

HANNAH-MY-HEDGEHOG

A Tale of Change and Transformation

By Bruce Donehower

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References to a hedgehog are based on the tale Hans My Hedgehog that appeared in the collection *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, vol. 2, (1815) as tale no. 22, published in German by the Brothers Grimm (Jakob, 1785-1863; Wilhelm, 1786-1859).

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“May the reader flourish!”

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“A fragment, like a small work of art,
has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be
complete in itself
like a hedgehog.”

-- Friedrich Schlegel,
Athenaeum Fragments, 1798

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CHAPTER ONE

Once upon a time . . . When did it happen? When did it not happen? . . . there lived a farmer who did pretty well for himself. He had land and money, and his neighbors gossiped and called him rich.

But despite all good fortune, he felt unhappy because he had no children with his wife.

Often when he went to town with the other farmers, the other farmers teased him and said mean things because they thought it was queer that he had no kids.

Finally, he got fed up. When he came home one day, he swore to his wife: "I will have a child, even if my child is a hedgehog!"

And so, his wife had a baby. And what do you know? The top half of the baby was a hedgehog, and the bottom half a girl!

When the wife saw the newborn baby, she shrieked with horror and said to her husband: "Now look what evil thing you have wished upon us!"

The farmer sighed: "Alas! It cannot be helped. The girl must be baptized. But the Lord knows that we cannot ask any decent person to be her godmother."

The woman said: "And the only name we can call it is Hannah-My-Hedgehog."

And so, they went to the church and did the proper ceremony, and afterwards the priest said: "Because of its quills, it cannot sleep in a proper bed."

So, the husband and wife threw some old dirty straw from the cow barn back behind the oven and stuck the infant there. She had to do for herself. She could not suck milk from her mother's breasts, for she would have stuck her mother with quills. She lay there behind the ov-

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en for eight years, and her father grew tired of the situation and often complained bitterly: “Oh why doesn’t she die!”

But she didn’t die. She just lay there.

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CHAPTER TWO

Now it happened that there was a market in the town, and the farmer had a hankering to go visit. He asked his wife what he should bring her as a present.

"Bring me some sausage, some rolls, and a few sweet fancies for the household," said the wife.

"And I'll take some cute earrings and pretty stockings!" said the servant girl.

The farmer peeped behind the oven and inquired: "Hannah-My-Hedgehog, what do you want?"

"I want bagpipes," said Hannah-My-Hedgehog.

When the farmer returned home, he gave his wife sausage, rolls, and a few sweet fancies for the household. Then he gave the servant girl the cute earrings and pretty stockings. And finally, he peeped behind the oven and gave Hannah-My-Hedgehog bagpipes.

When Hannah-My-Hedgehog saw those pipes, she said, "Father, go to the blacksmith and have my cock-rooster shod! I will ride away and never come back!"

The father was very glad to hear this! He wanted to get rid of his daughter in the worst way possible, so he had the rooster shod, and when it was ready, Hannah-My-Hedgehog climbed on the rooster and rode off. She took the pigs and the donkeys with her. She had decided to tend to them in the forest.

When they all got to the forest, the rooster—with Hannah-My-Hedgehog on its back—flew up into the very tallest tree. It was quite a good perch—you can believe it! Hannah-My-Hedgehog sat there and watched over the donkeys and the pigs. She sat in that tree for many

years until the number of pigs and donkeys became quite large. Hannah-My-Hedgehog's father, the rich farmer, knew nothing about her.

Was she unhappy? No!

She just sat in the tree and played beautiful music on her bagpipes and watched the pigs and the donkeys.

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CHAPTER THREE

One day a fat king with golden hair came by. He was lost, and he heard the music. The glorious sounds amazed him, so he asked a servant to have a look and scout out where the music came from. The servant scouted high and low, and at last he discovered the very tall tree in the forest. At the top of the tree, he saw what looked like a rooster. And beside the rooster sat a hedgehog. And the hedgehog was making music.

The servant ran back and gave report, and the king told him to find out why the hedgehog was sitting there in that tall tree—and furthermore, said the king: “Ask the hedgehog if it knows the way out of this dark forest so I can get home. I’m very lost.”

When Hannah-My-Hedgehog heard this question from the servant, she climbed down from the tall tree and told the servant that she would show them the way out of the forest—but only if the king promised in writing to give her the first thing that greeted him at the royal court when he got home.

The king considered carefully. He thought: “Hmm. I can agree easily. That creature cannot understand writing. It is as stupid as a cow! I can put down whatever I want. Who will know!”

So, the golden-haired king took pen and paper and he winked and scribbled something or other on the paper—who knows what! And after he had made a good show of it and signed his illegible signature with a self-important flourish, Hannah-My-Hedgehog showed him the way out of the forest, and he arrived home safe and sound.

The king’s favorite daughter saw her father coming from afar, and she was so overjoyed that she ran out to meet him. She covered him with kisses, and she was the first person he met when he got home.

But the king remembered the creature, and although he thought that he had fooled that ugly critter pretty thoroughly, he nevertheless told his daughter what had happened.

“It is a creature, half hedgehog half human that rides a rooster and plays beautiful music on bagpipes. It helped me escape the dark forest, but I had to promise to give it the first thing that greeted me when I got home. That would be you, my daughter. But don’t fret your pretty head! I fooled that ugly creature pretty thoroughly! It is as stupid as a cow and cannot read or write!”

“Oh, father, I love you!” said the princess. And she clapped her hands and put the entire matter out of mind.

Poof! Forgotten!

Meanwhile, Hannah-My-Hedgehog tended the donkeys and the pigs. She remained in good spirits, and she sat in the tall tree and blew her bagpipes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Another king, lanky lean with silver hair, came through the forest one day. He, too, got lost because the dark forest was so confusing. This second king also heard the beautiful music, and he asked one of his messengers to have a look and scout out where the music came from. The servant scouted high and low. He at last found the very tall tree and he saw Hannah-My-Hedgehog astride the cock-rooster and blowing on her pipes quite indecently, as he judged.

“Hey, what are you doing up there?” shouted the servant.

“I am tending my donkeys and pigs. What do you want?” replied Hannah-My-Hedgehog.

The messenger said that they were lost and could not find their way back to the kingdom.

“Can you show us the way home?”

“Well, all right.”

Then Hannah-My-Hedgehog climbed down from the tall tree with her rooster and told the king that she would show him the way home out of the dark forest—but only if the king gave her the first thing he met when he got home.

The silver-haired king said right away sincerely: “Oh, yes! Of course! Whatever you like! Certainly!”

And he even signed a promise in writing without delay.

When that was done, Hannah-My-Hedgehog rode ahead on her rooster and showed him the way home. Thus, the king reached his kingdom safely.

And, as you can imagine, there was great joy and jubilation when he returned.

The king had an only son who was very handsome. This extremely handsome young prince ran out to greet his father right away. He threw his arms around the old man's neck and kissed him repeatedly. Oh my, oh my! Wasn't he tickled to see his old father safe and sound!

The prince asked the king where he had been during his long absence, and the king told him how he had lost his way in the dark forest.

"But as I wandered through the forest—in despair and confusion that I would never find a path to home and safety—I came upon a remarkable creature. It was half human half hedgehog. It sat astride a cock-rooster in the tallest tree in the forest and made beautiful music. The creature showed me the way out of the forest. But first I had to promise to give the creature whatever first met me when I returned home. Alas, my son! You are the first to meet me. I am terribly sorry!"

But the prince promised right away and without hesitation that he would go with the mysterious creature when it arrived.

"I will do it for love of my father," said the young man.

CHAPTER FIVE

Meanwhile, back in the forest, Hannah-My-Hedgehog tended her pigs, and the pigs had more pigs until there were so many pigs and piglets that the whole forest was chock-full of squealing. Not to mention donkeys! Then Hannah-My-Hedgehog sent word to her father the rich farmer that he and the other farmers should empty out all the stalls in the village because Hannah-My-Hedgehog was coming to market with such a large herd of swine that everyone could take part in the slaughter and eat until they burst.

It saddened the father to hear this, for he thought that Hannah-My-Hedgehog had long since died. "Oh, why doesn't she die and leave me alone!"

Hannah-My-Hedgehog mounted her cock-rooster and drove the pigs ahead of her into the village and had them butchered—each and every one! What a slaughter! What a commotion! What a feast! You could hear the noise twenty miles away! So many pigs!

After the bloodbath, Hannah-My-Hedgehog said proudly: "Father, get my cock-rooster shod for a second time at the blacksmith's. I will ride away and not come back ever—for as long as I live!"

"Good riddance," thought the farmer.

Nevertheless, he was very happy to have all that pork. He got the cock-rooster shod and sent her off.

"Bye, bye," he shouted. "And don't ever come back!"

CHAPTER SIX

Well, now things got interesting.

Hannah-My-Hedgehog rode off to the first king's kingdom.

And what do you know? That first king had given orders that if any creature half hedgehog half human and carrying bagpipes and riding a cock-rooster should near the kingdom, that creature should be shot without warning, beaten down, trampled, stabbed, eviscerated, and burned.

Thus, when Hannah-My-Hedgehog rode up proudly, the king's men attacked her with bayonets and who knows what other nasty weapons. But Hannah-My-Hedgehog didn't mind. She spurred on her rooster, flew over the gate, and—Cock-a-doodle-doo!—she landed at the king's window. She perched on the ledge and shouted at the king. "Give me what you promised, or I will slaughter you and your children and all your wives!"

Faced with this dilemma, the king decided he had no better option but to send his favorite daughter to the creature. He reasoned: "I cheat and lie and rob the people all the time. No one stops me! Those stupid people love me all more! I must save my own skin . . . and perhaps my daughter will be fine! Who knows? She can take her chances!"

The king's daughter, the princess, put on a lily-white gown, and her father gave her a carriage with six white stallions and a cohort of magnificent servants, heaps of money, and real estate. The princess felt most pleased. She climbed into the carriage, and Hannah-My-Hedgehog took her place beside her with her rooster and bagpipes. They said farewell to the king and drove off.

The king thought that he would never see them again. “Good ride!” he added.

However, it did not go as planned, for when the two had traveled a short distance from the palace, Hannah-My-Hedgehog pulled off the princess’s lily-white gown and pricked her all over her body with hedgehog quills until the poor girl bled like a stuck pig.

“That is the reward for your deceit,” said Hannah-My-Hedgehog. “Now, go away! I do not want you.”

With that Hannah-My-Hedgehog sent the bloody princess back home, and the poor girl was cursed and disfigured for as long as she lived.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

You might think that this was enough trouble and commotion and bad behavior. But no!

Hannah-My-Hedgehog, astride her cock-rooster and carrying her bagpipes, rode on to the second kingdom where dwelled the second king whom she had helped to find his way home.

This second king, unlike the first king, had ordered that if any creature half human half hedgehog should arrive at the border, that creature should be saluted with high respect and greeted with honor. He gave strict orders. "Bring such a creature to the royal castle post-haste and do so with all the splendor of a fine military escort!"

This was done just as the king commanded, down to the last minor detail.

But when the son of the second king saw the strange creature, he was horrified.

"Alas," he sighed, "nothing can be done! I have promised my father that I will keep the bargain. And I will—no matter what. Because I love him. But oh, how terrible!"

Nonetheless, the young prince welcomed Hannah-My-Hedgehog courteously, and they were married. They went to the royal table, and the prince sat next to Hannah-My-Hedgehog as they ate and drank freely.

That evening when it was time to go to bed, the prince was afraid of the creature's hedgehog quills, but she told him to have no fear. "I will not harm you."

Hannah-My-Hedgehog then gave strict orders to the old king that he was to have four stout lads keep watch by the bridal chamber. The four stout lads were told to make a roaring fire. "As hot as you can

stoke it!” Furthermore, said Hannah-My-Hedgehog to the four stout lads, “I will remove my hedgehog skin before I go to bed. Once I toss off the skin, grab it quick and throw it into the blazing fire. Stand there stock still at attention until the skin has completely burned to ash.”

When the clock struck midnight, she went into the bridal chamber, stripped off the hedgehog skin, and threw it down by the marriage bed.

The four stout lads rushed in, grabbed the hide, and threw it into the roaring fire.

What a blaze! What a conflagration! So much heat and smoke! Hell’s fury hath found an equal!

As soon as the hedgehog skin had burned to ash, Hannah-My-Hedgehog lay there in bed entirely in the shape of a woman. But she looked incinerated, as though she had been burned to a crisp at the stake.

So, the king sent for his trusted physician. The physician washed Hannah-My-Hedgehog with soothing salves and healing balms and fragrant unguents, and she became a beautiful young female.

And when the prince beheld this transformation, he felt overjoyed.

The two young lovers leaped out of bed and ate and drank and made merry in a very frisky fashion. Their wedding was celebrated a second time in earnest, and Hannah-My-Hedgehog inherited the old silver-haired king's entire kingdom.

Some years later, she traveled with her husband to her father, the rich old farmer.

“I am your daughter!” she told the old man.

But the farmer grumbled: “Go away. I have no daughter. I once had a daughter, but she was born with quills like a hedgehog, and she went off to wander in the world.”

“It is I! Hannah-My-Hedgehog!” she told him proudly.

And to make certain he believed her, she told him a secret no one knows.

And then the old farmer saw the truth. Oh yes! You can be sure!
Absolutely! He saw it!

And so, they went off together and lived happily for many years in
Hannah's domain.

“My tale is done
To home I'll run.”

The End

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AFTERWORD

This little tale of Change and Transformation is itself a change and transformation of a Märchen from the Grimm collection called “Hans My Hedgehog.” Perhaps a better word for what I have done here is the German word “Umstülpung”—quite a mouthful in English. It’s a word whose meaning, “inversion,” also carries the connotation of “a deep opening process of turning a social field completely inside-out and outside-in, of upending things.”¹

The tale in Grimm tells the adventure of a little boy Hans, half-human half-hedgehog, who annoys people and raises hell until he at last comes to fulfillment as a human prince in a conventional marriage.

¹ This definition is from a paper “Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego System to Eco System Economies” by Otto Scharmer and Kartin Kaufer, a document that is available on the internet at

https://www.ottoscharmer.com/sites/default/files/e2e_Chapters_4%265.pdf.

While I might have chosen another source to define the term (such as the pioneering spiritual scientific work of Paul Schatz; <https://paul-schatz.ch/index.php/de/paul-schatz>), this first definition is good because it arises easily from a quick google search and it concerns itself with spirit and mindfulness practice in the social realm. One of the hopes of early romantic writers, such as Novalis, was that science, art, and spirit would reunite in a so-called Golden Age that would renew the social order. Schiller also shared this view. Such Golden Age, while clearly not yet at hand (unless we do misread the outward signs) would be the mother of all “Upendings,” one might imagine.

All well and good, but from an imaginative perspective, something smells wrong. The pigs, for instance. What are all those pigs doing in the tale? One doesn't have to be much of a scholar or reader of mythology to understand the association that pigs have with the Great Mother.

By aligning our heroine with this more ancient and/or transgressive mythology, we invert things. This "Umstülpung" perhaps better clarifies the heroine's role as Vajrayogini—an archetype whose avatars appear frequently in Arthurian Romance and other global tales of transformation and initiation. Bottoms up!

Bruce Donehower
St. John's Tide, 2021

"Sophia said:
The great secret is revealed to all,
and it remains forever sublime.
Out of pain is the new world born,
and the ashes are dissolved into tears
for a draught of eternal life.
The heavenly mother dwells in all,
so that every child may be immortal."

-- Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

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