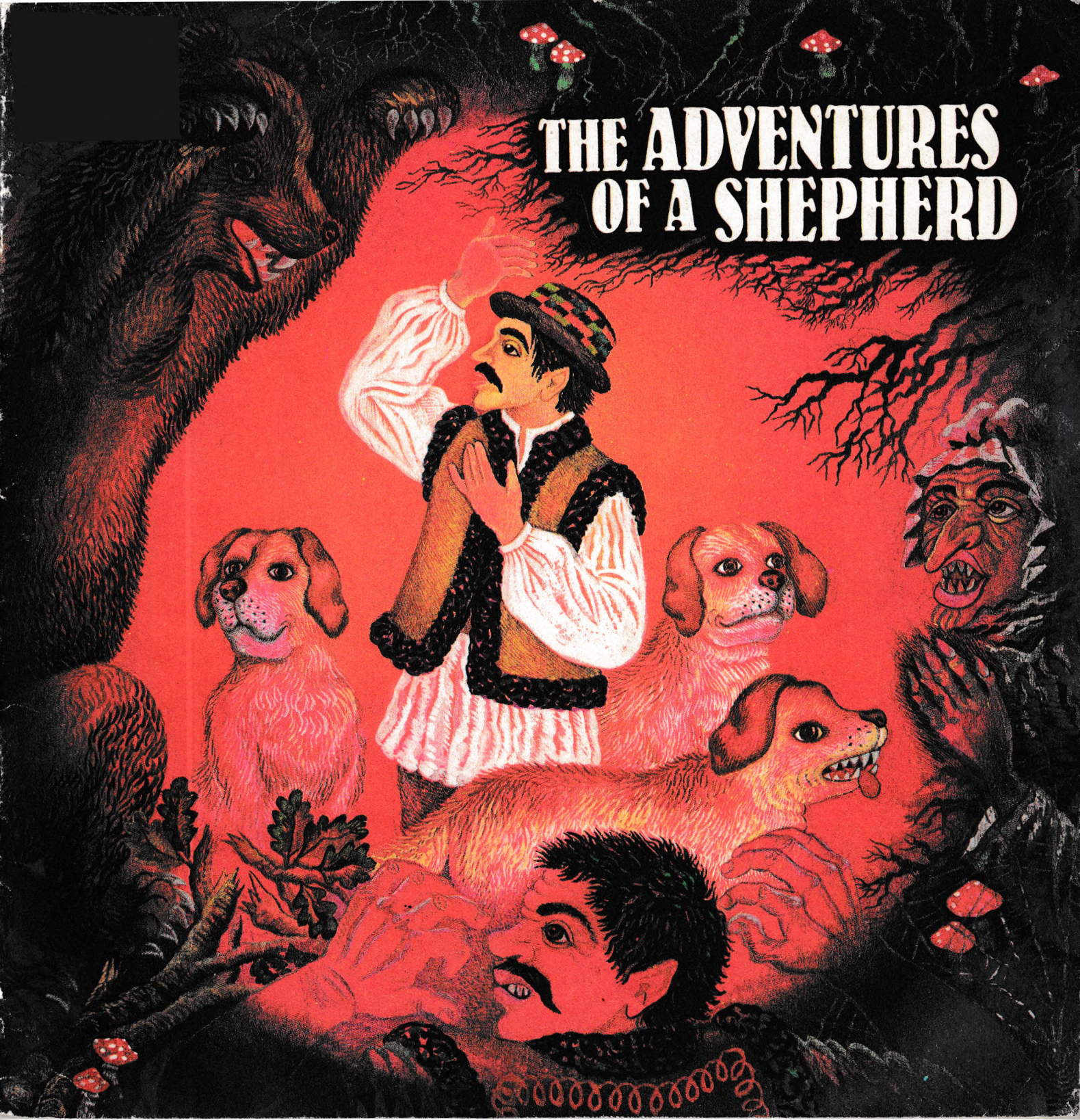


# THE ADVENTURES OF A SHEPHERD



# THE ADVENTURES OF A SHEPHERD

Ukrainian  
Folk Tale

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2

Once upon a time there lived a young shepherd who owned ninety-nine sheep and three rams. They were wonderful rams whose fleece was like gold. Proud of his wealth, the shepherd felt it was time to get married.

However, the summer had been very dry, so the lad could not lay aside enough hay for his flock, and the sheep nearly died in the winter. There was no new grass in the fields yet, and no stored grass in the hayloft either. What was he to do?

When the last hay had been fed to the sheep, the lad let his flock out of the pen. "I'll wander with them until we find a good place where there'll be grass or hay," he thought.

As he drove his sheep on and on, they were getting more and more shaky and dazed.

Once he came across a vast field. There were many haystacks there and also a lake with clear water nearby.

"Of course," thought the shepherd, "this hay is not mine. Most certainly I shouldn't touch it. But it is misery that is making me break the law."

The lad did not think twice. He broke up one haystack, then a second and a third. He fed the sheep, watered them at the lake and lay down on the hay to rest.

Suddenly a giant, as tall as an oak tree, appeared in front of him and asked angrily, "Where have you come from? And how dare you feed my hay to your sheep? I can squash you like a mosquito, if I choose to do so!" He stamped his foot and the earth shook.

Scared out of his wits, the shepherd could hardly speak at all. Then he stammered, "There's a drought in our parts and my sheep nearly starved to death. I have some money and I'm ready to pay you three times the price of your hay."

"I don't want your money. As punishment, you'll slaughter thirty-three of your sheep and a ram, because I haven't as yet had a bite to eat today."

**“Oh, my dear man! Have mercy! They’re my only joy. I’d rather pay you.” But the giant wouldn’t even listen to him. What could the poor lad do? When the enraged monster yelled at him again, the shepherd had to slaughter thirty-three of his sheep and a ram.**

**While he was skinning the animals, the giant fetched a cauldron and some firewood. He made a fire and the shepherd cooked the meat with red pepper. When the meal was ready, the giant began gobbling it down right from the pot. Having polished everything off, he patted himself on the stomach happily and left without as much as a “thank you”.**

**“Well, I’ve paid dearly for those three haystacks,” said the lad to himself.**

**He thought of running away with the remaining flock, but he was afraid that his sheep would starve to death on the way.**

**“It’s all the same. I’ll stay here come what may. I hope the devil won’t send the giant twice to the same place,” thought the lad.**

**He scattered yet another stack and went to sleep. Early in the morning he fed and watered his sheep, wondering what was going to happen to him now.**

**It was long before midday when the lad saw the giant approaching and heard him shout from afar, “You’re still here! Slaughter thirty-three sheep and a ram right away, or you’ll die a dreadful death.”**

**What could the poor shepherd do? He killed thirty-three more sheep and another ram.**

**The giant devoured all of them and went away.**

**“I’ve lost two-thirds of my flock within such a short time,” thought the lad. “They say that if you lose your cow there’s no sense in trying to save you calf. If I leave here, my sheep will die of hunger anyway.”**

**And he scattered yet another stack.**

**He slept the night away, and on the next day, just before noon, the giant hollered from afar, “Hey, boy, are those sheep still alive? I want them all killed because I’m starved!”**

**The shepherd, unable even to think of losing his whole flock, pleaded, “Pray, save these thirty-four for breeding!”**

**However, he had to slaughter the rest of his sheep and the remaining ram. Then he cut the meat and began boiling it.**

**Meanwhile, the giant stretched out by the fire and yawned. “I’ll take a nap,” he said, “and you keep an eye on the meat so it won’t get burnt.”**

**A few minutes later he was snoring his head off.**





As the shepherd was stirring the meat, he suddenly made up his mind, "I've lost almost all my sheep to this monster, but at least he won't gorge himself on these last ones!"

When the cauldron was bubbling away, the lad scooped up the boiling broth and — splash! — emptied the ladle into the giant's eyes.

The blinded giant howled with pain and jumped to his feet. He groped around trying to seize the shepherd, but the boy did not stay in one place either.

The giant rushed here and there following the lad's voice, but without success.

Then he tried to cajole the shepherd into coming closer. "Have no fear, my lad, I won't do you any harm. I did you a great wrong as it is. But I have some money in my pocket, and if you come closer you can take as much as I owe you for the sheep I've eaten."

"Smart fellow, aren't you?" said the shepherd. "You won't deceive me, oh no! You've eaten up all my sheep, and now you want to kill me. But I'm no fool. All the fools have gotten married, while I'm still single." He leapt aside where the blind giant could not reach him

and watched the huge man groping in vain.

The giant continued grabbing at the air for some time, but then realized that nothing would come of it. "All right, laddy," he said. "I see that I can't outwit you. But still I want to reward you. I'll give you a gold ring for the sheep you've lost. It's a valuable thing, so you can buy some sheep with it."

6 "I won't come near you," answered the shepherd. "You can throw me the ring if you want to."

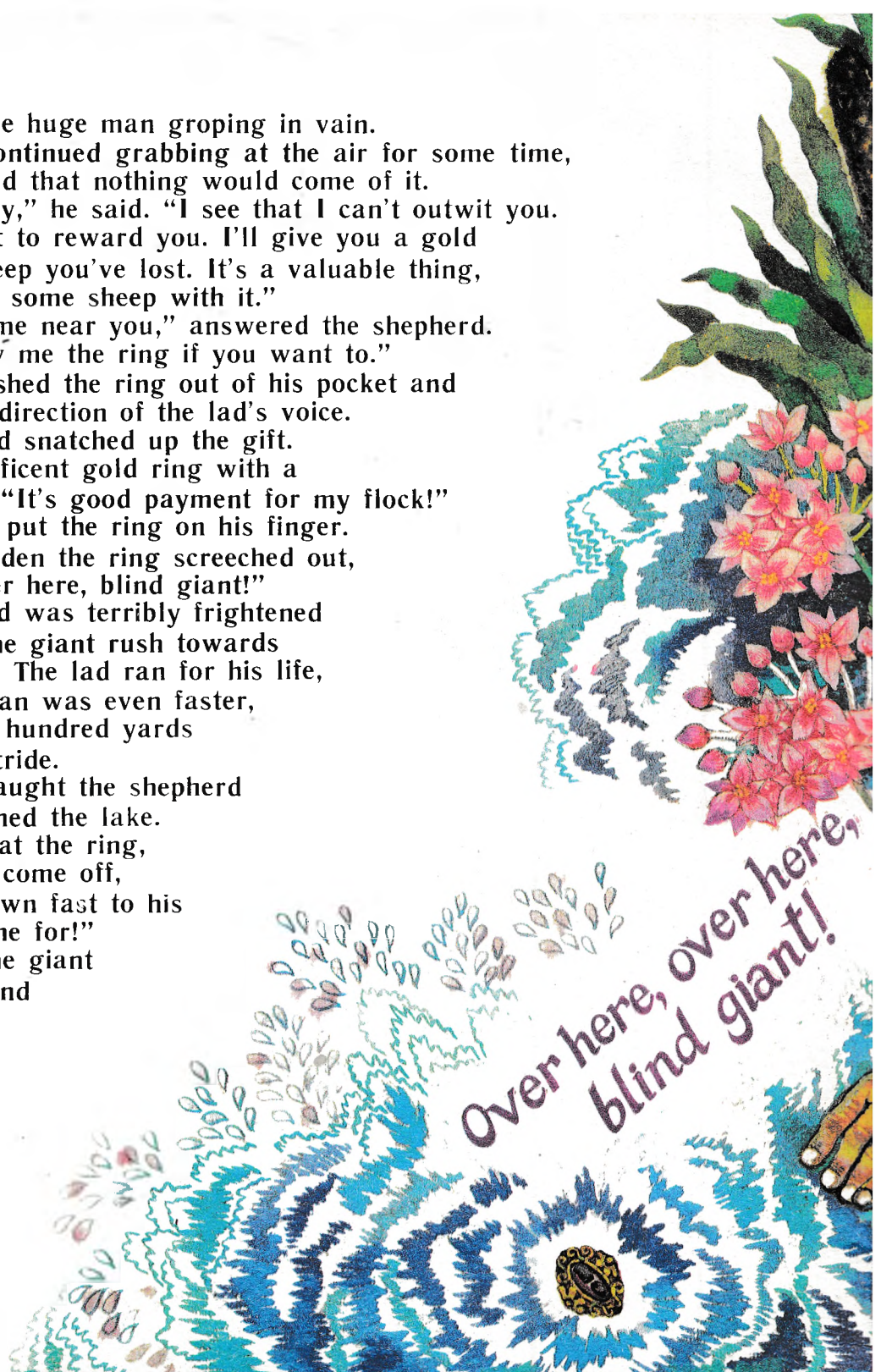
The giant fished the ring out of his pocket and threw it in the direction of the lad's voice.

The shepherd snatched up the gift. It was a magnificent gold ring with a precious stone. "It's good payment for my flock!" he thought and put the ring on his finger.

All of a sudden the ring screeched out, "Over here, over here, blind giant!"

The shepherd was terribly frightened when he saw the giant rush towards the crying ring. The lad ran for his life, but the huge man was even faster, making a good hundred yards with just one stride.

He nearly caught the shepherd when they reached the lake. The lad pulled at the ring, but it wouldn't come off, as if it had grown fast to his finger. "I'm done for!" he thought. "The giant will catch me and squash me like a fly!"







The shepherd whipped a knife out of his pocket, cut off his finger with the ring on it and hurled it into the lake.

The ring was not silent even in the water, calling loudly, "Over here, over here, blind giant!"

The huge man followed the voice and went splash into the lake. There were only bubbles to be seen where he had disappeared. And that was the end of the giant.

The shepherd heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, it seems I've pulled through somehow!"

But what was he to do now? He owned nothing but his sorry rags.

"Why worry?" he thought. "I'm young and strong, I'll manage somehow." And he went to look for a job.

He walked and he walked until he reached a dense forest. "If I get through to the other side of this forest," he thought, "I may find people there. They will certainly help me."

As he came to the middle of the forest, he stopped to take a look about. Suddenly a bear appeared in front of him from nowhere.

"Aha! Now I've got you, you cursed villain! I want you to know that the giant you killed happened to be my brother. I would strangle you here and now, but would that be a good enough punishment for you? No, I want you to suffer before I finish you off. Go on living for a while. But don't you dare to get married! The moment you do will be your last one." With that the bear turned round and went away.

Meanwhile, the shepherd pulled himself together and said, "Just my luck! My flock is gone, and now I can't even have a wife. I did tell him that only fools got married, but still a man must have a family."

The unhappy lad trudged on and on until he finally found himself on the edge of the forest and saw a village in front of him. "I'll knock on the first door," he thought. "They might have a job for me."

The shepherd opened the first door he came across and bowed. "Good day!"

"God day, lad!" answered a woman and a girl.

"Do you have a job for me by any chance?"

They sized him up and said, "Yes, we do. Our father has died, and there's much work to be done. We just can't manage alone. Work for us and you'll earn good money."

So the lad hired himself out. He worked for a year, then for another year.

They treated him well and payed fairly. He accepted the offer to work on for a third year. By that time he fell in love with the girl and wouldn't even think of quitting his job. The girl's mother had nothing against their marriage either, as the lad was handsome and strong, hard-working and clever. The girl also took to the shepherd and soon betrothed herself to him.

The lad was so deeply in love that he completely forgot that his marriage was to bring his life to an end.

The wedding day came. The guests were eating, drinking and making merr-y. About midday the couple were ready for the marriage ceremony. The wedding procession was about to enter the church when the people heard a terrible noise coming from the forest. They turned round in horror and saw an enormous bear rushing towards them.

The lad recognized the bear at once. He turned to his bride and said, "I must run away, my dear."

The puzzled girl wouldn't let him go, but the lad tore himself away from her. "Take care of yourself," he said hurriedly. "I may come back some day, but I may also die." With these words he took out his handkerchief and tore it into two pieces. Then he gave one to the girl and kept the other.

The girl pulled off her ring, broke it into two halves and handed one to her bridegroom. "This is for you to remember me," she said.

The shepherd took his half of the ring and dashed away, because the bear was quite near. As he ran, he heard the angry beast roaring behind him, "You didn't do as I told you! You won't escape my hug now!"

The wedding party broke off, but the girl pledged that she would wait to marry her beloved shepherd.

Meanwhile, the lad ran for his life up hill and down dale until he found himself before a hut standing in a gloomy forest. An old woman was sitting in front of the hut, basking in the sun. She was so old that you couldn't count the wrinkles on her face.

"Good day, granny!"

"Good day, my boy! What are you doing in these parts? Even birds never fly this far."

The lad told her about his ill adventure and then asked, "Can you tell me what I should do now?"

"I heard stories about a bear doing a lot of harm to people when I was still a young woman. I really can't help you in any way. But you know what? The

bear is still far away. Stay here for the night and early in the morning I'll give you a ring. You'll go to my elder sister's place, which is a three-days and three nights' walk from here, and you'll show her this ring. Perhaps she will give you the advice you need."

The shepherd passed the night in the old woman's hut. Early in the morning he thanked her for the ring and set off.

It really took him three days and three nights to get to the hut which belonged to another old woman, so old that she could hardly raise her eyelids.

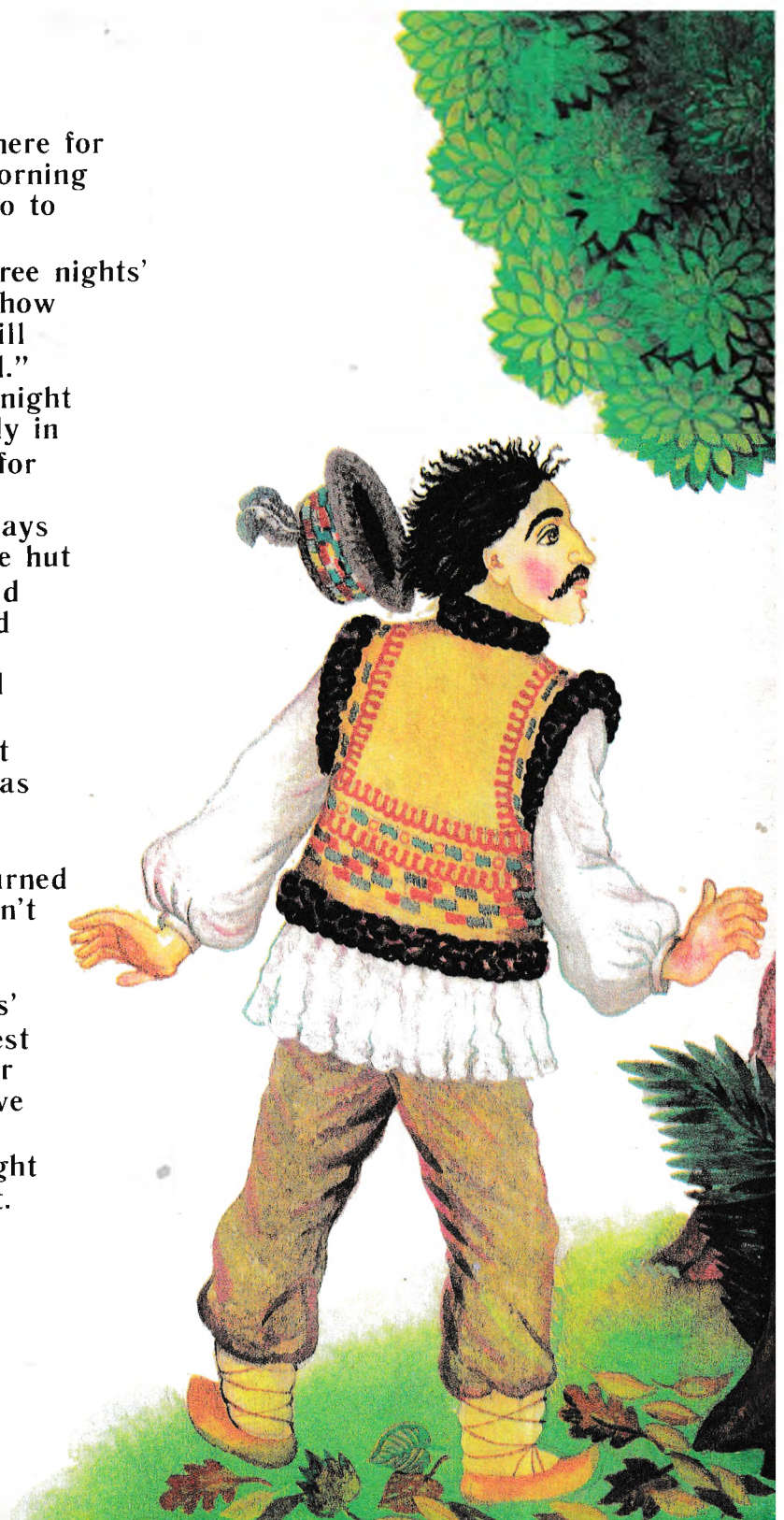
"Good day, granny!" said the shepherd.

"Good day, my son! What brought you here? No bird has ever flown this far."

He told the woman what troubled him, but she also turned out to be of little help. "I can't help you, I can't," she said.

"But I'll give you a ring. A three-days and three-nights' walk will get you to my oldest sister's place. You'll show her the ring and maybe she'll give you counsel."

The shepherd slept the night away in the old woman's hut. When morning came,





he thanked her for the ring and set off on his journey again.

In three days and three nights the lad reached the third hut, where yet another old woman lived. She was so old that she had to lift her eyelids with her hands and could hardly hear at all.

12

“Good day, granny!” the shepherd shouted into her ear.

“Good day, my son! How did you get here? No bird has ever flown this far.”

The lad told her his story and showed her the rings.

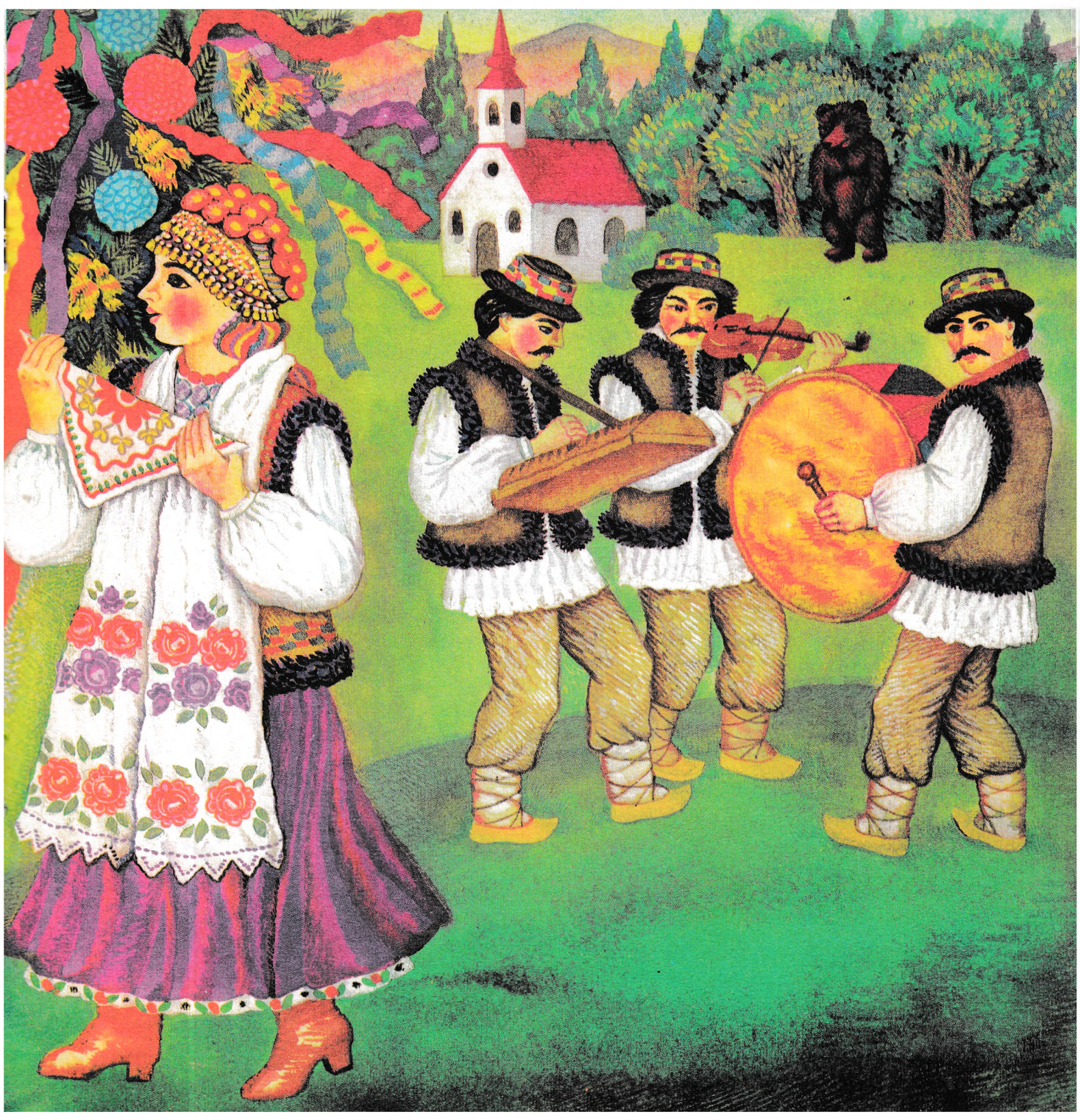
“Oh, so it’s my sisters that sent you here. You seem to be having real trouble with that bear. All right, go to bed and have a rest. I’ll tell you what to do in the morning.”

The lad had supper and went to bed. When he woke up, the old woman explained to him what he should do.

“I’ll give you one more ring, my son. You’ll walk seven miles through this thick forest until you come to a crossroads. You’ll see a hillock there. Put your rings on it, then lie down and pass the night there. At dawn the rings will turn into three dogs.

As long as these dogs are at your side, have no fear





of the bear. And then . . . well, then everything's going to be decided by your fate."

The lad thanked the old woman for her advice and went away.

It was getting dark when the shepherd reached the crossroads and the hillock. He put the rings on the hillock, lay down and went to sleep.

He woke up in the morning, and fear gripped him as he looked around. Three huge dogs were sitting by his side, and they looked more like lions. They were really frightful, those dogs!

14

Here the shepherd remembered what the old woman had told him as he left her place. "You won't be able to tell one dog from the other, because they'll all look alike. You'll know which is which by calling out their names. One will be Sharp Ear, another Sharp Eye, and the third Iron Grip."

"Sharp Ear!" cried out the shepherd springing to his feet.

One of the three beasts started up, ran over to the lad and began fawning on him. The shepherd looked him over to remember the dog well.

"Sharp Eye!" he called then.

Another dog trotted up to the lad. Now only Iron Grip remained standing on the hillock. In this way the shepherd remembered all three of them.

They went on together, the dogs always keeping close to their master.

Not far from the edge of the forest they caught sight of a house. "I'll go in," the lad thought, "because my dogs are hungry and I could do with some food too."

He opened the door and saw a hag sitting and looking gloomily at him.

"Good day!" he bowed.

The hag did not say a word.

"Good day!" he repeated.

The hag kept silent.

"Good day!" he said again.

Only then the hag answered, "Oh, good day, my son. What on earth brought you to our backwoods?" She was really a witch, but she pretended she was glad to see the newcomer.

"I'm looking for a job," answered the lad.

"You see, there's not much work to do here," the witch said slyly. "But if you feel like working, you may stay. You'll take care of the house and every day you'll kill a rabbit for dinner. And don't grumble about your pay."

The shepherd agreed, and the witch gave some food to him and his dogs

and showed them where they were to sleep. She woke them up early in the morning and told them to go to the forest to hunt rabbits.

At midday the lad brought her three rabbits instead of one—each dog had done his bit. The witch cooked a meal, and after dinner the shepherd had nothing to do for the rest of the day.

Thus day passed after day, and each time the lad went to bed his dogs slept at his side. He did not even suspect that the evil witch planned to kill him every night, but couldn't do so because of the dogs.

Once, when the shepherd and his dogs were away hunting in the forest, the bear called on the witch.

“Where have you been so long?” she asked.

“I've been trotting around the world, looking for the lad that killed my brother. I must find the scoundrel and squash his wretched life out of him.”

“Good grief!” wailed the witch. “So my elder son is dead?”

“He is, Mother. He's rotting in a lake, and it was a shepherd that killed him.” Here he described the lad to the witch.

“You've been looking for him throughout the world, while he lives in your own home!” screamed the witch. “He works for me, but he's guarded by such fierce dogs that I just can't lay my hands on him. We must use a trick to get him, that's the only way.”

Finally they agreed that the bear would ambush the lad from a pit, which he would dig out by the threshold. Coming back from the hunt, the shepherd would leave his dogs in the yard, and then the bear would jump out of his hiding-place and grab the lad as soon as he crossed the threshold.

So the bear dug out a pit and hid there, while the witch covered it over.

Meanwhile, the dogs sniffed the bear from afar. Sharp Ear ran ahead, lay down across the pit and wouldn't move from there. The lad wanted to take the rabbits into the house, but the dog blocked his way. The shepherd tried to push Sharp Ear aside, even beat him, but his faithful guard wouldn't budge. So he had to step over the animal to give the witch his prey. Sharp Ear even had his dinner lying across the pit.

At daybreak the shepherd went hunting again. Only then did the dog rise and follow his master.

The bear scrambled out of the pit gasping for air and looking more dead than alive after spending a whole night in his cramped hiding-place.

“We chose the wrong place,” he told his mother.



So they arranged that the bear would hide in the baker's oven and would wait for the shepherd there.

But Sharp Eye upset their appplecart. He ran to the witch's place ahead of his master, leaned against the door of the oven and held it until the next morning. Once again the bear nearly choked in his stuffy hiding-place.

On the third day the witch and her son decided to make a hole inside the oven, right under the hearth, for the bear to hide there. When the lad started roasting the meat, the bear would grab him.

This time it was Iron Grip that ran to the witch's house ahead of his master. First he dipped into a pool of water to get wet and then he ran up to the oven and leaped straight into the blazing fire. The oven caved in under his weight, trapping the unlucky bear, and the fire went out.

When the shepherd entered the house, Iron Grip was lying in the oven, while the witch was bursting with anger.

"I can't stand your dirty dogs anymore!" she screeched. "Look at this one if you please! He has put out the fire and wrecked my oven!"

The lad beat Iron Grip, but the dog wouldn't move from the oven. Finally they had to make a fire out in the yard.

Early in the morning, when the shepherd and his dogs went hunting, the bear and the witch consulted each other about what to do next.

"Hang it all! We can't destroy the enemy even in our own house!" growled the bear furiously.

"Don't do anything on your own, I'll think of another trick myself," said the witch. "You go to the forest now. Tomorrow I'll tell you what to do."

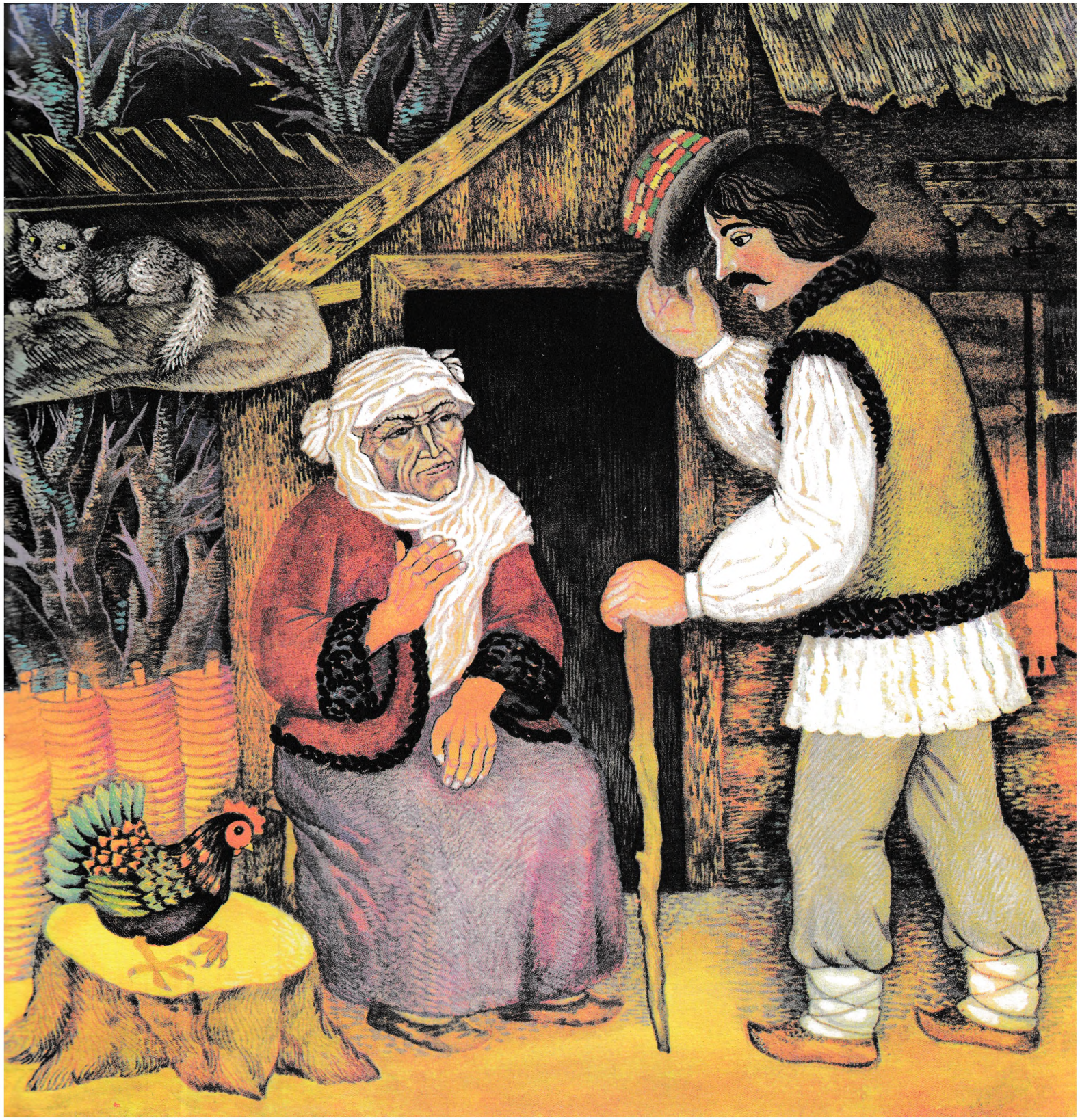
The bear did as he was told.

When the shepherd was about to make for the forest again, the witch said, "You keep wearing out your dogs, my boy. You never let them have a little rest. The sun's scorching today, so wouldn't you rather go alone just for once?"

"You're right, granny," answered the shepherd. "I ought to let them rest for a while. But where can I leave them?"

"Oh, I'll shut them up in the shed and spread some hay there to make it more comfortable for them." She locked the dogs in the shed and the shepherd went hunting on his own.

Meanwhile, the bear hurried to his mother's house. "Run to the forest! And hurry!" screeched the hag. "He's alone there. The dogs are under lock and key. You kill the boy and I'll take care of the dogs."



The bear rushed to the forest. As soon as the lad caught sight of the furious beast, he was seized with terror. He dropped the rabbit he had killed and scrambled up an oak tree.

"Hey, boy!" the bear said roaring with laughter. "There is no escape for you now. Better come down, so I can save myself the trouble of climbing this tree." And he gave the tree such a forceful shake that its roots even creaked.

"I'll climb down, but only if you let me call out three times."

"Oh, is that your last wish? You can call out thirty times for all I care. Your dogs are under lock and key," bellowed the bear and began climbing the oak tree.

"Sharp Ear, heel!" the boy screamed at the top of his voice.

The dog heard the lad's voice. "Brothers, it seems I've heard our master call us."

"Stop talking nonsense! Go back to sleep."

"Sharp Eye!" called the shepherd.

Sharp Eye heard him and said, "Sharp Ear was right, it's our master calling."

"Are you daydreaming or what?" grumbled Iron Grip.

"Iron Grip! Help!" the shepherd screamed for the third time.

The dogs sprang up. Sharp Ear pushed the iron door, but it didn't move an inch. Sharp Eye tried and the door creaked, but it didn't yield. And then it was Iron Grip's turn. He took a short run and threw his weight against the door. The shed's walls collapsed, to say nothing of the door.

The alarmed witch ran out into the yard, but it was too late. The dogs flew away towards the forest like three swift arrows.

When they reached the oak tree, the bear was almost at the shepherd's feet.

"Sick him!" yelled the lad.

Sharp Ear was the first to jump, but he couldn't get higher than the middle of the tree and only seized a branch. Then Sharp Eye tried to grasp the bear, but it was a near miss.

"I could uproot this tree, but then our master would fall down and get hurt," said Iron Grip and leapt high into the air. He sank his teeth into the bear's hind paw and they both went tumbling down. The other two dogs also rushed at the bear, and they tore him and threw him about until he finally died. The shepherd climbed down the tree and headed for the witch's house, accompanied by his dogs.



The witch was all kindness. "Poor dogs, they must be starving," she said and tried to feed them with poisoned meat. But the dogs only backed off and turned away.

The shepherd understood the witch's wiles. "Well, granny," he said, "you better try a bit of this meat yourself."

The witch uttered some lame excuse, but when the dogs snarled at her she had to obey. She nibbled at the meat and dropped dead.

"Well," said the shepherd, "we've done away with our enemies. It's about time we started for home."

20

He left the evil house and set off.

When he reached the crossroads, the lad thought of taking a rest. He lay down and dozed off. When he woke up his dogs were nowhere to be seen, but instead of them he saw three rings lying on the ground.

The lad picked up the rings and went on. On his way home he didn't forget to call on the sisters who had helped him to get out of trouble.

First he went to see the eldest sister.

"Good day, granny! Thank you very much for your help and for your wise counsel. Here's your ring." And the lad told her about his adventures.



“It all happened as I expected,” said the old woman. “I’m glad your troubles are past. Take this ring as a keepsake and be happy.”

The shepherd bowed low and went on. He also visited her younger sisters, thanked them, and they made him presents of the other two rings.

Finally he came to the village where his bride lived. Three years had passed since he had last been here. It wasn’t that long, but nobody could recognize him, dishevelled and tattered.

To tell the truth, the shepherd preferred not to be recognized. He went into the first house and they gave him something to eat.

“What’s new in your village?” he asked.

“Nothing, except that there’s a wedding. A widow’s marrying off her daughter. The girl is honest and diligent, and he’s a worthy man too. This girl once had a bridegroom but, as bad luck would have it on that day, he had to escape from his own wedding. She waited and waited, but she couldn’t wait all her life.”

“Yes, that’s my sweetheart all right,” thought the shepherd and hurried to where the wedding party was being held. He found the guests eating, drinking and singing, and the musicians working hard. The boy stood at the threshold the way beggars do and looked sadly around. Nobody recognized him.

The happy bride was walking among the guests, inviting them to eat and drink. As she noticed a stranger standing at the threshold, she poured him a glass of wine.

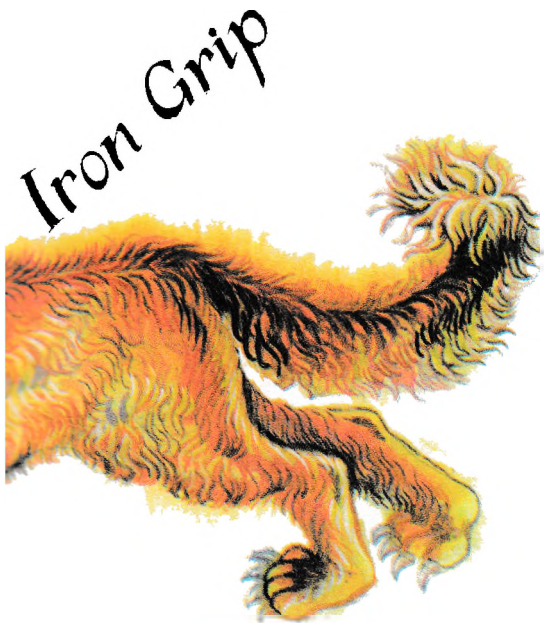
“Today, good man, is a very happy day for me. Please, drink to my health.”

“I’ll drink half of this wine,” said the shepherd, “if you drink the rest.”

“All right, have it your own way,” laughed the bride.

The shepherd emptied half of the glass, then took his half-ring out of his pocket and slipped it into the wine.

As the bride drank up the wine, she was amazed to see a half-ring on the bottom of the glass.



“Tell me, good man, where did you get this from?”

“Oh, this is something you’ll have to guess.”

The girl rushed to another room and found her own half-ring in her chest. She put the two halves together and saw that they fitted. Then she understood who the stranger was, but she was afraid to believe her own eyes.

“I’ve drunk the wine, and now I’ll dry my lips,” the lad said when she came back. And he pulled half of his handkerchief out of his pocket.

The girl recognized the handkerchief. She ran out and returned with the missing half. But still she asked, “Where did you get this handkerchief?”

“The same place you did,” answered the shepherd.

The girl was unable to hold back her joy anymore.

“So it’s you! But I’m marrying another man today... Oh, what shall I do? I would be glad to marry you instead, but I’m afraid that people will blame me for deserting a man on his wedding day.”

“If you really love me, you’ll arrange everything so that people themselves will say that you’re mine and nobody will look down on us,” said the shepherd.

The girl was thoughtful for a while. Then she said, “Wait here. I’ll be back in a minute.”

She returned to her guests. The wedding party was in full swing. Her bridegroom’s and her own relatives and friends were talking lively when they saw the bride reappear in the room. There was an outburst of cheering and everyone proposed a toast.

“To the bride! To the bride!”

The girl raised her glass.

“All right, my dear guests. I’ll drink with you, but first will you please give me a piece of good advice. My mother bought me a nice chest, but somehow I lost the key to it. I had a new key made, and just when it was ready I found the old one, the one that came with the chest. Now, would you tell me which key I should use—the new one, or the one that came with the chest?”

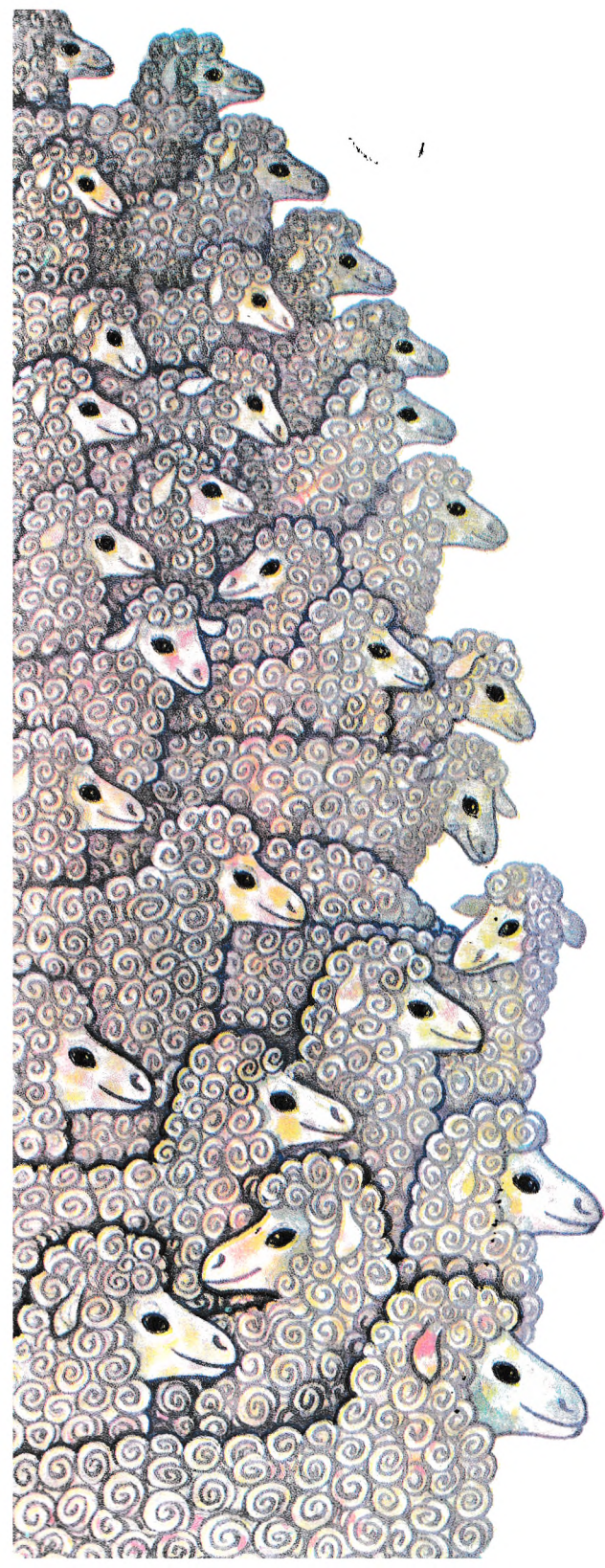
“The one that came with the chest,” said the guests in unison.

“Thanks for your advice,” the bride continued. “As you know, I once had a wedding already. And you also know that my bridegroom had to leave me suddenly. Now he has come back! You yourselves have told me that I should marry my first bridegroom.”

The news threw the guests into confusion. Then a quarrel followed.







But the bride turned to her new bridegroom and said,  
"You'll have to look for another girl."  
The wedding party went on as before, only the  
bridegroom was different.

Time passed.

Once the shepherd and his wife were sitting  
on a bench and remembering the past. He fished  
in his pocket and took out the three rings presented  
to him by the three old women.

"Aren't they marvellous!" his wife exclaimed.

"Would any of them be my size?"

"Why don't you try them on? I'd be only glad  
to make you such a present."

The woman tried to take all three rings  
into her hand at once, but she was rather  
clumsy with excitement and they slipped  
through her fingers. As soon as they  
touched the ground, they turned into  
three rams with golden fleece.

"Why! These are my rams!" the  
shepherd cried out for joy.

No sooner had he uttered these  
words than ninety-nine snow-white  
sheep appeared from nowhere.

The couple lived happily ever after.  
And maybe they still do.



Литературно-художественное произведение

Сказка о пастухе, у которого было девяносто девять овец и три золоторунных барана

Украинская народная сказка

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