

The Fate of Magically Strong Heroines in Central Asian Folktales

Central Asian folktales regularly feature women who are physically stronger and more skillful than men in hunt and war. The tales, however, cannot be automatically assumed to be championing women's rights and equality. I identify two major types of tales with physically strong heroines. Only one of the two and the rarer one of the two has a feminist stance. As in the European tradition, most tales of strong women are of ATU Type 519, in which a subdued hostile bride loses her magical strength upon marriage to the hero. Uniquely, however, in Central Asian folktales, the supernaturally strong bride is often won by the hero's supernaturally strong female relative—a daughter, a sister, or a wife in male disguise. She is favored provided she performs her feats on behalf of her male relative(s); however, persecution of the helper motif characteristic of ATU 519 is eventually employed to punish the heroine for entering the male sphere of action once her task is complete. The other tale type presents a heroine acting on her own behalf; she performs her magical feats with the help of her horse. She is often in male disguise too, and her magical powers extend beyond her marriage. Attempts of the husband to strip her of them are cast as wrong, while she triumphs over life's adversities on her own. I call this type Woman's Magical Horse. It is not known in Europe and is not reflected in the ATU Type Index. I have identified it in Mongolian, Kalmyk, Kazakh, and Kirghiz traditions in Central Asia. I conclude that the range of attitudes towards strong women in Central Asian folktales is wider than in the European tradition and that discourse on gender issues in those tales reflects insistent creative arguments both for women's subservience and for their equality.

The folktale is still an influential component of any culture, both reflecting and shaping societal views of gender roles. In the last few decades, feminist criticism of Western folktales has been pointing an accusatory finger at the passivity of its heroines, with *Sleeping Beauty* cited as a prime example. Such heroines are charged with relying exclusively on their meekness and beauty to progress in life. As role models for lack of initiative, they are believed to contribute towards gender stereotyping and to encourage women to be dependent on that meekness and

beauty for securing a powerful man, who acts and who defines them. To counteract the demoralizing determinism of such sexist role models and to empower women instead, confident, active, and resourceful folktale heroines are sought in European materials, materials from before the times when the likes of Perrault and Brothers Grimm started meddling with their sources and infusing them with patriarchal ideology.¹

Folktales from non-Western traditions, such as Central Asian, more recent collection and publication of which are hoped to be less contaminated by patriarchal attitudes of the male literary establishment, are thought to be of great interest to feminist-minded researchers too. Those tales are expected to contain genuine examples of assertive females triumphing over life's adversities to teach the West proper gender attitudes. In the case of Central Asia, another often argued-for reason to study such tales, brought up in informal conversations among social and political science academics, is raising the profile of native cultures, especially images of strong women in tales believed to have origins in pre-Islamic societies of the region. In a somewhat ironic twist, it has been suggested that awareness of those images should help Western NGO workers in educating and guiding local women in the area of women's rights, boosting the morale of women in the Central Asian patriarchal post-Soviet space.

While the interest in better understanding of the region's folktales is clearly identified, there is a lack of texts available as translations into Western languages (not to mention analyses of the tales), which is clearly related to the lack of Western specialists in native languages of the region who are also interested in the folktale. And so before I continue with developing my argument concerning the nature of female representation in those tales, I find it necessary to explain the nature of my corpus. Ethnographic work on oral tales in Central Asia has been taking

¹ Donald Haase, "Scholarship on Women in Folktales and Fairy Tales" in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* (Three Volumes) (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 1038-1039.

place since early XIX century; the materials are primarily available in the native languages, belonging mostly to Mongolic and Turkic linguistic groups, but a great number of folktales has been translated into Russian. So I have come up with an imperfect solution of approaching the study of the tales through my knowledge of Russian, a solution similar to Kira Van Deusen's collection of South Siberian and Far Eastern folklore via Russian.² I have assembled a corpus of Mongolian, Kalmyk, Buryat, Uzbek, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Bashkir, Shor, Kumandin, Tuvan, Tajik, Mari, and Dungan folktales as collections translated into Russian. In addition, a few sources are available in English: one of my key examples is translated by Nicholas Poppe Jr. from Mongolian; my Turkish examples come from Uysal-Walker English-language database of Turkish folktales, and my Uighur example comes as an English translation from a book by Wei and Luckert. In addition, I have found my Kirghiz example of Woman's Magical Horse type tale in a collection translated into French.

Examining my corpus of Central Asian wonder tales and heroic tales indeed nets a considerable number of stories that feature women and girls who are at least as capable as their male counterparts intellectually and physically. Attempting to detect general structural and discourse patterns among folktales dealing with attitudes towards women's power and women's sense of self, I have narrowed my focus to tales of females who don armor or dress as men and fight against or compete with men in a physical sense. Among secondary sexual characteristics, muscle mass is the most objective biological difference that influences the idea of gender.³ The hope is that by studying tales, in which this difference is conceptually equalized or even reversed, I can understand how gender is viewed in the region that the tales represent. The

² Kira Van Deusen, "Introduction: Shamanic Storytelling of the Amur Region" in *The Flying Tiger: Women Shamans and Storytellers of the Amur* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), xii.

³ Margaret M. Marini, "Sex and Gender: What Do We Know?" in *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Mar., 1990), 99.

emerging picture raises the question of whether the folktales view women as being rewarded for their initiative and boldness or whether the folktales view women as punished, and rightly so, for their actions.

Tales of physically strong females seem to occur more frequently in Central Asian than in the European folklore, and there is a considerable number and variety of those tales necessitating their own taxonomy to aid in their analysis. In organizing them, I recognize two major narrative classes. As in European tales, the first and the most common one is narrated from the point of view of a suitor seeking a supernatural bride. The bride is not at all receptive to his advances and, as a woman-warrior, is dangerous to him. In contrast to European tales that are centered on the bride actually challenging the hero to a fight, the Central Asian magical bride is usually defeated by the hero's cunning. Once defeated, often with the help from the suitor's magical companion(s), she marries the suitor and usually loses her supernatural powers, but not always her bad disposition. This tale type is based on Motifs T173 *Murderous bride* and F601.2. *Extraordinary companions help hero in suitor tests* in Stith Thompson motif index⁴ and is known as Type 519 in Aarne-Thompson-Uther (from now on ATU) classification (The Strong Woman as Bride (Brünhilde)).⁵

The second narrative class focuses on adventures of a female protagonist from her point of view. In contrast to European examples, this narrative class may also contain ATU Type 519, told from the point of view of a cross-dressed supernaturally strong female helper of the suitor. Whatever the type, when a physically strong and skillful heroine is present, the initial impetus for her story is one of the three major situations: 1) embarking on a quest to find a solution to a

⁴ *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, mediaeval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends.* (Revised and enlarged edition. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1955-1958. Electronic Edition).

⁵ Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: a classification and bibliography, based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson.* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).

problem of a male member of the family, usually a father or a brother, occasionally, a husband; 2) seeking an adventure, or 3) escaping an unacceptable marriage or an evil pursuer. In the rest of the paper, I examine specific tales organized according to the framework outlined above for their attitudes towards female power.

Narratives Told from the Male Protagonist's Point of View

Seeking a Bride, ATU 519

The hostile bride is a magical woman-*batyr*. *Batyr* is a Turkic word denoting an exceptionally strong warrior, knight, or champion who, as a rule, also has an exceptionally powerful horse. She is a personage related to *shieldmaidens* of the Germanic and Scandinavian folklore and to *bogatyr*' women or *polentitsas* of Eastern Slavic folklore. Most likely her origin is in the exogamy theme strongly emphasized in many a Central Asian folktale in general.⁶ The tale type is summarized by Stith Thompson as follows:

In this tale of The Strong Woman as Bride (Type 519) a prince and his faithful and extraordinary companion woo a bride who is beautiful, strong, and warlike, and who will have as a husband no man who is not her equal in strength. The prince must wield her gigantic weapons and ride her untamed steed.⁷

This type is found in all of the examined national collections.

For example, in Azerbaijani tale “Сказка об Искандере-шахе [Tale of Iskander-shah],” the story of the hero, whose prototype is Alexander the Great, includes the narrative on his mother's wooing—the future mother of Iskander is a supernaturally strong bride with whom the future father of the hero competes in horse races, archery,

⁶ As late as in the XIX century, Aleksei I. Levshin reports that the Kirghiz made a point of marrying their enemy Kalmyk women in his *Описание киргиз-кайсацких, или киргиз-казачьих, орд и степней, чч. I-III* [A description of Kirghiz-Kaisats, or Kirghiz-Cossack, hordes and steppes in three volumes] (Sankt-Petersburg, 1832), Volume III, 109.

⁷ *The Folktale* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), 112-113.

saber fencing and wrestling. She is equal to the groom in all those skills, except finally he manages to wrestle her down.⁸

Among the numerous Uzbek wonder tales of this type, only in “Рождённый дивом [Born by a dev],”⁹ however, there is an actual physical fight with the magically strong bride, who is finally defeated after six days of wrestling by her being throttled with her long hair. In the other tales of this type, “Клыч-батыр [Klych-batyr]”¹⁰ and “Мислабу [Mislabu],”¹¹ the bride is conquered by tricking her protective horse and by tying her forty plaits to forty posts while she is asleep (K635.1. *Hair of sleeping maiden tied to tree so that she is not able to rise*). Her subjugation effected by the sign of her gender—her long plaits—underscores the gender focus of the tale. The nature of the murderous bride ranges from being a slightly magical princess as in “Клыч-батыр [Klych-batyr]” to a full-blown peri as in “Мислабу [Mislabu].” Whatever the range of her magic, what makes her vulnerable and what allows her defeat is her gender.

An unsuccessful quest for the supernatural bride is another regional feature of this tale type, not usually found in European examples. Such a false-start marriage to an armored bride is described, for example, in a heroic tale translated into Russian from an endangered Turkic language, Kumandin, the current one thousand speakers of which reside in the Altay region of Central Asia. “Димей и Шимей [Dimei and Shimeı]” features a woman-*batyr* by the name of Ochy-Karaach as a reluctant bride whom the hero Dimei woos after he loses his wife. This heroic tale, akin to Russian *bylina*, is unusual in that besides the description of the woman-

⁸ Translated into Russian by E. Ibragimov in *Азербайджанские сказки [Azerbaijani folktales]* (Baku: Maarif, 1983), 66-72.

⁹ In *Узбекские народные сказки [Uzbek folktales]* in Russian (Tashkent: Gafur Gulyam Art and Literature Publishing House, 1972), 502-508.

¹⁰ In *Ibid.*, 237-242.

¹¹ In *Ibid.*, 546-558.

batyr's competition with Dimeï, her military exploits protecting Dimeï's khanate are presented too.¹²

The reason for the unusual description of the battle is that the woman-warrior in this tale never actually becomes a wife of the protagonist. Normally the female is neutralized by her marriage. For example, the magical Ak-Bilyak, who admits defeat and becomes Klych-*batyr*'s wife in the Uzbek tale bearing his name, once a wife, loses all her strength and gets easily tricked and physically overpowered by an old woman—a motif found in tales of other types with non-magical brides; the formally invincible woman-warrior becomes a damsel in distress, and it is her husband who frees her and gets her kingdom.¹³ Jessica Hooker observes the same pattern of behavior in the magical brides of Eastern European folktales.¹⁴

Narratives Told from the Female Protagonist's Point of View

Quest to Help a Male Relative

The two narrative types, the search for a magical and/or dangerous bride and the tale of a female leaving on a quest to help her male relative, are combined in many Central Asian tales in what appears to be a uniquely regional plot device. It is found in the majority of the examined national collections. For example, the motif is evident in Tuvan tales, in which a brother is revived by his sister through her obtaining a magical bride for him by her own magical transformation into a *batyr*. In a heroic tale “Шаралдай Мерген с конём в жёлтых яблоках [Sharaldai Merguen and his yellow-dappled horse],” a cross-dressed little sister Meshgued

¹² In *Кан-Алтай, Алтайские героические сказания в записях XIX-XX вв.* [Kan-Altai: Altaic heroic tales collected in the XIX and XX centuries] edited by Anatolyi Prelovsky (Moscow: Novyi klyuch, 2007), 55-101.

¹³ In *Узбекские народные сказки* [Uzbek folktales] in Russian (Tashkent: Gafur Gulyam Art and Literature Publishing House, 1972), 237-242.

¹⁴ “‘The Hen Who Sang:’ Swordbearing Women in Eastern European Fairytales” in *Folklore* (Vol. 101, Number 2, 1990) 178-184.

Ulaan wins in horse racing, arrow shooting, and wrestling competitions among all the pretenders to the khan daughter's hand.¹⁵ In another tale, *Boktu-Kirish and Bora-Sheelei*, the sister Bora-Sheelei glues moustache on her face and performs the same heroic deeds for her brother's sake.¹⁶ The heroine undergoes a corporeal transformation into a *batyr* of superhuman strength when she starts on her quest. Once her task is complete, however, she undergoes a horrific ordeal—seemingly for no reason—as she turns herself into a helpless hare and escapes into the woods, where the brother feeds her in secret from his wives and where the wives or their servants attempt to kill her either by pouring lead into the bunny's ears or by pushing needles into its temples (K2212.2. *Treacherous sister-in-law* and S112.3. *Murder by hot lead poured into ear*).

The persecution of the magical companion who has won the bride by the bride identifies this type as a classical ATU Type 519, but her punishment can be interpreted to have a specific meaning related to gender issues: After the little sister has transgressed into the forbidden male sphere, she is either ostracized by the society or she herself is unable to reconcile with it. In “Sharaldai Merguen,” she leaves a note to her brother saying that she now has no place to live, so she is turning into a grey hare and leaving for the mountains.¹⁷ In a similar Buryat tale, the sister too, fearing the anger of the three magical princesses she has won to revive her brother, leaves for the forest in the shape of a hare, whom the brother eventually convinces to turn back into a human by gently stroking its fur.¹⁸ In yet another Buryat tale of this type, after the sister turns back into a human, she continues living in the forest, away from the rest of the society, albeit in a palace that she builds for herself, but eventually she is forced by her sisters-in-law to swallow

¹⁵ In *Сказки и предания Алтайских тувинцев* [Folktales and oral histories of the Altay Tuvenes] in Russian, collected by Erika Taube (Moscow: Oriental Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1994), 127-131.

¹⁶ An emailed PDF version from K. Van Deusen of English translation by © K Van Deusen (2011 from a Russian translation by L.Grebnev, Tuvan Book Publishers, 1969).

¹⁷ In *Сказки и предания Алтайских тувинцев* [Folktales and oral histories of the Altay Tuvenes] in Russian, collected by Erika Taube (Moscow: Oriental Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1994), 127-131.

¹⁸ “Агу-Ногон-Абаха [Agu-Nogon-Abakha]” in *Бурятские сказки* [Buryat folktales], Volume I, edited by L.E. Eliasov (Ulan-Ude: Buryat Book Publishing House, 1959), 120.

needles and die.¹⁹ The girl's transformation into a hare describes a lack of role for her as a female who is more physically strong and more capable than men in the society. In most tales, she has to die and her body to be carried away on elk's antlers to another land, where, when a hunter shoots the elk, she is reborn a beautiful maiden whom the hunter or a khan marries. She is eventually reunited with her brother through her son(s).

A husband in a heroic tale translated in another endangered Turkic language, the Shor language of the Altay region, needs rescuing through cross-dressing. “Оленг-Тайджи [Oleng-Taygi]” is named after the protagonist's husband, even though the tale is definitely focused on the wife. The wife impersonates her husband at a wedding feast of a neighboring khan, when her husband ignores the invitation—something that she considers incorrect and dangerous. Not simply her sartorial transformation of getting into her military garb is presented, but a corporeal one as well, and it is described in great detail, for example, the floor made out of forty (i.e. infinite) layers of fired clay bends like a soft leather belt under her heroic weight. Her conduct is male as well: On the way to the wedding feast, she acquires a sworn brother (a common motif in heroic tales for *batyrs*, Motif P311.1.). She becomes instrumental in the plot, when she, as a senior *batyr* in her husband's guise, announces that the bride belongs not to the arranged suitor but to that sworn brother. (Here is an echo of the motif of a female *batyr* obtaining a bride for a brother, a sworn brother in this case.) But as a result, the wife finishes being gone longer than expected, and her reward is beatings from her husband for her absence. This ideal wife takes the beatings in stride and softens the husband by her meekness, restoring the domestic harmony.²⁰

¹⁹ “Алтан-Сэсэк и его сестра Эрмэльжин-Гохон-Абаха [Altan-Sesek and his sister Ermelzhin-gokhon-abakha]” in *Ibid.*, 90-91.

²⁰ In in *Кан-Алтай, Алтайские героические сказания в записях XIX-XX вв.* [Kan-Altai: Altaic heroic tales collected in the XIX and XX centuries] edited by Anatolyi Prelovsky (Moscow: Novyi klyuch, 2007), 109-122.

A Uighur heroine coming to her father's aid and inadvertently to her brother's aid and not getting much of a reward as a result except returning to the original state as a good daughter and sister is found in "A Courageous Daughter" tale. It tells a story of a girl with six brothers, all of whom have failed to reach the city of Rome, where an herb to cure their father's blindness is supposed to be found. So instead, she leaves for Rome herself and gets the medicine for her father, and a princess and a horse for her youngest brother.²¹

A cross-dressed woman-helper occurs occasionally in other types of tales. A Turkish heroine also acting on her father's behalf in a tale classified as ATU 514 (Shift of Sex) type leaves as a girl but comes back as a boy. "The Youngest Daughter Who Became a Hero" tells a story of a daughter looking for a magical bride that her father would like to marry. She dresses up as a knight, proves her manliness by saving a child from a wolf and obtains a magical lame mule as a reward. Aided by that talking lame mule, the girl gets the princess. The heroine is then cursed to become a male in her next series of adventures, and eventually marries the princess herself/himself rather than allowing her/his father to marry the princess.²²

Judging from the name of the storyteller, the tale is narrated by a man, as is often the case for Type 514 in Hispanic societies, according to Donna M. Lanclos. Lanclos has persuasively argued that, in that "macho" environment at least, the tale is a "boy's" story, narrating the path a boy has to take to reach his masculinity.²³ It is possible that in Turkic folktales, this type has a similar function with this heroine of Type 514 being a metaphor for a male who has not attained his manhood yet and the tale a symbolic journey of maturation. Jessica Hooker, however,

²¹ In Cuiyi Wei and Karl W. Luckert, *Uighur Stories from Along the Silk Road* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1998), 229-233.

²² Tale 1040 in in Ahmet Edip Uysal et al., *Uysal-Walker Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative* (Lubbock, TX: Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Electronic edition, 2002).

²³ "A Case Study in Folktale Analysis: AT 514, 'The Shift of Sex,' in Hispanic Societies," in *Pacific Coast Philology* (Volume 31: 1, 1996), 68-87.

interprets Type 514 in Eastern European tales as indication of how limited the options are for a strong and active female; there are only two of them: 1) she can either reject her cross-dressing past and become a docile wife or 2) she can become a male with all the attendant rewards.²⁴ It is possible that the tale actually exists in both of the described manifestations, as described by Lanclos and as described by Hooker, in the Central Asian tradition. Jessica Hooker's interpretation allows making sense of tales in which the female character searches for alternatives to the limited order, including her transformation into a hare and removing herself from the society (as, for example, in the Tuvan and Buryat tales quoted above).

Narratives Told from Female Protagonist's Point of View

Seeking Adventure

Internationally, the woman's transgression of cross-dressing, that is "dressing up," upgrading herself to a social sphere with more power and freedom,²⁵ and proving herself as strong as a man appears justified to a degree only under the circumstances when the masquerade is on behalf of a male relative. In Chinese oral histories, legends and literature devoted to a warrior-woman Hua Mulan, her career as a soldier is prompted by a need to help her father.²⁶ In researching a Russian *bylina* "Vasilisa and Staver," in which cross-dressed Vasilisa rescues her husband from the prince's prison, Amy Goldenberg concludes that "it is socially acceptable for women to be considered equal to men on the condition that it benefits at least one male

²⁴ "'The Hen Who Sang: Swordbearing Women in Eastern European Fairytales'" in *Folklore* (Vol. 101, Number 2, 1990) 178-184.

²⁵ Roland Altenburger, "Is It Clothes that Make the Man? Cross-Dressing, Gender and Sex in Pre-Twentieth-Century Zhu Yingtai Lore" in *Asian Folklore Studies* (Vol. 64, #2, 2005), 165-205, 171.

²⁶ Joseph R. Allen, "Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior," in *Positions* (4:2, 1996), 347 and Note 9 on Page 375.

character.”²⁷ And so it is not surprising that the most common reason for donning male disguise and arming herself by the female protagonist in the Central Asian folktale and heroic tale is a quest for a remedy to help, or heal, or even revive a father, a brother, or a husband. Even if the listener suspects that the necessity is actually just a pretext for the transvestism that allows the heroine an adventure, the necessity is practically always stated. Often it is exaggerated by the heroine’s corporeal magical transformation: she becomes like a man for the duration of her service.

It is not, therefore, surprising that among Central Asian folktales and heroic tales, the category of tales focused on female protagonists seeking adventure for adventure sake, in contrast to such tales with male protagonists, appears to be very rare. I am only able to identify one example with such a motivation unambiguously stated—an Uzbek tale “Айкпалван [Aikpalvan].”²⁸ The tale feels like a strangely chimeric story with types that are not normally combined. “Aikpalvan” tells of the three daughters of a shah who escape the boredom of the palace by dressing as male riders, arming themselves with swords, and tucking their long, to the knees plaits into their fur hats to ride off into the night. After long travels, they reach a fork in the road with customary road signs that a trio of male *batyrs* often encounters in their adventures. The first sign says that going in a certain direction means no return, the second means unlikely return, and the third—a sure return. As usual, the youngest one, still adventuresome, takes the most difficult path, and her sisters follow the other two paths (Motif H1561.9. *Prince chooses shorter but more dangerous road*).

²⁷ “‘Vasilisa and Staver’: Russian Version of the International Narrative ‘Woman Dressed as Man Rescues Her Husband’ ” in *The Folklore Historian* (Volume 19, 2002), 3-24.

²⁸ In *Узбекские народные сказки* [Uzbek folktales] in Russian (Tashkent: Gafur Gulyam Art and Literature Publishing House, 1972), 434-444.

But the tale itself then takes a totally different path than it would with male *batyrs*. The youngest sister encounters a bear, is forced to become his wife and produces a half-bear son Aikpalvan (Motifs B601.1.1. *Bear steals woman and makes her his wife* and F611.1.1. *Strong man son of bear who has stolen his mother*; usually ATU Types 301, 650). The tale then follows adventures of the bear-man Aikpalvan, who kills his father-bear, frees his mother and arrives to the palace of his grandfather, who plots against Aikpalvan by sending him off to perform difficult tasks during which the bear-man gets a princess to marry, defeats his grandfather, and becomes the ruler of the land. As an afterthought, it is reported that he finds his aunts, whose adventures are never narrated. Unavoidably, the message of the tale is that even when females attempt to act as males they finish falling into the persecuted female type and have to be saved by a male relative.

Narrative Told from the Female Protagonist's Point of View

Acting on Her Own Behalf—Woman's Magical Horse

In published literature, this is a very rare type. In Central Asia proper, I have encountered only five versions of this tale, two from Mongolia,²⁹ one from Kalmykia (the Kalmyk language is related to Mongolian),³⁰ one from Kazakhstan (Kazakh is a Turkic language),³¹ and one from

²⁹ “Soning Tsetseg,” translated from Mongolian by Nicholas Poppe, Jr, in *The Mongolia Society Occasional Papers: Number Four; Mongolian Folktales, Stories and Proverbs in English Translation*, edited by John R. Krueger (Bloomington, IN: The Mongolia Society, 1967), 35-38; and “Жеребёнок-спаситель [Colt the Savior]” in *Монгольские сказки [Mongolian folktales]* in Russian translation, compiled by Georgii Mikhailov, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoje izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoï literatury, 1962), 92-96

³⁰ “О девушке, ставшей царицей, и о её одиннадцати сыновьях [About a Girl Who Has Become the Queen and about her Eleven Sons]” in *Калмыцкие народные сказки [Kalmyk folktales]* in Russian translation, edited by I.K. Piishkin and U.U. Ochirov (Elista: Kalmytskoie gosudarstvennoie izatel'stvo, 1961), 7-18.

³¹ “Девушка Дудар [A girl by the name of Dudar]” in *Золотой караван: сказки тюркоязычных народов Казахстана [Golden caravan: folktales of the Turkic peoples of Kazakhstan]*, in Russian, Valeria.T. Marchenko, compiler (Almaty: Oner, 1994), 43-52. Also see Appendix to the paper.

Kirghizia (Kirghiz is a Turkic language)³² In addition, I have found a Nanai version in the Far East (Tungusic language, related to Mongolian and Turkic languages)³³ and a Georgian version in the Caucasus (Kartvelian language—an orphan group not related to any linguistic family).³⁴ International examples with cross-dressing to escape an unacceptable union are reported to occasionally include some variants of Type 510B (Peau d’Asne), in which the heroine escapes an incestuous father or brother.³⁵ The development of the overall tale with the cross-dressed heroine who is as strong and skillful or more so than men in its Central Asian versions is not reflected in ATU and appears to be uniquely regional. I call this type Woman’s Magical Horse.

Practically all the tales start with a girl’s flight from evil. Her magical talking horse warns her, guides her, carries her away from danger, and helps her find a good husband. In the Mongolian folktale “Soning Tsetseg (Remarkable Flower),” an evil “black monster *mangus*” wants to marry the eponymous princess; the princess, however, has a magical talking bay horse and escapes with its help.³⁶ The unnamed heroine of another version of this Mongolian tale “Жеребёнок-спаситель [Colt the Savior]” also escapes from *mangus* with the help of a sandy-colored colt.³⁷ The Kalmyk heroine escapes on a wonder-horse from a monster that comes to

³² “Tormuz” in *Contes Kirghiz de la steppe et de la montagne* [Kirghiz tales from the steppe and from the mountains], translated into French by Remy Dor (Publications Orientalistes de France, 1983), 56-58.

³³ “Endohochen” in *The Flying Tiger: Women Shamans and Storytellers of the Amur*, collected and translated by Kira Van Deusen (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 81-88.

³⁴ “The Tale of the Valley Flower,” in Shorena Kurtsikidze and Vakhtang Chikovaini, *Ethnography and Folklore of the Georgia-Chechnya Border: Images, Customs, Myths and Folk Tales of the Peripheries* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2008), 348-354.

³⁵ D.L. Ashliman, Note 1 for “Running Away and Hiding” in *Incest in Indo-European Folktales* (Electronic Source <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/incest.html>), last accessed 12/14/11.

³⁶ Translated from Mongolian by Nicholas Poppe, Jr, in *The Mongolia Society Occasional Papers: Number Four; Mongolian Folktales, Stories and Proverbs in English Translation*, edited by John R. Krueger (Bloomington, IN: The Mongolia Society, 1967), 35-38.

³⁷ “Жеребёнок-спаситель [Colt the Savior]” in *Монгольские сказки [Mongolian folktales]* in Russian translation, compiled by Georgii Mikhailov, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoje izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 92-96.

devour her family.³⁸ The Kazakh heroine escapes from a werewolf-husband on back of her dark-grey horse.³⁹ Only the Kirghiz heroine gets on her horse by the name of Grey Tail without a clear reference to a flight from evil; all the listener learns is that her father dies.⁴⁰

It should be noted that the magical horse as a symbol of a person's power and identity is a common motif in Central Asian tales, with females being under the protection of this special familiar as often as males in contrast to European folktales, where the horse is consistently a male attribute (Motif s B401. *Helpful horse*, B211.1.3. *Speaking horse*, and B184.1. *Magic horse*). In the Kazakh tale “Девушка Дудар [A girl by the name of Dudar],” the heroine's very conception is due to the sacrifice of a magical grey stallion that protects her family's herds of horses from wolves (Motif V12.4.9. *Horse as sacrifice*).⁴¹ A special horse motif is also found in tales, the heroines of which are not dressed or armored as men or escape an evil suitor. For example, in a Turkish tale of ATU Type 403C (The Substituted Bride), the heroine is recognized by raising a horse, a talking one, incidentally, because the girl is endowed with a magical ability to have grass grow where she steps (a Turkic variant of Motif D1454.7. *Treasure from footprints*) when the rest of the land is dead because of the drought; in that tale, her raising the horse becomes her way of reuniting with her husband.⁴² How important the image of the horse for Woman's Magical Horse tale type becomes clear when one considers that according to its collector and translator Kira Van Deusen, the Nanai version “Endochochen” is the only Nanai

³⁸ “О девушке, ставшей царицей, и о её одиннадцати сыновьях [About a Girl Who Has Become the Queen and about her Eleven Sons]” in *Калмыцкие народные сказки* [Kalmyk folktales] in Russian translation, edited by I.K. Pishkin and U.U. Ochirov (Elista: Kalmytskoie gosudarstvennoie izatel'stvo, 1961), 7-18.

³⁹ “Девушка Дудар [A girl by the name of Dudar]” in *Золотой караван: сказки тюркоязычных народов Казахстана* [Golden caravan: folktales of the Turkic peoples of Kazakhstan], in Russian, Valeria.T. Marchenko, compiler (Almaty: Oner, 1994), 43-52. Also see Appendix to the paper.

⁴⁰ “Tormuz” in *Contes Kirghiz de la steppe et de la montagne* [Kirghiz tales from the steppe and from the mountains], translated into French by Remy Dor (Publications Orientalistes de France, 1983), 56-58.

⁴¹ In *Золотой караван: сказки тюркоязычных народов Казахстана* [Golden caravan: folktales of the Turkic peoples of Kazakhstan], in Russian, Valeria.T. Marchenko, compiler (Almaty: Oner, 1994), 43-52. Also see Appendix to the paper.

⁴² Tale 718 in Ahmet Edip Uysal et al., *Uysal-Walker Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative* (Lubbock, TX: Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Electronic edition, 2002), 12.

tale that has a horse in it—a particularly striking observation because the Nanai generally do not know horse and were only introduced to it in the last century.^{43, 44}

Once she escapes, the heroine of all the tales either single-handedly and successfully fights with a khan's army or successfully competes in hunting with men. She often undergoes a *Test of sex* at the court of the khan, when the khan wants to see whether she joins those who make arrows or those who sew (Motif H1578). Eventually she gets to marry a khan's son or a great *batyr*.

Most significantly, in all the versions, when the heroine marries, her magical horse is claimed by her husband. The tale treats the loss of the horse by the woman as disastrous for everyone concerned. It makes the heroine and her son(s) vulnerable to more persecution from the first evil suitor. She is saved only by the magical horse that escapes from the husband (a female version of Motif H172.1. *Horse will permit only certain man to ride him*). In all of the tales, the husband is condemned to wandering for many years looking for his family. The horse, in essence the woman's alter ego, perishes in the struggle. The heroine painfully rebuilds her life out of the horse's carcass that is transformed into a magical protective yurt where she resides with her son(s), eventually with her husband too, when he finally finds his family.

The Kirghiz version displays the greatest variation from the type. In it, the marriage is effected by the sacrifice of the horse, making the woman and her twin-children, a son and a daughter, vulnerable to persecution from the husband's other wives, with the tale incorporating ATU 706 type (Maiden without Hands) into the tale at this point in the narrative: The husband

⁴³ Author's commentary for "Endohochen" in *The Flying Tiger: Women Shamans and Storytellers of the Amur*, collected and translated by Kira Van Deusen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 88.

⁴⁴ One explanation for the unusual motif is that it is a testament to its ancient nature and subsequently to the ancient nature of the type brought over thousands of years ago from the origin of this people in Central Asia. Another possibility is that the tale, a "female" tale that it is, reached the Nanai through a chain of brides over perhaps some shorter period.

chops the woman's legs off and gouges her eye out when he is told that she has delivered a puppy and a kitten. The woman saves herself not only by finding the root of a plant to restore her limbs and eye with the help of a rat but by burning the tail hairs of her horse—an action that resurrects it. The horse instructs the woman to sacrifice it, and its body turns into her protective yurt. Another round of resurrection by burning the horse's tail hair allows her to find her children, and then finally the family is reunited with the husband (who gets off amazingly easily in this case!).⁴⁵

That the tale is questioning the societal order is evident from its insistence that the heroine has a son or sons—in the Kalmyk tale, she has eleven sons!⁴⁶ In this respect, her saving these male relative(s) parallels the heroine's role in the female helper stories. The woman's disobedience to her husband via the escape of the horse is justified by her need to save her son(s)—with the single exception of the Kirghiz tale, she does not have a daughter to save. Nevertheless, this is a story of a female taking control of her life, and not just for the sake of her male offspring.

The societal gender norms are such that the best horse belongs to the husband, but most importantly, when the husband takes her horse, he strips his wife of her ability to acquire male disguise and male power over her life. He exerts control over her—it was the horse after all that guided and aided the heroine in her original flight. As I have already pointed out, the tale shows the husband punished for this act—he gets to wander for years in search of his family. In “Dudar” there is an additional punishment for the husband: His son robs him of his hunting

⁴⁵ “Tormuz” in *Contes Kirghiz de la steppe et de la montagne* [Kirghiz tales from the steppe and from the mountains], translated into French by Remy Dor (Publications Orientalistes de France, 1983), 56.

⁴⁶ “О девушке, ставшей царицей, и о её одиннадцати сыновьях [About a Girl Who Has Become the Queen and about her Eleven Sons]” in *Калмыцкие народные сказки* [Kalmyk folktales] in Russian translation, edited by I.K. Ilshkin and U.U. Ochirov (Elista: Kalmytskoie gosudarstvennoie izatel'stvo, 1961), 7-18.

trophy and humiliates him when he does not recognize his father.⁴⁷ In the Kirghiz tale too, the son derides the father for believing the slanders against the boy's mother; "Tu es drôlement stupide [...] Où as-tu vu que les femmes aussi donnent naissance a des chiots!..[You are awfully stupid ... Where have you seen that women also give birth to puppies!]." ⁴⁸

The heroine's horse, the symbol of her power, of her male-like control over her life returns to her because she dares to claim it rather than die as a result of her husband's actions. And in that she is different from the classical supernatural bride character! She does not get saved by her husband, she saves herself, herself and her children, and then eventually she nurses her husband to health, saving him too, so that they can leave a long and happy life of equality.

To summarize, based on Central Asian stories of physically strong female helpers, together with Jessica Hooker who has studied the image of armed women in the Eastern European folktales, I have to conclude that "[a] major message of the stories [...] appears to be that women may not pass entirely into the male sphere of action with impunity."⁴⁹ Moreover, I find that women of the Central Asian tales are aware of the price they have to pay for entering "into the male sphere" but often make their choices a matter of self-sacrifice for male members of their families, raising the questions of the value of male vs. female life. And so I find that another major message of most stories under consideration, answering those questions, appears to be that a woman's role is limited to self-sacrifice that defines her through the male for whom she labors and suffers, and more so than in the European tradition.

⁴⁷ "Девушка Дудар [A girl by the name of Dudar]" in *Золотой караван: сказки тюркоязычных народов Казахстана* [Golden caravan: folktales of the Turkic peoples of Kazakhstan], in Russian, Valeria.T. Marchenko, compiler (Almaty: Öner, 1994), 43-52. Also see Appendix to the paper.

⁴⁸ "Tormuz" in *Contes Kirghiz de la steppe et de la montagne* [Kirghiz tales from the steppe and from the mountains], translated into French by Remy Dor (Publications Orientalistes de France, 1983), 57.

⁴⁹ "The Hen Who Sang: Swordbearing Women in Eastern European Fairytales" in *Folklore* (Vol. 101, Number 2, 1990) 178-184.

On the other hand, I identify a type of wonder tale that questions such order—Woman’s Magical Horse—with no counterparts among European folktales. For example, Russian “Царевна-лягушка [Frog Princess]” (ATU Type 400+402) perhaps has some parallels: In it the supernatural bride departs when the husband attempts to exercise his control over her, but the tale’s focus is on the male protagonist and his search, which acquires features of re-conquering the supernatural bride, rather than asserting her rights.⁵⁰ Woman’s Magical Horse is a well-constructed and a defined type of folktale, widely, if sparsely, represented in Central Asian tradition. It masterfully combines multiple narrative threads of a great number of international motifs into an impressive tale arguing for women’s emancipation and empowerment. I suggest assigning an ATU number to this type because such action would allow identification of other version of this tale in international collections and manuscripts, making this tale less invisible and therefore making women in general less invisible as a result as well.

Very briefly returning back to the question of the search for a truly feminist wonder tale worthy of better representation both in the West and in the East by women’s rights NGOs, my review of the types dealing with the fate of the physically strong women alerts interpreters of those stories to be careful in evaluating the messages and not to assume immediately that just because a tale represents strong women it automatically reflects a feminist position. Most of those folktales in Central Asia, particularly ones dealing with a physically strong woman-helper, confirm and naturalize deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes. There is, however, a rare exception. Woman’s Magical Horse type argues against the established patriarchal order—it is a type of tale worthy of looking for, of promotion, and of further study.

⁵⁰ “Царевна-лягушка [Frog Princess].” In *Narodnye russkie skazki A.N. Afanas'eva v trekh tomakh* [Russian folktales collected by A.N. Afanas'ev, in three volumes][1873]. Eds. L.G. Barag and N.V. Novikov. (Moskva: Nauka, 1984), Volume 2, 267-269.

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APPENDIX

DUDAR-KYS⁵¹

In the olden times there lived a *bey*—a rich lord. He had neither a son nor a daughter. Uncountable herds of his horses roamed the steppe from one end to the other. The *bey* did not have to guard his herds. They pastured in the steppe all by themselves, and neither wolves nor horse thieves bothered them.

A khan lived nearby. Once he asked his servants, “I have all these herders and guard dogs, but my herds are constantly attacked by wolves and horse thieves. The *bey*’s horses are in pasture without anyone guarding them, but wolves and thieves stay away from them. Why is this?” And his servants told him, “There is a grey stallion in the *bey*’s herds. He is the one that keeps his herds safe from wolves and thieves.”

The khan sent a messenger to the *bey* asking him to let him have the dark grey stallion. He refused. The khan’s messenger returned empty-handed.

The khan announced a great feast—a *toi*. He invited all of his vassals. But he made it known that one who did not have a son would not have a place at the *toi* and one who did not

⁵¹ My translation of a Kazakh wonder tale “Девушка Дудар [A girl by the name of Dudar]” in *Золотой караван: сказки тюркоязычных народов Казахстана* [Golden caravan: folktales of the Turkic peoples of Kazakhstan], in Russian, Valeria.T. Marchenko, compiler (Almaty: Oner, 1994), 43-52.

have a daughter would not be served fermented mare's milk at the *toi*. Let that one not show up at the *toi*!

The *bey*'s camp of yurts—*aal*—emptied out. Everyone left for the *toi*. The *bey*'s wife said, "Let's go to the *toi*!" "The khan told us not to show up at the *toi*," answered the *bey*. "It's God's will that we have neither a son nor a daughter."

The wife kept after him for a long time. Finally, he gave up and agreed. They loaded a whole horse-hide bag full of fermented mare's milk on a camel, the *bey*'s wife took the reins, and they took off.

They arrived at the *toi*. There were uncountable crowds of people. Nobody came to meet them. They stood in front of the yurt's entrance for a long time, but still nobody came out. The *bey* got really angry. He pulled out a knife, slashed the entire horse-hide bagup, and spilled all of the milk on the ground.

He turned back. On the way home he kept scolding his wife, "I told you that we should not have gone to the *toi*, but you didn't listen to me!" When they got back to their *aal*, he took a stallion from among his horses, a bull from among his cattle, a ram from among his sheep, and a he-goat from among his goats. He took the stallion, the bull, the ram, and the he-goat into the open steppe. There, on the shore of the Lake, he slaughtered them, and started praying to Allah to send him a child. The *bey* and his wife lit a light and went to sleep on the shore repeating their prayer.

And the *bey* had a dream. Someone appeared and said, "If you sacrifice your grey stallion, you will have a daughter."

He told his dream to his wife. She started crying, “Don’t kill the grey stallion!” The *bey* did not listen to her—he killed the grey stallion. In the morning the wife realized that she was with a child.

In the due time women gathered in the yurt. Each one wanted to be the one to cut the baby’s cord. All of a sudden they heard from the mother’s womb, “Clear the yurt of all these women! I will come out on my own. Call my father in; I need to talk to him!”

The *bey* walked into the yurt.

“Father, should I come out?” asked the unborn baby.

“Come out, darling!” answered the *bey*.

“If I get to rule over my own self, then I will come out, but if you do not give me such power, then what’s the point of being born!”

“You will get to rule over your own self!” said the *bey*.

And so the baby jumped out of the womb.

The women returned and were astounded. “Who is it, a boy or a girl?” they asked.

“A girl,” said the father.

He called a *toi*, treating his guests to mutton and *fermented mare’s milk*. The women left for their homes.

Time passed, and the *bey*’s daughter grew up to be a real beauty. Every day sons of other *beys* came to ask for her hand. The *bey* would only say, “I do not tell my daughter what to do. Let her decide herself.”

They went to the girl.

“If you can guess my name, I will marry you; if not, go away,” answered the girl. But the young men could not find out what the girl’s name was. That was not surprising, even the parents did not know her name.

One day the mother said to her daughter, “How shall we call you? We don’t even know your name!”

The daughter answered, “My name is Dudar-*kys*, a girl by the boy’s name of Dudar, Dudar-girl. Nobody should know my name!”

One day another young man came to ask for her hand.

“I don’t know anything. Go to my daughter, let her decide herself,” answered the *bey*.

He went to the girl, “I am here to ask you to marry me. What do you say to that?”

“I will marry you if you find out what my name is. If not, you can turn around.”

The young man did not know the girl’s name. But that day the *bey*’s *aal* started to pack the camp for moving to a new pasture. The *bey*’s daughter loaded the packs on the camel, put a slave-girl on a horse and handed the camel’s reins to the slave-girl. But she herself got delayed.

She caught up with the moving party, astride on her black pacer horse . At the moment that she reached them, a pack on the camel slid sideways. But the girl did not notice—she just galloped along. The slave-girl kept calling and calling to her, but the slave-girl could not get her attention. The slave-girl then shouted, “Dudar-*kys*, come here! A pack on the camel’s askew!”

The girl heard that. She rode up to the slave-girl and asked, “Did you call my name?”

“No,” answered the slave-girl. “I just shouted ‘*kys*’—girl.”

The *aal* arrived at its new place. They set up the yurts, and unburdened the animals. The girl walked in and sat in the place of honor in the newly set up yurt. The same young man as had come earlier that day came in and said, “Dear *bey*, I am here to ask for your daughter’s hand.”

“My daughter decides for herself who she marries,” he answered.

“Find out my name,” she said.

“Your name is Dudar-kys,” answered the young man.

What was there to do? The marriage-brokers arrived. The *bey* called a *toi*, the marriage-brokers shook their hands, and the girl extended her hand to the groom. It was time for the newlyweds to take off for the groom’s *aal*.

“Dear daughter, I give you all my horses, take them all,” said the *bey*.

Dudar-kys rode to the herds. She was inspecting the studs with their mares and foals and saw a two year-old grey colt; his sweat-soaked fur was all crumpled. The girl worked through the fur with her fingers and smoothed it with her hands. Then the grey colt all of a sudden spoke to her in a human voice, “They have married you off, Dudar-kys?”

“They have,” answered the girl.

“What are you taking for your dowry?”

“Father gives me all of his herds.”

“Don’t take the herds, you don’t need them. Don’t take the goods, you don’t need them. Better tell me, what do you think about your groom: Is he good or is he bad?”

“I don’t know myself yet whether he is good or bad,” answered Dudar-kys.

Then the grey colt said to her, “If you don’t know, then I’ll tell you. Your new husband is not a person, but a werewolf. When the *aal* was moving to here, a pack slid askew on the camel. The slave-girl called you, but you could not hear. Then she shouted your name. The werewolf was nearby at that moment. He had dug out a man’s corpse out of a grave and was eating it. At that moment he heard your name.

The girl got frightened. But the grey colt continued, “When the father offers cattle and all the goods to you, don’t take them! Take only your father’s bow and arrows, a black slave-girl, a black camel, and me.”

Dudar-kys went back home, threw herself on her bed and started crying. The father tried to calm her down, “It’s almost time to go, dear daughter. What will you take for your dowry?”

The daughter answered, “Father, all I am asking for is your bow and arrows, a black slave girl, a black camel, and the grey two year-old colt.”

“I’ll certainly give you a black slave girl, a black camel, and the grey two year-old colt, but to give you my bow and arrows—that I cannot!” said the father.

The daughter started crying. The *bey*’s wife could not stand it any longer, “Your bow and arrows are more precious to you than your daughter? Give them to her if she is asking!”

“Oh, well, take them then!” agreed the *bey*.

Dudar-kys rode to the herds. She lassoed the two year-old colt—he turned a three year-old horse; she put reins on him—he turned a four year-old horse; she put a saddle on him—he turned a five year-old fully grown horse; she mounted him—he turned into a strong six year-old grey stallion! They brought a black camel. They put a black slave girl onto the camel. Dudar-kys threw her father’s bow across her shoulder, slung her arrow quiver across her back, and they took off.

When they were already far from the *aal*, the groom said, “I’ll ride ahead. You’ll know my way by following a line I’ll be marking behind myself. You’ll camp for the night where I draw a circle.” He said that, and rode ahead.

The grey stallion asked the girl, “Do you know why your new husband is riding ahead of us?”

“No, I don’t,” she answered.

“He’ll gain some distance, turn into a wolf and then attack the black camel and the black slave girl.”

And that was what happened. Had they barely ridden a few miles, a giant wolf charged the camel and the slave girl and devoured them in a blink of an eye. Then the wolf disappeared, and some time later the groom showed up again.

“Dudar-kys, where are the black camel and the black slave girl?” he asked as if he did not know anything.

“Some wolf attacked and devoured them,” she answered.

“Ah! Devoured them—no big deal!” said the young man. “There amidst the mountains, do you see a spot of white? That’s my yurt. You keep towards it, and I’ll ride ahead.”

When the girl was left alone, the grey stallion asked her, “What are you thinking about, Dudar-kys?”

“I don’t know what to do,” she said.

The grey stallion said, “When you get to the yurt, the elder wife of your groom will meet you. She’s an insatiable werewolf who’s devastated seven lands. Don’t allow her to touch my reins.”

Dudar-kys rode up to the yurt. A woman came out of it and stretched her hand to the reins as if to help the girl to get off the horse. “Don’t trouble yourself on my behalf,” said Dudar-kys. “You are the eldest wife, and I am the youngest, so I’ll tie the horse myself.” She dismounted and tied the grey stallion to the yurt by herself. She entered the yurt and sat right at the entrance. The new husband was sleeping. The eldest wife sat next to him. He woke up and started calling for Dudar-kys. She did not respond. He called her louder, and he got angry. The

eldest wife calmed him down, and he fell asleep again. He slept for seven days and seven nights. Then all of a sudden he shouted, and screamed, and shrieked!

The grey stallion leaned against the yurt then. “I think I’ll tie him in a different spot,” said Dudar-kys and stepped out of the yurt. She changed into a man’s clothes, mounted her horse, and took her bow and arrows.

The grey stallion said to her, “Close your eyes, and don’t open them for three days and three nights!” He leapt all the way to the skies. He flew for three days and three nights. On the fourth day he landed. The girl opened her eyes.

“Take my saddle off,” said the grey stallion.

She undid his saddle-girth, and the saddle came off together with the horse-hide. The grey stallion rolled on the ground, munched on some grass, and turned the same as before. He galloped across the steppe. In the distance he spied a lone rider. He hurried back to the girl and said, “Saddle me up, let’s go!”

They caught up with the rider. Dudar-kys said hello to him.

“Who are you?” asked the young rider.

“I’m a son of a *bey*. I’m hunting here.”

“Well, let’s swear to be brothers to each other: I’m the eldest, you—the youngest.”

So they started hunting together. Dudar-kys shot an arrow, and with that single arrow she killed two wild asses, her sworn brother by the name of Er-tostik—just one. They brought the carcasses to his home.

Er-tostik’s mother asked him, “Who’s that with you?”

“Mother, this is my sworn brother. He must be stronger than me: I killed one wild ass, and he—two in a single shot,” answered Er-tostik.

“Let my eyes ooze out if that’s a man and not a girl,” objected his mother.

Dudar-kys skinned the wild asses, brought water, and cooked the meat. They had their supper and settled for the night. In the morning they went hunting again. And again, Dudar-kys killed two wild asses, and Er-tostik just one.

They started butchering the carcasses, and at that moment, a man walked up to them, his horse in tow. He said hello and turned to Er-tostik, “I’ve come to fetch you, Er-tostik. Our khan is calling a *toi*. He’s announced that he’ll give his daughter away to the one who manages to knock off a golden coin from the top of the tallest poplar. Nobody can knock the coin off and marry the khan’s daughter!”

The three of them rode to the *toi* together. They arrived and saw archers sweating but unable to knock off the coin. Er-tostik shot his arrow—and his arrow flew just by the edge of the coin. Dudar-kys shot her arrow and knocked off the coin.

They put her on a carpet and carried her to the khan. And so the khan gave his daughter in marriage to the unknown rider. They put a new yurt for the newlyweds and held a fabulous *toi*. Three days passed, and the newlyweds were ready to depart for the groom’s *aal*. The bride addressed her youngest brother saying, “Why have they given me to a girl?”

The grey stallion heard those words and passed them on to Dudar-kys. She did not say anything. The newlyweds came to Er-tostik mother’s place. In the morning, Dudar-kys said to Er-tostik, “Dear brother, why won’t you stay home, and I’ll hunt on my own.”

When she and the grey stallion were far out in the steppe, the stallion asked her, “What are you going to do, Dudar-kys?”

“I’m going to leave from here,” said the girl.

“Do the following instead: Tomorrow morning go on a hunt with Er-tostik, tell him all, and offer yourself in marriage to him.”

In the evening Dudar-kys brought two wild asses, and the following morning, she invited her sworn brother to join her in a hunt. When they were out in the steppe, Dudar-kys asked her sworn brother, “Dear brother, who’s going to marry the khan’s daughter that we brought with us?”

“You, of course. You’ve knocked off the coin,” he answered.

“And who’ll marry me? I’m a girl after all,” said Dudar-kys.

She told Er-tostik about all of her adventures. He was very happy. They returned back home. The young man’s mother made a *toi*, and Er-tostik married both girls.

Some time passed. Dudar-kys was expecting a child. But an enemy attacked their lands. An army was formed and hurried off to intercept the enemy.

“Don’t leave for the war,” Dudar-kys asked her husband.

“What kind of man am I if I stay in the *aal*?”

Then Dudar-kys said, “If you go after all, don’t take the grey stallion, he’ll throw you off and come back to me.”

But Er-tostik did not listen to her—he saddled the grey stallion. Dudar-kys did not want to give him the grey stallion’s fetters, but Er-tostik yanked them out of her hands. He said goodbye to his mother, “Be healthy, mother dear! If Dudar-kys delivers a son, name him Altyn-bey.” And he left.

A month later Dudar-kys gave birth to a son. And what a son! He had a golden head and a silver torso. Er-tostik’s mother wrote a letter with the glad news, put a devoted servant on a black pacer horse that covered a month-long road in six leaps, and sent him off to Er-tostik.

The messenger rode and rode, and then he saw smoke coming from an opening in the ground. He rode up to it and saw a door. He opened the door, and there he saw a One-Legged Hag—Kuyaak Kempir.

“Where are you heading, sonny?” she asked.

“Have you seen an army going through here? I’m looking for it,” he answered.

“Why wouldn’t I see them? Of course, I’ve seen them. Just yesterday the warriors stayed here for the night, and then they rode off. You too, make this a rest stop. Come off your horse. Come in! Come in!”

The rider dismounted and entered the house. The old woman treated him to a cup of strong malted drink. He got drunk and fell asleep. But that old hag was the mother of the werewolf! She searched the rider’s pockets, pulled the letter out and read through it. That way she found out that Dudar-kys had become Er-tostik’s wife. She put the letter back into the pocket. The messenger woke up and continued on his way.

“On the way back, be my guest again!” Kuyaak Kempir shouted at his departure.

Er-tostik received his letter and was very glad. He wanted to head back home right away, but his army did not let him, telling him, “We are in our enemy’s country. You are our champion; all our hopes are tied to you. When we beat the enemy, then we’ll all return together.”

Er-tostik wrote a letter to his mother, “Make a *toi* and invite everyone. Name the son Altyn-bey.” He handed the letter to the messenger, and the messenger started riding back.

He got to the house of the One-Legged Hag. Again, she greeted him nicely, treated him to a drink and put him down to sleep. When he fell asleep, she took out Er-tostik’s letter out of his pocket and burned it. Instead she wrote a different one: “It was not worth troubling the black pacer for such news! Gather thirty loads of firewood and burn Dudar-kys and her son.” The

messenger woke up and did not notice anything. He took the substituted letter to Er-tostik's mother. She did not object to her son's instructions and ordered to bring thirty loads of firewood and pile them all together.

Dudar-kys learned about Er-tostik's answer, and sat down, and cried. In the middle of the night, all of a sudden she heard the familiar sound of hoofs—the grey stallion had galloped all the way to her. “Take Altyn-bey and come out,” he said.

Dudar-kys dressed up, wrapped the baby and stepped out of the yurt. When she saw the grey stallion, she started crying: Three of his legs were fettered. She took the fetters off, but all the way to the bone the fetters had cut into his legs. There was nothing she could do about that, she mounted the horse, and they took off.

All of a sudden they heard someone chasing after them. The grey stallion tried to pick up his pace, but his legs did not let him, he wanted to fly up, but he did not have enough strength. And the chase was closer and closer. It was Kuyaak Kempir.

Dudar-kys took out a comb, cast it behind them and said, “Turn into a dense forest!” And right away, a dense and impassable forest grew behind them. The One-Legged Hag got lost in it. While she was making her way out, the runaways put a great distance between her and themselves.

But the hag started gaining on them again. Dudar-kys took out a mirror, cast it behind them and said, “Turn into a wide lake!” And right away, a wide and impossible to cross lake splashed behind them. But Dudar-kys miscalculated how she threw the mirror and found herself together with the baby and the horse in the middle of the lake. The grey stallion was swimming, but the One-Legged Hag was gaining on them. She already grabbed Dudar-kys's shoulder! Dudar-kys pulled out a knife, but the old hag wrenched it out of her hand and slashed the grey

stallion's belly. He got mad and kicked the old hag with his hind legs. Her neck broke, and she expired.

They made it to the shore. The grey stallion's intestines fell out, he collapsed, breathing heavily. Dudar-kys embraced his head and cried. "Don't cry, Dudar-kys!" said the stallion. "Cut off my legs and say 'Turn into herds of horses!' and cast them to the four directions. Cut out my chest and say 'Turn into a large white yurt!' and cast it right here."

The grey stallion said that and died. For three days and three nights Dudar-kys cried, hugging his cold head. Then she cut off the legs of the horse and cut out the chest. She cast his legs to the four directions—and herds of horses appeared there. She cast the chest right there—and a large white yurt appeared on the spot.

Dudar-kys started living there without knowing any trouble, raising her son. He grew up and turned into a real man.

Once when Altyn-bey was guarding his herds, he saw a lame man. The lame man shot and killed a saiga antelope. While the lame one was hobbling to his trophy, Altyn-bey rode up on his horse, grabbed the carcass and was gone! He took the spoils to his mother and gave it to her as a present.

The following day he saw the lame one again. "Altyn-bey, come here!" the lame one called.

The youth rode up to him, and the lame one gave him his cap as a present. Altyn-bey put it on and went home. There he placed it accidentally by the spot where his mother milked mares. The mother came and started milking the mares. She saw the cap and started crying, and started asking her son, "Where have you got this cap?"

"Some lame guy gave it to me as a present."

“That guy is my husband, your father! Bring him over here, quick!”

Altyn-bey rode to the lame one. He picked him up, put him on a horse and brought him home. Dudar-kys came out of the yurt. Altyn-bey took his father off the horse, and galloped away to his herds. When he returned in the evening, Dudar-kys already had washed Er-tostik in mare’s milk, had dressed him in good clothes, and had fed him until he was full. They talked about everything that had happened to them. Er-tostik had been left without a horse: Dudar-kys was right when she warned him that the grey stallion would abandon Er-tostik for her sake. Er-tostik wandered for long time looking for the grey stallion. He worked his feet down and became lame, but he could not find the horse, or his wife, or his son.

They gathered their goods, herds, and cattle. They moved back to Er-tostik’s *aal*. The rest of their life, they spent in happiness and harmony. Altyn-bey became an even greater *champion* than his father.