



OLHA KOBYLYANSKA (1863 – 1942)

was a famous Ukrainian writer. She wrote numerous stories, novellas, sketches, and actively participated in social activities. Economic and social problems of people in her country were the main concern in Olha Kobylyanska's works, but she was especially interested in the life of women, was a member of the female society in Bukovyna. A lot of her works are about and for women. She also admired the splendid nature of Bukovyna and tried to reflect its beauty in her works.

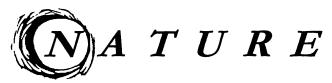
Olha Kobylyanska was born on November 27, 1863 in Hura-Humora, Romania, in the south of Bukovyna. In 1891, she moved to Chernivtsi, where she lived the rest of her life. At age 14, Olha started writing poems in German, later changing to Ukrainian. In 1903, she was partly paralyzed as a result of a common cold. On March 21, 1942, Olha Kobylyanska died and was buried in Chernivtsi.

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Novella Translated by Lesya Budna

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Olha Kobylyanska was born in Bukovyna, a picturesque area now situated in south-eastern Ukraine. This is the land of green mountains that proudly soar in the morning mist and scrape the clouds with their spruce branches. This is the land of blue-gray beeches, "the beech-land", for the name Bukovyna stems from the Ukrainian word "buk", which means "beech". This is the land of proud handsome people Hutsuls, who are sincere and passionate in their loves and angers closely tied to their land, who are a part of nature, superstitious and believe in witches, evil forces and magic. This is what "Nature" is about.

The same charming beauty of this land and its friendly people fascinated Cora Schwartz, an American from New York, when she first came to Bukovyna in 1976.

During one of her next visits, Cora learned about Olha Kobylyanska and felt some unexplained connection with the Ukrainian writer. Later on, she found a lot of things they had in common. Cora Schwartz was born the same day and year Olha Kobylyanska died. Cora also tries to help women by having created a shelter and writing a number of articles on domestic violence. After "meeting" Olha Kobylyanska, Cora Schwartz started writing. She has a retreat, which offers a peaceful setting for women to work on their writing. Now Cora wants to bring Olha Kobylyanska to the USA and introduce her to American readers. So Cora Schwartz sponsored the publication of the translation of this short story. We are especially grateful to this woman, who believes that even one candle can light the darkness and tries to keep her candle burning.



She was in her twenties and tall.
Although a Ruthenian\* from head to foot, she had reddish hair uncommon among Ruthenians. Her features revealed nobility, and her main characteristic was melancholy, a constant reminder of her miserable people. Her eyes, large, a little motionless, and misty, were sad even when she was smiling. It was because of her eyes that she was called the "Ruthenian Madonna". Having grown up in solitude, in almost splendid luxury, she didn't know life at all, none of its dark sides. She knew it only from her books, which she read voraciously.

Tolstoy was her deity. She knew Shevchenko almost by heart. Idle like her people, not really willing to work, she lived like exotic plants in greenhouses that can see the outside storms only in their dreams; and she dreamed a great deal.

Her imagination flourished so wildly that it nipped all the other impulses in the bud. Although painfully sensitive, she sneered at her pure "cultivation of feelings and thoughts."

She loved nature above all.

She used to wander in the mountains unarmed and alone. She knew the mountainous outskirts as well as her own room, and she would head for one of the best and wildest nooks of the forest during her summer walkings.

Her strong personality longed for something larger than the "room beauty" and her quiet, pampered life. Intuitively, she felt the storms. At times, her soul passionately desired them. She adored fighting and associated it with magnificent multicolored paintings and violent music sometimes. She was overwhelmed by an incomprehensible thirst for victory, but having grown up in idleness, never encouraged or supported, spoiled, and depraved, her power was asleep and in grief turning into morbid, groundless melancholy.

That is what she was.

She raved about happiness that would come out of diverse satiety.

She waited for it daily looking forward to some distant newness. Her soul was open like a sunflower to something unknown, something...

In the forest moss she used to stretch searching for the sky among the spruce tops.

Beautiful it was.

Sometimes she would follow an eagle's flight and watch a hawk making circles and floating like a black dot in the sky.

She would greedily absorb the sounds of water and turn them into laughter. The ripple of a waterfall falling down from the rocks may remind one of a suppressed laughter. If you listen in...

At times she would plunge into the roaring forest, cover her face with her hands, and imagine that she was lying at the beach.

The waves of the sea must rage like a spruce forest, exactly the same ... perhaps a little louder.

She longed to find herself just once at the sea to experience a storm, the sunrise or a moonlit night. That must be another kind of beauty, different from the mountains, turbulent, changeable, attractive, splendid. The solid and gloomy peace of the mountains aroused sadness and kindled thirst for beauty, but couldn't quench it.

She would dream about the fiords up in the highlands, in the North... A Hutsul's\* sad thought could be heard here and there in the forest, and it made her extremely delighted.

In the caves among steep rocks an echo was heard. She imagined it as a huge bird unconsciously battering on the solid rock walls and finally falling exhausted to the ground. After that, there was silence.

Sometimes she would cry of sorrow.

A storm ravaged among the spruces and shook them, and it made them even stronger. The prouder did they raise their tops the next morning and bathe them in the golden sunrays. They deserved to stretch up to the clouds and be proud.

She liked strength, yet!..

Once a mountain horse was brought for her father to examine.

It was a magnificent, slender stallion, black as coal jet, with an arched neck, large nostrils, protruding bright eyes, exuberant tail almost reaching to the ground.

She stood at the window and watched it rearing unwilling to be tamed. A handsome, young Hutsul she had seen quite often in her father's office was holding the animal trying, unsuccessfully, to get it stand still so as to see the hooves.

Suddenly she was overwhelmed by a desire to tame the animal. Her eyes flashed and her tender nostrils quivered. She felt some strong wish and was urged outside.

She rushed into the yard bareheaded, the way she was inside.

As she approached the animal, it began to rear and frightened her so much that her knees started trembling and she turned pale.

A few minutes later, she was lying feeble in an armchair. Her beautiful, pale, ring-trimmed hands were raving motionless on her black lace dress.

Alas! What happened to her? That was a ridiculous flash, an unexpected burst of plebeian instincts, which had no future because of her pampered life.

She made a fool of herself in front of the servants.

Her lips set in an ironic sneer.

Or is nature impossible to overcome?

Her grandmother on her father's side was actually a Hutsulka\*. Beautiful, but still a peasant! They are all prone to undistinguished surges when those instincts break through and no dam can stop them.

Her mother was a noble lady, with refined manners and strict habits, her beauty was far from accidental. It was elaborated upon by generations. She certainly had her mother's disposition, the echoes of her grandmother's unrest could have been only dissonance.

She wasn't really that interested in the horse.

She wanted to have a look at the man standing nearby. Once she decided to draw him. His features were purely Slavic, but they also had something highbred. It was something appealing, compelling, something that attracted her attention. She actually saw him walk by her window on his way to her father's office. She wanted to descry his eyes and lips from a close. Only once, then she could draw him from her memory.

Thus, there were moments when she felt capable of doing something important, strained like a bow about to let an arrow, but they didn't last long. She got tired and became lazy. Expectations tormented and annoyed her. She would turn to nature at such moments. Here she derived her strength and patience. Here she celebrated her triumph climbing a high dangerous peak, a steep



rock, looking at an eagle from a close: his sparkling, hostile, black eves, his watchful bowed head.

She especially cherished autumn, not the one with wet, cloudy days, yellowish leaves, and cold storms, but the one like spring. The one when the days were clear and warm, and pure blue were the skies. In the mountains the autumn is always wonderful.

The wild Carpathians\*! She knew their proud, mysterious beauty as well as their wonderful inhabitants, Hutsuls. She knew all the secrets of the forest.

In September, a web stretches from tree to tree almost endlessly shining in the sun; and the forest stands silent. The streams are bickering solemnly and quickly, and the water is cold; flowers do not blossom at their banks.

It's a bit different in the valley.

The air seems full of aster fragrance, and everything is wrapped in slight sadness.

It is the melancholy that leaves its traces everywhere. It is the beauty that fascinates her, feeds her soul, and finds its reflections in her large waiting eyes...

The storm had just stopped.

The sun was setting down; the sky was cloudy and light red only in the west.

The mountains veiled by mist stood out dark blue.

A new Hutsul cabin perched on one of these forested mountains. It was sheltered by the hands of thick spruces that shook their tops ruefully and raindrops fell silently on the moss.

Everything was calm; only some remote woods were rustling like suppressed sea waves.

The last rays of a sunset forced their way through the dense forest, danced for a while on twigs like golden shadows before pitch dark fell on the forest.

The door opened and the young Hutsul appeared on the threshold with an axe cast jauntily on his shoulder. He peered thoughtfully into the darkness before him.

He was as tall, supple, and robust as any of his fellowmen, and he had an extremely handsome face: gloomy, a bit tender round his mouth, and Slavic in the upper part, that is a little wide, but it didn't spoil his looks.

His black hair was cut at the eyebrow level as was common and covered his forehead.

His clothes outlined the beauty of his body.

Red pants, a snow-white shirt with an embroided collar and sleeves that revealed strong, muscular arms. His chest, neck, and hands were embellished with silver and copper chains and crosses. A broad multi-coloured belt was trimmed with rings and coins and had a smoking pipe and some tools attached to it.

He peered attentively into a cave that was emitting white foggy clouds, which capped the treetops like old rags.

No matter how long he watched, he couldn't find his thoughts in this green abyss. Clouds mantled the abyss one by one, until finally the last rays of the sun disappeared behind the mountains.

He spitted vexingly, headed for the spruce lying next to the hut, and with all strength threw his axe into it. Then he sat down on the log, leaned forward, and covered his face with his hands.

Some evil forces besieged him...

And that evil spirit was a beautiful red-haired witch he had come across in the forest. Is she a witch? He told her that she resembled the image of God's Mother that hung in the church, but nevertheless! Nevertheless, she is not God's Mother.

God's Mother doesn't have red hair. God's Mother doesn't make a fool of the man she tempts. God's Mother is saint. Yet she is...!

Three days ago it happened, and he has been totally out of his mind since then.

He even dreams of her at night. The blood rushes madly through his veins; hammers beat within his head, and in his eyes sparks flash.

That witch is not God's Mother. That beautiful, magnifying red-haired witch.

How much he loves her, how much he misses her. He is sick with sorrow, he is about to cry like a boy, he is ready to kill her, because she is nowhere around! Why can't he find her anywhere? Why?

It began in sadness but ended so splendidly...

That is how it happened.

First, the poberezhnyk\* charged him for breaking the forest law, because he had cut a spruce without permission (the rotten one he now sat on). He had to pay a fine for that and stay in prison for 48 hours, they said for the offense of the guards.

There is still a picture alive in his memory.

His excuses didn't help. He needed some wood for a shepherd's hut where he stayed in the summer with his mother and took care of his herds of sheep and horses. He had run out of fathom wood and badly needed some, so he cut down the tree, just one in that primeval forest.

He certainly got angry when the pany\* skipped over his excuses and only allowed him to answer their questions. He was willing to pay a double fine in order not to be put in prison, because his mother was up there with hundreds of sheep and horses, she couldn't watch all of them at once, moreover take them to water. She couldn't ride a horse any more like she used to, especially his stallion, the only one the other horses followed. She was an old woman and only did a little cooking and spinning for him. They should have understood this!..

The pany just smiled at each other. When he repeated his request with more obstinacy, stamped his foot, and glared proudly and arrogantly at them, they went berserk.

They called him a proud eagle and said he should be put in a cage, that he had broken the Cisar's\* law, that he would not believe in God soon, because he had hundreds of sheep and horses...

He gnashed his teeth madly.

They even mentioned the Cisar! And Heavenly Father! Didn't he go to church every Sunday? As to the Cisar, he is so removed and can't see what's going on here because of one tree. Beggars...all those pany. Slaves who served... They wanted to offend him, an only son, the richest Hutsul.

He got to tell them everything straight into their eyes and had to spend his forty-eight hours in prison.

He wouldn't touch the food they gave him. Let them keep it for themselves, he thought, that food made them thin as rails, pale, ugly.

But later they set him free...Oh, God!..

Still that wasn't the main thing, and he didn't even want to think about it.

After all that, he hastened through the town, where it was hot and dusty, and crawling with people; as soon as he stepped on the road that led home and shivered from the usual forest freshness, his anger towards those men down there in the valley vanished. He no longer needed to hurry, he wasn't being followed by anyone who could force him to go back!..

To the left of the mountainous road he was going along there was a verdant abyss, to the right a high wall of a rocky thickly forested mountain. A few hundreds steps ahead of him, right on the edge of the abyss, there was a huge stone that had cleaved from the rocky forested mountain one wild spring night and lay like a spot for wanderers to rest.

There he sat for a while to smoke his pipe.

He wasn't sitting long. From the abyss next to the stone, a girl was climbing up. She gripped the fern near the stone with her strong hand, rose up, and straightened right in front of him.

She wasn't a peasant. This he noticed at once. A red kerchief covered her head, its ends tied back, her face and neck were bare. Her face was white as snow and beautiful, her eyes were shining and extremely sad.

They gazed at each other in silence for a while.

"God bless you, pani\*," he said at last timidly and stood up.

"Bless you," she replied in a voice that was a little tired and nodded as if she knew him... Then she pulled the silk kerchief off her head, wiped her sweaty forehead, passed him by slowly, and went on climbing the abrupt mountainous path.

He followed her.

Tall and slender she was, her hips moved gracefully as she walked.

Thick red-fair braids, unplaited at the ends, streamed down her shoulders.

"Oh, Heavenly Father, red hair," he thought, "like a witch. None of the girls in the village have such hair. All of them are dark-haired. They must be missing him a lot! It's been almost a month since I left the village, and none of 'em comes up here!"

He burst out laughing suddenly. The girl in front of him turned around with a startled look.

"Where are you going?" he asked as he caught up with her. "To the forest."

She glanced at him askance, opened her mouth as if wanted to say something, but was silent. A slightly perceptible smile appeared on her sad face. He looked her over with confusion for a while, then went on looking forward, half dolefully and half thoughtfully, after that asked.

"Are you from down there, from the town?"

"Certainly."

"There are many beautiful houses there as well as people. The town's big. In our village only the priest has a big house. We don't need 'em." "Why don't you all live in big houses?" she asked.

"Why? We ain't pany, are we? Those down there are."

"That town down there is very small," she mentioned wisely.
"There are cities hundreds times bigger."

He whistled out of surprise, shook his head and looked around. "Pani!"

"Don't call me pani, I'm not married."

"You don't have a pan\*?"

She shook her head, her large eyes watched his lips.

"You can get one in the town, there are as many of 'em as drones. Marry an official!"

She shook her head again, meanwhile a noticeable smile touched her lips.

"Why not? Perhaps if you don't obey 'im or say something not to his liking, he can lock you up for 48 hours, too. That is something they can do well. I'm just coming back from 'em."

Without waiting for her response he indignantly told her about his adventure.

She looked at him attentively all the time. When he stopped talking and in a while cursed the pany down there, she started laughing quietly.

"Why are you laughing? It ain't funny."

"You should understand the matter, good fellow," she said solemnly.

"Have I gone crazy or eaten poisonous mushrooms? Rather those down there than me!" he replied.

"Neither those down there, nor those up there. You've misunderstood them. You think with your heart, they think with their heads. They think according to the law and will prove to the slightest detail that you didn't have the right to cut that spruce down, even though the forest is so vast. You see it differently, however. You should always use your common sense."

He spat far through his teeth.

"Damn 'em! They are all knaves, all those pany! God created the forest for all people. They can't deny it and would never convince me, no matter how big pany they are and that they can write and read. Misfortune struck me that I was caught because of an unlucky moment when I was cutting that spruce."

"There aren't any lucky or unlucky moments", she said.

"Huh-uh", he objected.

"You had better trust me. If you had studied, you wouldn't say such absurd things."

His eyes sparkled.

"You think that if you can read and write, you have a hold on God's feet? There are also saints. I don't deny that those people who study are smart. That is absolutely true; but those people are also malicious."

"Well, sometimes that may be true. But don't think that ignorance makes people better."

"What do I know?" he said. "Everyone is the way God created im, everyone lives according to his fate, and everyone dies when his time has come. However smart I may be, I have to die when God wants me to."

"Sure, nothing can be done about it."

"You see? If they are so clever, so kind, why don't you marry one of 'em?"

He looked at her malevolently.

"That is something else. That is something I may want or not want. I don't really like either of them. I'm a very wealthy person! I have all of them under my thumb."

"Just like the girls in my village," he said proudly under his breath. "I'm also wealthy; our people say 'the greatest wealthy man'. All the girls are crazy about me."

She laughed.

He frowned furiously.

"Why are you always laughing?"

"I am not laughing at you."

He calmed down.

"It's true," he said, "if you're a wealthy peasant, you can laugh at everyone. And I laugh at everyone. I care for no one."

"Would you laugh at me?" she asked playfully, probably under the influence of some inner voice, and stared at his face.

"At you?"

He looked at her, almost scared; then smiled, his face turned a little pink.

"Well, it's different," he said.

"Why?"

"I don't know... but you are like, like..."

"Like what?" she asked solemnly.

"Like... I don't know... like the icon of God's Mother in our church."

She laughed again, not very sincerely, but still; then they both became silent.

They walked in silence for some time.

He was handsome and sturdy-built, and she admired him as she had done before.

Once she wondered what it would be like if he loved a girl. Then she remembered suddenly, she didn't know why, the phrase, "to be embraced by a strong arm".

Physical force and body beauty meant a lot to her, and although she rarely loved anybody, she liked beautiful, robust people. When she felt tired, she longed for the need to rest on somebody's breast. But that somebody had to be strong and courageous. Courageous above all.

Her pace slowed.

They had been walking fast for a long time. He could guess by her deep breath and slight blush on her face that she was tired. "You must be tired," he said, "you can't match me. I have been walking too fast."

"Right," she answered with fatigue.

He started to walk very slowly.

"You speak our tongue so eloquently," he started again.

"I'm Ruthenian as well as you are. Wait a minute. I'm tired. When I walk too fast, my heart starts pounding frantically and thousands of sparkles flash in my eyes."

She pressed on her temples with both hands.

He stood before her. They looked at each other for a while; flames seemed to burst in their eyes and merge into a fire.

They both lowered their eyes.

She looked around scared: was it the same forest she knew so well?

Of course, it was. The same dark green abyss, the same rocky mountain there on the right covered with spruces, slender like candles with tender white birches among them, thick ferns growing out from moss, and delicate bell-flowers here and there... The forest was rustling quietly, unanimously.

A vague coldness invaded her body. A strange bird cried nearby; she shuddered in alarm.

"Are you scared?" he asked confused.

"Only today. Actually never."

"So you come here every day? What are you afraid of today?"

"I don't know... I feel less lonely when I'm alone in the forest."

"Why's that?"

"I don't know...don't know...really."

"What do you do here?"

"Nothing. Just come here. Well, sometimes I paint spruces. Usually I listen to the rustling forest. It rustles like the sea, only much weaker. You don't know how the sea raves...I have never heard it myself, but I know how it raves...Listen here!"

They held their breath and listened. Their hearts could be heard pounding.

She looked around again worried... She had never felt so queer and lonely; it seemed the wild greenery of the forest would smother her.

"Don't be afraid... I'm here in the forest... Don't look back...

It's a bad omen," his voice had a strange suppressed tone.

They went on walking silently and almost quickly up the steep road.

Strong determination touched her lips, her eyelids were lowered. Her long dark eyelashes could be seen clearly against her snow-white face.

"The sun will soon set behind the mountains," he broke the silence while quickly brushing the hair from his forehead. He got hot.

"When I started for the woods, it struck three. We have been walking for good two hours, so it could be five in the town."

While saying this, her lips almost trembling, she produced a small watch out of her silk belt, paused, and stared at it.

"Oh, you have a watch? Golden. Show it to me!"

He leaned closer to her. They both peered at the small gold thing.

"It runs as if it had a soul of its own," he said. "Those people who can make this must be very smart... Oh, Heavenly Father... You must be very rich if you have such a watch. Is your dad a top pan? Who are you?"

She smiled again.

"You don't know who I am?"

"No."

"But you saw me...think!"

"I have never seen you!"

"Try to remember."

"But I'm telling you!"

"Well...when you brought your handsome horse to the lawyer's yard and were forcing him to stay still, I came out...Do you remember?"

He thought for a while.

"I don't know," he drawled amazed, "I didn't see you...someone did come out...I can recollect that...but that was someone in a black dress...I can't remember your face."

She turned away from him and smiled.

"If you don't know who I am, never mind; I saw you often, very often!"

"You are mocking me again!"

"No."

"So who are you?"

"Why do you care? Well," she added suddenly with a melancholic senile, "I'm the one who has no luck...you know...in certain things."

"A rich woman who has no luck?" he said doubtfully and laughed. "Someone may have taken it away from you, it does happen sometimes ... But you are young...," he said and came closer, so that the brim of his hat grazed the hair on her forehead.

She glanced at him, and at that moment hot flames swept her face.

"That is true...I'm young...And how old are you?"

"I'll be twenty and six by Dmytriy's Day. I..."

Suddenly he stopped. He felt the blush on his face. Their eyes sparkling, they stared at each other.

"You!" he said in a trembling voice.

"What's that?" she answered almost inaudibly. She lowered her eyes.

"You are beautiful," he said, his voice changed and was now very low.

Her body started trembling slightly.

She raised her eyes again. His face turned pale as if the last blood drop had flowed away from it, and it showed that he was deeply touched. His eyes were glistening. A forced smile touched her lips. She couldn't stand his look. She was suddenly seized by some strange feeling, and tears rolled into her eyes. She stepped far back from him, to the very edge of the abyss, and said quickly:

"Let's move on!"

They walked further into the forest, where it was getting quieter; only the voice of a loquacious stream broke the silence. She walked fast along the brink of the abyss bending easily under spruce branches hanging over the road. He asked her extremely moved, "So you like it here in the forest?"

"I do."

"Why? There is nothing you can see here."

"Because I can't see here what I usually see."

"If that is true, then come up there to the highland with me; you are sure to like it more; not a soul comes there, except for my daddy on holidays. I have been staying there with my mother for two months, and no one has visited us so far. Would you?"

"Are you the only child in your family?" she asked him paying no attention to his words.

"Of course, I am; so will you come?"

"That is impossible!"

"Why?"

"Because it is impossible."

"cause you don't want to?"

She was silent.

"cause you don't want to. Are you listening?"

"Oh, you have such wishes!"

She hardly gave a smile, but her eyes showed she was deeply stirred.

"Look here," she said, "how dense the trees are here, the air is so damp; you can't even see the sky... Oh, my God!"

"You are afraid!"

She shook her head and looked at him, her eyes shining strangely. She still didn't want to go back, she didn't know why. Yet she was far from the thought to stay with him... She suddenly realized that her will was no longer free... How stupid she was just two hours ago!

"Don't walk so close to the edge, you can fall off!" She didn't answer.

"Do you hear me? Oh, you are so afraid of me! I won't do you any harm. And I don't need your watch. Come closer; 'ere is my chain with a cross on it, it is more valuable than your watch. Come 'ere, I'll give it to you!.. I could give you even more... Even my black horse with a carved saddle... Just come with me!"

She seemed not to hear. She kept quickly climbing up, evidently with difficulty, her face blushing and her eyes shining bright. The forest was becoming thicker, wilder. The road, steeper and higher, was leading straight to the polonyna\*. She would get there. Up there, by all means, and then she would turn back.

She could see him gasping and tensed as he walked silently next to her...

Finally, they reached the top of the mountain.

A terrific picture stretched out before them.

Gigantic mountain peaks covered with woods, dark blue abysses, glades, lush polonynas, all washed in a blue haze. And it wasn't very far from them. No, it was quite close, one mountain crawling upon another, separated only by chasms; the clear blue sky above all this.

Everything was mighty and grand... This space filled with gorgeous colours, this opulent, lush, almost dark green vegetation...

There was only silence, loneliness, and uproar of the forest around.

Overcome by this splendid beauty she stood there for a while; she seemed to have forgotten that he was near her.

He sat on the ground next to her. It was evident he didn't notice this beauty around them, he could see only her.

She stood in front of him and was so tall and slender, so amazingly pretty!

It seemed to him that due to the sunshine her gorgeous body was radiating through her light transparent robes. He could clearly see her shapes and lines, he could feel her as you can feel a scent of a fantastic plant. The blood rushed madly through his veins.

She suddenly turned her head and fixed her shining wideopen eyes on him. Why was he sitting there so silent?

"It is so beautiful here," she admitted, half confused, half sad, looking around.

"That's true, but sit down!"

"Oh, no, I have to go."

"Go? Why?"

He said it almost unconsciously.

"Yes!"

"How come?"

"I have to!"

"Sit down for a while!"

"I don't want to!"

"Why not?"

"Because..."

"Come on!"

It sounded like an order.

A willfulness that does not allow any fear rose in her. She smiled and whispered, "What if I have no wish?"

Boldness, cold as ice, appeared on his face. He knelt on one knee, grasped her slender body with both hands, and pulled her closer...

"You are so beautiful... so beautiful!" he said in a suppressed voice.



When he touched her, it seemed that something mysterious like an electric current passed from him to her, thousands of flames burst in her. Yet she felt like fighting.

"What are you thinking about, what do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Then let me go."

"You are so beautiful, so beautiful!"

Wild excitement seized her. Her breast was rising high, and her heart almost split. She felt something was destroying her resistance as he was pulling her closer to him.

"Good man, let me go!"

She tried to fight him for a while, silently, almost instinctively. His eyes were burning, and he was as pale as a corpse. He didn't let her go.

"I'm asking you... you see... begging you...," he whispered over and over again. "You are so beautiful, so beautiful..."

The world started to spin, she couldn't talk anymore.

He knelt and embraced her body with his hands and held her tight as if with claws. He hid his face passionately in the folds of her dress while pulling her slowly and forcefully to the ground.

She lost all her will...

A slight uncertain smile crossed her snow-white face that was bending lower and lower, and giving in to some unknown force she fell to the ground slowly like a broken palm, almost unconsciously...

The dazzling sun, as if drunk with victory, glittered splendidly in the west, and tender, fair clouds around it turned into bright red flames.

That was all!..

Now he is sitting here, as if incited just for fun, missing her badly!

He, the richest, the best, the one all the girls in the village are wild for, he is grieving in vain!

It has never happened to him before. He gnashes his teeth and hits his fist on the tree.

She is so beautiful, so very beautiful!

He has just seen her in a short dream. But he can't remember it clearly; he can only remember her leaning closely to him and making the sun shine inside him. She laughed as quietly as she had done when he had told her all the girls were crazy about him. She made him climb so high, where a man feels dizzy.

"You have to look for me," she told him casually, and these words were imprinted very well in his memory, even the tone of her voice. This morning, he mounted his wild horse, and as if he were crazy, he rode up the road they had walked along together.

She could have been sitting somewhere painting spruces and listening to the roaring forest.

But he didn't find her.

Once, he heard something that sounded like a man walking in the forest. He held his breath, listening attentively, standing still like a tiger on alert... But it was only a deer, and his horse got scared and almost jumped into the abyss... That is all his ride was about.

Everything was so beautiful that day like the sun at noon. He wants it to be so beautiful again. He loves her... Yes, now it's his turn to go crazy!

He laughs, but his heart is filled with bitter tears...

Then she left with a look in her eyes as if the world had changed for her, as if she had become a different person. She was white as snow, and her large sad eyes shone so strangely... Oh, Good Lord!

"Do you love me?" he asked her.

She didn't answer at once, but said after a while with a tired laugh, "No."

"Oh, you do love me!"

"Maybe!"

"Why "maybe"?"

"Because...because it's something different."

Was she mocking him, that is why she didn't come again? Or won't she come again at all?

That was impossible!

The village girls came more than once if they loved someone, for instance, him! He shook his grand head proudly and impatiently, and a suppressed, angry cry broke from his lips.

Yes, he was going mad...

He felt his soul was broken into pieces that no longer fit together. He hardly ever looked after his horses and hardly ever took them to water.

What should he do?

What should he do to see her and have her again?

But if he gets her again, she will have to go up with him voluntarily or not. She must. He wants it.

He will be with her alone. She does not like to be alone. She can listen to the rustling forest from morning till night; no one will disturb her. He will come to her, because she will be his, but strangers...

He frowned angrily.

If anyone only dared, he would fall into the abyss with his head broken, and even eagles would never find him.

Hutsuls are not the people to trifle with about love.

She would be happy with him.

Up there he would bring all the quilts his mother kept in a chest for him. All the bright silk kerchiefs, silk cloths, silver coins, multicoloured, splendid wool belts, all the textiles, snow white shirts, skins of the bears he had killed himself, all the embroided sheepskin coats — he would bring everything up there and lap her in it.

He would give her his black horse decorated with silver and a carved saddle he got from his grandfather, because it goes without saying that she wouldn't walk. A real Hutsulka never does that.

But if the horse wished to rear as he liked to do near every bridge, that would be his last hour! He would shoot him right away the way he did with a golden-maned mare some pan once gave him to bring to the polonyna. He wanted to clean the wound in her hoof, and she kicked him in his side so hard that he had to stay at home as if he were a cripple. He did pay for her later, perhaps even paid too much, but she got what she deserved!

Yes, he is gentle, when he's gentle... but when he's brutal!..

He ran his hands through his hair and scratched his forehead thinking of how to find her.

He would think of something.

He still had her red silk kerchief that had fallen off her belt and she had forgotten to pick it up. How it was scented! Only God knows what herbs it was lying next to. He would take it to an old Hutsul sorceress. She could help him if nothing else worked. But now he doesn't want to deal with witches, he wants to think of something on his own.

The door of the house opened and his mother came out to call him in for supper.

"I'm not hungry," he replied gloomily with his head down.

"God bless you, my dear son," she answered in a grave voice. "I'm afraid you are coming down with some kind of ailment. May Jesus stop it! May good saints kill it."

Her face very sad, she touched his forehead and wanted to look into his eyes.

He evaded her worried, seeking eyes.

"You see?" his mother said with triumphant bitterness. "Some evil eye looked at you down there! God will pay them for it. Let me suck all the evil out of your forehead."

And while kissing him, she sucked the spell out.

"That is better. I'll put out the coal again later and smoke the house with herbs. Oh," she complained, "it was an unlucky moment

when you cut this tree. Came back home sick, your head down. Don't touch your reed and hardly eat. Saints will kill the evil and turn it to your enemies. Come on, let's go inside... Why are you 'ere, with an axe?"

"I wanna go to the forest."

"Why?"

"I wanna cut down another spruce. "

"Have you gone mad? God forbid you!" she said frightened. "Wanna go to prison again and get sick? Leave it, dear, leave it. You are still under an evil spell, you are not cleansed yet."

"I will go, Mom, I have to," he answered gloomily, he lowered his head and covered his face with both hands. "I," he said next, "wanna make another fence for the sheep, next to the summer cabin. One may get sick, then you would look after it, while I'm in the forest with the others and the horses. I'll do it, Mom. But this time I'll get down to the river where I fish trout and cut a spruce down there. The forest is thicker there than anywhere else and the sound of my axe will be lost. I'll cut a tree down close to the ground and cover the stub with moss. I'll make boards right on the spot and throw wood chips into the water. Then let them sue me! I'm not afraid!"

He pronounced the last words with gloomy determination and got up.

"And now I'm going, Mom. Take care and don't expect me before midnight."

"If it's so urgent, then go," mother said sadly, "but it would be better if you stayed home. The weather can still change; it hasn't completely cleared up today."

"No. It won't rain again today. There is the sunset blinking over there, and the moon is full tonight!"

"God be with you. I'll put supper away for you, and till you come I'll be spinning and praying for you."

He went quickly down a steep forested mountain stirring up dry twigs and wood pieces lying on the road with his foot. The forest was plunged into silence broken only by the sound of his quick footsteps or the curses he blurted out from time to time when he took a wrong step.

"I'll get her!" he thought with ominous joy.

"I'll go down to the river and cut the biggest spruce right there where the forest is thin and where people come. Then someone will go and complain to the pany down there; they'll want to imprison me for forty eight hours again; and I'll go to the lawyer and will hang around until she comes!

Maybe she is his daughter?.. No. She was just kidding when she said she had often seen him there! Why didn't he see her? And why did he see the lawyer's wife? That sharp ugly pani that was constantly looking at his feet when she walked into the study and he was there. It couldn't be her mother ... She couldn't belong there, she must be somebody else's... She speaks Ruthenian, while her mother spoke only God knows what kind of awful tongue. He hates her. There is only one thing he knows. He'll be staying at the lawyer's until she comes, then he'll follow her... and she'll have to be his."

He didn't care about other things, he didn't think of them.

He was walking faster and faster. It wasn't far from his goal. Through the thinning forest he could already see the waves of a mountain river twinkling in the moonlight. Just a few more steps and he would be there.

There was a river flowing in front of him, right next to the mountain; it had risen because of the thunderstorm, and large white waves rolled and glimmered sadly under the moonlight.

He stood leaning against a spruce and looked far ahead.

A whole ridge of mountains, more beautiful and sorrowful than ever, stretched before his eyes. Lit with the magic moonlight and millions of stars it was as beautiful as in a fairy-tale. Could he see and hear the majestic beauty of nature? He was used to the gorgeous look of the mountains from childhood, he knew light as day, quiet, silent summer nights, because he had stayed awake more than once looking after his horses; but still... But still, while he was looking beyond the mountain tops covered with blue clouds, unknown sorrow squeezed his soul!

Here, by his feet, there were waves rocking and muttering something sad, and their sounds made him... cry. He felt so unhappy, so lonely that he couldn't help singing... A real child of his people, he looked for relief in singing.

A sorrowful thought floated far and wide into the silence and blended with the beauty of the clear night into splendid harmony.

He tossed his hat to the ground as if it were a cradle of his sad thoughts.

As he was walking here, he tied her kerchief around his neck. A strong fragrance that the kerchief was emitting, which he had noted, made him see her standing live in front of him. Grief and strong desire for her rose in him.

He turned his back to the river.

The closest spruce on the bank received his first hit. The hits were slow and even, then grew in speed and strength. He worked for more than an hour without stopping. He was obsessed with some kind of fever. He was constantly thinking of her. She was standing in front of him so vividly in her tempting beauty and with all her words and smiles, as if he had experienced everything again.

How beautiful, how very beautiful she was!

And that dream in addition to everything!

He still remembered that dream. He wished he could feel her next to him again, her soft warm body...

"You have to look for me!" he heard suddenly near him. He got startled and stopped chopping. The next moment again, "You have to look for me!"

Yes, that was her voice... Her voice!

Before he gained conscience, the spruce started creaking and rocking and would have hit him while falling if he hadn't jumped aside on time. He was scared as he had never been before, his hair stood on end.

What was it?

He turned around and peered into the water... That is where he had heard the words, so loud and distinct.

There was no commotion. The waves were rolling one after another, not very fast, but not very slowly, new ones all the time. The spruce fell into the water, where the waves raised it up slowly and carried away majestically and quietly.

The rest of the forest was very quiet as if waiting for something... The tree on the bank, no, the whole forest was there as if to see something.

The waves glittered in the moonlight, and above them stretched bluish, cloudy shapes. No, no, they were everywhere; they had come together as if they wanted to strangle and overcome everything.

He shivered with some crazy fear, and he wanted to roar like a beast, but suddenly remembered of God. He crossed himself once, twice, three times, many times. Then as if some ultimate inner force ordered him, he pulled the silk kerchief from his neck, rumpled it in his hand, then threw it into the water.

He started to understand everything now.

She is a witch... a witch! Oh, Saint God's Mother!.. Oh, all the Saints!

What did he do? With whom did he engage himself?

Crazy hatred towards her overwhelmed him.

He could have killed her, strangled her, squeezed her like a dog, like a worm... And suddenly he solves one puzzle after another as quickly as lightening.

No wonder she had red hair.

No wonder she smelled of herbs. No wonder she was so beautiful and resembled God's Mother. That was how she could charm him!

No wonder she was loitering in the forest. Would a true Christian go to the forest to listen to its roar?

And why didn't she want to tell him who she was? And how could she have been in the yard then, if he couldn't remember her face?

And ... she didn't have luck! Only those completely cursed by God don't have it... God gives little happiness to everyone. She wanted to steal his luck from him. Ha-ha-ha!

"You have to look for me!" she hissed in his dream. Of course, look for her. That is why he came here following her voice only God knows where to lose his way and fall into her family's claws, so his happiness would pass to her! Why did she ask him if he was an only child? Because an only child is especially happy. Why didn't she promise she would come again if she was really a girl and a Christian child? Why wasn't she afraid when she was alone in the forest? And she was pretending to be afraid for him.

When he told her that there was nothing to see in the forest, she said in the forest she could see something she didn't see every day. She leered at him with her large, flashing, bewitching eyes, until he got mad!

May lightening strike her! May it strike her and destroy all the traces of hers from the Earth. Oh, may she turn to a stone, or wild horses tear her to pieces, or may the earth swallow her, may she fall off a high cliff and disappear into the earth!..

.....

He has almost completely calmed down.

He is walking homewards and is so sober as he "used to be before" and can't help laughing. Another lightening dawned upon him. All this had to happen because he moved to his new cabin up there without blessing it first!

Tomorrow he will go to a priest.

1887

### Glossary

Carpathians, the Carpathian mountains – mountains in Central Europe, part of which is situated in western Ukraine.

Cisar – n. The emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Hutsul – n. A member of a Ukrainian people inhabiting the Carpathian region. adj. Of or relating to this people.

Hutsulka - a female form of Hutsul.

Pan – n. 1) a form of address to a man in some countries in Eastern Europe (e.g. Ukraine, Poland); 2) a wealthy, noble man.

Pani – n. 1) a form of address to a married woman in some countries in Eastern Europe (e.g. Ukraine, Poland); 2) a wealthy, noble woman.

Pany - the plural form of pan.

Poberezhnyk – n. A forest warden.

Polonyna - n. A meadow high in the mountains.

Ruthenian – adj. Ukrainians living in the Carpathian region and Bukovyna often called themselves Ruthenians and their language Ruthenian.

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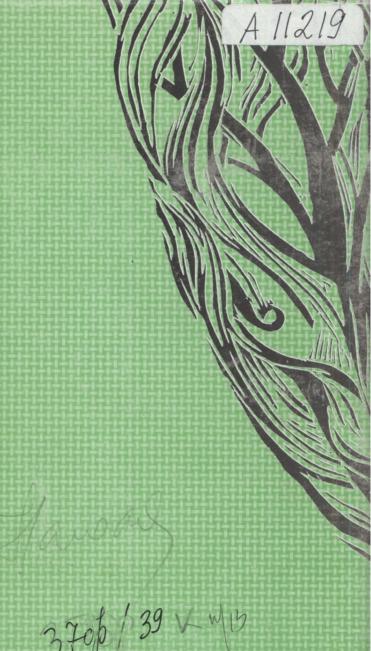
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