

Maria Prihara THE COSSACK HOLOTA

Stories Based on Ancient Ukrainian Ballads



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Оповідання за мотивами українських народних дум

For Young Readers and Adults

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THE COSSACK HOLOTA

Broad is the steppe through which the Danube flows: there seems no end to it as it stretches out to the horizon... High over the rolling grasslands hover the greywinged eagles, stalking the unwary birds flitting about below. At eventide the wild geese and silver-feathered swans fly in clouds over the lakes, completely unafraid, for who would be there, on the steppe, to frighten them? Unless, of course, the long-legged antelope who once in a while jumps up on a hillock to survey the scene, or the huge wild ox raising its massive horned forehead above the swaying grasses to gaze around and see if there was anyone there against whom he could match his strength.

Crossing the steppe is a broad, beaten roadway. It is the path travelled by the Tatar hordes between the Danube and the Dniester rivers, going on from there to the glorious Dnieper. They burned and pillaged as they went through village and farmstead, snatching up whoever they passed on their way. Their horses trampled on the weak, while those that were strong, with their hands tied behind their back with rawhide, were driven into slavery.

The captives wept bitterly as they trudged wearily over this dusty path. Mothers and daughters, sisters and



brothers, husbands and wives were separated by the savage conditions of slavery. The Tatar murza * would put them all up for sale on the slave block — some to Turkey, some to Persia or Arabia — filling their deep pockets with the handfuls of gold coin received in payment.

But who is this galloping along the roadway? Perhaps a Tatar who, having tied some rawhide rope to his saddle, pursues some luckless fugitive who managed to escape from the encampment at dawn when the guard dozed off for a moment?

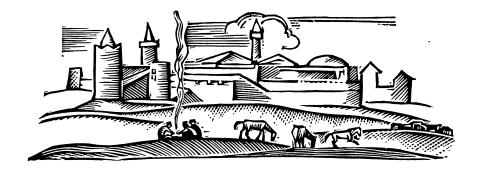
No, it's not a Tatar, it's a Zaporizhian Cossack. He is not with his brother Cossacks, he is travelling the road to the Danube alone. From time to time he rises in his stirrups to gaze around the steppe, shading his eyes from the sun with the palm of his hand. His Cossack cap is pulled low over his forehead, and what a cap! Sewn with wild grasses, frayed by the wind, all that is left of it are its tatters and its tassel! The jacket, too, is tattered, the bare flesh showing through its many holes.

Such was the Cossack Holota about whom this song is sung:

Over the steppe Cossack Holota roamed, Afraid of neither fire, nor sword, nor wind!

But the Zaporizhian is indifferent to how he looks: if Holota, then Holota! What matters it that his cap is tattered when he has an excellent horse that has travelled for three days and shows no weariness? Though his Cossack dress is in rags, his weapons are in good condition. There is a lance, a gun slung over his shoulder and a sharp sword at his side. There is also a heavy hammer

^{*} murza — one of the hereditary nobility among the Tatars



attached to the saddle — all at the ready enemies in battle to fight.

It was not for merrymaking that the Cossack set out on this long journey from the Zaporizhian Sich fortress to the Danube. He was desperately seeking the Tatar horde to save a brother Cossack.

During a hunt this reckless one had left his comrades in hotheaded pursuit of a herd of antelopes — and it was as if the waters had swallowed him up. Holota hurried after him in search, but all he was able to find was a Cossack cap lying on some flattened and downtrodden grass beside a grave in the steppe. It was more than likely that Maxim, in the heat of the chase, had been taken unawares by a Tatar ambush.

Three months had passed without a word, then a message came through to the Sich that Maxim had been in the stocks in the city of Keliya, a prisoner of the wealthy murza, Hassan-Bey. The murza was asking a high ransom for his return — 3,000 gold pieces. If it wasn't paid, he said, he would sell the prisoner to whomever he wished...

That was when Holota saddled his horse and set out for Keliya. Maxim was lost, he'd be murdered in slavery... There was no gold to be had to buy him out!



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...Far, far-off on the horizon columns of smoke rose thinly on the skyline. Could it be Keliya? Dark, moving spots glimmered indistinctly in the distance. There must be herds and flocks of sheep pasturing on the outskirts of the city. Around them rode the shepherds in shaggy sheepskin jackets followed by angry dogs. It was time, perhaps, to swing off the road, thought Holota, for the Tatars had eyes like those hawklike kites, they could see the peaked Cossack caps from a distance of a few miles.

The Cossack jumped out of his saddle and led the horse into a deep hollow. Here the tall uncut grasses had rustled from time immemorial, the silver-tinted waters of a small lake lapped against the rushes on the shore, and on the embankment an ancient oak spread its dark, knotty branches.

There was pasture and water here for his horse — what else could a traveller need?

After freeing his horse to pasture, Holota climbed up into the branches of the tall oak to take a good look around the countryside and make sure that there really were none of the horde around. All seemed quiet and there was no one in sight, only the herds could be seen in the distance...

Here a thought, that perhaps he could steal into Keliya as a beggar, ran through the Cossack's mind. He would pretend blindness, bend his back into an aged stoop and cry out as the beggars did: "Please help a poor blind man!" It was a possibility, for even in the horde itself there were many old men and cripples begging for a crust of bread...

Most important was to get to Hassan-Bey and spy out if his friend Maxim was still held a prisoner or had already been sold to someone for the galleys.

It was a good idea and maybe he could do it. He might





be able to see Maxim by stealth or give him some sign of his presence. After that he would see what the next step would be — after all a Cossack always had his wits about him!

With these thoughts turning over in his mind, Holota slid down off the tree. The sun was going down, leaning on the horizon. It would soon be dusk. He supped a bit on rye gruel diluted with water, then laid himself down in the grass to rest an hour or so. Before he knew it he had fallen fast asleep, his shaggy head resting on his fist.

But nothing happened as he had planned! The Cossack slept and didn't know that disaster was approaching. It was through his thoughtless climb up the oak. Who else, but the old *murza*, Hassan-Bey, saw him up there. It was as if on purpose that the *murza* decided to go out into the steppe after dinner to take a look at the horses and sheep grazing there and to check up on the shepherds to make sure that the young lambs were

not being stolen to be stealthily barbecued in some hidden hollow.

What he saw, however, was not the smoke of a shepherd's hidden fire, but the Cossack in the tree, carelessly descending to the ground as though he weren't in a strange steppe searching out an enemy, but at home, sitting on guard somewhere in Velikiy Luh *.

Hassan-Bey practically shook with excitement when he saw Holota, his heartbeat quickened like that of a youth. Just look where that impudent Cossack landed and how he's spying and smelling out the land! Well, he won't get away with it, he'll run after his horse like a dog on a chain!

Holota leaped to his feet as if burned, and into the saddle. Lucky for him that he hadn't unsaddled the horse. He dashed out of the hollow with the ping of a Tatar arrow ringing in his ear.

"Hey, you stray!" shouted the *murza* after him, breathing heavily. "Who are you to fight Hassan-Bey? You should tie a lasso around your own neck and run after me to be sold!"

Holota throbbed with anger and his eyes flashed: "Thank you, Hassan-Bey, that you came to me yourself! But be careful! You haven't taken me prisoner yet and you're already counting your money!"

And Hassan-Bey galloped hard out into the steppe, unmercifully urging his horse on with a heavy rawhide, and gleefully thinking of how he would capture the Cossack alive.

^{*} Velikiy Luh — marshlands of the lower Dnieper, the territory of the Zaporizhian Sich for a period of time

Laying his ears back, the shaggy pony sped swiftly over the grassy steppe.

Holota might have vanished like his friend, without a trace, if his faithful horse hadn't sensed danger. He whinnied and stamped his hooves as if saying "Get up, master!"

With that he took aim and his gun thundered in the direction of his enemy.

The Tatar pony gave a sharp whinney and fell to the ground as though cut down by a scythe. The *murza*, barely freeing his feet from the stirrups, flew forward and slid face down across the ground. He jumped to his feet, screaming at the indignity, to fire a salvo at the Cossack. One of the shots hit Holota in the face and the blood trickled down his cheek in a stream. Seething with anger, the Cossack threw his gun aside.

"Hear me, old man!" he shouted, "you've probably never been among the Cossacks, never eaten Cossack gruel, know nothing of Cossack customs!"

And he rushed toward Hassan-Bey, throwing himself at him with his big whip.

It was not the eagle of the steppe that plummeted down from above, having spied a fat gopher in the feather-grass. It was the Cossack Holota who captured the *murza*, threw a lasso over his head and tied his hands and feet with rawhide.

"If it weren't for Maxim," he said to Hassan-Bey, "this would be the end of you, you son of Satan, the separation of your soul from your body! But because of him we'll go to the Sich! I'll ask for a ransom, and a big one at that. You'll give back my comrade and 300 more of my people that you have enslaved. And if you resist — you'll pay more, much more!"



Saying this, Holota tied the *murza* to his horse and getting up in the saddle behind him, rode across the steppe singing:

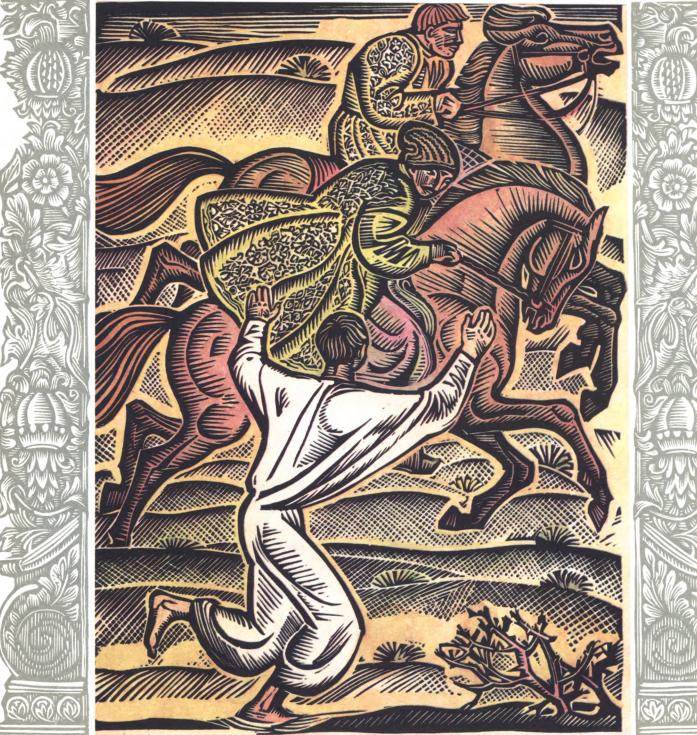
Oh, you broad, endless steppes of Keliya, May, your grasses remain always green! For the kind services that you gave to me! And the Cossack should forever o'er you travel, Thinking good thoughts of you as they go, Winning great victories over their foes. It was not the thunder of battle nor the sound of musketry that beat against the stone walls of the city of Azov. It was the fury of the Turkish viceroy, Suleimanpasha, screaming in frenzy and raining blows at his servants and guards who were down on their knees before him.

They had slept and idled, the lazy guardsmen! Three captives, three brothers from Ukraine had escaped that night. They had stolen two of the finest stallions from the stable, led them out through the secret gateway in the wall — and now, try to find the wind in the field! What's more, they had snatched the gold-embroidered mantle of the pasha himself and the costly Damascus steel sabres as mementos of their imprisonment.

Scores of the finest horsemen had been despatched by the pasha in pursuit of the fugitives, with orders to bring them back dead or alive. But the horsemen returned in the evening empty-handed. They had not seen or overtaken anyone, nor had they found a trace of the runaways. The steppe was broad, without end, and who knew the direction in which the fugitives had fled.

By this time the first fury of the pasha had abated and he waved his hand:







"They'll perish from thirst, the cursed infidels! They'll die! They'll find no water on the journey for either themselves or their horses..."

...The fugitives had already travelled some distance. They now rode slowly over the dusty steppe, sparing their tired mounts. The road behind them was long, they could slow down a little...

But why were there only two of them? Why were they silent, afraid to look each other in the eye?

They had not escaped alone out of bondage, their youngest brother had been with them. But when they had led the horses out of the stable, they had given no thought to the youngest. The poor fellow had rushed out into the dark blindly, breathlessly, in pursuit of the riders, until the middle brother had taken pity on him and lifted him up behind himself in the saddle. But when the tired horse had slowed its steps, its sides heaving, the second brother turned to him and said:

"You'll have to save yourself, the horse can't carry the two of us..."

And he abandoned his brother in the middle of the steppe, rushing on to overtake the eldest brother who, clinging to his horse's neck like a madman, leaped ahead as if a company of Mussulmans were after him.

Where did the brother on foot get the strength — he caught up with his brothers by sunset.

"My dear brothers," he begged, running up, "take me along, alternating between the two horses! Remove your packs and booty from the saddles so they will be lighter... Give me a lift for at least three versts * and



^{*} verst — an ancient Eastern Slavic measure of distance equal to 2/3 of a mile

show me the way. I will never make it on foot... I'll perish..."

Both brothers greeted this with silence, not a word did they utter.

But the youngest didn't give up. Breathing hoarsely he grasped at the stirrups.

"Who do you think is going to remove the booty to carry you alternately between the horses?" the elder brother spoke up, sullenly. "Neither of us will then get away and you won't be saved either. The horses will tire — the Tatars or the Turks will catch up — the three of us will be cut to ribbons, slashed to bits. It will be easier for you to hide, travelling on foot. Let go of the stirrup!"

The youngest paled.

"My brothers, have some mercy on me! If you don't want to share your horses then kill me right here with your yataghans *. Better to die immediately than to perish on the steppe without bread or water. Only bury me, don't leave me a prey for plundering beasts..."

The middle brother hung his head, but the eldest said:

"I cannot lift my arm to shed a kinsman's blood... Whatever gave you such an idea, brother! Don't worry. As long as you remain alive and well, you'll get to our parents yourself."

Saying this, he drove his horse off swiftly without once looking back.

The youngest brother barely had time to shout after them:

"Brothers! At least cut the branches off the bramble bushes as you go! Then I'll know which way to follow..."



^{*} yataghan — short Tukrish sabre

Silent, they rode the steppe, afraid even to think about what they had done. For as long as the earth existed, it was unheard of that a Cossack would abandon a brother Cossack in distress, and a blood brother at that!

The sun burned down with deadly heat. Thirst dried the throat, there was not a lake or stream in sight.

But what was this? Trees appeared, shimmering on the horizon, a broad stream weaving among them. The feathery branches swung, the waves sparkled. Approach traveller, they seemed to beckon, drink your fill, cool your battered feet!

The fugitives gazed, then turned away. It was not an oasis, it was a mirage! A puff of wind and all was dispelled, the water and the trees.

After they had travelled some distance, however, a slight breeze suddenly sprang up. Here the elder brother's horse whinnied, widening his nostrils to gulp in the air. He turned left on his own and galloped toward a deep ravine that appeared in the distance.

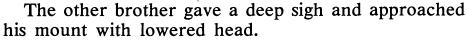
The tenacious hawthorn grew there and the prickly thornberry, while along the bottom a strip of yellow sand showed that more than likely a stream had flowed through in the spring. The elder brother dismounted and began to dig in the sand with his sabre, hoping to find water. The middle brother didn't watch, he had no desire to help him. Instead he slashed at the thornberry branches and scattered the twigs about. In his innermost soul he was oppressed; but how could it now be helped?

The eldest continued to root and dig till he came to water. He watered the two horses passably, drank himself, then shouted: "Come on, it's time to go!"









"And what, my brother, shall we tell our father and mother — shall we admit to what we have done?" he asked gloomily.

"We'll tell them that we were not all in the same place, that we didn't escape together! When we ran in to get our younger brother in the night — he wouldn't listen to us. He said, why would I go into certain death? Better to remain here and seek good fortune in a foreign land!"

"Do you think they'll believe it?"

"If I tell them, they'll believe. Just don't you interfere. Father and mother won't live a hundred years. They'll die — then the patrimony will be divided into two — not three. So keep quiet! You hear me? If you say but one word, I'll behead you!"

And he laid his hand on his curved Turkish yataghan. The second brother said nothing, he silently mounted his horse. With that they rode on.

The steppe grew ever more cheerful. It sparkled with silvery wormwood, overspread itself with feather grass and girded itself with narrow streams.

When there were no bushes he practically tore his Cossack cape to pieces, scattering the patches over the ground as they rode.

The elder brother finally laughed:

"You've probably taken leave of your senses, brother, tearing up your precious clothing that way." He jerked his own gold-embroidered Turkish cape over his shoulders. "When you get home you won't have anything to go out into the street in."

In the meantime the foot-travelling fugitive brother wandered the distant steppe. It constantly appeared to him that his brothers had taken pity on him and were standing somewhere on the distant hilltop, looking for him.

He hurried along, poor soul, running, thinking that at any moment he would catch up to them. Rushing up an incline he would find no one. Only a bug-eyed marmot greeted him from among the rustle of feather grass.

Again the walker slogged, forcing one blood-stained foot ahead of the other. But one thought remained embedded in his mind — that his brothers, his own brothers, had abandoned him in his misfortune.

Suddenly his bare foot landed on a piercing thorny twig. He cried out from the pain. Looking down—he saw hoof prints in the earth and scattered twigs—blackened and covered with dust.

He snatched up a twig, unbelievingly.

"No, they haven't forgotten me! They remembered!



They've left signs behind them for me to follow. That's probably why they went ahead, so that I'd know where to go." And he cheered up, poor fellow, his heart again filling with hope.

"Maybe I'll come through," he thought. "Maybe I'll still get to see my father and mother. And as for my brothers, I'll never say a bad word about them, I'll honour them as long as I live!"

He limped along, swaying, and smiling at the scattered twigs like a child.

In this manner he managed to stagger to the ravine and slide down into it.

"This is where my brothers rested. Probably they watered their horses here as well. Look at the pit they dug. God! Maybe there's still a bit of water left?"

He crawled to the pit and grubbed with his hands into the sand. He found nothing. All the water had evaporated in the sun. If only they had covered the dig with branches... The Cossack fell face down into the sand and fainted from thirst.

Immediately a steppe eagle appeared, circling over the hollow. Leaning his head aside he descended lower and lower — scenting prey. So close did he come that his wings caused a faint breeze to quiver over the fallen man.

The Cossack stirred, lifted his head and waved a hand.

"Fly off, eagle! I'm still alive... It is not yet time for you to circle above me..."

But the eagle remained, leading the Cossack on his way, hovering closer and closer, gazing fixedly. Likely he had seen more than one such wretch on the steppe.

Better not to look up at all. The Cossack plodded on, his head lowered, looking for twigs from the thorn







bushes further. But there were no more to be seen. But suddenly his eyes alighted on scraps of cloth—both green and yellow—strewn before his feet.

"O calamity! Are these not from my brothers' capes, torn to shreads?! It must be that the horde has been through, passed me while I was resting, and caught up to my brothers. Not wanting to take them back into bondage they've cut them to ribbons. If only I could find their dead bodies and at least give them a decent burial..."

The Cossack took one step, then another, looking for his murdered brothers. An indistinct outline of a high mound appeared before him. He fell on its slope and, exhausted, sank into deep slumber.

Here is where death found him...

The sharp-billed eagle descended from above, his cry echoing across the steppe, his yellow eyes gleaming.

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After him came the grey wolves, howling, as if in sorrow for the fallen Cossack.

The two elder brothers, alive and well, peacefully proceeded on their way... They trotted over the beaten Murav Roadway approaching the Samara River. Its waters were crystal clear — one could see every tortoise on its bottom. The grassy meadows along its banks shone green, interwoven with flowers. The tall reeds rustled, bending over its waves.

As if there were no black steppe, no burning heat. The eldest brother stopped his horse and jumped to the ground.

"Let's stop here, brother, at least for three days. The pasture is good, the water pure, the reeds tall; there are places to hide if we should be attacked. Maybe our barefooted brother will catch up to us here. Then I'll take him on my horse, forfeit my possessions. I'll throw my packs away."

The second brother shook his head:

"Oh brother, brother! They should have been thrown off when he had asked you to. It's nine days now since he's had a drink of water, eaten bread — and we've lost sight of him completely..."

If the eldest brother felt remorse at these words, one couldn't tell — he didn't answer, said not a word.

It was not geese that flew, nor trumpeting cranes, over the beaten roadway. It was two brothers riding toward their paternal home, urging their tired steeds onward...

The parents heard the sound of horses' hooves and ran out beyond the gate. The old mother looked at them and wrung her hands:

"My sons, why are there only two of you? Where is the third? Have you left him behind, in bondage? Or perhaps you have left him with the Mussulmans in return for these luxurious clothes, these golden weapons you are bearing?"

The eldest son paled, and spoke with an effort:

"No mother, we didn't give him to the Mussulmans. He himself didn't wish to escape along with us; he stayed behind, in bondage..."

The mother turned to the second son:

"Is that the truth, son?"

The second son couldn't hold back the truth, but burst out:

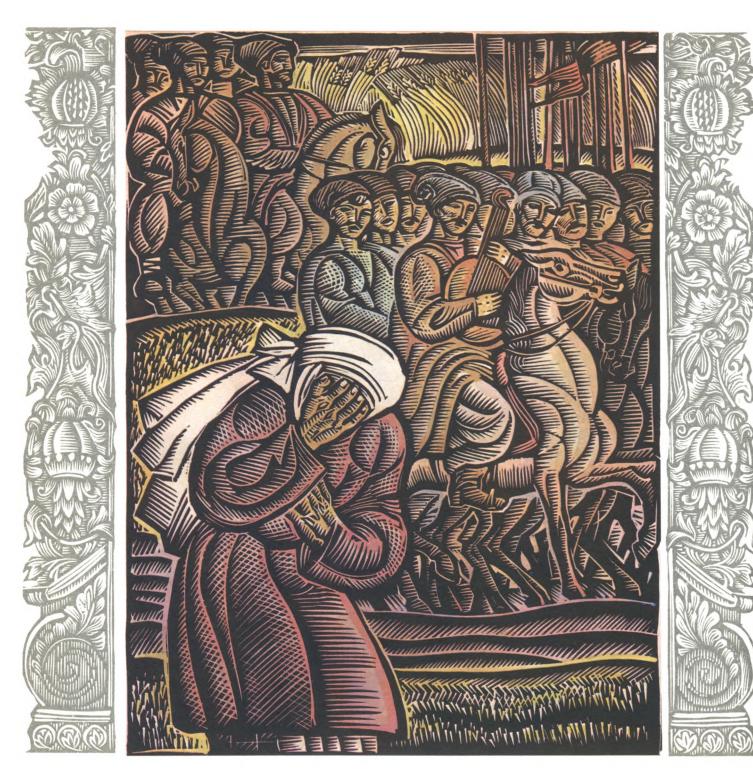
"Oh mother, it's a lie! We abandoned our brother out on the steppe, without water or food! We refused to share our horses with him..."

The old father wrung his hands:

"Then go from us, you fratricides! Would to God the humid earth reject you. May people forget that you are of Cossack descent!"

"Don't curse him, father!" the elder son said gloomily. "It was all my doing... All my fault..."

He turned his lathered horse around, and slumping in the saddle, he moved onto the roadway to go... knowing not where.



ABOUT IVAS KONOVCHENKO, THE WIDOW'S SON

There was a steady hum and a bustle throughout the glorious city of Cherkasy on a Saturday; the people swarmed through its streets like bees in a beehive. Though the fair was on the day following — the crowds in the market-place were practically impassable. Those who harvested their grain in the fields, those who tended their orchards or their horses — had left it all and had come running without so much as a backward look. And there was reason for it!

Standing in the centre of the market-place, a drummer beat at his drum with all the strength of his arms while beside him, beneath a standard bearing crosses, a blackmoustached Cossack captain, adorning a steed, was shouting with arms akimbo:

"Hey, you wine merchants, brewers, bathhouse keepers, peasants! Enough of your wine-making and brewing beer, feeding flies, or using youthful backs to clean out soot! Whoever among you wishes for Cossack glory, whom the Turk has gotten under the skin, let him join us in battle! Don't be afraid of death, you cannot protect yourself from it..."

He knew, the devilish captain, how to speak to the people. The eyes of the young men lit up, the older



Cossacks nodded in agreement. They had known, since spring, where it was all leading. Rumour had it that the Korsun colonel, Filonenko, was calling for a volunteer army to advance on the Turks, somewhere in Moldavia. So that more than one poor wretch who had been toiling for a landowner or would-be lordling had only been waiting for such a call to march, so that he might escape his servitude, go into the world. More than one such Cossack had already laid in a secret store of bullets and powder, and even put by a bag full of rusks which he hid in the straw so that, God forbid, they wouldn't be found by the master.

"Well, then, boys!" shouted the captain, "Who's first?"

A broad-shouldered, lively Cossack was already pushing his way through the crowd. He threw his tattered cap to the ground and said:

"Sign me in, Captain, Demid Zhezherya! Where haven't we had to perish!"

He was followed by five more who had been standing by, also robust lads.

"Sign us in also, Captain. We are all of the same family: Zhezherya."

Soon the captain was surrounded by a whole group of young lads — in front of all a young ringleader — Ivas Konovchenko. He was barely fifteen and had already made a name for himself in Cherkasy.

Who was it that caracoled on a horse in the marketplace on a Sunday, breaking up a potter's bowls and plates? Ivas! Who passed by women and grandads without lifting his cap or wishing them a good day? Ivas, who else but — Ivas!

At this moment, however, he very courteously removed his cap and bowed as was proper:

The captain looked at the boy through half-closed eyes.

"To sign you up, my lad, won't take long. But have you asked your father?"

"He doesn't have a father, Captain!" shouted the other lads, "only a mother..."

"A widow's son, then," the captain raised an eyebrow. "Ekh, no doubt nothing will come of it... An only son?"

"Yes."

"Now who has ever seen the like of a mother allowing an only son into the army! One moment! Do you have a Cossack horse?"

"No."

"Ah, you haven't... What kind of a Cossack then will you be? And how old are you?"

"Seventeen..." lied Ivas and his ears began to burn.

"So that's how it is! Well, when the down begins to show on your upper lip, come again and we'll sign you up, but now you had better run back home to your mother."

Better if he had slashed Ivas with his sword! Boisterous laughter followed the lad as he fled from the market-place, running, jumping over strange hedges, trampling without mercy over the vegetables in other people's gardens then rushing into his own garden and into the vard.

"Mother, where are you?"

But there was no answer from the lowly cottage which was moss-covered with age and sinking into the ground.

Ivas glanced quickly about, into the sty, around the barnyard.



She wasn't there!

She was never there when it was necessary!

"Mother!"

No, she was here, standing behind the gate. She had heard him and was waiting.

"What is it, son?"

The widow looked at her son and was frightened. He was deathly pale, his eyes glittered as with fever.

"Mother, I'm going into the army! I need a Cossack horse!"

The mother clasped her hands:

"You? Into the army?! Come to your senses, boy! You aren't fifteen yet! You've never even handled a sabre!"

Ivas was offended.

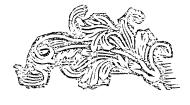
"How do you know, mother?! I have handled one more than once! Uncle Mikita taught me. ...And I can shoot too... I can shoot a swallow in flight!

The mother did not cry easily, but here the tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Oh son, my son! Have you no thought for your mother? I've loved you... brought you up... thinking that maybe in my old age I would have help, for I've always been alone, so alone! And this is the help I'm getting! This is what I've waited for!"

But Ivas wasn't up to feeling sorry for anyone at the moment.

"Oh mother! Now why are you crying? As if father had been home that much? If it wasn't into Crimea, it was into Turkey that he went to free captives or fight the Mussulmans of the Poles. He stayed away on campaigns for two years at a time. And when he ran away to the Sich, wasn't he but a child? I've at least grown up, while he was still but a knot. Wasn't it you who said



On hearing these words Mother Konovchenko's tears dried immediately.

"Sell the oxen? Boy, have you been eating henbane? ...Do you know how long I had to work to get that pair and now you ask me to get rid of them for a whim? A horse he wants, if you please! A good pair of reins is what you can need, not a horze! When you've grown up you can lead a Cossack's life, but for now get out of my sight! I'll hide the arms, too, so that you won't even see them!"

And turning swiftly around, she ran into the room where the Cossack and captured arms hung — arms that her husband, father and grandfather had brought home from their campaigns.

Ah, mother, mother! How little you know your son! What had been kindled in his heart could not be put out, either by severe, or gentle words...

Ivas sat in the weeds until the sun went down and when he heard the faint squeak of the closing gate as his mother went out of the yard, heading, probably, to the church — he rushed into the cottage.

His mother had indeed been driven by her wrath. The walls of the room were bare — no muskets, nor silver-decorated powder horns, nor silver-forged sabres, nor curved Turkish yataghans hung there. All that was left was his father's Cossack iron-handled mace, which lay in the corner. The door of the closet was closed with a huge padlock.

The boy applied his back — the stout boards of the door only creaked. He picked up the mace and swung



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once, twice, then in a rage so that the cottage shuddered, he broke the padlock.

There was no need to search. The weapons lay in a bundle on his grandfather's chest. Ivas snatched up the flint musket and attached the sabre to his belt with trembling hands. He paused a moment to think... No, there was something else! He went into the chest and pulled out a powder horn and ammunition belt, put his father's peaked cap on his head. Now he could take to the road!

While he was hiding among the weeds he heard a group of lads go laughing by. They were saying that the captain had joked that those who felt bad about leaving their mother's Sunday dumplings uneaten could go home to eat. Afterwards they should look for the colonel some ten miles out of Cherkasy: he would be there with the soldiers till nightfall.

Ivas would not be supping at home — he would catch up to the colonel — walking...

He ran stooping through the garden, jumped over the sty and out into the road — you couldn't see him for dust!

Mother Konovchenko stood in the church, praying and prostrating herself, her son never leaving her thoughts.

He took after his father — stubborn — but what of it! The father never got off his horse, dashed around the world until he was killed somewhere, in some campaign... and the son dreamt of doing the same. You couldn't get him to do anything on the land, even if you used a cudgel. What for, mother, he says, why should I cover my boots with dust, dirty my hands at the plough? If the Cossacks see me they'll call me a home body, a peasant...





"Oh, Ivas, Ivas, my wrong-headed child," whispered the mother bitterly. "Where have you been getting your daily bread if not from that plough?"

And all thought of prayer left her mind; the heart ached and burned, like a living wound.

She left the church to meet her neighbour running toward her.

"Oh, kinswoman, you must rush home right away! Your Ivas has run away to the Cossacks!"

Mother Konovchenko paled.

"When? Who saw him?"

"My Ilko saw him. He ran down the road without a backward look, he said, a sabre at his side and a musket on his back!"

Mother Konovchenko entered her yard wailing and cursing:

"May my tears, my son, beat you up on the road! May misfortune be your lot in that army! No compassion for your mother — no thanks."



All night long she walked, repeating these words. The house was dark, the night lamp barely flickered in its niche on the clay oven. She was filled with anxiety, her heart heavy. The whole world had turned dark, become a wasteland.

It's true what they say, that a mother's is a contradictory soul: though swinging hard, her strike hits lightly.

Mother Konovchenko remembered in the morning all that she had heatedly wished on her son and she was appalled.

"May I, an old woman, be beaten by fate, but not you, my child! I can see that it was predestined... You take after your father, so you'll follow in his footsteps..."

She went into the field, rounded up her pair of gray oxen and drove them to the market-place. She sold them right away, without bargaining, because the people, like flies after honey, flew up and saw that they would be getting a bargain.

She also borrowed from her brother, entreated — then bought a raven-black horse, mettlesome, even a Hetman * would have been proud to mount him. She saddled him herself, placed his father's pistols in the saddle bags, and clothing — blue pantaloons of thin serge, a red jacket and a silk sash, Zaporizhian — let her son wear them!

As if in answer to her need, a Cossack rode by the cottage, a stranger, somewhere from beyond the Don. Also trying to catch up to Filonenko, he said. There were many Cossacks from the Don at the Sich — so it wasn't surprising that this one was also on his way to the wars. The widow stopped him and begged that he

^{*} Hetman — Cossack commander-in-chief

take the horse to Ivas as well as give him three times sixty kopecks which she had tied up in a kerchief.

The Cossack took up the horse's reins and gave a sly wink. "Don't worry, mother!" he said and dashed away, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

Maybe he would really deliver, for somewhere, back home, his own old mother must be grieving for him too.

As for Ivas, he was wandering about the Cossack encampment, knowing not what to do. Nobody so much as looked at him, or even asked, "What do you want, lad?"

Day had already dawned... Everyone knew exactly what needed to be done — one cleaned his musket, another was darning his pantaloons, some were even breakfasting in a group around a campfire.

Ivas came up to them and doffed his cap.

"Yes, and it's our own, and you can stand alone!" answered a fair-haired Cossack, ladling hot millet gruel out of a cauldron.

Though Ivas knew that this was a correct answer and according to Cossack custom, his face flamed. Then he bent down and took a spoon out of his boot.

"Ah, I see you're a lad with experience!" the fair-haired one twitched his moustache. "You've even got a spoon. Sit, Cossack, and join the company."

That smoked-up gruel eaten in the field seemed so tasty to Ivas: he had never tasted anything like it! For one thing, he was very hungry, and for another, here he was, actually eating with the Cossacks! They hadn't pushed him away, but had accepted him into their circle...

The boy ate politely, didn't snatch, was the last to put his spoon into the pot, not taking too much so they wouldn't say: "Gulping like a dog!" And they no sooner finished eating than he ran and brought a pail of water and helped the cook to wash up.

If only his mother could see him!

The camp now began to stir. Bugles were sounding from every side, the Cossacks flitted about shouting that the horses be saddled.

Cossacks who had been sitting around a dying fire, puffing at their pipes, jumped up and ran toward their horses.

Only Ivas stood helplessly by in the middle of all this action and cursed himself in his thoughts that he had come on foot. Why couldn't he use his tongue and ask for the loan of a horse? No, they'd call him a mother's son, incompetent.

Should he go to the foot-soldiers?

That would be worse!

"Hey lad, would you be called Ivas?" shouted someone behind him.

The boy jumped.

A burly Cossack sitting on a grey horse held a raven-black horse by the reins.

"Did you hear, aren't you by chance Ivas Konovchenko?"

Ivas nodded. His throat was suddenly too tight to make a sound. He was guessing and yet was afraid to guess.

"Well, here's a present for you — your mother sent it," and he offered Ivas the reins of the black horse which wouldn't stand still, but stamped his hooves irritably over the ground, snorting and looking askance out of a bloodshot eye.

As if lifted by the wind, Ivas leapt into the saddle. Oh mother, dear mother! How can I repay you?



You've saved your son from endless shame! The horse was a real dragon! He had never even dreamed of having one like it.

The Don Cossack pulled the knotted kerchief out from inside his shirt, looking closely at Ivas.

"Take this money... She said to give it to you."
But Ivas only waved a hand. What was money! He would have taken the shirt off his back and given it away for the horse if anyone had wished it.

When the bugles sounded again and the Cossacks began to form ranks, Ivas was ready — he joined them in a line on the left, at its very edge.

The Cossacks, to tell the truth, exchanged smiles, but kept quiet, saying nothing. The Captain, the same one who had refused to sign him up the day before, rode by, and barely glancing it him, turned away, though Ivas's heart jumped and sank down somewhere into his heels, turned rigid with fear. But all his fears were now behind him. Now he was a real Cossack! He had a good horse, his weapons were adequate, he was sitting in his saddle like a burr... What else did he need?

Barely a week had passed in the march, yet it seemed like a year. Ivas had turned brown, grown thinner, with sunken eyes. His mother would not have recognized her son. He sat on his horse from morning till night, slept on the ground using his fist for a pillow, ate rye gruel with water. But nothing mattered... A Cossack had to suffer: he would then drink mead!..

The Colonel did not give them much time to rest, he hurried his army along to the city of Tyahin — planning a surprise attack, a stampede.

The scouts prowled ahead, reconnoitering, to see if the horde was anywhere near and that they should not notify the Turks of the attack betimes. But they weren't





able to save themselves! The devilish horde smelled them out, found out the Cossacks were coming. Early in the morning, on the eighth day, with day barely dawning — the gravemounds of the steppe burst into flames.

It was the scouts sending signals: the Tatars were approaching the camp!

If anyone had later asked what it was like, Ivas would have been hard put to explain. To tell the truth, he had seen nothing... Three of the younger lads and himself were sent out to drive the horses into a ravine in the steppe.

"And make sure you sit there as quiet as mice!" ordered the captain sternly. "And wind jute around the horses' snouts so they won't whinny. If the Tatars should find you — fight back. One of you call like a screechowl — and we'll attack from the camp!"

"Very well, Father!"

The horses' hooves beat dully over the ground. The tightly-packed drove lowered itself into the ravine, diving into the deep grass which soaked their legs with dew. The boys, after talking it over, crawled up to the

rim and squatted among the bushes so they could hear everything.

For some time all was quiet. The only sounds, dulled by distance, came from the encampment — voices, movement, rattling and jungling. The Cossacks were rolling the wagons into place, lining them up on four sides with their shafts up, tying them to each other, winding chains through the wheels.

Then the sound of snapping reached them. "They're getting their muskets ready!" guessed Ivas. "The riflemen are in front, and behind them the Cossacks are loading up and passing the muskets to them. That's faster!"

Now suddenly, it the steppe, through the morning mist, a far-off howling sounded. It was as if hundreds of wolves had emerged from the ravines and were advancing on the camp, maddened and foaming at the mouth...

The Tatars! The lament was coming closer and closer. One could hear the shouts of "Allah! Allah!" — the whistle of arrows. The Mussulmans were drawing their bows on the run!

The camp remained silent. The frenzied yelling of the horde pierced the eardrums, but not a shot sounded from the other side!

Without thinking, Ivas jumped up out of the ravine — then fell rigid to the ground.

The camp went into attack! Once, twice, three times, the shots rang out without pause, echoed resoundingly in the distance, spread rapidly through the valleys and hollows, startling the bird-life of the steppe which rose with frightened cries into the sky.

Now, breaking through the thunder of musket shots, came the boom of the small field artillery located on



the wagons. "Aha! The Tatars wanted to catch us unawares on one side and have been caught, like that frog, in the flames!" whispered the boy to himself.

He was shivering with feverish excitement, his hands shook. He wanted to leave everything and run to his own, to help. But he immediately remembered what the Captain had said, sighed deeply, and once more sank back under cover.

The shooting had already stopped: the laments of the horde sounded further and further away in the distance. The attack had been repelled! The sound of hoofbeats sounded in pursuit: the Cossacks had mounted their horses and went dashing after the runagates. Obviously, they hadn't sent all the horses into the ravine. They had left some in the camp.

Here the grass rustled under rapidly approaching footsteps. Somebody was running into the ravine — not one, but several! Without stopping to agree, the boys grabbed their muskets, then lowered them immediately on hearing the familiar owl's call.

"Hey, boys!" shouted the Cossacks on the run, "the horses, and quickly!"

Ivas guessed without asking that they would also pursue the horde. The enemy were stubborn thistles! More than one of their company would try to return to rummage about the Cossack encampment.

When the last rider had disappeared in the distance, Ivas jumped on his own black steed and galloped after.

Oh Ivas, Ivas, you foolish son! Perhaps fate had so decreed that you should dash blindly into the battlefield and death should pass you by... For on seeing a number of Tatars in the distance he delightedly went into attack without looking around to see how many...



...Two of them, however, Ivas laid low, but six surrounded him, knocked the sabre out of his hand, threw a noose about his neck and all that was left for him would be to run after a Tatar horse into slavery if Cossack muskets hadn't sounded in the rear.

His brothers rode up and shook their heads over him.

"Did no one tell you, soldier, that besides a sabre one also needs a head? Well, you've learned a lesson today!"

And so that the lesson would remain with him, a Cossack gave Ivas a good stroke across the back with his whip. Still, his escapade did not turn out a disgrace for the widow's son.

"A good son of his father," murmured the Cossacks among themselves, "he took on eight without fear!" And the other young lads, who had not yet had a taste of the battlefield, looked at him with envious eyes.

Ivas was encouraged by this; he rode along skirmishing his horse. "I will not swear," he thought, "to not attack the Mussulmans again! They won't knock the sabre out of my hands a second time," he vowed.





The Cossack army finally reached the green valley of the Dniester near the city of Tyahin. The Turks had been waiting for this: their pipes screeched, the trumpets sounded hoarsely, and the Janizaries advanced from the fortress, the horsemen galloping after.

In front ran the dervish-monks, spinning like tops, praying that the true believers would be successful.

The various standards waved against the sun, the forged weapons glittered — blinding the eyes.

Suddenly a powerful Turk on a white stallion rode out toward the Cossacks, hallooed and waved his arm. A steel coat of mail, a heavy shield, and he, like a rock—a giant of a man, sure enough!

"Well, brothers, he's challenging for a joust!" remarked Colonel Filipenko, looking back at his men. "Now then, who among you wants to win knightly renown, match his strength against the Mussulman?"

A flame seemed to run through Ivas. He urged his horse forward with his stirrups, bowed low before the colonel:

"Bless me, Father, I'll accept the challenge!"

Filipenko looked at him and frowned:

"Are there no older Cossacks among us, that I should send you, a lad, into a skirmish? You are still too young, you do not know the Cossack customs... Get back!"

But Ivas wouldn't turn back.

"Is it, Father, that only the old falcons can fly to great heights, that only the old pikes snatch at the carps?! There are times when the young duckling is quicker at snatching a fish than the old drake! Allow me to joust!"

A wave of laughter arose from the Cossacks, so loud

that the horses began to prance. The Colonel himself couldn't help breaking into a smile. This was all that the audacious lad needed. He drew out his sabre and galloped off toward the Turk.

...Many were the opponents that the mighty Mussulman warrior had met and competed with in his lifetime, but when he saw who was now approaching him — he went numb with shock. Could it be that the Cossacks had no stronger competitors that they should send this inexperienced lad against him? How would it look for a noted fighter like himself to fight him?

Like it or not, he would have to fight! For the young Cossack was galloping toward him on his raven steed, flying like that arrow leaving a Tatar bow. He leaped forward, the horses met and the tempered blades formed curved arcs flashing in the sun.

Ah, mighty Turk! You boasted too soon! Before anyone really had a chance to take a good look, the gilded shield of the Mussulman fell to the ground, after it the sabre jangled down and sank into the earth. The Mussulman uttered a sigh and slumped out of his saddle, covered with blood.

The Turks groaned with the shame of it. Mahmud-Ali, the pride of the sultan's army! Did anyone even dream, or give a thought, that you would lose your knightly honour by falling at the hand of an immature lad?

Ivas in his triumph, dashed about the field, beside himself with joy. He knocked two more of the horde out of their saddles, another he lassoed and brought to Colonel's tent for inquiry.

The Colonel threw up his hands in astonishment. "What an unrestrained lad! That's our Konovchenko! Where did you, your mother's son, following the



plough, learn Cossack ways to carry out such a skirmish?.."

But here the artillery roared, the Turkish trumpets sounded again. Angry, like devils, the Mussulmans threw themselves at the Cossacks to mitigate their disgrace. But luck was against them. The Cossacks routed both the Janizaries and the cavalry, drove them back into Tyahin.

...The night floated over the earth, the fires burned in the green valley. The Cossacks didn't sleep, they were reliving the recent battle, talking over their victory. More than anything else, they praised the widow's son: his triumph over the giant! It brought glory to the entire army.

...There was no lack of goblets being passed around either, though drinking during a campaign was not a good thing.

Ivas didn't need to drink to be intoxicated. He couldn't sit still but went from group to group, drinking in the praise lavished on him, unsatiated. The praise, to him, was sweeter than honey: it was as if he had grown and acquired the strength of three...

He approached one of the fires, coughed, stretched a hand to a glass that was making the round:

"Come, brothers, I'll have a drink, too!"

At first the Cossacks wouldn't give him one, then waving a hand, they poured out a measure from a wooden ladle.

"Very well, drink up, if only to forget any worries!" Ivas drank it down in one gulp — then went on, weaving about on weakened legs, babbling and prattling who knows what, for his tongue now moved in his mouth with an effort.

The Colonel suddenly appeared before him.

"What is this, son, drunk? Come, go into my tent at least and have a good sleep. Take care... a drunken Cossack proves nothing, he only loses his reputation as a knight"

knight."

But did Ivas obev? He entere

But did Ivas obey? He entered the tent and laid down as if to sleep, but when the Colonel left, he took flight.

Giving a piercing whistle for his horse, he mounted, and in his drunken stupor began to chase around the camp accosting everyone he met! Who said that he wouldn't prove anything? He would show them!

This one he pushed with his horse, another he hit in the chest with a stirrup, until the Cossacks lost patience and began to swear at him. Some, out of anger, even picked up their whips.

Here Ivas became so angry that he burst into sobs. So this was their thanks and respect due to him? Well, brothers, you'll be sorry!

He lashed at his horse — and off into the steppe: no one was able to stop him.

The full moon now floated on high, lighting up the hollows and the knolls. The widow's son rode on, swaying in the saddle, seeking the Turks after midnight, challenging them to a duel.

And the Turks appeared. Whether they had been lurking around the camp, or maybe recognized the drunk lad, though dark, they arose, as if out of the earth and surrounded him... "Very well, let us duel, young giaour! * We'll see, right away, how strong you are!"

Ivas suddenly came to his senses, but too late... He clenched his teeth and began to defend himself.



^{*} giaour — a derogatory name for a non-Moslem

It was not a deer that, with lowered ears, fled from the wolf, nor the antelope, breaking away from the herd. It was a black stallion that galloped into the Cossack camp at daybreak, dangling his tattered bridle across his neck.

The Colonel, on seeing the horse, was horrified: "Calamity!" he cried. "That's Konovchenko's horse! Quickly, brothers, we must try to find the lad. It's possible he's no longer on this earth."

The Cossacks rode out and found him. The widow's son lay in the steppe, his brows knit into a frown, his hand clutching his sword, and beside him, three slain Turks.

And his mother? The mother spent sleepless nights awaiting her son. Day after day she climbed the high mound in the steppe — gazing into the distance to see if the army was approaching.

A month passed, another, and a third — then they came... The breeze carried their song from a distance, the kettledrums hummed, the Cossacks were returning from the campaign. They were happy and bragging about their good fortune: the Turks were completely routed by the city of Tyahin!

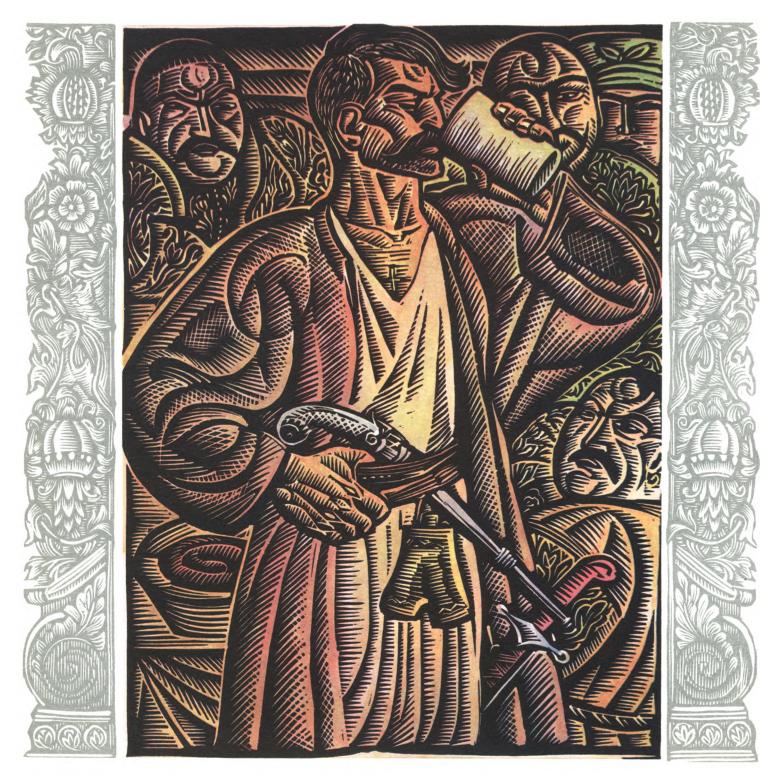
The mother looked and her heart ached with fore-boding.

"Dear Cossacks, eagles! Why is it that my Ivas is not with you?" she asked.

The Cossacks fell silent, suddenly saddened. They didn't answer the mother with speech, but with a song:

Do not weep, mother, do not sorrow, For your son got married, a rich bride He took for himself, in a barrow In the broad, wide steppe, he now lies. Oh, brothers, do not sing, do not break the heart of a mother! She knows, she knows that her son is dead... But the Cossacks went on singing:

Oh the brave Cossack's head has fallen, Like the grasses by the wind felled, But his glory won't fade — unforgotten, To the people the truth it will tell.



ABOUT FESKO HANZHA ANDIBER

A Cossack vagabond walked the highway leading into Cherkasy. His sword hung at his side, his cap was tilted over his brow, and as for a horse — there wasn't one — he had lost it in battle... There was no musket either, nor was there a powder horn — such was the state of his Cossackdom. On his back he wore a Cossack cape, if it could be called such: too tattered to be worn, yet too good to throw away.

But the Cossack wasn't grieving, he had shaken off his misfortunes and strode along with a song:

> Oh the vagabond made merry Seven years and four more, Losing from beneath him Three raven black steeds!

There was no denying the truth! As it was, he was fortunate in having kept his head on his shoulders—given his propensity for dashing in where the enemy was thickest and striking out from the shoulder.

But really, had he fought alone? Not at all — he had fought together with his comrades, his brothers in the Sich, vagabonds like himself. What was good enough for them, was good for him as well! They ate gruel out



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of the same pot, slept on the ground together with the sky their blanket, defended each other in battle.

Okh, and how they revelled in the field, those Cossack lads! It is something to be remembered... They scuffled with the insatiable Tatars and the Turks, but their greatest thrashings were reserved for the Polish magnates who had subjugated half of Ukraine, right to the Dnieper, and were stretching their avaricious claws toward the other half.

Their magnificent manors flamed red while hundreds upon hundreds of serf peasants, who had had a bellyful of feudal slavery, fled to join the Cossacks. More than one powerful magnate seized his head in his hands on seeing his properties and wealth go up in smoke; red with blood he screamed and threatened to impale every Cossack, while promising ten thousand gold pieces for the capture of the madcap Cossack Otaman *.

They tried everything: they pursued the Cossack, put a price on his head, but could not drive the living spirit out of his body. He had survived, though without a notched coin in his pocket.

It raced along, running out from under one's feet, the cobbled Cherkasy highway, losing itself in the distance under a canopy of leafless willows. The boundless fields spread all about him; the winter wheat, washed by a shower, shone green, gladdening the eye. In the meadows wild-maned horses still plucked at the second growth of hay, the big-horned oxen grazed. Among them a group of barefoot herders circled under the chilling drizzle, their heads covered by their soaked cloaks.

The Cossack stopped.

"Hey, lads!" he called out, "whose droves are these?"

^{*} Otaman — Cossack chieftain

"Colonel Zolotarenko's!" the boys shouted back with voices hoarse from the falling rain.

"And whose are the fields?"

"No one else's but Colonel Zolotarenko's!"

"Well, the Colonel has certainly extended himself, like that frog on a hillock," said the traveller to himself with anger. "There is no evil hour for these gentry. They've taken over every available bit of land, leaving not even a spot for a poor Cossack vagabond to pasture his horse..."

The wind continued to blow, driving the clouds before it. Dusk fell. The rain came down more strongly, spattering into the puddles. If one could only get into a tavern, toss down a tumbler, warm up a bit. But would the devilish tavern-keeper's wife let him have a drink without money?

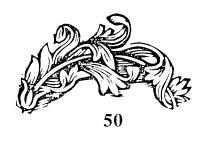
Thinking it over a bit, he finally waved a hand. "So what! At least I'll get warm for the cold is already getting to my bones. By the time I get to Cherkasy I'll be numb."

He turned off the highway and cut across to the tavern whose small windows winked into the darkness like a pair of cat's yellow eyes.

The Cossack had no idea that the tavern sheltered other guests. And such guests! Wealthy magnates, Cossack commanders. One — Havrilo Dovhopolenko, an old captain from Pereyaslav, another — Ivan Voitenko, a captain from Nizhin, and the third, sitting across from them — spread across the bench with his stomach thrust out — the Cherkasy colonel, Stepan Zolotarenko himself.

The lights glittered on the costly foreign sabres, the crimson Cossack mantles and clothing. No wonder the Cossack poor called these Cossack commanders would-be lords! Enriching themselves as they did in the





campaigns, annexing the land, as much as they wanted, so that now not even the devil himself could be called their brother... Not lords — but would-be lords! With such pretenders there was no measuring of the land, no counting of cattle. And how many wretched ragamuffins worked for each of them for food and two shirts a year, don't even ask, for they themselves couldn't tell you! They sat there, in the tavern, drinking mead and liquor, praising each other and stroking their long moustaches.

The tavern-keeper's wife and the barmaid both bustled around them, bringing them drinks and food, barely keeping up with their appetites. And the outside door they closed on a hook so that no uninvited should come in... After all — such guests were not often come by.

The Cossack came to the door: what on earth was this? The lights were on, voices could be heard, but the door was locked. He put his shoulder to the door with some force — the latch tinkled down to the floor and the oak door burst open... He stepped into the tavern and took off his cap: "Good evening, sirs!"

"And why, lad, without asking, have you broken down the door?" Zolotarenko, red-faced, slammed his empty glass to the table haughtily. "Have you not heard what happens to uninvited guests?"

"We could treat you to a drink that will prop you up against the gate!" added red-headed Voitenko. "He who is known is given a gentleman's welcome, but no-body here asked or invited you to join us..."

"But I, good sirs, have no desire to join your company," the Cossack answered calmly, seating himself on the bench. "I'll warm up a bit and go on. I have no time to waste sitting on a bench..."

Here the tavern-keeper's wife ran in, bearing a

huge platter on which rested a steaming roasted piglet surrounded by boiled plums.

"Akh, you lucifer, you bit of swamp life!" she shrieked, brandishing the platter. "Why did you break down the door? You see, good people, the door has been broken down! May the lightning strike you! How could you?.." The words tumbled out like those peas from a sack, then stopped suddenly, though the Cossack made no answer, only shrugged the broad shoulders beneath his ragged coat.

"Hush, Nastya! Stop grumbling like that empty barrel!" advised old Dovhopolenko, who hadn't yet uttered a word, but had silently quaffed at his mead from a wooden tankard.

"Better you should run along and bring the man a beer. Let him have a drink!"

And he began to burrow in his paunchy money bag — sorting out his gold, silver and copper coins under the table so his neighbours wouldn't see. He burrowed and burrowed and finally pulled out half a kopeck an old and battered coin.

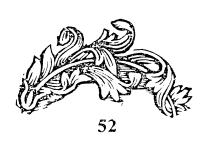
"There, take this! Exactly enough for a pint of beer."

How very prudent of old Dovhopolenko! He knew how to gain respect with no loss to himself. A halfkopeck spent would certainly not pauperize him. The tavern-keeper's wife turned away, hiding a smile, and said to the barmaid:

"Run, Marusya, into the cellar and draw some beer out of the barrel that is by the door. Quickly, you hear!"

The dark-browed Marusya glanced at the Cossack and lowered her eyes. Oh you Cossack falcon, do you not see that they mock you? My mistress has told me to draw you some beer from a barrel where it is quite sour and spoiled — even the pigs wouldn't drink it...





Thinking this, the girl ran down into the cellar, found a barrel of the best mead — fresh and intoxicating — which stood in a far corner. The tavern-keeper's wife kept it for only her most illustrious guests, for the gentry and the magnates did not shun the tavern, but came in for a drink from time to time.

Quick as a breath, Marusya was back, carrying a tankard of mead, her head turned away as if the fumes were more than she could bear.

The Cossack glanced into the tankard, smiled, and said: "Thank you, dark-browed maiden!"

He grasped the tankard by the handle and raising it, drank down its contents to the end, smacking his lips.

The gentry shrugged their shoulders, exchanging smiles as if to say: "What a wretch! One could pour him a drink from a puddle, he'll drink it and ask for more!"

The tavern-keeper's wife rejoiced: "That was for the door, you son of a fiend! I wonder that your eyes didn't pop!"

But the Cossack paid them no heed. He got up and went over to sit by the tile stove.

"E-e, lad," spoke up old Dovhopolenko, "why are you nestling down? One can see that you've never visited with people and don't know the customs."

"And what is the custom, Sire, that I don't know?"

"Why, the custom that all good visitors follow. They sit for a while and go."

"Before being put out by the nape of the neck," added Zolotarenko, who had for some time how been breathing hard with anger.

Hearing this, the Cossack banged his fist against the tile stove.

"And why don't you leave yourselves, you devils, you wealthy spawn? You think that because you are now

wearing fine clothes, that you cannot be touched?"

Suddenly something happened. The room filled with soot which hovered over them, burning their eyes. The gentry jumped up shouting, prepared to attack. But the Cossack merely waved an arm and all three fell to the floor. Suddenly there was a tap at the window.

"Ahoy, Father, are you here?" a heavy bass bawled. out. The Cossack shuddered.

"Akh, the devils! They've found me!" He went up to the window and opened it.

"Hey, brothers," he shouted, "come on in!"

The gentry stood up open-mouthed and rooted to the spot. What was going to happen now?

The door opened and a Zaporizhian Cossack came into the tavern. Hazel eyes, curly forelock, a musket on his back and in his hands a luxurious cape embroidered in gold thread. Bowing low, he gave it to the Cossack:

"Put it on, Father," he said, and stepped aside. The Cossack donned the mantle and smoothed down his youthful black moustache. Now more steps could be heard thumping through the hallway. The door banged and more Zaporizhian Cossacks came in — this time two. One carried a Cossack cap, the second a sabre stud-

The Cossack belted the sword to his waist and folded the cap over his ear.

"Thank you, brothers! Are you all here?"

ded with precious stones.

"Com-ming!" came a halloo from outdoors and into the tavern stepped an outsize, burly Cossack with a pipe hanging out of the corner of his mouth. He bowed and offered the Cossack a Hetman mace.

"Take it, chief! Enough of your vagabonding!"

The magnates slapped their hands against their thighs.



"Now how is it that we didn't recognize him? Why this is Fesko Hanzha Andiber — the Zaporizhian Hetman! Who could have known that he intended to dress as a vagabond and wander about the country?"

They then stamped their feet, calling for the tavern-keeper's wife.

"Come, you daughter of Satan, bring the very best mead, the finest brew, that even the gentry don't drink! We'll treat the Hetman!"

The tavern-keeper's wife rushed off and brought the mead with shaking hands.

ead with shaking hands.
"Now here's a Cossack for you! Here's a vagabond!"

The gentry bowed low, offering the Cossack a drink: "Drink up, noble Hetman, let there be harmony among us! Don't be angry, sit a bit closer and we will hold counsel on how we must live and get along in our native Ukraine."

But the Hetman, accepting the mead, did not drink it, but poured it down on his garments.

"This sudden esteem is not for me — but for you my red cape! Drink to your good health!"

Then he threw the expensive goblet to the floor, where it shattered, its splinters flying in all directions.

"Only then, my lords," he said, "will there be accord among us, when those bits of glass again form into a goblet!"

He twitched his brows at his colleagues:

"Now boys, you treat these gentlemen to a drink!. Show them that the rabble know how!"

Saying this he left the tavern, mounted his horse and galloped off down the road to Cherkasy. The Zaporizhians, meanwhile, hauled the Cossack gentry out of the tavern and gave them a sound flogging.

MARUSYA BOHUSLAVKA

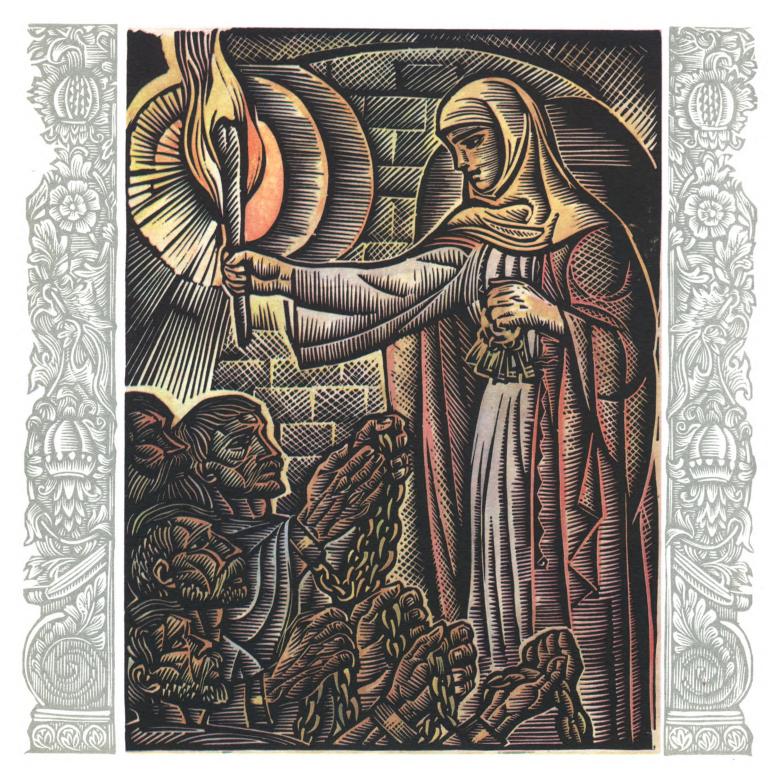
The sun burns over Istanbul, sparkling on the gilded ancient Moslem temples, plunging into the cool verdure of the orchards.

The heat is deflected off the marble palaces by the cascading fountains, by the white, red, and deep wine of the roses that overflow in islands of flower-beds. Where else could one find such beauty and such luxury as in the Turkish capital? For the poor, the wretched of the dirty alleys, there is no access to this beauty: let any one of them knock on the gilded gate to beg but a dipper of water from the fountain — and the guard appears immediately, driving him away with three swift chops to the neck and a knee in the back for good measure.

On the very edge of the sea itself the snow-white palace of the old Ahmed-pasha towers among its gardens. Not for nothing is that ancient proud of his gardens; they have been planted with everything that can grow beneath the sun. Even fruits foreign to the region — oranges, hanging like hot golden suns, were bred by the humpbacked Italian gardener for whom the pasha had paid a good sum at the market, having learned of his qualifications.

Roses and climbing jasmine entwine the gray rocks, the vineyards on the slopes are ripening into heavy,





But mighty is the power of gold! All Ahmed-pasha had to do was throw lavishly gold pieces about and make plans that slaves be brought to him. In no time at all the whole craggy shoreline was dotted with groups of wretched slaves — carrying marble blocks, building the palace, planting trees and flowers into the earth carted to the site from great distances.

No one mourned for the dead: there were always new slaves on the market — and if there weren't enough — there would be more driven in. The *murzas* led their hordes of Tatar-Nogais and Budjaks into Ukraine, seizing their captives from both Poland and Rus.

It was no wonder then, that the foreign merchants, sailing to Turkey and the Crimea in their ships, marvelled as to where all these people in Ukraine were coming from since they were constantly being captured without number — men, women, and children too — even those who could barely walk.

Every bush in that garden had been thrice-watered with burning sweat and tears. It should not have grown, but dried up... But no — it thrived, bloomed and spread in every direction, pleasing the eye with its beauty.

Nevertheless there was one little corner that wasn't touched by slave hands. There were no roses here, nor fragrant jasmine: the flower-beds glowed blue with periwinkle in the spring, and in the summer months the tall pink hollyhocks stretched toward the sun, while morning glories wound their vines around their trellises. Everything was exactly as in a garden around a house in Ukraine. But no one ever came here, to this hidden



nook among the rocks, except the young Meriemkhanum, the wife of Mahomet-agha, the old pasha's nephew. She came here secretly to water the flowers and to grieve.

She was not Turkish — she was but a maid in her early teens when the Tatars snatched her up at Bohuslav on the river Ros, darted by Perekop, and from there — by sea to Istanbul.

Perhaps Marusya would have died in evil hands had not the Ahmed-pasha seen the frightened, trembling blonde waif on the auction block, reminding him of his own daughter who had recently died. So, immediately, without bargaining, the pasha bought the little captive, brought her home and gave her to his wife who was pining away in sorrow.

They made of Marusya a Turkish maid, taught her foreign ways, a foreign, disliked tongue. She cried bitterly during the nights, kept seeing her mother in her dreams.

"Mother, darling mother, where art thou?.. At home, or perhaps, too in slavery? Where should I look, in what regions should I search for you? I'd walk through this entire hateful Turkish land, look into every mansion—to see if my dear mother isn't there!"

But Marusya was locked in a gilded prison — there was no way out, not even to catch a glimpse of the world...

After she grew up the pasha took pity and set her free. But what happiness from this gesture? There was nowhere to go from the palace! The only assurance was that she would not now be sold to anyone else.

Immediately on her release the pasha's nephew, Mahomet-agha, who was like a son to the pasha who had no sons of his own, sought her hand in marriage. Marusya married him, but life was no better. Mahomet-agha had other wives besides her, as was the established Turkish custom, and to all of them Marusya was like a bone in the throat. She was picked on and envied: for how was it that this Ukrainian slave girl without kith or kin could have such unusual good fortune! Out of all his daughters-in-law the old pasha loved her the best: constantly bringing her expensive gifts, as well as leaving her the keys to his treasure chests and storerooms whenever he left on a journey.

This, of course, did not make things any easier. How she had protested her marriage! She knew that now she would never be able to escape to her homeland! Six years had passed and she hadn't forgotten: Bohuslav, with all its greenery, remained before her eyes, her father's house above the ravine, the willows along the Ros.

And Marusya was filled with sorrow and compassion for her compatriot captives, stealthily helping them as much as she was able.

* * *

Deep were the dungeons in the palace of Ahmedpasha. There were some without even a narrow ray of light. Here it was that the captive slaves were driven for the night, manacled, so they wouldn't think of escape. And if any tried to escape, or angered their captors, then the manacles also went around their necks — then into the dungeon — there to disappear like a dog!

But things happened anyway: some managed to escape, fearless before death from hunger, or from the stormy waves that could scuttle their tiny skiff into the sea. But it was true: better to die escaping than to suffer the tortures of slavery!



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Once Marusya had thought this way, but not for some time now. She had a son... was it possible to run away from him? The dusky babe had wound itself around her mother's heart, fettered her — no other chains were necessary...

Marusya was ashamed to look into the eyes of the unfortunate captives, even though they couldn't see her face behind her heavy black veil. And sometimes, when new slaves from Ukraine were brought to the pasha, she was even afraid to glance at them for fear that some of her countrymen from Bohuslav would be among them or, God forbid, members of her own family! Hadn't it already happened that a Turk had taken his own mother-in-law into bondage and brought her home to his captive Ukrainian wife to be a slave nanny to his son?

There was even a song written about it:

Speeds a horseman on the roadway. The mother-in-law through the weeds. Her feet, bloodied, hide her footprints, A black raven, flying, dips — Drinks the blood with avid sips. The son-in-law, home now, gleeful, Calls his wife to come and greet him: "I've brought you a woman serf, All her life for you she'll work. She will spin and weave for you, Watch the herd at pasture too." The mother-in-law rocked a cradle. And rocking crooned a lullaby: "Rock-a-bye my Turkish baby, Through my daughter my grandchild." "Mother of mine, dearest mother! Shed those rags that you are wearing, Don my lovely, rich apparel, In luxury with us dwell."

"My poor rags I'll keep on wearing, I don't want your fine apparel!
Nor do I want your luxury grand, I want to die in my own land."

Marusya had heard this ancient song as a child at her grandmother's knee. It lay in her memory like a painful reproach. And Marusya cried long and bitterly, hiding herself in the corner of the boudoir behind a tapestry so strange eyes would not see, and calling piteously for the servant, old Pelahia. She comes immediately, bringing water, and stroking her hair, giving her comfort, as though to a child.

One could trust Pelahia — she wouldn't betray, wouldn't sell out, wouldn't report to Mahomet why his young wife grieved, nor would she whisper into the pasha's ear... She was a native countrywoman from Rus, in the Kursk district: one's own native blood! She yearned over Marusya as over a daughter. At one time, at home, she too had a daughter — but who knows what happened to her? Pelahia has been a slave for 30 years.

"Pelahia, dear heart, go and see whom they have brought in! Maybe there are countrymen from Bohuslay..."

The old woman doesn't need to be told twice. Nodding her head, she silently glides from the boudoir. Through hidden passages she makes her way to the courtyard where the tattered, shackled slaves are herded under the burning sun. Like a shadow she scurries among them, whispering questions, passing them morsels of food inconspicuously from out of her broad sleeves.

...One day a group of Sich Cossacks were driven into the palace courtyard. They had just recently been captured. Some one hundred and fifty Zaporizhian





baidaks * had attacked the Turkish coastline — exactly when the Turks least expected their visit. The Cossacks sent the little town of Buyuk-dere up in smoke and liberated three hundred slaves; they burned a number of coastal villages, then tore along the Bosphorus to destroy other slave dungeons in Istanbul, or some of its environs, as well.

But the Sultan had already mobilized and sent some ten thousand of his select troops toward them. In Istanbul the army quickly prepared a long iron chain which they lowered into the water across the harbour to protect it from the Cossack ships.

Five hundred Turkish ships and galleys, armed with cannon, were lined up in the Bosphorus to defend the city in case the enchained harbour would prove inadequate protection.

The Cossacks, however, neither attacked nor ran away. All day they stood in a half-moon around the harbour at a safe distance from the military installations, so that they would not be clearly seen. They smoked their pipes, spit into the sea and made fun of the Turks who, for some reason or other, didn't move either; perhaps awaiting a favourable wind that would allow them to surround and capture all the Cossack boats at once.

When the sails finally fluttered open in the sea breeze, the baidaks like birds retreated — and were seen no more — though the Turkish ships rushed after them in full sail and the slaves in the galleys pulled under the whip till they collapsed from exhaustion.

Only three Cossack ships were somehow separated from their fleet and were taken prisoner.

^{*} baidak — Cossack boat

Sultan Osman himself swore that he would personally torture them to death and directed that this information be conveyed by messenger to Velikiv Luh — so that the Cossacks would know better what it meant to attack Turkish soil. And he shot the manacled prisoners one by one with his arrows, first giving orders that they be securely chained to their posts, to keep them from moving.

But the captives refused to beg, nor did they cry out. They even, while they still could, joked among themselves: "And who was the fool who said that it is, so to speak, painful, when you are shot at with arrows? Honest to God, it's only like the bite of an ant!"

The Sultan Osman was so angry at this impenitence that he stamped his foot with rage. Time and again he pulled his bow, with its deadly arrow — livid with anger—till the one hundredth victim had lowered his tufted head under his arrows.

On cooling off a little, he ordered that the remaining Cossacks be sent to the galleys: there, of anywhere, they would show them that death was sweeter than any servitude.

It was at this point that Ahmed-pasha made the request that the Zaporizhians be given to him; together with others of the Sultan's favourites he had watched the executions.

His Highness graciously nodded his head. The old man had for twenty years been the chief treasurer — had looked after the Turkish exchequer — serving both the former Sultan and himself faithfully... He wouldn't indulge the prisoners, even though he did have a Rus daughter-in-law.



When the Zaporizhians were driven into the courtyard, everyone in the palace, including the servants and the slaves, came out to look at them. This was on the orders of the pasha. Let them see that the faithful knew how to punish their enemies! And particularly the slaves, who, whatever you might say, always had a stone hidden about their clothing. This would be a good lesson to them!

Marusya didn't want to, but went: she was afraid that the pasha might get angry, and even took the child with her. Who knows, maybe the old man had already noticed something — it seemed to her that he had been somewhat sterner with her recently — could it be possible that some gossip had whispered some damning words in his ear?

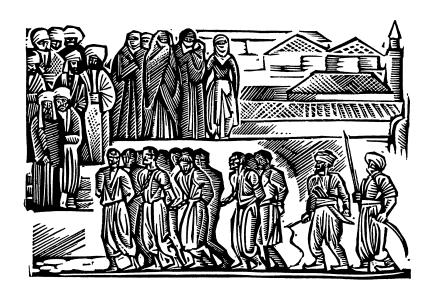
...Holding the child tightly to her, Marusya looked at the prisoners, nearly fainting with horror.

Lord, what had they done to them! One had an ugly blood-encrusted wound on his head; the stub of a cut-off arm on another was wrapped in dirty and blood-soaked rags. Scars and slashes showed through the tattered clothes on the bodies of all of them. The Turks must have vented their wrath in every way they could, beating them as they wished! Sunken eyes, lips black with fever — if only someone would bring them some water! But nobody did... The crowd stood, gazing at them as though at animals.

"Well, boys," the Cossack with the cut-off arm suddenly spoke up after having examined the snow-white walls of the palace gleaming blindingly under the sun, "what a devilish lot of luxury this pasha has acquired! If you set a match to it, it would burn at least three days!"

"Don't worry," promised another morosely, "our





brothers will get to it. It won't be overlooked. Too bad we won't be here!"

They continued talking and commenting as if they were all alone.

"Did you hear," asked a lad with a swinging forelock and a long red scar across his cheek, "they say that one of the young noble's wives is from Bohuslav and a beauty, like a star... If only we could see her... a countrywoman."

"What kind of a countrywoman is that?" asked the armless one angrily. "A turncoat, worse than any Moslem... She has disowned her own people. Such turncoats I would drown alive, so they wouldn't even have a chance to bear a child in their image — for our destruction!"

As if he sensed this terrible threat, Marusya's baby son awoke and began to cry bitterly.

Keeping her head low, Marusya fled the courtyard. Everything swam before her eyes. What had she heard!



Had she earned this? It was true, all true... "She has disowned her countrymen." Probably her own mother, if she saw her, would say the same thing!

What could she do? How could she continue living in this world? There was no one to ask, no one who could advise her.

Marusya sat over the cradle till dark, afraid to move. The child whimpered and choked, its little face flushed with fever.

Mahomet-agha came, stamped about angrily: why take the child out to look at those infidels! They had done this to him: everyone knew that the Zaporizhians were sorcerers, they probably cast an evil spell on his little Yusuf...

Frightened and crying along with her baby, Marusya denied this:

"No, it wasn't the Zaporizhians, it was my fault. He wasn't really feeling well this morning. I shouldn't have taken him out into the hot sun..."

The women ran in and out, each giving advice, oh'd and ah'd and clucked over the child — she didn't even hear them.

Finally Pelahia came in bringing the doctor-hakim, who murmured and muttered over the baby, burned some incense, gave him some herbs to drink, and the youngster, whether from the medicine or from sheer exhaustion, dozed off.

And again, like wasps, Marusya's thoughts came back to torture her. She suddenly remembered: tomorrow is Easter! At home it was a holiday.

But those poor wretches were locked in the dungeon: wounded, weary, thirsty and hungry, with not even a crust of bread. It was also a Turkish holiday. They would be praying in the mosque two days and nights without



Pelahia whispered that the Ahmed-pasha had directed that the Zaporizhians be manacled in two sets of chains, that the doors be padlocked with two locks. Just let them try and escape now!

The galley was already waiting for them at the port; after the holiday they would be driven to it, chained to the oars in the hold, and away they would sail across the seas, toward far-off Arabian shores.

A flurry of steps sounded outside the door. The beardless old eunuch, Alim, who looked after Mahometagha's harem came in. He bowed low, his hand over his heart: "The Most August Effendi-pasha is coming to visit the Honourable Meriem-khanum. Would you please prepare for the meeting!"

Marusya gave an angry little sigh, but donned the hated veil. Now this one will shuffle in with grumbling and reproaches. Why did she go, why did she take the baby, and maybe, too, why did she listen to what the prisoners were saying and didn't then report it to anyone?..

But the pasha didn't grumble and didn't reproach. He patted little Yusuf's hot cheek, promised to send in his own doctor to see him in the morning, then abruptly pulled a large bunch of keys out from the folds of his coat.

"Hide them, Janim, and give them to no one! I'll come in from the mosque in the morning and get them."

What the keys were from, he didn't say, he just turned and left.

And here Marusya was struck by the despairing thought: what if these keys were from the dungeon, where the prisoners were? Maybe she should go... and see?



If they were — she could at least give them some food, some fresh water. If she's caught, then what will happen, will happen! But maybe she wouldn't be caught...

The baby woke with a cry — she quickly rocked him back to sleep. Calling Pelahia, she instructed her not to take her eyes off the child, then passing quietly through the hidden door behind the tapestry, she left the security of her comfortable room.

* * *

Deep down into the bowels of the earth led the narrow, jagged steps. Stall stones rolled down from under the feet, the heart chilled. Marusya had never been here before. With two baskets slung over her shoulder and a huge copper jug in her hand, she crept down, carefully lighting her way with a torch... fortunately she remembered to take one with her.

A dark, starless night hung over the earth. Not a voice was heard anywhere, not a rustle — only the dogs howling in the distance. All the men were in the mosque. The women too, were praying in their secluded nooks; even the guard, who always sat near the dungeons, was gone, perhaps to murmur the Koran in his small lean-to.

Here is the door at last, with two huge cast-iron padlocks. With trembling fingers Marusya examined the heavy keys, trying each one carefully. Her heart chilled at the thought that she might be mistaken — that the keys weren't for this door... But no — there was a sudden click — once, twice... and the door was open! The rusty hinges squeaked loudly — and the damp and mould of the cellar hit her in the face.

The rats scattered in fright, rushing down the passage, waving their naked tails. Marusya clamped her hand over her mouth to keep from screaming aloud.





Water sloshed underfoot, heavy, sharp crags hung overhead. This terrible dungeon must have been dug in the cliff-side. No one could hope to escape this place, dig their way out from under this solid wall. Just try to break this rock with your naked hands!

Somewhere in this forsaken cave the pasha also held a group of Cossacks taken in a campaign many years ago. Since they had been driven underground they had never again seen the light of the sun or had their limbs free of shackles. Probably their very bones had decomposed by now in those iron manacles...

But where were the Zaporizhians? The passage turned to the right, losing itself in the darkness. Suddenly a sound broke the gloom — the murmur of voices, the clank of metal. They were here, somewhere close by.

The stingy light of the torch flickered over the black, unevenly hewn stone walls, clinging to the damp webs, then lighting up a dark alcove. A door — and two more iron padlocks!..



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Again heavily, with effort, the keys ground twice. Marusya tugged open the door, and stopped. It was as if she stood in a tomb. The stench of filth and oppressive air assailed her nostrils...

Human shadows turned toward her, chains clanked.

"Who is it?" asked a hoarse voice.

The one-armed Cossack!

Marusya put down the jug, took the baskets off her shoulder.

"It's me!" she answered softly.

"A woman," the Cossack was astonished. "Wait! You must be the one from Bohuslav! You came... and you weren't frightened?.."

Not frightened? Marusya's throat was so tight with fear she could barely breathe.

"I've brought you some food. Tomorrow is Easter — a holiday..."

"A holiday... If only we were free — that would really be a holiday! Why are you waiting? Let's have what you've brought!"

"Water, water," groaned weak voices from the corner.

"Holy Mother! Who is that?" Only now, having accustomed her eyes to the darkness, did Marusya see, in the narrow corner, a number of people, and yet they couldn't be people, manacled to the wall. They were naught but bones, long, tangled gray beards and shrivelled, long, claw-like hands...

Why these were the martyrs who had been held underground for so many years. The pasha certainly knew where to throw the Zaporizhians!

"Yes, yes, I'll bring you a drink right away!"

She moved swiftly about, pouring water into each earthenware cup, taking the food out of the baskets and passing it around.

"Ah, young woman," croaked a prisoner, stretching his withered hand out to the crock. "Better you should have kept quiet about Easter being tomorrow. My heart is fairly breaking."

What could one answer to this? Marusya only swallowed her tears.

"Well, boys!" shouted the one-armed Cossack suddenly. "Either we take a chance or we don't! Either we win, or we lose! Unlock our manacles, Bohuslavka!"

"What? How?" Marusya paled.

"Why, just like that. You have the keys? Give them here!"

Only then did she notice that the manacles that bound the Cossack's unhurt hand to his feet had a padlock.

She wanted to turn away, but couldn't. She ran to pick up the keys and brought them back. Two of them unlocked the chains that bound the prisoners.

Unbelievingly they straightened their cramped limbs.

"Don't waste any time, boys, we must be quick!" directed the one-armed Cossack. "We must be out and away before the Turks recover."

"Is there any kind of boat around?"

"Yes, there's a galley!" remembered Marusya, "and it's not far from here."

"What about us?" "Us too!" groaned those who were chained to the walls, piteously. "Even if you throw us into the sea, don't leave us here, brothers!"

The Zaporizhians threw themselves to free them with a will. They tore the rusted hooks out of the wall, broke up the chains that were to last a lifetime on the wasted flesh.

"Wait," the one-armed one stopped the brethren with a flash in his eyes. "Though time is valuable, let's play a trick on the Turks. Lock all your manacles again so



that when the Moslems find them they'll think that the devil himself helped us...

...Hardly visible in the pale moonlight was the path by which Marusya led the Cossacks to freedom.

The galley was empty; its guards, together with all the true believers were praying in the mosque, unaware of any disaster. Even the gangplank, propped to the galley from the top of the cliff, was in place.

"Well, Bohuslavka, be in good health! Our most grateful thanks... Perhaps you'll come with us?"

Marusya sighed: "What about my son?" she asked.

"Be careful then. When they find out, they'll kill you!"

"What will be, will be. There's nothing I can do..." And Marusya kept her control. She didn't cry, only wrung her hands in agitation.

"Cossacks, my doves, don't bypass Bohuslav! My mother is there. If you see her, tell her not to disperse her wealth, not to seek me, her daughter, for I am already in my grave..."

* * *

The oars rose silently and dipped into the water as one. The galley floated — flew away from the shore as if on wings.

Marusya stood on the shore and watched it disappear into the darkness. She had to get back, but couldn't bring herself to move from the spot.

There is but one mother for each person — one fatherland. Whoever loses it will know no happiness for all eternity.

ABOUT FEDIR BEZRIDNY, THE COSSACK WITHOUT KIN

The screech owl flew over the Sich Hooting as it flew,
Mount your horses, gallant Cossacks,
To the steppelands move!
Mussulmans are there approaching,
Leaving aft no traces,
And in front a Turkish horseman
On a grey steed races.

...There is no end, nor beginning to this song and for a long time now people have even forgotten how to sing it. But this is the past, in honest truth! This is the way it once happened...

Three hundred horsemen were speeding to the Sich from beyond the Dnieper estuary, from the Turkish fortress of Ochakov, led by their burly captain, Arslan-Bey.

Some ten days earlier the Zaporizhians had outwitted the Turkish guards at the mouth of the Dnieper — effectively bringing their barks in to the shoreline fortresses, even though the Turks had slung a long steel chain across the Dnieper, their galleries bristling with cannons alongside. The cunning Zaporizhians had released, ahead of their barks, trees that they had cut down and hung with all manner of jangling hardware on their branches. While the Turks, in a panic, had fired their salvos at the trees, the Cossacks had floated under the chain and into the Black Sea.

Now the Turkish cavalry was on the march to make a surprise night attack on the Sich and revenge themselves at such impertinence.





For about a week now they had been stealing stealthily through the bulrushes and marshes along the river, burning no fires during their rests and tying their horses' mouths with leather tongs to keep them from whinnying while listening attentively to every rustle.

But they didn't succeed... On the seventh day a company of Cossacks from the Sich fell upon them out of the blue, wedged themselves into the Turkish detachment, after which only the clash of the sabres was heard.

In front, on a white-maned steed and wearing a red cape, sped the young Cossack Otaman. He was the first to plunge into the battle for he had reason to revenge himself on the Turks. He had neither kith nor kin — father, mother, brother or sister — all had been captured by the Mussulmans and driven into Turkey when he was still a child.

He, too, would have been taken, for a goggle-eyed horseman had already bent from his saddle to pick him up when the frightened child screamed in full voice and, beside himself, ran into a field and got lost in the tall growth of rye.

Who knows what would have happened to him — the Turks had burnt down the entire village, to the last cottage, leaving not a soul alive — but three days later a company of Zaporizhians rode by, saw the blonde lad asleep, curled up like a kitten in the still warm ashes, and took him along with them.

Though they questioned the child, all he could remember was his name, Fedirko. That is why he was given the name Fedir Bezridny, or without kin.

It is no wonder then that they say that for the Cossack the Sich is a mother and Velikiy Luh a father. No sooner did he grow a little than Fedir became an orderly, looking after the captain's horse, cleaning his weapons.



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In time he acquired a horse for himself in a battle and became a real Cossack. Just in the past year the Cossacks elected him Otaman of the company, disregarding his youth, for he had already made a name for himself in battle.

...Fedir fought madly, his face white with anger. See where the Turks were heading — to the Sich, the scoundrels! In no way must they beat a roadway to it, their bones would be laid here, on the shore, to the last one!

"Hey, brothers!" he shouted to the Cossacks, "don't let these Mussulmans out of your sight! Make sure that none escape among the bulrushes and take care yourselves, keep together!"

The sparks flew from the clashing Cossack sabres; at least a hundred of the enemy were laid low.

It was as if a scythe had come in contact with a rock; it was also better for the Cossacks to suffer three deaths than retreat, than to allow the enemy to take their land.

battle.

Fedir glanced about at his brother Cossacks — more than half had fallen.

"Come on, lads, into attack once more!" he encouraged hoarsely, wiping the blood off his face.

Fedir was not alone in this battle — beside him was his faithful orderly, Yarema.

"Father Otaman, do be careful!" cried Yarema, frantically.

Fedir looked — and jerked his horse sharply to the left. A bullet from a musket whistled right past his ear. It had been shot by a tall, broad-shouldered Turk who was in the centre of a huddle of cavalry.

"A poor shot you are, Turkman! Let me show you how to take aim!" And Fedir drove his horse straight at him, swinging his blade above his head.

For a moment the slaughter halted; both the Cossacks and the Turks froze in their positions, their eyes glued to their chieftains. Who will be the victor?

Steel clashed against steel, the foam-covered horses surged back and forth. Now only the clash of swords, the dull stamping of the horses' hooves and the occasional cry through the teeth could be heard. The caps had flown off their heads, the chests heaved — but neither of the contestants would give in.

But what was this? The Cossack groaned suddenly,



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swayed in his saddle and began to fall, grasping with his hands and finally hanging from the saddle, caught in the stirrup. The Turk stared unbelievingly — dumbfounded at the swiftness of his victory. But just as suddenly the Cossack sprang up, swung his yataghan — and the Turk hit the ground, felled by a lightning stroke.

It is the more cunning who win in battle!

The Cossacks, in their delight, shouted as one, forgetting the danger. The Cossack caps flew high into the air.

Fedir also smiled, his eyes flashing, and waved them a hand.

But here a one-eyed Turkish cavalryman who had followed the skirmish closely, raised himself in his stirrups and rapaciously bared his teeth. Swift the dagger flew and buried itself in the Otaman's chest...

The orderly wasn't quick enough to catch him — the Cossack fell silently to the trampled grass.

A roar and a groan rose from among the shoals and bulrushes, the Dnieper whirlpools seethed and eddied. It was impossible to guess who were Turks, and who were Cossacks; they threw themselves at each other without thinking, collided. It was an encounter to the death.

Flocks of ravens beat their wings high above, flying in from all directions, circling like black leaves caught by a whirlwind, coming lower and lower — waiting for the end of the battle.

They didn't have to wait long. Within a short time silence fell on the shoreline.

Death had laid them all prostrate, closed their eyes and lips, silenced them for eternity.

The orphaned horses wandered the field of battle,

whinnying sadly and nosing the fallen — perhaps the master will speak?

But no! Only the ravens rise heavily from among their hooves and the Dnieper foams, raising its waves to meet a storm.

But who is that lying in the sand, his forelock cushioned by the water. The waves splash over it, washing the young face. There isn't even a hint, as yet, of a moustache over the pale lips... It's Yarema the orderly, Yarema. The white-maned horse appears from somewhere, bending his head and breathing into the lad's face as if to say: "Get up, lad! You hear? I'm beside you!" Yarema's lips opened suddenly in a groan, his arm moved. Now he is rising, grasping at the horse's mane, looking about agitatedly. There was no blood on him, nor wounds, only a dark blue streak across his forehead; someone had hit him with the hilt of a yataghan. There it was, a fragment in the sand; obviously broken in the heat of battle...

Yarema turned into the battlefield, bending over the Cossack bodies, looking into every face. Somewhere among them lay the body of his Otaman with a dagger in his breast...

Where could he be?

The white-maned horse followed closely at his heels, bending his swan neck and gazing attentively — also seeking. Whinnying in alarm, he moved suddenly toward a spreading maple, where something gleamed red among the tangle of bodies. Yarema also ran toward the spot. It was the Otaman!

He lay there, arms outflung, the dagger protruding from his breast, his blood congealed over his tattered cloak. But his eyes were open, unextinguished, and the



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breast barely rising. He was breathing! He was alive!

"Father Otaman!" Yarema bent over him, "Father!"

The eyes opened wider, the pale lips moved: "Yare-ma... You weren't killed?"

"No, no!" answered the boy hurriedly. "I was just hit over the head with a yataghan. It doesn't even hurt any more!"

The Otaman barely smiled at this and closed his eyes. Yarema immediately panicked.

"Father! Shall I bring you some water?.. This dagger... Let me pull it out."

Without opening his eyes, Fedir shook his head.

"Don't touch... the dagger... I'll die immediately...
Just bring... some water..."

Yarema darted off.

Fedir took a swallow of water.

"Yarema," he whispered, "bend closer! Who among us is alive?"

"I don't hear anything. All have been killed."

"When I die, go and find our men. Bring them here — let them bury us, commemorate their brothers. They died for the Sich, for the brotherhood. You hear?"

"I hear..."

Yarema bit his lips and clenched his fists — but couldn't hold back any longer. He gave a sob and threw himself to the ground.

A gurgle sounded in the Otaman's breast. His whisper was barely heard, coming as if out of a dream:

"Bend closer... It's hard... to die... without kin... You were the closest... I wanted you to become a Cossack..."

"Father..." sobbed the boy, "dear one!"

"Quiet... I have no time... Is my White Mane here? I don't see him."





"Yes, here he is..."

"He is yours. My red cloak is on him... Put it on and let me see. Don the sword and hang the musket on your shoulder. Get into the saddle... Let's see what a Cossack you'll make."

He hadn't yet finished when Yarema, his eyes full of tears, began to dress, buttoning up with trembling fingers. He buckled on the sword, then jumped into the saddle.

A happy smile touched the Cossack's pale lips.

"Ride off a little. Turn the horse! You lack only a moustache... otherwise a true Cossack. Watch out and take care... Listen to your elders."

He fell silent, mustering his strength.

"At the Chortomlik stream I buried a pot among the bulrushes... with silver... I got it during a campaign... There is a red stone to mark the spot... one hundred steps to the left from a fallen tree... Will you find it?"

"I'll find it."

"Divide it among the brethren of our company..." The whisper became fainter, as though being extinguished. "When you find the Cossacks, bow to them... first... to the Otaman... then to the troop... Tell them..." He was unable to finish what he wanted them told.

Yarema rode across the marshes, searching for the Zaporizhians. The white-maned horse beneath him step-



ped softly, his head low. He knew the way himself.

Suddenly he stopped, perked up his ears and whinnied — he had heard something. Yarema jumped out of the saddle and put his ear to the ground; he heard the distant patter of hooves.

"We'll go, my steed, to meet them. Maybe they're ours..."

So they did... They no sooner rode out into the steppe than a dark line, like a cloud, appeared on the horizon.

The boy climbed a hillock and shading his eyes, took a good look. They were one's own! It was the Sich army returning from the Crimea — somewhere there they had fought the Tatar horde.

The standard-bearer, carrying the red ensign in front, was already visible, and behind him, their leader, on a white horse. The Cossack regiments were spread across the horizon, flooding the steppe.

It seemed that the campaign had been successful, their song thundered across to him, frightening the birds out of the grass.

Yarema dug in his stirrups and trotted forward to meet them. Just before he reached them he took off his cap, bowed as he had been taught, first to the leader, then to the troops.

"Greetings, lad!" said the Cossack chieftain, looking at him from under his grey brows, "and who may you belong to?"

"This, Father, is a lad from the Stebliyiv Company of Fedir Bezridny and his orderly!" A young Cossack with a bandaged head, who rode directly behind his chief on a Tatar pack horse, spoke up promptly.

"So! Then why, lad, have you donned the red cloak of a true Cossack? Perhaps you have killed your Otaman and taken his horse and weapons?" "No, Father, I didn't kill my Otaman. He was killed by the Turks..." And he told the whole story.

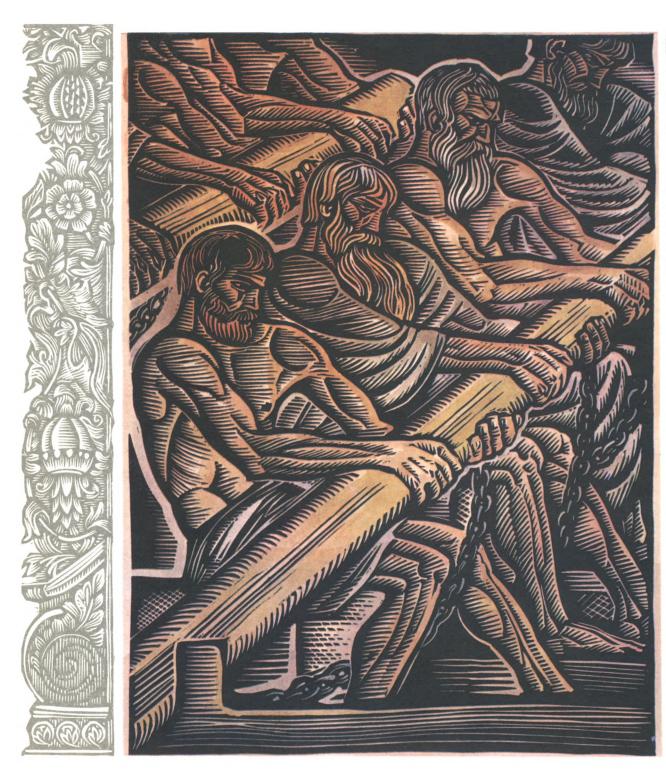
The story passed from mouth to mouth. The song was silenced, the tufted heads bowed low.

Half a hundred Zaporizhians followed Yarema back along the river.

They dug a grave with their sabres, carried earth in the skirts of their cloaks to build a high burial mound by the Dnieper. On top they placed the Cossack ensign so that it could be seen from afar.

A Cossack riding by — doffs his cap. A Kobzar * passing — sings a ballad to the eternal glory of the knights of the steppe.

^{*} kobzar — a wandering Cossack minstrel





ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE

The Black Sea around the Turkish shores frothed with alarm. There was no wind, but the foam-capped waves swept the horizon, rising one after another as if somewhere, a thrifty shepherd was calling his disobedient flock toward him.

Among the waves rocked numbers of frail barques; wherever one looked, half-naked Turkish fishermen were seeking their fortunes from the sea. But the sea was not eager to part with its wealth. The fish travelled in shoals; if you have a good boat you can go out further, find a shoal, throw out your nets and fishing rods and maybe catch some mullet, or if lucky a smooth sturgeon or goggle-eyed beluga.

But if the boat isn't yours, but belongs to your master, and has as many holes as you have on your pantaloons — then you cannot go out into deeper water, but have to do your best along the shore.

Above the sea floated a sad fisherman's song; one couldn't guess whether it was the moaning of the sea or the lamentations of the seagulls seeking their young, lost in the waves.

Suddenly a series of dull booms broke into the song. They thundered loudly then were silent, thundered



again, then again silence. What on earth? Why were kettledrums being sounded on the sea?

The fishermen glanced about under hand-shaded eyes then turned away — perhaps it wasn't anything unusual after all. But the sound came closer and closer... till a large galley, adorned as if for some festivity, sailed from behind a rocky promontory.

Green-gold canvas, yellow and red ensigns fluttering on their staffs; all pointed to the fact that it belonged to a person of some substance — a finer craft could he owned only by the sultan himself. Seven cannons looked out from the painted deck — such things do exist at sea.

The beautiful galley floated along in full military preparedness: powder and flint for the artillery and muskets — bows and arrows. Understandably, there were also good riflemen and dexterous gunners — all had been taken care of by the young Hussein-effendi on leaving Trebizond. The galley had belonged to his father and had become his when the old man had died suddenly a month back and had left his son wealth beyond reckoning — with five or six estates alone. One couldn't even cover them in a week. But Hussein wasn't overseeing his estates, he was sailing to Hezlov * toward a betrothal of marriage.

The Turkish governor of that area had a marriageable daughter, beautiful, like the sun. Hussein wished to marry her and settle in Hezlov. The city was prosperous, had a market-place where prisoners were sold and where wealthy buyers arrived from distant lands, for half the world had heard the rumour that the cheapest slaves could be bought here. The sultan's treasury grew rich and the governor's no less — such was its renown.



^{*} Hezlov — now Yevpatoria, a town in the Crimea

...The wind died down, the sails hung limply from the masts, still the galley ploughed quickly through the waves. Three hundred and fifty slaves manned the heavy oars; it was for them that the drum sounded, its beat helping them pull in unison.

At the head of the galley sat a dark, head-shaven young fellow — a cudgel in his hand and on his knees a drum. On one beat the oars were lifted — on the next — they sank into the water.

Sweat ran down the emaciated, bearded faces, the bare chests breathed hoarsely and with groans. Five slaves on each bench plied their heavy oars with difficulty. Each was fettered to the bench with a chain in a way that he was unable to stand up or stretch his numbed legs. No sooner an oar had been lowered for a moment's respite than the overseer was right there with a knout across the back, drawing blood into a long scar and shouting, "Keep rowing, you villain!"

If he heard a groan — he would beat harder; that's what he was there for — the owner's henchman!

At least if he were a Turk — but no, he was from Ukraine, Illyash by name! He was converted to Islam and became worse than any Mussulman. He stalked up and down among the oarsmen and watched, stalked and ferreted, making sure that the slaves were not idling, or perhaps whispering in secret, plotting revolt.

Walk, walk, you infidel! If the rowers want to exchange a word, you may be sure you won't hear it! As long as they understand each other, for who only wasn't there on that galley! You couldn't immediately guess who came from where: was it a Pole or an Italian, a prisoner from Ukraine or Russia behind the oars.

All were alike in their haggard appearance, all had long beards falling down to their chests. Their cursed



bondage had emaciated them all, stolen the light from their eyes, sprinkled their hair with hoary streaks.

The galley kept surging forward. From somewhere a breeze sprang up and swept across the stern. The waves rose and frothed splashing against the bulwarks and drenching the oarsmen from head to foot. They only shrank closer together and hunched their shoulders against their onslaught.

It was well that it was summer and the water warm. It didn't chill, but freshened, driving away, to some degree, their weariness.

The sails strained, swung taut on their masts, and pushed the galley forward. The slaves dropped the oars; the breeze had come just in time for the midday meal.

Sailors appeared on the board walk between the benches with baskets and jugs and began to distribute food: dry rusks, water, pork fat — black and rancid. The galley slaves grimaced and sighed, each taking his share. The young drummer left his drum and also took a basket.

He stood by the first bench on the left side, distributing the food quickly, and then stealthily pushed a large head of garlic into the palm of a tall oarsman who sat in the middle. He glanced about to see if anyone had noticed and winked, his black eyes twinkling.

"Thank you, Alim! Grow in good health!" The oarsman nodded his gray head. He broke up the garlic into cloves and passed them on to his three neighbours—there were only four of them on this bench, one slave had died at the oars shortly after the galley had left Trebizond.

The oarsmen crunched avidly at the garlic. This was a precious gift; the dry rusks and the rancid fat had left them open to scurvy. Their gums swelled, they lost their teeth and red spots appeared all over their bodies.



"How long are you going to eat, the plague take you?" the overseer barked unexpectedly, peering out of his corner. "Come, take up your oars!"

"Now why are you screaming, Illyash?" asked the gray oarsman, quietly, picking at the last crumbs in his palm. "The pasha always sleeps after his meal and won't notice you jumping out of your skin."

And wonder of wonders — the renegade, always quick to start a fight, flicked his whip, but didn't strike out. Instead he cursed them roundly, then subsided in his corner.

"Don't ask for trouble, Samiylo," his neighbour whispered. "He'll kill you..."

"Him? Me? He won't dare though an executioner..."
He spat on his calloused palms and picked up the oar.
"Come on, boys! Beat the drum, Alim!"

Barefoot Alim obediently waved and began banging on the drum. The oars rose heavily and sank into the water. Illyash began to walk the boards between the benches again, slowly, watching the oarsmen angrily. The first bench, ignoring him, barely audibly began to sing a harsh slave song:

On the Black Sea, on a white rock,
A resplendent falcon sits wailing-keening.
All the stars are by clouds overcast,
And half the moon they cover as they pass,
While wild south west winds hold sway,
The anchors break away
Submerging the Cossack barques with spray.
Not many perished, and yet not a few.
Three Cossack regiments in the waters sank,
Among them Father — of the Hetman rank.

Okh, that's not true! The Cossacks didn't drown, but better if they had. Their barques were returning from the field of battle and were about to enter the Dnieper







estuary when a south-west wind blew up and drove them back into the sea.

The brethren rowed until their palms showed blood, but couldn't escape their fate. Barely had the wind abated when the Sultan's galleys surrounded them, the cursed Mussulmans hooking the side of their boats and attacking — there was no way they could have defended themselves.

Though the Zaporizhians fought to the end, they were all taken prisoner and with them their Hetman — Samiylo Kishka.

...So now he sits, a slave on a bench, fettered in chains for twenty years. He himself can't believe what happened to him. For five years he had driven terror into the hearts of Turk and Tatar, led as many as two hundred barques and even three hundred into battle without losing one, then met with misfortune in the sixth year.

The Selim-pasha wouldn't even hear of a ransom for

the prisoner. On orders from the Sultan he was driven, fettered in chains, through the whole of Istanbul, then taken to the Sultan's galley and set behind the oars.

The Sich sent a letter — the Zaporizhians promised the pasha gold, as much as he wanted, if only he would release their chieftain and his brothers. But the Turk was adamant — it was no, and no! And why not? It was not everyone's galley that could boast such a prisoner.

But the Cossack never gave up. He had three times tried to escape from the galley. He wasn't fortunate, however, he was caught each time, beaten almost unto death and fettered with even heavier chains. Terrible to think of the tortures he endured. But he didn't perish, he had remained alive to this day...

His clothes were already in decay, hanging in tatters. Only his Cossack sash remained whole — the wonder was that it hadn't been taken from him. The Hetman guarded it like the apple of his eye, covering it with his rags and feeling for it in his sleep, to make sure it was still on him.

...Bending over his oar, Samiylo Kishka breathed a deep and heavy sigh. It was quite probable that there was now no memory of him in Ukraine — he had been long buried there. But he remembers his native land, ah, and how he remembers it!

Free, good Lord, the slave out of bondage, To the straight roadways,
To the bright starlight,
To the quiet waters,
To Ukraine, the happy land...

Sadly, the song begged. The hoarse voices of the oarsmen spun out the final words and fell silent.



The old Hetman shook his head. "Ah, but the good Lord didn't seem to see fit to help many slaves to freedom! While still alive... they must try themselves..."

Night was approaching with it dreams, to each his own — pleasant to some, unpleasant to others. It stopped by the bondsmen and waved a soft sleeve over them — sleep, you poor wretches!

The Dnieper waves also murmured dreamily, the large bonfire shot its sparks high into the darkness. The Cossacks, exhausted, laid themselves into a circle around the fire to keep warm. Some of them had already fallen asleep.

The younger Cossacks, however, and the orderlies, were not sleeping. They were listening to the Kobzar. He sat on a stump lit up by the red flames of the fire, his gray hair falling over his shoulders, his sightless eyes, burned out while in bondage, staring frighteningly out of their dark sockets. But the voice was not old—it rang clear:

Oh the Cossacks have left by four different byways, And a fifth — toward the Podillya.

Over one meadow went Samko Muskat,

Over the second went Stetsko Kukurudza,

And over the third — Karpo Pivtorakozhukha.

After him followed close to three thousand,

All brave Cossack brethren — Zaporizhians,

Prancing their horses, their sabres flashing,

Beating their drums...—

recited the Kobzar musically, accompanying himself on the strings. Beside the minstrel hovered the little orderly, Samiylo, known as Kishka * for his cat-like dexterity, gazing at the blind man without taking his eyes off him.



^{*} A female cat

"Grandpa," he begged, "tell us how you fled from servitude!"

"What is there to tell, lad," answered the Kobzar reluctantly, "I fled..."

"Then what?"

"Well, they chased after me, the devilish Nogais. See, they burned out my eyes."

"Then the Cossacks rescued you?"

"No, I ran away again myself."

"Blind?"

"Of course, nobody loaned me their eyes. I walked across the steppe haphazardly, ate grass, licked the dew, when it fell, for water. I thought I would die. The brothers — thanks to them — found me by the Savur burial mound and took me with them."

Samiylo didn't ask any more questions. He quietly moved away from the fire into darkness and tightly, almost to pain, closed his eyes, trying to imagine how the blind Kobzar walked the steppe.

And suddenly it all faded away in confusion. Only the minstrel continued talking somewhere quite near, in a hoarse, rapid whisper.

"So, my brothers, we stole that bag of powder, hid it among the rusks and waited for the right moment."

"...What was this? What bag?"

The old Hetman opened his eyes. All had been a dream: the Cossacks, the bonfire, the blind Kobzar and even himself as the little orderly.

In the distance the pale glow of lights flickered from Hezlov. The galley was not moving anywhere, but swayed, its timbers creaking, in the harbour, at anchor. The slaves were now asleep, chained to their benches. The descending darkness embraced the moans and cries of their troubled slumber.



Alongside, some stranger was speaking in a quiet, rapid whisper, as if afraid that he wouldn't have time to tell what he wanted to say.

"This must be the new oarsman," recalled Samiylo. "Illyash, the renegade, bought him in the Square of Tears, the slave market in Hezlov, and brought him to the galley as the sun was setting."

The Cossack moved, his chain clanking. The narration broke off. I thin, young face, covered with scars that could be seen even in the miserly light, leaned toward him.

"You aren't sleeping, brother?"

"No, I'm not." Samiylo sat up and straightened himself. "What is this bag you were telling us about?"

Again the oarsman spoke rapidly:

"We stole a bag of powder, I said, and hid it. Now our overseer was not such a hound as yours, though also a renegade, from Ukraine, Mykola by name. He did notice that it wasn't rusks in that bag — but he kept quiet and told no one."

"Ours wouldn't have kept quiet," sighed Musiy Hrach — the Judge of the Sich. He had been taken prisoner at the same time as the Hetman.

"Don't interrupt," said Samiylo. "Go on, my good man! What is your name?"

"Ivan. Ivan Moshkin."

"And where are you from?"

"From the Smolensk district in Russia. The Turks were advancing on the city of Azov there, wanting to take it from the Don Cossacks. But they didn't succeed and lost a lot of men besides. They then retreated below Tsarhorod. The Sultan gave brutal reprisal. He ordered that two of his colonels be hung and had three impaled on stakes. So that our Selim-pasha, for whom we slaved



in servitude, became very frightened and fled from Tsarhorod in his galley into the White Sea. *

"Here Mykola from Ukraine secretly unfetterd me in the night. I took the bag of powder and put it under the tent where the Selim-pasha and his Janizaries were sleeping.

"I set fire to a wick and stuck it into the bag, but the wick was damp and wouldn't burn — just smoked.

"Here the Selim-pasha woke up, looked out of the tent and asked: 'What are you doing here, you dog?!"

"So that's how it was!" sighed Hrach.

"This is it, I thought. I'm lost. But I answered that I wanted a smoke and that was why I had lighted the wick."

"Did he believe you?"

"He was drunk, and he believed me. He went back into the tent to sleep again."

"And you?"

"I stood there as if struck by lightning, knowing not what to do next. But I soon recovered and ran to the stern where Silvestro was sleeping. He was a young lad — Italian or Spanish, I don't know for sure — who was among us. I shook him awake, saying: 'Run Silvestro, quickly, into the galley where the sailors prepare food, there may be a few smouldering coals left. Bring them here, but make sure that no one sees you.'

"Away went my Silvestro. I waited — and here he comes! He had wrapped the smouldering coals in some kind of a kerchief, which was also beginning to smoulder.



^{*} White Sea — Sea of Marmora

"I snatched it from him and into the bag. Then I begged Silvestro to also bring me the Turkish swords—he knew where their arms were kept.

"And again Silvestro obeyed, bringing me twenty swords. I had just distributed them when the explosion came.

"A great fire broke out and the Janizaries fled into the sea.

"But the Selim-pasha wasn't even touched, the deuce take him. Where I got the strength, I don't know. I threw myself at him with my sword — the sparks flew in all directions.

"I knocked his sabre out of his hand, throwing him to the ground, and nearly fell myself. The boys ran up here, and grabbing him by the shoulders and feet, pitched him into the sea.

"But we didn't touch the sailors. For they were brothers, wretched like ourselves.

"The rain came pouring down at that moment, putting the fire out. We hoisted our sails and toward the Spanish land *, the shores of the city of Messina.

"How stupid we were to do this, for they fleeced us in that foreign land, to our very bones, taking our galley and all that was on it and throwing us into prison."

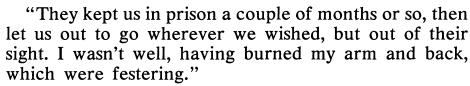
"So that's how it was!.." remarked the silent, to this time, Samiylo, with astonishment. "What for?"

"Because they were frightened. They also have galleys and slaves as well. They were afraid that we might embroil them — that they too might feel the desire to free themselves...



^{*} Spanish land — Italy at that time was under Spanish rule. That is why the narrator calls the Italian shore the Spanish land.





"So where did you go from there?"

"Where else, but home — to Russia! It took us over a year. The lands that we passed through! We were in Rome, in the land of the Kaiser *, in Hungary, in Poland, in Lithuania...

"The Pope, in Rome, called us in: wanted us to take the sacrament and serve him. But we didn't want to do this.

"The Hungarian king and the kaiser also, approached us. We didn't agree to serve them either — we couldn't stamp our customs under our feet.

"We begged for bread as we went — not wishing to die of hunger."



^{*} The land of the Kaiser — Austria

"Well, and how were you greeted by your own countrymen?" asked Samiylo, quietly.

"Our countrymen? Very well," answered the oarsman reluctantly. "As soon as our sovereign, Mikhailo Fedorovich, heard about us, he commanded that we be brought to him.

"He asked us about everything, then called a wise cantor in and told him to write a decree putting us into a monastery for a year."

"What was that for?"

"That we might expiate our sins. We had been, he said, in Turkish servitude, lived intimately with other foreigners, therefore we must have acquired some sins."

"So you were honoured by our sovereign!"

"He also commanded that we be paid five altins * from the treasury, saying that we had freed ourselves without ransom. If that would have had to be paid, it would have been ten..."

"Wait a moment, man!" recalled Musiy. "How is it that you are back here again — out of slavery and into slavery?"

"Well, I escaped to the Don Cossacks out of anger. They were just then preparing for a campaign against Turks. Such is my fortune that I was again captured! Still — if I didn't get lost the first time, I won't get lost the second time!"

"Who is this that won't get lost?" someone asked quickly out of the darkness. "You, you Muscovite?"

Illyash the renegade! He had come up quietly, stealing up like a cat. One sensed, even in the dark, that he was drunk.

He stood there, swaying.



^{*} altin — three kopecks

"Here, my pigeon, you will get lost!" he assured him. "And in vain, for better than you have perished!"

"Why don't you go back where you belong, Illyash?" said Samiylo, coolly. "Why are you picking on the man? It's night — one must get to sleep..."

"Well, maybe I don't want to sleep! Maybe I want to have a little talk!" said Illyash, capriciously. "You know, Samiylo," he suddenly suggested, "how about coming to my place. We'll drink a glass or two, have a chat about the Sich, about Ukraine."

"It's not for you to talk about our land, traitor," Samiylo wanted to say, but kept silent. He wanted to snap back that he wouldn't go — but he didn't do that either.

"How can I go with you," asked he, "when I am fettered to this bench?"

"Wait a moment, wait a moment. I'll unlock the chain," said Illyash, hastily.

And he jingled three huge key rings, looking for the right keys with fumbling fingers.

In the nook where the renegade made his home, a wax candle burned on the table alongside a green, square bottle of strong liquor and a tankard.

"How lean you have become, brother, nothing but skin and bones," remarked Illyash, examining the tall, bony figure of the old Hetman whose head nearly reached the roof, "and your clothes are falling apart, too. But look at that — the belt is whole. How is it that no one has noticed in till now?"

And he stretched out a hand to touch the copperembellished belt with its hooks and pockets, that barely hung about the Hetman's gaunt frame.

"Don't touch it!" Samiylo pushed the band aside. "If it's about my belt that you want to talk, then I'll leave."

"No! No!" cried Illyash in a fright. "Sit at the table



and we'll have a drink together. Here is a biscuit and some mutton — eat!

"It's bad with me, brother, very bad!" he began, pulling his chair closer. "I've broken away from my own, but haven't come close to the Turks, either. It's a bitter life in a foreign land and there's no returning home, to Ukraine. What to do — I can't even think!"

"It's true that you're in a bad way, Illyash," agreed his guest. He took a swallow of liquor and stealthily emptied the rest of the glass under the table. "You cannot go back to Ukraine — there's no getting away from it." He bit into the mutton hungrily, then into the dry biscuit. The food intoxicated him, flowed warmly through his veins.

"Maybe you would now consider adopting Turkish custom, Hetman?" asked Illyash, mournfully. "There is no way that you will be able to return home either. There can be no thought or hope for it!"

"You're telling the truth, Illyash, the solemn truth," agreed Samiylo, continuing to stealthily pour the liquor under the table.

Another glass, then a third was poured. Illyash's eyes had grown quite dim, his tongue barely moved.

"At least you can take pity on me, brother," he blubbered bitterly and leaned drunkenly toward his guest. "I'm like an orphan here with no one to turn to."

"Of course I'll pity you, why shouldn't I?" the Hetman nodded.

When the conniver finally fell face down on the table and began to snore resonantly, like the blacksmith's bellows, Samiylo Kishka laid him out on the narrow cot with its coarse coverlet, removed the three rings of keys from his belt, and blowing out the candle, faded into the darkness.





The chains rattled and the locks clicked throughout the galley. A variety of languages raised a deepening murmur as the slaves unlocked the chains that bound them for each other.

There were no guards. The pasha trusted Illyash and had taken all his Janizaries with him to his betrothal ceremonies. The sailors had also disappeared, most likely gone ashore for some merry-making of their own.

"Wait, brothers, don't rush to throw off your chains," warned Ivan Mashkin.

"I'm afraid we won't be able to swim away. I think that there's the pasha, coming back."

Sure enough, a glimmer of lights showed in the distance, coming nearer and nearer. It was the Hussein-pasha returning with his Janizaries, lighting their way back with torches.

"Don't remove your chains, close the locks!" ordered the old Hetman, and his words echoed across the benches in various tongues. The slaves had learned to understand each other over the years.



"And sit quietly, as though asleep. If they should guess what has happened, all will be lost."

He moved the benches himself — checking the chains and locks and reassuring the slaves, confused by the rapid and unexpected turn of events. Shortly after the whisper of horse's hooves sounded across the sand and the pasha rode up, happy and intoxicated. He must have taken several drinks at the betrothal, breaking with the tradition that didn't allow Moslems to drink liquor. Still, he called out to Illyash asking if all was well on the galley. Though his head was spinning, he remembered to do this. But even a clap of thunder wouldn't have awakened the renegade at this point. He was snoring so loudly that he could be heard on the beach. Swearing roundly, the pasha ordered the Janizaries to inspect the slaves and they, cursing their irrepressible master, separated by twos and began quickly glance over each bench of five oarsmen, lighting their way with their smoking torches.

They were met with snores and sleepy cries. The slaves rubbed their eyes, turning away from the fumes emitted by the torches, which blinded them. Samiylo also rubbed his eyes.

"What are you disturbing people for, breaking their sleep," he growled.

"We're all here, none have been whisked away by magic spirits."

"Quiet, dog!" A devilishly angry Janizary swung out at him. He wanted only one thing also — to get some sleep.

At last the torches were extinguished, the angry, irritated voices died away, and silence fell. Only once in a while, here and there, a quiet sigh or a whisper could be heard. Someone was restlessly waiting — and



finally, unable to wait any longer, arose and asked softly of his neighbours — when?

But the leaders in the first row had already unburdened themselves of their fetters. Samiylo Kishka called out: "Come, get up, it's time!" and was the first to throw himself toward the tent where the Janizaries slept.

With the moon lighting his way, he snatched up a few sabres and muskets that lay at the entrance, turned, and immediately found a dozen eager hands stretched out to receive them.

The padding of bare feet and the shouts of the awakened Janizaries brought a sober Hussein-pasha out of his quarters. The struggle soon spread to all parts of the ship.

More than one slave fell in this battle, his expectations of liberty snuffed out, his hot blood bedewing the floor of the galley. But the pasha and his followers did not fight long — all were killed.

But who was this fleeing from the mutinous oarsmen and falling on his knees before Samiylo with a cry: "Save me, Hetman!" Illyash the renegade, who else?

The angry mob raged around him.

"Don't beg for pity, you executioner! You showed no pity toward us when you beat us! To the mast with him! Into the sea!"

"Oh why are you silent, Samiylo?" the renegade begged breathlessly. "I know where the pasha keeps his money chest, where the powder and weapons are kept! I'll show you everything, tell you everything, just save me, don't let me be killed!"

The old Hetman shook his head.

"You can't buy us with this, you turncoat! However, we won't kill you. Step aside, brothers: we'll take him to trial — at the Sich, in Ukraine."



The traitor stood up, looking around like that wolf at bay — unable to recover from his fear.

"Hoist up the sails, quickly, and get behind the oars," Samiylo Kishka commanded the oarsmen. "Strange, that no one has to this time heard us on the shore. We must sail away immediately."

And he himself ran to the foremast and pulled on the rope. But the canvas didn't open, it was as if something heavy was holding it down.

"What the devil!" The Hetman unrolled the canvas and there, curled up into a ball, someone was lying. "Who on earth? Come, get out!"

A cringing, small figure emerged out of the sail. Tulumbash Alim! He crossed his hands over his chest and bowed his head — waiting for death.

"What are you doing — you fool?" Samiylo put his hand on the boy's skinny shoulder. "As if you were to blame for anything? Don't be afraid! You'll come with us."

The boy was silent — unbelieving.

"You want to be convinced yet," the Hetman asked angrily. "Come, get going on that rope!"

With timid hope Alim lifted his head, looked at the Cossack, and with a flash of teeth, grabbed the rope.

A fresh wind blew up.

Dawn was breaking — there was need to hurry.

Half the men sat down behind the oars, the other half Samiylo ordered to dress in Turkish uniforms. This advice was given by Illyash who walked behind him like his shadow, not leaving him for a moment — afraid of the oarsmen who gazed at him with sullen eyes. The opening sails flapped in the wind — the oars began to move and the galley made its way out to sea.



If a Turkish galley were met — they would not be stopped — there were Turkish sailors on deck, a Turkish flag flew from the mast.

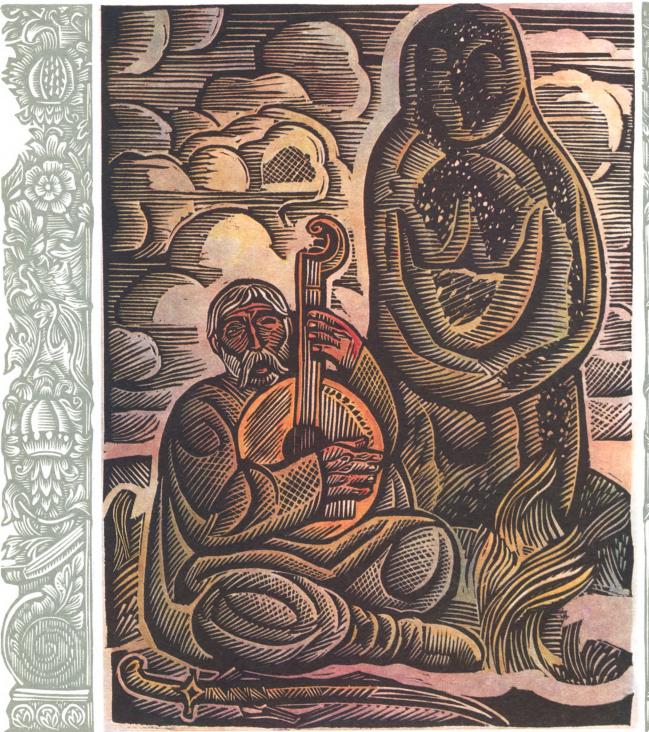
Ah, you beautiful white galley, don't pause in your flight! Carry the slaves to the bright stars, to the quiet waters, to their native shore!

Whether much or little time passed — but the island of Tendra finally appeared like a dream in the distance. The Zaporizhian chaikas * flowed forward to meet them — their riflemen at the ready, their cannon aimed to meet the stranger. It the heat of the moment a shot rang out — a cannon-ball hit the approaching galley knocking out some boards. But Samiylo Kishka emerged on deck drawing a red ensign from beneath his belt and held it high above his head with trembling hands. This is what he had kept hidden all those twenty years of servitude!

The banner with its cross fluttered in the breeze, blowing the wind from the Dnieper in their faces. Greet your sons, ancient Slavutich! ** The Cossacks have returned from bondage!

^{*} chaika — Cossack boat

^{**} Slavutich — old name for the Dnieper River





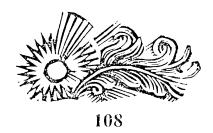
ON A GRAVEMOUND IN THE STEPPE

A salt wind blew out of the Black Sea, danced over the Tatar steppe and the Cossack highways, bending the tall grass which had not yet turned yellow from the heat of the sun. The grass shone silkily, flowing into deep waves. One couldn't even move quickly through its dense entanglements — it was as high as the human chest. It was difficult, in this denseness, to see the pathway; to find the roadway trampled down by horses' hooves. Only someone who had wandered the steppe from childhood could guess where it was.

But who was this traveller walking in the noonday heat, feeling his way along the path with a long staff? There was a pistol in his belt and a bandura hanging from his shoulder. His moustaches, white like milk, hung down to his chest, and instead of a left eye there was a gaping red hollow. An old Kobzar — a Zaporizhian, had taken to the road to somewhere. He was not alone. Following him limped a bay horse, his head bobbing — also old and turning grey. Weariness had overtaken them both. The horse would pause for a moment, take a deep, heavy breath, like a human, or the Kobzar would stop and rest his arms on his staff for a brief respite.

If one could but descend into a shallow ravine and sit a bit in the shade, get a drink of water from a spring,





but nothing like that showed itself. Only a steppe burial mound rose before them. There, in its shade, they would be able to rest a bit.

"You hear, Hnidash, we're nearly there. Limp along old fellow, don't stop now."

The horse took a deep breath. If it wasn't far, then it wasn't far! The Kobzar also sighed, patting the wet, golden neck. All would have been well, but the bay had hurt his leg and limped badly. He had had to get out of the saddle. Whatever you might say, he too, was old and enfeebled — the feet were refusing to carry him. It was as if life had left them already. His head was filled with a droning noise though he had neither had a drink or even a smell of liquor.

"Come, Hnidash, just a bit further!" the old man encouraged, whether for himself or the horse.

The short noontime shadows were already greeting them when they reached the burial mound. A small ravine showed itself a short distance away. Perhaps there was water there? Shortly before, a heavy rain had fallen over the steppe.

Hnidash raised his head and whinnied — yes, there was water! He looked questioningly at his master, then slowly limped to the ravine and began to descend its incline.

The old man, meantime, drank a bit of water out of his flask and then laid himself down on the ground. There was nothing to eat, there was not a crumb in his bag. This is how it always was: sometime, wandering over the steppe, he went hungry for a week at a time. A weakness filled his chest, gripped at his heart and stifled his breath.

Ekh, Kobzar, perhaps you have already sung your

last, reached your end? It seems that it's time for you to prepare for that long journey...

This thought made his heart beat faster, his blood course more quickly through his contracting veins. Away with you, grim Reaper, step aside! Allow me to yet look once more from the burial mound across the steppe, to sing again, if there be strength enough.

Without this, the Kobzar could not leave this world. It wasn't in his character.

Gritting his teeth, the old man raised himself, swaying on his weakened legs. He slung his bandura over his shoulder and stumbling and crawling, climbed his way up the incline toward the top.

What a tall gravemound — when could it have been heaped up to such a height? How strange he remembered, that once, in his youth, he could run up such a hill three times and down, to the delight of his brother Cossacks, without losing his breath. But once — he remembered — he lost his footing and had tumbled helter-skelter down the mound. Here is where he earned himself the nickname Zahreba — Raker — because he had gathered earth coming down, like a biscuit, and these, in the Sich were called zahreby because they were baked buried in hot ashes.

Whether from these reminiscences or his dogged determination, he finally reached the top feeling better.

Sitting down, he leaned against a primitively sculpted stone image of a steppe woman which, no doubt, had stood on this mound at least a thousand years, smiling with her stone mouth, and gave himself up to the pleasure of the hot, fragrant steppe wind fanning his face and chest.



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The steppe shone green right to the horizon, only here and there was it pierced by dark skeins of ravine and valley, dotted by white and yellow islands of ragwort and melilot, whose fragrance carried away up here to the burial mound.

Slowly, his dark thoughts receded. The Kobzar took the bandura off his back and began a quiet song, plucking at the strings with stiff fingers:

Oh the Cossacks, when riding out of Ukraine, Stopped and hobbled their horses in a valley. Hey, then on a burial mound they rested, Lighting and smoking their pipes as they tarried.

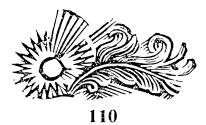
Now how did the rest of it go? Oh yes, something like this:

Hey, they lit up their pipes and were smoking,— Starting a fire across the valley, The children of the nightingales burning. Those that were older — flew out of danger. Those that were younger — burned to a cinder. The mother nightingale flying above, Grieved at the tragedy to those she loved.

Here he recalled that this was the first song he had learned when he went to a Kobzar for lessons. He had been young then — just twenty, or maybe even younger...

When they fought near Perekop, a Tatar had destroyed his eye. He had lain in fever for a whole month, knowing not whether it was day or night, because his other eye was also affected. But he came through it somehow — not totally blind — he could see a bit as though through a fog.

At the time his head was filled with all kinds of desperate thoughts. Why must he continue living, muti-



lated as he was? To whom, in the Sich, was he needed in this state? To sweep the barracks or pasture the horses? But he wasn't even capable of doing this.

He probably would have ended his life, but was saved by an old member of the Sich from a neighbouring garrison, who asked:

"You're worried, my boy? What have you to say about it? Well, now... Can you sing?"

"You can say I sing a little..."

"Fine, follow me!"

He led him, with some difficulty and much complaining, for his feet were bad, to the outskirts of the Sich—the Hasan-Bazaar—where his close friend—the old Kobzar, Danilo, lived in a straw hut near the tavern.

Recollecting, the old man smiled and shook his head. For though the Kobzar Danilo, on hearing of his misfortune, agreed to teach him, he had his own peculiar methods. Stetsko was to know a cane to his back and the bandura to his head if he didn't sing as his teacher wished or if, God forbid, he changed the ballad in any way.

"Ekh, you son of a fiend! Why are you changing this to your own taste? That Kobzar, perhaps, spent sleepless nights, didn't eat or drink, in creating this ballad — so that people would remember. He was giving them the true account of the past, of the olden times! You sing it, I say, the way it is. Don't change a word!"

Very irate was the old man, but thanks to him he learned everything he was able to teach him, and he knew a multitude of songs and ballads. He couldn't even remember where he learned one or another, or which he had composed himself. He sang, travelling with the Sich army or wandering in Ukraine with his bandura.





From the day that he bowed to the feet of grandfather Danilo in thanks for his teaching, hung his own bandura over his shoulder and for the first time since his disability, joined a campaign march with the Sich at least fifty years, more or less, had passed.

Where only hadn't he been! He had sung in the Square of Tears in Hezlov and before the gates of Istanbul, where he conveyed to the Cossack prisoners when their brothers were preparing to free them. He had also walked through golden-domed Kiev and glorious Lviv, and from there into the green Carpathian mountains where be sang to the sheep herdsmen in the mountain meadows.

Accompanying himself on the bandura beside a bonfire, he sang ballads about Father Khmelnitsky, who had frightened the Polish gentry out of their wits by roundly defeating their armies by Zhovti Vody, by Korsun and Pilyavtsi, taking the Polish Crown Hetman, Nikolaj Potocki himself, a prisoner.

"Aya! Aya!" the herdsmen, in wonder, nodded their heads in agreement. They welcomed the Kobzar with unappetizing shepherd's food, like hard sheep's cheese and sour whey. Then, joining hands, they themselves sang Hutsul songs with such resonant voices that the echoes rose high into the hills and frightened the sheep off the meadows beyond finding.

Then the lads sharpened their mountain axes and went off to join Father Khmelnitsky — to help him drive the gentry beyond the Visla.

The Cossack army grew and multiplied. Its victories were even discussed in secret by the browbeaten Polish peasants.

The Kobzar also went into Poland, but with unfortunate results. One of the gentry caught him by his estate, threw him into a cellar and threatened him with hanging

in the morning. But he didn't know this man: the Cossack escaped during the night and what is more, took ten of the man's serfs with him to Ukraine.

The old man sighed. There was a lot that happened, all told... He had also been in Pereyaslav when Khmelnitsky had called together the Great Military Council. Then he had wandered throughout Ukraine telling people what he had seen and heard in Pereyaslav—how the Hetman had come out into the square, and bowing, asked if the Ukrainian people were willing to live together with their Russian brothers forever.

"Willing!" The word had thundered across the square, after which, according to old custom, the caps flew like a cloud into the air. "Willing!"

The old man never stayed long in any one place. Such was his character. Even now, the thought of going to the farmstead of one of his brother Zaporizhians crossed his mind. Many of his old and close friends were spending the closing years of their lives in the steppe. However, nothing might yet come of this idea.

The old wounds made themselves felt; the heart ached and burned. Create, Kobzar, perhaps your last ballad. And the old voice lifted in song, the strings hummed:

Hey, my kobza,
My lifetime companion,
My lovely bandura!
What now shall I do with you?
Burn you in the steppeland
And your ashes throw to the wind?
Or shall I lay you down on this mound?
Here, where the turbulent steppewinds fly
And will pluck at your strings as they go by,
A sad song raising up to the sky.
The travelling Cossacks as they ride

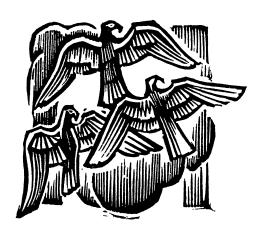


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Will hear your voice when passing by And turn to the gravemound here on high, My bandura!

The horse came out of the ravine and limped toward his master's voice, his ears raised.

The strings of the old bandura sang louder and louder from the burial mound across the steppe. The Kobzar was singing a ballad...



Мария Аркадьевна Пригара КАЗАК ГОЛОТА

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