St. John's Eve

Nikolai Gogol

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Thoma Grigorovich had a very strange sort of eccentricity: to the day of his death he never liked to tell the same thing twice. There were times when, if you asked him to relate a thing afresh, behold, he would interpolate new matter, or alter it so that it was impossible to recognize it. Once on a time one of those gentlemen (it is hard for us simple people to put a name to them, to say whether they are scribblers, or not scribblers: but it is just the same thing as the usurers at our yearly fairs; they clutch and beg and steal every sort of frippery and issue mean little volumes, no thicker than an A B C book, every month, or even every week)—one of these gentlemen wormed this same story out of Thoma Grigorovich, and he completely forgot about it. But that same young gentleman in the pea−green caftan, whom I have mentioned, and one of whose tales you have already read, I think, came from Poltava, bringing with him a little book and, opening it in the middle, showed it to us. Thoma Grigorovich was on the point of setting his spectacles astride of his nose but recollected that he had forgotten to wind thread about them, and stick them together with wax, so he passed it over to me. As I understand something about reading and writing and do not wear spectacles, I undertook to read it. I had not turned two leaves, when all at once he caught me by the hand and stopped me.

"Stop! Tell me first what you are reading."

I confess that I was a trifle stunned by such a question.

"What! What am I reading, Thoma Grigorovich? These were your very words."

"Who told you that they were my words?"

"Why, what more would you have? Here it is printed: 'Related by such and such a sacristan.'"

"Spit on the head of the man who printed that! He lies, the dog of a Moscow peddler! Did I say that? "Twas just the same as though one hadn't his wits about him!' Listen, I'll tell it to you on the spot.

We moved up to the table, and he began.

My grandfather (the kingdom of heaven be his! may he eat only wheaten rolls and makovniki 1 with honey in the other world!) could tell a story wonderfully well. When he used to begin on a tale you wouldn't stir from the spot all day but keep on listening. He was no match for the storyteller of the present day, when he begins to lie, with a tongue as though he had had nothing to eat for three days, so that you snatch your cap and flee from the house. As I now recall it, my old mother was alive then; in the long winter evenings when the frost was crackling out of doors and had so sealed up hermetically the narrow panes of our cottage, she used to sit before the hackling comb, drawing out a long thread in her hand, rocking the cradle with her foot, and humming a song which I seem to hear even now.

The fat lamp, quivering and flaring up as though in fear of something, lighted us within our cottage; the spindle hummed, and all of us children, collected in a cluster, listened to Grandfather, who had not crawled off the stove for more than five years, owing to his great age.

But the wondrous tales of the incursions of the Zaporogian Cossacks, the Poles, the bold deeds of Podkova, of Poltor−Kozhukh, and Sagaidatchnii did not interest us so much as the stories about 1 Poppy−seeds cooked in honey and dried in square cakes—some deed of old which always sent a shiver through our frames and made our hair rise upright on our heads. Sometimes such terror took possession of us in consequence of them that, from that evening on, Heaven knows what a marvel everything seemed to us. If you chanced to go out of the cottage after nightfall for anything, you imagine that a visitor from the other world has lain down to sleep in your bed; and I should not be able to tell this a second time were it not that I had often taken my own smock, at a distance, as it lay at the head of the bed, for the Evil One rolled up in a ball! But the chief thing about Grandfather's stories was that he never had lied in his life, and whatever he said was so, was so.

I will now relate to you one of his marvelous tales. I know that there are a great many wise people who copy in the courts and can even read civil documents, who, if you were to put into their hand a simple prayer book, could not make out the first letter in it and would show all their teeth in derision—which is wisdom. These people laugh at everything you tell them. Such incredulity has spread abroad in the world! What then? (Why, may God and the Holy Virgin cease to love me if it is not possible that even you will not believe me!) Once he said something about witches. . . What then? Along comes one of these head−breakers—and doesn't believe in witches! Yes, glory to God that I have lived so long in the world! I have seen heretics to whom it would be easier to lie in confession than it would for our brothers and equals to take snuff, and those people would deny the existence of witches! But let them just dream about something, and they won't even tell what it was! There's no use in talking about them!

* * * No one could have recognized this village of ours a little over a hundred years ago: a hamlet it was, the poorest kind of hamlet. Half a score of miserable izbás, unplastered, badly thatched, were scattered here and there about the fields. There was not an enclosure or a decent shed to shelter animals or wagons. That was the way the wealthy lived; and if you had looked for our brothers, the poor—why, a hole in the ground—that was a cabin for you! Only by the smoke could you tell that a God−created man lived there. You ask why they lived so? It was not entirely through poverty: almost everyone led a wandering, Cossack life, and gathered not a little plunder in foreign lands; it was rather because there was no reason for setting up a well−ordered khata.2 How many people were wandering all over the country—Crimeans, Poles, Lithuanians! It was quite possible that their own countrymen might make a descent and plunder everything.

Anything was possible.

In this hamlet a man, or rather a devil in human form, often made his appearance. Why he came, and whence, no one knew. He prowled about, got drunk, and suddenly disappeared as if into the air, and there was not a hint of his existence. Then again, behold, and he seemed to have dropped from the sky and went flying about the street of the village, of which no trace now remains, and which was not more than a hundred paces from Dikanka. He would collect together all the Cossacks he met; then there were songs, laughter, money in abundance, and vodka flowed like water. . . He would address the pretty girls and give them ribbons, earrings, strings of beads−more than they knew what to do with. It is true that the pretty girls rather hesitated about accepting his presents: God knows, perhaps they had passed through unclean hands. My grandfather's aunt, who kept a tavern at the time, in which Basavriuk (as they called that devil−man)

often had his carouses, said that no consideration on the face of the earth would have induced her to accept a gift from him. And then, again, how avoid accepting? Fear seized on everyone when he knit his bristly brows and gave a sidelong glance which might send your feet God knows whither; but if you accept, then the next night some fiend from the swamp, with 2 Wooden house—horns on his head, comes to call and begins to squeeze your neck when there is a string of beads upon it; or drag you by the hair, if ribbons are braided in it. God have mercy, then, on those who owned such gifts! But here was the difficulty: it was impossible to get rid of them; if you threw them into the water, the diabolical ring or necklace would skim along the surface and into your hand.

There was a church in the village—St. Pantelei, if I remember rightly. There lived there a priest, Father Athanasii of blessed memory. Observing that Basavriuk did not come to church, even on Easter, he determined to reprove him and impose penance upon him. Well, he hardly escaped with his life. "Hark ye, pannotche!" he thundered in reply. "Learn to mind your own business instead of meddling in other people's, if you don't want that goat's throat of yours stuck together with boiling kutya."3 What was to be done with this unrepentant man? Father Athanasii contented himself with announcing that anyone who should make the acquaintance of Basavriuk would be counted a Catholic, an enemy of Christ's church, not a member of the human race.

In this village there was a Cossack named Korzh, who had a laborer whom people called Peter the Orphan—perhaps because no one remembered either his father or mother. The church starost, it is true, said that they had died of the pest in his second year, but my grandfather's aunt would not hear to that and tried with all her might to furnish him with parents, although poor Peter needed them about as much as we need last year's snow. She said that his father had been in Zaporozhe, taken prisoner by the Turks, underwent God only knows what tortures, and, having by some miracle disguised himself as a eunuch, had made his escape. Little cared the black−browed youths and maidens about his parents. They merely remarked that, if only he had a new coat, a red sash, a black lambskin cap with dandified blue crown on his head, a Turkish saber hanging by his side, a whip in

one hand, and a pipe with handsome mountings in the other, he would surpass all the young men. But the pity was that the only thing poor Peter had was a gray svitka with more holes in it than there are gold pieces in a Jew's pocket. And that was not the worst of it, but this: that Korzh had a daughter, such a beauty as I think you can hardly have chanced to see. My deceased grandfather's aunt used to say—and you know that it is easier for a woman to kiss the Evil One than to call anybody a beauty, without malice be it said—that this Cossack maiden's cheeks were as plump and fresh as the pinkest poppy when just bathed in God's dew and, glowing, it unfolds its petals and coquets with the rising sun; that her brows were like black cords, such as our maidens buy nowadays, for their crosses and ducats, of the Moscow peddlers who visit the villages with their baskets, and evenly arched as though peeping into her clear eyes; that her little mouth, at sight of which the youth smacked their lips, seemed made to emit the songs of nightingales; that her hair, black as the raven's wing and soft as young flax (our maidens did not then plait their hair in clubs interwoven with pretty, bright−hued ribbons), fell in curls over her kuntush.4 Eh! may I never intone another alleluia in the choir, if I would not have kissed her, in spite of the gray which is making its way all through the old wool which covers my pate, and my old woman beside me, like a thorn in my side! Well, you know what happens when young men and maids live side by side. In the twilight the heels of red boots were always visible in the place where Pidürka chatted with her Petrus. But Korzh would never have suspected anything out of the way, only one day—it is evident that none but the Evil One could have inspired him—Petrus took it into his head to kiss the Cossack maiden's rosy lips with all his heart in the passage, without first looking well about him; and that same Evil One—may the son of a dog dream of the holy cross!—caused the old graybeard, like a fool, to open the 3 Rice or wheat floor with honey and raisins, a dish brought to church on celebration of memorial masses.

4 Uppergarment—cottage door at the same moment. Korzh was petrified, dropped his jaw, and clutched at the door for support. Those unlucky kisses had completely stunned him. It surprised him more than the blow of a pestle on the wall, with which, in our days, the muzhik generally drives out his intoxication for lack of fusees and powder.

Recovering himself, he took his grandfather's hunting whip from the wall and was about to belabor Peter's back with it, when Pidürka's little six−year−old brother Ivas rushed up from somewhere or other and, grasping his father's legs with his little hands, screamed out, "Daddy, Daddy! Don't beat Petrus!" What was to be done? A father's heart is not made of stone. Hanging the whip again upon the wall, he led him quietly from the house. "If you ever show yourself in my cottage again, or even under the windows, look out, Petrü! By Heaven, your black mustache will disappear; and your black locks, though wound twice about your ears, will take leave of your pate, or my name is not Terentii Korzh." So saying, he gave him a little taste of his fist in the nape of his neck, so that all grew dark before Petrus, and he flew headlong. So there was an end of their kissing. Sorrow seized upon our doves; and a rumor was rife in the village that a certain Pole, all embroidered with gold, with mustaches, saber, spurs, and pockets jingling like the bells of the bag with which our sacristan Taras goes through the church every day, had begun to frequent Korzh's house. Now, it is well known why the father is visited when there is a black−browed daughter about. So one day Pidürka burst into tears and clutched the hand of her Ivas.

"Ivas, my dear! Ivas, my love! Fly to Petrus, my child of gold, like an arrow from a bow. Tell him all: I would have loved his brown eyes; I would have kissed his white face, but my fate decrees not so. More than one towel have I wet with burning tears. I am sad; I am heavy at heart.

And my own father is my enemy. I will not marry that Pole, whom I do not love. Tell him they are preparing a wedding, but there will be no music at our wedding: ecclesiastics will sing instead of pipes and kobzas.5 I shall not dance with my bridegroom; they will carry me out.

Dark, dark will be my dwelling—of maple wood; and, instead of chimneys, a cross will stand upon the roof."

Petrü stood petrified, without moving from the spot, when the innocent child lisped out Pidürka's words to him. "And I, unhappy man, thought to go to the Crimea and Turkey, win gold and return to thee, my beauty! But it may not be. The evil eye has seen us. I will have a wedding, too, dear little fish, I, too; but no ecclesiastics will be at that wedding. The black crow will caw, instead of the pope, over me; the smooth field will be my dwelling; the dark blue clouds my rooftree. The eagle will claw out my brown eyes; the rain will wash the Cossack's bones, and the whirlwinds will dry them. But what am I? Of whom, to whom, am I complaining? 'Tis plain, God willed it so. If I am to be lost, then so be it!" And he went straight to the tavern.

My late grandfather's aunt was somewhat surprised on seeing Petrus in the tavern, and at an hour when good

men go to morning Mass; and she stared at him as though in a dream, when he demanded a jug of brandy, about half a pailful. But the poor fellow tried in vain to drown his woe. The vodka stung his tongue like nettles and tasted more bitter than wormwood. He flung the jug from him upon the ground. "You have sorrowed enough, Cossack," growled a bass voice behind him. He looked round— Basavriuk! Ugh, what a face! His hair was like a brush, his eyes like those of a bull. "I know what you lack; here it is." Then he jingled a leather purse which hung from his girdle, and smiled diabolically. Petrü shuddered. "He, he, he! Yes, how it shines!"

he roared, shaking out ducats into his hand. "He, he, he! And how it jingles! And I only ask one thing for a whole pile of such shiners."

"It is the Evil One!" exclaimed Petrü: "Give them here! I am ready for anything!"

5 An eight−stringed musical instrument—They struck hands upon it. "See here, Petrü, you are ripe just in time: tomorrow is St. John the Baptist's day. Only on this one night in the year does the fern blossom. Delay not. I will await thee at midnight in the bear's ravine."

I do not believe that chickens await the hour when the woman brings their corn with as much anxiety as Petrus awaited the evening. And, in fact, he looked to see whether the shadows of the trees were not lengthening, if the sun were not turning red toward setting; and, the longer he watched, the more impatient he grew. How long it was! Evidently, God's day had lost its end somewhere. And now the sun is gone. The sky is red only on one side, and it is already growing dark. It grows colder in the fields. It gets dusky, and more dusky, and at last quite dark. At last!

With heart almost bursting from his bosom, he set out on his way and cautiously descended through the dense woods into the deep hollow called the bear's ravine. Basavriuk was already waiting there. It was so dark that you could not see a yard before you. Hand in hand they penetrated the thin marsh, clinging to the luxuriant thornbushes and stumbling at almost every step. At last they reached an open spot. Petrü looked about him; he had never chanced to come there before. Here Basavriuk halted.

"Do you see, before you stand three hillocks? There are a great many sorts of flowers upon them. But may some power keep you from plucking even one of them. But as soon as the fern blossoms, seize it, and look not round, no matter what may seem to be going on behind thee."

Petrü wanted to ask—and behold, he was no longer there. He approached the three hillocks— where were the flowers? He saw nothing. The wild steppe grass darkled around and stifled everything in its luxuriance. But the lightning flashed, and before him stood a whole bed of flowers, all wonderful, all strange; and there were also the simple fronds of fern. Petrü doubted his senses and stood thoughtfully before them, with both hands upon his sides.

"What prodigy is this? One can see these weeds ten times in a day; what marvel is there about them? Was not devil's−face laughing at me?"

Behold! The tiny flower bud crimsons and moves as though alive. It is a marvel, in truth. It moves and grows larger and larger, and flashes like a burning coal. The tiny star flashes up; something bursts softly, and the flower opens before his eyes like a flame, lighting the others about it. "Now is the time," thought Petrü, and extended his hand. He sees hundreds of shaggy hands reach from behind him, also for the flower; and there is a running about from place to place in the rear. He half shut his eyes, plucked sharply at the stalk, and the flower remained in his hand. All became still. Upon a stump sat Basavriuk, all blue like a corpse. He moved not so much as a finger. His eyes were immovably fixed on something visible to him alone; his mouth was half open and speechless. All about, nothing stirred. Ugh! It was horrible! But then a whistle was heard, which made Petrü's heart grow cold within him; and it seemed to him that the grass whispered, and the flowers began to talk among themselves in delicate voices, like little silver bells; the trees rustled in waving contention. Basavriuk's face suddenly became full of life and his eyes sparkled. "The witch has just returned," he muttered between his teeth. "See here, Petrü:

a beauty will stand before you in a moment; do whatever she commands; if not—you are lost forever." Then he parted the thornbush with a knotty stick, and before him stood a tiny izbá, on chicken's legs, as they say. Basavriuk smote it with his fist, and the wall trembled. A large black dog ran out to meet them, and with a whine, transforming itself into a cat, flew straight at his eyes. "Don't be angry, don't be angry, you old Satan!" said Basavriuk, employing such words as would have made a good man stop his ears. Behold, instead of a cat, an old woman with a face wrinkled like a baked apple, and all bent into a bow; her nose and chin were like a pair of nutcrackers. "A stunning beauty!" thought Petrü, and cold chills ran down his back. The witch.tore the flower

from his hand, bent over, and muttered over it for a long time, sprinkling it with some kind of water. Sparks flew from her mouth; froth appeared on her lips.

"Throw it away," she said, giving it back to Petrü.

Petrü threw it, and what wonder was this? The flower did not fall straight to the earth, but for a long while twinkled like a fiery ball through the darkness and swam through the air like a boat; at last it began to sink lower and fell so far away that the little star, hardly larger than a poppy seed, was barely visible. "Here!" croaked the old woman in a dull voice; and Basavriuk, giving him a spade, said, "Dig here, Petrü: here you will find more gold than you or Korzh ever dreamed of."

Petrü spat on his hands, seized the spade, applied his foot, and turned up the earth, a second, a third, a fourth time. . . . There was something hard; the spade clinked and would go no farther.

Then his eyes began to distinguish a small ironbound coffer. He tried to seize it, but the chest began to sink into the earth, deeper, farther, and deeper still; and behind him he heard a laugh, more like a serpent's hiss. "No, you shall not see the gold until you procure human blood," said the witch, and led up to him a child of six, covered with a white sheet, indicating by a sign that he was to cut off his head. Petrü was stunned. A trifle, indeed, to cut off a man's or even an innocent child's head for no reason whatever! In wrath he tore off the sheet enveloping his head, and behold! before him stood Ivas. And the poor child crossed his little hands and hung his head.

. . . Petrü flew upon the witch with the knife like a madman and was on the point of laying hands on her. .

"What did you promise for the girl?" thundered Basavriuk, and like a shot he was on his back.

The witch stamped her foot: a blue flame flashed from the earth; it illumined it all inside, and it was as if molded of crystal; and all that was within the earth became visible, as if in the palm of the hand. Ducats, precious stones in chests and kettles were piled in heaps beneath the very spot they stood on. His eyes burned; his mind grew troubled. . . . He grasped the knife like a madman, and the innocent blood spurted into his eyes. Diabolical laughter resounded on all sides.

Misshaped monsters flew past him in herds. The witch, fastening her hands in the headless trunk, like a wolf, drank its blood. . . . All went round in his head. Collecting all his strength, he set out to run. Everything turned red before him. The trees seemed steeped in blood and burned and groaned. The sky glowed and glowered. . . . Burning points, like lightning, flicked before his eyes. Utterly exhausted, he rushed into his miserable hovel and fell to the ground like a log. A deathlike sleep overpowered him.

Two days and two nights did Petrü sleep, without once awakening. When he came to himself, on the third day, he looked long at all the corners of his hut; but in vain did he endeavor to recollect; his memory was like a miser's pocket, from which you cannot entice a quarter of a kopek. Stretching himself, he heard something clash at his feet. He looked—two bags of gold.

Then only, as if in a dream, he recollected that he had been seeking some treasure, that something had frightened him in the woods. . . . But at what price he had obtained it, and how, he could by no means understand.

Korzh saw the sacks—and was mollified. "Such a Petrus, quite unheard ofl Yes, and did I not love him? Was he not to me as my own son?" And the old fellow carried on his fiction until it reduced him to tears. Pidürka began to tell him some passing Gypsies had stolen Ivas; but Petrü could not even recall him—to such a degree had the Devil's influence darkened his mind! There was no reason for delay. The Pole was dismissed, and the wedding feast prepared; rolls were baked, towels and handkerchiefs embroidered; the young people were seated at table; the wedding loaf was cut; banduras, cymbals, pipes, kobzi sounded, and pleasure was rife. . .

A wedding in the olden times was not like one of the present day. My grandfather's aunt used.to tell—what doings!—how the maidens−in festive headdresses of yellow, blue, and pink ribbons, above which they bound gold braid; in thin chemisettes embroidered on all the seams with red silk, and strewn with tiny silver flowers; in morocco shoes, with high iron heels— danced the gorlitza as swimmingly as peacocks, and as wildly as the whirlwind; how the youths—with their ship−shaped caps upon their heads, the crowns of gold brocade, with a little slit at the nape where the hair net peeped through, and two horns projecting, one in front and an−other behind, of the very finest black lambskin; in kuntushas of the finest blue silk with red borders—stepped forward one by one, their arms akimbo in stately form, and executed the gopak; how the lads−in tall Cossack caps, and light cloth svitkas, girt with silver embroidered belts, their short pipes in their teeth—skipped before them and talked nonsense. Even Korzh could not contain himself, as he gazed at the young people, from getting gay in his

old age.

Bandura in hand, alternately puffing at his pipe and singing, a brandy glass upon his head, the graybeard began the national dance amid loud shouts from the merrymakers. What will not people devise in merry mood! They even began to disguise their faces. They did not look like human beings. They are not to be compared with the disguises which we have at our weddings nowadays. What do they do now? Why, imitate Gypsies and Moscow peddlers. No! Then one used to dress himself as a Jew, another as the Devil; they would begin by kissing each other, and end by seizing each other by the hair. . . . God be with them! You laughed till you held your sides. They dressed themselves in Turkish and Tartar garments. All upon them glowed like a conflagration, and then they began to joke and play pranks. . . . Well, then away with the saints!

An amusing thing happened to my grandfather's aunt, who was at this wedding. She was dressed in a voluminous Tartar robe, and, wineglass in hand, was entertaining the company. The Evil One instigated one man to pour vodka over her from behind. Another, at the same moment, evidently not by accident, struck a light and touched it to her; the flame flashed up; poor aunt, in terror, flung her robe from her, before them all. . . . Screams, laughter, jests arose as if at a fair.

In a word, the old folks could not recall so merry a wedding.

Pidürka and Petrus began to live like a gentleman and lady. There was plenty of everything, and everything was handsome. . . But honest people shook their heads when they looked at their way of living. "From the Devil no good can come, they unanimously agreed. "Whence, except from the tempter of orthodox people, came this wealth? Where else could he get such a lot of gold? Why, on the very day that he got rich, did Basavriuk vanish as if into thin air?" Say, if you can, that people imagine things! In fact, a month had not passed, and no one would have recognized Petrus. Why, what had happened to him? God knows. He sits in one spot and says no word to anyone; he thinks continually and seems to be trying to recall something. When Pidürka succeeds in getting him to speak, he seems to forget himself, carries on a conversation, and even grows cheerful; but if he inadvertently glances at the sacks, "Stop, stop! I have forgotten," he cries, and again plunges into reverie, and again strives to recall something. Sometimes when he has sat long in a place, it seems to him as though it was coming, just coming back to mind . . .

and again all fades away. It seems as if he is sitting in the tavern: they bring him vodka; vodka stings him; vodka is repulsive to him. Someone comes along and strikes him on the shoulder; but beyond that everything is veiled in darkness before him. The perspiration streams down his face, and he sits exhausted in the same place.

What did not Pidürka do? She consulted the sorceress; and they poured out fear and brewed stomach−ache ("To pour out fear" is done with us in case of fear; when it is desired to know what caused it, melted lead or wax is poured into water and the object whose form it assumes is the one which frightened the sick person; after this the fear departs. Sünyashnitza is brewed for.giddiness and pain in the bowels. To this end, a bit of stump is burned, thrown into a jug, and turned upside down into a bowl filled with water, which is placed on the patient's stomach; after an incantation he is given a spoonful of this water to drink)—but all to no avail. And so the summer passed. Many a Cossack had mowed and reaped; many a Cossack, more enterprising than the rest, had set off upon an expedition. Flocks of ducks were already crowding our marshes, but there was not even a hint of improvement.

It was red upon the steppes. Ricks of grain, like Cossacks' caps, dotted the fields here and there. On the highway were to be encountered wagons loaded with brushwood and logs. The ground had become more solid, and in places was touched with frost. Already had the snow begun to besprinkle the sky, and the branches of the trees were covered with rime like rabbitskin.

Already on frosty days the red−breasted finch hopped about on the snow heaps like a foppish Polish nobleman and picked out grains of corn; and children, with huge sticks, chased wooden tops upon the ice, while their fathers lay quietly on the stove, issuing forth at intervals with lighted pipes in their lips, to growl, in regular fashion, at the orthodox frost, or to take the air and thresh the grain spread out in the barn. At last the snow began to melt, and the ice rind slipped away, but Petrü remained the same; and, the longer it went on, the more morose he grew. He sat in the middle of the cottage as though nailed to the spot, with the sacks of gold at his feet. He grew shy; his hair grew long; he became terrible, and still he thought of but one thing; still he tried to recall something and got angry and ill−tempered because he could not recall it. Often, rising wildly from his seat, he gesticulates violently, fixes his eyes on something as though desirous of catching it; his lips move as though desirous of uttering some

long−forgotten word— and remain speechless. Fury takes possession of him: he gnaws and bites his hands like a man half crazy, and in his vexation tears out his hair by the handful, until, calming down, he falls into forgetfulness, as it were, and again begins to recall, and is again seized with fury and fresh tor−tures.

. . . What visitation of God is this?

Pidürka was neither dead nor alive. At first it was horrible to her to remain alone in the cottage; but, in course of time, the poor woman grew accustomed to her sorrow. But it was impossible to recognize the Pidürka of former days. No blush, no smile; she was thin and worn with grief and had wept her bright eyes away. Once, someone who evidently took pity on her advised her to go to the witch who dwelt in the bear's ravine and enjoyed the reputation of being able to cure every disease in the world. She determined to try this last remedy; word by word she persuaded the old woman to come to her. This was St. John's Eve, as it chanced. Petrü lay insen−sible on the bench and did not observe the newcomer. Little by little he rose and looked about him. Suddenly he trembled in every limb, as though he were on the scaffold; his hair rose upon his head, and he laughed such a laugh as pierced Pidürka's heart with fear. "I have remembered, remembered!" he cried in terrible joy; and, swinging a hatchet round his head, he flung it at the old woman with all his might. The hatchet penetrated the oaken door two vershok.6 The old woman disappeared, and a child of seven in a white blouse, with covered head, stood in the middle of the cottage. . . . The sheet flew off. "Ivas!" cried Pidürka, and ran to him; but the apparition became covered from head to foot with blood and illumined the whole room with red light. . . . She ran into the passage in her terror, but, on recovering herself a little, wished to help him; in vain! The door had slammed to behind her so securely that she could not open it. People ran up and began to knock; they broke in the door, as though there were but one mind among them. The whole cottage was full of smoke; and just in the middle, where Petrus had stood, was a heap of ashes, from which smoke was still rising. They flung themselves upon the sacks: only 6 Three−and−one−half inches—broken potsherds lay there instead of ducats. The Cossacks stood with staring eyes and open mouths, not daring to move a hair, as if rooted to the earth, such terror did this wonder inspire in them.

I do not remember what happened next. Pidürka took a vow to go upon a pilgrimage, collected the property left her by her father, and in a few days it was as if she had never been in the village.

Whither she had gone, no one could tell. Officious old women would have dispatched her to the same place whither Petrü had gone, but a Cossack from Kiev reported that he had seen, in a cloister, a nun withered to a mere skeleton, who prayed unceasingly; and her fellow villagers recognized her as Pidürka, by all the signs—that no one had ever heard her utter a word; that she had come on foot and had brought a frame for the icon of God's mother, set with such brilliant stones that all were dazzled at the sight.

But this was not the end, if you please. On the same day that the Evil One made away with Petrus, Basavriuk appeared again; but all fled from him. They knew what sort of bird he was— none else than Satan, who had assumed human form in order to unearth treasures; and, since treasures do not yield to unclean hands, he seduced the young. That same year, all deserted their earth huts and collected in a village; but, even there, there was no peace, on account of that accursed Basavriuk. My late grandfather's aunt said that he was particularly angry with her, because she had abandoned her former tavern, and tried with all his might to revenge himself upon her. Once the village elders were assembled in the tavern, and, as the saying goes, were arranging the precedence at the table, in the middle of which was placed a small roasted lamb, shame to say.

They chattered about this, that, and the other—among the rest about various marvels and strange things. Well, they saw something; it would have been nothing if only one had seen it, but all saw it; and it was this: the sheep raised his head; his goggling eyes became alive and sparkled, and the black, bristling mustache, which appeared for one instant, made a significant gesture at those present. All, at once, recognized Basavriuk's countenance in the sheep's head; my grandfather's aunt thought it was on the point of asking for vodka. . . . The worthy elders seized their hats and hastened home.

Another time, the church starost himself, who was fond of an occasional private interview with my grandfather's brandy glass, had not succeeded in getting to the bottom twice, when he beheld the glass bowing very low to him. "Satan take you, let us make the sign of the cross over you!" .

. . And the same marvel happened to his better half. She had just begun to mix the dough in a huge kneading trough, when suddenly the trough sprang up. "Stop, stop! Where are you going?"

Putting its arms akimbo, with dignity, it went skipping all about the cottage. . . . You may laugh, but it was no

laughing matter to your grandfathers. And in vain did Father Athanasii go through all the village with holy water and chase the Devil through the streets with his brush; and my late grandfather's aunt long complained that, as soon as it was dark, someone came knocking at her door and scratching at the wall.

Well! All appears to be quiet now, in the place where our village stands; but it was not so very long ago—my father was still alive— that I remember how a good man could not pass the ruined tavern, which a dishonest race had long managed for their own interest. From the smoke−blackened chimneys smoke poured out in a pillar, and rising high in the air, as if to take an observation, rolled off like a cap, scattering burning coals over the steppe; and Satan (the son of a dog should not be mentioned) sobbed so pitifully in his lair that the startled ravens rose in flocks from the neighboring oakwood and flew through the air with wild cries.