

There were a lion and a lioness,
And bravely both came forth to fight with him,
The lion first. He smote it with his sword ;
Its face grew coral-hued ; 'twas cloven from head
To midriff, which appalled the lioness,
Yet, like her mate, she came on savagely.
The chieftain smote her on the head, which fell
And rolled upon the sand. Her paws and breast
Were tulip-hued with blood. He bathed himself
And, looking to all-holy God alone
As his Protector, said : " O righteous Judge !
Thou hast destroyed these creatures by my hand."

Meanwhile the troops came up, and Bishútan
Surveyed the lions' breasts and limbs while all
Acclaimed Asfandiyár. That valiant leader
Thereafter went to his pavilion where
They served to that pure prince delicious fare.

§ 4

THE THIRD STAGE

How Asfandiyár slew a Dragon

Asfandiyár then ordered to his presence
The luckless and malevolent Gurgsár,
Gave him three goblets filled with rosy wine,
And, when the wine had cheered that Áhriman,
Addressed him thus and said : " Ill-fated wretch
Tell what thou knowest of tomorrow's sight."

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Gurgsár returned reply : " High-minded king
May evil-doers ne'er approach to harm thee.
Gone hast thou into battle like a fire,
And made a shift to over-pass these bales,
But know'st not what will come on thee tomorrow.
Have mercy then upon thy wakeful fortune,

For when tomorrow thou shalt reach the stage
 A greater task by far confronteth thee.
 There will encounter thee an awesome dragon,
 Whose breath doth draw forth from the deep the fish.
 A flame of fire proceedeth from its maw ;
 Its body is a mountain made of flint.
 Now if thou wilt retrace thy steps 'tis well ;
 My very soul is pleading in this counsel.
 Thou hast not any pity for thyself,
 And by that token came this host together."

Asfandiyár replied : "Thou evil one !
 I mean to drag thee in thy chains with me
 To be a witness that this sharp-clawed dragon
 Escapeth not my trenchant scimitar."

At his command some carpenters were fetched,
 And therewithal some long and heavy beams.
 He had a goodly wooden carriage built
 All set about with swords and with a box,
 Framed by a clever carpenter, whereon
 That seeker of the diadem sat down,
 And harnessed to the break two noble steeds
 To put it to the proof. He drove awhile
 In mail, armed with a falchion of Kábul,
 And helmed for fight. Or ever all was ready
 For battle with the dragon night grew dark,
 As 'twere a negro's face, while Luna showed
 Her crown in Aries. Asfandiyár

Gat on his steed Shúlak ; his noble host
 V. 1593 Marched after him. Next day when it was light,
 And night's black flag was furled, the heroic world-lord
 Assumed his breastplate and resigned the host
 To glorious Bishútan, had break and box,
 Wherein he sat, brought forth, attached two steeds
 Of noble stock, and sped toward the dragon.
 Afar it heard the rumble and beheld
 The prancing of the battle-steeds. It came,

Like some black mountain, and thou wouldst have
said :—

“The sun and moon are darkened.” Its two eyes
Seemed fountains bright with blood, while from its
gullet

Fire issued, and like some dark cavern gaped
Its jaws. It bellowed at Asfandiyár,
Who, seeing the monster, drew his breath and turned
To God for help. The horses strove to 'scape
The dragon's mischief, but it sucked them in,
Them and the break, and in his box dismayed
The warrior. In the dragon's gullet stuck
The sword-blades, and blood poured forth like a sea ;
It could not free its gullet, for the swords
Were sheathed within it. Tortured by the points
And chariot the dragon by degrees
Grew weak, and then the gallant warrior,
Arising from the box, clutched his keen glaive
With lion-grip and hacked the dragon's brains
Till fumes of venom rising from the dust
O'erpowered him ; he tumbled mountain-like,
And swooned away. Then Bishútan and all
His mighty host came up in tears and grief
Lest ill should have befallen Asfandiyár,
The troops all wailed, dismounted, and advanced
Afoot while Bishútan came hurrying,
And poured rose-water o'er the hero's head.
Now when the atheling had oped his eyes
He thus addressed the exalted warriors :—
“The venom's fumes o'ercame me, for the dragon
Ne'er struck me.”

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Rising from the ground like one
Awakening from a drunken drowse he sought
The water, plunged therein, and bathed, bespeaking
A change of raiment from his treasurer.
Then in the presence of all-holy God

He wallowed in the dust and wept, exclaiming :—
 “ Who could have slain that dragon if the World-lord
 Had not assisted him ? ”

His soldiers too
 Bent to the earth and praised the righteous Judge ;
 But thus to find alive Asfandiyár,
 Whom he thought dead, was grievous to Gurgsár.

§ 5

THE FOURTH STAGE

How Asfandiyár slew a Witch

Asfandiyár pitched by the water-side
 His tent-enclosure while the troops camped round him.
 He set forth wine, called boon-companions,
 Rose to his feet, and drank to Sháh Gushtásp,
 Commanding too to bring Gurgsár who came
 Before him, quaking. Then Asfandiyár
 Gave him to drink three cups of royal wine,
 Spake laughingly with him about the dragon,
 And said : “ Thou worthless fellow ! now behold
 How with its breath that dragon sucked us in !
 When I go forward for another stage
 What greater toils and troubles are in store ? ”

Gurgsár replied : “ O conquering prince ! thou hast
 The fruit of thy good star. When thou alightest
 Tomorrow at the stage a witch will come
 To greet thee. She hath looked on many a host,
 But quailed at none. She turneth waste to sea
 At will and maketh sunset at mid day.
 Men call her Ghúl, O Sháh ! Face not her toils
 In these thy days of youth. Thou hast o’ercome
 The dragon ; now turn back ; thou shouldst not bring
 Thy name to dust.”

The atheling replied :—