

STORY OF A STEPMOTHER AND HER STEPDAUGHTER ANADYR TALE

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There was an old man and his wife. The old woman died leaving a single daughter. The old man sought another wife, and married a widow, who had a daughter of her own. This widow was a Yahga-Witch. The stepmother had a violent dislike for her stepdaughter. She used to strike her hard and gave her nothing to eat. One day she sent her to the waterhole to wash some old nets. While the girl was washing it the swift current carried it away. She cried bitterly. Then she looked down the water-hole and saw a road. She descended and came to the lower world. She walked and walked, and then saw a horse stable. Several horses stood in it, and the place was quite unclean. So she cleaned it well, plucked some grass from under the snow among the tussocks, and brought it in for fresh litter. Then she continued on her way.

After a while she saw a cow barn. Several cows stood there. The barn was more filthy than the preceding one. She cleaned it well, and brought in some grass for fresh litter. Then she milked the cows and went away. After some time she came to a little house. It was so dirty that the rubbish covered the sill. She entered and cleaned the house. Then she made a fire and sat down on the bed. Sitting thus alone, she cried bitterly. All at once a noise was heard outside, and the shuffling of old feet clad in bristle-soled boots. There entered a small old woman. "Ah, my dear! whence do you come?"—"I have no mother. The Yagha-Witch was very hard on me. She sent me to the water-hole to wash an old net, and the current of water carried it off. So I thought, 'She will surely kill me. I may as well descend to the lower world of my own free will?'"—"All right!" said the old woman, "you may pass this night in my house; and in the morning I will give you a net to make good your loss."

In the morning the old woman gave her a net made of pure silver and also a small box with an iron cover. She said to the girl, “Give this net to the Yagha-Witch. She will thank you for it ever so much. You must keep the box for yourself. Everytime you feel hungry, you may call your father. Then open that box unseen by your stepmother. The box will give you food and drink.” She took the presents and went home. She gave the silver net to the Yagha-Witch. Oh, the witch was so glad! She called her own daughter and gave her a piece of a new net, quite clean and white. Then she said, “Go to the water-hole. Perhaps they will give you something too.”

The daughter of the Yagha-Witch came to the water-hole. She washed the net. The current carried it off. She looked down the water-hole and saw a road. She followed it and came to the lower world. After some time she saw the horse stable. Several horses stood in it, and the place was unclean. The girl grumbled, “Oh, what a filthy place!” and passed by. Then she saw a cow barn. Several cows stood in it, and the place was dirtier than the preceding one. She passed by with much aversion. After that she came to the little house. It was so full of dirt that the rubbish covered the sill. “Oh, what awful dirt!” said the girl. She entered, however, and she sat on the bed in the cold and among the heap of rubbish, singing lustily. The old woman came in, and asked, “Oh, my dear! where do you come from?”—“My mother sent me to wash a net, and the current carried it away. I looked down the water-hole and saw a road. I followed that road and came here.” The old woman gave her a net, the very same she had dropped into the water-hole, and also a large box with a cover of larch wood. She warned her also, “Be sure not to open this box in the presence of anyone! You must open it only when you and your own mother are together.” The girl went back and came out of the water place. “Mother,” she called to the Yagha-Witch, “I have a box, ever so large.”—“Do not open it, will you?” said the mother. They took the box and hid beneath a bush. Then she opened the lid. A flame came out and burnt them both. So they were destroyed. The old man and his daughter left that place and departed for the under world. They came to the old woman. The old man married her, and they all three lived together. The end.

[0] Told by Mary Alin, a Russianized Chuvantzi woman, in the village of Markova, the Anadyr country, winter of 1900. ↑

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