

THE DRAGON AND THE PRINCE

SIXTY TALES FROM EXCLUSIVELY SLAVONIC SOURCES

There was an emperor who had three sons. One day the eldest son went out hunting, and, when he got outside the town, up sprang a hare out of a bush, and he after it, and hither and thither, till the hare fled into a water-mill, and the prince after it. But it was not a hare, but a dragon, and it waited for the prince and devoured him. When several days had elapsed and the prince did not return home, people began to wonder why it was that he was not to be found.

Then the middle son went hunting, and as he issued from the town, a hare sprang out of a bush, and the prince after it, and hither and thither, till the hare fled into the water-mill and the prince after it; but it was not a hare, but a dragon, which waited for and devoured him. When some days had elapsed and the princes did not return, either of them, the whole court was in sorrow.

Then the third son went hunting, to see whether he could not find his brothers. When he issued from the town, again up sprang a hare out of a bush, and the prince after it, and hither and thither, till the hare fled into the water-mill. But the prince did not choose to follow it, but went to find other game, saying to himself: "When I return I shall find you."

After thus he went for a long time up and down the hill, but found nothing, and then returned to the water-mill; but when he got there, there was only an old woman in the mill. The prince invoked God in addressing her: "God help you, old woman!"

The old woman replied: "God help you, my son!"

Then the prince asked her: "Where, old woman, is my hare?"

She replied: "My son, that was not a hare, but a dragon. It kills and throttles many people."

Hearing this, the prince was somewhat disturbed, and said to the old woman: "What shall we do now? Doubtless my two brothers also have perished here."

The old woman answered: "They have indeed; but there's no help for it. Go home, my son, lest you follow them."

Then he said to her: "Dear old woman, do you know what? I know that you will be glad to liberate yourself from that pest."

The old woman interrupted him: "How should I not? It captured me, too, in this way, but now I have no means of escape."

Then he proceeded: "Listen well to what I am going to say to you. Ask it whither it goes and where its strength is; then kiss all that place where it tells you its strength is, as if from love, till you ascertain it, and afterward tell me when I come."

Then the prince went off to the palace, and the old woman remained in the water-mill. When the dragon came in, the old woman began to question it: "Where in God's name have you been? Whither do you go so far? You will never tell me whither you go."

The dragon replied: "Well, my dear old woman, I do go far."

Then the old woman began to coax it: "And why do you go so far? Tell me where your strength is. If I knew where your strength is, I don't know what I should do for love; I would kiss all that place."

Thereupon the dragon smiled and said to her: "Yonder is my strength, in that fireplace."

Then the old woman began to fondle and kiss the fireplace, and the dragon on seeing it burst into a laugh and said to her: "Silly old woman, my strength isn't there; my strength is in that tree-fungus in front of the house."

Then the old woman began again to fondle and kiss the tree, and the dragon again laughed, and said to her: "Away, old woman! My strength isn't there."

Then the old woman inquired: "Where is it?"

The dragon began to give an account in detail: "My strength is a long way off, and you cannot go thither. Far in another empire under the emperor's city is a lake, in that lake is a dragon, and in that dragon a boar, and in the boar a pigeon, and in that is my strength."

The next morning when the dragon went away from the mill, the prince came to the old woman, and the old woman told him all that she had heard from the dragon. Then he left his home, and disguised himself; he put shepherd's boots to his feet, took a shepherd's staff in his hand, and went into the world. As he went on thus from village to village, and from town to town, at last he came into another empire and into the imperial city, in a lake under which the dragon was.

On going into the town he began to inquire who wanted a shepherd. The citizens told him

that the emperor did. Then he went straight to the emperor. After he announced himself, the emperor admitted him into his presence, and asked him: "Do you wish to keep sheep?"

He replied: "I do, illustrious crown!"

Then the emperor engaged him, and began to inform and instruct him: "There is here a lake, and alongside of the lake very beautiful pasture, and when you call the sheep out, they go thither at once, and spread themselves round the lake; but whatever shepherd goes off there, that shepherd returns back no more. Therefore, my son, I tell you, don't let the sheep have their own way and go where they will, but keep them where you will."

The prince thanked the emperor, got himself ready, and called out the sheep, taking with him, more-over, two hounds that could catch a boar in the open country, and a falcon that could capture any bird, and carrying also a pair of bagpipes.

When he called out the sheep he let them go at once to the lake, and when the sheep arrived at the lake, they immediately spread round it, and the prince placed the falcon on a stump, and the hounds and bagpipes under the stump, then tucked up his hose and sleeves, waded into the lake, and began to shout: "Dragon, dragon! Come out to single combat with me to-day that we may measure ourselves together, unless you're a woman."

The dragon called out in reply, "I will do so now, prince—now!"

Erelong behold the dragon! It is large, it is terrible, it is disgusting! When the dragon came out, it seized him by the waist, and they wrestled a summer day till afternoon. But when the heat

of afternoon came on, the dragon said: "Let me go, prince, that I may moisten my parched head in the lake, and toss you to the sky."

But the prince replied: "Come, dragon, don't talk nonsense; if I had the emperor's daughter to kiss me on the forehead, I would toss you still higher."

Thereupon, the dragon suddenly let him go, and went off into the lake. On the approach of evening, he washed and got himself up nicely, placed the falcon on his arm, the hounds behind him, and the bagpipes under his arm, then drove the sheep and went into the town playing on the bagpipes. When he arrived at the town, the whole town assembled as to see a wondrous sight because he had come, whereas previously no shepherd had been able to come from the lake. The next day the prince got ready again, and went with his sheep straight to the lake. But the emperor sent two grooms after him to go stealthily and see what he did, and they placed themselves on a high hill whence they could have a good view.

When the shepherd arrived, he put the hounds and bagpipes under the stump and the falcon upon it, then tucked up his hose and sleeves

waded into the lake and shouted: "Dragon, dragon! Come out to single combat with me, that we may measure ourselves once more together, unless you are a woman!"

The dragon replied: "I will do so, prince, now, now!"

Erelong, behold the dragon! It was large, it was terrible, it was disgusting! And it seized him by the waist and wrestled with him a summer's day till afternoon.

But when the afternoon heat came on, the dragon said: "Let me go, prince, that I may moisten my parched head in the lake, and may toss you to the sky."

The prince replied: "Come, dragon, don't talk nonsense; if I had the emperor's daughter to kiss me on the forehead, I would toss you still higher."

Thereupon the dragon suddenly left hold of him, and went off into the lake. When night approached the prince drove the sheep

as before, and went home playing the bagpipes. When he arrived at the town, the whole town was astir and began to wonder because the shepherd came home every evening, which no one had been able to do before. Those two grooms had



already arrived at the palace before the prince, and related to the emperor in order everything that they had heard and seen. Now when the emperor saw that the shepherd returned home, he immediately summoned his daughter into his presence and told her all, what it was and how it was.

“But,” said he, “to-morrow you must go with the shepherd to the lake and kiss him on the forehead.”

When she heard this she burst into tears and began to entreat her father. “You have no one but me, and I am your only daughter, and you don’t care about me if I perish.”

Then the emperor began to persuade and encourage her: “Don’t fear, my daughter; you see we have had so many changes of shepherds, and of all that went out to the lake not one has returned; but he had been contending with the dragon for two whole days and it has done him no hurt. I assure you, in God’s name, that he is able to overcome the dragon, only go to-morrow with him to see whether he will free us from this mischief which has destroyed so many people.”

When, on the morrow, the day dawned and the sun came forth, up rose the shepherd, up rose the maiden too, to begin to prepare for going to the lake. The shepherd was cheerful, more cheerful than ever, but the emperor’s daughter was sad and shed tears.

The shepherd comforted her: “Lady sister, I pray you, do not weep, but do what I tell you. When it is time, run up and kiss me, and fear not.”

As he went and drove the sheep, the shepherd was thoroughly cheery, and played a merry tune on his bagpipes; but the damsel did nothing but

weep as she went beside him, and he several times left off playing and turned toward her: “Weep not, golden one; fear nought.”

When they arrived at the lake, the sheep immediately spread round it, and the prince placed the falcon on the stump, and the hounds and bagpipes under it, then tucked up his hose and sleeves, waded into the water, and shouted: “Dragon! Dragon! Come out to single combat with me; let us measure ourselves once more, unless you’re a woman!”

The dragon replied: “I will, prince; now, now!”

Erelong, there was the dragon! It was huge, it was terrible, it was disgusting! When it came out, they seized each other by the middle, and wrestled a summer’s day till afternoon.

But when the afternoon heat came on, the dragon said: “Let me go, prince, that I may moisten my parched head in the lake, and toss you to the skies.”

The prince replied: “Come, dragon, don’t talk nonsense; if I had the emperor’s daughter to kiss me on the forehead, I would toss you much higher.”

When he said this, the emperor’s daughter ran up and kissed him on the face, on the eye, and on the forehead. Then he swung the dragon, and tossed it high into the air, and when it fell to the ground it burst into pieces. But as it burst into pieces, out of it sprang a wild boar, and started to run away. But the prince shouted to his shepherd dogs: “Hold it! Don’t let it go!” and the dogs sprang up and after it, caught it, and soon tore it to pieces. But out of the boar flew a pigeon, and the prince loosed the falcon, and the falcon

caught the pigeon and brought it into the prince's hands. The prince said to it: "Tell me now, where are my brothers?"

The pigeon replied: "I will; only do me no harm. Immediately behind your father's town is a water-mill, and in the water-mill are three wands that have sprouted up. Cut these three wands up from below, and strike with them upon their root; an iron door will immediately open into a large vault. In that vault are many people, old and young, rich and poor, small and great, wives and maidens, so that you could settle a populous empire; there, too, are your brothers." When the pigeon had told him all this, the prince immediately wrung its neck.

The emperor had gone out in person, and posted himself on the hill from which the grooms had viewed the shepherd, and he, too, was a spectator of all that had taken place. After the shepherd had thus obtained the dragon's head, twilight began to approach. He washed himself nicely, took the falcon on his shoulder, the hounds behind him, and the bagpipes under his arm, played as he went, drove the sheep, and proceeded to the emperor's palace, with the damsel at his side still in terror.

When they came to the town, all the town assembled as to see a wonder. The emperor, who had seen all his heroism from the hill, called him into his presence, and gave him his daughter, went immediately to church, had them married, and held a wedding festival for a week. After this the prince told him who and whence he was, and the emperor and the whole town rejoiced still more.

Then, as the prince was urgent to go to his own home, the emperor gave him a large escort,

and equipped him for the journey. When they were in the neighbourhood of the water-mill, the prince halted his attendants, went inside, cut up the three wands, and struck the root with them, and the iron door opened at once. In the vault was a vast multitude of people. The prince ordered them to come out one by one, and go whither each would, and stood himself at the door.

They came out thus one after another, and lo! there were his brothers also, whom he embraced and kissed. When the whole multitude had come out, they thanked him for releasing and delivering them, and went each to his own home. But he went to his father's house with his brothers and bride, and there lived and reigned to the end of his days.