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## A LEGEND ABOUT THE BLESSED FOREST

Whether this was true or not, I cannot say. But here is what is told in our family: It happened about two centuries ago. Grey friar, strictly observing the laws of his order, escaped from Jacobin terror and roamed about Europe for a long time, trying to find a place where he could devote his life to prayers and service. His roving life continued for several decades but finally another Franciscan disciple told him that their monasteries were being opened again and the first country, where they had already been opened, was Spain. The friar was on the Balkans at the time and he decided to leave for Spain on the shortest route. An elderly man then, he was so excited about meeting his brothers from the order, that he travelled day and night. But he got tired, he could not wait to reach a village and he decided to spend the night in the forest. It was getting dark and the friar settled himself under the branches of a high magnificent oak which looked like a king among the rest of the oak – trees in the forest. The friar offered up a prayer to St. Francis, the patron and defender of every living thing, and fell asleep. And when he woke up he saw a huge bear near him. The bear lay next to him like a dog and guarded his sleep. It was raining everywhere but the branches of the oak protected him and not a single drop fell on the cassock of the elderly friar. The rain soon stopped and the sun showed up. The forest shone with the sun and the friar offered up a prayer to express his gratitude to the forest. He blessed the forest and the animals that lived there. As the friar was going out of the forest, he met a man who had come in order to get some wood for casks. The man accompanied him to the village and on the way there the friar, who had learned our language in all those years of roaming, told him about the blessed forest. He also asked the man, whenever cutting down trees, to leave the sprouts so that they could grow again. The craftsman listened to his advice and when the wine in the casks became mature, its flavour was unique. Those casks had been made of the wood from the blessed forest. And the wine lent strength to people, made them healthier and even cured some illnesses. Years and decades have passed by, governments and laws have been replaced and changed, but the legend about the Grey friar, who had blessed our forest, is still handed down from generation to generation.