

Contemplations of a Colonel's Remembrances of a Ukrainian Girl

Was she “chornabrova” as in the folktales?
Lybid in the flesh?
One of Shevchenko’s girls, thick-browed and dark-eyed?
In your dreams, does she chase you,
running swiftly, barefooted, crying
“Ya lyublyu tebe! Bud_ laska!
Ni! Vy ne mozhete zalyshyty!”
In that moment before you grab the Blackhawk’s rail,
hoist yourself into its bowels, do you drop to the ground
the rucksack which protects the embroidery she gave you?
Do you feign the blades’ wind, catch her in your arms,
kiss her full red lips, and tell the mission “Go to hell!”?
Or do you, bound by God and duty, hoist yourself
into the screaming bird, signal the pilot,
and whisk away to the next theater’s acts,
leaving your Katerina, your Oksana, your whatever her name,
lying crumpled, weeping, in the dust-blown aftermath?
The afternoon and alcohol’s haze breaks:
“I still have the embroidery,” you confess,
pouring one more snort of vodka
before you rise from your chair to fumble through
an ancient desk’s drawers; thirty minutes pass
before you emerge, bearing a cloth
stitched black and red, rose-patterned.
You retake your seat, and you stare
at the embroidery in your hands,
whisper—nearly inaudibly—

“Sometimes I still see her running,
and it’s as though
I never left.”