

OLESYA

It was a long time ago. It was then, when our ground was trampled by Turks and Tatars, and Ukrainian hetmans went with the Cossacks to struggle from enemies.

There was a small village in Volyn. It was hidden in the ravine. It was surrounded by forest. There were simple people, farmers in the village. If there were not Tatars assaults, their life could be better. This village was often assailed by Tatars. They looted, burned and destroyed villages. Old and small people were killed by them, and young were taken to the captive and sold as slaves to do hard work of Turks. Sometimes Tatars banished from Ukraine thousands of people.

And this village had to endure disaster, but still only once. The village was hidden in the woods and it was not easy to find.

A small hut stood on the edge of the village. There was a bountiful garden. Bees hummed in the garden . There was an apiary.

An old man Danilo lived in the house. Being a cossack, he was in the Turkish captivity, but was released from there. But now he was living at home and working in a bee-garden. His wife died a long time ago. He took two orphans: a girl and a boy-hopper Mikhailik. Olesya was already an impressive girl of sixteen years old.

Grandfather was happy with the children, and the children were happy with him. Children loved the way the grandfather spoke to them. He told them about Turkish and Tatar bondage. Grandfather was sitting in the apiary, doing something, a rake or something else. Misha-grasshopper was also doing something there, and Olesya was sitting with the sewing. The sun was shining, the birds were tweeting, bees were buzzing. Here Mikhailik says:

— Tell me, grandpa, about the Turkish captivity!

And grandpa:

Yeah, I already told you — you've already heard this story. Again and again, aren't you enough?

And Mikhailik and Olesya:

— More, more, grandpa! So good to hear!

And grandfather begins to talk, and children listen with interest and their eyes are bring with him. Olesya bowes her black-haired head on his hand, and Misha-grasshopper no longer jumps, he's also sitting, hearing. The grandfather is telling about his being in a Turkish prison:

—Three years I spent in a Turkish prison, chained to the one place. So for the lower back taken by the chain nailed. You can sit, stand, and lie down, but can not leave. The prison was the ship. There we rowed with oars, driving the vessel. And for that our bare backs got harsh walloping with nagai and red colored meadowsweet by ship watchers.

—And the blood flowed? — screams Mikhailik.

— Yes it was — says the grandfather.

— I would have them all killed, those damned Tatars and Turks! — screamed the boy, clenching his fists. Olesya didn't say anything, but all her face was pale. And grandfather continues:

— I was crippled well in those times. And basurmans fed us bad: moldy biscuits and stinking water. All the strength had left me because of the life I had, I was also chopped a little bit when was taken to the captivity. Well, cossacks set me free — I was not able to fight anymore. I came back home. Here I and your parents had met: and your, Olesya, and your, Misha. You were neighbors. But Misha then was very young — two years old he was. And you, Olesya, for like seven years was, and you've already knew how to run quickly. You lived beautifully. When the Tatars came to assault our home... What can I say? We have fought furiously, and did nothing. The village was burnt down by Tatars, many people were killed or were taken as prisoners. And some lucky people ran from this disaster, but came back and started to rebuild here again. Something heavy hit me on the head. I felt down. But I didn't die, I awaked at night. I saw the moon shining, it was clear... Quiet everywhere. When I looked around, I was among the ruins of our village, and corpses were around me, corpses... The morning came. I went among corpses and found you, Misha. You were crying near the dead mother. There was also your father with a split head.

— Damn! Oh damned! — screamed Mikhailik.

—And there were your father and mother, Olesya, dead... I have found you in the woods later. You ran there somehow... That's all...

Grandfather was silent. Olesya sat, without movings. Her face was pale and eyes were full of fire. Grandfather looked at Olesya and swayed his head:

—Hey! Hey!- he said. — I've upset you, my darling. But what to do! It is impossible to live without sorrow. Do not grieve, dear children, your parents died with a good death, defending their territory. Every man needs to protect his native land from every enemy, without sparing their lives.

—Yeah, without sparing their lives!.. — said the girl quietly and started thinking more stronger .

It was Sunday, Olesya and Misha decided to go to the forest for berries, and grandfather said:

— Watch out, kids, be further from swamp or that would be trouble.

There was a huge swamp in the forest. Not local people sometimes got on it, and drowned. Grandfather was worried about children. Olesya said:

—Don't worry, grandpa, don't we know?

And Misha-grasshopper in a tiny voice:

— Of course we do!

Kids took the pitchers and went out. Grandfather followed them with eyes. Mikhailik said:

— Olesya-sister! Let's go to the other side of the forest.

The wood could not be crossed because of swamp. And it was too far to go around, about six miles. Olesya said:

— But it's far.

— So what, — told Misha, — but there are a lot of berries. Come on, honey!

— All right! — said Olesya.

And they went. They didn't do into the woods, they went by the edge of it. There was a huge old, dark forest on the one side. And on the other side there was a steppe.

The girl and the guy went very fast. Already five miles away from home they passed. When Misha screamed:

— Look, Olesya, what's that?

Olesya looked. People were traveling through the steppe. All of them were on horseback. They weren't Ukrainians. Peaked caps could be seen from afar. These caps were not of ours. Olesya had heard a lot of things from her grandfather. She recognized those people — it was the Tatars.

Tatars! They arrived in Ukraine to burn out the villages, to kill and to pick up people in slavery. They will see children and take them away. Olesya grabbed Misha by the arm and silently dragged him into the bushes.

— What is it? What? — asked Mikhailik.

— Shut up! Tatars!

Mikhailik numbed. He was so embraced by fear, that he couldn't say a word. Olesya saw from behind the bushes that Tatars went just into the wood, they were turning their heads in perplexity. They were looking for the village. Some more time and they will find it. What will happen then?

The village will be lit, people will be killed. And grandpa will be killed!.. My God!..I Need to run, I must say!..

But Tatars were riding horses, they would reach faster than she ran. If they just lingered here! And how to do it, how it could be done?

Poor Olesya's heart was suffering. And the Tatars rode closer and closer. Their faces could be even seen.. And Olesya has decided immediately. She grabbed Mikhailik by the shoulder:

—Brother, you need to run home, and tell grandpa that tatars are going to the village. Do you understand?..

And she trotted him on the shoulder. He woke up and looked at the girl.

— Run or our grandfather will be killed.

— And what about you? — asked the guy.

Olesya pushed him, saying:

—I know what I'll do, don't be afraid. We have no time, you need to run fast!

The guy did not think any longer. He rushed into the forest and ran with all his strength.

Olesya was left alone. She still stood for a few minutes. Her face was pale. But she wasn't afraid. She came out from behind the bush and went near the forest not in the direction where her village was.

She went like unaware of Tatars. But the Tatars had to see her. They rushed to her. Olesya screamed and ran struggled on. And she ran for a long time. Tatars caught up with her at one moment, someone was screaming, and they were about thirty people. They stopped and started whispering among themselves. And then a taller one approached to the girl. He tried to speak Ukrainian, but so bad that Olesya barely understood what he had said.

— Good girl! Good girl! We're not gonna hurt you, we will let you go, you need only tell us where is the village?

Olesya said:

— Behind the forest. Go through the forest — and the village will be on the other side.

And Tatar to her:

— You have to hold us through the forest, because we don't know the road.

Olesya said:

— I will hold.

And the Tatar again:

—Don't joke with us and don't try to run, because then you see this!

He took a sharp curved sword and waved it in front of the girl's eyes.

— Do you see that? — head off!

I see! — said Olesya.

Olesya received a noose around her neck. High Tatar took the lasso in his hand, let the girl walk ahead of his horse and said:

— Lead!

Olesya led.

But she went not in the direction where Mikhailik was running. She's walked a bit around the woods, then she found a path which ran into the woods from the wilderness, and went through it. Tatars went behind. The forest becomes thicker. Olesya led the enemy right in the middle of the forest, right to the swamp.

She thought:

"Did Misha get home? Did he say to grandpa? Oh, I need to lead them more, until Misha gets home!"

And she walked quietly, sometimes rolled to the side, then back again. Tatars were angry, while the highest shouted:

— Why are you tangling us? Lead well, or here! And he showed his hand with his sword. The girl said:

— But now the forest ends, there will be the village.

And led on. The forest had become terribly thick. But Olesya knew it well. She had often come here to pick mushrooms, berries. She knew where the bog is. A small strip of firm land whistles into the quagmire. Olesya took the Tatars there. The swamp couldn't be seen behind the trees. Everything was dark and the forest was such that only someone who knew it, could get out of there without being locked into a swamp. Tatars also did not know the forest.

Tall Tatar screamed:

— Why have you stopped? Lead!

The girl turned to the enemies. The dark eyes were burning on her pale face. She looked in the eyes of the enemy and said quietly:

— I will not go further.

Tatar drove up to her, showed his sword to her and abused. The girl grinned:

— I can't lead you on, even if you will kill me. I have brought you, my enemies, to this forest and you will not come out of here.

At the same moment knife flashed in the Tatar's hand and hit the girl into the chest. She felt to the ground. Her head was bent, and the pure soul left the body. Tatar spat on it, and all enemies were turned back.

Misha, meanwhile, got home. He said that there were Tatars and nobody knows how many are coming there. People abandoned everything and ran into the wood. Grandfather Danylo thought that he will find Olesya there.

People spent all day in the wood. Then they became starving. On the second day they had to go back. One guy was sent to watch around in the village. The guy came back and said that there is everything okey in the village. People realized that the Tatars were spared, and began returning back home.

But Olesya was not there. Grandfather Danylo asked several people, and all forearmed, went to look for her in the wood. Misha led them to the place where he left her.

There Tatar's traces were found. With help of the tracks they came in a wooded forest. They were going for a long while, until they saw Tatar's horses that stucked in the swamp. Tatars were not there. Apparently, they came out of the horses and sunk in the mud.

Grandfather Danylo went ahead. He saw Olesya first. She laid dead. Tatar's lasso was on her neck.

Then Danylo and all the people realized that her death saved their native village.

People made a barrow from branches and carried deary body home.

* * *

The next day they buried her. Girl-friends carried the coffin. There was Olesya in it, dressed like a young princess. A wreath was on her head. Birds were singing around, the sun was shining at the top. And she lay quiet, relaxed. It seemed that her face was happy.

Yes, she could be happy.

Sobbing, held her to the cold pit; sobbing, covered with earth. Not the only one grandfather Danylo cried, cried everyone: old and young, men and women, and girls-friends.

But as was thrown on the grave the last shovel of earth, grandfather Danylo looked up. He was no longer crying. His face was respectful. He stretched out his hand over the grave and said:

— Everyone needs to protect their native land, not sparing their lives! God bless every such death!

ОЛЕСЯ

Це було давно: тоді, як нашу землю шарпали турки й татари, а гетьмани українські ходили одбиватись од ворогів. Татари грабували, палили й руйнували села, вбивали людей, брали їх у полон і продавали туркам у тяжку неволю.

У невеличкому селі на Волині жили прості люди-хлібороби. Довелося зазнати лиха і цьому селу, але тільки один раз, бо село заховалось у лісі і знайти його було важко. Край села у хатці жив старий дід Данило, колишній козак, що був колись у турецькій неволі, але визволився відтіля. Тепер він пасічникував. Жінка його давно вмерла, і він прийняв до себе двох дітей-сиріт: дівчинку Олесю років шістнадцяти і хлопчика-стрибунця Михайлика. Вони були щасливі разом. Діти любили слухати оповіді діда, і просили, сидячи в садку, щоб він ще й ще розповів про турецьку й татарську неволю. І дід Данило розповідав, як був він на турецькій каторзі на кораблі прикований до місця ланцюгом: встати можна, і лягти, і сидіти, а піти — ні. І гребли вони веслами, женучи суднину. А за ними дивився наглядчак і полосував голі спина нагаями та колючою червоною таволгою, щоб швидше гребли. І кров текла. Годували погано: цвілими сухарями та смердючою водою. Покалічено старого тоді добре було та ще й порубано, як у бран брата. То як визволили козаки — не здатний був уже козакувати. А батьки і Михайлика, і Олесі були сусідами дідовими у селі. Набігла якось татарва... Діти ще малі були: Олесі — сім років, а Михайлику — зо два. Одбивались селяни завзято, та нічого не вдіяли. Село татари спалили, багато людей в полон забрали, багато повбивали. А дехто повтікав. Оті втікачі повернулись сюди потім та й знову тут побудувались. А старого чимсь по голові вдарено було, він упав, а як вночі отямився — побачив, що круг нього люди лежать, пішов він між трупами та й знайшов Михайлика коло мертвої матері. І батько лежав тут з розрубаною головою. І Олесині батьки були тут же мертві. А саму Олесю знайшов пізніше у лісі. Якось вона туди забігла.

Олеся сидить і не ворухнеться, доки дід розповідає. Обличчя в неї бліде, в очах палає якийсь вогонь.

— Не журіться, діточки, — каже дід, — ваші батьки полягли доброю смертю, рідний край боронячи. Кожен чоловік повинен боронити від ворога рідний край, не жаліючи свого життя.

— Не жаліючи свого життя!.. — промовить дівчина тихо і замислиться ще дужче, і довго замислена ходить.

Одного разу в неділю пішли діти в ліс по ягоди. У лісі було величезне болото-багновище. Іноді, не знаючи, набреде на нього людина та й утопне. Дід боявся, щоб з дітьми нічого не трапилось, і застерігав ходити до болота. Перейти ліс не можна було, бо там болото, а обходити далеко — верстов шість. Та було там багато ягід. Пішли діти на другий бік лісу.

Одійшли вже далеко від дому і побачили чужих людей, що їхали верхи. Олеся пізнала тих людей — це були татари. Вони шукали село. А як знайдуть, то спалять, людей повбивають. Треба бігти, треба сказати!.. Але ж татари їдуть кіньми: вони доїдуть швидше, ніж вона добіжить. Треба їх тут загаяти. Олеся послала Михайлика в село попередити дідуся, що татари їдуть, а сама вийшла з лісу і пішла в другий бік од села. Ішла так, мовби не бачила татар. Але татари її побачили, наздогнали і сказали, щоб провела їх до села. Тільки щоб не одурила, бо вб'ють. Накинули їй на ший аркан і пустили поперед себе. Олеся повела. Вона знайшла стежку, що бігла зо степу, і пішла нею. Татари їхали за нею. Ліс густішав. Олеся вела ворогів прямо в середину лісу, де було болото. Вона добре знала ліс, бо часто ходила сюди по гриби та ягоди. Невеличка смужка твердої землі вела у драговину. Туди дівчина і повела татар. Навкруги була така пуща, що тільки хто добре знав ліс, міг вийти відціля. Тут зупинилася, повернулася до татар, глянула ворогам у вічі і тихо промовила:

— Я не поведу вас далі, хоч би ви й убили мене. Я вас, вороги, завела в цей ліс, і ви не вийдете відціль.

Тієї ж миті ніж блиснув у татарській руці і вдарив дівчину в груди. Як билина підрізана, впала вона-додолу, головонька схилилась, і чиста душа покинула тіло. Татари повернули назад.

А Михайлик тим часом добіг додому. Він сказав, що татар хтозна-скільки. Люди покидали все і потікали в ліс. День просиділи у лісі, далі їм не стало харчів, вони послали двох парубків подивитись, що в селі. Парубки повернулись і сказали, що в селі все ціле. Люди зрозуміли, що татари їх обминули, і почали вертатись додому. Дід Данило попрохав декілька чоловік, і всі, озброївшись, гуртом шукали Олесю в лісі. Михайлик привів їх до того місця, де він покинув Олесю. Тут знайшли татарські сліди і по тих слідах пройшли у лісову пущу. Татар не було, лише коні, що позагрузали в болоті. А татари, мабуть, позлазили та й потопли у багнюці. Дід Данило перший побачив Олесю. Вона лежала мертва. На шиї у неї був татарський аркан. Зрозуміли всі, що своєю смертю вона врятувала рідне село.

Другого дня ховали Олесю. Вона лежала в труні тиха й спокійна, убрана, як молода княгиня. Здавалось, що на обличчі в неї сяяла якась радість. Ридаючи провели її до ями, ридаючи засипали землею. Плакали всі: і старі, і малі, і чоловіки, і жінки, і подруги-дівчата.

Але як кинули на могилку останню лопату землі, дід Данило підвів голову, простяг руки над могилкою і сказав:

— Кожен повинен боронити свій рідний край, не жаліючи життя! Дай, Боже, всякому такої смерті!

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