

“Malanka Magic” - Pokrova Camp 2016

Final – May 15 2016 - English Translation Dr. Mirosława Bilaniuk & Chrystia Chudczak
Original Ukrainian Story by Dr. Maryna Hrymych, Kyiv, Ukraine

MALANCHYNI ZBYTKY - MALANKA MAGIC

Each winter vacation, Ostap visits Dido Timofey and Baba Hanna in a remote Hutsul village deep in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine. Winter is beautiful there. Fir and spruce trees stand proud and white, iced like candy, while frost stings your skin and snow crunches underfoot, like potato chips. It’s a winter wonderland!

Next to Dido’s house, there’s a small workshop. When Ostap was little, he was afraid to enter because the workshop seemed full of magic. It always smelled of fresh wood and leather.

And there were so many strange things, Dido explained. Shaggy pieces of animal fur hung off of wooden pegs, sheep and goat horns and hooves, and horse tails among other things.

On Dido’s wooden table sat a number of strange tools: huge scissors, an awl, heavy thread and big needles, coloured paint jars, brushes, ribbons, glue and even dyed goose feathers.

While Baba Hanna prepared for Christmas Eve (Sviat Vechir) and Christmas (Rizdvo), Dido Timofey hid in his workshop, busy with some very important task. Ostap knew that he couldn’t visit Dido in the workshop because it was ‘forbidden time’. Baba Hanna said Hutzul people believe that there are days in the year when one has to be especially careful, well behaved and courteous ---otherwise trouble will come.

Ostapchik loved Christmas Eve and Christmas. Best of all, he loved “Malanka”, which arrived in the village on the Old New Year. Hutzul Malanka with its festival was so much fun and different. In Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital where he lives, Ostap knew people didn’t have a clue how fantastic the Malanka holiday was to celebrate.

When Ostapchik was small, he believed all of Malanka’s characters were real. The Bear, the Gypsy, the Old Man, the Policeman, the Goat, the Crane and especially – Malanka herself. But last year, Baba Hanna told him that it was actually village men and teenage boys disguised in masks of the Goat, the Bear, the Crane, and others, who went house to house to wish families a wonderful New Year and cause some mischief – who were actually Malanka. For example, they would tease and play practical jokes like stealing a gate and hiding it in a tree. And because it was Malanka, no one got into trouble for it!

In Kyiv, Ostap’s school friends jealously checked out his Carpathian winter vacation pictures on Facebook. “You are lucky your Dido and Baba live in the Karpaty! But what is this weird thing called ‘Hutzul Malanka’?” – they posted.

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Ostap was proud he was the Malanka expert among his friends. “Malanka - it is our Ukrainian carnival!” he proudly posted. “And people who take part are called ‘Malankari!’”.

Then one of his friends asked, “Why is this carnival so special?” Ostapchuk knew what to say, thanks to everything Baba Hanna taught him.

“Malanka happens once a year – on the feast day of St. Melania, or ‘Malanka’ and continues to next day - St. Basil’s or Vasyl. According to Ukrainian lore, the night between Vasyl and Malanka - New Year begins. On that special night, two loaves of bread are laid out on each house’s kitchen table. The breads are named -- ‘Vasyl’ and ‘Malanka’. During this time, people in the village would go visiting: singing and dancing outdoors, playing jokes, making pranks and wishing everyone a happy new year. They do mischief, not out of ill will, but because they believe New Year pranks bring luck to the village. Some pranks could get Malankari into trouble, it is true, so they wear disguises and hide their faces behind elaborate masks.”

It makes sense. Last year, Ostapchuk finally found out what Dido Timofey did in his secret workshop. He made beautiful masks for Malankari! His work was so good that people from all across Ukraine asked him to make Malanka masks for their villages.

This winter Ostap felt it was time. “I’m old enough to join Dido in his workshop - even in the forbidden time. Besides this ‘forbidden time’? It’s just a fairy tale for little children!” Ostap was now older and too old for fairy tales. So he secretly snuck into Dido’s workshop that night to see for himself what magic it held.

Ostap waited until Dido and Baba were asleep and soundlessly climbed out of his warm bed covered with “lizhnyk”, a thick, handmade Hutzul wool blanket. Pulling on Dido’s jacket and boots, he quietly left the house for the workshop.

Ostap walked through snow drifts on a path between the workshop and the house then slowly opened the workshop door. Turning on his flashlight, he shone the light on the wall and there they were.

Hanging on the wall was a huge variety of masks, ready for “Malankuvannia” – the Malanka celebration.

Ostap had a crazy idea. “Wouldn’t it be fun to try on a mask? Sort of to become a Malankar for a second...”.

But which mask to choose? Malanka’s? No, he didn’t want to be a girl! What about ‘Staryj’ (Old Man)? Ostap wasn’t old enough. Better to choose an animal: maybe something with horns?

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So he approached the wall, climbed on a chair, and carefully took the Goat mask into his hands.

“Oy, oy, oy!”

As soon as Ostapchyk brought the mask close to his face, the mask leapt from his hands and landed smack on his face - clinging Ostap. It was totally unexpected and scary because the mask didn't want to come off his face even when he tried to take it off!

Suddenly – Ostap started seeing and hearing things as if he were a Goat! Then quickly he saw Malanka come alive and begin to dance...

Malanka looked funny! She wore a long skirt, with huge men's shoes peaking out from under it. She had a round white face, huge nose and a wide mouth rimmed with red, red lipstick.

Malanka grabbed a large fan made of colourful goose feathers, and began to fan herself like a lady.

Quickly, then Saryj's, mask moved toward her, stooped, with crazy hair sticking out from under his hat and leaning on his cane. Trying to impress Malanka with a bouquet of flowers - but wait it was a feather duster!

Saryj's cane tried to protect Malanka from the young, handsome imaginary Policemen.

Ostapchyk started to laugh, but instead he could hear himself making strange noises.

“Me-e-uh! Me-e-uh! Me-e-uh!”, Ostap's voice cried. “I sound like a goat!” he bleated. Then Ostap's legs began to move and groove, jumping and dancing around like a wild goat, trying to poke anyone and anything with his curved horns.

Ostap felt strange. He wasn't in control of his body, or his mask. Who was in charge?

Meanwhile, the workshop came alive with all of Dido's masks. A big shaggy Bear rolled around on the floor laughing. A tall skinny Crane waved its wings, trying to nip at anyone and anything with its long beak. It was crazy!

More and more, Ostap felt “his” Goat was getting naughtier, throwing his head and horns around trying to damage his Dido's workshop. Then Malanka and Saryj figured it was their chance to mess up the space even more, rampaging and trying to break Dido's table, chair and tools.

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The Policemen quickly arrived and used their night sticks to corral Malanka, Saryj, Goat, Bear and the Crane into the same space. Everyone started to dance and jump around, sing, make noise and carry on!

Ostap thought “This is serious. Soon we will be loud enough to wake up the entire village. Then Baba & Dido’s neighbours will come running and will call the real police to stop it!”

Ostap could not reason with masks of Malanka, Saryj, Policemen or any animals – not even with his Goat. She refused to listen! Instead, she kept running crazily through Dido’s workshop.

Ostap then recalled. “Dido Timofey told me not to go into the workshop at the forbidden time. But that’s exactly what I’ve done! How can I stop all this chaos?!”

Ostap was not proud of himself. He did not listen to Dido. “What have I done? What do I do now?” he thought desperately. “How can I save Hutzul Malanka?”

Just then, Dido entered the workshop. “What is going on here?” he bellowed loudly looking at the chaos before him. “Quick, all of you – back to your places!” Dido ordered.

Then a miracle happened. The masks swiftly returned to their places on the wall and on the workshop benches. Ostap’s Goat mask airlifted off his face and quickly flew to its place on the wall – as if nothing happened. Ostap’s heart stopped racing as calm and quiet returned to the workshop. It was as if nothing happened.

And it was like another miracle: Dido Timofey did not even notice Ostap was in the workshop...

The next morning, Ostapchuk woke up very, very, very late. But he felt happy because he was visiting Baba & Dido in the Carpathian mountains for a winter vacation for Malanka.

Suddenly he remembered and quickly sat in his bed, frightened from what happened the night before.

Did it really happen or was it all just a bad dream?, he thought.

From the kitchen Ostap could smell something sweet. It was Baba baking “Malanka” and “Vasyl”, the breads that would welcome the New Year. He yawned and stretched his legs and arms.

“Malanka is coming soon...”.