

§ 8

THE THIRD COURSE

How Rustam fought with a Dragon

A dragon, such an one as, thou hadst said,
 No elephant could 'scape, came from the waste.
 Its haunt was there; no div dared pass thereby.
 It came, beheld the atheling asleep,
 A charger near him, and was wroth. It thought:—
 "What do I see? Who dareth to sleep here?"
 Because no lions, dívs, or elephants
 Dared pass that way or, if they did, escaped not
 The clutches of that dragon fierce and fell.
 It turned on glossy Rakhsh, who ran to Rustam,
 Stamped with his brazen hoofs upon the ground,
 Whisked with his tail, and gave a thundering neigh.
 The hero woke up furious, looked about
 Upon the waste, perceived not that fell dragon,
 And wreaked his wrath on Rakhsh for waking him.
 He slept again, again the worm approached
 Out of the gloom; Rakhsh ran to Rustam's couch,
 And kicked the earth about and trampled it.
 The sleeper woke, his cheeks rose-red with passion,
 Looked round and, seeing nothing but the gloom,
 Said to affectionate and watchful Rakhsh:—
 "Thou canst not blink the darkness of the night
 Yet wakest me again impatiently!
 If thou disturb me more I will behead thee
 With my sharp scimitar, and carry it,
 My helmet, and my massive mace, on foot.
 I said: 'Should any lion come at thee
 I will encounter it.' I never said:—
 'Rush on me in the night!' Leave me to slumber."
 Then for the third time with his tiger-skin

Upon his breast he set himself to sleep.
 The fearsome dragon roared and, thou hadst said,
 Breathed fire. Rakhsh left the pasturage forthwith,
 But dared not to approach the paladin.
 Yet was his heart distracted by his fears
 For Rustam with that dragon, till at length,
 O'ermastered by affection for his lord,
 He rushed swift as a blast to Rustam's side
 And neighed and fretted, pawed upon the ground,
 And stamped the earth to pieces with his hoofs.
 Then Rustam, wakened from his sweet repose,
 Raged at his docile steed; but now the Maker
 Willed that the dragon should be seen, and Rustam,
 Perceiving it amid the gloom, unsheathed
 The keen sword at his girdle, thundered out
 Like spring-clouds, and filled earth with battle-fire.
 Then said he to the dragon: "Tell thy name;
 Earth is no longer thine, yet must not I
 Rob thy dark form of life, thy name untold."

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The laidly dragon said: "None scapeth me.
 For centuries this waste hath been my home,
 And mine its firmament; no eagle dareth
 To fly across or star to dream thereof."
 It further said: "What is thy name, for she
 Will have to weep that bare thee?"

"I am Rustam,"

He answered, "sprung from Zál—the son of Sám—
 And Narímán withal. I am myself
 A host, and trample earth 'neath dauntless Rakhsh.
 Thou shalt behold my prowess; I will lay
 Thy head in dust."

The dragon closed with him,
 And in the end escaped not though it strove
 So fiercely with the elephantine hero
 That thou hadst said: "He will be worsted." Rakhsh,
 On seeing the dragon's might, and how it battled

With Rustam, laid his ears back, joined the fray,
 Bit at the dragon's shoulders, tore its hide
 As though he were a lion, and amazed
 The valiant paladin, who with keen glaive
 Smote off the dragon's head; blood jetted out
 In rivers, and its carcase hid the earth.

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The matchless one, astonished at the sight,
 Invoked God's name and bathed him in the spring.
 Desiring conquest through God's strength alone
 He said: "O righteous Judge! me Thou hast given
 Grace, might, and wisdom; what care I for lion,
 Dív, elephant, parched desert, and blue sea?
 When I am wroth all foes are one to me."

§ 9

THE FOURTH COURSE

How Rustam slew a Witch

Thanksgivings done, he harnessed rose-cheeked Rakhsh
 And mounting came in time where sorcerers dwelt.
 Long had he fared and saw, as Sol declined,
 Trees, grass, and stream—the very spot for youth.
 There was a spring as bright as pheasant's eyes;
 Beside it were a golden bowl of wine,
 A roasted mountain-sheep with bread thereon,
 And salts and sweetmeats. Rustam thanked the Lord
 For showing him a place so opportune,
 Dismounted from his steed, took off the saddle,
 And marvelled at the loaves and venison.

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It was a sorcerers' meal, and when he came
 His voice had caused those dívs to disappear.
 He sat beside the rushy stream and brimmed
 A jewelled cup with wine. A dainty lute