



**IVAN FRANKO**

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**ZAKHAR BERKUT**

A Picture of Life in Thirteenth-Century  
Carpathian Ruthenia

*Translated from the Ukrainian  
by MARY SKRYPNYK*

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**ІВАН ФРАНКО**

**ЗАХАР БЕРКУТ**

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## I

Sad and unfriendly now is our Tukhlia countryside. True, the Striy and the Opir \* rivers continue to wash its gravelly and verdant banks, spring continues to cover its meadows with grasses and blossom, and the golden mountain eagle — berkut — floats and wheels through its pure, azure skies as in days of yore. But how everything else has changed! The forests, the villages and the people! The dense, impassable forests that had long ago covered almost the entire area, except for the higher mountain meadows, and descended to the very shores of the rivers, were now melted like snow under sunlight; sparse, diminished, or even vanished altogether, leaving behind bald patches. In other spots all that was left were the scorched remains of stumps among which, here and there, a timid and forlorn fir raised its branches, or even a more forlorn little juniper bush. Where long ago silence reigned, no voice was heard, except perhaps the call of the shepherd's *trembita* \*\* on some far-off meadow, or the roar of the wild aurochs or stag in the thickets — now the mountain meadows are filled with the cries of the ox-drivers and the ravines and gullies resound to the hallooming of the woodcutters, sawmill workers and

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\* The Opir and Striy — tributaries of the Dniester River crossing Carpathian northern slopes

\*\* *trembita* — mountain horn — a folk wind instrument of Ukrainian mountaineers in the form of a long wooden horn two or three metres long

shinglers who without pause, like indestructible maggots, gnawed away and brought down the beauty of the Tukhlia hills — the centuries-old pines and firs — either sending their trimmed logs down the swift-flowing rivers to new steam sawmills or cutting them up into boards and shingles right on the spot.

But it's the people who have changed most of all. At a glance it might seem that "culture" had developed among them, but in reality it was their number that had grown. There were more villages and hamlets, more cottages, but at the same time there was greater poverty and misery among them. The people were wretched, low-spirited and depressed, timid and awkward in the presence of strangers. Each one cares only for himself, not realizing that this attitude dissolves their strength, weakens their community. That's not the way it used to be at one time. Though there were fewer people, but what a people they were! How life seethed in these mountains among these impenetrable forests at the foot of the mighty Zelemin! \* For centuries on end an evil fate had dealt cruelly with these people. Its heavy blows had undermined their well-being, poverty had broken their free, stalwart spirit, and today only vague, misty recollections of the happier life of their ancestors are recalled by their descendants. And when sometimes an old grandmother, sitting by the brick oven spinning the coarse wool, would begin to tell her little grandchildren about the olden days, about the invading attacks of the dog-headed Mongols and about the Tukhlia chieftain Berkut — the children would listen with alarm, tears glistening in their grey eyes. When the wonderful tale was finished,

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\* Zelemin — a mountain in the Carpathians

then both old and young, sighing, would whisper: "Oh, what a beautiful fairy tale!"

"Yes, yes," Granny would nod her head in agreement, "yes, yes, children! For us it is a fairy tale, but once upon a time it was the truth!"

"I wonder if such times will come again?" interrupts one of the older listeners.

"Old people say that one day they will return, but it probably won't happen till just before the end of the world."

Sad and unfriendly now is our land of Tukhlia! The stories of those ancient times and people seem a fairy tale. Today's people, who grew up in poverty and oppression, under thousands of years of slavery and subjugation, do not believe these tales. However, let that be as it may! The imagination of the poet soars into those long past days, brings those ancient people back to life, and those who are pure of heart and have sincere human feelings see in them their brothers, a living people, and in their life, though far removed from ours, find much that could be desirable for our "civilized" times.

It happened in 1241. Spring had arrived to the Tukhlia mountains. One beautiful day the wooded foothills of Zelemin resounded with the sounds of hunter's horns and the shouts of numerous hunters.

It was the new Tukhlia boyar, Tuhar Vovk, conducting a great hunt for big game. He was celebrating the beginning of his new life, for not long ago Prince Danilo \* had granted him vast mountain pastures and a whole side of the Zelemin foothills

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\* Prince Danilo Romanovich (1201-1264) — Prince of Halych and Volhynia; since 1254, King of Halych. An outstanding political figure in medieval Rus who united the Carpathian country, the adjacent territories and Volhynia under his rule.

in Tukhlia. He had come to these mountains and built himself a beautiful house and now, to get acquainted with his boyar neighbours, he was holding his first feast. After the feasting they went into the Tukhlia forests to hunt.

Hunting big game is not play, but difficult sport, often bloody and a matter of life and death. Aurochs, bears and wild boars — all were dangerous opponents; an arrow rarely brought down one of these beasts, and even a javelin aimed at the animal from a short distance did not always help. Therefore the final and decisive weapon was the heavy lance which had to be used against the animal at close quarters by hand, with full strength and at one blow. If the hunter erred in his thrust, then his life was in the greatest peril, especially if he wasn't able, at that moment, to find a safe hiding place and draw his sword or use his heavy battle-axe in his defence.

It wasn't strange, therefore, that Tuhar and his guests set out for the hunt as if to war; provided with a large supply of arrows and javelins, with servants and extra food supplies, and even a sorcerer adept at incantations against wounds. It wasn't surprising either that Tuhar and his guests were arrayed in full battle dress except for their shields, for these would have interfered with their progress through thicket and underbrush. What was surprising, was that Tuhar's daughter Miroslava, refusing to remain behind, had boldly ventured on the hunt with their guests. The Tukhlia folk, seeing her riding to the hunt among the guests, proud and fearless, like a slender poplar among sturdy oaks, followed her with admiring eyes, saying:

"What a maid! She ought to have been born a man, and for sure she'd make a better man than her father!"

And that, to be sure, was no small praise, for Tuhar Vovk was a man like an oak. Broad of shoulder, thickset, with heavy features and coarse black hair, he looked somewhat like one of those savage Tukhlia bears which he was hunting. But his daughter Miroslava was also a maid whose equal would be hard to find. We do not speak here of her beauty, or of her goodness of heart — many of her peers could vie with her in this respect, though few could surpass her. What really placed her above her peers was the natural freedom of her bearing, the unusual strength of her body and her resolute courage — a characteristic of men who had grown up in constant struggle against adverse circumstances. It was immediately obvious that Miroslava had grown up with much freedom, that her upbringing had been masculine, and that in her beautifully-formed maiden body there dwelt a strong and highly-gifted spirit. She was the only child of her father and added to this, had lost her mother at birth. Her nanny, an old peasant woman, had accustomed her to performing all kinds of physical tasks from earliest childhood. When she grew up her father, in order to assuage his loneliness, took her with him everywhere. To gratify her spirited temperament, he taught her the arts of knightly combat, to endure all kinds of discomfort and to fearlessly face all danger. So it was that the greater the difficulties she had to overcome, the more eager she was to overcome them, thus demonstrating her strength of body and her resolute, direct character. Yet with all this Miroslava never ceased to be a woman: gentle and good, quickly sympathetic, modest and shy. All this blended within her in such rare and charming harmony that anyone seeing her once, hearing her speak, forever remem-



bered her face, her walk, her voice, recalling them vividly and clearly during the finest moments of his life, just as spring recalls even to the oldest of old men, his youthful love.

The hunt was already in its third day. Many antlered stags and blackmaned aurochs had been brought down by the boyar spears and arrows. The hunting party had pitched their tents on a grassy meadow above a rushing mountain stream. The smoke of huge open fires curled above them again and again as the steaming kettles hanging over them boiled and the roasting spits broiled the day's kill for the guests. This day, the last of the hunt, was to be devoted to the most important and at the same time the most dangerous action of the event — the bear hunt.

The main lair of the beasts had long been situated on a precipitous hillside separated from the others by a terrible deep gorge overgrown with a heavy growth of thicket, beech and fir and fallen trees and branches. Here, as the young Tukhlia guide and mountaineer, Maxim Berkut, asserted, was the lair of the mother bear. It was from here that these savage beasts terrorized the entire district and the mountain valleys. And though the brave herdsmen were often successful in killing a bear or two with arrows and axes or snare one in a trap where a heavy falling log would break its back, still their number was so great that these efforts did little to bring relief to the neighbourhood. So it was no wonder that when the newly-arrived boyar, Tuhar Vovk, notified the Tukhlia folk that he wished to organize a big bear-hunt and would they supply him with guides, they not only gave him the finest young guide in the Tukhlia highlands, Maxim Berkut, the son of

the Tukhlia chieftain Zakhar, but also of their own volition, provided him with an entire detachment of young lads armed with arrow and spear to help the assembled boyars. All of them together were to surround the bears' den and wipe out the ugly beasts for all time.

At the first hint of dawn the hunters' camp was filled with a great deal of commotion and anxious expectation. The boyars' servants had been busy since midnight, preparing a whole day's food for the guests and filling the drinking flasks with effervescent mead and apple cider. The Tukhlia lads were also getting ready, sharpening their knives and axes, pulling on their strong, animals-hide footwear and filling their knapsacks with roasted meat, flat bread, cheese, and all else that would come in handy during the difficult all-day journey. Maxim Berkut, faced with this very important and difficult task, and who only today felt himself completely in charge of this small army, directed the preparations in all their detail with true leadership and dignity, without hurry, forgetting nothing, and yet not falling behind. All was done in its proper time and place, without fuss and confusion; he was there when he was needed, restoring order where there was chaos. Whether he was among his Tukhlia comrades or among the boyars or the servants, Maxim Berkut was always the same — calm, free in movement and speech, like an equal among equals. His comrades treated him the way he treated them, freely, without constraint, laughing and joking with him, and yet carrying out his orders precisely, quickly and so cheerfully and willingly as if they could have done everything exactly like this without orders. The boyar servants, though far from being of like

nature and much less free in their conduct, more ready to mock and deride some and fawn at others, nevertheless respected Maxim Berkut for his unpretentiousness and good judgement, and while not without some scoffing and joking, did what he told them to do. The boyars, for the most part warriors and men of pride, were not really pleased to have a *smerd* \* in their midst, especially one who seemed to consider himself their equal — did not too obviously show their unwillingness, but carried out the orders of their young guide, and at every step having the opportunity to be convinced that these orders were fully sensible and just what was necessary.

The sun had not yet shown itself above the horizon when the company of huntsmen moved out of the camp. A deep silence reigned over the mountains; the shadows of night still slumbered under the dark green crowns of the firs; the heavy fronds of fringed fern were covered with dew drops; crawling green vines coiled underfoot, tangled among the roots of huge uprooted trunks of trees, and wove into impassable whorls with shrub and thorny bramble bush and garlands of climbing wild hops. A mist rose in gray clouds above the black bottomless pits of the ravines — a sign that small forest streams flowed below. The forest air was saturated with the mist and the scent of resin; it caught at the throat as though broader chests were needed to breathe it freely.

The detachment of hunters silently made its way through the impassable forest, thickets and fallen trees, without a path or a single guiding sign in the gloomy wilderness. Maxim Berkut walked ahead and

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\* *smerd* — a derogatory term implying a “stinking” peasant

after him came Tuhar Vovk and the other boyars. Tuhar's daughter, Miroslava, walked by his side. The Tukhlia lads brought up the rear. All looked about and listened intently as they walked.

The forest began to stir with the coming day. A gaudy-feathered jay sounded raucously in the fir tops, a green woodpecker, clinging to a tree trunk right above the heads of the passers-by, picked at its bark with its steel beak; the bellows of the aurochs and the howling of wolves sounded from distant ravines. The bears at this time of day, having fed, lay in somnolent slumber beneath the upturned tree-trunks on beds of moss. A herd of wild boars grunted somewhere in the gully, cooling themselves in some cold, slimy pool.

For perhaps an hour the company struggled through the difficult, untrodden wilderness. All breathed heavily, barely able to catch enough air into their lungs and all wiped beads of sweat off their faces. Maxim often glanced back to the rear. At first he was opposed that a woman should accompany the men in such a dangerous venture, but Miroslava was adamant. It was the first time she had taken part in such a big hunt and she was determined to participate regardless of the difficulties, especially now that they were approaching the best part of the adventure. Nothing Maxim could say about the perils of the journey, the danger, at its destination, the fierceness of the bears, convinced her to remain behind. "All the better! All the better!" she kept repeating with such confidence and with such a sweet smile that Maxim, as if bewitched, could say no more. Her father, who at first also advised Miroslava to remain in camp was compelled to give in to her pleading in the end. Maxim now gazed in wonderment as this extraordinary woman

overcame all the difficulties of the arduous march equally to the strongest men, at how lightly she leaped over the rotting deadwood and large fallen trees; with what confident strides she walked the edge of the precipices and up the steep cliff-sides, slid between the uprooted trees with such assurance and so indefatigably that it seemed to Maxim that she was rising upwards on magic wings. He watched her and couldn't get enough of watching.

"A strange girl!" he thought time and again, "I have never seen anyone like her before!"

Finally, they reached their destination. The bears' lair was situated on a high hill, covered with huge beeches and firs, choked up with uprooted trees and fallen branches and accessible with difficulty only from the southern side. On the north, west and east the entry and exit were barred by tall craggy walls that looked as if they had been split away from the body of the mighty Zelemin with an axe and then pushed less than twenty *sagens*\* away from it. At the bottom of these walls, a cold mountain stream foamed and frothed through a narrow crevice. The situation made the task of our hunters easier; all they needed to do was line themselves up along the narrow foot-path on the southern slope and move along it up the hillside, while the bears, having no means of escape, would inevitably fall into their hands and on their lances.

Having arrived at this momentous, though very dangerous passageway, Maxim Berkut bade the company to spread out and rest a bit, to gather strength for the difficulties ahead. The sun was rising, but the branches of the firs and the neighbouring hills screened its rays. After a short rest, Maxim

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\* *sagen* — an old Rus measure of about seven English feet

began to place the hunters in two rows so that the pathway would be completely covered. While the path was narrow, it was necessary for the hunters to stand some five paces from each other; but farther up the hill, where it widened into a broad slope, the hunters would have to stand further apart.

He was troubled by only one thing: What to do with Miroslava who insisted on standing on her own, rather than with her father.

"Why, am I worse than these men of yours?" she asked Maxim, her face flushed rosy red. "You are positioning them separately, but you refuse to do the same for me... No, I won't agree to it. It would also embarrass my father if we both had to stand in the same spot! Isn't that true, father?"

Tuhar Vovk could not oppose her. Maxim began to explain to her about the danger, warning her of the strength and ferocity of the enraged beasts, but she would not listen.

"Do I not have the strength? Do I not know how to use the bow and arrow, the lance or the axe? Just let one of your young men try to better me — we'll see who will be the stronger!"

Maxim finally fell silent and let her have her way. How could he oppose this astonishing and beautiful girl? He would have liked, at least, to place her in a less perilous position, but unfortunately, this was not possible, every position being equally dangerous. Having arranged the entire company, Maxim gave the final instructions.

"Now let us pray to whomever one knows, and then we will all blow our horns together. This will be our first signal and it will frighten the beasts. Then we will ascend the path till we get up to where it widens. There, my comrades will remain to watch the exits, so that not one bear should escape, and

you boyars will continue to the very den of the she-bear!"

A moment later the forests and valleys echoed to the hoarse bellows of aurochs horns. Like a huge wave the sound rolled through wood and ravine, spreading out, dying out, then doubling in volume. The forests awoke. A kite shrieked above the fir-tops; a frightened golden eagle, spreading wide its wings, rose high into the sky; some animals scampered through the thickets, trying to find a safe hiding place. Suddenly, the horns ceased their blowing and the hunters set off up the hill along the foot-path. All hearts were beating more rapidly in anticipation of unknown dangers, of combat and conquest. They moved carefully in rows; the boyars in the first line, then the young men; Maxim strode ahead, vigilantly listening as he tracked the beast. The king of the windfalls, the bear had not yet shown himself!

They had already reached the narrowest point of the path beyond which it broadened into a large open slope. Here they stopped at Maxim's instructions, and again their horns thundered out, with even greater force, spreading alarm in the twilight of the bear's burrows. There was a sudden crakling in the underbrush, not too far away, behind a huge mass of heavy rotting uprooted trunks.

"Take care!" shouted Maxim. "The beast is approaching!"

He had hardly uttered these words when suddenly a huge shaggy head thrust itself through a large cleft between two upturned stumps, and two grey eyes, half in curiosity, and half in fright, fixed their gaze on Tuhar Vovk who stood at his post some ten paces from the opening.

Tuhar was an old warrior and an old hunter — he didn't know the meaning of fear. So without a sound

or a word to anyone he snatched a heavy steel arrow out of his quiver, fitted it into his bow and aimed at the animal.

"Aim for his eye, boyar!" whispered Maxim from behind.

There was a moment of anxious silence, then the arrow whistled — and the animal roared as if maddened, and reared back. And though he disappeared from the sight of the hunters, hidden behind a wind-fall, his roars didn't cease, nor did his savage threshing about lessen.

"After him!" shouted Tuhar Vovk and threw himself into the opening where the bear had disappeared. At the same time two of the boyars scrambled up to the top of the uprooted tree, and raised their lances, trying to put all their weight behind them in a thrust to finish off the beast. Tuhar Vovk, standing in the opening, shot another arrow into him. The animal gave a tortured bellow and turned to flee, but his eyes were flooded with blood and not being able to find the exit, he rammèd into a tree. The lance of another boyar sank between his ribs, but the wound wasn't fatal. The savage roars of the wounded bear resounded ever more strongly. In desperation he raised himself on his hind legs, wiped the blood away from his eyes, tore at the branches and threw them ahead of himself, but to no avail: one of his eyes had been pierced by an arrow and the other was kept blinded by the flowing blood.

While threshing around blindly, the beast again drew close to Tuhar Vovk. The latter threw his bow aside and sheltering behind an overturned trunk of a tree, grasped his heavy axe with both hands. When the bear, feeling his way, approached the familiar to him opening, Tuhar swung it down on his head with such force that the skull was split in two, like



a broken pumpkin shell. The bloodied brains splashed on the boyar and the animal dropped to the ground without a sound. The boyars sounded their horns joyfully to hail the first victory.

The beast was pulled out from among the bushes and skinned. Then the boyars, continuing their hunt, plunged deeper into the thickets. The sun was already high in the sky and its rays glimmered through the leafy branches like skeins and streaks of golden thread. The hunters now marched along in a much gayer mood, bragging about their courage and strength.

"Though I'm but a wolf,\* and a small animal, I can still manage to overcome the Tukhlian bear," Tuhar Vovk exclaimed joyfully.

Maxim Berkut listened to the bragging and didn't know why, but was suddenly sorry for the Tukhlian bear.

"Well, why not?" he asked. "The bear is a foolish beast; he lives in solitude. If they would only get together, who knows, even a pack of wolves would probably have trouble with them."

Tuhar glanced at him angrily, but said nothing. The hunters moved ahead cautiously, scrambling over the windfalls, jumping from stump to stump, sometimes sinking waist deep into the rotting wood and fallen branches.

Among these grand ruins of nature were visible bear trails, beaten down from ancient times, narrow, but well-trodden, thickly strewn with the bleached bones of mountain goats, deer and other animals. Maxim dropped back behind the boyars; again and again he reviewed all the positions, checked the bear tracks to see if they were recent or not, helped and

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\* Tuhar's name "Vovk" means wolf in Ukrainian

encouraged those who were getting tired — while he himself showed no weariness at all. Miroslava kept glancing at him with admiration whenever he passed by her. Though she had hitherto met many young men, both strong and bold, this was her first meeting with such a one as Maxim, who combined within himself the qualities of a forceful worker, warrior and leader.

There was a sudden crackle of branches and a huge bear appeared in menacing fury before the hunting party. He approached first on all fours, but seeing the enemy before him, he rose on his hind legs, and with his front paws seized a storm-splintered branch off a beech tree and twirling it around himself, emitted an ominous deep growl in his throat from time to time, as though in challenge.

Standing right in front of the advancing animal were two boyars. They had been among those who boasted the loudest, wanting to present themselves as great hunters. Seeing the terrible enemy immediately before them, they paled visibly and shuddered. But to hide or to escape was impossible — they had to face the beast, come what may. Two arrows sped simultaneously from two bows, but one missed, whistling past the bear above his ears, while the other landed in his side, wounding him slightly, but serving to drive him into extreme rage. With a huge bound, the bear advanced with his weapon — the beech branch, which he threw with fearful strength at one of the hunters, but hit a tree with a loud thump. Then, without pausing even for a second and giving his enemy not a moment for thought, the bear threw himself toward one of them, who stood right on his beaten path. The lance flashed in the trembling hand of the boyar — he wanted to throw it at the animal.

“Don’t throw it!” shouted Maxim in alarm, running up and bringing help to the menaced boyars — Tuhar Vovk and another boyar. “Don’t throw your lance, hold on to it and defend yourself!”

But the boyar wasn’t listening and threw the weapon at the bear. The throw was weak because of the boyar’s trembling arm and the bear was but five paces away — so it was no wonder that the lance only lightly wounded the animal in the shoulder. The bear seized the lance, broke it, then with a terrible roar threw himself at his enemy. The latter now held in his hands a straight sword, sharpened on both sides, which he called a bear-sword, and was preparing to plunge its length into the bear’s chest. But the point of the sword slid along the ribs and got trapped in the bear’s shoulder. The animal seized the boyar into its terrifying steel embrace. There was an awful scream from the unfortunate victim; then the sound of crushing bones under the bear’s teeth. The whole appalling and spine-chilling episode happened so quickly and unexpectedly, that before Maxim could run up with help, the boyar, breathing hoarsely and convulsively in final agony, was lying on the ground with the bloodied bear standing over him, baring his terrible teeth and filling the forest with pain-filled roars from his wounds.

The boyars stood riveted to the spot, their bodies quivering from shock at the sight. Only Maxim quietly placed an arrow into his horn bow, took a couple of steps toward the bear. And, taking careful aim, shot the arrow straight into the animal’s heart. The roars of the animal stopped as if cut by a knife and he dropped, dead, to the ground.

There was no blowing of horns, no joyous shouts after this new victory. The boyars, leaving their positions, hastened to the spot of the disaster. Though all

had been inured in battles, accustomed to seeing death around them, the sight of the bloodied, mutilated and torn body, drew a heavy groan from all breasts.

Miroslava clasped her hands to her breast and turned her eyes away. The Tukhlian lads placed the corpse on a lifter of woven boughs, and dragged the bear along after it. A gloomy silence fell upon the company. A large puddle of blood, glistening in the sun, reminded them that a living man, a father to his children, cheerful, willing and full of hope, had stood here a moment ago. Now all that was left of him was a formless mass of bloody flesh. The greater number of boyars had lost all desire to continue the hunt.

"To the devil with the cursed beasts!" said some. "Let them live here or die! Why must we expose our lives to them?"

But Tuhar Vovk and Miroslava, and Maxim in particular, insisted that by all means they must finish what they had begun. The boyars finally agreed, but none were eager to return to their positions.

"Allow me, boyars, to say a word," spoke up Maxim. "My Tukhlia comrades have blocked up the exit and won't let a single beast out of here. Therefore we won't need to spread out too far from one another. It would be best, I think, if we divide into two parties and proceed along the very brink of the ravine on both sides. In this way we can drive them all in to the centre and there, together with the Tukhlia lads, surround them in a deep line and shoot them all to the last one."

"Of course, of course, that's the best way!" shouted some of the boyars, not noticing the mocking smile that flitted across Maxim's face.

The company then divided into two parties. One was led by Tuhar Vovk, the other by Maxim. Miroslava, of her own accord, joined the second party, though she couldn't explain to herself why she did it. Perhaps she sought danger, because Maxim clearly stated that the path to be followed by the second party was more dangerous.

Again the horns were sounded and the two groups parted. Some of the hunters stalked in two's, some alone, coming together, then separating, seeking the path. It was impossible to proceed in a group. They were getting close to the top. The top itself was bare, but just below it, were great heaps of fallen rock and ruins of uprooted trees. To get through this barrier was the most difficult and most dangerous part of the expedition.

In one spot a heap of this forest debris rose like a tower. The uprooted trees, fallen branches, stones and drifts of leaves blown down through the ages, were an obvious barricade to any access to this natural stronghold. Maxim crawled along the very brink of a deep precipice, clinging here and there to hanging moss or jutting rock, trying to find a through passage. The boyars, unaccustomed to such inaccessible and break-neck treks, continued along the edge of the barricade, hoping to find an opening at some point and so get around it.

Miroslava paused, as though something held her close to Maxim; her observant gaze roved intently over the bristling wall of fallen trees, trying to find some, no matter how difficult, thoroughway. She didn't look long, but with great daring began to ascend the large slabs of rock and windfall that obstructed her way. She reached the top and looked about her proudly. The boyars were already some distance away. There was no sight of Maxim, while before

her lay an even greater wall of disorder and confusion of boulder and windfall which seemed, at first glance, impassable. But no! Yonder, just a short distance away, lay a huge fir, like a footbridge over this underworld — one could quite safely cross it to get to the top! Without thinking long, Miroslava set out to cross the fallen fir. Stepping on it, she again glanced back, and proud of her discovery, placed her beautifully carved horn to her coral lips and sounded it through the forest. The sound reverberated across the mountain meadows and broke against the mountain sides and ravines into ever-lessening echoes, until it died off into the distance of the dense impassable forest.

Miroslava's horn was answered from a distance by her father's horn, and then by the horns of the other boyars. For a moment only, Miroslava, standing high on the fallen fir, besitated. The fir was very old and decayed, and far below, in the impassable denseness of the underbrush, it seemed to her that she heard a slight rustle and a low growling. Listening more closely, she heard nothing. So she confidently stepped forward on her footbridge. But she had taken barely five steps, when the rotted fir log cracked under her feet, and the daring girl, together with the decayed fragments of the broken tree, fell into the depths of the underbrush.

She landed on her feet, her weapons still with her. In her hands she clenched a powerful silver-ornamented spear; across her back hung a strong bow and a quiver of arrows, while in the beautiful leather belt that hugged her slender waist, was thrust an axe and a wide hunter's knife with a bone handle. Having fallen unexpectedly into this murky abyss, Miroslava, nevertheless, felt not a moment of fear, but immediately began to look around to find some

way out. At first she was unable to see anything clearly, but her eyes soon accustomed themselves to the gloom and she saw a sight that would have put the fear of death into the most courageous of beings. Not five steps away from her lay a huge she-bear with her cubs, gazing with enraged, green-glittering eyes at her unexpected guest. Miroslava shuddered. Should she attempt an attack on the terrible beast, or should she seek escape and bring help? But escape was impossible — she was surrounded by bristling underbrush and fallen rock, and though it would have been possible, with great difficulty, to climb over them, doing it in the very presence of the wild beast would be a dangerous undertaking. Making up her mind quickly, Miroslava decided not to provoke the beast, but to defend herself if attacked, and in the meantime sound an alarm on her horn and call for help. But no sooner did she blow the horn, than the she-bear sprang from her resting place and growling, threw herself at the girl. There was no time for Miroslava to get at her bow — the beast was much too near. She grasped her spear in both hands and bracing herself against a rock wall, aimed it at the oncoming bear. The animal, seeing the glittering spearhead, stopped. Both enemies stood thus for a long moment, without taking their eyes off each other, or making a move from their positions. Miroslava didn't dare make an attack on the bear; the bear shifted her eyes, trying to find a way of assaulting her enemy. Suddenly, the she-bear grasped a large rock in her front paws, and raising herself on her hind legs, prepared to throw it at Miroslava. But in that moment, when she was lifting herself on her hind legs, Miroslava, with one mighty heave, thrust her spear into the bear's chest. The bear gave a loud outraged growl and fell backward, her breast

drenched with blood. But the wound was not fatal and she quickly sprang to her feet. The blood flowed, but disregarding her pain, the she-bear again threw herself at Miroslava. The girl was in terrible danger. The raging beast advanced toward her this time with teeth bared. Miroslava's only escape was to try and climb up the rock she had been leaning against. One moment — one movement — and she stood on top of the rock. She gave a deep gasp of relief — her position was safer, for if the beast continued to attack she would be able to hit it from above. But Miroslava had barely grasped her new situation when the bear stood close beside her on the rock, growling fiercely, her bloodied jaws open wide. Cold sweat covered Miroslava's forehead; she saw that this was a crucial moment, that this narrow ledge of rock would see a struggle of life and death and that victory would depend on which one of them would be able to hold their position on the rock and hurl the adversary down. The she-bear was now very close; Miroslava tried to keep her at a distance with her spear, but the bear seized the point of the weapon between her teeth and gave it such a strong tug that she almost threw Miroslava off the rock; the spear slid out of her hands and the bear threw it down into the thickets.

"She's going to kill me!" the thought flashed through Miroslava's mind, but her courage did not fail her. She grasped her axe in both hands and began to wield it with all her strength. The animal came ever closer; Miroslava could feel its hot breath on her face; a hairy paw, on the alert with claws unsheathed, menaced her breast; another moment — and she would fall from the rock, tattered and bloodied, for the axe wasn't long enough to counter the longer paws of the mighty beast.



"Help!" shouted Miroslava, in mortal fear, and in that moment a spear flashed over her head, sinking into the bear's throat, and knocking it, like a log, off the rock. In an opening among the rock piles above Miroslava's head, beamed the joyous, vividly alive, face of Maxim Berkut. The deep look of gratitude aimed at him by the girl he rescued, touched him to the heart, but not a word passed between them. There was not time. The she-bear, still alive and roaring, had lifted herself up. One leap brought her to her cubs who, not understanding the terrible struggle that had taken place, were playing and tumbling about in the lair. Having sniffed them and assured herself of their safety, the bear turned and again threw herself at Miroslava. But Miroslava was prepared, and lifting her axe with both hands she split the bear's head asunder with one blow. The wounded beast fell, and heaving convulsively from side to side a few times, perished.

In the meantime Maxim had broken through the underbrush and reached Miroslava's side. Two pearly tears glittered in the girl's eyes, and without a word, she ardently pressed the hand of her rescuer. Maxim, for some reason, appeared quite disconcerted. He flushed, lowered his eyes and stuttered: "I heard your call for help... but I didn't know... where you were... Thank God... that I was able to break through!"

Miroslava stood where she was, holding the handsome lad's hand in her own and looking at his fine, sunburned face, illuminated by the ruddy glow of good health, open and generous. At that moment she felt nothing but gratitude for her escape from a terrible death. But when Maxim, gaining a little courage, pressed her small, yet so strong hand, Miroslava felt a sweet ache in her heart, and her face flushed

with a shy glow. She lowered her eyes and the words of thanks trembling on her lips died away and her face lit up with the wondrous charm of awakening tender feelings.

Maxim was the first to recover. In his heart, courageous and pure like true gold, there flashed a happy thought, which immediately turned into firm resolve. It returned to him all his courage and confidence in his future course. He placed his horn to his lips and blew the joyfull call of victory. From beyond the wall of rock and dead trees, came the answering calls from the horns of Tuhar and other boyars. Agile as a



squirrel, Miroslava scrambled swiftly back up to the heap from which she fell, and from its top announced her adventure and rescue by Maxim to the entire company. Tuhar Vovk scrambled up to her side with great difficulty, followed by other boyars. Tuhar held his daughter in a long embrace and shuddered at the sight of the blood on her clothing.

"And you, you, my daughter, were in such danger!" And he embraced her again and again, as though afraid that she might disappear.

Then he lowered himself down to Maxim who was busy around the carcass of the she-bear and the cubs. The baby bears, unconscious of their enemy in man, growled playfully as they tumbled about in their nest, like pups, allowing themselves to be petted and stroked without any fear of people. Maxim picked them up in his arms and put them down before Miroslava and Tuhar. "Here is your booty," he said. "You will, I'm sure, be happy to welcome such guests in your home." The gathered boyars gazed either with delight at the cubs, or with horror at the killed she-bear. They examined her wounds and marvelled at Miroslava's strength and courage in facing such a terrible beast in battle.

"Oh no," Miroslava laughed, "without the help of this upright young man, I would have been lying here just like this beast, my body torn and bleeding!

He deserves my deepest gratitude!"

Tuhar Vovk reacted somewhat unhappily to his daughter's words. Though he loved her dearly, and was overjoyed at her rescue from great danger, he would rather she had been rescued by a boyar's son, and not by a common Tukhlia peasant, this *smerd*, even though, after all, he had made a good impression on him. Still, for him, a proud boyar, who had grown up and won great honour in the service of

the prince, it was difficult to publicly give thanks to a common peasant for his daughter's rescue. But there was nothing else to be done... The obligation of gratitude was so deeply ingrained in our knightly ancestors, that Tuhar Vovk could not shirk this duty. He took Maxim by the hand and led him forward.

"Young man," he said, "my daughter, my only child, tells us that you saved her life from great danger. I have no reason to doubt her words. Accept the sincere thanks of a father whose love and hope lie entirely in this one child, for your honourable deed. I don't know how to repay you for your bravery, but you may be sure that as soon as it is in my power to do so, the boyar Tuhar Vovk will not forget what he owes you."

Maxim stood listening to these words as if on coals of fire. He was unaccustomed to such public praise and had neither hoped for nor desired anything like it. He was confused by the boyar's praise and didn't know whether he was expected to answer. In the end he said, shortly: "There is nothing to thank me for, boyar! I only did what anyone in my position would have done — so there is no need for thanks! Let your daughter live in good health, but I have done nothing to earn such thanks!"

Having said this, he went to call up his Tukhlian comrades. With their help the she-bear was quickly skinned, and the small cubs carried to the hunter's gathering place from which the whole company was to move back to camp after the hunt.

The sun had risen to midday and threw its hot golden rays over the Tukhlian mountains; the heated resin spread its fragrance through the forest; proudly, and only from time to time flapping its broad wings, swam the hawk across his blue ocean high above the

meadows. Silence reigned. Only the horns of the hunting party and the shouts of the hunters sounded across the Zelemin hilltop. The hunt had ended, though not entirely successfully. The Tukhlian lads carried three bear skins on poles before the hunting party and two bear cubs in a sack, and the boyar servants brought up the rear with a stretcher, carrying the bloodied and already rigid body of the unfortunate boyar who died from a bear's attack.

The company, under Maxim's guidance, reached their camp quickly. The hunt was ended. The boyars wanted to return home, today, immediately after lunch. The distance back was great, but Maxim promised to lead the company back to Tukhlia by an easier forest path, and from there to Tuhar Vovk's house. The Tukhlian young men, having eaten, immediately left for home. Maxim remained behind with the boyars till the servants had dismantled the camp, put out the fires and cleared the cooking utensils and weapons of the hunt. Then the boyar company also took to the road homeward.

## II

The ancient village of Tukhlia was a large mountain settlement, which together with two or three other large hamlets had close to fifteen hundred inhabitants. The village and neighbouring hamlets were not situated on the site of present-day Tukhlia, but much higher in the mountains, in a broad, long valley, that is now covered with forest and is called the Zapala valley. In those ancient times, of which we are speaking, the Zapala valley was not overgrown with trees, but to the contrary, was a cultivated area, feeding its inhabitants with adequate

harvests of grain. Stretching over half a mile in length and about a quarter of a mile in width, level and slimy, surrounded on all sides by steep rocky cliffs, three or even four fathoms high in spots, the valley was like the bottom of a huge cauldron which had been emptied of water. And certainly that's what must have happened. A fairly large mountain stream fell into the valley from the east in a waterfall some one and a half fathoms high. Breaking a path through narrow, harsh cliffs and winding snake-like through the valley, it flowed westward into a similar narrow gateway, dashing between the smooth rock walls and roaring down a few more waterfalls before it tumbled into the Opir River some quarter of a mile lower. The high steep banks of the Tukhlian cauldron were overgrown with dark-hued fir trees, which gave the impression of greater depth to the valley and a certain air of wilderness, tranquility and isolation from the rest of the world. In truth this was a huge mountain hideaway, accessible on all sides only with the greatest difficulty. But nearly all the mountain villages were like that in those days of incessant warfare, disputes and raids. It was only thanks to their inaccessibility that they were able, longer than the villages on the plains, to protect their free ancient-Rus community life, which the haughty war-enriched boyars, were more and more endeavouring to undermine in other parts of the land.

The people of Tukhlia made their living mainly from raising cattle. Only the valley where the village itself lay, and a few smaller stretches of land along the river, which were free of forest, were suitable for growing grain and each year yielded fine crops of oats, barley and millet. In the mountain pasturelands, however, which were, like all the surrounding forests, the property of the Tukhlia community, there

grazed great herds of sheep, in which reposed the main wealth of its people; from them they obtained their clothing and nourishment, edible fat and meat. Cattle and oxen pastured in the forest around the village, but the locality, mountainous, rocky and unapproachable, prohibited the cultivation of large horned animals. Another important source of affluence for the Tukhlia folk were the forests. Not to speak of the wood, which was free for both fuel and for building, the forests also provided the Tukhlians with animals, forest fruits and honey. True, life in the forest and in the impassable mountain wilderness was hard. It was a continuous battle with nature — with floods, snows, wild beasts and an untamed impassable terrain — but the struggle produced strong, courageous and enterprising people. It was the foundation and well spring of their strong, free communal order.

The sun had already dipped far past midday when our already familiar hunting party, guided by Maxim Berkut, descended from the heights into the Tukhlia valley. Tuhar Vovk, with his daughter and Maxim, led the way; the rest of the company straggled after them in small groups, discoursing on the hunt and its adventures. The Tukhlia valley, flooded with the hot rays of the sun, unfolded before their eyes like a large green lake dotted with small, dark islands. Around it rose the mountain walls, like a tall fence, over which combings of green bramble and hazel bushes clambered here and there. At the entrance to the valley the waterfall roared, dashing its silvery foam against the rocks. Alongside the waterfall a narrow trail, leading up and further along the shore of the river over the cliffs and mountain meadows right up to the Hungarian land, was hewn out of the rock. This was the famous Tukhlia Pass, the

easiest and safest after the Duklia Pass.\* Ten neighbouring communities from both the Halych\*\* and the Hungarian sides had worked almost two years on building this Pass. The people of Tukhlia put in most of the work on it and were as proud of it as if it were their own.

“Look boyar,” said Maxim, pausing above the waterfall at the entrance to the winding pass carved out of solid rock, “look at the work of the Tukhlia community! This Pass stretches away off there, over the Beskid ranges,\*\*\* the first such road in the highlands. My father himself supervised the work on it for a distance of five miles; every bridge, every curve, every rock removed within this distance was carried out under his direction.”

The boyar reluctantly looked up at the mountains where the trail, following the stream, wound into the far distance. Then he looked down the pathway and shook his head.

“Does your father have great power in the community?” he asked.

“Power, boyar?” answered Maxim in surprise. “No, there are none among us who have power in the community. The community is a power in itself and no one else, boyar. But my father is a man of great experience and he willingly serves the community. When he speaks at the community council there are few who can equal him in the highlands. The community takes my father’s advice — but my father has no power over it, nor does he desire it.”

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\* Duklia Pass — one of the oldest and most convenient passes to Hungary through the Carpathians

\*\* Halych — a township on the Dniester, which was the capital of the Halych Principality in 1140-1255

\*\*\* Beskid ranges — a cluster of mountain ranges in the Western and Eastern Carpathians



Maxim's eyes shone with pride and admiration as he spoke of his father. Tuhar Vovk bent his head thoughtfully as he listened, but Miroslava could not take her eyes off Maxim. Listening to his words, she felt that Maxim's father was momentarily becoming nearer and dearer to her, as though she had lived her whole life under his paternal care.

But Tuhar Vovk grew more and more morose. He frowned deeply and turned his eyes on Maxim with an expression of long-suppressed fury. "So it is your father then, that is stirring up the Tukhlian people against me and against the prince?" he asked suddenly in a harsh, bitter tone. The words struck Miroslava like a painful blow; she turned pale and looked helplessly from her father to Maxim in turn. But Maxim was not in the least confused by these words and answered calmly:

"Stirring up the people, boyar? No, you have been told an untruth. The entire community is angry with you for appropriating the community forest and meadows without so much as asking the community if it agrees or doesn't agree to your doing so."

"Ah, so I must ask the community yet! The prince granted me that forest and that meadow, and I'm not obliged to ask anybody for permission."

"That's exactly what my father is telling the community, boyar. My father is trying to keep the community calm and is advising them to wait till the community tribunal where this matter will be examined."

"A community tribunal?" cried Tuhar Vovk. "And I am expected to stand before such a tribunal?"

"I should think that you would wish to do this yourself. You will be able, then, to prove your rights to everyone and calm the community down."

Tuhar Vovk turned away. They continued descending the pass which twisted in circles to make the trail less steep and dangerous. Maxim, dropping behind, could not take his eyes off Miroslava. But his face no longer glowed with such pure happiness as it had such a short time ago. The darker the clouds of anger and dissatisfaction on her father's face, the more clearly did Maxim realize that a deep chasm was opening up between him and Miroslava. Besides that, he was a child of the mountains, ignorant of the wider world and of the extent of the boyar's ambitions and didn't even suspect how wide and deep the chasm actually was.

They reached the valley. Below the waterfall the stream widened into a large pool, calm and clear as a tear. Caps of pearly frothing foam converged along its banks, its bottom bristled with large and small rock boulders. Swift as arrows, the trout flashed their pearly-yellow, red-dotted sides among the rocks; at the far end of the cove the waterfall roared down the stone wall like a living silver pillar, sparkling in the sun with all the colours of the rainbow.

"What a wonderful spot!" cried Miroslava, gazing up at the waterfall and the wildly scattered heaps of fallen rock reaching down into its depths and fringed at the top with the deep green blanket of the forest of firs.

"This is our Tukhlia countryside, our paradise!" said Maxim, sweeping his gaze around the valley, up the mountain sides and over the waterfall with such great pride that few monarchs could equal in looking over their domain.

"Only you are poisoning life for me in this paradise," said Tuhar Vovk angrily.

No one replied to his words; all three continued silently on their way. They neared the village which

was scattered with densely massed areas of orderly shingled houses surrounded by thickly-planted mountain ash, willows and spreading pear trees. The people were out working in the fields; only the old men, grey-bearded and grave, ambled about the houses, sat whittling or weaving snares for animals or fish, or exchanging talk on community affairs. Maxim bowed and greeted them loudly and cordially and soon after Miroslava also began to greet the oldsters who stood by the roadside. Only Tuhar Vovk continued to walk along sullen and silent, refusing to even look at these *smerts* who dared to oppose the will of the prince.

As they approached the centre of the village they were met by an odd group. Three oldsters dressed in holiday attire were walking along the road carrying a tall, carved and silver ornamented pole with a large, also silver-bound chain, carved entirely out of one piece of wood in the form of a ring, indissoluble and interlocked. Above the chain fluttered a crimson, silver-embroidered banner. The three old men walked slowly. They stopped before each courtyard and loudly called out the masters by name, and when he or someone else appeared, they said:

"Tomorrow to the assembly!" and went on.

"What kind of freakishness is this?" asked Tuhar Vovk when the old men drew near.

"Have you never seen anything like it before?" asked Maxim in surprise.

"Never. We have no such customs in Halych."

"They're calling people to the assembly, the community council," explained Maxim.

"I thought they were priests with icons," Tuhar Vovk scoffed. "When we call an assembly we do it quietly, passing the assembly standard from house to house."

"With us the assembly banner is carried through the village by these heralds; they must call every citizen to the assembly by name. And you will also be called, boyar."

"Let them call, I won't go! Your assembly is of no interest to me. I am here by the will of the prince and have the authority to call an assembly myself, if I should feel it necessary."

"You yourself... call an assembly?" asked Maxim, puzzled. "Without our heralds? Without our standard?"

"I have my own heralds and my own standard."

"But no one from our community would go to your assembly. And our assembly, whatever it decides, so it will be."

"We'll see!" said Tuhar Vovk, angrily and stubbornly.

At that moment our company approached the heralds. Seeing the boyar the heralds set down the standard and one of them spoke:

"The boyar, Tuhar Vovk!"

"Here I am," answered the boyar sullenly.

"Tomorrow to the assembly!"

"What for?"

But the heralds did not answer him and continued on their way.

"It's not their concern, boyar, to answer you," explained Maxim, trying as well as he could to pacify the boyar's ill-will to the Tukhlia people's assembly. After a long silence, during which they continued their way through the village, Maxim again began to speak:

"Allow me, boyar, an inexperienced youth, to tell something."

"Speak," said the boyar.

"Come to the assembly tomorrow!"

"And submit to your underling tribunal?"

"So what, boyar. The Tukhlia community passes judgement with justice, and surely there is no shame in submitting to a just court?"

"Father!" Miroslava intervened in the conversation. "Please do as Maxim advises. He is right in what he says. He saved my life — and he wouldn't give you bad advice; he knows the native customs well."

Tuhar Vovk smiled reluctantly at this truly feminine logic, but his forehead soon creased back into its habitual frown.

"Now you are wearying my ears with this Maxim!" he said. "So he saved your life and I am grateful to him for it, and if you say so I'll give him a couple of oxen. But here is a matter in which neither you nor Maxim should get involved."

"No boyar," replied Maxim to this, "you are trying, I think, to belittle me by paying for my insignificant act. Neither I nor my father will accept any reward. As to my begging you to come to the assembly tomorrow, I am doing it only from sincere good will. I would be pleased, boyar, to see harmony between you and the Tukhlia community."

"Well, let it be so," said Tuhar Vovk finally. "I'll come to this assembly of yours tomorrow, but not to submit to them, but to see what this assembly is all about."

"Come, boyar, come!" cried Maxim, overjoyed. "You'll see for yourself that the Tukhlia community knows how to be just."

Tuhar Vovk's promise eased Maxim's heart. He became happy, talkative, showed Miroslava all that was beautiful and interesting on the right and the left, and there was much that was beautiful and in-

teresting. Our walkers had reached the very centre of the village and the centre of the Tukhlia valley. The sheer rocky sides of the cauldron gleamed on both sides in the distance like straight and tall marble walls. The stream flowed through the village, right alongside the roadway, foaming and frothing, breaking against the gravel that seeded the bottom and spreading cool freshness throughout the valley. On both sides of the river, whose banks were quite steep, having been carved through the slime of a long-ago lake, there were dams built from river rocks, thick fir logs and strumps to protect the village from floods. All along the stream there were convenient railed foot bridges and immediately beyond the dams were garden plots of beans and peas which wound up their stakes, beets and cabbage. Following were fields of wheat stretching in neat and bright green strips far beyond the houses. The houses were neatly fenced in and well-looked after; the walls of smooth square beams were not coated with clay, but scraped and rubbed with river gravel a few times a year and only when one beam didn't properly fit in with another. In the narrow strips between them, the walls were caulked with clay and whitewashed, looking very lovely among the green willows and pear trees that surrounded them. Two linden trees stood at the entrance to every courtyard, between which hung gates, beautifully woven in various decorative patterns. Some spread-eagled bird of prey hung on a rack over practically every gate — an owl, a magpie, a raven, a hawk or an eagle — with their wings widespread and head down. These were tokens of spirits — the protectors of the home. Beyond the houses were the barns and other out-buildings, all built of stout hewed logs and covered with shingle; only a few were straw-thatched, their

golden yellow cone-shaped crests protruding here and there, supported by the four high posts.

"Here is my father's homestead," said Maxim, pointing toward a dwelling that in no way differed from the others. There was no one in the courtyard, but the door into the hallway was open, and in the wall facing the south two large square openings had been cut through which, in the summer, were left either completely open or covered with thin and half-transparent ceramic squares. In the winter these openings were closed up with wooden shutters. These were the windows of the time.

Miroslava looked with interest at this nest of the Berkuts, over the gate of which hung, in fact, a recently-killed huge mountain eagle, who even in death seemed to threaten with his mighty steel claws and his black, heavily-curved beak. The atmosphere in this courtyard was peaceful, quiet and bright; the stream separating it from the roadway, accessible by footbridge, murmured quietly and splashed its crystal waters against a rock dam. Tuhar Vovk looked about him.

"Aha, so this is where the Tukhlia chief lives. Well, I'm looking forward to meeting him. We'll see what sort of a bird he is!" Maxim wanted to bid farewell to the boyar and his daughter and turn into his home, but something seemed to urge him to accompany them further. Miroslava seemed to sense this.

"Are you not going in?" she asked, turning away so as to hide her confusion.

"I was going to, but let it be. I'll see you through the narrows to your home."

Miroslava was delighted without realizing why. And so they went through the village chattering, looking about, enjoying each other's voices, their proximity and forgetting all else about them, father

and community. Though they said not a word about themselves throughout their entire conversation, about their hopes and desires, there trembled the warmth of young hearts, glowing with first love, revealing that secret force that attracted these two young, healthy and beautiful creatures to each other. Pure and innocent, they never gave a thought to the obstacles their young love would have to encounter.

Tuhar Vovk, who was walking ahead of them in deep, gloomy thought, pondering on how he would stand before the *smerds* in all his dignity and splend-





our tomorrow and show them his importance and superiority, didn't notice what was happening between the two young people. One thing only angered him — that this young man was so confident that his conduct with him and his daughter was that of an equal. But in the meantime and up to a point, he was prepared to control his anger.

They had already passed the village and were nearing the spot where the Tukhlia cauldron closed, allowing the stream to escape from the valley through a narrow rocky gate. The sun had gone down into the late afternoon and was hovering over the top of the forest, bathing its slanting rays in the foaming waves of the stream. The crags that narrowed the flow of the stream out of the Tukhlia valley were already casting long shadows. The passage itself was gloomy, cold and slippery. Lower down, the waters of the stream broke against huge fallen boulders, while the tall firs and beeches murmured high above. Beside the stream trails laid by the Tukhlia folk broke through the cliffs on both sides, Miroslava shivered as she entered this strange "stone gate", and, whether it was from the reigning chill, the dampness, or God knows what — she took her father by the hand and pressed against him.

"What a terrible spot!" she said, pausing in the middle of the passage and looking back and above. In truth, it was an unusually wild spot. The stream was narrow, about three fathoms wide and no more and so smoothly did its waters cut through the slate cliffs that one would be tempted to swear that this was the work of man. Before the very entrance stood a massive stone pillar, washed at its foot by the water and therefore thinner at its base and weightier at the top where it was overgrown with fern and

dwarfish birches. This was the widely-known Guardian who, it was considered, kept watch over the entrance into the Tukhlia valley and was prepared to fall on anyone who would seek to break into this peaceful, happy corner with hostile intent. Tuhar Vovk himself felt a chill go down his back after looking at this fearsome Guardian.

"What a dangerous rock!" he said. "Hanging over the very entrance and threatening to fall at any moment!"

"This is a sacred rock, boyar," said Maxim with dignity. "In the spring we lay wreaths of flowers at its foot — it is our Tukhlia Guardian."

"Oh, everything here is yours, everything here is sacred, everything here is Tukhlian — I'm sick of listening!" shouted Tuhar Vovk. "It's as if there were nothing in this world beyond your Tukhlia!"

"In truth there is no other world for us," answered Maxim. "We love our little corner above everything — if everyone would love his little corner in the same way, then for certain all people in this world would live happily and peacefully."

Maxim, in his innocent sincerity didn't realize how sharply he pierced the heart of the boyar with these words. He didn't notice, either, the malice in Tuhar Vovk's eyes when he looked at him. Turning to Miroslava, Maxim continued to speak in a calm, warm voice:

"Now about this rock, our Guardian. I'll tell you the story as I heard it from my father. Long ago — it happened very long ago — when the giants still lived in our mountains. Here, where our Tukhlia now stands, was a very large lake; this basin was yet completely closed and the water flowed over it. The lake was bewitched — there wasn't a living thing in it — neither fish, nor worm. Any animal drinking

of its waters had to die, while the birds who had to fly over it, had to fall into its waters and drown. The lake was under the protection of Morana, the goddess of death. It happened though, that the king of the giants quarrelled with Morana and in order to thwart her, he hit the mountain with his magic mallet and split it so that all the water from the bewitched lake flowed out and lost its miraculous power. The whole district suddenly came to life; the bottom of the lake became a fertile valley, turned green with lush grasses and flowers; fish appeared in the stream, all kinds of reptiles among the rocks, animals in the forest, birds in the skies above it. Morana was furious, for she hated all living things, so she laid a curse on the king of the giants, turning him into this stone pillar. But she could do nothing to the valley itself, because she couldn't return the deadly waters that had flowed out of the lake. If she had been able to return all that water, to the last drop, and close the passage hewn out of this cliff, then she would again have become the queen of these mountains. But now, though the king of giants no longer lives, Morana also has no power over the area. The king, however, did not completely die. He lives in that rock and watches over the valley. They say that some day Morana will again gather in strength and try to conquer our Tukhlia, but then this bewitched Guardian rock will topple over on Morana's power and crush it with its weight."

Miroslava listened to this story with deep emotion; with all her heart she ached to stand under the arm of this good and life-giving king of the giants and give battle to Morana's power. The blood flowed swifter in her young heart at the thought of it. How deeply and passionately she loved Maxim at this moment!

Tuhar Vovk, though he listened to Maxim's tale, didn't believe it, for he turned but one glance at the rock Guardian of Tukhlia and smiled contemptuously, as though thinking, "What foolish *smerds*, to place their pride and hope in such nonsense!"

Our strollers had now passed the narrowest point of the Tukhlia stream and emerged into the bright world. Before their eyes there now appeared the long, restricted by steep mountains, valley of the Opir River, which far in the distance joined the Striy River valley. The sun was setting in the west, and its hot, purple rays were reflected in the broad waves of the Opir. The Tukhlia stream roared downward in wild leaps and angry foam to bathe in the Opir. Its waters, sharply reflecting the last of the sun's rays, looked like blood gushing out of a huge wound. All around sounded the murmur of the already darkening forest.

Our strollers paused for a moment, drinking in that immortal and vital beauty of nature. Maxim seemed to be hesitating over voicing some thought that had come into his mind and was forcing itself to be heard. He finally mustered up his courage and approached Tuhar Vovk, flushed and quaking.

"Boyar, my father," he said in an unusually soft and timid voice.

"What do you want?"

"Allow me to be your most sincere servant..."

"Servant? Why that wouldn't be difficult. Come with your father and hire yourself out if you wish to be of service."

"No, boyar, you don't understand... Allow me to become your son!"

"My son. But you have a father of your own and I hear he is much better, more just and a wiser man than I, especially as he will try me tomorrow!" The boyar smiled bitterly and venomously.

"I wanted to say," Maxim corrected himself, "No, that's not the way I wanted to say it. Boyar, allow me to have your daughter, whom I love more than life itself, more than my own soul, for my wife!"

Thunder out of a clear sky wouldn't have startled Tuhar Vovk as much as these passionate, yet simple words uttered by the young man. He took two steps back and in a piercing glance mixed with anger and contempt, measured poor Maxim from head to foot. His face was malevolent, blue; his lips trembled over his clenched teeth.

"You *smerd!*" he suddenly shouted, so that the surrounding mountains re-echoed that vicious cry. "How dare you utter those words to me? Repeat them again, for it can't be that I really heard what I seemed to hear!"

Maxim's natural courage and decisiveness awoke at the boyar's menacing shout. He stood tall before the boyar, like a proud young oak, and said in a friendly, yet confident voice:

"I said nothing ill to you, boyar, nothing that would bring dishonour to either you or your daughter. I asked for your daughter's hand, your daughter whom I love as no one else in this world would love her. Is it possible that between your boyar and my common extraction there is such a big chasm that love cannot bridge it? And in what way, really, are you so much superior to me?"

"Silence, you *smerd!*" Tuhar Vovk interrupted savagely. "My hand is convulsively grasping the handle of my sword that I might curb your foolish mouth. One thing only saves you from my revenge, and that is that you did save my daughter from danger this day. Otherwise you'd be lying a corpse in those waves for those words. You fool, you could think, you could dare to raise your eyes to her, to my daughter?..

This is because we have both been talking to you in a friendly manner and not kicking you like a dog! You thought that by saving her from the claws of the bear you had gained her for yourself, like a captive? Oh no! If it had to come to this, she would rather have perished in the bloody embrace of the wild beast, than fall into your hands!"

"No, boyar, don't say it that way! I'd rather die in the embrace of the bear than see one hair of her head harmed."

Miroslava turned away at these words to hide from her father and Maxim the long-restrained tears that now gushed from her eyes. But Tuhar Vovk paid no heed to this, and continued:

"And you, you vile offspring of a villain, have the audacity to think you're equal with me? With me, who has all his life consorted with princes, has earned the praise of a prince and been rewarded for his knightly deeds! My daughter can choose herself a husband from among the most eminent and illustrious young men in the country, and I am being asked to give her to you, a *smerd*, to your Tuhklian nest where she would wilt, dry up, and perish in misery? No, no, go your way, you miserable young man, you are not in your right mind, you have uttered your words under an attack of madness."

Maxim saw that his hopes were shattered, that the boyar had his sights exceedingly high and looked at him with great contempt. No matter how difficult to accept this, there was nothing he could do.

"Oh, boyar, boyar," he said in a sad, fervent voice, "you have elevated yourself much too high on the wings of pride — take care! Fate usually raises to the heights those whom she has in mind to destroy. Don't scorn the lowly, don't scorn the toiler, boyar,

for no one knows at what well he may himself be brought to drink!"

"You yet have the gall to try to teach me, reptile?" cried the enraged Tuhar Vovk, and his eyes flashed in insane anger. "Out of my sight or as God is my witness, I'll not pay attention to anything, but will strike you down with this sword as I did the bear this morning!"

"Don't be angry, boyar, at the words of a foolish lad," Maxim again spoke calmly. "Farewell! Farewell also to you, my star, that flashed before me so miraculously for a day, and now must forever disappear for me! Farewell, and good fortune to you!"

"No, I won't remain silent," Miroslava suddenly spoke up, turning back decisively. "I will not disappear forever from your sight, young man, I will be yours!"

Tuhar Vovk stared at his daughter, dumbfounded, and now didn't know what to do.

"What are you saying, my daughter?" he cried.

"What you are hearing, father. Allow me to marry Maxim. I will marry him."

"You foolish girl, it cannot be!"

"Try it, and you'll see that it can."

"You are feverish, my daughter — you've been frightened by a wild beast, and you are not well!"

"No, dear father, I'm well and I will say it again and swear before that bright sun that this young man will be mine. Be my witness, O Sun!"

And she took Maxim's hand in hers and bent forward to kiss him passionately on the lips. Tuhar Vovk was scandalized, he could make no move, nor say a word.

"And now, my lad, go home and don't be afraid. Miroslava has vowed that she will be yours and Miroslava is capable of keeping her vows. And now,

father, let us hurry home! There it is in the valley, and there are our guests coming up."

Saying this, the brave girl took her bewildered father by the arm and led him down the hillside. Maxim remained long where he was, mused and happy. Recovering, finally, he fell prone to the ground and sent up a prayer to the setting sun, just as his grandfathers and great grandfathers had done, and as his father still did, secretly. Then rising, he walked slowly home.

### III

Beyond the village of Tukhlia, in the centre of a field close to the waterfall, stood a huge linden tree. No one remembered when it had been planted and when it had grown to such height and breadth. Tukhlia was not a very old settlement and the trees that grew in the Tukhlia valley were much younger than the linden, so that it was no wonder that the Tukhlia folk regarded it the oldest witness to the ancient past and invested it with great esteem.

The Tukhlians believed that the linden was a gift from their immemorial benefactor — the king of the giants, who had planted it in the Tukhlia valley with his own hands as a symbol of his victory over Morana. A spring of pure water gushed from its roots and murmuring quietly over small pebbles flowed into the stream. This was the place of the Tukhlia assemblies, of the village meetings which from ancient times were the one and only authority in the Rus communities.

Around the linden was a broad, level common. Smooth-surfaced blocks of stone, arranged as seating for the elders of the community, the family



fathers, stood in rows in this open spot, facing the sun. There were as many of these flat stones as there were elders. Beyond these stone blocks there was free space. Under the linden, right over the spring was a four-cornered stone with a hole in its centre. Here, during the meeting, the assembly standard was placed. A little to the side was another elevation for the speaker — for anyone who was to address the assembly on one or another matter; he would leave his place and come to this elevation so that all might hear him.

The second day after the boyar's hunt the Tukhlia people thronged to the assembly common. The noise of their discourse could be heard throughout the valley. The community elders entered the grounds with dignity, one after another, and took their places. The younger members of the community, with a great deal of noise, arranged themselves behind them in a broad semi-circle. The women came too, though not in large numbers: no fully-grown member of the community, man or woman, was excluded, and though the final decisive vote remained with the elders, all could freely take part in the discussions, the young people and the women, giving their opinions for consideration.

The sun was already high in the heavens when out of the village, and last among those attending, came the heralds bearing the Tukhlia assembly standard. Their appearance evoked a general murmur in the crowd, but when they came near, all fell silent. The heralds, after bowing three times to the assembled people, removed their caps and stood under the linden tree. The entire assembly did the same.

"Good people," the heralds spoke up, "is it your will that we hold council this day?"

"Yes, yes," hummed the crowd.

“Then may God help us!” they intoned, and lifting high the assembly standard, they placed it upright into the hole in the rock. This signaled the opening of the assembly.

The eldest of those assembled, Zakhar Berkut, then got up and with a slow, but firm tread walked up to the linden and touched it, then going to the spring flowing out of its roots, he knelt down and anointed his eyes and lips with its water. This was a customary ancient ceremony which signified the cleansing of the lips and the clearing of the eyes, necessary for such an important occasion as the people’s assembly. Following this ritual he sat on the speaker’s elevation with his face turned toward the people, that is, to the east.

Zakhar Berkut was a grey-haired, like a dove, over ninety-year-old patriarch, the oldest man in the Tukhlia community. The father of eight sons, three of whom were already sitting with him among the elders, with the youngest, Maxim, like a mighty oak among maples, standing out among the Tukhlia youth. Tall in person, dignified in stature, stern of countenance, rich in life’s experience and knowledge of people and circumstance, Zakhar Berkut was a true portrait of the ancient patriarchs, elders and leaders of the people spoken about in our centuries-old songs and tales. In spite of his venerable age, Zakhar Berkut was still a strong and robust man. True, he no longer worked in the fields or drove the sheep to the mountain meadows, nor did he join the hunt in the depths of the forest — still he never stopped working. The orchard, the apiary and the gathering of herbs — these were his beloved pastimes. No sooner did spring arrive in the Tukhlia mountains than Zakhar Berkut was in his orchard: digging, clearing, pruning, grafting and replanting.

The village inhabitants were amazed at his knowledge of orchard culture and were even more amazed that he didn't hide his knowledge, but gladly shared it with everyone, teaching and encouraging all who were interested. His apiary was in the forest and every nice day found Zakhar Berkut among his hives, though the road was difficult and rather far. But for the villagers, it was his knowledge of herbal remedies, that won for Zakhar Berkut their greatest regard. During the period between Whitsuntide and the Feast of Kupalo\* holidays, Zakhar Berkut with his youngest son Maxim, would go into the mountains for a few weeks to gather healing herbs. True, the clean and simple customs of the people of the time, the fresh Tukhlia air, the spacious and healthy dwellings and the continuous, though by no means excessive work — all these together protected the people from frequent and contagious diseases. More often there were injuries and wounds that positively no healer could as quickly or effectively remedy as Zakhar Berkut.

But it wasn't to these things that Zakhar Berkut gave the main attention of his declining years. "Life has value only to such time as man is able to help others," he often said. "When he becomes a burden to others and brings with him no benefits, then he ceases to be a man, he becomes a hindrance and is not worthy of further life. Deliver me, God, from ever becoming a burden to others and eat benevolent, even though 'well-deserved' bread." These words were the guiding golden thread in Zakhar Berkut's life. All that he did, said and thought, he did, said and thought with the view of the greatest good and

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\* July 7th — St. John's Day, or Midsummer Day (June 24 Old Style), rooted in pagan mysticism

benefit for others, and first of all — for the community. The community was his life, the whole purpose of his being. While yet a young man he saw that the bears and wild boars very often mutilated and crippled cattle and people, so he decided to learn how to heal these wounds. Leaving his father's home, he set out on a far, unknown journey to one celebrated sorcerer who, rumour had it, was able to magically charm away an arrow and blood. The magical incantations of this healer, however, turned out to be useless. On arrival, Zakhar Berkut promised this man ten martens as payment for teaching him his incantations. The sorcerer agreed, but it wasn't enough for Zakhar to learn blindly, he wanted to be convinced, first of all, that the sorcerer's remedies were good. He drew out his knife and gave himself a deep wound in his thigh.

"Now, charm it well!" he said to the astonished healer. The incantation didn't work.

"Ha," said the sorcerer, "it isn't successful because you inflicted the wound on yourself. One can't cure a wound like that!"

"Well, it's obvious that your incantation is nonsense and I want none of it. I must have a formula that wouldn't ask if a wound is self-inflicted, but would heal it however it happened."

And then and there Zakhar Berkut left the sorcerer and went on to search out better healers. For a long time he wandered through mountain and valley until a year had passed and he came across a group of roving hermit monks.\* Among them was one, a

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\* By hermit monks, I do not mean the historic Manyavsky hermitage, founded by Job Kniahinitsky in the early 17th century; what I am referring to is the folk tradition about the first apostles in the Carpathian foothills — monks from the Kiev Cave Monastery. Their pilgrimage and settlement in the

centenarian, who had for many years lived on Mount Athos in Greece and had there read many ancient Greek manuscripts. This monk was able to miraculously heal wounds and was prepared to teach his art to anyone who would live with him a year in good harmony and would prove himself a man of generous heart and purity of spirit. Many students had already come to the ancient, always melancholy, and continuously mournful monk, but he liked none of them, and none had lived with him the specified year to learn the secrets of healing. Zakhar Berkut, on hearing of this doctor, was determined to serve this trial. Arriving at the monastery, he begged to be taken to the old man Akintiy and frankly told him the reason for his coming. The grey-bearded, morose ancient accepted him without argument and Zakhar stayed not one year, but all of three years. He returned from his wandering a new man. His love for the community became more fervent and strong, his words flowed in a clear, crystal wave, calm, wise, strong as steel and sharp as a razor against all falsehood. During the four years of his travels Zakhar Berkut got to know the world, was in Halych and in Kiev, saw the princes and their deeds, got acquainted with warriors and merchants. His simple, open mind absorbed all that he saw and heard, seed to seed, into the treasury of his memory as material to be meditated upon. He returned not only a doctor but a citizen. Having seen how the princes and boyars exerted themselves to weaken and undermine the system of free communities in the

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mountains of Kolomiya is described by Antin Mohilnitsky in his long poem "The Manyavsky Hermitage"; the author based it partly on his own fantasy, and partly on folk tradition.—  
*Ivan Franko*

villages so as to more easily turn the disunited and divided people into servants and slaves, Zakhar Berkut was convinced that there was no other deliverance or hope for his brother peasants, except in good laws and wise leadership, in the development of community affairs, community friendship and in unity. On the other hand, he had heard much from the old man Akintiy and other men of experience about the community order in Northetrn Rus, in Novgorod, Pskov, and about the prosperity and well-being of the people there. All this inflamed his ardent spirit with the desire to devote his whole life to the improvement and strengthening of good community relations in his native Tukhlia.

Seventy years had passed since those days. Like an ancient and mighty oak stood Zakhar Berkut among the younger generations and could now see the fruits of his many years of labour. And certainly, he could not look at them without pleasure. The Tukhlia community stood as one man, together in work and in sharing, in joy and in sorrow. The community made its own laws and settled its own affairs in all matters. Community land and community forests needed no watchmen — the community itself, together and always, guarded its possessions with care. There were no poor among them: the land supplied food for all, while the community granaries and barns were always open to those who needed anything. The princes and their boyars looked at this life in which they had no place and in which they were unnecessary, with an envious eye. The prince's tax collector descended into the Tukhlia valley once a year and the community went to great pains to rid themselves of this unpleasant government guest as soon as possible: within a day or two he left, loaded with all kinds of goods — be-

cause the Tukhlians paid their taxes, for the most part, with natural produce. But in Tukhlia the collector of the prince's taxes did not have such absolute power as in other villages. The Tukhlia people carefully considered what belonged to the tax collector and what to the prince and didn't allow him to take mean advantage of them.

Zakhar Berkut's influence, however, was evident and notable not only in Tukhlia; he was known for several miles around on both the Rus and Hungarian sides of the border. And he was known not only as an excellent healer who cured wounds and other ills, but as an excellent orator and adviser who "when he spoke it was as though God himself stepped into the heart," and when he gave advice to one man himself or to the whole community, a whole common of elders could give none better. For a long time Zakhar Berkut had been convinced that just as a man alone within the community was weak and helpless, so a community in itself was weak, and only in the mutual understanding and mutual action of many neighbouring communities could they be strong and individually strengthen their independent community life. So that always, while working in the interests of his Tukhlia area, Zakhar also remembered his neighbouring settlements. When he was younger, he often visited these communities, attended their assemblies and endeavoured to understand their needs and their people. His advice and suggestions always had one aim; the strengthening of friendly, comradely and brotherly relations between the people and the communities in the neighbourhood. The ties at this moment were vital and strong; the corrosive schemes of the princes and boyars were as yet unable to tear them apart entirely — so that it was no wonder that under the leader-

ship of a dedicated and greatly beloved man like Zakhar Berkut, experienced in community affairs, these ties were regularly renewed and strengthened. The ties with the Rus communities situated in Hungary were of particular importance for Tukhlia, indeed for all the Striy highlands, rich in wool and sheepskins, but poor in grain which was plentiful beyond the mountains. One of Zakhar's main efforts, therefore, was the construction of a safe and straight road from Tukhlia to the Hungarian side. He pondered this matter for many years, crossing the length and breadth of the Tukhlia mountain meadows, deliberating where it would be best, safest and least costly to build such a road. At the same time he sought, slowly and unceasingly, to convince the highland communities on both sides of the Beskid range of this idea. At every opportunity, at every community assembly, he argued the advantages and necessity of such a road till, in the end, he was successful.

More than ten communities of the district, near and far, sent their chosen representatives to Tukhlia for a community council, where the building of the new road was to be decided. It was a joyful day for Zakhar. He not only gladly agreed to mark out the area where the road should go, but during the whole period of building took upon himself the supervision of the work. What's more, he sent four of his sons to work, and the fifth son, a blacksmith, was constantly present with his travelling workshop to keep all the necessary tools in repair. Every community sent several workers supplied with their own bread and food, and under the untiring direction of Zakhar, the road was built within a year. Its benefits were immediately evident to all. The ties with the still wealthy, at the time, Hungarian-Rus commu-



nities revitalized the entire highlands. There was a lively and mutually beneficial exchange resulting from the abundance of their labour; sheepskin coats went over there, cheese and whole flocks of sheep for slaughter, while in return came wheat, rye and linen. It wasn't only for these exchanges in trade, however, that the Tukhlia road was convenient; it was also the conveyor of all kind of news about the communities on both sides of the Beskid range, was a living link that brought together the children of one people, broken up into two states.

True, the Tukhlia road was not the first such link. An older and once more famous highway was the Duklia road. But for many reasons it was not popular with the Halych-Rus princes, less perhaps because it maintained a vital link between the communities on both sides of the Beskid ranges and strengthened in one or another group the laws of their free communities, but rather because the Magyar kings and princes and their armies very often used it to invade Red Rus\*. That was why the Halych and Peremyshl princes attempted to at least fortify this entrance into their borders, if not close it completely. Of course, such "fortifications" carried out by the state and for the aims of the state, could only turn out to be harmful to the people and to the autonomy of their communities. The princes established their boyars all along the Duklia road, granted them vast areas of community lands and possessions, and gave them the responsibility of guarding the Duklia Pass. In case of military attack they were to detain the foe with their troops, enlisted from the surrounding settlements, and with barricades constructed of stone and cut down trees

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\* Halychyna

obstruct the road and make it in one way or another impassable for the enemy troops.

It is quite understandable that the whole burden of these obligations fell on the peasantry and their communities. They not only lost a portion of their ages-long holdings of land, which was being settled by the boyars, but also had to, besides this, supply the boyars with guards, soldiers and servants, build the barricades, and in times of strife be completely subjected to boyar command and boyar justice. It was natural that the boyar, having been given such broad privileges, became a power in the village, and quite naturally concerned with the strengthening of that power. To extend their holdings, the boyars put up their own barricades over the roadway and demanded, even in peaceful times, payment from all travellers for its use and this, in time, almost stopped the movement of traffic along the Duklia road, thus weakening the link between the communities. At the same time it led to the decline of the free community meetings and councils within the communities themselves. The boyar rule couldn't and wouldn't suffer another power in the community, so that it was inevitable that this state of affairs led to prolonged and heavy struggles, which in the end brought no advantage to the area. True, in the period being written about, the struggle was far from terminated and in some places, in far-removed villages, had not even started, and these were, one can say positively, the most fortunate corners of the Rus land in that day.

To these fortunate secluded corners belonged the Tukhlia valley and the road built over the Beskid to Hungary insured their well-being for a long time. The Tukhlia road had not yet fallen into the hands of the boyars, it was free to all, though the people

in its neighbouring villages, both in the Rus and on the Hungarian side, were diligent in guarding it from any enemy attacks. They notified each other about any threatening danger, and in this way it was promptly and quietly repelled by the united action of all the interested communities. It was not surprising, therefore, that Tukhlia, lying as it did along the roadway between Hungary and Pidhiria, was noted not only for the well-being of its people but also for its free social order. It stimulated and supported, by its example, the entire surrounding highlands, and particularly those villages which had already been settled by the boyars and in which the ruinous struggles between the old settlers and the new overlords had already begun. Zakhar Berkut's fervour as an orator and great authority contributed much to the fact that the greater number of the communities stood firmly in this struggle. The boyars were unable to consolidate their power as rapidly as they wished and were forced to live in good relationships with the people, subordinating themselves in times of peace to their village tribunals, sitting alongside the elders as equal among equals. This situation, however, was very disagreeable to the boyars; they awaited a war-time situation with all the eagerness of awaiting a festival because then hope smiled at them — they could then immediately grasp all power into their hands and seize this opportunity to destroy completely the hated community system of governing, and having once seized power, it would remain in their hands. But there were no wars. The ruler of Red Rus, Prince Danilo Romanovich, though favourable in attitude to the boyars — quite unlike his father \* —

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\* Roman Mstislavich (d. 1205), Prince of Novgorod, Vladimir of Volhynia and Halych, successfully opposed the boyar

was unable to give them much help, occupied as he was in his endeavours to gain the king's crown, or in wrangles with other princes who had designs on the Grand Dukedom of the Kiev throne. Least of all could he help with the security of his land against a new, unknown until now, enemy — the Mongols — who some ten years ago had appeared like a terrible thunder cloud on the eastern borders of Rus, in the Don steppelands, and defeated the assembled Rus princes in a terrible, bloody battle on the Kalka River. From the Kalka, however, as though suddenly frightened by the bravery of the Rus warriors, they turned back, and now, though ten years had passed, there was no sign of them. But a quiet anxiety flowed among the people, like a hot breeze whose wave flows over the ripening rye, for they knew not whether it would die down or bring with it the dread hailstorm. Those who knew least about it, or least expected it, were the princes and the boyars. After their defeat at the Kalka they calmly went on with their past activity — wrangling about succession to the throne and undermining the free and self-governing community social order. How foolish! They were uprooting the oak that fed them with its acorns! If they had turned their power and their forces toward the strengthening of these self-governing communities instead of weakening them, strengthening the vital links between them, our Rus would not have fallen under the arrows and axes of the Mongols, but would have withstood their invasion like that deep-rooted giant oak withstands an autumn gale!

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aristocracy and the Church to consolidate the central princely power, and eventually became one of the most influential princes in the Rus lands

Fortunate was Tukhlia, for the insatiable eyes of the princes and boyars had somehow overlooked it as yet. Was it because it was so far removed from the world, among the mountains and cliffs, or perhaps because there were no great riches within its boundaries. Be that as it may, the boyars seemed to have little desire to remove themselves into such a secluded place. But even this good fortune was not to last. One fine day, the boyar Tuhar Vovk, suddenly appeared in the Tukhlia mountains, and without saying a word to anyone, began to build a home for himself on the hill over the Opir River at some distance from Tukhlia, but on Tukhlia land. The Tukhlians, out of surprise, were silent at first, and did nothing to stop the new visitor, but later began to ask him who he was, where he was from, and what he was here for.

"I'm a boyar of Prince Danilo," he answered proudly. "I have been granted the lands and forests of Tukhlia in return for my services to the prince."

"But these lands and forests belong to the people!" the Tukhlians answered.

"This has nothing to do with me," the boyar returned, "go to the prince and seek a claim. I have his decree — and that's all I want to know!"

The Tukhlians shook their heads at these words and said nothing. In the meantime the boyar behaved arrogantly, constantly bragging of the prince's kindness and the prince's behest, though he didn't, in the beginning, oppress the Tukhlia people or interfere in their community affairs. The Tukhlians, and especially the young people, whether from curiosity or from their customary hospitality, met the boyar quite often at first and rendered him some small services; then suddenly, as though cut off by an axe, their visits ceased and they very

obviously avoided him. The boyar was surprised at this and finally angered, and he began to perform all kinds of malicious acts against the Tukhlians. His manor stood just above the Tukhlia road, and taking example from other boyars, he erected an enormous barrier across it and demanded payment of a toll from all passing through. But the Tukhlia folk were a stubborn people. They immediately sensed that this was the beginning of a decisive struggle and determined, on Zakhar Berkut's advice, to stand firmly and persistently by their rights. A week after the barricade was erected the Tukhlia people's council sent their representatives to Tuhar Vovk and they gave him a short, but firmly-put question:

"What are you doing, boyar? Why are you barricading the road?"

"Because I wish to do so!" answered the boyar haughtily. "If you have a grievance then go and complain about me to the prince."

"But this is not the prince's roadway, it's a community road!"

"That is none of my concern!"

With this the representatives had to retreat, but immediately after they left, a whole band of village youths with axes arrived from Tukhlia and quietly dismantled and cut up the barrier into small pieces, piled it up, and set up a huge bonfire not far from the boyar's manor. The boyar fumed inside the house, curced the dirty *smerds*, but didn't have the courage to oppose them and didn't immediately put up another barrier. The first attack then, on community rights, was repulsed. But the Tukhlians did not rejoice betimes — they well knew that this was but the first attack and that they could expect others. And that is exactly what happened. One day the herdsmen came running into Tukhlia proclaiming

the sad news that the boyar's servants were driving their sheep off the best community pastures. The herdsmen had barely told their story when the community foresters arrived and said that the boyar was measuring and staking out a huge piece of the finest community forest. Again the community council sent their representatives to Tuhar Vovk.

"Why, boyar, are you mistreating the community?"

"I'm only taking that which the prince has granted me."

"But these forests don't belong to the prince, they belong to the community. How could he give away something that isn't his?"

"Then go and complain to the prince," said the boyar and turned away.

From that time on there was truly a war between the boyar and the Tukhlians. One day the Tukhlians would drive the boyar's flocks out of their mountain meadows; another day the boyar's servants would drive the Tukhlia flocks out. The forest seized by the boyar was guarded by both the village and the boyar's foresters, among whom quarrels and fights broke out more than once. These occurrences angered the boyar more and more. He finally gave an order to kill the Tukhlia cattle found on the meadows he had appropriated and a forester found in the appropriated forest he ordered bound to a tree and switched with thorn branches till he was nearly dead. These last incidents were already too much for the Tukhlia villagers. Many voices spoke up that the boyar be accused, by law of ancient custom, of being an insubordinate and malevolent citizen, a bandit and a thief; that he be banished beyond the borders of the community lands and his manor be destroyed

completely. A notable number of the villagers agreed to this and it would have been difficult indeed for the boyar if Zakhar Berkut hadn't expressed his opinion that it wouldn't be correct to condemn anybody without a hearing and that justice demanded that the boyar be called before the people's assembly and be given the opportunity of explaining his actions. Then the community could deal with him in complete calmness and with deliberation. The Tukhlians accepted this advice.

Certainly nobody at today's meeting realized the significance of this moment as did Zakhar Berkut. He saw that his life's work was being weighed in the balance of the people's verdict. If this verdict were concerned only with justice, then Zakhar would have been peaceful and would have placed his confidence completely on the good sense of his fellow villagers. Here, however, they were faced with deliberating — for the first time in a people's assembly — foreign, completely different, and immensely critical circumstances which complicated the affair almost to hopelessness. Zakhar well understood that the verdict, favourable or unfavourable for the boyar, threatened the community with great danger. A favourable verdict meant the acceptance, not so much of the right, but of the power on the boyar's side. Once and for all it would mean the abasement of the community before him, giving into his hands not only the appropriated forests and meadows, but the entire community. It would be the first painful breach in their free community social order over whose re-establishment and strengthening he had unceasingly laboured throughout seventy years. An unfavourable verdict which would decree the banishment of the boyar threatened also with great danger. What if the boyar was able to incite the



prince, awaken his anger, convince him that the Tukhliaus were rebels? This could bring down a great storm and even the complete ruination of Tukhlia, similar to other verdicts that had already ruined a number of communities whose princes had recognized them as rebels and handed over to the boyars and their armies for plunder and destruction. Either of these difficult decisions before the assembly filled old Zakhar's heart with great sorrow and he prayed with deep sincerity to the great Dazhboh, the Sun, that he enlighten him and his community and help them find the true path out of these difficulties.

"Good citizens!" so Zakhar began his speech. "I will not conceal from you that which, by the way, you are well aware of yourselves — the difficult and important decisions that await us in today's community tribunal. When I see what is happening around us and the threats we are facing, then it seems to me that our hitherto peaceful community life has been lost, never to return; that the time has come for all of us to show by our deeds, in struggle, that our community system is truly strong and good and that it is able to withstand the coming great storm. You know the kind of storm that is approaching us, and from more than one direction, and will hear more about it at today's assembly, so there is no need for me to talk about it at this time. I would only like to reveal to you and fix forever in your memory, the position which, in my opinion, you should take, firmly, to the very end. But then, neither I nor anyone else has any control over you — if you will, you will listen, if you don't — it's your will! I'll only say that today we stand at a crossroads, today we will have to choose: do we go here or there. Therefore it behooves us, mature and experienced

people that we are, to clarify for ourselves that choice, the paths down which it might lead us and the situation in which we find ourselves right now.

“Take a look, good citizens, at our assembly standard, which has for fifty years now heard our words and witnessed our deeds. Do you know what the symbols on it mean? Sainly and dignified old men, our fathers, designed it and passed its meaning on to me. ‘Zakhar,’ they said, ‘one day, at a time of threatening disaster, when life will turn a hostile face to the community and threaten its ways, then you reveal to the people what this standard means. At the same time reveal that our blessing and that of our spiritual guardian rests upon it, and that a retreat from the path that this standard points out will be the greatest misfortune to the community and the beginning of its downfall!’”

Zakhar paused for a moment. His speech had made a great impression on all those present. All eyes were turned on the standard which hung on its tall pole in the stone in front of them, its silver chains of interlocking rings shining, its crimson folds fluttering as if being transfused with living blood.

“I haven’t said anything to you about this before,” continued Zakhar, “because the times were peaceful. But the time has come to tell you today. Look at it, this ensign of ours! The chain was carved out of one solid trunk, strong and locked within itself, yet free in each of the links that hold it together and ready to accept other links. This chain — it is our Rus family, which emerged from the hands of good, creative spirits. Every link in that chain represents one community, forever naturally connected with all the others, yet free within itself, living its

own life and satisfying its own needs. Only this integrity and freedom within it of each individual community gives their totality its unity and freedom. Let but one link be broken, fall apart of itself — then the whole chain will fall apart, its unity shattered. This is how the downfall of free community relations in one community becomes a wound which brings illness, let alone infection, to the whole body of our sacred Rus. Woe to the people who would willingly allow themselves to become such a wound, who would not use all their strength and resources to remain healthy! Better that such a people disappear from the face of the earth, sink into a bottomless pit!”

Zakhar’s final words, spoken in a loud, stern voice, deafened the ears of his listeners to the noise of the waterfall which was dashing itself against the rocks just a short distance away. Like a living pillar of crystal, sparkling in the sun’s rays in all the colours of the rainbow, it appeared like a blazing streak above the heads of the assembly. Zakhar continued:

“Look again at this standard! Every link of this chain has been bound with silver into a beautiful design. These bindings do not burden the links but decorate them and give them durability. In the same way every people have their own treasured customs and rules born of necessity, regulated by the sagacity of our wise fathers. These laws are sacred not because they are ancient or that they were established by our ancestors, but because they are free, because they do not bind any good person doing good deeds; they are binding only on those who are evil, who want to injure the community. These laws do not bind the community either, but give it the strength and the power to defend all that is good

and beneficial, and to destroy all that is evil and harmful. If it weren't for these silver bindings the wooden links could easily be broken apart and the completeness of the chain would be lost. The same with our sacred community laws; if they were broken, the whole community would perish. Take heed then, good citizens! Thieving hands are stretching out to tear the silver bindings off our chain, to weaken and trample under their feet the social order under which we have lived so well."

"No, we won't allow this!" shouted the crowd, unanimously. "We'll defend our freedom, even if we have to shed the last drop of our blood!"

"Good, my children!" Zakhar Berkut was deeply moved. "That's the way it should be. Believe me, this is the spirit of our Guardian speaking through you! It is through his influence that you have guessed the meaning of the symbols fluttering in our banner. Why is it red? It represents blood. The community must defend its freedom, its sacred system, to its last drop. And believe me, the moment that blood will be demanded from us is not far! Let us be prepared to shed it in our defence!"

At that moment all eyes, as though at a signal, turned in the direction of the village.

There, on the roadway leading out of the village alongside the waterfall toward the mountains, came a group of magnificently uniformed, armed people. It was Tuhar Vovk and his consort arriving at the assembly in all their splendour. The boyar, disregarding the warm spring day, was arrayed in full battle dress; he wore a coat of mail of shining steel, and the same encased his hips and legs, while a shiny bronze helmet with a waving plume of cock feathers adorned his head. A heavy combat sword swayed at his side, a bow and a quiver of arrows hung across

his shoulder and an axe with a broad, glittering blade and bronze-plated head protruded from his belt. Over all these fearsome weapons, and as a sign of his good intentions, he wore a wolfskin cape with the wolf's head made into a clasp across his chest and the paws with their sharp nails encircling his waistline. Surrounding him walked ten soldiers, archers and axemen, dressed in like wolfskins, but without armour. The assembled Tukhlians instinctively recoiled on seeing the approaching wolflike soldiers; all understood that this, precisely, was the enemy that had pretensions to their freedom and independence. While they were still approaching, Zakhar concluded his speech:

"Here comes the boyar who is boasting that the prince, out of kindness, granted him our lands, our freedom, ourselves. See how arrogantly he steps forward in his response to that kindness, in the understanding that he is a servant to the prince, that he is a slave! We don't need kindness from the boyar and there is no reason for us to become slaves — that is why he hates us and calls us *smerds*. We know, however, that his arrogance is absurd and that arrogance does not become a man who is truly free, but rather a calm dignity and reason. Let us preserve our dignity and reason in our dealings with him, so that we do not humiliate him, but that he himself will feel humiliated in the depths of his conscience. I have finished."

A quiet murmur of satisfaction and spirited decisiveness rippled through the crowd. Zakhar sat down in his place. For a moment silence reigned on the common as Tuhar Vovk neared the assembly.

"Good health to you, people!" he greeted, touching his hand to his helmet, but leaving it on his head.

"Good health to you, too, boyar!" answered the

crowd. Tuhar Vovk stepped forward with a proud, confident step till he stood before them and then, barely sweeping his gaze over them, said:

“You called me to appear before you — and here I am. What do you want of me?”

The words were uttered in a sharp, contemptuous tone, by which the boyar obviously wanted to show the gathering his superiority. At the same time he didn't look at the people, but played with his axe as if delighting in the glitter of its sharp edge and its head, clearly showing his deep contempt for the assembly and its importance.



"We have called you, boyar, before this people's tribunal, so that before we pass sentence on your conduct, you would be given an opportunity to speak. By what right and to what purpose are you seeking to harm our community?"

"Before the people's tribunal?" Tuhar Vovk repeated as if astonished, and turned to face Zakhar Berkut. "I am in the service of the prince and a boyar. Nobody has the power to try me, other than the prince himself and boyars equal to me."

"As to whose servant you are, boyar, we will not argue, it is not our concern. But as to your right, we will discuss that later. For now, if you are so kind, tell us from whence you came into our village?"

"From Halych, the capital city of the prince."

"And who ordered you to come here?"

"My overlord and yours — the prince Danilo Romanovich."

"Speak for yourself and not for us, boyar! We are a free people and know no overlord. And why did your overlord send you into our village?"

The boyar's face flushed red with anger at Zakhar's words. For a moment he hesitated, as if debating whether he should continue answering his questions, then restrained himself and answered:

"He ordered me to be the protector of his lands and his subjects, administrator and commander of Tukhlia and rewarded me for my faithful service by giving me and my descendants the Tukhlia lands in perpetuity. Here is his decree with his seal and signature." With these words the boyar, with a proud gesture, removed the prince's decree from behind his wide belt and held it up to show the assembly.

"Put away your decree, boyar," said Zakhar calmly, "we cannot read it, and the seal of your

prince is not a law as far as we are concerned. Better that you yourself tell us, who this prince of yours is."

"What is this?" cried the boyar, amazed. "You do not know of Prince Danilo?"

"No, we do not know any prince."

"The ruler of all the lands, all the settlements and towns from the San to the Dnieper, from the Carpathians to the mouth of the Bug River?"

"We have never seen him, and he's not our ruler. The shepherd is the ruler of his flock, he guards it from the wolf, drives it to a cool stream in the heat of the day, and to a warm, secure sheep fold in the cool of the evening. Does the prince do this for his dependents?"

"The prince does even more for them," answered the boyar. "He gives them wise laws and wise judges to administer them, sends them his faithful servants to defend them from their enemies."

"You are not telling us the truth, boyar," observed Zakhar sternly. "See, the sun in the sky has hidden its bright face so as not to listen to your deceitful words! Wise laws came to us not from your prince, but from our fathers and grandfathers. We have not yet seen the wise judges of the prince but we have lived peacefully, in harmony and with order, ruling ourselves with our people's wisdom. Our fathers taught us long ago that one man is a fool, and a people's court is a just court. Our fathers lived without a prince's supervisors as we have lived to this day, and as you can see, our homes are not lying waste and our children have not been taken into slavery by any enemy."

"That's the way it has been till now, but it won't be like that from now on."

"How it will be from now on we don't know and



you, boyar, don't know either. But tell us one more thing: is your prince a just man?"

"The whole world knows and marvels at his fairness."

"And he sent you here, I suppose, so that you would dispense justice in our mountains?"

The boyar was confused by this straightforward question, but after a moment of indecision, answered:

"Yes."

"And what do you think, boyar, would a just man unjustly harm his subjects?"

The boyar was silent.

"Can he, with unjust deeds, plant justice in their hearts, and in injuring them, win for himself their love and respect?"

The boyar remained silent, playing with the edge of his axe.

"You see, boyar," concluded Zakhar, "your lips are silent, but your conscience tells you that it cannot be. Yet your so just prince is doing exactly that to us, whom he has never seen and doesn't know, whose welfare and happiness do not concern him, who have never done him any harm, but to the contrary, pay him a rich tribute every year. How could he do this, boyar?"

Tuhar Vovk flashed an angry glance at Zakhar, and answered:

"You are prattling foolishness, old man. The prince would not wrong anybody!"

"But he has harmed us with that same decree of which you boast so much! Just think, wouldn't I be wronging you if against your wishes I were to take off your coat of mail and give it to my son? This is exactly what your prince has done to us. What your coat of mail is to you, so our land and forest is to us. We have used and guarded them for centuries-

like the apple of our eye — and now suddenly you arrive in the name of the prince and say: "This is mine! My prince gave it to me as a reward for my great service on his behalf!" and turn out our herdsmen, kill our foresters on our own land! Tell me, can we then consider your prince a just man?"

"You are mistaken, old man!" said Tuhar Vovk. "All of us — we are all the property of the prince, with everything that we own, with our cattle and our land. Only the prince is free, and we are his slaves. His kindness — that is our freedom. He can do with us as he wills."

Like a blow of an axe to the head, so these words stunned Zakhar Berkut. He lowered his grey head and was silent for a long moment, not knowing what to say. The whole assembly stood in deathly gloom. Finally Zakhar stood up. His face was bright. Raising his hand up to the sun, he said:

"O bright Sun! Kind and beneficent free body of light, don't listen to these terrible words this man has dared to utter before your face! Don't listen. Forget that they have been said on our so far undefiled by such thoughts earth! And don't punish us for them! Because you won't let this go by without punishment, that I know. If there, in Halych, there are many such people around the prince, then wipe them off the face of the earth. But in punishing them, don't destroy the whole of our people along with them!"

Saying this, Zakhar was appeased. He sat down and turned again to the boyar:

"We have heard your views, boyar," he said. "Don't repeat them before us again, let them remain with you. Now listen to what we think of your prince. Listen and don't get angry! You can see and hear for yourself that we do not see him as a father

and guardian. A father knows his child, his needs and desires, but he doesn't know us, nor does he want to know us. A guardian protects his subjects from the enemy and from all other harm — the prince protects us neither from rain, nor from tempest, hail nor from the bear — and these have been our worst enemies. He does, however, proclaim that he protects us from the Ugrian armies. But how does he protect us? By sending us enemies who are worse than the Ugrians — his greedy boyars and their soldiers. The Ugrians attack, plunder whatever they can and go away; when the boyar attacks, he remains and is not satisfied with whatever spoils are available, but would be happy to turn us all into his slaves for eternity. Neither as father or protector do we see your prince, but as God's punishment sent to us for our sins, and for which we have to pay with our annual tribute. The less we know about him and he about us, the better for us. But if the whole of our Rus could somehow rid ourselves of him and his chiefs today, then it would certainly be fortunate and great!" \*

Tuhar Vovk listened to the passionate words of the old speaker with strange feelings. Though

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\* The views expressed by Zakhar Berkut here could be considered typical of the views of the people of the period about the princes and their bloody internecine wars and the beginnings of feudalism. We recall similar opinions were also voiced by our chronicler in a story about the singer Mitusa, whom Prince Danilo caused to be arrested and put to death for his mutinous speeches and rebelliousness. It is understood that in presenting these viewpoints and in characterising the period and its people, we don't want to belittle the consequence and importance of Prince Danilo, who among all the princes of the Halych-Rus lands was distinguished as an unusual man, pleasant and in his own way, and for his time, quite humane and endowed with political wisdom

brought up in the prince's court and spoiled by its corruption and baseness, he was after all a warrior, a soldier and a man, must have felt, in his heart, at least a spark of that feeling that so strongly moved the heart of Zakhar Berkut. At the same time he was far from sincere in his words about the limitless power of the prince; his soul also rebelled against this power from time to time, but now he wanted to conceal, behind the might of the prince, his own desires for like powers. No wonder, then, that the words of Zakhar Berkut sank more deeply into his heart than he wished. For the first time he looked at him in sincere wonder, at the same time feeling compassion for this giant of a man whose defeat, in his opinion, was close and inevitable.

"Old man," he said, "I grieve for your grey hair and youthful heart. You have lived a long time in this world, perhaps too long, it seems to me. Living in the past with your heart and in the fervent thoughts of youth, you have ceased to understand our new, contemporary times, their ideas and requirements. That which was in the past does not have to be in the present, nor forever. All that lives — passes. Outlived also are your youthful ideas about freedom. Difficult times are coming, old man! They inevitably demand a single, powerful ruler in our land, a man who would unite and grasp in his hands the strength of all the people for their defence against the enemy which is nearing from the rising sun. You don't know all this, old man, and you think that the old times are still here."

"You are again mistaken, boyar," answered Zakhar Berkut. "It is not seemly for an old man to sink into youthful dreams and close his eyes to the present. And it would be three times worse for him to disregard what is good because it is old and

grasp what is bad because it is new. This is the custom of the young, and that of poorly brought up young. You are intimating that I don't know what is going on about us. In the meantime it isn't known which one of us knows it better or in greater detail. You hinted to me about a terrible enemy who threatens us from the rising sun and expressed the opinion that the approach of this enemy demands the gathering of the entire strength of our people into one pair of hands. Now I will tell you what I know about that enemy. True, boyar, yesterday you received a messenger from the prince, who informed you of a new attack on our land by the terrible Mongols and about how, after a long resistance, they occupied Kiev and destroyed it completely. Now like a heavy cloud, they are spreading out toward our Red Rus lands. We knew this, boyar, a week ago, and we knew about the prince's messenger sent into this territory and about the news he was bringing. The messenger came a bit late — our messengers travel much faster. The Mongols have long been flooding our Red Rus, destroying many towns and villages and are now divided into two streams. One has gone to the west, probably to Sudomir, into Poland, and the second is coming along the Striy valley in our direction. Isn't it true, boyar, that you didn't know this?"

Tuhar Vovk looked at Old Zakhar with amazement, almost with fear.

"How do you know all this, old man?" he asked.

"This I'll tell you also, so that you know what strength there is in the community and in its free association. We are united with all the settlements in the foothills; they are obligated to us, and we to them, to bring each other all news important to our lives as quickly as possible. The Pidhirya settlements are as-

sociated with further settlements in the Pokuttya and Podillya, so that news, in one way or another important to us, of whatever happens in our Red Rus, goes like lightning from community to community.”

“What good is the news when you can’t help yourselves?” blurted the boyar, haughtily.

“What you’ve said is true, boyar,” answered Zakhar, sadly. “The Podillya and Pokuttya communities cannot help themselves because they’ve been stripped and weakened by the princes and the boyars who do not allow them to have their own arms, or learn how to use them. So you see, boyar, what this means: unite the strength of the people under one ruler! To unite the strength of the people under one ruler means to weaken the strength of the people. To give one man complete power over the people means that every community must be deprived of its freedom, all ties between them must be broken, the community disarmed. Then the road into our country is made open to all kinds of Mongols. Take a look at our Rus land now! Your ruler, your mighty Prince Danilo has disappeared somewhere without trace. Instead of turning to his people, giving them back their freedom and making them into a vital, undefeatable barrier against the Mongol invasion he has run to the Ugrian king to beg for help while the Mongols are ruining his country. But the Ugrians\* are in no hurry to help us though they themselves are being threatened by the same invasion. Now your Danilo has disappeared somewhere and who knows, maybe in a short while we’ll see him in the camp of the Mongol Khan as his faithful vassal and by the price of slavery and humiliation before a stronger power, buy himself power over the weaker.”

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\* Ugrian — Hungarian

The boyar listened to this story his head already making plans. What to do? How to take advantage of this situation?

"You say the Mongols are threatening invasion of these mountains?" Zakhar smiled knowingly at this question.

"Yes, boyar."

"And what are you thinking of doing? Will you give up or fight?"

"We can't give up, because all who give up are driven into their army and that into the front lines, into the thick of the battles."

"That means that you will defend yourselves."

"We'll try with all our strength."

"If so then accept me as your commander. I'll lead you into battle against the Mongols!"

"Wait a moment, boyar, we haven't arrived at choosing a commander as yet. You haven't yet cleared yourself of your conduct against our community. Your generous gesture of service to the community we will accept, but our ancestors taught us that one must approach a clean action with clean hands. Will your hands be clean for such an action, boyar?"

Tuhar Vovk was somewhat confused by this unexpected turn, and finally said:

"Old man, citizens, let us forget offences. The enemy is approaching, so let us unite our forces against him! In seeking justice for your wrongs you can only make things worse and gain no good for yourselves!"

"No boyar, don't say that! We are not seeking justice for our wrongs, we are seeking the truth. You came to us on a lie, boyar, and have conducted yourself with us deceitfully — so how can we trust you to command us in a war against the Mongols?"

"Old man, I see that you have determined to irritate me!"

"Boyar, take care! This is a people's tribunal and not an entertainment! Tell me — having settled on Tukhlian land, did you wish to become a member of the community?"

"I was sent here by the prince as a commander."

"We have told you that we don't acknowledge your proclaimed right over us, and particularly your right to our lands. Don't touch, boyar, our lands or our people and then, maybe, we'll accept you into our community as an equal among equals."

"So that's it!" cried Tuhar Vovk in anger. "So this is your justice! So I would have to disregard the favour of the prince and beg favours of the low-borns?"

"Well boyar, there is no other way in which you can become our citizen, and the people won't tolerate among themselves a man who is not a member of their community!"

"Won't tolerate?" Tuhar Vovk cried, derisively.

"Our ancestors told us: a harmful and unnecessary member of the community, a robber, a horse thief or a stranger who would take lands against the will of the people must be driven out with his family beyond the borders of the community, his home must be destroyed and razed to the ground."

"Ha-ha-ha!" the boyar gave a forced laugh. "You would dare to equate me, a boyar of the prince, rewarded by his kindness for my services, with robbers and horse thieves?"

"Well, boyar, you tell us in good conscience — are you treating us any better than a robber? You are taking our land, our greatest and only wealth; you are driving away our people and killing them,



shooting our cattle! Is this is the action of an honourable man?"

"You must cease such talk, old man! I cannot listen to it for it violates my integrity."

"Stop, boyar, I have not yet finished," said Zakhar Berkut calmly. "You have mentioned your integrity and time and again you have talked of your great services. Be good enough to tell us about them so that we may also respect them."

"I shed my blood in twenty battles!"

"To shed your blood, boyar, is not yet a service. A robber also sheds his blood more than once, and he is hung for it. Tell us, against whom and for whom did you battle?"

"Against the Kiev prince, against the Volyn, Polish and Mazowsze princes..."

"Enough, boyar! These wars — they are a disgrace, not a service, either for you or for the princes. These were nothing but predatory wars."

"I also fought against the Mongols on the Kalka." \*

"And how did you fight against them?"

"What do you mean, how? I fought the way I was supposed to fight, without retreating from my position until I was wounded and taken into bondage."

"Now that was a good thing you said, but we don't know how true it is."

"If you don't know then don't mix into what you don't know."

"Wait, boyar, don't jeer at our ignorance. We will try to find out." With these words Zakhar rose and turning to the people, said:

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\* the Kalka (now Kalchik) — a tributary of the Calmius, a river flowing into the Sea of Azov. The site of the first encounter of Rus armies with the hordes of Genghis Khan (May 31, 1223), where the Rus were defeated

“Good people, you have heard the boyar’s confession?”

“Yes.”

“Can anyone bear witness for or against him?”

“I can,” came a voice from the throng.

The boyar jumped as if struck by an arrow in hearing that voice, and for the first time he looked closely and in some alarm at the assembled.

“Anyone who can give evidence, let him come before the assembly and do so,” said Zakhar.

A man, not yet old but crippled — without an arm and a leg — came out of the crowd. His face was furrowed with deep scars. This was Mitko Voyak,\* as the people called him. A few years ago he had come into this community on a crutch and told them a terrible tale about the Mongols, about the battle on the Kalka, the defeat of the Rus princes and the death of those who were captured. They suffocated, being laid out under the boards, on which the Mongolian military commanders sat to eat during their banquet. He, Mitko, had been in that battle in the company of one boyar and had, together with him, been taken into bondage from which by some miracle he escaped. For a long time he had wandered through the villages and towns of sacred Rus, till finally he came to Tukhlia. The place appealed to him and he remained to live here. Because he could, with his one hand, weave beautiful baskets and because he knew many songs and stories about far-off lands, the people accepted him among them, looked after him and clothed him in turn, liking and respecting him for his wounds acquired in the war against the invaders and for his honest, jovial

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\* Voyak — warrior

characher. It was this Mitko who came out of the crowd to give evidence against the boyar.

"Tell us warrior Mitko," Zakhar began, "do you know this boyar, against whom you want to give evidence?"

"Yes, I know him," answered Mitko firmly. "I served in his company and was in the battle at the Kalka."

"What evidence do you wish to present against him?"

"Be silent, you vile slave!" cried the boyar, grown somewhat pale. "Be silent, or this will be the end of your miserable life!"

"Boyar, I am a free citizen and no longer your slave. Only my community can tell me to be quiet. I have been silent, but now I have been given the right to speak. Honest citizens! My evidence against boyar Tuhar Vovk is important and terrible. He is a trai..."

"If you have kept quiet to this day, then continue keeping quiet!" roared the boyar swinging his axe, and Mitko Voyak, his head slashed asunder, fell bleeding to the ground.

The crowd groaned and sprang to their feet. A terrible cry resounded through the common.

"Death to him! Death! He has disgraced the sacred tribunal! He has killed one of our men at the community council!"

"You filthy *smerds!*" shouted the boyar. "I have no fear of you! The same will happen to everyone who dares to touch me either by word or deed. Hey, my faithful servants, come here, beside me!"

The archers and the axemen, though pale and trembling, surrounded the boyar. Menacing and purple with rage, he stood among them with the

bloodied axe in his hand. At a sign from Zakhar the crowd quieted down.

"Boyar," he spoke, "you have committed a mortal sin against God and the people. You have killed a witness for the tribunal, a citizen of our community. The evidence he wished to present against you, we haven't heard and we don't wish to know — let your conscience be your judge. But with this murder you have acknowledged your guilt and have committed another crime. Our community can tolerate you no longer on our land. Leave us! In three days our people will come to raze your house and erase all trace of your living among us."

"Let them come!" shouted the boyar, angrily. "We'll see who will erase whose trace. I spit on your tribunal! I'll be glad to see whoever will have the nerve to approach my home! Come, my servants, let's leave this filthy assembly!"

So saying, the boyar and his servants left. For a long time the assembly stood silent. The young men removed the body of Mitko Voyak.

"Good citizens," said Zakhar, finally, "is it your will that we proceed with Tuhar Vovk as our fathers willed that we proceed with such as he?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the crowd.

"Who do you choose to carry out the community's verdict?"

Ten young men were chosen, among them Maxim Berkut. It was difficult for Maxim to accept this assignment. However hateful the boyar was, he was still the father of Her who had charmed his heart and his mind, and for whom he would have given his life. She also was condemned, to his grief, though innocent of her father's guilt. But Maxim did not refuse the community's choice of himself, for however hard it would be to carry out the assembly's verdict,

he was happy in his heart, it would give him the opportunity to see Her! Maybe he could comfort her, amend in some way with his sympathy the harsh verdict of the community!...

In the meantime the community council continued its meeting. The messengers from the neighboring communities were called that they might take council with them on how to best defend themselves against the Mongol invasion.

"We are ruined," said the messenger from the Pidhirya settlements.

"Our villages have been burned down, our cattle taken, our youth killed. The fires have spread in a broad stream of destruction through Pidhirya. The prince gave us no help and the boyars who oppressed us in times of peace betrayed us in our need."

The messengers from Korchin and Tustan said:

"We are threatened with a flood. The tents of the Mongols shine white on the plain down by Sinevidsk. They are countless in number and we cannot even think of battle but of taking our belongings and fleeing into the forests and the mountains. Our boyars had started to build barricades on the highway, but are now undecided. People are whispering that they want to sell our roadways to the Mongols."

Messengers from other highland communities said:

"Our harvests are poor, and now we have many refugees from the lowlands. This period just before the harvest is very hard. Rescue us and our guests; help us to live through this dark hour!"

The messengers from the Ugrian-Rus communities said:

"We heard that the Mongol invasion is flooding toward the Ugrian lands. In the name of God and the Gods of our fathers, we beg of you,

neighbours and brothers, to stop this terrible cloud, don't allow it to come over our land! Your villages are fortresses; every cliff, every ravine represents a thousand soldiers. But once they get across the mountains no power on earth will then be able to stop them, and all of us will perish in vain. We are ready to give you all the help you will ask for — in bread and in people — only don't give up, don't lose hope, stand up and fight this terrible invader!"

Then Zakhar Berkut said:

"Good people, and you good neighbouring ambassadors! All of us here are aware of the terrible disaster that is approaching our land. Our military forces fought the enemy and perished. Their strength is great and the unhappy situation in our lowlands allowed them to enter into the heart of our country, to the very threshold of our home. The princes and boyars have lost their heads or are obviously betraying their country. What must we do? How are we to defend ourselves? I would think that it would be impossible for us to seek help beyond our Tukhlia borders. We will defend our roadway with your help, our faithful Transcarpathian friends. But we cannot defend other roads. That will be your task, faithful Tustan citizens, and if we should succeed in our defence, then we will gladly come to your aid."

The Tustan messengers replied:

"We know, father Zakhar, that there is no way that you can come to our defence, and that in this dark hour it is necessary that each of us should first of all stand up for ourselves. But reflect on this. Our communities are not as fortunate as your because the boyars have taken over and they are keeping watch over the barricades and passes. If they decide to hand them over to the Mongols, then what can we do? We have but one hope: that the Mongols

won't come to your road and in that case, after safeguarding your roadway with sentries, you will be able to come to our help."

"Oh, come on, people," said Zakhar sadly, but with some reproach, "there's strength in your hands and wisdom in your heads, as in men, but your talk is childish! You are putting all your hopes in 'maybe' and in 'who knows'. You may be sure of this, that if we are not threatened, then our whole community will come to your aid. But first of all you must protect yourselves against your own enemies — the boyars. As long as the barricades and mountain passes are in their hands, so long nobody can take a secure breath. At any moment these crafty foxes can sell you out. It's time to stop dreaming, sound the bells and throw off the chains in which the boyars' greed and princes' power has put your communities. As long as this isn't done, so long will we not be able to help you."

The Tustan messengers listened to Zakhar with sadly bent heads.

"Oh, father Zakhar," they said, "you know our people, and yet you talk as if you didn't. Their long-held courage has been broken, their freedom down-trodden. We thank you for advice and will pass it on to our people, but will they follow it? Oh, if only you could be among them and speak to them yourself!"

"Could it really be, good neighbours, that my word would carry more weight among your people than their own needs, their own wisdom? No! If that were so, then my words would be of no help to you. It means the end of our community, the end of Rus!"

The sun had long sunk into late afternoon when the Tukhlia people ended their assembly and returned to the village. They went without songs or shouts,

sadly, both old and young, full of gloomy thoughts. What would the coming day bring them?

The messengers from the surrounding villages, invigorated in spirit and encouraged, departed their separate ways. Only the council standard, the symbol of the people's strength and unity, swung high and gaily in the breeze while the spring sky glowed with immaculate blue as though unseeing of the earth's sorrows and anxieties.

#### IV.

Fire, ruin and death flowed in a broad stream across the Rus lands. The terrifying Mongol horde from the far-away Asian steppe invaded our land and for many centuries sapped the strength of our country from its very roots, destroyed its national life. The first cities — Kiev, Kaniv and Pereyaslav — fell and were completely ruined; following them went thousands of villages and smaller towns. The Mongol chieftain, Batu Khan, \* nicknamed Batei, marched at the head of his one hundred thousand-man horde, driving before him four times as many prisoners whom he forced to fight for him in the front lines of the battles. They advanced across the Rus lands in a broad sweep, wading knee deep in human blood. There could be no thought of any kind of resistance on equal terms, especially since Rus was divided and torn with internecine strife. Here and there the townspeople offered resistance from within their walls and because the Mongols were unaccus-

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\* Batu Khan, or Sayin Khan (1208-1255) — Genghis Khan's grandson; founder of the Golden Horde. Leader of the 1237-1240 invasion disastrous for the Rus lands



tomed to laying seige, they had to waste a great deal of time storming the gates and the walls with their axes. But the weak citadels fell more from treason and corruption than from struggle with the enemy. The target of the terrible horde were the Ugrians, settled on a wealthy land and related to the Mongols and from which the great Mongol ruler Genghis Khan\* demanded surrender. The Ugrians refused and the terrible campaign of the Mongol horde was organized to show the vengeance of the great Genghis Khan. According to the plans of Batei, the horde was to advance on Hungary from three directions: from the east through the land of Semihorod, from the west through Moravia and from the north, through the Carpathians. To this end the horde was divided into three armies: one, under the leadership of Kaidan, went across the Bessarabian steppe into Wallachia; the second, led by Peta, separated from the main army on the Volyn lands crossed Red Rus through Plisnesko, battled its way to the top of the Dniester River where it forded and spilled across the foothills seeking passes through the Carpathians. The local people as well as some of the treasonous boyars, taken prisoner, guided the Mongols along the Striy River to the Tukhlia Pass and as the Korchin messenger had just reported, their tents were already gleaming on the plain below Sinevidsk.

The day was declining. Dense twilight shadows were falling over the Pidhirya. The wooded hills of

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\* Genghis Khan (originally Temujin; c. 1155-1227) — founder of a vast early-feudal empire; a notorious conqueror of great territories. Moving westward, his advance detachments reached South Rus in 1223 and first clashed with the Rus troops in the Kalka battle

Tukhlia misted over like numberless volcanoes preparing to erupt. The Striy murmured over its rocky fords and foamed in its bends. The stars emerged and covered the sky. Here and there lights also began to appear on earth, on the broad plain of the Striy, seldom at first, as though afraid, and then more often, more frequently — until finally the entire plain, as far as eye could see, was covered with them, was blazing with blood-red flames. Like the sea, moved by a fair wind, so did the fires glow across the plain, either blazing up animatedly or melting into the dark. These were the night fires in the Mongol camp. But far away in the distance, where the glimmering sea ended, other fires were blazing — terrible, extensive eruptions of dazzling flames; these were the burning towns and villages surrounding the Mongol camp in a wide, flaming holocaust. Detachments of the Mongol army were raging there, pillaging and murdering the people, taking them into captivity and destroying to the ground what they couldn't carry away.

As twilight fell, two people on sturdy mountain horses rode a narrow path over the Sinevid mountain. One of the riders, a man of some years, was dressed in full armour and armed with sword and axe, a helmet on his head and a spear attached to the horse's saddle. Long, thick and greying hair hung from below his helmet down to his shoulders. Even the deep shadows which lay like clouds over the mountains and swirled from the ravines and cliffs up the hillsides couldn't hide the deep dissatisfaction, anger and spite that played across his face and which, from time to time, spilled out in ironic laughter, then turned into a sullen cloud — the sudden jerks of the rider's limbs, as if seized by convulsions, irritated his handsome steed.

The second rider was a young, beautiful maid, dressed in silk-embroidered linen attire. A small beaver cap on her head couldn't contain her rich, abundant golden locks. Across her shoulders hung a bow of wild oxehorn and a quiver of arrows. Her dark, lively eyes moved like swallows, delighting in the gently billowing contours of the highlands and the rich deep green shades of the forests and meadows.

"What a beautiful country, daddy!" she cried in a ringing, silver voice when the horses paused for a moment on a steep hillside which they were negotiating with some difficulty so as to arrive at their destination before complete darkness settled. "What a truly beautiful land!" she repeated in a lower, softer voice, looking around behind her, her gaze drowning in the depths of the dark, bottomless valleys.

"But what a terrible people live in this country!" her father cut in angrily.

"No, daddy, don't say such things!" she answered fearlessly, but immediately stopped, confused, and lowering her voice considerably said, after a moment, "I don't know, but the people here appeal to me very much..."

"Oh, I know that they appeal to you!" her father cried, reproachfully. "Or rather that one among them appeals to you — that cursed Berkut! Oh, I know that you are ready to abandon your father for him. But what can I do — such is the nature of a young girl! But I'm warning you, young woman, don't be taken in by that outer glitter. Don't believe that snake, even though he glows in colours of coral."

"But father, what thoughts you have! And with what harsh words you reproach me! I've admitted

to you that I love Maxim and that I've sworn to the Sun that I'll be his. But I am not yet his, I am still yours. And even though I become his, I will never stop loving you father, never, never!"

"But my foolish child, you will never be his, there cannot even be any thought of it! Have you forgotten that you are a boyar's daughter and that he is a *smerd*, a herdsman?.."

"No, father, don't say such things! He is a knight, just like other knights — no, he is better, braver and more honest than any other young boyar that I have so far met. And by the way, father, it is too late to deny me now — I have sworn!"

"What does a foolish, blind young girl's vow mean?"

"Father, I am neither blind nor foolish! I am not impelled by deep passion. I have not done this without some thought and hesitation. Not even without some higher will, father."

These last words were said in a somewhat spiritless, secretive tone of voice.

The boyar turned to her with curiosity:

"Now then, what is this again? What kind of higher will guided you to this folly?"

"Listen father," said the girl, reining in her horse and turning to him, "on the night before the day we went on the hunt for the bears, I dreamt of mother. She was exactly as you described her to me; dressed in white, with her hair down, but with a rosy, glowing face, happiness on her lips and with a smile and immeasurable love in her bright eyes. She came up to me with outstretched arms and embraced me, holding me tightly to her breast.

"'Mother!' I said, and couldn't say any more out of the joy and bliss that filled my whole being.

"Miroslava, my child, my only child,' mother said, in a gentle, soft voice, which I can still feel in my heart, 'listen to what I have to say. A great moment is approaching you, my daughter! Your heart will awaken and speak. Listen to your heart, daughter, and follow that voice!'

"I will, mother!' I answered, trembling with some inexpressible joy.

"Bless your heart!' said mother, and saying this, disappeared in a fragrant flurry, and I awoke. But my heart did speak, father, and I followed its voice. I have been blessed by my mother!"

"But that was just a dream, you foolish girl! What you thought about during the day, you dreamt about at night. Still," the boyar added after a slight pause, "still, you won't ever see him again!"

"I won't?" cried Miroslava, startled. "Why won't I see him? Has he died?"

"Even if he lived to be a hundred you won't see him again, because... because we won't be returning to that cursed land."

"We won't return? But why not?"

"Because," said the boyar with forced constraint, "those good people of yours, and first of all that old devil, the father of your beloved Maxim, decided at their council meeting to banish us from their village, to destroy our home and raze it to the ground! But just you wait, you villainous tribe, you'll yet see who you have to contend with! Tuhar Vovk is not a Tukhlian wolf, he can show his teeth even to Tukhlian bears!"

Miroslava's heart beat painfully at these words.

"They have banished us, father? What for? It must be because of that forester that you ordered beaten so unmercifully, even though I begged you in tears to let him go?"

"How you remember these things!" Tuhar responded angrily, though his heart was deeply pierced at his daughter's reproach. "Oh, I know that if you had been at that assembly you would have sided with them against your father! What can I do — I'm old, gloomy, can't flash my eyes or sigh, I am not the companion you desire! So what if your father has aged prematurely in trying to secure a happy future for you and that the new, dearer, younger friend you desire can even now be ruining our home with his Tukhlia comrades, our last and only shelter in the world!"

Miroslava couldn't endure these bitter reproaches, her eyes filled with hot tears.

"No, it's you, you who don't love me," she said, weeping uncontrollably, "and I don't know what has turned your heart against me. I have given you no reason! You yourself taught me and bid me to live in truth and to tell the truth! Could it be that truth has suddenly become repugnant to you?"

The boyar was silent, his head bowed. They were nearing the top of the hill and riding along a narrow roadway between tall beeches which completely hid the sky. The horses, given free rein, sought their own path through the darkness and snorting frequently, trotted slowly up the rocky incline to the top.

"Where are we going then, since we've been banished from Tukhlia?" asked Miroslava suddenly, wiping her eyes with her sleeve and raising her head.

"To the ends of the earth," answered her father.

"You told me that we were going to visit one of your boyar friends."

"The truth has become repulsive to me — I told you a lie."

"Then where are we going?"

"Wherever you wish to go. It's all the same to me. Maybe we should go to Halych, to the prince who was vexed with me and was glad to get rid of my presence? Oh, he was a sly one, that prince! Having used a man's strength, drained him like a ripe cherry, he then thrown away the pit—that's him exactly. And how happy he was when I begged him to grant me some land in the Tukhlia area! 'Go,' he said to me, 'as long as I don't have to see you any more! Go and quarrel with those *smerds* over that miserable strip of land, just don't come back here!' Well, shall we go back to him and complain about the Tukhlians, ask him for help against them?"

"No father!" disagreed Miroslava. "The help of the prince won't undo the harm that was done, it will only make it worse."

"You see," continued the boyar, paying little attention to his daughter's last words, "then maybe we should go back to Tukhlia, to those cursed peasants, to that fiend, Berkut, and beg their good will, accept their punishment, renounce our boyardom, implore them to accept us into their community as equal among equals and live with them as they do— together with their sheep, between the oats and the manure?"

Miroslava's bearing imperceptibly, involuntarily straightened, her face brightened at these words.

"What do you think, father, would they accept us?" she asked quickly.

"Who knows!" fretted the boyar. "That would depend on the good graces of their villainous highnesses and on his most supreme highness, Zakhhar Berkut!"

"Father, why can't we try it? The Tukhlians hate deception and though they have convicted us, it's

because of this law. Maybe... maybe, father, you have in some way... with your harsh conduct, contributed to their attitude? But if we, in a gentle and in a friendly way...

"Oh my God, what is this?" Miroslava suddenly cried out, interrupting her flow of reflecting thought. They had reached the top of the mountain and before them as though by magic stretched the broad Striy valley flooded with a sea of fire and flame. The sky glowed red in its reflection. Strange voices rose up from the valley as though out of hell, the neighing of horses, the clatter of arms, the shouts of sentries to each other, the murmur of the dark, shaggy men seated around bonfires, and way off in the distance — the heart-rending cries of the tortured aged, of women and children, of men bound and being led into slavery, the lowing of cattle and the crashing of burned-out timbers, after which great cascades of embers, like swarms of golden insects, rose into the sky. In the blood-red gleam of the fires and clearly visible along the river, stood long, endless rows of quadrangular tents divided by wide passages. People, like ants, prowled about between them and gathered about the bonfires. Miroslava gazed at this scene, stunned, she couldn't tear her eyes away. Even the old, morose boyar was rooted to the spot, his eyes drowning in that frightening bloody sea, his nostrils catching the smell of the bitter smoke and blood, listening to the clamorous blend of sound — the cries, the groans, the joyful shouts of victory. Even the horses carrying our riders responded with trembling bodies, their ears pricked up and with snorts, as though fearful of going further.

"Father, in the name of God, what is this?" cried Miroslava again.

"Our allies," answered Tuhar Vovk morosely.



"Ah, these must be the Mongols about whose arrival the people talked with such alarm?"

"That's who they are!"

"The destroyers of our Rus lands!"

"Our allies against those accursed *smerds* and their communities."

"Father, they are our certain death! If the peasants are destroyed who will nourish the boyars?"

"Don't worry, the storm hasn't yet been born that is strong enough to destroy that vile seed!"

"But father, the Mongols spare neither house, nor mansion, nor prince's palace! You've often told me yourself how the princes were crushed under boards!"

"And that's good! Let them crush them, those cunning ravens! But they haven't killed a single boyar. I'm telling you again, they're our allies!"

"But father, how could you wish to ally yourself with these savages, stained as they are with the blood of our people?"

"Why should who they are and what they are like concern me? Without them there is no hope for us. Let them be the most evil of spirits, as long as they help me!"

Miroslava, deathly pale, looked at her father with alarm. The blood-red flames casting their reflection through the whole area made his face look cruel and savage, and shimmered on his helmet as if encircling his face with a bloody wreath. They both dismounted their horses, and standing on the high ridge of the mountain, gazed at each other.

"How terrible you are, father," whispered Miroslava, "I do not recognize you!"

"Speak out, my daughter, speak out!" said her father with savage derision. "I know what you want to say! You want to say 'I cannot go with you any

further, I will leave you, a traitor to your homeland and return to my beloved, my faithful Berkut!' Say it, say it frankly — and leave me. I'll go where my destiny takes me, but to the end of my days I'll be concerned with your welfare!"

The boyar's voice, venomous when he began, ended with a softer, tremulous, moving note, so much so that Miroslava burst into loud sobs and threw herself at her father's neck, weeping bitterly.

"Oh father," she gulped, "how you tear at my heart! In what way have I offended you so terribly? I know that you love me! I... I won't ever leave you! I'll be your servant, your slave to my dying breath, just don't go down there, don't bring eternal disgrace to your honoured name!"

Still weeping, she dropped to her father's feet and embracing his knees, shed bitter tears over his hands. Tuhar Vovk couldn't endure her tears and his own declining eyes overflowed. He picked up Miroslava and folded her tightly to his breast.

"My daughter," he said tenderly, "don't complain against me! Misfortune has filled my heart with bitterness, my thoughts with anger. But I know that your heart is pure gold, that you won't abandon me in these days of anxiety and struggle. We are now alone in the world, there is no one to whom we can turn, no one from whom we can get help, only ourselves. We have no choice. Let's get this help wherever we can find it!"

"Father, father!" Miroslava spoke through her tears. "Your anger against the Tukhlians has blinded you and is thrusting you into disaster. Let it be as you say, that we are unfortunate — but do we have to be traitors to our own land because of this? Better we should die of hunger by the roadside!"

"You are still young, my daughter, passionate,

emotional and you don't know the taste of hunger, the taste of misery. I do, and I want to protect you from them. Don't argue! Come, we must achieve our objective. What will be, will be, we cannot avoid our fate!" And he leaped up on his horse and spurred it. Miroslava tried to stop him in vain — he dashed on down the mountainside. Weeping, she followed. In her unshaken, childish faith, she still believed that she could save her father from disaster, from eternal disgrace — from betraying his homeland. Poor girl, she didn't know how deep her father had sunk into this vile swamp, how irrevocably he had fallen into the abyss, so far that there was truly no return, except to sink deeper, to the very bottom.

The lower they descended into the valley, the thicker the darkness surrounding them, the less they were able to see, except the flickering bonfires and the glow of the distant fires. The noise and roar of the huge throng, however, grew ever louder and more deafening. The smoke burned their eyes, caught at the breath in their throats. The boyar advanced straight to the first bonfire which was burning in the centre of the field. This was where the Mongolian sentries were situated. Approaching, they saw five men in sheepskin coats, the fur on the outside, and the same fur, sharp-pointed cap, armed with bows over their shoulders and axes in their hands.

As they neared Miroslava caught up with her father and grasped him by the sleeve.

"Father, I beg you in the name of God, let's turn back from this place!"

"Where?"

"Back to Tukhlia!"

"No, it's too late! We'll go, but not with humiliating pleas. We'll go as guests — and we'll see if your Berkut will dare to banish us again!"

At that moment the Mongols noticed the approach of the strangers and with wild shouts they surrounded them, their bows at the ready.

"Who goes there?" they shouted in various voices, some in the Rus language and some in their own.

"A colonel of the great Genghis Khan!" answered Tuhar Vovk in Mongolian. The Mongols stopped and stared at him.

"Where are you from, who are you, and what are you here for?" asked one, obviously in command of the sentries.

"It's none of your affairs," the boyar answered sharply in Mongolian. "Who is in command here?"

"The grandsons of the great Genghis Khan, Peta *bahadur* and Burunda *bahadur*."

"Go and tell them that the 'Kalka River flows over mud and falls into the Don'. We'll wait here by the fire till you return."

With slavish respect the Mongols stepped aside from the strange arrival who talked their language and in such a confident way, a way to which they had become accustomed from their own khans and commanders. In one moment the head of the sentries assigned another to take his place and mounting a horse, sped off to a camp that was about a quarter of a mile away from their bonfire.

Tuhar Vovk and Miroslava dismounted from their horses and these were immediately led away by a couple of sentries, curried, watered and tethered in one of the peasants' rye fields. The guests then came up to the fire where they warmed their hands, chilled by the cold of the spring night. Miroslava's whole body shook as if with fever. She was very pale and hadn't the courage to raise her eyes to look at her father. It wasn't till this moment, when she heard the Mongolian language coming from her father's

lips, and seeing with what respect the Mongols carried out his wishes, that she realized that this wasn't the first time her father had met with these terrible destroyers of their native land and that the rumour that had been whispered about in Prince Danilo's court that Tuhar Vovk had betrayed Rus to the Mongols during the battle at the river Kalka by informing them of the entire plan of battle prepared by the Rus princes, must be true. However, went the stories, there was no definite proof of this, for if there had been proof the boyarin would have had his head laid on the block; at the time the boyar had been in the front line of battle and had been taken prisoner in the very first skirmish. What caused the speculation and wonder was his quick release without any demands for ransom, though he swore that the Mongols released him out of respect for his courage. The whole incident was very mysterious, but what was certain was that all at the prince's court began to avoid Tuhar Vovk and the prince himself didn't trust him as he had before. The boyar finally felt this change in attitude and begged the prince to grant him land in Tukhlia. Without enquiring why the boyar had decided to leave Halych to bury himself in the forest wilderness of Tukhlia, and with a young daughter besides, Prince Danilo acceded to his request — clearly glad to get rid of him. When the time of departure from Halych came, the parting with the other boyars — long-time comrades in battle — was also somewhat cool. All this Miroslava suddenly recalled, and everything that had surprised and angered her at that time was now clear and understandable. Then the rumours and whispers were true! It meant, then, that her father had for a long time, for some ten years, had an understanding with the Mongols, was a traitor! Miroslava

lowered her beautiful head as if crushed, as if mowed down by these thoughts. Her heart ached terribly; she felt, how one after another, the strongest and most sacred ties — the ties of childhood love and respect — were breaking. How terribly alone, like a complete orphan, she felt at this moment, even though her father sat beside her. How truly ill-fated she now felt, even though her father had so recently assured her that everything he did was for her happiness.

But the boyar himself was also sitting there, looking unhappy; his determined heart was oppressed, it would seem, by heavy thoughts. One couldn't know what he was thinking, but his eyes were fixed unwaveringly on the flames of the bonfire, following carefully how the red logs, like glowing steel, were consumed by fire, how they crackled in the licking flames. Was this the quiet meditation of a man who had reached his objective, or was it some anxious awareness of the future that seized his heart in its cold clasp and placed the seal of silence on his lips. As old and deliberate man, he now avoided Miroslava's gaze, but stared and stared into the fire, at the gleaming sparks and the dying embers of the logs.

"Daughter!" he finally said, quietly, without raising his eyes.

"Why didn't you kill me yesterday, father," whispered Miroslava, forcibly holding back her tears. Her voice, though quiet, touched the boyar like an icy wind. He could find no answer to the question so he remained silent and continued staring into the fire till the sentry returned from the camp.

"The grandsons of the great Genghis Khan convey their greetings to their new friend and invite him to their quarters for military council."

"Let's go!" said the boyar shortly and rose to his feet.

Miroslava got up also, but her feet refused to move. But this was no time to hesitate. The Mongols brought their horses forward, helped Miroslava up on her mount, and surrounding them both, led them to the camp.

The Mongol camp had been pitched in a large quadrangle and surrounded by a deep trench. There were twelve entrances into each side of the quadrangle, each protected by armed sentries. Although no enemy threatened the camp, it was guarded with great vigilance — such were the Mongol military regulations, completely in contradiction with the Christian knighthood, who didn't compare with the Mongols either in military discipline, military tactics or in the leadership of large armies.

The sentries at the entrance to the camp exchanged wild greetings with those who were accompanying the boyar and his daughter, then took over their unusual guests and led them to the tent of their commander. Though Miroslava was crushed and her youthful cheeks burned with pain and shame she was, nevertheless, of courageous disposition, and brought up as she was, in a very independent and knightly spirit, she couldn't help being interested in the disposition of the camp and all that was new and extraordinary about her. Her quick eye went over the sentries who were escorting them. Their short, thickset figures in sheepskin coats, over which hung, on all of them, a bow and a quiver of arrows, gave them the appearance of bears or some other wild animals. Their beardless features, with their high cheekbones and small, deep-set eyes which barely glittered from between their narrow, slanted eyelids; their short, flat noses looked somehow ugly and

their yellow skin which, lighted by the fires, shone with a green tint, somehow made them seem even more terrifying and forbidding. With their bent heads and their guttural, sing-song voices, they looked like wolves on the lookout for something to devour. Their tents, after Miroslava had observed them closely, were made of the pieces of felt which had been stretched over four poles, tied together on the top and covered over with large caps of horse skins for protection against rain. Before the tents, on poles, hung human heads, bloody and congealed in expressions of pain and horror on pale, blue, and





in the light of the fires, strangely illuminated faces. Miroslava's forehead broke out in cold sweat at this sight; a heroic, courageous girl, she wasn't tormented by the thought that soon her head might also be hung somewhere before some Mongol commander's tent. No, at this moment she would rather smoulder and hang as a bloody trophy before the tent of the victor than to see these trophies of other people with her living eyes, trophies that just a short time ago were living men, who thought, worked and loved — than be walking along the length of this terrible camp on a dishonourable and traitorous mission! "No, no!" she thought, "I won't do it. I will go no further! I won't be a traitor to my homeland! I'll leave my father if I can't dissuade him from his accursed intention."

In the meantime they had arrived at the tent of Batei's favourite, the commander Peta. The tent was not distinguished from the rest on its outside, except for its roof which held three standards. It made up for it inside, however, where it was quite magnificently arrayed in oriental style. But neither the boyar nor Miroslava entered the tent because they found the Mongol commanders before their tent beside a bonfire on which their captives were roasting two rams. Seeing their guests, the commanders jumped to their feet and snatched up their weapons, though they didn't move from their places to meet them. Knowing the Mongol custom, the boyar signalled to his daughter to remain behind while he, removing his helmet and his bow from his back, advanced with a deep bow and stood, silent, his eyes lowered to the ground, three paces before the head commander, Peta.

"From which tsar do you bring us a message?" asked Peta.

"I know no tsar except the great Genghis Khan, the ruler of the whole world!" answered the boyar. This was the accustomed formula indicating submission. Peta then gladly and with great dignity extended his hand.

"You have arrived at the right time," he said. "We were a-waiting our ally."

"I know my obligations," answered Tuhar Vovk. "In only one thing have I transgressed your customs, I have brought my daughter to your encampment."

"Your daughter?" asked Peta, astonished. "Don't you know that our custom forbids women in a soldiers' camp?"

"I know. But what was I to do with her? I have no house, no family, no wife. Except for myself and the great Genghis Khan, she has no protection. My prince was happy to be rid of me from his town and those accursed *smerds*, my slaves, rebelled against me."

"But just the same she cannot remain here."

"I beg of the grandsons of the great Genghis Khan to allow her to remain here this night and tomorrow's day, until I find a safe place for her."

"We are hospitable to our friends," said Peta, and turning to Miroslava he said in broken Rus:

"Come closer, maid!"

Miroslava trembled at these words addressed to her by the terrible Mongol chief. With eyes full of hatred and pride she looked at this destroyer of Rus, not even listening to his words.

"Come closer, Miroslava!" said her father. "The great commander of the Mongol army is friendly to us."

"I don't want his friendship!" answered Miroslava.

"Come closer, I'm telling you!" said the boyar sternly. Miroslava moved forward unwillingly.

Peta looked at her with his small, glittering eyes.

"A beautiful girl! Too bad she can't stay. Listen to your father, girl. Be faithful to the great Genghis Khan. There will be much favour! Here, girl, take this ring which belonged to your Prince Mstislav. It be your security. Show it to Mongol soldier — all will be well, will do nothing bad. And now to the tent."

With these words Peta gave Miroslava a huge gold ring off his finger, taken by him from Prince Mstislav at the battle on the Kalka. On the ring was a large golden-green beryl with carved figures. Miroslava hesitated as to whether she should take the gift from the enemy — maybe even as payment for her father's treachery.

"Take it, daughter, this token from the great grandson of Genghis Khan," urged the boyar. "This token of his great favour toward you will give you safe passage in the Mongol camp. We'll have to separate, the two of us, daughter. Their military custom forbids women in the encampment. But with that ring you can safely leave the camp and come back in whenever you have to."

Miroslava still hesitated. But a new thought entered her head suddenly — she took the ring and turning aside said with a break in her voice:

"Thank you!"

Peta then ordered that she be taken to a separate tent which had been hurriedly prepared for her father while Tuhar Vovk remained behind with the Mongolian commanders to take military council.

The first to speak was Peta — the chief commander of this detachment, a man of some forty years, a Mongolian type — small in stature, restless, with quick-moving, small, mouselike eyes.

“Do sit down, guest,” he said to the boyar. “When we tell you that we were awaiting you, then take this as the highest commendation of your faith in the great Genghis Khan. Still, you have come a little late. Our army has already been waiting here three days and the great Genghis Khan, in despatching us on our journey west to the land of our slaves, the Arpads, advised us not to stop anywhere unnecessarily for more than three days. Our brother Kaidan *bahadur*, who went through the land of the Wallachs, will have reached the Arpad lands before us, take their capital city, and what glory will we get out of this campaign?”

The boyar replied:

“I fully understand your concern, great *bahadur*, and here is my answer. The faithful servant of the great Genghis Khan was unable to arrive at your encampment sooner, for he only heard of your campaign yesterday, but having heard he set out immediately. Don't worry about the delay. Our roads, though narrow, are safe. The gate to the kingdom of the Arpads will be opened, all we need do is knock at it.”

“What roads and in whose hands are they?” asked Peta, shortly.

“One is the Duklya road, above the San River and then over a low mountain ridge. The road is wide and convenient, and more than once travelled by the Rus and Ugrian military forces.”

“Who is guarding it?”

“It's being guarded by the boyars of our prince who have made barricades across it. But they serve our Prince Danilo Romanovich unwillingly, and unwillingly guard the barricades. A small favour will bend them in the direction of the great Genghis Khan.”

"But why haven't we seen any of them in our camp to date?" asked Peta.

"They cannot come, *bahadur*. The people among whom they live and who must supply the armed sentries to defend the barricades unwillingly tolerate the boyars' power. The spirit of rebellion and disobedience lives in these people. Their hearts yearn for the old order when there were no princes, no property owners and every community lived for itself, freely elected or removed their elders, but united with each other against their common foe. There is one old man in these mountains who has been named *Besidnyk*,\* and he arouses the flame of rebellion in the name of the old order. The people regard the boyars as the shepherds regard the wolves, and as soon as they see that the boyars are openly on the side of the great Genghis Khan, they would stone them. When you have drawn near with your forces, the boyars will surrender and give up the barricades, then the people will scatter like that chaff before the wind."

Peta listened to the boyar's words with attention. A smile of pride and derision flitted across his thin lips.

"What strange customs you have!" he said. "The prince rebels against his servants, the servants against the prince, the prince and his servants against the people and the people against any authority! Strange customs! When our lesser chiefs wanted to rebel against the great Genghis Khan he drove them all into his village and surrounding it with his faithful sons, he ordered them to place eighty huge kettles on bonfires and fill them with water, and when the water had boiled, he ordered,

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\* Speaker

without examining their individual guilt, that two of the rebels be thrown into each kettle and boiled long enough that their flesh should fall from their bones. He then ordered that their naked skeletons be removed from the kettles, placed on their horses and carried to their dependent tribes that they may, from the example made of their chiefs, learn obedience and submission to the great Genghis Khan. So it should be taught by you, and we will teach you this method. Thank the Gods that they have sent us to this land, for if it weren't for us, then you would surely, like those hungry wolves, devour each other."

The boyar's blood ran cold at the Mongol's story, but he said not a word against it.

"Well, and what other road is there?" asked Peta, further.

"The other road is through the Tukhlia Pass," answered the boyar.

"Though it is narrower and less even, it is closer and equally safe. There are no barricades along it, nor are there any boyars. The peasants themselves guard it."

"We are not afraid of your peasants," said Peta arrogantly.

"There is nothing there to be afraid of," agreed Tuhar Vovk quickly.

"They are without weapons and have no military experience. I myself could lead you along that roadway."

"But it could be that on the Arpad side this road is strongly blockaded?"

"The Tukhlia Pass is not blockaded at all. The Duklia road is, but not too strongly."

"Is it far to the Arpad lands along the Tukhlia road?"

“For the armed men it’s a day’s march to Tukhlia. They would spend the night in Tukhlia and be on the road again at dawn. By evening you will be on the plain.”

“And by the Duklia road?”

“If you consider the amount of time it would take to destroy the barricades, three days.”

“Well then, guide us along the Tukhlia road!” decided Peta.

“Allow me to say a word, great *bahadur*,” said one of the Mongol chiefs, a man of great height and herculean proportions, a dark olive complexion and dressed in a steppe tiger skin — all of which bore witness to his origin from a Turkoman tribe. Burunda *bahadur* was a rival for glory with Kaidan. The Mongol detachments which he led, left terrible destruction in their wake, the greatest number of corpses, the widest rivers of flame. He was vastly superior to Peta in courage — there were double the amount of freshly-impaled heads before his tent every evening than there were before the tent of any other warrior. But Peta didn’t envy him his boldness, knowing well his superiority over Burunda in leading large masses and in directing large battles and campaigns. He gladly allowed Burunda into the more dangerous areas, kept him in reserve for the most difficult, decisive moments, like an invincible steel battering ram, and then set him free with his detachment of “bloody Turkomans” to complete the victory.

“Speak, brother Burunda!” said Peta.

“Allow me, with a ten-thousand-man detachment to go the Tukhlia road, and you go along the Duklia road. After crossing to the Arpad side I’ll immediately attack those who defend the Duklia road and clear it for you.”

Peta looked at Burunda in wonder, as if this was the first time that a wise word passed through the lips of that veteran warrior. And truly, Burunda's plan, though bold, was also wise, and Burunda was the one man who could carry it out.

"Good," said Peta, "let it be as you propose! Choose your warriors and start out with them tomorrow."

"Allow me to say a word, great *bahadur*," said Tuhar Vovk.

"Speak," said Peta.

"If it is your will to send part of your forces along the Tukhlia road — for because of its narrowness I would not advise sending the whole force — then allow me to go ahead with a small detachment and occupy the entrance to the road before the Tukhlian *smerds* find out about your arrival and blockade it."

"Good, go!" said Peta. "When do you wish to start?"

"Immediately, so that by tomorrow afternoon I will have achieved my purpose."

"If that's what you want, then I suggest that we end our council and may the Gods bring success to your arms!" said Peta, standing up. The others also rose to their feet. Tuhar Vovk begged Peta to assign him a detachment of bold warriors and then went to his tent to refresh himself and to bid farewell to his daughter.

In the dark tent Miroslava was sitting on the bed covered with soft, looted feather-down pillows, weeping bitterly. After all the terrible and unexpected happenings of this evening, it wasn't till now that she had time to collect her thoughts, to examine well the situation into which her father had involved her. Her predicament was truly terrifying and seemed quite hopeless. Her father was a traitor, a Mongolian



servant; she herself was in a Mongolian military camp, a half-guest, half-prisoner, and however you looked at it, a complete orphan. For even her last support — her unswerving belief in her prognosticating dream, in her mother's blessing and in her fortunate love with Maxim — even this belief, after cold appraisal, was shaken, which made her heart bleed. For how could she face Maxim now? In what words could she explain to him her voluntary or involuntary stay in the Mongolian camp? Like serpents these questions coiled in her thoughts, and she gave way to tears and wept as if parting with her life.

Her father approached her quietly and in alarm, putting his hand on her shoulder. She didn't lift her head, didn't move, didn't stop weeping.

"My daughter — Miroslava," he said, "don't cry! God grant that all will yet be well!"

Miroslava sat as if she heard nothing — immovable, cold and indifferent.

"Forget that *smerd*! You have a beautiful future ahead of you, but he... What is he? Tomorrow at noon he will fall a corpse from my sword."

"Who?" cried Miroslava in a heartbroken voice.

Frightened by her tone, the boyar stepped back from his daughter, who had sprung to her feet.

"Who will fall a corpse?" she repeated. "Maxim? You are leading an attack on Tukhlia?"

"Why no, no!" denied the boyar. "Who told you such a thing?"

"You told me yourself!" said Miroslava. "Father, tell me the truth, what are you doing? Don't be afraid for me! I now see for myself that I can never be Maxim's. Because of you, I cannot be! Oh, you are clever and cunning! You have led it all to this! I cannot belong to Maxim, not because I am his

superior by birth — Oh no! I'm actually inferior to him, I feel myself vastly inferior, because he is a pure, honest heart, while I'm the daughter of a traitor. Maybe I'm also a traitor? Yes, father! You are cunning, so cunning that you have outwitted yourself! You say that you desire my happiness above all, but you have destroyed my happiness. But let that be! Of what use am I here? Just tell me what you are planning against him?"

"But nothing, absolutely nothing! He is now probably somewhere far in the mountains."

"No, no, no, I don't believe you! Tell me what you and the Mongols have decided?"

"We spoke about the best way to get to Hungary."

"And you have proposed to take the Tukhlia road, so that you can revenge yourself on the Tukhlians!"

"You foolish girl, why do I need to revenge myself on them? They are too trivial for my revenge. I want to guide the Mongols to Hungary because the sooner they leave our land, the less they will leave in ruins."

"Oh, of course, of course!" cried Miroslava. "But on their return they will finish ruining what they will now leave whole! And you are leading them on Tukhlia now, right away?"

"No, not on Tukhlia. I'm taking only a small detachment so as to occupy the entrance to Tukhlia."

"He who has a gate has a house! But now I understand. You yourself said just recently, up there on the hill, that Maxim and the Tukhlia lads will raze our home tomorrow. Now you with your Mongolians want to attack him, kill him..."

The boyar stared at her with surprise; he began to be afraid. Could she be a witch that she so quickly guessed his intent.

"Forget about him, daughter!" he said. "Whatever fate has in store for him, so it will be."

"No, father, you won't deceive me with that! I'm going to ride to Tukhlia and warn him, save him from your planned ambush. And if he should fall into that ambush I will stand beside him and will defend myself alongside of him to the very end, against you, father, and your evil allies!"

"Young woman, you are insane!" shouted the boyar. "Beware that you don't drive me to anger! This is a decisive moment!"

"What concern of mine is your anger?" answered Miroslava coldly. "And what more harm can you do me after what you've already done? If you should kill me, then you'd only be doing me a favour, for there is no further life for me. Let me go!"

"You'll remain here, you fool!"

"Yes, stay here while you calmly murder the one who is dearer to me than my life! Oh no, I won't remain!"

"Stay! I swear to God that I won't raise a hand against him!"

"Oh, I know what that means, I know!" cried Miroslava. "But of course, you're a boyar, how could you lift a hand against a *smerd*? But you will order your savage companions to aim all their poisoned arrows at his breast!"

"No! If your compassion for him is such, then I again swear to you that neither I nor any member of my company will touch him, even if he should attack us! Is that enough for you?"

Miroslava stood, her heart torn by terrible anxiety, and couldn't think of anything else to say. How could she know if that was enough, or if it wasn't? How happy she would have been if she could have flown, like a bird, to his side, and with her fervent song warn him of the danger! But there was no way. Her father picked up his weapons and leaving the tent, said:

"Daughter, I am telling you again and pleading with you. Stay in the camp till I return, then do what you wish, whatever you will. And now, farewell."

He walked out and the flap of the tent which served as a door moved restlessly after him. Miroslava stood in the middle of the tent, her hands clasped and her face a picture of misery and deep anxiety, speechless, bent forward with open lips, listening to the dull and muted receding clatter of horses' hooves as the company of Mongols, led by her father, left for the destruction of Tukhlia.

## V

With a heavy heart Maxim Berkut walked among the small group of Tukhlia lads to carry out the will of his people. He had grown up from childhood with a deep feeling of solidarity with the community and the sacredness of the people's will, so that even now, when it went completely against the wishes of his heart, he went along with the people's choice to banish the boyar, whom the Tukhlians considered their enemy, from the community lands. He couldn't refuse this commission though his heart was torn and breaking at the very thought that he would have to meet with Miroslava and her father as with enemies; that he would have to, perhaps, fight with the boyar's men or even with the boyar himself, to shed human blood before the eyes of her, for whom he was prepared to shed his blood. True, he was determined to carry out this task as calmly as possible and try to avoid the spilling of blood. But who would guarantee that the boyar, knowing his weak spot, wouldn't provoke him to attack? This could more

easily happen than not. "But no," thought Maxim, "if he should want my blood I will not defend myself. I'll bare my breast voluntarily, let him kill me! He refuses to give me life, so let him give me death! Farewell, my Tukhlia! Farewell, my father, you grey falcon! Farewell my brothers and comrades! You will never again see Maxim, and after hearing of my death you'll sorrow and say: 'He died for the good of the people!', but you won't know that I myself wanted and sought death!"

Such were Maxim's thoughts as they neared the boyar's estate on the hilltop over the Opir River. The boyar's house was built of thick pine logs, rough-hewn, and planed, tightly joined at the corners, similar to the way many peasant homes are still built today. The roof was covered with laths coated over with a heavy coat of red water-proof clay. The windows, as in all the houses, were turned to the south, and instead of glass panes, the frames were covered with the skin of ox bladders, which allowed a weak yellow light into the house. The entry and exit doors in the front and back led into a roomy hallway whose walls were hung with various weapons, deer and aurochs horns, and skins of the wild boar, wolf and bear. Doors on both sides of this central hall led into large and high-ceilinged rooms with clay stoves without chimneys and with wooden, beautifully carved shelves for holding all kinds of utensils. The boyar's personal chamber was on one side of the hall, his daughter's on the other. At the back there were two large chambers — the kitchen and the servant's room. The walls in the boyar's rooms were lined with bear skins except for over the bed where a beautiful and expensive foreign rug was hung — acquired by the boyar on one of his campaigns. Here also were his bows, axes and

other hand weapons. Miroslava's chamber, outside of the soft furs and rugs that also lined its floor and walls, was decorated with flowers. On the wall opposite the windows, over her bed, hung an expensive metal mirror and beside it a wooden, silver-studded four-stringed teorban, a beloved confidante of Miroslava's dreams and girlish thoughts. The barns and the stables and other buildings of the household were in a small hollow some distance from the house. There was also a small cottage for the herdsmen. But today the boyar's roomy house was empty and gloomy. The boyar and Miroslava were not at home, the servants had been sent away and the cattle had been ordered to be driven to join the herds of a neighbouring manor. Only the archers and axemen had been left behind and these, for some reason, were unhappy, silent, not talking, joking or singing as was their wont. It was quite likely that more important matters were on their minds, for they handled their axes and spears silently and sadly as though preparing for death. What was it all about?

But a sentry standing in the middle of the roadway soon gave a signal on his horn, and the whole company immediately drew up in a row in front of the boyar's house with lifted spears and bows at the ready for battle. As the Tukhlia company approached along the roadway and saw the armed men drawn up before the boyar's house, they too, prepared for battle. Maxim eyed the armed men with some alarm, seeking the boyar among them. As luck would have it, he wasn't there. Maxim took a deep breath as if a heavy weight had rolled off his heart and began to prepare his men for battle with more confidence. This didn't take long. Silently, with bows poised, shining spears and axes ready, the Tukhlia lads

approached the boyar's men in a row. Some fifty paces from them, they stopped.

"Boyar Tuhar Vovk!" called Maxim, loudly.

"Boyar Tuhar Vovk isn't nere!" answered his men.

"Well then you, his faithful servants, listen to what I have to say in the name of the Tukhlia community! We have been sent by the people to banish you, willingly or unwillingly, from Tukhlia's lands, according to the verdict passed. We ask you — will you leave voluntarily, or not?"

The boyar's men stood silent.

"We ask a second time," said Maxim.

The men remained silent, their weapons ready.

"We ask a third time," Maxim raised his voice.

The men continued silent, but stood unmoving in their hostile stance. Maxim wondered what this was supposed to mean, but waiting no longer, he signalled to his lads to shoot their arrows over the men. The arrows hissed through the air like dragons, flew over the heads of the soldiers and sank into the wall behind them. At that moment, as if at a signal, the soldiers dropped their weapons to the ground and with outstretched hands stepped forward toward the Tukhlia lads.

"Comrades, brothers!" they said. "Don't be angry with us for our silence. We gave the boyar our word that we would greet you with hostility, but we didn't give him our word to spill your blood, and to spill it for deception. We were present at your people's court and we know that the boyar has wronged your community and that the people's verdict was just. Do as you have been ordered and if your elders would be so kind, we will beg them to accept us into your community. We don't want to serve the boyar any more!"

The joy of the Tukhlia lads, and especially Maxim's, when they heard these words, knew no bounds. All immediately cast their weapons down in a pile before the boyar's house and with loud and merry shouts began to kiss and embrace their new and unexpected friends with whom but a moment ago they were ready to battle to death. Maxim was most happy that his fears hadn't been realized, that he hadn't been forced to fight Miroslava's father before her eyes and banish her, with whom he would have been happy to never separate, onto unknown highways. His joy at the peaceful ending to this unpleasant task drowned out, for a moment, all other uncertainties. In the companionship of the happy soldiers from the boyar's company, the Tukhlia lads entered the boyar's house, looked over everything with great interest, but did not touch anything. With beating heart Maxim approached Miroslava's room, hoping to meet her there in tears or in anger and wanting to reassure and soothe her with sincere words. But Miroslava wasn't there and Maxim was disturbed. Where was she, he wondered, and immediately thought to ask the boyar's men who, in the meantime, were bustling around happily preparing a hospitable repast for their Tukhlia brothers. But their answers to his question did not satisfy Maxim, nor did it appease him. The boyar had left yesterday morning with his daughter, but where, what for, and when he was to return — no one knew. He had commanded them to be hostile toward the Tukhlians, but whether he had noticed their gloomy, reluctant faces, or whether he had something else in mind, he cut short his discourse with them and rode away. This was all Maxim was able to find out from his new allies. The news immediately disturbed his happiness and even threw a shadow of suspicion



toward the boyar's men. What did this mean? Could there be treason behind their move? Did the boyar, perhaps, want to catch them in some kind of trap? Not wishing to reveal his suspicions by speaking out, however, Maxim whispered only to some of his comrades that they remain alert. He himself began to closely and attentively look over the house from end to end, ignoring neither the smallest detail, nor a single corner. There was nothing suspicious anywhere.

"A nice building," he said to the soldiers who were laying the tables, "but we have to take it apart. Of course we won't raze it or burn it, we'll just take it apart and pile everything up neatly so that the boyar, if he wants to, can take it all away. And all the goods within it have to be preserved as they are."

In the meantime the boyar's men had brought large oak tables into the hallway, covered them with white cloth and laid them out with all kinds of food and mead. Amid joyful shouts and singing the sociability began. But the longer the Tukhlia lads sat behind the tables, the more they ate and drank, the more their joy and happiness seemed to fade. And though the mead foamed in the carved wooden steins, though the meat, roasted on skewers, steamed on the wooden plates, though sincere and brotherly words passed from one end of the table to the other, their hearts were filled with a secret worry as if in expectation of some terrible news. A strange, unspoken anxiety, sensed by all, hung in the atmosphere. Were the walls of the boyar mansion suffocating to a free people?

One of the boyar's men got up and raised his wooden cup, filled with foaming mead, to drink a toast.

"Brothers!" he said. "This has been a joyful day for us and let no evil mishap..."

He didn't finish. He suddenly turned pale and trembled with his whole body. All the banqueters leaped to their feet, jumping in all directions and overturning the table with all that was on it.

"What is it? What is it?" they asked each other, making for the door. However distant and small the sound they heard was—the dull beat of horses' hooves—but what an excessive amount of fear it generated in the boyar's house! For a moment all hell broke loose in the hallway. One went in one direction, another in the opposite, one looked for this one, that one for another; all dashed about senselessly, stepping into the spilled food, on the cups and the plates, the white tablecloth and the overturned tables. Maxim was the first to tear himself out of the melee and outdoors, and having once looked around, realized the full magnitude of the danger.

"To your weapons, brothers, to arms! It's the Mongols, the Mongols!"

His shout was like an unexpected thunderclap. All stood as though paralyzed, the disorder and tumult changing to confused immobility. But this also lasted but a moment. The beat of horses' hooves was heard, coming nearer and nearer, and the inevitable danger woke them all from their paralysis. They were all brave, strong young men! Every one of them, from childhood into youth, had seen himself in battle, in danger, in a deadly struggle with the enemy, and had hoped and prayed that his dream would come true, that he would one day stand in defence of his country. Now the moment had come—and why should they be frightened of it? That dread message, the fearful word "Mongols" had momen-

tarily stunned them — a moment later they had returned to what they normally were — each holding his weapons, standing in line next to another, ready for battle.

“The most important thing to remember, comrades, is to stay close to these walls. Till the enemy pries us loose from this house and surrounds us in an open field, we have nothing to fear. This house — it will be our stronghold!”

Maxim then placed his archers at the windows, two or three by the doors, depending on the importance and access to the spot. Some were to remain within doors to supply the fighters with arrows and spears from the boyar's store of weapons. The main force would stand at the entrance door so that if necessary they could break through the line of attackers and ward them off from the house.

In the meantime, the Mongols had stopped on the gravelly bank of the Opir, dismounted their horses, separated into three groups and began their approach to the house along three paths. They were clearly being led by someone familiar with all the paths and trails, because the entire maneuver was being carried out swiftly, without hesitation, without any waste of time. The maneuver clearly showed also, that the Mongols wanted to surround the house from all sides at once. But who was it that so audaciously walked at the head of the central and most important company of Mongols? The comrades couldn't believe their own eyes. It was none other than the owner of the house, the proud boyar, Tuhar Vovk.

“It's our boyar! Our boyar!” some of the boyar's men cried out. These Maxim had placed among his own lads, not trusting them completely.

“Yes, your boyar — a servant to the Mongols, a traitor to his homeland! Could it be that even now you wish to remain faithful to him?”

“No, no!” cried his men in one voice. “Death to the traitor! We’ll destroy the enemy or die ourselves in the defence of our country!”

Delighted with this declaration, Maxim said:

“Forgive me, brothers! For a moment I was judging you unfairly, thinking that you might be in collusion with your boyar. But now I see that I have done you an injustice. Let’s stay together, close to the walls, so that they can’t surround us, and try to make them suffer the greatest losses. I have heard that the Mongols are not good at conducting a seige and all the more so in such a small number. We may be able to repel their attack.”

Poor Maxim! He tried to build hope in the others when it had begun to fade in himself the moment he saw the Mongols, and even more when he saw the full strength of their approaching forces. Still, his words carried a great deal of weight with his comrades who had more than once had the opportunity to be convinced of his presence of mind and his caution in times of great danger. Blindly accepting his words and directions, each was concerned only with the defence of his position to the end, knowing full well that the neighbouring position would be defended likewise.

The Mongols had now in a wide circle and in three rows surrounded the house and their flinted arrows fitted into bows were already aimed at the brave, beseiged young men. They waited only for their chief to give them the signal to start the battle. The chief, it seemed, wished first of all to enter into some discourse, for he stepped forward out of the main company of Mongol ranks and said:

"Infidel slaves! Foul *smerds*! Is it possible that your insolence is as boundless as your stupidity, that you would pick up arms against the great Genghis Khan who is today, without a doubt, the overlord of all the Rus? Surrender without fighting and he will pardon you. But those who would oppose his power will be mercilessly crushed, like those worms beneath the wheels of a wagon."

Maxim, on hearing this diatribe, spoke up boldly:

"Boyar! You have very inopportunistically called us, the sons of a free people, slaves! Take a good look at yourself! Maybe this title would be more fittingly applied to you rather than to us? Why only yesterday you were a slave to the prince, and today you are already a slave to the great Genghis Khan and more than likely have licked the milk spilled over the back of a horse belonging to one of his commanders. If it was to your taste, that doesn't mean that we also crave it. The might of the great Genghis Khan does not frighten us. But all the great strength of Genghis Khan will not make you, boyar, either a free or even an honest man!"

Maxim spoke sharply and severely. At any other time he would have considered the fact that it was Miroslava's father that stood before him, but now he saw only an enemy — no, a traitor, a man who has trampled on his own honour and to whom, because of this, no honour need be extended. Maxim's comrades rejoiced loudly at his speech, but the boyar was foaming with rage.

"You filthy peasant!" he exclaimed. "Just wait, I will show you that you have bragged of your freedom prematurely! Today you'll find chains binding your hands and feet! Today you will be lying in the dust before the chief of the Mongol forces!"

"Better to die!" answered Maxim.

“Then you won’t die!” shouted the boyar. “Hey, boys!” he cried, turning to the Mongols in their own language. “At them! Just make sure you avoid this one — this one must be taken alive!”

And he gave the signal to start the battle. The call of the horns reverberated over the mountains and forests and broke. Silence fell around the boyar’s house, but it was a terrible silence. The Mongol arrows hissed like snakes and fell like hail on the boyar residence. True, the attackers were a little too far for their arrows to hit the defenders and when they did they didn’t wound them seriously. Besides this, Maxim had ordered his comrades not to shoot as yet and to save their arrows and weapons till such time that they would be able to accurately hit the foe and do the greatest damage. So as not to allow the foe to advance closer immediately he, together with a chosen few, took up positions in the yard some twenty paces from the entrance, behind a strong wooden wall, part of an unfinished plank fence. The fence was exactly the height of a man and the arrows fired by the Mongols flew harmlessly overhead. The arrows of Maxim’s lads, however, though fewer in number, inflicted deadly wounds to the Mongols and prevented them from advancing closer. On seeing this, Tuhar Vovk became still angrier.

“Charge them!” he shouted, and a dense mass of Mongols under his command made a running charge, with loud shouts, toward the fence. All was quiet behind the fence, as if all had died out. The Mongols had almost reached their objective when suddenly over the edge of the fence, as if growing out of the ground, appeared a row of heads and mighty arms — and a mass of steel arrows whistled into the advancing foe who roared with the pain of

inflicted wounds. Half of them fell as if mowed down and those left swayed back, paying no heed to the shouts and curses of the boyar.

“Hurrah! Great lads! Hurrah, Maxim! Hurrah for Tukhlia!” shouted the defenders, their spirits high. But the boyar, out of his mind with anger, had gathered together another company for a fresh attack. He was instructing the Mongols how they must charge and not scatter under the first counter-attack of their adversary, but must continue advancing over their fallen. In the meantime Maxim was also directing his lads on what to do, and with weapons ready they awaited the next Mongol attack.

“At them again!” shouted the boyar. But before charging the Mongols let loose a whole cloud of arrows against their adversaries and then charged once more against the wooden barricade. As they approached they were again greeted with an effective volley from Maxim’s lads, and again a large number of the attackers fell with terrible screams to the ground. But this time the rest did not waver, but continued advancing with deafening shouts toward the wall. It was a terrible moment. Only the thin wooden fence divided its defenders from a vicious foe who, having reached the wall, was still unable to get at their adversaries.

For a moment both were silent, only their rapid, harsh breathing could be heard on both sides of the barrier. Suddenly, as though at a signal, the Mongol axes battered against the fence, but at the same moment the Tukhlia men, with a mighty heave, lifted the barrier and knocked the leading Mongols down. While the weight of the fence was stopping the front line of Mongols, the Tukhlia lads jumped forward, striking at the skulls of the Mongols with their long-handled axes. The blood flowed — there were shouts

and groans from the enemy — and again the attacking mob scattered, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Once more the delighted shouts of the defenders greeted this victory of their brothers. They were answered again with a volley of arrows from the Mongols and angry curses from the boyar. But the Tukhlia lads now had to retreat from their advance position — and they sorrowfully parted with the spot from which they had so successfully repelled the first attacks of the Mongols. Without a single loss, without a wound, fully armed and in good order, they retreated facing the enemy to the walls of the boyar's house.

While the Tukhlia lads were so successfully repelling the attacks of the Mongols on the south side, the defensive battle on the north side was somewhat less successful. Here also, the Mongol arrows whistled over without any damage to the besieged. But here the Mongols immediately charged into the attack and the situation became very heated for the defenders. They threw themselves in mass against the enemy, but were met with fire and had to retreat, losing three wounded, whom the Mongols immediately slashed to pieces.

The first task facing Maxim now was to inspect all his positions and review the situation. The Mongols had formed a living chain around the house and kept up a continuous fire. The besieged also fired, but less heavily. Maxim saw immediately that the attackers were endeavouring to drive them into the house. Having done this the Tukhlia lads would not be able to keep up a heavy fire and victory would then come quite easily to their enemy. That meant that they must keep their positions outside the house at all costs. But here they were also in full view of the Mongol archers. To shelter them-



selves to some degree, Maxim directed that the doors be removed, that the table tops be taken off and placed before every position like large shields. From behind these barriers Maxim's men safely and conveniently shot at the Mongols. Maxim went from position to position, thinking out new methods of defence and encouraging his comrades by word and example.

"Hold on comrades!" he urged. "They'll soon hear the shouting in Tukhlia, or someone may see what is going on here and help will come!"

The siege had already lasted a half-hour. The Mongols continued shooting and cursing profanely and violently the "Rus dogs" who had not only refused to surrender, but had the audacity to so courageously and successfully defend themselves. Tuhar Vovk called their more able commanders together for counsel, to plan one decisive and final blow.

"We must charge them all at once," suggested one.

"No, it will be difficult to charge. We must keep shooting till we have shot them all," said another.

"Wait a moment," said Tuhar Vovk, "there will be time for everything. The important thing now is to drive them away from their outside positions. We'll assemble our greatest number as if preparing for attack and so distract their attention. In the meantime our smaller forces will advance from both sides to the windowless walls, the unguarded part of the house. True, there are no windows in these walls, but when we have taken possession of them we can do a lot of damage."

The commanders agreed to this advice because they had little experience in such tactics and wouldn't have been able to think of such a plan

themselves. The Mongol forces stirred, their weapons clashed, their spears and axes flashed in the sun. On seeing this the Tukhlia lads courageously clenched their weapons in their hands, preparing for serious battle. But while the Mongolians took counsel and prepared for a feigned attack, Maxim wasn't idling either. A happy thought came into his mind. In the plank roof of the boyar's house were small windows facing all four directions, and into each of these windows Maxim placed two of his weaker men. From this vantage point they could watch all the moves made by the enemy and from these secure positions injure them either by shooting or by stones. While one stood at the window, the other was to supply him with whatever necessary, and another was assigned to bring back any news to their comrades down below.

The horns sounded again and the Mongols, with savage yells, threw themselves against their adversaries. They didn't have in mind, however, to meet them face to face, but stopped at the halfway point and aimed a shower of arrows at the besieged. When the attacked, who were prepared for the final, decisive battle, greeted them with a hail of arrows in return, wounding many and killing some, the entire Mongol line retreated as one. The Tukhlia lads greeted this retreat with loud laughter.

"Look here, boyar," called Maxim, "the might of the great Genghis Khan, I see, has the heart of a rabbit; they take a run, then retreat! Aren't you ashamed, an old warrior like you, to command such a spiritless company that is only brave as a mob, like those sheep, but not a single one makes up a man on their own?"

The boyar answered to none of these jeers; he saw very well that Maxim was laughing premature-

ly, and Maxim very quickly saw this for himself. Shouts of joy from the Mongol side resounded at that moment from both the right and left side walls of the house at the same time. During the feigned Mongol attack the others had moved against those walls as had been planned. These were the walls without windows or doors, so that the Tukhlia comrades had neglected to watch them as carefully. True, the lads situated at the windows on the roof had seen their approach and had fired some successful shots at them, but this didn't deter them, particularly after they had reached the house, for the overhanging roof shielded them from any danger from above.

Maxim paled on hearing these ominous shouts so close and on learning from the sentry up on his perch what they meant.

"We're lost," he thought. "There can now be no hope of help. Now we must fight not for life, but to death."

Tuhar Vovk, seeing the success of his maneuver, loudly proclaimed his delight.

"What now, peasants!" he shouted. "We'll see now how your arrogance will last. Look, my warriors are already at your walls. Set fire to those walls! We'll soon chase them out of their nest and once they're in the open field they'll be like a mouse against a cat."

Maxim saw that this was no jesting matter, so he called his comrades together, for there was no way in which they could fight in individual positions when the Mongols were lighting fires beneath the walls of the building.

"Brothers," he said, "it seems we may have to die, for there is little hope of rescue. The Mongols, and you know this as well as I do, will have no

mercy on any one who falls into their hands, just as they showed no mercy to our wounded comrades. If we are to die, then let us die like men — with weapons in our hands. What do you say: shall we take a stand and defend ourselves to our last breath, protected at least partly by the walls, or should we, all together, make an attack on the Mongols? Perhaps we'll be successful in breaking their ranks?"

"Yes, yes, let's attack the Mongols!" cried his comrades as one. "We're not foxes that the hunter smokes out of their lair."

"Good, if that's the way you want it," said Maxim. "Now stand in three rows, throw your bows and arrows away, and take your knives and axes — then after me!"

Like a large boulder fired out of a catapult at a fortress wall, so did our young men charge the Mongol ranks. True, by the time they reached the Mongols they were met by a hail of arrows — but these didn't harm anyone, for the first line carried the tops of the tables hammered into two spears as shields and the Mongol arrows sank harmlessly into the wood. On reaching the Mongols the men threw down their wooden shields and hurled themselves at the enemy in a desperate effort. The Mongols were immediately thrown into confusion and began to fall back, but Tuhar Vovk arrived with his company and surrounded the Tukhlia lads with a whole crowd of Mongols, just as hunters would surround an enraged boar with a pack of dogs. A veritable slaughter took place. The courageous young men laid about them and mowed down large numbers of the Mongol warriors, but Tuhar Vovk kept sending up ever new reserves against them. Blood splashed far and wide of the struggling mass of men, corpses, wounds and bloody weaponry. The groans

of the wounded, the laments of the dying, the savage yells of the murderers — all mingled in some diabolical harmony which pierced the ear and the heart and resounded under the smiling bright sun and against the background of pine forest and the rhythm of the incessant roar of cold mountain streams.

“To the right, comrades! Together as one man, press them hard!” shouted Maxim, fighting back three Mongols who were trying to knock his weapons out of his hands. With awesome persistence the comrades pressed to the right where the Mongol line was the weakest and the spot for defensive action most suitable. After a moment of opposition the Mongols retreated.

“Forward, forward, chase them ahead of you!” shouted Maxim, throwing himself with his bloodied axe after the retreating Mongols. His comrades followed and the Mongol retreat quickly turned into terrified flight. The Tukhlia lads pursued at their heels, knocking down one after another from the rear. Before them lay the open field and beyond it, close by, a dark and fragrant forest. If they could but reach it, they would be safe, for no Mongol force would have the power to do anything to them there.

“Forward, comrades, forward, to the forest!” shouted Maxim, and without stopping for breath — silently, bloodied and terrible, in fact like wild animals — the comrades drove the fleeing Mongolians before them in the direction of the forest. Tuhar Vovk, in a glance, saw the situation from both sides and burst into laughter.

“A safe journey!” he called after the Tukhlia lads. “We’ll meet again on another road!”

And he quickly separated a group of Mongol warriors and sent them up the hill to the Tukhlia road

to meet the Tukhlians face to face on the other side. He knew that his Mongols would get there in good time. He himself, with the remainder of the Mongol company, set out to overtake the Tukhlians from the rear.

Three clouds of dust rose in the air over the field above the Opir — three groups of people sped after each other across that field. The first runners were the group of frightened, shattered Mongolians; behind them and catching up, our Tukhlia lads led by Maxim, and after them the main company of Mongols led by Tuhar Vovk. The third company of Mongol warriors, sent by Tuhar Vovk up the hill to cut across them from the front, quickly disappeared from view without being observed by the hotly pursuing Tukhlia lads.

Suddenly the fleeing Mongols slowed up and stopped. An unexpected barrier had shown up before them — the deep passage forged out of the cliff — the entrance to the Tukhlia road. The passage here was almost two fathoms deep, its walls steep and smooth, so that it was impossible to get down into the valley. To jump was too dangerous, especially for those ahead who feared that those behind them would land on top of them. In mortal fear which often, in the final moments, brings out the courage in the most frightened, the Mongols stopped and turned to face their adversaries. For a moment they were buoyed up with sudden hope; following their adversaries and overtaking them were their own men — and their hands automatically went to their weapons. But this sudden burst of courage was unable to save them. Like a hurricane the Tukhlian lads fell upon the Mongols overcoming their resistance and pushing them into the precipice.

With screams the Mongols in the rear dropped down the cliff-side, while those in front agonized under the blows of the Tukhlia axes and swords. Now the Tukhlia lads found themselves standing over the steep wall of the precipice and shuddered. Behind them came Tuhar Vovk and his company, before them lay this terrible chasm! What to do? A moment of thought was enough for Maxim. The sight of the broken bodies of the Mongols lying at the bottom of the precipice gave him a good idea.

"Let the last row turn to face the Mongols and check their advance, and the front row throw the Mongol dead over the precipice and then jump down on them," he shouted.

"Hurrah!" the young men shouted with delight and carried out his directions. The Mongol corpses dropped over the cliff-side with a thud and the hope of deliverance rose high in the hearts of the Tukhlia lads. But here were the Mongolian pursuers with Tuhar Vovk in the lead.

"No more!" he screamed. "This time you won't escape my hands!" And he felled his first adversary, one who had only the day before been one of his finest archers, with a blow of his heavy axe. The mortally wounded soldier shrieked as he fell at the boyar's feet. A friend swung his axe at Tuhar, hoping to revenge the death of his comrade, but in that same moment he himself was lifted on Mongolian spears from both sides. The whole first row of defenders fell after a short skirmish. These were the weakest — they were wounded in battle and had been in the rear of the chase. However they were able to stop the Mongols for a moment while their more fortunate comrades reached the safety of the bottom of the cliff.

"Stop!" cried Maxim. "Line up against the wall of the precipice! If they wish to pursue us further then this is where we'll arrange for them a bloody bath!"

"Let the first row jump after them!" commanded Tuhar Vovk from above in the thoughtless heat of the battle. The first row followed his command, but did not land alive, in fact many were killed before reaching the ground, having been met in mid-air by the axes of the Tukhlia lads.

"Hurrah!" they shouted again in delight. "Come on, let the second line jump down also!"

But the second line stopped at the top of the precipice and was in no hurry to jump. Tuhar Vovk had seen his mistake and quickly sent a strong group lower down the hill so that they would close the exit from the passage.

"Now you won't escape us, you rogues!" he rejoiced. "Here are my hunters coming! Come boys, at them again!"

A savage shout rose from the passage right below Tuhar Vovk's feet. This was the company that had been sent uphill to cut off the Tukhlia lads. Now in the passage, they attacked the young Tukhlians.

"Escape down the passage!" they cried, but one glance showed them that their hope of escape was lost. Another group of Mongols had darkened the lower entrance and was advancing toward them, shutting them off completely in this stone cage.

"Now will be our death!" said Maxim, wiping his bloodied axe on the sheepskin coat of a dead Mongolian lying at his feet. "Comrades, bravely into this final battle!"

With great courage they fought. Drawing on all their strength, they attacked the Mongols, and in spite of the obstructive, sloping terrain, which helped



the Mongolians, were able again to confuse them and inflict a lot of damage to their men. Still the Mongols, with their superior force, managed to drive them down the passage and break up their ranks. Heroically defending themselves, the Tukhlia lads fell, one after another and only Maxim, who fought like a lion, did not yet have a wound on his body. The Mongols avoided him and when they did attack it was with the hope of disarming him and taking him alive. This was the clear command of Tuhar Vovk.

Now that the second company of Mongolians had come up from below, the young men were hopelessly caged in the passage. They were pressed against the wall with the only clear spot before them within the reach of their axes and swords. But their arms were beginning to weaken, while the Mongols pushed and pushed against them like the waves of a flood. Some, who had already lost all hope and seeing the impossibility of further defence, blindly threw themselves into the thick of the battle and perished immediately, hewed to pieces by the Mongol axes. Others, whispering a prayer, pressed against the cliff walls as though they might give them some help; the third, even though continuing to defend themselves, did so unconsciously, waving their axes mechanically and the mortal blows of the Mongols caught them already as corpses, unfeeling and spiritless. Only a small group of the strongest — five in all — surrounding Maxim, still held themselves straight, like spires, in the middle of a shouting flood. This small group, standing on a pile of corpses as though on a tower, had already beaten back three attacks; the swords and axes in the hands of these heroes were already dulled, their clothes, hands and faces completely covered with blood. But

Maxim's voice still rose strongly and clearly, encouraging his comrades in defence. Tuhar Vovk, half in rage, half in wonder, gazed at them from above.

"By God, what an amazing young man!" he said to himself. "No wonder he charmed my daughter. He could charm me also with his heroic character!" Then turning to the Mongols who were standing on the edge of the precipice beside him, he shouted:

"Come, jump down on them and let's finish with this carnage! But don't touch that one!" and he pointed at Maxim.

All together, like some heavy boulder, the Mongols leaped down on the as yet unconquered group of heroes and felled them to the ground. Again there was a roar of savage shouting, a few half-hearted skirmishes with the remaining Tukhlians, but not for long. A whole mass of Mongols rushed at each of the heroes — and they all perished. Only Maxim now stood alone like an oak in a meadow. He sliced in half the head of a Mongol who jumped him and raised his axe against another when an iron hand grasped him by the throat from the rear and threw him to the ground. Maxim fell, a victim of cunning and over him, scarlet with rage and strain, bent the face of Tuhar Vovk.

"Well, *smerd!*" jeered the boyar loudly. "Can you see now that I can keep my word? Come boys, put him in chains!"

"Even though in chains, I'm still a free man. My chains are on my hands, while yours are on your soul!" said Maxim.

The boyar burst into laughter and walked away to bring order into the Mongol ranks which were heavily thinned out in the bloody slaughter. He then went into his house with the main body of the Mon-

gols who were left. The others he ordered to occupy the unfortunate, littered with corpses, passage. Separating all who were well to guard the passage, he himself with a smaller group and his prisoner Maxim were to return to the encampment.

“Accursed peasants!” the boyar grumbled, totalling his losses. “All these people killed! Well, the devil take these Mongols — I’m not sorry for them! If only I could get to strength and power over their corpses, I’d turn my face against them too. But this scoundrel, this Maxim — there’s a fighter! Who knows, maybe he will be of service to my purpose. I’ll have to use him now that I have him in my hands. He must serve us as a guide through the mountains, for the devil only knows what this road of theirs is like and if there aren’t any untrodden areas along it. Now that he is in my hands, he must be won over, appeased a bit, who knows what else he may turn out to be useful for.”

In the meantime, the Mongols were preparing their horses for departure. Maxim, bound hand and foot in heavy chains, bloodied, hair wet with perspiration and clothing torn to shreds, sat on a rock by the river, silent, with his teeth clenched and despair in his heart. In the field before and in the passage lay the not yet cold heaps of tattered and blood-spattered bodies of his comrades and enemies. How fortunate were those corpses! They lay so quietly, so peacefully on their bloody bed, without anger, without suffering, without hostility. They were laughing now at all fetters, at all the power of the great Genghis Khan. As for him, this piece of iron made him an inanimate instrument in the hands of savage wilfulness, a victim of bloody revenge. How fortunate were those corpses! Though mutilated, they carried the image and form of human beings — while

in one moment these shackles had turned him into an animal, a slave!

“O blessed Sun!” cried Maxim in heartfelt pain. “Could it be that it is your will that I die in chains? Could it be that you so often greeted the days of my happiness with your bright smile only so that today you could greet my bottomless misery? Could it be, O Sun, that you have stopped being the good God of Tukhlia and have become the guardian of these mad savages?”

And the sun laughed! Its bright, hot rays shone in the puddles of blood, kissed the livid lips and the



deep wounds through which the brains of the dead leaked out, and the human bowels, still warm. These same bright, hot rays flooded the green forest, the beautiful, fragrant flowers and the far-off mountain meadows which bathed in the clear azure air. The sun smiled and with its divine, indifferent smile it wounded Maxim's bleeding heart even more deeply.

## VI

Zakhar Berkut was dreaming a strange dream. It seemed to him that it was the day of their annual festival of the Guardian and the whole community had gathered around the rock at the entrance to the Tukhlia Pass—the girls with wreaths, the young lads with music, all dressed in their holiday dress. He was also there, the oldest member of the community to first approach the sacred rock and pray before it. Secretive, anxious and painful feelings took possession of his heart as he was praying—something ached deep in his soul—and he didn't know what it was. He prayed passionately. After two or three words of the customary prayer he abandoned the ritual turns of phrase established into custom through the ages; a new, more passionate, more impetuous prayer flowed from his lips. The entire community, deeply moved, fell prone to the ground, and he did the same. But the words continued to come, it grew dark, black clouds covered the sky, thunder rolled across the valley, lightning flashed and flitted across the entire horizon with blinding flame, the earth trembled. At the same time, slowly inclining, the sacred rock moved from its place and with a terrible crash fell toward him.

"What could it have meant?" Zakhar asked himself, thinking about the dream. "Fortune or misfortune? Happiness or sorrow?" But he could find no answer to these questions, except that the dream left him with a deep sense of foreboding, a cloud of sadness on his brow.

This foreboding was quickly realized. Immediately after the noon hour the terrible, unexpected news alarmed Tukhlia. Herdsmen from a neighbouring meadow rushed breathless into the village, shouting out that they had seen a battle of some kind by the boyar's house, a crowd of unfamiliar dark people and heard an incomprehensible language and much shouting. Nearly all the young men of Tukhlia, arming themselves in whatever was at hand, ran to the site of the battle, but stopped at a distance when they saw the bloody and corpse-strewn field and the boyar's home surrounded by a swarm of Mongols. There was no doubt about it — all the young men who had been sent out to dismantle the boyar's house had died in an unequal struggle with the invaders. Not knowing what to do, the young men returned to the village, carrying the terrible news with them. Old Zakhar, on hearing it, shuddered, and a bitter tear slid down his old cheek.

"So my dream has come to pass," he whispered. "My son Maxim has fallen in defense of his village. So it had to be. If one has to die, let one die honourably — it doesn't happen to everyone. I musn't grieve for him, but rejoice over his fate."

So old Zakhar comforted himself, but his heart was filled with pain, for he loved his youngest son too deeply, with all the strength of his heart. But his strength of spirit soon came to the fore. His people turned to him for they needed his advice. They walked in a crowd, old and young, out of the village to

the Tukhlia Pass, beyond which, so close, stood their terrible foe.

For the first time in the history of Tukhlia the community council met without its traditional ceremony, without its standard, among the clash of axe and scythe, in a half-terrified, half-militant clamour. The old and the young mixed without order, armed and unarmed, and even women were seen wandering here and there in the crowd, asking for news of the enemy, or loudly bewailing the loss of their sons.

"What to do? What to start? How to defend ourselves?" The words hummed through the crowd. One idea prevailed over all others — to go together to the Pass and defend themselves against the Mongols to the last drop of blood. The youth, especially, insisted on this.

"We want to die as our brothers died, in the defence of our land!" they shouted. "The enemy will enter our Tukhlia valley only over our corpses!"

"Let's make barricades in the Pass and harrass the Mongols," counselled the elders.

Later, after the clamour had died down a bit, Zakhar Berkut spoke up:

"This is a question of war, therefore it is not for me, an old man, to advise about something that I cannot do anything about myself. Still, I would think that our service would be great if we should repel the Mongols, especially if we consider that it won't be too difficult for us to do so. Our sons have died from their hands, their blood had stained our earth and calls on us for revenge. Shall we have revenged ourselves on our foe, on the destroyers of our land, if we repel them from our village? No, for after being repelled from our village they will attack others with even greater savagery. Not to repel, but to defeat them competely — that must be our aim!"

The crowd listened attentively to the words of their Speaker and the youth, receptive to anything new and unexpected, were ready to accept this advice, though they didn't know how it could be achieved. But many voices among the elders spoke up against it.

"It's not to offend you that we are saying this, father Zakhar," spoke up one countryman, "but your advice, though wise and promises great glory, is impossible for us to carry out. Our forces are too weak, while the Mongol strength is great. There has been no help as yet from other highland communities, nor from beyond the highlands. Even if it comes we will still be too weak to even surround the Mongols, let alone defeat them in open war. And without that, how can we defeat them? No, no! We are not strong enough! We'll be lucky if we can repel them from our village and turn them away from our Pass: there is no hope of our defeating them at all!"

Seeing the entire truth of these words, Zakhar Berkut was ready to give up his youthfully impetuous thought, though with aching heart, when two completely unexpected events considerably raised the morale of the Tukhlia community and changed all their plans.

One after another, from the lower part of the village, heralded by the sound of horns and wooden trembitas, came three companies of armed young men. Each company carried a military standard in front; their eager, courageous songs reverberating far into the hills. This was the promised help from the highland villages and villages from beyond the highlands. Man by man, like fully-grown maples, the three companies stood in long rows before the gathered Tukhlians and lowered their banners in greeting. It was a pleasure to look at these strong, brown faces, warmed by manly courage and pride



that they were being called upon to lay down their lives for what was dearest to them on earth; that on their weapons there lay a great responsibility. Thundering joyous shouts greeted their arrival; only the mothers who had only that day lost their sons wept at the sight of these young men in the bloom of their manhood who tomorrow might also lay down their lives, be mown down and trampled just as their bright eagles had been today. Old Zakhar Berkut's heart also filled with pain when he looked at these young men and thought about how splendid his own son would have looked among them. But no, impossible! The dead can't be brought back to life, but the living live and dream...

The joy at the arrival of the awaited help had not yet faded away; the community had not yet had time to return to their meeting, when from the opposite forest glade which was above the Tukhlia Pass came a new and also totally unexpected guest. On a foaming horse, its skin torn by branches and brambles, and lying across its back so that he might ride faster and more securely, rode someone as fast as the horse could carry him. It was difficult to tell who the rider was from a distance. The rider was dressed in a Mongolian sheepskin coat, turned woollside out and on his head wore a lovely beaver peaked cap. The young men took the rider to be a Mongol messenger and stepped forward to meet him with their bows ready. But having left the forest behind and neared the steep precipice by which one descended into the Tukhlia valley, the supposed Mongol dismounted his horse, took off his sheepskin coat and to everyone's surprise, turned out to be a woman in a white linen mantle interwoven with silk thread with a bow hanging on her back and glittering axe in her belt.

"Miroslava, the daughter of our boyar!" cried the young men, staring. They couldn't tear their eyes away from this beautiful, courageous girl. She, however, didn't even look at them, but left the horse where she had dismounted and began quickly to look for a path by which she could descend into the valley. Her quick eyes soon found such a path, almost completely concealed by the wide, long-fringed leaves of the ferns and thorny bramble bushes that grew on both sides of it. With confident stride, as though accustomed to this from childhood, she came down the path into the valley and approached the crowd.

"Good health to you, good people," she greeted them, blushing slightly. "I have rushed here to inform you that the Mongols are on their way, will be here before nightfall and that you should prepare to meet them."

"We knew this," called several voices from the crowd. "It's not news to us."

The voices were sharp and unfriendly toward the daughter of the villainous boyar through whom so many of their young men had lost their lives. But she wasn't offended by this hostility, though she obviously sensed it.

"So much the better for me, that you are prepared," she answered. "And now please tell me where among you is Zakhar Berkut."

"Here I am, young woman," answered Zakhar Berkut, approaching. For a long moment, attentively and with respect, Miroslava gazed at him.

"Allow me, good father," she said in a voice trembling with agitation, "to tell you first of all that your son is alive and well."

"My son!" cried Zakhar. "Alive and well? Oh God! Where is he? What is happening to him?"

“Don’t panic, father, from the news I am going to give you. Your son was taken captive by the Mongols.”

“In bondage?” cried Zakhar, as though hit by lightning. “No, it cannot be! My son would rather be cut to ribbons than be taken captive. It cannot be! You want to frighten me, you bad girl!”

“No father, I’m not trying to frighten you. It’s true. I have come here straight from the Mongol encampment. I saw him, talked with him. They took him forcibly and by deceit, bound him in chains. Though not wounded, he is covered with the blood of the enemy. No father, your son didn’t dishonour your name.”

“And what did he say?”

“He told me to come here, father, to comfort you in your loneliness and sorrow, to become your daughter, your child, because I, father (and here her voice trembled even more), I... am an orphan, I have no father!”

“You have no father? Could it be that Tuhar Vovk is dead?”

“No, Tuhar Vovk is alive, but Tuhar Vovk stopped being my father when he... betrayed... his country and began... to serve the Mongols.”

“We could have expected this,” replied Zakhar morosely.

“Now I cannot consider him my father, because I don’t want to betray my homeland. Father, please be my parent! Accept me as your child! Your unfortunate son begs you to do this through my lips.”

“My son! My unfortunate son!” groaned Zakhar without taking his eyes off Miroslava. “Who will comfort me when he is gone?”

“Don’t worry, father, it may be that he is still

alive, that we may be able to save him. Now listen to what Maxim told me!"

"Speak, speak!" said Zakhar, looking at her again.

"He advised the Tukhlia people not to try and stop the Mongols before they got to the Pass, but to allow them to enter and then be caged within it. There they can be surrounded and be demolished to the last man and if not, they can be starved to death. But barricades must be built at the outlet over the falls and everything must be taken out of the village, all the community property, the grain, bread, cattle, and then they must be locked in there from all sides. 'Here,' said Maxim, 'they can be defeated, but nowhere else!' That's what Maxim advises."

The people listened to Miroslava with tense attention. A deep silence lay over the crowd when she finished speaking. But Zakhar, straightened up proudly and joyfully and approached Miroslava with open arms.

"My daughter!" he said. "Now I can see that you are worthy of being the daughter of Zakhar Berkut! These are the true words of my son — they are a reflection of his militant spirit! With these words you have captured my father's heart! Now I will find it easier to console myself at his loss, when heaven has sent me such a daughter to take his place!"

Weeping loudly, Miroslava threw herself into his arms.

"No, father, don't say such things," she sobbed. "Your son won't be killed, he'll return to you. He will be here this evening with the Mongol horde, and if God would help us to destroy them, then we will be able to free him too!"

At that moment shouts were heard from the sentinels at the Pass: "The Mongols! The Mongols!"

followed by their appearance before the people crying out that large numbers of Mongol forces had appeared in the valley by the Opir. Now it became crucial to decide quickly what to do, how to defend themselves. Zakhar Berkut again insisted that the Mongols be allowed into the Tukhlia cauldron and there, having been surrounded, destroyed or starved out to the last man.

No voice was raised against this advice now — and the gathering made a swift decision. All rushed back to their homes to take their goods into the forest. The young men from the outside villages moved with great speed to the upper part of the valley, to the waterfall, to make barricades at the entrance and prevent the Mongols from entering at that point. The village became the scene of concentrated action. Shouts, directions, questions, the lowing of oxen and the creaking of the wooden two-wheeled carts echoed on every side, deafening the ears and rolling across the mountains. The Tukhlians took sad leave of their cottages, yards and gardens, the cultivated fields which yet today would be trampled and ruined by the terrible Mongol flood. Mothers carried their weeping children, fathers drove the cattle, transported the family possessions, bags of grain and clothing in the carts. The dust rose above the village; only the silvery waters of the stream continued to murmur as always and the ancient, huge Guardian rock at the entrance to the Tukhlia Pass, stood gloomy, forsaken and sad, as though sorrowing over his children who had to leave their beautiful valley. It seemed to lean forward toward the pass as if to bar the enemy from entering with its huge, stone body. The ancient linden in the centre of the common beyond the village also drooped and the roaring waterfall, reflecting the crimson rays of the setting sun,

stood like an immovable pillar over the deserted Tukhlia cauldron.

The village was now completely deserted. The houses sank into the evening darkness; the dust settled on the roadway; the voices and shouts were silent, eternal wilderness seemed to have devoured all life in the valley. The sun set beyond the Tukhlia mountains, sinking into light, rosy clouds; the dark pine forests around Tukhlia whispered quietly, secretly, as though notifying each other of some ominous news. Only the earth, for whatever reason, rumbled and groaned dully; the air, though clear and mild, trembled with an odd, confused hum, which caused even the boldest to shiver. And far, far away in the forests, in the deep, dark ravines with their inaccessible windfalls, the wolves howled, the foxes barked in fits and snatches, the stags bellowed, the aurochs lowed. But the village was silent, lifeless! And the skies so clear, so fair! But no. The sun set suddenly behind a dark, animated cloud which had come up like a wall from the west, filling the air with wild clamour and descended on Tukhlia. These were the prophets and constant companions of the horde — the rooks and the ravens — in their countless numbers, sensing food. The ominous birds beat their wings through the air, broke into patches, then threw themselves in all directions like clouds scattered by a storm. The peaceful roofs of Tukhlia were soon covered by the black guests, their clamour bubbling like boiling water in a huge kettle. Silent, unmoving, standing on the steep shoreline of their kettle, the Tukhlians looked down on this evil fowl and cursed these harbingers of death and ruin in their hearts.

But the scene soon changed. Like an autumn flood through a break in a dam, that's how the dark

spectres, with terrifying shouts, poured into the cauldron. Row followed row, without end and without pause. They slowed down, like water below the waterfall, after emerging from the narrow mouth, then formed two long lines and moving slowly, without opposition, flooded the deserted valley. In front, along the roadway, rode the terrible giant Burunda *bahadur* on a white horse, and alongside rode another, smaller rider — Tuhar Vovk.

They advanced slowly as though expecting an attack from the village at any moment. But the attack didn't come, the village lay as though after a plague. Shrieking and screaming, the first rows of Mongols threw themselves at the houses to kill and pillage in their traditional manner — but there was no one to kill, the houses were empty. With cries of anger the Mongols dashed from house to house, breaking down doors, ruining gates and fences, breaking up casks and baskets, demolishing the oven stoves. But all their anger was in vain — there was no one in the village.

“The cursed dogs!” fumed Burunda to Tuhar Vovk. “They have learned of us and have hidden themselves!”

“Shall we spend the night here, *bahadur*?” asked Tuhar Vovk, without replying to the commander's remark.

“Until we meet with those scoundrels we can't spend the night,” answered Burunda. “Lead us to the exit of this hole, we must secure our exit!”

“The exit is safe,” appeased Tuhar Vovk, though even for him it was somewhat confusing to see how the Tukhlians had so cleanly cleared the village. And though he tried to calm the Mongol commander, he begged him to direct the soldiers to stop looking for booty and hasten to the exit. Very unwillingly the

front ranks of the Mongol horde went toward the exit, while the back rows were still squeezing through the pass, ever more densely filling the cauldron.

The leading detachment had already left the village and hurried toward the exit hewed out of the cliffside. Nothing could be seen in the Pass from below and the Mongols stepped confidently right up to the steep wall of the cliff through which the Pass had been hewed. Suddenly, a mass of rock came down on the Mongols from above, wounding and destroying many. The cries of the invaders, wounded and fallen filled the air. The birds of prey cawed and wheeled above their victims. The invaders began to withdraw backwards and to the sides when Burunda and Tuhar Vovk threw themselves forward with drawn swords to stop them.

“Where are you going, fools!” bawled Burunda enraged. “There is the entrance to the Pass. After me!”

And pushing the whole throng before him, he threw himself into the mouth of the Pass. But here the invaders were again met with a hail of stones from above and more than one Genghis Khan’s warrior’s eyes were blinded by blood and brains splashed against the stone walls from a crushed skull. Shouts and groans emerged out of the dark passage as though out of hell, but above them the voice of Burunda rose even louder:

“Forward, rabbit hearts, forward after me!”

And new masses, disregarding the falling rock, surged into the passage.

“Further up the passage!” urged Burunda, protecting his head from the falling rock with his shield.

In the meantime, Tuhar Vovk, seeing a group of young men on the top of the cliff, directed the Mongols standing at the entrance of the Pass to rain a shower of arrows at them. Screams of pain came



down from above and the Mongols shouted loudly with joy at the sound. But in revenge for their three wounded comrades, the Tukhlia lads, with twofold anger, began to throw large slabs of stone at the invaders. This wouldn't have stopped Burunda if in the bend in the passage, in its centre, a new unexpected obstacle hadn't appeared. The passage was obstructed, right to the top, with huge rock boulders. Here the Tukhlians attacked even more fiercely, the rock coming down like hail. The Mongols fell, one after another, and Burunda saw, finally, that his persistence was for nothing because they couldn't get through until they managed to bring the Tukhlians down from above. "Back!" he shouted, and the remaining few Mongols left from the storming troops, dispirited, flew out of the Pass like a rock out of a sling.

"The Pass is barricaded!" said Burunda to the boyar, breathing heavily and wiping the sweat and blood from his face.

"Let's leave them now, let them rejoice!" said Tuhar Vovk.

"No!" shouted Burunda, looking arrogantly at the boyar. "The warriors of the great Genghis Khan don't know how to postpone matters till tomorrow when they can be done today."

"But what can we do here today?" asked Tuhar Vovk, looking with fear into the dark mouth of the Pass, from which the groans and cries of the mortally wounded and dying Mongols could still be heard.

"Those dogs must be brought down from the cliff!" cried Burunda angrily, pointing at the ridge of the precipice. "Bring the ladders! Those in front shall go up while those behind will shoot to keep them away! We'll see who will win!"

Ladders were brought up from the near-by houses and under Tuhar Vovk's directions they were fastened together with transverse poles to form something like a wall. The Tukhlians looked calmly at this activity from above. Now the Mongols, with much shouting, lifted this assembled ladder and pushed it forward toward the wall of the cliff. The Tukhlians greeted them with stones, arrows and javelins, but were unable to restrain them, for when one or another of them fell wounded, others immediately took their place and moved the ladder ever closer. At the same time the rear ranks of the Mongols kept up a steady



stream of fire, forcing the Tukhlians to fall back. The terrible ladder was quickly drawing nearer to the wall. The Tukhlians began to panic.

Not far from the field of battle and protected by a huge boulder, sat Zakhar Berkut on a pile of straw, ministering to the wounded. He removed the arrows from their wounds, washed them with Miroslava's help and was preparing to bind them after applying some prepared resin, when several frightened warriors ran up and told him of the danger threatening them.

"What can I advise you, children?" asked the old man, but Miroslava jumped up and ran over to see the danger for herself.

"Don't worry," she told the Tukhlians, "we'll quickly tell them their fortune! Let them shoot and you take your spears and lie prone. When the first of them show themselves over the top of the rock, then all together at them! They themselves will be your protection against their fire and having shaken off those at the top, you'll stop those below as well. The darkness will help us and beating them back now will leave us in peace for the rest of the night."

Without a word of opposition the Tukhlians fell forward, their javelins in their hands. The arrows still kept coming for a while then stopped — a sign that the first row had begun to climb up the ladder. Holding their breath, the Tukhlians lay there, awaiting their enemy. Now they could hear the squeaking of the rungs of the ladder, the hard breathing of the climbing men, the rattle of their weapons — and slowly, timidly, before the eyes of the lying men emerged the fur caps and under them the black, fierce heads with small glittering eyes of the enemy. The eyes looked anxiously, fixed, as though bewitched, at the lying Tukhlians, but the heads rose

higher, ever higher; one could already see the shoulders under them, the backs covered with the sheepskins, and the broad chests. At that moment the Tukhlians sprang up with fearful cries and thrust their javelins deep into the chests of the invaders. Shouts, roars, confusion — here and there convulsive movements, here and there a short struggle, curses and groans — and like a heavy avalanche the enemy tumbled down the ladder toward the bottom, knocking down those coming up behind them. Then down on that pile of living and dead, disorder and confusion, bloody and shivering and wailing people's bodies, came an avalanche of rock — and above all this inferno, partially veiled by the coming night, rose the joyous shout of the Tukhlians, the pitiful laments of the Mongols and the thundering, terrible curses of *Burunda bahadur*. This one leaped about on the grass as though mad, tearing his hair and finally completely losing his head in his anger. He drew his sword and leaped at Tuhar Vovk.

"You pale-faced cur!" he shouted, grinding his teeth. "You two-fold traitor, this is your fault! You brought us here to this cavity out of which we now can't get out!"

Tuhar Vovk grew hot with anger at this accusation for no one, since his birth, had ever talked to him like that. His hand automatically went to his sword, but at that moment something so deep, so heavily pained his heart, that his arm weakened and fell and he, head bent and teeth clenched, said in a smothered voice:

"Great *bahadur*, you are unjust in your anger against a faithful servant of Genghis Khan. I am not to blame that the *smerds* oppose us. Direct the soldiers to retire for the night and rest, and tomorrow morning you will see for yourself that they will

scatter before our fire like those dry autumn leaves before a puff of wind."

"Hah, yes!" cried Burunda. "So that in the night they can attack us in their houses and slaughter our soldiers!"

"Then have them burn the houses and sleep beneath the open sky!"

"You are speaking with great cunning so as to turn aside my anger, so as to cast away your guilt! No! You brought us here, you have to get us out, and immediately, tomorrow, without any waste of time or people! Are you listening to what I'm saying? That's the way it has to be, or woe betide you!"

In vain Tuhar Vovk tried to convince the savage *bahadur* that he was not to blame, that he had advised what to his mind had been for the best, that the council of Mongol commanders had agreed to his proposals, that no commander could guarantee against unexpected mishaps that happen along the way. All this bounced off Burunda's conviction of his guilt like peas off a wall.

"Very well, boyar," he said finally, "I'll do as you say, but tomorrow you will still have to find us a way out of this hole, and if not, then woe to you! This is my final world. I expect action, not words, from you!"

And he turned away from the boyar disdainfully and stalked off to his men, commanding in a loud voice that they set the village on fire from all sides immediately and to clear the area of anything that could serve the enemy as a cover for a night attack. The Mongols gave a shout of joy—they had been waiting for just this command. Tukhlia went up in flames from every side, piercing the dense darkness that had fallen with tongues of flame rising into the

sky. The smoke rolled densely and covered the valley. The thatched roofs crackled under the licking blood-red flames. The flames leaped high and sank, as though jumping up and down in their effort to reach the sky. Occasionally, again from a puff of wind, the flames spread flatly, erupted in golden sparks, glimmered, then undulated like a flaming sea. The noise of falling rafters and walls rolled dully across the valley; stacks of grain and hay looked like piles of smouldering coal with flaming white streaks appearing here and there out of their centers. The trees burned like candles, their glowing leaves rising high in the air, like a swarm of golden butterflies. The whole Tukhlia valley now looked like a blazing inferno. The Mongols danced and ran among the flames, shouting savagely and throwing everything they came across into the fires. With deep groans, the ancient linden — witness to countless community meetings — fell heavily to the ground, felled by the axes of the Mongols. The air in the Tukhlia cauldron grew so hot that it felt as if it were really in a kettle. A sudden wind from the mountains whirled the sparks about, tore at the burning straw and sticks and threw them like flaming arrows in all directions. The Tukhlia stream, seeing such a blaze for the first time in its existence, warmed up for the first time in its cold, rocky bed. The fire lasted some two hours while the Tukhlians, with expressions of helpless grief, watched dumbly from above. The Mongols began to put out some of the smouldering timbers by throwing them into the stream and began to busy themselves with digging a deep trench around their camp. Very quickly a tent for the commanders was set up in its centre. The rest of the army were to sleep under the open sky, on the ground heated up by the fire.

Once again darkness fell in the Tukhlia cauldron. The Mongols would have been glad to light some bonfires in their camp, but were unable to do so. Only now they realized that they had created a desert with their fires and that everything that could possibly be burned had gone up in flames or had floated down the stream. The soldiers were therefore obliged to sleep and the sentries to stand watch in complete darkness — they weren't even able to dig their trenches deep enough, as was necessary, because it grew so dark. Angry and dissatisfied, Burunda walked about the camp like a dark cloud, reviewing the trenches and the sentries placed beside them, exchanging calls with his commanders and issuing orders on how to watch out for night attacks. Night had fallen when the camp finally quieted down somewhat and only the shouts of the sentries and the roar of the waterfall broke the general silence.

There was only one glimmer of light in the entire Mongol camp — this was the flickering pitch torch in Tuhar Vovk's tent. The whitish flame flickered and hissed and smoked, devouring the melted tar and throwing an uncertain light around the boyar's tent. It was empty and cold in the tent, just as it was in Tuhar's heart. He walked about the tent deep in heavy thought. Burunda's arrogant words were burning his proud soul. They were like a slap in the face. The boyar was finally realizing what a slippery path he was treading.

"Peta promised me the mercy and grace of Genghis Khan," he muttered, "and this scoundrel is treating me like a dog. Could it be that I am their servant, lower than the servants of this bondsman? Peta promised me these mountains as an inheritance, a large Carpathian kingdom, and Burunda is threatening me with who knows what. And he could carry out

his threats, confound him! What then — must I subordinate myself to him? Of course! I'm in his hands! I'm a slave, just as that scoundrel Maxim said! Now that I've thought of Maxim — where is he? Would it be possible to do what Burunda wants done using him? Would it be possible, for instance, to exchange him for a free exit of this trap? Its' a good idea!"

He called in two Mongols who were lying down close by and told them to find and bring the slave, Maxim, to him. Unwilling and complaining, the Mongols left — it seemed that the Tukhlia atmosphere was not conducive to strict Mongol discipline...

But where was Maxim? How was he faring in captivity?

Maxim was sitting in the middle of a Tukhlia road, bound in heavy chains, exactly across from his father's house. His face was turned toward the yard where he had played as a boy and where he had walked only yesterday, a free man, busy with everyday chores, and over which today groups of the hated Mongols were prowling. He had been brought here on a horse and when the order came for them to stop here and set fire to the village, he had been taken off the horse and left in the roadway. No one paid attention to him, no one watched him, but there was no thought of escape because groups of Mongols kept prowling about him — shouting, destroying and hunting for booty. Maxim didn't know what was happening about him and sat motionless on the road, like a milestone. His head seemed empty, his thoughts were incoherent, even his impressions refused to set into one integral whole, but wavered and flitted before his eyes like frightened black birds. One thing he was aware of — that the chains that bound him were like cold iron serpents draining the



strength from his body and all thoughts out of his head.

Suddenly there was a deep glow all around him, then dense, black smoke came swirling down upon the road and covered Maxim, burning his eyes and choking him. It was Tukhlia, burning. Maxim sat in the middle of this conflagration and didn't move. The wind whirled the smoke around him, covered him with sparks, spouted him with heat — Maxim didn't seem to see any of this. He would have been glad to have died with the village, to have flown into the air like one of those golden sparks and to fade away into that bright, cold blue, close to the golden stars. But the chains, the chains! How terribly heavy they were!.. Now his father's house was on fire, the flames erupted under the roof, wound like fiery serpents before the windows, looked into the house through the door and expelled a huge cloud of smoke so as to better establish themselves in the Berkut dwelling. Maxim watched the fire lifelessly; it seemed to him that here, in his chest, something was also being broken, something was blazing and pining away. And when the fire roared and the roof caved in, and the corners of his house fell, and a whole sea of sparks erupted out of this glowing, burning mass into the sky, Maxim cried out painfully and jumped up to his feet to run away somewhere, to save something — but taking but one step, helpless, as though mown down, he fell to the ground and fainted.

The fire had already gone out and the breeze blew the hot bitter smoke across the valley. The militant shouts of the Mongols who had been led by Burunda and Tuhar Vovk in the fight with the Tukhlians in the pass had died down, the night sky over Tukhlia was now brighter with the starlight, and silence had settled over the camp, but Maxim still lay as if

lifeless in the centre of the roadway, opposite the burnt-out skeleton of his home. The stars looked mournfully down at his pale, blood-streaked face. His breast barely moved and this was the only indication that a live man was lying there and not a corpse. The Mongols found him lying there in this condition and immediately panicked, thinking him dead and that he had suffocated by the fire. Only after they had doused him with water, washed his face and given him a drink, did he open his eyes and looked about him.

"He's alive, alive!" howled the Mongols, delighted, and picking up the half-conscious, weakened man under the arms, they rushed off to the boyar's tent.

Tuhar Vovk was struck with fear when he saw his hated young man in such a deplorable condition. His newly-washed face was colourless, almost green, his lips cracked with fever and heat, his eyes, reddened from smoke and glossy from exhaustion and inner pain, his knees shook like those of a very old man, and after standing on his feet for a moment, he couldn't hold out and sat down on the ground. The Mongols moved away, and the boyar, silently and in deep thought, looked at Maxim for a long time. Why did he so hate this man? Why did he invoke such terrible grief on his young head? Why didn't he have him killed immediately, but delivered him to a slow, but still certain death — for it was certain that the Mongols would not let him escape them alive, but would slaughter him like an animal and leave him on some roadway as soon as they tired of dragging him around with them. Was it because he had saved his daughter's life? Or was it because she was in love with him? Or perhaps for his truly warrior-like courage and sincerity? Or maybe because he wanted to get even with him? Well, now he was even. Both

were now enslaved and both were unfortunate. Tuhar Vovk felt that his anger toward Maxim was burning out, like that fire that had run short of wood. He had even earlier, after he'd taken Maxim captive, tried to ingratiate himself to him, not from sympathy, but from cunning, but Maxim had refused to say a word to him. True, the boyar had advised him in such a way, that Maxim couldn't accept it. He advised him to go into service to the Mongols, to lead them across the mountains, promising him a big reward, and then to the contrary, threatened that the Mongols would kill him. "Let them!" was the only answer that the boyar heard from Maxim's lips. It was surprising though, that even this proud answer which testified to the strength of Maxim's character, not only didn't anger the boyar, but pleased him. Now he clearly felt that something like a block of ice was melting in his heart; now on the ruins of free Tukhlia, he began to understand that the Tukhlians had acted wisely and correctly, and in his heart, though blinded by greed for power, he still wasn't so deaf to the voice of his conscience that he wouldn't admit it. All this the boyar had thought about today and now looked with different eyes at the half-dead, miserable Maxim, sitting in his tent. He stepped up to him, took his hand and wanted to raise him and seat him on a stool.

"Maxim," he said kindly, "what has happened to you?"

"Let me go!" groaned Maxim weakly. "Allow me to die in peace!"

"Maxim, my boy, where do you get these thoughts of death? I'm thinking about how I could get him freed, and he talks of death! Get up and sit here on the bench, eat a bit, I want to have a talk with you."

Though Maxim only half-understood and half-disbelieved the boyar's words and kindness, his weak state, hunger and exhaustion too loudly demanded refreshment for him to refuse the boyar's offered hospitality. A cup of invigorating wine immediately refreshed him, as if awakening his vital strength to new life; a piece of roast meat quieted his hunger. While he ate, the boyar sat opposite him, giving him courage and the desire to live with friendly words.

"Foolish boy," he said, "such as you have got to live and not think of death. Life is a precious thing and no amount of wealth can buy it."

"Life in slavery is worth nothing," answered Maxim. "Death is preferable!"

"Well... of course... that's understood," said the boyar, "but I'm telling you that you can be free."

"By betraying my people, by leading the Mongols across the mountains... No, better to die than to so earn my freedom!"

"That's not the question," said the boyar smiling. "The question is that even without your, as you call it, betrayal, you can be free... even today."

"How?" asked Maxim.

"I knew you'd be interested," the boyar smiled again. "Now then, lad, this is how it is. You Tukhlians have surrounded us in this valley — barricaded the exit. Of course your opposition is only worth a laugh, for you cannot stop us. But we regret the time. That's the point."

Maxim's eyes lit up with pleasure at this news.

"The Tukhlians have surrounded you, you say?" he cried joyfully. "And you can't get out of here? Well, thank God! I hope that you won't get out. The Tukhlia people are firm — once they have someone in their hands they don't like to release them."

"Tut, tut, tut!" the boyar interrupted. "Don't rejoice too soon, my boy. We are not so weak that a small handful of your Tukhlia folk could keep us! I'm telling you that it isn't important that you have stopped us here, but the time, every minute of time! We are in a hurry."

"But in what way can I help you?"

"Well then, I am planning to approach your Tukhlia men for negotiations today. I want to promise them yourself in return for free passage out of the valley. So then, I'm hoping that you will tell me how I can reach the hearts of your people and your father and get them to agree to my proposal."

"Your efforts are in vain, boyar! The Tukhlia people won't accept such an exchange."

"They won't accept?" cried the boyar. "Why won't they accept?"

"The Tukhlians will fight to the end to make sure you won't cross these mountains. Did you expect that for such a mean exchange as myself they would betray their fellow highlanders and brothers from beyond, whose villages would then be ruined just as our Tukhlia?"

"And they will be ruined, you foolish boy!" said the boyar. "Your Tukhlia forces are too weak to stop us."

"Don't brag, boyar, of the day before nightfall! Great forces are not necessary when nature itself, with its walls and cliffs, is stopping you."

"But still and all, tell me how to speak to your father and to the Tukhlians to reach their hearts."

"Speak sincerely and truthfully — that's the only sorcery."

"Oh it's not so simple, my boy, not so simple!" answered the boyar, dissatisfied. "Your father is an old sorcerer, he knows the words that reach everyone's

heart, he must have taught these words to you. Without this knowledge you wouldn't have been able to induce my archers, who so savagely fought the Mongols for nothing, to your side, when they wouldn't have fought better for greater rewards."

Maxim laughed.

"What a strange man you are, boyar," he said. "I know no such words, but I will tell you explicitly, that even if I knew them, I wouldn't tell you, just so that you wouldn't be able to convince the Tukhlians to make such an exchange."

The proud boyar exploded in anger.

"Be careful, my boy. Take heed of who you are and where you are!" he shouted. "Remember that you are a prisoner, that your life depends on the will of any one Mongol."

"What's my life?" answered Maxim calmly. "I'm not concerned about my life. Anyone who has known enslavement even for a moment has known worse than death."

At that moment the tent flap was opened and Miroslava quickly entered. She gave a rapid glance around the tent, and paying no attention to her father, threw herself toward Maxim.

"He's here, he's here!" she cried. "It was as if something pulled me here. Maxim, dear heart, what has been happening to you?"

Maxim sat immovable, his eyes fixed on Miroslava, who had grasped his hand and held it strongly. Her words sounded like the Easter bells to his ear, like revitalizing dew to a wilted flower. Like shining hope, she knelt beside him, weeping over his heavy chains, her tears washing the dried blood from his hands. Warmth and joy crept into Maxim's heart at her presence, at the touch of her soft hand. How warmly the blood coursed through his veins! How

strongly his love of life asserted itself! But the chains that bound him were unmercifully tight, reminding him of his captivity, that a bloody Mongol knife hung over his head. The thought of it at such a happy moment crept like a serpent into his heart, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Miroslava," he turned away, "why did you come here to make my agony even worse? I had already accepted the idea of death and now you have again awakened in me the desire for life!"

"My dear!" answered Miroslava. "Don't lose hope. That's why I am here, coming through all kinds of danger to the enemy camp, to tell you so — don't lose hope!"

"Why do I need hope? Hope won't break these chains."

"But my father will."

"Ah, your father! That's what he says, that he's prepared to do it, but he asks, in return, a service that I cannot fulfill."

"What kind of service?"

"He wants to go to the Tukhlians and propose an agreement that in exchange for me they release the Mongols from this valley, and desires that I give him the magic word that would win the hearts of the Tukhlia people."

Miroslava looked at her father in wonderment for the first time since she entered the tent, and as she looked, her wonder turned to delight.

"Father," she asked, "is this true?"

"True," he answered.

"And you think Maxim knows such a word?"

"He must know it. Didn't he bind you to himself the first moment you met him? He couldn't have done this without sorcery."

Miroslava, with a smile full of boundless love,

glanced back at Maxim, then turning again to her father, said:

“Do you have permission from the commander for negotiations?”

“Not yet, but that will only take a moment. His tent is next to mine.”

“Then go. In the meantime I’ll prevail on Maxim to tell you these magic words.”

“You’ll prevail?”

“You’ll see! Now go!”

“The maid’s bewitched!” muttered the boyar to himself as he left the tent. “Bewitched, nothing else but! She’s fallen head over heels in love with him.”

“Maxim, my precious, my darling!” said Miroslava, after her father had left, twining her arms around his neck and kissing his pale, feverish lips. “Don’t worry! The Mongols will never get out of here — this is where they’ll perish!”

“Oh Miroslava, my love!” answered Maxim sadly. “I’d gladly believe it, but their strength is too great. Our Tukhlia forces are too weak.”

“The highlanders and men from beyond the mountains have come to help us.”

“Their weapons are very poor.”

“Don’t worry about that either. Listen, there are hundreds of chopping axes in the woods, in a short time hundreds of fires will flare up around the valley, and around them our master craftsmen will be making machines with which we will be able to catapult rocks right into the centre of the enemy camp.”

“And whose idea was this? Who taught our masters?”

“I, dear heart. I have often watched these machines. They stand on the walls of Halych. Before the sun rises above the Zelemin, fifty such machines will be catapulting rocks on the Mongol heads.”



Maxim joyfully embraced Miroslava and held her tightly to his heart.

"My life!" he said. "You will be our Tukhlia's saviour!"

"No Maxim!" answered Miroslava. "I won't be Tukhlia's saviour, your father will. What are my miserable machines worth against such an enemy force? Your father will face them with an even greater force, no army could withstand."

"What kind of force?" asked Maxim.

"Listen!" said Miroslava.

It was very quiet all around, only from somewhere far-far in the mountains came the dull sound of thunder.

"Thunder," said Maxim, "so what of it?"

"What of it?" said Miroslava quickly. "That is the death knell of the Mongols! This is a greater destroyer than they are, and a destroyer that will hold hands with us... Just listen!"

And she looked about the tent, though it was completely empty, then, as if distrusting the silence and emptiness, she leaned toward Maxim and whispered a few words into his ear. As though lifted by a mighty hand, Maxim leaped to his feet so suddenly that his chains clanked. "Oh you girl! You bewitching apparition!" he exclaimed, looking at her half anxiously, half in deep respect. "Who are you and who sent you here with such a message? Because now I see that you can't be Miroslava, the daughter of Tuhar Vovk. No, you must be the spirit of the Guardian, who is called the protector of Tukhlia."

"No Maxim, no dear one," said the amazing girl. "It is I, myself, that same Miroslava who loves you so dearly, who would gladly give her life to make you happy!"

"As if I could be happy without you!.."

"No, Maxim, listen to what I'm telling you. Get away from this camp, right now!"

"How can I get away? The sentries are certainly not asleep."

"The sentries will let you through. Can't you see that they've let me through? Now this is what you must do—dress up in my clothes and take this golden ring; it was given to me by their commander as a sign of freedom and secure passage—show it to the sentries and they'll let you through."

"And you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'll remain here with my father."

"But the Mongols will realize that you helped me escape and will show you no mercy. Oh no, that's not what I want."

"Don't fear for me, I can manage very well."

"So can I!" said Maxim stubbornly.

The boyar entered at that moment, flushed and sullen. A cloud of anger and dissatisfaction hung over his forehead. Burunda had revealed himself to be even more unfriendly toward him and met his advice about exchanging Maxim with reproaches and barely-barely agreeing to it. The boyar more and more clearly began to feel bound, as though at any moment there would be bars about him that would become an ever tighter cage.

"Well?" he asked sharply, without looking at either his daughter or Maxim.

A happy thought flashed through Miroslava's mind.

"All is well, father," she said, "except..."

"Except what?"

"Maxim's words are such that they have no influence coming from someone else's lips. Only if he says them himself, do they have any power."

"Well then, the devil take it!" muttered the angry boyar.

"No father, wait. Listen to what I say. Tell them to release him from his chains and let him go with you to the Tukhlians. Here is the ring from Peta. With this ring, the sentries will let him through."

"Well thank you, my daughter, for your so good advice! Lead him to the Tukhlians, you say. That means taking our last guarantee of success out of my hands. The Tukhlians will take our captive and drive me away! No, that won't happen. I'll go myself and without his words."

Saddened, Miroslava's eyes filled with tears.

"My dearest!" she said, embracing Maxim. "Do as I advise. Take this ring!"

"No, Miroslava, don't worry about me," answered Maxim. "I've already decided what I will do. Go and help our people, and may our Guardian help you all."

It was hard for Miroslava and Maxim to part. She was leaving him to almost certain death, though she tried hard not to show her anxiety. Furtively, she kissed him and grasped his hand warmly, then ran out of the tent after her father. Maxim remained behind, his heart beating with a mixed feeling of joy, fear and hope.

## VII

"What is that knocking in the forest?" asked the boyar of his daughter as they walked together across the Mongol camp.

"They're cutting wood," answered Miroslava shortly.

"Now? At night?"

“It will soon be day.”

And truly, no sooner did Miroslava say this, than flashes of light appeared here and there on the high rocky crags that encircled the Tukhlia cauldron. It was the Tukhlians striking flint and lighting bonfires. Within a short time long rows of these bonfires flared on the hills surrounding the valley, like the glowing eyes of huge wolves shining in the darkness, ready to leap into the valley and devour the Mongol forces. Dark figures moved about each fire and the sound of axes rose with twofold vigour.

“What are they doing?” asked the boyar of his daughter.

“Hewing wood.”

“What for?”

“When you get there, you’ll see.”

They continued their way across the camp. Here and there they were stopped by the sentries and it was necessary to show the commander’s ring to be let by. The sentries eyed the bonfires with anxiety, then awakened their commanders, but these, seeing that the Tukhlians were conducting themselves quietly, told the sentries not to raise any alarms, but to be on the alert. That there were so many fires burning, the Mongols considered a plus — there could be no secret attack. They could sleep peacefully as long as they were burning, because they would be faced with important tasks in the morning.

Tukar Vovk and his daughter had now passed the camp, and having crossed a not too wide strip of land came up against the steep wall of the cliff.

For a long time they walked, looking for a path that would take them up, till finally Miroslava found one hidden between some stumps and tall ferns. With some difficulty they began to make their way up.

"Who's coming?" shouted voices from around a fire above them.

"Friends!" answered Miroslava.

"What friends?" called the Tukhlians, standing across the path. They soon recognized Miroslava, who was walking in front. "Who is that with you?"

"My father. The Mongol commander has sent him to conduct peaceful negotiations with your elders."

"What the devil do we need negotiations for? If only the sun would come up soon, we'll show them how we'll negotiate."

"Aren't you the brave ones!" said Tuhar Vovk smiling. "Well, you won't have to wait long for this pleasure. One doesn't know, however, if this pleasure will extend to your mothers when they see your heads hung on the Mongol lances!"

"The deuce take your words, you raven!" cried the Tukhlian lads surrounding the boyar.

"Now, now," Tuhar Vovk was conciliatory. "I don't wish this misfortune on you. I'm only saying that it wouldn't look good. And it's because I wish to spare you this fate that I came to negotiate with your elders. It's because I'm sorry for you, you young and thoughtless children! You're prepared to go blindly to your death without questioning whether any good will come out of it. But the elders should consider these things."

Speaking thus, the boyar approached the fire around which a number of craftsmen were planing wood while others were digging holes in already planed small posts, and still others hollowing out the logs.

"What are you making?" asked the boyar.

"If you're wise, you can guess!" answered they, bantering, and began to join the planed boards together in the shape of a gate with strong crossbars,

then joining two of them together at the top and bottom with long, heavy planking. The boyar looked, then slapped his hands against his sides.

"A catapult!" he shouted. "Who taught you peasants to make such a device?"

"There were those who taught us," answered the craftsmen, and began working on the heavy trunk of a beech, hewing out something that looked like a huge spoon which was to be thrust on a handle into a thick, strongly-wound rope, then tightened between the posts of the aforementioned gates, turned tighter and tighter with the help of two winches attached to the posts. The broad, hollowed logs at the other end were to hold rocks and the spring from the twisted rope would then throw these rocks out of the spoon far out at the Mongols.

Tuhar Vovk took a good look around. Beside every fire there was a group of craftsmen — and in Tukhlia every peasant was a craftsman — making the same type of device, while the younger boys, women and children, wound the ropes.

"Well, it's going to be pretty hot for our Mongols to gain their exit out of this hole under such fire," thought Tuhar Vovk, going further into the forest with his daughter along a beaten path ending in a clearing with a huge fire in its centre, around which a gathering of Tukhlia elders sat in council.

"Miroslava," said Tuhar Vovk, after a moment of silence, "did you teach them how to make catapults?"

"Yes," said Miroslava, looking closely at her father and expecting an eruption of anger. But no. The boyar's face lit up with something like satisfaction.

"Very good, my dear!" he said, shortly.

Miroslava was surprised, not knowing what this change in her father's attitude meant; not knowing that his belief in the successful ending of the Mon-

gol march, and still more in the observance of Mongol promises was much shaken, so that the boyar had to keep up his relations with the Tukhlians and his daughter's action was for him a welcome support.

They were now close to the clearing where the Tukhlia elders had spent a sleepless night in council. It was a large clearing, sloping to the south, and closed from the north by a steep cliff of soft Carpathian slate rock. Tall firs surrounded the clearing in a half circle from the east, south and west, so that the sun reached it only at its highest, at noon-day. The clearing had at one time been completely covered with rock slabs which were now overgrown with a soft, downy moss and bushes of long-fringed fern. There was only one beaten path across the centre of the clearing and this led to a deep cave, dug out in the cliff in the form of a crypt and completely open to the south. The walls in this crypt were bare, without a single decoration, but on its floor were benches and concavities beaten out of the rock. Within them the rock was burned red with traces of fire still to be seen in the pits; only the ceiling had a decoration, and only one— a hammered convex stone hemisphere about the size of a good loaf of bread, encircled with a shining gold hoop, as though crowned.

This was the ancient sacred Tukhlia sanctuary, where the elders of the present generation sent their prayers to the highest creator of life — Dazhboh, the Sun, whose image was the hammered out, gold-encased hemisphere in the ceiling. Although the Christian monks had long ago converted the people of Tukhlia, they still, for a long period of time, though praying in the Korchin church to the Christian God, did not abandon their ancestral gods. The road to Yasna Polyana, the clearing, was never over-

grown, the eternal fire in its centre was never extinguished — that's how it got its name, Yasna Polyana\* — and even in front of the small altars to Lada and Dido, there was often the fragrant smoke of juniper and the sacrificed, palpitating bodies of doves — the offerings of the young men and maids of Tukhlia. Very slowly did the people forget their ancient Gods, and customs; only the very old, here and there, conserved what remained of the ancient, free, purely people's religion which allowed every community to have its own God (like Tukhlia had its Guardian), who didn't frighten people with punishment and torment after death, but considered death itself the greatest punishment, the death of the body and the soul of the unrighteous. The new religion, born in the far east, prevailed in our land, or rather became mixed with our ancient religion, and only this mixture gave it the possibility of peacefully becoming part of the people's beliefs. The old people who practised the ancient beliefs passed slowly away, and even though some still lived, they didn't dare to openly proclaim them or teach them to the younger generations, but lived alone, hiding their beliefs in their hearts with the sad conviction that they would follow them into the grave.

Zakhar Berkut was one of the last supporters of the old religion in our Rus. And wonder of wonders! He had acquired this religion in the hermit's monastery, from the old monk Akentiy. Did this old and remarkable healer relate to his pupil stories about the ancient religion, so close to nature and its forces, accidentally, or was it that his own heart was more closely drawn to this faith in opposition to the sterner Byzantium Christianity — it is enough

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\* Bright Meadow



that after his sojourn with the old monk, Zakhar emerged with a great sympathy to the old faith and vowed to be true to it till death. He knew about Yasna Polyana in his Tukhlia, where the eternal fire had long ago died out and the fragrant juniper had stopped smoking, and which the Korchin priests had declared a cursed and unclean spot. But however neglected, no one to date had dared to touch the image of the Sun, nor the golden hoop that bound it. That golden image still shone on the ceiling of the sacred crypt, awaiting the rays of the noontide sun, so as to flash with a thousand sparks. Zakhar Berkut, of his own free will, had taken upon himself the care of the ancient sacred crypt; the pathway to the cave, which was visible across the clearing, had been trodden by his feet over a period of fifty years. Making his way there for medicaments, he would stay at the crypt for a week at a time and through prayer and thought returned to the village strengthened in spirit. More than once, during these periods, the Tukhlia folk from their valley would see the blue puffs of fragrant juniper smoke circling the tall firs that surrounded the clearing and would say among themselves: "It's the old man praying to the ancient Gods." They said this without derision, without contempt, because Zakhar, though he didn't teach anyone the old faith, did the more attentively teach all of them to respect other convictions and other religions.

It was here then, at Yasna Polyana, that the Tukhlian elders met on this terrible night. A large bonfire burned in the centre of the clearing; the ancient firs murmured secretly among themselves, as though recalling old times; the golden image of the sun in the crypt glowed with a fiery splendour in reflections from the fire; the old men sat deep in thought, listen-

ing to the chopping of the axes in the forest and to old Zakhar's stories about the old days. The old man was filled with a strange spirit today. He, who had never loved talking about the old faith, was very talkative now, and that with such heartfelt sorrow — a tone that he would only have used when talking about the closest and dearest things to his heart. He spoke about the deeds of Dazhboh, about the victories of Svitovid, about how three sacred doves — Dazhboh, Svitovid and Perun — had created the earth out of a grain of sand, how Dazhboh had searched in a bottomless abyss till he found three seeds — one of wheat, the second of rye and the third of barley — and presented them to the first man, Dido and his wife Lada; how Perun presented them with the spark of fire and Svitovid — with a single hair, out of which, after his blessing, came a cow and a herdsman who was named Volos. And further, Zakhar told about the life of the first people, about the great flood from which the people hid in the mountains and caves, about the ancient giants and their king — the Tukhlia Guardian, who had opened the dike of the Tukhlia lake. The Tukhlia elders listened to these tales as if they were about some new, unfamiliar world; yet they contained much of what they talked and sang about in their songs without understanding. Now it became a clear and integral whole before their eyes. Zakhar Berkut seemed to be the last of the great good giants — the guardians of Tukhlia, about whose good deeds the future generations would also talk.

The dry twigs on the pathway crackled and Miroslava and Tuhar Vovk appeared out of the forest gloom. Miroslava immediately came toward old Zakhar, while the boyar stopped by the fire.

"Father," said Miroslava to Zakhar, "I saw your son!"

"My son?" said Zakhar calmly, as though speaking of the dead.

"Yes! With the help of this ring I walked through the Mongol camp and saw him. Let us have hope, father, that he will soon be a free man again."

"It's difficult, daughter, difficult. But who is this that came with you?"

"It's me, old man," said Tuhar Vovk, stepping forward. "Do you not recognize me?"

"I remember your face, you were the boyar, Tuhar Vovk. What brought you here to us?"

"I have come to you, Tukhlia elders, as an ambassador from the great Burunda *bahadur*, the commander of the Mongol forces."

"What does Burunda *bahadur* want from us?" asked Zakhar.

"Burunda *bahadur* has asked me to tell you that his army is great and invincible, that you are wasting your time making barricades in your exits, wasting time making catapults to throw rocks — you will not be able to diminish his strength."

"It's obvious that your Burunda is beginning to fear us, when he decided to frighten us. That's a good sign. Continue speaking."

"No, old man, don't take the words of the Mongol commander lightly. His threat is but half of his punishment, and his punishment is terrible, like the punishment of God! Listen further to what Burunda *bahadur* has asked me to tell you. The purpose of his march is the land of the Ugrians, the principedom of Arpad who was subject to the great Genghis Khan and now refuses to acknowledge his superiority. The great Genghis Khan has sent this great army toward the setting sun to punish the rebel.

Is it up to you to stop this army in its march? Burunda *bahadur*, who is commander of but one detachment of this army, wishes to part from you with good will. Your son is now a captive in his hands, old man. This is what he has asked me to tell you — destroy your barricades and allow the Mongol army out of your valley, and in return for this he is prepared to return his captive to you alive and well. Deliberate well on how useful Burunda's friendship will be for you! Your opposition will be in vain — in one way or another the Mongols will demolish your barricades and continue on their journey. But they don't want to waste time in your valley, don't wish to shed your blood, and are ready to return you their captive for free passage. If, to the contrary, you refuse, then it is understood that he will die, and that under terrible torture, and you will be faced with bloody slaughter, in which, in spite of all your plans, you will be defeated. Choose, what is the best road for you to take?"

The Tukhlia elders listened to the words of Tuhar Vovk with attention, and they really made an impression on some of them. Zakhar saw this and said:

"Good brothers, do you sincerely wish to consider the proposals advanced by Burunda, or perhaps unanimously express your opinion?"

"We'll take counsel, we'll take counsel!" said the elders. Zakhar then asked Tuhar Vovk to withdraw for a moment. The boyar did so proudly, accompanied by his daughter.

"Zakhar," said one of the elders, "this whole matter rests on the life or death of your son. Wouldn't it be better if we retreated from an uncertain battle and save the boy?"

"The question before us is not about my son," said Zakhar decisively. "If it were definitely a ques-

tion of him only, then I would say to you: 'I have no son, my son died in battle.' But here the question has to do with our neighbours, the highlanders and those beyond the mountains, who depend on our defence and would now all have to, unprepared, die at the hands of the Mongols. This is why I say to you, don't worry about my son, but decide as if he were already buried."

"Still, Zakhar, a battle with such a large detachment of Mongols is uncertain."

"Well then, we'll all die in battle, to the last man, and then the Mongols can go over our corpses wherever they want. At least we will have fulfilled our duty. But to make an agreement with them now, and what an agreement — to exchange one boy for the ruin of our neighbours — it would be a disgrace, would be treason. But who really knows whether the battle with the Mongols will be so uncertain. Our position is strong, the Mongols are locked in our stone cage. With minor losses we can repel even the most persistent of their attacks. We won't even need to do this, however. Tonight we'll unleash our ally against them, against whom no human force can withstand, even if ten times greater than the Mongols."

"So you are in favour of rejecting Burunda's offer?"

"Yes, absolutely."

"And leave your son to certain death?"

"Don't mention my son!" cried Zakhar painfully. "Whoever in this situation reminds me of him, stands in league with a father's heart against my reason. Reason tells me — refuse the agreement. But what my heart says, is my affair and no one else's!"

"Let it be as you say!" said the elders. "If God

has decided that he die, then we can do nothing to stop it; if not, then he will be saved from the jaws of our implacable enemy."

The boyar was summoned and Zakhar got up to tell him their decision. Miroslava looked at him with her heart filled with deathly fear; poor girl, she still hoped that the Tukhlians would decide to redeem her Maxim.

"Very cleverly, to be sure, in your own way, very cleverly, boyar, did you praise the proposal put forth by your commander. We are not surprised, because it was your obligation to speak that way, to fulfil the command of the one you serve. Now listen to what we, in our peasant people's judgement, have decided. If this were a matter only between myself and your *bahadur*, I would gladly give him everything I have, even my own hoary head, to free my son. But you are asking us to make an unequal exchange, one that would profit only me and my family, but would be a loss not only to one community, but to all communities through which your march would pass. Should one go along with such an exchange? What would the highland people and those beyond profit from my son? For in letting you out of this valley we would be releasing disaster on our neighbouring and united with us communities. We have obligated ourselves to defend them against your invasion, and because of our word, they have sent us help — five hundred chosen young men. Our duty is to fight you here to the final moment — and this we will do. God may have destined you to triumph over us, in that case we will not be able to stop you; but we're letting you know that you will be able to leave this valley only over the corpse of the last Tukhlian. Or maybe even your corpses will never be able to leave it. Either we will

all perish, or you will — there is no other way out. That is our answer.”

Zakhar's face lit up with a wondrous light as he spoke these formidable words, so that the boyar, looking at this tall old man with his outstretched arm, couldn't find a word to say in answer. He saw that any further talk would be useless, so he turned away in silence and started his journey back. Dead silence reigned in the council — only the crackling of the fire and the ringing sound of axes preparing the deadly devices against the Mongols were heard.

“Father!” cried Miroslava suddenly in a pain-filled voice. “Father, come back!” And she ran after him and grasped him by the arm; a child's love spoke in her heart in a mighty, overpowering voice.

“Father, come back! Stay here, among your own people! Stand beside them in battle against the invaders, like a brother among brothers, and they'll forgive you your past! What hope do you have over there? They'll betray you, feed you with promises, then slaughter you! Father, don't go back to the Mongols, only death awaits you there!”

The boyar obviously hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he embraced Miroslava and said quietly, half-sternly and half-kindly:

“Foolish girl, it is not yet time for me! The Mongols have not yet lost all hope. One has to profit by what is at hand. But if it shouldn't be successful...”

“No, father,” whispered Miroslava through tears, “abandon such thoughts! Who knows, it may be too late then.”

“Don't worry, it won't be too late. You stay here and fraternize if you wish, with the Tukhlians, but I have to go back. Don't forget, child, that your

Maxim is over there, and who knows, maybe we could be useful to one another. Farewell!"

Tuhar Vovk disappeared into the glade, hurrying along the path to the bonfire over the cliffside to go down its slope into the Mongol camp. At the fire, he again examined the nearly finished catapult, tested the rope, and shaking his head, uttered "weak", then escorted by the Tukhlia sentries, he went down the slanting path into the valley.

In the meantime silence reigned at Yasna Polyana — heavy, sad, as if a dear departed lay among the gathering of elders. Only Miroslava was heard sobbing loudly, wiping the thickly-falling tears that rolled down her cheeks. Finally she came up to Zakhar and said:

"Father, what have you done?"

"What I had to do. Anything else would have been dishonourable," he replied.

"But your son, your son! What will happen to him?"

"Whatever God wills, my daughter. Now stop crying. We must think about the matter at hand. See, the Dipper is already inclined to the west and the black cocks are crowing in the thickets — morning is near. Come, my friends, we must prepare for our defence — no, for the attack, for the final battle with the invaders! Remember the answer I gave them! Come, let no one remain behind! The old and the young, all will be useful. Let's show those savages what a community can do!"

The elder Tukhlians rose with much clamour and moved out of Yasna Polyana in mass to the cliff-top to inspect the work of the craftsmen — the catapults. These were all finished and stood ready everywhere, primitively made out of heavy wood, joined and held together with wooden pegs,



made not to last but for the need of the moment. But Zakhar had brought them there not for inspection. They paused but a moment by the catapults, then began to go down the steep hillside in groups, down to the spot where the Tukhlia stream flowed through the narrow passage out of the valley and where the massive rock pillar, four-cornered, huge, and called the Tukhlia Guardian, stood leaning over the river. Toward it, led by Zakhar and Miroslava, sped the entire Tukhlia population; the young men carried long, heavy fir logs and ladders, the girls, huge wreaths of leaves and fir branches, the elderly long rolls of rope and lines. The fires in that area had been extinguished so that the enemy would not be aware of what was happening. Slowly, carefully, without a sound, like a quiet stream, the people moved down the steep paths along the hillside. A strong detachment of young men marched ahead to form into three lines at the bottom, facing the Mongol camp situated some one thousand steps away. After them came the young men with the ladders, ropes and logs. The ladders were placed against the cliffs and the firs slid lightly down into the valley. The girls passed their wreaths over the young men — they were not allowed to go down into the valley where the enemy could attack at any moment. At the end, the elders with Zakhar Berkut, also descended, and having inspected the position of the armed detachment and all the implements, they hurried to the passage through which the Tukhlia River flowed its clear waters noisily into the valley.

Zakhar stopped before the Guardian and began to look at it closely. It was very quiet around. Zakhar began to pray: .

“Our Great Guardian! You whom our ancestors considered our protector and whom we have also

honoured with annual festivals! For three nights now, night after night, you have appeared in my dreams as though you were falling and crushing me in your fall. I believe that you are good and kind, and when you summon me into your presence, I rejoice in your request and will gladly follow you. But if you yourself wish to move from your eternal resting-place, then destroy with your weight, our Father, this evil enemy, the children of Morana, who have again today overrun your sacred patrimony — the Tukhlia valley!

“Destroy for a second time this evil power, just as



you destroyed it the first time, when with your mighty hand you smashed this stone wall to give the waters a passage and presented our people with this beautiful valley! Dam it up again, and let the proud enemy, which is torturing us, perish!"

At that moment a flash of lightning tore the dark heavens from the south to the north and a roll of thunder sounded in the far-off hills.

"Yes, this is your mighty voice!" said Zakhar joyfully. "Come, children. Crown this sacred rock with your flowers for the last time."

Four young men climbed up the rock on a ladder and entwined its peak with the green wreaths. Again the thunder sounded from the south.

"It is his will, children!" said Zakhar. "Now entwine him with rope! And the rest of you, quickly with the spades! Undermine him from below and lay the levers! Quickly, children, quickly!"

Scores of hands worked quickly and noiselessly around the Guardian. The rock was encircled from the top with rope and cord, its foundation undermined by spade and shovel, and in the cavity that appeared below it, the fir logs were placed slantwise. They were to serve as levers to topple the rock across the passage. The young men worked quickly at their tasks, then removed the ladders and put large rocks under the levers.

"Now everybody that can reach them, grab the ropes! To the levers, lads!" commanded Zakhar, and a hundred hands moved to do his bidding. "Now all together!" shouted Zakhar. "Pull, pull."

The crowd groaned from the strain, the levers creaked loudly, but the rock held firm.

"Once again! Pull stronger!" shouted Zakhar, and seized a rope himself. The great rock trembled.

"It's moving! It's moving! It moved!" cried everyone joyfully.

"Now, pull hard, again, with all your strength!"

Once again the crowd strained and the ropes suddenly yielded as the huge rock moved from its base, teetered in the air for a moment, then fell to the ground with a terrible, dull crash, across the stream and the passage. The Tukhlia valley groaned and shook from the terrible blow and the pearl drops from the stream splashed far into the distance as the air was filled with the loud, joyous shouts of the Tukhlians. The sleeping Mongols stirred in their camp, the sentries screamed, the commanders shouted orders, the weapons clanked, then after a moment all was silent. The Mongols expected an attack and stood prepared for battle, but the Tukhlians had no thought of attacking them. They were carrying out an entirely different attack.

Zakhar quickly, like a young man, inspected the position of the fallen rock. It had fallen so well, as though it had been especially created to fit just there. Its sharp corners had wedged between the protruding jags of the precipice which created the passage, and its whole massive weight had fallen in a bridge across the stream. True, it had not dammed the waters of the stream, because the water flowed in a deeper trough — but the young Tukhlia men were already dragging huge slabs of rock toward it, while others were clearing the bottom of silt and pebbles, so as to put a stop to the flow of water. Others were busy walling up the other side, the passage beyond the fallen rock, building a thick wall of rock, some three fathoms thick, from one side of the passage to the other. This wall, with the huge Guardian as its base, could withstand the strongest pressure of water securely.

“Quickly, children, quickly!” encouraged Zakhar, standing above the stream and helping the work with either advice or with his hands. “Close the stream, dam it well, before the water begins to rise. There have been heavy rains in the mountains and the waters will begin to flood. Then it will be difficult to carry out our purpose. The barrier must be made as high as these ravine walls — then we will see how the might of Genghis Khan will stand up to the might of water.”

The work went swiftly. In a short time the stream was dammed up completely. The restrained waters swirled in an angry whirlpool below, as though not understanding why they should have been stopped in their course. Wave upon wave splashed angrily *against the huge rock, throwing themselves as though wishing to gnaw their way through the slabs of rock that had been placed lower down and seek a passage through them, but all in vain* — there were rocks everywhere — tightly packed and fitted together into one solid wall. The water seethed. It stirred through the entire river bed — then stopped in astonishment, seemingly quiet to the eye, but with anger in its crystal depths. Like the aurochs preparing to attack, standing with head lowered and horns bent to the ground, grows calm, to later tear himself out of his humiliating situation by casting himself with all his strength at his enemy, so did the water of the Tukhlia stream, unaccustomed to chains, become calm for a moment, as if grown sluggish and dreamy between its level banks, but in the meantime gathering strength and courage for a new, decisive attack, while quietly straining itself against the wall as if testing its back to see if it couldn't move aside the unexpected barrier. But the barrier held fast, cold, smooth and proud of its immovability its in-

vincibility. The diligent hands of the Tukhlians continued to strengthen it, piling stone on stone and slab on slab and joining them tightly with sticky, water-proof clay. Like a new, omnipotently created cliff, so did the stone dam rise higher and higher under the hands of the Tukhlians. The armed contingent of young men has long ago left their positions facing the Mongolians in the valley, had exchanged their bows for axes, stakes and hammers for breaking up the rocks. Zakhar looked on, rejoicing in their work and in their concern, a glow of victory in his eyes.

In the east, over the Mongol camp, the clouds shone rosy in the sunrise. Day was breaking. The rosy rays bathed the high peak of the Zelemin and scattered in sparks down the hillside. Then the clouds moved aside, and slowly, as if timid, the sun rose into the sky and glanced at the Tukhlians busily at work. Full of sincere happiness, Zakhar looked to the east and with outstretched arms proclaimed in a loud voice:

“O Sun, great and resplendent ruler of the earth! Eternal guardian of all that are good and pure in spirit. Have mercy on us! We have been attacked by a savage enemy who has destroyed our homes, ruined our land, slaughtered thousands of our people. In your name we stand prepared for mortal combat, and before your light we vow that we will not give in to the final moment, to the last breath in our bodies. Help us in this terrible struggle! Give us resolve, skill and unity! Give us courage to be fearless before their might and faith in our own strength! Grant us the friendship, the harmony and wisdom to defeat the destroyers! O Sun, I bow before you as our ancestors did, and I pray to you with all my heart to give us victory!”

He stopped. His words — passionate, powerful,

trembled in the morning air. Not only the Tukhlians listened. The mountains listened also and carried their echo from one path to another. The dammed up waves of the stream also listened, and as if having decided, abandoned casting themselves, against the stone barrier, and turned back.

## VIII

Till the boyar returned from his unsuccessful mission, Maxim sat in his tent, alert to every sound, and pondering what he should do. His short meeting with Miroslava was like a ray of sunlight in the darkness of his imprisonment. Her words, her glances, the touch of her hands, and the news that she brought, all acted as if to snatch him from a murky grave, restoring him to life. He felt his former courage and hope returning. Quietly, and with more optimism, he awaited the return of the boyar.

"So you're still here?" cried the boyar, entering the tent. "Poor lad, it was all in vain, my efforts to obtain your freedom. Your father is so obstinate! Though grey-haired, he's like a child."

"But didn't I tell you, boyar, that your efforts would come to nothing?" answered Maxim. "Still, what did my father have to say?"

"He said they would fight to their last breath, and that was his final word. 'Either we will all be destroyed,' he said, 'or you will'."

"My father never speaks lightly, boyar. He's accustomed to think matters over very thoroughly before he speaks."

"I can see now that while he doesn't talk much, he speaks the truth when he does," admitted the boyar, unwillingly. "But what to do? For all that, the battle of the Tukhlians against the Mongols is

an uneven one. Force will break the straw, whatever you may say!"

"Oh, boyar! There are ways to deal with force!" reasoned Maxim.

"Yes, yes, I saw how they're trying to do it! My hot-headed daughter — you've bewitched her that's certain — has taught them to make catapults. We'll get a hail of stones here tomorrow, but it won't be too damaging, because they haven't yet learned to plait good strong ropes for the slings."

"And the catapults, you think, will be their only method?"

"I don't know. It seems as if they haven't any other. Besides, we haven't long to wait — we'll see what happens in the morning. My problem is Burunda. He is insistent that I find a way out of this valley so that by morning we can leave without going into battle and wasting any time. And here the Tukhlians have dug in their feet like those stubborn goats with their horns lowered. So what do I do? If it can't be done, it can't be done!"

"Now, boyar, don't be discouraged! At the moment you are, after all, in Mongol hands, just as I am. You've got to do as they say."

"But what can I do for them?"

"Perhaps I can help in some way, boyar. I'm grateful to you for the kindness you've shown me today. If you wish, I can return that kindness."

"You? Help me?" cried astonished boyar. "What can you do for me?"

"I know a path out of this valley, a safe and secret path. Nobody in Tukhlia but my father and myself knows this path. It is unguarded. The Mongol troops can be led to the top and there surround the trail. Then it would be an easy matter to destroy the barricades and march out of the valley."



The boyar was stunned. He couldn't believe his own ears. "Is this possible?" the question flashed like lightning through his mind, then faded as a pain shot through his heart. Even though he had, until recently, regarded Maxim as his enemy, he couldn't help admiring his noble courage and determination. Now, on hearing his words, he felt, as if something deep-rooted and sacred had been broken in his heart, the last thread of his belief in the integrity and loyalty of man.

"Young man!" he exclaimed. "What are you saying? You mean you would actually do something like that?"

"Why not, boyar?" answered Maxim half-scoffingly. "You yourself told me that force could break a straw."

"But you, you who so recently vowed that you'd rather die than turn traitor?"

"You can't help it," again replied Maxim. "If a vow can't be kept, it can't be kept."

"And you, being so faint-hearted as you are, have the audacity to think that my daughter could love you!" cried the boyar, angrily.

"Don't remind me of her, boyar!" replied Maxim harshly.

"See how it hurts!" cried the boyar. "You realize that what I say is true!"

"Who knows, boyar, who knows! We are at war, and war teaches all kinds of tricks. Now, what if..."

"What if what? Why don't you finish?" cried Tuhar Vovk.

"It's nothing, nothing! I just want to ask you again; do you accept my proposition?"

"But are you honestly thinking of leading the Mongols against your own people?"

"Honestly, if it's at all possible..."

"What do you mean, if its at all possible? You mean if the path is unguarded?"

"No, that I can guarantee, the path will be unguarded and we can get through in broad daylight, unseen, as long as there will be no other obstacles."

"What other obstacles could there be?"

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

"In that case, let's not waste any time. Let's go to Burunda!"

"No, you go alone, boyar, and tell him what I have told you. Don't mention the possibility of any obstacles, because I swear, that neither my own people, nor any other armed people will hinder us, and any other obstacle wouldn't frighten your daredevils."

"Let it be so," agreed Tuhar Vovk.

"And ask him to have my chains removed, otherwise I won't be able to do anything."

"Of course, that's understood," answered the boyar, and went out in an utter confusion of thoughts.

What anxious, fearful and painful moments Maxim lived through while the boyar was out informing Burunda of his plan! With his head in his hands, he sat, in terrible uncertainty, responding to the slightest rustle of sound as if awaiting the coming of something near and dear. His body shook and quivered from time to time as if with fever, and his teeth chattered, as if with cold. The minutes passed so slowly, so peacefully, so lazily, that each one tore into his heart like the claws of a bear. What if things didn't turn out as Miroslava told him, and the boyar would insist on his carrying out his promise? Well, it stood to reason that death was unavoidable, he had prepared himself for it for a long time; but to die, not having kept his word to the man who believed in that word, whose future, maybe even whose

life depended on it; to die a traitor, even in the eyes of a traitor — was terrible, was torture, was worse than death itself.

And death too seemed far worse now than it did an hour earlier, after having seen Miroslava, than when he had sat by the roadside and stared mutely at the fire that had destroyed his home... But what is this? The earth was trembling and shaking with terrible reverberations. The camp was in an uproar, there were shouts and the clanging of weapons — what had happened? Maxim leaped to his feet and clapped his hands, so that his chains jangled. Joy! Joy! The Tukhlians are working! They are building that obstacle that would stop the Mongols and prevent him from being a traitor! Now he could die peacefully, for he would not have to break his word, even to his enemy!

His heart beat loud and fast — he couldn't sit still and began pacing up and down the tent. The hubbub in the camp began to subside, and in that moment the boyar re-entered the tent. His face was glowing with happiness and satisfaction.

"My boy," he began immediately, "your proposition came just in time. It saved me a great deal of trouble. Did you hear that noise? Very crafty, your Tukhlians: they're making barriers behind us, too. Come quickly to the commander, he's already assigned a detail to go with you. We must leave in a hurry — it isn't safe here!"

The words cut into Maxim's heart like sharp knives. Whatever happened, he must find some way to detain their departure to the moment when it would be impossible.

"Since when, boyar, have you begun to fear peasant barricades? I don't think the Mongols are in any immediate danger. Let the Tukhlians amuse them-

selves with their barricades — we'll quickly handle them. There's really no need to hurry, as you can see it's still dark. And until there's daylight I won't find the outlet I told about."

"What kind of a passage it is, that it can be found only by daylight?"

"Have patience, boyar, and I will explain. In a spot in our garden, under a covering of earth, lies a giant flagstone. We must find this spot, uncover the flagstone and lift it out. This is the entrance to a narrow underground passage under the hills which'll lead us out of the valley to the meadow, Yasna Polyana, at the top, where you earlier saw my father."

"But why must we wait? Why not go immediately and find it?" cried the boyar.

"It's easier said than done, boyar. You've forgotten one thing. The village has been burned down with all its buildings and fences, and the mark that indicated where the passage is was also destroyed. It would be impossible for me to find it in the dark. So I say again, why hurry, when we will be able to do it quite safely in broad daylight?"

"Well, let it be as you say, then," the boyar consented at last. "I'll go and tell Burunda about this and immediately send someone to free you as well. But remember, you'll still remain under guard, because, and I'll tell you the truth, neither Burunda nor I trust you, and the moment you try any trickery, it's certain death for you."

"I realized that from the very beginning," replied Maxim calmly.

The boyar again left and shortly after two Mongol blacksmiths entered the tent to remove Maxim's heavy manacles. As if born anew, so light he felt on removal of those heavy iron weights that had, for nearly twenty-four hours, eaten not only into his

flesh, but into his soul as well. Light of heart and full of hope, he followed the Mongols to Burunda's tent.

Measuring Maxim with his cruel, savage eyes, Burunda spoke to him through an interpreter — in this case Tuhar Vovk, fulfilling the task for both of them.

"Slave," he said, "I hear that you know a secret exit from this valley?"

"Yes," replied Maxim.

"And that you're prepared to show it to us?"

"I am."

"And what do you expect in payment for this service?"

"Nothing."

"Then why are you doing this?"

"As an indication of my good will."

"Where is this exit?"

"In my father's garden."

"Can you find it right away?"

"No, I cannot. All the traces marking its location have been burned out, and the entrance is deeply covered with earth. I can only find it by daylight."

"The day is already breaking. Go and search for it now! And listen! If you are telling the truth and the passage is there, you will be set free and rewarded as well. But if you are misleading us with empty promises you will die by terrible torture."

"I rely on your word, great *bahadur*," said Maxim, "and you can depend on mine."

"Then go and search for the passage. Here is your help, and I myself will accompany you."

How slowly and cautiously walked Maxim. How carefully he examined every little nook, every stone, as if trying to remember the exact location of the outlet, changed by yesterday's fire! Though still some distance away from his father's garden, he stopped

several times to lie on the ground, tapping and digging a bit, all the while glancing ahead to the stream from which his help was to come. The Mongol detachment followed his snail-like pace until Burunda began to lose patience.

"Don't be angry, great *bahadur*," soothed Maxim. "Yesterday's fire erased all traces of life in this valley. It's difficult for me to place things at once. In a moment now, we should be in my father's yard."

Maxim's eager eyes again turned to the stream. God be praised! The water had risen up to the banks — another moment and it would begin to flood the valley! Yes, and there in the lower reaches of the valley, rivulets and little pools had already appeared, like red blood, reflecting the rays of the rising sun. Now, he could go ahead! Quickly he led the Mongols to his father's property, and as quickly found the spot where the earth reverberated hallowly, and where Burunda, in a fever of impatience, shouted the order to dig. Only then, on glancing around, did he notice the rising waters of the stream.

"Ha, what's this!" he shouted, gripped by a sudden unexplainable fear.

Tuhar Vovk also gave a shudder. Only Maxim stood by, calm and concerned.

"It's nothing, *bahadur*! There were heavy rains in the mountains last night, and when that happens the stream always overflows a little. But it never rises this far."

"Ah, so!" Burunda accepted the explanation, relieved. "In that case, dig on!"

But Maxim had not told the truth. The water rose higher and higher, and only the ignorant and frightened Mongols didn't realize that this was not a natural flooding from the rains, that the rising water was

clear and did not flow forward and foam, but swelled higher and higher over the banks.

In the meantime the digging proceeded slowly, though the Mongols expended every effort. Finally their spades did strike a hard surface. The flagstone! But it revealed itself to be much wider than the dug-up area, so that more digging was required to remove it. Maxim watched the rising water with anxious eyes. The entire lower end of the valley was already flooded, and heavy waves of water were rolling into the upper reaches of the valley in exactly the opposite direction from that in which they naturally flowed since time immemorial. Cries of panic suddenly rose from the Mongol camp. The water had risen to overflow the camp in a thousand rivulets.

"Slave, what does this mean?" shouted Burunda to Maxim.

"Well, *bahadur*," replied Maxim. "It looks as if there's been a cloud-burst in the mountains, because the stream is overflowing more than usual. But surely you're not afraid of water that reaches only to your ankles? Now get at that flagstone," he shouted at the Mongols, "let the great *bahadur* see that I wasn't deceiving him!"

The Mongolian axes thundered against the rock, but it was solid and strong and resisted their attacks.

"Harder! Beat harder!" shouted Burunda, unable now to control his fear of the rising tide which had already engulfed the greater part of the Tukhlian valley and was now rolling straight toward them. But the rock had the Tukhlian character and held solid. At last it gave way, and a final blow shattered it to bits, carrying the Mongols on it down into the cavern below. The dark underground passage revealed itself to the gathered company.

"You see, *bahadur!*" said Maxim. "Now tell me, have I deceived you?"

But Burunda was not overjoyed at the open tunnel. The long, rolling waves were splashing at their feet. Another swish and the water was joyfully cascading into the newly uncovered opening.

"Stop the water, stop that water!" screamed Burunda, and the Mongols threw themselves into the task of shoring up the water around the opening. But it was too late. The water pressed on, turning the clay into mud in the hands of the Mongols. Ever stronger, it poured into the hole, splashing and gurgling as it disappeared into its depths, until finally it had filled it entirely. The Mongols watched, stupefied, as the water inundated their last remaining exit from the valley.

"Slave!" Burunda turned to Maxim, "is this your way out?"

"*Bahadur*, can I command the water?" answered Maxim.

Burunda made no reply, but gazed at the water which rose in an ever heavier tide across the valley. Its mirror-like surface shone, and only here and there now, shoals of dry land, like little islands, peeped above the flood. The tumult in the Mongolian camp continued, though the water had as yet barely reached their ankles.

"*Bahadur*," said Maxim to Burunda, seeing that he had made up his mind to return to his tent, "I would remind you of your promise. You said that if I showed you this exit, you would set me free. I have done what I promised."

"And the exit has not come up to expectations. You will be freed only after we have all left this valley, and not sooner!"

And Burunda, followed by his company, went to



restore order among his confused men. The Mongol army stood worried and helpless, in military formation, up to their ankles in water. Though shallow, smooth and clear like melted glass, the water that covered the valley, and the waterfall that poured down the slope, adding more and more water to the growing lake, frightened the Mongols. But standing still was not the answer! Fear itself, and the threat of further danger awoke these people to action, to do something, however futile, to save themselves. It was necessary to do something, Burunda realized it, or else the whole mass would panic, pursued by its own fears. Burunda ordered the whole army to band itself into a tight group.

“What are you, men or cats, that you are afraid of a few drops of water? Have we not crossed greater rivers? What is this stream in comparison to the Yaik, the Volga, the Don, or the Dnieper? Have no fear, water up to the ankles will not drown you! Forward to the passage! We’ll attack in mass and disregard the losses. Victory must be ours!”

So shouted Burunda, leaping forward to lead the march. The might of the Mongol army moved after him, tramping through the water with noisy splashes that echoed to the hills and reverberated through the forests. But barely a hundred paces from the passage they were met by a deadly hail of stones, hurled by the catapults. Large boulders, sharp slabs and gravelly pebbles from the river bottom rained down into the massed army of Mongols, breaking bones and shattering skulls. The water beneath their feet began to flow crimson with blood. Disregarding Burunda’s shouts, the Mongol ranks broke up, the greater number retreating to a point where the stones couldn’t reach them. Finally, Burunda himself, with the rest of the most courageous, was forced

to retreat, because the hail of stones continued to fly in ever greater numbers, and against them the Mongol arrows were helpless.

Tuhar Vovk, carefully observing the enemy positions, saw that the most active and largest catapult was being directed by his daughter Miroslava with several older Tukhlians. Maxim had noticed her some time earlier and couldn't take his eyes off her. How happy he would have been to be at her side at this moment, listening to her courageous, intelligent commands, helping defeat the enemy under her direction. But this was not to be! Here he stood, alone, among the enemy, free of his chains, true, but powerless, a slave, and wishing that a stone, thrown at her command, might end this torture and his life.

Tuhar Vovk gave a tug at his sleeve.

"There's no point in staring up there, boy," he said. "My daughter has gone completely mad. Look at what she's doing. And it's certainly not helping our situation. Is your valley often flooded like this?"

"Like this? Never!"

"What do you mean, never?"

"Because this isn't a flood, can't you see that the water is clear?"

"Not a flood? Then what is it?"

"Haven't you guessed yet, boyar? The Tukhlians have dammed up the stream in order to flood the valley."

"Dammed it!" cried the boyar. "Then that means..."

"It means that the water will continue to rise, until..."

"Until what?"

"Until we are all drowned, that's what!"

The boyar hit his head with his fist: "And you knew about this all along?"

"Yes, your daughter told me. It was all my father's idea, boyar."

"Curse it! Why didn't you tell me about this sooner?"

"Why?"

"We could have at least saved ourselves."

"There is still time for that," answered Maxim calmly. "Just stay beside me, boyar, and if anything should happen, don't let them harm me, unarmed as I am."

"That's understood, of course!" said the boyar. "But what shall we do?"

"At the moment there's nothing to fear," replied Maxim. "The stream is narrow and the valley is wide. The water will rise very slowly, but this won't last too long. In a half-hour or so, a real flood will come down from the mountains and that will quickly fill up the valley. By evening the water will be higher than the tallest man. We must hold out till then, for while the Mongols are still alive, it stands to reason that they won't let us leave them alive."

"But by that time they can cut us up to pieces!"

"Don't worry, boyar. A man in danger thinks first of himself, and not about another's death. What we must do now is find a reasonably safe spot for ourselves, where the waters won't reach us when the flood does come."

While this discussion was going on between the boyar and Maxim, the Mongols had retreated beyond the line of fire and stood irresolutely in the water, which by this time was swirling about their knees. Burunda was glaring in fury at this unexpected enemy which showed no fear of his angry voice or his warrior's might. He kicked at it, spit on it, cursed it with all the imprecations at his command, but the

enemy quietly, calmly splashed gently higher and higher across the valley. It obstructed their movements, sapped at their desire to fight, weakened their morale. What did all this mean? Was it possible that the water would continue to rise? If it came up to their waists, then all movement would be impossible, and the Tukhlians would be able to shoot them down like ducks with their stones! But the water was still clear, translucent; only where the Mongols floundered around were there broad muddy pools.

Tuhar Vovk approached Burunda:

"Great *bahadur*," he said, "I fear we are in grave danger."

"Why?" asked Burunda, harshly.

"This water will not recede, because our enemies have dammed the stream so as to drown the entire Mongol army in this valley."

"Ha!" shouted Burunda. "And you, you dirty slave, dare to tell me this after having led us into this trap yourself?"

"Consider, great *bahadur*, that I couldn't have brought you here out of treachery, when your danger is a menace to me too."

"Oh, I know you! You were with them last night, negotiating our destruction."

"If I had gone to them with this in mind, do you think, *bahadur*, that I would return to be destroyed along with the Mongols?"

Burunda quieted down somewhat.

"What are we to do, then?" he asked. "Must we really die like this?"

"No, we must try and save ourselves. Any moment now, *bahadur*, the real flood will sweep down from the mountains, and it will rapidly fill the entire valley. This must be our first concern, to prepare for it."

“But how?”

“Order your army, while the water is still clear enough, to gather rocks from the bottom and pile them up in heaps as high above the water level as they can. Standing on them, we can defend ourselves against the weaker foe, the Tukhlians.”

Without thinking long, Burunda issued the order to gather the stones and pile them up, each company for itself. The order, involving no danger for themselves, pleased the Mongols, and the hope of standing on dry land instead of in water up to their knees, raised their morale. They threw themselves into the task with whoops of joy. The Tukhlians stood over the lake, watching the Mongols' labours and splitting their sides with laughter.

“Closer, closer!” they shouted. “There are plenty of stones here, and we'll gladly divide them among you!”

But when any of the Mongols ventured too close to their positions, the catapults again rained a hail of stones at the unfortunates who, floundering about in the deep water to avoid the missiles, went on with their difficult task, but were unable to run away. Like it or not, the Mongols had to keep to the centre of the valley, out of range of the catapults.

Burunda nearly went mad from fury and helplessness in the face of the derisive, proud laughter of the Tukhlians.

“No, we can't allow this!” he finally shouted. “Come, gather around me, my faithful men!”

The most courageous of the Mongol soldiers gathered around him — men sturdy like oaks, like the tigers of the steppe whose skins they used for ornament. He led them against one of the Tukhlian positions which had been placed forward, on its own, on a sharp overhanging cliff. A small group of

Several tukhlians stood there, manning a newly-made catapult.

"Use your poisoned arrows on them!" shouted Burunda, and the arrows like a swarm of hornets, buzzed through the air.

The wounded Tukhlians screamed in pain and retreated in confusion. The Mongols, with joyous shouts, pressed ahead.

"Don't allow them to assemble again!" cried Burunda. "Don't let them shoot! Hold them so we can strengthen our position here!"

And he divided his men into two companies: one to keep shooting at the enemy position, the other to continue gathering stones to pile up against the rising waters. Tuhar Vovk and Maxim, whom Burunda kept constantly by his side, also helped to heap up the stones. But the task got more difficult as the water rose above their waists. There was also a shortage of stones, and the heaps had still not reached the surface of the water. Burunda turned his entire attention to commanding his archers; they had already wounded some ten Tukhlians who were dying from the terrible effects of the poisoned arrows. Zakhar Berkut's healing skills were to no avail.

"Give up this position, youngsters!" said Zakhar. "Let him keep this spot here, beneath the cliff! He certainly won't be able to save himself here, especially with the water rising up around him!"

The Tukhlians retreated from their post, while the Mongols happily continued to plough through the water heaping up stones. Finally, there was not another stone to be found.

"Enough of the stones, boys!" said Burunda to his men. "The archers will now stand on the piles and continue shooting at this scum! The rest of you follow me! We've got to take this position and get up

this cliff, even though the heavens fall upon us! And you, slaves, are coming too! You'll show us the way!"

"*Bahadur*," said Maxim, through Tuhar Vovk as interpreter, "it's useless to try and scale that cliff. There is no path up that hill."

"There has to be!" insisted Burunda, throwing himself into the water with the Turkomans following behind him.

The ground below the water was uneven, so that the Mongols slipped and slid, falling into the water which, driven by a light breeze, splashed in huge waves against the wall of the cliff. Though only some two hundred paces from the bank, it took the Mongols nearly half an hour to traverse the distance. Also the water just below the cliff was much deeper, reaching up to their armpits, with no trace of a path leading up to the top. A continuous barrage of stone missiles from neighbouring Tukhlian positions, though beating, for the most part, harmlessly against the cliff-side, added to the discomfort and disadvantage of Burunda's daredevils, who vainly attempted to find a foothold in the steep wall.

"Maybe your fine men can crawl better," mocked Maxim inwardly, "then it would be no trouble at all for them to clamber to the top."

But none of the Turkoman plainsmen were able to get even a toe-hold in the wall.

"If that's the case," said Maxim, finally, "then allow me, *bahadur*, to be the first to climb up and show them the way."

But Burunda was past listening to anything. He had worked out another plan. Again dividing his men into two groups, he left one manning the newly-gained position under the protective overhang of the cliff, and with the other group, led by Tuhar Vovk and Maxim, set out to find a better spot. But no

sooner did they show themselves beyond the wall of rock, up to their waists in water, than the entire might of the Tukhlian catapults met them with another volley of stones, felling half of their number. The rest were forced to retreat.

“Let’s return to our safer post, *bahadur*,” advised Tuhar Vovk. “Do you hear the shouts and screams coming from down the valley? The flood waters must be drawing nearer.”

The boyar was right. The roar of the waterfall had increased so that the very earth trembled, indicating that the waters were sweeping into the valley.





Huge, muddy waves, surged down the precipice, covering the entire surface of the broad lake with large caps of foam. Instead of a clear and calm mirror the water beat against the hillsides and swirled in mad whirlpools in the centre. The entire valley became a nightmare of screams and curses. All traces of military discipline disappeared as the Mongol army rose in groups here and there, like islands among the swirling waters. Like chaff blown before the wind, their strength was scattered across the valley. Struggling with the waves, and here and there reaching a temporary haven, they paid no attention to each other, each was concerned only with his own safety. Some stood on the piled-up heaps of stones, fortunate in finding a temporary foot-hold against the raging tide, others sank into the water up to their shoulders and to their necks, holding themselves up on their spears or waving their bows aloft. But most of them threw their bows away, and they, like straw, whirled about in the eddies. Some took off their sheepskin coats, their teeth chattering with cold, hoping to lighten their burden of clothing. Those who were short in height caught at the shoulders of the taller ones, knocking them off their feet, and sputtering and splashing, they went down together. Some attempted to swim, though having no idea which direction to take to find a safe port in the sea of water. The heaps of stones gathered earlier were only able to hold a fewfortunates, and these became the target of deadly envy and senseless curses from the drowning. They pressed in thousands around their fellow men, maddened with fear, and demanding a spot on the place of safety. Vainly did those standing on the piles argue that the stones wouldn't hold them all, that somebody had to die — none wanted to die and

each did his best to pull down the other, with those standing on the rocks defending themselves against the pressure. Mauls and axes of Mongols came down on the heads of Mongols. Brother fought brother in this terrible moment of near death; friend murdered friend with greater fury than he ever showed an enemy. Those of the drowning on the outskirts of the struggling mob, pushed forward; those closest to the safety of the rocks and exposed to the deadly rain of blows from their comrades, pressed backward, screaming; those caught in the middle between the two movements, shrieked in pain and terror, caught in the vise and trampled down into the water to drown in the squeeze.

Five piles of stone gave way under the pressure, and all those who stood on them sank into the water, finding themselves in the same predicament as those against whom they were defending themselves. And those unfortunates, maddened by fear, whooped joyously each time a pile of stones went down and new victims fell into the maw of the terrible, unmerciful foe.

Some were seized with a mad frenzy of killing and destruction. One of these, a giant of a man, blue in the face and teeth clenched over bleeding lips, blindly hacked away at his comrades with his axe. All who came near were felled under his blows and when there was no one near, he just as furiously vented his wrath on the foaming and bloody waves. Another, laughing hysterically, kept pulling down into the water any who happened to find a place of temporary safety — be it a rock or the fallen body of a comrade. A third, roaring like a bull, butted the sinking in the back. Still another, holding his hands folded over his head, wept and whimpered like a child. Some, seeing nothing but the inevitabil-

ity of death, clung to their comrades, hanging on to their shoulders, clutching at their hair, and finally dragging them down to the bottom with them.

Like a school of fish in a hatchery, up against the barrier of a small waterfall, fighting, splashing, coming up above water then sinking again, threshing about and gasping for air—the Mongols drowned in their hundreds and thousands.

Stunned and motionless, the Tukhlians stood on the banks; even the most hardened and courageous among them found it difficult to watch the terrible spectacle of mass drowning without shuddering or crying out.

As though paralyzed, Burunda *bahadur* watched the scene of horror. Though he himself was threatened by the same danger, though the waters had reached the shoulders of his own company and the swift currents of the stream tugged at their feet, reminding them of the urgency of returning to the safety of their former position — Burunda stood for a long moment, tearing at his hair uttering wild, uncontrollable shrieks of despair as he gazed at his army's destruction. No one dared to speak to him at this awful moment; all stood about him, silent and shivering, struggling to keep their footing against the buffeting waves of their enemy — water.

"Come," said Burunda a last. And they started to make their way to the heap of stones which the Turkomans had gathered before the captured Tukhlian post. They were just in time! The water suddenly rose higher. Between them and their destination a wide whirlpool suddenly appeared, which they were only able to cross by holding hands and sticking close to each other. Only the giant Burunda strode ahead breaking the turbulent waves with his broad chest.

Like a tiny island in the centre of the sea stood the group of soldiers on the stone pile, up to their waists in water, their bows and arrows still drawn and aimed at the deserted Tukhlian position. Their military discipline remained even in the face of peril. Fortunately the stone pile they stood on was stronger and more solid than the others, having been made up of larger rocks which it had been possible to lift because of the pressure of the water from below. More than a hundred men could stand on it comfortably, and there were just that many around Burunda, in addition to those he had left below the cliff.

Having reached safety, their first concern was for their companions left behind, some forty men in all. There was not a sign of them. Where they had stood the waves whirled and dashed madly against the cliff, splashing their silvery foam high up the wall of rock. In a moment of calm, something black appeared on its face, the only living man left of the company. With a paralyzing grip he held on to an outcropping of rock, disregarding the tug and pull of the buffeting waves. He did not scream or call for help, only swayed with each surge of the tide, till finally even he disappeared, like that leaf washed away by the stream.

Burunda, mute, his face blue with strain and fury, glanced around the valley. The terrible cries and screams had ceased. Only the whirlpools, here and there, threw up the drowned bodies to the surface, giving a momentary glimpse of clenched fists, heads, or feet. Only ten groups of men, like ten black islands, stood alive on their piles of rock, but it was not an army any more. It was a frightened, unarmed and helpless remnant of an army, shivering and broken by despair. Though they were able to call to

one another, they were unable to give each other help, for together, or alone, they were equally impotent, awaiting the same inevitable end.

## IX

“What do you think, boyar?” asked Burunda suddenly of Tuhar Vovk. “What will happen to us?”

“We’ll all perish,” answered Tuhar Vovk calmly.

“That’s what I think, too,” agreed Burunda. “But what angers me most of all is that we will die without fighting, without glory, like kittens thrown into the water!”

The boyar didn’t answer this. The new events had turned everyone’s attention to themselves. The Tukhlians, it was clear, did not wish to wait till the water rose high enough to drown the miserable, remaining Mongols. They were in a hurry to finish the enemy. In the forest above the stream the young men were cutting down the larger firs, sharpening their logs at both ends like palings, then tying them down with heavy stones so that these new style battering rams would flow below the surface of the water and choosing the right moment, when in the centre of the lake a strong current from the waterfall had formed, flowing directly toward the Mongol positions, they began to send these logs toward them. Now the first of them hit a pile on which a group of Mongols stood with tremendous force. The pile of rock shifted and rumbled below the surface and pressured from above by the Mongols’ feet, moved from its position and fell apart. The Mongols hit the water with loud shouts. Two or three fell near the traitorous log and grabbed it. The current caught them along with the log and carried them

far out into the open water where they hit a whirlpool which caught the fir and stood it up vertically. The Mongols fell into the water and were lost from sight. The other Mongols who were so unexpectedly thrown off their island, floundered about on the spot, pushing each other under the water, or begging others to save them. Two or three, clearly good swimmers, began to swim to the shore, but even here death caught up with them; a few large rocks thrown from the shore ended their swim. Only a few were accepted by their comrades on neighbouring positions. But even here they were not secure for long. The Tukhlians, seeing the success of their first venture, began to send battering ram after battering ram. These, however, did no damage to the Mongolian positions, the current carried them past the islands.

Mirolava then offered them a new idea — to hammer a few of those logs together and send the rafts down by rope over the waterfall and then pull them into shore, where ten of the strongest and best-armed young men would get on. Two would then guide the raft toward the Mongol positions with log poles. Two such rafts were put together swiftly and lowered over the waterfall, which had become half the height it was originally, now that the water had risen. Twenty courageous young men were soon floating down to battle with the Mongols. This was a light, though decisive struggle. The first group of Mongols they attacked were almost without weapons, frightened and powerless. These unfortunates were quickly pushed into the water with poles and those who resisted were knocked off with arrow and spear. The Mongols on neighbouring positions howled in distress, seeing their inevitable doom. Burunda, watch-

ing the enemy and their tactics, ground his teeth and grabbed his weapons, but his anger was in vain — even the poisoned arrows of his Turkoman archers failed to reach the courageous Tukhlians. The stubborn *bahadur* was compelled to stand in the water up to his chest and watch how the Tukhlians broke up the last of the Mongolian islands, one after another.

In the meantime, the Tukhlians stormed about over the water. With clenched teeth and crouched down on their rafts, they neared the Mongol positions. Here and there they were met with strong opposition; blood flowed, groans were heard from both sides, the dead fell from both the rafts and the rock turrets, but the strength of the Mongols was broken, their resistance short-lived. Like a fire set in a mown meadow, creeping from swath to swath and swallowing stack after stack of dry hay — so the Tukhlians thrust the Mongols into the water from one position after another and into death's cold embrace. All perished, to the last man, not a one of the few black islands in the middle of the lake remained. Only a little farther, to the side and not far from the shore, stood one more group, like a last black crag protruding from the centre of the flood. This was Burunda's detachment. One hundred Turkomans, Tuhar Vovk and Maxim — these were all that was left of the great Mongol might that was to travel the Tukhlia road to the Ugrian lands. Here, in the middle of the mountains, they found a chilling grave in water, though they had safely crossed the Yaik, Volga, Don and Dnieper rivers. The last victims, a fearless handful, stood in the centre of the water with no hope of rescue, but with one desire — to pay dearly for their life in the battle.

The whole Tukhlia community had now gathered before this last enemy bastion. Two more rafts were lowered so that the enemy might be surrounded and disturbed from the rear as well as from the front which suffered a constant hail of Tukhlian arrows and stones from the shore. The biggest number of these shots didn't even reach Burunda's position; others, though they covered the distance were unable to do the Turkomans much damage. The Tukhlians were afraid to come any nearer because of the poisoned arrows, but seeing that their own attacks did the enemy no harm, they quickly gave them up and stood quietly on the shore. High up on the cliff stood old Zakhar, his eyes never leaving his son, who stood among the enemy skillfully dodging the heavy stream of arrow and stone fired at them. A little distance from those who were shooting stood Miroslava, her gaze glued to the group on the island, among whom stood all that was nearest and dearest in her life — her father and Maxim. Her heart grew faint with every volley of Tukhlian arrows.

The young men on the rafts soon grew bored with shooting from a distance. They gathered up their courage and moved closer. The Turkomans met them with arrows in return and wounded a few, but the Tukhlians quickly noted that the enemy had few of their more effective weapons and with menacing shouts threw themselves into an attack. The Turkomans awaited their attack in silence. Tightly packed against one another, as they were, they were defending themselves not only from the Tukhlians, but from the billows of surrounding water. The Tukhlians, however, having approached till they were but a couple of fathoms away, attacked by throwing their javelins which they had attached with long



leather thongs to their wrists. Ten of the enemy cried out at the same time; ten bodies fell into the water. Again the Tukhlians threw their javelins — and again a number of the enemy fell.

“May they be accursed!” fumed Burunda. “They’ll pick us all off in this way, the dirty villains!”

But his rage was now like that empty wind, which makes a great deal of noise, but harms no one. The Tukhlia lads, with much shouting, circled the enemy position like crows, dealing a blow at one or another with a well-aimed javelin. It became impossible for the Mongols to defend themselves. They were forced, finally, to stand still, as though tied up, and await death.

“*Bahadur*,” Tuhar Vovk turned to Burunda, “could we not in some way come out of this alive?”

“What for?” asked Burunda, sullenly.

“Life is still better than death!”

“That’s true,” agreed Burunda, and his eyes gleamed not with a strong desire for life, but rather with a desire for revenge. “But what can we do? How can we save ourselves?”

“Perhaps they might be willing now to exchange our prisoner for our life and a free departure?”

“Let’s try!” said Burunda, and grabbing Maxim by the chest, he pulled him forward in front of him. Tuhar Vovk stood beside him and began to wave a white kerchief.

“Tukhlians!” he shouted to those on the shore.

Everyone suddenly quieted down.

“Tell them that if they want to have their slave among them, they must grant us our lives and allow us to leave freely. If not, we are quite capable of dying, but he too will die, right here before their eyes.”

“Tukhlians!” shouted Tuhar Vovk again. “The

Mongols' commander promises to return your prisoner alive and well and asks, that in return, you, would allow us, the few of us that are left, to leave this valley alive and well! If you won't agree then your son will meet certain death."

As though wanting to prove to the people the truth of this threat, Burunda lifted his huge axe over the head of unarmed Maxim. The whole throng stood holding their breath. Old Zakhar trembled and turned his eyes away from the scene that cut into his heart.

"Zakhar," said the Tukhlian elders surrounding him, "we think that we should accept this proposal. The Mongol might has been destroyed, and those few who are left cannot be dangerous to us."

"You don't know the Mongols, my brothers. The most terrible of their commanders is among those few who are left, and he will never forgive us the destruction of his army. He'll bring new forces into our mountains and who knows if we will be able to defeat them for the second time."

"But your son, Zakhar, your son! Consider that death awaits him! Look, the axe is over his head!"

"Better that my son should die than to allow even one of the enemy to leave our land!"

Miroslava approached old Zakhar in tears.

"Father," she wept. "What are you doing? Why do you wish to destroy your son, and... and me, father? I love your son and I vowed to live with him and serve him! The moment he dies I will die, too!"

"Poor girl," said Zakhar, "how can I advise you? All you see are dark eyes and a handsome body, but I'm concerned for the good of all. There is no choice here, daughter!"

"Zakhar, Zakhar," the people spoke up. "All of us

feel that there has been enough of destruction, that the enemy strength has been broken, and we don't wish the death of those left. We are putting their fate and the fate of your son in your hands. Have compassion for your own blood!"

"Have compassion on our youth, on our love," sobbed Miroslava.

"You can promise them anything in words, if only they will return your son," said one of the Transcarpathian youth. "As soon as Maxim is safe, give us the signal and we'll send the rest of them to the bottom to feed the crabs."

"No!" Zakhar was incensed. "That would be dishonourable. The Berkuts keep their word even to their enemies and to traitors. The Berkuts have never soiled their hands nor their hearts by shedding blood through deceit! Enough of this talk, children! I'll send them an answer by my own hand."

And turning away he walked up to a catapult whose ladle held a large rock. With a strong, steady hand he seized the cord that held the ladle in a lying position.

"Father, father!" screamed Miroslava, throwing herself toward him. "What are you doing?"

But Zakhar calmly, as if he didn't hear her cries, aimed the catapult at the enemy.

In the meantime, Burunda and Tuhar Vovk awaited the Tukhlian answer. Maxim stood quietly under Burunda's uplifted axe, prepared to accept what came. Only Tuhar Vovk, knowing not why, trembled with anxiety.

"Well, why are we having to wait so long?" Burunda cried, finally. "A mother gives you birth but once, and one dies but once. But before I do, you'll die, you vile slave!" And he swung with all his might to split Maxim's head with his axe.

But at that very moment Tuhar Vovk's sword flashed over Maxim's head and Burunda's menacing, deadly hand, together with the axe, was cut off with one swing from the shoulder, and dropped dripping with blood, like a dry stick into the water.

Burunda roared with pain and anger. With his left arm he held Maxim against his chest while his eyes, full of diabolical hatred, turned to the traitorous boyar.

But Maxim also responded quickly. Momentarily he bent over and hit the terrible Turkoman with all his might in his left side with his head and shoulder, so that Burunda lost his balance and rolled into the water, pulling Maxim in with him.

At the same time there was a hum in the air and a huge rock, thrown from a Tukhlia catapult by Zakhar Berkut, fell with a loud thump among the enemy group. The water rose high into the sky, the rocks on which the enemy stood heaved and screams to tear the heart rent the air. In a few moments the surface of the lake lay quiet and smooth and not a sign of Burunda's company remained.

The Tukhlia people stood above the shore stunned and immovable. Old Zakhar, hitherto so strong and unbreakable, now trembled like a child and wept heavily, covering his face with his hands. At his feet lay Miroslava, motionless, in a faint.

Suddenly a joyous shout sounded from below. The lads on the rafts, on nearing the spot where Maxim had sunk with Burunda, suddenly saw Maxim emerge on the surface of the water, safe and sound, and they greeted him with happy cries. Their joy was soon shared by the whole community. Even those who had lost their own sons, brothers and husbands, rejoiced over Maxim as though with his return all

those near and dear, who had fallen in the fray, had come back.

"Maxim is alive! Maxim is alive! Hurrah for Maxim!" The thunderous welcome resounded far across the forests and mountains. "Father Zakhar! Your son is alive! Your son has come back to you!"

Trembling in great agitation, Zakhar rose to his feet with tears in his old eyes.

"Where is he? Where is my son?" he asked in a weak voice.

Soaked through, but with his face lit up with happiness, Maxim leaped to the shore from the raft and flung himself at his father's feet.

"Father!"

"Maxim, my son!"

Neither the one nor the other could say more. Zakhar swayed and fell into Maxim's strong arms.

"Father, what is the matter with you?" cried Maxim, seeing the deathly pallor of his face and feeling the continuous trembling that shook his father's body.

"Nothing, my son, nothing," said Zakhar quietly, with a smile. "The Guardian is calling me to him. I can hear his voice, son. He is saying, 'Zakhar, you have done your duty, it is time to rest now!'"

"Father, father, don't say such things!" sobbed Maxim, falling on his knees beside him. Old Zakhar, calm and smiling, lay on the grass, his face serene, his eyes turned to the noon-day sun. He gently lifted his son's hand from his chest, and said:

"No, son, don't lament for me, I am happy! Better you should look just over there. There is someone there who needs your help."

Maxim looked around and went numb. Miroslava lay on the ground, pale, and with a look of anguish on her unconscious, lovely face. The lads had already

brought some water and Maxim hastened to his beloved's side to help restore her to consciousness. Finally, she sighed and opened her eyes, then closed them again.

"Miroslava, Miroslava, my darling!" cried Maxim, kissing her hands. "Awaken!"

Miroslava aroused herself slowly and gazed at Maxim with wondering eyes.

"Where am I? What has happened to me?" she asked in a weak voice.

"You are here, here among us! Beside your Maxim!"



"Maxim!" she cried, springing up.

"Yes, yes! Look, I'm alive, I'm free!"

Miroslava was silent for a long, long time, unable to overcome her wonder at this miracle. Then suddenly, she threw herself into Maxim's arms with hot tears streaming from her eyes.

"Maxim, my love!"

She couldn't say anything more.

"But where is my father?" she asked, after a moment. Maxim turned his face away.

"Don't think about him, my dear. He, who weighs truth and falsehood, is now weighing his good deeds and his evil deeds. Let us pray that the good will prevail."

Miroslava wiped the tears and looked at Maxim with eyes full of love.

"But come, Miroslava," said Maxim, "here is our father, and he too is leaving us."

Zakhar looked at the young couple with bright, happy eyes.

"Kneel beside me, children," he said quietly, in a voice already weak. "Miroslava, my daughter, your father fell — let us not judge whether he was guilty or not — he fell as thousands of others did. Don't mourn, my dear! In place of a father, fate has given you a brother..."

"And a husband!" added Maxim, holding her hand tightly in his.

"Let the God of our fathers bless you, children!" said Zakhar. "Fate has brought you together in troublous times and united your hearts. You have shown yourself worthy of enduring the most terrible of hurricanes. May the bonds you have formed in this day of victory be a guarantee that our people will also overcome their misfortunes and won't break

their heartfelt ties with integrity and humane custom!"

And with lips that were already cold he kissed Miroslava and Maxim on the forehead.

"And now, children, rise and lift me up a bit. I would like, before I go, to say a few words to the community which I have tried to serve sincerely all my life. Fathers and brothers! This day's victory is of great importance to us. How did we win? Was it only due to our weapons? No! Was it then, our cleverness? No! We won because of our communal order, our unity and friendship. Remember this well! So long as you live in a community order, remaining together in friendship, staunchly standing all for one and one for all, so long no enemy force will be able to defeat you. But I know, brothers, and I feel in my soul, that this will not be the last blow at our community stronghold, that there will be others, and that in the end our community will be destroyed. Evil times will descend upon our people. Brother will deny brother, sons will be alienated from their fathers, and great quarrels and conflicts will rend this land of the Rus, destroying the strength of our people and consigning them to bondage to both their own and to foreign invaders, transforming them into meek slaves of their caprices and turning them into beasts of burden. But in all this misery, the people will again recall their ancient community life and it would be good if they recall this soon and vividly — it will save them a whole sea of tears and bloodshed, whole centuries of slavery. But sooner or later, they will recall the life of their ancestors and will wish to follow in their footsteps. Fortunate are they who will live in those days! They will be beautiful days, spring days, days of revival for the people! So pass on the story of these



olden times and customs to your children and grandchildren. Let the memory live with them through all the harsh and difficult times like a living spark that will not die out in the ashes. The time will come when the spark will burst into a new flame! Farewell!"

Old Zakhar sighed heavily, looked up at the sun, smiled, and in a moment was no more.

They did not weep for him — neither his sons, nor his neighbours, nor his fellow-villagers, because they well knew that it was sinful to weep for one who was happy. With joyful songs, they washed his body and carried it to Yasna Polyana, to the ancient home of the gods of their ancestors, and placing his body in a stone crypt, facing the golden image of the sun in the ceiling, they closed the entrance with a huge slab of rock and walled it up. Thus old Zakhar was laid to rest, among those Gods that lived in his heart and who had whispered to him inspiring him to honourable and upright ideas and actions throughout his life, ideas for the common good of his people.

Much has changed since those times. The prophecy of the old community elder came only too true. Great calamities passed like hail clouds over the lands of the Rus. The old community was long forgotten, and it seemed, forever buried. But no! Perhaps it was fated that it should be revived in our times? Are we not living in the happy age of rebirth spoken of by Zakhar as he lay dying — or at least at the dawn of that happy age?

*Nahuyevichi, October 1 — November 15, 1882*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IVAN FRANKO (1856-1916) was born 130 years ago in the village of Nahuyevichi (now Ivano-Frankove), Lviv Region. His father was a blacksmith. Ivan Franko was educated at Lviv University, department of philosophy, and at Vienna University where he presented his doctor's thesis in 1893. He propagated socialist ideas among the masses, for which he was arrested time and again and put behind bars.

Ivan Franko played the leading role in developing Ukrainian literature and social thought at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. He blazed new trails for Ukrainian journalism, poetry, fiction and drama. His first collection of mature poetry, entitled *From the Summits and the Lowlands*, came out in 1887. Altogether, he published over forty long poems. His prose writing advanced the development of realism in Ukrainian literature on to a higher stage. In his essays, short stories and novels he introduced new themes (the proletarianisation of the peasantry, the shaping of the working class and its transition to organized class struggle), new conflicts, and new heroes — people who defended the interests of the workers. His most significant works in this respect are the long stories *Boa Constrictor* (1878) and *Borislav Laughs* (1881-1882), the historical story *Zakhar Berkut* (1882), and the socio-psychological novels *Lel and Polel* (1887) and *Crossroads* (1900). His best-known play is *Stolen Happiness* (1894). Ivan Franko also did research into the history of literature, collected medieval literature and folklore, and translated many books by authors of world prominence into Ukrainian.

# ИВАН ЯКОВЛЕВИЧ ФРАНКО

## ЗАХАР БЕРКУТ

Картина общественной жизни  
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