

## **MARO**

### I

OUR village is the one that stands  
Proudly in the misty mountains,  
Upon the cliff of the deep valleys,  
With hand held at the brow,  
Pondering with melancholy mien;  
I do not know what it seeks...  
There we observe every fast,  
We pray with fervent devotion,  
And go to church every day;  
Yet every some new sorrow,  
Some misfortune or disaster,  
Greets us without fail.  
Let me tell you of an incident,  
A tale that will never cease,  
With the sadness of its memories,  
To unsettle the peace in my heart.

## II

Below our village, to this day,  
There is a willow in mourning,  
Separated from the big forest  
And having escaped man's axe,  
It still stands there, and in the heat  
Provides the labourer with cool shade.  
There is a mad mountain stream  
Which babbles away under it,  
Frolicking through green meadows.  
When we were vexed by the heat  
In the middle of the day,  
We would go bathing in that stream.  
Naked and in joyous groups,  
Bustling around noisily,  
We would play and run about  
On the fine, multi-coloured sand.  
Or panting, we would chase  
After the gold-winged butterfly;  
And whenever we grew weary,  
Beneath that lonely tree,  
Sadly we would sit upon a stone,  
The tomb-stone over Maro's grave...

On luckless Maro, prematurely dead,  
Oh my friend of childhood days,  
How oft have we played together,  
Loved and fought each other...!

### III

Maro was so lively and pretty;  
And she was just nine years old,  
When one day there called  
Two visitors at their house.  
And when Maro's mother  
Brought out a laden tray  
And placed it before them,  
They thanked her and said:  
'May your troughs be full of bread  
And your doors ever remain open!  
It is not bread that we seek,  
But of the earth from your home!'  
And thereupon Maro's father  
Took a glass filled with rakii  
To the brim and said:  
'Let it be your will, Lord God!'  
Thus they betrothed Maro  
And gave her to the shepherd Karo.

### IV

The mountain shepherd Karo  
Was of such great stature,  
That those who gazed upon him  
Were filled with terror.  
But his mother-in-law to be  
Was exceedingly fond of him.  
So also was Maro fond of him;  
'Karo is kind', she would say,  
'He brings me, every day,  
Apples, sweets and raisins!'

## V

Then once, Karo, in vivacious mood,  
 Came accompanied with pipe and tabor;  
 They dressed Maro up in fine clothes,  
 They covered her face with a veil  
 And dyed her hands with henna...!  
 The priest came with across  
 And led them to the church;  
 ‘Will you be her husband, my son?’  
 He asked. ‘I will,’ replied Karo.  
 Maro remained silent all the while...  
 The father, too, went to the ceremony  
 And blessed his son-in-law, thus:  
 ‘May your harvest always be rich,  
 May your back be as strong as a fort!’  
 And when the cry ‘She’s off!’ resounded,  
 They took her to the bridegroom’s house.  
 Thus they married Maro  
 And gave her to shepherd Karo...

## VI

Whether by evil magic contrived,  
 With written charms and amulets,  
 They broke her infant heart,  
 Or into her clothing  
 That soulless, vile witch  
 Rubbed some wolf-fat,  
 No one knew for certain;  
 But the newly-wed child bride  
 Hated her husband and ran away,  
 Back to her parental home.

And there she cried with anguish:  
'I will not go near him!  
It is my mother that I love;  
I do not want to be a wife!'

## VII

Thereupon, her father grew angry;  
He beat her up and said:  
'Get out of here, shameless girl!  
Don't ever come back to us again,  
Or set foot in my house any more!  
You have smirched my name with mud!'  
And so, crying, her face covered up,  
Maro left her parental home.

## VIII

Thus persecuted by her father,  
Escaping from shephard Karo,  
Hungry and with clothes torn,  
She disappeared for many days.  
She would huddle up pathetically  
Round strangers' hearths,  
Or would roam about all alone  
Costantly in our meadows.

## IX

Many months went by...  
A shepherd from the mountain opposite  
Called upon us one day and said:

'I have to let you know  
That a child dressed in red  
Fell into the valley, by the path!  
We poured out of the village,  
Standing at a distance, through fear,  
We saw in that terrifying valley  
How Maro's white-haired father  
Was crying and sobbing aloud,  
And her mother mournfully howling.  
Karo, likewise, wept a great deal...  
Thus our Maro died and passed away.

X

But her luckless body they did not  
Bury beside that of her grandfather.  
To this day, far from the village,  
There is a willow in mourning.  
Beneath that lonely tree  
They dug a deep hole  
And, without church or mass,  
They laid Maro in it;  
They cut and polished a black stone,  
Which they brought and placed over her.

XI

Oft have i seen the mother when,  
In black mourning and alone,  
Bending down on to that stone,  
Would call to Maro thus:  
'Who beat you dear Maro?

Who cursed you, dear Maro?  
Where have you gone my Maro?  
Come home, dear Maro, come home!  
Are you in deep sleep, dear Maro?  
You will wake no more, dear Maro...!’  
Bending down on to that stone,  
She would call to Maro thus;  
She would burn incense, light a candle,  
Which in the darkness of the night  
Would twinkle in solitude,  
For a long time, from afar.