Viy[1]

As soon as the booming seminary bell that hung by the gates of the Bratsky Monastery in Kiev rang out in the morning, crowds of schoolboys and seminarians[1] came hurrying from all over the city. Grammarians, rhetoricians, philosophers, and theologians, notebooks under their arms, trudged to class. The grammarians were still very small; as they walked they pushed each other and quarreled among themselves in the thinnest trebles; their clothes were almost all torn or dirty, and their pockets were eternally full of various sorts of trash, such as knucklebones, whistles made from feathers, unfinished pieces of pie, and occasionally even a little sparrow that, by chirping suddenly amidst the extraordinary silence of the classroom, would procure for its patron a decent beating on both hands, and sometimes the cherrywood rod. The rhetoricians walked more sedately: their clothes were often perfectly intact, but instead their faces were almost always adorned with some rhetorical trope: one eye completely closed, or a big bubble instead of a lip, or some other mark; these swore by God and talked among themselves in tenors. The philosophers dropped a whole octave lower: there was nothing in their pockets except strong, coarse tobacco. They kept nothing stashed away and ate whatever came along on the spot; the smell of pipes and vodka sometimes spread so far around them that a passing artisan would stand for a long time sniffing the air like a hound.

The marketplace at that time was usually just beginning to stir, and women with bagels, rolls, watermelon seeds, and poppyseed cakes tugged those who had them by their coattails of thin broadcloth or some sort of cotton.

"Young sirs! Young sirs! Here! Here!" they said on all sides. "There are good bagels, poppyseed cakes, twists, rolls! Fine ones, by God! with honey! homemade!"

Another woman, holding up something long made of twisted dough, cried:

"Here's an icicle, young sirs! Buy an icicle!"

"Don't buy anything from that one! Look how foul she is—her nose is awful and her hands are dirty . . ."

But they were afraid to pester the philosophers and theologians, because the philosophers and theologians liked to sample things, and always by the handful.

On reaching the seminary, the whole crowd settled by classes in low-ceilinged but rather spacious rooms with small windows, wide doors, and dirty desks. The classroom would suddenly be filled with the hum of many voices: the monitors listened to their charges, the ringing treble of a grammarian would fall in tune with the jingling of the windowpanes in the small windows, the glass echoing with almost the same sound; from the corner came the low buzz of a rhetorician whose mouth and thick lips ought to have belonged to philosophy at the least. He buzzed in a bass, and from afar all you heard was: boo, boo, boo, boo . . . The monitors, as they heard the lessons, looked with one eye under the desk, where a roll or dumpling or pumpkin seeds stuck out of their subordinate's pocket.

If all this learned crowd managed to come a little earlier, or if they knew that the professors would be later than usual, then, with universal agreement, a battle would be planned, and in this battle everyone had to take part, even the censors, whose duty was to look after the order and morals of all the student estate. Usually two theologians decided how the battle would go: whether each class should stand separately for itself, or they should divide themselves into two halves, the boarders and the seminary. In any case, it was the

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[1] Viy is a colossal creation of folk imagination. This name is applied by people in Little Russia to the chief of the gnomes, whose eyelids reach to the ground. The whole story is a popular legend. I did not wish to change it in any way and tell it almost as simply as I heard it. (Author's note.)

grammarians who would begin it first, but as soon as the rhetoricians mixed in, they would flee and stand on higher ground to watch the battle. Then philosophy with long black mustaches would step forth, and finally theology in terrible ballooning trousers and with the thickest necks. The usual end was that theology would beat them all, and philosophy, rubbing its sides, would be hustled into class, where it settled down to rest at the desks. A professor who had once taken part in such battles himself, on entering the classroom, would know at once from his students' flushed faces that it had been a fine battle, and while he gave the rhetorics a knuckle-rapping, in another class another professor would be applying the wooden slats to the hands of philosophy. With the theologians it was done in a totally different way: each was allotted, as the professor of theology put it, a measure of "big peas," dealt out with a short leather whip.

For feast days and solemnities, the boarders and seminarians went around visiting houses with miracle plays. Sometimes they performed a comedy, and on such occasions some theologian, nearly as tall as the Kiev belfry, would always distinguish himself playing Herodias or the wife of the Egyptian courtier Potiphar.[2] As a reward they might get a length of linen, or a sack of millet, or half a boiled goose, or the like.

All these learned folk, both seminary and boarders, while living in some sort of hereditary hostility among themselves, had extremely poor means of obtaining food and were at the same time extraordinarily voracious; so that to count how many dumplings each of them gobbled up at supper would have been a quite impossible task; and therefore the voluntary donations of wealthy citizens were never enough. Then a senate comprised of philosophers and theologians would send out the grammarians and rhetoricians, under the leadership of one philosopher—and would sometimes join them itself—sacks over their shoulders, to lay waste people's kitchen gardens. And pumpkin gruel would appear in the school. The senators ate so much melon and watermelon that the monitors would hear two lessons instead of one from them the next day: one proceeding from the mouth, the other growling in the senatorial stomach. Boarders and seminary wore what looked like some sort of long frock coats which reached *heretofore,* a technical term meaning below the heels.

The most solemn event for the seminary was vacation, beginning with the month of June, when the boarders used to be sent home. Then the whole high road would be covered with grammarians, philosophers, and theologians. Whoever did not have his own refuge would go to one of his friends. Philosophers and theologians would go *on conditions*—that is, they would undertake to teach or prepare the children of wealthy people for school, and would earn a new pair of boots by it and occasionally enough for a frock coat. This whole crowd would string along together like a Gypsy camp, cook kasha[3] for themselves, and sleep in the fields. Each dragged a sack on his back with a shirt and a pair of foot-rags. The theologians were especially thrifty and neat: to avoid wearing out their boots, they would take them off, hang them on a stick, and carry them over their shoulder, especially when there was mud. Then, rolling their trousers to the knee, they would go splashing fearlessly through the puddles. As soon as they caught sight of a farmstead, they would turn off the high road and, approaching a cottage that looked better kept than the others, would line up in front of the windows and begin a full-throated hymn. The cottager, some old Cossack peasant, would listen to them for a long time, leaning on both arms, then weep very bitterly and say, turning to his wife: "Wife! what these students are singing must be something very intelligent; bring out some lard for them and whatever else we've got!" And a whole bowl of dumplings would be poured into a sack. A decent hunk of lard, a few white loaves, and sometimes even a trussed-up chicken would go in as well. Fortified with these supplies, the grammarians, rhetoricians, philosophers, and theologians would continue on their way. However, the further they went, the smaller the

crowd became. Almost all of them would have reached home, leaving only those whose parental nests were further away than the others.

Once during such a journey three students turned off the high road in order to provide themselves with victuals at the first farmstead they happened upon, because their sack had long been empty. These were: the theologian Khalyava, the philosopher Khoma Brut, and the rhetorician Tiberiy Gorobets.

The theologian was a tall, broad-shouldered man, and of an extremely strange character: whatever lay near him he was sure to steal. On other occasions his character was extremely glum, and when he got drunk he would hide in the weeds, and it would cost the seminary enormous efforts to find him there.

The philosopher Khoma Brut was of a merry disposition. He liked very much to lie about and smoke his pipe. When he drank, he was sure to hire musicians and dance the trepak. He often got a taste of the "big peas," but with perfectly philosophical indifference, saying what will be, will be.

The rhetorician Tiberiy Gorobets did not yet have the right to grow a mustache, drink vodka, and smoke a pipe. All he had was his topknot,[4] and therefore his character was not much developed at that time; but judging by the big bumps on the forehead with which he often came to class, one could suppose he would make a fine warrior. The theologian Khalyava and the philosopher Khoma often pulled him by the topknot as a sign of their patronage and employed him as their deputy.

It was already evening when they turned off the high road. The sun had just gone down and the warmth of the day was still in the air. The theologian and the philosopher walked along silently smoking their pipes; the rhetorician Tiberiy Gorobets knocked the heads off burdocks growing on the roadside with a stick. The road went among stands of oak and hazel bushes that dotted the meadows. The plain was occasionally disrupted by slopes and small hills, green and round as cupolas. A field of ripening grain showed in two places, making it known that some village must soon appear. But it was more than an hour since they had passed the strips of grain and no dwelling had come along yet. Twilight was already darkening the sky, and only in the west was there a pale remnant of vermilion radiance.

"What the devil!" said the philosopher Khoma Brut. "It certainly looked as if there'd be a farmstead."

The theologian said nothing; he looked around, then put his pipe back in his mouth, and they all went on their way.

"By God!" the philosopher said, stopping again. "It's as dark as the devil's fist."

"Maybe there'll be some farm further on," said the theologian, without releasing his pipe.

Meanwhile, however, it was already night, and a rather dark night at that. Clouds made it gloomier still, and by all tokens neither stars nor moon were to be expected. The students noticed that they had lost their way and for a long while had not been walking on the road.

The philosopher, after feeling in all directions with his feet, at last said abruptly:

"But where's the road?"

The theologian pondered silently and observed:

"Yes, it's a dark night."

The rhetorician stepped to one side and tried to feel for the road on all fours, but his hands kept ending up in fox holes. Everywhere there was nothing but steppe where it seemed no one passed. The travelers made another effort to move forward a bit, but everywhere was the same wilderness. The philosopher tried shouting, but his voice was completely muffled on all sides and met no response. Only a little later came a faint wailing that resembled the howling of a wolf.

"Well, what do we do now?" said the philosopher.

"Why, we stay and spend the night in the fields!" said the theologian, and he went to his pocket to get his tinderbox and light up his pipe again. But the philosopher could not agree to that. He had always been in the habit of packing away a ten-pound hunk of bread and some four pounds of lard before going to bed and this time felt a sort of unbearable solitude in his stomach. Besides, for all his merry disposition, the philosopher was somewhat afraid of wolves.

"No, Khalyava, we can't," he said. "What, lie down and stretch out like some dog without fortifying ourselves? Let's try again, maybe we'll happen onto some dwelling and manage to get at least a glass of vodka for the night."

At the word *vodka* the theologian spat to one side and observed:

"Sure, there's no point staying in the fields."

The students went on and, to their greatest joy, fancied they heard a distant barking. Figuring out the direction, they listened, set off more cheerfully and, after going a little further, saw a light.

"A farmstead! By God, a farmstead!" said the philosopher.

His anticipation did not disappoint him: in a short while they indeed saw a small farmstead that consisted of just two cottages sharing the same yard. There was light in the windows. A dozen plum trees stuck up by the paling. Peeking through cracks in the boards of the gates, the students saw a yard filled with ox carts. Just then stars appeared here and there in the sky.

"Watch out, brothers, don't hang back! We must get a night's lodging at all costs!"

The three learned men knocked at the gate with one accord and shouted:

"Open up!"

The door of one cottage creaked, and a minute later the students saw before them an old woman in a sheepskin coat.

"Who's there?" she cried with a muffled cough.

"Let us in for the night, granny. We've lost our way. It's as bad out in the fields as it is in a hungry belly."

"And what sort of folk are you?"

"We're harmless folk: the theologian Khalyava, the philosopher Brut, and the rhetorician Gorobets."

"Can't do it," the old woman grumbled. "I've got a yard full of people, and every corner of the cottage is taken. Where will I put you? And such big and hefty folk at that! My cottage will fall apart if I take in the likes of you. I know these philosophers and theologians. Once you start taking in those drunkards, there soon won't be any house. Away! Away with you! There's no room for you here!"

"Have mercy, granny! Can it be that Christian souls must perish for no reason at all? Put us up wherever you like. And if we somehow do something or other—let our arms wither, and whatever else God only knows. There!"

The old woman seemed to soften a little.

"Very well," she said, as if considering, "I'll let you in. Only I'll make you all sleep in different places, for my heart won't be at peace if you lie together."

"That's as you will, we won't object," replied the students.

The gates creaked and they went into the yard.

"Well, granny," said the philosopher, following the old woman, "and what if, as they say ... by God, it's as if wheels are turning in my stomach. We haven't had a sliver in our mouths since morning."

"See what he's after!" the old woman said. "I've got nothing, nothing like that, and I didn't start the stove all day."

"And tomorrow," the philosopher went on, "we'll pay for it all, well and good, in cash. Yes," he went on softly, "the devil of a cent you'll get!"

"Go on, go on! and be content with what you've got. Such tender young sirs the devil's brought us!"

The philosopher Khoma became utterly despondent at these words. But suddenly his nose caught the scent of dried fish. He glanced at the trousers of the theologian walking beside him and saw an enormous fish tail sticking out of his pocket: the theologian had already managed to snatch a whole carp off a wagon. And since he had done it not for any profit but simply from habit, and, having forgotten his carp completely, was looking around for something else to filch, not intending to overlook even a broken wheel, the philosopher Khoma put his hand into his pocket as if it were his very own and pulled out the carp.

The old woman got the students installed: the rhetorician was put in the cottage, the theologian was shut up in an empty closet, the philosopher was assigned to the sheep pen, also empty.

The philosopher, left alone, ate the carp in one minute, examined the wattled sides of the pen, shoved his foot into the curious snout that a pig had poked through from the next pen, and rolled over on his other side in order to fall into a dead sleep. Suddenly the low door opened and the old woman, stooping down, came into the pen.

"Well, granny, what do you want?" said the philosopher.

But the old woman came toward him with outspread arms.

"Oh-ho!" thought the philosopher. "Only no, dearie, you're obsolete!" He moved slightly further off, but again the old woman unceremoniously came toward him.

"Listen, granny," said the philosopher, "it's a fast period,[5] and I'm the sort of man who won't break his fast even for a thousand gold roubles."

But the old woman kept spreading her arms and grasping for him without saying a word.

The philosopher became frightened, especially when he noticed that her eyes flashed with some extraordinary light.

"Granny! what is it? Go, go with God!" he cried.

But the old woman did not say a word and kept grabbing for him with her arms.

He jumped to his feet, intending to flee, but the old woman stood in the doorway, fixing her flashing eyes on him, and again began to come toward him.

The philosopher wanted to push her away with his hands, but noticed to his astonishment that his arms would not rise, nor would his legs move; with horror he discovered that the sound of his voice would not even come from his mouth: the words stirred soundlessly on his lips. He heard only how his own heart was beating; he saw how the old woman came up to him, folded his arms, bent his neck, jumped with catlike quickness onto his back, struck him on the side with a broom, and he, leaping like a saddle horse, carried her on his back. All this happened so quickly that the philosopher barely managed to recover his senses and seize both his knees with his hands in an effort to stop his legs; but, to his great amazement, they kept moving against his will and performed leaps quicker than a Circassian racer. When they passed the farmstead, and a smooth hollow opened out before them, and the coal-black forest spread out to one side, only then did he say to himself: "Oh-oh, this is a witch!"

A reverse crescent moon shone in the sky. The timid midnight radiance lay lightly as a transparent blanket and steamed over the earth. Forest, meadows, sky, valleys—all seemed to be sleeping with open eyes. Not a flutter of wind anywhere. There was something damply

warm in the night's freshness. The shadows of trees and bushes, like comets, fell in sharp wedges over the sloping plain. Such was the night when the philosopher Khoma Brut galloped with an incomprehensible rider on his back. He felt some languid, unpleasant, and at the same time sweet feeling coming into his heart. He lowered his head and saw that the grass, which was almost under his feet, seemed to be growing deep and distant and that over it was water as transparent as a mountain spring, and the grass seemed to be at the deep bottom of some bright, transparent sea; at least he clearly saw his own reflection in it, together with the old woman sitting on his back. He saw some sun shining there instead of the moon; he heard bluebells tinkle, bending their heads. He saw a water nymph swim from behind the sedge; her back and leg flashed, round, lithe, made all of a shining and quivering. She turned toward him, and her face, with its light, sharp, shining eyes, with its soul-invading song, now approached him, was already at the surface, then, shaking with sparkling laughter, withdrew—and then she turned over on her back, and the sun shone through her nebulous breasts, matte as unglazed porcelain, at the edges of their white, tenderly elastic roundness. Water covered them in tiny bubbles like beads. She trembles all over and laughs in the water . . .

Is he seeing it, or is he not? Is he awake or asleep? But what now? Wind or music: ringing, ringing, and whirling, and approaching, and piercing the soul with some unbearable trill. . .

"What is it?" thought the philosopher Khoma Brut, looking down, as he raced on at top speed. Sweat streamed from him. He felt a demonically sweet feeling, he felt some piercing, some languidly terrible pleasure. It often seemed to him as if his heart were no longer there at all, and in fear he would clutch at it with his hand. Exhausted, bewildered, he began to recall all the prayers he ever knew. He ran through all the exorcisms against spirits—and suddenly felt some relief; he felt his step beginning to become lazier, the witch held somehow more weakly to his back. Thick grass touched him, and he no longer saw anything extraordinary in it. The bright crescent shone in the sky.

"All right, then!" thought the philosopher Khoma, and he began saying exorcisms almost aloud. Finally, quick as lightning, he jumped from under the old woman and in his turn leaped on her back. With her small, quick step the old woman ran so fast that the rider could hardly catch his breath. The earth just flashed beneath him. Everything was clear in the moonlight, though the moon was not full. The valleys were smooth, but owing to the speed everything flashed vaguely and confusedly in his eyes. He snatched up a billet lying in the road and started beating the old woman as hard as he could with it. She let out wild screams; first they were angry and threatening, then they turned weaker, more pleasant, pure, and then soft, barely ringing, like fine silver bells, penetrating his soul. A thought flashed inadvertently in his head: Is this really an old woman? "Oh, I can't take any more!" she said in exhaustion and fell to the ground.

He got to his feet and looked into her eyes: dawn was breaking and the golden domes of the Kievan churches shone in the distance. Before him lay a beauty with a disheveled, luxurious braid and long, pointy eyelashes. Insensibly, she spread her bare white arms and moaned, looking up with tear-filled eyes.

Khoma trembled like a leaf on a tree: pity and some strange excitement and timidity, incomprehensible to himself, came over him; he broke into a headlong run. His heart beat uneasily on the way, and he was quite unable to explain to himself this strange new feeling that had come over him. He no longer wanted to go around to the farmsteads and hastened back to Kiev, pondering this incomprehensible incident as he went.

There were almost no students in the city: they had all gone to the farmsteads, either on conditions, or simply without any conditions, because on Little Russian farmsteads one can eat dumplings, cheese, sour cream, fritters as big as a hat, without paying a penny. The big,

sprawling house where the boarders lodged was decidedly empty, and thoroughly as the philosopher searched in all the corners, even feeling in all the holes and crannies under the roof, nowhere did he find a piece of bacon or at least an old knish— things usually stashed away by the boarders.

However, the philosopher soon found a solution to his troubles: he strolled, whistling, through the marketplace three times or so, exchanged winks at the very end with some young widow in a yellow cap who sold ribbons, lead shot, and wheels—and that same day was fed wheat dumplings, chicken ... in a word, there was no counting what lay before him on the table, set in a small clay house amid cherry trees. That same evening the philosopher was seen in the tavern: he was lying on a bench smoking his pipe, as was his custom, and in front of everybody tossed a gold piece to the Jew tavern keeper. Before him stood a mug. He looked at people coming and going with coolly contented eyes and no longer gave any thought to his extraordinary incident.

Meanwhile, the rumor spread everywhere that the daughter of one of the richest Cossack chiefs, whose farmstead was some thirty-five miles from Kiev, had come home from a walk one day all beaten up, had barely managed to reach her father's house, was now lying near death, and before her dying hour had expressed the wish that the prayers at her deathbed and for three days after her death be read by one of the Kievan seminarians: Khoma Brut. The philosopher learned it from the rector himself, who summoned him specially to his room and announced that he must hasten on his way without delay, that the eminent chief had specially sent people and a cart for him.

The philosopher gave a start from some unaccountable feeling which he could not explain to himself. A dark foreboding told him that something bad lay in store for him. Not knowing why himself, he announced directly that he would not go.

"Listen, *domine* Khoma!"[6] said the rector (on certain occasions he spoke very courteously with his subordinates), "the devil if anyone's asking you whether you want to go or not. I'm telling you only this, that if you keep standing on your mettle and being clever, I'll order you whipped with young birch rods on the back and other parts—so well that you won't need to go to the steam-baths."

The philosopher, scratching lightly behind his ear, walked out without saying a word; intending to trust to his legs at the first opportunity. Deep in thought, he was going down the steep steps to the poplar-ringed courtyard when he stopped for a minute, hearing quite clearly the voice of the rector giving orders to his housekeeper and someone else, probably one of those the chief had sent to fetch him.

"Thank your master for the grain and eggs," the rector was saying, "and tell him that as soon as the books he wrote about are ready, I'll send them at once. I've already given them to the scribe for copying. And don't forget, dear heart, to tell the master that I know there are good fish to be had on his farmstead, especially sturgeon, which he can send whenever there's a chance: at the markets here it's expensive and no good. And you, Yavtukh, give the lads a glass of vodka. And tie up the philosopher, otherwise he'll take off."

"Why, that devil's son!" the philosopher thought to himself, "he's got wind of it, the long-legged slicker!"

He went down the steps and saw a kibitka, which at first he took for a granary on wheels. Indeed, it was as deep as a brick kiln. This was an ordinary Krakow vehicle such as Jews hire, fifty of them squeezing in along with their goods, to carry them to every town where their noses smell a fair. He was awaited by some six stalwart and sturdy Cossacks, no longer young men. Jackets of fine flannel with fringe showed that they belonged to a considerable and wealthy owner. Small scars bespoke their having once been to war, not without glory.

"No help for it! What will be, will be!" the philosopher thought to himself and, addressing the Cossacks, said loudly:

"Greetings, friends and comrades!"

"Greetings to you, master philosopher!" some of the Cossacks replied.

"So I'm supposed to get in there with you? A fine wagon!" he went on, climbing in. "Just hire some musicians and you could dance in it!"

"Yes, a commensurate vehicle!" said one of the Cossacks, getting up on the box along with the coachman, who had a rag wrapped around his head instead of his hat, which he had already left in the tavern. The other five, together with the philosopher, climbed deep inside and settled on sacks filled with various purchases made in town.

"I'd be curious to know," said the philosopher, "if this wagon were to be loaded, for example, with certain goods—salt, say, or iron wedges—how many horses would it need?"

"Yes," the Cossack on the box said after some silence, "it would need a sufficient number of horses."

After which satisfactory answer, the Cossack considered he had the right to keep silent the rest of the way.

The philosopher had a great desire to find out in more detail who this chief was, what sort of character he had, what this rumor was about his daughter, who had come home in such an extraordinary fashion and was now dying, and whose story was now connected with his own, how it was with them and what went on in the house? He addressed them with questions; but the Cossacks must also have been philosophers, because they said nothing in reply, lay on the sacks and smoked their pipes. Only one of them addressed the coachman sitting on the box with a brief order: "Keep an eye out, Overko, you old gawk. When you get near the tavern, the one on the Chukhrailovsky road, don't forget to stop, and wake me and the other lads up if we happen to fall asleep." After that he fell rather loudly asleep. However, these admonitions were quite superfluous, because as soon as the gigantic wagon approached the tavern on the Chukhrailovsky road, everybody shouted with one voice: "Stop!" Besides, Overko's horses were already so used to it that they themselves stopped in front of every tavern. Despite the hot July day, everybody got out of the wagon and went into the low, dingy room where the Jew tavern keeper rushed with signs of joy to welcome his old acquaintances. Under his coat skirts the Jew brought several pork sausages and, having placed them on the table, immediately turned away from this Talmud-forbidden fruit. They all settled around the table. A clay mug appeared in front of each guest. The philosopher Khoma had to take part in the general feasting. And since people in Little Russia, once they get a bit merry, are sure to start kissing each other or weeping, the whole place was soon filled with kissing: "Well, now, Spirid, give us a smack!" "Come here, Dorosh, till I embrace you!"

One Cossack who was a bit older than the others, with a gray mustache, rested his cheek on his hand and began sobbing his heart out over his having no father or mother and being left all alone in the world. Another was a great reasoner and kept comforting him, saying: "Don't cry, by God, don't cry! What's this now . . . God, He knows how and what it is." The one named Dorosh became extremely inquisitive and, addressing himself to the philosopher Khoma, kept asking him:

"I'd like to know what they teach you at the seminary—the same as what the deacon reads in church, or something else?"

"Don't ask!" drawled the reasoner. "Let it all be as it has been. God, He knows how it should be; God knows everything."

"No," Dorosh went on, "I want to know what's written in those books. Maybe something completely different from the deacon's."

"Oh, my God, my God!" the esteemed mentor said to that. "What on earth are you talking about? God's will decided it so. It's all as God gave it, they can't go changing it."

"I want to know all what's written there. I'll go to the seminary, by God, I will! What do you think, that I can't learn? I'll learn all of it, all of it!"

"Oh, my God, my goddy God! . . ." the comforter said and lowered his head to the table, because he was quite unable to hold it up on his shoulders any longer.

The other Cossacks talked about landowners and why the moon shines in the sky.

The philosopher Khoma, seeing such a disposition of minds, decided to take advantage of it and slip away. First he addressed the gray-haired Cossack who was grieving over his father and mother:

"What's there to cry about, uncle," he said, "I'm an orphan myself! Let me go free, lads! What do you need me for?"

"Let's set him free!" some replied. "He's an orphan. Let him go where he likes."

"Oh, my God, my goddy God!" the comforter said, raising his head. "Free him! Let him go!"

And the Cossacks were going to take him to the open fields themselves, but the one who showed his curiosity stopped them, saying:

"Hands off! I want to talk to him about the seminary. I'm going to the seminary myself. . ."

Anyhow, this escape could hardly have been accomplished, because when the philosopher decided to get up from the table, his legs turned as if to wood, and he began to see so many doors in the room that it was unlikely he could have found the real one.

Only in the evening did this company all remember that they had to be on their way. Scrambling into the wagon, they drove off, urging their horses on and singing a song, the words and meaning of which could hardly be made out. After spending the better half of the night rambling about, constantly losing the way, which they knew by heart, they finally descended a steep hill into a valley, and the philosopher noticed a palisade or wattle fence stretching along the sides, low trees and roofs peeking from behind them. This was the big settlement belonging to the chief. It was long past midnight; the sky was dark and small stars flashed here and there. There was no light in any of the huts. Accompanied by the barking of a dog, they drove into the yard. On both sides thatch-roofed sheds and cottages could be seen. One of them, in the middle, directly facing the gates, was bigger than the rest and seemed to be the owner's dwelling. The wagon stopped before something like a small shed, and our travelers went to sleep. The philosopher, however, wanted to look the master's mansion over a little; but however wide he opened his eyes, he could see nothing clearly: instead of the house, he saw a bear; the chimney turned into a rector. The philosopher waved his hand and went to sleep.

When the philosopher woke up, the whole house was astir: during the night the master's daughter had died. Servants ran to and fro in a flurry. Some old woman cried. A crowd of the curious looked through the fence into the master's yard, as if there was anything to be seen there.

The philosopher began leisurely to examine the places he had been unable to make out at night. The master's house was a small, low building such as was commonly built in Little Russia in the old days. It had a thatched roof. The sharp and high little pediment, with a small window resembling an upturned eye, was painted all over with blue and yellow flowers and red crescents. It was held up by oak posts, the upper half rounded and the lower hexagonal, with fancy turning at the tops. Under this pediment was a small porch with benches on both sides. At the ends of the house were shed roofs on the same sort of posts, some of them twisted. A tall pear tree with a pyramidal top and trembling leaves greened in front of the

house. Several barns stood in two rows in the yard, forming a sort of wide street leading to the house. Beyond the barns, toward the gates, the triangles of two cellars stood facing each other, also roofed with thatch. The triangular wall of each was furnished with a door and painted over with various images. On one of them a Cossack was portrayed sitting on a barrel, holding a mug over his head with the inscription: "I'll Drink It All." On the other, a flask, bottles, and around them, for the beauty of it, an upside-down horse, a pipe, tambourines, and the inscription: "Drink—the Cossack's Delight." From the loft of one of the barns, through an enormous dormer window, peeked a drum and some brass trumpets. By the gates stood two cannon. Everything showed that the master of the house liked to make merry and that the yard often resounded with the noise of feasting. Outside the gates were two windmills. Behind the house ran the gardens; and through the treetops one could see only the dark caps of chimneys hiding in the green mass of cottages. The entire settlement was situated on a wide and level mountain ledge. To the north everything was screened off by a steep mountain, the foot of which came right down to the yard. Looked at from below, it seemed steeper still, and on its high top the irregular stems of skimpy weeds stuck out here and there, black against the bright sky. Its bare and clayey appearance evoked a certain despondency. It was all furrowed with gullies and grooves left by rain. In two places, cottages were stuck to its steep slope; over one of them an apple tree, propped by small stakes and a mound of dirt at its roots, spread its branches broadly. Windfallen apples rolled right down into the master's yard. From the top a road wound down all over the mountain and in its descent went past the yard into the settlement. When the philosopher measured its terrible steepness and remembered the previous day's journey, he decided that either the master's horses were very smart or the Cossacks' heads were very strong to have managed, even in drunken fumes, not to tumble down head first along with the boundless wagon and the baggage. The philosopher stood on the highest point of the yard, and when he turned and looked in the opposite direction, he was presented with a totally different sight. The settlement, together with the slope, rolled down onto a plain. Vast meadows opened out beyond the reach of sight; their bright greenery became darker in the distance, and whole rows of villages blued far off, though they were more than a dozen miles away. To the right of these meadows, mountains stretched and the distant, barely noticeable strip of the Dnieper burned and darkled.

"Ah, a fine spot!" said the philosopher. "To live here, to fish in the Dnieper and the ponds, to take a net or a gun and go hunting for snipe and curlew! Though I suppose there's also no lack of bustards in these meadows. Quantities of fruit can be dried and sold in town or, even better, distilled into vodka—because no liquor can touch vodka made from fruit. And it also wouldn't hurt to consider how to slip away from here."

He noticed a small path beyond the wattle fence, completely overgrown with weeds. He mechanically stepped onto it, thinking at first only of taking a stroll, and then of quietly blowing out between the cottages into the meadows, when he felt a rather strong hand on his shoulder.

Behind him stood the same old Cossack who had grieved so bitterly yesterday over the death of his mother and father and his own loneliness.

"You oughtn't to be thinking, master philosopher, about skipping from the farmstead!" he said. "It's not set up here so as you can run away; and the roads are bad for walking. Better go to the master: he's been waiting for you a long time in his room."

"Let's go! Why not? . . . It's my pleasure," said the philosopher, and he followed after the Cossack.

The chief, an elderly man with a gray mustache and an expression of gloomy sorrow, was sitting at a table in his room, his head propped in both hands. He was about fifty years old; but

the deep despondency on his face and a sort of wasted pallor showed that his soul had been crushed and destroyed all of a sudden, in a single moment, and all the old gaiety and noisy life had disappeared forever. When Khoma came in together with the old Cossack, he took away one of his hands and nodded slightly to their low bow.

Khoma and the Cossack stopped respectfully by the door.

"Who are you, and where from, and of what estate, good man?" the chief said, neither kindly nor sternly.

"I'm the philosopher Khoma Brut, a student."

"And who was your father?" "I don't know, noble sir." "And your mother?"

"I don't know my mother, either. Reasonably considering, of course, there was a mother; but who she was, and where from, and when she lived—by God, your honor, I don't know."

The chief paused and seemed to sit pondering for a moment.

"And how did you become acquainted with my daughter?"

"I didn't become acquainted, noble sir, by God, I didn't. I've never had any dealings with young ladies in all my born days. Deuce take them, not to say something improper."

"Then why was it none other than you, precisely, that she appointed to read?"

The philosopher shrugged his shoulders:

"God knows how to explain that. It's a known fact that masters sometimes want something that even the most literate man can't figure out. And as the saying goes: 'Hop faster, mind the master!'"

"And you wouldn't happen to be lying, mister philosopher?"

"May lightning strike me right here if I'm lying."

"If you'd lived only one little minute longer," the chief said sadly, "I'd surely have learned everything. 'Don't let anybody read over me, daddy, but send to the Kiev seminary at once and bring the student Khoma Brut. Let him pray three nights for my sinful soul. He knows. . .' But what he knows, I didn't hear. She, dear soul, could only say that, and then she died. Surely, good man, you must be known for your holy life and God-pleasing deeds, and maybe she heard about you."

"Who, me?" the student said, stepping back in amazement. "Me, a holy life?" he said, looking the chief straight in the eye. "God help you, sir! Indecent though it is to say, I went calling on the baker's wife on Holy Thursday itself."

"Well. . . surely you were appointed for some reason. You'll have to start the business this same day."

"To that, your honor, I'd reply ... of course, anybody versed in Holy Scripture could commensurably . . . only here it would call for a deacon, or at least a subdeacon. They're smart folk and know how it's done, while I . . . And I haven't got the voice for it, and myself I'm—devil knows what. Nothing to look at."

"That's all very well, only I'll do everything my little dove told me to do, I won't leave anything out. And once you've prayed over her properly for three nights, starting today, I'll reward you. Otherwise—I wouldn't advise even the devil himself to make me angry."

The chief uttered these last words with such force that the philosopher fully understood their meaning.

"Follow me!" said the chief.

They stepped out to the front hall. The chief opened the door to another room opposite the first. The philosopher stopped in the hall for a moment to blow his nose and then with some unaccountable fear crossed the threshold. The whole floor was covered with red cotton cloth. In the corner, under the icons, on a high table, lay the body of the dead girl, on a cover of blue velvet adorned with gold fringe and tassels. Tall wax candles twined with guelder rose

stood at her head and feet, shedding their dim light, lost in the brightness of day. The face of the dead girl was screened from him by the disconsolate father, who sat before her, his back to the door. The philosopher was struck by the words he heard:

"I'm not sorry, my darling daughter, that you, to my sorrow and grief, have left the earth in the flower of your youth, without living out your allotted term. I'm sorry, my little dove, that I do not know who it was, what wicked enemy of mine, that caused your death. And if I knew of anyone who might only think of insulting you or just of saying something unpleasant about you, I swear to God he would never see his children again, if he happened to be as old as I am, or his father and mother, if he was still a young man; and his body would be thrown to the birds and beasts of the steppe. But woe is me, my wild marigold, my little quail, my bright star, that I must live out the rest of my life with no delight, wiping the tears with my coattails as they flow from my aged eyes, while my enemy rejoices and laughs secretly at the feeble old man . . ."

He stopped, and the reason for it was the rending grief that resolved itself in a whole flood of tears.

The philosopher was moved by such inconsolable sorrow. He coughed and gave a muffled grunt, wishing thereby to clear his voice a little.

The chief turned and pointed to the place at the dead girl's head, before a small lectern on which some books lay.

"I can do the three nights' work somehow," thought the philosopher, "and the master will fill both my pockets with gold coins for it."

He approached and, clearing his throat once more, began to read, paying no attention to anything around him and not daring to look into the dead girl's face. A deep silence settled in. He noticed that the chief had left. Slowly he turned his head to look at the dead girl, and . . .

A shudder ran through his veins: before him lay a beauty such as there had never been on earth. It seemed that facial features had never before been assembled into such sharp yet harmonious beauty. She lay as if alive. Her brow, beautiful, tender, like snow, like silver, seemed thoughtful; her eyebrows—night amid a sunny day, thin, regular—rose proudly over her closed eyes, and her eyelashes, falling pointy on her cheeks, burned with the heat of hidden desires; her mouth—rubies about to smile . . . Yet in them, in these same features, he saw something terribly piercing. He felt his soul begin to ache somehow painfully, as if, in the whirl of merriment and giddiness of a crowd, someone suddenly struck up a song about oppressed people. The rubies of her mouth seemed to make the blood scald his heart. Suddenly something terribly familiar showed in her face.

"The witch!" he cried out in a voice not his own, looked away, turned pale, and began reading his prayers.

It was the very witch he had killed.

When the sun began to set, the dead girl was taken to the church. The philosopher supported the black-draped coffin with one shoulder, and on that shoulder he felt something cold as ice. The chief himself walked in front, bearing the right side of the dead girl's cramped house. The blackened wooden church, adorned with green moss and topped by three conical cupolas, stood desolate almost at the edge of the village. One could see it was long since any service had been celebrated in it. Candles burned before almost every icon. The coffin was placed in the middle, right in front of the altar. The old chief kissed the dead girl once more, made a prostration, and walked out together with the bearers, ordering the philosopher to be given a good meal and taken to the church after supper. Going into the kitchen, all those who had carried the coffin started touching the stove, something people in Little Russia have the custom of doing after they see a dead body.

The hunger that the philosopher began to feel just then made him forget all about the deceased for a few moments. Soon all the household servants began gradually to gather in the kitchen. The kitchen of the chief's house was something like a club, to which everything that inhabited the yard flowed, including the dogs, who came right up to the door wagging their tails for bones and scraps. Wherever anyone might be sent, on whatever errand, he would always stop at the kitchen first, to rest on a bench for a moment and smoke a pipe. The bachelors who lived in the house and paraded around in Cossack blouses all lay about here for almost the whole day, on the benches, under the benches, on the stove—in short, wherever they could find a comfortable place to lie. Besides, everybody was forever forgetting something in the kitchen—a hat, a knout for stray dogs, or the like. But the most numerous gathering was at suppertime, when the horseherd came after rounding up all his horses, and the cowherd after bringing the cows home for milking, and all the rest who were not to be seen in the course of the day. During supper, loquacity would come to the most taciturn tongues. Here everything was usually talked about: someone who was having new trousers made for himself. . . and what was inside the earth . . . and someone who had seen a wolf. . . There were numerous *bonmotists*[7] here, of whom there is no lack among the people of Little Russia.

The philosopher sat down with the others in a wide circle under the open sky in front of the kitchen porch. Soon a woman in a red cap stuck herself out the door holding a hot pot of dumplings with both hands, and placed it in the midst of those ready to eat. Each of them took a wooden spoon from his pocket, or some, lacking a spoon, a splinter of wood. As soon as the mouths began to move a bit more slowly and the wolfish appetite of the whole gathering subsided a little, many began to talk. The talk naturally had to turn to the dead girl.

"Is it true," said one young shepherd, who had stuck so many buttons and brass badges on his leather pipe strap that he looked like a mercer's shop, "is it true that the young miss, not to speak ill of her, kept company with the unclean one?"

"Who? The young miss?" said Dorosh, already known to our philosopher. "But she was a downright witch! I'll swear she was a witch!"

"Enough, enough, Dorosh!" said another, the one who had shown such readiness to give comfort during the trip. "God help them, it's none of our business. No point in talking about it."

But Dorosh was not at all disposed to be silent. He had only just gone to the cellar with the steward on some necessary business and, after bending a couple of times to two or three barrels, had come out extremely cheerful and talking nonstop.

"What do you want? For me to keep quiet?" he said. "But she rode on me, on me myself! By God, she did!"

"And what, uncle," said the young shepherd with the buttons, "are there some tokens you can tell a witch by?"

"No," answered Dorosh. "There's no way to tell. Read through all the psalters, you still won't be able to tell."

"You can, too, Dorosh. Don't say that," said the same comforter. "Not for nothing did God give everybody a special trait. People who've got some learning say witches have little tails."

When a woman's old, she's a witch, the gray-haired Cossack said coolly.

"Ah, you're a good lot, too!" picked up the woman, who was just then pouring fresh dumplings into the emptied pot. "Real fat boars!"

The old Cossack, whose name was Yavtukh but who was nicknamed Kovtun, showed a smile of pleasure on his lips, seeing that his words had struck the old woman to the quick; and the cowherd let out such dense laughter as if two bulls, facing each other, had bellowed at once.

The beginning conversation awakened an irrepressible desire and curiosity in the philosopher to learn more in detail about the chief's deceased daughter. And therefore, wishing to bring him back to the former matter, he addressed his neighbor with these words:

"I wanted to ask, why is it that all the folk sitting here over supper consider the young miss a witch? What, did she cause some evil or put a hex on somebody or other?"

"There were all kinds of things," replied one of the seated men, with a smooth face extremely like a shovel.

"And who doesn't remember the huntsman Mikita, or that. . ."

"And what about the huntsman Mikita?" said the philosopher.

"Wait! I'll tell about the huntsman Mikita," said Dorosh.

"I'll tell about Mikita," said the herdsman, "because he was my chum."

"I'll tell about Mikita," said Spirid.

"Let him! Let Spirid tell it!" shouted the crowd.

Spirid began:

"You, mister philosopher Khoma, didn't know Mikita. Ah, what a rare man he was! He knew every dog like his own father, so he did. The present huntsman Mikola, who's sitting third down from me, can't hold a candle to him. He also knows his business, but next to Mikita he's trash, slops."

"You're telling it good, really good!" said Dorosh, nodding approvingly.

Spirid went on:

"He'd spot a rabbit quicker than you could take a pinch of snuff.

He'd whistle: 'Here, Robber! Here, Racer!' and be off at full speed on his horse, and there'd be no telling whether he was ahead of the dog or the dog ahead of him. He'd toss off a pint of rotgut as if it had never been there. A fine huntsman he was! Only in more recent days he started staring at the young miss all the time. Either he was really smitten, or she'd put a spell on him, only it was the end of the man, he went all soft, turned into devil knows what— pah! it's even indecent to say it."

"Good," said Dorosh.

"The young miss would no sooner glance at him than he'd drop the bridle, call Robber Grouchy, stumble all over, and do God knows what. Once the young miss came to the stable where he was grooming a horse. 'Mikitka,' she says, 'let me lay my little leg on you.' And he, the tomfool, gets all happy. 'Not only your little leg,' he says, 'you can sit right on me.' The young miss lifted up her leg, and when he saw her bare leg, white and plump, the charm, he says, just stunned him. He bent his back, the tomfool, grabbed her bare legs with both hands, and went galloping like a horse all over the fields. And he couldn't tell anything about where they rode, only he came back barely alive, and after that he got all wasted, like a chip of wood. And once, when they came to the stable, instead of him there was just a heap of ashes and an empty bucket lying there: he burned up, burned up of his own self. And what a huntsman he was, you won't find another like him in the whole world."

When Spirid finished his story, talk came from all sides about the merits of the former huntsman.

"And have you heard about Shepchikha?" said Dorosh, addressing Khoma.

"No."

"Oh-ho! Then it's clear they don't teach you much sense there in your seminary. Well, listen! In our settlement there's a Cossack named Sheptun. A good Cossack! He likes to steal or tell a lie sometimes without any need, but... a good Cossack! His place isn't far from here. At this same time as we're now having supper, Sheptun and his wife finished eating and went to

bed, and since the weather was fine, Shepchikha slept outside and Sheptun inside on a bench; or, no, it was Shepchikha inside on a bench and Sheptun outside . . ."

"And not on a bench, Shepchikha lay on the floor," the woman picked up, standing in the doorway, her cheek propped on her hand.

Dorosh looked at her, then at the floor, then at her again, and after a pause said:

"When I pull your underwear off in front of everybody, it won't be so nice."

This warning had its effect. The old woman fell silent and did not interrupt anymore.

Dorosh went on.

"And in a cradle that hung in the middle of the hut lay their one-year-old baby—I don't know whether of male or female sex. Shepchikha lay there, and then she heard a dog scratching outside the door and howling so loud you just wanted to flee the house. She got frightened—for women are such foolish folk that you could stick your tongue out at her behind the door at night and she'd have her heart in her mouth. 'Anyhow,' she thinks, 'why don't I go and hit the cursed dog in the snout, maybe it'll stop howling.' And taking her poker, she went to open the door. As soon as it was slightly open, the dog darted between her legs and went straight for the baby's cradle. Shepchikha saw that it was no longer a dog but the young miss. And if it had been the young miss looking the way she knew her, it would have been nothing; but there was this one thing and circumstance: that she was all blue and her eyes were burning like coals. She grabbed the baby, bit its throat, and began drinking its blood. Shepchikha only cried out, 'Ah, evil thing!' and fled. But she saw that the front doors were locked. She ran to the attic. The foolish woman sat there trembling, and then she saw that the young miss was coming to the attic. She fell on the foolish woman and started biting her. It was morning before Sheptun got his wife out of there, blue and bitten all over. And the next day the foolish woman died. That's what arrangements and temptations can happen! Though she's the master's progeny, all the same a witch is a witch."

After this story, Dorosh looked around smugly and poked his forefinger into his pipe, preparing to fill it with tobacco. The material about the witch became inexhaustible. Each in turn hastened to tell something. The witch drove right up to the door of one man's house in the form of a haystack; she stole another's hat or pipe; cut off the braids of many village girls; drank several buckets of blood from others.

At last the whole company came to their senses and saw that they had been talking too much, because it was already quite dark outside. They all began trudging off to sleep, putting themselves either in the kitchen, or in the sheds, or in the middle of the yard.

"Well, now, Mr. Khoma, it's time we went to the deceased," said the gray-haired Cossack, turning to the philosopher, and the four of them, Spirid and Dorosh included, went to the church, swinging their knouts at the dogs, of which there were a great many and which angrily bit at their sticks.

The philosopher, though he had fortified himself with a good mug of vodka, secretly felt timorousness creeping over him as they drew near the lighted church. The tales and strange stories he had heard helped to affect his imagination still more. The darkness under the paling and trees began to thin; the place was becoming more bare. They finally stepped past the decrepit church fence into the small yard, beyond which there were no trees and nothing opened out but empty fields and meadows swallowed by the darkness of night. Together with Khoma, the three Cossacks climbed the steep steps of the porch and went into the church. Here they left the philosopher, having wished him a successful performance of his duty, and locked the door on him as the master had ordered.

The philosopher remained alone. First he yawned, then stretched himself, then blew on both hands, and finally looked around. In the middle stood the black coffin. Candles flickered

before dark icons. Their light illumined only the iconostasis[8] and, faintly, the middle of the church. The far corners of the vestibule were shrouded in darkness. The tall, ancient iconostasis showed a profound decrepitude; its openwork, covered in gold, now gleamed only in sparks. The gilding had fallen off in some places, and was quite blackened in others; the faces of the saints, completely darkened, looked somehow gloomy. The philosopher glanced around once more.

"Why," he said, "what's frightening about it? No man can get in here, and against the dead and visitors from the other world I've got such prayers that, once I've read them, they'll never lay a finger on me. Nothing to it," he said with a wave of the hand, "let's read!"

Going up to the choir, he saw several bundles of candles.

"That's good," thought the philosopher, "I must light up the whole church so that it's bright as day. Ah, too bad I can't smoke my pipe in God's church!"

And he began sticking wax candles to all the ledges, lecterns, and icons, not stinting in the least, and soon the whole church was filled with light. Only the darkness above seemed to become deeper, and the dark images looked more gloomily from the old carved frames on which gold gleamed here and there. He went up to the coffin, timidly looked into the dead girl's face, and could not help shutting his eyes with a slight start.

Such terrible, dazzling beauty!

He turned and wanted to step away; but with strange curiosity, with the strange, self-contradictory feeling that will not leave a man especially in a time of fear, he could not refrain from glancing at her as he went, and then, with the same feeling of trepidation, glancing once more. Indeed, the deceased girl's sharp beauty seemed frightful. Perhaps she even would not have struck him with such panic terror if she had been slightly ugly. But there was in her features nothing dull, lusterless, dead. The face was alive, and it seemed to the philosopher that she was looking at him through closed eyes. It even seemed to him that a tear rolled from under her right eyelash, and when it stopped on her cheek, he made out clearly that it was a drop of blood.

He hastily went over to the choir, opened the book and, to cheer himself up, began reading in his loudest voice. His voice struck the wooden walls of the church, long silent and deaf. Solitary, without echo, it poured in a low bass into the utterly dead silence and seemed a little wild even to the reader himself.

"What's there to be afraid of?" he thought to himself meanwhile. "She won't get up from her coffin, because she'll be afraid of God's word. Let her lie there! And what kind of Cossack am I if I'm scared? So I drank a bit—that's why it seems so frightening. If I could take some snuff-—ah, fine tobacco! Nice tobacco! Good tobacco!"

And yet, as he turned each page, he kept glancing sidelong at the coffin, and an involuntary feeling seemed to whisper to him: "Look, look, she's going to get up, she's going to rise, she's going to peek out of the coffin!"

But there was a deathly silence. The coffin stood motionless. The candles poured out a whole flood of light. Terrible is a lit-up church at night, with a dead body and not a living soul!

Raising his voice, he began singing in various voices, trying to stifle the remnants of his fear. Yet he turned his eyes to the coffin every other moment, as if asking the inadvertent question: "What if she rises, what if she gets up?"

But the coffin did not stir. If only there was a sound, some living being, even the chirp of a cricket in the corner! There was just the slight sizzle of some remote candle and the faint spatter of wax dripping on the floor.

"Well, what if she gets up?. . ."

She raised her head . . .

He gazed wildly and rubbed his eyes. But she was indeed no longer lying but sitting up in the coffin. He turned his eyes away, then again looked with horror at the coffin. She's standing up . . . she's walking through the church with her eyes closed, constantly spreading her arms as if wishing to catch someone.

She was walking straight toward him. In fear he drew a circle around himself. With an effort he began reading prayers and reciting the incantations that had been taught him by one monk who had seen witches and unclean spirits all his life.

She stood almost on the line itself; but it was clearly beyond her power to cross it, and she turned all blue, like someone dead for several days. Khoma did not have the courage to look at her. She was frightful. She clacked her teeth and opened her dead eyes. But, seeing nothing, she turned in the other direction with a fury that showed in her twitching face and, spreading her arms, clutched with them at every pillar and corner, trying to catch Khoma. Finally she stopped, shook her finger, and lay down in her coffin.

The philosopher still could not come to his senses and kept glancing fearfully at the witch's cramped dwelling. Finally the coffin suddenly tore from its place and with a whistle began flying all through the church, crossing the air in every direction. The philosopher saw it almost over his head, but at the same time he saw that it could not enter the circle he had drawn, so he stepped up his incantations. The coffin crashed down in the middle of the church and remained motionless. The corpse again rose up from it, blue, turning green. But just then came the distant crowing of a cock. The corpse sank back into the coffin and the coffin lid slammed shut.

The philosopher's heart was pounding and sweat streamed from him; but, encouraged by the crowing of the cock, he quickly finished reading the pages he ought to have read earlier. At daybreak he was relieved by the beadle and gray-haired Yavtukh, who on this occasion performed the duties of a church warden.

Having gone to lie down, the philosopher was unable to fall asleep for a long time, but fatigue overcame him and he slept till dinner. When he woke up, all the events of the night seemed to have happened in a dream. To bolster his strength, he was given a pint of vodka. At dinner he quickly relaxed, contributed observations on this and that, and ate a rather mature pig almost by himself. However, he did not venture to speak of his experiences in the church, from some feeling unaccountable to himself, and, to the questions of the curious, replied: "Yes, there were all sorts of wonders." The philosopher was one of those people in whom, once they have been fed, an extraordinary philanthropy awakens. Pipe in his teeth, he lay looking at them all with extraordinarily sweet eyes and kept spitting to the side.

After dinner the philosopher was in the highest spirits. He managed to walk about the whole village and make the acquaintance of nearly everybody; he was even chased out of two cottages; one comely young wench gave him a decent whack on the back with a shovel when he decided to feel and find out what kind of material her blouse and kirtle were made of. But the closer it came to evening, the more pensive the philosopher grew. An hour before supper, almost all the household people would gather to play *kasha* or *kragli*—a variety of skittles in which long sticks are used instead of balls and the winner has the *right to ride on his partner's back*. Then the game would become very interesting for the spectator: often the cowherd, broad as a pancake, got astride the swineherd, puny, short, consisting of nothing but wrinkles. Another time the cowherd would bend his back and Dorosh would jump onto it, always saying: "Hey, what a hefty bull!" Those who were more sober-minded sat by the kitchen porch. They had an extremely serious air as they smoked their pipes, even when the young people laughed heartily over some witticism of the cowherd or Spirid. In vain did Khoma try to take

part in this fun: some dark thought, like a nail, was lodged in his head. Over supper, hard though he tried to cheer himself up, fear kindled in him as darkness spread over the sky.

"Well, our time has come, mister student!" the familiar gray-haired Cossack said to him, getting up from his place together with Dorosh. "Let's go to work."

Khoma was again taken to the church in the same way; again he was left alone, and the door was locked on him. No sooner was he left alone than timorousness began once more to creep into his breast. Again he saw the dark icons, the gleaming frames, and the familiar black coffin standing in menacing silence and immobility in the middle of the church.

"Well," he said, "this marvel doesn't make me marvel now. It's only frightening the first time. Yes! it's only a little frightening the first time, and then it's not frightening anymore, not frightening at all."

He hastened to the choir, drew a circle around himself, spoke several incantations, and began reading loudly, resolved not to raise his eyes from the book or pay attention to anything. He had been reading for about an hour already, and had begun to weary and to cough a little. He took a snuff bottle from his pocket and, before taking a pinch, timorously turned his gaze to the coffin. His heart went cold.

The corpse was already standing before him, right on the line, fixing her dead green eyes on him. The student shuddered and felt a chill run through all his veins. Dropping his eyes to the book, he began reading his prayers and exorcisms louder and heard the corpse clack her teeth again and wave her arm, wishing to seize him. But, looking out of the corner of one eye, he saw that the corpse was trying to catch him in the wrong place and evidently could not see him. She was growling hollowly, and began to utter dreadful words with her dead lips; they spluttered hoarsely, like the gurgling of boiling pitch. He could not have said what they meant, but something dreadful was contained in them. The philosopher fearfully realized that she was reciting incantations.

Wind swept through the church at these words, and there was a noise as of a multitude of fluttering wings. He heard wings beating against the glass of the church windows and their iron frames, heard claws scratching iron with a rasping noise and countless powers banging on the doors, trying to break in. His heart pounded heavily all the while; shutting his eyes, he kept reading incantations and prayers. At last something suddenly whistled far away. It was the distant crowing of a cock. The exhausted philosopher stopped and rested his soul.

Those who came to relieve the philosopher found him barely alive. He was leaning back against the wall, goggle-eyed, and stared fixedly at the Cossacks who where shaking him. They practically carried him out and had to support him all the way. Coming to the master's yard, he roused himself and asked to be given a pint of vodka. After drinking it, he smoothed the hair on his head and said:

"There's all sorts of trash in this world! And such horrors happen as—oh, well. . ." At that the philosopher waved his hand.

The circle that had gathered around him hung their heads on hearing such words. Even the young boy whom all the servants considered their rightful representative when it came to such matters as cleaning the stables or toting water, even this poor boy also stood gaping.

Just then a not entirely old wench passed by in a tight-fitting apron that displayed her round and firm shape, the old cook's assistant, a terrible flirt, who always found something to pin to her cap—a bit of ribbon, or a carnation, or even a scrap of paper if there was nothing else.

"Greetings, Khoma!" she said, seeing the philosopher. "Ai-yai-yai! what's happened to you?" she cried out, clasping her hands.

"What do you mean, foolish woman?"

"Ah, my God! But you've gone all gray!"

"Oh-oh! And it's the truth she's telling!" said Spirid, studying him intently. "You've really gone all gray like our old Yavtukh."

On hearing this, the philosopher rushed headlong to the kitchen, where he had noticed a triangular piece of mirror glued to the wall and stained by flies, in front of which forget-me-nots, periwinkles, and even a garland of marigolds were stuck, showing that it was intended for the stylish flirt's toilette. He saw with horror the truth of their words: half of his hair had indeed turned white.

Khoma Brut hung his head and gave himself over to reflection.

"I'll go to the master," he said finally, "tell him everything, and explain that I don't want to read anymore. Let him send me back to Kiev right now."

In such thoughts, he directed his steps toward the porch of the master's house.

The chief was sitting almost motionless in his room; the same hopeless sorrow that the philosopher had met on his face earlier remained there still. Only his cheeks were much more sunken than before. It was clear that he had taken very little food, or perhaps not touched anything at all. His extraordinary pallor gave him a sort of stony immobility.

"Greetings, poor lad," he said, seeing Khoma, who stood hat in hand in the doorway. "Well, how is it with you? Everything fine?"

"Fine, fine indeed. Such devilish goings-on, I'd like to just grab my hat and flee wherever my legs will take me."

"How's that?"

"It's your daughter, sir . . . Reasonably considering, of course, she's of noble birth; nobody will maintain the contrary; only, not to anger you by saying so, God rest her soul. . ."

"What about my daughter?"

"She's had some dealings with Satan. Giving me such horrors that I can't read any scriptures."

"Read, read! It was not for nothing that she called you. She was worried about her soul, my little dove, and wished to drive away all wicked thoughts by prayer."

"Have it your way, sir—by God, it's too much for me!"

"Read, read!" the chief went on in the same admonitory voice. "You've got one night left now. You'll do a Christian deed, and I'll reward you."

"Rewards or no rewards... As you like, sir, only I won't read!" Khoma said resolutely.

"Listen, philosopher!" said the chief, and his voice grew strong and menacing, "I don't like these notions. You can do that in your seminary, but not with me: I'll give you such a thrashing as your rector never gave. Do you know what a good leather whip is?"

"How could I not!" said the philosopher, lowering his voice. "Everybody knows what a leather whip is: an insufferable thing in large quantities."

"Yes. Only you still don't know what a scotching my boys can deliver!" the chief said menacingly, getting to his feet, and his face acquired an imperious and ferocious expression that revealed all his unbridled character, only temporarily lulled by sorrow. "First they'll scotch you for me, then douse you with vodka, then start over. Go, go! do your business! If you don't, you won't get up; if you do—a thousand pieces of gold!"

"Oh-ho-ho! Some customer!" the philosopher thought, going out. "No joking with this one. Just you wait, brother: I'll cut and run so fast your dogs will never catch me."

And Khoma resolved to escape without fail. He only waited till the time after dinner, when the household people all had the habit of getting into the hay under the sheds and producing, open-mouthed, such a snoring and piping that the yard came to resemble a factory. This time finally came. Even Yavtukh stretched out in the sun, his eyes closed. In fear and

trembling, the philosopher quietly went to the garden, from where it seemed to him it would be easier and less conspicuous to escape into the fields. This garden, as commonly happens, was terribly overgrown and thus highly conducive to any secret undertaking. Except for one path beaten down on household necessity, the rest was hidden by thickly spreading cherry trees, elders, burdock that stuck its tall stalks with clingy pink knobs way up. Hops covered the top of this whole motley collection of trees and bushes like a net, forming a roof above them that spread over to the wattle fence and hung down it in twining snakes along with wild field bluebells. Beyond the wattle fence that served as a boundary to the garden, there spread a whole forest of weeds which no one seemed to be interested in, and a scythe would have broken to pieces if it had decided to put its blade to their thick, woody stems.

As the philosopher went to step over the wattle fence, his teeth chattered and his heart pounded so hard that it frightened him. The skirt of his long chlamys seemed stuck to the ground, as if someone had nailed it down. As he was stepping over, it seemed to him that some voice rattled in his ears with a deafening whistle: "Where to, where to?" The philosopher flitted into the weeds and broke into a run, constantly stumbling over old roots and crushing moles underfoot. He could see that once he got through the weeds, all he had to do was run across a field, beyond which darkled a thicket of blackthorn, where he reckoned he would be safe, and passing through which he supposed he would come to the road straight to Kiev. He ran across the field at once and wound up amid the dense blackthorns. He got through the blackthorns, leaving pieces of his frock coat on every sharp thorn in lieu of a toll, and found himself in a small hollow. A pussy willow spread its hanging branches almost to the ground. A small spring shone pure as silver. The philosopher's first business was to lie down and drink his fill, because he felt unbearably thirsty.

"Good water!" he said, wiping his mouth. "I could rest here." "No, better keep running. You might have somebody after you." These words came from above his ears. He turned: before him stood Yavtukh.

"Yavtukh, you devil!" the philosopher thought to himself. "I could just take you by the legs and . . . and beat your vile mug in, and whatever else you've got, with an oak log."

"You oughtn't to have made such a detour," Yavtukh went on.

"Much better to take the path I did: straight past the stables. And it's too bad about the frock coat. Good broadcloth. How much did you pay per yard? Anyhow, we've had a nice walk, it's time for home."

The philosopher, scratching himself, trudged after Yavtukh. "The accursed witch will give me a hot time now," he thought. "Though what's with me, really? What am I afraid of? Am I not a Cossack? I did read for two nights, God will help with the third. The accursed witch must have done a good deal of sinning for the unclean powers to stand by her like that."

These reflections occupied him as he entered the master's yard. Having encouraged himself with such observations, he persuaded Dorosh, who, through his connection with the steward, occasionally had access to the master's cellar, to fetch a jug of rotgut, and the two friends, sitting under the shed, supped not much less than half a bucket, so that the philosopher, suddenly getting to his feet, shouted: "Musicians! We must have musicians!"—and, without waiting for the musicians, broke into a trepak in the cleared spot in the middle of the yard. He danced until it came time for the afternoon snack, when the household people, standing in a circle around him, as is usual in such cases, finally spat and went away, saying, "Look how long the man's been dancing!" Finally the philosopher went right to sleep, and only a good dousing with cold water could wake him up for supper. Over supper he talked about what a Cossack is and how he should not be afraid of anything in the world.

"It's time," said Yavtukh, "let's go."

"Bite on a nail, you accursed hog!" thought the philosopher, and getting to his feet, said:

"Let's go."

On the way, the philosopher constantly glanced to right and left and tried to talk a little with his guides. But Yavtukh kept mum; Dorosh himself was untalkative. The night was infernal. Far off a whole pack of wolves howled. And even the dogs' barking was somehow frightening.

"Seems like it's something else howling—that's not a wolf," said Dorosh.

Yavtukh kept mum. The philosopher found nothing to say.

They approached the church and stepped in under its decrepit vaults, which showed how little the owner of the estate cared about God and his own soul. Yavtukh and Dorosh withdrew as before, and the philosopher remained alone. Everything was the same. Everything had the same menacingly familiar look. He paused for a minute. In the middle, as ever, stood the motionless coffin of the terrible witch. "I won't be afraid, by God, I won't be afraid!" he said, and, again drawing a circle around himself, he began recalling all his incantations. The silence was dreadful; the candles flickered, pouring light all over the church. The philosopher turned one page, then another, and noticed that he was not reading what was in the book at all. In fear he crossed himself and began to sing. This cheered him somewhat: the reading went ahead, and pages flashed by one after another. Suddenly . . . amidst the silence . . . the iron lid of the coffin burst with a crack and the dead body rose. It was still more horrible than the first time. Its teeth clacked horribly, row against row; its lips twitched convulsively and, with wild shrieks, incantations came rushing out. Wind whirled through the church, icons fell to the floor, broken glass dropped from the windows. The doors tore from their hinges, and a numberless host of monsters flew into God's church. A terrible noise of wings and scratching claws filled the whole church. Everything flew and rushed about, seeking the philosopher everywhere.

Khoma's head cleared of the last trace of drunkenness. He just kept crossing himself and reading prayers at random. And at the same time he heard the unclean powers flitting about him, all but brushing him with the tips of their wings and repulsive tails. He did not have the courage to look at them closely; he only saw the whole wall occupied by a huge monster standing amidst its own tangled hair as in a forest; through the web of hair two eyes stared horribly, the eyebrows raised slightly. Above it in the air there was something like an immense bubble, with a thousand tongs and scorpion stings reaching from its middle. Black earth hung on them in lumps. They all looked at him, searching, unable to see him, surrounded by the mysterious circle.

"Bring Viy! Go get Viy!" the words of the dead body rang out.

And suddenly there was silence in the church; the wolves' howling could be heard far away, and soon heavy footsteps rang out in the church; with a sidelong glance he saw them leading in some squat, hefty, splay-footed man. He was black earth all over. His earth-covered legs and arms stuck out like strong, sinewy roots. Heavily he trod, stumbling all the time. His long eyelids were lowered to the ground. With horror Khoma noticed that the face on him was made of iron. He was brought in under the arms and put right by the place where Khoma stood.

"Lift my eyelids, I can't see!" Viy said in a subterranean voice— and the entire host rushed to lift his eyelids.

"Don't look!" some inner voice whispered to the philosopher. He could not help himself and looked.

"There he is!" Viy cried and fixed an iron finger on him. And all that were there fell upon the philosopher. Breathless, he crashed to the ground and straightaway the spirit flew out of him in terror.

A cockcrow rang out. This was already the second cockcrow; the gnomes had missed the first. The frightened spirits rushed pell-mell for the windows and doors in order to fly out quickly, but nothing doing: and so they stayed there, stuck in the doors and windows. When the priest came in, he stopped at the sight of such disgrace in God's sanctuary and did not dare serve a panikhida[9] in such a place. So the church remained forever with monsters stuck in its doors and windows, overgrown with forest, roots, weeds, wild blackthorn; and no one now can find the path to it.

When rumors of this reached Kiev and the theologian Khalyava heard, finally, that such had been the lot of the philosopher Khoma, he fell to thinking for a whole hour. In the meantime great changes had happened with him. Fortune had smiled on him: upon completing his studies, he had been made bell-ringer of the tallest belfry, and he almost always went about with a bloody nose, because the wooden stairs of the belfry had been put together every which way.

"Have you heard what happened with Khoma?" Tiberiy Gorobets, by then a philosopher and sporting a fresh mustache, said, coming up to him.

"It's what God granted him," said the ringer Khalyava. "Let's go to the tavern and commemorate his soul!"

The young philosopher, who had come into his rights with the passion of an enthusiast, so that his trousers and frock coat and even his hat gave off a whiff of spirits and coarse tobacco, instantly expressed his readiness.

"Khoma was a nice man!" said the ringer, as the lame tavern keeper set the third mug down in front of him. "A fine man! And he perished for nothing!"

"No, I know why he perished: because he got scared. If he hadn't been scared, the witch couldn't have done anything to him. You just have to cross yourself and spit right on her tail, and nothing will happen. I know all about it. Here in Kiev, the women sitting in the marketplace are all witches."

To this the ringer nodded as a sign of agreement. But, noticing that his tongue was unable to articulate a single word, he carefully got up from the table and, swaying from side to side, went off to hide himself in the remotest part of the weeds. Withal not forgetting, out of long habit, to steal an old boot sole that was lying on a bench.

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[1] Russian seminary education was open to the lower classes and was often subsidized by state scholarships; seminarians were thus not necessarily preparing for the priesthood.

[2] Herodias, wife of Herod the tetrarch and mother of Salome, ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-11); Potiphar, an officer of the Egyptian pharaoh, bought Joseph as a slave and made him overseer of his house; his wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to lie with her (Genesis 39).

[3] See note 7 to "Old World Landowners."

[4] See note 8 to "St. John's Eve."

[5] Earlier of the two summer fasts (see note 3 to "The Night Before Christmas").

[6] "Master" in Latin.

[7] Thus in the original. The French *bon mot* means a clever or witty saying.

[8] See note 14 to "The Night Before Christmas."

[9] See note 4 to "The Night Before Christmas."