

ALBANIAN FOLKTALES AND LEGENDS

selected and translated from the Albanian

by

Robert Elsie

Second amended edition

For Hillary and Cameron Ward, and Erin and Ross Springinotic on Vancouver Island,
and for Lea and Jack Pengally in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta,
and for all other children and adults who have never heard of Albania

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INTRODUCTION

Folk tales and legends are still very much alive in the mountains of Albania, a land of haunted history. They are recited in the evenings after a day's work or out in the fields, are learned by heart and pass, as if immortal, from one generation to the next. Whose imagination could not be captured by the cunning of the Scurfhead, by the demands of the Earthly Beauty, by the heroic feats of Mujo and Halil or by the appearance of a fiery Kulshedra in the forest?

The fundamental theme of Albanian folk tales, as no doubt of folk tales everywhere, is the struggle between good and evil, a reflection of social values as we perceive them. The cautious reader may rest assured from the start that in the fantastic world of Albanian folk literature the good always win out.

Oral literature is known to preserve many archaic elements. Albanian folk tales reveal not only a number of oriental features from the centuries when Albania formed an integral part of the Ottoman Empire but indeed also the occasional trace of the ancient world of Greco-Roman mythology. Pashas and dervishes abound in an otherwise eminently European context. The evident patriarchal structure in the tales and the passive, secondary roles attributed to female characters reflect Albania's traditionally Moslem society. In the first half of the twentieth century, about 70% of the Albanian population was Moslem, 20% Orthodox and 10% Catholic.

Yet despite their oriental background and the remoteness of Albanian culture, one of the last in Europe to withstand the onslaught of our high-tech monoculture, many of the tales will have a surprisingly familiar ring to the Western reader.

Albanian folk tales were first recorded in the middle of the nineteenth century by European scholars such as Johann Georg von Hahn (1854), the Austrian consul in Janina (Ioannina), Karl H. Reinhold (1855) and Giuseppe Pitrè (1875). The next generation of scholars to take an interest in the collection of Albanian folk tales were primarily philologists, among them well-known Indo-European linguists concerned with recording and analysing a hitherto little known European language: Auguste Dozon (1879, 1881), Jan Jarnik (1883), Gustav Meyer (1884, 1888), Holger Pedersen (1895), Gustav Weigand (1913) and August Leskien (1915).

The nationalist movement in Albania in the second half of the nineteenth century, the so-called Rilindja period, gave rise to native collections of folklore material such as the 'Albanian Bee' (*Albanikë melissa / Bëlietta sskiyipêtare*) by Thimi Mitko (1878), the 'Albanian Spelling Book' (*Albanikon alfavêtarion / Avabatar arbëror*) by the Greco-Albanian Anastas Kullurioti (1882) and the 'Waves of the Sea' (*Valët e Detit*) by Spiro Dine (1908). In the last thirty years, much field work has been done by the Institute of Folk Culture in Tirana and by the Institute of Albanian Studies in Prishtina, which have published numerous collections of folk tales and legends. Unfortunately, very little of this substantial material has been translated into other languages.

The only substantial collections of Albanian folk tales to have appeared in English up to the present, as far as I am aware, are *Tricks of women and other Albanian tales* by Paul Fenimore Cooper (New York 1928), which was translated from the collections of Dozon and Pedersen, and *Albanian wonder tales* by Post Wheeler (London 1936). The present volume of Albanian tales endeavours to be as faithful as possible in style and content to the original Albanian texts which were recorded from word of mouth in a relatively unelaborate code.

Included in this collection are not only folk tales but prose versions of a selection of

well-known Albanian legends (based originally on historical or mythological events and figures). The adventures of Mujo and Halil and their band of mountain warriors are still told and indeed sung in epic verse in the northern Albanian mountains, and the exploits of the great Scanderbeg, the Albanian national hero who freed large parts of the country from Turkish rule in the fifteenth century, are recounted everywhere Albanians gather, as if events five centuries old had taken place yesterday.

It remains for me to thank the many people who have assisted me in this project, among whom the late Qemal Haxhihasani of the Institute of Folk Culture (Tirana), staff members of the Institute of Linguistics and Literature (Tirana) and of the Institute of Albanian Studies (Prishtina), as well as Barbara Schultz (Ottawa) for her kind revision of the manuscript.

Robert Elsie
Eifel mountains, Germany

1. The boy and the Earthly Beauty

Once upon a time there was a very rich man who had a wife and a son. When he was about to die, he gave his son some advice, the most important part of which was never to go to the village where the Earthly Beauty lived. The boy grew up and lived happy and content, not knowing in which village where the Earthly Beauty lived. But in the end, he was overcome by a great desire to visit her, although both his father and his mother had forbidden him to do so. One day, taking a big sack of gold coins with him, he set out to find the village where the Earthly Beauty lived.

On his way, he rested for a while at the house of an old woman who told him right away that the Earthly Beauty lived in the village and that many a young man had come and squandered his fortune just to catch a glimpse of her finger or her hand. When the boy heard this, he too burned with desire to see at least her hand, no matter what it cost him. After asking the old woman to show him the way, he set off for the maiden's palace and asked to see the Earthly Beauty. Since he was quick to show the gold coins he had brought with him, the servants informed the maiden and she gave orders that he be let in. They put the boy in a corner of the room where he could catch just a glimpse of her finger. Then, taking away his gold coins, they threw him out, for the Earthly Beauty never showed herself completely to her admirers; the first time they just got to see her fingers, the second time her hand, and the third time her arm. When the boy got back to the old woman's house, he was so overwhelmed and excited by what he had seen at the maiden's palace that he could not wait to return. He resolved to go back home and fetch more money. He told the old woman what he had experienced and she encouraged him because she, too, was receiving gifts from him. The next day the boy got home, his heart full of desire for the Earthly Beauty. The moment he entered the house, he began looking for money so that he could return to the maiden as quickly as possible. When the poor mother saw that her son had squandered all of his money and been made a fool of by the maiden, she was saddened at first, and then angered. She tried to persuade him to change his mind, but it was all in vain. The boy was not to be swayed. In short, he took even more money than he had taken the first time, and set off once again.

When he got back to the Earthly Beauty, her servants cheated him a second time by showing him the maiden's hand, taking his money and throwing him out again. In a short time, the boy had wasted his whole fortune on the Earthly Beauty without getting any closer to her. Very soon, although he had once been quite rich, he was as poor as a church mouse.

But he refused to give up, and so returned home to search through his father's bedroom and cellar to try to find something of value to take to the maiden. To his surprise, he found a cap that made him invisible the moment he put it on. His mother could no longer see him, although she could hear his voice. He was delighted with the cap, for he believed that with its help he could win over the Earthly Beauty. So without hesitation, he took the cap and set off for the maiden's village. When he arrived at the palace of the Earthly Beauty, he put the cap on and, being invisible, was able to get right into the maiden's bedroom without being seen by her servants. Now he could see the maiden in all her beauty and stared at her in awe all night long until daybreak. Then he spoke to her. She could hear his voice, but could not see him. After the two had talked for some time, he told the Earthly Beauty who he was and, trusting in her love, revealed to her the secret of his cap. She snatched it from him, called her servants and ordered them to chase the boy away.

When the boy realized he had been deceived again, he was very sad indeed, because he had now given up all hope. In his misfortune, he returned home. But he could think of nothing

but the maiden, because his heart was so full of desire for her. Again he went into his father's bedroom and poked around looking for something else to take to the Earthly Beauty. Suddenly, he noticed a jug. Picking it up, he had a look at it, turned it around in his hands, and polished it a bit because it was very dusty. Immediately, a band of warriors appeared and addressed him, "What is your command, oh master? We are ready to serve you."

At this, the boy reflected for a moment and said to himself, "Now I'm sure to win over the Earthly Beauty." His heart began to rejoice, his eyes brightened and he set off once again to win the object of his desire.

On his way there, he spent the night at the house of the old woman again and sent her to the palace with a message for the Earthly Beauty that she should receive him. But hardly had the old woman begun to speak when the maiden summoned her servants and had the old woman tossed out. Much distressed, the old woman returned home and told the boy of the ill treatment she had suffered at the palace. He nevertheless persuaded her to go back a second time and tell the maiden that if she did not receive him courteously, things would look bad for her. Because of the boy's urging and the gifts he had always given her, the old woman went back, though she knew very well that the Earthly Beauty would not listen to her. When the maiden saw the old woman coming, she became so furious that she ordered her servants to beat her and throw her out. And the old woman, wailing in sorrow, had to flee from the fists and clubs of the servants.

When the old woman returned and told the boy what had happened, he realized that courtesy would not get him any farther. He took his jug and rubbed it. The warriors immediately appeared and said to him, "What is your command, oh master? We are ready to serve you." The boy dispatched them, all dressed in fine garments, to the palace of the Earthly Beauty to exercise until he called them back. Then he sent the old woman to the maiden once more to tell her that if she did not receive him voluntarily, he would come by force with the warriors she could see in front of her palace. When the maiden heard this and saw the warriors, she became frightened and immediately ordered that the boy be received with full honours. When the boy arrived, the palace dignitaries received him with such kind words that he was quite flattered. After a while he said to the maiden, "Since you have caused me such suffering, I am now going to send you to Tinglimaimun." But the Earthly Beauty knew how to wrap him around her finger and he forgave her. Now that they had made peace with one another, the boy believed that she loved him and revealed to her the fact that all his power came from the jug. When he was not looking, the maiden took the jug from him and rubbed it, and immediately the warriors appeared and demanded, "What is your command, madam? What can we do for you?" The boy jumped up and shouted, "You're my warriors, not hers!" But the warriors replied, "The jug is in the maiden's hands." She then spoke to them, saying, "Seize the youth and take him off to Tinglimaimun." And they seized him and took him away.

Having arrived in this distant foreign land with no food and no friends, the boy wandered about in the wilderness looking for something to eat. Finally, he found a bunch of red grapes, and hungry as he was, he began to eat them. But to his horror and amazement, for every grape he ate, a horn grew out of his face. The boy was most distressed by his misfortune. However, because he was still hungry, he wandered around in search of something else to eat. At last, he found some white grapes. After he had eaten the first grape, a horn fell off. Indeed for every grape he ate, one of the horns fell off. Realizing that for every red grape a horn grew on his face, and for every white grape one fell off, the boy was very happy because he remembered the Earthly Beauty and realized he could take advantage of this lucky coincidence. With the red grapes, he would make horns grow on the maiden's face, and then with the white grapes he would heal her again. This way, she would be his.

He quickly filled two baskets with grapes, one with red and the other with white, and set off swiftly to return to the land of the Earthly Beauty. After travelling for a long, long time, he

came to an ocean where he had to wait for a ship. Sometime later he spotted a ship on the horizon, and as he had no handkerchief, he took off his trousers and waved them in the wind as a sign for the ship to come and pick him up. The ship approached, took the poor boy in rags on board and brought him back to his own country. He planned to sell the red grapes as soon as he arrived and at last his feet brought him right to the palace of the Earthly Beauty. There were no other grapes for sale as the season was over, so the boy's grapes attracted the attention of the people in the palace. When the Earthly Beauty caught sight of the grapes, she decided she had to have them, and ordered her maid to fetch them for her. The unfortunate maid could not resist eating a grape herself and immediately a horn grew out of her face. She did not know where it had come from and hid in shame in her room. When the maiden demanded her grapes, the maid asked another servant to take them to her. The Earthly Beauty seized the grapes and ate them all with great pleasure. Immediately, her face was covered with horns. She was so horrified at this that she almost lost her mind. A few days later, since the horns would not go away, she sent for her physicians. She received the physicians on the condition that they would be beheaded if they did not heal her. The physicians went to treat the maid first, because they both had the same illness.

The boy knew now that his day had come and that he would be called on to heal the maiden. He wanted to make the Earthly Beauty more desperate than ever, so went away for a few days to prolong her illness and increase her grief. Then he adorned himself with fine garments, went to the palace of the Earthly Beauty where he announced that he was a physician, and promised to heal her. They warned him that he would be beheaded if he was not successful, and to this he agreed. He entered the palace and was sent first to the maid. He had brought the white grapes with him, but had squeezed them into a paste so that no one could see what they were. He began by asking the maid what she had and had not done and about her illness. "Be careful," he said, "if you don't tell me the truth, you will not be cured." The maid told him everything and about the grapes she had eaten. He then gave her the medicine made of white grapes he had with him, and the horn fell off. The maid was cured.

When the Earthly Beauty heard this, she summoned the physician right away and could hardly wait to see him. He entered her chamber and again began by asking questions, as he had done with the maid, saying that he would only cure her if she told him the whole truth. She told him of all her deeds, and when she talked about the gold coins which she had repeatedly taken from the boy, he said to her, "Give me the money." She also showed him the cap which she had stolen from the boy, but pretended to have forgotten the jug. The physician said to her, "There is something you have not told me yet." Finally she brought out the jug which, like the cap and money, she had taken from the boy. Thereupon, he gave her the medicine and she was immediately cured. When the boy rubbed the jug, the warriors appeared and asked, "What are your wishes, my lord? You are our master." The boy then turned to the Earthly Beauty, saying, "Now I have you in my power. I am the one you caused to suffer. You sent me to Tinglimaimun, but now it is my turn. I am going to marry you and take you home with me." He commanded the warriors to seize her and take her back to his village, together with her palace and everything she owned. When the mother saw her son with the Earthly Beauty, the palace and all the treasures, she was overjoyed. And so they all lived together happily ever after.

2. The scurfhead

Once upon a time there was a king who had three sons. He also had a beautiful garden with a quince tree in it which bore only three quinces a year. Every time the tree bore fruit, a dragon came by and gobbled them up. The king desperately wanted to eat one of the quinces because they were so beautiful, but the dragon got them every time.

The eldest son decided to guard the quinces and went to his father to ask him for a net, a rattle and three candles to light his way in the dark. The father gave him what he asked for and the youth went into the garden and chose a place in the tall tree to wait for the dragon. The dragon arrived at midnight as usual and, seeing the light, guessed that a trap had been set for it. It therefore let out a frightening roar, threw itself with all its might against the tree, plucked a quince and was off in a flash. The youth was so frightened that he could not even move. The next morning he returned downcast and pale with fear to his father and told him what had happened. The father was very disappointed that his son had proved to be such a coward.

The second son then said, "This time I will go and guard the quinces!" At first the father did not want to let him go, for the second son was also a coward just like the eldest, but eventually he gave in. The second brother took a net, a rattle and light with him and set off for the garden to guard the quinces. That night, the very same thing happened. The dragon arrived, stole the second quince and disappeared, and the second son, having failed to put up any defence at all, was obliged to return to his father in shame.

The third son was a scurfhead. He was delighted at the failure of his brothers and went to his father saying that he too would go into the garden to guard the last quince. He gathered together everything he needed to guard the last quince, entered the garden and hid behind a tree. When the dragon arrived, the youth bravely lunged forth, struck the beast and wounded it so badly that it took flight. When the two older brothers saw how courageous the scurfhead had been they hung their heads in shame. They were jealous because they themselves had failed to fight the dragon. Nevertheless, when they heard their brother shouting and the dragon roaring, they ran to help him and the three of them pursued the dragon with fury until it disappeared into a hole in the ground. Standing in front of the hole, they talked to decide which of them would enter. The two older brothers were too afraid. Only the undaunted scurfhead was still willing to pursue the dragon. He tied two ropes around his waist, a black one and a white one, to be lowered into the cave, and they agreed on a signal. If he tugged on the white rope, everything was all right, but if he tugged on the black one, it meant he was in danger and they were to pull him up immediately to save his life.

And so the scurfhead entered the cave, looking for traces of the dragon. He wandered around for some time until he saw a small slab of iron on the floor, covering a hole. With all his might, he lifted the slab and descended three steps. At the bottom of the steps, he found a tiny house and knocked at the door. A fair maiden came out, one of the three Earthly Beauties. She welcomed him and asked him what he wanted. The scurfhead replied that he had come to slay the dragon which frightened everyone. The maiden replied, "The dragon is very strong indeed. If you want to slay it, you will first have to find out if you are strong enough to do so, otherwise you will be killed yourself. Anyone who does slay the monster will become known as the saviour of our country and I will take him for my husband." As a sign of their betrothal, she gave him a spindle which could make gold. He threw it onto the floor and a golden apple appeared.

He then continued on his way, came across another house, and knocked at the door. The maiden who answered was even fairer and more attractive than the first. She too said that she

would marry the man who slew the dragon. As a sign of their betrothal she gave him a bowl. When he placed the bowl on the floor, another golden apple appeared. He accompanied the maiden to a third house and knocked at the door. There, too, a maiden answered who was more beautiful and wondrous than the first two, who were her sisters. After she had welcomed him and they had talked for a while, she gave him a hen with twelve chicks as a sign of their betrothal because she, too, wanted to marry the man who would slay the dragon. Then she took him into the den of the dragon, who had not yet returned.

As he waited and pondered on how best to slay the dragon, he saw a crowd of people in the distance who were weeping and lamenting. They were accompanying the king's daughter who was to be offered to the dragon, for the country was forced to offer one maiden a day to the dragon as payment for the water which it owned. The maidens were chosen by lot and that day the lot had fallen to the king's daughter. The crowd brought the poor maiden to the dragon's den and left her there. When the scurfhead saw the maiden sobbing and weeping, he felt sorry for her and asked her what was wrong. She told him her sad tale and he replied, "Don't be afraid, I'll save you."

At last the dragon arrived, still covered with blood from the wound it had received in the garden. The scurfhead had fallen asleep with his head in the maiden's lap. When she caught a glimpse of the dragon covered with blood from the wounds it had received in the garden, she began to tremble and warm tears welled up in her eyes. One of the tears dripped onto the scurfhead's face and woke him up. He sprang to his feet and asked the frightened maiden what had happened. Although she was speechless with fright, she managed to show by her glance that the dragon had arrived. The youth set upon the monster like a serpent, mortally wounding it so that it could neither stand nor move, and plunged straight into a well. When the dragon hit the bottom of the well, the water which the townspeople needed so badly began to gush forth. It formed streams which flowed through the villages, still crimson with the blood of the dying dragon. The maiden went to the scurfhead and thanked him on her knees, saying, "I will never forget you for saving me!" Then she filled her jug and returned to the palace.

When the king and queen saw their daughter return safe and sound, they were overjoyed and asked with great astonishment how she had escaped from the monster. The maiden recounted everything that had taken place and how an unknown hero in the dragon's den had saved her. The king immediately gave orders for the hero to be summoned, for he was anxious to meet the man who had slain the dragon and saved his daughter. The youth was brought in and the king rose to welcome him, offering the boy a seat at his side. The king praised the scurfhead's bravery and added, "Tell me what you would like to have. Don't be afraid to ask, even if it is half my kingdom! I'll give you whatever you want to pay you back for the service you have rendered us by ridding our kingdom of the dragon and by saving my daughter. I would also be very pleased if you would have my daughter for your wife." The hero replied, "The honour and tribute you have paid me have made me very happy. I need nothing at the moment, but if I should ever be in need, I will gladly call on you for help." He then departed content.

From there, our hero returned directly to the three Earthly Beauties who were impatiently awaiting him. They reminded him that they had given him their word that they were willing to marry him. He, too, spoke warmly to them, saying, "I have come to take all three of you with me. The two older sisters I will give in marriage to my brothers and the youngest one I will marry myself." The three maidens made themselves ready and the four of them set off to return to the surface of the earth. The maidens took all of their belongings with them and went to the opening of the cave. There the scurfhead called his two brothers and they let down a rope. The scurfhead tied the rope around the eldest sister and shouted to his brothers to pull her up, explaining that she was to be the wife of the eldest brother. When they let down the rope again to pull up the second maiden, he explained that she was for the second brother. As soon as the

two elder sisters had been pulled up, the youngest maiden, who was the prettiest of all, said, "I have an inkling that something terrible is going to happen to you. Your brothers have wicked intentions. They want to leave you down here forever and have me, the prettiest one, for themselves. But don't be afraid. If they do leave you here, run back into the dragon's den. There you will find two rams, a black one and a white one. You must seize the white one, which will take you back to the surface of the earth. Be careful not to seize the black one, because if you do, you will have to remain here and will be lost forever. I will never belong to your brothers, even unto death. I will wait for you until you come." The two brothers then lowered the rope for the third time and pulled the maiden up. When they saw how beautiful she was and heard the scurfhead say that she was for him, they decided to abandon him in the cave below.

The scurfhead remembered what the maiden had advised him to do and ran back to the dragon's den. There he found the two rams, the black one and the white one. But to his great misfortune he seized the black ram instead of the white one and was thus condemned to remain in the depths of the earth.

The poor lad wandered off, downcast and despondent in his misfortune. He happened upon an oak tree where he sat down in the shade. There he heard birds chirping and, looking upwards, he saw a nest of young eagles. He also noticed a snake slithering up the tree to devour the eaglets. The birds cried out as if begging him to save them from the snake. Taking pity on them, he jumped up, drew his knife and slew the snake. Then he returned to his resting place under the tree and fell asleep. When the mother eagle returned and saw the sleeping hero in the shade of the tree, she imagined that he intended to kill her babies, and set upon him. But the babies, by means of sounds and signs, made it clear to her that he had been their saviour, not their attacker. She flew off to the sea to moisten her wings and returned, sitting at the youth's head with wings outstretched to protect him in his sleep. When he awoke, he saw the eagle hovering over him with its wings outstretched and thought that it intended to kill him. But the eagle calmed his fears, telling him in a gentle and soothing voice, "You saved my children. I am therefore indebted to you. I beg you to regard me as your servant and tell me freely what wish of yours I can fulfil to repay you." The hero replied by asking, "But how could you repay me? You are a bird." "I will do whatever you want," responded the eagle. "All right," declared the scurfhead, "I'd like you to take me back to the earth if you can. That is my only wish." The bird replied, "That's easy enough for me. But you must bring with you an oven full of bread, two roasts of mutton and a barrel of water for the journey. Pack everything on my back, climb on and we will fly back to the earth."

The scurfhead recalled the promise of the king whose daughter he had saved from the dragon, went to him and asked for the things the eagle had demanded. The king was surprised at how little the scurfhead wanted in compensation for his great deed, but ordered that he be given everything he needed. The scurfhead then loaded everything onto the eagle, climbed onto its back and they took off, soaring into the air. They flew for a long, long time through wind and rain and finally, after great exertions, they arrived on the earth.

The youth was overjoyed at having escaped from the underworld and asked first of all whether his parents were still alive and how they were faring. When told that they were well, he thought it was high time that he made some money for them. The next morning he went for a walk and, lost in thought, came upon three feathers. He singed the tip of one of the feathers and suddenly three mares appeared, saying to him, "What is your command, master? We are here to serve you." Although he was particularly delighted to have found a source of income, he told them after a moment's thought to go their way and that he would call on them if ever he needed them.

He still wanted to find work and went to see a silversmith, asking if he could serve as the man's apprentice. He said that he wanted no wages, only food and some old clothes. The

silversmith saw that the youth was dressed like a noble and accepted him as an apprentice. One day, a herald arrived from the palace and told the silversmith that the king wished to see him. The silversmith was quite alarmed and went to the palace. There the king ordered him to make a spindle which could make gold. He said to the silversmith, "I want to marry off my eldest son, but his bride wants a spindle like the one she had when she was a child. I summoned you because you are the best silversmith of all. Have the spindle ready for me within three days or you will lose your head!"

Though the silversmith was very talented, he had no idea how to make such a spindle. Fearing for his life, he said nothing and returned home in dismay. The scurfhead, sitting at his work, saw his master returning in distress from the palace and asked him why he was so upset. The silversmith replied, "Hold your tongue! It is not your place to ask such questions." But the scurfhead asked again and again until finally the silversmith told him about the spindle. The scurfhead allayed the silversmith's fears and boasted that he could make such a spindle in one night. He would need only five kilos of nuts and plenty of good wine. Although the ill-fated silversmith found this hard to believe, he took heart and went out to buy what the scurfhead had asked for.

The scurfhead locked himself in his room and began cracking open the nuts and drinking the wine. His frightened master tiptoed up to the door and looked in through a crack to see what the apprentice was doing. The sly fox, however, frightened his master even more by calling out, "Be off with you or you'll ruin my work with your evil eye!" The next morning he gave his master the spindle he had received as a gift from the first Earthly Beauty. The silversmith was overjoyed and relieved when he saw the wonderful craftsmanship, and ran off to the king with it. The king, too, was very satisfied with the spindle and gave orders that the silversmith be given five cartloads of gold for his work. The silversmith accepted them and returned to give half the reward to his apprentice. The scurfhead, however, simply replied, "It is enough for me to know that my master is pleased with me."

The next day, the eldest son was to be married and the silversmith was invited to the wedding. He wanted to take his apprentice with him, but the youth would not go. A lofty pole had been set up on a hill outside the town, with a golden apple and a bag of money hanging from it. The king sent heralds all over the kingdom to proclaim that anyone who could jump high enough to reach the apple would receive a royal gift. Many brave men arrived from all corners of the earth, but none could reach the apple. When the scurfhead heard of the proclamation, he singed one of his three feathers and one of the three mares appeared on the spot with garments of gold for him. Dressed in his golden garments, he mounted the mare and rode off to the pole where a large crowd had gathered. He called to them in warning and, taking a mighty leap, plucked the apple from the pole. Everyone was amazed at such bravery. And so, the struggle between the scurfhead and his brothers ended and he was rewarded with the prettiest of the three Earthly Beauties.

3. The three friends and the Earthly Beauty

A man died leaving his wife with child. Six months later she gave birth to a son. Though they were very poor, the woman raised the son well. When he turned fifteen, the youth asked his mother if she had any souvenirs to remember his father by. The mother replied that his father had left many things, but that she had been forced to sell everything off in order to raise the boy. Still the youth continued to pester his mother to find out whether there wasn't something left over of his father's. Finally she replied, "I have the feeling that his sabre may still be under the roof." The youth asked his mother to lift him up onto her shoulders so that he could reach under the roof. There he found the sabre which, after such a long time, was now covered in rust and dirt. He cleaned the sabre and polished it until it shone again. He then slung it over his shoulder and said to his mother, "I am off on a journey to foreign lands." His poor mother began to weep and lament and begged him not to leave. The next morning she said to him, "Take your father's sabre, son, but cut my head off before you go!" The youth replied, "Which son has ever cut off his mother's head? I beg you, mother, do not make it difficult for me and break my heart. Wish me good luck so that, God willing, I may return as soon as possible."

Thereupon he changed his name, calling himself Kordha the Sabre, and inscribed this name on the sabre itself. Then he hugged his mother, and they kissed because they were to separate and wept many tears. Once they had said their good-byes, the youth kissed his sabre for luck and departed, saying, "Farewell and please wish me well for I will not be back for six months." After leaving the village, he wandered through the countryside for five or six hours until he came to a mountain. There was not a soul to be seen. The youth sat down on a flat patch of ground, drew his sabre, kissed it and placed it on his lap. Hardly had an hour passed when another youth of his age came by and greeted him. "Hello," answered Kordha, "Where do you come from and where are you going?" "I am in search of my fortune," replied the other. "I, too, am in search of my fortune. Let us become brothers and travel together." They hugged and kissed and told one another their names: one was called Kordha and the other Ylli the Star. Then they set off together and walked until it got dark, when they lay down and went to sleep without dinner.

The next day they set off again in the same direction and after a while met another youth of the same age. They greeted one another and inquired of one another where they had come from and where they were going. The youth asked Kordha and Ylli if he could become their brother too. And so they became brothers, and the new boy said that his name was Deti the Sea. They all hugged and kissed and swore that they would be faithful to one another and that if anything should happen, they would all die together.

The three set off and arrived at a city. The king of the city had just had a wide moat dug and announced that he would give his daughter's hand in marriage to the man who could jump over the moat, but that those who tried and failed to jump over the moat would have their heads chopped off. Many men had already attempted to jump over the moat and had fallen in, and the hangman had come straight away and chopped off their heads. When the three friends approached and found out that they had to jump over the moat, they thought for a while. Finally they agreed to take courage and jump, or all die together, though Deti had doubts, "Look how wide the moat is! I'm afraid we won't be able to jump across it." Kordha then picked up a stone, gave it to Deti and told him to throw it across the moat. Then he asked, "Was it difficult to throw the stone over to the other side?" "No, but it weighed less than a hundred grams." "Well, it won't be any harder for me to jump across," said Ylli. And in the twinkling of an eye, he grabbed the other two and, using all his strength, jumped with ease across the moat.

The people who had gathered on the other side were amazed. The king then ordered that the three of them be brought to him. They were put in a coach and driven to the king's palace. "Which of you is to marry my daughter?" asked the king. Kordha replied, "Ylli will marry your daughter." The king then ordered the marriage to be arranged and asked Kordha and Deti what their wishes were. Kordha replied that he wanted nothing for himself but that the king should give Deti a gift. A few days after the wedding, Kordha asked his brothers for permission to set off again. They were very sad and said to him, "Is our friendship to have lasted such a short time? How can you have the heart to set off and leave us?" Kordha replied, "Our friendship is eternal, but I must depart. I will leave a feather over your doorway. Pay attention to it, for if the feather ever drips with blood, you will know that I am in danger. You must set off immediately to find me, for I will be in great need of your help." Then he kissed them and departed.

After travelling alone for several days, he came to a place where the road divided into seven. At the crossroads was a cottage in front of which sat an old woman. Kordha asked her to tell him where the roads led. One of the roads, said the old woman, led to the Earthly Beauty. Kordha immediately prepared to set out in that direction. But the old woman said to him, "No, my boy, you'll lose your head there, and that would be a shame because you are still so young. Many kings with mighty armies have taken that road and never got to the end of it, and you want to go all by yourself?" He wrote something on the wall of the cottage and asked the old woman to point it out to the two brave young men who would come by and inquire about him, and to show them the road he was now taking. Then he set off down the road which led to the Earthly Beauty.

After continuing for a while, he came across a Kulshedra with six young. The Kulshedra charged and wanted to devour him, but the boy drew his sabre and slew it and all its young. Suddenly Kordha saw the palace of the Earthly Beauty rising before him. On his way up to it, he came across a spring of cool water at the side of the road and sat down for a rest. From the window of the palace, the Earthly Beauty caught sight of him and said to her Kulshedra, "Look there's a brave young man coming all dressed in white." The Kulshedra replied, "Look out the window and see whether he drinks the water with his hands or on his knees?" The boy knelt down, bowed his head and drank the water without using his hands. The Kulshedra said, "I fear this person." Beside the palace was an appletree with fruit on it. When Kordha got closer to the tree, the Kulshedra looked out to see if he would jump up and pick the biggest apple. And Kordha jumped and plucked the apple off the tree, but did so by using his teeth and not his hands. When the Kulshedra saw this, it said, "Alas, there is no salvation from this boy!" Kordha approached the gate of the palace and entered straight away, calling out, "Hello to those within." "How dare you enter here!" said the Kulshedra menacingly. And the boy answered angrily, "Why shouldn't I? Afer all, you dared to enter!" The Kulshedra was furious and set upon Kordha, but he drew his sabre quickly and slit the Kulshedra into two pieces. And so he won the Earthly Beauty.

Several weeks passed and the kings heard that a brave young man had killed the Kulshedra and had married the Earthly Beauty. They set off in haste and arrived at the place where the road divided into seven. There they asked the old woman who it was that had travelled down the road leading to the Earthly Beauty. When she told them that the brave young man was but a youth sixteen years old, they took counsel and decided to attack him by surprise. They set off and did battle with him for twenty-four days, but they could not defeat him and returned home having achieved nothing. After this initial failure, the kings went back to the old woman and asked her to go to the Earthly Beauty and inquire as to what power the boy possessed or what feats he had accomplished to win her. The Earthly Beauty recounted to the old woman what had happened, "He arrived in a fury," she said, "slew the Kulshedra and won me." Then the old woman told her to ask the boy what the source of his heroic power was. A

few days later, the Earthly Beauty asked Kordha where he got his power, and the poor boy, because he loved her, revealed to her that it came from his sabre. If anyone were to take his sabre away from him, he would be lost. When the old woman heard this, she stole the sabre and threw it into the sea. Kordha became ill and lay down to die. The old woman returned gleefully to her cottage and announced to the kings that they could now win the Earthly Beauty easily without an army and without doing battle at all.

As the kings were about to begin their attack, Kordha's friends noticed blood dripping from the feather and set off right away in search of him. Ylli took Deti by the arm and in no time they were standing beside Kordha, long before the kings arrived. They asked the Earthly Beauty where the sabre was. She told them that someone had stolen it and thrown it into the sea. Deti then rose and plunged into the sea, found the sabre and brought it back. As soon as the sabre was put in front of him, Kordha opened his eyes and said, "Look how long I've been sleeping!" But when he saw his brothers, he realized that he was in danger.

At that moment the kings arrived to do battle once again. They set upon him furiously but since Kordha had regained his health, he managed to fight the kings off once more and they returned home, vanquished. Kordha took the Earthly Beauty and all her possessions and set off with his friends to return home to his mother. When they arrived at the place where the seven roads met, he gave the old woman a present, saying to her, "This is for you because you did me a good deed by throwing my sabre into the sea. Please tell the kings who did battle with me that I have gone away and taken the Earthly Beauty with me. I am going home and if they still miss me, they can come and do battle with me again. I will be waiting for them. Farewell, old woman!" And so they parted.

First they all went together to the king who was Ylli's father-in-law and asked his permission to take his daughter back to their country. The king replied, "You can go wherever you wish, but my son-in-law and my daughter must remain here." "You can think whatever you want, but we're going anyway!" Kordha retorted. And Ylli said to the king straight off, "I am not going to abandon my friends for the sake of the king's daughter." The king was furious and shouted, "I don't care what he wants. You will have to leave him behind!" Kordha, too, became furious. "What do you mean, you don't care? Do you intend to keep our brother Ylli here by force? The man who can keep one of us by force has yet to be born!" The king gave orders to his guards, saying, "Arrest the three of them and throw them into prison!" But Kordha asked the king to call his daughter first so that everyone could hear what she thought about this. The king ordered his daughter to be brought forth. Kordha said to Ylli, "Put one arm around your wife and the other arm around Deti, say farewell to the king and take off." Astounded, the king called his guards and ordered them to post at least four watchmen at every door. Ylli stood up, walked to the middle of the room and said to the king, "Forgive me, father-in-law, and farewell!" Then he jumped out the window with his wife and Deti, and all three disappeared. Only Kordha remained behind. The king rushed to the window to see whether they had been crushed by the fall, because the window from which they had leapt was very high. When he saw that nothing had happened to them, he became so furious that he didn't know what to do. He gave orders to kill Kordha. When Kordha asked why the king wanted to kill him, he replied, "Because it's your fault that my daughter has left me." Kordha then stood up, took the Earthly Beauty by the hand and started to leave. When the watchmen refused to let him pass, he drew his sabre and slew all four of them. And so he escaped and soon joined his friends.

When the king realized what had happened and that his watchmen had been killed, he ordered the army to pursue the brothers and bring them back dead or alive. When the three brothers saw that the army was following them, they stopped and waited for it to approach. The warriors sent a herald to tell them that it would be better for them to return peacefully to the king, for otherwise all the warriors would attack at once and annihilate them. The three

answered, "Do what your king has ordered, for we shall not return." The herald went back and reported that they would not return voluntarily. Then the whole army advanced against the three who were laying in wait for it calmly. When Kordha saw it coming, he rose and shouted, "Hey, wait a moment! What do you think you're doing, friends? You will all be killed if you approach!" Although the soldiers were somewhat put off by his words, they did not believe him and continued their advance.

When Kordha saw that there was nothing more to be done, he told his friends to take the two women and go on ahead. All by himself, he drew his sabre and set upon the army, slaying seven hundred of them including their leader. When the remaining warriors saw that so many men in their ranks had been killed, and that their leader too was dead, they fled in panic. Kordha then departed and soon caught up with his brothers.

They continued their journey and three days later arrived at Kordha's house. "Hello, mother," they said to Kordha's mother. She was confused and asked, "Who are you people calling me mother?" They replied, "Your son, who will arrive any moment, asked us to do so. We made a bet with him that you would not recognize him when he comes." "Oh yes I would," she replied, "I would recognize my son among five hundred men," and began to cry thinking about her boy. Ylli then asked her which of the three was her son. She took a close look at the three boys, compared them and recognized Kordha as her son. She threw her arms around him, kissed him tenderly and embraced the other boys and the two women as well.

The three friends and their wives settled there and after a while, one of them asked, "Are we three friends or just two?" "We are three," Ylli answered. "If we are three, then why do we have only two wives?" Deti jumped up and declared, "That doesn't matter!" But Kordha responded, saying, "We will make you king of the whole country."

And so Deti became king and reigned over the land for a long, long time. And the three remained the best of friends and loved one another like brothers for as long as they lived.

4. The three brothers and the three sisters

Once upon a time there lived three brothers and three sisters. The brothers married their sisters off, one to the sun, one to the moon and one to the south wind. After the sisters had been married for some time, the brothers said to one another, "Let us go and see how our sisters are faring." And so they did. They took some food with them for the journey and set off. After they had gone a ways, darkness fell while there were crossing a plain at the foot of a mountain. They sat down, took out their food and made a fire. When they had finished their meal, the eldest brother said, "You two go to sleep and I will keep watch so that no one comes to rob or kill us." The two younger brothers lay down to sleep and the eldest kept watch.

A Kulshedra, attracted by the light of their fire, approached, was delighted to see the humans and set upon the eldest brother keeping watch, to eat him up. The eldest brother shot and killed the Kulshedra, took out his sabre and chopped off its head, stuffing it into his bag. Then he threw the Kulshedra's body into a ditch so that his brothers would not see it. He sat there for a spell, then he woke his brothers and they set out on their way. They spent the second night at a different place, made a fire again, ate supper and two of them lay down to sleep. That night the second brother kept watch and slew a Kulshedra, too. The third night, the youngest brother said he would keep watch. The two older brothers told him he should sleep instead because he was still too young, but he insisted and finally they allowed him to keep watch. A Kulshedra approached to devour the youngest brother, too. He shot at it but missed, for he was too young. The boy then drew his sword and slew the Kulshedra, but as the beast lay dying, it swished with its tail and put out the fire. The boy tried to relight the fire but did not know what to use. Finally, spying a small fire at the top of the mountain and set off for it.

On his way, he met the Mother of the Night and asked her where she was going. She replied that she was on her way to the dawn. He said to her, "Wait for me to light my fire." She agreed, but he didn't believe her and tied her up so that she could not let the day break. When he got to the fire, he saw a huge cauldron with twelve handles on top of it. He lifted the cauldron off and lit his fire. At that moment the thieves who owned the cauldron arrived. They asked him who he was and he replied, "I am a traveller. My fire went out so I came here to relight it." "How did you manage to lift the cauldron off?" they asked. "There are twelve of us and when we want to lift the cauldron off the fire, each of us has to take a handle and we still have to strain with all our might." "It doesn't seem very heavy to me," retorted the boy and lifted the cauldron again. "You are a good lad," they replied. "We are off to rob the king and you're just the one we need."

So the thirteen of them set out. They broke a hole into the palace wall and entered the courtyard to steal the king's horses. The boy remained outside and thought to himself, "I have never stolen anything. It would be better for me to slay the thieves instead and escape." So he shouted to the thieves, "Come out quickly. Someone has betrayed us." As they crawled through the hole, the boy chopped their heads off one by one. Then he threw his knife into the middle of the king's courtyard, ran away, relit his fire, freed the Mother of the Night, awakened his brothers, and they set out on their way once again.

When the king got up the next morning, he saw the dead men and the knife in the courtyard and wondered what had happened. He gave orders that an inn be built at a crossroads. Anyone who stopped there was not to pay for the night but was instead to tell the story of all the good and bad deeds he had done in his lifetime. Many people stayed at the inn, eating and sleeping there without paying a cent. One day the three brothers happened by and stayed overnight at the inn. When they went to pay the next morning, the inn-keeper said to them, "No

one pays here. Instead, everyone must tell a story from his life.” The eldest brother told the story of what he had done with the Kulshedra. The second brother also told the story of how he had slain a Kulshedra. The youngest brother then began to tell the story of the Kulshedra and the twelve thieves who had wanted to rob the king. The inn-keeper cried out, “So you’re the one the king is looking for!” The two older brothers continued on their way and the third brother was taken to the king. When the king had heard the story, he gave the boy his daughter in marriage.

There was a wedding custom in that land to release a lot of prisoners from jail. One of the prisoners was half man, half iron. When many of the prisoners were released and he was not, the half-iron man began to weep. The king’s son-in-law took pity on the man and begged the king to release him, too, but the king had had him imprisoned for life. The son-in-law begged the king again and finally he gave way and freed the prisoner from his chains. The king’s daughter was standing nearby, and the moment he was released, the half-iron man devoured her and disappeared. The king was so furious that he drew his sword to slay the son-in-law who was to blame for this misfortune. But the son-in-law declared, “I’ll find your daughter and bring her back. But first let me make some iron shoes and an iron cane because I have a long way to walk. Once I am equipped, I will return in one year and bring you your daughter.” When everything was ready, he set off.

That evening, he visited his sister who was married to the sun, and knocked at her door. She approached and asked, “Who is there?” “It is a human,” he replied. She opened the door and rejoiced to see her brother. After a while, her husband the sun arrived. Because the sister was afraid that the sun would devour her brother, she hid him in a chest. When the sun entered, he asked his wife what she had been cooking. “The same as always,” said the wife. “But I can smell meat,” said the sun. “No,” she replied, “there is no meat.” The sun, however, stood up and began looking around for the meat. The wife then said to him, “Eat me rather than my brother who arrived just before you came in.” “Let him out, I won’t eat him.” She got her brother out of the chest and the sun, too, rejoiced at meeting his brother-in-law. Then the brother asked the sun if he knew where a being who was half-man, half-iron lived. “We don’t know,” the two of them answered, “but go and ask the moon.”

The next evening the boy visited the second sister who was married to the moon, but they knew nothing of the half-iron man either.

Then he visited the third sister who was married to the south wind. He asked again if they knew where the half-iron man lived. The south wind answered, “I don’t know, but if you take this road before daybreak tomorrow, you will come across a falcon so huge that it cannot fly. Steal up to it, seize it by the head and say: I’ll kill you if you don’t tell me about the half-iron man. Then it will tell you where the iron man lives and what you must do.” The brother set out at dawn and found the falcon. He did just as his brother-in-law, the south wind, had told him and the falcon said, “I know where he is, but first you must serve me many okas of meat and wait until my wings have grown back, for I am very old.” And so the boy waited until its wings had grown back. He prepared a lot of meat to feed to the falcon on their journey. Their destination was a mountain so high that no man had ever climbed it. The mountain was in another world, and it was there that the half-iron man lived with the king’s daughter.

When they were finally ready, the boy climbed onto the falcon’s back, taking the meat with him, and the bird flew off. They flew higher and higher and he kept feeding the falcon pieces of meat until they got close to the mountain. When the meat was all gone and he had nothing more to feed to the falcon, the bird croaked, “Give me more meat.” “I haven’t got any more. It’s all gone.” “If you don’t give me more meat, I’ll throw you off.” Not knowing what else to do, the boy cut a piece out of the calf of his leg and gave it to the falcon. The next time the bird demanded meat, he cut a piece out of his thigh. Once they had arrived, he clambered off

the falcon. When the falcon saw that the boy was covered in blood, he spit out the pieces of meat and the boy recovered immediately. The boy then went over to one of the palaces nearby and knocked at the door. His wife, the king's daughter, opened and recognized him right away. "My husband!" she exclaimed joyfully. "How did you get here? Who brought you here?" He recounted all he had been through. As they were talking, the half-iron man approached so she quickly hid her husband in the attic. The half-iron man entered and asked, "What have you been cooking?" "The same as always." "But I can smell meat." By chance, he noticed the boy through a hole in the ceiling, went upstairs and sucked his blood out, picking up the skin and bones and throwing them outside. The falcon saw them, recognized them and exclaimed, "That's the boy I carried here! I'll go and get some swallow's milk to bring him back to life." Without delay, it flew off to a place between two mountain peaks where swallow's milk was to be found. It landed, filled its beak and returned, pouring the milk into the boy who recovered immediately. The boy stood up, went back to his wife and told her that she must pretend to be sick. She was to say to the half-iron man, "We have been together for such a long time now and you have never told me the source of your power. I am at death's door. You have nothing more to fear from me." Then he would tell her the source of his power. The boy went off and hid so that the half-iron man could not find and devour him again.

The king's daughter did as they had planned. She pretended to be sick and asked the half-iron man what the source of his power was. "It is in my broom," he told her. The next day when he was out, she burned the broom, but his power remained untouched. The wife pretended to be sick again and asked him once more about his power. This time he said, "My power is in a boar up on the mountain over there. The boar has a silver tusk and in it there is a hare. In the hare's belly are three doves. There lies the source of my power." The half-iron man went back to work. The wife ran out, called her husband and told him what she had heard. The boy climbed the mountain where he met a shepherd tending his sheep and inquired about the whereabouts of a huge boar. "Don't speak so loudly," replied the shepherd. "If the boar hears us it will come and devour us." The boy began talking even louder until the boar heard them and charged into their midst to devour them. But it could not assail the boy because he was carrying a knife. The boar said, "If only I had a stalk of arum to sharpen my teeth with, you'd see something happen!" Then the boy said, "If only I had some fried fish, cake and a cup of wine, you'd see something happen, too!" The shepherd immediately brought the boy and boar what they wanted. When the boar had eaten its arum and the boy his fish and cake, they set upon one another and battled until the boy had slain the boar. He examined its tusks and saw that one of them was indeed made of silver. Breaking it open, he found in it a hare, which he killed, and in the belly of the hare he found the three doves.

The moment the boy slew the boar, the half-iron man fell sick. When the boy killed the hare, the half-iron man became so ill that he could not get up. Then the boy killed two of the doves, took the third one and returned to the iron-man's bed. When he saw the boy approaching, the half-iron man tried to get up but was not able to. And when the boy killed the third dove, the half-iron man died.

The boy took his wife, mounted the falcon, flew back and returned to the king. The king rejoiced to see the two of them and had a splendid feast prepared in their honour.