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SHADOWS OF FORGOTTEN ANCESTORS

Ivan was the nineteenth child in the Hutsul family of the Paliichuks. The twentieth and last was Annychka. Who is to say whether it was the eternal roaring of the Cheremosh River and the complaints of the mountain streams filling the lonely cottage on the bare high peak, or whether it was the sorrow of the black fir forests that frightened the child? Whatever the reason, Ivan wept constantly, cried out in the night, grew poorly, and looked at his mother with such a profoundly wise and ancient gaze that she would turn away from him in consternation. Sometimes she would even think with a shudder that he was not her child. The midwife had failed to utter the proper charms during labor, or to fumigate a corner of the house, or to light a candle, and a crafty she-devil had managed to exchange her own child for the human one.

The boy grew poorly, and yet he did grow, and before his mother had noticed, it was time to sew trousers for him. But the boy was still strange. He would stare ahead, seeing something unknown and distant, or he would yell without reason. His breeches slipping down, he would shut his eyes tightly, open his mouth, and scream.

Then his mother would remove the pipe clenched in her teeth, wave it at him, and angrily call out, “Fie on you, changeling! May you vanish in the lake or the woods!”

And Ivan would vanish. He would roll through the green hayfields, small and white, like a dandelion puff, and fearlessly make his way into the forest, where firs nodded their boughs overhead like bears waving their paws. From there he would gaze at the mountains, the nearer and farther peaks outlined against the azure sky, at the black fir forests that cast off a blue breath, and at the emerald-green hayfields that twinkled like mirrors in a frame of trees] The cold Cheremosh seethed in the valley below. Isolated farms dozed in the ( sunlight on distant hills. All was sad and still, and the black firs ceaselessly lowered their sorrow into the Cheremosh, which carried it away.

“Iva-a-a-n! Hey!” the folks would call from the house, but he would not listen and would continue to pick raspberries, make whistles, and blow on blades of grass, trying to imitate the bird calls and the other sounds that he heard in the forest. Barely visible in the verdure, he would pick flowers to decorate his broadbrim straw hat and then, when he was tired, lie down under the hay drying on a dead fir, and the mountain streams would lull him to sleep and then wake him with their peals.

When Ivan turned seven, he looked at the world with different eyes. He already knew many things. He could find such useful herbs as valerian, deadly nightshade, mandrake, and sanicle. He understood the kite’s weeping, and he knew where the cuckoo comes from. When he talked about these things at home, his mother would glance at him uncertainly: perhaps it was speaking to him? He knew that evil forces rule the world, that the evil spirit of the aridnyk reigns over all, that the woods are full of forest demons who graze deer and hares like cattle, that the merry chuhaistyr—who rends wood nymphs from limb to limb—roams about, inviting passers-by to join him in dance, and that the sound of the ax lives in the forest. Higher up, on the distant waterless peaks, wood nymphs dance endlessly, and the shcheznyk (“the Vanisher”) hides in the cliffs. Ivan also knew about the water nymphs who emerge onto riverbanks on clear days to sing songs and make up tales and prayers, and about the drowned men who dry their pale bodies on river boulders after sunset. All manner of evil spirits inhabit the cliffs, forests, ravines, cottages, and enclosures, lying in wait to harm Christian folk or cattle. Waking at night, surrounded by a hostile silence, Ivan would often lie trembling with horror. The world was like a fairy tale, miraculous, intriguing, and yet

frightening.

By now he had been given chores and was sent to graze the cows. He would drive Godly and Blue into the forest, and when they were immersed in waves of grass and young firs and the mournful peal of their bells seemed to be emerging from under water, he would sit down, on a slope, take out his flute, and play the simple tunes that he had learned from his elders. Yet this music never satisfied him. He would cast aside his flute in annoyance and listen to the faint and elusive melodies that dwelled within him.

The dull clamor of the river would rise toward Ivan from the valley below and flood the mountains, and the pellucid ringing of the cow bells would echo like drops of falling water. The sorrowful mountains would peer from behind fir boughs, imbued with the sadness of the shadows cast by the clouds, which obliterated the pale smiles of the hayfields. The mountains were always changing their mood: when the hayfields smiled, the forest would frown. Difficult as it was to peer into the mountains' changing visage, it was just as difficult for the boy to catch the whimsical melody that fluttered its little wings by his ear and yet could never be caught.

Once Ivan abandoned his cows and climbed to the very peak. He rose higher and higher along a barely visible path, through thick growths of pale ferns and prickly blackberries and raspberries. He leaped lightly from stone to stone, clambered over fallen trees, and pushed through thickets. The eternal roar of the river rose after him; the mountains grew around him, and the blue vision of Chornohora appeared on the horizon. Now long weeping grass covered the slopes; the cow bells echoed like distant sighs, and large rocks cropped up ever more frequently, until at the very peak they formed a chaos of shattered boulders, covered with lichen and strangled in the snakelike embraces of fir roots. Each rock under Ivan's feet was covered by soft and silky reddish moss. Warm and gentle, it preserved the sun-gilded water of summer rains and caressed his feet like a feather pillow. The bushy green cranberries and whortleberries had sunk their roots deep into the moss and sprinkled over it a dew of red and blue berries.

Here Ivan, sat down, to rest. The boughs of fir trees rustled gently overhead, the sound blending with the roar of the river. The sun filled the deep valley with gold, making the grass green; the blue smoke of a bonfire wound its way upward, and velvety peals of thunder rolled over the hills from beyond Ihryts Mountains. Ivan sat listening, completely forgetting that he had cows to tend.

Suddenly he heard in the resonant silence a quiet music that sinuated by his ear so long and so elusively that it was almost painful. Frozen motionless, his head tilted forward, he listened to the strange melody with joyous anticipation. He had never heard people playing in this manner. But then who was playing? Not a single person could be seen in the forest around him. Ivan glanced back at the rocks and was petrified. There, astride a rock, sat the Vanisher, his pointed beard twisted, his horns bent down, and his eyes shut, playing on a floiara. "My goats are gone, my goats are gone!" the floiara echoed sadly. Then the horns were raised, the cheeks filled with air, the eyes opened wide, and joyful sounds leaped forth. "My goats are back, my goats are back!" And Ivan saw to his horror that bearded billy goats had emerged from a thicket and were shaking their heads.

Unable to flee, Ivan sat rooted to the spot, shouting inwardly in mute terror. When he finally found his voice, the Vanisher disappeared into the rock, and the billy goats turned into roots of windblown trees.

The boy dashed down headlong, blindly fending off the treacherous embraces of blackberry

bushes, breaking dry branches, rolling over slippery moss, and sensing with horror that something was pursuing him. Finally he felt he did not know how long he lay there.

When he came to and recognized familiar places, he calmed down a bit. Still shaken, he listened for a while. The song seemed to be echoing within him. He took out his *dentsivka*. At first he could not get the hang of the melody. He started over and over, straining his memory and trying to recreate the sounds. When he finally found what he had been seeking for a long time, what had given him no rest, a strange, unfamiliar tune floated through the forest. Joy filled Ivan's heart, flooding the mountains, forest, and grass with sunlight, gurgling in the streams, and lifting Ivan's legs. Hurling his flute into the grass and placing his arms akimbo, he broke into a whirling dance. He leaped, squatted, pattered his bare feet in spinning steps, and stood on his hands. "My goats are back, my goats are back!" something sang within him. In the sunlit meadow surrounded by the gloomy realm of firs, the little blond boy leaped up and down, flitting like a butterfly from one blade of grass to another. His two cows poked their heads through the branches, eying him in a friendly manner as they chewed their cud and jangled their bells in time to the dance. Thus Ivan found in the forest what he had been looking for..

At home, Ivan often witnessed strife and woe. During his lifetime, the *trembita* had twice echoed by the house, announcing to the mountains and valleys that death had come: once when his brother Oleksa had been crushed by a falling tree in the forest, and once when his brother Vasyl, a fine young lad, had been cut to pieces by broadaxes in a fight with a hostile clan. The enmity between Ivan's family and the Huteniuks was of long standing. Although everyone in the family seethed with rage at the devilish Huteniuks, no one could tell Ivan exactly how the feud had started. He, too, burned with a desire for revenge and would grasp his father's hatchet, which was still too heavy for him, ready to dash into battle.

Although Ivan was the nineteenth child and Annychka the twentieth, the family consisted only of the parents and five children. The other fifteen were buried in the churchyard. The family was devout and liked to visit church, especially for parish fairs. There they could meet distant relatives who had settled in neighboring villages, and opportunities would occur to repay the Huteniuks for Vasyl's death and for the blood that the Paliichuks had shed so often.

They would take out their finest clothes, their new wool breeches, their embroidered jerkins, their nail-studded leather belts and wallets, their aprons, their red silk kerchiefs, and even the snow-white mantle that mother carefully carried on a walking stick across her shoulder. Ivan received a new hat and a long shoulder bag that swung against his legs.

The horses would be saddled, and the grand procession would set out, garlanding the green upland track like red poppies. The festively clad people stretched out along peaks and vales. The green hayfields seemed to blossom; a multicolored stream sailed along the Cheremosh, and high above, against (the black cloak of the fir forest, a red Hutsul parasol glinted in the early morning sun.

Ivan soon saw a meeting of the feuding clans. The family was returning from a parish fair, where father had had a bit to drink. All at once a commotion arose on the narrow road between the mountain and the Cheremosh. Wagons had stopped, and men and women, both on horseback and on foot, had gathered in a crowd. Hatchets flashed in the fierce uproar that sprang up, and the Huteniuks and Paliichuks clashed like flint and steel. Before Ivan could figure out what was happening, his father brandished his hatchet and struck someone across the forehead. Blood gushed

over the man's face, shirt, and fancy jerkin. The womenfolk cried out and ran to pull the wounded man back. His face as red as his breeches, he struck at his foe with his hatchet, and Ivan's father fell like an undercut fir. Ivan dashed forward. He did not know what he was doing. But the adults stepped on his feet, and he could not make his way through to the fight.

Flushed and furious, he ran straight into a little girl who was shaking with fear beside a wagon. Aha! This must be Huteniuk's daughter, he thought and £ without hesitating struck her in the face. She grimaced, clutched her shirt to her breast, and ran off. Ivan caught up with her near the river, seized her by the shirt, and tore it. New hair ribbons fell out, and the girl lunged with a cry; to save them, but Ivan jerked them away and threw them into the water. Then the girl gave him a penetrating look with her limpid black eyes and said calmly, "That's all right. I have other ribbons, much better ones." She seemed to be consoling him.

Surprised by her gentle tone, the boy remained silent.

"My mother bought a new apron for me... and moccasins... and embroidered stockings and..."

He still did not know what to say.

"I'll dress up in my beautiful clothes and be a fine young lady."

He felt envious. "And I can play the flute."

"Our Fedir made himself a fine floiara. When he plays it..."

Ivan frowned. "I've seen the Vanisher."

The girl looked at him incredulously. "Then why do you fight?"

"And why were you standing by the wagon?"

She thought for a moment, uncertain of her answer, and then started to look for something inside her shirt front. Finally she pulled out a long sweetmeat. "Just look!" She bit off half the sweet and extended the other half with a grave and trusting motion. "Here!"

Ivan hesitated, but then took the gift. Soon they were sitting side by side, oblivious of the screams of the fight and the angry roaring of the river. She told him that her name was Marichka, that she was tending sheep, that a one-eyed woman named Martsynova had stolen their flour, and other things that were interesting and familiar to both of them, as the gaze of her limpid black eyes softly pierced Ivan's heart.

The trembita announced a third death in the lonely cottage on the high peak: old Paliichuk died the day after the fight. Hard times came for Ivan's family after the master's death. Disorder took root; the possessions disappeared; one hayfield after another was sold, and the livestock melted away like mountain snow in the spring.

But his father's death made less of an impression on Ivan than the friendship with the little girl who had so trustingly given him half a sweet after he had wrongly hurt her. A new current flowed into his old and causeless sorrow. It drew him into the mountains, carrying him to neighboring peaks, forests, and valleys in search of Marichka. He found her, finally, when she was grazing lambs.

Marichka greeted him as if she had been expecting him: they would graze the sheep together. Of course! Let Godly and Blue ring their bells and bellow in the forest. He would graze Marichka's lambs.

And how they grazed them! Clustered together in the shade of a fir, the white yearling ewes watched with dull eyes as the children rolled on the moss, their laughter ringing in the silence. Tired, they would climb onto the white boulders and fearfully peer into the abyss below, from which the

black apparition of the mountain sharply rose into the sky, shimmering with an azure that would not melt in the sunlight. A stream rushed through a crevice in the mountains, shaking its gray beard on the rocks. The age-old silence sheltered by the forest was so warm, lonely, and frightening that the children could hear their own breathing. Their ears sought out and magnified every sound in the forest, and sometimes it seemed to them that they could hear mysterious footsteps, the dull thud of an ax, and a heavy, panting breathing.

"Ivan, can you hear it?" Marichka whispered.

"Why shouldn't I hear it? Of course I do."

They both knew that the invisible ax was wandering through the forest, thumping on trees and gasping for breath in exhaustion. Fear would send them scampering down to the valley, where the stream flowed more calmly. They would make a deep hole in the stream, strip naked, and splash about in it like forest creatures that had never known shame. The sun would glint on their fair hair and beat into their eyes, while the icy water would nip their limbs. Marichka would be the first to feel cold and would set off in a run.

"Stop!" Ivan would call out. "Where are you from?"

"From Ya-vo-riv," Marichka would reply, her teeth chattering.

"And whose daughter are you?"

"The blacksmith's."

"Fare you well, blacksmith's daughter!" Ivan would pinch her and dash after her until exhausted, but warm, they would collapse in the grass.

In the quiet stretch of the stream, where wolfsbane shimmered and monkshood berries hung down like blue slippers, frogs croaked sadly. Ivan would bend down to the stream and ask a frog, "Godmother, godmother, what have you cooked?"

"Beet borsch, beet borsch, beet borsch," Marichka would croak.

"Beets, beets, beets!" they would both shriek, their eyes tightly shut, forcing the frogs to fall silent.

Thus they grazed the sheep, often losing them completely.

Their games changed when they grew older. Ivan was now a young man, as tall and robust as a fir tree. He dressed his hair with butter and wore a wide leather belt and a fancy straw hat. Marichka braided her hair with ribbons, signifying that she was ready to give her hand in marriage. They no longer grazed sheep together and met only on Sundays and holidays, by the church or in the forest, so that the feuding families would not know that their children were in love.

Marichka liked to listen to Ivan playing his flute. Lost in thought, he would fix his gaze beyond the mountains as if seeing something others could not see, place the carved flute to his full lips, and a strange tune that no one had ever played would waft over the fir-shaded hayfields. The frost nipped at Ivan and Marichka, and the first whistling sounds sent chills down their spines. The winter-clad mountains seemed dead. But then the sun-god rose from beyond the mountains and placed his head on the ground. Winter was overcome; the waters awoke, and the earth rang with the song of the streams. The sunlight scattered like flower pollen; wood nymphs slipped through the hayfields, and the first green grass sprang up under their feet. The fir trees breathed with greenery; the grass sounded a green laugh, and the whole world consisted of only two colors: all green the earth and all blue the sky. And down below the Cheremosh drove the noisy, restless green blood of the mountains.

“Turu-rai-ra...” a trembita echoed. “Turu-rai-ra...” The shepherds hearts quickened, and the sheep bleated as they caught wind of the fresh fodder. The sedge rustled in the cold upland pastures, and from his lair in a thicket the bear rose on his hind paws, trying out his voice and casting about a sleepy eye for food. Spring rains fell; the mountain peaks roared with thunder, and a chill evil spirit blew from Chornohora. Then suddenly the sun—the right side of God’s face—appeared and glinted against the scythes that were mowing hay. From peak to peak, from stream to stream, a kolomyika flitted, so light and transparent that the flutter of its wings could be heard.

A white ewe came running  
From the upland herds.  
I love you, my sweetheart,  
And your beautiful words....

The boughs of the firs rang quietly; the forests whispered their cold dreams of summer nights; the bells of the cows pealed mournfully, and the mountains ceaselessly sent down their sorrow to the streams. A felled tree flew down with a crack and a cry into the valley; the mountains sighed in response, and again the trembita wailed. This time for death. A life of ceaseless labor had ended. A cuckoo sang out on a mountain crest: now someone’s gone to eternal rest....

Marichka responded to the flute like a wood pigeon hen to a cock by singing songs. She knew a multitude of them. She could not have said where they came from. They seemed to have rocked in the cradle or splashed about in the bath with her. They were born in her breast the way wild flowers spring up in a hayfield or firs grow on mountain slopes. No matter what her eye rested on, no matter what happened—a sheep strayed, a lad fell in love, a girl was unfaithful, a cow took sick—everything was poured into a song, as light and simple as the mountains in their primeval life.

Marichka could also compose her own songs. Sitting on the ground beside Ivan, she would embrace her knees and quietly rock with the tune. Her rounded, sunburned calves were visible from the hem of her skirt to her red leggings, and her full lips curved sweetly as she began:

A cuckoo small and gray now sings for me,  
A bright new song for the village is ringing.

Marichka’s song would relate a well-known, but nonetheless fresh event: Paraska had enchanted Andrii, who was dying from her spell, and was warning other men not to love married women. Or her song would tell of the sorrowing mother whose son had been crushed to death by a tree in the forest. The songs were so sad, simple, and fervent that they tugged at the heart. Marichka usually finished them with a couplet:

The cuckoo warbled for me by the stream.  
Who composed this little song? Ivanko’s Marichka.

She had been Ivan’s since the age of thirteen. What was so strange about that? Grazing the sheep, she had often seen the billy goat covering a doe or the ram coupling with a ewe. Everything

was so simple and natural, so little changed since time immemorial, that no impure thought ever clouded her heart. Yes, the goats and sheep did become big with young, but people could be helped by a sorceress. Marichka was not afraid. Around her waist, next to her skin, she wore a clove of garlic over which a sorceress had whispered, and nothing would harm her now. At the thought of this Marichka would smile slyly and embrace Ivan by the neck.

“My dear Ivanko! Will we always be together?”

“God willing, my sweet.”

”Oh no! Our parents bear a great hatred for one another in their hearts. We will never be married.”

Ivan’s eyes would cloud over, and he would sink his ax into the ground. “I don’t need their approval. They may do what they will, but you shall be mine.”

”Oh my, my! What are you saying?”

“Exactly what I mean, my love.” And as if to anger their parents he would swing the girl about at dances so violently that her moccasins would fly off.

But events did not take the course that Ivan expected. His farm was falling apart. There was not enough work for everyone, and Ivan would have to hire himself out. He was torn by worry.

“I must go to the uplands, Marichka,” he announced sadly.

“Well, then, go, Ivanko,” she replied with resignation. “Such is our fate.”

Marichka wove a wreath of songs for their parting. She was sorry that their meetings in the quiet forest would cease for a long time. Embracing Ivan by the neck and pressing her flaxen head to his face, she sang in his ear:

Think of me, my sweetheart,  
Twice a day,  
And I will think of you  
Seven times an hour.

“Will you think of me?”

“I will, Marichka.”

”It’s all right,” she comforted him. “You’ll be a shepherd, my poor darling, and I’ll mow hay. Ill climb on a haystack and look at the upland ranges, and you’ll play the trembita for me. Maybe I’ll hear it. When fog settles on the mountains, I’ll sit down and cry because I cannot see where my lover is. But when the stars come out on a clear night, I’ll look to see which star is shining over the high pasture. That will be the one my Ivanko sees. I’ll only stop singing.”

“Why? Don’t stop singing, Marichka, don’t be sad. I’ll soon come back.”

But she only shook her head sadly in reply and sang:

My sweet little songs,  
What shall I do with you?  
Perhaps I’ll scatter you  
Over the mountains and valleys.  
Then she sighed and added even more sadly:

Oh you'll fly o'er the mountains,  
My sweet little songs,  
And I will wash my face  
With my tears.

If fate is kind,  
Then I'll gather you together,  
But if my fate is evil,  
Then I'll abandon you.

Ivan listened to the thin girlish voice and thought that Marichka had long since sowed the mountains with her songs, that the forests and the hayfields, the peaks and the pastures, the streams and the sun were all singing them. But the day would come when he would return to her, and she would gather her songs for their wedding.

Ivan set out for the upland pasture on a warm spring morning. The forest was still casting a chill; the mountain waters roared over the rapids, and the highland path joyously ascended past the wattle fences. Although he found it difficult to leave Marichka, the sunlight and the rustling green spaces extending to the horizon endowed him with briskness. He leaped lightly from rock to rock like a mountain stream, greeting passers-by simply for the pleasure of hearing his own voice.

“Praise be to Jesus!”

“Praise Him forever!”

Hutsul farmhouses stained cherry-red by fir smoke and peaked stacks of fragrant hay appeared here and there on the distant hills, and in the valley below the frothy Cheremosh angrily shook its gray curls and shone with a malignant green light. Forging stream after stream and passing gloomy forests where occasionally a cow would tinkle its bell or a squirrel in a fir tree would drop the leavings of a cone, Ivan climbed ever higher. The sun was beginning to burn, and the stony track was galling his feet. Now the cottages were less frequent. The Cheremosh spread out in the valley below like a silver-thread, and its roar was not audible here. Forests gave way to full, soft mountain meadows. Ivan waded through them as if they were lakes of flowers, sometimes stooping to decorate his hat with a handful of red Iceland moss or a wreath of pale camomiles. The slopes fell away into deep black abysses, where cold streams welled up and the only denizen was the brown bear, the dreaded enemy of the livestock known as “Uncle.” Water occurred less frequently. But how Ivan fell to it when he did find a stream, a cold crystal that had bathed the yellow roots of firs and had brought here the echoes of the forest! Beside these streams a kindly soul would often leave a cup of boiled sour milk.

The trail continued to rise into thickets where prickly firs, without bark or needles, moldered in piles like skeletons. These forest graveyards were sad and desolate, forgotten by God and man, and only heathcocks hissed and snakes writhed here. The severe and sorrowful silence of nature ruled over everything. Mountains were rising behind Ivan in the azure distance. An eagle ascended from a rocky point, proffering a benediction with the wide sweep of its wings. The cold breath of the upland pastures could be felt, and the sky expanded. The forests had given way to a black carpet of creeping mountain pines and firs that caught at Ivan's feet, and moss covered the rocks in green silk.

The faraway mountains revealed their peaks, flexing their backs and rising like waves in a blue sea. It seemed that ocean breakers had been frozen at the moment when a storm had raised them from the depths in order to dash them against the land. The peaks of Bukovina could be seen supporting the skyline with their blue shapes; Synytsia, Dzembronia, and Bila Kobyla were wrapped in azure; Ihrets was smoking; the sharp peak of Hoverlia pierced the sky, and Chornohora crushed the earth with its weight.

The upland pasture! Ivan was finally standing in the high, grass-covered meadow. A sea of stormy mountains surrounded him in a wide circle, and the endless blue ramparts seemed to be advancing toward him, ready to fall at his feet. A wind as biting as a honed hatchet struck at his chest. His breath flowed into one with the breath of the mountains, and pride overwhelmed him. He wanted to shout at the top of his lungs so that the echo would roll to the horizon and shake the sea of peaks, but he sensed suddenly that in these spaces his voice would be as insignificant as a mosquito's buzz. He had to hurry.

In a vale behind a hill, where the wind was less biting, he found a sooty shepherd's hut. The smoke hole in the wall was cold. The sheepfolds stood empty, and shepherds were bustling about, preparing a place to sleep. The chief shepherd was occupied in making living fire. Having inserted a small log in the doorjamb, he and a helper were pulling a leather belt back and forth, making the log whirl and squeak.

"Praise be to Jesus!" Ivan greeted them.

The men did not reply. The log continued to hum, and the men, concentrated and severe, continued to pull the belt back and forth. The log began to smoke, and soon a small flame leaped up. The chief shepherd devoutly raised the fire and placed it in a bonfire piled by the door.

"Praise him forever!" He turned around to Ivan. "Now we have a living fire, and as long as it burns neither wild beast nor evil spirit will touch either the livestock or us Christian folk. "He led Ivan into the hut, where they were greeted by the musty smell of empty casks and bowls and bare benches.

"Tomorrow the livestock will be driven to us. If only the Lord helps us to return it all to the masters," the chief shepherd remarked and then proceeded to explain Ivan's duties. There was something calm and even stately about the speech and gestures of this master of the uplands. "Mykola!" he called out the door. "Go light the fire in the hut now!"

Mykola, a thin, curly-headed fellow with a plump feminine face, brought the fire into the hut.

"And who might you be, my friend?" Ivan asked with curiosity. "A shepherd?"

"No, I'm the fire keeper," Mykola replied, showing his teeth. "My job is to tend the fire and keep it from going out all summer, because there will be trouble if it does. "He even looked around with horror. "And to go to the stream for water and to the forest for wood."

The fire outside was blazing higher. With the dignified motions of an ancient priest, the chief shepherd kept adding dry wood and green branches to it. The blue smoke rose lightly and then, blown by the wind, seized hold of the mountains, cut across the black strip of forest, and rolled over the distant peaks. The upland pasture was beginning its life with living fire, which would protect it against all evil. As if aware of this, the fire proudly wreathed like a snake and spouted ever new clouds of smoke.

Four strong sheep dogs rested in the grass, thoughtfully gazing at the mountains, ready at any

moment to jump up, bare their teeth, and bristle their fur. The day was ending. The mountains were exchanging their blue garb for chasubles of pink mixed with gold. Mykola called out that supper was ready. The shepherds assembled by the hut and peacefully sat down at the living fire to eat their first bowl of gruel in the upland pasture.

How cheerful the upland was in springtime when sheep came to it from every village! The tall chief shepherd circled the sheepfold, fire in hand, his face as grave as a pagan priest's, his stride broad and firm, and the smoke from the glowing ember spurting after him like a winged dragon. At the gate of the fold, through which the sheep would have to pass, the chief shepherd threw down the ember and listened. He heard the gait of the upland pastures with more than his ear. He sensed with his heart how from deep valleys, where rivers seethed and ate away at their banks, from quiet farms and meadows, a wave of livestock was surging upward in response to the call of spring, and the earth underfoot sighed joyfully. He heard the distant breathing of the flocks, the lowing of the cows, and the barely audible sounds of songs.

And when people finally appeared, raising high their long, sun-gilded trembitas to greet the upland pasture, when sheep bleated and filled all the folds in a noisy stream, the chief shepherd fell to his knees and raised his arms to heaven. Behind him the shepherds and the people who had brought their livestock also knelt in prayer. They were beseeching the merciful Lord to give their sheep hearts as fiery as the hot embers they were passing over and to protect Christian livestock from all evil, beasts, and accidents. As God had helped to bring the livestock together, so the worshippers hoped that He would help to return it to the owners. The sky listened kindly to the simple prayer; the Baskid frowned benignly, and the wind overhead carefully combed the grass in the pastures like a mother combing her child's hair.

Upland pasture, high wild meadow, why are you so proud? Is it because of the sheep you have just seen? "Heh-ya, hah-ya!" a shepherd cried as he drove the sheep. Bending their knees lazily and trembling on their thin legs, the sheep shook their wool. "Heh-ya, hah-ya!" Their naked muzzles opened wide with elderly expressions of boredom, revealing salivating lips, to complain to God knows who. Be-eh, me-eh.... Two shepherds led the flock. Their red breeches evenly sliced the air, and the flowers on their hats swayed with their motions. "Byr-byr!" The sheep dogs sniffed the air, keeping one eye on the sheep to make sure that everything was in order. Wool rubbed against wool, white against black; the fluffy spines trembled like small waves on a lake, and the entire flock quivered. "Ptrua! Ptrua!" The guttural cry called back the sheep at the edge and kept the flood within banks. The surrounding mountains were like an azure sea, and the wind raked the clouds across the sky. The curly tails of the sheep quivered; their heads were bent, and their flat white teeth chewed thistles and sweet crocuses down to the ground. "Byr-byr!" The high pasture spread its carpet at the feet of the flock, and the sheep covered it with a piebald moving coat. Crunch-crunch... be-eh, me-eh... crunch-crunch.... Cloud shadows wandered over the nearer hills. The mountains seemed to be moving like waves in a sea, and only the distant ones stood motionless. Sunlight flooded the wool of the sheep, breaking up into rainbows in it and spreading a green fire through the grass, and the shepherds' long shadows trailed after the animals. "Ptrua! Ptrua!" Crunch-crunch, crunch-crunch.... The shepherds stepped silently in their moccasins; the woolly wave softly rolled over the pasture, and the wind began to play on a distant fence. "Dzzz," it hummed on a splinter, buzzing monotonously like a fly. "Dzzz," replied another fence, introducing a low note of sorrow. More and

more clouds appeared, and now they covered half the sky. The distant Beskid grew dim and then turned black and gloomy in the shadows like a widower, while the pasture was still green and bright. "Why don't you marry, high Beskid?" the wind in the fence asked. "Because the upland pasture will not have me," the Beskid sighed in reply. The blue sky was covered with gray. The sea of mountains grew dark. The pasture became dim, and the flock of sheep crawled over it like a gray lichen. A cold wind unfurled its wings, striking the shepherds under their jerkins. It was so difficult to breathe that they wanted to turn their backs to the wind. Let it strike. The fences whined a high tune, like flies buzzing in a snare; an unbearable pain howled, and lonely sorrow wept. Dzzz... dzzz.... Ceaselessly, persistently. Sucking out the blood and piercing the heart like a knife. I don't want to listen, but I have to. I'd like to escape, but where? Heh-ya, hah-ya! And where are you off to? The devil take you! Byr-byr! Murko! But Murko was already chasing the ewe back. Dashing after it as the wind raised the hackles on his back, he seized the sheep by the neck with his teeth and threw it back to the flock. Dzzz... dzzz.... Like a monotonous and unbearable toothache. Clench your teeth and be quiet. Go on and hurt. Buzz away and begone! What's that crying? It must be the One. May he turn to stone! I could fall to the ground, shut my ears with my hands, and weep. I can't take any more.... Dzzz... dzi-u-u!

Ivan took out his floiara and blew into it with all his strength, but the madman was stronger than he was. Flying from Chornohora like an unbridled horse, he struck the grass with his hooves and scattered the sounds of the

floiara with his mane. Like a witch blinking a cataracted eye, Chornohora frightened him with a snow field under black, windswept tresses. Dzzz... dzi-u-u!

The sheep rolled into a dale where the wind was quieter. A blue lake appeared in the gray sky. The pungent upland grass gave off a stronger fragrance. The lake in the sky overflowed its banks and spilled its waters. The peaks became visible again, and all the valleys were filled with the gold of the sun.

Ivan looked down. Somewhere in the lowlands, Marichka's white feet were stepping on the green grass. Her eyes were probably turned toward the uplands. Was she singing her songs? Or had she perhaps sowed them over the mountains, where they had come up as flowers, and she herself had fallen silent? He remembered her sweet girlish voice and plucked a flower to decorate his hat.

When shepherds graze Their little white sheep, They'll twine my songs Around their hats.

"Ptrua! Ptrua!" The sun beat down, and the air was becoming oppressive. The sheep were waddling along, snorting and flexing their lips to get at the sweet thistles and leaving fresh droppings. Crunch-crunch. Wool rubbed against wool, white against black, and their spines rippled like waves on a lake. Be-eh, me-eh.

The sheep dogs were tired and lay down in the grass, their flanks heaving. Flies settled on the long red tongues lolling between their fangs. "Byr-byr!" Ivan called angrily, and the dogs were by the sheep again.

Cows were grazing at the edge of the pasture, near a thick forest. The cowherd leaned pensively on his trembita. Time moved slowly. The mountain air invigorated the lungs and brought on hunger. How lonely it was here! You were like a slim stalk in a field. The green island underfoot was lapped by the waters of distant mountains. Higher up, on the wild and deserted peaks, evil spirits gathered, hostile forces that you could not overcome and could only guard against.

“Heh-ya, hay-ya!” The sheep shook themselves, and moccasins softly stepped through the green field. The silence was so overwhelming that you could hear the blood flowing in your veins. Sleep began to weigh heavily. Placing a soft paw on your eyes and face, it whispered in your ear: sleep! The sheep dissolved before Ivan’s eyes. Now they had turned into lambs, and now nothing was left. The grass floated off like green water. Marichka was coming. Oh you won’t fool me, my dear, oh no! Ivan knew that it was a lisna and not Marichka who was alluring him. Yet something was pulling him after her! He did not want to go but was sailing away like the green stream of grass.

The abrupt death cry of a cow hurled him out of his daze. What? Where? The cowherd continued to lean on his trembita. A red bull struck its hooves against the earth, bent its thick neck, and raised its tail. Now the bull was racing toward the sound, jumping high and tearing up the grass with its hoofs. The cowherd shook himself and hastened after the bull into the forest. A shot rang out. The burst resounded over the mountains, echoing and reechoing. Then everything fell silent.

“Uncle” must have killed a cow, Ivan thought and looked at his flock more attentively.

“Ptrua, ptrua!” The sun seemed to have fallen asleep. The wind had died down and moved higher into the sky, where it was drawing clouds together in a sea as stormy as the sea of mountains encircling the pasture. The day had died in the endless spaces, and it was impossible to tell whether time was passing.

Finally the long-awaited sound of the trembita reached Ivan’s ear. It brought with it the fragrance of gruel and smoke from the shepherds’ hut and related in a long melodic ripple that the folds were waiting for the sheep.

“Heh-ya, hah-ya!” The dogs scurried about, and the bleating sheep flowed in a piebald stream, shaking their milk-heavy udders.

A fine rain had been drizzling on the range for three days. The mountains were shrouded by a smoky fog. Their wool heavy with water, the sheep could barely walk. The shepherds’ clothing was cold and stiff. Their only rest was at milking time under the roof of the shed.

Ivan sat with his back against a board, kneading an udder between his legs. Beside him sat a swarthy, curly-headed goatherd whose every word was accompanied by an oath. The impatient ewes, their udders heavy with milk, pressed from the fold to the shed to be milked. Wait, you poor things! It won’t work this way. One at a time!

“Ryst!” the drover angrily called out in the bedlam and snapped a wet rod. “Ryst! Ryst!” the shepherds shouted in encouragement, taking their knees away from the hole through which the sheep jumped into the milking shed. “May you all...” The goatherd did not finish his oath. Who would dare say something at a time like this?

Ivan seized a ewe by the spine with a practiced motion and pulled it backward toward himself over the broad milk pan. The ewe stood submissively, its legs awkwardly spread apart, listening to the milk gush into the pan. “Ryst!” the drover whipped it from behind. “Ryst! Ryst!” the shepherds called out. After being milked, the ewes fell down in the fold as if drugged, placed their heads on their forelegs, and grimaced with their aged lips. “Ryst! Ryst!” Ivan’s hands continually squeezed the warm udders, as milk trickled down his arms. It smelled of tallow, and a sweet oily vapor rose from the pan. “Ryst! Ryst!” The ewes dashed in as if crazed and spread their legs over the pans, and ten shepherds’ hands squeezed the warm udders. The wet flock on both sides of the shed wept pitifully. Exhausted sheep fell down in the fold, and thick, warm streams of milk gushed into the

pans. "Ryst! Ryst!"

The goatherd smiled at his goats. Unlike the sheep, they had keen hearts. Instead of collapsing like the weak sheep, they stood firmly on their thin legs. Raising their horns, they stared into the fog as if seeing something, and their thin little beards shook briskly.

The sheepfolds were empty and quiet. Perhaps laughter was echoing in the deep valleys where the mountains begin to grow, but here in the uplands, where the sky encompassed desolate spaces, age-old silence reigned.

It was broken only by the crackling of the undying fire in the hut. The fresh milk rested heavily in a wooden bowl over which the chief shepherd was bent. He had already set the milk. A wind blew over him from the shelf under the roof where huge round heads of cheese curds were drying, but it could not dispel the odors of wood coal, cheese, and wool. The shepherd himself was impregnated with the odors. New casks and kegs stood silently in the corner, but a knock on them would evoke the voice that dwelled within them. Cold whey cast a green eye from a wooden pail. The chief shepherd sat amidst his utensils like a father with his children. Everything here—the black benches and walls, the fire and the smoke, the cheese curds, casks, and whey—was dear and familiar. His warm hand had rested on everything.

The milk was thickening, but it was not yet ready. The shepherd pulled out from his belt a handful of wooden tally boards and began to read. This book recorded who had how many sheep. His eyebrows knotted with worry as he stubbornly read on, "Mosiichuk has fourteen lambs and should get...."

Outside the hut, the fire keeper was singing:

A twisted-horn ewe Asks of the ram, Will you make hay for me, My sweet little ram?

"He's at it again!" the chief shepherd called out angrily and set about recounting his tallies.

You don't know what winter brings,

My twisted-horn ewe,

Or if you'll come out

Dead or alive from the uplands.

The fire keeper finished his song in the vestibule and entered the hut. Black with soot, he bent over the fire and flashed his white teeth. The fire crackled quietly.

The milk in the wooden bowl was yellowing and thickening. The chief shepherd hunched over it in stern concentration. Slowly unbuttoning his sleeves, he sank his hairy arms to the elbows in the milk. Then he froze motionless over it.

Now everyone in the hut had to be quiet. The door had been fastened, and even the fire keeper did not dare look at the milk while the chief shepherd was casting his spell. Everything was frozen in expectation. The wooden casks pent up their voices; the curds on the shelf were silent; the black walls and benches had fallen into a heavy sleep; the fire barely breathed, and even the smoke furtively escaped through the window. Only the fleeting movement of the veins in the chief shepherd's arms indicated that something was happening at the bottom of the bowl. His arms slowly became animated, first rising and then dropping into the milk again and kneading and stroking something below. Suddenly from the bottom of the bowl, from under the milk, rose a round, raw, miraculously born body. It grew white and tender, its flat sides turning and bathing in the pale liquid, and when the chief shepherd held it up, the green birth water sonorously drained into the bowl.

The chief shepherd sighed lightly. Now the fire keeper could look. The head of cheese was a goodly one. It would bring joy to the shepherd and nourishment to people. The door opened wide; the wind blew from under the roof; the fire joyfully licked at the black pot in which the whey was dancing a kolomyika, and the fire keeper's teeth glinted in the smoke and flames.

At sunset, the chief shepherd emerged from the hut with a trembita and announced victoriously to all the desolate mountains that the day had ended in peace, the cheese had turned out well, the gruel was ready, and the sheds were waiting for new milk.

\* \* \*

During his summer in the uplands Ivan had many adventures. Once he saw a strange scene. He was preparing to drive the sheep to the fold when he glanced inadvertently at a neighboring peak. A fog had settled on the forest, making it look as light and gray as a ghost. The meadow beside it was still green, and a solitary fir stood black against it. Suddenly the tree burst into smoke and began to grow until a man stepped out from it. He stood in the meadow, tall and white, calling to the forest. Immediately, deer emerged from the forest, one after another, each with bigger and brighter horns than the one before it. Does ran out, trembling on their thin legs, and began to nibble at the grass. Whenever they scattered, a bear would turn them back, like a sheep dog herding sheep. The tall white man tended the herd and halloed at his cattle. Then a wind sprang up, and the flock disappeared, as if someone had breathed on glass, which fogged over and then cleared up. Ivan drew the other shepherds to look, but they would not believe him. "Where? That's only fog!"

In two weeks "Uncle" slew five cows. Later he killed two more, but that was the last time: trying to break into the sheepfold one night, he impaled himself on a stake. Now his hide was drying on poles, and the dogs howled at it.

Fog would often trap the sheep in the pasture. Sky, mountains, forests, and shepherds would disappear in the thick, milky mist. "He-ey!" Ivan would call out. "He-ey!" a muffled reply would sound, as if coming from under water, and Ivan could not say where the caller was. The sheep rolled underfoot like a gray haze, and then they, too, would disappear. Ivan would walk helplessly, his arms extended as if he were afraid of stumbling into something, and call out, "He-ey!" "Where are you?" would resound behind him, and he would be forced to stop. He would stand in despair, lost in the sticky overcast, and when he applied the trembita to his lips to call out, the other end would be lost in the mist, and its choked voice would immediately fall at his feet. Thus the shepherds lost several sheep.

Sometimes cloudbursts swept the uplands. Saint Elias was battling with the forces of evil, the deuce take them all! His sword flashed and his rifle roared so loudly—hallowed be Thy name!—that the sky would split in half and fall on the mountains, and something black would wriggle back and forth each time and then slip under a rock. The devil was mocking God and exposing his rump, and the poor shepherds had to suffer: they would be overcome with fright and drenched to the skin.

On the feast of Saints Peter and Paul a blizzard broke out. The snow lay on the ground for three days, and many sheep died when they slipped and tore their groins. —————

Occasionally people would come up from the lowlands. The shepherds would surround them and contend with one another to ask, "What news from the village?" Then they would listen like children to simple accounts: the hay had been taken in; potatoes were scarce; the corn was thin; Ilena Mocharnyk had died. They would all drink to the health of the livestock, and the guests would fill

their casks with cheese and peacefully depart for the valley.

In the evenings bonfires would burn beside the sheepfold. The shepherds would take off their clothes and shake out the lice into the fire or, starved after a summer without their women, they would engage endlessly in salacious talk. Their roars of laughter would drown out the sleepy sighs of the livestock.

Before going to sleep, Ivan would call Mykola, who was always talkative and loved to sing. "Mykola, my friend! Come here."

"Wait a minute, brother Ivan, I'm coming," the fire keeper would reply from the sheepfold, and Ivan would hear his song resound:

Chornohora does not grow corn Nor grain nor hay. It brings up young shepherds And cheese and fine whey.

Mykola was an orphan and had grown up in the uplands. "I was brought up by sheep," he would say, smoothing down his unruly curls.

His work finished, the fire keeper would lie down beside Ivan. He was sooty and smoke-saturated, and his young teeth would flash in the firelight. Ivan would move closer to him, embrace him by the neck, and implore, "Tell me a story, my friend. You know so many of them."

Stars would shoot down from the black sky, and the Milky Way would stream forth like white river foam. The mountains would be sleeping. "They must be growing," Ivan would call out as if to himself.

"Who?"

"The mountains."

"At first they grew, but now they've stopped. " Mykola would fall silent and then add quietly, "In the beginning there were no mountains, only water. The water was like a sea without shores. And God walked on the water. But once He noticed that foam was whirling on the water. 'Who art thou?' He asked. 'I do not know,' it replied. 'I am alive but cannot walk. ' That was the aridnyk. God did not know about him, because the aridnyk, like God, existed from the beginning. God gave him arms and legs, and they went about as sworn brothers. When they grew tired of walking on the water, God decided to make land, but He could not get clay from the bottom of the sea, because He knew everything in the world but could not do anything. But the aridnyk had the power to do anything and said, 'I could dive down there. ' Then dive down, ' God answered. So the aridnyk dove down, picked up a handful of clay, and hid the rest in his mouth for himself. God took the clay and scattered it. 'Is there no more?' 'No. ' Then God blessed the earth, and it began to grow. But the earth that was in Satan's mouth also grew. It grew and grew until it forced his mouth open. He could not breathe, and his eyes bulged out. 'Spit!' God advised him. The aridnyk began to spit, and wherever he spat mountains grew, each one taller than the previous one, until they reached the sky. They would have pierced the sky, had God not cast a spell on them. Since then the mountains have not grown."

Ivan found it very strange to think that such fine and cheerful mountains had been created by the Evil One. "Tell me more, my friend," he begged.

"The aridnyk was capable of doing anything he wanted to," Mykola continued. "When God wanted something, He would have to obtain it by craft or stealth. The aridnyk created sheep and made himself a fiddle and played on it while the sheep grazed. God saw this and stole sheep from the aridnyk, and then they both tended sheep. All wisdom and cleverness in this world came from

Satan. Every wagon, horse, musical instrument, mill, and cottage was invented by him. God merely stole these things and gave them to people. So it was once upon a time....

“Once the aridnyk grew cold, and to warm himself, invented fire. God came and looked at the fire. The aridnyk knew what he wanted. ‘You’ve stolen everything else from me, ‘ he said, ‘but this I will not give you. ‘ Then the aridnyk saw that God was starting a fire, too. He was so vexed that he spat in God’s fire. Smoke rose from his saliva. The first fire was clean and smokeless, but since then fire has smoked.”

Mykola related these stories for a long time, and whenever he mentioned the devil, Ivan would make the sign of the cross under his jerkin, and Mykola would spit to keep the Evil One from having power over him.

Once Mykola was taken ill, and Ivan tended the fire for him. The chief shepherd was sleeping on a bench beside the fire, and the sick man lay groaning in the corner, where the shadows of the cheese casks restlessly moved about. Water was boiling in a black pot, and the smoke forced its way up, under the roof, and then flew out through the cracks in the shingles. Sometimes the Evil One would blow into a crevice, making the smoke spout in Ivan’s face, stinging his eyes. But that was good because he dared not fall asleep. To chase away the sleep that weighed heavily on him Ivan stared into the fire. He had to guard the fire, that spirit of the upland pastures, for who knows what would happen if he let it go out. The embers smiled at him from under the heavy load of firewood and then vanished. Green spots floated before his eyes and sailed off to the meadows and forests. Marichka’s white feet were stepping through a meadow. Flinging down her rake, she extended her arms to him. Just as her soft body was about to touch his breast, a bear emerged with a roar from the forest, and the white sheep scattered, separating him from Marichka. The devil take it! Did I really fall asleep? The embers in the fire winked; the chief shepherd was still snoring, and Mykola groaned under a heavy cover of restless shadows.

Wasn’t it time to cook gruel for the shepherds’ breakfast? Ivan emerged from the hut. Silence and cold enveloped him. He could hear the livestock breathing in the pens. The sheep had clustered together, and the fires by the shepherds’ huts glowed dimly. The dogs surrounded Ivan, stretching their sleepy bodies and rubbing their flanks against his legs. The black mountains filled the lowlands like a huge flock. They had lived in such silence since time immemorial that they could hear even the breathing of the cows and sheep. Above them stretched the sky, that heavenly pasture where stars grazed like white sheep. Was there anything in the world besides these two pastures? One stretched out over the land and the other over the mountains, and the shepherd was only a black dot between them.

But perhaps there was nothing at all. Perhaps the night had flooded the mountains, and they had moved, crushing everything living between them, and only Ivan’s heart was left to pound under his jerkin in the still and endless C spaces? Loneliness gnawed at him like a toothache. Something huge and alien, a rigid silence, an indifferent stillness, a sleep of nonbeing, was crushing him. Impatience hammered on his brain, and anxiety clutched him by the throat. Shaking himself suddenly, he leaped forward into the pasture, his cries, shrieks, and halloos shattering the silence and splintering the night like a stone thrown against a windowpane. “Oh-oh-oh!” the startled mountains called out. “Ha-ha-ha!” the more distant peaks cried anxiously. Then the shattered silence closed in again. The sheep dogs turned back, baring their teeth at Ivan and wagging their tails.

Now he felt even sadder. He wanted to see sunlight, to hear the cheerful roar of the river, and to share the warmth and talk of home life. Sorrow and longing gripped his heart. Recollections poured in and shimmered before his eyes. Suddenly he heard a quiet call. "Iva-an!" Then again. "Iva-an!"

Marichka? Where was she? Had she come to the pasture? At night? Was she lost and calling out to him? Or was he hearing things? No, she was here. I Ivan's heart pounded as he hesitated. Where should he go? Then, for the third time, a cry reached him. "Iva-an!" Marichka... she must have.... He ran headlong, not following any path, in the direction of the voice, but there encountered a precipice that prevented him from reaching the pasture. He stood peering into the black abyss. Then he understood: a nymph was calling him. Making the sign of the cross and looking back fearfully, he returned to the hut.

It was time to cook the gruel. Pouring flour into the boiling pot, he cut through the thickening mass, and soon a fragrant aroma mixed with the wood smoke. The chief shepherd was stretching, and day was breaking. Who had called him? Ivan wondered. Perhaps it had been Marichka after all?

He was drawn to look again and returned to the pasture after daybreak. Cold dew settled on his moccasins. The sky was turning red, and the stars were growing dim. Ivan emerged on a peak and suddenly felt a chill. Where was he? What had happened to him? Why had the mountains disappeared? Water had flooded the valleys around the upland pasture, submerging the peaks, and the pasture was floating like a lonely island in an endless sea. A wind blew from Chornohora. The deep waters rippled quietly, and the invisible sun could be heard growing in its depths. Now a gray peak rose from the sea, and the water streamed off it. The cold wind blew more strongly; the waves on the sea grew higher, and one peak after another appeared from the white foam. It seemed I that the world was being born anew. The waters rushed down from the peaks and were now swirling underfoot. The sun had cast its corona over the sky and would show its face any moment now, and the lonely voice of a trembita wafted from the sheepfold, waking the uplands from their sleep.

Thus Ivan summered in the upland pasture until it became deserted. The livestock drifted back to the owners in the valleys; the trembitas trumpeted their last; the grass lay trampled, and the autumn wind sighed over it as if it were a corpse. Only the chief shepherd and the fire keeper stayed behind. They had to wait until the fire went out. The fire of the upland pasture, which had given birth to itself like a god, also had to go to sleep by itself. And when the chief shepherd and the fire keeper were also gone, a specter wandered into the saddened pasture and groped about the huts and the sheepfolds to see if anything was left for it.

Ivan hurried back from the upland in vain: he did not find Marichka alive. The day before, when she had been fording the Cheremosh, the water had taken her away. A flood had sprung up unexpectedly, and savage waves knocked Marichka off her feet, swept her over a waterfall, and then carried her off between the rocks below. People watched the waves toss her about and heard her screams and entreaties but could not save her.

Ivan could not believe the news. This must have been a trick by the Huteniuks. They had learned about his love for Marichka and had hidden her away. But when he heard the same news from every side, he decided to search for the body. It must have been thrown up against the wooden

embankments that lined the river. People must have found it somewhere. He went along the river, full of burning rage at its ceaseless roaring.

He found the body in another village. It had been dragged up on a graveled bank, but he could not recognize Marichka. It was not Marichka, but a wet sack, a bloody mass of blue flesh that had been mangled by the river rocks as if between millstones.

A great sorrow seized Ivan's heart. At first he was tempted to jump from a rock into a whirlpool: Here, devour me as well! But then his burning sorrow drove him into the mountains, away from the river. He covered his ears so that he would not hear the treacherous roar that had absorbed Marichka's last breath. He wandered through the forest, among the rocks and clefts, like a bear licking its wounds, and even hunger could not drive him back to the village. He lived on blackberries and cranberries and drank water from streams.

Then he disappeared. People supposed that he had died of great sorrow, and girls composed songs about the love and death of Ivan and Marichka. For six years there was no news of Ivan. He appeared unexpectedly on the seventh. He was gaunt and blackened and looked much older than he was, but he was calm. He said that he had been a shepherd on the Hungarian side. He went about like this for another year and then was married. It was time to take up farming.

When the songs and pistol shots of the wedding had died down and his wife had driven her livestock into his pens, Ivan was satisfied. His Palahna came from a rich family. She was a haughty and robust girl with a coarse voice and a thick neck. It was true that she liked fine clothes and would spend much money on silken kerchiefs and coin necklaces, but Ivan did not worry as he looked at the sheep bleating in the folds and the cows grazing in the forest.

Now he had something to tend. He was not greedy for riches—that is not a Hutsul's purpose in life—and simply tending the livestock filled his heart with joy. The animals were for him what a child is for its mother. All his thoughts revolved around the hay, the comfort of the livestock, and concern that it not grow weak or have a spell cast on it, that the sheep lamb successfully and the cows calve. Danger lurked everywhere, and he had to guard his livestock against snakes, beasts, and witches, who did everything they could to harm the cows and deprive them of their manna. He had to know a great deal and had to fumigate, cast spells, and gather useful herbs. Palahna helped him. She was a good mistress, and he shared his worries with her.

“What neighbors the Lord has given us!” she complained to her husband. “Khyrna came into the shed this morning, looked at the calves, and clapped her hands. ‘Oh how fine they are!’ There you have it, I thought to myself. No sooner had she left than two lambs spun about and fell down dead. Faugh, you witch!”

And I was walking past her house at night,” Ivan said, “when I saw something round like a pouch rolling along. It was shining like a little star. I stopped to look, and it rolled across the meadow and the fence, and straight to Khyrna's door. God help me! If I had thought of it in time and taken off my breeches, I might have caught the witch with them, but it was too late....”

Their neighbor on the nearest hill on the other side was Iura. People said that he was like a god. Wise and powerful, that thunder-soothsayer and sorcerer held in his strong hands the forces of heaven and earth, life and death, and the health of livestock and mankind. He was feared but needed by all. Occasionally Ivan would turn to Iura for help, but each time, encountering the burning look in the sorcerer's black eyes, he would spit unobtrusively. “Salt in your eyes!”

But Khyma was the worst nuisance. An ingratiating old woman, she was always friendly, but at night she would turn herself into a white dog and wander about the neighbors' enclosures. Ivan often had to throw a pitchfork or an ax to drive her away.

The speckled cow was growing thinner and giving less milk. Palahna knew whose fault this was. She watched over the cow, whispered charms, ran to the barn several times an evening, and even got up during the night. Once she raised such a cry that Ivan dashed into the enclosure like a madman and had to chase away from the threshold a large frog that was trying to crawl into the stable. But the frog suddenly disappeared, and Khyma's voice squeaked from the other side of the fence. "Good evening to you, my fine neighbors! Hee-hee-hee..."

Yes, she was shameless! What was that born witch not capable of? She could change herself into a white sheet visible at dusk by the forest's edge, or crawl as a snake, or roll over the hills as a transparent sphere. She even drank the moon so that she could go to other people's cattle in darkness. More than one man swore that he had seen her milking a thornbush: she would drive four pegs into it like udders and fill a pail with milk.

How many cares Ivan had! He had no time to stop and think. The farm required ceaseless work, and the life of the livestock was so closely linked with his own that it pushed aside all other thoughts. But sometimes, when he raised his eyes to the green meadows, where hay was resting in stacks, or to the deep, pensive forest, a long forgotten voice would waft to him:

Think of me, my sweetheart,  
Twice a day,  
And I will think of you  
Seven times an hour.

Then he would drop his chores and disappear. Haughty Palahna, who was accustomed to working six days a week and resting only on Sundays, when she showed off her fine clothes, scolded him for his whims.

But Ivan fumed. "Be quiet! Mind your own business and let me be!"

He was vexed with himself, too. Why do I do it? he would wonder and then return to his cattle with a guilty feeling. He would bring the animals bread or a lump of salt. The white and the blue cow would reach toward him with trusting lows, extend their warm red tongues, and lick the salt from his hand. The glossy humid eyes would look at him kindly, and the fresh scent of milk and dung would restore his peace and balance.

In the sheepfold he would be surrounded by a sea of small round sheep. These rams and ewes knew their master and rubbed against his legs with joyous bleats. He would sink his fingers into their fluffy wool or take a lamb in his arms with a paternal feeling, and then the spirit of the upland pastures would waft over him and call him to the mountains. His heart would fill with calmness and warmth. Such was Ivan's joy.

Did he love Palahna? The thought had never entered his head. He was the master and she the mistress, and although they had no children, they did have the livestock. What more could they want? The good life had made Palahna plump and pink. She smoked a pipe, like Ivan's mother; she wore sumptuous silken kerchiefs, and the necklaces sparkling around her thick neck made the

womenfolk green with envy. Ivan and Palahna would go together to the town or to parish fairs. Palahna would saddle her horse and slip her red boots into the stirrups as proudly as if all the mountains were hers. At the parish fairs beer would foam, whiskey would flow, and news from distant mountains would fly back and forth. Ivan would embrace other men's wives, and Palahna would be kissed by strange men. What a marvel it all was! Satisfied with having spent the time so well, they would go home to their daily concerns.

Respectable farmers would visit them, too.

"Praise be to Jesus! How are your wife and livestock?; Are they hale and hearty?"

"They are. And you?"

They would sit down at the table with the embroidered cloth, clumsy in their sheepskins, and consume fresh gruel and sour milk so sharp that it peeled their tongues.

Thus life passed: weekdays for work and holidays for magic.

Ivan was always in a strange mood on Christmas Eve. Imbued with something mysterious and holy, he would reverently perform all the actions as if serving Mass. Striking up a living fire so that Palahna could prepare the supper, he would spread hay over and under the table, mooing like a cow, bleating like a sheep, or neighing like a horse with complete faith to make the livestock prosper. He would fumigate the house and the sheepfold with incense to drive away wild beasts and witches, and when Palahna, her face flushed from bustling about, would announce in the smoke-filled room that all twelve dishes were ready, he would carry a little of each dish to the cattle before sitting down. The cattle had to have the first taste of the cabbage rolls, plums, beans, and barley gruel that Palahna had painstakingly prepared for him.

But that was not all. He also had to summon to the holy supper the hostile powers against which he had guarded all his life. Taking a bowl of food in one hand and an ax in the other, he would go outside. Dressed in white mantles, the green mountains listened attentively as the gold of the stars rang in the skies and the frost flashed its silver sword, cutting down the sounds in the air, and Ivan extended his arm into this winter-clad loneliness and invited all the necromancers, sorcerers, astrologers, wolves, and bears to share the holy supper with him. He called the tempest to accept his invitation to sumptuous dishes and brandies, but it did not accept, and no one came, although Ivan asked three times. Then he adjured them never to come and sighed lightly.

Palahna was waiting in the house. The embers in the stove sizzled quietly; the dishes rested on the hay, and a Christmas peace filled the dark corners. Hunger called Ivan and Palahna to the table, but they did not dare sit down yet. Palahna looked at her husband, and they knelt together, begging God to allow to come to their table the souls nobody knew, the souls of people lost or killed at work in the forest, or crippled on highways, or drowned in deep waters. No one remembers these poor souls, and yet they bitterly bide their time in hell, waiting for Christmas Eve. As they prayed, Ivan was certain that Marichka was sobbing behind his shoulder and the souls of those who had died unnatural deaths were sitting down on the benches.

"Blow on the bench before you sit down!" Palahna cautioned him.

But Ivan knew what to do without being told. Carefully blowing clear a place on the bench to avoid crushing a soul, he would sit down to the supper.

On New Year's Eve, God himself visited the livestock in the pens. Stars glittered high in the sky; the frost snapped fiercely, and gray-haired God walked barefoot over the powdery snow and

quietly opened the door to the stable. Awakening during the night, Ivan thought that he heard a gentle voice ask the livestock, "Have you been well fed and well watered? Does your master take good care of you?"

The sheep bleated joyfully, and the cows replied with a merry bellow: their master tended them conscientiously. He fed and watered them and had even curried them today. Now the Lord would be certain to reward Ivan with increase. And God granted increase: the ewes lambed peacefully, and the cows calved successfully.

Palahna was always busy with her magic. She set fires in the stable to make the cattle shining and beautiful like God's light and to keep away evil spirits. She did everything she could think of to make the cattle as quiet as a root in the ground and as full of milk as a stream is with water. She would tenderly say to the cattle, "You will feed my master and me, and I shall take care of you so that you may sleep easily and bellow rarely, so that the milk-stealing witch will not recognize you wherever you may graze or sleep, and so that no one will bewitch you."

Thus the life of the livestock and the people passed, joining into one like two mountain springs flowing into a single stream.

It was the eve of a great holiday. The next day warm Iurii would take the keys of the world from cold Dmytro to rule over the earth. The full waters on which the earth sailed would raise it toward the sun. Saint Iurii would decorate the forests and meadows; the sheep would be covered with wool like the earth with grass in the summer, and the hay meadows would turn green. The sunlight and joy of spring would come the next day, and already bonfires were cropping up on mountain slopes and blue smoke was wrapping the firs in a transparent veil. When the sun had set, the fires had died down, and the smoke had drifted away, the cattle gave a joyful bellow as they were driven over the glowing embers to keep them as keen as this fire all summer and to make them multiply as the ashes had multiplied from the fire.

People went to bed late on the eve of Saint Iurii's day, although they had to get up early. Palahna woke up as soon as day began to break. "Isn't it too early?" she wondered aloud, but immediately remembered that she had to go to the meadow. She threw back the warm woolen bedcover and stood up. Ivan was still asleep. The stove was yawning in the corner with its black maw, and a cricket was chirping sadly beneath it. Palahna unbuttoned her shirt, took it off, stood naked in the middle of the room for a moment, and then went to the door, glancing back fearfully at Ivan. The door squeaked, and an early-morning chill enveloped her body. The fir forests, the meadows that had turned gray overnight and now looked like severe monks, and the peaks that were melting away in the fog were all sleeping. A cold heavy mist was rising from the valley and extending furry white paws to the black firs, and the Cheremosh was relating its dreams under the pale sky.

Palahna stepped on the wet grass, trembling lightly in the morning chill. She was certain that no one would see her. And what if someone did? Naturally, it would be a pity if her magic were wasted. She had no other thought in her mind. She had buried salt, bread, and a necklace in an anthill on the Feast of the Annunciation and now had to dig them up. She was slowly getting used to the cold. Her taut body, which had not known motherhood, and was as fresh and rosy as a gilded cloud filled with warm spring rain, sailed freely and proudly through the young grass in the meadow. She stopped finally under a beech. Before digging up the anthill she raised her arms and blissfully stretched her whole body so that her bones cracked. Suddenly she felt that she was losing her

strength. She felt sick. Helplessly dropping her arms, she looked ahead and at once plunged into a watery black abyss that would not let her go.

Iura the sorcerer was looking at her from the other side of the fence. She wanted to scream at him but could not. She wanted to cover her breasts but did not have the strength to raise her hands. She tried to flee and found that she was rooted to the spot. She stood powerless, almost swooning, intently gazing into two black embers that were sucking out all her strength.

Finally anger stirred her. All her magic had been wasted! Palahna pulled herself together and called out to Iura, "Why are you goggling so? Haven't you ever seen a woman?"

Without dropping the gaze with which he had bound her, Iura flashed his teeth. "I swear, Palahna, I haven't seen one like you!" He threw a leg over the fence.

She clearly saw the two embers that had turned her will to ashes float toward her and yet continued to stand, unable to move in sweet and terrible expectation. He was very close now. She could see the embroidered seams on his jerkin, the flashing teeth between his lips, and the half-raised hand. The warmth of his body streamed toward her, and she was still standing. Only when the iron fingers squeezed her hand and pulled her toward him did she jerk back with a cry and run home.

The sorcerer stood still, flaring his nostrils and watching as Palahna's white body flashed over the grasslike waves on the Cheremosh. Then, when Palahna had disappeared, he climbed back over the fence and resumed scattering the ashes from yesterday's fire on the meadow so that the cows and sheep that would graze here would be fruitful and each ewe would have two lambs.

Palahna arrived at home angry. It was a good thing that Ivan hadn't seen anything. What a fine neighbor Iura was, the devil take him! Couldn't he have picked a better time to approach her? As for the magic, well, that was lost. She hesitated whether to tell Ivan about Iura or to leave well enough alone. A quarrel or a fight could come of it yet, and once you've started with a sorcerer.... She should have slapped him properly in the face! That would have taught him! But Palahna knew that she could not raise a hand to him. The mere thought of doing so made her swoon. She remembered the burning look in his eyes and the flashing teeth in his avidly open mouth and sensed that he had spun a web around her. No matter what she tried to do that day, she continued to feel the sorcerer's eyes on her body.

Two weeks had passed since then, and Palahna still had not told Ivan about the meeting with Iura. She only observed her husband more closely. There was something heavy about him. A worry seemed to be gnawing at him, weakening his body. Something aged and watery was shining in his tired eyes. He had noticeably lost weight and become indifferent. No, Iura was better. If she wanted a lover, she would take Iura. But Palahna was proud and could not be taken by force. Besides, she was angry at the sorcerer.

She met him by the river one day. For a moment Palahna felt that she was naked again and a thin cobweb had bound her body. "How did you sleep, my sweet Palahna?" She heard his words as if in a dream.

A reply was on her tongue. "All right, and you?" But she held back, pursed her lips, raised her head high, and passed by as if she had not seen him.

"How are you?" she heard him ask again. But she did not turn around.

Now you'll have to beware of trouble! she thought fearfully. Indeed, as soon as she came home, Ivan greeted her with the news that a lamb had died. Strangely enough, she felt not the slightest

regret for the loss of the lamb. She was even angry that Ivan was grieving so.

Iura did not cross her path again, yet Palahna's thoughts turned to him more and more. She listened eagerly to stories about his powers and was amazed that the passionate Iura, who had seen no finer woman than Palahna, was capable of so much. He was powerful and knew everything. A mere word from him could kill a cow or shrivel up a man. The sorcerer wielded life and death; he could drive away clouds and stop hail. The fire in his black eyes could reduce an enemy to ashes and kindle love in a woman's heart. Iura was an earthly god. His hands, which he had extended to Palahna in desire, held the forces of the world.

Sometimes Palahna's heart would grow indifferent to the livestock and to her husband, and they would pale to insignificance like a fog dissipating when it settles on fir boughs. Weary, she would go to the meadow, sit under the beech, and feel Iura's warm breath on her breast and iron fingers on her arms. He could have made her his paramour had he appeared then. But he did not appear.

A hot day came. Ihrets was smoking; the earth was steaming, and clouds ceaselessly scudded from Chornohora, pouring down rain on which the sun cast a slanting glint. The weather was so humid that Palahna never would have ascended to the peak if a dream had not warned her that something bad was in store for the cattle. She wanted to visit the cows in the forest. The mountains around her were covered with fog, as if the streams had boiled over and turned to steam. The Cheremosh boiled below. The river found the rocks hard to lie on and so jumped from stone to stone. Palahna had barely reached the peak when a wind from Chornohora waved a wing and shook the trees. God forbid there should be a storm, she thought and turned her face to the wind. But there it was. A heavy bluish-white cloud was raging. It seemed that Chornohora itself had risen to the sky and was ready to drop on the earth and crush everything beneath it. The wind raced ahead of it, pushing aside the firs, and the mountains and valleys immediately turned black, as if swept by a forest fire. There could be no thought of going on. Palahna took shelter under the tent of a fir. The tree was squeaking. Thunder softly rolled over the distant hills; shadows fleetly ran over the mountains, washing away their colors, and tall young firs swayed in the wind on distant peaks. If only it wouldn't hail, Palahna thought fearfully as she huddled in her jerkin.

Thunder was rumbling overhead. Inside Chornohora necromancers were chopping ice on frozen lakes, and the souls of suicides were gathering the ice in bags and racing on the clouds to scatter the ice over the earth. The hay meadows will be ruined when they're covered with hail, and the hungry cattle will weep, Palahna thought bitterly. Suddenly lightning struck. The mountains shook, and young firs came crashing to the ground. The earth heaved, and everything spun in a whirlwind. Palahna barely managed to grasp the tree trunk. As if through a fog, she suddenly saw a man clambering up the mountain. He was struggling with the wind, spreading his legs apart like a crab and holding on to rocks with his hands. Now he was close to the peak. He doubled over, then he was running, and finally he was standing on the very peak. Palahna recognized Iura.

He must be coming to me, she thought fearfully, but Iura apparently did not see her. Outlined against a cloud, one foot forward, he folded his arms across his chest. Throwing back his pale face, he stared grimly at the cloud. He stood thus for a long moment as the cloud advanced toward him. Suddenly he dashed his hat to the ground with a sharp motion. The wind immediately blew it down into the valley and lifted his long hair. Then he raised the staff in his hand and shouted into the blue roar, "Stop! I will not let thee pass!"

The cloud pondered for a moment and then replied by sending down a fiery arrow.

“Oh!” Palahna covered her eyes with a hand as the mountains scattered.

But Iura continued to stand firmly, his curly hair waving about like a nest of snakes. “Aha! So that’s how thou art!” he shouted at the cloud. “Then I must exorcise thee. I exorcise you, thunder big and little, clouds big and little! Calamity, I dispel thee, to the left, to the forests and waters. Go, scatter like the wind throughout the world! Disperse and scatter! Thou hast no dominion here!”

But the cloud merely shook its left wing derisively and began to turn to the right, toward the meadows. “Woe!” cried Palahna, clenching her fists. “It will crush all the hay!”

Iura was not ready to give in. He only paled even more, and his eyes grew darker. When the cloud moved to the right, he, too, moved to the right. When the cloud moved to the left, he followed it again. He ran after it, struggling against the wind, waving his arms and threatening with his staff. He slithered like a snake over the mountains as he wrestled with the cloud. Just a bit more, just a bit here, on this side.... Sensing the power in his breast, he shot thunderbolts from his eyes as he raised his arms aloft and cast his spell. The wind raised high his jerkin and smote him in the breast. The cloud growled, sent forth thunder, flung rain in his eyes, and quivered overhead, ready to fall down, as Iura, drenched with sweat, barely catching a breath, cast about in a frenzy, afraid of losing his remaining strength. He sensed that he was weakening, that his breast was empty, that the wind was tearing his voice away and rain was pouring into his eyes, and that the cloud was winning. With his last bit of strength Iura raised his short staff. “Stop!”

The cloud stopped. Rearing like a horse on its hind legs in astonishment, the cloud boiled with anger and despair and begged, “Let me go!”

“I will not!”

“Let us go, we’re dying!” cried the souls pitifully as they struggled under the weight of their bags of hail.

“Aha! So now you’re begging! I conjure thee: go to the abysses where the neighing of horses and the bellowing of cows and the bleating of sheep never reach, where a crow will not fly, and where Christian voices are never heard. There will I let thee go!”

Strangely enough, the cloud obeyed, submissively turning left, untying its bags over the river, and scattering the thick hail on the graveled riverbank. A white curtain veiled the mountains, and something roared and crashed in the valley below. Iura fell to the ground and gasped for breath.

When the sun broke through the cloud and the wet grass smiled, Iura saw as if in a dream that Palahna was running toward him. She was like the sun itself when she bent over him anxiously. “Did something bad happen to you, my sweet Iura?”

“Nothing at all, Palahna dearest, nothing at all. You see, I’ve turned the storm back!” He held out his arms to her. Thus Palahna became Iura’s lover.

Ivan was astonished by Palahna. She had always loved to dress in fine clothes, but now something seemed to have possessed her: she began wearing expensive, cleverly embroidered silken kerchiefs, skirts threaded with gold and silver wires, and heavy coin necklaces even on weekdays. Sometimes she would disappear from the house and return late at night, flushed, disheveled, and seemingly drunk.

“Where have you been roaming?” Ivan would ask angrily. “Watch out, mistress!”

Palahna would merely laugh. “Now how about that! I’m not even allowed to have a good time.

I want to enjoy life. We live only once in this world.”

What’s true is true. Our life is brief—it flickers for a while and then goes out. Ivan thought so, too, but Palahna was going much too far. She drank every day at the tavern with Iura, kissing and embracing him publicly and making no attempt to conceal the fact that she had a lover. Was she the first to have one? Since time immemorial no woman has ever abided by only one man.

Everyone talked about Palahna and Iura. Ivan heard the talk, too, but accepted it indifferently. If it was the sorcerer, then so be it. Palahna was blossoming and enjoying herself, and Ivan was languishing. He himself was amazed at the change. What had happened to him? His strength was deserting him. His eyes were sunken and watery. Life was losing its relish. Even the livestock did not give him the pleasure it once had. Had someone cast a spell over him? He bore no malice toward Palahna and felt no grievance, although he fought for her with Iura.

He fought not in anger, but for appearance’s sake when people brought them together. If it hadn’t been for Semen, his sworn brother, who spoke up for Ivan, nothing might have happened. For meeting Iura in the tavern once,

Semen struck him in the face. “You scoundrel! What are you doing with Palahna? Don’t you have your own wife?”

Then Ivan felt ashamed and jumped at Iura. “Mind your Hafiiia and don’t touch my wife!” he shouted, brandishing his ax in Iura’s face.

“Did you buy her at a market?” Iura exploded. His ax also flashed before Ivan’s eyes.

“May scurvy strike you down!”

“You bandit!”

“There, take that!” Ivan hewed first, straight at the forehead. Flooded with blood, Iura managed to slash Ivan between the eyes, covering his face and chest with blood. Both men were blinded by the hot waves that gushed into their eyes but continued to strike ax against ax, aiming their blows for the chest. Streaming with gore, these red masks were dancing the dance of death, Iura’s hand was crippled, but with a lucky blow he suddenly smashed Ivan’s ax. Ivan bent down, expecting death, but Iura reined in his passion and with a fine, grand gesture threw aside his own ax. “I do not attack a defenseless man with an ax!” They seized each other by the shoulders. The by-standers managed to pull them apart.

Well, what of it? Ivan washed his wounds, coloring the Cheremosh with his gore, and went to his sheep. There he found rest and consolation. The fight had not helped. Everything remained as before. Palahna continued to stay away from home, and Ivan languished even more. His skin darkened and stuck to his bones. His eyes sank even deeper. Fever, irritation, and restlessness gnawed at him. He even lost his appetite for food. It must be the sorcerer’s doing, Ivan thought bitterly. He wants to drive me from this world.

He went to an exorcist, but she could not turn the spell away: apparently Iura was stronger. Ivan was even certain of this. Walking past the sorcerer’s house once, he heard Palahna’s voice. Could it be she?

Pressing a hand to his chest, Ivan applied an ear to the gate. He was not wrong. Palahna was inside. Searching for a crack to peer inside, Ivan quietly moved along the fence. Finally he found a hole and saw Palahna and the sorcerer. Iura was holding a clay doll before Palahna and poking his finger in it from head to foot.

“I drive a peg here,” he whispered maliciously, “and his arms and legs shrivel. In the stomach, and he suffers pains and cannot eat.”

”And if you drive one into the head?” Palahna asked inquisitively.

“Then he dies immediately!”

They were plotting against him! Ivan wanted to jump over the fence and kill both of them on the spot. He squeezed the ax in his hand, measured the fence with his eyes, and then turned pale. Weakness and indifference flooded his body again. Whatever for? It must have been fated this way. He shivered, lowered the ax, and moved away. He walked along desolate, not feeling the ground beneath his feet and straying off the track. Red circles floated before his eyes and dissolved over the mountains.

Where was he going? Ivan did not know. Wandering aimlessly, he climbed mountains and descended into valleys. Finally he noticed that he was sitting by the river. The green blood of the mountains was frothing and roaring by his feet, and he stared uncomprehendingly into the swift current until the first clear thought illuminated his tired mind: Marichka had walked about these places. Here the water had taken her away. Then one thought after another surfaced, filling his empty heart. He saw Marichka’s sweet face again, her simple and sincere kindness, and heard her song. “Think of me, my sweetheart, twice a day, and I will think of you seven times an hour. “ Now it was all gone. Gone never to return, just as the foam on the river could never return. Once Marichka, and now he.... His star was barely holding up in the sky. For what is our life? A glimmer in the sky, a cherry blossom, fleeting and evanescent.

The sun hid behind the mountains, and in the quiet evening shadows azure smoke wound through the cracks in the roofs of the Hutsul cottages that blossomed on the green mountains like great blue flowers. Sorrow enveloped Ivan’s heart. His soul longed for something better, something unknown. It was drawn to other, better worlds, where it could finally find rest.

When night fell and the black mountains flashed with the lights of scattered cottages, like evil creatures blinking their eyes, Ivan sensed that hostile forces were stronger than he was, that he had fallen in battle.

Ivan awoke.

“Get up,” said Marichka to him. “Get up and come with me. “ He looked at her without surprise. It was good that she had finally come. He rose and went after her.

Silently they made their way into the mountains. Although it was night, Ivan clearly saw Marichka’s face in the starlight. Climbing over a fence that divided the meadow from the forest, they entered a thicket of firs.

“Why are you so pale?” Marichka asked. “Have you been ill?”

“I’ve been pining for you, Marichka my love. “ He did not ask where they were going. He was happy simply to be with her.

“Do you remember, my sweet Ivan, how we would meet here in this forest? You would play for me, and I would wrap my arms around your neck and kiss your dear curls.”

”Yes, Marichka, I remember, and I will never forget.”

He saw Marichka beside him, but he knew that it was a wood nymph and not Marichka. He walked beside her and would not let her go ahead for fear of seeing the bloody hole in her back where a wood nymph’s heart and lungs can be seen. On narrow paths he squeezed against her to

avoid falling behind and sensed the warmth of her body.

"I've always wanted to ask you: why did you hit me in the face? You remember, when our fathers were fighting and I hid in fear under the wagon at the sight of blood."

"Then you ran off. I threw your ribbons in the water, and you gave me a sweetmeat."

"I fell in love with you immediately."

They were moving deeper into the forest. The black firs extended their mossy branches over them as if in benediction, and an utter silence reigned over everything, broken only by the foaming wantonness of the streams in the valley.

"Once I wanted to frighten you and so I buried myself in moss and ferns and lay quietly. You called me, looked for me, and were almost crying. And I lay there, choking back my laughter. And what did you do with me when you finally found me?"

"Ha-ha!"

"Fie, you shameless man!" She puckered her lips sweetly and gave him a mischievous look.

"Ha-ha!" Ivan laughed.

She reminded him of their childish games, their swimming in the cold streams, their jokes and songs, their joys and fears, and their passionate embraces and painful parting. All the sweet memories that warmed their hearts.

"Why did you stay so long in the uplands, Ivanko? What were you doing there?"

Ivan was tempted to tell her how a nymph had called him in Marichka's voice, but he kept quiet. His consciousness was splitting. He sensed Marichka beside him and yet knew that Marichka was gone, that someone else was leading him into the unknown, to the desolate mountain crests, in order to destroy him. Yet he felt good. He followed her laughter and girlish twittering, light, happy, and unafraid the way he once had been. His worries, his thoughts of Palahna and the hostile sorcerer, and his fear of death had disappeared. Lighthearted youth and joy were leading him again to the unpeopled peaks, so desolate and lonely that even the rustling of the forest could not hold on there and was carried away into the valleys by the roaring streams.

"I kept looking out for you and waiting for you to come back from the uplands. I did not eat or sleep, and my songs were lost, and the world withered away for me. When we were in love, even dry oaks bloomed, but when we parted, living oaks dried up."

"Don't say that, Marichka, don't say that, my sweet! Now we are together and will never part!"

"Never? Ha-ha!"

Ivan shuddered and stopped. The dry malicious laugh cut at his heart. He looked at her incredulously. "Are you laughing, Marichka?"

"Of course not, Ivanko! I didn't laugh! You must have imagined it. Are you tired? Is it difficult to walk? Let's go a little further. Come!"

He went on, firmly pressing his shoulder to hers, with only one thought: to go on like this and not fall behind. Else he might see that instead of clothes on her back Marichka had.... Ah, what was the point? He refused to think. •\*•-> The forest was growing thicker. The putrid odor of moldering stumps wafted to them from a thicket where dead firs were decaying and poisonous mushrooms sprouted. The boulders were cold to the touch under their covering of slippery moss, and the bare roots of firs entwined the paths, which were covered by a layer of dry needles. Ivan and Marichka went on, deeper and deeper into the cold and uninviting wilds of the highland forest.

They emerged into a glade. Here the sky was a bit lighter. The firs seemed to be holding back the black night. All at once Marichka paused with a shudder. Tilting her head forward, she stood listening. Ivan noticed anxiety flicker over her face and draw her eyebrows together in a frown. What was wrong? But Marichka impatiently silenced his question, placing a finger on her lips, and then disappeared.

It had all happened so quickly and strangely that Ivan did not have time to collect himself. What had frightened her? Where had she fled? He stood for a moment, expecting that Marichka would soon return, but when a long time had passed he called out quietly, "Marichka!" The soft cover of fir branches swallowed the sound, and again everything was quiet.

Ivan became anxious. He wanted to look for Marichka but did not know which way to turn because he had not noticed where she had disappeared. She might get lost in the forest or stumble over a cliff. Should he start a fire? She'd see the light and know which way to come back. He gathered dry branches and lit a fire. The flames crackled a bit underneath and sent up smoke. When the smoke was whirling over the fire, the shadows of the angular firs began to dance, populating the glade.

Ivan sat down on a stump and looked around. The glade was littered with rotten stumps and overgrown with a prickly net of wild raspberries. The thin, dry lower branches of the firs hung down like a red beard. Sadness overcame Ivan again. He was alone once more. Marichka was not coming. Lighting his pipe, he stared into the fire to while away the time. Marichka would have to return sooner or later. He even thought that he heard her footsteps and the crackling of dry branches. Oh! She had finally come back.... He wanted to get up and go toward her, but before he could do so, the dry branches parted quietly and a man emerged from the forest.

He was naked. Soft dark hair covered his entire body, encircling his round compassionate eyes, entwining with his beard, and hanging down over his breast. He clasped his hairy arms on his large stomach and approached the fire. Ivan immediately recognized him. It was the merry chuhaistyr, the benevolent forest spirit who protected people from wood nymphs. He was death to them: if he caught one, he would tear her apart from limb to limb.

The chuhaistyr smiled affably and said with a sly wink, "Where did she go?"

"Who?"

"The wood nymph."

He's talking about Marichka, Ivan thought with fear, and his heart began to pound. So that's why she disappeared. "I don't know, I didn't see," he replied indifferently and then invited the chuhaistyr to sit down.

The chuhaistyr seated himself on a stump, shook off the dry leaves clinging to his hair, and extended his feet to the fire. Both were silent. The forest man warmed himself by the fire and rubbed his round stomach. Ivan wondered how he might detain the chuhaistyr so that Marichka would have more time to flee.

The chuhaistyr himself helped. Winking slyly at Ivan, he said, "Perhaps you'd dance with me a little?"

"Why not?" Ivan gladly rose. Adding fir branches to the fire, he examined his shoes, tucked in his shirt, and got ready to dance.

The chuhaistyr placed his hairy hands on his hips and started to shake. "Well, begin!"

All right, if he was to begin, then he would begin. Ivan stamped his foot in place, put a leg out, shook his whole body, and sailed into a light Hutsul dance. The chuhaistyr comically swayed back and forth. Crinkling his eyes, he smacked his lips and shook his stomach as his hairy, bearlike legs flexed and straightened. The dance was warming him. He jumped higher and squatted lower, encouraging himself with cheerful grunts and wheezes that made him sound like a bellows. Drops of sweat appeared around his eyes, running down in rivulets from his forehead to his mouth, and his underarms and belly glistened like a horse's flanks. /

"Haiduk once! And again!" he shouted at Ivan, stamping his feet.

"Another crooked one!" Ivan called out in encouragement. "Another blind one! Ho-ho! If we're to dance, then let's dance!"

"Let it be!" The chuhaistyr clapped his hands, squatted, and whirled about.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Ivan called out, slapping his thighs. Wasn't he still able to dance?

The flames leaped higher, casting the dancers' writhing shadows on the brightly lit glade. The chuhaistyr was getting tired. He raised his hand with its dirty nails to his forehead to wipe away the sweat and now shook his hairy body in place instead of leaping. "Perhaps that will be enough?" he wheezed.

"Oh no, a little bit more!" Ivan, too, was fainting with exhaustion. He was heated and wet. His legs ached, and his lungs rasped for air. "I'll play a tune for our dance," he encouraged the chuhaistyr, reaching into his sack for his floiara. "You've never heard anything like this, my friend!"

He played the tune that he had heard the vanisher play in the forest. "My goats are back, my goats are back!" Animated by the song, the chuhaistyr kicked up his heels again and shut his eyes with satisfaction, his exhaustion seemingly forgotten. Now Marichka would be safe. "Flee, Marichka, don't be afraid, love. Your enemy is dancing," the floiara sang.

The chuhaistyr's hair was matted as if he had just emerged from water. Saliva ran in a stream from his mouth, open with the joy of the dance, and his whole body shone in the firelight, as Ivan encouraged him with his cheerful tune, striking the stones in the glade with feet from which the shoes had flown off.

"Finally the chuhaistyr was exhausted. "Enough, I can't!" He fell to the grass, breathing heavily, his eyes shut. Ivan collapsed beside the chuhaistyr. And so they breathed together.

At last the chuhaistyr giggled quietly. "Oh, what a fine fling I've had!" Rubbing his round stomach with satisfaction, he sighed, smoothed out the hair on his chest, and began to say good-bye. "Thank you very kindly for the dance."

"Go in health."

"Farewell." Parting the dry branches of a fir, the chuhaistyr plunged into, the forest.

Silence and gloom enveloped the glade again. The dying fire blinked a single red eye. Where was Marichka? Ivan still had much to tell her. He felt a need to tell her about his whole life, his longing for her, his joyless days, his loneliness among hostile people, his unhappy marriage. But where was she? Where had she gone? Perhaps to the left? It seemed to him that he had last seen her on the left.

Ivan moved left. The firs had clustered so closely here that passing between their rough trunks was difficult. The dry lower branches stung Ivan's face, but he went on. Roaming about in the dense gloom, he continually stumbled and ran into tree trunks. Sometimes he thought that someone was

calling him. He would stop, hold his breath, and listen. But the forest was so still that the crackling of dry branches which rubbed against his shoulders sounded like the falling of timbers. Ivan went on, extending his arms like a blind man afraid of tripping over obstacles.

Suddenly a barely audible breath reached his ear. "Ivan!" The voice was coming from behind, from a depth, as if emerging from a sea of fir needles. This meant that Marichka was not here. He had to turn back. Ivan hurried, banging his knees against trees, fending off branches, and half-closing his eyes to avoid being stung by needles. The night seemed to be seizing his legs and not letting go, and he had to drag it with him. He had been wandering for a long time and still had not found the glade. Now the ground beneath his feet was sloping down. Rocks blocked his path. Going around them, he slid on slippery moss, stumbled over stiff roots, and seized hold of grass to keep from falling. From the abyss below a faint, forest-muffled cry reached him again. "Iva-an!"

He wanted to answer Marichka's call but was afraid that the chuhaistyr might hear. Now he knew where to look for her. He had to go right and descend. But the slope here was even steeper, and he could not understand how she had been able to get down. Pebbles skipped from under Ivan's feet, falling with a muffled growl into the black abyss. But Ivan was agile and used to the mountains and was able to halt at the edge of the precipice, carefully seeking out support for his feet. The descent was becoming more difficult. Once he almost fell but managed to seize an outcropping of rock and hung by his arms. He did not know what was below him, but he sensed the cold and malevolent breath of the abyss that had opened its insatiable maw toward him.

"Iva-an!" Marichka moaned from below in a voice that blended love and suffering.

"I'm coming, Marichka!" Ivan longed to call out. He had forgotten caution. Leaping from rock to rock like a mountain sheep, his mouth barely able to catch a breath, he kept injuring his arms and legs, fell on sharp rocks, lost the ground beneath his feet, and through the thick fog of passion in which he was careering into the valley heard the dear voice urge him on: "Iva-an!"

"I'm here!" Ivan shouted and then suddenly sensed that the abyss was pulling him down. Seizing him by the neck, it bent him backward. He flailed his arms about, tried to grasp rocks with his legs, and felt that he was flying headlong, his body filled with a strange cold emptiness. The heavy black mountain spread its wings in an instant and took to flight like a bird. A sharp deathly curiosity burned his brain: what would his head strike? He heard a bone snap and felt an unbearably sharp pain wrack his body; then everything melted in the red fire that consumed his life.

The next day shepherds found the dying Ivan.

The trembita heralded the death to the mountains. For death here had its own voice in which it spoke to the lonely peaks. The hooves of horses pounded stony tracks, and leather moccasins rustled in the gloom of night, as Hutsuls hurried from their mountain dwellings to the deathwatch. Falling to their knees before the corpse, they piled coins on the dead man's chest to pay for the transport of his soul and then silently sat down on benches. Gray hair mixed with the crimson of silken kerchiefs, and healthy pinkness with the yellow of waxy, wrinkled faces. A deathly light wove a net of shadows on the dead and the living faces. The chins of rich farmers' wives quaked; elderly eyes shone in respect for death; a serene calm united life and death, and coarse, hardworking hands lay heavily on knees.

Palahna adjusted the shroud on the dead man. Her fingers felt the coldness of the corpse, and the warm, sweetish smell of wax dripping down the candles raised sorrow from her breast to her

throat. The trembitas wept outside the window.

Ivan's yellow face rested on the linen, having forever closed within itself something that only he knew, and the right eye slyly peered from under a slightly raised eyelid at the brass coins piled on his chest and the candle burning in his folded hands. His soul was resting at the head of the corpse: it did not dare leave the house yet.

"Why don't you speak to me?" Palahna called to her husband's lonely soul. "Why don't you look at me? Why don't you bandage the callouses on my fingers? What road are you setting out upon, my husband? Where shall I look for you?"

"She wails well," old women nodded, and others replied with sighs that melted away in the hubbub of voices.

"We shepherded together in the uplands. Once we were grazing sheep when a cold wind broke out as if it were winter. The snowstorm was so fierce that we couldn't see a thing, and he, the deceased... " a farmer was telling his neighbors. Their lips moved with their own thoughts, for it was fitting to comfort the sad soul that had parted from its body.

"You've gone and left me alone. With whom will I farm now? With whom will I tend the cattle?" Palahna asked her husband's soul.

New guests kept entering the cottage through the open door from the dark night. Knees were bent before the corpse; brass coins jingled on its breast, and people moved over on the benches to make room for the newcomers. The thick candles burned quietly, their wax dripping down like tears. A pale flame licked at the fetid air, and a blue vapor, mixed with the nauseous smell of wax and sweat, hung over the hubbub.

The cottage was becoming crowded. Faces were pressed against faces. Warm breaths mixed together, and perspiring foreheads reflected the deathly light that had lit flickering fires on wire-decorated skirts and leather bags and belts. More guests continued to arrive, thronging at the threshold. The corpse was beginning to move. A barely visible shadow of white, lichenlike spots crawled over it.

"My sweet husband, you've abandoned me to woe!" Palahna wailed. "There's no one left to go to town or to bring things...."

Outside the window, the trembita repeated its lament, augmenting Palahna's grief. Hadn't the poor soul heard enough sorrow? The thought must have been concealed under the oppressive weight of grief, because a movement was beginning at the threshold. Feet stamped hesitantly; elbows pushed; a bench shook occasionally, and voices rose over the noise of the crowd. Suddenly a woman's high-pitched laugh cut through the heavy veils of sadness, and the pent-up hubbub burst forth like a flame from under a cap of black smoke.

"Hey you, snub-nose! Buy a rabbit from me!" a young man boomed in a bass voice.

"Ha-ha, snub-nose!" A wave of laughter rolled forth. The merriment was beginning. Those who were sitting closer to the door turned their backs to the corpse, ready to join in the game. Cheerful grins broke out on faces that a moment ago and been knotted in grief, and the rabbit went further and further, enclosing ever wider circles, until it reached the dead man. "Ha-ha, humpbacked! Ha-ha, lame one!"

The light flickered and smoked with the laughter. One guest after another stood up from the benches and moved to the corners, where merry-makers were gathering in tight clusters. The spots

on the dead man's face spread wider, as if concealed thoughts were moving it and changing its expression. A bitter thought seemed to be caught in the raised corner of the mouth: what is life? A flash in the sky, a cherry blossom.

People were already kissing by the outside door.

"On whom are you hanging?"

"On black-haired Annychka."

Annychka pretended to resist, but dozens of hands pushed her out from the tight crowd, and hot lips encouraged her, "Go on, girl, go on!" Annychka embraced the boy who was hanging and kissed him on the lips with relish as the crowd whooped with joy.

The corpse was forgotten. Only three old women stayed beside it, their glassy sorrowful eyes observing a fly that was crawling over the still, yellow face.

The married women threw themselves into the game. With eyes in which the deathly light had not died down yet and the image of the dead man was still fresh, they eagerly went to kiss, oblivious of their husbands, who were hugging and squeezing other men's wives. The kisses resounded throughout the house, mixing with the weeping of the trembita, which continued to announce to the distant mountains that death had come to the lonely peak. Palahna had stopped lamenting. It was getting late, and she had to entertain her guests.

The merry-making grew more abandoned. The room was suffocating. People sweated in their jerkins, breathing in the odor of sweat, the nauseating fumes of warm wax, and the smell of the decomposing corpse. They all spoke loudly as if forgetting why they were here and related their adventures with roars of laughter. Waving their arms, they slapped one another on the back and winked at the women.

Those who could not fit into the cottage started a bonfire in the yard and played merry games outside. The light in the vestibule was put out. Girls squealed wildly, and boys choked with laughter. The merriment shook the walls of the cottage and made the dead man's bier tremble. The yellow lights of the candles flickered in the thick air.

Even the old people joined in the games. A carefree laughter shook their gray hair, spreading their wrinkles and revealing the rotten stumps of teeth. The oldsters spread out unsteady arms and helped the young men catch the women. Necklaces jangled on the women's breasts. Female squeals shattered the ears. Benches jumped and banged against the bier. Peals of laughter rolled from the corner with the icons to the threshold, and whole rows of people bent double with laughter, holding on to their stomachs.

A "mill" clattered with a wooden roar in the midst of the screaming throng. "What do you have to mill?" the miller called out repeatedly.

"We have corn," girls shouted as they pushed forward to him.

"Jews" who had made beards by affixing long strips of flax quarreled with one another, and a tightly rolled wet towel was whacking people's backs with a snap. People fled from it, screaming and roaring with laughter, knocking over others in their way, stirring up the dust, and spoiling the air. The floor of the house shook under the weight of young feet, and the corpse on the bier jumped up and down, the mysterious smile of death still playing on its yellow face. The brass coins heaped on the breast by good people for the soul's fare quietly jingled.

Outside the window the trembitas wept.

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