

# A Kozak Superhero

(adapted from “Za Sestroyu” Andrija Czaykovskoho)

It was in times of great turmoil in the land of the steppes (stepy) and Cossacks (Kozaky). Rich lands of Ukraine were again invaded by Tatars, its cities and villages robbed and burned and their people taken into slavery (nevolya). Only the volunteer Cossack army provided some defense against the invaders.

A sister and a brother, Anna and Pavlo, lived in a little village (selo) of Spasivka. They were best of friends and were inseparable. Pavlo was 13 and was learning horse riding, shooting and Cossack traditions and taught his sister who was 10 all he learned. He sometimes tried new and dangerous things on his own and got in trouble from his parents for it. It was Anna who always got her parents to forgive him, so he could come out from hiding...

One day their village was taken over by a large band of Tatars. The evening raid caught people by surprise and amongst fires, cries and mayhem, Pavlo was separated from the family and saw them being taken away in chains. He hid in a garden and in the depth of night crept up to the Tartar camp where the horses (koni) were kept. He quietly untied and mounted one when his plan was discovered. Pavlo had never ridden a horse as fast and never prayed (molyvsya) so hard that he could outrun his pursuers. He heard the arrows (strily) buzzing around him, and felt one sting him in the back. He held fast to his horse and rode despite the pain and weakness he felt. He had to reach the Cossacs and tell them what happened in his village. He saw familiar hill and heard voices, he kicked the horse's flanks and rode right into the hands of sentry (stiyka). He did not remember what happened next...

After spending some time with Cossacks and recuperating from his wound, Pavlo hatched a new plan – he had to find his family: Mom, Dad and Anna! He knew it was foolhardy, but he had to try it. Cossack troop he was in was getting ready for an ambush (zasidka) on a marauding Tartar band, the same one that attacked his village. He was to mind the horses and was not allowed in the combat (bytva). As the ambush happened, a Tatar leader - wealthy and important young man Mustafa was captured. In the celebration, Pavlo saw his chance to leave the camp (tabir).

**STORY: A Kozak Superhero**

He saddled the horse, took some supplies and rode into the night. He was avoiding people and villages so he would not be noticed. But he needed to sleep and eat and he was getting tired... And soon he got caught by a slave trader who sold him to the group of Tatar merchants returning from North to Crimea. Pavlo was traded to a wealthy pasha to work in the stables. It was a hard work and a rough time for proud and freedom-loving Pavlo. His attitude and words sounded arrogant to the Tatars and for that he was punished. It was an old Cossack Ostap who worked there as well, that took care of Pavlo and protected him. He taught Pavlo some Turkish language, which Pavlo learned amazingly quickly. Old Ostap taught him also the ways of the Turks and was to Pavlo like his own Grandfather (dido).

One day there was a rumour going around that the son of the Khan did not come back from a raid in Ukraine. The Khan promised great deal of gold (zoloto) to anyone who knew his son's whereabouts. Pavlo jumped at the opportunity – he told his minders that he had the information, but would only share it with Khan himself. He was taken to Bakshisarai - the Khan's palace in Crimea (Krym) but he had to be careful not to reveal his plan to anyone or else all could be lost and he'd never see Anna again. At the audience with the Khan, Pavlo told him that it really was his sister (sestra) that knew where to find Khan's son, but she was also captured (polonena) in a raid and had to be found first. A major search (poshuky) was organized in Tartar slave markets all over Black Sea (Chorne More) shores and soon Anna was found. Pavlo could not be happier but needed to speak to her before Khan would summon her to him. He and Anna were reunited and while together, he taught her all she needed to know and say to the Khan, so he would believe her.

Oh how scared Anna was standing in front of the Khan! She stood tall and sure and told him of Cossack troop (kuren') by her village and how they captured Khan's son - Mustafa in an ambush (zasidka). She offered to lead the emissaries (posly) to her village and connect them with Cossacks... All that in hopes that Pavlo guessed correctly who was captured on the night of his escape! No matter - she had her brother and he found her!

The Sultan sent a messenger (posol) to Cossacks and found out that what the children said was true. He asked Pavlo what reward (nahoroda) he should like for

**STORY: A Kozak Superhero**

his help. To the Khan's surprise, Pavlo asked only that his sister, he and the old Cossack Ostap be allowed to return to their village in Ukraine. This wish was granted and soon the three of them, on well equipped horses, were on their way north – homeward. They even had a letter of Khan granting them passage through rough lands of Black Sea shores.

What a joyous journey (podorozh) that was for the three of them: away from the misery of slave markets, foreign foods and language and into the land of tall grass and freedom (volya)!

PS. Pavlo and Anna became the children of the troop (kuren') since their parents never returned back. Pavlo learned Cossack ways first as stable boy (pacholok), then as an apprentice (dzhura) and then became Cossack warrior himself. Anna worked with an elderly and wise Cossack and learned from him how to prepare ointments and medicines from herbs found in steppes and later became a medic to the Cossack troop.