

Cossack Mamariga

Cossack Mamariga served in the household of some very rich people for twenty-five years and earned three copper coins, so he decided to see the world. He was walking along the road when he met a young lad. “Good day to you, young fellow,” he said.

“Good day to you too,” was the reply. “And who are you?”

“I am Cossack Mamariga. I served in the household of some rich people for twenty-five years and earned three copper coins. Now I am on my way to see the world. And who might you be?”

“Well,” replied the lad. “I hired myself out to a certain man to cut some rye for him and I found a bag of hair in the field. It was magic because it produced food and drink. Well, my master found out about the bag. He ordered me to be beaten and for it to be taken from me. But I managed to keep the bag and escaped from him.”

“And where is this bag now?”

“Some robbers fell upon me in the forest and stole it from me.”

“Well. Let us travel together and we’ll be companions.”

So the two of them set off. They walked and walked until they met another youth.

“Good day, young fellow,” they said.

“Good day to you too,” he replied. “And who are you?”

“I am Cossack Mamariga and this is my companion. And who might you be?”

“Well,” said the lad. “I hired myself out to a man to cut some wood and in a tree I found a bag made of wire netting. It was a magic one that could be made to do any kind of work when ordered. But my master found out about the bag. He ordered me to be beaten and to have it taken from me. But I didn’t stay long enough for that to happen. I took the bag and escaped.”

“And where is the bag now?”

“Some robbers fell upon me in the forest and stole it.”

“Well come with us and let us be companions.”

They went on farther. They walked and walked until they met a third youth.

“Good day young fellow.”

“Good day to you, too. And who are you?”

“I am Cossack Mamariga and these are my companions. And who might you be?”

“Well,” said the third youth, “I hired myself out to a certain man and while I was grazing his horse I found some boots that can walk over water. But my master found out about them and wanted to beat me and steal my boots. So I ran away.”

“Where are these boots now?”

“Some robbers fell upon me in the forest and stole them.”

“Well, come with us and be our companion.”

So the four of them went off. Sometimes they stopped to do some work in return for bread, and thus they progressed. At last they came to some crossroads where four roads diverged. Cossack Mamariga looked and said, “Well my dear companions. Here is where we ought to part. I have three copper coins. Each of you take one coin and go in whatever direction you wish. As for me, I shall take the road that is left.” He then gave each of them a copper coin and, bidding farewell, they all parted on their chosen ways.

Cossack Mamariga went on by himself. He wandered for a long time—about three years. Once he happened to be going through a great forest when he came out into a wide clearing. Suddenly he saw four men fighting each other.

“Good day to you. Good people,” he said, “why are you fighting?” And they replied, “Because we can’t agree amongst ourselves. We have a bag made of hair that provides one with food and drink, and a bag made of wire netting that will do any work all by itself, and some boots that can walk upon water. We also have a horse called Hiver. One says he’ll take this and another says he’ll have that and we just can’t make up our minds how to deal out these things. And so we are fighting.”

“Aha,” thought Cossack Mamariga. “These are no doubt those very bandits. Well now, just wait. I’ll settle you.” And aloud he said to them, “Are you willing to listen to me—Cossack Mamariga? No one will divide these things more fairly than I can.”

“We are willing,” said the bandits. “Go ahead then, Cossack Mamariga.”

“Do as I say, then,” he replied. “Put beside me the bag of hair, the bag of wire netting and the boots. Also leave the horse, Hiver. You yourselves go to the other end of the clearing. The first person who reaches it can take whatever he most desires. The second will take his choice. The third will get the next choice. And as for the fourth, he will have to take what is left.”

The bandits ran to the end of the clearing but Cossack Mamariga himself did not stop to linger. In an instant he threw the bags over his shoulder, put on the boots and jumped onto Hiver.

“Ho, Cossack,” said the horse Hiver. “How shall I carry you—above the trees or over the reeds and rushes?”

“Carry me above the trees,” said Cossack Mamariga.

High above the trees rose the horse. The bandits saw him and ran back, but it was impossible to pursue the horse Hiver.

So Cossack Mamariga rode far off with the horse. His only thought was to look for his companions and to return their possessions. “I’ll return the bags and the boots, but I’ll keep the horse for myself.” So saying, he continued on his way into the world to find them.

Whether he rode for a long time or short, we don’t know. But at last he came to a rich courtyard where he asked for a drink of water. The owner came from the house and said, “Who are you and where are you going?”

“I am Cossack Mamariga and I am going to look for my companions.”

The man was overjoyed and, throwing himself at him, said, “But I am your companion who once found a bag of hair and ran away from my master!”

“Well, I have brought back your bag of hair,” said Cossack Mamariga.

His companion thereupon took him by the hand and led him into the house. He seated him at the table and gave him food and drink. Cossack Mamariga got out the bag of hair and offered it to him.

“No,” said the latter. “I won’t take the bag. Let it be yours. The copper coin that you gave me brought me luck. I am now rich and live in prosperity.”

Cossack Mamariga spent three days enjoying his companion’s hospitality, then bade him farewell and rode off once more to find his other two friends. Whether he rode for a long or short time isn’t known, but once more he arrived at a rich courtyard. The owner came forth and he turned out to be his second companion—the one who had once found the bag of wire netting and had run away from his master. He greeted Cossack Mamariga with great respect but would not take the bag of wire netting from him. “I got rich from your copper coin and now lead a prosperous life. Let the bag belong to you.”

Cossack Mamariga spent the time hospitably with his companion and then rode off to find his third friend.

He rode off into the world and at last came to a courtyard even richer than the others. The owner came forth to meet him and he turned out to be the third companion. He received Cossack Mamariga with great respect but refused to accept the boots. "Prosperity came to me from your copper coin so now I do not need the boots. Why should I want to walk over water? But they might stand in good stead for you."

Cossack Mamariga bade farewell to his third companion and rode off further to see more of the world, to find happiness and good fortune. He rode and rode until he got tired. Then he halted somewhere by the road and took up the bag of wire netting.

"Wire-net bag: set me up a tent!"

From the bag there came forth servants who quickly set up a tent and then hid themselves in the bag. Cossack Mamariga opened up the bag of hair.

"Hair bag: give me something to eat and drink!"

Suddenly, who knows from where, there appeared on the table food and various kinds of drinks. There was enough to eat and drink to fulfill your every desire. And all there was to do was say, "Bag: disappear!" And everything disappeared again into the bag, as if it had never been.

Thus Mamariga wandered and wandered until he came to a foreign land. Here he heard from the people that in this country there was a king and in front of the king's palace there stood a hundred-year-old oak tree and beneath the oak tree there lay untold treasure. And the king announced that the person who would cut down the oak tree and dig out the root and get the

treasure would win his daughter in marriage. But out of all those who tried, not one was able to cut down the oak. Cossack Mamariga heard about it and said, "Well now, let us try to cut it down!"

He drove down to the king's palace and announced that he had come to try his luck. The king came out to him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Cossack Mamariga," he said. "I can get the treasure from under the oak tree."

"If you cut down the oak and get the treasure, I'll give you half of my kingdom and the hand of my daughter, the princess. But if you don't succeed, you'll lose your head."

When night set in, Cossack Mamariga went to the oak tree, opened up his bag of wire netting and said, "Bag of wire netting: cut down the oak tree, dig out the root and get the treasure!"

From the bag there came forth servants who began to work while Cossack Mamariga lay down out of the way and rested quietly. Barely had half the night gone when the oak was cut down, the root dug out, the treasure pulled out and the servants were back in the bag.

The king, meanwhile, couldn't sleep, he was so eager. He got up at dawn, went out onto the balcony and was almost struck dumb. The oak tree was lying in the courtyard all cut up and there where it had stood before was a deep hole. Standing near it were chests of iron and in them untold treasure of gold and precious stones.

Cossack Mamariga went toward him and approached the balcony. "Here you are," he said.

"Everything has been done a long time already."

"Truly done," said the king. "And now you may take my daughter for yourself."

But the princess was hard to please and didn't want to go. "Why should I marry a plain cossack?"

"You can't do anything about it," said the king. "You must!"

So they all began to celebrate the wedding. Afterwards, the king said he would sign away half his kingdom to Mamariga. But the latter said, "What is half a kingdom to me? Your kingdom is small. Give me all of it. I don't want half!"

"If you don't want it, it's your business. Do as you please," said the king. "But I won't give you the other half."

Cossack Mamariga then led his horse Hiver out of the stable and took his wife by the hand.

"Farewell to you," he said. "Seeing that you don't want to let go of your kingdom I'll ride off to some other country with my wife." He mounted his horse and seated his wife.

"How shall I carry you?" the horse Hiver asked. "Carry us above the trees," was the reply. The horse Hiver arrived them off swiftly and only the dust stirred beneath them.

They rode and rode for several days until they arrived at the Black Sea. He then carried them over the water and no land could be seen anywhere, only the waves. Suddenly they saw a stone in the middle of the sea. They lowered themselves down onto the stone where they rested. Then Cossack Mamariga hefted from his shoulder the bag of hair. "Hair bag: give us food and drink!" There suddenly appeared a table before them on which food and drink lay, such that even the princess had never seen in her father's palace. They drank and they ate.

"Hair bag: disappear!" Everything disappeared, nothing was to be seen. Then they lay down on the stone to sleep. He slept soundly, but the princess quietly took the two bags and went to the

horse, Hiver. She had barely put her feet in the stirrups when the horse asked, “Where should I carry you?”

“Carry me to my father,” she replied. And the horse carried her so fast that they could barely be seen.

Cossack Mamariga had a rest and when he awoke he saw neither the horse, nor his wife—nor the bags. Only the boots were left. “Well,” he said, “as long as I have my boots, Cossack Mamariga won’t perish!”

He put on the boots and started to walk over the water. He walked and walked for two days until he had crossed the sea. All of a sudden he felt like eating. He saw before him a cherry tree with fruit on it. He picked a cherry and threw it into his mouth. All at once there grew on his head a huge horn. He picked another cherry and threw it into his mouth. There grew another horn.

“Alas, alas,” he said. “How can I live with such horns?!”

Then he saw another bush and on it there were also cherries growing abundantly. “Well,” he said, “maybe I should try them too. Things can’t be any worse.”

He picked a cherry from this tree, ate it and one horn fell off. He picked another cherry, ate it, and the other horn fell off. He thereupon picked some cherries from this tree and some from the other tree and so went on to the kingdom where his wife lived. When he began to approach it, he changed his clothes so he shouldn’t be recognized and then went to the king’s balcony. Then he called out, “Buy some cherries! Here are cherries! Cherries!”

The princess heard him and sent down her servant. “Go and see what kind of cherries they are,” she said. “Ours are still only in blossom and somewhere, it seems, there are already ripe cherries.”

The servant went out and asked, “Are your cherries good and dear?”

“They are.”

“How much?”

“One silver coin per cherry.”

The servant went and told the princess who gave her fifty silver coins. “Here,” she said. “Buy me some of those cherries.”

Cossack Mamariga took the money, gave the cherries and then scurried off.

The princess then took a cherry and popped it into her mouth then quickly put another one into her mouth. Suddenly there grew on her head two huge horns. The princess threw herself at the mirror and looked and how she yelled from fright. Servants ran up—the king ran too, terrified.

“What’s wrong? What did you eat?”

And she cried and told him about the cherries.

“It just couldn’t be,” said the king, “that such a thing could happen just from eating cherries.

Where are these cherries, then?” He thereupon threw some cherries into his mouth. At once horns grew on his head. The king was frightened, then angered. He ordered his men to run quickly and grab hold of the man who had sold the cherries. The soldiers ran. They searched and searched but found no one. What to do now? How were the king and princess to live with these horns? The king called together doctors and sorcerers from all over the kingdom. They looked and looked but could do nothing. The horns wouldn’t fall off. So the king sent his scouts to foreign lands to announce that the person who could get rid of the ugly things would receive his whole kingdom.

Doctors from foreign lands came. They spoke wisely and suggested what to smear on the horns, but they could do nothing.

The princess cried copiously, the king was mad and the people jeered at them. “What do we want with a king who has horns? We don’t want such a king!”

The Cossack Mamariga came to the king. “Good day, father-in-law,” he said. “Maybe I can help you.”

“Well, son-in-law, please do and I’ll sign off all of my kingdom to you if you rid me of this evil.”

“Fine,” he replied. And he gave the king two cherries from the second tree. The king swallowed them and instantly the horns fell off. The princess pleaded, “My dear husband, give me some, too.”

“I’ll give you some. But tell me, where is my horse, Hiver?”

“Your horse is alive. He stands in the stable. Spare me! Give me some cherries!”

“And the bags. Where are they?”

“They are safe, hanging on a nail in the bedroom. Please save me!”

“And you won’t leave me anymore?” he asked.

“No, never, never,” the princess replied.

“Well, take one cherry and throw it into your mouth.” She did so and immediately one horn fell off. He gave her another, which she threw into her mouth, and the other horn fell off. So the princess became as she had been formerly.

“Now just take care that you treat your husband with respect,” he said.

So they all began to rejoice and feasted and drank mead and honey. The king signed off his whole kingdom to Cossack Mamariga. So they lived in prosperity and happiness. The hair bag gave everyone food and drink and the wire net bag did all the work.