

A keen collector of second hand illustrated books, Agathe (secretly author of a children's book), tells me she came across the folktale 'Kolobok' published by Ipomée, coincidentally but perhaps not surprisingly located in her hometown of Moulins. Russians claim the story Russian and Ukrainians claim it to be Ukrainian. Nevertheless, there are about 40 variants of "Kolobok" in the world: the story is known as Roule Galette in French, and the Gingerbread man which may be more familiar to English or German speakers, is categorized in the same folktale type (type 2025 to be exact, according to the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index) by folklorists - including its own variants of The Gingerbread Girl, The Gingerbread Cowboy, The Matzah Man, the Musubi Man etc.

The story goes a little something like this: An old and poor woman makes a bread bun from the scraps of wood and dust in the attic (this aspect is unique to the slavic tradition of the tale), and leaves the bun to cool on the window pane. The bun comes to life as Kolobok and rolls off into the forest where it meets a hungry bear who declares it will eat Kolobok, to which it responds with a song:

*I'm Kolobok, Kolobok,
I was scraped from the flour-tin,
Swept from the corn-bin,
Mixed with sour cream into a bun
Fried in butter till I was done,
I ran away from grandpa and grandma too,
And I'm sure I'll have no trouble running away from you.*

Kolobok rolls away fast enough to save itself from the bear, then runs into a wolf and then a rabbit, pulling off the same trick: sing song and escape. It finally runs into a fox, who upon hearing Kolobok's song flatters it by saying "What a fine song! But I am hard of hearing. Kolobok, be so kind as to sit on my nose and sing your song again, a little louder." And so Kolobok hops onto the fox's nose and starts to sing the song, but the fox quickly flings Kolobok into the air and with one big snap of its jaws, gobbles it up.

Some narrators paint the picture plainly and end the story with "and that's what happens to children who run away from home", or alternatively, as The Clash have said a good few: "I fought the law and the law won". Whilst *obedience or else* is the most pressing and convincing lesson relayed by years and years of folk tale telling to children, for the critical paranoiac, these tales also signal how we are doomed to fail as children and adults. A Russian cross- linguistics study with the objective to 'recognize the abilities of fairy-tales to improve conflict management practices in children', states that in all the tales covered in its study (which includes Kolobok) evince that:

- A)The predominant behavioral strategy is confrontation
- B)The most successful tactics are;
 - a) cunning,
 - b) fleeing,
 - c) reliance on a support group
- C)Trying to reach a compromise, collaboration, and/or open assertion of desires leads to ... loss.
- D) Emotions are frequently not identified at all.

I don't see any aspirational practice indicated other than perhaps "reliance on a support group". On account of this, now imagine a folktale where the —poor, in both senses— grandparents, bear, rabbit, wolf and fox are replaced with concerns that want to gobble a piece from *you*, dear reader: family, housing, insurance, no work, and then work (the equivalent of the cunning fox of course) etc. How do you deal? Have you tried lying? Or, perhaps fleeing the scene? I'm sure you've already been disappointed by the promises of earnesty. Yet, we keep rolling deeper into the forest of needs and responsibilities and get better at staying in one piece.

So, do show the bread some love, they've come a long way.