



Trying Our Luck – Preparing for a Career and Navigating Through Life with Folk Tales

Guide for the use of the folk tale cards

The Magician's Horse

Lithuanian folktale

Author: Éva Virág Suhajda

Supervisor: Ildikó Boldizsár

Illustrations: Szentimrey Zsófia



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The Tale – The Magician's horse

Once there was a king who had three sons. One day the three princes went hunting in a large forest that was far their father's castle, and the youngest prince lost his way, so his brothers had to return home without him.

The lost prince wandered through the forest for four days. At night, he slept beneath the stars, and when he was hungry, he ate roots and wild berries. At last, on the morning of the fifth day, he came to a large open space in the middle of the forest, and there he found a magnificent mansion – but not a living soul was to be seen there. The door was open, and the prince entered and walked through the deserted rooms. In the end, he came to a great hall, and in the centre of the hall was a table laden with delicious food and wine. The prince sat down and ate and drank until he was full, but the next moment the table vanished. The prince thought this was very strange, but though he continued to search all the rooms, he could find no one to speak to. Finally, just as it was beginning to get dark, he heard the sound of footsteps and he saw an old man coming towards him up the stairs.

"What are you doing in my mansion?" asked the old man.

"I was hunting in the forest and I lost my way. Now I would like to stay with you. If you let me work for you, I will serve you faithfully," replied the prince.

"Very well," said the old man. "You may be my servant. You must make sure that the fire in the kitchen stove is always burning, and you must look after the black horse in the stable. I will pay you one gold coin a day, and at mealtimes you will always find plenty of food and wine on the table, and you can eat and drink as much as you like."

The prince was very happy and he promised that he would always fill the stove with wood and never let the fire die down. Although he didn't know it, his new master was a magician, while the fire in the stove was a magic fire, and if it ever went out, the magician would lose a great deal of his power.



Well, one day the prince simply forgot about the stove, and the fire burned so low that it nearly went out. Just as the last flames were flickering, the old man hurried angrily into the kitchen.

“Why have you let the fire burn so low?” he roared. “If I had arrived a minute later, it would have gone out altogether!” And while the prince quickly threw a log into the stove, his master boxed him on the ear and warned him that if ever it happened again there would be trouble.

A few days later, the prince was sitting unhappily in the stable when, to his surprise, the black horse spoke to him. “Come closer,” it said, “I have something to say to you. Fetch my bridle and saddle from that cupboard and put them on me. Take the bottle that is beside them – it contains some special oil that will make your hair shine like pure gold. Then gather all the wood you can and put in into the stove until the fire is burning more fiercely than ever before.”

The prince did what the horse had asked him to. First, he put the bridle over its head and the saddle on its back. Next, he rubbed the oil into his hair until it shone like gold. Finally, he built such a big fire in the stove that the flames leapt up and set fire to the roof – and in a few minutes the whole mansion was burning.

The boy hurried back to the stable, and the horse said to him, “There’s one more thing you must do. In the cupboard you’ll find a mirror, a brush, and a riding whip. Bring them and jump onto my back. We’ve got to get out of here as fast as we can!”

The prince did as he was told, and as soon as he had jumped into the saddle, the horse raced away. Very soon, they had left the forest and all the land that belonged to the magician far behind them.

In the meantime, the magician returned home – but all he saw was smoke and ashes. He shouted for his servant – but his servant was nowhere to be seen. In the end, he went to look for the boy in the stable, and there he discovered that the black horse had disappeared too. Certain that they had left together, the magician jumped onto a brown horse that was also there, and set off after them. As the prince rode on, his horse called out to him. “I can hear



hooves! Look behind you and see if the old man is following us.” When the prince turned, he saw a cloud of smoke in the distance.

“We must hurry!” said the horse.

After they had galloped for some time, the horse spoke again. “Look behind you! How far away is he?”

“He’s quite close now,” replied the prince.

“Then throw the mirror to the ground!” said the horse.

The prince did so, and when the magician rode that way, the brown horse stepped on the mirror. It smashed with a loud noise and the poor horse stumbled and fell, cutting its hooves so badly that the old man had no choice but to walk slowly back to the stable with it and fit it with some new horseshoes. When they were ready, they set off after the prince a second time. The black horse was very valuable to the magician, and he was determined not to lose it.

By now, the prince had ridden a long way, but just then, the black horse pricked up its ears again. “Jump down!” it said to the prince. “Put your ear to the ground and tell me if you can hear anything.”

The prince jumped down and listened. “I think I can hear the earth rumbling,” he said. “The magician must be getting closer again.”

“Jump back up,” replied the horse. “I’ll run as fast as I can!” And with that, it began to gallop so quickly that it seemed to be flying over the ground.

After a short time, the horse spoke again. “Look back once more. Can you see him?”

“I can see a cloud and a flame,” answered the prince. “But they’re still a long way off.”

“We must hurry,” said the horse.



A few minutes later, the horse called out yet another time. "Look back again! He can't be far off now."

The prince turned. "He's close behind us!" he cried. "The flames from his horse's nostrils will reach us in a minute."

"Alright," replied the horse. "Then throw the brush to the ground!"

The prince did so, and the next moment the brush turned into a forest. The trees were so close together that when the magician got there, his horse had to suddenly stop. There was no way through, and the old man had no choice but to ride back to the stable for an axe. When he returned, he began to chop a way through the forest, but this took quite some time, and the prince and the black horse made good progress ahead of him.

Eventually, however, they once more heard the sound of racing hooves. "Look back," said the horse. "Is he there?"

"Yes," answered the prince, "I can hear him clearly."

"We must keep going," gasped the horse. And only a little later it said, "Look back now. How close is he?"

"Very close indeed," said the prince. "I can see the flames."

"Then you must throw down the whip," shouted the horse.

In an instant, the whip turned into a broad river. When the old man reached it, he rode his horse straight into the water, but the farther the horse went, the higher the waves climbed, and the magic flame which gave the magician all his power grew smaller and smaller until – with a fizz – it went out, and both the magician and the brown horse sank beneath the surface and disappeared. When the prince looked round they were no longer to be seen.

"At last!" sighed the black horse with relief. "Now you can jump down. The magician is dead and we have nothing more to fear." When the prince jumped down, he saw a little stream,



and just then, the horse spoke again. "By the side of that stream, you'll find a willow wand. Strike the ground with it. The earth will open and you'll see a door at your feet."

The prince did what the horse had told him to. Sure enough, a door appeared in the ground, and the boy saw steps leading down into a big hall, where the floor, the walls, and the ceiling were all made of stone.

"Lead me into the hall," said the horse. "I will stay there, but you must continue over the fields till you reach a garden. In the middle of the garden is a palace. When you get there, you must ask to become one of the King's servants.

Goodbye – and don't forget me!"

Before the prince went on his way, the horse made him promise not to let anyone see his golden hair. The boy promised, and he wrapped his scarf around his head like a turban. Then he walked over the fields until he reached a lovely garden. Just as the horse had said, in the distance he could see the walls and towers of a beautiful palace. He was just about to walk through the gate when the head gardener stopped him and asked what he wanted.

"I want to become one of the King's servants," replied the prince.

The head gardener stared at the boy's shabby clothes. "You can't enter the palace looking like that, but you may stay and work for me in the garden. I need someone to weed the flowerbeds and sweep the dead leaves from the paths. You'll get a gold coin a day, food and drink, and a horse to help you carry the leaves away."

The prince agreed and he immediately set to work. But when they brought him his dinner, he only ate half of it. When no one was looking, he took to rest to the stone hall by the stream and gave it to the black horse. He did this every single day, and the horse was extremely grateful for the boy's faithful friendship.

One evening when the boy was in the stone hall, the horse said to him, "Tomorrow many princes and great lords will visit the palace. They are coming from near and far to meet the King's three daughters. All the young men will stand in a line in the courtyard, and the three



princesses will come out carrying diamond apples. Each princess will throw her apple into the air, and the man at whose feet the apple falls will marry that princess. Make sure that you're working close by in the garden. The apple of the youngest princess, who is far prettier than her sisters, will roll past the princes and lords and stop right in front of you. When it does, pick it up at once and put it in your pocket."

The next day, when the princes and lords were lined up in the courtyard, everything happened just as the horse had said. The princesses threw their diamond apples into the air, and the apple of the youngest princess rolled past everyone. It rolled right out into the garden and only stopped when it was at the feet of the young gardener, who was busy sweeping up the leaves. As quick as a flash, the boy bent down, picked the apple up, and slipped it into his pocket. But as he was bending, the scarf around his head slipped a little to one side. Only one person noticed this – the youngest princess – and when she caught sight of his golden hair, she fell instantly in love with him.

The girl was thrilled, but the King was very sad, because of all his daughters, she was the one he loved the most. Still, nothing could be done about it, and the next day a triple wedding was held in the palace. After the celebrations were over, the boy took his bride back to the little hut in the garden where he lived.

Time passed, but then one day an army from a neighbouring country invaded the kingdom. The King set off to fight them at once, and the husbands of the two elder princesses rode at the head of his troops on magnificent horses. The husband of the youngest princess, however, had nothing but the worn-out old carthorse that helped to carry away the dead leaves, and the King, who was ashamed of this son-in-law, refused to give him a better one.

As he was determined not to be left behind, the prince went into the garden and jumped on the back of the carthorse. After no more than a few steps, however, the poor old horse stumbled and fell. The boy was angry and frustrated, but then he had an idea. He ran to the stone hall and told the black horse what had happened.



“Find my bridle and saddle and put them on me,” said the horse. “Then go into the next room. There you will find a suit of armour and a sword. As soon as you’re ready, we’ll ride into battle together!”

The prince did as he was told. As he rode out of the hall, his armour glittered in the sun, and he looked so brave and handsome on the back of the beautiful black horse that no one would have recognised him as the shabby boy who worked in the palace garden. They galloped away as fast as the wind, and when they reached the battlefield they saw that the King was losing the fight, and that many of his men had been killed. All the same, when the glittering knight on his black horse began swinging his sword, the enemy soldiers were terrified and they ran like rabbits.

When the king and his two elder sons-in-law saw this, they and the few men who had survived shouted out in joy: “A god has come to our rescue!” They all wanted to crowd around the boy, but at that moment the black horse rose into the air and carried him far away.

Soon after this, part of the kingdom rebelled against their ruler, and once more the King and his two elder sons-in-law had to ride into battle. The young gardener wanted to join them and he went to the throne room. “Dear father-in-law! Please let me go with you.”

“I don’t want a fool like you to fight for me,” grumbled the king. “And anyway, I haven’t got a spare horse for you. But I’ll tell you what. You see that peasant driving his cart of hay down the road? You can have his horse.”

So the prince took the peasant’s horse, but the poor thing was old and tired, and before it had gone very far it stumbled and fell. The prince returned sadly to the garden and watched as the king rode away with his other two sons-in-law at the head of the army. As soon as they were out of sight, the prince hurried to the stone hall by the stream. Again he told the black horse what had happened. Then he put on his armour and jumped onto the horse’s back. The next second, they were flying through the air and they soon landed right in the middle of the battlefield. Just like before, the boy’s sword swung to the left and to the right, and the king’s



enemies ran for their lives. Once again the King and his men cried out in thanks: “A god has come to our rescue!” But when they tried to speak to the knight in the glittering armour, the black horse rose into the air and carried him far away.

When the king and his sons-in-law returned home, the only thing they could talk about was the hero who had won the battle for them, and they all wondered who he could be.

Before too long, another neighbouring country declared war, and once again the King, his sons-in-law, and their soldiers got ready to ride into battle. Once again, the boy begged to go with them, but the King repeated that he had no spare horses.

“I’ll tell you what, though,” he added. “You see that woodcutter coming out of the forest? You can have his horse – it’s more than good enough for you!” So the prince took the woodcutter’s horse, but it was so old and weak that it couldn’t even carry him beyond the palace gates. This time when the boy went to the stone hall, the black horse had prepared an even more magnificent suit of armour for him than the old one, and after he had put it on, and jumped onto the horse’s back, he found himself in the middle of the battle in the blink of an eye.

Once more, the prince made the King’s attackers run. But this time, while he was fighting, an enemy soldier wounded him in the thigh. Seeing this, the King took out his royal handkerchief and tied it around the boy’s leg. He wanted his men to carry the brave warrior straight back to the palace, but the prince grabbed the mane of his faithful horse, and managed to pull himself up into the saddle. The next moment, the horse rose into the air and carried him off. The King and his men all cheered:

“The glittering knight has saved us again! He must be a god!”

After the battle, everyone spoke of one thing only. “This hero has won so many battles for us,” they said. “But who can he be? He can’t be an ordinary man – he must be a god!”

And the King said, “How I wish I could see him once more. If it turned out that he wasn’t a god, but only a man, I’d reward him with half of my kingdom.”



Well, when the prince got back home, he was exhausted, and he lay down on his bed and fell fast asleep. It was then that his wife noticed the handkerchief tied around his wounded leg, and she wondered what it could be. When she looked at it more closely, she couldn't believe her eyes. There in the corner of the handkerchief she saw a picture of a royal crown, and underneath it, her father's name.

The princess ran straight to the palace and told her father what she had seen. The King and his two elder sons-in-law hurried back to the hut with her – and there they saw the young gardener dreaming peacefully on his bed. The scarf that the boy always wore wrapped around his head had slipped off in his sleep, and now his golden hair sparkled on his pillow. At that moment, they all realized that this was the hero who had fought and won so many battles for them.

Everyone was overjoyed, and the King rewarded his youngest son-in-law by giving him half of his land. The young prince was now a king himself, and his queen were the happiest rulers in the whole world.



Guide to the tale

In every folk tale there is a starting point – a momentary life situation the heroes find themselves in. Some bid farewell to their parents and set off to seek their fortunes.

Elsewhere, they escape from step-parents, while in other stories, their parents pass away. In this tale, we encounter a peculiar beginning: our hero was once a prince – but he got lost, and his family never found him again.

There are many ways to get lost: spatially, temporally, or even emotionally. The prince wanders for days, eating and drinking whatever he comes across. What real-life situation could this refer to? According to Jungian interpretation, wandering in a forest corresponds to an inner quest. The prince leaves his old family behind – the tale never mentions him wanting to return to them later – and he doesn't yet know which way to go. We might find ourselves in such a situation too: the past is already behind us, but although we don't wish to go back, we have no idea of the next direction to take. This situation may occur when we

are starting out in life, but it is also a characteristic problem of midlife crises, and it can happen when we finish a course of studies, or even after a break-up or divorce. Grief is also a similar emotional state.

Regarding it from this aspect, we can identify with the situation in which the prince spends his days "living on roots and wild berries" and his nights "sleeping on moss beneath the stars". The tale doesn't describe how the prince feels at this time, and we have the freedom to imagine what feelings such a situation might evoke in ourselves.

The ensuing story of the prince is about what happens when he finds himself again, when he 'finds his way' somewhere. The stakes of the tale are for him to become a prince once more, and to take up the royal position in his life that is his destiny. And the hero's journey is the story of what he must do to accomplish this and the direction in which he must evolve.



This tale feels like we are watching multiple stories unfold one after another, or it can be viewed as a serialized narrative: in the first part, the prince works for the magician and then breaks free from him; while in the second, he gains glory, a wife, and a crown at the royal palace. Many tales might focus solely on one or the other plotline, but they wouldn't be about this particular prince.

In those tales where the protagonist goes to see the king and subsequently wins fame and a wife, the hero knows what he wants – whereas in this tale, that is precisely what our prince has no idea of. And in stories where the hero has to escape from an enemy's fortress, they usually go there for a reason: they want to obtain something and defeat the foe – but that's not the case here either.

During his wanderings, our prince stumbles upon a seemingly abandoned mansion and he unsuspectingly offers to serve the first person he meets. This happens to be an old man, who seems to be both harmless and honest. For want of a better idea, the prince asks to work for the old man, and his wish is granted.

In return for his accommodation, meals, and payment, the prince is entrusted with only three tasks: to gather wood, keep the fire alive, and take care of the black horse in the stable. The prince happily starts work immediately. However, when one day he lets the fire burn too low, his master scolds him severely and even strikes him – for only now does it turn out that the old man is a magician, and his power comes from the fire.

This situation can be viewed from two perspectives. The prince, who here is no longer a prince but a servant, fails to fulfil his duties. Even though they are hardly too much for him, he forgets all about them. It's obvious that we can find no trace of ambition, enterprise, determination, or independence in the boy, which of course also makes it understandable how he could have strayed from his royal background so easily. He simply wasn't cut out for it. And the old man, who finds it convenient that the prince is so easy to manipulate, exploits this situation. He creates a dynamic where the prince's fate depends on him, yet he also depends on the boy: if the fire goes out, he will lose his magic.



We can see a typical abusive dynamic here, where the stronger preys on the weaker: this doesn't necessarily have to be a romantic relationship, it can be interpreted in the paradigm of relationship in a workplace as well. Aside from feeding the fire, the prince has one more task – the 'upkeep' of the black horse.

The horse doesn't really belong to the magician, he doesn't even ride it; it's just kept locked up. It is only with hindsight that we can understand that this horse actually belongs to the prince, but for him to be able to 'mobilize' it, he also needs to change, there needs to be something that pushes him out of the comfort zone of his uninspiring routine. The horse knows exactly when to speak to the boy, when it's time for change – when fear overrides comfort. First the prince is told to prepare the horse for a journey; next it makes him find a bottle of special oil; finally it convinces the boy to set the fire to the mansion.

Before they are ready to leave, a few more 'trifles' must be gathered. Here comes the turning point for the boy – and upon closer examination, we can see this from the pattern of verbs associated with him as well. While up until now he has lost his way, sat around, forgotten his duties, and moped (all actions that are directionless and passive in nature), now he suddenly becomes active: he combs his hair, builds a huge fire, and burns down the mansion.

Why must he burn down the mansion? Why isn't it enough to just run away? The answer might be interesting in the context of abusive relationships: because in this way, there's nowhere to return to. If he simply escapes, and his master catches up with him, the old man might easily take the boy back to the emptiness, fear, and abuse of his isolated home – where the recipe for survival is well-known. Yet precisely because of this, when the magician returns home to find only "smoke and ashes", it's obvious that the situation cannot go on.

Before setting off, the boy applies the oil to his hair, making it look as if it was made of gold. Gold is precious – perhaps he is trying to draw strength from within himself in this way. Changing the colour and style of our hair is a typical way of changing ourselves, and very often it signifies some kind of radical turn in a person's life.



The horse makes the boy bring several objects along: a mirror, a brush, and a whip, all of which play important roles during their escape. First comes the use of the mirror. A mirror shows us who we are and also who the other person is. A crucial part of getting out of a dysfunctional relationship is to hold up a mirror to ourselves and to the other person, just as the use of the mirror is an important step in the tale too. When his pursuer's horse treads on it, the mirror shatters and the horse cuts its hooves. The mirror reveals the truth, and sometimes this truth causes pain. However, from the prince's perspective, this is positive because it buys him time.

The second magical object is the brush. A brush can be used to untangle, clean, and smooth out knots, but sometimes there are too many knots and obstacles. In some situations there are just too many tangles to unravel. The boy's brush turns into a dense forest, which is a typical folk tale twist. The forest is also a place of secrets and lies, and this forest stops the old man again – as he has to go back to fetch an axe.

The third object is the whip. With a whip, we can strike, or – as in the situation in the tale – strike back. The whip turns into a river, which surges towards the magician – who is still unable to see beyond and emerge from his anger and hurt – and he drowns in it. The boy is finally free.

But the story doesn't end here, as the boy finds himself 'only' where he was at the beginning of the tale – somewhere in space and time where he is not going anywhere, but can't go back either. Yet now he is in a different situation, because he knows that not only has he survived, he has defeated the magician, and he also has a wonderful black horse.

The horse leads him into an underground chamber and steers him in the right direction, telling him how to reach the royal palace. However, it stays behind, supporting the boy from the background, while in return the boy takes care of and continues to nourish it. The horse offers the boy a piece of advice: not to reveal his golden hair. What could this mean? The golden hair, symbolizing royal status, cannot yet be made public, as it might seem like boasting



without proof. Therefore, the boy doesn't appear at the palace on horseback as a knight or a prince, but arrives as merely a simple man offering himself for service once again.

He starts his life in the palace 'from the bottom', as an assistant gardener. But this situation still allows him to be in the right place at the right time when things happen. The king's three daughters seek their respective husbands by throwing magic apples into the air. As – in theory – whoever the apples roll to is worthy of marrying a princess, it surprises everyone (except the reader) when the youngest princess's apple rolls right up to the gardener's assistant. The boy cannot (and hopefully does not want to) disguise his true identity from the girl. When she catches a glimpse of his golden hair, she falls in love with him and marries him. But as yet this is not enough to prove his worth and suitability. This is where the war provides an opportunity. The boy is not in a good position because he is not highly regarded at the palace, and he's not really given a chance to prove himself (he can't be a knight on another man's steed), but his own horse helps him three times, and – incognito – he wins each battle for the king. It's important that the boy doesn't reveal himself yet, because he still has something to prove, and until he establishes his reputation for himself, he won't rely on 'family connections' for help. He could probably admit the truth after the first battle, but he doesn't, and in the end, it is his wife who 'exposes' him. Why does he wait so long? What is the test he still needs to pass to become a true ruler?

On one hand, it is a test of humility and modesty. On the other hand, along the lines of 'delayed gratification', we can see that the longer he waits, the greater his reward will be, because after the third victory, the king offers him half of the kingdom and a crown of his own.

Now arises a fresh challenge for the boy – to stand up and publicly embrace himself. This isn't easy, as he might not even believe himself to be as good as others perceive him to be – and here the one who comes to his aid is his wife. Also a supportive character, she sees the hero in the boy and tells her father as much. Now others also see his golden hair and his virtues, and he can rightfully accept his crown as a worthy hero. He has earned his place on a throne of his own, and now he can truly rule happily ever after.



Working with the tale on our own

Working through a story on our own is an exciting experience, but it is not at all straightforward. In folk tales, order is restored by the end; the heroes go on a journey, and through that they develop.

This is our task too – to interpret the turns and ‘codes’ of the folk tale for our own lives, to find the steps that will help us to become better masters and mistresses of our own lives.

When we begin to work through ‘The Magician’s Horse’, we should first listen to or read the story and then sit back and let the mood of the tale wash over us. Even with our eyes closed, we can find a taste, a smell, or an image from the story. What would we take from the story if we could? Where in the story are we, and what role are we playing? Then we should take a pencil and write down our answers to the questions (on the cards or in the text here). We should focus on the questions that speak to us the most. Not all questions may be relevant to us, but those that are, are worth thinking about at length, or even talking about with others – parents, friends, peers, or even helpers. In what way does this happen? Probably one of the characters, places, or objects captures our imagination. The elements in a folk tale do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone, and in fact, when we work on the story on our own, we interpret the situations, characters, etc. that appear in it completely for ourselves.

The characters in the story.

Let us first look at the characters in the story.

Each character conveys something. They all have their own strengths, their own role, and their own message. The characters’ cards carry these messages.

- ❖ The hero of our story is a lost prince. We don’t know his name, so any one of us could be him. His task is to find his way and to become a true king rather than just wandering



in the forest and offering to serve the first person he meets. In order to become a king – to control his own life – he has to learn many things and to prove his worth.

- ❖ The chief antagonist in the tale is the magician – and he also represents a very important lesson: if we don't know what to do with ourselves, others will take advantage of us, but they will do it for their own purposes. We mustn't be naive like the prince, who needed that symbolic (and not just symbolic) slap he received from the seemingly benevolent and supportive old man at the beginning. We can learn from our adversaries, and the magician is no exception: he can teach us not to let our inner fire go out, and perhaps also not to entrust our own magic fire to others, as well as not to be motivated by blind revenge.
- ❖ The prince's main helper is the black horse. It gives advice and provides actual physical assistance both in the boy's escape and in the battles. But for this, the prince must take care of it, nourish it, and listen to it. What kind of inner 'magic horse' do we have, and how can we nourish it? What advice does it whisper to us?
- ❖ The princess also helps the prince by seeing him for who he truly is and marrying him. She falls in love with him. Therefore, when she becomes certain that her husband truly is the golden-haired hero she sees him as, she immediately tells the king himself. Is there someone in our lives who sees us as valuable and important, and is willing to acknowledge this in front of others?
- ❖ The king (and his relatives) cannot see the boy's real worth. They consider him to be no more than a foolish young gardener and they deny him the chance to prove himself. But the boy must cast off this role and show his worth in a battle. Ultimately, the king is fair and generous: he gives the boy his daughter and later, when he has proven himself, offers him half the kingdom. Are there people we need to prove ourselves to whose help we can afterwards count on? How can we prove ourselves? What battles must we fight?



The locations in the story

We can also study the various locations in the tale. In which setting can we find ourselves? Each scene presents its own tasks, which we have to perform in order to arrive at the next way station.

- ❖ The first setting is the forest, the place of aimless wandering. Here the task is to find a place where we are physically safe.
- ❖ The second location is the magician's mansion. Here the task is to keep the magician's fire alive, and then to be able to escape from our subservience.
- ❖ The third setting is the escape route. Here we have several tasks: facing up to ourselves (the mirror), untangling the problems around us (the brush), and being able to step out of unhealthy dynamics (the whip – the river – avoidance), and on the way, we must be capable of changing and abandoning the old negative patterns.
- ❖ The fourth location is the underground chamber, our secret inner space where the magic horse resides. Here we store our resources; this is where we return for help, tools, advice, and to nourish our horse.
- ❖ The fifth setting is the battlefield. Here the task is to prove that we are true knights and that we are worthy of the throne.
- ❖ The sixth location is the little hut where the newly-weds live. Here the task is to be capable of revealing ourselves to the princess and of showing our true selves.
- ❖ Finally, the last location is the royal palace, where our task is to embrace ourselves publicly and assume the role of ruler.

The objective matrix of the tale 'The Magician's Horse' is as follows:

- ❖ Who is the hero of the tale? – The main character of the tale is the lost boy, the wandering prince.
- ❖ What is the life situation? – Wandering away from his family, the lost prince searches for his way in life – and for himself.



- ❖ What is the challenge of the tale? – Will the prince become capable of growing to be a king?
- ❖ Who is the adversary? – Although at first the main antagonist may seem to be the magician, it is the prince himself who serves the old man – and he must break free from that by seeing all the dynamics that keep him there and consciously changing the course of his life.
- ❖ Who is the helper? – The helper is the magician's horse, which provides aid in mobilizing both the inner and external resources needed for the prince to become a king.
- ❖ What is the solution? – The prince needs to find himself and also prove his worth to both himself and those around him. The subjective matrix of the tale 'The Magician's Horse' is as follows:
- ❖ Who am I in the story? – It's easiest to identify with the protagonist, especially if we've ever struggled with a life situation where we truly had no idea what we wanted or which direction we should take. However, as a helper, I may identify with the horse, which rescues the prince from an exploitative – even abusive – relationship and helps him find his own way. And of course, if I see someone I know gradually getting their life together, I might also identify with the princess or even her father.
- ❖ Where am I in the story? – One thing is for sure: I can't be in a place where the character I identify with hasn't been. Once we find the setting where we feel we currently are, it's worth looking around and contemplating the next question.
- ❖ What is my role here? – It might be just to search for berries so that I don't starve, or perhaps I need to realize that I have to escape from the magician, who is mistreating me. Our various life situations can entail very different tasks, and depending on where we see ourselves in the tale, different tasks may now await us.
- ❖ What is my own inner adversary that I must overcome to move forward? – As a prince, in order to embark on the path of self-development, I first need to dispense with my aimlessness and my uncritical attitudes and self-pity. As a helper, I must be able to



speak to others when they are receptive to hearing me, and to step back when their growth takes them forward.

- ❖ What is my inner help, my own resources for change? – To change something in our lives, we need resources. The magic horse, as an inner helper, symbolizes all these resources. What, then, is my own 'magic horse'? What resources, abilities, and strengths is it made of?
- ❖ What object would I take from the story for myself? – Magical objects also have a certain facilitating function in tales. Not every folk tale has such an object, but that doesn't mean that the objects appearing in the tale cannot have magical powers for us personally. There are objects in this tale that have magical powers – aiding my escape, or perhaps helping me to become a knight (the armour). But it might also be that I need the magician's fire.
- ❖ What is the very specific thing I need to do to move forward in this situation? – If we have thoroughly explored the above questions, it is likely that a possible path has already emerged for us. Yet very often, this just makes our situation even more daunting, and we may be confronted with a multitude of tasks to accomplish. How will I be able to handle all this? How long will it take? We might tell ourselves that we're sure we won't be able to meet this challenge. Before we panic, it's worth breaking down the path ahead of us into individual steps and trusting that if we take one step, we'll be able to take the next. So, the question is: What is the next step I can take right now?



Working with the tale as a coach

When we want to work with the story as a coach, the first step is to work with the story ourselves – that is, to think through the steps detailed in the previous section.

Before we start working with the story as a coach, it is necessary to have a subjective interpretation of the tale, an interpretation of the story as it applies to our own personal life, because it is very important to avoid imposing our own interpretation on our clients. To do this, we need to know what our own interpretation is. On the other hand, it is also important to interpret the folk tale in relation to our own lives, so that we do not run into questions and topics that trigger an emotional reaction in us while working with the client.

At the same time, however, we also need to interpret the story objectively, and to think through the possible interpretations from the client's point of view.

Ildikó Boldizsár calls these two approaches the 'objective and subjective story matrix'. In the objective matrix, we interpret the story itself, while in the subjective matrix we examine ourselves in the light of the story.

The objective matrix of the tale 'The Magician's horse' is as follows:

- ❖ Who is the hero of the tale? - The main character of the tale is the lost child, the wandering prince.
- ❖ What is the life situation? - Wandering away from his family, the lost prince searches for his path and himself.
- ❖ What is the theme of the story? - Will the prince become capable of becoming a king?
- ❖ Who is the antagonist? - Although the main antagonist may seem to be the Magician at first, the prince himself is the one who serves him - and he needs to break free from that, see all the dynamics that keep him there, and consciously change the course of his life.



- ❖ Who is the helper? - The helper is the black horse that aids in mobilizing both internal and external resources for the prince to become a king.
- ❖ What is the solution? - The prince needs to find himself and also prove his worthiness to both himself and his environment.

The subjective matrix of the tale 'The Magician's horse' is as follows:

- ❖ Who am I in the tale? - It's easiest to identify with the main character, especially if we've ever struggled with a life situation where we truly had no idea what we wanted or where to go. However, as a helper, we may identify with the horse, who rescues the prince from an exploitative, even abusive relationship and helps him find his own way. And of course, we might also identify with the princess or even her father if we see someone in our environment slowly pulling themselves together.
- ❖ Where am I in the tale? - One thing's for sure: I can't be in a place where the character I identify with hasn't been. Once I find the scene where I currently feel myself, it's worth looking around and contemplating the next question.
- ❖ What is my task in this scene? - It might be just to search for berries so I don't starve, or perhaps I need to realize that I have to escape from the Magician who's mistreating me. Our various life situations can entail very different tasks, and depending on where I see myself in the tale, different tasks may await me now.
- ❖ What is my own inner adversary that I must overcome to move forward? - As a prince, I first need to shed aimlessness, uncritical attitudes, and self-pity to embark on the path of development. As a helper, I must be able to address others when they are receptive to hearing, and step back when their growth takes them forward.
- ❖ What is my inner support, what are my own resources for change? - To change something in our lives, we need resources. The magical horse, as an inner helper, symbolizes all these resources. What then is my own magical horse? What resources, abilities, and strengths make it up?



- ❖ What object would I bring out from the story? - Magical objects also play a certain assisting function in tales. Not every fairy tale has such a magical object, but that doesn't mean that the objects appearing in the tale cannot have magical power for us personally. There are objects here that have magical power - helping in escape, or perhaps objects that help in becoming a knight (knight's armor). But it could also be that I need the Magician's fire.
- ❖ What is the very specific thing needed for me to move forward in my current situation?
- If we have thoroughly explored the above questions, a possible path has likely already emerged for us. But very often, this just makes our situation even more daunting. We may be confronted with a multitude of tasks to solve. How will I be able to handle all of this? How long will it take? I'm sure I won't be able to meet this challenge, we might tell ourselves. Before we panic, it's worth breaking down the path ahead of us into steps and trusting that if we take one step, we'll be able to take the next. So, the question is: what is the next step I can take right now?

After a thorough reflection on the tale, we can begin to work on it with our clients. If we are working with a client in an individual process, the main question is really where to start, considering in what place and at what stage of development our client is. We might have already ascertained this during prior conversations, but we may give them the story, or they may listen to it and determine this for themselves.

Then, based on the client's interpretation and the interpretations made in previous sessions, we should go through the questions formulated in the previous sessions and on the cards during the facilitation process, which may sometimes take several sessions. Not all questions need to be worked with, some are relevant, others less so. It is possible that new questions will arise from the questions on the cards, and we will move on from there. The cards mainly feature questions, however sometimes there is a specific problem to solve.

Sometimes we may come across a topic that is no longer within the scope of the current story. We can then continue with another story and return to this one later.



The aim of the process is for the client to develop and apply effective coping strategies, to find the root cause of their anxiety, and – finally – to release it.

In the following are suggestions on how to engage with the story with young people in groups as well.



A possible scenario for a group activity

The purpose of the folk tale work group: finding and feeding our own horse

Target age group: Young people aged 18-23 (possibly older), who do not yet know what they are capable of

Duration: 60 minutes.

Number of participants: No more than 20.

Preparation of the venue:

The setting for the story group should be prepared according to the atmosphere of the tale. It is important that participants can sit in a circle – perhaps not on chairs, but on cushions. There should be a clear point of entry, which could be the door of the room, but if this is not possible, or if the room is too large, then a ‘gateway’ should be set up.

There should be sufficient but not too much lighting. If there are tables, we should place them by the wall; they can be useful for individual work later. If there are no tables, we need to bring drawing boards or folders for the participants to write or draw on.

Next to the ‘gateway’, already inside the space, we place symbol cards that the participants can choose from when they enter, before they sit down. These can be OH cards, Dixit cards, or even a personal collection of pictures or postcards – the main thing is that they depict different situations and feelings, and that there should be at least one and a half to two times more cards than participants so that everyone can choose freely.

In the centre of the circle, it is worth putting a colourful shawl, or perhaps a flower or a symbol related to the story. In the case of ‘Magicians horse’, we could choose mirror, a comb, hair dye, shawl or even a hat.

Outside the circle, close to the group leader, we place any other desired props, including the folk tale cards, and the printed handouts for colouring and writing on.



If storytelling is done using video, the computer, projector, screen/wall surface, and speakers should also be prepared and tested so as not to hinder the process.

If the group is already in the room before we start, we should ask everyone to leave, and only lay out the symbol cards, shawl, symbols, etc. when the group is waiting outside.

Tools needed:

A shawl or piece of material for the centre of the circle, decorative items, symbol cards, drawing boards if needed, pens, coloured pencils, drawing equipment, the folk tale cards, and enough copies of the handouts for each participant.

Possibly: a computer, projector, screen/wall space, speakers.

Script:

(timings are approximate, being dependent on the size of the group)

1. Entrance

Duration: 5 minutes

We allow group members to enter, preferably one at a time, and give each of them the following task:

Have you ever been in a situation in life where you had no idea what you were supposed to be doing, just wandering around like lost in a forest? Choose a card that represents this situation in life."

When everyone has made their choice and is seated, we can join in.



2. Getting in the mood

Duration: 10-15 minutes

We discuss the cards chosen by the participants. We shouldn't go round in a circle and not everyone necessarily has to share their card. When everyone who wishes to do so has spoken, we can discuss about what happens when we don't know what we're supposed to do and just drift.

During the conversation, we can ask the following questions:

- What situations cause us to get completely lost in our lives?
- How does this affect our human relationships?
- How well can we make good decisions in this state?
- Is it possible that someone takes advantage of our lack of purpose and uses us for their own ends?

3. Storytelling

Duration: approx. 15 minutes

When similar stories have been told and we continue with this particular tale, we should provide the following introduction:

"There was a boy who also got lost in the woods and drifted away, and he turned to someone for help where he shouldn't have. Would you like to hear his story?"

The storytelling should preferably be done by ourselves, in our own words, because in this way we can maintain contact with the participants. If we cannot tell the story personally, we can read it aloud or listen to a recording/watch a video of the tale.

If we are telling the story ourselves, before it begins, we might ask the participants to close their eyes and concentrate on their breathing. When everyone is focused, we can start.



We can also use a musical instrument (e.g. koshi chimes, a kalimba, or a sansula) to put the participants in the mood for the storytelling experience.

At the end of the story, we again ask the participants to close their eyes and, allowing enough time for their own internal imagery to be activated, we give them the following tasks:

- ❖ Pick a colour from the story!
- ❖ Pick a smell from the story!
- ❖ Pick an object from the story!
- ❖ Look around you, where are you in the story? What surrounds you, who is near you?

4. Processing

Duration: 35-40 minutes

After everyone has returned from the story, we discuss who has taken what from the story, what landscape they found themselves in. Answering is not obligatory; the participants can volunteer to speak if they wish to. Regarding the locations, we can ask the participants what the task in that particular place is.

Then (or in the meantime, as appropriate) we can talk with the participants about the following questions:

- ❖ Why would the prince get himself into such a situation? What qualities does he have that got him into trouble? How often do they get into these situations?
- ❖ What do they think of the Magician? What should the prince learn from him?



- ❖ Do they have people in their lives, like the Magician, who at first seem helpful, but then turn out to be exploitative of those who turn to them?

The first task is to start the change.

Then place the hair colouring tools, the mirror and the comb in the middle. Divide the group into pairs. Ask them if they have ever had a situation where they changed their hair? What were some of these situations? Who changed or would change their hair to what colour?

Think about whether there is a big step in your present life that would be as big a change as the one that would make you change the way you look?

The couples should discuss and then together pick out a few life situations where a big change is needed or a similar life situation they are facing.

Second: the process of change

The process of change. Discuss briefly what the mirror, the comb and the whip might have meant in the process of change for the prince (see storybook), and then invite participants to work individually. To do this, give out the "mirror" colouring book and card 9. The tasks are as follows:

- ❖ • What are some things you would see about yourself in a magic mirror that could prevent you from achieving your goals?
- ❖ • The mirror also shows a horse - what do you like to see about yourself when you look in the mirror?

We should give each group about 6-8 minutes to share their thoughts and then work with the whole group to brainstorm ways to prevent such situations or deal with them if they do occur.

The third part: the inner horse. (card 5)



- ❖ What resources do you need to be in control of your life?
- ❖ What are some of the resources you have at your disposal?
- ❖ Do you have a helper who can help you know what to turn to when you need help?
- ❖ How do you nurture your own inner black horse?

To do this, add the "Black Horse" colouring and card 5. We should leave time for individual work – perhaps up to 8-10 minutes. After that, the participants can share freely. Not everyone has to share or to speak about every question.

5. Closing / Exit

When our time is up, some people will still be working. We conclude the session by asking everyone to leave the story space within a few minutes. We walk through the 'gateway' and meet whoever is ready to leave, one by one.

There, we ask the given person to tell us how they feed their inner horse.