Agrikov's Sword

Long or short, he sailed until he reached a large foreign city. He went ashore, began to walk about the city, looking it over, and came upon the city cemetery. He looks: beyond the cemetery, in a ditch where carrion is thrown, lies a dead human body—all beaten, covered with mud. Pavel-tsarevich took pity on the dead man, dug a grave with his sword, and lowered the body into it.

The next day they lead Pavel-tsarevich out to be executed; suddenly a man squeezes through the soldiers and says to the tsarevich: "Do not fear, Pavel-tsarevich! When you come to the square where they intend to execute you, tell King Dementy the Lawless that you undertake to free his daughter Fedosya-korolevna from the Serpent. And I will help you against the Serpent."

As soon as the king heard that Pavel-tsarevich was going out against the Serpent, he immediately ordered the execution postponed. "If," he says, "you fulfill your boast, there is no reward I would deny you." And he ordered Pavel-tsarevich untied.

Pavel-tsarevich goes, deep in thought: "What sort of Serpent is this, and how shall I free Fedosya-korolevna from him?" And that same unknown man meets him and says: "Listen, tsarevich: the local king has a daughter of indescribable beauty. A six-headed Serpent-shapeshifter has taken to flying to her. Every night he flies in, strangles and crushes the princess, and sucks her hot blood. She cannot escape an early death unless that Serpent is killed. Many knights have already gone out against the Serpent, but all have laid down their heads, because no weapon can harm him—steel breaks against him like glass... There is one weapon against him; I know that weapon and will help you obtain it. That sword is called Agrikov's." And the unknown man taught Pavel-tsarevich what to do next.

That evening Pavel-tsarevich appears before King Dementy the Lawless and says: "Order, Dementy the Lawless, three young lads to be brought here who know no sin and have not yet gone to bow before your pagan idols. I will go with them to obtain a weapon against the Serpent."

The king immediately gave orders. Pavel-tsarevich went that dark night with those little children beyond the city to a deserted place and found an underground cave. In that cave, back when the godless had not yet overpowered the Orthodox in this kingdom, the Orthodox used to gather for the liturgy, and a kind of small church

had been made there. Pavel-tsarevich ordered the three lads to remove the altar icon, and there was found a recess in the wall, and in it lay Agrikov's sword.

On the way back he meets this unknown man: "Well, you have obtained a true weapon against the Serpent—a great vow was laid upon this sword that sinful hands could not draw it. That is why I instructed you to have the children draw it: there is no sin upon them, though they are children of pagan parents. Go now straight to Fedosya-korolevna's bedchamber—and I will slip in after you, and when the Serpent swoops down, strike him once and strike twice, and three times, to cut off all six heads; but if you strike a fourth time, he will be whole again and his strength will increase a hundredfold."

So Pavel-tsarevich stands in the princess's bedchamber. Suddenly a storm howls, the whole palace shakes—and the six-headed Serpent flies in. "Ah, tsarevich! You have learned that my death is foretold only from Pavel's shoulder and Agrikov's sword. Well, little is said: let us have it out!" And a great battle began. Pavel-tsarevich struck the Serpent once—cut off two heads; struck twice—knocked off two more. The third time he struck—his arm slipped, and he cut off only one head... The Serpent keeps swooping at him: he threatens with claws, breathes fire. Then Pavel-tsarevich forgot the instruction and swung the sword a fourth time... But his unknown companion, who had been standing behind him all the while, knocked the sword from his hand, rushed at the Serpent himself, unarmed, and sank his teeth into its throat, like a dog. The Serpent struggled a little, stretched out, and died...

Joy throughout the whole kingdom became unspeakable when they learned that the tsarevich had defeated the Serpent. "I gave my vow," says King Dementy the Lawless, "that to him who overcomes the Serpent I will give half my kingdom and my daughter in marriage, and I will not go back on my word. The wedding shall be when my daughter Fedosya-korolevna recovers." Pavel-tsarevich, for his part, dug in his heels: "But I," he says, "have not even seen her, what she is like; and I am Orthodox, a king's son—what is she; and I am Orthodox, a king's son—I cannot marry a woman of a foreign faith." Only this unknown man persuaded him: "Fear nothing: your bride will please you—such beauty the sun has never seen. And she will follow you into our Orthodox faith."

And indeed, when Fedosya-korolevna recovered and showed herself to the bridegroom, he was stunned. What indescribable beauty! The maiden stands, her eyes lowered, quiet, sad—and Pavel-tsarevich cannot take his eyes off her... They held the wedding. "Let us go, father-in-law," says the tsarevich, "to my native land, to bow before my parents." The king agreed, equipped a rich retinue, and Pavel-tsarevich set off with his young wife for his homeland by land.

They traveled long or short and stopped to spend the night in an open field. Suddenly this unknown man enters the young couple's tent and says to the tsarevich: "The time has come, tsarevich: I will serve you one last service, and then it is time for me to go to my place." With these words he drew Agrikov's sword from its sheath, struck Fedosya-korolevna on the very crown of her head, and split her in two. And out of her crawled serpents, toads, all manner of vermin—writhing in coils. The unknown man gathered them all, threw them into a fire, put together the split body of Fedosya-korolevna—and she came to life. And after that the unknown man said: "Now, tsarevich, when you arrive in your own Land—baptize your wife into the Orthodox faith, and she will be your faithful friend and wife until your very death. And let me go—I have repaid you for your kindness: you committed my dead body to the earth and did not let the unbelievers mock over it—I am that very dead man whom you buried at the cemetery."

With this, Pavel-tsarevich's helper vanished, as if he had never been. And Pavel-tsarevich arrived at his parents', baptized his young wife, and they began to live in joy, happiness, and prosperity.