

A Maiden from Działdowo

It was a long, long time ago. The town of Działdowo was surrounded by vast marshy fields. At midnight, a white maiden would appear at the Teutonic castle, situated near a beautiful lake covered by club-rush and willow trees.

One day, a young maiden, born and living with her parents in Działdowo, left the family home after sunset to meet her father returning from work.

She went past the lake and sat down at crossroads.

She waited for quite some time, but her father was not coming back.

When dusk fell, the girl fell asleep on the grass, tired from all that waiting. She was captured by evil spirits and taken far away, underneath a mountain called Krzyżowa Góra.

Her life in the enchanted kingdom of spirits was very hard.

She was only allowed to leave her hiding place before midnight to look down from the top of the mountain.

Passers-by would see her from afar in the moonlight, pale and sad.

She looked into the distance, waiting for a saviour to rescue her from her horrible fate.

One evening a shepherd looking for a lost sheep suddenly came across the maiden.

When she saw the stranger, she begged him to save her.

The kind shepherd felt sorry for the girl: he decided he would do everything that was needed to free her from the devil's grasp.

So the girl told him he needed to kiss every animal living on the mountain without looking back.

The young man agreed without hesitation.

All kinds of creatures and beasts started crawling out of the ground and the shepherd kissed them as they came: dogs, cats, moles, mice, snakes, snails... but when a big toad crawled out slowly and heavily from underneath a burdock leaf and came towards him, the shepherd could not take it and turned away with disgust.

At that moment, everything around him, including the girl, was swallowed by the earth.

The shepherd regretted his weakness deeply.

For a long time he would come to the feet of Krzyżowa Góra every evening after sunset and wait patiently for the maiden – but all in vain.

The girl never reappeared again.

Masurian Legends, "Gazeta Mazurska", 1923, no. 14, p. 2.

Ewa Sotomska, *Kierz róży. Bajki mazurskie*, Miniatury mazurskie no. 7, Działdowo 2016.