

THE MOUSY KING

BY KONSTANTIN ILIEV

Translated from the Bulgarian by Andrey Filipov

IRINA, BALKAN, BRANIMIR, THE MOUSY KING, BOYAR SMILEC, BOYAR STAN, BOYAR IVATS, THE PATRIARCH, GRANDPA METHODIUS, THE SILENT POPPY, THE SPIDER, THE FROG, THE FISHERMEN, THE WHITE HORSE, THE BOATMAN, FIRST HANGMAN, SECOND HANGMAN, THE BAGPIPER WITH SEVERED EARS, ANGELARIUS, THE SKELETON WITH A FEATHER BETWEEN HIS RIBS, A RAVEN, TWO LIZARDS

PART ONE

1.

A serene blue sky. In the sky – the sun and a white cloud. By the stone fence Grandpa Methodius removes frames of honey from a beehive. IRINA is sitting on the fence with a large book in her hands, she is not reading it, though. Balkan is lying in the grass and looking with sad eyes at the white cloud.

IRINA (*singing*).

A drop fell on the leaves,

And made a little sound,

Then suddenly large ones

Began to hit the ground.

The rain then stopped and on a branch

A lonely bird just sang and sang.

Wind over grasses chased

The bitter herb's aroma in a haste.

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Read on! Read your lessons.

IRINA (*reads*). In one thousand one hundred and eighty-five, led by the brothers Asen and Petar, the Bulgarians rose in a rebellion and drove the Byzantines across the Balkan Mountain.

BALKAN. Woof! Woof!

IRINA. Grandpa!

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. What is it?

IRINA. Why is Balkan barking at the cloud?

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Because clouds obscure the sun.

IRINA. So what if they do?

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Balkan doesn't like the dark.

IRINA. Why not?

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Would you like some honey?

IRINA. How old is Balkan?

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. My grandfather said that his grandfather had gone fox hunting with his grandfather and Balkan.

IRINA. He then has to be at least one thousand years old. Balkan is the oldest dog on earth.

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. The honey's really good!

IRINA. But he's been very sad lately.

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. That is what I call delicious!

IRINA. Gone for weeks and when he comes home, and the sun begins to set, he howls.

BALKAN. Wooo!

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Lovely honey!

BALKAN. Wooo!

IRINA. Balkan is the saddest dog on earth.

BALKAN. Wooo!

GRANDPA METHODDIUS. Shoo!

2.

IRINA. Gradpa Methodius! Gradpa Methodius!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. What?

IRINA. The Black Bee is coming!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Where is it? Where is The Black Bee?

IRINA. Over there, on the boxwood!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Run! Run home right away! Hide home! ... Wait a minute! Take my hat. If the Black Bee catches up with you, lay the hat on it. Run now! Run as fast as you can! Run!

Irina grabs the broad straw hat of grandfather Methodius and rushes with all haste towards home. Grandpa Methodius is spinning like a top round and round with a smoke bellows in his hand.

3.

IRINA (from the window). Grandpa! I'm scared!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Fear not, Irinka! I'll chase the black bee away with the bellows.

IRINA. Grandpa, see Balkan running in the alfalfa!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Close the windows tight!

IRINA. Balkan has hidden his tail between his legs and is running through the alfalfa.

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Close the windows tight and stay inside!

IRINA. Grandpa! The Black Bee has attacked Balkan and is biting him!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. You don't say, the rascal! (*Stops blowing with the bellows.*)

IRINA. I want to help him.

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Do not come out!

IRINA. I'll cover the Black Bee with your top hat.

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Do not come out! The Black Bee is poisonous.

IRINA. Hold on, Balkan! I'm coming with the hat!

4.

Balkan rushes across the stage with his tail between his legs. Above him hovers the hairy Black Bee. Irina runs after them with a wide straw hat in her hands. Suddenly the opening of a cave appears before her.

IRINA. Now what?

RAVEN (from the dry branches above the entrance to the cave). Crruck! What now?

IRINA. What's this hole?

RAVEN. This is not a hole. It's a cave.

IRINA. Where did Balkan go?

RAVEN. Crruck! If you're a hero! Crruck! Go into this dark abyss! Crruck! If you're a fool! Crruck! Go into this dark abyss! Crruck!

IRINA. I have to put my grandpa Methodius' hat over the Black Bee.

RAVEN. Don't go in! It's a terrible abyss! It's a bottomless cave. Crruck!

POPPY. Wait! Wait, little girl! Take me with you.

IRINA. I am in a hurry.

SILENT POPPY. Take me with you. I am the Silent Poppy. Take me with you!

IRINA. How could I do that? I would have to pick you and you'd die.

SILENT POPPY. Let me die. This cave is full of secrets. I don't want to lose my petals just staying here like a stupid coward poppy.

RAVEN. Crrrazy!

IRINA. I have no time for this.

SILENT POPPY. Pick me!

IRINA. All right. *(She picks the poppy and disappears with it into the darkness.)*

RAVEN. Crruck!

5.

IRINA. Balkan! Hey, Balkan! Where are you, Balkan? Make a noise. *(To the Silent Poppy.)* Can you hear a dog barking?

POPPY. No. I hear nothing.

IRINA. The hat!

POPPY. Oh, don't let go of me!

IRINA. I can't hold you when the wind will blow my hat away.

POPPY. This is not the wind. We're falling.

IRINA. Ap-choo!

POPPY. Bless you!

IRINA. What has happened to you? Why is your voice so weak?

POPPY. One of my petals broke off.

IRINA. Hide beneath the hat.

POPPY. I do not want to hide. I want to watch.

IRINA. Where are we going?

POPPY. To the underworld.

IRINA. A river! We're falling in the river!

POPPY. Fear not!

6.

A fisherman with rolled up trousers catches fish in the underground river. Three noblemen sit on the rocky shore, yawn and swing their legs.

BOYAR IVATS. Is it ready?

FISHERMAN (*holding a net in hand*). It is.

BOYAR IVATS. Hup!

BOYAR STAN. Two!

BOYAR SMILETS (*snores*).

IVATS (*stirs him*). We said - hup!

IVATS and STAN. Two!

SMILETS. Three!

FISHERMAN. Shall I throw it in?

ALL THREE. Throw it!

FISHERMAN (*throws it*).

IVATS. Ready?

FISHERMAN. Done.

IVATS. Hup!

SMILETS. Three!

STAN. Two!

FISHERMAN. Shall I pull it out?

SMILETS. Pull!

IVATS. Don't pull!

STAN. Pull!

The fisherman pulls out the net. There is nothing in it.

Blessed boyars

Tell the MOUSY KING,

That the river has no fish.

STAN. What?

SMILETS. What did this creature down there say?

IVATS. Again it claims that the river has no fish anymore.

SMILETS. I can't understand why we give all that gold to the Green Snake's soldiers. I cannot understand why we give all our honey to the black bees. I can't understand why let them live off us, when they are no good to us. Why is that filthy creature below us still alive. Is there no one to cut off its tongue? Is there no one to gouge out his eyes? Is there no one to impale it on a pole? How dare this stinking fisherman say there is no fish in the river?! How could it be possible that there be no fish in the Mousy King's river?

IVATS and STAN. It's impossible.

SMILETS. Catch a fish!

IVATS. Prepare the net!

STAN. Is it ready?

FISHERMAN. It is.

IVATS. Hup!

STAN. Two!

SMILETS. Three!

The fisherman casts the net.

SMILETS. There's no fish, they claim!... Nine hundred years the glorious tribe of the MOUSY KING has been fishing here. For nine hundred years fish - this only and unfortunately irreplaceable for us food – like a silver stream springs from fishing nets to flow to the light of our underground palaces of our capital and sizzle in the pans of our skilled chefs. There is, he says, no fish! ... Fish in our river is not only not declining, but with each passing year is steadily increasing. And the day is not far off when young and old will sit on this shore with forks in hand and will help themselves with it straight from the water, and will eat and sing. Is it ready?

FISHERMAN. Ready.

IVATS. Hup!

STAN. Two!

Smilets is snoring.

IVATS (*stirs him*). Your Excellency! We said - hup...

IVATS and STAN. Two!

SMILETS. Three!

FISHERMAN. Shall I pull it out?

ALL THREE. Pull!

FISHERMAN (*pull out the net. There's nothing in it*).

Blessed boyars

Tell the MOUSY KING,

That the river has no fish.

SMILETS. Of course wouldn't be. Of course there'd be no fish when the Byzantines - that sly and treacherous tribe - throw all their filth into the river to poison the fish and starve us to death. Prepare the net again!

IVATS. Is it ready?

FISHERMAN. Ready.

IVATS. Hup!

STAN. Two!

SMILETS. Three!

Three. Pull!

FISHERMAN. Blessed nobles, tell the Mosy King...

Suddenly, from above, Irina and the Silent Poppy fall into the empty net. The Fisherman is terrified and drops the net from his hands.

THE THREE BOYARS. The Byzantines are coming! Run!

(They disappear behind a rock.)

IRINA. Hey! For crying out loud, won't you get us out of this net?!

FISHERMAN. I won't.

IRINA. If you don't, we'll drown.

FISHERMAN. Blimey, you don't say! (*Grabs the net.*)

IRINA. Goodness, this water is so cold. Come on, you, pull us out!

FISHERMAN. How could I? I haven't been given an order.

IRINA. What order?

IVATS (*from behind the rock*). I say, let her drown.

STAN. I say, pull her out.

SMILETS. I say, we ask the Mousy King.

ALL THREE. Hear, hear!

SMILETS. Hey, you with the soaking trousers! Be off to the palace of the Mousy King!
Now!

FISHERMAN. Off I go!

IRINA. Help!

ALL THREE. Blimey, what a silly fisherman! What about the net?

FISHERMAN. What about it?

IVATS. Hup!

IVATS and STAN. Two!

IVATS, STAN and SMILETS. Three!

The fisherman pulls out the net.

IRINA (*on the shore*). Ap-shoo!... Good day.

SMILETS. Who are you?

IRINA. I'm Irina and this is Silent Poppy.

POPPY. Good day!

IRINA. Why do you speak so quietly? What's happened?

POPPY. Nothing. I lost a second petal. No matter!

IRINA. I need to find the Black Bee and put the hat upon it.

THE BOYARS. What?!

IRINA. To put the hat upon it.

BOYARS. What?!

IRINA. Upon the Bee.

BOYARS. Guardsmen!

IRINA. Because the Black Bee is poisonous.

BOYARS. Guardsmen!

Enter a guardsman.

SMILETS. Chain her up! Take her to the castle. Put her in the tallest tower, in the deepest dungeon!

IRINA. Blimey, these people are crazy! Can't you understand that I'm looking for my dog!

SMILETS. Inform the Mousy King. Tell the Black Bee. Report this to the Green Snake.

FISHERMAN. Poor little girl!... Better she had drowned!

SMILETS. Guardsman!

THE GUARDSMAN. At your service, Your Excellency.

SMILETS. Chain up this fisherman as well. (*The Guard pulls the fisherman out of the water.*) And tell the Mousy King that we'll fill three hundred basketfuls of fish. (*To the net.*) Hup!!

STAN. Two!

IVATS. Three!. .. Hup!

STAN. Two!

SMILETS. Three!... Guardsman!

GUARDSMAN. At your service, Your Excellency.

SMILETS. Arrest the net as well. For unsobordination.

PART TWO

1.

High upon a rocky peak there stand the castle towers and church domes. Way below glimmer the black waters of a chilly lake. Voivode Branimir gallops towards the highest rock. When he reaches the peak, his horse suddenly stops and stands on its hind legs, as if a monument and neighs. Branimir blows into his horn. The sound reaches the rocky sky of the nether kingdom and the rocky sky returns a vibrant echo.

BRANIMIR. Why is it you neigh so sadly, white horse of mine?

THE HORSE. Because I feel tormented, Branimir. To wait for nine centuries beneath the earth, to only wade in muck and mud and sand... I dream of going out into the fields, where the warm summer sun shines. My hooves to be in flowers and wind to blow my mane. I crave for sun, oh brother Branimir.

BRANIMIR. This ray of light arrives from the sky above Bulgaria.

HORSE. It is just a single ray.

BRANIMIR. But if it fades away, we will all be blind as bats.

2.

Upon the lake a boat appears. In it stands the Patriarch with a tall black crown upon his head, atop of which – a cross.

PATRIARCH. Ahoy, Voivode!

HORSE. The Patriarch is coming.

Voivode Branimir gallops to the shore and dismounts. The Patriarch climbs out of the boat. Branimir bows and kisses his hand.

PATRIARCH. Look here, Branimir, for a while now unpleasant roomers come to me. I have been told that you often come on your horse to this wretched place. Is that so?

BRANIMIR. It is true.

PATRIARCH. Don't you know that the King forbade this ray to even be mentioned.

BRANIMIR. I know, Father.

PATRIARCH. This ray of light is sent to us by forces dark.

BRANIMIR. I know.

PATRIARCH. You know... Then how dare you?!...

BRANIMIR. Father!

PATRIARCH. The Mousy King cannot sleep by day or night...

BRANIMIR. He cannot sleep?

PATRIARCH. He does not sleep.

BRANIMIR. Why does he not sleep?

PATRIARCH. He worries. What if all begin to come to this here peak...

BRANIMIR. If all begin...

PATRIARCH. If others, just like you, begin to watch this beam...

BRANIMIR. What will happen then?

PATRIARCH. What do you mean, what will happen?

BRANIMIR. Why not let them watch?

PATRIARCH. Branimir, this beam is sent here by our enemies. They know that we are used to the dark and want to blind us. That's all.

BRANIMIR. Farewell!

PATRIARCH. Wait! The king has ordered that you go in this boat to the castle and bring to him the captive.

BRANIMIR. What captive?

PATRIARCH. The captive.

BRANIMIR. What captive do you mean? For nine centuries in these dungeons no one from the outside has set foot. What captive?

PATRIARCH. The Mousy King has cunningly succeeded in capturing a treacherous Byzantian girl.

BRANIMIR. Good God!

PATRIARCH. He did it with the help of the Snake and the Black Bee.

BRANIMIR. Really?

PATRIARCH. The Mousy King is wise.

BRANIMIR. I'm off.

PATRIARCH. Wherever you go, may the church bells ring and the people praise the king.

BRANIMIR. Fair thee well!

PATRIARCH. Branimir, I do not think I like this cool reserve with which you receive the joyous news of the king's new success. Aren't you glad?

BRANIMIR. I'm glad.

PATRIARCH. Then why don't you smile?

BRANIMIR. Farewell, Father.

PATRIARCH. Well... Farewell. Farewell. Farewell...

3.

In the canal by the castle wall Branimir, Irina and Silent Poppy are in a boat. The dark waters reflect the castle wall, towers and long spears.

GUARD. Ahoy! Who's there?!

BRANIMIR. Branimir!

GUARD. Pass through!

BRANIMIR (*to Irina*). How old are you?

IRINA. I'm nine. And you?

BRANIMIR. Nine hundred.

GUARD. Who's there?

BRANIMIR. Branimir. What tribe are you from?

IRINA. What?

BRANIMIR. The patriarch told me you were Byzantine.

IRINA. What patriarch? What does he mean I'm Byzantian?... I get it. They're shooting a movie.

BRANIMIR. What?

IRINA. And you are one of the actors.

BRANIMIR. I'm not. And I do not know a family name called Actors. I am Branimir. One of the king's men.

IRINA. What king?

BRANIMIR. King Mousy the First.

IRINA. Whose king is he?

BRANIMIR. The Bulgarians.

IRINA. The dog!

BRANIMIR. What?

IRINA. I heard the dog! Please, give me your helmet. Give me your helmet to put over the Black Bee!

BRANIMIR. Do not move! You're a captive.

IRINA. Whose captive am I?

BRANIMIR. The king's.

VOICE. Spears and swords at the salute! Praise be to Branimir – our glorious voivode! Glory!

SOLDIERS' SALUTE. Glory! Glory!

VOICE. Glory to King Mousy the First - King of the Bulgarians.

SOLDIERS' SALUTE. Glory! Glory!

IRINA. In Bulgaria there are no kings. I know very well that Bulgaria has no kings.

BRANIMIR. So too believe the Byzantines. But they don't know that the MOUSY KING the First - nephew of Samuil the Proud, grandson of Ivan Vladislav, son of his son Alusianus -

that brave and wise King Mousy hid away along with his troops in these bottomless caves and waits for a convenient time to charge them in a final holy battle with the Byzantines. The MOUSY KING is patent.

IRINA. How long has he been waiting?

BRANIMIR. What do you mean how long?

IRINA. How long have you been in these caves?

BRANIMIR. It is nine centuries today.

4.

BRANIMIR. The boat! Watch out - the boat!

BOATMAN. A whirlpool!

The boat begins to spin round and round.

VOICE. Branimir!

BRANIMIR. Paddle harder! Paddle or we'll end up in the cursed place. There is a current.

VOICE. Branimir!

BOATMAN. We're nearing the wheel! Good God! ...

BRANIMIR. Paddle faster!

BOATMAN. It isn't working.

5.

The cry of an owl. From the darkness emerges a large wooden wheel, to which a person is tied up. His arms and legs are so widely spread on the spokes that his body has become a form of the letter X. On the rope where one of his wrists is tied, an owl is perched. Under its weight the wood wheel squeaks and starts turning downwards. The Owl flaps its wings and lands on the other wrist. The heavy wheel slowly starts to turn in the other direction. The Owl once again moves to the its previous position, etcetera.

THE MAN ON THE WHEEL. Welcome, my friend. Long time no see.

BRANIMIR. And greetings to you. How are you, Angelarius?

ANGELARIUS. I'm fine. I'm creaking ... What's new?

BRANIMIR. Nothing.

ANGELARIUS. Will the time come soon for battle with the Byzantines? When will the battle-horn blow? When will the swords blaze?

BRANIMIR. Soon.

ANGELARIUS. And remember, when you defeat the treacherous and vile enemy, when you come out into the sun, tell all nations of the world that Angelarius – a Bulgarian from Vidin, all alone in the dungeons deep, deprived of books of wisdom, with a single trammel compass and long –long observations of the shadow discovered...

BRANIMIR. Listen, Angelarius ...

ANGELARIUS. He discovered ...

BRANIMIR. Listen to me...

ANGELARIUS. It rotates. The earth rotates.

BRANIMIR. That is crazy!

ANGELARIUS. And tell all that in the year of nineteen hundred and seventy a Bulgarian first made this wondrous discovery. For the glory and the honour of us all!

BRANIMIR. Angelarius! Why did you forsake your home, your rank, your honour? Why did anger the king?

ANGELARIUS. In the year nineteen hundred and seventy...

BRANIMIR. Goodbye, Angelarius!

ANGELARIUS. The Earth goes round! A Bulgarian discovered this!

BRANIMIR. Farewell, my friend!

ANGELARIUS. Wait! Chase away the owl!

BRANIMIR. That can't be done!

ANGELARIUS. Goodbye!

6.

VOICE. Branimir!

BRANIMIR. Retreat!

IRINA. Who called?

VOICE. Branimir!

BRANIMIR (*to the boatman*). Paddle backwards.

IRINA. What are these birds?

BRANIMIR. Bats.

Over the water huge black bats fly in circles – they are larger than humans. The boat crashes into a tree on the shore. To the tree trunk a live skeleton with a wide black beard is tied, the water is reaching his midriff. Between his ribs a huge plume feather is stuck.

SKELETON. Branimir!

BRANIMIR. Paddle backwards!

SKELETON. Save me, brother! Take this quill from my ribs. Pull it out!

BRANIMIR. I can't! The King has forbidden you to write books.

SKELETON. Pull the quill out!

BRANIMIR. If I pull it out, you'll start writing futile essays once again.

SKELETON. Pull it out! Brotherly blood flows in our veins.

BRANIMIR. You don't have veins. You are a skeleton! You've got it easy.

SKELETON. No, I haven't!

BRANIMIR. All right, I'll try. (*Grabs the feather. A scream is heard.*)

BOATMAN. The Snake!

BRANIMIR. What?

BOATMAN. The Green Snake!

BRANIMIR. Retreat!

SKELETON. Hold on, brother! I composed a poem. I want it to be heard by one human ear at least. Listen! A poem!

BRANIMIR. Tell it to the bats! Goodbye!

The Silent Poppy dives into the water.

BRANIMIR. Halt! Come back!

POPPY. I want to hear the poem.

BRANIMIR. Come back!

With oars and spears the Poppy is returned into the boat.

7.

BRANIMIR. The town is near. (*He blows into the horn.*)

A huge horse's skull appears from below with widely opened mouth. Its teeth are touching the water. Like a high arch, covering the cervical spine, rises a black harness.

IRINA. What's this?

BRANIMIR. It is a fortress - a symbol of freedom. Through it one can go into the kingdom. (*He knocks with his sword.*) Hey! Who will greet us?

FROG. Who knocks?

BRANIMIR. Branimir.

FROG. Why are you knocking?

BRANIMIR. We must enter.

FROG. You can't.

BRANIMIR. Why not!

FROG. You can enter after two-thirty.

BRANIMIR. We need to enter immediately. It is a matter of state affair.

FROG. I said: you can't. The spider is busy. (*Hides away*).

IRINA. What is this spider?

BRANIMIR. When at first we came beneath the earth, it was so dark here that nobody could find their way. And before we knew it we began to be ordered about by snakes, frogs and lizards. Because in this darkness they feel at home. Darkness is the reptiles' kingdom.

FROG (*appears again*). If you don't clear the entrance immediately, I will need to take extreme measures. Can't you understand that you are disturbing the Spider's work!

BRANIMIR. I'm a royal chieftain and cannot wait. Let me immediately see the spider!

FROG. I told you – after half-past two. There's order here.

SPIDER (*form inside*). Let him enter! Let him in.

8.

BRANIMIR and IRINA are inside the fortress.

THE SPIDER. Name?

BRANIMIR. Branimir.

SPIDER. Age?

BRANIMIR. Nine hundred years old.

SPIDER. Occupation?

BRANIMIR. Royal chieftain.

SPIDER. What do you want from us?

BRANIMIR. By order of the king and the patriarch I need to take the Byzantine captive to the royal palace.

SPIDER. What captive?

BRANIMIR. This captive.

SPIDER. Name?

IRINA. Irina.

SPIDER. Age?

IRINA. Nine years old.

SPIDER. Occupation?

IRINA. What do you mean?

SPIDER. What do you want of us?

IRINA. The Dog.

SPIDER. What dog?

IRINA. Balkan.

SPIDER. There's no such dog.

IRINA. What do you mean there isn't?

SPIDER. Tie her up!

The guards tie Irina up.

SPIDER (to Branimir). Are you aware who there is in the golden crown of His Majesty King Mousy the First?

BRANIMIR. I am aware.

SPIDER. Who?

BRANIMIR. The Green Snake.

SPIDER. Do you know that the Green Snake that lives in the golden crown of His Majesty King Mousy the First, sees everything and hears everything.

BRANIMIR. I am aware.

SPIDER. Do you know that the Green Snake is a reptile?

BRANIMIR. I am aware of this.

SPIDER. Then how dare you talk abominations about reptiles!

BRANIMIR. I haven't said...

SPIDER. Guards!

Guards appear.

BRANIMIR. I didn't mean it that way...

SPIDER. Tie him up. Tie him up with nine knots, this traitor. Tie him up with nine cobwebs!

9.

On a high tower appears a town crier with a drum and drum stick. He beats the drum thrice.

THE TOWN CRIER. A message, a message!

The skull disappears. A bagpipe sounds. At the foot of the tower a round dance turns and turns. The dancers are men and women in colorful folk costumes.

THE TOWN CRIER. A message, a message!

A piper continues to inflate and play his bagpipe. The crier reaches out and hits him on the head with his stick. The bagpipe stops to sound.

THE TOWN CRIER. A message! I report to all that tomorrow in the palace of His Majesty King Mousy the First there will be a public trial. Tried will be: first – Hemus, also called Balkan, former dog of his Majesty; for treason; second - Branimir, voivode and former top commander to his majesty, for treason; third – Irina, a person with unknown identity, for incitement to rebellion and spying for the benefit of the Byzantine emperor. The chairman of the tribunal - King Mousy, representing the defendants - Patriarch Spittle. All are invited to attend the execution.

Second announcement: on the order of Green Snake today, the first of September of nineteen seventy, it is prohibited to play bagpipes and dance, as conducts incompatible with the fighting spirit of our tribe and causing deviation from its grand purpose – which is the final defeat of the cunning and crafty Byzantines. The violators' ears will be cut off!

The Town Crier beats the drum twice. The bagpiper, who until now has been lying unconscious on the ground, sits up, rubs his eyes and blows his bagpipe. The men and women who have been listening to the crier, now again began to dance. At that moment an ominous buzzing is heard and sky blackens.

A VOICE. Run! The black bees are coming!

The Large black bees attack the dancers and everyone runs for safety. Just the stunned Piper turns round and round in the middle of the square, trying to fold his bagpipe. Two frogs with a large pair of scissors arrive and cut off his ears.

PART THREE

1.

A stone prison dungeon. In a small crack in the stone wall penetrates some slight light. In the ground a rusty sword is stuck – almost to the ceiling high. Irina's head sticks out from a boot – tossed near the rusty sword. In the other boot is voivode Branimir, but so that his knees are sticking out between the sticks of the gaping soles. To the spur of this boot Balkan is tied by a thorny chain. Everything is bathed in cobwebs.

BALKAN (*whales*). Bauuuuu!

BRANIMIR. Shoo!

IRINA. Balkan! Why do you howl so? Balkan!

BALKAN. Because I'm sad.

IRINA. I feel sad too. The saddest I feel for Grandpa Methodius.

BALKAN. I am to blame for everything. I am guilty. Bauuuuu!

BRANIMIR. Blame the reptiles! Listen, hey you, frogs, snakes and lizards! Once I get out of this boot, I'll cut you to pieces one and all. I'll chop you up to such small pieces, you'll be sorry you were ever born. How dare you me in keep Khan Krum's boots! Khan Krum's boots are kept in order that people admire and bow to them, they are not to be stuffed with little children and tied-up voivodes.

IRINA. Are these Khan Krum's boots?

BRANIMIR. Yes, they are.

IRINA. As I recall from the history book...

BRANIMIR. What does it say in the history book?

IRINA. It says that the Byzantines were chased away from the Bulgarian land as early as the year eleven eighty-six, now it's nineteen seventy.

BRANIMIR. I know.

IRINA. There are no Byzantines up there.

BRANIMIR. I know there aren't.

IRINA. Do you really know?

BRANIMIR. I know.

IRINA. Then why don't you tell the others?

BRANIMIR. Which others?

IRINA. The other people underground. Tell them that up there there are no Byzantines. (*Branimir bursts out laughing.*) Bless you!

BRANIMIR. But I have not sneezed. I'm laughing.

IRINA. Why are you laughing?

BRANIMIR. Because everyone knows that up there there are no Byzantines.

IRINA. Everyone?

RANIMIR. Everyone.

IRINA. And they remain underground?

BRANIMIR. They do.

IRINA. In the dark!

RANIMIR. In the dark.

IRINA. For nine hundred years!

BRANIMIR. Nine hundred, yes.

IRINA. Boy, are you stupid!...

BRANIMIR. We're not stupid. The Mousy King doesn't allow it. The Mousy King is blind in both eyes and does not need the sun.

BALKAN. Woof! Woof!

BRANIMIR. He needs some fish. He loves fish tail.

BALKAN. Woof!

Wings flapping are heard and with a ball of dust the Owl enters through the hole in the wall. It lands on the swords handle.

OWL. By order of the Green Snake, that sees and hears all, voivode Branimir should be gagged with a cloth around his mouth!

Two FROGS appear and carry out the order.

2.

On a golden throne, the back-rest of which has the form of a horse's hoof, sits the MOUSY KING. The high crown rests very unsteadily upon his head, so he keeps moving his neck around, trying to hold the crown in balance. The MOUSY KING is crouched, hunched, animated and very richly dressed. In his left hand he holds a human skull, plated golden, and in his right hand a silver fork in the place of sceptre.

THE MOUSY KING. And so, what other important state matters need to be decided?

SMILETS. A letter of request has arrived for you, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. What request?

SMILETS. Wiseman Angelarius has written a letter of request.

MOUSY KING. Who?

SMILETS. That crazy one who claims the earth is spinning.

MOUSY KING. What does that fool want?

SMILETS. He wants to teach the people how to make iron.

MOUSY KING. What?

SMILETS. Iron, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. What for God's sake do we need iron?

SMILETS. He's simply mad, Your Majesty. Should I rip up his letter?

MOUSY KING. This Angelarius is to be sent to the cursed place and tied to a stake. I have no time to listen to his silly requests.

SMILETS. He is already there, Your Majesty. His request had arrived a little late.

MOUSY KING. So that I don't bother the Green Snake because it is asleep, what was this thing – iron?

SMILETS. Iron is what horseshoes are made of, Majesty.

MOUSY KING. What?

SMILETS. Horse's shoes.

MOUSY KING. Aha ... What other state problems are there that we need to solve?

SMILETS. The horses.

MOUSY KING. What horses?

SMILETS. The horses.

MOUSY KING. Which horses?

SMILETS. The horses of the army, Your Majesty. They've got to be shoed.

MOUSY KING. Why should they? I say that they shouldn't.

SMILETS. So that they will be prepared for the war, Your Majesty. That was your order.

MOUSY KING. Yes. That was my order. All should be ready for the great and final war with the Byzantines.

SMILETS. But there are no horseshoes, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. There's no what?

SMILETS. Horseshoes.

MOUSY KING. To avoid disturbing the Green Snake, what was that?

SMILETS. Metal horseshoes.

MOUSY KING. I see. What are they for?

SMILETS. To shoe the horses, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. I see. (*Grabs the crown with both hands and closes his eyes.*)

Pause.

MOUSY KING. The Green Snake says that horses are shoed with nails. Is that right?

SMILETS. It is.

MOUSY KING. Then what is all this about horseshoes, eh?!

SMILETS. I'm guilty, Your Majesty. Forgive me.

STAN. Let me explain, Your Majesty. Shoeing horses is done with horseshoes and nails.

MOUSY KING. I order that horses are to be shoed with nails only.

SMILETS. As you order, Your Majesty.

IVATS. But ...

MOUSY KING. What!

IVATS. Stabbing them. I mean – it will be stabbing the horses. To be exact it will just stab their hooves. I mean the nails. But what I actually mean is that there are no nails, because there is no iron...

MOUSY KING. What was your name?

IVATS. Ivats.

MOUSY KING. Boyar Ivats, call the executioner.

Boyar Ivats calls the executioner. The executioner comes and bows.

MOUSY KING. Executioner, chop off Boyar Ivats's head.

THE EXECUTIONER. Your order is my command, Your Majesty. (*Takes out boyar Ivats.*)

MOUSY KING. What other state matters do we need to solve?

SMILETS. The patriarch has arrived.

MOUSY KING. What does the patriarch want?

SMILETS. He wants to make an offering to you.

MOUSY KING. He wants to make an offering to me?

SMILETS. Yes.

MOUSY KING. Let him enter.

The Patriarch enters. After him four monks enter with a heavily bound book entitled: "The Science Of Light" by HM King Mousy I.

THE PATRIARCH. Good day, Your Majesty. We have brought the book.

MOUSY KING. Give it here. (*The monks are approaching. The Mousy King reaches out with his fork with the movements of a blind man.*) Is it roasted?

SMILETS. Your Majesty, this is not a fish, it's a book.

MOUSY KING. What?

SMILETS. A book.

MOUSY KING. A book? I see... So as not to ask the Green Snake, have I ever before eaten a book?

PATRIARCH. Your Majesty, this is a book, and you are its author. This morning we wrote it and we will give it to the people to read.

MOUSY KING. Why to the people? I have a chef! Why should the people bake the fish?

STAN. Not to bake any fish but to read the book, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. Who said that?

STAN. I did.

MOUSY KING. Who were you?

STAN. Stan, boyar Stan.

MOUSY KING. Boyar Stan, call the executioner.

Boyar Stan calls the executioner. The executioner comes and bows.

MOUSY KING. Hangman, you see that fish?

HANGMAN. I do not see it, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. You don't see it because you've snuck up in the upper world and have become blind by the sun! That is why you cannot see. Give me the ax!

The executioner gives him the ax.

MOUSY KING. I won't tolerate blind folk in my kingdom. Where is your head?

HANGMAN. Here it is, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING (*swings*). Did I slay you?

HANGMAN. No you didn't, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. Where is your head?

HANGMAN. Here it is.

MOUSY KING (*strikes again*). Did I slay you?

PATRIARCH, STAND and SMILETS. You slew him.

MOUSY KING. Call another executioner!

Another executioner arrives. The Mousy King points in the direction of the book.

MOUSY KING Do you see that fish?

HANGMAN. I see it, Your Majesty.

MOUSY KING. This is a fish of the book sort.

HANGMAN. I see it very well, Your Majesty. A book of the fish sort.

MOUSY KING. Boyar Stan is to personally take this book to the kitchen. The book should be cleaned and fried in oil. Do we have enough oil?

HANGMAN. Not enough, Your Majesty. We need to economise.

MOUSY KING. Boyar Stan is to be fried in the same oil.

HANGMAN. As you wish, Your Majesty.

Boyar Stan heaves the book upon his shoulders and unsteady on his legs, he exits. The executioner swings the ax over his shoulder like a shepherd's staff and, whistling, walks after him.

MOUSY KING. What other state problems need solving?

SMILETS. The court of justice.

MOUSY KING. Let all defendants enter.

Branimir, Irina and Balkan enter. Branimir's mouth is still gagged and his arms are still chained. Balkan has a wire muzzle protector. Irina is holding in her hand the Silent Poppy. On either side stand two green lizards, armed with a long spear each.

MOUSY KING. May all people enter!

A long procession of heads is seen to enter in the background. Last is the head of the piper with the severed ears. King Mousy, the Patriarch and Boyar Smilets remain to the left, voivode Branimir, Irina and Balkan are to the right. In between but further back is the rosary of heads.

MOUSY KING. My people! Brothers and sisters! Dear friends! For nine hundred years now our industrious and wise tribe, hidden in these dark dungeons, has been building its bright future. And the day is near when I intend to bring you out upon the land above and you lead you a decisive and final battle with the Byzantines. In order to regain our fatherland and to live more happily than we do now. But!... A handful of pathetic traitors - that's them – tried to brainwash the people that we have to go toward the light right now. Right now! ... Can we get out into the light now? We can. Should we go into light right away? No, we shouldn't. Why? Because we will all go blind. The eyes of our nation are not used to light. Our nation is not yet ready for the light. It will, of course, become ready, but years are

needed for that. I propose that the traitors be punished by death. Are there any other proposals?

SMILETS. No.

PATRIARCH. Voivode Branimir, you have been accused of treason. How do you plead.

Branimir is trying to say something, but cannot for his mouth is tied up with the cloth.

SMILETS. He is silent. Thus he admits his guilt.

PATRIARCH. You, little girl, do you have anything to say?

IRINA. I have to go now, because I am way late. If anyone of you loves honey, they are welcome to come along. Grandpa Methodius got the honey from the beehives. Fear not. There are no Byzantines up there. Way back in eleven eighty-six, the brothers Asen and Petar chased away the Byzantians from the lands of Bulgaria.

MOUSY KING. Enough! ... Call the executioners! ... Who growls there?

SMILETS. The dog.

MOUSY KING. Why is it growling!?

PATRIARCH. Hemus, dog of this kingdom, also known as Balkan, you are accused of secretly leaving the underworld of the state of His Majesty King Mousy the First. Is this true? (*Balkan growls.*) Will you say anything in your defence?

IRINA. Balkan, respond when this old man is asking. (*She removes his muzzle.*)

Balkans. Woof!

IRINA. And behave yourself before these people. Behave!

BALKAN. Woof! I'll speak. I'll say this: I'm a very old dog. I swam with the horses of Khan Asparoukh across the Danube and bit Emperor Nikephoros I as he fled through the Tvarditsa Pass. And I would like to say that it is a disgrace that a nation that once respected the power of Khan Krum and Simeon and the wisdom of Cyril and Clement, now trembles before a simple mouse. That is all I have to say. Woof!

Pause.

MOUSY KING. My executioners! Where are my executioner? Call for the Black Bee to come and sting him right in the eye.

THE PEOPLE. Poor dog!...

The Mousy King stands up from his throne and starts with his fork held out in the direction of Irina, Balkan and Branimir. A few steps from them uncertainly he stops.

MOUSY KING. What's this? What smells so?

IRINA. The poppy. This is Silent Poppy. Here you are, take it.

MOUSY KING (*takes the poppy*). A poppy?... A poppy? ... What was this thing, a poppy? ... (*Boyar and patriarch Smilets pick up the throne and take it to where the king is now standing.*) A poppy?... A poppy? ... (*He hangs his head.*)

PATRIARCH AND BOYAR SMILETS. Quiet! Quiet! The Mousy King's fallen asleep. When he falls asleep the Green Snake awakes to protect the crown. Quiet! (*They all step back silently.*)

In the silence a buzzing is heard. The Black Bee appears, circles above the sleeping king and attacks Balkan.

IRINA. The Black Bee!

Balkan tucks in his tail in despair and whimpers. IRINA grabs with both hands the crown of the Mousy King and puts it over the Black Bee..

THE PEOPLE. Oh!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. Irina!... Where are you, Irina!

Grandpa Methodius appears through a hole high upon the wall of the dungeon.

IRINA. I'm over here, Grandpa Methodius!

GRANDPA METHODIUS. What are you doing there?

IRINA. Talking to some stupid people. They've got a king.

GRANDPA METHODIUS. What on earth did you do with my hat? My head got sunburned. Where's my hat?

IRINA. Your hat got wet. But here's another. I'll get it for you. (*Takes the crown.*)

THE PEOPLE. Oh!

Grandpa Methodius' head disappears. The piper with the severed ears steps forward cautiously and takes the crown in his hands.

THE PIPER. But there's only cobwebs inside! And I let two toads to cut my ears off on the orders of the Green Snake... There is no snake!

THE PEOPLE. There is no snake!

BALKAN. Woof!

The Mousy King is startled and jumps from his throne. Balkan chases him across the stage, barking at him. Branimir the voivode tenses up his muscles and breaks the chains. He then grabs Boyar Smilets's sword and waves it in all directions.

MOUSY KING, SMILETS and PATRIARCH. Help!

The Green lizards run away in panic. Branimir reaches them and cuts off their tails. When King Mousy, the Patriarch, Smilets and the lizards disappear, in the middle of the stage remain Irina and The Piper with the cut off ears.

IRINA. Do you like honey?

PIPER. What?

IRINA. Do you like honey?

PIPER. I can't hear.

IRINA. Mum has prepared bread and honey, but I don't like it. When we go above ground, I can give them to you. Do you like honey?

PIPER. All right. I'll play something.

The Piper with the severed ears starts to play and a round dance ensues.

BRANIMIR. Where to now?

BALKAN. Upward.

BRANIMIR. Where upward?

BALKAN. To the land above. Woof! Woof! Follow me! I know the path! Woof!

The long line of people starts up the steep path towards the exit of the dungeon. Only the Silent Poppy remains behind.

POPPY. Goodbye! Goodbye to all! ...

MOUSY KING (*appears through the hole high up in the wall*). Come, one and all. Come to me! I'm up here now, waiting for you.

THE END