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Foreword

The two short stories that comprise this book, *Bloody Wedding in Kyiv* and *Kniahynia's Comb*, were written almost 150 years apart. The former was published in 1866; the latter very recently, in 2015. The authors portray events that happened in the country of their birth, Ukraine, in the middle of the 10th century during the momentous period of the Middle Ages known as Kyivan Rus. The historical events that underpin the stories still seem outrageous, and they left such a mark that, over centuries, the people of Ukraine entwined them into their legends. As with any legends or other folk stories, people added some events and forgot to mention or purposely omitted others, making their protagonists stronger and more beautiful and their enemies more inhumane or unworthy. The evolving legends were passed from generation to generation, until they reached a learned man who recorded them in a written form, in chronicles.

What was so amazing about those events, which took place more than ten centuries ago, but continue to draw the interest of modern writers? The answer lies in their heroine, the instigator of the historical events that reverberated for centuries, Olha, Kniahynia of Kyivan Rus.

Bloody Wedding in Kyiv and *Kniahynia's Comb* are based on two very famous Ukrainian legends about Kniahynia Olha. *Kniahynia's Comb* explains the first meeting of Olha, a simple village girl, and her future husband and ruler of the land, Kniaz Ihor. The second legend, which became the foundation of *Bloody Wedding in Kyiv*, is about Kniahynia Olha's revenge for her husband's murder. By any extent, her revenge was cruel, but that inhumane cruelty kept the legends alive for such a long time. Throughout their existence the tales about Olha have acquired many changes in the names of the characters involved, the order of key events and their location; however, the graphic description of Kniahynia Olha's inventive tortures remains unchanged.

In his explanation of her severe cruelty, which can barely be offered as a justification but does account for Kniahynia Olha's actions to a point, the author of *Bloody Wedding in Kyiv*, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, calls her: "a true daughter of her time..." Kniahynia Olha destroyed almost an entire tribe, the Derevlians, for two main reasons. The first and most obvious reason, often mentioned in the legends and offered by the Kniahynia herself, was revenge for her husband's murder. The second reason was to assure the destiny of her son, Sviatoslav I Ihorovych, who was still a minor when his father Kniaz Ihor was killed. With her display of wrathfulness Kniahynia Olha showed her subjects, neighbouring kingdoms or empires and her enemies that she was capable of protecting Kyivan Rus and handing it over to her son in all its prosperity when he was old enough to rule the land as its rightful sovereign.

People praised Kniahynia Olha for her astute and cunning mind as well as for her beauty. One of the legends celebrates both her mental and physical attributes and is based on tales about Kniahynia Olha's baptism. According to the legend, the

Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus fell in love with Kniahynia Olha for her intelligence and beauty, and decided to marry her. Kniahynia Olha respectfully replied that it would not be proper for a Christian to marry her, a Pagan. Accordingly, she agreed to be baptised. Constantine VII, who was eager to reach his goal and take Olha as his wife, performed the Christian ceremony of baptism together with the Ecumenical Patriarch. However, when Constantine VII reminded Kniahynia about her promise to marry him, since she was now a Christian, she brought his attention to the fact that he was now her godfather and, in the eyes of her newfound God, such a union would not be possible. The legend ends on a positive note: Constantine VII was so impressed with Olha's cleverness that he sent her home in peace and gifted her with many treasures.

Although writing centuries apart, both the authors in this collection were born in Ukraine and their works bear witness to their interest in Ukrainian history and folklore.



The author of the first short story, **Leopold von Sacher-Masoch** (27 January 1836 to 9 March 1895) is probably best known in modern literary circles for his novel *Venus in Furs*, as well as his association with the term 'masochism'. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was born in the majestic city of Lviv in western Ukraine. At that time it was a part of the historic region of Halychyna or 'Galicia'. For about twenty years, in addition to his other works, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch wrote about Halychyna, focusing on the cultures of the different ethnic groups who populated the territory at those times, producing

Halychyna Stories (1876), *Jewish Stories* (1878), *Polish Jewish Stories* (1886) and others. Von Sacher-Masoch's stories, rich in the folklore and culture of Halychyna, were actually written in German but were translated into several languages, including Ukrainian, Polish and French.

Bloody Wedding in Kyiv was first published in 1866, in Berlin, making Leopold von Sacher-Masoch the first published writer to re-tell the legend of Kniahynia Olha's revenge in literary form in Western Europe. In his account, many historical events and the realities of Medieval Ukrainian society are represented quite accurately; however, there are some glaring errors that some literary critics believe may have been intentional. Von Sacher-Masoch mentions the Turkish Seven Towers, which were built centuries after the events of the story took place, and names the river that flows through Kyiv the 'Dniester', instead of the Dnieper.



The second author, Petro Haivoronskyi was born in 1958 in Lysychansk town in the Luhansk region of Ukraine and is a modern Ukrainian writer and journalist. A long-standing journalist of the *Free Thought* Ukrainian newspaper in Australia, his articles are well known to Ukrainians at home and overseas. For his achievements Petro Haivoronskyi has received several accolades including the Gold Medal of Ukrainian Journalism and the Honorary Ethnographer of the Donetsk Region.

Reflecting his lifelong interest in Ukrainian literature and history, the published works of Petro Haivoronskyi include the Ukrainian titles: *Miners' Ballad* (Donetsk: Skhidnyi Publishing House, 2002); *Black is a Noble Colour* (Donetsk:

Skhidnyi Publishing House, 2002 (co-authored with O. Vynnychenko); *Mykola Momot: Life Without Intermissions* (A documentary novel about the Ukrainian opera singer; Donetsk: “Kashtan”, 2010); *Day of Hope* (Poetry and short prose; Donetsk: “Kashtan”, 2012); *Colours of Agate* (Novels, Short Stories, Essays; Donetsk: “Kashtan”, 2013); and *The War in Donbas: Kaleidoscope Glass Pieces* (Kyiv: “Lesia”, 2014).

Kniahynia’s Comb is the first fiction work of Petro Haivorosnyskyi to be translated into English.

Two authors from different backgrounds, nurtured by dissimilar societies and divided by countless historic events, are united in their fascination for the same woman, Olha, Kniahynia of Kyivan Rus. She was a most intriguing figure and from the beginning Olha’s reign has both repulsed and impressed observers. As Leopold von Sacher-Masoch noted, “She was called ‘light of salvation’ by the great Rus chronicler Nestor, ‘wise’ by history, ‘cunning’ by the people and ‘holy’ by the church.”

Note on the illustrations:

The illustrations incorporated in this book were extracted from *The Radziwiłł Chronicle*, an ancient East Slavic illuminated manuscript that was named after its first known owner, the Radziwiłłs, a Polish-Lithuanian noble family. In the 17th century the manuscript was donated to Königsberg Library (as such, sometimes the *Chronicle* is known as *The Königsberg Chronicle*), which was then robbed during the Seven Years’ War, after which the *Chronicle* ended up in St Petersburg, where it is kept today.

The Radziwiłł Chronicle narrates events in Kyivan Rus between the 5th and 13th (1206) centuries, and enriches them

with 617 illustrations. Dated to the 15th century, the work is shrouded in many mysteries, including the name of the author. However, it is known that the paper was manufactured in Poland and that the text was scribed in a dialect of Old East Slavic, which was characteristic of the Subcarpathia and Volyn region (Ukraine) as well as some Belorussian regions.



Bloody Wedding in Kyiv

by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, 1866

Chapter One

Outrageous Disobedience

Under the golden dome of a Kyivan castle Kniaz Ihor played chess with the Greek monk Anastasius, one of those tireless apostles of the written word who had been sent by the Byzantine church to the Slavs, who at that time were Pagans. At this moment one of the servants announced the arrival of heralds from the Derevlans, residents of the Podillia region.

“Tell them that I will see them...” began the Kniaz. His appearance (indeed heroic, remarkable, strong and handsome) dressed in wide silk trousers and a long upper garment, made from Byzantine fabric and adorned with precious furs, rather resembled that of a ruler from the Middle East than a European Kniaz. Then he added, “...tomorrow, if I am in the mood, or the day after tomorrow...”

“Mighty Kniaz,” the servant replied, “they demand to be brought into your presence immediately.”

“They demand? Are they not my subjects? Am I not their ruler and protector?” Ihor shouted angrily. However, after a minute of deliberation he said: “But who knows what news

they have brought... It might be that the Asian hordes threaten our borders again. I will see them now.”

The servant bowed and left to escort the Derevlians, who were waiting downstairs in a large hall, up to the Kniaz’s chamber. When the messengers entered the parlour, Kniaz Ihor was sitting on a low, ornate seat that was placed on high steps. Beside him sat a young, beautiful and fine-figured woman with golden-red hair and bright blue powerful eyes, who was dressed in equally precious fabrics and lavish fur.

Mak, a young boyar who had been elected by the other nobles as their leader, asked the servant with inappropriate curiosity: “Who is this beautiful woman by the Kniaz’s side?”

“She is the wife of our ruler, Kniahynia Olha,” came the answer.

The young boyar’s walk became slower for a moment, but an instant later, with a proud calmness, he approached the Kniaz’ throne under the gaze of the other Derevlians. The manner with which these brave free men greeted their Kniaz was very different from the flattering humility that prevailed in



the imperial palace in Constantinople. It did not even occur to them to fall on their knees; instead, they showed their respect with a bow that was full of dignity.

“Well, what gifts have you brought me?” Kniaz Ihor began.

“We came Kniaz, not to bestow gifts on you,” Mak said, “but to ask you to remove that evil which you have bestowed upon us.”

The Kniaz wrinkled his forehead and asked: “Are you complaining about the new levy that I set for you?”

“Yes, ruler.”

“You come in vain, I cannot go back on my decree!” exclaimed the Kniaz.

“But we cannot fulfil your demands,” said the Derevliaus’ leader. “The levy that you set is too high, it weighs heavily on us and as such causes resentment. The income from it, as we know well, goes neither to you nor to the state, but to the soldiers of your army. Is it fair, Kniaz Ihor, to make payments with our blood to those who have done much less for you and your ancestors than we did? Did not we join you and your subjects in military campaigns against the Byzantine emperor at sea and on land?”

“Who receives more profits from our wars,” Kniaz Ihor interrupted the speaker, “if it is not you, men of Podillia? Who freed you from the Khazars’ rule and from the tribute that you paid to those robbers – the Asians? We, the Kyivan Kniaz, did! Whom should you thank, if not your Kyivan Kniaz, for guarding your trade with the Greeks? Does not Dniester carry your golden wheat to the Black Sea and then by the sea it reaches the Seven Towers? Do you not exchange it for precious silks and other rare goods made by Greek masters, which you then bring to our markets? People say that honey and milk flow like rivers in Podillia. Its lush and fertile pastures are filled with herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Everywhere you look there