

The Roe-Deer

She did not call him as one calls,
but gave a bleat like a hind...

— Folk Song

Over yonder, where the white scree drops down towards Kráinitza, in the vale, was old Tsóno's mill.* The willows are still standing, the mill-stream remains, but the mill is gone. Some ruined walls are all that is left, overgrown with brambles, and a few joists, greying and flattened like mushrooms. Because all this was long ago, and now neither the folk nor the places are as they once were.

Two men used to come to that mill: Tsóno himself and his son Stéfán. Gaffer Tsono was an old man. All old people are bent and, while the young look upwards, the old direct their glances downwards and look at the earth which will soon gather them in. But old Tsono was not merely bent but was simply folded double by some disease and could not walk except by putting his stick across the middle of his back and catching on to the two ends of the stick with his hands. Thus he preserved his equilibrium and walked slowly, gazing at the earth, as if he were looking for something. When he was on his way to the mill, he made no detours to left or to right, but twisted and turned as the path itself twisted.

Stéfán was different. For him there were no paths. No sooner do you see him leaving the village than there he is all of a sudden finishing up over the mill, standing erect on the hillside, tall and stalwart, as indeed he was, and the children who often got into the garden to pick plums, seeing him, not merely got down but simply fell down and fled as fast as their legs could carry them. You could say that a hawk had dropped on to sparrows.

But Stéfán did not always choose the direct way to the mill. Sometimes he went down from the knoll where, at the edge of the village, was Moutsa Stoentichina's house. This Moutsa was a wise-woman, understood about herbs, knew all about demons and fairies. She used to say about the fairies that they had long since gone away, because people had become wicked, but all the same it seemed as if one of them, the prettiest, had stayed behind in her

house. Moutsa had a pretty girl. For her sake Stéfán used to pass by that way when going to the mill. They used to chat in some secluded corner of the garden, between the plums and the sunflowers. He remaining outside the fence and she — inside. She was fair, blue-eyed, shyly looking down, he — swarthy, with wide shoulders, a little black beard which encircled his face but did not hide it. His thin lips smiled, but his eyes stayed sharp, dark, with a little flame inside, in the pupils, in which something like a wicked thought glowed.

From there Stéfán, took he or no a flower from Dóina, felt as if his shoulders were growing wings, leapt across hollows, flung himself from hill to hill, and in a trice was by the mill. He would unleash the water and the mill-clack would begin to clatter. And what sort of thing was old Tsono's mill? A nothing, a sorry cottage, low, tumbledown, like a swallow's nest stuck to the hillside as if beneath some under-eave. But the hollowed-out flume was large, grown green, wet and swollen, the water filling it, rushing headlong through it and striking against the boards of the mill-wheel. On the other side, as from the dark maw of a cave, the water emerged frothing, slapped against the stone walls, slapped on to a wet, shiny stone slab laid opposite, roared, scattered into a million droplets, which filled the air (like) fine dew. Always at that spot, when the sun was shining, there appeared a small rainbow. And it was as if all the light of the sun gathered in that bow, and everything that was happy was singing the song of the clapper-board. Because all around there was nothing but silent hollows and dark woods.

One day Stéfán, old Tsono's lad, came out of the mill with a mattock on his shoulder and went off to fettle the mill-race. He got to the place where the water came out of the wood, widened at one spot and formed that cool, clear pool in which the women from Zhéravna washed their rugs and bleached cloth. There was nobody there now, all the pebbles at the bottom of the pool could be seen and the sand round about was clean and smooth as a writing tablet. Here and there on that sand were tracks. Stéfán halted, squatted down and began to inspect them. They were not goat tracks, although the goats of Kalistrát pastured and took their midday rest nearby; nor were they cow tracks, although the village herd used to pass that way. Stéfán looked at the tracks, bent lower. Finally he straightened himself, his face glowed, his eyes