was afraid of her neighbours; it was only the old woman Lysykha who occasionally dropped by to see her.



Lysykha was a widow who, after the death of her husband, drank away all her possessions, of which there had been a great many, as her husband had been a stingy man, and they did not have any children. Even while her husband was still alive, Lysykha had liked her drink, but she had not yet become an inveterate drunkard. Back then, because her husband abstained from alcohol and did not permit her to drink it, she always maintained that she had to take a sip now and again “to treat” her bad teeth.

After her husband died, she sold off everything—to the very last item—and found herself with so much money that she was sure it would never run out. Instead of entrusting it to someone for safekeeping to ensure that it would last her for the rest of her life, she began to carouse and drink. She continued drinking and eating the finest foods until all her money was gone, and then she started begging people to take her in. But who would want her now? She had become a drunkard, had no money, and reeked so badly that you could not bear to come near her. Moreover, she was ill and had almost no clothing, just a shirt, a skirt, a jacket, a kerchief—and absolutely nothing else. Worse still, she never washed, or combed her hair, or laundered her clothes, and so all the women found her repulsive and chased her away when she approached them.

Khodolya was the only one who accepted old Lysykha. There were times when, wrapping the old woman in her own sheepskin coat, she would wash her clothing for her; and she always fed her and gave her the odd *kopiyka*. At those times, Lysykha, who ordinarily was silent, like a beaten dog, became garrulous; she shouted, sang, heaped abuse on the entire village, and even swore at Khodolya for being “so stupid and so foolish as to feed her, old Lysykha.”

This did not sit well with Khodolya. She wanted to help Lysykha in secret, without her husband and other people knowing about it, and so she would end up saying that she would never again do anything for Lysykha, no matter what. When the old woman showed up the next time, however, and swore that she “would not be like that,” Khodolya would give her something—some pork fat, a piece of bread, or some other tidbit—and wash Lysykha’s shirt; but she refused to give Lysykha any money until the old woman begged and cried so much that it was impossible not to give in to her.

In addition to Lysykha, Khodolya had some other friends like that—beggars, cripples, and blind people. She never threw stale bread into the pig trough as other women did, but saved all of it for

beggars; and every wandering lyre player knew that if she had any food at all, she would sooner feed him than eat it herself. And then she would listen to his songs for as long as he continued singing, weeping just as bitterly over his cheerful songs as over those that were sad . . .

Khodolya had still another friend—Ustya, a deaf-mute young woman who ran over to see her every day and called her “Mmamm.” If Ustya was in a happy mood, she would kiss Khodolya and twirl her about the house; if she was sad, she would shout and moan piteously and angrily, and look at Khodolya like a sick calf, and Khodolya would stroke her head and caress her.

Every day Ustya bemoaned the fact that a certain young man had fooled her; he had left her with a child, and now did not want to marry her or live with her in order to make her “a proper young married woman.” He had gone far away and left her all alone.

Even though the girl grieved that she had been deceived, she loved her little son passionately. Every day she would run over to brag, first, about how much he had grown, and then to tell Khodolya how he mimicked her and refused to obey her.

Ustya came to see her so often that Khodolya came to understand her garbled attempts at speech better than her father. As for Ustya, she became so attached to Khodolya that, when the latter died, she wept for a long time, beat her chest with her fists, and ran through the entire village, telling everyone that Khodolya was gone and asking them what she, poor thing, was to do now.

The first week after Khodolya’s funeral, Ustya came to Hnat’s home every day. She would look closely at everything in the house and stare intently, first at Hnat, who silently continued with his carpentry work, and then at the children who, terrified and uncomprehending, huddled in a heap, like blind kittens. Then she would strike her arms against her sides and begin to cry, and the children would follow her example, but she could not hear them.

It would have been better if she had helped Hnat with his children, but, even though she knew how to do everything, she did not seem to realise that he needed assistance. As for Hnat, he did not tell her to do anything; she would simply cry for a while and then run home.

Where was Hnat to look for help after the death of his wife? If it had not been for Motrya, Khodolya’s sister, he most certainly would have perished, because he had to do everything himself—keep the fire burning in the stove, cook meals, bake bread, do the laundry,

and take care of the children. He simply refused to get married, and that was that! And so, even though Motrya's husband scolded her, she always found a spare moment or two to run over to Hnat's cottage and do a few chores.

She would dash in and begin shouting at the children in a rough voice: "Well now, come here, you wretched child, and I'll mend your shirt; you've sure done a good job of ripping it! As for you, you snotty young fellow, wipe your nose! Come here, you magpie, and you too, you little chick, and I'll give you some buckwheat groats, because you're hungry, you foolish little things!"

After feeding and combing them, she would tidy up the cottage, light the fire, cook some food, tell the older girl to sweep the floor, yell at all of them to sit still, touch this up and then that, stoke the oven, turn and do something first here and then there, knead the bread she had started making the evening before, shape the dough into loaves, shove them into the oven, and, should Ustya happen to show up just then, tell her to take the bread out when it was ready.

And as she rushed home, she would chuckle quietly: "Is there really that much work at Hnat's place? Even a sparrow could do it; there are no pigs, no geese, and no cattle to tend to—he doesn't have a cow, and the horse can take care of itself."

Now that there was someone to take charge, Ustya also began helping Hnat. She and her little boy spent entire days in Hnat's cottage, until one day her father, angry that she was gadding about and not getting her own work done, gave her a sound drubbing.

Disturbed by this incident, Hnat led her to the door, tapped her lightly on the shoulder, and pointed: "Go away!"

She became angry, spat, and brandished her fist at him, but she did stop coming over.

Between the two of them, Motrya and Hnat managed on their own. At first the children were afraid of Motrya, but in time they grew accustomed to her; however, they never dared to whine and carry on with her the way they had with their mother.

Motrya did her best to convince Hnat that he should get married, saying that she could not spend her life looking after his children. In response, he said that if she had no time, and if her husband was annoyed, then she could abandon him, and he would have to manage somehow or other until the children grew up, because he simply did not want them to have a stepmother. Motrya shouted that she was not saying that it was too hard on her, but that it was "not

convenient” for him to be without a wife. After all, did he actually think that a nice young woman could not be found for him? Why, take Paraska Kyselykha, the young widow; she even had a cottage, and Hnat would not have to live in a stranger’s house.

Hnat was as stubborn as an ox. He would not listen to what she was saying and continued living alone, while Motrya ran over almost every day “to tend to the children,” as she put it.

And so, Hnat did not get married; he had something else on his mind, a problem of another kind. He had come up with the idea of moving to Tomsk. It was something he had wanted to do while Khodolya was still alive.

He had often said to her: “Look, let’s go! Let’s go and find ourselves a better life! Let’s go somewhere; we don’t want our children to be landless!”

She was agreeable to everything; she did not have any thoughts of her own and relied completely on Hnat. And she would have endured anything, suffered anything, just as long as the children would be better off.

At that time, people from neighbouring villages were already setting out for Tomsk, but Hnat had not yet made up his mind; it did not feel right to be the first man in his village “to initiate” the trek. But now that throngs of people were on the move, he also wanted to go. Hnat liked to examine things from all sides, but, no matter how he looked at the possibility of migrating, there were some indisputable facts. First, it might be bad there, but it was also bad where he was now; and, second, how bad could it be over there, if there was land, as much land as a man wanted to plough. And so he decided to migrate and, once he made up his mind, no one could hold him back.

He reflected on the matter in the following manner: “Well, really now, am I to perish where I am without ever having owned any land? Are my two sons going to work, like me, on land that belongs to someone else? And live in a house that belongs to someone else? And eat bought bread? Or wander about homeless among strangers to earn a crust of bread? Oh, no, I don’t want that to happen! I have to start looking for a spot for myself, I have to go somewhere—to the ends of the earth if need be! After all, there must be a parcel of land somewhere for my sons as well; there must be free land over there, in Tomsk. Just think how many people are resettling there! There’s a lot of land there—enough for everyone!”

And the more Hnat thought about it, the more he wanted to jump up, take to his feet, leave at once, fly to that distant region in a single moment, measure off some land, and stroll on his own fields. His hands were itching to plough, to harrow, to sow, to reap, and to thresh his own rye, to build his own house. He could already see in his mind's eye the log cabin he would build—it undoubtedly would be a house made of logs, for people said that there was more than enough forest there, the devil take it! It was then that he would show people what kind of a carpenter he was!

Tomsk was all he could think about, all he could talk about with every man that he met, and all the more so with the men who were getting ready to go with him on the long journey. These men were: Vasyl Kutsy—his father had chased him out of his home, left him without a patch of land, and told him to get along in life as best he knew how; Vasyl Ryaby who, as the sixth son in his family, was fated to receive only a narrow strip of land; Maksym Puhach, who worked in various factories, wandered here and there, and was convinced that there was no place on earth that could possibly be worse than where they presently lived; and Vasyl Rudy, who had so many children that his cottage was bursting at the seams.

There were also some men who were not being driven by poverty. Take, for example, Yermylo, the rich man who wanted to migrate in the hope of growing still richer; or Mytrokhvan Bily who felt stifled at home and, instead of sitting in one place all his life like a mushroom, wanted to go away to see the world and other people; he did not want to die without seeing for himself what existed far beyond his native village, his native steppe; repulsed by his father's old house made out of wattles, he wanted something different, something better . . .

Still others were going simply because it was all the same to them if they were here or someplace else, and they went along with the others just as a splinter of wood drifts with the current.

It was quite a sizeable group of people that came together, and they all began selling off their belongings, saving up their money, and preparing for the road. They did not plough their fields or sow any crops. Every Sunday they would meet, talk things over, shout, argue, and rejoice that they would be setting out soon—but exactly where they were going, they really did not know.

Hnat sold his horse, collected the money owing to him for his work, sold his brother his half of the garden patch, and was all ready

to apply to the county council for an official document permitting him to leave, when the most careful of the migrants, Yermylo—the man who wanted to go in order to become richer—decided that things should not be done in this fashion. He thought they should know more about the region to which they were migrating.

The matter was discussed, a collection was taken up, and a decision was made to send two scouts on ahead to see what they could find out. The men chose Konstyantyn, Tsarenko's son, a teacher in a distant village, and, as a companion for him, they selected Maznytsya, a single man who had no children, and whose wife had left him many years ago.

The two scouts were outfitted and sent on their way. They left and did not hurry back. One month went by, and then another one, and they still did not return. The people were becoming impatient and growing restless. Hnat was more anxious than anyone else; both waking and sleeping he saw his log cabin with its ornately decorated doorframes and the golden field that belonged to him. It seemed to him that he had wasted a lot of time for nothing, that he should have gone when Khodolya was still alive, and that maybe she would not have died if he had gone.

And now a rumour started up once again that it was possible to resettle, that land was being given away—as much land as you needed, as much as you wanted—and that people were going there in droves, crushing everything in their path like ice floes in the springtime, and that they were on their way because they could have a good life there, and freedom, and land.

That was when Hnat began rushing about, preparing to leave as soon as possible and convincing others that they too should go, without waiting for the scouts to return. But the others did not pay much attention to him. It was then that, on his own, he put in a request for an official travel document. Every day he looked up at the sky, where the pink clouds announced that spring was drawing near, and then, turning his eyes to the ground that was slowly thawing, eating away at the snow a patch at a time, and growing soft, like a pillow, he would think: "It's time to plough! Oh yes, it's time to seed!"

"What do you have in mind, in-law? What do you think you're doing?" Motrya stormed at Hnat like a tempest, as she rushed around in his house.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Where’s your brain?”

He looked at her and asked angrily: “What do you mean?”

“Oh sure—what do you mean?” Motrya mimicked him. “You want to take the children away who knows where and why, and without a mother at that—without a mother! Well, I must say—that’s very smart!”

“I know very well where I’m taking them and why, and as for you, in-law, don’t interfere in something that’s none of your business,” Hnat retorted sharply.

Motrya struck her hands together in astonishment: “Do you actually think I’ll let them go? What a strange idea!”

“Well, really now, what kind of guardianship is this? Get out of here! I know what I’m doing. I’ve had more than enough of roaming among other people like a soul that’s damned. Over there, in Tomsk, I just might be able to find a spot for myself and for my children—and I don’t intend to ask your permission,” Hnat said as he turned away.

Motrya, not the least bit offended, responded: “Well, fine, you’re going to Tomsk; so that means you need to look for a wife.”

“What the devil for?”

“Oh sure, what the devil for! But should children like these be dragged on such a long trek without a mother? To have them all die along the way? Helpless little children like this? Young little tykes like this?” And Motrya jokingly, but, nevertheless painfully, tugged the hair of one of the boys.

Glancing first at his youngest child and then at the others, Hnat grew a bit concerned, but then he said: “It will be fine. We’ll get there one way or another.”

Motrya, striking her forehead as if she had thought of something, dashed out of the house.

From that day on, Motrya began looking for a wife for Hnat. And when she found one, she swooped down on Hnat and insisted that he get married.

She was supported in her efforts by Hnat’s brother, his sister-in-law, all of Khodolya’s family, and all of the neighbours. They made it seem as if there was no way that Hnat could set out for Tomsk without getting married, because it was impossible to look after the children without a wife, either on the way to the new place, or when he got there. After all, Hnat had more than enough problems to worry

about, and if he had to take care of whining children as well, he would surely lose his mind. Besides, the widow that they were advising him to marry had a house and a cow that could be sold, and the money would come in handy in those foreign parts.

As for the widow, she was young, cheerful, industrious, and, most importantly, willing to resettle in Tomsk. Hnat, feeling like cabbage pressed down by a heavy weight when he heard all this advice, mellowed, and agreed to get married. He was also favourably impressed by the widow's cottage and the fact that it could be sold.

Hnat's bride, Lysaveta Baldyna, was still fairly young. A robust woman with broad shoulders, a round face, large eyes, and eyebrows that were straight and fine, she liked to show off her strength in front of others by expertly wielding a scythe or a flail, and by picking up sacks that were heavier than most men could manage to lift. She had served on various estates and, almost every year, gave birth to a child; she was like an apple tree that has no choice but to blossom annually and bear fruit.

She was attracted to one young man because he had dark hair; to another one—because he had curly hair; and to a third—well, who knew why he appealed to her. Everyone thought he was ugly, but she found him attractive, fooled around with him as long as she could, and then did penance for her sins—crying and cursing all young men, especially the Satan who had led her astray: “May he not live to see another day!” But, the very next year, she would indulge herself with yet another young man.

Lysaveta's husband had left her with one child, a twelve-year-old daughter called Hapunya. Her other three daughters were wild apple trees, not properly grafted ones. At times, Lysaveta kept a tight rein on her daughters, shouting at them and teaching them how to behave; at other times, however, she abandoned them and took no interest at all in what happened to them. At those times, Hapunya, the eldest daughter, had to assume the headship of the house. Lysaveta was interested mainly in sewing dresses for her daughters, and she led them around as if they were flowers—all in yellow, like gilly flowers, or all in red, like poppies, or in azure blue, like cornflowers, or in green, like the grass.

Lysaveta was very fussy about her own appearance as well. She dreamt up all sorts of fashions and enjoyed sewing, but only when the spirit moved her. There were days when she would sit around unwashed and uncombed, while at other times she would dress up



like a peahen. Most of all, she liked to do as she pleased—to cook, or not to cook; to work or not to work; or to abandon the children at home and have herself a good time. One day she would eat heartily, but the very next day she would drink only whey. She would live in an unswept house, and then an urge would overtake her, and she would turn the whole house upside down, cleaning it and putting things right; and she demanded that her daughters also be neat and hard-working.

“Why aren’t you doing anything?” she would yell at Hapunya. “Why don’t you see to it that your sisters are nicely dressed?”

And then, abandoning all her work, she would start carousing and enjoying herself, flitting about like a butterfly.

How had Motrya found such a bride? Was there no other woman who might be stricter, and who had fewer children? Why had she not stopped to think that to feed four plus four mouths might be too much? Well, she had, of course, hoped to find someone else, but Lysaveta was the only one who was willing to wander off to Tomsk; none of the others had wanted to marry “a Tomsk man.” In fact, the more the men wanted to head off for Tomsk, the more the women tried to hold them back. From the very first day that the idea of migrating to Tomsk spread like fire through the village, the women began to worry, to weep, and to complain.

The men felt constrained and bitterly unhappy at home. The women, however, did not want to go anywhere. Here, even though the situation was bad, everything was familiar, but over there, even though things might be good, no one knew what lay in wait for them. It seemed to them that Tomsk was at the end of the world, in a totally different world.

It was only Lysaveta who did not fear anything, who wanted to travel, to see more than just her own village. And so she agreed to marry Hnat, not only because he was a quiet and skilful man, but because he was preparing to migrate to Tomsk.

“So, there you have it, I’ll get to see the world as well,” Lysaveta said happily.

Her mother, however, was weeping and wailing: “Oh, woe is me! Where are you going, you silly fool? You’ll perish over there. You’ll all swell from hunger!”

“No we won’t; there’s grain there, as well,” Lysaveta laughed.

“How would you know? Maybe there is, and maybe there isn’t. What kind of a place is it? Where is it? Martyn Tsyapor went there,

and where is he? He's vanished! Oh, woe is me! Why are you going? And where are you going? No one from here has ever gone anywhere, but now—you've all gone crazy! If Hnat were staying here, I wouldn't say anything, because there's no denying that he's a good man . . . But if he's going to Tomsk, then may his father go berserk! Don't marry him, my daughter; I'm begging you."

"But why are you so worried, mother? Other people are going—and I'll go too."

"Do you think no one else will marry you? Is that why you're ready to wed such a wanderer? There are lots of men around."

"What kind of a wanderer is he? With him I'll at least get to see some of the world."

"You're crazy! You'll see the world! You'll work yourself to the bone there! Oh, dear me, what am I to do? Why go there? Why? You say it's bad here, but at least what's here is your own. It's bad! But if that's God's will, what can we do? Did our fathers or mothers traipse off somewhere? They stayed at home, and they lived and died in their own country. I'm not going, am I? And if your father were alive, he wouldn't be going. And your brother isn't going, because everything here is your own, your native land—you know every willow, every well, every boundary line, and they all know you. I'll never see you again, my daughter! And things will be worse over there than they are here—believe me!"

"They may be worse, but at least they'll be different," Lysaveta maintained stubbornly.

"Then may you be damned. If you don't want to listen to your mother . . . I'll put a curse on you!"

"Go ahead; it doesn't bother me!"

And even though Paraksa did not put a curse on her daughter, she went to the wedding with eyes red from weeping, and she tried a few more times to stop her daughter, but to no avail.

Lysaveta's eldest daughter Hapunya also wept. She understood quite a lot for her age, and more than once she asked her mother: "Why are you getting married, mother? My sisters and I will grow up, and we'll feed both you and ourselves. Why do you want to go to that Tomsk? Oh, my heart tells me that misery awaits us there. Why do you need a 'husband'? Why should we go there? We're doing well here. Oh, mummy, mummy, take pity on us!"

"So, your granny has taught you this, has she? Is it granny that's sent you here?"

“No, no, I swear to God that it wasn’t granny. It’s my own idea. Don’t get married, mummy. Let us grow up, let us . . .”

“Hush, I tell you! Why are you sticking your nose into this matter? How dare you speak to me like this?” And there were times when Lysaveta even beat Hapunya.

And Hapunya would scream: “Oh, I won’t do it any more, mummy! I won’t!” A few days later, however, she would begin all over again; at first, she would speak softly and timidly, like rustling ears of rye, but then she would grow bolder: “Mummy, let’s not go to that Tomsk. It’s bad there, I know it’s bad . . . Here we have our own house and a cow, but there we won’t have anything.”

“You’re being foolish. We’ll have the same things there. And we’ll grow even richer, because they’re giving away lots of land there, and we’ll see other people and more of the world. They say that everyone drinks tea there, and so will we.”

The little girls listened and, like tiny magpies, repeated her words: “Tea, tea . . .”

But Hapunya kept insisting: “No, no. My heart tells me that we’ll come to know misery there!”

“So, you damned girl, you’re calling down misery on us now?” Lysaveta became furious and beat Hapunya again.

It was in this the way that Lysaveta was badgered both by her mother and by Hapunya.

One time she said to her mother: “I’m sick and tired of staying here with you like a mushroom near a tree. Stay here by yourself if that’s what you want; it doesn’t matter to me. I’m going. Just don’t cry and don’t plead with me, because I don’t want to hear anything more about it.”

And she told Hapunya that if she dared to pipe up with another word from her corner, she would pierce her tongue with a needle.

So, both the granny and Hapunya fell silent, but they wept in secret. Paraska lamented among the women that she would never again see her daughter, and Hapunya kept voicing her concerns to her granny, begging her to turn this misfortune away from them.

“Let that old man find himself another bride. What good is he to us? Let him stay away from our mother! He thinks he’s really smart! You tell him, granny; tell him to leave us alone!”

Paraska did not know if she should laugh or cry as she listened to Hapunya. “God be with you,” she said. “Do you suppose he’ll listen to me? Do I mean anything to him?”

“Well then, let him take his own children to that Tomsk or wherever he wants to; but we don’t want to go! We don’t want to! We’ll perish there . . .”

“Yes, you will—that’s what I’ve been saying, as well.”

Both the granny and the granddaughter would begin to cry, and after they had their fill of crying they would feel a little better. And the granny—who lived with her married son—would sneak a potato out of the oven when her daughter-in-law was not looking, and give it to Hapunya.

After she finished eating the potato, the little girl would grow more cheerful and say: “Granny, exactly what is this Tomsk?”

“Who knows, my darling; it’s some kind of a town,” the granny replied. “It’s over there somewhere . . . I’ve forgotten where . . . Yes indeed, Martyn went there . . . It’s ve-e-e-ry far! We haven’t heard anything about him; maybe the wolves gobbled him up!”

Hapunya would once again begin to cry: “And that’s what will happen to us. The wolves will gobble us up, as well!”

“Oh, no, don’t be afraid, my dear!” the granny tried to console both herself and her granddaughter. “Maybe they’re only fooling us; maybe they won’t go. Who ever heard of such a thing? No, no, your mother will stay here; she’ll be afraid to leave. So don’t cry, darling; that’s enough crying.”

And this was how the granny and Hapunya often talked.

When Hnat got married and moved into Lysaveta’s cottage, Hapunya and her granny felt reassured that now he and Lysaveta would not go to Tomsk, because if they were planning to go, they would be selling the house. But Hnat could not sell either the cottage or the garden; the local authorities told him that the property belonged to Lysaveta’s children. Hnat was unhappy, but there was nothing he could do about it, and so, while he waited for permission to set out for Tomsk, he moved in with his bride.

Lysaveta’s home hummed like a beehive—there were as many children in it as there were berries on a bush. Hapunya was happy, because her “crew” was bigger now, and she kept a firm rein on all the little ones—especially on Hnat’s children, because they were not accustomed to obeying anyone.

The cottage resounded with Hapunya’s commands: “Shut up! Be quiet! What do you think you’re doing? Spin the wool this way, not like that!”

Even though Hapunya was not very pretty, she was skilful and dextrous, and so concerned about neatness that her mother jokingly referred to her as “Little Miss Prissy Fly.” Now there was no end to her work. She had to wash this one, braid that one’s hair, find this one’s cap, tie that one’s kerchief—and tie it nicely, and firmly, like an older girl would tie it—make a doll for this one . . . O Lord! Did she not have a lot to do? She had to divide onions and bread among the children, making sure that no one got more than the others; and she kept saying over and over again: “Watch out, or I’ll let you have it! I’ll show you a thing or two! You’d better watch out!”

When she was in a happy mood, she would tell them a fairy tale a “never-ending story,” one that could be continued from morning to evening without any need to finish it. She would narrate it to them as she tidied up the house, or peeled potatoes, or daubed the floor, and all the while her skinny braids bobbed up and down like mouse tails as she rushed here and there. She would be by the bench, and then, a moment later, way over at the other end of the house, chattering incessantly: “You’re saying—tell a story, and I’m saying—tell a story. Should I tell you a never-ending story?” And then she would say: “You’re saying—there’s no need to, and I’m saying—there’s no need to,” and so on and so forth.

But the children liked best the stories that Hapunya thought up all by herself and told them on Sundays. Sitting with her legs tucked under her and shelling sunflower seeds, she would begin: “In a faraway kingdom, in a faraway land, there once was a storm—such a terrible storm that it stood all the thatched roofs on edge, smashed all the windows, and knocked down all the houses. The furiously strong wind yanked trees out by their roots and toppled them to the ground, and plucked all the flowers from the gardens and the fields.

“The flowers rejoiced, because they were tired of standing on one leg all their life, and they began to prance about in a lively dance. And they were all very happy! There were marigolds, and cornflowers, and carnations, and poppies, and monkshood, and morning-glories, and castor beans, and roses, and asters, and nasturtiums, and cowslips, and sweet peas, and dandelions, and black-eyed Susans and—well, there were so many flowers, that you could not possibly count them all.

“And so they all began to dance, and the white, blue, and red harebells were the musicians. And they were all very happy. But then the carnation said to the nasturtium: ‘My dear in-law, you really

stink!’ The offended nasturtium left the dancing circle, lay down on the grass, and wilted, and the chicories attacked and beat the carnations until they stripped them of all their leaves. But the other flowers continued dancing and prancing about. And they were all very happy until the asters jabbed themselves on the prickly rose, and their boobos had to be bound with cobwebs; and then they all rushed towards a pond to have a drink of water, because it had turned very hot.

“When the goslings that were swimming on the pond saw this approaching army, they froze in fright.

“‘Good day!’

“‘Good day! From where has God sent you?’

“‘Oh, we’re free now,’ the flowers replied. ‘We can go wherever we please, just like you.’

“‘Oh, oh, oh, you rascals,’ the goslings said. ‘You’d do better to stay at home and not gad about; you’d better stay put, or you’ll come to harm.’

“The flowers laughed, and the geese swam away.

“When the flowers saw their reflections in the water they were delighted. They thought they looked ever so beautiful with their pink, blue, and white little heads, and so became even happier—except for the dandelion who lost her hair when she bent over the water and ended up looking like a bald old man. But that didn’t matter. The flowers joined hands and scampered farther on. No one wanted to run alongside the rose now, because she was so spiteful, so she skipped on ahead. When they came across a tumbleweed that was racing over the steppe, they all began to laugh, because it was running—but it had no arms or legs. They laughed so hard that the asters and the black-eyed Susans scattered their feathery petals along the way.

“The butterflies, seeing that there were no flowers anywhere—in the meadows, the gardens, or the fields—were very surprised: ‘Where have they all gone?’ They were worried. When they saw the flowers running from afar, sparkling like beads, or like colourful ribbons, they asked: ‘Where have you so-and-sos been?’

“‘We’re free now; we run wherever we feel like running. Keep up with us, if you can!’

“They roared with laughter and felt very happy. Trying to outrun one another, they raced around until late at night when they climbed up an oak tree to go to sleep; but they did not sleep for long, because

the butterflies kept telling them ‘a story about nothing at all,’ and when they finally did fall asleep, they tumbled down from the tree, because they had nothing with which to hang on to it—they had no roots, and they weren’t used to sleeping so high up; the rose was hanging by her thorns.

“In the morning the children went outside, and when they saw all the flowers lying under the oak tree, they thought that someone had scattered the flowers there to make garlands out of them. Before the flowers could flee—it was difficult for them to get up from the ground and run away—the children gathered them up; they even pulled down the rose that had attached itself to the tree. And the children were very happy!

“Then the children started pretending they were soldiers, and they knocked off all the flowers’ heads and crushed them. And the butterflies fluttered around them and squealed: ‘You see, you shouldn’t have run away, you shouldn’t have rejoiced. You should have stayed put, because that’s what God wanted you to do!’

“And that’s what it will be like if we go off to that Tomsk.” Hapunya sighed reflectively before concluding her story in the following manner: “And there weren’t any flowers or seeds left—they were all destroyed. And, from that day on, there was not a single flower in that kingdom, in that land; there was only the green grass.”

That was the story that Hapunya narrated, and the five little girls and two little boys listened and kept begging her to continue: “More, more, more,” or “Yes, yes, go on!” And they did not believe that the tale had been concluded.

“What tall tales are you telling them? What kind of nonsense are you concocting?” Lysaveta would smilingly ask her daughter.

Hapunya and the little ones would fall silent at once. They did not want “grown-ups” to know anything about their childish conversations, about their fairy tales. Why should they know? What business was it of theirs?

And so, sitting in a corner of the cramped cottage, Hapunya related to “her little children,” as she called them, much that was happy, and funny, and terrifying. And some of what she told them she dreamed up herself, and some of it she heard from others; and some stories were short, while others were long; and some she narrated loudly, while others she whispered softly—into their ears—especially at night, after their mother had put out the light, and everyone had gone to sleep.

The girls slept on the sleeping platform over the oven; there were times when they did not feel like going to sleep, but they could not talk out loud. And so Hapunya would press her mouth tightly to the ear of the girl nearest to her and say something, and that girl would pass it on to the third one, and the words would trickle down, like water in a trench, from five mouths into five ears, and they would talk this way until one of them fell asleep, and it was no longer possible to pass on what was being said.

When Hnat sold Lysaveta's cow, both the granny and Hapunya realised at once that he had not given up his notion of moving to Tomsk, and so both of them began grieving again. In turn, Hapunya tuned all her little charges just as a bandura is tuned, and they all ended up whining and pouting without understanding what it was all about.

When Hapunya told them: "The wolves will eat you there," it is little wonder that they worried and were afraid. Only Hnat's youngest daughter—Hnat often placed her on his knee and said: "We'll go far, far away, and it will be very very good there"—kept saying: "Father said it will be vely, vely good. Yes, he did! He said it will be vely vely good."

Hapunya kept thinking: "Mother is being ever so mean. Why couldn't she just be stubborn and say: 'I don't want to go, and I won't go.' If she took a firm stand, father would stay here, but the way things are now . . ."

She pouted and, for days on end, did not say a single word to her mother; she did not beg her to stay where she was, because she knew that her mother would beat her if she did. She just ran to her granny and tried to convince her to let her stay behind with her, but her granny did not know how to go about doing this.

One time, the granny mustered up her courage to beg Hnat not to go to Tomsk, because when she looked in the direction in which they were to travel, it seemed to her that she was looking into a well—it was so dark, so deep, and so terrifying!

In reply, Hnat said: "If your daughter wants to stay behind, let her; I'll go on alone."

"You should fear God—you'll destroy the children!"

"It's none of your business."

After that exchange, the granny did not open her mouth again. When Lysaveta heard the little children squealing: "The wolves will



eat us there,” she knew all too well who was instigating this nonsensical talk, and she beat not only them, but Hapunya as well.

One day the scouts returned. They had nothing good to report. Konstyantyn the teacher kept saying over and over again that it was not worth going to Tomsk, because the grain was bad, the soil was bad, and the people were bad. He and the other scout had walked over every foot of ground, looked at every spike of grain, and listened to everything that the people said about Tomsk; they had spent all their money, were left with nothing to eat or drink, and had barely made it home. And they had seen nothing good. The community could see at once that the teacher was a braggart seeking attention; no one but his father heeded what he said.

The other scout, Maznytsya, did not say anything; he just spat and muttered through his teeth: “If you go there—may your father go berserk.”

But the villagers did not believe him either, even though they felt as if someone had plucked all their hopes out of their hearts, just as threads are drawn out of a cloth to make a trimming. They did not want to believe them, and so they did not believe them. They concluded that the scouts were lying—that they had not gone to Tomsk, but had drunk up the money they had been given, and so there was no point in listening to them or believing them. They should gather together their belongings and prepare to leave.

Hnat was the most to blame that the men did not want to listen to the scouts. He never used to talk much, but now his tongue was loosened and, after every word they uttered, he kept repeating: “Fellows, don’t listen to them. Come on, let’s go! Let’s go!”

It was just at that time that Martyn Tsyapor sent a letter from Tomsk to his wife telling her to sell everything, pack up the children, and join him. He said he had money, that everything was going very well, and that his married brother should come out too, because no matter how many people came to Tomsk, everyone would be well off there.

The letter cheered everyone up, and they began to prepare for the journey. Now all the talk centred on Tomsk. Someone said—just who said it no one knew, for it seemed to come out of the blue—that there was a dragon there that swallowed people alive.

The “migrants” just laughed and said: “You don’t say! Well, as long as it snatches people alive, it’s not a problem; you can always

carry a knife, slice open its stomach from the inside, and step back out into God's world."

Others said that if a thief like Martyn made a good living in Tomsk, that meant things really were good there.

"If we're going, then let's go," Hnat said.

In the end, they went to the city, got their official documents, hired carts, piled them high with all sorts of goods, placed their children on top of everything—the same way they put them on top of sheaves that they hauled from the fields—took some soil from the graves of their parents, tucked it into their bosoms, crossed themselves, bid farewell to relatives who were staying behind, and set out on the long journey.

Just when Hnat was all set to start out, Hapunya disappeared somewhere; the children and Lysaveta searched all over for her. After finally finding her hiding in a patch of weeds, they brought her to the wagon.

She was crying and shouting: "Oh, save me, my good people! I don't want to go, I don't want to! Oh, I won't go! We have it good here. Oh, mummy, mummy! What are you doing? Just listen—we'll stay here . . . Take pity on us."

Listening to her, Lysaveta began weeping herself as she quietly reasoned with her daughter: "Why are you carrying on like this, my foolish little one, why? Just look how many people are going. So why are you afraid? Don't cry! If it's no good there, we can always come back . . . But now, we have to go, because the county council is telling us to go, you hear? Well, it's no use talking to you. Hush now!" she added sternly.

Hapunya calmed down a bit. She clambered up on the wagon all by herself, embraced Marushka, Hnat's daughter, and wept silently; however, when her granny Paraska began to wail beside the cart, she jumped down again, grabbed her by the skirt, and would not let go of her. Hnat tore her away, struck the mare with his whip, jerked the reins with one hand and Hapunya with the other one, and walked rapidly straight ahead, without turning around, even though granny Paraska was tearfully reproaching him for taking her daughter to the end of the earth.

Motrya shouted after him: "Hey, in-law, did you take some salt? Some suet? Wait up a moment! I've baked you some fritters. Untie your bag, and I'll give you some . . . He won't listen, may the devil take him! Stop! Stop for just a moment!"

The deaf-mute—appearing out of nowhere—was also screaming and running after Hnat's cart in an effort to detain him. But it was all in vain . . .

Lysaveta had to forcibly free herself from her mother, because the old woman was wailing and lamenting: "Let me look at you! Let me see you the way you are now, because I'll never see you again—I can feel it in my heart . . ."

At first, Lysaveta tried to joke: "I'll become even more beautiful over there, in Tomsk. You'll see . . ." But then she too burst into tears, tore herself free, and ran after Hnat, who was already quite far away, on the outskirts of the village.

When they left the village behind, the steppe—long, flat, and wide—stretched out before them right up to the horizon. The rye was in bloom, and a golden aromatic dust hovered over everything; the grain crops, sown in the springtime, rippled incessantly in the breeze in yellow and green waves. The men, staring gloomily at the ground, walked next to the horses; they were followed in silence by the women—some of them sighing and wiping their eyes with the hems of their jerkins—and the older children.

The younger children were perched high up on the carts, like chickens in a coop. They were happy and took a great interest in everything around them. Hapunya enjoyed observing the people, both from their own village and from neighbouring ones as well, who were walking ahead and behind them. She took note of what was piled on the wagons—where a red or blue skirt was showing, or where an oven rake or a kneading trough was sticking out.

Up ahead, the rich Yermylo was leading the way with as many as three carts. Even though he himself had outfitted the scouts and heard from them that it was not worth going to Tomsk, he must have decided that a person with money will survive anywhere; moreover, there was always the chance that you could strike it lucky. "Let's give it a try," he thought. Yermylo was walking at a dignified pace at the head of the line, just as he always headed the procession in the village church.

And Maksym Puhach was walking over there. Even though he was convinced that "it can't be worse anywhere than it is here, at home," his eyes were dimmed, a deep furrow was etched between his brows, and his lips were closed so tightly that they seemed to be glued shut. Maksym was walking even more slowly than his horse, as if someone had hobbled him, and he kept taking off his cap and looking

into it, as if there was something hidden there, and then he would put it on again, shoving it right down to his eyes.

Mytrokhvan Bily, on the contrary, was walking very briskly. It looked as if he would lift off at any moment and, with his long nose sticking ahead of him, soar over the steppe like a black stork.

Some people continually crossed themselves as they walked along, while others picked camomile or cornflowers that grew alongside the road. They either shyly hid the flowers in their bosoms or passed them to the children on the carts to play with. The children shouted for more flowers and begged to be taken down so that they could run around for a while.

The girls, who were eating sunflower seeds as they walked along, did not appear to be sad. Hapunya caught up to them after her father, releasing her hand that he had been holding tightly in his own, finally let her go.

Hnat had a lot of children on his cart, but there were even more of them in Vasyl Rudy's cart that trailed behind all the others. The youngsters—as small as little doves—were bundled in rags, and so the entire cart resembled that of a ragman with his collection of tattered old clothes. The mother, walking alongside the cart, was weeping bitterly, and it looked as if the father was wiping his eyes with his big grimy fist.

When they had travelled about three versts from their village, Hnat felt something clutch at his heart. Was he doing the right thing by going to foreign parts and taking his children with him?

“We'll have our own land,” Hnat consoled himself. “We'll have our own rye, and our own spring wheat, if not this year, then next year. It's really too bad that we started out so late! Well, in the meantime, we'll build ourselves a cottage, and then we'll see how things go. But I'll never see this village again!” The thought flashed through his mind like a streak of lightning, and a wave of bitterness engulfed him. He turned around, took one last look at his village, and dropped his hand in resignation.

“It will be better,” Lysaveta said to him, as if she had read his thoughts.

“Yes indeed,” he said. “but still, will it really be like that there?”

“What do you mean?” his wife asked, not understanding what he was saying.

Hnat once again gestured resignedly and looked up at the clouds that, hurrying on ahead of them, cast shadows on the carts, the

people, the rye, and the spring wheat, and momentarily even covered the sun . . . Where were they rushing to? Towards their fate, or away from it?

Along the way, they came across a group of people.

All the settlers doffed their caps in unison and bowed down low to them. On another occasion, perhaps none of them would have bowed so low before strangers, but now those people seemed like dear relatives to them—relatives that they were abandoning forever, just like everything else that they saw around them.

“These people are returning home,” Hnat thought, “and we’re going away from home. But it’s too late to turn back now, even if we wanted to.”

And the same thought crossed all the settlers’ minds, as if there were only one head among them.

The steppe spread out before them, unfurling its green wings, and the settlers trudged on and on . . . A wind came up and drove the clouds, the golden dust from the rye, and the settlers more quickly on their way. But where was it driving them? No one among them knew. They did not know the answer any more than Martyn’s little blind boy who, sitting beside his mother and brother on a cart, turned his eyes directly towards the sun.

After her daughter left for Tomsk, not a day went by but old Paraska thought of her and shed a few tears. It seemed to her that it was as if she had buried her daughter—but no—it was even worse, because it was as if she were still alive, but no longer there, and they would never see each other again! Most of all, she regretted that she had not kept Hapunya at her side. Oh, how the poor girl had begged her to keep her; she had wept and even tried to hide from her family!

At the time that the migrants were leaving, Paraska had thought it was impossible to have Hapunya stay behind with her, but now it seemed clear to her that it would have been very easy to have her remain at home. She ought to have asked her son and daughter-in-law either to hire Hapunya as a nanny for their little ones or to send her to work in the tobacco fields, and she would have paid them for the bread she would have eaten during the winter.

And old Paraska kept asking herself: “Well really, why didn’t I have the girl stay behind with me?” And she did not know the answer—whether it was because she feared her son, or thought that Lysaveta would not abandon Hapunya for anything in the world.

Now, however, she kept saying to her neighbours: "It's Hapunya I feel most sorry for—she really didn't want to go!"

Every day Paraska went to see her daughter's cottage, and every time she went there, her heart ached when she saw how deserted it looked. It remained empty, and no one could be found to rent it, because many of the migrants had abandoned their cottages.

After the migrants left, there was more room in the village, but not for the poorer people who had a lot of children. They remained in the cramped quarters of their old cottages and did not buy new ones—they did not have enough money. They began thinking that they too should uproot themselves and go to Tomsk.

Paraska's son, the appointed guardian of his sister's children, sold Lysaveta's house when he saw that it was not bringing in any income and spent the money on his own farmstead. Of course, no one asked old Paraska about it, and even if they had, she would not have said anything; she was convinced that her daughter and granddaughter would never return home, so it was best that at least her son's children have some benefit from the cottage.

Paraska finally received a long-awaited letter from her son-in-law. He wrote that, praise God, everything was "just fine." They had built themselves an *izba* [*a log hut*] and bought a pair of horses. They were all well and sent her their regards.

Old Paraska should have been happy to receive the letter, but she cried bitterly and did not believe a word of what was in it.

"I know in my heart," she said, "what kind of an *izba* it is—it's a hovel of some kind, and nothing more. A pair of horses? They don't have any horses. They only wrote that because they wanted to say that everything was fine . . . Oh, dear me, I feel so sorry for Hapunya. Why didn't I keep her with me? I don't regret that Lysaveta married Hnat—he's a quiet, gentle man—if only he had stayed here!"

The women neighbours listened to Paraska and added their bit: "Yes, that's how it is."

And then a rumour spread that the son of an older woman—a woman who had departed eagerly for Tomsk and dragged her son and daughter-in-law along with her—had lost his mind before they reached that distant land, and the old woman herself had lost her speech from the shock and grief.

The rumours kept coming, growing in volume like runoff in the springtime. Sitting by the church on a Sunday, old Paraska heard many terrible stories that made her cry time and time again. They

now said that Martyn had lied when he said things were fine in Tomsk; he had just wanted to trick his brother into joining him, because it was difficult to endure poverty alone, and he wanted others to have a taste of it as well.

They also said that someone who returned from Tomsk had described the grain that grew there as being black as the earth and bitter as wormwood. And it grew only in the first year—in the second year it did not yield a single sheaf. In order to plough the earth to grow the grain, you first had to clear the land of trees—something that people of the steppe were never supposed to do. And the trees there were bad; it was impossible to build a log cabin out of them, and so you had to live in a sod hut with a roof made of brushwood.

People also said that it was so cold there in the spring that on Easter Sunday the water in the wells was still covered with ice, and the ground was frozen so hard that you could not dig it with a spade. When some of the settlers who arrived in the springtime died there, axes had to be used to dig their graves. And when the snow melted after such freezing weather, the water rose to your knees, and the black flies arrived in such swarms that it was impossible to work during the day because they would eat you alive, and so you had to work at night.

There were no villages there; two or three migrant families would settle together in the bush, but they had no church with benches by it, and there was nowhere to buy salt, or matches, or kerosene, or whiskey, unless you were prepared to travel more than forty kilometres. Nor was there any place to earn some money, because there were no lords or Jews. And the “Kirghizes,” who were everywhere, did not want to give up their land, and when they did sell it, it was at an inflated price, and then they watched it like animals and, if things were not done to their liking, they were prepared to hack a person to death. Bandits, thieves, and convicts roamed the countryside and skulked around every corner, ready to kill you. And the migrants, especially the children, were often sick; their lips puffed up, and they could not eat . . .

Paraska’s heart broke when she heard these stories, and she decided to write her daughter a letter asking her to at least send Hapunya home with some of the migrants who were returning.

But it would not have been possible for Lysaveta to manage in those foreign parts without Hapunya. As soon as Lysaveta saw that “things were not turning out as they had desired,” her spirits drooped,

and she began to wail and curse the ill fate that had brought her to Tomsk. For days on end, she just stared at the forest that, instead of the green steppe, jutted up before her eyes.

She stood and lamented: "Oh, my poor little feet! You've walked so far and been so cold, only to find such misery! Oh, woe is me!"

Lysaveta was always like that; whenever things did not go her way, she at once began crying and cursing. And if you said something to her, she instantly became offended, refused to work, and just sat and grieved. She was an only daughter, and her mother had spoiled her from the time that she was little until she got married; and her husband had done as she said, and her life as a widow had been an easy one, but now—there you had it! She could not accept the fact that they were living in a windowless sod hut. There were times that she clawed angrily at the earthen walls while tearfully commanding them: "Split open, O damp earth! Split open, O grave!"

Time and again she would fall into a frenzy and beat the children just to relieve her heart. For days on end, she did not wash, comb her hair, or do anything at all. She liked to work with others, but here there were no people, no benches, no village street, no market, no church—you may as well perish! You had no idea when it was an ordinary day, or when it was a holy day. It was only when Hnat became very upset and yelled at her that she did something, but she did it so slowly, so unwillingly, that it was frustrating to watch her.

And so, as it turned out, Hapunya was the only one who helped her father a bit, because when she saw that her mother was grieving and incapable of doing anything, she said to herself: "Who will cook? Who will do the work?" She would cook a soup out of groats or nettles, gather brushwood, pick mushrooms, and take care of the children when they were hungry or grieved too much. Hapunya had a lot to do. In addition to feeding the children, there were times when she also had to feed her mother.

"Why did you bring me into this world, O mother of mine, if I'm to perish here?" her mother wailed, and at those times she did not want to eat or drink, and did not seem to see or hear anything.

Hapunya would beg her: "Mummy dear, that's enough; honest to God, that's enough. Mummy dear, eat some soup. Mummy, I have to feed the children as well, but there isn't another bowl or spoon, so eat quickly before father sees, or you'll be in trouble."

Lysaveta would listen to her and begin to eat, idly stirring the spoon in the bowl and raising it to her lips without looking at it.



And then she would throw it down, burst into tears, embrace Hapunya, and say: “Oh, my dearest, my precious one! I did the right thing in not leaving you with your grandmother.”

After a while, Lysaveta would force herself to do something, but before long she would become even more depressed that they lived as if they were in a prison, as if they were wolves in the forest.

As for Hnat, he worked very hard, weaving a fence around his garden, cutting brushwood—he could not find trees that were suitable for building a log cabin—digging clay, clearing the land, and planting trees. It was difficult for him to make any headway. The trees were not good, the soil was saline, the children were noisy, and his wife was unpredictable. Everything was working against him, and he often recalled Khodolya and thought that it would have been easier for him if she were with him. He grew belligerent—if he was opposed with a single word, he would shout: “I’ll kill you!”

Hapunya was the only one he treated kindly. He never shouted at her. She would run up to him and say: “Daddy, O daddy, can a fruit soup be made out of these berries? Look at all the branches I’ve dragged here. Just look, aren’t these mushrooms wonderful? Daddy, what are we to do now? We’re out of salt, so what do we do now? Should I run over to Uncle Vasyl’s place to borrow some? (Vasyl Ryaby had settled not too far from where they were living.) Daddy, Marushka and Maksymka found roots that can be eaten. They’re very sweet! Do you want to try some? Here, have some!”

One time Hnat asked her: “Well, Hapunya, do you want to go home to your grandmother?”

“How’s that?” Hapunya stared at him with her small grey eyes.

“Well, it’s like this. I picked up this letter when I went to the district office. Your grandmother wrote that we should send you home with anyone who is returning. So, I’ll try to find someone.”

Hapunya’s eyes lit up, but then she thought about it for a little while and said: “No, I won’t go.”

“Why not?”

“What will become of you here without me?”

“Yes, indeed,” Hnat smiled. “Well, we’ll just have to manage somehow.”

Hapunya began to cry.

“Why are you crying? What’s wrong, sweetheart?” Hnat asked.

For a long time she responded only by repeating: “It’s just, just, just . . .” And then she said: “How cheerful it must be back home.

The strawberries are probably ripe already, and little cucumbers must be forming on the vines . . .”

Hnat was also ready to cry. “Don’t worry,” he said. “In a short time, I’ll send you home to your grandmother.”

“No, no, daddy! I don’t want to go home to grandmother. I truly don’t. I won’t go, daddy, I won’t go! What about ‘my children?’” she added in dismay, as if she really were their mother.

“Forget about them! You’ll be better off with your grandmother,” Hnat tried to persuade her.

“Oh, don’t say that, because honest to God I’ll get good and angry,” Hapunya finally said.

Hnat fell silent and brushed his hand first over his eyes, and then over Hapunya’s smooth little dark head.

Hapunya ran off to be with her mother, but did not say anything to her about her grandmother’s wishes. Hnat also refrained from mentioning the letter to Lysaveta, and so Hapunya remained in Tomsk.

Hnat thought he would get through the summer one way or another, just to see how the barley he had sown would turn out. But there was no way that Lysaveta would stay. Having seen how cold the spring was, she refused to remain through the fall and the winter, and wailed stubbornly: “You can beat me, or kill me, but I won’t stay here! O Lord, if only I could die! Why did you bring me here? I may as well hang myself on a birch tree in that forest, because I won’t get out of here alive anyway!”

Well, Lysaveta’s wailing did not matter all that much to Hnat, but the children were falling ill. The mosquitoes, or maybe something else, made their skin break out in a rash, and then his youngest boy died. He caught a cold, or God knows what, and lay in bed for three days. Feverish, and red as a raspberry, he kept closing his eyes as if he found it hard to look at the world, and, on the fourth day, when his father bent over him, he caught hold of the tip of his father’s finger in his sweaty little hand and did not let go of it until he fell asleep . . . until he fell asleep forever and turned cold . . .

Hnat had to bury his son by himself, without any prayers and without a funeral service. It was then that he began to think: “What if my other son dies here, as well? No, I’d better go back home.”

To make matters even worse, towards the end of their stay their food ran out. They had eaten up the food they had brought with them,

the garden had not yet yielded anything, their money had all been spent on their trip and on the horses and the wagon that the Kirghizes had saddled him with, and so now they were reduced to digging out of the ground the potatoes they had planted in the spring.

And so Hnat decided to go back home. Of course, if he had been alone, without any children, and without the demented Lysaveta who, on top of everything else, had got pregnant, he probably would have managed to survive one way or another in the sod hut, and then he would have built himself a house out of logs . . .

Well, there was nothing that could be done about it! He sold the horses, gave away some of their belongings to the migrants who were remaining in Tomsk, and prepared to set out on the long trek home.

When Hnat drew near the village, the grain had already been harvested and, in most cases, hauled from the fields, so that only a few stacks of sheaves, like little golden cottages, remained here and there. The steppe was beginning to turn dark in places, like a jerkin adorned with long narrow pieces of cut velveteen, because many of the people had managed to get some of the ploughing done early, and the remaining stubble glittered like short blond hair on a little boy's head.

Even though the sun no longer wanted to blaze and shine as it formerly had, it was still a bright day. The air smelled of the soil and the rich aroma of the rye. The clouds were somewhat bigger than they had been in the spring, and the white ones, massing with the grey ones, turned dark and expanded. On one side of the sun, everything was still shining, but on the other side, streaks of rain united the sky with the earth; it looked as if someone was forcing grey poppy seeds through a sieve.

The road was still dry. Dust devils swirled and rose up in columns; a strong wind dispersed the clouds in the sky, whipped the kerchiefs on Lysaveta's and Hapunya's heads, tried to topple the children like winged insects from the cart, covered the eyes of the horse with its mane, and swept down the road, so that it was difficult to see what lay ahead.

Hnat, however, recognised his village from afar, and said: "Well, we've lived to see it once again!"

Lysaveta who had found it hard to trail behind the wagon on such a long trip, crossed herself and muttered: "Glory to Thee, O Lord!"

The children, shrieking and screaming as loudly as they could, bounced up and down like balls on the cart and almost rolled off it. Hapunya clapped her hands in glee, leapt forward, and raced ahead so much faster than the horse that a moment later she disappeared from view.

Hnat and his wife now resembled willows growing by the roadside in the steppe that, although not completely broken by the wind, are warped so badly that they do not look like anything at all. It was as if someone had forced them to dance until their heads were twisted off. Their children looked like small crumpled dry leaves that a tempest swirls pitilessly. They were pale, grey, as if sprinkled with ashes, and their eyes were wide with hunger. Just like the crushed flowers in Hapunya's story . . .

Hnat recalled that they had set out for Tomsk in a huge group, a long procession, but now he was returning alone, all by himself, with only one son, and, even though he had not felt very happy then, he was ever so much sadder now. He had not held in his hand the ears of rye that he had seeded, he had not threshed his own grain, he had not tasted it, nor would he ever do so now . . .

"I'll have to train my son to be a carpenter," Hnat thought, and he sighed deeply.

Old Paraska had nothing to be happy about when she saw her daughter once again.

"Oh, how skinny you've become!" she said, striking her hands together in dismay.

Lysaveta told her mother about all her suffering, recounting how the first woman who had gone there from their village had walked into their sod hut and told them: "Oh, my dear sisters, why have you come here? It's the second year now that I haven't had even a taste of borshch—here we all survive on just dry bread."

Well, now they were home again, but there was nothing to eat and nowhere to live, because the man who had bought their house did not want to let them in.

"I didn't buy a house just to return it to its owner," he said. "I don't want to have anything to do with that kind of buying. A man who sells his cow at the market does not take it back again."

Hnat did not have the cash to buy back the house, and so he had to do battle with the guardian who had sold it; in the meantime, he was forced to live once more in a rented house. And so Hnat's life was as wretched as it had been before, only now he was even worse

off, because he had lost many of his possessions, and there were still eight children to be fed—one had died in Tomsk, but another one was born when they returned home—and the youngsters were too small to be of any help.

Whenever Hnat was asked about Tomsk, he would just gesture hopelessly and say: “It would have been better if we had not gone there. I thought that I had it all figured out, but it turned out differently.”

Now he talked even less than he had before, and he stopped speaking to Lysaveta altogether, addressing her only through Hapunya: “Have your mother do this, have her pass this, or bring this.” His wife had become hateful to him after Tomsk.

Lysaveta, however, became her old cheerful self. She told the neighbours a great deal about Tomsk, and they listened in awe and interjected their comments: “O my God!” “How that poor Lysaveta suffered—it’s terrible!”

She appeared to enjoy talking about her misfortunes and ill fate, because now it was all in the past, and the women were such good listeners. It was even enjoyable to indulge in a few lies, saying: “In that Tomsk there’s never any summer, and it’s never warm; there’s only ice and still more ice, and the sun never sets—it’s always daytime there!”

Even though her mother rejoiced to have Lysaveta back home, she still reproached her: “I told you, my daughter, I tried to tell you that it would be like that. Yes I did, but you wouldn’t listen to me, and so off you went. You see, you should listen to your elders. And my son-in-law thought that he was the only wise one!”

Hapunya revived when she came home, became happier, and did not worry as much. And she began to make up new tales for “her children,” about wolves, “ice-men” that she supposedly saw herself, and about a dragon-machine with red eyes. The children sat and listened as if they were enchanted, and they considered Hapunya to be the smartest person in the whole world.

Before long, Hapunya was sent to work in the tobacco fields to earn money, and she then became prouder than words can describe!

A year later, Lysaveta’s brother gave Hnat the money that he had taken for the house. Hnat bought a patch of land, began to build a house, rented a few acres, and sowed some grain . . .

But what about the other migrants who went away with Hnat? Not all of them returned home.

Maksym Puhach came back and immediately went away to work in a factory. He left his wife and children in his brother's home where every member of the family—from the oldest to the youngest—abused her, as if it was her fault that life was bad in Tomsk.

After Vasyl Rudy returned, he told everyone that he should not have gone to Tomsk, and that there was absolutely no point in going back there; instead, he maintained that he should have gone to Kherson, and that he most definitely was going to go there the very next year.

Vasyl Ryaby and Vasyl Kutsy stayed in Tomsk, because they did not have the means to get away; otherwise, they most certainly would have fled.

The rich Yermylo also remained there, because, as the saying goes, if you have money, you can make a go of it anywhere, and so he was able to find good fortune in Tomsk.

Martyn Tsyapor, the thief, also stayed, because his deeds undid him. He took up the "practice" that he had engaged in at home, and everything went along just fine, until either the Kirghizes or the migrants caught up with him. His brother, however, did come home, and he cursed Martyn so soundly for deceiving him that it was terrifying to listen to him.

Some migrants came back without so much as the shirts on their backs, and, having no homes to return to, either had to move elsewhere, or work for a crust of bread while living with anyone who would take them in.

And so it turned out that the scouts had not lied after all, and that the migrants should have listened to the older men and women, because, as Paraska said: "Everything—if no one really knows what it is and where it is—must be bad; and, even if it is good, it's not meant for us."

## *She's "Literate"*

(1903)

"It's true, I swear to God—ha-ha-ha!—she's reading a book—ha-ha-ha! It's true, she's reading! Ha-ha-ha! May God strike me dead! Ha-ha-ha!"

Katrya Moskalivna, chubby-faced and ruddy, was choking with laughter. Her words, like a string of coral beads, fell so quickly and in such profusion, that saliva spattered from her mouth as she spoke to a group of girls by the swings one Sunday.

"You're ly-y-y-ying! Don't lie! It's all lies! That's enough!" the voices of girls, tall, short, fat, and thin, showered down on all sides, and pattered like rain on roofs and trees. In them could be heard astonishment, scorn, lack of comprehension, ridicule, and, perhaps, a little envy and hatred, black as soot.

Katrya began to swear: "May the earth swallow me whole, may I never get married if I'm lying. May I never see my Vasyl again. Ha-ha-ha! She's reading; she's reading a book! Ha-ha-ha!" Her shrieks of laughter, like clusters of tinkling bells, made it impossible to fully understand her.

"But, really, you're always lying," Mokryna Kovalivna said. Withered like a tree that had not taken root, and with stringy hair that had sprung free of her braids and hung like limp spaghetti on both sides of her head, she stepped forward as she spoke and grimaced as if she had eaten something bitter.

Katrya flushed so furiously that her face flamed right up to her hairline. Even her eyelids reddened and started to tremble. Seething with anger, she screamed: "So, I'm lying, am I? Well then, let's go!"

She leapt forward like a thread that had snapped, and ran off, followed by Mokryna and a few other girls who were shouting: "Let's go, let's go!"

They ran through the gardens to the edge of the settlement where the white cottage of the village chief stood. It was the only house in the village that had a shingled roof, and a wooden fence around its garden.

The girls, who had started out running noisily and roaring with laughter, ran more carefully now, gliding along on tiptoe, pressing the tips of their fingers to their lips, and moving ever so quietly, like gently falling snow that alights soundlessly on the ground. When they came to the fence, they all crouched down and became completely silent. No one uttered a sound.

Next to the cottage there was a small orchard of cherry trees that had begun to drop their blossoms. Among the trees, there was a winding narrow path, so frequently trampled by people's feet that the encroaching grass was kept at bay. Slowly widening, and making way for the broad, shiny leaves of the plantain, this path was now dotted on both sides by long, white, fragrant borders of fallen blossoms.

Although an endless stream of little white petals floated down to the ground, the trees still looked like white clouds—tinged slightly pink by the setting sun that was now no higher than they were. The sun flooded the trees with its red light, setting their dark trunks aflame and transforming them into burnished gold.

In the sky a miracle was transpiring. High up on its eastern edge, little clouds, very fine, light as feathers, fluffy and frosted, and shiny like silver, like tiny fish scales—the kind of clouds that foretell good weather—were rising and converging, spreading, expanding, widening, changing their shapes every moment, and taking on pink hues, as the fire of the sun approached them obliquely from below. Still higher up, the sky was turning bluer and darker . . .

In the northern part of the sky, a pale green streak flashed by and, mingling with the blue and red fire, was transformed first into a flaming gold—like amber carnations—and later into a deep grey—like a steel-blue dove. And then an unknown hand scattered exquisite pink roses all over the heavens.

On the horizon, where the sun was setting, the red light lingered, and, in that light, amid the white cherry trees, encircled by it as if by a gold ring, a girl with a thin, long face walked through the orchard. Her head was bent over a book, an old, soiled book, whose pages were difficult to turn. She clasped it firmly in both hands, holding it so low that only the dark eyebrows on her alabaster forehead and her thick, well-oiled braids, wound tightly around her head and copiously flecked by drifting cherry petals, were visible.

She was laboriously sounding the words out loud. "Our ear-th is not f-l-a-t like a t-a-ble, it is sh . . . sh-aped . . ."



It was very difficult for her to pronounce this word, and she kept stumbling over it: “sh . . . sh . . .”

The girls could not hold back any longer. They sputtered with laughter—even though they had covered their mouths and tried to stifle their giggles. Then there was a whirring sound, like an entire flock of sparrows taking wing.

The girl stood dumbstruck. She raised her long eyelashes, and her frightened, animated grey eyes glowed marvellously in the sun’s rays; her lips remained half-opened. Blushing like a full-blown rose, she held her soft book close to her breast and, a moment later, vanished into the house like a startled nightingale disappearing in the grove.

The girls scattered, joking among themselves that literacy was not a “girl’s concern.” After all, were they about to join the army, become junior clerks, or what?

“Huh, what an ass! She wants to be smarter than the rest of us!” Mokryna’s voice cut through the air like a knife.

“What a bore that Oksana is. She looks like chalk, as if she doesn’t have any blood,” added the chubby-faced Kattrya, kicking her bare feet high up into the air and giving voice to the thought that was winding through all their heads as if it were weaving cloth out of threads. “It’s spring, it’s the time for songs, for boys . . . but she’s got her nose in a book . . . Shame on her! Come on. Who can run the fastest? Let’s race!”

They all ran off.

The boys also shunned Oksana Korolenko, because she was shy and hard to figure out. She did not dance or sing, and if you wanted to kiss her—then heaven help you! Covering her face tightly with the sleeves of her shirt, until only her pointed little chin could be seen between her braids, she would tremble all over, like a little aspen, and hiss through tightly clenched teeth: “D-d-don’t touch me, I don’t want to, don’t want to, don’t want to.”

Or she would dash away, without letting you come near her. Moreover, to their way of thinking, she was very pale and scrawny, like a spindly blade of grass in the open field. No one even secretly dreamed of courting her, for her hands were also very delicate—exceptionally long, and extremely white, like the neck of a goose.

It was obvious she did not do any work. As an only daughter—the son in the family was a teacher in the next village, and there were no other children—she was, in fact, indulged by her mother,

who, even though she appeared to be strict, she did not make her work very hard.

And of what use is a woman if she is not a good worker? Who the devil needed her literacy and her lily-white arms and legs?

"We'll find ourselves a better girl—one whose hamstrings quiver, who finishes her work in a flash, and who knows how to love a husband!" the boys said.

They shunned Oksana, and never arranged to meet with her under the willow tree or by the fence. And so, she more often than not found herself alone on quiet, warm, spring nights. Standing by the fence, she would stretch out her arms, bared to the elbow, and gaze into the distance with her eyes open wide, as if she were looking for someone, waiting for someone . . .

One after the other, stars slowly appeared in the sky, inscribing golden letters on the dark, velvety background. Oksana traced them, and it seemed to her that they truly resembled a golden alphabet in a book—spelling out G for "God," or W for "Wealth."

At times like that, something strange came over Oksana, and her thoughts sorted themselves out in a most orderly fashion, like this:

"O night so dear, O dear, dark night,  
Why does my heart ache and writhe?  
I stand alone, loneliness is my plight.  
O stars, O stars! O stars so pure and bold,  
Why are you far off? A necklace of gold?  
So far, so far, and farther still in height.  
If you, dear stars, were close in my sight  
Perhaps my heart would not ache and writhe!"

All sorts of trivia filled her head, but it made good sense to her—it was always about stars, or flowers, and it made her feel as if someone were holding her heart in his hand. And her soul ached a little and rejoiced a little, while her eyes gazed steadily into the darkness, and her ears stayed tuned to the nightingales in the grove.

Perhaps she too would have sung—it might have brought solace to her heart—but she did not have a voice for singing. Or, perhaps she did, but she did not have the nerve to lift it up in song. There were times when she wanted to join the girls and youths who gathered at night to sing on the village common, but she was far too shy; she was so bashful that she hid herself, like an anemone under the snow . . .

The few times that she did join the young people, she felt as if she were a stranger among them. They would begin laughing, teasing, and making jokes among themselves. For example: “Paraska has a nose like a stork.” But Oksana did not find this funny, because she thought: “Paraska’s not to blame for that.”

Then they would pass judgment on someone: “Mykola, the old blind man, stole a slab of pork fat from Komarykha.” But Oksana did not want to judge him, for she thought: “He’s not to blame—the old man is always hungry and cold, and no one ever gives him anything.”

If they, let’s say, began to scold Marusya, who snarled at her mother-in-law and fought like a wolf with her, Oksana would think: “The mother-in-law and Marusya are both equally at fault and equally in the right. Marusya is drained by her children, and her mother-in-law by life, and both are pulled every which way and shaken down like hemp. And that’s why they rage at each other!”

Oksana would have liked to help them, but it was no use! No one asked for her help, and she had no idea how to go about offering it. Even if she wanted to do something like chase around with the rest of the girls, she would invariably stumble and fall to the ground as she was running, or clumsily bump into someone, or lag way behind the others, and they would abandon her, saying: “Oh, you’re such a nuisance! Why don’t you just stay at home!”

On warm, starry, spring nights, Oksana spends a lot of time thinking about her misadventures, wondering why she does not even know how to laugh properly. And she keeps on thinking and smiling attentively and quietly, like a flower whose petals are being ruffled gently by a breeze, until her mother, realizing she is not in the house, calls out in a frightened, low voice from the doorstep: “Oksana! Oksana, where are you? Come to bed!”

“Huh?” Oksana responds softly, as if waking from a dream.

And, moving as if she were wading through honey, she walks listlessly towards the house. She is reluctant to go indoors, but she is obedient; moreover, her mother—a swarthy woman, still youthful in appearance, with black eyebrows that grow together and eyes that are dark as plums—is strict.

“Where were you? What were you doing? And who were you talking with?” she begins to question her daughter sternly, her eyes blazing. “You watch out now!”

She pulls her by the sleeve and tries to look closely into the young woman's face to see if she is pale or blushing.

"Nowhere . . . There . . . By the fence. Nothing. Yes, alone. With no one . . ." Oksana answers hesitantly, and her clear eyes begin filling with tears.

"You think you're very smart," her mother says angrily. The strange thing about it is that she is both happy that her daughter is like a little white dove, and annoyed that she is so placid, and that, like a green branch, she does not burn or flame with passion. She had not been like that when she was a young girl, not at all!

"Go to sleep already," the mother says, shaking her head and speaking in a voice that is calm now. "It looks as if father won't be coming home from the market after all."

They both lie down, but Oksana cannot fall asleep for a long time. She does not feel drowsy, and she calls to mind the song:

"Oh, I'm alone, all alone, like a blade of grass in the field!"

And once again she sets her thoughts out in an orderly fashion:

"Oh mother, will my heart its petals unfold,  
Or will it wilt like a flower grown old?  
A star is falling, tumbling from the sky,  
Perhaps no one needs it, and that is why!  
In the sky the bright sun does appear,  
And the beautiful stars disappear!"

"Mother, oh mother, are you sleeping?" Oksana, leaning on her elbow, calls out softly to her mother.

No, her mother is not sleeping. She is deep in thought, thinking about her strange daughter. It really was too bad that their son Konstyantyn taught her to read. He had completely ruined the girl. It would have been better if she were disobedient, lazy, quarrelsome. Then she could have been seized by her braids and shaken, and that would have been that! But what could be done about this? She is cold, like a fish . . .

"Well, what do you want?" she responds angrily.

"Do you know, mother, that . . . that . . ."

She is afraid and does not have the nerve to say anything, because her mother's voice seems quite harsh. She moves closer to her on the floor where they are sleeping, and catches hold of her mother's lean bony hand with her slender one—but hers is soft and hot.

“Well, go ahead, tell me what it is that you want to say,” her mother speaks without any anger now.

“Well, do you know that . . . that our earth is not flat like a table, not at all . . . It’s . . . round like . . . like . . . what? Like an apple, like a potato . . . and it spins. It spins like a spindle around the sun and around itself,” Oksana cries out all in one breath, and she raises herself on the bed.

She can no more keep this news to herself than the snow in the spring can resist flowing away with the water. If it had been light in the house, one would have seen how her eyes begin to blaze when she utters these words.

Old Kateryna becomes angry.

“What are you lying about? Who is spinning? What kind of a potato earth? Where did you get this from? You’re doing it again, and what did I tell you? Leave that studying! Leave it alone, because no one will want to marry you! It’s good to be smart, but you’ve become so smart that you’re stupid! I’m going to take your book and burn it in the fire.”

She turns around to face the wall, but then she hears Oksana crying. Pulling her over, she clasps her to her warm breast as she had done when she was little. Oksana sobs quietly.

The mother’s shirt starts to get soaked, so she says: “Well, that’s enough, that’s enough now! Just see that you don’t brag to anyone about what you know, my little wise one . . .”

Having had a good cry, Oksana feels better. Clinging to her mother—like a pink-blossomed ivy twining around a tree—she falls fast asleep.

\*\*\*

Do you suppose that Oksana’s father, Konon, praised her for being educated? Not in the least! But then, he was a man of gentle disposition, and he rarely talked. When people laughed at him and said his daughter would have to read him the “official paper” because he himself was illiterate, he would turn a little pink—even though it was not seemly that a village chief with a grey beard should blush—and say, as he always did, while blinking his kind grey eyes: “Well, you know, fellows, that the art . . . of reading is not a bad thing, not bad at all. Only, of course, if it’s a girl . . . then it’s not

quite . . . Yes, indeed! But you know, fellows, in the village of Petrivka they've begun teaching little girls as well!"

"What next? They're stupid to teach them," someone from the crowd exclaimed. "What good is learning for womenfolk? Their business is to have children and nothing else! I wouldn't let my son marry such a 'book!'"

"Well, of course," Konon became alarmed, "it's none of their business, that goes without saying! But, you know, my Konstyantyn wanted to teach his sister—yes, he did—so that's what . . ."

Konon always managed to bring every conversation around to his Konstyantyn. His son was literate; he taught in the next village, and was paid twenty-five rubles a month for it. Konon liked to listen to Konstyantyn, and he respected him, almost as if he were not his son, but the other way around.

The villagers roared with laughter.

The chief went home scratching his head. Actually, he did make Oksana read the "official paper" out loud to him, for he was a timid and correct man, and he wanted to know exactly what it said.

Oksana was really very happy that she could help her father; she began to read in a trembling voice, amazed that she could understand so little of what was she was reading: "It is hereby decreed to be the responsibility of the village chief of the village of Hrechanaya Hreblya henceforth to oversee absolutely the sanitary conditions and the cleanliness of the yards . . ." and so on and so forth.

Her father understood everything well, for he was accustomed to the manner in which the administration spoke. He only smiled, rubbed the palms of his hands together, and thought with delight: "She really can read. Honest to God, she's reading. No doubt about it! And she's reading such intelligent things."

He wanted to come up to his daughter and caress her as he had done when she was still a little child, but he did not dare. He was ashamed in front of his wife, his daughter, himself, and even the walls. So he hovered over her like a steel-grey dove, bobbing up and down on his toes by the table where she was sitting, comically craning his veined, scrawny neck, and glancing warily at the "official paper" that he both saw and did not see—because he could not read.

And, instead of lifting Oksana up to the heavens, as he felt like doing, he said quietly, but firmly: "There, there now, Oksana, take it easy; take it easy and don't spoil that paper for me or, you know, I'll really let you have it . . .!"

He did not finish what he was saying and retreated to the wall where he could not be seen. When the reading was completed, he said sternly: “Well, that’s enough of that reading. That’s enough!” And it sounded as if he had no use for it, and as if there really had been no need to read it at all. Oksana always took to heart the words spoken by her father; but, as for the feelings that really lay in her father’s soul—she had no way of knowing them.

Yes indeed, while keeping his happiness within himself, Konon was, at times, as delighted with his daughter as the blind man who is told by others what the sun is like—the sun that he can feel but cannot see. At the same time, he was embarrassed that other people had daughters who acted like real girls, and it was only in his home that a black rose had come into bloom.

Konon would often say things like: “Of what use is reading to a girl? It’s of no use.” And at other times he would thunder at her: “Well, aren’t you the literate one!”

He should have told Konstyantyn at the outset not to teach her, but somehow he had not done it soon enough. At first it had been comical to watch Oksana as she opened wide her red mouth—her lips were really very red—like a jackdaw, and repeated the alphabet after her brother: “Ah, beh, veh . . .”

Konstyantyn had taught her as a joke, after he had finished school. Before that, she used to take his books and, without understanding anything in them, sit silently for a long time, looking intently at the letters, and even copying them with a piece of chalk on the bench, or with a twig in the sand. Even though she did not know the letters, she would make patterns with them.

After Konstyantyn taught her to read, he gave her his books when he left home, and she did not part with them, no matter how angry her mother became, or how often her father said: “Hm! Hm! It seems that you’re, you know . . . really going at it!”

Later she began to read furtively in corners, hiding the books to which she had taken such a liking. She read a book from the beginning to the end, and then reread it over and over again, until she knew it completely by heart. Only then would she begin to read another book.

“We should have put her to work with the other girls in the tobacco fields,” Konon’s wife said bitterly to her husband, “but we took pity on her, and now her head is so befuddled that she’s become sad and walks around like an icicle. What a shame!”

As she spoke these words, pain and grief pierced her heart like a sharp piece of iron, until she thought it would break. And if Oksana happened to be nearby, she would yell at her: "Don't bother me! Get away from me!"

Oksana would burst into tears, for she was very sensitive, like a mature dandelion blossom—just one little puff, and she would disintegrate. But even though the mother wronged Oksana, she would not let other people touch her, even with their fingertips, saying: "If anyone says anything about my Oksana, I'll scratch the son-of-a-bitch's eyes out!"

And everyone believed that she would do exactly that. It really was no joking matter, for with her hooked nose and coal-black eyes she truly did look like a vulture.

No one courted Oksana in her own village—but that did not matter. Would Konon's wife be able to find a son-in-law for herself? You better believe it! She did find one—a handsome and rich young man who had sixteen acres of land to his name, was an only child, and had no mother of his own! He had seen Oksana and her mother in church when he came to their village for their feast day, and she had caught his eye. To clinch the matter, he was fated to buy some bullets and roofing material cheaply from Oksana's father—and so he began to court her.

What was Oksana to do? Should she marry him or not? Of course, she would marry him. First of all, her mother and father blessed the union; second, she had to get married at some point in her life; and third, Ivan appealed to her.

From the moment he saw her, he fastened his eyes on her—dark eyes that bulged slightly in his round head and peered out from under his hair that fell to his eyebrows—and he did not shift them even once to look to the side somewhere.

At first, she hid her face in her sleeve, but then she uncovered it. He was still looking at her, like the moon gazing down from a clear sky. She lowered her eyes and head, then raised them again. He was still looking at her. She went behind the stove, and then came out again, and he was still looking at the spot where she had been standing. She walked out of the house, and then came back in again, and he still looked at her in the same way, without taking his eyes off her.

And he did not utter a word . . .



She felt as if coals were beginning to smoulder in her breast. Words began coming into her head of their own accord, arranging themselves in an orderly fashion, like thread on a spindle:

“Oh, my darling dove!  
My eagle bold! My dear one!  
If I could be your love,  
I would not pine for freedom.”

And she presented him with her *rushnyky* [embroidered linen ceremonial cloths].

For the longest time, Ivan and Oksana lived together quietly and peacefully. She was quiet and meek, but she did not know how to do things. More often than not, she would injure herself—scald her hand with boiling water or cut herself with a knife. If she broke a pot, or if her dough was too soft, she would begin to cry right away, and she wept so bitterly that one could neither beat nor scold her.

Well, in due time, of course, she learned how to cope with the housework. She also became accustomed to her husband and no longer feared him. At first, whenever he approached her, she wailed like a seagull in a swamp and, even though she submitted to him, she was still afraid.

And she finally felt comfortable with her first-born as well. In the beginning, she had no idea what she should do with him. But now he was a year old and beginning to take his first awkward steps. In Oksana's opinion he was just as good-looking as his father, with healthy eyes like those of a frog, and ruddy cheeks that resembled a little pumpkin.

In short, she became accustomed to everything, settled down, got used to her new home, and . . . became bored. She once again felt an urge to read her books.

One Sunday, neither her father-in-law nor her husband were at home, and the little boy was sleeping in his cradle with his hands tightly clenched into fists, his wet lips smacking lightly and sweetly in his dreams. The house was all tidied up, dinner was ready in the oven, and it was so quiet that one could hear a fly when it flew by.

Oksana crept up furtively to her trunk, as if she were hiding from someone and, from the very bottom of it, pulled out one of her favourite books. It was wrapped in paper and hidden so well under

her skirts and corsets that no one else could have found it. She pulled it out, perched with it on the edge of the table like a bird on a branch, and began to read about the earth—that our earth is not flat—even though she knew all of it by heart.

Just then her husband came home. He walked into the house, saw what was happening, flung his arms out in amazement, and stood dumbstruck: “Oksana, what is this?” This was all he could utter.

She froze like a drop of water in the frost, and then said in confusion: “I’m . . . You’re . . . I was just bored, a trifle bored . . . I’ve already done everything. I’ve cooked dinner and . . .”

She bowed her head down on the table. She thought that Ivan would be angry—Lord knows how angry—but he put his hand on her head and stood there, without saying anything. Caught under his hand, she also remained silent, scarcely breathing.

Then he said: “Well, what’s wrong with that? It’s good, it’s very good! Some day you’ll teach him to read as well.” And he nodded his head at the cradle. “Because I’m illiterate. Somehow I never learned to read, even though I was taught. It was too hard for me, I found it very . . . uh . . .”

“No, no,” Oksana, beside herself with happiness, hastened to reassure him. “It’s not at all difficult, it’s not, it’s . . . Oh, how wonderful! But you must be hungry, Ivan! What am I thinking about?”

She hurried over to the oven and began taking out the borshch, but Ivan, as if transfixed, remained standing over the book.

He stared and stared at it, without ever taking his eyes off it, just as he had once unblinkingly fastened his eyes on Oksana when he was courting her.





Lesya Ukrainka  
1871-1913

## Biographical Sketch

Lesya Ukrainka is the literary pseudonym of Larysa Kosach-Kvitka, who was born in 1871 to Olha Drahomanova-Kosach (literary pseudonym: Olena Pchilka), a writer/publisher in Eastern Ukraine, and Petro Kosach, a senior civil servant. An intelligent, well-educated man with non-Ukrainian roots, he was devoted to the advancement of Ukrainian culture and financially supported Ukrainian publishing ventures.

In the Kosach home the mother played the dominant role; only the Ukrainian language was used and, to avoid the schools, in which Russian was the language of instruction, the children had tutors with whom they studied Ukrainian history, literature, and culture. Emphasis was also placed on learning foreign languages and reading world literature in the original. In addition to her native Ukrainian, Larysa learned Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, German, and English.

A precocious child, who was privileged to live in a highly cultivated home, Larysa began writing poetry at the age of nine, and when she was thirteen saw her first poem published in a journal in L'viv under the name of Lesya Ukrainka, a literary pseudonym suggested by her mother. As a young girl, Larysa also showed signs of being a gifted pianist, but her musical studies came to an abrupt end when, at the age of twelve, she fell ill with tuberculosis of the bone, a painful and debilitating disease that she had to fight all her life.

Finding herself physically disabled, Larysa turned her attention to literature—reading widely, writing poetry, and translating. She shared these literary activities with her brother Mykhaylo (literary pseudonym: Mykhaylo Obachny), her closest friend until his death in 1903. When Larysa was seventeen, she and her brother organized a literary circle called *Pleyada (The Pleiades)*, which was devoted to promoting the development of Ukrainian literature and translating classics from world literature into Ukrainian.

As a teenager, Larysa's intellectual development was further stimulated by her maternal uncle, Mykhaylo Drahomanov, the noted scholar, historian, and publicist. He encouraged her to collect folk songs and folkloric materials, to study history, and to peruse the Bible for its inspired poetry and eternal themes. She was also influenced by her family's close association with leading cultural leaders of the day.

Lesya published her first collection of lyrical poetry, *Na krylakh pisen'* (*On Wings of Songs*), in 1893, a year after her translations of Heine's poetry, *Knyha pisen'* (*The Book of Songs*) appeared. In the Russian Empire, Ukrainian publications were banned; therefore, both books were published in Western Ukraine and smuggled into Kyiv.

From the time that Lesya was a teenager, she often had to go abroad for surgery and various treatment regimens, and was advised to live in countries with a dry climate. Residing for extended periods of time in Germany, Austria, Italy, Bulgaria, Crimea, The Caucasus, and Egypt, she became familiar with other peoples and cultures, and incorporated her observations and impressions into her writings. An inveterate letter writer, she engaged in an extensive correspondence with the Western Ukrainian author Olha Kobylanska that led to an exchange of sketches both entitled "The Blind Man." (See Volume III of this series.)

In addition to her lyrical poetry, Ukrainka wrote epic poems, prose dramas, prose, several articles of literary criticism, and a number of socio-political essays. It was her dramatic poems, however, written in the form of pithy, philosophical dialogues, that were to be her greatest legacy to Ukrainian literature. Only one of Ukrainka's dramas, *Boyarynya* (*The Boyar's Wife*) refers directly to Ukrainian history, and another, an idealistic, symbolic play, *Lisova pisnya* (*Song of the Forest*), uses mythological beings from Ukrainian folklore. Her other dramatic poems issue from world history and the Bible. With their sophisticated psychological treatment of the themes of national freedom, dignity, and personal integrity, they are a clarion call to people the world over to throw off the yoke of oppression.

In 1901, Lesya suffered a great personal loss—the death of her soul mate, Serhiy Merzhynsky. She wrote the entire dramatic poem *Oderzhyma* (*The Possessed*) in one night at his deathbed. A few years later, in 1907, she married a good friend of the family, Klyment Kvitka, an ethnographer and musicologist. It was he who transcribed and published the many Ukrainian folk songs that she had learned as a young girl in her native province of Volyn'.

Despite many prolonged periods in her life during which she was too ill to write, upon her death in 1913, at the relatively young age of forty-two, Ukrainka left behind a rich and diversified literary legacy. While it is the deep philosophical thought and the perfection of her poetic form that have assured her a place among the luminaries of world literature, her prose works, which she continued writing throughout her literary career, provide a fascinating insight into the inner life of this gifted, multifaceted writer, and reveal her perceptions of the multi-layered society in which she lived.

## *Friendship* (1905)

### I

A little girl sat hunched over on the earthen embankment abutting Martokha Bilash's cottage. Her sallow pale face was swollen, and her grey eyes were faded. The unfortunate child was shaking, her body racked by both a fever and heaving sobs.

Her mother, who had just beaten her, was standing in the doorway, rod in hand, shouting threateningly: "I've given you a thrashing, and I'll beat you some more! And just you try running into the forest once again with the young lady instead of staying at home, and I'll break the broom on you! I've told you more than once not to run around in the sun. But no!—you keep on doing it, until the fever strikes you again!"

"But is it the sun that causes the fever?" little Darka asked through her tears.

"Well, what else would it be, you stupid dumbbell?"

"The young lady says it's the swamp . . . and the mosquitoes . . ."

"Mosquitoes? Have you and that young lady of yours lost your minds, or what? Mosquitoes bite a lot of people . . ."

"A lot of people also walk about in the sun!" Darka could not refrain from saying, even though she knew that her mother did not tolerate "smart alecks."

"Just you keep on talking! Just keep on talking, and I'll really let you have it!" Martokha yelled, brandishing her rod.

Mustering her remaining strength, Darka fled. Racing past the gardens, she ran into the pasture adjoining the lord's orchard where she hid from sight among some alder trees. As she sat there sobbing, she waited for the arrival of her playmate, the young lady Yuzya, who was of an age with her.

On some days, Darka waited until twilight, because the young lady could not always get away from home. More often than not, however, sooner or later her loyal friend did come, and then they sat together in the bushes and, equally wasted and wan from malaria,

complained bitterly to each other about their lack of freedom at home before going on to settle matters between themselves. Usually, it was Darka who reproached the young lady, and so now, the moment that Yuzya appeared, she began to “upbraid” her.

“Why didn’t you come right after dinner, young lady? I’ve been waiting here so long that I’m tired, but I’m afraid to go home because my mother is sure to beat me again if you’re not there to defend me.”

“I simply couldn’t,” Yuzya tried to justify herself. “After dinner grandfather asked me to read him the newspaper, and then I had to wind yarn for granny and, after that, I had to do some arithmetic with my father and read a French book with my mother.”

“You don’t say! So, why didn’t you just run away?”

“But how could I do that?”

“Just the way I do it—I run away and that’s that!”

“Oh, it’s different for you. No one tells you to study, so you can go ahead and play,” Yuzya said thoughtfully, looking into the distance and sounding as if she were talking to herself.

“Oh, sure! I really play a lot—lugging around my baby sister Priska!” Darka rebutted sharply in an offended tone.

“How do you manage to carry her? She’s ever so heavy!” the young lady said in the same thoughtful manner, turning to look at Darka. “You should tell your mother that you can’t do it, that you’re sick, and then she wouldn’t make you.”

“Mother doesn’t ask me if I’m sick. She just says: ‘When it comes to running around in the forest with the young lady, you’re not sick, but when I ask you to mind the baby, you’re nowhere to be found!’”

“But why do you have to look after Priska?”

“And why do you read the newspaper to your grandfather?”

“Because . . . Because grandfather’s eyes are weak, and he can’t read it himself.”

“And why do you wind yarn for your granny? She’s not sick.”

“My granny would be annoyed with me if I didn’t.”

“That would really bother me! Let her be annoyed—would I care? And I’d run away from that arithmetic as well, and as for that French book—I’d lose it for good, if it were me.”

“But why don’t you throw away the distaff? And why don’t you run away from the geese when you’re told to graze them?”

“Because I’ll be beaten if I run away from them, but you’ve never been beaten from the day you were born. Isn’t that true?”



“Yes . . . It’s true,” the young lady said with a quiet sigh. Her eyes, as grey as Darka’s, filled with sorrow, and she bowed her head like a willow.

Darka felt sorry for the gentle, quiet young lady. She jumped up resolutely and said in a cheerful voice: “Miss, let’s go to the swings at Ryvka’s place; all the girls will have gathered there by now!”

But the young lady bent down even lower. “No, Darka, I can’t go there anymore . . .”

“Why not?”

“If you only knew the trouble I got into yesterday for going to the swings with you . . .”

Darka recoiled in fear: “Oh my! Did they beat you?”

“No, they didn’t,” the young lady smiled weakly, “but it would have been better if they had. Yesterday evening, Bronek teased me, in the presence of guests, that I milk goats with the Jewish girls and graze pigs with the peasant girls. He’s a real meanie; he spied on us and then told father everything. And now he’s making fun of me. But he’s lying—I didn’t milk goats at all! I was only at the swings!” Yuzya began to sob.

“Did he actually see you grazing the pigs with us the day before yesterday?” Darka was curious to know.

“I don’t know—maybe he did. But what can I do about it? And now mother’s crying . . . and granny’s angry . . . and daddy says that mummy’s sick all because of me . . . and I can’t . . . I don’t know . . .”

After that, her sobbing made it impossible to understand what she was saying.

“Miss Yuzya!” the thin voice of the lady’s chambermaid called out from the orchard. “Miss Yuzya! It’s teatime. Come! Your mummy’s angry! Miss Yuzya!”

And, at the same time, the voice of Darka’s mother reached them. “Darka! Darka! When are you coming home? Damn you anyway! Darka! Darka!”

A moment later, little Priska joined her mother in the shouting.

“Oh, I’d better get going, or I’ll get an even worse thrashing! You’d better go home as well, Miss; they’re calling you. Don’t come with me, because then you’ll be in for a scolding as well.”

But Yuzya continued running beside Darka. “No, I’m going with you! I’m going with you! I won’t let them beat you. I don’t want them to! When I get home, I’ll tell them I didn’t hear them call me.

I'll say I was studying . . . that I was at the rabbits' hutches . . . I won't let them beat you!"

All out of breath from running, but looking pale instead of flushed, the girls ran up to Darka's mother.

Martokha was standing at the gate with a rod in her hand. When Darka tried to slip by her and run into the house, she grabbed her by the hand and raised her arm to take a swing at her. At the same moment, however, Yuzya seized her arm, and Martokha had to stop herself for fear of accidentally striking the lord's child.

"Let go, Miss! Move away. Don't defend her. You don't know what a terrible girl she is!"

"I won't let go! Don't you dare beat her!" Yuzya protested in a choked voice. Her pale cheeks were splotched unevenly with reddish blotches.

"I don't dare? And why is that?" Martokha shouted. "If you don't beat a girl like her, who knows what kind of a spoiled brat she'll end up being?"

And Martokha, trying all the while not to jostle Yuzya, made a move to swing the rod in her hand. In the meantime, Darka was jerking every which way, hoping to break free while the other two were talking.

Yuzya squeezed Martokha's arm as hard as she could. "That's not true! She won't be a spoiled brat! Even now, Darka does everything for you . . . And why should she work? If she doesn't want to, she doesn't have to!" There was a note of angry desperation in Yuzya's ringing voice.

Martokha frowned and grew very serious. "Now then, Miss, don't you go teaching Darka things like that. Maybe it's accepted among you lords that a child doesn't have to listen to her mother, but we don't have any such custom. Did I spend all those sleepless nights with her and give her food that I might have eaten just to see her grow into a parasite? I'm not rich enough to do things like that. Why, I'd sooner kill her, because I don't need any spongers."

Martokha tore her arm away from Yuzya and struck Darka so hard that the little girl curled up in pain.

Darka's howl was drowned out by Yuzya, who was shrieking at the top of her lungs. Falling to the ground, she twitched and flung herself about as if she were losing consciousness.

A chambermaid rushed in from the lord's yard. She had been dispatched by Yuzya's mother, the lady of the manor, who could hear

her daughter's screams all the way from her balcony. Yuzya had to be carried home and, as soon as they got her there, she was undressed and put to bed in the throes of a malaria attack.

Covered by two quilts and a fur coat, Yuzya lay in bed, blue from the chills that shook her until she ached all over and almost lost consciousness. All the same, her eyes followed her father, as he paced the room and lectured her about her disobedience. It was evident from the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes that he felt genuinely sorry for his sick daughter; nevertheless, an undercurrent of harshness and irritability crept into his words: "It's always like this. You don't listen, you run around where you have no business going until you become ill, and then someone has to fuss over you!"

The words "fuss over you" painfully stabbed Yuzya's heart. "But I'm not asking anyone to fuss over me," she thought. "I'd rather go to Darka's home to lie on the hay with her, and I'd stay there without all your quilts and without your quinine until I got better! At least no one would torment me there!"

She did not, however, dare to voice her thoughts. Her mother had already soaked a handkerchief with her tears as she sat silently by the bed; her grandmother had ordered that the servants bring some aromatic vinegar and medicinal spikes used for curing migraines; and her grandfather, speaking with pointed emphasis, once again began his tirade that it was high time to hire a governess for the child, because before long she would become "as coarse and uncouth as a peasant."

Previously, her mother had always defended Yuzya, saying that she did not want some stranger, a governess, assuming what were her maternal responsibilities towards her daughter. But this time, she no longer put forth any arguments; she only wept and sobbed.

Yuzya's chills were followed by a high fever. Her father's figure appeared to move in a fog, and his voice came to her in waves, so that it was hard for Yuzya to tell if it was Martokha yelling: "I don't need a parasite!" or her father saying: "You fall ill, and then someone has to fuss over you." And then the two phrases blurred into a single reproach: "And then someone has to fuss over the parasite!"

Yuzya felt very distressed, as if she were guilty of something or, on the contrary, as if someone had sinned against her. Her feverishly hot head could not figure it out, and the phantom-ague was carrying her out of the manor . . . out of the yard . . . towards Darka on the hay . . .

## II

As a result of this incident, despite all of Yuzya's tears, pleas, and promises to be "obedient," a governess was hired for her. To placate the young lady, her grandmother visited Martokha Bilash and had a firm "talk" with her, telling her not to create any more "disturbances"—that is, not to beat Darka again, or, at least, not so hard that it raised a ruckus and created a public scandal.

Martokha understood that "talk" as an order—how else are the "talks" of lords to be understood? Moreover, Martokha was the lord's closest neighbour, and her family was the poorest in the village, and so it was to her benefit "to listen" to the lords in more ways than one in order not to lose favour with them. If it were not for the day labour that Martokha did in the manor yard and the lord's fields, who knows how she and her young children could have survived, given the lazy drunkard she had for a husband. He had spent all of Martokha's dowry in the tavern where the Jews had benefited from it, and was the kind of man who sold his grain to usurers when it was still sprouting.

Whenever the lord told Martokha to come and work for him, she had to drop everything and run, whether it was convenient for her or not. This meant, of course, that Martokha's grain often shelled out on the ground before it was mown, and her hemp frequently lay unbeaten on account of the lord's work.

And now, because of the "queen"—that's what Martokha called quinine—that the older lady gave Darka, and the used clothes that were passed down from the lordlings to her own small children, and the buttermilk and whey from the lord's cows, and everything else, she had "to listen" more than once to the lords whether it was about some work, or something else.

Why, even after this last "talk," the older lady had given her some "queen" for Darka and some "stomach powder" for Priska. She had also told her to come to the manor to pick up some of Bronek's old clothes for her Ivan and, while there, "to listen" to her and clean up all the paths in the orchard, because the women servants were busy with their work, and the pathways had to be tidied up, as guests were arriving that evening.

"Yes, of course, if it pleases your Ladyship, I'll get it done in a flash; I'll do it right away," Martokha said. And, after kissing the

lady's hand for the medicine, she walked her to the gate and part way down the street as a sign of respect.

Martokha was of two minds about all of this—she was irritated by the intrusion of the lady into her family affairs but, at the same time, she was pleased by the kindness shown to her child. In front of her neighbours who were better off than she was, Martokha often mentioned, as if by chance, how the young lady simply could not live without Darka.

“She really loves my Darka! Just as if she were her own sister. She doesn't have another friend like Darka in the entire village!”

In response, the well-to-do neighbour ladies just thrust out their lips disdainfully, and Martokha thought: “They're jealous!”

After seeing the older lady off, Martokha walked back to her cottage and called Darka: “You come along too, you little untouchable!”

“Where to?” Darka asked from where she was sitting on the floor with Priska. Her malaria attack had left her looking yellow, but she was no longer feverish or delirious.

“To the manor yard,” her mother replied. “I'm going to clean the walks, and you're going to sweep them.”

“What about Priska?”

“You're sure worried about Priska! But you only remember about her when there's work to be done! Your father will look after Priska. Carry her to him—he's in the stable.”

“But will father want to do it?” Darka asked incredulously.

“I'm telling you to take her there, so do it! I don't need any back talk from you!” Martokha yelled so loudly that Darka snatched up Priska and ran out the door with her.

After crossing the sunlit yard and stepping on the threshing floor of the dark shed, Darka could not immediately see where her father was, and so she called out: “Daddy! Daddy, where are you?”

“What do you want?” an asthmatic voice responded from within.

Darka's father, Semen Bilash, was lying in a corner on some straw. He often lay around like that, not only on a holiday, as all decent people do, but also on ordinary working days. Most often, he lay in the shed to get rid of a hangover, after threatening his children and beating his wife, who never stopped nagging him, regardless if he was drunk or sober.

When he was sober, Semen suffered her nagging in silence, agreeing in his own mind that she “maintained” all of them, that the

family was surviving only thanks to her, and that, as she said, he was “a damned asthmatic,” and “an inveterate drunkard.” He was well aware that his wife was speaking the truth; he knew it even when he was drunk, but at those times the truth infuriated him.

Perhaps if he had been a rich man who was strong, and healthy, and capable of doing all sorts of work, like his neighbour Yakym Hrechuk, and if his wife were a simpleton and came from a poor family, like Hrechuk’s wife, then he might not have been so mean when he was drunk. Maybe he would have laughed and danced when he had drunk too much, flirted with his wife, twirled her around as if in a dance, and called her his “sweet little worker,” his “dear little housekeeper,” and who knows what other endearments, until she became better disposed towards him and began laughing herself that the old man was making “a fool” of himself.

That was what always happened in Hrechuk’s home when Yakym happened to come home “feeling no pain.” Of course, this did not happen as frequently with Yakym as it did with Semen—but after all, a well-to-do man does not have any problems, and so there is no need for him to drown his sorrows.

Ulyana Hrechuk knew only too well what kind of a “sweet little worker” and a “dear little housekeeper” she was, and she was also well aware that it was only due to Yakym that she led a comfortable life. And she thanked God that she had a husband who was good and treated her kindly.

But then Semen was certain that he also would not pick a fight with a wife like that, and he often thought: “I swear to God I wouldn’t beat her, even if she called me the kinds of names that my wife does. But my wife is sturdy, like a stone wall, and she calls me ‘the asthmatic.’ Who the devil is to blame that she, such a wealthy young woman, from a spotless, smoke-free house, married me and ended up living in a sooty, chimneyless cottage? Why does she keep throwing it in my face? I’ll show her!”

And so, when the asthmatic Semen got drunk, he showed Martokha all the “strength” that he possessed, and he did it so thoroughly that she, despite her robust constitution, could not defend herself. After a fight, however, Semen, his bones aching and his chest wheezing, lay on the straw and watched with shame and envy as Martokha—who worked even more swiftly after a fight than she usually did—rushed about doing all the chores, putting everything in order, both in the house and in the yard, and yelling threateningly

at the children, as a householder should. And it seemed that it was not she who had been beaten, but he, because he lay like “a beaten man,” “not good for anything,” while she was “sturdy like a stone wall,” as he often said.

This time, however, Semen was not resting on the straw because of a hangover or a fight. He had been sober now for three days, and it was the third day that he was lying there. Ever since their cattle had been seized for tax arrears, and ever since Martokha had liberated the cattle by successfully pleading with the lord to give her some money that she could later work off, and ever since she had run to the district office to lay a charge against her husband—Semen had simply given up.

He listened without comment to the decision handed down by the judge that from henceforth it was not he, but his wife who would be in charge of the farm because “she paid the taxes and therefore she had the right to manage their affairs.”

On what legal grounds the district judges based their decision remained a mystery to both Semen and Martokha, and even to the judges themselves; but, at the time, no one gave any thought to written laws.

“Do you agree to this?” they asked Semen.

“Well, you know . . . that is . . .” he started to say dejectedly, and then fell silent once again.

On their way home from the district office, Martokha expanded on the implications of the decision. “From now on, you won’t live to see the day when you can beat me up. Now I’m the boss in our home! If I feel like it, I’ll give you money for whiskey, and if I don’t feel like it, I won’t; if I feel like giving you something to eat, I will, and if I don’t, I won’t; and if you dare to take anything yourself, I’ll lay charges against you, as if you were a thief.”

Semen argued that there was no such law that allowed a wife to starve her husband to death, but it was all in vain. Martokha countered by making the point that there also was no law decreeing that parasites should be fed.

“You’ll eat as much as you earn,” she concluded. “I won’t starve you to death for no reason at all, but I also won’t feed you for nothing—have no fear of that!”

And from the very first day, Martokha stuck by her words. Semen, out of spite, lay down and did not get up to do any kind of work. Martokha did not say anything to him, but she also did not call him

to come and have either dinner or supper. And so he went to sleep in the shed without having eaten anything.

The next day after breakfast, Darka stealthily brought him a piece of scorched bread. "Here, eat it as quickly as you can, but you can't have any garlic with it, because mother will smell it on you, and then she'll know that you've eaten, and she'll scold you."

"I don't want to eat," Semen said softly, and the way he looked at her moved her to tears.

By evening, Semen had wilted completely, and he was coughing and groaning loudly. His wife broke down and, after the children had gone to sleep, brought him a dish of corn meal gruel. He silently pushed the dish away, spilled the gruel, and demonstratively turned his face to the wall.

Martokha stood for a while without saying anything; then she picked up the dish, wiped it with her apron, and walked in a dignified manner to the house.

Semen spent another night in the shed.

In the morning, the children spied on him and then told their mother: "We saw daddy eating the spoiled pears under the wild pear tree; he kept looking around to see if anyone was watching, and he even buried some of the pears in the ground."

Martokha had been brooding over what she should do about her husband when the older lady from the manor came along to have a "talk" with her. After the lady left, it occurred to Martokha that she could take Darka to the manor yard to help her with the work; after all, the girl was not so little anymore, and she could work off at least some of the money they owed the lord. It also occurred to her that it might be to their advantage if Darka were to be seen more often by the lord's family.

"And as for little Priska, that lazybones in the shed can look after her," she suddenly decided.

Semen responded to Darka's call in such a hoarse and gloomy voice that she did not dare to come right out and tell him why she was looking for him.

Setting Priska down on the bare threshing floor beside her father, she backed up to the door and, speaking rapidly but loudly, said: "Mother said that you're to look after Priska while I go with her to work in the manor yard."

As soon as the last word flew out of her, she bolted out of the shed and ran back to her mother.



At first, Semen sat without moving, staring morosely at Priska. The infant, who was not strong enough to sit upright for any length of time, swayed, toppled over, banged her head on the hard threshing floor, and convulsed in silent sobs; her tongue fluttered rapidly, and her face began to turn blue.

Semen could not bear to wait until that silent crying broke out into loud bawling; jumping to his feet, he picked up the baby and held her tightly on his chest, all the while rocking and hushing her: "There, there now, my little one, my darling Priska! Oh my! The child has almost killed herself! Hush, hush now, and I'll give you a pear. Shhh!"

And, fishing a pear out of his bosom, he pressed it gently against Priska's mouth.

The infant, distracted by the pear, gradually quieted down; sucking at the fruit and still sobbing from time to time, she settled into her father's arms.

He was hugging her a trifle awkwardly, patting her on the head with the palm of his hand, and saying: "Oh, what a fine little girl you are! See, you're not crying! Shall I give you another pear? Shall I? And look, here's our dear God."

Gazing at the baby with compassionate, melancholy eyes, he tried to amuse her with the copper cross that hung on his emaciated chest—and Priska began to smile.

### III

From that day on, Semen frequently stayed at home with Priska, while Darka worked more often in the manor, either with her mother and her older sister Yaryna, or, on occasion, by herself. If her mother did not have the time to go, and if Yaryna had to take her turn at grazing the cattle—a job she shared with their brother Ivan—then Darka was sent alone to the manor to do some of the lighter work—weeding the flower beds, gathering St. John's wort for the turkeys, and sweeping the pathways.

The tasks that Martokha and her family did in the manor yard helped to pay off the debt they owed the lord, while the work they did out in the fields was paid for separately in cash. During the harvest, therefore, Yaryna earned a gold coin for twisting wisps of straw together to bind the sheaves and, even though her mother took

this money from her, she still got a new jacket, because she had earned it. This arrangement made Darka jealous. Except for the odd lump of sugar or discarded piece of clothing that she brought home for Priska, she came home empty-handed from the manor and had to walk around in her ragged old clothes. And her tears did not succeed in persuading her mother to buy her a new skirt that summer.

“The old skirt is good enough for you. You’ll have to learn to work if you want a new one,” her mother decreed, and that was the end of the conversation.

One time, Darka tried to convince her mother that she also worked—not for cash, but to pay off their debt. Her mother, without becoming the least bit annoyed, shrugged her shoulders indifferently and said calmly: “Leave me alone; don’t even bother talking to me about work like that. You eat twice as much as you earn. You certainly won’t get anything new to wear by working to pay off the debt—unless your father buys you something.”

Martokha laughed as she said this, but Semen rose abruptly from the table, in the middle of the meal, and went outside to chop wood. And he continued chopping until nightfall, as if he had been hired to do it.

There was one thing that Darka liked about working at the manor—she was able to see the young lady more often. Of course, Yuzya was no longer permitted to play in the forest or the pasture with Darka, because her governess, the elderly *Fräulein Therese* [*Miss Theresa*] did not let her out of her sight.

As soon as Yuzya tried to slip away to the alder grove beyond the pond, a shrill voice would ring out from the arbour or the porch: “*Jussa! Jussa! Wo gehen Sie hin?* [Yuzya! Yuzya! Where are you going?]

And Yuzya would once again have to turn her attention to a boring German book—according to *Fräulein Therese* it was *sehr interressant* [*very interesting*—or embroider a “keepsake” on a paper canvas for her mother, her granny, or some other relative.

Yuzya now would have preferred reading the French books that she had once considered so loathsome, or doing arithmetic, rather than reading these “interesting stories” and engaging in crafts that were supposed to entertain her. The reading and the handwork had to be done in the presence of the German governess, but Yuzya was allowed to do her homework alone in the orchard, while the governess, having satisfied her professional conscience that her young charge was gainfully employed, devoted her time to finishing

off her correspondence, or to reading Freytag's novels—books that enthralled her.

And so Yuzya would run off with her book, either into the orchard or to the garden, depending where Darka happened to be working at the time. While Darka swept the pathways, the young lady walked to and fro, “hammering away” at the German words she was supposed to learn, and smiling or saying something to Darka whenever she drew near her; however, she had to do this with the utmost caution, because the pathway could be seen from where *Fräulein Therese* was ensconced.

It was boring for Yuzya when Darka weeded the flowers, because they grew right under the windows in front of the house and were clearly visible to the people inside. Moreover, Darka usually did not do the weeding alone, and when there were other people present it was more difficult to talk about things than when there were just the two of them. To make matters even worse, the other labourers might think that Yuzya had come to see how diligently they were working, and this possibility was something that she simply could not contemplate. She was not like Bronek, who hovered over the workers without being asked to do so.

And so, one time, she was greatly embarrassed when Yaryna, who was weeding, turned to her and said: “Well, my young lady, is it pleasant to sit in the shade? Come on, give me your book for a while, and you come and help Darka with the weeding.”

That was what Yaryna was like! She had forgotten how Yuzya—before the arrival of the governess—had worked alongside Darka, pulling weeds from among the flowers that she, Yaryna, had planted on a small patch of land behind the cottage. And Yuzya had even inveigled some lavender and dahlias from her mother for Yaryna.

Yaryna, however, would not let Yuzya transplant any herb bennet, saying: “You’ll just ruin the plants; you’re too little to do any transplanting.”

“Oh that Yaryna!” Yuzya thought. “She thinks that just because she’s twelve or fourteen—see! she doesn’t even know how old she is!—that she’s a grown-up girl already! She goes dancing, and ties her kerchief like the older girls.”

Yuzya had never liked Yaryna. She much preferred it when Darka came by herself to pick St. John’s wort among the grafted young trees in the new orchard. No one could see them there, from either the house or the arbour, and she could loll in the grass with Darka

and help her gather the wort and some salvia for Martokha's borshch. Her book lay close at hand—"just in case"—but Yuzya did not read it; instead, she and Darka had heart-to-heart talks.

"Why do you study so much, my young lady?" Darka asked.

"Well, because they tell me to."

"But why do they tell you to?"

"They just do; all of us children have to study."

"What's the good of it?"

"What do you mean?" Yuzya asked in amazement; but she herself could not come up with an answer.

"All that knowledge—of what use is it to you? You study German and French—but what do you need it for?"

Yuzya smiled indulgently, as an adult would smile at a child. "What do you mean, what do I need it for? What if I travel abroad? Everyone there speaks either French or German—and I wouldn't be able to understand anything."

Darka frowned with displeasure. "As if you have to go abroad! Why don't you want to stay here?"

Now Yuzya had to laugh. "You're really strange, Darka. Did I say that I'm going to go right now? I only said, *if* I travel."

"Well, if that's the case, then there's no need to study," Darka insisted. "If you don't travel, then what good will it do you if you know how to talk in some other language?"

"Well . . . What good? But then, why does everyone study?"

"How am I to know?" Darka retorted sullenly.

"Well, even your Ivan goes to school."

"But he's a boy! It's different for boys!" Darka regained her spirits, forgot her anger, and turned to Yuzya. "A boy will spend less time in the army if he studies; a boy can become a Kaiser, a teacher . . ."

"A girl can become a teacher as well!" Yuzya interrupted her.

"So, does that mean that you might be a teacher in a school?"

"Well, I might be," Yuzya replied somewhat indecisively.

"Oh, come on now! You're just saying that."

"Well, maybe I could be a governess," Yuzya stated with a bit more certainty.

"You'd go to serve other lords, like your German governess? Why would you want to do that? After all, you're rich!"

Yuzya bent over her book, and her lips began to tremble.

"So why are you studying, if that's the case?" Darka asked almost in a whisper, looking askance at Yuzya as she plucked at some grass.

Flinging her book to the ground, Yuzya threw herself on the grass and wept silently.

“Miss! Miss!” Darka cried out in confusion. “Why are you doing that? Did I say anything? I wasn’t saying anything . . .”

“Why are you tormenting me?” Yuzya sobbed through her tears. “Am I supposed to know why I’m studying? I’m studying because I’m told to . . . because I have to . . . And I don’t even want to travel abroad . . . I’m sick and tired of everything!—the German governess, and the books . . . And you keep pestering me with questions . . . What am I supposed to say to you?”

The situation was very awkward for Darka, but she did not know how to change the conversation. Then she noticed that her legs had been covered by Yuzya’s wide jumper when the young lady threw herself down on the grass. Picking up a fold of the “marine” jumper that was navy with white stripes, she smiled hesitantly and asked: “So you’ve put on a new jumper, have you? I don’t think I’ve seen it before . . . When did you have it made?”

“Yesterday,” Yuzya replied, her voice muffled by her white handkerchief. She too had wanted to change the topic of conversation, but had not known how to do it.

“It’s ever so pretty,” Darka continued, stroking the stripes with a finger. “Did it cost a lot?” There was a note of genuine curiosity in Darka’s voice.

“I don’t know . . . No, it was quite cheap—two gold coins, or something like that,” Yuzya replied indifferently, but in a slightly calmer voice.

“Oh, my dear fate!” Darka shrieked. “And you don’t think that’s expensive? When will I ever be able to earn enough to buy one like it? My mother’s been saying for some time now: ‘Earn the money!’ It’s fine for her to say that, when everything I earn goes towards that debt of ours!”

Yuzya flushed. She knew that Yuzya had to work to pay off the debt her family owed them, “the lords.”

Darka fell into deep thought.

Yuzya waited a little while, and then asked: “What are you thinking about, Darka?”

Darka came to with a start. “I’m still thinking about that debt. When will we ever pay it off? Oh, this year I’m going to go and work in the fields, no matter what! I’ll be older then. Yaryna went last year . . . But what can I earn in one summer? A skirt is so

expensive . . . and I don't have a jerkin, either. But still, will mother let me buy them?"

"How can she stop you from buying them?" Yuzya stood up for Darka. "It will be your own money! She should be buying you everything as it is. What right does she have to take your money? When my daddy gives me silver *p'yatachky* [nickels], mummy never takes them from me, but your mother takes everything for herself."

"Well, it's not really for herself," Darka explained reasonably. "You see, we have to buy salt—or herrings, or matches—but we don't have the money; or sometimes we have no bread left, but the money has run out . . . It still might be possible to buy a skirt—but it's so expensive! Two gold coins for a *lokot'* [yard]—that's a lot! Get up, my young lady, let me look at your jumper and see how full it is. How much fabric do you need for it?"

Yuzya stood up, and Darka spread out the skirt of the jumper, trying to count the number of seams and gores.

"It's cut in such a way that I can't figure it out . . . We don't sew jumpers the way the lords do," Darka said in a discouraged voice.

"Well, try it on. Maybe it will fit you." Yuzya quickly dropped her jumper, revealing her short, white slip. Then she took off her blouse as well, so that Darka could truly be a "young lady."

Darka, after removing her sash and taking off her white homespun skirt with its five strips of wool woven into the lower edge, was left standing in her shirt. Picking up Yuzya's clothing, she struggled to pull the narrow sleeves of Yuzya's blouse over the wide sleeves of her thick hand-woven shirt; the skirt of Yuzya's jumper barely covered her knees.

"Oh, how short it is, and how tight! How do you walk around in it? Look, you can see my calves!" Darka roared with laughter,

Yuzya also laughed loudly.

Suddenly, they heard a shriek and someone's hands being struck together behind them.

*"Matko cudowna! [O Holy Mother of God!]"*

The girls froze in fear.

Under a nearby pear tree stood the Polish housekeeper, Madam Kachkovska, the wife of the lord's steward. Wrath and incredulity deepened the furrows on her aging face, and she looked very old and very severe.

*"Matko cudowna!"* she wailed. "Miss Yuzya! How can the young lady allow a swineherd like that to put on her clothing? God only

knows what kind of disease the young lady might contract! And then the doctor will have to cure the young lady of the mange! Ugh! It's shameful! Who has ever seen anything like it? And you, why are you standing there like a stump?" she turned to Darka, changing her piercingly reproachful tone to a coarsely furious one. "Take off the young lady's clothes and put on your own rags!"

Darka hurriedly began to remove the jumper and blouse, but Kachkovska did not let up.

"What were you thinking? Are you supposed to be playing dress-up? Here I am—calling her and looking for her, while she . . . Just look at her! Wait until I tell your mother—she'll beat these 'highfalutin notions' right out of you!"

"Martokha won't beat Darka; my mother won't allow it," Yuzya stood up for her friend.

Madam Kachkovska pressed her lips tightly together, and then she spoke again in a high-pitched strident voice: "If you please, my young lady, the young lady should not spoil Darka, because it won't stand her in good stead. And the young lady would do better to think what *Fräulein Therese* will say. *Fräulein Therese* has spent the last half hour looking for the young lady to give her a piano lesson."

At the mention of *Fräulein Therese*, Yuzya darted towards her clothing, but Kachkovska intercepted her.

"*Jesus-Mariya [Jesus-Mary]!* Is the young lady going to dress in those things after *that one* has had them on? I'll send a servant to fetch them to be washed; the young lady must not touch them."

"But how will I go home?" Yuzya cried out tearfully.

"Miss Yuzya should have thought about that sooner," the housekeeper observed smoothly.

"*Jussa! Jussa! Aber wo sind Sie doch? Du, liebe Zeit! [Yuzya! Yuzya! Where are you? O dear God!]*" the troubled voice of *Fräulein Therese* reached them, and then she herself appeared.

Madam Kachkovska cast a penetrating look at Yuzya and then set out for home, yelling at the silent Darka and hurrying her along. As she rushed on ahead, Darka fumbled with her sash, trying all the while not to tip over the basket with the herbs that she had picked.

*Fräulein Therese* was left alone with the sobbing Yuzya. Quite a bit of time went by before she could find out from the young lady exactly what had happened. In the meantime, a serving girl came and took away Yuzya's clothing. *Fräulein Therese* began a long spiel about Yuzya's "lack of upbringing"; she had not completed her

“litany” when the young lady’s troubled grandmother rushed up, all out of breath. She had met Madam Kachkovska in the orchard and already “knew everything.” Quite unexpectedly, the old woman attacked the governess instead of her granddaughter.

“How could you?” the grandmother reproached *Fräulein Therese*, speaking in broken German with a strong Polish accent. “How could you neglect the child like this? And now you’re letting her catch a cold here! Take her to the house! She’s shivering from the cold.”

Yuzya truly was shivering, but not from the cold. Her grandmother covered her with her large black shawl and led her home. *Fräulein Therese* followed them dejectedly. The three of them arrived at the house without saying another word.

Well, there was quite a to-do that day, complete with tears, reproaches, and migraines! At a family council, it was decided that *Fräulein Therese* was “worthless.”

The grandmother recalled that she had said as much from the very first day, and went on to say: “Only a French governess can see to it that Yuzya receives a proper upbringing; besides, Yuzya already knows enough German, and her French accent is only being spoiled by that German woman.”

Everyone agreed that another governess had to be found, but there was some disagreement as to whether the German woman should be sent away immediately, or kept on until a French governess was found. French women were not too keen on living in a village, and it could well be that Yuzya would be left on her own for a few weeks, or even a few months, because her mother was always “ailing,” her grandmother was old, and there was no one else to look after the young lady. And such a situation was not at all desirable, because the young lady with “her whims” could become even more attached to Darka, or other undesirable girls like her. But then again, it was not right, from a pedagogical point of view, to leave Yuzya under the German woman’s care now that her authority had been undermined in front of her.

It was Madam Kachkovska who helped them arrive at a decision. In the evening, when the housekeeper was giving the older lady a summary of the day’s household activities, she cautiously inquired if the lady had something *do dyspozycji* [by way of instructions] for her, because it seemed that *Fräulein Therese* had said something to the effect that she might be leaving, and, if that actually was the case, then it might be proper to bake her something for the road.



The old lady could not refrain from confiding in her “dear Kachkosya”—after all, you could trust such a fine, upstanding woman—the concerns that the family had.

Kachkovska, lowering her eyes and raising her eyebrows, hesitantly said: “If Your Ladyship would permit me to say something, I might be able to find a suitable, temporary companion for the young lady . . . Well, of course, not completely suitable, but better than no one at all.

“If you please, Your Ladyship, in the neighbouring village of Krasyllovka—three miles from here, only three miles away—I have a young niece who was left an orphan after the death of my sister. She lives with a stepmother and a stepfather. Let’s see, how can I explain it? If it please Your Ladyship, it’s like this: her mother died, and her father remarried; then he died, and the stepmother married again. And the stepmother, supposedly out of the kindness of her heart, kept the poor orphan. But some kindness that is, my dear lady . . . *opieka oczy wypika* [care like that is like salt in your eyes]. Anyone would show that kind of kindness if a girl sewed and embroidered for you without getting paid for it . . . If only Your Ladyship could see the work she does! *Biedactwo* [the poor dear]!”

“Does this niece of yours have an education of some kind?” the old lady asked casually.

“Of course, my dear lady, of course! The girl knew better times while her parents were alive, because her father was the steward of the count in Krasyllovka—I believe Your Ladyship knows that count. So Zonya . . .”

“Is her name Zonya?” the lady interrupted her.

“Yes it is, if you please, Your Ladyship; her name is Zonya, or Zofiya . . . Well, it can be said that she was raised alongside the young countess, and so she has an excellent upbringing, one that for a simple gentlewoman may even be considered *niepospolite* [exceptional]. It is not right to praise one’s own family, but it may truly be said that Zonya would be a much more suitable companion for Miss Yuzya than a girl like Darka.”

“How old is she?” the lady interrupted her once again.

Kachkovska stopped to think for a moment: “Well, I think she’s probably sixteen already.”

“That’s a bit too young,” the lady said.

“But, if you please, Your Ladyship, does that really matter? Perhaps it’s even better. Miss Yuzya is thirteen, and at that age it is

difficult to spend all one's time among older people, and so, out of sheer boredom, the young lady latches on to the likes of Darka. It must be out of boredom, because Miss Yuzya is an obedient and noble *dziecko* [child]. She most certainly would not do things like that if she had someone nearby who was a better and more cheerful companion, with a more suitable upbringing. Zonya is a cheerful and talkative girl, at least she was when her parents were alive . . . *Biedactwo!*"

As she uttered the last word, Madam Kachkovska raised the edge of her apron to wipe her eyes, and the old lady patted her on the back and said: "*Alez, kochana Kachkosiu, Pan Bóg nigdy nie zapomina o sierotach* [But my dear Kachkosya, God never forgets about orphans]. Kachkosya may go to sleep, and I'll discuss the matter with my family." And Kachkovska, feeling completely confident about the fate of her niece, went off to bed.

The next day, the teary-eyed *Fräulein Therese* began packing her belongings. The poor German woman was crying not only because of her grief and shame at being dismissed by the lord and lady, but also because she had to part with Yuzya. The kind-hearted spinster had the misfortune of becoming truly attached to all her young charges, despite the fact that her attachment was rarely reciprocated.

Yuzya, out of politeness, had a serious look on her face that day; besides, she felt a certain responsibility towards the innocent governess who, in this instance, had become the scapegoat. But even her sense of courtesy could not make her cry over the departure of her governess.

Darka did not even think it necessary to conceal her glee at the departure of "that damned German woman." When the carriage containing *Fräulein Therese* drove through the village past Martokha's cottage, Darka ran out with her younger sister and brother and romped in a wild dance, singing:

"Oh you old woman, you old witch,  
Let's harness the horses, and quickly flee  
Beyond the border for some wheat,  
While there's light enough to see!"

Darka rejoiced that, without the German woman's supervision, her secret encounters in the alders with the young lady would begin again—at least on Sunday, if there was no time for them on ordinary days. And maybe they could go to Ryvka's swings in the Jew's

empty shed . . . But it was not to be! The same carriage that drove the elderly German governess to the train station returned in the evening with Zonya, a modest, smiling young lady from Krasyllovka.

Darka, fast asleep, did not witness her arrival.

#### IV

Miss Zonya quickly found her way into Yuzya's heart, a way that had been tightly barred to *Fräulein Therese*. Everything worked in her favour. First of all, Zonya did not bear the hated title of "governess"; she received, instead, the modest title of "lady of the wardrobe," even though she actually had very little to do with wardrobes, because the lady of the manor did not like home-made clothing. Zonya was not a teacher, but a companion, who was older in years but lesser in station, and Yuzya was permitted to strike up a friendship with her; indeed her parents desired her to do so, even though they did not force the matter.

Yuzya was not told that Zonya had come to stay with her family because of her, and even Zonya herself was not to know this, so that she would not become overly proud. But Zonya was a clever girl, and it did not take her long to figure things out.

For Yuzya, it was a new experience to have a friend whom she did not have to meet secretly in corners, in case, God forbid, someone should see them! And Zonya was "so kind," and she did not disdain to participate in Yuzya's somewhat childish interests, even though she herself already had "the secrets" of a sixteen-year-old girl. Zonya knew many funny, pithy witticisms, and she knew how to dance well; and she taught Yuzya, taking the part of a "young gentleman."

With Zonya's arrival, the house seemed to become a happier place; Yuzya's mummy cried less frequently, her grandfather recalled the polite manners of his youth, and her grandmother was sometimes kind enough to play old-fashioned waltzes for the young ladies so that they could dance. After every waltz, Zonya rushed up so gracefully to kiss the grandmother on the shoulder, that even this grumbling old lady was moved to call the girl *motylkiem* [*a butterfly*] and *przepióreczką* [*a quail*]. The winter, always so long and hard for the sickly Yuzya, seemed to go by more quickly and easily this year, and it felt as if spring arrived earlier than it usually did.

That spring, Yuzya regained her strength. She even suffered fewer bouts of malaria. Perhaps it was because she spent less time hiding in damp places—as she had previously done with Darka—but, in addition, the spring was also an exceptionally fine one, not at all wet, like springtime usually was in the province of Polisya.

The month of May was sunny and amazingly dry. Zonya and Yuzya spent entire mornings wandering through the meadows looking for forget-me-nots, picking lilies of the valley in the groves, and stripping the rose and jasmine bushes in the orchard—all for the special Marian divine services in May.

Zonya slept in Yuzya's room "for the time being," until a French governess was found and hired. Oh, Yuzya prayed ever so fervently that a governess would not be found for a long, long time. With this "intention" in mind, she intoned—on Zonya's advice—long litanies and antiphons as she knelt before the little altar that the two of them had decorated in her room.

Never before had Yuzya's altar been adorned so attractively and profusely as it was this spring, and never before had Yuzya prayed so sincerely. Previously, she had prayed mostly out of a feeling of obligation, but her mind had not been engaged, and her heart had slumbered.

Now it seemed, however, that a secret gate to paradise had been opened for her, and through the flowers before the icon of the Mother of God she saw, as in a dream, silvery blue waves of something mystical, heavenly, illuminated by the rays of the unfathomable Star of the Sea, the Virgin Mother Mariya. She even forgot about her "intention" and, intoxicated by the passionate words of the litany, she intoned them like a serenade, rapturously, as if she were in a state of ecstasy.

"O Holy Mother, pray for us! O Immaculate Virgin, pray for us! O Wondrous Rose, pray for us! O Morning Star, pray for us!"

Zonya stood beside her like a white angel, and chanted the responses of the litany in a soft voice "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison! [Lord have mercy! Christ have mercy!]*"—mysterious words, that sounded as if they were taken from an angel's prayer. There were times when Yuzya, overcome with emotion, burst into tears and flung herself into Zonya's arms.

"Miss Yuzya, my dear, my sweet! What's wrong?" Zonya would ask, embracing her.

"I don't know . . . I feel so happy . . . so very happy . . ."

“Then please don’t cry! It’s not good for my dear Miss Yuzya to cry; my beloved Miss Yuzya must take good care of herself.”

“Why?”

“Because everyone loves Miss Yuzya dearly; everyone treasures her. What would poor Zonya do if dearest Miss Yuzya took ill?”

It was with such sweet tender words that Zonya gained control over Yuzya. Zonya did not cry like Yuzya’s mother, or “grumble” at her like her grandmother, or “get annoyed” with her like Darka. And, in her heart, Yuzya began to betray Darka with Zonya. At the same time, however, a strange feeling tormented her.

Yuzya often recalled the day that she decided not to play with dolls any more, because it was “shameful” to do so when one was twelve. She had dressed her last doll in her prettiest dress, gathered together all her “trousseau,” and opened the trunk in her mother’s room in order to tuck her away on the very bottom of it.

While she was doing this, the doll, looking ever so small and forlorn, sat propped up on the big stuffed couch, her blue eyes opened wide, and her limp arms hanging helplessly; her hair was bunched unattractively on the top of her head, and her feet, shod in bootees knitted by a child, stuck out in an ungainly manner from under her dress. She appeared to be cold and uncomfortable, and seemed to be aware that she was most piteous . . . and superfluous.

Yuzya walked out of the room with tears in her eyes; she asked Zonya to put the doll away and did not go into that room for a long time. And now, whenever she thought about the doll—and she thought about it quite often—she felt compelled to think about Darka; dissolving into tears at such times, she herself did not know if she was crying for the doll she had forsaken, or for Darka . . .

The feast day of Corpus Christi, a festive May holiday of plants and flowers, was approaching. The maidservants tidied up the rooms, day labourers—including Darka, her mother, and her sister—whitewashed the exterior walls of the house, while Zonya and Yuzya strolled through the garden and picked flowers for the innumerable bouquets and wreaths that they were to take to the *kost’ol* [*Polish Roman Catholic church*] the next day.

“Oh, my God, my God, Miss Yuzya!” Zonya said grievously as she spread out her apron filled with various plants and cut flowers. “We have only eleven different kinds of flowers, and we need at least twelve—at least! It’s imperative that we have them; anything less is not seemly for *Boże Ciało* [*the Festival of Corpus Christi*].”

“Why isn’t it seemly?” Yuzya asked in surprise. Having been raised in isolation, without the companionship of Roman Catholic girls, there were many details about the Marian celebrations that she was only now finding out from Zonya.

“Well, because there were twelve apostles!” Zonya explained.

“Oh yes, that’s right . . .”

“And to make matters even worse, Miss Yuzya, we don’t have any trailing ivy. It’s very good for cows; when the wreaths are burned, and the smoke drifts under the cows, they produce more milk. But didn’t Miss Yuzya know that? It’s a well-known fact!”

Hearing the name “trailing ivy,” Yuzya shrugged her shoulders and blushed, then she bent down low to a bunch of daisies and murmured: “There’s a lot of it . . . trailing ivy . . . beyond the clearing in the forest, but I don’t know exactly where . . .” And then, blushing harder, she blurted out: “Darka is the one who knows . . .”

“Who’s Darka?”

“That girl over there; the smallest one, whitewashing the house; she’s next to the girl in the red skirt.”

“Why do you think she knows where the trailing ivy is?”

“She’s sure to know. There’s always a wreath of trailing ivy hanging over the icons in her cottage.”

“But how does Miss Yuzya know what’s in a peasant’s cottage?”

“I . . . sometimes went there . . . with my mother . . . They’re very poor . . .”

An embarrassed flush spread over Yuzya’s face, and something pressed painfully against her heart. Zonya did not notice her confusion; she thought the young lady was simply out of breath from the heat and from bending over to pick flowers.

“Then let Darka go and get some trailing ivy, or let her show us where it grows,” Zonya said calmly.

“Please tell Madam Kachkovska to let her go,” Yuzya said, and something like tiny needles pierced her heart.

“It would be better if Miss Yuzya told her herself.”

“No . . . She won’t listen to me. Please tell her yourself; it must come from you . . . it will be better that way . . .”

With a slight shrug of her shoulders, Zonya went to see her aunt, Madam Kachkovska; she instantly received permission “to take” Darka to show them where the trailing ivy grew.

Zonya went to get Darka herself. “Listen, you! Come and show the young lady and me where the trailing ivy grows.”

"I don't have time!" Darka replied morosely, her dark eyes casting an oblique glance at Zonya from under her white, lime-covered eyebrows.

"My aunt has given you permission to go."

"Which aunt would that be?" Darka asked sullenly.

"Why, my aunt—Madam Kachkovska!"

"Oh yes . . . the housekeeper . . ." Darka slapped her brush on the wall without looking at Zonya.

"So are you coming, or aren't you?" Zonya shouted. "Be careful with that brush! You almost splashed me!"

"Go on, Darka," Yaryna said.

"You better go if they're calling you," Darka's mother added hastily, anxiously jabbing Darka with her elbow.

Darka put her brush down by the pail, wiped her face in her sleeve, pulled down her tucked-up apron, and started out towards the gate, calling to Zonya over her shoulder. "Well, come on!"

Yuzya caught up with her at the gate and walked alongside her, looking at her silently, with an uncertain tenderness.

"Don't walk so quickly," Zonya stopped them when they came to the outbuildings by the lord's stables. "Wait here for me; I forgot my parasol. You can get such a tan on that pasture that you'll end up looking like a gypsy."

"If you're going to go back for a parasol then I'm going back to whitewash. I don't have time to walk around, because then the housekeeper will deduct half a florin from my wages—she'll say that I didn't work the whole day."

At the word "housekeeper," Zonya pressed her lips tightly together, and Yuzya, blushing profusely, hurriedly said: "No no! Madam Kachkovska wouldn't do something like that. After all, she gave you permission, she . . ."

"That's fine for you to say . . . I'm going to the pasture, and if someone doesn't want to, that's fine with me!"

And Darka walked on resolutely. Zonya pouted and stayed where she was, but Yuzya whispered something in her ear and looked so upset that Zonya took pity on her and set out after Darka, covering her face as best she could with a handkerchief and the wide sleeve of her blouse.

In the most sunny spot of the pasture, amid the colourful sea of the May grass, gleamed a pale gold island of tiny, spreading, waxen trailing ivy.

“There it is!” Darka pointed at the island, and all three of them began to pick the masses of star-shaped flowers.

But Zonya quickly gave up and, saying that she could not tolerate the “fiery heat,” walked off to the clearing, where she lay down in the shade of a shrub.

Yuzya watched her go. Then softly, in a trembling voice, she began speaking to Darka. “What are you up to now, Darka?”

“As you can see, I’m picking trailing ivy . . .”

“No, not right now . . . usually.”

“Usually, like usually—I go to work, or I work at home, or I herd the cattle . . .”

Darka was not talking in an overly friendly manner, but she no longer spoke in the surly, sharp tone she had just used with Zonya; rather, her voice was tinged with regret, a sudden sadness. With taut, wide-open eyes, she stared unblinkingly at a tiny flower that she twirled in her fingers.

“Who’s looking after Priska?”

“Priska is big girl now. Why would she need looking after? There’s Hapka now, who is smaller than she is.”

“And who looks after Hapka?”

“Our Ulyanka! She’s almost six now. Why wouldn’t she be able to look after her?”

“And you . . . with whom do you play now?”

Darka turned her eyes from the flower to Yuzya. “Do you suppose I have time to play? Am I still a little girl?”

“But you played back then!”

“Then! How much did I really play? I was always with the geese or the babies—that was some playing! But back then, it was still possible to get away on a feast day, or to just run away.”

“And now? Can’t you get away on a feast day?”

“No.”

“So what so you do on a feast day?”

“What do I do? I pick strawberries and salvia, and then I sell them. And my mother sends me to graze the cattle, because Ivan is spending more time herding horses at night, and Yaryna goes to the dances on feast days.”

“Don’t you go to the dances?”

“There’s no time for that.”

“Why?”

“And who’s going to herd the cattle?”



“Why doesn’t Yaryna take turns with you on feast days?” Yuzya insisted, becoming just as involved in her friend’s matters as she had been in the past.

“Mother says that Yaryna is a grown-up girl already, so she ought to go to the dances, but I’m still too little.”

“But you just said that you weren’t little!”

“It all depends for what!” Darka smiled for the first time during this conversation, but her smile was sad, and Yuzya was not at all cheered by it.

“Listen, Darka, have you bought yourself a jumper like the one I had? Remember?”

“Oh, how could I! Mother sewed me one out of some thin cotton fabric, and that’s that.”

“You know what, Darka? Come some evening, maybe even today, and I’ll give you that jumper. Mother will let me. The skirt is still good, but I’ve grown out of it. Oh, but what am I thinking about? You’ve grown bigger as well.”

Yuzya was embarrassed. But Darka’s cheeks flamed, and her eyes flashed and no longer seemed dark.

“That’s nothing, Miss! I’ll lengthen it under the collar; we do things like that, and it can’t be seen from under the jerkin. So when should I come?”

“In the evening, when the cows are being milked. I’ll be studying then in my room . . . alone . . . Come to my window.”

“Maybe it would be better if my mother came?”

“No, no, Darka. You come. You come yourself! Will you come?” Yuzya gently tugged Darka’s sleeve and looked into her eyes.

Darka smiled, but this smile was not like her previous one; now she seemed to blossom, and Yuzya recalled the happiest moments of their former secret games—the Jewish swing . . . sliding together on the hay . . .

“Fine! I’ll come.” And Darka nodded her head twice—happily and resolutely.

“Oh, how much longer is it going to take? The mosquitoes are eating me up,” Zonya drawled in a sleepy voice.

She got up lazily from under the bush and, walking languidly, started out towards them.

“We’re finished; there’s enough here,” Yuzya hurriedly called out and ran to meet her.

Darka walked more slowly.

The three of them walked home side by side. Yuzya was in the middle, and Darka carried the trailing ivy in her apron. The sun was scorchingly hot, and the girls, weary and perspiring profusely, did not feel like talking. When they came to the manor house, Yuzya told Darka to carry the trailing ivy to her room where all the other plants were lying on the books and notebooks on Yuzya's table.

Yuzya began to write some words on long pieces of paper. "*A słowo stało się ciałem i witało między nami.*" [*And the word became flesh and lived among us.*]

Zonya sat at the same table; she attached slender ribbons to the papers, tied them into circles, and used them as a form for making small wreaths; into every wreath she wove a few stems of the various plants and flowers. The small wreaths that she made were very tiny and delicate, as if meant for an elfin queen.

Darka, after putting the trailing ivy on the table, had not left the room; she was standing behind Yuzya's chair, watching the young ladies as they worked. She looked with great interest at what Yuzya was doing, but she watched Zonya with an almost palpable gloomy jealousy.

After a while, Zonya went into the salon to pinch off a few sprigs of myrtle and rosemary for the smallest green wreath that was to grace the most holy of holies tomorrow—the paten with the holy gifts. She had scarcely closed the door behind herself, when Darka began speaking to Yuzya.

"Give me one of those pieces of paper, young lady. Let me make at least one wreath."

Yuzya glanced at the door and then gave her one of the papers. Darka began folding it awkwardly, creasing it and dirtying it with her fingers, grimy from the lime and the plants. Finally, the paper tore, but Darka, not daring to ask for another one, began making a wreath out of the greenery, tucking in the stems of flowers and plants without using any thread. The wreath was turning out big and shaggy, but Darka, trying to braid it as quickly as possible, was completely caught up in her work.

Zonya re-entered the room, singing the hymn "*Do serca Jezusa*" [*To the Heart of Jesus*]. She was in the mood for singing, but it was not seemly to sing ordinary happy songs on the day before an important feast day. Darting a curious look at Darka and the wreath she was making, she abruptly stopped singing and burst into gales of laughter.

“Oh, Miss Yuzya, look at what she’s put together! It’s really quite a sight!” Then she turned to Darka and, no longer laughing, cried: “Why are you wasting plants? Who allowed you to do it?”

“It’s nothing . . . let her . . .” Yuzya mumbled and, blushing painfully, bent over and pretended to be writing something.

“Did Miss Yuzya allow her to do this?”

Yuzya did not reply.

But Darka piped up. “What’s there to allow? Isn’t there more than enough of this greenery in the garden? Didn’t I gather the trailing ivy just like you did? Even more!”

“Well, well, now, just you be quiet! You’ve cracked open your mouth from one ear to the other! You said: ‘I don’t have time,’ but now you’re standing around, and may the work go hang! I’ll tell my aunt.”

“Your aunt doesn’t scare me!” Darka retorted. But she threw her unfinished wreath on the table and ran out.

“Why did you say that? Let her be . . .” Yuzya mumbled hesitantly.

“Oh, I can’t stand coarse peasant girls!” Zonya said passionately. “And why should she be here? If she were at least a clean, decent girl, but she’s from a sooty, chimneyless cottage.”

“How does Zonya know what kind of a cottage she lives in?”

“But, if you please! You can smell the musty smoke on her from a mile away. Feh! I can still smell it!” Waving her handkerchief under her nose, Zonya opened the casement and disdainfully flung Darka’s wreath out the window.

Darka, who was whitewashing the wall, looked up and saw Zonya throw out the wreath.

Pushing herself away from the table, Yuzya sat with her hands on her knees and stared out the window without budging.

“Has Miss Yuzya finished writing on all the papers?”

“Yes.”

The curt and muffled tone of that “yes” alarmed Zonya. She had never heard Yuzya speak that way.

“Why isn’t Miss Yuzya braiding wreaths?” Zonya asked, currying Yuzya’s favour.

“Because.”

“But please, tell me why.”

“Because Zonya will not like them, and Zonya will throw them out of the window.” Yuzya’s lips were trembling, and her voice barely forced its way through them; her words, therefore, failing to

come out in the sarcastic tone that she had intended, sounded plaintive, weepy, and completely childish.

“Is Miss Yuzya angry at me?”

Yuzya could not find her voice to reply.

Zonya peered into her face, and Yuzya lowered her trembling eyelashes.

“Miss Yuzya is angry with me, at her Zonya? And because of what? Because of that peasant girl? Isn’t it a fact that everything from a cottage without a chimney smells with smoke? Am I to blame that I can’t stand the smell of smoke? And what did I do to that girl? Did I not speak politely enough to her? Well, after all, she’s not a countess, is she?”

Yuzya finally recovered her voice. “*Fräulein Therese* said that one ought to be polite to everyone, even to the servants. She said that all aristocrats behaved that way. Isn’t that so? Zonya should know this better than anyone, because Zonya was raised alongside a countess.”

Zonya blushed slightly, but spoke even more resolutely. “No one can be polite to rude people. Does Miss Yuzya think that every peasant woman has the right to speak as she wishes to Zonya, and that she should bow graciously to her for it?”

“But Darka did not badger Zonya first,” Yuzya said softly, as if she were justifying not Darka’s actions, but her own.

“You should have heard how she spoke to me when I went up to her. I called her nicely enough, but she almost snapped my head off. And she did it in front of all the peasant women—I was quite embarrassed! And has Miss Yuzya forgotten how that the perverse girl glared at me when I wanted to fetch my parasol?”

“But why am I bothering to say anything? It’s all the same to Miss Yuzya. Let anyone who feels like it offend Zonya, and Miss Yuzya will still be angry at Zonya, the poor orphan, for not knowing how to speak politely, like a countess. But how was Zonya to learn from the example set by the countess? Everyone walked on tiptoe before the countess, while Zonya was fed a diet of pokes and shoves in the corners because there was no one to stand up for her. Zonya had to accept everything, because she was poor . . .”

“Darka is also poor, my dear Zonya,” Yuzya reminded her in a pleading voice.

“In what way is she poor? She has a home, she’s accustomed to working, and she has parents and a place to find shelter. But what

about me? I'm always dependent on the kindness of others, always under someone's care, always in homes that are not my own. No one needs me; I'm all alone in this world, and no one loves me . . . Why should I go on living? Oh, God, how I wish I could die! O God, dear God!" Zonya was shedding real tears now.

"Zonya, my dear Zonya!" Yuzya flung herself at her. "How can you say such a thing? What about me? I love Zonya as if she were my family, my sister. Zonya is my one and only friend. Doesn't Zonya believe it any longer? O Zonya, Zonya!" Yuzya's voice brimmed with despair. She dropped to her knees and embraced Zonya's waist. Zonya nestled her face in Yuzya's hair.

"I believe you . . . but . . . I feel so unfortunate . . . so very unfortunate . . . that Miss Yuzya is angry with me."

"No, no! I'm not angry, I'm not at all angry! And I'm begging Zonya not to be angry with me!" Yuzya, caught up in a frenzy of penance and love, took Zonya's hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Miss Yuzya! Really now . . ." and Zonya pressed Yuzya closely in her embrace, while Yuzya tried to kiss her.

Suddenly there was a knock at the window. Darka had drawn closer to whitewash around the window opening. Her face, spotted with lime and so pale that it looked terrifying, like a mask, showed through the closed pane.

"What do you want? What's wrong with you?" both young ladies exclaimed simultaneously.

Darka did not reply; she just swung her brush so quickly and violently that the pane was soon as white as her face.

The young ladies gathered up the greenery and went out on the veranda to finish braiding the wreaths. Then they walked for a long time in the orchard, until it was dark. Because of the impending feast day, Yuzya's mother had given her a break from her studies.

Zonya narrated many sad incidents from her childhood years. Yuzya, moved to tears, squeezed Zonya's hands and vowed that she would love her "always, always, until she died," and then she made Zonya promise that she would address her using the familiar form of "you" and call her simply "Yuzya" or "Yuzechka," without using the title "Miss." At first Zonya refused, then, after a long time, she finally agreed, but only in private, because otherwise the grownups would be angry with her.

That informal "you" was the first "secret" between them. As they dined, they exchanged mysteriously happy glances, and then, when

they were alone in their room, Zonya said: "Take the prayer book, Yuzya. You'll pray, and I'll do the responses."

Yuzya gave her a long, very long, kiss and, that evening, Yuzya's soul felt as if it were in paradise, where "the lilies of purity" and the "font of holiness" were enticing her to them. And Zonya's voice chanted: "*Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!*"

As Yuzya lay in bed, almost falling asleep, she suddenly shuddered. "Oh," she silently remembered. "Darka must have come for the skirt, and she probably waited under the window for heaven knows how long!"

But Yuzya need not have worried—Darka had not come.

## V

From the time that Zonya and Darka switched to using the informal "you," there was a subtle, but sudden change in their friendship, and even though Yuzya did not dare to complain even to herself about this change, her heart was pained by not one, but two feelings that were equally heavy, even though they were just as equally vague and unspoken. Yuzya often thought now that Zonya never forgot that she was "a big girl," and that it was only out of "kindness," that she was friends with her, the "little" Yuzya. Well, not so very little, because Yuzya was coming fifteen, but she still walked around in a short dress and "did not know" much of what, as Zonya said, grown-up young ladies knew.

And what kind of a friendship is it, if one of the friends knows something and does not tell the other? But had not Zonya sworn that she did not have a closer, dearer friend than Yuzya? She had sworn this quite recently on the memory of her deceased mother.

"Perhaps it was quite recently," thought Yuzya, "but perhaps things are different now?" Yuzya needed to have daily, almost hourly assurances of Zonya's friendship. Her friendship was anxious, demanding. The feeling of a calm, relaxed restfulness that she had experienced during the first winter after Zonya's arrival was now gone. Yuzya was especially unhappy that Miss Oktusya, the sister of the medical assistant, had begun to visit Zonya.

The same age as Zonya, Oktusya had a round, swarthy face, "repulsively" shiny, oily hair, and "bovine" eyes. Zonya seldom went to see Oktusya, because Yuzya cried whenever she did so.

“Oh, why,” Yuzya thought, “did I let Zonya see those tears!”

Yuzya took no joy in the fact that Zonya did not visit her new friend. If Zonya herself had not wanted to go, it would have been different, but if she was simply responding to external pressures—what good was that? Perhaps she truly did want to visit Oktusya, but did not do so, either because she did not dare to, or because she wanted to spare Yuzya’s feelings.

And Yuzya became loathsome to Zonya because of her demands for “the truth,” and her repenting for her “*kaprysy i grymasy*” [*caprices and grimaces*], and for her constant pleading to have Zonya love her “at least the tiniest bit.” Zonya laughed it off but, turning away, bit her lips in vexation and awaited Oktusya’s arrival “*jak zbawienie*” [*like a deliverance*].

Yuzya usually left the house when Oktusya put in an appearance, but, unable to stay away for any length of time, soon came back. It seemed to her that the two young ladies either stopped talking or changed the conversation whenever she walked in, but she could not find out for certain, and Zonya said . . . Oh, Yuzya no longer had any confidence in what Zonya said, she really did not, even though she reproached herself for it, and even though every night, when Zonya was fast asleep, she lay on her back on the bare floor with the “intention” of having God grant her assurance and an unqualified trust in her friend.

Because she began to spend the nights on the floor, Yuzya’s bouts of malaria returned, but God did not grant her the feelings of assurance or trust for which she had prayed.

Finally, Yuzya could not stand it any more. One time, she went up to the door and listened; she stooped to eavesdropping, eavesdropping “crudely, like a chambermaid,”—this was how she chastised herself. Through the churning of the agitated blood in her ears, she heard the muffled, coarse laughter of Oktusya, and then Zonya’s outcry: “Mr. Felix? Oh, is it possible? Ha-ha-ha! It’s wonderful having a brother like that! So, how did it go? How?”

Oktusya said something in a low voice, then they both sang, to the tune of a *krakov’yak* [*a Polish dance melody*], a dialogue conducted between a “young lady” and her “young man.” The dialogue made Yuzya’s heart leap and freeze. The lewd innuendoes became clearer and clearer, and Yuzya’s eyes grew wider and wider, as if she were being approached by something unexpected and horrible; but she did not have the strength to turn away.

The girls finished their song and once again roared with laughter. Yuzya shuddered. Then, all out of breath, red-faced and furious—but trembling as if she were cold—she flew into the room as if possessed,

“What are you singing? Why are you singing things like that? What is this? How can you?”

“And how did the young lady hear what we were singing?” Oktusya, her dark eyes half-closed, asked slyly and shamelessly.

For a moment, Zonya was taken aback, but she quickly raised her head and looked directly at Yuzya. “Well, and so what? We were singing! We didn’t know that someone who was not a grownup would be listening, and it doesn’t harm grownups.”

“You’re right,” Oktusya picked up on her words. “Just let the young lady put on a long dress, and she’ll admit that we’re right. But then, you really don’t need a long dress for that; it all depends on the person . . .”

Yuzya stared at her helplessly. Zonya tugged Oktusya’s sleeve and spoke to Yuzya in a displeased voice: “It would be best not to eavesdrop on our secrets, or not to be disturbed by them; as it is—one does not go with the other.”

And Zonya took her sewing and began embroidering without paying any more attention to Yuzya. “Oktusya,” she turned to her friend, “will this ‘Z’ be fine for a handkerchief, or is too big?”

“It’s a trifle too big; it should be smaller for a young lady, more modest. It might be fine for a *mężatka* [*a married woman*].”

Yuzya, lowering her head dejectedly, walked out of the room. The young ladies appeared not to notice her departure, even though it seemed to Yuzya that when she was on the other side of the door, one of them sputtered with restrained laughter. But after that she did not hear anything else, and she continued on her way.

Walking down a narrow, well-worn pathway through the orchard, Yuzya arrived at the alders by the fence—the place where she used to meet Darka for their conversations. She lay face down on the grass, hid her face in her hands, and lay quietly, ever so quietly. It was almost as if she were ashamed to look at the thoughtful, dignified alders and the clear little stream that ran from the forest into the pond. It was as if she did not want to meet the gaze of the azure blue eyes of the forget-me-nots. She did not cry; she only trembled slightly and felt a painful emptiness, a faintness throughout her body.



She did not want to think about what she had just heard . . . Such ugly, such loathsome words—that song, everything . . . Why, why had she listened to it? Now Yuzya was no longer as she had been. She was no longer like that, and she could never again be like that! O Lord, it would be far better to never be a grownup.

Tears forced their way through Yuzya's tightly clenched fists. She did not grimace or sob like a child, as she usually did; she was hardly aware that she was crying. It was as if her tears were not flowing from her eyes, but from a deeper source.

"I don't want to remember it! I don't want to!" Yuzya uttered loudly and hoarsely. Raising herself on her knees, she lifted her arms in prayer: "O God! O Most Holy Virgin! I want to forget everything! O Immaculate Virgin, make this miracle happen."

A ray of sunshine broke through the leaves of the alders, and golden arrows flashed in Yuzya's eyes—the golden light of the sun had fragmented in the tear drops beading her eyelashes. To Yuzya this seemed like "a sign from heaven," the beginning of a miracle.

Yuzya returned home feeling calm, but she did not go to see Zonya; she went into the salon where the grownups were sitting. She helped her grandmother catch the stitches she had dropped while knitting a sock, read her grandfather ten pages or so of a boring memoir, played the mazurka "On the Death of Konarsky" for her father, and talked in French with her mother. She was so "polite" that she truly was worthy of a miracle.

But a miracle did not happen.

That very same evening, as she lay in bed and waited for Zonya to come home from her visit with Oktusya, she kept thinking about what she had hoped to forget. And she was tormented by the grief, disgust, and anger that she felt towards Zonya, and her soul was depressed by her vow of eternal friendship to the "poor orphan."

"Will I actually betray her as I betrayed Darka?" This was the first time that Yuzya dared to call the change in her behaviour towards Darka a betrayal. "But I didn't make a vow to Darka. No, I truly did not promise her anything, but I did make a vow to Zonya in front of my altar. How unkind I am! How perfidious!"

When Zonya walked in, Yuzya created "a scene." Yuzya heard that Master Felix, the medical assistant, had walked Zonya home, and she reproached her for betraying a girlfriend for a young man.

Already half-undressed, Zonya sat down beside Yuzya on the bed and, covering the girl's mouth with her hand, whispered: "Quiet!

Quiet! The older people will hear . . . Now, Yuzya, don't be a little baby! Who can compare a girlfriend to a young man? I can see now that it really would be better to tell you everything, because you're being simply impossible!"

Zonya lay down beside Yuzya, positioned the girl's head on her shoulder, embraced her thin childish body with her bare arms, and pressed her to her warm, healthy body. And she kept talking, and talking.

Opening wide her eyes and mouth, Yuzya listened, and it felt as if her heart was beating in her very throat, beating so furiously that she found it hard to breathe. She did not fall asleep until the white heater was clearly visible in the dark corner, and the crimson flowers could be distinguished from the azure blue ones on the wreath above the icon of the Mother of God.

Yuzya woke up very late, with a heavy head, and a dull ache in her heart. Zonya was dressed and reciting her *różaniec* [rosary] before the icon. Yuzya dressed wearily and carelessly, opened the window, and sat down beside it, gazing mindlessly into the distance.

"Why aren't you praying with me, my dear Yuzya?" Zonya asked.

"Later . . . I haven't washed up yet," Yuzya drawled limply, sluggishly

"Well then, wash up quickly."

"I don't feel like it," Yuzya drawled in the same manner, stretching contortedly.

Lowering her head to the window sill, she feebly stretched one arm along it, while covering her head with the other one.

"O young girl of mine, *in haute couture*,  
Grab a pitchfork, let's go to the manure!"

Zonya and Yuzya were both startled by the unexpected singing that issued from the depths of the raspberry bushes.

"It's that stupid Darka!" Zonya cried with displeasure. "The devil take her! What a scare she gave me! And what a subtle song: 'Let's go to the manure!' That's how a young peasant bachelor invites his lady. What a 'clean' song! It simply reeks!"

Darka did not hear her criticism and continued shouting in a deliberately coarse voice, so unlike her natural Polisiyan one:

"O dear girl, work long, or just awhile,  
But be sure on Sundays to dress in style!"

Darka's crimson kerchief peeped out like an oversized berry from among the dark green bushes. Her song was cut short as her lips busily engaged in another task. While picking raspberries to be made into jam for the lords, she was claiming a certain percentage of her pay in kind, right on the spot.

Madam Kachkovska came and called Zonya to help her pick over the berries, because it was a job "that has no end."

Yuzya was left alone, but she still did not move.

Darka started singing a wedding song. There were all sorts of wonders in it—"a wreath with pearls" and "a bramble bush wrapped in gold." And it all revolved around some girl called "Mar'yunya" who was forsaking her "Ivanko," because she loved another young man "with all her heart."

Darka sang enthusiastically, loudly, and resolutely, yelling out every word in exactly the same manner as she had sung the song about the young man calling his girlfriend to go to the manure pile with him.

Listening to her, Yuzya began to smile. And, for a moment, a miracle did occur—she forgot about what happened yesterday, and during the night . . . and everything. She became happy; she noticed that even though it was a hot day, the air was light, and it bore the fragrance of raspberries and of the lunar rose. And it was all so simple, and so pleasant, so very pleasant.

Yuzya washed briskly and, feeling refreshed, went over to the window again. Bending forward slightly, she leaned on her hands.

From behind the bushes, Darka's tall but slender figure came into view. With her scrawny but strong hands, she was balancing a basket filled with raspberries on her shoulder. From beneath her sleeves that were rolled up to her elbows, you could see how the muscles on her arms were taut like springs; her childish waist, tightly bound by a narrow sash, was thrust backwards and, because of it, her entire figure looked haughty. And the slight strain made her face look serious and "grown-up." No longer singing, Darka walked silently up to the path leading past Yuzya's window.

"Good day to you, Darka!" Yuzya greeted her cheerfully and started to ask something.

But Darka, without stopping or so much as glancing at Yuzya, simply replied respectfully: "Good health to you," and set out for the kitchen without changing her pace.

Yuzya sat down again and bent her head on the window sill. Her head once again felt heavy, as if she had inhaled fumes, and confused thoughts raced through her mind.

In the kitchen, a little ways off, Zonya began singing a Polish dancing song; the words were indistinguishable.

Like yarn from a ball thrown to the floor, Yuzya's thoughts rapidly began to unwind the memories of yesterday, of the past night . . . The miracle had vanished . . .

"Yuzya, my dear child, why aren't you coming to have tea?" her grandmother inquired as she entered the room.

"I'm coming, I'm coming right away," Yuzya replied, kissing her grandmother's hand and shoulder.

"You've slept in, *koteczko* [kitten]. Have you said your prayers?"

"Yes," Yuzya replied softly, lowering her eyes to the ground.

"You seem to be ill again. Drink some quinine with your tea."

"Fine, grandmother. I'll do that." And, obediently bowing her head, Yuzya followed her grandmother into the dining room.

## VI

No miracle happened before Yuzya turned sixteen, but many other things came to pass. The most important event was her parting with Zonya. It was a sudden, unexpected, and cruel parting. Yuzya did not know how she lived through it.

For three days prior to Zonya's departure, Yuzya's eyes were damp with tears. She implored her parents on her knees, kissing their hands and promising everything possible and impossible, not to turn Zonya out of their home. But her parents remained implacable—it simply had to be; it was imperative for Yuzya's own good; that was all they said. There was not a single word of explanation from anyone.

Yuzya was never told the reason for Zonya's departure. She even asked Bronek, who had arrived home about three weeks before the misfortune, if he knew anything.

Bronek—a cheerful, energetic high school student—shrugged his shoulders, twirled his cane, whistled, and flung a few words carelessly at his sister: "It would be best if you asked her yourself; maybe she'll tell you." And he walked off singing: "*Ja kawaler, a ty wdowa* [I'm a young bachelor, and you're a widow]," and a very merry refrain: "Trom drita, trom ta drita."

But Zonya answered Yuzya's question with tears, complaints about her orphan's fate, the cruelty of "people without a heart"—excluding, of course, Yuzya's parents—and a jumble of things that were incomprehensible. She assumed a humble mien in front of Yuzya's parents, and did not dare to look her aunt in the face. Kachkovska did not let Zonya kiss her hand in parting, and her husband, driving up with the ladder-wagon to the outbuildings where Zonya had lived for the last few days, did not enter the room as was the custom, to sit down before a trip "so that everything would go well," but simply shouted at Zonya from the wagon: "Well, come on, already! The horses are waiting."

Pale, teary-eyed, and wrapped in a kerchief, Zonya sat all hunched over in the cart. The draft horses moved forward with a jerk, and Zonya drove out of the yard, past the crowd of curious servants, and vanished in a grey dust cloud.

Yuzya lay in her room and wept inconsolably.

Strangely enough, Yuzya did not grieve too long for Zonya. It may well be that her grief had been poured out too quickly and unrestrainedly at the outset, and there was none left for later. Indeed, the time soon came when Yuzya had to remind herself to keep Zonya in her thoughts during her morning and evening prayers as she had promised to do when they parted. Eventually, she even had to tie knots in her handkerchief to remind herself.

They did not correspond. Yuzya did not feel like writing to Zonya, even though she could have found much to tell her. She still wrote childish letters, letters containing only facts, and even those she did not know how to put together except by saying "*I donoszę tobie [and I'm informing you].*" This irritated her, and so she did not complete or send a single letter to Zonya. And Zonya, most likely, did not dare to initiate the correspondence.

And there really was no time for Yuzya to dissolve in recollections and heartaches. A new French governess arrived—"better late than never" the family decided—and she was not at all as terrible as Yuzya had imagined she might be. On the contrary, *Mademoiselle Lucie* was cheerful, friendly, interesting, slightly sarcastic, but "pleasant."

Yuzya began to fill in "at a fast tempo" the gaps in both her education and her upbringing. Her formal studies quickly reached such an advanced level that she made only those orthographic errors in her French writing that were made by the governess—a former

saleslady in the large *Magasin de Louvre*. And because, even before the arrival of the governess, Yuzya had kept up her music, mathematics, and other subjects by studying at home and making trips three times a week to the district town to see a lady who had a “diploma,” she did not lack much in these areas to quickly complete the education prescribed for a young lady.

She also made much progress in her social development. Now Yuzya realised fully that young ladies studied “to know how to behave in society, so that people would not laugh at you, so as not to be worse than others, and so that others would even envy you.” No one told her why all these things were necessary, but she could guess the reason herself. Yuzya could now surmise a lot without naive and importunate questions. The French woman finished the education that Yuzya had begun under Zonya’s direction; she completed it both intentionally and unintentionally!

Everything served as a textbook for the “study of life.” First of all, there was the entire figure of *Mademoiselle Lucie*—girdled, polished, coiffed, and imposing, with the customary Parisian indivisibility of the artificial and the natural reflected in her slightest movement and word. And Yuzya also learned from the books that were never passed from hand to hand, but always lay either under a pillow or in the unlocked drawer of the teacher’s desk. Yuzya learned to read those books rapidly, and in such a way that no one ever saw her when she had such a “textbook” in her hands.

How naive the simple ABCs of Zonya’s and Oktusya’s dancing ditties—learned from Mr. Felix—now seemed. How little that poor Zonya knew! But what could a young lady know if she did not know French and could not read even Prévost in the original?

It was true that even in this new study of life there remained a mysterious corner draped with a semi-transparent veil; it enticed Yuzya, but no longer frightened her. She no longer wished for the miracle of a return to her childish innocence—no, on the contrary, she longed to get to know first hand the life described so enticingly in those books. If only she could turn sixteen more quickly! Her father had promised her that then they would spend the winter in Warsaw—while her grandparents minded their house—and her mother would introduce her “to the world” at that extolled, long dreamed-of “first ball.”

Yuzya already knew the prelude to it, because *Mademoiselle Lucie* had insisted that she be taken to a few juvenile parties in the city.

The clever French woman thought that Yuzya's upbringing had been *trop isolée* [too isolated] up to now. After these evenings, Yuzya often could not sleep at night as she thought about her "first ball," a real ball, for grownups. Would she, at long last, ever be sixteen?

Finally the day came. Today was Yuzya's sixteenth birthday! There would be ever so many guests, and there would be such a grand party! Yuzya had a lot of friends now, all thanks to *Mademoiselle Lucie*, who knew how to cultivate acquaintances and had gathered together a group of young ladies from neighbouring villages.

For her birthday, they made Yuzya a very beautiful long white gown. Oh, it really was too bad that it had rained all day yesterday—that damned Polisiyan autumn—it would have been so pleasant to walk in her light white dress on the dry leaves beneath the yellow and red branches of the trees! There was a description like that in one of the novels she had read: "She was like the white soul of spring in the midst of the autumn ruins . . ."

But really, yesterday's rain did not matter, because it was not raining today, and daddy had ordered that all the paths around the house, including the path leading to the arbour, be strewn with fresh sand. Maksym and Yakiv had already hauled in the first load of sand in a wagon, and Darka and Ulyanka were carting it away and sprinkling it on the paths. It would be grand! Wonderful! How kind daddy was!

Darka and Ulyanka were working at a good clip. Darka's kerchief had slipped off, and she was slightly out of breath from hauling the heavy sand from the wagon in a basket; nevertheless, every time that she finished pouring the sand on the path, she briskly swung the empty basket and trotted back at a good pace for another load. Ulyanka, on the contrary, ran more speedily with a full basket, bending her feeble body almost in two, but walked more slowly with an empty one, shuffling her feet and weakly dangling her arms.

Ulyanka was just beginning the struggle—the struggle in which Darka had already gained the upper hand. Darka had already overcome adversity, become accustomed to going "half hungry," and grown out of being a "nanny" and a "herder's helper" into a working girl—even though she was never paid more than a *sorokivka* [twenty cents] a day. And she rejoiced with her whole being, unconsciously but enthusiastically, in her youthfulness, in the maturing but already well-tempered strength that she had carried out of her difficult childhood like a treasure out of a conflagration.

Her former, recent frailty was attested to only by her small waist, her thin legs, slender but strong as steel, and her narrow and long feet. It was these legs that even now, as in childhood, earned her the unkind nickname “spindly-legs.” Her dusky face was not rosy; it retained a slight ivory hue. Her cheeks were not plump, and her eyes gave no hint of a girl’s carefree giddiness. The features of her face appeared to have been carved by a thoughtful artist who was stingy with easy effects and who, while creating beauty, really did not care about it.

Few who looked casually at this girl would perceive her as attractive, and she was not usually referred to in that way. Nevertheless, a person who looked carefully at her would fathom her completely, even though he could not say what distinguished those small dull grey eyes from other grey eyes, or in what way this girl, whose hair was neither blond nor red, who was neither big nor small, and was not even darkbrowed, differed from thousands of others of God’s creatures. Perhaps it was because, as you looked at this girl, it seemed that she knew something that many others did not know or understand. But she was certain of it. And therefore, she looked seriously and directly into everyone’s eyes, without the usual girlish bashfulness that is partly genuine and partly feigned, and that incites most girls to giggle and cover their faces with their sleeves when they are in public.

As a child, Darka had often been sullen. She had kept her eyes on the ground, and her brow had always been furrowed, as if she were searching for something she had lost. Or she looked obliquely at the person talking to her, wrinkling her brow and covering her eyes with her sleeve. Now she stared directly ahead, not caring if there were people in front of her or simply the remote distance, and it seemed that her eyes were created for just such a gaze.

And this was how she looked at Maksym now, as she came up with her empty basket to the wagon with the sand. Maksym, a young manor servant, glanced at her and smiled.

“Well, why are you standing there? Hey you, spindly-legs!”

“Can’t a body stand for a while?” Darka responded calmly. “After all, I’m not a horse.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, my girl,” said Yakiv, an older, married worker. “If you were a horse then you would have time to stand around, like this one.” And he poked his horse in the side with his whip.



Darka slowly shifted her eyes from Maksym to Yakiv. "But it seems to me, uncle, that you're also standing."

"Well, I . . . You'd better move along and scatter the sand."

"Listen to that! I've done lots more—I've even dug the clay. But as for you, uncle, you'd better grab a wheelbarrow and help Maksym scatter the sand, because we won't finish by evening. And as for this girl," she pointed at Ulyanka who was standing with her arms hanging loosely at her sides, "she can't keep going; she's barely crawling."

"It was a bad idea to bring such carrion to do the work; it would have been better if Yaryna had come," Maksym observed.

"Yaryna won't be coming," Darka replied curtly and seriously.

"Our Yaryna has been promised in marriage; yesterday Haptin's matchmakers were at our place," Ulyanka, speaking like a child, broke in with her thin voice.

"Is that true?" Maksym cried out.

"Are you saying you didn't know?" Darka asked incredulously.

"How can a person know anything when he's always being hounded like a rabbit chased by greyhounds—go to the neighbouring lords, fetch some sand, and who knows what else. They've gone plumb crazy with this birthday!" Maksym finished in a much softer voice than he had started out.

"When's the wedding?" Yakiv interrupted him, turning to Darka.

"As soon as the bans are read in church."

"Haptin's in one big hurry!"

"Yes, of course, because his mother's sick, and if she dies then it isn't seemly to have a wedding; but who will do the work for them when the old woman dies?"

"That's true," Yakiv conceded.

"But does Yaryna want to marry him?" Maksym asked.

"Why wouldn't she?"

"That's true," Yakiv said once again.

Maksym did not say anything.

The four of them stood silently, thinking their own thoughts.

Just then, Kachkovsky the steward came at a run and shouted: "Well, why are you all standing around? These people will be the death of me yet! The moment you leave them alone . . ."

Darka and Ulyanka rushed back to work.

In her haste and fear, Ulyanka tripped and spilled the sand before she got to the pathway.

Kachkovsky jerked the basket away from her. “Eh, if you’re going to work like that, it’s best you not work at all! All we do is give you money for nothing! Maksym, grab a wheelbarrow. And you, Yakiv, you’re going to carry the sand on the stretcher with Darka as long as there’s sand left in the wagon. Why are you sitting around doing nothing? And as for you, Ulyanka, run along home and tell the engaged girl to come.”

“Yaryna is making fringes on her wedding *rushnyky* [*embroidered linen ceremonial cloths*]; she doesn’t have time to come here,” Darka spoke up.

“Some big deal that wedding of yours is! She’s got plenty of time! And if she doesn’t wasn’t to come, then all of you can go to the devil’s mother, and I’ll find others to do the work! What stupid complaints—one wants to, the other doesn’t want to. I’m not going to beg. Let Yaryna come here this very minute, or you can all get out of here! And I won’t say this a second time!”

Darka nodded at Ulyanka, and the girl dashed off.

“Tell your mother to come as well!” Kachkovsky shouted after her, and then he turned to Maksym. “So then, listen; when Martokha comes, she’ll take your place, and you’d better get ready to go the Zhabokryk home to fetch the young ladies. And you two better see to it that all this is ready before dinner.”

Leaving Darka and Yakiv with these instructions, he trotted off to the barn.

Maksym shrugged his shoulders angrily and trailed after Kachkovsky.

Martokha came with Yaryna and brought Ulyanka back as well. They carried the sand in the baskets, on the stretcher, and in the laps of their clothing. They hauled it in wheelbarrows, threw it around with their hands and with spades, dirtied their clothing, and got dust in their eyes.

And, shortly before dinner, Miss Yuzya, lightly skimming the sand with her long white gown, was able to skip with a mazurka-like step down the long pathway—yellow as gold—that led to the arbour wreathed with crimson wild grapevines.

“It’s ever so much better with the sand,” she observed, “because the wet fallen leaves rustle so mournfully . . . and I might have dirtied or soiled my gown.”

Miss Yuzya hastened back to the house, because the guests were beginning to arrive, and she had to receive their best wishes, accept

their gifts, and invite the young ladies to have coffee and sample the dazzling variety of dainties. The dinner was to be served much later, and it was to be very sumptuous; and then there were to be the evening festivities, followed by a dance and a stately supper. Yuzya's parents were not stinting on this feast—the celebration of the sixteenth birthday of their only daughter.

## VII

After finishing their work with the sand, Martokha and her family sat down to eat. Yaryna was seated beside her father in the corner under the icons; as a girl who was betrothed, she was entitled to sit in the most important place in the room, and she did not have to leave the table to help her mother at the stove. In reality, there was little need for any assistance, because the food was quite ordinary—a rye mash, potato fritters with poppy seeds, and that was it.

But Darka was helping, passing out the spoons, slicing bread, and getting up time and again from the long bench directly across from the icon corner.

Ulyanka and Ivan were seated on the narrow bench, and Priska, now a thickset seven-year-old with chubby cheeks, was sitting cross-legged on the floor holding Hapka the baby, who had skinny arms and legs, but an unusually big head and stomach. Priska was feeding herself by carrying spoonfuls of hot food over the baby from a bowl that stood at her feet. Whenever the hot food dribbled on the baby, she had to stop eating and hush its bawling. Impatient with the slow pace with which she was feeding herself, Priska poked Hapka a couple of times on the sly. The baby shrieked.

“Oh, be quiet—may you be cured in smoke! Be quiet, do you hear? May your blood curdle!” Priska could not restrain herself from shouting.

Martokha, turning around from the stove, slapped Priska's face and took Hapka away from her. “I've told you more than once—don't you dare curse the baby; God forbid, that you should say it at an evil moment!” Martokha sat down on the bench to feed Hapka and calm her down. “You're as healthy as a mare, and there you go—cursing others. May you be struck down!”

Priska began mumbling, but stopped at once when her mother threatened her: “Just you try and say something! Just try it!”

Of all her children, Martokha liked her “big-headed” Hapka the best, and could not tolerate it when the neighbours, shaking their heads over the baby, prophesied: “There’s no doubt that nothing will come of her, because, dear in-law, the bridge of her nose is blue, and her eyes are like those of an old person.”

Hapka was “the spitting image” of her mother, but she was also the most sickly of all the children. She was turning three already, but could hardly hold up her head. It seemed that Martokha was hurrying to get her fill of enjoying this child before something happened, and she petted her to the point that Priska and Ulyanka grew to detest “this favourite child.” Martokha often made her older daughters do the bulk of the housework and let the younger ones sit around doing nothing, while she sat with Hapka, amusing her and healing her with all sorts of medicinal remedies.

And so now, Martokha—once again bypassing the betrothed Yaryna—delegated the main household duties to Darka, saying more gently than usually: “Darka, take the fritters out of the oven. And there’s a drop of whiskey left over from yesterday; get it and give it to your father.”

Ever since Hapka was born, Martokha treated her husband more kindly. It may well be that because of her sickly youngest child, she had learned to feel sorry for and be more understanding of her unfortunate “asthmatic” husband. When she compared the healthy Priska—whom she used to favour because of her good health—to a mare, the feeling that stirred within her was very similar to the one that moved Semen to beat her and reproach her for being “sturdy like a stone wall”; but Martokha’s feelings were even more painful.

Semen took the shot glass from Darka with trembling fingers and silently nodded at his wife by way of saying: “May God grant you good health.”

Martokha just as silently nodded back to him: “May you drink in good health.”

At first, Semen wanted to drink in small sips, to prolong his pleasure, knowing full well that he would not get more than one glass; but, unable to control himself, he tossed the drink back in one gulp, croaking hoarsely and loudly: “A-a-a!” After yesterday’s “drinking to seal the match,” he had been in dire need of a shot of whiskey to cure his hangover, but his wife had not thought of it earlier and, as for asking her—it was “a point of honour” for Semen never to ask her for anything, and he adhered rigidly to it.

For a while, Semen, as usual, ate without saying anything, but the intoxicating drink loosened his tongue and made him feel like talking, and so he finally did speak up, saying to no one in particular: “Yes, yes . . . We’ve betrothed our Yaryna, and before we know it, we’ll do the same with Darka.”

“But, daddy, I’m not old enough yet! Why are you shoving me into marriage?” Darka responded jokingly, and she looked amicably at her father with something like a smile in her eyes.

She liked it when her father spoke freely and cheerfully, even though this happened only after he had a few drinks—but not too many drinks, because when he got drunk, he became gloomy and, even though he no longer got into fights, he would clench his fists and, through gritted teeth, curse anyone and everyone. Occasionally, Darka even bought her father “a small glass” with the money she earned: “So that daddy would talk a bit.”

“I’m not shoving you into it, my dear Darka,” Semen continued in a gentle, high-pitched voice. “But it’s a fact—a daughter is raised for the benefit of others. And as for being old enough—who knows if you’re old enough or not. Only the priest knows for sure. When I go to get Yaryna’s birth certificate, I’ll ask for yours as well—by God, I will! Think I won’t? After all, if Dmytro sends matchmakers we have to know what to say to them.”

“There’s nothing to know,” Martokha spoke up, “because I won’t let Darka go now.”

“Why is that, old woman?”

“Why? You should know why yourself! We’ll give Yaryna away in marriage, and Ulyanka is still quite little and not able to do much, as yet—so if Darka goes too, who is supposed to help me with all my work?”

“We’ll marry off Ivan, and then you’ll have a daughter-in-law!” Semen said still more cheerfully.

“A lot of good there is from having a daughter-in-law! A daughter-in-law is not the same as a daughter. And who says that Ivan is ready to get married?”

“He who marries young does not live to regret it,” Semen insisted. Apparently, yesterday’s drinking to seal the match had inclined his thoughts to weddings.

“Oh, just be quiet, old man!” Martokha was angry now. “No one wants to listen to nonsense like that! Even if I were to have a hundred daughters-in-law, I wouldn’t give Darka away, because I can’t get

along without her—it would be like losing my own arms. Just try and find another girl like her!”

Darka flushed. It was the first time that her mother had praised her so openly. No, she had not actually been praised directly, but it meant more to her than the usual bragging by mothers about their daughters. Her mother had finally said what Darka herself knew and understood very well, but Darka had never imagined that her demanding mother would come out and say it in front of everyone.

“Well, why are you just sitting?” Martokha turned severely to Darka. “Clear the table and help Yaryna make fringes on her *rushynyky*. Huh! Her father’s spouting nonsense, and she’s listening as if it was something worth listening to!”

Darka smiled, exchanged glances with Yaryna, and began clearing the table.

Crossing himself, Semen rose from the table, hesitated for a moment as if he wanted to say something, then thought better of it and walked out of the house. After a moment, he came back in.

“Oh yes, can you tell me why there’s such a crowd of people—like at a market—in the manor yard? Why are so many other lords coming here? Today isn’t a feast day, is it?”

“They’re having a birthday party for the young lady. She’s turning sixteen today,” Darka said.

“Sixteen years old . . . my, my . . . just think! And which one of you is older?”

“How am I to know? Can you tell us, mother?”

Martokha thought for a moment, and then replied: “Why, you’re exactly the same age—to the very day! The midwife was brought in to help the lady, and she gave me some advice as well, because I almost died giving birth to you. Yes, yes, that’s how it is; both of you were born on the same day—you and the young lady.”

“Well then, we’ll have to have a birthday party for Darka!” Ivan shouted all at once. Up to now he had been sitting silently, whittling something. Getting to his feet, he slapped Darka as hard as he could on the back.

“Get away from me, you damn fool,” Darka snarled at him.

“Sure, sure, go ahead and beat each other up!” Yaryna intervened, and Priska giggled.

Suddenly Yaryna’s friend Motruna, a short girl, dark as a beetle, burst into the house. She rushed up to Yaryna, yanked the unfringed *rushnyk* from her hands, and pulled her out by the sleeve from behind

the table: “Come on, my friend, let’s run to the manor as quickly as we can!”

“But why?”

“Haven’t you heard? Oh!” Motruna raised her finger, and everyone listened. Through the open door came the echoing sounds of violins and snare drums.

“Musicians? Where are they? In the lord’s manor? Why?” the girls peppered Motruna with questions.

“The lord has hired musicians for the servants. It’s the young lady’s birthday or something . . . There’s quite the dance going on there now. In the evening, they’ll have different music for the lords and ladies, but now the lord is letting the servants dance. They say that the older folks and the young men will be given a shot of whiskey, and the girls will get ribbons to braid in their hair . . . Oh, let’s go, my dears! Quickly now!”

Motruna finished what she was saying while running down the street to the manor yard, and the entire Bilash family hurried after her. Martokha even took little Hapka with her.

A large crowd had gathered in the lord’s yard, and the people were packed in close to the threshing floor. Despite this, the agile Motruna and the sturdy Martokha pushed their way through to the front. All of Martokha’s family followed them except for Ulyanka who, after being elbowed out of the way by a young man, did not dare to force her way through the throng, and went off into a corner between the shed and the barn where the children were dancing and twirling with mincing steps like the little azure and crimson butterflies that flit ever so swiftly over the stubble in the hot days of the harvest.

On the threshing floor, in a small round area that was free of people, a couple of young girls were spinning arm in arm in a dance, and a trio of dancers—a boy with his arms around the necks of the two girls who were on either side of him—were twirling somewhat heavily and paying no attention to the two girls who, dancing with abandon, almost collided with them several times. The girls looked very serious, while the boy, haughtily resting his arms on the girls’ shoulders, smiled triumphantly and winked at his friends.

The musicians were sitting on a pile of hay; the thumping of the snare drum spread along the ground, rolling into the darkest corners, while the rapid, cascading sounds of the violin and the cello soared over the people and rushed out of the barn together with the afternoon rays of the autumn sun that streamed in through an opening

in the wall—where a wide board had been removed—and spread across the entire threshing floor. The music rushed right up to the open gate on this bright wide swath of sunlight alive with millions of glittering dust particles flickering like tiny golden insects.

The shaft of light glanced on heads and sparkled on the festive clothing—a jumble of white, blue, red, green, and spotted fabrics—of the girls and young women who flaunted themselves like spring blossoms in the front rows. Then the light grew dimmer on the dark autumn colours of the men's caps and homespun coats, and disappeared in the older people's brown caftans, their fustian coats, and their padded jackets that dulled the joyous riot of colours.

All the girls wore kerchiefs tied like those of the young married women, and only Darka and "crazy Hrypa" were "bareheaded." Darka liked to walk around like a young girl without binding her head in a kerchief, even though her mother scolded her for this, and her friends compared her to "crazy Hrypa."

"It's no sin to be bareheaded," Darka said. "I'll have time enough to walk around like an old woman."

The two girls who were dancing grew tired and left the threshing floor. Motruna grabbed Yaryna by the arm and flew off with her in a dance, breaking out, in opposition to the musicians, into a merry dancing song. The young man who was dancing with the two girls responded to the song. No longer dancing with both girls at the same time, he twirled first with one and then with the other; and then he let go of that one and latched on to the other one.

He tried to fling a free arm around Darka's neck, but Darka shrugged it off, saying: "I really hate to dance in threes—it's much too slow!"

Letting go of the other girl, the boy pulled Darka into a dance and, holding her by the arm, twirled rapidly with her. They could not see each other's faces; their left arms were linked, and it looked as if the boy was trying to encompass Darka's waist with his right arm, but she kept escaping from him, going round and round, but without letting go of his arm. They were trying to outdo each other in their singing, and Darka's song seemed to be running away and mocking the boy's song.

Suddenly their songs and their glances met—the boy grabbed Darka by her other arm and peered into her eyes. Darka broke off her song, freed her left arm and, twirling like a whirlwind, rushed off in the other direction with another song. And once again the boy



could see only the shiny weave of her fair braids that struck his face and forced him to step back, despite the fact that his left arm was outstretched as if searching for her waist.

While dancing, Darka was as serious as the other girls but, instead of keeping her eyes to the ground, she looked directly at the people. When her face became flushed, and her hair turned damp and dark, Darka, somewhat breathlessly but calmly, said to the boy: "Well, that's enough. Let me go!"

He immediately released her and left the circle himself.

While the people danced the "kozak" and the "chumak" in threes against one, Darka was nowhere to be seen. She stamped around for a while "in a waltz" and then fell back once again. But then the musicians began playing "hrechky," and the whole front row of people nearest to the circular area joined hands and began swaying in a circle, and in the middle of it flashed Darka's head, twirling first with a boy's cap, and then with a girl's kerchief.

The circle stamped in time to the music, and the women's high-pitched singing was interrupted at regular intervals by the men shouting: "I drink alone, I dance alone . . ." In the end, however, this chorus was lost in the heavy breathing, the stamping of dozens of feet, and the crazed thumping of the snare drum.

The circle flew apart; it let out one group of people, took in others, and spun once again in a living wheel. Couples came together, parted, doubled up and, with their numbers multiplying before one's eyes, twirled both in the circle and outside of it.

Rolling out far beyond the gates of the barn, the dance flung some couples out into the yard, into open spaces where they flew in their dance like wild bees breaking away from a tight swarm. The dancing rolled up to the corner, where the children were hopping around, and to the threshold of the bakehouse, where the old people were sitting. The music ignited the innocent eyes of the children with a sharp flame and teased enfeebled old legs with its unrestrained, wild power.

"I drink alone, I dance alone . . ." roared intermittently like the heavy thumping of blood throbbing in veins.

"Hey there, musicians, quiet!" Kachkovsky's voice suddenly boomed so loudly that the violin and cello stopped instantly, as if their strings had snapped, and only the snare drum rumbled on its own. A moment later, someone jerked the hem of the drummer's shirt, and the drum halted as well.

The dancing pairs could not come to a stop all at once, and a few of them kept spinning and looking in astonishment at the musicians.

“Hey, that’s enough twirling!” Kachkovsky yelled at them. “When the lord is paying for it, you’re all ready to hop around until evening. All of you—musicians, older men, married women and young men—come into the bakehouse, and the lord himself will give each of you a drink. And as for the girls—go up to the front veranda; the young lady will give each of you a souvenir.”

Kachkovsky said all this in the same loud, overbearing voice in which he usually gave orders about what work should be done. The crowd immediately split in two; the larger group moved towards the bakehouse in the back yard, and the smaller one crossed the lane into the front yard.

In the bakery, Yuzya’s father was sitting on a chair beside a neatly covered table. (Her grandfather was caught up in playing the card game bezique and had decided not to come to the ceremony.) Behind him, on a bench, sat several of the visiting lords, silently exchanging scornful smiles.

Kachkovsky made the crowd stop in the porch and began to let the people in, one or two at a time, into the bakehouse.

Semen Bilash had pushed himself to the front, but Kachkovsky glared at him and said in a lowered voice: “Where do you think you’re crawling? Aren’t there any who are older than you?”

The embarrassed Semen hid in the crowd, but some young man said jokingly: “It’s a well-known fact, uncle, that people are beaten in order of their seniority.”

“Sh-h-h!” Kachkovsky hissed like a gander.

A few of the younger men, covering their mouths with their hands, sputtered with laughter.

“Have a drink, grandpa, to the young lady’s health—she’s sixteen and ready to be married,” the lord said in the meantime. He was treating old man Lyash, who stood in front of him, leaning on a cane and pressing his cap on its tip. The old man’s right hand shook so badly that it took all he had to catch hold of the glass and, even then, he spilled half of it as he raised it to his lips.

“Yes, may God grant it, may God grant it,” the old man whispered, without having heard what it was exactly that the lord had said. “May God grant good health, to the lord, and to his lady, and to the young lord, and . . . and . . .” the remainder of his words were lost in his bushy grey beard.

Lyash wanted to set the glass down on the table, but his hand jerked, and the glass fell to the floor and shattered into splinters. The other old men gasped in fright, and one of the visiting lords could not restrain himself from saying: “Why bother calling up such old people?”

Kachkovsky grimaced severely, but the lord, feeling extremely well-disposed because of this joyous occasion, only said: “*To nic, to nic, to szczęście. [That’s nothing, that’s nothing, it’s for good luck.]* Pass me another glass.”

In the confusion, Martokha hastily thrust Hapka into the arms of an in-law and slipped through the door past Kachkovsky, who did not see that she was entering out of turn. Snatching a little green glass out of the cupboard, the usual peasant *polovynchyk* [four-ounce glass]—she knew where everything was kept in the bakehouse—and coming up to the lord, she wrapped the *polovynchyk* ceremoniously in her apron and passed it to him.

“Here you are, if you please, my lord; here’s a *polvynchyk*.”

“Hang on to it, woman,” the lord said, and he poured Martokha some whiskey.

“May God’s favour fall on you like the morning dew, like the rain,” Martokha said, bowing down low over and over again to the lord, “so that you and the young lady will live to see this birthday and many more in happiness and good health. And may God grant you and your lady the joy of blessing your daughter in marriage within the year . . .”

“Thank you, my good woman, thank you, may God grant it,” the lord interrupted her cheerfully, thinking that the toast was over.

But Martokha was on a roll: “And may the Holy Mother give you a rich son-in-law, and may the young lady walk in golden garments and dine on gold plates, and may her life be as happy and brilliant as gold is bright!”

At this point Martokha began drinking the whiskey in tiny little sips, grimacing all the while—but not too badly—as called for by “the occasion.”

Then, leaving a bit of whiskey in the glass, she threw it up in the air without saying, as was the custom, that she wished the young lady “good sporting about.” She understood that this was not proper; besides, everyone knew even without her saying anything what was meant by flinging the whiskey up into the air. Placing the glass on the table, Martokha wiped her lips, and then carefully, as if touching

something sacred, she kissed the lord's hand and stepped softly to the door, her eyes lowered and her lips pursed.

"Just look at the airs she's putting on—the lord's bootlicker!" the young married women whispered among themselves. "She thinks that just because she's buttering him up, the lord's favour will fall on her 'like the dew, and like the rain.' Oh yes indeed!"

The lord turned to the visiting lord who was sitting nearest to him and said: "You have to admit that in these peasant toasts there is, from time to time, some kind of naive poetry, something so genuine, so childlike . . . *Poczciwy ludek* [*They're decent folk*], if only no one leads them astray . . ."

The lord treated a few more of the older men. Mumbling and stammering, they did not speak with the same "poetry" as Martokha.

Squinting, and looking into the porch crammed tightly with a noisy throng of the "decent folk," the lord nodded at Kachkovsky: "Listen, my good man, you finish treating them, because I . . ."

And, without finishing what he was saying, the lord passed the *polvynchyk* to his steward and left, followed by the visiting lords. In the porch, the people, bunching so closely together that they were close to fainting, opened a generous passageway for the lords.

By the time the lord and his guests made their way to the front yard, Martokha was already in the flower bed bordering the veranda. She immediately found her daughters in the crowd of girls and, holding Hapka, whom she had swooped up from her in-law while dashing to the front yard, took up her place behind Darka and Yaryna. Ulyanka and Priska pushed their way through the crowd and huddled against her. Next to Martokha, a few other mothers whispered among themselves as they adjusted the kerchiefs on their daughters' heads.

"They say that they're going to be handing out the most beautiful ribbons—made out of pure silk," the tall and attractive Oleksandra Chuhayikha said to Ulyana Hrechukh.

"Oh, no!" the other woman whispered disdainfully. "The chambermaid said that they cost only five *hroshi* [*half-pennies*] a *lokot* [*yard*]. Do you suppose our lords would give away anything expensive? Just look at the countless people here . . ."

"Hush, in-law; the young lady is approaching!" Oleksandra interrupted her.

Miss Yuzya came out of the house with her young lady guests. Even in her gown, she looked like a child among her grown-up

friends. With her thin, undeveloped figure, and her small, pale face she did not look at all like a girl who was “ready to be married.”

All the young ladies had, or tried to have, an untroubled, birdlike expression, swivelling their heads and chirping merrily. Yuzya also called to mind a bird, but one that was restrained, and in whose eyes there lurked a dream of breaking away into freedom, or at least into a bigger cage.

Behind Yuzya walked a chambermaid with a basket filled with ribbons cut into even, but not overly long, lengths. The young gentlemen trailed after the young ladies, but did not go out on the veranda. They stopped in the doorway and peered over the young ladies’ heads and shoulders at the girls; some looked through a pince-nez, while others simply squinted. The young gentlemen winked at each other, but none of them said anything critical out loud, perhaps out of respect for the young ladies. The young ladies, however, completely oblivious to the fact that someone might be listening, chattered away about the first thing that came to mind.

“Are they all girls, or married women?” asked a young lady from Warsaw. When she did not receive a reply, she laughed: “Oh, some of them are very young indeed—what kind of *mężatki* [married women] are they? What am I thinking about? But because they’re all in kerchiefs, I thought . . . Tell me, is it only in poetry that peasant girls are adorned in flowers? What was it that our Mickewicz said about wreaths—‘*z róż, lilii i tymianku* [out of roses, lilies and thyme]’ . . .”

“I don’t know how it is in other places,” a young village lady said, “but here in Polisia they dress very unattractively.”

“It’s true,” another young lady, dressed very pretentiously, added. “Just take a look. Even their white clothing is unsightly.”

“Why?” the daughter of a leaseholder spoke up hesitantly. “If it’s clean and smoothed out well, then . . .”

“But if you please!” interrupted an elegantly dressed young lady, “What good does it do if it’s clean and smoothed out well, if it’s out of thick homespun?”

“And it’s sewn without any sense of style at all,” the young lady from Warsaw dove into the conversation once again. “I don’t understand why they make their sleeves so narrow and their collars so wide and ostentatious—they’re like horse collars!”

“If you please, Miss Wanda, it’s a nautical outfit,” Master Bronek threw in with a snicker.

“*Milcz, pan! [Be quiet, sir!]*” the young lady from Warsaw called out, glancing sharply at Bronek over her shoulder. “Gentlemen are not experts in matters of dress.”

“But they’re experts in other matters,” Bronek rebutted, and the young Warsaw lady admonished him with her finger.

“If that’s the case, then the gentleman’s talents for making observations are being wasted,” a tall, slender young lady remarked, smiling ironically, “because in Polisya it’s a very ordinary outfit among the peasants, even among young girls.”

“It’s the influence of the climate and the environment!” Bronek boomed with a feigned pedantry.

“Oh, it must be very unpleasant to live in such an unappealing country!” the young Warsaw lady said.

“Yes, indeed! Very unpleasant!” affirmed a few young ladies.

“But perhaps it’s not like this in all the villages,” the young lady from Warsaw chirped. “I imagined things to be quite different—actually very different—because I saw a play in the theatre once, ‘*Wesele*’ [*The Wedding*], and things were quite different in it than they are here—the outfits, and everything, they were really quite nice, quite nice indeed . . .”

In the meantime, the peasant girls were standing in a tight group, not knowing what to do. Miss Yuzya also was at a loss as to how to handle the situation until the chambermaid came to her assistance.

“Is the young lady going to ask the girls to come up here one at a time, or should I pass the ribbons out, and the young lady can watch from here?”

“Let them come up one at a time.”

The chambermaid put the basket down on the porch, on the railing by Yuzya, and dashed off to call the girls.

“Come along quickly, whoever is the oldest or the youngest, because the young lady is waiting. But why have the older women come here?” she asked Darka in a whisper. “It’s only the girls who are going to get the ribbons.”

Martokha heard her and answered: “We just came to watch, Marysya. And I brought along my youngest little girl—she can’t get here by herself; her feet are still too small.” And Martokha loudly kissed her youngest daughter.

“Well, ribbons have not yet been made for little girls like that,” the chambermaid laughed. “Her hair must first grow long enough to be braided.”

“She’ll pin them to her little cap,” Martokha continued in a wheedling voice, adjusting Hapka’s little percale cap decorated with colourful tassels.

But Marysya, no longer paying any attention to her, was calling the girls. “Come on, any one of you! Come on, Yaryna; you’re engaged, so you should take the lead.”

Yaryna blushed and hid behind Motruna.

“Well then, you go first, Motruna!” and Marysya tugged at Motruna’s sleeve.

“Oh, I won’t go, honest to God, I won’t go,” Motruna muttered, and her dark eyes darted fearfully in all directions.

“Then you go, Darka!”

Darka looked silently at Marysya and did not budge from her spot.

“Oh, what foolish girls; they don’t want to go!” Marysya said angrily as she turned to Miss Yuzya.

“If you please, young lady, they’re scared,” Martokha spoke up. “You see, they’ve grown up wild, as if raised in a forest. What have they ever seen or heard? The young lady must forgive them . . .”

As she said this, she furtively poked Darka, urging her to go, but Darka stood as if cast in stone.

“Then I’ll pass them out myself,” Miss Yuzya said, stepping down from the veranda. “Marysya, carry the basket behind me.”

And so, together with Marysya, Yuzya began walking among the girls, giving each one of them a length of ribbon. The silky rayon ribbons were very ordinary, the kind that are sold in booths at the market. For the girls who came from better homes, they were nothing special, but the poorer girls were delighted, because they did not have any that were even as good as these.

Yuzya, starting on one side of the group, gave a ribbon to everyone at first, both to the grown-up girls, and the younger ones. The older girls bent their heads and kissed the young lady’s hand, but the younger ones had to be poked by their mothers or older sisters and reminded: “Kiss the young lady’s hand!”

Of the older girls, only “crazy Hrypa” did not bow and kiss Yuzya’s hand. She threw her blue ribbon to the ground and cried: “I don’t want this one! Give me a red one!”

Yuzya moved away from her without complying with her request.

Almost two dozen colourful heads had already bowed to Yuzya, but just when Martokha raised her little Hapka to get a ribbon for her, the chambermaid said: “If you please, young lady, don’t give

ribbons to such little girls, because there won't be enough to go around; there aren't that many left in the basket. Little girls don't appreciate them anyway."

And so Hapka was left without a ribbon.

Motrana and Yaryna were each given one, and now Darka's fair head with her uncovered crown of hair was bending over Yuzya's white hand. Her sunburned lips touched that hand in a dry kiss and mumbled indistinctly: "Thank you, my young lady." Then Darka straightened up and looked directly past the young lady into the distance.

"This is my Darka—she's the same age as your Ladyship," Martokha could not resist saying. "She also turned sixteen today."

"Really?" Miss Yuzya smiled graciously. Her eyes came to rest involuntarily on Darka's white, but very grimy clothing, and she did not say anything else. After completing her task—there were not enough ribbons to go around—she turned away and rejoined the sparkling group of young ladies.



# Warm the Children, O Sun

UKRAINIAN SHORT FICTION IN ENGLISH

Stories about  
childhood and adolescence

Translator: Roma Franko Editor: Sonia Morris

Olena Pchilka  
(1849-1930)

Nataliya Kobrynska  
(1855-1920)

Lyubov Yanovska  
(1861-1955)

Olha Kobylianska  
(1865-1942)

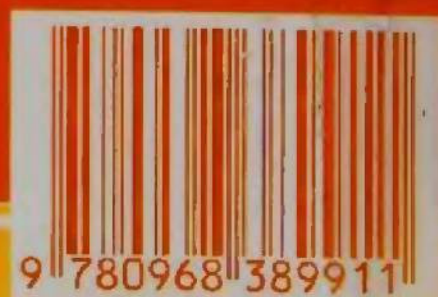
Hrytsko Hryhorenko  
(1867-1924)

Lesya Ukrainka  
(1871-1913)



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