



DRAGON'S BRIDE

Once upon a time there lived a girl. She was very good and hardworking but also very pretty. The most handsome young man in the village, where she lived, asked her to become his wife. But the girl confided in him:

'I cannot marry you. There is a fierce dragon coming down from the mountain and guarding around my house every night. Zmey², the dragon, wants to take me away and make me his wife! I don't know what to do!'

The young man listened to the story but he felt determined to save and protect the pretty girl from the dragon. So, he said to her:

'Do not fear Zmey, the dragon, my lovely. When we get married you will stay only in the house lest the dragon grabs you. Time will pass and the dragon will forget about you.'

They had a wonderful wedding. A year later the young bride gave birth to a baby boy. She was looking after her

2 Zmey – Bulgarian word for dragon.

son, taking care of the household and she never set her foot outside the house. Her husband was working on the field and around the farm all day. Soon they became a rich and happy family.

They lived like this for nine years. On the ninth year they decided that the dragon must have forgotten about them and would not come back for the woman. So, one day she made some bread, cooked her husband's favourite stew, took her son and together they went to the field to have a family lunch.

It was almost noon. They sat under a tree to eat. Suddenly a dark cloud covered the sky. A horrendous thunderstorm unleashed. Heavy rain poured down. The black cloud set down on the tree and then when it finally moved away the woman was gone!

The man realised that Zmey, the dragon, had stolen his wife. He suffered so much from the absence of his beloved that he fell ill. He stayed in bed and didn't speak to anyone.

The boy, however, was growing up. When he turned twenty years, he asked his father:

'Father, will you tell me what happened to my mother? I only remember her vaguely and I also remember a dark cloud, but you never talk about this.'

The father hadn't told his son about the dragon when he was young to save him the pain but this time he thought that his son was old enough to know the truth. So, he told him the story of the dragon who stole his mother.

The son heard the story and said without hesitation:

'I shall bring my mother back home!'

All his father could do was to bless him and wish him good luck. On the next day, the boy set off to find his mother.

He walked a long way before reaching a large field, on which sheep were grazing. There were so many sheep he couldn't count them. He asked the shepherds:

'Whose sheep are these?'

'They belong to Zmey, the dragon!'

'Then I will stay with you. You surely need some help with all this work.'

He soon noticed that every morning a woman with some big wooden buckets would come to take fresh milk for the dragon. The young man stopped her one day and tried to talk to her. When the woman saw him, she dropped the buckets on the ground and cried:

'Son! You have grown up so much but I know it is you!'

She held him in her arms, kissed him, with tears rolling down her eyes.

‘Don’t cry, mother! I have come to rescue you from the dragon!’

‘I wish you could, my boy! Zmey is very strong. You cannot fight him, you cannot beat him. He won’t die because he has two hearts and his soul is not in his body!’

‘Where is it?’

‘His soul is in his second heart. The heart is in a monster and the monster lives in a far away mountain. On the mountain there is a lake, the monster lives in the lake, in the monster there is a pig, in the pig there is a rabbit, in the rabbit there is a dove and in the dove there is a glass ball. In this glass ball there is the second heart and the soul of the dragon. His heart is as big as a chickpea. If you want to kill Zmey, the dragon, you must take out this glass ball and break it. This is the only way to defeat him.’

‘Where is the mountain, mother?’

‘I have heard that it is very far from here, beyond seven rivers, seven forests, and seven mountains, it is where the sun sets down. The road goes through dangerous crevices and steep slopes.’

‘Don’t be afraid, mother. Wait for me! I will find the glass ball!’

So, the boy went on a journey to search for the dragon’s heart. He passed through seven rivers, seven forests, seven mountains, he tore seven pairs of shoes. On the seventh day of his journey he noticed in the distance a big town with towers and turrets.

All of a sudden some armed men jumped out of the bushes and surrounded him. They told him that they were going to take him to the king. The princess was just turning eighteen that same day and the fortune-tellers had told her to marry the first traveller who approaches the town on her eighteenth birthday.

The young man was stunned to see how beautiful the princess was but he asked the king to postpone the wedding because he had something very important and dangerous to do before that. He asked if anyone in the kingdom had heard of the monster. The king’s men pointed up to a cloudy mountain peak that could be seen from the windows of the castle.

The next morning, the young brave man got up very early and without anyone noticing, he aimed to the mountain peak. He reached the lake, walked around it three times but there was no monster to be seen. On the third round he shouted:

‘Where are you, ugly monster? Why are you hiding from me? Come out and fight with me, let’s see who is the stronger of the two!’

The water in the lake turned dark, ripples appeared on the surface. Then out of the waters the monster appeared. A fierce battle began. They fought all day long. None of them would give up the fight.

The monster bellowed:

‘If only Zmey, the dragon knew to drink a bucket of milk for me! I would have buried you already!’

The young man replied:

‘If only the princess was here to look at me, I would have buried you nine feet underground already!’

The sun came down and they stopped the fight. The monster retreated back into the lake and the young man went back to the castle. Everybody was asking him where he had been all day but he didn’t say a word. He didn’t eat anything and went straight to bed. The princess was concerned that her future husband might be in danger and asked her father, the king, to follow him the next day.

It was before dawn when the young man got up from bed, sneaked out of the castle and went again to the mountain

peak. This time, however, the king, the princess and the king's men followed him.

The battle was even more brutal than the previous day. They fought all day again.

The monster felt exhausted and bellowed:

'If only the dragon knew to drink two buckets of milk to restore my powers, I would bury you forever!'

The young man replied:

'If only the beautiful princess was here to look at me, I would bury you nine feet underground!'

Then the princess stood up from behind the bushes where she was hiding and looked at the brave man with her beautiful, loving eyes. The young man suddenly felt stronger than ever. He pushed the monster on the ground so hard that its stomach burst out and a black pig jumped out of it. The pig started running. Luckily, the king's men were there to stop the pig, they killed it but a rabbit jumped out of the pig. They caught the rabbit and killed it. But a dove came out of the rabbit. The king's hunters threw a net over the dove and they caught it. In the stomach of the dove they found the glass ball. This was the glass ball that held the second heart and the soul of the evil dragon. The young man took the glass ball and everybody went back to the castle.

On the next day, the princess saw the young man off again. He hadn't finished his fight with the dragon yet.

The young man reached the palace of Zmey, the dragon. Everything was silent inside the palace. The dragon was lying ill and helpless on his bed. The young man took the glass ball out. The dragon saw it and started begging:

'Please, let me just touch it! Just for a second!'

But the young man dropped the glass ball on the marble floor and it broke into thousand pieces. That very minute the dragon died.

The palace of the dragon, the sheep herds, the forests and the fields the young man left to his mother and his father. He went back for his princess, who was eagerly waiting for him. They got married and lived together happily for many, many years.