Pregnant With Meaning: Translations and Adaptations of Italian Fairy Tales

by

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Introduction

“The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it.”

-Tuscan proverb

Much of what we read today is a translation of another text. Particularly in the educational world, many works are available in languages other than the one they were originally written in, and we often take for granted the reincarnated material that we are able to have access to thanks to the process of translation. In fact, we are dependent on translations, because despite the great amount of globalization in various sectors throughout the world, the fact remains that there exist thousands of languages. Along with this abundance of languages comes a variety of kinds of translations. Perhaps the most prevalent are literary translations, which allow people to enjoy an array of literature from around the world, regardless of language barriers. There are also, for example, journalistic translations, which serve a smaller but nonetheless crucial community, and the instantaneous translation of speech that takes place in institutions such as the United Nations. What unites all translations, however, is the absolute need for a context, be it circumstantial or cultural, because without one the translated text cannot retain a true and accurate representation of the meaning found in the original.

The most basic definition of a translation is the rendering of a text in a language different from the one in which it was originally written. For the purposes of this essay, I will call this a ‘direct translation’. The most straightforward kind of direct translation would be a wholly literal, word-for-word and sentence-for-sentence translation. However, that in and of itself is problematic, because a translation must inevitably do more than just transfer words from one language to another. In order for the text to make any sense in the target language, the translator must also assume the role of interpreter in order to understand the meaning of the original text and transfer that meaning to the new text. This means that part of being a translator is being a reader –
that is, a translator must read a text critically and carefully in order to grasp the full meaning, and thereby imbue the new text with that meaning.

Perhaps a short example of a ‘direct translation’ would be useful here. The following passage is from a story in Italo Calvino’s collection of Italian fairy tales, *Fiabe Italiane*, entitled *L’arte di Franceschiello*, or *Franceschiello’s Trade*: “E Franceschiello si mise a batter le strade con la compagnia. Dopo un anno, il capo morì, e fu fatto capo Franceschiello. Un giorno commandò a tutta la compagnia d’andare in giro e restò solo a guardia del bottino.”¹ My translation of this passage would be: ‘And Franceschiello took to the streets with the group. After a year, the captain died, and Franceschiello was made captain. One day he commanded the whole group to take a walk and he stayed by himself to guard the loot.’ One of the interpretations in this passage involves my decision to render ‘si mise a batter le strade’ as ‘took to the streets’, an idiom which is somewhat different in the two languages. In the context of the sentence and the story overall, however, ‘took to the streets’ seemed the most appropriate, instead of ‘hit the road’ or simply ‘set off’, partially because of what follows in the storyline – this group is a group of bandits, and ‘took to the streets’ has a certain negative connotation which reflects the trade Franceschiello learns from them – and partially because the phrase suggests motivation or purposefulness in a way that ‘hit the road’ does not. Another example of an interpretive decision I made is my choice to render “andare in giro” as “take a walk”. Literally the phrase would translate roughly as “to go around.” “Take a walk” seems appropriate not only because it sounds more natural, but also because in everyday American slang the phrase can have a “get out of here” connotation, which, considering what Franceschiello proceeds to do after the group leaves, fits quite well. Though for the most part, the translation of this passage is a very ‘direct’ one in that it primarily involves basic translation of verbs in

¹ Italo Calvino, *Fiabe Italiane* Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1956. 571. For full text, see Appendix, p. 97-98.
certain tenses and nouns and adjectives, there is some interpretation and adjustment necessary (certain word orders, for example).

A direct translation is not the only kind of work that can be born of an original text, however, and it is important to acknowledge and examine some of the other kinds of works that can arise. It may be useful to think of a direct translation as one end of a translation spectrum, and if that is the case, what kind of work would fall at the other end of such a spectrum? I would argue that an adaptation, that is, a refashioning or a rewriting of a work in a much looser manner than a direct translation would allow, marks the other end of the spectrum of translated texts. For example, *West Side Story*, a musical production which then became a very popular movie as well, is based loosely on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* story. This adaptation of the original story fits many of the same criteria that one might see in the translation ideas mentioned above: it presents the story to a new audience, keeping parts of the original themes and plotlines, and can help maintain the important messages in Shakespeare’s work alive in a contemporary society. Between these two kinds of works lie many other kinds of translations and adaptations, ones that may result from various liberties that a translator or editor might take, for instance. The direct translation and the adaptation, though they fall on opposite ends of this ‘spectrum’, still have some interesting parallels and commonalities, such as the retention of overarching ideas, themes, and morals found in the original work from which they are taken.

To what extent is a translation an original work? To what extent is it merely a reflection of the original text? What does a translation entail, and how interdependent are the original and the translation upon one another? What is the role of the translator here? Does that role change depending on the translation at hand? In this project, I have chosen to focus on direct translations and adaptations, and so the rest of this essay will deal primarily with those two ends of the spectrum. First I will examine the give-and-take relationship between an original work and its translation, as a result of the mutual
dependence between the original and the translation. I will argue that almost any text is ‘fertile’, in the sense that it has the inherent ability to be translated. Moreover, I will explore the notion of a work “giving birth” to a translated text, and the implications thereof. From there I will focus on the role of the translator in this filial relationship, examining the different ways in which a translator is a part of the process of creating a text in a different language. Finally, I will discuss the translation and adaptation processes that I experienced while translating and rewriting several fairy tales from Italo Calvino’s collection Fiabe Italiane (Italian Fairy Tales). I will discuss the importance of fairy tales as cultural items and the challenges and intricacies I faced in bringing those tales into English, both as direct translations and in their rewritten forms.

The translation and the original text from which the translation arises are entirely dependent upon each other. By exposing a new culture or group of people to a text which they might not otherwise be able to enjoy, the original receives another chance to be appreciated, and in some cases a translation can be responsible for keeping the original ‘alive’, in the sense of keeping it widely read and known even after the original is no longer as popular. For example, I recently presented one of the tales, and nobody in the room had even heard of the collection of tales before, much less read the story. When I shared the translated text with this audience, I was in some small way helping to keep the original alive – an illustration of one way in which the original text is served by any translation which comes from it.

At the same time, however, a translation could not exist without the original having preceded it. Much of the literature and theory which focuses on translation and on the relationship between a text and its translated counterpart uses the sort of vocabulary that has been used here, in this essay: that of creating and sustaining life, production and reproduction, and death. Howard Needler writes in his essay “Translator’s Hell” that “the life of languages extends into the past, as well as the
future.”² Similarly, Walter Benjamin writes in his “The Task of the Translator” that “just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife.”³ Benjamin’s point reminds one of traducianism, the religious concept which “denotes the materialistic doctrine of the transmission of the soul by the organic process of generation.”⁴ Traducianism, that is, posits that the soul of a person arises from the souls of those who create him. The same can be said for a translation – its soul, its life, comes directly from the original text. A translation, then, is reliant on the original text for its very existence. More generally, any piece of text, with the possible exception of religious scriptural texts (and that is a category which is probably a little too complicated and loaded to take on in this particular forum) must undeniably be influenced by other texts. The extent to which a given text is derived from others is often very difficult to gauge, but nonetheless it seems unlikely that a text could be written without the conscious or inadvertent influences of other texts, because any writer of any kind must also be a reader, and therefore must have read works which – whether consciously or not – played a role in that writer’s own works.

According to Umberto Eco’s definition in his Dire Quasi La Stessa Cosa, a translation and the original from which it comes are entirely and inextricably intertwined:

…una buona definizione (ispirata al buon senso) del concetto di traduzione “ideale” tra due lingue: il testo B nella lingua Beta è la traduzione del testo A nella lingua Alfa se, ritraducendo B nella lingua Alfa, il testo A2 che si ottiene ha in qualche modo lo stesso senso del testo A. Naturalmente, dobbiamo definire cosa si intende per “in qualche modo”, e per “lo stesso senso”, ma quello che per ora mi pare importante tenere presente è che una traduzione, anche se sbagliata, permette di tornare in qualche modo al testo di partenza. [….a good definition (inspired, in the good sense of the word) of the concept of an

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“ideal” translation between two languages: *text B in language Beta is the translation of text A in language Alpha if, retranslating B into language Alpha, text A2 which results has in some manner the same sense as text A.* Naturally, we must define what we mean by “in some manner” and by “the same sense”, but for now what seems important to keep in mind is that a translation, even if it is incorrect, allows one to return *in some manner* to the text from which it came. (My translation)

That is to say, a translation’s existence and function are based on the existence and function of another text. Does Eco’s assertion here imply not only the dependence of a translation on the original for its meaning, but also the idea that a translation is simply a reflection of the original, a reference back to the previous work from which it came? A translation, Eco writes, “allows one to return…to the text from which it came.” Though this does imply that a translation is in some way a reflection of the original text, perhaps Eco’s point was simply that it is important to keep fairly strict boundaries on what constitutes a translation.

Let us for a moment return to the connection between the vocabulary of language and translation and the vocabulary of biological reproduction. It has been noted that there are several striking overlaps between the two: one can speak of production and reproduction; the conjugation of a verb; active verbs and passive ones. Furthermore, one can think of the translation as being ‘born’ of the original. As the concept of traducianism suggests, the soul of the translation – like the soul of a child – is born of the soul of the original text – like the soul of that child’s parent. It seems that the relationship between the original and the translation is much like that of a parent and child: complex, inextricably linked, and reflective of one another. This analogy leads one to the question which this essay attempts to address: to what extent is a translation or a child an original, unique, independent creation; and to what extent is it merely a reflection of the original work or its parent? Furthermore, what, if any, role does a translator play in this analogy?

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First of all, let us elaborate on this analogy to see how far we can actually take it. On a purely physical level, a child usually, to some degree or another, resembles the parent – certain genes are passed along from parent to child, and so the child often reflects certain physical characteristics of the parent. Similarly, a direct translation of an original does, to varying degrees, reflect the original. It is probably structurally similar – if the original was told in verse, the translation may well follow the same pattern; if the original is divided into chapters, the translation will also have chapter markers at the same places in the story. In other words, if someone who did not understand either the language of the original or that of the translation were to look at the two side by side, he or she might very well be able to see, without even reading the words, that the two resemble one another and might have some sort of connection, much as a passerby on the street might notice that a woman and the child she is with have similar traits and could come to the conclusion that the two might very well be biologically related.

As a child is made up of the genetic material of his or her father and mother – half from each – one could argue that the child is a mere reflection of the parents: nothing that the child starts out with is uniquely his or her own, because traits (physical as well as others) are inherited from the parents, who inherited their traits from their parents, and so on. Of course, the specific combination of dominant and recessive genes are entirely individual in each person, thereby creating an entirely unique person, but the genetic material from which someone is made is a combination of the genetic material passed along from that person’s parents. The analogy with a translation and an original text fits well here: the material of the original text is what is used to create the translation, and from that perspective the translation is merely a reflection of what has already been produced before. One major difference, of course, is that the material is transferred into a new language, as if the DNA of the original were in some way replaced by material in a different genetic code. Furthermore, as the translation contains its own unique
combination of idioms, sentence structures, and particular cultural context, it can also be considered a unique creation.

There is also another way in which the analogy can be understood. The vast majority of people in this world are ‘capable’ of procreation – that is, they are biologically able to reproduce and pass on their genetic material. Of course, not everyone chooses to do so, but nonetheless, the capacity is there. On a similar note, I would argue that any document, any creation, any text, theoretically has the capacity to be translated. There are, of course, complications with many translations, as they often have culturally specific references and ideas which do not translate well, as well as innumerable linguistic difficulties. The process of translation, and its challenges – cultural, linguistic, or otherwise – fall to the translator, whose role in the translation-as-offspring analogy is both multifarious and dependent on the specific translation at hand.

If a translation is the child of an original piece of work, what does that make the translator? If we can posit that the translation is already embedded in the original text, and needs only to be developed and coaxed out, the translator can be thought of as a midwife, while also embodying some of the duties of a gynecologist and a pediatrician. The translator is like the midwife in that he or she is responsible for caring for the parent for the duration of the pregnancy, and then for coaxing the baby out safely at the proper time. The translator, in this initial stage of the translation’s existence, is focused on understanding the basic arc of the text, translating words and phrases and sentences from one language to another, and bringing them together into a cohesive work. In both cases, there is an understanding that the translation already exists within the original, at least as an idea or a possibility, and that the translator’s job is to bring that idea to fruition. Furthermore, a midwife is responsible for understanding the baby’s medical needs in a way neither the parent nor the child necessarily could, making the midwife a sort of bridge or mediator between the two parties. Similarly, the translator must use his
or her knowledge of both languages in order to help create a successful and accurate translation.

One example of the role of translator as a bridge arises from my own translation work. When translating a Calvino fairy tale, I came across the concept of *i confetti*, the sweets and treats once sent out to announce a wedding in rural Italian towns. How do I go about translating the concept, when it is mentioned regularly but off-handedly in a fairy tale, without going into a lengthy excursus in the middle of the story? (Not unlike the excursus I am taking now to explain this concept through this example.) One possibility of course involves employing parenthetical references, or footnotes, or endnotes, but in the context of a fairy tale, as in this particular example, it seems more out of place than anything else to employ a tool usually reserved for much more formal, analytical texts. I needed, therefore, to find a smooth, concise way to describe *i confetti*. I considered omitting the concept altogether in the translated version – though *i confetti* is mentioned often, it is not a key part of the storyline. But that seemed to overstep a certain boundary. I thought about using a long, cumbersome but detailed phrase such as “the confectionery sweets accompanying wedding announcements”, and I considered translating it simply as “sweets.” I finally settled on a compromise, “bridal sweets”, because I wanted a concise phrase that would include both the matrimonial significance and the fact that it is a candy of some sort. Though the distribution of *i confetti* does not exist as a practice in the current traditions of marriage in America, the gist of this phrase (in the context of the tale) is immediately understood by a reader, without having to invest in a digression from the narrative to explain any cultural or historical significances.

The translator also holds another important, in some ways more central, role: that of, to continue the analogy, adoptive parent. It is the translator’s job, once the translation has been ‘born’ – that is, initially extracted from the original – to imbue it with coherence, with cultural context, and to create a successful and completed work based on
what initially came out of the original text. This process of formation is very akin to raising a child, and though in a direct translation the translator cannot be thought of as a biological parent (because the work’s concept did not originate from the translator) it plays a very significant role in the development of the text. As such, the translator should have some sort of parental role. For example, the relationship between Franceschiello and the priest in the tale *L’arte di Franceschiello*, or *Franceschiello’s Trade* is a very casual, familiar one, and often times Franceschiello and the priest call each other by friendly nicknames, such as “compare” and “comparuccio.” The translation of those terms was not easy, because there is often no precisely parallel word, and so it became a question of creating a certain tone in the story, or at least in their relationship, as opposed to a question of vocabulary. I used a variety of nicknames, such as ‘little buddy’, ‘my lad’, and ‘pal’, keeping them all relatively casual in an attempt to recreate the familiar, almost jocular relationship between Franceschiello and the priest. By making those decisions, my role as translator was not only to move the words from Italian to English, but to set a tone of conversation between Franceschiello and the priest. In doing so, I helped to shape the tale as a whole, give it coherence and fluidity, and in some way was its “parent” as a result.

These roles of the translator are applicable mainly, though not exclusively, to direct translations. That is to say, to those translations which focus on bringing a text as wholly as possible, from one language and culture to another, losing the least amount of meaning along the way. On the other end of the spectrum, however, lies a different kind of work, that of adaptation. This process allows for much more creative license, because its goal is not necessarily to represent the original work as accurately as possible in a new context. Rather, an adaptation often strives to create something new while using some elements of the original work on which it is based. Although the process of

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adaptation is decidedly different from the translation process, there are some fundamental similarities between a direct translation and an adaptation. One such similarity demands a broad definition of ‘language’, in which language is entirely a reflection of a certain culture and not necessarily dictated by an alphabet or specific set of vocabulary. As Ferdinand de Saussure writes, languages are “…quite separate from speech: a man who loses the ability to speak none the less retains his grasp of the language system, provided he understands the vocal signs he hears.”7 Saussure also says that:

The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is also a body of necessary conventions adopted by society to enable members of society to use their language faculty. Language in its entirety has many different and disparate aspects. It lies astride the boundaries separating various domains. It is at the same time physical, physiological and psychological. It belongs both to the individual and to society. No classification of human phenomena provides any single place for it, because language as such has no discernible unity.8

An adaptation, then, could transpose a work from one set of conventions to another, while still keeping the same “social product” – that is, the same “vocal signs,” and in that way the process mirrors that of a direct translation. In other words, though the vocabulary is quite different in West Side Story from what it is in Romeo and Juliet because they are set in different cultural contexts, they were both originally written in English, and so West Side Story still falls on the translation spectrum, albeit at the adaptation end of things.

In the case of an adaptation, the translator undertakes the role of biological parent of the text being created. As a child receives his or her genetic material from the parents, the creation of a new piece of text, based partially on the original work and partially on the translator’s own ideas and imagination, is the “child” of these two

8 Ibid., 9-10.
sources. As Walter Benjamin writes, “The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational.” When a translator becomes a poet, to use Benjamin’s words, he or she must move from being “derivative” and “ultimate” and instead become “primary” – that is to say, one of the individuals responsible for the actual creation of the person or text in question. Before the translator is the parent, he or she is the midwife, as was explored earlier. The role of the midwife, then, in some way functions as the intermediary between the text in its parental role (in that it holds in itself the possible translations) and the translator in his or her parental role (in that he or she contributes in a significant way to the creation and completion of the translated text).

There is, however, a respect in which the familial analogy falls short. We know that any child is the product of half of his father’s genetic material and half of his mother’s, but we cannot make any similar formula when discussing a rewritten translation. The precision of genetics does not apply to an adaptation in the same way that it does to a child. Nevertheless, the translator’s role in an adaptation is much more like that of an adoptive parent, whose influence and input into the child’s existence and life can be as central as the contributions of the parent who gave birth to the child.

Finally, it seems important to acknowledge one more participant in the creation of a piece of text: the reader. What power or influence does the reader have on the translation? Other than the translator’s or writer’s expectations of a reader’s reactions and ideas, the reader can color the piece of text in many different ways. Reader-response theory is a school of thought devoted to the role of the reader in a text’s life, and one that is necessary to address here. According to Cuddon’s Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, “Fundamentally, a text, whatever it be (poem, short story, essay, scientific exposition) has no real existence until it is read. Its meaning is *in potentia*, so to speak. A reader completes its meaning by reading it. The reading is complementary; it

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9 Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”, 77.
actualizes potential meaning. Can the reader, then, be thought of as another parent for a piece of text, specifically for a translation? Cuddon’s definition of the reader’s role is very reminiscent of the role a parent or set of parents might play, giving existence to something that was potentially there all along, waiting to be actualized. However, this is complicated by the fact that a translation is a text which is directly born of another text, and so, to say that the reader is the one who breathes life into the text would perhaps imply that a translation is somehow “born” twice: first it is conceived and coaxed out and developed in a union between the original text and the translator; and then it is given life again when a reader imbues it with a meaning.

The translation is not a work that stands entirely on its own, nor is it something that relies solely on the existence of a text or a person. The roles of the original work, the translator, – in several different capacities – and the reader all contribute to the final product of the translation, be it a direct translation, an adaptation, or anything in between. In my work on this project, I have researched translation theory and history, but I have also tried my hand at some of my own amateur translations and adaptations. This was a very challenging and unique process for me. I had taken on some translation projects before, but they were low-key, generally very informal translations in which the main lesson I learned was that the translation machines available online, though quite useful for looking up individual words, are laughably terrible at understanding the meaning of a sentence, phrase, or overall context (“stakeholder” translated to “tenedor,” the Spanish word for fork; my favorite translation story to date). That is primarily because the machine cannot be a translator and a reader in the same way that I, or any other human being, can. The combination of roles, of reading the original and using that knowledge to create a translation, is central to the entire translation process.

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To return to the familial analogy, a machine cannot be a parent. Even with today’s technology, which allows for some fairly complex fertilization processes thanks to certain machines and scientific advances, a machine cannot nurture a child inside of it, cannot give birth to the child, and cannot contribute to the child’s well-being as that child grows up. Similarly, a machine cannot accurately translate an entire text, because it cannot take on all the roles a translator must fulfill. It cannot understand the meaning of an original text and transfer that meaning to the translation; it can only examine individual words or short phrases and move them, unthinkingly and without context, from one language to the other. One of the most central functions whose absence a machine from being able to understand meaning is an ability to take a context into account. In my stakeholder-to-fork example, for instance, the machine did not have any way to know that the text was about Latino students’ performance on standardized tests in the Massachusetts public school system, because the machine cannot read the text as a whole to grasp its meaning; it can only read individual words and phrases and use some sort of automated inter-lingual dictionary to transfer the words from one language to another. The context, however, is crucial in order to properly transfer the meaning, and that is not something that a machine can be taught to connect to the translation process.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, I translated seven fairy tales, taken from Italo Calvino’s collection entitled Fiabe Italiane, from Italian into English. This idea came to me after I read Angela Carter’s collection of revised Grimm fairy tales, The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories. Fairy tales seemed to me an especially intriguing and different way of gaining insight into a culture. They represented for me a set of anthropological gems: fairy tales are bits and pieces of the culture which are condensed into a few pages and told and retold over generations. They can play a big role in family life, both as bedtime stories and as the product of various oral traditions passed on from parent to child, though often they are rather grisly in their original version and are toned
down for younger audiences. In any case, they seemed to me an important representation of a certain culture at a certain time, and as Calvino writes in the introduction to the collection: “Taken all together, they offer, in their oft-repeated and constantly varying examinations of human vicissitudes, a general explanation of life preserved in the slow ripening of rustic consciences; these folk stories are the catalog of the potential destinies of men and women, especially for that stage in life when destiny is formed, i.e., youth, beginning with birth, which itself often foreshadows the future; then the departure from home, and, finally, through the trials of growing up, the attainment of maturity and the proof of one’s humanity.”

The entire collection paints a picture of what the culture was like at that particular time, while each individual story portrays certain values, certain traditions, certain religious beliefs or superstitions. A part of translating these stories, then, is to keep alive not only the original text, but also the very culture found in the text. Most people are familiar with a set of fairy tales from their own culture, and so they can easily relate to the significance of these stories, even if only to contrast the stories they grew up hearing with the ones in Calvino’s collection. A translation is important precisely because different readers come from diverse cultures, and may very well not be able to appreciate the stories in their original Italian.

Overall, I chose the stories I translated simply on the basis of what appealed to me. I found a good deal of repetition in many of Calvino’s stories, so I tried to choose fairly different stories. For the most part, however, I looked for stories which struck me as ones that I could see myself adapting and rewriting in some way – either I somehow identified with a main theme or the protagonist, or it reminded me of other texts which could play a role in its refashioning, or the story was so bizarre and absurd that I had to investigate it further. The first story I translated is entitled Il Vaso di Maggiorana, or The Pot of Marjoram, the moral of which warns against taking revenge. I suppose what

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drew me to this story was the challenge of translating rhyming couplets – the two protagonists speak to each other exclusively in rhyming verse, though the narrated parts are in prose. The main challenge, of course, was to come up with rhymes in English, but even keeping the specific tone of the original dialogue – playful, competitive, and poetic – proved to be more difficult than I’d anticipated. A friend pointed out that the story reminded her of an “anything you can do, I can do better” relationship, and I kept that song in mind as I translated (and, to some degree, as I rewrote). The relationship between the two characters developed in my mind in a way that it did not develop in the story. I found the ending of the story to be anti-climactic and frustrating, and so my refashioning tells the story of their relationship after the end of the original tale, which I also changed.

_Bene Come Il Sale, or As Dear as Salt_, starts out like so many of the tales in Calvino’s collection: a king with his three daughters. The opening of the story echoes parts of Shakespeare’s _King Lear_, in that a king’s youngest (and preferred) daughter refuses to comply with her father’s wish to be told how much each of his daughters cares for him, though in the fairy tale she does declare the depth of her love, but not to his satisfaction. Much like Cordelia, Zizola, the rebellious daughter, leaves the kingdom, and the rest of the tale follows her own adventures and eventual happy reunion with her father. I was struck by several aspects of this story, but overall I felt that the least developed and potentially most interesting part of the story was Zizola’s adventure outside the kingdom, and the way she is objectified by the prince whom she eventually falls in love with and marries. This notion of her objectification stems directly from the Carter rewritings of the fairy tales, many of which emphasize the almost inanimate, wholly materialistic role of the woman. Though Zizola clearly has a mind of her own in the beginning of this story, and sticks to her beliefs stubbornly in the face of her father’s outrage, her bizarre connection with the chandelier and the prince’s decision to ‘marry’ the chandelier seem to make Zizola nothing more than a beautiful object. This
was infuriating to me as a reader, but I felt that rewriting a version in which she had agency throughout the entire story would not make for as triumphant and satisfying a tale. So instead I decided to go in the opposite direction: I gave Zizola even less independence and agency in the physical sense, and compensated with her strong narrative voice and ultimate victory at the end of the story. In a sense, then, I created a “translation” of the story: though I changed many of the facts, I was only emphasizing what I believed was already implicit in the plot, realizing the potential that lay in Zizola’s character.

*La Ragazza Mela, or The Apple Maiden,* is apparently one of the most well known tales in the collection, though I didn’t realize this when I originally chose to translate the story. There is good reason for its popularity: the story is ripe (no pun intended) with powerful symbolism as well as a familiar cast of fairy tale characters – two neighboring kings, an evil step-mother, a beautiful but cursed princess. The theme I found most interesting in this story, though perhaps it was not the main one, was the idea of privacy. I consider privacy to be a relatively modern idea, and so for it to be featured in an age-old fairy tale was striking to me. I decided to retell the story from a modern perspective, focusing on the relationship between a parent and child and the theme of privacy. This was the story which held the most personal aspects for me: though most of the events which take place did not happen during my own adolescence, much of the background and the relationship between the parents and their child, in my refashioning, particularly between the mother and the narrator, is somewhat autobiographical. This was the story I felt most connected to, not because I somehow considered myself an “apple maiden”, cursed and inanimate, but rather because of the theme of privacy and boundaries, which seems a crucial one for most adolescents to struggle with. In my refashioning, I attempted to keep some of what I found to be the most powerful images and moments from the original tale, though my focus had shifted the primary relationship in the story from that of prince and princess to that of mother
and child. The translation analogy discussed earlier of parent and child seems a useful way to describe what I attempted to do in my refashioning: as I read and translated *La Ragazza Mela*, I saw another potential reading of it, another way to approach the text, and that was what I tried to coax out in my refashioning. The result was of a different generation, a much more modern cultural context, but it still contained some of the ideas, themes, and images found in its parent text.

The last story I chose to write a refashioning of is *L’assassino senza mano*, or, *The One-Handed Murderer*. Besides the absurdity of the tale, what drew me to this story was that its main female protagonist reminded me so much of the women who played important roles in Angela Carter’s refashionings. They were women who did not have much of their own agency, despite the fact that the audience reading the story clearly saw how potentially strong and independent the women could be. The main character in this story is constantly haunted by a figure whom only she sees as evil; everyone else falls for his disguises and his charm, but she knows who he really is and what he is capable of doing to her. This was one of the only stories in the Calvino collection that I found which so clearly allies the reader (at least, the modern reader) with one particular character. When I refashioned the story, I wanted to emphasize how much the battle the protagonist was fighting was all her own. Many times throughout the original story, she tries to tell those around her of her troubles, but nobody listens to her and finally she must take matters into her own hands. I refashioned the story through a psychological lens in an attempt to make her battle and her “victory” truly her own.

*La figlia del sole*, or *The Sun’s Daughter*, *L’arte di Franceschiello*, or *Franceschiello’s Trade*, and *San Antonio dà il fuoco all’uomo*, or *Saint Anthony Gives Fire to Man*, were the three tales that I translated but did not adapt. Quite frankly, I chose to translate these because I found them enjoyable and different. *The Sun’s Daughter* brought in an interesting pagan element of man’s relationship with the heavens, specifically with the Sun, and the fact that the relationship was a sexual one but
not seen as favorable by the characters in the story also struck me. I’m not quite sure what to make of the story of Franceschiello’s Trade. It seems that the moral would be, whatever you do, do it well, even if what you do is steal and pillage. The story promotes craftiness and wit, but in the context of cheating others and taking advantage, and so it seems to be one of the less moralistic stories. It is certainly entertaining, and one of the only stories of its kind that I have come across, but I found it difficult to grasp the values or traditions being emphasized in the tale. Finally, Saint Anthony Gives Fire to Man focuses on the netherworld, which I found fascinating as a description of how Hell might be imagined. Furthermore, the team of the saint and the pig (the choice of animal is in and of itself intriguing as the pig is often seen as a symbol of the devil) makes for an amusing duo.\(^\text{12}\) Again, there is an emphasis on the importance of wit, of using one’s brain instead of force in order to accomplish a desired end.

This thesis, then, consists of three major sections: a set of seven translations from Calvino’s collection of Itlaian fairy tales; a set of four adaptations, based, to varying degrees, on some of the directly translated stories; and this essay, which attempts to address some overarching questions surrounding translation and my own battles in the world of translation and adaptation. As I worked on these stories, I found that I was fulfilling all the roles a translator does. There were times in which I felt that I was simply putting together a creation which already existed between the lines of the Italian fairy tales, and that my job was to conjugate verbs correctly and search for the best English verb meaning ‘what a pig does with its nose when it is digging around in the dirt’. Many times, however, I also felt that I was somehow giving a part of myself to these fairy tales. In his introduction to these stories, Calvino writes of a Tuscan proverb which says, “The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it.” He goes on to add, “In

\(^{12}\) This could very well be a reference to “Porco Sant’Antonio” from Dante Alighieri’s Paradiso 29, line 124.
other words, its value consists in what is woven and rewoven into it.”\textsuperscript{13} Though Calvino was not speaking about translation when he made reference to that proverb, I think it reflects perfectly how crucial every role in the translation process is, particularly in the case of fairy tales. The original text, the translator, – in his or her capacity as midwife, cultural bridge, and adoptive parent – and the reader all add to the new text, helping to create the next generation of fairy tales to be retold to children before bed.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, xxi.
Once upon a time there was a spice vendor. He was a widower and he had a dear, lovely daughter named Stella Diana. Every day, Stella Diana went to her teacher’s house for a sewing lesson. The teacher’s house had a terrace filled with pots of flowers and plants, and every afternoon Stella Diana would water the marjoram plant, of which she was especially fond. Facing the terrace was a balcony from which a young man was always looking out. One day, the young man said to Stella Diana:

Stella Diana, do you know,
How many leaves does your marjoram grow?

And she answered:
O, my fine young noble lad,
Can you tell how many stars the sky has had?

And he:
One cannot count all of the stars in the skies.

And she:
Then my marjoram should not be for your eyes!

So the young man disguised himself as a fishmonger and walked beneath the teacher’s window, selling fish. The teacher sent Stella Diana to buy a fish to fry for supper from the fishmonger, so she went outside to ask him how much it cost. He told her such an astronomical price that Stella Diana started to walk away. But then he said: “For a kiss, I’ll let you have the fish for nothing.”

Stella Diana gave him a perfunctory kiss and he gave her the fish for her teacher’s supper.

That afternoon when Stella Diana appeared amongst the pots on the terrace, the young man on the balcony said to her:

Stella Diana, do you know,
How many leaves does your marjoram grow?

And she:

O, my fine young noble lad,

Can you tell how many stars the sky has had?

And he:

One cannot count all of the stars in the skies.

And she:

Then my marjoram should not be for your eyes!

And then he said:

I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss, Miss;

For just one small fish, you gave me a lovely kiss!

Stella Diana, furious at the trick played on her, left the terrace, thinking about how she could respond with a trick of her own.

The following day, she disguised herself as a man, putting a precious belt around her waist. She mounted her mule and rode up and down the young man’s street. He saw her belt and said: “What a beautiful belt! Would you sell it to me?” Stella Diana, making her voice sound like a man’s, told him that she would not sell the belt at any price. He insisted that he would do anything to get that belt, however, and so Stella Diana told him:

“In that case, kiss my mule’s rear end and I will give you the belt.” The young man liked the belt very much, indeed, and after looking around to make sure nobody was watching, he kissed the mule’s behind, took the belt, and left.

When they next saw each other, she on the terrace and he on the balcony, they had the usual conversation:

-Stella Diana, do you know how many leaves does your marjoram grow?

-O, my fine young noble lad,
Can you tell how many stars the sky has had?
-One cannot count all of the stars in the skies.
-Then my marjoram should not be for your eyes!
-I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss, Miss;
For just one small fish, you gave me a lovely kiss.
-To procure a belt, you didn’t mind
Planting a kiss on my mule’s behind!

The young man took this latest taunt very badly. He got into Stella Diana’s teacher’s good books and received permission to hide underneath her staircase. When Stella Diana left the house, the young man – hiding beneath the stairs – pulled down her petticoats. Stella Diana yelled:

-O mistress mine, o what distress;
The stairs are pulling down my dress!

And that afternoon, between the terrace and the balcony, the following conversation took place:

-Stella Diana, do you know
how many leaves does your marjoram grow?
-O my fine young noble lad,
Can you tell how many stars the sky has had?
-One cannot count all of the stars in the skies.
-Then my marjoram should not be for your eyes!
-I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss, Miss;
For just one small fish, you gave me a lovely kiss.
-To get a belt, you didn’t mind
Planting a kiss on my mule’s behind!
-O mistress mine, o what distress;
The stairs are pulling down my dress!
This time it was Stella Diana who took the taunt poorly; she thought to herself, ‘Now I’ll show you!’ By bribing a servant one evening, she managed to get into the young man’s house and appeared to him, wearing a sheet over her head, and carrying a torch in one hand and an open book in the other. The young man, upon seeing this apparition, started to tremble and said:

-O heavens, I’m young, death’s not what I want
Go instead to my very old aunt!

Stella Diana doused her torch and left. The following day, their duet continued:

-Stella Diana, do you know
how many leaves does your marjoram grow?
-O my fine young noble lad,
can you tell how many stars the sky has had?
-One cannot count all of the stars in the skies.
-Then my marjoram should not be for your eyes!
-I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss, Miss;
for just one small fish, you gave me a lovely kiss.
-To get a belt, you didn’t mind
Planting a kiss on my mule’s behind!
-O mistress mine, o what distress;
the stairs are pulling down my dress!
-Oh heavens, I’m young, death’s not what I want;
-Go instead to my very old aunt!

At this taunt, the young man said to himself: ‘This time I can’t take it anymore. I’m going to find a new way to get my revenge.’ No sooner said than done. He went to the spice vendor and asked for Stella Diana’s hand in marriage. The spice vendor was very content and they laid out the contract.
The day of the marriage grew closer, and Stella Diana feared that the bridegroom was still harboring some ideas of revenge for all her tricks. She decided to make a life-sized doll of dough that would resemble her in every respect, and in place of the heart she put a bladder filled with whipped cream. When she retired to the bedroom after the wedding ceremony, Stella Diana dressed the doll in her bonnet and nightshirt, set the doll in the bed, and hid.

The bridegroom came in. “Oh, we are finally alone! The moment has arrived to avenge myself of all the humiliations that you put me through.” And, unsheathing his dagger, he stuck it into the heart of the doll. The bladder burst and the whipped cream sprayed everywhere, including the bridegroom’s mouth.

“What a wretch I am! How sweet is the blood of my Stella Diana! And I have killed her! Whatever have I done! Oh, if only I could bring her back to life!”

Just then Stella Diana jumped out, healthy as a horse. “Here I am, your Stella Diana! I’m not dead at all!”

The bridegroom hugged her, happy and content, and happy and contented they lived forevermore.
Once upon a time there lived a king and a queen, desperate because they had no children. And the queen said: “Why can’t I bear children, just as the apple tree bears apples?”

And it came to pass that the queen, instead of giving birth to a child, gave birth to an apple. It was a more beautiful and richly colored apple than anyone had ever seen. And the king put it on a golden tray on the terrace.

Across the way from this king lived another king. One day this other king was looking out his window when he saw, on the terrace across the way, a beautiful girl, white and rosy like an apple, washing and combing her hair in the sun. He stood watching her with his mouth agape; he had never seen a girl so beautiful before. But as soon as she realized she was being watched, the girl ran to the plate, jumped into the apple and disappeared. The king had fallen in love with her.

He thought and thought, and finally went to knock on the door of the palace across the way. He asked the queen: “Your Majesty, I have a favor to ask of you.”

“My pleasure, Your Majesty; among neighbors, if one can be of help...” said the queen.

“I would like that beautiful apple that is on your terrace.”

“What are you saying, Your Majesty? Don’t you realize that I am the mother of that apple? Do you have any idea how much I longed for her before she was born?”

But the king was so insistent, that they could not say no to him and maintain their neighborly accord. And so he carried off the apple to his bedroom. He arranged everything for her to wash herself and comb her hair, and the girl came out every morning, and washed herself and combed her hair and he watched her. The girl did nothing else: she did not eat, she did not speak – she just washed herself and combed her hair, and then re-entered the apple.
This king lived with his stepmother, who, noticing him always locked up in his room, started to be suspicious: “I’d give a lot to know why my son is always hiding in there!”

Soon after, a war was declared, and the king had to leave for the front. He was heartbroken to part from his apple! He called on his most faithful servant and said: “I am leaving you the key to my bedroom. Make absolutely certain that no one enters there. Every morning, prepare the water and the combs for the apple girl, and be sure that she lacks nothing. Remember, she will tell me if anything goes wrong.” (This was not true, the girl did not speak a word, but he did not tell the servant this.) “Be careful, because if one hair on her head is harmed, you will be the one to suffer.”

“Don’t worry, Your Majesty, I will do my best.”

As soon as the king had left, his stepmother set herself to the task of getting into his room. She put opium in the servant’s wine, and when he fell asleep she stole the key. She opened the bedroom door, and began poking around, but the more she searched the less she found. There was only the beautiful apple in a golden fruit bowl. “His obsession can be nothing other than that apple!”

It is well known that queens always carry a dagger on their belt. She took out the dagger, and began to stab the apple. From every puncture came forth a rivulet of blood. The stepmother was frightened, and ran away, replacing the key in the pocket of the sleeping servant.

When the servant woke up, he couldn’t figure out what had happened. He ran to the king’s bedroom and found it flooded with blood. “Oh, what a wretch I am! What should I do?!” he said, and he ran away.

He went to his aunt’s house, who was a fairy and had magical powders. The aunt gave him a magical powder for enchanted apples and another for girls under a spell, and she mixed them together.
The servant returned to the apple and put a bit of the powder on all of the punctures. The apple split itself open and the girl came out, covered in bandages.

The king returned and the girl, speaking for the first time, said: “Listen to me, your stepmother attacked me with a dagger, but your servant cured me. I’m eighteen years old now and have just been released from a spell. If you would like, I will be your wife.”

And the king: “Would I!”

The celebration was held with great joy by the two neighboring palaces. Only the stepmother was missing; she had run away and was never heard of again.

And there they stayed, rejoicing forever
But to me they gave nothing whatsoever.
Well, one tiny farthing out did they dole,
And I went and I put it into a small hole.
Saint Anthony Gives Fire to Man

There was a time when there was no fire in the world. The people were cold, and they went to Saint Anthony, who lived in the desert, to beg him to help them, because they could no longer live with this cold. Saint Anthony was sorry for them, and as fire could only be found in Hell, he decided to go and get it.

Saint Anthony had been a pig farmer before he became a saint, and one little pig from his flock never left his side, and followed him everywhere. So Saint Anthony, with his piglet and his fennel walking stick, showed up at the door of Hell, and knocked.

“Open the door for me, I’m cold and want to warm up!”

The devils, on the other side of the door, understood right away that this was no sinner, but a saint, and they said: “No, no! We’ve recognized you! We won’t open the door for you!”

“Open up! I’m cold!” insisted Saint Anthony, and the pig snuffled against the door.

“We’ll let the pig inside, but not you!” said the devils, and they opened the door a tiny bit, just enough to let the pig through. As soon as Saint Anthony’s pig got into Hell, it began to race around every which way, poking its snout into everything and turning the whole room upside-down. The devils had to run after him, collecting the branding irons, picking up the pieces of cork, righting the tridents that he had knocked over, putting back into place pitchforks and instruments of torture. The devils couldn’t take it anymore, but they also couldn’t catch the pig or throw him out.

Finally they turned to the saint, who was still outside the door: “This cursed pig of yours makes a mess of everything! Come and take him back.”

Saint Anthony entered into Hell, touched the pig with his walking stick, and the pig immediately calmed down.
“Seeing as I’m here,” said Saint Anthony, “I’ll sit down for a moment to warm myself up.” And he sat on a sack full of cork, right in the passageway, reaching his hands out towards the fire.

Every so often a devil would run past Saint Anthony, on his way to tell Lucifer about some soul from this world that he had helped fall into sin. And Saint Anthony, with his fennel walking stick, would give him a whack on the back!

“We don’t like these jokes,” said the devils. “Put that stick down.”

Saint Anthony put down the walking stick diagonally, with the tip down, and the first devil who ran by yelling, “Lucifer! A guaranteed soul!” tripped over it and fell flat on his face.

“Enough! You’re annoying us with that walking stick!” said the devils. “We’re going to burn it.” They took the stick and put the end into the flames.

At that moment, the pig started to create havoc again, tossing around sticks of wood, hooks, and torches. “If you want him to behave well,” said Saint Anthony, “you have to give back the walking stick.” The devils returned the stick and the pig instantly settled down again.

But the walking stick was made of fennel, and fennel wood has a spongy heart, and if a spark or a fleck of coal gets inside, it continues to burn, hidden, without being seen from the outside. Because of this the devils did not realize that Saint Anthony had the fire in his walking stick. Saint Anthony, after having preached to the devils, left with his walking stick and his piglet, and the devils all breathed a sigh of relief.

As soon as he was outside in the air of the world, Saint Anthony lifted the walking stick with the flaming tip, whirling it around and making sparks, as if he were giving a benediction. And he chanted:

Fire, fire,
Everywhere,
Through the world entire,
Carefree fire!

From that moment, to the great contentment of the people, there was fire on earth. And Saint Anthony returned to his desert to meditate.
A king and a queen, after a tiresomely long wait, were finally about to have a baby. They summoned the astrologers to find out if the baby would be a boy or a girl, and what the baby’s planet would be. The astrologers consulted the stars and said that a baby girl would be born, and that her destiny was to capture the Sun’s love before she turned twenty, and to bear the Sun’s daughter. The king and queen were quite upset to hear that their daughter would have a child with the Sun, who is in the sky and cannot marry. And so, to remedy the situation, they constructed a tower with windows so high that even the Sun could not reach the bottom. The baby girl was shut up in the tower with her nursemaid, so that until she was twenty years old she would neither see the Sun nor be seen by him.

The nursemaid had a daughter of the same age as the king’s daughter, and the two girls grew up together in the tower. They were almost twenty years old when one day, talking about the beautiful things that must be in the world outside of that tower, the nursemaid’s daughter said, “What if we try to climb up to the windows by putting one chair on top of another? We’ll see a bit of what is out there!”

No sooner said than done, they constructed a stack of chairs so high that they managed to reach the window. They looked out and saw the trees and the river and the herons in flight, and above they saw the clouds, and the Sun. The Sun saw the king’s daughter, instantly fell in love, and cast a ray upon her. From the moment in which that ray touched her, she became pregnant with the Sun’s daughter.

The Sun’s daughter was born in the tower, and the nursemaid, who feared the king’s wrath, swaddled the baby in golden cloths fit for a queen, brought her to a bean field, and left her there. Soon after, the king’s daughter turned twenty, and her father let her leave the tower, thinking that the danger had passed. He did not know that
everything predicted had already happened, that at that moment the baby of his daughter and of the Sun was crying, abandoned in a bean field.

Another king, out on a hunting trip, passed by that bean field. He heard the wailing, and took pity on the beautiful creature abandoned among the beans. He took her home to his wife. They found her a nursemaid and the baby was raised at the palace as if she were the king and queen’s child, together with their son, who was just a little older.

The boy and the girl grew up together, and, as they got older, they fell in love. The king’s son wanted to marry her at all costs, but the king did not want his son to marry an abandoned girl. And so the king forced her to leave the palace, confining her to a faraway, solitary house, with the hope that his son would forget about her. He had no idea that she was the Sun’s daughter, an unearthly being who knew all the arts unknown to men.

As soon as the girl was out of the way, the king searched for a bride of royal blood for his son and arranged the marriage. The day of the wedding, an announcement and bridal sweets were sent to all the relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and as the list of relatives, friends and acquaintances included the girl found in the bean field, the royal emissaries brought the sweets to her as well.

The emissaries knocked at the door. The Sun’s daughter came down to open the door, but she was headless. “Oh, excuse me,” she said. “I was combing my hair, and I left my head on the dressing-table. I’ll just go get it.” She went back upstairs with the emissaries, put her head back on her neck and smiled at them.

“What should I give as a wedding gift?” she asked, and brought the emissaries into the kitchen. “Oven, open!” she said, and the oven opened. The Sun’s daughter smiled again at the emissaries. “Wood, get into the oven!” and the wood took itself over to the oven. The Sun’s daughter smiled yet again at the messengers, then said,
“Oven, turn on and when you’re hot, call me!” She turned to the emissaries and said, “Now, tell me what’s new!”

The emissaries, with their hair standing on end, pale as ghosts, were trying to think of what to say, when the oven yelled, “My lady, ma’am!”

The Sun’s daughter said to the emissaries, “Wait just a second,” and she entered the red-hot oven with her entire body, turned around, and came back out with a perfectly cooked, golden pasty in her hands. “Bring this to the king for his wedding feast.”

When the royal emissaries returned to the palace, their eyes popping out of their sockets, and weakly recounted in a scarcely audible voice the things they had seen, nobody believed them. But the bride, jealous of this girl (everyone knew that she had been her husband’s great love) said, “Oh, I used to do those sorts of things all the time, when I was still living at home.”

“Fine!” said her husband. “Now you can do them here, for us.”

“Uh, yes, of course, we’ll see,” the bride tried to say, but he steered her towards the kitchen right away.

“Wood, get into the oven,” said the bride, but the wood did not move. “Fire, light yourself,” but the oven remained unlit. The servants lit it, and when it was hot, the bride was so prideful as to think she could enter it. She burned to death before she got halfway in.

After some time, the king’s son allowed himself to be convinced to take another wife. On the wedding day, the royal emissaries went back to the Sun’s daughter to bring her the bridal sweets. They knocked, and instead of opening the door, the Sun’s daughter passed through the wall and came outside. “Please excuse me,” she said. “This door doesn’t open from the inside. I always have to pass through the wall and open it from the outside. There, now you can come in.”
She brought them to the kitchen and said, “Now, what treat should I prepare for the king’s son who is getting married? Get on with it, wood, into the fire! Fire, light yourself!” And everything was done in a second, all in front of the emissaries who had broken out in a cold sweat.

“Frying pan, onto the flame! Oil, into the pan! And when you’re hot enough to fry, call me!”

After a bit the oil called, “Madame, I’m ready for frying!”

“O.K.!” said the Sun’s daughter and, smiling, she put her fingers in the boiling oil and her fingers became fish: ten fingers, ten beautifully fried fish, which the Sun’s daughter wrapped up herself because meanwhile her fingers had grown back. And she gave the gift to the royal emissaries with a smile.

The new bride was jealous and ambitious like the first, and when she had been informed of the stupefied messengers’ story, she started in: “Big deal, you should see what kind of fish I can make!”

Her husband took her at her word and had a frying pan with boiling oil prepared. That braggart thrust her fingers into the pan and scorched herself so badly that she never recovered and died.

The queen was furious with the royal emissaries: “What kinds of stories are you telling us? You’re killing all the brides!”

Nonetheless, a third bride for the prince was found and on the wedding day, the royal emissaries once again brought the bridal sweets.

“Hey fellows, I’m up here!” said the Sun’s daughter when they knocked on her door. They looked all around and finally saw her suspended in the air. “I was taking a stroll on a spider’s web. I’ll come down now.” And she climbed down the spider’s web to take the sweets.

“This time, I really don’t know what gift to give,” she said. She thought about it, then called, “Knife, come here!” The knife came, she took it, and cut off her ear.
Attached to the ear was a piece of gold lace that emerged out of her head as if it had been attached to her brain, and she continued to pull it out in such a way that it seemed to never end. Finally the lace came to an end. She put her ear back in place, prodding and poking at it a bit with her finger until it looked exactly as it had before.

The lace was so beautiful that at Court everyone wanted to know where it had come from, and the royal emissaries, despite the queen’s prohibition, ended up telling the story of the ear.

“Big deal,” sniffed the new bride dismissively. “I decorated all my dresses with lace that I made that way.”

“Here’s a knife; show us!” said her husband.

And that ninny cut off one of her ears. Instead of the lace a river of blood came forth, so much of it that she died.

The king’s son continued to lose wives, but he was always more in love with the Sun’s daughter. He finally became sick, stopped laughing and even eating, and it looked as though he was going to die.

They summoned an old witch who said: “He needs to take a barley mash, but it must come from a barley that is planted, grows, is picked and then made into a mash, all within one hour.”

The king was in despair because no one had ever seen such barley. Then they thought of that girl who knew how to do so many marvelous things, and sent for her.

“Yes, yes, such and such a barley, I understand,” she said, and no sooner said than done, she planted the barley, it poked up and grew, she cut it, and made a mash out of it, all before one hour had passed.

She decided to go in person to feed the mash to the king’s son, who was lying in bed with his eyes closed. But the mash was disgusting, and he’d hardly swallowed a teaspoonful before he spat it out, and it landed in the girl’s eye.
“What? You dare spit barley mash in my eye, in the eye of the Sun’s daughter, of the king’s granddaughter?”

“You’re the Sun’s daughter?!” said the king, who was standing nearby.

“Yes, I am.”

“And you’re a king’s granddaughter?”

“Yes, I am.”

“And we thought you were a foundling! Now you can marry our son!”

“Of course I can!”

The king’s son was instantly cured and married the Sun’s daughter, who from that day forth became a woman like all other women and never again did strange things.
Franceschiello’s Trade

There was once a mother who had only one son, named Franceschiello, and she wanted him to learn a trade. And her son said in response: “You find me a master and I will learn the trade.” The mother found an ironsmith to be his teacher.

Franceschiello went to work for the ironsmith, and he managed to hit himself on the hand with the hammer. He returned to his mother. “Mama, find me another teacher, as this trade is not for me.”

The mother searched for another master and found a cobbler. Franceschiello worked with the cobbler and managed to drive the awl through his hand. He returned to his mother: “Mama, find me another master, because this trade is not for me, either.”

His mother responded: “My son, I only have ten ducats left. If you’re going to learn a trade, that’s fine, but I don’t know what to do with you anymore.”

“If that’s how you feel, Mama,” said Franceschiello, “then it’s better that you give me those ten ducats and I will travel the world to see if I can learn a trade on my own.”

The mother gave him the ten ducats and Franceschiello set out. On a road in the middle of a forest, four armed men suddenly popped out and yelled: “Facedown on the ground, now!”

And Franceschiello: “Facedown on the ground how?”

And the men: “Facedown on the ground!”

And Franceschiello: “Show me how I should do it.”

The captain of the bandits thought to himself, ‘This one is tougher than we are. What if we make him one of us?’ And he said, “Young man, would you like to come with us?”

“What trade can you teach me?” said Franceschiello.
“Our trade,” said the bandit captain, “is the *honorable trade*. We lie in wait for people, and if they don’t want to give us their money, we leave them dead. Then we eat, we drink, and we have a good time.”

And Franceschiello took to the streets with the group. After a year, the captain died, and Franceschiello was made captain. One day he commanded the whole group to take a walk and he stayed by himself to guard the loot. An idea came to him: ‘With all the money that is here, I could carry off a mule-load, get myself out of here and never be seen again.’ And that is exactly what he did.

He arrived back at his mother’s home and knocked: “Mama, let me in!” The mother opened the door and found her son, holding a mule by the bridle. Immediately he began unloading sacks filled with money.

“Whatever trade did you learn?” asked his mother right away.

“The *honorable trade*, Mama, a good trade. You eat, you drink, and you have a good time.”

The mother, who did not understand, thought that it was a good trade and did not ask him any further questions. Now you have to know that his mother’s neighbor was the parish priest. The next day she went to the priest and said, “You know what, neighbor? Your little buddy has returned!”

“So,” said the priest, “has he learned a trade?”

“Yes,” said the mother, “he learned the *honorable trade*: you eat, you drink, and you have a good time. And he earned a mule-load of money.”

“Oh, I see,” said the priest, who knew the score. “I’d like to see him and have a chat.”

Franceschiello went to see him. “Now, my lad, is it true that you learned a good trade?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, if it’s true that you really learned it, we should make a bet.”
“What kind of bet?”

“I have twelve shepherds and twenty dogs. If you can steal a castrated ram from my flock, I will give you one hundred ducats.”

And Franceschiello: “Look, pal, if you have twelve shepherds and the dogs, how am I supposed to do this? Oh boy, what can I tell you? Let’s give it a try.”

He dressed up as a monk and went to the shepherds. “Hey, you shepherds, keep those dogs off me, I’m just a poor priest.”

The shepherds held the dogs. “Come, come, brother, come warm up with us.”

Franceschiello sat next to the fire with the shepherds, brought a piece of bread out of his pocket and began to eat. Then he slid a flask out of his shoulder bag and pretended to drink from it (he only pretended because the wine was drugged). Said one of the shepherds: “Now, brother, you eat and drink and don’t offer any to anyone else?”

“Your wish is my command!” said Franceschiello. “A sip is enough for me.” And he passed the flask. The shepherd drank, and the other shepherds drank, and once they had drunk they began to fall asleep. “Just when we wanted to chat a little with the brother, you guys go to sleep!” said the only one who was still awake; he hadn’t even finished saying it when he too was overcome by sleepiness, and nodded off.

When Franceschiello saw that all twelve were deeply asleep, he undressed each of them and dressed them all as monks. He took the fattest castrated ram and left. At home, he killed the ram and roasted it; then he sent a drumstick to the priest.

When the shepherds woke up and saw they were dressed as monks, they understood that they had been robbed. “And now,” they said, “how are we going to tell the boss about this?”

“You go,” said one.

“You go,” said another. But nobody wanted to go. So they decided all to go together. They knocked. The servant looked out and said,
“Master, there are a whole bunch of monks that want to come in!”

And the priest: “I’m celebrating mass this morning; tell them to leave.”

“Open up, open up!” yelled the shepherds. And finally they all went in.

When the priest saw his shepherds dressed as monks, he understood that it had to be Franceschiello’s trick. He said to himself, ‘So it’s true that he’s learned a trade!’ He summoned Franceschiello and gave him the hundred ducats.

“But now, my friend,” he said, “I want payback. Let’s make a bet for two hundred ducats. There is a church in the country, it’s part of our parish. If you can succeed in taking anything from that church, you win. I will give you eight days.”

“All right,” said Franceschiello.

The priest called the hermit who dwelt at that church, and he said: “Look sharp; someone is going to try to steal something from the church. Be on your guard day and night.”

The hermit responded: “Don’t worry, boss! Provide me with a weapon, and I’ll take care of it.”

Franceschiello let seven days and seven nights pass. On the last night he approached the church, and hid behind a corner. The hermit, poor thing, who had been awake for seven days and nights looked out and said to himself: “For seven nights no one has come. This is the last night. The clock has struck six and there is no one in sight. It looks like he lost his nerve. Pooh! I’ll go do what I need to and then I’ll go to sleep.”

He left to do what he had to, and Franceschiello, who had heard everything, quick as a cat ran into the church. The hermit came back in, barred the doors, and then, dead tired as he was, he threw himself down in the middle of the church and fell asleep. Franceschiello then took all the statues in the church and placed them around the hermit; next to his feet he put a sack; then he dressed as a priest, climbed up to the altar and began to preach: “You, the hermit living in this church, it is time for you to be saved!”
The hermit did not wake up.

“Hermit who lives in this church, now is the time for you to be saved!”

The hermit woke up and saw all the saints around him. “Your Holinesses,” he said, “Your Holinesses! Let me pray to you! What should I do?”

And Franceschiello: “Get into the sack, for now it is time for you to be saved!”

The poor hermit got himself into the sack. Franceschiello climbed down off the altar, put the sack on his back and left. He went to the house of the priest and threw the sack down in the middle of the room. The hermit from inside said: “Uf!”

“Look here, pal! Look what I brought from the church.”

The priest opened the sack and found himself face to face with the hermit.

“Franceschiello, my boy” said the priest, “here are two hundred ducats. I see you have learned your trade well. It’s better for us to be friends, otherwise you’ll put me into the sack, as well!”
Once upon a time there was a king with three daughters: a brunette, a redhead, and a blonde. The first was ugly, the second was so-so, and the littlest one was the best and prettiest. The older two were jealous of their younger sister. The king had three thrones: one white, one red, and one black. When he was happy he would go and sit on the white throne, when he was feeling so-so he would sit on the red one, and when he was angry, he sat on the black throne.

One day the king sat himself down on the black throne, because he was angry with his two older daughters. The two hovered nearby, caressing him. The oldest daughter said to him:

“Father, did you sleep well? Are you sitting on the black throne because you’re angry with me?”

“Yes, I am.”

“But why, Father?”

“Because I am not dear to you at all.”

“Of course you are dear to me, Father.”

“How dear am I to you?”

“As dear as bread.”

The king fumed a little, but he said no more, for he was quite pleased with this response. Next came his second daughter.

“Father, did you sleep well? Why are you on the black throne? You aren’t upset with me, are you?”

“Yes, I am.”

“But why are you angry with me, Father?”

“Because I am not dear to you at all.”

“But you are so dear to me…”
“How dear?”

“As dear as wine.”

The king muttered something between clenched teeth, but it was clear he was satisfied. Next came the youngest daughter, all smiles.

“Oh Father, did you sleep well? You’re on the black throne? Why? Could it be you’re angry with me?”

“Yes, I am, because I’m not dear to you, either.”

“But you are dear to me.”

“How dear?”

“How dear?”

“As dear as salt!”

Upon hearing this answer, the king flew into a rage.

“As salt! As salt! Oh, you wretch! Get out of my sight; I never want to see you again!” And with that, he gave the order that his youngest daughter be taken into the woods and killed.

Upon hearing the king’s order, her mother, the queen, who truly cared for her, racked her brain to find a way to save her daughter. In the royal palace there was a silver chandelier, so big that Zizola – that was the name of the youngest daughter – could fit inside it, and that was where the queen hid her.

“Go and sell that chandelier,” the queen told her most faithful servant. “And when someone asks you how much it costs, if they are poor people tell them a high price, and if it is a wealthy man tell him a low price and give it to him.” The queen hugged her daughter, gave her a thousand pieces of advice, and put some dried figs, chocolate, and cookies inside the chandelier.

The servant brought the chandelier to the town center, and if those who inquired about its price were not to his liking, he asked an unseemly amount. Finally, the son of the Prince of Torralta passed by, examined the chandelier from all angles, and then asked how much it cost. The servant told him an absurdly low price and the prince took
the chandelier back to his palace. He put it in the dining room, and everyone who came
to dine there looked at it with wonder.

In the evening, the prince went out to talk to people; as he didn’t want anyone to
wait up for him at home, the servants left him his dinner and went to bed. When Zizola
could hear that there was nobody in the room, she jumped out of the chandelier, ate all
the dinner, and got back in. The prince arrived, didn’t find anything to eat, rang all the
bells and started to beat the servants. They, swearing that they had indeed left him his
dinner, said it must have been eaten by the dog or the cat.

“If it happens again, I’ll dismiss you all,” said the prince. He made them bring
him another dinner, which he ate and then went to bed.

The following evening, even though everything was locked up tightly, the same
thing happened. The prince seemed to be about to yell the house down, but then he said:
“Let’s see what happens tomorrow evening.”

When the following evening arrived, what did the prince do? He hid under the
table, which was covered with a tablecloth that reached the ground. The servants came in,
put all the food on the table, sent out the dog and the cat and closed and locked the door.
They had just left, when the chandelier opened up and out came the beautiful Zizola. She
went over to the table and started to stuff herself with the food. Out jumped the prince,
who grabbed her by the arm! She tried to escape his grasp, but he held onto her. And so
Zizola kneeled and told him her entire story, beginning to end. The prince was instantly
smitten with her. He calmed her down, and told her, “I’ll tell you now that you’ll be my
bride. For the moment, get back into the chandelier.”

In bed, the prince couldn’t close his eyes all night, he was so in love. In the
morning he ordered that the chandelier be brought into his bedroom, because it was so
beautiful that he wanted it nearby at night. And then he ordered that the servants bring
his food to his bedroom, and in doubled portions, because he was very hungry. And so
first they brought him coffee, and then breakfast, and then lunch – all doubled in
portion. As soon as they had left the tray, and closed and locked the door, the prince had Zizola come out and they ate together joyfully.

The queen, who was left alone at the table, sighed: “What does my son have against me that he never comes down to eat anymore? What will I do with him?”

He continued to tell her to have patience, that he wanted to be on his own; until one beautiful day he said: “I want to take a wife.”

“And who is this wife?” asked the queen, completely overjoyed.

The prince replied, “I want to marry the chandelier!”

“Oh, my son has gone mad!” said the queen, covering her eyes with her hands. But her son was serious. She tried to make him understand reason, to think about what people would say, but he held firm: he gave orders to prepare the wedding in eight days.

On the wedding day, a large procession of carriages left the palace, and in the first one was the prince, with the chandelier by his side. They arrived at the church and the prince made sure the chandelier was carried up to the altar. At just the right moment, the chandelier opened and out jumped Zizola, in a brocaded dress, with so many precious gems around her neck and at her ears that she glittered everywhere. They celebrated the wedding and returned to the palace, telling the queen the entire story. The queen, who was sly as a fox, said to Zizola, “Let me take care of this father of yours. I want to teach him a lesson.”

All of the kings of all of the surrounding kingdoms, including Zizola’s father, had been invited to the wedding party. And for Zizola’s father, the queen had prepared a separate meal, in which all the food was made with no salt. The queen told the guests that the bride was not feeling well and could not be at the lunch. Everyone began eating, but Zizola’s father had the tasteless soup and started to complain to himself: “This cook, this cook, he forgot to put salt in the soup!” and he was forced to leave it, untouched, on his plate. The next course came out, and it also didn’t have any salt. The king put down his fork.
“Why aren’t you eating, Your Majesty? Don’t you like it?”

“Oh, no, it’s very good, really excellent.”

“So why aren’t you eating?”

“I don’t feel very well.”

He tried to take a forkful of meat, but he chewed and chewed and couldn’t swallow. Suddenly, the king remembered what his daughter had said, that he was as dear to her as salt, and he was overtaken by such remorse, such pain, that slowly he broke into tears, saying, “Oh, wretched me, what have I done?!?”

The queen asked what was wrong, and he began to tell the whole story of Zizola. Then the queen stood up and called for the bride to come out. Her father hugged her, crying, and asked her how she had ended up there, and soon he began to look and feel better. They sent also for Zizola’s mother, and had the wedding all over again, with a party every day; I think they are still there now, dancing.
The One-Handed Murderer

There was once a miserly king, who was so miserly that he kept his only daughter in the attic for fear that someone would ask for her hand in marriage and then the king would be forced to give a dowry.

One day a murderer came to town, and he stopped by the inn, which was across from where the king lived. He started to ask those in the inn about who lived across the way. “It’s a king,” they told him. “who is such a miser he keeps his daughter in the attic.”

What did the murderer do? That night he climbed up onto the roofs, and opened the attic window. The princess was in bed and saw the window open and a man standing on the windowsill. “There’s a thief! A thief!” she yelled. The murderer closed the window and ran away over the roofs. The servant ran up, saw the closed window, and said: “Your Highness, you are dreaming: there is no one here.”

The next day the princess asked her father to let her out of the attic, but the king told her: “You’re dreaming; who do you think would come in there?”

The next night, at the same time, the murderer opened the window again. “A thief! A thief!” He escaped this time as well, and nobody would believe the princess’s story.

The third night, she shut and chained the window, and sat guard just underneath it with a knife in her hand, her heart beating wildly. The murderer tried to open the window but could not. He pushed his hand through the opening, and the princess used her knife to cut the hand off cleanly at the wrist.

“Wicked girl!” yelled the murderer. “I’ll make you pay!” and he ran away over the roofs.
The princess showed the king and the royal Court the lopped hand and finally everyone believed her, and complimented her courage; from that day on she did not sleep in the attic.

After some time a young foreigner, well dressed and wearing beautiful gloves, requested an audience with the king. He spoke so well that the king took a liking to him. Talking about this and that, he said he was a bachelor, that he was looking to marry a stylish girl, and that he would take her even without a dowry, as he was so rich himself. The king, hearing that this man didn’t want a dowry, thought, “Just what I want for my daughter,” and he sent for her. The princess, as soon as she saw the foreigner, began to tremble, because she seemed to recognize him. And when she was alone with her father, she said, “Your Majesty, that man looks like the thief whose hand I cut off.”

“You’re imagining things,” said the king. “You must not have seen what beautifully gloved hands he had! This is a gentleman.”

To make a long story short, the foreigner asked for the hand of the princess, and, to obey her father and also to get away from his tyranny, she said yes. The wedding was brief and simple, because the husband could not stay so far away from his business, and because the king did not want to spend much. As a gift, he gave his daughter a necklace made of nuts and a mangy fox’s tail. The couple left immediately afterward in a carriage.

The carriage entered a forest, and instead of following the main road, it went deeper into the forest, along dark paths. At a certain point, the husband said: “Dear, pull this glove off for me.”

The princess removed the glove and uncovered a stump instead of a hand. “Help!” she said, understanding that she had married the man whose hand she had cut off.

“You are in my power now,” said the man. “Let me tell you something. I’m a professional assassin. Now I will avenge the wrong you have done me.”
The murderer’s house was on the edge of the forest, on the seashore. “Here is where I keep all the riches of the people I’ve killed,” said the murderer, showing her the house. “And you will keep guard here.”

He chained her to a tree in front of the house and left her there. The princess was left alone, chained to a tree like a dog, with the sea in front of her. Every so often a ship passed by very slowly. She signaled a ship that passed, and through their binoculars they saw her from the ship and came closer to see what was there. They disembarked, and she told them her story. So they set her free and took her with them, along with all the murderer’s riches.

It was a cotton merchants’ ship, and the sailors decided to hide the princess and all the riches underneath the cotton balls. The murderer returned and found his home ransacked, and no sign of his wife. “She could not have escaped to anywhere but the sea,” he thought, and saw the ship as it sailed away. He got into his fastest sailboat, and caught up to the ship. “Dump all the cotton into the ocean,” he ordered. “I’m looking for my wife, who has run away.”

“You will ruin us,” said the merchants. “Why don’t you stick your sword into the cotton balls, to see if there’s anyone hidden in there?”

The murderer began to stab the cotton with his sword, and at one point he wounded the hidden girl, but as he pulled the sword out, the cotton soaked up the blood and the sword reappeared completely clean.

“You know,” said the sailors. “We saw another boat close to the coast; that one there.”

“I’m going to go look,” said the murderer. He left the ship loaded with its balls of cotton and guided his sailboat towards the other boat.

The girl, wounded but only in one arm, was brought ashore at a safe port. But she did not want even to set foot on land and just kept saying, “Throw me into the sea! Throw me into the sea!”
The sailors talked amongst themselves, and one of them, an old man, with a wife but no children, offered to bring her to his home, along with some of the murderer’s gems. The sailor’s wife was a dear old woman who set to welcoming and caring for the girl. “We’ll treat you like our own child, you poor dear!”

“You are so good to me,” said the girl. “I only ask of you one favor: I want to stay in the house always, and never be seen by any man.”

“Don’t worry, poor dear: no one ever comes to our house.”

The old man sold some of the gems and bought silk to embroider, and the girl passed the time embroidering. She made a beautiful carpet, with every color and design imaginable, and the old woman brought it to sell to a king who lived nearby.

“Whose is this beautiful work?” asked the king.

“My daughter, Your Majesty,” said the old woman.

“Wow! If you say so. This doesn’t seem to be the work of a sailor’s daughter,” said the king, and bought the carpet.

With the money earned, the old woman bought more silk, and the girl embroidered a lovely folding screen. The old woman brought it to the king. “And it’s really your daughter who makes these things?” said the king, and, hardly convinced of the answer, he secretly followed her home.

As the old woman was about to close the door to her house, the king came forward and put his foot in the opening; the old woman let out a yell of surprise. The girl, who was in her room, heard the yell, and thought the murderer had come to take her away; and she fainted from fright. The old woman and the king came into the room and tried to revive her. She opened her eyes, and seeing that the man was not the murderer, she returned to her normal self.

“Now, why are you worried about who might come here?” asked the king, who really liked this beautiful girl.

“It is my misfortune,” she said, and nothing else.
And so the king began to come to the house every day, to keep the girl company and watch her embroider. He was truly in love with her, and finally asked her to be his wife. As for the old couple, what could they say? “Your Majesty, we are poor people…”

“I don’t care. It’s the girl that I like.”

“I am happy to marry you,” she said, “but on one condition.”

“What would that be?”

“I don’t want to see men at all, except for you and my father. (She called the old sailor ‘father’.) I don’t want to see them or be seen by them.”

The king consented, because after all he was jealous and he was happy that she did not want to see other men.

Thus a secret wedding was held, so that no man would see her. This did not sit well with the king’s subjects: when had a king ever married without showing his wife to the people? The strangest rumors started to go around: he married a monkey. He married a hunchback. He married a witch….and not only amongst the masses, also amongst the Court dignitaries. The king was forced to say to his wife: “You must choose a time to show yourself to the public and put a stop to all these rumors.”

The poor thing had to agree. “All right. Tomorrow from eleven to twelve I will stand on the terrace.”

At eleven the main square was fuller than anyone had ever seen it. People had come from all over, even from the most remote part of the countryside. The bride appeared on the terrace and from the crowd there arose a hum of admiration. Such a beautiful queen had never been seen. The queen, however, allowed her gaze to turn to the center of the crowd in apprehension. And there, in the middle of the crowd, she saw the face of a man cloaked in black, a man who brought his hand to his mouth and bit it in a threatening way, then raised his other arm and showed that at its end was a stump. The queen fell to the floor in a faint.
They immediately brought her into the house and the old woman kept repeating: “You had to show her off! You forced her to make an appearance when she didn’t want to! Now look what’s happened!”

The queen was put to bed and the doctors were called, but they didn’t know what was wrong with her. She wanted to stay closed in and to see no one, and she trembled unceasingly.

During those days, a rich foreign gentleman came to see the king. He was a smooth talker, full of compliments and words of admiration. The king invited him to stay for a bite of food. The foreigner, who was none other than the murderer, graciously accepted, and offered wine for everyone in the royal palace. Soon barrels and casks and demijohns were brought, all filled with wine laced with opiates. That evening, guards, servants, ministers, everyone drank until they could drink no more. By nightfall they were all so dead drunk that they snored, the king first and foremost.

The murderer made a trip around the palace, made sure that in all the stairwells, the rooms, the corridors, there were only sleeping people flat on their backs, and then he silently entered the queen’s room. She was curled up in a corner of her bed, with her eyes wide open, as if she were expecting him.

“The time for my revenge has come,” said the murderer breathlessly. “Get out of bed and go and get me a basin of water so I can wash the blood from my hands after I slit your throat.”

The queen left and ran to her husband. “Wake up! Wake up, for heaven’s sake!” But her husband continued to sleep. Everyone was asleep, throughout the palace, and they could not be awakened. She fetched the basin of water and returned to her room.

“Bring me soap, as well,” said the murderer, who was sharpening his knife.

She went, tried again to stir her husband, but it was useless. She brought the soap back.
“And the towel?” asked the murderer.

She went out, took the pistol from her sleeping husband, covered it with the towel, and, making as if to give the towel to the murderer, she shot him in the heart point-blank.

At the sound of the shot the drunk people woke up at once, the king first of all, and ran up. They found the murderer dead and the queen finally liberated of her fear.
Adaptations

Giuseppe and Anita

It seemed a little strange to Giuseppe to be lying in bed next to his wife Anita when she was dead. It had been a long, overwhelming day – the two had just been married that afternoon, with much fanfare and celebration afterwards – and to now be making small talk with his deceased wife was more than Giuseppe could handle. But Anita clearly wasn’t ready to call it a night. “Do you remember the first time we talked, Giuseppe?”

“Oh, of course I do,” Giuseppe tried to yawn, but Anita wasn’t even looking at him. She was staring dreamily out the window at the rain that was falling. Giuseppe noticed that the bloodstain on her nightgown where she had been stabbed was still growing larger.

“Do you remember what I was wearing, darling?”

“I remember I saw you from across the way. I was looking out from my balcony, dreading another boring day, when I saw you watering plants on the terrace across the street. How come I’d never seen you before?”

“I’d never visited my aunt there before. Do you remember what you said to me that day?”

“I asked you about the marjoram plant.”

“The marjoram was my favorite one to water. It smelled so nice.” Anita was fingering the hole where she’d been stabbed, idly running her index finger around the wound.

“Yes, dear,” Giuseppe said as he again tried to go to sleep.

“At first I wouldn’t have anything to do with you,” Anita said, rather proudly.

“You told me to keep my eyes off your marjoram plant.”

“I thought you were trying to start with me.”
“I was. And I didn’t give up so easily, either.”

“Well, I didn’t have any choice but to pay attention after that fishmonger stunt you pulled.”

“I don’t remember that,” said Giuseppe, shifting uncomfortably. The truth was he did recall, quite clearly, what he’d done. The trick itself had been rather ingenious, actually, but it had led to an embarrassing moment for him.

“Sure you do. I was buying my aunt’s dinner, and you dressed up as the fishmonger and came down our street selling fish. I tried to buy a fish from you, don’t you remember?”

“No.” Giuseppe took the opportunity to turn decisively on his side, fluff his pillow.

“Don’t go to sleep! I’m dead! If I want to talk about that day, we’ll talk about that day! I tried to buy a fish from you – I didn’t know it was you, of course, what with that getup you had on – and you tried to charge me a fortune!”

“I was setting you up. I knew you’d never pay.”

“I realize that now, of course. But I was innocent at the time, what did I know? I started to walk away, but when you offered me the fish free in exchange for a simple kiss, I took pity on you and agreed to it.”

“You took pity on me?!” Now Giuseppe righted himself, indignant. “You were taken in! I was charming!”

“You were a fishmonger. I wanted the fish for free. So I kissed you. And anyways, once I found out it was you, I had my own bit of fun, didn’t I?” Anita started to cackle, but the sound soon turned to a hacking cough. Giuseppe turned away to hide his disgust at the unpleasant sound.

“Yes, I suppose you did.”

“Do you remember what I did? You remember it well, I bet.” Anita was prodding him on the back, his shoulder blade shifting under her nagging finger.
Giuseppe muttered something under his breath. “What? What did you just say?”

Giuseppe was silent. “Come on, I want to hear you tell the mule story.” She was coaxing now, but Giuseppe could hear the suppressed laughter in her voice.

“You know this story already. You don’t need to hear it again.”

“Look, Giuseppe, I’m dead here. I don’t think you’re in any position to tell me what I do or don’t need. Now tell the story. I’m not sure I’ve ever heard your end of it.”

Giuseppe sighed. “You wanted to pay me back after I revealed that I was the fishmonger. You tricked me into kissing your mule’s behind. That’s all there is to it.”

“That is certainly not all there is to it! I very cleverly dressed myself as a man – you aren’t the only one who can pull off a good disguise – and wore my most beautiful, rare belt. I knew exactly what would catch your eye. You wanted to buy it from me, though of course you didn’t know it was me at the time. I can be quite convincing as a man,” she laughed, practically growling the last word to make her voice deeper.

“Yes, well, I fell for your little trick. I was ready to buy that belt from you, no matter how much it cost.”

“Did you ever think you’d be paying in something other than gold?” Anita asked slyly.

“I had no idea what it would cost in the end!” said Giuseppe hotly.

“Me, neither,” Anita replied quietly, her gaze once again returning to the light rain.

Giuseppe cleared his throat, uncomfortable with the direction the conversation was now taking. “Well anyway, when you offered me the belt in exchange for kissing your mule’s buttocks… the belt was beautiful!” he added defensively as Anita turned to look at him, her mouth twitching upwards at the corners.

“You must have really wanted that belt, that’s all I have to say,” said Anita.
“What I really wanted was my dignity, especially when I found out you were the man with the mule. Imagine, being so humiliated, and by a woman no less!”

“Yes, we women have a few tricks up our sleeves, don’t we? If only you hadn’t decided to take revenge again….”

“What choice did I have? None. And besides, you’re just as culpable for everything that came afterwards – you took your fair share of revenge, as well!”

“That’s true, I did. After the mule, there was the petticoats incident –”

Giuseppe burst out laughing, interrupting Anita’s recollections. “That was a good one, wasn’t it?”

“If you consider hiding beneath the stairs and scaring me half to death by pulling on my skirts when I walked by ‘good’, then yes, I suppose it was.” Anita dry tone was drowned out by Giuseppe’s roar.

“You want to talk about scaring someone half to death? When you found out it had been me under those stairs, you came after me wearing that sheet and carrying that torch – I thought I was meeting death himself!”

“Yes, and you tried to send me to your aunt instead. Such a gentleman. I should have known then that you wouldn’t play fair….” Her voice trailed off and once again she ran her hand around the bloody wound, sighing.

Silence followed. Both were thinking of what had come after Giuseppe’s near-death experience. Giuseppe, fed up with the escalating pranks, and also determined to get the final word, had gone to Anita’s father and asked for her hand in marriage. Anita’s father was delighted at the proposition and the two worked out a deal. Anita was simultaneously mortified – she was sure Giuseppe had another prank planned – and also pleased – at least Giuseppe kept things interesting. Several weeks later, the two were married.

“I should have known….” Anita repeated wearily.
“How could you have known what I was thinking of? If you’d known, it wouldn’t have made a very good trick.”

“But if I’d known….” Again Anita trailed off in the middle of her thought, her attention focused on the tear in her nightgown, the maroon stain surrounding the tear.

“I’m going to sleep, I’m exhausted” her husband said.

“All right, all right. Do watch out for the dagger. I think it’s still on the bed somewhere.”

“It’s still in my hand,” said Giuseppe with a yawn, holding up the blood-stained knife to show Anita and then placing it on the floor. “Good night.”
Behind Closed Doors

My mother is always telling me that ‘privacy’ is a very American concept. In Israel, she reminisces, neighbors gossip while they hang laundry out to dry; businesspeople know the intimate life details of the security guard working the front desk at their office building; and everyone in the tiny Mediterranean country is connected by no more than four degrees of separation. So it infuriated my mother that, upon hitting my teenage years, I began closing my bedroom door on a regular basis, and demanding that she knock before entering. She didn’t want any secrets between us, and closed doors and knocking rules definitely fell under the category of withheld information.

It was the end of my sophomore year in high school, just a few weeks before classes let out, when my best friend Sam and I decided to try pot. We smoked it at a sleepover at Sam’s house the first time, while his parents were out at an auction, and we had such strong cravings for cheese fries and milkshakes that we sneaked out to the all-night diner, walking the mile and a half each way just to satisfy our case of the munchies. It was light out by the time we got back to Sam’s house. When I returned home later that day, my mother, as usual, wanted to know what we’d done at the sleepover. It was a casual question, asked partially out of genuine interest and partially out of perpetual parental curiosity and worry. I told her about the movie we hadn’t rented and the pancakes we didn’t make, and went upstairs to my room to take a nap.

We started smoking more regularly after that, especially after the school year had ended. The first time we smoked pot at my house, my parents had gone out with friends to dinner and a movie. By the time they came back, Sam had already left, and I was lying on my bed listening to music on my headphones. My mother came into my room (without knocking, naturally) on her way to bed.
“How was your nig...” her voiced trailed off as her facial expression changed, her nose scrunched up. “What’s that strange smell in here?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. Dirty laundry?”

“It doesn’t really smell like that.” My mother’s eyes narrowed as she focused on me again. “What were you and Sam up to tonight?”

“We just had some dinner, watched a little TV.”

“What did you eat?”

“Pizza.”

“Did you have a good time? How’s Sam?”

“Just about the same as he was when you saw him two days ago.”

“I don’t need the attitude. Are you going to sleep soon?”

“Yeah, probably.”

“Open a window in the morning. Air out whatever that smell is.” She walked down the hall, leaving my bedroom door wide open.

A few weeks later Sam came over with some more pot. My parents were going out to another movie, and once they had left, we started to smoke. We were smoking and listening to music in my room, and didn’t hear when my parents came back early.

“Hey, we’re back!” we suddenly heard my mother holler from the bottom of the steps. “I’m going to make some tea; do either of you want any?”

Sam and I looked at each other. “What if she comes up here?” Sam asked.

“She probably wouldn’t knock first.” I answered.

We opened several of my bedroom windows and joined my parents at the kitchen table for slices of homemade blueberry pie and herbal fruit tea.

“So, what have you guys been up to tonight?” My father asked jovially. “The usual sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll?” I froze.

“Playing video games,” Sam said smoothly. My mother nodded absently at this answer; I could tell she was thinking about something else.
“I smell that funny smell again. What is that?”

“Teenaged angst,” replied my father.

A few days later, I came home from Sam’s house and found my mother reading the newspaper in the kitchen. “I went into your room today to try and find the source of that weird smell,” she told me.

“You WHAT?!”

“Look, you obviously weren’t going to do it, so I thought I’d take a look around. I couldn’t find anything, though. Do you have any idea what it could be from?”

“Mom, how could you go into my room like that without asking me? And while I wasn’t here? You invaded my privacy!”

She sniffed. “You live here, with us, in our home. That room is not ‘yours,’” and what do you need privacy for, anyway? Do you have something to hide?”

I turned and walked away without answering her. On my way back to my room, I ran into my father.

“What does it take to get a little privacy around here?” I asked him angrily.

“You know she only wants you to be safe and happy.”

“She’s got some way of showing it!”

One sticky Tuesday later that month, while my parents were in the Berkshires at a Yo-Yo Ma concert, Sam and I installed a lock on my door. It was a simple, gold-colored lock that I had picked up at the hardware store along with a set of two keys. When we had finished installing it, the shiny newness of the lock looked out of place on the worn door with peeled paint in the corners. For my mother, the lock presented clear, tangible evidence of the existence of the notorious Adolescent Rebellion: something else she’d chalked up as an American concept. It meant I must be hiding something from her. It also breached every mother-child rule in her book.

“How dare you!” she screeched, her heavy accent rolling the ‘r’. Her accent always became more pronounced when she was angry. “If you don’t have that thing
out of here by tomorrow morning, I will!” But I had been learning from my father, who
let most of her rants wash over him, clenching his jaw and muttering to himself
afterwards but rarely reacting to her short temper in kind. I did not respond to her
ultimatum, and went to bed that night behind a closed and locked door.

The lock stayed, though not without some heavy repercussions. My mother
began employing a selective silent treatment: for the most part she was cold and
standoffish, barely making eye contact and certainly never cracking a smile in my
presence. Her only comments made in my direction were snarky, sarcastic remarks:
“Why are you asking me for $20? Why don’t you ask your lock instead?”; “Maybe
your lock can help you study for your Spanish test”; “I hope you and your lock are
very happy together.”

That we were. My room became a total safe-haven, where fights with my mother
could be ignored and forgotten and Sam and I could do as we pleased. When I left in
the mornings to go to school, the heavy click of the lock settling into its channel was a
satisfying, comforting sound, and upon my return each afternoon, I breathed a sigh of
relief as I slid the key out of its hole and stepped into the bedroom.

After the silent treatment and the snide remarks came a string of rational, “real-
world” arguments. “This isn’t an apartment building,” my mother would tell me. “We
should start charging you for rent and utilities!”

“Maybe I’ll just move out and get my own place, then!”

“And how exactly do you plan to support yourself? Monopoly money?”

“I could get a part-time job after school. How expensive could it be?”

When that tactic ran up against my admittedly naive reaction, she switched to an
emotional appeal.

“Look, we just want you to be open with us. The lock is keeping us from
talking. I don’t know what’s going on in your life, because you’re always cooped up in
there behind that locked door.”
During Christmas vacation that winter, I visited my cousin in New York City for a few days. We saw the tree in Rockefeller Center, wandered through Chinatown, and I enjoyed not being under my mother’s thumb. At the same time, however, I missed the familiar silence and surroundings of my room, the security of the private, uninvaded space.

When I returned home from New York, my father greeted me at the door.

“Don’t get too upset,” was the first thing he said to me, ever the peacemaker. “She’s just worried about you. We both are.” I glanced at his pleading, sad face and ran upstairs.

The gold had been scratched up – that was the first thing I noticed. I ran my fingers over the cuts in the metal, some deeper cuts of anger, some more superficial ones around the keyhole. Suddenly, the gold looked duller, the scratches and lackluster metal seemed nondescript, and the lock no longer stood out against the plain backdrop of the peeling door.

“There shouldn’t be secrets between a mother and her child. A child should be able to tell his mother everything.” Her eyes were welling up with tears as I turned around. She was standing at the other end of the hall, just outside her bedroom door, a towel wrapped around her head like a turban and a terry-cloth robe wrapped around her body.

“I can’t believe you would do something like this. You invaded my personal space. Did you find whatever it was you were looking for?”

“I was just trying to figure out what you were keeping from me. I want us to be open with each other.”

“What if I don’t want to be open with you? What if I want to keep some things to myself?”

“I only want to help you. Why won’t you talk to me?”
“Because you wouldn’t want to hear most of it. Trust me.” I turned back towards my room and found that it was unlocked. After the door had swung shut behind me, I tried to lock it, but the lock had been permanently jammed. I noticed that a few things had been moved around in my room, but nothing had been taken. I never bothered to replace the lock.

These days, my mother’s issues with privacy and other such “only in America!” concepts aren’t as focused on me. She was offended that our neighbors of ten years didn’t inform us of their plan to sell their house, and she is exasperated every day that she has to show an ID upon entering her work building: “I’m there six days a week for the last fifteen years! Doesn’t the guard recognize me?” When I came home from college for the first time at Thanksgiving, I found that the lock had been removed altogether. I stuck my finger through the hole it left in the door, remembering the satisfying sound of the lock slipping into its place and the room’s mysterious smell my mother never did manage to identify.
A Hard Woman is Good to Find

When I was eighteen years old, salt changed my life. It was a cold, gray morning in February, and we were all sitting around the breakfast table – my parents, my two older sisters, and I – when my father made the announcement. “I’ll soon be dividing up the kingdom,” he said casually as he spread strawberry jam onto toast. “I’d like to know how much each of you loves me.” He always was a straightforward man.

My eldest sister, always the quickest to act, leaned across the table to take his hand. “Daddy, you know, I love you as much as I love…” her eyes darted around the table, landed decisively. “As much as I love bread!” My father nodded sagely and grunted his approval.

“Well, I love you as much as I love wine,” my second sister proclaimed, producing a saccharine smile. Again my father nodded, grunted. My sisters looked at each other, satisfied that they would get a fair share of our father’s wealth. Then all eyes turned to me. Not to brag, but I was my father’s favorite at the time, and the entire family knew it. My sisters’ smiles faded as they realized that I could potentially take all.

“I love you as much as I love salt,” I stated plainly. Thick silence followed. My father looked confused. “Salt? Nothing can come from salt. You must mean something else.”

But I had no Plan B. Soon my father went from befuddled to angry. He called me ungrateful, wicked, and spoiled. Eventually, I was ordered out of his sight, out of his house, out of his life (and, needless to say, out of his will). He gave the order for me to be killed.

My mother, who had quietly witnessed the entire scene, took quick action. A witch was summoned, and that witch cast a spell on me, turning me into a marble statue. The spell, thanks to an acute sense of irony on my mother’s part, could only be reversed
if someone poured salt onto me. Then my mother arranged for me (as a statue) to be taken into town and sold.

“If the person who wants to buy it looks poor, ask a very high price,” she told the messenger. “But if he is well off, give him the statue for nearly nothing.”

Next thing I knew, I was carted away, sold, and found myself riding along next to a young man. He stared dreamily at my face and stroked my marble hand gently for most of the trip. I kept my eyes straight ahead (as if I had a choice). When we arrived at his elaborately decorated home, he took me directly to his bedroom without encountering anyone else.

For two weeks this man (who I soon found out was a prince; that messenger did his job well) kept me a secret, requesting all his meals be brought to his room so he would not have to leave my stony company, barely ever taking his eyes off of me, touching me and holding me and whispering in my ear. Finally, one morning he disappeared for an hour, and when he returned, he placed himself squarely in front of where I stood, putting his clammy hands into my cold ones.

“We’re going to be married. I just announced it to my mother.” As my wedding to the prince was planned, he grew more and more excited at the prospect of my becoming his, officially, forever.

The wedding ceremony passed fairly uneventfully: a beautifully brocaded dress had been slipped over my marble one, and I was carefully carried up the aisle, the prince waiting anxiously. We were married, and afterwards, we all returned to the palace for a celebratory meal with family, friends, and the neighboring kings and queens.

I was placed next to the prince at the head table – not that I could consume any of the feast before us. I was sitting stoically and watching the guests enjoy the meal when I noticed a man stand up at the other end of the room and begin to make his way towards our table. As he drew closer, I recognized his features, saw a reflection of my own sharp nose and curly hair. When my father arrived at our table, he knelt beside my
chair, and tears welled up in his eyes, pouring over, down his cheeks, landing on my arm and hand. Suddenly, I felt the hardness of the marble melting away, felt the tight heaviness lift itself from my body, felt the warm air against my skin.

It turns out that the salt from my father’s tears (tears of remorse, presumably) had been enough to break the witch’s spell, and here I was, warmth and flesh once again, hugging my father while my mother was summoned from our home to join our reunion.

Unfortunately, not all parties were quite as enthusiastic about my makeover. My new husband liked the old me, and after the wedding festivities had ended and we were on our honeymoon, the prince had that same witch come back and recast her spell. I began to harden into a statue, and my husband, so excited to see “me” again, followed suit.

A few days after we returned from our honeymoon, my husband was found dead, hit over the head with a blunt, hard object. I lay nearby, toppled over, a few drops of his blood spattered on my shoulder and across my front. As various people sifted in and out of the room, I overheard my husband’s mother say through her hysterical tears, “Did that stupid statue always have that infuriating smile on her face?” Of course – what do I look like, a real person?
Once upon a time, there lived a miserly man. He had only one child, a daughter, named Penta. He kept Penta locked away in the attic, because he was so miserly he did not want to pay a dowry should a young man see her and ask for her hand in marriage.

On the night of Penta’s seventeenth birthday, she dreamt she was a little girl, lying in her bed in the attic. In her dream, a cloaked figure had entered her room through the window. Penta tried to scream for her father but no sound would come out, and as she watched in horror, the figure walked over and cut off one of her cat’s forepaws as it lay at the foot of her bed. As the figure turned to go, the hood of the cloak fell away, and the young Penta saw her own face on the intruder. She woke up drenched in sweat and shivering.

The following night, as Penta was sleeping in her bed in the attic, she heard a sound. Her eyes fluttered open in time to see a shadowy figure, standing in the open window frame with his feet on the windowsill.

“THIEF! THIEF!” Penta screamed as loudly as she could. The intruder stepped back from the window, closed it, turned and fled, scampering across the roofs of the neighboring homes. By the time Penta’s most trusted servant and dear friend, Domenico, had arrived in the attic, Penta could no longer see the thief across the roofs. Domenico looked at her skeptically.

“Penta, there is nobody here. The window is closed. Perhaps you just had a bad dream.”

The following night, Penta was lying in bed when she heard the window open. Again she began to scream, “THIEF! There’s a thief in my room!” And again the figure at the window left, closing the window behind him and escaping over the roofs. Again Domenico came up to find no one but Penta, pleading for him to believe her. The next morning she begged her father:
“Please let me leave the attic. It is not safe up there; the thief will come again tonight! I know he will!”

“Penta, you are dreaming up the thief. Nobody but you has seen him. You’ll stay in the attic.”

But Penta wasn’t ready to give up so easily. She wanted to prove that she wasn’t just dreaming the figure in her window. So that night, as darkness fell, Penta chained the window shut, and sat just underneath it, where the intruder would not be able to see her. She waited for him with a sharp knife in her hand and a heart beating so loudly she was sure she’d wake the whole house. When the intruder arrived at the attic, he tried to open the window but found it chained shut. He reached his hand through the crack to unhook the chain, and at that moment Penta chopped his hand off cleanly at the wrist.

“You wicked, wicked girl!” the intruder howled. “I’ll get my revenge, you wait!” And with that the figure, whose bony, slender hand Penta now held in her own, scuttled off across the roofs.

The next morning, Penta awoke and looked at where the hand lay on her nightstand. She grabbed it by the fingers and ran to find her father.

“Father, look, here is the hand of the intruder in my room. Last night when he came to my room, I cut it off.”

“Penta, how could you have done such a terrible thing?”

“But Father, I needed to show you that there really was an intruder in my room!”

“Penta, the hands I see there are only your hands. I don’t understand why you’ve chosen to ruin yourself this way.” And with that, he walked away angrily. Desperate, Penta went to find Domenico.

“Domenico, you see this thief’s hand here, don’t you?” But Domenico shook his head sadly.

“I’m sorry, Miss. I don’t see anything except your own hands.”
Penta’s father and the house servants began treating Penta differently. They thought she was crazy, always imagining intruders, and soon they stopped believing what she said, whether or not it had anything to do with the mysterious intruder. One day, Penta could not take it anymore, and she ran away.

She ran to the forest, wandering away from the main road, onto the darker paths where fewer people went. As night fell, Penta realized that she did not know where she would sleep, and her stomach began to growl. Suddenly, she felt a hand place itself firmly in the middle of her back and push her forward. Her feet were lifted slightly off the ground, though they continued to move back and forth as though she were still propelling her own body. She tried to turn and see who was pushing her, but she found herself unable to twist from side to side, only to face front and continue gliding her feet back and forth, back and forth a few inches above the ground.

She tried to scream, to call out, but there was no response. Her cries bounced back from the trees around her, and Penta realized that other than whoever was behind her (and she had an inkling about whom it could be) she was entirely alone.

Soon they reached the edge of the woods, and though she could not see it, Penta could hear ocean waves crashing against a shore somewhere nearby. Suddenly, she saw that they were heading towards a small house.

“Where are you taking me? What is this place?” Penta once again tried to turn to see her kidnapper, but to no avail.

“This is my home. It’s where I store everything I’ve stolen from those whom I’ve killed.” Before he even let her down, Penta knew that the voice behind her belonged to the intruder at the attic window. His voice was surprisingly clear, almost feminine. “You’ll be the guard of my treasures. Let’s go.” Still unable to see his face, the intruder pushed her once again towards the house, until they arrived at a tree just outside the front door. Before Penta could run away, she had been chained to the tree like an animal left to wait for his owner. “I’ll be back later,” said the intruder, and
hurried away. In the darkness, Penta could only make out his figure, a hunched back covered with a dark cloak.

The following day, Penta sat by the tree, gnawing on the stale bread the intruder had thrown at her on his way out of the house that morning. Suddenly, she saw a ship in the distance, coming in her direction. She began waving her arms and yelling as they drew closer, and through their binoculars, the sailors could see a figure on the shore. They drew closer to see what it was, and finally came on shore and freed Penta.

“Please, get me away from here. I’ve been kidnapped!” Before they whisked her away, the sailors took a look around the house.

“Look at all these jewels, these riches!” they exclaimed, and took whatever their pockets could hold.

The sailors brought Penta aboard their boat and began sailing away. As she watched from the safety of the deck, the cloaked figure come back to the house, saw the broken chain by the tree and the open door to the ravaged house.

Penta saw him turn towards the ocean and spot the boat speeding away. She was too far away to see his face clearly, but nonetheless she shuddered, afraid that he knew she was on the boat.

“How did you end up here, anyway?” asked one of the sailors.

“I was kidnapped by the man who lives in that house!”

“The man who lives in that house?” said another in surprise. “The man who lived in that house died years ago. Nobody lives there now; it’s abandoned.”

Penta hesitated before she asked, “The man who used to live there, what was he like?”

The sailors scratched their heads. “He kept to himself. He was usually wearing some sort of long, dark coat. We had no idea of all the loot stashed in his house, until we rescued you.”
“Is that him?” Penta was almost afraid to ask, her finger trembling as she pointed at the figure standing on the beach.

One of the sailors looked at her strangely. “I don’t see anyone there. And anyway, we told you – he’s dead.”

The ship sailed farther and farther away, until Penta could no longer see the intruder on the shore. Eventually, the sailors tried to let Penta disembark at a port far away, but she refused. “Just throw me into the ocean! Otherwise he’ll catch me again. Please, throw me into the ocean.” The sailors gathered together to discuss what to do.

“I can take her back to my home,” one of the older sailors offered. “My wife and I have never had any children. We will take care of her.” And so it was decided: the old sailor would take Penta home, as well as some of the gems from the house on the beach.

“I will only go on one condition,” said Penta when they told her. “I don’t want to leave the house. I want to stay inside all the time, and I don’t want to see any men.” Penta was sure the intruder would continue to follow her. She had to stay out of his sight.

The old sailor brought her home, and his wife welcomed her warmly. The sailor sold some of the gems they’d taken, and with the money he bought silk, which Penta immediately began to embroider. She spent all her days embroidering, and while she embroidered, she often thought about her father and Domenico and the life she had left behind. She knew, however, that she could never return. Having embroidered every day, she soon finished a beautiful carpet. The old woman took the carpet to King Giacomo, who lived nearby, to sell it to him.

“Who made this?” asked King Giacomo curiously. “It is beautiful.”

“My daughter, Your Majesty.” She was proud of how quickly Penta had learned to embroider, especially considering her difficult circumstances. The old woman was beginning to feel as though Penta really were her daughter.
Penta continued to embroider and the old woman continued to sell her finished artwork to the king. One day, King Giacomo was simply too overcome by curiosity about the creator of these beautiful things, and so he secretly followed the old woman back to her home in the forest. As the old woman was about to close the door behind her, the king stepped into the doorway, startling the old woman so much that she let out a yell. Penta, who was in the other room, heard her mother’s yell, followed by a man’s voice that she didn’t recognize. Terrified and feeling suddenly helpless, Penta fainted.

When she awoke, Penta saw her mother and an unfamiliar man’s face standing over her, both looking concerned.

“What happened? Why did you become so frightened?” The man seemed truly interested in Penta’s answer.

She liked the kind man and sat up to answer him. “I have troubles.” And that was all she would say on the subject.

King Giacomo, who took an immediate liking to Penta, began visiting more and more frequently, until he became a daily fixture in the old couple’s home. He would keep Penta company while she embroidered, and though often the two did not talk, they very much enjoyed each other’s company. And so one day he asked for Penta’s hand in marriage.

“I would be happy to marry you, but I do have one condition.” Penta had stopped embroidering and stood up. “I don’t want to see any men, except for you and my father.” At that she put her hand on the old sailor’s shoulder. “I don’t want to see any men, and I don’t want to be seen by any men. All right?”

“Done,” said King Giacomo.

A secret wedding was held, and an announcement was made that the king had been married. But the public did not understand why they could not see their king’s new bride. Soon, rumors began to circulate about Penta. She was a witch. She was a
hairy beast, her face covered with dark fur. She was actually the king’s mother. Finally, the king approached Penta.

“My darling, you have heard the rumors of the public. We cannot let this go on; it is too damaging for me. Won’t you make an appearance? The public will love you.”

“I don’t know….” Penta could feel herself begin to tremble at the very thought.

“Please, my darling? For me?”

“All right – I’ll come out onto the balcony for an hour tomorrow morning, at eleven o’clock.”

By eleven that morning, the main square in town was more packed than anyone could remember it having been before. Everyone, from the farthest corners of the kingdom, had come out to see this mysterious new queen. As Penta prepared to step out onto the balcony, a servant helped her to put on the final part of her carefully chosen outfit: a pair of immaculate white gloves which reached her elbows. As Penta emerged into the sunlight, a general buzz of excitement and admiration passed through the crowd. She certainly wasn’t a witch, nor an animal, it was agreed. Penta, meanwhile, was fighting to control her fear as she stood on the balcony, smiling with some difficulty. She let her eyes pass over the huge crowd, and all of a sudden, her gaze landed right in the middle of the mass of people. There stood the intruder in a dark cloak, his face hidden by the shadow of his hood. He must have known she was looking directly at him, for at that exact moment he lifted his arm and waved it towards her. Even from the balcony, Penta could see that there was no hand at the end of the arm. And with that, she fainted.

When she awoke, Penta first heard the old sailor’s wife, screaming in the next room.

“She wasn’t ready to do this! She didn’t want to see people! What have you done to her?”
“How dare you speak to me in that fashion? It was the right thing for her. She can’t stay hidden away like this forever. It’s not natural!” King Giacomo’s voice was strained and he sounded tired.

“The right thing for her? You were worried that people thought you’d married a monkey. Penta wasn’t ready, and you pushed her! You promised her you wouldn’t do this – how could you?”

Penta did not want to face them just yet – she was ashamed of her behavior, and knew she could never explain it to anyone. She was the only one this intruder was haunting, and as much as they loved and cared for Penta, she knew her family would react in much the same way Domenico and her father had acted when she’d told them about the intruder at her window. Wanting to remain hidden and alone, Penta climbed the stairs to the abandoned attic of the palace, where she curled up on the warm wooden floor and fell asleep.

Penta was startled out of her slumber by a familiar sound. Before she’d opened her eyes, her first thought was that she was back in her old bed, at home with her father before she’d run away. The sound was so familiar, as was the terrifying thumping of her heart and her shaking fingers, that it wasn’t until Penta opened her eyes and saw the attic of her husband’s palace that she realized where she was and what was happening.

The first thing Penta saw was the outlined figure of the intruder standing in the window frame. Before she could even open her mouth, the intruder had jumped into the room and pointed his stumpy arm at her, his face a dark shadow in the dim light of the moon.

“Don’t say a word,” he said evenly. “Now go get me a bowl of water. After I’ve killed you, I’m going to want to clean myself up.”

Penta scurried down the stairs onto the main floor of the palace, relieved at how easily she’d managed to escape. She ran to wake King Giacomo.
“Help me! The intruder is going to kill me!” Penta shook the king awake urgently.

“What are you talking about, darling?” His eyes were barely open.

“There’s an intruder in the attic! He wants me to bring him water so he can wash my blood off his hands! I know him! He’s going to kill me!”

“My dear, you’ve had a very long, trying day. You had a bad dream. Now come to bed and get some sleep. You’ll feel better in the morning.”

“I’m not dreaming! This is an emergency, you have to help me!”

“Sweetheart, this is nonsense. I know it’s been a difficult day, but there’s no reason to get so worked up over a dream.” And with that, King Giacomo turned on his side and went to sleep.

Terrified, Penta could think of nothing else to do but fetch the requested bucket of water. When she brought it back to the attic, she could hear the intruder sneering through his words.

“I’ll also need some soap, please.” As Penta rummaged around and found a bar of soap, she had another idea. She ran to the servant’s quarters to wake her only friend there, an older man called Alessandro.

“There’s a man trying to kill me. He’s in the attic. Please, you must help me.”

Alessandro pulled himself out of his bed and followed Penta, but as they climbed the steep, dark stairs, Penta realized something. “You aren’t going to be able to see the man. He’s invisible; I think maybe he’s a ghost. A long time ago, I cut off his hand, and he swore revenge, and then he kidnapped me, and then some sailors rescued me and told me he’d died, and I think I’m the only one who can….” she trailed off as Alessandro looked at her warily. “Please, just come to the attic with me.” But when they arrived, Alessandro could not see the intruder, who stood there sharpening his knife.
The intruder sneered at Penta as she desperately tried to convince Alessandro. But after taking a look around the attic and not seeing a soul, Alessandro descended the stairs with a yawn, scratching his head perplexedly and muttering to himself. Once he had disappeared, the intruder took the soap from Penta and stared at her.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“What now? Please don’t torture me any longer.”

“The fun has barely begun. After I’ve washed your blood off of me, I’ll need a towel to dry off. Go fetch one.”

For the third time, Penta went down to the main floor, but this time she did not have a plan. She felt entirely helpless, and, not knowing what else to do, she picked out a towel from the closet and started back towards the attic stairs. As she passed by her husband’s open bedroom door, she stopped for a moment to look inside. She felt betrayed by him, and was about to continue to meet her death when she spotted his dagger, glinting in the moonlight beside the bed. Before she knew what she was doing, Penta had picked up the knife and left the room holding it in one hand, half hidden behind her back.

When she reached the top of the stairs and entered the attic, the intruder turned and came towards her with his one remaining hand outstretched to take the towel from her. All the way up Penta had been shaking and fighting back desperate tears, but at that moment she felt the determination and resolve that she’d had on the night when she’d cut off the intruder’s hand. Taking a deep breath, Penta thrust the towel towards him. As his fingers clamped over the cloth, Penta did not let go of the towel, and before the intruder could understand what she was doing, Penta had chopped his other hand right off. The intruder howled and fell to the ground. Penta stood over him, his disembodied hand and his writhing body at her feet. The dagger she held was covered with blood, but Penta did not tremble as she leaned over the intruder and said, “Be gone from my life. You will never lay a hand on me again.”
As Penta watched, the figure before her slowly faded away. She placed the knife down on the floor beside the disappearing disembodied hand and descended the stairs, firmly closing the attic door behind her.

She walked purposefully towards the balcony where she had stood the day before, determined this time to take advantage of her newfound liberty by going outside without fear. As Penta looked out over the now empty town square, she rested her arms on the railing, the freshly bloody stump leaving a stain on the white marble, and watched the sun rise over the kingdom.
Appendix

Il vaso di maggiorana

C’era una volta uno speziale; era vedovo e aveva una figlia bella e cara che si chiamava Stella Diana. Stella Diana tutti i giorni andava a imparare il cucito da una maestra. In casa di questa maestra c’era una terrazza piena di vasi di fiori e piante, e tutti i pomeriggi Stella Diana andava ad annaffiare un vaso di maggiorana che le piaceva tanto. Di fronte alla terrazza, c’era un poggiolo, dove un giovane signore stava affacciato. E il giovane signore un giorno le disse:

Stella Diana, Stella Diana,
Quante foglie ha la tua maggiorana?

E la ragazza gli rispose:

O bel nobile cavaliero,
Quante stelle c’è nel cielo?

E lui:
Le stelle del cielo non si posson contare.

E lei:
La mia maggiorana non si deve guardare.

Il signore allora si travestì da pescivendolo e andò sotto alle finestre della maestra a vendere pesce. La maestra mandò Stella Diana a comprarle un pesce da friggere per cena, e lei scese e domandò al pescivendolo quanto costava. Lui disse il

14 All of the stories in the Appendix are taken from the following source: Calvino, Italo. Fiabe
prezzo, ma era una cifra così grossa che Stella Diana disse che non lo voleva. Allora lui le disse: - Per un bacio, glielo do per niente.

Stella Diana gli diede un bacio di sfuggita e lui le diede il pesce per la cena della maestra.

Al pomeriggio quando Stella Diana apparve tra i vasi della terrazza, il signore dal poggiole le disse:

    Stella Diana, Stella Diana,
    Quante foglie ha la tua maggiorana?

E lei:

    O bel nobile cavaliero,
    Quante stelle c’è nel cielo?

E lui:

    Le stelle del cielo non si posson contare.

E lei:

    La mia maggiorana non si deve guardare.

Allora il signore le disse:

    Per un solo pesciolino
    Tu m’hai dato un bel bacino.

    Stella Diana, compreso lo scherzo, s’arrabbiò a si ritirò dalla terrazza, e subito pensò di rispondergli con un altro scherzo. Si vestí da uomo e si mise alla vita una bella cintura preziosa; salí in groppa a una mula e si mise a passeggire per la via dove stava quel signore. Lui vide la cintura e disse: - Che bella! Me la venderebbe? – Ma lei

facendo la voce da uomo, gli disse che non la vendeva per nessun prezzo. Lui disse che avrebbe fatto qualsiasi cosa per aver quella cintura; e lei: - Allora dia un bacio sulla coda alla mia mula e io gli darò la cintura. – Al signore quella cintura piaceva davvero e, guardatosi intorno che nessuno lo vedesse, diede un bacio alla coda della mula, prese la cintura e andò via.

Quando si videro lei sulla terrazza e lui sul poggio, ci fu il solito dialogo.

-Stella Diana, Stella Diana,
Quante foglie ha la tua maggiorana?
-O bel nobile cavaliero,
Quante stelle c’è nel cielo?
-Le stelle del cielo non si posson contare.
-La mia maggiorana non si deve guardare.
-Per un solo pesciolino
Tu m’hai dato un bel bacino.
-Per avere una cinura
Hai baciato la coda alla mia mula.

A sentire questa battuta, il signore ci restò davvero male. Decise di mettersi d’accordo con la maestra e le chiese il permesso di nascondersi sotto la scala. Quando Stella Diana salì la scala, il giovane, di sotto, le tirò la sottana. La ragazza gridò:

Signora maestra, signora maestra,
La scala mi tira la vesta!

E della terrazza al balcone, quel pomeriggio si tenne questo dialogo:
-Stella Diana, Stella Diana,
Quante foglie ha la tua maggiorana?
-O bel nobile cavaliero,
Quante stelle c’è nel cielo?
-Le stelle del cielo non si posson contare.
-La mia maggiorana non si deve guardare.
-Per un solo pesciolino
Tu m’hai dato un bel bacino.
-Per avere una cintura
Hai baciato la coda alla mia mula.
-Signora maestra, signora maestra,
La scala mi tira la vesta!

Stavolta fu Stella Diana a restarci male; e pensò: “Adesso ti faccio vedere io!”
Con una mancia al servitore riuscì a entrare una sera in casa del giovane e gli apparve con un lenzuolo sulla testa, una torcia in mano e un libro aperto. Il giovane, quando vide quel fantasma, cominciò a tremare e disse:

Io sono giovane, morte mia bella,
Va’ invece da mia zia, che è vecchierella.

Stella Diana spense la torcia e se ne andò. L’indomani, il duetto continuò:

-Stella Diana, Stella Diana,
Quante foglie ha la tua maggiorana?
-O bel nobile cavaliero,
Quante stelle c’è nel cielo?
- Le stelle del cielo non si posson contare.
- La mia maggiorana non si deve guardare.
- Per un solo pesciolino
  Tu m’hai dato un bel bacino.
- Per avere una cintura
  Hai baciato la coda alla mia mula.
- Signora maestra, signora maestra,
  La scala mi tira la vesta!
- Io sono giovane, morte mia bella,
  Va’ invece da mia zia, che è vecchierella.

A questa nuova beffa, il giovane si disse: “Stavolta non posso più sopportare. Troverò un nuovo modo per vendicarmi.” E detto fatto, andò dallo speziale a chiedere la mano di Stella Diana. Lo speziale fu ben contento e stesero subito il contratto. Si avvicinava il giorno delle nozze e Stella Diana aveva paura che lo sposo covasse ancora propositi di vendetta per tutti i suoi scherzi. Pensò di farsi una bambola di pasta, grande quanto lei, che le somigliasse in tutto e per tutto, e al posto del cuore le mise una vescica piena di lattemiele. Quando dopo le nozze si ritirò in camera, mise la bambola a letto, con la sua cuffia e la sua camicia, e si nascose.

Entrò lo sposo. – Ah, siamo soli finalmente. È venuto il momento di vendicarmi di tutte le mortificazioni che m’hai dato. – E sguainato un pugnale lo ficcò nel cuore della bambola. La vescica scoppiò e il lattemiele schizzò dappertutto: anche in bocca allo sposo.

- Ah povero me! Com’è dolce il sangue della mia Stella Diana! E io che l’ho uccisa! Cos’ho mai fatto! Ah, potessi mai farla rivivere!

Allora saltò fuori Stella Diana, sana come un pesce. – Eccomi qua, sono io la tua Stella Diana, non sono mica morta!
Lo sposo l’abbracciò felice e contento e d’allora in poi felici e contenti
continuarono a vivere.

(Milano)
La ragazza mela

C’era una volta un Re e una Regina, disperati perché non avevanofiglioli. E la Regina diceva: - Perché non posso fare figli, così come il melo fa le mele?

Ora successe che alla Regina invece di nascere un figlio le nacque una mela. Era una mela così bella e colorata come non se n’erano mai viste. E il Re la mise in un vassoio d’oro sul suo terrazzo.

In faccia a questo Re ce ne stava un altro, e quest’altro Re, un giorno che stava affacciato alla finestra, vide sul terrazzo del Re di fronte una bella ragazza bianca e rossa come una mela che si lavava e pettinava al sole. Lui rimase a guardare a bocca aperta, perché mai aveva visto una ragazza così bella. Ma la ragazza appena s’accorse d’esser guardata, corse al vassoio, entrò nella mela e sparí. Il Re ne era rimasto innamorato.

Pensa e ripensa, va a bussare al palazzo di fronte, e chiede della Regina: - Maestà, - le dice, - avrei da chiederle un favore.

- Volentieri, Maestà; tra vicini se si può essere utili... – dice la Regina.

- Vorrei quella bella mela che avete sul terrazzo.

- Ma che dite, Maestà? Ma non sapete che io sono la madre di quella mela, e che ho sospirato tanto perché mi nascesse?

Ma il Re tanto disse tanto insistette, che non gli si poté dir di no per mantenere l’amicizia tra vicini. Cosí lui si portò la mela in camera sua. Le preparava tutto per lavarsi e pettinarsi, e la ragazza ogni mattino usciva, e si lavava e pettinava e lui la stava a guardare. Altro non faceva, la ragazza: non mangiava, non parlava. Solo si lavava e pettinava e poi tornava nella mela.

Quel Re abitava con una matrigna, la quale, a vederlo sempre chiuso in camera, cominciò a insospettirsi: - Pagherei a sapere perché mio figlio se ne sta sempre nascosto!
Venne l’ordine di guerra e il Re dovette partire. Gli piangeva il cuore, di lasciare la sua mela! Chiamò il suo servitore piú fedele e gli disse: - Ti lascio la chiave di camera mia. Bada che non entri nessuno. Prepara tutti i giorni l’acqua e il pettine alla ragazza della mela, e fa’ che non le manchi niente. Guarda che poi lei mi racconta tutto -. (Non era vero, la ragazza non diceva una parola, ma lui al servitore disse cosí). – Sta’ attento che se le fosse torto un capello durante la mia assenza, ne va della tua testa.

- Non dubiti, Maestà, faró del mio meglio.

Appena il Re fu partito, la Regina matrigna si diede da fare per entrare nella sua stanza. Fece mettere dell’oppio nel vino del servitore e quando s’addormentò gli rubò la chiave. Apre, e fruga tutta la stanza, e piú frugava meno trovava. C’era solo quella bella mela in una fruttiera d’oro. – Non può essere altro che questa mela la sua fissazione!

Si sa che le Regine alla cintola portano sempre uno stiletto. Prese lo stiletto, e si mise a trafiggere la mela. Da ogni trafittura usciva un rivolo di sangue. La Regina matrigna si mise paura, scappò, e rimise la chiave in tasca al servitore addormentato.

Quando il servitore si svegliò, non si raccapezzava di cosa gli era successo. Corse nella camera del Re e la trovò allagata di sangue. – Povero me! Cosa devo fare? – e scappò.

Andò da sua zia, che era una Fata e aveva tutte le polverine magiche. La zia gli diede una polverina magica che andava bene per le mele incantate e un’altra che andava bene per le ragazze stregate e le mescolò insieme.

Il servitore tornò dalla mela e le posò un po’ di polverina su tutte le trafitture. La mela si spaccò e ne uscí fuori la ragazza tutta bendata e incerottata.

Tornò il Re e la ragazza per la prima volta parlò e disse: - Senti, la tua matrigna m’ha preso a stilettate, ma il tuo servitore mi ha curata. Ho diciotto anni e sono uscita dall’incantesimo. Se mi vuoi sarò tua sposa.

E il Re: - Perbacco, se ti voglio!
Fu fatta la festa con gran gioia dei due palazzi vicini. Mancava solo la matrigna che scappò e nessuno ne seppe piú niente.

E lí se ne stiedero, e se ne godierono,
E a me nulla mi diedero.
No, mi diedero un centisimino
E lo misi in un buchino.

(Firenze)
Sant'Antonio dà il fuoco agli uomini

Una volta, al mondo, non c’era il fuoco. Gli uomini avevano freddo e andarono da Sant’Antonio che stava nel deserto a pregarlo che facesse qualcosa per loro, che con quel freddo non potevano più vivere. Sant’Antonio ne ebbe compassione e siccome il fuoco era all’Inferno, decise d’andare a prenderlo.

Sant’Antonio prima di fare il santo era stato porcaro, e un porchetto della sua mandria non l’aveva mai voluto abbandonare e lo seguiva sempre. Cosí Sant’Antonio, col suo porchetto e il suo bastone di ferula si presentò alla porta dell’Inferno e bussò. – Apritemi, che ho freddo e mi voglio riscaldare!

I diavoli, dalla porta, videro subito che quello non era un peccatore ma un santo e dissero: - No, no! T’abbiamo riconosciuto! Non t’apriamo!

- Apritemi! Ho freddo! – insisteva Sant’Antonio, e il porco grufolava contro la porta.

- Il porco sí che lo lasciamo entrare, ma te no! – dissero i diavoli, e aprirono uno spiraglio, tanto che entrasse il porco. Il porco di Sant’Antonio, appena fu nell’Inferno, cominciò a scorrazzare e grufolare per ogni dove, e metteva tutto in scompiglio. I diavoli dovevano corrergli dietro a raccogliere tizzoni, a raccattare pezzi di sughero, a rialzare tridenti che lui faceva cadere, a rimetter a posto forche e strumenti di tortura. Non ne potevano piú, ma non riuscivano ad acchiappare il porco né a cacciarlo via.

Finirono per rivolgersi al Santo, che era rimasto fuori dalla porta: - Quel tuo porco maledetto ci mette tutto in disordine! Vientelo a riprendere.

Sant’Antonio entrò nell’Inferno, toccò il porco col suo bastone e quello se ne stette subito quieto.

- Visto che ci sono, - disse Sant’Antonio, - mi siedo un momento a scaldarmi, - e si sedette su un sacco di sughero, proprio sul passaggio, stendendo le mani verso il fuoco.
Ogni tanto, davanti a lui passava un diavolo di corsa che andava a dire a Lucifero di qualche anima di questo mondo che lui aveva fatto cadere in peccato. E Sant’Antonio, col suo bastone di ferula, giù una legnata sulla schiena!

- Questi scherzi non ci piacciono, - dissero i diavoli. – Tieni giù quel bastone.
Sant’Antonio posò il bastone con la punta in terra inclinato accanto a sé, e il primo diavolo che passò di corsa gridando: - Lucifero! Un’anima sicura! – ci inciampò e picchiò la faccia in terra.

- Basta! Con questo bastone ci hai annoiato! – dissero i diavoli. – Ora te lo bruciamo. – Lo presero e ne ficcarono la punta nelle fiamme.

Il porco in quel momento ricominciò a buttar all’aria tutto: cataste di legna, uncini, torce. – Se volete che lo faccia star buono, - disse Sant’Antonio, - dovete ridarmi il bastone. – Glielo ridiedero e il porco stette subito buono.

Ma il bastone era di ferula, e il legno di ferula ha il midollo spugnoso, e se una scintilla o un carbonchio c’entra dentro, continua a bruciare di nascosto, senza che di fuori si veda. Così i diavoli non s’accorsero che Sant’Antonio aveva il fuoco nel bastone. E Sant’Antonio dopo aver predicato ai diavoli, col suo bastone e il suo porchetto se n’andò via, e i diavoli tirarono un sospiro di sollievo.

Appena fu fuori all’aria del mondo, Sant’Antonio alzò il bastone con la punta infuocata, e la girò intorno facendo volare le scintille, come dando la benedizione. E cantò:

Fuoco, fuoco,
Per ogni loco,
Per tutto il mondo
Fuoco giocondo!

Da quel momento, con gran contentezza degli uomini, ci fu il fuoco sulla terra. E Sant’Antonio tornò nel suo deserto a meditare.
(Logudoro)
La figlia del Sole

A un Re e a una Regina, finalmente, dopo averlo tanto aspettato, stava per nascere un bambino. Chiamarono gli astrologhi per sapere se sarebbe nato un maschio o una femmina, e qual era il suo pianeta. Gli astrologhi guardarono le stelle e dissero che nascerebbe una bambina, e che era destinata a far innamorare di sé il Sole prima di compiere i vent’anni, e ad avere dal Sole una figlia. Il Re e la Regina, a sapere che la loro figlia avrebbe avuto una figlia dal Sole, che sta in cielo e non si può sposare, ci rimasero male. E per trovare un rimedio a quella sorte, fecero costruire una torre con finestre così alte che il Sole stesso non potesse arrivare fino in fondo. La bambina fu chiusa lí dentro con la balia, perché stesse fino ai vent’anni senza vedere il Sole né esser da lui vista.

La balia aveva una figlia della stessa età della figlia del Re, e le due bambine crebbero insieme nella torre. Avevano quasi vent’anni quando un giorno, parlando delle belle cose che dovevano esserci al mondo fuori da quella torre, la figlia della balia disse: - E se cercassimo d’arrampicarci alle finestre mettendo una sedia sopra l’altra? Vedremmo un po’ cosa c’è fuori!

Detto fatto, fecero una catasta di sedie così alta che riuscirono ad arrivare alla finestra. S’affacciarono e videro gli alberi e il fiume e gli aironi in volo, e lassú le nuvole, e il Sole. Il Sole vide la figlia del Re, se n’innamorò e le mandò un suo raggio. Dal momento in cui quel raggio la toccò, la ragazza attese di dare alla luce la figlia del Sole.

La figlia del Sole nacque nella torre, e la balia, che temeva la collera del Re, la avvolse ben bene con fasce d’oro da regina, la portò in un campo di fave e ve l’abbandonò. Di lí a poco la figlia del Re compí i vent’anni, e il padre la fece uscire dalla torre, pensando che il pericolo fosse passato. E non sapeva che tutto era già successo, e la bambina del Sole e di sua figlia in quel momento stava piangendo, abbandonata in un campo di fave.
Da quel campo passò un altro Re che andava a caccia: sentí i vagiti, e s’impietosí di quella bella creaturina lasciata tra le fave. La prese con sé e la portò da sua moglie. Le trovarono una balia e la bambina fu allevata a palazzo come fosse figlia di quel Re e di quella Regina, insieme al loro figlio, piú grandetto di lei ma di poco.

Il ragazzo e la ragazza crebbero insieme e, divenuti grandi, finirono per innamorarsi. Il figlio del Re voleva a tutti i costi averla in sposa, ma il Re non voleva che suo figlio sposasse una ragazza abbandonata e la fece andar via da palazzo confinandola in una casa lontana e solitaria, con la speranza che suo figlio la scordasse. Non s’immaginava nemmeno che quella ragazza era la figlia del Sole, ed era fatata e sapeva tutte le arti che gli uomini non sanno.

Appena la ragazza fu lontana, il Re cercò una fidanzata di famiglia reale per il figlio e combinarono le nozze. Il giorno delle nozze, furono mandati i confetti a tutti i parenti, amici e familiari, e siccome nell’elenco dei parenti, amici e familiari c’era anche quella ragazza trovata nel campo delle fave, andarono gli Ambasciatori a portare i confetti anche a lei.

Gli Ambasciatori bussarono. La figlia del Sole scese ad aprire, ma era senza testa. – Oh, scusate, - disse, - mi pettinavo, e ho dimenticato la testa sulla toletta. Vado a prenderla. – Andò su con gli Ambasciatori, si rimise la testa sul collo e sorrisse.

- Cosa vi do, per regalo di nozze? – disse; e portò gli Ambasciatori in cucina. – Forno, apriti! – disse, e il forno s’aprí. La figlia del Sole fece un sorriso agli Ambasciatori. – Legna, va’ nel forno! – e la legna prese e andò nel forno. La figlia del Sole sorrisé ancora agli Ambasciatori, poi disse: - Forno accenditi e quando sei caldo chiamami! – Si voltò agli Ambasciatori e disse: - Allora, cosa mi raccontate di bello?

Gli Ambasciatori, coi capelli ritti sul capo, pallidi come morti, stavano cercando di ritrovare parola, quando il forno gridò: - Sora padrona!
La figlia del Sole disse: - Aspettate, - ed entrò nel forno rovente con tutto il corpo, ci si voltò dentro, tornò fuori e aveva in mano un bel pasticcio ben cotto e dorato. – Portatelo al Re per il pranzo di nozze.

Quando gli Ambasciatori giunsero a palazzo, con gli occhi fuor delle orbite, e raccontarono con un fil di voce le cose che avevano viste, nessuno ci voleva credere. Ma la sposa, ingelosita di quella ragazza (tutti sapevano che era stata l’innamorata del suo sposo) disse: - Oh, sono cose che facevo sempre anch’io, quand’ero a casa.

- Bene, - disse lo sposo, - allora le farai anche qui per noi.
- Eh, sí, certo, vedremo, - cercava di dire la sposa, ma lui la condusse subito in cucina.

- Legna, va’ nel forno, - diceva la sposa, ma la legna non si muoveva. – Fuoco, accenditi, - ma il forno restava spento. Lo accessero i servitori, e quando fu caldo, questa sposa era tanto orgogliosa che volle entrarcì dentro. Non c’era ancora entrata che era già morta bruciata.

Dopo un po’ di tempo, il figlio del Re si lasciò convincere a prendere un’altra moglie. Il giorno delle nozze, gli Ambasciatori tornarono dalla figlia del Sole a portarle i confetti. Bussarono, e la figlia del Sole, invece d’aprire la porta, passò attraverso il muro e venne fuori. – Scusate, - disse, - c’è la porta che non s’apre dal di dentro. Mi tocca sempre passare attraverso il muro e aprirla di fuori. Ecco, ora potete entrare.

Li portò in cucina e disse: - Allora, che cosa preparo di bello, al figlio del Re che si sposa? Su, su, legna, va’ nel fuoco! Fuoco, accenditi! – E tutto fu fatto in un attimo, davanti agli Ambasciatori che sudavano freddo.

- Padella, va’ sul fuoco! Olio, va’ nella padella! E quando friggi chiamami!

Dopo poco l’olio chiamò: - Sora padrona, friggo!

- Eccomi, - fece sorridente la figlia del Sole, mise le dita nell’olio bollente e le dita si trasformarono in pesci: dieci dita, dieci pesci fritti bellissimi, che la figlia del Sole
incartò lei stessa perché intanto le dita le erano ricresciute, e diede agli Ambasciatori sorrendo.

La nuova sposa, quando intese il racconto degli Ambasciatori stupefatti, anche lei gelosa e ambiziosa, cominciò a dire: - Uh, bella roba, vedeste io, che pesci faccio!

Lo sposo la prese in parola e fece preparare la padella con l’olio bollente. Quella superba ci cacciò le dita e si scottò così forte che le venne male e morí.

La Regina madre se la prese con gli Ambasciatori: - Ma che storie venite a raccontare! Fate morire tutte le spose!

Comunque, trovarono una terza sposa al figlio e il giorno delle nozze tornarono gli Ambasciatori a portare i confetti.

-Uh, uh, sono qui! – disse la figlia del Sole quando bussarono. Si guardarono intorno e la videro per aria. – Facevo quattro passi su una tela di ragno. Ora scendo, - e scese giú per la tela d’un ragno a prendere i confetti.

-Stavolta, davvero, non so che regalo fare, - disse. Ci pensò su, poi chiamò: - Coltello, vieni qui! – Venne il coltello, lei lo prese e si tagliò un orecchio. Attaccata all’orecchio c’era una trina d’oro che le veniva fuori dalla testa, come fosse aggomitolata nel cervello e lei continuava a cavarla fuori che sembrava non finisse mai. Finí la trina, e lei si rimise a posto l’orecchio, gli diede un colpettino col dito e tornò come prima.

La trina era tanto bella che a Corte tutti volevano sapere da dove veniva, e gli Ambasciatori, nonostante il divieto della Regina madre, finirono per raccontare la storia dell’orecchio.

- Uh, - fece la nuova sposa, - io ho guarnito tutti i miei vestiti di trine che mi facevo a quella maniera.

- Te’ il coltello, prova un po’! – le fece lo sposo.

E quella scriferiata si tagliò un orecchio: invece della trina le venne fuori un lago di sangue, tanto che morí.
Il figlio del Re continuava a perdere mogli, ma era sempre piú innamorato di quella ragazza. Finí per ammalarsi, e non rideva piú né mangiava; non si sapeva come farlo vivere.

Mandarono a chiarmare una vecchia maga che disse: - Bisogna fargli prendere una pappa d’orzo, ma d’un orzo che in un’ora sia seminato, nasca, sia colto se ne faccia la pappa.

Il Re era disperato perché orzo cosí non se n’era mai visto. Allora pensarono a quella ragazza che sapeva fare tante cose meravigliose e la mandarono a chiamare.

- Sí, sí, orzo cosí e cosí, ho capito, - disse lei, e detto fatto, seminó l’orzo, l’orzo nacque, crebbe, lo colse, e ne fece una pappa prima ancora che fosse passata un’ora.

Voleva andare lei in persona a porgere la pappa al figlio del Re che se ne stava a letto a occhi chiusi. Ma era una pappa cattiva, e appena lui ne ebbe ingeriuto un cucchiaio lo sputò e finí in un occhio della ragazza.

- Come? A me sputi in un occhio la pappa d’orzo, a me figlia del Sole, a me nipote del Re?

- Ma tu sei figlia del Sole? – disse il Re che era lí vicino.

- Io sí.

- E sei nipote di Re?

- Io sí.

- E noi che ti credevamo trovasseti! Allora puoi sposare nostro figlio!

- Certo che posso!

Il figlio del Re guarí all’istante e sposò la figlia del Sole che da quel giorno diventò una donna come tutte le altre e non fece piú cose strane.

(Pisa)
L’arte di Franceschiello

Una mamma aveva un figlio solo, Franceschiello, e voleva che imparasse qualche arte. E il figlio rispondeva: - Voi trovate mi il maestro e io imparerò l’arte - . La mamma per maestro gli trovò un fabbroferraio.

Franceschiello andò a lavorare dal fabbroferraio e gli successe di darsi una martellata su una mano. Tornò dalla mamma. – Mamma, trovate un altro maestro, ché quest’arte non fa per me.

La mamma gli cercò un altro maestro e trovò un ciabattino. Franceschiello lavorò dal ciabattino e gli successe che si diede la lesina in una mano. Tornò dalla madre: - Mamma, trovate un altro maestro, ché neanche quest’arte fa per me.

Gli rispose la madre: - Figlio mio, mi restano solo dieci duacti. Se tu impari l’arte va bene, se no non so più che farti.

- Se è così, mamma, - disse Franceschiello, - è meglio che tu mi dia questi dieci ducati e io me ne vada per il mondo a vedere se imparo un’arte per conto mio.

La madre gli diede i dieci ducati e Franceschiello si mise in cammino. Strada facendo in mezzo a un bosco, sbucano fuori quattro armati e gridano: - Faccia a terra!

E Franceschiello: - Faccia a terra come?

E quelli: - Faccia a terra!

E Franceschiello: - Fatemi vedere voi come mi devo mettere.

Il capo dei briganti pensò: “Questo è uno piú duro di noi. Se lo pigliassimo nella nostra compagnia?” E gli chiese: - Giovanotto, ci verresti insieme a noi?

- Che arte m’inseginate? – disse Franceschiello.

- La nostra arte, - disse il capo-brigante, - è l’arte onorata. Andiamo incontro alla gente, e se non ci vogliono dare i quattrini li stendiamo morti. Poi mangiamo, beviamo e andiamo a spasso.

E Franceschiello si mise a batter le strade con la compagnia. Dopo un anno, il capo morí, e fu fatto capo Franceschiello. Un giorno comandò a tutta la compagnia
d’andare in giro e restò solo a guardia del bottino. Gli venne un’idea: “Con tutti i quattrini che c’è qui, potrei caricarmi un mulo, andarmene e non farmi più vedere!” E così fece.

Arrivò a casa di sua madre e bussò: - Mamma, apritemi! – La madre aprí e si trovò davanti il figlio che teneva un mulo per la cavezza, e subito si mise a scaricare sacchi di quattrini.

- Ma che arte hai imparato? – gli chiese subito la madre.

- L’arte onorata, mamma, un’arte buona. Si mangia, si beve e si va a spasso.

La madre, che non se n’intendeva, credette che fosse un’arte buona e non gli domandò piú niente. Bisogna sapere che essa aveva per compare l’Arciprete.
L’indomani andò a trovare quest’Arciprete e gli disse: - Compare, sai, è tornato il comparuccio tuo!

- E allora, - disse il compare, - l’ha imparato un’arte?

- Sí, - fece la madre, - ha imparato l’arte onorata: si mangia, si beve e si va a spasso. E ha guadagnato un mulo di quattrini.

- Ah sí, - fece l’Arciprete, che la sapeva lunga, - be’, fammelo rivedere, che gli voglio un po’ parlare....

Franceschiello andò a trovarlo. – Allora, comparuccio, è vero che hai imparato una buona arte?

- Signorsí.

- Be’, se è vero che l’hai imparata buona, dobbiamo fare una scommessa.

- E che scommessa?

- Io ho dodici pastori e venti cani. Se tu riesci a portarmi via un castrato dalla mandria, ti do centro ducati.

E Franceschiello: - Compare, se hai dodici pastori e i cani, come vuoi che faccia?
Mah, che volete che vi dica? Proviamo.
Si vestì da monaco e andò dai pastori. – Ve’, pastori, tenete i cani, sono un povero sacerdote.

I pastori legarono i cani. – Vieni, vieni, zi’ monaco, ventic a scaldare con noialtri.

Franceschiello si sedette accanto al fuoco coi pastori, trasse di tasca un pezzo di pane e si mise a mangiare. Poi si sfilò da tracolla una fiaschetta e fece finita di bere (fece solo finita, perché era vino coll’oppio). Disse un pastore: - Alla buonora, zi’ monaco, mangi e bevi e non inviti nessuno?

- Padrone! – disse Franceschiello. – A me basta un sorso -. E gli porse la fiaschetta. Bevve il pastore, bevvero pure gli altri e quand’ebbero bevuto cominciò a prenderli il sonno. – Proprio ora che volevamo discorrere un po’ con lo zi’ monaco, a voialtri vi piglia sonno! – disse l’unico che era rimasto sveglio; non aveva ancora finito di dirlo, che prese sonno anche a lui, e s’abbatté a dormire.

Quando Franceschiello vide che dormivano della grossa tutti e dodici, li spogliò uno per uno e li rivestì tutti da monaci. Prese il castrato piú grosso, e andò via. A casa, uccise il castrato e lo fece arrosto; e una coscia la mandò all’Arciprete.

Quando i pastori si svegliarono e si videro vestiti da monaci, capirono subito d’esser stati derubati. – E ora, - dissero, - come andremo a dirlo al padrone?


E l’Arciprete: - Stamattina ho l’uffizio; digli che se ne vadano.


Quando l’Arciprete vide i suoi pastori vestiti da monaci capí che doveva esser un tiro di Franceschiello e disse fra sé: “Allora è vero che ha imparato l’arte!” Lo mandò a chiamare e gli diede i cento ducati.

- Va bene, - disse Franceschiello.

L’Arciprete mandò a chiamare il romito che stava a quella chiesa e gli disse: - Ve’, sta attento; verrà uno a portar via qualcosa in chiesa. Fa’ la guardia di giorno e di notte.


Franceschiello lasciò passare sette giorni e sette notti. All’ultima sera cominciò ad avvicinarsi alla chiesa, e si nascose dietro un angolo. Il romito, che, poveretto, erano sette giorni e sette notti che non dormiva s’affacciò all porta e si mise a dire: - Per sette notti non è venuto. Stanotte è l’ultima. Son suonate le sei e non s’è visto. Segno che non si fida di venire. Mah! Andrò a fare i miei bisogni e poi me ne andrò a dormire.

Uscì per fare i suoi bisogni, e Franceschiello, che aveva sentito tutto, svelto come un gatto, si cacciò dentro la chiesa. Rientrò il romito, sbarrò le porte, e poi, morto di sonno com’era, si buttò giù in mezzo alla chiesa e s’addormentò. Franceschiello allora prese tutte le statue della chiesa e gliele mise intorno; vicino ai piedi gli mise un sacco; poi si vestì da prete, salì sull’altare e cominciò a predicare: - Romito che stai in questa chiesa, è tempo che tu sia salvato!

Il romito non si svegliava.

- Romito che stai in questa chiesa, ora è tempo che tu sia salvato!

Il romito si svegliò e si vide intorno tutti quei santi. – Santità, - disse, - Santità!

Lasciate che vi preghi! Cosa devo fare?

E Franceschiello: - Entra nel sacco, ché or è tempo che tu sia salvato!

Il povery romito si cacciò nel sacco. Franceschiello scese dall’altare, si mise il sacco in spalla e via. Andò a casa dell’Arciprete e gli buttò il sacco in mezzo alla stanza.

Il romito da dentro fece: - Ih!
- Compare, ecco! Guardate cos’ho portato via dalla chiesa.

L'Arciprete aperse il sacco e si provò faccia a faccia col romito.

- Compare Franceschiello, - disse l'Arciprete, - eccoti duecento ducati. Vedo che l’arte l’hai imparata bene. È meglio che siamo amici, se non metterai nel sacco pure me.

(Abruzzo)
Bene come il sale

C’era una volta un Re che aveva tre figlie: una bruna, una castana e una bionda: la prima era bruttina, la seconda cosí cosí e la piú piccina era la piú buona e bella. E le due maggiori erano invidiose di lei. Quel Re aveva tre troni: uno bianco, uno rosso e uno nero. Quando era contento andava sul bianco, quando era cosí cosí sul rosso, quand’era in collera sul nero.

Un giorno andò a sedersi sul trono nero, perché era arrabbiato con le due figlie più grandi. Esse presero a girargli intorno e a fargli moine. Gli disse la piú grande: - Signor padre, ha riposato bene? È arrabbiato con me che la vedo sul trono nero?

- Sí, con te.
- Ma perché, signor padre?
- Perché non mi volete mica bene.
- Io? Io, signor padre, sí che le voglio bene.
- Bene come?
- Come il pane.

Il Re sbuffò un po’, ma non disse piú nulla perché era tutto compiaciuto di quella risposta.

Venne la seconda. – Signor padre, ha riposato bene? Perché è sul trono nero?

Non è mica in collera con me?

- Sí, con te.
- Ma perché con me, signor padre?
- Perché non mi volete mica bene.
- Ma se io le voglio cosí bene...
- Bene come?
- Come il vino.

Il Re borbottò qualcosa tra i denti, ma si vedeva che era soddisfatto.
Venne la piú piccola, tutta ridente. – O signor padre, ha riposato bene? Sul trono nero? Perchê? L’ha con me, forse?

- Sí, con te, perché neanche tu mi vuoi bene.
- Ma io sí che le voglio bene.
- Bene come?
- Come il sale!

A sentire quella risposta, il Re andò su tutte le furie. – Come il sale! Come il sale! Ah sciagurata! Via dai miei occhi che non ti voglio piú vedere! – e diede ordine che la accompagnassero in un bosco e l’ammazzassero.

Sua madre la Regina, che le voleva davvero bene, quando seppe di quest’ordine del Re, si scervellò per trovare il modo di salvarla. Nella Reggia c’era un candeliere d’argento cosí grande, che Zizola – cosí si chiamava la figlia piú piccina – ci poteva star dentro, e la Regina ce la nascose. – Va’ a vendere questo candeliere, - disse al suo servitore piú fidato, - e quando ti domandano cosa costa, se è povera gente di’ molto, se è un gran signore di’ poco e daglielo. – Abbracciò la figlia, le fece mille raccomandazioni, e mise dentro al candeliere fichi secchi, cioccolata e biscottini.

Il servitore portò il candeliere in piazza e a quelli che gli domandavano quanto costava, se non gli andavano a genio domandava uno sproposito. Finalmente passò il figlio del Re di Torralta, esaminò il candeliere da tutte le parti, poi domandò quanto costava. Il servitore gli disse una sciocchezza e il Principe fece portare il candeliere al palazzo. Lo fece mettere il sala da pranzo e tutti quelli che vennero a pranzo fecero gran meraviglie.

Alla sera il Principe andava fuori a conversazione; siccome non voleva che nessuno stesse ad aspettarlo a casa, i servitori gli lasciavano la cena preparata e andavano a letto. Quando Zizola sentí che il sala non c’era piú nessuno, saltò fuori dal candeliere, mangiò tutta la cena e tornò dentro. Arriva il Principe, non trova niente da mangiare,
suona tutti i campanelli e comincia a strapazzare i servitori. Loro, a giurare che avevano lasciato la cena pronta, che doveva essersela mangiata il cane o il gatto.

- Se succede un’altra volta, vi licenzio tutti, - disse il Principe; si fece protare un’altra cena, mangiò e andò a dormire.

Alla sera dopo, benché fosse tutto chiuso a chiave, capitò lo stesso. Il Principe pareva facesse venir giù la casa dagli strilli; ma poi disse: - Vediamo un po’ domani sera.

Quando fu domani sera, cosa fece? Si nascose sotto la tavola che era coperta fino a terra da un tappeto. Vengono i servitori, mettono i piatti con tutte le pietanze, mandano fuori il cane e il gatto e chiudono la porta a chiave. Sono appena usciti, che s’apre il candeliere e ne esce fuori la bella Zizola. Va a tavola e giù a quattro palmenti. Salta fuori il Principe, la prende per un braccio, lei cerca di scappare ma lui la trattiene. Allora la Zizola gli si butta in ginocchio davanti e gli racconta da cima a fondo la sua storia. Il Principe ne era già innamorato cotto. La calmò, le disse: - Bene, già d’adesso vi dico che sarete la mia sposa. Ora tornate dentro il candeliere.

A letto, il Principe non poté chiudere occhio tutta la notte, tant’era innamorato; e al mattino ordinò che portassero il candeliere nella sua camera, perché era tanto bello che lo voleva vicino la notte. E poi diede ordine che gli portassero da mangiare in camera porzioni doppie, perché aveva fame. Così gli portarono il caffè, e poi la colazione alla forchetta, e il pranzo, tutto doppio. Appena gli avevano portato i vassoi, chiudeva l’uscio a chiave, faceva uscire la sua Zizola e mangiavano insieme con gran gioia.

La Regina, che restava sola a tavola, si mise a sospirare: - Ma cos’avrà mio figlio contro di me che non scende piú a mangiare? Cosa gli avrò fatto?

Lui continuava a dire che avesse pazienza, che voleva star per conto suo; finché un bel giorno disse: - Voglio prendere moglie.

- E chi è la sposa? – fece la Regina tutta contenta.

E il Principe: - Voglio sposare il candeliere!
- Ohi, che mio figlio è diventato matto! – fece la Regina coprendosi gli occhi con le mani. Ma lui diceva sul serio. La madre cercava di fargli intendere ragione, di fargli pensare a cosa avrebbe detto la gente, ma lui duro: diede ordine di preparare il matrimonio di lì a otto giorni.

Il giorno stabilito partì dal palazzo un gran corteo di carrozze e nella prima ci stava il Principe, con a fianco il candeliere. Arrivarono alla chiesa e il Principe fece trasportare il candeliere fin davanti all’altare. Quando fu il momento giusto, aperse il candeliere e saltò fuori Zizola, vestita di broccato, con tante pietre preziose al collo a gli orecchi che risplendevano da tutte le parti. Celebrate le nozze e tornati al palazzo, raccontarono alla Regina tutta la storia. La Regina, che era una furbona, disse: - Lasciate fare a me che a questo padre gli voglio dare io una lezione.

Difatti, fecero il banchetto di nozze, e mandarono l’invito a tutti i Re dei dintorni, anche al padre di Zizola. E al padre di Zizola la Regina fece preparare un pranzo apposta, con tutti i piatti senza sale. La Regina disse agli invitati che la sposa non stava bene e non poteva venire al pranzo. Si misero a mangiare; ma quel Re aveva la minestra scipita e cominciò a brontolare tra sé: “Questo cuoco, questo cuoco, s’è dimenticato di salare la minestra”, e fu obbligato a lasciarla nel piatto.

Venne la pietanza, senza sale anche quella. Il Re posò la forchetta.

- Perché non mangia, Maestà? Non le piace?
- Ma no, è buonissima, è buonissima.
- E perché non mangia?
- Mah, non mi sento tanto bene.

Provò a portarsi alla bocca una forchettata di carne, ma ruminava, ruminava senza poterla mandar giù. E allora gli venne in mente la risposta della sua figliola, che gli voleva bene come il sale, e gli prese un rimorso, un dolore, che a poco a poco ruppe in lagrime, dicendo: - O me sciagurato, cos’ho fatto!
La Regina gli domandò cos’aveva, e lui cominciò a raccontare tutta la storia di Zizola. Allora la Regina s’alzò e mandò a chiamare la sposina. Il padre ad abbracciarla, a piangere, a domandarle come mai era là, e gli pareva di risuscitare. Mandarono a chiamare anche la madre, rinnovarono le nozze, con una festa ogni giorno, che credo siano là ancora che ballano.

(Bologna)
L’assassino senza mano

C’era una volta un Re avaro, tanto che la sua figliola unica la teneva in soffitta perché aveva paura che qualcuno la chiedesse in moglie e lui dovesse darle la dote.

Un giorno arrivò in quella città un assassino, e si fermò all’osteria, in faccia a dove stava il Re. Cominciò a informarsi di chi abitava lí davanti. – Ci sta un Re, - gli dissero, - così avaro da tenere sua figlia in soffitta.

Cosa fa l’assassino? La notte s’arrampica sui tetti e apre la finestra dell’abbaino. La Principessa era coricata e vede aprire la finestra e un uomo in piedi sul davanzale. – Al ladro! Al ladro! – grida. L’assassino richiude la finestra e scappa via sui tetti. Accorre la servitú, vede la finestra chiusa, e dice: - Altezza, lei si sogna: qui non c’è nessuno.

L’indomani lei chiese al padre d’esser tolta dalla soffitta, ma il Re le disse: - Ti sogni; chi vuoi che ci venga?

La seconda notte, alla stessa ora, l’assassino riaprí la finestra. – Al ladro! Al ladro! – Anche stavolta scappò, e nessuno voleva credere al racconto della Principessa.

La terza notte, ella legò la finestra con un catenaccio, e si mise di guardia col coltello in mano, sola lassú, col cuore che le batteva forte forte. L’assassino provò ad aprire ma non poté. Cacciò dentro una mano; la Principessa col coltello gliela tagliò di netto al polso. – Sciagurata! – gridò l’assassino. – Me la pagherai! – e scappò via per i tetti.

La principessa mostrò al Re e alla Corte la mano mozzata e tutti finalmente le credettero, e si complimentarono per il suo coraggio; da quel giorno non dormí piú nella soffitta.

Dopo qualche tempo chiese udienza al Re un giovane forestiero, tutto ben vestito e ben inguantato. Il Re lo sentí conversare così bene che gli entrò in simpatia. Parlando del piú e del meno, disse che era scapolo, che cercava per sposa una ragazza a modo, e
l’avrebbe presa anche senza dote, tanto era ricco di suo. Il Re, sentendo che non voleva
dote, pensò: “Questo è lo sposo che ci vuole per mia figlia,” e la mandò a chiamare. La
Principessa, appena vide il forestiero fu presa da un tremito, perché le pareva di
riconoscerlo. E quando fu sola col padre, gli disse: - Maestà, quell’uomo mi pare di
riconoscerlo per il ladro cui ho tagliato la mano.

- Ti sogni, - disse il Re. – Non hai visto che belle mani ben inguantate ha!
Questo è un signore.

Per farla breve, il forestiero chiese la mano della Principessa, ed ella per obbedire
al padre e anche per levarsi da quella sua tirannia, disse di sí. Le nozze furono fatte alla
svelta e alla buona, perché lo sposo non poteva star tanto lontano dai suoi negozi, e il Re
non voleva spendere. Alla figlia per regalo diede una collana di noci e una coda di volpe
spelacchiata. Poi gli sposi partirono subito in carrozza.

La carrozza entrò in un bosco, e invece di seguitare per la strada maestra,
prendeva sempre di piú nel folto, per oscuri sentieri. A un certo punto lo sposo disse: -
Cara, sfilami questo guanto.

La Principessa gli sfilò il guanto e scoprí un moncherino. – Aiuto! – disse,
comprendendo che aveva sposato l’uomo cui aveva tagliato una mano.

- Sei in mia potestà, ora, - disse l’uomo. – Sappi che io di mestiere faccio
l’assassino. Ora mi vendicherò del male che m’hai fatto.

La casa dell’assassino era al margine del bosco, in riva al mare.

- Qui tengo tutte le ricchezze della gente che ho ammazzato, - disse l’assassino,
mostrandole la casa, - e tu resterai a far la guardia.

La legò con una catena a un albero, davanti alla casa e la lasciò lí. La Principessa
rimase sola, incatenata a un albero come un cane, e davanti aveva il mare, su cui ogni
tanto passava pian piano un bastimento. Cominciò a far segni a un bastimento che
passava; dal bastimento la videro coi cannocchiali e s’avvicinarono per vedere cosa
c’era. Sbarcarono, e lei raccontò la sua storia. Allora la liberarono e la presero con loro, insieme con tutte le ricchezze dell’assassino.

Era un bastimento di mercanti di cotone, e pensarono di nascondere la Principessa e tutte le ricchezze sotto le balle di cotone. Tornò l’assassino e trovò la casa svaligiata, e senza piú la sposa. “Non può esser scappata che sul mare,” pensò, e vide quel bastimento che si allontanava. Scese in una barca a vela velocissima che aveva, e raggiunse il bastimento. – Tutto il cotone a mare, - ordinò, - devo cercare la mia sposa che è fuggita.

- Lei ci vuole rovinare, - gli dissero i mercanti. – Perché non caccia la spada nelle balle di cotone, per vedere se c’è qualcuno nascosto?

L’assassino si mise a trafiggere il cotone con la spada, e a un certo punto ferí la ragazza nascosta, ma tirando fuori la spada il cotone asciugò il sangue e la spada riapparve pulita.

- Sapete, - gli dissero i marinai, - avevamo visto un’altra nave avvicinarsi alla costa; quella laggiú.

- Ora vado a vedere, - disse l’assassino. Lasciò il bastimento carico di cotone e diresse la sua barca a vela verso l’altra nave.

La ragazza, ferita ma appena a un braccio, fu sbarcata in un porto sicuro. Ma lei non voleva neppure metter piede a terra e continuava a dire: - Buttatemmi in mare! Buttatemmi in mare!

I marinai si consultarono tra loro, e uno di loro, che era vecchio, con la moglie e senza figli, s’offrì di portarla a casa sua, con parte dei gioielli dell’assassino. La moglie del marinaio era una brava vecchia e prese a benvolere la ragazza. – Ti terremo come una figliola, poverina!

- Voi siete tanto buoni, - disse la ragazza. – Solo vi domando una grazia: voglio restar sempre chiusa in casa e non esser vista mai da nessun uomo.

- Sta’ tranquilla, poverina: in casa nostra non viene mai nessuno.
Il vecchio vendette un po’ dei gioielli e comprò seta da ricamo, e la ragazza passava le ore ricamando. Fece un tappeto bellissimo, con tutti i colori e i disegni del mondo, e la vecchia lo portò a vendere a casa d’un Re che stava lì vicino.

- Ma chi li fa, questi bei lavori? – chiese quel Re.

- Una mia figlia, Maestà, - disse la vecchia.

- Mah! Sarà. Non sembrano proprio lavori da figlia d’un marinaio, - disse il Re, e comprò il tappeto.

Coi soldi ricavati, la vecchia comprò altra seta, e la ragazza ricamò un bel paravento. La vecchia lo portò dal Re. – Ma è proprio vostra figlia che fa questi lavori? – diceva il Re, e poco convinto delle risposte, la seguì di nascosto.

Quando la vecchia stava per chiudere la porta di casa, il Re si fa avanti e mette un piede nello spiraglio; la vecchia cacciò un urlo. La ragazza, che era nella sua stanza sentí l’urlo, e pensò che l’assassino fosse venuto a prenderla; e dalla paura svenne. Entrarono la vecchia e il Re e cercarono di rianimarla. Riaperse gli occhi e vedendo che quell’uomo non era l’assassino ritornò in sé.

- Ma perché ha così paura di chi può arrivare? – chiese il Re, cui questa bella ragazza piaceva proprio.

- È la mia disgrazia, - disse lei, e nient’altro.

Cosí il Re prese ad andare il quella casa tutti i giorni, a far compagnia alla ragazza e a vederla ricamare. Se n’era proprio innamorato, e finí per chiederla in sposa. I vecchi, figuriamoci: - Maestà, noialtri siamo povera gente... – gli dissero.

- Non m’importa. È la ragazza che mi piace.

- Io sono contenta, - disse lei, - ma a una condizione.

- Quale?

- Non voglio veder uomini di nessuna sorta, escluso voi e mio padre -. (Padre chiamava il vecchio marinaio). – Né vederli né esserne vista.
Il Re acconsentí. Perché oltre tutto era geloso e che lei non volesse veder uomini era contento.

Cosí si fece un matrimonio segreto, perché nessun uomo la vedesse. Questa storia non garbò affatto ai sudditi: quando mai era successo che un Re si sposasse senza mostrare la sposa al popolo? Cominciarono a correre le voci piú strane: - Ha sposato una scimmia. Ha sposato una gobba. Ha sposato una strega, - e mica solo tra il popolino, anche tra gli alti dignitari della Corte. Il Re fu costretto a dire alla moglie: - Bisogna che tu decida un’ora per mostrarti al pubblico e fare cessare queste voci.

La poverina dovette acconsentire. – Va bene. Domani dalle undici a mezzogiorno starò affacciata sul terrazzo.

Alle undici la piazza era piena come non s’era visto mai. Era venuta gente da tutte le parti, anche dalle compagne piú lontane. Apparve la sposa sul terrazzo e dalla folla si levò un brusío d’ammirazione. Mai s’era vista Regina cosí bella. La Regina però faceva correre il suo sguardo in mezzo a quella folla con apprensione. Ed ecco, in mezzo alla folla, vide il viso d’un uomo intabarrato di nero, un uomo che portò una mano alla bocca e la morse in segno di minaccia, poi alzò l’altro braccio e mostrò che terminava in un moncherino. La Regina cadde al suolo svenuta.

La portarono subito in casa e la vecchia ripeteva: - L’avete voluta far vedere! L’avete voluta far vedere mentre lei non voleva! Ecco cosa le è successo!

La Regina fu messa a letto e furono chiamati i medici, ma non si sapeva che male avesse; voleva star chiusa, non veder nessuno e tremava, tremava.

In quei giorni venne a trovare il Re un ricco signore forestiero, gran parlatore, tutto complimenti e parole d’ammirazione. Il Re gli chiese se voleva restar da lui a mangiare un piatto di minestra. Il forestiero, che altri non era se non l’assassino, accettò, di buon grado, e ordinò vino per tutto il palazzo reale. Subito furono portate botti e barili e damigiane, ed era tutto vino oppiato. Quella sera guardie, servitori, ministri, tutti
bevevano a piú no posso, e a notte erano tutti ubriachi morti che russavano, il Re per primo.

L’assassino fece il giro del palazzo, s’assicurò che in tutte le scale, le sale, i corridoi non c’era che gente riversa che dormiva, e allora, silenziosamente entrò nella stanza della Regina. Era rincantucciata nel letto, con gli occhi sbarrati, quasi l’aspettasse.

- È venuta l’ora della mia vendetta, - disse l’assassino parlando come in un soffio. – Esci dal letto e va’ a prendermi un catino d’acqua per lavarmi le mani dal sangue quando t’avrò sgozzata.

La Regina uscí, corse dal marito. – Svegliati! Svegliati per carità! – Ma il marito dormiva. Tutti dormivano, in tutto il palazzo, e non c’era verso di svegliarli. Prese il catino d’acqua e tornò.

- Portami anche il sapone, - disse l’assassino, che stava affilando il coltello.

Lei andò, provò ancora a scuotere il marito, ma era inutile. Portò il sapone.


Lei uscì, prese la pistola dal marito addormentato, l’avvolse nell’asciugamano, e facendo il gesto di dare l’asciugamano all’assassino, gli sparò una palla in cuore a bruciapelo.

A quello sparo gli ubriachi si svegliarono tutti insieme, il Re per primo, e accorsero. Trovarono l’assassino morto e la Regina finalmente liberata dal terrore.

(Firenze)
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