

## **Bash-Chelik**

### Folklore story from Serbia

Once upon a time there lived an emperor who had three sons and three daughters. When the time came for him to die he told his sons to marry their sisters to the first men who proposed to them, so they wouldn't be cursed. One night somebody started knocking on the door, making a terrible noise. Only the youngest emperor's son dared to open the door. As soon as the door had opened, a creature came into the castle. But nobody could see it clearly because of the flame that was all around it. The creature said that it had come to propose to their oldest sister. The oldest and the middle brother were against it but the youngest one remembered their father's last words. So he let the creature take the girl away. The next two nights the same thing happened again. Some creatures surrounded by fire came to propose to the middle and the youngest sisters. Again, only the youngest brother let his sisters go. A lot of time had passed and the brothers didn't know anything about their sisters. They decided to try to find them. So they set off on a long journey.

Soon they came to a lake and decided to stay overnight. They agreed that the eldest brother should be on guard. That night the surface of the lake started stirring and a dragon came out of it. It attacked the prince, but soon the dragon was killed by the young man. He cut off the dragon's ears and threw the rest of the dragon's body into the lake. Then the three brothers continued their journey. On the second night the middle brother kept the guard. Just like the first time, a dragon got out of the lake but this one had two heads. However, the prince knew how to deal with it. He cut off its ears and threw away the body. In the morning he didn't tell anything to his brothers. On the third night of their trip they stopped by a lake. The king's youngest son was getting ready to guard. Later that night a dragon with three heads got out of the lake and attacked the prince. He defended himself and cut off the dragon's ears. But when he threw its body back to the lake the water splashed and put out the campfire. Since his brothers were asleep, he decided not to wake them up. Instead, he decided to go alone and find something that would set the fire again. While he was searching for it, he came across a cave. Some giants were sitting in there. There was a smell of roasting meat. They were eating human flesh. The prince got scared, but having no other choice, he approached them. They welcomed him nicely and told him they would treat him as one of them if he did everything they told him to do. So the young man joined them and sat down pretending to eat. After they had finished eating, they decided to go hunting and take the prince with them. Then they reached the town where they usually chased people. They told the prince to go there first and climb a tree which led to the town. He did so. Soon the giants started climbing the tree one after another but each time one of them reached the place where the prince was standing he would kill them.

When he killed all of them, he went to the town but it was completely deserted. There were no people. He was wandering around when he saw a tower. He came in and soon he was in a room which was decorated with silk and gold. There was a bed too. A pretty girl was sleeping in it. All of a sudden he spotted a snake going towards the girl's head. Before the snake had time to bite her, the prince took out his knife and killed the snake. Then he went back to the cave, took some fire and joined his brothers. They were still sleeping when he arrived. When they woke up the youngest brother didn't mention anything. Then they continued their journey. They arrived in the town that had been saved by the prince. Having seen the dead giants, the town mayor ordered his men to find the man who had done that. One of his servants met the three brothers. Each brother told him what had happened while they were on guard. When the servant heard the youngest brother's story, he immediately told his master. He invited the princes to his castle and gave a lot of treasure to the eldest and the middle brother. He gave his daughter to the youngest prince to be his wife. The prince stayed in his father-in-law's castle and lived there. The two elder brothers went home. One day his father-in-law went hunting. Before he left, he gave nine keys to the prince telling him that he could open the first eight doors in the castle but not the ninth one. But the prince opened all the doors out of curiosity. Then he came to the ninth door and opened it. Inside there was a man who was completely shackled with heavy chains. There was a golden fountain in front of him but he couldn't reach the water. When the prince stepped into the room the man started begging him for a little water in exchange for his life. The prince gave him some water. The prince asked him what his name was and the man said that his name was Bash Chelik. Just as the prince was getting ready to leave, the man asked him again for some water in exchange for one more life. When the prince again turned to leave, the man offered him the third life if the prince spilt the water over him.

As soon as the prince did it, all the chains broke. Bash Chelik got free grabbed the prince's wife and flew away. When the girl's father came back to the castle, the prince told him everything that had

happened. He promised to find his wife and set her free. He went on a long journey. He wanted to find Bash Chelik. Travelling along he came across a castle. There was a girl who was calling him from the castle. When he came closer, he recognized his eldest sister. She brought him into the castle and told him how she got married to the dragons' emperor. When her husband arrived she hid her brother. During the dinner she asked him what he would do if her brothers came to visit her. He responded that he would kill her eldest and her middle aged brother, but he wouldn't do anything to her youngest brother. Then she brought her brother. The young prince told the dragons' emperor everything that happened to him. Although the dragon tried to dissuade him from further pursuit, the young prince didn't change his mind. As he didn't succeed in his efforts, the emperor gave him a feather, and told him if he ever needed any help, he only had to burn it, and he would come to help him with all his army. Then he continued his journey. Soon he came across another castle. His middle-aged sister, who got married the emperor of falcons, lived there. Like her elder sister she hid her brother first. When her husband returned she asked if he would hurt her brothers if they decided to visit her one day. The emperor of falcons responded the same as the emperor of dragons. Then she brought her brother. Since they greeted each other, the young prince told him his story. Although the emperor tried to stop him in his intention to go on, the prince didn't give in. The emperor gave him another feather, telling him to burn it if he needed help.

As he was going further, he came across the third castle. The youngest sister was calling him from it. She told him that she got married to the emperor of eagles. She had hidden her brother before her husband returned. During the dinner she asked him what he would do if her brothers came to visit her. He answered that he would only spare the life of the youngest brother. Then she brought her brother. After they greeted each other, the prince told the emperor that he went to save his wife from Bash Chelic. Even the eagles' emperor didn't succeed to dissuade him. So he gave him one more feather, and told him to burn it he would get trouble. Travelling from town to town the young prince found his wife in one cave. He tried to escape with her, but Bash Chelic caught him. Since he promised three lives to the young prince, he didn't kill him; he just took his wife and came back to the cave. In spite of Bash Chelic's threats, the young prince tried to save his wife two more times. But the third time, after he has lost all his lives, Bash Chelic cut him. However, before he died, he succeeded to light all three feathers which were given to him by his brothers-in-law. When the emperors came and saw the young prince dead, they sent one of the dragons to the River Jordan to bring some water. As they poured the water over him, the young prince revived. The young princes tried to prevent him to return for his wife, but he didn't listen. Finally they told him to force his wife to find out where the power of Bash Chelic was. So he did it. As she was asking him many times, finally Bash Chelic said to her that there was a bird in the heart and in the bird there was a power. She told that to the young prince, the prince told that to his brothers-in-law. The three of them together with their armies went on the trip to find the fox. When they reached the mountain they let the eagles go to catch her but she escaped into a lake. The falcons started for her, but she had flown away.

Then the dragons started for her but she has landed again. But the rest of the army waited and caught her there. They made the fire and took out the heart from the fox, and then they took out the bird from the heart and threw it into the fire. When the bird was burnt, Bash Chelic died. The young prince took his wife then, and they returned home together.

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### **XLIII.--THE DRAGON AND THE PRINCE.**

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 this 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

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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 afterwards 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 the dragon a boar, and in the boar a pigeon, and in that is my strength.' The next morning when the dragon went away

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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 on 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, moreover, 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

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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 go of him, 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;

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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 has 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, 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

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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 towards 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

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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

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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.

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## Footnotes

[226.\\*](#) This is intended as an insult. 'Azhdaja,' a dragon, is feminine in Servian.

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[Next: XLIV. Fate](#)