

Oles Berdnyk

THE HEART OF MATIGLA





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Казки та легенди «Серце Матіоли» – це спроба відомого українського письменника-фантаста Олеся Бердника повернутися в правічне річище народної мудрості, де простими словами та образами передаються найскладніші філософські поняття, а за дитячими сюжетами приховуються болючі роздуми мислителя про вічні проблеми людства.

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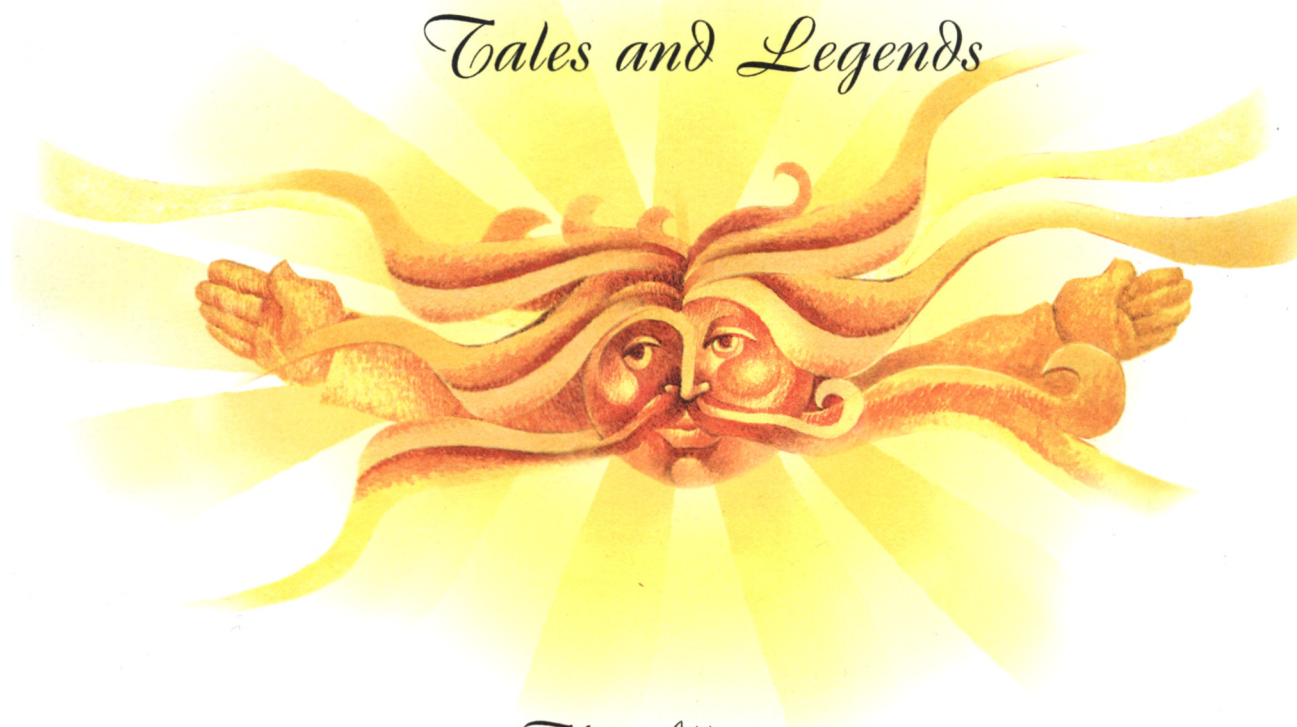
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Oles Berdnyk

THE HEART OF MATIGLA

Tales and Legends



*The Illustrations
of Sergey Lukiyanyenko*



Kiev—2007





THE LEGEND OF PALM



ong ago there was a sheik living in a desert who practiced sorcery. He got his magic power from the awesome Lord of the Sands that lived somewhere in the very heart of the waterless kingdom. Nor a nomad or shepherd knew what he was doing there, neither anybody wished to know – so great was the horror of the dreadful lord of the burning whirlwinds, in the image of which the Lord of the Sands appeared sometimes around the sheik's palace.

There was a sheik's harem, but he didn't love his women. He had the only daughter from the first beloved wife, who died when giving birth to a child. Strict did the sheik brought up the girl, teaching her magic. And then was the fair princess fifteen. That day the Lord of the Sands came to the sheik and demanded from his disciple the hand of his only daughter.

Gorgeous festivities began the sheik in the name of his guest. He made wonders to the teacher and other folks invited: frightening monsters from the thin air which fought one another, enchanted spouts and thunders, which terrified servants and soldiers, made wrestlers kill

one another and then returned them to life with his spells. The Lord of the Sands watched that indulgently, smiling in approval.

Then the daughter showed her magic skills. But she didn't ruin anything, she created flowers, beautiful birds and butterflies, made invisible musicians play charming songs that touched the soul. Father frowned, glancing at the teacher, as if apologizing for girl's whims, but the Lord of the Sands nodded approvingly, thus calming the sheik.

— When she'd live with me, — he smiled, — I'll teach her how to destroy...



And there was a handsome young soldier among the guests. From the first sight he fell in love with the black-eyed princess and completely lost self-control, seeing wonders of her kind heart. The girl also noted the goodly guy.

When the guests went home, under the night stars the man and the girl met each other, burning with love. But their joy didn't last long: they were traced and caught. Sheik ordered to enchain the young man and imprison him into the deathly tower. In the name of the Lord of the Sands the judgment was called: to execute the impudent soldier, as he dared touch the princess.

But the girl, using her magic, got to her lover in the night. They made their way out of the tower, got the horses and run into the desert to come to the sea and sail into the lands, where nobody knew them.

The guard set alarm, the enraged sheik with his soldiers chased the lovers. Gloomy, Lord of the Sands accompanied him.

The exhausted runaways were overtaken among the red-hot barchans. The lovers stood in the ring of merciless chasers, holding each other tight.

— What were you waiting for? — asked the Lord of the Sands, surprised. — And you, princess, why did you neglected my love? In the name of what?

— I fell in love with this brave man, — answered the girl bravely. — You proposed only evil and desert to me. And my only one granted the joy of love to me.

— What joy? — exclaimed the Lord of the Sands in astonishment. — What can he do — this fool? Smoke over the sands — that is his love! Only the desert exists, nothing else! All the other is only a dream. You'll learn it — just look!

He held his hand out powerfully to the young man. He turned into stone in his lover's eyes, turned into a rock. But his eyes looked at the princess with love and tenderness even when the lasts movements of life went out in them.

— That is your love! — laughed the Lord of the Sands malevolently, and even the sheik shivered in awe. — My desert will reign the world for ever!

Suddenly a clear spring burst from under the rock, and in the rays of the burning sun sparkled joyfully the rainbow.

— You are won, — exclaimed the girl happily. — You are conquered, good-for-nothing Lord of the Death! My lover's heart brings life to the world even in the stone form. You will never break us apart!



And she pronounced the fair spell of love. Chasers watched her thin body turning into a tall beautiful palm: her roots bathed in the cool spring. The Lord of the Sands roared with rage and turned into a black spout from sky to ground, trying to cover with sands the clear spring and the palm, but the more he raged, the stronger was the spring, and the taller and more shadowy became the palm.

Thus the lovers' hearts created in the middle of the hottest desert the first oasis and the hope that once the deathly sands would disappear in the whole word, giving way to life and love.





WILLOW AND THE WATER KING



nce upon a time there lived a girl of an unusual beauty. Lots of young and elderly men proposed her heart, wealth and glory, gained in wars or in hard work. But the girl refused them all only because she was in love with her beauty, always looked at herself in the mirror and repeated with sorrow:

— Would really once disappear such a wonder? Would the eyebrows fade, the eyes lose colour, the skin wrinkle and I would be a hunchback molly?

And when the suitors came, she demanded:

— Give me the eternal beauty, then would I love you. Whoever would gain the secret of an unfading beauty, that one would be my only.

Went the suitors in every part of the world, searching for youth potion for narcissistic young lady. Everywhere had they been: in alchemists' caves, in faraway lands, in enchanted homes, but nowhere could they found the potion. Lot of them lost their lives in far lands.

Once sat the girl by the lake, looked in the mirror of water, admiring herself, and combed her magnificent hair. And the Water King fell in love with her. He swam out of





the deep, cautiously neared the beautiful girl, so as not to frighten her, and gently called her, sighing:

— Do not frighten me, ye beauty! I am the Water King!

With fogged eyes looked she at the scaly shoulders, at the green hair, and nodded friendly:

— I've seen such folks, Water King! Many a suitor wooed me. You are even handsome, comparing with some of them. I do not frighten you, say, what do you want?

— I have fallen in love with you, girl, strongly and forever. Never have I met such beauty, nor among my nymphs, neither among those girls that bath in my kingdom. Be my wife, I will make you the queen of the water world. Everything will I do for you, anything you wish, for great a force have I!..

The girl gave a start.

— Can you do everything?

— Yes! Command!

— Wonderful, — said the girl enthusiastically, though thinking to fool the water lord. — I will be yours, but... make so, that for ever my beautiful image would reflect in the mirror of your waters, that from year to year would it be more and more beautiful...

Frowned the king, thoughtfully. He understood, that the girl gave him a tricky order, fooled him. Be forever young, be reflected in the lake and together with that not to go to him? But the word was spoken, the dignity of the water lord didn't allow him to take it back.

— Be it as you wish, — sighed the king. — Your wonderful image would be ever reflected in this lake, but you will be a willow — a beautiful and thoughtful tree. I will kiss your roots, bathing in my waters, will caress your green hair with mighty waves...

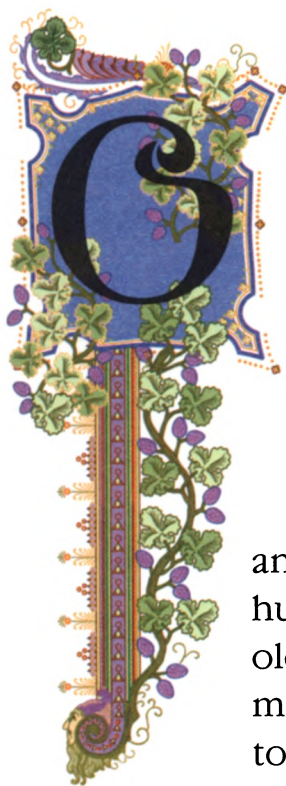
Thus a new fair tree appeared in our land — a willow...







CACTUS AND THE PURPLE BIRD



Once upon a time the cactus didn't have flowers. It was a poisonous plant, thorny, with an unpleasant smell. When the Andean people wanted to reproach someone, they said with a friendly warning:

— Fear that the life spirit wouldn't make you a cactus in future!

And the most terrible curse was such:

— Be you a cactus!

So that, in those long ago times there lived a poor girl of an unseen beauty in the mountains. Wooed her a young hunter, hunting for all the game in the mountains, and an old priest – rich and evil sorcerer, who had in the Andean mountains the castle and many servants. They both wanted to marry her. One could propose her youth and love, and the other – incredible wealth and power over the people. She had loved the hunter for a long time, but did not dare tell that anyone, besides she bewared the sorcerer. And finally the girl pronounced:

— I will be the wife to that one, who would catch the Purple Bird.



Went the suitors to look for that legendary wonder. A few people were lucky to see the rare creature, and no one had ever caught it. They said, to that who would get the Purple Bird, the fortune would bring numerous gifts. A long while lasted the search, but after all the young hunter found the legendary creature in the highest mountain of Andean. Set her into a cage and went along a path in the mountains, singing a song of joy. Suddenly from behind a rock appeared the priest, his eyes burning in jealousy and madness, bony hands trembling.

— Give me the Bird! – demanded he.

— Oh really! – smiled the hunter. – You wish to get yourself glory and wife from my hands? It won't happen! I love the beauty boundlessly, and she would be mine!

— No, she wouldn't! – cried the priest fiercely, speaking the awful spell. – Be cursed and become a cactus!

As if stricken with lightning stoned the young man. His body turned green, covered in thorns. The cage with a wonder-bird fell onto the ground. The priest caught his game and laughed.

— Stay here forever, you poisonous thorn! – You would never be a man again. Only that somebody would recognize you in this fearful form. But it won't happen, I won't let it happen, because the curse would then fall on me...

With those words the sorcerer went into the valley. He came to the girl, showed the bird. She hung her beautiful head down, tears appeared in her eyes. But what could she do, as she agreed to be a wife to that one, who would bring her the Purple Bird. She gathered her things

and went with the sorcerer to mountains to her new place. On the steep path the contended priest stopped, showing the miserable dried cactus, burning in the hot sun.

— Do you like this poisonous plant? — he asked malignantly. — Doesn't it remind somebody to you?

The girl looked in alarm, and she felt pity to a lonesome cactus. Suddenly the plant moved, between the thorns appeared a ripe bud, broke up, and a giant pink flower shone in the sun.

— It's he, it's he! — cried the girl, astonished, and burst to the cactus. — It's my lover! Even in this form he prepared the best present to me!

As soon as these words sounded, the thorny cactus disappeared. Wiping his eyes, the young hunter stood in front of the beautiful girl. At the same moment a black whirl came from the Andean, caught the sorcerer and throw him into an abyss. Thus the curse fallen upon that who had spoken it. And the young man and a girl, setting the Purple Bird free, came back to their poor hut, where joy and love awaited them... Since that time, cactuses delight the world with the most wonderful flowers: white, red, pink, golden. Disappeared either the poison of that plant, and the thirsty wonderer may get fine cool moisture from their flesh...





THE TALE OF THE THORN WALL



nce upon a time there lived a khan in a step land, the lord of the nomads. He had a young daughter. She loved horses, limitless steps and mad ride. Even her father, brave warrior and experienced rider, feared sometimes, watching her irresistible races with young men that fought for victory on celebration days. Almost always the horse of khan's daughter won the greatest racers.

From dawn till sunset she rushed on her favourite black horse through the fields, only sometimes resting upon a high old grave. She stood there for hours, looking into the wild and dreaming of something.

Once she met a guy near the grave, a sheep shepherd. He was a thin, strong, keen-eyed young man. His look went through the girl's heart.

Since that day they were always together. He played her sad tunes with his flute, and their sounds called her to the mysterious land of untrue dreams, where there exist nor lords, neither slaves. The girl looked still in his sky-blue eyes, as if wishing to flow into the land of his hopes.

And the young man felt warm and alarmed by the look of her sun-like golden eyes.

But the khan's servants traced the lovers. They told everything to their lord, and he ordered to catch the shepherd, bind him to a column and beat him pitiless in the eyes of all the people. The princess also saw how her lover was tortured on the square, but, biting her lips into blood, kept silence. Only in the depth of her eyes the fire of madness began to glow.

The shepherd was unbound and left in the step, beaten, helpless. She slinked to him, cured his wounds, moistened his face in tears, gave him healing koumiss to drink. The khan's servants traced her again, caught and set the guard, so that she couldn't leave the castle on her wish. And the shepherd was turned into the wilderness, where only jackals, wild horses and wolves lived.

He wandered about the deserted step like a mad, sang weird songs, played his flute and constantly tried to get near the khan's palace. They set dogs on him, mocked at him, called him insane. And for his daughter the khan ordered to build a stone tower on the mountain slope. And, moreover, to surround it with a ferry thorny wall. For three months the smiths forged that terrible hedge. The khan was glad: now the mad shepherd won't be able to get to his daughter!

But once on the dawn everybody saw that the shepherd began to climb the thorny wall. Servants tried to set him off, but the khan ordered not to bother him. Let that insane die in everybody's eyes!

It was hard to climb up the hedge, the young man tore his hands and legs with the metal thorns. Stunning of hor-

ror and sympathy, the princess watched him from the prison window. Weakened, wavered the shepherd and his chest fell onto an iron edge. Blood shone in the morning sun rays. The girl cried like a bird and desperately rushed down to her lover. And got numbed by him.

The lord groaned in horror, but it was too late. Suddenly the people saw in astonishment, that the iron hedge turned into a wall of green bush covered with white fragrant flowers. Thus the great love of a man and a girl turned even the dead iron into an unseen wonder, giving the beauty of a hardy step plant to the following generations. That is what the old people tell about the appearance of thorns on earth...







THE FLOWER OF FERN



ong ago there lived happy, joyful and never dying people in the world. They could easily change their forms – turned from the man's form into animal or plant. If you wanted to be an eagle – grow yourself wings and fly, if you wished to bloom like a rose – ask mother-Earth for such a gift and bloom for joy of your and people's.

But the Evilgod, who sew so many dark seeds into the world, envied the fair creatures too much and divided them into men and women. In the nature itself the disagreement and hatred appeared, in the woods and plains roared predators, in the air rose clouds of gnat and mosquitoes longing for blood.

But even then people learned to find their halves and join into a sole creature. Was it so.

When the Evilgod divided the folks of our world into men and women, on everyone's chest was left an open space, through which one could see the heart, which wasn't asleep even in the nighttime. When meeting the dear part, the heart burst into rainbow flames and longed to re-join into a sole creature. Then the lord of the darkness ordered to close the heart's opening already in the childhood, so that

people shouldn't even listen to what happens in their hearts. Meanwhile went out the love in the world, up to that everybody forgot the time when never dying people lived in the world.

But once a boy was born in the faraway mountains, Vir was his name. His parents didn't ever went down into the valleys, that is why the Evilgod's servants couldn't close in time the opening, through which the flaming heart shone. When Vir grew up, he left the mountains and went into the open world.

The darkness servants were alarmed and began to keep an eye on the boy. And he went from one village to another, looking for at least one creature with an open heart.

Days went by. Years went by. All searches were vane. Not a light on the limitless spaces.

And then the boy began to come into the houses, where children were born, whose chests the Evilgod's servants hadn't closed yet. Thus he met a little girl on the name Nadijka: her heart flashed to him. As soon as Vir took Nadijka in his hands, they became a sole powerful creature, and the darkness servants couldn't step to the Flame Heart.

The Evilgod was afraid that his intentions might not come true. He decided to commit even worst evil. All the world he divided into two: one was that where we live in, and the other – that our grandparents and ancestors called the “world of rahmans”, that is sunny people. Different flowers, trees, animals, birds, insects live there; people may see them only in their dreams.

There, to the world of rahmans, the Evilgod turned the Flame Heart, the creature, which appeared of Vir and

Nadijka. But the lord of the darkness didn't reckon that the Flame Heart took with him a root of fern. From that time that ancient plant grows in both the worlds. That is why the lovers who search the unseen love go to the Kupala night to the deep forest, they may see a flaming flower of fern; thus from the world of "rahmans" shines the Flame Heart. And if the searcher would be lucky to touch his chest with the flower (despite all the dark forces), such a person gains sight after all.

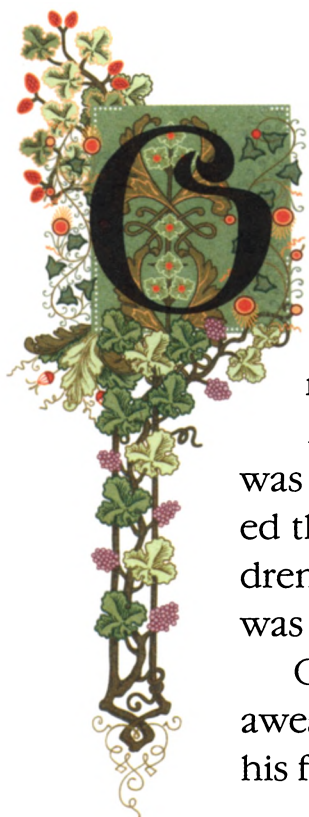
Only ignorant say that the flower of fern gives an ability to search underground gold, jewels and other treasures. Oh no! Such a fortunate gains a sight of true treasures of wisdom and love...







THE LEGEND OF FIR



nce our earth was deserted and unfriendly. There were no forests, no bird's songs, no fish in the rivers, the bright flowers did not bloom. Fearful Marakara, the spirit of darkness and death, reigned in the world. Under his power in the lightless abyss lived shadows, miserable and speechless. They served Marakara.

And in the heaven gardens, in the land of sun Yarylo, it was joyful and freely, easy and sorrowless. The songs sounded there, the careless creatures lived there – birds and children, flying flowers and speaking fish. The major in that land was the sun son Yarovyt.

Once he looked down the limitless spaces and saw the awesome kingdom of Marakara. He was very sad and said to his father Yarylo:

— My fair father, shouldn't we share our joy with the dark abyss of Marakara? No good being joyful when someone in the world suffers. Let's give the inhabitants of the dark kingdom life and joy..

— My son, — sighed Yarylo, — centuries have passed since I send rays of life to the abyss of Marakara, but everything is dead there, nothing moves. The lord of darkness doesn't accept the seeds of love...



— Then I'll go there myself, — promised Yarovytt to himself. — I'll propose Marakara to seed his world with flowers and trees, living hearts and songs. Let the lonesome shadows be people.

— Well, — agreed Yarylo, — your will is sacred, for it wants kindness. Go, my son, to where your heart calls.

Yarovytt rushed to the fearsome abyss, followed by his friends — flowers, butterflies, birds, fish and children. But on the edge of the dark abyss Marakara himself appeared behind them, frowned, looking at the passenger from the fair land.

— What do you want from me? — he asked severely.

— I want to present your land the treasures of heart, — smiled Yarovytt. — I want to seed the land with flowers, trees, herbs. Let the fish swim in the waters, birds and butterflies fly in the air.

— And you would be the lord? — asked Marakara sarcastically.

— Oh no, it's my present to you!

— All right! — suddenly agreed the lord of darkness. — Come into my kingdom. Live here. And let your friends live. But stay with them until at least one flower would bloom here.

— I will! — agreed Yarovytt.

— But before you come in, — Marakara didn't stop, — leave at the gate of my world your power and treasures. Be a simple man. Only on that condition you may live in my kingdom.

— Let it be! — agreed the prince gladly.

— Then come in!





Rushed into the abyss birds and children, fish and flowers, butterflies and bees, herbs and trees. Yarovytt also entered the dark land, having left to Marakara the sunny beads, fire lightings, heaven jewels that gave the ability to foresee, be powerful, travel in space and time. The prince became a simple man.

The earthly abyss burst in life. The deserts bloomed, covered in herbs and woods, birds flew into the sky, children laughed in the first villages, lakes, seas, rivers and oceans filled with colourful fish.

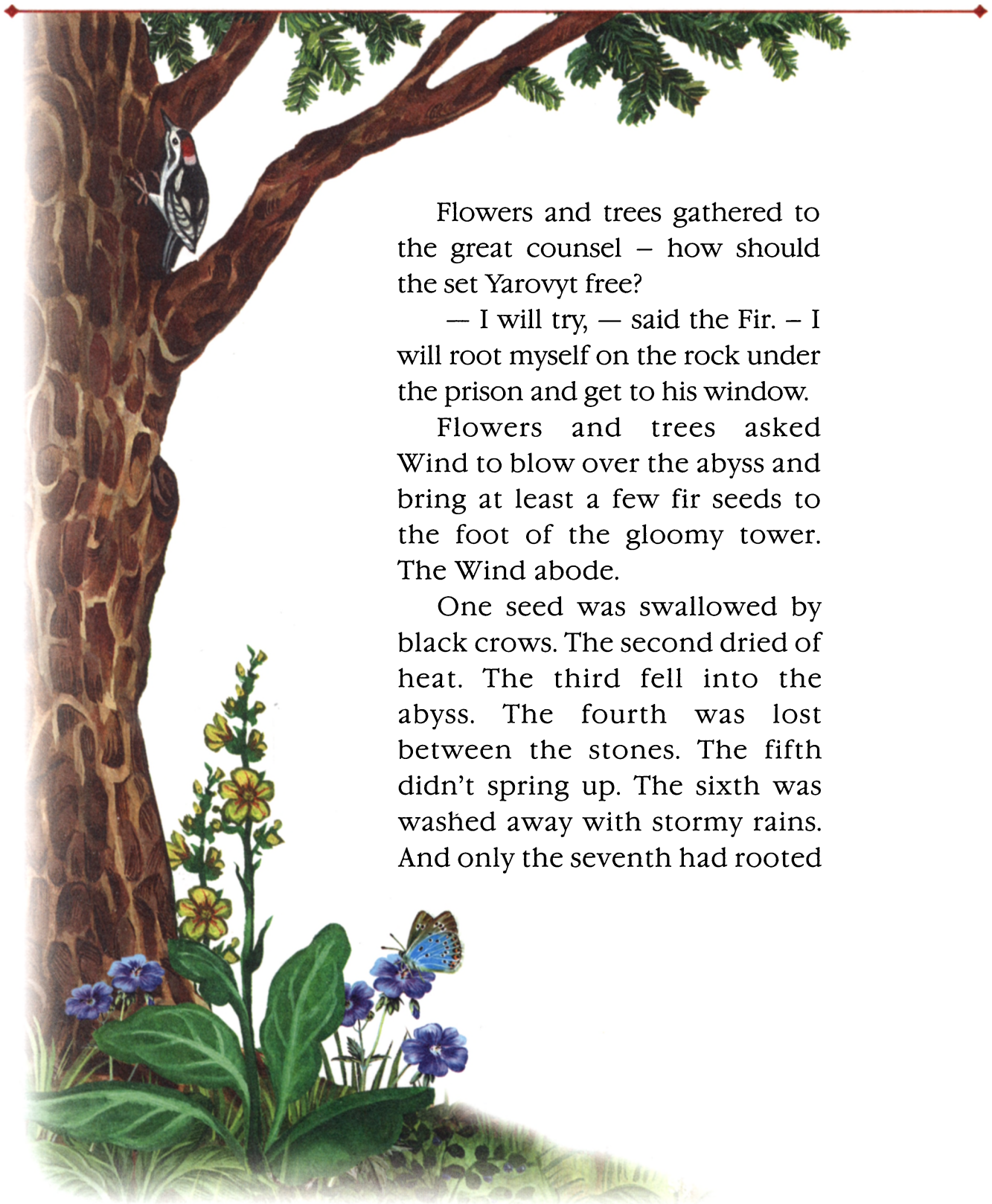
Marakara laughed malignantly. He ordered obedient shadows to catch Yarovytt and lock him into a high tower, surrounded with impassable swaps and gorges. From inside the prison was guarded by dragons, from outside – the deserted abyss, where there were no path.

And Marakara became the lord over Yarovytt's friends – birds, fish, butterflies, flowers and people. He began to torture them pitiless, drink their blood and life. Father Yarylo saw that all and was very disappointed. And the flowers and trees addressed him, begging:

— Our fire father, help your sun Yarovytt, set him free! Then we would be able to run away from the traitor Marakara!

— I cannot, — answered Yarylo. — You came in there by your own will. You must set Yarovytt free yourself. If I come into the abyss, the darkness will enter the fair worlds, the life would fade in the wonderworld of heaven...





Flowers and trees gathered to the great counsel – how should the set Yarovyty free?

– I will try, – said the Fir. – I will root myself on the rock under the prison and get to his window.

Flowers and trees asked Wind to blow over the abyss and bring at least a few fir seeds to the foot of the gloomy tower. The Wind abode.

One seed was swallowed by black crows. The second dried of heat. The third fell into the abyss. The fourth was lost between the stones. The fifth didn't spring up. The sixth was washed away with stormy rains. And only the seventh had rooted

itself into the rock and sprang up a sprout.

Flowers and trees waited alarmingly, worried, if fierce dragon-guards notice the green fir?

In one only night grew the young firm Fir, stretched her hands-branches to the prince and whispered on the dawn:

— Run away, son of sun! Your friends wait for you, your father Yarylo misses you!

Yarovyt got through the window, hardly holding stones with the exhausted hands. But the Fir's branches hold him firmly over the abyss and he landed unharmed to the foot of the tower. And the lianas had already made him a bridge over the abyss. And the birds are already waiting for him to bring him to his father, to the free wonderworld, and Yarylo – the Lord of Life and Joy – is already stretching his caring hands-rays to hold the beloved son. And said Yarylo:

— Glorious you will be among the plants, kind and wise Fir! I give you the eternal youth. Let your undying green crone remind everyone of your deed.







WORMWOOD – GOD’S TREE



Forefathers tell, that the world is created by a mighty heaven traveller Dajbog. He built it with a beautiful woman on the name Lada. For the love and happiness prepared they earth, seeding flowers, herbs, trees, inhabiting the forest with singing birds, kind animals, rainbow butterflies and busy bees.

But Dajbog and Lada, working inspirited and lenient, didn't see that step by step them followed Chornobog – envy and evil Lord of the Darkness, pouring dark seeds to fair creatures. That is why in the woods sounded not only joyful, sonorous birds' songs, but also vermin roar, evil croak, fierce hissing. In the wild appeared jackals, vipers, on the branches sat vultures, in the scrub crept scorpions, ran poisonous spiders – fight began in the world, death came into the world.

Dajbog stopped tired at the end of the world to look back at his creature, held his friend Lada and looked around. The creatures were in horror, seeing what Chornobog had made. Darkened the high Dajbog's forehead in rage, he already wanted to rush at his enemy, but held himself in time. He sighed and said to Lada:



— We cannot remake the world. Let the black seeds grow. And the fruits of evil Chornobog should use to the end. Let him be the lord of the world, since he made such a malignant treachery. And I will go with you, Lada, to create a new world, fair and clear, like a child's smile...

— Are you giving everything to Chornobog? — surprised Lada. — And the people would also remain under his reign?

— No, — answered Dajbog, — I will leave for me an imperceptible plant — wormwood. My fate is bitter in this spoiled world, but who would love wormwood — god's tree, who would be fed up with the bitterness of life, he would find the way to my new fair world...

Lada agreed with her friend, and they have blessed the wormwood, and after that went their way to create other earth, other worlds. Where was it — nobody knows. Only wormwood — god's tree whispers of that wonderful legend.

He knows. But try to guess, try to understand the language of a bitter step plant!..





CHERRY, THE ETERNAL BRIDE



In the Bug river in a poor hut lived long ago an old grandmother. She healed people with herbs, spells, good eye, kind word. She had a grand-daughter, a merry, joyful girl. She was friends with the neighbour boy – shepherd's son. The children walked in the forest, played on the bloomy glades, searched, stunning of fear, the enchanted fire-flower on the Kupala night. The boy and girl were always together, and loved each other very much.

But the years went by. They grew up. The girl became a beauty, suitors came to her from far and near lands to ask her hand. But the girl was merciless. She often stayed alone in the forest, on the river, turning off even her ex-friend, the shepherd. And he didn't know what to do, wandering in the deep woods, by night making up sad songs for his lover.

People told, that the old healer gave her grand-daughter the skill of sorcery. From that time the village guys didn't sent match-makers to her, but the nobles from foreign places came to grandmother's yard even more.

And then the healer died. The grand-daughter buried her, cried over the grave. Here, on the cemetery, she met her old





friend – the shepherd. He looked timidly in her sad eyes and whispered:

— You are alone now. Who would love you? Come to me, remember our love...

— Will you be able to keep all my love? – asked the girl mysteriously.

— I will! – undoubtedly exclaimed the young man. – If you would be a bird, I would be the air to hold you in your fly. If you turn into a fish, I would be a clear river, so that you would be comforted in my depth, if you turn into the night, I would be stars shining in the sky to make people admire your mysterious face...

— We'll see, – answered the girl alarmingly. – You promise a lot, so don't forget when it's time...

Soon a noble suitor came to the girl – a general from far-away kingdom. He proposed her his hand and wealth. The girl looked at him proudly, and then opened her window, showing the garden, the forests, the fields and the blue river.

— Look at my wealth – it is imperishable and undestroyable. What's your gold, palaces, servants and gorgeous festivities? It's a miserable mirage. Tell me better, can you love like I do? If I become a bird – would you become the sky? If I would be a fish – would you turn into river? So that wherever I would be, you would catch me up with your love?!

— Are you mocking at me? – enraged the general.

— No, I don't, – answered the girl. And she suddenly turned into a pigeon, flew out of the window and sat on the branch of the old oak. The general was surprised, looked at the grey bird perplexed, and the more his blood boiled in him. And he promised himself to get what he wanted after all.

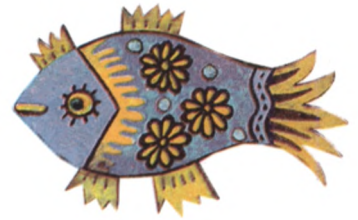




For two years he was studying sorcery in a faraway land. And when he returned to the girl, he said boastfully:

— Now I can love you. Now I tempt your heart neither with palaces, nor with wealth, but with the magic ability to be where you are...

The girl laughed and turned into a pigeon. The general became a vulture at once. She cried in fear, rushed to the river, dived into a clear wave, turning into a white fish. The general rushed to her in the form of a toothy pike. She ran out of the water as a wild goat, feared, rushed home, and he chased her as a hungry wolf. Finally she turned into a girl again, stood by the window. Getting his natural form, the general bended to her feet.



— See – now I'll be with you always! Please, be mine... — Wanting or not, the girl had to agree. A few days the wedding was prepared. The general's servants dressed her in a snow-white dress, and then took her to the church to wed. Near the church the girl saw the shepherd. He looked at her begging and sad. And suddenly she cried to her ex-friend:

— Can you love me forever, young man?

— I can! – the guy answered immediately.

— Then love me if you can! – she exclaimed, springing out of the wedding cab. The general moved after her, but it was too late.

Astounded, people saw that her wedding dress disappeared and floated in white pelts over the earth. And then as far as the eye could reach the gardens burst in an unseen blossom.

The general-sorcerer roared, rose into the sky as a black whirl, sprang onto one garden, onto the second, the third, trying to tear off the white pelts to take them with him, to return the lost bride. But everything was in vain! The girl covered all her land in the gentle blossom, presented herself to all the good people.

And the wedding guests saw one more wonder: the shepherd disappeared, and instead appeared the bee swarm. That golden cloud gently caressed the cherry gardens, gathering fragrant honey off them. It is still so nowadays: the cherry, the eternal bride, every year wears a white wedding-dress, and the bees, the shepherd's match-makers, kiss her, receiving the present of undying love.





THE TALE OF CHAMOMILE



hey say, when a star falls from sky, somebody dies. It is not true. Our forefathers said that when a star falls, a new man is born.

It is sad for the star to wander lonely through the desert of sky. It looks down on the wild life on earth, on the bloomy fields, deep forests, on the bird flocks, flying up to the clouds, on the children, playing in the sands by the rivers and lakes, and dreams to be a man.

Sometimes the will to be born becomes so strong that overcomes the sky gravity. Then the star falls down. And at once a child would cry somewhere, announcing the appearance of another star-bearing heart. So the human baby receives a heavenly soul, and that soul would always long for stars, for a star is the restless human heart.

Once the son of the Night Queen envied people. He wanted to get the star soul himself. But how could he do that? Because the star should choose the new life for it itself!

And he addressed the beautiful White Star. He said:

— I want to have star soul, like people do. What should I do for that?





— It's a dangerous wish,
— smiled the Star. Only to
the lover the star shines and
gives a joyful life, and to
unwanted — only sadness,
the abyss of longings and
lusts and even murder!

— And how would I know
— loves or not? — exclaimed
the son of the Night Queen.

— Guess! — answered the
Star mysteriously.

The son of the Night Queen stayed in the darkness, constantly looking at the White Star. He was trying to guess: loves — or not? He was afraid to stay on either. And finally he saw that the Star began to change colours, and worried. The Night Queen whispered to her son, that the White Star will soon fall from the sky: soon an unseen baby would be born, with which she fell in love.

And then the dark prince committed a crime. He created from darkness and night fogs the form of baby, and



killed the real one. He wanted to gain the White Star slyly when she would fall to live on earth.

And finally the Star had fallen, lining a flame path in the sky. But when she touched an untrue baby, she didn't come into it: there wasn't the fire of love there.

The prince of Night rushed to the disappointed Star, wanted to catch her, but she spread into silvery flashes in the fields, turning into wonderful chamomile flowers, as she could not come back to the sky.

The son of the Night roared in madness, turned into a crazy whirl, began to tear off the flower pelts, asking:

— Loves – or not! Loves – or not!

The pelts fall to the earth, and the flower keeps silence. Someone of people heard those words of the son of the Night and began to ask chamomile, too, if she loves.

But do you ask for that?

People say, there would be a time when the chamomile would turn into a White Star again. When? It would happen, when that unusual boy, killed by the son of the Night Queen, will be born again.





THE ROOT OF SYCAMORE



A sycamore grew over a quiet clear spring. From a small sprout it became a mighty old tree. In the heat or in bad weather it gave shelter in its shadow to shepherds and travellers, generously gave his branches to birds' nests, guarded the hill from falling.

The gorgeous green sycamore crone played with winds, enjoyed the blue abyss of sky, delighted in the cool spring rains.

And once a fierce storm went over that land, an unseen rain fell down. Stormy waters naked the root of the tree. Branches and leaves looked down and awed.

— What ugly, loathsome, nasty things glued to us, — they cried.

— Fools! — told them Crook, resting at the top of the sycamore. — That is your roots. Without them you won't exist...

— No, no — murmured the branches. — We don't need any bastards. It's time to get rid of those monsters.

And they called barks, bugs and other vermin: they asked them to get them rid of the ugly roots.

— All right! — they said and began to work. Soon the roots were eaten.

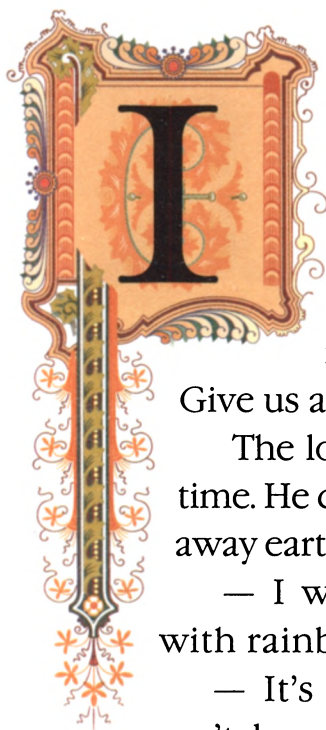


The mighty tree fell down. The
gorgeous crone faded. The rains
ruined the high hill, the ground
moved down and turned the clear spring into a dark
smelly swap...





WHO IS THE SUNFLOWER?



In the beginning the plants didn't have flowers. High trees, giant herbs covered mountains, steps, valleys. But there were not a flower in sight!

Trees, bushes, herbs addressed the Sun:

— Flaming father! You kindle a multicolour rainbow in a thunder cloud, decorating the sky.

Give us a bit of those colours, too.

The lord of the day Sky thought. He kept silence a long time. He couldn't imagine, how to help the plants on the far-away earth. The Sun's son, the golden-haired prince told:

— I will come to the earth and decorate the green with rainbow colours.

— It's dangerous, — said the father, alarmed. — You can't leave the sun home for free. Spreaded on the far planet, you might not return home...

— I'll go anyway, — insisted the golden-headed prince. You bring joy to the whole world, and I want to give it to trees and herbs.

The father sighed, but, what he had to do, — agreed.

The son of Sun came to the earth and began to go round the world in a rainbow wheel. And the nature bathed in delight.





Magnolias covered with giant fragrant flowers, wild roses smiled gently with pink pelts, the blue-bells sang silvery between the herbs with their blue bells, through the sky eyes looked up the brothers-forget-me-nots, shyly swayed in the winds white carnations...

Thousands of flowers covered limitless spaces, as if a multicoloured river spread on the earth, giving spirit to

the nature, discovering the world of beauty and creativity to the people.

The sunny prince stopped and looked around. And when seeing the results of his work, laughed happily. He spread his flame wings and wanted to return home. But alas! He spent his might to creating of flowers, he gave his might to the earth and couldn't come back to his father's shining home.

Lonesome, Yarylo cried in the sky, hiding behind the dark horizon. And the weakened prince fell down to the earth, bursting into tears. On the dawn he got up, gathered all the forces to fly, when the Sun appears, but he could only get his flaming face up to his father. From that time the king-flower, the golden-headed sunflower constantly looks west: his father promised to return him in future to his shining home.





THE SAYING OF KALINA



nce the young heroes of Rus went to the war with enemies, which pitiless deserted their land.

Leaving their villages and towns, the young men parted with their brides. After leaps over the sacred fire, the chief of the heroes addressed the girls and said:

— Merciless fight awaits us, dear friends. But we will come back if you would stay true to us. You must swear it by the fire. And we would give a sacred oath always long for you!

The girls agreed to those words. So, when lighting the ring of fires, warriors and their brides stepped over the wall of fire and spoke the words of oath.

The mighty heroes rode to the war. And the girls kept true to them.

The fate cared for the young warriors. They went out of the bloody fight unharmed, won the enemies of Rus (the Ukrainian land was once called so). They came home merrily, hoping for the future meetings.

But sorrow awaited them in the home towns. While they fought in the eastern boundaries of the country, from the west came the nomads, killed mothers, old





people and children, and the young girls, keeping true, gathered in the church and set fire on it. Not a bride came out of the fire to the enemies...

The heroes stunned, seeing ashes and desert there, where not a long ago the joyful life burst. The mighty hands fell down, the sorrow filled the hearts. Why do they need their youth and might for, when their brides are dead?

But the heroes' chief said:

— We gave our brides the oath of true. We should keep it. In all the lands, in all the worlds we will search our lovers until we find them!

The warriors asked:

— How should we find our lovers in the land of Svitovyd? Who will show us the way?

— Let's ask the Guards of the Sacred Oak, — decided the chief. The warriors found the shelter of the Guard of the Sacred Oak in a deep forest on the Slavuta bank. The hundred-years-old hermit listened to the heroes, looked sharply at the chief, as if measuring the depth of his feeling. He said severely:

— There is no bridge between our world and the land of Svitovyd. Only through the death come people there, forgetting their relatives, left here. There they also wander, forgetting who they are and where are they from. Are you sure that you won't forget your love in the land of Svytovyd?

— We are! — answered the heroes.

— Then follow your brides on the incredible path, — said the Guard of the Sacred Oak kindly. — I'll teach you



how to get there. And if your love is more than the fear of death, in your land will remain the sign of your deed. But wide is, and, oh, deep is, ah bottomless is the land of Svytovyd, my children! The mountains are high there, the abysses fearful, the spaces limitless! Who would tell you, how long should you search your brides?

— Let it be eternity itself! — all as one spoken the young men. — Teach us!

The Guard set a giant fire on the sacred glade, ordered the heroes on their horses in their war clothes come into the fire ring. They abode. The hermit spoken the sacred word, and the heroes disappeared. They haven't returned yet, although a hundred of years passed...

But suddenly in Rus villages and towns appeared an unseen plant: between the dark green leaves bloomed tender white flowers, in the autumn on the branches appeared blood-red berries, bitter, but wonderfully healing.

The girls liked the sad plant, which was called kalina, and began to bind red berries into their hair. And the Guard of the Sacred Oak told them:

— Do love the wonderful plant, people. It is a sign from the Svytovyd land from the heroes which went to search for their true brides. White flowers are their dream, red berries, filled with bitterness, are the drops of bloody sweat of heroes, that restlessly look for you...





THE HEART OF MATIOLA



First Matiola blossomed in the day-time, opening her tender pelts to the Sun, greeting his appearance with wonderful fragrance.

Once Matiola woke up in the spring, looked around and noted nearby a thorn bush, whose branches swayed a bit in the wind.

Matiola was surprised: between the thorn leaves flamed brightly something golden, living, hot. Its flashes fell onto her pelts, and she felt glad of that touches.

— It's thorn's heart, — sighed Matiola. — I love you, thorny tree, for your flaming heart...

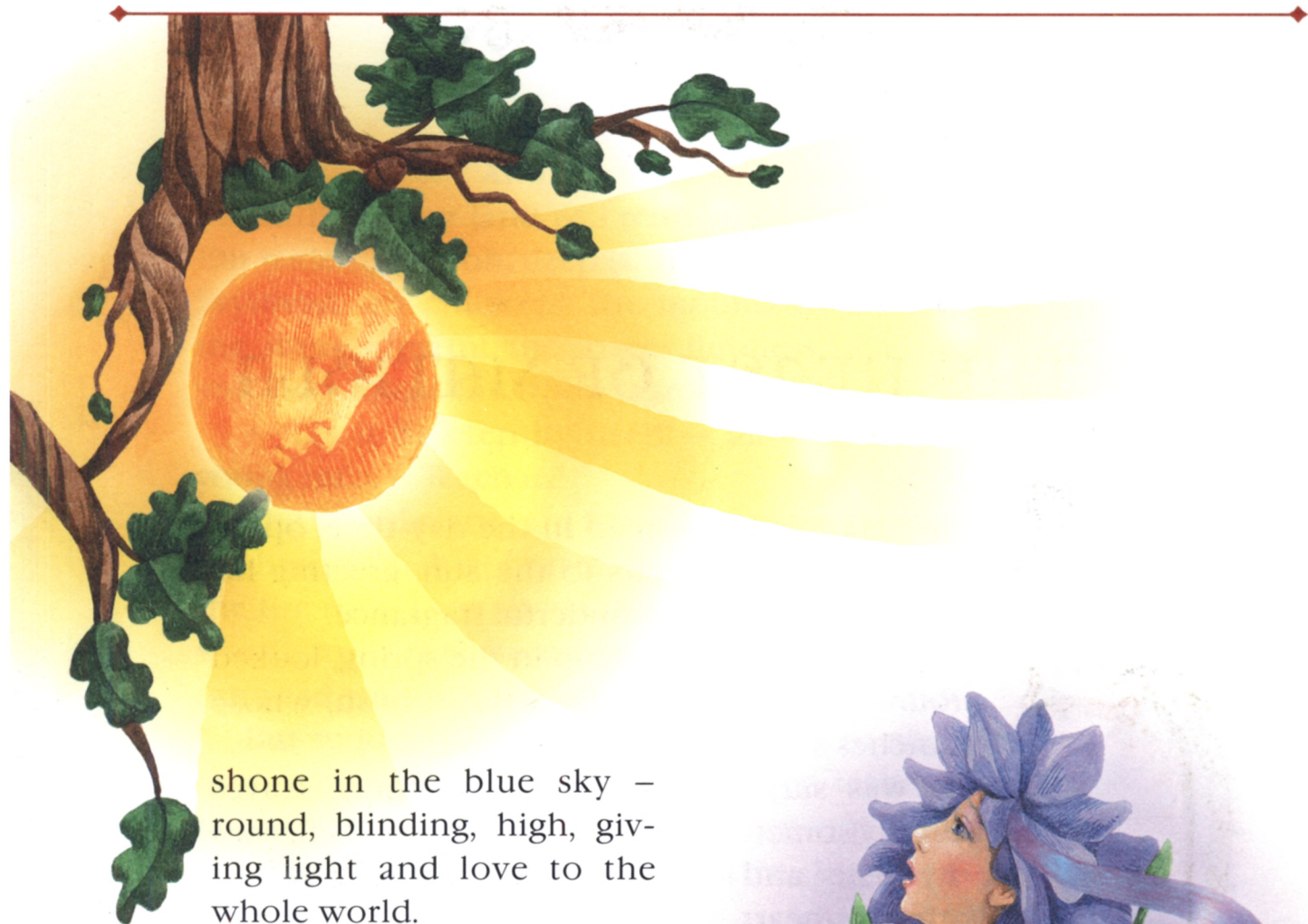
The thorn kept silence, smiling mysteriously. Time went by. And suddenly Matiola noted, that the flaming heart is already pulsing among the branches of an old oak. The flower turned to the mighty tree, amused.

— So you have such a kind, flaming heart? — she whispered, opening her pelts to the oak. — I love you, my glorious giant!

Perplexed oak whispered something, but Matiola didn't hear his words. She was inflamed with love.

Later — oh wonder! — Matiola looked up the oak branches, but the flaming heart wasn't there no more. It





shone in the blue sky – round, blinding, high, giving light and love to the whole world.

— So that is the sky that has such a wonderful heart? – exclaimed Matiola, amused, opening herself to the bottomless blue space, where the sun burned. – I love you, beautiful sky!

But the heart of Matiola couldn't bear such a love. She shivered under the burning rays of light and, fading, fell onto the earth.



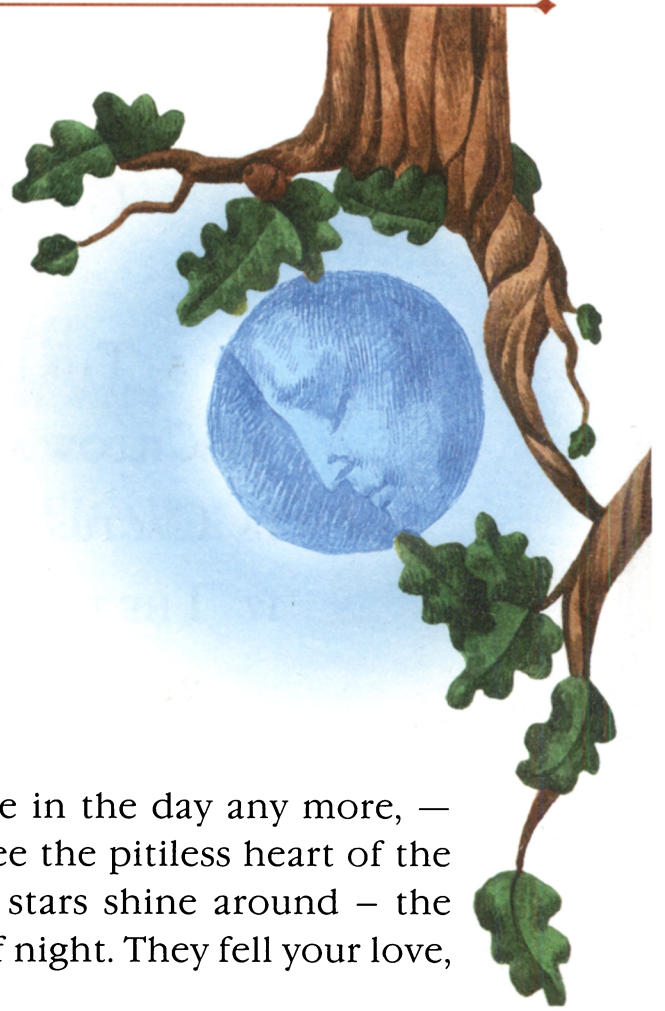
The thorn and oak tried to hide her from the merciless heat, but Matiola didn't hear the voices of reproach and care any more.

The loving flower was saved by the evening cold. It watered faded pelts with moisture, breathed in the new life. The flower opened her eyes and groaned:

— And where is the flaming heart?

— You won't be able to live in the day any more, — sighed the evening. — Won't see the pitiless heart of the sky. But calm down, look up: stars shine around — the flaming hearts in the garden of night. They fell your love, your wonderful fragrance...

Since that Matiola blooms in the night, giving the far stars her beauty. Sometimes on her pelts sparkles a drop of a transparent moist. "Night dew", people say. But it is not true. Matiola cries, remembering inaccessible flaming heart of the sky...



1975—1988



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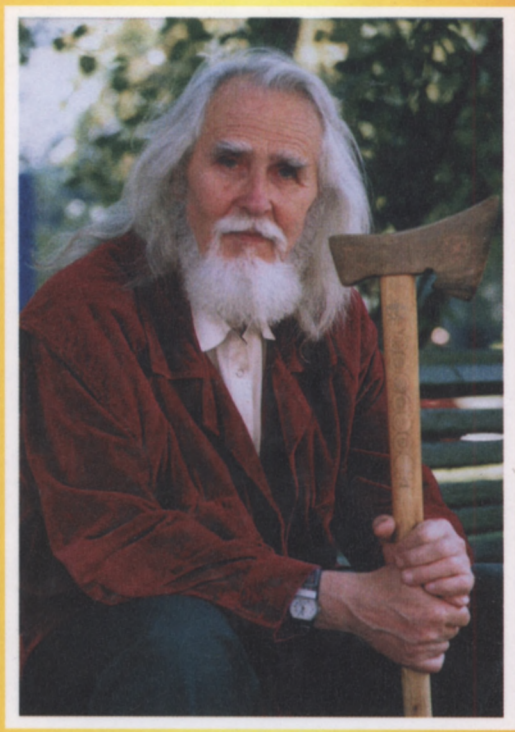
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