

Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko



Marusia

Translated by
Florence Randal Livesay



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Translated by
Florence Randal Livesay¹

[Dedicated to:
Anna Hryhorivna Kvitka]

Chapter I

[I often wonder: why should a man get so attached to anything in this world; not so much to mere objects, but even to the very dearest people—wife, children, faithful friends, and others? In the first place, we must consider this: are we eternal in this world? And all that we have, be it our livestock, our grain in the fields, our oxen, the wealth in our trunk—will all of this too continue without damage? No. Nothing here is eternal. And what about ourselves? We live today. Tomorrow—whatever the lord gives us. When living among people that’s all you ever hear: here they’re ringing the bells for departed souls, there they’re wailing for the deceased, and somewhere else, they’re serving a meal to the beggars, as custom warrants after a funeral. Every day someone will tell you: this one has fallen ill, that one is dying, the other one has passed on. You will hardly have a look around and all of a sudden you’re left all alone in the world, although surrounded by all sorts of people. What’s the use? They’re not the good friends that you have already buried, or maybe you don’t even know them. It’s all the same as wandering in a sleepy forest. Just you try to recollect your friends, and your whole song will have but one refrain: we were friends in childhood, but he has died; we were young lads together, but he has died, and so with this one and that one, and that one and this one, they have all died. And since it is so, you best remember: you won’t be forgotten in this world. They’ll take you too, and they won’t ask if you want to join the group or maybe run around for a while longer.

After such a thought, why should we, who are mortal, attach ourselves to anything that is temporary? Why shouldn’t we do thus: God has blessed you with good fortune—your father and mother live with you and are grateful to you for the affection and respect you give them in their old age. You are blessed with a wife who is a tireless housewife and is good to you and obedient. You are blessed with children who are humble and obedient. Thank God for these blessings every day as you retire and as you wake. Respect them and love them, and on their behalf spare no effort nor chattel. Lay down your very soul for them! Tear yourself apart, give your life for them but remember always that they are mere guests in this world, like you and every other man—whether tsar, or lord, or bishop, or soldier, or shepherd. When our merciful Lord calls any one of us, send them off with sorrow but without reproach or rebuke. Make the sign of the cross and recite, as you do every day, the Our Father: “Lord, Thy will be done with us, sinners.” And do not fall into grief, that it may not shorten your life. For it is a mortal sin to bring on an early

¹ Hrihory Kvitka [i.e. Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko] *Marusia*. Trans. Florence Randall Livesay. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1940. This text was prepared and edited by Maxim Tarnawsky, who made small changes in the translation. The division of the text into chapters is by Ms. Livesay. The original text is not divided.

death for oneself or even to bring on an illness or pain of any kind. If you do not preserve the body, you will lose your soul for eternity. Above all, remember, that although you bury the dead today, it is you who will be buried tomorrow and we shall all be together with the merciful Lord in eternal paradise, where there will be no more separation, and no grief, and no evil will befall us.

Furthermore, we often think, that if a difficulty or misfortune befalls someone who has lost someone from his family or relatives, then this is a punishment of that person for some earlier sins or offenses. It is not so. Just listen to what the reverend father tells us in church: The Heavenly Lord is to us as a father is to his children. And in this light is it not sinful to apply such a judgment: Consider a group of children who are playing on the street. Among them there are those who are more fortunate, and these, rather than play with toys, take to fighting and cursing. Among them there might be a weaker child, meek and humble, whom almost anything could easily harm. Is it not true, that the father of such a child, to prevent any evil coming to him, will take pity on the child and call him in from the street? And no matter how the child shall long for the company of his playmates, a father will sit him down beside himself and comfort him with loving words and give him anything he might ask for. The children who remain on the street will regret their loss. Not knowing the goodness the child experiences by his father, they will complain that their friend has been taken from them. No matter, let them complain. He is very comfortable at his father's side. And so our Heavenly Father does with us: He protects us from various misfortunes by taking us directly unto Himself, where we find such goodness—such goodness ... that it cannot be told or even imagined. And we should think thus. Do you feel that God has sent you misfortune on account of your sins? Consider this: What kind of a father would completely abandon his children so that they would waste their lives without guidance? Every father tries to teach his children what is good. The disobedient will be taught in a parental way and they shall be shown parental mercy as well. No wonder people say “it is a worthless child that was not taught by its father.” People do this for their own children, so what can we expect of Our Heavenly Father, whose mercy has no bounds! If He should send misfortune as punishment for sins, He will surely also show his mercy. But you must submit to Him. After that, we shall not worry, that the merciful God might send us suffering. We shall make the sign of the cross and say “Lord, teach me, a sinner, how to fulfill Your Holy Will.” And then you shall see, that everything will be fine.]²

After this fashion lived Naum Drot...

When some misfortune overtook him, how did he behave? He ignored it, he always praised God, and in this manner he lived all his days. He never allowed grief to subdue him, never fell into violent abandonment of sorrow.

But the highly educated have not such submission, such passivity in faith.

As a young man, Naum Drot was a leader in the village. He obeyed his father and mother, revered his elders, was a good companion for his friends; he never lied, never was drunk, and did not like the company of drunkards; he never had companionship with the lazy.

But as to church—Oh, he was a great churchgoer! No matter how minor the feast day, it was enough for the priest to ring the bell—Naum was there the next instant.

He put a new candle in the place of one burned out, gave alms to the beggars, and on his return home took up his labors again. When he heard of someone in need he set off with help and

² The section of the text in [square brackets] is omitted in the Livesay translation. It is translated by the editor.

advice.

Because of his right living God did not lose remembrance of him, but helped him in all his achievements, and gave him a good-hearted, industrious, and obedient wife. If Naum wished for anything Nastia did not sleep until she had procured it for him. He respected her utterly, and loved her as his own soul. Not only did they not quarrel, but they did not curse or swear. Every day they praised God for His mercies.

There was only one grief in their lives—that God did not see fit to give them children. Whenever the thought came into Nastia's head she began to cry; but Naum crossed himself, recited a Pater Noster, and his heart forthwith became lighter, and he went to his work in the fields, on the threshing-floor or in the stable—or to oversee his servants.

There were five teams of oxen which he owned; and these, with his servants, entailed on him serf-obligations of work for his lord, and meant that he and his laborers must accompany the latter on trading expeditions. He had also two fields left him by his grandfather, and a third one which he had himself bought. So he now had land enough for his various activities.

And that is why Nastia looked so sadly at the cattle, saying: “Who will inherit all this wealth after we are gone? None will remember our history or be mindful of our name. Who will bury us? Who will remember to say masses for us? Strange people will spoil what we have gathered and will not even thank us.

But Naum answered her: “Men should labor even until their death. If God should give children, everything will be left to them; if not, let it be as He wills. He knows why everything is so fated; nothing is ours, everything belongs to God. If our wealth should be the heritage of a good man, he will order masses to be said for us, and he will offer prayers for the dead and give alms. And if a bad man should inherit, the sin will be upon him. But the merciful God will see that we are kept in memory, in any case, if we deserve it.

“Don't worry, Nastia, about the cattle. They belong to us, not we to them. Beware lest the cattle bar the way for you to the Heavenly Kingdom. Satan knows how to deceive. Pray to God to deliver us from evil and all will be well.”

And behold! For the father's and mother's prayers, God gave them a daughter. How Naum and Nastia rejoiced! They hardly allowed her to go out of their arms; and when it sometimes happened that the child would run to the entrance or into the street, then someone, father or mother, followed her step by step, like a shadow.

What a child! Tiny, yes, but she knows the Lord's Prayer, “Hail Mary,” “Holy God,” and the better half of the Creed. Let her but hear the chimes, and she leaves her play at once, exclaiming: “Mother, I'll go to church, the bells are ringing already; it is wicked not to go. Father, give me a copper for a candle, and another for God's beggar.”

And when in church she behaves so well—she speaks to no one, but prays, genuflecting.

And now she is grown up, to be the delight of her parents. Oh, what a beautiful girl! Tall, straight as an arrow, her eyes black as sloes. Her charming eyebrows are as delicate as fine lace; her face high-colored, pink as a choice rose blooming in a noble-nun's garden, her nose, well-formed, aquiline; her lips like an opening flower, disclosing teeth like a chaplet of pearls.

When she speaks it is always in a polite way, polite and sensible, and the sound of her voice resembles a low-toned flute—one would wish to listen to it continually. And when she smiles, and her eyes glance from side to side as she blushes, it is as if she would wipe with a silk handkerchief the hot, fevered lips of a thirsty man.

Her braids are as black as tar, and long, falling to her knees. On a feast day or a Sunday she plaits her hair in many little braids and then sets them on her head as a crown, over parti-colored ribbons; in this her coronal she wreathes flowers.

Her bosom is covered with coral beads, and ducats between—perhaps ten strings, if not more. And round her throat... Oh, her throat is as white as if carved from chalk cliffs! And on such a neck as this is hung a gold coin, depending from a black velvet ribbon strung through a ring set with a gleaming stone.

Then she puts on a red coat, fastening it up to her throat so that nothing may be shown more than modesty permits. (Not like girls from the cities, nowadays, who have copied the custom from the nobility, going with uncovered heads, unfastened clothing—there is no limit to what they will do!)

Our Marusia, the daughter of Naum and Nastia, was different. Everything was as God made it, but her beauty was hidden. Better for the girl and for those looking on her!

Her smock was snow-white and thin, and she wove it herself; she alone spun the thread for the *sorochka*³ and the full puffed sleeves she embroidered with red thread. The *plakhta*, or seamless skirt wrapped round her hips, was barred in oblongs and was part of her mother's dowry. What colors! Now nobody makes such things—alas!

Her apron was of silk, and when she laced herself up in her belt you could span her waist with your hands, though she did not torture herself by squeezing too much. The handkerchief tucked in her belt was eyeleted and embroidered with eagles; her chemise showed beneath her skirt, and the hemstitched border was embroidered, with tassels hanging. Her stockings were blue, her slippers red. So when she went out—well, then she looked finer than a noble's daughter.

She walked superbly, like a peacock, not looking from side to side, but regarding only the tips of her shoes; when she met elderly people she made a low bow and said: “Good health to you, Uncle!” or “Good health to you, Aunty!” And if there should be a young child in the way, she would greet it courteously.

But if some lad should dare to approach her—well, she would not start a quarrel with him at all—she would not even address him by so much as a single word. But let her only look at him, with a mixture of pity and anger, no matter how boisterous and assured the boy, he would take off his cap, bow to her in a polite way and go off without a word.

She was the most beautiful girl in the whole village, wise and rich and courteous, and withal of a peaceable disposition and obedient. You would never think of suggesting to her that she might be with her girlfriends amusing themselves in the street, walking about and singing.

Sometimes her mother would say to her: “Well, little daughter, why don't you go into the street now that the lovely spring has come? You could play *khreschyk* [tag] with your companions and sing with them.”

“Why, Mother,” she would answer, “instead of going out I ought to help with the housework; then I can go to bed and get up earlier and so take your place getting dinner ready and taking it to Father in the fields.

“As for playing in the street, I did not forget anything—there is no need to go back. It's all jesting and foolishness. And I know this—something wicked might happen, if not to me, then to

³ *Sorochka*: Loose and long, straight petticoat or chemise: today the word means shirt, or a blouse when worn by women.

others, and it would be horrible to have to confess later that I was there too. May those girls realize their danger! But as for me, no, I will not go.”

And also, don't mention to her the *Vechertnytsi*, the evening gathering and revel of youths and maidens. She besought others not to go to it.

“Be good, dear little sisters, little doves—Oh, won't you be so good, dear sisters, and not go to those accursed gatherings? There is nothing good there, nothing except folly—jokes you shouldn't listen to, boys who try to get you drunk.

“I know of girls who steal chickens from their mothers and bring them to the *Vechertnytsi* for food!

“And then, too, something is going on—it makes me ashamed to speak of it—many girls lose their reputations. Take, for instance, Iavdokha, Kalyna and Priska.... That is why the good father the priest forbids us to go there and says it is a mortal sin to attend.

“And—I can spin more at home than you can at the *Vechertnytsi!*”

So she talked, entreated, and argued. And first one stopped attending, then another, then a third—till finally the custom ceased. All the gatherings were at an end, and good people were thankful, mothers especially.

(But later the devil once more got the upper hand and tempted them, and carried a group into the abyss.)

Only seldom it happened that Marusia went to a marriage feast as a bridesmaid. But she would never run in the street on a Saturday with the other bridesmaids and sing loudly as all the rest did. She would come on Sunday and seat herself beside the bride, as custom required.

But when after dinner the young couple would be led out into the yard to dance, she would go home at once, put aside her finery and begin to make the fire and prepare supper. And in this work her mother was never able to get ahead of her.

Chapter II

In the “Green Feast Week” it happened that Marusia was bridesmaid at her girlfriend's festival, and therefore was seated at the table for the occasion; opposite the bridesmaids, as custom decreed, the *boiary*, or bridegroom's assistants, were placed.

The head *boiaryn* was a lad from town—Vasyl, a coatmaker. He was a nice-appearing youth, fair and smooth shaven. His *chub*, or forelock, was like a cloak over his brow, with thickly clustering curls; his mustache was that of a handsome Cossack, his eyes gay, his cheeks highly colored.

He wore a blue long coat, or homespun *zhupan*, and an under-jacket girt with a belt of English worsted; full breeches and high boots with horse-hide leather tops, the heels clinking with the metal with which they were shod, which gave forth a cheerful jingle in the dance.

When the bridesmaids sewed artificial flowers on the caps of the *boiary*, the latter offered in payment one or two pennies, and the butler from the nobleman's house also gave coins, amazing everyone by their quantity.

But Vasyl watched for his chance, and all the time he was feeling in his pocket. Then he drew out his purse, in which money was chinking, and took from it a piece of silver to ransom his cap. When he threw it, jingling, into the dish, all at the feast were astonished; even the singing of the bridesmaids ceased for a time.

Vasyl, however, paid no attention to the general wonder. He tossed his curly locks, took a

spoon and began to finish his dish of noodles as unconcernedly as if he had put in only a penny.

Sitting at the table while the dishes were being removed, he bestowed a good look on the girls present, especially the bridesmaids. *Zirk!* He saw Marusia, although she sat in the third place, for she never wanted to be first bridesmaid, no matter how much she was pressed, and she always said: "Let others sit there, this is all right for me."

Vasyl arose, quite beside himself, speechless and dazed with the sudden shock. A moment before he had been joking more than all the rest. He alone was heard, and he was the cause of all the hubbub and laughter.

And now he could not say a single word. He bowed his head, clasped his hands under the table and was unable to utter a sound to a soul. Only from time to time he stole a look at Marusia and sighed deeply, his brow shadowed.

The viands were removed from the table and nuts placed there instead. The little bridesmaids hastened, with the groomsmen, to play "Odd-and-Even." They chattered and laughed and made impromptu verses.

But Vasyl was sitting as solitary as if in the woods; he spoke to no one and looked nowhere. He thought only of Marusia until it seemed as if everyone living had perished, and he and she alone were left.

And what of Marusia? She, poor darling, had also suffered a change. Up till now she had been unusually gay, but suddenly it seemed to her best that she should go home.

Why had she this strange confusion of feelings? When she looked at Vasyl she was consumed with pity—why, she did not know. Perhaps because he was sitting in such an abandonment of sadness.

And the worst of it was when they looked into each other's eyes. Then Marusia shivered as if she had the ague; and she felt like weeping.

Vasyl was stifled—as though he were in a very hot room. It seemed to him that he had at least three sheepskins on his body, and that someone was giving him piping hot water to drink, with honey and pepper.

Then each turned away, and apparently they did not look at one another. But it was enough for Vasyl to move his arm or bend his head—Marusia blushed, they stole glances again, and once more turned away.

Marusia, poor thing, thought that doubtless she had been bewitched. "I think I'll go home," she said to herself. But a second thought came.

"That *boiaryn* in the blue coat—isn't he well, or what is wrong? How could I leave this place in that case? Perhaps he might get worse, and no one would help him.

"See how pitifully he looks at me, almost as if he were beseeching: 'Be kind, Marusia, don't run away from here.' Very well, to be sure, I will stay."

Vasyl found everything around him tedious to a degree, and he did not know what to do. Then he noticed that the men were playing "Odd-and-Even."

"Well, let me play with that girl who is sitting over there—the sad one."

When he stretched out his hand, something whispered to him in warning: "Don't touch her—she might be angry! See how finely she is dressed. Perhaps she is from the town, probably she would not even speak to you." And Vasyl again grew pale with dread and hung his head. So he hesitated for a long time.

When the bridesmaids began to sing more loudly and the "Bridal Father and Mother" poured out the wine oftener, the room was filled with a murmurous hum. Vasyl snatched a handful of

nuts and turned to Marusia. "Odd or Even?" he asked.

When he had spoken the words he nearly fell off the bench. His head turned round and round and everything was black before his eyes.

And it was no better with Marusia. When Vasyl spoke to her she was struck with fright, just as if her mother had become vexed with her. Such a thing had happened only once in her life—when she, having brought the clean linen from the river, lost her mother's shawl which the latter's dead mother had given to her daughter. Then Marusia's mother was angry, but her wrath did not last long.

But oh, how frightened Marusia had been! And now that feeling returned. She would like to fall through the floor, or run away—anything not to look at this *boiar*. But how to answer him?

"If I say 'Odd' he will think I am proud and that I don't want to play with him. He is sad—or cross—enough already. And it is such a pity to see him like that. Oh, well! I will say 'Even'! But..."

When she tried to force herself to say the words she could not speak at all; her lips seemed glued together, her tongue was like a wooden thing and her breath choked in her throat.

She glanced at Vasyl and saw that he was looking at her expectantly, clutching the nuts in his palm. He was waiting for what she would say. She pitied him very much; she overcame her fear, and with great difficulty whispered, "Even!" and looked straight into his eyes.

And then she did not remember how she took the nuts from his hand, or when she came to herself. O Mother of God, how ashamed she was!

But luckily for her the best man made his announcement to the master of ceremonies and his assistant: "Grant your blessing, lead out the married couple to the yard to dance!"

And at once all rushed from the table and from the hut to see how the dance would go. For Marusia and Vasyl it seemed as if the sun had risen. Their hearts grew light, and they went out from the hut too.

A three-piece orchestra, putting its whole heart into the music, is now playing outside; violins are singing, cymbals clinking, and instead of a bass the leader hums.

All this fires the spirits of the girls. The first couple takes the floor, then a second, to dance the *dribuskky*. Little feet are flying through the tiny steps; heels, metal-shod, are jingling. Grasping hands, they turn round and round again, then separate; a moment, and they appear to be floating like ducks, their only movement, heads turning from side to side. Then again the tiny, quick steps.

They are tired already, and mop their faces with their handkerchiefs. Others wish to dance, but what can they do? The musicians play on and on.

One of the girls, Odarka, shouts to the fiddler, "That's enough, Uncle. Stop playing!" But the fiddlers play and play. At last they stop and ask for a drink. Then the girls dart into the crowd.

"Now play 'Horlytsia,'" cried Denis Dekanenکو, pushing other lads aside, and dragging a girl from the assembly into the center, halting in the middle of the room, waiting for the music to strike up.

His arms were akimbo, his legs planted far apart, his high cap of Persian lamb with a black felt top perched rakishly on one side. Moving his long mustache in a comical way he looked around, saying: "Well, I am going to dance, but I don't know whether I can or not. Perhaps I had better take lessons from lame Khoma, limping on his crutches!" At this sally there was much laughter.

After the fiddlers had a drink or two they twanged the strings of the fiddles vigorously, and Denis showed such devilish high spirits, dash and abandon! And when he began to crouch in the *prysiudky*, the real Cossack dance, it seemed as if he did not touch the ground with his feet.

At times it appeared as if he were sitting on his knees; he achieved a somersault, then clapped his hands and whistled so suddenly and piercingly that one's ears rang.

Then again, with arms akimbo, he danced the *hopak* in such a fierce way that the ground echoed under his stamping heels. Yet once more, when his legs swung from side to side so fast that they appeared bent in shape, he leaped into the air; again the *prysiudky* steps around the girl, like a snake encircling her, while he was singing in high tones:

“The dovelike one, Beauty,
Nestled in the Cossack's arms,
And the Cossack, in sheer pride
And enchantment, nearly died!”

It was all very well for Denis to show off—since Vasyl did not take part in the dance. If he had danced he would have “tucked Denis beneath his belt” like a handkerchief!

In dancing and staying power, in jesting calls, Vasyl when he appeared on the scene would tire every fiddler; and as for the girls, they would look only at him and would pay no attention to other youths.

And when he approached and sat among his elders and began to tell jokes and stories of all kinds, then everyone sat and listened to him, no matter how late the hour. Such was Vasyl up to this time.

But now he looked as if he had been condemned to death. He went out of the house, but instead of dancing with a girl, he went away from the crowd and leaned against a fence, meditating.

“What is happening to me? I hear nothing, see nothing but that lovely black-browed girl. She is always before my eyes and in my thoughts.

“Why do I not make love to her? I am afraid she may be angry. I don't dare approach her, and that's the truth. Just suppose she should turn her back on me....

“I don't know what to do with myself. I would go home, but my feet seem nailed to this place. I can't keep my eyes away from the bench by the wall where my girl is sitting talking with her girlfriend. Perhaps they are talking about me?”

Levko Tsiomkal, the second *boiaryn*, came up behind him at this juncture and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Why are you so sad, Vasyl? Are you watching the girls dance? Smoke my pipe and cheer up, and then let us dance again. See what smart girls are here from town!”

“I don't want to smoke a pipe—it couldn't help me. I don't feel well. I think I'll go home—or something...” said Vasyl. “Will you act as chief *boiaryn* in my place?”

“*Tsur iomu*⁴! Oh, come now, cheer up! Let us dance. Perhaps someone has cast a spell over you, looked on you with the evil eye. Go out for a walk on the street for a while, it may help you. Or better still, go and see how the girls are dancing. The best dancer here is the daughter of Kurbak. She's a real dancer if you like. If nobody marries her before autumn she will be mine.”

⁴ Remove the spell!

Vasyl was shaking as with ague. Losing his high color, he grasped a paling of the fence for support. Otherwise he would have fallen, overcome with dismay. He believed that Levko was speaking of the one in whom he himself delighted. For, when one is in love, one always thinks the girl of one's choice cannot but be loved by all who see her.

Coming to his senses, he tried strategy, and said to Levko, "Where is the daughter of Kurbak? Is she perhaps that dark-eyed, black-browed girl with so many strings of coral on her breast?"

"No, she is too grand for me. My sweetheart is that fair-haired girl with the upturned nose, in the gray woolen coat. She is wearing an embroidered towel as a sash."

Vasyl felt much easier in mind. He sighed with relief and his eyes gleamed when he found that Levko did not mention the girl of his heart. Now he did not care whether she was the daughter of Kurbak or not. So he questioned Levko.

"Whom did you mean when you said 'she' was too grand for you? Is there anyone here who is the daughter of a priest, or of the manager of a nobleman's estate, for instance?"

"No," replied Levko. "They are all our equals here. I was speaking of our Marusia."

"And just who is this Marusia?"

Vasyl managed to speak with mild interest only.

In reality, not only his ears but every nerve in his body listened; he held his breath lest he might miss a single word.

Then Levko began to talk about Marusia, telling him all he knew—whose daughter she was, how rich her father was, and how much he loved her. Then he described Marusia's character, and how she seemed afraid of everyone—so bashful! "No one has a chance to look at her, not only at the *Vechernytsi* or when they sing the *Koliadky*⁵, but even at early nightfall on the street, and on *Kupalo* night⁶.

"She does not take part in any of our games. Perhaps she thinks she's above all that—too grand; perhaps she's too shy. But she's so diligent—she sews, spins, washes for herself and her parents. She can even bake and cook without a servant's help—her mother may sit with folded hands."

Marusia did not go where the rest were dancing but, sorrowful, sat alone on the bench in front of the house; and the nuts which she had received from Vasyl she fingered continually, following him with her eyes.

She thought: "What has happened in my inmost heart? I don't understand. One moment I feel gay and like running to Mother and embracing her with joy, and the next I feel so sad." She wiped tears from her eyes, wishing her father were there to dispel her sadness.

Then she smiled and became ashamed of all this, and thought it would be best to go home after all.

Never before had she tarried with her girlfriends; she used to run home always as fast as she could. But now when she saw that on her way she would have to pass Vasyl she changed her mind once more. So she was undecided, thinking first one thing and then another.

She thought, "I wish that young man would come and speak to me, and then I would feel much more contented."

But with this thought she became ashamed again. She flushed the color of a cranberry and

⁵ Koliadky: Christmas carols.

⁶ Kupalo night: St. John's Eve.

covered her face with her little hands, and lowered her head.

Then Olena, Kurbak's daughter, after dancing one round, approached her and sat down to rest for a time.

"Why are you sitting here for so long? Are you crying, or what?"

"No, I'm not crying," said Marusia, feeling as if Olena had read her thoughts. "I choked myself 'with some pickled apples, that's all. But you are out of breath—why?"

"Oh, I was dancing too long, dancing to my sorrow! That *boiaryn* caught me and whirled me around so and the music kept up for so long. It's not only my feet that are sore, my arms and neck are aching, and my head is dizzy. Oh, how he danced! We have no such dancing in our village. I told our boys to bring that youth to our village square gatherings."

Then Marusia was so glad! Perhaps Olena knew about the one who had so deeply entered into her soul, because, even as Olena, she thought no likelier youth, no better dancer existed than the one she had in mind. Surely, she thought, Olena is praising Vasyl? Then she began to ask questions.

"What *boiaryn* is he? The chief one?"

"No, not the chief one," Olena answered scornfully. "That one sits over there with bowed head and does not look at the girls at all. As soon as we sit down at the table again I will sing to him:

"Like a manekin the chief *boiaryn* sits,
 With ram's-eye stare. He has no wits.
 His head is kept together by hoops.
 Look at his back! See how he stoops.
 His coat is sewn with bark from a tree.
 He doesn't know thread when he sees it, maybe.
 His belt is nothing but a rag:
 Our fine *boiaryn* of clothes may brag!"

"There, that's the way I would sing to him! I'd let him know what our girls are. Perhaps he thinks the village girls don't know how to dance! Well, well, they could even teach his father!"

"But—maybe he doesn't know how to dance?" suggested Marusia, hiding her face with her hand so that Olena should not notice her blushes and confusion.

"Who? Are you saying that Vasyl doesn't know how to dance?" exclaimed Olena.

"But I don't know that his name is Vasyl, or who he may be! Does he know how to dance? Does he? I don't know... I don't know him at all"

Saying this, Marusia gradually recovered her presence of mind; she did not want Olena to stop talking about Vasyl, because she wanted so much to know who he was and from what village he came. But she had barely asked a question when Olena again began to talk about her *boiaryn*, and complained that he pulled her arms out, twisted her wrists roughly, tired her out, and so on.

Marusia listened to her for a long time, and did not know how to stop her: Olena would have been glad to talk about her *boiaryn* until sundown. At last she broke in and said:

"Then sing to the music as he dances, clap, encourage and praise him. Shout, 'Good, very good!'"

"But not to him! Aren't you listening?" Olena's voice rose. "I would sing only to Vasyl."

“Oh, what’s all this about Vasyl? Why do you like him so much?” cried Marusia. (For it is the nature of girls that when one loves a youth she depreciates him in order that she may hear him praised.) “Haven’t I seen your Vasyl? Where does he come from, I mean, from what village?”

“What? I like that! He is not from a village—He is from the town—a coatmaker, and a smart one, I can tell you! When he appears all the girls flock round him. He is always dancing and joking. How handsome he is! ‘May the Devil take him.’”

“He sways like a young ash tree; his red cheeks, like an apple, might have been painted; his eyes are like two stars. His forelock is not like a peasant’s, don’t you see? It has the regular merchant’s cut.”

“You praise him so much, you must be in love with him,” said Marusia in a low voice, hiding her nuts by thrusting her hands up her sleeves. She was sitting as if over a fire on account of what Olena had said.

“Rubbish! I in love with him! Perhaps I might be, but he pays no attention to anyone here. They say that his master wishes to adopt him, to accept him as a son. The master’s daughter is so beautiful, and so rich—it would be a good match. He has something of his own, of course. You saw yourself that he threw silver into the cup, for ransoming the bride. And he does this everywhere....”

Here Denis ran up to Olena, and, catching her by the sleeves, dragged her off to dance. Although she scolded him furiously and beat him back with her fists, she was helpless—be pulled and pulled. And she really did want to stay with Marusia for a while, and so satisfy her desire for talking about the youth of her fancy.

Marusia remained by herself. The thought of what Olena had told her went through her mind—that Vasyl’s master was going to adopt him and marry him to his rich and beautiful daughter. She was shocked by this, and bowed her head over her white arm and tears began to fall. She wiped them off with a handkerchief and hid her face in her arms and thought:

“Oh, what bad luck for me! It would have been better never to have seen him at all. How can I forget him now? These town girls are luckier than we are. Their boys are much nicer than ours. Oh, *dolenko moia lykha!* Poor me! Well, I had better go home now, and I will start to do something that will help me to forget him.

“I will keep these nuts and will always carry them with me, and will never give them away to anyone. I wonder if they could tell me, just for fun, if he loves me or not? Odd or Even?”

“Even! He loves you with all his faithful heart!” answered Vasyl, who had been standing near her for a long time, observing her distress, but not knowing how to approach her.

“Oh, *meni lykhenko*, trouble enough for me!” cried Marusia, and leaped up like a fish caught in a net. “Who is that? About whom are you speaking?” she asked, before she knew what she was saying.

“I speak of the one who loves you... the one you were thinking about,” said Vasyl, breathless with shyness and fear, since he had heard that she had someone in her mind by whom her whole soul was absorbed.

“Why, I... am not thinking of anyone specially,” said the poor girl, fearing that she had committed some sin. And then she asked: “Who could love me?”

“Marusia! Marusia!” exclaimed Vasyl, his beating heart making him gasp. “I know one who could love you!”

Marusia felt she was neither alive nor dead. She was frightened because Vasyl had begun to speak to her in such a violent way, and frightened lest Olena had seen that she was talking to a strange young man. In that case she would laugh at her; and what was worse, she was vexed that it seemed as if Vasyl were speaking of someone else who loved her. She longed to hear that it was he himself of whom he spoke.

Frightened, she wanted to rush from the place, but she could not move. And Olena was calling: "Come here! I am here."

But Vasyl stood beside Marusia as if he were planted there. He, too, did not know how to say any more, though his brain was racing with thoughts clamoring for utterance; but his tongue disobeyed and would not speak. And for greater grief he remembered that Marusia had been thinking aloud of some youth, and therefore it seemed hopeless for himself to be a wooer.

This interference of Olena, too, put him off the track, so they both—poor darlings—remained opposite each other and did not know when to start, where to go, nor what to do.

Then Olena herself approached Marusia and asked her if she were going to stay much longer.

"No," said Marusia. "It is time for me to go home. Nothing keeps me here." And saying this she sighed deeply: "Oh, help me, Mother of God!"

"I am going home, too," said Olena. "My mother needs me.... What do you think of this idea? Let us go tomorrow to the market in the town. Mother wants me to buy some things and you know better than I do how to make a good choice."

"Very well—let us go. My mother is not well. So I shall have to buy what we need. Call for me," said Marusia.

"I will call—I will call before sunrise. Wait for me. Let us go home together and we will buy some wild apples from the vendor."

And the girlfriends clasped hands and went their way.

Chapter III

Vasyl remained solitary, undecided, not knowing what to do. It seemed to him that he had given Marusia to understand that he was the one who loved her and thought about her.

"If she has no other one in view, and if she could love me even just a little, then I would need nothing more, neither money nor social station.

"She blushed so when I began to hint at my love for her; she cast her eyes to the ground and fingered her handkerchief all the time, so that it seemed as if she understood and felt what I felt; and yet when she went with Olena she did not say a single word to me, and did not look at me!"

In so sad a mood he followed Marusia from afar and observed that before she had gone as far as the second road she turned her head and looked back three times. Why? Who could explain?

It is a difficult thing to try to guess a girl's innermost thoughts and character, because women often pretend they do not love those who court them, and appear to be angry when in reality, though it is hidden beneath the surface, they love one man so passionately that it is beyond description.

And this is also true of some young girl who for the first time in her life meets a youth who greatly takes her fancy. She herself does not know what has happened to her. In her mind she wishes always to look at him, to speak to him only. She would like to sit beside him, but she

does not know why she is ashamed of such a feeling.

Though there is not a single soul around, it seems to her as if everyone is peeping at her, and that all must read in her own eyes that she has been speaking to a youth.

So this is why one girl was afraid and fled away, speaking never a word to the lad who sought to court her. And after she had run away she was sorry for herself, because she had acted in such a fashion—alas, alas, too late!

It would be all right if the boy would not be vexed with her and would continue his wooing—but if he is thinking: “*Lykho!* bad luck to her mother, curses on her daughter—how proud she is! *Tsur!* Away! Let her go out of my sight!” then it is the worst of ill fortune for the girl who was afraid to speak to him.

She may be sad and weeping secretly, but she takes no steps to bring him to her. And of course she should not approach him, because he might say: “She is hanging herself around my neck.”

Marusia came home in sadness, but it was not occasioned by any of these causes. She feared Vasyl did not love her for, she thought, if he had been in love he would doubtless have declared himself openly.

“But he was talking about someone else—not a word about himself. And Olena said that his master was going to accept him as a son, take him into his own house. And of course Vasyl loves his daughter. How could he help loving her? She is a town girl and they say these girls are always beautiful—Oh, how beautiful!

“I imagine that when she dresses up she puts on herself more necklets of beads than I own altogether, and for her dowry chest—why, she hasn’t just one, she has several. No doubt they are large and decorated with flowers, and move about on casters—and oh, how many pillows she must have!

Maybe so many that heaped up they would reach the ceiling! And I am not his equal—he wouldn’t look at one like me.”

Thoughts like these swarmed in Marusia’s head when she came home and seated herself on a bench.

Old Nastia, her mother, observed her from the bed where she lay groaning with illness; she noticed how sadly she was sitting, telling her nothing about the marriage feast, and not attempting to do a stroke of work. Nastia watched her for a long time and then asked her:

“Little daughter, why are you so sad, just as if you had been plunged into cold water? Perhaps you are sick? Oh, then may God protect you! Take care ... if you, too, should become sick, what would your father do with both of us on his hands? Tell me, have you any pain—what ails you?”

“Nothing, Mama!” said Marusia.

“Perhaps you broke your beads in some game, playing at the feast?” her mother suggested.

“No, Mama.”

“Then did someone abuse you? If so, tell your father and he will see to it at once.”

“No, Mama.”

“Well, if there is nothing wrong, why do you sit like this? Go, fetch water. It is time to get supper ready.”

“At once, Mama!” said Marusia. But she did not move.

Nastia waited and waited and then again inquired, and with a greater effort her words pushed Marusia to her task.

Not removing her wedding finery, nor putting away anything carefully, she took a basket to get vegetables in the garden. But instead of going there she absent-mindedly directed her steps to the spring-well, as she thought she had a pail in her hand. And when she reached the spring, people there began to laugh at her. Then she came to her senses and ran home.

But she was no better when she returned. She heated the oven but set empty pots in it; and, instead of lentils to add to the beet soup, she ground salt in a large earthen vessel and sifted it from time to time into the soup. And everything she did was exactly contrary to what should have been done.

Even old Naum on his return home was astonished when he saw what she was about.... After supper was prepared in this fashion Marusia went to milk the cows and Nastia began to tell her worries to Naum:

“Such misfortune! What is happening to Marusia? She seems well, but everything she starts to do is wrong. She is worrying about something. May God protect her if she has been bewitched by the Evil Eye!”

“That’s your idea—every woman thinks everything comes from the “Evil Eye,”” Naum muttered. “If a child has a cold or gets overheated in the hut you all say it is bewitched; if a child is hungry and begs for food—bewitched; if, when it is satisfied, it does not want to eat more—again, the ‘Evil Eye.’ If a child laughs or cries, if it sits, stands—everything is caused by the ‘Evil Eye.’”

“But what could these ‘eyes’ do? Nothing. They are looking at God’s world and that’s all. You could bring evil to a man with the hand, and, even more, with the tongue, but the eyes are not guilty.”

“Well,” said Nastia, “why does the *Baba*—the old wise woman—why does she ‘lick away’ and ‘whisper away’? If there were nothing, she would do nothing, but...”

“They are ‘whispering and licking away’ to deceive such fools as yourself and others. If you just submit to them they will be glad to ‘charm away’ everything, so that they may get money from you. Who could do anything good for a man except the merciful God? Misfortune and pardon both come from Him.

“Pray to Him only, know Him only; then that devil-work and those witches and fortune-tellers can have no company with you. Oh, Nastia, pray to God, lying down if you haven’t strength to rise. And I will pray too, and we shall see our Marusia well tomorrow. Now, hush, she is coming!”

When all the evening work was done, Marusia put the hut in order and then asked her mother what she should buy in town next day, and her father gave her money for her purchases. Then she made her bed on the broad, wooden bench and prayed to God, heaping up her prayers, thrice bowing to the ground, determined to keep her thoughts from Vasyl.

Her father had taught her in thus: “If thou needest something, or if sorrow overcome thee, turn at once to God; make three low bows, and ask Him for thy desire, and wait for His grace. Behold, this is our Father—He knows in what manner and in what time to give what is needed.”

Thinking in this way, Marusia lay down, but sleep did not come. Her mind was busy with her work, not with fancies about Vasyl. ... Oh, no! ... She does not want to know him, he has no use for her... and really now he is already betrothed, because the handkerchief which he took from his pocket belonged, not to a boy, but a girl

Probably “she” gave it, and he was not cheerful at the wedding feast because he was longing

for his *Holubka*, his dove.

“And after all, should I think about him? Oh, no, not I!... He was sitting as lonesome as if he were in the woods, not looking at anyone ... then he sighed, and seemed lost in thought once more. (And he came after me with those nuts.)

“No, Vasyl, it is not for our girls to think about you—you have your own. ... Therefore, he loves her, I think. It seems to me that he was continually thinking about her, for I saw tears in his eyes. But probably by now they are together ...and she doubtless is kissing his dear eyes which flash like lightning; when he looks at one, they flash,... Now she won't kiss them ... that is why he wept. Alas, what sorrow is mine! If I had known, I would not have gone to that feast. Why did I ask Olena about him? Oh, dear!

“Oh well, I am not going to think about him any more! And he isn't thinking about me. But, perhaps, he did mean something when he said ‘I know one who loves thee.’ And I think that *he* could not love me, because he is betrothed.

“Oh, may God be with thee, Vasyl! May God help thee, that thou mayest be married and that both may love one another.... But why am I crying? Oh, this grief! Why did I ever go to that marriage feast? Now I will sleep....

“Tomorrow at dawn I will rise and will go to market so maybe I will destroy and scatter my sorrows, and if I should meet him in the town I will pretend that I don't know him, and I will not look at him. I am sure that he will be with her in the bazaar buying something, because... their marriage feast is not far away. How happy he will be when he marries her!

“And she? Well, why am I bathing my face with tears? Oh, such a misfortune for me. I'm so unhappy! Why did I ever go to that marriage feast?”

Thus poor Marusia, though she did not want to think of Vasyl, thought of him all the time and did not close her eyes even for a moment. She was weeping and grieving all the night; and in our country the night is very short in the time of “Green Week,” when the Evening Star's light is quenched as the Morning Star begins to glow, and when the Big Dipper shines and rolls into the sun.

The stars began to shine not long ago, not brightly, but rather dimly as through a veil, because of the brevity of life. The nightingale hushed his song beside his mate that she might sleep well; the breeze also went to sleep without any fear, and the branches of the trees in the orchard moved now and then, very slowly, in their dreams.

Only one thing is heard—the tiny stream cascading, sifting itself over the mill dam; drowsily in monotone is there someone telling a fairy story? All around, everything is spellbound in silence.

But behold, a little star falls athwart the sky, then a second, a third; they hide themselves in the blue sky as if they had dropped into the ocean. And saying farewell to the earth, they weep a little, and their tears cause the dew to fall on the ground.

A drop of dew descending makes a faint rustling stir in the ravine; the breeze awakes and gently moves branches in the orchards and woods; then the mother birds, wakening, blink their eyes and twitter, so rousing their mates, sleeping beside them.

And because of the joy that again God's day is coming, when they may fly, play and woo their beloved (perhaps some of them will have bestowed an egg)—because of such joy they ring out their songs, those strains with which they praise the Lord of Heaven, the gracious Father, morning and evening. He is the Father of man and of every kind of beast and of bird; Father of

the smallest insect, too minute to be seen by the human eye.

But of them all, none sings so beautifully as the nightingale. He chirrup faintly, then one hears a louder sound—*chit-chit-chit*, like repeated clapping; he whistles, trills *chere-chi-chi*, so sweetly long-drawn-out!

Sometimes he hushes his note, and it seems as if he whispers to his mate how he loves her, and she doubtless answers telling him that she loves him too, and praises his songs. Then, overflowing with joy, his music resounds in a mighty burst over all the orchard. And if perhaps they kiss each other's beaks, then, ah then, he loses self-control entirely! He closes his eyes, chirrup and trills so high that it seems as if he would be voiceless for lack of breath, and again he swells with greater volume of sound.

A trill once more, high, breath-taking, glorious—this song so beautiful, so beautiful that one may not think to put it into words; one's soul remains lifted up with joy, transported.

Now the leaves on the birch trees murmur among themselves, murmur that they also may show forth this beauty because of God's bounty in His gift of bright sunshine; the tiniest grasses wake to life when the heavenly dew refreshes them with drops. Stems straighten, little flowers bud but and, opening their tiny mouths, exhale such an aroma over all the ravine that when you catch the perfume you have but one thought: O gracious God, Our Heavenly Father, everything on earth and in the waters and in the heavens—didst Thou create all these solely because of Thy bounty to Man?

And he, this miserable creature, this blade of grass, this atom of dust, is he thankful to Thee? O God of Truth, be ever kind to us, sinners! More than this may not be said.

Now light mist falls on the face of the rivulet, flowing with it, following as the stream runs, as if, ever close and indivisible, a lad and maid cleaving each to each ran as one to hide along the steep banks.

In the further distance, clouds begin to disperse, becoming more transparent, passing away in groups; assuming spiral shapes they make ready to leave the way open to some other more important guest—perhaps a king giving of his bounty to the universe. They roll far away behind steep mountains; from that vantage point waiting to observe what is to take place.

Now the road by which this important guest comes unrolls as a crimson path; the next moment it is as if someone is strewing silver flowers on it; and then—the road seems to be covered with golden sand scattered on its golden field. And the tops of the trees become red.

Golden sand is falling from the treetops, lower and lower. Everything is hushed, expectant.

Then it begins to emerge from behind the earth—what is it? Light and Fire and Beauty! It is impossible to look on the edge of the rim now—and what will it be when its entire surface appears, is manifested to the world?

Golden rays shower the earth, the heavens themselves become more beautiful. Everything is silent, is waiting that Beauty in her completeness may the sooner appear before the world, coming ... wide extending... rolling in waves. Beauty gazes over the globe and, as it were, sends forth its commandment:

“Praise the Lord Who created me and you, and daily sends me to give to all the world light, and life to every creature!”

And here again the birds, as if by someone's direction, with one voice hail this coming of Beauty. It seems as if every thing bursts forth into life. Man goes to his work; and the whole universe rejoices.

Chapter IV

Now Vasyl set out from the orchard. He had distinctly heard Marusia and Olena agreeing to go together to the town, so he did not take his homeward way, but wandered about in the same village all night, the hamlet being about four miles from the town. When dawn came he was on the watch for them.

Peeping between the orchard trees, he saw in the distance two girls who kept themselves away from the rest. They were walking slowly and talking. He at once recognized them, for the very good reason that his heart leaped, and so told him the news.

Therefore he also walked in their direction, pretending that he was going to the town. He sauntered on, keeping his head bent, as if deeply meditating. But in reality he was trembling all over and panting for breath, because of his joy in the realization that he would have a chance to speak to Marusia.

As the girls walked along, Olena was chattering like a magpie about anything that came into her head. Marusia pretended that she was listening to her, but actually she was thinking about her own affairs.

Then, suddenly, she recognized her Vasyl. Her hands and feet trembled, cold held her whole body as in a vise; then her spirit took fire, flamed; she could not *move* from the place where she stood.

“Oh, come more quickly!” cried Olena. “Why do you stumble so? We are late already.”

“Well, nobody has noticed whether I stumbled or not,” said Marusia. But she could not move, though she would have liked to fly to Vasyl as a dove to her mate. For she forgot that perhaps he did not love her, that he was betrothed to his master’s daughter—she forgot everything and wished only one thing—to be together with her dear Vasyl.

When Vasyl heard the girls talking he slackened his pace, took off his cap, bowed and said: “Good morning, girls. May God help you!”

“Thanks. May God help you, also!”

“Did you see any dog running across your path?” Vasyl asked.

“Tsur! Send it away!” cried Olena. “No, we didn’t see it. Was it running around near here?”

“Just now—a little while ago—the dog attacked someone,” Vasyl replied. “They chased it away—it was fierce—and it came back from another direction. So you can’t tell which way to look for it. I can tell you it’s a vicious brute—it attacks everybody and anything; that’s why I broke off a paling from the fence and now I’m hunting for it.”

“Bad luck for us! I am afraid of that dog. Let’s go back!” cried Olena.

“Don’t be afraid, girls. You’re going to town? So am I. I will join you and if the dog runs at us I will protect you.”

“God bless you! Now, Marusia, we are not afraid, eh?” said Olena.

And she was much pleased that they were going to town with a young man. So they went on all together.

Vasyl lied in saying there was a dog. He deliberately made them afraid so that they would beg him to accompany them and would be at their ease, talking freely. As they walked, Vasyl was always taking the lead, as everyone knows that a boy’s step is quicker than that of a girl. Getting ahead, he waited for them.

Marusia wavered for a long time, then, plucking up courage to speak to him, she said: “We walk slowly, and you have to wait for us. Perhaps we are keeping you back?”

“Why? What makes you think that?”

Marusia replied: “Perhaps you ought to hurry to the town? Perhaps your master’s... I mean, your master waits for you?” She said this in the hope that he might possibly say something about his master’s daughter.

Vasyl answered: “I do not care about town now, I have even forgotten it—I do not think of it at all” And, sighing deeply, he added: “I have just a single thought in my brain—may God help me! I am going to see the master just for the purpose ...”

“Why didn’t you dance yesterday at the marriage feast?” Olena interrupted him. He made a reluctant response, and she began to chat answering him ten words to his one.

As rapidly as scissors snip cloth, so did she chatter. She made up stories, added to them—and then she cross-examined him, took him up on every word he said so that he could not possibly get rid of her.

And dear Marusia was sorry that she had ever spoken to Vasyl. Ah, now he has told her frankly just what is in his mind, and just why he is going to his master! It is certain that he is going to arrange with him about his marriage with his master’s daughter!

So, being in such a mood, Marusia walked and lagged behind—her feet refused to serve her. She was angry with herself—why did she go to the market? She was angry with Vasyl, because fate sent him across her path, being almost betrothed, and yet wanting to go to a bazaar with other girls. She was angry with Olena because she was so gay; why was she chatting with a betrothed youth? She was angry with everyone and everything. And she did not know why.

Now they came to the town and walked about the bazaar. Olena at once bought everything that she needed, but Marusia followed her with the feeling that the world had become tedious and a bore; and all the time she was fussing and telling Olena that they should hurry home.

Vasyl followed in their wake as a moneybag carrier follows the Christmas carol singers. He carried Marusia’s basket and put into it everything that Olena bought. Then, having seen that Marusia was silent all the time and wondering if she were angry with him, he gained courage to ask her a question: “Why aren’t you buying something, Marusia?”

“Oh, I have not much to buy!” answered Marusia, and turned away from him, that she might not look at someone else’s betrothed. “I have only to buy tinder for my mother’s pipe... and red thread for my father... for embroidering a handkerchief, and mutton for the Petrivka fast...”

So our Marusia babbled on—Vasyl had a hard time to control himself so that he should not laugh in her face! And it was a good thing that Olena did not hear her; this was because she was very busy bargaining for pins from a huckster.

Vasyl only laughed a little to himself, for he grasped the idea that something out of the ordinary was beneath the surface, and he began to buy all the things that Marusia needed. These bought, he collected them and said: “Well, girls, I don’t know whether you will like the idea or not, but I will escort you home, if you say so, to protect you from the dog. And then, too, I have some business with a man in your village.”

Again Vasyl lied. He had no business at all with anyone there. He only wished ...but we shall see... later on.

So they went out from the town, all three, but as soon as the street was left behind and they were on the steppe, Olena cried out suddenly:

“Oh, how foolish and crazy I am! I have forgotten my father’s boots at the cobbler’s. What in the world shall I do?”

They held a council and decided that Olena should go alone to the town for the boots,

because it was not far, and she could be in no danger in the streets; and Vasyl remained beside Marusia. They agreed to wait there for Olena, who promised to return quickly.

When Vasyl was left alone with Marusia, they sat on a hillock and Vasyl said to her at once: "Marusia, even though you may be angry with me and perhaps will drive me away and order me never to appear in your sight again, I am going to tell you what I did not say yesterday."

"What is that?" asked Marusia, indescribably startled, though she did not know why she should be.

"Am I the only one in the world who, seeing you, would not love you? Dear Marusia, with my whole heart I love you! I love you more than anything in the world.... Don't be angry with me, don't turn away from me. Don't cover your dear eyes with your white hand.

"Give it to me. Let me press it to my heart. If you don't love me in the same way, I shall die! Why don't you speak, why don't you look at me? Say but half a word! Tell me that you are not angry with me because of my love. Ask other people about me. Maybe you will hear something good."

As Vasyl began speaking Marusia lost herself utterly, her heart beat so violently. She felt as if she were in a fever; she was trembling and afraid, not knowing why. If the earth beneath her should crack wide open she would jump into it.

But she would take Vasyl with her! And if she had wings she would fly to the ends of the world ... but not alone; Vasyl would be with her. But what was she to do? The ground did not yawn to swallow her; she had no wings; her feet did not seem to belong to her.

Vasyl grasped one of her hands and kept it next to his heart, which was beating in the same way as her own. She did not look on the world with her dear eyes, but she covered them with her hand and asked Vasyl in very low tones, so low that she could hardly hear herself speak: "But are you betrothed?"

"No, Marusia, I am not betrothed. I have never thought of a girl until now. When I saw you yesterday my world was turned upside down. I could not even breathe the same air without you by my side. I could never find a girl like you anywhere."

"But your master's daughter? Your master is going to adopt you?" said Marusia, a little bolder, because her heart was becoming lighter.

"Not my master's daughter, not even the daughter of a king, of a Prince, not even the daughter of an officer himself! You are my only gladness, my only treasure. If you would love me a little! I will not look at anyone else. Ask people about me. I would wait for you a whole year."

"A whole year... so long!"

"As long as you wish! Only don't send me away; don't be angry with me."

"I am not angry with you."

"But why do you cover your eyes? Why do you turn away from me? Perhaps you love another? Tell me, don't be ashamed if that is so. Let me hear it myself from your own lips. And then I will go away forever into the wide world."

"No, I don't love another."

"Well, then, look at me. Don't hide your face."

"How can I do that? I am ashamed."

"But—Nonsense! There's no reason to be ashamed."

"Is it not a shame to say... that I... love you? Oh, for the whole treasure of the world I could not say that!" And, saying this, she wept bitterly and began to entreat him: "Oh, Vasylenko, my

Eagle, my glorious Falcon! Do not ask me if I love you! I would not tell you that in all the years of my life, for you might laugh at me.

“I myself do not know what has happened to me. I have never loved anyone yet; I did not want to love anyone; I kept away entirely from the boys of the village. Yet when I saw you my old world became strange and unlovely; I was tired of everything; but when they said that you were engaged, then I did not know what to do....”

“My Marusenka, little Swan, little Star, little Minnow, little Quail!”—Vasyl repeated his endearments, embracing her—“I can’t feel the ground under my feet... I seem to be in Paradise! Do I sleep or wake? Is it true that you love me, Marusenka? Tell me, is it true?”

“No, I would not say it, dear; before God, I would not say it!”

“Why do you not want me to be sure of my happiness?”

“I am ashamed.”

“Marusia! I shall kiss you, if you do not say it.”

“Kiss me ten times ... as long as I don’t kiss you!”

“So take this—and this—and this!...” cried Vasyl, kissing her again and again, without stopping for breath, kissing her until he could not say a word.

Marusia lay in his arms, scarcely aware of what was happening; she seemed herself to be in Paradise, so happy was she. She wanted to say a word and could not utter it. She wanted to leave his embrace, but it was as if she were fastened to his neck; she wanted to close her eyes, but they, against her will, were gazing into Vasyl’s, and his own glowed like burning charcoal. She wished to turn from him and only clung the more....

And he? He was looking at her in such a way that it seemed as if his eyes would devour her. He forgot the whole world and everyone. A shot from a cannon would not have aroused him to action! He looked only at his Marusia, holding her tightly in his arms.

Then she came to herself, sighed heavily, and whispered through her tears, “Vasylenko! What has happened to me? I do not understand myself; there is only one thought in my mind, that you love me, that you are mine—only.... I am afraid it is a sin?”

“Why is it a sin?” asked Vasyl, kissing her and pressing her to his heart. .

“Oh, do not kiss me, my dearest! It always seems to me that it must be a sin.... I am afraid to bring down God’s anger on me.”

“But, my Marusenka, I swear to you by the same God that there is no sin in it. He commanded that man and woman should be husband and wife. He would have us love each other and cleave to each other until death. So, I love you, we love each other, later God will help us to fulfill His holy law, and then we will not be separated till death comes. And until we are joined in marriage it is quite right for us to love and to make love like doves.”

“But if... Oh, God forbid! ...” said Marusia, and leaned heavily on his shoulder. She did not finish her thought, and was afraid to look at him.

“I say also, God forbid!”... Vasyl cried, being in fear also when he thought of what Marusia meant. “My little *Zozulenka*, my cuckoo! I would care for you as my own eye. No evil, devilish thought will ever be in my heart. Don’t be afraid of me. I know God in Heaven. He would punish an evil deed. As for the laughter or whispers of men, I tell you don’t be afraid of me! If it should ever happen that you might forget God and give no heed to the shame of gossip, I myself would protect you as a brother would guard a sister.”

“My dear little brother!” cried Marusia, her eyes as it were embracing him, shining like a

very bright star. “Now I myself kiss you these three times, because I see that you have no evil thought!” And she fell on his shoulder, looking into his eyes as imploringly as a lamb about to be slaughtered, gazing piteously. In such a fashion Marusia looked upon Vasyl, and a tear, like a dewdrop on a flower, glistened in her eyes. And as a flute plays sadly, she asked him:

“But what would happen if you should abandon me after all?”

“Don’t say such a thing, Marusia; don’t let such a thought enter your mind, my dear little dainty morsel! Sin though it be to swear, yet I will swear such an oath that, if it were broken, the sin for me would be a mortal one...”

“I believe you, I believe you, my dear Falcon, my beloved Swan! What would you say if I said I really believed you?”

It would take too long to tell of all that Marusia and Vasyl had to say. They forgot the world, their surroundings—and if Olena had not shouted to them while some distance away—if she could have crept upon them stealthily—she would have seen them, between every two sentences, kissing and kissing. But when they heard her voice they broke away from each other.

As a child would do, Vasyl began to sift the sand through his fingers and Marusia found some broken pieces of earthenware and played with them for “jacks.” And neither one of them looked at the other.

Then all three went home. Olena, observing Marusia closely, thought: “She was never so gay and talkative in her life, and especially with a boy. Usually she is afraid of young men without any reason. And now she is the first to begin a conversation, and makes jokes and invents stories. And, all the way, she laughs with Vasyl! And it seems to me that I don’t exist at all!

“In the morning when we were going to town she did not even let breath come out of her mouth, and now she does not stop talking for a moment. In the morning she walked so slowly, and was angry when I hurried her, and now she runs ahead and does not feel the earth under her feet. She throws sand or twigs at Vasyl and he tries to catch her, and when he does he turns her round and round by her wrists.

“It means something, this!... Wait a moment, you sly one! You rebuked us for our tricks with the boys, and I will pay you back for all that.”

When they approached the village, Vasyl said: “Well, good-bye, girls! I was so glad to be with you. I thank you both, for everything. I don’t know when we shall meet again?”

At this, tears fell from Marusia’s eyes. She wiped them away with a handkerchief, not allowing Olena to see that she was crying, and began to hum a song—she even pretended to dance, but her eyes looked eagerly into those of Vasyl

“Now take all your treasures,” said he. “Lift them out of the basket, see if by chance I have lost anything, and then I will go my own way.”

Then the girls began to remove the various articles. Olena took what belonged to her, and put it in the pouch of her blouse; and Marusia, when she had looked over her purchases, put them back into the basket and went on.

When she had gone just a little distance, she pretended that she had just remembered something, and cried: “Oh, my goodness! I took out everything except the bluestone crystals ‘which Father told me to buy. I did not get that parcel from Vasyl. Well, I think I’d better run to overtake him.” And she ran and shouted to him to wait for her.

Did Vasyl know her voice? Well!... He stood as if on nettles waiting for Marusia to run to him, to hear what she had to say.

When she reached him she said, "I pretended that I had left the bluestone with your things—just because I wanted to speak to you alone. Come down today to the pond in our pine woods. I'll be there and we can have a chance to talk to one another.... Leave me alone, don't touch me! Olena will suspect. Give me this bluestone and say good-bye, my dear Falcon! Well, now, go!"

With these words she ran at full speed to Olena.

"That's all right for now," muttered Olena. "She can't stop me now!"

Chapter V

Marusia entered her home again. Goodness! How joyful, how bright and talkative she was; relating everything and chattering like three servants! So her mother, observing her, became more cheerful and felt relieved.

At first she had intended to scold her daughter because she came late, but when Marusia began to pet and caress her, to embrace and kiss and cajole her, and started to light the fire in the stove and put on the earthen pots, and showed such activity generally, her mother decided not to upbraid her.

And indeed she had not time to spend a thought over what had happened—Marusia had dinner ready in an instant. She sat down with her hands clasped idly in her lap and still repeated to her mother how fine it was to go to the bazaar in the cool, early morning; told her what she had seen in town; how she had bargained, what she had bought, whom she had seen, with whom she had spoken—what had taken place there, and everything, telling it all over again five times—always the same story.

But of Vasyl, not a word, not even a shrug or nod! She would have liked to tell everything to her mother, but she did not know where to begin, and she thought to herself: "Let me ask Vasyl. He will tell me how to say it."

Old Naum came home; while he was eating he thought: "From the day of her birth Marusia never made such nice-tasting beet soup as she did today, and the meat, too, is well roasted. Everything is good, but best of all, she herself is joyful, joking all the time."

Then he whispered to Nastia: "See what I said? That there was no need of 'licking away' and whispering! It will pass away by itself."

After dinner Marusia removed the dishes from the table in haste, grasped a pitcher and said: "Well, Mother, now I am going to pick wild strawberries; at the *bazaar* there were quantities of them—our girls brought them in pots. I'll pick some for you and some I'll sell"

Her mother had no time to answer, for Marusia was outside the gate, hurrying to the woods, to the shores of the lake. She saw berries on the way, but she thought: "Maybe Vasyl is waiting for me there already. I will hurry first to him and when I've sat with him for a while, then on my way home I'll pick the berries."

She did not look long for Vasyl. He was there, and when they met it did not matter in the least that they had seen each other three hours before! It seemed as if they had been separated for ten years. They embraced, kissed each other, talked and talked of their love.

Sometimes they would walk hand in hand; sometimes they would find a place to sit down; then again they would rise once more and walk. They didn't notice that dusk was falling. So true it is that when you are together with one you love a day passes sooner than one brief hour.

Marusia was the first to cry: "Oh, what have I done! Look where the sun is!"

"What's the matter? What of it?" asked Vasyl.

“Well,” said Marusia, “how can I go home?”

“Don’t be afraid. I will escort you,” Vasyl answered.

“Oh, I’m not afraid to go, but I’ve picked no berries and I begged mother to let me go to the woods for them!” explained Marusia. “What in the world am I to do? Must I tell Mother that I spoke to you and forgot about the berries?”

“No, Marusia, don’t tell your mother about me just yet.”

“Why not?” Marusia asked.

It’s not the right time, just now. We’d better wait.”

“How can you say that? Everything should be told to one’s parents; no lies must ever be told them. What will I tell them now? What reason shall I give for not picking strawberries in the wood?”

“Well, Marusia, let them hear everything, only say nothing about me yet. I will myself tell them when the time comes.”

“But it’s not only one’s parents—it’s a sin to lie to anyone!” demurred Marusia.

“It’s not a lie,” Vasyl maintained. “And they should be told everything, but if you announce this now and they do not know me, they will think that I took advantage of you. Then they will scold you and drive me away, and they will part us.

“Have patience, little Minnow, just till the end of Peter’s Fast, and I will do something that your parents will hear of; they’ll discover something good about me! Then I’ll send the marriage-brokers, and then you can tell them everything. It is really a lie, a sin, to keep things secret forever; but in this case we will tell them nothing before the time. Is it all right, my Little Lady, my *Panianochka*?” he asked, and kissed her with all his heart.

Marusia was lost in thought for a long time, and then she said: “Maybe it is so; I know nothing about it all now. But I will do as you say. Yet, Vasyl, my dear Cossack, think what you will of me, but I shall not come to you, here, nor at the bazaar, nor anywhere.”

“Why not?” cried Vasyl, in fear.

“Well, make what you like of all this, but I believe it is a sin to do in secret what you would not tell your mother. Even if you should be furiously angry, not just frowning as you are now, I won’t come, and don’t wait for me, don’t look for me!

It would be different if I were betrothed. Then it would be all right; but now someone might see us and then what ill-natured gossip might go abroad!

I don’t want that,” said Marusia. “May God protect me from it.

“I am already afraid of Olena. She was looking at us very closely when she returned the second time from town, and she murmured something under her breath; now when she returns home I shall tell her everything, and ask her not to tell anyone before the time, Vasyl. My Falcon, my lover, don’t be vexed with me! Anyway, you will send the matchmakers, the *Starosty*, soon. Then we will not be separated long.”

No matter how Vasyl begged and entreated her to meet him by the lake every second or third day, she would not do it for all the riches of the world. And after saying so, she returned to her home, forbidding him to follow.

He went back over the hill with head bowed, and she set out through the pine woods, wishing that she did not have to lie to her mother. On the way, she went to meet the herd of cows pasturing beside the village, knowing that Olena did the same every evening. She wanted to tell her everything about Vasyl, and ask her to keep it secret.

Olena did not come to meet the herd, however, and the other girls told Marusia that on the

morning of that day, when she was at the same place, the matchmakers had arrived; they, with the groom, came from a farm some twenty miles away.

So, paying no attention to custom and wedding ceremonies—to anything, in fact, because the bridegroom was a fine fellow and a good matrimonial chance—they had delivered embroidered wedding scarves, bound the matchmakers with them as symbol of betrothal, and the young couple were married at once. After the wedding, they took Olena with her father and mother and went to the groom's house in the country where the wedding festivities were held.

Ah! How light Marusia's heart became! Now there would not be a witness of her intimacy with Vasyl.

When she came home it was burdensome to her to have to lie to her mother about the berries. She never had lied in all her life before, and she did not know how to carry it off. Well, she mentioned the herd and Olena—"and this way and that way she hid the ants in the water."

When she was working around the house and was with her mother she was joyful, especially since the latter felt better and had risen from her bed. Her father also was in a good humor; so not only did she not grieve, but she thanked her good fortune that she had acted as she did, and had not allowed Vasyl to see her. And walking about at her tasks she always thought: "Oh, may time go more swiftly, so that I may tell them everything about Vasyl, and then sin will go from my soul!"

When she lay on her bed, she could not induce sleep to come. At once Vasyl came into her thoughts—no doubt he was grieving that he would not be able to see her soon. If she did not see Vasyl for one week—or two—God save her! What in the world would she do?

"Yesterday," she thought to herself, "I did not know how much I should love him today. After that time when he told me he loved me—Oh, how he kissed!—" and then she became so ashamed over the thought of that night that she felt her cheeks flaming.

"Oh, what did I do!" she thought. "Is it really I myself who never wanted to hear anything about boys? Oh, I would rather sink through the earth from shame! Suppose Vasyl only mocked me?" And at this thought her cheeks burned even more.

But thinking about it all, she came to the conclusion that Vasyl was not the kind of man to do a thing like that—to mock her when he swore he loved her so much; and then she felt more peaceful. Only she still wished that she had not kissed him nor lingered with him in the woods.

"But," she thought, "it is the first and last time. It is Love that has attacked me, and Mother says that Love is like a dream. You cannot get rid of it by eating or sleeping or working; what you are doing you don't know, as it is in a dream.

"O Mother of God, protect me, so that I may not do something worse! But if I do not see him, then there will be no one with whom to make merry.... I did very well after all, and I should be thankful that I forbade Vasyl to visit me."

Taking counsel with herself in this way she arose, because it was already dawn, and began to do the morning duties. She milked the cow, but watched all the time to see if Vasyl might be coming; she went to fetch water, and there, too, she thought Vasyl might be approaching. While she was beating salted bacon in a mortar with a pestle she kept her eyes on the door, thinking that perhaps the next moment Vasyl would open it. She set the table for dinner, but peeped out of the window to see if he was coming.

So she was waiting—and not waiting; one moment she wished that he would come, the next she was afraid, and did not want him to come.

After dinner, sitting in the hut, she thought: "Oh, I wish he would not come in! I will go into

the yard in case he does.” When she went into the yard she thought again: “I wish he were not likely to walk in the street—he might see me—I’ll go back to the house.”

So in this way she found the whole world irksome and disagreeable in the daylight hours, and in the night she slept little. All the time she wondered and wondered when she would see Vasyl, and when the time would come when there would be no need for parting.

And Vasyl was no better than she. He not only neglected his work but left his master and the town, and all the time he was wandering around the village where Marusia lived. He sought continually and inquired in every likely place. He went to the woods, to the lake; and where the two of them had sat, he sat—but there was no Marusia, Marusia did not come.

He walked from one street to another all over the village, but he did not know where her house was, nor her father’s name. “Marusia!” only “Marusia” ... that was all he knew; he had not wanted to know more; he had not asked her what her surname was, because he had no need to know it at the time; he only told her how he loved her and listened to her as she told him how she loved him.

The Eve of Peter’s Fast arrived—the first week of Peter’s Fast passed; still was Vasyl wandering and roaming about and not knowing what to do.

Once, walking aimlessly as usual, he saw a man who was carrying sacks from the mill, and part of his wagon came to pieces and all his load fell out. He was trying to fix the wagon in some way, but the horse would not stand quiet; the man’s entire attention was absorbed by his problem; Vasyl noted that he was rather old and had not strength enough for his task.

So, being of a friendly nature, Vasyl approached and hailed him: “Let me help, Uncle, because you aren’t strong enough to manage both the horse and the bags.” The man thanked him and asked him to give his help.

So, with his aid, the wagon was patched up, tottering on three wheels. The man thanked Vasyl again, suggesting that, if possible, he go with him to his door, for he was afraid that if the ropes got loose he would not be able to fix them, and dusk was approaching.

Vasyl walked with him, but asked no questions of him; he was still thinking of Marusia, and so was indifferent to his surroundings, He walked and walked behind the wagon till he was in the village where Marusia lived! With joyful heart he said *to* himself: “That’s all right; I will wait here and perhaps I shall learn something about Marusia, and what she, my little Jackdaw, my *Halka*, is doing all day.”

Then the man drove his wagon into the yard.

Zirk! Vasyl stared, for there he suddenly saw his Marusia running toward the man, crying, “Where have you been, Father? We were—” ... and she was struck speechless when she saw her dear Vasyl, her Swan, her *Lebedyk*. Because of her great joy she did not know what to do nor what to say, and she ran into the house.

Naum—for it was indeed he—put the sacks into the granary and took the harness off the mare, and when all the work was done with the help of Vasyl, went with him into the house. And there they sat down and began to talk.

Now Vasyl was not tongue-tied; he questioned Naum about many things; and, too, he told him about himself, where he was living and working; also, he was very respectful to Nastia.

But he pretended that he was not looking at all at Marusia, who was trailing herself from the living room into the kitchen, and from the kitchen into the hall, and from the hall into the kitchen. And she, too, pretended that she had never seen him from the day she was born!

When they had sat for a long time talking and talking, Vasyl began to look for his cap to go

home. Then Naum said: "Come to us, Vasyl, tomorrow for dinner, if you like. Tomorrow is Holy Sunday, and then we will talk some more."

Vasyl promised to come, and bowed and left the hut. Naum cried: "Where are you, Marusia? Go and escort Vasyl to the gate, and see that the dogs do not annoy him."

This was exactly what Marusia wanted to do; she ran from the house before Vasyl had hardly left the hall. They grasped hands. She said "Oh, Vasylo! If I had been one more day without seeing you I would have died!"

"Tomorrow, Marusia, I will tell you how I suffered without you! But now, like a good girl, listen to what your old folks say about me. Will they like me or dislike me? Tell me this when we meet, so that I may decide in what way to tell them what they must know."

"Look, then, what I will do, Vasyl. Supposing my old folks praise you! Then I will bind a red ribbon round my forehead and about my hair. But if all should go contrary—which God forbid—then I will wear a black ribbon and leave my hair loose.

"When you come, look at me, and you'll know at once. Good-bye, my dearest, until tomorrow!"

All the evening Marusia was busy washing spoons and dishes, cleaning the cupboard, whitewashing the oven, and washing herself, but she worked so quietly that she was not heard at all. She was afraid to miss, through any noise she might make, a single word of what her father and mother were saying about Vasyl; but they praised him the whole time!

Nastia repeated again and again how courteous and handsome he was, and Naum commended him for being as wise as a scholar. "I know," he said, "all his kin. His relations are honest, his uncles are rich enough, although he himself is an orphan; but even a son with a father living could not be as brave a Cossack as he is!"

Marusia did not miss a single word, and that very evening she made ready a red ribbon to wear on the morrow, and with great joy she went to sleep, though it would be impossible to say if she slept for an hour all night.

In the morning she dressed up in her finery; she plaited her tresses in many little braids and coiled them on her head; then she added her ribbons, which hung most effectively, dangling. Then she adorned herself with the special red ribbon, and decked her head with flowers.

She prepared dinner in an instant: there was soup, made with fresh fish (the night before she ran to a neighbor, a fisherman, and obtained the fish from him); then there was lentil porridge to be eaten with oil; salted *tarania*, fish with noodles; and then dumplings with specially prepared hemp-seed paste. When she was through with the preparation of all this, she went with her father to the church.

After their return Marusia peeped through the window, and saw Vasyl coming. She ran out at once, pretending to protect him from the dog, but in reality to give him a chance to see that she was wearing the red ribbon.

As she ran, she cried: "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid!" And at the same time she passed her hand to and fro over the ribbon as if she wished to say: "Don't be afraid; see the red ribbon!"

Well, it did not matter what was there to eat! But they ate well, and talked a great deal. After dinner Naum lay down, put his head in Nastia's lap and slept, and Nastia combed his hair, nodded, and slept above him.

And the young people, like doves, were still making love. When the old couple woke from their nap they were sitting in the hut; later they sat down in the shade of the granary, and so till dusk came. Then, supper over, Vasyl went home.

But after this he began to come to old Naum's house every day, without being invited. The first time he had business with the smith; the second, with the cooper; the third time he had occasion to visit some people in the village, and each time he looked in on Naum.

When Vasyl found Naum in the house, he talked with him; but if not, he would sit for a while with Nastia. And they became so used to him that if one day he came later than they expected they would long for his appearance, and would say to one another: "Our Vasyl has not come; he is not coming for dinner!" For each time they insisted that he should have dinner with them.

And what of Marusia? She was beside herself with joy. When Vasyl came she always found a nook where they could talk together and make love undisturbed; and when he was absent; then you may be sure he would hear afterward how the old folk had praised him.

Chapter VI

The Day of St. Peter and St. Paul came, and they tasted meat once more. And on the next day, before sunset, Nastia ran into the house, breathing heavily, and crying: "Naum! Naum! I am sure the marriage-brokers are coming."

"To whom?"

"To us, to us! They are at the doors already. Make ready the Table and sit down quickly on the bench. As for you, Marusia, go into the other room at once and adorn yourself."

When Marusia heard that the matchmakers were on their way she let everything fall from her hands, and her mind became a blank. She kept her eyes fixed only on her mother, and her cheeks were flaming. Usually they were rosy enough, but now they became crimson as clusters of *kalyna*, the cranberry.

In the end her mother had fairly to push her into the other room, where she began to dress her daughter in a *plakhta*, her new plaid skirt, and everything that a girl should wear, looking her best.

Then someone knocked three times with a staff on the door. Naum quickly fetched a new coat and belt, arrayed himself in these, girded himself, trembling as if he were afraid, and muttered:

"O gracious God! Give my little daughter a good husband. Forgetting my sins, remembering her own goodness, send her happiness."

A second time three knocks were heard, made by a staff. Naum, now dressed, swept the crumbs from the tablecloth and moved the bread, which was always on the table, towards the *pokuttia*, or Corner of Honor.

Nastia lit the candle standing before the holy icons. Sitting on the bench, Naum waited till for the third time the three knocks sounded.

Then he crossed himself and called out:

"If you are good people and with good tidings for us, then we invite you into the house! Nastia, come also and sit down."

Then Nastia, who had by this time attired Marusia, entered and, crossing herself three times, sat beside Naum, and upon his summons two *Starosty*, or matchmakers, came into the hut.

They were worthy, burly townfolk, bearing staves, girded in blue *zhupans*, or long-coats of English worsted.

The elder of the two carried in his hand a holy loaf. And behind him was Vasyl. Saints preserve us! He seemed neither alive nor dead; his face like a whitewashed wall.

The *Starosty* said a prayer, and bowed before the host and hostess.

Then Naum (although he knew them very well, but speaking for tradition's sake) said: "What people are you? Whence do you come? Why has God brought you here?"

Then spoke the elder: "Allow us to bow to you and serve you with good words. Listen to us carefully; and if our speech should be agreeable to you—if *that* should follow ... then we ... of course! ... But if our speech is not to your liking, we will return.

"And for proof that we are honest people, and have some manners, behold the holy bread in our hands."

Naum took the holy bread, kissed it, and put it beside the loaf on the table.

"We accept the holy bread; we are not unmindful of what you say. Sit down, good folk. We don't know what will happen yet. But in the meantime, don't let your feet get more tired. Perhaps you come from a distant place—from some kingdom or dominion?"

The matchmaker replied:

"We are foreigners, *Nimtsi*⁷—trappers, youthful braves. Not long ago a heavy snowstorm fell in deep drifts upon our land and my comrade said to me: 'Why look everlastingly on this blizzard? Let us seek elsewhere for game.'

"We rode, following many trails, but found nothing. Then we met this Prince,⁸ riding on a bay horse."

Here he bowed to Vasyl, who rose and bowed in return, since they were alluding to him.

"And at that meeting he said: 'Hai, trappers, youthful braves, hunters! Do me a favor. Show your friendship. Not long ago I came across a fox, or a marten—possibly it was a beautiful girl. I ask of you no food nor drink. I must have her. Help me then to catch her. Ask of me whatsoever your soul desires. I'll give you ten towns and a stack of grain.'

"Young hunters, we needed exactly what he promised. We followed the trail along all the towns. The first led us to the land of the *Nimets*, and thence to Turkey; we went through all the tsardoms and dominions, but could not find what was sought.

"Finally, we said to the Prince: There are other kinds of game in the fields, beside the marten, so let us look elsewhere. It is just possible we would find a beautiful girl somewhere else.'

"But the Prince was like a log which you cannot split; he would not budge, and said: 'I have traveled all over the world, in many tsardoms and dominions, but never did I see such a marten, such a beautiful girl.'

"So we followed the trail and came to this village—the name of which we do not know. We lost our way in the storm, but at sunrise we arose and followed the trail. It led to your house; the marten went into it; we wish to trap it. Probably what we would see is really a beautiful girl in your home.

"Now we make an end of our speech—do you make an end of the matter? Give to our Prince the marten—your beautiful daughter. Will you give her up now, or allow her to grow a

⁷ Ukrainian peasants might call a foreigner or anyone whom they could not understand a "*Nimets*," a dumb man, one who cannot speak. Today, *Nimets* means a German.

⁸ An ancient custom was that of calling the bridegroom the "Prince" and his bride the "Princess" during the three days of wedding ceremonies.

little older?”

While this traditional speech was being made Marusia was in the other room on her knees, bowing her head to the floor, praying that her father would give her to Vasyl; and the latter, sitting on the bench, was watching her through the open door, sighing deeply and from time to time meeting her eyes.

And when the *Starosty* had recounted their story, and it was the father’s turn to speak, Marusia leaned against the door and listened.

But Naum, frowning, remained silent for a time. And then he said: “I do not know how to speak in this matter. I cannot speak in rhymes, as is the custom. I thank you for all your labors. You have come from a great distance. Maybe you will have a drink?”

When Marusia heard this (which meant refusal), what an outcry she made! Nastia struck her hands together and let them fall on her hips, exclaiming: “Alas, Alas, *Oi meni lykhko!* Why must it be like this?”

And Vasyl slipped to the ground before Naum, kissing his feet and weeping bitterly.

“Be to me a real father; don’t mock the poor orphan! Why do you take my soul from my body? I could not live without your Marusia. I will work for you always as a serf and will follow out all the wishes of your heart. Do with me as you will Orphan that I am, still let me live in this world!”

Now Marusia, forgetting what was proper and what was not, ran out and fell at her father’s knees and entreated him, and cried, and then she turned to her mother and kissed her hands, saying:

“Dear Father, my Dove, my Falcon, my dearest Swan! Mother, my own one, little Duck, little Quail, my dearest Dove! Don’t let your child perish! Give me the chance to live still in this world. Don’t part me from Vasylechko. Don’t look on me as a daughter. Let me be your servant-maid.

“I will do any work you command, without any complaints. I will support myself and will care for and honor you as long as you live. Let me stay with Vasyl if only for a year, that I may know what happiness means in this world.”

In such a manner Marusia and Vasyl in each other’s presence entreated the old couple, and in such a heartbroken fashion that both the marriage-brokers rose from their seats and wiped tears from their eyes with the folds of their coats.

Then, the first *Starosta* could contain himself no longer and said: “Oh, noble *Svat!*⁹ In such an impossible situation it is not my business to say a word more than I should. My business is this: to say what tradition commands, not to weigh the answer. ‘Whatsoever you hear, with that go away.’

“It is a sad affair, this, that you should give us a cup from which to drink! Now we have nothing good to wait for.

“But, seeing their tears, and hearing their prayers, we feel that we ourselves cannot keep back our words—we must speak or we shall burst! How say you, son of Olexii? There is no escape; bless the children; let Marusia bind us.”

But Naum only shook his head, wiped tears away with his sleeve and again bent his head and was silent.

Then the *Starosta* said: “Maybe the old mother is the cause of the trouble.”

⁹ *Svat*: So-called in anticipation of the betrothal ceremony when he would be kinsman of the bridegroom.

Old Nastia answered for herself: “Oh, dear me!” she cried. “Should I not wish happiness for my child, for my very own? Where should we look for a better than Vasyl? He is a wise child, and obedient, but am I not the wife of my husband? Should I not obey him? In our household all goes after the old way; he is the law for me, not I for him. But why he does not wish to give her up, I don’t know. He has always loved Vasyl. Say now, Naum, what is it you are doing?”

Then Vasyl and Marusia, weeping, approached Naum, and old Nastia crying, and the marriage-brokers bowing, and all beseeching him. He was silent, absolutely dumb, with difficulty suppressing his tears.

Then he rose and sighed heavily, crossed himself as before the merciful Lord, and said: “I have only one joy in the world—it is my Marusenka. I pray every day God gives us for her happiness—but alas! —praying thus for one thing, shall I do another? Praying for her happiness, shall I myself leave her to drown?”

“Farewell, gentlemen, *Svatova!* Certainly you may have a drink if you feel like it; if not, don’t mind about it, and give me, too, rest—for—Oh, I did not mean to say that, but you made me so sorrowful. For I am indeed sorry that I have decided in this way in Vasyl’s case; but that can’t be helped. Farewell, good children—go. Never mind about all that.”

Here again they all came closer to him. “If you like Vasyl,” they said, “why don’t you marry Marusia to him?” And Marusia clung to his neck and shed tears; Vasyl fell on his knees, wept bitterly and implored him.

“But—why don’t I give her in marriage?” Naum said, sighing. “Because I am sorry for my offspring! This is not the time, on such an important occasion as arranging a wedding, to discuss everything.

“Come, Vasyl, tomorrow—but alone, without other people, then I will tell you everything. There is nothing more to talk about; farewell; and there is your holy bread.”

Whether the matchmakers wanted to or not, having taken their bread, they went out together with Vasyl—or rather, they led him out, because he did not have strength enough to walk alone. Naum remained with his family, and sat in mournful contemplation. Marusia was crying so that she sank on the floor, and Nastia, weeping, watched over her and wondered what had happened to the old man that he had offended Vasyl in such a fashion. Nobody thought about supper; nobody bothered about it, nor cared to eat anything.

Thus sat Naum; he pondered long and finally spoke his mind:

“Stop crying, Marusia! Get up and listen to what I am going to ask you.”

Naum was not a father to whom Marusia could ever be disobedient. Whether she felt well enough or not, when her father spoke so seriously, even a shade angrily, she must needs arise. So, standing, she wiped away her tears and waited for what he had to tell her.

“I see that you knew Vasyl before I brought him in here?”

“I knew him, dear Father,” she said, and quivered like a poplar leaf and drooped her eyelashes to conceal how ashamed she was.

“And how was that?” he asked, angrily.

Then Marusia, although she stammered, related everything to him. How she had met Vasyl for the first time at a wedding, how she sympathized with him, how he treated her with nuts, and how, going to the bazaar, they met; how they came back, what they said—and—they could not conceal the truth—how they kissed...

“Well, well, go on; the beginning is good!” said Naum, looking as if he were sitting on spikes.

Then Marusia, after having wept a little, began to relate more cheerfully how they made an appointment to meet in the woods at the lake, and how they met and how ...

“That’s enough, that’s enough!” Naum ejaculated in a strange voice, which came from the depths of his heart. “Now tell your mother that she did not know how to take care of you and keep you from doing such things!” And, clutching his cap, he started to run out into the yard.

But Marusia threw herself on his neck and said:

“No, dear Father, no, my Gray Pigeon! Your daughter did nothing wrong, and is not going to do such a thing! Mother dear, it is better for me to be tortured; I am willing to die... but I am not going to disgrace you, not for a General, even! I remember your prayers. I know that I am your daughter. Would it be possible, then, for me to prepare my own destruction? This is how it is with us.”

Then she told how she had spoken with Vasyl, what occurred, how she had forbidden him to visit her, and why. She also spoke of her loneliness, and how she worried without him, explaining how everything stood, up until the last time they had seen each other.

Nevertheless Naum asked once more: “See now if all that you have told us is true; see that you have concealed nothing.”

“I have told you the whole truth and have concealed nothing, and, Father, if you want me to swear this, if you wish it, I will do so.”

“It’s a great sin to swear,” said Naum, “and still worse, to swear in vain. I believe you, without swearing before God. Now, listen to me, Marusia. I have told you more than once that you cannot remain single—you must marry. I commanded you, when you fell in love with someone, to tell me directly, and I, looking into the affair, would settle the matter. If it happened that I did not like him I would tell you so, and say that it was best for you not to have anything to do with him; and, if I should be willing to let you have him, I would tell him beforehand without your knowing it. I would send a Cossack for *Rushnyky*, the betrothal scarves—because before an engagement there should not be any love-making, since it leads to no good. It’s lucky for your lover and ourselves and Nastia that Vasyl is so honest and God-fearing; with anyone else you would not even know when he would tie a stone around your neck, of which you would never be rid unless you jumped from a bridge into the water.

“If I had known from the beginning about Vasyl, I would have told you why I couldn’t agree to your marrying him, and you would not have got so used to him, and so could have forgotten him more easily. But know that, suffer as you will, I shall not let him marry you!”

Though Marusia’s spirit had been so lightened and her heart cheered by her confession of the truth, she began anew to plead, begging her father to let her marry Vasyl in spite of everything. Because, even if she had to remain an old maid all her life, she would marry none else but him.

“Say you so? And don’t you know, senseless child, that your father is the best judge of your happiness—knows better than you in this matter? You are young and foolish. Go to bed, girl! Tomorrow you will be older than today, and because of that, wiser.” Making the sign of the Cross over her, he left her.

At dawn Vasyl was already at Naum’s house. Doing one thing or another, he and Marusia passed the time until noon. While cooking and serving the meal Marusia was crying, probably guessing that she was seeing Vasyl for the last time. Well, to tell the truth, they all sat around feeling sad, and when dinner was served no one cared much for it.

When the dishes were removed from the table Naum said:

“Vasyl, sit down by me and listen without interrupting to what I will tell you. Not because of my own righteousness—for outside of my sins I have nothing—but on account of the prayers of my parents God rewarded me with a good wife, industrious, humble and not quarrelsome. We did not squander my father’s inheritance and little by little, as God blessed us, we continually added to it.

“God’s grace is great. Morning and evening we thank Him for not forsaking us, and the greatest of all God’s mercies to us is that He blessed us with a daughter. And what kind of a daughter? No human being—a holy angel!”

“That’s very true, Father!” Vasyl interrupted.

Naum checked him at once: “Silence, Vasyl! Keep quiet and listen. Don’t interrupt. You, seeing her eyes and lips—finding them not ill-looking, praise her. But I’m not speaking of her body—no, it is her soul How quiet, gentle, obedient she is—she knows God in heaven, she loves, and fears to anger Him.

“She respects us and takes heed to herself, careful not to vex us. She is merciful and kind, not only to people but to the tiniest insect. She doesn’t know of any wrong, even in spirit, and is afraid even to think of it.

“Kind herself, opposed to any wrongdoing, she thinks others are like her; she will believe everybody. God protecting her, she fell in love with you, and not with a wicked person—her fife with anyone else would have been spoiled forever.

“But you, even you, have confused her ideas and soul. I know everything. Even you yourself have brought confusion to her heart. I tell you I know everything! Yes, it was a sin to do this.”

“Father!” Vasyl broke in.

“Be silent, son. You can tell me what you want to later. God has given us a child like this—although I am her father, I cannot deny the truth. What kind of parents would we be if we did not think of the happiness of our child?

“I’m telling you—if she were such-and-such, then perhaps it would have to be settled that way. But on account of her kindness, her gentle disposition, her docility, she would need for a husband one who would be like a father to her—loving, pitying, so that in case harm befell her (which God forbid) in deed or in thought, then, he would instruct and guide her, teach her everything that is good—wouldn’t let her be insulted by anyone. Because, one as obedient and easily led as she is, could be insulted by any person wishing to do it.

“Then, too, whatever God has blessed us with in the way of farm stock, horses, cattle, fowls, sheep, pigs—all these we would leave to our son-in-law, because I would accept him (if God blessed the idea) as a member of our household.

“But it is my business—and not that of anyone else—to watch very carefully and see that he is a good overseer and manager, and no spendthrift, to let everything slip through his fingers, and so bring his wife to misery; and when God blesses them with children, they must be given instruction and guidance, brought up in the right way, and so inherit something. Now tell me, Vasyl, am I not telling you the truth?”

“Perfectly true, sir, what you say—all of it. If of your kindness you would grant me Marusia I would fulfill all those conditions of which you spoke...”

“Impossible, Vasyl. You will never be such a husband and farm manager as you wish, because it does not depend on you.

“I know this—that the event cannot take place; and I see, too, that my Marusia has entirely lost her senses in falling in love with you ... she is now willing to follow you to the ends of the

earth, but she is not forsaken by God altogether.... Because I am thinking of what might happen... the thought comes... the Virgin Mother protect her!" Naum exclaimed, and crossed himself.

"For these reasons, Vasyl, I beg of you kindly, and order you as the father of my child—leave her alone, forget! Don't visit us, don't know her, even if you should meet her anywhere; don't injure her and her soul, don't push her into the grave while we are still living. I am entreating this of you," he said, and cried bitterly. "Let us live the rest of our lives in peace, and don't make us answer for her salvation in the next world."

"Naum Semenovych, why are you thinking that I won't be a good husband to her, and a good manager?"

"You have been telling me of yourself. You are an orphan; each of your uncles has two or three sons, and you belong to the same military group of nine persons.

"Your uncles' boys are small, and when conscription is at hand then your head will surely be shaven, because you are an orphan, and there is no one to speak in your behalf; and the uncles will say, 'We have been feeding and clothing you and have brought you to maturity, so you should serve for us.'

"What will happen then to Marusia? Neither wife nor widow—everyone knows how soldiers' wives are respected—like women of ill repute. No one will believe that it is possible for a woman to be a soldier's wife, and an honest woman at the same time. Isn't it so?"

"How would it be possible for her to follow the military class that is conscripted? She, being young and foolish, would fall into the hands of wicked people who would lead her into everything that is bad. They would take and carry away the household goods and stock, and who would protect her? Children, without oversight, poor, owning nothing, without guidance or help, without everything, would die, or—God forbid—would become idle good-for-nothings.

"And so she would become old and helpless, unable to work, conquered by poverty, crippled.... She would be just about fit for a hospital, or to live with old beggars!"

As he ended his speech he cried like a little child. "O God, do not leave even an enemy to such a fate! So, Vasyl, no matter how much I may like you, yet I pity you as if you were my own son. I don't want to lose my daughter, least of all such a one as Marusia. You can see now for yourself why I can't take you for a son-in-law."

Vasyl sat with head bent, thinking. Suddenly his face brightened and he said: "What about this—suppose I found a substitute for myself?"

"A substitute?" Naum pondered. "How are you going to find and hire such a one, when you are only getting from your employer eighty rubles a year, and you haven't a single cent from your father?"

"My uncles will help."

"Don't count on that, Vasyl. They will help, but not you—themselves rather. What you will get is just a shaven skull, and the substitute will then go in place of the uncles' boys.

"I would gladly help you, but things don't work out that way. When they got to know that your wife was rich, they would grab so much that you'd have no say in the matter; and they would never stop asking. They would pawn everything, so that they still would have a claim on the estate. If you yourself were able to hire a substitute with your own money, then—well, that would be different.

"Vasyl, before the images of the Heavenly King and His Virgin Mother, and of St. Nicholas, vow that you will bring me a letter showing that a substitute is accepted for you, and with your own money. Then, with both hands, I would give Marusia to you."

How cast-down and dejected poor Vasyl was, listening to this! With hands clutching at his heart he fell forward over the table, eyes blind with tears. ““This is the end of everything!” he said.

Then leaping up he clasped Naum, embracing him and saying:

“Good-bye, my ... if you have pity on poor Vasyl, even just a little, be kind, be merciful, call Marusia here. Let me say good-bye to her in your presence.”

“Good, Vasyl,” said Naum. “But see, it must be a final good-bye. You understand that?”

“I understand, and will do everything you tell me.”

And Marusia came, and Nastia followed her.

Vasyl, clasping Marusia’s hand, said, “Marusenka! Truth, truth indeed your father has told me. We have to part.”

“Forever?” Marusia asked, with great difficulty.

“We will see each other... you will be mine, if not in this world, in the next. Good-bye, my Ma...”

In the midst of his speech she fainted, and fell back into his arms. He embraced her, holding her close to his heart, blessed her, and gave her back into the hands of her seemingly heartless father. He kissed the latter’s hand and that of Nastia—and went quickly out without turning back.

Chapter VII

How greatly, how long Marusia worried over him! She nearly died from anxiety, poor creature. No matter how much her mother tried to cheer her, it was useless; and what made it all the worse was that she did not know where nor why Vasyl had disappeared, whether he had hidden himself for a long time, whether he would ever come back, and if so, when.

Many a time she asked her father these questions, but “I don’t know, I don’t know!” was his only answer. For indeed he did not know where Vasyl had vanished, nor why he had gone from all men’s knowledge.

Every day Marusia would count her nuts, which he had given her at the wedding where they first saw each other; she would pick them up and kiss them, one by one, and then clasp them to her heart and put them away. Or, if a free day came, she would go to the woods, near the lakes where she had walked with Vasyl that first time; she would sit there idly, shed tears ...and then would go home.

Her mother did not ask her often to do the housework or perform any other tasks; but Marusia would do these things of her own accord. “I do not feel so heavy-hearted when I am doing something.” She never sought for amusement with her friends any more, never went out to see them.

When harvest was over and work was done in the fields—*Semen*, late in autumn—they began to spend more of their evening leisure sitting and talking with one another, and Marusia took up her spinning. And after *Pokrova*, the fall festival, she was up before daylight, spinning, sewing, seeing to everything; always and forever worrying, and crying so bitterly! For no news had come from Vasyl, not a single solitary word; it was as if he had fallen into the ocean.

And now Philip’s Fast—*Pylypivka*—is at hand, and Anna’s Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is approaching, when marriageable youths begin to send matchmakers to the girls.

Look! People are going through the streets, walking socks in their hands; or, see there!—two of them are bound over the shoulder and chest, heads held high, proud of their success, and boasting: “At such and such a place we have betrothed such and such a girl to such and such a man.”

Or others walk in silence along the pigs’ path; and these, under one arm, carry instead of a loaf of holy bread—a pumpkin! Ehe! Oh, yes, no place to hide themselves; one must abide by whatever he has earned!

More than just one group of matchmakers came to old Drot’s house to make a proposal to Marusia ... but what was the use?

“*Tatobku*, my dear old one,” she would say, “we shall give them a drink, eh?”

The old man would thunder at her: “Are you a fool and crazy into the bargain? Why don’t you accept? His people are nice, he has been well brought up, and the boy is brave. Are you looking for a priest’s son, or a merchant?”

“Vasyl—and if not Vasyl, then no one!” Marusia would say. Her mother reduced, to tears, her father would begin to shout, angrily:

“How can we get this Vasyl for you—where? You are now refusing to consider proposals from people, but the time will come when they will begin to refuse you, and you will sit single till your hair turns white.”

“No use, Father. Without Vasyl, I’m not afraid even of a coffin, let alone white hairs.”

Naum would merely shrug his shoulders and say: “Let her wait a year and she will be silent enough.” All the time he was sorry that there was no news of Vasyl, for he liked him very much and always hoped that he would make something of himself.

Now *Miasnytsia*, the winter season of weddings, arrived and the news spread everywhere that Drot’s Marusia, haughty and lovely, was refusing the proposals of village youths and was waiting for a lord’s son from beyond the seas. She knew of all the talk about her, but laughed and said: “That’s nothing! I shall wait.”

They were all greatly dissatisfied that such a nice girl—and so rich—should not act according to their wishes. But what could they do? One could not take her by force.

Then Lent came. They waited until it was ending—and at last to everyone’s delight they were at the goal of Eastertide.

On the Saturday before Easter, Marusia made ready the *Paska*, the dough that would rise in the Easter bread. Into it went some eggs, with seasonings of ginger, bay leaves and saffron—and the *Paska* baked itself, mounting high and yellow, and blushed before it came out of the oven.

Marusia did everything that was needful, and on that same Easter Day in the morning, with servants assisting, she carried the bread to the church for blessing; other viands also—baked lamb and young pig, sausage, ten or a dozen Easter eggs, lard, and a lump of salt; spreading out her napkin in the churchyard, in the row with the rest of the women, she set down everything in nice order, as her mother had taught her to do, for Nastia, owing to her illness, was not able to leave the house.

Naum meanwhile was praying, standing, in the church. His petitions were always made in good earnest; he did not try to catch the wind; he did not turn around here and there, but stood up as he should, as he would stand before God, the Heavenly Tsar, and humbly listened to what was read and chanted.

And, today, on such a great holiday, he prayed even more than usual, feeling light-hearted, as do the God-fearing, when allowed to find themselves in the world of the living at the Easter

Festival.

Hear how he prays, standing! The Mass is being sung, and someone comes to the center of the church to read verses from the Acts of the Apostles.... Who is it? Vasyl!

Naum looks, and does not believe his eyes. Is it he, or not? Vasyl does not know how to read—how then can he be reading? Perhaps from memory, without a book. Perhaps he has learned it by heart—we shall see.

Now Vasyl has already intoned “a reading from the Apostle Peter,” and starts reading ... but how excellent is the voice, a clear, loud baritone, each word distinctly spoken.

Naum thinks: “I once saw a man blind from birth, who read the Psalter in the same way, without a book; but Vasyl is looking at the book so often—isn’t he pretending? Did he not learn it all off by heart with the church singer, the *Diak*, and now pretends he can read?”

“Now he has made one slip. He faltered a link there, but puzzled it out bit by bit and finished without a mistake.

“Now he has come to ‘Alleluia’—he has found his place by the bookmark? No, if he did not know how to read he would not be able to give out the Acts of the Apostles—to read it out on this great Easter Day?”

Naum listens intently: Vasyl sings. When he commences the “Cherubim” he sings in such a way! Even the choir conductor could not do it properly. Vasyl’s voice, without any faltering, dominates the rest, up and down the cadences; prolongs the notes, ends; begins again; rings all the changes—and he finishes alone, as he began alone.

Then Naum was quite satisfied in his mind that Vasyl could read; but when and how did he manage it, and where has he been? “Well,” he thought to himself, “I shall know all about this later on.”

When the priests left the chancel and the congregation began to go out from the church, Naum stopped Vasyl and said at once: “Christ is risen!” So, both having exchanged Easter greetings, kissing each other, Naum said: “Have you not forgotten us then, Vasyl?”

“May God forgive me, if...”

“Well, well, son. This is not the proper rime for that. Come to us for a talk, and if you wish you can have dinner with us if you are not going home.”

“You are to me a home—and parents.”

“Good, very good! Come then, do not forget; I will wait.”

Having said this, Naum hastened home, thinking to himself on the way: “I have not done well: I should have asked Vasyl what he has become, and what has happened to him, before I called him to me. Perhaps he does not even think of Marusia now, or perhaps he is married. I will only trouble Marusia with all this, make her worry again. But even if this is not so, he may not have bought his own release from conscription; what shall be done then? Well, I shall see.

“If God grants the chance of a talk, I shall correct then what I spoiled in my first moment of gladness, when I saw Vasyl so unexpectedly, and when he read so well. Whence did God send him such a blessing? Indeed, the child is wise; it suits him perfectly to be a church singer.”

With such an idea he came home, and said nothing to his wife as to whom he had seen. Then Marusia came, with the food that had been blessed—and with what indifference! For she had not seen Vasyl, not having stood in the church itself, but outside, with the Easter bread.

She set everything on the table as it should be, arranged everything properly, and then she wondered, as did her mother, why her father did not sit down to talk, but instead walked about the house, thoughtful.

But at this moment the door creaked. And Vasyl was in the house! Without having a chance to think, Marusia exclaimed in a voice unlike her own: “Oh, my dear Vasyl!” and stood stock-still, as if half-rooted in earth.

Old Nastia also rejoiced, God knows how greatly, and threw herself into Vasyl’s arms, and then repeated the traditional Easter greetings.

Naum, however, observed that Vasyl and Marusia stood and looked only, he at her and she at him, as if this were the first time they had ever seen each other; and so he asked: “Why don’t you greet each other with a kiss?”

“I do not dare, sir!” said Vasyl

“How is it that you would not dare?” replied Naum. “By our tradition and custom, Easter greetings must be given to everyone—even your worst enemy, your would-be murderer—kiss each other, therefore, three times, as is usual, and may God protect you from every evil thought. It is a grievous sin to think anything wrong in connection with such a holy act.”

Accordingly they greeted each other in the proper way.

Marusia ran to Vasyl with questions: “Where have you been, Vasyl dear?”

“You should know the right time for all this!” Naum interrupted. “There’s just one thing or the other to do; either be merry together, or just chat, since God has granted us this feast and the blessed Easter bread; in thankfulness to our merciful God it is necessary to forgive without worrying over the past, and in a happy spirit. We shall talk afterward. Sit down at least, God bless us!”

Old Nastia seated herself on the bench, and Marusia beside her, at the end, so that it would be more convenient for her in helping to serve. Vasyl sat on a bench; Naum in the center, the *pokuttia*, the place of honor; and the servants at the end of the table. So Naum crossed himself and, having said three times, “Christ is risen, Christ is risen from the dead!” he at once cut the blessed *Paska* and laid a piece of it at each plate. Then, having tasted it with care, so that no crumb would fall on the table, they all crossed themselves, and Naum said: “Thanks, O merciful God! May it be granted to us to see next Easter!”

Then they began to eat the roast meat: lamb and pork. They were careful not to throw the bones under the table, but left them on the cloth so that they might be tossed into the stove.

Then they were served with sausage, and fat pork cut in small pieces; the peeled eggs given them they cut up on their plates.

When they had finished, Marusia took everything from the table and carefully swept up the crumbs and bones and egg-shells and threw them into the stove; and then she began to pass the soup and other cooked viands.

Old Naum had drunk a glass of whisky before dinner; Vasyl did not take anything, as he said he was not used to drinking. They served soup, and carved veal on a wooden platter, salted, and ate—not, of course, in a dainty way, for they did not use forks, but fingers. Then they passed *iushka*—soup made from entrails—baked lamb, milk soup, and that was all, absolutely nothing else!

Marusia did not know whether she was eating or not; sufficient the good knowledge that Vasyl had come back alive and well; this meant more than any kind of celebration except that of the Holy Festival itself.

With her face half hidden behind her mother’s head, she was looking at Vasyl as might a darting swallow, pretending that she was in need of reaching with her spoon for something on the platter, so as to give the appearance of eating, at least.

But how little use she had for this eating now! There was one thing only in her head, and that was Vasyl. And as for him, he too must force himself to eat, seated as he was beside Naum; it was not possible for him to turn and have a good look at Marusia.

Then, when all had finished dining, and had thanked God and the father and mother—and when all had been cleared away by Marusia—Naum said: “A new church singer read the Acts of the Apostles for us today.”

“Who is it? Where is he from?” asked Nastia at once.

“Here he is—Sir Vasyl!” Naum said, and smiled.

“Is Vasyl able to read like that—can he indeed chant the Acts of the Apostles?” asked Nastia; and Marusia was straining her ears to listen to every word in the discussion.

“He could not read at one time, but now God has sent him wisdom—yet how was this done? I do not know myself even. Please tell me, do me that favor, Vasyl—how was the world opened to you? This makes me so astonished: not quite a year since you left us, and you have learned to read—not only that, you can sing as well as a church singer himself. Where have you been?”

“I have not been very far away, Father,” Vasyl began. “When you opened the world to me, and showed me that I myself would be lost and would also devour the life of someone else in case I did not find a substitute, then I spent the time thinking and thinking, and nearly went crazy.

“You told me just the truth when you said that with the money, eighty rubles, which I was getting from my employer, one could only buy necessary clothes. What had I to do in that case? How did God send into my mind this thought: ‘Try the merchants—with them there is good livelihood’?

“I went to an icon merchant who knew me a little, and told him of my troubles. He thought the matter over and engaged me for fifty rubles a year, on the understanding that if I were clever in my trade then he would increase my wages, and go on increasing gradually when my efforts were worth more. Having heard this, I was very glad to find that there was nothing more needed in the making of money than honesty and diligence in duty. I arranged everything with friends, although they were all Muscovites: I discovered this only—that they knew how to read, and that the best educated got the highest wages.

“Then, when I settled down at last, I am telling you the truth, Father, I studied day and night, and God sent me a gift. True it is that when you push one of us into learning or into some trade he will bring himself up to the level of the rest and become their equal: money spent on such a one is not lost.

“So, from *Spasivka*¹⁰ to Christmas I learned both the church language¹¹ and that which we use every day; I can write a little; I know how to figure and use the abacus, so that I can even divide ten thousand *poods* into pounds without mistake: I could pay the drivers and look after the affairs of my employer as if I looked after my own eye, so that not a single coin would be lost.

“My friends, you know, were singing in the choir stalls, giving their services in place of the church singer; and when they noticed me and found that I had a voice, they taught me a little of what they knew themselves.

“Before I had put myself on the right path I did not go to you, Father, and no matter how hard it was for me without seeing Marusia, I remembered your word, and I ‘fasted’ from her

¹⁰ *Spasivka*: Feast of the Assumption.

¹¹ Old Church Slavonic, used in church services in the 19th century.

sight and did not come here.

“And my employer, who knew me to be honest, began to send me to the smaller fairs; after Christmas he sent me even farther afield and it was just before the Easter holiday, when I brought him not a small sum of money, that he encouraged me with a cheering word which sent away my sadness.

“Then I came to you for the holiday festival; and so that you might believe that I had not become wicked, I stood up at the church singer’s desk to sing, and read the holy Acts of the Apostles.”

Naum, having heard him to the end, could not endure keeping still any longer, and kissed Vasyl on the brow, thinking, “What a splendid child! I love him not in vain; a fellow like this will not be lost.” Then he asked: “What wages are you getting now?”

“Not very much as to wages,” said Vasyl, “just enough for clothes. But what is more important is the fact that my employer, knowing my distress—the fear I have had, why you would not give Marusia to me—is himself anxious about me; he is sending me with the wagon to Odessa, and then I go to Moscow, and then to a factory, and shall only come back about the time of *Precbysta*, the holiday of the Immaculate Conception. Then he will find me a substitute.

“He says: ‘Even if I lose five hundred rubles, in the fall when they tax the crops, I will myself pay Marusia all the money, and you can pay me back something every year, for the substitute money.’”

“May God help you!” Naum answered; and then, after a little consideration, he went on; “Why think about this any more? Send on Tuesday, day after tomorrow, your matchmakers bearing the scarves. You will feel happier on your journey, and Marusia will no longer make life miserable for herself and those around her.

“There is nothing to fear now; it is certain that you will find a substitute. If God grant it, you will come back, and the wedding will take place in the autumn.

Impossible to relate how happy Vasyl and Marusia became! At once they ran to the father’s feet and kissed them, and kissed his hands and embraced each other; again they ran to Naum to show their gratitude, also to the mother—once more, to him; in short, they forgot themselves and scarcely knew what they were doing.

Naum looked at them for a long time, smiling to himself, and thinking, “What children they are! Enough—stop! Let me out of this! The old woman and I will go to bed, as I have been standing all night listening to the choir till at last it reached the ‘Christus.’ You may sit here at home, or go if you like to the Swings—but keep by yourselves in that case. Because it’s a sin on a holiday like this to rub shoulders with such wickedness as you may find going on there.”

It is difficult to express how the great day affected Vasyl and Marusia, for, walking and talking, they spoke only of how lonesome each had been for the other—and when he and she had thought such and such a thing—and when without, dream or expectation of it they had seen each other—and how happy they would be after they were married.

Of such things they spoke—and made love, as do the wood doves—so they embraced.

Chapter VIII

Tuesday arrived. As evening approached they sat waiting for the matchmakers. They arranged the house in good order, lighted the candle before the icons; the old folks, in accordance with the beautiful tradition, as custom demanded, dressed themselves in their best. As for

Marusia, how can one describe her appearance?

Knocking once, a second time and a third, the matchmakers were allowed to enter; they bestowed the bread and spoke the customary phrases about the marten, as they had when they came before.

Said Naum—how full of joy he was, though he pretended to be angry—”Why do you come in like this? Wife, what will we do? Daughter, come here for the council.”

Marusia, having come in from the other room, was suddenly bashful. Heavens! She blushed like a poppy, and, omitting her bows, stood up at once by the stove, and drew patterns on the oven and nervously scratched it with her finger.

And Naum said: “Behold, youths and hunters, what you have done! You have made me and my wife sad; you cause my daughter to hang her head; it looks as if she would ruin the oven if she is not stopped soon. Hai! Hai! Probably she thinks she will not be living here any more, and so nothing matters.

“So we will do this: We accept the holy bread and will give you good words as long as you don’t trouble us any more by saying that we are hiding any martens and beautiful girls in the house. So we will bind you and explain all.

“Daughter! The time has come to speak in rhymes:

“Don’t scratch the oven. But can’t you find
Something with which these trappers to bind?”

Marusia made no reply, but went on scratching the oven.

Then her mother spoke to her: “Don’t you hear your father? Go, bring something to bind them. Or... maybe you haven’t anything? Maybe you did not learn how to weave the thread, and made no *Rushnyky*? Then bind them with strings!”

So Marusia went into the other room and brought out on a wooden dish two long scarves, finely embroidered; she crossed one over the other and put them in this fashion over the holy bread; then she stood before the holy icons and bowed three times. She bowed thrice before her father, and kissed her parents’ hands; placing the scarves on the dish, she offered them to the elder and then to the younger of the visitors.

They, rising and bowing, took the offered work, and said (in rhyme):

“Thanks, O father and mother, that you wakened your child early and taught her how good work should be done! Thanks also to the little girl that she arose early and wove fine and thin linen and embroidered it so beautifully.”

They bound each other with the long towels, and the *Starosta* said: “Finish the work. What about this young Prince? We were brought here, we are not guilty. Bind the leader, the *Kniaz*, that he may not escape from the house.”

And the mother spoke: “Well, daughter! You have told us that you earned money in order to buy and embroider a kerchief of silk with which to bind an invader. Now the invaders have come and you have not bound them all.”

Instead of a head-covering, Marusia brought out a silk kerchief, beautiful and fine, like herself. Naum said to her: “Now, daughter, bind this one yourself; put the kerchief through his belt and draw him to you; obey him, respect him—and now, kiss him.”

Then they kissed each other and Vasyl threw a silver coin into the dish. After all this, the first *Starosta* ordered the betrothed to bow first to the father’s knees three times, after which they

must remain prostrated. Then the father spoke to them.

“Listen, son-in-law! Strike your wife morning and evening; when you awake and when you go to bed, with offense and without offense. Swear at her all the time, give her no garments to wear; stay not in the house, spend your time with other men’s wives at the inns. In such case, with wife and children, ye will be beggars!

“And you, Daughter! Always oppose your husband. Do not respect him at all. When he is so drunk that he cannot go to the field to work, then you must go to the inn and drink up the last piece of bread. Drink, dance, and let him starve. Never touch the stove; let it be covered with spider webs.... You are no longer children, you understand what I am saying. This is all I am going to tell you—you yourselves know how to live.”

And the *Starosta* added: “Children, for such a lesson, kiss your parents’ hands.” They did so; thrice they bowed low before the mother. The latter said nothing; according to tradition, after the blessing she must not speak but instead, must be weeping, weeping!

After this, the *Starosta* took a seat and said three times: “Christ is risen!” And three times the old couple answered in their turn: “He is risen indeed!”

The *Starosta* said: “*Panove-Svatove*, noble kinsmen by marriage!” And the father and mother, now known as *Svaty*, replied: “We rejoice to hear your words.”

“We have done what we wished to do,” the *Starosty* went on, “and for these things give us whisky, as custom demands.”

The old couple replied: “We beg your acceptance with good will of our bread and salt and our betrothal feast.”

After this, according to the ritual of betrothal, they placed the betrothed pair on the *posad*, the wedding seat. The father sat beside his son-in-law; and the mother, of course, was busying herself, unaided, in passing the food at the table, as it was not fit for *Marusia* to rise from the seat. The *Starosty* sat on a bench beside the table.

While the mother was serving the different courses, the father began to treat the marriage-brokers. The first *Starosta* tasted, tossed his head back, smacked his lips, and said:

“What is this, *Svatushka-Panushka*? What kind of drinks are these? Although we have traveled through the world so much, we have never seen nor heard of such drinks, nor did we ever taste such before.”

“We have brought them from beyond the seas for our loving matchmakers,” said *Naum*, and urged them to drink more. “Here, try everything. It’s good on top, but the best taste is at the bottom.”

The *Starosta* drank, screwed up his face ecstatically, almost choked, hemmed loudly, and said: “You will blush from this stuff like a poppy. *Svatushka-Panushka*, you had better see that you’ve not filled us up with such a liquor that would make us try to climb the walls!”

“Say not such things—would you have us under penalty? It’s good stuff as it is, but in addition there is something ... an old crone was walking from the Polish country, carrying seven bags of health, so we bought them from her, paid her seven *ducats*, and tipped them into the liquor.”

And the *Starosta* replied: “Well, however the good taste got there, it’s very good indeed. Hai, comrade! You try it also and say if you ever drank such stuff in Turkey or in Germany? We never drank this, even in Russia.”

The second *Starosta* drank also, smacked his lips and praised the liquor immensely. Then, having spoken all the traditional sentences, they began to treat one another in the usual way,

joking.

And, later, when they began their supper, the girls whom Marusia had asked to the betrothal feast early in the afternoon, sang:

“Oh, dear little soul, our little Marusia!
Sweep the yard, set the table.
Place little spoons, silver saucers,
And golden dishes.
Behold, the bridesmaids come!”

The song over, they bowed low and said: “God grant you all a good evening. God help you in everything good.”

Old Nastia, rejoicing greatly that God had permitted her to attain the hour when she could betroth her daughter to a fine man, a lover of Marusia as well, busied herself at such a rate that she hardly felt the ground under her feet. Where did her strength come from?

She fairly rushed from the table to the stove, bearing the food to the table and giving orders. She flew to the bridesmaids and said: “Thanks! We invite you to bread, salt and the betrothal feast.”

So she seated them in the traditional manner, according to the degree of relationship, sitting just so far from Marusia on the bench, and cried: “Sit down, my dear little *Druzhky*, my little Doves, and eat food without shame. And you, *Starosta*, speed them on, if need be, with a whip!”

But the girls were not in an eating mood. For one thing, they were ashamed to eat in the presence of others who might say: “Here she comes—a hungry one, if you like. It would seem that there is nothing to eat at home so she runs among strangers, and feeds herself. Look over there and see how she is stuffing herself!”

Another reason was that they had various things to do; so, without having touched the spoons they broke out into singing:

“Oh, why. Oh why
Is the house lighted
At early dawning?”

“Marenka arose.
Combed then her hair,
Asked of her father.

““Advise me, I beg.
Choose, my dear father,
Bride-maiden for me.”

““Oh, take, my daughter,
Thine own relations,
Else they’ll be angry.

““Set them, my daughter,

In proper ranking,
Thy kin beside thee.””

When the girls observed that because of the mournful melody and significance of the words Nastia gave up her task, and began to cry as if her heart would break, they changed to other songs:

“Where was the Drake, *Selezen na stavku*
And where was the Duck? *Utinka na plavku*
Upon the Pond and on the wash-plank.
Now on one plank
Both eat nice duckweed,
And drink cold water.

“Where was Vasylko?
Where our Marenka?
He with his father.
She in her dwelling.

And now, together.
In room of Welcome,
They eat white wine.
The cakes are drinking!
Dip cakes in honey
And seeds of poppy.

There, in the early morning,
Why was the Sea¹² so stormy?
In it Marenka was drowning, drowning.
And on her father she was calling.
A boat was there, no oars were lacking:
But ‘Sink!’ he cried, ‘Oh, sink, *Serdenko!*’¹³

“There in the early morning
The Sea was rough and stormy—
In it Marenka was drowning, drowning.
And on her mother she was calling.
A boat was there, no oars were lacking:
‘Sink down, Sweetheart, my own *Serdenko!*’

“Now in the early rooming
How rough the Sea and stormy!

¹² Sea of Matrimony.

¹³ *Serdenko*: My dear heart.

And Marusenka, drowning, drowning.
 Vasyl she begged to come and save her.
 And he had oars and boat for rescue:
 ‘Nay drown not, darling, my *Serdenko!*’”

Further, the girls, seeing that the betrothed couple were sitting side by side, absorbed in each other, not seeing anyone nor anything, not noticing what was being done around them—not hearing—wished to arouse and divert them, and began to sing:

“In the orchard the Nightingale sang not:
 And Vasyl embraced not his Marusia.
 But when *Soloveiko* began to chirp
 Vasyl and Marusia kissed each other.”

Here everyone laughed so much that the noise echoed through the house, and Naum insisted that “the children” should kiss, which was what they wanted to do above all things. Then the girls, pretending that they were joking, broke out into another song:

“Thou beloved soul, our own Marusia!
 Cut down the roses.
 Strew them in the little path,
 That thou mayest step softly
 To the dance on the grass
 With the fiddle and cymbals
 With the handsome *boiary!*”

Naum, absorbed and carried away by all this, took the floor. With huge strides he began prancing about; he went down on his knees, crouching in the *prysiudky*. “Music! Give me music!”

There was no denying him. One, the cleverest of all, Domakha Tretiakivna, ran out to the fiddler and called him in. *Batechky!* The dances and leaping are in full swing, so much for that! The house is filling rapidly, now that people have heard that old Drot has betrothed his daughter.

And not all were in the house, for there were a great many people around the windows, peeping in all the time; and near the house the girls were dancing with the boys, the girls stamping in the little steps of the *dribushka*, the boys dancing the *hopak*, the father and mother treating the guests. Such dancing! God protect us!

Almost until the twilight preceding dawn they danced. But Marusia and Vasyl, of them all, never saw a soul—they wondered that those invited had gone away so soon. They could not realize what was happening, because of their own love-making, their caressing, as of doves.

Chapter IX

If God chooses to send oppression or sadness, then slowly as a crab goes the time. But when in a happy mood one does not even notice how time flies—like a swallow! One thinks a day has gone, but no—it is a week.

It was the same now with Vasyl and Marusia, always together, like a pair of turtledoves. They went together to the city, to the town, to the public Swings, and to the garden, always together.

They went together to the monastery, and requested that a mass be said on the occasion of Marusia's promising a set time for the marriage ceremony.

Thus, ever flowing, time sped away—suddenly they realized it was *Providna*, the first Sunday after Easter. And Vasyl's employer was sending a conveyance for him—he must go away at once.

“Alas, our misfortune!” they said to one another, with tears falling. “We haven't even had time to satisfy ourselves talking; we have not had a chance to look at each other ... it is as if we had only just met!”

“Don't cry, Vasylenko!” Marusia said to him. “You are now on your way, and will hardly notice or feel it until *Spasivka*¹⁴ is here. Then you will come back and we shall be together again. Take care of yourself especially so that you may keep well; please don't be lonesome and don't worry your head about me; and I, being left alone without you, will wash myself in tears morning and evening....”

“Enough! My little Quail; don't cry, my little Swan!” Vasyl exclaimed, drawing her to his heart. “Let *me*, alone, in a strange country, experience what woe and trouble may bring—and you here—alone, too—be well and happy and wait for me.

“Please do this, to make things happier for us; when the Evening Star appears, look at it, thinking of me; at that very moment I shall be gazing at it, and I shall know that you are doing the same thing: then I shall have some consolation. It will seem as if I were looking into your eyes, which shine like tiny stars. Please don't cry—please don't cry!”

In this way they spoke to one another during their last moments, weeping incessantly. But when came the instant of farewell, then what took place!... Even old Naum began to sob like a little child, and the mother, seeing the tears and distress of Marusia, collapsed. As for the young couple!...

At the moment of good-bye Marusia begged from Vasyl the betrothal shawl which she had given him instead of an embroidered handkerchief, so that he would not lose it on his journey and so that, in looking at the gift, it would seem that she was looking at him.

Vasyl hesitated at first, loath to part with it, but gave it back, and in it she tucked away some nuts—those, which at the very beginning of their acquaintance Vasyl had given her, at the wedding. She tied them up and clasped the kerchief to her heart, saying: “Here it will lie until such time as you come back and take it yourself.”

At last Vasyl managed to break away from the old people, and Marusia went with him to accompany him yet a little farther. The final farewell took place on *Providna* and on their way they had to pass through a cemetery where the ceremony of Remembrance of Ancestors was taking place, when the graves of dead relatives are visited.

So Marusia took a platter with her, for the purpose of remembering her own kin. On it was a cooked chicken, three strings of cracknel, a loaf freshly baked, two pies of a sort staffed with cheese, and on the very top, a five-kopeck honey pancake. And she took her purse, the contents of which she intended to distribute among old beggars. Vasyl also carried for her as many as thirty Easter eggs.

¹⁴ *Spasivka*: Feast of two weeks in August.

They reached the graves, where the priest was making ready to say the special Prayers of Remembrance. Marusia laid her dish with the rest and handed the priest a list of names, so that he might remember individually her relatives.

Sad and unhappy, she prayed and prostrated herself continually. When the church singers began to chant, "*Ni pechali, ni vozdykhannia*" (No more sorrows, no more lamenting), she began to sob, and cried: "When you come back, Vasylechko, it may be that you will have to 'remember' me in this cemetery."

Vasyl shuddered as she expressed herself thus, and wished to stop her, so that she would cast out such an idea from her mind. His own tears fell profusely and his sorrow left him breathless; he seemed unconscious of what was happening to him.

When the Remembrance Service was over, Marusia handed her plate to the priest and presented the old beggars with her Easter eggs and the money, which was given with the hope that they would pray for her departed relatives in heaven.

The assembled people sat down on the graves to eat their lunches and to remember their parents, but Marusia was not in a mood for this ... Vasyl with difficulty said that it was time for him to return to his home.

Oh dear, Oh dear! *Batechku!* Now Marusia burst into a storm of tears! She hung upon his neck, she kissed his eyes and head and lips and neck—and then, as if at someone's direction, she left him suddenly, her eyes brightening.

Pale for a moment, the next instant she was flushed. In a loud voice, unlike her own—as though she were another person, she spoke to Vasyl without hesitation: "Vasyl, you are leaving me in the cemetery, and you will find me in the cemetery. ... *Remember me!*... Do not worry... good-bye" forever. We shall see each other there."

Saying this, without a backward look she went home quickly, her step so light she seemed scarce to touch the ground. And Vasyl? As if a thunderbolt had struck him, he stood, rigid as a post.

At last he drew a deep breath, raised his eyes to the heavens, crossed himself, prostrated himself, fell on the spot where Marusia had stood and kissed it instead of her, being afraid of the suggestion that she had put into his head.

And then he said: "My God, my gracious God, let me alone suffer all trouble, let me die, but protect and help Marusia! May it be granted to us to live in this world, but be that as Thou wilt."

Then silently he went quietly away on his journey.

Not very long ago Marusia was gay as a star in the clear air of spring. She was chattering like a sparrow, witty, making jokes like a darting swallow; but now she is like one submerged in the depths of waters.

She speaks very little; when she sits down to sew perhaps she makes a stitch, perhaps not; she begins to think—she wrings her hands. She goes out to the garden to weed—she stands over a garden patch, and so would stand all day without doing anything if her mother did not call her away.

She sets out to prepare the dinner, and either puts it on a cold stove, or forgets to put in something, or everything boils over, so that there is hardly anything left fit to eat. And she has brought things to such a pass that little can be done—so her mother has to begin all over again.

Her father has tried scolding, has used all kinds of kind persuasion and diversion, so that she would not fall into a sad mood in which such worry would eat away her health; she would

“wither up,” he tells her. What will she have to show to God when health, His best gift, is not preserved—when she has lost it?

Is this so? She only says decisively: “Father, and you, my very own Mother! What can I do when I cannot forget my anxieties? I cannot help thinking about my Vasyl. The world is no longer interesting to me, and nothing makes me happy.

“My heart breaks when I see that you are worrying so over me—but what can I do? I have to worry myself; the only idea I have in my mind is ‘Where is my Vasyl?’ I know that every little while, each day as it comes, he is going farther and farther from me. So sorrow is strangling me.

“Please don’t disturb me; let my mind be quiet, do not notice anything; please don’t try to cheer me. I feel as if it were better for me to give way to my grief, as much as I can, and to be left alone.”

The little old man and his little old wife talked with each other, and let her have her own way. “Let her do what she likes with herself. God gave her wisdom; she is God-fearing and prayerful, so she will not be forgotten by the Almighty Father in Heaven. Let her do as she sees fit.”

From the very day when she went with Vasyl for the last time Marusia wore no ribbons nor wreaths. When she covered her head with a black silk scarf, so it remained—black scarf and nothing else.

She used to be willing to go out on Sundays and holidays in the evening, and even in the daytime she went quickly when she heard the bell ringing.

Now she goes every day to the favorite spot in the woods by the lake, where she was wont to go with Vasyl.

She sits there under the pine tree; spreads out the kerchief, which Vasyl had given her, looks at it, lets the nuts roll from one hand to the other—and cries.

As soon as it grows dark, she sits outside on the bench carved from the clay bank, and looks for the Evening Star.... How it is twinkling!... Marusia becomes so glad, so glad once more—there is no end to her joy. “Here is my Vasyl!” she whispers to herself. “He looks at his star, and knows that I am looking at it, too. So his eyes used to twinkle whenever I was running to meet him.”

And now one might call her or not, do whatever one liked, she would not move from the spot and would keep her eyes fixed on the star until it disappeared. Then she would take a deep breath and say: “Good-bye, my Vasyl, dearest love, pass the night with God. Come back quickly to your poor Marusia!”

Coming back into the house, she would kiss each nut and the kerchief a hundred times. And replacing them, she would clasp them to her heart and so lie down to sleep—yet would never say whether she had slept well or ill

In this way Marusia, with grief and deep sorrow, managed to come through the days until it was *Spasivka* again; and during the fast, before *Prechysta*, the Virgin’s holiday, had come, Vasyl had said he would assuredly return.

Although Marusia had not become altogether happy, yet gradually life surged back and back. She began to do various things in her home; you could see her with her father out in the fields reaping with a sickle.

Now even Naum—looking at her and seeing that she had begun to forget her care—even he became glad.

“Glory to our God; *Spasivka* is only just approaching and Marusia already is different—as if

she were reborn. Vasyl will be here any time now. Then I shall throw my worry to the ground. I shall arrange the wedding and let them live together as they like.”

Chapter X

Once, during *Spasivka*, on the third day after the *Spasa*¹⁵ holiday (the blessing of fruits), Marusia, having first set the table for dinner and left everything in good order, went to the woods for mushrooms, and of course her way led to the lakes.... She came across so many mushrooms and such nice ones, that, although she had to wade in marshy places, she picked a pailful, heaped up, and a basketful as well.

She would have gathered even more, but suddenly it began to rain—such a terrific storm, as if it were pouring from a bucket, with a chill wind; and she wore only a single slip, with no lining, and she had not brought her coat. What in the world was she to do?

There was no use thinking of running anywhere for shelter and sitting there until the storm was over; it was a great distance to the village and the rain poured down so. There was no place to go—she must run home.

She walked, ran, stumbled, ran again; and when she neared home she was tired, and moreover, she was soaked through like a piece of rotting hemp. Her clothes dripped at every step; she was so chilled that her teeth chattered and she shivered and shook.

With such difficulty, by degrees, she reached there, still running. But in her home the mother, old and helpless, was unable to rise and make a fire in the stove.

Trouble, and plenty of it, for our Marusia! There was not a dry stitch on her—and no heat to dry her clothes; she was as cold as if it were winter, and there was no place in which to get warm. She climbed on top of the clay oven, but it was not heated, and she got still colder. She covered herself with a sheepskin coat, but that did not help. Chills and fever seized upon her.

And now Naum entered, having finished his work of overseeing the menservants. There was no one to give him his supper, nothing was ready. At the outset he became angry; later, when he was more reasonable and would listen, Nastia told him everything, groaning the while. He became silent.

Then, when his eyes lighted on Marusia, that frightened him.

“Almighty God! Thy will be done! She is hot as fire and she is shaking. I can’t tell you how she is shaking!”

His heart almost stopped beating for a second. An instant’s thought, and he was praying to God. This was his nature and disposition; whether in slight trouble or great rejoicing, he went inevitably to God.

So it was now. He said his prayers, crossed Marusia three times, and lay down. He listened for a little while: “Is Marusia sleeping yet? O God, may it be Thy will that she should fall asleep, and be well tomorrow!” With these words he went to bed and fell asleep.

But in the stillest midnight hour he was wakened with difficulty by Nastia.

“Look, Naum! What is happening to Marusia? She sighs from time to time, oftener than she did, and louder... and even cries out.”

Naum was already beside the sick one. “What is wrong with you, Marusia? Why are you sighing ... what is hurting you?”

¹⁵ *Spasa*: Transfiguration Day, 21st of August.

“My Father dear, *Batechku!* Don’t let me be lost. The pain stabs me.... Oh, it is hard to stand it! Do everything that you can think of. I have a piercing pain. I feel weighed down with my suffering. Do all you know... I have a sharp pain....”

“Just where is the pain, *Masechka*¹⁶?”

“Right there in my side... Oh!... Oh!... in my left side. Help me! I will not endure this!”

Naum busied himself at once. With flint and steel he lighted the lamp. And now Nastia has risen, ... Whence comes her strength? And then he turns to Marusia ... and she sighs more and more.... What is to be done? They do not know themselves.

With difficulty the old couple light the stove, cover Marusia with sheepskins ...but she cries, “Tm so hot! I cannot lie down any longer on top of this stove; put me lying down on the bench... Oh, I am hot... Oh, it is hard for me! My side hurts me... Oh, it hurts!”

They quickly arrange the bench as a bed; the old people begin to lift her ...toggling at each other, forcing themselves to support Marusia, stumbling.

Naum becomes angry, and scolds his wife because she does not help him. Nastia in her turn grumbles that he is pushing Marusia on top of her. Marusia sighs, cries, and the old folk looking at her, are in tears themselves.

With much trouble they finally bring Marusia to the bench, helping her to lie down, and covering her with a sheet because she seems to be in a sweat. They consult with one another as to what more can be done.

Nastia is all for seeking out quickly a “wise woman” to get her to “lick away,” because it may be the Evil Eye; or, to heat wax and exorcise their fear; or to “whisper away” the chills—let her do what she knows!

But Naum is opposed to all this because he very much dislikes the “wise women” and fortunetellers, who deceive only fools, cheating them out of their money, unable to help or to do good to anyone—trouble and plenty of it, instead!

So in a moment’s time he fetched the Jordan water¹⁷ and told Nastia to rub her with it, and also gave her some to drink. And he himself burned Easter incense, allowing her to inhale it. Then he and Nastia prayed—and suddenly Marusia became quiet and it seemed as if she were falling asleep.

Rejoicing, the old people would have extinguished the light and gone to bed themselves ... but at this moment Marusia cried out in a voice unlike her own: “Oh, woe! It stabs me, it stabs me in my side, it burns me... Oh, how I am suffering!... Oh, this is dreadful for me!... it is my death... it won’t let me breathe.”

Naum, seeing now that the matter was serious, and that it was necessary to do something more, seized his cap, ran to a neighbor and woke her up, and asked her to come immediately to help Nastia.

After she was ready and he had escorted her to his house, dawn had come, and then he went to the town, where he had an acquaintance or friend, a surgeon-barber, who also was kin to Marusia by baptism. She had been godmother at his own house to three of his children; so Naum went to him for consultation as to what should be done, hoping that, if possible, he would come and see the suffering one.

¹⁶ *Masechka*: Diminutive of “mother.”, an endearment here. In common usage when addressing women, married or single.

¹⁷ Water blessed on the Feast of Theophany or the Baptism of Jesus.

But is it easy for an old man to hurry anywhere? Walking, walking, it seemed to him that he was always on the same spot; if he started to run, his breath left him; his feet were stumbling, and he was on the point of falling.

Naum became sorry that he had not aroused any of the servants, who were sleeping on the straw in the yard, but what was one to do? Even if he could reach the destination more quickly, a servant would not be able to tell everything; and in case the surgeon would not come the messenger would not be able to insist and be urgent as he himself would have been.

The sun had risen when Naum was just arriving at the veterinary-surgeon's; his step was heavy, plodding and slow. Then, the time he had waking him!... He was quite well-to-do, having made a good sum in an epidemic of smallpox, and he had begun to walk abroad in a noble's frock coat, and in keeping with this, to sleep late in the morning, after the custom of a nobleman.

So, by the time they had heated up a pot for him, and he had drunk some of the tea made therefrom, puffing at his pipe with sundry noises, like the head man of a county—by the time he had come out to Naum, stretching and yawning, it was very late.

But thanks for that, even!.... When by his questions he discovered Marusia's ailment, then he prepared to go at once, quickly grasped something which he stuffed in the front of his shirt, seized a flask containing some liquid, and said: "Naum Semenovych! This is a bad state of affairs. We must use as much haste as we can. Don't be stingy in hiring a conveyance; it is nothing for me to walk to your house, but we must rush."

Naum leaped to his feet at once, hired a driver, and the horses ran as fast as their breath would let them to the house.

When the surgeon saw Marusia he sucked in his breath ominously. He began asking her where it hurt her to breathe; but on account of her cough she was unable to speak a word.

The surgeon nodded his head and whispered to himself: "Oh, it is a bad business!"

And Naum, hearing this, let his hands fall.... The surgeon, hurrying, busied himself at once. He let blood from her arm; then he took off the cover of the flask, which held leeches, and applied them to her side.

While all this was taking place, Naum was as one neither alive nor dead; he would walk about, then stop, then sit down, all the while sighing and wringing his hands; what troubled him most was that the surgeon's face was so disturbed.

And poor Nastia, so unconcerned! She helped with Marusia, holding her up, doing all that was needful, but busied herself also with other things, just as if her daughter were not ill. So, when a great worry or trouble looms up, one is liable to be oblivious of it, hardly aware of it at all

Having finished, the surgeon came out to the porch for a breath of air, and Naum plied him with questions. "A bad situation!" was his only answer.

Naum stooped to the latter's feet, clasping them even in his entreaty, as he wept and cried out: "My friend, Konrad Ivanovych, do all that you know, but do not let me lose my child—don't put me into my grave alive. I will always look on you as my real father. Take what you like—all my livestock—only cure Marusia!"

The surgeon broke into tears and said: "My dear friend, Naum Semenovych! Should I not pity my child's godmother? What would I not do to cure the godmother of my children! But when it is not God's will, what can our brother do—even though he had ten heads, he could do nothing."

"Then there is no chance for my Marusia to live?" Naum asked.

“God only knows!” said the surgeon, and went back to the sick girl. Having regarded her closely for some time, taking her pulse, he said: “Say a prayer to God, Semenovych! When she falls asleep then there will be nothing to worry about. It looks as if she would go to sleep soon.”

They stepped aside quietly so as not to disturb her... but to what purpose? As soon as she fell into slumber a cough began, such a violent cough, from the bottom of her chest; it did not give her a chance to breathe; and again that sharp pain in her side.

It is a long story—how she suffered for three days. The surgeon treated her and then he called in a German physician. The latter applied some salve to the side, and what else did he not do! But there was no relief, no relief! Every little while it seemed that she grew worse.

Naum gave them permission to do what they wanted, and he, shutting himself in his room, prayed to God continuously. He fell on his knees and wrung his hands; he remained prostrated for perhaps half an hour, praying all the time: “God of Mercy! Do not make us orphans. Do not take away from us our Gladness. Take all our stock, take my old feeble self, take me unto Thee, but let her live in this world a little longer.”...

And then he ended his petition: “Thy will be done, Thy Holy will be done with me, a sinner. Thou knowest all; Thou wilt do better than we sinners think.”

He would approach the German, would entreat him, and kiss his hands... he brought out a casket containing perhaps three hundred rubles and said: “Take as much as you like, take everything, take the stock... I will lose everything, I will go begging, if you will only cure my child.

“She is my only child... why should I live without her, for there would be no gladness for me of any kind if she should die... who will look after me... who?” And then he broke out into groans and tears.

Although a stranger, the German wept too. And do you think he took a cent? And then, when he came the last time he did everything possible, and finally he said: “Nothing can be done!” With that he went away.

Naum was praying, praying ... and how he wept, such floods of tears! Then he went out of the room and looked at Marusia. She seemed to him like a candle burning itself out.

He crossed himself and murmured, “Our Lord! Thy will be done! Forgive us sinners and teach us what we should do and how we should obey Thee.” With these words he went away.

He walked along after a fashion, but could hardly see anything through his tears. He called the priest, who was surprised that such a healthy girl, after only three days’ illness, should be on her way to God.

Before the priest came with the Holy Sacrament Naum returned and, bracing himself against his emotion, with great difficulty said to Marusia: “Daughter dear, we shall give you Communion. It may be that God will restore you to health the sooner for it.”

“I had wanted to ask you for this, but was afraid to bother you. You speak of health, but it is the salvation of my soul that is in my mind.... If he would only come sooner!” said Marusia, brokenly.

Nastia hastened to arrange the house and porch; Naum lighted a candle and burned some incense; and then the priest came.

While Marusia was making her confession, Naum with Nastia and some neighbors who were present went out into the porch, and here Nastia said to her husband: “Why have you frightened her so? She thinks now that she is already going to die, since they have brought the priest.”

“Well, wife, dear old woman, what are we to do?” replied Naum, sighing heavily. “Should I not be blamed if she died without confessing?”

“What are you saying, my old man? She is not going to die yet! It’s only four days since she became really sick.”

“But it is the fourth day! With God everything is ready. Such is His holy will. If God wills, I will die sooner than she, even though she is at death’s door, breathing the incense.”

Naum left them, lamenting aloud in his pain and grief. Finally, becoming quieted, he repeated: “If God would but give me this grace! But Thy will be done, our Lord!”

Nastia became thoughtful—was Naum telling the truth? Hardly any illness, hardly any pain... and to die? If she had lain in bed a fortnight—but as it was...

Here the priest called everyone to enter, for he would give Marusia the Sacrament, Naum, barely alive and warm himself, managed to raise her up for the Holy Communion... which she accepted like God’s angel.

Then she lay down, crossed herself, raised her eyes to Heaven and said, happily: “When I feel so happy here after taking Communion, what will it be in the Heavenly Kingdom? Take me, my God, to Thy Holy Kingdom...” -

The priest; after having sat for a time, reading and expounding the Bible, went home.

After a while it was observed that Marusia had stopped coughing to some extent, and although she sighed no longer and was apparently sleeping, yet... in her throat could be heard a constant rattle, and her breast was heaving with gasps.

Then Nastia said to the old man Naum: “I am sure she will not die; you see she is really easier already!”

“Keep quiet—and pray God!” Naum answered. A violent trembling fit seized him.

“Now,” said he, “the holy angels are hovering above her. The awful hour draws near when the righteous soul is about to depart. We sinners can do nothing but pray to God.”

“O merciful God!” cried Nastia. “You are afraid yourself and you are trying to frighten me!” She had not realized her approaching desolation, but Naum, aware of all, said:

“If only God, the Merciful One, would create such a miracle!”

Then he lighted the Passion Candle, placed it in front of the icons, and went back to his room. With what fervor he besought God! Where did he not promise to go, and what pilgrimage did he not vow to make! How much stock would he give to churches, to old people!...

Somehow Marusia gained strength to speak clearly, and not feebly: “Dear Father, Mother dear, come to me.

They approached her. To Naum it was apparent that a change had come. Her face was flushed like the star just at sunrise, her beloved eyes shone as swallows’ wings flash in flight—glad, with a wonderful radiance.

He knew what this meant. He came to himself with a start, and, gathering all his forces, strengthening his heart, gulped down his fears, and prayed in this wise to himself:

“The time has come, do not forsake me, O my God!”

Marusia spoke to them: “Father dear; Mother, both of you, forgive me, a sinner. Let us say good-bye to each other in this world, good-bye until God brings us together again in His Kingdom.”

Here she began to kiss their hands. And they tearfully bent down and kissed her. She spoke again to them, so gladly, and smiling the while:

“I thank you, my own dear parents, because you loved me... forgive me, perhaps there were

times when I did not obey you... or got angry... God has forgiven my sins... and you, forgive me also.

“Don’t think of me so much, because it is a sin. And remember my sinful soul; don’t stint the cattle, for masses. Everything is earth, and dust of earth.

“Stop, stop! Enough! Don’t cry. Don’t you see how happy I am? And there I shall be very happy. One has to die sometime. We shall not be separated long; there a year is like a moment.

“You see I’m not sorry for you because we shall meet again soon.... Vasyl... Oh, when you see my dear Vasyl tell him not to grieve nor worry. We shall see each other soon.... I loved him so much.... My nuts... put my dear little nuts in my hands when I am dead; and the kerchief, please return that to him!

“But... where are you? I don’t see you; dear Father, read prayers to me aloud; and you, Mother dear, cross me, bless...”

Naum began to recite prayers, and Marusia tried to follow him, but could not say a word; and he, breaking into tears at each word, overcame his distress and went on. Nastia made the sign of the cross twice and then sank down on the floor powerless.

A neighbor woman put a candle in Marusia’s grasp, opening her hand with difficulty, for it was already growing cold. Her voice could not be heard any longer.

Naum, bending down, read aloud in her ear: “I believe in one God” and “Hail Mary.”... And at this she quickly opened her eyes and said aloud: “Do you hear? What is this? ...”

Naum fell on his knees and said: “Pray, everybody! The angels have come for her soul” And then Marusia continued to ask: “Do you see?”

At length she was silent... sighed deeply, and said: “Mother of God, receive...”

And she became quiet forever.

Chapter XI

Naum leaped to his feet, wrung his hands, raised his eyes to the heavens and stood motionless for a long time in that position. Then he fell down on his knees before the icons and prayed:

“Our merciful Father in Heaven, leave me not alone in this bitter hour; Thou hast shown favor unto me all my life; and in my old age, when I should be making ready to lie in my grave Thou hast sent such a calamity. ... Strengthen me, O God, so that I may not commit a sin in Thy sight!”

He ran to Marusia, bowed himself over the couch, kissed her hands, lips, neck and head, and murmured all the time: “Good-bye forever, my daughter dear, my Comfort, my Gladness; you have withered like a flower in the orchard, you have pined away like a ruined stalk in the field!

“Have I now indeed been left without you? Orphaned—worse than if I were a small child... a child is pitied and tended, but who will care for me now?

“At this moment you are in the new world among the holy angels. You know how hard it is for me, how bitter for me without you—pray so that God may take me to you....

“I am covering your dear little eyes, to remain so until the Judgment Day.... I shall not see any more of my Gladness. I am folding your little hands, which fed me, minded me, clasped me....”

He would have continued in such a strain longer, but at this juncture one of the neighbors walked up to him and said: “Leave her alone, Uncle; you will not lift her up any more. Some

girls have come to dress Marusia; you must go and give orders, because, as you see, Nastia is dazed and almost prostrated.

Naum stood beside Nastia, and, regarding her, he broke out into bitter tears and cried: "Get up, Mother! The flower girls have come. Let them prepare our bride for the adorning with the wreath ... and I shall go and make ready the wedding."

When he came to the priest he could not speak a word, and wept so much, so much, Oh God! The priest guessed at once what he would have said and responded to his need: "She has won to the Heavenly Kingdom. Hers was a righteous soul. God keep her in peace among His saints!"

Then having finished his prayer, he tried to cheer Naum until the church singers gathered; after this they went into the church; the priest began to chant the Requiem Mass and commanded that the passing bell should toll, the Immaculate Bell¹⁸ be rung as if for an old and honored man. He sent for a pall and a large wax candle, and also ordered the Psalter to be read.

Having entered the church, Naum fell down before the icons and prayed and entreated in this wise: "O God of Mercy! Give me wisdom so that in such a heavy woe I may not anger Thee, not by word only—not even in thought."

When the singing of the Requiem began he felt his spirit lightened, and although he grieved for his daughter—how deeply he grieved!—he thought: "It is God's will. She is now in His Kingdom, and for such sadness as we now endure God will elect us to be with her."

With new courage he reached his home. He found that they had arrayed Marusia and laid her on a bench by the window. Naum stood beside her. His prayer ended, he folded his hands and began to speak:

"Little daughter of mine, most dear to me! My unforgotten Marusia! Why do you not glance with your dear black eyes at your own *Batechko*? Why do you not throw your arms around him?... why is it you do not speak to him? Not a single word, one little word! You have ever been running to meet me... and now! You have covered your eyes until that hour when you shall see God on the Day of Judgment; you have folded your little hands together until you, with this holy cross you hold, rise from the coffin to meet Him. You have closed your lips, until you begin to glorify Him, together with the angels.

"In whose care have you left us? You have taken our happiness with you. Who will cheer us with such kindness as you showed? Who will pity us, orphans, when we are old? Who will take care of us, we who are like a couple of lonely stalks left in the field? Who will stanch our stinging tears? Who will wipe our lips, burning like fire? Who will, during pain and suffering, wet our parched tongue?

"You have not rejoiced us by living with your Vasyl, you have not made us glad with your wedding. You are taking your girlhood into the raw earth.

"However, your girl friends have arranged your braids as for a wreath, and the ribbons are placed in adornment, set with flowers, ...and on the right-hand side a flower by itself, to let the people see that you were a virgin in this life, and that you are going, a maiden, into the other world."

Such a great throng of people assembled—the house was full as it could be, brimming over, and yet more looked through the window—and now they all were crying!

And indeed it was hard and piteous enough to stand looking at this man in his old age, white

¹⁸ *Neporochni*: Virign. Bells in Ukraine are baptized, i.e., sinless, stainless or virgin.

as a gull, helpless, mourning over his own child, his only daughter whom he had outlived—even over her whom he is burying in her flowering time; he the while remaining in this world, aged with ills, with sorrows, alone wherever he goes.

And this was a girl having no equal, not only in the village but everywhere—there was no one like her in all the country round. God-fearing, pious, willing to do anything, obedient, modest, not making herself conspicuous, quiet, wise—and how sweet! None may say anything as to that! Whether they knew her or not, everyone liked and respected her, and when they heard that she was dead, then all, old and young alike, grieved for her, hastened in crowds to look at her and to lament her passing.

As to old Nastia, there was not much use to speak to her. Not only did she fail to give any orders, but she could not stand on her feet nor move from the one spot. She sat ever beside her dead daughter; she had lamented and wept so much that now she had no tears left. She only sighed heavily and, crying, could not speak even half a word.

Having heard the Psalter which the church singer was continuously reading, Naum sat beside the old woman and said: “Now, *Stara*, dear old woman, have we come to the end? We have been preparing for the wedding, and now the funeral awaits us! Alas! Alas! Pray, Nastia, pray to God!”

“This is for our sins, Naum, that is why God has sent us this punishment,” said Nastia.

“For our sins!” Naum exclaimed, having first thought a little. “Is there any punishment that would make up for our sins? Every day, every little while, we are sinning greatly before our Lord; what do we deserve?”

“If our Heavenly Father dealt with us not in a merciful way and according to His holy truth, then we would not have been privileged to look at the world for a long time now. There is no limit to His kindness.”

“Why has He taken from us our only joy? What will we do now?”

“Why? How foolish, foolish! Why has He taken her? So that, being a good child, and one whom God favored, living in an evil world and seeing others acting badly, she might not follow in the steps of those who do not act according to His will, would not become like them.

“And for evil, wicked children God punishes the father and mother. It is as if we were responsible for her, and now, if our child has been good, God will forgive us some of our sins.”

“In whose care are we now remaining, and who will look after us when we are old and helpless?” Nastia still urged.

“I thought in that way at first,” Naum said, “and then, after my prayer, God gave me wisdom: We had no child once, we lived alone; and now we shall be without her. You will say: ‘Then we were in good health, and now we are old and not very well able to earn money for ourselves.’”

“Nastia, Nastia! In our young days we were not living and working alone—we had each other. God was helping us then, and He will not let us be lost now. We shall live for a while yet; we shall suffer a little yet for our sins in this world; according to His will our hour will come.

“You will cover my eyes, and you... in your trouble you will be left a lone orphan. But He who is mindful of the smallest insect will bring us together again, and Marusia will meet us there.

“That time will come some day—we shall not have to endure this for a hundred years. But even if it should be a hundred years or more, and even if God sent a worse woe than this—if there could be a worse—then can it be equal to what we shall receive from the merciful God, in

his Kingdom, where our Marusia now rests?

“Stop! Don’t cry; give orders. A living person thinks of living things, and so it is with us. It is needful to arrange everything as is customary—to do as much as we can for the soul and glory of our Marusia.”

It began to get dark. In front of one of the outhouses a painter known to Naum was painting a coffin—and how splendid it was! Oak boards, thick and dry as iron, shaved and smoothed clean, as by an expert carpenter, the reason being that the man who made it, sorrowing over Marusia and loving Naum, put deep emotion into his task.

Then a painter painted it black and marked a holy cross on the lid; and on the borders dotted words in different colors. At the head he painted an angel of God and at her feet he drew a picture of Death—a skeleton—so realistically that it might have been skull and crossbones in truth—any good person would not mind if God sent such a coffin to him.

In the house, in the loom, the women were busying themselves—either setting up the baking trough or sifting the flour, or breaking up macaroni, or cleaning fowl; and the people, either crowding beside the dead or near the open window, were ever looking at her; and from sorrow both the old folks became so weak that they had to lie down.

All at once there was a noise and commotion.... Someone groaned loudly, shouted aloud even; the people outside the window also cried excitedly, “Vasyl! Vasyl!” and moved out of the way.

Naum hearing this, leaped up, looked out of the window.... Poor Vasyl was prostrate beside it, lying like one dead.

At the moment when they were tolling the bells for the soul of Marusia, Vasyl was riding by the church, hastening as quickly as he could to his employer, because he had finished all he had to do, as far as he was able, and was bringing him a good profit....

He rides, and hears the bells tolling. He starts at the sound, quivers as if someone had thrown snow down his back, a cold, sinking feeling in his heart; and such sorrow falls on his soul, so strange, so heavy, that he becomes scarcely conscious of himself.

Making the sign of the cross, he says: “Grant, O God, eternal peace to the dead in Thy Heavenly Kingdom!”

And he whips the horses so that he may the sooner hand in his accounts to the overseer and be on his way to Marusia—to remain with her till the wedding day and forever after.

Chapter XII

So what a wedding Vasyl found! And when he saw his Marusia, instead of being throned on the betrothal chair, lying on a bench covered by a pall—although she was dressed and decked with flowers, it was not for the marriage with him, but to go to the grave away from him.

Realizing this, he was overcome with grief; he sighed, grew pale as death, and fell to the ground on the instant as if he himself were dead. They revived him with the utmost difficulty; they even threw water on him and shook him—at this he opened his eyes, looked around and said quietly: “Marusia! Where is my Marusia?”

“Son, Marusia is already neither yours nor mine; she is God’s,” Naum began. “She has left us.”

Vasyl saw and heard nothing. Observing this, Naum realized that he must bring home his grief so poignantly that a torrent of tears would burst forth, before he could be roused from his

torpor.

So he began to speak to him, sadly enough. It is hard to describe the way he told Vasyl what he had to know—how Marusia had loved him, what efforts she had made in his behalf, how she became ill, and, when dying, what were her last commands.

Listening to this, Vasyl wept and cried out in his agony.

He rushed to where she lay, fell down by the bier ...kissed her hands, saying nothing but “Marusia!... my Marusia!” He would leave her alone for a time, then cry out with despairing gestures and again hasten to her bier.

All those assembled, even small children, seeing his grief and that of the old folk, wept in pity for him, wept as though it were he who lay dead.

It was like this until the evening. Neighbors and friends dispersed gradually, and in the night Naum, who had wearied himself past bearing, fell asleep. He woke up, seeing that Vasyl had not even thought of leaving his dead, but knelt by her all the rime, kissing her hands, murmuring something, with burning tears.

“Rest, son, at least a little while!” Naum implored. “It will be a hard day for you tomorrow.

Get a hold of yourself and dress. Look at me—I who am more sorry for her death than anyone, have drowsed awhile so as to help my head at least a little.”

“Are you more sorry for her?” said Vasyl. “How is it possible to even think this? I love her a hundred times more than you do.”

“One can’t explain... you say that you love her more—and I know, I that am her father, an old man—and there will be no more daughters for me. And you, if you wished it, could find a mate tomorrow.”

“Father, Father!” exclaimed Vasyl, reproachfully. “Is it not a sin for you to say that? ... At such a time, and at such a place?” Then he looked at him in a threatening way, frowning, and started to talk to himself, as if he were out of his senses.

“It is true... I shall be betrothed soon... I shall marry. You will come to the wedding... but do not call a priest... perhaps... in vain.”

At this speech Naum became thoroughly frightened. It struck him that perhaps Vasyl intended—but God forbid!—to kill himself. He tried then to cheer him, and told him of how great a sin this would be—against the will of God—and that he must rely on His mercy.

And he spoke to him many words of comfort and hope, as he was very wise although he had never learned to read. Often, even talking to a priest, one would find him apt with an answer; and as for the church singer he did not even try to argue with him!

Vasyl, listening to all his speeches, stood in silence, smiling now and then, or wrinkling his brow, or muttering: “To pray? Pray yourself!” And apparently he was thinking his own thoughts.

Naum, having spoken for quite a long time, pondered: “How can I explain anything to him in this state? He is not even conscious of himself. I must wait till I can get hold of him, alone, and talk quietly and make everything clearer, so that he may not lose his soul by doing harm to himself in some way.”

When it became a little lighter outside, the good people, friends and neighbors, began to gather in Naum’s yard; a fire was lighted in the center and then at last did those present busy themselves; they set pots over the fire to boil soup, preparing macaroni and sorrel; they carved baked meats; in one place they might be seen filling a plate with boiled wheat (*kutia*) dissolved in water and honey; brimming glasses with whisky; setting out plates; laying planks for the

tables and arranging everything as it should be so that those arriving could have dinner, and the beggars would also be fed.

Broad daylight came—they tolled the master bell for the assembly, and then rushed in, pell-mell, as one might have expected—rich and poor in an indistinguishable mass. Not the native peasantry alone, but also some of the nobility, came to see a ceremony not often witnessed today, an old custom—the wedding-funeral of a betrothed girl

When all had gathered and the bell had stopped, the holy cross and banners were being borne in procession from the church, and just behind them the bier was brought; yonder walked three priests and a deacon, all in black robes; and ten or twenty lay readers also. These with difficulty pushed their way through the press into the house.

Naum, having seen that everything was in readiness, began to receive the people, choosing some of them for bridesmaids, some for bridegroom's assistants, some for matchmakers; some of the women also were called on to act as representatives of mother-in-law, matchmakers, and so on, selected always in couples.

He chose a young girl for the Light-Bearer, *Svitylka*, (a sister or relative of the bridegroom, who, during the wedding ceremony, holds a lighted candle, or—as in the old days—a sword); and as many as twelve youths for groomsmen; but it was unnecessary to choose the bridegroom, as Vasyl, her betrothed husband, was present.

So, when he had received them all, Naum bowed and said to them:

“Good people, kind neighbors, noble elders, dear women, noble mothers, and ye, worthy youths—and ye, maidens! Listen to me, an unhappy father.” And here he himself broke out in lamenting.

“God did not permit me—such was His holy will—to give my daughter in marriage, to partake of bread and salt with you and make merry. But he caused me, a sinful man, to give up to Him my only pure and virgin daughter, pure as a white dove.

I am going now to bury her virginity as custom demands, and as her fame deserves.

“Take upon you the labor of walking behind her in the wedding procession, so honoring her. Lead her virginity to the celestial life, not to the new house, to a loving husband—but into the wet earth, into the dark coffin. Oblige me in this, an unfortunate and sorrowing father...”

Here he would have bowed, but instead he fell to the ground and wept out his sorrow in laments, and all the people behind him did the same.

Later, having risen and taken breath, he said: “Where is the old mother? Let her distribute gifts to the matchmakers, and equip the wedding procession.” So they called Nastia, and in her place they set another woman to lament over the dead and to cry aloud the chants of weeping for a time.

Nastia needed assistance when she came out; she was so weak that she had to be led to the front. Following her came boys bearing the dowry in a chest, which they opened.

Nastia then called the girls to her, and said:

“My soul was not given the happiness of seeing my *myla*, my dear little Marusenka, select the bridesmaids for herself. In my old age, bathing my face with bitter tears, the Lord has caused me to ask you to lead the virgin to her grave.

“I may not hear your wedding songs for my Marusia, but instead must see your tears like fine rain falling, shed with me, her mother, when the priest sings the Requiem over her.

“Do not be vexed that, instead of the wedding honey-wax roses on the *Korovai*,¹⁹ her unhappy mother bestows upon you wax candles. Light them, and lead out my Marusenka, and give her up; as your candles burn so my poor heart is consumed with great sorrows, burying my only daughter, my Gladness.... I remain now an orphan... as a lonely stalk or weed in the field.”

Then she distributed among them costly candles of green wax. She took that *Rushnyk*, that wide and long scarf or towel—how finely embroidered!—which would have been spread out at the wedding for the bride and groom to stand on, and bound it round the holy cross, borne in the van.

Then, with other long towels embroidered with eagles and flowers, so long that they trailed on the ground, she bound the best man and his assistants, crossing their breasts also with white linen, crossed the *Svakhy* with towels and pinned a flower in their caps.

The matchmakers were bound, each with a fine towel. For the Light-Bearer a “wedding-sword” was made, in accordance with the old custom, of flowers—sweet basil and cranberries, gilded, for the hilt, and the ends of an embroidered towel for the sheath.

The red silk kerchief, with which the hands of the wedding couple would have been bound, she wreathed about the arms of the silver cross that the priest carried. To each priest and choir leader blue kerchiefs were given; each singer had a kerchief also.

A large and beautiful carpet was placed on the coffin lid, and another fine rug, with design in a rich border, the center embroidered with a huge eagle, was placed on the bier below the coffin—this being an offering to the church for the soul of the dead.

Then Nastia began to distribute the dowry in the huge chest. Articles such as kerchiefs which Marusia had owned as a girl were given to poor girls and orphans, as they could not possess these otherwise. The veils, shawls and coifs of the wife she was to have been, were given to poor women; so that although it was such a large chest, heaped so full, there was not a tiny scrap of cloth left.

She gave everything: the chest to the church—even the pillows and bedspreads—she gave away everything to have masses said for Marusia’s soul, for her own, and Naum’s. Then, having crossed herself, she said:

“Glory to thee, O God, that we had so much to give for the soul of our dear little Marusenka! I have no need for it, when I have lost her.” And then she wept aloud, and said:

“Where is now our bridegroom?”

They brought him to her; she gave him close embrace, kissed him, wept, and murmured: “Oh, my dear son-in-law, my loving one! You are the only one left to me. Here is your wedding kerchief. In your absence Marusia wore it on her heart, and when she was dying she told us to bind it on you at her funeral.

“Forget not our Marusia and how greatly she loved you—forget not our old age—forsake us not! There will be no one to close our eyes and remember us with masses.”

Vasyl, pale as death, with disheveled hair, his eyes like those of a corpse, staring and seeing nothing, his hands stiffened at his sides, his body shaking like a leaf—he did not even feel it when they bound the kerchief to his waist. With difficulty he said to Nastia: “My own dear Mother!” And no other word could he utter.

And having tied the kerchief about him, Nastia made the sign of the cross over him and said: “Oh, my little son, little orphan, widower without a wedding! May God and the Mother of

¹⁹ *Korovai*: The wedding cake.

God bless thee! Do not forsake us.” Then she went back to the house to lament over her daughter.

When everything was in readiness, the priest began to read the service for the dead, and sprinkled the coffin with holy water. The groomsmen laid Marusia in the coffin, and the flower girls arranged her long braid, decorating it with flowers, and put on her head a wreath (as she was not yet married), which they made themselves from marigolds, chamomile, and various other flowers.

Poor Naum was barely able to stagger, yet he wished to comply with the old custom; he approached the coffin, made the sign of the cross over Marusia, and said:

“I congratulate you, Marusia, on your new estate. God sent this dwelling, rest in it; let no evil one disturb your bones ... neither with hand nor tongue. As you lie in such beauty now, may you lie till the Day of Judgment, and then arise with joy with this holy cross.”

After this the groomsmen carried the coffin from the house, and Nastia followed in their steps; although she wept bitterly, she forced herself to repeat: “Farewell, Marusia, from my house! Not long were you my guest. All my gladness was with you, and you will never come again, I shall never know gladness more.”

Then they left: they carried in front a holy cross with banners; the bier, covered with the funeral pall, was carried by four boys, bound with kerchiefs, looking like angels; behind them the coffin lid, hidden by a rug, was borne by four groomsmen, then came the priest with candles, the deacon with a censer, followed by the lay readers singing so sweetly and plaintively that all who heard them wept, whether they would or no.

Next came the flower girls, in couples, dressed in long coats, with only black scarves on their heads—without any ribbons or finery; in the hands of each a green candle was burning. Following them, the Light-Bearer walking alone with her sword; in the next rank the women assistants, then the best man and his assistant.

The groomsmen who had been chosen to carry the coffin, which was on a trestle, came next. Vasyl, as bridegroom, walked on the right-hand side, with great difficulty, and as if stunned or dazed. Nothing interested him; he did whatever he was told, followed where he was led; never for a moment took his eyes off Marusia!

And she—poor girl, dear little dove—lay covered by the veil which was to have enveloped her at the wedding; her face alone remained uncovered, and it seemed as if she, lying there, looked around her everywhere, being arrayed so prettily. Having died at peace, the trace of a smile still rested on her lips—a pleased smile that they had buried her in such a good fashion—so was she well content.

Vasyl would not have moved from the spot, perhaps, as he had no idea of what was going on, no memory; but he was led by wedding scarves in the hands of the two *Starosty*, each taking an arm.

Behind the coffin the neighbors and friends accompanied Naum and Nastia, tears like streamlets flowing. The bells—how they rang! *Hospody!* O Lord! They never stop—they ring ceaselessly! And throngs, throngs beside and behind the coffin, on the sides of the road, in front, on the gates and fences ... it would be hard to say how many, to count their numbers.

Before they reached the church, twelve times they stopped when portions of the Gospel were read, and each time they spread a cover, given afterward to the priest.

Having recited the Funeral Mass in the church, they carried the body to the cemetery. When they lowered the coffin into the grave, twenty yards of toweling were provided.

With the entire gathering lamenting Marusia's passing, Naum fell to his knees, then rose, with arms outstretched, to pray:

"O very God, by Thy will I became an orphan, a powerless old man! I give the body of my daughter to Mother Earth; accept her soul in Thy Kingdom. Forsake me not; a sinful man."

Then he began to repeat the Pater Noster as the coffin was lowered to its resting-place, and the priests, praying, performed the final ceremonies. Then Naum arose, took some earth in his hands—shaking, poor man—lamenting. He scattered it; and said:

"May we, O God, be with her in one Kingdom! Good-bye, Marusia, for the last time! May the earth lie on thee light as a feather!" And Nastia did the same.

When Vasyl's turn came he clutched some earth in his hand, while sobs burst from him, shaking his whole frame; his fingers stiffened, and he could not relax them sufficiently to throw the earth on the grave. He shivered, trembled, then fell down, unhearing, unseeing.

Then all those assembled took at least a pinch of earth, throwing it on the grave in the hope that they, too, might be with her in one Kingdom. And finally the *boiary* spaded the earth into a hillock and at the head they placed a high, broad cross painted green. Behold, then, Marusia's "In Memoriam."

Arriving home, the priests and the rest of the people, including those who had taken part in the ceremonies in any way, began to make ready a repast. Nastia was the first to occupy herself.

"Where is our Vasyl? Let my Wood Dove, my dear son and widower, sit down all alone on the betrothal chair."

But Vasyl was not to be found. They looked here, looked there—where was he? Nowhere. They searched in every likely and unlikely place. Then an old man described what he had seen at the cemetery.

He had lifted Vasyl from the ground, had tried to rouse him—had shaken him—sprinkled him with water and so had revived him after a long time. Having taken a breath or two, Vasyl had stumbled to his feet and declared that he was going for a little walk. So the old man let him alone, and went back to the others, but in the end he had not seen where he had gone.

The more active of the *boiary* jumped up at this to take on the hunt—in the cemetery, in the woods; they sought Vasyl everywhere but nowhere could they find him. As nothing further could be done, they partook of food and, thanking Naum and Nastia, went away. Vasyl's employer was asked to help to trace him, as were relatives, but none had seen or heard of the missing man.

In accordance with Christian rites, memorial masses were chanted every three months until the ninth month had passed. They gave bountiful dinners to the poor of the parish, hoping for aid in finding Vasyl. But there was no sign, and it seemed as if even the memory of him had perished.

Naum was the one who worried about him most, being apprehensive of suicide; in that frame of mind he was really dejected, and would weep, and pray God to lead Vasyl on the right road and bring him back so that Naum might care for him.

And a year went by. The old people "remembered" Marusia as was customary and paid the priests for a full mass in as many as three churches; at the fourth monastery they paid the precentor and choristers for some special chants to be sung over her grave for a period of forty days, or as long as the soul of Marusia was hovering over the spot.

Old Nastia lamented as if she had just buried her daughter. Naum tried to cheer her.

"What can you do? Pray to God! If we endure this suffering to the end here in this world, we

shall have our reward in the next. Let His will be done. It is Vasyl whom I worry over, hoping that he will not be lost, body and soul”

He himself took charge of the household, directing and caring for everything, quite willing to do all that he could unaided. And as soon as he amassed even a small sum he distributed it among the poor and needy; he apportioned some of it to everyone.

Nastia would begin to cry out at this: “Why are you troubling yourself so much? What is it all for? Whether we have it or not, it’s all the same—our age is just a day.”

“Suppose it were only an hour,” Naum made reply. “I am not caring for myself; everything is in the hands of the merciful God. Everything is His, and I am only His worker. I am passing what I have, by means of God’s beggars, into His holy hands. It is sin to eat bread lying idle; while I have the strength I should labor and give what I earn to the poor.

“If He wills me to go to Him I shall go, praising Him, and he who inherits what I have left will thank us and will remember us whenever he wishes to; and if he does not want to do this, then let that be as he likes. I am doing my duty while it is in my power.”

And now the second year has passed; at the beginning of the third year a man from the city came to them—one who had been to Kyiv the summer before—and said to the old couple: “Vasyl sends his greetings to you!”

Naum in his gladness exclaimed aloud, “Where did you see him?” and shouted to Nastia, who had become somewhat deaf on account of advancing years, to come near and listen to what they should hear concerning Vasyl.

Nastia also rejoiced, as she had been sorrowful that no news ever came, of any kind, about him.

She seated herself near the man and begged him to tell her everything—where he had seen him, how he fared.

Then the man said: “I saw him at Kyiv, but he is no longer ‘Vasyl’ but ‘Father Benedict.’”

“How is that? What happened?” the old people shouted together.

“Well,” said the stranger, “he became a monk over there.”

“A monk?” the old man repeated, praising and thanking God that Vasyl had been led into the way of salvation.

“He is in the monastery of Pechersk, already in the deaconate. Serving mass in my presence,” the man went on, “he later learned that I was from your town and knew you; then he called me to him and said, ‘Greet them for me. I regard them as if they were my own father and mother; every day when I serve mass I remember them and their dead daughter—and will do so as long as God allows me to live. It was through their prayers that God saved me and snatched me from the hands of the devil

““For, after Marusia died, sinner that I was, I vowed to kill myself, and after Marusia was buried I stole away, where they could not find and stop me—very far away. I took with me only a handful of earth from her grave that I might lie near that which covered Marusia.

““How, when or where I walked or blindly ran I don’t know, through that whole day and night and the next day. I remember nothing. I woke from my stupor to find myself on the riverside, at the bend of the stream; two monks were sprinkling me with holy water, counseling me with comforting words.

““It was long before my senses fully returned. Then, when a monastery, that of Pechersk, sent a wagon, the friars placed me in it and took me to Kyiv. Later on, when authorities gave permission, I was free to go. The monks pondered.

““They asked me if I would agree to have my head shaven and be one of them; some time afterward, because my voice was good, I was made a deacon.

““Pay my loving respects to my dear parents—deliver to them this holy bread.

““Let them come to me, should I be spared; for my one wish is to depart and be with Marusia as soon as possible.””

Naum received the gift, kissed the bread, and, deep in thought, spoke to Vasyl as if indeed he were standing there before him:

“Now you are Father Benedict—and serving mass already! Why stumble, then, in your course? Pray, pray earnestly. Make your own the petition: ‘Thy will be done and deliver us from evil.’”

At that moment and on the spot Naum promised to go with his old wife; so in time God brought them there. Setting out, they visited different monasteries; reaching Pechersk they asked for Father Benedict.

The porter replied: “Remember him, sometimes, in your prayers! Pray for the peace of his soul. Daily we saw him pining away. He took no care of himself, paying no attention to his sufferings, taking no nourishment, so that in about a fortnight he died, his endurance ended.

“In the face of death he prayed very earnestly, sparing himself nothing; he begged us to place some earth, wrapped in a red silk kerchief, in his coffin, beneath his head, but because of the rule forbidding such privileges to a monk his wish could not be granted.”

Naum sighed heavily when he and Nastia approached the grave, after having paid for a Requiem Mass. Silent for a long time, grieving, finally he crossed himself and said:

“May the merciful God grant that you are now with your Marusia!”