

Marko Vovchok
THE KOZAK GIRL
Tr. N. Pedan-Popil¹

I

Once there lived in our village a Kozak named Khmara. What a rich man he was! Such livestock he had! He had so many acres of land and all kinds of riches! The Lord did not give him many children: only one girl was born to him, like the one sun in the sky. They pampered her and raised her to be beautiful, smart, and sensible. Sixteen years had already passed for Olesya and matchmakers had begun to visit the house. The parents thanked them for the honor and paid them the customary attentions, but did not give away their daughter: "Let her enjoy herself as a girl a little longer. She will have something to remember her girlhood by. It is too early for her young head to be bothered with housekeeping responsibilities; let her enjoy herself yet."

What a girl she was! How many admirers she had! Wherever she went they would be buzzing around her like a swam of bees! She was gracious, beautiful, and kind; she would talk, smile, and joke with everyone; and, when she noticed anything out of place, she would immediately show her disapproval by a cold look and take her leave.

She lived with her parents, knowing neither misfortune nor grief. It is said that, when one is young, all that one thinks about is fun. But, no matter how merry and gay her life was, the time came for her to learn what sorrow is as well. To begin with, her mother's strength began to fail—she was by that time quite old; she ailed for two weeks or so, then died. After the mother, the father died from loneliness and from grieving for his devoted wife with whom he had spent all his days.

Olesya was left an orphan. She cried her eyes out, but had to make the most of it. The good people did not forget her: an old aunt would call to cheer her up, or the girls would come to chat, sometimes even to make her go out with them.

Autumn arrived. The matchmakers kept coming one after another to Olesya's house. But she simply expressed her thanks and for one reason or another refused them.

"Why are you not getting married, Olesya?" the old aunt would ask. "You have as many suitors, God be thanked, as a garden has flowers.

Why should you be so haughty? The young lads we have here are like eaglets! All of them energetic and in the springtime of life. Even an old heart rejoices at the sight of them, but I do not know what the world has come to when a young girl like you does not take a liking to any of them."

"Dearest aunt! Leave me to enjoy myself for a while longer as I am!" "But it is time, time, my child! Listen to the advice of an old woman. You are happy by yourself, but with a loving husband to keep you company, you will be happier still. And as regards housekeeping worries—do not be afraid of that! You will not be working for anyone but yourself. It is even nice to be troubled in that way. You are not a serf, thank God, your work will not be in vain."

"Not a serf! As if, were I a serf, the whole world would come to an end! Others live on in spite of being serfs."

"They live on, Olesya, but what a life they have!" "If the landlords are good, their people benefit thereby." "And what of it, if the landlords are good? What will the young landlords after them be

1. Marko Vovchok. *Ukrainian Folk Stories*. Trans. N. Pedan-Popil, Ed. H. B. Timothy. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983. Pp. 25–39.

like? You have to please even the good ones, and even in their case, all you earn by the sweat of your brow is three feet of ground for a grave! In the case of the bad ones ... Lord forbid that we should even hear tell of it! The very mention of it is enough! Take my advice, Olesya, and we will have a good time at the wedding! In no time then, the Lord will bless you with a family and I will be most content and happy to see the little ones around you humming like bees in a full-blown flower.

"I would still like to enjoy my girlhood, auntie!"

II

Then came the matchmakers from Ivan Zolotarenko. Olesya paid her respects to the honored guests and accepted the proposal of marriage.

This Ivan Zolotarenko was a serf. So handsome and sprightly was he that no one could have recognized him as one who had grown up in bitter serfdom. Everyone had now guessed for whom Olesya was waiting and why she had refused the others. The talk got up in the village, like the babbling of a brook: "How is it possible! Who ever heard of a free Kozak girl marrying a serf!"

The old aunt heard about it and slapped the sides of her skirt in astonishment.

"It would have been better had I not lived so long as to hear this! My child, Olesya! Come to your senses! If your father or mother were alive they would rather drown you in a deep well! Why, their very bones, from sheer dismay and sorrow, will tremble in the ground! What are you up to? You must have been bewitched!"

So she tried to talk some sense into her; she pleaded with her, and wept.

"No, my dear aunt," said Olesya, "it cannot be helped; I will marry Ivan!"

The old woman went to Petro Shostozub, but he was not at home; he had gone to the fair. What tough luck! Petro Shostozub was the most respected elder in the community.

She went to Andriy Honta—he, too, was not at home. Then she went to Mykhailo Didych—he was from home as well; they were all at the fair.

"Oh, woe is me for this unhappy hour! I shall hurry, then, to Opanas Bobryk, perhaps he is at home."

He was. He was lying in the orchard under a pear tree, puffing on his pipe. Seeing Olesya's aunt, he called out to her: "Good health to you! Why are you running? Is there a fire somewhere?"

"God be with you, sir! I have come to you for help. Please assist me. An unexpected misfortune has taken place! Call a council meeting!"

"Call a council meeting for women? What for? What a community that would be—as senseless as a tomtit! You had better get together by yourselves, and the one who outshouts the other will win the day."

"O, dear, sir! These are not women's fancies. A great misfortune has befallen us!"

And she told him the whole story. Even he, although always merry and carefree, became worried over this mishap.

"Oh!" he said, "what a stupid little girl! What a misfortune she has brought upon herself!"

"Come, sir, perhaps she will listen to you. And if she will not listen, we will order her to! Here is your cap, let us go!"

They set off. The streets were full of people. They were all coming to Olesya's—the old, the

young, and even the little ones were running to her house. All of them tried to stop her, and pleaded with her:

"Do not marry a serf! Do not! One might as well drown oneself!"

The young lads surrounded the house and shouted:

"We will not let the girl go!" they shouted. "We will not give her away! We will not allow a free Kozak girl to be made a laughingstock by becoming a serf, and to put her village to shame!"

Nothing helped, no matter how they pleaded with Olesya. They only saddened the girl more. Although Olesya listened to their honest and wise advice, she told them over and over again that she did not care for the livestock, because she was not poor herself, nor for freedom, for, she said: "What would life with a free man be without love?"—still the tears kept streaming from her eyes and grief overwhelmed her.

"I see, my girl, that it would take more than a year to convince you; and listening to your reasoning might take even more than that," said Opanas Bobryk. "As they say: 'What good is a woman's reasoning?' The only thing I hear from you is: 'I love him! I love him!' And who your love is, and what position he is in you care nothing about! You do not even listen to me! And this way, I know, we will not be any further ahead than we are now! So, farewell then ... All I can say is: 'Look before you leap!'"

Having said that, the old man went back home, to his place under the pear tree.

Later, the other people also began to disperse. Only the old aunt was left crying in the house.

III

Night had embraced the land. The moon came out and cast its bright rays on the white houses. Olesya, sad and upset, opened a window and looked out. The young lads were sitting round her house; some were talking, others sat dejectedly with their heads drooping. Olesya looked at them, thought a little, shut the window, and came out with her aunt behind her.

Standing on the doorstep, she spoke these words to the Kozaks:

"Young Kozaks, I have known you from childhood. You have always been considerate and courteous! I would never have suspected that you could show me such disrespect. Why do you guard me as though you were my enemies? Why do you disgrace an orphan in this way? You should fight against your equals and not against a helpless girl! You, men, will not gain any glory this way!"

"We also never expected this of you, Olexandra," answered a tall, sturdy youth. "We did not expect that old Khmara's daughter would marry a serf!"

"When our young lads were not to your liking, you should have let us know," another Kozak, handsome like a bolt of lightning, said. "Then we would have found someone for you ourselves! We would have searched all Ukraine and found!"

"It is a waste to search now, when God has already sent me one that I do love. My fate will be what it will be. I will not blame anyone. Even if you were to guard me for a whole year, I will marry the next, and none other than Ivan Zolotarenko. Go now, Kozaks, I beseech you, do not sadden me more! Listen to my aunt, heed her sober words of wisdom!"

"Please leave, my young hawks!" said the old woman, in tears. "You cannot help our misfortune any more! It is God's will, my children!"

The young lads talked among themselves for a while and dispersed.

Now, Zolotarenko's matchmakers became angry:

"We have never heard the like in all our lives!" they said. "After having given us their consent and entered into the betrothal, they now take it into their heads to dispute it! You are Kozaks, but you do not know the customs! We know how to defend our honor, even though we are serfs!"

"But who is to advise the orphan, if not us?" retorted the old Kozak women. "It would be for us a great sin against God, if we did not try to do something to prevent this misfortune. If she pays no heed to us—God help her! The silly girl will have a miserable time repenting—then she will remember us!"

IV

In the morning Olesya went to ask the girls to be her bridesmaids. Wherever she went all declined; others even wept. To some girls, mothers refused them permission to be bridesmaids; other girls refused to take part. The ones who did agree to, sighed sorrowfully saying: "It is a sad maiden's night for our bride!"

Olesya and Ivan finally did get married and went through the village to invite folk to the wedding feast. Just then, all the other villagers were returning from the fair: Petro Shostozub, Andriy Honta, Mykhailo Didych, and the others. Petro, with his carriage drawn by gray oxen, was plodding on ahead of the others. He was already old and gray, but he was still as tall and erect as a maple tree. His eyes shone like stars. He rode on slowly and asked the first man he met:

"What wedding is it that has taken place here?"

"The marriage of the late Khmara's daughter to Ivan Zolotarenko," someone said.

"To Zolotarenko? Who is this Zolotarenko?"

"A serf, sir, a subject of Sukhomlynsky's landlord."

Old Shostozub became sad, very sad, but said nothing. The others cried out in disappointment.

Just then the newlyweds came up to them and, in keeping with tradition, it was necessary to greet them. The newlyweds bowed and invited them to the wedding feast.

Petro raised his high cap. "May God be your helper!" he bellowed. "May God bless you with happiness and health!"

The newlyweds thanked him.

"We invite you, dear sir, to the wedding feast!"

"No, young princess, I will not go; it is not fitting for an old man like me to revel at weddings. Thank you kindly!"

Just then Honta Andriy, a good, quiet man, said to the groom:

"Oh, Ivan Zolotarenko! What have you done, my friend! Do you have the sense of a girl? You are thinking of the moment, but you are giving no thought to what will happen later! You have ruined the girl and all her clan! As they say: 'If you are an orphan you are free to drown!' "

And he shook his gray head.

"And why should we not have a merry time at a wedding?" replied Opanas Bobryk, with his arms akimbo. "What is spilt is spilt! Let us at least enjoy ourselves!"

"You old thoughtless fool!" said Petro. "Come to your senses! You would make merry even

where good people are grieving and crying miserably!"

"But what of it, my good fellow! If one cannot help the situation by crying, one should sneeze and forget!"

"It is disrespectful to joke, Opanas, when such things are happening!" they all shouted. "Respect your gray head, if not Kozakdom!"

"All right, quiet down! You have stormed at me as you would at a fool! If you think we should not go—I will not go, but she is a Kozak's daughter, so there should be Kozak dances. However, there is, I see, no use in trying to convince you people. What a pity!"

The newlyweds stood with their heads bowed.

"May God grant you good fate and good luck! May you be healthy as water and rich as the earth! Let the good Lord give you a long life and good sense and beautiful children!" With that, the elders bowed and moved on to their homes. The newlyweds went on their way.

The young couple grew sad. They looked at each other: there was a pallor on his face and her eyes were full of tears. They fell into each other's arms.

"My love," he said in a low voice, "I think I have ruined your life!" "My darling husband," replied Olesya, "what God will give us is what will be! Spending the rest of my life with you is all that matters!"

V

The next day they went to make their bows to the nobles. Olesya heard no word of welcome or advice, saw not a smile or cheerful look. The nobles were somehow irate, and so proud. "Be obedient," they ordered, "and be honest in your work for the estate!"

It was strange and sad for Olesya to hear this! She became frightened. By the look of things, she would be a real slave here! Her young years would all soon pass in vain! Her splendid beauty would soon be gone in daily drudgery in bondage!

They went along the street to their house. How gloomy it was in the village! Olesya remembered how it was in her village when she walked there along the street—one would greet her, another would inquire about her health, another would joke, or someone would stop and tell her about his problems; the elders would be talking and the young children muttering. As soon as the sun was up, the village would come alive with people! But here everyone you met was gloomy, untalkative, and sorrowful.

Her mother-in-law was happy about Olesya. She tried to please and comfort her, as if she were her own child; but still, she could not cheer Olesya's heart. She was too old now, and so exhausted from hard labor and deprivation that Olesya never heard any cheerful talk from her. The mother-in-law's stories were always full of sadness and misery. She was forever crying over her misfortunes, as if in this splendid, beautiful world, there was no place for goodness, beauty, or truth.

It was very difficult for Olesya to speak with her husband because he could not get away from his work even for a moment. It was doing this and that, or going here and there! He was just like a visitor in the house.

As for what came later, things only got worse. The master began to demand the house they lived

in; he bought a peasant family from somewhere and needed extra accommodation.

"Go to the manor to live," he said to Zolotarenko. "You do not have a large family, and, if you want to, you can build a house of your own. You took a wealthy wife!"

They were moved to the manor and there God gave them a child, a boy. Olesya nestled the infant against her bosom and let her tears fall over him. "My son! My dear child," she cried, "you would have enjoyed life and come to love the beauty and the splendor of the world, but miserable will your fate be! While you are still in your cradle they will suppress you. You will not blossom, my dear flower, for you will be crushed while you are still in the green bud!"

VI

Four years had passed. The Lord blessed Olesya with children: three sons—like eaglets! But how she suffered, how she wept over them! It is said: "When the tip of a child's finger hurts, the mother's heart bleeds!" Whenever she went to work in the fields, she had to leave her children. As for them: one could not yet talk, one was not walking, and one did not yet know how to sit. They were so little and there was no one to look after them, because the old mother-in-law had died the same year that Olesya got married. She grieved the days away at work and in the evening, she would run home worrying: "How are my children?" She was never sure whether they were still alive and well. It had happened before that, while playing near a pond, one woman's two sons were drowned.

The children sprouted up, but then other problems came along. The master was picking on Semenko and his children were bothering Ivas, because somehow he just could not please them. The lady of the manor was scolding Tyshko for running past her and not bowing. Every day Olesya's children were beaten like drums. If a day passed without punishment, there was still uneasiness in the air and her heart was always sad, with the anticipation of sorrow and trouble for her family.

Just as the boys were beginning to mature and could then be the mother's joy and help, they were all taken away to the master's quarters. From that time on, there was not a moment of happiness or quiet relaxation for Olesya. Before her, all day and night, was the vision of her black-haired boys, tired and pale, sitting silently in a room. If they moved or talked at all among themselves, the nobles would scold them immediately: "What is the noise there! I will teach you how to sit quietly!" The little doves would become frightened and silent.

Each day Olesya would weep bitter tears: "My children! My flowers! You have wilted while still green!"

Everything that was of any value they sold and the money dwindled. And such a family needed a lot! The lady of the manor would not help; she would only say angrily: "You should have plenty of your own! You had a rich father, he had plenty of everything! If you are sorry for your children, then clothe them yourself, I have enough expense without you."

At the beginning, Olesya's husband could not stand seeing such injustice to his family. He would be sorrow-stricken! Forgetting himself, he would become enraged and would rush out of the house, his eyes flashing, his face so pale that it was terrible to look upon him then. More than once, for the sake of their children, Olesya stopped him from doing something terrible. With loving words she would calm him down and he would embrace her and the children and weep.

VII

They were living, from one day to the next, grieving and worrying, when, unexpectedly, the hardest misfortune of all befell them. The master was going on a trip, all the way to Moscow, and he was taking Ivan Zolotarenko with him. They did not even try to plead with the master not to be so hard on them. He was so cruel and unmerciful that it would be a waste of effort to implore him.

"Farewell, my children, farewell, my bright eaglets!" Ivan said. "Take care of your mother, love each other and do no one any harm ... farewell, my dear children! My beloved wife, do not remember me with scorn! Do not forsake the unfortunate one who has drowned you in an abyss and is leaving you all alone and in poverty. One day your tears will punish me!"

Olesya was past weeping. She just stood there, pale as her white kerchief, not taking her eyes off her Ivan, not letting him go from her arms. Just then the master shouted: "Quickly, quickly!" Ivan embraced Olesya for the last time and hurried off. When she came to her senses and recovered, they were already gone ... All she could see was a whirling cloud of dust and the children crying beside her.

"My children! My children!" she cried. "Now we have neither defense nor help, we are left all alone in the world!"

She was right. It was much easier to bear their misfortune and sorrow when she had Ivan with her. She used to look into his loving eyes, listen to his earnest words, and embrace him. Somehow her fate was more endurable with a good soul and a sincere heart near her. But now she was left all alone, like that blade of grass in the field! Even though the village was not without good people, every one of them was preoccupied with his own misfortunes, everyone had his own troubles to look after. The only visitor she had was her old aunt. She was very, very old: all wrinkled, like an old, dried apple, but, for all that, she could still walk and enter into a conversation. She would come to Olesya and cry for a bit with her and give the children her blessing.

This was how Olesya lived, working without rest, keeping constantly at it; a year went by to her like one hour. All the time was spent doing work for the master's estate. The lady was a real slave-driver! It was work, work, and more work! Wherever her people were doing something for her, she would be there too. They would carry out a little table for her and she would sit down and play cards all by herself. It was her favorite amusement. She would sit at her game, lifting her eyes occasionally and shouting: "Do your work! Work! Don't slack up!"

Somehow or other Olesya tore herself away from her work and went to visit her old ailing aunt. That day there was a fair in the village, and Olesya had an opportunity to see her former girlfriends. What young married women they had become! How well dressed they were! How beautiful they looked—like roses in full bloom! Their husbands and their children were about them. The little ones were playing happily with their toys, and the older ones, creaking in their new boots, were gazing joyfully into everybody's eyes. Olesya stood there in an old coarse wool coat and all alone. Her husband has been taken from her; her children were worn out with hard labor, trying to please the noble breed. They had no toys, no amusements. They had no feast-day clothes. Their mother will return from the fair, bringing nothing to cheer them up, nothing to satisfy their needs. Such were the thoughts that crowded in upon Olesya. Hanna came up to her, then Motrya and Yavdokha—all were friends of hers from girlhood. They talked in a friendly way to her and asked about her children. One

of them gave her some poppy-seed rolls for them, another gave her some cookies.

"Thank you! Thank you" said Olesya, overcome with tears. "May God not forget you all, as you have not forgotten me!"

VIII

Another year passed—no news came from her husband, as if he had disappeared from the face of the earth. Olesya got despondent and decided to go to the lady, because the lady often received letters.

She entered the room. The lady was busy telling fortunes from her cards and did not notice her entrance. Olesya looked around. It was the same room in which she had stood when she first came here. She was then a young newlywed, well dressed, adorned with flowers—and as fresh as a flower herself. Now! ... Dear God! Was this really herself? There stood an old, tired-out woman, grief-stricken and frightened. "Gone is my youth!" she thought.

She bowed to the lady:

"Dear kind lady! Please tell me how my husband is faring in the foreign land."

"My God!" the lady screamed. "You have spoiled my card game! Why are you creeping into my sight like that? What do you want?"

"Have you letters from the master. How is my husband Ivan?"

"Aren't you the smart one! Why should the master write about your husband? Has he nothing else to write about? How is he? What is he doing?—you ask. He is serving; that is all!"

"Did he get used to his work, gracious lady, is he well?"

The young nobles entered the room. They listened, with sneers, and the lady roared with laughter.

"What are you thinking about!" she screamed at Olesya. "The master is to write me whether your husband is well! Maybe you are drunk, or born mad. Go away! Go! Take her out!"

Both of the young nobles seized her and pushed her from the room, out the door.

"I will never see nor hear anything of Ivan any more," thought Olesya. "We met and fell in love at an unfortunate hour!"

About two or three weeks later a letter came from Ivan. "Are you alive, are you well, my dear children, my beloved wife?" he wrote. "I am always ill. I would have died long ago, if the hope of seeing you and my native Ukraine had not kept me alive. How is your life? Respect your

mother, my dear sons, and love each other sincerely! May the Lord bless you all! I have nothing to send you as a gift. I have silver buttons on my uniform, but other than that I have nothing. Often, when the master goes visiting, I would be sure to starve while waiting for him, if good people did not feed me. What else is there to say! If you are born poor, you die poor."

"Your fate is no different from mine, my Ivan!" exclaimed Olesya, crying. "If I could write, I would do so every day, but now I must bow to someone and beg to get a letter written for me. Will someone do that as sincerely and as sadly as my heart feels?"

She went to ask the church deacon to write a letter.

"Very well," said the deacon, "I will write. But what will I get for this?"

She glanced at him. He was red-faced and jovial. He looked like a man who likes having a good

time and drinking! There was no hope of his asking a reasonable price.

"What do you want, sir?" she asked.

"What do I want? Give me two rubles and a quart of whiskey!"

"Sir! Please be kind."

"Then go to someone else and don't bother me!"

"Write, write straight away! Let it be as you wish! He is waiting for my letter."

She began dictating the letter to him, and he wrote it down. She wept more than she spoke, poor soul! How she sorrowed! Even the deacon shook his head and finally said impatiently:

"Listen, woman! You will give me, will you not, what was promised?"

"Oh sir! Be gracious, there is more to be written. I have not told you all."

"I will write, I will write ... enough of that ... and don't give me anything! I don't need it!"

"How so, sir? What will you take?"

"Nothing!" shouted the deacon, in an irritated tone of voice, but immediately took hold of himself and said: "Let me finish, and then let us both go and drown our grief and misfortune in a glass of whiskey."

"Thank you for your kindness, sir, but I had rather not. May the Mother of God give you good fortune and good health! Thank you."

"Let me post the letter for you, woman. This is not a job for you!" he said.

"What do I have to give for this?"

"Nothing. Acquaintances of mine will do it free of charge."

IX

The deacon sent the letter to Ivan, but it was uncertain whether the poor wretch ever saw it, because soon came the news from the master that Ivan had died. The master also wrote to send for his eldest son and a boy-servant along with him. And he ordered the younger son to be sent to the capital.

Trouble began in the manor when preparations were afoot for the young lords to make the trip. They started choosing the servants to take along with them. They picked Zolotarenko's sons. Oleksandra was called in. Up to that very time no one was concerned about whether she was alive or dead; no one cared about the sort of burden the Lord had sent her to bear.

When she came in, the lady said to her, "Get your sons ready for the trip! They will go with the young lords."

She stood there, looking into the lady's eyes, as if she understood nothing. She grew as pale as a piece of chalk. The lady got angry.

"Are you deaf or dumb?" she shouted.

Oleksandra fell down in despair, unable to say anything. She raised her hands, weeping loudly and bitterly.

The lady became enraged and began to threaten her: "I will do this to you! I will do that to you! I'll show you!"

She let herself go on in this fashion, as if Oleksandra had committed a great sin by feeling sorry for her children—even God commands us to have such compassion—and she was scolded, insulted,

and driven from the room! What her poor heart felt at that moment no one knew, and no one cared to ask.

She must get her sons ready for the trip. Would they be able to return to bury their old mother, or, would they like their father, die there, with no one to mourn for them! Perhaps her bright eaglets, so beautiful, good and true now, would grow slack there ... or even worse! What would happen then? Who would be there to guide them? Who would be there to teach them sound sense? At this time there was nothing to send them off with—no shirts, no decent clothes to wear. They were in terrible poverty. Anything of value they had owned she had sold or used up already for the children. There was nothing left over for herself in the event of her own death.

The children were sleeping at home for the last time, and she was so tenderly watching over them. She watched over them quietly the whole night, weeping bitterly. They were spending their last night at home! How much time would pass before she would see her beloved boys, if, indeed, she would ever see them again!

The sun had already risen ... there came the tinkling of a bell ... Suffused with tears, Oleksandra let out her children, blessing and crossing them every minute.

"My young masters!" she wailed to the young nobles, bowing low to the ground, "be kind to my boys!"

The young nobles just turned away.

"Mother of God," shrieked Oleksandra sobbing, "I am handing my children over to you! My sons, my sons!" And she fell on the ground like grass cut down by a sharp scythe.

X

The life of the unfortunate is also a long one, they say, and so it was with Oleksandra. She grieved away a few more years with little Tyshko.

There was not a bit of news about her older sons. The young nobles may have written something about the boys, but the lady did not say.

Meanwhile the lady had sold the village and moved into the town. Oleksandra and a few other people had to go with her. If only someone knew, or cared to advise her, that, as a widow, she ought to be a free woman again! But what use now was freedom for Oleksandra!

Her health failed. She was so weak that she could not work anymore. The lady got angry: "You eat my bread for nothing!" she said. Later on she became really furious: "Off with you! Go wherever you like! Since you are too weak to work, do not ask to eat. Leave my premises and take the boy with you!"

Oleksandra left the mansion and took Tyshko with her. "A curse upon you, mansion of the lords," she said. "May no good ever come to you!"

She went searching for work. For about a week she slept alongside fences until she found work at a blacksmith's. The blacksmith carried himself like a real lord, he was so wicked and quarrelsome. He would abuse his wife and daughter and, when he got drunk, they would run for their lives, escaping through the window, because they were in for a thrashing. He would shout:

"And why should I not beat my wife or anyone else? Everyone has to be beaten, for I was beaten!"

"Is that my fault?" lamented his wife.

"So what, if this is not your fault? Each one has to answer for the other!"

That was the sort of blacksmith he was!

Had anyone chanced to see an old, miserable woman carrying pails of water uphill, with a shabby, black-haired boy jumping behind her—nobody would have recognized in her the wealthy, beautiful Kozak girl.

She had not served a month, when she fell ill and the blacksmith threw her out of the house. Where could she go now? She went back to the lady's mansion. She had just got to the gate when the lady met her and said spitefully:

"You have raised a thief for a son! Your Semenکو has robbed the young master! What are you doing here? Why have you come? You are ailing, eh? Remove her out of the premises, put her out!

They led out Oleksandra from the courtyard and left her helpless and alone behind the fence with little Tyshko. The boy cried his heart out!

"O Father in Heaven! My Semenکو a thief! Oh Semenکو, Semenکو! My good, honest child! How it feels to hear something like this about you! ... Your father told you what not to do ... My unfortunate son! Think of your old mother!

Tyshko, not understanding what it was all about, embraced and kept consoling her:

"Do not worry, mother, do not cry, Semenکو will return. Semenکو and Ivas—they will both return."

And thus comforting his mother, he fell asleep beside her.

XI

Morning came. Tyshko got up and set out begging. Oleksandra saw how her child held out his hand to the people; how one would give him a kopek², or a bublyk³, or how another would stroke his black hair, and how still another would shove him out of the way—Oleksandra saw it all!

Then a certain man approached her and asked who she was, and why she was lying there. He asked her about numerous things. "Come to my place," he said, "while you are convalescing." And he took her with Tyshko to his house.

He lived with his mother. He was a widower and had a small daughter. They were well-to-do city people, with enough of everything. And what good-natured people they were! In a week or so Tyshko was flourishing like a red apple and tumbling about in the yard. Oleksandra could not have been happier. She recovered, regained her strength, and became younger looking.

"Work for us looking after our child," they asked her, and her soul rejoiced. She started working for them. She lived there in peace and quiet. All was well, except that her thoughts about Semenکو kept nagging at her.

"Do not worry!" the master of the house said, "perhaps it is not as bad as you think. Inquire where he is serving. If he is still serving the young lord, it means he has forgiven him."

2. kopek—penny.

3. bublyk—a thick bread roll in the shape of a ring.

One evening Oleksandra went to the lady's mansion secretly, so that the lady would not see her, and inquired about Semenko from her servants.

"All that we heard," they said, "was that your Semenko was punished severely and that the young lord still has him."

"Well, what happened?" her master asked when she got back.

"It's good news, sir!" she said in tears, "could not be better."

"Stop crying now! The young lords will not live all their days in a foreign land; they will return and you will see your sons. Save up something for them that they will have reason to be thankful to their mother."

She sewed a little purse and bought herself a little box and began collecting her money. "This will be for my children!" she thought.

Whenever the master came from the market he would call her:

"Would you mind coming over here, dear! Here is a new ruble for you; let us trade for your old one."

Oleksandra would run and trade with him. How she would thank him! She would rejoice, like a little child! She would marvel at the shiny new money, and put it away for her children.

Then one day the master had to leave for a far-off homestead. He invited Oleksandra to go with him. If only the lady would let her go!

She went to the lady to ask for written permission, but she refused:

"No, I won't! I will not give you permission and I will not allow you to go, unless you pay me. How much do you earn?"

"Two rubles a month, my lady."

"Pay me two rubles a month, then, and I will let you go."

"But I have to clothe myself and the boy."

"I need more than you do. You can throw on any overcoat and it is all the same, but I need to live like people. If you will not give me two rubles, I will not let you leave!"

And she did not let her leave.

"Give her the two rubles," said Oleksandra's master, "and do not worry! We will take care of you."

But the lady now said:

"I want three rubles, and maybe even for that much I won't release you."

The master himself went to the lady and put in a good word for her.

"I will not hear a word of it! I will not let her go!"

The master went on the trip by himself.

"May no one ever know or see such people as your lady!" he said.

XII

The lady took Oleksandra into her household again and Tyshko into her rooms. Since she would not let him see his mother, the only way he could see her was by stealth.

Oleksandra became gravely ill. She was lying alone; there was no one even to give her water. She was lying, waiting for death. There was no one in the house except the nobles' old ailing

steward.

"My kind friend!" she exclaimed. "Call Tyshko to me, let me bless my child! The Lord has already sent me death."

"Your Tyshko is gone, sister. I saw him drive off with the lady."

"May the Mother of God bless him!" she said weeping. "My beloved child! My children, my children! You are all scattered about somewhere and now you are not even at your mother's deathbed to close her eyes. I have raised you to be humiliated by evil people. Where are you, my doves? Where are you, my bright eaglets!"

The old steward somehow managed to bestir himself and called some people in. They entered the house.

She looked at them:

"Raise me up, good people!"

They raised her up. She took the purse from around her neck and gave it to them:

"This is for my children ... six rubles ... Give it to them ... Whoever has a good soul, teach my Tyshko all that is good!... Do not harm a poor orphan!" she entreated them with tears. "Be kind to him! ... Death comes to me while I am all alone ... I reared my three sons like three gray doves ... but there is not one of them beside me ... My sons! My children! ..."

So, as she lived weeping, she died weeping.

The lady was such that she would not even give her a decent burial, much less a funeral feast. The servants buried her themselves and said a requiem for the unfortunate soul.