

THE ELECTRONIC LIBRARY OF UKRAINIAN LITERATURE
An Internet Collection of Freely Accessible Literary Texts
<http://www.utoronto.ca/elul/>

Lesia Ukrainka

Forest Song

Translated by

Percival Cundy

Original Publication: *Spirit of Flame: A Collection of the Works of Lesya Ukrainka*. Translated by Percival Cundy. New York: Bookman Associates, 1950. Pp. 169–260.



This electronic reprint was prepared for the
Electronic Library of Ukrainian Literature
by Maxim Tarnawsky, 2005.

SPIRIT OF FLAME

*A Collection of the Works of
Lesya Ukrainka*

Translated by

PERCIVAL CUNDY

Foreword by

CLARENCE A. MANNING

Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages

Columbia University

BOOKMAN ASSOCIATES

New York

Forest Song

Fairy Drama in Three Acts

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES," *a destructive sprite dwelling in the freshets of spring.*

LOST BABES, *water nixes*

RUSALKA, *a water nymph*

WATER GOBLIN, *guardian spirit of the lake*

LEV, *a peasant*

LUKASH, *a peasant, Lev's nephew*

FOREST ELF, *a woodland sprite*

MAVKA,¹ *a forest nymph*

WILL-O'-THE-WISP, *a fire sprite (ignis fatuus)*

KUTZ, *a malicious imp*

MOTHER of Lukash, *a peasant woman*

FIELD SPRITE, *a nymph dwelling among the grain*

KILINA, *a young peasant widow*

"HE WHO DWELLS IN ROCK," *a phantom signifying Death and Oblivion*

STARVELINGS, *imps personifying Famine and Want*

A BOY, *Kilina's son*

FATE, *a phantom*

PROLOGUE

A dense and hoary primeval forest in Volhynia. The scene is a spacious glade in the heart of the forest, dotted with willows

1. Ukrainian folklore is full of beliefs and superstitions, manifestly the survivals from a dim ethnic past. In substance they are all connected with natural phenomena as observed in the changing seasons as the year runs its course, and with the activity of the manifold spirits supposed to lie behind the visible world. This is the general background of this fairy drama. However, two remarks on the persons of the drama will be useful. "Lost Babe" is a fairy being conceived as coming from an unbaptized infant, the fruit of illicit love, after having been drowned by its desperate forsaken mother. Similarly, a "Mavka" is another sort of fairy being, whose origin is ascribed to a female infant which dies before receiving Christian baptism.

and one very old oak. At one end the glade turns into tussocks and reedy growths, and then into a vivid green marsh, the shore of a woodland lake formed by a stream which runs through the forest. The stream emerges from a dense thicket, empties into the lake and comes out at the end of it, only to lose itself again in the undergrowth. The lake itself is a placid sheet of calm water, covered with duckweed and water lilies except for a clean open space in the center.

The spot is wild and mysterious but not gloomy, filled with the tender, pensive beauty of Polissye, the wooded part of the province of Volhynia.

It is very early spring. Along the edge of the forest and in the glade the first green is showing and hepaticas and anemones are in bloom. The trees are still leafless, but their leafbuds are about to open. A mist hangs over the lake, at times concealing it entirely, but when moved by the wind, the mist opens up, displaying the pale blue water.

A roaring is heard from the forest; the stream begins to foam and clatter. Then, together with its waters, out of the forest there comes racing "HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES." He is a youth, very blond with blue eyes, who makes expansive motions as though he were swimming. His clothing is constantly changing in color from turbid yellow to clear blue, and at times he emits swift golden sparks. Rushing with the current into the lake, he begins to circle around on the clear, open space, agitating the somnolent water. The mist dissolves and the water becomes bluer and bluer.

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES"

Down from mountain into valley,
 Skipping, racing, forth I sally.
 All the villages are quaking,
 As the dikes and dams I'm breaking.
 When folk try to dam the water,
 To their work I give no quarter;
 For wild waters of the spring
 Like wild youth, must have their fling!

He continues to agitate the water more and more, plunging and then emerging as though seeking something.

TWO LOST BABES

(Tiny pale infants in scanty white shirts, who come up to the surface among the water lilies.)

1. Why do you come hither blundering?
2. Why do you disturb our slumbering?
1. Here our mother made our nest;
Laid us gently down to rest;
O'er the stones and o'er the gravel
She laid reeds to make it level,
Lily pads she gave for covering,
And we heard her softly singing:
"Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my darlings, mother's nigh."
2. Why do you come us to scare?
1. Whom is it you're seeking here?

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES"

That Rusalka, blithe and kittle,
Whom I've loved since I was little;
For of water nymphs so queenly
There is none I love more keenly.
I have coursed all over mountains,
Valleys, ravines, springs, and fountains.
Lovelier spirit of the mere,
None there is than who dwells here.
Into foam this lake I'll churn,
Seeking her for whom I yearn!

He agitates the water tempestuously.

THE LOST BABES

Please, oh, please! be not so savage,
Or our home you'll surely ravage.
One small cave—for there's none other
Than the one found by our mother.
Humble is the place we own—
Father's love we've never known . . .

(They seize him by the hand, beseeching him.)

We'll dive down to depths profound
 Where no light or warmth is found;
 There Rusalka watch is keeping
 Where a fisher drowned is sleeping.

“HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES”

Let her leave him lying there!
 Straightway let her come up here!

(The LOST BABES dive down into the lake.)

Come up, love, I say!

RUSALKA *comes up out of the water, smiling alluringly, joyfully clapping her hands. She is wearing two chaplets: the larger one, green; the other, small, like a crown of pearls, from which there hangs a veil.*

RUSALKA

Ah! 'tis you, my sweetheart gay.

“HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES”

(Angrily)

Why all this delay?

RUSALKA

(She starts to swim as though to meet him, but veers aside, avoiding him.)

All the night, dear, I've been yearning,
 Dreaming that you were returning!
 All the many tears I wept
 In a silver cup I've kept.
 Without you, the tears, my lover,
 Filled the cup till it brimmed over.

(She claps her hands, darts forward as though to meet his embrace, but again swerves aside and avoids him.)

Some gold to the bottom fling,
 And baptize the wedding ring!
She laughs in bell-like tones.

“HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES”

(Bitingly)

Ah! 'tis gold that you desire—
 You, who dwell down in the mire!
 Truly, my Rusalka owns
 She loves best a dead man's bones.

Sitting there's her dearest wish,
 Guarding him from crabs and fish
 Lest they further him deface.
 What a lovers' trysting place!

RUSALKA swims closer, takes him by the hand and looks up into his face.

RUSALKA

Why so angry? Say!
(Maliciously)
 I know something, you reviler,
 O you handsome heart-beguiler!
(She smiles knowingly and he becomes alarmed.)

While you were away
 A miller's maid seemed fair,
 So you forgot me here.
 Winter nights were cruel,
 Dark eyes furnished fuel—
 When a maid's not cold,
 Gentlemen give gold!
(She shakes her finger at him and laughs lightly.)

Well do I perceive
 That you can deceive;
 Yet I pardon you,
 For I love you true.
(With humorous pathos)
 For a lengthy second, I'll be yours most loyal;
 For a moment's space, I'll give a love that's royal.
 Fool me, and I'm through.
 The water keeps no traces
 No more than our embraces;
 'Tis transient as your living,
 As fleeting as my giving.

“HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES”

(With a convulsive movement, he stretches out his hand to
 RUSALKA.)

Anyway, 'tis spring!
 O'er the lake let's take a fling!

RUSALKA

(Seizing his hand, she circles around swiftly.)

By the little lakelet,
O'er its yellow sands,
With my pearly chaplet
I fly in the dance!

They whoop and splash and dash the water about. The water surges and beats against the shore till the weeds and reeds begin to thrash about, and the startled birds in swarms rise up out of them in fright.

WATER GOBLIN

(He rides up from the middle of the lake. He is a very ancient gray old man with long hair and a long white beard. He is covered with a mass of weeds hanging down to his girdle. His garments are the color of mud and on his head is a crown of shells. His voice is hollow but robust.)

Who's this who dares disturb our tranquil lake?

(RUSALKA and her partner stop, then flee asunder in haste.)

For shame, my daughter! Should the water's queen
Be romping with a stranger? Shame on you!

RUSALKA

He's not a stranger, father. Don't you see?
'Tis "He Who Rends the Dikes."

WATER GOBLIN

I know, I know.

He's not our kin although of watery birth.
Deceitful and malicious are his ways:
In spring he raves, he agitates, despoils,
Rips from the lake its glorious crown of green—
The year-long husbandry of water nymphs,
Affrights our guards, the wise and watchful birds,
The roots of widowed willows undermines,
Upon the poor Lost Babes he flings and pours
A stunning mass of dreadful deluges,
Destroys the smoothness of my level sands,
And wrecks the tranquil peace of my old age.
But where is he in summer? Where is he
When the insatiate sun the water drinks

From out my cup like gryphon mad with thirst;
 When reeds and rushes faint for lack of drink,
 And, withering, die on my arid banks;
 When lilies, perishing, bend low their heads
 Towards the warm water to relieve their thirst,
 Where is he then?

During this harangue "HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES" stealthily nods at RUSALKA, inviting her to flee with him down the stream.

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES"

(*With covert mockery*) Why, father—in the sea.

'Tis then that Ocean calls me to his aid,
 So that the sun may not drink his cup dry.
 And when the Sea King calls, one must obey.
 It is my duty—that you know right well.

WATER GOBLIN

Ah, so! You're in the sea . . . But as for me,
 If 'twere not for the help that I receive
 From my old trusty friend, the Autumn Rain,
 I'd die, evaporate in mist.

RUSALKA

But, sir,
 The mist can never die, for out of mist
 The water comes again.

WATER GOBLIN

How wise you are!
 Back down below! Enough of chattering!

RUSALKA

At once, dear father. Lo, he's disappeared!
 Well, now I'll comb these tangled water plants.

Taking out of her girdle a comb made of shell, she begins to comb out and smooth the growths along the shore.

WATER GOBLIN

Yes, comb them out. I like to see things neat.
 Stick to your combing. Meanwhile I'll stay here
 Until you get it done. And tidy up
 The water lilies so they spread out flat,

And patch the duckweed carpet that's been torn
By that bold vagabond.

RUSALKA

Yes, father, yes.

WATER GOBLIN *settles down comfortably in the reeds, following RUSALKA's work with his eyes until they gradually close in sleep.*

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES"

(*Stealthily emerging, to RUSALKA*)

Hide behind the willow tree!

(*After looking round at WATER GOBLIN, RUSALKA does so.*)

Let us fly! Come, fly with me,

If you're not afraid;

Where the mill race runs so gay,

There we'll tear the dam away

And we'll drown the miller's maid!

He seizes RUSALKA by the hand and speeds with her across the lake. Not far on the other side, RUSALKA stops.

RUSALKA

Good grief! I've caught upon that ancient oak!

This awakens WATER GOBLIN, who rushes after RUSALKA and seizes her.

WATER GOBLIN

What's doing here? You cursed rogue, you'll learn

The cost of leading water sylphs astray!

I'll lay complaint about you to your dam,

The Mountain Snowstorm, so beware, you'll pay!

"HE WHO RENDS THE DIKES"

(*Bursting into loud laughter*)

Until that happens I'll just take my fling!

Good bye, Rusalka, fill your silver cup.

He rushes into the stream and disappears.

WATER GOBLIN

(*To RUSALKA*)

Go down below! Don't dare to rise again

Above the surface for three moonlit nights!

RUSALKA

(Rebelliously)

How long is it since all the water nymphs
Have been your slaves in this same lake? I'm free!
I'm free as water is!

WATER GOBLIN

In my domain

All waters must their limits recognize.
Go down below!

RUSALKA

I won't!

WATER GOBLIN

So, so! You won't?

Then give me back that pearly chaplet!

RUSALKA

No!

The Sea King's son gave me this pearly crown.

WATER GOBLIN

You don't deserve to wear a crown like that;
And for your disobedience, you'll go
To "Him Who Dwells in Rock."

RUSALKA *(Horror-struck)*

Oh, father, no!

I'll be obedient.

WATER GOBLIN

Then go below.

RUSALKA

(Slowly sinking in the water)

I'll go, I'll go . . . I may amuse myself
With that dead fisher lad?

WATER GOBLIN

For all I care.

*(RUSALKA reluctantly sinks in the water up to her shoulders
and, mournfully smiling, gazes up at him.)*

How strange you are! I do this for your sake.
That vagabond would simply ruin you.

He'd drag you all along the bristling bed
Of some fierce woodland stream and mutilate
Your fair white body, then abandon you
In parts unknown.

RUSALKA

But he was beautiful!

WATER GOBLIN

You're at your tricks again?

RUSALKA

No, no, I go!

She dives under.

WATER GOBLIN

(Looking up at the sky)

The young spring sun already grows quite hot . . .
It's stifling here! I must cool off a bit.

He also dives down under the water.

ACT I

The same spot, but spring is further advanced. The edge of the forest seems to be covered with a tender green veil, and in some places the top of the trees are tinted with a greenish shade. The lake is full to its brim, the green shores forming a crown of vegetation around it.

Into the glade from out the forest come UNCLE LEV and his nephew LUKASH. LEV is an elderly peasant, grave, but with a very kindly face. In Polissyan style he wears his hair long, falling in a white fullness on his shoulders from beneath his square cap of grey felt. He is dressed in coarse hempen cloth, over which he wears a very light-grey smock; his high boots are made of bast; in his hand he carries a fishing net; a knife is stuck in his belt; and on a broad strap across his shoulders, he carries a basket made of woven felt.

LUKASH is a very young man, sturdy, black-browed, handsome, with a still childish look in his eyes. Like his uncle he is dressed in hempen cloth but of a finer weave. His shirt, hanging outside and belted, is embroidered in white, with an open collar, fastened with red knots at both collar and cuffs. His belt is of red leather and on his head is a straw hat. A knife is stuck in his belt and there is a small pouch hanging from it on a string.

Arriving at the shore of the lake, LUKASH stops.

UNCLE LEV

Why are you stopping here? This is no place
To try for fish. Too slimy, slippery.

LUKASH

I only want to cut myself a pipe;
The reeds right here are very fine for that.

UNCLE LEV

But you've got all the pipes you'll ever use.

LUKASH

No, very few—one each of cranberry,
Of willow, and of linden—that is all.
I must have one that's made of reed. That plays
The best of all.

UNCLE LEV

All right, amuse yourself.
That's why God gave us holy days. But when
Tomorrow comes, we'll start some building here.
'Tis time to drive the cattle to the woods.
See yonder how the grass is springing up.

LUKASH

But how shall we abide here in this place?
The people say it's bad—a dangerous spot.

UNCLE LEV

Maybe for some. But I, good nephew, know
The art of dealing with such things as these:
Where one should lay a cross, where stick a twig,
Where simply spit three times, and that's enough.

We'll sow around our quarters poppy seed;
 Before the threshold we'll plant gentian root.
 No evil spirit then will trouble us . . .
 Well, I'll be off, and you do what you please.

They separate. LUKASH goes towards the lake and vanishes in the reeds. LEV walks along by the shore and is lost to view behind the willows.

RUSALKA

(Comes swimming to the shore and cries out)

Grandfather! Forest Elf! There's trouble, help!

FOREST ELF

(A tiny bearded old man appears. He is nimble in his movements, but grave of countenance, dressed in dark brown, the color of bark, and wears a shaggy fur cap.)
 Now what's the matter with you?

RUSALKA

There's a youth

Who's cutting reeds to make a pipe.

FOREST ELF

That all?

That's no great trouble. Why are you so mean?
 They're going to build a dwelling here, it seems.
 Forbid them I will not, provided they
 Don't use live trees.

RUSALKA

Oh dear! A dwelling here?

We must have people here? Those dreadful folk
 Who dwell beneath straw roofs! I can't bear them!
 I can't endure that awful smell of straw!
 I'll flood them and with water wash away
 That hateful smell! I'll give such trespassers
 Wet welcome when they come.

FOREST ELF

Stay, not so fast!

It's Uncle Lev who comes to settle here,
 And he's our friend. Sometimes in jest he'll use
 His simple arts to scare the forest sprites.

I love the good old man! Had it not been
 For him that oak would long ago be gone,
 Which has beheld our doings many a year,
 Our dances, councils, and our mysteries.
 Three Germans once inspected it; they stood
 Around it with their arms extended wide,
 And scarce their fingers touched. They offered gold,
 New-minted dollars, to the folk for help.
 But Uncle Lev swore by his life that none
 Should touch the oak as long as he drew breath.
 And so I also swore by my white beard
 That Uncle Lev and all his tribe should be
 Forever safe in this our forest home.

RUSALKA

Indeed! My father soon will drown them all!

FOREST ELF

Don't let him try it. If he does, I'll fill
 His lake cram-full with last year's brush and leaves.

RUSALKA

Oh, dearie me! How dreadful! Ha-ha-ha!

She disappears in the water.

FOREST ELF, *muttering to himself, sits down on a fallen tree and lights his pipe.*

From the reeds there comes the sound of a pipe playing a tender, undulating air. As the melody evolves, everything in the forest gradually comes into life. First, the buds on the willows and the alders open out, then the birches commence to put forth leaves. On the lake the water lilies expand the flowers on their lily pads. The wild rose also begins to blush with its tender buds.*

From behind the trunk of an old, half-withered, tattered willow, MAVKA emerges. She is dressed in a bright green garment, and her black hair, hanging loose, has a greenish sheen.

*In an appendix to the original text, the authoress gives the musical notation of a number of Ukrainian folk melodies, with instructions as to when and how they are to be played by Lukash in the course of the drama.

She makes gestures with her hands and rubs them across her eyes.

MAVKA

Ah me, how long I've slept!

FOREST ELF

A long time, child.

Anemones have long since ceased to bloom;
And now the cuckoo's striking his alarm.
He's put his scarlet booties on, and soon
He'll measure off the summertime for all.
Already from the south come flying guests:
And yonder on the lake, there, where it's clear,
Like yellow balls of fluff, the ducklings swim.

MAVKA

What was it that awoke me?

FOREST ELF

Maybe spring.

MAVKA

I never heard a spring to sing the sounds
I hear today. Or did I simply dream?

(LUKASH plays again.)

There, hark! . . . Is that not spring that's singing now?

FOREST ELF

Oh, no!—a youth who's playing on his pipe.

MAVKA

A youth? Maybe 'tis "He Who Rends the Dikes"?
I ne'er expected aught like that from him!

FOREST ELF

A human youth it is, nephew to Lev,
And Lukash is his name.

MAVKA

I don't know him.

FOREST ELF

Because he's not here long. He's from afar;
Not from these woods, but from the groves of pine
Where our Great Father all his winters spends.

The widowed mother and her orphaned son
Were given a home by good old Uncle Lev.

MAVKA

I'd dearly love to see what he is like.

FOREST ELF

What's he to you?

MAVKA

He must be good to see!

FOREST ELF

Beware how you gaze on these human youths:
It's perilous for wood nymphs such as you.

MAVKA

How stern you have become, grandfather dear.
You don't intend to hold me in as close
As Water Goblin holds Rusalka?

FOREST ELF

No,

My child, I don't. But Water Goblin in
His weeds has been accustomed all his life
To live by sucking other lives, while I
Respect your freedom. Go! sport with the wind,
Play all you like with wild Will-o'-the-Wisp;
Allure all spirits to yourself, be they
Of water, forest, mountain, field, or air.
But keep afar from human pathways, child;
You'll find no freedom there, but woes instead,
To clog your steps and weigh you down. My child,
Once start to tread them and your freedom's gone!

MAVKA (*Laughing*)

La-la! like that, my freedom would be lost?
That's just as though the wind should cease to be!

LUKASH *with his pipe suddenly emerges.* FOREST ELF and
MAVKA *hastily conceal themselves.*

LUKASH *is about to cut a birch to test the sap.* MAVKA
dashes out and seizes him by the hand.

MAVKA

No, no, don't touch! Don't cut the tree, you'll kill!

LUKASH

Why, girl, what's wrong? I am no murderer!
I only wanted to try out the sap
Of this tree here.

MAVKA

Don't shed it! That's its blood.
Don't draw the blood from out my sister's veins!

LUKASH

You call this birch tree "sister"? How is that?
Who are you then?

MAVKA

I'm Mavka, forest nymph.

LUKASH

(Not overly astonished, he examines her closely.)

So, you're a forest nymph! I've heard of them
From old folks many a time, but never yet
Saw one myself.

MAVKA

And did you want to see?

LUKASH

Why shouldn't I? But see, you're just the same
As any girl . . . no . . . like a lady fair!
Your hands are white, your figure's straight and slim,
Your clothes, somehow, are not the same as ours . . .
Why is it that your eyes aren't always green?

(He looks at her closely.)

Ah, now, they're green again . . . a moment since
They were as blue as heaven . . . now they're grey
As thunder clouds . . . no, now they're almost black,
Or maybe brown . . . Why, you are wonderful!

MAVKA

(Smiling)

You think me beautiful?

LUKASH
(*Abashed*)

How can I tell?

MAVKA
(*Laughing*)

Who else should tell?

LUKASH
What questions you do ask!

MAVKA
(*In frank surprise*)

Why should such questions be a task?
See there, doth not the wild rose ask:

“Am I not lovely?”

The ash tree nods, his branches bow,
He says: “None lovelier than thou.”

LUKASH
I never knew that trees could talk like that.
I thought they were but speechless growing things.

MAVKA
In all the forest there is nothing mute.

LUKASH
And have you always lived here in the woods?

MAVKA
In all my life I've never been outside.

LUKASH
Did you live anywhere before?

MAVKA
Indeed,

I never thought on things like that at all . . .

(*She ponders a moment.*)

It seems to me that here I've always lived . . .

LUKASH
And were you always just the same as now?

MAVKA
I think I've been the same . . .

LUKASH

Your family,
Who are they? Or perhaps you've none at all?

MAVKA

There's Forest Elf whom I call "grandfather,"
And he calls me his "daughter," sometimes "child."

LUKASH

Well, which is he, your father, or grandsire?

MAVKA

I do not know. Is it not all the same?

LUKASH

(Laughing)

What queer folk in this wood! There's someone you
Call "mother," or "grandmother"—what you will?

MAVKA

It seems to me at times the willow tree—
That old, half-withered one—my mother is,
For during wintertime she took me in,
And spread inside a bed of something soft
On which I slept.

LUKASH

You spent the winter there!
And what work did you do the winter through?

MAVKA

Why, naught; I slept. Who works in wintertime?
The lake's asleep, the forest, and the reeds.
The willow kept on creaking: "Sleep, my dear . . ."
And always, I dreamed lovely dreams, all white:
In silver settings, I saw sparkling gems,
And carpets made of unknown grass, and flowers
Pure white and glittering. Quiet, tender stars,
Clear white, fell down from heaven, and shaped themselves
Into a white pavilion. Clean and pure
Beneath that tent it seemed. A coronet
Of crystal clear seemed glittering everywhere . . .
I slept; I breathed so freely, easily.

Through those white dreams came rosy thoughts which made
 Themselves into a bright embroidery.
 The dreams thus woven out of gold and blue,
 Were peaceful, tranquil, not like summer dreams . . .

LUKASH

(Listening avidly)

Oh, how you talk . . .

MAVKA

You like it, do you not?

(He nods his head affirmatively.)

That pipe of yours can speak with better tongue.
 Play me a tune and I will swing to it.

She takes some of the long hanging branches of the birch, and knotting them together, makes a seat into which she springs and begins to rock herself gently. LUKASH, leaning against the oak, plays on his reed pipe without taking his eyes off MAVKA. He plays spring songs and MAVKA, listening, involuntarily joins in singing the melodies he plays.

“How lovely is the strain
 Of mingled joy and pain;
 It cuts deep in the breast
 And cleaves the heart in twain.”

A cuckoo responds to the music, a nightingale follows likewise. The wild rose blooms more ardently, the white blossoms of the cranberry tree expand, the hawthorn reddens bashfully, even the black, leafless thorn bush begins to shoot forth tender shoots.

MAVKA, entranced, sways quietly, smiling, while in her eyes there is a yearning which almost overflows in tears. LUKASH perceiving this, stops playing.

LUKASH

Why are you weeping, maiden?

MAVKA

(She passes her hand across her eyes.)

Did I weep?

Indeed . . . ah, no! 'Tis but the evening dew.
The sun is setting . . . See, upon the lake
The mist is rising . . .

LUKASH

Nay, 'tis early still!

MAVKA

You wouldn't like it if the day were spent?

LUKASH (*shakes his head, signifying he wouldn't.*)
Why not?

LUKASH

My uncle then would call me home.

MAVKA

You'd much prefer to stay with me?

(LUKASH *nods affirmatively.*)

You see,
You're talking now just as the ash tree did.

LUKASH

(*Laughing*)

I needs must learn to talk as folk do here,
Since I'm to spend the summer here.

MAVKA

(*Rejoicing*)

In truth?

LUKASH

Tomorrow we begin to build right here.

MAVKA

You build a house?

LUKASH

No, just a hut at first,

Together with a pen.

MAVKA

Just like the birds:

You take a lot of pains to build a nest
And then abandon it.

LUKASH

No, we shall build

For ever.

MAVKA

How for ever? You just said
You're only going to spend the summer here.

LUKASH

(Embarrassed)

Well, I don't know . . . 'Twas Uncle Lev who said
He'd give me here a piece of ground and house,
Because in autumn he wants me to wed.

MAVKA

(Alarmed)

Wed whom?

LUKASH

I don't know. Uncle did not say,
And maybe he has not yet found the girl.

MAVKA

Can you not find a partner for yourself?

LUKASH

(Gazing at her)

Maybe I could, but . . .

MAVKA

What?

LUKASH

Oh, nothing . . . but . . .

*Breaking off, he begins to play a melancholy air on his
pipe, then drops his hands and sinks into a moody train of
thought.*

MAVKA

(After a little silence)

When people mate, do they do so for long?

LUKASH

For life, of course!

MAVKA

Why, that is like the doves . . .

I've often envied them—so tenderly
 They love each other . . . But I've never known
 Such tender love, unless 'twas from the birch,
 And that is why I call her "sister." Yet
 She always seems so sorrowful, so pale,
 So bowed and swaying, making mournful sounds;
 It often makes me weep to gaze at her.
 The alder I don't like; it is too rough.
 The aspen, somehow, always frightens me;
 It must feel fear, it trembles all the time.
 The oak is much too stern. And the wild rose
 Is prickly, like the hawthorn and the brier.
 The ash, the plane, the maple, they are proud.
 The cranberry so glories in her pride
 Of beauty, that she cares for nothing else.
 I was like her last year it seems to me,
 But now, somehow, she makes me ill at ease;
 For when one thinks of it, it's true that here
 I'm utterly alone. . . .

She falls into a melancholy brooding.

LUKASH

Your willow tree—
 The one that you call "mother"—what of her?

MAVKA

The willow? . . . Ah! she's good to winter in;
 But in the summer, oh, she is so dry!—
 Forever creaking: "Winter's coming on . . ."
 No! I'm alone . . . I'm utterly alone . . .

LUKASH

Here in the woods there are not only trees,
 But also hosts of spirits of all sorts.

(A trifle maliciously)

Don't be so sorrowful, for we have heard
 About your sports, your frolics, jollities!

MAVKA

All those are but like sudden gusts of wind,

Which start up, swirl around, then disappear.
With us there's nothing like you have—for life!

LUKASH

(*Drawing nearer*)

Would you like that?

Suddenly a loud shouting from UNCLE LEV is heard.

VOICE

Hey, Lukash! Where are you?

LUKASH

(*Answering*)

I'm here, I come!

VOICE

Well, come at once!

LUKASH

What an impatient man!

(*He shouts back in response.*)

I'm coming!

He starts to leave.

MAVKA

You'll come back?

LUKASH

I cannot tell.

He disappears in the bushes.

Flying out of the forest comes WILL-O'-THE-WISP, a handsome youth, dressed in red, with a shock of reddish hair blown about by wind. He tries to embrace MAVKA, but she evades him.

MAVKA

Don't touch me!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Why not, pray?

MAVKA

Fly off and see

How in the fields the crops are getting green.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

What care I for those crops?

MAVKA

Well, there you'll find
Your Field Sprite who is busy in the rye.
Already she's begun to plait for you
A garland of the brightest vivid green.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

I have forgotten her.

MAVKA

Forget me too.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Now, don't make mock of me! Come on, let's fly!
I'll carry you to far-off mountains green.
You've always wished to see the spruce and fir.

MAVKA

Now I don't wish to.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

What! And why not now?

MAVKA

Because I've lost desire.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Some mad whim!

Why have you lost desire?

MAVKA

I've no interest.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

(Coaxingly, he circles round her.)

Let's fly, let's fly up high! and there my sisters hail,
The mountain spirits, free as is the comet's tail!
In dizzy circling dances round you they will sail,
As bright as lightning's trail!
From out the ferns for you I'll pluck the flowers frail;
To tear some stars from heaven I know I cannot fail:
Upon the mountain snows I'll bleach a magic veil
To keep you from all bale.
And so that you may call the forest crown your own,

We'll cast the Dragon-King down from his lofty throne,
And set for our defence each mountain, rock, and stone!

Then cheer my heart forlorn!

From evening until morn

A garment glittering

To you I'll always bring.

And chaplets you shall wear,

And in the dances share.

On pinions I will bear

You far to crimson seas, to where the wealthy sun

His golden store in secret depths has laid.

And then we'll take a peep into the stars' abode,

And strip from them their silvery sheen, and with the load

We'll weave ourselves for rest a velvet shade.

Then when the dawning comes, and cloudlets white are stirred

To gather in the heavens like some bright, fleecy herd,

Which drinks the clear cool water from a tranquil pool,

We'll rest like loving sweethearts on the flowery . . .

MAVKA

(Impatiently)

Fool!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

How pettishly you've broken off my rhyme!

(Aggrieved, and maliciously)

Have you forgotten last year's summertime?

MAVKA

(Indifferently)

Of last year's summer I no memory keep.

What was sung then died out in winter's sleep;

No memory it provokes.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

(Mysteriously, urgently)

What of that grove of oaks?

MAVKA

I went to gather berries, I suppose . . .

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Perhaps to find some trace of me, who knows?

MAVKA

I tore wild hops down from the trees, I think . . .

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

To make a couch for me in which to sink?

MAVKA

No, fragrant garlands my black hair to grace!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

You hoped, perhaps, a lover's fond embrace?

MAVKA

No, 'tis the birch alone who cares for me.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Yet there was someone whom you wished to see?

MAVKA

Ha-ha-ha! I do not know.

Ask the grove if it was so!

I'll go and deck my hair with flowers today . . .

She starts off towards the forest.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Beware! Cold dews will smite them with decay!

MAVKA

While the breeze is blowing,

And the sun is glowing,

Who will cold dews fear?

She runs off and vanishes in the forest.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Stay a moment, maiden,

With longing I am laden!

Where are you, O where?

He also rushes into the forest. For a few moments his red garment is seen flashing amongst the trees and his voice is heard echoing: "O where?"

The crimson of the setting sun bathes the forest, then dies out. A white mist rises up over the lake. UNCLE LEV and LUKASH come out into the glade.

UNCLE LEV

(Muttering angrily)

That damned Water Goblin! May he dry up!
I'd finished catching fish and started out
To cross the lake by skiff—I only meant
To reach the other side—he up and grabbed
The bottom of my skiff and held it fast.
I couldn't stir. A bit more, I'd have sunk!
But I'm not quite a fool; I grabbed his beard
And got a twist of it around my hand,
And got my knife from out my belt—By God,
I would have sliced it off! But that damned fog—
A bump—and over went the skiff with me!
I hardly got out to the bank alive,
And lost my skiff as well . . . The dirty scamp!

(To LUKASH)

And something, too, must have caught hold of you.
I yelled and shouted, bellowed till I'm hoarse.
Where were you all the time?

LUKASH

I told you where—

Just cutting me a pipe.

UNCLE LEV

A little long,

It seems to me, it took to cut a pipe!

LUKASH

(Uncomfortably)

But, Uncle, I . . .

UNCLE LEV

(Smiling, having recovered his good humor)

Eh, lad, don't try to lie!

You're still too young for that. It hurts the tongue.
Much better hunt some dry brush in the wood

And start a fire so I can dry myself.
 I wouldn't dare go home all wet like this;
 Before I'd get there, I should be assailed
 By one I won't name here—bad cess to her!—
 And afterwards she'd rack my very soul . . .

LUKASH goes into the forest where a moment later he is heard cracking and breaking dry branches.

UNCLE LEV

(Sitting down on the gnarled roots of an oak tree, he tries to strike fire in order to light his pipe.)

Good grief! You strike and strike! The flint is wet,
 The tinder's gone . . . Maybe in this old oak
 I'll find a bit of punk that's dry enough
 To light my pipe?

He gropes about the trunk in search of punk.

Out of the mist over the lake, a white female form arises, more like a wisp of vapor than a human shape. The thin fingers on its long white hands claw menacingly as the figure advances towards UNCLE LEV.

UNCLE LEV

(Aghast)

What's this? Is it a ghost?

Aha! I know. It's well I saw it first!

(Recovering himself, he takes some roots and herbs out of his wallet, and stretches them out towards the approaching phantom as though to ward it off. The phantom retreats somewhat. He recites a charm, speaking faster and faster as he does so.)

Evil spirit, Fever Wraith,
 Burning fever, shivering ague!
 Back into the scum you go, back into the slime;
 Where good people do not walk, where the fowls don't drink,
 Where my voice you hear no more!
 Here no power you dare employ
 My white body to destroy,
 My bones' marrow to enjoy,

My red blood with which to toy,
 No one's health may you annoy.
 Fly, you phantom, fly!
 Perish, specter, die!

The phantom slowly retreats to the lake and dissolves in the mist.

LUKASH comes with an armful of brush, lays it down before his uncle, takes out his flint and steel, strikes it and lights a fire.

LUKASH

There, Uncle, warm yourself.

UNCLE LEV

Thank you, my lad.

You're good to your old uncle.

(He lights his pipe at the fire) Ah, that's good!

Putting his wallet under his head for a pillow, he stretches out in front of the fire and gazes at it through half-closed eyes.

LUKASH

Suppose you tell a story, Uncle.

UNCLE LEV

See,

You're still a child! Which one would you prefer?
 The Sorcerer? or Tromsina the Dwarf?

LUKASH

I've heard those two. You know some better ones
 That none can tell so well.

UNCLE LEV

(After pondering a while) All right, here goes:

I'll tell about the Princess of the Wave.

(He begins to recite in a quiet, sing-song, measured tone.)

Whene'er the house is warm

And everybody's gay,

We like to tell our tales

Until the break of day.

Beyond the forest's mighty sweep,

Beyond the heaving ocean deep,

Beyond the lofty mountains steep,
 There is a marvellous, enchanted strand
 Where Urai rules the land.
 And in that land the sun doth ne'er decline,
 The moon doth always shine;
 The stars that glitter in that wondrous clime
 Keep dancing all the time.
 Of all those stars the brightest one was he
 Whose name was Silver Prodigy.
 His little face so nice
 Bore not a trace of vice,
 His flowing hair was gilded by the sun,
 His silver weapon in his small hand shone . . .

LUKASH

But what about the Princess?

UNCLE LEV

Eh? just wait! . . .

Now when young Silver Prodigy to manhood's years approached,
 He pondered much about his lot and thus his thoughts
 he broached:

“I've turned out handsomest of all, I guess,
 And yet have not achieved my happiness.
 Mother Star!” he loudly cried,
 Where shall I go for a bride:
 Seek among the chivalry,
 Or the proud nobility,
 Or perhaps the royalty,
 Or the simple laity?
 Is there not some princess fair,
 Worthy with me life to share?”

(UNCLE LEV *begins to drowse.*)

So off he went until he reached the ocean blue,
 And there upon the beach a pearly necklace threw . . .

LUKASH

Hey, Uncle! You've missed something out, I'm sure.

UNCLE LEV

You think so? . . . Well, 'tis you who don't pay heed!

... Then from the ocean rolling, a monstrous billow came,
 And from the billow horses sped,
 As red as flame,
 All harnessed to a chariot red,
 And in the chariot was . . .

He stops, overcome by sleep.

LUKASH

What then? A princess in the chariot sat?

UNCLE LEV

(Through his sleep)

What? . . . How? . . . What princess?

LUKASH

Ah! he's fast asleep.

For some time LUKASH gazes pensively at the fire, then rises and moves away from it. He saunters about the glade, playing on his pipe, low and almost inaudibly.

It grows quite dark in the forest, yet the darkness is not dense, but transparent, as it usually is just before moonrise. The darting flames of the fire seem to be carrying on a mysterious dance with the shadows. The flowers nearest to the fire now gleam in full color, then fade out in the thick darkness. Along the edge of the forest the trunks of the aspens and birches loom strangely. The spring wind blows fitfully, running through the trees and fluttering their branches. The mist over the lake drifts out in white billows into the bushes, and the reeds and aspens concealed by the floating mist whisper one to another.

Out of the thicket MAVKA comes running, swiftly, as though fleeing. Her hair is dishevelled, her dress disordered. In the glade she stops and looks around her, pressing her hands to her bosom, then rushes to the birch and stops once more.

MAVKA

Grateful thanks, O magic night,
 For your cover in my flight,
 And you paths, who helped my search
 And have led me to the birch!

O my sister, shield me now!

She hides behind the birch, clasping its trunk.

LUKASH

(Coming up noiselessly to the tree)

Mavka, is that you?

MAVKA

(Quickly)

Yes.

LUKASH

You were running?

MAVKA

Like a hare.

LUKASH

You were fleeing?

MAVKA

Yes.

LUKASH

From whom?

MAVKA

From him, who's fire itself.

LUKASH

Where is he now?

MAVKA

Hush, hush! or he'll come flying round again.

Silence a moment.

LUKASH

How you tremble! And I can feel the birch
Vibrate, and all its leaves are murmuring.

MAVKA

(Moving away from the tree)

Alas! I am afraid to lean on it,

Yet thus I cannot stand.

LUKASH

Then lean on me.

I'm strong . . . I'll hold you and will you defend.

MAVKA leans against him. They stand in close embrace.
The moonlight creeps on, covering the forest. It spreads all over

the glade and steals under the birch. From the forest the song of the nightingale and all the voices of a night in spring are heard. The breeze blows fitfully. RUSALKA emerges out of the illuminated mist on the lake and silently watches the young pair.

LUKASH *pressing MAVKA closer to himself, bends his face lower and lower down to hers and suddenly kisses her.*

MAVKA

(Crying out in ecstasy)

Oh, joy! A star from heaven fell in my heart!

RUSALKA

Ha-ha!

With a laugh and a splash she dives into the water.

LUKASH

(Startled) What's that?

MAVKA

Rusalka, that was all!

My playmate—she won't harm us; have no fear!

She's wilful, and she loves to mock at folk.

But what care I . . . I care for nothing more

In all the world!

LUKASH

You care for me, don't you?

MAVKA

You are my world, more splendid, more beloved,

Than he whom hitherto I knew, and he

Is far more splendid since we two are one.

LUKASH

Then we two are now one?

MAVKA

Do you not hear

The nightingale singing the marriage song?

LUKASH

'Tis true . . . I hear that she no longer chirps

Or twitters as she always did. She sings:

"Now kiss her! Kiss her! Kiss!"

(He kisses her with a long, tremulous kiss.)

And her I'll kiss!

Kiss her to death!

A gust of wind comes, blowing white blossoms like a snowstorm all over the glade.

MAVKA

No, no, I mustn't die!

'Twould be . . .

LUKASH

What's that you say? I didn't mean
To frighten you.

MAVKA

And yet 'twould lovely be
To die as dies a falling star . . .

LUKASH

(Speaking caressingly) Enough!
Don't talk of things like that! Don't talk at all!
Don't talk of anything! Ah, no, do talk!
The way you talk is strange, but, somehow, sweet
It is to listen to . . . Why don't you speak?
Ah, have I angered you?

MAVKA

I'm listening
To you make love.

She takes his head in her hands, turns his face up to the light of the moon and scrutinizes it.

LUKASH

Don't! That makes me afraid.
Your eyes seem peering down into my soul . . .
I cannot stand it. Talk to me, make fun,
Ask questions, tell me what you like, or laugh . . .

MAVKA

Your voice is clear as is the running stream;
Your eyes, though, are opaque.

LUKASH

Maybe the moon's

Not bright enough.

MAVKA

(She presses her head to his breast as though fainting.)

Perhaps.

LUKASH

Oh, have you swooned?

MAVKA

No, hush! I want to hear your heart speak loud.
It talks, but faintly, like the nights in spring.

LUKASH

Why must you try to hear it? You should not!

MAVKA

You say I should not? Then I will not, love!
I should not, must not? Then I never will,
Dear heart! Instead, I will caress you, sweet!
You are not used to that?

LUKASH

I've never been

In love before, and so I never knew.
That love could be so sweet.*(She caresses him passionately until he cries out in ecstasy.)*

Oh, Mavka dear,

You're drawing out my soul.

MAVKA

I'll draw it out!

I'll draw your singing soul out in these arms,
Enchant your heart with lovely words and charms . . .

With kisses I your lips will close

Until they yearn,

Until they burn,

As do the blossoms on the rose!

I'll gaze into your deep blue eyes

Until they blaze,

And shoot forth rays,

As do the bright stars in the skies!

(Suddenly she claps her hands.)

But how shall I attract those eyes of yours?

With flowers I'm still unadorned.

LUKASH

No need!

You're lovely without flowers' help.

MAVKA

No, no!

I want to be adorned with flowers for you,

As suits a forest queen.

She runs to the other end of the glade away from the lake, where there are flowering shrubs.

LUKASH

No, wait for me!

I'll put the flowers on myself.

He runs after her.

MAVKA

Alas!

The flowers at night—their colors go to sleep . . .

LUKASH

See, fireflies in the grass! I'll gather some

And put them in your hair to shine. They'll seem

Just like a crown of lovely, sparkling stars.

(He puts a few fireflies in her hair.)

No, let me take a look . . . How beautiful!

(Beside himself with joy, he pulls her into his embrace, then looses her.)

I must collect still more. I'll dress you up

As if you were a queen in jewelled robes!

He hunts around in the grass along the bushes for more fireflies.

MAVKA

I'll break some blossoms from the cranberry tree.

She sleeps not—nightingale, keep her awake.

She breaks off the white flowers and decks her dress with them.

RUSALKA

(She emerges out of the mist again. Turning back towards the reeds, she whispers)

Little Lost Babes, in the night,
Kindle now your lanterns bright!

(Two moving lights are seen in the reeds. Then the LOST BABES come forth, each bearing a lantern. The lights sometimes flare up brightly and then fade out almost completely. RUSALKA gathers them closely to her, whispering and pointing a little way off to the dim figure of LUKASH, who is groping about in the bushes in an intoxication of joy.)

See there, that one who's wandering about—
He's like that father who abandoned you,
Who ruined your dead mother, let her die—
He should no longer live!

LOST BABES

You drown him then!

RUSALKA

I do not dare; the Forest Elf forbids.

LOST BABES

But we're not strong enough; we are too small.

RUSALKA

You are tiny,
Light and shiny;
With your lights in small hands sure
You can foolish folk allure.
Go into the rushes there
Where no Forest Elf can hear.
Should he come out,
Put your lights out,
Disappear!
Be like lights deceiving always
O'er the pathways;
Burst out bright o'er reeds and rushes,
Lead him into bogs and slushes.
When he's slipping,
Send him dipping

Down into the deepest slime . . .
 Then I'll finish him this time!
 Off now, like a flash!

LOST BABES

(To one another as they proceed)
 You go there. This way I'll take
 And we'll meet upon the lake.

RUSALKA

(Elated) They're off!

(She rushes to a marshy pool, takes water and sprinkles it backwards over her shoulder. From behind the bushes KUTZ jumps out. He is a youthful imp, like a mannikin.)

Kutzie, Kutzie, where you stand
 Here before me, kiss my hand!

With an imperious gesture she stretches out her hand. KUTZ kisses it.

KUTZ

Lady, what is now your wish?

RUSALKA

For you I prepare a dish
 One you will like, if you don't miss your aim.
(She points to LUKASH)
 See there, you're well accustomed to such game?

KUTZ

(With a wave of his hand)

Whatever's in the mud,
 For the mouth is good!

RUSALKA

There's the meat for you!
 'Twill bring you joy and please your grandam too.

KUTZ skips into the bushes and vanishes. RUSALKA in the rushes peers after the LOST BABES, who keep flashing and dimming their lights, running forwards and backwards and weaving in circles.

LUKASH

(Still hunting for fireflies, notices the lights.)
 What lovely fireflies, so swift and bright!

Such splendid ones I've never seen . . . so large!

I must get hold of them!

He chases them, first one, then the other. Imperceptibly they lead him on towards the danger spots.

MAVKA

Don't go for them!

Sweetheart, don't go for them! It's the Lost Babes!

They'll lead you into peril!

LUKASH absorbed in the chase, does not hear her and keeps right on; then with a sudden cry.

LUKASH

Lord, I'm gone!

I'm tangled in the weeds! They drag me down!

MAVKA comes running up at his cries. She cannot, however, reach him because he has sunk into the mud some distance from the solid bank. Holding her belt with one hand, she casts the other end out towards him.

MAVKA

Now catch it!

It fails to reach him.

LUKASH

Oh, it doesn't reach! Now, what?

MAVKA

(She runs to the willow, the branches of which hang out over the water.)

O willow dear! O mother dear, please save!

Quick as a squirrel, she climbs up the tree and, clinging to the outmost branches, again casts out the belt. This time it reaches. LUKASH grasps its end, MAVKA pulls it back towards herself, then giving him a hand, helps him to climb into the tree.

RUSALKA in the water gives a dull groan of vexation and disappears in the mist. The LOST BABES also vanish.

UNCLE LEV

(Awakened by the outcries)

Hey, now! What's this? Some phantom here again?

Avaunt, accursed!

(Looking around) Hey, Lukash; where are you?

LUKASH

(From the willow)

Up here, up here!

UNCLE LEV

(Coming nearer and looking up into the tree)

What are you doing there?

Come down at once, I say!—the girl as well!

LUKASH *climbs down but MAVKA remains where she is.*

LUKASH

Oh dear! I nearly drowned there in those weeds.

I stepped into a hole, and she's the one

(Pointing to MAVKA)

Who somehow saved my life.

UNCLE LEV

And why do you

Go sneaking round at dead of night as though

You were a haunt?

LUKASH

I was after fireflies . . .

He breaks off in embarrassment

UNCLE LEV

(Now noticing the fireflies in MAVKA's hair)

I might have known without your telling me.

I see myself just how the matter lies!

MAVKA

Oh, Uncle, I'm the one who rescued him.

UNCLE LEV

Just hear her: "Uncle!" Now we've got a niece!

And who was it enticed him in the trap?

(He shakes his head disapprovingly.)

You forest folk! There is your loyalty!

I'll get that Forest Elf for this, so he

Won't get away again! Inside an oak

I'll stuff that whiskered piece of trickiness,

As he'll find out! He sends his maids to do
His dirty work while he stays out of sight!

MAVKA

(She runs swiftly down from the tree.)

No, no! He's not to blame. May Dragon-King
Pour out his wrath on me, if it's not true!
And I am innocent!

UNCLE LEV

Well—I believe
You now, for that's your greatest oath, I know.

LUKASH

Oh, Uncle! She it is who saved my life.
So help me God! without her I'd have drowned!

UNCLE LEV

Well, girl! although you don't possess a soul,
You have a good kind heart. You'll pardon me
For what I said in anger.

(To LUKASH) Why were you

Out chasing fireflies in the dangerous marsh?
Were there none in the bushes on dry land?

LUKASH

But those were such big ones, such brilliant ones!

UNCLE LEV

Aha, I know them! It was those Lost Babes.
All right, just wait. Tomorrow I'll bring here
Some pups who don't fear witches—then we'll see
Who does the whining here!

VOICES OF THE LOST BABES

(Groaning miserably, almost like the grunting of frogs.)

No, grandfather, please!

We are not to blame.

Out among the weeds,

We were gathering reeds.

We had no idea

Visitors were here,

Or we ne'er had come

Up above the scum.
 Babes so weak and frail
 Can but weep and wail!

UNCLE LEV

You notice how the treacherous mist sneaks out
 To hide the witches' spawn? Well, let it try!
 I'll soon find out who's guilty and who's not . . .

(To LUKASH)

Well, nephew, don't you think it's time for us
 To start for home?

(To MAVKA) Goodbye, my girl!

MAVKA

You'll come again tomorrow? I can show
 You where to find good lumber for your house.

UNCLE LEV

I see you've nosed in all of our affairs.
 You're smart! Well, you can come. I'm used to you,
 And you folk also must get used to us.
 Let's go! Goodbye!

They start off.

MAVKA

(*More to LUKASH than to UNCLE LEV*)

I'll be expecting you.

LUKASH *drops behind his uncle, silently squeezes MAVKA's two hands, kisses her without a sound, and overtaking his uncle, departs with him into the forest.*

MAVKA

(*Alone*)

Dear night, couldst thou more swiftly pass away!
 Forgive me! for I yet ne'er knew a day
 So blest, so happy, such a day so bright,
 So calm and tender as thou art, O night!
 O birch, why must thou always mournful be?
 Behold me, sister, filled with ecstasy!
 O willow, no more o'er the waters weep!

Be kind, while here thy child love's watch doth keep.
And tell me, O my father, thou dark grove,
Where it were best for me this night to rove.
The night is brief, but separation's long . . .
What destiny awaits me—grief or song?

The moon sinks behind the dark mass of the forest. The darkness, velvety black, envelops the glade. Nothing is now visible except the dying coals of the fire, but by the fireflies which she is still wearing in her hair, MAVKA can be traced as she wanders among the trees. Her headdress at times shines out as a complete circlet, then again in separate sparklings until it is completely lost in the gloom. A deep midnight silence falls, broken only occasionally by the rustling of leaves in the forest, a sound as though someone were sighing in his sleep.

ACT II

Late summer. Here and there the dark, dull leaves of the trees are touched with autumn yellow. The lake has diminished in size, its beaches have broadened out; the reeds and rushes with their scanty leaves make a dry rustling.

A house has been erected in the glade and a vegetable garden planted. There are also two fields, one of rye and one of wheat. Geese are swimming on the lake. Linen is drying on the shore; household utensils hang on bushes near the house. The grass in the glade has been mowed down short, and a stack of hay is piled up under the oak. The cackle of poultry is heard among the trees and in places cattle are browsing. Nearby a pipe is heard playing a lively dance tune.

MOTHER

(Coming out of the house and calling)

Lukash, hey! Where are you?

LUKASH

(He comes out of the forest, carrying his pipe and a carved walking stick.)

Here, Mother, here!

MOTHER

Isn't it time to quit that pipe of yours?
You play and play and let the work stand still.

LUKASH

What work is there?

MOTHER

You ask, what work is there?
Whose job is it to build that cattle pen?

LUKASH

All right, all right, I'll do it right away.

MOTHER

And when will be that "right away" of yours?
You're always running off to fool around
With that bold hussy, that queer vagabond!

LUKASH

Who's running off? I drive the cattle out
To feed and Mavka helps.

MOTHER

A lot of good
Is such a help as hers!

LUKASH

You said yourself
That when she takes care of the cows, more milk
They always give.

MOTHER

Oh! Sure—by witches' tricks!

LUKASH

There's nothing that she does e'er pleases you.
When we put up the house, was it not she
Who brought the wood? And who was it who helped
You with the garden, helped to sow the fields?
Did ever you get harvest like this year's?
The lovely flowers she has planted there
Beneath the window—what a pretty sight!

MOTHER

Much good are all those flowers, since I have
 No daughter in the house to marry off . . .
 There's nothing on your mind but flowers and songs!

(LUKASH *shrugs his shoulders impatiently and starts to go away.*)

Where are you off to now?

LUKASH

To build that pen.

He goes around the house and a little later the sound of a chopping axe is heard.

MAVKA comes out of the forest, richly decked with flowers and her hair hanging loose.

MOTHER

(*Disagreeably*)

Now what?

MAVKA

Where's Lukash, Auntie, do you know?

MOTHER

You're always running after him. It is
 Not seemly for a maid to chase a youth.

MAVKA

No one e'er said the like of that to me!

MOTHER

Well, hear it now for once; 'twill do no harm.

(*She looks at MAVKA sourly.*)

Why do you always go trimmed up like that?
 You're always combing, fixing up your hair.
 You dress up like a witch. It isn't nice.
 And what is all that rubbish you've got on?
 Not practical at all for working in.
 I've got some things of my dead daughter's there:
 Go put them on—you'll find them hanging up;
 These you can lay away inside the chest.

MAVKA

Oh, very well, I'll go and change my dress.

She goes into the house as UNCLE LEV comes out.

MOTHER

Not e'en a word of thanks!

UNCLE LEV

Why, sister, must
You always nag and nag the girl like that?
What has she ever done to give you cause?

MOTHER

Ah, brother, you would scarcely do a thing
Unless we pester you. You'd bring in here
Amongst us all the witches from the woods.

UNCLE LEV

If you'd talk sense—of things you understand—
I'd listen; but this talk of "witches from the woods" . . .
There are none there, for witches only dwell
In villages with folk.

MOTHER

You think that you
Are very wise, don't you? If you attract
This forest trash you'll find some day what good
You've gained by it!

UNCLE LEV

Why, sure I'll gain great good.
What comes out of the forest is not trash—
All good things from the forest come.

MOTHER

(Mockingly)

Oh yes!

UNCLE LEV

From maids like her good humans come, that's what!

MOTHER

What sort of humans? You've been drinking, eh?

UNCLE LEV

A lot you know! My dead grandfather used
To say: You only need to know the word,
And you can make a soul the same as ours
To enter into any forest sprite.

MOTHER

And will the smell that witches always have
Then also disappear?

UNCLE LEV

Ah, what's the use! . . .

I'd do much better to go back to work
Than stay here chattering with you!

MOTHER

Then go!

Who's stopping you? Am I?

UNCLE LEV goes away, shaking his head angrily.

MAVKA comes out of the house, having changed her dress.
She is wearing a blouse of coarse material, poorly made and
patched in places, a scanty skirt and a faded apron. Her hair is
now smoothly combed and made into two plaits which are
wound around her head.

MAVKA

I've changed my dress.

MOTHER

Now that is something like. All right; meanwhile
I'll go along and get the chickens fed.
I meant to do some work amongst the hemp;
But we have lots of still unfinished tasks
And you, somehow, don't give much help . . .

MAVKA

Why so?

I gladly do the work if I know how.

MOTHER

"If I know how." You're always saying that.
A pretty farmer's working girl you make!
In haying time, your head it was that ached . . .
But now you've got to reap . . .

MAVKA

I've got to reap!

You want me to go out and reap today?

MOTHER

And why not, pray? Today's no holy day.

(She gets out a sickle from behind the door and hands it to MAVKA.)

Here is the sickle; try it. When I'm done,
I'll lend a hand.

She goes away, taking with her a basket of grain. Soon she is heard calling and clucking to the chickens as she scatters food for them to eat.

LUKASH *appears with an axe and approaches a young tree, manifestly intending to chop it down.*

MAVKA

Sweetheart, don't touch that tree!
It's living, don't you see?

LUKASH

Leave me alone!

I haven't time!

(MAVKA looks him sadly in the face.)

All right, find me dead wood . . .

MAVKA

(She leaves swiftly, and returns, dragging a considerable amount of dead wood.)

I'll find you more . . . Will you be needing much?

LUKASH

How much? Enough to make up this one pen.

MAVKA

Somehow you've turned quite disagreeable.

LUKASH

Well, see . . . Because of you my mother nags.

MAVKA

What does she want? And how is she concerned?

LUKASH

Concerned? Why, I'm her son . . .

MAVKA

Her son—so what?

LUKASH

She doesn't fancy such a daughter-in-law . . .
 She has no liking for the forest folk . . .
 An unkind mother-in-law she'd be to you.

MAVKA

We in the forest do not know such things.
 What mean all these "in-laws" you talk about?
 I don't grasp it.

LUKASH

She wants a daughter-in-law
 Because she needs some help . . . she's getting old.
 It isn't right to have to hire help;
 A hired maid is not a daughter-in-law . . .
 In truth, all this you'll never understand . . .
 To understand these human cares and woes,
 One should grow up elsewhere than in these woods.

MAVKA

(Ingenuously)

You tell me—then I'll clearly comprehend,
 Because I love you. And I grasped at once
 The meaning of each song I heard you play?

LUKASH

The songs I played? There's no great art in that!

MAVKA

Do not despise that flowering of your soul,
 For from your music this our love was born!
 Like to the magic blossom of the fern,
 Which hath creative power within itself,
 So in me there was born another heart
 When I found that I knew your songs. Right then
 A fiery miracle took place

(Breaking off suddenly) You laugh?

LUKASH

In truth, it did seem somewhat humorous . . .
 To see you dressed in working clothes, and hear
 You talk as though delivering a speech.

MAVKA

(Tearing at the dress she is wearing)

I'll burn this up!

LUKASH

Then Mother'll scold the more.

MAVKA

What care I, when this dress seems to have made
A change in me to you.

LUKASH

I knew 'twould come . . .

From now on there'll be nothing but reproach . . .

MAVKA

No, sweetheart, I am not reproaching you;
I'm only sad because you cannot bring
Your life up to the level of your soul.

LUKASH

I do not understand just what you mean.

MAVKA

Ah, that is why I love you most of all:
Because you do not understand yourself,
Although your soul sings all about what's there
So clearly and sincerely through your pipe.

LUKASH

And what is there?

MAVKA

Something more beautiful
Than all your dear and handsome manliness—
But I can not express it as I would . . .*(Lovingly but sadly she gazes at him for a moment in
silence.)*Play something for me, sweetheart, on your pipe,
And let it banish evil far away.

LUKASH

'Tis not the right time now for me to play.

MAVKA

Well then, embrace me, so I may forget
This conversation.

LUKASH

Hist! Mother may hear!
For see, she's always calling you a bold
And brazen girl.

MAVKA

(Flaring up) Yes! One who's not grown up
With you will never know you! "Brazen, bold:"
What does she mean? Because I love you, eh?
Because I told you first? Is it a shame
For me to have a generous heart, which hides
No treasures it possesses, but at once
Bestows them all upon the one it loves
Without awaiting any pledges first?

LUKASH

It might have hope that they would be returned.

MAVKA

Again a strange expression, meaningless . . .
"Return?" You gave to me the gifts you wished
To give as I gave likewise unto you,
Unbounded, numberless . . .

LUKASH

So then, 'tis well,
When neither can the other blame for aught.
You said so once yourself . . . Don't you recall?

MAVKA

Why should I now recall what once I said?

MOTHER

(Coming from behind the house)

Is that the way you reap? And build the pen?

(LUKASH hastily drags off his wood.)

If you, my girl, have no desire to reap,
I will not force you to. Somehow, myself,

I'll get it done. But when the autumn comes,
 Please God, I'll find a daughter-in-law to help.
 You know, there is a widow, strong and smart;
 She's sending inquiries here through the folk,
 And I sent back to say that if my son
 Is not against it, then . . . The sickle, dear;
 Give it to me . . . I have no other one.

MAVKA

I'll reap. You go and work among the hemp.

MOTHER crosses the glade and conceals herself in the reeds.

MAVKA swings the sickle and bends down over the rye. Suddenly out of the rye FIELD SPRITE springs up. The green dress she is wearing shows in places through her long golden hair which falls down all over her small figure. Round her head she wears a blue fillet, and daisies and other field flowers are twined in her hair.

FIELD SPRITE

(Rushing beseechingly to MAVKA)

O sister, stay such shameful toil!
 My beauty thus do not despoil!

MAVKA

I must.

FIELD SPRITE

Already I've been sadly torn,
 The flowers slain that I have borne.
 Those flowers ne'er will come again,
 For they were cut down with the grain.
 My poppies red with fury burned,
 But now to blackness they have turned.
 The soil is now like blood congealed
 In this my once so happy field . . .

MAVKA

I must, my sister. All your loveliness
 Returns each year in still more gorgeous dress;
 But if my happiness should fade today,
 'Tis gone for aye!

FIELD SPRITE

(Wringing her hands and bowing in grief as a stalk is bent by the wind.)

Woe, alas! My lovely hair!

My golden, glorious hair!

Woe, alas! My beauty fair!

Condemned to disappear!

MAVKA

Your beauty was not made with time to vie,
But merely for a time to bloom, then die.
I cannot help it, though you wail and weep;
If I do not, some other will you reap . . .

FIELD SPRITE

O grant me, sister, but a moment's grace

In this field to sport and race.

Let me enjoy this paradise of dreams

While still the summer beams.

While rye stands in the field,

The hour's not yet when I at last must yield.

A moment, but a moment, dearest one,

Ere my poor beauty must be done!

'Twill then itself lie down for ever still . . .

O sister, be not like the winter chill,

Who cannot be besought, cannot be swayed!

MAVKA

I'd gladly do as you have prayed,
But I'm no longer free, this duty I daren't shirk.

FIELD SPRITE

(Reaching up to MAVKA's ear and whispering)

Does it not sometimes happen in this work

That with the sickle one may wound the hand?

Such pain, O sister, you could surely stand;

Some drops of blood to save me would suffice . . .

Is not my beauty worthy such a price?

MAVKA

(She draws the sickle across her hand and the blood spurts out over FIELD SPRITE's golden hair.)

See, sister, I have taken your advice!

FIELD SPRITE *bows low before MAVKA in gratitude, then springs up and vanishes in the stalks of rye.*

LUKASH'S *mother comes from the lake accompanied by a full-faced young widow who is wearing a red kerchief with fringes, a dark red skirt with narrow and regular pleating, and a similarly pleated apron, garnished with white, blue, and yellow braid sewn on it. Her chemise is heavily embroidered in red and blue; a necklace with many trinkets attached jingles around her white, chubby neck. Her bodice is tightly laced around her plump torso, and this makes her figure appear all the more opulent. She walks with such long strides that the older woman has difficulty in keeping up with her.*

MOTHER

(Very amiably)

Come, on, Kilina; there, around the birch,
You'll find much fresher herbs. The yarrow there . . .
You'd like a boiling of it, wouldn't you?
It's very good indeed, my dear, with milk.

KILINA

I've so much milk I don't know what to do.
I wish the fair were soon, I'd buy more pails.
My cow is one of Turkish breed, a cow
My dear departed got somewhere . . . And young . . .
My Lord, you never saw the like! Somehow
I manage to get all the farm work done,
But there's the house as well. O dearie me!
A widow has to split herself in two.

She talks dolefully, making a drooping mouth.

MOTHER

And yet my dear, you did get it all done!
But then, of course, when one's industrious,
One manages . . . Yet here, with two small fields,
We have no such success.

KILINA

(Looking at the field where MAVKA is standing)

Ah, who is that

You've got a-reaping there?

MOTHER

Some orphan girl . . .

(Whispering)

Ah, God forgive me! not a bit of good.

KILINA

(Coming up with MOTHER to MAVKA)

Good day, my girl! The reaping going good?

MOTHER

Oh, goodness me! She hasn't started yet!

A plague on you! What have you done the while,

You good-for-nothing! Worthless, lazy slut!

MAVKA

(Dully)

I cut my hand . . .

MOTHER

And for what reason, pray?

KILINA

Give me the sickle . . . Let me take a swing.

MAVKA puts the sickle behind her and stares with hostility at KILINA.

MOTHER

Give her the sickle now! It isn't yours!

She snatches the sickle out of MAVKA's hand and gives it to KILINA, who rushes to the rye and reaps so furiously that the straws whistle under her strokes.

KILINA

(Delightedly)

Ah, that's the way to reap!

(Without stopping her work) If someone here

Would twist some bands for sheaves, I'll clear this field

Off at a single stretch.

MOTHER

(Shouting) Lukash, come here!

LUKASH

(Coming up, to KILINA)

God give you power!

KILINA

(Without looking up) Thank you.

MOTHER

Lukash, you

Can bind the sheaves for our good visitor.

Your "helper" has already cut herself.

(LUKASH begins to bind sheaves.)

Well, keep it up, my children. I must go

And boil some dumplings for your midday meal.

*She leaves, while MAVKA goes off to the birch and, leaning against it, peers through its hanging branches at the two workers.**For some time KILINA keeps up her furious reaping; then she stops, straightens up, and gazes at the bent figure of LUKASH stooping over the sheaves. She smiles, and with three long strides walks up to him and gives him a hearty slap on the back.*

KILINA

Come on, young fellow! Don't crawl like a snail!

There's still a lot to do.

She bursts into a resounding laugh.

LUKASH

(Also straightening up) How fast you work!

But don't brag yet. I'm still the stronger one!

KILINA

(Throwing down the sickle, she stands with hands on hips.)

All right, just try it out! We'll see who wins!

LUKASH darts towards her but she holds him back. They then take positions "to measure strength" by placing the open palms of their hands pressed flat each against the other's and straining to see which one will first give way. For a time they are evenly matched; then KILINA yields slightly, laughing loudly and making play with her eyes. LUKASH, inflamed, pushes her hands wide apart and tries to kiss her, but at the last moment she trips him and he falls.

KILINA

(Standing over him and laughing)

Now who's the winner? Who's the stronger one?

LUKASH

(He rises, breathing heavily.)

That was a trick . . . you tripped me.

KILINA

But I won!

The door of the house slams. KILINA again starts to reap and LUKASH to bind sheaves. Soon the field appears dark; only the stubble and the standing stooks of sheaves are left on its surface. Apart from these, there are some scattered piles of stalks of rye, intended for bands, lying like victims already overpowered and waiting to be bound like captives.

MOTHER

(Calling from the open door)

You reapers, hey! 'Tis time to come and eat!

KILINA

(Shouting back)

I've finished mine, but Lukash doesn't seem
To get along so fast.

LUKASH

I won't be long.

MOTHER

Well, get done quick! Kilina, you can come.

*KILINA goes into the house and the door closes behind her.
MAVKA comes out from underneath the birch.*

LUKASH

(Somewhat confused at seeing her, but resuming his task immediately)

Oh, so it's you? Just finish up these sheaves
So I can go.

MAVKA

I don't know how to bind.

LUKASH

Well, why did you come here to stand and look,
If you don't want to help?

He keeps on binding alone.

MAVKA

Oh, Lukash dear,
 Don't let that woman come here anymore.
 I don't like her . . . She's vicious and she's sly,
 As otters are.

LUKASH

You don't know her at all.

MAVKA

Oh yes, I do! I've heard her voice and laugh.

LUKASH

That's not enough.

MAVKA

Nay, that is quite enough.
 She's avaricious, like the lynx.

LUKASH

Worse, eh?

MAVKA

She must not come into this grove again.

LUKASH

(Straightening up)

You seem to think that you're the forest's queen,
 To say who shall or shall not walk about
 Here in the woods.

MAVKA

(Sadly but menacingly) Here in the forest there
 Are certain pitfalls hidden in the brush,
 Of which nor beasts nor humans are aware
 Until they fall therein.

LUKASH

And yet you talk
 Of viciousness and slyness—Fie, for shame!
 I didn't know what your true nature was
 Till now.

MAVKA

Maybe I knew it not myself . . .

LUKASH

Well, listen now: if it's the case that I
 Have got to ask you first who may come here
 And who may not, 'twill be the best for me
 To leave this forest and go back to live
 Amongst my fellows, where I'll find a home.
 'Twould be far better than to stay with you
 Like some trapped beast.

MAVKA

I never set a trap
 For you. You came here of your own free will.

LUKASH

I'll follow my free will where'er I wish.
 I will be bound by nothing, by no one!

MAVKA

Whenever have I sought to fetter you?

LUKASH

Well, what's the good of all this idle talk?

*Having finished the last sheaf, and without looking at
 MAVKA, he goes into the house. MAVKA sits down in a furrow
 amongst the stubble, and lets her head droop in sad meditation.*

UNCLE LEV

(Coming from behind the house)

What is the matter, maiden? Why so sad?

MAVKA

(Softly and sadly)

The summer's passing, Uncle Lev.

UNCLE LEV

For you,

That's certainly a grief. No longer can
 You use the willow as your winter home.

MAVKA

Where then shall I find lodging?

UNCLE LEV

As for me,

No house with you inside would be too cramped . . .
 My sister has a nature hard to please;
 No one can get along with her. If I
 Were master here, I wouldn't ask, but then,
 I gave them ownership of house and land,
 So I've no say. Myself, I'm leaving here
 To winter in the village, in my home . . .
 If you could stand it there amongst us folk,
 I'd gladly take you in.

MAVKA

No, no, I can't . . .

And if I could, I wouldn't go. You're good!

UNCLE LEV

'Tis bread alone that's good, not humankind.
 To tell the truth, I'm downright fond of all
 You forest folk. When my time comes to die,
 I, like the beasts, will come back to the woods—
 Here, 'neath this oak, let them lay me to rest . . .
 Hey, good old oak! Will you be standing still
 When my grey head shall bow itself at last?
 Ah me! there never were such sturdy oaks
 As those which were chopped down. As green as you,
 Despite the frosts, my sturdy, shaggy friend . . .

He stands, leaning sadly on his staff. MAVKA gathers some half-withered flowers from among the harvested rye and makes them into a nosegay.

Out of the house come MOTHER, KILINA, and LUKASH.

MOTHER

(To KILINA)

Why must you go? Can you not stay a while?

KILINA

Eh, not a moment more; I must be off.
 You see, it's getting late, and I'm afraid.

MOTHER

Why, Lukash, you could see her home?

LUKASH

Why not?

KILINA

(Looking at him)

But he's got work to do . . .

MOTHER

What sort of work,

Now evening's come? Go on, my son, go on,

And take Kilina out unto the road.

Myself, I dread these dismal woods at night;

And such a handsome girl as she might meet

Some harm, who knows?

KILINA

Oh now, you really do

Make me feel terrified to linger here!

Come on then, Lukash, ere it gets real dark,

Or both of us will be afraid.

LUKASH

Who, I?

Feel scary in the woods? Ha-ha, no fear!

MOTHER

He's such a bold and enterprising youth.

Take care, Kilina, you watch out for him!

KILINA

Oh, no, I'm joking . . .

(She notices UNCLE LEV passing.)

Why, here's Uncle Lev!

So you're here too?

UNCLE LEV

(Pretending not to have heard aright)

Eh? Oh, goodbye, goodbye!

He goes off into the forest.

KILINA

Now, Auntie, do take good care of yourself!

She makes as if to kiss the older woman's hand, but the latter does not extend it; instead, she wipes off her mouth with a

corner of her apron and kisses KILINA three times, "with ceremony."

KILINA

(*Departing*)

Long life to you, and don't forget us, too!

MOTHER

Don't stay away, but come another day!

She re-enters the house and fastens the door behind her.

MAVKA gets up and, walking slowly as though fatigued, goes towards the lake. Sitting down beside the sloping birch, she lets her head fall down between both hands and weeps softly. A drizzling rain begins to fall, dimming the outlines of glade, house, and forest.

RUSALKA

(*She comes swimming up to the shore and stops, gazing at MAVKA in surprise and curiosity.*)

You're weeping, Mavka! Why?

MAVKA

And have you ne'er,

Rusalka, wept yourself?

RUSALKA

What I? Why no!

If I should weep e'en for a moment's space,
Someone would surely laugh himself to death!

MAVKA

But ah, Rusalka, you have never loved . . .

RUSALKA

I've never loved? Nay, it is you who have
Forgotten now what real love ought to be.
Real love is like the water, rushing swift,
Which sports, caresses, draws one on, then drowns.
Where it strikes heat, it seethes; where it meets cold,
It turns dead, like a stone. So is my love!
But that of yours is like the brittle straw,
A puny child. It bends before the wind,
It cracks beneath the feet. It meets a spark
And flares without resistance, after which

There's nothing left but cinders and dead ash.
 If it's despised, it lies and putrifies
 Like unused straw that's in the water thrown—
 The water of vain self-reproach, or else
 Turns mouldy 'neath cold rains of penitence.

MAVKA

(Lifting up her head)

"Vain self-reproach" you say? Well, ask the birch
 If she feels "penitence" for nights she spent
 When spring's light breezes in her tresses played
 And sported with her.

RUSALKA

Why then does she grieve?

MAVKA

Because she can her love no more embrace,
 Clasp him eternally in her long arms.

RUSALKA

Why not?

MAVKA

Her lover is the breeze of spring.

RUSALKA

Why did she choose a lover such as that?

MAVKA

That breeze of spring was tender, gentle, mild.
 It was his singing that brought out her leaves;
 His fondling caused her glorious crown to spread,
 And his caresses damped her hair with dew.
 Yes, yes . . . it truly was the breeze of spring.
 How could she help but love him and none else?

RUSALKA

Well, she should cease her grieving now and let
 It fall to earth, for she will not embrace
 That breeze again . . . It's fled away and gone.

*Quietly and without a splash she swims away and vanishes
 in the reeds. MAVKA lets her head fall down again till her long
 black tresses are touching the ground.*

A strong wind springs up, driving grey clouds before it as well as black swarms of migrant birds which are flying south. After this there comes a still stronger blast of wind, the dark clouds drift asunder and the forest becomes visible in a vivid autumnal pattern against the dark blue of the sky, betokening thus the approaching end of the day.

MAVKA

(Softly and in deep sorrow)

"It's fled away and gone . . ."

FOREST ELF *comes out of the thicket. He is wearing a long gown, the color of old gold, with a dark red fringe around the bottom, and round his cap are twined sprays of wild hops.*

FOREST ELF

My child, although

You have betrayed, do not so sorely grieve!

MAVKA

(Lifting up her head)

Betrayed? Why, whom have I betrayed?

FOREST ELF

Yourself.

You gave up dwelling in the high tree tops
 And came down low to walk in baser paths.
 And now you're like to some poor serving maid
 Who, by the fruit of bitter toil, had hoped
 A scrap of happiness to win. Then when
 She's found it all in vain, a sense of shame
 Allows her not a beggar to become.
 Remember what you were that night in spring,
 When your life flowered into glorious bloom:
 That night you seemed to be a Forest Queen,
 A crown of stars upon your green-black hair.
 Then eagerly did happiness stretch forth
 Its hands and offered you its choicest gifts!

MAVKA

What shall I do now when those stars are gone,
 Extinguished in my crown and in my heart?

FOREST ELF

Not all the stars are faded out for you.
Behold, see what a festival is here!
The maple-prince has donned his golden robes,
The wild rose all her wealth of corals wears;
While innocence has changed to purple proud
Upon the cranberry, whose flowers you wore
When nightingales intoned your marriage song.
The ancient willow, e'en the mournful birch
Have put on gold and crimson, rich brocades,
For autumn's festival. And you alone
Will not cast off that beggar's garb of yours.
You seem to have forgotten that no grief
Should ever triumph over loveliness.

MAVKA

Then, grandsire, give to me my festal robes!
Once more I'll queen it as the forest's pride,
And happiness shall fall down at my feet,
Beseeching favors at my hand!

FOREST ELF

My child,

Those robes were long since ready for the queen,
But she, capriciously, has tarried long
While wearing for a jest a beggar's gown.

He throws back his gown and brings from underneath it a splendid crimson robe, embroidered with gold, together with a silvery veil. MAVKA swiftly runs to the cranberry tree and breaks off some of its sprays covered with red berries and weaves herself a chaplet. She then lets down her hair, places the chaplet on her head, and bows before FOREST ELF who throws the silvery veil over her head.

FOREST ELF

No longer now do I feel fear for you.

Gravely nodding to MAVKA, he swiftly skips off into the bushes and disappears. A moment later WILL-O'-THE-WISP comes running out of the forest.

MAVKA

What! You again?

She makes as if to flee.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

(Contemptuously) Fear not, I don't seek you . . .

I came to see the sprite who's in the rye,
 But she's already gone to sleep. Too bad . . .
 You're sadly wasted, too.

MAVKA

(Proudly) To you, it seems!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

"It seems," you say? Let me more closely look.

(He draws nearer, MAVKA retreats.)

Why are you so afraid of me? I know
 You are betrothed. I will not pester you.

MAVKA

Away! Hands off!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Now, don't get so worked up . . .

Suppose I did wrong you? . . . Now, Mavka, come
 And make it up. Let us be friends.

MAVKA

With you?

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Why not with me? We're both in autumn now.
 Don't you perceive the sun is growing cold
 And our blood's running slow? There was a time
 When we were good companions—whether then
 We played or lovers were, 'tis hard to say.
 But now's the time for brotherhood. Your hand!

(MAVKA, after a momentary hesitation, gives him her hand.)

Permit me to bestow a brother kiss
 On that pale face of yours.

(MAVKA shrinks, but he kisses her all the same.)

O flowers on

That lovely face, again ye have bloomed out!

Autumnal, unexpected, and benign . . .

(Without releasing her hand he looks around the glade.)

See the spider's gossamer

Swings and spirals in the air . . .

And so do we . . .

(With a sudden movement he draws her into a dance.)

And so do we;

As swiftly swirling,

Circling free!

The stars that blaze,

Sun's golden rays,

The clear and brilliant lights that daze

All that glitters,

All that flitters,

In one unceasing mad career!

And so do I . . .

And so do I . . .

Be like a spark, my love most dear!

He whirls furiously in the dance. MAVKA's silvery veil swirls up in the air like a glittering serpent, her black tresses, now madly dishevelled, intermingle with WILL-O'-THE-WISP's fiery red curls.

MAVKA

Enough! Enough, I say!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

In unrestrained play

Stay not a moment doubtfully!

For happiness will cheat,

And only that is sweet

Which whirls and flies eternally!

(The dance becomes delirious.)

Let us whirl!

Let us whirl!

And like the whirlwind rise!

Let us know

Here below

A frenzied, fiery paradise!

MAVKA

Enough! . . . Release me now . . . I faint . . . I swoon.

Her head falls helplessly on his shoulder, her arms hang limply, but he carries her swooning along in the dance.

Suddenly from under the earth, there rises a dark, bulky, awe-inspiring shape.

PHANTOM

Release her. Render to me what is mine.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP stops, letting MAVKA fall out of his embrace. She sinks down helplessly on the ground.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Ha, who are you?

PHANTOM

Do you not know me then?

I'm "He Who Dwells in Rock."

WILL-O'-THE-WISP shudders, and with a swift turn, he dashes away and vanishes in the forest.

MAVKA comes to herself and sitting up she opens her eyes wide and gazes with horror at the PHANTOM which is stretching out its hands to lay hold of her.

MAVKA

No, touch me not!

I do not wish to come! I'm still alive!

"HE WHO DWELLS IN ROCK"

I come to lead you to a distant land,
 An unknown land, where quiet waters dark
 Serenely sleep in peace; where silent rocks
 Hang over them and stare with clouded eyes,
 Mute witnesses of what is past and gone.
 'Tis calm and tranquil there, for neither trees nor grass
 E'er stir or murmur to bring on bad dreams—
 Those treacherous dreams which always banish sleep.
 And thither on the winds are borne no songs
 Of freedoms unattainable; no fires
 On altars e'er burn there. The lightning's points
 Are blunted on those rocks and never can
 Pierce through to that stronghold of gloom and peace.

I'll take you there. 'Tis there that you belong.
The fire has made you pale, the movement weak;
Your happiness is but a shade—you're dead.

MAVKA

No, I'm alive! I'll live eternally!
I have that in my heart which cannot die!

"HE WHO DWELLS IN ROCK"

By what are you so sure?

MAVKA

By this:

I love my pain, for I gave life to it.
If it were possible for me to wish
E'er to forget it, then I'd go with you;
But in this world there is no power so strong
That could e'en stir a longing to forget.

(The sound of human footfalls is heard in the forest.)

Lo, here he comes, the one who gave the pain!
Now vanish, Phantom, for here comes my life!

"HE WHO DWELLS IN ROCK" retreats into the dark bushes
and there waits in ambush. LUKASH emerges out of the forest.

MAVKA goes to meet LUKASH. Her face with its deadly
pallor stands out in contrast against her resplendent garments.
Expiring hope distends her large dark eyes, her movements are
convulsive and faltering as though something within her is giving
way.

LUKASH

(On perceiving her)

Oh, dreadful sight! What do you want with me?

*(He rushes to the house and knocks on the door. His mother
opens but remains standing within. LUKASH on the threshold
cries out.)*

Hey, Mother, make the bridal loaf at once!
Tomorrow to Kilina I'll send word!

He enters and the door is shut behind him.

"HE WHO DWELLS IN ROCK" touches MAVKA who with a
cry falls into his hands. He casts the skirt of his black robe over
her and both sink into the ground.

ACT III

A cloudy, windy, autumn night. The last pallid gleams of moonlight fade out amidst the wild confusion of the forest's naked tree tops. Eerie, piercing cries of nighthawks, owls, and other nocturnal birds of prey are heard. Suddenly all these sounds are drowned out by the long-drawn mournful howling of a wolf. The howling grows louder and louder, and then suddenly breaks off. Silence follows.

A sickly, late autumn dawn soon begins to appear. The leafless trees of the forest bristle against the ashen grey sky. The white walls of LUKASH'S cottage begin to loom; and, leaning against one of the walls, the dark figure of someone apparently worn-out becomes visible. Although hardly recognizable, it is MAVKA. She is dressed in black, with a grey opaque veil, and her only ornament is a tiny nosegay of cranberry blossom on her bosom.

As it grows lighter in the glade a large stump becomes visible on the spot where once stood the ancient oak, and close beside it there is a recently filled-in grave not yet overgrown with grass.

Out of the forest comes FOREST ELF. He is wearing a grey smock and has a cap of wolf's fur on his head.

FOREST ELF

(Peering at the figure leaning against the wall of the house)
That you, my child?

MAVKA

(Moving slightly towards him) It is.

FOREST ELF

And can it be
That "He Who Dwells in Rock" has let you go?

MAVKA

It was your crime that set me free to come.

FOREST ELF

You call it "crime," that vengeance which I took?

'Twas righteous judgment I inflicted on
 That sweetheart, base and treacherous, of yours!
 Was it not just that he should know what 'tis
 To feel a dread, unearthly, wild despair
 In roaming through the woods in wolflike form?
 Now he is nothing but a savage wolf!
 Then let him whine and howl—let him feel thirst
 For taste of human blood—'twill not assuage
 His torments and his pains!

MAVKA

Do not exult!

For I've delivered him. Within my heart
 I found the magic liberating word
 Which transforms brute back into human form.

FOREST ELF

(Stamping his foot with rage, he snaps his staff in two.)

Unworthy of the name of forest child!
 Your soul is no more of the forest free,
 But of the slavish house!

MAVKA

Oh, if you knew,

If you but knew how terrible it was . . .
 I slept a stonelike sleep there in the rock,
 In depths profound, in blackness, damp and cold,
 When lo! a dreadful echo broke clean through
 The rock impregnable—a long-drawn howl.
 The wild despairing howl went drifting o'er
 The dark and lifeless waters and aroused
 Vibrations long since muted in that place . . .
 And I awoke. Like subterranean fire
 My ardent pity split the granite vault,
 And I broke out again into the light.
 The magic word gave life to my dumb lips—
 I wrought a miracle . . . I only knew
 I was not destined to forgetfulness.

FOREST ELF

Where is he now? Why is he not with you?

Is his ingratitude eternal as
Your deathless love?

MAVKA

Ah, grandsire, could you but
Have seen him then! He, in his human form,
Sank down before me, like a maple felled . . .
He, in abasement, lifted up to me
A countenance so anguished, full of pain,
And deepest penitence, and hopelessness . . .
None but a human face can look like that!
But yet, before I found a word to speak,
He sprang convulsively up to his feet,
And, covering his face with trembling hands,
Rushed off into the bush and disappeared.

FOREST ELF

What do you think of doing now, my child?

MAVKA

I do not know . . . I, like a shadow, roam
About this house and have no longer strength
To leave this spot . . . for in my heart I feel
'Tis hither that he will return . . .

FOREST ELF

(After a moment's silence during which MAVKA resumes her position leaning against the wall.)

Poor child!

Why did you leave us for that land of gloom?
Could you not rest here in your native groves?
See how the willow is awaiting you;
Already, long ago, she spread your bed,
And mourns because of your long tarrying.
Go there and rest.

MAVKA

(Softly) Ah, Grandsire, but I can't.

FOREST ELF *sighing deeply, betakes himself to the forest.*
From the forest is heard a violent stamping as though
someone is ruthlessly riding a horse. It ceases.

KUTZ

(He comes skipping and hopping from behind the house, rubbing his hands, but stops on perceiving MAVKA.)
Mavka, you here?

MAVKA

And you, why are you here?

KUTZ

I got their horse out, now I've brought him back.
A glorious ride he gave me this last time.
No one will ever drive him any more!

MAVKA

O shameless one! Our forest you disgrace!
Is this how you keep faith with Uncle Lev?

KUTZ

Our compact of good faith died out with him.

MAVKA

What! Uncle Lev is dead?

KUTZ

There is his grave.
They buried him beneath the oak, but now
The old man needs must lie beside the stump.

MAVKA

So, both are gone . . . a strong presentiment
He felt that he would not see winter through . . .
(She approaches the grave.)

Alas! how shall my heart weep over thee,
My only human friend! If I could but
Shed living tears, I would bedew this ground
With them and bring forth myrtles ever green
Upon thy grave. But now I'm destitute;
My grief has no more weight than withered leaves . . .

KUTZ

Pity beseems me not, yet still I must
Confess, I feel regret for that old man,
For he knew how to live on terms with us.
With all his horses he was wont to keep

A goat so I could ride on it at night.
 As lightning flies, I'd ride on that black goat,
 His horses meanwhile left alone in peace.
 Those women don't know how to live on terms
 With us at all. They sold the goat; they had
 The oak chopped down; they broke good faith with us.
 Well, I have paid them back! I rode to death
 Their working horses; they buy more—I ride.
 I asked the witch who acts as midwife for
 Old Nick to use her arts upon their cows,
 And she did well. Oh, yes, they'll surely learn!
 The Water Goblin waterlogged their ricks;
 The Lost Babes dusted rust amongst their grain;
 And now the Fever Wraith is thrashing them,
 Because with offal they defiled the lake.
 They'll never thrive now in this forest glade,
 The Starvelings round their house already lurk!

STARVELINGS

(Small wizened creatures, in rags, their faces seamed with the signs of eternal hunger, suddenly appear from around the corner of the house.)

We're here! Who's calling us!

MAVKA

Go, disappear!

No one was calling you!

ONE STARVELING

The word went forth,

Can't be recalled.

STARVELINGS

(Besieging the threshold) Hey, open up the door,
 At once, at once! We're starving, famishing!

MAVKA

I will not let you in!

STARVELINGS

Give us to eat!

MAVKA

I haven't anything . . .

STARVELINGS

The cranberries

You're wearing on your bosom! Give us those!

MAVKA

But that's my blood.

STARVELINGS

No matter! We love blood.

One of them rushes at her and tears the nose-gay from her breast. The others snatch at it to get a piece, fighting among themselves and yelping like dogs.

KUTZ

Hey, Starvelings, stop it! . . . She's not humankind!

They desist, gnashing their teeth and whimpering from hunger.

STARVELINGS

(To KUTZ)

Well, you give us to eat or we'll eat you!

They rush at KUTZ who jumps backwards.

KUTZ

Now, now, go slow!

STARVELINGS

Give us to eat! We starve!

KUTZ

Just wait a while; I'll wake those women up.

You'll all get food, and I'll have sport besides.

He picks up a clod of earth and hurls it at the window, smashing in the glass.

VOICE OF MOTHER

(From inside)

Oy! What was that? Some evil sprites again!

KUTZ

(Whispering to the STARVELINGS)

Now, now, you see, she is awake; and soon

You'll hear your name. But sit here still,

Or else the dame will put a curse on you

And you'll sink through the ground. She knows the word.

*The STARVELINGS crouch in a dark corner at the threshold.
From inside the house through the broken window panes
are heard the movements of MOTHER getting up; then her voice,
next that of KILINA.*

MOTHER

It's nearly broad daylight and still she sleeps.
Kilina! Hey, Kilina! Still she sleeps.
(Would that she slept for good!) . . . Get up, get up!
(Would that she never rose!) . . .

KILINA

(Sleepily)

What now? What's wrong!

MOTHER

(Spitefully)

Get up and go and milk that cow of yours,
That fine young cow, that one of Turkish breed,
Which your departed hubby got for you.

KILINA

(Now fully awake)

I'll go and milk the one that I found here;
She'll give me just about three drops of milk—
A pound of butter, eh?

MOTHER

You'd best not talk!

Who is to blame if we don't get more milk,
With such a famous dairymaid? . . . Oy, woe!
A daughter-in-law like this! What have we done
To merit such bad luck?

KILINA

Who was it, pray,
Sent me the invitation? What about
That slattern you had here? Why didn't you
Take her and dress her up a bit? You'd then
Have had a daughter-in-law to suit your taste.

MOTHER

You don't think so? But that she would have been!
 That stupid Lukash gave her up for you;
 And yet she was obedient, kind, and good,
 No matter what you did to her . . . You call
 Her slattern, do you? and yet you yourself
 Have taken that green dress of hers and made
 It over and you're wearing it—for shame!

KILINA

Why not? You've got to find your own clothes here! . . .
 Here is my husband, gone off with the wind.
 We're sinking into poverty the while.
 I'm neither wife nor widow—just a waif!

MOTHER

Could any husband stick it out with you?
 You greedy shark! What we had, you've devoured,
 You and your shameless brood—see, there they sit!
 May famine take the lot of you some day!

KILINA

Starvation take her first who speaks the curse!

At these words the door suddenly opens. The STARVELINGS jump up and rush into the house while KUTZ flees off into the marsh.

KILINA with a pail in her hands hurries to the forest stream nearby and with a splash fills the pail with water, then returns at a somewhat slower pace. She notices MAVKA, her face covered with the grey veil, who is leaning weakly against the wall near the doorway.

KILINA

(Stopping and putting down the pail)

Good Lord, who's this? . . . Hey, listen, are you drunk,
 Or maybe frozen stiff?

She shakes MAVKA by the shoulder.

MAVKA

(With difficulty, as though struggling with an overpowering drowsiness)

Sleep conquers me . . .

The sleep of winter.

KILINA

(Throwing back the veil and recognizing her)

Why have you come here?

Maybe they didn't pay you for your work?

MAVKA

(As before)

No one can ever pay me what is due.

KILINA

For what then did you come? He isn't here.

I know, you're after him! Come now, confess;

Is he your lover still?

MAVKA

(Still as before)

Once, long before

This gloomy day, there was a morning red . . .

But now he's dead . . .

KILINA

You've gone insane!

MAVKA

No, sane, and free again!

The cloud drifts slowly 'cross the sky,

Without a goal, to perish by and by . . .

Where do those azure lightnings fly?

KILINA

(Plucking at MAVKA's sleeve)

Be off! Don't frighten me! Why stand you here?

MAVKA

(Now somewhat more aware, she steps away from the door.)

I stand to watch how happy you are here.

KILINA

I wish you stood amidst your charms and spells!

MAVKA is suddenly transformed into a willow with withered leaves and drooping branches.

KILINA

(Recovering from her stupefaction, viciously)

Ah, 'twas a lucky hour when I said that!
Now you can stand and watch us all you want! . . .

BOY

(Running out of the house, to KILINA)

Hey, Mother! Where are you? We want to eat,
And Granny won't give us a bite!

KILINA

She won't?

(Bending down and whispering to the boy)

Behind the stove I hid a piece of pie—
When Granny goes outside, you eat it up.

BOY

(Pointing)

Who put that withered willow there? Did you?
What did you do that for?

KILINA

What's that to you?

BOY

I'll make a whistle from it.

KILINA

I don't care.

*The boy cuts off a twig and goes back into the house.
LUKASH comes out of the forest, emaciated, with long hair, ragged
and without coat or cap.*

KILINA

*(At first crying out joyfully, but immediately changing to
vexation)*

So here you are! Where've you been carrying on
For all this time?

LUKASH

Don't ask . . .

KILINA

I mustn't ask?

You run away, footloose, the Lord knows where!

You chase around and then you say: "Don't ask!"
 But, dearie, I don't need to ask you where . . .
 Some place where there's a tavern, where a fool
 Can swill, and gamble all his clothes away.

LUKASH

It was no tavern . . .

KILINA

Who'll believe it, dolt!

(Striking up a song)

"I have been forced to spend a wedded life
 With this sad drunkard . . ."

LUKASH

Shut your mouth! Stop it!

(KILINA stops, gazing at him in fright.)

See here, let me ask you a question, too.

Where is my Uncle's oak, where that stump stands?

KILINA

(At first confused, but swiftly recovering)

Well, what were we to do? Eat famine fare?

The merchants came, they bought, and that was all.

An oak is just a tree!

LUKASH

But Uncle Lev

Swore it should ne'er be felled.

KILINA

Your Uncle Lev

Is dead and gone, so what is his oath worth?

Did either you or I swear any oath?

I'd gladly sell the whole cursed forest too,

Or root it out entire. Then we'd have land

Like other folk and not this bush bewitched.

When evening comes, it terrifies one's soul,

And what good do we ever win from it?

We grub here in the forest like the wolves,

And, really, soon we'll learn to howl like them.

LUKASH

Hush, hush! Don't talk like that! Shut up!

(His voice vibrates with a terrified apprehensiveness)

You say

To sell the forest . . . cut it down . . . and then

It won't be like . . . what you just said?

KILINA

Said what?

That like the wolves . . .

LUKASH

(Gripping her and covering her mouth with his hand)

No, don't say it!

KILINA

(Freeing herself from his grasp)

Good God!

You're drunk, or mad, or someone's put a spell

On you! Go in the house.

LUKASH

All right, I'll go . . .

I'll go at once . . . but first I'll take a drink.

He kneels down and drinks from the pail. He then stands up and stares moodily into space without stirring from the spot.

KILINA

What are you thinking of?

LUKASH

I? . . . I don't know . . .

(Hesitatingly)

Did someone come while I was gone?

KILINA

(Viciously)

Who would

Come here?

LUKASH

(Dropping his eyes)

I know not . . .

KILINA

(With a wicked smile)

You don't know?

But maybe I know who.

LUKASH

(In alarm)

You do?

KILINA

Why not?

I plainly see whom you expected here.

'Tis all in vain—too bad for what you'd hoped!

Whate'er was here, it's gone into that tree . . .

LUKASH

What's that you say?

KILINA

Just what you heard.

MOTHER

*(She comes running out of the house and rushes to embrace**LUKASH. He receives her embrace coldly.)*

My son!

My son! Oh dear! what have I suffered from

This wicked witch!

LUKASH

(Shuddering)

What witch?

MOTHER

(Pointing to KILINA)

Why, this one here!

LUKASH

(With a contemptuous smile)

So, she's the witch? . . . Well now, it was your fate

To be a witch's mother-in-law for sure.

And who's to blame for it? You wanted her.

MOTHER

If I had known she could be such a slut,

And such a dirty idleback . . .

KILINA
(*Breaking in*)

Oy, woe!

Who would have thought it! Never in the world
Was such a witch, a slattern such as she!
See what a mother, Lukash, you have got!
She's hard as iron, she will wear you down.

LUKASH
And you are just as hard as she is, too.

KILINA
No use expecting any help from you!
Like mother, so's the son, 'tis plain to see!
For what ill fortune did you bring me here?
To make a mock of me?

MOTHER
Why don't you, son,
Tell her to shut that mouth of hers? Am I
A skittle to be knocked about by her?

LUKASH
Here, both of you, give me a moment's peace!
Do you want me to clear out of this house
And run away for good? By God, I will!

KILINA
(*To MOTHER*)
You see, that's what you get.

MOTHER
I hope you get
The same from your son too.

(*Raging, she goes into the house again and on the threshold she meets KILINA's son, who is running out with a willow pipe in his hand.*)

Get out, you brat!
She slaps the boy and goes inside, slamming the door.

BOY

Oh, Papa, you've come back!

LUKASH

I have, my son.

He puts an ironical emphasis on the word "son."

KILINA

(Offended)

Well, tell the child how he should call you then.

It's "Uncle," isn't it?

LUKASH

(Somewhat ashamed)

I don't care which!

Come here, come here, my child! Don't be afraid.

(He pats the boy's blond head.)

So, did you make that pipe yourself?

BOY

I did.

But still I don't know how to play. Show me!

He holds the pipe out to LUKASH.

LUKASH

Eh, boy, my days for playing are all past!

He falls into a moody pensiveness.

BOY

(Persistently)

Ah, you don't want to show me! Mother, hey!

Why doesn't Papa want to show me how?

KILINA

Who cares? A lot of good that playing does!

LUKASH

Here, hand the pipe to me.

(He takes it.)

A fine one, too.

You made it out of willow?

BOY

That tree there.

He points to the willow into which MAVKA has been transformed.

LUKASH

It seems to me I ne'er saw that before.

(To KILINA)

You planted it?

KILINA

Who'd ever plant it there?

Some willow branch fell down and sprouted roots;
The water made it grow . . . and all these rains . . .

BOY

(Eagerly)

Why don't you play a bit?

LUKASH

(Absently)

Eh? Play a bit? . . .

(He begins to play, at first softly, then more and more loudly until he strikes into the spring song which he once played to MAVKA. As he does so the words begin to come out of the pipe:)

"How lovely is the strain
Of mingled joy and pain;
It cuts deep in the breast
And cleaves the heart in twain."

LUKASH

(Letting the pipe fall out of his hands)

What sort of pipe is this? Black magic! Spells!

(The Boy terrified, flees into the house. LUKASH seizes KILINA by the shoulder.)

Speak up, you sorceress! What tree is that?

KILINA

Here, take your hands off me! How should I know?

I don't associate with forest sprites

As your folks do. Now fell it, if you want to!

No one is stopping you. I'll get the axe.

She goes into the house and returns, bringing an axe.

LUKASH

(Having taken the axe, he approaches the tree and strikes its trunk once. It shrinks and makes a murmuring with its dry leaves. He gets ready for another swing but his arms fall down powerless.)
I cannot raise my arms at all; I can't . . .
There's something gripping at my heart . . .

KILINA

Let me!

She snatches the axe from LUKASH and takes a violent swing at the willow. At that instant, like the flying tail of a meteor, WILL-O-THE-WISP swoops down from the air above and embraces the tree.

WILL-O-THE-WISP

I will deliver you, beloved one!

Suddenly the tree bursts into flame. Reaching the topmost branches, the fire sweeps over on to the house, setting fire to its straw roof. The flames speedily envelop the entire dwelling. MOTHER and KILINA's children come rushing out with cries of "Fire, fire!" "Save us, help!" MOTHER and KILINA rush about, snatching up whatever they can from the conflagration. They carry out bundles and sacks on which the STARVELINGS are perched, after which the latter creep into the bundles and sacks and hide themselves inside. The children run with pails and vessels of all sorts, pouring water on the fire, but it rages too fiercely to be extinguished.

MOTHER

(To LUKASH)

Why are you standing there? Help save your goods!

LUKASH

(With his eyes fixed on the roof, from which innumerable flowers of flame are now bursting out.)

My goods? Maybe 'twill burn the evil, too?

The roof-tree cracks, pillars of sparks and flame fly up high, the roof collapses and the whole house becomes a furnace. A heavy dark cloud rises in the sky and snow begins to fall. Soon nothing is visible through the heavy white blanket except the crimson glow where the fire still burns. Gradually the red glow

dies down and when the snowfall slackens, a blackened spot is visible where the fire had been, still smoking and hissing from the damp snow falling. MOTHER and KILINA'S children with the bundles and sacks are no longer to be seen. Through the snow flakes there loom indistinctly an undamaged shed, a cart, and some farm implements.

KILINA

(Carrying the final bundle, she twitches LUKASH by the sleeve.)

Hey, Lukash, stir yourself! Come, wake up now!

You might at least help me to carry this!

LUKASH

You carried all the Starvelings out with you.

KILINA

Come, pinch yourself! What are you talking of?

LUKASH

(With a queer, quiet smile)

Ah, wife, I see that which you cannot see . . .

I've learned some wisdom now . . .

KILINA

(Frightened)

Oh, husband, how

Can you say such strange things . . . you frighten me!

LUKASH

Why be afraid? A fool you never feared;

Why fear a wise man now?

KILINA

Come, Lukash dear,

Let's go back to the village.

LUKASH

I won't go.

I'll never leave the forest. Here I'll stay.

KILINA

What sort of work can you get here?

LUKASH

Why must

We work at all?

KILINA

But still we've got to live?

LUKASH

And must we live?

KILINA

For God's sake, husband, have

You gone completely off your head, or what?

Maybe what's happened here has been too much.

Come to the village. I can get a dame

Whose spells will break the charm.

She pulls at his sleeve.

LUKASH

(Looking at her with a contemptuous smile)

Who's going to stay

To keep a watch on this that still remains?

He points to the cart and farm implements.

KILINA

(Speaking like a thrifty housewife)

Oh, yes, that's right. They'd all be carted off!

Just let them learn our place has been burned down,

And every living soul would soon be here!

Yes, Lukash, maybe you had best stay here.

I'll run off somewhere, borrow me a horse—

For ours have all been roasted in the fire.

We'll load this on the cart and then we'll drive

To your folks—maybe they will take us in . . .

Oy, woe! We've got to save ourselves somehow . . .

She is already running into the forest while speaking these last words. LUKASH follows her departure with a quiet laugh when she is finally lost to view.

From the forest there approaches a tall female form wearing a robe descending to her feet and with a white headdress arranged in antique style. She walks with a hesitant motion as though swayed by the wind, stopping now and then and bending down

as though searching for something on the ground. When she has drawn near, she stops beside the dewberry bushes growing close to the blackened ruins, straightens up and reveals a female face with wasted features but strongly like those of LUKASH.

LUKASH

Who are you? What do you here?

PHANTOM

I am your lost Destiny,
 Led into a labyrinth
 By unthinking villainy.
 Like a shadow through this grove
 Evermore I weave and rove,
 Searching with sad eyes where the pathway lies
 Leading to lost Paradise.
 But the pathway I would trace
 By the snow is drifted o'er;
 Now in this blank labyrinth
 I am lost for evermore! . . .

LUKASH

Break off, O my Destiny,
 From this dewberry a spray;
 Though the snow be deep, through its thickness sweep
 Till you find that little way.

DESTINY

Once in springtime in these groves
 Here I walked and planted there
 On the pathway guiding signs:
 Lovely flowers, rich and rare.
 But, unheeding, 'neath your feet
 You trod down those flowers sweet.
 Now beneath the snow thorns and briars grow;
 Gone is every sign, I know.

LUKASH

Search then, O my Destiny,
 With your hands beneath the snow,

If perchance a single stem
Of those flowers still doth grow.

DESTINY

Cold already are my hands,
And my strength is running low.
Though I weep and wail, nothing can avail.
Death approaches; I must go.
With a groan, the PHANTOM moves on.

LUKASH

(Stretching out his hands after the departing figure)
Tell me, how can one live on
When one's happiness is gone?

DESTINY

(Pointing to the ground at his feet)
Only like a twig that's found,
Cut off, lying on the ground!

LUKASH bends down to the spot at which DESTINY had pointed and finds there the willow pipe he had let fall out of his hands. He picks it up and goes across the white glade to the birch. He sits down under its long branches heavy with snow, and turns the pipe round and round in his hands, smiling at times like a child.

An ethereal, white, transparent form, with features recalling those of MAVKA, appears from behind the birch and bends over
LUKASH.

FORM OF MAVKA

O play, O play, give voice unto my heart!
'Tis all there is that now remains of me!

LUKASH

'Tis you? And have you as a vampire come
To suck my blood away? Come, drain it all!
(He bares his breast.)
Come, take new life from this my blood! You must,
For I have taken yours . . .

MAVKA

Nay, nay, dear heart,

You gave to me a soul, as the sharp knife
Gives to the willow twig a tender voice.

LUKASH

Your soul from me? Your body I destroyed!
For you are but a phantom now, a shade!

He looks at her with unexpressable pain.

MAVKA

Ah, for that body do not sigh!
'Tis now infused and glows with fire divine,
As clear and bright and glittering as good wine
Whose life in sparkling bubbles mounts on high.

Naught but an airy pinch of dust
Remains to mingle with the earth below.
Beside these waters shall a willow grow,
My end give life to something more robust.

And to me here shall many seek,
Both rich and poor, the joyful and the sad.
Their griefs I'll mourn, their joys shall make me glad—
To every one my soul shall gently speak.

And I shall find some word for all:
The quiet murmur of my rustling leaves;
The willow pipe that tender music breathes;
The melancholy dews that from my branches fall.

I'll give them back in mystic speech
All those dear tender songs you used to sing,
The tunes you played for me in that lost spring—
O play again, beloved, I beseech!

LUKASH begins to play. At first his music is melancholy, like the winter wind, like a yearning for something lost and unforgettable, but soon the invincible song of love overcomes the nostalgic tones. As the music changes, so winter all around undergoes a transformation; the birches rustle their crinkly leaves, the

sounds of spring are heard in the flowering groves, the dull winter day passes into a clear, moonlit, spring night. MAVKA suddenly flashes out in all her former beauty with her starry crown alight. LUKASH, with a cry of ecstatic joy, rushes towards her.

The wind lashes the white blossoms off the trees. The blossoms fall and fall until the pair of lovers are completely covered over, then the blossoms change into thick flakes of snow. When the snowfall ceases, the landscape is again a winter one, with snow clinging thickly on all the branches of the trees. LUKASH is sitting alone, leaning against the birch, with the pipe in his hands, his eyes closed and his lips set in a happy smile. He sits motionless. The snow falls over him like a thickening robe until his form becomes indistinguishable, and keeps on falling, falling endlessly. . . .