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UKRAINIAN FOLK TALE



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The Cossack Mamariha, having spent twenty-five years in service to the wealthy, was given three copper coins in payment. Taking these he set out on the highroad, going wherever fortune took him.

As he walked along he met a young man.

“Good-day to you lad!” he greeted.

“And good-day to you, too!” answered the young man.

“And who might you be?”

“I’m the Cossack Mamariha who served the rich for twenty-five years, earned three copper coins, and am now going wherever fortune takes me. And you?”

“And I,” answered the young man, “served one landlord, and while harvesting grain I found a haircloth pouch, one that always contained food and drink. When the Master found out about it he ordered me beaten and the pouch taken away. But I was able to escape, pouch and all.”

“And where is this pouch?”

“Some highwaymen attacked me in the forest and robbed me of it.”

“Well, let’s go on together, you can be a brother to me.”

So the two went on together. They walked and they walked till they met another young man.

“Good-day to you lad!” they greeted.

“A good day to you also,” he replied. “And who might you be?”

“I’m the Cossack Mamariha, and this is my sworn brother. And you?”

“I,” answered the young man, “was in the service of a rich man, and while cutting wood in the forest I found a pouch of wire mesh in a tree, one that was able to do all kinds of work. When the Master discovered that I had such a pouch he ordered me beaten and the pouch taken away. But I was able to escape and here I am.”

“And where is your pouch?”



“Some highwaymen attacked me in the forest and robbed me.”

“Well, come along with us, you’ll be a brother.”

So they continued on their way till they met a third young man.

“Good-day to you lad!” they greeted.

“A good day to you also,” he replied. “And who might you be?”

“I’m the Cossack Mamariha and these are my sworn brothers. And you?”

“And I,” replied the young man, “was in the service of a rich man, and while pasturing the horses I found a pair of boots in the grove in which one could walk on water. When the Master discovered I had such boots he ordered I be beaten and the boots taken from me. But I ran away.”

“And where are the boots?”

“Highwaymen attacked me in the forest and robbed me.”

“Well, come along with us, you’ll be a brother.”

Now there were four of them. In some places, as they wandered on, people responded to their begging with bread, in others they were able to get food in exchange for work – so it went. At last they came to a crossroads connecting four highways going in different directions. Here the Cossack Mamariha stopped, looked about him, and said:

“Here, my brothers, is where we will part. I have three copper coins which I’ll divide between you and whatever direction each of you choose to take, so you will go. I’ll take the one that’s left.”

He gave each of them a coin, bid them farewell, and so they parted, each following his chosen path.

Left alone, the Cossack Mamariha also went on. He wandered a long time, three years to be exact. One day as he was walking through a dense forest, he came to a large clearing. There, to his surprise, he found four men beating each other up. He went up to them:



“A good day to you, good people,” he said, “and what may you be fighting about?”

And they answered:

“Well, it’s like this. We have this haircloth pouch which always contains food and drink, a wire pouch that can do all kinds of work and a pair of boots in which one can walk on water. We also have a horse named Heaver. One says he will take that, another wants the same thing, so that we can’t divide the stuff nohow, and that’s why we’ve come to blows.”

“Ha!” thought Cossack Mamariha, “This must be the group of highwaymen who robbed my brothers. Well, well, I’ll soon make peace among you!” And he said:

“Would you be willing to listen to me, Cossack Mamariha? I have a splendid plan for dividing your treasures among you!”

“Agreed!” said the highwaymen. “Divide as you see fit, Cossack Mamariha.”

“Well then,” said the Cossack, “place your haircloth pouch, your wire mesh pouch, your boots and your horse Heaver right here beside me in a row. Now all of you go to the other end of the clearing. When I wave my hand you all race back: he who comes first will choose what he wants, the second will do the same, and so on until the last, who will take what is left.”

The four highwaymen trotted off to the end of the clearing and while they were doing this Cossack Mamariha wasted no time. He threw the two pouches over his shoulder, donned the boots and mounted the horse, Heaver.

“Hey Cossack,” said the horse, Heaver, “how do you wish to be carried about – over the bulrushes or above the trees?”

“Above the trees!” said the Cossack Mamariha.

As the horse rose above the forest, the highwaymen realized





what had happened and gave chase. But who could catch up to the whirlwind speed of the horse Heaver?

After the two runaways had put some distance behind them, the Cossack Mamariha began to think: "I must now search for my sworn brothers and return their property to them. I'll give them back their pouches and the boots and keep the horse Heaver for myself." And he started on his journey to seek them out.

For a long time he travelled before he came to a large mansion. While begging for a drink, the master of the house came out and asked:

“Who might you be, and where are you travelling?”

“I’m the Cossack Mamariha,” he replied, “and I’m searching for my sworn brothers.”

The man fell upon him rapturously:

“Why I’m one of your sworn brothers, the one who once found a haircloth pouch and ran away from his landlord!” And he took the Cossack by the hand, led him into the house, and placed food and drink before him.

The Cossack Mamariha then took out the haircloth pouch and handed it to his host.

“No,” said his good friend, “I won’t take the pouch, you keep it for yourself. That copper coin you gave me brought me good fortune. I am now a rich man and live in great comfort.”

The Cossack Mamariha visited with his good friend for some three days, then bidding him farewell he went on – in search of his other two friends.

After some time he came upon an even larger and more prosperous estate. The owner came out and as luck would have it he turned out to be another of his sworn brothers – the one who had found the wire mesh pouch and run away from his landlord. This one also greeted the Cossack Mamariha with great joy and hospitality, refusing to take the wire mesh pouch as well: “I have been very fortunate with the copper coin you gave me and have become a very rich man,” he said. “Please keep the pouch for yourself.”

After a short visit the Cossack went on in search of his third brother. He travelled about for a long time, till he finally came to a very prosperous estate, even wealthier than the first two. The master of the property came out to greet him – and behold, it was the third brother-companion. He too was overjoyed and generous in his hospitality, refusing also to accept the boots from his old friend.











“Your copper coin brought me great fortune,” he said, “so that I do not need the boots. I have no need to walk over water – but they may be of good service to you in your travels.”

The Cossack Mamariha then said goodbye to his third friend and went on with his wanderings about the earth in search of good fortune. He travelled till he became tired, then sitting by the side of the road he would take out the wire mesh pouch and say:

“Little wire mesh pouch, put me up a tent!”

Here the servants would come out of the pouch, quickly put up a tent, and disappear back into it. Then the Cossack Mamariha would pull out his haircloth pouch:

“Little haircloth pouch,” he would say, “bring me something to eat and drink!”

No sooner said than done. A table appeared with food and wine – he could eat and drink his fill. Then he would say:

“Enough, little pouch,” and everything would disappear into its depths as if it had never been.

So the Cossack Mamariha travelled until, travelling, he came to a strange country. Here he heard from the people that there lived a king, and that before his palace grew a mighty oak tree, and that under this tree there lay untold treasure. The king had proclaimed that whoever would cut down this mighty oak, uproot it and get to the treasure, would have his daughter as his wife. But none who had tried so far were successful.

Hearing this, the Cossack Mamariha decided that he would give it a try. He rode up to the palace to announce his arrival and his willingness to fell the oak. The king came out and asked:

“Who are you?”

“I’m the Cossack Mamariha,” he replied, “and I will get the treasure from under the oak for you.”

“Very well,” said the king. “If you cut down the tree and





get the treasure I will give you half of my kingdom and the hand of my daughter in marriage. But if you haven't done it overnight—you'll lose your head in the morning.”

As soon as night fell, the Cossack Mamariha came up to the oak, drew out his wire mesh pouch and ordered it to cut down and uproot the tree, and bring up the treasure. The servants appeared and began their task, while Mamariha lay down on the grass and went to sleep. It was not yet midnight when the task was finished and the treasure laid out, and the servants disappeared back into the pouch.

The king could not sleep, he was so impatient. He rose at

dawn, rushed out on the balcony, and gazed in astonishment. The oak had disappeared, there was only a large hole and all around it were sealed chests full of gold and precious stones – untold wealth.

The Cossack Mamariha woke up and came up to the balcony:

“Here it is Sire,” he said, “all done hours ago.”

“In truth it is,” answered the king. “Take then my daughter in marriage.”

But the princess was capricious and proud and refused to marry him, saying, “Why do I have to marry a common cossack?”

“There’s nothing can be done,” answered the king, “you have to!”

A grand wedding was planned after which the king was prepared to sign the papers giving Cossack Mamariha half of his kingdom. But the cossack refused:

“What is half a kingdom?! Your country is small, either give me the whole of it, or none at all!”

Of course the king refused. “If you don’t want it, that’s your choice,” he said, “but I won’t give you the other half.”

The Cossack Mamariha then led his horse, Heaver, out of the stables and took his wife by the hand.

“Farewell to you!” he said. “If you won’t give me your entire kingdom I’ll go with my wife to another land.”

He seated his wife on the horse and mounted himself.

“How do you wish to go?” asked the horse, Heaver.

“Above the trees!”

Away sped Heaver, so swiftly that clouds of dust rose behind them. They rode one day, then another, till they came to the Black Sea. Over the sea they sped, with only the heavy waves below, when suddenly they came to a rock in the middle of the water. Here Heaver descended for a much-needed rest.



The Cossack Mamariha took out his haircloth pouch and asked for food and drink. A table appeared immediately loaded with delicious fare, the like of which neither the princess nor her father, the king, had even seen in their kingdom. After they had eaten and drank their fill, the table was magically cleared by the servants of the haircloth pouch.

It was now time to rest. The Cossack Mamariha fell into a deep sleep immediately, but not so the princess. She quietly got up, took the two pouches from the Cossack and mounted the horse, Heaver. No sooner she did this, then it asked:

“Where shall I carry you?”

“To my father, the king,” she answered. And away they sped with the swiftness of the wind.

Having had enough sleep, the Cossack Mamariha awoke to find his wife, his horse and both pouches gone. Only the boots were left.

“Ha!” he said, “with the boots here, Cossack Mamariha can still survive!”

He donned the boots and off he went over the waters of the Black Sea. It took him two days to reach the shore. Then he started overland, but by then he was very hungry. He went up to a bush covered with berries. Picking one, he put it in his mouth, and no sooner he did this than a large horn grew out of the side of his head. He ate another – and a second horn grew on the other side.

“Ho-ho!” said the Cossack Mamariha, “how am I to live with these two horns?” But he noticed another bush with berries on it and decided he might as well taste these too. No sooner he ate a couple of these when the two horns vanished, much to his relief. So he picked berries from both bushes and continued his journey to his wife’s kingdom.

Arriving, he disguised himself so he wouldn’t be recognized, and approached the palace.

“Fresh berries!” he shouted outside the balcony.



The princess heard and sent a servant to get some. “Go,” she said, “and see what they are. Ours are still in blossom, so these must be from some other land.”

The servant came out and asked if the berries were good and were they expensive.

“They are expensive and they are good!”

“What are you selling them for?”

“A silver coin for each berry.”

The servant went back to the princess and explained. The princess gave her fifty silver coins and told her to buy some of the berries.

The Cossack Mamariha took the money, gave her the berries, and went away.

The princess could not wait, but popped two of the berries into her mouth at once. Suddenly two horns appeared on her head. She rushed to a mirror – looked – and screamed from fright. The servants rushed in, as did the king, and stared in horror.

“How did this happen? What did you do?” he asked. The princess explained how she had eaten the berries.

“It cannot be that berries could do such a thing! Where are those berries?” he demanded.

He chose two and threw them into his mouth. No sooner he did so than two horns grew out of his head! Frightened and angry, the king gave orders that the man who sold the berries be found. The soldiers searched the city and the kingdom, but to no avail. What to do?

The king called together all his doctors and learned men. They came from the far corners, of the kingdom, but having examined the king and princess, they were unable to do anything. Then the king sent messengers to neighbouring countries offering his kingdom to anyone who would be able to remove the ugly horns. Doctors came from far and wide, but no matter what they did, the horns remained.



The princess wept day and night, the king raged, and the people jeered, saying: "We don't want a king with horns! Of what use is such a king?"

At last the Cossack Mamariha appeared before the king. "A good day to you, Sire," he said. "Perhaps I can help?"

"Ah, my good son-in-law," greeted the king, "I'll give you my entire kingdom if you'll only rid us of these atrocities!"

"Very well!" said the Cossack Mamariha, and handed the king two berries from the second bush. The king no sooner swallowed them than the horns dropped off. When she saw this, the princess wept and begged:

"Dear husband, let me have some too!"

"No," answered the Cossack, "I won't give you any. What have you done with my horse, Heaver?"

"He's alive and well, in the stable. Have pity on me and give me some berries!"

"And the pouches, the haircloth and wire mesh, where are they?"

"They're in my apartments, hanging in the closet, in good condition. Help me!"

"And will you never leave me again?"

"I'll remain with you forever and ever," she vowed.

Only then did the Cossack Mamariha give her one berry – and one of the horns came off. He gave her another and the other dropped off. So the princess became as she had been.

"I hope that this has taught you to respect your husband," cautioned the Cossack Mamariha. And to be sure it did. Such a feasting of food and mead that took place! The king gave the Cossack Mamariha his entire kingdom, and there they all live in happiness and in health to this day, with the haircloth pouch feeding all the hungry and the wire mesh pouch doing all kinds of work.





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