

THE EMPEROR'S SON IN LAW OUTWITS THE PRINCES

A TALE FROM BOSNIA, RETOLD BY LOUISE SOUVAN

ALAD once dreamed he had become the emperor's son in law. In the morning he spoke to his parents about the wonderful dream he had had, and they, of course, immediately wanted to know more about it, but the boy only said:

"I couldn't possibly tell you what it was, much as I would like to."

This reply made the parents of the boy very angry. They declared that he was the most obstinate boy they had ever known and gave him a sound thrashing. The boy ran out into the highroad and in his misery began to cry.

At that moment an imperial Tartar passed by on the road and said to the boy:

"What's the matter with you? What are you crying like that for?"

"I am in good health, thank you," replied the lad, "but, oh, brother, I had a dream, and as I did not want to tell my father and mother they beat me green and blue and called me an obstinate youngster."

"All right," said the Tartar, "if you did not feel like telling your dream to your parents tell it to me, as I am an imperial servant. I may communicate it to my master, which would not be to your disadvantage."

"But if you were the emperor himself I would not tell it," insisted the boy.

The Tartar went as fast as he could to the emperor and told him every word he had learned from the boy, and immediately the emperor sent out another man to catch the boy and bring him to the palace. Of course, the boy was not strong enough to resist, and so he presently found himself before the emperor, but again he refused to tell the dream.

The emperor was, of course, very angry. "Do you know you are speaking to the emperor," he said, "and that if you refuse to obey me I will have you thrown into the deepest dungeon, where you may reflect on the proper manner in which to obey your imperial master?"

But the boy still refused to tell his dream. "I don't care whether you are emperor or not," he said, "I am not willing to tell my dream."

Of course, there was nothing left for the emperor to do but to put him into prison, and this he did; and all day long the lad sat in his dungeon room wondering how he would be able to get out of the scrape in which he found himself.

In the neighboring room he could hear the noise of knives and forks. Oh, how hungry he suddenly felt! He could hardly stand it. Immediately he commenced to go over the wall with his hands to see if there was a place thin enough for him to break through.

To make a long story short, he finally succeeded in making a hole in the wall. And, my life, what did he see? You would never believe it! It seems that was the princess' room on the other side of the partition and there was the princess fast asleep. At her feet a colored candle was burning and a white one at her head, and around her were scattered her faithful women servants. Near by was a table laden with delicious food and drinks. When the lad had eaten all he could and had stuffed his pockets full, so that nothing would go in, he stole back to his room and closed up the opening in the wall so that no one could see in the least that the wall had been injured.

In awakening next morning the princess saw that the food had disappeared and blamed the maids for it. Of course, they all insisted they had not touched a crumb, but the princess would not believe it.

Every night for about a week the lad stole into the room at night and finally the princess got tired of it and decided to catch the thief. So one evening she besmeared her eyes with a magic herb, so that she could see all that was going on with eyes closed. Toward midnight the lad again broke through the wall, ate up all he could and then quickly made for his room. But at that instant the princess jumped up and caught hold of his hand. The lad trembled like birch leaves. He fell on his knees and told the princess everything, and as she was a good hearted and kind young girl she forgave him his tricks and told him to go back to his room.

The following morning the emperor announced to his daughter, the princess, that she was of age and it was time for her to choose a husband. The prin-

cess was willing, but said that she wished to take only that man who was able to throw an arrow across the big towers of the city walls. The emperor consented to her wish, and next day the pashas, princes and counts assembled in the imperial castle.

All tried one after the other, but none could throw the arrow as high as the city wall, much less across the high towers. Now, when the princess saw this she asked her father to send for the slave whom he had sent to prison a week ago and have him try to throw the arrow.

The emperor, not a little astonished at her request, for he thought the lad had perished in prison long ago for want of food, sent immediately after him. But his amazement grew considerably when he saw how fat the prisoner had become and how splendid he looked. He handed him the arrow to throw across the towers, while the noblemen laughed at the youngster who was going to try to do what they could not accomplish. But soon the laughter stopped as if it had been cut in two, for they saw the arrow shoot across the tower and sink itself in a marble block two yards deep. On seeing this the emperor paid no attention whatever to the lad's humble descent, but made him a knight on the spot and gave him his beautiful princess as his wife, not to speak of costly presents besides.

Of course now, having been conquered like that, the pashas, princes and counts were angry beyond saying. Therefore to win the emperor's daughter from the unknown hero they invited them both to be their guests the coming Friday, and also to bring with them a thousand companions. They said besides that they would prepare plenty of drink and food, but if only a drop of the beverage remained, or a crumb of the food the emperor's daughter would be theirs and also the thousand companions. They all agreed and promised to be there at the time appointed.

At the start on Friday only 995 men arrived, but the emperor's son in law did not worry and with his wife marched at the head of the crowd. On the way he met a man who with one ear was touching the ground, as though listening to something.

"How do you do?" said the emperor's son in law. "For goodness' sake, what are you doing here?"

"Why, sure enough, nothing at all. As I had just a little time I was listening to the grass to hear how it was growing," said the man. When the emperor's son in law heard this he asked: "Would you like to join me, brother? I have been invited to supper; you shall have good food there." The man consented right away, and so they were already 996 men. They proceeded on their journey and in a short

while they met a man who was standing in the middle of the road and looking toward every region of the heavens. "How do you do?" asked the emperor's son in law. "What are you looking about for like that?" "I laid a wager with a bird that I would be the swifter of us two, and here I am now for three hours at the mark waiting for him," said the man.

The emperor's son in law marveled about such swiftness, and said: "Would you be willing to join me, brother? The princes have invited me to have supper with them; you shall have good food there." This man, too, consented immediately, and so there were already 997 men. Presently, in marching along they came to a man who stood in the middle of the street and stared up into the blue sky.

"How do you do?" asked the emperor's son in law. "What under the sun are you staring up like that for?" "I have cast up a javelin and now I have waited here for three hours, but it does not come back." So the emperor's son in law asked him also to join him, which he immediately did. Now there were 998 companions. After wandering for about an hour they met a man who was scratching out the kettle where 600 pounds of corn mush had been cooked and eaten up by himself. "How do you do?" said the emperor's son in law. "What on earth are you doing here with this big kettle?" "By Jove," replied the man, "nothing at all. I got myself a little luncheon, and if it had only been more I could have stood it beautifully."

This man also was invited to join the companions, which he did with the greatest of pleasure, so they were now 999 in all. They went on. In another hour they happened to meet a man who had just drunk up a whole lake and was now watching the fishes struggle along without water.

"How do you do?" What are you doing here?" said the emperor's son in law. "Why, surely it's not worth while talking about," replied the man. "I was just a wee bit thirsty and so I drank up this trifle of a lake. I am watching the fishes to see what they are going to do without the water."

This man, too, was bidden to join the company, which he did with great joy, and thus a thousand men reached the palace as the invitation had specified. But to their dismay they found enough supper for at least 4,000 persons. Immediately the emperor's son in law saw the trick, and so he sent the 600 pound corn mush eater to taste the food and drinks. He took a spoon, went from pot to kettle, from kettle to pot, tasting here and tasting there, and in no time all was cleared up and neither drop nor crumb was left. Upon that he returned to the emperor's son in law, told him how he had just tickled his

stomach a little bit with the food and drink and that he was quite ready to have supper.

Angry beyond comprehension, the princes offered another wager. They agreed to get up a furnace which a man of the emperor's son in law's party was to get into. If he did not burn up the emperor's son in law was to have all their fortunes and treasures, and, on the other hand, if he did burn up they would get the princess, his wife and all the companions.

A tremendous furnace was heated and the man who drank up the lake jumped in. Once in the oven the immense quantities of the water which he had swallowed put out the fire in less time than it takes me to tell. Seeing this, the sultan's sons got awfully scared and implored the emperor's son in law to let them have a third and last bet, to which he consented. They proposed that a quick footed man from his party should run into this and that mountain to get a jug full of water while they sent a witch to do the same, and whichever of the two returned first would be the winner. So the emperor's son in law chose the man who overtook the bird within three hours, gave him the jug to bring in the water, while the old witch got a pumpkin flask. The witch flew up in the air and the man started to run into this and that mountain, got there first and immediately reached out for the water. And just while he was filling the jug to the brim the witch arrived.

Now, you wouldn't believe it, but it is just as I say, for before he had a chance even to as much as look up and see what sort of a bird touched him, she took the jug and, leaving him the empty pumpkin flask, was off on her way back. Well, of course, while the man had to stop to fill the pumpkin flask again the witch got a fine start. In the meanwhile the man who heard the rustle of her wings. Quickly he ran to the emperor's son in law and said:

"Listen, the witch cheated our fellow awfully. She took the jug with water which he just filled and left him the empty pumpkin flask. Thus she got a fine start and will be here in another moment. I can hear the rustle of her wings." Then the emperor's son in law called the man who had thrown a lance up into the sky, which had never returned. He commanded this man to hurl a spear up into the clouds, which struck the witch, so that she turned a somersault in the air and spilled all the water she was carrying. Of course, the princes lost this wager also, and presently the emperor's son in law and his 1,000 companions returned to their homes with great piles of treasure, and perhaps they are living happily today. Who can say?



They Saw the Arrow Shoot Across the Tower