

Marko Vovchok  
INSTYTUTKA<sup>1</sup>  
Tr. N. Pedan-Popil<sup>2</sup>

Dedicated To T. H. Shevchenko

People marvel at my being always happy. They seem to think that I have known neither sorrow nor misfortune. But I have been like this all my life, born, as one might say, with a good disposition. There were times when I was beaten (it would be better not to mention it at all) and could not keep from crying, so I cried, but only for a moment — after reconsidering a bit, I would laugh and become happy once again. There is no joy without alloy! So it was with me. If I had cried at every misfortune that befell me, I would have cried my eyes out by now. I never knew my father or mother and grew up an orphan in strange surroundings, among strangers. Even though there was no hard work for me to do, I being still a child, many a time no one ever cared whether I was hungry or cold, whether I was alive or dead.

When I reached the age of ten, I was taken into the manorhouse. The lady of the manor was, you might say, sedate — actually she was enfeebled by old age. She could scarcely drag her feet after her and spoke in such a whisper that at first one couldn't make her out. And as for whippings! That was not to be thought of! She spent her entire day on the porch, and at night would sigh and moan. In her youth, they say, she, too, was not without her whims, but there is a season for everything and one has to give up sometime.

During the period of my stay there, however, all was peaceful; the only unfortunate thing was that no one was allowed to venture outside the house, except perhaps on a big feast-day when we begged leave to go to church — but on Sundays, never! “You will slack,” the old one would say angrily. “I won't let you go! There will be time enough for you to worship God — you are still a long way from death's door.”

Day, after day we sat toiling in the girls' quarters. And it was as quiet round about as if a spell had been cast over everything. All you could hear was the lady moaning, or one girl whispering something to another, or an occasional sigh of boredom. It was tedious work — so tedious, it tortured you. And what could one do about it? One had to be grateful that at least we didn't get whipped ten times a day as others had been, so we heard!

Sometimes we would get jolly for no reason at all. We would be oh, so overwhelmed with joy. Our hearts would go pit-pat! If we had been free, we would have sung then so, as to let our song resound through all the village. But we didn't dare! At such times just looking at each other made us laugh. First, one would give a wink, then another would follow suit; another would be tied to the footstool by her braids; still another would jump up and begin to dance a little jig, turning, whirling, in such a way that the old lady would not hear. The things we wouldn't do!

The old lady did not have any relatives, except a granddaughter in Kyiv, who was studying in a — let's see if I can pronounce it — in-sti-tute of some sort. She often sent letters to the old one, and the old one used to read them every day, crying and laughing over them. Finally the granddaughter wrote, asking to come and take her home. Mother of God! The whole household was in a turmoil — painting, washing, cleaning up! We were expecting the young lady! The young lady would be arriving soon!

---

1. a graduate of the college for daughters of the nobility.

2. Marko Vovchok. *Ukrainian Folk Stories*. Trans. N. Pedan-Popil, Ed. H. B. Timothy. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983. Pp. 97–134.

The old lady seemed to have pepped up. She traipsed from room to room, looking out along the road from every window and sending us to the outskirts of the village to see if the young lady was on her way. That was just what we needed. It could be said that during the week we awaited her arrival, we really had the time of our lives. They sent us out and we ran like the wind. It was good to see the steppe and the lovely fields! The green steppe seemed to recede before our eyes into the very horizon. It was lovely to breathe in freedom!

We would pick flowers and make wreaths, adorning ourselves with them like brides, and would show off with them until we reached the manor house; only on entering would we take them off and throw them away. How sorry we were to throw those wreaths away!

## II

At long last the young lady arrived. What a pretty face she had! Where did she get those good looks from? No artist, it seemed, could have depicted such a beauty! When the old one finally got her arms around her granddaughter, she could not let go of her: she kissed, caressed, and admired her, escorting her round the house, showing and explaining everything. The young lady just kept turning from side to side, surveying everything with a curious eye.

The old one set her down at the table, coaxing her: "Perhaps you would like this to eat? Or perhaps that to drink?" Having had all kinds of food and drink brought to the table, she herself sat down and fixed her admiring gaze on her granddaughter. The young lady for her part pecked at her food, like a sparrow, making a clean, quick job of it. We were peeping from behind the door at them and listening to what the young lady had to say that might throw light on her thoughts, her character, and her habits.

"How did it go, dearest, living alone?" asked the old one. "You are not telling me anything."

"Oh, dearest grandma! What is there to tell? It was so boring!"

"Did they teach you much? What did they teach you, my dearest?"

"Oh, that's what you want to know! It was fine for you, grandma, living here in freedom; and what I went through in that course of study! Do not remind me of it, ever!"

"My darling! It is understandable — you were among strangers. They insulted and offended you. But why did you not write me about this immediately?"

"How could I, granny? How could I do that? They would have found out about it instantly."

"My poor darling! Tell me all about what they did to you there?"

"Oh, granny! They tired us out and aggravated us with all sorts of stupid things. Learn this, that, and the other. Stuff it, stuff it into your heads! Why should I know how the stars wander about the heavens, or how people live across the seas, or whether they like it there or not? All I need to know is how to put on my best face in other people's company." -

"But, my treasure, there must be a reason for people studying! Even our local young ladies, though they are poor, squeak in French."

"Oh, granny!" prattled the young lady, "I also applied myself to the French language and to music and dancing as well. What is necessary is necessary. They're things everyone pays attention to and praises; as for the rest — it is just a perfect nuisance! Learn and forget! It is boring for those who teach, and misery for those who study. A lot of time wasted for nothing!"

"How can this be? Was it poor teaching?"

"I am telling you, it was boring, a waste of effort, and unprofitable. All they thought of was how to get their fees, and all we thought of was how quickly we could get out of there. Come, come, now grandma, what are you thinking about?"

"That is precisely what I am thinking about, dearest — they took good money from you, and taught you badly. What is going to happen when you have forgotten it all?"

"Bless you, granny! How could I forget? When one is among guests or at a party, how can one possibly forget music, dancing, or even French? But where that overseas trash is concerned... Well — it went in one ear and out the other. In fact, I really don't know anything about it. Away with it!"

"But what would happen if someone asked you how those stars move about the heavens or the like? People right away would react critically: 'She has studied but doesn't know anything!' "

"What is all this granny? I have admitted this only to you. As for other people, they will never suspect, even if they kept on questioning me all day long. I can wriggle my way out of anything and I can certainly outsmart them — and that's how it is, granny!. Would you like me to sing for you? Listen then."

And at that she burst into song; her voice had a beautiful silvery tone.

The old one started kissing her: "My sweet! Joy of my heart!" And the young lady fawned on her:

"Buy me nice clothes, granny, the ones in the latest fashion!"

"My child, do not worry about that. You will have everything. You will be queen among noble young ladies!"

We servants exchanged glances: some training our young lady had received! What she had learned best, it seemed, was how to fool people!

### III

"Let us go, dearest," said the old lady. "I would like you to pick out a servant-girl for yourself."

And she brought her to us. We ran from the door into a corner and huddled together.

"This is your young mistress," the old one said to us. "Kiss her hand!"

Without giving us as much as a glance, the young lady held out two fingers to be kissed.

The old one pointed all of us out to her: "This is Hanna, this is Varka, and this is Domakha. ..."

"Heaven help us!" the young lady cried with a clap of her hands. "Is there any of you who knows how to braid my hair and dress me?"

She stood with her arms folded, looking at us.

"Of course they know how to, dearest," said the old one, "and if they don't, we will teach them."

"What is your name?" the young lady asked me, and without waiting for my reply, turned to the old lady and said: "This one will be mine!"

"Very well then, let this be the one. Any one you want, dear! See that you are a good servant,

Ustyna — the young mistress will be good to you."

"Enough of that, granny! Let us go!" the young lady broke in, making a wry face. She leaned to one side, shutting her eyes and itching to be off — just like a cat when someone puffs smoke into his whiskers.

"We have to teach her common sense, my dearest," the old one said. "They are all empty-headed. I will teach her one thing, you will teach her another, and this way we will turn her into a human being."

"What a pity, granny, that they have not been taught already! You should have sent one of them to the city; it would have saved us trouble now."

And they prattled on as if they had been talking about horses or some such thing.

"Oh, Ustyna!" said the girls, concernedly, "how is it going to be for you, working for her, and her so unfriendly?"

"Oh well, girls," I said, "what's meant for you won't miss you! There is no escape from one's fate. We shall see how it will be."

And that set me thinking.

#### IV

In the evening, they called me: "Go to the young mistress — help her to get undressed."

I entered her room. She was standing before the mirror, already tearing off everything she had on.

"Where have you been running off to? Hurry up and undress me! I want to get to sleep!"

As I was undressing her, she kept shouting at me:

"Faster, faster!"

She threw herself on the bed:

"Take off my shoes! Do you know how to set hair?" she asked.

"No, I don't."

"Good Lord! Good grief! How stupid she is. Get out!"

The girls were already waiting for me.

"How did it go, Ustyna? What happened? What is she like, dear?"

What could I tell them?

"I am stupid, girls," I said, "because I don't know how to set hair!"

#### V

The next day our young lady got up quite early. She washed, dressed, and inspected all the buildings, all the grounds, and even the orchard. She was so happy.

"I am home!" she said, "I am home! I am free to do anything I want!" And she kissed the old lady and asked over and over again:

"How soon do we go visiting, granny? When are we going to have guests?"

"Well, let me enjoy you for a start, dearest. First let me see all I can of you!"

"But how long must I wait, granny? I thought that when I came home it would be very jolly

---

for me, lots of people, music, dancing. Granny, my dearest, my loveliest, do tell me!"

"Very well, my little bird! Let us make some preparations and then invite the guests."

The preparations began. The old one rolled the trunks containing velvet and other delicate materials out of storage and took the young lady's measurements. The young one was jumping for joy, becoming flushed and happy with excitement. She hopped from mirror to mirror looking at herself; got a glass of water and, while holding it, admired her beauty; did up and undid her hair, or tied it with ribbons or adorned herself with flowers.

"Oh, dear grandma," she would say, "when will I wear the satin dress?"

"When you are betrothed, my child," replied the old one. "I will give you away to a prince or to a count, to the richest man on earth!"

And the young lady would give herself airs and acts as if she were already a real princess.

They did nothing but chatter endlessly about princes and men of nobility. They would talk of weddings, with black horses saddled and bridled, and build all sorts of castles in the air. They would ramble on in this fashion until the young lady sighed:

"But granny! It is all talk. We have not yet had anyone to visit us!"

"Just wait a little, they will be here — so many that there won't be room enough for them."

## VI

Guests indeed did come. One group would be leaving just as another was arriving. We servants got neither sleep nor rest. From morning till night we were kept busy with running and serving. Sometimes such a crowd would come, that we wondered at so much variety! All that mob would be roaring with laughter, dancing, eating, drinking, all of them bearing the marks of luxury, and all of them so coddled! Some of the ladies could hardly squeeze through the door — and, as for young men — so many of them came! They swarmed about our young mistress, buzzing like bumblebees. She moved among them all with a word here, a lift of her eyebrows there, inquiring about this one's health, or lamenting to another about her being lonely without him; still another she would place beside her as if he had been one of the family. The poor souls got all worked up and made complete fools of themselves. Day after day they came, each trying to go one better than the next, staring coldly at each other. Did she really appeal that much to them, or did they simply have nowhere else to go to amuse themselves — who knows? They settled on us like insects. You see, how else can the idle rich spend their time except in dining sumptuously, drinking their fill, and showing off their finery! What else is left for them to do?

## VII

Little by little the young mistress had the household just as she wanted it.

"Please stop weaving, grandmother! Is there no one to do that for you? Whenever anybody comes visiting, you always have a piece of knitting in your hands, as if you were a servant."

"But it is boring without work, child," replied the old one.

"Get hold of a book and read it."

"What can I read? I can't see to read."

"Well, then, take a stroll; only, dearest grandmother, stop knitting! I would rather have my eyes plucked out with that needle, than see you using it!"

"All right, all right, calm down!"

The old one gave up her weaving and got bored. The young mistress dressed her up in a bonnet adorned with polka dot ribbons and placed her in a chair in the middle of the room. Should guests arrive, she would be ready to receive them.

The old one was bored stiff, but the young one was delighted:

"How grand it all is, grandma! What pomp and splendor in our home!"

### VIII

She put all us girls to embroidering, teaching us herself, and making sure that we kept at it. When we had time off for lunch, she frowned and scolded. She got progressively more cross, now swearing at us, stealthily pinching or pushing us and becoming, in consequence, red in the face with embarrassment. This was how it was until she became accustomed to us. Then, after she mastered the situation, we really discovered where misery lives in this world.

Whenever I had to dress her up, what derision I had to endure! I plait her braids — wrong! I unplait and replait them — wrong again! The whole morning would be taken up with doing that. She would pinch me and poke me with her comb and bobby pins, or she would pour water over me. You have no idea what she would not do to poor me!

On one occasion, we were expecting some regimental officers from the city. Everything inside and out was sick and span, as though we had been preparing for Easter. The young mistress sat down to comb her hair. Good grief! It would have been better if I had taken a red hot coal in my hand rather than get mixed up with her fair tresses. It was: come here, you good for nothing slued! Go there! Leave me alone! Come back here again! She pushed and shouted at me, so that I got frightened! Then she screamed, shrieked, stamped her feet, and ended up by bursting into tears! I ran out the door into the orchard and she ran after me: "I will tear you to pieces! I will choke the life out of you, you snake!" I glanced back at her — she became so terrifying that my legs gave way under me. She grabbed me by the neck with both her hands. Her hands were as clammy as snakes. I wanted to scream, but something stopped my breath and I collapsed near an apple tree, regaining consciousness later with cold water being splashed over me. I saw all the girls, white as chalk, crowded round me, and the young lady stretched out on a bench, crying. The old one was standing over me in a black fury, swearing at me for all she was worth.

"What have you done, you slacker! How dare you anger the young mistress? I will send you to Siberia! I will chase you off the face of the earth!"

And she comforted the young lady.

"Don't cry, don't cry, my little angel. She is not worth your tears! You might make yourself ill, which God forbid! See how cold your little hands are! Stop crying, dearest. Why do you take so much on yourself? If there is anything that displeases you, come to me."

"As for you," she began laying into me again, "you will get what is coming to you!"

I don't know how I had the luck to escape a beating. Perhaps it was because of how weak I

felt at the moment — so all the old one did was jab me with her foot and order the girls to take me into the cottage.

The girls picked me up and carried me inside where they knelt beside me, crying: "Ustyna, dearest! What an awful thing to happen to you! Mother of God! For what reason is this misfortune sent on us?"

## IX

All spring they fed me warm milk, until I got better. I would lie all alone and the others would be working in the field. As I lay there by myself I thought: "Lord, to think that one so young could be so heartless!"

It was quiet and cool in the cottage where I lay. Silence reigned within its white walls and there I was by my solitary self. A light gust of wind would cause a branch of fragrant lilac to dip in front of my window. At midday the sun's rays would send a hot, trembling streak of light through the cottage, suffusing me with warmth. It would be sultry and sleepy, but I would not be able to sleep. All the time I was left like that with my thoughts, wondering what was to become of me. I would be overjoyed at times — when the orchard rustled, when the sky became overcast, and when the rain rattled on the ground. I would hear the patter of feet, laughter and noise, and a throng of children would pour into my room. Happy and rosy-cheeked, they would greet me and sprinkle me with the raindrops that had fallen on them. They would scramble to the window, impatiently waiting for the rain to cease, singing at the top of their voices:

Let the sun shine out again, Let it shine on our priest's grain; On our grandma's herbs let it shine, On your courtyard, and on mine.

As soon as the sun peeped from behind a cloud, they would disappear quickly from the cottage. For a long time after, I would still hear the echo of their laughter in one corner or another, as if someone were ringing silver bells.

At dusk, the people returned from their labors on the estate, tired from the hot sun and hard work. They would all be silent, except for someone sighing heavily or singing sadly and quietly.

From time to time one of the girls would dash across from the manor-house to see how I was:

"Ustyna, dearest!"

"What is happening over there, dear?" I would ask her.

"It would be better that you did not ask, Ustyna. Terrible things are happening! Hanna was beaten today, yesterday it was Paraska, and it may be my turn tomorrow. Mother of mine," she would cry out, "what if they look for me now and I am not there! Oh, Ustyna, what is to become of us?"

"Are they saying anything about me?"

"What aren't they saying! They are raising the roof. 'Why doesn't she go to work! Why is she being pampered like a lady of noble birth?' That's what they are saying, if you want to know. Well, I have been here long enough. I must fly! Goodbye, Ustyna!"

## X

---

One morning, while I was still convalescing, Katrya ran in.

"Come, Ustyna, come quickly!"

"Come where?"

"To the young mistress and the old one! And hurry! They have sent for you to come immediately. The young mistress has complained to the old one that you have completely recovered, but don't want to work. Come along, let us go!"

"How can I go, Katrya, when I cannot even put a foot down!"

"I will help you, dearest! Use all your strength, so that you won't get the worst of it. Let us go! Let us go!"

I managed somehow to drag myself to the manor-house. The young lady met us at the door.

"Why are you taking your leisure? Why don't you come to work? You are a slacker! Just you wait? I will think up a punishment for you the like of which you have never seen or heard of!"

My God! How she went on shouting till she was out of breath. She began pushing, pulling me by the sleeve. What a black hour for me! How furious she got, what a terrifying look her lovely face took on!

Her screaming brought the old mistress just in time to join in the shouting. She, too, began to scream and promised me a beating. And we, the Lord be praised, had never experienced anything like that from her, before the young mistress arrived.

From then on it was punishment as well as sweeping every day for us. If someone laughed (and that was a rare occurrence!) the young lady would run to the old one: "Granny," she would say, "they do not respect me!" Or, if someone started to cry: "Granny, they are not going about their duties, they are crying!" Our executioner, she was all day long on the lookout for some fault or other to find in us; and the old one would get furious, and, renewing her youth, hand out the punishment as she used to!

## XI

The only time we breathed freely was when we had young noblemen as guests; then, the young lady would forget about us for a while. She would receive them so genially and cordially, twittering like a bird. What a change! You couldn't have told that she was the same person. As for the young men, they were crazy about her. One would show himself off in front of her, another from a corner would size her up with gleaming eyes, another would traipse after her, and still another would give her a lingering, sidelong glance. She moved among them like a pea-hen.

"Which one of them will fall into her trap?" the girls would say. "Poor soul! He is in for a tough, miserable time!"

At first the old lady was highly delighted with those guests, but later, when quarrels broke out among them over the young mistress, she began to be unhappy at the whole business, and was at her wit's end to know what to do about it. Each of them had one and the same thing on his mind — to win the young mistress's favor. They abused one another, argued and bickered among themselves. The old lady began to call them dogs behind their backs. Suddenly, toward autumn, out of a clear sky, things took quite a different turn and our young lady's fate was sealed. The young noblemen bolted from her in all directions, embarrassed and ashamed of themselves.

## XII

The local regimental doctor became acquainted with our young mistress and started to visit her daily. He was a quiet, ordinary man, polite to everyone, and without the remotest resemblance to a noble! How did he happen to meet her? For a long time she had been hearing from the local young ladies who visited her, about a certain regimental doctor: tall and handsome, black-browed and rosy-lipped — so indescribably good looking! There was one thing about him, however — he happened to be a very proud man. He could not even look at, or talk to, girls, no matter how they tried to make up to him.

Hearing this, the young mistress would often say to the old one: "I wish you would invite that doctor to our house, granny. I would love to see what he looks like!"

And the old one would reply:

"My child, what you have heard is just the chatter of those magpies. What is so special about that! A regimental doctor! Poor as a church mouse! Why should you even rub shoulders with such people?"

"Well, just to see him, that's all, grandma; to find out if he is all he is praised to be!"

"Away with him! He might force himself on you! You are already quite a storm-center, and yet not one is getting serious. All they do is get in one another's way and quarrel. A plague of rabies on them all!"

The old mistress was so opposed to it! But the granddaughter kept at it: "Let us have the doctor, let us have him!" As a result, at the next party, the old one announced that she was inviting the doctor to the house. This was well received by the guests, who agreed to bring him along next time.

"And when will that be?" asked the young lady, turning right and left, and gazing into their eyes like the little fox she was. "Will it be soon?"

"Since you are so gracious, we shall make it the day after tomorrow," said the guests delightedly.

And they left feeling happy, the stupid fools that they were!

## XIII

How prettily the young mistress dressed that day! The old one scowled and grumbled:

"What use have we for that penniless character?"

The young lady pretended not to hear what was being said, and the old one was taking it out on us.

The regimental guests came, but without the doctor. "He thanks you for the favor," they said, "but does not have a minute to spare. He has too many patients to attend to."

"Don't force him," said the old one. "Let him attend to his patients, and God help him!"

The young lady blushed and bit her lip.

We servants got our medicine after the guests left! We had to take the whole brunt of it!

The same week the young lady took ill. She was moaning, groaning, and screaming. The old one got alarmed; she wept and called for a doctor. The regimental doctor was said to be the most

knowledgeable, and he was closest at hand — let him be called in!

Meanwhile the young lady dressed herself up in her best and arranged herself in bed, like something out of a picture — waiting.

He came, examined her and asked some questions. She talked to him softly in a sing-song tone of voice. He stayed an hour or so, and took his leave. "I will look in tomorrow," he said.

The old one quizzed her granddaughter about the visit, but she, wrapped up in her thoughts, only nodded her head. When the old one asked: "What do you make of the doctor, then? What is he like?" — the young lady awoke from her reverie: "Proud," she said, "like a high and mighty lord. And who does he think he is?"

The poor deluded soul! He devoted so much time to curing her that in the end he fell head over heels in love with her. The young lady also fell in love with him. The other suitors got the message immediately and cleared out.

The old one tried everything she could think of to put a stop to it, but it was like beating one's head against a brick wall.

"If you stand in my way, granny," said the young lady, "I will die! Hold your peace! Don't talk me out of it! Have pity!"

The old one gave in, but kept on moaning.

#### XIV

On the manor grounds it became very silent and deserted: the tramping of horses' feet, the rumbling of carriage wheels were no longer heard. The young lady also quietened down: no more cursing, no more beatings, no more complaining about us to her grandmother. She spent all her time deep in thought.

As soon as the sun rose, the doctor would roll up in his carriage-and-pair. The young lady would already be waiting for him by the window, prettily dressed and blushing like a red poppy. He would come rushing in. If one of us happened to run into him he would say, "How are you, my girl? How is your young mistress?"

He would stay all day, sitting near to the young lady, never for a moment letting her out of his sight. The old mistress would dart from the one door to the other, eavesdropping — wondering what the two of them were saying to each other. It bothered her no end that they were together, and that she could not separate them: she, too, was afraid of her granddaughter.

The time came when he asked for the young lady's hand in marriage. The old one wept and lamented:

"I expected to give you away to a prince or a noble of high degree!"

"Oh my God!" the young lady cried in tears. "If he had been rich and famous there would not have been a thing for me to worry about! I would have been married to him long ago. But what can I do? Such is my luck! Such is my bitter fate!"

"But aren't there any better than him?" asked the old one, just for the sake of asking, for she had no more courage left to contradict her.

"There is no one better in the world for me — there isn't now, nor will there ever be!"

The young lady became very sad. She lost weight and grew pale. The old one got thoroughly

worked up about the whole thing and she no longer knew which side to take or what decision to abide by. One moment she would say: "Don't marry him!"; the next, when the granddaughter got angry and wept bitterly at her saying so, she would console her to cheer her up: "Don't worry, you will get married soon!" The granddaughter was cursing her bad luck:

"The Lord has sent this misfortune on me," she said, "I don't know what can be done about it!"

The bridegroom began to take notice and became concerned:

"What is the matter? Why are you so sad?"

"But I am not sad."

"Tell me all about it, do tell me!" he pleaded, kissing her hand.

"So, we get married," she said, "but how will we live? In poverty!"

"Oh, so this is what is bothering you, sweetheart. Why do we need all these riches, when our life together will be beautiful, and our lot a joyful one?"

"You see!" she retorted. "You are not thinking of me at all! It will be pleasant, will it not, when someone comes to visit us, and mocks us saying, 'How poor they are!' "

And at that she began to cry.

"My dearest, what can I, a poor man, do about it? Where can I get it all? Riches were never of any concern to me, but now I crave for all the luxuries to please you. But how am I to acquire them? There is nothing I would not gladly do for you," he said. "I would bend the sky for you if I could, but it cannot be bent!"

And they would both worry about it.

## XV

She loved him, but in a strange sort of way, not as other people love. Occasionally some of the young ladies of the neighborhood would visit and quiz her:

"Is it true that the proud fellow has fallen in love with you? That he has proposed? Is he jealous? What present is he giving you? Do you respect him? Does he listen to you?"

"Judge for yourselves," said the young lady, smiling.

And she would begin to belittle him in front of them.

"Listen," she would say to him. "Go to the city and buy me this and that and be quick about it! Hurry up, don't let me get angry!"

He would go right away, and buy what she had told him to.

"Heaven help us, what is this you have bought? I do not want this! Go, get it changed! I have no need for it! It is worthless. Wherever did you get it?"

Again he would go and have it changed.

Or it was this way. He would want a drink of water and she would say:

"Don't drink, don't drink!"

"Why not?"

"I do not want you to! Stop doing it!"

"And what if I want to? I am thirsty!"

"But I don't want you to! Do you hear? I don't want you to!"

And she would look at him or smile in such a way that he would listen. Sometimes she would get angry at him. She would not look at him or talk to him. Almost in tears, he would beg her forgiveness.

The young ladies who were visiting were astonished: "Who could ever expect such love from someone like him! What did you do to win it? How did you get God to help you?"

Our young lady would just smile.

They asked what presents he gave her. She would spread out in front of them the satins and velvets which the old lady had once presented to her, and boast: "This is what he gave me!"

How strange is nobles' love!

The bridegroom very much disliked those neighbor ladies, probably wishing that every trace of them might be obliterated.

While talking to him now and then about this and that, the old mistress discovered that he owned an estate.

"My child!" she said to her granddaughter. "He owns an estate!"

"Really?" exclaimed the young lady, springing up, "Where? Who told you that?"

"It is not very far from town. They say he inherited it recently from some aunt of his. The aunt was childless and he was raised by her."

"For God's sake! Why did he never tell me about it? Probably because it is only a small estate — nothing to boast about. But it is an estate for all that! It is still landed property."

That day she received him joyfully, and greeted him graciously. He

was delighted, little knowing that the greeting was not for him but for his estate!

## XVI

After Christmas they were engaged. What a crowd of guests attended! The young lady was so happy, so talkative, her eyes all aglow, as she walked hand in hand with the bridegroom. He could not take his eyes off her — so much so that he stumbled as he walked. The merrymaking continued until dawn.

As soon as the guests and her intended departed the young lady burst into tears. She wept and bemoaned her fate:

"Look what I have done! Look what I have started! What a poor life lies ahead of me! Why was I born into the world! Woe is me! Such is my fate as an orphan!"

The old one was not happy with the engagement either, and tried to cheer up her granddaughter, pleading with her:

"What have you to cry for? Come now, stop it!"

"Why didn't the Lord make him a wealthy aristocrat!" cried out the young lady, her face covered with tears, as she paced quickly about the room, wringing her hands.

"My child! My dearest heart! Do not cry! You will not be the richest one, but you will not be poor either. All that I have is yours."

At that the young lady threw herself on the old one, embracing and kissing her:

"My granny, my dearest mama! I thank you with all my heart and soul! Suddenly everything has brightened up for me! You have given me a new lease on life, mother of mine!"

"Come, come, before you know it I will be bursting into tears too! That's enough now!" said the old one, crying and laughing herself.

"Granny dearest, my dove! Will you live with us?"

"There is nothing I would like better, but it cannot be. This, I think, is what I shall do: I shall stay on in Dubtsi and look after your estate. Could there be a better way? If one or the other place is vacated it will become rundown and you will have no peace of mind. As the wise saying goes: 'It is the landlord's eye that makes his cattle grow fat.'"

"Well, splendid, grandma! Let it be this way! Oh, granny," she said, "you have given a completely new beginning to my life!"

"Then be happy, and don't cry."

"I won't cry, granny, I won't!"

As soon as the bridegroom appeared in the doorway, the young lady informed him:

"Grandmother is giving us her village Dubtsi! Granny is giving us Dubtsi!"

He smiled softly and said calmly:

"You are happy, and I am happy that you are. I myself like Dubtsi. It was here we met and here we fell in love. Remember, how this orchard was, all green and blossomy, and how we walked through it together talking?"

And she replied:

"The orchard indeed was green and blossomy, but, dearest, don't forget what a good investment Dubtsi is!"

A tremor ran through him: He looked at her, and astonishment and fear together clutched at his heart.

"What is the matter?" asked the young lady, "Why do you look at me so? Have I said something one should not say? You do wish to farm the estate with me, don't you?"

And she took him by the hand, smiling affectionately. He smiled back at her:

"My beloved homemaker!" said he.

## XVII

The young lady cheered up, occupying herself with her trousseau, giving orders and making arrangements, seeing to everything herself. They brought in from the city shoemakers, dressmakers, tailors, and merchants. She was running about, pushing the bridegroom around — buying, laying out patterns, getting things together. The house got like a pot on the boil! It was the most difficult time for us servants, for this is how it goes — no matter whether the lords have a good time or a bad one, it is always the same for servants — hard work! As they say: "For some folk, a wedding — for a chicken, death!"

Many lords and ladies came to the wedding. Indoors it was like a beehive! The inquisitive young ladies feasted their eyes on the dowry exclaiming: "Oh, how pretty that is! Oh, this is grand! Look at this! And this — it is probably very expensive!" Another would notice a particular scarf or dress and it would so touch her heart that she would close her eyes in admiration. They clung about it all, as flies cling to honey! It was a hard job getting them out of the house.

## XVIII

With all the goings on I could not spare a moment to bid my friends farewell. It was only when the horses were harnessed and ready to go that I found time to run indoors. Words failed me; all I could do was embrace the young and the old folk.

The bridegroom came for his bride with a carriage drawn by four raven-black, spirited horses. It was driven by a broad-shouldered coachman with a moustache and a high cap. The lords were saying goodbye; there were sounds of talking and weeping, but the coachman, who was trained to meet aristocratic requirements, sat on the driver's seat as if made of steel — neither turning round nor looking at anyone.

The nobles took their seats inside the coach and I occupied the place provided at the back for the postilion.

"Godspeed, Nazar!" shouted the lord happily.

It was a calm, bright, and bitterly cold morning when we left. The willows were all bedecked in hoarfrost, their hoary branches glistening in the sunlight. The girls poured out onto the street, bowing me farewell. The horses kept up a lively pace and everything went past me in a flash. Soon the village faded from sight. Ahead was nothing but the road and still more road — the desolate, lonely path, the path into the unknown.

## XIX

We reached the city in next to no time and plunged in as if into the middle of an ants' nest. People going about on foot and in conveyances, selling and buying: common people, nobles, Muscovites, and market women. Wherever one looked there were Jews in their long coats chaffering like May bugs.

The lord ordered the horses to be stopped at a wayhouse and led his young bride into it. He gave the coachman money to buy some lunch, but never a thought of me.

I sat alone and looked about me. Everything was strange, unlike what I was used to! Then someone shouted: "Hey, Beautiful!" I started. It was the coachman calling to me. I gave him a close look: Heavens! How swarthy he was, like a raven! He smiled and his smile revealed a mouthful of teeth as white as sour cream.

"Whom do you want?" I asked him.

"Why, you! . . . What is your name? . . . Ustyna, is it not? . . . Come with me, come with Nazar, to lunch."

I'm very cold, but how can I go? I thought. The young mistress might kick up a row!

"No, thank you," I replied, "I am not hungry."

The coachman smiled: "As you wish, my girl!" and he took off.

## XX

I sat there a good hour, until the lords came out. Just then the lord glanced at me.

"Are you still sitting here, Ustyna?" he asked, "did you have lunch?"

"Hey you," he shouted to the bearded innkeeper who, on the porch, was loudly counting money into his palm, "give the girl something to eat!"

The innkeeper put the money into his pocket and went off to get me something.

"What is this, what is this?" exclaimed the lady. "Are we to wait for her?"

"What else, dearest heart!" said the lord. "She is very hungry and cold!"

"What of it? They are used to it. We will be late on the road and I'll be afraid."

"Run, girl, be quick," the lord told me. "Hurry, so that we won't have to wait for you."

The lady went red to the roots of her hair with annoyance.

"It is time to go!"

"But she is hungry, sweetheart. Look, how cold she is!"

"I am cold, I am the one that is cold — I!" she said, with such emphasis on the T.

"Take your seat!" she shouted at me and jumped into the coach herself.

The lord was bewildered. He did not know what to think or say — he just stood there stock-still.

"Well, what is it now?" asked the lady. "Hurry up!"

The poor fellow got in beside her.

"So you are not ordering any lunch for the girl?" the bearded innkeeper asked.

The newlyweds talked together for quite some time, but for a still longer time after they were silent.

## XXI

By dusk, we arrived at the estate. Here and there were houses lighted up. We proceeded along the street and stopped before our future home. People were standing on the porch with lighted candles and bread. They were bowing and welcoming the young couple, according to tradition.

"Thank you, thank you," said the lord taking the bread in his hands. "I have brought you a young mistress. Is she to your liking?"

He was laughing happily: for who would not find such a good looker to his liking!

The lady flared up and darted a glance at him. Her eyes threw off sparks, and her face changed color. The people came still closer — to greet her in their own way. She, however, merely grabbed a candle from one of them and bolted off indoors! The people drew back from the door in astonishment without having had a chance to answer the lord's question.

Ill at ease and saddened, the lord went with bowed head into the house.

I, too, went in and looked around. The rooms were not big, but they were beautiful and clean. The chairs, the tables — everything was new and shiny. I heard the couple talking. I listened closely — my mistress was sobbing, and the lord was pleading with and consoling her!

"Don't cry, don't cry, my life, my dearest heart! If I knew it would offend you, I never would have said it!"

"You have probably got all the peasant folk used to taking you for an equal! How nice! The way they inspected me, smiled at me — almost took to embracing me! Oh, how miserable I am! How could they!" she finally shouted, bursting into tears.

"Sweetheart! They are good, simple folk. ..."

"I do not wish to know, hear, or see anything about it!" the lady said in a rush of words. "Do you wish to drive me mad or what?" she shouted through her tears.

"Come, come dearest! You might make yourself ill. . . . Oh, don't cry, don't cry! From now on I'll do everything the Way you want it. Forgive me just this once."

"You do not love me, you have no sympathy for me. . . . God forgive you!"

"It is a sin to talk so! How can you say I don't love you? . . . You yourself know that it is not true!"

Then I heard them kissing.

"Look," said the lady, "if you don't do things my way, I'll die!"

"I will do them your way, I will, dearest heart!"

## XXII

I went from room to room; nobody was there. "Have they all run away and left us?" I thought. I went out on the porch — it was a moonlit, starry night. I was standing there looking about me, when — like the plucking of a string behind me, I heard: "How do you do, little girl?" I shuddered. Standing there before me was a tall, handsome young lad looking smilingly at me. I was abashed and frightened. I stood there dumbstruck, as if made of stone, just staring into his eyes.

The young lad spoke again: "You are standing here all alone, perhaps you don't know where to go?"

"If I did not know, I would ask you," I replied, regaining my composure. "Goodbye!"

And I quickly stepped indoors.

"Goodbye, sweetheart!" he called after me.

## XXIII

The lords were still walking about the rooms. The young bride was peering into every corner to find out what was what. Behind the icons she saw some herbs:

"What is this?"

"The old peasant woman, my housekeeper, has adorned the icons."

"What? So, she is the one who says how things are to be around here! Throw those herbs out, dearest! This is utterly peasant-like."

"All right, dearest," he said.

And she kissed him: "My darling!" she said.

They walked and talked for a long time.

"Why is there no one about," said he, "where has the old woman, my housekeeper, gone?"

"You see," jabbered the lady, "you see how you have spoiled them! She felt like going and she went."

"She can't be far away! I'll call her."

And he began to call out just like an obedient little boy:

"Old woman! Where are you, old woman!"

"She will be here in next to no time, dearest," he said consolingly.

"And where is she?"

"Probably she is doing something, my love. She is the only servant I have here."

"And where is my Ustyna? Has she also learned already to run off without asking permission? Ustyna! Ustyna!"

I presented myself instantly.

"Where were you?"

"Here, in the next room."

Once again I placed myself behind the door, listening and looking about me.

#### XXIV

An old woman entered — so old that she was almost bent double. She was all shrunken and wrinkled — shining dark eyes were the only things that were still alive about her. She came in with a light step, bowed to the lady and asked the lord:

"What is it that you want, sir?"

The lady bridled at the old one's being so forward with the master.

"Where have you been, woman? I had to call for you," said the lord.

"I was at the stove, sir, helping Hanna, so that your supper would be a good one."

The lord saw that his wife was upset, but still, he did not have the heart to scold the old granny. He blinked, coughed, and paced to and fro, not knowing what to do. The lady kept turning away from him. The old granny stood in the doorway.

"Well, is the supper ready?" asked the lord, this time with a rather frowning look.

"It is, sir," answered the old one, quietly and composedly.

"Sweetheart," said the lord (turning to the lady), "perhaps we should have supper?"

"I do not want any supper!" retorted the lady, running out and slamming the door after her.

"Then I won't have any supper either, granny," the lord said sadly.

"I'll go, then. Goodnight to you sir!"

"Off you go, but watch out, woman, that you don't have me running after you!" he said, raising his voice just for a moment. He composed himself immediately, however, when in her simple way the old one replied: "Very well, sir!"

She bowed and went out.

#### XXV

The lord paced for a while about the room. Through the wall he heard the lady weeping. "My God!" he said to himself in a quiet, sad tone of voice. "Why is she weeping?"

He could not bear it. He went to her and consoled her with his kisses. It was a good hour before she quietened down.

"I still don't want any supper," she said, "I can't even stand the sight of your servants! They behave towards you as if you were a brother of theirs or some other relative!"

## XXVI

I sat alone in the maidservants' quarters. All around it was so sad and so quiet. This was how my life was going to be! Just delightful in every way! "Now," I thought, "the girls will have a jolly time without my mistress to bother them! It is cheerful and pleasant for them, all together. But, for me — a place among strangers, without knowing a single living soul!"

Suddenly someone knocked on the window! Knock! Knock! I blushed and got flustered, half guessing who it was. I kept sitting as if I had heard nothing.

There was a pause and then the knocking began again. I leapt up and shut all the doors, so that the lords would not hear.

"Who is there?" I asked.

"It is I, turtle-dove!"

"Perhaps," I said, "you have made a mistake. You are at the wrong window!"

"It looks like it, doesn't it? Why are there eyes in one's head when one cannot see what is what!"

"Why come to this window! Imagine starting a conversation through double glass! Go away! The lords might hear us!"

And I moved back from the window.

He persisted:

"Girl! Girl!"

"What are you doing prowling around the window, Prokip?" someone said softly. "Supper was ready long ago and none of you was there!"

## XXVII

Someone stepped into the hall. I opened the door; it was the old granny.

"How are you, my girl?" she said to me. "Supper is ready, my dear!"

"Thank you, granny."

"Let us go, then."

"I must ask the lady first."

"Ask what, dearest? It is supper-time!"

"If she will permit me to go."

Granny was silent for a moment, then she said:

"Go then, my child, and I'll wait for you here."

The lord and lady were sitting together, happy in their love, talking.

"Why are you barging in like this?" said the lady when I entered.

"Permission requested to go to supper, my lady," I said.

"Go, then, and have your supper!"

## XXVIII

I went with granny across the courtyard into the servants' cottage.

"I have brought you a girl," said she, showing me in.

There at the table sat the dark-bowed Nazar with his young, pretty wife. The flames which shot up like a foundry from the stove illumined the white walls, and the icons-corner, adorned with embroidered towels, dried flowers and herbs. On the shelves green, red, and yellow bowls, platters and saucers glowed like precious stones. Everything was so gay, clean, and bright in that cottage: the distaff of soft flax on the loom, the black sheepskin coat on the hook, and the basket-work cradle with the child in it.

"Please come in and join us," they said, and greeted me.

"Such a beauty could sit beside me, perhaps?" said Nazar.

"Are you the pick of the bunch, uncle, that I should?" I asked. I looked round and noticed that the lad who came to my window was there already. He was sitting in a corner, watching me. I became hot all over.

"To be sure, I am!" said Nazar. "Just give me a good look over. Ain't I handsome! Ain't I worth looking at!"

"Perhaps in the dark!" said his young wife jocularly.

What a charming woman Nazar's wife was! They called her Katria. She had a fair complexion, a slightly turned-up nose, clear, bright blue eyes, and was round and fresh like an apple. She was wearing a red ochipok and a green baize skirt. Risible and slightly haughty, she was brimming over with energy! She talked, flitted about and rocked the baby in his cradle — all at the same time. Her embroidered sleeves and the rings on her fingers were to be seen at the stove the one minute, at the table the next.

"Well, well," Nazar said to her, "if it were not for these here dumplings, I would take you up on that!"

At that precise moment Katria had set a bowl of dumplings before him.

"There is no sin in having a good supper if you haven't had your lunch!" said Nazar, giving me a wink.

## XXIX

Even though Katria talked and joked, she seemed somewhat sad and ill at ease. Granny was sitting quietly at the table pondering her thoughts. Nazar was the only one joking and laughing, his teeth flashing in the wick light; and his teeth, I tell you, were as white as sour cream! As for that young lad, well — I did not look at him at all.

"Well, dearie," granny asked, "have you been long in service with the young mistress?"

"How pretty she is!" Katria butted in.

"A lot of good that will do, when she gives looks that can turn milk sour!" exclaimed Nazar.

"Enough of that, Nazar, enough!" said granny and sighed heavily.

"Our lord is so good-natured," said Katria. "He has probably never harmed anyone in his life."

"So, then, let's hope that God gave him a wife like that too!" granny said.

"How is it going to be for us now?" Katria said sadly. She sighed and reflected. "How is it going to be?" she repeated softly, looking at me as if asking with her eyes.

I said nothing.

"It will," said granny, "be the way the Lord wills, dearest."

"What will be, will be — we'll get through it all!" bellowed Nazar. "For the present we have the dumplings to attend to. And you, Prokip, why don't you join the company, or has the young mistress caught your eye? Or this beauty here perhaps?"

And he winked at me.

"God forbid my even dreaming about that mistress!" replied the lad as he sat down in front of me. "How could one possibly be born so unfriendly!"

Then Nazar's wife turned to me and said:

"My dearest girl! Tell us the honest to goodness truth."

She paused. Everyone looked at me attentively. And the lad never once took his eyes off me. If he hadn't been there, everything would have been fine, but with him around I felt so very self-conscious; I blushed and came pretty close to crying.

"Tell us, girl! Is our young mistress bad?" asked Katrya.

"She is no good!" I replied.

"Lord have mercy on us! I felt it in my heart from the beginning! My dearest child!" she cried rushing to the cradle and bending over the baby. "Could I have foreseen that things would work out like this for me, when I, a free person, was marrying a serf! She has almost devoured us with her eyes already!"

And she began weeping so bitterly — the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"The devil isn't as black as he's painted!" said Nazar. "Why get all keyed up? One should, for a start, take stock of the situation."

But Katrya was crying and sobbing as if the young mistress with her evil eyes had already devoured her child.

"Come, my darling!" granny begged Katrya. "Why should we despair? Don't we have the merciful Lord watching over us?"

The lad kept silent; only, wherever I looked, I would meet his eyes staring at me.

### XXX

Having had supper and crossed myself, I was running back to the big house when I heard behind me:

"Goodnight, girl!"

"Goodnight to you!" I answered and dived into the hallway. I entered the maidservants' quarters — my heart was all a-flutter! I kept thinking.

. . . How he stared at me! And the thought of my lady also came back to me: here she was, barely over the threshold, and already she had cast a gloom over everyone. And why does that lad bother me? How handsome he is! The moon shone full before me . . . reminding me of the song:

Oh lovely moon above Shine only for my love!

The words of the song really touched me. I could not be sure within myself whether I truly wished that lad to appear again at my window or not.

## XXXI

A day, a week, a month, a half-year passed, like a river rushing by. It seemed quiet and peaceful in the little village with its blossoms and its greenery. If only one could see what was really going on behind the scenes! People woke up crying and went to bed crying and cursing their lot. The young mistress had twisted everything to her own liking. She handed out the hard work and a tough time to everybody, forcing everyone to put a shoulder to the wheel — the handicapped and little children not excluded. The children tidied her orchard, and tended her turkeys; crippled folk sat in the orchard scaring off the sparrows and other birds. The mistress always found reason to pour words of scorn on everything, so that it made you feel that the work you were doing was slave labor. She saw all that went on as if she had had a hundred eyes. She glided back and forth about the village like a lizard, and God only knows what it was in her: she had only to look at you and it would be as if she was crushing your heart in her hand.

The neighboring landowners, however, had nothing but praise for her: "There is a mistress for you! She is the wise and thrifty one! Even though she is so young, we all have a lot to learn from her!"

At first the people pinned their hopes on the young lord, but after a while they sort of gave up hoping. He had a good heart and was kind, but he was absolutely useless. He tried at first to reason with his wife, but she was not the kind to be reasoned with. Latterly he was even afraid to mention anything and pretended neither to see nor to hear a thing. He had neither the spirit nor the energy. It is said that a good master does not beat or scold his people, but he cares nothing about them either. When the lady would begin to swoon and moan as if in pain, or shout, he would kiss her hands and feet, weeping and cursing folk himself: "Destroying the one who is most dear to me! How could you! How dare you!"

"Don't expect anything from him," said Nazar. "I saw the sort of spineless character he was, when he gave Ustyna the money for her dinner. If I had a wife like that I would push her into an ant-hill and let her take what's coming to her!"

At that, he roared with laughter, and the sound of it echoed through all the cottage. That is the kind of man that Nazar was: everything the world over was amusing to him. He gave you the impression that, even if he had been roasted at the stake, he would still have cracked a joke.

Katrya shed many a tear! Heaven knows where all those tears were coming from. She would take her child in her arms and cry and cry! Then she would begin lamenting loudly.

Prokip, too, was very worried. He was always deep in thought and would not even joke with me.

"How very sad you are!" I told him on one occasion (this was in the evening). "Why are you so downcast?"

He took me by the hand — embraced and kissed me. By the time I got over it, he was gone.

## XXXII

All the village folk were washed out and weary, only the granny was always her usual self — hale and hearty. No matter how much the lady scolded or shouted at her, she got neither

frightened nor disturbed. She moved about quietly, talking calmly and looking steadily at everything with her bright eyes. Without giving it a thought, you would cling to her, weeping, as a child clings to its mother.

"Don't cry, my child, don't cry!" she would say in a soft, soothing voice. "Let the evil folk do the crying. Don't lose courage, see it through! Surely you can put up with it for a while?"

O Lord! What a miserable, sad life we lived! Neither the sound of laughter, nor the chatter of voices could be heard. Not a living soul from the outside world would visit us — unless on business — and even when we had such a visitor, he would glance about so fearfully, and be in such haste, as if desperate to escape from a mad animal in the wilderness.

Once for some reason I was late with my supper and was on my way back at a quick run. "Why didn't Prokip at least come to supper?" I was thinking. Just at that moment, there he was right in front of me, barring the way!

"Ustyna, dearest, tell me the truth: do you love me?"

I would have run from him, but for some reason I stood there rooted to the spot, hot all over.

He grasped me by the hand, embraced me and repeated his question over and over again:

"Do you love me?"

He was so strange!

We sat down. We talked and caressed each other for a while — and all our misery was forgotten. My heart was full of joy and the world was a delight to me at that moment. Everything around me was wonderful and lovely! Even the lady noticed: "What is the matter with you?" she said. "Why are you looking so flushed, as if somebody had slapped you? Or perhaps you have stolen something!"

### XXXIII

Heavens! How I would wait for darkness to come down! The lady would let me off to go to supper — Prokip would be waiting for me. He would step in front of me and we would stand for a while talking and sharing our sorrows — in the daytime, even if we chanced to meet, we could only exchange glances and go about our business without saying a word.

"A fine time, indeed, for you to fall in love!" Katrya would say.

"You are the smart one and no mistake, my darling Katrya," joked Nazar. "But I bet you would not miss the chance of falling in love with me a second time! I bet you would lick your lips over that! Wouldn't you?"

"What are you getting at? Love! Who is talking about love? That's the furthest thing from my thoughts now! My heart breaks at the thought of what the future holds for these two."

"Why do you pester and frighten the girl so?" granny would butt in. "She has fallen in love, let her love. Such is her fate."

### XXXIV

The lady was becoming more angry and ferocious. If I were the least bit late or detained: "Where were you?" she would ask challengingly, and here I was right in the soup again.

At first that really got me down, but I got used to it all as time went on. As they say: "One may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb!" While she was going on at me, I would give way to tears, but it wasn't long until I wiped my tears away and was happy and in a merry mood again! Everything about me was just right — my hair would be nicely braided and my blouse spotless — I kept my troubles to myself. What help could anyone give me anyway? It would only remind them of their own misfortunes! Prokip, however, went about like a dark night and at such times he neither ate nor drank, nor talked to anyone.

God have mercy! I thought — here am I with my misfortunes and other people with theirs as well. What was one to do about it? Where was one to begin? Katrya's child became ill, and yet she had to cook lunch and supper for the landlords, dig and plant the garden with the lady storming at her all the time as well: "You don't do a hand's turn, you slacker! You don't earn the bread you eat! I will show you how to work!"

Katrya would be up all night tending her child. By daybreak she had to be off to work. Granny would then look after the child. She would console Katrya, would take the child to her or come by herself and say: "The little one is quiet!" or "The baby is asleep!" In this way she was a constant help, like a guardian angel sent from heaven.

"Why do you keep on so, Katrya, without rest?" I asked her.

"I shall go on working as long as I have strength," she said (her eyes sunken with fever). "Perhaps I shall manage some day to please her ladyship, and earn her mercy!"

But she neither pleased her ladyship nor earned her mercy. She worked without a wink of sleep until one day sleep overcame her as she sat beside the cradle. She woke up with a start, but the child was already near to death. The unfortunate woman had time only to look at the infant, pick it up, and clasp it to her breast, when it expired.

Katrya was heartbroken, but at the same time she was happy for the child:

"My child has gone to be God's angel, and is set free from sorrow!" And at that she wailed: "Who will stretch out those little hands to me? Who in this world will cheer me up? My child! My daughter, you have left me!"

Nazar, pretending that the child's death had not upset him all that much, comforted his wife, trying to calm her down by reminding her that she was still young. But one could see how strained his voice had become, how sorrowful he was within himself.

After that blow fell, Katrya was prostrate with grief. Not only could she no longer work, she could hardly even walk. The lady, nevertheless, never let up on her:

"Why are you slacking? I will let you have it! I will show you!"

"I am no longer afraid of you!" replied Katrya. "You may eat me alive now, if you wish!"

The lady paid her back for that!

"Prokip," I said, "what is going to happen to us now?"

"Ustyna, dearest heart! You have my hands tied!"

### XXXV

The lady sent Katrya from the house into the fields, in spite of the fact that her husband was the coachman.

The lord gave her a ruble on the sly so that the mistress would not see, but Katrya refused to take it; he put it on her shoulder, but she brushed it off as if it had been a loathsome frog. The ruble fell on the lawn where it lay till it grew black — no one touched it. Finally, while taking a leisurely stroll in the courtyard, the lady caught sight of it and picked it up.

"You are probably the one flashing the money about?" she said to the Lord. "O, my God! What next!"

The lord went the color of beetroot, but made no reply.

Katrya had no desire to go on living. Something came over her after the shock she had experienced. She ran about the woods and marshes looking for her child and then one day the poor soul was drowned.

The lord became very concerned, but the lady paid no heed:

"Why are you worrying when there is nothing to worry about? Didn't you notice that for a long time she was crazy? Her eyes had a rather frightening look and what she said never made sense.

"That's true," said the lord, taking comfort from her words. "When you come to think of it, she did behave like one demented!"

So they made her out to be demented! What an inspired thought! And with that they put their minds at ease.

### XXXVI

They hired a Muscovite of some sort from the city to be their cook. How queer he was! When his cooking chores were over, and he had eaten his fill, he would lie on a bench and would whistle on and on; then, all of a sudden, he would burst loudly into song! It resembled the tinkling of a bell or, more exactly, the crowing of a rooster. He was indifferent to our miseries; he would only ask: "Were you beaten today?" and would add, "It can't be otherwise! That is service for you!"

A change came over Nazar. He sort of drooped, although he kept on joking: "I wish someone were in service to me just for one day; I would be grateful for it all my life!"

The lady praised the cook for being so good and for showing so much respect to her! He would stand before her at attention, straight as an arrow, with his hands at his sides, his eyes fastened upon her: "I was hunting the spotted piglet; the spotted piglet escaped into the weeds, then I went after the black piglet. I caught the black piglet; I scalded the black piglet; I roasted the black piglet." So he would mumble it all, blinking stupidly as he waited to hear what the lady would answer.

"Good! Good! Everything is just fine! Only don't slacken in your work like the rest of that pack of wolves," the lady would reply.

"I will never dare do that, your highness!"

He would bow low to her, clicking his heels right and left, and go out to the bench to whistle again.

"When will you ever stop that whistling!" I told him on one occasion. "All around you is nothing but grief and misery, and what do you do?"

"Don't grieve! Don't grieve, girl! This is what being on service means; what else? See, how many teeth I have left. I lost these on service! We once had a captain. . . . Ouch!" he shouted, and that was all.

"And what do you think? What do you figure out living in the world is? What is service about? How do you reckon one advances? They beat you up, they tear you apart, they deceive and discredit you, and you must put up with it all without even as much as batting an eyelid! All I can say is — God forbid!"

Having said that, he resumed his whistling. Prokip was so annoyed, as he listened to his philosophizing, that he hurled his pipe to the ground in anger.

"Even oxen in the yoke bellow, so why should a Christian soul suffer all kinds of reproach and injustice and not retaliate!" stormed Prokip, so that the Muscovite even stopped his whistling and looked at him as a goat would look at a new gate. "I am not made that way," said Prokip, "it is do or die with me!"

"And I am all for showing a clean pair of heels!" guffawed Nazar. "Run away! That's the way of it with me."

"They will catch you!" shouted the Muscovite, jumping up. "They will catch you, and you are done for!"

Whatever inner feelings any of us may have had at the time — we all laughed.

"It is not every captain who is a fast runner," said Nazar. "Some may trip up. You had better tell us where to run to? It is an out of the frying pan right into the fire situation. And he burst out singing like the clanging of a bell:

"Everywhere there are dukes, Everywhere there are lords ..."

### XXXVII

The old dowager, our lady's grandmother, died in a year. How she did not want to die! She prayed, read holy scriptures, and attended litanies all the time; candles were kept burning continually before the icons. Once one of the girls carelessly allowed a candle to get out — she ordered the girl to be whipped: "You are a sinner," she said, "and you wanted to spoil my chances of salvation too!"

### XXXVIII

Our mistress grieved and wept bitterly over the dowager.

"Now I am left all alone in the world! They will fleece me now like a linden tree of everything I have! I cannot keep an eye on the whole property by myself. As for you," she said to the lord, "what can I expect from you? You will never add to our property, you will likely scatter what we do have to the four winds! You do not seem to realize that we are soon to have a child. For the child that is coming, then, if not for me, my friend, take a tumble to yourself! Be the master, take charge of things and, most important of all, don't spoil the servants."

"God preserve you, dearest, what is this now! There you go again, getting upset about things! I will see that everything is attended to the way you want it!"

This is how he would reassure her.

On one occasion, wanting to cheer her up, he said:

"Come, dearest, give your mind a rest. Just listen to what I have to say. I already have a godfather picked out for us."

"Whom did you ask?" broke in the lady.

"A friend of mine. A charming good fellow."

"My God! I guessed who it would be right off! He has invited some poor wretch! ... I won't have it! I won't! I do not want to hear anything about it! It will not be!"

And she burst into bitter tears.

"Sweetheart, don't cry!" pleaded the lord, "sweetheart you will make yourself ill! ... We won't have that godfather, then. I will make my excuses to him and that will be the end of it. Just tell me whom you want and I will ask him."

"The colonel is the one to ask — that's who!"

"The colonel? All right, then. The colonel let it be! I will go to him tomorrow. Forgive me, dearest heart, for making you sad!"

"And so you do! You do make me sad, you never give me sympathy, you are always grieving me!"

"My dearest," the lord said quietly, "give me also a little sympathy. You are always snapping, angry, quarreling, and I was looking forward to. . ."

And, at that, he began to weep bitterly!

"Why are you crying, what's wrong?" she burst out.

She tried to take hold of his hands, but he covered his face with them and kept on sobbing bitterly! With her kisses and embraces she got him finally quietened down.

"Tell me," she said afterwards, "why you were crying? Please do tell me!"

"I do not know myself, my love," replied the lord, making an effort to smile. "I cannot tell the reason why ... I do not feel too well. Don't think any more about it, just laugh at me for crying like a baby." And he heaved a sigh.

"Perhaps you think that I do not love you any more?" said the lady.

"No, I know you love me."

"I love you, how much I love you! But we cannot stay together all the time. We have our responsibilities to attend to, my dearest!"

And she kissed him.

In the morning he left to ask the colonel to stand as godfather.

### XXXIX

A son was born to them. What a crowd of guests arrived for the baptismal celebration! A magnificent dinner was arranged. The colonel-godfather rolled through the gates in a carriage drawn by gray horses, with a jingling and jangling of bells. He was a stout gentleman with a round red face, and his shoulders thrust back. He was continually curling his moustache with his right hand, while resting his left hand on his sword.

I was happy that I was a little freer than usual. I ran out to Prokip and stood talking with him

---

near the porch. Just then the lord came on the scene looking as happy as he was when he was courting the mistress.

"Why are you two standing here? What are you talking about?" He was laughing.

And Prokip burst out:

"My lord, give me permission to marry this girl!"

"That's all right with me; take her, Prokip! I am not standing in your way. Get married and live happily!"

"What about the mistress?" said Prokip.

The lord sighed, reflected briefly, and said:

"Come with me! Take her by the hand, Prokip!"

He went into the house and Prokip, squeezing my hand, led me in after him.

"Dearest heart," said the lord, "I have brought you the bride and groom! Are they to your liking?"

The room was full of noble guests! Among them the colonel was strutting about like a prize turkey.

Our mistress occupied a chair. She gave us a quick glance and turned her head away. The smile faded from her face; she gave the lord an angry look and asked:

"What is the meaning of this?"

Prokip bowed, beseechingly.

"I have already given them my consent," the lord said, "give yours as well, my love. The Lord blessed us with happiness; let them be happy too!"

The lady bit her lip and still said nothing. At that moment the colonel trumpeted:

"Pair them up, pair them up, damn good-looking they are, I would say! We have to get them hitched, dear relative of mine! Do you want to get married, girl?" he asked me, making an effort to give me a wink and closing his eyes instead: it was too big an effort for him — he had had too much to drink.

All the lords joined in with him:

"Marry them off, marry them off! You heard what the colonel, your godfather, said: they make a good pair."

So the lady finally said:

"Very well, let them!"

When her words reached us, we were out of the room like a shot. We got married right away, for fear the lady might come between us.

.When the party was over she vented her anger on the lord:

"You have deceived me," she stormed. "I cannot forgive you for the way you have pulled the wool over my eyes!"

"And as for you," she shouted at me, "you will get what is coming to you!"

"So be it!" I thought. "We are married anyway!"

It made me very happy that I could now talk to and look at Prokip openly, because he was mine!

I remained in the lady's service as previously. She was worse than ever, keeping my nose to the grindstone, quizzing me continually: "Well, how are you finding married life? Are things any better for you?"

If my husband had not talked to, and comforted me, life would have been unbearable. When I was with him all was merry and bright; all my troubles were forgotten. He, however, got more and more morose. Seeing him like that made my heart ache.

"Don't you love me any more, Prokip?"

He would put his arm about me and look into my eyes so lovingly that I felt as if I were growing wings.

"But why are you so sad, Prokip? We are together now for life."

"O my dear heart! It was hard without you, and with you it is even harder.... Not a moment passes without trouble and humiliation for you here ... and I do not have the power to defend you. ... It is hard to live so, Ustyna!"

"We will overcome our troubles somehow. Two, in my opinion, will do better than one!"

"Perhaps you are right, dearest!"

And he would smile and caress me.

My heart rejoiced whenever I was able to cheer him up and talk him out of it!

## XLI

So we lived — in poverty and anxiety till autumn. Then something happened.

One day we were picking apples. My husband was shaking them off, and from time to time he glanced at me playfully through the branches, Granny soon got tired and sat down to rest.

"Well, the beautiful summer is gone," she said. "The sun still shines but gives no warmth."

So saying she looked about her.

"Ustyna, dearest! Could those be children peeping through the foliage?" she asked me.

I looked, and indeed there was a group of children gathered near the fence.

"What is it, children? granny asked. "Why are you here, my little dears?"

The little ones said nothing. Their eyes were full of the baskets of apples.

"Come a little closer, you boys. I will give you each a little apple!" granny told them.

The children streamed into the orchard. They surrounded granny, like sparrows round an ashberry tree and she kept handing out apples to each of them. A lot of noise and chatter got up, as one would usually expect from children. All of a sudden the lady's shrill voice was heard:

"What is this?"

The children became frightened. Some were crying, some took to their heels; only the drumming of their feet told that they had been there. My heart began to pound.

Granny calmly explained the situation to the lady.

"I gave each of the children an apple," she said.

"You did, did you? You dared to do that!" shrieked the lady (she was shaking). "You country bumpkin, stealing my property like that! Thief that you are!"

"Me — a thief!?" said granny. She turned as white as a kerchief, and her eyes glistened with tears.

"You won't steal any more!" shouted the lady. "I have been watching you for a long time and now you are caught red-handed. . . . Giving away the master's apples!"

"I have never stolen in my whole life, mistress," granny replied. She was calm now, except for a tremble in her voice. "The master never forbade it; he often gave apples to the children himself. God has provided enough of them for everyone. See, surely there are plenty left for you!"

"Shut up!" shrieked the lady with a threatening gesture.

The branches creaked and my husband stuck his head out from among the green leaves. How stern was his look! My eyes pleaded with him.

"Thief! Thief!" the lady went on shouting. She thrust her nails into granny's shoulder, pushing and shoving her about.

"There's no truth in what you say, lady! I am not a thief! I have lived uprightly all my life!"

"So, you dare to argue with me?"

At that, as if with an axe, she struck the old one across the face.

Granny reeled, and I rushed to her. The lady sprang at me; and my husband sprang at the lady.

"Thank you, my child," granny said to me. "Don't worry about me, and don't anger the lady."

By this time the lady had me by the hair.

"That will do, lady! Enough of it!" stormed my husband, grasping her by the hands. "You have gone far enough! Stop!"

The lady was furious and utterly astonished. She kept shouting:

"What is this? What is the meaning of it? Eh? What?"

When she had collected her senses a little, she sprang again at Pro kip. He, however, kept on as before:

"No. Enough of it!"

She then began to scream. A crowd collected and stared. The lord came running up.

"What is this?" he asked.

My husband then let go of the lady's hands.

"There are your fine folk for you!" said the lady, hardly able to speak. "Thank you! Why do you not say something!" she yelled still more loudly. "They almost broke my arms and you have nothing to say!"

"What happened?" he asked, looking around in bewilderment.

Then the lady began: the old one had robbed her; everyone there was after her. What a story she made of it! She sobbed and shouted and cursed so much that the lord got mad as well.

"Cutthroat! Murderer!" he stormed at my husband.

"Keep your distance, master, don't come any closer," my husband responded sullenly.

"Aha, so this place now cannot hold you," said the lord. "Just you wait; you can indulge your rioting to your heart's content when I put you to the soldiering!"

The lady shrieked:

"To the soldiering with him! Off with him to the soldiering! It is the right time too — they are recruiting in the city. Pack him off at once!"

"Take him!" shouted the lord to the people. "Tie his hands!"

---

Prokip did not resist, he held out his hands and even smiled. Just then Nazar called to me: "What are you afraid of? Why are you crying? It won't be any worse than here! Whether it will be any better — I do not know."

## XLII

They led Prokip into the house, and a guard was posted at the door. Out in front the horses were being harnessed to the lord's carriage and the wagon was getting ready for Prokip.

"Ustyna, sit beside me!" said my husband after reflecting for a while.

"What have you done, my love? What have you done?" I said to him.

"What have I done? You will be free, that's what! You will be free, Ustyna!"

"Freedom! What is freedom without you?" I said and sorrow overcame me.

"Freedom!" he shouted. "Yes, freedom! With freedom any hardship can be endured! In freedom I can move mountains! But in bondage even the bright moments for serfs are overcast by misery!"

At that instant the rattling of the wagon could be heard. They led Prokip out, and, just as I was, I jumped into the wagon with him. Granny gave both of us her blessing: "May the Mother of God protect you, my children!" and tears flowed quietly from her gentle eyes.

They hurried us off. It was lucky for me that the lady had not yet come completely to her senses, so she did not notice me. If she had not been so busy giving orders to the master she would not have let me go!

We sat in silence, holding hands. I did not cry or grieve, but my heart thudded and palpitated.

Now we were approaching the city. The lord in his carriage overtook us and pulled ahead. We entered the city, quickly passing from street to street, and stopped near a tall building.

Prokip let go of my hand:

"Don't worry, Ustyna."

They took him to the recruiting depot. For me, as I waited on the porch, it was like being in a graveyard.

"Don't let it get you down," said Nazar. "One sorrow gives way to another, and there are always plenty more to come. ... So don't worry!"

But he himself had begun to give up the struggle and gray was already showing in his hair. He was cheering me up, but it was evident that nobody would be able to cheer him up any more.

At that moment my husband was led out. Good Lord! My heart missed a beat; but for him it was like Easter Sunday. He was happy and elated.

## XLIII

I had one hour in town with Prokip. It passed as quickly as a flash of lightning, but I will never forget it as long as I live!

They handed him over right away for military training to a Muscovite — a tall man with dark eyes and bristling hair and moustache. He walked like a ramrod, spoke in a loud voice, and

carried himself very proudly.

We both bowed to him, but he said nothing and just stared at Prokip with a glum look on his face. Prokip gave him some money:

"Forgive me, sir, for there being so little; a serf cannot come by much."

The man coughed and spat.

"After me," he said.

"Let us go downtown, wife, let us have a good time!" Prokip said.

So off we went.

We were strolling along the street and avenues, enjoying ourselves, when Prokip asked:

"Well, Ustyna, do you feel you are a free soul now?"

And, smiling, he looked into my eyes.

Even though I was still uneasy, and my heart was heavy, I smiled back, as if I had something to be happy about.

I came upon a house that was for rent, but we had no money, and no means of getting any. We had nothing to sell. I had left the village without taking a stitch with me, and, even if I had taken what there was, it was not much — a few shirts, two skirts or so and a sheepskin jacket. The day I left I did not have time to think of this and later the mistress refused to return my things to me. I then had an idea: "I will get myself a job by the day!" So Prokip and I agreed on it and we went to the woman who was renting the house. We explained what our problem was, and asked if it would be all right with her if we paid for the house by the day.

"Fine," she said, "If you have the money, pay me by the day and, if you don't, I'll wait."

We then moved into the house.

#### XLIV

Our landlady was an elderly widow, friendly and kind-hearted. What a talker she was! She would go on and on, and always about her troubles. She told us how her kinsfolk were gone and she was left all alone in the world like a blade of grass in a field. She would sigh repeatedly and cry quite often, at times, even over what had befallen us. Occasionally when I would be sitting talking with my husband she would start lamenting tearfully that here we were — fine, young people, who should be enjoying life and its pleasures and were not. She wept and wailed. We begged her not to do that! But she would only stop when the Muscovite arrived and shouted: "The old dame is going sour again!"

She was very much afraid of him. His disposition was such that no one could talk to, or ask him anything.

"What a man!" the landlady would say. "How unfriendly and how ferocious! Heaven protect us! Has such a fellow ever had flesh and blood connections? Who can tell why he's like that?"

I got up every day at the crack of dawn and hurried to my work, returning late, but happily clutching in my hand the money I had earned.

My husband would meet me on the way home, would clasp my hand lovingly and warmly, and would quietly ask of me:

"Are you tired enough, Ustyna?"

## XLV

One evening we were all sitting about: the Muscovite on the bench holding his pipe, the landlady by a window and I with Prokip at some distance from them. We all sat in silence. Just then someone knocked at the door and shouted: "Greetings, all!"

Would you believe it — it was Nazar!

He entered and stood before us, his head almost touching the ceiling, his pipe clenched between his teeth, his curly hair flecked with gray.

"God bless the lady of the house and all the rest of you!"

"Thank you!" said she, "You are welcome!"

"Where have you come from, Nazar, so suddenly, as if out of the blue," asked Prokip.

"I come," he said, "from the journey that all good people want to take."

The Muscovite gave a twitch and looked at the door.

"Why are you twitching, sir Muscovite? We are all of the same faith, stop shamming."

The Muscovite continued to look at the windows and at the door.

"You don't say! Look how hard to hold he is! Listen you! Are you trying to catch the wind on the steppe? I see that you, too, are a steppe-dweller. So don't even try it — you don't stand a chance of catching it. You had better give me a light for my pipe. And how goes it with you folk here?" he asked us, changing the conversation. "Are the young city ladies expensive?" he asked, winking at me.

"And how is it back home?" I asked him.

"How is it, you ask! The same doom as ever — still the same two choices open to folk like us: whichever you choose — it's ruination beyond recall!"

"What a calamity! What a black hour!" the landlady sadly exclaimed.

The Muscovite twirled his moustache.

"And how is granny?" I asked.

"She is still alive. Granny can stand up to anything. She sends you her good wishes."

I asked what the mistress had to say about me.

"Ehe! The lord got it on account of both of you after you left. 'Because of your slackness/ the mistress told him, 'we have lost two laborers! Who was made a fool of?' And I tell you, the way he was standing there before her — he looked like a downright fool!"

Meantime, the landlady announced that supper was ready. Nazar drew a bottle of whiskey from inside his shirt and set it on the table.

"Let us drink a bumper," he said, "for our life is short! Here is health to those who have dark brows!"

"What sort of whiskey is this?" said the Muscovite. "One might as well drink water as this stuff!"

"Every man to his taste. Water, if one so prefers," replied Nazar.

"The whiskey seems all right," said the landlady.

"May the life of the man who sold it be like his whiskey!" snapped back the Muscovite, but, in between spitting and swearing, he kept on drinking it.

The landlady wondered at him, shaking her head, until at last, unable to contain herself, she

burst out:

"Why are you calling it down so?"

"Mind your own business, woman!" he shouted. "One drinks anything to please one's friends."

"Good health to you, then!"

"That just goes to show what good fellows you Muscovites are!" added Nazar.

Supper and conversation continued. The Muscovite kept drinking and drinking. He grew pale and slumped forward on to the table. He looked at me and my husband and said:

"See here, you young love birds! You won't have it long together. But, it's not all that bad! Don't worry. You lived for a while in clover — that should do you. Some people have less. People often know no such thing as happiness at all; one spends one's life in abject slavery constantly under the rod. Try that for a way of living! . . . No family, no home, no one to welcome you, or give you advice. . . ."

"Where are your kinsfolk, my good man?" asked the landlady. "Where do you hail from?"

"I have no family I have ever known of. My kinsfolk belonged to the people who, as you may have heard, perished in the plague."

"What about your mother?"

"As I said: I do not know! . . . Why ask such pointless questions!"

"I have no kinsfolk either," said the landlady, sobbing.

"Hark to her tale of woe!" shouted the Muscovite, "Some misfortune you have! . . . A mere spit! Would you like to know what real misfortune is? It is when no one thinks of you, and you have no one to think of. It is when you have nowhere to go, nowhere to stay. . . . You have nothing of your own and no one to call your own. . . . You said that I am a steppe-dweller," he shouted to Nazar. "Yes indeed, brother! I was taken from those steppes. For all I know they were perhaps glorious! . . . Give us more whiskey, woman! Let us drain our glasses to the very bottom — our young days are there!"

He laughed and drank, while the tears rolled down his cheeks. Finally he slid down on the bench and fell asleep.

"Well, safe home, all," said Nazar, "and goodbye to you, Prokip — my brother! Oh, I almost forgot. I brought a little bit of money for you: five rubles. Keep well!"

"Thank you, brother! I do not know when I will be able to pay you back."

"There is no hurry! It is not a hand-out from a lord, but from a friend. Don't let it worry you! I will earn some cash for myself: now I am free, for at least half a year; even with dogs they won't catch me!"

And he took his departure. That was the last that was seen of him.

## XLVI

O God! What a life we then had together! So lovely, so blessed by God, even though it was spent in poverty and worry. We could breathe, think, and look around us freely! What I earned was mine, and mine alone; I could sit and talk without fear of anyone; I could work or not, without being forced to do either. For the first time, in soul and in body, I felt I was alive.

In the spring it was rumored that the Muscovite troops were marching out.

"It could not be true," I consoled myself, but my heart felt immediately that it was true. And then the marching orders came.

Prokip tried to comfort me, to convince me that it was only temporary and, when he came back, we would both be free.

"Yes, yes!" I said, "yes, my dearest!"

But my heart ached, and the tears flowed.

The day for the march-out was already posted. We went to our native village to say goodbye. The lords were not home; just granny all by herself on the estate. Dear, dear granny! — I recognized her from a long way off, and recognizing her began to cry. It was only her soul that was still alive. I ran to her and embraced her as I might have my own mother.

"Why are you crying, my darling?" she asked quietly.

"You are actually staying on in this hell!"

"Yes, dearest! Here I was born, christened, and left an orphan . . . and here I'll die, my child."

"So you'll put up with it, till you die?"

"I shall indeed, my dearest."

She blessed us both and gave us what she could, as if we had been her own children. We said goodbye and took leave of her, turning to look back many times. There on the doorstep stood granny. Silence reigned around. Everything was so bright! A wind wafted from the fields; the cool air was blowing from the meadows; water was trickling somewhere; and the whole scene was overspread by the sun's golden radiance.

## XLVII

I saw my husband off as far as Kyiv, and remained there myself to work while he went with the army — somewhere far — to Lithuania.

"Don't wear yourself out with weeping, sweetheart!" he commanded me, "I'll come back ... I am looking forward to it, and you should do the same. Wait for me!"

I waited. What a long tour of duty it was for him! Seven years went by from the day he left me. Would I see him again? I had not been to my native village in all that time. I heard through certain people that everyone was alive there and that things had not changed. Granny was still alive and standing up to it, but there was not a scrap of news regarding Nazar. I worked away and earned my living. It was money earned by the sweat of one's brow. Just the same, from time to time I was happy in the thought that I could stop working whenever I liked. The thought gave me strength to carry on, and another year would pass by. "This sort of life," I would tell myself, "will not last forever!"

How could I even for a minute forget my husband? He was the one who freed me from the hell of slavery! May God forget me if I ever forget Prokip! He is a good man! Protect him, Mother of God! I am free! I talk, walk, and look around me, and whether there are lords in the world or not, is no concern of mine!