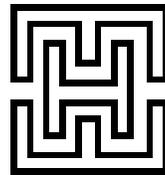


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*LITERATURE*

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A Journal of Translations

Volume 1  
2004



Ukrainian Literature  
A Journal of Translations

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## Introduction

*Ukrainian Literature* is a forum for translation into English of literary works written in Ukrainian. The primary purpose of the journal is to open the world of Ukrainian literature to a wider audience by acquainting English speakers who cannot read Ukrainian with the bounty and variety of writing in this language.

Like every effort in support of translated literature, this journal begins with the idea that culture can and should be shared across national boundaries. Even in the shrinking world of commercial and political globalization, literature in a language other than our own needs the active intervention of translators before we can access it. Where two cultures have strong ties and close links, literary translations become a part of the cultural mainstream. Often they are supported or commissioned by commercial enterprises, cultural institutions, and educational or government agencies, and occasionally these translations are even profitable. In the case of translations from Ukrainian literature, however, neither profit nor institutional support is readily available.

Translations of Ukrainian literature into English have a brief and uneven history. Aside from a few works by some of Ukraine's classic authors, before the mid-twentieth century hardly any Ukrainian literature appeared in English. Then the Cold War and the presence of a generation of Ukrainian refugees in North America created circumstances in which translating literature was part of an effort to promote Ukrainian identity. In Soviet Ukraine, translators presented politically correct versions of ideologically compliant works, mostly by classic authors and usually with an ethnographic focus. Outside Ukraine, literary translation was largely a labor of love for a number of dedicated individuals, among them Mary Skrypnyk, Marco Carynnyk, and the late George S. N. Luckyj, to name a few of the most productive. Here too, the selection of works was somewhat eclectic, with a strong leaning toward the classics, particularly works whose authors were ignored in Soviet Ukraine. Institutional involvement was minimal. The two major centers of Ukrainian scholarship in North America, at Harvard University and at the University of Alberta, showed little interest in translating literature. Until recently, there were hardly any translation projects that originated outside the Ukrainian community or individual Ukrainians.

Ironically, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Ukraine was not a fortuitous development for Ukrainian

literature in English translation. Soviet institutions that supported literary translations were not replaced by equivalents in Ukraine. In North America, the model of Ukrainian ethnic identity subtly changed from that of a diaspora, a refugee community with a shared cultural heritage in need of protection, to that of an expatriate fraternity with political, economic, social, and family ties to the motherland. In the earlier model, culture was a central component of the community's active concerns. In the latter model, culture is a product of the motherland that émigrés receive passively. Many Ukrainians in North America see themselves as conduits of western culture to Ukraine rather than the reverse.

In this context, the establishment of a forum for translations of Ukrainian literature into English is an important development reversing the pattern of neglect. The Shevchenko Scientific Society merits commendation for its willingness to support this journal. In particular, the president of the Society, Larissa M. L. Z. Onyshkevych, herself a translator, deserves special praise for her leadership on this issue and the courage to commit institutional funding to translation, a field notoriously susceptible to criticism and derision.

There are no universal standards by which translations can be reasonably and comprehensively evaluated. The recently established scholarly field of translation studies has clearly shown that the goals and methods of literary translation and the evaluative criteria by which it can be judged are as varied as the translators who undertake it and the works they translate. In this journal, there is no particular "approach" to translating: the translations published here need only to meet the eclectic standards of the editorial board, all of whom are specialists in Ukrainian literature and translators in their own right. A good translation is always an example of good writing. But a good translation is also a good reproduction of someone else's work. In an effective translation, these two qualities must co-exist in a harmonious balance. As someone who teaches Ukrainian literature to university students, I am particularly attuned to the accuracy of translations. This quality is often given short shrift in Ukraine, where the style and tone of a translation frequently trumps meaning in the evaluation of a translation, particularly in poetry.

Another important factor in evaluating translations is the quality of the original work. A weak translation of a work by a brilliant writer will generally outshine a strong translation of a poorly written work. This journal seeks to publish translations of good works of literature only, but even among these the range in quality is wide. Since the intention here is to reflect Ukrainian literature in all its breadth and diversity, this journal will include works by a broad spectrum of writers, across a wide variety of genres and styles. The journal's intention is to show a strong preference for contemporary writing in Ukraine, but it will also publish translations of writers from the near and distant past. Eclectic variety will, it is hoped, give

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every reader something to savor while providing a true reflection of the vitality and energy of Ukrainian literature today.

This journal owes its existence to a number of individuals. The idea originated with Marta Tarnawsky, who also secured the Shevchenko Scientific Society's financial support. The journal's manuscript editor, Uliana Pasicznyk, deserves recognition for her skillful editing as well as her patience in dealing with the editor. Thanks are also due to all the members of the editorial board for their generous help and cooperation, especially to my colleague Taras Koznarsky, who gave unstintingly of his time to improve the quality of the translations in this issue.

This journal would not be possible if there were no Ukrainian literature to translate. I am grateful to the authors of the original works for their cooperation and for the confidence they placed in this venture and I sincerely hope these translations will find them appreciative new readers. Finally, I thank the translators whose works appear in this first issue of *Ukrainian Literature* for their commitment and cooperation. This journal is their achievement. The satisfaction that readers derive from the works published here is a measure of their skill. It has been a great pleasure to work with them, and I hope to continue working with them and with new translators for many issues to come.

Maxim Tarnawsky  
Toronto, 2004



## Eye of the Abyss

*Valerii Shevchuk*

### CHAPTER ONE

We met in Zhytomyr, in a monastery situated outside of town, down by the river Teteriv: I, Mykhailo Vasylevych, calligrapher and illuminator (he who had scribed and painted first in the village of Dvirtsi in the same region, and then in Peresopnytsia the Gospel, having transcribed it to the vernacular, which was edited, later, by Archimandrite Hryhorii from Peresopnytsia); Sozont, a deacon from Kyiv, and Pavlo, a friar from the Carpathian mountains, who walked to Kyiv to pay homage to the relics of the holy fathers of the Monastery of the Caves, which is where he encountered Sozont. Together they arrived in Zhytomyr, where we all met. In Zhytomyr, too, I set about scribing and designing the Gospel. The work did not progress with the same divine inspiration as it had in Dvirtsi or Peresopnytsia, however—it seems I was spent at that point, which means: I was drained. Here I toiled in languor. After each completed page I was exhausted, my fingers felt numb, my eyes would not stay open—it was as if my hand had lost its habitual ease in scripting and skill in painting. This obviously meant that I should put aside my work for some time, so that the well of my soul could be replenished with spiritual water. Without this spring, man becomes dried up and petty, incapable of any deeds or accomplishments; these thoughts I shared frankly with Hryhorii, who had arrived in Zhytomyr with me, since we worked well together.

“It is not fitting,” said Hryhorii, “that your work should bring bitterness into your life, as was the case for the Israelites in Egypt. For when one’s labor causes resentment, it is slave labor, not the God-inspired labor of love. What good can one glean from slave labor?”

“I feel hollow, like a vessel with no water,” I remarked.

“So replenish the water,” Hryhorii answered curtly, and with that he set me free.

That is when God brought Sozont and Pavlo to our monastery. Pavlo was on his way back to his native Carpathians but wanted to digress by way of Polissia, where a certain Mykyta the Pole-Sitter had recently taken refuge in the woods, so people said, in a hut fashioned atop two cut pines, and prayed unceasingly to God. The news of his miraculous deeds spread throughout the land; that is why people came to him from all directions.

And thus, on his homeward route, Pavlo planned to take a detour, to turn to the hermit Mykyta for advice about his malady, as well as to behold him. I believe he persuaded Sozont, who was in the process of compiling a contemporary *Cheti-Minei*, that is to say, he intended to write not about the venerable saints, but stories about real people, because he thought, as Sozont himself told me, that if the Lord, in fact, performs miracles with the hands of mortals, then those miracles should take place not only in ancient times, when faith in the Lord was being established and embraced entire realms, but also now, when miracles are referred to as fables and when beliefs have multiplied into such a variety of unorthodox philosophies; and all these tenets, claimed Sozont, are symptoms of an ailing soul. Men who espouse unorthodox philosophies dwell in vapidness, and therefore in uncertainty, and uncertainty is the first step in the destruction of intellectual constructs. Admittedly, these words impressed me, as I was such a one who often questioned the principal values of our existence. When this happens, I become ineffectual, listless, lethargic, unenthusiastic, everything in the world seems artificial and senseless, human activity appears ghostly, futility reigns. But I do not believe that Satan enters the soul at that point—for that is, after all, how Christianity wills us to perceive life: as transient mortality, as vanity of vanities, where everything is as fleeting and mutable as grass, as blossoms that wither at the end of the day, and where only one lady rules supreme—Death. She lies in wait every year: every year, every month, every day, every minute, to transmute us into ashes, and our deeds as well, as she bridges the span between existence and immortality.

Precisely at the moment when such thoughts occur to me, my work begins to poison my life, and from a fastidious craftsman of exquisite calligraphy and ornament I become a futile good-for-nothing, incapable of wagging a finger. That is when the Eye of the Abyss appears before me. It, that Eye, materializes in a horrible apparition, it takes aim at me, as if an arrow on the taut string of a bow poised to launch and, whistling, to enter my heart; it is the moon in the night, casting beams of light, each gleam like that arrow; it is the sun at noon, piercing my wretched body with golden spears; it watches my every move, every act, gliding behind me, guarding my every step; it is a spider that has spread its web, preparing to spurt poison at whoever will become entrapped; it invades my dreams and shatters them, scattering them like shards of a broken glass; it is, finally, like Death—that link between life and eternity; it is my heart, pumping blood through my veins ever and ever more slowly, until the blood thickens and gels. I become like jelly then, and my metamorphosed, gelatinous body might dissolve at any moment; the bones soften, the brain flattens like a cloud in the sky, wherein thunder hides, and lightning and rain, and the rays of the sun. It stares at me, that Eye of the Abyss, through female and male eyes, and their malevolent gaze begins to frighten me; it is like a window-pane, bleeding with a crimson sunset or sunrise; it is an animal that scares

by appearing suddenly before you; a dog, gnashing its teeth, glaring at you with blood-thirsty eyes; a hog, a bull, a rooster or a goose—in other words, it inhabits everything, everywhere. And I, jelly-like, am aware that only my calculated vigilance keeps me in this world, for otherwise I would melt and spill into a putrid puddle, never again possessing enough strength to collect my juices, that is to say, to be able to reason and create freely. It was at such moments that I would realize that I, the world, world events, and even spiritual affairs were all futile.

But other experiences defined me as well. There were moments, days, weeks, months, even years when I knew myself differently: as a being brimming with sun. It filled me with light and energy, as if with sparkling spring water. I felt it in every fiber of my being. At such moments the arrow on the bow of time did not target me, rather, I was the one aiming, and the drawn twine rang melodiously and warmly in my ears; the moon's luminosity did not frighten me then, for I, too, felt luminous, and the trees, drenched in moonlight, seemed to blossom; the grass, the earth and buildings cast a mysterious, blue glow; my entire being hummed, absorbing streams of radiance. Every muscle and extremity in my body sang, surrendering to my will without complaint. At such moments the ever-present seeker that followed me quietly in times of weakness disappeared, and I became the seeker, as the world awed me with its singular splendor. All around me, everything became beautiful: the bend of the path in the grass, the warm tones of the wildflowers, the glimmer of the lake, the leafy garb of trees, the dew, the line of a limb, the curious weave of branches, the shape of a leaf, the elegant sway of stalks, the earthen tones, the color of the sky, of clothes, women's eyes, their soft, tender voices, the gleam in men's eyes, and the grace in human and animal forms—at those moments I did not wonder about the transience of ever-changing existence, since beauty had so many unique, delicious yet elusive contours, so many permeations, endlessly and infinitely unknowable, that it was impossible not to see signs of immortality. And this eternity was not nonexistence, but existence. And I questioned the timelessness of nonexistence, because when you believe that that which is not is eternal, then the value of that immortality is conditional. At the same time, the timelessness of beauty was visible, visibly perceived and visibly understood. In a spider's web I observed a wondrous, exquisite design; I marveled at the gentle rotundity of its little form, the whimsy in the angles of its legs. What a delightful outline its form sketched. How miraculously a bird's feathers fit next to each other, and what brilliant patterns the colors create. It is then that I sensed that my eyes are fluttering, grazing on the shapes and tones of a living world; that my fingers are capable of astonishing creations and that my body is not gelatin that might dissolve, but a vessel for life-giving water. I was overwhelmed with this sensation in 1556 in the village of Dvirtsi, when I embarked on scribing and illuminating the Gospel. All those designs, weaves, ornamental frames, and

intertwining of lines were inspired by nature, and when I sketched, I first applied pigment to a panel of linden wood, following the dictates of the iconographers, while at the same time taking liberties with the placement of color. As a result, without overstepping canonical dictates, my icons were luminous and vibrant—I was careful to convey the presence of God in our resplendent world with its endless beauty. Thereafter, I copied the picture onto parchment, where it looked even better, since, while I drew, I felt an incandescence oozing from my eyes and fingertips, and that life-giving water, which filled me, spilled into the pigment, the design, the lines; each letter I scribed possessed, to me, its specific charm of endless beauty, and when, exhausted, empty-headed, and weak after a day's work, I fell into bed, I brimmed with happiness, my heart was washed with a cool, invigorating spring, continuously restoring my entire being; and my dreams were not torn apart, thrown asunder, like shards from a broken glass, but duplicated a likeness of a world visibly magnificent, luminescent—my dreams led me to sacred levels, where I saw silhouettes of lovely outlines. And a sacred truth unfolded before me: there is beauty in a tree, but there is also beauty in the shadow of a tree; there is beauty in grass, but also in the spaces between the blades; in solid objects, but also in the open air, defined by surrounding objects; there is likewise beauty in letters as well as in the spaces between them, in the margins between the lines, in the knots of capital letters and the proportions in them.

So what did I doubt? I challenged that which I could not prove adequately: does the spirit of the Lord inhabit me when I love the world, or when I despise it—that is, when I become inspired by beauty, or when I view beauty as compost and a vessel for mortality? Or was it when I burned with the lofty flame of fine art and myself became a creator of immortal beauty, or when beauty and the world seemed to me to be the embodiment of vanity? Or when the Eye of the Abyss stared at me, or when it was absent; or in the end when Death seemed to me to be that link between a futile and transient world and eternity, or was it when she seemed to be a servant to the one who despises the world—the devil? That is to say, this is what I doubted: is the devil God's adversary or His instrument to be used in testing us? And finally, who impregnated me with this uncertainty?

CHAPTER TWO,  
which describes my fellow travelers

I called on Archimandrite Hryhorii to receive his blessings for a pilgrimage. I determined the course for the journey thus: visit Mykyta the Pole-Sitter and witness his wondrous deeds, then onward to Volyn—my father’s old archpriestly parish—to pay tribute to his and mother’s gravesites. From there I wanted to stop over in Dvirtsia and Peresopnytsia, and possibly in Ostroh. Thereafter, return to Zhytomyr, hopefully having gained strength in body and spirit, and having benefited from new insights, for what Father Hryhorii called replenishing the “wellspring.”

“Why are you so curious about Mykyta?” the archimandrite asked me a bit suspiciously.

“They say he’s a present-day miracle worker,” I replied.

“The Lord alone works wonders,” said Father Hryhorii, quoting Psalms, “not man, certainly.”

“Man’s steps are ordained by the Lord,” quoted I, from Proverbs.

“Do not let man prevail,” said Father Hryhorii, again referring to the Book of Psalms—this citing of Scriptures was our favorite method of discourse.

“There is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill,” I responded with a line from Ecclesiastes.

“Beware of evil persons,” said Father Hryhorii and proceeded to bless me, though from his words I concluded that he had little faith in Mykyta’s miraculous deeds.

Nevertheless, I wanted to satisfy my curiosity about Mykyta and his miraculous acts—this would serve to fortify my skeptical spirit, and in the end, to a degree, to restore me. To be more precise, I yearned for a wondrous event. I longed to be awed by something; since my soul, I avow, was weary and dimmed. Father Hryhorii, being wise, I believe, understood me. He smiled faintly and said: “Go ye with God, Brother! Standing water stagnates, becomes putrid. It transforms fresh water into mud, obstructing its streams. I am surprised that you seek clear springs amid the marshes. To be clear, water must flow.”

These words were full of import, though at the time I failed to comprehend them. Suffice it to say that the archimandrite did not forbid me to go. So gladly, with some trepidation, I dressed in pilgrim attire, exactly like my future fellow travelers Sozont and Pavlo. The linen mantle was black, capeless, that is to say, not sectioned in half; tightly stitched, with narrow sleeves, similar to a deacon’s cassock—pilgrims don this cloak over their usual garb, covering it. Over the chest a cross is hung; the waist is girded with a leather or cord belt, and a gourd, for water, is hung at the side. A pouch, filled with food and necessities, is carried over the shoulders. I added a short cape to protect my shoulders from rain. The burlap sack I

brought was coated with wax—it looked like black leather; my feet were shod in tightly-laced sandals, and on my head was a black helmet, with a wide, round brim. In our hands we held solid, shoulder-high blackened staffs. We needed to dress this way to be identified as pilgrims, and thus to be treated accordingly; this protected us from abuse by the authorities, and proved that we were not untrustworthy. A number of vagrants roamed the roads and not all of them were harmless. We hoped to be ensured a safe journey.

Deacon Sozont was a strongly-built fellow. At forty-two, his beard was already white around the edges, as was his thick, black hair; his head appeared unkempt. And from under this mop, a wide, bill-like nose emerged. His dark, fiery eyes gazed out, perhaps, too piercingly; their expression bespoke a considerable intellect. So that, outwardly, Sozont appeared to be a man of strict habits, possibly even saintly, and at first I thought he was one of those who place cruel demands not only on themselves, but even more so on others, so when others don't adapt to their terms, they are bitterly rebuked (I think that is sinful). Later, I realized how deceitful one's appearance can be. To be sure, his intent to write a *Cheti-Minei* was altogether virtuous, but as far back as Zhytomyr, after a series of conversations, I became convinced that it was more an *idée fixe* than a serious endeavor, based on a simple fact: though Sozont wanted to prove to himself that miracles occur in his day, and though he diligently collected evidence about miraculous incidents, recording them scrupulously, his attitude, nevertheless, was one of debilitating suspicion. He never, therefore, accepted the accounts of those parables as truth, and needed to travel to those places, where the purported miracle occurred, and, like a king's bailiff, conducted rigorous investigations and inquiry according to law—he practiced law prior to becoming a member of the clergy and served in municipal court, until he became sickened with the world and withdrew to serve the Lord. The thing is, having lived in a world of crime, transgressions, quarrels, attacks, lawsuits, and libel, his mind had become muddled, at which point an itinerant monk convinced him that it is selflessness that offers an escape from ineffectual deeds. Life, in other words, is a masterpiece of Christian existence. Christian virtue lies in imitating the life of Christ. And fulfillment, according to Christ, lies in selflessness.

Sozont obeyed Christ's teaching: "Sell your possessions, and give alms, and follow me." He sold and donated all his belongings, for as the wayfaring cleric said: "Selflessness perfects perfection and allows for perfect love, for whenever there is: 'This is mine, and that is yours;' there shall be no peace in peace." Sozont could not escape his character, however. He was a born lawyer, not a clergyman. Thus, he examined every incident of miraculous acts in detail: objectively interrogating and researching, delving for the core of truth, the result being that each of the recorded

miracles, having been subjected to harsh scrutiny, developed into a questionable matter. Lacking basic convictions, Sozont could not present it as something indisputable. As a result, I think his book will never be written, since each miracle should be perceived and understood not rationally, but through faith, and faith together with rationality is an unreliable combination. Such was the strange saintliness of Deacon Sozont. And here is where I believe he sinned before God: believing that man's intellect is a part of the great mind of God, and if so, then it is perfect, even though in Scriptures it is written not to lean on one's own understanding (Proverbs). Pavlo, on the other hand, rejected the intellect of the intelligent, and instead believed that man is confounded precisely through reason; for there is but one understanding—the understanding by virtue of faith, which means unquestionable servitude to God. I expressed my thought to Sozont in one of our conversations, to which he poured forth not a few quotations from Scriptures in defense of reason; that is, that thought and reason are divined from God, that understanding keeps us from evil (Job), and knowledge shields man (Proverbs), and blessed is he who has found understanding (also Proverbs), because through understanding the Lord established the heavens, and a reasonable man is one who learns from the Lord, inclining an ear to His teaching. After all, the Lord challenged fools to learn (again, Proverbs), claiming that by way of reason God is powerful. Man must, therefore, follow the path of learning, not of foolishness. It is not in vain that the learned are praised.

“How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver,” he said, again quoting from Solomon's Proverbs. “To the one who has it, understanding is a fountain of life and it adds learning to his lips.”

When he spoke thus, his eyes blazing, I realized that I would be incapable of persuading him otherwise, and so I ceased discoursing, although I had my misgivings even here. Knowledge can be real or imagined, and not always is man able to recognize where it is false and where real. Wisdom can be found even in foolishness, as Erasmus of Rotterdam wisely observed, and as St. Paul did long before him, and there can be foolishness in wisdom, and when the inscrutability of the world, the unknowingness of things, becomes manifest, man's intellect is simply a way, the first step in an everlasting, endless labyrinth of paths. Reason is merely a glimpse into infinity and the horror of it, since infinity cannot be comprehended, as God cannot be comprehended. The perpetual labyrinth of paths is, I believe, the definition of God.

My other debater was altogether dissimilar. Although not a youth (he was thirty), he was nevertheless child-like, with naïve, startled, kind eyes, excitable about everything; if he did not understand something, he remained silent. He doubted nothing. He believed everything. That is probably why Pavlo set out into the world: to be forever astonished and surprised. To

observe with wide-open eyes. He believed all that Sozont called tales and fables, summarizing his conviction simply: “After all, Father, all that exists is real. Even things contrived are real. The greatest nonsense, jokingly retold, is real for the simple fact that it is told. Man cannot speak about that which does not exist. For that which does not exist does not exist absolutely: one cannot even speak of it. Therefore miracles, as well as miracle workers, exist,” declared Pavlo.

He had his own odd and quixotic way of thinking, and perhaps that was why they had become friends, he and Sozont, in Kyiv; at any rate, they had embarked on this journey together, and had found me along the way. I was to stand between them, balancing their differences, although I later found that they weren’t that discordant after all; that this grown child was likewise quite wise.

I even thought that, walking together, our entire pilgrimage would evolve into an endless dispute. Along the way, however, both my fellow travelers remained silent; therefore I, too, was silent. Perhaps it was better that way. It was an arduous course, and it was hardly prudent to waste energy talking. A long, dusty path unwound before us, twisting through fields, forests, and clearings; in a strange way, we were drawn into it.

## CHAPTER THREE,

which recounts our first stop in the town of Cherniakhiv

In Cherniakhiv we called upon the local priest: Father Ivan greeted us with open arms. His wife, a simple, round-faced woman, welcomed us with a warm, radiant expression. In front of the entry to the house, four grimy lads mustered themselves, staring at us with bewildered eyes, as if we were from the other world. A flock of well-fed geese waddled about in the yard. The parson's wife bid the boys to catch one of the geese. Screaming with delight, the children rushed to execute the command, scaring the poor birds to death. The geese darted about the yard in a piercing din. An unbelievable commotion ensued: each of the boys wanted to capture a goose on his own. The birds beat their wings, trying to flee. A hissing gander flew at his assailants, attacking them with his bill. Feathers scattered everywhere. Clamoring to fly, the geese flapped their wings. At last the boys cornered one of the birds, pressed it against the fence, quelled it, and wrung its neck. In a solemn procession, the boys carried the dead bird to their mother: two held it by its wings, one by its head, and the last boy by its legs.

"But Father," Sozont said, "We are simple pilgrims. Do not fuss over us."

"I do not accept guests without fuss," the priest proclaimed ceremoniously. "Once you have stepped into my yard, I will fuss."

We sat around a table in an orchard thick with cherries, plums, apples, and pears. While the goose was being prepared, glasses of milk with honey were set before us, as was a loaf of fresh, spongy bread. Here we could ask the route to Mykyta the Pole-Sitter.

"Aha! So that is where you are headed," the priest said in an enigmatic tone, gazing into the distance, over our heads. "Nowadays fewer people venture there. Before, let me tell you, we were inundated."

"Is something the matter, Father?" asked Sozont.

"Everything is fine," replied Father Ivan. "Once people are headed there, they have a need to go there; may the Lord help them in their need."

"Have you journeyed there?" I asked.

"I have no reason to go there," the priest replied. "To tell you the truth, I've known that Mykyta since he was in diapers. I christened him, in fact." We became curious.

"I am obeying a calling, Father," Sozont said. "To write a book about the saints of the day and about God-fearing, devout men. Share, if you will, what you know."

The priest put a finger in his mouth, and dug between his teeth with a fingernail.

"What can I know?" he said. "Growing up, he was, so to say, a lazybones; neither godly nor worldly. He didn't want to work, so he got it into his head that, Lord forgive me, he was, so to say, not of this world. Pray

tell,” the priest continued, squinting slyly, “are you going to, so to say, lead him out of the murky water?”

“I go to see what I can see,” said Sozont. “Who were his parents?”

“Semen and Varvara. Good people, I must say!” He slid a finger into his mouth again. “My tooth aches,” he explained. “Do any of you blessed men have anything that can help me with that?”

We did not have anything for a toothache.

“Did the boy attempt any book learning?” Sozont inquired.

“His education consisted of hogs... sheep,” the priest laughed, displaying yellow, broken teeth that stuck out every which way; they were obviously loose.

“The wisdom of the Holy Ghost often inhabits simple folk,” I said, “and chooses those unschooled to put to shame the erudition of our times.”

Pavlo, meanwhile, stood by the cherry tree, enjoying the fruit, spitting out the pits. He had the owner’s permission to pick cherries.

“Perhaps,” mused Sozont, “but one born slow-witted—will not become a sage.”

“Jacob, Moses, and David,” Pavlo shouted from the cherry tree, having just ejected a pit, “all attained divine enlightenment, though they began as shepherds.”

“I am a simple man, my learned guests,” the priest said, poking his aching tooth once again. “Ineffectual and weak in book knowledge. That he was lazy, however, I can swear on the cross. How his father used to beat him! The entire vicinage heard his screams.”

“Was he church-going?” Sozont inquired seriously.

“On Sundays, through the winter months... And were it not for that godly man, who, like you, stopped in our town, he would probably still be herding pigs and sheep, instead of troubling people. I can see him now, standing in church, listening, as if he were dim-witted.”

Sozont’s eyes flashed darkly. “Of which godly man are you speaking? Why godly?”

“Because every beggar is godly,” said Pavlo, spitting out a pit, his lips reddened by the cherries.

“He stuck fast to that godly man for a reason,” the priest declared. “Wherever they walked, they gabbled. What their tongues wagged about, God only knows.”

“They spoke of the path to humble piety,” Pavlo said, putting a cherry in his mouth.

“How do you know that, young fellow?” the priest asked, surprised.

“Well, that is simple,” Pavlo replied flatly. “If after those conversations he became a pole-sitter, then that is what they talked about.”

He spit out a pit and placed yet another cherry in his mouth.

And so that was all that we could learn about Mykyta the Pole-Sitter, whom we were on our way to see, from Father Ivan. Dusk settled in by the

time the goose was roasted, and we gladly gathered around the goose, quaffing on mead and faring on barley meal. The pain in Father Ivan's tooth subsided, it seemed, for after glancing at one another in consent, he and his wife began to harmonize in enchanting voices. In the gentle twilight, I detected a blush blossoming on the round cheeks of the priest's wife. Pavlo's tenor poured out in concert, Sozont and I did not join in: Sozont, perchance, because he was so solemn, and I because the Lord endowed me with a skill in painting and scribing, but not in singing. Mellowed by the mead and roast, however, I harkened with great pleasure. A few neighbors and their wives appeared in the yard. Swaying slowly, they too, sang, their voices melding effortlessly. The music soared powerfully and melodiously into the shadows. All eyes were aglow. The priest seemed transformed; he appeared younger, tender. His four boys came out of the house and stood slightly apart. Interrupting the chorus, Father prodded the lads to sing a psalm. A hush descended as gliding descants curled into the evening stillness, surprisingly harmoniously, as far as I could tell. It was a simple melody, moving and sorrowful; the women's eyes welled with tears. With cherubic countenances the boys lifted up their voices, stretching up on their toes to reach the high notes. Everything seemed to fade, save for that heavenly singing, save for the tear-filled yet tranquil eyes of the women. Sozont pensively sipped mead from his goblet; Pavlo sat at the table, cupping his head in his hands, his pure blue eyes gleaming. God's grace embraced this virtuous place and all those gathered, even us, sinful wayfarers with pretensions of great wisdom. For why, after all, had we embarked on this road? Sozont for the purpose of conducting another investigation (how perceptive Father Ivan is!), to be once more convinced that the miracles of his day are really fables; Pavlo, to be inspired with the power of those tales, for after all, if they are so stirring, why not believe in them; besides which he was seeking a cure for his malady—he knew not yet what it was; while I was fleeing the Eye of the Abyss, which pursued me relentlessly. I set out on this journey to unshackle myself from its tether. It had not yet relinquished me. It ventured on this trip along with us: as we departed Zhytomyr I discerned it in the morning sun that attended us; it, that Eye, bore into our backs, floating behind us like a balloon—the Eye itself headless, formless, limpid, an umbra at its center, like a pupil; and only at eventide, when the lads were intoning the psalm, did I not sense its presence. Until then it gaped at me out of the fruits of the cherry, plum, pear, and apple trees, through the eyes of the priest's wife, out of window-panes; I believe I even got accustomed to its abiding presence. And always, when it was there, a tenseness developed in my torso and would not surrender me. Until, suddenly, in the midst of that divine singing, the Eye melted and dissolved, my breathing became effortless, and I felt a pleasant surge of energy. There was not yet enough vigor to revitalize me, to gladden me, to bid me to my beloved work, but at least I could breathe, and this was

something. And, to my own surprise, even though I had never heard the psalm before, I, too, sang, softly, so as not to bespoil the fine thread of the youths' voices with my shrill tone. Exhaling through my lips, I simply hummed, for the first time harmonizing perfectly.

Afterwards, we retired for the night in the hay. We covered ourselves with a thick linen cloth, lightly aromatic with the muskiness of roots and fields and paths, which was spread out for us. But slumber did not overcome us. It was then that Pavlo set out to recount his first story about one of the miracles that occurred in our day, which happened (so he said) to Sozont the deacon—but not this Sozont with whom we are traveling, but another, who lived in Lviv and who himself related this tale to the wayfaring monk Pavlo, when that monk arrived in Lviv for a sojourn in one of the local monasteries.

CHAPTER FOUR,  
relating one of the miracles described by Sozont the deacon

There ministered in one of the churches of Lviv a certain Father Petro and his deacon, Sozont. They lived peacefully and harmoniously, so much so that the demon became vexed, for he had nudged them repeatedly and had often attempted to bore into their souls. And so one day, when Reverend Petro yawned and neglected to make the sign of the cross over his mouth, a little demon dove in, wriggled toward the heart, liquefied in his veins, and flowed through his body like a splinter in a stream. Upon reaching the brain, he spat. His spittle poisoned the priest to such a degree that he could not bear to look at the deacon, so repulsive and despicable had he become in his eyes. Once he thought he espied goat horns sprouting on the deacon's head, hooves on his feet, a wolf's demeanor in his look. Later this same demon, skilled in reproducing himself, wormed into Deacon Sozont's ear in another incarnation. He attempted to gain hold of the deacon and defile his brain. Thus, in a dream, the deacon beheld Father Petro not as a priest, but as a wolf-like creature with goat horns atop his head, and with hooves instead of feet. This is how their feud arose, Pavlo recounted. The priest wailed at the deacon, opening his mouth amply, while the deacon barked at the priest, stretching his lips widely. Cursing one another, they tussled and shoved, clutching one another's hair. Satisfied, the demon withdrew from them both, as he had no more to effect. He stood beside them, scratching behind his ear with his paw, and rejoiced, clapping and dancing. When the priest struck the deacon, the demon exclaimed, "Eh-oh-ooh-oh," stomping his hooves. He laughed and teased, aping first one and then the other; he was so delighted to see the deacon and the priest brawling, pushing, pulling each other by the hair, slapping each other across the cheek. Merrily he hopped about, exclaiming: "Eh-oh-ooh-oh!" He knew that it would take a long while for the demonic spirit to swarm out of the deacon at the priest, and out of the priest at the deacon. So when the next quarrel ensued, Father Petro expanded like a bubble, his face and ears turning crimson, his eyes popping like raspberries. He collapsed as he stood. His bubble-like head burst into a thousand fragments. Slowly, the deacon came back to his senses...

Out of the darkness, Sozont the deacon, not the one from Lviv, but the one traveling with us, raised his voice: "You are a great storyteller, Pavlo! Let us avoid any deceptions, since you are telling this story to Brother Mykhailo. There is no deacon in Lviv and this did not happen there, but in Kyiv. I am not even certain whether it occurred in Kyiv, or if it was a dream. I prefer truth to fables. Stories, as we can see from Pavlo's narration, are created by the false retelling of a true incident—each new narrator adds something of his own: a detail missed, another embellished and magnified. This is how deception spreads. Our lips are full of lies, as revealed in

Psalms; untruths are repeated because man loves lying more than speaking the truth. Repeating lies, the wicked go astray from the womb. No wonder it is written in Psalms that man is the son of him who lies, for man is falsity. I abhor any form of deceit, as I despise falsehood, for he with lying lips shall not be saved; he who speaks with a deceitful tongue is doomed.”

Still lingering in a state of bliss after that cherubic singing, I found listening to Sozont’s formal, slightly ironic tone somehow unpleasant.

“Therefore, let us weed out falsehood as weeds from the field. There were no demons, they did not assail us, and his head did not split into shards. The only truth is that we argued, and Father Pavlo died, not having had time to make peace with me.”

The deacon proceeded to relate the story himself. We listened. He described how his conscience gnawed at him, how his soul fainted within him. He, as the younger, did not initiate a truce with his superior; they did not cast out their anger in mutual forgiveness. As an honorable man, he left the monastery in Podil for the Cave Monastery in Kyiv, seeking a minister who could absolve him of his rankle. There he encountered a benevolent beggar (at least, everybody took him to be one) with whom he shared his sin of wrath and enmity.

The beggar harkened attentively and then proclaimed: “He who asks in faith shall receive; he who deliberates shall prevail. Your longing to rid yourself of sin I commend, for it is a good thing you are contemplating. May the Lord be propitious to you! It is not, however, my province to bring peace between you and the departed. Go ye to Kyiv, to the magnificent St. Sophia, stand at the entry in the middle of the night, and, whomever you shall see first, bow to him, tell him about yourself, about me, hand him the sealed envelope, and you shall be restored.” He then sat down to write a message.

Silence hung over us as the deacon grew speechless. Under the eaves, birds roosted; we heard the squealing of a baby bird.

“All this really occurred,” Sozont proclaimed. “The rest either did not transpire, or transpired in visions.”

“If it was a vision, so be it,” mumbled Pavlo.

For Deacon Sozont, that day had been an unusually toilsome one. He had scurried here and there on various errands. He so craved to rid his spirit of corrosion that he had no desire to postpone his departure for the gates of St. Sophia in Kyiv. And so he headed toward the exit, which opened onto the courtyard surrounding the church. The sanctuary itself was still largely in ruins, but some rebuilding had commenced and a few hieromonks had begun to hold services there. Some even sojourned there as in a monastery; the entrance gate to the courtyard was kept locked. A long time passed in waiting. Spent, the deacon sat on his haunches beside the wall. In his hands he held a folded piece of paper.

“And then I spied a man, cloaked in black, walking along the deserted

street. He was large. He appeared somber. A mysterious glow rendered him wholly visible. I was able to observe him in detail: his raiment, his legs, his hands; though not his face, which seemed lost in shadow...

The deacon fell into another silence, while I, as one with ample inspiration, detected a shape materializing out of the darkness: a phantasm out of oblivion, or a dream. And I witnessed Deacon Sozont rise to greet this apparition. Bowing before him, he kissed his hand and handed him the message composed by the beggar, whereupon he proceeded to recount his misfortune. This transpired at the same moment as the other Sozont, squatting on his haunches, slept soundly beside the wall. As the figure with the eclipsed face (or who was faceless) unfolded the letter (an identical letter stuck out of the hands of the one crouching, the one sleeping), the paper suddenly lit up, as if illuminated by someone, and words we already know were recited: "He who asks in faith shall receive, he who deliberates shall prosper. Aid him who asks, unshackle the spirit of him who cannot free himself, even if by way of a dream. Then ye shall succeed, and your quarreling shall cease. Not a man exists who quarrels not."

"You ask of me more than I can grant," the stranger declared. "I cannot ignore these written words, however, for they ring true. With the Lord's blessing, I shall attempt to execute that which is willed of me."

Looming like an impenetrable mass, he paused in front of the entrance gate. Behind him, and almost half his size, stood Deacon Sozont, while behind him—the other Sozont, who was half the size of the first Sozont, as he sat on his haunches, seemingly spiritless. Not a breath escaped him. It was as though he assumed the form of a lifeless membrane—endowing the upright Sozont with his quiddity. While not duplicating the motions of his actions, that Sozont appeared like a replica reflected in a mirror. Separated from his own casing, he became an independent entity.

And thus the stranger stopped before the gate of entry, and raising his hands heavenward, prayed in a whisper. With his face to the ground, he did obeisance. For a time, he remained motionless. Then he stood up, his voice bellowing, as if through a pipe: "Open the gates of Your mercy, oh Lord!"

Swaying, the cumbersome gate slowly rocked open of its own accord, its rusted iron hinges creaking, even as the other gate, beside the stooped, contorted body of Deacon Sozont, remained closed. Forsaking the torpid figure cowering on his haunches, they entered the church courtyard. They approached the sanctuary. In that same resounding voice, the stranger commanded Sozont: "Abide here, and do not move! Act not according to your will!"

Though Sozont attempted to observe the figure closely as it slid away, that was not possible: the shape was like a dense knot of darkness. Moreover, Sozont noticed that the stranger's gestures lacked the gracefulness of a living being. He moved like a warrior clad in armor. Even his steps sounded metallic, as if he were shod in iron boots.

Approaching the newly-installed oaken doors of St. Sophia in Kyiv, which stood half in ruins, though restoration had begun, he again raised his hands, this time, however, not heavenward in supplication, but in the direction of the entry. And with a piercing screech, the oaken doors swung open at the bidding of the stranger's hands. The stranger disappeared into the opaque darkness of the interior. As he reached the center of the nave (Sozont watched through the opened door), a burning candelabra detached itself from the crossbeam and, slowly gliding through the air, positioned itself above the stranger's head, glowing brilliantly, like a sinking star, scattering clusters of beams. The entire church quivered with light, especially one of the saints on the wall. The wide expanse of the immutable wall, depicting the Oranta in mosaic, glimmered. And Sozont became frightened: he espied two flames flickering in the Oranta's eyes. It was an ominous flickering.

As the stranger neared the altar, the doors noiselessly swung open. There he prayed, long and hard, as dew collected on Deacon Sozont, the one in the dream, standing before the opened door, as well as the one huddled beside the gate near the wall, holding in his hand a white shadow of the letter from the beggar.

Thereupon the stranger turned on his heels, like a soldier executing a military drill, and withdrew from the altar; the doors to the altar closed of their own accord. He left the church. The burning star of the lowered candelabra followed, hovering above his head, but only as far as the exit, where it stopped, suspended, as the stranger crossed the threshold. The doors to the church closed of their own accord, creaking loudly; as they closed, the light inside gradually dimmed. Obscure darkness filled the sanctuary the moment the doors clicked shut. But yet something else struck Deacon Sozont this time: the stranger's face did not appear black, but rather was awash in radiant incandescence. Still, it resembled a mask more than a living countenance, a reflection more than a face. More feminine than masculine, it was beardless, with no mustache, and with extraordinarily large eyes that emitted a glow much like the eyes of the Oranta on the Immutable Wall. And Sozont became alarmed a second time: the gaze of those eyes strewing dark sparks seized him. He sensed his body evanesce into gossamer: more ghost than human, he felt ripped from his marrow, set free to roam the world. (This was not so odd, as many a folk tale relates that even witches are capable of such feats.) He felt his heart slackening and hardening under this gaze, turning into a sack made of thick hide, drawn tightly with a string. And a thought suddenly flashed through Deacon Sozont's mind: this is not a living human before him; rather, perchance, an angel descended from heaven. Only now he discerned that the stranger's head was enclosed in a diaphanous glass sphere, as if in a hood, the face appearing mask-like beneath. And, as the thought was occurring to him, a voice thundered, as though through a pipe: "If you wish to fulfill your

desire, be not timorous towards me, my good man. Believe me, I am man begotten of man, born in a plain house, brought up in Kyiv..."

"But are you alive?" Deacon Sozont asked, moving only his lips.

"My soul is alive," the stranger bellowed. "I have been freed to roam among the living; for the blessing of the Lord embraces the weak, when it so wills... but we have no time for nonsense."

"Where shall we go?" Deacon Sozont inquired.

The stranger did not answer. His clanging steps headed toward the portal and I followed like a disconnected shadow. The gate opened of itself, without so much as brushing against the crouching deacon who was numb and still sleeping beside the gate, leaning against the wall. A letter, emanating light, stuck out from his hands, and his somnolent face appeared lifeless. The stranger walked a few paces, and Sozont could not tarry—a mysterious force pulled him. He felt as if he were tied to the stranger with invisible string. They strode from St. Sophia toward the Borychiv descent. A curious silence enveloped everything. The ghostly byways were deserted. Not a sound anywhere: not a dog barking, not a leaf rustling in the breeze. Only the metallic ring of the stranger's leaden gait was audible, a brief echo clamoring in pursuit. Sozont meandered behind him like a mute shadow (for what sounds can a shadow emit?), fettered with a string; like a Tartar taken prisoner. The clear cadence of a measured stride, duplicated with an echo, carved the night's silence.

Thus they arrived at the Church of the Tithes. The church stood in ruins, save for the one part that survived. Covered with a renovated shingled dome, it boasted freshly-installed doors (as at St. Sophia). The stranger halted and extended his arms—and the doors opened. He stepped inside the section that was preserved and not in ruins. And once again, a star lit up, illuminating the interior. The stranger prayed even longer here, and as he departed the doors closed of their own accord, as they had at St. Sophia. Sozont, standing outdoors here as well, with dew falling on him, whispered only this: "Lord, have mercy." For though his body felt evanescent, an inexplicable horror shot through him like a gust of wind.

Then the stranger led him down the curving Borychiv descent to St. Pyrohoshcha Church, and everything repeated itself as before. As they continued on their way along the similarly deserted alleys of Podil, Deacon Sozont realized that they were heading to the church and monastery where he had served as deacon with Father Petro, where their quarrel had ignited, and from where Father Petro had departed this world, not having made peace with Sozont. Upon reaching the entry, the stranger again stopped, motionless. In front of the door he raised his hands, even though a phantom key lay in the phantom robes of Deacon Sozont, which he could have used to unlock the door—the real key lay in the pocket of the forsaken, somnolent deacon. And here, too the doors swung open of their own accord, and the stranger, arresting the shadow of Deacon Sozont, proclaimed in a

bellowing voice: “Stand and behold. Observe closely, overlooking nothing!” And as he stepped into the church a radiance emanated, not from the star-candelabra but from an invisible source. And Sozont watched as a glowing deacon approached from the altar, much as he himself often had, as deacon (not he, that is to say, not in his likeness); he swung a silver censer, and incense wafted throughout the church. A string of priests in white vestments, unfamiliar to Sozont, filed out of the opened Royal Gates. Shuffling one after another, they arranged themselves in the left wing. Behind them, from the same source, yet more priests filed out, likewise one after another. Taller by a head than the first group, cloaked in scarlet vestments, they assembled in the right wing. And standing before them, gesticulating with his hands, the stranger directed them to sing. Their voices rose in mellifluous harmony:

The gates of hell were thrown open—  
These blasphemous lips—  
Mercilessly to swallow thy church,  
But thou art our true one, lord-bridegroom  
By the heavenly power of these bulwarks.  
With broken heart we implore thee,  
Reveal her promptly free from defilement—  
She is thy virtuous church, ransomed by thine blood.

Thereupon the stranger turned toward him. In the vivid light the stranger’s head was clearly visible: it appeared encapsulated in a glass orb, the face more feminine than masculine, beardless, with no mustache, seemingly inert, though splendidly luminous. It was itself the source of light. The eyes exuded a dark, yet not doleful passion. Sozont’s ghostly form stiffened. Evenly, clearly and slowly, the stranger’s voice commanded: “Deacon Sozont, enter the church!”

And the deacon obeyed. He sensed that he was not walking, he was being carried: his feet did not touch the ground. And his body felt like parchment; his being—a leaf containing the Cave Monastery’s beggar’s handwriting.

“Behold the priests to your left,” the stranger said. “Perhaps you will recognize him with whom you quarreled?”

Swaying, as if floating, the deacon was swept in front of a row of faces.

And each face was lifeless, though each had skin, and eyes, and hair covering the head and face. And the eyes in those faces gleamed with an otherworldly glow. The priests appeared to be waiting to be released, they waited expectantly and imploringly. And he whom the deacon was seeking was not among them.

Then the stranger bellowed: “Behold the priests to your right!”

And the deacon passed along the right row of faces, and they all seemed oddly similar, save for one who stood out: not only was he robed in a scarlet vestment, but his face, too, was red. Sozont pointed at him: “This, servant of the Lord, is he!”

“Usher him outside!” the stranger ordered, and turned on his heels, like a soldier at military exercises, and exited the church, his heavy steps clanging like steel. Hieromonk Petro and Sozont drifted behind the stranger, not touching the ground, as if tethered with string, both shadowy ghosts. Sozont grasped the priest by the hand. He thought he held a fistful of bones: the priest’s hand seemed fleshless.

And that is when they espied the moon before them. It was enormous. Perhaps three times larger than an actual moon, it smothered everything in the death-like paleness of its diffused sheen: the trees, the buildings, the people therein, the streets, and the grass, which suddenly appeared coated with frost. As if sliding to earth, the increscent moon grew larger and larger, its surface displaying the face of Cain, twisted in anger, and that of Able, warped with suffering. Whereupon the stranger said in a quiet voice: “Cast asunder the enmity that existed between you!”

After bowing to one another, the deacon and the priest (really their shadows) embraced, acknowledging the spoken words. And to Sozont, it felt as though he were clutching a skeleton in his arms. The skeleton gripped him with bony hands so tightly that Sozont could barely breathe. The moon above, consumed in boreal flames, lashed elongated, fiery tongues, issuing ruby curves of streaming light that undulated over earth, the trees, the grass, the sanctuary, and across their countenances (though Father Petro was already faceless: his uncovered skull grinned crookedly, with bared teeth).

“Exchange kisses and dispel your enmity!” the voice bellowed.

And the deacon sensed his lips grazing frigid bones, those cold, bare teeth. He was unable to tear himself away from the kiss—the bones of the hands pressed into his shoulders, and though his lips and shoulders were phantasmal, they were full of pain and gnawing. As though winded by the chill of death, he could not inhale. His heart paused in his breast; blood stopped flowing in his veins. And he felt himself plummeting through a long and bottomless well, as if into the jaws of a beast, the head of which was the moon, and the body—a smooth, slippery, narrow pipe, like a wide intestine. And Sozont plunged through that pipe, like a cannonball which is to explode and scatter him into the dead space of night. Hurling himself into that void, he flew, frigid and burning at the same time, until he landed at the same St. Sophia in Kyiv, and next to him the one who squatted on his haunches, slumbering by the gate, leaning against the wall.

Beside him towered the stranger: massive and motionless, like a mountain, his caped face glowing peacefully. And Sozont was impressed with the warm feminine beauty of that face—it was no longer a mask. The lips were timidly, gently smiling. And the stranger said (but not in a

sonorous voice, not in a thick man's voice as before, rather, in a soothing, woman's voice): "Redeem your soul, Deacon Sozont, and harness it in my benefit."

"I will that!" Sozont proclaimed.

"And to the beggar who sent you, impart this: 'The purity of supplication and an exalted yearning for God can raise one from the dead.'"

"It has come to pass," Deacon Sozont said.

"Are you free from the suffering of conscience?"

"With your aid and the Lord's," said Sozont. "But pray tell: who are you?"

Whereupon the lips on that feminine face, waxed into a masculine form, encased in the scaffolding of a body, smiled sadly. "I already told you: one accorded liberty to walk among the living! And in conclusion, I pronounce this: 'To receive everlasting life, always seek the truth.'"

And abruptly, the stranger's face faded, like a lamp snuffed out for lack of oil. The feminine face grew imperceptible, a round core, as if chiseled out of stone, appearing in its place. Like a soldier at military exercises, he reversed himself, and slowly retreated, his precise steps slicing through a hollow void dense with moonlight. Those steps were audible for a long while. But the farther they went, the quieter they grew, the shorter the clatter of their echo became. Sozont stood motionless, overawed. Only his lips soundlessly repeated: "Seek the truth, so that ye remain alive... Seek the truth!"

And when the sound of the steps receded, he turned to him who sat perched near the gate beside the wall, seeming to slumber. But he was awake. He stared with eyes wide open. The shadow of Deacon Sozont shuddered. It began to shrink, to roll, like paper, into a scroll, only to cave in, as if crumpled, like a sheet of paper, to finally coil into a paper ball. Streams of light, aglow with the glint of moonstone, splashed out of the ball. It split in half, and two gleaming globes drifted into the wide-open eyes of Deacon Sozont. Both lucent orbs penetrated his lifeless eyes, at once warming his rigid body. Flushed with heat, Deacon Sozont's heart fluttered and stirred in his breast, forcing blood through icy veins, thawing him gradually.

Over earth a new day, bespeckled in crimson tones, dawned.

CHAPTER FIVE,  
which recounts the journey's progress

Indeed, Deacon Sozont narrated a remarkable story. He did not wish to discuss it, however, bidding us to sleep, since the following day would provide ample time to discourse about that which we harkened. Sozont himself fell asleep promptly, as did Pavlo, who had heard the story before. Pavlo was not impressed with it as was I: it was not new to him. I tossed and turned on my bed until finally I sank into slumber. And this is what I dreamed: I soared over Kyiv, I wandered through caves, I encountered strange people with dead faces, I visited dwellings where feasts were underway; at one there were soldiers, at another merchants, at a third townspeople, and at the fourth clerics. A cauldron stood in the center of each dwelling. Large chunks of meat were cooking in them; dipping their hands into the bubbling stew, those who were present fished out pieces of meat, tore them and wolfed them down greedily, juices dripping from their lips and down their chins.

Pavlo jostled me awake early, imparting that Sozont had risen long before and that we should set out, as the day ahead would be hot and it would be better to walk in the chill of daybreak, pausing in the shade as the day heated up. I sprang to my feet at once. Our hosts provided us with milk and honey and a loaf of bread for the road. They were kind, forthright people, and not without tears and emotion did we bid our farewells.

The Eye of the Abyss never assails me at morningtide; a day's beginning fills me with creative force. All around, everything is somehow different, as if enchanted. Oblique shafts of light transform the thick dew into shimmering precious stones, gold, and silver. Coated with moisture, the turf grows leaden and gray, while light brown seed pods of grass or wild sorrel blend softly with the ashen verdancy of grassblades and herbs. The crowns of trees seem rounder: every leaf exhales a mist into the air, as people do in winter, the gossamer vapor clinging around the tree's crown like a bubble—this is why trees appear rounder in the morning. Steam rises from tranquil waters as if they were burning under the sun's first rays; everything is wrapped in a dense, magical stillness. Mornings, all that breathes moves in slow motion, phantoms of dreams still lingering in the depths of the mind like dawn's veil: contourless, obscure. And then one begins to sense: as if saturated with the juices of herbs, one's being is permeated with a tingling pleasure, wafting through the eyes to caress the hues, the patches of light, the shadows, the dazzle. Stalks, weeds, flowers, and leaves effuse a distinct aroma. Earth itself is redolent with fragrance. The lines of branches, trunks, stems do not possess sharp, angular outlines—they appear muted, unperturbed. Even a bird glides in the sky differently than during the day—unhurriedly, smoothly. This is why at morningtide, one ought not to hasten, nor run. One should saunter slowly,

serenely immersing oneself in endless glorious space, assimilating nature's beauty into one's soul and heart. This is precisely why I believe God communes with nature at dawn. Infusing nature with fecundity, God tempts the spirit of every plant, every creature. The Eye of the Abyss closes, quiescent. Death, passions are not contemplated at morning's inception—mornings are for living, not demise; they are therefore divine, for God. This is exactly why I possess a singular attitude toward dawn: dawns are divined in resplendent fullness. And where there is resplendent fullness, there is lust for life, there is inner peace, harmony and mirth. Was that not why we did not discuss the story Sozont recounted before we fell asleep, why we ambled peacefully, silently, marveling at the world while absorbing its radiance into our souls. And only when the sun climbed higher, and the shrouded magic of dawn with its tones, its moistness dissipated, like smoke, did Sozont speak.

In a calm, amiable voice, the deacon recounted that he was acquainted with the servant of the Lord cited by Father Ivan from Cherniakhiv. This was that same beggar from the Cave Monastery in Kyiv who dispatched Sozont, with his message in hand, to meet with the stranger. Once a year he roams the land, Sozont informed us, as he is bound to convert at least one living soul onto the Lord's path, disentangling it from life's vagaries while infusing the heart with a yearning to serve God. It was the beggar who once happened upon Sozont in court, and it was owing to the beggar that Sozont, known formerly as Stepan, took his vows, was tonsured as a monk and consecrated as a priest. Gloomy and distressed with an unresolved dispute, evoked by the death of Father Petro, Sozont sought only the beggar. This same servant of the Lord encountered Mykyta (still named Matvii at the time) in Cherniakhiv. Once, while in church attending Mass, Mykyta (or rather, still Matvii) inquired: "Are those words written, and read?"—in response to which the venerable elder ushered him out of church and, settling in the graveyard, instructed Matvii at length on the way to humble piety. This is how, Sozont claimed, the longing to know God germinated in the simple fellow's mind. He determined to embrace the quest for a path leading to the Lord.

"You are mother and father to me," he declared to the beggar. "Instructor of good deeds and guide to my salvation."

And that is when Matvii forsook his pigs and his sheep to join the beggar in his wanderings. The beggar wished to bring him to the Cave Monastery, because he loved him dearly. One night, in a dream, Matvii felt impelled to build a home. He dug to lay a foundation. He dug deeply. He heeded a voice commanding: "Dig deeper!" Once more he dug, and the voice did not will him to stop. Listening to Matvii recounting his dream, the servant of the Lord, who believed that man communes with God through dreams, proclaimed: "Abide by your wayfaring! You are not yet prepared for a monk's life."

Thereafter, they parted company: the beggar returning to the Cave Monastery, while Matvii, who was later to become Mykyta, left to wander...

Exactly as we are now. In general, travel is stimulating, especially for me, whose toil is both sedentary and sedulous—calligraphy and illumination in manuscript scribing require not only mastery, but perseverance. Presently, even in our land, books that had not even circulated formerly are now printed. I am well acquainted with the Psalms and the Homiletic Gospel published by Ivan Fedorovych and Petro Mstyslavets in Zablud. Some of our books had been printed previously, but in Cracow. For the most part, however, I had not come across any of our printed books, though I saw German and Italian editions among the tomes of my benefactress, Anastasia Paraskeva, Princess of Zaslav. A proud noblewoman who fancied possessing a Gospel such as no other person possessed, she commissioned me to scribe the Peresopnytska Gospel. It was for her that I labored, devoting days, months, and years in a mad fever, while, at the same time, in profound spiritual serenity. I did not embark on this because it gave me pleasure: Princess Anastasia Paraskeva would surely vaunt her book of books before her noble neighbors; to be frank, I was not impressed or amused with her haughtiness. The fact that I had a chance to test my strength and skill had more meaning for me, that it was possible for me to fulfill the Lord's dictum—that talent not be buried underground. Granted, Scriptures speak not about skills, but about money that is not bringing benefits. Though the Scriptures should be read not at face value, but rather as uncovering in the texts the sacred, mystical meaning established by the Lord. Thus I, as calligrapher and artist, gained a limitless realm in which to exhibit my undertaking, and I believe that rather than creating a masterpiece, I was delivering myself from the Eye of the Abyss, which snipped at me as far back as my native Sianok, in Red Rus', whereupon I took a staff into my hand and set off. Yet even as I settled down to work in Dvirtsia near Zaslav and, later, in Peresopnytsia, the feeling that I am footloose did not forsake me: those rootless, with no ties to land, home, family, children, or property—whether on the move or staying in place—are forever journeying. And though I toiled at my book for years, I had no home, no family, nor children nor property; even the pigments and ink were not mine, neither was the book that I designed—I was, therefore, like a living tool, a pen, a paintbrush in the hand of the Almighty. That feeling, precisely, that the hand of the Almighty is guiding me, delivered me from the Eye of the Abyss. I had escaped my own home, after all, as that is exactly where it infested me with dread and chased me out into the world—I have not stopped since. I devoted five years to my work. And thus, I arrived at the Prechystynsky Monastery, for women are an unfathomable lot: Princess Anastasia Paraskeva lost interest in my work, discontinued her subsidies, and ordered me to leave Dvirtsia. That is when I set out to

Archimandrite Hryhorii, with whom I had been acquainted earlier. He brought me to Kateryna Chartoryska, holder of Peresopnytsia, and she, seeing the book, that is, my commenced, unfinished work, emitted an emotional “Oooh,” which pleased me not a little, and thus, urged by Father Hryhorii, she agreed to acquire the Gospel from Anastasia Paraskeva, who readily consented. Kateryna Chartoryska, pledging to fund all expenditures for the book, designated it for the Prechystynsky Monastery. So that once again, I was enabled to test my strength, and in 1561 my work was consummated. But when we departed for Zhytomyr, where I was to scribe the Zhytomyr Gospel, my strength abandoned me, as I have said, and I felt hollow and impotent. In spite of the leniency with which I was treated, Hryhorii admonished me by threatening to call upon his pupil Petro (who at one time assisted me in scribing and painting, that is to say, he was apprenticed in calligraphy and art under me, with great satisfaction, I might add), to entrust him with designing the Zhytomyr Gospel. But even that reproof did nothing to restore my strength—and that is why I ended up on this journey.

In the depths of my soul, I know not why, I was convinced that I would never return to Zhytomyr, as the Eye of the Abyss did not leave me there. In its focus, my body felt shackled, my motions—restrained, my spirit—gloomy, in my heart, I sensed a subtle ache, all desires vanished, in work I became lazy, in feeling, exhausted. One so debilitated is not suited for spiritual ventures. The thought that I have effected that which I was put on this wicked earth to do supervened at times. Therefore, I reasoned, I am no longer needed, and hence, I felt compelled to gather my thoughts, to probe, to deduce, and to arrive at some conclusion regarding myself and the world, that is to say, either to revitalize my spirit and embark on a new assignment, or prepare myself to meet the Lord, which is to say, start reflecting about death. Thus, the journey was to be a challenge. Man’s power is negligible. One is not always able or capable of feats.

The sun, meanwhile, climbed even higher. We sat in the shade of a large oak tree, which grew in the middle of a glade not far from the road, to relax and refresh ourselves a bit with water from a humble stone well. The cold, sweet water nipped our teeth as we drank it in shallow gulps, as one would imbibe a delicious beverage. That is when we discussed Deacon Sozont’s story.

“I cannot enter this story in my book,” Sozont said, frowning his wide, blue-black, and overgrown brows, “because dreams are illusory, and miracles must happen in reality, not in dreams. Had I awakened with no letter sticking out of my fist (in the dream I had, after all, delivered it to the stranger), I would have believed in the miracle. This way—one can surmise anything!”

Pavlo’s face was shaded by the brim of his pilgrim’s helmet; his clear, blue eyes, mildly surprised, shone out of the shadow, like two springs.

“But, Father,” he said. “Earlier you agreed with me that saints and prophets beheld the Lord in their dreams and communed with Him.”

“But I am not certain that they really beheld such things,” Sozont stated stubbornly. “For what is the difference between dream as hallucination and dream as vision of reality?”

“The Scriptures teach,” I said, “that worldly life is a dream. Perhaps it is the Lord’s dream, or, perhaps, a dream shared by the Lord and the devil. And we perceive ourselves in that spectacle—shadows vivified by the imagination of a transcendent shadow. If you accept this, your dream can be interpreted as real.”

“But does the Lord need to dream?” Deacon Sozont asked.

“That we cannot know,” Pavlo remarked passionately. “The difference between us and God is that He knows all about us, while we know nothing about Him. We are knowable, while He is unknowable.”

Sozont smiled broadly. “Everything that we express about Him is a fable. The story of my dream, therefore, is another of a great number of fables devised in this world.”

“Why cannot a dream be prophetic?” I asked. “Is there no confirmation of that?”

“Let us approach the matter from a different angle,” Pavlo stated fervently. “After that dream, was your conscience subdued in regard to Father Petro, with whom you had quarreled?”

“To a degree,” Sozont replied pensively. “In spite of everything, part of my mind believed that dream.”

“Because everything that happens to a person,” Pavlo asserted, “be it in a dream, or in actuality, is, in its own way, real. Because it happens.”

“Perhaps,” Sozont reflected. “But the other part of my mind cannot accept it. Each of our acts is committed irreversibly. What I want to say is, that while I have, perhaps, been absolved of my sin, nevertheless I did sin; therefore, my sin is always with me.”

“So you do not believe in the purifying power of repentance?” Pavlo asked, surprised.

“My sin lies in my attempts to verify verity, rather than trusting in faith,” Sozont said.

And here I sensed an uncertain anxiety, the alarm one feels in the face of danger, or when one is being closely observed. I glanced into the forest and espied a monstrous Eye, the size of a field kettle, in the nearest tree. Framed in an equilateral triangle, it stood on the lowest branch of an oak tree. Reacting to the abrupt turn of my head, my fellow travelers involuntarily looked in that direction as well.

“Did you see or hear something, Brother Mykhailo?” Pavlo asked.

“A dry branch snapping,” I lied.

## CHAPTER SIX,

which describes how the demon tortured Friar Pavlo

Once again we set out, though no longer chatting. We felt, in a way, dejected: I for obvious reasons, Sozont due to the indeterminacy of his doubts. Again, I thought that his intent to write a book about the lives of saints was illusory, what with his lawyerly habits and the weakness of his faith. I also believed that he was one of those people who readily discover some good intention through which they can help people, live only for this good intention, and develop it and let it flower, but who never manage to accomplish these goals, and this inability to complete their intentions becomes the substance of their spiritual anguish. And their good intentions arise, I mused, not because they are beneficent, striving for good will, but because deep in their heart they are afraid that they actually may not be benevolent. It is a simple truth that existence is divided into day and night; that life is shadowed by the night of non-existence—Christianity teaches us to be continually prepared for death, as it perpetually shadows us in our daily lives. Man is capable of both good and evil: desiring to the one, he is impelled to the other. Concealing one, he wishes to expose the other. But there are people of another ilk, I thought. They perform neither good deeds nor evil deeds. Any effort seems evil to them, and they suffer in discontent, perceiving action as impiety—thus they cannot do good, fearing lest good deeds be witnessed. In society, such people are nonentities. They wrench themselves from daily, worldly affairs, seeing no sense in them, and proclaim inactivity to be pious, even seeking it for themselves. Although searching for those who live devoutly, in the depths of his soul Deacon Sozont did not believe in a pietistic life. In fact, he was not actually pursuing people living a saintly life; he wished, rather, to examine and verify, as he himself said, whether such a life is not, in fact, deceitful, and if miracles performed by such individuals are not delusions for the purpose of elevating themselves in the face of society, or even in front of God. That is to say, by purportedly devoting themselves to God, do they not wish to satisfy their own vainglory, escaping the routines of daily life and transcending it for that unfulfillable vainglory. Or, more simply: while relinquishing the world, they live, nevertheless, within worldly measure. What would Mykyta the Pole-Sitter have achieved, for example, had he remained a herder of sheep and pigs, while abiding an honest, God-fearing, Christian life? Even having renounced the world, he became, in this world, famed throughout Volyn, in Polissia, and in adjacent regions, as people from everywhere streamed to behold him, exaggerating his glory. And thus, having attained renown, he pledged himself to that which he is. The unfortunate, the crippled come to him, those who have dropped out of life's ebb, or those who are glaringly discontent, downcast, and irresolute—that is to say, spiritually fractured. About the curious I shall not speak, as their

interest is likewise a manifestation of a life lived in deficient impressions. But enough of this surmising about the future, as I will become like Deacon Sozont, with his unwritten book and his lawyerly inquiries. I did not know as much about Pavlo. He had not yet expressed himself sufficiently. Outwardly, he appeared to be a simple friar, observing with naïve eyes, although his knowledge of Scriptures was remarkable, and, to be sure, he had perused many a book at the monastery library, for he was quite articulate. But he, like Deacon Sozont and me, was uprooted from his native domicile, from that innate place in the garden of life where he was designated to grow, to mature and procreate; instead he had set out on a journey, seeking wind in the field, like others. Though not talkative, he spoke wisely and grandly, which meant that questions to which he had no answers occupied his mind. And so, all three of us, being smart fellows who had outsmarted themselves, ended up on this road, seeking the way, while not having determined where we wished to go. Thus we experienced the Biblical truth about a narrow path and a wide one. But we lacked the courage to tread either one: we understood the ambiguity of all definitions.

We walked and walked. The sun had ascended almost to its apex; above us, skylarks pealed incessantly, with the birds of the forest chiming in. The sun cast such light and heat that our dark attire could not protect us adequately—it is well known that black absorbs heat, while white deflects it. We were awash in sticky sweat. Our faces were covered with tacky rivulets of perspiration. And it was then that Pavlo suddenly stopped. His eyes opened widely, bulging out of their sockets. His body tensed and stiffened. He collapsed as if hewn, cramping and writhing in the dust. Deacon Sozont, who knew Pavlo better than I did, as they had traveled together longer, rushed to help, pressing on his arms and torso, which convulsed madly, yelling at me to fetch a twig or the staff. I ran to a tree, found a branch, and brought it back to Sozont, who inserted it between Pavlo's teeth though he had already bitten his tongue: blood was gushing out of his mouth. His head twisted peculiarly. His eyes appeared mad. Though plainly weak, he heaved and tossed, pitching Sozont so that the deacon could barely stay on top of him. This lasted a while. Finally succumbing, Pavlo's stretched body lay motionless. Removing the twig from his mouth, Sozont instructed me to grasp his legs. He grabbed Pavlo under his arms, and together we pulled him into the shade—the road passed through a forest, so we did not have to haul him far. We laid him in the grass. Soon, Pavlo's breathing subsided—he was asleep. Meantime, we refreshed ourselves in the stream, washing and drinking. Tired, we reposed. Soon after, Pavlo sat up, leaning against a tree. Not yet wholly conscious, he watched us mutely with a sentient expression. Deacon Sozont prayed over him. Fitful cramps rolled over Pavlo's body, as if shaking out of him. With a sleeve, Sozont wiped his face, wet with trickling sweat.

“Forgive me, Brother Mykhailo,” he said, “that I failed to warn you

about Brother Pavlo's affliction. At Maniava Hermitage, from where he hails, the holy fathers not only did not rid him of his curse—judging him to be possessed, they mocked him. Thus he arrived in Kyiv, at the Cave Monastery, renowned for its miracles and priests who practice exorcism. The Patericon of the Cave Monastery describes just such a healing, proving that this skill has been practiced since ancient times. Convinced by the priests of the Cave Monastery that the demon would not return, as he had been definitely exorcised, I felt at ease, and did not wish to perturb you with this matter. Pavlo himself was satisfied that his misfortune was over.”

“But it has not ended, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo uttered feebly.

“As you can see, Brother,” Sozont stated calmly. “And this is another example confirming the fact that it is not a demon that afflicts you, but rather a malady for which the holy fathers discern no remedy. It is known as the convulsions.”

“I think,” Pavlo continued, still feebly, “that it is a demon. I perused the Patericon of the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv. It describes St. Lavrentii healing a possessed man. Three times I read the story, and it seems to me that my ailment is similar.”

“It is in vain that you think that, Brother Pavlo,” Sozont said. “Mind verse twenty-six about ‘Hermit-Monk Lavrentii.’ The possessed did not lose consciousness, nor did he thrash about or suffer a fever. Perchance he spoke in tongues, but in general he was fully cognizant. That is precisely why, Brother,” Sozont said gently, “this might be something other than possession.”

“But I feel it in me, I feel it!” Pavlo exclaimed. “When I am in its clutches, I can sense bony hands, overgrown with red hair, tearing at my heart with sharp claws. At times it fuses into me: feet into feet, arms into arms, head into head, shaking me like a tree. And then a red face appears, its cavernous, bloody mouth laughing, its ogling eyeballs shooting like nuclei out of orbits, dangling down cheeks on thin white veins.”

“You might be hallucinating in your fever, Brother Pavlo,” said Sozont calmly.

“And what does your wisdom state, Brother Mykhailo?” Pavlo turned towards me.

“Each of us has his own dark cloud, Brother Pavlo! And each of us must know and contend with his own dark cloud.”

Pavlo smiled an innocent, child-like smile: “I thank you, Brother Mykhailo!”

“For what?”

“For not being terrified of me. For not judging me. Besides Brother Sozont, you are the only one.”

“That is why we became fellow travelers,” Sozont smiled.

We did not walk any further. We decided instead to eat some bread, drink a bit of water, and rest a while. Pavlo declined. He lay in the grass,

motionless, silently contemplating the sky while we ate. “Curious thing, the sky,” he said, suddenly. “Sometimes it seems that the bottomless depths exist up above, not here below. Are not my thoughts sinful, Brother Sozont?”

“Where there is eternity, there are unfathomable depths,” Sozont declared. “But as with everything in this world, duality dwells here, as well. One depth is radiant, full of sun; overflowing with luminosity, it bids our souls to refinement. The other is dark, opaque, likewise calling our soul, but to abasement. And so we choose.”

“Do we choose, or are we chosen?” I asked.

“That is in the will of God,” Sozont replied curtly. “But He did endow us with the will to act.”

“But I am afraid,” Pavlo said quietly. “If I am really possessed, I did not invoke the demon. He is, therefore, in me not of my will. And if God willed it, then what good is my will?”

“Your will is part of God’s will,” I said. “If you have ardent faith in Him.”

“Is it possible for me to be any more devout?” Pavlo asked, suddenly bursting into tears. And his tears were so unusual: out of his azure eyes flowed azure tears.

## CHAPTER SEVEN,

which recounts the meeting with another fellow-traveler, Kuzma

At last Pavlo announced that he felt strong and able to proceed. Indeed, there was no trace of any infirmity—he appeared exactly as he had before. And so we continued along our way. In the meanwhile, I questioned Pavlo about his sickness: when did it commence, how often he was afflicted.

“You can aid me with my attacks, is that why you are inquiring?” Pavlo asked.

“I am not a doctor, but I am curious about disease,” I replied.

He proceeded to relate that the convulsions come upon him suddenly—they strike, and that is all: that is to say, he does not remember anything after that. Sometimes severe headaches precede the attacks by several hours: he has endured headaches since childhood, when he fell from a pear tree and injured himself badly. He becomes irritable at such times, and it is better not to disturb him then. Often he feels chilled, or feverish, or he desperately needs to eat, or an otherworldly terror smites him. At times he envisions flames sweeping around him, fire engulfing everything: trees, grass, fields, even earth itself.

“I then feel as if an abyss is swallowing me. It is so frightening that every follicle of hair on my body quivers or stands on end. It is then that I sense the demon awakening within me. But this lasts only a moment and I know not what occurs next.”

“Does this happen often?” I asked.

“It depends,” Pavlo replied. Sozont was silent. Pavlo had likely shared this with him before. “It can be several times a day. Sometimes once a month, and there are times when nothing occurs for a long while. When this happens to me,” Pavlo continued, “I die, at least it seems that way to me, and then I rise from the dead. Perchance, one day I might not rise from the dead. At times I fall into a stupor, or I tread as if in slumber. I do not remember any of this—I have only heard about it from others. And this is most distressful to me: I do something, I do things, but unconsciously and without thinking, as though I were functioning somewhere outside of myself.”

“All sinners live outside of themselves,” said Sozont. “And evildoers.”

“But I do not wish to be a sinner, nor an evildoer!” Pavlo exclaimed.

“Do you expect St. Mykyta to aid you?” I inquired.

“That is what is left for me—to hope,” Pavlo replied.

So Pavlo had set out to Mykyta the Pole-Sitter hoping to be healed of his affliction. What struck me: he had spent time with the priests of the Cave Monastery, who seemed to have cured him (at least, they convinced him that the demons were rebuked)—so why, if he considered himself restored, was he seeking a new healer? I asked this of Pavlo directly.

“I wish to behold him, the righteous one, beloved by the Lord,” Pavlo said. “Besides, the priests at the Cave Monastery and others treated me and persuaded me that they cured me of possession—yet the demon has not vanished.”

“Have you ever attempted to deliver yourself of the evil spirit on your own?” I asked. “By fasting, by submission, by praying to God and the Mother of God?”

“That is why I became a monk, Brother,” Pavlo spoke woefully. “But for some reason the Lord is not releasing me from this infirmity... And you know, I sometimes think, Brother Mykhailo, I know not if this is sinful, that the Lord is displeased with excessive supplication. There is a limit to it, as there is to everything in the world. One should not overstep that limit. Greater prayers, fasting, and devotion to service do not necessarily mean one is drawing nearer to God. Often even the opposite occurs...”

And here we came upon a marvel: on a slope beside the road, with feet immersed in a runnel of green water, sat a quaint figure. He wore such a tattered, dingy, rent frock that it was impossible to guess its original color. Protruding atop his head was something like an abbot’s hood, already shapeless. The hood framed an unnaturally elongated face. His features were arranged over fine, well-defined bones encased in leathery skin, as if he were one of the Cave mummies, escaped from its eternal resting place and out on a journey to view the world. His hair, brows, beard and mustache were ruddy, or possibly a dirty gray; he had tiny eyes, wondrously round like a bird’s, and string-like lips set over sunken cheeks. This creature was most likely toothless. Actually, he did have at least one tooth: I glimpsed it as he responded to our greeting. The man had no sack, nor boots, nor even bark sandals.

“Have you set out to Mykyta the Pole-Sitter, Brother?” Sozont asked, for that was his fate, to interrogate everybody about everything.

“Is that the only destination there is?” the apparition retorted, showing a single, dandelion-yellow tooth.

“If you are a monk, then from which monastery?”

“The one from which Mykyta embarked on his wanderings,” the man said.

This immediately piqued Sozont’s curiosity: I noticed how piercingly his eyes blazed. “Why are you soaking your feet in a puddle?” Sozont asked.

“So that leeches attach to my skin. They’re good here.”

“But what for?” I was surprised.

“To suck the bad blood out of me.” His little round eyes gazed at us, darting from one to the other—he appeared either blessed or mad.

“And after they suck it out, then what?”

“Then I will become kinder and lighter, able to tread better.”

“And are you walking barefoot?”

“God created feet for man—boots are man’s creation. Human inventions are trivial!”

“So why not tread naked?” Pavlo asked.

The man examined his raiments; patches of bare skin were visible. “God willed man to be robed,” he asserted, his voice cracking, “after the fall of Adam and Eve. Garments cover what is sinful on our body. Shoes do not hide anything sinful—they are, therefore, not essential.”

“And winters you go barefoot, too?”

“Barefoot,” the man replied, emotionless.

“What is your name?” Sozont asked.

“Kuzma—and as for a surname, I have none,” the man replied.

“Have you ever considered,” Sozont ventured a smile, curling his lip, “that God created Adam as a lustful being, and Eve with an erotic anatomy, because He knew that they would sin? Thus, He devised them for sinning or, more precisely, not for sinning, but for future propagation.”

“Pharisee! Scribe!” Kuzma shouted in a shrill voice, pointing a withered, mummy-like finger at Sozont. “God created them in their bodies not for sin, but as probation. Since they failed the test, they were willed to wrap themselves in garments—there!”

“I see you are a wise man,” remarked Sozont, sitting in the grass, holding his staff in front of him. “Let us reflect. If God wished merely to test, He would have equipped Adam with a simple little trout and Eve with a tube, and no more. But to Adam’s little trout He added a semen-producing sac, and provided Eve with a place to carry a fetus. So that He foresaw their sin, if sin it is, and, therefore, He willed their fall from grace...”

Kuzma’s small eyes grew large while retaining their roundness—they simply widened to twice their size. His lower lip hung open, the lone tooth revealing itself, like a yellow blossom, from under his upper lip. Crossing himself with exaggerated breadth, he uttered: “Die, perish, Satan! Lead not my spirit, my reasoning astray, as they are infirm.”

“I am no Satan! I am a Christian, as are you,” declared Sozont, with his peculiar half-smile. “Behold!” And he proceeded to cross himself as Kuzma had a moment before.

“What do you want from me?” Kuzma exclaimed.

“I am testing your wisdom. ‘Understanding seeks knowledge,’ it is said in Proverbs.”

“One does not need reason to find wisdom,” Kuzma proclaimed categorically.

“But with wisdom everything must be tested; so it is stated in Ecclesiastes.”

“Stop pursuing me, stop!” Kuzma cried. “Why have you affixed yourself to me?”

“Do you not want leeches to attach themselves to your skin to drain your bad blood? I am that leech, sucking out your foolishness.”

Kuzma's round eyes again expanded to twice their size, his lower lip hung open once again, his single tooth standing erect. "So you wish to make fun of me?" he asked, his voice quavering. "If so, you are Satan twice over. Die! Perish!"

We spied a swarm of leeches fastened to his legs as he jumped out of the green pool. They were globular and black and obviously engorged with blood. He ran off toward the trees, where he stopped and eyed us.

"You are sinning, Brother Sozont, poking fun at an impoverished mind," Pavlo said remorsefully. "It is not him you are testing, but rather yourself."

The smile faded from Sozont's face. "You are right, Brother, though I doubted that his mind was impoverished," he replied. "Forgive me, if you can!"

"May God forgive you. Let us be on our way, and let us leave this blessed man."

Sozont rose with difficulty and we proceeded on our way. Glancing behind me, I noticed Kuzma following us at a distance. And suddenly I was filled with horror: though I saw no leeches on his bare calves, they were red with blood.

"Kuzma is following us," I whispered.

"Do not frighten him," Sozont replied calmly. "If he so wishes, let him. I must ask him about the monastery Mykyta the Pole-Sitter comes from."

It was already evening when that encounter took place. All around, everything was deserted. We intended to reach a nearby village, hoping to spend the night there, so we walked until the shadows had grown quite dense, with Kuzma trailing at a safe distance. Eventually we decided to stop on the outskirts of a forest, or rather, in a glen hidden from the road by a cluster of trees. And as we kindled a fire, placing over it a small kettle to cook porridge, Kuzma, who had been hanging around out of sight behind the trees, finally drifted toward us. Without a word he sat down cozily by the fire.

"Forgive me, Brother, if I have offended you," Sozont said gently.

"I want to ask you," Kuzma said in a high-pitched voice, "if God created man with carnality, such as you mentioned, then that means He knew that man would sin and it was He who sent the serpent to tempt Eve?"

"Everything in the world happens only with the will of God," Sozont answered evenly and as if reluctantly.

"So He wished to cast man out of paradise?" Kuzma inquired sharply.

"Not to cast man out, but to give him free will," Sozont replied calmly. "As does every father who, separating his children from himself, gives them the chance or even aids them in building a home for themselves."

"So what, then, is original sin? Is it not the curse of mankind?"

"Not a curse, but a father's principal lesson, Kuzma. 'He gave man

eyes so that he could see the great works of the Lord,' as is stated in Deuteronomy. Thus, He cast man out of paradise, but gave him commandments to strengthen him, to allow him to possess and rule the land he was entering, to inhabit and populate it for years to come. To sow, as Adam did in Eve, his seed and the fruits of the earth, and with the sweat of his labor to water his garden, which is replenished with heavenly rain. To create a place cared for by the Lord, as the eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if man harkens diligently to the commandments of the Lord, He will provide his land rain in due season, the first rain and the latter rain, so that man may gather in his grain and grapes for wine. But people must be vigilant, that their hearts be not deceived or they turn aside out of the way which God commands—that is why God conferred original sin upon man. Man must know: once the wrath of God is kindled against you, He will shut up the heavens, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit. Lay up these words in your hearts and minds, and teach your children that they meditate on them, so that the days of man, and the days of his children may multiply as the days of heaven upon the earth. For this God gave man His blessing and His curse: blessing if man obeys the commandments of the Lord God, and curse if man obeys not His commandments and turns aside from the righteous path.<sup>1</sup>

This was the first sermon delivered by Deacon Sozont that I attended—later there would be more. I admit that I was impressed with it, as was Pavlo, and Kuzma even more. His little round eyes flickered like two flames, and he drank the spoken words more than he listened to them. The air whistled as he inhaled through his single-toothed mouth. Suddenly he dropped down at Sozont's feet, kissing them. "Forgive me, Brother," he exclaimed in a shrill voice, "that I called you Satan. You really are a leech, sucking out my foolishness. Nay, you are no Satan!"

"Amen!" Sozont said, and a scant, barely noticeable smile appeared on his face, illuminated by bursts of flame.

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<sup>1</sup> Sozont based this sermon on Deuteronomy 11:7–28

## CHAPTER EIGHT,

which recounts a miracle purportedly witnessed by Pavlo with his own eyes in the Carpathian Mountains

This happened, narrated Pavlo as we sat around a fire in the glen, when I arrived at the Eremite Monastery, known also as the Maniava Monastery, where I was admitted as a lay novice. And so, as I entered the orchard tended lovingly by the holy fathers, I spied birds alighting on boughs laden with fruit. Breaking them off, they bore them away. And I asked a holy father-gardener: “Why do you not chase the birds away, as they cause damage?”

“The orchard is good,” he replied, “bountiful—for us and for God’s creatures. The Book of Genesis states: ‘And out of the ground the Lord God formed every fowl in the air,’ and the book of Leviticus states, ‘Do not transgress the spirits of birds.’”

Then I asked the gardener-priest: “Why is it that, instead of consuming the fruit, the birds snap off branches heavy with fruit and carry them off somewhere?”

“They have been doing that for ten years now.”

“Could it be, perchance, that somewhere in the mountains there are holy men, and they carry this fruit to them?” I inquired.

“If so, then such is the will of God,” the gardener-priest replied. “No need for us to intrude. If it is thus, so be it.”

I was young at the time, as yet unable to restrain my curiosity. And so once, being free of chores, I sat in the orchard. I witnessed a raven breaking off fruit and flying away. I decided to trail him. That was easy to do, for the raven’s load was awkward for him to carry, and he had to fly from tree to tree, alighting on each to rest. Quietly, persistently, not taking my eyes off him, I followed. I arrived at a wide ravine. There were no trails. The raven flew down with his apple and I thought that I would not see him again. I sat at the edge of the chasm to relax a bit and to admire the magnificent gorges. Before long the raven flew out of the gully without the fruit. I idly picked up a stone and tossed it into the ravine. It rolled down clamorously, landing somewhere in the chasm. I shuddered when I heard a woman’s voice echo out of the depths:

“If you are a Christian, do not slay us.”

“Who are you?” I shouted into the abyss.

“If you wish to behold any of us, disrobe, as there are three of us here and we are all naked.”

I took my cassock off. I wrapped it around a stone and hurled it down. The woman’s voice instructed: “Walk along the gully to the right. There you will find a path along which you will be able to descend.” Treading along the edge of the ravine, I soon spied a barely visible, narrow path. It led into a crevice. Grasping boulders, I descended. The passage was quite

narrow, so much so that I nearly tumbled several times. Reaching the base, I noticed a fissure which created a hollow, and in the entry stood a shape wrapped in my cassock, cloaked in such a way that the face was hidden. When I approached closer, the woman—that it was a woman I surmised from the voice I harkened earlier—bowed to me and requested that I stop some distance away, since she had hidden her impure body but her sisters had not: they were stark naked. Perched on a rock not too far away so that I would be able to hear her well, I asked:

“Where did you come from? How long have you been here?”

“We have been here ten years, and where we hail from—that is a long story. If you wish, I can tell you, but do not step any closer.”

I inquired why she did not wish to come near, to avoid the need of raising her voice, to which she replied that she was not assured that I was not harboring any cunning schemes. Invoking the Lord, I swore that I had no evil, scheming thoughts, and in fact I had not, but suddenly, without warning, my ailment gripped me. I sank to the ground. Convulsions wracked my body. I lost consciousness, and know not what transpired. When I awoke and regained my senses (I am told I sleep after a seizure), I saw that I lay inside their cave, covered with my cassock. Three nude women were tending me: one, older, with sagging, withered breasts was bending over me, offering me a drink, while two younger women stood nearby, observing me with curiosity.

“Where am I?” I asked, quite overwhelmed by this strange sight.

Shocked, the younger women shrieked. They cowered, bending themselves into mounds, concealing their nudity by pressing their knees into their chins while embracing their legs with their arms. The older woman cautiously regarded me.

“The Lord has punished you,” she stated. “You did harbor evil, cunning thoughts about us. So He smote you down.”

Only now I realized that my legs were girded with something rough, as were my hands. “I had no evil, cunning thoughts towards you,” I said, “but I am afflicted with the convulsions. Untie me! Do not be afraid: I wish to aid you, not to commit evil. Besides, I am completely exhausted.”

Removing my cassock from me, the older matron handed it to the most beautiful of the women, who wrapped herself in it. I recognized her as the one with whom I conversed. The other woman rose, no longer hiding her flesh. They both proceeded to untie me—I had been bound with winding roots. Leaning me against the stone wall, they helped me to sit. The women were no longer ashamed. The one cloaked in my cassock sat, cross-legged, hiding her face no more.

“We want to believe that you were sent to us by the Lord. Last night, all three of us dreamed the same dream: as I was fetching water from the stream, a gigantic raven on human legs approached me and said: ‘Look into the jug—that is our only possession, the jug—is the water therein clear?’

“I peered in and saw that the water was murky. ‘It is murky,’ I announced.

“‘That means,’ the raven said in a human voice, standing on human legs, ‘that your time has arrived. Expect a guest.’

“My sister-servants dreamed the same dream: the raven and the jug and the muddy water. And so when morning came, as we recounted our dreams one to the other, you appeared. Garbed in your cassock you strongly resemble that raven, and nude, you resemble my late husband. And from that I conclude: it is you who had to come. But when, all of a sudden, you turned blue, and fell, convulsing, we reasoned that you were a substitute. That is, that you were not he whom we were expecting, and that you harbored wicked, devious plans concerning us. That is why we tied you up. I must tell you, one such with wicked, crafty thoughts did assail us.”

“And what became of him?”

“Are you a priest that we can confess everything to you?” she inquired.

“No. Merely a novice,” I responded.

“Then we will divulge our sin to a priest, whom you are to bring here.”

For a moment she was lost in thought, as if considering something. Meantime, the older sister-servant approached with a tankard and gave me drink. The jug was charred—apparently the women used it for cooking as well as for storing water. And whether the water was extraordinary, or my seizures had not yet run their course, or perchance I fell into slumber again, as often happens: I beheld a gigantic, human-like raven enter the cave. His plumage gleamed like armor, and a small hand, overgrown in feathers and clutching a flaming sword in its plumed fist, revealed itself from under a wing. Lapping tongues of flames now and then rippled off the blade to the ground, blazing uninterruptedly in a blue, completely smokeless fire.

“Will you, saintly matrons, command me to decapitate him?” the raven inquired in a rasping tone. “It seems to me he is no different than the ruffian I punished.”

“And if he is a messenger rather than a ruffian?” the older woman asked.

“Then seduce him. If his member engorges, he is an evildoer—if it remains flaccid, he is a messenger.”

“Fine,” declared the matron dressed in my cassock. And in the next moment, she disrobed. Her sister-servants rushed towards me, one pulling off my shirt, the other my breeches. There I was, as naked as the women. Rejuvenating before my eyes, they instantly became tender, lovely—I had not seen such comely maidens in my time. And then they danced before me, swaying their lustrous bodies voluptuously, shaking their sumptuous, pendulous breasts, thrusting their loins toward me with quivering, distended labia beckoning. The raven, meanwhile, stood at the entry to the cave. His iron plumage flickered in variegated tones. Holding the fiery, torch-like

sword before him, with head held high, he pointed his beak upward and seemed to cluck, or snicker, or croak, in some kind of harmony, as if providing accompaniment to that libertine dance. And leaning against the wall, with legs spread open, I sat: cramped, cold, as if gelid. Not a muscle twitched. Nor was I shaking, as usually happened when I was gripped by my debility. Blood ceased to circulate in my veins. I breathed not. I could not lift a finger. My member did not rise. I was completely dead before their beautiful, graceful, and alluring bodies. Only my eyes served me, though even they seemed to have frozen into icy balls, for though my eyes could see everything, no import passed from my eyes to my body, nor to my head. I was not, after all, beholding naked women, but rather flaming tongues in female shapes. The stone walls of the cave glowed. The raven and his sword glistened, his body enveloped in plume-like flames. And all this afflicted me with tribulation: who am I in the world? Who are these matrons? Who is this raven with the blazing sword? What is the meaning of all this, why is it occurring? Who is testing me, and to what end? Why did I succumb to that insatiable curiosity? I do not know, after all: was this a demon dallying with me, were these his tricks, his antics? Why was I so infirm before him? Why did prayers not aid me? Would I remain among the living after this challenge?

And then I spied the Eye. The raven vanished from the entry to the cave. In its place an enormous, kettle-like Eye materialized; a ball, with an iris and a pupil, incrusting in white ice. I sensed the Eye watching only me, searching my soul. Under its scrutiny, I grew smaller and smaller; I was reduced to a dwarf, the height of a forearm, then smaller still. Whereupon one of the women, the one robed in my cassock (the mistress of the other two), placed me onto the palm of her hand, her palm becoming like a stage for me. And there I danced, kicking my tiny legs in leaps and squats, prancing and cavorting, sweat rolling down my miniature face, flooding my eyes. Merrily I danced as anguish consumed me.

“He passed his challenge,” the woman proclaimed. “Dress him!” Whereupon the servants approached me, one pulling on my shirt, the other my breeches. As she pulled them on, she tugged at my limp stick, laughing scornfully. They then grasped me by the arms and hauled me to the stone wall, leaning me against it. I opened my eyes and beheld the one wrapped in my cassock sitting before me, legs folded beneath her in the Turkish style. Flanking her on both sides, behind her, sat her motionless servants, likewise in the Turkish style. Her expression became melancholy as she gazed somewhere above my head. She spoke in a strained voice:

“Now I can tell you everything, for I am convinced: you have not been sent here by the devil. I, young fellow, hail from near Lutsk. We lived rather well, my husband and I, though we had our share of misery: a familial feud with our neighbor, who filed a claim against us for governance over our village. As he was unable to attain anything legally, he resorted to

intimidation, threatening to evict us from our homestead. An unfortunate accident befell my husband: he was bitten by a viper in the woods and he died, suffering horribly. I was twenty at the time. His death affected me profoundly. Days and nights I wept—firstly, for my uncompensated loss, and secondly, because I remained childless.”

She wiped her eyes, leaning slightly. Her two servants tottered momentarily, yet their visages seemed as if chiseled in stone.

“Then our neighbor dispatched servants to our homestead. They surrounded our farmyard. A message was relayed: ‘We must either set your roost on fire, or deliver you to our master, as he fancies you.’”

“Leave me to mourn,” I replied. “And when my grief passes, I shall await his match-maker.”

The messenger burst out laughing, showing large teeth. “My master desires you as his concubine. With no conditions or promises.”

In my thoughts I prayed to our Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from the violent assailant, desirous of cleaving my body and spirit. I was well aware that that odious aggressor would keep his word: should I fail to appear, he would send my late husband’s village up in smoke; should my servants intervene, he would kill them. That would forever hang like a stone around my neck. Becoming a concubine was unthinkable to me, as there is no greater shame for an honorable woman than being a kept woman in the home of an enemy of her clan, although I was actually an outsider who had only married into this family. But my husband loved me, was kind to me, and I found happiness with him. In the other world he would not have endured it, if I would have shared my body with his attacker. He would have punished me weightily...

Looking down, she grew silent once again; the servants, meanwhile, moved not a muscle.

“So how did you escape your distress?” I asked.

“I said to the messenger: ‘Order everyone out of the room, and to you I shall divulge my secret.’”

“And when his and my servants stepped out, I proclaimed: ‘Your master has been on my mind. I would will that after my mourning he should dispatch his matchmakers to me. But if he does not agree, I will gladly join your master, as I am smitten with his good looks and courage. Presently I am burdened with female problems, that is to say, I am impure, menstruating incessantly. Let him wait five days, while I cleanse. Thereafter, I will gladly join your master. I will be loving and obedient to him. If he wishes to consolidate our properties, let him suffer to wait, while I grieve. Afterwards, I shall agree to marry.’”

“Again the messenger laughed, flashing his large teeth. Then he said: ‘I believe my master will wait a week. But do not even consider fooling him, for when he is duped he becomes enraged.’”

“I am well acquainted with your master’s mettle,” I replied firmly.

“Go and report what you were told.”

“He departed, leaving me in peace for a week. And here is what I did: I dismissed all my servants, paying them well with a goodly portion of the money left with the property, retaining only the two you see here with me, as they did not wish to leave me. The rest of the assets I distributed among the villagers under my governance, and among beggars. I summoned my relative and called dreadful curses upon him, compelling him to sell my property and to give all the profits to a monastery for the erection of a sanctuary, for which I had drawn up a will and testament, registering it in the municipal records in Lutsk. I executed all this secretly, so as not to alarm my foe and not cause him any panic, lest he rape me. Again I questioned these two servants whether they wish to go with me wherever the Lord leads me and again they agreed of their good will not to forsake me. We stole away at night just in time: our furious foe suspected something and dispatched a group of his servants to capture me that same night. They very nearly caught us—we were just barely able to hide in a roadside ditch. So that the servants found my home and property sealed by the king’s page, in the name of His Highness. Meanwhile we headed for the Carpathian Mountains, and God brought us to this desolate place, where we have abided for ten years until we dreamed that dream we described and fate brought you to us. Over the years, our raiments faded and fell apart. Thus we live as God delivered us.”

“And what did you eat?” I asked.

“Summers, God provides us with whatever we can forage. Some things we gather, other things birds bring us. Some items we consume fresh, others we dry. We collect honey out of tree hollows. We eat no venison, as we have no implements to hunt with, so we have given up meat.”

“And in those ten years, no one has visited you here?”

“We already told you: we had one visitor, who was evil. The Lord has punished him.”

“The Lord has, or you have?”

“The Lord. But we carry the sin. We shall confess not to you, but to a priest.”

“Why did you not withdraw to the monastery, to which you had wanted to will your property. You would have been accorded honor and respect there.”

“The Lord brought us here,” the matron replied curtly.

“How did you survive the cold and frost, naked?” I asked.

“The Lord covers our nakedness and warms us with His blessedness. We do not dread the cold in winter, nor the heat in summer. We live like the inhabitants of paradise, glorifying the Holy Trinity. In paradise there are no garments.”

“And you have never wished to leave this place?”

“Being naked, we have had no possibility of doing that. How could we

appear in public, bare? And, to tell you the truth, we did not wish to.”

Then I said: “If you would allow me, and if you wish, saintly matrons, I will report about you at the monastery. I can bring clothes, whatever you request. Then you will be free to leave. If you do not wish that, I will ask the abbot for permission to supply you with whatever you may need. And you, being in such proximity to the Lord, and having spent so much time in His grace, pray for me! Pray that my infirmity forsakes me.”

“We see that you have a kind soul, young fellow,” the woman said. “So if you desire to do good and receive our prayers, come back with a priest who can serve Holy Mass with the Holy Eucharist in Communion. We have not received the sacrament since we have been here. Food we do not need. We have grown accustomed to what we have. Clothes you can bring, so as not to embarrass the priest.”

I left astonished and in shock. When I recounted all that I witnessed and what transpired (excluding the manner in which I was tested, how the women tempted me with seduction; for that was a dream, it had not really occurred) to the abbot, he did not believe me. I swore on the Gospel that I was avowing the truth. He willed me not to impart any of this to anyone, and since he himself was a priest, collected everything he needed to execute the requests. We included some clothes and food. Making it known that we were setting off to take care of some of the abbot’s affairs, we headed deep into the mountains. I feared only one thing: that after my departure the women might flee to another desolate location, and then my swearing on the Gospel would be blasphemy. But I consoled myself with the thought that I would at least show the abbot the cave; signs of their having been there would remain.

When we reached the abyss, I called out into the depths, and the women immediately responded. The matron willed us to throw down the clothes we had brought, and then to descend to them. We found them dressed. The abbot served Divine Liturgy with Holy Communion, first for the mistress, and afterwards for her servants. Then we set the food out. They ate reluctantly—probably they really were unaccustomed to ordinary food. On the whole, they seemed immeasurably sad. The abbot inquired about their lives, and they recounted what I already knew. Then each confessed individually in the cave. What they divulged to the abbot, I did not learn. After confession, the matron said: “I ask one thing of you, Father: abide here three days.” The abbot promised he would. She then expressed a wish to retire to the stream which flowed nearby, to bathe and to pray for my sickness. Her servants, actually her sisters, chatted with us, inquiring about worldly affairs. Meanwhile, the matron did not return. Her sisters rushed to the stream. Hearing their doleful lament, we ran to the stream and saw the woman lying naked in the water, her head on the bank. The clothes we had brought for her lay, neatly folded, near her head. She had not drowned in the stream. Having washed, she departed this world peacefully, still immersed

in the purifying water. The abbot and I joined in the weeping. Her sisters dressed her in the garments we had brought. Sorrowfully, we chanted dirges—a veritable canon for the departure of a soul. The abbot intoned:

According to Your Divine will, Lord  
 Death was established.  
 Have Mercy on the soul of Your servant  
 Which has separated from its body  
 We beseech You, Savior.  
 And disregard all her transgressions,  
 And through Your redemptive suffering  
 As One who is good, receive her  
 Among the righteous.

And I, along with the sister-servants of the deceased, sang “Glory”:

In fear and trembling,  
 The humble soul separates from its body.  
 Recalling its deeds  
 And anticipating Your benevolence,  
 Through us it appeals to You, weeping:  
 Have mercy, Oh, benevolent Savior  
 Through Your redemptive suffering  
 Receive me, as One who is good, in eternal life.

Thereafter, all together we sang “And This Day”:

She, who gave birth to the Creator of life,  
 Oh, Mary, Mother of God,  
 To the soul that separated from its body  
 At this dreadful time today arise,  
 Repel the legions of shadowy demons,  
 Heartfully implore Thy Son and God  
 That He, as One who is good, absolve her of sin  
 And accept her in His domain.<sup>1</sup>

And our cries reverberated strangely in those dark and frightful caverns, echoes beating like the wings of a bird, shattering our voices. Tears streamed down the faces of not only the women, who wept unreservedly for their soul-mate and mistress, but down our faces, as well. A grave and woeful terror smote us...

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<sup>1</sup> Note in the margin of the manuscript: “This song, and the next, Pavlo rendered rather heartily and sorrowfully in several tones.”

Only now did I learn that the deceased's name was Anastasia Zahorovska. She was of good stock, from the same Zahorovsky lineage that married into the family of your patron, Kateryna Chartoryska, at whose cost and benevolence you, Mykhailo, as you yourself recounted, designed the Peresopnytska Gospel. Her servants and soul-sisters were Hanna and Olena.

We buried her that same day, according to Christian tradition. I had to dig the grave using rocks and my staff. We passed the time until nightfall in prayer and silence. And, effecting the will of the deceased, we did not depart, but stayed the night, the women sheltered in the cave, while the abbot and I lay outdoors. The abbot, spent from the road and all that had transpired, fell into slumber quickly, while I gazed at the stars in the sky. Never again in my life did I behold such large sprawling stars, each of which seemed like a living Eye. A raven on human legs appeared. He sat next to me, sighed sorrowfully, and covered my face with a black wing.

At morningtide, after breakfast and a commemorative observance for Anastasia Zahorovska, Hanna, the older of her soul sisters, related that throughout these ten years she had not heard a single complaint or regret from Anastasia for the life she had renounced. Moreover, at a time when they still had raiment of some sort, she told them to leave, and was prepared to suffer loneliness. But they did not comply. Instead, fashioning a single frayed though passable dress out of three worn-out garments, they decided to send Olena away. Finally, Olena was persuaded to leave, and so she left. Along the way, she was attacked and raped by some rogues. She returned. God was propitious—Olena did not become pregnant. And that was the only instance when their triad of sisterhood was disturbed. Since then departure was never mentioned. They lived heart to heart.

“What will you do now, sisters?” the abbot asked.

Hanna was silent for a time and Olena, as if mute, did not open her lips. At last Hanna said, “We shall uphold the testament of our mistress,” sighing as tears rolled down Olena's cheeks, “and remain here two more days.”

Afterwards she informed us that she wished to pray at Anastasia's grave alone, and willed Olena to cook a meal for the guests. I gathered kindling and started a fire, all the while adding tinder. Olena cooked porridge in their only pot. The abbot, meanwhile, withdrew to pray for them and the deceased. When it was time to eat, Olena went to the grave to call Hanna. And again we heard a piercing shriek. Rushing over, we beheld Hanna slumped over and strangely contorted near the grave. Olena stood next to her, wringing her hands, and we knew that the Lord had summoned the second of the saintly women. And again I dug a pit in the rocky soil. Using my stave, I dug out the stones and scooped the soil. Sweat rolled down my face, and a kind of quiet horror flooded my soul: I was experiencing something unique and still incomprehensible. Whimpering soundlessly, Olena washed her soul sister's body. Once again we sang dirge-hiermos:

The abbot set the tone:

The ghost of mortal, temporal life  
 A picture of this useless world—  
 Let us behold our sister, at this time deceased,  
 Let us bow, let us weep onto the Lord:  
 Have mercy, pity upon this soul, O Lord,  
 That departed from its body, grant her blessed peace.

Sister Olena and I joined in:

Ghosts of slumber, haze and smoke,  
 Grasses and blooms, that on this earth grow—  
 Thus we see our lives.  
 The sorrows of life we forsake,  
 Into celestial abode let us ascend.  
 Let us repent, let us wail unto the Lord:  
 Have mercy, pity upon this soul, O Lord,  
 That departed from its body, grant her blessed peace.

And then all together we chanted:

Behold, all ye gathered here,  
 How uselessly man bustles,  
 The temporary sorrow of life we forsake,  
 Let us lift up our thoughts into the heavens,  
 Let us repent, let us weep unto the Lord,  
 Have mercy, pity upon this soul, O Lord,  
 That departed from its body, grant her blessed peace.

Then Olena said to the abbot: “Tomorrow, Father, shall be my turn. Judge us not. Pray for us. And I shall pray for you—most of all, for Pavlo to be rid of that dreadful ailment.”

And thus it came to pass. On the morrow, Olena passed on, exactly as Anastasia had, that is to say, while bathing in the stream. We buried her as well. With sorrow in our hearts, we prayed over their tri-mounded grave and departed from this abyss.

And I remained malady-free for an entire year, until it smote me again, even though I oftentimes thought of the holy women, imploring them to pray for me before the majesty of God.

Pavlo narrated at length while we listened, enchanted. As he ended, Deacon Sozont stirred on his bedding—we had lain down to sleep under an oak tree—and said: “It seems to me, Brother Pavlo, that your sins caused

the recurrence of your affliction. Just as when you were recounting my story you invented a Deacon Sozont from Lviv, likewise here you altered and embellished the tale, and it was Pavlo's tale, but another Pavlo—Paul, the bishop of Monembasia. I do not know if the story of Paul the bishop is true—perchance it is, as it contains nothing implausible. But your account, Pavlo, is false—you adapted it to your own life, and your life included no such incidents.”

“I related a true story, Father!” Pavlo exclaimed passionately, tears in his eyes. “And I do not know any Pavlo of Monembasia! Abbot Manasia witnessed everything, and everyone at Maniava Monastery knows the story.”

“Is your Reverend Abbot Manasia living?” Sozont inquired, wearily.

“Unfortunately, he has died.”

“You are, therefore, unable to substantiate the veracity of your story. It is not possible for the account of your own experiences to correspond so closely to a well-known story from a book.”

Pavlo laughed curtly. “And your story, Brother Sozont, is it not about Mykyta Chartulari of Constantinople?”

Sozont was silent for a long while. “Forgive me my sin, Brother! You have found a good way to lead me onto the way of truth! Thank you for a sound lesson.”

“But we have committed no evil, Brother, by teaching one another through parables—even Jesus did that.”

“True! But the thing is, in lands ruled by the Roman church storytelling is not considered sinful, but honorable, instead. Recall Giovanni Boccaccio's novels *Filocolo*, *Fiammetta*, or *Decameron*. They have tens, perhaps hundreds, of such books, the writers of which are well respected. In the Greek church, it is the opposite—those who amuse themselves with storytelling are judged, and reproved as sinners.”

“Is play sinful, Brother?” asked Pavlo. “Sin is devised evil. But what evil is there in our God-inspired amusement?”

“You are both deceivers, and that is sinful,” Kuzma remarked hoarsely. “And I think Satan does abide in you—pew, pew, and again pew! If he were not in you, Pavlo, you would not be telling such ribald tales. I don't know what you talk about among yourselves—I am too simple for that—but your thoughts are impure. A fine diversion you found, may the Lord forgive us. Naked wenches! Phew!”

“Pavlo described naked wenches, as you call them, but they were in fact saintly women and this story is included in the chronicles of the lives of the saints. And what do you see in my thoughts that is indecent, Brother Kuzma?”

“That you know everything so well! That you play with your mind—that you exalt in your intellect,” Kuzma said bitingly. “Man's reason is perhaps his greatest sin.”

“So too is man’s foolishness, Brother Kuzma,” Sozont stated. “Just as much!”

I was struck by something else in the story: Brother Pavlo had mentioned the Eye of the Abyss in his narration—he said it had appeared to him. I do not know whether he got it from Pavlo of Monembasia’s narrative. I have not read it, nor am I a bibliophile, as were these two, but that is less important. I was struck by the fact that the Eye of the Abyss appears not only to me, but to others, at other times. I am, therefore, neither the least nor the greatest in my troubles. Nothing unusual in that, after all!

CHAPTER NINE,  
which describes the continuation of the journey

Overnight the rain caught us, though we slept under an oak tree. Our mantles did not save us, though we covered ourselves with them. Kuzma in his tattered frock was thoroughly soaked.

Yesterday Sozont tried to get him to tell more of what he knows about Mykyta the Pole-Sitter, but Kuzma behaved like a fickle and capricious lass who makes secrets of the simplest things. So that when Sozont first tried to question him, Kuzma shut his eyes—actually, half-closed them, like a chicken, lowering his upper eyelid—and replied: “Curiosity killed the cat,” and his drawn, string-like lips pursed even tighter.

And when Sozont attempted to do the same today (as I have said, his mission was after all to investigate), that is to say, when he directed the conversation to the subject of Mykyta the Pole-Sitter, Kuzma took such figurative twists in his replies that in spite of myself I thought: he is not as simple as he pretends.

“Sozont, are you Satan, that you are constantly testing me? You know what I do not know, and what I know, perhaps you don’t need to know. And when I do know something, let it be mine—a man must own something! If I know nothing, of what use is this chatter?”

“But what can you possibly know about Mykyta that is so special, to keep it a secret?” Sozont asked, unable to restrain himself.

Kuzma regarded him almost cheerily while mysteriously keeping silent.

“Oh well,” Sozont sighed, “I respect your pledge of silence.”

“Thank you, Brother,” Kuzma responded politely, but not without a spark in his round eyes, “that you respect my attitude and will pester me no more. Otherwise, I would have had to part from you.”

His tone implied that if we were to lose his friendship we would forfeit Lord knows what. Sozont, therefore, troubled him no more, and as fickle and capricious lasses (such as Kuzma feigned to be) do not like being ignored, he began to tease Sozont, provoking him to inquire further. But, for some reason, Sozont did not wish to play games, possibly because as a former lawyer he was well acquainted with human nature. He was, therefore, aware that his persistent curiosity would accomplish nothing, that Kuzma’s string-like lips would close even tighter around his single tooth, as if it were golden, while in the face of plain indifference his lips would part with no prompting. And thus it came to pass. After a nourishing pause for bread and water (the kindling was damp, not conducive for starting a cooking fire), we set off, walking a considerable distance. The morning sky cleared, and glowed in vestal blue, the dappled verdure aglitter with raindrops. Inadvertently, I harkened back on how while scribing the Peresopnytska Gospel, I would venture outdoors on such mornings, hoping

to capture the play of light and shadow amid the blending of shades, which in Mother Nature can be so startling and dramatic, though never jarring. Perchance this majestic, sumptuous morning had its effect on Kuzma and flushed the querulousness out of him: without any prompting, he volunteered all he knew about Mykyta, since he himself was from the same monastery where Mykyta arrived after leaving the Cave Monastery beggar. But as a bit of quirkiness and peevishness remained in him, Kuzma refused to divulge the name of the monastery where this transpired, or even who the abbot was, though he related enough for Sozont to be able instantly to surmise the monastery's name. So it was that Mykyta had joined one of the large monasteries of Volyn. Falling at the monastery gate, he lay there with no food or drink.

"And he lay there for seven days?" Sozont asked.

"How do you know?" Kuzma shuddered.

"I know the magic of numbers: three, seven, twelve, twenty-one," Sozont replied. "Three days is a few, twelve is many; besides which, seven days make a week, a holy number, determined by the Lord during creation."

"Well, as you know everything, there is nothing for me to say," said Kuzma, balking once again. "This is the second day that I am observing all of you. And do you know who you are?" he paused, then added jauntily: "Scribes and pharisees! And the Lord instructed against scribes and pharisees."

For a time he held himself proudly as we walked, his string-like lips tightly sealed. And when the mire descended to the bottom of his agitated little well, filtering the water after Sozont's inappropriate utterance, Kuzma once again sallied forth, as if nothing happened. So on the eighth day the abbot had emerged, inquiring of Mykyta where he hailed from, where he was headed, and what his name was. Had he not committed any evil? Was he not absconding from his masters?

Dropping at the abbot's feet, with tears in his eyes, Mykyta had proclaimed: "I have committed no evil, Father. I am seeking a place where I may labor for the Lord. Lead me to your monastery and will me to serve all."

The abbot had then taken him by the arm and ushered him into the monastery.

"I witnessed that with my own eyes," Kuzma said haughtily, his round eyes glowing triumphantly.

"Was not that abbot sharp-tongued?" Sozont asked nonchalantly.

"No! He was sweet-tongued, like Chrysostom," Kuzma replied proudly.

"Then he had a scar across his forehead from a Tartar saber."

"But how do you know that!" said Kuzma, jumping into the air.

"I guess this occurred at the Zhydachivsky Monastery," Sozont stated flatly and calmly.

Kuzma eyed him with terror, his round eyes gone mad. “You are beginning to scare me,” he said—or rather, shouted. “What kind of a man are you?”

“Sinful, as is every person,” Sozont replied simply.

“But why are you so curious about saints?”

“I want to write a book about them, *Cheti-Minei*,” Sozont said. “That is to say, a book of fable-like stories that will not be frowned upon by the Eastern church.”

“You consider the lives of saints fables? Is this what makes you sinful?” asked Kuzma, lowering his head mischievously.

“I want them not to be fables,” Sozont said.

“So, are you looking for hypocrisy? It seems to me that you should seek glory among saints, instead of hypocrisy. The Lord shall bless you for that.”

“I wish to write the truth about them,” Sozont stated firmly. “The Lord does not punish for truth, as He does not bless for false glorification. Jesus said: ‘It befits man to fulfill the whole truth,’ and in His sermon on the Mount, He proclaimed: ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.’ One ought to seek not only human truth, but divine truth, to serve Him piously in truth, for he who serves in truth is pleasing to Him. Why are you angry with me, Kuzma?”

“Because you suspect my veracity. And I am relating what I witnessed with my own eyes.”

“So tell me without jumping up and down, Kuzma.” A barely visible smile appeared on Sozont’s face again.

But the puny well of Kuzma’s soul became muddied once more, and he had to wait for the mire to settle to the bottom.

Pavlo and I walked on in silence. I surveyed the enchanting world around me: my eye caught the fanciful angles of lines, the daintiness of leaves, of stalks, the delicate contour of the trampled path alongside the road. I was most amazed by the dry, sapless trees that appeared here and there. They stood like gnarled shapes of droll, imaginary creatures, frozen in supplication to the unfathomable depths of heaven. It felt, moreover, as if the dry trees were not lifeless as long as they were standing, as long as they suggested something to someone, as long as they were worshipping. Tender summer shoots—thick, juicy, bulbous and oddly protuberant—wound around above the roots of some of the tree trunks, awarding them solace for their prayers. Pavlo walked lost in his own introspection, and I became anxious that his seizures might strike today. As if hearing my thought, he glanced at me, smiled, and nodded.

“Is everything all right?” I asked him.

“Everything is fine,” he replied. “I feel a bit chilled.”

“Probably because we were drenched during the night.”

“Mykyta was accepted at the monastery,” Kuzma suddenly started

talking. “He acquiesced to everybody. He served, learned to read and write. He had memorized all the Psalms by ear beforehand. He was seventeen years old. In the solitude of his monastic life, he reached a point where he surpassed us all.”

“He should have been eighteen years old, for that is how Teodoryt wrote about Symeon the Pole-Sitter, whose successor Mykyta was,” Sozont claimed.

“Why do you corroborate everything with books, Brother?” Kuzma again spumed. “I know nothing of Symeon the Pole-Sitter, and I doubt that Mykyta knew of him.”

“That is what I would like to find out,” Sozont said.

“But why, Brother, can there not be similarities beyond bookish stories?” Kuzma disputed hotly. “So-and-so were monks, therefore they both came to live at monasteries. Cloister life is alike everywhere. So-and-so set out on a life of Christian asceticism, which is done from a common base—the teachings of Christ. When people live similar lives, a repetition of events can occur.”

Sozont laughed.

“You are laughing at my foolishness, Brother? Are you not afraid of the sin of arrogance?”

“I am!” Sozont declared. “But I am not laughing at you—I am glad that the Lord willed me to leech out your foolishness. I am glad for the wisdom in your words.”

Suddenly, Kuzma puffed up saucily, like a young lad or a fickle lass. He actually seemed younger, and his string-like lips opened for the first time. He smiled kindly. “So you know it all. But I vow before God: I am not recounting this from a book someone wrote,” he said softly.

“Teodoryt,” Sozont said, smiling.

“All right. I am recounting what I witnessed. We ate once a day, in the evening. The better among us—though I did not belong to that group—every third day. Mykyta did not eat for an entire week.”

“How do you know that?” Sozont asked sharply. “Did you see it yourself?”

“No, I did not, but that is what everybody said.”

“In rumors truth is merely topical,” Sozont muttered. “There are true rumors, and false ones. Did his parents look for him?”

“Two years they searched, but the Lord sheltered him. Then his father died of grief, so they say.”

“Who said?”

“He told me himself. A man came to our monastery from Cherniakhiv asking for Matvii, that is to say, Mykyta, and told me.”

“I know a bit about his life in Cherniakhiv. We walked through that town.”

“And you inquired about him?”

“As much as I could.”

“You really are a dreadful man,” Kuzma said, regarding Sozont with his round little eyes. “A leech.”

“Yes, yes,” agreed Sozont, sighing. “A leech leeching human foolishness.”

“If you know everything, why should I talk?”

“I am not insisting on it. The journey is easier to endure in banter,” Sozont stated amiably.

“It seems to me, on the contrary, that you are constantly insisting, though imperceptibly, with no verbal prodding. And this distresses me—even though I did not want to divulge anything, here I am, wagging my tongue. In his writings, did Teodoryt mention the fact that Symeon bound himself with a cord from a well?”

“Yes,” Sozont replied. “But Symeon used a cord made from the shoots of a fig tree, which are very coarse. In our land we don’t have fig trees.”

“It was a simple cord, used for drawing buckets out of wells,” Kuzma said. “I saw him, fettered, with my own eyes. The gangrenous sores that developed from the chafing of the cord stank atrociously.”

“Were there maggots?”

“Maggots I did not see. But we, his cloister brothers, became indignant. Because a monk is to serve the Lord in purity, sublimation, and good worldly deeds. Bringing useless torment upon oneself is iniquity. Besides, all of this occurred not on the instructions of the abbot, but on his own. That is disobedience. And what good deeds could he perform while dormant like a butterfly in a cocoon? So we approached the abbot and inquired: ‘Wherefrom did you bring this man? Were he a saint, he would not stink; he would have a pleasing odor. It is impossible to even stand next to him. His putrid linens are covered with bloody stains, as he is himself.’”

“The abbot was not aware that Mykyta had bound himself with rope and he did not believe us when we told him. He instructed us to rip his clothes off. His hair shirt was bloody, and as we loosened the cord, pieces of skin fell off. It was very difficult to do. He howled like a wolf as we undressed him: we even thought that he had succumbed to a werewolf’s curse. Everyone was unreasonably terrified. The stench was unbearable, as if from a dog carcass, may God forgive me. Everything transpired as I describe. Eventually he stopped howling, and his whole body began to shake. After recovering a bit, he said: ‘Release me, like a stinking dog! My sins contribute to my being honored with such a label.’”

“To which the abbot said: ‘You are only seventeen years old! What are your sins?’”

“And Mykyta replied: ‘Father, it is written: “I was born in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me...”’”

“Is this how Teodoryt describes Symeon the Pole-Sitter?” Kuzma asked.

“Yes, exactly,” Sozont said.

“In that case, he emulated Symeon,” Kuzma reflected. “I can swear I saw it with my own eyes. What else does Teodoryt write?”

“He writes,” Sozont said evenly, “that the abbot healed his sores, but he continued to inflict torture on his own body and was cast out of the monastery.”

“In our case it was different. He left the monastery on his own immediately after we violated him. Actually, he ran, and since he was feeble, he ran not only on his two legs, but on all fours. That is why we assumed that he had become transformed into a werewolf.”

“So why are you heading to him now, when he has fame as Mykyta?” Sozont asked.

“At the time of this episode, I felt a dread. That dread has not been purged from my soul to this day. And I cannot cease wondering who was guilty of sin: he with his self-torture, or we, for revealing his acts?”

“Do you know what happened to him thereafter?”

“There weren’t even any rumors about him, he simply vanished. Until his renown as a pole-sitter spread.”

“Curiosity is urging you on?”

“Not so much curiosity as fear of sin. I was, after all, among those who exposed him.”

At this time, we were caught in a downpour. Engaged in conversation, we had not noticed the small dark cloud appearing in the middle of a clear sky, from which water poured forth in torrents. We sprang off the road under the trees for shelter—the path ran through a forest at this point, having just crossed a valley. Suddenly, we heard the clatter of hooves. We hid behind the trees. A convoy of captives was being driven along the road in the rain by a Tartar detachment—men lassoed to horses, lads and women; several bound maidens were being transported on horseback. The captives ran more than walked behind the horses. Water streamed down their faces. Yelling, whips lashing, the Tartars were winding up a raid. Thus, the rain saved us! Otherwise, engrossed in conversation, we could have found ourselves in their cords and belts. Then our journey would have ended too soon and in grief—possibly forever. That is why we stood behind the trees, afraid to breathe. The rain rendered us less visible to the Tartars. Besides which they were in a rush and passed without noticing us.

“Where did the Tartars come from?” Pavlo asked. “We weren’t aware of any attacks.”

“Tartars are Tartars! They fall upon one like snow on one’s head,” Sozont said.

Mindful, we tread along the edge of the forest, not returning to the road. Evidently they had attacked Turchynka, the village where we had planned to spend the night before plunging into the thickets of Polissia.

The rain soon abated and we stopped to repose a bit, having entered

the forest deeper to wait out the danger. Apparently only that one detachment had wandered this far in search of captives, and it was now hastily retreating. A journey really is full of unforeseen danger!

Nothing happened to us all the way to Turchynka. Upon reaching the village, however, we saw that our assumption was correct: the village was partly burned. The part of it that still stood was deserted. Some of the villagers were taken captive, others were slain—we saw hacked corpses near houses, mostly old men and women. The survivors were apparently hiding in the forest—it was unlikely they would return to spend the night here. Walking around the village, we spied not a soul. Even dogs and cats were struck down and cows slashed. A few chickens wandered about in yards, having hidden in the brush during the attacks.

We approached the remains of the small, scorched church, and prayed for the souls of the hapless victims. Afterwards we cooked ourselves some porridge in one of the houses, not disturbing any of the utensils left behind. We ate in silence and then settled for the night. Each of us was to take a turn at guard duty in the yard. Our mood was solemn. No one talked before falling asleep. We slept fitfully, but the night passed uneventfully.

In the morning, villagers on horseback began returning from the forest. The few who had managed to save a cow now led the animal tied to the saddle. We aided in the collection of the dead for burial, and Deacon Sozont, though not a priest, intoned burial hymns for the slain. The village priest was among the dead. Hosting us as best they could, in somber receptions, the villagers expressed their gratitude. Thus, we stayed in the village another night. We did not designate a sentry this time—the village was guarded by its inhabitants. Lamenting and weeping resounded throughout the village all day. Cattle bellowed frightfully. A strong, acrid smell filled the air.

Tired and fearful we could not fall asleep. Kuzma volunteered to tell a tale he knew and had experienced about a saint. It transpired at the Zhydachivsky Monastery. Sozont admitted that he had not read anything like it in any books, thus validating its authenticity, though perhaps he said that not to ruffle Kuzma's fiery temperament.

## CHAPTER TEN,

which describes the heavenly adventures of the cook Kalistrat

Kalistrat was a simple man, the son of simple folk. He labored in the monastery kitchen. Meager in talk, he was humble and hardworking and further distinguished himself in that he offered his help to anyone, for which he was exploited like a slave by a few evil-spirited monks, wearying him; yet he performed all their requests without refusal, and this in addition to his usual work. Out of habit, he even thanked those who took advantage of him. He never neglected prayers nor fasting. He walked with a slight stoop, thrusting his beard forward as if he did not want it to rub against the clothing on his neck. He was often the brunt of jokes, the object of insults; at times he was beaten for minor things, and then a bird-like cawing escaped from his throat. But he never defended himself. Meek and kind, he never responded to his assailants with sharp words. In this cruel world it is accepted that the kinder one is, the more misfortunes befall one; the more defenseless, the more one is taunted—as is the case among animals and birds: the weak are killed, the strong flourish. Such was Kalistrat. Though always helpful and servile, he was invariably spurned. He was mocked and slighted. The Gospel axiom “many that are first shall be last, and the last first” was forgotten, as were the words of Christ willing his followers to sit in the lowest place, since “he who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”<sup>1</sup>

Kuzma heard this story from Hieromonk Avtonom, who abided in their cloister with but a single petition to the Lord: that the Lord in some way convey whether heaven and hell really do exist in the other world. It was not so much hell he was curious about as heaven, which is to say that Avtonom wanted to know if his monastic feats, seclusion from the world and from life, his austerity and ascetic existence would really procure for him eternal recompense after death, or would all his exploits go to the wind. Even in his conversations with Kuzma, Avtonom would say: “A single detail sustains the ascetic—the belief that paradise is not the invention of a human being afraid of death. Aside from this, nothing is important. Because if stories about paradise are myths of man, then the rejection of the temporal makes no sense. One ought then to be loving this world and this life, instead of eschewing it, penetrating it rather than abstaining from it, not shunning people, but living among them; rather than contemplating a posthumous paradise, one ought to be envisioning a paradise constructed with sagacity and benevolence in the living world, shutting all the monasteries, expelling all the monks.”

“So you wish to serve people, not God?” Kuzma asked. “And if you do not believe in God’s paradise, is that not a lack of faith in God?”

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<sup>1</sup> Note in the margins of the manuscript: Matthew 19:30 and Luke 15:10–11.

“Only a crooked mind can fail to believe in God,” Avtonom declared. “For the world exists according to someone’s will and according to laws created by someone. Not only man submits to this will, but every insect, plant, every useless weed, each conceiving of a fetus, which causes the continuation of life—each of these occurs through human effort, but not from human will, but by Divine will. For in a developing seed a future plant is stored, with not only its leafy stalk but its new germ. And all this in an incomprehensible variety of fruits and species. Was it not a warped mind that proclaimed that pursuing benevolence and fostering reason and worldly order are not servitude to God? So that when I am tormented with uncertainty,” Avtonom continued, “is it not the devil whispering into our ears to despise the living world, God’s creation, the great feat of greatness, and to love God, renouncing and repudiating the world, culminating in a grace unseen and unknown by the living?”

Hieromonk Avtonom meditated on this so much that a vision came to him one night: he beheld a valley, peculiarly beautiful, decked with forests of fruit trees, fields of assorted edible flora, and flowers of which there were so many that they smothered all available space. And he spied a road traversing that abundant land, and walking along it, leaning on a stave, the cook Kalistrat, scorned by everyone. Avtonom himself seemed to soar above that wondrous land, but on encountering Kalistrat, he descended to him on his wings (he had the form of a bird) and inquired: “Brother Kalistrat, where are we? Is this not paradise?”

“It is paradise, Father. We are in God’s paradise,” Kalistrat said.

“I flew here in a dream,” the hieromonk said, “and you, being alive, how did you arrive?”

“I was bid here by a great benevolence,” stated Kalistrat, treading along the road while Avtonom, bird-like, fluttered above him. “This is the dominion for those chosen by God.”

“So you have died?” Avtonom asked. “The living cannot come here.”

“Though I have,” Kalistrat replied calmly, leaning on his staff.

The trail led into a grove. Here apple trees grew, their limbs bent under the weight of splendid, succulent, and ripe fruit.

“Can you pick anything here?” Avtonom asked.

“Anything I wish,” Kalistrat responded, walking.

“In that case, pick an apple for me,” Avtonom bid, pointing at the reddest.

Kalistrat plucked three apples, placed them in a small sack which hung around his neck, and hung it on Avtonom the bird.

“Receive and enjoy!” he said.

And then a tide of slumber rolled over Avtonom, spinning him as if on a whirling wheel. Avtonom was seized by a sense of being hurled into boundless depths, falling endlessly. He transformed gradually from bird to man, spreading his arms and legs. He flew in circles, his speed slackening,

surrounded by streaking colors scattering in space like a shattered rainbow. He heard music, each tone matching a tint, sounds transfusing into hues, shades into inflections, and below, far in the distance, he spied a round globe, which he approached incredibly fast, although he was gliding slowly. And on that globe he spied azure waters and verdant bands of forests, mountain ridges, golden squares of fields, and strips of road; gleaming beautifully in the sun, the Earth, wrapped in a haze, tipped and rotated as the heretic Galileo had claimed. It was then that Avtonom's eyes involuntarily shut, as he continued flying in darkness, a darkness glowing in pearly luster, a darkness shimmering with ether. And then it all vanished and he heard the clangorous toll of a bell bidding him to matins.

Hieromonk Avtonom awoke but did not immediately regain his senses. His head reeling and dazed, he thought he was still spinning, along with his bed. He touched the sack hanging on his chest. He inserted his fingers into it, retrieving a golden apple, which shone and glowed mysteriously, and smelled even more wondrously. His disorientation dissipated completely, the bed stopped spinning and he sat up, holding the apple in his hand. He pulled two more apples out of the sack and set them on his bed. He gazed at them at length, lacking the strength to comprehend what had transpired. But he had to hurry to church, so leaving the apples on the bed, he rushed to matins. He was indeed curious whether Kalistrat, the cook, would attend. And so he did not walk to the service, but ran. Upon entering the church, he grew numb with shock: there stood Kalistrat at the choral matins. Avtonom approached him and demanded in a whisper: "Evince where you were last night, Kalistrat."

Regarding him calmly, Kalistrat, also whispering, replied: "Forgive me, Father, I was where you saw me."

Then Avtonom said emphatically: "I warn you, I shall curse you if you do not share the truth and announce the glory of God."

Kalistrat quietly said: "Father, you asked God to show you the posthumous recompense for benevolence. The Lord willed enlightenment to come through me, undeserving though I am, and so I was there."

"Why you, the lowliest in this abbey?" Avtonom asked.

"Perchance because I am lowliest," Kalistrat said humbly.

"What was delivered to me from paradise, when I asked, Father?"

"That which is lying on the bed in your cell. But it is not good to defile the service with prattle, Father. Let me pray, and do not interrupt your own prayer. And forgive me, for I am a worm, not a man..."

Avtonom stayed for the entire service, praying raptly. When he looked around towards the end, he did not see Kalistrat in his place. After the service he approached the abbot and said: "Father, come to my cell. I have something to show you."

They departed. Several monks hung behind, Kuzma among them. Upon entering Avtonom's cell they beheld on his bed three large, beautiful

apples emitting an ephemeral radiance. Their hearts fainted sweetly in their bosom from the otherworldly fragrance that wafted throughout the dwelling.

Avtonom recounted his dream, his meeting with Kalistrat, their conversation in church. All were astonished mightily, even more so because no one had seen Brother Kalistrat in church at the matin service. But that could have been because as someone regarded as the lowliest in this world, he was usually ignored, unless he was required to perform some service, or was an object on which anger could be vented. And they all, Kuzma included, burst into the kitchen, to bow to him, servant of the Lord. But he was not in the kitchen. The other cooks said that he had been absent yesterday, as well. They rushed to his cell. There they found his torpid corpse. He appeared to be alive, a smile frozen across his inert face. And they were all unduly horrified, especially Hieromonk Avtonom, for he had conversed in church not with a living but a deceased Kalistrat.

Later he described how he had gone back into the church and found, on the spot where their conversation had taken place, an unsightly red worm still coiling on the stone slabs. Placing it in his hands, Avtonom brought it into the light. And he carried it to the monastery orchard, burying it under one of the apple trees. Ever since, that apple tree has been bearing fruit consistently and generously.

Silence descended as we relived the story.

“What became of those apples?” Pavlo asked.

“Nobody saw the apples afterwards,” Kuzma replied. “The elder monks may have hidden them, or, perchance, Avtonom took them with him.”

“Took them where?” Sozont asked.

“Perchance to where he got them from,” Kuzma said, “for nobody has seen Avtonom since. He either left the monastery or something happened to him. Immediately after Kalistrat’s funeral he vanished from the monastery, not saying a word to anyone. Thereafter nothing is known of him. He himself said: a living man cannot enter heaven, not even in a dream, transformed into a bird. So, perchance, he became a bird in this world. Do you doubt what I have told you, Brother Sozont?”

“I do,” Sozont said. “The story is too nice to be true. All pleasant things in this world are short-lived and fleeting. Therefore, your story, which I have really not come across in any books, is as elusive as it is sublime.”

“For heaven’s sake, Brother Sozont,” said Kuzma, who was angered for some unknown reason. “Hark on the words of Jacob: ‘He who doubts is like a billow of the sea, tossed and chased by the wind.’ And about beauty the Psalms say: ‘Gird thy beauty upon thy thigh, O most mighty.’ And Zion was considered the perfection of beauty.”

“So you composed the tale, Kuzma, since you are protecting it so?” Sozont asked.

“Satan!” Kuzma hissed. “You are a real Satan.”

“No, Kuzma,” Sozont remarked sadly. “Unfortunately, I am like that billow of the sea, chased and tossed by the wind.”

“And you are boasting of it?”

“I am harrowed by it,” Sozont said, as sadly as before. “I suffer because the worm of uncertainty nibbles at me and smolders in me no less than the worm of faithlessness. And where worms nibble, who shall speak of eternity or immutability? We are human, our thoughts, our bodies, affairs, dwellings, our feelings, even our stories or fables are fodder for worms. Though there is another truth.”

“Why did Kalistrat call himself a worm of the Lord?” Pavlo asked.

“A worm is God’s creature, created by God, as are we. It transmutes us into manure, and in this compost our seeds germinate and grow, our seeds along with a new generation of all-eating worms. And on this, my dear scribes and pharisees, eternity is based. This, I believe, is that other truth.”

“If so, then our parables, no matter how false they may seem, are the seeds of that eternity,” Pavlo said.

“‘In the multitude of my thoughts within me,’” recited Sozont sadly, “‘thy comforts delight my soul.’ Psalm 94.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN,

describing a youth who was our guide and how we set off with him on a trek to the swamp

Very early, at sunrise, someone knocked steadily at the house where we were sleeping. As I lay closest to the door, I came out first. I saw a youth, draped in a peculiar habit of bleached peasant linen, coarsely stitched with sinewy thread, and shod in moccasins. His face was quite handsome, angel-like, the skin waxen, as if dead. I was most struck by his eyes, which were also seemingly lifeless.

“I was told,” he said in a high, nearly feminine voice, “that you are pilgrims on your way to St. Mykyta. Am I right?”

“Yes,” I said, yawning, for I was not yet fully awake.

“There is no direct route from here to the saint. One must go cross-country without a path, and later through a swamp,” the youth said.

“So we have been told,” I replied.

“You need not hire a guide, as I am headed there. I can guide you. But we must depart early.”

Sozont, meanwhile, had stepped out, and was listening to our exchange, standing on the threshold with a disheveled head of hair. “How much will you charge us?” he inquired.

“Hired guides take payment. As a disciple of St. Mykyta, I shall guide you at no charge.”

“Why do you refer to Mykyta as a saint?” Sozont asked. “Saints are canonized by the church after they die.”

“One becomes a saint not through canonization, but through deeds and miracles performed. The church merely recognizes the saint, or does not. Mykyta lives the life of a saint,” the youth proclaimed categorically. Not a muscle on his face twitched.

“You are right,” Sozont agreed, stepping into the yard. Kuzma appeared in the doorway.

“Why are you clothed thus?” the deacon inquired, inspecting the youth. “Are you a monk, or a postulant?”

“I am a disciple of St. Mykyta,” the youth said. “My raiments are what they are. We have no tailors. We sew for ourselves, out of linen donated to us by the peasants.”

Pavlo, too, appeared, scratching himself. There were fleas in the house and they must have been vexing him. My body, too, itched all over.

“Do many people visit Mykyta?” Sozont asked.

“Enough—sometimes more, sometimes fewer. But we do not allow everyone to see him; especially not women seeking ministration—they must remain at a distance from the hallowed place. Not one is allowed to enter the gate.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because according to St. Mykyta, a woman is a vessel of the devil. Besides, we do not admit those who come with hollow intent, wishing merely to behold the saint. Those coming here ought to have a need. Whoever comes to the saint with impure motives might as well not come—the swamp will swallow those. Therefore, before I lead you I must question each of you individually, and you must avow the truth. Who are you?” The youth raised his lifeless eyes to me and chills ran down my spine.

“Scribe and artist,” I answered. “I transcribed the Gospel in Peresopnytsia, embellishing it with ornaments and representations. People claim there are few that can match it in beauty and effort.”

“What is your name?”

“Mykhailo Vasylevych.”

“Why are you headed there?”

“I came to Zhytomyr to scribe and design a new Gospel, but my will to work has faded. I am unable to draw or write. My hand shakes. I am lacking in imagination. It seems my skill has vanished.”

“St. Mykyta will aid you,” the youth said, “if you approach in faith. And what is your name?” he turned toward Pavlo.

“Pavlo Hutiansky,” he answered.

“What brings you to the saint?”

“I am afflicted with convulsions,” Pavlo said. “I spent time with the holy priests of the Cave Monastery, who promised to heal me, but they did not succeed.”

The youth became still. He regarded Pavlo with expressionless eyes. “It is not a disease, but a demon that is depleting you. St. Mykyta can aid you. But remember: he does not heal physical ailments, but only spiritual ones. And what brings you?” he said, turning toward Kuzma.

“I was with him at the Zhydachivsky Monastery,” Kuzma said, “that is, we lived like brothers in Christ. I wish to meet him as a brother.”

“That does not suffice,” the lad declared. “St. Mykyta has dissociated himself from the sinful mortal world and no longer attends to relatives, former friends, or acquaintances. He has no brothers in this world. Are you spiritually distressed in any way?”

“What distresses me is that I see Satan in every person,” Kuzma said, his tiny eyes becoming completely round.

“For that is how it is,” the youth stated brusquely. “Satan dwells only in the souls of men, no place else. The sins of man are the deeds of Satan. Men with no sins do not exist. If that is all, you shall not go to the hallowed place.”

“So Satan dwells in him, as well?” Kuzma inquired, surprised.

The lad stiffened a bit. For the first time an expression appeared on his passionless countenance. “St. Mykyta struggles with Satan,” he said bitingly.

“So why does he not wish to battle with mine?” Kuzma asked.

“According to the Lord, every man must contend with his own fiend.”

“But why are you taking him with you?” Kuzma pointed at Pavlo. “You yourself said his sickness is demonic.”

“Demons and Satan are not the same,” the lad continued evenly. “The demon possesses, that is why he is rebuked, while Satan is something man is born with from his primary sin. Each person must struggle with this alone.”

One of Kuzma’s little round eyes seemed to shrink, or its lid partially closed down, like a chicken’s, while the other remained unchanged. “And if I say that I am infirm in my faith?” he asked.

“All the more reason why you should not go to the saint,” the lad proclaimed. “He who treads there faithlessly is devoured by the mire along the way.”

“You believe that mud has a mind?” Sozont asked, observing the lad closely.

“The will of God acts here. Through St. Mykyta.”

“And what if I say,” Kuzma interjected, keeping one eye half-shut, “that I am consumed with anguish?”

“Anguish is demonic,” the youth said, turning toward him. “You can set out, but consider it, first. I am afraid for you—that you will not be able to cross the swamp.”

“I am one who can cross even a sea!” Kuzma declared.

“I warned you,” the lad said curtly. “What is your name?”

“Kuzma Lopata, surname—Indykokur,” he stated proudly.

“May the Lord protect you,” the youth said. “And what brings you?” he turned to Sozont.

“Something a bit unusual,” a half-smile appeared on Sozont’s face. “I am obeying a duty to chronicle the lives not of saints of yore, but of saints of today. Thus I have been dispatched to record the life of Mykyta.”

The youth remained silent for a while. Something seemed to flash in his lifeless eyes as he stood across from Sozont. “A venerable effort indeed. But I am chronicling the life of St. Mykyta.”

“If you would allow me to utilize your notes, I will compare what I have collected up to now.”

“I have no notes. I am compiling it orally. But it is factual, as it came from the mouth of the saint.”

“Then I will gladly record your stories and confer with St. Mykyta.”

“What is your name?”

“Sozont Trypilsky. Deacon from Kyiv.”

“You may go,” the lad said, “but...”

“But what?”

“You must chronicle the life story word for word, as I tell it, not doubting anything, not verifying anything. If you should need to verify, you can confer with me or with Antonii, the saint’s leading disciple. You will

record everything together, letting us review it.”

“You do not trust me?” Sozont asked.

“The Scriptures say that every man is deceitful. Those close to a saint must insure that falsehood about the saint is not strewn about the world,” the youth proclaimed harshly.

“And if I were to doubt something?”

“Beware of this Satan,” Kuzma suddenly interrupted, rounding his eyes incredibly. “Last night he himself admitted that he is like a sea swell, chased and tossed by the wind. And he said that the worm of uncertainty nibbles at him.”

“Then it is imperative that he go to the saint,” the youth said calmly. “The worm of doubt is also a demon. Once he is rid of it, then the Life of St. Mykyta he produces will be completed veritably, without lies or embellishments. Because if something were not right, I fear the swamp would stretch into an abyss for him, as well.”

“Has your swamp swallowed many?” Sozont asked.

“All those who went to the saint without faith and who bore lies or evil thoughts to him or about him.”

At this point, he recounted a parable about a group of people journeying to the righteous one, so that he would pray for them. They spotted a deer along the way, walking past in its need. They shouted after the deer: “By the prayers of St. Mykyta, we command you to stop!” And the deer stopped, as if rooted to the ground. Lunging at it, they slew it and ripped off its hide. Famished from the road, they prepared a meal from its flesh. After they had their fill, the wrath of God smote them: they were dispossessed of their human voices. One of the men covered himself with the pelt for protection from rain and it grew onto him. Others became overgrown with furry skin and ran into the forest, grunting like deer. They wandered about like this for a long time. Wolves devoured some of them, and the rest—the one cloaked in the pelt included—made their way, staggering, to the saint; there they sojourned with him for two years until they took on human form and were able to speak in human voices.

“And that hide,” the youth said, “still hangs on a pole near the fence surrounding the hallowed place, as a frightful reminder to violators. And when you arrive there, you will be able to view it.”

I felt an unfamiliar dread, though the tale resembled a fable. Glancing around at my fellow travelers, I observed that they all, except Deacon Sozont, felt the same way. Kuzma’s round eyes bulged. Pavlo racked his fingers. The youth narrated the story calmly, his eyes and face remaining expressionless—he looked at no one. Interestingly, Sozont did not compare the parable to stories in books as he was wont to do, especially to the life of Symeon the Pole-Sitter, written by Teodoryt, though later, when we found ourselves face to face, having stepped aside to relieve ourselves, he muttered that the story with the deer was false, taken outright from

Teodoryt—evidently, the deacon understood that putting the youth on his guard too soon was unwise, since he was too laden with certainty. Besides which, he was unlike simple and fiery Kuzma, whom it was easy to ruffle in a discourse. The youth possessed a kind of impenetrable, rock-hard gloom, and disturbing it was clearly dangerous. Perhaps it was a sense of that gloom that aroused the dread in us, and not the telling of the tale. For indeed, there was something otherworldly about that youth. A force flowed out of him: powerful, puzzling and inscrutable. And I recalled the words of Prophet Amos: “He is darkness, not light.” If truth be told, I always measured others by the bearing of light or darkness, and throughout my life I became convinced that conveying only one is impossible: each of us has his darkness, though none of us is without light. Some possess more light, others more darkness. Not a day exists without shade or dark nooks, nor a night without light: candles, the moon, stars, fireflies—all this is elementary. And only infrequently does an individual appear from whom stream currents of radiance that generously fill those around him, like empty vessels. Also infrequent are those who are full of blind darkness, who likewise fill the souls’ receptacles of their fellow man, but with shadow. Much later I learned that the cause of the lad’s gloom was easily elucidated; I was mistaken in the dimensions, the magnitude of the darkness he bore. But more about this later.

So we followed him into the forest, along a lightly trampled path. We could converse freely, though the lad advised us to look under our feet, especially barefoot Kuzma. We were in a land of poisonous vipers: their bite paralyzes and kills swiftly. This added to our dread. In a voice that was calm and lifeless, as was everything about him, he related two stories about serpents from the life of Mykyta.

One day a green-faced woman was brought to Mykyta. Her face was green as grass, or as leaves. Later it turned out her entire body was that same green, as were her hands. The women claimed she was green all over. The reason, said the lad, was that one night, quenching her thirst, she swallowed a baby snake along with the water she drank. As the snake grew in her belly, her skin turned green. Village healers and soothsayers could do nothing for her, though they tried very diligently. The saint was her only hope.

“When I told him about this woman,” the youth said, “without looking at her or examining her, since he feels an indescribable aversion to women, he said: ‘Have her drink water from the hallowed place, and she must pray from morning till night.’”

The woman was offered a drink in the morning. She prayed all day, with no food or drink, and at eventide, as the sun set, her body began to twitch. Mouth agape, she dropped to the ground. People spied a snake’s head in her mouth. Hissing, it crawled out. It was three elbow lengths long. The green hue faded from the woman’s complexion; her skin assumed its

natural color. Slithering to the gate near the sacred spot, the snake coiled up and died.

The second story was about a serpent that lived in the local marsh. It was twelve elbow lengths long. Grass wilted in its wake and where it nested, grass did not grow. It attacked people and cattle, choking them and sucking out their blood. A wood splinter fell into its left eye. The eye became inflamed, causing it great pain. It crawled out of the marsh to the fence enclosing the holy place. Swerving, veering its head, it seemed to beg for mercy from St. Mykyta. Though he comes down from the pole very rarely, the saint descended to behold the serpent and touched its eye with his finger. The wood splinter dropped out of its eye. Winding itself into an erect posture, the serpent bowed to the saint. For a few days it lay at the gate, not harming anyone, until its eye cleared of pus. It then slipped into the marsh, never again attacking innocent people or cattle, only those who set out to the saint faithlessly or with ill thoughts. Those it drowns in the mud, so they say.

Sozont could not resist and asked: “How do you determine whether a person is approaching the saint with faith or faithlessness, with ill will or without it?”

“That is how we determine it,” the lad replied shortly. “The faithful come and go freely. Those who are malicious are devoured by the swamp and its serpent.”

“Do you employ other measures?”

“Malice is a spirit within a person,” the lad announced. “‘Blessed is he,’ according to David, ‘with no malice in his soul.’ Man carries this spirit in his breath. The serpent senses this spirit and divines it according to the teachings of the Lord.”

“But that same David stated,” Sozont said, “‘Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.’”

“That is a commandment for man,” the lad replied. “We do not judge, nor does St. Mykyta, though he is a weapon of the Lord. God himself judges. ‘The wicked shall be cut out,’ that same David said, ‘and those who wait upon the Lord shall inherit the earth.’ And a bit later: ‘The wicked shall not be!’”

This was uttered in an even, offhand voice, though it resounded with a note of steel. Once again I felt a touch of fear. An indefinable dread clenched me. Regaining his senses, Deacon Sozont remarked amicably: “Your parables are truly enlightening!”

“Have you recorded them in the life of St. Mykyta that you are compiling?” the youth asked.

“No. I did not know all that.”

“What do you know?”

“Not much. In Cherniakhiv I learned about the early years of the saint from Father Ivan, the local priest. From Kuzma, who is with us, I heard of

his sojourn at the Zhydachivsky Monastery. If you so wish, before we reach the marsh, tell me what transpired before the saint found this place?”

“I am obliged,” the lad said, “to recount the life of the saint to everyone, everywhere.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE,

describing the youth's tale about Mykyta the Pole-Sitter, that is, about how he became a pole-sitter

And the lad narrated how, upon being cast out of the monastery, Mykyta roamed desolate places amid clefts of rocks. He came upon a dry well, where serpents and evil spirits nested. There he settled, praying to God. Snakes bit him. Evil spirits tested him, attempting to turn him away from God by whispering flattering words into his ear. One spirit became alcohol, another—delectable food, and a third—a woman. At first the saint was not aware of what was occurring, believing that the woman hid the food and alcohol, for she appeared after he had consumed these other two. Sliding down the well to the saint, singing in a sweet voice along with the serpents while baring her body in front of him, she beguiled him with her dancing. Dazed, intoxicated, and on the verge of demise, Mykyta was impelled by the Lord to make the sign of the holy cross across his chest. And thus Mykyta was saved: the snakes were transformed into faggots, the alcohol into urine, the food into waste, and the woman, who nearly triumphed over him with seduction, vanished as vapor. After that, the saint swore a terrible oath: not to drink, not to eat, and to reckon woman to be a vessel of the devil, for that is how it is. And again he wandered through forests and caverns, until he came upon a mountain cave, wherein for three years he secluded himself, drinking and eating nothing. Word about Mykyta spread. Multitudes gathered, seeking cures for their infirmities, and Mykyta was seduced. He refused no one his help, not taking into account that flesh is mortal, destined to rot and perish, and that diseases of the flesh are the beginning of that demise. One of the Chetvertynsky princes heard of him. Doubtful that the saint neither ate nor drank, he brought him choice food and beverage. He spoke thus to the saint: “A person ought not to kill himself with excessive fasting. That is more sinful than virtuous.”

And the righteous one said: “Place, O Prince, the food and drink beside me. If need arises, I will fortify my body. Shut me up in the cave for forty days and nights. Then you may return.”

The prince did as he was asked and ordered his servants to block the entrance with earth and rocks, leaving but a small breathing hole.

When forty days had passed, the prince returned with his servants and opened a passage into the cave. He found the righteous one on the ground, lying as if dead. The food, unspoiled and untouched, lay beside him, likewise the beverages and water. The great abstainer had not taken even a bit, not even to taste.

And Prince Chetvertynsky was aghast. He appealed for a blessing. The righteous one rose, his body steadfast. He declared to the prince and those present: “I can no longer remain here. I do not desire human glory. I do not consider my sojourn in the cave a feat. I wished to pass the time standing,

but I floundered and permitted myself to sit. After sitting, I wanted to lie down, and when I lay down, I could neither sit nor stand. This means that I have failed to fortify my spirit.”

Once again he roamed the forests and caverns. He found an even higher mountain, and a rope left behind by someone. He girded his leg with one end, tying the other around a boulder. Standing thus atop the mountain, he contemplated the heavens, penetrating the nether heavens with his mind. Once again word about him spread and multitudes thronged, seeking cures for sickness. A priest from a local town visited. Beholding the fettered saint, he said: “A man is not a dog and does not need to be bound. Man is bound to a place by will and reason.”

Harkening, the righteous one unfettered himself and from that moment only his free will bound him—he wished to be a willing captive of the Lord. He did not sit, nor lie. He only stood, gazing at the sky, praying and making obeisance.

His glory spread across entire regions of Volyn and Polissia. Multitudes followed from as far as Podillia and Red Rus', carrying the sick and bearing their own afflictions, woe, and pain. Those who were grievously tormented, and those who were possessed with demons, they all received help. The saint healed all, regardless of who they were, restoring some, bringing joy or some other aid to others. And as he healed, to each of them the righteous one said: “Glorify God who restored you. Tell no man that Mykyta cured you, as the cure will lose its power...”

“But man is sinful in this world,” the youth said emphatically. “On their homeward journey, they glorified the propitious one instead of God, and his word came to pass: those who had been healed of sickness again became afflicted, those who had been possessed with demons saw demons again enter their souls, those who had been full of pain and grief were again tormented with pain and grief.”

In spite of everything, the righteous one's glory spread. Still multitudes came unto him, even from foreign lands. They all wished to touch him, to receive his blessing. And the saint sensed a great yearning, a quandary from such attention, for he had not a moment of peace day or night. He had no time to pray in solitude, and that was all he desired to devote himself to.

“Thus, he vowed not to heal any more diseases of the flesh, only spiritual ones. He accepted a few of his favorite from among the followers who wished to abide near him and permanently serve him. Among them was I, who had been blind, and thanks to him, could see again. We left through the thickets of Polissia, traversing the marsh, finding a peaceful place amid swamps overgrown with giant trees. We cut the tops off two pine trees standing close together and fashioned a floor. To that we leaned a ladder. Then the site was fenced. The pole was thirty-six elbow lengths—to bring the propitious one closer to the heavens and to allow him to submit

himself to holy prayers. He suffered mightily in that supernal realm, soaked with rain, scorched by heat and frost. He needs no food. He drinks only water, since he has become weak of late. Before, he did not even imbibe water.”

Jealous men of the cloth with no faith in his saintliness heard about him and, wanting to lead the spirit in him to temptation, sent two men from among their number. The first secretly harbored faith in the saint. The other wished to dishonor him by revealing him as a deceiver. So one was able to cross the swamp, while the other was swallowed. He was the first on whom God showed vengeance. The visitor who believed in Mykyta, meanwhile, conversed with the righteous one privately, marveled at his life, performed a liturgy and served the Holy Eucharist to him in Communion, and then returned home safely. And thereafter, the propitious one was left in peace. He has lived on that island in the midst of marshes for twelve years, rarely descending from his pole.

The lad stopped and turned toward us abruptly, his lifeless eyes glowing. And suddenly we realized that his eyes looked the way they did because he really was blind, though he claimed that Mykyta had restored his sight. And we were frightened mightily: we would be led across the swamps by a blind guide. Sozont alone remained calm.

“Can you see us?” the deacon asked.

“I cannot see you, but I can feel you,” the youth replied calmly. “The righteous one allowed me to see with my soul, not with my eyes. Guided by my spirit, I learn and discover. That is to say, the saint replaced my physical eyes with spiritual ones, explaining that with such a skill I will have no need for physical eyes.”

“And indeed, you do not need them?” Sozont asked.

“Not a bit,” the lad said. “Spiritual eyes are more perceptive than physical eyes. There are those who have eyes yet see not. Physical eyes are insatiable, inclined to err, while the eyes of the spirit know no malice nor enticements. ‘Though man has eyes, he cannot see,’ said Isaiah; for a spiritual man, his whole body serves as eyes. I know this better than anyone.”

“Is it far to the swamp?” asked Pavlo.

“Not far. But first we are obliged to proclaim again: He who believes what has been recounted, let him follow me. He who believes not, ought to return.”

“I believe,” Pavlo said. “Had I no faith, I would not have embarked on this journey with such expectations. I hope to be healed.”

“You can accompany me,” the youth said. “You shall be allowed to approach the hallowed one.”

I had doubts, but inwardly I sensed that now was not the time to reveal them. I needed first to witness and to discover, then to reflect. That is why I

said: "I, too, believe."

"You shall come with me," the lad said.

"And I wish to believe," Sozont said. "Will you allow me to ask what is unclear to me?"

"Of course. Forthright directness is better than concealed enigmas of the mind."

"Can man cross the boundaries determined for him by God?"

"When God wills it," the lad said. "God devised the boundaries, God can expand or remove them."

"Can man retain his humanity, crossing those boundaries?"

"He becomes chosen by God," the youth stated.

"Why does one chosen by God, sent to abide among people, flee those same people?"

"One chosen by God serves as an example to humanity, not as a mortal healer or as an urban pastor."

"Was not Jesus Christ a pastor, a healer?"

"He was. But even He fled into the desert. Besides which, St. Mykyta heals spiritual ills, and this is the same as being a pastor. He has disciples, as well. He is both a healer and a spiritual shepherd, but not a worldly one."

"This suffices for my faith," Sozont stated. I detected an ambivalence, that is to say, he expressed himself not like we did, Pavlo and I, but wryly, though he did not allow himself to forthrightly reveal what it was that seemed false to him in the story about Mykyta. The lad, it seemed, did not notice. He was already turning toward Kuzma, who stood a bit to the side (was he really blind, I wondered).

"And now you are last, Kuzma Indykokur," he said.

"Well said! I am last," Kuzma declared, while gawking, bug-eyed. "The Lord prefers those who are last. Moreover, I am no pharisee nor scribe, as are some." Kuzma cast an oblique glance toward Sozont. "But if he could inquire, allow me to do the same."

"Ask," the youth said.

And here Kuzma blurted something which, to my mind, he ought not have. "Is man guided by God or Satan?"

"Some by God, others by the impure one," the lad replied.

"Can Satan appear in the image of God?"

"He can appear as whoever he wishes."

"How can one test whether God is guiding, or Satan?" Kuzma asked.

"The same way St. Mykyta did," the lad said. "Do you know this story?"

We did not, so he proceeded to tell it.

The devil, jealous of kindness, transformed himself into an angel of light appearing before Mykyta in a blazing chariot with blazing horses. And he proclaimed in a bellowing voice: "The God of heaven and earth sent me, as you can see, to carry you into the heavens, like Illia. According to the life

you have led, you are due such honor. And the time has come for you to have the fruits of your labor—plentitude from the hand of the Lord shall be yours. Go, linger not, and do not be like Zakharii, who trusted me not. Fall to the ground and make obeisance to Him—may the angels and prophets, apostles and martyrs behold you.”

And the saint did not recognize his adversary’s deceit. He thrust his right leg towards the chariot, while extending his right arm to make the sign of the cross, and at that moment the devil and the chariot with the horses vanished, like smoke. Then the righteous one realized the devil’s bewitchment. Repenting, he punished the leg with which he was prepared to step into the chariot. He stood on that one leg for an entire year. Meanwhile, as revenge, the leg was beset with a rash by the devil, and the flesh on it began to rot. It became infested with maggots. Maggot-filled pus slid down the pole to the ground. One of our lads, a disciple, a follower named Antonii, collected the maggots that fell to the ground, and as the saint willed, carried them to the pole. The righteous one, suffering like a second Job, applied the maggots to the sore, saying: “Consume what God has provided for you!”

“Stop, stop!” Kuzma shouted, raising his arms. “Not what God provided—not God! You yourself said: the devil issued the rash, not God! How could he label the devil God?”

And for a second time we observed the youth stiffen, or at least his face twitched—Kuzma had zeroed in on him so precisely. Sozont turned to him; a smile he was unable to hold back flashed across the deacon’s face.

“Even the devil acts according to the will of God,” the youth said.

“Stop!” Kuzma cried in a falsetto, waving his arms. “If the devil acts according to the will of the Lord, then He transformed him into an angel with a chariot. And if so, how could Mykyta have resisted the will of God?”

“Through the devil, God was testing the saint,” the youth pronounced evenly. His face became inert once again. “But He, by His own will, informed the righteous one by raising his right hand for the sign of the cross.”

“If the Lord was testing him,” Kuzma continued caustically, “why did He not bring him to his challenge in the chariot? Why did he retreat from the challenge so swiftly?”

“Do not judge the acts of the Lord!” resounded the youth’s steely voice. “Man cannot know or comprehend them.”

“But you said yourself they were the acts not of the Lord, but of Satan. Why do you accept God and Satan as allies? Did not Lucifer rebel against God, freeing himself of the Lord’s supremacy? Did he not create his own realm, antagonistic and opposite to God’s? Does God not battle with Satan, while keeping him as His tormentor? Does He not have enough of His own warriors? Did not God cast Lucifer out with his black angels of His own will, was He not dismayed by them? Is not the world a stage for the great

battle between God and Satan, a war also fought in the souls of men, with no end as long as man exists? Why did you fail in discerning which is God, and which is Satan and why did you confuse them?"

The youth stood as if thunderstruck, his face as pale as the linen habit he wore. Kuzma was enthralled. His elongated face blushed, his eyes blazed with an otherworldly fire, his mouth expanded from button-size to full capacity, his single tooth glistening like chivalrous copper. "That is why I maintain," his voice thundered, "that God and Satan dwell in every man, and there they wage war. But an end does come! That occurs when Death smites man with a sword or with a scythe. Then judgment begins!"

Finally, the calm and even voice of the youth resounded: "I see that the demon has possessed you. You speak with his lips. You doubt the all-mightiness of God, and that is demonic. If so, you can come with us, but heed the Eye of the Abyss! If you cross the swamp, you will be allowed to behold St. Mykyta."

I shuddered: the lad spoke of the Eye of the Abyss. I felt shivers down my spine: what does he know of the Eye? It turns out that he knows as much as Pavlo does, who beheld it in a vision while visiting the holy women. And even though he admitted that his story was devised—actually, that he had read it in a book and simply retold it in his own words—he could not have invented the Eye of the Abyss. He knew that it exists, as do I, and as does this peculiar young lad—blind or not, it is impossible to ascertain. But to him, it seems, the Eye of the Abyss was the swamp; therefore he might be employing it metaphorically. I was struck this time by both Sozont and Kuzma: Sozont led a fruitless discourse with the youth, though earlier he had expressed himself quite passionately and cuttingly, as had, surprisingly, Kuzma. It was evident, therefore, that Sozont had sensed, as had Pavlo and I, the danger or threat ahead, the nature of which we could not sufficiently comprehend. Perhaps he was brushed by fear of a mystery we could not fathom, or perchance, as the youth had related, of the dreadful journey on which we embarked and which none of us wished to forsake. We trod like blind men, following a blind leader, after all, and only this blind man knew the way. It seemed that an unfamiliar force was propelling us, obscuring all reason, not letting us stop or return, which none of us even considered.

Kuzma surprised me by suddenly revealing a sound intellect, though previously, in debates with Sozont, he had pretended to be a simpleton and a fool. The lad, similarly, was of sound mind, so that it seemed that we were all to a like degree bookmen, but were we pharisees? At least Deacon Sozont exhibited himself a pharisee: earlier he had praised the merit of authenticity, but now, when he sensed a whiff of danger, suddenly he did not wish to be genuine. So he was to an extent dishonest, but is not dishonesty in some instances wisdom? St. Paul, at least in his epistle to the Ephesians, compared cunning artifice to deception, which leads to contrived misunderstanding. Were Pavlo and I pharisees? Undoubtedly so, for neither

Pavlo nor I chose candor with the youth who expressed intolerance to uncertainty. We therefore refused to dispute. Whether the lad was a pharisee is impossible to say at this time; we knew him too little, although after our last discourse I began to feel respect towards him. While the youth revealed a powerful mind during the discussion with Sozont (this is what the deacon wished, since he was a pharisee), in the argument with Kuzma, at the end only Kuzma remained on the field of battle.

And so we continued on our journey, for a time walking silently. Before reaching the swamp, our silence was broken only once, by Sozont.

“Forgive me, Brother,” he said. “We have walked together so long, yet we know not your name.”

“Teodoryt,” the youth replied shortly, without stopping and without turning around.

But Sozont, deeply shocked, stopped as if rooted to the ground. We were likewise shocked: the hagiographer who wrote about Symeon the Pole-Sitter was a bishop of Cyrrhus and also named Teodoryt, that is, Theodore. As mentioned before, he recounted the saint’s life in chapter 26 of his *Philotheos Historia*. Our present Teodoryt also mentioned Antonii, one of those close to Mykyta. There was a hagiographer and disciple of Symeon the Pole-Sitter named Antonii, as well. I gather it was precisely this that shocked Deacon Sozont so forcefully: it appeared that a devised, chimerical game was being played out, in which we were unwitting participants. If my presumptions proved true, then this new Teodoryt could undoubtedly be considered, as we all could, with the exception of Kuzma, a pharisee. But I shall not rush ahead, so as not to be a worse sinner than I need to be.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN,  
which describes our crossing the swamp

This chapter needs to be the thirteenth because the number thirteen is the number of the devil. At the swamp we experienced a spiritual shock, the horror of which has still not washed out of me, even as I spin out these lines. Earlier, when we had rambled through labyrinths the egresses of which we knew well, our rambles—being reflections, mental games and stories—were merely a challenging game in which we participated like grown children. There, at the swamp, we experienced a horror not imaginary, but real.

The marsh itself was curious; an endless surface of aqueous sheen, with islands and outcroppings overgrown with short, sparse saplings—birches, alders—and thick with cattails. A dense odor of stagnant water hung over it.

A magpie screeched overhead; this same magpie escorted us the entire way. Before stepping into water, Teodoryt picked up a long, solid stave, evidently one he had left in the reeds and directed us to cut similar poles for ourselves, as our walking staffs were inadequate for crossing the marsh—they were too short. In his sack Sozont carried a small axe, and we easily effected what was needed. Teodoryt fell to his knees to pray, as did we. We prayed raptly, earnestly. Each of us sensed an anxiety. I know I did.

“The path might be narrow and unstable. Follow me step by step. First feel for solid ground, then set a foot down. Move the free foot only after you can stand solidly on the other foot.”

Here is how we set out: Teodoryt first, with Deacon Sozont behind him, then Pavlo. I followed Pavlo. Kuzma was last. Being heftier than the rest of us, Sozont tread ahead of Pavlo, wanting to test the course with his weight; I was instructed to watch Pavlo so that, heaven forbid, his seizures not strike along the way. I believe Sozont placed Kuzma last to keep him from Teodoryt, mindful of the lad’s threatening boasts. The lad did not meddle in our preparations. He stepped into the water confidently, and we followed as if on a string, one after the other, setting our feet down deliberately. The path turned out to be quite firm. The water, agitated by our passing, bubbled and emitted a musty stench, intoxicating me and possibly the others. Teodoryt trod confidently, though carefully, not once glancing in our direction; of course, we did not talk. Occasionally we scrambled atop small outcroppings to rest a bit. Overhead the screeching magpie doggedly accompanied us, to our annoyance. That screeching was curiously unsettling, though on one of the isles Teodoryt informed us that this magpie was his primary guide in the places where extra care was required.

The forest from which we emerged soon vanished from the horizon. We found ourselves in the midst of a sea of mud, no edges of which were visible in any direction. Half-limpid, scrawny saplings or mounds of cattails were all we could see. A cloud of mosquitoes swarmed above us, painfully

stinging our faces and our hands. We rinsed the irritated places with water from time to time, as Teodoryt advised. A muddy flavor lingered on our lips. So far, no adventures had befallen us. The path supported us. Pavlo was calm, but not Kuzma, who was clad in humble, torn raiments that did not protect him from the mosquitoes as ours did. Every time we clambered onto an island, Kuzma tore leeches off his bare feet and shins, from which his calves bled. He was accustomed to such discomfort and he seemed even to enjoy it, still believing that leeches suck only bad blood, never good. He held no such notions about mosquitoes, however. His face and neck were swollen from mosquito bites, even though he rinsed his skin with water. Time dragged incredibly slowly. The sun stood over our heads. The sky was clear, with not a cloud, yet the heat did not bother us. We were steeped in water. Though warm, it refreshed us sufficiently.

Thus we plodded along the entire day. Finally we climbed atop a larger island. We gathered twigs, chopped branches from dead, standing trees, and ignited a flame over charred remains where pilgrims on their way across the swamp to St. Mykyta had doubtlessly set many a fire. We cooked porridge and ate it, all except Teodoryt, who told us he consumed only bread and water. Thus we offered him bread, which he ate reluctantly. Oddly, mosquitoes did not sting him, even though his arms, neck, and face were unprotected. After faring on bread, he fell to the ground and did obeisance, praying silently: his lips moved, his lifeless eyes widened. His complexion appeared waxen, like the parchment on which I scribed countless words and painted ornaments and pictures.

The magpie that screeched over our heads relentlessly was joined by another, so now we were accompanied by two magpies on our trek. During this long period of rest, Sozont asked Teodoryt to share a few more stories about St. Mykyta. He nodded in agreement and recounted the story of Kateryna, mother of the righteous one. After the death of her husband, she resolved to search for her son. He was her sole progeny and there was no one to run the Cherniakhiv homestead. She roamed far and wide and eventually decided to seek the help of St. Mykyta, whom she did not know to be her son. At first, after she had crossed the swamp, Mykyta was unwilling to speak with her, to admit to who he was, remarking that this was no place for a woman. Removing herself from his sight, the mother sat and wept, her maternal heart not letting her leave. Then the saint decided to admit who he was and dispatched Teodoryt to tell her: "I am your son, whom you are seeking. Do not expect me to return, as I have relinquished the world. Do not worry about me, my mother. If we are deserving, we shall meet in another, better place, in heaven."

And she, learning that she had found her son, wailed and howled and lamented, begging to behold him. Upon which the righteous one sent Teodoryt a second time with the following words: "Wait a little while, O mother, in silence. You can behold me from the enclosure."

Thus she lay near the gate of the fence, not accepting any food nor drink for three days and three nights. On the morning of the fourth day, she sent word to her son that if he did not descend to her to see her and talk to her, she would die. But even then the propitious one did not descend to her, and quietly and wordlessly she gave up her soul to the Lord. When the righteous one learned of this, he willed her body to be brought to the pole, and gazing upon her from above, he prayed, weeping. And his tears fell upon his mother's lifeless face, and her body quivered and her lips smiled, an otherworldly radiance shining from her face. She was buried, Teodoryt reported, in front of the pole. Everyone can view the grave. To this day the saint prays for her twice a day.

Kuzma rose, asking: "So what about the Lord's commandment? Solomon said: 'A foolish son is a calamity for his parents: the house and riches become their only legacy.' And Paul proclaimed that those who are disobedient to their elders are like deceivers, haters of God, attackers, braggarts and evildoers. And in his epistle to the Ephesians, he plainly said: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for that is right! Honor thy elders—this is the first commandment along with your vows.'"

Teodoryt stood on his knees as on an immovable pole. "St. Mykyta honored his mother," he said, gazing with expressionless eyes. "But he did not forget Christ's words: 'And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.'"

"So that one must overstep the first commandment for greater advantage?" Kuzma asked sharply.

"The words of Christ should be your response: 'Oh, ye of little faith, why do you doubt?'"

"Because I have a mind that can reason," Kuzma said. "And it is evident to me that here one truth is excluding another."

"Your reason is the darkness of heresy," said Teodoryt, and sighed. "The truth lies not in reason but in faith."

"What is faith without reason?"

"Everything!" Teodoryt exclaimed. "Look how mosquitoes, God's creatures, feast upon your intelligent face. They do not touch me! I abide in faith. You are filled with doubt."

"They do not eat you because you are dead," Kuzma declared. "I am alive!"

"You have stated the truth," Teodoryt agreed calmly. "I am dead to this world, while you are alive in it. You are, therefore, more dead than I am."

And he smiled maliciously. This alarmed me, as it did all of us, I believe. I sensed danger once again—and perchance something more grave.

In the morning, we set out and walked until noon. Finally, Teodoryt

said: “The end of our journey is near. This part is the most precarious. Be alert! Only faith will carry us through.”

Then he stopped and gestured with his hand toward a pool. “This is it. The Eye of the Abyss.”

“Why is it called that?” Sozont asked.

“Because we believe it to be bottomless.”

In front of us lay a seemingly unconnected pool, peculiarly round in form. The water in the pool was milky, as if stirred with white clay—not tinted with brown, as it was in other places. But something else impressed me: in the middle of the large circle, a clearly defined smaller circle was discernible, the water there was dark, with shades of ocher. It looked like the pupil of an eye. Shivers ripped through me. Inadvertently, I thought: those visions of the Eye I mentioned, were they not premonitions of our journey here, and thus a warning prior to our encounter with this wondrous place? If so, what was providence cautioning me about? I received no omens not to head in this direction. A wish to turn back from the journey likewise did not surface; therefore, all was beholden to my will, my will being simple—to go on. Did I expect to recoup my skill after meeting Mykyta, and is that why I set out on this journey? Perchance, that is what I expected, perchance not; I have, after all, written enough about what prompted me to undertake this journey. Let me remind you, I craved not so much a healing of my spirit as its revival, an invigoration and fullness. That is, I was seeking a powerful rouser who could entice my soul to crack open the bark that had begun gradually to cover it, as if a chick hatching from an egg, to allow me to view the world with a fresh eye, renewed and rejuvenated. If this did not happen, my soul, encased in the membrane of my anatomy, would begin to suffocate from the weight, the longing to escape. And the meaning of that was evident. To be completely honest, then, it was a fear of death that chased me onto this, as I see it, irrational journey, because the Eye of the Abyss which hounded me was, perchance, its image. Another thought occurred to me as I followed Pavlo into the milky turbulence of that pool: was I not game for an unknown hunter, invisible to me except for his watchful eye, attending me relentlessly, and was he not chasing me cleverly into his snares, like an unthinking wild animal? Stalking not only me, a single buck, but an entire herd and chasing us in a direction chosen not by us, but by him who is craftily devising this peculiar hunt? And if so, who is he, that hunter, I wondered as I stepped onto something unsteady under my feet, something narrow and tottering, which nevertheless held not only me, but all of us. I was under the impression that we were treading over a submerged plank, secured to the shores of the pool, because when I attempted to plumb the bottom along the sides, my staff did not meet any resistance, sinking easily. The depth of the pool could be considerable. My pole did not reach the mud at the bottom as it did in other places.

I glanced at Teodoryt, who took his staff into both hands much like itinerant minstrels do, walking on a stretched cord. Sozont held his pole the same way, as did Pavlo, so I did likewise. Teodoryt inched along quite slowly, shifting his feet deliberately. Attempting to duplicate his motions we gradually approached the small, dark circle, which was very clearly defined. The murky water appeared to be cut off at the edges, not mixing even slightly with the brown water in the center.

Teodoryt stepped into that brown ring and stopped, losing his balance for a moment; we all stopped as well. Finally the youth again set out, now even more alert and careful. He exited the small circle. Sozont crossed steadily, as did Pavlo. As I approached it, I observed that although we were stirring up the water (we were submerged in it chest-deep), the milky water was not mixing at all with the brown water, which I could in no way explain. I had not yet crossed the smaller circle, when suddenly I felt the track under me waver, and in back, where Kuzma was walking, I heard a sharp, anguished, inhuman cry suddenly echo. Something plunged into the water behind me. Instinctively I drove my staff into the track, like a peg into soil. It held fast. I leaned on it, successfully using it to retain my balance. When I turned around to see what had happened to Kuzma, I saw ripples spreading, as happens when one throws a stone into water. The rings rippled precisely from the dark circle in the middle of the pool. I had, it seemed, stepped out of it in time.

”Do not stop! Do not stop!” Teodoryt yelled, and I saw that he was striding briskly, almost running, Sozont and Pavlo at his heels. Tugging at my staff, I, too, walked as swiftly as I could. The track began to shake lightly underfoot—it felt as though I was walking along the spine of a frightened beast which, while still standing in place, was ready in a moment to tear away in terror, and I would plunge off it exactly as had Kuzma.

Teodoryt was approaching land, and I noticed the shoreline was round and that young lads, looking much like Teodoryt and garbed in similar linen habits, were standing along the arc of the shore. They had positioned themselves at definite intervals. One of them, the one in the middle, extended his hand to Teodoryt, pulled him onto the bank, and then helped each of us clamber out of the pool. We immediately turned around to survey the swamp. The surface was flat, void and completely calm. It occurred to me that at least Kuzma’s staff should be floating in the place where he fell—but he had probably held on to it so tightly that it had gone under with him. The milky mass of the pool was clear and still, the sharply defined circle of ochre at its center.

“I warned you,” said Teodoryt, out of breath. “I warned your fellow traveler. I warned all of you: only in faith can one cross. He dishonored God!”

Pavlo and I were anxious, Pavlo to such a degree that his teeth rattled. I was gripped by a sickly feebleness. Sozont alone remained completely

calm and balanced. Surprisingly, he renounced Kuzma much like Apostle Peter had renounced Jesus. “You must know,” he said, “that that man was not our fellow traveler. He joined us not long ago along the way. I know not that man!”

And from the depths of the island where we were heading we heard the crowing of a rooster.

*Translated by Olha Rudakevych*

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Look for the second half of this novel (pp. 82–196) in the next issue of *Ukrainian Literature*.

## Birthday

*Volodymyr Dibrova*

### I

Boyko is celebrating his fortieth birthday in America. He's here for a semester at the invitation of Professor Kohut, whose first name, like Boyko's, is Yuri, or, as they say here, George.

Boyko is a philologist of note in certain circles. He has a candidate's degree, and he is a translator and member of the Writers' Union. His body of work to date includes some poetry written as an adolescent, several translations, a volume of literary criticism, and a monograph on morphology (written together with several colleagues). With him here in America are his wife, Luda, and their two daughters, who are twelve and seven.

The Boykos would like to mark the upcoming occasion simply and at home, without guests or any fuss. But Professor Kohut knows that Boyko's birthday is approaching. If he isn't invited, his feelings will surely be hurt. He might even think of them as, well, ungrateful swine. All the more because there is good reason to be grateful. It was Kohut who sent them the invitation, found them an inexpensive apartment, and arranged for Boyko's appearances before the diaspora.

They are on cordial terms. Over coffee—Boyko always drops by between classes—Professor Kohut tells him about his new projects. It could be about setting up a committee of some kind, or compiling an anthology of translations, or bringing someone over for the summer. In three months Kohut's academic department is hosting a conference, and invitations have been sent to the luminaries in the field. The crowning event will be a medieval Slavic banquet, and Kohut has implied more than once that he's counting on Boyko's help with it.

"Of course!" Boyko has assured him. "I'll be thrilled!"

The Boykos' apartment is just a few blocks from the Kohuts' home, and as good neighbors they frequently drop by. Professor Kohut has a wife and fifteen-year-old son, but the visitors rarely catch them at home.

From the start, the Boyko girls feel at home in their backyard, with its swings, monkey bars, and slide, and they make friends easily with the kids next door. People affiliated with the university live in the neighborhood; the oaks, maples, and a kind of tree somewhat like the walnut remind Boyko of home. Every week he rakes the leaves around Kohut's house (winter is just

around the corner) and stuffs them in plastic bags. One weekend he helped Kohut take down his shed. Kohut is planning to plant tomatoes on that spot, come spring.

## II

Boyko picks up a translation of the hottest new Ukrainian fiction. The translation is the project Kohut is wrestling with at the moment. Boyko compares it to the original, and groans. Even without Kohut, the prose is loaded with double barrels of insanity: it seeps first from every aspect of Soviet life, and then it's compounded by the fury swirling in the author's head. This bedlam makes the work unfit for translation, no matter what kind of effort is put into it.

But Kohut doesn't know that. Every morning he conscientiously sits down before his computer and until five p.m. pulls words from the foreign language into the other one. To render both the spirit and letter of the original, he puts anything he can't translate into a footnote, where it is explained as an idiosyncrasy of the Ukrainian character. For everything else he relies on the dictionary. As a result, every narrative he has laid low reeks of schizophrenia. In his translation, when someone in the original text shows a "dulia," it is never an insulting gesture but always a pear, and any reference to "Besarabka" is never to the market in Kyiv but always and only to a female from Bessarabia. When a character cries, "Shit, why is that Soviet prick always hanging around?" his translation reads, "Shucks, why is that quivering sow still lolling about?"

"Shit!" proclaims Boyko, hurrying to share this latest gem with his wife. "What am I going to do? The whole thing has to be redone!"

"Leave it alone," says Luda.

"What do you mean, leave it alone!? He asked me to check it! He wants me to fix anything that's wrong!"

"Well then, point out a blunder or two and say you don't see anything else. Tell him you haven't learned the language well enough to get the nuances."

"Nuances! But it's not even literature—it's a disgrace! My poorest students translate better than this!"

"That's not your problem."

"But it *is* my problem! He asked me to do it. It's a matter of honor—of professional ethics!"

"Have you lost your mind?! He'll hate you for your ethics! We've got to stay here until spring. And if he won't extend your visa, who will? Why, he's like God here! He can do anything!"

Boyko erases all his pencil marks except for a few brief comments and praises Kohut for having recreated the original so perceptively.

"Unfortunately," confesses Boyko, "I haven't mastered the language

yet, so I can't correct your work—I don't have the right."

Kohut agrees.

Then, to erase any implied double meaning, Boyko adds, "I probably don't have the gift."

Kohut throws up his hands.

Boyko doesn't know how to interpret the gesture, and Kohut offers no comment.

"By the way," Boyko interjects into the silence, "There's something I wanted to ask. My *jour de naissance* is approaching..."

Kohut doesn't understand.

"My birthday," Boyko explains. "You celebrate birthdays here, don't you? How do you think we should mark the occasion?"

Kohut replies that here people go to regular restaurants or ethnic ones—Chinese, Korean, or Mexican—to celebrate that kind of event.

Boyko extends an invitation to Kohut—including his family, of course. He asks what place would suit him best. Kohut mentions an inexpensive Chinese restaurant nearby and offers to drive everyone there. He also proposes to bring drink for the occasion.

"Why be extravagant?" he says. "Then you'll save more to take back home with you when you go."

### III

The Boykos are trying to keep the number of guests to a minimum. But in addition to their benefactor they are obliged to invite a few countrymen who, for one reason or another, are currently in town. They are, specifically, Lev Sambur and Uliana Zhovtianska (who never let Kohut out of their sight anyway) and the Kravetses, husband and wife, and their son (the Kravetses have helped the Boykos out, loaning them bedding, pillows, nails, and a hammer).

Sambur is a theater director and impresario of pop entertainment. Back home he gained renown as the organizer of glittering spectacles of various kinds—competitions, celebrations, stage performances, festivals, and reunions. He is here thanks to Kohut, who got him an invitation to be artist-in-residence and the department's visiting fellow. For the past three months Sambur has been living in a dormitory on \$50 a week. Nothing is expected of him, but he and Kohut have made a verbal agreement that Sambur will help out with the banquet.

"A piece of cake!" Sambur has assured him. "Just you whistle!"

But Kohut seems to have forgotten about this for now. Lev knows no English. The money he receives barely suffices for food, and the only way he can earn more is through Kohut. Every morning, at ten minutes of eight, Sambur runs out to the curb and peers out for Kohut's Mazda. Kohut makes a detour on his way to the department to drop Sambur off at the library.

Fridays they go to the fitness center together and then to the sauna, where they talk about contemporary Ukrainian culture.

"Well," Sambur consoles himself, "at least he won't grumble that my time here was wasted."

Aimlessly he clips photos out of magazines and pastes them into collages. To handle any contingency, he has come up with two scenarios for the banquet. The no-holds-barred one calls for Polovtsian folk dances and a laser show; the other is geared to a stand-up, cold-buffet kind of affair.

Like every true theater professional, Sambur dreams of Broadway and Hollywood. And why not, he reasons: am I any worse an artist than any of them? Not at all! If only Kohut let me stay for a year, I'd tackle learning the language head-on. Then I'd be babbling away by spring—or summer, at any rate.

"Maybe you want me to put on a play for them?" Sambur asks Kohut every Friday. "For free! There's a theater at the university, isn't there? If you provide the translation, I'll show them a new interpretation of anything they want. Totally neo-avant-garde!"

But Kohut doesn't respond.

"Maybe I've offended him," frets Sambur. "But how? There's absolutely no reason! If it's about Uliana—why, I haven't touched her! After all, I'm not stupid—I understand how things are. If he has any intentions about her—well, by all means! Full steam ahead! I pass! For a friend, I'd not only go beg at a monastery—I'd join it!"

Uliana is a celebrity poet as well as a doctoral candidate in fine arts—her specialty is the Baroque. This is her third stay in America. She managed to arrange this one on her own by a timely application to conduct some complex scholarly research. The topic that got her the stipend straddles the fields of feminism, ecology, and minority studies.

Uliana arrived here from New York last Wednesday. She expects Kohut, as department chairman, to propose that she conduct a course on the Baroque next semester. She's been told that universities here have special funds for such things.

The final invitees are the Kravetses, Larysa and Alex. He defended his dissertation here and then didn't go back home. Instead he found a job at the university, in the chemistry lab. While he was making something of himself, she sat at home with their son. They have finally applied for green cards and are waiting for the outcome. Larysa wants to find a job now too. She is a philologist by education, specializing in Romance languages. Kohut is her direct (and only!) connection to the academic job market. That connection is all the more promising because, as they've just learned, Kohut doesn't have an instructor lined up yet for the Russian conversation class next semester.

Kravets earns enough for the family to live comfortably and have a nice apartment. But their Ihor, who is seven, doesn't talk (he can't say "Mama" or "Papa"), and he doesn't understand where he is or what is

happening around him at any given moment. At times it seems to the Kravetses that someone has stolen their child and is holding him captive behind some soundproof wall, and that all they have been left is his blameless and confused physical presence.

#### IV

In two trips, Kohut drives everyone to the Chinese restaurant —except for the Kravetses, who have their own car. Kohut's wife and son are unable to come, but they have passed along their greetings.

The staff of the Chinese restaurant is dressed in white nylon shirts and black vests. They are all short and agile, and they all look alike. Clearly these refugees are not from Hong-Kong or Taiwan, but from the depths of the mainland itself.

Kohut explains that refugee smuggling is big business. People give traffickers all their money just to jump on a boat. The traffickers pack the ballast with illegal immigrants for the trip across the ocean, and then cast them off into the icy waters along the American coast. The Chinese don't complain, though—as a stoical people they're happy simply to still be alive.

Their waitress is a shining example of this. No more than seventeen at the most, she radiates a happiness that has absolutely no relation to the reality of the moment. The Boykos' guests suspect some kind of trick ("she's probably already figuring the tip"), and so their perusal of the menu starts from the prices.

The waitress hasn't mastered the language yet, but she's learning. She passes out menus and pencils and indicates that she'd like everyone to mark down their order. They look at Kohut and wait to hear his proposals.

Kohut begins to describe the Chinese dishes. When he falters, Uliana helps him out, thus demonstrating her familiarity with restaurant food as well as her understanding of subtleties in the two languages. Uliana knows, as Kohut does not, that "egg rolls" are *pyrizhky*, that "shrimp" are *krevetky*, and that broccoli, though not sold in the bazaars back home, should be called *brokoli*.

The conversation meanders into a discussion of the highs and lows of Ukrainian cuisine. In Kohut's view, Ukrainian cooking contains much too much fat and cholesterol and too little seafood.

The Boyko daughters, too, want to know what they'll be eating. They spar over the menu—if not for its lamination in sturdy plastic, it would already be ripped into pieces. They can't translate the dishes listed in English into their native language, of course, but they understand that the column on the right is a list of the prices.

"Oh, look how many dollars it costs! Look how expensive it is! Papa, don't order that! Order something cheaper!"

The adults laugh.

Seven-year-old Roxolana knows all her numbers. Her older sister Oksana converts the dollars into the currency back home, at first silently and then aloud—the count goes into the millions. The budding personalities of the two are in evidence: the older girl is an A student, whereas the younger one is a mischievous hellion. Luda shushes them, all the while beaming with pride at Oksana's mathematical ability. Boyko, for his part, is more indulgent of the younger child.

Kohut is taking bottles out of a bag—a three-liter flask of burgundy, a Spanish sherry, and a Chilean "cabernet sauvignon." All three bottles are opened, somewhat dusty, and far from full.

The guests are stunned. To bring your own bottle to a restaurant and surreptitiously pour the contents into a house carafe, under the table, is something they are all familiar with (Sambur has brought along his last bottle of "Pepper Vodka" with just that in mind). But that people do things like this in America astounds them. They just don't know what to make of it. To mask their unease, they turn their attention to the bottles, read the names of the wines out loud, and begin to praise the selection.

"My, my—Chilean! Pinochet or no Pinochet, no one has taken to cutting down the vineyards! After all, Chile's not the Soviet Union! And, oh, look here—a burgundy! Just the thing! And what year would it be? Don't tell me—it's imported from France?! No? From California? That's even better! But it's probably expensive—why, for God's sake, Yurko, did you... We could have done with less! Why, this even puts us on the spot."

Kohut says that it's okay. He pours himself some wine and, not waiting on ceremony, takes a big gulp. The Boykos exchange glances ("What is this—everybody's glass is empty, they haven't brought the food, and he's drinking already?!").

Kravets saves the situation by making a toast to the birthday boy. The guests take to drinking the wine. Boyko stands up and, as if in exoneration, starts praising Professor Kohut and the whole diaspora for having preserved the language here, on foreign soil.

"I can't speak for anyone else, but it overwhelms me," he confesses. "The mind-set, especially... I mean, the love for the land of their forefathers and some remarkable kind of hope... For I'll admit honestly, we would never... You, Yurko, for instance—a scholar, a Ukrainian, and department chairman... What you, the holder of a professorial chair, have done for us Ukrainians and for Ukraine... Well, what can I say! We must raise our glasses to that! Cheers!"

Everyone joins in the sentiment. They add that Kohut is doing Ukraine a great service by inviting its creative young people to America and allowing them to suck up the experience. Because we have had the desire, but not the opportunity. Nor the training. Nor the knowledge of how the civilized world works. That's why we need to live here for a while, to

become used to everything and then work together to gain more spirituality.

"That's certainly true," agrees Kohut.

"What's everybody drinking?" asks Roxolana, getting up from under the table.

"Wine," says Kohut.

"Wine—but that's poison!! Pour it out this instant!"

Luda jumps up and pulls the impish girl over to her side of the table, crooning, "I know you're concerned about Uncle Kohut."

The food is brought out, and all the platters are placed Chinese-style on the round tray in the center of the table. Kohut explains that the tray is actually a lazy Susan and that everyone should help himself to what he likes.

"And to whatever's giving you the eye," adds Boyko.

"Certainly—see, it moves," says Kohut, demonstrating exactly how the laden carousel turns.

"What have you poured for yourself?" asks Roxolana, wrenching herself free of Luda's restraint. The girl slips down and crawls under the table, briefly loses her way amid the knees and footwear, and then finds a way out. In getting up she bangs against Sambur and wine spills from his glass.

"Don't you know that's bad for you?" cries Roxolana.

Sambur moistens his finger in the spilled sherry and touches it to the girl's lips. "There—a little kiss for you!"

Roxolana shrieks and dives under the table again.

The Chinese waitress wants to wish everyone bon appétit, but she doesn't quite know how to say that in English. The diners assault the carousel with their spoons and forks.

"You can also eat everything with these," Professor Kohut tells them, tapping his wooden chopsticks together to demonstrate.

## V

Each tends busily to satisfying his or her appetite. Some of the diners—Uliana and Sambur, for instance, and also Boyko himself—realize that no more toasts are expected and that the wine on the table is all there is, so they hurry to fill their glasses.

"Did I ever imagine that one day I'd be in America, sitting in a Chinese restaurant and drinking burgundy?"

"It's straight out of a movie," his wife seconds. "Like in *The Three Musketeers!*"

"Five years ago—no, not even that, four!" Uliana joins in, "—when I wasn't even being published yet, if anyone had told me..."

"Or me!" interjects Sambur. "Why, I would have..."

"And me," says Oksana, tugging at someone's arm, "When I was in first grade..."

"Be quiet!" Luda Boyko admonishes her daughter.

"Gee, something like this couldn't have happened in a bad dream!" cries Kravets, plunging into the conversation.

His wife responds by kicking him in the thigh with her boot. She fears that his weird sense of humor will wreck everything. For Larysa can't tell whether Alex's jokes are going over or not. That's because their Ihor keeps trying to wriggle free of her knees and make for the door. Once he ran out of the house like that and was almost run over by a truck. And when they were at the shore the year before last, he waded into the water and started gulping it down. On top of that, he adores forks and loves to bang them against plates or cups. Right now she's locked in battle with the child's unflinching will, obliged to extract a fork from his hand—and do it without crushing his fingers.

Once his toy is gone, Ihor drops down to the floor and starts crawling toward the door. Shooting her husband a look of despair, Larysa darts up after their son. But neither that look nor the kick from Larysa's boot is going to restrain Alex Kravets.

"If anyone had suggested that my life would take this direction," he proclaims, "I would have spat in his face."

"All those years I was forbidden to travel!" recalls Boyko.

"And me—the years they wouldn't publish my second collection!" cries Uliana.

"Once, when I woke up—stinking drunk, of course," Sambur breaks in, "I looked out my window at the wall where the banner proclaiming 'Glory to the CPSU' always hung—and it wasn't there! 'Well, Levko,' I said to myself, 'now you've gone and done it—you're so sloshed you're having hallucinations! You've got to put a stop to it!'"

"Why—it was a miracle!" everyone concurs. "No one could have foreseen it!"

"But why not?" questions Kohut, trying to understand.

"For numerous reasons," says Boyko, for he is not only a philologist but a political analyst as well. "Let's just consider one factor—the army. When we got together to dream about independence back then, we always said, 'Look at the map—everywhere there are divisions of the occupying army, military bases, underground shelters, nuclear weapons.' And that was very sobering, I can tell you. How could we fight all that? How could we fight when everything—railroads, roadways, sea routes, communication channels, everything—went through Moscow?"

"So now you have to investigate all that," Kohut readily advises. "You've got to set a course for NATO and Europe. And build new roads! We did that here a hundred years ago, when Henry Ford began making cars. In Italy Mussolini hurried to do the same, because he realized how impor-

tant roads are. Why, that was the first thing the Romans did when they acquired new territory—in Britain, for instance, even before the birth of Christ.”

“Just so,” says Luda, latching on to Kohut’s words. “But at home they forbade us any spirituality at all. God forbid that you let slip anywhere that you’re a believer! Even so, we still baptized our children. Oksana is Greek Catholic—we had her christened in Lviv, at the home of a friend who’s a sculptor. But later, with Roxolana, we had her baptized in an Orthodox church, in Kyiv.”

Those who initially sampled the meat dishes now go for the gifts of the sea and vice versa, as everyone animatedly recalls the deprivations each was obliged to endure.

Sambur paints a detailed picture of how difficult it was for him to put on his plays. Everyone has something to add about how his or her own national awareness was kept under close watch.

“I’ll give you one small example of what we got used to and had to accept,” says Uliana. “Once, when I was seven or eight, we managed to rent a corner in the Crimea.”

“What does that mean?” asks Kohut, and they all obligingly explain.

“So,” Uliana continues, “the landlord overhears me speaking to my parents in Ukrainian. He gets very upset and says to me in Russian, ‘You’re a civilized girl and yet you’re still speaking that degraded tongue?! How senseless!’”

Kohut doesn’t comprehend. “What? What did he say to you?”

When they translate, he is thunderstruck.

“But, why didn’t you make an issue of it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, if it wasn’t possible to take him to court, you should have left and gone somewhere else! So he’d at least feel the results of his chauvinism in his pocketbook!”

“That’s easy to say.”

“Here people are sued for things like that. It’s racism!”

“But over there, no one paid any attention. People would say we were lucky not to get shot!”

“But how was that possible?!”

“And things like that were just trifles. Look at the way they kept the famine secret—the one in ’33.”

“And ’22!”

“And ’47!”

“And what about the fact that in ’20, Kyiv was left cold, hungry, and totally empty! Why doesn’t anyone know about that?”

They speak about how under Khrushchev, back in ’63, bread was rationed and schoolchildren were issued rolls of white bread according to some special list. But not everyone sitting here can remember those times—

only Sambur, who was then fifteen, and Boyko. Luda is younger than her husband and lived in the countryside, whereas Uliana and the Kravetses are now just in their thirties.

"Why was it like that?" they ask themselves, and in discussion they come upon the answer.

"Because for a very long time we lived in slavery! And as slaves we were deliberately maimed! They amputated our self-respect! Still, at last, we broke free! And we have not only survived, but preserved our spirit, our thirst for freedom—and the language!"

They toast this with both the cabernet and the burgundy—but not with the sherry, which has a strange color and a suspicious taste.

Each tries to outdo the others in crediting himself with how many relatives and friends he encouraged to embrace being Ukrainian.

"Why, I even managed to influence my sister-in-law," confides Luda. "Just guess what her maiden name was—Barvinova! Can't be any more Russian than that! Yet now she speaks better Ukrainian than my brother! And she knits, stencils, and has mastered Poltava-style embroidery. As for her family, they're from Luhansk."

"It's supposed to be pronounced Luhanske now, not Luhansk," they correct her.

"And Donetske."

"And Hemingway, not Khemingway."

"And Sapyhiv."

"Where is that?" asks Professor Kohut.

"In the Ternopil oblast. A pretty little town that they made 'Sapogov.' The correct form is Sapyhiv, though, because it comes from Sapiha, the name of a Lithuanian palatine."

"He was Lithuanian, but became Ukrainian!"

"Because of whom?"

"Whom do you think? His wife, of course! *Cherchez la femme!* Our Ukrainian women—they're all femme fatales. He was a nobleman and chose a commoner. But she was a beauty!"

"You don't say? Didn't the Turkish sultan have a Ukrainian wife too—from Rohatyn?"

"He did—but Sapiha did too."

The girls are playing tag while Ihor stands apart. When anyone touches him, the boy waves his arms, jumps in place, and laughs gleefully. In outward appearance (discounting how he shakes his head and the strange sounds he utters instead of words) he is a completely normal little boy, nice-looking, tall, and friendly. But the children sense that he's not a playmate, and indeed he is not, for the very idea of a game with rules is somewhere far beyond his comprehension.

"Why doesn't he want to play with us?" Oksana asks Larysa Kravets.

"It's not that he doesn't want to," she begins to explain.

"He doesn't know how?"

"Oksana!" Luda chides her daughter, "don't bother the boy!"

"No, do!" says Larysa. "It's just that he doesn't understand. You go play with him and he'll catch on right away. Go on, show him—he really wants to play."

Oksana goes up to Ihor, takes him by the hand, and says, "Now you're it! Come on, run after us!"

Ihor is enthralled. He lets out gales of laughter and bangs himself against the table, head first. His mother grabs the boy and presses him to her, thereby rescuing the tableware. The girls see that nothing will come of this Ihor, so to vary their game they crawl under the table and try to involve the adults.

"I'm porking you!" Roxolana yells in Kohut's ear.

Kohut chokes, coughs, and spits out something muddy and dirt-brown.

"Roxolana! Look what you've done!" cries Boyko, getting to his feet. But the naughty girl is already scrambling back down under the table. Before vanishing amid the legs of the adults, she puts her index fingers on either side of her mouth, stretches it wide, thrusts out her tongue at Kohut, and chants, "Nah-na-na-na-nah!"

"So it was you!" cries Kohut.

"Roxie!" cries Luda, jumping up. "Oksana—help me! Pull her over here!"

Oksana dives under the table. A moment later they hear crying intermixed with scuffles and slapping sounds.

The Boykos pull their daughters apart.

"We never get involved in these things," they tell their fellow diners. "It's best to let them settle it themselves."

Meanwhile Ihor, unnoticed by his parents, ducks under the table too, intent on examining legs. He crawls up to Kohut and gives him a start. As Kohut jerks back, his wine overturns, staining his jacket, shirt, and pants.

## VI

Professor Kohut rushes off to the restroom to try to wash out the stains.

"Salt!" yells Larysa. "Alex! Take the salt! Shake lots of it on the stains! Why are you still sitting here? Go help him!"

Kravets bolts into action and vanishes through the door graced with pictures of a pair of pants and a parasol.

Boyko has a sinking feeling that Kravets's aim in there will be not to get out the stains but to persuade Kohut to give Larysa the job of teaching Russian in the department. If Kohut agrees to that, it's entirely possible that Kravets will promptly add that Larysa can teach the Ukrainian class as well. In which case Boyko and his womenfolk can start packing their suitcases

this very day, for there are only enough students for one Ukrainian language class. It's damned unfair! Larysa's on the verge of getting a green card anyway! Whereas for Boyko to be allowed to stay on here for just one more measly semester, Kohut, as head of the department, will have to go to bat for him, run around, make phone calls, drum up some funds, put himself out... Who does that Larysa think she is?!

Sambur has no interest in being a language instructor himself, but he knows intuitively that Kohut won't be able to grant everyone's wishes. Nor will he want to. It'll be a boon if he satisfies any one of them—man or woman, whoever gets to him first. For Sambur knows that though Kohut is a dunce, of course, deep down he's soft-hearted. That's why he can be swayed. And whoever presses him the hardest is the one he'll oblige.

Without explanation, Boyko and Sambur jump up from the table and make a dash for the washroom. There they see Kohut, minus his jacket—it's been liberally sprinkled with salt and hangs draped over the hand dryer. He's lying on his back, stretched across the sink: he can't stand up because then the salt will fall off before drawing out the wine—Kravets is now bending over Kohut and shaking salt on his crotch. The phrase Kravets has just uttered makes it clear that he has already apologized for his son. Now he's telling Kohut that his little Ihor didn't act with intent, but only because of his awful illness. Kohut tries to rise but Kravets restrains him—the salt has to set another two or three minutes to penetrate the fabric sufficiently to draw out the liquid.

"And here's what my Larysa can do," says Kravets, getting down to specifics. "Not that I flatter her or exaggerate her abilities—not at all! She graduated with honors, and she's been a language teacher and linguist. She started working on her dissertation, but then came pregnancy, maternity leave, childbirth. She passed two sets of exams—her generals and the French exams. She can teach language courses in your department, even the graduate courses—you know, phonetics, lexicology, typology. Her dissertation title is 'Participles and Conjunctions in Various Languages.' If she hadn't had to stay home with our boy..."

"Here we have assorted kinds of day-care for situations like that," Kohut responds, pulling himself up. "They're like what you call *iasla*—nursery schools."

"Wait!" cries Kravets, pushing Kohut so he has to lie back down on the counter and over the sink. "Here's another one!" A second later a small mound of salt is heaped over another stain on Kohut's checkered pants.

"There you go," says Kravets. "That'll soak it up—it'll be fine. Now, if Larysa were hired just by the hour, or at half-salary..."

"So how are things going in here?" Boyko and Sambur are shouldering Kravets on either side, trying to separate him from Kohut. "Where's our hero? Still among us?"

The interruption is Kohut's chance to climb down off the sink.

Grabbing a couple of paper towels, he brushes the salt from his clothes. Having examined the stains, first Sambur and then Boyko step up to the urinals. But when they notice Kohut moving toward the door, they cut this activity short. They rush up to him and grab him under the arms.

"I—it's... you see, doc," Sambur is saying, "I keep wanting to talk to you about the banquet. It hasn't been called off, has it? Because I'm up for it—any time! We'll put on such a sweet little number. Totally *avant-garde!*"

Kohut can't fathom what he's talking about.

"Totally *avantgardeschön!*" Sambur goes on. "I'm ready to roll! The scenarios—the banquet—the Slavs!"

"Ah-h!" says Kohut, as the disjointed phrases bring Sambur's meaning home. "You mean the conference!"

"But of course!" says Sambur, giving Kohut a hug. "I've got two scenarios already written! The next move is yours. My stay here ends in December—but the banquet's not till February! So, comrade commander, chart your course and set things rolling!"

"I'll have to speak to my secretary—she'll know what form to use."

"Of course!"

"Yurko!" Boyko has squeezed between Kohut and the door. "Remember when you talked about textbooks of Ukrainian—how there aren't any really good ones? I've been thinking about that, and I have an idea. What if I worked on a textbook here—in the library—for, say, six months, at least. To become familiar with the latest methodologies..."

"I'll have to think about it. We have until the 20th—"

"Larysa has completed all her courses!" Kravets cries out behind them. "She knows all the methods—intensive, full immersion, the Bulgarian one. And that other method—what's it called?... I forgot what that one's called!"

"And the textbook"—Boyko is painting the future bright—"would appear under the aegis of your department!"

"I'll have to speak to Jennifer," says Kohut, making for the door. "She's my secretary. She'll know how to handle it. So we get the application in before the 20th."

"I was Lviv's top theatrical director for ten years," Sambur breaks in, pushing Boyko aside. "Lviv—the Vienna of Ukraine! Where cabarets and coffee shops abound! Did I ever tell you about the time we put together a sex show based on motifs in the Ukrainian classics? Think of it! It was incredible! I took the work of Nechui—"

"By the 20th," Kohut mutters, blocked on all sides. "We'll do it on the 20th."

"What? Not until the 20th?!" Sambur is incredulous. "But wait! Today's already the 23rd!"

Just then somebody bangs the door open with the tip of a shoe and charges through. The door hits Sambur in the back—his arms fly up and he drops to the floor. A hefty fellow in belted jeans rushes by noisily, a

toothbrush hanging from his mouth. Before anyone can react, the oaf occupies the last stall and bolts the door shut.

As Boyko and Kravets help their countryman to his feet, Kohut manages to slip past them and makes it out the door.

Uliana is standing there, waiting for him and choking with rage.

"How is this possible?!" she's fuming to herself. "How dare they?! One more episode in a millennium of constant slander and sexual harassment! And who's responsible? They are, the wretches! The *he's* of this world—they're the ones who do it. And this bunch! They're just the type to squeeze from *him* what by all rights must be *hers*! Because not one of them—not a single one of them—cares about what happens to Ukraine!"

"Yurko dear!" Uliana coos, managing to carry off the appearance of having met Kohut by chance.

As they are making their way back to the table, she thrusts a course outline into his hands. It's a course on Ukrainian culture and civilization, beginning with the Trypillian period—the first of its kind, and planned to run a full academic year. Uliana could sit down right now and write the course description in full, but the basic structure is already there. It needs some fleshing out—but that's a mere trifle; it would take a month or two, no more. All that's really needed is for Kohut's department to go to bat for Uliana and vouch that her services are desired—for two semesters, minimum.

"That would be fine," Kohut acquiesces. "I'll have to speak to Jennifer."

"For the spring and summer—" Uliana specifies.

"Sure," says Kohut. "Our summers aren't like yours over there, you know—"

"Or maybe we should make it for the next academic year," says Uliana, altering her plan on the fly. "That might be more logical. But in that case I absolutely must have a formal invitation—and something to tide me over until next September. Because my grant—my stipend, that is—runs out at the end of this December. Then I've got nothing for the rest of winter, or spring and summer—"

"Summers here are scorchers," Kohut is saying, having made it back to the table. "If you don't have air conditioning, things can get pretty sticky. But then you can always head out for a drive into the mountains—it's nicer up there."

"—So come spring I could teach language here, right up 'til fall."

"Falls here are warm," Kohut has paused and is recollecting something very pleasant. "About a two-and-a-half-hour's drive from here there's a railroad, and some caves. And in October there's a big festival. Farmers from all around come and cook mounds of apple preserves in huge kettles."

"Butter"—the poet can't refrain from correcting him—"It's called

apple butter.”

“Of course,” says Kohut, closing his eyes. “Excellent!”

## VII

While their husbands are off tending to business, Larysa and Luda are brushing the spilled salt off the table and putting it to rights. Roxolana is running about, chasing Oksana. Ihor is waving his arms and jumping up and down—actually, he’s trying to make a dash outdoors. His mother hangs on to one of his hands, clasping it in one of her own.

“And how is he, aside from that?” asks Luda. “Everything’s normal?”

“What do you mean, normal?” says Larysa, struggling to keep calm.

“Well, does he have any allergies?”

“Allergies?”

“Our girls’ allergies drive us crazy! First Roxolana came down with them and then Oksana—allergies to oranges, mangoes, and even to... what do you call them... the ones that grow in New Zealand?”

“Kiwi.”

“That’s them—just terrible!” Luda recounts in detail how often and in what circumstances her girls’ allergies have erupted.

Larysa says that she would be the happiest mother on earth if allergies were her biggest concern.

“So he doesn’t talk to you?”

“You see for yourself.”

“But it seems to me that he said something.”

“He said, ‘A-wa-sa-wa-sa.’”

“Maybe he’s speaking a language you don’t understand.”

“Maybe.”

“Mine do that, when they’re annoying each other.”

Oksana overhears who is being talked about and comes close, followed by Roxolana.

“Here they are now!” says Luda. “You stinkers! Roxie, why did you tease our Uncle Kohut that way? Come on, tell me!”

Roxolana hides under the table.

“So, what he has—is it a kind of mental retardation?” asks Luda.

“No,” Larysa says. “Not retardation. Autism.”

“What?”

“A medical puzzle—a phenomenon yet to be explained,” says Larysa. “Until he was eighteen months old, his development was absolutely normal. Why, he was even saying two- and three-word sentences. And then, before leaving for America, we went to the clinic to get his immunizations—the ones he had to get for the travel papers. Afterwards—that’s when he began to regress. As if every day he was slipping deeper into some invisible hole. He forgot nearly every word he knew, his normal activities stopped—he

didn't recognize people, didn't know what to do with his toys."

"Don't blame the immunizations!" Luda protests. "They can't be the reason. Immunizations are needed! At my school—"

"He even forgot things he could do at twelve months!" Larysa goes on, switching Ihor's hand from her right hand to the left and sitting him down on a stool. "Sit still for a minute!" she tells him.

"Now he has to be taught everything all over again. Everything! How to go up and down stairs, how to wash his hands, how to use a spoon. Normal children learn it all without thinking, but try to get it across to him! And there's no guarantee that by tomorrow he won't have forgotten it all again."

"But it can't be from the immunizations!" Luda refuses to back down. "Probably it's Chornobyl—that's what I think. Maybe it triggered some kind of genetic mutation—how do we know? Remember how they kept everything from us? The criminals! They're the ones to blame! Even now, do you think they're telling us the truth? Before we left, I read that some place near Zhytomyr some strange sort of animal has been found—and children without fingers or toes... And how many idiots are being born!"

"Our son is no idiot!" Larysa fires back. "He started walking at eight months! One morning, from his crib, he gave us a look as if to say he wasn't the child and we the parents, but the other way around. As if he understood everything, and on top of that—"

"Well, kids can sure have an unfathomable look," says Luda, refusing to budge.

"What do you want?" Larysa cries at Ihor, holding her son down in his seat with both hands. "Can't you keep still for even a minute!"

"Is he getting any help?" asks Luda. "Does he get any therapy? You must be doing something to help him!"

In a single sentence Larysa recounts every resource they have tried, from the brutish medical shysters back home in the town where they lived to the American doctors oozing respectability here.

"Well, having the right contacts isn't everything," says Luda. "Our neighbor, Toni—she lives on the fifth floor—has a granddaughter, Ally. Her husband's a major-general, retired ten years. They eat good food, naturally, and their medical care—through the military—is just about the best there is. In a word, they've got everything anybody needs, from A to Z. And what do you think? One time their Ally broke out all over in such huge blisters that they had to call an ambulance. And what caused it, they still don't know. Maybe something she ate."

"Maybe."

"Well," says Luda, a new idea dawning, "maybe you should have tried something untraditional."

"We did!" Larysa counters, and proceeds to describe the folk healers and self-anointed faith healers they also turned to. Not here, of course, but

back home, where she and Ihor return every summer.

"By the time you land at Boryspil," Larysa sighs, "you're cursing everything on earth! Alex has a job—he's got to stay here, and it's tough to handle things all on my own. A knapsack on my back, suitcase over there, another bag slung across my shoulder—because everybody expects presents, and God forbid that anyone be left out, or they'll be offended for life! And then there's Ihor—handling him alone requires two arms, at least."

"That's it, exactly!" says Luda gleefully. "Last month I sent along a parcel, through that Baptist organization, and right afterwards I called my mother-in-law. Told her all about it and said just to expect it, because it's on the way. And guess what she said to that!"

"I can guess—" says Larysa distractedly, impatient to finish what she has to say. "We took him to others, too. Medicine women and then to a psychic, one who had an advanced degree—"

But once Luda starts to tell someone about something, she's not one to leave it hanging either. Yet for Larysa to learn precisely how Luda's mother-in-law responded to her daughter-in-law's request to send back some of the exotic folk remedy called mumio, Luda must first be ready to outshout Larysa.

"—Then my parents," says Larysa hurriedly, "sent Ihor's picture to a woman living near Lutsk—"

"—And then I explained," Luda counters, "just where it is and that it's wrapped in blue cellophane—under the freezer compartment, right next to the echinacea!"

"—She took just one look at him," confesses Larysa, revealing the Kravets family secret for everyone in the restaurant to hear, "and said that someone in our own family had bewitched him!"

Her son twists around and bangs his chest against the table in an unsuccessful attempt to break away. He arches back, thrusts his face up toward the ceiling, and howls.

Larysa is dumbfounded.

"Someone in your own family?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Why, I would have found that creature," Luda swears, "even if I had to root her right out of the ground! I would have choked her, squeezed her neck until she herself—"

"—And then that woman from Lutsk," Larysa has slid down in her chair, "said to me, 'Let them be. All of them. Every single person who has wronged you. Don't hold on to any ill will, not even a particle—because it'll poison you. Forgive them. And then go to church...'"

"—died a slow death!" declares Luda, having now made Larysa's trial her own. "I would keep choking her from morning 'til night! And through the night too!"

"Now the only thing that keeps me going," Larysa is speaking softly

now, unmindful to whom, "is some kind of... not knowledge, not presentiment.... Faith? Can it be that?... More likely it's hope. Yes—it's more like hope. Hope that that look of his at eight months, and what happened later and his good looks—that there's more to it than this."

"Do you think he might outgrow it?" Larysa suggests. "Someone I work with has a daughter who didn't talk until she was four."

"No!" Larysa interrupts, "No—I'm not talking about that."

"You're still young," Luda counsels her. "How can you tell what will happen? You know, I think it could be that speaking two languages is what's at fault. In kindergarten he hears English, and at home... What do you speak at home? Russian probably—yes? Well, with mentally retarded kids—"

"He's not mentally retarded!"

"Don't get offended. That's just the way life is. And knowing the diagnosis is half the battle."

Ihor darts up from his chair. Larysa rushes after him—she grabs hold of him and gives him a slap. Ihor trembles and screws up his eyes, and his arms flail about—but he doesn't yell, nor does he cry.

The other diners in the restaurant exchange looks—they don't know whether what they've just witnessed is child abuse or not. They decide to put on smiles, in any case. The Boyko girls, who have been off milling around the aquarium with the goldfish, come skipping back, to be on hand for whatever happens next.

Larysa pulls her son back to the table.

"I'm so tired of it!" she sighs, addressing Roxolana. "Hit him or not, he never complains. So how do you know what hurts him? Or where? What it is he wants? So tell me," she says, addressing her child. "Where were you running to? Tell me! Why don't you speak?... If someone would just stay with him, mind him for us—just once. We'd go somewhere—let everything out, maybe get drunk! Or go to a movie. In four years, we've never once gone to a movie!"

Luda moves her girls farther away from Ihor.

"Nobody ever gave us any help either," says Larysa soothingly. "Except my parents. If just once my mother-in-law had—"

Ihor screeches like a wild thing. Larysa clamps her palm over his mouth.

"Stop it! Stop it, or I'll kill you, here and now!"

"You're still young..." Luda continues persuasively.

"Oh be quiet!" Larysa snaps, eyes welling with tears. She hugs her son close, wiping her eyes on his shoulder.

"But I understand how you feel!" says Luda, conceding to the display of emotion. "Because you're the mother. While the father—well, he's always just a man."

"Sometimes I see exactly how it will be," Larysa's voice is soft, and

she is speaking more to her son than to Luda. "One morning he'll just wake up, like Sleeping Beauty, and talk to me—"

"Do you think Boyko and I always had an easy time of it?" Luda is speaking softly now too.

Larysa doesn't hear.

"—but who will awaken him from this sleep? When all around us people are blind and indifferent, at best. Stupid moles. Jealous, boorish, obtuse, evil people—"

"That's it, exactly!" Luda agrees. "If only you knew how they've made me suffer! Some day I'll tell you..."

Luda spots Uliana and Kohut making their way toward them. Luda keeps talking, but abruptly changes topic.

"You have to read to him more!" She now counsels Larysa. "And explain things to him! For instance, pick up a fork and say to him, 'Look at this. See? This is a *vylka*. Now you say it!' What I mean is—oh, what am I saying?! The word's not *vylka*, but *vydelka*!"

"Could that possibly really work?" says Larysa, barely holding back tears.

"Well," says Luda defensively, "if you keep hearing something from a very young age... Though, of course, the right word is *vydelka*. Yet, for some reason, back home we always just said *vylka*. We should have said it correctly! At home all of us—adults and kids alike—always spoke only Ukrainian. Yet we always said *vylka* instead of *vydelka*!"

Ihor grabs the *vylka-vydelka* and pokes the fork at a bottle of sauce.

"See that! He understands me! Come on now, say it—*vydelka*, *vydelka*, *vydelka*..."

Under Larysa's instructive gaze Ihor crouches down and begins to strain.

"No!" says Larysa, falling to her knees and starting to crawl under the table.

"What is it? What's the matter?" asks Luda apprehensively. Bending over, she sees a puddle spreading toward one of her new, Brazilian-made shoes.

Larysa pushes her son past Uliana and Kohut, in the direction of the men's room. She jostles against Boyko and Sambur, who are on their way back to the table, and deposits her son with his father.

"Take him!"

"What happened?" he says, bewildered.

"That's what! Look at that! Do something—anything! I've got to mop it up! Did you bring extra clothes?"

"A shirt and pants—in the bag on the back seat."

"And underwear?"

"No."

"No underwear!"

"Yes—no underwear! Why are you looking at me like that? I'm not the one who peed himself! And when he did it, he was with you!"

### VIII

The bottles are empty and their cups are nearly dry too. They sit waiting for more tea.

Sambur, gesturing grandiosely, is launching into an anecdote about two telephone companies—one European and the other American—competing for Ukraine's telephone business.

But Uliana outdoes him. Capturing Kohut's attention, she starts speaking with deliberate offhandedness—but so the others can hear—about the conference she recently attended. She casually mentions that the participants included three Nobel laureates. And on the last day of the conference, during the concluding reception—which happened to be held at the Waldorf-Astoria—Uliana, speaking in Polish, engaged one of them in discussion.

Luda is trying to get her daughters to eat some of the shrimp—they're very high in calcium—but the girls are putting up a fuss. Between prods and threats, Luda is embellishing the tale of how when they were getting ready to leave for America, the girls' grandparents—her own mother and father, she means—reminded them always to carry their own soap and water, because people in the U.S. were being mowed down by AIDS right and left. Earlier they had pleaded with Luda: 'You two go wherever you like, but leave us the grandchildren!' Why, when Oksana first went to school, she wouldn't touch anything, or even sit down at a desk. She was so nervous that she began to stutter—then she broke out in red spots and her temperature climbed to 40°: that's Oksana for you. As for Roxie, she couldn't have cared less.

Sambur, alternately taking on the voices of a German, an American, and a regional head official, is artfully relating how the momentous decision was made. The gist of his anecdote is that while one businessman was presenting a prospectus and extolling his firm's advantages, the other was determining who had to be bribed how much and thus nabbing the contract.

Kravets has come back with Ihor and they sit down at the table: the child is wearing dry pants. Kravets takes his son on his lap to give his wife a break. When there is a pause in the conversation, he asks Kohut where he should go for a car inspection, since renewal of his permit is long overdue.

"What office do I go to? And how do I go about it—do I have to phone ahead, or can I go without an appointment?"

"You can keep driving on the old one for months," Kohut assures him. "Lots of people here do that. So don't worry."

"And if I'm stopped?"

"Then you'll get fined—several hundred dollars! Because in America

nobody does that. There are laws against it."

"So where is this office?" Kravets persists.

"We've been in America for years now," Larysa breaks in, "but I have yet to see any garlic shoots. Onion, yes—several kinds, green onions and various kinds of bulbs. But garlic—there are only the heads. Why doesn't anyone here sell young green garlic?"

"My wife's the one who does the grocery shopping," explains Kohut. "At one of the supermarkets. They're big stores, part of a chain. 'Chain' because there's a whole string of them—from state to state. I just go to the refrigerator, open it, and tell myself, 'Good! I'm going to cook something Mexican today!' In any case, that kind of produce is sold in specialty stores."

"And your wife," asks Larysa, "does she cook too?"

"Certainly!"

"So you both cook? Together?"

"Of course! And we've got feminism to thank for that! Nowadays men have to know how to do everything themselves, because women want to have their own careers. It's time we men founded our own men's liberation."

But this topic fails to get off the ground. Instead, taking Uliana's account of the banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria as a springboard, they launch into an animated discussion of where their literature is headed. Each of them reads voraciously and is well acquainted with the works of just about all the leading writers. Luda presses Oksana to recite a poem she wrote in third grade to mark the old calendar New Year. As Oksana prevaricates, Roxie yells out a short verse about a fly that alighted on jam.

Kohut, who once reviewed a translation of Honchar's *Sobor*, invites comment on whether Honchar writes in the social realist style. Opinion on the matter proves divided.

There echoes the idea that if any of their writers deserves the Nobel prize, it is Shevchuk. Because he writes a psychological kind of prose. Because he's an historian, a literary stylist, and a philosopher to boot—an individual as broad as Franko.

In Boyko's view, the Nobel prize has been prostituted in the service of politics. All the nominees have been selected beforehand, an iron-clad coterie rules, and only cretins don't see who's calling the shots.

Uliana is critical of Shevchuk—they once traveled by train in the same sleeping car—because he's a populist, and populism is now old hat.

The others stand up staunchly for Shevchuk. Because he risks writing about urban life, stays clear of politics, and works day and night. He also makes use of sleek and obscure lexical forms.

Sambur is fascinated by the man. "Shevchuk's a marvel—a walking encyclopedia!" he exclaims. Sambur once directed one of Shevchuk's plays—he visited him at home and drank tea with him several times.

"Belief in the masses is anachronistic," declares Uliana, squashing these arguments. "Now we're in the age of Deconstructivism and Post-Modernism."

Kohut agrees.

"Yet over there," he says, making no effort to hide his amazement, "nobody knows a thing about phenomenology! And sex studies are unknown! When I was presenting at a session of your Academy of Sciences, back in '90, that's when I realized—they don't even know the terminology! So how can there even be hope of a fruitful discussion?!"

In Kohut's view, collectivism is to blame for every deficiency. It's the brake that prevents the flow of Ukrainian culture into the Western arena—the reason why to this day Ukrainian culture has no aesthetic function, but only a social one. That's understood by younger artists, who are no longer bound by dogmas and have cast taboos aside. Kohut is hoping that the translation he is currently working on will sweep the old clichés away and have a positive impact on the situation.

"For Ukraine must wake up," he declares, "and absorb the enterprising spirit—is that what you call it?"

"The entrepreneurial spirit," says Uliana, hitting on the phrase.

"Right," says Kohut, nodding assent. "Because that's exactly what America had! How hard we've all worked! Both of my parents held down several jobs at the same time. Because they knew that if you just hang around, you get nowhere."

Luda says that after getting her girls off to school today, she watched a Western on T.V. It's part of their culture—that kind of fighting. Their very organism craves it, like ours craves alcohol.

"And then I understood," Larysa shares her revelation, "that before the whites took over, they destroyed everybody else! As they were consolidating their authority and dividing everything into spheres."

"What spheres? Where? Who was destroyed by whom?" they all clamor to know.

"Why, spheres of influence—in the Wild West, of course," Luda elucidates. "While the cowboys were killing the natives! Because before they got their Constitution, there was lawlessness everywhere—even greater than ours! Today they themselves admit that!"

In the several years that the Kravetses have lived here, Larysa has made friends with lots of Americans. So now, commenting on Luda's observation, she can explain to her countrymen that with the Americans, everything is different from how it is back home. That's because they're simply totally different from us.

"For instance, suppose you go over to somebody's house for a picnic and bring a salad. Then after the picnic is over, you take it home—I mean what's left in the bowl, of course. No one will even think of being offended by your doing that! On the contrary—it's what they expect you to do!"

"We, by contrast, are a generous people," the others respond. "We don't begrudge a guest anything. Back home, anything we have in the house goes right on the table! And that's not left-overs or canned stuff—no, everything that's fresh and really good. We don't host our friends with dregs. Let them think we're stupid Scythians—to us, they're simply boors!"

The conversation abruptly halts. The guests sense that they have said more than they should. Not knowing how to extricate themselves, they take turns checking to see what is left to be sampled—the only thing left is a trace of the yellow sauce. Their smiling waitress is putting the dirty dishes on a cart and clearing the table for dessert.

"But those of us here now"—it's Boyko who finally thinks of something to say—"could gang together—I mean, unite—and do something ... I mean, something so that... so they'll at least sit up and take notice!"

Everyone pounces on this idea and begins to elaborate on it. For each of them has both the desire and the expertise to serve the national cause. Through courses of language, culture, and civilization. Through exhibits of collages. By starting a local Ukrainian club, with weekly evening get-togethers devoted to literature and art. By the degustation of Ukrainian culinary specialities, and through lectures and slide presentations. They might offer Yurko Kohut collegial help with his translation, for that text abounds in Russian words and a slangy mishmash of Russian and Ukrainian, not to mention obscure nuances and allusions. They would all work on that translation together, so it becomes a real event in the literary world. Then everybody out there would finally get the message: we're neither Rusksies nor Sovs!

"So, Yurko, what do you think of the idea?" asks Boyko, summing things up. "Is it realistic or not?"

"It might work," says Kohut amiably. "In the spring the university holds a multicultural arts festival—students dance and sing and there is entertainment of all kinds. There's a whole collection of costumes stored at the department—Jennifer can show you where. It's a nice idea—so why not?"

Everyone is taken aback, and silence reigns.

"When I was at the banquet," says Uliana abruptly, breaking the silence, "I began a conversation with a British novelist. I asked what he knew about Ukraine. He said he knew it was a very big city and that many Catholics lived there. And another writer, a renowned poet, said frankly, 'What literature? Yukrainian? Is there really a literature like that?'"

Kohut nods. "You'll find that kind of thinking everywhere!"

"Well!" Uliana is dismayed. "Somehow we have to enlighten them! Your department must offer courses—"

"But I have no openings!" says Kohut irritably. "And where will the money come from? That's not how we do things here!"

"Of course not!" Boyko comes to Kohut's support. "What kind of

courses can there be, when there aren't any up-to-date textbooks! That's where one has to begin—with textbooks!"

"And the instructors can't be artistic types!" Kravets adds. "They've got to be teaching professionals!"

Uliana shoots looks of burning hatred, first at Kravets and then at everyone else. She refuses to make any bones about who is who here. The proposed professional—that is, Larysa Kravets—is an impudent housewife. As for Sambur, he's a drunk. And Boyko, he's a nobody—he calls himself an academic and professor, but in fact he's only a candidate and docent. As for artistic types—yes, it's true, she is one of them! She's an artist: a literary artist, whose works have been translated into English—and even into Romanian! She has more scholarly articles to her credit than all the rest of them put together—including Kohut. And she has lectured at two American colleges, to boot!

"Our heroine!" they respond, "So you've taught! So now it's time to take a break and give others a chance."

But their common front against Uliana crumbles with every remark they utter. Soon everyone is arguing with everyone else.

"What right do you have to judge me?!" they charge one another. "How dare you say, 'If I had only your troubles!' What can you possibly know about the troubles I have?!"

It becomes patently clear that each of them has a valid reason—and what luck if it's only one!—to tarry here. Their longing for their homeland—and the strain of being constantly obliged to be reticent in this foreign, albeit bounteous, land—erupts now in stormy confessions.

Uliana's confession is the loudest, because she is a poet and hence more sensitive to the world's beauty and pain than anyone else. And she's the only one able to transform the pulse of life throbbing about them into exquisite verse, and at least in that way know immortality.

Luda's confession, by contrast, drips with tiresome and mundane trivialities—bad dreams (which give rise to just the kind of mood one might expect), fretting about the children and their illnesses, recollections of how she fought off the floozies who were after her husband (the concoctions she drank, just to lose some weight! and the things she had to do, just to cater to him and keep the family together!).

"How sick I am of it all!" Luda proclaims. "So sick of it that—as God is my witness—I'd walk all the way home! Right across that ocean!"

Boyko, too, would say the hell with it all and return home to his institute, if it weren't for the parents—his and Luda's, both. Because while they're living here, a Greek journalist is staying in their place back home, and the rent is being divided, absolutely equally, between the two sets of retirees.

"Look at that! He's making money here and raking it in over there! Why Yurko, you crafty fox!" says Sambur, clapping his hands together.

"While I've got no place to call my own, either here or over there!" (It's true—Sambur's wife locked him out of the house as soon as their son got into the police academy.)

Kravets puts his head down on the table, covers his face with his hands, and groans. Because all of them are living lives of their own—but he and his Larysa cannot.

"Not to be able to have a normal conversation with your own child! Or let him out of your sight for even a moment, because he'll injure himself or someone else! Could any of you deal with that?!"

"Stop it!" cries Larysa. "Whose sympathy are you looking for? And why? As if they could possibly understand!"

"Why must you think you're so unique?!" Now Luda's temper flares. "Everyone here has kids!"

Everyone except Uliana, that is, who hears Luda's declaration as the next vile accusation flung her way. In retaliation, she calls the Boykos commies. For not that long ago both Luda and Yuri were party members. Luda Boyko was even head of the party office at the high school where she taught.

"Look who's talking!" says Boyko, by way of reminding Uliana that she's a communist too, albeit a former one.

The counterattack unnerves Uliana totally—she's long forgotten about her membership in the party.

"But I had to!" she says, recovering and striking back. "Or I wouldn't have been able to defend my thesis!"

"Then hold your tongue!"

Not Uliana.

"It's not up to you to judge!"

"Not up to me?!"

"No—not up to you!"

"Then who? Maybe you?"

"Yes—me!"

"Ha! As if you could!"

Sambur steps in to separate the party members bodily.

"Don't take it out on each other!" he says genially. "The other guy always seems to have the meatier stick."

He allows himself this witticism because he never had a party card. But that omission doesn't save Sambur—he gets it anyway. For having repeatedly staged theatrical performances for Komsomol meetings, conferences, and other gatherings—performances that glorified their whole gang. That's much worse than being nominally a member but actually opposed. And Sambur not only entertained them, but raked in the dough—just about bulldozed it in.

"Me?" says Sambur, eyes like saucers. "Why, I don't even have a decent suit to my name, and never did!"

Kohut, over whose head the dispute is being waged, hasn't been able to figure out for a while what it is that they're arguing about, but at last he can comprehend Sambur's problem and he offers advice.

"You don't have to go to the expensive stores to get one, you know. Because there are other kinds, and they've got clearance sales too—that's when they want to sell everything off fast. You can snap up all kinds of things for a song. There's also the place where people drop off the clothes and shoes they no longer want—it's open on Thursdays. And then there are the church basements. On Saturdays they sell things there even more cheaply—it's considered charity."

"In basements? Where are they? In churches?" each is exclaiming. "Which ones? Ukrainian churches?!"

"No—they belong to various denominations," clarifies Kohut. "The Ukrainian church—that's about a three hours' drive. That one's quite new. A Hindu painted the icons—but then he's also half-Chinese."

This swerving explanation baffles everybody, and they exchange glances. The Boyko girls fall silent, like the adults.

The happy Chinese girl brings them tea and fortune cookies (no ice cream or cake was ordered). In response to the waitress's question if she can bring them anything else, Boyko asks for the check, for he prefers to pay now. He takes out his money.

"They take checks here," notes Kohut helpfully.

"I'll just pay cash," says Boyko. "After all, it's more reliable."

"You can also use plastic," urges Kohut, "A credit card—or your bank cash card."

"Thanks. I know. But cash is simpler."

While their father is taking care of the bill, Roxolana and Oksana pull Ihor under the table. They press him to take a fork they have hidden there especially so he can use it to bang on the dishes.

"But you could have paid by check," Kohut is still fretting.

Making an effort to regain his composure, he picks up the teapot. Ihor moves up to Kohut from behind, looks him straight in the eye, and grins.

"Hello there," says Kohut.

Ihor bursts into laughter and touches the fork to Kohut's arm.

Kohut's eyes widen in terror. He jerks back his arm and jumps up, spilling the hot liquid all over himself. Grabbing his crotch, he doubles over and falls back down in his chair.

"What is it?" Everyone is confused. "What happened?!"

"That's it—I've had it!" moans the scalded Kohut. Very gingerly, he gets up. As the shocked restaurant-goers watch, he starts to shuffle slowly toward the door.

## IX

Larysa gives her son a slap and berates her husband for not minding him. Little Ihor doesn't protest—he just closes his eyes and flails his arms about. Snickering sounds come from under the table, where the Boyko girls have hidden.

Boyko nearly overturns his chair as he rushes after Kohut. Larysa is just behind. But it is Sambur who reaches the professor first, catching up to him just at the exit.

"I understand what you said about being enterprising—I agree absolutely. Now, have I got a business proposal for you!"

Panting audibly, Sambur summarizes his plan for striking it rich within a year. For it to work, Kohut has to introduce him to one of the university deans. The plan springs from the fact that several businessmen have given Sambur verbal authorization to start up a noodle factory.

"We don't need any marketing help, or any managers. Just give us the money—the dollars—and we'll take care of the rest. We've got everything—the site, the flour, the packaging and wrapping. The only thing we need is capital. If you help us get that, we'll be able to buy fax machines, computers—in short, get the whole infrastructure. And we'll return your investment in a flash—I swear! Just put me in touch with the dean—or the provost, whoever's in charge of the physical plant. This is no joke, believe me—we'll become millionaires! Within a year! From noodles!"

"Oh, leave me alone!" says Kohut, breaking away.

Larysa, Uliana, and Boyko rush forward. Each addresses Kohut in his particular way. "Master Yuri!" "Yurko dear!" And, even, "Pater!"

"Are you badly burned?" says Boyko, crowding him. "I know what to do. Let's go to the restroom—"

"No, I don't want to!" Kohut declares to all of them. "I'm sick of it!"

"He didn't mean to do it!" says Larysa, defending her son. "He doesn't understand that you can't do things like that!"

"That's something none of you understands!" Kohut is already out the door as he pronounces this verdict. "It's part of your culture—part of that code of yours. Because your words mean something different than ours do!"

"What?" The guests are astounded. "Why are you so offended?"

"That's not the point!"

"Then what is the point?" They surround him on all sides. "Tell us! What is your point?!"

Kohut peers into the low American sky and watches planes cutting across constellations. Rather than give examples of that mysterious code of theirs, he begins to recall his painful childhood. And soon everyone understands why he was terrified by the fork Ihor wielded. His family lived in difficult circumstances. His immigrant parents worked every day—the whole week through and on weekends. They wore plain clothes, bought

plain food, and ate everything on their plates. But their little Yurko disliked anything fatty or with gristle. One day he tried to get away with tossing a piece of fatty bacon under the table. But his father caught him at it, and nearly pierced his hand through with a fork—it was the only way he could reach him. Nonetheless, in time all the children in the family managed to get a university education.

"But how does this relate to us?" ask the guests, unable to see any direct connection.

"Because you think that in America everything comes easily, just like that. And that everyone here is supposed to take care of you. But to get anything from you—that's another story. One can wait and wait and still get no gratitude—and no help!"

"How can you say that? Why, we"—each is beating his or her breast—"are always happy to help. With every ounce of strength. With total gratitude. And as for our reliance on your good will—we thought you were offering it. But if you weren't offering, well then—we'd expect nothing from you, of course! Because no means no! But how did we—we want to know, exactly—how and when did we let you down?"

Everyone is clamoring for an explanation—with names named and masks removed. So, crowding together, they extract from Kohut, now pinned against the glass doors, revelation of all the times he has been wronged and abused.

So now they learn that, for instance, Luda knew it was her girls who had damaged the trampoline out in the yard and yet blamed everything on the neighbors' kids. His wife had seen it all through the window while working out on the fitness machine.

When Kohut organized a lecture for Boyko at the university, he had delivered his standard patriotic text, geared for a diaspora audience. Afterwards, in academic circles rumors had spread that through his position Kohut was fostering the usual backwoods anti-Semitism—something that is not only vile, but a crime! To get his tenured professorship, Kohut had been obliged to maneuver around the entire Jewish kahal in Slavic studies. Publish or perish—that's the law of the academic jungle! And who will publish any of his work now, branded as he is?!

Uliana, too, has offended. She has the necessary language skills, but did not want to help him with his latest prose translation. (True, Kohut hadn't asked for her help, but she should have realized that he needed it.) On top of that, when she was giving a talk before an audience in New York, she failed to mention him as her benefactor. (Kohut was not there, but that same evening he received a call describing everything that took place.) And that offended him.

"Because here it's customary to thank people. That's the way we do things in America."

Sambur—to whom Kohut has opened up more than to anyone else—is

charged with having failed to appreciate the breadth of Kohut's spiritual and artistic world (the professor paints, composes music, and writes controversial poetry, in prose).

Nor is Larysa Kravets without sin. Once, standing in line at the supermarket, she pretended not to see him.

"I don't understand that kind of behavior," says Kohut indignantly. "I don't understand what that means in your culture. It must mean something—but what?"

"But when did I do such a thing?" says Larysa, stunned at the revelation. "What supermarket was it in?"

Loudly, and in turn, the others, too, start making justifications.

"Enough!" cries Kohut, cutting them off. "Please let me go! And good night!"

And with that, burdened by the insults he has sustained, he gingerly makes wide-legged strides out into the parking lot.

The birthday celebrant and his guests watch until Kohut reaches his Mazda and lowers himself into the seat. Then they all turn around and head back to the table.

"There we have it, friends—big trouble, right on Yurko's day! It's done! Our America has closed its doors!" they say, scaring each other. "Now he'll really take care of everything for us. Courses, visas, invitations—everything!"

## X

A shroud of deep anxiety hangs over the table. Warranted or not, everyone had quietly harbored his or her own expectations.

"Why are we so wretched?" each wants to know. "Could it be a national curse of some kind?"

Boyko yanks them back to their senses.

"For God's sake, what are you doing—breeding mysticism? With laments like 'Damnation! Reason can't explain this'! That's the way the Ruskiy talk! We're not like them—we know there's a logical cause for everything! Centuries of foreign occupation, serfdom, statelessness, no elite of our own—aren't those cause enough? All of them gave us certain ways of looking at the world, they shaped our patterns of behavior and defense mechanisms. And together, all that fits the colonial syndrome—half the world suffers from it!"

This news boosts everyone's confidence and self-assertiveness. The realization dawns that they're not the ones dependent on Kohut—that, in fact, things are the other way around. Because, they tell each other, he needs us more than we need him. Otherwise he wouldn't have gathered all of us here. That's why this isn't the end of the world. We can survive without the U.S. of A.! Soon we'll have our own hard currency, and then everything

will be different. After all, we've already got independence.

The flask of "Pepper Vodka" that Sambur has pulled out of his jacket heightens their sense of liberation. Fraternally they pour the vodka into their cups and raise a toast to Boyko's fortieth.

"No, wait!" cries the birthday boy. "We've already toasted that! Let's drink to the ladies!"

The ladies do not protest, but Luda wants to drink a separate toast—to all of them together, she declares. So fortune will smile on them, always and everywhere—on them and their children.

Everyone is amenable. And because there is no prospect of replenishing the vodka, the three toasts are linked together as one. The men stand and, like hussars, toss back the vodka in one gulp, forearms parallel to the floor from fingertips to elbow.

Instead of having a bite to eat as chasers—Boyko has suggested ordering more food, but quite quickly allows himself to be dissuaded—they take to dissecting Kohut.

Uliana thinks that Kohut is a genius at banality.

"I just don't understand him," says Luda. "At times, when he gets started on something... Does he talk in riddles on purpose?"

They explain to her that it probably stems from a lack of self-confidence. Or was caused by his being ridiculed—in school, no doubt, because his parents were immigrants. Just like the city people do to the country folk back home. Kids are cruel like that everywhere. And maybe it continued even later, after he finished his dissertation and managed to latch onto a job. Back home, that part was easy—you'd finish and join the party and get the green light to go anywhere. But what have they got here? No party, no KGB, no Komsomol.... So now Kohut takes it out on us. Because who else can he lord it over?

They don't neglect to comment on Kohut's family life. Why is his wife never around? Do they live together or not? Could it be that he's gay?

Sambur says that when they're in the sauna together, Kohut never fails to look him you-know-where, even if it's just out of the corner of his eye or for a split second.

"Where?" Kravets and Boyko ask, pretending to not understand.

Luda shoos her daughters off to the aquarium and the goldfish.

"Why, he's checking you out," the two men tease, "to see whether you're circumcised or not. Come on, Lev—we want to see too!"

"What, right here?"

Laughing about it all, each in turn unbegrudgingly gives Kohut his due. For if it weren't for him, neither the Boykos nor Sambur would be sitting here. Even Uliana, if she hadn't met him in Kyiv back in '90, might not have made it onto the international scene. This Kohut of theirs is, after all, a person of stature. There's good reason why he's known not only in Ukrainian circles, but far beyond.

Having clarified everything about Kohut, they go on to criticize America. Because there's no really good bread here. And their strawberries—they taste like plastic! And the watermelons! Granted, they're sold year round, but the flavor—ugh! August is the time to eat watermelon—or October, at the outside. But to have them in March or May—that's just going against nature.

"We eat only the food we cook at home," says Luda. "Potato pancakes, omelettes, some meat, cheese pies. We do without lobster just fine. And we don't poison ourselves with the chemicals their MacDonal'd's doles out."

Everyone concedes that well-made clothes are readily available here. But what's intriguing is that no matter what you pick up, the label reads "Made in China." Footwear, dishes, toys, office supplies—it's all made for them by the Chinese. To produce something themselves, let alone make it by hand—that they can't or just won't do. Whereas Luda's sister-in-law, for example, knits sweaters so beautiful that even the ones in boutiques can't compare.

Insightful observations, notes on geography, and analyses of socio- as well as culturological phenomena are all aired. Everyone's verdict is the same: this is a very strange country indeed. Because here children are taught from infancy to be like adults, and when they get older they're enticed to be childish. They're handed so many rights and freedoms that they become unhinged and driven to excess or rage.

"And why do they need so many credit cards? One should be enough! Use it, spend, plunge into debt! But no, for them that's not nearly enough!"

History teaches that all capricious excesses lead to turmoil and perversity. That as soon as a civilization begins to reach its apex, a barbarian force inevitably descends on it from who-knows-where, raking through it forward and back and then crushing it outright and destroying everything it produced.

"That's right!"

Everyone's observation nudges the situation closer to impending disaster.

"They'll find out how the game ends! They let in everybody—blacks, gays, slant-eyes. And then they wonder why they're in a mess! But let me tell you, when disaster strikes, it'll come from someplace totally different than they expect! A hole in the ozone layer, a hurricane, an earthquake—whatever it may be, it'll bury them suddenly, and right over their heads. Because they are absolutely undisciplined and totally soft. Because they haven't gone through anything like what we've endured. In comparison to us, they're mere adolescents! We know a thing or two—things we could teach them. We know how people tick. Whereas all they have to rely on is technology—and that can always fail."

With this conclusion, a hush descends. The thoughts of some wing

homeward. With self-pride Uliana reveals her desperate longing for the sound of the Ukrainian language—even for that loathsome, thrice-cursed *surzhyk* that's a mishmash of Ukrainian and Russian combined.

Luda is agonizing over the prospect of going back home and being obliged to approach the school principal with a bribe—she's so inexperienced at doing such things. With Roxolana, there'll be no problem—she completed the whole first-grade program at age six. But because of this sojourn in America, Oksana has missed the better part of a school year. Will they agree to place her in sixth grade? If they don't, well then, the only thing left to do is grease their palms—but should it be \$50 or \$100? And should it be in small bills or large? Should the money be put inside a box of cologne or just in an envelope? And how should the presentation be made?

They reminisce about what things were like when dollars were prohibited, about the goods you could find on the shelves then. Meringues—white, or pink if you preferred—and packets of cheese with raisins, regular butter and chocolate spread, smoked cheese sausages and sliced peppers.

And what candies one could choose from! "Bilochka," "Bear-Cubs-in-a-Pine-Forest," "Tuzik," and those luscious ones called "Just-Try-to-Take-These-Away."

The men recall exactly what wine and liquor cost back then. "White-Power" went for a ruble and 22, "Kysliak" for just 0,77, "Chornylo" for 0,97. Or you could choose between the "Rubin," "Rusty," "Rumelian," or "Sun-Gift" brands (they note the cost and alcohol content of each). Even those who weren't around to enjoy "Sun-Gift" or a "Tuzik" recall when a ruble bought several times what a dollar does here today.

Bonds are forged when recollections are shared.

"There was all that to choose from! And the quality!" they say, smacking their lips. "With our soil and climate, we could be the best-fed nation in Europe—maybe the world!"

With nothing else to munch on, they break open the fortune cookies and pull out the paper slips inside. Each reads what the Chinese predict for him or her, and they compare their lucky numbers. One fortune reads: Life change with new suit. Another: Character combine light heart and deep knowledge. One's lucky numbers are 46 and 5; another's are 32 and 7.

They resolve to take turns hosting weekly get-togethers at their homes. For tea and something with the tea. To chat and share things with each another, countryman to fellow countryman. For who else can understand them?

The children each take a cookie as well. They too want to know what it reveals about them and what their lucky numbers are. In the three months she's been here, Oksana has learned more English than her father has in all his years of study and practice.

Suddenly it dawns on all of them simultaneously—so that's why we didn't have our own country before! Because everybody sat in his own burrow willing his neighbor's cow to die. When everyone should have been doing exactly the opposite. If someone wishes you ill, forgive him, because you'll never know why he does—maybe it's because of his own insecurity, or because for some reason he has a real fear of you. Pardon the person who expects a bribe from you. And the one who has fallen prey to hate and bewitches your child. Or drives you into the ranks of the party. Forgive them and embrace them—because they're all our own people. Then we'll feel how many of us there are! No fewer than the Jews! Incidentally, Kohut once told them that apparently Walt Disney, too, was Ukrainian.

Oksana runs up to Larysa. "Why is your Ihor taking our cookies?"

"Ihor dear, come here!" Larysa calls her son. "Don't touch them! Give them back!"

"He's crumbling my cookie to bits!"

"It's not on purpose—he won't do it any more. Ihor!"

"Please, tell him it's my cookie! He has his own!"

"Unfortunately, he doesn't understand that."

"Then you explain it to him—please!"

"Oksana," Luda breaks in, "don't bother him. Here, take mine."

"Mama," says Roxolana, pressing herself under Luda's arm, "I don't want to sit next to him!"

Sambur plunges his fingers into Ihor's head of hair and tousles it. "Maybe it's his way of showing the girls he likes them. How old is he—seven? Well then, it's high time! Am I right?" Sambur looks Ihor in the eye. "Who is this standing here—is he a Cossack?"

But this Cossack is emitting animal sounds. And from the way his body is writhing, it's clear Ihor doesn't have it under control.

Uliana is aghast.

"What's happening to him?"

As Larysa tells Uliana Ihor's diagnosis, Luda whispers to Sambur that someone gave the boy the evil eye.

"What kind of treatment is he getting?" asks Uliana.

"There is no treatment," says Larysa.

"What do you mean, no treatment?"

Back home there isn't any, but in France they've found a way to fight it, says Uliana. Researchers there have found that children who suffer from autism hear a constant din which varies in frequency from child to child. So they put earphones on the children and use sound equipment to create a noise of similar frequency, thereby eliminating the din. Once the children have undergone this procedure, they begin to relate to the outside world.

"You must take him to France," Uliana concludes.

Kravets replies that the former Soviet Union, too, has quite a number of psychologists—at the Leningrad school, for instance—who work in very

original ways with such children. Not every psychologist, of course, but the dedicated ones, who under communism weren't allowed to try innovative and alternative methods of treatment. On their days off, these young researchers regularly take these children by suburban train out of the city, into fields and forests. There the children might be muddy, cold, sniveling, and wet, but they're happy because they can experience the world around them. Equipment isn't always necessary for that to happen.

Uliana doesn't take well to being contradicted. She persists in urging the Kravetses to make immediate plans to fly to France.

"You've got a job—set aside a few thousand! Does it make sense to scrimp where health and well-being are concerned?"

Larysa opens her mouth to reply, but a child's shriek interrupts.

"Mama!" Roxolana wails, "He's got it again! And he's crushing it! Give it back—it's mine! What is it with you?!"

She must have kicked Ihor under the table, for he has bent over in pain. Even so, tears don't flow down his face immediately. They begin a little later, after the shock recedes. For Ihor doesn't whimper at just anything. That happens only when he's lost the strength to endure.

## XI

"What is it now?" says Larysa, turning around. "What's the matter with you now?"

"I didn't do anything! He did it himself!" cries Roxolana, hiding behind her mother.

"I didn't touch him either!" Oksana chimes in.

"Maybe he choked on something," Boyko suggests.

"Oksana, come here!" orders her mother.

As Kravets bends under the table to examine his son's leg, Roxolana punches Ihor in the cheek with her fist.

But Kravets has straightened up just in time to catch what she's done. He grasps hold of her arm.

"Hey, hey—careful!" Luda warns.

"With kids there's always trouble," says Boyko, moving closer to his younger daughter. "That's why I don't get involved."

"I saw what you did!" cries Kravets, flushed with anger and shaking a finger at the girl. "Why did you hit him? He wasn't bothering you!"

"He took her cookie," Boyko explains to Kravets, "and crumbled it to bits. Why, that's as if I came over and broke something of yours... like your computer! Well—how would you feel about that?"

"But he didn't even touch her!" shouts Kravets, shaking his fist.

Ihor writhes and bawls in fright, as tears stream down his face.

"Take him away!" Luda demands. "And keep him at home! Why does everybody have to share your problem? If he's so wild that he hits other

children, stay home with him! Or else hire a nanny!"

"Let's get out of here!" Larysa cries at her husband. "I told you to go on your own, but no—you had to drag all three of us here!"

"Don't yell at me!" Kravets warns. "I wanted what was best—for you to get out for a while."

"Any more of this and my mind will give out!"

"Stop it! Is it my fault? I have no life anyway!"

"And what about me? At least you go out to work every day!"

"And if I didn't, where would we be? Don't forget who's responsible for our being here!"

"I... you," Larysa sobs, "... Ihor..." Nothing else she says is comprehensible.

They all fall silent, chagrined and embarrassed. Luda, unable to stand it any longer, is the first to speak. They should have another child, she says. This time it'll be a normal one. Then everything will fall into place.

"You think that's all it takes?!" Uliana snaps back. "There's more to a woman's life than bearing children!"

"Why are you getting involved in this?" Luda fires back in defense. "If you don't want kids, don't have them!"

Boyko hastily intervenes, telling Uliana that every child has a unique personality and character.

"It's as if you'd written a novel," he explains, "and then someone came and tore it up before your very eyes—and that was the only copy there was!"

In spite of Boyko's soothing tone, dissension and discord swell beyond the topic of children and envelop them all. Every time that one of them offended another, by word or by glance, is dragged forward and stripped bare. With no holds barred, they give vent to their feelings so forcefully that the children, mouths agape, can't comprehend everything they're hearing.

Boyko is called to account for being a brown-nose who rakes Kohut's leaves. Uliana, for setting her cap on the professor and acting up front to secure her next American stay. Sambur, for slithering unlubricated into every crevice, like a worm. The Kravetses, for never taking their fellow countrymen for a ride out of the city even though they own a car.

"Go fawn over your benefactor," Kravets retorts. "Let him drive you around. As it is, you put your butts out for him but he won't do it for you."

"It's not clear yet who is taking advantage of whom," says Boyko, smiling sagaciously. "Because I tell him one thing and do something totally different. And what I'm thinking while doing it is something neither he nor you knows—or ever will!"

"And you won't know it about us, either!" boast the others.

"But I'll put him in my next novel," Uliana vows, "and then he'll have something to scratch his head over! And he won't be the only one!"

Sambur has become so expansive that he swears to them all that he'll

expose Kohut in all his glory!

"You needn't do that!" they entreat him. "Nobody will understand!"

"But I've got to do it! As the ultimate proclamation of my own liberation!"

Kravets regrets having offended his wife. As their companions are teasing Sambur, he tries to lift Larysa's spirits.

"Never mind," he whispers in her ear. "Things aren't so bad. After all, we're here. And remember that woman from Lutsk—remember what she told you? That you have to believe and then it'll all pass?"

"Believe! That's easy for her to say!" says Larysa, wiping her eyes with a napkin. "How can I believe when there's no reason to believe. He forgot everything he knew at age two—what is there left to believe? And she was speaking not just to me but to you too!"

"But I go to work and stay there all day! You're the one who minds him!"

Everyone hears this last whisper, because for several seconds now no one has moved a muscle.

Looking up, Kravets sees that Ihor isn't at the table.

"Where is he?" Kravets says hoarsely. "Where did he go?"

Turning around, he sees Kohut, standing to his left. Only now instead of a suit Kohut is wearing red-and-yellow shorts and a sweater.

No one dares breathe. For nobody knows—did Kohut overhear something or not? And if so, how much? And, most important, what parts did he understand?

Larysa spots her son at last. He's at the end of the corridor, standing by the doors to the kitchen. Kneeling in front of him is their pleasant Chinese waitress. She is holding Ihor close and telling him something. From what Larysa sees, Ihor is saying something to the girl in turn.

"It can't be!" she shivers.

Kohut has had enough of the perplexed stares fixed on his garish clothes. He nonchalantly throws up his hands.

"I always keep extra clothes and shoes in the car," he explains. "Things are different over here, you know. Here you can go to restaurants even in shorts. Because this is a free country."

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*Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk*

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## Selections

*Taras Shevchenko*

### **The Girl under a Spell**

The wide Dnipro roars and moans,  
An angry wind howls aloft.  
It bends the tall willows down,  
Lifting waves as high as mountains.  
And at that time a pale moon  
Peeks out from behind a cloud now and then,  
Like a tiny boat in a deep blue sea  
It jumps up and dives down.  
The cocks had yet to crow three times,  
No one anywhere making a sound,  
The owls in the grove called to each other,  
And the ash tree creaked now and then.

Taras Shevchenko. "Prychynna" Lines 1–12 of 225.

**The Haidamaks**, excerpt

Everything moves, everything passes, and there is no end.  
Where did it all disappear? From where did it all come?  
Both the fool and the wise man know nothing.  
One lives... one dies... one thing blooms,  
But another has withered, withered away forever...  
And winds have carried off yellowed leaves,  
And the sun will rise, as it used to rise,  
And crimson stars will float off as they used to,  
They will float afterwards, and you, white-faced one,  
Will saunter along the blue sky.

Taras Shevchenko. "Haidamaky" Lines 1–10 of 2565

\* \* \*

The days pass, the nights pass,  
As does summer. Yellowed leaves  
Rustle, eyes grow dim,  
Thoughts fall asleep, the heart sleeps,  
All has gone to rest, and I don't know  
Whether I'm alive or will live,  
Or whether I'm rushing like this through the world,  
For I'm no longer weeping or laughing...

My fate, fate, where are you now?  
I have none;  
If you begrudge me a good one, Lord,  
Then give me a bad one!  
Let a walking man not sleep,  
To die in spirit  
And knock about the entire world  
Like a rotten stump.  
But let me live, with my heart live  
And love people.  
And if not... then curse  
And burn the world!  
It's horrible to end up in chains  
To die in captivity,  
But it's worse to be free  
And to sleep, and sleep, and sleep—  
And to fall asleep forever,  
And to leave no trace  
At all, as if it were all the same  
Whether you had lived or died!  
Fate, where are you, fate where are you?  
I have none!  
If you begrudge me a good one, Lord,  
Then give me a bad one! A bad one!

1845

Taras Shevchenko. "Mynaiut' dni, mynaiut' nochi"

**My Testament**

When I die, bury me  
On a grave mound  
Amid the wide-wide steppe  
In my beloved Ukraine,  
In a place from where the wide-tilled fields  
And the Dnipro and its steep banks  
Can be seen and  
Its roaring rapids heard.  
When it carries off  
The enemy's blood from Ukraine  
To the deep blue sea... I'll leave  
The tilled fields and mountains—  
I'll leave everything behind and ascend  
To pray to God  
Himself... but till then  
I don't know God.  
Bury me and arise, break your chains  
And sprinkle your freedom  
With the enemy's evil blood.  
And don't forget to remember me  
In the great family,  
In a family new and free,  
With a kind and quiet word.

December 25, 1845  
Pereiaslav

Taras Shevchenko. "Iak umru, to pokhovaite"

## N. N.

The sun sets, the mountains darken,  
A bird grows quiet, the field grows mute,  
People rejoice that they will rest,  
And I look... And with my heart I rush forth  
To a dark tiny orchard... to Ukraine  
I think a thought, I ponder it,  
And it's as though my heart is resting.  
The field blackens, the grove and mountains, too,  
And a star emerges in the blue sky.  
Oh star! Star! —and tears fall.  
Have you already risen in Ukraine yet?  
Are brown eyes searching for you  
In the deep blue sky? Or do they forget?  
If they've forgotten, may they fall asleep,  
To keep from hearing of my fate.

The second half of 1847, Orsk Fortress

Taras Shevchenko. "Sontse zakhodyt', hory chorniut"

\* \* \*

Thoughts of mine, thoughts of mine,  
You are all that is left for me,  
Don't you desert me, too,  
In this troubling time.  
Come fly to me my gray-winged  
Doves,  
From beyond the wide Dnipro  
To wander in the steppes  
With the poor Kirghiz.  
They already are destitute  
And naked... But they still pray  
To God in freedom.  
Fly here, my dear ones.  
With peaceful words  
I'll welcome you like children,  
And we'll weep together.

1847, Orsk Fortress

Taras Shevchenko. "Dumy moi, dumy moi, / Vy moi iedyni"

\* \* \*

And the unwashed sky, and drowsy waves;  
And above the shore far away  
The reed bends like a drunk  
Without a wind. My dear Lord!  
Will it still be long for me  
To yearn for the world  
In this unlocked prison  
Above this wretched sea? In the steppes  
The yellowed grass does not speak,  
It is silent and bends as though it were alive;  
It does not want to disclose the truth,  
But there is no one else to ask.

Second Half of 1848, Kosaral

Taras Shevchenko. "I nebo nevmyte, I zaspani khvyli"

In captivity, alone there is no one  
With whom to join your heart.  
Alone, I'm searching for someone  
To talk to.  
I'm searching for God, but I find only  
That God forbid I say it.  
This is what the years and cruel fate  
Have done to me; add to this  
That my precious youth  
Has passed in clouds, that there isn't  
Even a single event  
That's worth recalling.  
But you have to comfort your soul,  
For it so wants, so pleads at least  
For a word of peace. You can't hear,  
It's as though the snow in the field is  
Drifting over a still warm corpse.

1848

Taras Shevchenko, "V nevoli, v samoti nemaie"

\* \* \*

Once again the mail has not brought me Anything from my  
home, Ukraine...

Maybe I'm being punished  
For my sinful deeds  
By an angry God. It's not for me  
To know why I'm being punished.  
And I don't even want to know.  
But my heart cries when I recall  
The unhappy events  
And those unhappy days  
That passed over me  
Once in my Ukraine...  
Once they swore oaths and made pacts  
Of brotherhood and sisterhood with me,  
Until, like a cloud, they scattered  
Without tears, without this sacred dew.  
And once again in old age  
I cast on mankind this... No! no!  
They've all died of cholera,  
But if only they'd send me just  
A scrap of paper .....

.....  
Oh, out of sorrow and regret  
So as not to see how they read  
Those letters, I take walks,  
I stroll looking above the sea  
And console my grief.  
And I remember Ukraine  
And sing a little song.  
People will talk, people will betray you,  
But it will cheer me,  
Cheer and comfort me,  
And will tell me the truth.

Second Half of 1848, Kosaral

Taras Shevchenko. "I znov meni ne pryvezla"

\* \* \*

It's not for people or for fame,  
That I pen these  
Ornate and embroidered poems.  
They're for me, my brothers!  
    It's easier in captivity  
    When I compose them.  
    It's as though words fly to me  
    From beyond the far-off Dnipro River  
    And spread out on paper,  
    Crying and laughing  
    Like children. They give joy  
    To a lonely, wretched  
    Soul. It's pleasant for me.  
    They give me pleasure,  
    The way it is for a wealthy father  
    with his little children.  
    And I am joyful and lighthearted,  
    And I plead for God  
    Not to put my children to bed  
    In a far-off land.  
    Let them fly homeward  
    My fleeting children.  
    And they will say how difficult  
    It has been for them on earth:  
    And in a joyous family the children  
    Will quietly be welcomed,  
    And the father will nod  
    His gray head.  
    The mother will say: "I wish these  
    Children had not been born."  
    And the girl shall reflect:  
    "I loved them."

Second Half of 1848, Kosaral

Taras Shevchenko. "Ne dlia liudei, tiiei slavy"

\* \* \*

I'm well-to-do  
And very pretty,  
But I don't have a mate.  
My fate's so cruel!  
It's hard to live in this world  
Not having someone to love,  
To wear velvet coats  
When I'm all alone.  
I'd fall in love,  
I'd get married  
To a dark-haired orphan,  
But it's not my choice!  
My father and mother stay awake all night  
Standing guard,  
They don't even let me out alone  
In the garden to stroll.  
When they let me, it's only  
With a really awful old man,  
With my wealthy unbeloved,  
With my wicked foe!

Second Half of 1848, Kosaral

Taras Shevchenko. "I bahata ia"

\* \* \*

In captivity I count the days and nights,  
Then lose count.  
O, Lord. How hard  
These days drag on.  
And the years flow between them.  
They quietly flow by,  
They take away the good and bad  
With themselves!  
They take away, without returning  
Anything ever!  
And don't plead, for your prayer  
Will be lost on God.

And the fourth year passes  
Quietly, slowly,  
And I begin to embroider  
My fourth book in captivity—I embroider  
My sorrow in a foreign land  
With blood and tears.  
For you never can tell  
Your grief to anyone in words,  
Ever, ever,  
Nowhere in the world! There are no words  
In far-off captivity!  
There are no words, no tears,  
No nothing.  
You don't even have great God  
Around you!  
There is nothing to look at,  
No one to speak to.  
You don't feel like living in the world,  
But you have to live.  
I must, I must, but why?  
Not to lose my soul?  
It's not worth this sorrow...  
This is why I am fated  
To live in the world, to drag  
These chains in captivity.  
Maybe some day I'll still look  
At my Ukraine...  
Maybe some day I'll share  
My word-tears with

Green oak groves,  
Dark meadows!  
For I have no kin  
In all of Ukraine.  
But still, the people aren't the same  
As in this foreign land!  
I'd stroll along the Dnipro River  
Through cheerful villages  
And I'd sing my thoughts in songs,  
Quiet ones, sad ones.  
Let me live to that day, to glance,  
Dear God,  
At these green fields,  
At these grave mounds.  
If you don't grant me this, then carry  
My tears  
To my land; for I, Lord,  
I am dying for her!  
Perhaps it will be easier  
To lay myself down in this foreign land  
If from time to time  
They'll remember me in Ukraine!  
Carry my tears there, my Lord!  
Or at least send hope  
To my soul... for there is nothing  
That I can do with my wretched head,  
For my heart grows cold  
When I think that perhaps  
I'll be buried  
In a foreign land—and these thoughts  
Will be buried with me.  
And no one in Ukraine  
Will remember me!

And perhaps quietly after the years  
My thoughts embroidered by tears  
Will reach Ukraine  
Sometime... and fall,  
Like dew, over the land,  
They will quietly fall  
Over a sincere young heart!  
And this heart will bow its head  
And will weep with me,  
And, perhaps, Lord,

Will remember me in prayer!

Let be what will be.  
Whether to flow on or wander,  
At least I'll be forced to crucify myself!  
But I'll quietly embroider  
These white pages anyway.

1850

Taras Shevchenko. "Lichu v nevoli dni i nochi" (First version)

\* \* \*

Even till now I have this dream: among the willows  
And above the water near a mountain  
There is a tiny white bungalow. A grayed grandfather  
Sits near the bungalow and watches  
His tiny grandson, so nice  
And curly-haired.

Even till now I have this dream: a happy  
Smiling mother steps out of the house  
And kisses grandfather and the child,  
She joyfully kisses him three times,  
Takes him into her arms and nurses him,  
And carries him to bed. And grandfather  
Sits there and smiles, and quietly  
Whispers: "Where is that misery?  
That sadness? Those foes?"

And in a whisper the old man,  
Crossing himself, recites the Our Father.  
Through the willow tree the sun shines  
And quietly dies out. The day is done,  
And all has gone to sleep. The grayed old man  
Has gone himself to the house to rest.

1850, Orenburg

Taras Shevchenko. "I dosi snyt'sia: pid horoiu"

**Destiny**

You were not devious with me,  
You became a friend, a brother and  
A sister for a poor wretch. You took me,  
A little boy, by the hand  
And led me off to school  
To a tipsy deacon's lessons.  
Study hard, my darling, and someday  
We'll be somebody, you said.  
And I listened and studied,  
And learned the lessons. But you lied.  
We're not the somebodies you promised?... But never mind!  
We were not devious with you,  
We walked straight; there's not  
A grain of falsity in our breasts,  
So let's go on then, my destiny!  
My wretched, undeceiving friend!  
Go on further. Further there'll be fame,  
And fame is my testament.

February 9, 1858  
Nizhny Novgorod

Taras Shevchenko. "Dolia (Ty ne lukavyla zo mnoiu)"

*Translated by Michael M. Naydan*

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## The Little Hunchback

*Spyrydon Cherkasenko*

### I

April. A holiday.

It's merry and noisy on the common beyond the miners' settlement. Farther away, near the railroad, the older boys and girls have come together. The boys are in red, blue, green or yellow shirts, with jackets, new caps, and fine shining boots; the girls are dressed in varicolored skirts, necklaces, ribbons, and brand-new kerchiefs. Some are playing spring games, singing songs around an accordion. Others sit on the grass, watching an inventive dance, chatting and cracking sunflower seeds.

Closer to the houses, the children—boys and girls separately—revel in their own sport. The girls are playing jacks with some round pebbles. Two teams of boys are chasing a ball. Those not chosen for either team sit off to one side and watch the game with interest.

Running, clamor, laughter...

The small hut where Grandpa Antyp lives with his widowed daughter and grandson Pavlyk stands on the edge of the settlement, unfenced, like all the other miners' huts. Behind the hut lies the common, and beyond it, across a wide road, stretch the colorful lands (they're now green) of the manorial tract of the steppe.

The sun is shining—it's warm and joyous. The bright, cloudless day has even lured Grandpa Antyp, once a miner and now a stableman at the mine, out of his hut.

Puffing on his pipe, Grandpa Antyp sits under a window on the earthen ledge of his house. Pavlyk sits beside him. They're both watching the ball game, their faces beaming with joy. Their pleasure is expressed in short shrieks and extended, raucous laughter, as if they themselves were taking part in the game.

"Grandpa, look... look at Pronko there! Ha-ha-ha!" Pavlyk, choking with laughter, bends his head down to his sharp bony knees, his big hump swaying back and forth.

"Hee! hee! hee! Quite a show that squirt puts on! Hot ziggity damn, he really can sprint! But he missed! Oh no, brother Pronko, you won't score that way. Pronko's like a flying bullet! Hee! hee! hee!" Old Antyp, getting excited, is stamping his foot and spitting to one side.

"Ha-ha-ha!" shrieks Pavlyk with laughter.

"Run-run! Go-go-go! Hee! hee! hee! Hot ziggity damn! Whose boy is that?" Grandpa inquires about another nimble fellow.

"Which one? That biggest one over there?" Pavlyk asks, pointing a finger. "Zakharko, Iavdokha's boy."

"My, he's quick! Like a rabbit."

"Grandpa—he smokes tobacco."

"Really? One of those, is he!" Grandpa says angrily. "He should get a good lashing. A belt lashing, for sure. How do you like that—smoking tobacco! Hmm. But he's got legs, damn it! Faster than a horse. See!... See that ... see how he kicked that ball! But I'll have to tell Iavdokha about his nasty habit. That rascal needs a taste of the lash before he gets used to devil-knows-what!"

"Grandpa—he steals money too, from his mother to buy tobacco."

"No! What a fellow, ... Aha! Hee! Hee! Hee! Our Pronko has missed the ball again, hot ziggity damn. But that other one—what's his name?—he deserves a good lashing..."

"Grandpa... I'm going over to the boys."

"You? Hmm..."

Grandpa Antyp gave Pavlyk a sidelong look, his glance flitting across the boy's hump and fathomless, radiantly clear eyes, which shone with a deeply concealed and silent sadness. Then he turned away, knitting his thick, bristly, and ash-gray eyebrows.

"Hmm... over there, you say?"

"Yes, to the boys."

"They're troublemakers, son. They might beat you up. Those boys are an unruly lot! Hot ziggity damn—look, look, what Pronko's up to again. What do you say about that?" Grandpa was trying to change the subject.

The old man was ill at ease—and not because he wanted to deny his grandson some fun. Despite Pavlyk's horrible, weird hump, Grandpa loved the boy immensely. But he knew only too well what those Zakharkos, Pronkos and others were like—how those children failed to see Pavlyk's wonderful heart because of his hump. That is why he was afraid they would bring Pavlyk to grief: many a time on his way back from work he had to rescue Pavlyk from his tormentors.

"Then I'll go join the girls, Grandpa."

"The girls?" Grandpa said, delighted. "Oh yes, that's where you can go, son. The girls—well, they're not like those rowdy boys. They're quiet, the girls are. You go join them—they won't do you any harm."

Pavlyk set off.

Grandpa Antyp took the pipe out of his mouth and watched his grandson wobble off like a duck, his weird hump bobbing up and down and his arms swinging somehow comically, palms turned outward. His small, thinly haired head was almost concealed behind the hump.

The old man shook his head sadly and heaved a sharp sigh, as if

chasing away his sad thoughts. Stamping out his pipe with a gnarly, tobacco-stained finger, he put it in his pocket, got to his feet with a grunt, and went inside the hut for a rest.

"Pavlyk, come over here!" the girls called when they spotted the hunchback.

"It's better over here, Pavlyk," some others interrupted. "With them, it's ... God-help-you!"

"You're not a God-help-you type, are you?" said the girls competing for him.

The girls really liked to play with him, to look into his sad blue eyes and to listen to his placid, lecturing tone when he spoke, instructing them how to play a game or telling them something interesting, like a long and complicated fairytale.

## II

Pavlyk knew quite a few such fairytales.

When he was younger and got fed up listening to a snowstorm rage behind the frosted windows during a long winter evening or watching a needle dance in Mother's thin fingers as he got drowsy from the wind whistling in the oven and Grandpa snoring on the bench, Pavlyk would say:

"Sleep-time, mama."

"Right away, dear," she would reply, raising her head and putting the needlework aside. "Let's go, my darling."

"You'll sit beside me for a while, won't you?" asks Pavlyk as he undresses.

"I'll sit beside you, dear. Yes, I will. Get into bed now."

"And you'll tell me a story?"

"And I'll tell you a story."

"But we don't need any songs," Pavlyk pouts, waving his hand in rejection.

"No, we don't need songs tonight," Mother confirms.

"They're so sad..."

"Yes, they're sad, my child..."

"... and the songs will make you cry again."

"Me, cry? No, dear. I won't cry. Mother of God, save me and have mercy," she says, covering the boy with a blanket and making the sign of the cross over him. Then she places a stool next to his bed and settles down on it.

"Yes, don't cry," Pavlyk chirps away. "Crying causes headaches. Better to tell me a story, Mama."

"I will tell you a fairytale, my son. Sleep, with God's blessing!"

"Tell me the story, you know, the one about Hoppity-Rabbit, who sits under an oak tree and weeps."

Pavlyk curls up under the blanket and prepares to listen.

"Sure, sure," Mother replies and begins a long, interesting fairytale about an old man in red boots, a deceitful billy goat, and Hoppity-Rabbit. "And then Hoppity-Rabbit jumped out of his hut, sat down beside an oak tree, and burst into tears..."

"And he wept and wept," Pavlyk intones in sympathy with Hoppity Rabbit; a shadow of suffering flickers across his face, and his big eyes well up with tears.

As this sad adventure unfolds, Pavlyk's mind goes on to work feverishly. Mother has finished one tale and begun another, about a young prince and his princess or about Ivasyk Telesyk or some other tale, but Pavlyk isn't listening to her anymore. His mother's words flow past him like a quiet brook.

In his mind's eye he sees a dark and dense forest with glades of green. In one such glade Hoppity-Rabbit has built himself a hut the size of the watchdog Hector's kennel; Dereza, the horrible billy goat with raggedy sides and huge sharp horns, stalks around this hut seeking to deprive Hoppity-Rabbit of his life. Looking out from behind the bushes in the forest are the cowards: the rude and clumsy Well-Met-Bear, the habitually hungry Brer Wolf, and Sly Sister Fox. Just the thought of Hoppity-Rabbit's dreadful lot makes Pavlyk's heart contract with pain and horror.

"Mama, is Hoppity-Rabbit afraid of the billy goat?" Pavlyk interrupts his mother's tale.

"What?" Mother is confused by the unexpected question. "Of course he is afraid, my dear. But I see you aren't listening to me. Maybe that's enough for tonight?"

"No, no—go on. I'll listen."

Again Mother spins the thread of the tale he interrupted. At first Pavlyk tries hard to listen attentively, but by and by his thoughts return to the forest, the beasts, and poor defenseless Hoppity-Rabbit.

"Mama, why is that billy goat so mean?" Pavlyk interrupts her again.

"What? The billy goat? I guess that's how God made him, dear," says Mother and continues her tale.

Pavlyk thinks and thinks and thinks, until his mind is tired and sleep gently seals his eyes, his long thick eyelashes casting shadows on his face. But his far-roaming thoughts do not rest. Bound and chained by their enemy, sleep, his thoughts still resist, striving to break free. Pavlyk has strange and fascinating dreams. His mother's stories aren't nearly as interesting as his dreams.

Pavlyk has an excellent memory, and he always remembers his dreams, down to the minutest details. He recounts them to the girls as new fairytales, but without mentioning that they were his dreams. Sometimes he forgets that himself.

Pavlyk grew, albeit slowly.

His peers shunned him because of his hunched back, and so he became used to being mostly alone—alone with his thoughts, with which he lived, rejoiced, and entertained himself. The serene, kindly and beautiful world of his mother's tales had made his thoughts kindly too, and his heart became receptive to all the adventures experienced by small and defenseless creatures. Pavlyk loved animals and birds so much that he wept, and even fainted, whenever one of the boys crushed a bird's egg or wrung the neck of a baby sparrow.

### III

Pavlyk joined one of the groups of girl playing jacks with pebbles.

The boys must have gotten bored with their game. They had quarreled over something, there was some pushing and shouting. The boy whose ball they had been using, put it in his pocket and said that he wouldn't let anyone use it any more.

Zakharko tackled him from behind, threw him to the ground, and began choking him with his knee.

"Live or die?" Zakharko demanded, raising a fist above the boy. He had seen grown-ups say and do this in their fights, and now he was imitating them.

The boy under Zakharko's knee was crying.

"Leave him alone! Get off him!" Pavlyk, on the verge of crying himself, shouted to Zakharko.

"Well, how do you like that?" Zakharko guffawed. "A defender!"

"I'll tell Grandpa on you..."

Zakharko let go of the boy and made for Pavlyk.

"I'll tell Grandpa on you!" he said, mocking Pavlyk and showing him his tongue. "I'm not afraid of your grandpa. I'll punch your hump and then you can run off to your grandpa and complain—hunchback!"

"Now you cut that out, Zakharko!" the girls came running to Pavlyk's defense. "Go away! When you were playing we didn't interfere."

"Neh-neh-neh!" Zakharko mocked the girls, knocking the pebbles out of one girl's hands. She began to cry.

"Cut it out! Leave 'em alone," Pronko said. "Let's go pick some cranberries."

"At this time of year?" Zakharko asked. "They're not ripe yet."

"They are," one of the boys assured them.

"They're not..."

"They are!" the girls confirmed.

"All right, let's go," Zakharko said. "If there aren't any, we'll look for lark eggs. Who's coming?"

They got to their feet and marched off into the steppe.

"Shall we join them?" the girls hesitated.

"Yes, let's go. We'll pick some berries too."

"There are no ripe berries yet."

"Oh yes, there are—I saw them myself."

"Coming with us, Pavlyk?"

Pavlyk did not know whether to go or not. He wanted to, but he hadn't asked Grandpa's permission. Grandpa was still sleeping, and Mother hadn't returned home yet.

He looked toward his hut: there was no one in sight.

"Grandpa's asleep, and I didn't ask."

"We're not going far, Pavlyk."

"It'll be just there and back home again," said the girls coaxing him.

It really wasn't far. Just beyond the common, across the road, spread the luxuriant virgin tract of manorial steppe.

Pavlyk had always liked to go there whenever Grandpa was at the mine and Mother was working at the manor. Other children would either be at school or working around the mines, and Pavlyk was not afraid of wandering the steppe alone.

He loved to slide across the slippery, verdant steppe in his boots, to inhale deeply the fresh, balmy air, and to lie on some little hill, watching as small clouds on silvery wings passed in the blue sky overhead. Or to cross the gully and from there take in the flat scenery: the straight rows of miserable miners' huts, the steep-roofed buildings over the mines, surrounded by high mounds of clay, and the soaring brick chimneys, billowing smoke near the mines. From afar the people looked like ants and the huts were small too, and the mysterious mine didn't seem all that scary. He would imagine himself a fairytale king over all that he saw; or, at times, he would suddenly want to take wing and fly higher still, where the full-throated meadowlark fluttered in the blue heavens. It must be so nice up there—all that open space and everything in clear view.

Like a flock without a shepherd, the children scattered over the huge green carpet: the girls looked for flowers and tied them into bunches with shaggy feathergrass, as the boys raced around, looking for cranberries.

Pavlyk settled on a hill and watched: his sky-blue eyes were calm and content. His sensitive ear picked up the gentle lilting song of a lark hovering over his head. And his thoughts, as charming as his fairytale dreams, drifted quietly one after another, like beads on a string, forming a tale of magic and wonder. If the girls hadn't run off in all imaginable directions, Pavlyk would have told them a beautiful new tale about the meadowlark-songster flying high, high above and conversing with the deep sky and bright clouds. Curly clouds drifted from far-off lands, across the sea. They had seen and heard so many fantastic, fascinating things. They really had something to tell the gray-winged musician.

## IV

"Hey, he-e-ey, boys!" Zakharko, bending over something in the grass, shouted across the steppe. "I've found a ne-e-e-st! It's a la-a-ark's!"

"You're ly-y-ing!"

"No-o-o! For su-u-re."

Suddenly Pavlyk was frowning. His heart, chilled with fright, gave a start. Quickly he got to his feet and wobbled over to the boys and girls bent over a tiny nest. In it lay four gray speckled eggs.

"There I was, walking along," Zakharko was recounting excitedly, "when all of a sudden—whirr!—right in front of me. I spent a lo-o-ong time looking for it."

"Oh, they're so bea-u-u-ti-ful," one of the girls said joyfully.

"Look, they're so tiny and cute," another girl said, skipping and clapping her hands with delight.

"Let me pick them up," Pronko said, extending a hand to the nest.

"Don't! Don't touch them!" the girls shouted at him.

"And why not? Are they yours?!"

"Just don't touch them," Zakharko declared in a serious manner, and that took a load off Pavlyk's heart. He knew that if Zakharko didn't touch the nest and told others not to, the nest would stay intact.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because if you take it in your hands the lark will know you touched it."

"So what?"

"Then it won't come back to the nest again. I know what we'll do! Let's mark this spot with a stick, so we know where it is, and then we'll come here every day to have a look. And when the nestlings hatch, we'll take them out."

"Don't do that," Pavlyk said.

"Why? Do you pity them?"

"Of course I do. It'll make the mother lark cry."

"Just listen to that hunchback!" Zakharko said. "Did you ever see a bird cry? I've snatched plenty of sparrows out of their nests, and I've never seen a mother or father sparrow cry."

By that time Pronko had already found a stick. They pushed it into the ground and Pavlyk walked away, dismayed.

"Let's go and look for some more!" Zakharko cried.

"Let's go."

"Come on, boys! Let's go, girls!"

Several minutes later, the boys found a second nest and marked it with a stick, too. Then they went off to search for more.

Pavlyk sat on the grass, deep in thought, eyes unblinking. He imagined how the mother lark would return to her nest and, on seeing it empty, would

squeak plaintively, beating her wings and body against the ground, searching and searching for her fledglings. They'd be gone... Zakharko would have taken them and torn them to pieces, just as he had the baby sparrows.

Pavlyk shuddered and quickly got to his feet. Seeing the boys had gone off a long distance, he pulled the stick out of the ground and threw it away. Then he walked slowly toward the second nest.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing, hunchback?" Zakharko cried when he saw Pavlyk take hold of the stick. "Now I'll show you..."

"Boys, he's taken this one out, too!" yelled Pronka, trying to find the first nest.

Pavlyk grew pale at the sight of Zakharko running at him, fists swinging. He cried out in terror and burst into tears.

Zakharko pounced on Pavlyk like a wild beast and drove a fist into his back. Pavlyk fell to the ground and Zakharko held him down with his knee, pounding him in the ribs and chest with his fist. The other children gathered round.

Pavlyk fell silent.

"What are you doing?" the girls shouted through tears. But they were afraid to defend Pavlyk against the enraged bully Zakharko.

"Stop beating him! Oh my God, he'll kill Pavlyk!"

The boys pulled Zakharko off of Pavlyk.

When the children saw that Pavlyk wasn't screaming or crying but lay with eyes closed and hands outspread, barely breathing, they scattered like frightened sparrows.

## V

Pavlyk was already sitting up, quietly gulping down his sobs, when Grandpa Antyp and the girls ran up to him.

"Oh, my God! What did those rascals do?!" lamented Grandpa, lifting his grandson up in his arms.

"It's Zakharko who did it," the girls twittered.

"He nearly killed him..." they said, interrupting one another

"Yes, he would have strangled him if the boys hadn't pulled him off!"

"One of those, eh?! That good-for-nothing. Now, now, dear boy. Does it hurt? Where does it hurt, son?" Grandpa asked worriedly.

Pavlyk said nothing and quietly moaned, closing his eyes like someone utterly powerless. In fact, he wasn't as much hurt as he was frightened. Meek and peaceful himself, he couldn't understand what made others so evil, and this always frightened him. When he saw Zakharko's beastly black eyes flaming with anger, he had all but fainted with fear.

"Never mind, son! He won't get away with it, hot ziggity damn!" Grandpa reassured Pavlyk. "He won't get away with it, I tell you! If

Iavdokha won't give him a lashing, I'll paint his back black and blue with my own hands, damn it! Who ever heard of a child behaving like that?"

"You won't find him now, Grandpa," the girls warned him.

"I won't find him, you say?"

"When he hides, his mother searches and searches and never finds him."

"Is that so? This Grandpa will find him, all right!"

"He usually hides in the building at the old mine."

"Or else he climbs into a prospecting shaft and sits there on a ladder, where his mother is afraid to go."

"She ends up begging him to climb out of there."

"You see, she's afraid he'll fall down into the shaft."

"That's all nonsense! This Grandpa isn't Iavdokha and won't be afraid. I've climbed in all kinds of shafts. He better watch out! I'll pull him out of there by his ears."

Talking to the girls in this manner, Grandpa Antyp carried Pavlyk to his hut, where he undressed him and put him into bed.

"Do you want something to eat, son?"

"No," Pavlyk replied in a whisper, closing his eyes.

"I'll boil some tea, and by the time it's ready your mother'll be back."

Wheezing, the old man filled a big tin kettle, put it on the stove and began to kindle a fire.

Shaken and exhausted, Pavlyk fell asleep.

Dusk had fallen. The sound of merry singing came from the common. Grandpa closed the window, but he did not light the lamp, lest he wake his grandson. He sat down in front of the stove and kept muttering under his breath as he filled his pipe. The bright red flame illuminated his ruddy gray beard, short smoke-tarred moustache, and hairy chest beneath his open shirt. The light glimmered on his bald head as if it were trying to smooth out his wrinkled forehead, release his tensed brows, and blow away his dark thoughts.

The old man was deep in thought. He was reflecting on the fate of his dear, unfortunate, and crippled grandson, whom just about anyone could abuse.

"With a lot such as his, he won't get far," he sighed. "While his mother and grandfather are alive he's still got a chance, but when we're gone... God gave the boy a heart, but denied him appearance. And without good appearance there's no fortune. Why did God mete out this punishment? His mother is beautiful and a good person, may God preserve her. It's because of him—that drunkard of a father—that God punished the boy with deformity. But now the father is dead, so his son's fate is of no concern to him any more."

"What happened here? What's happened to Pavlyk?" Pavlyk's worried mother rushed into the house, interrupting Grandpa's thoughts.

"Hush!" Grandpa gestured to her.

"Is he asleep?" she whispered and hurried over to the bed, where she bent over the boy. On hearing him breathe serenely in his sleep, she came back to Grandpa.

"Is he all right? Was he hurt?"

"No," Grandpa mumbled, taking the pipe out of his mouth. "Just frightened."

"Who did it? The girls told me it was Iavdokha's Zakharko."

"Yes—him, the rascal..."

"They're having company at the manor. I left everything and came running back here. Why was Pavlyk beaten? Was it because he got in Zakharko's way?"

"Nonsense! I'll find that scamp tomorrow, I will! I'll show him, hot ziggity damn!"

For a long time Grandpa kept mumbling at the stove as he smoked his pipe and contrived how he would catch the culprit. Mother placed a stool by the boy's bed and, sighing deeply, settled at his side. Her eyes filled with tears and maternal sorrow as she looked at the boy's face, pale even in the dusk. She gently stroked his head and took his thin hands into hers; she started every time he tossed and cried out in his sleep. Thoughts much darker and more desperate than Grandpa's oppressed her heart.

## VI

Pavlyk was roused from sleep by the morning sun, as a sheaf of golden rays played on his face.

He turned his head toward the window and smiled.

"Oh no you don't! That won't do!" Pavlyk heard stamping feet and bustling in the entrance hall. "You won't get away from Grandpa, you scamp! Keep moving, or I'll pull you inside by your ears!"

Pavlyk looked toward the door with wide-open eyes, making no sense of anything. He looked around the room, but there was no one there.

The door burst open with a bang. Grandpa Antyp literally carried in a horribly frightened Zakharko: the boy resisted and kicked the air with his bare feet.

Surprised and frightened by this unexpected scene, Pavlyk sat up in his bed.

"You're up already, son?" Grandpa asked, tightly closing the door lest Zakharko attempt to slip out. "Here he is ... I barely managed to find the scamp! He dug himself into the straw in the barn. Good thing the boys told me where to look for him. Get ready now, you bully! Pavlyk and I are going to give you the works!"

The old man grabbed the boy by his shoulders and pushed him toward the bed.

"Hit him, Pavlyk! Hit this rat so he won't be nasty any more."

Pavlyk hid his hands under the blanket and looked at Zakharko with fear.

"Don't you want to hit him?! Go on!"

"I'll never do it ag-a-a-ain!" the culprit bawled.

"That's a lie! Ha! He'll never do it again! I'll bet you won't, after Pavlyk and I beat the stuffing out of you! Mind you, boy, I've got a good belt!"

Grandpa let go of Zakharko and started looking around for his miner's raw leather belt.

"Now, where did I put it?"

Zakharko pressed himself into a corner and howled:

"I won't do it again."

Tears began to tremble on Pavlyk's eyelashes.

"Grandpa ... he'll never do it again," said Pavlyk, on the verge of tears.

"Who won't?" Grandpa asked angrily. "He won't? Just go and believe him, and next time he'll bash in your head and kill you! Now, where is my belt, hot ziggity damn! I'm sure I put it here yesterday."

"I wo-o-on't!" Zakharko howled.

"Ah, here it is!" Grandpa said, happy to have found what he was looking for. "All right, you bully! Come here and I'll teach you a lesson."

"I won't anymore! I wo-o-o-n't!"

Pavlyk quickly rolled out of bed and ran up to Grandpa in tears.

"He... he won't do it again! Grandpa, dear Grandpa, he... he..."

Pavlyk burst into sobs.

"Saints alive!" Grandpa threw up his arms in surprise. "Now you're crying, too?"

"He won't do it again," Pavlyk said, wiping away his tears.

"How's that?" Grandpa said angrily. "You want to let him get away with it? What kind of business is that? Next time he'll crack your head open with a rock. Am I supposed to pat him on the back for it, hot ziggity damn?!"

"He's not like that. Zakharko, you won't fight again, will you?" Pavlyk hastened to intercede, afraid that Grandpa would make good on his threats.

"I won't do it again," said Zakharko, quieting down. He sensed that matters were taking a favorable turn.

"Grandpa, Zakharko and I will play for a while," Pavlyk chirped, seeing his grandfather hesitate. "We'll play, Zakharko, won't we?"

"Well, well!" The old man was still angry, but he did not want to sadden his grandson and stepped away from the boy. "You're not gonna get away with this! Just wait! I'll go get your mother. She'll take care of you, hot ziggity damn! See how he looks daggers at me!"

Grandpa went out and locked the door behind him.

"Zakharko, let's play jacks," said Pavlyk solicitously. "Look at the beautiful pebbles I've got!"

Zakharko was reluctant to play what he considered a girls' game, but he didn't want to displease Pavlyk, who had kindly and selflessly interceded on his behalf.

"All right," Zakharko agreed, sighing and glancing at the open window.

When Antyp and Zakharko's mother, Iavdokha, arrived at the hut, they stopped at the threshold in surprise.

Zakharko and Pavlyk were sitting on the floor, playing happily, and laughing.

"Grandpa," Pavlyk cried out joyfully to the old man. "Zakharko isn't angry at all—he's nice! Now we'll be playing together often."

"Well, well, what do you say to that?" said Grandpa, angrily slapping his thighs. "That boy should be given a good drubbing, hot ziggity damn, and here he's... Boy, this time luck's on your side!" said Antyp, wagging a rebuking finger at Zakharko, as Iavdokha smiled kindly through her tears.

*Translated by Anatole Bilenko*

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## On Sunday Morning

*Ievheniia Kononenko*

“Shut the door after me!” her mother-in-law shook her by the shoulder, as always. No! She wouldn’t wake her precious son.

“Just a minute,” she answered groggily. As mother-in-law shuffled to the exit she crawled over the “precious” one, put on a robe, and locked the door. She did not return to the warm bed, but sat down in the kitchen, pulling the door closed behind her. The hour hand has not yet dragged itself to seven. There are no signs of morning outside. Empty streetcars crawl along sluggishly. Sweet nocturnal tears slowly flow from her eyes down her cheeks. The precious husband and son will sleep till ten. Then the mother-in-law will return from the markets. She has a couple of hours of her own.

Every Sunday the mother-in-law makes the rounds of the big Kyiv markets. From Lukianivskyi she goes to Zhytnyi, then to Besarabskyi, then if she still has time and money, she’ll go to Volodymyrskyi. It’s a religious ritual. She will talk about Sunday’s marketing till Wednesday. Then she’ll start imagining where she’ll go next Sunday. She never takes the house key, as if to emphasize for the umpteenth time that she is not registered to live here. Since she is not the mistress of the house, why would she carry the key? Let the mistress of the house close the door behind her.

Ever since her parents and younger brother had moved to a new apartment, leaving this streetcar-shaped apartment to their daughter and her family, her mother-in-law lives with them almost all the time.

“At least she’ll speak Ukrainian to the little one,” the precious one had said, though it was a stretch to call the language she spoke Ukrainian. But she fetched the kid home from kindergarten sometimes, and every so often she would cook dinner. And she couldn’t stand the idea of going back to her provincial hometown, where her wild, peasant son-in-law reigned supreme.

“Oh, dear, the world has gone mad! The earth is rotating in reverse!” the old woman complained to her busybody old neighbors in the courtyard, and they nodded empathetically.

“Did you ever see anything like it? A mother-in-law living as a tenant in her daughter-in-law’s house! How can a household survive this way? I tell her: ‘How can you peel off so much of the potatoes? Did you plant them? Did you dig them up? Did you bend over them with your backside in the air?’ And you know what she says? She says: ‘Now there’s radiation, even on TV they advise people to cut thicker peels off potatoes.’ That’s

what she says! What kind of respect for your elders is that?!"

Actually, her mother-in-law was quite content. Only a trivial detail stood between her and complete fulfillment—a residence permit, that little stamp establishing her as a legal resident of the apartment and the city.

"I could get a job at the Institute, as an orderly. Work a whole day, then three days off. The extra cash wouldn't hurt. But I can't get the job without—"

But the daughter-in-law refused to grasp this "without." There was no need for an elderly woman to find work—they weren't starving. And, by the way, how was her own house back in the provincial capital? Wasn't it high time she visited her daughter and son-in-law there? Mother-in-law would shut up and drop the subject for a long time. Otherwise she might find herself going back to her small town and living with her peasant son-in-law again. That would mean Sundays not at the Sinnyi or Lukianivskyi market, but at the local "Harvest" bazaar—true, she'd know every single soul there, but the produce wasn't quite as good and the atmosphere certainly wasn't the same.

So nothing changed. Streetcars kept rumbling down the street and the streetcar-shaped apartment kept shuddering from the noise. The rare holiday was even worse than the boring gray weekdays. On Sunday mornings the mother-in-law set off on her market ritual, the precious one slept in a stupor, and she sat in the lonely kitchen, listening to the streetcar sounds.

Pulling the doorknob to close the kitchen door completely, she flipped on the tape-recorder. The songs of her youth clattered hoarsely from the tape. That was the so-called pre-Petrine era—the "precious" one's name was Peter. The music dispelled what remained of her lethargy. Streetcars passed more frequently outside. She heard the precious one roll over in bed. The last thing she needed was for him to wake up, still tired and angry. It had happened before. She turned off the tape-recorder. Glancing at the door she got down on her knees and pulled out a notebook that lay behind the jars of last-year's jam in the cabinet. She flipped the pages—it was her own writing. Some had as few as two or three lines, others only one... These torrents on the window in the cold autumn mist...

"My God, what nonsense," she whispered, rolling her eyes. A couple of years ago, when she was pregnant and came home out of an unexpected, invigorating fresh rain, she sat down at the table and wrote:

Under rain, scents of intoxication  
Under rain, unsettling meditation...

Her precious husband had crumpled the paper and shoved it into her mouth. Later, of course, he had begged her forgiveness and for three days he wouldn't let her put on her own shoes. All the same, after that incident, whenever images whirled in her mind like tropical butterflies, and the faint

rustle of a cosmic wind echoed in her ears, the taste of ball-point ink appeared on her tongue. This morning the cosmic wind was silent. Somewhere, of course, it was wailing or laughing, but her soul wasn't receiving the signals. One evening its signals had been so intense that she couldn't resist jotting them down on a sheet beside the telephone. The precious one had looked over her shoulder, "Oh, wow! We are so-o-o ta-len-ted!"

Now she knows all too well that the only time for cosmic wind is Sunday morning, when the precious one is snoring, the little one is sleeping, and the permitless mother-in-law is making the rounds.

When her parents moved to their new apartment, her mother had warned:

"Live any way you want, my dear. Just don't sponsor your mother-in-law's residence permit. Because as soon as she gets it, the balance of power will shift in her favor."

She maintained the balance and she did not forget anything. She remembered how in the very first month of their marriage, when they were still living with her parents, the precious one had broken off the handle of a cup from the good china to mark it as his: it was not to be used by anyone else. She remembered how, displeased with the pillow he'd been given in Kyiv, he brought back from the village a pillow his grandma had given him. Once, in the middle of the night, he had pulled it out from under her head. But life rushed onward, like an express bus, without stops or pauses. The mother-in-law and the little one slept in the bedroom, and she and the precious one slept on a fold-out couch in the so-called living-room. And at night the mother-in-law could be counted on to set out for the bathroom just when the precious one recollected that he had a wife.

"Is this the parade ground?" The son would yell and the mother would mumble that in such cases she and her deceased husband went to the barn.

"Why would you screw the deceased," the daughter-in-law would remark to her husband's delight. He didn't care that his wife didn't respect his mother. The only thing he cared about was himself.

Autumn's gray tears streamed down the windows, and the streetcars rumbled by, muffling the signals of the cosmic wind.

One day a blazing meteor cut through this gloom. It was Rybina's birthday. She and the precious one always went to her parties. Rybina lived as she wished, not as she was supposed to. She dressed in bulky sweaters and tight slacks, dyed her hair in various colors, married, divorced, and then married again or just lived together. The precious one looked forward to Rybina's birthday parties so he could criticize her lifestyle afterwards with a sense of his own superiority. But this year the Streetcar Drivers' Association was hosting a screening of the film "Pan Volodyiovsky." Only that one night! She would go to Rybina's alone, they agreed.

It was crowded, as usual, and, as usual, nine out of ten of the guests had not been there the year before.

"Marcello is coming," Rybina had bragged.

Marcello turned out to be an ordinary-looking guy in blue jeans and a sweater—he didn't look at all like a famous movie-star. The fanciful name was probably not real, maybe just a variation on his surname. What his real name was she never did learn.

They talked all evening. At one point, Rybina had freed herself from the embrace of a red-haired dentist and rudely squeezed between them, but they continued talking behind her back or across her chest and she soon left them alone.

They walked home together. A heavy rain had passed earlier. He picked her up to carry her across a puddle, but he couldn't manage and set her down right in the deepest spot. It was not far to his place so they went in to dry their shoes. They were alone. A woman's underwear and some toys were scattered about, but that didn't matter. What mattered were the bookcases, filled with her favorite books—books her parents used to buy, books she had dreamed of. She was drawn to a shelf of poetry. He stepped up behind her.

"You know," he said, "in the library I once found a poem written on a yellow index card—it had been used as a bookmark. Just three stanzas. I took it home and still read it sometimes. Now, where did I put it?"

She began to recite:

The love is gone.  
It wasn't ever there.  
Yet twilight graced the boulevards  
And streets—they sang, they sang  
And goodness was a given.

Dumbfounded, he put his hands on her shoulders:

The sky was far and high  
And the stars were scattered too wide—  
They didn't fit into the patch of sky  
Confined by tightly woven high-rises.

He tried to kiss her on the mouth but she wouldn't let him, so he kissed her eyes, cheeks, ears. The stanzas, read aloud for the first time, sounded hollow and foreign:

But lights closed their eyes in such bliss  
Through lilac tide,  
Through lilac mist  
And a piano's echo  
Played amiss.

They kissed. And everything else followed. Because they were adults and knew what to do next. A light in the next room stayed on. A street lamp peeped through the window.

The phantom of that moment did not stay—  
Was it part of a stranger's dream?  
His whispered "You're so lovely!"  
And the naked shadows on the wall.

Those lines had come to her long ago. Of course, the kitchen notebook had stored the memory of that evening. My God, how fast time flies—it was three, no, almost four months ago. How is he? Does he, like the precious one, hurry home to have a tasty dinner and then sprawl comfortably on the sofa? And does the owner of the scattered underwear also crawl indifferently over him in the morning, to make breakfast for her family? Does he remember Rybina's birthday and what happened later? How fast time flies!

The streetcars have turned off their headlights. The hour hand has passed nine. The mother-in-law will soon be back.

The water in the bathroom began to flow. The precious one started blowing his nose with conviction. He'll soon grind the coffee. They don't have an electric coffee-mill: he grinds the coffee by hand. He's proud of this contribution to the family; it's his muscle-power at work. The little one woke up. She went to him. The mother-in-law returned.

"At the Lukianivskyi Market chickens were going for nine rubles, but they were scrawny. I bought some at the Zhytnyi market for twelve. Something inside me said: 'Buy now!' And I was right: at the Besarabskyi Market, they were selling the same chickens for fifteen. But I got some sauerkraut there. Peter, here, try the sauerkraut!"

"Get out of here with your damned sauerkraut! Can't you see I'm grinding coffee!"

"To hell with your coffee," the mother-in-law said, offended.

*Translated by Svitlana Kobets*

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## The Temple of Poseidon

*Yuri Pokalchuk*

*For Bohdan Pevnyi*

“Oi ty zh Haliu, Haliu molodaia...”  
(*From a Ukrainian folksong*)

Atop the highest of the low mountains that rise over the Aegean Sea, in a spot not far from Athens, framed by the deep rich azure sky, soar the snow-white and mighty, albeit part ruined, marble columns of the glorious Temple of Poseidon—all that remains of what was once a slender, august edifice. These vestiges of its spiritual beauty have survived for millennia.

A skinny Ukrainian teenager stares, unable to take his eyes off the ruins of the temple, mesmerized by the glow all around him. He absorbs the sensation as one of the world’s great wonders calls him to an awakening of the soul. Enchanted, trembling at what he has seen during the several hours that he has been here with his parents, he touches the columns with his hands and approaches the remains of the temple from all sides, as his gaze imbibes the endless, wondrous blue spaciousness of the Aegean Sea with its tiny islands—the view a visitor has from the foot of the temple toward the sea. A sudden sadness overwhelms him because he must leave this wonder: he cannot take it with him, and who knows where or when he will again find himself in the presence of such a majestic creation of the human soul. This is a beauty that cannot be grasped, attained, nor embraced. It is beyond the bounds of the limits of the attainable. It just exists, a sliver of eternity.

Before leaving for Athens with his parents, enchanted by the splendor he has seen, he enshrines it in his soul forever.

Halia finished high school the year the Soviets entered Volyn. In the haste and tumult of that turbulent time, some fled to Poland; others lacking the nerve to leave, agonized about what was happening; and still others celebrated the unification with eastern Ukraine.

Halia’s mother, Marianna, remained quite calm. She was a high school teacher, and since her husband’s sudden death several years before she had become passive, believing that everything happens according to fate and

God's will: What is to happen will happen, what is not will not, and there is no use getting agitated. She was nearing fifty, and though still quite pretty as a woman, she did not seek lovers, because her life's meaning was in her work—which, Marianna was convinced, is always necessary, no matter what the times or who holds political control—and, above all else, in her daughter, the beautiful Halia, who was a good student and serene by nature. Now, under the new regime, Marianna imagined Halia studying at a university, maybe even somewhere in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Let it be Soviet—what was the difference? In these changing times, things could get no worse, no matter who was in charge or what they were saying. In fact, the communists say that we will live better under the Bolsheviks than we did under Poland.

But within a year, Halia married.

Vadym Medvedenko, a first lieutenant, was quartered at their apartment. The residence was large, and they were offered money. And when the arrests and deportations began, it did not make sense, to say the least, to refuse a request from the new authorities.

Medvedenko was twenty-five, Halia eighteen. He was tall and had dark eyebrows. Halia fell in love.

And things progressed as they always do in such situations: I can't live without him, I'll study by correspondence at Kyiv University; his parents live in Kyiv—we'll all go to Kyiv as their guests.

The neighbors were appalled—marry a Soviet?! Just look at what they're doing in Volyn. And in Galicia! Marianna, think about it. Talk Halia out of it!

But Marianna loved her daughter and wanted her to be happy: these were new times, everything was changing, let her live the new way.

The beginning was the hardest. Halia never did find out what happened to her mother: she died in a concentration camp, most likely. That Vadym had died she knew for sure. His closest friend, Mykola, also a lieutenant, jumped out of his car into the house for a minute on the first evening of the war: "Gather your things, the evacuation begins in two hours, trucks will leave from the officers' quarters!" And, in answer to the unspoken question: "Vadym died right before my eyes, killed by bomb fragments."

"Run! Run away, Halia! Things won't be good here!"

Things hadn't been good for a long time. Marianna did not want to go anywhere. She clutched Halia with trembling hands and kissed her good-bye. It turned out to be their final farewell.

The truck full of the officers' families did not get very far. When they ran into a German tank column, they stopped and everyone ran out of the

vehicle, scattering in different directions.

Halia made it back to Lutsk, barely able to drag her feet. Mother was not at home. Half-dead, senseless with fear, pain, and exhaustion, she staggered to her bed and fell asleep. They came for her in the morning.

She deduced that the Gestapo had also arrested her mother. She began asking about her, but soon fell silent. They already knew all about Halia too—a local and the wife of a Soviet commissar.

"You're a Soviet whore, that's what you are!"

Surprisingly, this German spoke a bit of Ukrainian. Halia had studied German in high school, so she was able to gather from the conversations she overheard that his name was Otto Hinzl.

"You're a good-looking Soviet whore. From now on, you will serve the Reich."

He was no longer laughing. Covetously, he bared his yellow teeth. Not very tall, he was handsome enough and somewhat pleasant, but when he smiled his face took on an eerie look: something deep in his smile signaled danger, destruction, terror.

He was the first to rape Halia. There was no one else in Halia's cell. This basement had been a prison for years—during the Soviet occupation, the NKVD had used it, too.

Hinzl entered the cell and commanded: "If you want to live, undress." Halia began to undress, but her trembling hands wouldn't cooperate.

Hinzl approached and ripped off her dress. Almost instinctively, Halia covered herself with her arms. In a frenzy, Hinzl hit her with the whip that he carried and then slapped his boots with it, as if that aroused him further. More from fear than from pain, Halia fainted.

When she came to, he was already inside her, moving mischievously and angrily, his face hovering over hers: she shut her eyes, but all of a sudden, with horror, felt pleasure. A second later, her head was spinning. "Oh God, it's been so long!"

Unwittingly, she responded to his actions and a wave of pleasure swept through her body. Her pleasure came just when his did, and this was what was most horrible: she could not reconcile the simultaneous feelings of hatred, revulsion, and pleasure.

"Lovely," said Hinzl, getting dressed. "You were made for this. This is how you will aid the German army—*Sehr gut!*"

He left, but before long another one came, and then another and another.

A week passed in this way and then another.

They fed her well and even brought her drinks, which she drank gladly, to dull her consciousness.

They made her a nice bed and brought a table and a few chairs into the room.

Finally, they let her rest, as one spells an overworked horse. But not

for long, because Halia was now being visited by some twenty men. At first she could not distinguish between them, but in time she learned who did what and how, and what it was that each wanted.

Several times she contemplated suicide, but she couldn't. The worst thing was that she actually responded to them, she gave them a part of her womanhood and got pleasure in turn. One day Halia decided that she had gone insane and so, was not and refused to be, conscious of what was happening to her. She lived from day to day: *Guten Tag! Sehr gut! Auf Wiedersehen!*

From Greece the Vozniuk family set out for Volyn. First they stayed for a while in Prague but childhood memories of Lutsk enticed the elder Vozniuk and eventually they settled there. Fedir finished high school and went on to serve in the Polish army, eventually entering officers' school.

He was well educated and bright enough to be offered admission to the officers' school even though he was Ukrainian. His father was not thrilled with this idea, of course, but eventually he found justification for it: someday Ukraine would need soldiers and its own trained officers.

Back in his own day the elder Vozniuk had graduated from Kyiv University, and he knew several languages. Greece impressed him most and as a participant in the Ukrainian national movement at the times of the UNR, he was sent to serve in the Ukrainian embassy there. But the Ukrainian embassy never presented its credentials to the Greek government. The UNR ceased to exist just as the Vozniuks arrived in Greece.

After returning to Lutsk, Vozniuk worked at a high school. When the Soviet army entered Volyn he was arrested. Before the Germans came, he was shot by the NKVD in the Liubart Fortress, together with thousands of other prisoners.

Mother, suffering from tuberculosis, had pinned her hopes on Greece, but she died in Czechoslovakia before the Vozniuks settled in Lutsk.

When the Germans entered Poland and the Soviets marched into western Ukraine, Fedir fled into the woods.

Eventually, he became head of a group in the UPA and took the nickname, "The Raven."

Someone informed on Hinzl to his superiors, and a commission arrived at the Gestapo headquarters in Lutsk.

Halia was called in for questioning. She didn't care what would happen—nothing mattered to her any more.

A plump, dark major gaped in stupefaction at Halia when she entered. She was indeed lovely. Graceful posture, large brown eyes, glistening light-blond hair, and they had even dressed her becomingly. She looked beautiful.

"Wow!" pronounced the major.

"I told you," said Hinzl, fawningly. "A high-grade whore, a rare find."

The major spoke briefly with Halia, asking some general questions. Then he turned to Hinzl.

"A bordello belongs in a bordello. Not in the Gestapo! Understood?"

"We'll put everything in its place, Herr Major—right away! At once!"

The major visited Halia too. An older man, he reddened and strained with frustration, and things were not going well for him. Halia, realizing that her fate had changed hands and now depended on the post-coital mood of this man, helped him to come.

The major's mood improved. Hinzl, elated, ran up to Halia ready to kiss her.

And within a few days he organized a small officers' bordello, with Halia as the star attraction.

What hides at the bottom of our souls, in the secretive depths of our existence? We succeed in realizing only a tiny portion of ourselves—and not everyone can do even this—and already night is knocking at the door: soon it will be midnight, a time for tranquility. Then later someone else will begin this all over again, and also will not succeed, and thus everyone, now and forever and unto ages of ages.

At the nadir of the deep well of our genes something steers us, something leads us to nocturnal flight, into unknown regions, into a borderless nowhere, from which there is no escape and just as surely no entrance, for it is eternal.

What do we really know about ourselves, harnessed in the restraints of our communal being? Where does our connection with the simple natural world end, and where does this thing we call a soul begin?

And what about this other thing, the urge to prolong life, that crazy gene of passion and feeling? That eruption of craving, that drawn-out insatiability, that need for love, behind which hides the specter of desire, which forces us into insane leaps in every direction, in pursuit of pleasure and the confirmation of life and of oneself in time and in our biological space while we are still among the living.

By whom and how has each been programmed in time and space? Grains of sand on an ocean beach, we fly with the wind, or a wave washes us into the ocean, or we dry out like billions and billions of other grains of sand. Who are we in reality?

Who are we?

They spent the night in Stara Vyzhva on the outskirts of the village, for it was understood that the NKVD was gone for now. They had come on reconnaissance but had succumbed to the temptation to spend the night

under a roof, something they hadn't done in a while. The rap on the door awoke Fedir, and his first thought was about his men, sleeping in the stable, that they had already heard it and would be able to hide. But for him it was too late! And then, like thunder: "Good Lord, I set up the owners of the house! This will be their end!"

He had slept with his clothes on, so he could get up right away. Revolver in hand, he stood behind the door, feeling the cold metal against his palm and his life about to end.

He listened as the owner of the house explained that there were no strangers in the house. That was true—there were no strangers. We are all acquainted—it's they who are strangers.

"Search all the rooms!" he heard: it must have been the commanding officer who spoke. The door to the room opened and a fair-haired young man with lieutenant's insignia ran in. He looked around, and saw Fedir, standing behind the door, revolver in hand.

For a moment, their eyes met.

With whom are we close? Who is distant from us? Is it the one we don't know, or the one who lives on a different street, or the one who lives in a different building, or the one who lives in another city or country? Or the one who lives on a different planet, or the next world, or in a different dimension?

You, the random passer-by on the street whose glance touches me—who are you? Why do you look at me that way? What do you see in me? What do I see in you? Whom do we both see: each other, or our mutual soul, that which unites all of us now living on this earth?

We have so little time to live, to know one another, to succeed at living.

From behind the eyes a soul glances out. Maybe once we are together, we will succeed at being? Give me your hand!

"There's no one here!" announced the fair-haired lieutenant, closing the door to the room. Fedir stood, stunned by what had just happened.

After the NKVD patrol left, Fedir could not come to his senses. For the rest of his life he would remember that glance—the gaze that had saved his life. Why did he say there was no one there? Why did he act that way?

Had his Ukrainian soul overcome his current role in an NKVD uniform?

Or was it some kind of subconscious biological logic that had stopped him? Had he realized they could both die in that instant?

Or was it because his gaze chanced on someone who was like him in some way, who could be close to him, who could someday have been a colleague or friend?

By now, Fedir was in the woods, telling his friends what had happened

to him. But at night, after lying down to sleep, he thought about the fair-haired young man. And the question remained—why?

There were five of them in the officers' bordello. Each one had her own story, but none was like Halia's. They were simpler than she was, and their lives hadn't been as bad. They ate and drank well, put on make-up for the evening, smoked long cigarettes. But they lived as if in a cage, rarely allowed to go into the city alone.

In charge of them was a clumsy, middle-aged warrant officer. He sometimes took advantage of their services too, but not often, probably because of his nature.

Hinzel, in contrast, was there almost every day, and usually with Halia. She was used to him now, and had long forgotten how it all began—she had forgotten almost everything now. She even liked him more than the other clients. Beyond his cruel lust there was an animal-like strength that affected her senses, though by now she had learned not to react to each client with her body, not to give herself to him, to control herself, waiting for him to finish. Now and then, however, nature took its course and she moaned in satisfaction, genuinely, not for the client's gratification. Later, when he was done, she slept peacefully, especially if he was the last one and she could allow herself to relax.

She was different now: the Halia of old had died. Her mother was not at home any more, she knew other people lived there now, and no one could tell her where her mother had gone. Hinzel had promised to look for her, but never came up with anything.

Halia never visited her former home: it was as if she had forgotten that she once had a different life. She now lived in the bordello, and she waited for night without fear and for her clients without disgust. She didn't care about anything any more.

She now laughed and joked with the clients, as the others did. She laughed at their jokes, rejoiced over new dresses and tasty chocolates, and remembered nothing about the past.

Fedir was dying. A few days had passed since he had come down with spotted typhus in the Carpathian mountains, just days before they were to break out across the border into Czechoslovakia and beyond. They had planned for a long time, but it turned out to be very simple. Moving in a large group, the Ukrainian partisans broke through the border, only just set up by the Soviet army, still pressing further westward in pursuit of the Germans. Changing into German uniforms captured in earlier battles, the partisans sped through Czechoslovakia in a long column of trucks filled with soldiers, to meet the Allied armies. They chanced upon the Americans, and after assessment of various kinds, wound up in a camp for "displaced persons," the term given people without a place to live in their own country.

Most such people were from the Soviet Union. Ukrainians, in light of their problems with the Russians, were handled separately.

The camp in Augsburg was a camp in name only, as Ukrainian schools, publishing houses, and artistic groups were soon formed. In short, a new, free, and post-Soviet life was brewing for Ukrainians there.

But all this came later. As soon as they reached the camp, they were all overcome by the incredible exhaustion, built up over the course of the entire war between the Germans and the Soviets. Now, finally, there was peace. Even that was frightening. It was shocking to think: had everything really come to an end? For them, indeed, it had ended.

With quiet and peace came deep, even ponderous, and bewildering dreams, visions in which an alternative, completely different reality emerged, where there were peace and work, but no homeland. Behind that stood yet another fear, albeit of a different kind—a fear of the unknown.

Nevertheless, now they could sleep. And they slept.

And Fedir lay dying in hospital.

They carried him—his war buddies, his brothers—in their arms. They did not abandon their weak, typhus-stricken commander, although in his lucid moments he told them, "Leave me—I won't live anyway."

They carried him all the way to Augsburg, to the hospital. But there they were told immediately that there was no hope. Fedir was just skin and bones, rarely conscious, dirty, covered with lice, not strong enough even to turn over on his own. He needed someone to wash him, someone unafraid of contracting typhus, someone with both strength and time. There were many patients with many ailments, and although there was enough medicine, there was no one who agreed to take on the task.

And Fedir lay dying.

Charcoal-gray clouds crawled across the sky, heavy and swollen, and dropped down to earth, swaddling everything in sight. In the fog stood dark figures, row upon row, aiming rifles at one another. They fired, fell, and stood up again, and they aimed again, and shot again and again; they were faceless and hairless. There were only the dark stains from which trickled reddish-black blood.

Fedir was lying on his back. A black cloud was dropping right over him, pressing against him, slimy and viscous, and he was losing his breath. But he couldn't budge his arm or his leg, and he understood that this was it—the end was coming, he was almost without strength. A large, bony hand stretched out from the cloud towards his throat. He was too weak to shout, to scream for help, but at the edge of consciousness he understood that if he did not give voice this phantom would choke him, and so he gathered every bit of strength he had left and screamed a final, frantic yell for life.

And the hand pulled itself back into the cloud.

Suddenly from the darkness glowed an island of light, and from the light there appeared a sorrowful angel with dark eyes and long, fair hair radiating a deep, peaceful sadness. Fedir felt sorry for the angel who looked so unhappy.

The angel approached and placed a hand on Fedir's forehead. A light shone upon Fedir, and his forehead cooled from the angel's touch. He breathed a sigh of relief, and his eyes closed.

When he opened them, he saw soaring in the distance, above the dark clouds covering the earth, the majestic ruins of an old temple—white marble columns against the backdrop of a bright, deep-blue sky that seemed to pour out from a similarly blue and calm ocean. They radiated warmth and wisdom, the strength of beauty, faith, and vitality.

Fedir closed his eyes and fell into a blissful sleep.

When the time came for the Germans to pull out, Hinzl was able to find them a car: German prostitutes would not be spared under Soviet authority, of course. And these were *his* prostitutes, especially Halia, to whom, if truth be told, Hinzl had become attached.

The prostitutes retreated together with the Germans. At first there was still time for partying, but soon the only thing they thought about was getting out alive.

They were already in Germany when a bomb exploded next to the car in which Hinzl was riding. Halia saw his dead face, flooded with deep-red blood and his shattered chest. The girls had been following behind in another car. Now they fled west, as far as they could. Finally, the American armies, their commanders, the camp in Augsburg....

They were surrounding her in an increasingly tighter circle, yet she felt no fear, only exhaustion at the sight of the countless naked male bodies, all with taut, red-violet rods ready to penetrate her, all wanting her and only her. She could not choose, she was never able to choose, particularly here when they were all together, everyone who had been with her in those years, everyone who desired her, who delighted in her body, who possessed both her body and her.

Yes, her—she knew they had possessed her, not just her body. She yearns to have said no, to have withstood the powerful lust of manhood, but she lacked the strength. She wants to wail at her own weaknesses, to yell, to cry for help, but they steadily approach, and in weariness she remembers them, remembers every one. Her whole being explodes and breaks free of any restraint and now she senses them differently, the bigger ones and the smaller ones, the uncovered ones and the covered ones, the fatter and the skinnier, the ones with large heads and thin rods, with powerful trunks and narrow heads—ugly, repulsive, with their red-blue fervor and inexorably

alluring, avaricious defilement. Each one was different, spoke to her differently, pleaded, demanded, penetrated her depths and released himself and his body to her, took her in a different way—and she gave herself and embraced, caressed, and kissed them, and climaxed with each one differently. Behind each one of them stood a different individual, a different character. In fact, she had once boasted, after a few drinks, that she could distinguish a man's character and destiny from the shape of his male rod, as gypsies do from the lines on a hand or the features of a face.

Now they were here together. It was bizarre and disgusting. Climax came after climax. She came from the memory of them, from their features, from their presence, from a remembrance of their flesh. Now they were all on top of her, penetrating her continuously, individually and collectively, and they all came together, and she came with them, and now she'd had enough, now it was too much for her, but they did not stop, and in the end, past the gratification of the body, past the eruption of the female orgasm behind which she had banished her damaged person, appeared the frigid reality of the recent past.

The satisfied pleasure began to recede, and she suddenly began to feel surrounded by a strange, wild sexuality, a strange body, a strange, disgusting craving, and all of this was now inside her, on top of her. She began to resist, she wanted to free herself, but the swollen rods banged her body from all sides, crawled up on her, like red snakes, ravenous and slippery, and suddenly exploded in unison, and a flood of white-yellow male fluid filled her character, her body, mouth, nostrils, arms, and legs; she was drowning in it, losing her breath, lacking any strength, she couldn't even breathe, and at once felt that she was dying, surely dying, that she should have died a long time ago from the nastiness, from the shame, from having betrayed the sense of her individual being. In essence she had died, died a long time ago.

But darkness continued to press in on her—an abyss, a nothingness into which, withdrawing into the past, she broke through with desperate relief: finally, everything was over.

Halia spent the first couple of days at the Augsburg camp as though waiting for something, expecting change of some sort, something new yet again. But here things happened as if in slow motion, in contrast to everything that had happened before. She was beset by memories of her past. In the camp people knew what she was. There were several others like her, and all of them were looked upon with disdain and generally avoided. Only when it was absolutely necessary or in matters involving obligatory camp duties would others speak to her. Except for those like her, whores of the Germans who shared her fate.

One day the dreaming came to an end, and Halia saw herself in totality—what she now was, how she had lived, and everything and

everyone around her. These were good, normal people, full of vitality, ready to create a new life for themselves, often with capricious but original ideas and views about the world and their surroundings.

But she had no views, no surroundings, no future. She would rather have died, but she was not capable of desiring anything, even death. She did not care. She did not care about anything.

So when they announced that help was needed in the hospital because there were so many patients, she volunteered: she didn't care. When they said that there were some typhus patients who would die soon but still needed care—washing, cleaning bedpans—which others had refused to do, fearful of infection, Halia agreed: she didn't care. She was no longer living, only by chance was she still alive, and the threat of infection held no fear for her. Dying would be an improvement.

Among the typhus patients was one in the very worst condition. They had just brought him in; he remembered nothing, was dirty, lice-ridden, thin as a skeleton—it was a wonder he was still alive. He needed to be washed and looked after until his final moments even though, as the doctor said, it hardly made any sense.

Halia came up to that one, looked down at the fever-ridden unconscious face of a swarthy, still young man, lying with the gray stamp of death upon him. She placed her hand on his forehead and held it there. Suddenly he opened his eyes and looked at her with a gaze as deep as life, and she shuddered at his all-seeing blue eyes.

He closed his eyes, sighed as if feeling better, and fell into unconsciousness again.

Halia took it upon herself to tend him.

The doctor warned her that she needed to be careful: his disease was infectious, he would not live through it, and she should not expend too much energy on him, for there were others requiring care who still might live.

"That's all right," said Halia. "I'm not afraid. I'll care for him, and when the time comes, I'll care for the others. I'm not afraid of anything. Someone needs to be near this one, too, even though there's no hope. Let it be me."

They were standing on the precipice of a tall mountain, looking out to sea. The deep blue of the sea, intensified by the sun's glistening rays, stretched out to infinity, where picturesque, bronze-green islands beckoned seductively. This fabulous beauty attracted tourists from all parts of the world. There were already many of them here, especially Americans. But it was only May, the start of the season, so romantics could still hope to find a spot to be by themselves.

"Now you know why I longed to bring you here."

A tall, thin, elderly man, graying and with a receding hairline, wearing jeans and an orange T-shirt, was addressing his fellow traveler, a woman. Also older, she wore dark sunglasses and was well-dressed, and she had obviously at one time been an unparalleled beauty.

"I know, Fedir," said Halia. "I know."

*Translated by Mark Andryczyk with Yaryna Yakubiyak*

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## Two poems

*Pavlo Tychyna*

### Lament of Iaroslavna

(I)

Snow. Light flurries falling  
on the Prince's palace.  
Around it day and night  
walks a tiny voice crying:  
—Prince, my dearest Prince,  
are you beyond the Danube?  
Or on the Don River?  
Send me some news of you  
or I'll die.

The Princess listens—only snow.  
Only snow, and still more snow,  
and beyond the field, beyond the forest  
a tiny starving voice:  
My father—war took him!  
My mother—gone, too!  
Who will plow, who will sow?  
—*Oh!*

What a desert.

Again the Princess:  
—Your services are needed,  
black-browed Wind.  
Somewhere the Prince is retreating  
with a handful of his men,  
—Turn the arrows from him,  
send them whence they came.  
The Princess listens—but there's no wind,  
only snow and cold,  
and beyond the field, beyond the forest  
voices can be heard:  
It's you we'll turn!

It's you we'll send!  
You'll lie, like your Prince,  
turned to stone.

What a desert.

—Dear Dnipro, dozing dreamer,  
you are father to us all.  
You at least must rise, since the Prince is gone—  
let's resurrect the kingdom!  
A kingdom peaceful, just,  
wise in its laws:  
where some tend the land,  
and others, the crown.  
The Princess listens—only laughter,  
only laughter rattling  
and a noise, rumbling, rumbling  
from the huts, from under the eaves  
Maybe the Prince has returned from his campaign?  
Maybe his men have come back?  
The Princess listens—the clang of swords and clamor  
and voices approaching:  
It's you we'll resurrect!

What a desert.

1923

Pavlo Tychyna. "Plach Iaroslavny"

### The Feeling of a Single Family

Deep and resilient,  
strange and foreign to native fords  
I possess an iridescent span  
arching toward the peoples.

It is so powerful in me  
and on so many posts it stands!  
With lightning-and-thunder you hit the essence  
and you hear: another thunder in the mountains...

And this second thunder—roars further, to others  
it roars, it wants and rejoices,  
that there is a steel bridge between nations,  
that international friendship is working.

And here you are, having resounded,  
you become clear in your unfolding  
as if you had gulped the good health  
from a well in the steppe.

So having drunk, and drunk, and wiped your mouth  
—without any warning or conditions  
—you see the first in the last  
as you approach a foreign language.

You touch the language—and it seems  
to you softer than soft.  
Even when a word is pronounced differently  
—its essence remains ours.

At the beginning, like this: as if a woeful horseshoe  
is being bent in your hands  
and then suddenly—language! language!  
A foreign one—sounds to me like my own.

Because it isn't just a language, not just sounds  
not just the coldness of a dictionary  
—in these, work, sweat, and sufferings are heard  
—that sense of a single family.

In these, a forest murmurs and a flower blossoms,  
the joys of the people ripple.

One can hear one common thread that runs through them,  
from antiquity through today.

And so you borrow this language,  
this beautiful and rich one—into yours  
And all this finds its basis  
in the power of the proletariat.

7.22.36

Pavlo Tychyna. “Chuttia iedynoi rodyny”

*Translated by Taras Koznarsky with Marta Baziuk*

Original publication: Pavlo Tychyna. *Zibrannia tvoriv u dvanadtsiaty tomakh* [Collected works in twelve volumes], Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1983–1990. Volume 1, pp. 171–2, Volume 2, pp. 7–9.

## **Ivan Ievhrafovych Is No Longer His Own Man**

*Borys Antonenko-Davydovych*

Once again Ivan Ievhrafovych took the notice from the table with trembling hands and, holding his breath, read: "... present yourself on 20 November 1937 at 10:00 a.m. to Investigator Parfutin, Room 13."

Today was Saturday November 18th, so the 20th would be a Monday, which people regard as a difficult day; the room number—13—didn't bode well either.

His twelve-year-old son Pavlo had given him the notice late in the evening, just after Ivan Ievhrafovych returned from a teachers' meeting, which, as usual, had dragged on long after classes.

"Dad, a soldier came and asked me to give you this piece of paper," the boy had said casually.

If only it had been an ordinary soldier! But it had been a courier, an operative, or whatever they're called in the NKVD! Obviously, the boy doesn't yet comprehend how mysterious and terrible these words are—"present yourself at 10:00 a.m." But Ivan Ievhrafovych will know torment for two nights and a day, until he learns why and for what reason and purpose some investigator named Parfutin was summoning him. He's likely a Jew, like many other investigators in the NKVD, and for some reason is masquerading under a Russian surname, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych. He began racking his brains to remember everything that had happened in the past year, in order to figure out the reason for this summons. Last year, right after the October festivities, his wife had suddenly fallen ill with croupous pneumonia and died. All the neighbors as well as the teachers and pupils at school know this, for they expressed their sincere condolences to Ivan Ievhrafovych, who had become a widower at forty-eight, while poor Pavlo—or Pavlyk, as his late mother used to call him—had become an orphan. If this were a case of belated interest in his wife's sudden death, then someone from the militia would have come—not someone from the NKVD.

No, this must be something else, and definitely something political, because the NKVD is interested in political matters, not domestic dramas. But politics could hardly concern Ivan Ievhrafovych. Until now he has been a completely inconspicuous mathematics teacher in an ordinary public school in Kyiv. What does mathematics have to do with politics? Not a thing! Everyone needs Newton's binomial theorem or, say, logarithms—

Reds, Whites, monarchists, and Communists. Since the beginning of time not a single state system has been able to do without the multiplication table. Political errors can be made in all the other sciences; even in natural science one can inadequately explain the theory of evolution, the dialectic of nature, or other highfaluting stuff that Engels wrote about. And what about history or literature, which offer so many perilous opportunities to deviate from the general party line and fall into bourgeois heresy. For instance, you could fail to expose the bourgeois character of the great French Revolution, forget about the fundamental class nature of all wars, censure Trotsky and his permanent revolution only superficially, instead of condemning him and categorically disassociating yourself from him. How is it that hairdressers were not afraid of calling a woman's elaborate hairdo a "permanent"? It would be easy to accuse them of Trotskyism too! And what about literature? Are there any fewer of those dangerous underwater reefs here? Suppose you haven't read the speech by Popov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, which states: "We will never pardon Shevchenko for his nationalistic outlook in such poems as 'Rozryta mohyla,' 'Iakby zh to ty, Bohdane pianyi,' and others." So you're still prattling on about the "great son of the Ukrainian people and his social and national significance"—it's curtains for you. You will definitely be accused of being a Ukrainian nationalist, which is exactly what happened to Porfyr Hryhorovych Ponomarenko, the Ukrainian literature instructor, who was taken away a month ago. Unfortunately, few teachers realize that newspapers should now be read not so much to learn what is going on in the world as to find out what is currently forbidden and why. This applies not only to Ukrainian literature but to literature in general. It's said that four senior girls in a Russian school in Kyiv were jailed because they recited Sergei Yesenin's poem "Moskva kabatskaia" at a school soirée. Misfortune probably befell their lecturer, too, who had not noticed in time that Yesenin's works were being quietly removed not only from school libraries but from public ones, and who had not taken the trouble to explain to his students the petty-bourgeois character of this newly proscribed lyricist.

Mathematics—now that's something else. No matter how often the government changes, or how often the current government changes its policies, two times two will still be four, not five or three. Still, for some reason they are summoning Ivan Ievhrafovych to the NKVD. But it's a good thing that they sent for me, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, instead of coming during the night and taking me away, like they did two weeks ago when they took away Vasyl Petrovych Semeniuk, the history teacher in their school. Semeniuk, a bit younger than Ivan Ievhrafovych, had left a wife and two children to their fate. His wife visited Ivan Ievhrafovych a while ago to give him this sad news. Perhaps he was being summoned to the NKVD in that connection? It's quite possible. Now, belatedly, Ivan Ievhrafovych regretted that he had been so careless in his solicitude: deeply moved, he

had expressed his profound sympathy to Semeniuk's anguished wife and had even given her ten *karbovantsi* to help tide her over the first few days. How could he have forgotten that any relations, even normal human contact with families of "enemies of the people," let alone offering them material comfort and aid, are now considered political crimes! But it's hardly likely that Semeniuk's wife told anyone about this, Ivan Ievhrafovych reassured himself; no one knows about his gesture. Except, perhaps, his son, who was in the next room doing his homework. He might have been listening to their conversation and later told someone in school. But no, his son was not so stupid as to jabber about such things in or out of school. It probably had something to do with the young literature teacher Porfyr Hryhorovych Ponomarenko. If they ask about him, Ivan Ievhrafovych will say, "You know, he's young—a greenhorn. He made a muddle of things through ignorance, because he didn't get enough preparation at the pedagogical institute. He only just graduated from there." Such a reply should satisfy the investigator, and wouldn't burden Ivan Ievhrafovych's conscience where his young colleague is concerned.

But what if their attention is focused on Ivan Ievhrafovych Kapustian himself? But Ivan Ievhrafovych hadn't seen the name Kapustian mentioned among the political activists of various sorts hostile to Soviet rule. Unless his patronymic "IevHRAFovych"<sup>1</sup> had caught the eye of someone at the NKVD who thinks that social origins dating back to the former privileged classes of counts, princes, etc., are hidden behind it. It's very likely that today's young investigators don't know, or have not yet had it explained to them, that in the past footmen, salesmen, watchmen, and people of various petty social classes were named Ievhraf—not people from the powerful ruling classes, not even from the intelligentsia. Well, Ivan Ievhrafovych will explain that his father, Ievhraf Pylypovych Kapustian, was once a watchman in a boys' high school in Kyiv: there are even documents to confirm that. It's nothing! Ivan Ievhrafovych thought, calming down.

Suddenly he remembered that the historian Semeniuk would occasionally drop by and converse on topics that were far from innocent. What exactly had they talked about, or, more precisely, what had Semeniuk talked about while Ivan Ievhrafovych listened, agreeing and smiling from time to time? It's hard to remember everything exactly, but it can be said unmistakably that, judging by his turns of phrase, Semeniuk's attitude was very skeptical, if not hostile, toward everything that was taking place not just at school, but in the entire country. To listen without contradicting is already a political crime, for it shows that Ivan Ievhrafovych is in agreement with these ideas. To hear everything that is being said and not report it to the proper authorities is yet another crime!

Ivan Ievhrafovych was gripped by fear, as though he were already at

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<sup>1</sup> Hraf (= Graf) means Count or Earl.—*Trans.*

the investigation and was struggling to justify his politically indifferent conduct. He tried to recall at least individual phrases that Semeniuk had blurted out in his presence: "Today we are all like those tightrope walkers who balance themselves on a slippery rope beneath the dome of the circus tent without a safety net below..." "Truly, even the medieval Inquisition did not burn as many heretics as the numbers of people being put through their executionarium." Ivan Ievhrafovych had even laughed at hearing the word "executionarium," which was so similar to the generally known word "planetarium" and was free of the terrible gist of its philological cousin. But fun and games aside, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, now suffering: it'll be no joke when they take me to the executionarium because of somebody else's witticism!

Just then Ivan Ievhrafovych remembered the most terrible thing that Semeniuk had ever told him: "What have we pedagogues been driven to that we should now be educating informers! You've probably heard about the 'achievement' of Pavlyk Morozov, that boy somewhere in the Urals who denounced his father and his friends as *kulaks*. Somebody killed Pavlyk in retaliation for the denunciation, but he was canonized and his name inscribed in the pantheon of Red saints. Just let some lecturer in the humanities try not telling his pupils about this contemporary hero! Even a geography teacher lecturing on the Ural region has no right to skip over Pavlyk Morozov's heroic act! Medieval justice, which upheld the rule: 'the first lash is for the informer' was morally superior to the current "pedagogy" that must exalt informers. After this, just see what'll happen when a teacher gives some dunce a failing grade, and his father takes a belt to sonny-boy for the F. The son will write a denunciation against the father and the teacher, charging that they are "enemies of the people." Then he'll not only have his revenge, but become a hero, like Pavlyk Morozov! The horror!"

At the time, Ivan Ievhrafovych had totally agreed with Semeniuk that the story of the denunciation by the boy from the Urals undermined parental authority and was generally anti-pedagogical. But now he feared that he had not only listened to, but even endorsed Semeniuk's incredibly harsh words. Maybe Semeniuk had been unable to withstand the investigator's pressure, and had admitted everything; otherwise, how had the NKVD found out what Ivan Ievhrafovych thought? The two of them had been alone in the room at the time. Pavlo—or Pavlyk, as his late mother used to call him—was doing his homework in the next room. Ivan Ievhrafovych was unpleasantly struck by the similarity of their names: his son Pavlyk and Pavlyk Morozov, and he felt a chill in his heart.

Could his son have told his friends in school about the conversation between the history teacher and his father? If so, then it's clear that Ivan Ievhrafovych is being summoned as a witness. Come to think of it, who are his son's friends in class, and whom does he hang out with after school, when he's running around outside? After his wife's death Ivan Ievhrafovych

had utterly neglected his parental duties. He barely had enough time to shop for necessities and prepare food for himself and his son, because his day was taken up with lessons in school and in the evening, at home, he had to correct his pupils' assignments. Pavlo, left to his own devices, could have made friends with God-knows-whom and gotten up to who-knows-what—even denouncing his own father!

The next day, Sunday, at morning tea, Ivan Ievhrafovych, concealing his anxiety, asked his son casually: "What sort of marks do you have in history?"

"History?" His son was surprised. "I've never gotten anything lower than a B and Kozeroh hasn't called on me yet."

"Who's this Kozeroh?"

"The new history lecturer—Kozelets. In school we call him Kozeroh<sup>1</sup>."

Any other time Ivan Ievhrafovych might have asked his son what he, Ivan Ievhrafovych, was called by his pupils in school, but this was not the right time.

"Dad, why did they arrest Vasyl Petrovych? He always told us interesting things that you can't read about in the textbooks. We all liked him a lot."

Is he deliberately deflecting suspicion, pulling the wool over my eyes, pretending that he's not involved in this sordid deed? This thought flashed through Ivan Ievhrafovych's mind. Shrugging his shoulders, he replied quietly—just in case:

"Maybe he did something bad outside of school. They don't arrest innocent people here."

The father's reply seemed to satisfy the son, and the boy went off somewhere. For a long time Ivan Ievhrafovych sat beside his cold cup of tea reflecting: had his son pretended to be nonchalant when he gave him the summons from the NKVD investigator, and not said anything deliberately? Had youthful curiosity caused him to read the note brought by "some soldier," when no soldiers had ever come to their house before? Was it possible that childish vanity had prompted the boy to try to acquire the glory of a Ukrainian Pavlyk Morozov, so he might read about himself in a newspaper: "The Young Pioneer Pavlyk Kapustian has helped the security organs expose a vile enemy of the people who was hiding under the guise of a Soviet teacher." Had he thought of the kind of trouble he might cause by denouncing his father, who might transform from witness into accused during the very first interrogation? And what might happen to him then, without a father or mother? Kateryna Mykhailivna was fortunate to have died last year and not lived to see the terrible calamity that had befallen her husband and the disgrace caused by their son!

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<sup>1</sup> Capricorn, i.e., goat horn. *Trans.*

At that moment Ivan Ievhrafovych felt that it would be better to die than to testify tomorrow against the intelligent and witty Semeniuk, who was beyond all help because his sad destiny had already been decided. After all, it was unheard of for someone taken away during the night ever to return home after an investigation or trial.

But life must go on, even if only for the sake of that very son who in his childish ignorance had become involved in this mess.

Lost in thought, Ivan Ievhrafovych paced the room, imagining the interrogator's potential questions and devising answers to them, so that he might somehow wriggle out of this disaster.

It was only towards evening, when his son came home hungry, that Ivan Ievhrafovych realized he had not eaten anything since the morning's unfinished cup of tea, and that dinnertime had come and gone long ago. He quickly heated up leftovers from yesterday's dinner for his son and began cooking food for the next three days, because tomorrow anything might happen.

Seemingly oblivious, Pavlo polished off the borshch and cutlet and then started his homework. This allayed Ivan Ievhrafovych's suspicions somewhat, but still he hardly slept at all that night—perhaps the last in his own home. Ivan Ievhrafovych kept tossing and turning, trying to fall asleep so he could appear at his summons with a clear head, but his consciousness surrendered only for a short while. The suspicions of his son had nearly vanished, but in their place appeared all kinds of thoughts—some very contradictory—searing his brain and lacerating his soul. It even occurred to him that the summons had deliberately been sent long in advance, in order to torment him and paralyze his thinking.

He arose at 6:00 a.m., when it was still dark outside. Maybe he should take some dry food and a change of underwear, just in case? But he rejected that idea instantly: the investigator will think that I feel guilty and that I realize I will be put in jail. No crackers, underwear, soap, or toothbrush! But cigarettes—as many as possible, because when you start getting nervous, you'll smoke a lot.

Ivan Ievhrafovych woke his son a little earlier than usual and gave him a good breakfast. He himself drank only a cup of tea, and that for appearance's sake; he really didn't feel like eating at all. After a moment's hesitation, and keeping his emotions in check, he said to his son in a feigned, business-like tone:

"I may be sent on an assignment to... um... evaluate the teaching of mathematics in the outlying schools, so here are fifteen *karbovantsi* for while I'm away. Spend the money sensibly, so it lasts until I return."

Pavlo took the money hesitantly, and stared at his father in amazement. But Ivan Ievhrafovych rushed his son off to school without even saying goodbye, no matter how much he may have wanted to embrace his only child, perhaps for the last time.

He put on his coat, donned an old cap, and before leaving, perhaps for the last time, sat down as custom dictates. With sorrowful eyes he gazed around the room and sighed deeply. Although his appointment was still an hour and a half away, he left the house in a hurry.

Everything was completely different from what Ivan Ievhrafovych had imagined. At the security desk, a man in military uniform, who seemed indifferent to everything in the world, silently took the notice that Ivan Ievhrafovych carefully handed him through the small window: he wrote out a pass, and at Ivan Ievhrafovych's request reluctantly explained how to get to Room 13.

With a sinking feeling Ivan Ievhrafovych passed through the immense doors of a large, gray building. He politely showed his pass to a guard who was as immobile as a statue, and apprehensively, as though walking on an ice floe, made his way down a long corridor.

A deathly silence prevailed here. Contrary to Ivan Ievhrafovych's expectations, there were no cries or groans of interrogated prisoners; only the sound of someone approaching who was noisily snapping his fingers for some reason. Around the bend in the corridor two figures appeared. But when the figure in back, who was armed with a pistol, spotted Ivan Ievhrafovych, he sternly ordered the other person to turn and bury his face in the wall. They're taking someone to or from an interrogation, maybe Porfyr Hryhorovych or Vasyl Petrovych, and the guard is snapping his fingers from a distance so that they won't see me or I them, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych dolefully. And so as not to give any cause for complaint, he turned his head sharply in the opposite direction.

Ivan Ievhrafovych stopped in front of Room 13, took a deep breath, and knocked lightly. There was no answer. Ivan Ievhrafovych knocked harder and heard someone from within say "Enter!"

Investigator Parfutin was not a Jew at all, Ivan Ievhrafovych noted, but an aging man with dark circles under his eyes and a band of gray hair.

"Kapustian? Ivan Ievhrafovych?" he asked, placing the pass on the table.

"Now it begins," thought Ivan Ievhrafovych nearly in despair, as if he were about to jump into an abyss. But the investigator looked at Ivan Ievhrafovych's frightened face with a friendly expression and asked him to sit down.

"We know, Ivan Ievhrafovych, that you are an honest, upright Soviet person, and that is why I summoned you on a certain delicate matter," the investigator said in a calm, simple, and business-like manner. But Ivan Ievhrafovych became guarded. "This is hocus-pocus, as they say—an underhanded maneuver. He'll lull me into complacency and then crush me with an accusation," Ivan Ievhrafovych told himself silently. "Watch out, and don't give in to the charming words, because any minute now he's going to come out with 'And how could you, a Soviet person, stoop to—'"

But the investigator said something else:

"No doubt you know that numerous arrests are taking place in our country."

Ivan Ievhrafovych became even more guarded and kept silent. The investigator went on:

"It's very possible that among this mass of arrested people are quite a few innocent persons. But we can't release them, because that would discredit the organs, for then ordinary citizens on every street corner would whisper, 'They're taking people away for nothing, snatching innocent people!' Why, in fact, do we sometimes arrest innocent people? Have you ever thought about that?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych, completely baffled, didn't know what to reply.

"Because," continued the investigator, "we are forced to use second-rate information. Who gives us information? People who have committed great sins against Soviet rule in the past—all kinds of White Guardists, Petliurites, and so on, who are quaking in their boots and are ready to commit any vile deed to save their own skins. Second, there are paid agents who are interested in earning more money. I rarely see objective, respectable people among them. But what else are we to do? Whom can we rely on, when honest people will do anything to avoid helping us? Let's say that we make you a proposal to cooperate with us. You'll wave your hands about—I don't want to! I won't! Leave me alone! Because you, like many others, are still living according to old notions, as though cooperation with the organs were something disgraceful, unethical, humiliating, but in the meantime..."

"Are you proposing that I become an informer?" Ivan Ievhrafovych, now recovered from his earlier fright, asked quietly.

"Ivan Ievhrafovych! Shame on you! Informer! Maybe next you'll say stool pigeon, tattletale, or spy? Dear, dear, dear! And here you are, a cultured person, a pedagogue entrusted with educating the next generation!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych sensed that he was making mistakes and fidgeted in the chair, but at the same time he was calming down. Obviously they were not planning to arrest him; in fact, it seemed they were courting him.

"Ivan Ievhrafovych, think seriously about how good it would be if honest people like yourself didn't shun us but helped us instead. Here's an example: we have received damaging information about your colleagues at the school—" the investigator glanced at a piece of paper in a drawer, "Ponomarenko and Semeniuk. This information tells us only bad things about them, but how can we verify whether that corresponds to reality or is meaningless slander? Now if a person like you cooperated with us, before arresting these people we could turn to you for truthful, objective information and reach the proper conclusions based on it. Think how many mistakes we would avoid, and how many innocent people you would be saving!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych began thinking: there was actually nothing shame-

ful in the investigator's proposal. Was it a disgrace to give somebody objective information, even if it was to the NKVD? If he had agreed to such a proposal earlier, maybe it would have been possible to save Porfyr Hryhorovych and Vasyl Petrovych from arrest, and their families would not be in the critical situation they found themselves in now.

The investigator smiled gently.

"Perhaps you're thinking that we're asking you to stand on a street corner with a raised collar and a cap over your eyes and follow some suspicious type, or to provoke teachers in your school with various anecdotes so they'll make counter-revolutionary statements. Ugh!—how disgusting! It's deplorable even to imagine such a thing!" The investigator's face became serious, almost solemn. "No, we favor honest work. Specifically, it would look like this: say, for example, that we're interested in some individual about whom we still don't have any exact and verified information. We ask you to provide us with an objective report on this person. Do you hear, Ivan Ievhrafovych? Objective! If you know this person's good points, then you write about that; we don't need fabricated insinuations. But if you know that this person has hostile intentions, then you write about that frankly, as every Soviet citizen should, even those who have no ties to us, because hiding such things is, as you know, punishable by law... So now what's keeping you from accepting our proposal? Honesty? No. Respectability? Again, no. Your conscience? No again."

Ivan Ievhrafovych's every doubt had completely evaporated, and in a measured tone of voice he said:

"I can accept this."

"So, we have an agreement?" The investigator was pleased.

"I agree," Ivan Ievhrafovych replied firmly.

"You should have said so at the start!"

The investigator stood up and stretched out his hand across the table to an astonished Ivan Ievhrafovych.

"Now you're one of us!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych blinked nervously, and the investigator took a blank form from a drawer and pushed it towards him.

"Now all that's left is a small formality... You probably realize that this is still a secret matter. No one should know about it. You will not come here any more: we'll keep in touch through a secret address, which I'll give you right now. You'll be summoned there for meetings, and that's the address to which you will write if the need arises, and also where you'll deposit material. Never sign your own surname, only a nickname, which you must choose right now. Only you and I will know that nickname."

Ivan Ievhrafovych looked distressed. The elaborate, unnecessary secrecy with which the investigator was shrouding an ordinary matter like writing the objective truth did not appeal to him at all. The word "material" had put him on guard, and he really didn't like the term "nickname"—as

though the matter concerned a dog rather than a person.

"What's the problem?" asked the investigator, seeing a change in Ivan Ievhrafovych's face.

"It's just this 'nickname'—"

"It's the same thing as a 'pseudonym.' Do you know that party documents of the pre-Revolutionary period also included 'party nickname?'" The term has been established in official usage, and we won't be changing it," the investigator explained disapprovingly, and then asked impatiently, "So what's your nick— ... your pseudonym going to be?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych spread his hands in confusion:

"If it's really necessary, then let it be Kapustiansky instead of Kapustian."

"Oh, no, that won't do!" The investigator disagreed categorically. "There should be no cabbage<sup>1</sup> in the nickname. Think of something else."

Ivan Ievhrafovych thought for a moment and then, looking questioningly at the investigator, said:

"Well, how about Horokhovsky<sup>2</sup>?"

"That'll do, more or less. And now take the pen and write: 'I, Kapustian, Ivan Ievhrafovych, born 1889, pledge to keep my contacts with the organs of the NKVD strictly secret and to carry out all the tasks assigned to me. My nickname in contacts with the organs of the NKVD is I. Horokhovsky.'"

Whatever else Ivan Ievhrafovych had written on that thrice-cursed form, he could not remember, because he wrote as if in a trance, his hand forming someone else's words as though he were bewitched. The only things that stuck in his memory, like two tightly hammered nails, were the words "I pledge" and "my nickname, I. Horokhovsky."

Afterward Ivan Ievhrafovych dimly remembered how the investigator handed him the signed pass, shook his hand, and said: "Good luck!" But Ivan Ievhrafovych could not tell if this was a sincere wish or a veiled irony of some sort.

As he left the NKVD building and stepped out into the fresh air, Ivan Ievhrafovych felt joy at being alive. Had the weather really cleared up, or was the day not as overcast as it had seemed to Ivan Ievhrafovych when he had walked over here in the morning? It was sunny outside and in his soul. Despite everything, things had turned out well for Ivan Ievhrafovych! He

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<sup>1</sup> Kapustian and Kapustiansky derive from the word *kapusta*, which means "cabbage." *Trans.*

<sup>2</sup> Horokhovsky derives from the word *horokh*, which means "peas." "Mixing peas and cabbage" is a Ukrainian idiom with a meaning similar to "mixing apples and oranges." *Trans.*

had kept his cards close to his chest, as they say. On top of that, he would now have the chance to save other people. That'll be the day when Ivan Ievhrafovych helps to jail people in dark cellars! No way! And it was no big deal that the investigator had cloaked Ivan Ievhrafovych's summons to the NKVD in secrecy. They are so used to secrecy there that they can't take a single step without it. Of course, no one should be told about the conversation with the investigator; back at school Ivan Ievhrafovych will explain that he missed his lessons due to illness, that's all. The main thing was that all his fears had dissipated: he was free, and for the time being nothing threatened him.

Ivan Ievhrafovych was in such a good mood that when his son came home rather late from school, he didn't ask where and how the boy had spent three whole *karbovantsi* of the money he had been given.

When, having gone to bed, Ivan Ievhrafovych remembered "I pledge" and "my nickname, I. Horokhovsky," he immediately reassured himself. Well, they'll summon him once or twice, and they'll see that he's of so little use to them, like getting milk from a bull, that they'll leave him alone. At worst, Ivan Ievhrafovych will deflect their grasping hands from another innocent person.

For two weeks Ivan Ievhrafovych received no summons and he began to think that they had forgotten all about him. Then an ordinary envelope containing a small piece of paper came in the mail: "Present yourself at 4:00 p.m. on 4 December 1937 at the address known to you." The signature was illegible, but the laconic and imperative tone of the contents, which seemed more like an order than an invitation, hardly sounded like Parfutin, who had impressed Ivan Ievhrafovych as a polite and frank individual.

That day Ivan Ievhrafovych's classes ended at 3:00 p.m., and he arrived a bit early at the "known address," a one-story residential building indistinguishable from many similar buildings in Kyiv. When he rang, the door was opened by an old woman, also unremarkable, who asked:

"Are you Horokhovsky?"

Hearing his nickname instead of his surname embarrassed Ivan Ievhrafovych for a moment, but he soon recovered and nodded his head:

"Yes. Yes, Horokhovsky." For some reason he even repeated: "Horokhovsky..."

The woman led him into a small room similar to a dentist's waiting room and invited him to sit down on the soft couch.

"The person who is supposed to meet you," she said briefly, "will come soon. Wait a bit." Then she left.

Ivan Ievhrafovych gazed with interest around the foyer of the secret apartment, looking for covert signs, but it was an ordinary place, with a rubber plant in a flat tub and oleographs on the wall. One of them, Leonardo

da Vinci's "Last Supper,"<sup>1</sup> caught Ivan Ievhrafovych's attention. "Maybe this is a sign that marks branch locations of the institution where everything is secret?" thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, when a tall man dressed in civilian clothing suddenly entered the room. His hair was cut short, and he nodded in greeting. Without shaking hands, he sat down at the table opposite Ivan Ievhrafovych.

He asked: "Do you know Polishchuk, secretary of your district board of education?"

"Yes, I do," replied Ivan Ievhrafovych.

"Write a report on him and bring it in three days. What time do classes end on December 7 in your school?"

"At five."

"I will be waiting for you at six sharp."

The tall man rose and left, nodding goodbye.

Ivan Ievhrafovych was somewhat startled by the tall man's cold, officious behavior, but immediately explained it to himself: he's probably an ordinary employee, something like a courier. Only someone like that could behave in such a manner.

That evening Ivan Ievhrafovych sat down to write his report.

"Mykola Hnatovych Polishchuk is a very patriotic person...."

Ivan Ievhrafovych smiled to himself: if he had written anything like that ten years ago, oh, how they would have pounced on him: "What White Guardist terminology—patriotism!" Wasn't it common knowledge that the world proletariat does not and cannot harbor any kind of patriotism, only internationalism?! But "times and morals change," and today the word "patriotism" has absorbed all the virtues that every Soviet citizen should possess.

After describing this trait of Polishchuk's, which would guarantee his safety, Ivan Ievhrafovych filled in the rest with generalizations: "knows his job well," "hard-working," "conscientious," "friendly," and so on.

When he had finished writing, Ivan Ievhrafovych was very pleased that he had completed his task successfully and, most importantly, that he had saved the likable Polishchuk from possible arrest. Ivan Ievhrafovych was trusted over there, he and they were now teammates, as Parfutin had said.

At exactly the appointed time on December 7 Ivan Ievhrafovych handed his report to the tall man. He read it silently and asked:

"And do you know Prokopovych, head of the district board of education?"

"More or less."

"Write a report on him, too. Bring it here in five days, at six."

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<sup>1</sup> In Ukrainian, "Last Supper" is *taiemna vecheria*, which means, literally, "Secret supper". *Trans.*

Ivan Ievhrafovych was somewhat taken aback that he was being given five days for Prokopovych instead of three, but he rationalized to himself: it's probably because I didn't just say "I know him," but "more or less." That's why they're giving me more time, so that I can get to know Prokopovych better, in their opinion. Go ahead, comrades, give me more time, but the results will be the same, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, smiling to himself.

That very evening he sat down to write the report on Prokopovych.

"Everyone is aware of Comrade Prokopovych's patriotism, which manifests itself in his every deed and general leadership in the field of education. Comrade Prokopovych is a former pedagogue and has a good knowledge of schooling and its requirements...."

Although Ivan Ievhrafovych had official contact with Prokopovych and knew him only vaguely, as did every teacher in their district, why not deflect danger from his superiors, too? So Ivan Ievhrafovych wrote a few pro forma generalizations: "polite to his subordinates," "attentive to everyone who consults him," and so on.

On December 12, Ivan Ievhrafovych delivered the report on Prokopovych at the designated time. The same tall man, with whom Ivan Ievhrafovych now felt familiar, read the new report in a disinterested manner, and said:

"And now write a report on Pryimenko, who works in your school. Will three days be enough for you?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych had known Donat Karpovych Pryimenko, the natural science teacher, for several years so even a single day would have been enough to write a report about him. But why were they pressuring Ivan Ievhrafovych to keep writing reports! It was beginning to seem as though he now had to work not just as an educator, but also simultaneously at an unpaid, uninteresting job that had been thrust upon him as a civic duty. Ivan Ievhrafovych did not like this, but you could hardly say that to the tall fellow, who no doubt did not carry out important functions, but worked as a drudge for the NKVD.

That same evening, without delay, Ivan Ievhrafovych wrote his report about Donat Karpovych Pryimenko, a sociable person with a cheerful nature who loved to laugh and make others laugh. He did not spare laudatory epithets: "a person of wide erudition," "a teacher enamored of his subject," "strong community involvement." He did not forget, of course, to write at the very beginning of his report: "a patriot who strives with all his might to instill patriotism in his pupils."

Ivan Ievhrafovych was very pleased with his new composition, certain that he had also deflected a threat from Donat Karpovych, granting him the opportunity to continue his carefree cheerfulness in today's otherwise cheerless circumstances.

The next day, Ivan Ievhrafovych, Donat Karpovych, and Palianychka, the new lecturer of Ukrainian literature, who had replaced Porfyr

Hryhorovych Ponomarenko and whom Ivan Ievhrafovych did not yet know very well, had a free period and the three of them spent it together in the teachers' lounge. They had nothing to do and passed the time talking about various school matters.

"It's easy for you teachers of the exact sciences—you can teach the same thing over and over year after year, without adapting to changing circumstances. But what are we miserable humanities teachers supposed to do? For example, how are we to present Pushkin to pupils today? Do we continue to mention that he was a gentleman of the imperial bedchamber at the court of Nicholas I, a nobleman, and the author of the poem "No, I am not a flatterer when I praise the tsar," or do we keep silent about that? In what context do we present the introduction to "Ruslan and Liudmila"? Do you remember?

An oak tree greening by the ocean;  
A golden chain about it wound:  
Whereon a learned cat, in motion  
Both day and night, will walk around;  
On walking right, he sings a ditty;  
On walking left, he tells a lay.

A magic place: there wends his way  
The woodsprite, there a mermaid sitting  
In branches, there on trails past knowing  
Are tracks of beasts you never met.<sup>1</sup>

What is this, if not a fairy tale for pre-schoolers? But master-wordsmiths have updated it so that it can capture the interest not only of schoolchildren but adults. Have you heard it?

At the curving seashore they cut down an oak tree,  
Brought a gold chain to the *torgsin*<sup>2</sup>,  
They took away the mermaid's passport,  
And exiled the woodsprite to the Solovetsky Islands.

That place is now watched over  
A star now burns over it,  
And about the successes of the Five Year Plan  
Stalin himself is spinning tales.

<sup>1</sup> *Ruslan and Liudmila*, trans. Walter Arndt (Ann Arbor: Ardis Inc., 1974). *Trans.*

<sup>2</sup> *Torgsin*, or *torhivlia z inozemtsiamy* [trade with foreigners]—stores where food and delicacies could be purchased for gold and dollars. *Author's note.*

Donat Karpovych's face dissolved in a good-natured smile. He drew his chair closer to Palianychka and asked:

"How does it end?"

"The master himself is telling tales," replied Palianychka, smiling mysteriously.

"What a stroke of genius! So he replaces the 'learned cat?' Those rascals sure are witty!" Jerking backwards in his seat, Donat Karpovych burst out laughing.

Ivan Ievhrafovych also grinned, but was quick to extinguish the smile on his face: this was dangerous to do in public, although he enjoyed clever political jokes as much as the next man. Only the French Revolution had given rise to as many as our Soviet reality, Ivan Ievhrafovych had often thought. But he avoided listening to them, especially in the company of others, because look out!—you may accidentally wind up as a witness, and then you'll have no end of problems!

Of course, in his report on Donat Karpovych, Ivan Ievhrafovych did not mention a word about this dicey comic poem, nor about the way the joker Donat Karpovych had reacted to it. Whatever for? It wasn't he who had written the poem, and is it a crime to laugh at someone else's joke? After all, Ivan Ievhrafovych had promised to furnish objective reports, not write denunciations about everything he saw and heard.

On December 15 Ivan Ievhrafovych submitted the report at the designated time, and after reading it like he had the others, the tall one went away without saying anything about the next meeting. This surprised Ivan Ievhrafovych somewhat, but he immediately rationalized to himself: maybe they're not interested in our school any more; it could also be that his "bosses" (that is how Ivan Ievhrafovych had secretly begun calling the security organs) had finally become convinced of his uselessness for their work. What's the good of his meatless information when they prefer it fried and salty!

But Ivan Ievhrafovych was mistaken.

The next day he received a terse message signed by Investigator Parfutin, sent not by post, but delivered by a state messenger: "Appear on December 17 at 10:00 a.m. at the address known to you."

Such a swift reaction to the last report alarmed Ivan Ievhrafovych, and the following morning, he pressed the electric buzzer of the familiar building with heavy foreboding.

Ivan Ievhrafovych's presentiment had not deceived him: this time, instead of the tall man, Investigator Parfutin came to meet him.

Without even greeting Ivan Ievhrafovych, Parfutin came up to him and in a voice dripping with sarcasm and indignation, said:

"So, my dear man, you've decided to waste our time on trifles!?"

"How so?" quietly asked Ivan Ievhrafovych, thunderstruck by this change in behavior toward him, and blanched.

"Instead of a comprehensive, serious report on the individual we're interested in, you write empty and meaningless clichés: 'hard-working,' 'attentive,' 'polite'... Who needs your useless trivia? Do you think we're so dense that we can't see your efforts to leave out the main point? Why, you're simply hiding from us the political core of the individual whom you know well. No, this will not do! Obviously, we will have to change our opinion of you..."

"I wrote what I knew," Ivan Ievhrafovych mumbled awkwardly, feeling his heart growing cold and his hands trembling.

"And you have the nerve to assure us that you were writing everything you know?" said Parfutin, his voice rising.

"I did write everything," said Ivan Ievhrafovych very quietly.

"May I ask, then, why you didn't mention a word about the new version of 'Ruslan and Liudmila,' eh?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych was overcome with horror: who had informed on them? No one else but that new teacher Palianychka, because Donat Karpovych, who had been so impressed with the new version of "Ruslan and Liudmila," could not have informed on himself. So Ivan Ievhrafovych, is not the only one in his school connected to the NKVD. Palianychka is too, and maybe someone else, who is writing reports about him...

"Pryimenko did not compose the re-worked "Ruslan and Liudmila," that's why I didn't mention this." This was all that Ivan Ievhrafovych managed to say—not so much in Donat Karpovych's defense as his own.

"But aren't Pryimenko's guffaws while listening to this counter-revolutionary version proof enough of his political physiognomy? No, indeed, you are more like a fellow-thinker of these people than an objective informant. I'm afraid that the organs will have to draw the appropriate organizational conclusions..."

Ivan Ievhrafovych broke into a sweat at Parfutin's last words. The term "organizational conclusions," widely used in official parlance, entailed nasty goings-on, beginning with dismissal from work and ending with the far-off camps, or even—look out—the "executionarium." It was no longer a question of saving others now, it was crucial somehow to save himself from the danger that was suddenly looming over him. And Ivan Ievhrafovych, cowering like a schoolboy caught in some serious mischief, pronounced in a guilty voice:

"Please forgive my incompetence... It's my lack of experience and misinterpretation of the assignment. I will try to correct my error."

"That's the spirit!" Parfutin said severely. "Write a report on Bukhaltsev and bring it here in one week. I myself will come for it, at this same hour."

Without shaking hands, merely nodding his head, Parfutin went out, leaving Ivan Ievhrafovych in a very dejected state.

Ivan Ievhrafovych had known Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev, the

German teacher at their school, for several years, but he could not say anything specific about him. Middle-aged, reserved, and guarded, Bukhaltsev was not close to any of his colleagues, never visited anyone, and did not invite anyone to his home. Ivan Ievhrafovych didn't even know if he was married. Always silent, Bukhaltsev would bring his class journal to the teachers' room after classes were over and disappear from the school. He usually kept silent at teachers' meetings and his voice was heard only when he had to make a report on the pupils' German marks. He spoke Russian, which was not to Ivan Ievhrafovych's liking—in his opinion, teachers should speak the language of instruction of their school; but you couldn't fault Bukhaltsev for this in a report. He was very demanding of his pupils, and they were afraid of this "kraut," as they had dubbed Bukhaltsev in school. As a result, the success rate in German language was rather high. But this should not be written in a report, lest it become a "totally unnecessary trivial detail." What, then, should he write?

Ivan Ievhrafovych was caught in the predicament of a pupil in the senior class who is asked on a final exam to write a composition on a topic for which he is completely unprepared. But write one must, absolutely, because Parfutin's tone implied not a request but an order—and a harsh one at that.

For four days Ivan Ievhrafovych could not bring himself to sit down and write a report on Bukhaltsev, afraid as he was of failing to satisfy Parfutin's demands and of becoming a shameless liar who aims fabricated slander against someone. He began to scrutinize Bukhaltsev closely in the teachers' lounge, whenever he made a brief appearance there. Once he even tried talking to him, but that led nowhere: in reply to Ivan Ievhrafovych's remark that it had gotten colder outside in the last while, Bukhaltsev answered curtly that cold weather was what winter was all about and then left the school. Further delay was impossible and finally, on the sixth day, after tearing up several sheets, Ivan Ievhrafovych managed to write the damned report.

"Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev is a very reserved and taciturn person, which involuntarily raises certain doubts about him: he is uncommunicative, does not express himself—this means that he is hiding something inside, but exactly what is not known. One can only guess that this secretiveness hides a frame of mind that is not germane to a Soviet person. He never speaks up at general teachers' meetings, where acts of exposed enemies of the people are discussed, and even though Bukhaltsev also raises his hand 'in favor' when a vote is taken on the severest degree of punishment for nasty criminals, he is the last to do so, and does it with obvious displeasure.

"He never stays behind at school: after his lessons he disappears who knows where. I cannot follow him because I am busy with my classes.

"He makes himself out to be a Russian, but is this really the case? I

have doubts about his surname, name, and patronymic: maybe he is not Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev at all, but Oskar Konradovych Bukholts? This should be checked thoroughly, but it is beyond my capacity."

Ivan Ievhrafovych could not drag anything more out of himself, and on the appointed day he brought his work, extracted after great ordeals, to Parfutin.

Parfutin read the report calmly and said:

"Now this is more or less what's required, but why didn't you write down his address?"

"But I don't even know it myself."

"Find out and tell us. Now report on your gym teacher. In general, you should demonstrate initiative, look for targets for your observations; we're not putting any time constraints on you. It wouldn't be bad if you expanded your observations outside the school: after all, you don't sit there the whole day, and we're interested in everything and everyone."

Parfutin was obviously satisfied with the last report: in saying goodbye he even shook hands with Ivan Ievhrafovych briefly.

Ivan Ievhrafovych breathed a sign of relief: perhaps the terrible danger had shifted away from him, but in the future he ought to conduct himself so as not to cause trouble again.

Writing reports became much easier for him. Ivan Ievhrafovych was not troubled by the fact that occasionally he lacked concrete facts, for now he gave free rein to all sorts of surmises and suppositions. After all, his main task was to flash a signal, as the official speechmakers say, and the NKVD organs could dig up the facts without his involvement.

The only thing that surprised Ivan Ievhrafovych was why no organizational conclusion had been instituted against Pryimenko and, in particular, Palianychka. Just in case, Ivan Ievhrafovych began to avoid them both.

Without any difficulties, he easily wrote a negative report on the dashing gym teacher with presumably low morals, to whom he had long had an aversion. Without awaiting instructions from above, he began writing reports on other school colleagues, but he left out the Ukrainian literature teacher Palianychka: if he had not been punished for the reworked version of "Ruslan and Liudmila," then it was better not to meddle with someone like that, because he may be writing reports himself.

Parfutin allowed Ivan Ievhrafovych to submit the "material" to the landlady at the secret address without waiting for a special summons, and he began frequenting the one-story building, which—it seemed to him—brought a look of admiration to the landlady's face.

The only task that remained was to find targets for observation outside school. After his wife's death, Ivan Ievhrafovych visited no one and, in fact, did not know anyone. But even in this respect fortune unexpectedly smiled on him.

Returning from school one Saturday evening, Ivan Ievhrafovych encountered his neighbor Prokip Stepanovych Khmelko at the front door of their building. The latter greeted him politely; as always on Saturdays, he was hurrying to church for evening Mass. Well advanced in years, Khmelko suffered from epilepsy and was a mute. A thought immediately flashed through Ivan Ievhrafovych's mind: why couldn't Khmelko become his required target? What was there to stop Ivan Ievhrafovych from reporting about him, too?

Nowadays Ivan Ievhrafovych has hardly any free time. All his thoughts are occupied with reports and the search for new targets of observation. He rarely cooks meals at home, and prefers bringing home ready-made suppers from the cafeteria for himself and his son. He can no longer look after his son; he has stopped preparing his lesson plans as he used to; he barely has time to read the newspaper lest he fall out of step with the requirements of the times. But now he sleeps peacefully at night: he sleeps in his own bed, not one that belongs to the state—and that's the main thing!

*Translated by Marta D. Olynyk*

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## Shvonts

*Vasyl Gabor*

Ivan Shvonts was shaving with a blunt razor, scraping the bristle from both his flaming-red cheeks. He shaved feverishly, with haste and even anger. He moaned, pouted and ground his teeth, but did not sharpen the blade. He was in a hurry. The pounding of joyous drumbeats, the wail of a violin, and singing reached all the way here to his house from the Mykolaichuks' place. Old Mykolaichuk was marrying off his daughter Maria to a young man from Vuibarevo. At the very least, Ivan wanted to dance a little at her wedding.

He sat down on a stool and got up again and again, but didn't take his eyes off the small square mirror propped against an enamel jug, stubbornly continuing to scrape away with the blade. He was naked from the waist up. When he got up from the stool again or leaned toward the mirror, the muscles on his back rippled like snakes or braided ropes. He tossed his dirty shirt under the bench and threw a brand-new one, never worn, clean as snow, onto the bed.

"Ivan, son, I implore you: drive the hemp to Chumaliv for soaking!"

Shvonts turned abruptly to his mother, who was standing near the door, and asked sharply:

"Couldn't you have picked a different day?"

"When, if you're always so busy?"

He wasn't listening to her.

"Damn it, a hoe would be sharper." He cursed the razor under his breath, stubbornly scraping the bristle on his chin.

"Ivan, my son, I implore you: listen to me just this once!"

"I said I wouldn't take the hemp for you today. And that's that."

"Ivan, you—" she was wiping away her tears—"you swore to me that you wouldn't do anything foolish."

"And I don't plan on doing anything. I ju-s-s-t... damn, what a blade! Ma, I...," he turned his head to the door, "I just want to dance at Maria's wedding. Can't I do that?"

"Dear son, I am begging you, have pity on me! Drive the hemp over to Chumaliv." She dropped to her knees. "My heart ... is not made of steel."

Shvonts hurriedly raised his mother up from the ground.

"All right. I'll drive the hemp," he said without looking at his mother, and picked up the shirt he had tossed on the ground. "Gather your things."

He said this last phrase hoarsely as if it were tearing at his throat, unwilling to come out into the daylight.

He harnessed the horses and hastily began tossing the hemp sheaves onto the wagon. Mother tried to help him but he pushed her away.

"No thanks! I'll do it myself."

After loading the hemp and bracing it with a drying-pole, he helped his mother up onto the wagon. He then climbed up himself and laid the whip sharply on the horses' backs. The horses had not been expecting this from their master. In surprise, they jerked in different directions, nearly flipping the wagon over into the ditch.

"Ivan!" Mother screamed with alarm. "Have you gone crazy or what?"

Seeming not to hear his mother's words, he jumped down off the wagon and, restraining the horses, began lashing at their legs with all his might. They snorted and tried to pull away, but Shvonts held the reins firmly.

"I'll teach you to pull!" he yelled. "Take that! And that! Now!"

"Ivan, leave the animals in peace. They've done you no harm."

Ivan flashed his angry black eyes at his mother for a second and then lowered his head. It was evident that he had regained his senses and cooled down. He jumped back up onto the wagon, but now without the anger.

"Giddy-up, Chillok! Giddy-up, Tsyhan!" He yelled to the horses, and together they began to move forward.

Then, as if deliberately, the drumbeats became livelier, the violin started to wail, and the sound of a wedding song flew to the heavens, although its words were hard to make out. Even the melancholy sound of the flute was clearly audible from the other side of the hill where the Mykolaichuks lived. The flute's lament disturbed Shvonts's soul.

"Hmm! I guess it's true what they say—the sound of a flute beckons the heart," he said to himself, grasping his heart with his hand.

"Ivan, are you ill?"

"No, Ma. I heard a flute."

"Yes! And when a bride hears it, tears flow from her eyes."

Shvonts let out a dull moan and his teeth clenched.

"Ivan, what's wrong with you?" She grabbed her son's hand and rested her face on his shoulder. "Don't torment me, my child, and don't torment yourself."

"Okay, Ma, I won't torment you any more," he said and urged on the horses.

They rode on in silence. The autumn sun hovered above the hills on their right, warming them gently. Here and there, along the banks, ferns were already changing color.

Ivan did not avoid puddles; the wagon swayed so sharply that it seemed all the hemp would fall off.

"Ivan, drive more carefully or you'll shake the soul out of me," she pleaded, only half-jokingly.

"Okay, Ma, I'll drive you as I would a young lady." He called to the horses, "Hey, Chillok! Hey, Tsyhan! Ease up and stop shaking Ma."

They continued in silence again, following the road that led out of the village. The drumbeats were now muffled and barely audible. The sound of the violin and the flute no longer reached them, but the drumbeats, like a slender thread, kept hold of them, pulled them, lured them, and begged them to return.

Mother wanted to ask her son to drive faster to escape the drumbeats, but she did not dare. She looked at her Ivan. His face was still enflamed from shaving, so he licked his fingers and cooled first one cheek and then the other. A lock of black hair hung over his pale forehead. There was sadness in his eyes. It was painful to look at them, so she set her gaze on the sky, and joyfully yelled out in surprise. A stork was slowly flying over their heads.

"Look there—look, Ivan!" she said, pointing up, and then added quite softly and tenderly, "Look, Ivan, a stork is flying."

The son flashed his eyes crossly at the sky and mumbled, "I see."

"Do you remember, Ivan, when you were little and took eggs from a stork's nest? And then you couldn't sleep all night? I asked you why you weren't sleeping and you answered: 'Ma, I didn't listen to you and I took eggs from a stork's nest and now I'm scared that they'll come with embers in their beaks and burn down our house—and you'll burn to death because of me.' Do you remember?"

"I remember. Whoa, Chillok-Tsyhan! Cha! Cha! Chillok!"

They passed the last houses. Just ahead of them, some old women sat on a bench, warming themselves in the sun.

"Good day, ladies," Shvonts's mother greeted them.

"May God grant you a good day as well," the old women answered. "Where are you taking the hemp? To soak it?"

"Yeah! To soak it. To Chumaliv."

The old women nodded their heads and smiled. "We know the eddies in Chumaliv. We soaked hemp there more than once when we were young and healthy."

"Ivan, stop the horses for a minute. I want a drink of water."

"Why didn't you drink back home?" he barked, and then yelled to the horses, "Whoa, Chillok! Whoa, Tsyhan!"

"Keep going," she said, holding back her tears.

"Go on, drink your water! Why aren't you going?" he said, without looking at his mother.

"I've changed my mind," she said, gritting her teeth. "Drive on."

Once they were out of the village she let her tears flow freely.

"Oh God, oh God! Why do I suffer so in this world? I put up with his father," she motioned towards her son, "and now he, too, is disrespectful to me. God, why do you punish me so? What sins am I suffering for? His father danced with a knife and I lived in constant fear, and now my son wants to run me into the raw earth. Lord, why have you sent me this punishment? Did I offend someone? Did I malign anyone?"

"Stop whining, Ma. Look, people are coming and they're going to stare at us."

"Let them stare. Let them see what my son has reduced me to!" She sighed heavily, quickly wiping the tears from her eyes with a corner of her kerchief. "And why was I born into such misfortune? So many nice young men chased after me, but stupid me—I chose his father. When he asked for my father's blessing, he didn't do it the civilized way. No! He threatened my dad with a knife. 'If you don't let me marry Olena,' he said, 'then I'll either burn your place down or stab you.' Dad was so terrified he asked me to accept the marriage proposal."

She spoke in a barely audible whisper.

"Good day, Olena!"

"Good indeed, Stefan," she said, looking at a man about her own age, dressed up in his Sunday best and standing at the side of the road with a package under his arm.

"Why so sad, Olena?"

"And what do I have to be happy about?"

"There's a wedding in the village! You should go dance and sing a little."

"My singing and dancing days are over, Stefan."

"Just recall how Old Mykolaichuk and I once chased after you and you'll be dancing already. And probably singing too."

The woman looked sadly at her old friend and smiled painfully.

"And why didn't this handsome young man go to the wedding?" He asked to keep the conversation going.

"Excuse me, I forgot to ask you what I should be doing!" Shvonts shot back sarcastically and whipped the horses. "Go, Chillok! Go, Tsyhan! Go!"

Mrs. Shvonts held on tightly to the drying-pole, but she didn't ask her son to slow down. She wasn't happy to have met her old friend. Inadvertently he had disturbed her soul by stirring up vivid memories of the summers of her youth. He also evoked sad thoughts about her son and his stubborn courting of Maria Mykolaichuk. Ivan had sent matchmakers to her house three times, according to tradition. And three times she had rejected him by escaping through a window.

"If you won't marry me, you won't marry anybody," he had told Maria.

"Oh sure! I'll check with you about whom I should marry!"

He said nothing more, but from then on he would intercept young men on their way to visit her and threaten them with a knife—the one his grandfather used to slaughter pigs back in Shandriv.

"If you want to live—don't visit the Mykolaichuks!" He would say.

Some were scared away: "How can you deal with this maniac? You say one word to him and he starts pacing with his knife and foaming at the mouth!" So these young men avoided the Mykolaichuks' farmyard. Others, braver ones, did visit her. These Shvonts would meet beyond the hill, by the forest. He beat them. He beat them so fiercely that they too would forget, once and for all, the path that led to Maria's door.

Spitting out blood and the teeth that had been knocked out, the men swore to take their revenge on Shvonts.

"Just try," he would say, showing them the butcher knife. "Try—if you're not afraid of death."

The young men stopped visiting Maria. Shvonts sat on top of the hill across from her farmyard and watched the girl as she fetched water from the well and went about her chores. This went on for a long while until Maria could not bear it any longer and sent her father to talk to him.

Old Mykolaichuk was out of breath by the time he climbed up the hill. He sat down next to Shvonts and lit his pipe.

"I have a matter to discuss with you, Ivan, but I don't know how to begin without riling you."

"Tell me the worst part first and the rest won't be so bad."

"I came to tell you—leave Maria alone. She doesn't love you, and doesn't want to marry you. So why are you forcing yourself on her? Why do you seek her out in public?"

"You may not believe this," said Shvonts softly, "but I'm being pulled towards her. Something comes over me that drives me to her, and I can't control my actions."

"So you grab your knife and threaten to stab Maria if she doesn't marry you?!"

"That only happened once ... and your Maria is not easily frightened—she's courageous."

"Courageous or not, I beg you—leave her alone!"

Shvonts said nothing in reply. But from that day on, he was no longer seen up on the hill, though Maria claimed that she could still sense his gaze on her.

Back home, Ivan became restless. He could not work and the smallest things threw him into a rage. He beat the horses ruthlessly. Whenever he approached them, they trembled in fear, pricked up their ears and neighed in fear. Whenever anyone said a word to him, malicious or not, he grabbed for his knife.

Then news spread throughout the village: a young fellow from Vuibarevo had sent matchmakers to the Mykolaichuks.

"What will Shvonts do now? Will he kill that young fellow from Vuibarevo?" the women asked each other. Now they had something to chatter about.

Shvonts's mother was beside herself. Fervently she prayed God to take pity on her.

"Ivan! don't do anything stupid!" she would beg her son in the evenings. "You're walking around black as night. You've thought up something evil. Don't do it!"

For a long time he was silent. Then, one day, by the river, he pulled the knife out from the leg of his boot and threw it into the water.

"From this day on, Ma, you don't have to worry that I'll hurt anyone. I just want to dance at the Mykolaichuk wedding."

That had calmed the old woman. Only today, when she heard the joyful drumbeats, the wailing of the violin, and people singing, did fear grip her again. She was terrified for her son. She wanted him to be far, far away from the village today. That is why she asked him to take the hemp to Chumaliv, where the river flowed through a neighboring village, in the opposite direction from Vuibarevo. When he refused, she had become petrified. Remembering yesterday's dream, a horrible dream, she had fallen on her knees before her son, crying and begging him:

"Ivan! have pity on me! My heart is not made of steel!"

Yesterday's dream was still giving her chills. She had dreamt that her Ivan was still a little boy, and she was bathing him in a wooden trough. Suddenly the water had turned red. Frightened, she had pulled her son out of the water and held him close. Then she dreamed that her son was grown up. There was a wedding at the Mykolaichuks. Her Ivan is wearing a snow-white shirt and desperately wants to go to the Mykolaichuks, and she will not let him. But he doesn't listen to her. Mrs. Mykolaichuk greets him cordially, embraces him, looks him over from head to toe, and then, over his shoulder, signals to the young men who are present: "He doesn't have a knife!" Relieved, they sing a while, making conspiratorial nods that no one else notices. Her Ivan drinks a glass of vodka, declines some food he is offered, and gets up to dance. Spinning in a frenzied dance with some young girl, he glances at Maria. Suddenly Ivan Slupak, who had always scowled at her son in the past, yells:

"One! Two! Three!" And all the young men fly in a whirlwind at her Ivan.

They beat him and thrust their knives into his back and chest. Instantly his snow-white shirt becomes red. Ivan backs into a haystack and his eyes feverishly search for Maria—he seeks forgiveness and help only from her.

The women raise a chorus of shrieks and wails. The violin cuts off the song at its highest note, the cymbals ring and fade but the drummer seems not to notice: he strikes the drum five or six times more and only then, coming to his senses, presses his hand against the tightened drum skin.

But the young men from Shandriv continue to dance around her son with their bloody knives. They beat him and keep beating him, yet her son does not fall to the ground, to the green grass, but stands firmly! And it's no wonder!—he's the strongest young man in the village. And then they finish him off with poles.

What kind of wedding can there be with a corpse?! The musicians gather their instruments and set off for home. Maria is put on a wagon and driven to Vuibarevo, unaccompanied by any songs.

Mrs. Shvonts awoke from her dream soaked in sweat, her teeth clattering in fear. She moved close to her son. Only after touching him, after feeling his steady breathing, did she calm down.

"Whoa, Chillok! Whoa, Tsyhan!" called her son, bringing her out of her trance.

"Ma, we're here. Where should I unload the sheaves?"

"Yes, yes—here, Ivan."

He helped her off the wagon, lifted the drying-pole, and began unloading the sheaves onto the ground.

"Ma, I drove the hemp over for you, but I won't be soaking it today," he said after unloading the last of the hemp. He wiped the sweat off of his forehead. "I'm going home."

"Ivan!" His mother cried. "Don't leave me alone! Do you hear me—don't leave me!"

"Don't be so worried! I'm not going to do anything to anyone. You saw me throw away the knife. I'll dance once with the bride, then maybe I'll come back and help you out," he said and turned the horses around, gaily waving his whip above their rumps.

The mother's eyes followed her son. The longer she looked, the more it seemed that he wasn't riding down the dirt road, but flying like an arrow. The wagon rattled and tossed so much that she thought it would fall apart, its wheels rolling off in different directions.

Sighing heavily, she began soaking the hemp, but it was hard to keep working. She kept looking at the village. Suddenly, she went numb: from the top of the hill flowed bloodied water.

"My God!" she cried, crossing herself and waddling hurriedly to shore.

She looked all around. It was quiet everywhere. Only the river beside her burbled, carrying the bloody water. She dropped everything and ran to the village as fast as she could.

She wanted to hear happy drumbeats, the wailing of the violin, or the villagers singing, but everything around her was silent. Now and then she would stop to catch her breath, thinking she heard drumbeats. But it wasn't a drum—it was her heart that was pounding. Her anguish deepening, she hurried even faster. She passed the first houses without noticing anything.

"Oh God, let the musicians at the Mykolaichuks be playing, let them not be still," she begged God in her thoughts. "Do you hear me? Tell them to keep playing!"

But perhaps God was very far away in the heavens. He didn't hear her. Mrs. Shvonts began to implore the musicians: "Fiddlers, why have you gone silent, why aren't you playing? Please play, play on—don't torture my heart!"

She was now in the village, but neither the beating of the wedding drum nor the wailing of the violin, nor the mourning of the flute were heard from the Mykolaichuks' farmyard. Mrs. Shvonts wailed sorrowfully:

"Ivan, my dear son! Why didn't you listen to me?!"

*Translated by Mark Andryczyk with Yaryna Yakubyak*

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## Ievshan-Zillia, the Magic Herb

*Leonid Mosendz*

“And when Otrok, the khan’s son, smelled the magic herb *ievshan-zillia* that the court musician Or had brought from his father, Khan Sirchan, he immediately recalled his Polovtsian homeland, and, together with Or, he fled from the enemy in Kyiv to the free steppes.”

Thus ends the legend about the magic herb. But it is only the beginning of the story about the khan’s son himself. And this is how that story goes.

After a long journey, the runaways reached the encampment of their tribe. Neither songs nor joyous exclamations greeted them, but only silence and sorrow: Khan Sirchan was dying. The enfeebled khan lay in his yurt, surrounded as far as the eye could see by the tents of his people. With his last ounce of strength he clung to what was left of his life, so as to have a last glimpse of the son whom he had lost a long time ago. He had ordered the flaps of the yurt raised so that he could look out for him on all sides of the earth, day and night. He dispatched sentries in every direction to herald in advance the approach of his son. He did not sleep at night, nor did he close his eyes during the day. He watched and he waited.

When at last the young man, dressed in a dust-covered fox coat and a marten cap, leaned over him, Sirchan could barely utter a word. His eyes only flashed with a final joy, and he firmly pressed the son’s extended hands. Then the chiefs of the Horde arrived to bow to Sirchan, sweeping the earth with their marten caps, and one after another they put their left hand on the joined hands of father and son. Otrok knew that his people were swearing allegiance to him, to be as loyal to the son as they had been to the father.

Afterwards Sirchan raised himself up in his bed, his eyes glistening like the blade of a hunter’s knife and his teeth bared like the fangs of a steppe wolf. He wanted to call something out, but his body shuddered, he dropped back and breathed his last. Otrok stood over him without moving or thinking, his senses stirred only by the fragrance of the magic herb wafting up from the sachet around his neck. He felt his chest tighten.

For three days and three nights, laments resounded throughout the camp. Women wailed, sitting around a dead campfire; warriors shouted bellicose challenges to Death, children screamed, hungry horses neighed,

and camels bawled. This savage world of the steppe was so strange and wild to the young man that it seemed to him a horrible nightmare, like those he used to dream in the Rus' land he had left. But then he lowered his head to the sachel, and the fragrance of the magic herb aroused his slumbering Polovtsian soul.

During the night of the third day, the body of the dead khan, dressed in the costly attire of the Great Khan, was put on a horse, fastened to the high back of the "saddle of the dead" and the last guard of honor closed around the horse. Then the funeral train galloped off into the boundless steppe, toward the sinking sun. The young khan rode in front, flanked by two old warriors who lead the train. Otrok felt uneasy and frightened among these strangers. The horses' hoofs clattered as startled gophers scampered from under their legs. The air whistled in his ears. All this was alien to the Rus' soul of the Polovtsian khan. Only the millwheel of a moon was the same as it had been in the distant Rus' land.

Otrok looked back and saw the horse of death with the dead figure in the saddle and beyond, a disorderly troop of warriors galloping behind the khans. Suddenly, they seemed to him not warriors, but a troop of devils racing across the steppe to a horrible victory. But then he clutched the sachel with the herb and his heart again began to beat in time with the rhythm of the steppe.

The wild train finally halted above an unfamiliar ravine where a deep grave yawned. When the cries of the slaughtered horses mingled with the screams of the sacrificed slaves, a wave of alienation swept over Otrok again. But the fragrance of the *ievshan-zillia* tickled his nostrils anew, and he, like all the others, struck his sword against his shield and shouted the Polovtsian battle cry. When the corpses were covered with earth and the pale moon had completely sunk in the east, the first glimmering light of dawn aroused a manly courage in the young Polovtsian's body and Khan Otrok felt that he was the master and ruler of a great people. He rose in his stirrups, waved his sword, and a war cry burst from his lips. Thousands of horsemen repeated it after their lord: "At Rus'! At Rus'!"

The fragrance of the magic herb tickled the khan's nostrils, his chest heaved with excitement, and his eyes turned to the north, against which he intended to lead his hordes.

The next day Otrok was dressed in the costly royal attire that had been captured from the Romei and he was crowned with the cap of the Great Khan. Sitting in the middle of an open yurt, he was lauded with shouts of glory to the Great Khan. At the sight of the mighty and loyal hordes, Otrok again could not restrain himself, and the war cry of the previous day—"At Rus'!"—repeated by thousands of strong throats, rolled all the way to the Polovtsian Sea.

All the hordes had assembled to greet the new khan. Eager for battle, victory, and booty, the chiefs and the warriors alike looked to their new

khan to revive the glory of their steppe people. They looked forward to good fortune in campaigns, success in battles, a multitude of captive maidens and other booty. When excitement and koumiss had muddled their brains, Otrok convened a great council of the chiefs.

As the khan began to speak, the fragrance of the *ievshan-zillia* assailed his nostrils and clouded his judgment. He recounted the great woe Rus' had inflicted on the steppe people, he mentioned all the victories over Rus', its wealth, raiments, churches, stone palaces, and fair maidens. He also recounted his bondage in Kyiv, the subjugation of the glorious kin of Khan Sirchan, as well as all the dangers to the Polovtsian tribe posed by the growth of Rus' and its encroachment into the open steppe. While he spoke, the eyes of the chiefs glistened like Polovtsian knives. They bared their teeth with the insatiable fury of steppe wolves and their concerted war cry—"At Rus'! At Rus'!"—shook the Khan's yurt, rolled through the encampment, and did not fade until it reached the shores of the Polovtsian Sea.

A great battle was fought in Kyiv. The arrows blocked the sun; the stamping of hooves, the neighing of horses, and the clatter of steel drowned out human voices. The entire horde under Otrok had come to the walls of the city. In their mind's eye they already saw Kyivan raiments, fair Kyiv maidens, handfuls of gold, and endless rows of slaves. Otrok experienced a strange sensation as he looked on the golden cupolas of the Cathedral of St. Sophia, which he had visited as a Christian boy, and a peculiar sorrow and fear contracted his heart. But he clutched the bag hanging on his neck, and the fragrance of the herb drifted into his brain.

However relentlessly the Polovtsians pushed ahead, however much Otrok, riding at the head of the host and shooting arrow after arrow at the Rus' armored troops, urged them on, however much he raced with his standard from one flank of the host to the other, the Rus' stood their ground, like the walls of St. Sophia. Polovtsian arrows stuck in the chain mail of the Rus', spears broke against their shields, and when a Rus' warrior fell, an impregnable wall of shields closed the gap. The waves of the Polovtsian sea broke against this wall like the waves of the Dnipro against the rocks of the rapids. The golden standard of the Kyivan prince fluttered strong and unbowed amid the Rus' host.

In the end, the Polovtsian horde yielded. The frightened chiefs came running to Otrok one after the other: many warriors had fallen; more were falling still, while the Rus' were standing as before! Otrok himself was losing courage, and doubts seized his heart in a vise. When the Rus' made another push forward and the horde was thrown into confusion, he was the first to leave the battlefield, his routed horde fleeing behind him from the Prince's dreaded standard.

Otrok returned to the steppe filled with shame, passionate hatred, and an even stronger thirst for revenge. And again he began to contemplate a

campaign against the Rus'. Furious and bloodthirsty, he assembled all his hordes and allies, a tremendously large multitude of horses and wagons, and set forth. Rus' villages went up in flames, cities could not withstand the onslaught, smoke and cries rose across the Rus' land. Otrok laid siege to golden-domed Kyiv and struck the Golden Gates with his spear. In his mind's eye he could again see the princely palaces, St. Sophia, and the entire Rus' land as the new homeland of his tribe and kin. The Polovtsian host seethed and churned like a dammed flood of the furious Dnipro, ready to inundate the fertile Kyivan meadows at any moment.

Again there was a furious battle such as Kyiv had not seen since the times of the Pechenegs. Enraged by the previous failure, fired by the thirst for revenge and booty, the Polovtsians attacked Rus' in a final deadly thrust. Wherever the thrust weakened, wherever the persistence of the steppe waned, there was Otrok leading his army, paradigm of confidence and courage.

But the wall of Rus' troops stood strong, and the Polovtsian waves broke against it like the waves of the Dnipro against the rapids. And when Rus' counter-attacked, the hordes collapsed, and again Otrok had to flee, leaving behind not only booty, but countless Polovtsian warriors in the ravines and gullies of the Rus' land.

The Rus' troops pursued the fleeing enemy into the steppe. Where they came upon a Polovtsian encampment, they destroyed everything in sight. Otrok attempted to check the Rus' troops, but they advanced like a wall of shields, over which fluttered the horrible and unwavering standard with the severe, dark image of the Savior so hated by the steppe. Otrok was forced to flee to the Polovtsian Sea itself, while the scent of *ievshan-zillia* contracted his chest and clouded his judgment with impotent hatred.

When the remnants of the routed Polovtsian host reassembled, great lamentation filled the encampment. Many of the glorious and mighty khans were missing. Although the thirst for revenge burned in Otrok's heart, although the scent of the magic herb rose to his brain and excited his blood, the war cry "At Rus'! At Rus'!" did not rise in his chest. Silently he scanned the assembly of disheartened chiefs sitting in a semi-circle in the khan's yurt.

Finally, Kobiak rose from the circle. He was khan of a distant horde that dwelt by the Polovtsian Sea, and he rarely appeared in Otrok's yurt. Perhaps it was the long distance he had to travel, or perhaps because, having once been imprisoned in Rus', he had taken a Rus' girl for his wife and had adopted many Rus' habits, and now took part only reluctantly in the campaigns against the Rus'. When he spoke, his words were given an intense attention that was rare among the steppe warriors.

At first, Kobiak recalled all the chiefs and commanders who had fallen during the last campaigns. He mentioned them and then was silent for a moment. There was no response. Those present looked about the assembly

and, seeing how many friends were missing, pushed their caps lower over their eyes.

Then Kobiak began to recall the glorious days of the Polovtsian victories, when Rus' paid tribute to the free people of the steppe, and each chief had more slaves and captive maidens than he needed. The glory of the steppe people had spread beyond the Polovtsian Sea and reached the lands of the Romei. Again Kobiak heard not a word in response, as the eyes of his listeners flashed passionately like Polovtsian knives and their marten-fur caps were pushed back onto their heads.

Now Kobiak's speech became bolder. He said that the gods had already forgotten the Polovtsian people. They no longer gave them the courage or desire they once had. No longer did they bestow on the steppe the bounty enjoyed, for example, by the Rus'! How could anyone compare the Rus' gods to the Polovtsian ones? The Rus' gods were mighty and strong! Didn't they help Rus' acquire stone palaces, powerful weapons, cities and temples? That is why Rus' stood like a wall against its enemies! Because it had treasures to defend! And no sooner had the enemy attacked than the steppe people had taken flight, along with their gods and miserable tents. That is why Rus' pushes further and further into the steppe and, behind its armies the walls of its churches and fortified settlements extend deeper and deeper into Polovtsian land.

As Kobiak continued to speak to the attentive assembly, it seemed to Otrok that he had found the reason for the defeat and decline of his people. Indeed, it was the Rus' God! It was the God who dwelled in their golden-domed churches, the God to whom he had learned to confess while he had been a prisoner in Rus'. It was the dark Savior on their banners, the kindly Virgin in their churches, the brave Archangel Michael with his fiery sword. It was they and a great number of other prophets, saints, and martyrs who kept their protecting hand over Rus', giving it power, endurance, courage, and wealth. The Polovtsians should seek the protection of this same God and accept Him as their own. He would help the steppe people finally become equal with the Rus' and even surpass them in power and courage. Once that strength was gained, the steppe would seize the wealth, temples, and stone palaces of Rus' and turn the Rus' people into slaves. That would be a much sweeter revenge than any arms or bloodshed could achieve.

When Kobiak finished speaking and looked around, it was evident from the glistening eyes and tense breathing that his words had not fallen on deaf ears. Then the chiefs spoke one after the other. Unanimously they agreed that the gods of Rus' were more powerful than the gods of the steppe and it would be good for the Polovtsians to accept their assistance and protection.

When news spread through the steppe encampments that the khan and chiefs had chosen different gods, more powerful and well-disposed than the previous ones, almost no one resisted. After all, everyone expected the Rus'

gods to bring wealth, a comfortable life, victories without battle, and glory without struggle. The old black idols that had felt the touch of so many hands over the centuries were thrown out of the yurts; sacred tambourines were burned, and amulets and magic bags were torn from necks. Ever more changes were made in the Polovtsian land. The Rus' gods did not want to dwell in dark and smoky yurts that always reeked of sheepskin, milk, and horse sweat. They needed bright, tall, and sturdy buildings adorned with paintings and carvings, filled with the fragrance of incense and the sound of sweet song.

After the new Rus' gods were introduced, first the khans and then the commoners came to dislike their yurts, wagons, and food. Stonecutters, masons, carpenters, wood carvers, weavers, and all sorts of other craftsmen and instructors were lured to the Polovtsian land from Rus'. Now the Polovtsians gladly received all of them, because many temples needed to be built for the Rus' gods, as well as palaces for the chieftains and khans; brick had to be baked, stone cut, wood carved, and cloth weaved.

Observing how easily the new gods accepted the Polovtsian land and how gladly they adjusted to the steppe people, Otrok peacefully inhaled the steppe air, and in its breezes he could already imagine acrid smoke from future conflagrations in the Rus' land.

Oh yes, the Rus' God will grow accustomed to this steppe land. He will have his fill of incense and songs, after which He will surely make the power of the Rus' fall prey to the power of the Polovtsians, who will, at long last, rise over Rus' like a terrible, tailed star. The great khan himself urged his people to accept the faith and the customs of the Rus' without delay, so as to win the favor and kindness of the new gods quickly. The scent of *ievshan-zillia* intoxicated him with the joy of future glory.

But when the Rus' craftsmen and instructors finished their work, they were reluctant to leave the Polovtsian land, because the customs of Rus' were spreading ever farther through the steppe. Along the slopes of valleys rose the khans' palaces built in the Rus' or the Romei style; near them crowded the houses of their subjects. The Polovtsians began to forget their yurts and covered themselves with blankets, just like the Rus'. And the Rus' forgot their enmity toward the steppe, because they had already subdued it, not with swords, spears, or arrows, but with the power of their God, the words of their instructors, and the skills of their craftsmen. The Polovtsians did not realize this and gladly continued to accept ever more gifts from the Rus' land.

Not everyone bowed eagerly to the new gods, however. They were few, but nevertheless some did not want to throw their old gods out of the yurts or exchange their creaky steppe wagons for white homes along the steppe valleys. They took their gods and left. They were not many, and nobody stopped them when they left their native encampments for lands far beyond the Polovtsian Sea.

As the years passed, peace and bounty filled the Polovtsian land. Settlements multiplied, temples grew, and the customs of Rus' replaced the former savagery of the Polovtsians. Rus' girls now went into the Polovtsian steppes voluntarily and not as captive maidens. Likewise, Polovtsian girls went to Rus'. Peaceful relations had developed to a point where the steppe seemed to have forgotten why it had invited the Rus' gods.

Only Khan Otrok did not forget. The war cry often rose to his lips, but he held it back. It seemed to him that his people had not yet multiplied enough, they had not yet gained enough strength to launch a struggle against the Rus'. Khan Otrok was patient and wise. He even put away the sachet with the magic herb, lest it excite his soul before the time was right. He was patient, like a steppe hawk that soars over the steppe all day, watching its wary prey. Finally, when it seemed to him beyond any doubt that the hour was ripe, he convened the great council.

The khans and chiefs of the entire steppe assembled in Otrok's palace, as they had not done for a long time. The great khan spoke to them. He recalled the bygone glory of the Polovtsian people, their campaigns against the Rus' and the Romei, and the victories they had won. He expected that their eyes would flash like those of a wolf pack in a winter night. But their eyes remained calm and dark like steppe ponds overgrown with reeds. As he recalled the enemies of the Polovtsian tribe he expected white teeth to flash with the fury of a boar's tusks, but the lips of those present twisted in suppressed yawns. He thought that he was just imagining this. But when he began to speak about Rus' and all the injustices it had inflicted upon the Polovtsian people, and its eternal enmity with the steppe, he could hold back the sharp war cry no longer. Filled with a thirst for revenge, he cried out "At Rus'!" Instantly, however, it broke off. Not a single voice joined him, not a single warrior rose to his feet. Stunned by this unexpected response, the great khan—now he understood!—froze amid his chiefs, who, one by one, turned their eyes away from the khan's fiery gaze.

The assembly was silent for a long time. At last, a young khan rose and began to speak. What Otrok heard bore down on him like ice chunks crushing a misguided boat. He looked around like a cornered animal, without any hope of escape; he sought friendly eyes, but everyone turned away from him. To them he had become a strange, incomprehensible, and even hostile herald.

The young khan said that the times had passed when the steppe was an enemy of Rus'. Those times had passed and would never return! Polovtsians had no reason to rise against Rus'. Aside from gratitude, no other emotion should excite the Polovtsian heart. Rus' had brought to the steppe their kind and mighty God. He was followed by Rus' homes, which were so convenient, by bread and roast meat—tastier than millet and raw meat—and by Rus' songs, sweeter than Polovtsian dirges. Peace and quiet now prevailed in the Polovtsian land, and it was a crime to call upon the

Polovtsians to fight their dear Rus' brothers just because of some forgotten glory of the Polovtsian tribe.

The young khan said much more, but Otrok did not listen. A beastly fury seized his body, rising to his heart and flooding his eyes with blood. He tore open his shirt and snatched the *ievshan-zillia* from his neck. He wanted to let this insolent Rus' slave and this cowardly, enervated assembly inhale its magic fragrance. But the *ievshan-zillia* no longer had any fragrance. It had become mere grass—the steppe's most plentiful hay. Otrok was dumbfounded. He threw the sachet to the ground and left the council on unsteady feet. No one stopped him, no one hindered him from untethering his mount, and no one saw the khan off when he rode south in the direction of the Polovtsian Sea.

Just as years ago he and Or had wandered back to his ancestral encampment to find his father's faded glory and honor, now again he hurried through the steppes and valleys. He sought out those who had not submitted to the Rus' gods and to Rus' peace and tranquility. He found them! Far away, beyond the sea, an insignificant remnant of his Polovtsian tribe. They were still like the Polovtsian tribe of bygone days—like the *ievshan-zillia*, they still exuded the strong fragrance of the steppe's power and glory. They kept their old gods and their old songs, their customs and their yurts—the habits that had already died away among their brothers in the north. And again the forgotten scent of the *ievshan-zillia* greeted Otrok's nostrils.

When the exile humbly told the elders of this small tribe what had transpired in the steppes to the north, there was only silence in response. At long last, an ancient warrior who seemed covered from head to foot with the moss of the steppe came up to Otrok, looked intently into his eyes, and then sat down again. Others approached him as well, peering closely at the exiled khan. Afterwards, the eldest tribesman spoke.

He did not address Otrok or any of those present. He spoke as if there were no one else in the big yurt. He was confessing to himself under his breath. His words echoed the thoughts he had when he and a handful of his tribesmen had left the dear steppe, because they did not want to adopt a foreign god. No, it was not the new god he had been afraid of. He had feared that with the new god the Polovtsian tribe would lose its ancient soul, that it would be replaced by the soul of the Rus' people.

That is exactly what had happened! They had learned to eat the soft Rus' bread, and the courageous Polovtsian heart had softened. They had begun to sleep on soft down beds with Rus' girls, and Rus' had ceased to be their enemy because their own children were already half Rus'. They had begun to tend wheat, and they had become plowmen for the Rus', their drovers and slaves. They had not wanted to be lords of the steppe, because the duties of a steppe lord were difficult and demanding! It was much easier and more convenient to live as servants of the Rus', under a foreign lord and a foreign god.

As the old man was concluding his whispered speech, Otrok's head hung lower and lower with every word. Yes, there was no doubt whatsoever: his guilt was enormous! He had succumbed to doubt in his own powers and had put his people under the protection of a foreign god, thereby wasting both the Polovtsian spirit and the Polovtsian soul. He thought he could achieve his revenge by embracing the power of the Rus' gods. But he hadn't noticed that he did so because it was easier and more peaceful than relying on his own sword and his own gods. He had been fooling himself—and fooling others!

After a lengthy silence, when even the breathing of those present in the yurt was inaudible, Otrok went up to the old man and bent his head in anticipation of the verdict. He calmly listened to the judgment.

It was midnight, but the encampment was not yet asleep. Screams and laments rose toward the sky, fearfully bewailing what must pass for all time into the astral steppe. But when Otrok, in ceremonial dress, was led out of the yurt to the horse with the "saddle of the dead," everything fell silent. When he was put on the horse and tied to the high back of the saddle like a limp corpse, and when the horrible train galloped off into the dark steppe, neither the victim nor the guards nor the spectators uttered any breath of a moan or whisper of pain.

Like many years before, the horrible train raced through the nocturnal silence. The only sounds were those of hoofs striking hoofs, of grass rustling, and saddles creaking, as the millwheel-shaped moon rose over the edge of the steppe. Otrok's mind was bereft of every thought: this was a cortege of the dead for a soulless victim!

Only when the victim of repentance for the past and sacrifice of hope for the future of the Polovtsian tribe dropped into his grave under the sacrificial knife did a drawn-out scream resembling the cry of a wounded animal rend the silence of the steppe—a scream of alarm and pride and the eternal thirst for revenge.

*Translated by Anatole Bilenko*

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## A Little Play about Betrayal, for One Actress

Oleksander Irvanets

### Act One

*A white room turned diagonally toward the audience, that is, instead of the so-called invisible fourth wall, both the third and the fourth walls are invisible. On the two actual walls, there are a door and a window. The furnishings are minimal: a bed, a table, a chair, a small wardrobe. On a nightstand, a telephone. A tape recorder is on the table.*

*This room is inhabited by ONA—the stress is on the first syllable—a young woman of 23 or so. And here she is: she is rolling out in her wheelchair. A blanket covers her up to her waist; she is wearing a light-colored blouse. She rolls about rather skillfully. Her movements are precise, with no sign of weakness. But there is the wheelchair. The chair is tidy, comfortable, and compact: still, it'd be better if there were no need for it.*

*ONA rolls from the bed toward the table. She stops as if wanting to turn on the tape recorder, but changes her mind. Then she lifts the edge of the tablecloth, looks underneath, and even touches something. She puts the tablecloth down, turns around, and moves away from the table toward the window. She approaches the window somewhat sideways,  $\frac{3}{4}$  face toward us, and opens the window. The noise of the street bursts in: unintelligible speech, traffic, other noises.*

ONA (*looking out the window for someone*): Mrs. Hona-a-a-h! Mrs. Hona-a-a-h! Hello! Come here, please—closer. Everyone has already left for work anyway, and your morning sales are over. No one will show up before lunchtime... Well, once more then—good morning my dear Honah! Is there any stupor left for me? One tiny portion... What kind of sauce do you have? Beetle juice? Spider-dressing? Cockroach drippings? Well, may I have one with the spider dressing... How much? Fifteen? Whoa!... But last week it was twelve or thirteen... All right, I'll take one!... (*She pulls herself away from the window, rapidly rolls over to the table, reaches under the tablecloth where she just looked, pulls out some cash, counts out the necessary amount, and squeezing it in her fist, rolls back to the window. After handing the money through the window, she receives her stupor with spider dressing, and slowly, savoring it, begins to eat.*) Ta-a-sty!... But the portions really have gotten smaller lately. I remember when I was in school, you'd buy one serving and share it with all your friends, and you still couldn't finish it

and would end up throwing away the last scraps... Or maybe it only seems that way... When you're a child, everything seems big... Maybe... Anyway, what's new, Mrs. Honah? What do you mean, nothing?... There must be something new. Me? Now in my case, there really is nothing new. What can happen here, within these four walls... Oh, I got my pension today, the personal one from the Dark-Grays, so I'm treating myself to a little feast now. Yes, the personal one. It's not really very much... Oh, you do have to know everything, don't you! It's eight hundred fifty, clear, no taxes. That's nothing, these days. No, I still have a stipend from the Light-Grays, since I'm supposedly still studying at the university. (*She smiles bitterly.*) It's really ridiculous—a whole four hundred. Well, somehow I make ends meet. (*She savors the stupor, biting off tiny bits.*) M-m-m-m... Not really! Why should I be bored? The same thing that I'm doing now—sitting by the window and looking out at Black Square. Sure, I mean Gray. But no one calls it that, everyone still calls it Black. How long has it been since it was renamed—half a year? You can't expect people to adapt that fast. Do you remember how it was before, Mrs. Honah? Of course you remember, you lived most of your life in those times... I was small then, but even I... At school once, everyone was singing "We march into the black expanse!" and one boy sang "into the gray expanse." You can imagine what happened to him! He was thrown out of the Black Scouts and sent away to a special school, and his parents were dealt with, too. Such idiocy... Well, now it seems all this has passed, gradually. But it was just two or three years ago—do you remember when the first demonstrations against the Blacks took place? When the Gray banners appeared at those demonstrations for the first time? That was something! Now, of course, it seems everybody's used to the Grays and to the demonstrations. Here, at the square, they happen almost every day. The Blacks gather too, sometimes, but there aren't very many of them, just the die-hards. Mostly, it's the Dark-Grays. And yesterday, there was a protest demonstration by the Light-Gray Youth. And that guy, the one I just told you about, my classmate, he's one of their leaders. I watched through the window, and I even wanted to call out, but you can't be heard over that noise...

No, no, it was nothing like that. There was nothing between us. I almost never saw him after he was sent to the special school. The one who walked me home? Oh, no—that was a different guy... Yes, yes, the tall one with black hair. But that's a totally different one, Mrs. Honah. I went to school with him, too, and later to college. Yes, that's right, he's also in the Light-Gray youth now. He wears the pin and the Light-Gray shirt. You really have quite a memory... No, he didn't leave me. We still get together. He comes by here... He used to come here... It's true that he hasn't stopped by for a few weeks, but he called and explained that

he's really busy with the Light-Grays right now. Why shouldn't I believe him? Why would he lie to me?... If he wanted to leave me, he would say so. You think I could stop him? Our relationship is based on complete trust. *(A pause, as ONA listens through the window.)* So what if you saw them together! I know who you mean. That's Mona—we call her Monkey. I went to college with her, too. A brunette—tall, with long legs and big eyes, right? Yes, that's her... What, he's not allowed to walk on the street with another girl?... Especially since they're both activists in the college branch of the Light-Grays. And you're immediately thinking God-knows-what. No... But here's what I'm thinking ... I just might buy one more portion, a tiny one, without any sauce. Can you make one especially for me—for ten, Mrs. Honah? Just a second, I'm getting it. *(She rolls toward the table, takes a bill from under the tablecloth, hands it through the window, and gets a tiny portion of stupor.)* Oh, thank you, Mrs. Honah, dear. *(She begins to eat with relish.)* Yes, we've known each other since school. There's always been competition between us, a rivalry. We were the best three students in the class—him, me, and Monkey. Every year on Black Day we always received honors. In our whole graduating class, only three Black diplomas were awarded: to him, me, and Monkey. Well yeah, in those days everyone was in the Black Scouts and the Black Youth League. No one ever asked whether we wanted to be or not! We were signed up all together, as a group. Don't tell me about your own youth—that was different. The Black ideals were still really sacred then. But with us, do you think anyone still believed in them?... Of course not! The only reason we worked so hard to receive the Black diploma was to get into university. Of course. Do you know where the rest of my class is today? In factories! Only the three of us are students. *(Remembering her situation, she pauses.)* Well, two of us now, actually. And Mrs. Honah, he was top-of-the-class in every way. The most talented, the smartest, and everything. I worked my butt off, excuse the phrase. Sometimes I studied until three or four in the morning, going blind over those books. Then in the morning I'd stumble into class numb. And Monkey, well, her father had connections... need I say more? *(She makes a telling gesture.)* But he—I remember from the first grade—he was like a sponge. He always had the answer to any question. For him, exams were a piece of cake... He was that smart!... And always so honest—he never let anybody copy from him, forget that. And he'd never whisper an answer either. He's still like that in his Light-Grays—he's done okay for himself. He's the head of the college branch, but he doesn't allow himself to go off on vacation-symposiums or youth entertainment conferences. He insists that's only for elected delegates. He's that kind of a guy...

With whom, with them?... Oh no, Mrs. Honah, he's too honest for

that... Well, they were everywhere. In every school, next to the principal's office, there was a Deputy Advisor or even a full Advisor. And at the university, until quite recently, the things going on there!... No, don't you know, they've now taken an oath, it seems—they can't just break it. Him? Well, of course they probably did call him in for questioning. Who wasn't called in then? *(She thinks for a while.)* Mrs. Honah, darling... May I ask you a favor?... See, you figured it out yourself. You'll run and get it? Well, how much... I'll give you two hundred and you keep the change. Yes, I know that the price has gone up, but you can probably still get the cheapest one for a hundred seventy, a hundred eighty. Okay? All right?... Oh, Mrs. Honah, what would I do without you!... *(Happily and quickly she rolls to the table, takes a couple of large bills from under the tablecloth, and hands them through the window.)* I'll wait for you here, Mrs. Honah. Would you please hurry, though?... *(She falls silent. Her eyes follow someone on the other side of the window, and then she silently looks out onto the square.)* Oh, they're gathering. Another demonstration. Wow, the Dark-Grays' banners really got darker. They're almost Black... And the Light-Grays', too—they're almost Dark-Gray now. What will they protest today? Probably against the molva again. They all protest against it, but it keeps getting built. The molvists and molva scientists explain over and over again in all the newspapers that the explosion of the Southern molva was a freak accident—molva explosions are possible, but they don't happen more than once in a hundred thousand years... And they still protest... against... Well, we have to understand them, too. They have to protest... against... well, against something at least. *(Suddenly she loses interest in the demonstration, rolls to the table, and turns on the tape recorder, which this time works as a radio.)*

VOICE OF A NEWSCASTER, *announcing*: And now for the latest news. In the Upper House of the People's Council, the block of the so-called Black minority sent the President a set of demands and propositions outlining decisive and irrevocable measures to repair the economy and overcome hyper-meta-inflation and the imbalance in command and executive discipline. The statement, which calls on the President to take decisive and tough measures in carrying out a severe economic policy, is signed by delegates Blackman and Blacksmith; deputies Black and Schwarzmeister; and senators Blackwell, Inkman, Blackout and Blacken-Decker.

VOICE OF A SECOND NEWSCASTER: Evacuation of the southern regions of Maturasa county to neighboring Tamurasa and Raturasa counties continues. The workers of Tamurasa are welcoming the refugees from the territory affected by the explosion of the Southern molva with open arms. Collection of donations for the reconstruction of the damaged section of the twelfth terminal of the Southern molva

continues. As of today, the collection total has reached...

*(ONA turns off the radio, thinks for a while, and rolls toward the window.)*

ONA. Where is she?... Oh, here she comes, finally!... Mrs. Honah! What happened? Give it to me, give it to me quickly... *(She stretches her hand down through the window impatiently.)* What? Damn! You've got to be kidding. Well, yeah, it's my fault, what can I say... But Mrs. Honah, I think it was just some moron who scared you, no way was he an Advisor. Why would an Advisor be hanging out there—as if they don't have more important things to do! And besides, if he really was an Advisor, he wouldn't even have approached you, he just would have whistled, and about ten agents would have run up and grabbed you and the seller... It's just because you're so trusting... So how much did you say you gave him? Fifty? All that was left? You even added some of your own money? *(She thinks for a moment.)* Oh well, Mrs. Honah, I'll reimburse you that fifty. *(Reluctantly she moves toward the table, gets a bill from underneath the tablecloth, and rolls to the window again.)* Here, take it, Mrs. Honah, and forgive me for sending you on such an adventure!... And now, give it to me, quickly, please! *(Impatiently, she reaches through the window and at last receives a bottle with some liquid the color of medium-strength tea.)* Oh, Mrs. Honah, thank you so much, thank you very-very much!... And come back in the afternoon—perhaps there'll be some business closer to evening. And you'll lift my spirits a bit. Okay? Good-bye now...

*(ONA presses the bottle to her chest. She sits in her chair, gently rocking the bottle in her arms, like a baby. Then she puts it on her knees, and while holding it with one hand, she shuts the window with the other. She carefully rolls toward the nightstand with the telephone. She opens it and takes a little shot glass. She uncorks the bottle, pours a full glass, and drinks it in one gulp. Immediately, almost without a pause, she tosses back a second glass. Exhausted, she falls back in her chair, holding the glass and the bottle as if they were her most valuable possessions. For a few minutes she sits immobile. Finally, shaking it off, she puts the glass and the bottle inside the nightstand, and closes it. She moves to the middle of the room. Her movements are clear and confident again. She rolls toward the table and clicks the start button of the tape recorder. The folk song «The Blazing Pine in Flames» plays. Moving as if to the rhythm of the song, she rolls her chair to the wardrobe, opens the door, and takes out a white wedding veil. Looking at herself in the mirror on the back of the opened wardrobe door, she puts it on. She closes the wardrobe and rolls to the middle of the room and begins to dance in her little chair. Her dance is frightening. Her dance is beautiful. Her dance is frighteningly beautiful.)*

End of Act One.

## Act Two

*The same room. ONA may have been dancing in her chair only a minute ago, but the song has ended and she turns the tape recorder off. She is out of breath a bit. She wipes her face with her hand, takes off the veil, and hides it in the wardrobe. She fixes her hair. She becomes lost in thought for a moment, but her thoughts are light, since she is tipsy. Then she rolls around the room for a while, finally approaching the window. She opens the window and peeks out.*

ONA. Oh, Mrs. Honah, you're here again already? So quickly?... What was I doing? Nothing much, just listening to some music. What, you could hear it outside? Really? I didn't think it was so loud. What? Oh, no, how would I dance?... I live only in my bed and my chair. Yes. No, I can't get up, not at all. Of course, it's too bad. But what can you do? Well, the doctor said that it's impossible, that never, not ... Well, forever, in one word. That's just the way it is. Oh, Mrs. Honah, you ask such things! How can I describe it to you? It's difficult. How long have I lived like this? *(She thinks for a minute, recollecting.)* Well, more than half a year, because it's already four months since I was sent home from the hospital, and I was stuck there for two and a half months. Yes, it's been a long time... since then...

Mrs. Honah, it was during the very first demonstrations against the molva. Right after it exploded, a couple of days. The Light-Grays weren't legal yet, but we all sewed ourselves gray shirts. Mmm... Well, now I can laugh about it, after everything. But then we took it very seriously, as though it were... Well, you know. I remember, sewing myself a very loose shirt, and I didn't tuck it in my pants or skirt; I wore it out... So... We had a demonstration right at the university, in the yard. The Grays decided to get everyone to come, the sympathizers as well as the unaligned of all stripes. Well, to attract them somehow, to influence them—actually he suggested this—I stood by the gate, you know the gate to the university yard, the pretty ornamented ironwork gate... So he asked me to, and when everyone had gathered in the yard, I closed the gate... Well, I mean, I shut the two halves, but we didn't have the lock, the guard had it... So he gave me a pair of police handcuffs, and I locked the gates with one side of the handcuffs and with the other I chained myself to the gate by my arm. *(ONA pauses often in her narrative; it's obviously not easy for her.)* So... The demonstration began, and the Light-Grays are making speeches... And someone, probably from the university, maybe even the president himself, someone called the police. I just barely had time to turn around to see the two black armored vehicles approaching at full-speed from the street. They were heading straight at the gates and they weren't stopping. Of course, the gates crashed down on top of me, and they dragged me... under the gates... crushed, you understand—they pushed

me like that through the whole yard, fifty meters, at least... No, are you kidding? People who were there told me later. I lost consciousness right after the gates fell on me... Well it was a couple of weeks before I came to, in a hospital. And not right away... gradually. I regained consciousness bit by bit. Oh, it was terrible, Mrs. Honah, my whole body hurt so badly... *(She shivers, shaking her shoulders.)* Of course, they chased everyone away, and I was taken to the hospital. Yes... The doctors said that it's amazing I survived... But enough of this, Mrs. Honah, I can't talk about it any more... Enough is enough... *(Depressed, with her head down on her chest, she sits in her chair. Suddenly, the phone on her nightstand rings.)* Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Honah, someone is calling!... *(She quickly closes the window and rolls toward the telephone.)* Hello! Yes, ONA speaking. Who? *(Immediately her voice changes and becomes dry and cold. Even her face changes.)* Ah, it's you. What do you want? If there's something to talk about, well, why not... *(A pause.)* Yes... Yes... Well, that's what you think... So... Huh?... Aha... Yes. That's it. That's it! Enough! And now you listen to me! Do you hear me?! Now I want to tell you something! Listen, girl, and don't interrupt me! You always lived off me like a leech. Even in school, you sucked up to me! And ever since then you cling to me like some parasite!... Copying my homework, cheating off me on a midterm, using my results in the lab! Did you take even one exam without my cheat-sheets? And not only at school, not only in academics—in everything! In our freshmen year when we went hiking in the forest and I made myself a little bouquet of cat rose and pinned it to my jacket, you immediately did the same. And you even came to the university with it the next day! And everyone was surprised, just crazy about it. Oh, that Mona, clever Monkey, what a sense of style, what imagination! But it was my style, my imagination! When I started to smoke, you couldn't start fast enough. And not some other brand, but precisely "Philboroughs"! And then, the time the three of us were in that coffee-shop, you must remember... I was taking a cigarette—it was the last one in the pack and it was broken. So I broke the filter off and smoked it like that, without the filter. And in a minute you took out a pack from your purse, and you twisted off the filter and lit up. You don't deny it, do you? And I thought it was funny—how limited you are, you can't come up with anything on your own. I drank meps without sugar, and you drank meps without sugar. I chewed trick, and you chewed trick. Once in conversation, I happened to mention that I sleep without a pillow because I don't like my head to be elevated. And I bet from that night on you've also slept without a pillow! You stole everything from me—the way I dressed, my tastes, my expressions, my style of living.

And now I'm going to tell you the main thing! I'll tell you why you did it! You thought it would help you steal him from me! But don't think

you succeeded! *(She falls silent, sobs, and puts the phone back. Numbly she sits by the nightstand. After a few seconds, the phone rings again.)* Oh, what's going on? *(She picks up the phone.)* Well? What else do you want? Go ahead... *(She listens.)* You're lying! I don't believe you! *(She is close to tears.)* You're lying, Monkey, you're lying! I don't believe you! I won't believe it until he tells me himself!... You bitch, Monkey!... *(She throws the phone. Hunched over in her chair, she covers her face with her hands and sits like this for a bit longer—for a couple of minutes. The phone rings again. She picks it up as though half-asleep, apathetically, reluctantly.)*

I'm listening. Yes, it's me. Of course I recognized you, why wouldn't I? How am I? Everything's okay. Everything's fine, nothing new... And what about you? Aha... Yes, I understand... And this call—is it your idea, or did Monkey suggest it?... Well, if I asked, then obviously I want to know. I have my reasons. She called me. Not long, a couple of minutes ago... What did she tell me? Different things... Oh, by the way, she said that when they broke up our demonstration, when I was ... when the gates fell on me... She told me... are you listening?... that it was you who called the police! *(Pause.)* Yes. Yes, I hear you very well, and I'm listening very carefully! Yes, I know there's no struggle without bloodshed and victims! *(Again with a voice on the verge of hysterical wailing.)* Yes, victims and bloodshed strengthen our ranks! Your ranks, you understand?! How long did you think about it, did you even hesitate, before you tactfully gave me the handcuffs and asked that I block the gates?... I was the one... Yes, yes, no struggle without victims... Do you know that when I was brought to the hospital, before the doctors started putting me back together, piece by piece, bit by bit, they took it out of me... actually, it came out by itself... What should have been called my baby... Our baby, darling... Yes... it wasn't all for nothing—my daily nausea, and the big gray shirt that I sewed for myself and wore untucked. You laughed—why would I wear such a tent! You really didn't know? You really didn't even suspect, or were you just good at pretending to be such an ignoramus? Because now I can't figure it out... What? What for? What for—here, to my place? What do you want to explain? What can you explain? What? So...

*(It's clear that the conversation was interrupted on the other end. After holding the phone in front of her face for a moment, ONA slowly puts it back on its base. She sits silently, concentrating, calmly, with her hands on her knees. The phone rings again. She picks it up quickly.)*

ONA. Yes! Yes, it's me, Mr. Advisor! Mr. Senior Advisor!... Yes. Yes, sir. According to your instructions, Mr. Senior Advisor. Everything as planned. He should be at my place any minute, Mr. Senior Advisor! Yes.

Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Senior Advisor! Your orders will be carried out, Mr. Senior Advisor! Thank you, Mr. Senior Advisor!

*(With a precise, clean gesture she hangs up the phone. She rolls to the middle of the room and throws the blanket off her knees. Under the blanket she wears only underwear. She stands up from her chair and shakes out her legs, which most probably have fallen asleep. She walks toward the wardrobe and pulls her blouse off over her head. She puts it into the wardrobe and takes out a dark dress and stockings. Without rushing, she dresses. From some lower drawer she takes out a pair of high-heeled shoes. Just as she steps into them, someone rings the doorbell. Two short rings.)*

ONA. Just a minute! Wait just a minute, please!... (She closes the wardrobe door. Calmly, she sits down in her chair, makes herself comfortable, and covers her legs with the blanket. With the whole chair and her whole body, she turns toward the door. Another ring.)

ONA. Yes! It's open! Please, come in!...

CURTAIN.

November, 1992, Irpin'—Rivne—Irpin'.

*Translated by Taras Koznarsky with Marta Baziuk*

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## Selections from *Tyhry*

*Emma Andijewska*

### **The Melon Patch**

There's a melon patch outside my window. It's a few stories high, with cantaloupes and watermelons, but meat grinders grow in it, too. It seems that these meat grinders are condensers of silence, although I can't say what their exact function is. The people who walk across the concrete courtyard below do not notice the melon patch. Even I myself, when I go downstairs and look up from below, don't always take note of it. That's why I'm still deliberating whether it's just carried in by the south wind in the evenings, or if during the day the melon patch simply takes on the colors of the air, making it difficult to perceive. Because the fact that it changes, chameleon-like, caught my eye a long time ago.

The melon patch is outside my window all year long. True, when I open the door it gets carried into the room by the draft and then hangs above the lamp or near the bookshelves, but, nonetheless, I'm used to the idea that it's just outside my window. It's convenient that way. Because I like order, and when I sample the watermelons with a knife, lots of juice spills out on the floor, and then it's difficult to breathe. And I quite like breathing. I can lie and breathe for hours on end, intently inhaling whole landscapes into my lungs, because I perceive the world through my lungs.

I keep the melon patch right outside my window, so I don't even have to walk out on the balcony or lean out of the window to get to it. After all, the melon patch knows my hands, and all I have to do is extend my knife and it flows onto my fingers. With one movement of the blade I slit open the watermelon and take out the insides. I walk around my room barefoot, consuming watermelon after watermelon, and the neighbors who live next door run from apartment to apartment, informing one another that I'm pacing once again. They don't know that I'm getting heavier from the watermelons and that my steps are losing confidence. And that's when I hear soft music from the meat grinders.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Bashtan"

### Tigers

The first suspicion that it was tigers came to me sometime around noon, when the room was full of sun. Looking at the spots and stripes that were stirring about, I couldn't shake off the feeling that beneath the spots of sun were at least a dozen tigers, and that all of them were racing across chairs and trestle-beds, ignoring the rules of respectable behavior. I cannot, of course, assert that it was exactly then that I first noticed them. No. I just felt that something around me wasn't right, though I couldn't explain straight away just why. The fact of the matter is that I'm not very observant, and it wasn't until they began to roam in my apartment every day, almost knocking me off my feet, especially when I was carrying something in my arms and couldn't look at my feet, that I began to look more closely at what I had once considered to be spots of sunlight. Now, of course, it is clear to me that if I had been observant, then surely I would have noticed earlier how often during the heaviest rains there would be a flickering of sunny spots and stripes in my apartment and I would have begun to wonder if just maybe there weren't, by chance, tigers hiding behind those spots of sun, tigers that for some reason had grown fond of my apartment, although I could not imagine where they could have entered it, if they weren't living in the furniture or behind the cornice along the walls. Quite probably I wouldn't have noticed them to the end of my days if I hadn't once been angered by my neighbors, who began to ask what it was that races about in my apartment from time to time, albeit I never had visitors and I always wore soft house shoes indoors so as not to disturb the neighbors. I myself did not like to be disturbed, which is why I tried to be considerate to others, but this kind of iniquity offended me deeply. I didn't even allow myself to sneeze loudly in my apartment, so as not to disturb somebody on the other side of the wall, and they had the nerve to declare that something was racing about in my apartment. Naturally, I told them that the way homes—and most larger structures, for that matter—are built today, there is a displacement of acoustic properties due to a lack of appropriate building materials, and that is why those who live below me hear not me, as it seems to them, but my neighbors, who have a large family. But I myself wasn't satisfied. I began to look closer at what I had hitherto presumed to be spots of sun. And no matter how much I did not want to admit this—I cannot bear complications of any sort—after some deliberations I came to the conclusion that these were, indeed, tigers. Then I decided that, since they were tigers, it would be necessary to feed them, despite the fact that they had found their way into my apartment illegally. How could I neglect any living creature, even if tigers were a disturbance in the apartment? For they would certainly be hungry, and it can't be ruled out that the reason I hadn't noticed them for so long was because without food they had become excessively thin, although this argument was less persuasive in light of the

stories about their racing about the apartment. But I decided to feed them. At the beginning, to be honest, I was rather apprehensive that if I accustomed the animals to food it would be difficult to break the habit, and tigers grow to be quite big and strong, and that it was my responsibility to care for them, as they had already grown fond of my apartment, so I dug out of my memory a recollection from my childhood of when I was taken to the circus, and then it occurred to me that tigers can also be tamed. In all honesty, I didn't know how one goes about this, but I was quite sure that it wouldn't take a genius. What happened after this I cannot express in words. I can betray only this: I now ride a tiger.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Tyhry"

### Passion

You'd think that nobody would be disturbed by my rooster, which I walk on a leash, just like others take their dogs for a walk. But no, somebody took the trouble to observe my rooster in a vacant lot blowing the sun out of its beak, and now I have to tremble at the thought of his being harmed, because I have already heard that the butcher from whom I buy meat complained that the sun has begun to rise too early. As if that wasn't enough, I have received several threatening letters from the observatory, alleging that I've been forcing my rooster to blow out new stars that have no place whatsoever in the heavenly design, as if there really were any universal laws established on earth, but what's more, these letters insistently claim that, by emitting new stars, I am disrupting their observation of the sky, and that is why, if any calamity appears from space, which, in the present circumstances could easily occur, then the only one guilty will be me, and so it would be best, then, for me to turn my rooster over to the authorities, so that official bodies can decide its fate. This kind of naïveté simply moves me. They think that since I have my own rooster that blows out the sun, this automatically means that I have a special rooster. They don't know that all I have to do is take any rooster, or even a hen, or the most mangy duckling, or, indeed, any animal, although I prefer birds, because a star blown out of a beak has a far more shapely appearance than one blown out by other animals, and keep it in my house for a couple of days and it will begin to blow out the sun. Those who complain don't understand that my roosters blow out the sun only because it would not be proper for me, at my age and in my position, to engage in such activities myself. Besides, I am prone to obsession, and that is why if I were to begin blowing out the sun myself it would be doubtful if I could be stopped, and that would have consequences far too unpleasant for all, whereas when I transfer my passion onto an object, which, in this case, happens to be a rooster, it is far easier for me to regulate this passion. But everything I say is met with total misunderstanding. All of my arguments, which occupy so much of my time, are yielding no results, and I am beginning to worry more and more that when they come to take away my rooster, and if I don't learn to blow out soap bubbles instead of the sun, then when they appear on my doorstep to put things in order once and for all, I will greet the police with the sun on my lips.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Prystrast"

### At The Post Office

“This letter must go out today.” “But we are closed for the day.” “If that letter arrives even one minute later than it should, the whole structure of the universe will collapse, everything will be destroyed and this world will no longer exist.” “This world will not exist, but there will be another, and the people will settle in another space outside its boundaries.” “If this letter does not go out today—” “We are closed for the day. It won’t go out. The post office is a government institution and here everything is governed by rules, according to which the post office is closed for the day.” “Then everything will be destroyed!” “Unfortunately, I cannot be of any help.”

The ceiling began to crumble and the walls to cave in, but the postal clerk did not move from his little window. He didn’t notice it. It was noticed only by an old woman who had come to collect her rent. She sat on the floor and started to cry. The clerk looked at her and said that she should get up because it was forbidden to sit on the floor in the middle of the post office. But the old woman could not hear him anymore. She was covered up by the rocks and rubble of the whole structure of the universe.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. “Na poshti”

### In The Restaurant

“If you don’t return, I will die,” said the girl, laughing and eating strawberry ice cream from a goblet. “One doesn’t die from that,” replied the imaginary friend at her table. “Life is so simple, and you will soon forget that he ever existed.” “You must return, because I will die,” said the girl. “I can’t go on without you.” “Everybody can do without another, and people with rosy cheeks like yours don’t die so quickly.” “But I will die, because I can’t go on without you.”

Cars drove past beside the tables, and confident young men walked by, their thighs rocking the air as if on a swing.

“I’m dying,” said the girl and paid for her ice cream. “Young people don’t die from this—time heals all wounds.” “For me, time does not exist.” “Everybody your age says that.” “If you don’t return, I will die,” said the girl, and got up from the table. Two men eating cold turkey sandwiches looked at her and then saw her off with their eyes. She was pretty and young, and it was indeed a pity that as she was crossing the street, vehicles were already driving through her. Passenger cars, commercial vehicles, and trucks with trailers went through her, as did people and the policemen controlling street traffic.

Emma Andievs'ka. “V restorani”

*Translated by Maria Kachmar*

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## **The Devil Who Is (The One Hundredth Witch)**

*Valerii Shevchuk*

1.

The itinerant inquisitor, or, as he was also known, Hexenkommissar (“commissar of witches”) Johann Spingler arrived in the town of Möckmühl in a black coach. He was escorted by a leather-covered wagon with the executioner and secretary, and by several armed cavalrymen. The wagon was driven by a midget with purulent eyes and thin tufts of facial hair. The driver of the coach, on the other hand, was colossal and fat. His red face, visible from afar, filled people with a terror that is beyond explanation: indeed, the Hexenkommissar employed the monster precisely for such an effect. His eyes glared piercingly from under a thicket of eyebrows, the disheveled hair on his head was gray like ashes, and the exposed parts of his face looked like two pieces of hanging flesh—he had almost no forehead. When Johann Spingler’s coach rumbled into a town, he stopped in front of the city hall and dispatched one of his attendants to the mayor. He did not even consider disembarking from his coach. The mayor came out alone to greet him, bowing deeply to receive a blessing. Disclosing the nature of his visit, the Hexenkommissar ordered that announcements be posted immediately on the doors of the city hall and neighboring churches, obliging every inhabitant of the town, under threat of excommunication and criminal proceedings, to report within twelve days on anyone who elicits any suspicion of involvement in sorcery, or about whom evil rumors are circulating, or who displays any suspicious behavior. The informant was promised heavenly blessings as well as a financial reward from the property of the sorcerer or sorceress. Confidentiality was guaranteed.

The inquisitor remained in his coach until the requested decrees were formulated, until they were nailed onto the doors of the city hall and the same was done at the churches—such was his peculiarity, as if to prove his curious dedication to the task he was assigned to perform. Moreover, the coach followed the person distributing the proclamations, the driver yelling loudly and cracking his whip. That yelling, together with the whole spectacle, dispersed any curious onlookers at once—the inquisitor observed with satisfaction the void expanding so quickly around him: the closed, even shuttered windows and the deserted streets and town square, where the wind

was free to blow, howling distinctively as if it too were affected by the stench of horror and dread that was descending on the town. Perhaps the wind itself became the messenger of that terror: the air had the smell, the Hexenkommissar liked to joke among friends, of impending blood and death.

After these formalities, the coach set off to the tavern courtyard: in each of the towns and villages he visited, Johann Spingler always stayed with the same person. And so in Möckmühl he called upon his acquaintance Maximilian Spee, who, having been notified some time earlier of the arrival of the fearsome guests, stood before the opened gates. When Pater Ioannes, or Pater Johannes, as he was also known, deigned to disembark from the coach—he was a hefty man and had a round face, in the center of which a small, pug nose protruded above puffy lips twisted in a scornful line—the innkeeper bent in two and kissed the priest's hand. The hosteller knew perfectly well that these guests would not be paying for their lodging, food, or wine, but their visit would benefit him no less than that of guests who paid for everything.

"Have you many lodgers?" inquired Spingler as he blessed the innkeeper.

"I have a few, Your Reverence," the innkeeper replied warily.

"Announce my arrival," Spingler said, raising his face haughtily. "And if someone wishes to hold converse with me, I am at their disposal."

This phrase was almost ritualistic. It meant that from that moment on, the courtyard had become a venue of the inquisition—access was granted only to those who wished to make a denunciation. Pater Johann knew from experience that no one would appear immediately, and so he could dine peacefully and take an afternoon nap, since his real work would commence as darkness set in—only then would informants begin to creep in. Sleeping then would be out of the question. He even knew what they would say, since it was almost always the same: someone has long been suspected of sorcery; a woman standing just outside of town at the onset of a storm was seen staring at the sky; a man developed severe abdominal pain after his neighbor gave him the evil eye. Someone will claim that his horse or hog fell ill after an quarrel with his neighbors; sometimes the informant himself, or an acquaintance of his, fell ill after being touched by a woman who had expressed an evil wish against him, which later came true.

Johann Spingler even kept a notebook, in which he recorded all incidents of witchcraft on good-quality paper. This was separate from the records of court proceedings: those he submitted to the inquisition, whereas the notebook was always at his side. So when the denunciation procedure began, he would find a similar incident in his notebook and nod his head in agreement—the repetition of motifs proved the veracity of the informant, since the things he spoke of were known to be practiced by witches. The Hexenkommissar's enthusiasm was even greater and swelled into a peculiar

kind of joy when the denunciation was new and unusual—this was proof that witches were developing novel methods of activity, and the revelation of these methods was his, Pater Johannes's, sacred mission. In quiet moments he liked to review this notebook. All sorts of things were entered in it: a peasant stole a sack from the accused and patched his pants with it, after which his knee ached, since the patch was directly over that knee; another ate a bun at his neighbor's and then fell ill; yet another complained that after a female suspect scolded him, his bull became afflicted; two women were burned at the stake because during the summer they had roamed forests foraging for medicinal roots. Yet another woman wiped her lips after communion while walking around the altar, that is, she attempted to incorporate consecrated bread into a magic formula. At any rate, Johann had become convinced long ago that any misfortune was a trick of the devil or the act of a witch: be it drought, storm, epidemic, an unexplained illness, and so on.

Johann Spingler hastened to his designated chamber; he could not wait to leaf through the pages of his notebook before lunch. Why before lunch? The midday meal always fatigued him and made him sleepy, whereas before lunch he was, though tired from travel, still full of vigor and strength. But Pater Johannes was unable to indulge this desire prior to partaking in food: just as he was settling into his seat there was a knock on the door, and he was informed that one of the lodgers at Maximilian Spee's inn wished to hold converse with the commissar of witches at once. The inquisitor was surprised; after all, by volunteering to confer with him so openly, the informant was exposing himself before other people and possibly the devil, who would certainly avenge himself later. But such was the case, and the Hexenkommissar, though somewhat perturbed that someone had dared to ruin his schedule for the day, sat up straighter in his seat and turned his face toward the door. He was disappointed, however, for it was only the mayor of Metz, Agrippe von Nettesheim, with whom he had studied at the academy and even befriended for a time, though now they had nearly come to the point of dueling, all because of a certain woman in Metz whose case Johann had not yet concluded. That is, she was still incarcerated, locked in tight irons and confined in a horribly tight space. Agrippe pretended to be interceding in the incrimination of the sorceress at the behest of his father's friend, and he had sparred verbally with Spingler in Metz on several occasions with regard to the case. All would have been well, had Agrippe not gotten so deeply involved that now he gave the inquisitor no peace, even tracking him down here. Agrippe would probably claim that their meeting happened completely by chance, since he just happened to be in town to take care of personal affairs. And so, this is what was said:

"I am glad to see you, Agrippe!" exclaimed Pater Johannes. "As long as you don't start pining for that witch again. Her case has been resolved, and I would advise you not to exhibit such approbation for a daughter of the

devil. Did we not conclude our discourse?"

"That's just it," said Agrippe. "I indicated to you that the documents do not provide sufficient evidence to charge the woman."

The priest was unhappy. This excessive affability of his former friend had begun to irritate him. Of course, that enchantress had undoubtedly been Agrippe's sweetheart and he was ruthlessly taking advantage of Spingler's partiality to him as an old friend. Johann sighed.

"The fact that her mother was burned at the stake as a witch is sufficient evidence."

"You know perfectly well, Johann, that does not bear upon her case. That concerns her mother's case."

Pater Johannes puckered his spongy lips. "Remember *Malleus Maleficarum*," he said. "The charge is completely well-founded. Witches dedicate their offspring to the devil right after birth. Or they procreate with incubi and in that way sow magic and sorcery in their families."

At that Agrippe turned crimson.

"That is fallacious theology, Johann. It is not sufficient reason to torture innocent women and drag them to a bonfire. Is this how heresy is to be eradicated? Your conclusions demonstrate that you yourself are a heretic!"

Johann felt an iciness inside. What Agrippe had said was no joke. And he too began to feel angry. "Explain!" he ordered, for this no longer concerned the witch, but rather Pater Johann himself.

"I'll explain," Agrippe replied curtly. "Let us say that you are right. Then, however, the sacrament of baptism would be nullified. There would be no meaning in the priest's words, 'Away, ye with a darkened soul; relinquish your place to the Holy Spirit,' if through the acts of a godless mother this child, too, fell under the spell of the devil! They are then meaningless. Is this what you claim?"

Johann could endure no more. He jumped to his feet and pointed a finger at the door.

"Don't abuse our long friendship, Agrippe!" he yelled. "It's better that you get out of my sight and not play with fire!"

"Are you saying that our friendship is over?" Agrippe asked quietly, eyes ablaze.

Johannes felt a glacial chill beneath his shoulder; perhaps he had overdone it? Would it be better to part with this man on good terms, so that Johannes could perform his holy mission in peace, and then dispense with him—well, not directly, but by pointing a finger at him?

Pater Johannes sat down and paused for a long moment.

"No, I don't wish to forfeit our long-standing friendship, Agrippe," he said warmly. "But we have chosen an unsuitable setting for our discussion. The matter will not be resolved in any case until I return to Metz. There we will resume our debate. Perhaps you will even rescue her whose case so consumes you."

"Thank you, Johannes. I am consumed with her case not for personal reasons, but because divine justice must exist in the world."

"You are consumed in vain, Agrippe," Johann said, barely opening his puffy lips. "God passes judgment not in this world, but in another, more perfect world. He has appointed us to be the judges here."

"And if you misjudge?"

"Then we shall be judged. Even a child knows, Agrippe, that heaven is for the righteous, and hell for the sinful—may the Lord save us from that!"

"Amen!" Agrippe exclaimed, his face brightening. "I'm glad that we met once again, albeit by chance, and have come to an agreement."

## 2.

The midday meal was brought to the chamber, although not by the maid, but by the innkeeper. Pater Johann Spingler enjoyed eating, especially the choice dishes that were masterfully prepared by the local chef, who had once known better days, but because of an excessive inclination for wine had ended up working here at this public house, which actually had a rather good reputation. And so when the priest spied the tray laden with salads and patés which were to be complemented with a well-aged wine, he immediately forgot about business matters, including the unpleasant conversation he had just held with Agrippe, and, raising his hands, surrendered to the charming approach of the beaming innkeeper.

"I am happy to serve Your Reverence however I can!" exclaimed the innkeeper unctuously, knowing full well that his presence was not superfluous: the established customs of their interaction demanded it. The priest was expected to invite the innkeeper to partake in the meal, even though the food and drink were the innkeeper's; in addition, Master Maximilian had to feign great excitement at the honor. The remaining dishes would be brought by the maid. Thus they ended up face to face in a repast that lasted a good two hours, Pater Johann gladly devouring dozens of platters and washing them down generously with truly magnificent wine. They conversed like genuine friends and shared entertaining fables, laughing all the while, the host sonorously, like a drum, and the priest giggling in a high pitch, although such a laugh did not befit an authoritative figure, especially one with so grave a mission. Only after the fruit had been served and eaten did the Hexenkommissar grow serious. His face hardened, and for the first time he looked at the innkeeper, his companion, in such a way that the latter felt shivers crawl up his legs.

"And now, Master Maximilian, serve me a delicacy for dessert. What can you offer?"

"Katarina Lipps, Your Reverence."

"Who is she?"

"The wife of a teacher, Your Reverence. She gets up late in the

morning and always has marks on her skin."

"Any witnesses?"

"Yes. A girl, her former servant. Sometimes there are even bruises on her body. Also, she gazes out from under her brow; at times she swoons in the middle of the day, rolling her eyes upward. But the worst is ... she reads books, my lord!"

"Books?" The priest twitched. "Where does she get them?"

"From her husband, the teacher, who buys them even though he does not earn enough to afford such luxuries."

"Oh, these are a pair of doves, to be sure. What is his name?"

"Peter Lipps, Your Reverence."

"Are they prosperous?"

"Quite. Peter's father was a merchant well-regarded by the townspeople. He bartered livestock. But the son did not wish to take over his father's successful trade; instead he chose to study the damned learning somewhere in Würzburg."

"Where?" Pater Johann shuddered. "I'll have you know, profane learning is not taught there!"

"Well, you know these matters better than I, Your Reverence," the innkeeper replied submissively. "This is what I do know: when a woman reads books instead of keeping house, it is a sure sign of the involvement of that one whom I do not wish to mention, Your Reverence!"

"Fine," said Pater Johannes, whose eyelids were now beginning to droop. "You shall receive a respectable guerdon from this. Respectable, respectable!"

"Was the dessert tasty, Your Reverence?" the innkeeper inquired suggestively.

But the priest was already yawning and stretching. He liked to stretch contentedly before reposing; likewise, it was a signal for the host to be gone. The act of retiring usually played out as follows: the priest's lips broke open, his eyes misted over, then shut; sighs erupted from his parted lips. In the next moment, his capacious mouth fell open so widely, that his jaws cracked. This time was no different, and the innkeeper immediately sprang to his feet, so as not to—heaven forbid!—forestall or bespoil those sweet moments before rest and sleep subdued his esteemed guest. And the proprietor of the inn did indeed take his leave, for Pater Johannes had a weakness: after a satiating meal he must invariably have a nap for slumber would roll over him like an avalanche, overtaking him suddenly—whether he was sitting or lying down.

And so now, sitting in an armchair, the priest felt himself plummet into the underworld, dropping like a black bird, his arm-wings heaving, the hem of his black mantle unfurling, the air whistling around him. Perhaps it wasn't the air—the whistling intensified from below, like currents of steam gushing from underground pipes. Indeed, a wooly, whirling fog oozed out

with naked red figures streaking around in it. And Agrippe von Nettesheim's crimson face, contorted in a crooked grimace, was hovering over Johann Spingler and it was pronouncing: "Your evidence proves that you yourself are a heretic, Pater Johannes!"

"But I have managed to burn ninety-eight witches at the stake," shouted Spingler. "Two more and I'll have a hundred, not counting the one you are protecting and for whom you burn with sinful lust. Those two I shall find here, but yours, Agrippe, shall burn at the stake too! With her I will start my second hundred!"

At that Agrippe only laughed, flaunting ruby lips and teeth, and the priest suddenly understood with whom he was dealing. He let out a cry for his head was clearing, even as he was submerged in slumber's thousand-fold depths, afloat in reddish-blue billows of a malodorous fog. Nevertheless, his mind was working clearly and soberly, forever on guard for Divine Glory, whether asleep or not. In the considerable time that had passed since he became commissar of witches, he had learned his trade well, as he had also discovered the variety of tricks and chicanery used by the devil. No wonder he recorded everything so diligently and scrupulously. And he was well aware that he must not overlook his own preservation, for the power of the devil is, after all, greater than that of man.

This so excited him that he awoke, and he remained sitting in the armchair, recovering his senses and chiding himself for having been too lazy to get into bed for a restful nap. Again Agrippe's booming voice echoed in his ears with the unexpected accusation of heresy, accusing not just anyone, but him, Johann Spingler! No! This smelled of something foul.

"This cannot be ignored. The impious one must be overcome. I shall overcome him!" he thought with determination.

He blinked, his eyes like dark plums floating in milky whites. He was no longer thinking of Agrippe—more immediate matters concerned him. At once he would summon people and send them off to fetch that witch, whom, with God's will, he would expose and destroy as a lesson to future generations. As always in these cases, he was gripped with a keen fascination for his next victim. But at the same time a cold though passionate circumspection took hold of him, as if he were a hunter daring to attack a wild animal.

He stretched out toward the bell and rang it twice, rousing the bailiffs. And before the doors opened Pater Johannes contemplated only this: should Katarina Lipps be seized alone or with her husband? Peter Lipps undoubtedly practiced black magic, but even if they were both arraigned, he still could not be factored into the sum of one hundred witches exposed. Yet it would be much more efficient for the Holy Inquisition to seize them both at once—then the property of the godless sinners could be confiscated in full, and from the confiscated property he would pay the innkeeper. Yes! It was certainly better to take both of them! And as for the number one

hundred, there was a simpler and yet likewise certain way to achieve it. At any rate, he kept a separate account of sorcerers; they, too, added up to a round number—twenty-five. The ninety-ninth witch might be the maid who had unmasked her mistress. She should be closely examined! And so Pater Johannes ordered the bailiffs to apprehend both the Lipps and to bring their former servant in for questioning.

## 3.

Lately, Katarina Lipps had a sense of dread. It all started with the dismissal of her maid, Louiza Hilgen, who had turned out to be slovenly, lazy, and rude. Peering at her mistress from under her brow, Louiza had hissed: "This matter shall not pass lightly—I'll make sure of that!" Then she had turned and left.

Katarina fretted: she had no reason to keep the wretch, but to be so impudent, to have the gall to threaten—that was too much! She might have forgotten the whole thing, except that soon after, Katarina began to sense a chill from her neighbors, with whom she had maintained a harmony of sorts in the past. Evidently the loud-mouthed girl had spread lies and gossiped about her, relating those biting if good-natured jibes concerning her neighbors that Katarina had sometimes allowed herself in the confines of her home. A wall of exclusion had arisen around Katarina, who was now acknowledged coldly, or not at all. When she passed in the street, the women stopped talking and gawked at her with vacant eyes. The worst of it was that Katarina was unable to find a new maid, even though there were always plenty of girls willing to serve. It seemed that some kind of conspiracy swirled around her—she clearly felt it. Katarina could not bear it and complained to Peter, who tried to comfort her in any way he could. He advised her to go out less frequently, so as not to rub salt in the women's eyes; to treat everyone as before, as if she were unaware of their changed attitude towards her; and finally, to pay a visit to Pater Markus, confessing everything forthrightly—he was a serious and influential man.

Katarina heeded her husband's counsel. She rarely left the house, greeted everyone politely, and behaved as if she did not notice the neighbors turning their backs on her. She even called on Pater Markus, recounting everything that happened around her honestly and telling him about her shameful maidservant, who had obviously slandered her.

Pater Markus plainly knew more.

"There are rumors, my daughter," he said gently, "that you read your husband's books, often until midnight."

"Is that a sin, Father?" Katarina inquired, since what he said was true.

"It is not a sin for an educated individual, or for a man, but it is a sin for a woman," Pater Markus replied.

"But Father, those books expound Scripture!" remarked Katarina.

"Interpreting the Holy Book should be left to wise philosophers, men of sound intellect; for creatures with an intellect as thin as a woman's hair, prayer and the confession of faith suffice—a God-pleasing and honest life."

"Did I not lead a God-pleasing and honest life?"

"The answer to that you should know yourself. But you must have acted inappropriately to cause people to turn away from you. One should conform rather than stand out—arrogance is one of the great sins of mankind. Let your husband read books. You should concern yourself with the womanly matters that are appropriate for you."

"But I do not neglect my womanly responsibilities, Father," said Katarina, lowering her eyes.

"A woman's responsibilities are not confined to the home," Pater Markus observed. "They include the world as well. You may be womanly in your home, but if you treat other women with insolence, that is sinful too."

"So what must I do, Father?"

"Pray and have faith! Be obedient and kind! Attend church daily, approach your neighbors and ask their forgiveness. Be humble. And forget books. Books strengthen a sound mind, but they can break a weak one."

She left the church deep in thought. No, she did not comprehend many matters in this world. Her husband had taught her to read and write; she had such aptitude that she became adept at both with surprising ease. Pleased, Peter instructed her further, in grammar and Latin. She mastered that brilliantly, as well, and in a few years they were able to converse in Latin. Katarina, being childless, found great pleasure in learning. Her husband added poetics. Within a year, Katarina astonished Peter even more by composing verses.

"You should have been born a boy," he stated once. "You would have been famous the world over. As it is ... let's hope no evil comes of this."

He instructed her no more although she craved to delve into the mysteries of rhetoric and philosophy. That is when she set out to peruse his texts, even the most complex ones. She read in private, and had it not been for that wretch, Louiza, no one would have known.

She did not walk but flew home from church. The bitter insults seared her heart: what evil had she committed in the world? Is it a crime for a woman to devote herself to learning and poetry? Shouldn't wisdom be spread throughout the world? And irrationality dispelled?

But then so many books asserted—Scripture among them—that wisdom can hide in ignorance, for that which is rational to the world is irrational to God, and the other way around. Then to what avail are all books, learning, and knowledge? Of what use are schools, collegiums, academies? Who needs philosophers, magistrates, theologians? Why is a man allowed to be educated, but not a woman? Cannot a sensitive mind schooled in worldly wisdom become a sound mind? If she had children, she would be too busy for such introspection. No, she did not comprehend the

world. She knew only this: her endeavors, her reading did not cause anyone harm. The single wrong she had committed was not to retain that malicious and obtuse loudmouth who secretly spied on her, listened to the conversations she had with her husband, and then revealed everything in public.

And so now Katarina felt the world hemming her in, tightening around her like a noose, cutting off the air so that there was not enough to breathe. She felt as if she were trapped inside a glass sphere running and running, yet remaining in place as the sphere slid from under her feet. Bug-eyed faces with flattened noses glued themselves on all sides of the glass, their fingers pointing at her, their cavernous, toothsome mouths laughing and shouting. And she knew what they were shouting:

"Ogress! Ogress!"

It was so ghastly.

Katarina restrained herself. It was street lads playing and calling.

"Are they mad? How dare they use that word to describe her!"

Frightened and outraged, she looked around—the sun flashed into her eyes, blinding her for a moment. A fanciful white cloud hung suspended next to it. The ground around her glowed with glistening green grass, as if ablaze. The boys' faces, contorted from shouting, came into her sight. Curious eyes followed her from behind wooden shutters, women's eyes—oh, how they despised her, and she them! And near the approach to her yard stood a covered black cart. Strange armed men clothed in black milled about, and clusters of townspeople swarmed around; all at once, they stretched their arms toward her. And there, next to the wagon, stood her husband Peter, stunned, his hands in manacles (were they really manacles?). He turned his pale face towards her, his face was as white as that cloud overhead, next to the sun.

Katarina felt the blood rush from her body too, her eyes bulging, her mouth agape in shock. Startled, she stopped, and suddenly turned, trying to flee, but someone cloaked in black was waiting for her nearby. Or perhaps it was one of those mischievous boys who had absurdly labeled her an ogress that tripped her. She staggered and fell into the dust. It was then that she heard jeering laughter and the stomping of heavy boots. Once again, she tried to escape, screeching like a mortally wounded bird. A heavy fist struck her between the eyes, and she tumbled again, face into the dust. Thick, unyielding hands grabbed her legs, tied a noose around them, and dragged her along the road, writhing and screaming, and again there was no help.

4.

"She's a genuine witch," declared Louiza Hilgen with complete conviction. "I've been observing her for a long time. One day she woke up late, and when I helped her get dressed, I noticed round red splotches the size of coins all over her body—this was in the morning. And one night I

crept into her bedroom: she lay motionless, as if dead. I touched her, and her body was cold. Something creaked in the chimney before dawn. I stayed awake deliberately to observe and investigate, and I witnessed a white shadow crawl out of the cookstove and run as fast as it could into the bedroom. And at times she boiled herbs. What she studied in books I don't know. Once she murdered a child and boiled it in a kettle, prancing around it and muttering. And a man came to visit her: he looked much like Master Peter, but he had a funny hat on his head and wore tiny boots. When this Peter-like man took off his hat, I saw little horns on his head. He threw himself at the lady, embracing and kissing her—pew, pew, pew, lest I conjure him up! Then he pulled his boots off and I saw that he had hooves instead of feet. And he proceeded to perform acts with my lady that I can't describe, cursing God in the process with words I can't repeat."

"Do, do tell us!" prodded the Hexenkommissar soothingly.

Louiza fell to her knees, crossed herself, raised her eyes toward heaven and swore: "Kill me, slice me with a knife, but my lips shall never utter such words against the Lord."

"Very well, then. Tell us what acts they performed."

This Louiza agreed to recount, though at first she stuttered, but only on the condition that she be allowed to whisper those words into the Hexenkommissar's ear. She proceeded to whisper passionately and frantically, as if she were not condemning but rather envying her mistress, as if she herself might have enjoyed doing such things.

"Enough!" Pater Johann cut her off. "What else?"

"For entire days and nights at a time she read books of magic. A black mist emanated from those books and my mistress inhaled that mist, muttering something. Little black men with black tails cavorted all over those black pages; my mistress watched, clapping and laughing. Her hair stood on end, and I became so afraid that my teeth chattered."

"Why did you not report her immediately?" Pater Johannes asked.

"I wanted to investigate and not to overlook anything," Louiza replied firmly.

"And you denounced her after she dismissed you."

"Because I had uncovered all I could and could do no more."

"Did Master Peter also read those black books?"

Louiza's eyes fluttered and she seemed to regain her senses.

"Master Peter is a good man," she said. "He tried to turn her away from the books."

"But he was aware of the fact that his wife was a witch?"

"No, he wasn't," said Louiza, alarmed. "As far as I know, he simply discouraged her from reading books."

"How do you know?" the priest asked sternly. "And don't lie!"

"He is a good man," Louiza blurted out, frightened.

"Evince the truth," Pater Johannes declared solemnly, "so that I won't

be forced to extract it from you by other means."

Louiza shook her head nervously.

"I have spoken the truth," she said.

At this point the executioner entered from an adjoining room, holding a thumbscrew in his hands.

"See this?" he said. "We put a foot or hand here, the bolt is tightened—it is very painful. Better to confess."

"Confess what?" asked Louiza, frightened. Her thoughts became confused.

"You've already forgotten what I asked. Was Peter Lipps aware of the fact that his wife was a witch?"

"He knew," Louiza pronounced quietly, her lips trembling.

"And did he discourage her not only from reading books, but also from flying off to the witches' sabbath?"

"Yes," Louiza whispered.

"And did he himself read those books of magic?"

"No, he read academic texts."

"How do you know that, if you are illiterate?"

"There were no demons dancing atop those pages."

"The truth!" exclaimed the priest, as the executioner demonstrated the Spanish boot to Louiza. "It's a fine item, my lass! Would you like me to show you how it works?"

Louiza screamed.

"Reveal everything!" shouted Pater Johannes.

"He read the same books," gasped the maid.

"Now you're a good girl!" the executioner observed.

"We have enough," said the priest with a yawn. "Did you record everything?" he asked the clerk. "Let her put her mark beneath it."

Louiza complied.

"Do not wander far from town," ordered Pater Johannes, inserting a finger into his ear to scratch an itch. "We may need to summon you again. Go with God, my daughter, and may the Lord bless you!"

Louiza bowed, kissed the priest's hand, and ran out the door as fast as she could. She was overcome with dread. She felt the priest's piercing gaze fixed on her back as if he were a snake eyeing a frog. She did not know what ideas had formed in his head, but they were not favorable to her.

5.

All this took place at the magistrate's building, where the itinerant Holy Tribunal was temporarily installed. This was also where the prison, with its stocks and implements of torture, was located.

Katarina lay in a deep dungeon. Her feet were shackled, rendering her immobile. An iron collar with spikes pointing inward, toward her skin was

fastened around her neck. The collar was on a chain that was bound to the wall. Her wrists were in cuffs clamped to a perpendicular shaft and she lay on a horizontal beam. She appeared to have been crucified. She could not move. Her body was stiff and wracked with pain. She sent her thoughts and prayers upwards to Him who was crucified 1516 years ago for preaching love and mercy and all the ten commandments to the world. But now His disciples had appeared, extracting from His wisdom only what was advantageous for them, that is to say, profitable; in the name of His cross they had proceeded to crucify the disgruntled and the arrogant and along with them the innocent, sowing death in the name of love, and in the name of submission—confrontation. This thought bored into Katarina Lipps's mind like a wedge until suddenly it occurred to her that someone had once hopelessly betrayed the Master, that the act of Judas Iscariot was merely the first sign of that great betrayal (the Master knew it was coming, for nothing transpires without His will); after all, that deed was not a betrayal, but a repudiation. The real betrayal was formulated among the loyal and faithful, those who made renunciations when necessary and repented and reverted when it was beneficial for them to repent and revert; those who first persecuted the Master and then suddenly took His teachings to heart, recognizing a pragmatism in His sermons and sensing an enduring vitality in His words.

She had considered these notions earlier, when studying Scripture, but she had not allowed such thoughts to enter her heart. Now, however, crucified as He had been and sensing the suffering that awaited her, she could only think about Him and the great betrayal. In spite of herself she seemed to become His body; her thoughts seemed to develop from His thoughts.

"Lord," she whispered, "You came into the world and allowed Yourself to be crucified because You wished to deliver the world from the hatred that had flooded it. But Lord, You did not save the world, You merely extended your agony throughout the ages. You command the good and the enlightened to die and the evil ones to reign. Is this the lesson of love?"

She listened as if expecting an answer, but there was only silence around her. Her body ached oppressively because she could not move. The crossbeam ate into her spine. The disintegration of her body, it seemed, had commenced from within. No, she was not entirely sure what to expect—no one knew how those suspected of witchcraft were dealt with since only vague rumors circulated, especially about the inhuman torture that was inflicted upon them. After all, nobody ever came back alive. She had witnessed the burning of witches at the stake only once, and that was so gruesome that she had not gone to view it a second or third time. Those hapless victims had crushed fingers and toes, blackened faces, scorched heads, crazed eyes, blue splotches on their necks—and now here she was, in their skin. Her kind and surprisingly calm husband Peter lies somewhere near, also in chains—how she yearned to exchange a few words with him,

to seek counsel, but that was not possible. A feeling that she needed to remember something crucial overtook her—something she had read in a book or something her husband had cited; this would be the thread she should grasp—she felt dizzy from the effort. She had read somewhere—or was it her husband who had mentioned?—that those accused of sorcery were not allowed any means of defense. In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *Hexenhammer*—"the hammer of witches"—the identity of the denouncers was to remain secret, according to established principle. There was only one circumstance that the defendant could take advantage of—but what was it? She could not recollect: it was mentioned just once, in a chance conversation; perhaps with a clear head she might remember it, but now, suffering as she was, treated as the Prophet was, while at the same time labeled His foe, she was completely helpless. She tried shifting her head—the spikes bit into her neck and she shrieked. She tried to move her hands and feet—the only response to her efforts was pain.

Then she heard footsteps in the corridor—two men were approaching. The sound of their steps reverberated loudly in the silence. She shuddered with dread. The footsteps stopped in front of her door and a key scratched in the lock. One of the guards held a torch. After first illuminating her from head to toe he slipped it into a sconce.

"Shall we treat ourselves before she is turned into meat?"

"Hee-hee!" sneered the other one. "You first, or me?"

"Me, of course!" responded the first, who was obviously the older. "Unfasten her collar, so it doesn't tear into her. You hear, my beauty," a face overgrown with stubble hung over her. "So we'll unshackle you and play with you a bit, heh? Witches enjoy such things, and even revel in the excesses!"

She screamed. Then they gagged her and began raping her. She felt a weight bearing down on her, she heard panting, smelled putrid breath and garlic. Then the other one collapsed on her, reeking of burnt onion. And again the weight, the wheezing. Choking, she tried to resist, but was powerless. Tears streamed down her cheeks—here it was, the beginning of her torture, the violation of her honor. But no, she had been stripped of her honor earlier, when they hauled her by the legs to the coach—that had been her first contact with the brutal force into whose power she had fallen.

Afterwards they left her alone. They left, closing the door behind them, chatting cheerfully, their boots clanging—she knew that they would return. The rest of her tears poured out, and she calmed herself as best she could. And a strange thought came to her: the world only appears to be sunny and beautiful. In reality the world is the belly of an apocalyptic beast, inhabited by a nebulous darkness—a darkness without contours or dimensions. Perhaps that blackness, in the form of an invisible and shapeless beast, is actually a kind of predatory fish that aimlessly and indiscriminately swallows living beings. And the unfortunate victim ends up

in its maw, that is, subject to the beast's will. It does not matter whether the victim is guilty or not. What matters is that the beast gains possession of the victim, and until it digests and absorbs him, the victim will not be disgorged from the beast's bowels. Such a darkness—perhaps it was the apocalyptic beast, or maybe a carnivorous, sightless fish—once befell the Prophet. He was consumed, as a mortal might be devoured, though He was not mortal. Who knows, perhaps He went deliberately toward that apocalyptic beast, into that darkness so as to enlighten a generation about how, having entered into the beast, one can remain pure.

"Lord, Lord," she whispered. "Is it really possible to remain pure in the belly of the apocalyptic beast, in the purgatory of this world?"

## 6.

Again the steps resounded in the corridor as again those two brutes, the servants of darkness, approached. Again they unchained her and again they raped her; and, punching and shoving, led her along subterranean passages. Her body was numb, and she could barely move. She was full of disgust at what they had done to her, yet she was glad that she could at least unbend her limbs (though with great difficulty), that the ribs of the beam were not eating into her, and that she would have the chance to explain everything to that man from the witch-hunting committee: an unearthly error had occurred. Her maidservant, the hateful wretch, had lied about her. In truth Katarina had led a God-fearing life, attended church dutifully and confessed regularly. She was a faithful lamb in the Shepherd's flock, and wished to remain such forever.

Everything she longed to express she recited at once, the moment she appeared before the pug-nosed, puffy-lipped, beady-eyed priest: she was raised to respect the clergy. Weeping, she described how the guards had defiled her, an honest and proper matron. The priest listened politely, nodding his head and smiling ever so faintly. A clerk sat at a table in a corner of the chamber—motionless, like a scarecrow, recording nothing, simply watching her with a glassy stare; in another corner stood the executioner—monument-like, arms folded across his chest, unsmiling—his expression steely, unmoving. She talked and talked, she could not stop. Tears flowed down her cheeks as she implored the priest with outstretched arms: he was the one, after all, who must understand and help her draw closer to God. So she prayed and entreated him. The priest listened attentively, without interrupting, head slightly bowed; he attended her like a confessor, letting her speak, waiting patiently for all the words to spill out. He was calm and kind, this Hexenkommissar. And when she stopped, he graciously let her be seated. Then his voice flowed, warm and soothing:

"I hope, Madame, that you possess a sound mind and a conciliatory manner, so as to lighten my onerous and thankless duty and to save yourself

from torment. Allow me to explain. We do not snatch innocent individuals; we apprehend only those against whom we have evidence. Crimes are separated into *crimina ordinaria* (common crimes) and *crimina exscepta* (exceptional crimes). But there is a particular crime, *crimina exscepta in exscepta*, a crime extraordinarily exceptional, which is committed in secret, concealed in darkness, veiled in mystery—the devil himself aids these criminals, tutoring witches in perjury and denial, muddling witnesses' recollections, blinding judges and exhausting the torturer. We hold incontestable evidence against you, avowed by living witnesses. Hand me the paper," the priest said, addressing the clerk. "Here, please; you can read this yourself, you're literate, or else I can read it."

"I can read it," Katarina stated, taking the page.

As she took the leaf and read it, her mind cleared and she remembered how she could contest the charge.

"The evidence was collected from Louiza Hilgen, whose testimony against me is biased, based on hatred and vengeance because I dismissed her from my home for incompetence and lack of integrity."

Pater Johannes Spingler's mouth fell open. This was a first in his practice of witch hunting—the defendant was familiar with canonical law.

"Possibly, possibly," he murmured mildly, already delighting in the fact that his hundredth witch would not be that simple, loudmouthed maidservant, but rather the devil's beloved—not his usual, basic victim.

"So, upon departing, did that ne'er-do-well gaze at you from under her brow, perhaps? And did she threaten you?"

"Yes, that's how it was!" said Katarina Lipps.

"And your testimony is presented with full accountability, as expected of a witness?"

"Yes," declared Katarina, and the priest nodded his head cheerfully.

"We accept your attestation," he said gently. "That wretch shall be apprehended as your accomplice. I am glad that you are disclosing those who were in collusion and accord with you."

"But Master Hexenkommissar, I did not say she was my accomplice, because I am an honest woman!" Katarina exclaimed. "I challenge her testimony against me only because it is based on her lethal rancor towards me."

"Possibly, possibly! But unfortunately ... we have secured another witness, about whom, Madame, you most certainly cannot say that his testimony is based on lethal rancor towards you."

"And who is that?"

"I see that you are familiar with the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Therefore, Madame, you are aware that the court cannot divulge the name of a witness to the accused." He lowered his head and seemed lost in thought for a moment, but quickly raised it again. His beady eyes glistened. "But because you exposed your accomplice, I shall tell you: it is your husband, Peter

Lipps! Of course, we were forced to conduct his hearing a bit more roughly than yours."

She could not bear it—she screamed. The blow was too calculated. Katarina was now indisputably convinced: that evil, that apocalyptic beast, that blind fish, was annihilating her. Peter, her kind and gentle husband, could not endure the torture. Nobody can endure it. He said about her what was not true: the darkness had forced him, wringing treacherous words out of him—nay, not treacherous words, but words of agony, words beaten out of him, wrenched from his tongue with red-hot clamps.

"What shall become of him?" she asked, her voice hollow.

"The same as with you," Pater Johannes replied calmly.

"Will we be burned alive?"

"Well, it all depends on you. For instance, I could be of help, since in some instances you were cooperative. If you concede guilt, without the need for us to enlist the methods familiar to you, we will consider you to be one whom the devil has forsaken and no longer protects. That is, I can promise that you will be put to death before you are burned."

She once again thought of the Master. Perhaps He too had answered the summons to appear in court to persuade the judges. After all, His force of persuasion was great. Yet He realized that even the Son of God cannot prevail over the apocalyptic beast. And so He agreed to be crucified, even though His power was greater than the power of judges, and to accept death, even though He was immortal. Because only in that way was it possible to proclaim the greatest, the most terrible, and the most edifying lesson. This is what He proclaimed: the devil exists. The consuming darkness that engulfs like the open jaws of an unseeing fish, that apocalyptic beast—that is his image. That darkness is within those who are powerful in this world, no matter that they claim to be the light and its guardians. The darkness is ubiquitous and eternal; it exists not in one era but throughout time. It does not end with any generation—it is in all generations. Like the germ in a grain, it exists. For a grain has two sprouts: one verdant for life, and the other black for decay. Thus the Master chose death in order to conquer it. He allowed the darkness to swallow Him to demonstrate to the righteous that there is a force that even the Son of God cannot defeat, there is a death that even an immortal being cannot avoid. But this does not mean that the Master himself succumbed to darkness and death. It was the criminals crucified next to Him who surrendered to death and darkness. And one of them, Barabas, was pardoned to instill one truth: a life in darkness is not a life.

Katarina Lipps, a woman whose genius was to be extinguished in that darkness, stared with wide-open eyes at the grinning Pater Johannes Spingler, a smiling man with peculiarly cold eyes. It occurred to her that he could easily have lied to her: perhaps no torture had yet been inflicted on her husband, and he had offered nothing against her. But she knew that it

might happen; she knew, moreover, that even if while tormented he would not disclose anything, that would not alter her fate. And suddenly a steadfastness filled Katarina; she sensed that this duel with the pseudo-priest sitting opposite her would not only test her spirit, but continue that eternal battle first undertaken by the Master.

"Evince the truth," Pater Johannes declared solemnly. "Do you admit everything your maidservant, Louiza Hilgen, disclosed about you and which your husband, Peter Lipps, the professor, confirmed? Do you acknowledge the fact that you directly participated in a witch's mass, and that you had intercourse with an incubus, and that you committed debauchery with him? If yes, then describe what occurred and how you amused yourself with the incubus, that is, the devil in human form."

"I am an honest woman, a proper matron," Katarina replied, without flinching.

Pater Johannes regarded her with his small, round, nearly glittering eyes. "After all that has been revealed about you, you can say that? Is this your idea, or is the devil counseling you?"

"I speak independently, with my own mind," Katarina stated.

"Do you know where this will lead? We will be forced to inflict torture upon you. Show her, lad, how she will be tormented. Actually, it is not you who will be tortured, but the devil in you, and you yourself know that there can be no mercy in such circumstances."

The executioner displayed everything just as he had for Louiza Hilgen. Katarina beheld the tools of torture with wide open eyes but remained silent.

"I still have some compassion for you, Katarina Lipps," the priest remarked, "because I have studied witches like you very carefully. Understand this well: one who has not experienced torture cannot know its power. But it is a terrible force and horrible experiences await you, Katarina."

Katarina shuddered.

"Have you no fear?"

"I am afraid," she admitted openly. "And I wish that I could confess everything. But tell me, truthfully, Father: is it possible to preserve a soul's purity after bearing false witness?"

"Nobody is invoking you to bear false witness," the priest said. "You are only urged to attest to what witnesses have testified against you."

"The testimony of Louiza Hilgen is false," Katarina said, "for it is founded on her lethal enmity towards me. The testimony of my husband, if it exists, is likewise false, since it was extracted under torture. I am well aware of what I did or did not do."

"Not exactly," said Johann Spingler less warmly. "You could have committed acts unconsciously. For example, you could have attended a witch's mass while leaving your body at home, that is to say, you were there in spirit, but not physically conscious of what you were doing."

"Can one who is ignorant of one's deeds be brought to court?" Katarina asked.

"Of course," Pater Johannes said. "The court examines the deed, not the state of consciousness."

"So why am I being questioned, if I am not aware of my evil deeds? Of what use is my testimony?"

Pater Johannes's eyes grew large once again. He did, indeed, have an unusual witch, one wisely instructed by the devil himself. How powerful was her logic! But he, too, was no laggard.

"You are cognizant of the evil acts you have committed," he said. "They are simply buried deep within you. We shall attempt to repel the devil, your protector so you will recollect everything. Proceed, executioner!"

The executioner grasped Katarina by the arm and pulled her into a corner. Implements of torture lay there and a ladder stood against a wall.

"Will you undress yourself, or do you need help?" he asked.

"I will undress myself," Katarina said.

She took her clothes off, although she was terribly ashamed—she did not want that monster to undress her. Meanwhile, he snatched a burning torch from a sconce and held it to Katarina's head. Her hair crackled and burst into flames, burning Katarina with unbearable pain. She began to run, but, tripped by the executioner, she crashed to the floor, extinguishing the fire. The executioner bound her tightly and again ignited her hair.

"Lord, help me!" screamed Katarina, "do not forsake me, Lord—I am innocent!..."

When she regained consciousness, she saw the tyrant's face hovering over her. The burns on her head and in her groin caused excruciating pain.

"So, have things cleared in your head?" the executioner asked.

"It is better for you to confess," the priest said in a weak voice.

"All right," said Katarina. "I will gladly die and confess to anything you wish. But under one condition." She licked her scorched lips.

"Have you heard anything like this, Your Reverence," the executioner said, cackling. "She is proposing conditions!"

"It is her right," Pater Johannes spoke calmly from the depths of the chamber. "We are listening."

"I will avow everything," Katarina said, "if you, my judges, take responsibility for my sin of lying."

The executioner recoiled.

"Did you hear, Father Johannes?" he shouted. "I have never heard anything like this!"

"This proves," Pater Johannes said, unruffled, "that the devil has promised her his protection. Resume! Probe her body for signs of the devil!"

The torturer poked her body with needles but she no longer

screamed—only her body twitched. Without leaving his seat, Pater Johannes watched intently as the executioner poked and pierced.

"I believe her entire body is under the spell of the devil," he observed. "Those especially preferred by the devil behave this way. I am certain that what we have here is one of the devil's favorite witches."

"I agree," the executioner said.

"Katarina Lipps!" the priest proclaimed. "Before embarking on real torture, I once again appeal to you: evince the truth!"

"Your Honor," the woman replied, "I ask only this of you: condemn me in innocence. I would confess gladly, but I truly am innocent. I committed no evil deeds."

"Progress to torture of the third degree," Pater Johannes ordered.

The tormentor locked a press around Katarina's foot. Katarina screamed. He pushed the *capistrum* (gag) into her mouth and tightened the bolts. Her body heaved and stiffened. She cried not a single tear.

"Well, let her lie a while," said Pater Johannes. "Come, let us enjoy some wine."

They withdrew to an adjoining room where they ate, drank and shared anecdotes. After half an hour they returned to the torture chamber. Katarina was unconscious. The executioner poured a bucket of water on her. As he pulled the *capistrum* from her mouth, she cried: "I am innocent! Oh, Lord, do not forsake me! Help me in my suffering!"

"We will have to proceed to torture of the fourth degree," the priest said.

But here a surprise awaited them. For when they put on the Spanish boot and tightened it, she not only did not shed a tear—she didn't even scream, even though the *capistrum* was not inserted into her mouth.

"*Per maleficium*—The Devil's Work" Pater Johannes uttered, stumped. He leaned toward the martyr. "Do you concede your guilt?"

"I am innocent," Katarina moaned.

"All right. We shall deem that she endured torture of the fourth degree. Have you ever witnessed anything like this?" he asked the tormentor.

"It happens sometimes," the executioner replied equivocally.

"Stretch her!" the inquisitor ordered.

The tormentor twisted Katarina's arms and, attaching weights to her feet, hoisted her off the floor with pulleys. Then she was flogged with boughs. Katarina groaned feebly. She did not answer the demands to confess. In the end she screamed, beseeching the Lord's help, and fainted.

When Katarina came to, she saw Pater Johannes, seated on a bench and watching her closely.

"Your obstinacy is useless," he observed. "You must confess, because you must be guilty. We will torture you today and tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, until you confess. Even if you die from torture, you will be proclaimed a witch and burned at the stake. And if you endure all the

torture—which I doubt—that will signify even more surely that you are indeed culpable. The devil is lending you his power; he is holding your tongue, rendering you speechless, so that you do not confess. So listen to me. I wish to counsel you well: it is better to concede, since there is no escape for you. If you led an evil life, you led it in association with the devil; if you lived a proper life—it was all pretense, so as not to cause any suspicion. If you are afraid of torture—that is a sign of guilt, and if you are convinced of your innocence—you are guilty all the more, because the devil is protecting and abetting you. Without his aid one cannot bear that which you have already suffered. By attempting to save yourself, by trying to persuade us that you are innocent—you prove that you are guilty. Remaining silent under torture is a sure indication of guilt. One way or another you must die, and you must die horribly, because during the torture your eyes moved. That means you were searching for the devil. But you also restrained yourself, body rigid, eyes unmoving—that, too, means you saw the devil. If you found the strength to endure today's torment, that already indicates you deserve punishment. And if you last through all the torture, if you survive and still refuse to confess—you shall remain in prison until you die. So there is only one way for you—to confess. And that you will do!"

As Katarina listened to the monologue, the priest appeared to metamorphose in front of her eyes: his form began to quaver, as if he were fluid. She clearly saw his pug-nosed, round face with its soft lips and spidery eyes darken; little horns sprouted from the top of his forehead. And when she looked down, she saw that the priest's ankles were overgrown with fur: in place of his boots there were hooves.

"Do you see the devil?" the priest asked in a booming voice.

"I do!" Katarina whispered.

"Did you attend a witch's Sabbath?"

"I was dragged here against my will!" Katarina stated.

"Does the devil that you see want to protect you?"

"No," replied Katarina. "He wants to pass judgment on me."

"That is enough," said Pater Johannes Spingler, commissar of the witch hunting committee. "She has confessed, and we can now put her on trial." He circled the chamber, tapping the floor with his hooves, a long, black tail in tow. Then he turned toward Katarina, who was staring in unworldly fear, and with a wink said: "You, Katarina Lipps, are a strong woman. To tell you the truth, I feel sorry for you."

7.

The following day, after the Lipps had been burned at the stake in Möckmühl together with their maidservant (Louiza likewise did not want to acknowledge being involved in witchcraft; the Spanish boot was employed

repeatedly, she was suspended for hours, the hair was scorched off her body, she was poked with a needle in search of devil's marks; in the end she too confessed), Pater Johann Spingler and his retinue departed the town in a good humor (their portion of the Lipps' confiscated property was substantial) along their predetermined route, more precisely, to the town of Metz, where there was unfinished business with that woman whom Agrippe von Nettesheim desired.

Along the way, Pater Johann mulled over several matters: Whom should he consider the hundredth witch, Katarina or Louiza? Louiza turned out to be even more intractable than Katarina, but he settled on Katarina, since she was an educated witch. The second item he pondered was this: the time had come to deal with that hateful Agrippe. He needed to sacrifice his friend; it would suffice to set one of his new acquaintances against him, say, Friedrich Mintz—that wasn't too complicated. And Pater Johannes contemplated the strange power of the devil. So much was expounded on the subject everywhere—but in the depths of his soul he did not believe it. All that exists, the priest reflected benignly, exists; therefore, thinking logically, if the priest, a warrior against evil, exists, it would be a mockery to hold then that evil does not exist. Nevertheless, he was unable to conquer his own inner doubt, but there was no need to reveal that to anyone. No man would describe his work as pleasant, but the priest would not exchange it for any other, and not only because it yielded an income. In his own way he believed in his mission. He also believed that by performing such an odious function he was protecting himself from the arbitrariness of the inquisition, since he had learned the crude but merciless mechanism of its operation. He wanted at least to live peacefully into old age, without experiencing the horrors that he himself had brought into the world.

This was indeed the fatal notion for which God or the devil avenges. For just as this thought occurred to him, his coach was halted; strange men tore off the door, seized the priest by his cassock and pulled him out. Pater Johann Spingler protested. They hauled him along in the dirt, kicking him, until they dropped him under the wheels of a coach exactly like his own. The door swung open, and Friedrich Mintz, his new friend, the very one whom Pater Johannes had planned to sway against Agrippe von Nettesheim, stepped out.

"You are under arrest, former Master Hexenkommissar," Mintz officially proclaimed. "We have indisputable evidence against you, deposed by live witnesses, that you are a heretic."

Pater Johann Spingler raised his eyes; a cloud of darkness appeared to glide out of the shadowy interior of Friedrich Mintz's coach. It floated toward him, like a fish or the apocalyptic beast, its toothsome jaws opening wide to swallow him.

Pater Johann howled and turned to run, but somebody tripped him. As he fell, several bailiffs pounced on him. They bound the priest tightly,

locking sturdy manacles around his wrists.

Spingler screamed, shrieked, prayed, whined, and swore, but someone hit him over the head with a club, and he was still.

*Translated by Olha Rudakevych*

Original publication: Valerii Shevchuk, "Dyiavol, iakyi ie (Sota vid'ma)," in his *U Cherevi Apokaliptychnoho Zvira* [In the Belly of the Apocalyptic Beast], Kyiv: Ukrains'kyi pys'mennyk, 1995, pp. 19–44.



**Ukrainian Literature in English**  
**A Selected Bibliography of Translations**  
**2000 –**

*Marta Tarnawsky*

- ¶ 1. *For a Crust of Bread: Selected prose fiction by Nataliya Kobrynska, Olena Pchilka, Lyubov Yanovska, Olha Kobylianska, Yevheniya Yaroshynska, Hrytsko Hryhorenko, Lesya Ukrainka*. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. Saskatoon, SK.: Language Lanterns, 2000. 471 p. ports. (Women's voices in Ukrainian literature, v.6).

**Contents:** Introduction to the series. ▪ **Olena Pchilka:** Biographical sketch [2–3]. ▪ Artichokes. ▪ **Nataliya Kobrynska:** Biographical sketch [34–35]. ▪ For a crust of bread. ▪ **Lyubov Yanovska:** Biographical sketch [70–71]. ▪ My romance. ▪ **Olha Kobylianska:** Biographical sketch [158–59]. ▪ A human being. ▪ A conversation. ▪ Ideas. ▪ The she-wolf. ▪ **Yevheniya Yaroshynska:** Biographical sketch [312–13]. ▪ The accursed mill. ▪ The marriage contract. ▪ The gold heart. ▪ The final refuge. ▪ **Hrytsko Hryhorenko:** Biographical sketch [368–69]. ▪ Fate. ▪ **Lesya Ukrainka:** Biographical sketch [398–99]. ▪ Such is her fate. ▪ The cup. ▪ Grief.

- ¶ 2. *A Hundred Years of Youth = Sto rokiv iunosti: A bilingual anthology of 20th century Ukrainian poetry*. Compiled and edited by Olha Luchuk and Michael M. Naydan. Lviv: Litopys, 2000. 877 p. illus.

An anthology of selected works by one hundred Ukrainian poets with Ukrainian originals and English translations on opposite pages. Translations are by C.H. Andrusyshen & Watson Kirkconnell [C.H.A. & W.K.], Oksana Asher [O.A.], Jars Balan [J.B.], Bohdan Boychuk [B.B.], James Brasfield [J.B.], Marco Carynyk [M.C.], Vitaly Chernetsky [V.C.], Elaine Epstein [E.E.], Zbigniew Folejewski [Z.F.], Daniel Halpern [D.H.], Assya Humesky [A.H.], David Ignatow [D.I.], R.A. Jamieson [R.A.J.], J. Kates [J.K.], Stanley Kunitz [S.K.], Jaropolk Lassowsky [J.L.], Stash Luczkiw [S.L.], Oleh Lysheha [O.L.], Askold Melnyczuk [A.M.], Liliana Naydan [L.N.], Michael M. Naydan [M.M.N.], Paul Nemser [P.N.], Aila de Oliveira Gomes [A.O.G.], Larissa M.L.Z. Onyshkevych [L.Z.O.], Dzvinia Orlowsky [D.O.], Gregory Orr [G.O.], Lydia Palij [L.P.], Paul Pines [P.P.], Katha Pollott [K.P.], Orysia Prokopiw [O.P.], Mykola Riabchuk [M.R.], Vera Rich [V.R.], Dorian Rottenberg [D.R.], Bohdan Rubchak [B.R.], Mark Rudman [M.Rud.], Lisa Sapinkopf [L.S.], Grace Schulman [G.S.], Myrosia Stefaniuk [M.S.], Jaroslav Stetkevych [J.S.], Danylo H. Struk [D.H.S.], Marta Tarnavska [M.T.], Yuriy Tarnawsky [Y.T.], Peter Tempest [P.T.], Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps [V.T.& W.P.], Eugenia Vasylkivska [E.V.], Patricia Nell Warren [P.N.W.].

**Contents of the English language material:** The voices of 20th century Ukrainian poetry / Michael M. Naydan [41–43]. ▪ At the crossroads of the century / Mykola Ilnytsky. Tr. by Olesia Shchur [59–72]. ▪ **Ivan Franko:** Moses (Prologue) (My people tormented and broken) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Spring elegy (Spring! You are torturing me! In the sunshine of April you scatter) / Tr. C.H.A.& W.K. ▪ For the album of Mrs. O. M. (During a sleepless night) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Yearning roams along a bald mountain) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Lesia Ukrainka:** A divine night (We gathered together to go into the dark night) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I want to hold you like ivy) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Songs from a graveyard (I was lying in an old graveyard) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (He who dwelt not among tempests) / Tr. V.R. ▪ The Forest song (Excerpts) Keeper of the shadows (I've come for what is mine) / Tr. V. T. & W.P. ▪ **Agathangel Krymsky:** \*\*\* (I climbed the crest. Below, the clouds were moving) / Tr. C.H.A.& W. K. ▪ \*\*\* (The prophet speaks: "I like to pray) / Tr. J.S. ▪ \*\*\* (I stopped to rest) / Tr. J.S. ▪ \*\*\* (With a red flare the moon went out) / Tr. J.S. ▪ **Bohdan Lepky:** The cranes (Do you behold, my brother bold) / Tr. C.H.A.& W. K. ▪ \*\*\* (Catch life! It won't wait for you) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Petro Karmansky:** \*\*\* (In the embraces of grapevines white lilacs have fallen asleep) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I do not know if, joined with each other) / Tr. V.C. ▪ \*\*\* (No, I do not want you to love me, my) / Tr. V.C. ▪ **Vasyl Pachovsky:** I would have cursed Prometheus (Like Fata Morgana the groves disappeared) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Gilded sorrow (Friends, don't be surprised—you are surprised) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Sydir Tverdokhlib:** In the mirror of the river reaches (Rings move from the shore) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The lament of Icarus (Sun!.. Sun!.. I've stopped) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Ostap Lutsky:** \*\*\* (Dark night moves above the pine wood) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (A fire burns in my soul) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Oleksander Oles:** Sorrow and joy (Sorrow and joy have kissed each other) / Tr. C.H.A. & W. K. ▪ The asters (The asters had bloomed in the garden at midnight) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (She always comes at the same time) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (In a café filled with a crowd) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Hrytsko Chuprynka:** Ting-a-ling-ling (A poetic jest) (A bright and ethereal sprite we evoke) / Tr. C.H.A.& W. K. ▪ Haven't you heard? (Haven't you heard?.. But you should hear) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Pavlo Tychyna:** \*\*\* (Not Zeus, or Pan, or the Dove-Spirit) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Pastels (I. A ray of sun runs. II. The iron day. III. Flutes swayed. IV. Cover me, cover) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Instead of sonnets or octaves: Dawn (Dawn now, but the mist still lingers...) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Test (We just started to love the land, took the spade) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Terror (So again we take the Bible, philosophers, and poets) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Lull (I sleep—I stir. I fulfill a will. Fill) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Rhythm (When two slim girls walk by—red) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ Emptiness (I wash. The water's like silver bells. The curtains -) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ Wind from Ukraine (I love no one) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (And Bely and Blok, Esenin and Kliuev) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Maksym Rylsky:** Music (In the night they swooped down) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Heine (Harlequin with a rose in his hand) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Baudelaire (In a paradise of blissful torments where on thin stalks) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Our nuptial bed was decked with fragrant roses) / Tr. C.H.A.& W.K. ▪ \*\*\* (Autumn began to smell of withered tobacco) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ To Mykola Zerov (Like a tulip that in Haarlem) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Mykola Zerov:** The Laestrygons ("This, King, is the wild land of Laestrygons) / Tr. C.H.A.& W. K. ▪ Vergil (A Mantuan peasant, easy-paced and brown) / Tr. C.H.A. & W. K. ▪ Kyiv from the left bank (Welcome, dreamy, golden-haired Kyiv) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Avarians (Spring blooms in all its beauty) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ In the steppe (The high and even

steppe. Grave mounds in a green string) / Tr. V. R. ▪ For an album (The burden of working years has lain on my back) / Tr. L.N. ▪ **Pavlo Fylypovych:** \*\*\* (The silver beak of the moon) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Look, look on boundless fields, unploughed, unfarmed) / Tr. V.R. ▪ Monomakh (He's looking from the tower) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (A single will controls the world) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Mykhailo Drai-Khmara:** Second birth (It seemed sufficient honor so to render) / Tr. O.A. ▪ \*\*\* (Once again like the first man) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The city of the future (A semicircle, straight lines, squares) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Swans (Upon the lake with winds through willows singing) / Tr. O.A. ▪ **Oswald Burghardt:** Volodymyr (1. The monk, sent hither from Byzantium; 2. Moustache of gleaming gold, and silver head; 3. Among the spread of grainfields ruling long) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Volodymyr Svidzinsky:** (Tired, leaning on the hills) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ \*\*\* (The haziness of blinding days has buzzed) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Cold silence. Broken moon) / Tr. B.B.& K.P. ▪ The pendulum is tired (The pendulum's tired) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ \*\*\* (The rain struck, rocking) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Bread, and the fragrance of milk, and a portion of gold-coloured butter) / Tr. C.H.A.& W.K. ▪ **Mykhajl Semenko:** The conductor (Along the edge of the world at night) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Village landscape (O) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ The ocean (I don't know if) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Geo Shkurupiy:** Semaphores (All over Ukraine) / Tr. Z.F. ▪ \*\*\* (This is Geo Shkurupiy) / Tr. Z.F. ▪ **Mykola Bazhan:** The blood of the captive women (A shaggy-maned horse strikes its hoof on its bridle) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The ghetto in Uman (The earth is horrified, as are rust and dust) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Nights of Hoffmann (Over carved rungs—into an abyss, a hole, gloominess) / Tr. M.Rud.& B.B. ▪ **Volodymyr Sosiura:** \*\*\* (No one loved so before. In a thousand years once) / Tr. D.R. ▪ On the corner (On the noisy corner there's a bookstore) / Tr. M. M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Wounds of anger) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Love Ukraine (Love Ukraine like the sun, o love her) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Maik Yohansen:** \*\*\* (There I walk on the train tracks and totter) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (By the roofs through rusty grain) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Yuriy Darahan:** \*\*\* (It merged together, submerged, extinguished...) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (The wind and I in the wild field) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Evhen Malaniuk:** Earthy Madonna (As in Ionic columns here) / Tr. C.H.A.& W.K. ▪ Biography (1. Always intense, for always against currents. 2. So, coming out of a dull prairie. 3. I must drink this cup to the bottom) / Tr. B.R. ▪ August (Time, Lord, for solitude, humility) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Oleksa Stefanovych:** \*\*\* (There will not be Arsen) / Tr. G.S. ▪ 1941–1944 (In bread she stands) / Tr. G.S. ▪ **Vasyl Khmeliuk:** When will my auntie come for me (When will my Auntie) / Tr. P.P. ▪ Azure (I'll leave footprints in the sky) / Tr. P.P. ▪ \*\*\* (and again love ripens) / Tr. P.P. ▪ **Mykhailo Rudnytsky:** Autumnal (A dark thread weaves from mountains to valleys) / Tr. D.O. ▪ Waiting for a letter (I'm not waiting for a letter) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Evhen Pluzhnyk:** \*\*\* (At night they led him to a firing squad) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (He shoved him up against the wall) / Tr. G.O. ▪ \*\*\* (How futile—to deck stanzas lavishly...) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (All day long a certain unsure mood) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Stone has a single purpose—to stay!) / Tr. G.O. ▪ \*\*\* (Judge me then with your severest judgement) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Vasyl Mysyk:** The heart of Burns (To singing his beloved's praises) / Tr. P.T. ▪ The drop (It's dark in the room here from shelves overburdened) / Tr. P.T. ▪ **Vadym Lesych:** The parchment of memory (The crumpled parchment of memory does not rustle) / Tr. P.N.W. ▪ Black and white (Nights do not roll over horizons or break) / Tr. E.E. ▪ Stone upon stone (You have to place stone upon stone) / Tr. E.E. ▪ \*\*\* (You look without a word into the faded window) / Tr. E.V. ▪ **Bohdan Ihor Antonych:** Self-

portrait (Red and silver maples) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Spring (Antonych grows, the grass grows) / Tr. P.N. ▪ To the bottom (I hewed a poem from silver) / Tr. P.N. ▪ Fall (Watch the long days grow ripe like early apples on the apple tree) / Tr. A.H. ▪ The rustle (The straw heap slowly stirs and rustles) / Tr. A.H. ▪ Song of the indestructibility of matter (Lassoed by wind, blanketed by sky) / Tr. M.Rud. ▪ Six strophes of mysticism (The night slipped down like the cape from Christ's shoulders) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The house beyond the star (The anthem of vegetation streams through my veins) / Tr. M.Rud. ▪ **Sviatoslav Hordynsky:** Apocalyptic (Above the much bountiful earth) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Gaze: a gold color, barely sensed) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The city (In the dark blue darkness such a transparent instant) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Olena Teliha:** \*\*\* Sharp eyes staring wide in the darkness) / Tr. V.R. ▪ Without a name (It's not love, not whim, not adventure) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Evening song (Outside the panes, day grows cold) / Tr. V.R. ▪ The memory most dear (When the evening descends on the city) / Tr. O.P. ▪ \*\*\* (Jasmine bushes bloom) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Oleh Olzhych:** Pebbly beach (The curving road overhung by the precipice) / Tr. D.I. ▪ \*\*\* (Evening. I look on the blue rock-faces) / Tr. V.R. ▪ Aquarium (Pause for a moment on the gloomy staircase) / Tr. B.B.& D.I. ▪ Dutch painting (I wiped the heavy oak benches clear) / Tr. B.B.& D.I. ▪ **Todosiy Osmachka:** To night eternal (Oh, night, night without echo and sound) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Laughter (The Mediterranean Sea is rumbling) / Tr. E.V. ▪ Elegy (Hospital) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Mykhailo Orest:** \*\*\* (Like a black boat, night into town comes sailing) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (The day falls like a short-winged bird that shivers) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (Today I thought about the woods again) / Tr. V.R. ▪ Enduring (I saw myself. There where the battlefield) / Tr. V.R. ▪ After a cinema show (Evil is punished, right triumphantly is gleaming) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Vasyl Barka:** Paradise (Sunflowers pray) / Tr. S.L. ▪ The wanderer (I. The day of victory, I keep silent. II. I knew what I chose. X. On the evening mountain are cherries) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The ruins of the sea (Through sea-gull thickets parting and farewell) / Tr. B.R. ▪ Today (Today this new moon plants) / Tr. S.L. ▪ Visible warning (The rotted pine lay like a spine) / Tr. S.L. ▪ **Leonid Pervomaisky:** From the top of the hill without brakes (The wind streams past your head) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (A sad sound something like flutes) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ In Babyn Yar (Stand beside me, stand here, my son) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (The past brooks no denial) / Tr. P.T. ▪ **Hryhoriy Kochur:** The translator (And so, in foreign works you'll now go ranging) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Oleh Zujewskyj:** The end of Hemingway (All shadows are braiding into one shadow) / Tr. J.B. ▪ Proteus (From today on there will be no greeting) / Tr. P.N.W. ▪ Ars poetica (Narrow roads lead to words) / Tr. J.B. ▪ A lament for Ophelia (The stream is still murmuring there) / Tr. J.B. ▪ Around the fish (Neither a leaf's mould nor commandment fables) / Tr. B.R. ▪ **Dmytro Pavlychko:** Two colors (In spring when I was young and thought) / Tr. D.O. ▪ I must (I must read books) / Tr. D.O. ▪ \*\*\* (You are like the rain. And I'm like a maple tree) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Kyiv in May (Kyiv in May) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Photographs (In age-old photos) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Lina Kostenko:** Granite fishes (Quiet rules over the expanse of ocean) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (A shady spot, twilight, a golden day) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I stop and for a long time will listen) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Landscape from my memory (Just barely I touch a word with watercolor) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Yesterday Blok came to visit me in the rain) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The fire is roaring (The fire is roaring—merry Satan rains) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Wira Wowk:** Psalm (Angels of Light: Blessed are You) / Tr. L.Z.O. ▪ Mandala: The Mountain (When the hermit) /

Tr. A.O.G. ▪ The sea (The sailor read) / Tr. A.O.G. ▪ Myself (My house is a royal palace) / Tr. A.O.G. ▪ Rain (The tree trunks are sticky with sunlight) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ Anaconda (Maybe in the dance of an anaconda) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ **Emma Andijewska:** Birth of an idol (As though slime had been torn off monsters) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (One day far back I lost my face in stone) / Tr. V.R. ▪ An unlawful meeting with prophets (The beards of prophets are like sheat-fish) / Tr. P.N.W. ▪ The storm (The giant cocks of thunder tumbled from their perches) / Tr. B.R. ▪ **Bohdan Boychuk:** For my mother (1. For everything. 2. With hands. 3. Tears streaming from. 4. I've seen an icon over her head. 5. And I brought her) / Tr. D.I. ▪ A mirror (Early day you disfigure) / Tr. M.Rud. ▪ Landscapes (Landscapes pass through you) / Tr. M.Rud. ▪ Look into the faces of dead poets (The cheek bones protrude) / Tr. D.I. ▪ Five poems on one theme (1. Whoever can smell. 2. Whoever can taste. 3. Whoever had eyes. 4. Whoever has a voice. 5. Whoever has ears) / Tr. D.I. ▪ Open my lips (Open my lips) / Tr. A.M. ▪ God is with us (Becoming man) / Tr. A.M. ▪ **Yuriy Tarnawsky:** When the poet Pablo Neruda is no longer with us (You are dead, Pablo) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ Arrival V (My feet, left behind among molecules...) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ Every wound has a name (Every wound has a name, a right) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ \*\*\* (I am not a poet) / Tr. B.R. ▪ **Bohdan Rubchak:** Dramaturgy (I've lived through our lifegiving sin) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I've fashioned a cage of words for you) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The angel's betrayal (Shoulders have grown weary from clumsy wings) / Tr. L.N. ▪ To Hamlet (Not the first book, and not the last) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ **Volodymyr Luchuk:** Tenderness (Evening: Whispers. Eyes—cornflowers) / Tr. D.O. ▪ \*\*\* (The maple burns in the wind) / Tr. D.O. ▪ Birds (Birds, like people, gravitate toward their nests) / Tr. A.H. ▪ Simply a poem about a sunflower (Among the beets, those which my wife has planted) / Tr. A.H. ▪ **Vasyl Symonenko:** \*\*\* (Granite obelisks, like medusas) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (In my soul) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Everything was there. The road began to scream) / Tr. M.M.N. \*\*\* (The people are beautiful) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The Ukrainian lion (My thoughts now are swelling, to words they are growing) / Tr. V.R. ▪ **Ivan Drach:** Sunflower (The sunflower had arms and legs) / Tr. D.H. ▪ The pail (I am—zinc is my form. And I contain—cherries) / Tr. S.K. & G.O. ▪ The mystery of beginning (Is there a beginning in wailing? Or in a black piece of flint?) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ La strada (La strada, a saber of curved steel) / Tr. P.N. & M.Rud. ▪ Wings (Through forests and jungles) / Tr. P.N. & M.Rud. ▪ Synthesis (Banquet of storm. Thunder rolls) / Tr. P.N. & M.Rud. ▪ **Mykola Vinhranovsky:** \*\*\* (I got on the wrong plane) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (When the night begins) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The first lullaby (Sleep, my little baby, lulla-bye!) / Tr. D.R. ▪ **Vasyl Stus:** \*\*\* (The sea - ) / Tr. J.L. ▪ \*\*\* (The evening thickens with a chapter from the Koran) / Tr. J.L. ▪ Sleepless night (I am gleaning thoughts like grains) / Tr. V.R. ▪ \*\*\* (The pain is like the alcohol of agonies) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (You're shade, you're shadow, dusk and long reproof) / Tr. M.C. ▪ \*\*\* (How well it is that I am not afraid of death) / Tr. C.H.A. ▪ \*\*\* (A hundred mirrors glare at me) / Tr. L.Z.O. ▪ **Ihor Kalynets:** Verses about uncertainty (\* someone strode this road \* there were good stars \* our land doesn't lack \* a finger carved from stone \* and yet \* how to achieve [sic, i.e. achieve] certainty \* being able to graze lions \* the girl closed the circle \* the most charming creature \* no one ahead / Tr. M.C. ▪ **Mykola Kholodny:** A poem you'll never think of a title for (On a sheer hillside) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I lose my head) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Roman Kudlyk:** \*\*\* (When our shadows) / Tr. D.O. ▪ \*\*\* (... And still I dream) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Oksana Senatovych:** Wife of an artist; a triptych. (1. Spring won't

blossom without you. 2. I sleep the sleep of a fireman. 3. You turned me into a shadow) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Pear (Autumn comes ringing bells) / Tr. V.T.& W.P.

▪ **Stepan Hostyniak:** Archeological finds (An endless steppe of the night) / Tr. A.H. ▪ A plant hymn (All right, all right!) / Tr. A.H. ▪ **Bohdan Stelmakh:** Van Cliburn (Long) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Invite me into your dreams (Years go by—no big deal) / Tr. A.H. ▪ Love blossoms only once (Look, everything is blooming all around) / Tr. A.H. ▪ **Mykola Vorobiov:** The rendezvous (I bought a flower on the corner) / Tr. M.S. ▪ The chase (We're in a boat: I'm in sunlight) / Tr. M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (To be—brush a hand along the snow again) / Tr. M.S. ▪ Searches for balance (If you pick up a pear that rolled away) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Cage—balcony—frost—dream (for the lonely a cage) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Vasyl Holoborodko:** Night song (Late at night, as I sit reading a book) / Tr. M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (On the corner of that street) / Tr. M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (Going, I leave you a singing leaf) / Tr. M.S. ▪ Her name (You told me to guess your name) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Victor Kordun:** Psalm of loneliness (God has abandoned me along the way) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ Psalm of white silk (Lord, God, spring is abloom in whiteness) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (Take my hand) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Vasyl Ruban:** \*\*\* (... don't look into the window) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (... when we bring each other the agony of parting) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Mykola Miroschnyenko:** Though I look at the world / Tr. D.O. ▪ \*\*\* (On the marble sea) / Tr. D.O. ▪ The stars (The stars) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Roman Babowal:** \*\*\* (books under heaps of the dust of conscience) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ July 25 (I brought you the moon, stolen) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (my spider) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (snake-like, a long path) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (I write a love letter) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (we are like frightened birds) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ **Lydia Palij:** Junction without sign posts (By the Dnipro river) / Tr. L.P. ▪ Loneliness (Loneliness has no scent) / Tr. L.P. ▪ A woman beyond the window (When late at night) / Tr. L.P. ▪ **Marta Tarnavska:** \*\*\* (Did you, too, have this night?) / Tr. M.T. ▪ A black cat (A black cat crossed my path) / Tr. M.T. ▪ Das ewig Weibliche (I am the earth) / Tr. M.T. ▪ In my life, too, there was a Babyn Yar / Tr. M.T. ▪ **Moses Fishbein:** The ravine (1. In the morning silence. 2. Over Babyn Yar the cranes are flying) / Tr. B.B.& J.K. ▪ In memory of Paul Celan (Master of twigs and broken glass) / Tr. B.B.& J.K. ▪ \*\*\* (A mouth contorted in pain) / Tr. B.B.& J.K. ▪ \*\*\* (... It is still the season of a warm Easter) / Tr. B.B.& J.K. ▪ Apocrypha (Sweetness is the seasoning of sorrow) / Tr. B.B.& J.K. ▪ **Hryhoriy Chubai:** The search for the accomplice (He saw today in his own eye) / Tr. D.H.S. ▪ **Oleh Lysheha:** He (On the mountain, wet with overripe blackberry) / Tr. J.B.& O.L. ▪ Song 212 (There are so many superstars, overgrown with weeds) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Song 352 (When you need to warm yourself) / Tr. J.B.& O.L. ▪ Song 551 (Until it's too late—knock your head against the ice) / Tr. J.B.& O.L. ▪ **Mykola Riabchuk:** \*\*\* (here I am) / Tr. M.R.& R.A.J. ▪ \*\*\* (we have been trained to write) / Tr. M.R.& R.A.J. ▪ To think about eternity (To think about eternity—to think) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Volodymyr Ivasiuk:** Red rue (Own up to me) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Sofia Maidanska:** \*\*\* (You'll always be able to find me) / Tr. L.Z.O. ▪ A Scythian etude (From beneath the roots) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Only once) / Tr. L.Z.O. ▪ **Hryhoriy Falkovych:** The Hosiiv Forest (I touch the trees I come upon) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Lake Chinnereth (In autumn we were stydying) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Where is the carver who has carved those leaves? / Tr. A.H. ▪ **Natalka Bilotserkivets:** We'll not die in Paris (You forget the lines smells colors and sounds) / Tr. D.O. ▪ A hundred years of youth (A hundred years of youth and all beyond—a wasteland) / Tr. M.S. ▪ The

Picasso elegy (That very night the snow began to fall. Go.) / Tr. M.M.N.& D.O.  
 ▪ May (So, that's how we spent that terrifying spring) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ A knife (A knife, to cut bread) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Liudmyla Taran:** The blues (My movements, gestures) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ India ink (The spot of India ink is beautifully) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ \*\*\* (The raw material for chance and fate) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Not even Paris can save you. Wine) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Taras Fediuk:** A night of sorcery (A night of sorcery. The tiny corner of a village) / Tr. M.M.N.  
 ▪ final parting (Your eyes are like the wind) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I know, it's not worth it) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Vasyl Herasymiuk:** Men's dance (You have to dance the arkan) / Tr. J.B. ▪ \*\*\* (The century passes) / Tr. J.B. ▪ \*\*\* (I asked you) / Tr. J.B.  
 ▪ The first snow (It quieted blood. It quieted its step) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (Is your future in the stars?) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Ihor Rymaruk:** \*\*\* (It's the very first night) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I don't know where you've come from) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The sonnet-mutant (Where is the elegance of form and the clarity of lines?) / Tr. M.M.N.  
 ▪ Sign (I have flown through a hundred worlds as one) / Tr. R.A.J. ▪ Star (I would, probably, live in an invisible way) / Tr. R.A.J. ▪ **Ivan Malkovych:** An angel on my shoulder (Along the edge of the world at night) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Folk scene (On a heap amidst thistles) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ Southern Ukraine (The spirit of Cimmerian silver) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ At home (Again I'll visit for a day or two) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ **Oksana Pakhliovska:** The last cicada (When the doors shut close) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Forests near Prypyat (Forests near Prypyat flare) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Oksana Zabuzhko:** Clytemnestra (Agamemnon's coming home) / Tr. L.S. ▪ Letter from the summer house (Hello, dear. After the recent acid rains) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ A definition of poetry (I know I'll die a difficult death) / Tr. M.M.N.& A.M. ▪ **Tadej Karabowicz:** \*\*\* (behind night's veil) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (it is hard to survive without you) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (my heart told me) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (bare crosses looked at my nakedness) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ \*\*\* (beloved Kholm region) / Tr. B.B.& M.S. ▪ **Maria Rewakowicz:** Entreaty (embrace me) / Tr. P.P. ▪ \*\*\* (you kiss) / Tr. P.P. ▪ Personal poem (You enter the forest, hidden by trees) / Tr. P.P.  
 ▪ Whispering, whispering (you penetrate) / Tr. Y.T. ▪ **Yuriy Andrukhovych:** Midnight flight down High Castle Hill (it's not really the Garden of Eden not oranges shining) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The museum of antiquities (How the two of us amble) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Jamaica the Cossack (oh how many tough miracles are out there my stallion my brother) / Tr. V.C. ▪ India (India begins with dreams about setting out) / Tr. V.C. ▪ Library (we search for the most esoteric knowledge) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Victor Neborak:** Flying head (It lifts up, like a head) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Fish (cold-blooded beings) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ Supper (There were seven of us) / Tr. J.B. ▪ Metro fantasy (The reflection disappears again you) / Tr. M.M.N.  
 ▪ \*\*\* (there are mirrors and doors) / Tr. J.B. ▪ **Oleksander Irvanets:** Love Oklahoma! (Love Oklahoma! At night and at supper) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ An open letter (We can't either sleep or eat here) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Yaroslav Dovhan:** \*\*\* (A disciplined, fasting woman only an old man wants) / Tr. D.O. ▪ \*\*\* (She's back. Now every night) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Petro Midiianka:** Hi there, Mr. Warhol (Andriy Warhola—Ruthenian or khokhol?) / Tr. D.O. ▪ Irony (Roses wrapped in cellophane) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Yurko Pozaiak:** \*\*\* (Come see me tomorrow!) / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ A warning (for whoever has already lost hope) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (If you keep a bird captive) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Alcohauku (Today for the second time I) / Tr. M.M.N.  
 ▪ **Attila Mohylny:** Beatles (1. I want to tell you about. 2. When I hear this music

from Liverpool. 3. When I think of writing about you. 4. Believe me. 5. ... I see the guys on our block) / Tr. V.T & W.P. ▪ Archipenko's plasticity (The intricacy of our recollections) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Kostiantyn Moskalets**: She (tomorrow a handful of your friends) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Ivan Luchuk**: Three whales (The world is the dream of three brothers) / Tr. M.M. N. ▪ Je t'aime (By habit I repeated the cliché of love) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Nazar Honchar**: Self-portrait in a tram car (I'm riding a tram) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Self-portrait in a frying pan (I bend over a frying pan) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Ode to a bed or a lullaby for myself (My bed) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ A dream (with Antonych at the head of the bed) (they jeered at me) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Roman Sadlovsky**: Journey to the other shore (We needed to walk a few steps to the flood-tide) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ The arrival (a cliff is painted with the mysterious signs of your departures) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Vasyl Makhno**: \*\*\* (you foresaw beyond the hills of a dream) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Yaryna Senchyshyn**: \*\*\* (bits of stilled time) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Mittelspiel** (I don't want to tell you) / Tr. D.O. ▪ **Maria Kryvenko**: \*\*\* (My dark-eyed angel) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (In the city) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Halyna Petrosaniak**: \*\*\* (I've seen this landscape before, and I'll see it many times more) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (I fall into dependence from your presence. Fleeing) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ **Anka Sereda**: I don't want to be a poet / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ In our blood / Tr. V.T.& W.P. ▪ **Serhiy Zhadan**: \*\*\* (Everything, as always, is justified) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ Atheism (You always approached) / Tr. M.M.N. ▪ \*\*\* (When no one remained who loved you) / Tr. D.O.

¶ 3. Kobylians'ka, Ol'ha. *On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs*. Tr. by Mary Skrypnyk. With an introd. by Maxim Tarnawsky. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2001. xi, 168 p. port.

Translation of the novel *V nediliu rano zillia kopala*.

¶ 4. Tsybulko, Volodymyr. *Angels in a Pyramid = Anhely v piramidi: Poems* / Volodymyr Tsybulko. Tr. from Ukrainian by Yuriy Tarnawsky. Lviv: Kalvariia, 2001. 62, 57 p. illus.

A bi-lingual English-Ukrainian collection of Tsybulko's poetry with brief notes about the author and the translator.

**Contents of the English language material:** Volodymyr Tsybulko [4]. ▪ Yuriy Tarnawsky [5]. ▪ **The pyramid**: \*\*\* (I came back home like an epic poem). ▪ \*\*\* (earth bed bugs revolution). ▪ \*\*\* (this unexpected smell). ▪ \*\*\* (they cut off electricity long time ago). ▪ \*\*\* (the negative of a landscape). ▪ **The lock** (there was a lock with a tongue for a cover). ▪ **Underground** (0.0 here I learned to understand. 1.1 this unconscious seepage. 1.2 as long as an artist's model shines for us. 1.3 a rat named Harmodios to frighten the tyrant of the flesh. 1.4 the bodies of those killed by silence. 1.5 the stone in the sculpture expands. 1.6. night between two dates. 1.7 the dissection of the planes and maxims. 2.1 who do you burn for nameless candle. 2.2 a wind will come blowing down from another outer space. 2.3 I burned my faded jeans. 3.0 like a line on a street artist's portrait. 3.1 smashing calendars carved in stone. 3.2 in the middle of the night. 3.3 having exchanged butterfly wings. ▪ **The Angel of Collapse** (three generations separate). ▪ **The Angel of Creation** (a flight is never called a flight). ▪ **Gypsies** (a little later just past midnight you start crying).

▪ **Text No.1** (1. o endless o inexhaustible o inexpressible world of forms). 2. a hallow- or phalotherapist. 3. I am a debtor but I collect debts. 4. o form of scream! like a red rectangle the machine of silence. 5. that's how the one condemned to death. 6. so when you hang up on a pole Allen Ginsberg's jeans. 7. and poppy milk.

¶ 5. Tychyna, Pavlo. *The Complete Early Poetry Collections of Pavlo Tychyna = Ranni zbirky poezii Pavla Tychyny*. Translated with a critical introd. and notes by Michael M. Naydan. Guest introd. by Viktor Neborak. Lviv: Litopys, 2000. 430 p.

A parallel text, Ukrainian-English edition.

**Contents of the English language material:** Introduction [7–13]. ▪ Acknowledgments [140 / Michael M. Naydan. ▪ The senses and nonsenses of Pavlo Tychyna / Victor Neborak. Tr. by Michael M. Naydan. [25–27]. ▪ **Clarinets of the Sun (1918):** Not Zeus, or Pan, or the Dove-Spirit... (Not Zeus, or Pan, or the Dove-Spirit) ▪ The clouds swirled into curls (The clouds swirled into curls. Azure settled in the depth) ▪ The groves rustle (Groves rustle) ▪ In harps, in harps (Like harps, like harps) ▪ Somewhere spring approached... (Somewhere spring approached. I told her: “You’re spring!”) ▪ The flower in my heart (There is a flower in my heart) ▪ Don’t look so fondly... (Don’t look so fondly) ▪ She looked at me brightly... (She looked at me brightly—violins began to sing!) ▪ I cried from love, I sobbed (I cried from love, I sobbed). ▪ O my Inna... (O my Inna, darling Inna!) ▪ I’m standing at the bend... (I’m standing at the bend) ▪ The poplars in the fallow field are free... (The poplars in the fallow field are free) ▪ A girl’s embroidering... (A girl’s embroidering and sobbing) ▪ A flowery meadow (A flowery meadow and golden rain) ▪ O, nature, don’t conceal... (O, nature, don’t conceal, don’t hide) ▪ The birds still... (The birds are still bathing the azure day in ringing songs) ▪ It’s dawning (It’s dawning...) ▪ Enharmonies: The fog (Above the swamp milk is spun); The sun (Somewhere the birds of paradise nibble); The wind (a Bird—a river—a stalk of green vetch); The rain (On the water, in someone’s hand) ▪ They trample flowers... (They trample flowers, they trample the dew). ▪ To the cathedral. I. (Willows to one side). II. The path to the garden. ▪ Pastels: I. (A rabbit ran past). II. The iron day. III. It vibrated with flutes. IV. Cover me, cover me. ▪ I walked to the grove (I went to the grove). ▪ Someone was caressing the fields (Someone was caressing the fields, caressing them) ▪ On steep cliffs... (On steep cliffs) ▪ A child went out for bread... (A child went out for bread—rosily!) ▪ Open the doors... (Open the door) ▪ Sorrowful mother (I. She passed through a field. II. She passed through the field. III. She passed through a field. IV. She passed through the field) ▪ Along the azure steppe... (Along the azure steppe). ▪ Lullaby (Go to sleep, little baby, go to sleep! May your dreams erupt in flowers!) ▪ The choir of bell-flowers (A fragment of a long poem) (Tiny bells) ▪ Green Sunday (From its golden courtyard) ▪ War (I. I lie down to bed. II. To the right—the sun) ▪ A дума on three winds (In early spring, at the onset of spring) ▪ The golden hum (Above Kyiv there is a golden hum) ▪ [Notes]. ▪ **The Plow (1920):** The plow (Wind) ▪ Sow seeds... (With a song, with play) ▪ And Bely and Blok... (And Bely and Blok, Esenin and Kliuev) ▪ On the square... (On the square near the church) ▪ He fell... (He fell from his horse) ▪ They outstar the stars (They

outstar the stars) ▪ It will be this way... (It will be this way) ▪ Interplanetary intervals... (Interplanetary intervals!) ▪ Just beyond the village... (Just beyond the village) ▪ At Shevchenko's grave... (I. Having paid homage to the remains. II. We stayed overnight on the floating Seagull Hotel. III. Beyond Trypillia on a mountain) ▪ The Messiah (I imagine) ▪ From the cycle "Creation of the world" (I. In the beginning there was nothing. II. The gray evening has already nodded off. III. They let the poor be sacrificed) ▪ Letters to a poet: a triptych (I. A map of Hellas, a book by Kotsiubynsky. II. You seem to be not from these parts. III. I'm a communist girl, wearing foreign clothes) ▪ Madonna of mine (I. Madonna of mine, Immaculate Virgin. II. Already they sing and exalt a new name. III. My Madonna, Blessed Virgin. IV. Not of stone, not of marble) ▪ The psalm to iron (I. We hate accursed copper. II. Somewhere beyond the seas there is law and honor. III. The blessed hour passed like a dream. IV. What the hell do we need power for?) ▪ Rondels (I. I walk from work, from the factory. II. The poplars mobilize) ▪ February 26 (March 11) (I. There, on a hill, beyond the Dnipro. II. The preachers and dictators came (o shame!) ▪ I know... (I know: the new bards, the new beauty, the rabble) ▪ For Hnat Mykhailychenko (We can't imagine you decaying) ▪ One escapes to love... (One escaped in love, another in mysticism) ▪ For shrivelled prophets (To you, poets of the state, petty waiters) ▪ Burn the proclamations (Burn the proclamations, trample the decrees) ▪ [Notes]. ▪ **Instead of sonnets and octaves (1920):** \*\*\* (It's dawning, but still there is mist) ▪ Autumn (Over all cultures of the world May mold has grown) ▪ Antistrophe (Grown-ups and seven-year-olds sing: "O, sweet apple, where are you rolling?") ▪ Terror (Once again we take the Gospels, philosophers, poets. The one). ▪ Antistrophe (Airplanes and the perfection of technology—what good is it) ▪ Rock-A (I sleep—can't sleep. I bow to someone else's will. I rock-a-) ▪ Antistrophe (Even when above boundless water) ▪ The highest power ("Get dressed for a firing squad!" someone shouted) ▪ Antistrophe (I'll never love a woman without) ▪ Rhythm (When two slender girls walk—with red poppies) ▪ Antistrophe (She poured some milk for the hungry children and sat down) ▪ Evohe! (The creators of the revolution are, for the most part, lyric poets) ▪ Antistrophe (Join the party, where they look upon at a human being) ▪ Who'll say (The rain dripped a little—and all the sidewalks now have) ▪ Antistrophe (Grass grows wherever it wants. The wind tosses an order for) ▪ Chauvinistically (They take bread, coal, sugar, and repeat as though in) ▪ Antistrophe (The rightists go back, but they try to hold their head) ▪ A test (As soon as we began to love the land, took) ▪ Antistrophe (The most profound, the loftiest and, at the same time) ▪ Emptiness (I wash. The water's like metallophones. A curtain) ▪ Antistrophe (The city is decked out in painted posters: a person) ▪ Tares (They shoot the heart, they shoot the soul—they) ▪ Antistrophe (It's still not a revolution just to play Scriabin) ▪ [Notes]. ▪ **In the orchestra of the cosmos (1921):** I. (Blessed be) ▪ II. (I am spirit, the spirit of eternity, of matter. I am primordial muscles). ▪ III. (In the orchestra of the cosmos). ▪ IV. (What are our tears, our screams and shouts?) ▪ V. (On the shores of eternity the sun is moving) ▪ VI. (Like a cannon ball shot from a cannon) ▪ VII. (An anemic planet was withering in the sun) ▪ VIII. (Humanity speaks) ▪ IX. (Once the gardens of Semiramis bloomed) ▪ X. (In tsars they found their guardians and kin) ▪ [Notes]. ▪ **Wind from Ukraine (1924):** Wind from Ukraine (I love no one) ▪ Yaroslavna's lament (I. Snow. More snow). II. (A strange flotilla glistens in the sun) ▪ Summer is on the way... (Summer is on the way) ▪ Mykyta the tanner (Mykyta was tanning hides) ▪ Three sons (Three

sons came to their mother) ▪ Faust is walking (Faust is walking through Europe) ▪ Famine (If only the sun would rise... “Mommy, some bread!”) ▪ An answer to my countrymen (Like Dante in hell) ▪ I will speak for all... (I will speak for all and suffer for everyone) ▪ O strength of my hate (O strength of my hate) ▪ To great liars (“O, how we love harmony so much!”) ▪ Before a monument to Pushkin in Odessa (Take care, my Pushkin, mighty organ of the earth!) ▪ Such a lovely autumn (Such a lovely autumn) ▪ On a farmstead (... A little girl on a clay bench) ▪ We say... (We say: the sun is rising) ▪ Spring (Spring, spring! Such azure blue) ▪ La bella fornarina (Along the Tiber Raphael floated) ▪ Storm clouds lay all around (Storm clouds lay a siege everywhere—and the field hid into shadow) ▪ The rebels (A fragment) (“Well, have you rested up?” “Onward!” It’s time, friends, for the road!) ▪ Cleon and Diodot (There’s a stirring and anxiety in Athens, the Athenians convened a council) ▪ From my diary (I. O storm clouds...) II. “Dnipro is a bandit”. III. With blue tears the lake cries profusely) ▪ We live as a commune (I. We live as a commune, we work. II. Yellow butterflies are over the cabbage patch. III. At night we dream of phalanxes. IV. We still don’t have enough music. V. You’ve turned gray, my Dnipro. VI. Do you want me, Dnipro, to read for you? VII. A gale from the north and south. VIII. It dances to it’s heart’s content. IX. Sometimes—he’s like a gentleman. X. We live as a commune, we work. ▪ Blacksmith street: Sunset I (I walk on, forward). Sunset II (No, I can’t resist, I’ll look back). The sun grew feeble (The sun grew feeble. A hot violet color burns). Easter Sunday (I walk back along Blacksmith Street. The sun). The first of May on Easter (Easter rain) ▪ Kharkiv (I. Kharkiv, Kharkiv, where is your countenance?) II. (The streets roll past, the pavement clicks with hoves in darkness) ▪ A fugue (I pass through the cemetery) ▪ [Notes]. ▪ Contents.

- ¶ 6. Vynnychenko, Volodymyr. *Notes of a Pug-Nosed Mephistopheles*. / Volodymyr K. Vynnychenko. Tr. by Theodore S. Prokopov. Godeffrey, N.Y. : Guymard Press [2001]. viii, 170 p. illus., port.

Translation of the novel *Zapysky kyrpatoho Mefistofelia*.

- ¶ 7. Vynnychenko, Volodymyr. *Selected Short Stories*. Tr. from the Ukrainian by Theodore S. Prokopov. Godeffroy, N.Y.: Guymard Press [2001]. x, 120 p. port.

**Contents:** Acknowledgements. ▪ Translator’s foreword [ vii–x]. ▪ Honor. ▪ First love. ▪ The moment. ▪ Kooz and Hrytsoon. ▪ The purchase. ▪ Illusion and reality. ▪ Zina. ▪ A zealous friend. ▪ Contrasts.

These translations were first published in 1991 (Wakefield, N.H.: Longwood Academic).

- ¶ 8. Vynnychuk, Yuri. *The Windows of Time Frozen and Other Stories*. Tr. from Ukrainian by Michael M. Naydan (with one translation by Askold Melnychuk). Translations ed. by Oksana Tatsyak. [Lviv: Klasyka, n.d. rel. 2000]. 271 p.

**Contents:** Acknowledgments. ▪ Table of contents. ▪ Introduction [p. 6–10, unsigned]. ▪ **I. The lyrical and philosophical imagination:** An embroidered world. ▪ The windows of time frozen. ▪ Beatrice: twilight, the cold. ▪ A dream about a tramcar. ▪ **II. Psychologist of the human soul:** The clover was so fragrant. ▪ The doorbell. ▪ The vagrant. ▪ **III. Fantastic and alternative worlds:** The pulsing beacon. ▪ The snail chronicles. ▪ A cat named Abel. ▪ Order is everything. ▪ **IV. Black humor and satire:** The island of Ziz [Tr. by Askold Melnyczuk]. ▪ Max and me. ▪ Welcome to Ratburg. ▪ **V. Pulp erotica:** Maidens of the night: an adventure tale (Introduction. The Odessan circus tourers. The history of the first sin. The history of the second sin).

¶ 9. *Warm the Children, O Sun: Selected prose fiction by Olha Kobylianska, Olena Pchilka, Nataliya Kobrynska, Lyubov Yanovska, Hrytsko Hryhorenko, Lesya Ukrainka.* Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. Saskatoon, SK.: Language Lanterns, 2000. 471 p. ports. (Women's voices in Ukrainian literature, v. 5).

**Contents:** Introduction to the series. ▪ **Olena Pchilka:** Biographical sketch [2–3]. ▪ Help! ▪ The chaotic supper. ▪ **Nataliya Kobrynska:** Biographical sketch [40–41]. ▪ The dealer's child. ▪ The first teacher. ▪ *Liebesahnung*: a presentiment of love. ▪ The one left behind. ▪ A candle burns. ▪ **Lyubov Yanovska:** Biographical sketch [88–89]. ▪ The ideal father. ▪ *Darochka*. ▪ *Anemone*; a recollection. ▪ *Ivas*. ▪ “The stranger.” ▪ The secret of our princess. ▪ *Mykolka's sheep*. ▪ The ball. ▪ **Olha Kobylianska:** Biographical sketch [254–55]. At St. John's monastery. ▪ The diviners (A sketch). ▪ To meet their fate. ▪ Warm the children, o sun. ▪ **Hrytsko Hryhorenko:** Biographical sketch [304–5]. ▪ It's that kind of a “story”. ▪ *Khivrya the babbler*. ▪ The migrants (From home and back home again). ▪ She's “literate”. ▪ **Lesya Ukrainka:** Biographical sketch [412–13]. ▪ Friendship.

## About the Authors

**Emma Andijewska** (Emma Andiiivs'ka) was born in Donetsk, Ukraine in 1931. She lives in Munich, Germany.

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**Leonid Mosendz** was born in 1897. After 1921 he lived outside Ukraine. He died in 1948 in Switzerland.

**Yuri Pokalchuk** (Iurii Pokal'chuk) was born in 1941. He lives in Lviv.

**Taras Shevchenko** (1814–1861) is the most respected poet in Ukrainian literature.

**Valerii Shevchuk** was born in 1939 in Zhytomyr, Ukraine. He now lives in Kyiv.

**Pavlo Tychyna** was born in 1891. He was among the most celebrated writers in Soviet Ukraine. He died in 1967.



The Shevchenko Scientific Society is an organization of scholars from a variety of disciplines, who are dedicated to the advancement of Ukrainian studies. It is the oldest Ukrainian academy of arts and sciences whose activities have formed the mainstay of Ukrainian scholarly and cultural life for over a century. Founded in 1873 in Lviv, Ukraine, it was liquidated by the Soviet regime in 1939. The Society was reestablished in Western Europe and the United States in 1947, in Canada in 1949, and in Australia in 1959; in 1989 it resumed its activity in Ukraine. The Society's headquarters in the United States are located in New York City at 63 Fourth Avenue, with offices, lecture halls, a specialized library and archives pertaining to Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora. Membership consists of about 400 fellows and associate members, whose activities are organized in the following scholarly sections: Mathematics & Sciences, Medicine & Biology, Philology, History & Philosophy, Social Sciences, and The Arts. The Society's publications in these fields represent over 160 volumes. The Shevchenko Scientific Society in the U.S.A. is proud to add *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations* to its list of publications.