# A Tale of a Dashing Lad, Rejuvenating Apples, and the Water of Life — Variant 6

Once upon a time there lived a tsar and a tsaritsa, and they had three sons. The tsar sent his sons off to find his youth. So the tsareviches set out on their way and came to a pillar where three roads diverged, and on that pillar it was written: go right — the fine fellow will be full, but his horse will be hungry; go left — the fine fellow will be hungry, but his horse will be full; go straight — the living shall not survive. The eldest tsarevich went right, the middle one left, and the youngest took the straight road. Whether the youngest brother rode long or short, he came upon a deep ditch. He did not long ponder how to cross it; he crossed himself, lashed his horse, leapt to the other side, and saw a hut standing near a dense forest — on chicken legs it stood. "Hut, hut! Turn your back to the forest and your front to me." The hut turned around. The tsarevich enters; there sits Baba Yaga. "Fie, fie!" she says. "Till now the Russian spirit has not been seen by sight nor heard by hearing, and now the Russian spirit appears before the eyes and bursts into the mouth! What is it, fine fellow, are you shirking work or seeking work?" — "Ah, you old hag! You'd do better not to speak, and I'd do better not to listen. First give me drink and food, and then ask your questions." She gave him drink and food, questioned him about the news, and gave him her winged horse: "Ride on, my dear, to my middle sister."

Whether he rode long or short, he saw a hut, went in — and there sat Baba Yaga: "Fie, fie!" she says. "Till now the Russian spirit has not been seen by sight nor heard by hearing, and now the Russian spirit appears before the eyes and bursts into the mouth! What is it, fine fellow, are you seeking work or shirking work?" — "Eh, auntie! Give me drink and food, and then ask your questions." She gave him drink and food and began to question him: "By what fate have you been carried off to these far lands?" — "My father sent me to find his youth." — "Well then, take my best horse in exchange and ride on to my elder sister."

The tsarevich set out on the road without delay; whether he rode long or short, he again saw a hut on chicken legs. "Hut, hut! Turn your front to me and your back to the forest." The hut turned around; he went in — and there sat Baba Yaga: "Fie, fie! Till now the Russian spirit has not been seen by sight nor heard by hearing, and now the Russian spirit appears before the eyes and bursts into the mouth! What is it, fine fellow, are you seeking work or shirking work?" — "Eh, you old hag!

You haven't fed me, you haven't given me drink, and already you're asking for news." Baba Yaga fed him, gave him drink, questioned him thoroughly about the news, and gave him a horse better than the previous two: "Ride on with God! Not far off there is a kingdom — do not ride in through the gates, lions stand guard there, but lash your horse well and leap straight over the fence, and mind you don't catch the strings, or the whole kingdom will be thrown into turmoil: then you shall not survive! And once you've leapt over the fence, go at once into the palace — into the back room, quietly open the door, and you will see the maiden tsar sleeping; under her pillow a little bottle of living water is hidden. Take the bottle and hurry back, and do not linger over her beauty."

The tsarevich did everything as Baba Yaga had taught him; only one thing he could not endure — he was smitten by the maiden's beauty... He began to mount his horse — the horse's legs buckle beneath him; he began to leap over the fence — and he caught a string. In a flash the whole kingdom awoke, the maiden tsar rose and ordered her horse saddled; and Baba Yaga had already learned what had befallen the fine fellow, and prepared herself to answer; she had only just managed to let the tsarevich go when the maiden tsar came flying up and found Baba Yaga all disheveled. The maiden tsar says to her: "How dared you let such a scoundrel into my kingdom? He was with me, drank my kvass, and did not cover me." — "Mother, maiden tsar! You can see for yourself how my hair is all disheveled; I fought with him long and hard, but could not get the better of him." The two other Baba Yagas said the same. The maiden tsar set off in pursuit of the tsarevich, and just as she was about to seize him, he leapt across the ditch. The maiden tsar called after him: "Wait for me in three years; I will come by ship."

The tsarevich was so overjoyed that he did not notice how he came to the pillar and how he turned from it to the left; he arrives at a silver mountain — on the mountain a tent is pitched, beside the tent a horse stands, eating white wheat and drinking honeyed mead, and in the tent lies a fine fellow — his own dear brother. The youngest tsarevich says to him: "Let us go and look for our elder brother." They saddled their horses and rode to the right; they come to a golden mountain — on the mountain a tent is pitched, beside it a horse eats white wheat and drinks honeyed mead, and in the tent lies a fine fellow — their elder brother. They woke him, and all rode together to the pillar where the three roads meet; they sat down there to rest. The two elder brothers began to question the youngest: "Did you find our father's youth?" — "I found it." — "How and where?" He told them everything as it had happened, lay down on the grass, and fell asleep. The brothers hacked him into small pieces and scattered them across the open field; they took the bottle of living water with them and set off to their father.

Suddenly a firebird comes flying, gathered all the scattered pieces, fitted them together as a man should be; then she brought dead water in her beak, sprinkled it — and all the pieces knit together; she brought living water, sprinkled it — and the tsarevich came to life, stood up, and said: "How long I have slept!" The firebird answered: "You would have slept an unawaking sleep forever, if not for me!" The tsarevich thanked her and went home; his father took a dislike to him and sent him out of sight; and so he wandered about in various corners for three whole years.

And when three years had passed, the maiden tsar sailed up in a ship and sent a letter to the tsar, demanding that he send out the culprit to her; and if he refused — she would burn and hew the whole kingdom to the ground. The tsar sent out his eldest son to her; he went to the ship. Two boys, two sons of the maiden tsar, saw him and began to ask their mother: "Is this our father?" — "No, this is your uncle." — "How shall we greet him?" — "Take a whip apiece and see him off back again." The eldest tsarevich returned home, having got nothing for his pains! And the maiden tsar, with the same threats, demanded the surrender of the guilty one; the tsar sent out another son — and the same thing happened to him as to the first.

Then the tsar ordered the youngest tsarevich to be sought out, and as soon as he was found, the father began to send him to the ship to the maiden tsar. But he said: "I will go when a crystal bridge is built all the way to the ship itself, and on the bridge there will be many different viands and wines set out." There was nothing to be done; they built the bridge, prepared viands, and laid in wines and meads. The tsarevich gathered his companions and said: "Come with me as an escort, eat and drink, spare nothing!" So he walks along the bridge, and the boys cry out: "Mother! Who is this?" — "This is your father." — "How shall we greet him?" — "Take him by the arms and lead him to me." Then they kissed, embraced, and made much of one another; and afterwards they rode to the tsar and told him everything as it had happened. The tsar drove the elder sons from his household, and with the youngest he began to live and prosper, and to grow rich.