

Cor Hendriks: The footless hero (an episode from my study *The Macaws*)

The episode is also part of a ‘true’ Russian version of AT 519: *The Strong Woman as Bride (Brunhilde)*. I. *The Suitor*. A prince with his extraordinary companion woos a bride who is beautiful, strong, and warlike, and who will have a husband no man who is not her equal in strength. II. *Suitor Tests*. (a) The prince must wield her gigantic weapons and ride her untamed steed. (b) By substitution of his companion this is accomplished. III. *The bridal night*. (a) In the bridal night she lays her feet and hands on the prince and almost stifles him. (b) He asks permission to go outside and in the darkness the helper substitutes himself and overcomes the princess. IV. *The Princess’s Revenge*. (a) When on the return to the prince’s home she discovers the betrayal, she cuts off the feet of the helper and drives forth the prince, who becomes a swineherd. (b) The lamed helper joins a blind man and they assist each other. (c) They overcome a giant and compel him to show healing water. (d) The helper with his feet restored returns and compels the restoration of his master.¹

So the hero is the son of a tsar who wants to marry the beautiful princess, who has put the heads of her suitors on a fence around a palace. He gets help from a lowly peasant, Ivan the Beggar, and together they go to the princess, who receives the tsar’s son festively. Then the games take place and each time Ivan breaks the weapons saying that they are not fit for a worthy man (kills her steed). In the wedding night she discovers that she is tricked, and while they are travelling she has the opportunity when Ivan sleeps to cut off his legs. She takes the prince as servant back with her and leaves Ivan behind. Fortunately Marco the Runner passes by, takes him, as a friend, on his shoulders and goes with him into the forest where they build an isba (wooden house) and a cart, in which Ivan, pulled by Marco, hunts for wild, from which they live. They get bored and steal the daughter of a pope (Ivan grabs her, and Marko runs away on his long legs). They make her their sister, who keeps the house. One day coming back from the hunt they notice that their sister is meagre and pale, and they ask what has happened. She tells that she is visited every day by a dragon [who sucks her blood]. Ivan hides under the bench. Marko stands behind the door. A half hour later the trees rustle, the roof creaks, and the flying dragon arrives. Hitting the ground he becomes a beautiful young man, enters the house and asks for something to eat. Ivan grabs his legs, [he falls,] while Marko lets himself fall on him and crushes his loins. They drag the dragon to a tree-trunk, split it, push his head in between, and beat him with rods, until he offers to take them to the Waters of Life and Death. When they arrive at the lake, Marko wants to jump immediately into it, but Ivan withholds him and throws a (green) branch in the water; it burns immediately to a crisp. The dragon gets renewed beatings and takes them to a 2nd lake, in which Ivan throws a dead stick, that immediately starts to make leaves [cf. Medea’s kettle]. They jump in and are both cured. Then they throw the dragon in the first lake, go back to the girl, that Marko brings home and marries. Ivan finds a good horse, goes looking for the tsar’s son, finds him tending pigs, exchanges clothing with him, puts him on his horse and drives the pigs in his stead. When the princess sees them coming, she orders them to be punished, but Ivan runs towards her, grabs her by the braids and drags her around until she shows remorse.²

In another version from the collection of Afanassiev the king’s son is called Ivan and his helper is the old Katoma-woodcap, recommended by his parents. The latter takes the young king to a gallery in the palace, where the portraits of all the princesses of the world hang; he chooses Anna the Beauty, who has no equal, but who only wants to marry someone who can pose a riddle she can’t solve. Finding a purse Ivan finds also the riddle that Anna can’t solve, but then she imposes

¹ Thompson 1961, 187, based on Löwis of Menar, *Die Brünhildsage in Russland*, Leipzig 1923.

² Gruel-apert 1990, 112-115 n°89: ‘Le cul-de-jatte et le manchot’ (Afan. 200/116c) = Guterman 1975, 269ff.

difficult tasks in which the prince receives help from Katoma. The princess thinks she is marrying a powerful man, but when they leave the church she presses his hand and the blood flows to his head, so she knows she has been tricked. She wants to take revenge on Katoma and manages to get the prince to leave Katoma to her will, whereupon she has his legs chopped off and left behind on a tree-trunk. Ivan is made cowherd. After a 3 days a blind man (also the victim of Anna, who scratched out his eyes 30 years ago) bumps into the tree-trunk and Katoma falls down. They become friends, and the blind man takes the legless on his back, so he can function as his eyes. One day they decide to abduct the daughter of a merchant and make her sister and housekeeper. She stays with them, but starts looking bad after a while. After being hard pressed she reveals to get visits from an ugly old woman with long white hair, who commands her to louse her, while sucking on her white breasts. The two heroes take their position and when the girl louses the baba-yaga, she has to hang the witch's hair out of the window. The blind man grabs them, whereupon Katoma comes out from under the bench and strangles her. The baba-yaga is seeing 36 candles! She begs for mercy and promises to do what they want, and takes them through the woods to a well: 'Look there the Water of Life.' Katoma withholds the blind man, throws a green stick in it, that burns right away. They want to throw the baba-yaga in it, but she quickly shows them the right well and the heroes cure themselves and throw the incorrigible baba-yaga in the burning well anyway. Then Katoma marries the merchant's daughter and the 3 of them go to the kingdom of Anna the Beauty, where they find near the capital Ivan, herding cows. (etc.)³ In another version from the collection of Afanassiev the hero/helper is called Nikita Koltoma and the blind man is his brother Timofej Koltoma, who has been blinded on orders of Jelena the Most Beautiful, and who is discovered by his brother, who has been put without legs in a boat and set adrift. The blind one takes the other on his shoulders and together they form a whole man. They come into a dark wood upon the little house of the baba-yaga. She is not home and they enjoy themselves eating and drinking. Then the baba-yaga comes, scolds them a thieves of her food. Timofej grabs the witch and Nikita drags her by the hairs. She begs them to stop, and will do what they want. They want healing and life-giving water. She takes them to 2 wells. Nikita takes from the healing well and his legs grow whole, but are not able to move; then he takes from the life-giving water and now he can move. His brother does the same: the healing water gives him his eyes back and the life-giving water enables them to see. They thank the old woman, and return to free the tsar from his life as pig-herd.⁴

In a White-Russian version the hero is called Ivan Chicken-Leg, because he is born with chicken legs, didn't grow from day to day but from hour to hour and after a day he was as big as a normal man, so he says to his father: 'Tomorrow we are going to look at the daughter of the tsar. His father goes reluctantly with him, but tsar has 3 assignments: jump over the highest tower of his palace, then jump over the palace, and finally to throw his 7-pud tsar-sceptre over the highest tower and the whole of the estate. As Ivan fulfils all 3 tasks the tsar has to give him her daughter, but she doesn't want a man with chicken feet and when he is asleep, she cuts them off with a knife. When he wakes up, he notices it and sets out into the world, walks and walks [!] till he meets a man without arms, called Kusma Without Arms, although he had arms the day before, but they were torn off by a 7-pud tsar-sceptre falling out of the air. Ivan apologizes, takes the sceptre with him, seats himself on Kusma's shoulders, and they walk and walk till they meet the devil, who can't stop laughing when he sees the strange duo. He mocks them and is beaten by

³ Bozoki 1978, 242-249 n°65: 'Le cul-de-jatte et l'aveugle' (Afan. 198/116a) = Ralston/Brueyre 1874, 219-237: 'L'aveugle et l'estropié'.

⁴ Heemskerk 1964, 174-184 (n°45) = Gruel-apert 1990, 105-112 n°88: 'Le cul-de-jatte et l'aveugle II' (Afan. 199/116b).

Ivan with the sceptre, who doesn't stop until the devil promises to take them to a source with Water of Life. He takes them to a source in the wood, but Ivan first puts in a twig that withers. Ivan threatens with his sceptre and the devil quickly takes them to another source. This time the twig put into it becomes weak as a string. Again Ivan waves the sceptre and the devil says it was a mistake, takes them to another source, this time the right one, that makes the twig blossom, gives legs to Ivan still called Chicken-Leg, and arms to Kusma. Ivan goes to the palace, where the wedding is celebrated of the daughter of the tsar. He storms in, but as soon as the tsar's daughter sees him, she comes to him, happy that he is back.⁵

The tsar becomes an anti-hero in the Russian version 'Mathusha the Ashes-grey One', collected by A.N. Netsjaev. Mathusha advises against the plan of the tsar to court the strong Nastassia Vagrameevna, but the tsar is pissed, and treats Mathusha as a slave. After the winning of the bride (Mathusha chops a 300-year old oak with a 100 pud sword to matches, shoots with a 300 pud bow and 5 pud arrows the cupola of a tower in the realm of the neighbour-king, and tames the wild stallion), during the sail-trip home (after the bride has already discovered that she is tricked) the tsar, observing the sleeping Mathusha, remembers his words and in a fit of anger he cuts off the legs of his sleeping servant and throws him overboard. Mathusha uses his legs as peddles, arrives at the shore, and thinks of the bird Magaj he has met in the beginning of the story, when he was 15 and said goodbye to his parents. After a long walk he came to a dark forest, that was hit by a thunderstorm. To protect himself he climbed in the highest oak and saw there a bird's nest with young birds, that were getting cold and wet and pounded by hail, so he covered them with his caftan, joined the birds in the nest and shared with them his provisions. After a while the storm passed, but then there was a great noise and it became dark, and the bird Magaj landed and started beating Mathusha, but the little birds called off their mother, telling what he had done for them. The bird was very pleased and told Mathusha that at the foot of the oak there was buried a bottle out of which he had to take three sips. He did this and became very strong (so strong, that when there would have been a pillow standing in the ground reaching to the sky and he would grab it, he would be able to turn mother earth around her axis). After that he became water-carrier for the tsar, slept among the garbage and ash-hill, which gave him the name 'The Ashes-grey One'. Thinking of this bottle, he sees a man coming, stumbling every step of the way. It turns out he is blind, and he offers to carry Mathusha in his backpack, so that he can show him the way. Together they go (a tale is rapidly told), and finally they arrive at the oak where the copper bottle with the healing water is buried. First Mathusha heals the eyes of his fellow, who then helps him to put on his legs. They both take a good sip and revitalized they go to the city of the tsar. When they approach the city, they see the tsar herding cows, forced by the strong Nastassia. When Mathusha makes himself known, the tsar begs him to help him, but Mathusha tells him to disappear out of the kingdom and the former tsar runs off. The strong Nastassia was secretly in love with Mathusha, and had cried when he had fallen overboard. He tells her what has happened, after which they marry, and Mathusha becomes the new tsar.⁶

Also in Bohemia versions have been recorded and Tille has two versions under the heading 'Die zwei Krüppel'. In the first the legs of the hero Hans are cut off, while his brother Prokop is turned into a shepherd by the deceived princess. Hans goes on stilts away, finds in the woods a man nailed with his hands to a tree, who asks him to free him. Hans pulls him free, which costs the man his hands. Together they find a cart, in which Hans sits while his comrade pulls. They abduct a princess to an abandoned castle. When the princess lies sick in bed, she is attacked by a snake [he was the cause of the sickness, sucking her blood daily]. Hans forces the snake to bring

⁵ Verroen 1973, 136-141.

⁶ Siebelink 1993, 118-134: 'Matjoesja de Asgrauwe'.

him to a curing well. The snake first takes him to a fire well (the branch dipped in the water enflames), then to the curing well, where Hans regains his feet and his comrade his hands.⁷ The second version starts with the into of AT 502, but Tille uses often the word ‘entstellt’ to indicate that the version deviates from the ‘norm’. At a certain point the ‘giant’ (cf. Iron Hans) falls from the carriage and breaks (= loses) both feet. The coachman takes him to gallows (entstellt), where a man hangs without hands who carries the giant on his back to a castle. They often go hunting, the giant sitting on the other, and once they abduct a girl to do their cooking. Once the girl is attacked by a witch and killed. The giant heals the girl with unguent from a white snake, catches the witch and forces her to bring him his feet and his comrade his hands (two times she brings the wrong ones).⁸

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⁷ Tille 1921, §7G, version Prikryl 70 (377).

⁸ Tille 1921, §7G, version C. Lid XI (410) from Olesna near Blansko.