

Fedko-brigand (Федько-халамидник англійською)

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Авторський переклад відомого оповідання "Федько-халамидник" англійською мовою від нашої читачки Софії

This was the true brigand-deadbeat. Not a day went by without anyone complaining about Fedko: in one house a window was broken by an unsuccessful shot from a slingshot; one of Fedko's "bosom" friends was bruised; and a barrel full of rainwater that had been very troublesomely gathered was thrown over.

As if the devil himself had possessed the guy! All of the other kids had fun, skylarked, and blandly played together in peace. But Fedko seemed to be constantly seeking an opportunity to fight or turn something upside down. Calmness was his worst enemy with which he was fighting restlessly.

For example, such an occasion: children were sculpting sand lodges. In front of the house where Fedko lived there was an unpaved street in which horses always sank and struggled to walk. After rain, the sand became sticky and dabby — the best material for building lodges. One can dip a leg into this substance, put some sand on it, and take the leg out of the mash. A new lodge is now ready! Whoever would like to can also make a chimney for better sight. Near the lodge one can sculpt a fence and stick some stems of hay behind it to make a garden.

There is a lane between these self-made houses so that the children can make visits to one another.

Fedko is sculpting too. But suddenly he stands up and looks around attentively before wiping everything out — his own lodge and others too, while nickering loudly. If someone becomes angry or cries, he'll give them a good punch. There's no point in trying to fight with him because he's the strongest guy of all the kids in the whole street. He'll trip them, bend them, push them to the ground, and ask, "Well? Are you tired of living in the world? Speak immediately!" If they answer that they are, he spares them; but if they dare to disagree, he'll continue to beat them up further.

Another example: the guys are going to fly a kite in a huge field where there are no houses or shops. The wind in the field is extremely strong, so they are setting the kite free. Fedko is sitting on the fence near his house like Nightingale the Robber and watching the process. He loves climbing on roofs or sitting on the fence. The fence is high, and an additional annex is fixed on it, like a box. Fedko likes to sit in that box like a congressman.

"Let it go!" the guy who is holding the kite shouts.

The kite is blasting off like a bird in captivity willing freedom, but its flight only lasts for a moment; at the next second it is falling and hitting the ground. Fedko feels chagrined: stupid boys, the tail is too short! But he doesn't say anything and remains silent. He has

something else on his mind. The guys understand what's wrong and bind a rag to the tail.

After that, the kite is finally smoothly flying up into the sky. It's such a pleasant feeling to hold it! The wind is great; one only has to unwind the threads and make sure the knots are tied well. The kite seems to be flirting, shaking its head to one side and the other. If the ratchet is also bound, it will be such a great joy for the spirit! A trembling feeling rushes through you, as if all the day long you would just stay and hold it, looking up. The sky, blue and cold, seems to be so high, so far away.

The kite is niveous against its background. It's shaking, wagging its tail as if it's swimming; as if it is stuffy and it's fanning itself. One can not only see, but barely hear the rumbling of the ratchet, as if Hrytsko or Styopka are somewhere high in the sky, pulling the thread, misbehaving and rumbling to make such a sound. The thread took a form of an arc. Eh, the hobble was made badly! If the hobble had been done well, the thread wouldn't have taken the form of an arc. Well, it's not that bad — unwind further. The thread is cutting the hand, but it is bearable.

As the kite is curling and twisting flying higher up into the sky, it becomes smaller and smaller. — Give me a telegram!

The telegram is launched. A white piece of paper is attached to the thread and pushed a bit higher along it. The wind picks it up and the telegram goes. It becomes stuck because of a knot and twirls, struggling to blast off: it may seem it should scream to the guys below, "I can't go!". But when the thread is pulled slightly, the wind picks it up again, allowing the white writ to sail in the sky. It's not far away from a kite; the telegram is now in such a place where even Havryk can't see the thread. Very soon, when it comes a bit closer, the kite will be able to read the telegram. But suddenly all of the guys hear a scream and shift their gaze from the kite to the ground. Fedko goes. Just goes and screams. He could steal up, but he didn't like that.

He's shouting from afar, "Hey, you there; give your kite to me!"

Fedko comes to take the kite away. His hands are in his pockets, and his cap is hanging sideways sloppily. He's slowly coming. He doesn't hurry. There's no way to escape — he runs like a redshank. The boys begin to wind the threads back, but how would it help?

"Give your kite to me!" Fedko comes closer.

Havryk curls his lips and hems. Styopka becomes pale, but he quickly tries to wind the threads back. Keeping an eye on Fedko, Spirka picks up a stone from the ground and shouts, "Eek, come here! Eek!"

But Fedko comes closer despite everything, not even taking his hands out of his pockets.

"Give your kite to me!"

Spirka stands in the way of Styopka and raises the stone higher, causing Fedko to take his hands out of his pockets. But Fedko isn't going to seek for any stone himself; he's just keeping an eye on Spirka's hand.

"So, will you give me your kite?"

"Do you think it's your kite?"

"As soon as I take it, it'll be mine."

"Gee! You, smug! I'll smash your head if you dare to come closer."

"Eek, try it! Beat me!" Fedko even puffs his chest out as if it's his only wish to be hit by a stone. His forelock sticks out from under his cap, and his gaze is slaphappy. Styopka winds back, and Styopka winds back in a hurry! The kite only rumbles somewhere in the navy blue sky, twitches and doesn't understand anything of what's happening below to cause its being pulled back so soon.

"Well, beat me! Eh, you! You're just afraid of me... Even though I'm without a stone and there are the three of you against me."

"Lyonka, Va-a-asko!" Spirka is screaming all of a sudden, — "Come here!... Fedko is taking the kite away!"

But Fedko is breaking away in a flash. He runs up to Spirka, trips him up and throws the boy to the ground; then he rises with a spring to Styopka, grabs the thread, and pulls it. The thread is cracking, and the kite is rumbling. Havryk cries and Fedko winds the thread on his hand, going home at an easy pace. He appears to be beaming with pride. Spirka and Styopka rush to him; their eyes light up, and they throw stones towards him, but Fedko easily dodges blows and jubilates.

"Brigand! Well, naff off our street!"

"Tramp! Bug!"

But Fedko continues to walk leisurely. The kite is already his. But sometimes he goes and does the unexpected. When the boys are far away from him and can't do anything to him, he suddenly comes back and gives the kite to its owners. He even brings his own threads and gives them to the guys.

"Take your kite back! Do you really think I need it? If I want to, I'll make it out of the whole sheet of paper. My dad will bring red paper from the printing house, I'll make it very well."

But that doesn't happen often. Things usually ends up with the boys running home and complaining; their mom or dad go to Fedko's mother and complain too. In the evening he'll be punished. But even in such a situation he doesn't behave like any other kid. He never cries, asks for forgiveness, or says that he won't ever do anything like that again. He frowns and sits silently. His mother scolds and threatens him — if only he would ever at least utter a word in response! He just sits and keeps silent. His dad comes home from work, tired and angry. His arms are grizzled because of the tin of the letters that he prints in the printing house. His thin and scrawny cheeks look as if they also are poured with tin; through the rare beard you can see skin.

"What? Again?" he asks, looking at Fedko. Fedko frowns even more and starts to poke the edge of the table with his finger. His mother tells everything.

"Is it the truth?" the father asked Fedko. Fedko keeps silent.

"Who am I talking to? Is it true what your mother says?"

"Yes," he replies quietly.

"Take off your trousers."

Fedko stands up silently, takes off his pants, and waits, lowering his head. The father takes off his belt, places Fedko on the chair, and starts flogging him. Fedko trembles all over, and his feet twitch. "Lie down!!" the father yells.

"What a damn child! Such a damn child!" the mother says, clapping her hands, "If he ever asked dad to forgive him, if he ever cried! Stone, not a kid! Some kind of a syberian, what else can I say..."

After beating the "syberian" up, the father takes two or three kopeks out of his pocket and gives them to him.

"That punishment was for your doings, and that's your regard because you always tell the truth."

Fedko wipes away the tears from his eyes, takes the money, and hides it in his pocket. He isn't angry for the punishment — he understands that he deserved it. But at the same time he takes the three kopeks because he really didn't lie. If he wanted to, he could get out and sklent, but Fedko hates to lie. Fedko also doesn't like to extradite comrades. The father praises him for that, but the mother is angry, all the same.

"Yeah-yeah, indulge him; give him money; do that. He'll keep roistering on purpose in order to tell the truth. A clever father teaches his son. Instead of giving it hot and strong for not turning in accomplices, he praises..."

"That's nothing, my old one... You mustn't beat for everything. There are doings for which you have to be punished, also there are others for which you can be praised..."

"Yeah-yeah! Praise him, praise..."

But Fedko's worst trouncings occurred because of Tolya. Tolya was the son of the owner of the house where they lived. He was a gentle, delicate and meek child. He always went outside feeling a bit bashful and timid, and he smiled, looking about with his innocent blue eyes. Such a spruce and neat boy like him didn't have the propensity for Fedko's rude games. But this brigand was tempting him by all means; and poor Tolya came home being scratched, wounded, and with a broken nose to boot. His mother, who was a sensible and delicate woman, almost fainted at the sight at Tolya looking like that. "What happened to you?! Who tore your clothes like that?" She was horrified. Tolya answered sobbing that it wasn't his fault but Fedko's. That evening, Fedko's father interrogated the "syberian". "Have you gone with Tolya to tear sparrows?"

"I have."

"Did you rip his trousers?"

"No, he did. He can't shin up but tries it. Let him not shin."

But at that moment the mother was interrupting, "How dare you speak like that? He's a noble and gentle child, and you, yokel, treat him the same way you do Styopka. Because of you we may be kicked out of the apartment. Don't dare to come to him, you turnip mug. You're allowed to play only with swineherds, not noble children. Oh, my misfortune! What awful thing did I do to make God punish me with having such a syberian? And the father won't tell him anything, so do, my son, everything you want: beat children, let us be kicked out of the apartment."

The father keeps silent and looks gloomily through the window. It's evening. From the direction of the owner's house, barely audible sounds of gentle music arise. It's warm and cozy there. Tolya's father saunters somewhere in the large, spacious house, thoughtfully listening to music. Here's, may be, Tolya, a spruce, gentle boy with beautiful cheeks like prosphora. Tenants will bring them a payment for renting apartments, and peasants will pay them money for using their land,. They won't be kicked out of their apartment, no matter how much Tolya offended Fedko.

"Take off your trousers, son of a bitch!" All of a sudden the father turns menacingly to Fedko. Fedko looks at his dad sullenly.

"Why?" he asks very softly.

"Because you mustn't hang out with noble children. Brat, I told you a thousand times: don't dare to have any deals with nobles. They aren't your company."

"But I don't hang out with him, he himself sticks to me."

"Tell him to go away from you to hell... He isn't a good companion for you... Lie down!"

Fedko lies down, but the father beats him up so that the mother remains completely disgruntled. Two or three days later, Fedko is tempting Tolya again; and he's tempting him at such a moment when any other man wouldn't even think of doing it.

There's a storm outside, and rain is pouring from the sky in such large streams as if there are thousands of Fedkos throwing over a thousand water barrels. Clouds are dark-blue and shaggy, and they are constantly being cut by greenish lightning. Thunder cracks with such magnificent force that dishes jingle in cupboards loudly. Lurking by the window, Tolya is looks out into the street. It's empty; there's no one. Everyone and everything hid. Only a large stream of dirty, bubbly water is flowing down the hill. The rain flogs water, stones, pillars. Whole waterfalls flow down from gutters into the front garden. It's dark, gray and scary.

His mom is lying now in her own quarters with her head bandaged — she can't stand storms and always becomes sick during them. Tolya would also hide somewhere, but his mom forbade him to sit near the window; because of that, Tolya wants even more to sit there and look. Oh, what a wild dirty stream is flowing down the street! And where does it always come from? Swoosh! Whoosh! Bang-bang! Bang! The thunder strike arose with renewed vigor, and the lamp is jingling somewhere in the canteen. Tolya crosses himself quietly and becomes pale, but still can't leave the window.

Suddenly he sees something incredible: in the street, in the very stream, in the rain, wet and without beanies, Fedko, Styopka and Vaska are wandering. They pulled their pants up to their bellies; they're frolicking, laughing, shouting something, and they seem to be having lots of fun! The water is probably warm, and the rain pours upon them like shower in a bathtub. Fedko puts forward his face up to the blessed rain and catches drops with his mouth. Their wet heads look so damn funny! Vasko has found something in the water. What's that?.. A horseshoe. Fedko hides it in his bag. They'll be gathering nails, horseshoes and pieces of irons again. Once, Fedko even found five kopeks!

Tolya gets on the windowsill, to his full height, and waves his hands for them to see him,

but the guys aren't looking at the window. They stomp their feet, frolicking and sloshing; the thunder cracks above their heads, but they don't care at all. The clouds above them are so ghastly that it's scary to look at them, but they're happy because of that — it means that it'll rain for a long time. Here they're hopping and even singing (a note to the text: it's a Ukrainian national children's song):

— Raindrops, raindrops, how-d'ye-do,
Such a tasty borsch I brew
In a green pot just for you.
Buckets of rain fall through and through
Over the grain and the cornfields too!

And the rain falls on their heads, shoulders, and arms. Their shirts are stuck to their bodies.

The stream runs fast, and the thunder cracks; but Tolya isn't afraid of thunder anymore. He himself would flee outside. He waves his hands even harder, but he doesn't knock on the window because his mom may hear the noise. Finally, Fedko notices Tolya and starts to wave his hand too, calling the boy to come. Vasko and Styopka also wave, show him horseshoes and nails, stomp their legs, and bob up and down. Vasko falls right into the water. Fedko and Styopka nicker, and Vasko does too.

Suddenly, Tolya jumps off the window, quickly takes off his shoes, and pulls his pants up, running almost silently into the entryway, then out of the entryway onto the terrace. He's wearing a velvet jacket and pants — he's sorry to pollute them. But the boys are already near the terrace, and he hears their exclamations:

"Come here, don't be afraid! The rain is warm."

"Come on! Oh, he hesitates like a broad... One — two! "

Tolya feels cold and scared, but he doesn't want them to call him a broad. He leaves the terrace and walks gingerly to the guys. His tender and sleek legs stumble. The dirty stream floods the velvet trousers; the neatly combed hair and the pretty jacket get wet immediately. At first, cold pierced his body but then it feels so awesome and goody-goody! Those pleasant feelings make Tolya squeak, and he stomps his legs in the water. The boys also scream and run down the hill, holding hands, with Tolya is in the middle of them. In the evening, Tolya is sick with a fever, and Fedko is laid on a chair and flogged.

Spring came. The snow is yellow and dirty, and the ice on the river is like sugar soaked with water. After that, the rivulets start to flow across the streets, and the ground is covered with a small fog that evaporates in the sun, gradually creating a fading haze. Once Styopka, Hrytsyk, and Spirka were launching paper boats along the street.

At that time, Tolya came outside to the terrace and looked at them. He himself didn't launch boats because he was strictly forbidden to play together with street boys, but he was allowed to stand in the terrace. Suddenly Fedko appeared. His sheepskin coat was all wet, his boots had turned reddish because of the water, and his beanie was in the swamp. But he was beaming all over and swinging a huge stick that was twice his size.

"Guys! Just imagine where I've been!" he has screamed from afar.

They abandoned their business immediately and rushed to him.

"Where? Where?"

Fedko nimbly stuck the stick into the heap of wet snow, took off the beanie, and wiped off sweat.

"Huuuh...! I got so tired, chaps! Well, this work was difficult enough."

"And where have you been? What work?"

"Well, I was at the river. There's so much going on right now there!.. The ice is melting awfully! The market bridge was demolished, dash it! That's it! We'd been pulling out the boards. I pulled out such an oak that oh-oh-oh!"

His narrative took the guys' breath away... They didn't know about that!

"Don't you lie? Is it really the truth?"

"Go and see. And they just sit here and launch boats... Tomorrow I'm not going to school, I'm planning to go to the river..."

"How will you not go to school? What will your father say?"

"Here's the thing! I'll just get to not go. Hey, Tolka!" (A note to the text: "Tolko" and "Tolya" are forms of the name "Anatoliy". "Tolka" is a more informal form than "Tolya")

Tolya had been listening to their conversation since the very beginning and he was terribly anxious to ask how the ice was going on the river. But he couldn't stand it when this Fedko called him "Tolka". As if they were friends.

Tolya turned away and didn't say anything, as if he didn't hear Fedko's words. But it was so interesting to hear how the ice was going on the river that he immediately turned back to the boys and said, "Hey! Have you been to the river?"

"I have."

"Does it go well?"

"Go and see if your mom lets you," Fedko grinned and turned away from Tolya.

Tolya turned reddish — how dare he sneer, this filthy munter! If he complained to his dad, Fedko'd be given a hard time! Fedko was talking meanwhile further.

"The ice is going on the whole river. It runs down and cracks... And the crowd on the shore is so-o-o huge! One guy wanted to ride on ice and make a trip, but he was scared in the end. I'm going to do it tomorrow."

Tolya wanted to go home, but after hearing these words he went down to the guys. The guys were also astonished — this Fedko is truly crazy! It's scary to even look at that and he was going to swarm up there on his own.

"Are you going to swarm up the ice alone?"

"That's for sure! You see, I already have a stick for that — it's so much fun on ice! Last year I saw how Antoshka was riding on the ice... But I didn't find a stick for this business... Let's go together? Eh?"

Spirka and Styopka hesitated; they have to go to school tomorrow.

"Oh, to school! Nothing will happen if we skip one day."

Tolya felt scared listening to such conversations, but he hadn't the strength to go away. The guys thought for a while, and decided after all to go to the river the next day. They

negotiated that tomorrow exactly at eight o'clock the three of them would come to the place where they met today. When Fedko came to the meeting the next day, he saw there Spirka, Styopka, and... Tolya. He was all wrapped in scarves through which only the tip of the nose and the eyes peeked out. His eyes looked somehow odd: either guilty or frightened. Fedko was surprised to see Tolya.

"Why did you come here? Do you want to join us?"

Tolya blushed a little and said, "I'll just go, watch for a while and go to school after that."

"Ok, go, watch," - Fedko agreed and started to pull out a stick out of snow. He had hidden it there yesterday evening. The stick was great! The tip of the stick was sharp, with the pointed nail, so that if you embed it into ice, you won't slip. He tied the books to his stomach and covered them with his sheepskin coat. His appearance was funny because he looked so pot-bellied.

"Just like your tato..." Spirka said to Tolya. That was true, Tolya saw it himself, but he began to feel unpleasant. "Tato"... Not "tato", but "papa". And what's bad about his papa having a bigger belly than their tatos? Because his papa is rich; that's all. (A note to the text: in Ukrainian, "dad" is translated as "tato", while in pre-revolutionary Russia it was fashionable among Ukrainian nobility to speak Russian and use Russian definitions, for example this one. "Papa" is "dad" in Russian. That's why I didn't translate it here.)

All the same, Tolya didn't reply; for he was a delicate and well-behaved boy. Fedko, on the other hand, would definitely start saying rude things or even start a fight should someone dare to say something bad about his dad. But Tolya even said something to Spirka. However, Spirka didn't hear him, because at that time they are already near the bottom of the hill. They stopped their conversations — the river was in front of their eyes. There hadn't been a spring flood yet, but the river had become so odd! It was gray, pitted, and carrotty. People are crowding and walking around on the shore. The sun cunningly peeks out from behind the steam mill. Screaming crows fly somewhere in flocks. How the tip of the cross on the Church of Epiphany glitters! Ah, what a beautiful view!..

"Hey, let's see who will get there first!" Fedko shouted suddenly and rushed forward like a whirlwind. Styopka and Spirka yelled and ran after him. Tolya also wanted to shout and run, and even punt with his leg like Styopka did, but he couldn't do that: shouting in the street doesn't befit noble children, it was too hard to run because his sheepskin coat was too long and heavy, and he wore deep galoshes on his feet. He also carried a bag full of books on his back. Tolya could only watch how Styopka and Spirka scooted. When Styopka lost his books, he stopped, picked them up, punted with his leg again, and kept following the guys who ran ahead. Tolya managed to catch up with them only when he came to the river itself.

At such close range, the river seemed to be even weirder. It was easily seen how, little by little, the ice was melting. The ice cracked and peeled away, big pieces of ice crashing into each other; the sight was quite similar to that of oxen being driven out to pasture. A gray mass of livestock moved slowly; but if an ox hit another one, chaos arose in that place, oxen hit each other, and they stood flailing until the ones causing the blockage finally moved

forward.

People were crowding along the entire length of the shore. There were lots of boys among the adults, and they didn't stop screaming in sonorous and cheerful voices. How many schoolchildren were there who would tell their teachers tomorrow that they had a "headache" that day and couldn't come "to the classes". The river kept flowing wildly, and ice floes rubbed against each other with wet cracking. They were so venerable, old, and yellow. Where did they come from? It would be so nice to sit on one of them and ride on it to someplace far away. There were lots of other ice floes around, so you'd have to push them away so they didn't crash into the piece of ice where you sat; because if they did, you'd be drowned. It'd be good if you jumped onto another ice floe in time, but what would happen if you didn't and fell in the water? And the water was, ooh, black, deep and cold; it even squeaked.

But there appeared daredevils who jumped on the floes and rode on them for a while. Dozens of boyish eyes were following fine fellows with envy. And the fine fellows stomped the ice with their legs; you see, the ice was sturdy, so no one would fall through it. Some of them jumped on other pieces of ice and stood on purpose on the very edge of them, just above the black-blue thick water.

"Hey, you there! Do you want to feed crayfish?" one of the adults screamed at a fine fellow. "Go back to the shore! If he falls in the water, it'll be so troublesome to get him out..."

The fine fellow seemed not to hear, but after stomping a bit more on the ice, he came back. Tolya looked at Fedko from time to time: well, why doesn't he go and try it too? Fedko was saying something to Spirka and Styopka, pointing his head towards the river. Tolya came closer and started to listen to him.

"That's it! They're jumping here..." Fedko said, "and what's actually cool in it? Nope, the main hero is the one who can cross the river on ice!"

"Well, to the opposite side!" Styopka shook his head, "But if ice takes you away, what will you do?"

"You can jump on another ice floe!" His eyes shone with enthusiasm. "And from that one to another too!.. Just do that! Will you do that? Eh?"

"What about you? Can you do it?"

"Well, maybe I'll do..."

Tolya was terribly anxious to see how Fedko would jump from one ice floe to another. He'll be jumping and, of course, get frightened after a while and begin to weep: he'll be taken back to the shore and after that everyone will laugh at him. He'll be humiliated. He'll know then that he shouldn't whistle until he's out of the wood.

"You'll ne-ve-r be able to do that!" Tolya said to Fedko, pointing at the river. Fedko looked at him in silence and didn't answer anything. But Tolya noticed how Fedko's lips got pale, and his gaze became so weird and sharp when he was looking at ice. Yeah! He's definitely got frightened.

"Come on, why don't you try it?" Tolya said again, "You boasted that you'd ride on ice,

didn't you? Come o-on!"

Huge pieces of ice came towards them and moved away. From time to time they broke, and a black terrible patch of water appeared between them. In that water, straw and wooden sticks floated. Both straw and sticks were spinning and disappeared somewhere — such a great swirl formed there.

"You know what, let's bet that I'll cross the river!" Fedko instantly turned to Tolya.

"Oh, you won't!"

"No, let's bet! What's your wager? If I cross the river, you'll give me your pocket knife — the one with a bone handle. If I don't, I'll give you my siskin. Deal?"

Tolya didn't want to have a siskin at all — what would he do with it? — but he agreed.

"Well, okay! Give me your hand. Spirka, break it."

After Spirka broke it, Fedko started to gird tighter, having cautiously given his schoolbooks to Styopka.

"But keep it quiet..." Fedko said to everyone, "If anyone knows that I'm going to the opposite side, I won't be allowed to go. Let them think that I want to wander near the shore."

"Okay!.."

Fedko girded, took his stick, checked it, and tucked his beanie tighter.

"Well, look out!" He pronounced that phrase in a somehow strange voice, looking at Tolya, and went ahead to the river despite the great risk of danger.

"Fedko went! Fedko went!" boys, who had already instigated him for long time to go there, shouted. Fedko jumped on the first ice floe and, as if testing it, stomped his feet on the ice. This one was good, thick and solid. Fedko approached the next one little by little, walking and measuring with his stick, if it were thick enough. After that, he looked back quickly and suddenly jumped upon the second floe. Spirka, Styopka, and Tolya were watching him with bated breath.

"You there! Where're you going?" some worker from aside shouted to Fedko. "Where the hell are you going? Come back!"

But Fedko, as if he didn't hear anything, ran to the edge of the ice floe and started looking for a new one. This one was too thin. He tried to put pressure on it — the ice was bending. People behind him were screaming, waving their hands, and asking him to come back before it's too late. Fedko chose another — it was thicker. Taking a running jump, he sprang. The ice floe only shook slightly under his weight; that was all.

"He's truly gone insane, this leper!" the others on the shore shouted.

"Where the hell is he going? Hey, you, come back here immediately!"

"Well, just take a look at this stupefied guy!"

"Run, bring him back, this son of a bitch!"

But it was too late to run after him. Fedko rode downstream on the ice, and he was in the middle of the river. Sometimes he turned around, his beanie hanging on his stick. He twirled it merrily and screamed something. It was impossible to hear what exactly he was saying, but it was definitely something cheerful and fervent.

"Whose son is he?" everyone asked.

"He is Fedko, the son of Ivan, typographer. A famous brigand."

"What a reckless guy... Ah, just take a look at him, how is he doing it! Oh, Goodness!"

And Fedko was doing something really incredible on the river. Sometimes he crawled on his stomach on thin ice sheets, leaned on the stick, and jumped over patches of water, or he ran from one edge of an ice floe to another, having no way out. It seemed that huge drift of ice would burn into him, smash the guy, and there wouldn't be any traces of the crumb-boy. But the crumb, by some miracle, skillfully climbed to the very crests of ice drifts, slid off of them, and jumped again from one sheet of ice to another. Silence reigned on the shore. Boys froze with open mouths and wide eyes. Elders were worried and carefully watched every movement of the "varmint". If he got stuck for a while, everyone became really worried, and some people started shouting all kinds of advice.

"Turn to the right, jump to the right, son of a bitch!"

"How — to the right?" The other one gets mad at the advisor. "Don't you see, there's water there; let him wait till another ice floe comes close... Don't move, stay where you are!"

Fortunately Fedko couldn't hear any of their advice and happily reached the opposite shore. Boys started to squeak from happiness, fight, and throw stones at ice. Adults sighed from relief and berated Fedko-brigand, shaking their heads. But in their berating was no anger or chagrin. A dexterous boy, what to say. And how did he, a whelp, do that, eh?

From the other side, Fedya waved his beanie on the stick. That shore was empty, because one couldn't get there from the streets — there were someone's walls and wattle fences.

"But how will he come back? Can it be that he will be on the ice again?"

"And so it is; he is on the ice again!"

It was really so; Fedko jumped on the ice floe, then on the second one, everyone quieted down again watching the foolhardy guy. No one shouted advice anymore, and no one berated; they just didn't take their eyes off a tiny crumb who climbed, ran among gray frightful ice sheets, jumped, and fussed. It was such a small crumb, but how deftly and fearlessly it overcame huge pieces of ice that came on cracking as if they intended to crush the impudent living creature. And how this creation was stomping that gray pile of ice, even waving sometimes his tiny stick.

"Well, what a varmint!" someone sighed when Fedko overcame a difficult place. And the "varmint" was closer and closer. He was not far away. You could see his naughty eyes that were looking arduously for a new place where he could go next. He had found it. He leaned on the stick. The stick bounced. He hit the ice and leaned on it again. It was fixed more or less securely. A split second! — he's on another ice floe. A sinewy darn kid that jumped like a cat. And now the boy was already on the shore. Happy screams all around, squeaks of his friends. What a fine fellow, wasn't he? That's how it must be!

"Well, it's your luck that you're so dexterous!" Adults shook their heads. But they weren't berating and didn't feel angry at all, "what would they say to such a job!" Tolya choked as he watched Fedko clamber over the ice floes. His eyes lit up, his heart beating

fast and wild. There was nothing scary there, on those ice floats. But how interesting it was; what a spree! It would be so nice to go there himself. He just had to take his galoshes off; it's hard to run in such shoes. It wasn't difficult at all. He'd just take Fedko's stick, poke it in ice, and jump. What a big deal!

And when Fedko stepped ashore again, the boys surrounded him and looked at him with joy and delight like they'd look at a hero. Tolya felt that he could cross the river too, but he not only could; he'd go and do that! And he, without saying anything to anyone, quickly threw off the galoshes, dropped the knapsack from his shoulders to the ground, and went to Fedko.

"Give me your stick!" he said.

"What for?"

"I want to go to the other side too."

"Where??"

"To the other side."

Spirka and Styopka just snorted. But Fedko didn't laugh.

"But if you fall into the water?"

"Don't worry, I won't. Give it to me!"

"Don't do it better, Tolka... You can't."

"Gee! Not only you can. So give me the stick. What, do you feel sorry to give me your stick?" "Okay, take it..." Fedko shrugged. "But be careful..."

Tolya took the stick and went closer to the river.

"And who again? Where? Why? Who?" People screamed suddenly when they saw Tolya on ice. But Tolya, just like Fedko, rushed forward and jumped onto the second ice floe. At that time, a whole pile of ice moved in and cut Tolya off from the shore. Tolya found himself alone among terrible, cold and huge pieces of ice that moved, crashed into each other, and whirled.

People on the shore were yelling something and running around. Tolya got confused: he wanted to run back but couldn't: ahead of him was a whole strip of water. And behind him, a huge ice rock was moving. It seemed to be willing to crash the sheet on which he was purposely standing, and it was catching up with him.

Tolya got so scared. His arms felt somehow very cold, and his legs became weak and skidded on the ice. He wanted just to fall on the ice, lean against it with his whole body, and scream to call for help. But he was afraid to do it, so he just stood and cried. Those ones who stood ashore were worried; they screamed, discussed how to save Tolya, and didn't know what to do because everyone was suggesting his own advice. All the crowd was going along with the ice floe on which Tolya was standing and crying. They yelled, waved their hands, sent someone to go somewhere.

At the same time, Tolya was floating further. He dropped the stick from his hands and blew on his red fingers, his tears pouring upon them. Some of adults tried to go on ice from another side, but the ice curved and crumbled under them. One sewer almost fell into the water.

Now, Fedko suddenly appeared, seemingly from nowhere. When Tolya got lost and everyone saw the fear on his face, Fedko had instantly disappeared. They even wanted to berate him for so much trouble for the young gentleman. But Fedko vanished like he never existed.

"Aha! He got scared, the son of a whore! A damn varmint; he taunted the guy and ran away." Everyone knew that Tolya was the son of wealthy parents, the richest people in their village, and someone even ran to find his papa. And at the moment, when everyone was fussing and no one really knew how to save Tolya, Fedko appeared unexpectedly. He was holding a very long stick in his hands into which he was hammering a nail, while looking worriedly at Tolya from time to time.

Spirka and Styopka tried their best to help him.

Well, the nail is hammered, it's fixed well.

"Hey, let me go... Go out of the way!"

Everyone parted when they hear his shout. Oh just look, this varmint is again here! But he's holding a stick; he's probably going to save the young gentleman.

"Where're you going, brigand?"

"Move away!.. Get out of the way everyone!" Fedko made his way through the crowd, chose an ice floe, and jumped.

"Hold on, Tolka! I'll be there in a minute! Hold on, don't move! Stay where you are!"

When Tolya saw Fedko, he began to feel worried and wanted to run toward him, but Fedko's order made him stop. Five minutes later, Fedko was on Tolya's ice floe.

"Well, give me your hand... Come with me. Don't be scared, go boldly. Take the stick and lean on it. Well, so... Hold on... Stay there... I'll jump over, wait for me..."

"Oh, don't go!.. I'm scared..." Tolya grabbed him.

"Don't move! Oh what a silly guy... I'll jump over and push my ice floe towards you, and you'll go then... Because you yourself won't jump over..." Fedko jumped over, ran to the edge of his ice floe, and foisted the stick in a nearby pile of ice. The ice snarled and moved closer to Tolya.

"Now come here!.. Well, you see... Now go to this edge. Go boldly, don't be scared... Stand here. Stay there, don't be afraid. I'll go back and push us to the shore..."

Fedko ran to the other edge of the ice floe and was just about to push off the bottom of the river with a stick, when a sudden crack was heard under him. The fragile ice floe broke in two pieces, and Fedko disappeared in the water. Everyone froze.

But Fedko didn't become puzzled; he grabbed the ice with both his hands and tried to hold on with all his might, trying not to be swept away. But to the patch of water that was caused by this, a new ice floe was moving. Fedko was in danger. Tolya saw it and ran across the ice floe with a cry.

"Tolya! Tolya!" Fedko shouted. "Give me your stick... Give me the stick... I'll climb out."

But at that time, the ice floe came closely to the shore and Tolya flew off of it like an arrow. Styopka, Spirka, and other guys rushed to Fedko and held out a stick to him. Fedko was already turning blue and wanted to take hold of the stick, but his hand didn't obey

because he couldn't move it. The boys couldn't come to him, because the ice floe was bending, and the water was bubbling and breaking the ice in several pieces again.

"Styopka, lie down on the ice sheet and move over to me," Fedko croaked.

Adults shouted something from the shore, but the boys didn't listen to them. Styopka lay down and began to sneak up on Fedko.

"Get off the ice there, whoever is left," Styopka shouted, looking around. But at this time, one of the boys handed Styopka a leash tied from a belt. Styopka threw it to Fedko..

"Take it, Fedya! Take it... Faster, Fedya, because the ice is approaching." (A note to the text: "Fedya" and "Fedko" are short forms of the name "Fedir") Fedko stretched out his hand, but again he caught hold of the ice.

"I can't..." he hissed. "My hands don't obey anymore, I'm going to fall..."

But suddenly he grabbed the leash with his teeth, filled his mouth with it, clenched his teeth tightly, and shook his head, as if saying, "Pull!". Styopka and guys and adults from the shore started to pull Fedko out.

"Hold on, Fedya; hold on some more... Eh, hold on a bit more! Bravo!"

Fedko turned completely blue from the cold, and also because he had clutched the leash with his teeth. But as soon as they pulled him out onto the ground, he rose to his feet, beginning to stomp and wave his hands very quickly. Water was pouring from him and his teeth were chattering, but he didn't care.

"That's nothing, it isn't the first time, I have already fallen through the ice this winter three times. I just need to run and get warm."

But he didn't run that day. Tolya's papa and mom appeared from somewhere, Fedko's mother coming with them. Tolya, seeing them, began to tremble and rushed towards them with a yell and a cry. "Pappy!.. Mommy!.. That's not fault, that's not my fault!.."

But his papa and mama didn't let him finish the phrase. They grabbed him by the arms, yanked violently, and dragged him home. Fedko's mother also grabbed Fedko and shook him so hard that splashes of water fell from him.

"Go home, Herod! You'll be given a hard time at home!" She pulled him so hard again that he had to run after her. Fedko had never seen his mother so pale and furious. Ahead Tolya's parents were dragging Tolya, who was stumbling repeatedly, shouting something, and crying loudly. His parents replied something to him from time to time. They were yanking Tolya so violently that several times his beanie fell on the ground. Suddenly, they stopped and waited for Fedko and his mother.

"Has he been on ice?" Tolya's father turned menacingly to Fedko. Fedko felt very cold, his teeth didn't stop chattering, and his body hurt awfully because of his mother's yanking; but he still managed to notice that Tolya's father's saliva had hardened on his lips and his eyes were bloodshot. Tolya raised his head with horror, first to his mother, then to his father, and only said, pitifully, "That's not my fault, that's not my fault..."

"Shut up!" his father shouted to him and turned to Fedko again. "Has he been on ice?"

"He has..." said Fedko, chattering his teeth.

"That's a lie! That's a lie!" Tolya cried even more pitifully and trembled in fear. "I didn't

want to go, but they dragged me to the river. And then Fedko took me and threw on the ice... Ask everyone... I'm not guilty..."

Fedko stopped shaking and glanced straight at Tolya. Fedko's mother flared up.

"Oh, my Goodness! What are you thinking, you, Luciper! Your father will skin you three times, he won't leave a living place on you. Why didn't the devil grab you there in the water, you Herod!" She hit Fedko on the head with all her might. Fedko fell to one knee and covered his head with his hands. His mother wanted to hit him again.

"Wait, Ivanykha!" Tolya's father stopped her.

"Stand up... Wait, Ivanykha..." (A note to the text: Ivanykha isn't the name of Fedko's mother. In Ukraine, women sometimes could be called by a modified form of their husbands' names. For example: Fedko's father's name is Ivan, that's why here his wife is called "Ivanykha") "I want to ask him... Fedko, I believe you, I know that you never lie, so don't lie now, either: tell me, did you drag Tolya to the river?"

Fedko shook terribly. His knees were bent and swaying in all directions. He remained silent. "Speak, scoundrel!" The mother jolted Fedko. Fedko raised his gaze at Tolya, who was looking directly at him with big eyes full of fear and longing. Tears ran down his cheeks and stopped at the corners of his mouth. Tolya mechanically licked them with his tongue and kept looking at Fedko with the expectation of something terrible.

"Well, speak, Fedko!" Tolya's father said impatiently.

Fedko took his eyes off Tolya, bent down, and said quietly, "I did..."

"Did you push him onto the ice?"

"I did..."

"What a bastard you are!" Tolya's father screamed and slapped Fedko hard on the face. Then, he turned to Fedko's mother and said, "I hope that this time your husband will punish him properly... Otherwise, you'd better leave my apartment."

Fedko's beanie fell off his head again when Tolya's father hit him. He picked it up and looked at Tolya. But Tolya snuggled up to his mother, who was already fondling and pitying him.

In the evening, when Fedko's father had to come home from work, Fedko coughed dreadfully and licked his hot lips. He felt very hot.

"Yeah, are you coughing and barking, Herod?" the mother called out from the behind the oven. "Wait, wait, you bloody well. Soon your father will come and warm you with the belt. What, are you having a fever?"

"Yeah..." Fedko answered quietly and looked closely at the strange yellow and green spots in his eyes. When the father came home and the mother started to tell him, he saw almost nothing but yellow and his head felt so awfully heavy and hot; it felt so heavy that he couldn't hold it up on his shoulders. He terribly wanted to lay the head either on the table, or on the ground, or even in the oven — just to rest it. The mother said something, but Fedko didn't even listen; he didn't remember anything. He just saw, as if in a dream, that his daddy got terribly angry for some reason; so angry that he couldn't even speak and only grabbed his throat and his belt alternately. Then, Fedko was laid on the chair and beaten up

properly. But this time Fedko didn't even scream at all. Only when the father let go of his hand that he held, Fedko fell to the ground and didn't move.

"Stand u-up!!" the father yelled and grabbed his son's hand; but the hand was so hot, and the son's face was so strangely calm, that the father threw the belt away and leaned down to Fedko. Fedko didn't hear or see anything.

Three days later he lay dead. Two times he came to his senses, asked if Tolya had been beaten, muttered something and fell unconscious again. In a state of unconsciousness, he begged someone, threatened someone, and restlessly questioned Tolya about something.

His father and mother didn't leave his bed, trembled and silently fought against death. But death won.

On the fourth day, his funeral was held. Boys from all the neighboring streets came to the cemetery. Spirka, Styopka and Havryk wept bitterly. And Tolya quietly looked out the window. His mother strictly ordered him not to go out around street boys. But he was interested to see how Fedko-brigand would be buried.

When Fedko's coffin hid behind the corner of the street and no one was in sight anymore, Tolya moved away from the window, twisted on one leg, and ran to play with the siskin. He had told Fedko's mother to give him this siskin because he had won it from Fedko.