

## **Kyrilo the Tanner**

Once upon a time in the city of Kiev there lived a knightly prince. There also existed at that time a dragon. Every year the people had to send him tribute in the person of a youth or a maiden. And so in due time, it came the turn of the daughter of this prince to be sacrificed. There was nothing to be done. If the townsfolk had to pay tribute so did the prince; therefore he sent the princess to the dragon.

Now she was so beautiful that the dragon fell in love with her. She on her part began to flatter him and one day said to him, "Is there anyone in the world who is able to overcome you?" "Well," he replied, "there is a certain man who lives beyond the Dnieper River. When he makes a fire in his house the smoke rises up to the very heavens and when he comes out to the Dnieper to soak his hides, for he is a tanner, he doesn't carry one but twelve hides at a time. And when they become saturated with water in the Dnieper, I have tried to seize them to see if he'd be able to pull them out. But he doesn't care: when he seizes them he almost pulls me with the hides onto the bank of the river. So that is the only man I am afraid of."

The princess decided one day to send some news home and to try to gain her freedom through the prince. But she was all alone except for her pigeon. She used to feed him even when she was in Kiev. She thought the matter over and finally she wrote to her father:

"There is, dear father, a man in Kiev called Kyrilo the Tanner. I implore you to find out amongst the older people if he doesn't want to fight with the dragon and so free me, poor soul, from slavery. Appeal to him, dear father, with words and gifts, and don't let him be offended by tactless behaviour!"

This is what she wrote, and she fastened the note under the pigeon's wing and let him fly out the window. The pigeon took flight and arrived home in the courtyard. It so happened that the prince's children were running around the yard and they saw the pigeon.

"Papa, papa," they said. "Don't you see? Our sister's pigeon has returned."

At first the prince was happy, then he became thoughtful, saying, "No doubt that cursed scoundrel has destroyed my child!" And so he coaxed the pigeon to himself, look under its wing and saw the note. He took it and read it. At once he called all his elders to him. "Is there amongst us a man called Kyrilo the Tanner?"

"There is, Prince. He lives above the Dnieper River."

"How can we approach him so as not to offend him and yet get him to obey us?"

So, with some difficulty, they talked amongst themselves and sent him the elders. They arrived at the house, opened the door slowly and were frightened at what they saw: the tanner himself, seated on the floor with his back to them. He was tanning twelve hides with his bare hands and there was seen only his great white beard shaking. Suddenly one of the messengers coughed. The tanner was startled and the twelve hides cracked. He turned to them and they bowed low and told him that the prince had sent them with a request. But he didn't even look at or listen to them. He was furious because of the twelve hides that had been spoiled. Again they begged and pleaded with him. They knelt down before him. It was no use! So they finally left with heads bent down. What was to be done? The prince was very sad and so were all the elders.

"Maybe we should send some young people to plead." So they did. But the young people couldn't do anything, either. Kyrilo didn't speak and only snorted. He was still upset about the hides.

The prince thought things over and sent to him some little children. When they arrived they began to plead with the tanner. They knelt before him and started to cry. Kyrilo couldn't stand it any longer and he too wept, saying, "Well now, I'll do it for you." And he went to see the prince. "Give me twelve barrels of tar and twelve wagons of hemp," he told the prince. He bound the hemp around his body, smeared it well with tar, took a cudgel that weighed around three hundred and sixty pounds and went to meet the dragon. And the monster said to him, "Well now, Kyrilo. Did you come to fight or to make peace?"

"What do you mean 'to make peace'? To fight with you, you cursed scoundrel!" replied the tanner.

They started to fight so hard that the very earth rumbled. No sooner did the dragon start to run and grab Kyrilo with his fangs than a piece of tar would come off. And every time he rushed up to him, he would tear off a hank of hemp. But Kyrilo would bang him hard with his huge cudgel and drive him into the ground. And soon the dragon became flaming hot. While he was rushing down to the Dnieper River in order to have a drink and to jump into the water to cool himself a bit, the tanner had already wound himself with some hemp and smeared it over with tar. And so the cursed scoundrel would jump out of the water and come after the tanner. Then Kyrilo would beat him until the air would echo with the sounds. They fought and fought till smoke and sparks were to be seen. Kyrilo made it still hotter for the dragon just as a blacksmith does with a ploughshare in a forge, till he spluttered and hawked, the cursed scoundrel. And beneath him the very ground groaned.

In the hills above, the townspeople stood as though lifeless, with clenched fists, waiting to see what was going to happen, when all of a sudden there was a loud bang: the dragon had crashed to

the ground. The earth shook. The people standing on the hills clapped their hands, crying out,  
“Good for you, Kyrilo! Good for you, tanner!”

And Kyrilo, having killed the dragon, freed the princess and returned her to the prince, who  
didn't know how to thank him. But from that time on they called the spot where Kyrilo lived  
“Tanner's Place.”