



Panteleimon Kulish

The Black Council

Abridged and translated from Ukrainian
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1

Late in the spring of 1663 two travelers mounted on good horses were approaching Kyiv from the direction of Bilhorod. One was a young Cossack, armed for battle; the other, by his dress and white beard, appeared to be a priest, but by the long sword under his cassock, the pistols at his belt and the long scars on his face, looked like an old Cossack. Their horses were tired, their clothes covered with dust—they had obviously traveled a long way.

Two or three versts from Kyiv they turned left and trotted through a grove of trees along a winding track. Whoever saw them turn that way must have guessed at once where they were going. The winding track led to Khmaryshche, the khutir of Cherevan, one of the wealthy, high-living Cossacks who had grown rich during the ten-year war against the Poles. For about ten years Bohdan Khmelnytsky raided the mighty Poles with his Cossacks. That was when Cherevan grabbed his immense wealth and, after the war, settled down on a khutir near Kyiv.

Evening was approaching. The sun was no longer hot; it was a joy to see it shimmering through the leafy branches, gleaming on the mossy oak trees and the young grass. Birds were singing and calling joyfully in the grove and the earth around was smiling. Yet the travelers were sad. They seemed unlikely guests of the merry Cherevan.

At last they reached Khmaryshche. It nestled among trees enveloping it like clouds. Around it wound a stream graced with reeds and willows. A dike led across the stream to the gate. The gates themselves were made of oak and studded from top to bottom. In those days an enemy might be expected day or night, either a Tatar or a Pole. And so there was a little window in the turret to see if the visitors were welcome or not. A stockade was raised over the entrance and a moat surrounded the entire khutir.

Arriving at the gate, the visitors started to pound the studs with their sabres. An echo resounded in the grove, but no one stirred inside. Soon there was a cough and old, shuffling feet could be heard

climbing up the steps in the turret, accompanied by a muttering.

“The devil take them, what sort of people are they? Coming here from nowhere and rattling on the gates enough to break them down. If only they had come 15 or 20 years ago—the entire Ukraine was as quiet as a bee in the wintertime. Ah, yes! If only the cursed Poles hadn’t stirred the Cossack hornets’ nest, it would still be quiet today. Oh, life was hard under the Poles. But our own folks are losing their heads now, too. Ah, merciful God!”

“That’s Vasyl Nevolnyk,” the priest said. “The same as ever.”

“Who is banging the gates as if they were his own?” asked Vasyl Nevolnyk through the window.

“Don’t ask so many questions,” answered the priest. “You can see we are no Tatars. Let us in.”

“Oh, merciful God,” shrieked Nevolnyk. “That’s colonel Shram from Pavoloch. I don’t know if I should open the gates first or run and tell the master.”

“Open the gates first, then you can run anywhere,” replied Shram.

“True, true, my dear friend,” the old watchman called out. He began to climb down, talking to himself all the time. “A mountain cannot meet a mountain, but a man can meet a man. I never thought my old eyes would see Shram again.”

The gates swung open. Colonel Shram and his son bent down and entered. Vasyl Nevolnyk was beside himself with joy. He embraced Shram’s knees. And then he spoke to the son.

“Merciful God. So this is your Petro. A real eagle among the Cossacks.”

Petro bent down from the saddle and kissed Vasyl Nevolnyk.

“An eagle among the Cossacks,” repeated Nevolnyk. “If only I’d had two boatloads of eagles like that when I was in Turkish captivity! Oh, merciful God! I shall never forget those cursed prison days.”

Indeed, old Vasyl Nevolnyk was so feeble that he looked as if he had just been released from captivity. He was small, stooping, with sunken eyes and lips which never smiled. He wore a blue coat and old baggy cloth trousers which looked as if he had borrowed them.

Petro jumped down and took the reins of his father’s horse.

“Vasyl, take us to the master,” said old Shram. “Where is he? Indoors or in the apiary? He used to be fond of bees, so he may be there.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Nevolnyk. “Cherevan has done well for himself; may he live a long time. He is hardly out of the apiary these days.”

“Well, I suppose he hasn’t forgotten his fellow men? Or perhaps he has turned into an anchorite?”

“No, he hasn’t forgotten his fellow men,” said Nevolnyk. “He couldn’t live here without other people. He’s got guests with him now. You will see who is the guest of honor in Khmaryshche now.”

The old man opened the gate to the apiary and led the way for Shram under a low tree.

Who was this Shram, both priest and colonel?

He was the son of a priest from Pavoloch whose name was Chepurny. He attended the church brotherhood school in Kyiv and became a priest himself. However, when the Cossacks rose under Hetman Ostrianytsia, Shram joined the Cossack host. He, too, was a fiery man and could not sit quietly in his parish while blood was flowing in the war between the Polish overlords and the Ukrainians, between the Catholics and the Greek Orthodox Christians. Poland was then in an upheaval, with any official doing whatever he liked with the unarmed people in the city and the

countryside who could not defend themselves. Polish soldiers used to requisition food and drink in cities and villages, rape and kill defenseless women, make people pull plows across the ice in the middle of winter and let the Jews whip them and sneer at them as they plowed the ice. And the Catholic gentry, with some Ukrainian renegades, tried to force a church union with Rome and called the Orthodox faith a peasant religion. Their churches they rented to the Jews. No one could protest against this humiliation, since the King of Poland himself was in the hands of the senators, landlords and bishops. The Cossack elders took the side of the Polish commander-in-chief and his chieftains and received money from the Poles for recruiting Cossacks. Registered Cossacks were hard up; they were dependent on the Polish starostas and had to work in the houses of the elders. Only 6,000 were left in the registry and even those favored the Poles until the time of Khmelnytsky when, to a man, they rose to free Ukraine. The ordinary folks and their priests took their grievances to the Zaporozhian Cossacks who lived in the distant steppes beyond the Dnieper rapids and who elected their own officers and had nothing to do with the Poles. It was from among the Zaporozhian Cossacks that the Hetmans Taras Triasylo, Pavluk and Ostrianytsia rose with fire and sword against the enemies of their native land.

Under their banners the Ukrainians rose for a time against the Poles who were firmly entrenched in Ukraine and took the upper hand again. But soon a big fire began to blaze in Ukraine, started by Khmelnytsky in Zaporozhe against the Poles. The Polish authorities did all they could to put it out. They barricaded the roads in the steppes so as not to let people flee to Zaporozhe. But it was all in vain. A plowman would leave his horses in the field; a brewer, his barrels of beer; the shoemakers, tailors and blacksmiths, their work; fathers would leave small children; sons, their infirm parents; and everybody made their way secretly at night through the steppes to Khmelnytsky on Zaporozhe. That was when the Cossack glory was born in Ukraine.

Much could be written about Shram's whereabouts at the time between Ostrianytsia and Khmelnytsky. During the winter he lived with the Cossacks in the steppes and took a captive Turkish girl as his bride. He preached the word of God to the Zaporozhians; took part in their military expeditions on land and sea. Several times he faced death and grew so battle-hardened that when Khmelnytsky rose against the Poles, Shram rendered him great assistance. In these battles he received so many scars on his body that the Cossacks started calling him Shram (Scar) and forgot his real name. Under this new name he was registered as a Cossack. In those days when the Cossacks had either to win or lose everything, they were not all known by their real names.

The Khmelnytsky decade passed quickly. Shram's sons grew up and helped their father in military expeditions. Two of them fell at Smolensk and Petro was the only one left. After Khmelnytsky's time the old Shram used his sabre several times. Later, feeling that his strength was ebbing, he resigned as a colonel, became a priest and began to serve God. He sent his son to a military camp and he himself became a devout supporter of the church. "Ukraine," he used to say, "has taught the Poles something; she has expelled their minions, repulsed the union with Rome and has punished the Jews. Now let her live by her own wits."

Yet conditions in Ukraine grew turbulent again. There were many quarrels and the Hetman's mace, the symbol of highest office, became merely a playful stick. The old man's heart bled when he learned of the bloodshed caused by Hetman Vyhovsky and the half-wit Yuras, Khmelnytsky's son, who had succeeded his father as Hetman. He was terrified when the Hetman's mace passed to

Teteria. Whenever Shram prayed or served mass his mind was filled with the terrible thought that the end of his beloved Ukraine had come. Whenever he preached in church he warned the faithful: "See that you are not brought into servitude; take care that you do not fall once again under Polish domination."

When Shram's successor, the colonel of Pavoloch died, the Cossack council gathered to elect a new colonel. Shram, in his priestly habit, came to them and said: "My children, a terrible hour is approaching. The Lord is about to try us again with fire and sword. We need a colonel who will know a fox from a wolf. I served you under Khmelnytsky and I am ready to serve you again should you elect me."

The council received this offer with great joy. In approval, Shram was covered with Cossack caps and military banners. He was given the seal of office, cannons were fired and Shram the priest became a colonel.

Teteria did not like the news of Shram's election. But he could not countermand it since the will of the Cossack council was supreme. And so Teteria sent a charter to Shram confirming him in his new office. They both exchanged gifts and pleasantries while secretly each watched the other's step.

Shram thought a great deal about ways to save Ukraine. So he spread the rumor that he was not well. He gave his seal of office to his deputy, Hulak, and he himself departed with his son ostensibly to take a cure, but in fact on a very definite mission about which we shall soon hear.

2

Shram walked quickly into the apiary, forgetting to say a prayer to St. Zosim, the protector of bees. Suddenly he heard music.

"Is someone playing the bandura?" he asked.

"Yes, someone is," answered Vasyl Nevolnyk. "And you'll never guess who it is."

"Is it the holy man himself?" asked Shram.

"No one else can play the bandura so well. A minstrel like that is unique among the Cossacks."

As they walked they listened to the strains of the bandura. It sounded far away and soon was accompanied by chanting. At last Shram saw Cherevan and the holy man sitting down on the grass under a lime tree where a repast was laid. The old minstrel was known far and wide as a holy man. He was blind yet walked unaccompanied, in a patched coat, without any shoes, his pockets full of money. What did he do with it? Most of it he used to ransom Cossacks from Turkish captivity. He was, besides, a famous healer who knew how to cure any wounds. With his prayers and songs he encouraged the ailing. But his songs were indeed wondrous to hear. The Cossacks respected him for all this and treated him like a father. They would give him their very last piece of clothing should he ask it to ransom a captive.

At this moment he began a sad *duma* about Khmelnytsky's death.

"Sad sorrow spread over all Ukraine ..."

Some Cossacks would weep listening to this *duma*, but Cherevan only rocked, stroking his paunch and his full cheeks. In fact, he was laughing, for that was his temperament.

Colonel Shram, concealed behind a tree, looked at them both. It had been a long time since he had seen his merry friend. He had changed little; only his bald pate shone brighter than ever. The holy man's long beard, reaching to his belt, was whiter. The old minstrel's face was radiant and as

he sang he raised his eyes as if to see things ordinary mortals could not with open eyes.

Shram listened to the music for a while and then stepped out of the tree's shadow and faced Cherevan who immediately rose and greeted him effusively.

"Bhoter (he could not pronounce the 'r')—is that you or your soul which has flown here to listen to the holy man?"

Cherevan embraced Shram and kissed him on both cheeks as if he were his own brother. The holy man stretched out his hands as soon as he heard Shram's voice. He smiled with joy.

"Good health to you, colonel," he said, "we heard how you have followed God's will and turned Cossack again."

Vasyl Nevolnyk saw all this, smiled happily and shook his head.

"Merciful God," he said, "it's good that there are such men in the world."

"What has brought you here?" asked Cherevan. Shram answered that he wanted to join a pilgrimage to Kyiv.

"Where did you come from, old man?" Shram asked the holy man.

"I have but one way in this world," he answered. "Blessed be the merciful, for they will be saved."

"Yes, my father, my benefactor," Vasyl Nevolnyk interrupted him. "May God have mercy upon you, as you had upon me. For three years I was languishing in Turkish captivity, on their cursed galleons. I almost gave up hope of seeing my native shore. But you came with a ransom of a hundred gold pieces, which you collected with your songs. And here I am among Christian folk, listening again to the Cossack tongue."

"Don't thank me for it, Vasyl," said the holy man. "Thank God and the one who offered a hundred gold pieces out of his pocket."

"I have thanked them already," said Vasyl Nevolnyk. "The monks offered to receive me into a monastery because I have a little learning. The Cossacks called me too, since I know the Dnieper's mouth like my own fingertips. The Zaporozhians wanted me, as well, when I passed their stronghold on the way from captivity. But I pledged myself to serve the one who freed me from the Turkish land. I wouldn't mind being his swineherd just to be able to repay him somehow." While Vasyl Nevolnyk was talking, Cherevan listened and smiled.

"Whatever are you talking about, bhoter? As if 100 gold pieces was something unheard of in this world. After the battles of Pyliavtsi and Zbarazh the Cossacks carried away gold pieces by the sackful. Now, let us sit down, my dear guests, and drink to colonel Shram's health."

They emptied their glasses. Then Shram began asking:

"Tell us, holy man, you go everywhere and listen to all the gossip. Have you heard what is happening beyond the Dnieper?"

"Something is happening," sighed the holy man, "it would be better not to talk about it. On this side of the Dnieper Teteria is in great trouble, but beyond the Dnieper it is even worse. There is no order among the Cossacks."

"What about the Cossack elders and the Hetman?"

"There are too many elders and nobody is listening to them."

"Why is that? What about Somko?"

"Well, although he is the wisest and bravest of them all, they won't let him be a Hetman."

“Why?”

“Because the devil himself has confounded Vasiuta, the Nizhen colonel. Although his hair is gray like mine, he is not satisfied with being a colonel but wants to be a Hetman. Many Cossacks are supporting him. And the Muscovite boyars whose favor he has gained, are on his side. Somko, on the other hand, seeks no favors from anyone. And so the Cossacks are divided. Whenever they meet, in a tavern, or on the road, they start to argue: What side are you on? And on whose side are you, Vasiuta’s or Somko’s? Off with you, the boyars’ favorite! Be gone, cronies of the Pereiaslav merchant (that’s a reference to Somko who has some businesses in Pereiaslav). And soon they start fighting.”

Listening to all this Shram bowed his head sadly.

“Wait a moment,” he said, “but Somko was elected Hetman by the council at Kozelets.”

“Unanimously, and the reverend Metodiy was there to administer the oath. But Somko was naive enough to forget that the reverend gentleman was anxious to make some profit out of the ceremony. Vasiuta, who learned these tricks from the Poles, realized this, bribed the reverend gentleman and made him send a letter to Moscow demanding a new election. Apparently the Kozelets council was not properly convened and should have included the Zaporozhians. The fact was that Vasiuta wanted to become Hetman. The Zaporozhians in the meantime elected Briukhovetsky as their own Hetman.”

“Which Briukhovetsky?” called out Shram. “What sort of news is this?”

“News you will not believe when you hear it. Do you know Ivanets?”

“Indeed. Who would not know Khmelnytsky’s servant?”

“Did you hear how Somko humiliated him?”

“Yes, we have heard,” said Shram, “so what does it signify?”

“Somko called Ivanets a pig,” added Cherevan.

“Not a pig, but a dog, an old dog. This he did in front of the general council of officers and the Hetman himself.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” laughed Cherevan, “well done.”

“Not so well done, after all,” said the holy man. “Although Ivanets was not a distinguished Cossack, Khmelnytsky loved him for his loyal service. Those who lived near the Hetman would sometimes hear him say kind words about Ivanets. Even to his son Yuri, the Hetman used to say ‘Take Ivanets’ advice when I am no longer here. He won’t deceive you.’ And this is what Yuri did—he listened to Ivanets whose words were gold to him. Somko, as you know, was Yuri’s uncle since Khmelnytsky’s first wife was his sister Hanna. And so he did not like Khmelnytsky’s old servant to have so much influence over his nephew. On one occasion, when a Hetman’s council gathered at Yuri’s place, Ivanets stayed there as if he were one of them. Somko, who as you know has a fiery temperament, flared up and pointed out to Yuri that, as he put it, ‘the old dog’ should not be present. This is what he called Ivanets. I heard it with my own ears since I was there. Later, at night, they caught Ivanets with a knife near Somko’s bed. He was tried by the military court and sentenced to be beheaded. But Somko intervened and instead had Ivanets paraded riding on a pig across the town of Hadiach.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” roared Cherevan. “Served him right.” Shram listened to all this and said: “Yes, we know all this.”

“But do you know,” asked the minstrel, “what Ivanets did after that?”

“What could he do, bhoter?” asked Cherevan. “If I were he, I would not know what to do after such a humiliation. What do you say, Vasyl?”

Vasyl Nevolnyk silently shook his head.

“I’ll tell you what Ivanets did,” the holy man began again. “It seemed as if the devil himself had possessed him. He started collecting money, influencing people and asked the Hetman for an appointment. He was made a standard-bearer. When Yuri ceased to be Hetman and went to a monastery, Ivanets, who had the keys to the Hetman’s treasury, stole a great deal of silver and escaped to the Zaporozhe. There he bribed the Cossacks who began to support him and call him Ivan Martynovych. He, the scoundrel, was only too ready to be friendly with them and to drink with them.”

“Well, what about it?” asked Shram gloomily.

“Well, the Zaporozhians liked him so well they chose him as their commander.”

“Who, Ivanets?” they all called out in surprise.

“Now he is no longer called Ivanets,” added the holy man. “Now he is Ivan Martynovych Briukhovetsky.”

“Heavens above,” exclaimed Shram. “So the Zaporozhians elected him their Hetman?”

“Yes, they did.”

“Merciful God,” said Vasyl Nevolnyk, “the glory of Zaporozhe will soon be over if they have a Hetman like that.”

Cherevan only laughed:

“Ha, ha, ha. This is a joke, bhoters. You couldn’t imagine anything funnier.”

“My dear brethren,” said colonel Shram, “my heart is heavy. I can no longer keep my secret from you. I am not going to Kyiv, but to see Hetman Somko in Pereiaslav. I fear that Ukraine has been torn asunder. One half, with the help of the Polish minion Teteria, the Poles will soon seize in their hands. The other half seems not to know what it wants. I thought that Somko was secure in his office and I know he is a good and honest Cossack. I wanted to persuade him to strike Teteria down and unite all Ukraine under one mace. Now you, holy man, have created grave doubts in my heart, but perhaps it is not too late. Let us go to the other bank of the Dnieper. You, holy man, are loved and honored by the Cossacks.”

“No, my, lord, I must not get involved in these quarrels,” the minstrel interrupted him.

“It is not for us to know this or to meddle in these affairs; Our task is to pray to God To glorify our Saviour ...”

“I hate to see this vanity which has spread throughout the Hetman state. Even distinguished Cossacks have started to live like the Poles, in luxury. Now they do not wish to listen to ancient songs which the common people like to sing to God’s glory. Now these Cossacks have hired musicians who can play only dance music. I cannot bear this. Yet we blind minstrels still chant our songs to them and play on our banduras. They no longer fear God. In any case, we cannot see anything; we are deprived of this world, so why should we be tempted into sin? When you are blind, sing to the good people and do not offend God. Sing so that people feel better in their hearts.”

“Bhoters,” said Cherevan, “I am happy in my heart. Let us go inside. There we shall see such varenyky that all sorrows will leave our hearts. Enough talk about grief. I am happy that God has sent

me such visitors, and all you can do is grieve. Do not spoil the visit and forget your dark thoughts if only for one night.”

He led his guests into the house. Shram walked behind him, shaking his head. Vasyl Nevolnyk was also sad. Only the holy man was serene, as if his soul lived not here on earth but in heaven.

3

Cherevan looked into the room where bread was baking. Petro Shram had been sitting there for some time talking to Cherevan's wife and daughter Lesia.

“So,” exclaimed Cherevan, “you have brought us a suitor. See how merry they are, not like us. They chirp like sparrows. Oh, how good it must be to be young. Vasyl, lead the guests into the main room. I must greet young Shram.”

Cherevan's main room was the kind that may still be seen today in wealthy Cossack houses. His father or grandfather must have built it. Above were oak beams, carved with sayings from the Scriptures. The name of the builder and the date were there too. Benches made of lindenwood, comfortable, with back supports, were covered with kylyms. In the middle stood a table and icons, surrounded by embroidered towels, were in the corner, as you may still find them today. Only one unusual item which cannot be seen nowadays adorned Cherevan's main room. There were shelves running along the walls, full of silver, golden and crystal cups, flasks, bottles, trays and all kinds of china seized in the wars. Whenever the Cossacks burned Polish manor houses and princely castles they first carried out the contents by the sackful. The Lord was good to the Cossacks who avenged themselves on the proud Polish nobles, whose cups now adorned Cossack homes while their former owners were either in Turkish captivity or had fallen on the field of battle. On the walls, too, were Polish sabres, ancient Tatar quivers, gold-embroidered horse-plates, German muskets and armored vests and helmets to protect against enemy blows. Yet none of these much helped the Poles who were hated by the common people. So now all these bows and sabres and arms shone in Cherevan's room and elsewhere, and gladdened Cossack eyes.

However, Petro Shram was enjoying himself much better where the bread was baking, although there were no sabres or quivers there, only flowers and fragrant herbs behind the holy pictures and over the beams. A tall loaf of freshly baked bread lay on the table. The greatest adornment was Lesia herself. As the old folk song says, “her house was like a wreath, the bread like a sun and she like a flower.” Petro talked to her as if she were his sister. Cherevan's wife, as a good hostess, kept her distance and the young man could not imagine any better company. He could have spent the whole evening there, looking at Lesia's dark eyebrows and her embroidered sleeves.

Cherevan came into the room, completely out of breath. He greeted Petro and started kissing him. “Well,” he said, “you look more handsome than ever, young Cossack. Melasia,” he turned to his wife, “here is a son-in-law for us. Lesia, here is your man. Ha, ha, ha! You see, Petro, what a man I am—selling my own goods! She won't get married otherwise. But let us go into the living room. Let's leave the women here. They should tend the oven, but we Cossacks must fight and drink.”

He took Petro by the arm and pulled him into the living room. As Petro stepped over the threshold he looked back and saw Lesia gazing at him. Her look was gentle and loving. It was obvious that she liked him.

“There you see, old man,” said Cherevan to the holy man, “here is Petro Shramenko, the same

one who swam the river Sluch under a hail of bullets. What daring and still so young! He penetrated the Polish camp, killed the standard-bearer and brought the flag back to the Hetman.”

The holy man placed his hand on Petro’s head and said:

“Here’s a good Cossack, like his father. Brave one, he will have a long life and be lucky in battle. He won’t die by sabre or bullet but from a natural death.”

“It would be better for him,” interjected his father, “to fall by sabre or bullet for a good cause, for a united Ukraine, which is now torn in two.”

“Enough, enough,” said Cherevan. “I’ll give you a different topic for conversation.”

He took down from a shelf a pitcher made of silver and beautifully decorated. The Polish lords spared no money for such luxuries. On the sides of the pitcher figures of barefoot girls were entwined; one of them was playing a tambourine. On the top, the figure of Bacchus looked lifelike. That was the reason why Cherevan called this jug a deity.

“I am sorry, old man, that you are blind,” he said to the holy man. “Perhaps you can feel with your hand the relief on this jug. A wonderful vessel which I brought back from Poland.”

“Vanity of vanities,” said the old man with a smile.

“No, this is no vanity. Wait till we have drunk all that’s inside it- then you will speak differently.”

“So you call it a deity,” said Shram. “It looks more like the devil to me.”

“Let it be a devil,” replied Cherevan. “But the ancient Greeks thought it a deity. And the Greeks were just like us Cossacks. Invincible—that’s right! They say that the Greeks had a special place of honor for Bacchus.”

“And do you honor him too?” asked Shram.

“Well, he won’t complain if you are good to him.”

He reached for a silver-plated tray. It bore an engraved design which made everybody laugh. It represented a Jew and a Cossack. The Jew was offering the Zaporozhian a drink yet at the same time his hands were trembling with fear of the Cossack. On top it bore an appropriate inscription. Cherevan took the tray, placed five goblets on it and filled them with drink poured from the deity.

“This drink,” he said, “would make a dead man get up from his coffin.”

He offered drinks to all, including Vasyl Nevolnyk, although he stood at the back, keeping his distance from the company.

“Well, Mykhailo,” said Shram, enjoying the drink, “I will tell you a riddle about your deity. What is it? A deity stands on a tripod. The King says: my delight and the queen says: my undoing.”

“I can’t guess what it is,” replied Cherevan.

Shram repeated the riddle. “You see,” he explained, “when a man is drunk he feels like a king, but a woman can only say she’s undone.”

Cherevan was still unable to discover the answer to the riddle. He said: “All I know is how to drink. You can do the philosophizing.”

“It wouldn’t hurt you to think about drinking,” answered Shram. “In the riddle, the king stands for the body, the queen for the soul. A drunken man’s body is happy; his soul is sad. That’s all.”

“That’s true,” said Cherevan, “but let’s have another drink.”

Cherevan’s wife came into the living room. She was a handsome, stately woman who must have been very pretty in her youth. She offered herself for Shram’s blessing. He blessed her and since he

knew her well he greeted her warmly. They exchanged kisses. Cherevan emptied another glass and threw the last drop up to the ceiling.

“May our children have a happy life,” he added.

Cherevan’s wife started to talk while the others were drinking. “So you are on a pilgrimage, father Shram,” she said. “That’s what I like.” She turned to her husband, “You see, what good men are doing? From the distant Pavoloch they come to pray to God. And we live so near Kyiv and yet we haven’t been to pray there this spring. What a shame! You may think what you like, but I am ready to go. I shall join the reverend Shram and follow him on pilgrimage.”

“Madwoman,” replied Cherevan. “So you want to follow Master Shram. What if he goes further, beyond the Dnieper?”

“What if he does? I’ll follow him. I am tired of sitting here in this crow’s nest. My brother has sent me several messages to come and visit him and I see no reason why I should not go.”

“Believe me, Melasia,” said Cherevan, “I would gladly come too to see your brother. They say he is doing very well near Nizhen. The Cossacks, apparently, call him ‘Prince’.”

“He is called prince because of his wealth,” said his wife. “He married a Polish princess from Volhynia. When the Cossacks raided Volhynia he fell in love with this Polish princess. That’s how he became a prince.”

“Prince Hvyntovka,” roared Cherevan. “There used to be the princes Vyshnevetsky and Ostrozhsky but now an ordinary Hvyntovka has become a Prince. I wonder what his wife is really like? I wouldn’t mind visiting him this very moment if it were not so far.”

While they talked and drank, the door to the living room opened and Lesia entered the room. Cherevan took her by the hand and said: “Here is my beauty.” “She enters the room As if a star is risen ...”

“You see, bhoter, don’t I have something to show off in my old age?”

Shram said nothing, only looked at Lesia. She stood there, a radiant beauty, ready to receive his blessing. She was a little shy and lowered her eyes. But this added to her charm. Petro looked at her and felt faint with admiration, although he had seen many young girls.

“My darling daughter,” said Cherevan, “please offer us a drink with your white hands.”

Lesia crossed herself and brought the drinks. The entire room was filled with her presence. Her every movement was graceful and everyone was happy to look at her.

Old Shram took a glass from Lesia’s white hands and emptied it. He turned to Cherevan:

“I agree that here you have something to show off in your old age.”

Cherevan laughed.

“Well, my friend,” said Shram, “perhaps this is a lucky hour to bring up this question. Would you agree to my Petro marrying your Lesia?”

“Why should I not agree?” answered Cherevan. “Let our enemies perish, as long as you are a Shram and I—a Cherevan.”

“Well then, let’s not waste time. Shake hands, kinsman.”

They shook hands, embraced and kissed each other. Then they said to Lesia and Petro:

“Bless you, children. Kiss each other.”

Petro was so pleased that he felt as if he were dreaming. All his desires seemed fulfilled. But Lesia looked anxious and said:

“Father, don’t you see that not everyone is present?”

Cherevan turned round and saw that his wife was out of the room. He called her in.

“Melasia, do you see what is happening?” he asked.

“I certainly can, my lord,” she answered curtly, taking Lesia by the hand.

Petro looked up and saw in Lesia’s face sorrow mixed with pride. Everything that was so precious between them suddenly disappeared. Lesia leaned her head on her mother’s shoulder and started to finger her necklace without looking at Petro. Her lip was raised defiantly.

“So you were quick about it, father,” said Cherevan’s wife. “You wasted no time in finding a bride for your son. But we’ll show you that women are not such an easy conquest.”

Cherevan laughed.

Shram did not like what he heard.

“The deuce take me,” he said. “Perhaps castles are easier to win than women. But I don’t know what objections you have. Why, don’t you like my son as a suitor?”

Cherevan, who was standing there, listened to Shram with open mouth. As soon as he finished, Cherevan turned to his wife in expectation. She started to speak with a honeyed voice.

“Dear colonel, you are an old friend of ours. There is no one in the whole Ukraine who doesn’t esteem you and there are many officers and colonels who would let their daughters marry your Petro. However, the point is this. We too, would gladly give you our daughter, but let’s do this according to old Christian tradition. Our grandfathers and grandmothers who wanted to marry their offspring first of all went with the entire family on a pilgrimage to some monastery to pray to God. Only then did they let their children marry and fulfill God’s will. Let’s do the same and keep the old tradition.”

She knew how to talk to old Shram who could now no longer raise any objection.

“Well, brother Mykhailo,” said Shram, “God has not only given you a beautiful daughter but a wise wife.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” roared Cherevan, “my Melasia could hold her own even with a Hetman.”

“Let’s forget the past and drink to the future,” said Mrs. Cherevan, offering them drinks.

“May our enemies perish,” said Shram.

“And may our children enjoy themselves,” added Cherevan, flinging his drink up to the ceiling.

“Amen,” said Mrs. Cherevan.

That is how the courtship of Petro and Lesia ended. The parents never mentioned it again. Petro had his own thoughts. He immediately guessed that Cherevan’s wife had another suitor in mind for Lesia, who remained strangely aloof. He grew sad and thought that life was no longer worth living.

Lesia had disappeared. She did not come to dinner and soon after dinner the guests were ready to retire for the night. Shram and the holy man were lodged in the living room and Petro, as a young Cossack, slept outdoors under the open sky.

We do not know how well Petro slept after this matchmaking. Early in the morning when he came into the living room the holy man had already gone. He had left Khmaryshche before sunrise. Everybody was dressed in traveling clothes and waited for old Shram who was finishing his prayers in front of the icons. The rich arms and precious goblets had disappeared from the shelves. They were put away in secret places underground since in those uncertain times nothing was left at home unattended.

The elder Shram told Petro to saddle the horses. At that moment Vasyl Nevolnyk drove a

carriage from behind the orchard. Some Cossack elders in those days had beautiful carriages which they had seized from their enemies. Cherevan's carriage glittered with rich adornments—lions, peacock's feathers, maces with horsetails—all had once belonged to some magnates who now no longer existed.

Cherevan's wife and daughter took their seats in the carriage, but Cherevan decided to go on pilgrimage on horseback. Shram, also mounted, kept him company. Petro wanted to follow the horsemen but, without realizing it, was trotting close to the carriage. He rode in silence with his head bowed. Then he said to Mrs. Cherevan:

"Yesterday, madam, things were going well but you upset them by your action. I don't know what you and Lesia have in mind. I approached you with an open heart, but was met by your shrewdness. It would be better if you cut me off at once. What are you thinking? Please tell me truly whether you are prepared to let Lesia marry me or whether you have another suitor in mind."

"We do and we don't," answered Mrs. Cherevan laughingly.

"Don't talk in riddles," said Petro with annoyance. "If you want to wound me, do it openly. Please tell me, Mrs. Cherevan, whom else you have in mind?"

"Slowly, my boy," answered Cherevan's wife, "the time will come for confession."

Petro became silent, lowered his head and his face grew as pale as a handkerchief. Mrs. Cherevan had offended him deeply. Even Lesia looked at her mother askance and shook her head.

The proud Mrs. Cherevan smiled and went on:

"If you want to know I'll tell you the whole story. My Lesia was born under a lucky star. Even before she was born I dreamt a wonderful dream. Listen, young Cossack, and try to understand. I dreamt that there was a mound in the middle of a field and a girl was standing on top of the mound, shining like the sun. And Cossacks and famous knights came from all over the world—from Podolia, Volhynia, the Siver and the Zaporozhe. They covered the entire field like poppies and began fighting each other in an attempt to win the shining maiden. They fought for a day or two until suddenly a young Hetman appeared on horseback. They all bowed before him and he went to the mound and took the girl. This was my dream, young Cossack. I shall never forget it. I went to the soothsayer and what do you think she told me?"

"I think you are teasing me," answered Petro.

"No, I am not. Listen to what she said. This dream, according to her, was a prophecy of my daughter's future marriage. 'Your daughter,' she said, 'will be a famous beauty. Suitors will come from all over the world but no one will offer her more than the one who is destined to marry her. He will be more beautiful than all of them. Instead of eyes he will have stars; a sun will shine over his head and a moon over his back.' That's what the old woman told me. Her word came true and I bore a daughter who is the most beautiful of girls. A little later Ukraine was plunged into turmoil and many Cossacks and Hetmans came to Kyiv. They all admired my daughter and gave her expensive presents. But no one was more generous than the Hetman I dreamt about. He was as the soothsayer said he would be. He was more handsome than any of the others. He told me in my dream: Do not let your daughter marry a prince or any lord. I shall not marry until she is grown up; then I shall be her true husband. I hope this last prophecy will also come true."

The travelers emerged from behind a hill. Before them stretched a view of churches, crosses, hills and buildings. The holy city of Kyiv shone like Jerusalem. The sun was still rising and the

churches and the ‘orchards, as far as the eye could see, were ablaze like a precious golden veil.

The pilgrims crossed themselves and prayed. Only Petro was left to his own thoughts and he neither saw nor heard Anything. He was still under the spell of Mrs. Cherevan’s dream.

4

It is both pleasant and difficult to remember you, our old Kyiv. Sometimes you shone in your glory and sometimes you garnered many miseries. How many princes, knights and Hetmans conquered you covering themselves with fame! How much Christian blood was shed on your streets, city walls and cemeteries. Not to mention Oleh and Sviatoslav and the Polovtsian raids. The old glory was lost to us during the Tatar invasion, when Khan Baty broke into your golden gates. Let us not recall the days of your ruin.

Shram was barely twelve when, during the unhappy Berestechko year Radziwill raided Kyiv with a Lithuanian army and burned the city while its inhabitants had to flee by boat to Pereiaslav.

The results of this terrible fire were still visible throughout the city. Burned-out ruins of houses could be seen everywhere, orchards stood uncared for and gates were abandoned. Shram looked sadly at the remains of the fire. The beauty of Kyiv was preserved in its churches, gardens full of poppies and green valleys.

In those days the entire city was contained by the Podil. The Pechersk quarter had not yet risen and the Old and Upper City had been uninhabited since Khmelnytsky’s days. Only a few buildings on the Podil were built of stone; most were made of wood, including the walls and turrets around Podil and the castle on Kyselivka mountain. The streets were narrow and crooked. From time to time they opened out into a square where only geese waddled.

Our pilgrim? were passing through the alleys when they saw several carts blocking the way. Shram sent his son to clear the road. Petro went over to the carts and saw that behind them there was quite a large crowd of people sitting down in front of their porches. A *kylym* was spread out in the middle and on it were placed many dishes and several bottles. He immediately guessed that someone was celebrating the birth of a child or some similar occasion and was inviting neighbors and passersby to take food and drink. The crowd grew in size; they were all obviously townspeople because none of them wore a sabre, only a knife at the belt. Only lords and Cossacks wore sabres. They could also be recognized by the way they dressed and their clothes were either blue or green in color, but never red or purple, which was the color of the Cossack’s dress.

The guests sat talking gaily and Petro had to call out “good day” to them twice before they turned their heads in his direction.

“Listen, good people,” said Petro, “will you let colonel Shram from Pavoloch through your camp?”

As soon as he named Shram, several people rose and the master of the house recognized Petro and said:

“Where is Shram? Ten of us aren’t worth one Shram.”

“Why ten, a hundred, or a thousand of our best coats wouldn’t buy one Shram,” said the others jokingly.

Some of them were laughing too much; they had obviously had too much to drink. Now Shram himself came up to them. As soon as they saw his gray beard, they pushed their carts aside and went

out to meet him. In the forefront was the master of the house, holding a bottle and a glass in his hands.

“Long live old Shram,” the crowd called out.

“What are you doing, Taras?” Shram asked him. He knew Taras since he had been Shram’s Cossack trumpeter. “Why are you turning the street into a camp? I thought things were quiet in Ukraine now.”

“It is far from quiet, colonel,” answered Taras. “Shall I call you colonel or father? Today a boy was born in my family and God has given me a son, Taras. If a rat doesn’t bite his head off he will grow to become a Cossack. He is quite a trumpeter already.”

“May he grow big and happy,” said Shram.

“How can we honor you, my lord?”

“Don’t bother about me, Taras.”

“Why not? Have you turned monk?”

“No, but when a pilgrim comes to Kyiv he must first pay his respects to the churches.”

“My dear lord,” pleaded Taras, “why did I sound the trumpet for you if you don’t want to honor my family? Don’t you want to see little Taras? Perhaps you don’t care whether he turns out to be a true Cossack?”

“I give him my best wishes,” said Shram, “but now is not the time to start drinking and dancing.”

“Yes, the time is just right. See how many carts there are around us. They have all come to seek my hospitality. They were all going about their business in the city but when they heard that a newborn babe was here they came to celebrate.”

“Think again, Taras,” said Shram who was tired of hearing the drunken drivel, “how can I, a pilgrim, join the merrymakers at a christening party?”

“Hey, wait a moment,” said someone from the crowd. “Why do you pay so much attention to him? Can’t you see that he is an arrogant Cossack who scorns our company?”

His words set a spark among the others. The townsmen began to murmur, since in any case they did not like the Cossacks.

“The Cossacks want our company,” they were saying, “only in the war against Polish domination.”

“Why the deuce should we pay any attention to the Cossacks?” called out Taras.

“To hell with the red coats,” roared the crowd. “All they can do is rattle their sabres. Where were they when Radziwill fired his cannons at the city walls?”

“And where were you,” answered Shram angrily, “when the Poles surrounded us at Berestechko? Where were you, damned hypocrites, when almost half our Cossack army perished? You didn’t rattle your sabres then, but only the money in your pockets which you got from the Cossacks for your rotten shoes and cheap cloth. When Radziwill came here you didn’t once defend yourselves with cannons. You surrendered the city to him, cowards that you are, and called ‘peace’ to him like a gaggle of women. And when the Lithuanians set the city on fire and started to cut your throats who, if not the Cossacks, came first to your assistance? It was Cossack Dzhedzheliy who raced into the city like a hawk with his men. But he got no support from you yellow bellies. He was a fool. Instead of fighting the Lithuanians, he should have cut you to pieces. I would have taught you

how to defend what the Cossacks won for you.”

“What did the Cossacks win for us?” the townsmen protested. “We ourselves did it, not the Cossacks. By your favor, we don’t carry sabres now or wear crimson tunics. You have won your victories and now behave like lords almighty, drive around in carriages while we have to work, pay rent and God only knows what. Why shouldn’t we carry sabres like you and do nothing?”

“So you think the Cossacks are doing nothing?” replied Shram. “What a pack of lies! If it weren’t for the Cossacks the devil would have licked you all; you would have been conquered by the Poles or taken prisoner by the Tatars. You are fools! Only through Cossack bravery were the whole Ukraine and the Orthodox faith saved. So you demand your rights. If you had talked to Bohdan Khmelnytsky like this he would have smashed your silly heads with his mace. Where else in the world can you see that everyone has the same rights? Each one has his station in life: the Cossack has a sabre; you have your scales and the peasants have a plough and a harrow.”

“If everybody has his own station,” roared Taras Surmach who was waving the bottle in his hand and spilling the liquor, “then we want the Cossack sabre and freedom. When the Cossacks hadn’t enough men we helped them; when the Cossacks hadn’t enough money we gave it to them. We fought the Poles together and shared our adventures, but when the day of reckoning came the Cossacks remained Cossacks and we returned to city life. Why was this? Weren’t we as good as the Cossacks?”

“Weren’t we as good as the Cossacks?” the crowd took up the words defiantly. “Yet those who lived with us in time of war now scorn our hospitality.”

Shram tried to speak several times but the noise drowned his words.

“Just wait, you red-coated lords,” called a townsman dressed in blue, “we’ll show you what’s what. You won’t scorn us forever. We still have friends who haven’t forgotten us. Together we shall call a black council-then we shall see who has what rights.”

“So that’s what you are thinking of?” said Shram.

“Why should only Cossacks have councils?” said the stubborn townsmen. “The Zaporozhians are on our side now.”

They all looked at a Zaporozhian Cossack who with his big tuft of hair sat near the house and pretended he hadn’t heard anything.

“So that’s where the wind is blowing from,” said Shram.

He realized that these fellows were setting sparks to a fire which could well engulf the entire Ukraine. His heart was heavy when he realized what misery could follow this conflagration. He decided to address the townsmen without any rancour.

“Esteemed citizens, I did not know that you would forget my old age. It was not so long ago that we were together with Hetman Khmelnytsky. Then you received us Cossacks with respect and now you scorn old Shram who rode beside our father Bohdan.”

“Our beloved father Shram,” replied Taras Surmach who was stunned by Shram’s speech, “we don’t wish to scorn you. We are not talking against you personally. You have never done us any harm. Do not pay attention to the drunken ones.

Go on your pilgrimage and pray for us in the churches you visit.”

All this time Cherevan was waiting to one side until they calmed down, since he hated any kind of quarrel. When the din subsided he came up to Shram and said: “I don’t know what you were

arguing about, bhoter. Let us visit a church and then we shall see who can put down more drink in Kyiv than I can."

The townsmen quieted down. They liked Cherevan for his affability. He was well known among them and they started to flatter him.

"Here's a real gentleman for you," they said, "may he live long! He is not a bit proud!"

"That's why he has such a good wife," remarked some.

"And such a beautiful daughter," added others.

"Well, let us through, then," said Shram.

"We shall let you through," replied Taras Surmach and told his guests to stand aside. The horsemen and the carriage passed along the street. Shram rode on for a long time, his head bowed. Then he sighed heavily and said half to himself:

"My soul is oppressed and troubled, but it relies on God."

Cherevan, who was riding alongside him, tried to catch what Shram was saying. He decided to rally the old colonel who was so upset by the townsmen.

"Bhoter Ivan," he said, "don't worry about it! It isn't worth it."

"Not worth it?" replied Shram. "Haven't you heard that these fellows are thinking of calling a black council?"

"To hell with their black council!" shouted Cherevan.

"This is no light matter. Can't you guess who put them up to it? It is Ivanets with his Zaporozhian Cossacks who is stirring them up. We cannot sit quietly when a fire has been set and a great conflagration might spread from it across the entire Ukraine."

"What do we care about Ukraine?" answered Cherevan. "As if we didn't have enough to eat and to drink and weren't able to wear fine clothes? Thank God we have plenty of everything. If I were you I would sit quietly at home rather than in your old age travel far and wide and quarrel with the townsfolk."

"May the enemy take my soul," replied Shram with great heat, "but I didn't expect such a speech from you. You talk more like Barabash."

Cherevan was very upset by this remark which touched him very deeply.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"Remember what Barabash used to tell Khmelnytsky—'We pay no taxes and aren't conscripted into the Polish army. Wouldn't it be better for us to live in peace and comfort than risk our lives and feed the mosquitoes with our bodies?'—This is how you talk. Let our fatherland perish as long as we are well off. That's why I decided to call you Barabash."

"Bhoter Ivan," said Cherevan trembling with emotion. "Ten years ago I would have settled this with you in a duel. I cannot do this today, but let the devil take my soul if I am to be called Barabash. I'll show you I don't deserve it. I will ride with you beyond the Dnieper, as sure as I stand here, together with my wife, my daughter and Vasylyl Nevolnyk. I will do anything you say to defend my country."

"That's a Cossack's speech," said Shram who was pleased to see that Cherevan's heart was still awake. "Let's shake hands and promise me at Sahaidachny's church that you will follow me, no matter what."

"I promise," said Cherevan laughing. He was glad that Shram was no longer angry with him.

They reached the brotherhood church on the Podil.

“Let us go and pray,” said Shram, “so that God may help us in our good cause.”

5

There are few people in Ukraine who at least once in their lifetime have not visited Kyiv. They would certainly know the brotherhood church on the Podil with its lofty belfry, walled enclosure, the five-domed church itself gaily decorated, with tall buildings on either hand. Two hundred years ago, when Shram was visiting Kyiv, things looked different. The wooden belfry put up during Sahaidachny’s hetmanate was still standing. The enclosure, the belfry and the brotherhood school were all built of wood. Inside there was a dense old orchard. This used to be the property of Hanna Hulevych who gave her manor and orchard to the church. That was where Hetman Sahaidachny had the church built, together with a monastery and a school, in order to provide an education for the Cossacks’ children and to spread enlightenment among the people.

Our pilgrims stood in the church, gave their offerings to the brotherhood school and were now visiting the monastery. A monk had painted both the outside of the church and the enclosure. People were looking at his paintings which portrayed not only biblical scenes but historical events as well. They depicted the Cossacks so that people might see the recent past. Among the pictures were those of Nechay and Morozenko. Around them, castles and Polish churches were seen burning and one of them was cutting down the Poles with his sabre and trampling them with his horse. Underneath was written: ‘A noble Zaporozhian knight’ and over the Poles ‘these are the cursed Poles.’ This was soon after Khmelnyt-sky’s time and people liked to recall the Cossack exploits. The monks used to tell people that their worst enemies were Catholics. Burn and kill them, they would say, and you will be as good as Morozenko. The picture of the famous Cossack Baida was also there. The Turks had hanged him by his ribs but he did not betray the Christian faith. All the paintings recalled Ukraine’s old glory. Among them was Samiilo Kishka whose fame is even now sung by blind minstrels. He fell into Turkish captivity where he spent 54 years chained to a galleon. Yet the good Lord helped him to free 350 comrades and to bring the galleons over to the Cossacks for their eternal glory.

Our pilgrims looked at the pictures and had almost reached the belfry when they heard music behind the enclosure.

“These are the good old Zaporozhians,” explained the guide, “enjoying themselves in Kyiv. You can see how our seminarians run to the gate. No one can stop them as soon as they hear the Zaporozhians. They love to join them.”

The music and the roar grew nearer. This was how the Zaporozhians said farewell to the world—by such dancing and carousing as has never been seen. If one of them lived to an old age and could no longer fight, then he would take 30 or

40 friends to Kyiv and spend all his money entertaining them. While at the Sich they would wear simple clothes; here they would deck themselves out; they would treat anyone to brandy and wine and beer. Here they would dance to the sound of the bandura and sing their songs. They would buy a barrel of tar and spill it in the middle of the marketplace; they would buy up all the ceramic pots and smash them to smithereens; they would buy up all the fish in the market and give it to passersby, saying, ‘there you are, eat it.’

After two weeks of carousing throughout the city of Kyiv the Zaporozhians would go with their

musicians to the Mezhyhirsky monastery. Some would still be dancing as they drew near. An old white-haired Zaporozhian would be in front; behind him there would be supplies of drinks and all sorts of food. Anyone could eat and drink as much as he wanted.

When a Zaporozhian came to the monastery gate he would knock boldly.

“Who is there?”

“A Zaporozhian.”

“What do you want?”

“To save my soul.”

The gate would open and receive him while all his friends with their wine, dancing and all the vanities of the world would stay outside. He would come in, give his money belt to the church, take off his jacket and put on a rough monastic shirt. That was how the way to salvation began. At least, that was how the old people described it.

In front of Shram and Cherevan the Zaporozhians were dancing in the street. They were a sight to behold. Their dancing was intricate and the seminarians came out of school to watch them.

“Don’t cry, you fools,” the Zaporozhians joked, “the Dnieper flows straight to the Sich.”

At home the Zaporozhians wore tar-soaked shirts and tattered sheepskin coats, but here they decked themselves out in all their finery, just like the Hetmans. Yet they scorned even these fine clothes, for at times they would roll in the mud or cover their beautiful boots with tar. They were a strange company.

Shram himself was attracted by what he saw. Although the Zaporozhians did a great deal of harm, they were irresistible. I once saw a blind minstrel begin by upbraiding them and then finish by praising their customs. Why were the Zaporozhians so attractive? Perhaps because they looked at the world with confidence and sorrow. By dancing and carousing they demonstrated that all was vanity. They did not care for women or children and spent money like water. From time immemorial, Zaporozhe was the heart of Ukraine; there freedom never died and old customs and songs were not forgotten. Zaporozhe was like a spark; anyone could blow it into a fire. That is why it was famous among both high and low.

Cherevan looked at them and felt like dancing himself.

“These men know how to live,” he said to Shram. “If I weren’t married I would join the Zaporozhians.”

“You don’t know what you are talking about,” replied Shram. “No honest man would have anything to do with these vagabonds. There was a time when the best people fled to Zaporozhe from Polish domination. But who goes there now? Only vagabonds, thieves fleeing from the gallows or idlers who do not want to work honestly. All they do on the Sich is drink, and when they have had enough they go to the city and strut like peacocks. I say, to hell with them. We’d better go to the Pechersky monastery or else we shall miss the service.”

Someone called from behind: “So?” Shram turned around and saw a Zaporozhian laughing at him.

“So,” he repeated, “what seems to be true is really a lie.”

“You scum,” called out Shram, but he controlled himself and added, “I don’t want to see you near the church.” He leaped onto his horse and rode on. Cherevan and Petro followed him.

Mrs. Cherevan went back to the coach, since the evil Zaporozhian and a friend of his were

glancing at Lesia like wolves at a lamb.

The Zaporozhian was a veritable giant. His face was sunburnt, his hair fell back like a horse's mane. His long mustache touched his jacket. His eyes gleamed under dark eyebrows. It was difficult to say whether he was stern or playful, for occasionally he would wink. His comrade was a tall young Cossack with an Asiatic look about him. He was a foreigner, but then there were many of them on the Sich. They even accepted Turks and Germans as long as they could cross themselves and say "I believe in Jesus Christ and will defend the Christian faith."

Mrs. Cherevan was glad to catch up with the party, as if she had escaped from some plague. They rode through the upper city, along the Michael path to the Evsiikova ravine and Pechersky hill. At that time the hill was covered with thick forest. The path through it was difficult; it wound between the trees and dropped down slopes. The coach followed the horsemen with difficulty. Petro was not anxious to stay near the coach after Mrs. Cherevan's strange stories. And so the women were left with Vasyl Nevolnyk.

Suddenly the sound of horses' hooves was heard nearby. The red jackets of the two Zaporozhians who had pestered them before were seen approaching.

Mrs. Cherevan and her daughter were frightened. The Zaporozhians circled around the coach and disappeared momentarily into the forest. Their horses could be heard through the thicket. They climbed dangerous ravines and seemed to lose their riders only to reappear with them a second later. The horsemen shone scarlet in the sun. The two Zaporozhians were exchanging jokes and calls across the pilgrims who shook to hear them.

"Here's a girl for you," one of them shouted. "I've never seen a prettier one in my life."

"That's a piece of fat, but not for you, old cat," replied the other across the path.

"Why not? If you dare me, I'll kiss her right now."

"You'll get your due at the Sich if you do."

"What do I care? Let them beat me with their sticks or cut me with their sabres. It's worth it."

Lesia was afraid lest he really would seize her. A deep ravine opened up before them and the Zaporozhians flew down on their horses like two demons.

Mrs. Cherevan asked Vasyl Nevolnyk where they were. "Whatever will happen to us here?" she said.

"Don't worry," replied Nevolnyk, "those boys are only joking. They never bother women."

But Mrs. Cherevan asked him to drive on and catch up with the rest of the party. The Zaporozhians reappeared at their sides, their tunics muddied, but they did not care about that.

"Comrade Chornohor," one of them called out, "guess what I'll tell you."

"You can't tell me anything good since you stick to that wench."

"You'll hear something that'll please you."

"Really?"

"Just listen. Although Sich is our mother and the Great Meadow our father, for a girl like that you can leave your mother and father."

"You don't say."

"Yes, I do."

"When?"

"Right now."

At that moment both Zaporozhians disappeared like phantoms. Mrs. Cherevan and her daughter thought they had evil intentions. Vasyl Nevolnyk shook his head and said:

“What smart people these Cossacks are. I was one of them once until I fell into captivity. I raced across the steppes like a madman and I was up to all kinds of tricks. They knew me in the cities and in the steppes, in taverns, in houses both rich and poor.”

“I could tell you more,” exclaimed one Zaporozhian in a deep voice.

“Enough,” his comrade replied. “If old Puhach could hear you now he’d soon teach you how to avoid wenches.”

“No, seriously, Bohdan! How can I help it when her dark eyebrows suck my heart like leeches? I don’t care what happens, this girl is going to be mine.”

“You talk nonsense.”

“And we shall visit your mountains with her.”

“Are you joking?”

“No, I’m serious. You didn’t invite me to fight for the Turks in vain. When we seize the girl we’ll make for that Black Mountain of yours.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I mean it. With a girl like that I would race not just to the Black Mountain, but to the devil himself.”

That was how the Zaporozhians planned to seize the girl, although no one could tell what was in their minds. They were a passionate people. They did not care whether they lived or died. When others cried they laughed. Mrs. Cherevan was afraid that they were in league with the devil. However, soon the pilgrims were reunited. The Zaporozhians disappeared like a bad dream tormenting the minds of men.

6

Is there a writer who could describe the Pechersky monastery so that someone not born in Kyiv might see the walls, the tall belfry and the golden-domed churches? That is how the monastery appears today, but 200 years ago sombre words were needed to describe it. It had suffered from the Tatar invasion, too. The great church which in the chronicles was likened to the heavens lay half in ruins. Although Prince Olelkovych Simeon had it restored it still did not equal its former glory. The Lavra did not gleam with gold and silver as it does now; everything was impoverished then.

Along the walls of the great church were portraits of princes, hetmans and voievods who had defended and supported the church. How gladly we would see them now. Lower down were the crypts of famous citizens, defenders of the orthodox faith. There is nothing left of it now.

After attending the service Shram walked from one crypt to another. On a tablet affixed to one of them he read that here lies ‘Semen Lyko, a brave warrior, resting after many exploits.’ Elsewhere a prince was quoted as saying, “I shone with great glory and courage, but in death I am the equal of any poor man. We are bom unequal but we all die equal.” Another inscription asked visitors to say a prayer for the dead. If anyone in the church could not read, looking at all the sabres, coats of arms and precious stones, he would guess what it meant: all the glory and all the riches are but vanity of vanities. The sabre, the mace and the fine sable coat will lie beside the bones of the dead.

Shram, who was reading the epitaphs, grew sad and said:

“How many graves there are here and all these people were subject to God’s final judgment. Soon we shall go where our fathers and grandfathers have gone.”

With these thoughts he took out a little toy hammer made of pure gold which he had taken from a Pole and pinned it on the icon of the Virgin Mary.

Our pilgrims had turned from the church to the caves when they saw someone coming towards them. He was tall and handsome, dressed in a crimson tunic, lined with gold and covered with a sable cape. He was carrying a silver mace. He was followed by a crowd of people all dressed in crimson silk and was preceded by two monks.

Shram trembled with joy when he saw him.

“My God,” he said, “it is Somko himself.”

Somko, too, was pleased when he recognized Shram. They embraced and kissed and held each other for a long time. Then the Hetman greeted Cherevan, who was so overcome that he could hardly say a word. The Hetman called Mrs. Cherevan his own mother and she was very pleased, chattering continuously.

“So here is my fiancée,” said Somko, turning to Lesia, “I bow to your feet.” He took her by the hand and kissed her. “It is a long time,” he continued, “that wars have kept us apart, but now suddenly the Lord brings us together forever.” Lesia blushed and drew back towards her mother, seizing her by the hand.

Now Petro immediately guessed which Hetman Mrs. Cherevan had been dreaming about. He realized that she had agreed to Somko’s marriage with Lesia. Petro was only surprised that Cherevan himself did not seem to know about this. Obviously, in that family Mrs. Cherevan made all the decisions. Now Petro had to dismiss Lesia from his thoughts. He could not compete with the Hetman. Somko, according to the chronicles, was a man of great beauty, tall, well-proportioned, his head covered with blond hair and his eyes shining like two stars. Whichever way he turned he looked like a Hetman. Poor Petro could not equal him.

Somko would not allow Shram to go to the caves but turned him back to the courtyard where the Cossacks remained. This was separated from the monastery so as not to disturb the monks. Somko himself guided his guests. They came to a cottage and entered a living room. Shram once more embraced Somko.

“You are a brave falcon,” he said to him.

“Father, you are like my own father,” replied Somko.

Then Shram sat at the head of the table and propped his white head on his hands and started to cry. They all grew pensive. The Hetman, who knew Shram well, wondered what was the matter. He had seen how Shram had reacted to the death of his son and blessed his body, riddled with bullets. And now the old man was crying as he had at Khmelnytsky’s funeral when for three days the trumpets had lamented the death of the great Hetman amid Cossack tears.

“Father,” asked Somko, “what has happened?”

“Nothing has happened to me,” replied Shram, lifting his head. “A Cossack doesn’t cry over his grief, only a woman does.”

“Why are you crying then?”

“As if there were no reason. On our side of the Dnieper Teteria is bargaining with the Poles for Christian souls; on your side ten Hetmans are trying to seize the same mace. Ukraine is torn asunder

and you see no reason to cry.”

“You say ten Hetmans. Just let one of them try to seize the mace I am holding.”

“What about Ivanets and Vasiuta?”

“Vasiuta is an old fool; the Cossacks laugh at him. And Ivanets is only a Hetman of the drunken mob. I could have squashed the wretch many times before but I don’t care about him.”

“These wretches, as you call them, won’t let you be Hetman of all Ukraine.”

“Who told you that? All the Cossack elders from Samara to Hlukhiv recognize me as Hetman, since at the council at Kozelets they all vowed to obey me.”

“Is it true that Vasiuta has written a letter to Moscow against your Hetmancy?”

“It’s true and if Vasiuta did not have a gray head I would do to him what the late Hetman did to Hladky.”

“Is it true that Ivanets had been proclaimed Hetman by the Zaporozhians?”

“That’s true. But don’t you know the Zaporozhians? They are ready to do this to any ruffian.”

“I know them well, my esteemed Hetman; that’s why I fear that they may do great harm to our cause. They are making trouble everywhere and I heard them calling for a black council.”

“All this is Cossack tomfoolery. Let the tsar’s boyars come to Pereiaslav and we shall see how the black council will do against our cannons. I shall flatten the Zaporozhians then and teach the mob how to honor my Hetmancy.”

Shram thought for a little while and said: “Your speech gladdens my heart. I am worried, though, because the Zaporozhians are arousing not only the village population but the townsmen as well — against the Cossacks.”

“I know,” said Somko, “and, to tell the truth, I don’t like it. Let our pot boil on the side too, only if the porridge inside it is cooked. The Cossacks, I think, have grown arrogant. They consider themselves above the common man and they are only prepared to drink in taverns and smash wine bottles. If they are allowed they will introduce Polish gentry ways into Ukraine. Yet Poland should have taught us that it has no good or truth to offer. No! Let the townsmen, the common people and the Cossacks each defend their own rights. Then Ukraine will be strong and united.”

Shram embraced the Hetman and kissed him after these words.

“Let us hope that your thoughts will be shared by every citizen in Ukraine.”

“And may both banks of the Dnieper bow under one mace,” added Somko. “As soon as I meet the tsar’s boyars I plan to march against Teteria. We will expel this Polish sympathizer from Ukraine and drive the Poles back to the river Sluch. With the help of Moscow we will punish everyone who has designs on our land.”

Shram was very pleased to hear these words.

“Merciful God,” he said, stretching his hands towards the icon, “now that you have placed this precious thought in his mind, help him to carry it out.”

“Enough about these great plans; let’s turn to the small ones,” said Somko. “A man does not like to be alone. A Hetman needs a wife. Let me, therefore, proclaim to all these present that I have an agreement with Mrs. Cherevan about her daughter. Father Shram and you, Mrs. Cherevan, give us your blessings.”

He took Lesia by the hand and they both bowed to her father and mother.

“May God bless you, children,” said Mrs. Cherevan. Cherevan was so overcome that all he

could say was “bhoter.”

Shram looked at his son Petro who was standing near the window as white as chalk. Although he was sorry for him he did not betray his emotion.

“Why aren’t you offering us your blessings?” Somko asked Shram.

“Bhoter,” said Cherevan suddenly, “it is a great honor for me to let my daughter marry a Hetman, but she is no longer free-she is half promised to young Shram.”

“What’s this?” Somko turned to Mrs. Cherevan. She wanted to say something but old Shram touched her hand and explained.

“Nothing has happened, your honor. I was trying to get Lesia for my son, Petro, knowing nothing of your previous arrangement. Now I would rather see Petro turn monk than that he should stand in your way. May God bless you both. We shall find a bride for Petro. There must be many girls who would make him a good wife.”

“Well, then, bless us together,” asked Somko.

Shram stood at Cherevan’s side. Both Somko and Lesia bowed their heads and received the blessings.

Someone under the window called: “Tu-whit-tu-who!”

Somko smiled. “That is our prankster, Kyrylo Tur,” he added. He then answered the call with “Cossack from Luh” since this is how the Zaporozhians greeted each other by imitating bird calls.

“I do not know,” Shram turned to Somko, “how many of these owls you put up with. I think the city Cossacks should beware of them.”

“You are right, father,” replied Somko, “the Zaporozhians have grown lazy since Khmelnytsky, but there are still good men among them. Take this Kyrylo Tur. He has helped me on several occasions. He is a noble man with an open, Cossack heart, though he pretends to be a wizard and an idler. But then they are always inventing things.”

“May the devil take them with their tricks,” said Shram. “They laugh at everything. They were even disrespectful to Khmelnytsky.”

“But you can’t say that there are no good men among them.”

“It would be a sin to say that,” replied Shram. “Once I was surrounded, along with a dozen Cossacks, in the field and would have lost my head. The Poles surrounded us all. Only four of us were left alive and my horse was killed. They wanted to take me alive so that they could mock me as they did Nalyvaiko and others. Then suddenly the Zaporozhians appeared. The Poles fled, though there were a hundred of them and the Zaporozhians only numbered ten.”

“Yes, they are good fighters,” agreed Somko.

“You should say ‘were’. There are no warriors on the Sich today. The best of them fell in the wars and what is left is not worth much.”

“What’s that?” called out Kyrylo Tur who at that moment appeared in the doorway. He entered the house without taking off his Cossack cap, set his arms akimbo and looked at Shram, who flared up.

“What’s what?” asked Shram.

“What’s what?” repeated Tur, placing his mustache behind his left ear (to show that he was not afraid of him). “So you think the Zaporozhians are finished? Nonsense. They do not sing “all the rivers flow into the Black Sea” in vain. Just as the Black Sea will never be empty of water, so noble

warriors won't be lacking on the Sich. They fly there from the ends of the earth like eagles to a distant cliff. Just look at my comrade. But let us change the subject. I bow to you, Your Honor." (Here he took off his cap.) "I bow to you fellow citizens and to you, colonel. How did you manage to get back to the camp without a horse?"

"You, Herod," said Shram angrily, bristling his white eyebrows, "I would teach you a lesson if I were in a different place."

"I know, you would take out your sabre and ask me to measure up with you. I would be honored by such a challenge. But it won't come to that. It would be better for you to cleave me in two than that I should take up arms against your scars."

The Zaporozhian's speech mollified old Shram. He said:

"What, then, do you want from me?"

"Nothing else, just tell us how you reached the camp on foot."

"You are a real devil!" answered Shram, smiling. "I'll tell you and don't tempt me any more. The Poles scattered and then someone noticed that I was without a horse. They soon set out to get me one."

"And did they?"

"Yes, the Zaporozhians got me a Polish stallion. We wondered how they managed it but the horse was good and champing at the bit."

"You know how the Zaporozhians fight — they are often in league with the devil."

Kyrylo Tur said this as he stroked his mustache and glanced at the assembled company. His eyes were difficult to fathom — were they honest or guileful?

"I thought myself," said Shram, "that they must have relied on the devil. I asked them how they got hold of a stallion like that for me and all they would say was 'Take him and be off before the Poles get over their defeat.'" "You see, that's how we are," said Kyrylo Tur. "We don't make a fuss. I'll tell you how it all happened. A handful of our Cossacks were chasing the Poles, who suddenly stopped. Before they could get their muskets ready the leader of the Cossacks fired a shot which hit their captain between the eyes. I know because I was the one who did it and I got you the horse."

"You did?" exclaimed Shram. "I didn't know it was you."

Tur laughed. "That's how you treasure your friends," he said.

"Forgive me, brother," said Shram embracing him. "Perhaps the Poles did me some harm, after all, for my old head doesn't remember things anymore."

"You are talking a lot," said Somko, "and it's time to have a drink and something to eat."

"That's the kind of talk I like to hear," said Cherevan. "I haven't eaten since breakfast and I can't keep it up any longer."

Kyrylo Tur emptied his glass and turned to Somko.

"Please, Your Honor, don't forget my comrade."

"I won't," answered Somko. "I know that he is more skillful with his sabre than with his tongue."

"Please don't be offended when he doesn't say a word. He comes from a distant land, from the Black Mountain, which lies beyond Hungary. Now he can speak our language a little but he could barely say a word when he first came. He is a good lad and my only true comrade. I love no one except myself and him."

7

Somko asked his guests to sit at a long table. He placed Shram and Cherevan in the seats of honor, placing himself at the end of the table and Mrs. Cherevan and Lesia on the bench. The Zaporozhian and his comrade sat at the other end of the table. Petro Shram had to sit next to Lesia, although he would rather have been separated from her by a sea and a mountain. In spite of all the jokes made by the Zaporozhian and the general laughter of all the guests, Petro sat there lost in thought.

“Tell me, otaman,” Somko turned to Kyrylo Tur, “why did you come to Kyiv?”

“We are escorting a Zaporozhian who is going to retire to the Mezhyhirsky Spas Monastery,” Tur answered.

“Why have you parted company with them?”

“Wait, I’ll tell you everything in due time. First, let me have another drink. You have glasses so small they don’t hold anything. On the Sich we drink out of mugs. And a mug is big enough to drown a Pole in.”

“That’s true,” added Cherevan. “I always said that they know how to live in the Sich. If I hadn’t a wife and a daughter I would soon join the Zaporozhians.”

“Well,” said Kyrylo Tur, noticing how fat Cherevan was, “not many Cossacks like you would fit into one hut.”

They all burst out laughing, led by Cherevan. He did not mind being teased.

“I love this vagabond with all my heart,” Somko whispered to Shram. “He can throw a few darts, but one can’t help liking him for his humor.”

“It’s a pity,” replied Shram, “but the Zaporozhians can buy and sell a man while they laugh.”

“That’s true. According to their belief nothing in this world is worthy of either joy or sorrow. These Sich philosophers look at the world from a barrel — not an empty one like Diogenes’, but one full of brandy.”

“So you want to know why I left my company,” said Kyrylo Tur, emptying his glass. “I’ll tell you why. Have you heard about comradeship? That’s what we believe in in the Sich. However much we scorn the world, all the same we seek brotherhood. So I told Chornohor ‘Let’s be brothers’ and he agreed. We asked a priest to give us his blessing, for although we are not of the same flesh, we are of the same God’s word: we are as close as Thomas and Jeremy were.”

“Well, what then?”

“Then . . . well it always happens that as soon as a man does something the devil wants to undo it. So I saw this beauty and could not help myself.”

“Could a woman possibly tempt a Zaporozhian?”

“Yes, Your Honor, she certainly can. It’s no wonder, since Adam himself was tempted by Eve.”

“Where did she come from?”

“I don’t know — you ask her.”

“You fool, she is my fiancée,” said Somko laughing.

“What do I care if she is your fiancée,” said the Zaporozhian, “if she has cast a spell over me?”

They all laughed.

“So our bear has been caught in a trap,” said Somko. “What will you do now?”

“Well, the bear will retreat to his lair and take the trap with him.”

“Where? To the Sich?”

“Why to the Sich? The world is wide.”

“So you, a brave otaman will leave the Sich brotherhood for a woman?”

“Why not? For a beauty like that I could forsake anything, not merely the brotherhood.”

“So where would you take her?”

Kyrylo Tur laughed.

“You want to know everything, but I don’t want to lie to you.”

“I have heard that you never lie,” said Somko.

“I won’t lie now,” answered Tur, “only give me a drink.”

He took a drink, cleared his throat and looked at all the guests as he stroked his mustache.

“You must know, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “that the Black Mountain is as sacred as our Sich, only there they admit women. It is divided like our Sich--we have the kurins; they have brotherhoods and each brotherhood has its own leader. They fight the Turks every day. And how they can fight — if you only knew. When my comrade starts telling me my heart grows as big as a mountain. My comrade who is here with me in Ukraine is longing to go back to the Black Mountain and he has asked me to join him. I am tempted to go: why shouldn’t a Cossack see a bit of the world?”

They all listened closely to his story which cast a spell upon them.

“Very well, I tell him,” he continued, “we’ll go and show your countrymen the noble Cossack ways. I am a true brother of his since we no longer divide our personal possessions but share everything. We have agreed to help each other to the end. Everything went well until I saw that beauty who stunned my soul. So I told my brother that without her I could not leave Ukraine. And he answered that I should steal her as a falcon does a gull, and go straight to the priest to marry us.”

“But what will you do,” Somko answered mockingly, “if the gull has brothers who are eagles and parents who are falcons?”

“We shall know how to deal with them. We shall carry the girl away. If it’s necessary, volunteers will be raised to abduct the golden-haired girl from her parents. They say they can do it by themselves, but I will help them with my Zaporozhian wizardry.”

“What nonsense you are talking,” laughed Somko. “Perhaps that’s all you do in the Sich--tell each other your wild schemes.”

“Your Honor, our comrades practice tricks like that every day; they don’t need to invent any schemes. I know they won’t think of any better than the one I have in mind. No one has heard of it yet.”

“What kind of scheme is this?”

“I shall seize this beauty and place her on the saddle beside me. Then my comrade and I will make for the Black Mountain. What a beautiful girl!” he added, looking at Lesia like a wolf.

Lesia was petrified with fear. She had never in her life feared anyone as much as this Zaporozhian. She tried to appear normal, sitting behind the table. But when he looked at her, she shuddered. She grew scared and started to cry. She covered her eyes with her hands and the tears kept flowing down. Her mother, too, was alarmed, got up and took Lesia into another room. The Cossacks did not care — they laughed.

“You are a real criminal,” said Shram. “You see what your talk has done. The poor child is

frightened.”

Mrs. Cherevan did not return to the table. But no one asked after lunch whether Lesia was feeling well. The Cossacks cared nothing for women’s hearts. The tears and sorrows of women touched them not at all.

Getting up from the table, Kyrylo Tur thanked his host thus:

“Thank God and me and not our host. If he doesn’t feed me, someone else will and I shall not die of hunger.” Then he walked out with his comrade without another word to anyone. He could be heard singing outside the gate: “Sorrow is shrivelling me Sorrow will fell me soon.”

“Did you hear that?” the Hetman asked Shram. “No one can fathom a Zaporozhian. I know this Kyrylo Tur has some worry on his mind. He pretends to be a carefree vagabond, but I can see the direction he is taking.”

“He has chosen the wrong path,” said Shram.

“He chose the one he found, father. He has defied God and I don’t know where he will end. But I saw him once pray to God in the dead of the night and shed scalding tears, like an anchorite. Still, I won’t talk about that. I’ll tell you why I am in Kyiv. I am not thinking of my wedding. I shall not marry until the Poles are driven back to the Sluch river and then my wife will be at my side. But now, before the war begins, we must take a firm stand in Kyiv and organize military supplies. We must also visit Gizel, our advisor, whose head is no worse than Mohyla’s. We must talk to him about the treaty of Hadiach. Vyhovsky was no fool when he signed it, only the Poles tricked him. The Cossacks will never be friendly with the Poles. Whether we like it or not we shall have to live together with the Russians. Isn’t that so?”

“My son,” said Shram, “we have learned what the Muscovite boyars are like.”

“This is my personal belief, but the Russians are closer to us than the Poles and we should keep in touch with them.”

“God only knows,” sighed Shram. “Perhaps we should.”

“We won’t be any worse off. The Russians at least speak with a single voice but the Poles are all divided and each speaks in the name of the King and wants to bring us down.”

“They will never succeed in that,” said Shram, tugging at his mustache.

“So that they won’t succeed, we must ally ourselves with the Russians. After all, this is all one Rus. If we do well, the Russians will be better off too. May God help us to bring together both sides of the Dnieper. Then we will establish law courts, schools, academies and printing houses everywhere, raise standards throughout Ukraine and so gladden the souls of the great Kyivan Princes Yaroslav and Monomakh.”

Talking in this fashion they drifted towards the house of Father Innokenty and some of them wandered through the monastery.

What was happening to Lesia? She was almost ill. She had failed to be amused by Kyrylo Tur’s stories. She was afraid he would grab her like a hawk, and begged her mother to bolt all the doors. Mrs. Cherevan did everything she could to calm her down, but Lesia was haunted by the accursed Zaporozhian. Even Cherevan himself came to see his daughter and tried to tell her to have no fear. This failed to reassure her and he finally gave up, lay down and fell asleep. He slept until the evening.

After dinner they all gathered in the courtyard. The Hetman and Shram were in high spirits; they

toasted a united Ukraine and the tsar who, they thought, was a just monarch unlike the Polish king who left the Cossacks at the mercy of his nobles. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Cherevan was glad to see Shram so gay and exclaimed with each drink, "May our enemies perish."

The noise of the party was disturbing to Lesia who was in the next room. She was lying down, feeling almost ill and no one was concerned about her now. The Cossacks were true to their nature: they had no interest in women, only in military affairs. And although their women were aware of this attitude, Lesia's heart was wounded because she felt neglected. She was sad when she thought about her fiance, Yakym Somko. He was the noblest of knights, the most handsome, but he thought only of his own affairs. What does a man's fame and beauty matter to a girl if his thoughts are not with her? Lesia had fallen in love with Somko when she was still a little girl and he used to swing her in his arms and give her all kinds of presents. Even then he used to call her his bride and had made an agreement with Mrs. Cherevan. Cherevan regarded this as a joke, but obviously his wife did not. Even then Somko used to address Mrs. Cherevan as his mother and she in turn called him her son-in-law. Lesia was brought up to love him and to sing songs about him. But now she realized that her beloved had no special feeling for her. He was talking to old Shram about things that did not interest her and he paid no attention to her. Lesia's heart contracted but she said nothing to her mother.

What about Petro? Immediately after lunch he took a rifle and went outside as if he were going hunting. He walked through the forest until it grew dark. Then he returned to the courtyard only to see them all merrymaking. They were all rather boisterous but although the others asked him to join them he remained aloof, remembering the Cossack song: "Somehow, brethren, I cannot drink my brandy For a snake is wound around my heart . . ."

They sat down to dinner. Kyrylo Tur came too, but without his comrade. Lesia did not appear at dinner. She was not feeling well and Mrs. Cherevan sent for a local healer. She came and boiled some herbs which Lesia had to drink before going to bed. The woman stayed with her and slept in the courtyard. Lesia begged her mother to undress and come to bed. Then she heard Kyrylo Tur's voice and started to tremble. She could not fall asleep. She was afraid to sleep lest he might abduct her. She was convinced he was a real wizard, since she had heard stories about them among the Cossacks.

In the meantime Kyrylo Tur had no misgivings on the subject of women's fears. He sat down to supper and started to joke.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I am all ready for the journey."

"Where are you going?" asked Somko.

"To the Black Mountain."

"Still the same place. Have you not changed your mind?"

"Have you ever heard, Hetman, that Zaporozhians change their minds? They would rather die than change their minds, though they may be set on strange things. I suppose I must keep my word now or die ingloriously. I have never been under the spell of a woman before."

"And are you not ashamed to admit it?" asked old Shram who was listening carefully. "What will your comrades say when they learn that you have so disgraced them?"

"They won't say anything, since I am a free Cossack now."

"What do you mean? Were you not free before?"

"We have a rule, gentlemen, that a Cossack must obey the Sich elders as long as he is a member

of the community. If he takes up with a woman then he must expect a great deal of trouble. Yet our rules are better than the monastic sort. If someone is led astray by vain and worldly pursuits they do not put him in jail, but let him go. Let him taste the freedom of the outside world if he is tired of the Sich. It often happens that a Cossack who leaves the Sich will enjoy himself for a time, but then he will leave his wife and children and ask to be accepted back at the Sich. 'Brethren,' he will say, 'take me in. There is nothing good in this world and it brings neither joy nor sorrow.' And the brethren will say, 'So you have had enough. Good, come back and drink a keg of brandy so that you will get wiser.' Then the Cossack will sit with his comrades, will drink and tell them about his life in the city with a wife and children. They will listen, teasing him and laughing. My poor father, may he rest in peace, met such a pair of woman's eyes that life on the Sich became stale to him. He left it and settled on a khutir near Nizhen, started farming and had two children, a boy and a girl. After five years he grew bored with his farm. He felt like a caged bird. He grew sad and could not see how his life would be fulfilled with a hen-like wife and her little chickens — his children. The Cossack soul cannot be fulfilled like that. It would dance a mad dance and scatter money from its pockets. Only God can fulfill it."

"So what happened to your father?" asked Somko. "Tell your story straight. You want to have your cake and eat it."

"To my father?" said Kyrylo Tur, dreamily. He was speaking now with bent head. "Well, I am saying that my father realized that he was longing for his comrades. My mother used to tell him like the woman in the song: 'What are you thinking, my darling? Do you want to leave me, Since you get up early to water the horse And give him some oats and hay.

When you enter the hall you ask for a crop And when you go into the pantry you look for a saddle.

The child cries and you do not comfort him And you breathe contempt into my face.' Only my father held no long conversations, but saddled his horse, took his son, that's me, with him and went on to Zaporozhe. My mother did not run out after him, contrary to the song, didn't catch his stirrups, begging him to come back to drink some brandy and look at her once again. He left her all his clothes and his cattle and escaped with what he stood up in, beyond the boundaries of the women's kingdom. That's why I must follow my father's path."

"Well, have a drink before you go," said the Hetman. "It's a long way to the Black Mountain. Let us make your way easier."

"Thank you, Hetman," replied Kyrylo Tur, bowing low. "If you smoothe my way I shall certainly take my girl safely to the Black Mountain."

"What do you think, son," whispered Shram to the Hetman, "these Zaporozhians are mad and the devil himself won't take them apart. Don't trust him too much, for even if he can't bite you he will scare you. Remember this saying because these wizards are sometimes genuinely mad."

"Father," answered Somko, laughing, "I know this wizard very well. I don't think there is any one more generous to me than he is. When I chased the Poles from Ukraine and fought Yurus, he and his mute comrade rendered me a great service. He served as my spy and servant and he did it all merely for a kind word and a bottle of liquor. I used to fill his cap with money but he would scatter it all on the threshold saying: 'There's a lot of rubbish here and I don't know where it came from.' Once I asked him how I could reward him because he saved my life many times. 'You are not the

one to reward me,' he would say. So there you are, father."

"Indeed," said Shram, "this Cossack is made of pure gold. Hey, otaman!" he called to Kyrylo Tur, "come here so I can embrace you and kiss you."

"What for?"

"I know what for."

And he embraced and kissed the Zaporozhian. "May God reward you," he said, "for your noble deeds."

"Father," said the Zaporozhian, "now you are embracing me, but what will you say when I steal the Hetman's bride?"

Cherevan, who liked Kyrylo Tur more than anyone else, roared with laughter.

"The devil take me if I saw a saucier Cossack. Let me kiss you, too."

"So that's how good these people are," said Kyrylo Tur. "You steal from them and they kiss you in return. Oh, what good people! It's a pity we won't see each other much longer. The raven won't carry our bones to the Black Mountain. Goodbye, gentlemen. We thank you for your hospitality. Now we must be off."

Walking outside, he spread his arms wide and repeated twice, "Doors open up, but people stay asleep."

"What a lad, this Kyrylo Tur," said Somko, laughing. "He is always casting spells and tempting fortune."

8

The Cossacks did not continue their revelry late. It was too close to the holy places for them to be carousing. Long before midnight they were all asleep. Loud snores came from the living room where the Hetman and Shram were resting, and from the coachhouse where Vasyl Nevolnyk slept near the horses. Others were lying under the open sky and although it was cold outdoors they did not mind. They felt as good as the grass in the evening, reviving after the daytime heat. Nightingales were singing in the groves and now and again an owl's sorrowful hoot was heard. The moon, a sun to the Cossacks, was high and the sky was covered with stars.

To a Cossack, the sky, the moon and the stars were no strangers. Whenever he looked at the moon, with its dark patches, or at the stars his mind and heart would quicken. Why did the moon have patches? The Cossack knew why. When Cain slew Abel, God marked this sin on the moon with his own hand. "Look here, Christians: just as Cain must bear the dead body of his brother until his death, so every killer must bear his sin until the day of the Last Judgment." And the stars? These are human souls. When the sinful body is done for, the good souls, leaving the earth, rise to the Almighty and bathe in heavenly light, listening to the angels. When a star falls sometimes a Cossack prays for the dead soul. Other stars show him what the harvest will be like, whether the cattle will prosper and the Great Plough is a happy signpost to them.

The night over Pechersky was gloriously light, but only one man was silently watching its wonders. This was Petro Shram. He could not sleep because he was so full of sorrow. He tossed and turned for a long time and then got up, put his tunic on and went into the grove. He was reticent about his love since people would only laugh at him. Cossacks were no great lovers. Young women knew this and they composed those songs in which long conversations take place between the

Cossack and his girl.

If Petro had had a mother or a sister he might have told her this sorrow. Because no matter how hard a Cossack was, should his mother or sister begin to cajole, asking him about his foreign adventures, his heart would soften and he would tell them his troubles. But Petro had no mother and no sister. His closest companions were his stern father and his fun-loving Cossack comrades. Petro walked in the grove without quite knowing why he was there. The moon was low over the horizon and shone on the grass, the bushes and the birches. Suddenly Petro heard horses, coming closer and closer. He recognized the shadows of two horsemen. He hid in a bush and overheard a little conversation. At night voices rang out clear. He recognized Kyrylo Tur's voice and by its accent the voice of his comrade.

Kyrylo Tur was saying, "What will your countrymen say about Zaporozhian wizardry if we bring them this girl?"

Chornohor answered: "Brother, I think you are only joking. I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes."

"The moon hasn't set yet," replied the Zaporozhian, "but when it does you will see they won't run out of doors."

"I wish you wouldn't boast of your secret powers," said Chornohor.

"You are a fool, brother," answered Tur. "The Zaporozhians did not choose me as their otaman for nothing. They certainly wouldn't do it because I'm a good drinker. They have plenty of those, but not many masters of wizardry."

They moved further away and their conversation was lost to Petro who was now beginning to take Tur seriously. At first he thought to rouse the Cossacks but then he stopped short.

"Why panic?" he said to himself. "Whoever heard of abducting a girl from this peaceful company? This Zaporozhian is a wild talker and I have been taken in by him."

He walked on quietly. "Wizard indeed," he thought to himself. "I should be glad if Somko had him beaten for this little joke. Still, what if he were a real wizard? I often heard the old Cossacks say that the Zaporozhians, who spend a lot of time in the wilderness, have contact with the devil. They abducted captives from the Turks and sometimes even Turkish girls so cleverly that you would think they had supernatural powers. Perhaps people are right to regard them as wizards. When they ran from the Tatars they would spread their jackets on the water and cross the river as if they were in a boat. The Poles say that Zaporozhians grow in the Velyky Luh like mushrooms in the ground and that they have nine souls, so they must be killed nine times to get rid of one Cossack. A Zaporozhian can steal things as easily as filling his pipe with tobacco. He knows how to cast a spell over anybody."

He remembered how in Khmelnytsky's time a Cossack wizard asked to be tied up in a sack and when this was done his voice was suddenly heard from the doorway: "So that's how you kept me in?" Petro thought that Tur might be a wizard like that. "I'll go and see that he does no harm," he thought. After taking a dozen or so steps, he stopped as if he had suddenly run up against a wall.

"What am I thinking of?" he thought. "Whom do I want to rescue? Surely she has her fiance to defend her. Am I her guard or something? Why should I stay awake at night merely in case some drunken ass should frighten the Hetman's bride? Let the Hetman guard her; why should I do it? Let them abduct you for all I care. I would like to see the Hetman's face when he discovers his bride has

been stolen. I can see her proud mother, too. Will she look at me with such scorn when the Hetman sleeps through her daughter's abduction? I can see you, too, my bright beauty, when this brigand brings you to the Black Mountain. They don't respect women there. You'll have to jump over the wild Tur's sabre, singing the song

"A Zaporozhian has loved me, mother, He made me go barefoot in the snow . . ."

While Petro was thinking thus, he suddenly heard the horses again. He listened, and could not believe his eyes. The horses came nearer. Petro looked and saw Kyrylo Tur on horseback holding Lesia in front of him like a child. Petro's heart grew heavy. Lesia was completely bewitched. She sat with her head bowed and clutched the Zaporozhian with one hand. Tur was holding Lesia with one hand and holding the reins with the other. The poor girl was groaning as if she were having a bad dream. She was saying something but Petro could not hear what it was because just then the nightingales burst into song before dawn.

Petro felt sorry for Lesia. He wanted to step out from behind the bush and stop her abductors, in spite of their magic powers. But he realized that he had no sabre. They passed him and he kept still, uncertain what to do. At that moment Lesia cried out, as if she had suddenly waked up. Her call echoed through the grove and pierced Petro's heart. He ran to the courtyard, grabbed his sabre, caught a horse and leapt onto it bareback. Vasyl Nevolnyk woke up, and thinking gypsies were stealing the horses, raised the alarm.

"Don't shout," said Petro, "but run and wake the Cossacks. Miss Lesia has been abducted." Vasyl Nevolnyk started to rouse everyone but Petro, without stopping to listen, rode through the gate and spurred his horse on to fly like the wind.

In the meantime the abductors held to their course, hoping to leave the vicinity of Kyiv before sunrise. Poor Lesia was probably still under the influence of the herbs which the women had given her. She was swaying as if drunk and did not know what was happening. She woke up only when the cool wind rising from the field enveloped her. She realized that she was in the hands of the terrible Zaporozhian. At first she still imagined she was dreaming, then she began to scream. This was useless, since the Cossacks merely smiled at each other. She begged them not to kill her but to let her go. Kyrylo Tur roared with laughter:

"How silly these women are," he said. "She wants me to give her up after all this effort. No, that's not likely to happen. Why should you be upset? Won't I know how to love you as well as someone else? Don't cry, my darling! You will get used to living with me as well as you would with a Hetman. A girl, so they say, is like a willow. Wherever you plant her, she'll take root."

Lesia went on crying and waving her arms. "My love," said Kyrylo Tur in a different tone, "don't cry. You haven't lived long enough for that. You think I'll let you go free as soon as they catch up with us. But I won't do that. Please be quiet; don't cry like a baby."

He flashed a short Turkish knife in front of her and stared at her so threateningly that she was overcome with terror.

They left the grove for the open field and saw that in the east, dawn was outshining the moon. The sky was red. Their way led down and up again. When they reached the top, Kyrylo Tur looked back and saw somebody racing after them on a gray horse. He stopped and said:

"I'll be damned if this horseman isn't after us. And if you want to know, I'll tell you who it is, if my eyes don't deceive me. It's Shram's son. He is like his father, an eaglet from an old eagle. I

know why he wants to overtake us.”

“Comrade,” said Chornohor, “why are we waiting? Let’s be off.”

“He’s got a good horse and we are loaded down with a woman. In any case, why should we run away? Better wait here and give him a battle if necessary.”

“Comrade, what shall we do? There are two of us against him so we can’t use our pistols. You’ll have to fight him with a sabre. But that will take time and the others will catch up with us and take the girl away.”

“I know how well young Shram can wield a sabre,” said Kyrylo Tur. “That’s why I don’t want to run away from him. Look, he’s waving his sabre now. As if inviting old friends to a conversation. I’ll be damned if one of us won’t triumph today and the other perish.”

“So you want to fight a duel with him?”

“Well, we can’t both be fighting him at the same time.”

In the meantime Petro was drawing closer and closer and when he saw Lesia waving her handkerchief he pressed his horse even harder.

The Zaporozhians had just passed along a narrow bridge over a ravine. Kyrylo Tur put the girl down and entrusted her to his comrade. Then he went back and destroyed the bridge, knocking the planks down into the ravine. At the bottom of the ravine a fast stream flowed.

“What are you doing?” asked Chornohor.

“I just want young Shram to prove that he’s worthy to fight a duel with Kyrylo Tur.”

“If you think he won’t jump over the ravine we’d better let him be and make our escape.”

“Perhaps that’s what you would do in the Black Mountain, but we have a sense of military honor which must be respected. A knight thinks about glory, not about the safety of his head. Either today or tomorrow his head will fall like grass in the wind of the steppes, but glory won’t fall; it will live forever.”

While the Zaporozhian was pontificating on glory, Petro was approaching him with his sabre. He was quite close. But his horse backed away. It stopped at the edge of the ravine and reared its front legs, foaming at the mouth.

“Ha, ha,” laughed the Zaporozhian on the other side, “perhaps you don’t like ravines like this?”

“You scoundrel,” shouted Petro, “so that’s how you repaid the Hetman for his hospitality?”

“What hospitality?” answered Tur. “A great wonder. In the Sich we offer hospitality to everybody. Come, we say, help yourself and be satisfied. We don’t expect anything in return. But here, city folk consider everything their property.”

“You are a Judas,” shouted Petro. “You were welcomed and kissed at supper and afterwards you betray them.”

“Ha. ha, ha,” laughed Kyrylo Tur. “Who forced those fools to kiss me? I told them to their faces that I’d abduct their beautiful girl and they start embracing me. But what is there to talk about? Better jump over this ditch so we can show this young man how the Zaporozhians fight.”

Petro turned his horse back and made a run at the ravine but the horse stopped once more. It looked down and saw the stream full of water. It quivered all over, snorted and dilated its eyes.

The Zaporozhian was laughing with his arms akimbo.

“There’s a knight-errant for you; take a look at him. I jumped over this ditch with a girl on my horse and he can’t do it by himself.”

“I would soon silence you if I hadn’t forgotten to take a pistol with me.”

“I don’t believe that Shram’s son would fire a pistol at me when he has a chance to fight me with a sabre. Perhaps I could kill you with a pistol, too, but I am waiting for you to come over to my side.”

“You scoundrel,” said Petro dismounting from his horse, “I’ll get you somehow.”

He stepped back to take a run at the ravine. Guessing what he was about to do, Lesia closed her eyes, praying that God would help him. She had no need to worry. Anyone looking at young Shram’s physique would realize that he had a good chance of making the leap. Petro ran, jumped and reached the other bank, which crumbled under him and he would have fallen into the ravine had it not been for Kyrylo Tur who came running and stretched a hand out to Petro.

“You are a brave man,” said Kyrylo Tur. “Not for nothing have you a good reputation. Now I am ready to fight a duel with you.”

“Listen, friend,” said Petro breathing heavily, “I don’t want to fight with you. My hand won’t be raised against you.”

“What do you mean? Do you, then, renounce the girl?”

“No, I would rather renounce my own soul.”

“So what do you want from me?”

“Give her back to me without a fight. We don’t want to shed blood uselessly.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” roared the Zaporozhian. “That’s a strange idea if I ever heard one. Did you hear, Bohdan? Petro, you are a fool and not like your father at all. The devil himself has forced me to play this joke on the Hetman. I’d rather fall by your sabre than give up the girl. It’s useless to talk any more. Let us fight so that the minstrels may sing a song about us.”

He pulled his long sabre out of the scabbard.

“Here is my other mistress, my sabre,” he said. “You met the Turks and kissed them many a time. Now you must meet this young Cossack so that the Zaporozhians are not put to shame.”

“So you won’t give her up without a fight?” asked Petro again.

“You won’t believe it, will you?” said Kyrylo Tur. “May I never rise up on the day of the Last Judgment, if you free her. Are you ready?”

“May God pronounce His judgment upon us and may He forgive me for raising my hand against you,” said Petro.

He, too, pulled out his sabre.

“Dear comrade,” said Tur to Chornohor, “if I should fall, do not deny the girl to him. Go alone to the Black Mountain and tell them how we fight in Ukraine. Why aren’t you attacking me?” he turned to Petro. “You should attack and I will defend myself.”

Petro began the Cossack duel. Never before had two warriors like these met on this particular spot. Their strength, skill and determination were equal. Would Petro stand up to the broad-shouldered Cossack, Kyrylo, who stood there like a bison with his legs rooted in the ground? Petro was a full-grown Cossack, too. He had his father’s strength and stance and could handle his sabre well. Their sabres clanged with terrifying force. One attacked and the other parried the blows. Lesia was almost mad with fear. The noise, the lightning over the heads of the fighters—all this tore at her heart. Kyrylo Tur’s comrade could hardly sit still in the saddle as he watched this duel. He was a skilled swordsman, too, and for him the contest was not a duel but an exhibition.

At first they would match sabres as if it were a game, but then they would hack at each other with great vigor. They came together, then drew back. At one moment their sabres would whirl above their heads, then each would try to trap the other into a false move. They were both so highly skilled that they could not harm each other. Their eyes sparkled, their cheeks flamed and the veins on their hands were as taut as strings. Sparks flew off their sabres until at last each broke in two. Both Cossacks tossed them angrily to the ground.

“How shall we finish it?” asked Petro, who was anxious to settle his score. “Let us wrestle with our hands or fight with our pistols. Let no one tell me that I could not fight Kyrylo Tur.”

“To the devil with wrestling,” said the Zaporozhian, breathing heavily. “That’s child’s play. I won’t give the girl up to you. No pistols, either. But we have Turkish knives, made by the same craftsman. Let us follow the old custom, shake hands and may God Almighty forgive us our sins.”

He took a knife from Chornohor, measured it against his own and handed it to Petro. Then they clasped their left hands and began a dreadful duel with the knives.

“Comrade, you had better finish it quickly, because they are catching up with us.”

“Don’t worry,” answered Kyrylo Tur, “I’ll finish it before they reach us.”

“Oh, merciful God! Our friends are coming to the rescue,” cried Lesia. She stood near Chornohor, half dead, watching the terrible duel.

The Cossacks were approaching. Somko was leading the group, and Shram was with them too. There were half a dozen of them.

As soon as they left the grove they saw the duellers on the hill. The sky was red in the east and the sabres of the duellers shone like red streaks of lightning. Old Shram had no doubt that his son would defeat Tur. But when the duellers dropped their sabres and took up the knives, Shram’s heart grew cold. He knew that in this type of duel both men were likely to be killed. It did indeed nearly happen here. As Somko and Shram reached the ravine they saw both men had fallen after slashing each other with the knives.

9

Chornohor immediately rushed to his comrade and Lesia went to Petro. She was ready to help him as much as she could. She bandaged his wound with her kerchief and leaned over him, crying. She had forgotten about her Hetman. Warm blood was pouring from Petro’s wound over Lesia’s hand and staining her kerchief. Lesia felt as if she could give up her life for the Cossack who had defended her and had risked his life for her. Shram and the Hetman finally reached them, after bypassing the ravine, but she was still tending Petro.

“Enough, daughter,” said Shram. “You won’t heal his wounds with your tears. Let us bandage him with a belt; perhaps we can save him.”

Somko, in the meantime, was helping Kyrylo Tur.

“Poor Tur,” he said, “I thought you were joking, but now I see that the devil himself led you astray. I would rather not marry at all than see you here like this, without voice or memory.”

He was indifferent to the fact that Lesia was crying and calling someone else her darling.

“I don’t know how you can worry about this dog,” said Shram.

“What should I do, leave him?”

“Let him perish; he’s earned it.”

“No, he saved my life once.”

“Saved your life? And now he’s almost stolen your bride.”

“I could find another bride, but there is only one Kyrylo Tur.”

Lesia heard him speak. “So that’s how he loves me,” she thought to herself, and her heart turned away from Somko forever.

Shram was upset too. “So he is sorry for the Zaporozhian brigand,” he thought, “but he cares nothing that my Petro lies there unconscious.”

But Somko was not indifferent to Petro. After tending Kyrylo Tur, he turned to Shram’s son.

“How is Petro? Is there any hope?” he asked Shram. “Take my coat and make a stretcher for him between the horses.”

“You look after the Zaporozhian,” said old Shram gloomily. “Petro has a father.”

He took off his coat and attached it to the horses. They put Petro on it and carried him down, holding him gently.

“My son,” said his old father, following behind, “so here’s where I must rock you in a Cossack cradle. God would not let you receive these wounds in a battle for Ukraine, so you got them in a fight for someone else’s bride.”

Somko wanted to make another stretcher out of his own coat for Kyrylo Tur. But at that moment two Zaporozhians appeared and at once realized what was happening.

“What are you doing with our comrade?” they asked. “Is he such an orphan that city Cossacks must look after him?”

No, gentlemen! We will not forsake him; he is a true comrade of ours. Give him back to us. We know how to heal his wounds and we will put him on his feet again.”

Without further ado, they winked at Chornohor, seized Kyrylo Tur by his arms and legs, put him across their horses and fled like demons. Bohdan Chornohor followed them.

Petro was carried down carefully, with great solicitude.

Somko took Lesia’s hand, asked about her health and tried to caress her. She remained cold towards him. In her deep sorrow she could not say a word.

They crossed the ravine and met Mrs. Cherevan who was coming towards them. Vasyl Nevolnyk was her coachman. The mother was very glad to see her daughter.

Shram greeted Mrs. Cherevan sarcastically:

“So you see what your daughter has done. As soon as you women take over there will be trouble.”

Mrs. Cherevan asked her daughter about Petro and how it all happened. She was on the point of tears.

“Father Shram,” she said, “if my Lesia has caused all this tragedy we must both try to help. Why don’t you take Petro back to Khmaryshche? We won’t sleep at night until he is better. I am used to looking after a Cossack’s wounds and so is Lesia. May God help us to bring him back to full health.”

Shram agreed that they should take Petro straight to Khmaryshche. Cherevan asked the Hetman and all the Cossack notables to be his guests.

Later, Mrs. Cherevan and Lesia started back home so as to put everything in good order. On the way, Lesia told her mother for the tenth time how Petro fought Kyrylo Tur. Once they reached Khmaryshche, Lesia’s full attention was given to the wounded man. She made a bed for him in her

own room, decorated the ceiling with fresh flowers, put an embroidered curtain across the window and looked after poor Petro as if she were his sister. Cherevan's guests were feasting at Khmaryshche while some of them remained with the Hetman in Kyiv, attending to military affairs. Mrs. Cherevan looked after the guests and all Lesia had to do was dig up roots, boil various herbs and stay with the sick man. Vasyl Nevolnyk helped her.

Petro felt like a newborn child. What if Lesia were not his bride? She loved him and he needed no more. Sometimes, half-dreaming, he saw her, bending over him, watching over his recovery. Like a mother playing with a child she would look into his eyes to see if consciousness were returning.

He felt weak and could not move his legs or arms but his heart was as full as water in a spring well. He would have given up his whole life and health if only he might die looking into those eyes, clear as spring water. A nightingale sang in the orchard and a fragrant gust of wind blew in through the window. The setting sun gently touched its rays on the wall. Lesia sat beside him, took his hand and put her palm on his parched forehead. He would have liked to fall asleep thus and never wake again. Slowly his health started to improve. It filled his body like water in a well. His lips grew red and his eyes shone once more.

Old Shram was pleased to see this and so was the Hetman. But Lesia was the most pleased. Her joy was as quiet as the moon on a rainy day: its silvery charm is spread over fields, villages, orchards and rivers. Whenever it hides behind a cloud the fields grow dark and everything becomes sad. So did Lesia change her mood; now she was joyful, and then sad, especially when she remembered that she would have to spend her life alone in the Hetman's house, listening to men talking of war and clinking glasses at the table. She had learned too late that Somko was not born for love. He was a proud Hetman, but he could not talk to her like poor Petro. Still, she was ready to accept her fate. It was useless to tell her father or mother of her feelings. She hoped Petro would not know of them, either.

As soon as Petro started to recover, Lesia visited him rarely as if she were shy of him.

"Why are you running away from me?" he asked her once, catching her by the hand. She said nothing, but tears filled her eyes.

"Don't run away from me," said Petro, "be like a sister to me. Even if God has decreed that we may not live together, I shall not stop loving you."

"It is better for us to part and not see each other," answered Lesia, running into the garden, crying.

After that she would come and sit near his bed and sing a sad song. Her whole soul would be revealed in it. They would sit there in silence looking at each other and enjoying each other's presence.

Somko paid no heed to it. Shram and the Cherevans were oblivious to it. In those days when a girl was affianced, it was too late to say whom she loved or did not love. Everyone took things for granted and Petro and Lesia suffered in silence.

As soon as Petro got up, Somko received news that the tsar's envoys would shortly arrive in Pereiaslav. There was no more time to spend with Cherevan. Somko left immediately to greet the visitors. Shram was waiting in vain for the General Council which was to have gathered all the Cossacks on this side of the Dnieper against Teteria. Mrs. Cherevan thought about her daughter's wedding and Cherevan was still carousing with the merry Cossacks. They decided that he should

take Lesia to a place near Nizhen where his relative Hvyntovka was a Cossack officer. Shram and his son were to travel to Pereiaslav to join Somko. There they planned, after meeting the tsar's envoys, to celebrate the Hetman's wedding and then persuade all the Cossack elders to join in a campaign against Teteria, so that one single Hetman would rule the entire Ukraine.

When they reached Brovary forest, a messenger from Pereiaslav met them. It was the Pereiaslav captain, Ivan Yusko. As soon as they saw him they suspected bad news.

"What news do you bring?" asked the Hetman.

"I would rather not say, your Honor."

"What, have the Tatars reappeared?"

"Worse than the Tatars. Vasiuta has brought you four enemies, not counting Ivanets."

"Tell me honestly, or don't you have a tongue?" shouted Somko.

"It would be better if I had no tongue than to have to report such news. The colonels of Zinkiv, Myrhorod and Poltava have gone over to Ivanets."

"What's that? They went over to Ivanets?"

"You heard, all three of them."

"Myrhorod, Poltava and Zinkiv?"

"All three of them. Only the colonels of Lubny and Hadiach are loyal to you this side of Nizhen."

"Why wasn't I told about it?"

"The news did not reach Pereiaslav until yesterday."

"How, when did it happen? Tell us."

"This is how it happened," said captain Yusko. "Our mayor went to Prince Romodanovsky to pay taxes to Moscow. He heard that the Prince was in Zinkiv. When he arrived there he found Colonel Ostap from Myrhorod and Colonel Demian from Poltava with their officers. They were well received by the Zinkiv colonel, Hrytsko. The Prince was swamped by Zaporozhians who, after leaving their masters, went to the Zaporozhe to drink. Some recognized the mayor and called him an envoy of Somko, the merchant, if you'll pardon the expression. They threatened to rise against the city Cossacks. Then we learned the real news — that the Prince and Ivanets are friends and that the Prince calls him Hetman of the Zaporozhians and lets him govern Ukraine as far as Romny."

Somko held his head in despair.

"Myrhorod, Poltava," he mumbled, "they have betrayed me. I see that military honor is lost in Ukraine. We buried it along with father Khmelnytsky. Look here, Yusko, are you telling the truth?"

"I wish it were a lie. But Ivanets is now a guest of the Prince. The mayor saw him there, as plainly as you see me here, your Honor. They say that the tsar favors the Zaporozhians and is ready to do what they ask. That's why, after summoning them to Zinkiv, the Prince, the tsar's envoy, proclaimed Ivanets as Hetman. Now the only thing people care about is that they should do well out of it. And so the three colonels asked for Ivanets to be given authority over the territory up to Romny."

"Yes, yes," Somko agreed bitterly. "Let anyone be Hetman over us, whether he is a knight or a swineherd, as long as we stay colonels. Oh, the cursed greed of the Cossack elders — now I see it all. You are ready to serve anyone as long as your privileges are safe. What about Vasiuta? Has he gone over to Ivanets too?"

“Probably not,” answered captain Yusko, “since the mayor said that the Zaporozhians were against him too. They were all against the city Cossacks, especially those who were beaten by them and who are now promising to avenge themselves.”

“What news to greet us in my Hetman’s country!” said Somko, smiling bitterly at Shram. “Well, we still have to see who will have the upper hand. I’ll teach those traitors a lesson.”

“What are you planning to do, son?” asked Shram.

“Go to Pereiaslav, summon the regiments still obedient to me and face the entire world if need be. What do I care about the princes and the boyars! What do they have in mind—to cut Ukraine to pieces? We have our own Cossack laws and no one must interfere with us. We shall see who’ll win this one.”

“And instead of a war against Teteria, there will be strife between the regiments,” said Shram. “If Ivanets has three regiments with him you will not dislodge him without a fight. And Vasiuta will rise too, since he has support in the Siver and Starodub country. Let us wait till Somko defeats his enemies. If only Teteria doesn’t come over the Dnieper. I shouldn’t be surprised if he does, with his Polish allies.”

“Well, what would you do, father?” asked the Hetman. “Give me your advice and I’ll take it.”

“I would advise this: go to Pereiaslav and write letters to all the colonels asking them to reconsider and not to support Ivanets, who wants to bring us into disgrace. In the meantime I will go to Nizhen with Cherevan and will try to convince that madman Vasiuta that he had better support you. If only he would come to your side the colonels would soon obey you.”

“Let them obey me soon or I’ll do with them what the late Hetman did to Hladky.”

“Don’t boast now, my son, but pray,” said Shram gloomily. “See which side takes the upper hand and then rejoice. Don’t let us waste time—let us go our ways.”

They said goodbye and left. No one had a cheerful word to say. They were all sunk in deep sorrow.

“So now I can see which way fate is going for Ukraine,” said Shram to himself, his head bowed. He rode at the end of the sad procession and would not talk to anyone. “Is it possible,” he thought, “that everything will be scattered like peas from the palm of a hand? Is this the end of all the Cossack wars of liberation?” He remembered a song the holy man had composed on Khmelnytsky’s death: “Have Ukraine’s prayers been in vain? Has she gained her freedom from Poland for long?”

“Perhaps it was in vain,” thought Shram, “perhaps it’s God’s will that we should not enjoy peace. Or perhaps the end of the world is coming and everybody is rising against everybody else? Where are the dark clouds coming from? At one time Zaporozhe was the seat of Cossack knighthood but now it produces these vultures. Perhaps the Zaporozhians are now so defeated that they are stirring up trouble among the people for their own advantage? They are probably jealous because the city Cossacks are better off. Why did they go to Zaporozhe after the Poles were defeated and the Cossacks could settle down if they wanted to? No, they wanted military glory! Many of them went to the Sich only because they did not want to put in some honest work. Now they have their military glory! They help mother Ukraine with their deeds. Ivanets has gained their favor and now he gets what he wants from the prince. I know the direction he is taking. Yet perhaps there are still one or two hundred souls left in Ukraine who are loyal to the cause.”

While he was thus thinking aloud he heard a noise. The reapers were working in the fields and one of them, obviously drunk, was stretched out across the road. Vasyl Nevolnyk must have dozed off and run over him. There was the devil to pay.

Shram spurred his horse and rode up to the crowd of people.

“The red jackets,” the drunken reapers were shouting. “Szlachta has taken over again. But we shall weed out these lords from Ukraine.”

They approached the carriage, waving their scythes. One of them was carrying an ax, ready to cut down the wheels.

“Go away, you Herods,” shouted Shram.

When they saw a priest they stopped.

“What are you doing?” asked Shram. “Are you Turks or Tatars that you want to rob travelers? Are you Christians, or what faith do you have?”

“No father, we haven’t forgotten our Christian faith,” one of them said. “But how can we stand it if our people are mangled by the red jackets?”

“Thank God, our hands are not handcuffed,” shouted two or three others. “We will not be humiliated. Why should one man lace his clothes with gold while another man has barely enough to cover himself? Why should one man have enough land and the other not? Surely, we all fought the Poles and won our freedom.”

“So I see,” said Shram to himself, “the Zaporozhians have been at work here, too.”

“We have nothing to do with the Zaporozhians,” they replied. “In the Zaporozhe all are equal, but here our city Cossacks are to blame. In Zaporozhe there are no lords or peasants, rich or poor.”

“You are blind, my children,” Shram said to them through tears. “May God have mercy upon your ignorance. Let the horses go or I shall invoke God’s punishment on you.”

“Well, let them go,” said the reapers, stepping aside. “If it weren’t for you, father, we would soon find out what kind of wood the spokes of the coach wheels are made of. It wouldn’t save them even if they were of fine Polish craftsmanship.”

“May God have mercy upon you,” said Shram riding away. “You are all sick. May he who turned your heads be damned!”

Our travelers heard further talk of this kind all the way to Nizhen. When Shram went to the blacksmith to have his horse shod he heard him talk about the black council. “Why aren’t you getting your spears ready?” he asked the people. “There will soon be a chance to use them. The Zaporozhians went to Nizhen and said that a new Hetman just like Khmelnytsky was there.”

Driving through the villages they heard village counselors, instead of performing their duties as judges, talk of the Cossacks and how they would liberate everybody.

“Now the Cossacks have power,” a graybeard said, “and we can test their strength. But in the time of Nalyvaiko and Pavliuha it was the Poles who had power. One of them over a hundred villages. In the old days when you walked through the fields they would tell you that they all belonged to Vyshnevetsky. It would take you a week to go through Vyshnevetsky’s property. These lords did what they liked with the King and yet our father managed to deal with them.”

“How did we throw off the Polish yoke?” asked the younger ones.

“God helped us. The Poles thought they could trample us like straw. They treated us like cattle. But our brothers, poor creatures, prayed to God every night. The Poles drank and enjoyed

themselves, while our brothers were asking God for help. That's why God helped our cause."

So the villagers talked and reminisced about Khmelnytsky's time. They knew which of the Cossacks had grown rich as a result of the war and why some became poor. Someone was holding forth thus:

"When, with God's help, our side had cleared out the Poles, then the land on both sides of the Dnieper belonged to the Cossacks. They started to divide it up among the regiments. But then the old Cossacks protested and said, "What Cossacks are those? Their fathers and grandfathers were no Cossacks. Let us take a census. Whosoever is a true Cossack will be free and whosoever is not will have to work on the land. There was a big quarrel. The common people did not want to give up their privileges and Khmelnytsky had to make peace between them. Those who were rich and had horses remained Cossacks and were so registered, while those who had nothing remained commoners (except those who were merchants) and worked for others. They were unable to become free Cossacks. As the Hetman and the elders had ruled thus, it was accepted. The commoners were taxed and the rich Cossacks were not. A Cossack colonel used to come and ask the Hetman for so much land and so on down the line. This is how the rich Cossacks used to treat the poor. There are too many rich Cossacks now. That's the root of it." Shram listened and did not know what to reply. "What's the point of talking to them?" he thought. "I can see that they have been persuaded by the Zaporozhians. Now Ivanets is stirring up an old fire. Ignorant people repeat insults against the 'red coats' and he is exploiting this for his own use. We shall need God's help if we are to defeat him."

10

The next day, at sunset, our travelers reached Hvyntovka's khutir, which stood not far from Nizhen, in a beautiful oak and lime forest. Passing the blacksmith's house, which stood in the forest, Shram made a detour to ask whether Hvyntovka were at home. The door suddenly opened and a woman flew out, as if pushed by the devil, and stopped just in front of his horse. Her husband jumped out after her, holding a pestle in his hands.

"I'll give it to you for those songs of yours," he cried.

The wife saw that she could not run away so she started to circle round Shram's horse.

"So," she answered, "can't I sing about an old man and a young lass?"

It was obvious that her husband had gray hair and his wife was black-browed and young.

"Wait till I catch you by the hair," he shouted, "I'll show you how old I am. You can laugh and wink, but when I catch you I'll beat you hard." He chased after her around Shram's horse.

"Stop chasing me," she said, "you are out of breath. I'll sing you another song if you didn't like the first one." She clapped her hands and started to sing about a young Zaporozhian Cossack.

"Now you won't escape me," her husband threatened. "I can see the Zaporozhians have been visiting you too often to get a drink of water. I bet it's not water they want from you."

He chased after his wife but she escaped and went on teasing him.

"Stop this tomfoolery," shouted Shram. "Let my horse go through."

"Where can I take refuge, father?" said the wife. "He'll kill me if he catches me."

"You should be ashamed," said Shram to the man. "You have white hair and yet you act like a clown."

The blacksmith realized that he was facing a priest and went indoors. On the threshold he shook

his pestle at his wife and she stuck out her tongue at him.

“Is the regimental captain at home?” Shram asked the woman.

“Yes, he is at home. He is carousing with the Zaporozhians.”

“What? Hvyntovka with the Zaporozhians?”

“Why not? Don’t you know that the Zaporozhians are the best people in the world? The tsar, they say, has offered them the whole Ukraine.”

“May you turn to stone like Lot’s wife for saying things like that,” shouted Shram and rode away.

“You silly old man,” muttered the blacksmith’s wife, who was a little drunk.

On his way to overtake his own party Shram stopped when he saw the holy man.

“So you didn’t want to come with me, but now you are here before me,” said Shram.

“Is this Shram talking to me?” said the holy man.

“How did God bring you here?” asked Shram.

“The pilgrims gave me gold and brought me here to Nizhen.”

“What did you do for them?”

“They left a wounded Cossack with me. It’s the one who fought against your Petro.”

“So you are nursing a viper?”

“Why not? They are all the same to me; I don’t intervene in your quarrels.”

“Herod’s soul,” said Shram. “He nearly sent my youngest one to the next world.”

“How is your Petro?”

“He’s here with me. He’s only just recovered.”

“So you are going to be Hvyntovka’s guests?”

“I plan to go straight to Vasiuta.”

“He is not to be found in Nizhen. They say he’s gone to a council being held at Baturyn.”

“Has Hvyntovka gone with him?”

“No. He doesn’t need Hvyntovka in Baturyn. Why isn’t he calling a council in Nizhen? But let him go, I don’t care. Goodbye, father.”

The holy man drove away.

Shram caught up with his party at the gate of Hvyntovka’s estate. The buildings owned by this worthy Cossack were finer than Cherevan’s. The wall was two stories high, with ornate windows and embrasures, surmounted by a brass weathercock. It was a lord’s manor. In the middle of the courtyard was a post with brass, copper and silver rings on it. A simple Cossack had to tie his horse to the brass ring, a middle Cossack to the copper one, and Hvyntovka’s equals to the silver ring.

Mrs. Cherevan, seeing all this, turned to Shram and said, laughing

“No wonder my brother has a princess for a wife. His customs are different from ours.”

Shram commented gloomily that whoever married a Polish woman soon imitated Polish customs.

As they entered the gate they saw Hvyntovka, who was returning from the hunt. Hounds swarmed around him, horns were being blown and two pairs of oxen were being driven to one side.

“I see that your brother has become a real landlord,” said Shram to Mrs. Cherevan. “I have never seen a Cossack leading hounds on a leash.”

“And look what they have brought from the hunt,” said Mrs. Cherevan. “How are you, brother?”

she shouted to Hvyntovka. "Can you welcome these unexpected guests?"

"They are expected and very welcome," said Hvyntovka, approaching the coach. "Greetings, dear sister and everyone. Is this Mr. Shram?"

"Who else would want to come here from Pavoloch? Here's my son, at your service," said Shram.

"I did not expect such a surprise," said Hvyntovka. "Nastia," he shouted, turning back to the house. "Nastia, darling, come out and greet our visitors."

The mistress of the house showed herself in the doorway. She was young and pretty, although rather pale. Her walk and appearance were foreign and her Ukrainian dress did not fit her properly. She was a black-browed, beautiful lady.

"My princess, my darling," said Hvyntovka, "why don't you greet our visitors graciously? This is my sister and her daughter, my brother-in-law and Mr. Shram with his son. He is well known in Ukraine and in Poland."

The princess came down from the porch, smiling, yet she had a sad look about her and everyone noticed it. One could guess immediately that she had a deep sorrow in her heart.

Hvyntovka dismounted from his horse, took his wife by the hand and led her to the coach. Mrs. Cherevan and her daughter got out to meet their hostess. They looked at the princess but she looked past them as if she were seeing a nightmare. Then she called out in a desperate voice: "The coach," and fell down, unconscious.

They all rushed to her, unable to say what had happened. Cherevan alone smiled, for he knew the reason.

"Don't wonder, brothers," he said. "We seized this coach near Zboriv while the prince and his son were sitting in it.

The prince was taken captive by the Tatars and the little boy was trampled to death by the horses' hooves."

They picked the princess up. Perhaps she had heard what Cherevan said, for she groaned in agony as if her heart were being pierced by a knife.

"You see the Polish viper," said Hvyntovka through his teeth. "I thought she had forgotten her past, but she is like a wolf—no matter how long you feed him he will still look for the woods."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cherevan. "Didn't I tell you not to marry a Polish woman? You won't be happy with her."

"Enough," answered Hvyntovka. "Come into the living room, dear guests. And you," he turned to the servants, "have you lost your wits? Carry the lady to her chamber."

"How do you get on with the people in the city?" asked Shram.

"Well," answered Hvyntovka, "you should hear them fraternizing with the Zaporozhians. They drink and eat together and they are so proud that they won't tip their caps to the city Cossacks."

"Wait a moment," said Shram, "whose side are you on?"

"I am on the Hetman's side."

"Then why do you fraternize with the Zaporozhians?"

"Who told you that?"

"Someone did. I heard that you have been entertaining the Zaporozhians as much as the townsmen do."

“You should have spat at whoever told you that. I am a man of some means and I don’t have to seek the company of the Zaporozhians.”

“So I see,” said Shram quietly to himself.

Hvyntovka looked through the window and screamed at his servants: “Chase away those beggars.”

“Who does that to a Christian?” protested Cherevan and Shram added impatiently: “You are behaving like a Pole. Is this the influence of your wife?”

“What do you mean?” cried Hvyntovka.

“Your speech and behavior are those of a Yarema.”

Hvyntovka blushed deeply.

“Father,” he said, “you are the only one who can tell me things like that without asking for a fight. I am a Yarema if you are a Barabash. May the devil take my soul right now if I am not ready to draw my sabre for Ukraine.” He took out his sabre and it gleamed in the setting sun.

“Steady there,” said Shram. “I know you well. Don’t take me seriously — what I said was in the heat of argument.” To himself he thought: “Ukraine was dear to Yarema too, who fought for his estates with his sabre.”

“I must look after my guests, not quarrel with them,” said Hvyntovka. “Princess,” he called out, “give the Cossacks their dinner. You were wrong,” he turned again to Shram, “when you said that my wife had turned me into a Pole. Perhaps I have turned her into a Cossack’s wife. You see, my table isn’t set by pages as it would be in Poland. The princesses themselves serve us Cossacks at the table. Hey, Princess, my darling, do you hear that the Cossacks are waiting for dinner?”

Hvyntovka was boasting in front of Shram and was trying to show that his wife was his servant, although she was born a princess. Like a corpse risen from the grave, the princess came unsteadily into the room in response to her husband’s angry call. She behaved like a Turkish slave, and trembling and bowing, tried to please her husband and his guests. She started to set the table. Her white hands seemed whiter than the tablecloth and shone through the evening dusk like newly fallen snow. Were they made to set a Cossack table, after they left those lofty princely chambers?

“Doesn’t it add to the Cossack glory,” said the host watching her, “that a Polish princess will serve you dinner, dear guests?”

“Our carriage has upset your lady,” said Mrs. Cherevan, “and possibly she doesn’t feel well. Perhaps we should sprinkle some holy water on her?”

“Sister,” said Hvyntovka, “my voice will raise her from the coffin. Pay no attention to her sadness today. I have only to say one word to make her gay again and jump over my sabre. That’s how our Cossack lads used to dance to the Polish tune.”

No one could tell what was happening in the princess’s heart. She must have grown used to this treatment. She was not even crying or sighing. She listened to her husband’s boasting as if it concerned someone else. But sometimes she would tremble at the sound of her husband’s voice, like the string of a bandura.

“Faster, faster,” Hvyntovka shouted at her. “Show that your good breeding has been of some use to you. Give us some brandy, so that we can feel young again.”

The princess brought the brandy and began to serve the guests. She had to drink the first glass herself and then she handed glasses to the guests.

“Drink up,” said Hvyntovka, “it’s safe now. The Polish woman won’t poison you.”

“I don’t want to slight your wife,” said Shram. “But that has happened before. Perhaps Khmelnytsky would have lived longer if he had not fraternized with the Poles.”

“So you see,” Hvyntovka turned to his wife, “what we think of your countrymen. You should thank God that I rescued you from them. Even though my lime tree living room is not quite up to a princely palace, at least you live among orthodox Christians. You won’t smell of Poland when your final day of judgment comes.”

“Does she pray as we do?” asked Mrs. Cherevan of her brother.

“Of course,” answered Hvyntovka, “you don’t think I would have a wife who is a Catholic? I don’t know what’s inside her heart, but she attends our church and crosses herself like us. Darling, cross yourself.”

The princess crossed herself like a small child. Lesia and her mother almost wept to see the poor woman in such misery. She was like a helpless bird in the hands of little teasing boys. She had to pay for everything the Polish princes, senators and landlords had done to the Cossacks.

They sat down at the table and Shram blessed the food. Then, suddenly, someone pulled the window open and called out:

“Tu-whit-tu-who!”

Shram dropped his spoon and their host became confused and did not know what to do. Then again they heard: “Tu-whit-tu-who! Are you asleep, Prince, or are you so proud that you won’t let a stranger in?”

“Come in, come in,” replied Hvyntovka, “the whole house is open to you.”

“And your dogs don’t bite?”

“And why do they say that a Zaporozhian Cossack fears no dogs?”

“The devil knows what has happened in Ukraine,” said the voice outside. “You have to be careful going into anyone’s house.”

“You can come into my house at midnight,” answered Hvyntovka.

“Matviy,” said Shram to Hvyntovka, “I thought you didn’t fraternize with the Zaporozhians.”

“Oh, my lord,” said Hvyntovka, blushing, “all Zaporozhians aren’t alike. This is old father Puhach, their leader. I am no enemy of his. Everything has changed and grown muddled in Ukraine, so that there is no straight road anywhere. When we have the upper hand we’ll deal with the Zaporozhians, but for the time being we have to be good to them. They have the tsar’s respect and get favors from him.”

“I’ll not go along that road with you,” said Shram gloomily in reply.

Just then, old Puhach, with his long mustaches, came into the living room with his batman. He was simply dressed and wore a black shirt. His host was indifferent to his dress. Forgetting his guests, he greeted old Puhach as if he were wearing a crimson jacket.

“Please sit down with us at the table,” he said.

“I won’t sit down,” said Puhach in the middle of the room.

“Why not?”

“Because you treat good people like dogs.”

“Which good people do you mean?”

“Those who pay two oxen for a cartload of wood. Here they are to see you. Without me they

would not be able to approach you.”

Several townsmen came in and stood near the threshold.

“Tell them,” said Puhach, “why you took away their oxen.”

“So that they won’t cut down the trees, that’s why.”

“But they weren’t cutting trees in your wood, but in the one owned by the city.”

“By the city,” they chanted and bowed to Puhach and to Hvyntovka.

“Since when has my wood belonged to the city?” asked Hvyntovka.

“According to your deed it’s yours, but according to ours it is ours from time immemorial. When Khmelnytsky expelled the Poles he gave us the right to seize any land we liked. These are still staked out by our mayors.”

“We know very well that you only waited to seize the best lands while we Cossacks were fighting. But that is not right. My colonel gave me the right to claim as much land as I could ride around on horseback in a day. Now this is my property.”

“Now listen to me, Prince,” said old Puhach solemnly. “It is true that the townsmen took advantage of you after the defeat of the Poles, but it is also true that the Cossack elders have treated them badly since. If a colonel gave you the land, so be it, but don’t offend good people and give them back their oxen.”

Hvyntovka remained silent for a while and then said, looking at Shram:

“No, let them get their oxen from their mayors. I’ll show them that I am the master here. I think they should be put down, these sabre-less peasants.”

“Very soon these peasants will knock hell out of you,” said old Puhach. “Sabres won’t help you. You are foolish in your pride and you don’t repent of anything. Children,” he turned to the townsmen, “spit on his pride and his greed. We shall reward you tenfold when the time comes.”

“Thank you, father, for defending us,” said the townsmen. “Come and have supper with us. Don’t scorn our modest quarters. Goodbye, Prince; your time will come.”

“Wait,” said Hvyntovka, “I don’t want to quarrel with you over the poor beggars. Let them take their oxen and you stay with us for dinner.”

“There is no time to sit down to dinner,” answered Puhach. “Soon our Zaporozhians will reach Nizhen. The tsar’s boyars are coming too. We won’t let them go to Pereiaslav. Nizhen is good enough for a black council. So, we can’t sit down to supper.”

Without waiting for an answer he put on his cap and went out along with the townsmen.

Hvyntovka was left in an awkward position in front of Shram. He realized that Shram had taken his measure. Though he tried to patch up matters with Cossack slogans he knew that he could not deceive old Shram. The old man sat sullenly at dinner. The other guests were silent too.

Hvyntovka was annoyed and vented his annoyance on the princess. She did not sit down but waited at the table along with two servant girls. He did not like the food. Everything was wrong, everything smacked of Polish recipes. So he started swearing at the Poles and their habits.

The poor princess, seeing him so upset, trembled like a stalk in the wind. She did not know what she was doing. She caught the silver jug of cherry brandy with her sleeve and upset it on the table.

Hvyntovka flared up. “That devilish blood,” he roared so that the window-panes shook and he shoved the princess away from the table. She fell to the floor.

“Servants,” he called out, “take this Polish louse away.” Two girls ran into the room, picked up

their mistress and led her out.

Cherevan looked at Shram, waiting for a comment, but the old man continued to sit gloomily as if he had not seen anything. Cherevan remained silent and thus they finished their dinner.

After dinner Shram told his host that the next morning he would leave early for Baturyn and that Petro would stay behind to convalesce. They departed to their rooms for the night.

11

Petro rose early and went into the stable, but his father's horse was gone. The old man must have left at dawn.

Petro felt heavy at heart. The same thought accompanied him always — the thought of his unhappy love. At first he was upset that the girl did not care for him, then disappointed when he found out about her bridegroom and now he was heartbroken because he knew she loved him but they could never be together. How happy he would be if she could share his life with him. The thought of her dazed his mind, for without her life would be like a desert.

Another man would not have paid much attention to the fact that she was betrothed and that his own father had blessed this couple. He would have seized her and run away into the wild steppes and the Khorol khutirs and would have laughed at his enemies. But Petro never entertained such a thought. He was a good son and a loyal Cossack and he would rather suffer than disobey his father or besmirch the Cossack honor. He had a different plan. After his father's death he planned to go to Zaporozhe and there with the other Cossacks raid Turkish cities and give his life to Cossack glory on sea or land, in defense of the Christian faith. In the meantime he decided to avoid Lesia and suffer in solitude. That was why he did not want to go back to the house, so that he would not meet the sweetheart he could not marry. He went for a walk in the woods to dispel his sorrow.

He took a path to the left of the main road and was trying to think of his father, wherever he might be, and of the woes which had befallen Ukraine. As he wandered, he came to a spot where he could see smoke rising behind a tree. At a distance Petro saw a house and a fence. He was about to turn aside so as not to wake the dogs when he saw a man in Cossack dress walking from the direction of the house, led by a dark young girl. Perhaps the man had no need of assistance, since he removed his hand and said:

“Nastia, why do you lead me like a drunken man from a tavern? I would like to ride a horse today and you are leading me like a child. Step aside, please.”

Petro was surprised to recognize Kyrylo Tur. He was as pleased to see him as if he were his own brother, despite the fact that they had fought a mortal battle not so long ago.

Kyrylo Tur was pleased too and greeted Petro like an old friend.

“Greetings,” he said. “So you are cured. I didn't think you would survive your wounds. I didn't want to get up, either. God only knows if there will be any more time to rest so peacefully.”

“You don't know what you are talking about, brother,” said the girl looking up into his eyes and still holding his hand.

“Be quiet, woman,” said Kyrylo Tur. “You think that life turns around house, stove and bed. That's where you think happiness lies. But a Cossack isn't happy on land or on sea. His fate lies in God's lap. That's where his soul longs to go, if you want to know. But how can I talk to you about things like that? Brother,” he turned to Petro, “I was about to leave this world full of women and

other visions and had my foot on the threshold of the path to the other world when good people stopped me and brought me back. They thought they did a good deed in not letting me die. They thought that life was the most precious gift of God. But he who knows everything knows that this life is a misery.”

“Tell me,” said Petro, “how do you come to be here?”

“Because those good people started to nurse and bathe me and give me all kinds of herbs to drink and finally brought me here. As if I wanted it! But they brought me to my mother’s house. Here the women got me in their clutches and as you can see I can’t get away from them. They tell me I am ill, and I feel as if I could seize a bear by the ear. If it weren’t for the holy man I would die of boredom with all the weeping women around me. He can transport my soul with a Cossack song and he looks at the world soberly, like a man.”

“Where is your comrade?” asked Petro.

“He’s busy now. We Zaporozhians want to make things unpleasant for the city Cossacks, so he’s moving from place to place. Our brothers have made a shirt for you that you won’t be able to wear.”

“Listen, tell me the truth; don’t talk in riddles,” said Petro.

“Who the hell can tell you the truth now?” laughed the Zaporozhian. “It is cloudy everywhere. It won’t get clearer until the thunder and lightning strike. It’s not far off. My comrade told me that our men have set up camp in Ostry, in the Romanivsky Kut. Just wait and see if Ivan Martynovych himself won’t come there. And tomorrow morning the tsar’s boyars may arrive. The rabble is gathering around Nizhen like locusts.”

Petro shuddered when he heard all this. He thought first of his father and wanted to rush to tell him, until he remembered that he had gone. His second thought was of Lesia. He feared that something might happen to her during the Cossacks’ quarrels and thought that Kyrylo Tur might try to abduct her just as he had once attempted in Kyiv. What should he do? He thought he might mention Lesia to the Zaporozhian.

“Ha, ha, ha,” roared Kyrylo Tur. “Are you still thinking about such nonsense? I thought it was enough to spill half a bucket of blood to come to one’s senses. But I see your nurse has fed you such porridge that you will always, even in your old age, think about women.”

“Does that mean,” inquired Petro, “that you are ready to give up the girl for whom you fought so bravely?”

“Fie,” the Zaporozhian spat angrily, “why should I start to think about her now? They could give me a dozen girls like that now and I would trade them all for a pipeful of tobacco.”

Petro felt better. “Where are you going?” he asked.

“You see, the holy man told me to go for walks in the woods, but this woman here, she is my sister if you want to know, and my mother, who is at home, can’t believe that I am well again. I’ll show them today that they should leave me alone. I shall saddle my horse and ride into the fields. How is Cherevan, by the way?”

“He is with us here at Hvyntovka’s,” said Petro.

“So we are neighbors,” replied the Zaporozhian. “Let us live in peace now, if that is at all possible in Ukraine. Let’s go inside and have something to eat.”

Petro agreed. Tur’s mother was in the house, making pancakes for breakfast.

“This is my old mother,” said Kyrylo Tur, turning to his mother. “This is the Cossack who was

with me near Kyiv when we were both attacked.”

Tur whispered to Petro: “I can’t tell them it was you who fought me, because they would frown at you. These women don’t understand that today you can fight and tomorrow you can be friends. Women don’t know what the world is like.”

The old mother was happy to see that her son had a guest and at once asked him to sit down and eat. She served hot pancakes with some bacon and sour cream. She also took down a bottle of pepper brandy from the shelf.

“The merciful Lord has sent me a guest,” she said. “I never thought I would see my son, my bright falcon.”

She embraced Tur and kissed him on the head.

“Enough, mother,” he said. “All you know is how to nurse me. I am afraid my comrades may not take me back because you have made me into such a mother’s boy.”

“And you haven’t stopped thinking about that cursed Sich?” asked his mother.

“Mother,” cried the Zaporozhian, “you had better hold your tongue if you want me to stay here another day. How can you say, ‘that cursed Sich’?”

“May it sink into the earth,” said his mother tearfully. “It stole my husband, we did not know what happiness was when we were young, and now it will take my son so I won’t be happy in my old age.”

“What can you do with women?” said Kyrylo Tur, smiling. “What sort of happiness do they know? Mother, let us have something to drink; then we will be merrier. Now the Sich will be near — at the Romanivsky Kut. I will be able to visit you and bring you presents.”

“You are the best present I can have, my darling son,” said his mother.

“What about Marusia? God hasn’t created a Cossack for the benefit of women. He has better things to do than sit here and eat pancakes.”

As he finished saying this, a cry was heard from outside:

“Tu-whit-tu-whoo!”

Both women began to tremble with fear.

“Mother,” cried Tur’s sister. “Why am I so frightened? Brother, who is that?”

“They have come to claim my soul,” answered the Zaporozhian gloomily.

“Oh, dear,” cried his mother, “is it really so?”

“The young men will tell you themselves,” said Tur, “if you haven’t guessed already.”

The door opened and old Puhach came into the room, with his henchmen.

“Greetings, you scoundrel,” the old man from the Sich said to Kyrylo Tur. “How are you going to receive your guests? Say goodbye to your mother and sister, for you won’t be seeing them for a long time.”

“Father,” called out Tur’s mother, “what are you going to do to him? Don’t leave me alone in my old age; don’t take my bright light away from me.”

Father Puhach did not even glance at her, but addressed Kyrylo Tur again.

“So, you scoundrel, you’ve pulled yourself to your feet again. We must go to the Sich to see what your punishment is. You think that we were foolish to give money to the holy man? You are really scum. You have brought shame on all your comrades. Get ready quickly, you swine. Saddle the horse. You should be brought before your comrades with a rope around your neck, but I’ll let you

ride on a horse for the last time.”

Tur’s mother and sister listened to this speech in a complete stupor. They flung themselves on the floor and embraced Puhach’s feet, crying and pleading with him not to take away their last joy.

“Go away to the devil,” cried the fierce Zaporozhian. “Why are you crawling in front of me? I won’t be his judge—he will have to stand trial before his comrades.”

At that point Kyrylo Tur got up from the table and said gaily:

“Why are you frightening the women, father? Surely you had a mother, or was it a she-wolf who bore you? Sit down and have something to eat and I’ll saddle the horse and get ready. Mother and sister, please don’t cry. Don’t you know these Zaporozhian jokes? They are so heavy-handed that they make you cry.”

They did not know whether to believe Kyrylo Tur or not, but they calmed down a little. They gazed silently at their grim guest, father Puhach, to see if he would say a gentle word or smile. With his white mustache hanging down he looked at Kyrylo Tur like an eagle at a lamb. But Tur was not paying much attention to him.

“Why are you so sad?” he asked. “Father has joked and you have all lost your senses. Let us have some hot pancakes and I’ll give the guests pepper brandy. I told you that I’ll saddle the horse today. So the Cossacks came to fetch me, did they? These women don’t know how to do anything but cry. And they asked me to stay with them. How could a Cossack live with such crybabies?”

Father Puhach sat down at the table and started to eat pancakes. His aide did the same.

Kyrylo Tur left the room and whistled for his horse, which was grazing outside. The animal was well trained; it came as soon as his master whistled.

Kyrylo Tur started to collect his weapons, and to cheer his mother he chanted a Cossack song about a young Cossack and his wife. The song was ill chosen and his mother felt even sadder afterwards. She left her daughter to clear away the dishes and sat at the end of the table, crying so bitterly that even a Zaporozhian heart grew kinder.

“Don’t cry, mother,” said old Puhach, “you are wasting your tears.”

Kyrylo, walking past the window, was singing his song and his voice resounded through the house. “Remember me, my old mother, When you sit down to supper, Your child is in a foreign land And news of him there is none ...”

Tur’s sister embraced her mother and started to cry.

“Mother,” she said, “what are we going to do when Kyrylo is not with us?”

Her mother wept so hard she could not reply.

Kyrylo Tur came into the room, pretending to be as gay as a wedding guest. Seeing the women crying, he stood in the middle of the room, shrugged his shoulders and said:

“What can you do with women? I’ll have to cook my own pancakes in the future. But please stop crying. I shall come back to you a hundred times.”

“Go and put your belt on,” said Puhach. “I can’t wait for you very long. What kind of man are you?” he asked Petro.

Petro had silently watched everything that was happening. He told Puhach his first and last name.

“So, you are the son of the priest who meddles into other people’s business. We shall soon show you what’s to be done. Ivan Martynovych has already reach Nizhen; he will teach you a lesson.”

Had Petro been quite recovered he would have known how to answer the old Zaporozhian, but he felt so weak that he decided to be silent.

Kyrylo Tur got dressed. Old Puhach and his aide got up, bowed in front of the icons, gave thanks for the food and left the house. Kyrylo Tur bowed to his mother and said gaily:

“Goodbye, mother, goodbye, sister, and fare thee well, brother,” he said to Petro and quickly left the house.

His mother and his sister thought they had seen him for the last time. They rushed up to him and embraced him. Then he jumped onto his horse and kept turning it around so that neither his mother nor his sister could seize the stirrups.

“When can we expect you?” asked his sister.

“I’ll come to visit you As soon as the grass Grows on the bridge,” he answered in a sing-song.

Pressing the horse’s flanks with the stirrups, he flew away like a hurricane. Father Puhach and his aide followed him. The women returned to the house and wept as if he were dead.

“Don’t lose heart,” said Petro. “Perhaps he is going to be all right. The Romanivsky Kut is not far away and he may be back soon.”

“When the grass grows on the bridge,” whispered Tur’s sister.

“Could you do a favor to an old mother?” said Tur’s mother to Petro. “Could you go to the cursed Zaporozhians at the Romanivsky Kut and see what they’ll do to my son? Perhaps he has offended the comrades. They are without mercy. Go, my bright falcon, and tell us what’s happening. Let us know if he is still alive.”

“Very well,” said Petro, because he was genuinely sorry for the old woman. “I’ll go; perhaps I’ll bring you some good news.”

“May God help you,” they both cried and prayed that he would have a good journey.

12

Any small child could point out the Romanivsky Kut, especially since everybody was talking about Ivan Martynovych who had his headquarters there. It was along the river Oster. Ancient oaks and birches grew there, providing shade for the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

From far away Petro heard the tumult as if a fair had been set up. Coming closer he saw that it did in fact resemble a fair. A great many people were there and most of them were peasants who had come here in the hope of looting nearby Nizhen as Briukhovetsky had promised them. Many were dressed in rags, wearing black shirts. These were homeless vagabonds who served in the breweries and wine shops or at the public baths. Some had axes tucked behind their belts, others had scythes on their backs and still others merely carried big sticks. Petro was saddened when he saw this peasant multitude — a veritable mob.

From time to time he saw barrels of beer, buckets of mead and brandy, carts laden with flour, bacon and millet. All this was supplied to Ivan Martynovych by the Nizhen merchants because he had told that there would be no Cossack overlord and all would be equal. That was how he leveled off Ukraine.

No one asked for something to eat or drink; they just helped themselves as if they were at home. Large ovens were being constructed from earth and fires were burning. Here they were kneading dough and there they were roasting an ox. Elsewhere they were boiling gruel in large pots. Every-

thing was covered with a pall of smoke. Some were standing and others lying down. Everybody was merry. They kept shouting, "Ivan Martynovych, our dear father." Some would raise full glasses in one hand and their caps in the other and would proclaim loudly that Ivan Martynovych had always cared about human happiness.

Minstrels were mingling with the people, playing their banduras and chanting all kinds of songs. Struggling through the crowd Petro saw all manner of things. Here were some people dancing and laughing. With their arms akimbo they danced, forgetting the bad days. Others were standing around them, craning their necks and gawking as if at a puppet show. Further on some downcast heads were seen. Stooped over walking sticks or scythes the old men were listening to the minstrel. He played from a sitting position with his feet tucked under him. He sang of how the Poles had plundered Ukraine or of how Bohdan Khmelnytsky had gathered his soldiers from among the people and fought the nobles and the dukes. Others, having drunk a little, cried bitterly as they listened to the songs. One theme was clear in the talk of both merry and sad: Briukhovetsky was another Khmelnytsky, who was defending Ukraine once more against her enemies and was offering freedom to the people.

Passing people jumping and crying, Petro made his way further in search of the red Zaporozhian coats. The further he went the better dressed people looked. Here he found townsmen in blue jackets and town Cossacks in blue and green tunics. No sign of the crimson coats. He made his way to the very center where the Zaporozhian headquarters were set up.

The ground around had been leveled and sanded. No carts or barrels were to be seen, only Cossack tents. People were rushing to and fro. It was as noisy as a beehive. Petro noticed that in their dress the Zaporozhians were no different from the rest of the crowd. The only way they could be told apart was by their long tufts of hair and by their precious sabres and pistols.

Petro stopped and waited to see if he could spot Kyrylo Tur. Just then he noticed a man of middle years and height surrounded by a throng of followers—Zaporozhians, city Cossacks, townsmen and ordinary peasants. They were calling out, "Ivan Martynovych." Petro was looking at Briukhovetsky himself. He had expected to see someone clad in sables and gold. Instead he saw a man in a short old jacket, cloth trousers and down-at-the-heel boots. Only his sabre indicated that he was someone of distinction. It was wrought of gold and looked as if it did not belong to him. He did not seem like a Hetman. He looked a very ordinary little man. No one watching him would surmise that his head contained any thoughts other than those concerned with food and shelter. On closer examination he appeared approachable, the kind of man with whom one could strike up a conversation. Only his eyes were strange; they were shifty and did not appear to trust anyone. He walked with a slight stoop, holding his head on one side, as if saying, "I don't want any favors; just leave me alone." When he was asked a question he answered strangely, shrugging his shoulders and stepping aside. Altogether he looked like a little dog. This was Briukhovetsky, the snake in the grass, who had brought so much misery to Ukraine.

"Children," he said in a thin voice, "how shall I clothe you and feed you? You see, I don't have much to wear myself."

"Father Ivan Martynovych," shouted the Zaporozhians, "may your health be strong. We shall manage somehow."

"By God, it's right," one townsman cried, drowning out all the others. He was the same Taras Surmach we met earlier, who had come here to the black council. "They tell the truth, these good

men. If only your health is good, Hetman. We shall provide for you as long as you defend us.”

“Merciful God,” Briukhovetsky sighed. “Why else does a Zaporozhian live in this world if not to defend Orthodox

Christians like his own brothers? We do not need gold or silver, nor grand mansions. We don’t even think about that, brothers. Let ordinary people live well in Ukraine and we don’t care if we live in a mud hut eating only bread and drinking water. As they say—bread and water—the Cossack’s food.”

“That’s right,” called out the townsmen and the peasants. “For our sake the Zaporozhians live in misery, don’t wear white shirts. That’s why we love these young soldiers. That’s why we want Ivan Martynovych to be our Hetman.”

Briukhovetsky went on: “My children! Don’t talk of a Hetman. We, on the Sich, don’t care whether it is a Hetman or an otaman or a simple Cossack. It’s only the city Cossacks who say that if a man isn’t a landlord he isn’t a human being. We Zaporozhians don’t think of a Hetman. We only think of how we can help you. My heart aches when I see your poverty. At the time of Khmelnytsky rivers of honey were flowing in Ukraine, people dressed well. But now your Cossack overlords take everything away from you. They will soon take off your very skin. The words of the Bible ring true—the rich oppress you dearly.”

“So help us God, so help us God,” the crowd applauded. “The cursed crimson jackets would soon make our lives miserable if it weren’t for your protection, Hetman.”

Then Briukhovetsky turned to the Zaporozhians: “You remember, dear comrades, how well dressed I was when I came to the Sich? What happened to all my belongings? I did not squander them, as you know. I gave them to you to meet your needs. I have given everything away. That’s why I’m walking in such rags. I am prepared to go barefoot if only my children have enough of everything.”

“Dear father,” they were calling out with tears in their eyes. “We shall buy you such boots, even the tsar himself would envy them.”

“God be with you, children,” said Ivanets, stepping aside. “At one time we brought all our booty to the Sich and carried gold and silver in sacks. But I have given it all away for your sake.”

“There is a father for you, there is a Hetman. Now God has given us a true leader,” the townsmen, the Cossacks and the peasants shouted together as he walked away between them, gently stooping.

Petro had passed through the thickest part of the throng. He was glad to see with his own eyes. Not until then had he realized what Briukhovetsky was like, what a bitter enemy of the city Cossacks he was. This cursed vagabond mesmerized everybody and brought them to his side with his words. Petro wondered how people could be so greatly deceived. Ivanets had cast a spell on the people and there was nothing to be done about it. Petro’s thoughts were occupied with the tragic fate of his country and he had almost forgotten why he had come here in the first place. Just then a roll of drums announced that the time had come for the Cossack council. Everybody was rushing about and making their way in the direction of the drums.

“Why are they beating the drums?” one Zaporozhian asked his comrade.

“Don’t you know?” the other answered. “They are going to judge Kyrylo Tur.”

Petro followed the two Zaporozhians until he reached the place of judgment. He managed to

find a spot from which he could see everything. In the center of the circle of judges stood Kyrylo Tur, his eyes downcast, surrounded by his comrades. People were pressing hard to watch a Zaporozhian court of law, but the Zaporozhians formed a firm ring around the accused and were not letting anybody through. Anyone who wanted to watch had to crane his neck or climb a tree to have a good look.

Petro saw Hetman Briukhovetsky in the first circle of the Cossacks, who were holding over him the insignia of his office. On his right stood a military judge and on the left a regimental secretary with an inkwell tucked behind his belt and a quill behind his ear. He was holding some paper in his hands. Further off there stood the elders from the Sich. They held no formal office but had a privileged place during the council. Some of them were former leaders and were held in high esteem. Five of them stood there, bending their gray heads. No one wore a cap, since this was a military court.

Father Puhach began the proceedings. He came forward, bowed to each side and to the Hetman and began solemnly:

“Your Honor and you fathers, otamans and comrades, and all orthodox Christians. You know that Zaporozhe is bound together by ancient laws and traditions. No one knows when they began. The Zaporozhian Host began during the reign of the Varangians who ruled over land and sea. No Cossack betrayed these traditions, not Cossack Baida who was hanged in Constantinople with an iron hook, not Samiilo Kishka who was tortured for 54 years in Turkish captivity; but he who stands before you has besmirched our Cossack honor.”

He took Kyrylo Tur by the shoulders and turned him to face all four sides in turn.

“Look straight into people’s eyes, you scoundrel, so that others may learn from your bad example. What has he done?” asked father Puhach rhetorically. “It is hard to say in front of everyone, but he had dealings with a woman and this is strictly forbidden at the Sich. Tell me how we should punish him for this crime.”

No one said anything and they all waited for the Hetman to say something. “Speak, Hetman, your word is law,” said the elders.

Stooped to the ground as he was, Briukhovetsky said:

“Fathers! What can I think with my imperfect mind? You know best what to do. You know the old customs and you will be his best judges. I’ll approve of whatever you decide. Not for nothing have I brought you from Zaporozhe to Ukraine. You make your own rules in your own wisdom. We are all children to your gray-haired wisdom.”

“If that’s what you say,” said the elder, “then there is nothing further to be done. Tie him to a pole and let everybody beat him with sticks.”

The Hetman waved his mace. The council came to an end. Kyrylo Tur was bound with rope and brought to a nearby pole. He was tied to it in such a way that he could turn to each side and his right hand was left free to reach the bucket of brandy. The Zaporozhians arranged for a bucket of brandy and a basket of cookies to be available to those being punished as well as for those who were inflicting the punishment. A pile of sticks lay to one side and any Cossack could stop, take a drink of brandy, strike the accused with a stick and then pass on. There were very few who did not seize the opportunity. In the end the accused might hope to recover from the beating. But Kyrylo Tur’s crime was the most grievous a Zaporozhian could commit: consorting with a woman. Only a few

Cossacks, who knew Tur and to whom he had done a service, passed by him without striking him.

Tur's comrade, Chornohor, was trying to plead with passersby to forego the free brandy and not beat Kyrylo. Chornohor even wept a little in front of an otaman to try to win him over to Tur's side. Suddenly father Puhach came up from the crowd. Chornohor did not dare to interfere with the old man. He was unable to find the right language to plead for Tur. So he cringed aside, like a little dog in front of a stern master. Puhach approached the pole, drank a cup of brandy and ate a cookie. He even took time to praise the food and drink and then seized the stick with both hands.

"Turn round, you scoundrel," he said. Tur turned around and the old man hit him with the stick so hard that his bones cracked. But Tur showed his mettle and neither groaned nor sighed. "Now you will remember how to honor the Zaporozhian tradition," the old man said and walked away.

Looking from a distance, Petro thought that Tur would not be able to stand many beatings like that. He was sorry for him and came to him to find out if he had any message for his mother and sister.

Bohdan Chornohor, thinking that Petro was going to strike Tur, barred his way saying, "I won't allow a stranger to smite my comrade."

"You don't have much gray matter," said Kyrylo Tur. "Let him by; he is a friend. He won't do any harm. Welcome to the Sich, Petro. You see how they treat visitors here. They don't offer you hot pancakes, for sure. Let us drink a measure of brandy so that life doesn't taste so bitter."

"Drink yourself; I won't, or else your elders will expect me to strike you," said Petro.

"Well, here's to your health," said Kyrylo Tur, drinking.

"What shall I say to your mother and sister?" asked Petro.

Tur bowed his head and repeated the words of a song: "Cossack, see his old mother, when you're in town Tell her not to cry much, for a black Raven is cawing over her son's body."

"That's what will happen to you, you scoundrel," said an old Zaporozhian. "Don't have any hope of getting out of this because the young Cossacks avoid you. We elders will finish you off, only let us have a drink first."

One of them, having had a drink, seized the stick and said to the others:

"What do you think? Shall I crack him across the head and finish him off?"

"No, not across the head. The head is made in God's image and we can't strike it. It is not his head but his heart that's to blame."

"But you can't reach the heart with a stick," said a third old man. "We won't finish this ox off if we hit his back. It's a shame to let him go free. This ape has disgraced the Zaporozhian Host."

"Listen to me," said a fourth old man. "If Kyrylo Tur survives this beating, let him go — a Cossack like that will do some good."

"What good will he do?" asked father Puhach. "He is a disgrace to the Orthodox faith. Hit him hard. It's a pity I can't strike him again, but I would beat him till he fell dead."

The old Cossacks drank the brandy, picked up the sticks and hit Kyrylo Tur on the back. Anyone else would have collapsed after a beating like that, but Kyrylo Tur stood up and joked with his friend.

"Our Sich sauna is fine," he said. "After a treatment like that you'll never have a backache."

"What shall I say to your mother?" Petro asked.

"Tell her a Cossack's soul isn't worth a goat, that's all. My comrade knows what to do with my

property. He will give part of it to my mother and sister; another part he will take to a church in Kyiv, where temptation overcame me, so that's where the monks will pray for my soul. A third part he will take to the Black Mountain so that young men can buy themselves ammunition and remember me in their duels."

"Keep your spirits up," said Chornohor. "No one else is going to hit you. Soon they will roll the drums for lunch and then your punishment will be over."

Petro waited till lunch. He saw that the other Cossacks, apart from Chornohor, protected Kyrylo Tur. As soon as the gong sounded he was untied from the pole and many a Zaporozhian embraced Tur heartily.

"Leave me alone," said Kyrylo Tur. "If you spent some time tied to this pole you would not feel like embracing anyone."

"So now you know the taste of Sich sticks," said father Puhach. "Your back must be as sore as that of the devil who drove the monk to Jerusalem. Here are some herbs; put them on and tomorrow you will be recovered. I was beaten too, when I was young, so I know how to look after the wounds."

They undressed Tur and Petro shivered when he saw his back without the shirt which Tur's sister had embroidered for him. It was covered with blood. Kyrylo Tur clenched his teeth in order not to cry as they tore the shirt off his body. Father Puhach put some ointment on Tur's back and then some herbs.

"Well," he said, "now you are a free Cossack again, but remember don't have anything to do with women or else you'll be lost."

Then the Zaporozhians picked up the barrel of brandy and the basket of cookies and led Kyrylo Tur to lunch. They ate on the grass under the oak trees, each regiment separately with its regimental commander. The elders lunched with the Hetman. Father Puhach joined Kyrylo Tur's regiment for lunch and everyone felt very honored. Kyrylo Tur gave up his own seat and sat next to him. Two minstrels sang songs about Nechay, Morozenko and Perebyinis and other epic songs of Cossack glory. Father Puhach blessed the food. They all ate bread first and took out the spoon which each Zaporozhian carried in his pocket. Kyrylo Tur glanced around and said:

"Comrades, you beat me mightily with sticks, but you don't have much sense yourselves. Whoever would allow a guest to remain hungry?"

"What guest do you mean?"

At that moment Chornohor came along with Petro.

"Here is my guest," said Kyrylo Tur. "If you want to know he is the son of the priest from Pavoloch, the one who fought me so bravely near Kyiv."

The Zaporozhians welcomed Shram's son. Some received him as a comrade while others got up to make room for him.

"Sit near me," said father Puhach. "You are a good Cossack and your father was a good Cossack, but he has gone mad in his old age. I only hope he won't come to any harm here, because there are bound to be incidents at the council."

"It is all God's will," replied Petro.

"What? Do you really think that your side will win?" asked old Puhach. "It was not for nothing that we met the tsar's boyars with Ivan Martynovych yesterday. We received them well. Now we are going to turn all your city Cossacks upside down."

“You know, father,” said Petro, “it is a pity that youth can’t teach old age, but I would advise you not to brag but to pray.”

“We have prayed well,” the old man answered. “We are going to introduce a new order in Ukraine now. There will be no more master and servant; everything will be held in common. I see you have no spoon. That means that you are used to eating off silver plates. Make a spoon for him out of something or else his father, who breathes fire against us, will say that we let him starve at our table.”

The Zaporozhians ate mostly fish and very little meat. Both plates and cups were made of wood. They drank a great deal of brandy, mead and beer with their meal, but no one got drunk. Kyrylo Tur, trying to drown his pain in liquor, drank more than anyone else. But he remained sober, too. He became very merry and after lunch when they started dancing he joined in. No one would think that this was a man who had been beaten not so long ago. The Zaporozhians admired his endurance.

After lunch Petro wanted to go home, but Kyrylo Tur prevented him.

“Wait for me,” he said. “I’ll go home too. After a bath like that I don’t want to be left with my comrades. At home I’ll recover quickly.”

Soon Kyrylo Tur asked for two horses to be saddled and on the way out whispered something into Chornohor’s ear. Then he turned to Petro:

“Why don’t you join the Zaporozhians? Why do you waste your time among city Cossacks?”

“I’ve thought about it many times myself,” confessed Petro.

“That’s the spirit. Why should you live in a city? They’ll soon be turned upside down.”

“I can see,” said Petro, “that trouble is brewing on all sides. But be honest with me and tell me why are you attacking Somko?”

“Who is attacking him?” replied Kyrylo Tur. “That I stole his bride is not very important. He doesn’t need a bride. A different wedding is being planned for him. And not only for him. The Zaporozhians will make you city Cossacks dance to a fine tune. No one will be able to stop them. No force on earth will win the Zaporozhians over. So it’s better to swim with the tide. We shall see what will happen to our Ukraine.”

“I can’t understand what you are talking about,” said Petro. “Are you sincere or are you acting? I like straight talk so why don’t you tell me what you think openly.”

The Zaporozhian laughed.

“My dear fellow, do you think that there is one straight road in this world? If you want to go straight ahead you’ll end up devil knows where. A man likes to give his life for the defense of the Christian faith, but the devil continually ensnares him. A man would like to avoid the path of sinners, but can he do that? Not everyone can be a holy man. He is in both his mind and heart a follower of God’s laws, but a sinner such as I is always led astray.”

“Where does your heart lead you astray?” asked Petro. “Surely you can’t be thinking of women again-after the lesson you have just been given?”

“Fie on women. A man has enough trouble without them.”

“Where is your heart urging you then?”

“I wish I knew,” answered Kyrylo Tur and began to recite aloud a passage from Jeremiah. “Behold, O Lord, for I am in digress; my bowels are troubled, mine heart is turned within me.” Then he shuddered. “I feel faint,” he said to Petro, “and I feel I have a fever, but here is my house. I’ll fall

asleep there and all my troubles will pass away.”

When they reached the house Tur’s mother and sister ran out to meet them. They were beside themselves with joy. One took the horse by the bridle and the other helped the Zaporozhian to dismount. All he could do was smile.

“So you see,” he said, “I told you there was nothing to worry about. But perhaps God created women to worry.”

When they wanted to embrace him he pushed them away.

“No, I mustn’t do that,” he said, “you see, my comrades almost killed me because I came close to a woman.” To Petro he whispered: “It’s the last thing I want now — to be embraced.”

Petro was anxious to go home but Kyrylo asked him to come in and have a drink. Tur’s mother and sister, too, pressed him to enter the house.

“Mother,” said Kyrylo Tur, “give us the kind of brandy that would send the devil himself to sleep. And bring it to us in a jug, because one bottle won’t be enough.”

When they brought the brandy, Kyrylo Tur, instead of offering it to his guest, started drinking it like water. His mother tried to take it away from him, but he kept on drinking, saying that a man couldn’t drink as much as an ox. Then he fell to the ground unconscious. The women were alarmed, but Petro knew why Tur was doing it. He helped them to pick him up and carry him to bed. Then he bade farewell and went back to Hvyntovka’s khutir, thinking about all that he had heard and seen.

13

In the meantime Shram, careless of his age, was hurrying to Baturyn. He had crossed Nizhen before sunrise. He was glad that no one saw him, because in those days anyone could have stopped him on the road, despite his priestly vestments. Then he suddenly heard a commotion.

Some men were crying: “With sabres!” while others said, “With pistols!”

“You can’t trust a bullet; it kills the innocent and the guilty. The sabre is a better judge.”

“No, the sabre is man’s judgment and the bullet is sent by God.”

“Here is a priest; let him decide for us.”

Shram saw that quite a crowd had gathered in a wooded copse. Some were wearing crimson jackets and wore sabres; others wore blue coats, without sabres. Some were holding muskets and scythes.

“Why are you here before sunrise, starting trouble? Isn’t there enough of it in Ukraine?”

“We have gathered in a court, father,” said one of them. “Let the Lord decide which side is wrong.”

“What injustice are you talking about?”

They said: “A young man fell in love with a girl. She loves him in return. The boy comes from a city family, he is the son of our mayor, and the girl comes from a land-owning family, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Domontovych. When the young man sent to ask the parents if he could marry her he was rebuffed. His messengers were abused and Mr. Domontovych declared that he would not let his daughter marry a mere townsman.”

“That’s how the gentry treats us,” said the others. “They came to Ukraine after Khmelnytsky, but now they behave as badly as the Poles.”

“Be quiet, you damned crows,” said some crimson jackets. “Be quiet. Do you really expect a

father to force his only daughter to marry a townsman?"

"He doesn't have to force her. She herself wants to."

They went on quarreling for a long time and asked Shram to act as an arbiter. He announced:

"You are a blind and foolish people. When a real tempest is gathering over the land you should forget your personal quarrels." Then he left them abruptly.

In Borzna Shram rested for a while at the house of captain Bilozerets. He was an old friend and was one of the first to follow Khmelnytsky.

As Shram approached the gate Bilozerets was on his way out. They greeted each other warmly. Then they went inside the house. Here Bilozerets told Shram that he was on his way to see Vasiuta in Baturyn. Apparently Vasiuta also wanted to be Hetman and was trying to sway his officers against Somko. But those loyal to Somko were gathering at Ichnia and Bilozerets was one of them.

"Why are we waiting?" asked Shram. "Let's ride on to Ichnia."

"You must be made of steel if you want to ride without having a rest first. Your old wounds and your age don't seem to have any effect on you."

"When it's time to save Ukraine," answered Shram, "my age is of no account. I feel young again. Let's go."

"Stop! Let's have a rest and something to eat and to drink."

Bilozerets prevailed upon Shram to alight from his horse. They left Borzna later and a little while afterwards they were met by a messenger who told them to ride straight to Nizhen.

"The Hetman's army went there and Somko and Vasiuta have gone in that direction too. All the Cossack elders swore allegiance to Somko and hearing that the Russian boyars are at Nizhen, they moved off there."

"So our side is active," said Shram. "Glory be to God. Now, don't let's waste any time."

Half way to Nizhen they met Somko and Vasiuta. Behind them were the Cossack elders. They greeted each other.

"What's happening, Hetman?" asked Shram.

"Don't worry, father," said Somko, "everything will end well. Now that I have joined forces with colonel Zolotarenko they won't be able to oppose us. I have dispatched Vuiakhevych with the Lubny, Pryluky and Pereiaslav regiments to Nizhen. The Chernihiv regiment will be there tonight. Why do you look so grave?"

"You say that you dispatched Vuiakhevych with those regiments?" asked Shram.

"Yes, he is my general secretary."

"I wouldn't trust him with this mission."

"Father," said Somko, "you don't trust anybody."

"You trust them too much. I don't like Vuiakhevych."

"You don't know him. No one knows better than he how to keep the Cossacks quiet. That's why I gave him authority."

"This is a sad, sad hour," said Shram to himself.

"Not as sad as it seems to you," answered Somko.

"I hope you are right. But what do you think about the mob surrounding Nizhen as if Khmelnytsky's time were beginning again? They are all Briukhovetsky's followers."

"I am sorry for them, not afraid of them. As long as I have Cossacks and guns on my side I am

not worried. You may think that the desertion of the regiments from Myrhorod, Poltava and Zinkiv has hurt me. Yes, it has.”

“If only people would think of honor and glory,” thought Shram, “but nowadays they are like animals; each wants to feather his own nest.”

They rode into the town. They were met by a funeral procession. Shram asked whom they were burying. They answered that it was Viitenko.

“The one who brought the lawsuit against Domontovych?”

“The very same. He had no luck; he crossed swords with a crimson jacket and fell.”

“Not quite,” someone interjected. “At first Domontovych cut Viitenko’s left hand and it bled. My father, who was there, told me about it. But Viitenko said that there was only room in this world for one of them. Then Domontovych cut

Viitenko again and again until he fell.”

“Let them be,” shouted someone. “We will avenge this death.”

Shram saw that almost the entire town of Nizhen was following Viitenko’s coffin. They were all townsmen, not a single crimson jacket among them. But behind the townsmen came the Cossacks too. They all walked with their eyes lowered to the ground, pretending not to see the Hetman. Shram shook his head. Somko, too, wondered why his Cossacks were taking part in the funeral at such a critical time. The elders began to glance meaningfully at each other. Vasiuta began to realize something was wrong, for he bowed to the Hetman and hastily left for his home. The elders of the Nizhen regiment went home, too. The others remained with Somko and went to his camp near the Bilakivsky meadows.

As they approached the camp they heard a commotion. They saw that the Cossacks in the camp were in disarray. There was no order among them. It began to grow dark and Somko’s army was like a sea full of waves.

As soon as he arrived in his tent Somko asked for Vuiakhevych. The camp was searched for him but he could not be found in the swirling mass of people. Somko shouted angrily at the assistant secretaries. Then he realized that the best thing to do was to send the elders to talk to the Cossacks in the camp. He himself rode on horseback from tent to tent. Shram rode after him, dark as the night that was approaching. Then they saw the secretary general. He had had little success in quieting the Cossacks, who were growing increasingly impatient.

“We’ll teach you to honor the elders. You are behaving like the Zaporozhians who think that everyone is equal. Perhaps that is good for the Zaporozhians. There is neither rich nor poor among them. But you are simple Cossacks and we’ll turn you into peasants if you don’t obey our orders.”

The secretary general was shouting these words heedless of the sea of Cossacks threatening to engulf him. As soon as he passed through the crowd hostile voices were raised behind him.

“Did you hear what he said? We are like peasants. He would have us whipped. Are we going to stand for that? Are we going to take orders from them? Never!”

The general secretary heard these voices but did not look back and continued to harangue the Cossacks.

“Secretary,” said Somko as he caught up with him. “What order is this? Did I give you power to do this?”

The secretary bowed low and said: “Your Honor, we are in bad straits. Not far from here is the

camp of the Zaporozhian Hetman.”

“Hetman?” shouted Somko so loudly that his voice rose above the tumult. “I thought I was the only Hetman there is. If you don’t agree, you can go over to the other side; I don’t need officers like that.” With these words he removed the horsetail which was the sign of the secretary’s office.

As soon as the Cossacks heard Somko’s voice they fell silent. “The Hetman has arrived,” the news spread through the camp. People grew calmer for they knew that Somko did not tolerate disorder. He was a modest man but when he was aroused everyone felt his anger. In his camp or during a campaign there was discipline and this gave his men an advantage over the enemy. Old Cossacks respected him. Only the ordinary soldiers did not care. They wanted a free hand and that was why Ivanets had been able to seduce them to his camp.

“Well,” said Shram, “are you going to defend your secretary general now?”

Somko only waved his hand and rode back to his tent.

“Give me your horsetail,” said Shram, “I’ll do the job no worse than one of your men.” Somko handed it to him in silence.

“Poor Cossack leaders,” thought Shram. “People think it brings honor and glory, but only a few realize that the best leaders are beset by vipers only waiting for the moment to attack them.” With these thoughts Shram went around the camp holding his horsetail. He placed sentries all around the camp and ordered them to let no one through without giving the password. He had had scarcely any rest himself. Wherever he saw Cossacks gathered around an open fire, cooking their gruel or grilling their bacon, he would stop and listen to the way they were talking about the black council. He reminded them of the days of Khmelnytsky and called on them to preserve their loyalty. Elsewhere he would tell a parable from the Bible, inclining the Cossack minds to charity and humility. Then like a swarm of bees, the Cossacks would grow quiet.

Perhaps Shram would have calmed the Cossacks but he was followed by the devilish Vuiakhevych who was Briukhovetsky’s agent. Puffed up like an owl he prowled among the groups of Cossacks and scattered his words here and there reminding them of injustices and making them bite their mustaches in dismay. Like a fisherman throwing nets from a boat, Vuiakhevych was casting for Cossack souls.

The night grew dark and both good and evil lay down to rest. Somko might have been asleep, but Shram was still awake. No one could know all his thoughts. With a heavy heart he walked from one sentry to another, frequently looking over at the Romanivsky Kut. There the big oak trees were illuminated by fires and the quiet rumble of human voices was heard like waves before a bad storm.

14

We shall now tell what happened at Hvyntovka’s house. It seemed as if no order was possible there among either men or women. Among the women, Hvyntovka’s wife, the Polish princess, could not be on good terms with the others. Among the men, Cherevan was wondering what had become of Hvyntovka, whom he had known well since childhood. He used to be a famous Cossack and, in Khmelnytsky’s time, renowned for his bravery. Cherevan had loved him in those days and had married his sister. But now Hvyntovka was different. His words were no longer firm and Cherevan realized that he had changed.

“Is it true,” asked Hvyntovka, “that your Lesia is going to marry the Hetman?”

“Why not?” answered Cherevan. “Aren’t we equal to the Hetman?”

“I don’t mean that,” said Hvyntovka. “My sister’s daughter is fit to be any Hetman’s bride. But you have acted so hurriedly that you might have made a mistake.”

“What do you mean?” asked Cherevan.

“I mean that just now, while the storm is gathering, you should be careful.”

“Let our enemies be careful, not Somko.”

“Somko is not an exception. Consider how well Vyhovsky sat in the Hetman’s saddle, but he tripped up too over the treaty of Hadiach. They say that Somko wants to reopen treaty negotiations with the Russians. I don’t think it is wise. Ivan Martynovych is wiser and they say that the tsar looks with favor on him.”

“What will Ivanets negotiate,” asked Cherevan, “when he sold his soul to the devil long ago? You will see that he will betray the tsar to the Turks one day.”

Hvyntovka had not expected such an answer from his brother-in-law. Instead he conducted his guest to the farm and showed him barns full of produce, the sheep, mills with ponds, herds of horses. All these belonged to Hvyntovka who was now a great landlord. Cherevan, looking at it all, was wondering how his brother-in-law had become so rich. He himself had no comparable wealth but then neither was anyone telling him that he had obtained it illegally. They looked at everything and returned to the house. On the way they saw a horseman riding up. It was the Nizhen captain, Hordiy Kostomara.

“Why are you staying here?” he asked. “Bad things are happening in the town.”

“What bad things?” asked Hvyntovka.

“The townsmen are having a good time with the Cossacks.”

“What can I do about it?” said Hvyntovka.

“You can go and restrain the Cossacks.”

“They will listen to me another time, not now. Just now I have no authority. I don’t want to get involved.”

“So, perhaps there is some truth in what the people say about you,” said Kostomara quietly. “I think you are not being loyal to our colonel.”

“Nonsense,” said Hvyntovka, laughing. “I fear you are not loyal to me and my brother-in-law. They are serving dinner, so let us go and eat and perhaps we shall grow wiser.”

Captain Kostomara sat down to dinner but did not enjoy his food. He tried to find out what Hvyntovka’s plans were but he only encountered jokes. So he went back to Nizhen none the wiser.

“Listen to me, brother,” said Mrs. Cherevan afterwards, “when you were talking to Kostomara I felt shivers running down my spine.”

“Perhaps he has cast a spell on you, sister,” answered Hvyntovka. “They say that he can cast spells on people and on horses.”

“I don’t mind the spells, but your talk has given me a headache.”

“It is a woman’s role to listen,” said Hvyntovka gloomily.

“In a great cause like the black council women have their say too. I didn’t interrupt your Cossack talk at lunch, but now that the guests have gone I’ll tell you that I am afraid. A soul is the same in a woman as in a Cossack. Why condemn it then, if one can’t get another one?”

“That comes of living near Kyiv,” interrupted Hvyntovka. “One can see the monastic teaching

in what you say. In Nizhen women are supposed to mind their own affairs in the kitchen.” He then left the living room.

Darkness began to fall. Petro Shram came back and described what he had seen in Romanivsky Kut. Mrs. Cherevan and Lesia were aghast to hear it and grew pale. Cherevan was shaken and only Hvyntovka kept smiling. Mrs. Cherevan looked at her brother and could not believe her eyes. Everyone was troubled by the news, but he alone did not care a fig.

Petro and Lesia no longer talked, as they used to, like brother and sister. Now they were afraid to look at each other. Both had thoughts they would have liked to smother, like a tempting viper, but both allowed these thoughts to grow in their hearts. They were afraid to look at each other.

Mrs. Cherevan was very upset and Cherevan, too, sat silent at supper. Only the princess was unchanged; she was like the weeping birch tree which bows down in both rain and sun. She was sad no matter what others did.

Next morning they rose early. Cherevan and Petro had no sooner washed than a Cossack came riding to Hvyntovka.

“You had better put on white shirts and jackets for the council will be held today.”

They saddled their horses and were off. Vasyl Nevolnyk followed his master.

Hvyntovka turned back and said to Mrs. Cherevan. “Look here, sister, see that the larder is full for supper, for I shall return from the council with some guests.”

As they came to the edge of the forest they could see that the field was a mass of people, most of them peasants. They crowded together with the townsmen as the Cossacks advanced towards the town. Near the town a tent was pitched for the tsar’s envoy and the boyars with the Muscovite army. On the right Briukhovetsky’s army was drawn up and on the left, Somko’s Cossacks. The crowds were so dense it was impossible to see anything. The Zaporozhians and the city Cossacks could only be discerned by their flags. The flags of the Zaporozhians bore red crosses and those of the city Cossacks had eagles on them. The crowds were growing thicker and all kinds of people were riding and walking by. Hvyntovka had four riders ride in front of him, otherwise he could not have reached his tent.

“This is our prince,” a townsman called out. “You wait, you won’t be a leader much longer.”

“Let him alone,” shouted someone else. “I have heard about him from the Zaporozhians.”

“What have you heard?”

“Something favorable, so don’t shout at him.”

On the other side Petro heard the following conversation:

“What do you think? Who is going to win?”

“Ivan Martynovych.”

“Wait a moment. They say that Somko has cannons in his camp. He won’t give up his mace willingly.”

“Our side has cannons too. The Cossacks have had enough of being treated like servants. Nowadays whoever does not wear a crimson jacket won’t be asked to sit at the table.”

They moved on.

“Is it true,” one vagabond asked another, “that yesterday they buried the mayor’s son?”

“It is,” answered the other. “The funeral procession stretched the whole length of Nizhen. No one has ever seen such a funeral before.”

Hvyntovka encountered a friend who started to tell him how Somko and Ivanets had met at Prince Gagin's. Early in the morning the prince called the Cossack elders together and that was where Ivanets met Somko.

"Ivanets is a dog," said Hvyntovka in a subdued voice. "Did they agree to hold the council according to plan?"

"Yes, they did."

"And has Somko agreed?"

"Willy-nilly he agreed. But you see, Briukhovetsky, according to the agreement, will bring his side to the council without arms, but Somko insists on his men being armed. They say he is going to use cannons if the council does not go his way."

Hvyntovka laughed.

"Let him fire his guns," he said.

They parted and Petro saw a blacksmith carrying a hammer on his back.

"Are you on the Zaporozhian side, Ostap?" he was asked by a shepherd.

"May all the Zaporozhians perish," he answered.

"What's that? Why?"

"There is a good reason, though. I can't trust my wife."

"What? Has a Zaporozhian stolen your wife?"

"You obviously don't know them. They called me yesterday to do some work for them. They entertained me afterwards, but when I came home in the morning I discovered that my wife had some guests."

"Perhaps you only thought so when you had had too much to drink."

"Thought?" exclaimed the blacksmith. "When I came back I asked my son with whom they had had supper and she, the bitch, told him, 'Say we had supper with God.' But the child innocently asked, looking at her: 'Does God wear a crimson jacket, mother?'"

They moved on. The closer they got to the tent of the tsar's envoys the more difficult it was to push through the crowd. Near the tent drums sounded and people were called to the council. The crowd, most of them peasants, surged like the sea.

"Brother," one said to another, "we won't return to our wives empty-handed."

"We'll do better than in the hayfield. You see what expensive clothes the rich are wearing and the gold and silver they cart round with them. All this will be ours."

"And we shall get some of their supplies, too. The Zaporozhians said that everything would be divided equally."

Petro saw Taras Surmach in the crowd.

"Are you against Somko and my father, too?" he asked.

"We are grateful to Somko and your father," he replied as he walked along, "but you used to elect the Hetman by Cossack votes alone. Now the townsmen are going to have a say at this council."

They reached the innermost circle which consisted solely of Cossacks. They made way for Hvyntovka, and Petro and Cherevan followed him. Some of them shook hands with Hvyntovka, who smiled and bowed.

Petro saw that of the Cossack elders there were only a few who had red stripes on their collars; they were mostly blue ones. He saw this as a bad omen of things to come. Cherevan noticed it too.

He turned to Vasyl Nevolnyk and said: "What strange fashions these people follow; they all prefer blue, while we prefer red."

Hvyntovka reached the innermost circle and found himself among the colonels, captains and other Cossack officers. He saw regimental clerks with their paper and ink. In the middle of the wide circle stood a table covered with a Turkish rug. Briukhovetsky's mace, his horsetail and flag were lying on the table. Briukhovetsky himself, in a blue tunic, stood among the Zaporozhians. He appeared a different man from the one in Romanivsky Kut. He had a proud, Hetman-like bearing and was cocky in his posture.

Just then Somko and his officers entered the tent of the tsar's envoys. They all wore battle dress, with their sabres at the ready. Somko carried the golden mace of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Above him there flew a flag and a horsetail. Two drummers with silver drums stood at each side.

"He is a proud and wise Hetman," thought Petro. "But who are your supporters? The devil has turned most people against you. You are treading on ice in front of the enemy. I am sorry for you, although once you crossed my path."

These were Petro's thoughts as he stood behind Hvyntovka. Around them the roar of human voices was like the waves of the Black Sea. Somko heard Briukhovetsky's followers start to shout:

"Put down your mace, horsetail and flag, you merchant from Pereiaslav."

He ordered his drummers to beat the silver drums. The crowd grew a little quieter. Then in a clear, serious voice he said, as if speaking through a golden trumpet:

"I will not lay it down. Let my elders tell me to do that." He glanced around proudly. "And I do not know why so many vagabonds have come to stand side by side with the noble Cossacks."

My God! Hell broke loose. Those who had come to create a fight broke ranks. The Zaporozhians, who were unarmed, had brought some sticks with them. There would certainly have been a fight if it were not for the Sich elders who subdued the young Cossacks.

"Stop," they cried. "Back to your places."

Old Shram, who was standing close to Somko, looked at each side and said:

"You see, children, whom we have to fight for the Hetmancy. Are they worthy to be treated as humans? We shall use our sabres to deal with them. With sabres and cannons we will sober up this drunken mob."

Petro wanted to get nearer his father. He realized that there was going to be trouble and he wanted to join the small group of Cossacks with their red bands who were grouped around Shram. But he was surrounded by those wearing blue stripes and could not move.

"Well," said one of them, "now we shall be lords in Ukraine."

"How can we rule over them if we are all going to be equal?" asked the second one.

"Who told you that?"

"You can see the fat mayors from the towns among the Cossacks and even the peasants are mingling with them."

"Ha. You don't know Ivan Martynovych!"

Just then the drums and trumpets sounded. Prince Gagin came out of the tsar's tent bearing in his hand the tsar's proclamation. His lieutenants carried the tsar's banner to the Cossack Host along with silks and furs as the tsar's presents to the Cossacks. All the envoys, according to Muscovite custom, wore beards. They wore jeweled coats, while the prince wore gold-embroidered boots inlaid

with precious stones. They bowed to both Hetmans and to the Cossacks. The crowd grew so quiet that the rattle of the boyars' sabres could be heard. The prince crossed himself, raised the tsar's proclamation and began to read it.

The peasants, who were standing behind Briukhovetsky's supporters, could not hear and started to chant: "We want Briukhovetsky."

Somko's Cossacks answered with a shout, "Somko is our Hetman."

Soon a real tumult arose and even those standing in front started to shout.

"Briukhovetsky!"

"Somko!"

"Down with the swineherd."

"Down with the merchant from Pereiaslav."

They soon began to fight, some with sabres and others with knives and sticks.

"Form a column," called Somko. "We'll show them with our sabres."

Some Cossacks responded, but others turned back and were ready to retreat to their tents.

The Zaporozhians seized Ivanets' hands and lifted him onto the table where they handed him the mace and the horsetail. They had to push the Russian boyars aside in the melee.

"Hetman Ivan Martynovych," they shouted with all their might.

"Children," cried Shram to his men, "we won't stand this insult. Let us push Ivanets down."

They surged towards the table. They fought the Zaporozhians and placed Somko on the table. But the Zaporozhians surrounded Somko's men like angry wasps and hit them with sticks and knives. They seized Somko's horsetail and broke it in two, and they took away his mace.

When Somko looked around he saw only a handful of Cossacks supporting him. The Zaporozhians swarmed around him. Ivanets, waving his mace, shouted, "Knock him down and I'll fill your caps with coins."

Somko's elders realized that they were losing, so they closed ranks and retreated to the tent. Some of them fell in battle.

In the meantime Cherevan was proclaiming Somko Hetman. The angry Zaporozhians turned on him. But he answered that he was supporting his son-in-law.

"You see, he is the merchant's father-in-law. Strike him down if you can."

Some Cossacks set about him and who knows whether he would have survived the ordeal had it not been for Vasyl Nevolnyk who recognized one of them and ordered them to cease.

Hvyntovka mounted a horse and rode away, carrying in his hands a silver baton. Nobody knew where he had obtained it, but around the baton was tied a blue ribbon. Some Cossacks had followed him. By the time he reached Somko's side Hvyntovka had gathered quite a following. Hvyntovka rode to the Nizhen regiment while Somko went to his own—the Pereiaslav.

As soon as he reached his regiment Somko issued orders for the cannon to be prepared for battle. His main thought was to attack Ivanets' forces and scatter them, then to take the mace and the horsewhip by force for there seemed to be no other way for reason to prevail.

But before he could issue his orders the Nizhen regiment moved away. Vasiuta, the colonel of that regiment, came up to him on his horse.

"Hetman, we are losing. I am no longer colonel, for Hvyntovka seems to have won the Cossacks over to his side; see how his baton shines in the sun."

Other Cossacks followed Vasiuta. Captain Kostomara cried:

“We are lost. Losing the Nizhen regiment is like losing our right hand.”

While Somko stood at a loss, his Cossacks were flocking to Briukhovetsky.

“Why should we wait,” some of them said, “until they take us by force with our Hetman?”

Somko realized that his cause was lost and with his elders dashed to the tsar’s envoy’s tent. As he went inside he saw Ivanets receiving gifts from the prince. Around him were Vuiakhevych and others of his former associates.

“See,” cried Ivanets, “what a fish is caught in our net.”

Somko disregarded this and asked the prince: “What are you doing? Has the tsar sent you to Ukraine to approve the Zaporozhian rebellions?”

The prince was taken aback by the crowd, which he had not seen in Muscovy.

“Why did you bring an army from Moscow at our expense if you cannot give us your support? It won’t do you any good to set one party against another. Give me your general’s baton and I will call your soldiers to crush the mob.”

The prince was undecided. Then Briukhovetsky shouted: “As Hetman I forbid you to interfere in our affairs. Let the Cossacks be their own judges. Let us seize this rebel and drown him in the river.”

“So truth lies neither with them nor with us,” remarked Somko.

“Yes, truth is ours and you will be punished for your pride,” cried Ivanets. “Take him and put him in chains.”

“Your Honor,” said those of Somko’s elders who had remained faithful to him, “we would rather have our heads cut off than see you in chains.”

“Brothers,” answered Somko, “why should you fight to defend my head when Ukraine is lost? Do not think of me; think of the insult our Cossacks have suffered. I don’t care about my head. Farewell, unlucky Ukraine.” With these words he threw his sabre to the ground. His supporters did the same. Some Cossacks were weeping. “Merciful God,” they said, “may our tears fall on the heads of our enemies.”

Briukhovetsky was very happy. He ordered Somko, Vasiuta and all their elders to be put under guard and asked Vuiakhevych to write a letter to Moscow alleging that Somko and his lieutenants were rebelling and, according to the treaty of Hadiach, were thus traitors to the tsar.

Prince Gagyn was concerned that the Cossacks under arrest should remain quiet so that no one would discover that after receiving costly gifts from Ivanets, he had decided to support the latter’s side. Meanwhile the new Hetman and his elders were led into the Nizhen church to take the oath to the tsar. After leaving the church the Hetman invited the prince and his envoys to a luncheon at the house of Mayor Kolodiy. There the townsmen had prepared a great banquet for Briukhovetsky.

15

Having freed himself from the Zaporozhians, Cherevan was panting as he spoke.

“Bhoter Vasyl,” he said, “get me a horse ready. To hell with this council. It was an evil hour when I met that mad priest Shram.”

Vasyl Nevolnyk tried to find a horse, but could not because of the general tumult. Cherevan had to wait and suffer. He turned to Petro.

“Don’t leave me,” he implored, “if only I can reach Khmaryshche safely. Let those who want them keep their councils.”

As soon as Briukhovetsky was proclaimed Hetman the crowd began to disperse. Hvyntovka left with his party. Only the Zaporozhians crowded around the Hetman’s table and the mob swarmed around it. When Briukhovetsky went to church they called out: “Glory be to God! We’ve won. There are no more landlords or peasants, rich or poor. We shall all live in prosperity.”

“Well, why are we waiting, brothers?” said the others. “Let us share the landlords’ goods; they are all here.”

“There will be plenty of time to fleece them. You can see that Somko’s camp is being looted.”

“Let’s go wherever we can and loot what we can.”

Half the crowd went to Somko’s camp and the other half went to the town of Nizhen. Only a few solitary men were left in the field, dancing to the music of sundry musicians.

Petro and Cherevan were downcast to see this merriment at such a grave time, when everybody should have been crying rather than laughing. A mob of men was turning away from the camp and encountered a group of men from the city.

“Where are you going?” they asked.

“And where are you going?”

“We are going to Somko’s camp.”

“And we are going to the city to loot.”

“You can’t go there.”

“Why not?”

“The Muscovite guards are stopping everyone going to town.”

“There isn’t much use going to the camp. The Cossacks are there and they won’t let us in.”

“Well, it looks as if the Cossacks are still the top dogs.”

Then some others came running up and shouted: “Our cause is lost. Have you heard what the Zaporozhians say?”

“What do they say?”

“When some of our men wanted to take over some estates the Zaporozhians beat them with sticks and made them clear out. Our men said, ‘We are all equal now.’ Then they beat us and told us to go and hide or else they would see to us.”

“So that’s how they thank us,” the crowd shouted (each group had its leader). “Wait a moment! We helped the Hetman to climb onto the table, so we can help him to climb down, too. Let us organize and demand another council. We’ll liberate Somko and Vasiuta from captivity. They’ll support our cause.”

The crowd grew loud and restive but nothing came of it. Some remarked:

“There’s no point in taking this dough out of the oven; let it bake. We should consider ourselves lucky that we feasted with the Zaporozhians for two days.”

Some said: “The Cossacks will all be against us now. Let us run away while we can.”

Some exchanged notes:

“I stole some bacon from a cart; it’ll last us a good while.”

“And I took a bag of millet. If only somebody would help me to carry it.”

“What’s the use of bacon and millet?” said a third one. “I got a jacket which is worth a pair of

oxen.”

“Let’s go home before they catch us,” said several peasants.

“There is no way of hiding the truth — we didn’t take the right side. Our neighbors, who didn’t listen to the Zaporozhians, did better. It’ll be shameful to go back to our village — they will tease us there for having been at a black council.”

People began to scatter. Quiet descended and the musicians and dancers disappeared. Soon everybody realized that there was no reason to make merry.

Cherevan saw Taras Surmach driving in a carriage. The Zaporozhians, who were molesting others, let him go. Half a dozen townsmen were riding with Surmach. Seeing Cherevan he called out:

“So that’s what our side gained.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Zaporozhians have cheated us.”

“What have they done?”

“At the reception at Mayor Kolodiy’s, they stole silver cups and jugs which the townsmen had brought from the city. When the mayor started to rebuke them they almost killed him. ‘Don’t call a Cossack a thief,’ they said. ‘From now on there is no private property and the Cossacks take what they like.’ That’s what they are like. But that’s not all. While the Cossacks were at the banquet with the townsmen, the mob raided the town’s stores and took what they wanted. The townsmen complained to the Hetman but he only laughed. ‘Don’t you know that from now on we are all brothers and we own everything in common?’ That’s how the Zaporozhians have betrayed us. I am hurrying back to Kyiv now in case the Zaporozhians are looting there as well.”

“We left our home at a cursed hour,” said Cherevan. “If it wasn’t for the fact that I have a wife and daughter here I would join you and leave here as soon as possible.”

“You must save them,” said Surmach, “because I’ve heard that the Hetman is planning to have your daughter married to someone.”

“The hell he’ll marry her,” a deep voice was heard nearby.

Cherevan saw Kyrylo Tur with a dozen Zaporozhians riding by.

“Now,” said Kyrylo Tur, “Miss Cherevan is going to be mine. At least then they won’t have beaten my back in vain.”

“Don’t joke, Kyrylo,” said Petro. “Or are you seriously going back to your old idea?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” answered Kyrylo Tur. “Somko has gone to the devil; the Zaporozhians won’t let him out. So why should she not belong to me? You are mad if you think I’ll leave her for you. I am not as big a fool as that.”

So saying, Kyrylo Tur rode off with his friends in the direction of Hvyntovka’s khutir. Petro was dumbfounded. Just then Vasyl Nevolnyk came up with the horses. Petro leaped on a horse and raced after the Zaporozhians. But then suddenly he encountered old Shram.

“Where are you racing, my son?”

“Father, the Zaporozhians want to abduct Lesia again.”

“Let them go, Petro,” said his father gloomily. “Come with me. There is nothing more to be done here. The crow has beaten our falcon.”

Petro said nothing. He rode behind his father with bowed head and a broken heart. Cherevan called out:

“Bhoter, let me look at you.”

Shram reined his horse.

“Where were you during this storm?” asked Cherevan.

“There is no time to talk about it. Farewell.”

“Wait a minute. Where are you going? I was at the council too, but what has come of it? I was nearly robbed there myself. What do you think I should do now?”

“It is too late to do anything. Go back to Khmaryshche and forget about it all.”

“So you won’t call me a Barabash again?”

“No. The whole of Ukraine is full of them now.”

“But I shouted for Somko until I almost lost my voice. I tell you we left Khmaryshche at an evil hour. Wait till Lesia hears about the council. But where are you going? Wait!”

“You won’t come along where we are going,” answered Shram.

“Well, I don’t want to. What about poor Somko? Where is he?”

“You go your way. We have no time to gossip.”

“Goodbye. When you have finished, come to Khmaryshche. We’ll forget all our troubles there.”

“That’s not likely,” answered Shram. “You will only hear from us. Fare thee well.”

Shram embraced Cherevan and then Vasyl Nevolnyk and Petro did the same. Before leaving, Cherevan turned to Petro and said: “It would have been better if we hadn’t chased after a Hetman.” Then they parted. Shram took the road to Kozelets and Cherevan and Vasyl Nevolnyk went to their khutir. Nevolnyk was wiping his tears away with his sleeve.

16

In the meantime Briukhovetsky was making merry in Nizhen. Next to him sat Prince Gagin with his entourage. They had not hesitated to betray the tsar for a good sum of money. As it turned out they prepared the way for bloody battles between the followers of Ivanets and their enemies.

Who does not know how much blood was spilt in Ukraine because of Ivanets’ treachery and the greed of the tsar’s boyars?

The banquet at which Briukhovetsky was seated beside Gagin was held at Kolodiy’s house. City Cossacks and Zaporozhians sat next to each other, among them those who had so shamelessly betrayed Somko. Some of them drank little because they felt like Judases. Some guests were noisy, drank brandy like water and boasted of their exploits. The prince was bewildered by this behavior and asked the Hetman:

“Are your Cossacks always so loud at banquets on the Sich?” He was answered by a flippant song extolling the Zaporozhians as heavy drinkers. Later the guests started to pocket the host’s cutlery and the prince was worried lest they would be insolent to him. So, as soon as he had finished eating he took his leave. Briukhovetsky saw him to the gate.

Returning to the banquet, Briukhovetsky saw two Sich elders leading a miserable-looking Cossack between them. They were like two wolves circling around a pig.

“What has made you so late that you didn’t eat with us?” asked Ivanets.

“You see, because of this scoundrel we missed our meal.”

“What has he done?”

“He has disgraced the Cossack brotherhood. He took up with the blacksmith’s wife. The

blacksmith lives near Hvyntovka's khutir and that's where this wretch was found."

"Did you actually catch him in the act?"

"Dead right," they answered. "Like a cat with a piece of bacon. We had heard before that Oleksa Senchylo ran after women. So we watched him. Just when the men were choosing their Hetman at the council this swine went to visit the blacksmith's wife. We traced him there and asked him to open the door. When he wouldn't we broke it down and saw him there like a hog in his lair."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Well, he should taste some sticks. But in this case we should be more severe than with Kyrylo Tur. His back should be warmed nicely so that he'll remember the lesson well."

The Zaporozhians gathered around them, but the Hetman asked for the council to be called. The drums were struck to announce this. The Cossacks, like dogs at the shepherd's whistle, hurried to the meeting place. They were joined by the city Cossacks. They gathered in a wide circle, the elders in the front row. Then the Hetman and his staff came out of the banquet hall. Before father Puhach could speak on behalf of the Zaporozhian elders, the Hetman ordered Somko's silver drums to be struck and then started to speak himself.

"Colonels, captains, elders, and all you Cossacks of the Sich and of the cities. I will speak to you and let the council judge and decide. When I encouraged you to join me I did not think of beating you with sticks. The Sich elders demand that the offender be beaten with sticks. Why should this hapless Oleksa Senchylo perish? Because once in a lifetime he chased after a woman? Doesn't a Zaporozhian desire what most men want? Perhaps on the Sich this punishment may be good, but here we'll soon lose all our Cossacks if we follow this practice. Do I not speak the truth?"

"Yes, you do," shouted the surrounding Zaporozhians.

"And what do you think, elders?" he asked.

They stood with bowed heads, not knowing what to say. They deliberated thus for a long time, but in the end, father Puhach stepped forward and said:

"Now we can see, you scoundrel, though you are a Hetman, what you have in store for us. We have supported you with our old backs but you have decided to run Ukraine without us. You won't run it for very long. Since you have started to lie to us like a dog, we won't endure it for long. And you will perish like a dog!"

"Enough, father," shouted Briukhovetsky. "You are loose-lipped. This is not the Sich and you have to respect your Hetman."

"So that's what we get for our support," said the elders. "They used to warn us on the Sich not to listen to you, that you would deliver us to Moscow. But we didn't believe them and trusted that you would bring about a better order."

"What are you talking about?" shouted Briukhovetsky. "What new order did you expect? Now the Zaporozhian Sich is among married people. You think the young Cossacks are as indifferent to it as you old men. We feel differently. I have not betrayed you to the Muscovites, but I act as I see fit and your Cossacks don't complain. On the Sich you can live without women, but here it is natural to marry and keep house."

"Was it not you," asked father Puhach, "who told us that we would establish a new order in Ukraine?"

"Yes, I told you that," answered Briukhovetsky, "and I have kept my word. You can see that the

Zaporozhians are ruling Ukraine now. I have appointed many of them to be colonels and judges. The peasants and the townsmen no longer quarrel over their status. The Cossacks have become lords. What else do you want? That I should order a Cossack to be beaten with sticks for such a trifle? No, that I won't allow."

"For a trifle?" said the elders. "You have ridiculed the very foundation of the Zaporozhian Sich."

"Well, I can't help that. If you want to keep your customs, do that in Zaporozhe but not here."

"We'll not be here much longer," answered Puhach. "Don't you push us out. But remember the proverb: 'You can cross the world on lies, but you can't come back.' Spit on his Hetmancy, comrades. Let's go back to the Sich. Who is coming with us?"

The Sich elders thought that the Cossacks would give a resounding response to their call, but only a few did so. The others stood by silently and hid their faces.

"Who comes with us?" Puhach called out again. "Those who stay are sinners and those who come with us treasure their Cossack glory."

No one moved.

"So I see you are all alike," said father Puhach. "I hope you all perish and that good fortune will leave you as we are leaving you now. I spit on the very path I shared with you. Fathers, spit at him and tell him whatever you wish."

One after another the elders started to leave the circle. The first one turned, spat behind him and said, "May you die in shame as you have brought shame on us."

The second one spat and said: "May the holy icons fall down upon you."

The third one admonished: "May you roast in hell day and night with no respite."

The fourth one said: "May the earth not receive you."

And the fifth one: "May you not rise for the Last Judgment."

Then they all saddled their horses and went away to the Sich.

This was what Ivanets had been waiting for. Laughing among his companions, he said:

"Now we are our own masters. We have cheated the stupid peasants and townsmen and now the Sich elders as well. Let us drink and make merry. I feel sleepy now. Petro Serdiuk, take me to the Hetman's chamber."

So Ivanets retired, leaning on a Cossack. He could hardly drag his feet along and the Zaporozhians teased him about that.

"He's tired," they said.

"He's been busy all day."

"He's been drinking quite a lot too."

But Ivanets was neither tired nor drunk. His mind was preoccupied with thoughts of how Somko could be deprived of his freedom. Stumbling and closing his eyes he asked the Cossack:

"Did you know that a mouse can bite a man's head off?"

"That's only possible in a proverb," laughed the Cossack.

"But the proverb is based on life. My legs won't carry me any further. This is old age. Whether I drink or not I cannot walk straight."

"That is because you walked so much during the council," said Serdiuk.

"Yes, I suppose I served the Cossacks well, but how well will the Cossacks serve me?"

mumbled Briukhovetsky.

“Don’t worry, Hetman,” answered Serdiuk. “We are ready to lay down our heads for you.”

“All I need is one head,” mumbled Ivanets. “There is only one head I hope will never rise again.”

Petro Serdiuk smiled and thought to himself: “Our Hetman is tipsy.”

Briukhovetsky walked, stepping heavily, as if he were indeed drunk and constantly brought up Somko’s name. But Serdiuk did not understand him. When they reached the castle Briukhovetsky said:

“Petro, do you see the little window just above the ground? That’s where the proud Somko is locked up. Don’t you think it’s strange?”

“Very strange,” replied Serdiuk. “All I can say is that you were very fortunate.”

“But I’ll tell you something even stranger. Just listen to the dream I had last night. I dreamt that I was drunk and came to this very place and was so tired that I fell asleep here. And in the morning they told me that during the night a very strange thing had happened. Somko’s head had been bitten off by a mouse. What do you think, Petro? Why did I have this dream? If you guess right I’ll reward you.”

At last the Cossack guessed Ivanets’ meaning and said:

“Do you want the Cossack to turn into a swine?”

Ivanets embraced him and, taking a ring from his finger, said:

“This ring will turn you into a swine; it will lead you through a dozen doors to the place where you must go. Take it and don’t draw back.”

“I am drawing back,” said Serdiuk, “because I don’t want to have anything to do with it. Farewell, Hetman. Perhaps when your fit has passed you will awaken from your dream.”

Briukhovetsky was left alone. “Perhaps,” he thought, “they are right who say that a Cossack can never be an executioner.”

He was thinking to himself, “Why don’t I go myself and finish him off? I used to attack him openly, but now I’m afraid.” He paced up and down silently.

“Who knows a man’s fate?” he was saying to himself. “Perhaps the devil himself is helping me? Oh, father Bohdan, you would not recognize your Ivanets now. I have an enemy now. Now there is no room for two cats in one bag. Then why do I lack the strength to put an end to it? I had enough energy to turn the world my way, but now I am afraid to stick a knife into him. What if they revise the decision in Moscow to our disadvantage? It’s true I paid the boyars, but the tsar may find out.”

17

Ivanets was thinking to himself and pacing up and down when the sentry entered.

“A man wishes to report to you on some urgent business.”

The Hetman permitted him to be brought in. A very strange man appeared. His face was muffled except for his eyes and he was wearing a long coat. He appeared to be a hunchback. Briukhovetsky was afraid of him.

“Who are you?”

“I am the one you need.”

Ivanets felt his flesh creep.

“Whom do I need?” he asked.

“He who would put to rest all other Hetmans.”

“What kind of man are you?”

“I am a blacksmith from Zaporozhe, but if I make shoes for someone he won’t need another pair.”

“How are you going to get rid of the other Hetman?”

“I’ll go to Somko and tell him your dream.”

“You are a devil,” shouted Briukhovetsky. “How do you know my dream?”

“I heard it from a pig.”

“Enough.”

“Think well, Hetman. Think of how to get rid of your enemy as swiftly as possible.”

“Uncover your face,” said Briukhovetsky.

“Here I am — a devil from a monastery,” replied the man and uncovered his face.

“Kyrylo Tur!” exclaimed Briukhovetsky.

“Quiet, Hetman,” said Kyrylo Tur, “it’s enough that you know who will be Somko’s executioner.” He covered his face once more.

“Are you ready to be involved in an affair like this?” asked Briukhovetsky.

“Why not?” answered Tur. “I have a pair of hands.”

“But they say you were on Somko’s side.”

“That’s not true. I have a score to settle with him — you know why — but the Zaporozhians paid me for it with their sticks. There is no justice in this world.”

“What have you got against him?”

“I know, and don’t ask me what it is. Just as I don’t ask you. Just tell me how to get near him.”

“I’ll tell you. Take this ring. It will open all doors for you.”

“A beautiful ring,” said Tur. “A quiver with an arrow is stamped on it.”

“If you want to know,” said Briukhovetsky, “it is the very ring that Khmelnytsky took from the sleeping Barabash. The late Hetman gave it to me as a present.”

“That’s a good present,” said Kyrylo Tur and walked out of the room.

Ivanets accompanied him to the door and Tur turned to him and said:

“Go to sleep and don’t worry. Your dream will come true.”

Kyrylo Tur walked on, pretending to be a hunchback. No one would recognize his youthful gait or his height. He appeared to be a hunchbacked old man. It was dark outside. He went straight to Somko’s prison. At the door he was met by a Cossack with a spear who opened the door for him as soon as he saw the Hetman’s ring.

Behind the door was another door with another guard. He also let Tur through after seeing the ring. Behind this was a third door and a third guard.

Tur told him he was going to see the prisoner. “I am going to hear his confession,” said Tur.

“I don’t want to hear it,” said the guard. “I can guess what kind of confession it will be.”

“Well, all the better if you do,” said the Zaporozhian. “You can go away. After confession the prisoner will go to sleep.”

“I’m sure he will,” murmured the guard.

Kyrylo Tur entered the cell and, holding his lamp, saw Somko sitting on a bare bench. He was

chained to the wall and had chains on his feet as well. His clothes were torn and he was without belt or boots. These had been looted when he was taken prisoner. The only thing left to him was his shirt, embroidered in gold and silver and adorned with blue flowers. This was a present from Mrs. Cherevan on his last trip to Khmaryshche and it was now his only real treasure.

Kyrylo Tur placed the lamp on the windowsill and came close to the dejected prisoner. He looked at Tur in silence. The Zaporozhian took a dagger out of his boot and showed it to Somko, who raised his eyes to heaven and said:

“Well, do what you were told to do.”

Kyrylo Tur asked him in a whining voice:

“Aren’t you afraid to die?”

“Perhaps I am afraid,” answered Somko, “but I remember the words about the soul which cannot be killed even if the body can.”

“That’s what you think,” said Tur, “as long as you haven’t felt the steel touch your skin. Let me cut it a little.”

“You tormentor,” said Somko, “my blood isn’t enough; you want to torture me. I can tell by your voice that you are someone who has crept from under a stone. Go on, torment me and you won’t hear me groan.”

“Very well,” said Kyrylo Tur in his normal voice, hiding his knife. “It is as if I am a bow and people are violins. They play as I draw the bow. I feel like a fiddler at a wedding.”

“What is this?” said Somko. “Am I beginning to have daydreams? Tell me, in God’s name, are you Kyrylo Tur or is it my disordered mind?”

The Zaporozhian roared with laughter.

“Why do you ask? Who else but Kyrylo Tur could get past three guards. Only he can cast such powerful spells.”

“What are you going to tell me?”

“Simply this. Let us change clothes and you walk out of here. This is a place fit for a vile reptile, not for a man. Make your way to the Buhaiv Dub where old Shram and his son are waiting for you. I told him that I’d let the falcon out of the cage. They have already spread the rumor that Somko has been freed. You don’t know what discontent there is with Ivanets. Now all you have to do is shout for help and thousands of people in Ukraine will support you. Those who were not at the council will help you, too. The Zaporozhians too are sorry they helped Ivanets. Well, what do you say to this? Why are you staring so silently, as if I were telling you a story?”

“I listen silently because I know that nothing good can come of this. Much blood has been spilt by Hetmans Vyhovsky and Yuras Khmelnytsky. Now you are asking me to shed more blood. Ivanets and his Cossacks are firmly entrenched. To defeat him the whole country would have to fight bitterly. And what would be the aim? Only that I, rather than Briukhovetsky, would be the Hetman.”

“Not only so that you could be Hetman, but so that truth would win over injustice.”

“It will win without me, brother Kyrylo. Perhaps God has plunged Ukraine into this crisis on purpose. Only through suffering can people reach understanding.”

“So you renounce your title to the Hetmancy?” asked Kyrylo Tur.

“And what would you do? When I had friends, regiments and cannons, God did not bless my side and my friends turned away from me. Why should I question my fate?”

“Old Shram does not think so,” said Tur.

“I was proud until death came and looked into my eyes.”

“Do as you please,” said the Zaporozhian. “But if you have any sense left you will walk out of this place when the door is open. Take my clothes and this ring and you are a free man again.”

“What about the chains?” asked Somko.

“That is nothing to us. I brought herbs with me which will break them apart.”

“Wait a moment,” said Somko. “Tell me — how are you going to get out of this place?”

“Don’t worry about that. You go and leave me to find my way out.”

“No, I won’t allow it. Let him, whom God has abandoned, perish. I will not buy my freedom with someone else’s death.”

“Death!” laughed Kyrylo Tur. “You must be mad to say that. I am no fool. Before sunrise I shall be free.”

“How are you going to get out of here?”

“Leave that to me. Haven’t you heard of the Zaporozhian wizardry? Some of them can draw a boat on the wall and then sit in it and paddle away. Do you think I am incapable of planning my way out?”

“I find it strange that you are prepared to joke in the face of death.”

“Isn’t all our life a joke?” commented Kyrylo Tur. “When our lips are smeared with honey we think that’s happiness. But in fact all is vanity. That’s why it is easy to leave it. But why waste time on philosophy? Give me your clothes.”

“No, my friend, I won’t allow it.”

“So you’ll make me look like a liar in front of old Shram? I was hoping to show him that a Zaporozhian is not a good-for-nothing. Now you’re taking this opportunity away from me.”

“Are you really doing all this to demonstrate Zaporozhian prowess to old Shram?” asked Somko.

“And why not? Did you think I was doing it out of patriotic duty? No, I was tempted to put my head on the block for the sake of a dream. There are not many men in Ukraine who would do that. Or do you think I am an eccentric?”

“My dear friend,” said Somko, “you have brought some light into this darkness. Now I shall find it easier to suffer because I know that the truth will live on in Ukrainian hearts. Let us say goodbye till we meet in the next world.”

The Zaporozhian became gloomy. “So you really want to stay in this dungeon?” he asked.

“I told you that I won’t buy my freedom with someone else’s death,” answered Somko.

“Really?” asked Kyrylo Tur, looking intently into Somko’s eyes.

“Really,” answered Somko, returning his look.

“This is a cursed hour,” said the Zaporozhian. “May he who is born now never enjoy happiness! May boats drown at sea! May horses stumble! And for those who die, may their souls re-enter their bodies! Cursed be this hour! Farewell, dear brother! I’ll not stay much longer in this miserable world!”

They embraced each other and wept softly.

Kyrylo Tur left the cell. He uncovered his face and told the guards: “You can see I was no executioner, but Kyrylo Tur, trying to rescue a noble soul.”

Passing a guard Kyrylo Tur threw at him the pillow he had carried on his back to make him appear hunched and said to him:

“Take that, you dog, so that you won’t have to sleep on the straw while you are guarding an innocent soul.”

He left the dungeon and soon found his comrade who was waiting for him with the horses at an ancient bell tower. Kyrylo Tur felt sad as he sat on the horse which had been waiting for Somko and felt even sadder as he rode to meet old Shram to tell him that Somko would not rejoin the Cossacks.

Near the Buhaiv Dub Shram was waiting for them and seeing in the distance two horsemen approaching he rode out to meet them. He asked:

“And where is Somko?”

“So you really trusted me,” Kyrylo Tur teased him.

“Don’t joke,” answered Shram. “If you haven’t succeeded tell me why.”

“I’ll tell you why,” said the Zaporozhian. “Somko is as big a fool as you or I. He said that he didn’t want to buy his freedom with someone else’s death. I couldn’t do anything and had to leave him there.”

“What will you do now?” asked Shram.

“I’ll tell you straight out. We’ll go to Hvyntovka’s khutir and steal Lesia Cherevan. Then we’ll go the Black Mountain and spend the rest of our lives in merriment.”

He bowed to Shram and his son and turned his horse in the direction of Hvyntovka’s khutir. Petro Shram caught up with him.

“What do you want, you ladies’ man?” asked Tur.

“Kyrylo Tur,” said Petro, “you have a true Cossack heart?”

“Certainly a Cossack and not a Jewish one,” replied the Zaporozhian.

“Tell Lesia Cherevan two words from me.”

“Very well, I’ll do it,” said Kyrylo Tur. To his comrade he whispered, “I’ll wager this is some love message.”

“Tell her I’ll never forget her,” said Petro.

“Very well, I will.”

“Farewell,” called Petro.

“Fare thee well, and don’t forget us either,” said the Zaporozhian.

They parted. Kyrylo Tur laughed and said: “We seem to be in control of this world, but wait till the devils take care of us in the next world.”

18

We should now follow old Shram and his son and relate everything as it happened. Teteria attacked Pavoloch and old Shram fell in defense of it. His head was cut off by the Cossacks of Teteria. In the same year Somko and Vasiuta also lost their heads in the town of Borzna. Briukhovetsky ordered their execution, though later he was put down by the Hetman Doroshenko. So both Somko and Shram gave their lives for the Ukrainian cause. The glorious memory of these lives will live forever. It will survive among the chroniclers, scholars and all wise men. This would be the proper place to end the history of the black council. But I should like to mention those who survived it.

After his father's funeral Petro did not stay long in Pavoloch. He wanted to join the Zaporozhians. He was on his way to Kyiv when he thought of Khmaryshche and rode in that direction. The gate of the khutir was open. He went inside and to his surprise found both Lesia and her mother.

"Merciful God!" cried Mrs. Cherevan, clapping her hands. Petro came in and stood on the threshold as if turned to stone. Lesia, who was sitting at the table, did not move. Mrs. Cherevan came and embraced Petro. Now she felt as if he were her own son. Petro summoned his courage, went to Lesia and kissed her. They were both beside themselves with joy, crying and laughing at the same time and constantly talking and interrupting each other.

Cherevan came in and was glad to see his visitor. He embraced and kissed Petro but because of his emotion all he could say was "Bhoter." When they had calmed down a little Petro sat down on a bench with mother and daughter at each side.

"Tell us now," said Mrs. Cherevan, "how God saved your life. We heard that you had given up your soul together with your lather."

Cherevan tried to sit on the bench too, but since he could not see Petro very well, he finally sat down opposite him on the floor, tucking his feet beneath him.

Petro told them what happened in Pavoloch. At times they all wept listening to him. Especially when Petro told how he parted with his father.

"Tell me," said Petro, "how you managed to avoid the Zaporozhian and reach Khmaryshche?"

"No," said Mrs. Cherevan, "it wasn't we who avoided him, but he who saved us. My brother decided that immediately after the council, Lesia should be married to Vuiakhevych. But Kyrlyo Tur appeared with a dozen of his comrades. He showed some sort of ring to my brother and asked him to release us. He said that Lesia was going to be married to the Hetman himself. And so we were all driven away. Then Kyrlyo Tur told us not to worry since he was not taking us to the Hetman but to Khmaryshche. We thanked him but he refused our thanks, saying that he would send suitors to Lesia. We worried again in case this was a serious thought in his heart. When we got to Khmaryshche, the Zaporozhian started laughing and told us, "You probably thought I was as foolish as young Shram. To hell with you women. You are the source of all evil and it is better to have nothing to do with you. Just let them cook our supper, for we have to travel tomorrow."

"Where did they go?" asked Petro.

"To the Black Mountain," answered Cherevan. "Kyrlyo Tur kept his word. At supper I asked him about his plans. They drank so much brandy that they very quickly fell asleep on the grass in the orchard. I thought they would stay with us the next day but in the morning they were gone. At supper Tur told me that he had wanted to influence the Zaporozhians in favor of Somko, but that the devil himself was helping Ivanets. Then he wanted to leave Ukraine forever. He was sure that Somko would be beheaded. As he spoke tears fell from his eyes."

"So he left his mother and sister for the sake of the Black Mountain?" commented Petro.

"We asked him why he was leaving his old mother with her daughter, but he answered: 'What use is a mother to a Cossack? Our mother is war with the Turks, our sister is a sharp sabre. I left them money; they will have enough as long as they live. But a Zaporozhian was not created by God to sit on the stove.'"

Talking all the time, they did not notice that dinner time had arrived. Just then Vasyl Nevolnyk

came in bringing with him the holy man. He had brought him to Khmaryshche from a fair in Kyiv. Vasyl Nevolnyk was very pleased to see young Shram. Both he and the holy man embraced the Cossack. The entire household grew gayer. Lesia was chattering like a little swallow. After dinner the holy man played and chanted all kinds of serious songs. Afterwards, when he was leaving Khmaryshche, Petro gave him money to buy freedom for the slaves in Turkish captivity and thus commemorate his dead father.

“It is sad,” he said to the holy man, “that evil triumphs in this world and that there is no reward for work and suffering.”

“Don’t talk to me like that, my son,” said the holy man, “we all receive both punishment and reward from God.”

“How is it then,” said Petro, “that Ivanets triumphed and Somko and my father drank the cup of bitterness?”

“Ivanets has been punished by his sins,” said the holy man. “The just man needs no reward here. A Hetmancy or riches are mere phantoms. You say there is no reward. A reward for what? That one’s soul is better than one’s neighbor’s? Is that not a reward? Some will say that your father sought glory. That is a chimera. Glory is needed for the world, not for individual men. People should learn to be good and those who seek glory will find it only with God.”

The old man grew silent, bent his head and remained deep in thought. Then he bowed to all four sides and left the house, carrying his bandura on his back.

Petro stayed with the Cherevans who accepted him as their own son. Six months later the wedding was held. Spring was not quite over when Petro and Lesia became husband and wife.

And so everything passed like a dream. It seemed terrible to most people. But some were spared, by God’s will. It was just like a storm. It thundered, winds blew and God’s world was invisible. Old trees were uprooted, both oak and birch. But whatever God has commanded to grow and blossom remains and flourishes gaily, as if there had never been a storm.

TRANSLATORS' NOTES

Panteleimon Kulish wrote his *Chorna rada*¹ (The Black Council) in 1845–46. It was the first novel to be written in modern Ukrainian. This fact, so important for the development of Ukrainian prose, presents a major problem for the translators of this book. The original text was written in a language which had not yet evolved into an adequate literary medium and is full of dialectal and folk elements. In vocabulary and style, the original text of the novel is rich and colorful, yet it is precisely here that translation into English becomes virtually impossible.

It was decided, therefore, to condense the Ukrainian text from the original 50,000 words to 40,000. It is hoped that the consequent loss may not be without certain compensations. While purists will inevitably bemoan this, we can remain confident that the entire structure of the novel, its characters and ideas, have remained undisturbed.

Brief explanatory notes of names and special terms are as follows:

Baida — a legendary figure in the dumas, sometimes identified with Baida Vyshnevetsky.

bandura — a Ukrainian stringed instrument.

Barabash, Ivan — a Cossack colonel who sided with the Poles and was killed by Khmelnytsky's men in 1648.

Berestechko — field of battle where in 1651 the Polish army defeated the Cossacks led by Khmelnytsky.

Cossacks, registered — the number was limited by the Polish king.

duma — an epic-lyric song chanted to the accompaniment of the bandura.

Gizel, Innokenty — Ukrainian ecclesiastical leader in the 17th century.

Hadiach, treaty of — concluded in 1658 between Hetman Vyhovsky and Poland.

Hetman — an elected supreme commander of the Cossacks.

Jews — in 17th-century Ukraine were often employed as tavern-keepers by Polish landlords.

Khmelnytsky, Bohdan — (Hetman, 1648–1657), the leader of the Cossack revolution against Poland.

Khmelnytsky, Yuras — Bohdan's son, a Cossack Hetman.

khutir — a homestead, where the Cossacks often settled or retired.

kobzar — a minstrel playing a kobza or bandura.

kurin — the Zaporozhian community was known as a kish (camp) of which a kurin was a section.

kylym — a Ukrainian tapestry.

Lavra — the famous Cave Monastery in Kyiv.

Luh, Velyky — Great Meadow, adjacent to Sich.

Mohyla, Petro (1596–1647) — Metropolitan of Kyiv and prominent ecclesiastical personality. Founder of the Mohyla College.

Monomakh, Volodymyr — a Kyivan Prince of the 12th century.

Morozenko — colonel of Korsun, Khmelnytsky's lieutenant, a legendary hero.

¹In Ukrainian, the word *chorna* (black) is related to the word *chern* (rabble).

Nalyvaiko, Severyn — Cossack leader at the end of the 16th century. Beheaded by the Poles in 1597.
Nechai, Danylo — one of Khmelnytsky's colonels, a legendary Cossack hero.
Ostrianytsia, Yakiv — leader of a Cossack revolt in 1638. Died in 1641.
otaman — a Cossack chieftain.
Pavliuha (Pavluk) — real name is Pavlo But. Cossack leader in the 1637 rebellion.
Perebyinis — a legendary Cossack hero.
Rus — ancient name of Ukraine.
Sahaidachny, Petro Konashevych — Ukrainian Hetman. Died in 1622.
Samiilo Kishka — a legendary Cossack hero and a historical personage.
Sich, Zaporozhian — a Cossack fortress on an island in the Dnieper River “beyond the rapids.” The name refers to a place protected by felled trees.
starosta — a Polish district official.
szlachta - Polish gentry and lesser nobility.
Teteria, Pavlo — colonel of Pereiaslav, later Hetman of the Right-Bank Ukraine.
Triasylo, Taras — Cossack leader of the rebellion against the Poles in 1630.
varenyky — Ukrainian dumplings.
voievoda — Polish provincial government chief, also a military leader.
Vyhovsky, Ivan — Hetman, close collaborator of Khmelnytsky; after whose death he favored pro-Polish policies.
Vyshnevetsky, Yarema (1612–1651) — Polish Prince, a fierce enemy of the Cossacks.
Yaroslav the Wise — a Kyivan Prince of the 11th century.
Zaporozhe — a series of fortified islands on the Dnieper, where the Zaporozhian Cossacks made their headquarters.

Orginal: Panteleimon Kulish. *Chorna rada*.