The Dragon and the Gypsy — Variant 1

In olden days there stood a little village, and a dragon took to flying to that village to devour people. He ate them all; only one man remained. At that time a Gypsy came there; it was late in the evening. Wherever he looked — everywhere was empty! At last he entered the last hut; there sat the remaining man, weeping. "Hello, good man!" — "Why have you come, Gypsy? Surely you're tired of life?" — "What of it?" — "Why, a dragon has taken to flying here to devour people; he has eaten everyone, left only me until morning, and tomorrow he will fly in and eat me, and you won't fare well either. He'll eat both of us at once!" — "Maybe he'll choke! Let me spend the night with you and see tomorrow: what sort of dragon flies to you?" They spent the night.

In the morning a fierce storm suddenly arose, the hut shook — the dragon arrives: "Aha!" he says. "There's a find! I left one man, and found two. Something to breakfast on!" — "You really think you'll eat us?" asks the Gypsy. "I certainly will!" — "You're lying, you devil! You'll choke!" — "Well then, are you stronger than me?" — "Of course! You know yourself my strength is greater than yours." — "Come on then, let's try: who is stronger?" — "Let's!" The dragon took a stone from the millstones: "Look, Gypsy! I'll crush this stone with one hand." — "All right, I'll watch!" The dragon took the stone in his fist and squeezed so hard that it turned to fine sand: sparks flew all about! "What a wonder!" says the Gypsy. "And you squeeze the stone so water flows from it. Watch how I squeeze!" And on the table lay a bundle of cottage cheese; the Gypsy grabbed it and began to squeeze — and the whey flowed onto the ground. "Well, did you see? Whose strength is greater?" — "True, your hand is stronger than mine; but let's try: who of us can whistle louder?" — "Well, whistle!" The dragon whistled — and leaves fell from all the trees. "Good, brother, you whistle well, but still not better than mine," said the Gypsy. "Tie up your eyes first, or when I whistle they'll pop out of your forehead!" The dragon believed him and tied a kerchief over his eyes: "Well, whistle!" The Gypsy took a club and whistled the dragon on the head — he screamed at the top of his lungs: "Enough, enough, Gypsy! Don't whistle anymore, my eyes almost popped out in one go." — "As you like, but I think I'm ready to whistle another time or two." — "No, I don't want to, I don't want to argue anymore. Let's become sworn brothers instead: you be the elder brother and I the younger." — "So be it!"

"Well, brother," says the dragon, "go — there on the steppe a herd of oxen is grazing; choose the fattest, take him by the tail and drag him for dinner." Nothing

to do — the Gypsy went to the steppe; he sees a big herd of oxen grazing, and began catching them and tying them to each other by the tails. The dragon waited and waited, could not stand it and ran himself: "Why so long?" — "Wait a bit: I'll tie up some fifty, and drag them all home at once, so it lasts a whole month!" — "What a fellow you are! Are we to live here forever? One will do." Thereupon the dragon seized the fattest ox by the tail, tore the hide off him, loaded the meat on his shoulders and dragged it home. "How now, brother, I tied up so many — surely I won't just leave them?" — "Well, leave them."

They came to the hut, filled two cauldrons with beef, but there was no water. "Here, take the oxhide," says the dragon to the Gypsy, "go, fill it with water and bring it here; we'll cook dinner." The Gypsy took the hide, dragged it to the well — barely drags it empty, let alone with water. He came and began digging around the well. The dragon waited and waited again, could not stand it and ran himself: "What are you doing, brother?" — "I want to dig around the well and drag the whole thing into the hut, so we won't have to go for water." — "What a fellow you are! You start too much! Digging around takes a lot of time." The dragon lowered the hide into the well, filled it with water, pulled it out and carried it home. "And you, brother," he says to the Gypsy, "go to the forest meanwhile, choose a dry oak and drag it to the hut; it's time to light a fire!" The Gypsy went to the forest, began stripping bast and twisting ropes; he twisted a very long rope and began lashing the oaks. The dragon waited and waited, could not stand it, ran himself: "Why are you dawdling?" — "I want to catch some twenty oaks with the rope at once and drag them all with their roots, so the firewood lasts a long time!" — "What a fellow you are! You do everything your own way," said the dragon, tore out the thickest oak by the roots and dragged it into the hut.

The Gypsy pretended to be very angry, puffed out his cheeks and sat silent. The dragon boiled the beef, calls him to dinner, and he replies angrily: "I don't want any!" So the dragon ate a whole ox, drank the oxhide of water and began pressing the Gypsy: "Tell me, brother, why are you angry?" — "Because whatever I do — it's all wrong, not your way!" — "Well, don't be angry, let's make peace!" — "If you want to make peace with me, let's go to my place as guests." — "Very well; I'm ready, brother!" At once the dragon got out a cart, harnessed a troika of the best horses, and the two of them drove to the Gypsy camp. They began to approach; the Gypsy children saw their father, ran to meet him naked and shouting at the top of their lungs: "Father has come; he brought a dragon!" The dragon was frightened, asks the Gypsy: "Who are they?" — "My children! They must be hungry now; look how they'll set upon you!" The dragon jumped out of the cart and ran; and the Gypsy sold the troika of horses together with the cart and lived prosperously ever after.