SPIN ME A YARN

1

WOVEN TALE,

77

SELECTED TALES, LEGENDS AND FABLES,

7

TRUE STORIES

Collected in English Versions
by Alexine Chanel

SPIN ME A YARN

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NOTE

This first edition of *"Spin Me a Yarn"* brings together seventy-seven tales on the themes of spinning, weaving and tailoring, the world of textiles and garments in general. This assemblage is followed by *"The Seven Tailors of New Cologne"* (seven real life stories from seven real alterations-tailors of Neukölln, Berlin) and preceded by a satirical tale *"Seven at One Blow"* wich is woven from elements of the folk-tales and the realities of the local tailors and the global fashion industry.

Clothes are our chosen skin, we communicate who we wish to be through them. We are surrounded by textile, *textus** from birth to death: we wear it day and night, sit on it, walk on it, eat on it, and get buried in it. We are completely immersed in the world of textile and perhaps this explains the abundance of tales and myth centered around its many components.

The narratives were collected along a route loosely following that of the ancient silk-road, between Japan all the way to Spain, going through China, India, Russia, Persia, Arabia, the Mediterranean Basin, and up to Germany, and Denmark. All along this navigation, *"Spin Me a Yarn"* explores the many subtle variations, versions of truth and fiction depicted through the lexical field of textitle. Innitially, this work seeked to highlight the contrast between the global fashion industry and the stories local tailors, but in fact, the "true stories" of the seven interviewed tailors - Barat, Sultan, Jurai, Helena, Mercedes, Ahmed and Hilde - are also stories of migration, of socio-economic conditions.

Fashion has been shifting ruthlessly towards a global industry that only thinks in terms of the highest profit. Most of our clothing is made in countries where wage is very low. The distance is not only geographical, but also emotional. The worker is so far away from the consumers, that they are completely ignored. They are invisible, doubly so: the big brands think only in terms of financial capital - not human capital; and the conusumers have long forgotten that every garment one can buy has been touched and assembled by human hands.
Yet it's estimated that one in every six or seven people alive in the world today, work in some part of the fashion industry, making it one of the most labour-dependent industry.

"Spin Me a Yarn" is about the clothes we wear, the people who make them and the world in which they are dumped. It's about migration, greed, fear, power and poverty. It's complex in that it extends all the way around the world, that clothing can both be a liar and a revelator, and that "truth" has many versions.

*Textile: early 17th century: from Latin textilis, from text- 'woven', from the verb texere.

"An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread,
and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns --
but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver.
The scribes made this old and audible
abstraction into a new and visible fact.
After long practice, their work took on
such an even, flexible texture that they called
the written page a textus, which means cloth."
Robert Bringhurst
The Elements of Typographic Style, 2012

"Orito pictures the human mind as a loom
that weaves disparate threads
of belief, memory and narrative
into an entity whose common name is Self,
and which sometimes calls itself Perception"
David Mitchell,
The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet, 2010

"If we look at nature carefully,
we shall find that her colours
are in a state of perpertual confusion
and indistinctness."
John Ruskin,
Modern Painters, 1843

ANMERKUNG

Diese erste Ausgabe von „Spinn mir ein Garn“ versammelt siebenundsiebzig Märchen zu den Themen Spinnen, Weben und Schneidern, aus der ganzen Welt der Textilien und Bekleidung. Dieser Zusammenstellung folgen „Die Sieben Schneider von Neu Köln“ (sieben Geschichten aus dem wirklichen Leben von sieben wirklichen Änderungsschneider aus Neukölln, Berlin). Ein satirisches Märchen, „Sieben auf einen Streich“, das aus Elementen von Volksmärchen und den Realitäten örtlicher Schneider und der globalen Modeindustrie gewebt ist, leitet die Ausgabe ein.

Kleider sind unsere gewählte Haut, durch sie kommunizieren wir, wer wir seien wollen. Wir sind umgeben von Textilien, Textus*, von der Geburt bis zum Tod: Wir tragen sie Tag und Nacht, sitzen auf ihnen, gehen auf ihnen und werden in ihnen begraben. Wir sind völlig eingetaucht in eine Welt aus Textilien und vielleicht erklärt dies die Fülle von Märchen und Mythen die sich um ihre vielen Bestandteile drehen.

Die Erzählungen wurden entlang einer Route gesammelt die locker der antiken Seidenstraße folgt: Von Japan den ganzen Weg nach Spanien, China, Indien, Russland, Persien, Arabien und das Mittelmeerbecken durchquerend, und hoch nach Deutschland und Dänemark.
Auf dieser Reise erkundet „Spinn mir ein Garn“ die vielen subtilen Variationen, Versionen von Wahrheit und Fiktion, die sich in dem Wortfeld „Textil“ darstellen.
Anfangs sollte diese Arbeit den Kontrast zwischen der globalen Modeindustrie und den Geschichten lokaler Schneider herausstellen, aber im Grunde sind die „wahren Geschichten“ der sieben interviewten Schneider – Barat, Sultan, Juraj, Helena, Mercedes, Ahmed und Hilde – darüber hinaus auch Geschichten von Migration, von sozio-ökonomischen Bedingungen.

Mode hat sich gnadenlos zu einer globalen Industrie entwickelt die ausschließlich nach maximalen Profiten strebt. Der größte Teil unserer Kleidung wird in Niedriglohnländern produziert, in nicht nur geografischer, sondern auch emotionaler Ferne. Die Arbeiter sind vom Konsumenten so weit entfernt, dass sie völlig ignoriert werden. Sie sind in doppelter Hinsicht unsichtbar: Die großen Marken denken in Begriffen des Finanzkapitals – nicht des menschlichen Kapitals; und die Konsumenten haben längst vergessen, dass jedes Kleidungsstück das man kaufen kann einmal von menschlichen Händen berührt und zusammengefügt wurde.

Zugleich wir geschätzt, dass einer von sieben oder acht Menschen, die heute auf der Welt leben, in einem Teil der Modeindustrie arbeitet, was sie zu einer der arbeitsintensivsten Industrien macht.

„Spinn mir ein Garn“ ist eine Arbeit über die Kleidung die wir tragen, die Menschen die sie machen und die Welt in der sie verschleudert wird - eine Arbeit über Migration, Gier, Furcht, Macht und Armut. Sie ist komplex in ihrer Ausdehnung um die ganze Welt, darin, dass Kleidung sowohl eine Lüge wie eine Offenbarung seien kann, und auch darin, dass es viele Versionen der „Wahrheit“ gibt.

*Textil: frühes 17.Jhd.: aus dem Latein, Textilis, von text – „gewebt“, von dem Verb textere

“Eine uralte Metapher: Das Denken
ist ein Faden und der Geschichtenerzähler s
pinnt ein Garn – aber der wahre Erzähler,
der Poet, ist ein Weber. Die Schreiber machten
diese alte und akustische Abstraktion zu einem
neuen, sichtbaren Fakt. Nach langer Übung
nahm ihre Arbeit eine solch ebenmäßige,
ausgearbeitete Textur an, dass sie
die geschriebene Seite einen Textus nannten,
das heißt ein Gewebe.”
Robert Bringhurst
The Elements of Typographic Style, 2012

“Orito stellt den menschlichen Geist als
Webstuhl dar, der verschiedene Fäden von
Glauben, Gedächtnis und Erzählung in eine
Einheit verwebt, die gemeinhin Selbst
genannt wird und sich selbst manchmal als
Wahrnehmung bezeichnet.”
David Mitchell,
The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet, 2010

Wenn wir die Natur sorgfältig betrachten,
werden wir finden, dass ihre Farben sich in
einem fortwährenden Zustand von
Verwirrung und Unentschiedenheit befinden.
John Ruskin,
Modern Painters, 1843

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PART THREE

The Seven Tailors of New Cologne

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SEVEN AT ONE BLOW

Once in the little city of New Cologne seven tailoresses were sitting and working. They had met to help each other out with new cuts and tricks, and to have some tea and cake too. There were many wasps around the cake as was usual during the summertime. The tailoresses lost their patience and each took a piece of cloth. Then they hit the wasps around the cake and each hit one. When the tailoresses saw this, they thought that they had taken care of the situation quite well, and they soon had seven identical beautiful suits of arbor made for themselves, and on each they stitched golden letters that read: "Seven at One Blow". Then, thus dressed to kill, they went on the street, and whoever saw them believed that they had wiped out seven W.A.S.P.*s with one stroke. After that, everyone was very terrified of them and thought they were powerful bigwigs.

Now in New Cologne there was a Mayor whose praise resounded far and wide, and the tailoresses made their way to the Council, lay down on the grass, and slept. The civil servants, who went in and out of the court of council, saw the tailoresses in the splendid suits of arbor and read the golden inscriptions. They were very puzzled and wondered what these bigwigs were doing in the Mayor's courtyard during a time of peace. The Mayor's councillors, who had also seen the tailoresses, informed his mayorship that these bigwigs could be very useful whenever there might be a conflict. The Mayor was very satisfied with their advice and soon sent for the dressed-to-kill tailoresses and asked them whether they wanted to enter his bigwigs. The tailoresses answered right away: "This is why we have come! Tell us, where might we be of use?". The Mayor immediately admitted them into his municipal service and gave them special lodgings.

Now it didn't take long for the top-councillors to resent the good tailoresses. They wished the devil would cart them away. But they were afraid that, if ever they had differences, they wouldn't be able to stand up against them because they had killed seven with one stroke. So, they continually thought of ways to get rid of these bigwigs. Finally, they discussed the situation with one another and agreed that they would all go to the Mayor and ask to be released from his service, and the Mayor granted their wish.
The Mayor was sad to lose all of his top-councillors on account of the seven bigwigs, and he wished he had never laid eyes on them. Indeed, he actually wanted to get rid of them, but he didn't dare to discharge them for fear that the tailoresses might liquidate him and all his people and take over the municipality. The Mayor pondered the situation for a long time, until he hit upon a plan. He summoned the tailoresses and made them a proposal.

There was a giant living in the New Cologne forest, and it was causing great damage by robbing, murdering, poisoning, and burning people out. The Giant, Textiliou Industriou [(1)], had been terrorising the citizens of New Cologne for a while. Its chimneys constantly spitted out fibre dust and dye fumes: one could see tiny bits of fluff flying all over in the sky. For years, Textiliou Industriou's production chain had been running so fast that it had spun out of control. The giant factory bursted and choked like a volcano, excreting tons and tons of clothing that amassed around it, forming a huge mountain, and the monster kept puking out new cheap clothing, ever and ever more. There were so many garments that some areas were completely buried under them. The poor New-Cologners had to work round the clock to feed the giant and at the same time, they had been brain-washed into forever buying its cheap outfits. Now too poor to pay rent, they had to use the huge piles of discarded garments and fashion holes in them to live in, like troglodytes. There was such a mass of cloth everywhere that people had dug tunnels into it to get around: the little city had become a huge labyrinth, its walls made of rags, rags, rags. In time, the New-Cologners had become so poor that they learned to survive from eating the clothing – their staple diet now consisted of linen rolls, baked collars, cuffs à la mode and the such.

Nobody could get near Textiliou Industriou, because it tore apart anyone who approached. Neither weapons nor anything else helped. „However, if you could conquer this terrible giant and kill it", the Mayor promised the tailoresses, „I will give you my seven sons for husbands and half the Mayordom as dowry". Moreover, he proposed that one hundred armed officials accompany them and lend them assistance.

The tailoresses felt good about this proposal, especially since they would become the Mayor's daughters-in-law, and thus replied: „we would like very much to kill Textiliou Industriou the giant, but we don't need the help of the officials. We know quite well how to do it". Thus they went to the forest, and having left the dignitaries at the edge of the woods, they began searching for the giant. They looked carefully behind all the rag hills, and after searching for a long time, they found the giant asleep, snoring loudly behind mounts and mounts of knitwear from last year. The tailoresses didn't have to think too long about what to do. They quickly unravelled the mass of knitwear and rolled it into an ever bigger ball; then, forming a circle around the sleeping giant, they began to throw the ball to each-other and around it. Faster and faster, they spun the ball, wrapping in the sleeping giant. After some time, the gravitational force overtook and the ball started spinning of its own accord and at great speed, swaddling the giant into a gigantic cocoon. The whirling speed was such that it ripped up the giant cocoon, which soon took off, gyrating madly. Off it went into orbit, and into space, ejecting itself into a tornado. A little later, nothing but a huge depression remained at the place where Textiliou Industriou the giant had been lying. Fortunately, it didn't tear up the hillock of socks that the tailoresses were siting on. When they saw this, they exulted, and climbed cheerfully down the sock hillock.

Emerging from the ragged forest, they met the Mayor's officials, who asked them whether they had seen the giant.
"Yes," they said. "We've slaughtered the giant and banished him forever."
The officials doubted very much that the tailoresses could have come away from the giant without being wounded in the slightest. They rode into the forest to inspect this miracle for themselves and found everything just as the tailoresses had reported. While they all felt astonished, they also felt great horror. Indeed, they felt worse than ever: they feared that the tailoresses might easily kill them all if they came to know that they were their enemy. So they rode home and told the Mayor about the tailoresses' deed.

Now the tailoresses wished to have the Mayor's sons for husbands along with half the realm, but when the Mayor saw that the mysterious bigwigs had killed the giant, he regretted his pledge. He began thinking of a way to break his promise, for he had no intention of giving his progeny to them.
So he said: "There is one more great fiend to this Mayordom: the Propaganda Monster [(2)], who also dwells in the forest. It has been brain-washing the New-Cologners into believing that their attire were their souls, and to work ever harder to change clothes seven times a day. The citizens had to work more and more for less and less, and yet believed they were rich because they could sport seven different outfits a day, afford huge wardrobes, and keep on buying. The Propaganda Monster, reiterating 24/7 that their outlook would make them "be somebody", kept all the New-Cologners under control by way of a huge flickering panorama-wide screen on which hypnotic videos looped night and day, covering the horizon. Everybody was mesmerised, utterly ruled by its slogans. "If you capture the Propaganda Monster," the Mayor concluded, "I will give you my heirs in fair marriage".

The tailoresses were satisfied with this proposal. They went to the forest and once more, ordered their escorts to remain outside. They collected some discarded shirts from a towering pile, pulled their seven needles out and quickly sewed up the shirts into an enormous kite. Once the wind picked up, they drove the kite over the screen. As soon as the screen was covered, the flickering stopped, the sounds stopped, you could hear the birds singing! Quickly, they stitched the kite to fit the screen snugly, like a shroud, and within a few minutes, the lack of air caused the Monster to collapse and self-implode. Then, the tailoresses tied it to a tree and left the forest. When the Mayor learned of their triumph, he became tremendously worried and didn't know what to do, for the tailoresses continued to desire his sons. So once again, the Mayor demanded that they perform a task.

"Oh saviours, won't you capture the Great Equity Creature [3] that is running around in the forest! If you succeed, I will immediately give you my seven sons". The Mayor's officials were to lend them two hundred hands. The tailoresses went off to the forest with the dignitaries and ordered them to stay outside. These didn't object, for the Great Equity Creature had already given them such a rough treatment that they had no desire to chase it. Soon after entering the forest, the tailoresses spotted the Great Equity Creature, busy delineating financial graphs that indicated which markets would crash or bubble up, forecasting high yields or black depressions, and controlling the world!

The crafty tailoresses knew it wouldn't do to face this mega-power frontally, so they crept into the deepest recesses of its castle, "Stock Market". There, they twisted profit and loss graphs, "buy" and "sell" curves, by weaving them into a secret weave, the moiré. Generating the illusion of gentle ripples, it put the bidding engines to sleep. When the illusion was complete, the Great Equity Creature got grossly confused, and miscalculated a bank transfer that equally divided its whole capital between all of the New-Cologners. The transaction emptied the Great Equity Creature of its life blood, thus it lay there unconscious, brain-dead.
At this point, the seven tailoresses rammed the comatose creature into Stock Market Castle, slammed the door shut, and locked it in for more safety. Once more, they announced to the officials that they had captured the Great Equity Creature, and these in turn rode to the Mayor to inform him of the tailoresses' deed.

It's not clear whether the Mayor liked it or not, and that doesn't matter: he now had to give his seven sons to the tailoresses. However, one thing is certain: if he had known that the heroes were actually humble tailoresses, he would have put a noose around their necks instead of giving his precious sons in marriage to them. As it was, the Mayor had to keep his promise, if with grave concern. For their part, the tailoresses didn't ask many questions but just thought about becoming the Mayor's daughters-in-law. So the wedding took place with little joy, and seven Mayoresses were made out of seven tailoresses.
After they had spent some nights lying next to their husbands, once it occurred that they talked in their sleep and said, with one voice: "Boy, finish that jerkin and mend the trousers fast, or else I'll give you a whack on your head with my yardstick."

Well, the seven husbands happened to hear all of this, and they went to their father to complain. They begged him to help them get rid of these wives who were nothing but mere tailoresses. The Mayor was cut to the heart when he heard that he had married his sons to mere tailoresses. He consoled them as best as he could, and told them to leave the seven doors of the seven bedrooms open that night. He would post civil servants outside each door, and as soon as the tailoresses began to talk, they would come in and do away with them. The Mayor's sons were content with this plan. However, the Mayor had an emissary who was kindly disposed to the tailoresses, and he had overheard everything. Promptly he informed the young Mayoresses about the plot against them and advised them to protect themselves as best as they could. The tailoresses, grateful, assured their friend that they knew how to take care of this matter.

When night arrived, the seven couples went to bed and every involved party pretended to fall asleep. Before long, the seven husbands secretly got out of bed, went to the door, opened it, and then got back into bed. At this point, the tailoresses began to talk as if in their sleep, and so loudly that the servants outside the door could hear them. They said, with one voice: "Boy, finish that jerkin and mend the trousers fast, or else I'll give you a whack on your head with my yardstick! I've slain seven with one blow, killed Textiliou Industriou the giant, liquidated the Propaganda Monster, and annihilated the Great Equity Creature. Do you think I'm afraid of those fellows waiting outside my door?"

When the civil servants heard these words, they fled as if the wild host of hell were after them, and henceforth nobody else dared to do anything to them. From then on, the seven tailoresses lived happily as Mayoresses, and the Great Equity Creature remained comatose ever after.

(1)

- 3.6 millions of acres in Texas are dedicated to growing cotton. Almost 85% of that is GMO. *(Source:https://www.texasobserver.org/seeds-of-discontent/)*

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), pesticide poisoning affects 3 million people around the world and accounts for 20,000 unintentional deaths a year.
(Source: https://www.publiceye.ch/fileadmin/files/documents/Syngenta/BD_Pesticides-in-Punjab_QA_151007.pdf)

- In the last 16 years, they have been more than 250,000 reported farmer suicides in India, that is one farmer every 30 minutes, the largest wave of suicides in history.
(Source: http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/In-16-years-farm-suicides-cross-a-quarter-million/article12892373.ece)

- China's textile Industry produces 60 million garments a year. It discharges over 2.5 billion tons of wastewater every year.
(Source: https://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-figures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057)

-The average American throws away 82 pounds of clothes a year. That is 11,000,000 tons of textile waste a year. This mostly non-biodegradable waste sits in landfills for 200 years, emanating toxic gases.
(Source: http://www.takepart.com/video/2015/05/29/clothes-trash-landfill)

(2)

- In 2017, advertising expenditures for textile industry reached 686.34 million U.S. dollars.
(Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/470617/apparel-and-accessory-stores-industry-ad-spend-usa/)

- Average spending on Fashion in the EU is about $782 per year per capita. (a)
- American households spend nearly $2,000 on apparel and related products every year. (b)
- People who live in Manhattan spend the most on clothing at $362 per person per month. (c)
(Source for a, b, c, d, e and f: https://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-figures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057)

- UK consumers have an estimated $46.7 billion worth of unworn clothes in their closets. (d)

(3)

- The global textile and garment industry is currently worth nearly $3,000 trillion (e)

- The global fashion apparel industry now represents nearly 2% of the world GDP, and almost 75% of world's fashion market is concentrated in Europe, USA, China and Japan. (f)

- H&M capital as of May 2017: $39.9 Billion
(Source: https://www.forbes.com/companies/hm/#)

SIEBEN AUF EINEN STREICH

Es war einmal in der kleinen Stadt Neu Köln, da saßen sieben Schneiderinnen und arbeiteten. Sie hatten sich getroffen, um sich mit neuen Schnitten und Kniffen zu helfen und wohl auch für Tee und Kuchen. Wie gewöhnlich zur Sommerszeit umschwirrten viele Wespen den Kuchen. Die Schneiderinnen verloren die Geduld und jede nahm ein Stück Tuch. Sie schlugen nach den Wespen bei dem Kuchen und eine jede traf eine Wespe. Als die Schneiderinnen dies sahen waren sie sehr zufrieden damit wie sie die Situation gemeistert hatten und bald hatten sie sich sieben gleiche, wunderschöne Harnische gemacht und auf jeden stickten sie in goldenen Lettern den Spruch: „Sieben mit einem Streich“. Dann, so mörderisch gekleidet, gingen sie auf die Straße und jeder der sie sah, glaubte sie hätten sieben W.A.S.P.*s mit einem Streich ausgelöscht. Und alle waren von ihnen in Angst und Schrecken versetzt.

Nun gab es zu Neu Köln einen Bürgermeister dessen Lob Land auf, Land ab gesungen wurde und die Schneiderinnen machten sich auf den Weg zum Rathaus, legten sich auf eine Wiese und schliefen ein. Die Beamten, die im Rathaus ein und aus gingen sahen die Schneiderinnen in ihren wunderbaren Harnischen und lasen die goldenen Inschriften. Sie waren verdutzt und wunderten sich, was diese Hohen Tiere zu Friedenszeiten am Hof des Bürgermeisters zu tun hätten. Die Ratgeber des Bürgermeisters, die die Schneiderinnen auch gesehen hatten, informierten „Ihre Bürgermeisterschaft“ das solch Hohe Tiere sehr nützlichen sein, wann immer es zu Streitigkeiten komme. Der Bürgermeister war sehr zufrieden mit diesem Rat, sandte bald nach den mörderisch gekleideten Schneiderinnen und fragte, ob sie nicht in städtischen Dienst treten wollten. Die Schneiderinnen antworteten sofort: “Das ist warum wir gekommen sind! Sag, wie können wir helfen?“ Der Bürgermeister nahm sie umstandslos in Dienst und verbrachte sie in besondere Gemächer.

Nun dauerte es nicht lange, dass die Spitzenratgeber den Schneiderinnen ihr Missfallen zeigten. Sie wünschten, der Teufel möge sie holen! Doch sie fürchteten, ihnen im Falle eines Zwistes nicht gewachsen zu sein, da sie ja Sieben mit einem Streich getötet hatten. So dachten sie fortwährend darüber nach, wie sie diese Hohen Tiere loswerden konnten. Schließlich berieten sie miteinander und beschlossen, gemeinsam zum Bürgermeister zu gehen und um ihre Entlassung aus dem Dienst zu bitten. Der Bürgermeister entsprach ihrem Wunsch.

Der Bürgermeister war bestürzt, all seine Spitzenberater wegen der sieben Hohen Tiere verloren zu haben und er wünschte, er hätte nie ein Auge auf sie geworfen.
Tatsächlich wäre er sie gerne losgeworden, aber er wagte nicht sie zu entlassen, da er fürchtete die Schneiderinnen würde ihn und die Seinen beseitigen und die Verwaltung übernehmen. Der Bürgermeister grübelte lange über die Lage, bis er einen Plan gefunden hatte. Er rief die Schneiderinnen zu sich und machte ihnen einen Vorschlag.

Versteckt im Neu Kölner Wald lebte ein Riese der den Menschen raubend, mordend und brennend großen Schaden zufügte. Der Riese, Textilou Industriou[1], hatte die Bürger von Neu Köln für eine ganze Weile in Schrecken versetzt. Seine Schornsteine spuckten unablässig Faserstaub und Farbstoffqualm und man konnte tatsächlich kleine Fusseln überall am Himmel schweben sehen. Über Jahre war Textilou Industrious Produktionslinie so schnell gelaufen, dass sie außer Kontrolle geriet. Die Riesenfabrik barst und spukte wie ein Vulkan, Tonne um Tonne von Kleidung absondernd die sich um sie herum ablagerte, einen riesigen Berg formend, und das Ungeheuer spukte weiter neue, billige Kleidung, mehr und mehr und immer mehr. Da waren so viele Kleidungsstücke, dass ganze Gegenden unter ihnen begraben wurden. Die armen Neu Kölner mussten den ganzen Tag arbeiten um den Riesen zu füttern und zugleich wurden sie einer Gehirnwäsche unterzogen die sie zwang für immer diese billigen Klamotten zu kaufen. Da sie jetzt zu arm waren um Mieten zu bezahlen, mussten sie gewaltige Stapel ausgesonderter Kleidungsstücke nutzen und Löcher in sie formen, um in ihnen zu leben wie Troglodyten. Es gab solche Massen Stoff, dass die Leute Tunnel in sie gegraben hatten, um sich bewegen zu können: die kleine Stadt hatte sich in ein Labyrinth mit Wänden aus Lumpen, Lumpen und noch mehr Lumpen verwandelt. Es kam die Zeit, da waren die Neu Kölner so arm, dass sie lernten durch das Essen von Kleidung zu überleben – ihre Hauptnahrungsmittel waren jetzt Manschetten à la Mode, Leinen-Rolls und gebackene Kragen.
Niemand konnte in die Nähe von Textilou Industriou kommen, da er jeden der sich näherte in Stücke riss. Weder Waffen noch sonst etwas halfen. „Wie auch immer, wenn ihr diesen schrecklichen Riesen niederstreckt und tötet“, versprach der Bürgermeister den Schneiderinnen, „gebe ich euch meine sieben Söhne zu Gatten und das halbe Bürgermeisterreich als Mitgift“. Mehr noch, er stellte einhundert bewaffnete Amtsträger als Begleitung und Unterstützung in Aussicht.

Die Schneiderinnen mochten den Vorschlag, besonders da sie Schwiegertöchter des Bürgermeisters werden sollten, und antworteten deshalb: „Wir würden den Riesen Textilou Industriou sehr gerne töten, aber wir brauchen keine Hilfe von Amtsträgern. Wir wissen ziemlich genau wie man das macht“. Also begaben sie sich zum Wald und begannen, nachdem sie die Würdenträger am Waldesrand zurückgelassen hatten, den Riesen zu suchen. Sie schauten sorgfältig hinter die Lappenhügel und nach langer Suche fanden sie den Riesen, laut schnarchend hinter Bergen und Bergen von Strickware des Vorjahres. Die Schneiderinnen mussten nicht lange überlegen was zu tun. Sie trennten die Masse von Strickwaren schnell auf und rollten sie zu einem immer größeren Ball; dann, einen Kreis um den schlafenden Riesen formend, warfen sie sich den Ball zu und um ihn herum. Schneller und schneller schleuderten sie den Ball und wickelten den Riesen ein. Nach einer Weile übernahm die Erdanziehung und der Ball wirbelte im eigenen Takt und mit großer Geschwindigkeit und spann den Riesen in einen gigantischen Kokon. Die Geschwindigkeit war so rasant, dass es den gewaltigen Kokon losriss, der, verrückt kreiselnd, abhob und dann ging er dahin, in den Orbit, dann ins All, sich selbst in einem Tornado herausschleudernd.

Ein bisschen später blieb nichts außer einer mächtigen Delle an der Stelle zurück an der Textilou Industriou, der Riese, gelegen hatte. Glücklicherweise wurde der Hügel aus Socken auf dem die Schneiderinnen saßen nicht weggerissen. Sie jubelten als sie dies sahen und stiegen gutgelaunt von ihrem Sockenhügel.

Aus dem verlumpten Wald kommend trafen sie die Beamten des Bürgermeisters, die sie fragten, ob sie den Riesen gesehen hatten. „Ja,“ sagten sie. „Wir haben ihn niedergemacht und für immer vertrieben.“

Die Amtsträger bezweifelten sehr, dass die Schneiderinnen dem Riesen ohne die kleinste Wunde entkommen konnten. Sie ritten in den Wald, um dieses Wunder selbst zu betrachten und fanden alles wie die Schneiderinnen berichtet hatten. Sie waren nicht nur höchst überrascht, sondern auch in großer Angst. In der Tat ging es ihnen schlechter denn je: sie fürchteten, dass die Schneiderinnen sie leicht töten könnten, wenn sie gewahr würden, dass sie ihre Feinde waren. So ritten sie nachhause und erzählten dem Bürgermeister von der Tat der Schneiderinnen.

Nun wünschten die Schneiderinnen des Bürgermeisters Söhne als Gatten und das halbe Bürgermeisterreich. Aber als der Bürgermeister sah, dass die Schneiderinnen den Riesen getötet hatten, bedauerte er seine Zusicherung. Er begann über Möglichkeiten nachzudenken sein Versprechen zu brechen, denn er hatte nicht die Absicht ihnen seine Nachkommenschaft zu überlassen.

Also sprach er: „Es gibt einen weiteren bösen Feind dieses Bürgermeisterreichs: das Propaganda Monster(2), das auch im Wald haust. Es hat die Neu Kölner so gehirngewaschen, dass sie glauben, dass ihre Garderobe ihre Seele ist und sie noch härter arbeiten müssen, um siebenmal am Tag die Kleidung zu wechseln. Die Bürger mussten mehr und mehr für weniger und weniger arbeiten und doch glaubten sie reich zu sein, weil sie täglich siebenmal die Kleidung wechseln konnten. Sie konnten sich enorme Kleiderschränke leisten und immer weiter kaufen. Das Propaganda Monster wiederholte 24 Stunden am Tag, sieben Tage die Woche, dass ihr Aussehen sie „zu jemandem mache“ und hielt die Neu Kölner mit einer riesigen, flackernden Panorama-Leinwand unter Kontrolle, auf der in ständiger Wiederholung hypnotische Videos liefen die den Horizont bedeckten. Ein jeder war verzaubert und vollständig beherrscht von seinen Slogans.

„Wenn ihr das Propaganda Monster einfangt,“ schloss der Bürgermeister, „gebe ich euch meine Erben in einer ordentlichen Hochzeit.“
Die Schneiderinnen waren mit dem Vorschlag zufrieden. Sie begaben sich zu dem Wald und noch einmal befahlen sie ihrer Begleitung draußen zu warten. Sie sammelten einige weggeworfene Hemden von einem turmhohen Stapel, zogen ihre sieben Nähnadeln und nähten die Hemden schnell zu einem unerhört großen Drachen zusammen, den sie mit dem Wind über die Leinwand lenkten. Sobald die Leinwand bedeckt war hörte das Flackern auf, der Ton war weg und man konnte die Vögel singen hören! Schnell nähten sie den Drachen so, dass er genau auf die Leinwand passte, wie eine Hülle, und in wenigen Minuten brach das Monster wegen des Mangels an Luft zusammen. Dann banden es die Schneiderinnen an einen Baum und verließen den Wald.
Als der Bürgermeister von Ihrem Triumph erfuhr wurde er schrecklich besorgt und wusste nicht, was zu tun. Denn die Schneiderinnen hörten nicht auf seine Söhne zu begehren. Also verlangte der Bürgermeister noch einmal, dass sie eine Aufgabe lösen sollten.

„Oh ihr Retterinnen, bitte fangt die Great Equity Creature(3) die sich im Wald herumtreibt! Wenn ihr Erfolg habt, gebe ich euch unverzüglich meine Söhne“. Die Beamten des Bürgermeisters sollten sie mit der Kraft ihrer Hände unterstützen. Die Schneiderinnen zogen mit den Würdenträgern los zu dem Wald und befahlen ihnen draußen zu bleiben. Die hatten nichts dagegen, denn die Great Equity Creature hatte sie schon einmal so übel zugerichtet, dass sie kein Verlangen hatten, sie zu jagen. Schon bald nachdem sie den Wald betreten hatten, machten die Schneiderinnen die Great Equity Creature aus. Sie war damit beschäftig Finanzgrafiken zu entwerfen die anzeigten, welche Märkte zusammenbrechen oder hochkochen würden, die die hohen Erträge und schwarzen Depressionen voraussagten und die Welt kontrollierten!

Die geschickten Schneiderinnen wussten, dass es keinen Sinn machte dieser Großmacht von Angesicht zu Angesicht gegenüberzutreten. Also krochen sie in die tiefsten Tiefen ihres Schlosses „Stock Market“. Dort verdrehten sie die Gewinn-und Verlustgrafiken, die „Kauf“ und „Verkauf“ Kurven indem sie sie zu einem geheimen Gewebe, dem Moiré verwoben. Es schuf den Eindruck lieblicher kleiner Wellen und es wiegte die Wettmaschinen in den Schlaf. Als die Illusion vollständig war, geriet das Greta Equity Monster heftig durcheinander. Es fehlkalkulierte eine Überweisung und teilte sein gesamtes Kapital gleichmäßig unter den Einwohnern Neu Kölns auf. Mit der Überweisung verlor die Great Equity Creature ihren Lebenssaft und lag bewusstlos, hirntot da. Da rammten die sieben Schneiderinnen die komatöse Kreatur in das Stock Market Schloss, warfen die Tür zu und schlossen sicherheitshalber ab.
Und wieder verkündeten sie den Beamten, dass sie die Great Equity Creature gefangen hatten und diese wiederum ritten zum Bürgermeister, um ihm von ihrer Tat zu berichten.
Es bleibt unklar, ob der Bürgermeister es mochte oder nicht - und es spielt auch keine Rolle: jetzt musste er seine Söhne an die Schneiderinnen geben. Wie auch immer, eins ist sicher: wenn er gewusst hätte, dass die Helden eigentlich einfache Schneiderinnen waren, hätte er ihnen ehr eine Schlinge um den Hals gelegt, als sie mit seinen hochgeborenen Söhnen zu vermählen. So aber musste der Bürgermeister sein Versprechen halten, wenn auch mit größten Bedenken. Die Schneiderinnen, für ihren Teil, fragten nicht lange nach, sondern dachten nur daran die Schwiegertöchter des Bürgermeisters zu werden. Die Hochzeit fand statt, wenn auch mit wenige Freude, und aus sieben Schneiderinnen wurden sieben Bürgermeisterinnen gemacht.
Nachdem sie einige Nächte neben ihren Gatten liegend verbracht hatten geschah es, dass sie im Schlaf sprachen und mit einer Stimme sagten: „Junge, mach diese Jacke fertig und flick schnell die Hose, oder du kriegst was an den Kopf mit meinem Messstab!“
Nun hörten die sieben Gatten all dies und sie gingen zu ihrem Vater, um sich zu beschweren. Sie flehten ihn an, ihnen zu helfen ihre Frauen loszuwerden, die nichts als schlichte Schneiderinnen waren. Er versicherte ihnen sein Bestes zu geben und wies sie an, die sieben Türen der sieben Schlafzimmer in der Nacht geöffnet zu lassen. Er würde Amtsdiener vor jede Tür stellen, die die Schneiderinnen hinauswerfen würden sobald sie begännen zu sprechen. Die Söhne des Bürgermeisters waren zufrieden mit dem Plan. Allerdings, der Bürgermeister hatte einen Abgesandten der den Schneiderinnen wohlgesonnen war. Dieser brachte den jungen Bürgermeisterinnen umgehend die Nachricht von der Verschwörung gegen sie und riet ihnen, sich so gut als möglich zu schützen. Die Schneiderinnen versicherten ihrem Freund dankbar, dass sie wüssten wie mit der Sache umzugehen sei. Als die Nacht hereinbrach gingen die sieben Paare zu Bett und ein jeder tat als würde er schlafen. Binnen kurzem stiegen die sieben Gatten aus den Betten, schlichen zu den Türen, öffneten sie und schlüpften zurück ins Bett. Da begannen die Schneiderinnen zu sprechen – als würden sie schlafen, aber laut genug, dass die Diener draußen sie gut hören konnten. Sie sagten mit einer Stimme: „Junge, mach diese Jacke fertig und flick schnell die Hose, oder du kriegst was an den Kopf mit meinem Messstab! Ich habe Sieben auf einen Streich erschlagen, ich tötete den Riesen Textilous Industrious, beseitigte das Propaganda Monster und löschte die Private Equity Creature aus. Glaubst du, ich habe Angst vor den paar Burschen die draußen vor der Tür warten?“
Als die Amtsdiener diese Worte hörten, flohen sie als ob die wilden Horden der Hölle hinter ihnen her wären und von nun an wagte niemand mehr den Schneiderinnen etwas anzutun. Und seither leben die Schneiderinnen glücklich als Bürgermeisterinnen, und die Private Equity Creature bleibt für immer komatös.

(1)

- 3.6 Millionen Morgen Land in Texas sind dem Anbau von Baumwolle gewidmet. Fast 85% davon sind GVO
(Quelle:https://www.texasobserver.org/seeds-of-discontent/)

-Nach Angaben der Weltgesundheitsorganisation (WHO) betrifft eine Pestizidvergiftung weltweit 3 Millionen Menschen und verursacht 20.000 Todesfälle pro Jahr.
(Quelle: https://www.publiceye.ch/fileadmin/files/documents/Syngenta/BD_Pesticides-in-Punjab_QA_151007.pdf)

- In den letzten 16 Jahren wurden über 250.000 Selbstmorde von Bauern in Indien gemeldet. Das ist ein Bauer alle 30 Minuten, die größte Welle von Selbstmorden in der Geschichte.
(Quelle: http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/In-16-years-farm-suicides-cross-a-quarter-million/article12892373.ece)

- Chinas Textilindustrie produziert 60 Millionen Kleidungsstücke pro Jahr. Es entsorgt jedes Jahr über 2,5 Milliarden Tonnen Abwasser.
(Quelle: https://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-gures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057)

- Der Durchnittsamerikaner entsorgt 82 Pfund Kleidung pro Jahr. Das sind 11.000.000 Tonnen Textilabfälle pro Jahr. Dieser größtenteils nicht biologisch abbaubare Abfall wird die nächsten 200 Jahre giftige Gase abgeben.
(Quelle: http://www.takepart.com/video/2015/05/29/clothes-trash-land)

(2)

- Im Jahr 2017 erreichten die Werbeausgaben für die Textilindustrie 686,34 Millionen US-Dollar.
(Quelle: https://www.statista.com/statistics/470617/apparel-and-accessory-stores-industry-ad-spend-usa/)

- Die durchschnittlichen Ausgaben für Mode in der EU belaufen sich auf etwa 782 US-Dollar pro Jahr und Kopf. (a)

- Amerikanische Haushalte geben jedes Jahr fast $2.000 für Bekleidung und verwandte Produkte aus. (b)

- Menschen, die in Manhattan leben, geben am meisten für Kleidung aus: $362 pro Person/Monat. (c)

(Quelle für a, b, c, d und e: https://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-gures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057)

- Verbraucher im Vereinigten Königreich haben ungetragene Kleider im Wert von schätzungsweise 46,7 Milliarden Dollar in ihren Kleiderschränken
(Quelle: https://www.business2community.com/fashion-beauty/30-shocking-gures-facts-global-textile-apparel-industry-01222057)

(3)

- Die globale Textil- und Bekleidungsindustrie hat derzeit einen Wert von fast 3.000 Billionen Dollar (d)

- Die globale Modebekleidungsindustrie macht heute fast 2% des weltweiten BIP aus. Fast 75% des weltweiten Modemarkts konzentrieren sich auf Europa, die USA, China und Japan. (e)

- H & M Kapital Stand Mai 2017: $ 39,9 Milliarden (Stand: Mai 2017)
(Quelle: https://www.forbes.com/companies/hm/#)

THE FEATHERY ROBE 1.

On the coast of Suruga, at Miwo, there once lived a fisherman by the name of Hakurioo. One day when he was resting from his work on the bank in the sunshine he saw a brightly glistening white robe lying before him, delicate and translucent and entirely woven from feathers. At the place where the shoulders would fit on the wonderful robe there hung two wings.

He eagerly picked it up, wanting to take it home and carefully put it away, when a beautiful girl appeared before him. She sobbed aloud and demanded the return of her robe.

Hakurioo was at first not at all willing to give up his find. But then the girl said, amidst endless sobs and tears, that she was a heavenly goddess, and that she would have to remain miserably on earth as long as she did not have her feathery robe, that she had taken off while bathing, and which had thus wrongly come into his hands.

Moved by compassion, the fisherman said, "Very well, I will give your robe back to you, if in return you will dance the heavenly dance for me with which you daughters of heaven soar through the clouds."

The maiden replied, "Yes, give me my robe, and you shall behold the most beautiful dance that I am able to dance."

The fisherman considered for a moment and said, "No, dance first, and then I will give you your robe."

With this the heavenly maiden grew angry and said, "Shame on you, that you doubt the words of a goddess! Quickly, give me my robe, for without it I am not able to dance. You will not regret it. That I promise you!"

Thereupon Hakurioo handed her the feathery robe. She immediately put it on and rose into the air. True to her words, before the fisherman's amazed eyes she performed the most magnificent dance that one can imagine, at the same time singing the most beautiful, sensuous melodies, until Hakurioo did not know what was happening to him. In more and more beautiful loops she rose higher and higher, but it was a long time before she disappeared from the enchanted fisherman's view, soaring into a light cloud that was drifting toward Fujiyama's summit, with the last sounds of her godly song sounding in his ears.

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David Brauns,
Japanische Märchen und Sagen
Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Friedrich, 1885
Translated from the German by D. L. Ashliman. © 2008.

Long ago, the man wandered aimlessly until he reached the province of Michinoku. A woman who lived there must have thought a person from the capital a marvel indeed, for she fell head over heels in love with him and sent him a poem.

Rather than dying
From this one-sided love,
I wish I'd been born a silkworm
So that we could cocoon together
For even the shortest while.

Even though her poem was countrified, the man must have been moved by it because he went to spend the night with her. But when he left in the middle of the night, the woman exclaimed:

Wretched fowl!
When morning comes
I will dunk you in the pail,
For by crowing too early,
You drove my man away.

As he prepared to return to the capital, the man recited a poem:

Dear Pine Tree
Of Aneha in Kurihara,
If only you'd been human
I would have said to you,
'Come, be my gift to the capital.'

However, the country girl completely misunderstood the meaning. Delighted, she repeated over and over again, "He must be in love with me!"

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Japanese Tales,
edited and translated by Royal Typer

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady with whom he had been intimate some years earlier.

Like the threads of linen
That were spun upon a spool
In ancient times, can't we wind
Back to the way we were,
And let the past be now?

His poem, however, seems to have made little impression on the lady.

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Japanese Tales,
edited and translated by Royal Typer

UNDO A TRAIN **4.**

Long ago, the man hosted a farewell party for a friend who was departing for the provinces to take up an appointment. As the friend was close to the family, his wife had a servant serve him sake and made arrangements to present him with a complete set of ladies' robes. Then the host wrote a poem and had it attached to the belt of the train.

Dear Departing Friend,
I undo this train
From my robes for you,
So that misfortune won't undo
The train accompanying you.

It was one of the most interesting of all the poems read on the occasion, and it was read aloud with deep feeling so that it could be savoured fully.

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Japanese Tales,
edited and translated by Royal Typer

Once upon a time, there lived an elderly couple in a certain place. On a snowy day in winter, the old man was going to town to sell firewood, when he found a crane that was caught in a hunter's trap. Feeling sorry, he released the bird from the trap. That night while the snow fell violently, a beautiful girl came to the couple's house. According to her explanation, ever since her parents died, she had been traveling between relatives she had never met before, when she got lost and as a result would like to stay for one night. The couple heartily welcomed her into their home. The snow had not quite stopped the next day, and the day after that, as the girl remained in the house of the elderly couple. Meanwhile, the girl tirelessly took care of the couple, making them happy. One day, the girl asked the couple, instead of sending her off to meet relatives she had never met before, to please make her their daughter. The elderly couple was delighted to accept.

As she continued to help the old couple, one day she requested: "I would like to weave a cloth, so please buy me yarn". When she was handed the purchased yarn, she stated: "Please don't ever look in the room." to the couple; then hid in the room, and wove for three days straight without a break. "Sell this, and buy me more yarn", she told the couple. The cloth was very beautiful, and became the talk of the town immediately, and sold for a good price. With the new thread that was bought with the new money, their daughter wove another fabric with stunning workmanship, selling at a higher price and making the elderly couple wealthy.

However, when she confined herself to the room to weave a third piece, while the couple persevered in keeping the promise at first, they began to wonder how she wove such beautiful cloth. Unable to fight curiosity, the old lady took a peek inside. Where there should have been a girl was a crane. The crane plucked its own feathers to weave between the threads to produce a glittering cloth. Large portions of the wing had already been plucked out, leaving the crane in a pitiful state. In front of the shocked elderly couple, the daughter who finished weaving approached them, confessing that she was the crane that was saved. While she had intended to remain their daughter, she had to leave, as her true identity has been discovered. She turned back into a crane and flew into the sky, leaving behind the remorseful elderly couple.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsuru_no_Ongaeshi

In A.D. 692, the third year of the reign of the Empress Wu, the scholar Chang Yi took up residence in Hengchou, Hunan, to serve as an official there. He was a simple, quiet man with few close friends. He had fathered two daughters (no son), of which the elder had died early. The younger, Ch'ien Niang, was a beauty beyond compare.

Now, Chang Yi had a nephew named Wang Chou, who was clever and handsome. Chang Yi always thought of the boy as having a promising future, and he would say, "When the time comes, Ch'ien Niang should be his wife."

After Wang Chou and Ch'ien Niang reached maturity, they often pictured one another in their secret dreams. But neither of the families knew anything about it, and some time later when an eligible member of Chang Yi's staff sought Ch'ien Niang's hand, the father said yes.

The news made Ch'ien Niang terribly sad, and Wang Chou was bitterly disappointed. On the pretext that he was to be transferred, he requested permission to go away to the capital. Nothing could dissuade him, and so he was sent off with many gifts.

Wounded by sorrow, Wang Chou bid a final farewell and boarded the boat. By sunset he had gone several miles into the surrounding hills. That night he was lying awake when suddenly he heard the sound of footsteps along the shore. In moments the pattering reached the boat, and Wang Chou discovered that it was Ch'ien Niang, who had been running barefoot.

Wang Chou nearly went mad with delight and amazement. Gripping her hands, he asked where she had come from. She said tearfully, "Your depth of feeling moved us both in our dreams. Now they want to deprive me of my free will. I know your love will never change, and I would give up my life to repay you, so I ran away."

This was more than Wang Chou had ever expected. He could not control his excitement. He hid Ch'ien Niang in the boat, and they fled at once, pressing the journey day and night. A few months later they reached Szechwan in the far west.

Five years passed. Ch'ien Niang bore two sons. She exchanged no letters with her parents, but she thought of them incessantly. One day she said in tears to Wang Chou, "Time was when I could not desert you, so I set aside a great duty to run away to you. Now it has been five years. I am cut off from my parents' love and kindness. How am I to hold up my head in this wide world?"

Wang Chou took pity on her and said, "Let's go home; no sense in grieving like this." And so they returned together to Hengchou. When they arrived, Wang Chou went alone first to the house of Chang Yi to confess the whole affair. But Chang Yi said, "What kind of crazy talk is this? My daughter has been lying ill in her room for many years."

"But she's in my boat right now," said Wang Chou.

Amazed, Chang Yi sent someone to see if it were true. Indeed Ch'ien Niang was there, with joy on her face and spirit in her expression. The astonished servant rushed back to tell Chang Yi.

When the sick girl in the chamber heard the news, she rose and joyfully put on her jewelry, powdered her face, and dressed in her finest clothes. Then, smiling but not speaking, she went out to welcome the woman from the boat. As they met their two bodies stepped into each other and became one, fitting together perfectly. Yet there was a double suit of clothes on the single body.

The family kept the entire affair secret in the belief that it was abnormal. Only a few relatives learned the facts. Husband and wife died forty years later, and their two sons both attained the second-highest official degree and rose to be deputy commandants.

I often heard this story when I was young. There are many
different versions, and some people say it is not true. But more than eighty years after the events, I chanced to meet a magistrate of Lai Wu. His father was cousin to Chang Yi, and since this magistrate's account is the fullest I know, I have put it down on paper.

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Ch'en Hsüan-yu
Chinese Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Moss Roberts
The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, 1980

Zhīn Xīng the Weaver Girl Star and Qiān Niú Xīng the Cowherd Star fell deeply in love with each other. However, in the Heavens of the Chinese mythological world, it is against the heavenly rules for these stars or deities to have romantic relationships. Moreover, the Weaver Girl Star is the granddaughter of the Heavenly Empress.

When word of their forbidden love reached the ears of the powerful Heavenly Empress, she became furious and sent the Cowherd Star down to Earth as a mortal. The Weaver Girl was punished to weave non-stop in the sky. In the legend, clouds in the skies were weaved by the Weaver Girl with magical silk and weaving machine. Different colours were weaved according to different times of the day and season.

On a day, a group of fairies requested the Heavenly Empress for permission to descend to the mortal world, to Bi Lian Chí, a lake which could beautify and whiten skin. The Empress was in a good mood and agreed. The fairy girls taking pity on the Weaver Girl for working so hard on her weaving, further requested for her to join them on the trip. Heavenly Empress thought for quite a while, and gave in eventually.

On earth, when the Cowherd Star descended to the mortal world, he was reborn into a farming family and named Niú Láng, the Cowherd. After his parents passed away, he stayed with his brother and sister-in-law, who treated him very badly. Eventually he was chased out of their home with only an old Ox and a broken cart.

The Cowherd and the old Ox depended on each other and lived through hardship together. They plowed and worked hard and in a couple of years, managed to build a small house and make ends meet.

Unknown to the Cowherd, the old Ox was originally Jīn Niú Xīng, the Golden Ox Star. One day, the Ox suddenly spoke, to the Cowherd's surprise. The Ox said to him, "Go to Bi Lian Lake today. You will find the dresses of some fairies by the rocks, while they are bathing in the lake. Take the red dress and the fairy will become your wife."

Shocked and thrilled, the cowherd took the advice, for he has been alone and yearns a companion. He hid near the lake and sure enough, true to the Ox's words, fairies flew down from the sky. The fairies placed their dresses by the rock and stepped into the Lake.

Seeing his chance, the Cowherd ran out and grabbed the red dress. The fairies were frantic to find there was man around. Wearing their dresses in haste, they flew back to heaven. Only one fairy was left in the lake, for the Cowherd was holding onto her dress. She was none other than the Weaver Girl Star.

The Cowherd walked forward and asked the Weaver Girl to be his wife, in exchange for her dress. At this moment, the Weaver Girl recognized him as the Cowherd Star whom she was still deeply in love with. Shyly but happily, she accepted his request and became his wife.

Life on earth for them was wonderful. They bore a son and a daughter and lived happily as a family. However, their joy and peace did not last forever. For when the Heavenly Empress knew of this matter, she stormed in rage! She immediately deployed heaven guards and soldiers to bring the Weaver Girl back for punishment.

Back on earth, the Cowherd ran back home in the midst of his plowing day with sad news that the old Ox has passed away. He told the Weaving Girl that the Ox spoke before it died. It asked him to keep his ox hide well. One day, he will be able to cape the hide and fly into the sky. Upon hearing this, the Weaving Girl realized that the Ox was once the Golden Ox Star, who was also punished to the mortal world when he tried to speak in favour for the Cowherd Star. Sadly, they skinned the hide and gave the Ox a burial.

Right at this moment, the heaven guards and soldiers came! In an instance, they grabbed the Weaving Girl and flew off. Sad as she may be, the Weaving Girl could do nothing about it. Helplessly, she flew in the skies with the guards to the heavens.

"Weaver Girl, wait for me!" The Weaver Girl heard the Cowherd's voice. Looking back, she saw him flying behind them, wearing the magical Ox hide with each hand holding a basket and their 2 children in them.

The gap between them became closer and closer. Soon, Weaver Girl could see the adoring faces of her children and hear their cries for her. Just when they were almost reunited, the Heavenly Empress appeared and with a wave of her hairpin, created a galaxy -the Milky Way - between them, forming an impenetrable barrier.

The couple and their children gazed helplessly across the Milky Way at each other. Emotionally torn, they cried and cried. Fairies and gods who heard their cries all felt pity for them and pained that the loving family had to be separated. Soon, even the Empress soften her heart. She allowed the family to stay in the sky and remain as stars, permitting them to meet once every year on the seventh day of the seventh month.

On that day of the year, countless magpies form a bridge to reunite the Cowherd, the Weaving Girl and their two children in the skies.

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http://cultureofchinese.com/traditions/folklore/folklore-cowherd-and-the-weaver-girl/

In a distant village, there was a young girl who gained fame for her great skill in weaving. This girl was named Hua Lei. When she walked around her village, she would look for unsuspecting women, busy with weaving, and she'd point out the flaws in their work. Then, she'd bring out her latest creation and wait for them to compliment her. However, she always heard the same words of praise.
"It's almost seamless like a goddess' robe!" they all said.

Instead of feeling respected and celebrated, Hua Lei felt like a failure because she equated "almost" to "imperfect" despite the fact that the compliment really meant that others highly regarded her talent.

On her sixteenth birthday, Hua Lei finally got tired of hearing those words, so she resolved to become better. Deeply spiritual, she called out to her favorite goddess, Chih'nu, the daughter of the Jade Emperor and the Celestial Queen Mother and the weaver of the stars and their light. "Oh goddess, please show me the way to your palace so that I might see you and learn from you. I want to become the best weaver in the world!"

Luckily, the goddess heard Hua Lei's plea, so she decided to unravel a small part of her tapestry and used the silvery thread to fish out Hua Lei from earth.
Not realizing what was happening, Hua Lei panicked and fainted while she was hurtling upwards. When she woke up, she looked around and saw that she was in a palace, clothed in a seamless robe. She realized that she was at the palace of the Goddess Weaver. She looked around and noticed that a woman was standing behind her.

The woman spoke, "Hello Hua Lei! I'm glad that you're awake now. I didn't mean to scare you. I felt excited to teach you, so I did what I did."
"It's alright, great goddess. I'm glad to meet you face to face," Hua Lei said as she bowed in respect. "Hearing that puts my heart at ease," replied the goddess. "Let's have some tea first before we go on to your lesson."

After drinking tea, the two ladies headed for the goddess's work shop. It was adorned with fantastic tapestries, cloths, and threads. At the center of the room, two looms were set; one was made out of ivory and the other, jade. The goddess motioned for them to sit, pointing at the ivory loom for Hua Lei. "Show me how you weave," said the goddess.

Hua Lei nodded and started her weaving process. She took a spindle full of blue thread, and she laid the strands onto the loom. She also took red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet threads to mix into her design. She planned to make a cloth depicting a blue heaven with a rainbow across it.
After finishing one fourth of the cloth, the Goddess Chih'nu asked, "What is that?"

Hua Lei looked at where the goddess's finger was pointing and saw a stray fiber that didn't follow the pattern. Embarrassed, she undid the fabric and fixed the kink that she saw. After what felt like a few hours, she finished the cloth that she was weaving.
The Goddess Chih'nu smiled, obviously pleased with Hua Lei's work. She held the cloth up, and threw it onto the sky where it manifested as a perfect blue sky with a glowing rainbow that made people who saw it ecstatic.
"You have done really well, Hua Lei. I'm glad that you don't give up when you make mistakes. Now, I will teach you the secret that will turn you into a master."

With reverence, Hua Lei watched the goddess on the jade loom, and paid close attention even though the motions of weaving were repetitive. Then, she saw something odd. One of the silver meteors on the design seemed crooked. Following the goddess's lead, she also pointed out the error in a respectful question.
"Oh Goddess, why is that meteor leaning towards the right? The rest are all leaning towards the left."

Tapping her forehead, the goddess giggled and exclaimed, "Oh dear! I did it again!" Then, she continued weaving.
At that point, Hua Lei was confused. Is the goddess joking by continuing even if there was a mistake? Or is she not as conscientious and meticulous as I am? I can't believe I revered her for so long, and this is just what she does! Where's the lesson on being a master? The confusion rumbled and churned inside her head, but she only had the chance to blurt out her observation after the goddess stopped weaving.
"Holly One, why did you continue weaving even when you already know that there's a mistake in your cloth?"

Again, the goddess smiled. "I wanted to teach you something, Hua Lei," she said softly. "Look at the finished cloth."
The goddess spread the cloth in front of Hua Lei, and said, "Look at the pattern. Isn't it more interesting now that the meteors alternate in direction? It looks as if they're dancing! Imagine if all of them just leaned to the right. Wouldn't that be boring? Remember, Hua Lei, everyone makes mistakes. The common artisans would work hard and correct their errors. A truly great master incorporates the mistakes into the design and loves the finished product."
"I also know that you're unhappy when you hear that your work is 'almost like a goddess's seamless robe.' That's a sign of foolishness, Hua Lei. Nobody is perfect. Even I make mistakes, but masters accept errors as learning opportunities and avenues for creativity. While we should not purposefully make errors nor stay mediocre, we should learn to look at them positively. The same goes for compliments. Only a foolish amateur would smirk at a compliment. The polite reply would be a simple 'thank you,'" she continued.

Humbled, Hua Lei wept and thought herself foolish for having doubted her patron goddess and for wasting time by sulking after receiving compliments. She bowed down and thanked the goddess for the lesson. She tried to take her leave, but the goddess said that she's welcome to stay another night.

The next day, Hua Lei woke up in her room. She thought that she just dreamt the entire thing, but she kept the lesson she learned in her mind as she weaved that day and the rest of the days that followed. Whenever she made mistakes, she also tried to incorporate them in her designs, and true enough, most of the people who saw her work complimented it with "It's almost seamless like a goddess' robe!" With each compliment, she thanked her admirers and replied with "Thank you" each time. As she continued this practice, she became renowned in all the land and became a master weaver.

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https://velociwritetor.wordpress.com/2012/05/25/hua-lei-and-the-weaver-goddess/

BLACK AND WHITE

9.

The philosopher Yang Chu had a younger brother named Pu. One day Pu left the house wearing white clothes. A storm came up and soaked them, so he changed into some dark ones. When he returned home, his dog did not recognize him and barked furiously. Pu was angry and raised his arm to beat the dog, when his older brother said, "Don't hit him. Would you recognize your dog if he went off white and came home black?"

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Lieh Tzu
Chinese Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Moss Roberts
The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, 1980

(...) In the region of Varanasi, there lived a young and beautiful Brahman woman named Somada, who was unchaste and secretly a witch. And as destiny would have it, I had secret interviews with her,
and in the course of our intimacy my love for her increased. One day I wilfully struck her in the fury of jealousy, and the cruel woman bore it patiently, concealing her anger for the time. The next day she fastened a string round my neck, as if in loving sport, and I was immediately turned into a domesticated ox. Then I, thus transformed into an ox, was sold by her, on receiving the required price, to a man who lived by keeping domesticated camels. When he placed a load upon me, a witch there, named Bandhamochanika, beholding me sore burdened, was filled with pity. She knew by her supernatural knowledge that I had been made an animal by Somada, and when my proprietor was not looking, she loosed the string from my neck. So I returned to the form of a man, and that master of mine immediately looked round, and thinking that I had escaped, wandered all about the country in search of me. And as I was going away from that place with Bandhamochini, it happened that Somada came that way and beheld me at a distance. She, burning with rage, said to Bandhamochini, who possessed supernatural knowledge, " Why did you deliver this villain from his bestial transformation ? Curses on you ! wicked woman, you shall reap the fruit of this evil deed. To-morrow morning I will slay you, together with this villain." (...)

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The Jakata, Volume I,
translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895
sacred-texts.com

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a Spirit of the Air. Now in Benares there was held the night-festival of Kattika; the city was decorated like a city of the gods, and the whole people kept holiday. And a poor man had only a couple of coarse cloths which he had washed and pressed till they were in a hundred, nay, a thousand creases. But his wife said, "My husband, I want a safflower-coloured cloth to wear outside and one to wear underneath, as I go about at the festival hanging round your neck."

"How are poor people like us to get safflowers?" said he. "Put on your nice clean attire and come along."
"If I can't have them dyed with safflower, I don't want to go at all," said his wife. "Get some other woman to go to the festival with you."
"Now why torment me like this? How are we to get safflowers?"
"Where thereh's a will, there's a way," retorted the woman. "Are there no safflowers in the king's conservatories?"
"Wife," said he, "the king's conservatories are like a pool haunted by an ogre. There's no getting in there, with such a strong guard on the watch. Give over this fancy, and be content with what you've got."
"But when it's night-time and dark," said she, "what's to stop a man's going where he pleases?"

As she persisted in her entreaties, his love for her at last made him give way and promise she should have her wish. At the hazard of his own life, he sallied out of the city by night and got into the conservatories by breaking down the fence. The noise he made in breaking the fence roused the guard, who turned out to catch the thief. They soon caught him and with blows and curses put him in fetters. In the morning he was brought before the king, who promptly ordered him to be impaled alive. Off he was hauled, with his hands tied behind his back, and led out of the city to execution to the sound of the execution-drum, and was impaled alive. Intense were his agonies; and, to add to them, the crows settled on his head and pecked out his eyes with their dagger-like beaks. Yet, heedless of his pain, and thinking only of his wife, the man murmured to himself, "Alas, I shall miss going to the festival with you arrayed in safflower-coloured cloths, with your arms twined round my neck." So saying, he uttered this stanza:--
I count it not as pain that, here impaled,
By crows I'm torn. My heartfelt pain is this, That my dear wife will not keep holiday Attired in raiment gay of ruddy dye.
And as he was babbling thus about his wife, he died and was reborn in hell.

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The Jakata, Volume I,
translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895
sacred-texts.com

"Whoso renounces."--This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove about a brahmin who was skilled in the prognostications which can be drawn from pieces of cloth. Tradition says that at Rajagaha dwelt a brahmin who was superstitious and held false views, not believing in the Three Gems. This brahmin was very rich and wealthy, abounding in substance; and a female mouse gnawed a suit of clothes of his, which was lying by in a chest. One day after bathing himself all over, he called for this suit, and then was told of the mischief which the mouse had done. "If these clothes stop in the house," thought he to himself, "they'll bring ill-luck; such an ill-omened thing is sure to bring a curse. It is out of the question to give them to any of my children or servants; for whosoever has them will bring misfortune on all around him. I must have them thrown away in a charnel-ground; but how? I cannot hand them to servants; for they might covet and keep them, to the ruin of my house. My son must take them." So he called his son, and telling him the whole matter bade him take his charge on a stick, without touching the clothes with his hand, and fling them away in a charnel-ground. Then the son was to bathe himself all over and return. Now that morning at dawn of day the Master looking round to see what persons could be led to the truth, became aware that the father and son were predestined to attain salvation. So he betook himself in the guise of a hunter on his way to hunt, to the charnel-ground, and sate down at the entrance, emitting the six-coloured rays that mark a Buddha. Soon there came to the spot the young brahmin, carefully carrying the clothes as his father had bidden him, on the end of his stick, just as though he had a house-snake to carry.

"What are you doing, young brahmin?" asked the Master.
"My good Gotama ," was the reply, "this suit of clothes, having been gnawed by mice, is like ill-luck personified, and as deadly as though steeped in venom; wherefore my father, fearing that a servant might covet and retain the clothes, has sent me with them. I promised that I would throw them away and bathe afterwards; and that's the errand that has brought me here." "Throw the suit away, then," said the Master; and the young brahmin did so. "They will just suit me," said the Master, as he picked up the fate-fraught clothes before the young man's very eyes, regardless of the latter's earnest warnings and repeated entreaties to him not to take them; and he departed in the direction of the Bamboo-grove.

Home in all haste ran the young brahmin, to tell his father how the Sage Gotama had declared that the clothes would just suit him, and had persisted, in spite of all warnings to the contrary, in taking the suit away with him to the Bamboo-grove. "Those clothes," thought the brahmin to himself, "are bewitched and accursed. Even the sage Gotama cannot wear them without destruction befalling him; and that would bring me into disrepute. I will give the Sage abundance of other garments and get him to throw that suit away." So with a large number of robes he started in company of his son for the Bamboo-grove. When he came upon the Master he stood respectfully on one side and spoke thus,--"Is it indeed true, as I hear, that you, my good Gotama, picked up a suit of clothes in the charnel-ground?" "Quite true, brahmin." "My good Gotama, that suit is accursed; if you make use of them, they will destroy you. If you stand in need of clothes, take these and throw away that suit." "Brahmin," replied the Master, "by open profession I have renounced the world, and am content with the rags that lie by the roadside or bathing-places, or are thrown away on dustheaps or in charnel-grounds. Whereas you have held your superstitions in bygone days, as well as at the present time." So saying, at the brahmin's request, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time there reigned in the city of Rajagaha, in the kingdom of Magadha, a righteous King of Magadha. In those days the Bodhisatta came to life again as a brahmin of the North-west. Growing up, he renounced the world for the hermit's life, won the Knowledges and the Attainments, and went to dwell in the Himalayas. On one occasion, returning from the Himalayas, and taking up his abode in the King's pleasaunce, he went on the second day into the city to collect alms. Seeing him, the King had him summoned into the palace and there provided with a seat and with food,--exacting a promise from him that he would take up his abode in the pleasaunce. So the Bodhisatta used to receive his food at the palace and dwell in the grounds.

Now in those days there dwelt in that city a brahmin known as Cloth-omens. And he had in a chest a suit of clothes which were gnawed by mice, and everything came to pass just as in the foregoing story. But when the son was on his way to the charnel-ground the Bodhisatta got there first and took his seat at the gate; and, picking up the suit which the young brahmin threw away, he returned to the pleasaunce. When the son told this to the old brahmin, the latter exclaimed, "It will be the death of the King's ascetic"; and entreated the Bodhisatta to throw that suit away, lest he should perish. But the ascetic replied, "Good enough for us are the rags that are flung away in charnel-grounds. We have no belief in superstitions about luck, which are not approved by Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, or Bodhisattas; and therefore no wise man ought to be a believer in luck." Hearing the truth thus expounded, the brahmin forsook his errors and took refuge in the Bodhisatta. And the Bodhisatta, preserving his Insight unbroken, earned re-birth thereafter in the Brahma Realm.

Having told this story, the Master, as Buddha, taught the Truth to the brahmin in this stanza:--
Whose renounces omens, dreams and signs, That man, from superstition's errors freed, Shall triumph o'er the paired Depravities And o'er Attachments to the end of time.

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The Jakata, Volume I,
translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895
sacred-texts.com

"Guile profits not."--This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a tailoring Brother. Tradition says that at Jetavana dwelt a Brother who was exceedingly skilful in all operations to be performed with a robe, such as cutting, joining, arranging, and stitching Because of this skill, he used to fashion robes and so got the name of 'The Robe-tailor.' What, you ask, did he do?--Well, he exercised his craft on old bits of cloth and turned out a nice soft robe, which, after the dyeing was done, he would enhance in colour with a wash containing flour to make a dressing, and rub it with a shell, till he had made it quite smart and attractive. Then he would lay his handiwork aside.

Being ignorant of robe-making, Brethren used to come to him with brand-new cloth, saying, "We don't know how to make robes; you make them for us."
"Sirs," he would reply, "a robe takes a long time making; but I have one which is just finished. You can take that, if you will leave these cloths in exchange." And, so saying, he would take his out and chew it them. And they, marking only its fine colour, and knowing nothing of what it was made of, thought it was a good strong one, and so handed over their brand-new cloth to the 'Robe-maker' and went off with the robe he gave them. When it got dirty and was being washed in hot water, it revealed its real character, and the worn patches were visible here and there. Then the owners regretted their bargain. Everywhere that Brother became well-known for cozening in this way all who came to him.

Now, there was a robe-maker in a hamlet who used to cozen everybody just as the brother did at Jetavana. This man's friends among the Brethren said to him, "Sir, they say that at Jetavana there is a robe-maker who cozens everybody just like you." Then the thought struck him, "Come now, let me cozen that city man!" So he made out of rags a very fine robe, which he dyed a beautiful orange. This he put on and went to Jetavana. The moment the other saw it, he coveted it, and said to its owner, "Sir, did you make that robe?" "Yes, I did, sir," was the reply. "Let me have that robe, sir; you'll get another in its place." "But, sir, we village-Brethren find it hard to get the Requisites; if I give you this, what shall I have to wear myself ?" "Sir, I have some brand-new cloth at my lodging; take it and make yourself a robe." "Reverend sir, herein have I shewn my own handiwork; but, if you speak thus, what can I do? Take it." And having cozened the other by exchanging the rag-robe for the new cloth, he went his way.

After wearing the botched robe in his turn, the Jetavana man was washing it not long afterwards in warm water, when he became aware that it was made out. of rags; and he was put to shame. The whole of the Brotherhood heard the news that the Jetavana man had been cozened by a robe-tailor from the country.

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"The strong will always have their way," etc.--This was told by the Master whilst at Jetavana how Elder Amanda received a present of a thousand robes. The Elder had been preaching to the ladies of the king of Kosala's palace as described above in the Mahasara Birth.
As he preached there in the manner described, a thousand robes, worth each a thousand pieces of money, were brought to the king. Of these the king gave five hundred to as many of his queens. The ladies put these aside and made them a present to our Elder, and then the next day in their old ones went to the palace where the king took breakfast. The king remarked, "I gave you dresses worth a thousand pieces each. Why are you not wearing them?" "My lord," said they, "we have given them to the Elder." "Has Elder Ananda got them all?" he asked. They said, yes, he had. "The Supreme Buddha," said he, "allows only three robes. Ananda is doing a little trade in cloth, I suppose!" He was angry with the Elder; and after breakfast, visited him in his cell, and after greeting, sat down, with these words:--
"Pray, Sir, do my ladies learn or listen to your preaching?"
"Yes, Sire; they learn what they ought, and what they ought to hear, they hear."
"Oh, indeed. Do they only listen, or do they make you presents of upper garments or under-garments?"
"To-day, Sire, they have given me five hundred robes worth a thousand pieces each."
"And you accepted them, Sir?"
"Yes, Sire, I did."
"Why, Sir, didn't the Master make some rule about three robes?"
"True, Sire, for every Brother three robes is the rule, speaking of what he uses for himself. But no one is forbidden to accept what is offered; and that is why I took them--to give them to Brothers whose robes are worn out."
"But when these Brothers get them from you, what do they do with their old ones?"
"Make them into a cloke."
"And what about the old cloke?"
"That they turn into a shirt."
"And the old shirt--?"
"That serves for a coverlet."
"The old coverlet?"--"Becomes a mat."-- "The old mat?'--"A towel."
"And what about the old towel?"
"Sire, it is not permitted to waste the gifts of the faithful; so they chop up the old towel into bits, and mix the bits with clay, which they use for mortar in building their houses."
"A gift, Sir, ought not to be destroyed, not even a towel."
"Well, Sir king, we destroy no gifts, but all are used somehow."
This conversation pleased the king so much, that he sent for the other five hundred dresses which remained, and gave them to the Elder. Then, after receiving his thanks, he greeted the Elder in solemn state, and went his way.

The Elder gave the first five hundred robes to Brothers whose robes were worn out. But the number of his fellow priests was just five hundred. One of these, a young Brother, was very useful to the Elder; sweeping out his cell, serving him with food and drink, giving him tooth-brush and water for cleansing his mouth, looking after the privies, living rooms, and sleeping rooms, and doing all that was needed for hand, foot, or back. To him, as his by right for all his great service, the Elder gave all the five hundred robes which he had received afterwards. The young Brother in his turn distributed them among his fellow-students. These all cut them up, dyed then yellow as a kanikara [*1] flower; then drest therein they waited upon the Master, greeted him, and sat down on one side. "Sir," they asked, "is it possible for a holy disciple who has entered on the First Path to be a respecter of persons in his gifts?" "No, Brothers, it is not possible for holy disciples to be respecters of persons in their gifts." "Sir, our spiritual Teacher, the Treasurer of the Faith, gave five hundred robes, each worth a thousand pieces, to a young Brother; and he has divided them amongst us." "Brothers, in giving these Ananda was no respecter of persons. That young fellow was a very useful servant; so he made the present to his own attendant for service' sake, for goodness'

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" A certain poor woman had tied together several threads of different colours and made them into a necklace, which she took off from her neck and placed on her clothes as she went down to bathe in a tank which the pandit had caused to be made. A young woman who saw this conceived a longing for it, took it up and said to her, "Mother, this is a very beautiful necklace, how much did it cost to make? I will make such a one for myself. May I put it on my own neck and ascertain its size?" The other gave her leave, and she put it on her neck and ran off. The elder woman seeing it came quickly out of the water, and putting on her clothes ran after her and seized hold of her dress, crying, "You are running away with a; necklace which I made." The other replied, "I am not taking anything of yours, it is the necklace which I wear on my neck"; and a great crowd collected as they heard this. The sage, while he played with the boys, heard them quarrelling as they passed by the door of the hall and asked what the noise was about. When he heard the cause of the quarrel he sent for them both, and having known at once by her countenance which was the thief, he asked them whether they would abide by his decision. On their both agreeing to do so, he asked the thief, "What scent do you use for this necklace?" She replied, "I always use sabbasamhharaka to scent it with." Then he asked the other, who replied, "How shall a poor woman like me get sabbasamharaka? I always scent it with perfume made of piyangu flowers." Then the sage had a vessel of water brought and put the necklace in it. Then he sent for a perfume-seller and told him to smell the vessel and find out what it smelt of. He directly recognised the smell of the piyangu flower, and quoted the stanza which has been already given in the first book:

"No omnigatherum it is; only the kangu smells;
Yon wicked woman told a lie; the truth the gammer tells."

The Great Being told the bystanders all the circumstances and asked each of them respectively, "Art thou the thief? Art thou not the thief?" and made the guilty one confess, and from that time his wisdom became known to the people.

V2: THE COTTON THREAD

A certain woman who used to watch cotton fields was watching one day and she took some clean cotton and spun some fine thread and made it into a ball and placed it in her lap. As she went home she thought to herself, "I will bathe in the great sage's tank," so she placed the ball on her dress and went down into the tank to bathe. Another woman saw it, and conceiving a longing for it took it up, saying, "This is a beautiful ball of thread; pray did you make it yourself?" So she lightly snapped her fingers and put it in her lap as if to examine it more closely, and walked off with it. (This is to be told at full as before.) The sage asked the thief, "When you made the ball what did you put inside?" She replied, "A cotton seed." Then he asked the other, and she replied, "A timbaru seed." When the crowd had heard what each said, he untwisted the ball of cotton and found a timbaru seed inside and forced the thief to confess her guilt. The great multitude were highly pleased and shouted their applause at the way in which the case had been decided.

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The Jakata, Volume I,
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In a certain place there lived a weaver by the name of Mantharaka, which means "the simpleton." One day, while weaving cloth, the wooden pieces on his loom broke. He took an ax, and set forth to find some wood. He found a large sissoo tree at the ocean's shore, and said aloud, "Now this is a large tree. If I fell it, I will have wood enough for all my weaving tools."
Having thus thought it through, he raised his ax to begin cutting. However, a spirit lived in this tree, and he said, "Listen! This tree is my home, and it must be spared in any event, because I like it here where my body can be stroked by the cool breezes that blow in from the ocean's waves."

The weaver said, "Then what am I to do? If I don't find a good tree, then my family will starve. You will have to go somewhere else. I am going to cut it down."
The spirit answered, "Listen, I am at your service. Ask whatever you would like, but spare this tree!"
The weaver said, "If that is what you want then I will go home and ask my friend and my wife, and when I return, you must give me what I ask for."
The spirit promised, and the weaver, beside himself with joy, returned home. Upon his arrival in his city he saw his friend, the barber, and said, "Friend, I have gained control over a spirit. Tell me what I should demand from him!"

The barber said, "My dear friend, if that is so then you should demand a kingdom. You could be king, and I would be your prime minister, and we two would first enjoy the pleasures of this world and then those of the next one. For they say: A prince who piously gives to others, achieves fame in this world, and through these good deeds, he will arrive in heaven, equal to the gods themselves."
The weaver spoke, "Friend, so be it! But let us also ask my wife."
The barber said, "One should never ask women for advice. They also say: A wise man gives women food, clothing, jewelry, and above all the duties of marriage, but he never asks for their advice. And further: That house must perish where a woman, a gambler, or a child is listened to. And: A man will advance and be loved by worthy people as long as he does not secretly listen to women. Women think only of their own advantage, of their own desires. Even if they love only their own son, still, he will serve their wishes."
The weaver spoke, "Even though this is true, she nonetheless must be asked, because she is subservient to her husband."

Having said this, he went quickly to his wife and said to her, "Dear one, today I have gained control over a spirit who will grant me one wish. Hence I have come to ask for your advice. Tell me, what should I ask for? My friend the barber thinks that I should request a kingdom."
She answered, "Oh, son of your excellence, what do barbers understand? You should never do what they say. After all, it is stated: A reasonable person will no sooner take advice from dancers, singers, the low born, barbers, or children, than from beggars. Furthermore, a king's life is an unending procession of annoyances. He must constantly worry about friendships, animosities, wars, servants, defense alliances, and duplicity. He never gets a moment's rest, because: Anyone who wants to rule must prepare his spirit for misfortune. The same container that is used for salve can also be used to pour out bad luck. Never envy the life of a king."
The weaver said, "You are right. But what should I ask for?"

She answered, "You can now work on only one piece of cloth at a time. That is barely enough to pay for the necessities. You should ask for another pair of arms and a second head so that you can work on two pieces of cloth at once, one in front of you, and one behind you. We can sell the one for household necessities, and you can use the money from the second one for other things. You will thus gain the praise of your relatives, and you will make gains in both worlds."

After hearing this he spoke with joy, "Good, you faithful wife! You have spoken well, and I will do what you say. That is my decision."
With that he went to the spirit and let his will be known, "Listen, if you want to fulfill my wish, then give me another pair of arms and another head."

He had barely spoken before he was two-headed and four-armed. Rejoicing, he returned home, but the people there thought that he was a demon and beat him with sticks and stones, until he fell over dead.
And that is why I say: He who cannot think for himself and will not follow the advice of friends, he will push himself into misfortune, just like the weaver Mantharaka.

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Pantschatantra: Fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen und Erzählungen,
translated from the Sanskrit into German by Theodor Benfey
Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1859, book 5, story 8
Translated into English by D. L. Ashliman. © 2002.

THE BRAHMAN'S CLOTHES 17.

There was once a Brahman who had two wives. Like many Brahmans he lived by begging and was very clever at wheedling money out of people. One day the fancy took him to go to the marketplace dressed only in a small loincloth such as the poorest laborers wear and see how people treated him. So he set out, but on the road and in the marketplace and in the village no one salaamed to him or made way for him, and when he begged no one gave him alms.

He soon got tired of this and hastened home and, putting on his best pagri [turban] and coat and dhoti [waistcloth], went back to the marketplace. This time everyone who met him on the road salaamed low to him and made way for him, and every shopkeeper to whom he went gave him alms; and the people in the village who had refused before gladly made offerings to him.
The Brahman went home smiling to himself and took off his clothes and put them in a heap and prostrated himself before them three or four times, saying each time, "O source of wealth! O source of wealth! It is clothes that are honored in this world and nothing else."

—
Cecil Henry Bompas,
Folklore of the Santal Parganas,
London: David Nutt, 1909, no. 146

DIE WÄSCHERSTOCHTER

1
Refrain: *Im Feuer dieser Trennung stirbt mein Herz.*
Welch Leid bringt diese Liebe!
Und nicht zwei Tage dauerte mein Glück!
"Die Tschampabäume blüht an allen Seiten dieses Teiches.
Mit ihren Blüten schmücke ich mein Haar. Nun laß mich gehen, Freund.
Ein Bett aus Blättern findest du am Ufer. In der Nacht,
Mein Freund, komm her, geh nicht bei Tageslicht.
Die bösen Leute aus der Nachbarschaft, wie werden uns verleumden,
Sie werden reden, wenn sie dich um diese Zeit hier sehen.
Da ist mein Vater, da ist meine Mutter, beide werden es nicht dulden.
Verleumden wird man uns im ganzen Dorf, mein Freund.
Laß meine Hand, ich muß nach Hause gehen,
Was soll ich machen, wenn der Strom den Krug mit fortreißt.
Dort in der Ferne, im Bananenhain, kling eine Flöte -
Wir werden heute nacht uns wiedersehen."
"Es ist jetzt Abend, Mädchen, du gehst Wasser holen,
So bleibe stehen, hör, was ich dir sage:
Dein Haar fällt bis zum Knie, und reif ist deine Jugend.
Bleib ein paar Stunden hier, was mich bewegt, will ich dir sagen
Als ich dein Haar erblickte, war ich gleich verliebt. In deinen Augen
erblühen Aparadschitas, dein Leib ist voller Tschampablüten.
Ich will dir allen Reichtum meines königlichen Vaters geben -
nur dich will ich zur Gattin haben.
Verrückt bin ich, mein Mädchen, wie im Sturm der Kranich.
So bleibe, Mädchen, höre meine Worte."
"Laß meine Hand, mein goldner Freund, spar mir die Schande,
bei Tageslicht wird man uns sehen und mich dann verleumden.
Gedulde dich, mein Freund, und warte noch ein wenig,
Da ist mein Vater, da ist meine Mutter, kann ich sie betrügen?
Dein Vater ist der König dieses Landes - ein Untertan jedoch,
ein Diener deines Vaters ist der meine, er ist Wäscher.
Du bist dem Monde gleich, streckst dennoch deine Hand zur Erde,
die Leute werden reden über dich, wenn sie das hören.
Du bist die goldne Hummel, aller Blumen Saft kannst du genießen,
kannst du ein dauerhaftes Glück in einer solchen Liebe finden?
Laß meine Hand, mein Freund, laß mich nach Hause gehen,
erlaube mir zu gehen und verzeihe mir."
"Ich bitte dich, mein schönes Mädchen, bleib bei mir,
Gib mir von deinem Blütesaft in dieser Nacht zu trinken.
Ich werde auf dich warten, will auf meinem Flöte spielen,
mit dir gemeinsam will ich diese Nacht verbringen.
Du hast ein Bett aus Blättern vorbereitet,
ich werde dich umarmen, einen schönen Traum erleben.
Mit Liebe hast du stets mein Kleid gewaschen, Mädchen,
Auf dem Gewand sind noch die Spuren deiner Finger.
Die letzten Zweifel schwanden, als ich es zurückbekam;
wenn ich es trage, spüre ich die Düfte deines Blumenkranzes."
"Wie kann ich bei dir bleiben, Prinz, die Eltern sind zu Hause.

Ich bitte dich, mein lieber Freund, so laß mich gehen.
Die Unvernunft darf nicht das Herz so stark beherrschen,
daß es, dem Fluß im Juli gleich, zum Narren wird.
Dein Antlitz scheint mir wie der Mond in meinen Träumen,
das ist des einzige Glück für mich, die Arme, in der Nacht.
Ich will dir das Versprechen geben, Freund, ich komme heute,
ich werde nachts, wenn es nur irgend geht, das Elternhaus verlassen.
Mein Tageszeuge ist die Sonne, Nachtzeugen die Sterne -
der Hauptzeuge, mein Freund, bist du: Ich halte was ich dir versprochen habe."

2
Refrain: *Ich konnte nicht, mein Freund,*
Ich konnte es um keinen Preis.
"Ich kann nicht kommen, Prinz, muß mein Versprechen brechen,
die Eltern sind noch wach - wie soll ich da das Haus verlassen?
Fremd ist das eigne Heim, und Fremde sind die Angehörigen,
die Angst vor der Verleumdung ist mein ärgster Feind.
Was habe ich von Ehre und Familie? Spiele nicht mehr auf der Flöte,
zur Sklavin deiner Flöte werde ich durch diesen Lockruf!
Gedulde dich, mein Freund, und warte noch ein wenig,
bis meine Eltern eingeschlafen sind. Siehst du die Wolken dort
am Himmel? Hör den Donner! Ich befürchte,
daß wir uns heute nacht nicht wiedersehen können.
Es regnet, alles ist schon naß. Drum schneid dir Blätter
und halte sie zusammen und bedeck damit den Kopf.
Durchnäßt hat dieser Regen deinen goldnen Körper.
Mit meinen Haaren wollte ich ihn trocknen, wenn du bei mir wärst.
In tiefem Schlummer liegt die Welt, und nur die Flöte singt -
sag, welchen Weg ich nehmen soll, wenn ich das Haus verlasse.
Die schweren Wolken zogen fort, der Mond erlosch,
ich fürchte diesen Weg, ich habe Angst um meine Ehre,
denn dieser Baum hat keine Äste, es ist ohne Blätter, ohne Blüten.
Doch was bedeuten Kaste und Familie, wenn ich nur den Freund bekomme!"

3
Refrain: *Wo fließt du hin, mein Fluß!*
Wo kommst du her, und warum läufst du fort?
"Du leuchtest golden, Morgen, nur verstreute Wölkchen zeigen sich
Flog denn ein Vogel auf die Erde, so ist sie für ihn zu klein.
Fliegt er zum Himmel auf, so ist er unzufrieden.
Fang ich den Vogel ein, in welchem Käfig sollte ich ihn halten?
Ach, wie und wo bewahre ich den Vogel meines Herzens?
Wer trägt die Schuld, daß diese Nacht zu Ende ging.,
warum hat mich mein Freund so früh verlassen?
Den Freund in meinem Arm, verbrachte ich die Nacht,
warum ist er, der Räuber meiner Seele, fortgegangen?
Als ich noch schlief, verließ er mich in aller Frühe,
das weiche Ruhebett vertauschte er für einen harten Boden.
Was soll mein Grübeln, ist er nicht ein Königssohn?
Ist nicht die Liebe zwischen hoch und niedrig lächerlich?
Ich bin ja nur ein Zwerg und greife nach dem Mond.

In meinem armen Kopf ist kein Verstand zu finden.
Tauch in das Wasser, Krug, tauch in das Wasser dieses Flusses,
mein Freund versenkte mich genauso in die Tiefe.
Dici füllte ich mit Wasser, Krug, hob dich auf meine Schulter.
Wenn mich die Leute sehen, tuscheln sie.
Soll ich, den Sari um den Hals und in der Hand den Krug,
mich wegen meines Freundes in dem Fluß ertränken?
Kommst du heut wieder, Freund, dann will ich Betel vorbereiten,
ich werde dir mein Leben, meine Jugend, meine Ehre opfern.
Ich will mein Heim verlassen und die Eltern,
will aus dem Lande ziehen in den Schutz der Wälder."

4
"Wie ist es möglich, Herr des Landes, ruhig dazusitzen?"
Dein Sohn hat eine Wäscherstochter sich zur Liebsten auserkoren!
Sie ist so niedrig, daß sie deine Wäsche waschen muß.
Dein Sohn hat sich in sie vernarrt, als er sie sah.
Ihr Leib ist golden, sie heißt Kantschanmala.
Mit diesem Mädchen hat dein Sohn sich eingelassen,
als hätte sich der Mond mit dem Dämonen Rahu abgegeben.
Der Vater, dieser böse Wäscher, hat gewiß die Hand im Spiel."
Ein schwerer Zorn ergriff den König, als er dieses hörte,
Er schickte seine Knechte aus, den Wäscher herzubringen.
Der Wäscher Gotha kam mit einem Bündel Wäsche auf der Schulter,
Auf einen Stock gestützt und heftig zitternd, zu den König.
Der König hielt Audienz, umringt von seinen Leuten.
Vor ihm stand Gotha, ehrerbietig zu dem Gruß die Hände hebend.
"Zwei Tage regnet es, zwei Tage dauert dieser Sturm,
Die Wäsche trocknet leider nicht bei solchem Wetter.
So kommt es, König, daß ich mich verspätet habe.
Die Wäsche ist nicht trocken, schuld ist das Gewitter."
Ich kann es kaum beschreiben, wie vor Wut des Königs Körper bebte.
Voll Zorn fuhr er den Wäscher an, der halbnackt vor ihm stand:
"Schon mannbar ist die Tochter, warum hat sie keinen Mann?
Mein einziger Sohn hat sich in sie vernarrt, als er sie sa.
Noch ehe dieser Tag zu Ende geht, ist sie verheiratet!
Sonst schleppen morgen meine Leute dich am Haar herbei."
"Ein Gärtner wohnt in dieser Stadt, mit Namen Baguja,
schon morgen früh wird er der Gatte meiner Tochter sein."
Der Wäscher ging nach Hause, auf den Stock gestützt,
Dort weinte er zusammen mit der Frau die ganze Nacht.
Wohin jedoch sind Kantschanmala und er Königssohn gegangen?
Die Trommeln tönen überall im Land. Das ist das Ende dieser Episode.

5
"Prinz, ich bin hilflos, hilflos bin ich, Prinz.
Ich sehe keine Weg mehr in der Dunkelheit des Waldes.
Doch ist der Kewawald am Ufer jenes Flusses voller Blüten,
führ mich dorthin und halte meine Hand.
Ich kann nicht gehen, Freund, zu schwer wiegt meine Jugend."
Laß uns hier rasten und die Nacht verbringen."
"Ich bitte dich, mein Mädchen, komm noch etwas weiter.
Die Nacht ist bald zu Ende, es beginnt zu dämmern.
Wir müssen meines Vaters Land verlassen, weiterziehen, irgendwo
wird uns ein guter Mensch schon Zuflucht geben.
Sonst müßten wir für alle Zeit im Walde bleiben.
An deiner Seite, Mädchen, will ich alles auf mich nehmen,
gemeinsam mich mit dir von Waldesfrüchten nähren.
Im Schatten dieses Baumes finden wir ein Heim, ein Bett aus Blättern.
Die Tiger und die Bären sollen unsre Freunde sein."
"Die Nacht ist fast vergangen und der Mond erloschen,
wir haben deines Vaters Reich gewiß schon längst verlassen.
Mein Vater wird sein armes Kind beweinen, meine Mutter
wird an der Wand vor Kummer ihren Kopf zerschlagen.
Du hast verzichtet auf dein Heim und ich auf meine Ehre,
ein hilfloses Geschöpf wie ich ist jetzt zu Stein geworden.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht den Fluß Khurai erblicken.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht das Grün der Reisfelder erkennen.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht mehr unsre Heimat sehen.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht mehr meine Nachbarn treffen.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht den Morgenhimmel sehen.
Ist auch die Nacht vorbei, ich werde nicht mehr Blumen unsres Gartens rieche.
Für immer habe ich mein Heim und die Familie verlassen."
"So weine nicht, mein Mädchen, weine nicht und sei nicht traurig!
Wir beide werden hier gemeinsam in dem Walde leben.
Wein bitte nicht, mein Mädchen, laß das Weinen.
Uns bindet wie den Blütekranz ein fester Faden.
Was höre ich? Was höre ich an jenem Ghat?
Wir sind schon in dem Reiche eines andern Königs angekommen."

6
"Hör, Wäscher, der du im Palast die Wäsche wäschst,
gib mir und dieser Unglücklichen bei dir Zuflucht.
Uns haben unsre Väter fortgetrieben - sei du uns jetzt Vater!
Ins Unglück hat man uns gestürzt, gequälten Herzens sind wir hergekommen."
Der Wäscher blickte ganz erstaunt, als wär die Sonne
zusammen mit dem Mond vor ihm auf Erden hier erschienen.
Ob wohl die beiden Kinder eines Königs waren?
"Ich habe keinen Sohn und keine Tochter, bleibt bei mir,
betrachtet meine Frau Adina jetzt als eure Mutter.
Du bist mein Sohn, und du bist meine Tochter, Lakschmi meines Hauses.
Das Reinigen der Wäsche unsres Königs wird uns alle schon ernähren."
"Hör zu, mein Stiefvater, hör, was ich sage:
Ich werde jetzt allein die Königswäsche waschen.
Ich bin ein Wäscher, und ich weiß, wie man das macht.
Und meine Frau wird fortan Hausarbeit bei dir verrichten.
Du wirst uns Vater sein, und wir sind deine Kinder.
Hier werden wir verweilen, hier in deinem Hause."

7
"Alltäglich wäschst du meine Wäsche, Wäscher meines Vaters,
doch nie zuvor ist sie so schön wie jetzt geworden."

Prinzessin Rumging erhielt von einer Dienstmagd Nachricht:
“Ein neuer Wäscher ist gekommen, der jetzt deine Wäsche wäscht.
Sein Antlitz leuchtet wie der Glanz des Mondes -
er könnte sicher Sohn von einem König sein.
Ein Mädchen ist mit ihm tierhergekommen,
auch ihre Schönheit ist von wunderbarer Art.
Die glänzend schwarzen Haare fallen über ihren Rücken,
Aus reinstem Gold ist ihrer Jugend Schönheit.
Die Farbe der Atasiblume hat ihr Körper -
ein jeder spricht von ihrer Anmut.”
Als die Prinzessin diese Worte hörte,
befahl sie ihrer Dienstmagd, jenen Wäscher herzubringen.
“Von meiner Magd erfuhr ich seltsame Geschichten -
du hättest eine Tochter, hättest einen Sohn.
Ist denn das Mädchen, das mir meine Wäsche brachte, deine Tochter?
Ich werde sie sogleich zu meiner Freundin machen.”
So wurde Kantschanmala ihre ständige Gefährtin.
Rukmini war von ihrer Schönheit ganz bezaubert.
Sie rief sie liebe Freundin und umarmte sie,
so wurden beide Mädchen beste Freundinnen.

8
Ein Monat ging dahin, ein zweiter und ein dritter,
doch eines Tages fragte Rukmini die Wäscherin:
“Wo kommst du her, wo ist dein Haus, und wer sind deine Eltern?
Sag mir, woher du kommst, nd wohin wirst du gehen?
Hast du die Eltern in so früher Jugend schon verloren?
Warum hast du dein haus und deine Heimat denn verlassen?
Dein Gatte ist, wie ich erkennen kann, ein schöner Mensch -
hat er dich mit Gewalt aus deinem Haus entführt?
War es die Liebe, die dich dazu brachte, alles aufzugeben?
Erzähle mir doch bite alles ganz genau!”
Die kluge Kanschanmala wurde jetzt sehr töricht,
berichtete von allem, was sich zugetragen hatte, der Prinzessin.

“Oft kommt der hübsche Jüngling und geht wieder fort.
Es scheint, als ob er sich nicht ganz zum Wäscher eignet
In einem Königshaus und nicht bei einem Wäscher ist er aufgewachsen.
Ein schlimmes Schicksal hat dies Unglück ihm beschert.
An jedem Tag bringt er die Wäsche in dies Haus.
Ich sehe hinschob auf dem Weg vom Fenster aus.
Ein Mistkäfer bist du geworden, eine Hummel warst du einst.
In ihrer Liebe hat die Wäscherstochter dich ertränkt.”

Aus einer guten Königstochter wurde eine böse Frau.
In ihre Wäsche tat sie heimlich einen Brief:
“Hör zu, mein lieber Freund, ich kenn dich nicht,
Doch habe ich in deine Schönheit heftig mich verliebt.
Den König hast du arg betrogen, denn du trinkst,
Im Walde wandernd, vom dem Saft der Blüten.
Der Frühling ist gekommen, es ist März.
Der Kolik singt, in voller Blüte stehen die Bäume.
Mit Farbe werfen sich die Männer und die Frauen in der Stadt.
Sag, wann du wieder Wäsche in den Königspalast bringst!
Wenn wir alleine miteinander sind, will ich dir alles sagen.
Erraten mußt du aus dem Brief, woran Rukmini denkt.”

9
Aus dem Geschlecht der Hummeln stammt der Mann, er trinkt den Blütensaft,
welkt eine Blume, sucht er nach der nächsten.
So sprach zu Kantschanmala eines Tages dieser Prinz:
“Ich gehe fort und werde in der Fremde für drei Monate verweilen,
du aber bleibe diese Zeit im Wäscherhaus.
Sind die drei Monate vergangen, werden wir uns wiedersehen.”
Das Mädchen dachte weiter nicht darüber nach
und nahm getrost von dem Geliebten Abschied.

Und so verging ein Monat, und ein zweiter und ein dritter -
Da tönten im Palast des Königs laut die Trommeln,
und heller Jubel war aus dem Palast zu hören.
Von ihrer Stiefmutter Adina wollte Kantschanmala wissen:
“Hör zu, hör Mutter Adina, was ich dich frage:
Was soll der Jubel und das Trommeln im Palast?”
Die Wäschersfrau Adina antwortete ihr:
“Rukmini heiratet aus irgendeinem Lande einen Prinzen.”
Drei Monate vergingen, doch der Freund blieb in der Fremde.
Der vierte Monat kam, er aber kehrte nicht zurück.
Der fünfte Monat ließ des Mädchens Hoffnung schwacher werden.
Im sechsten Monat wollte Kantschanmala nicht mehr essen.
Im siebenten, da wollte sie auch nicht mehr schlafen.
Im achten Monat fraß bereits der Wurm am jungen Bambusrohr.
Als er im neunten Monat auch nicht kam, war sie enttäuscht.
Drei Monate des Jahres ware noch verblieben,
doch auch im zehnten Monat blieb das Herz ihr leer.
Im elften Monat wußte sie, daß bald die Fesseln bersten.
Nun waren dreizehn Tage schon vom zwölften Monat abgelaufen.
Der Freund versprach zurückzukommen, und sie glaubte ihm.
Sie zündetet die Lampe an. Als sie verlöschte, weinte sie.
Das Jahr war nun vergangen, und der Freund blieb fort.

Am Ufer irrte weinend die Verlassene umher:
“Aus welchem Lande kommst du, Fluß, und wohin fließt du?
Erzähle meinem Freund vom Kummer einer unglücklich Verlassenen.
Dem Freunde flüstere die Nachricht in das Ohr!
Du kommst aus weiter Ferne, Boot mit auftezognen Segeln -
bringt mir vielleicht ein Kaufmann Botschaft von dem Freunde?
Wo warst du, Boot, wie viele Länder hast du aufgesucht -
hast du denn nirgendwo den Freund gesehen?
Er wird aus Diamanten und aus Perlen eine Blume bringen,
mit meinen Tränen werde ich die Blume, ist der Freund erst hier, begießen.
Die Hoffnungen des Tages sind vorbeigegangen, Freund.
Ist diese Nacht vorüber, wird der Morgen neue Hoffnung bringen.

Bleibt er auch morgen aus, so wird auch dieser Tag ein schwarzer sein.
Mich hat das Schicksal, Freund, zu schwerem Leid verurteilt.

10

Der Steuereinnehmer des Königs war ein böser Mensch
Den Wäscher rief er eines Tages, als sonst niemand in der Nähe war:
"Ich weiß, in deinem Hause lebt ein junges Mädchen,
fünfhundert Rupien, dazu Haus und Boden geb ich dir für sie.
Wenn du mir nicht gehorchst, kann ich dich leicht vernichten,
durch meine Macht kann eine Kuh, die trächtig ist, ihr Kalb verlieren.
Befolge meinen Rat und schick das Mädchen zu mir."
Der Wäscher zitterte vor Furcht und sagte alles seiner Frau.
"Der Steuereinnehmer wird unser Haus in Asche legen -
Soll solches Leid uns wegen dieses fremden Mädchen widerfahren?"
"Hör, Tochter, höre meine Worte:
Ein ganzes Jahr hast du nun schon in unserm Haus verbracht.
Du bist ein gutes Mädchen, und ich bin wie deine Mutter,
Verlasse dieses Haus noch diese Nacht, ich bitte dich!
Den bösen Steuereinnehmer hast du zum Feind,
er muß dich irgendwo gesehen haben.
Wenn du noch länger bei uns bist, er hat es uns gesagt,
Wird er das Haus in Asche legen, uns vernichten.
Ich bitte dich, verstehe unsre Lage
und gehe fort, befreie uns aus der Gefahr!"

11

Der Kaufmann Tampa Gazi aus dem Dorfe Purer Kanda
Verschiffte Reis, ihn zu verkaufen, in fünf vollen Booten.
Mit diesen Booten hatte er am Ufer angelegt,
er brachte seine Ladung aus dem Norden.
An Bord war ein Gefährte, und was machte der?
Er ging an Land, am Ufer dieses Flusses.
Dort an dem Ufer saß ein schönes Mädchen.
Davon gab er sogleich dem Kaufmann Kunde!
Der Kaufmann hatte weder Sohn noch Tochter.
Er nahm das Mädchen mit zu sich nach Hause.

Im Hause Tampa Gazis machte Kantschanmala alle Hausarbeit.
Sie kocht Reis, und Tränen flossen aus den Augen.
Mit ihren Tränen netzte sie den ganzen Boden,
wenn sie den Hof des Hauses kehren mußte.
Wie Perlen von der Kette rannen ihre Tränen,
wenn sie mit ihrem Krug zum Flusse ging.
Der Kaufmann Tampa und die Frau empfanden großes Mitleid,
erfuhren aber von dem Mädchen nicht den Grund des Leides.
"Ich muß auf Reisen gehen, Mädchen, ich muß Reis verkaufen.
Sag, Mädchen, was ich dir von meiner Reise bringen soll.
Du bist ein gutes Mädchen, wir sind deine Eltern,
wir haben einen Schatz gefunden dank der Gnade Allahs."
Das Mädchen aber weinte nur, als sie das hörte.
Sie wußte nichts, was sie sich wünschen sollte, konnte nichts
von jenem Schatz verraten, den sie sich erhoffte.
Drei Monate und dreizehn Tage später kam der Kaufmann
Mit vielen schönen Sachen in sein Haus zurück.
Er brachte für das Mädchen eine Dose voller Muscheln,
ein Perlenhalsband brachte er ihr mit.
Er hatte eine Sari ihr gekauft
mit flammendrotem Rand und einen reichverzierten Gürtel.
Er brachte Schmuck für ihre Für, schöne Nasenringe,
er brachte ihr zu essen, eine schöne Honigwabe
und Trockenfisch und viele, viele andre Sachen,
Das ganze Boot war mit Geschenken angefüllt.
Was er in jenem fernen Ländern sah,
erzählte er in allen Einzelten seiner Frau:
"In einem Lande sah ich Häuser ganz mit Ulustroh gedeckt,
In einem anderen sah ich Wasser oben auf den Bäumen.
Ich sah die Männer kochen und die Frauen auf den Feldern ackern.
Die Frauen kaufen und verkaufen ihre Waren auf den Märkten.
Auch sah ich Büffel weiden an den Ufern,
ich sah Gazellen, die aus Büchern Wasser tranken.
Ich überquerte viele Hügel und auch Berge,
ich sah die vielen Länder in der Fremde,
sah Flüsse, deren Wasser schnell dahinfloß.
Auch sah ich Kaufmannsschiffe, voll beladen,
und viele Königreiche hab ich gesehen."
Dies und noch mehr berichtete der Kaufmann seiner Frau.
"Dann sah ich noch ein seltsames Geschehen,
Wie ich ein ähnliches noch nie gesehen habe.
Ich fuhr den Fluß entlang in einem großen Königreich,
am Ufer wusch ein Wäscher seine Wäsche.
Er war sehr alt und fast erblindet seine Augen.
Wenn man nur leise zu ihm sprach, da konnte er nicht hören.
Er war der Wäscher, der die Königswäsche wusch,
er brauchte sieben Tage für ein einziges Kleid allein.
Er tat mir leid, als ich ihn da so sah.
Ich rief ihn zu mir, fragte ihn nach seinem Schicksal.
Der arme Mann, er hatte keinen Sohn und keine Tochter.
Zwar hatte er zuvor ein Mädchen, aber sie war fort -
sie hatte ihre Kaste und Familie entehrt
und war aus ihrem Elternhaus geflohen.
Jetzt ist der arme Wäscher schon fast blind und taub,
hat soviel Kummer, dennoch lebt er weiter.
Am Ufer sitzt er, weint und ruft nach seiner Tochter -
mit eignen Augen habe ich dies Elend angesehen."
Als Kantschanmala diese Worte hörte,
vergoß sie heiße Tränen wegen ihres Vaters.
Ist es schon schlimm, wenn Eltern keine Kinder haben,
So ist es schlimmer noch, wenn man sein Kind verliert.
"Hör zu, mein Stiefvater, hör, was ich sage:
Ich bitt dich flehentlich, bring mich zu meinem Vater!
Ich bin in jenem Wäscherhaus geboren, bin die Wäscherstochter,
wie soll ich dir beschreiben, welches Unglück mir einst widerfuhr?

Das Schicksal hat es so gewollt, die Ehre habe ich verloren,
Jetzt brennt die Schmach in meinem Herzen wie ein Feuer."

12
"Was soll ich dir nur sagen, meine Tochter?
Als du noch klein warst, zog ich dich mit großer Mühe auf.
Die Mutter fand, als alles dann für sie verloren war,
die letzte Ruhe auf dem Scheiterhaufen nah dem Flusse.
Ich aber wasche Kleider an dem Ghat und weine.
Du hast mein Herz zu Stein gemacht, du meine Tochter."
Darauf erzählte Kantschanmala weinend, was sich zugetragen hatte
und welches Leid ihr in der Fremde widerfuhr.
Vom Vater wiederum erfuhr das Mädchen, was inzwischen
am Hof des Königs sich ereignet hatte. Vernichtet war sie durch ihr Karma
Der Sohn des Königs hatte längst geheiratet und lebte glücklich.
Nicht einmal mehr im Traum erinnerte er sich an Kantschanmala.
Getrocknet sind des Mädchens Tränen,
Sie spricht zu niemandem, sieht niemand an.
"Ich habe meine Ehre eingebüßt, wem kann ich mich noch zeigen?
Was für ein Glück soll mir noch widerfahren, Vater?"
"Du bist von einem bösen Wunsch getrieben worden, Tochter,
du hast das Haus verlassen, warst zuvor ein gutes Mädchen.
Ich bin um deinetwillen tot, obwohl ich lebe,
uns alle hat das Schicksal so vernichtet.
Es kann nicht Liebe geben zwischen hoch und niedrig,
was hoch hinaufsteigt, fällt gewiß herab und stirbt.
Man kann sich nicht vom Boden heben und dann durch die Lüfte schreiten,
was einem nicht gehört, wird nicht zum Eigentum, auch wenn das Herz dabei zerbricht.
Man weiß im voraus, wie die Liebe einer Blume zu der Hummel endet:
Die Hummel trinkt den Saft der Blume aus und geht zu einer anderen.
Wie lange liebt der helle Mond die kleine Wolke?
Nur einen Augenblick versenkt er sich in sie, dann hat er sie verlassen.
Schlimm endet eine Liebe, wenn sie einem bösen Menschen gilt.
Gebissen wird die Zunge, sollte sie sich in den Zahn verlieben.
Du aber legtest deine Hand ins Feuer, du warst unvernünftig,
dem bösen Schicksal folgtest du und bist sein Opfer.
Es gibt die Liebe, die uns Leben bringt, und eine andre, die uns tötet;
wer würde sich nach einer Liebe sehnen, die nur Schande bringt?
Du hast die Last der Schande dir selbst aufgebürdet, Tochter,
Das schwarz ist für die Augen schön, nicht aber für die Tugend."
Der Vater und die Tochter hielten sich im Arm und weinten miteinander.

13
Die Leute wußten von der Rückkehr dieses Mädchens nichts.
Sie sahen nichts als eine irre Frau, die ruhelos
von einem Ort zum anderen ging, von niemandem erkannt.
Sie war so rastlos wie ein Wirbelwind, der immer weiterzieht,
der Staub aufwirbelt, keinen Augenblick verharrt.
Bald stand sie unter einem Baum, bald war sie dort am Fluß,
bald lachte sie und sang ein Lied und weinte wieder.
Rukmini, die Prinzessin, saß auf ihrem Ruhebett,
als in das innere Gemach die irre Frau gelangte.
Der Prinz, schön wie der Mond, saß in der Halle zur Audienz,
als man ihm von dem Wahnsinn dieser Frau erzählte.
Sie zog durch alle Straßen dieser Stadt
doch dann verschwand sie. Niemand sah sie wieder.

Den Mond verdunkeln Wolken, Sterne blinken nur.
Sie kann kaum noch den Weg von ihren Augen sehen.
Von Regenwasser übervoll ist jetzt der Fluß im Juli,
am Ufer dieses Flusses läuft die irre Frau.
Der Regen strömt, es donnert immer wieder,
am Ghat des Flusses ist das Mädchen angekommen.
"Mein Kummer ist zu Ende, ohne alle Hoffnung bin ich jetzt.
Ich habe meinen Freund gesehen, wie ich es mir wünschte.
Sei glücklich, Freund, mit deiner schönen Frau,
in dem Palast magst du an ihrer Seite glücklich sein.
Doch denke nie mehr an die arme Kantschanmala!
Ich beuge mich mit einem letzten Gruß zu deinen Füßen.
Her an dem Ghat war jenes Bett aus Blättern,
in dem wir einst im Glück die Nacht verbrachten.
Doch denke nicht mehr, Freund, an jene Tage,
denk nicht daran, wie ich dir Blütenkränze wand.
Ich kam bei Nacht, wenn deine Flöte sang.
Vergiß, mein Freund, vergiß die unglückliche Braut.
Du, Fluß, verrate niemandem, daß ich gestorben bin,
verrat es keinem, auch dem kleinen Vogel nicht!
Ihr Bäume dort am Fluß, in deren Ästen
die Vögel ruhig schlafen, schweigt vor meinem Freunde!
Auch ihr dort oben, Mond und Sterne, hoch am Himmel,
ihr dürft dem Freund nicht sagen, daß ich tot bin.
Mein Vater, sprich auch du zu keinem Menschen
und sage keinem, ich sei jemals heimgekehrt.
Zu deinen Füßen, Vater, liege ich ein letztes Mal.
Dir aber, Wind, dir kann ich alles sagen,
in deine Ohren kann ich flüstern, was ich fühle.
Du bist von allem, was geschehen, Zeuge Tag und Nacht.
Die Tiere und die Vögel wissen längst von meiner Schande.
Doch bitte ich euch, sagt zu niemandem, daß ich zurückgekommen bin.
Mein Freund darf nie von meinem Tod erfahren.
Kein andrer auch in diesem Lande soll von meinem Tode wissen,
Sonst könnte es mein freund erfahren, und er würde traurig sein.
Woher bist du gekommen, Welle, wohin führt dein Weg?
Nimm mich mit dir, bring mich zum bodenlosen Meer!"
Die Sterne zuckten auf am Firmament, sie bebten.
Das Mädchen warf sich in den Strom der Wellen.

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Bengalische Balladen, herausgegeben von Dušan Zbavitel und Heinz Mode
Mit acht Wiedergaben bengalischer Kalighat-Malereien
Insel-Verlag, Leipzig, 1976

ONCE upon a time there lived a little weaver, by name Victor Prince, but because his head was big, his legs thin, and he was altogether small, and weak, and ridiculous, his neighbours called him Vicky–Little Vicky the Weaver.

But despite his size, his thin legs, and his ridiculous appearance, Vicky was very valiant, and loved to talk for hours of his bravery, and the heroic acts he would perform if Fate gave him an opportunity. Only Fate did not, and in consequence Vicky remained little Vicky the valiant weaver, who was laughed at by all for his boasting.

Now one day, as Vicky was sitting at his loom, weaving, a mosquito settled on his left hand just as he was throwing the shuttle from his right hand, and by chance, after gliding swiftly through the warp, the shuttle came flying into his left hand on the very spot where the mosquito had settled, and squashed it. Seeing this, Vicky became desperately excited: 'It is as I have always said,' he cried; 'if I only had the chance I knew I could show my mettle! Now, I'd like to know how many people could have done that? Killing a mosquito is easy, and throwing a shuttle is easy, but to do both at one time is a mighty different affair! It is easy enough to shoot a great hulking man–there is something to see, something to aim at; then guns and crossbows are made for shooting; but to shoot a mosquito with a shuttle is quite another thing. That requires a man!'

The more he thought over the matter, the more elated he became over his skill and bravery, until he determined that he would no longer suffer himself to be called 'Vicky.' No! now that he had shown his mettle he would be called 'Victor'–'Victor Prince'–or better still, 'Prince Victor'; that was a name worthy his merits. But when he announced this determination to the neighbours, they roared with laughter, and though some did call him Prince Victor, it was with such sniggering and giggling and mock reverence that the little man flew home in a rage. Here he met with no better reception, for his wife, a fine handsome young woman, who was tired to death by her ridiculous little husband's whims and fancies, sharply bade him hold his tongue and not make a fool of himself. Upon this, beside himself with pride and mortification, he seized her by the hair, and beat her most unmercifully. Then, resolving to stay no longer in a town where his merits were unrecognised, he bade her prepare some bread for a journey, and set about packing his bundle.

'I will go into the world!' he said to himself. 'The man who can shoot a mosquito dead with a shuttle ought not to hide his light under a bushel.' So off he set, with his bundle, his shuttle, and a loaf of bread tied up in a kerchief.

Now as he journeyed he came to a city where a dreadful elephant came daily to make a meal off the inhabitants. Many mighty warriors had gone against it, but none had returned. On hearing this the valiant little weaver thought to himself, 'Now is my chance! A great haystack of an elephant will be a fine mark to a man who has shot a mosquito with a shuttle!' So he went to the King, and announced that he proposed single-handed to meet and slay the elephant. At first the King thought the little man was mad, but as he persisted in his words, he told him that he was free to try his luck if he chose to run the risk; adding that many better men than he had failed.

Nevertheless, our brave weaver was nothing daunted; he even refused to take either sword or bow, but strutted out to meet the elephant armed only with his shuttle.

'It is a weapon I thoroughly understand, good people,' he replied boastfully to those who urged him to choose some more deadly arm, 'and it has done its work in its time, I can tell you!'

It was a beautiful sight to see little Vicky swaggering out to meet his enemy, while the townsfolk flocked to the walls to witness the fight. Never was such a valiant weaver till the elephant, descrying its tiny antagonist, trumpeted fiercely, and charged right at him, and then, alas! all the little man's courage disappeared, and forgetting his new name of Prince Victor he dropped his bundle, his shuttle, and his bread, and bolted away as fast as Vicky's legs could carry him.

Now it so happened that his wife had made the bread ever so sweet, and had put all sorts of tasty spices in it, because she wanted to hide the flavour of the poison she had put in it also; for she was a wicked, revengeful woman, who wanted to be rid of her tiresome, whimsical little husband. And so, as the elephant charged past, it smelt the delicious spices, and catching up the bread with its long trunk, gobbled it up without stopping an instant. Meanwhile fear lent speed to Vicky's short legs, but though he ran like a hare, the elephant soon overtook him. In vain he doubled and doubled, and the beast's hot breath was on him, when in sheer desperation he turned, hoping to bolt through the enormous creature's legs; being half blind with fear, however, he ran full tilt against them instead. Now, as luck would have it, at that very moment the poison took effect, and the elephant fell to the ground stone dead.

When the spectators saw the monster fall they could scarcely believe their eyes, but their astonishment was greater still when, running up to the scene of action, they found Valiant Vicky seated in triumph on the elephant's head, calmly mopping his face with his handkerchief.

'I had to pretend to run away,' he explained, 'or the coward would never have engaged me. Then I gave him a little push, and he fell down, as you see. Elephants are big beasts, but they have no strength to speak of.'

The good folks were amazed at the careless way in which Valiant Vicky spoke of his achievement, and as they had been too far off to see very distinctly what had occurred, they went and told the King that the little weaver was just a fearful wee man, and had knocked over the elephant like a ninepin. Then the King said to himself, 'None of my warriors and wrestlers, no, not even the heroes of old, could have done this. I must secure this little man's services if I can.' So he asked Vicky why he was wandering about the world.

'For pleasure, for service, or for conquest! ' returned Valiant Vicky, laying such stress on the last word that the King, in a great hurry, made him Commander-in-Chief of his whole army, for fear he should take service elsewhere.

So there was Valiant Vicky a mighty fine warrior, and as proud as a peacock of having fulfilled his own predictions.

'I knew it!' he would say to himself when he was dressed out in full fig, with shining armour and waving plumes, and spears, swords, and shields; 'I felt I had it in me!'

Now after some time a terribly savage tiger came ravaging the country, and at last the cityfolk petitioned that the mighty Prince Victor might be sent out to destroy it. So out he went at the head of his army,–for he was a great man now, and had quite forgotten all about looms and shuttles. But first he made the King promise his daughter in marriage as a reward. 'Nothing for nothing!' said the astute little weaver to himself, and when the promise was given he went out as gay as a lark.

‘Do not distress yourselves, good people,’ he said to those who flocked round him praying for his successful return; ‘it is ridiculous to suppose the tiger will have a chance. Why, I knocked over an elephant with my little finger! I am really invincible!’

But, alas for our Valiant Vicky! No sooner did he see the tiger lashing its tail and charging down on him, than he ran for the nearest tree, and scrambled into the branches. There he sat like a monkey, while the tiger glowered at him from below. Of course when the army saw their Commander-in-Chief bolt like a mouse, they followed his example, and never stopped until they reached the city, where they spread the news that the little hero had fled up a tree.

‘There let him stay!’ said the King, secretly relieved, for he was jealous of the little weaver’s prowess, and did not want him for a son-in-law.

Meanwhile, Valiant Vicky sat cowering in the tree, while the tiger occupied itself below with sharpening its teeth and claws, and curling its whiskers, till poor Vicky nearly tumbled into its jaws with fright. So one day, two days, three days, six days passed by; on the seventh the tiger was fiercer, hungrier, and more watchful than ever. As for the poor little weaver, he was so hungry that his hunger made him brave, and he determined to try and slip past his enemy during its mid-day snooze. He crept stealthily down inch by inch, till his foot was within a yard of the ground, and then? Why then the tiger, which had had one eye open all the time, jumped up with a roar!

Valiant Vicky shrieked with fear, and making a tremendous effort, swung himself into a branch, cocking his little bandy legs over it to keep them out of reach, for the tiger’s red panting mouth and gleaming white teeth were within half an inch of his toes. In doing so, his dagger fell out of its sheath, and went pop into the tiger’s wide-open mouth, and thus point foremost down into its stomach, so that it died!

Valiant Vicky could scarcely believe his good fortune, but, after prodding at the body with a branch, and finding it did not move, he concluded the tiger really was dead, and ventured down. Then he cut off its head, and went home in triumph to the King.

‘You and your warriors are a nice set of cowards!’ said he, wrathfully. ‘Here have I been fighting that tiger for seven days and seven nights, without bite or sup, whilst you have been guzzling and snoozing at home. Pah! it’s disgusting! but I suppose every one is not a hero as I am!’ So Prince Victor married the King’s daughter, and was a greater man than ever.

But by and by a neighbouring prince, who bore a grudge against the King, came with a huge army, and encamped outside the city, swearing to put every man, woman, and child within it to the sword. Hearing this, the inhabitants of course cried with one accord, ‘Prince Victor! Prince Victor to the rescue!’ so the valiant little weaver was ordered by the King to go out and destroy the invading army, after which he was to receive half the kingdom as a reward. Now Valiant Vicky, with all his boasting, was no fool, and he said to himself, ‘This is a very different affair from the others. A man may kill a mosquito, an elephant, and a tiger; yet another man may kill him. And here is not one man, but thousands! No, No!–what is the use of half a kingdom if you haven’t a head on your shoulders? Under the circumstances I prefer not to be a hero!’
So in the dead of night he bade his wife rise, pack up her golden dishes, and follow him–’Not that you will want the golden dishes at my house,’ he explained boastfully, ‘for I have heaps and heaps, but on the journey these will be useful.’ Then he crept outside the city, followed by his wife carrying the bundle, and began to steal through the enemy’s camp.

Just as they were in the very middle of it, a big cockchafer flew into Valiant Vicky’s face. ‘Run! run!’ he shrieked to his wife, in a terrible taking, and setting off as fast as he could, never stopped till he had reached his room again and hidden under the bed. His wife set off at a run likewise, dropping her bundle of golden dishes with a clang. The noise roused the enemy, who, thinking they were attacked, flew to arms; but being half asleep, and the night being pitch-dark, they could not distinguish friend from foe, and falling on each other, fought with such fury that by next morning not one was left alive! And then, as may be imagined, great were the rejoicings at Prince Victor’s prowess. ‘It was a mere trifle!’ remarked that valiant little gentleman modestly; ‘when a man can shoot a mosquito with a shuttle, everything else is child’s play.’

So he received half the kingdom, and ruled it with great dignity, refusing ever afterwards to fight, saying truly that kings never fought themselves, but paid others to fight for them.

Thus he lived in peace, and when he died every one said Valiant Vicky was the greatest hero the world had ever seen.

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Tales of the Punjab told by the people,
by Flora Anne Steel
London and New York,
Macmillan and Co., 1894

ONCE upon a time there lived a cock-sparrow and his wife, who were both growing old. But despite his years the cock-sparrow was a gay, festive old bird, who plumed himself upon his appearance, and was quite a ladies' man. So he cast his eyes on a lively young hen, and determined to marry her, for he was tired of his sober old wife. The wedding was a mighty grand affair, and everybody as jolly and merry as could be, except of course the poor old wife, who crept away from all the noise and fun to sit disconsolately on a quiet branch just under a crow's nest, where she could be as melancholy as she liked without anybody poking fun at her.

Now while she sat there it began to rain, and after a while the drops, soaking through the crow's nest, came drip-dripping on to her feathers; she, however, was far too miserable to care, and sat there all huddled up and peepy till the shower was over. Now it so happened that the crow had used some scraps of dyed cloth in lining its nest, and as these became wet the colours ran, and dripping down on to the poor old hen-sparrow beneath, dyed her feathers until she was as gay as a peacock.

Fine feathers make fine birds, we all know, and she really looked quite spruce; so much so, that when she flew home, the new wife nearly burst with envy, and asked her at once where she had found such a lovely dress.

'Easily enough,' replied the old wife; 'I just went into the dyer's vat.'

The bride instantly determined to go there also. She could not endure the notion of the old thing being better dressed than she was, so she flew off at once to the dyer's, and being in a great hurry, went pop into the middle of the vat, without waiting to see if it was hot or cold. It turned out to be just scalding; consequently the poor thing was half boiled before she managed to scramble out. Meanwhile, the gay old cock, not finding his bride at home, flew about distractedly in search of her, and you may imagine what bitter tears he wept when he found her, half drowned and half boiled, with her feathers all awry, lying by the dyer's vat.

'What has happened?' quoth he.
But the poor bedraggled thing could only gasp out feebly–

'The old wife was dyed–
The nasty old cat!
And I, the gay bride,
Fell into the vat!'
Whereupon the cock-sparrow took her up tenderly in his bill, and flew away home with his precious burden. Now, just as he was crossing the big river in front of his house, the old hen-sparrow, in her gay dress, looked out of the window, and when she saw her old husband bringing home his young bride in such a sorry plight, she burst out laughing shrilly, and called aloud, 'That is right! that is right! Remember what the song says–

'Old wives must scramble through water and mud,
But young wives are carried dry-shod o'er the flood.'
This allusion so enraged her husband that he could not contain himself, but cried out, 'Hold your tongue, you shameless old cat!'

Of course, when he opened his mouth to speak, the poor draggled bride fell out, and going plump into the river, was drowned. Whereupon the cock-sparrow was so distracted with grief that he picked off all his feathers until he was as bare as a ploughed field.
Then, going to a pîpal tree, he sat all naked and forlorn on the branches,
sobbing and sighing.

'What has happened?' cried the pîpal tree, aghast at the sight.
'Don't ask me!' wailed the cock-sparrow; 'it isn't manners to ask questions when a body is in deep mourning.'
But the pîpal would not be satisfied without an answer,
so at last poor bereaved cock-sparrow replied–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair!'
On hearing this sad tale, the pîpal became overwhelmed with grief,
and declaring it must mourn also, shed all its leaves on the spot.

By and by a buffalo, coming in the heat of the day to rest in the shade of the pîpal tree, was astonished to find nothing but bare twigs.
'What has happened?' cried the buffalo; 'you were as green as possible yesterday!'
'Don't ask me!' whimpered the pîpal. 'Where are your manners?
Don't you know it isn't decent to ask questions when people are in mourning?'
But the buffalo insisted on having an answer, so at last,
with many sobs and sighs, the pîpal replied–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Bewailing his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves!'
'Oh dear me!' cried the buffalo, 'how very sad! I really must mourn too!'
So she immediately cast her horns, and began to weep and wail.
After a while, becoming thirsty, she went to drink at the river-side.

'Goodness gracious!' cried the river, 'what is the matter?
and what have you done with your horns?'
'How rude you are!' wept the buffalo. '
Can't you see I am in deep mourning? and it isn't polite to ask questions.'
But the river persisted, until the buffalo, with many groans, replied–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,

Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns!'
'Dreadful!' cried the river, and wept so fast that its water became quite salt.

By and by a cuckoo, coming to bathe in the stream, called out,
'Why, river! what has happened? You are as salt as tears!'
'Don't ask me!' mourned the stream; 'it is too dreadful for words!'
Nevertheless, when the cuckoo would take no denial, the river replied–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last!'
'Oh dear! oh dear me!' cried the cuckoo, 'how very very sad! I must mourn too!'
So it plucked out an eye, and going to a corn-merchant's shop, sat on the doorstep and wept.

'Why, little cuckoo! what's the matter?' cried Bhagtu the shopkeeper.
'You are generally the pertest of birds, and to-day you are as dull as ditchwater!'
'Don't ask me' snivelled the cuckoo; 'it is such terrible grief! such dreadful sorrow!
such–such horrible pain!'
However, when Bhagtu persisted, the cuckoo, wiping its one eye on its wing, replied–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes!'
'Bless my heart!' cried Bhagtu, 'but that is simply the most heartrending tale I ever heard in my life! I must really mourn likewise!' Whereupon he wept, and wailed, and beat his breast, until he went completely out of his mind; and when the Queen's maidservant came to buy of him, he gave her pepper instead of turmeric, onion instead of garlic, and wheat instead of pulse.

'Dear me, friend Bhagtu!' quoth the maidservant, 'your wits are wool-gathering!
What's the matter?'
'Don't! please don't!' cried Bhagtu; '
I wish you wouldn't ask me, for I am trying to forget all about it.
It is too dreadful–too too terrible!'
At last, however, yielding to the maid's entreaties, he replied, with many sobs and tears–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes;
Bhagtu's grief so intense is,
He loses his senses!'
'How very sad!' exclaimed the maidservant.
'I don't wonder at your distress; but it is always so in this miserable world!
–everything goes wrong!'

Whereupon she fell to railing at everybody and everything in the world,
until the Queen said to her, 'What is the matter, my child? What distressed you?'
'Oh!' replied the maidservant, 'the old story! every one is miserable, and I most of all!
Such dreadful news!–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes;
Bhagtu's grief so intense is,
He loses his senses;
The maidservant wailing
Has taken to railing!'
'Too true!' wept the Queen, 'too true! The world is a vale of tears! There is nothing for it

but to try and forget!'
Whereupon she set to work dancing away as hard as she could.

By and by in came the Prince, who, seeing her twirling about, said,
'Why, mother! what is the matter?'
The Queen, without stopping, gasped out–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes;
Bhagtu's grief so intense is,
He loses his senses;
The maidservant wailing
Has taken to railing;
The Queen, joy enhancing,
Takes refuge in dancing!'

'If that is your mourning, I'll mourn too!'
cried the Prince, and seizing his tambourine, he began to thump on it with a will.
Hearing the noise, the King came in, and asked what was the matter.
'This is the matter!' cried the Prince,
drumming away with all his might–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Lamenting his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes;
Bhagtu's grief so intense is,
He loses his senses;
The maidservant wailing
Has taken to railing;
The Queen, joy enhancing,
Takes refuge in dancing;
To aid the mirth coming,
The Prince begins drumming!'
'Capital! capital!' cried the King, 'that's the way to do it!'
so, seizing his zither, he began to thrum away like one possessed.

And as they danced, the Queen, the King, the Prince, and the maidservant sang–

'The ugly hen painted.
By jealousy tainted,
The pretty hen dyed.
Bewailing his bride,
The cock, bald and bare,
Sobs loud in despair;
The pîpal tree grieves
By shedding its leaves;
The buffalo mourns
By casting her horns;
The stream, weeping fast,
Grows briny at last;
The cuckoo with sighs
Blinds one of its eyes;
Bhagtu's grief so intense is,
He loses his senses;
The maidservant wailing
Has taken to railing;
The Queen, joy enhancing,
Takes refuge in dancing;
To aid the mirth coming,
The Prince begins drumming;
To join in it with her
The King strums the zither!'

So they danced and sang till they were tired,
and that was how every one mourned poor cock-sparrow's pretty bride.

–

Tales of the Punjab told by the people,
by Flora Anne Steel
London and New York,
Macmillan and Co., 1894

A GREAT while since there lived a Rajah who was left a widower with two little daughters. Not very long after his first wife died, he married again, and his second wife did not care for her step-children, and was often unkind to them; and the Rajah, their father, never troubled himself to look after them, but allowed his wife to treat them as she liked. This made the poor girls very miserable, and one day one of them said to the other, 'Don't let us remain any longer here; come away into the jungle, for nobody here cares whether we go or stay.' So they both walked off into the jungle, and lived for many days on the jungle fruits. At last, after they had wandered on for a long while, they came to a fine palace which belonged to a Rakshas; but both the Rakshas and his wife were out when they got there. Then one of the Princesses said to the other, 'This fine palace, in the midst of the jungle, can belong to no one but a Rakshas; but the owner has evidently gone out; let us go in and see if we can find anything to eat.' So they went into the Rakshas' house, and finding some rice, boiled and ate it. Then they swept the room, and arranged all the furniture in the house tidily. But hardly had they finished doing so, when the Rakshas and his wife returned home.

Then the two Princesses were so frightened that they ran up to the top of the house, and hid themsehres on the flat roof, from whence they could look down on one side into the inner courtyard of the house, and from the other could see the open country. The house-top was a favourite resort of the Rakshas and his wife. Here they would sit upon the hot summer evenings; here they winnowed the grain, and hung out the clothes to dry; and the two Princesses found a sufficient shelter behind some sheaves of corn that were waiting to be threshed. When the Rakshas came into the house he looked round and said to his wife, 'Somebody has been arranging the house, everything in it is so clean and tidy. Wife, did you do this?'--' No,' she said; 'I don't know who can have done all this.'--' Some one also has been sweeping the courtyard,' continued the Rakshas. 'Wife, did you sweep the courtyard? '--' No,' she answered, 'I did not do it. I don't know who did.' Then the Rakshas walked round and round several times with his nose up in the air, saying, 'Some one is here now. I smell flesh and blood! Where can they be?'--'Stuff and nonsense!' cried his wife. 'You smell flesh and blood, indeed! Why, you have just been killing and eating a hundred thousand people. I should wonder if you didn't still smell flesh and blood!' They went on disputing the subject, until at last the Rakshas said, 'Well, never mind, I don't know how it is, but I'm very thirsty; let's come, and drink some water.' So both the Rakshas and his wife went to a well which was close to the house, and began letting down jars into it, and drawing up the water, and drinking it. And the Princesses, who were on the top of the house, saw them.

Now the youngest of the two Princesses was. a very wise girl, and when she saw the Rakshas and his wife by the well, she said to her sister, 'I will do something now that will be good for us both;' and, running down quickly from the top of the house, she crept close behind the Rakshas and his wife, as they stood on tiptoe more than half over the side of the well, and, catching hold of one of the Rakshas' heels and one of his wife's, gave each a little push, and down they both tumbled into the well and were drowned, the Rakshas and the Rakshas' wife! The Princess then returned to her sister and said, 'I have killed the Rakshas.'--'What! both?' cried her sister. 'Yes, both, she said. 'Won't they come back?' said her sister. 'No, never,' answered she.

The Rakshas being thus killed, the two Princesses took. possession of the house, and lived there very happily for a long, time. In it they found heaps and heaps of rich clothes, and jewels, and gold and silver, which the Rakshas had taken from people he had murdered; and all round the house were folds for the flocks, and sheds for the herds of cattle, which the Rakshas had owned. Every morning the youngest Princess used to drive out the flocks~ and herds to pasturage, and return home with them every night, while the eldest staved at home cooked the dinner and kept the house; and the youngest Princess, who was the cleverest, would often say to her sister on going away for the day, 'Take care if you see any stranger (be it man, woman, or child) come by the house, to hide, if possible, that nobody may know of our living here; and if any one should call out and ask for a drink of water, or any poor beggar pray for food, before you give it them be sure you put on ragged clothes, and cover your face with charcoal, and make yourself look as ugly as possible, lest, seeing how fair you are, they should steal you away, and we never meet again.'--' Very well,' the other Princess would answer, 'I will do as you advise.'

But a long time passed, and no one ever came by that way. At last one day, after the youngest Princess had gone out as usual to take the cattle to pasturage, a young Prince, the son of a neighbouring Rajah, who had been hunting with his attendants for many days in the jungles, came near the place when searching for water (for he and his people were tired with hunting, and had been seeking all through the jungle for a stream of water, but could find none). When the Prince saw the fine palace, standing all by itself; he was very much astonished, and said, 'It is a strange thing that any one should have built such a house as this in the depths of the forest! Let us go in; the owners will doubtless give us a drink of water.'--'No, no, do not go,' cried his attendants; 'this is most likely the house of a Rakshas.'--' We can but see,' answered the Prince. 'I should scarcely think anything very terrible lived here, for there is not a sound stirring, nor a living creature to be seen.'

So he began tapping at the door, which was bolted, and crying, 'Will whoever owns this house give me and my people some water to drink, for the sake of kind charity?' But nobody answered, for the Princess, who heard him, was busy up in her room, blacking her face with charcoal, and covering her rich dress with rags. Then the Prince got impatient, and shook the door, saying angrily, 'Let me in, whoever you are! If you don't I'll force the door open.' At this the poor little Princess got dreadfully frightened; and having blacked her face, and made herself look as ugly as possible, she ran downstairs with a pitcher of water, and unbolting the door, gave the Prince the pitcher to drink from; but she did not speak, for she was afraid. Now the Prince was a very clever man, and as he raised the pitcher to his mouth to drink the water, he thought to himself; 'This is a very strange-looking creature who has brought me this jug of water. She would be pretty, but that her face seems to want washing, and her dress also is very untidy. What can that black stuff on her face and hands be? it looks very unnatural' And so thinking to himself; instead of drinking the water, he threw it in the Princess's face! The Princess started back with a little cry, whilst the water, trickling down her face, washed off the charcoal, and showed her delicate features and beautiful fair complexion. The Prince caught hold of her hand, and said, 'Now tell me true, who are you? where do you come from? Who are your father and mother? and why are you here alone by yourself in the jungle? Answer me, or I'll cut your head off.' And he made as though he would draw his sword. The Princess was so terrified she could hardly speak, but, as best she could, she told how she was the daughter of a Rajah, and had run away into the jungle because of her cruel stepmother, and finding the house, had lived there ever since; and having finished her story, she began to cry.

Then the Prince said to her, 'Pretty lady, forgive me for my roughness; do not fear; I will take you home with me, and you shall be my wife.' But the more he spoke to her the more frightened she got,--so frightened that she did not understand what he said, and coulu do nothing but cry. Now she had said nothing to the Prince about her sister, nor even told him that she had one, for she thought, 'This man says he will kill me; if he hears that I have a sister, they will kill her too.' So the Prince, who was really kind-hearted, and would never have thought

of separating the two little sisters,, who had been together so long, knew nothing at all of the matter, and only seeing she was too much alarmed even to understand gentle words, said to his servants, 'Place this lady in one of the, palkees, and let us set off home.' And they did so.

When the Princess found herself shut up in the palkee and being carned she knew not where, she thought how terrible it would be for her sister to return home and find her gone, and determined, if possible, to leave some sign to show her which way she had been taken Round her neck were many strings of pearls. She untied them, and tearing her saree into little bits, tied one pearl in each piece of the saree, that it might be heavy enough to fall straight to the ground; and so she went on, dropping off one pearl and then another, and another, and another, all the way she went along, until they reached the palace, where the Rajah and Ranee, the Prince's father and mother, lived. She threw the Iast remaining pearl down just as she reached the palace gate.

The old Rajah and Ranee were delighted to see the beautiful Princess their son had brought home; and when they heard her story they said, 'Ah, poor thing! what a sad story; but now she has come to live with us, we will do all we can to make her happy.' And they married her to their son with great pomp and ceremony, and gave her rich dresses and jewels, and were very kind to her. But the Princess remained sad and unhappy, for she was always thinking about her sister, and yet she could not summon courage to beg the Prince or his father to send and fetch her to the palace.

Meantime the youngest Princess, who had been out with her flocks and herds when the Prince took her sister away, had returned home. When she came back she found the door wide open, and no one standing there. She thought it very odd, for her sister always came every night to the door, to meet her on her return. She went upstairs; her sister was not there; the whole house was empty and deserted. There she must stay all alone, for the evening had closed in, and it was impossible to go outside and seek her with any hope of success. So all the night long she waited, crying, 'Some one has been here, and they have stolen her away: they have stolen my darling away. O sister! sister!' Next morning, very early, going out to continue the search, she found one of the pearls belonging to her sister's necklace tied up in a small piece of saree; a little further on lay another, and yet another, all along the road the Prince had gone. Then the Princess understood that her sister had left this clue to guide her on her way, and she at once set off to find her again. Very, very far she went--a six months' journey through the jungle--for she could not travel fast, the many days' walking tired her so much, and sometimes it took her two or three days to find the next piece of saree with the pear. At last she came near a large town, to which it was evident her sister had been taken. Now this young Princess was very beautiful indeed--as beautiful as she was wise,--and when she got near the town she thought to herself; 'If people see me they may steal me away as they did my sister, and then I shall never find her again. I will therefore disguise myself.' As she was thus thinking she saw by the side of the road the skeleton of a poor old beggar-woman, who had evidently died from want and poverty. The body was shrivelled up, and nothing of it remained but the skin and bones. The Princess took the skin and washed it, and drew it on over her own lovely face and neck, as one draws a glove on one's hand. Then she took a long stick and began hobbling along, leaning on it, towards the town.

The old woman's skin was all crumpled and withered, and people who passed by only thought, 'What an ugly old woman!' and never dreamed of the false skin and the beautiful, handsome girl inside. So on she went, picking up the pearls--one here, one there--until she found the last pearl just in front of the palace gate. Then she felt certain her sister must be somewhere near, but where, she did not know. She longed to go in to the palace and ask for her, but no guards would have let such a wretched-looking old woman enter, and she did not dare offer them any of the pearls she had with her, lest they should think she was a thief. So she determined merely to remain as close to the palace as possible, and wait till fortune favoured her with the means of learning something further about her sister. Just opposite the palace was a small house belonging to a farmer, and the Princess went up to it, and stood by the door. The farmer's wife saw her and said, 'Poor old woman, who are you? what do you want? why are you here? have you no friends?'--' Alas! no,' answered the Princess. 'I am a poor old woman, and have neither father nor mother, son nor daughter, sister nor brother, to take care of me; all are gone! and I can only beg my bread from door to door.'

'Do not grieve, good mother,' answered the farmer's wife kindly. 'You may sleep in the shelter of our porch, and I will give you some food.' So the Princess stayed there for that night and for many more: and every day the good farmer's wife gave her food. But all this time she could learn nothing of her sister.

Now there was a large tank near the palace, on which grew some fine lotus plants, covered with rich crimson lotuses--the royal flower--and of these the Rajah was very fond indeed, and prized them very much. To this tank (because it was the nearest to the farmer's house) the Princess used to go every morning, very early, almost before it was light, at about three o'clock, and take off the old woman's skin and wash it, and hang it out to dry; and wash her face and hands, and bathe her feet in the cool water, and comb her beautiful hair. Then she would gather a lotus-flower (such as she had been accustomed to wear in her hair from a child) and put it on, so as to feel for a few minutes like herself once more! Thus she would amuse herself. Afterwards, as soon as the wind had dried the old woman's skin, she put it on again, threw away the lotus-flower, and hobbled back to the farmer's' door before the sun was up.

After a time the Rajah discovered that some one had plucked some of his favourite lotus-flowers. People were set to watch, and all the wise men in the kingdom put their heads together to try and discover the thief; but without avail. At last, the excitement about this matter being very great, the Rajah's second son, a brave and noble young Prince (brother to him who had found the eldest Princess in the forest) said, 'I will certainly discover the thief.' It chanced that several fine trees grew round the tank. Into one of these the young Prince climbed one evening (having made a sort of light thatched roof across two of the boughs, to keep off the heavy dews), and there he watched all the night through, but with no more success than his predecessors. There lay the lotus plants, still in the moonlight, without so much as a thieving wind coming by to break off one of the flowers. The Prince began to get very sleepy, and thought the delinquent, whoever he might be, could not intend to return, when, in the very early morning, before it was light, who should come down to the tank but an old woman he had often seen near the palace gate. 'Aha!' thought the Prince 'this then is the thief; but what can this queer old woman want with lotus-flowers?' Imagine his astonishment when the old woman sat down on the steps of the tank and began pulling the skin off her face and arms! and from underneath the shrivelled yellow skin came the loveliest face he had ever beheld! So fair, so fresh, so young, so gloriously beautiful, that appearing thus suddenly it dazzled the Prince's eyes like a flash of golden lightning! 'Ah,' thought he, 'can this be a woman or a spirit? a devil, or an angel in disguise?'

The Princess twisted up her glossy black hair; and, plucking a red lotus, placed it in it, and dabbled her feet in the water, and amused herself by putting round her neck a string of the pearls that had been her sister's necklace. Then, as the sun was rising, she threw away the lotus, and covering her face and arms again with the withered skin, went hastily away. When the Prince got home the first thing he said to his parents was, 'Father, mother; I should like

to marry that old woman who stands all day at the farmer's gate, just opposite.'--' What!' cried they, 'the boy is mad! Marry that skinny old thing? You cannot--you are a King's son. Are there not enough Queens and Princesses in the world, that you should wish to marry a wretched old beggar woman?' But he answered, 'Above all things I should like to marry that old woman. You know that I have ever been a dutiful and obedient son. In this matter, I pray you, grant me my desire.' Then seeing he was really in earnest about the matter, and that nothing they could say would alter his mind, they listened to his urgent entreaties, not, however, without much grief and vexation; and sent out the guards, who fetched the old woman (who was really the Princess in disguise) to the palace, where she was married to the Prince as privately, and with as little ceremony, as possible, for the family were ashamed of the match.

As soon as the wedding was over, the Prince said to his wife, 'Gentle wife, tell me how much longer you intend to wear that old skin? You had better take it off; do be so kind.' The Princess wondered how he knew of her disguise, or whether it was only a guess of his: and she thought, 'If I take this ugly skin off, my husband will think me pretty, and shut me up in the palace and never let me go away, so that I shall not be able to find my sister again. No, I had better not take it off.' So she answered, 'I don't know what you mean. I am as all these years have made me; nobody can change their skin.' Then the Prince pretended to be very angry, and said, 'Take off that hideous disguise this instant, or I'll kill you.' But she only bowed her head, saying, 'Kill me, then, but nobody can change their skin.' And all this she mumbled as if she were a very old woman indeed, and had lost all her teeth and could not speak plain. At this the Prince laughed very much to himself, and thought, 'I'll wait and see how long this freak lasts.' But the Princess continued to keep on the old woman's skin; only every morning, at about three o'clock, before it was light, she would get up and wash it and put it on again.

Then some time afterwards the Prince, having found this out, got up softly one morning early, and followed her to the next room, where she had washed the skin and placed it on the floor to dry, and stealing it, he ran away with it, and threw it on the.~ fire. So the Princess, having no old woman's skin to put on, was obliged to appear in her own likeness. As she walked forth, very sad at missing her disguise, her husband ran to meet her, smiling and saying, 'How do you do, my dear? Where is your skin now? Can't you take it off, dear?' Soon the whole palace had heard the joyful news of the beautiful young wife that the Prince had won and all the people, when they saw her, cried, 'Why, she is exactly like the beautiful Princess our young Rajah married, the jungle-lady.' The old Rajah and Ranee were prouder than all of their daughter-in-law. and took her to introduce her to their eldest son's wife. Then no sooner did the Princess enter her sister-in-law's room, than she saw that in her she had found her lost sister, and they ran into each other's arms! Great then was the joy of all, but the happiest of all these happy people were the two Princesses. and they lived together in peace and joy their whole lives long.

—
Old Deccan Days
by Mary Frere, 1868

Siu Rajah, who reigned long years ago in the country of Agrabrum, 2 had an only son to whom he was passionately attached. The Prince, whose name was Logedas, was young and handsome, and had married the beautiful Princess, Parbuttee Bai.

Now it came to pass that Siu Rajah's Wuzeer bad a daughter called Seventee 3 Bai [the Daisy Lady] who was as fair as the morning. And beloved by all for her gentleness and goodness; and when Logedas Rajah saw her, he fell in love with her, and determined to marry her. But when Sui Rajah heard of this, he was very angry. And sent for his son, and said: 'Of all that is rich and costly in my kingdom I have withheld nothing from you, and in Parbuttee Rajah you have a wife as fair as heart could wish; nevertheless, if you are desirous of having a second wife, I freely give you leave; there are daughters of many neighbouring kings who would be proud to become your Queen, but it is beneath your dignity to marry a Wuzeer's daughter; and if you do, my love for you shall not prevent my expelling you from the kngdom.
Logedas did not heed his father's threat, and he married Seventee Bai; which the Rajah learning, ordered him immediately to quit the country; but yet, because he loved him much, be gave Logedas many elephants, camels, horses, palanquins, and attendants, that he might not need help on the journey, and that his rank might be apparent to all.

So Logedas Rajah and his two young wives set forth on their travels. Before, however, they had gone very far, the Prince dismissed the whole of his retinue, except the elephant on which he himself rode, and the palanquin, carried by two men, in which his wives travelled. Thus, almost alone, he started through the jungle in search of a new home; but, being wholly ignorant of that part of the country, before they had gone very far they lost their way. The poor Princesses were reduced to a state of great misery; day after day they wandered on, living on roots, or wild berries, and the leaves of trees pounded down; and at night they were terrified by the cries of wild beasts in search of prey. Logedas Rajah became more melancholy and desponding every day; until, one night, maddened by the thought of his wives' sad condidon, and unable longer to bear the sight of their distress, he got up, and casting aside his royal robes, twisted a coarse handkerchief about his head after the manner of a fakeer's turban, and throwing a long woollen cloak around him, ran away in disguise into the jungle.

A little while after he had gone, the Wuzeer's daughter awoke and found Parbuttee Bai crying bitterly. 'Sister dear,' said she, 'what is the matter?' 'Ah, sister,' answered Parbuttee Bai, 'I am crying because in my dreams I thought our husband had dressed himself like a fakeer, and run away into the jungle; and I awoke and found it was all true: he has gone and left us here alone. It would have been better we had died, than that such an evil should have befallen us.' 'Do not cry,' said Seventee Bai; 'if we cry, we are lost, for the palkee-bearers will think we are two weak women, and will run away, and leave us in the jungle, out of which we can never get by ourselves. Keep a cheerful mind and all will be well; who knows but we may yet find our husband? Meanwhile, I will dress myself in his clothes, and take the name of Seventee Rajah, and you shall be my wife: and the palkee-bearers will think it is only I that have been lost; and it will not seem very wonderful to them that in such a place as this a wild beast should have devoured me.'

Then Parbuttee Bai smiled and said, 'Sister, you speak well; you have a brave heart. I will be your little wife.'
So Seventee Bai dressed herself in her husband's clothes, and next day she mounted the elephant as he had done, and ordered the bearers to take up the palkee in which Parbuttee Bai was, and again attempt to find their way out of the jungle. The palkee-bearers wondered much to themselves what had become of Seventee Bai, and they said to one another, 'How selfish and how fickle are the rich! See now our young Rajah, who married the Wuzeer's daughter and brought all this trouble on himself thereby (and in truth 'tis said she was a beautiful lady); he seemed to love her as his own soul; but now that she has been devoured by some cruel animal in this wild jungle, he appears scarcely to mourn her death.'

After journeying for some days under the wise direction of the Wuzeer's daughter, the party found themselves getting out of the jungle, and at last they came to an open plain, in the middle of which was a large city. When the citizens saw the elephant coming, they ran out to see who was on it, and returning, told their Rajah that a very handsome Rajah, richly dressed, was riding towards the city, and that he brought with him his wife--a most lovely Princess. Whereupon the Rajah of that country sent to Seventee Bai, and asked her who she was, and why she had come. Seventee Bai replied, 'My name is Seventee Rajah. My father was angry with me, and drove me from his kingdom; and I and my wife have been wandering for many days in the jungle, where we lost our way.'

The Rajah and all his Court thought they had never seen so brave and royal-looking a Prince; and the Rajah said, that if Seventee Rajah would take service under him, he would give him as much money as he liked. To whom the Wuzeer's daughter replied, 'I am not accustomed to take service under anybody; but you are good to us in receiving us courteously and offering us your protection; therefore, give me whatever post you please, and I will be your faithful servant.' So the Rajah gave Seventee Bal a salary of £24,000 a year and a beautiful house, and treated her with the greatest confidence, consulting her in all matters of importance, and intrusting her with many State affairs; and from her gentleness and kindness, none felt envious at her good fortune, but she was beloved and honoured by all; and thus these two Princesses lived for twelve years in that city. No one suspected that Seventee Bai was not the Rajah she pretended to be; and she most strictly forbade Parbuttee Bai's making a great friend of anybody, or admitting any one to her confidence--for, she said, 'Who knows, then, but some day you may unawares reveal that I am only Seventee Bai; and, though I love you as my very sister, if that were told by you, I would kill you with my own hands.'

Now the king's palace was on the side of the city nearest to the jungle, and one night the Ranee was awakened by loud and piercing shrieks coming from that direction; so she woke her husband, and said, 'I am so frightened by that terrible noise that I cannot sleep. Send some one to see what is the matter.' And the Rajah called all his attendants, and said, 'Go down towards the jungle and see what that noise is about.' But they were all afraid, for the night was very dark, and the noise very dreadful--and they said to him, 'We are afraid to go. We dare not do so by ourselves. Send for this young Rajah who is such a favourite of yours, and tell him to go. He is brave. You pay him more than you do us all. What is the good of your paying him so much unless he can be of use when he is wanted?' So they all went to Seventee Bai's house, and when she heard what was the matter, she jumped up, and said she would go down to the jungle to see what the noise was.

This noise had been made by a Rakshas, who was, standing under a gallows on which a thief had been hanged the day before. He had been trying to reach the corpse with his cruel claws; but it was just too high for him, and he was howling with rage and disappointment. When, however, the Wuzeer's daughter reached the place, no Rakshas was to be seen; but, in his stead, a very old woman, in a wonderful glittering saree, sitting wringing her withered hands under the gallows-tree, and above--the corpse, swaying about in the night wind. 'Old woman,' said Seventee Bai, 'what is the matter?' 'Alas!' said the Rakshas (for it was he), 'my son hangs above on that gallows. He is dead, he is dead! and I am too bent with age to be able to reach

the rope and cut his body down.' 'Poor old woman!' said Seventee Bai; 'get upon my shoulders, and you will then be tall enough to reach your son.' So the Rakshas mounted on Seventee Bai's shoulders, who held him steady by his glittering saree. Now, as she stood there, Seventee Bai began to think the old woman was a very long time cutting the rope round the dead man's neck; and just at that moment the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and Seventee Bai, looking up, saw that instead of a feeble old woman she was supporting on her shoulders a Rakshas, who was tearing down portions of the flesh and devouring it. Horror-stricken, she sprang back, and with a shrill scream the Rakshas fled away, leaving in her hands the shining saree.
Seventee Bai did not choose to say anything about this adventure to the Ranee, not wishing to alarm her; so on returning the palace, she merely said that the noise was made by an ol woman whom she had found crying under the gallows. She the returned home, and gave the bright saree to Parbuttee Bai.

One fine day, some time after this, two of the Rajah's little daughters thought they would go and see Parbuttee Bai; and it happened, Parbuttee Bai had on the Rakshas' saree, and was standing by the half-closed window-shutters looking out, whe the Princesses arrived at her house. The little Princesses were quite dazzled by the golden saree, and running home said to the mother, 'That young Rajah's wife has the most beautiful saree we ever saw. It shines like the sun, and dazzles one's eyes. We ha~ no sarees half so beautiful, and although you are Ranee you have none so rich as that. Why do you not get one too?'
When the Ranee heard about Parbuttee Bai's saree, she was very eager to have one like it; and she said to the Rajah, 'Your servant's wife is dressed more richly than your Ranee. I hear Parbuttee Bai has a saree more costly than any of mine. Now, therefore, I beg you to get me one like hers; for I cannot rest until I have one equally costly.'

Then the Rajah sent for Seventee Bai, and said, 'Tell me where your wife got her beautiful golden saree; for the Rane desires to have one like it.' Seventee Bai answered, 'Noble master, that saree came from a very far country--even the country of the Rakshas. It is impossible to get one like it here but if you will give me leave I will go and search for their country and, if I succeed in finding it, bring you home sarees of the same kind.' And the Rajah was very much pleased, and ordered Seventee Bai to go. So she returned to her house and bade good bye to Parbuttee Bai, and warned her to be discreet and cautious and then mounting her horse, rode away in search of the Raksha country.

Seventee Bai travelled for many days through the jungl going one hundred miles each day, and staying to rest every no and then at little villages on her road.
At last, after having gone several hundred miles, she came one day to a fine city situated on the banks of a beautiful river, and on the city walls a proclamation was painted in large letters. Seven-tee Bai inquired of the people what it meant, who told her that it was to say the Rajah's daughter would marry any man who could tame a certain pony belonging to her father, which was very viciouS. 'Has no one been able to manage it?' asked Seventee Bai. 'No one,' they said. 'Many have tried, but failed miserably. The pony was born on the same day as the Princess. It is so fierce that no one can approach it; but when the Princess heard how wild it was, she vowed she would marry no one who could not tame it. Every one who likes is free to try.' Then Seventee Bai said, 'Show me the pony to-morrow. I think I shall be able to tame it.' They answered, 'You can try if you like, but it is very dangerous, and you are but a youth.' She replied, 'God gives his strength to the weak. I do not fear.' So she went to sleep, and early next morning they beat a drum all round the town to let every one know that another man was going to try and tame the Rajah's pony, and all the people flocked out of their houses to see the sight. The pony was in a field near the river, and Seventee Bai ran up to it, as it came running towards her intending to trample her to death, and seized it firmly by the mane, so that it could neither strike her with its fore-legs nor kick her. The pony tried to shake her off, but Seventee Bai clung firmly on, and finally jumped on its back; and when the pony found that it was mastered, it became quite gentle and tame. Then Seventee Bal, to show how completely she had conquered, put spurs to the pony to make it jump the river, and the pony immediately sprang up in the air and right across the river (which was a jump of three miles), and this it did three times (for it was strong and agile, and had never been ridden before); and when all the people saw this they shouted for joy, and ran down to the river-bank and brought Seventee Bai, riding in triumph on the pony, to see the Rajah. And the Rajah said, 'O best of men, and worthy of all honour, you have won my daughter!' So he took Seventee Bai to the palace, and paid her great honour, and gave her jewels, and rich clothes, and horses and camels innumerable. The Princess also came to greet the winner of her hand. Then they said, 'To-morrow shall be the wedding day.' But Seventee Bai replied, 'Great Rajah and beautiful Princess, I am now going on an important errand of my own Rajah's; let me, I pray you, first accomplish the duty on which I am bound, and on my way home I will come through this city and claim my bride.' At this they were both pleased, and the Rajah said, 'It is well spoken. Do not let us hinder you from keeping faith with your own Rajah. Go your way. We shall eagerly await your return, when you shall claim the Princess and all your possessions, and we will have such a gay wedding as was not since the world began.' And they went out with her to the borders of their land, and showed her on her way.

So the Wuzeer's daughter travelled on in search of the Rakshas' country, until at last one day she came in sight of another fine large town. Here she rested in the house for travellers for some days. Now the Rajah of this country had a very beautiful daughter, who was his only child, and for her he had built a splendid bath. It was like a little sea, and had high marble walls all round, with a hedge of spikes at the top of the walls--so high, that at a distance it looked like a great castle. The young Princess was very fond of it, and she vowed she would only marry a man who could jump across her bath on horseback. This had happened some years before, but no one had been able to do it, which grieved the Rajah and Ranee very much; for they wished to see their daughter happily married. And they said to her, 'We shall both be dead before you get a husband. What folly is this! to expect that any one should be able to jump over those high marble walls, with the spikes at the top.' The Princess only answered, 'Then I will never marry. It matters not; I will never have a husband who has not jumped those walls.'

So the Rajah caused it to be proclaimed throughout. the land, that he would give his daughter in marriage, and great riches, to whoever could jump, on horseback, over the Princess's bath. All this Seventee Bai learnt as soon as she arrived in the town, and she said, 'To-morrow I will try and jump over the Princess's bath.' The country people said to her, 'You speak foolishly: it is quite impossible.' She replied, 'Heaven, in which I trust, will help me.' So next day she rose up, and saddled her horse, and led him in front of the palace, and there she sprang on his back, and, going at full gallop, leapt over the marble walls, over the spikes high up in the air, and down on to the ground on the other side of the bath; and this she did three times, which, when the Rajah saw, he was filled with joy, and sent for Seventee Bai, and said, 'Tell me your name, brave Prince; for you are the only man in the world,--you have won my daughter.' Then the Wuzeer's daughter replied, 'My name is Seventee Rajah. I come from a far country on a mission from my Rajah to the country of the Rakshas; let me therefore, I pray you, first do my appointed work, and if I live to return, I will come through this country and claim my bride.' To which the Rajah consented, for he did not wish the Princess, his daughter, to undertake so long and tiresome a journey. It was therefore agreed that the Princess should await Seventee Bai's return at her father's court, and that Seventee Bai herself should immediately proceed on her journey.

From this place she went on for many, many days without adventure, and traversed a dense jungle, for her brave heart carried her through all difficulties. At last she arrived at another large city, beautifully situated by a lake, with blue hills rising behind it and sheltering it from the cutting winds; little gardens filled with pomegranates, jasmines, and other fragrant and lovely flowers reached down from the city to the water's edge.

Seventee Bai, tired with her long journey, rode up to one of the Malees' houses, where the hospitable inmates, seeing she was a stranger and weary, offered her food and shelter for the night, which she thankfully accepted.
As they all sat round the fire cooking their evening meal, Seventee Bai asked the Malee's wife about the place and the people, and what was going on in the town. 'Much excitement,' she replied, 'has for a long time been caused by our Rajah's dream, which no one can interpret.' 'What did he dream?' asked Seventee Bai. 'Ever since he was ten years old,' she replied, he has dreamed of a fair tree growing in a large garden. The stem of the tree is made of silver, the leaves are pure gold, and the fruit is bunches of pearls. The Rajah has inquired of all his wise men and seers where such a tree is to be found; but they all replied, "There is no such tree in the world;" wherefore he is dissatisfied and melancholy. Moreover, the Princess, his daughter, hearing of her father's dream, has determined to marry no man save the finder of this marvellous tree.' 'It is very odd,' said Seventee Bai; and, their supper being over, she dragged her mattress outside the little house (as a man would have done), and, placing it in a sheltered nook near the lake, knelt down, as her custom was, to say her prayers before going to sleep.
As she knelt there, with her eyes fixed on the dark water, she saw, on a sudden, a glorious shining light coming slowly towards her, and discovered, in a minute or two more, that a very large cobra was crawling up the steps from the water's edge, having in his mouth an enormous diamond, the size and shape of an egg, that sparkled and shone like a little sun, or as if one of the stars had suddenly dropped out of heaven. The cobra laid the diamond down at the top of the steps, and crawled away in search of food. Presently returning, when the night was far spent, he picked up the diamond again, and slid down the steps with it into the lake. Seventee Bai knew not what to make of this, but she resolved to return to the same place next night and watch for the cobra.

Again she saw him bring the diamond in his mouth, and take it away with him after his evening meal; and again, a third night the same thing. Then Seventee Bai determined to kill the cobra, and if possible secure the diamond. So early next morning she went into the Bazaar, and ordered a blacksmith to make her a very strong iron trap, which should catch hold of anything it was let down upon so firmly as to require the strength of twelve men to get out of it. The blacksmith did as he was ordered, and made a very strong trap; the lower part of it was like knives, and when it caught hold of anything it required the strength of twelve men to break through it and escape.

Seventee Bai had this trap hung up by a rope to a tree close to the lake, and all around she scattered flowers and sweet scents, such as cobras love; and at nightfall she herself got into the tree just above the trap, and waited for the cobra to come as he was wont.
About twelve o'clock the cobra came up the steps from the lake in search of food. He had the diamond in his mouth, and, attracted by the sweet scents and flowers, instead of going into the jungle, he proceeded towards the tree in which Seventee Bai was.
When Seventee Bai saw him, she untied the rope and let down the trap upon him; but for fear he might not be quite dead, she waited till morning before going to get the diamond.
As soon as the sun was up, she went to look at her prey. There he lay cold and dead, with the diamond, which shone like a mountain of light, in his mouth. Seventee Bai took it, and, tired by her night of watching, thought she would bathe in the lake before returning to the Malee's cottage. So she ran and knelt down by the brink, to dip her hands and face in the cool water; but no sooner did she touch its surface with the diamond, than it rolled back in a wall on either hand, and she saw a path-way leading down below the lake, on each side of which were beautiful houses, and gardens full of flowers, red, and white, and blue. Seventee Bai resolved to see whither this might lead, so she walked down the path until she came opposite a large door. She opened it, and found herself in a more lovely garden than she had ever seen on earth; tall trees laden with rich fruit grew in it, and on the boughs were bright birds singing melodiously, while the ground was covered with flowers, among which flew many gaudy butterflies.

In the centre of the garden grew one tree more beautiful than all the rest: the stem was of silver, the leaves were golden, and the fruit was clusters of pearls. Swinging amid the branches sat a young girl, more fair than any earthly lady; she had a face like the angels which men only see in dreams; her eyes were like two stars, her golden hair fell in ripples to her feet; she was singing to herself. When she saw the stranger, she gave a little cry, and said, 'Ah, my lord, why do you come here?' Seventee Bai answered, 'May I not come to see you, beautiful lady?' Then the lady said 'O sir, you are welcome; but if my father sees you here he will kill you. I am the great Cobra's daughter, and he made this garden for me to play in, and here I have played these many, many years all alone, for he lets me see no one, not even of our own subjects. I never saw any one before you. Speak, beautiful Prince--tell me how you came here, and who you are.' Seventee Bai answered, 'I am Seventee Rajah: have no fear--the stern Cobra is no more.' Then the Lady was joyful, when she heard' that the Cobra who had tyrannised over her was dead, and she said her name was Hera Bai jungle palace to see Hera Bai, and said to her, 'I have a friend whom I have not seen since he became mad twelve years ago, and ran away into the jungle disguised as a Fakeer. I should like very much to find out if he is still alive. How can I learn?' Now Hera Bai was a very wise Princess, and she answered, 'Your best plan will be to provide a great feast for the poor, and cause it to be proclaimed in all lands, far and near, that you are about to give it as a thank-offering for the blessings God has bestowed on you. The poor will flock from all countries to come to it, and perhaps among the rest you may find your friend.'

Seventee Bai did as Hera Bai had advised, causing two long tables to be spread in the jungle, whereat hundreds of poor from all parts of the world were daily entertained; and every day, for six months, Seventee Bai and Parbuttee Bai walked down the long rows of people, apparently to see how they were getting on, but in reality to look for Logedas Rajah; but they found him not.

At last one day, as Seventee Bai was going her accustomed round, she saw a wretched wild-looking man, black as pitch, with tangled hair, a thin wrinkled face, and in his hand a wooden bowl, such as Fakeers carry about to collect broken meat and scraps of bread in; and, touching Parbuttee Bai, she said to her, 'See, Parbuttee, there is your husband.' When Parbuttee Bai saw this pitiful sight (for it was indeed Logedas; but so changed and altered that even his wives hardly recognised him) she began to cry. Then Seventee Bai said, 'Do not cry; go home quickly. I will take care of him.' And when Parbuttee Bai was gone, she called one of the guard and said to him, 'Catch hold of that man and put him in prison.' Then Logedas Rajah said, 'Why do you seize me? I have done no harm to any one.' But Seventee Bai ordered the guard not to heed his remonstrances, but to take him to prison instantly, for she did not wish the people around to discover how interested she was in him. So the guard took Logedas Rajah away to lock him up. Poor Logedas Rajah said to them, 'Why has this wicked Rajah had me taken prisoner? I have harmed no one. I have not fought, nor robbed; but for twelve years I have been a wretched beggar, living on the bread of charity.' For he did not tell them

he was a Rajah's son, for he knew they would only laugh at him. They replied, 'You must not call our Rajah wicked; it is you that are wicked, and not he, and doubtless he will have your head cut off.'
When they put him in prison he begged them again to say what was to be done to him. 'Oh!' said they, 'you will certainly be hanged to-morrow morning, or perhaps, if you like it better, beheaded, in front of the palace.'

Now as soon as Seventee Bai got home, she sent for her head servants, and said to them, 'Go at once to the prison, and order the guard to give you up the Fakeer I gave into their charge, and bring him here in a palanquin, but see that he does not escape.' Then Seventee Bai ordered them to lock up Logedas in a distant part of the palace, and commanded that he should be washed, and dressed in new clothes, and given food, and that a barber should be sent for, to cut his hair and trim his beard. Then Logedas said to his keepers, 'See how good the Rajah is to me! He will not surely hang me after this.' 'Oh I never fear,' they answered; 'when you are dressed up and made very smart, it will be a much finer sight to see you hanged than before.' Thus they tried to frighten the poor man. After this Seventee Bai sent for all the greatest doctors in the kingdom, and said to them, 'If a Rajah wanders about for twelve years in the jungle, until all trace of his princely beauty is lost, how long will it take you to restore him to his original likeness?' They answered, 'With care and attention it may be done in six months.' 'Very well,' said Seven-tee Bai, 'there is a friend of mine now in my palace of whom this is the case. Take him and treat him well, and at the end of six months I shall expect to see him restored to his original health and strength.'

So Logedas was placed under the doctors' care; but all this time he had no idea who Seventee Bai was, nor why he was thu~ treated. Every day Seventee Bai went to see him and talk to him. Then he said to his keepers, 'See, good people, how kind this great Rajah is, coming to see me every day; he can intend for me nothing but good.' To which they would answer, 'Do not be in a hurry; none can fathom the hearts of kings. Most probably, for all this delay, he will in the end have you taken and hanged.' Thus they amused themselves by alarming him. Then, some day, when Seventee Bai had been more than usually kind, Logedas Rajah would say again, 'I do not fear the Rajah's intentions towards me. Did you not notice how very kind he was to-day?' And to this his keepers would reply--'Doubtless it is very amusing for him, but hardly so, we should think, for you. He will probably play with you for some time (as a cat does with a mouse); but in three months is the Rajah's birthday: most likely he is keeping you to kill you then.' And so the time wore on. Seventee Bai's birthday was fixed for the day also of her marriage with the Rajah's daughter. For this great event immense preparations were made. All over the plain outside the city walls, tents made of cloth of gold were pitched in a great square, twelve miles long and twelve miles broad, for the accommodation of the neighbouring Rajahs, and in the centre was a larger tent than all the rest, covered with jewels, and shining like a great golden temple, in which they were to assemble.

Then Seventee Bai said to Parbuttee Bai, 'On my birthday I will restore you to your husband.' But Parbuttee Bai was vexed, and said, 'I cannot bear the thought of him: it is such a terrible thing to think of our once handsome husband as none other than that miserable Fakeer.'
Seventee Bai smiled. 'In truth,' she said, 'I think you will find him again altered, and for the better. You cannot think what a change rest and care have made in him; but he does not know who we are, and as you value my happiness, tell no one now that I am not the Rajah.' 'Indeed I will not, dearest sister,' answered Parbuttee Bai. 'I should in truth be loath to vex you, after all you have done for me; for owing to you here have we lived happily for twelve years like sisters, and I do not think as clever a woman as you was ever before born in this world.'

Amongst other guests invited to the wedding were Siu Rajah and his wife, and the Wuzeer, Seventee Bai's father, and her mother. Seventee Bai arranged thrones for them all, made of gold, and emeralds, and diamonds, and rubies, and ivory. And she ordered that in the seat of honour on her left-hand side should be placed the Wuzeer her father, and next to him her mother, and next to them Siu Rajah and his wife, and after them all the other Rajahs and Ranees, according to their rank; and all the Rajahs and Ranees wondered much that the place of honour should have been given to the stranger Wuzeer. Then Seventee Bai took her most costly Rajah dress, and ordered that Logedas Rajah should be clothed in it, and escorted to the tent; and she took off the man's clothes which she had worn, and dressed herself in a saree. When she was dressed in it she looked a more lovely woman than she had before looked a handsome man. And she went to the tent leading Parbuttee Bai, while with her came Hera Bai and Tara Bal of more than mortal beauty, and the three other Princesses clothed in the most costly robes. Then, before all the Rajah's and Ranees, Seventee Bai knelt down at Logedas Rajah's feet, and said to him, 'I am your true wife. O husband, have you forgotten her whom you left in the jungle with Parbuttee Bai twelve years ago? See here she also is; and behold these rich jewels, these tents of gold, these hangings of priceless worth, these elephants, camels, horses, attendants, and all this wealth. It is all yours, as I am yours; for I have collected all for you.'

Then Logedas Rajah wept for joy, and Siu Rajah arose and kissed Seventee Bai, and said to her, 'My noble daughter, you have rescued my son from misery, and done more wisely and well than woman ever did before. May all honour and blessing attend you henceforth and for ever!' And the assembled Rajahs and Ranees were surprised beyond measure, saying, 'Did any one ever hear of a woman doing so much!' But more than any was the good Rajah astonished, whom Seventee Bai had served so well for twelve years, and whose daughter she was to have married that clay; when he learnt that she was a woman! It was then agreed by all, that Logedas Rajah should on that day be newly married to his two wives, Parbuttee Bai and Seventee Bai; and should also marry the six other beautiful Princesses--the Princess Hera Bai, the Princess Tara Bai, the Rajah's little daughter, and the three other Princesses; and that he should return with his father to his own kingdom. And the weddings took place amid great splendour and rejoicings unheard of; and of all the fine things that were seen and done on that day it is impossible to tell. And afterwards Logedas Rajah, and his eight wives, and his father and mother, and the Wuzeer and his wife, and all their attendants, returned to their own land, where they all lived very happily ever after. And so may all who read this story live happily too!

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Old Deccan Days,
by Mary Frere, 1868

Once on a time there lived a weaver, whose ancestors were very rich, but whose father had wasted the property which he had inherited in riotous living. He was born in a palace-like house, but he now lived in a miserable hut. He had no one in the world, his parents and all his relatives having died. Hard by the hut was the lair of a jackal. The jackal, remembering the wealth and grandeur of the weaver's forefathers, had compassion on him, and one day coming to him, said, "Friend weaver, I see what a wretched life you are leading. I have a good mind to improve your condition. I'll try and marry you to the daughter of the king of this country." "I become the king's son-in-law!" replied the weaver; "that will take place only when the sun rises in the west." "You doubt my power?" rejoined the jackal; "you will see, I'll bring it about."

The next morning the jackal started for the king's city, which was many miles off. On the way he entered a plantation of the Piper betel plant, and plucked a large quantity of its leaves. He reached the capital, and contrived to get inside the palace. On the premises of the palace was a tank in which the ladies of the king's household performed their morning and afternoon ablutions. At the entrance of that tank the jackal laid himself down. The daughter of the king happened to come just at the time to bathe, accompanied by her maids. The princess was not a little struck at seeing the jackal lying down at the entrance. She told her maids to drive the jackal away. The jackal rose as if from sleep, and instead of running away, opened his bundle of betel-leaves, put some into his mouth, and began chewing them. The princess and her maids were not a little astonished at the sight. They said among themselves, "What an uncommon jackal is this! From what country can he have come? A jackal chewing betel-leaves! why thousands of men and women of this city cannot indulge in that luxury. He must have come from a wealthy land." The princess asked the jackal, "Sivalu! From what country do you come? It must be a very prosperous country where the jackals chew betel-leaves. Do other animals in your country chew betel-leaves?" "Dearest princess," replied the jackal, "I come from a land flowing with milk and honey. Betel-leaves are as plentiful in my country as the grass in your fields. All animals in my country—cows, sheep, dogs—chew betel-leaves. We want no good thing." The jackal . . . opened his bundle of betel-leaves, put some into his mouth, and began chewing them."

country," said the princess, "where there is such plenty, and thrice happy the king who rules in it!" "As for our king," said the jackal, "he is the richest king in the world. His palace is like the heaven of Indra. I have seen your palace here; it is a miserable hut compared to the palace of our king." The princess, whose curiosity was excited to the utmost pitch, hastily went through her bath, and going to the apartments of the queen-mother, told her of the wonderful jackal lying at the entrance of the tank. Her curiosity being excited, the jackal was sent for. When the jackal stood in the presence of the queen, he began munching the betel-leaves. "You come," said the queen, "from a very rich country. Is your king married?" "Please your majesty, our king is not married. Princesses from distant parts of the world tried to get married to him, but he rejected them all. Happy will that princess be whom our king condescends to marry!" "Don't you think, Sivalu," asked the queen, "that my daughter is as beautiful as a Peri, and that she is fit to be the wife of the proudest king in the world?" "I quite think," said the jackal, "that the princess is exceedingly handsome; indeed, she is the handsomest princess I have ever seen; but I don't know whether our king will have a liking for her." "Liking for my daughter!" said the queen, "you have only to paint her to him as she is, and he is sure to turn mad with love. To be serious, Sivalu, I am anxious to get my daughter married. Many princes have sought her hand, but I am unwilling to give her to any of them, as they are not the sons of great kings. But your king seems to be a great king. I can have no objection to making him my son-in-law." The queen sent word to the king, requesting him to come and see the jackal. The king came and saw the jackal, heard him describe the wealth and pomp of the king of his country, and expressed himself not unwilling to give away his daughter in marriage to him.

The jackal after this returned to the weaver and said to him, "O lord of the loom, you are the luckiest man in the world; it is all settled; you are to become the son-in-law of a great king. I have told them that you are yourself a great king, and you must behave yourself as one. You must do just as I instruct you, otherwise your fortune will not only not be made, but both you and I will be put to death." "I'll do just as you bid me," said the weaver. The shrewd jackal drew in his own mind a plan of the method of procedure he should adopt, and after a few days went back to the palace of the king in the same manner in which he had gone before, that is to say, chewing betel-leaves and lying down at the entrance of the tank on the premises of the palace. The king and queen were glad to see him, and eagerly asked him as to the success of his mission. The jackal said, "In order to relieve your minds I may tell you at once that my mission has been so far successful. If you only knew the infinite trouble I have had in persuading his Majesty, my sovereign, to make up his mind to marry your daughter, you would give me no end of thanks. For a long time he would not hear of it, but gradually I brought him round. You have now only to fix an auspicious day for the celebration of the solemn rite. There is one bit of advice, however, which I, as your friend, would give you. It is this. My master is so great a king that if he were to come to you in state, attended by all his followers, his horses and his elephants, you would find it impossible to accommodate them all in your palace or in your city. I would therefore propose that our king should come to your city, not in state, but in a private manner; and that you send to the outskirts of your city your own elephants, horses, and conveyances, to bring him and only a few of his followers to your palace." "Many thanks, wise Sivalu, for this advice. I could not possibly make accommodation in my city for the followers of so great a king as your master is. I should be very glad if he did not come in state; and trust you will use your influence to persuade him to come in a private manner; for I should be ruined if he came in state." The jackal then gravely said, "I will do my best in the matter," and then returned to his own village, after the royal astrologer had fixed an auspicious day for the wedding.

On his return the jackal busied himself with making preparations for the great ceremony. As the weaver was clad in tatters, he told him to go to the washermen of the village and borrow from them a suit of clothes. As for himself, he went to the king of his race, and told him that on a certain day he would like one thousand jackals to accompany him to a certain place. He went to the king of crows, and begged that his corvine majesty would be pleased to allow one thousand of his black subjects to accompany him on a certain day to a certain place. He preferred a similar petition to the king of paddy-birds.

At last the great day arrived. The weaver arrayed himself in the clothes which he had borrowed from the village washermen. The jackal made his appearance, accompanied by a train of a thousand jackals, a thousand crows, and a thousand paddy-birds. The nuptial procession started on their journey, and towards sundown arrived within two miles of the king's palace. There the jackal told his friends, the thousand jackals, to set up a loud howl; at his bidding the thousand crows cawed their loudest; while the hoarse screechings of the thousand paddy-birds furnished a suitable accompaniment. The effect may be imagined. They all together made a noise the like of which had never been heard since the world began. While this unearthly noise was going on, the jackal himself hastened to the palace, and asked the king whether he thought he would be able to accommodate the wedding-party, which was about two miles distant, and whose noise was at that moment sounding in his ears. The king said "Impossible, Sivalu; from the sound of the procession I infer there must be at least one

hundred thousand souls. How is it possible to accommodate so many guests? Please, so arrange that the bridegroom only will come to my house." "Very well," said the jackal; "I told you at the beginning that you would not be able to accommodate all the attendants of my august master. I'll do as you wish. My master will alone come in undress. Send a horse for the purpose." The jackal, accompanied by a horse and groom, came to the place where his friend the weaver was, thanked the thousand jackals, the thousand crows, and the thousand paddy-birds, for their valuable services, and told them all to go away, while he himself, and the weaver on horse-back, wended their way to the king's palace. The bridal party, waiting in the palace, were greatly disappointed at the personal appearance of the weaver; but the jackal told them that his master had purposely put on a mean dress, as his would-be father-in-law declared himself unable to accommodate the bridegroom and his attendants coming in state. The royal priests now began the interesting ceremony, and the nuptial knot was tied for ever. The bridegroom seldom opened his lips, agreeably to the instructions of the jackal, who was afraid lest his speech should betray him. At night when he was lying in bed he began to count the beams and rafters of the room, and said audibly, "This beam will make a first-rate loom, that other a capital beam, and that yonder an excellent sley." The princess, his bride, was not a little astonished. She began to think in her mind, "Is the man, to whom they have tied me, a king or a weaver? I am afraid he is the latter; otherwise why should he be talking of weaver's loom, beam, and sley? Ah, me! is this what the fates keep in store for me?" In the morning the princess related to the queen-mother the weaver's soliloquy. The king and queen, not a little surprised at this recital, took the jackal to task about it. The ready-witted jackal at once said, "Your Majesty need not be surprised at my august master's soliloquy. His palace is surrounded by a population of seven hundred families of the best weavers in the world, to whom he has given rent-free lands, and whose welfare he continually seeks. It must have been in one of his philanthropic moods that he uttered the soliloquy which has taken your Majesty by surprise." The jackal, however, now felt that it was high time for himself and the weaver to decamp with the princess, since the proverbial simplicity of his friend of the loom might any moment involve him in danger. The jackal therefore represented to the king, that weighty affairs of state would not permit his august master to spend another day in the palace; that he should start for his kingdom that very day with his bride; and his master was resolved to travel incognito on foot, only the princess, now the queen, should leave the city in a palki. After a great deal of yea and nay, the king and queen at last consented to the proposal. The party came to the outskirts of the weaver's village; the palki bearers were sent away; and the princess, who asked where her husband's palace was, was made to walk on foot. The weaver's hut was soon reached, and the jackal, addressing the princess, said, "This, madam, is your husband's palace." The princess began to beat her forehead with the palms of her hands in sheer despair. "Ah, me! is this the husband whom Prajapati[2] intended for me? Death would have been a thousand times better."

As there was nothing for it, the princess soon got reconciled to her fate. She, however, determined to make her husband rich, especially as she knew the secret of becoming rich. One day she told her husband to get for her a pice-worth of flour. She put a little water in the flour, and smeared her body with the paste. When the paste dried on her body, she began wiping the paste with her fingers; and as the paste fell in small balls from her body, it got turned into gold. She repeated this process every day for some time, and thus got an immense quantity of gold. She soon became mistress of more gold than is to be found in the coffers of any king. With this gold she employed a whole army of masons, carpenters and architects, who in no time built one of the finest palaces in the world. Seven hundred families of weavers were sought for and settled round about the palace. After this she wrote a letter to her father to say that she was sorry he had not favoured her with a visit since the day of her marriage, and that she would be delighted if he now came to see her and her husband. The king agreed to come, and a day was fixed. The princess made great preparations against the day of her father's arrival. Hospitals were established in several parts of the town for diseased, sick, and infirm animals. The beasts in thousands were made to chew betel-leaves on the wayside. The streets were covered with Cashmere shawls for her father and his attendants to walk on. There was no end of the display of wealth and grandeur. The king and queen arrived in state, and were infinitely delighted at the apparently boundless riches of their son-in-law. The jackal now appeared on the scene, and saluting the king and queen, said—"Did I not tell you?"

Here my story endeth,
The Natiya-thorn withereth, etc.

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Folk-Tales of Bengal,
by the Rev. Lal Behari Day
Macmillan and Co.,
London, 1912

In a certain village there was a girl who was lazy and slothful, hated working, but would gossip and chatter away like anything! Well, she took it into her head to invite the other girls to a spinning party. For in the villages, as every one knows, it is the lazybones who gives the spinning-feast, and the sweet-toothed are those who go to it.

Well, on the appointed night she got her spinners together. They span for her, and she fed them and feasted them. Among other things they chatted about was this -- which of them all was the boldest?

Says the lazybones: "I'm not afraid of anything!"
"Well then," say the spinners, "if you're not afraid, go past the graveyard to the church, take down the holy picture from the door, and bring it here."
"Good, I'll bring it; only each of you must spin me a distaff-full."

That was just her sort of notion: to do nothing herself, but to get others to do it for her. Well, she went, took down the picture, and brought it home with her. Her friends all saw that sure enough it was the picture from the church. But the picture had to be taken back again, and it was now the midnight hour. Who was to take it? At length the lazybones said: "You girls go on spinning. I'll take it back myself. I'm not afraid of anything!"

So she went and put the picture back in its place. As she was passing the graveyard on her return, she saw a corpse in a white shroud, seated on a tomb. It was a moonlight night; everything was visible. She went up to the corpse, and drew away its shroud from it. The corpse held its peace, not uttering a word; no doubt the time for it to speak had not come yet. Well, she took the shroud and went home.

"There!" says she, "I've taken back the picture and put it in its place; and, what's more, here's a shroud I took away from a corpse." Some of the girls were horrified; others didn't believe what she said, and laughed at her.

But after they had supped and lain down to sleep, all of a sudden the corpse tapped at the window and said: "Give me my shroud! Give me my shroud!"

The girls were so frightened they didn't know whether they were alive or dead. But the lazybones took the shroud, went to the window, opened it, and said: "There, take it."
"No," replied the corpse, "restore it to the place you took it from." Just then the cocks suddenly began to crow. The corpse disappeared.

Next night, when the spinners had all gone home to their own houses, at the very same hour as before, the corpse came, tapped at the window, and cried: "Give me my shroud!"
Well, the girl's father and mother opened the window and offered him his shroud. "No," says he, "let her take it back to the place she took it from."
"Really now, how could one go to a graveyard with a corpse? What a horrible idea!" she replied. Just then the cocks crew. The corpse disappeared.

Next day the girl's father and mother sent for the priest, told him the whole story, and entreated him to help them in their trouble. "Couldn't a service be performed?" they said.
The priest reflected awhile; then he replied: "Please tell her to come to church tomorrow."

Next day the lazybones went to church. The service began, numbers of people came to it. But just as they were going to sing the cherubim song, there suddenly arose, goodness knows whence, so terrible a whirlwind that all the congregation fell flat on their faces. And it caught up that girl, and then flung her down on the ground. The girl disappeared from sight; nothing was left of her but her back hair.

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W. R. S. Ralston, Russian Folk Tales
London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873
Ralston's source: Aleksandr Afanasyev,
"From the Voroneje Government."

This story is a story of the past of the days when Christ and the twelve apostles still walked on earth. One day they were still on their road, going on a long, long road, and a wolf met them and said: “Lord, I am feeling hungry.”
”Go,” Christ said to him, “and eat a mare.”

So the wolf went to look for a mare. And he saw her going up and down, and said: “Mare, the Lord has bidden me eat you!” So she answered: “Well, please do not eat me it is not the proper thing. But I have a passport on me; only it is driven in very hard.”
“Well, show it me.”
“Just come near my hind feet!”

So the wolf went up, and she kicked him with her hoofs, and knocked out his front teeth, so that the wolf was thrown, at a blow, three sazhéns away, and the mare ran off. [A sazhén is seven feet.]

Back the wolf came with a petition, met Christ, and said: “Lord, the mare almost killed me!”
“Well, go on and eat the ram.”

So the wolf ran up to the ram ran up and said: “Ram, I am going to eat you; it is the command of the Lord.” “Well, come and eat me up if you will. I will stand on the hill, and will jump up into your mouth all ready.”

So the wolf stood on the hill, and the ram told him to open his mouth. So the wolf went and stood on the hill and opened his mouth for the food, and the ram ran down and hit him hard with the horns on his fore-head whack! The wolf was knocked off his feet, and the ram went away. And the wolf got up, looked all round, and there was never a sign of the ram.

So he went up with another complaint. And he found Christ and said: “Lord, even the ram has deceived me. Why, it almost knocked me to bits.”
“All right!” said Christ. “Go and eat the tailor.”

So the wolf ran up, and he met a tailor on the way.
“Tailor,” he said, “I am going to eat you, by command of the Lord.”
“All right. Let me say good-bye I should like to greet my kin.”
“No, I cannot let you say good-bye to your kin.”
“Well, I cannot help it it must be so. Come and eat me up. Only at least let me take your measurements. I only want to see whether I shall slip in easily.”
“All right! Measure away,” said the wolf.

So the tailor went back, took hold of the wolf by his tail, twined his tail round in his hand, and began to whip the wolf. And the wolf struggled and tussled, roared and shrieked, and tore until he tore his tail loose, and he then took to his feet. So he ran away with all of his might, and he met seven other wolves.

They said: “Why are you, grey wolf, tailless?” “Oh, the tailor tore it out.”
“Where is the tailor?”
“You see him there, on the road.”
“ All right we will hunt after him.”
And they started after the tailor.

When the tailor heard the chase coming after him, and saw that it was a disagreeable business, he scaled up a tree as fast as he could. So the wolves arrived there and said: “We will stop here, brothers, and wait until the tailor comes down. Do you, manx-wolf, stop below, and we will each of us climb on the other’s shoulders.”

So the manx-wolf lay at the bottom, and all the seven wolves went after the others and climbed up. When the tailor saw his ill-fate coming so near him, for they were nearer and nearer, he cried out to the top one: “It is nobody’s fault, only the manx-wolf’s!”

So the manx-wolf was frightened, and jumped out from below and ran off. All the seven wolves tumbled down and chased after him, caught him up, and tore him to bits.

But the tailor slid down the tree and went back home.

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Alexander Afanasyev, Russian Folk Tales,
translated from the Russian
by Leonard A. Magnus
London: Kegan Paul, Trench,
Trubner, and Company, 1916

There was once a widowed king who had twelve daughters, one more beautiful than the other. Every night these princesses went away, no one knew whither; and every night each of them wore out a new pair of shoes. The king could not get shoes for them fast enough and he wanted to know where they went every night and what they did there. So he prepared a feast, summoned kings and princes, noblemen, merchants, and simple people from all lands, and said: "Can anyone solve this riddle? He who solves it will receive his favourite princess in marriage and half the kingdom as a dowry." However, no one would undertake to find out where the princesses went at night, except one needy nobleman, who said: "Your Royal Majesty, I will find out." "Very well, find out."

Soon the needy nobleman began to doubt and thought to himself: "What have I done? I have undertaken to solve this riddle, yet I do not know how. If I fail now, the king will put me in prison." He went out of the palace and walked outside the town with a sad face. He met an old woman who asked him: "Why are you so sad, my good man?" He answered: "Grandmother, how can I help being sad? I have undertaken to find out for the king whither his daughters go every night." "Yes, that is a difficult task. But it can be accomplished. Here is an invisible cap; with its help you can find out many things. But mind you: when you go to bed, the princess will give you a sleeping potion; however, turn your face to the wall, pour the drops into your bed, and do not drink them!" The nobleman thanked the old woman and returned to the palace.

At nightfall he was assigned a room next to the princesses' bedroom. He lay on his bed and made ready to watch. Then one of th princesses brought him sleeping drops in wine and asked him to drink to her health. He could not refuse, took the cup, turned to the wall, and poured it into his bed. On the stroke of midnight the princesses came to see whether he was asleep. The nobleman pretended to be sleeping so soundly that nothing could rouse him, but actually he was listening to every rustle. "Well, little sisters," said one of them, "our guard has fallen asleep; it is time for us to go to the ball." "It is time, high time!"

They dressed in their best garments; the oldest sister pushed her bed to one side and disclosed a passage to the underground kingdom, to the realm of the accursed king. They began to climb down a ladder. The nobleman quietly rose from his bed, donned his invisible cap, and followed them. Accidentally he stepped on the youngest princess' dress. She was frightened and said to her sisters: "Ah, little sisters, someone seems to have stepped on my dress; this is a bad omen." "Don't worry, nothing will happen to us." They went down the ladder and came to a grove where golden flowers grew. The nobleman picked one flower and broke off a twig, and the whole grove rumbled. "Ah, little sisters," said the youngest princess, "do you hear how the grove is rumbling? This bodes no good." "Fear not, it is the music in the accursed king's palace."

They came to the palace and were met by the king and his courtiers. The music began to play and they began to dance; they danced till their shoes were torn to shreds. The king ordered wine to be served to the guests. The nobleman took a goblet from the tray, drank the wine, and put the goblet in his pocket. At last the party was over; the princesses said farewell to their cavaliers, promised to com e the next night, returned home, undressed and went to sleep.

The next morning the king summoned the needy nobleman. "Well," he said, "have you discovered what my daughters do every night?" "I have," "Then where do they go?" "To the underground kingdom, to the accursed king, and there they dance all night." The king summoned his daughters and began to question them. "Where were you las night?" The princesses denied everything. "We did not go anywhere," they said. "Have you not been with the accursed king? This nobleman testifies against you and is ready to offer proof." "Father, he cannot offer proof, for he slept like the dead all night." The needy nobleman drew the golden flower and the goblet from his pocket. "Here," he said, "is the proof." The princesses had no choice but to confess everything to their father; he ordered the passage to the underground kingdom to be walled up, married the needy nobleman to his youngest daughter, and all of them lived happily ever afterward.

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Russian Fairy Tales,
collected by Aleksandr Afanas'ev,
translated by Norbert Guterman,
Random House, New York, 1973

A brave soldier, while serving in his regiment, received a hundred rubbles from home. The seargeant got wind of it and borrowed this money form him .When the time came to settle the debt, instead of paying it, he gave the soldier a hundred blows on his back with a stick, saying: "I never saw your money. You invented the whole thing!" The soldier became enraged and ran away into a deep forest; he was about to lie down to rest under a tree when he saw a six-headed dragon flying toward him. The dragon stopped beside the soldier, questioned him about his life, and said: "Why should you trudge through the woods like this? Instead, come and serve me for three years." "With pleasure," said the soldier. "Sit on me, then," said the dragon. The soldier began to load all his belongings on the dragon. "Eh, veteran, why are you taking all this trash with you?" "How can you ask that, dragon? A soldier gets flogged for losing even a button, and now you want me to drop all my belongings!"

The dragon brought the soldier to his palace and charged him as follows: "Sit by the kettle for three years, keep the fire going, and cook my kasha!" The dragon him self went to travel in the world during all that time. The soldier's work was not hard: he put wood under the kettle and sat beside it drinking vodka and eating tasty snacks - and the dragon's vodka was not like ours, all watered down, but quite strong! After three years the dragon came flying home. "Well, veteran, is the kasha ready?" "It must be, for all these three years my fire did not go out once." The dragon ate the whole kettleful in one meal, praised the soldier for his faithful service, and hired him for the next three years.

These years passed too, and the dragon ate his kasha again and left the soldier for still another three years. For two years our soldier cooked the kasha, and toward the end of the third began to think, "Here I am living with the dragon for the ninth year, cooking his kasha all the time, and I don't even know what it tastes like. I must try it." He raised the lid and found his sergeant sitting in the kettle. "Ah, my fiend," thought the soldier, "now I'm going to give you a good time; I'll pay you back the blows you gave me." And he began to drag in wood and put it under the kettle, as much as he could, and made such a fire that he cooked not only the flesh but even the bones of the sergeant to a pulp. The dragon returned, ate the kasha, and praised the soldier: "Well, veteran, the lash was good before, but this time it was even better. Choose whatever you like as your reward." The soldier looked around and choose for himself a mighty horse and a shirt of thick cloth. This shirt was not an ordinary shirt, but a magic one: he who put it on became a mighty champion.

The soldier then went to a king, helped him in a difficult war, and married his beautiful daughter. But the princess disliked being married to a common soldier. So she intrigued with a neighbouring prince, and in order to find out whence came the soldier's mighty strength, she coaxed and flattered him. Having discovered what she wanted, she seized the opportunity when her husband was asleep to remove his shirt and give it to the prince. The prince put on the magic shirt, took a sword, cut the soldier into little pieces, put them in a hempen bag, and said to the stableboy: "Take this bag, tie it to some battered jade, and drive her into the open field!" The stableboy went to carry out this order, but meantime the soldier's mighty steed had turned himself into a battered jade and put himself in the stableboys' path. They took him, tied the bag to him, and drove him into the open field. The mighty steed darted off faster than a bird, came to the dragon's castle, stopped there, and for three nights and three days neighed without ceasing.

The dragon was sound asleep, but he was finally awakened by the horse's loud neighing and stamping, and came out of his palace. He looked into the bag and groaned aloud! He took the pieces, put them together, washed them with the water of death - and the soldier's body was joined together. He sprinkled it with the water of life, and the soldier came to. "Fie," he said, "I have slept a long time!" "You would have slept very long indeed without your good horse!" answered the dragon, and taught the soldier the difficult science of assuming different shapes. The soldier turned into a dove, flew to the prince with whom his faithless wife now lived, and sat on the sill of the kitchen window. The young cook saw him. "Ah," she said, "what a pretty little dove!" She opened the window and let him into the kitchen. The dove struck the floor and became a goodly youth. "Do me a service, lovely maiden," he said, "and I will marry you." "What shall I do for you?" "Get from the prince his shirt of thick cloth." "But he never takes it off, except when he bathes in the sea."

The soldier found out at shat time the prince bathed, went out on the road, and turned into a flower. Soon the prince and the princess came to the beach, followed by the cook carrying clean linen. The prince noticed the flower and admired it, but the princess guessed at once what it was: "Ah, that accursed soldier must have turned himself into this!" She picked the flower and began to crumple it and pluck the petals, but the flower turned int a little fly and without being noticed hid in the cook's bosom. As soon as the prince undressed and went into the water, the fly flew out and turned into a bright falcon. The falcon snatched the shirt and carried it away, then turned into a goodly youth and put it on. Then the soldier took a sword, put his treacherous wife and her lover to death, and married the lovely young cook.

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Russian Fairy Tales,
collected by Aleksandr Afanas'ev,
translated by Norbert Guterman,
Random House, New York, 1973

Once upon a time there lived an old man and his wife. When the old man became a widower, he married another wife, although he had a daughter from his first wife. The wicked stepmother disliked the girl, beat her, and pondered how she might destroy her. One day the father went away somewhere and the stepmother said to the girl: "Go to your aunt, my sister; ask her for a needle and some thread to sew a shirt for you." That aunt was Baba Yaga the Bony-legged. The girl was not stupid and she first went to her own aunt. "Good day, auntie," she said. "Good day, my beloved, what have you come for?" said her aunt. "Mother has sent me to her sister to ask for a needle and thread to sew me a shirt." The aunt told her what to do. "My little niece," she said, "when you get there, a birch will lash your eyes, but do you tie it with a ribbon. The gates will bang and creak at you, but do you pour some oil on their hinges. Dogs will want to tear you apart, but do you throw them some bread. A cat will scratch your eyes, but do you give him some ham." The girl went her way; she walked and walked and finally arrived at her other aunt's.

She saw a little hut and in it sat Baba Yaga the Bony-legged. "Good day, auntie," said the girl. "Good day, my beloved!" "Mother sent me to ask for a needle and thread to sew me a shirt." "Very well; meanwhile sit down and weave." The girl sat at the loom and Baba Yaga went out and said to her maid: "Go and heat a bath and wash my niece, but be careful; I want to eat her for breakfast." The girl sat there half dead with fright and begged the maid: "My dear, do not burn so much wood! Pour water over it and bring the water in a sieve." And she gave the maid a kerchief. Baba Yaga waited. She came to the window and asked: "Are you weaving, little niece, are you weaving, my darling?" "I am waving, auntie, I am waving, my dear." Baba Yaga went away from the window ant the girl gave ham to the cat and asked him: "Is there no way of getting away from here?" "Here is a comb and a towel," said the cat. "Take them and rung away. Baba Yaga will pursue you. But do you put your ear to the ground, and when you hear her coming close, throw the towel, and there will be a wide, wide river. And if Baba Yaga crosses that river and begins to catch up with you, put your ear to the ground again, and when you hear her coming close, throw your comb, and there will be a very thick forest - she will not be able to get through it."

The girl took the towel and the comb and ran. The dogs wanted to tear her, but she threw them some bread and they let her pass. The gates wanted to bang shut, but she poured some oil on their hinges and they let her pass. The birch wanted to lash her eyes, but she tied it with a ribbon and it let her pass. Meanwhile the cat sat at the loom and wove; he did not so much weave as tangle everything up. Baba Yaga came to the window and asked: "Are you weaving, little niece, are you weaving, my darling?" "I am weaving, auntie, I am weaving, my dear," answered the cat in a rough voice. Baba Yaga rushed into the hut, saw that the girl had gone, and took to beating the cat and scolding him for not having scratched out the girl's eyes. "I have served you so many years," said the cat, "and you nave not given me even a bone; but she gave me a piece of ham!"

Baba Yaga flung herself on the dogs, the gate, the birch, and the maid, and began to thrash and scold them all. The dogs said to her: "We have served you so long, and you have not even thrown us a burnt crust; but she gave us bread!" The gate said: "I have served you so long, and you have not even poured water on my hinges; but she poured oil!" The maid said: "I have served you so long, and you have not given me even a rag; but she gave me a kerchief!"

Baba Yaga the Bony-legged jumped on her mortar, goaded it on with her pestle, swept away her tracks with a broom, and flew in pursuit of the girl. The girl put her ear to the ground and heard Baba Yaga coming quite close. She threw her towel - and there was a wide, wide river. Baba Yaga came to the river and gnashed her teeth with rage. She returned home, took her oxen, and drove them to the river; the oxen drank the river clean. Then she set out again in pursuit. The girl put her ear to the ground and heard Baba Yaga coming close. She threw her comb - and there grew up a deep and terrifying forest. Baba Yaga began to gnaw at it, but no matter how she tried she could not gnaw through it, and she turned back.

Meanwhile the old man had come home and asked: "Where is my daughter?" "She has gone to her aunt," said the stepmother. After a while the girl also came home. "Where have you been?" her father asked her. "Ah, father," she said, "mother sent me to auntie for a needle and thread to sew me a shirt; but the aunt was Baba Yaga and she wanted to eat me." "How did you get away, my daughter?" The daughter told him how. When the old man heard all this he grew angry at his wife and shot her to death; and then he and his daughter began to live and prosper. I was there and drank mead and beer; it ran down my moustache, but it never got into my mouth.

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Russian Fairy Tales,
collected by Aleksandr Afanas'ev,
translated by Norbert Guterman,
Random House, New York, 1973

There was once a King who had a son called Muhammad. One day the boy said to his father: 'I wish to marry.' 'That is right,' answered the King, 'but you must wait until your mother has passed the maidens of the harims in review.' 'I would rather choose for myself and see with my own eyes,' objected the prince. So, when the King gave him leave, he mounted his horse, which was as beautiful as if it had come from fairy stock, and rode away from that city.

At the end of two days' journey he came upon a man sitting in a field, who cut leeks while his young daughter bound them into bundles. After greeting, the prince sat down beside the two and asked the girl for water. She rose and fetched him a cup, and he drank. Then, because the maiden pleased him, he turned to her father, saying: 'O sheikh, will you give me the hand of your daughter in marriage?' 'We are your servants,' answered the old man. 'I am rejoiced, O sheikh!' said the delighted prince. 'Have the goodness to stay here while I go to my native city and make preparations for the wedding. I will soon return.'

Prince Muhammad returned to his father, saying: 'I am betrothed to the daughter of the Sultan of leeks.' 'So they have a Sultan, then?' asked the king, and his son replied: 'Yes, and I am going to marry his daughter.' Then cried his father: 'Glory be to Allah, my son, that He has given a Sultan to the leeks! Since the daughter pleases you, we will send your mother to leek-land, to see father leek, mother leek, and the leek girl.' 'Very well,' answered Muhammad.

The Queen set forth and found the daughter of the Sultan of leeks charming in each respect and fitted by Allah to be the consort of a King's son. Her heart went out to the girl and she embraced her, saying: 'I am the Queen, my dear, I am the mother of the prince who visited you a short time ago. I have come to marry you to him.' But the girl replied: 'If your son is a prince, I will not marry him.' 'Why?' asked the astonished Queen. 'Because,' answered the girl, 'I will never wed a man who does not work with his hands.

The Queen returned in anger to the city, and said to her husband: 'The chit of leek-land will not marry our son.' 'Why?' asked the King. 'Because,' answered the Queen bitterly, 'she will only wed one who practises a trade.' 'She is quite right!' exclaimed the King. But the prince fell ill when he learnt of this refusal. So the King ordered the sheikhs of all the corporations into his presence, and said to the first, who was the sheikh of the carpenters: 'You, how long would it take you to teach my son your trade?' 'Two years, at least,' answered the man. The King bade him step aside, and asked the sheikh of the blacksmiths: 'How long would it take you to teach my son your trade?' 'Exactly a year,' replied the man. So the King bade him step aside, and questioned all the other sheikhs in turn; but they all asked one year, two years, three years or four years, in which to teach their trades. The King was about to give way to despair when he saw a little man, obscured by all the rest, who was dancing up and down, and clicking his fingers. 'Why do you dance up and down, and click your fingers?' he demanded, and the little man replied: 'So that our lord the King might notice me. I am poor, and the sheikhs of the corporations did not tell me of this meeting. I am a weaver, and will teach my trade to your son in one hour.'

The King sent away all the sheikhs and provided the weaver with coloured silks and a loom, saying: 'Teach my son your art.' So the weaver turned to the prince, and said: 'Watch me! I do not say do this, or do that; I simply say, open your eyes and watch me! Watch the way my hands go in and out!' In less time than it takes to tell, the weaver wove a handkerchief under the attentive eyes of the lovesick prince; then he said to his pupil:
'Come here now and weave a handkerchief yourself.' The youth sat down immediately at the loom and wove a most remarkable handkerchief, working in pictures of the palace and the gardens. At this point Shahrazad saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But when the nine-hudred-an-fifty-second night had come

She Said:

The weaver took the two hankerchiefs to the king and asked him to decide which was the proince's work and which his own. Without hesitation, the King pointed to the one which bore the design of the palace and the gardens, saying: 'This is your work, and the other one is also your work.' But the waever cried: 'By the merits of your glorious ancestors, O King, I swear that the handsome hanckerchief was woven by your son, and the other one, the ugly one, by me.'

The pleased King appointed the weaver to be sheikh of all the sheikhs of the corporations, and then said to his wife: 'Take our son's work and show it to the daughter of the Sultan of leeks; tell her that he is by trade a waever.'

The prince's mother carried the hankerchief and the message to the leek girl, who marvelled and exclaimed: 'I am ready to marry him now!'

The King's waziers sent for the kadi and bade him write out a marriage contract. The wedding took place, and the prince went in to the leek girl, who bore him numerous sons, each marked upon the thigh with the ressemblance of a leek. Every one of these children learnt a trade, and, consequently, passed his life in prosperous content. But Allah knows all!

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Know, O Commander of the Faithful, that the eldest of my brothers, he who became lame, is called Bakbuk because when he tattles he makes a glucking noise like water coming out of a jar. At one time he was a tailor in Baghdad. He used to do his sewing in a small shop which he rented from a very rich merchant, who himself lived in the top part of the house above the shop. In the basement there was a mill where a miller lived and kept his bullock.

One day, as my brother Bakbuk was sitting sewing in his shop, he chanced to raise his eyes and saw a woman looking out at the passersby from a skylight let into the terrace floor above him. She was thewife of the owner of the building, and her looking forth was like the rising of the young moon. Bakbuk's heart was fired with passion at the sight of her. He could sew no more, but spent all day with his head fixed, looking up at the skylight as if he were an idiot. Next morning he was in his place by dawn, and every time he took a stitch his eye wandered to the skylight, so that he pricked his fingers more than the cloth. For several days he did the same, neither working nor bringing in any money.

It was not long before the young woman understood my brother's feelings and made up her mind to derive both profit and amusement from them. One day, as Bakbuk was sitting there in his customary adoration, she threw him a laughing glance which pierced his heart. He gave her back a languishing look which was so ridiculous that she had to retire precipitately to laugh at her ease. And the fool Bakbuk was overjoyed that day by the conquest which he thought he had made.

Next morning, therefore, my brother was not astonished to see his landlord entering the shop, carrying a great roll of rich silk under his arm. The merchant said: 'I have brought this piece of stuff so that you can sew some shirts for me.' 'Certainly, certainly, they shall be ready this very evening,' answered Bakbuk, who supposed that thelandlord had been sent by his wife to further their intrigue in some way. He set to work so quickly, not allowing himself a moment for food, that twenty beautifully cut and sewn shirts were ready by the evening. The landlord came down to the shop again and asked: 'How much do I owe you?' but just at that moment the young woman appeared secretly at the skylight and signed to Bakbuk with her eyes and brows not to accept any money from her husband. So Bakbuuk refused any payment, although he was extremely poor at the time and the smallest coin would have meant much to him. Yet the ass thought himself very lucky to be able to do the husband's work for dthe love and bright eyes of the wife.

That was only the beginning of my infatuated brother's trials. Next morning the landlord came again and handed a new roll of silk to Bakbuk, saying: 'They tell me at home I must have some new trousers to go with the new shirts, so I have brought you the stuff. Let them be plenty large enough, do not stint the material, and use the finest needlework.' 'I hear and I obey!' answered my brother, and for three whole days he worked fasting, so as to lose no time and also because there was not a single dirham in the house with which to buy food. When he had finished the fine new trousers, he folded them together and carried them joyfully upstairs to the landlord.

It is unnecessary to tell a person of your sagacity, O Commander of the Faithful, that the young woman was in league with her husband to make a laughing-stock of my unfortunate brother and to play himevery trick that she could think of. When the landlord had received the trousers, he pretended to want to pay for them, but just at the right moment the pretty head of his wife appeared round the door and signed again to the tailor to refuse. So Bakbuk said that he would take no sort of payment. The husband withdrew for a moment to confer with his wife and then returned, saying: 'As my wife and I feel that we must repay your splendid services in some way, we have determined to marry you to our white slave girl, that you may become in some sort one of the family. She is both beautiful and submissive.'

My witless Bakbuk thought that this was a clever ruse of the wife to give him free entry to the house, so he accepted without hesitation and was married straightway to the young slave.

When evening came, Bakbuk wished to approach his bride, but she said: 'No, no, it cannot be to-night,' and he was not able to take even a kiss from her. Usually Bakbuk slept in the shop, but that night it had been arranged that the couple should sleep in the millroom, as it was larger; so, when the slave refused to let him lie with her and went upstairs again to her mistress, my brother was obliged to sleep in that unpleasant place alone.

In the morning he was awakened by the loud voice of the miller saying: 'Devil take the bullock! He has had a great deal of rest lately. Now I must harness him up to grind all the accumulated store of corn. My customers will be wanting their flour to-day.' Then, feigning to take my brother for the bullock, he said: 'Up lazy one! Come and be harnessed!' and with that he fastened the dumbfounded Bakbuk by the middle to the pole of the mill and gave him a great blow with the whip, crying: 'Ya Allah!' Feeling the whip sting about his loins, my brother began to low like a bullock and started to turn the mill. For a long time the miller thonged him on, and Bakbuk trotted round and round, lowing dismally and snuffling between the blows just as a bullock does.

In course of time the landlord came down to see what was happening. Satisfied that the plan was going well, he returned to his wife, who sent the slave girl down to my brother. By this time the miller had disappeared, so the young girl unfastened Bakbuk from the mill, saying in tones of the deepest concern: 'My mistress begs me to say that she has just heard of the abominable mistake which has been made. She is desolated, and so am I.' The unhappy bridegroom was so exhausted by the blows and the unusual labour that he could not answer a word.

The slave girl left him alone, and soon the clerk who had drawn up the marriage contract appeared and saluted him, saying: 'Allah grant you a long life and a fortunate marriage! You seem to have passed the happiest of nights, with amusing and intimate embraces I am sure, sweet kisses and fornications from night till day.' 'Allah confound such lying snakes, O thousand fold traitor!' answered my brother. 'Your contract has caused me to turn a mill all night.' The clerk asked for details of this singular thing and, when he had heard them, said: 'I understand it all. Your star does not agree with the star of the young woman.' 'Wretch,' cried Bakbuk, 'get out of this and play your dirty tricks elsewhere!' Then he went up to his shop and began to work sorrowfully to make a little money, he who had worked so joyfully for love.

While he was sitting sewing the white slave came down to him and said: 'My mistress desires you madly. She bids me say that she is about to mount on the terrace for the pleasure of looking at you through the skylight.' At the same moment Bakbuk saw the face of the lady of his love all bathed in tears appearing at the skylight. She wept, saying: 'My dear, my darling, why will you not look at me? Why will you not smile at me? I swear that.I was in no way privy to what happened in the mill. As for this foolish slave, I beg that you will not honour her even with one glance. I and I only shall be yours, my love.' She spoke so sweetly that Bakbuk at last lifted his head and gazed fully at her. Then were all his trials forgotten and his eyes filled with joy through looking on her charms. They spoke a little together, and soon he began to think that his misfortunes had happened to someone else. Bakbuk continued to work assiduously in his own place, sewing shirts and trousers, undergarments and overgarments, for many hours

a day in the hope of seeing his fair tormenter again.

One day the slave girl returned, saying: 'My mistress greets you and would have you know that my master will be away all night at a feast given by one of his friends. She will wait you with loving impatience and lie with you all night in delicious love and amusement.' Hearing this, my all too simple brother thought that he was already in Paradise. Now you must know that the graceless young woman had conceived a plan, with the help of her husband, to get rid of my brother and so avoid all payment for the work he had done for them. The landlord had said to his wife: 'How can we persuade him to visit you, so that I may surprise him and send him up before the wal?' And the wife had answered: 'Leave it to me, and I shall so deceive and compromise him that he shall be shamed throughout all the city.' To think that they should have been at such pains to do him hurt, and the poor fool guess nothing of it! Alas, alas, he knew little of women!

When evening came, the slave girl led Bakbuk to her mistress, who smiled on him, saying: 'As Allah lives, my master, I burn to have you near me!' 'And I burn, too,' said Bakbuk. 'Let us be quick, first to kiss and then…' He had not time to finish his sentence before the door opened and the husband rushed in with two black slaves, who fell upon my brother, bound him, threw him to the floor and belaboured his back with whips. But that was only the beginning; when he had been well trounced, they took him upon their shoulders and carried him before the wali who condemned him to the following punishment: after two hundred stripes had been laid on with rods, he was to be hoisted on the back of a camel and led through all the streets of Bahgdad, preceded by a public crier who should announce in a loud voice: 'Thus shall adulterers be punished!'

This sentence was carried out, and, during the procession, the camel became unmanageable and began to make great jumps about the street. Bakbuk was thrown to the earth and broke his leg; since then he has always walked with a limp. Further, the wali banished him, and he was forced to drag his broken limb away from the city. But just in the nick of time, Commander of the Faithful, I was told of what had happened, so I ran after him and brought him back secretly to the city. Since then I have cured him at my own charges and kept him in food and raiment.

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There was once a woman who could not conceive, for all her husband's assaulting. So one day she prayed to Allah, saying: 'Give me a daughter, even if she be not proof against the smell of flax!' In speaking thus of the smell of flax she meant that she would have a daughter, even if the girl were so delicate and sensitive that the anodyne smell of flax would take hold of her throat and kill her.

Soon the woman conceived and easily bore a daughter, as fair as the rising moon, as pale and delicate as moonlight. When little Sittukhan, for such they called her, grew to be ten years old, the Sultan's son passed beneath her window and saw her and loved her, and went back ailing to the palace. Doctor succeeded doctor fruitlessly beside his bed; but, at last, an old woman, who had been sent by the porter's wife, visited him and said, after close scrutiny: 'You are in love, or else you have a friend who loves you.' 'I am in love,' he answered. 'Tell me her name,' she begged, 'for I may be a bond between you.' 'She is the fair Sittukhan,' he replied; and she comforted him, saying: 'Refresh your eyes and tranquillise your heart, for I will bring you into her presence.'

Then she departed and sought out the girl, who was taking the air before her mother's door. After compliment and greeting, she said: 'Allah protect so much beauty, my daughter! Girls like you, and with such lovely fingers, should learn to spin flax; for there is no more delightful sight than a spindle in spindle fingers.' Then she went her way. At once the girl went to her mother, saying: 'Mother, take me to the mistress.' 'What mistress?' asked her mother. The flax mistress,' answered the girl. 'Do not say such a thing!' cried the woman. 'Flax is a danger to you; its smell is fatal to your breast, a touch of it will kill you.' But her daughter reassured her, saying: 'I shall not die,' and so wept and insisted that her mother sent her to the flax mistress.

The white girl stayed there for a day, learning to spin; and her fellow pupils marvelled at her beauty and the beauty of her fingers. But, when a morsel of flax entered behind one of her nails, she fell swooning to the floor.

They thought her dead and sent to her father and mother, saying: 'Allah prolong your days! Come and take up your daughter, for she is dead.'

The man and his wife tore their garments for the loss of their only joy, and went, beaten by the wind of calamity, to bury her. But the old woman met them, and said: 'You are rich folk and it would be shame on you to lay so fair a girl in dust.' 'What shall we do then?' they asked, and she replied: 'Build her a pavilion in the midst of the waves of the river and couch her there upon a bed, that you may come to visit her.' So they built a pavilion of marble, on columns rising out of the river and planted a garden about it with green lawns, and set the girl upon an ivory bed, and came there many times to weep. What happened next?

The old woman went to the King's son, who still lay sick of love, and said to him: 'Come with me to see the maiden. She waits you, couched in a pavilion above the waves of the river.' The prince rose up and bade his father's wazir come for a walk with him. The two went forth together and followed the old woman to the pavilion. Then the prince said: 'Wait for me outside the door, for I shall not be long.'

He entered the pavilion and began to weep by the ivory bed, recalling verses in the praise of so much beauty. He took the girl's hand to kiss it and, as he passed her slim white fingers through his own, noticed the morsel of flax lodged behind one of her nails. He wondered at this and delicately drew it forth. At this point Shahrazad saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But when the nine-hundred-and-fifty-first night had come

She Said:

At once the girl came out of her swoon and sat up upon the ivorybed. She smiled at the prince, and whispered: 'Where am I?' 'You are with me,' he answered, as he pressed her all against him. He kissed her and lay with her, and they stayed together for forty days and forty nights. Then the prince took leave of his love, saying: 'My wazir is waiting outside the door. I will take him back to the palace and then return.' He found the wazir and walked with him across the garden toward the gate, until he was met by white roses growing with jasmine. The sight of these moved him, and he said to his companion: 'The roses and the jasmine are white with the pallor of Sittukhan's cheeks! Wait here for three days longer, while I go to look upon the cheeks of Sittukhan.' He entered the pavilion again and stayed three days with Sittukhan, admiring the white roses and the jasmine of her cheeks.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him across the garden towards the gate, until the carob, with its long black fruit, rose up to meet him. He was moved by the sight of it, and said: The carobs are long and black like the brows of Sittukhan. O wazir, wait here for three more days, while I go to view Sittukhan's brows.' He entered the pavilion again and stayed three days with the girl, admiring her perfect brows, long and black like carobs hanging two by two.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him towards the gate, until a springing fountain with its solitary jet rose up to meet him. He was moved by this sight and said to the wazir: 'The jet of the fountain is as Sittukhan's waist. Wait here for three days longer, while I go to gaze again upon the waist of Sittukhan.' He went up into the pavilion and stayed three days with the girl, admiring her waist, for it was as the slim jet of the fountain.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him across the garden towards the gate. But Sittukhan, when she saw her lover come again a third time, had said to herself: 'What brings him back?' So now she followed him down the stairs of the pavilion, and hid behind the door which gave on the garden to see what she might see. The prince happened to turn and catch sight of her face; he returned towards her, pale and distracted, and said sadly: 'Sittukhan, Sittukhan, I shall never see you more, never, never again.' Then he departed with the wazir, and his mind was made up that he would not return.

Sittukhan wandered in the garden, weeping, lonely and regretting that she was not dead in very truth. As she walked by the water, she saw something sparkle in the grass and, on raising it, found it to be a talismanic ring. She rubbed the engraved carnelian of it, and the ring spoke, saying: 'Behold, here am I! What do you wish?' 'O ring of Sulaiman,' answered Sittukhan, 'I require a palace next to the palace of the prince who used to love me, and a beauty greater than my own.' 'Shut your eye and open it!' said the ring; and, when the girl had done so, she found herself in a magnificent palace, next to the palace of the prince. She looked in a mirror which was there and marvelled at her beauty.

Then she leaned at the window until her false love should pass by on his horse. When the prince saw her, he did not know her; but he loved her and hastened to his mother, saying: 'Have you not some very beautiful thing which you can take as a present to the lady who dwells in the new palace? And can you not beg her, at the same time, to marry me?' 'I have two pieces of royal brocade,' answered his mother, 'I will take them to her and urge your suit with them.

Without losing an hour, the Queen visited Sittukhan, and said to her: 'My daughter, I pray

you to accept this present, and to marry my son.' The girl called her negress and gave her the pieces of brocade, bidding her cut them up for floor cloths; so the Queen became angry and returned to her own dwelling. When the son learned that the woman of his love had destined the cloth of gold for menial service, he begged his mother to take some richer present, and the Queen paid a second visit, carrying a necklace of unflawed emeralds.

'Accept this gift, my daughter, and marry my son,' she said; and Sittukhan answered: 'O lady, your present is accepted.' Then she called her slave, saying: 'Have the pigeons eaten yet?' 'Not yet, mistress,' answered the slave. 'Take them these green trifles!' said Sittukhan. When she heard this outrageous speech, the Queen cried: 'You have humbled us, my daughter. Now, at least, tell me plainly whether you wish to marry my son or no.' 'If you desire me to marry him,' answered Sittukhan, 'bid him feign death, wrap him in seven winding-sheets, carry him in sad procession through the city, and let your people bury him in the garden of my palace.' 'I will tell him your conditions,' said the Queen.

'What do you think!' cried the mother to her son, when she had returned to him. 'If you wish to marry the girl, you must pretend to be dead, you must be wrapped in seven winding-sheets, you must be led in sad procession through the city, and you must be buried in her garden!' 'Is that all, dear mother?' asked the prince in great delight. 'Then tear your clothes and weep, and cry: "My son is dead!"'

The Queen rent her garments and cried in a voice shrill with pain: 'Calamity and woe! My son is dead!' All the folk of the palace ran to that place and, seeing the prince stretched upon the floor with the Queen weeping above him, washed the body and wrapped it in seven windingsheets. Then the old men and the readers of the Koran came together and formed a procession, which went throughout the city, carrying the youth covered with precious shawls. Finally they set down their burden in Sittukhan's garden and went their way.

As soon as the last had departed, the girl, who had once died of a morsel of flax, whose cheeks were jasmine and white roses, whose brows were carobs two by two, whose waist was the slim jet of the fountain, went down to the prince and unwrapped the seven windingsheets from about him, one by one. Then 'Is it you?' she said. 'You are ready to go very far for women; you must be fond of them!' The prince bit his finger in confusion, but Sittukhan reassured him, saying: 'It does not matter this time!' And they dwelt together in love delight.

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It is related that there was once in Cairo a druggist named Abu Kasim, who was celebrated for his avarice. Though Allah granted him riches and prosperity in his trade, he lived and dressed like the poorest beggar; his garments were a vast collection of rents and scraps; his turban was so old and dirty that it was impossible to tell its original colour; but, of all he wore, his slippers were the most notorious witnesses to his meanness. They were not only studded with great nails and armoured like a machine of war, and had soles mended a thousand times until they were as thick as the head of a hippopotamus, but their uppers were so patched that for twenty years one of the chief labours of the cleverest cobblers and curriers in Cairo had been to keep their component rubbish from disintegrating. Abu Kasim's slippers were so heavy that they had become proverbial throughout all Egypt. When a guest stayed too long, they would say of him: 'His manners are as heavy as Abu Kasim's slippers.' When a pedantic schoolmaster tried to be funny, they would say of him: 'His wit is as heavy as Abu Kasim's slippers.' Porters would sigh, and say of their load: 'It is as heavy as Abu Kasim's slippers.' When a nasty old woman in a harim would stop her master's wives from playing together, they would say: 'She is as heavy as Abu Kasim's slippers.' When a man ate indigestible food and felt a tempest rising in his belly, he would say: 'Allah preserve me, that meat was as heavy as Abu Kasim's slippers!' In fact, folk would drag in Abu Kasim's slippers in a thousand connections when heaviness was in question.

One day Abu Kasim made an unusually good bargain in his business but, instead of giving some little feast as merchants do when Allah has particularly favoured them, he determined, by way of celebration, to visit the hammam, where he had not set his foot in the memory of man. He shut his shop and set forth, carrying his slippers on his back to save their use; when he arrived at the hammam, he left them on the threshold, with all the other footgear, and entered to take his bath. Abu Kasim's skin was so penetrated with filth that the rubbers were a long time in completing their labours upon him, and it was not until sunset that he was ready to depart. When he went forth, he discovered that his slippers were missing and that an exquisite pair in citron yellow leather stood in their place. 'Allah must have known that I have often thought of buying a pair like this,' said Abu Kasim to himself, 'or perhaps someone has exchanged with me by accident.' Delighted at this saving of expense, he put on the yellow slippers and departed.

As a matter of fact, the yellow slippers belonged to the kadi, who was still in the hammam. Also, the slipper guard had found Abu Kasim's monstrosities fuming and stinking on the threshold, and had hidden them in an odd corner. Then, as his duties were over for the day, he had returned home, without thinking of replacing them. When the kadi had finished his bath, the obsequious attendants searched everywhere for his slippers, but could only find Abu Kasim's fabulous footwear, which they instantly recognised. They set out in pursuit and brought him back to the hammam, with the missing property hanging about his neck. The kadi exchanged slippers with Abu Kasim and sent him to prison, where he was obliged to pay the officers an enormous bribe before he could get free. As soon as he returned to his shop, he cursed his luckless slippers and threw them into the Nile, to get rid of them.

A few days afterwards, certain fishermen with great difficulty pulled their nets to shore and found them laden with Abu Kasim's slippers, the nails of which had seriously damaged the mesh. They ran to Abu Kasim's shop and violently threw the slippers inside, with a curse for their unlucky owner. The slippers knocked down a large quantity of flasks, containing rose-water and rare essences, and smashed each into a thousand pieces. The grief of Abu Kasim knew no bounds, and he cried: 'Ill-omened slippers, daughters of my arse, you shall do me no more harm!' So he went out into the garden and began to dig a hole in which to bury them; but one of his neighbours, who had a grudge against him, ran to the wali and informed him that Abu Kasim had dug up a hidden treasure in his garden, without reporting it. The wali believed this, as it chimed with his knowledge of Abu Kasim; so he sent for the unfortunate druggist and, in spite of the poor man's oath that he was only burying his slippers, made him disgorge a large sum of money. At this point Shahrazad saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But when the seven-hundred-and-ninety-fifth night had come

She Said:

Abu Kasim tore his beard in despair and walked with his slippers far into the country, meaning to see the last of them at all costs. After walking for many hours, he threw them into a canal and returned home, supposing that he would never hear of them again. But, as ill luck would have it, the current of the water carried the slippers down to a mill, which was served by the canal, and they violently stopped its working by being caught in the wheels. The owners of the mill ran to repair the damage and found two enormous objects caught in the gears, which they instantly recognised as Abu Kasim's slippers. At their instigation the druggist was heavily fined, to make good the damage, and again thrown into prison. He came forth after richly bribing the officers, and his slippers were returned to him at the gates.

He walked home in a state bordering upon madness and, placing the slippers behind him on the terrace so that he might not see them, leaned on the balustrade and began to consider deeply what he should do with them. While he was cogitating, a dog belonging to one of the neighbours saw the slippers and, leaping from his own terrace on to that of Abu Kasim, took one of them in his jaws and began to play with it. In the course of casting it to and fro the wretched animal sent it flying over the balustrade, and it fell upon the head of an old woman who was passing below. Its enormous weight crushed the old woman flat, as if she had been made of paper, and her relations, recognising Abu Kasim's slipper, appeared before the kadi, demanding either the price of the victim's blood or the death of Abu Kasim. The poor druggist was obliged to pay the full sum demanded by law, and also to give a monstrous bribe to the police in order to escape being sent to prison for a third time.

This last calamity taught him what to do; he went home, took up the fatal slippers and returned to the kadi. When he was in the presence, he lifted the slippers above his head, and cried so violently that the kadi could not forbear to smile: 'Behold, my lord, the cause of all my tribulations! Because of them I shall henceforward have to beg my bread. Therefore I entreat you to make a formal announcement that Abu Kasim no longer owns any slippers and is not responsible for anything which any slippers may do in the future.' So saying, he hurled the slippers into the middle of the hall and ran forth bare-footed, leaving all who were in that court fallen upon their backsides and shaking with laughter. But Allah knows all!

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INSCRIPTION ON A CHEMISE

33·

It is related that al-Amin, brother of the Khalifah al-Mamun, on going one day to visit his uncle al-Mahdi, saw a very beautiful young slave playing the lute, and fell in love with her. Al-Mahdi noticed the impression which the child had made upon his nephew and, wishing to give him an agreeable present, waited until he had gone and then sent the slave after him, loaded with jewels and very richly dressed. But alAmin, knowing that his uncle had a great reputation as a lover of still unripe fruit, imagined that he had had first use of the slave; therefore he did not wish to accept her and sent her back with a letter, saying that apples which the gardener had bitten before they were ripe were not popular in the market.

Al-Mahdi at once undressed the girl, placed a lute in her hand, and sent her back again to al-Amin, dressed only in a silk chemise over which ran this inscription in letters of gold:

No hand has been allowed to touch
The rose I hide,
Though eyes have looked upon it and desired it.
Surely the thought of all this foiled desire
Should feed your fire
And fan your pride
And raise the value of the bud, as such,
If it required it!

On seeing the girl's charms displayed by this delightful garment and on reading the inscription, al-Amin accepted the gift as one of the most pleasant he had ever had.

—

The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night,
rendered into English from the literal and complete
french translation of Dr J.C. Mardrus,
by Powys Mathers, Routledge,
London and New York, 1964

NASREDDIN HODJA AT A BRIDAL FESTIVAL

One day Nasreddin Hodja went to a bridal festival. The master of the feast observing his old and wretched garments, paid him no consideration whatever. The Hodja saw that he had no chance of notice; so going out he hurried to his house, and putting on a splendid pelisse, returned to the place of festival.

No sooner did he enter the door than the master advanced to meet him, and saying, "Welcome, Nasreddin Hodja," with all imaginable honor and reverence placed him at the head of the table, and said, "Please to eat, Lord Hodja."
Forthwith the Hodja taking hold of one of the furs of his pelisse, said,
"Welcome, my pelisse, please to eat, my lord."
The master, looking at the Hodja with great suprise, said, "What are you about?"

Whereupon the Hodja replied, "It is quite evident that all the honor paid is paid to my pelisse, so let it have some food too."

—
George Borrow,
The Turkish Jester; or,
The Pleasantries of Cogia Nasr Eddin Effendi
Ipswich: W. Webber, 1884

So, having cleared the road, Theseus came to Athens. But Medea, being then wedded to Aegeus, plotted against him and persuaded Aegeus to beware of him as a traitor. And Aegeus, not knowing his own son, was afraid and sent him against the Marathonian bull. And when Theseus had killed it, Aegeus presented to him a poison which he had received the selfsame day from Medea. But just as the draught was about to be administered to him, he gave his father the sword, and on recognizing it Aegeus dashed the cup from his hands. And when Theseus was thus made known to his father and informed of the plot, he expelled Medea.

And he was numbered among those who were to be sent as the third tribute to the Minotaur; or, as some affirm, he offered himself voluntarily. And as the ship had a black sail, Aegeus charged his son, if he returned alive, to spread white sails on the ship.

And when he came to Crete, Ariadne, daughter of Minos, being amorously disposed to him, offered to help him if he would agree to carry her away to Athens and have her to wife. Theseus having agreed on oath to do so, she besought Daedalus to disclose the way out of the labyrinth. And at his suggestion she gave Theseus a clue when he went in; Theseus fastened it to the door, and, drawing it after him, entered in. And having found the Minotaur in the last part of the labyrinth, he killed him by smiting him with his fists; and drawing the clue after him made his way out again.

And by night he arrived with Ariadne and the children at Naxos. There Dionysus fell in love with Ariadne and carried her off; and having brought her to Lemnos he enjoyed her, and begat Thoas, Staphylus, Oenopion, and Peparethus.

In his grief on account of Ariadne, Theseus forgot to spread white sails on his ship when he stood for port; and Aegeus, seeing from the acropolis the ship with a black sail, supposed that Theseus had perished; so he cast himself down and died. But Theseus succeeded to the sovereignty of Athens, and killed the sons of Pallas, fifty in number; likewise all who would oppose him were killed by him, and he got the whole government to himself.

On being apprized of the flight of Theseus and his company, Minos shut up the guilty Daedalus in the labyrinth, along with his son Icarus, who had been borne to Daedalus by Naucrate, a female slave of Minos. But Daedalus constructed wings for himself and his son, and enjoined his son, when he took to flight, neither to fly high, lest the glue should melt in the sun and the wings should drop off, nor to fly near the sea, lest the pinions should be detached by the damp.

But the infatuated Icarus, disregarding his father's injunctions, soared ever higher, till, the glue melting, he fell into the sea called after him Icarian, and perished. But Daedalus made his way safely to Camicus in Sicily.

And Minos pursued Daedalus, and in every country that he searched he carried a spiral shell and promised to give a great reward to him who should pass a thread through the shell, believing that by that means he should discover Daedalus. And having come to Camicus in Sicily, to the court of Cocalus, with whom Daedalus was concealed, he showed the spiral shell. Cocalus took it, and promised to thread it, and gave it to Daedalus; and Daedalus fastened a thread to an ant, and, having bored a hole in the spiral shell, allowed the ant to pass through it. But when Minos found the thread passed through the shell, he perceived that Daedalus was with Cocalus, and at once demanded his surrender.

Cocalus promised to surrender him, and made an entertainment for Minos; but after his bath Minos was undone by the daughters of Cocalus; some say, however, that he died through being drenched with boiling water.

—
Apollodorus, Epitome,
translated by Sir James George Frazer, Ed.

BBVI:1-25 Arachnee rejects Minerva

Tritonian Minerva had listened to every word, and approved of the Aonian Muses's song, and their justified indignation. Then she said, to herself, 'To give praise is not enough, let me be praised as well, and not allow my divine powers to be scorned without inflicting punishment.' Her thoughts turned to Arachne, of Maeonia, whom she had heard would not give her due credit, in the art of spinning. The girl was not known for her place of birth, or family, but for her skill. Her father, Idmon of Colophon, dyed the absorbent wool purple, with Phocaean murex. Her mother was dead. She too had been of humble birth, and the father the same. Nevertheless, though she lived in a modest home, in little Hypaepa, Arachne had gained a name for artistry, throughout the cities of Lydia.

Often the nymphs of Mount Tmolus deserted their vine-covered slopes, and the nymphs of the River Pactolus deserted their waves, to examine her wonderful workmanship. It was not only a joy to see the finished cloths, but also to watch them made: so much beauty added to art. Whether at first she was winding the rough yarn into a new ball, or working the stuff with her fingers, teasing out the clouds of wool, repeatedly, drawing them into long equal threads, twirling the slender spindle with practised thumb, or embroidering with her needle, you could see she was taught by Pallas. Yet she denied it, and took offense at the idea of such a teacher. 'Contend with me' she said 'I will not disagree at all if I am beaten'.

Bk VI:26-69 Pallas Minerva challenges Arachne

Pallas Minerva took the shape of an old woman: adding grey hair to her temples, and ageing her limbs, which she supported with a stick. Then she spoke, to the girl, as follows. 'Not everything old age has is to be shunned: knowledge comes with advancing years. Do not reject my advice: seek great fame amongst mortals for your skill in weaving, but give way to the goddess, and ask her forgiveness, rash girl, with a humble voice: she will forgive if you will ask.'

Arachne looked fiercely at her and left the work she was on: scarcely restraining her hands, and with dark anger in her face. Pallas, disguised it is true, received this answer. 'Weak-minded and worn out by tedious old age, you come here, and having lived too long destroys you. Let your daughter-in-law if you have one, let your daughter if you have one, listen to your voice. I have wisdom enough of my own. You think your advice is never heeded: that is my feeling too. Why does she not come herself? Why does she shirk this contest?

The goddess said 'She is here!' and, relinquishing the old woman's form, revealed Pallas Minerva. The nymphs and the Phrygian women worshipped her godhead: the girl alone remained unafraid, yet she did blush, as the sky is accustomed to redden when Aurora first stirs, and, after a while, to whiten at the sun from the east. She is stubborn in her attempt, and rushes on to her fate, eager for a worthless prize. Now, Jupiter's daughter does not refuse, and does not give warning, or delay the contest a moment. Immediately they both position themselves, in separate places, and stretch out the fine threads, for the warp, over twin frames.

The frame is fastened to the cross-beam; the threads of the warp separated with the reed; the thread of the weft is inserted between, in the pointed shuttles that their fingers have readied; and, drawn through the warp, the threads of the weft are beaten into place, struck by the comb's notched teeth. They each work quickly, and, with their clothes gathered in tight, under their breasts, apply skilful arms, their zeal not making it seem like work. There, shades of purple, dyed in Tyrian bronze vessels, are woven into the cloth, and also lighter colours, shading off gradually. The threads that touch seem the same, but the extremes are distant, as when, often, after a rainstorm, the expanse of the sky, struck by the sunlight, is stained by a rainbow in one vast arch, in which a thousand separate colours shine, but the eye itself still cannot see the transitions. There, are inserted lasting threads of gold, and an ancient tale is spun in the web.

Bk VI:70-102 Pallas weaves her web

Pallas Athene depicts the hill of Mars, and the court of the Aeropagus, in Cecrops's Athens, and the old dispute between Neptune and herself, as to who had the right to the city and its name. There the twelve gods sit in great majesty, on their high thrones, with Jupiter in the middle. She weaves the gods with their familiar attributes. The image of Jupiter is a royal one. There she portrays the Ocean god, standing and striking the rough stone, with his long trident, and seawater flowing from the centre of the shattered rock, a token of his claim to the city. She gives herself a shield, a sharp pointed spear, and a helmet for her head, while the aegis protects her breast. She shows an olive-tree with pale trunk, thick with fruit, born from the earth at a blow from her spear, the gods marvelling: and Victory crowns the work.

Then she adds four scenes of contest in the four corners, each with miniature figures, in their own clear colours, so that her rival might learn, from the examples quoted, what prize she might expect, for her outrageous daring. One corner shows ThracianMount Rhodope and Mount Haemus, now icy peaks, once mortal beings who ascribed the names of the highest gods to themselves. A second corner shows the miserable fate of the queen of the Pygmies: how Juno, having overcome her in a contest, ordered her to become a crane and make war on her own people. Also she pictures Antigone, whom Queen Juno turned into a bird for having dared to compete with Jupiter's great consort: neither her father Laomedon, nor her city Ilium were of any use to her, but taking wing as a white stork she applauds herself with clattering beak. The only corner left shows Cinyras, bereaved: and he is seen weeping as he clasps the stone steps of the temple that were once his daughters' limbs. Minerva surrounded the outer edges with the olive wreaths of peace (this was the last part) and so ended her work with emblems of her own tree.

Bk VI:103-128 Arachne weaves hers in reply

The Maeonian girl depicts Europa deceived by the form of the bull: you would have thought it a real bull and real waves. She is seen looking back to the shore she has left, and calling to her companions, displaying fear at the touch of the surging water, and drawing up her shrinking feet. Also Arachne showed Asterie, held by the eagle, struggling, and Leda lying beneath the swan's wings. She added Jupiter who, hidden in the form of a satyr, filled Antiope, daughter of Nycteus with twin offspring; who, as Amphitryon, was charmed by you, Alcmena, of Tiryns; by Danaë, as a golden shower; by Aegina, daughter of Asopus, as a flame; by Mnemosyne, as a shepherd; by Proserpine, Ceres's daughter, as a spotted snake.

She wove you, Neptune, also, changed to a fierce bull for Canace, Aeolus's daughter. In Enipeus's form you begot the Aloidae, and deceived Theophane as a ram. The golden-haired, gentlest, mother of the cornfields, knew you as a horse. The snake-haired mother of the winged horse, knew you as a winged bird. Melantho knew you as a dolphin. She gave all these their own aspects, and the aspects of the place. Here is Phoebus like a countryman, and she shows him now with the wings of a hawk, and now in a lion's skin, and how as a shepherd he tricked Isse, Macareus's daughter. She showed how Bacchus ensnared Erigone with delusive grapes, and how Saturn as the double of a horse begot Chiron. The outer edge of the web, surrounded by a narrow border, had flowers interwoven with entangled ivy.

Bk VI:129-145 Arachne is turned into a spider

Neither Pallas nor Envy itself could fault that work. The golden-haired warrior goddess was grieved by its success, and tore the tapestry, embroidered with the gods' crimes, and as she held her shuttle made of boxwood from Mount Cytorus, she struck Idmonian Arachne, three or four times, on the forehead. The unfortunate girl could not bear it, and courageously slipped a noose around her neck: Pallas, in pity, lifted her, as she hung there, and said these words, 'Live on then, and yet hang, condemned one, but, lest you are careless in future, this same condition is declared, in punishment, against your descendants, to the last generation!' Departing after saying this, she sprinkled her with the juice of Hecate's herb, and immediately at the touch of this dark poison, Arachne's hair fell out. With it went her nose and ears, her head shrank to the smallest size, and her whole body became tiny. Her slender fingers stuck to her sides as legs, the rest is belly, from which she still spins a thread, and, as a spider, weaves her ancient web.

—

Ovid, A. S. Kline's Version

Book 2 , lines 84-128

"Telemachus, thou braggart, unrestrained in daring, what a thing hast thou said, putting us to shame, and wouldest fain fasten reproach upon us! Nay, I tell thee, it is not the Achaean wooers who are anywise at fault, but thine own mother, for she is crafty above all women. For it is now the third year and the fourth will soon pass, since she has been deceiving the hearts of the Achaeans in their breasts. To all she offers hopes, and has promises for each man, sending them messages, but her mind is set on other things. And she devised in her heart this guileful thing also: she set up in her halls a great web, and fell to weaving— fine of thread was the web and very wide; and straightway she spoke among us: "'Young men, my wooers, since goodly Odysseus is dead, be patient, though eager for my marriage, until I finish this robe—I would not that my spinning should come to naught—a shroud for the lord Laertes, against the time when the fell fate of grievous death shall strike him down; lest any of the Achaean women in the land should be wroth with me, if he, who had won great possessions, were to lie without a shroud.' "So she spoke, and our proud hearts consented. Then day by day she would weave at the great web, but by night would unravel it, when she had let place torches by her. Thus for three years she by her craft kept the Achaeans from knowing, and beguiled them; but when the fourth year came as the seasons rolled on, even then one of her women who knew all told us, and we caught her unravelling the splendid web. So she finished it against her will, perforce. Therefore to thee the wooers make answer thus, that thou mayest thyself know it in thine heart, and that all the Achaeans may know. Send away thy mother, and command her to wed whomsoever her father bids, and whoso is pleasing to her. But if she shall continue long time to vex the sons of the Achaeans, mindful in her heart of this, that Athena has endowed her above other women with knowledge of fair handiwork and an understanding heart, and wiles, such as we have never yet heard that any even of the women of old knew, of those who long ago were fair-tressed Achaean women— Tyro and Alcmene and Mycene of the fair crown—of whom not one was like Penelope in shrewd device; yet this at least she devised not aright. For so long shall men devour thy livelihood and thy possessions, even as long as she shall keep the counsel which the gods now put in her heart. Great fame she brings on herself, but on thee regret for thy much substance. For us, we will go neither to our lands nor else whither, until she marries that one of the Achaeans whom she will."

book 19, lines 148-189

"So I spoke, and their proud hearts consented. Then day by day I would weave at the great web, but by night would unravel it, when I had let place torches by me. Thus for three years I kept the Achaeans from knowing, and beguiled them; but when the fourth year came, as the seasons rolled on, as the months waned, and the many days were brought in their course, then verily by the help of my maidens, shameless creatures and reckless, they came upon me and caught me, and upbraided me loudly. So I finished the web against my will perforce. And now I can neither escape the marriage nor devise any counsel more, and my parents are pressing me to marry, and my son frets, while these men devour his livelihood, as he takes note of it all; for by now he is a man, and fully able to care for a household to which Zeus grants honor. Yet even so tell me of thy stock from whence thou art; for thou art not sprung from an oak of ancient story, or from a stone." Then Odysseus of many wiles answered her, and said: "Honored wife of Odysseus, son of Laertes, wilt thou never cease to ask me of my lineage? Well, I will tell thee; though verily thou wilt give me over to pains yet more than those by which I am now held in thrall; for so it ever is, when a man has been far from his country as long as I have now, wandering through the many cities of men in sore distress. Yet even so will I tell thee what thou dost ask and enquire. There is a land called Crete, in the midst of the wine-dark sea, a fair, rich land, begirt with water, and therein are many men, past counting, and ninety cities. They have not all the same speech, but their tongues are mixed. There dwell Achaeans, there great-hearted native Cretans, there Cydonians, and Dorians of waving plumes, and goodly Pelasgians.

—
Homer,
Odyssey.

Bk VI:401-438 The marriage of Procne and Tereus

From such tales as these the company turns immediately to the present, and mourns the loss of Amphion and his children. The mother was blamed, though even then one man, her brother Pelops, is said to have wept for her and, after taking off his tunic, to have shown the ivory, of his left shoulder. This was of flesh, and the same colour as his right shoulder, at the time of his birth. Later, when he had been cut in pieces, by his father, it is said that the gods fitted his limbs together again. They found the pieces, but one was lost, between the upper arm and the neck. Ivory was used in place of the missing part, and by means of that Pelops was made whole.

The princes, of countries to the southwest, near neighbours of Thebes, gathered, and the cities related to Thebes urged their kings to go and offer sympathy. Argos and Sparta, and Peloponnesian Mycenae, Calydon not yet cursed for rejecting Diana, fertileOrchomenos, and Corinth famous for bronze; warlike Messene, Patrae, and low-lying Cleonae, Nelean Pylos, and Troezen not yet ruled by Pittheus; and whichever of the other cities were southwest of the Isthmus, lying between its two seas, or seen to the northeast of the Isthmus, lying between its two seas. But who can believe this? Athens, alone, did nothing. War prevented them doing so. A Barbarian army had crossed the sea and brought terror to the walls of the city of Mopsopius.

Tereus of Thrace routed these Barbarians, with his army of auxiliaries, and won a great name by his victory. Since Tereus was a master of men and riches, and happened to trace his descent from mighty Mars himself, Pandion, king of Athens, made them allies, by giving him his daughter Procne in marriage. Neither Juno, who attends on brides, nor Hymen, nor the three Graces, was there. The Eumenides, the Furies, held torches snatched from a funeral. The Eumenides, the Furies, prepared their marriage bed, and the unholy screech owl brooded over their house, and sat on the roof of their chamber. By this bird-omen, Procne and Tereus were joined. By this bird-omen, they were made parents. Thrace of course rejoiced with them, and they themselves gave thanks to the gods, and the day when Pandion's daughter married her illustrious king, and the day on which Itys their son was born, they commanded to be celebrated as festivals: so, always, our real advantages escape us.

Bk VI:438-485 Tereus's passion for Procne's sister Philomela

Now, Titan, the sun, had guided the turning year through five autumns when Procne said, coaxingly to her husband, 'If any thanks are due me, either send me to see my sister, or let my sister come here. You can promise my father she will return after a brief stay. It would be worth a great deal to me, if you allowed me to see Philomela.' Tereus ordered his ship to sea, and with sail and oar reached the harbour of Cecrops, and landed on the shore of Piraeus.

As soon as he gained access to his father-in-law, right hand was joined to right hand, and they began by wishing each other favourable omens. Tereus had started to tell of the reason for his visit, his wife's request, and promise a speedy return if she were sent back with him, when, see, Philomela entered, dressed in rich robes, and richer beauty, walking as we are used to being told the naiads and dryads of the deep woods do, if only one were to give them like her culture and dress. Seeing the girl, Tereus took fire, just as if someone touched a flame to corn stubble, or burned the leaves, or hay stored in a loft. Her beauty was worthy of it, but he was driven by his natural passion, and the inclination of the people of his region is towards lust: he burnt with his own vice and his nation's. His impulse was to erode her attendants care, and her nurse's loyalty, even seduce the girl herself with rich gifts, to the extent of his kingdom, or rape her and defend the rape in savage war. There was nothing he would not dare, possessed by unbridled desire, nor could he contain the flame in his heart. (...)

Bk VI:486-548 Tereus forces Philomela

(...) So he commanded his daughter and kissed her, and soft tears mingled with his commands. As a token of their promise he took their two right hands and linked them together, and asked them, with a prayer, to remember to greet his absent daughter, and grandson, for him. His mouth sobbing, he could barely say a last farewell, and he feared the forebodings in his mind.

As soon as Philomela was on board the brightly painted ship, and the sea was churned by the oars, and the land left behind them, the barbarian king cried 'I have won! I carry with me what I wished for! He exults, and his passion can scarcely wait for its satisfaction. He never turns his eyes away from her, no differently than when Jupiter's eagle deposits a hare, caught by the curved talons, in its high eyrie: there is no escape for the captive, and the raptor gazes at its prize.

Now they had completed their journey, and disembarked from the wave-worn ship, on the shores of his country. The king took her to a high-walled building, hidden in an ancient forest, and there he locked her away, she, pale and trembling, fearing everything, in tears now, begging to know where her sister was. Then, confessing his evil intent, he overcame her by force, she a virgin and alone, as she called out, again and again, in vain, to her father, her sister, and most of all to the great gods. She quivered like a frightened lamb, that fails to realise it is free, wounded and discarded by a grey wolf, or like a dove trembling, its feathers stained with its blood, still fearing the rapacious claws that gripped it. After a brief while, when she had come to her senses, she dragged at her dishevelled hair, and like a mourner, clawed at her arms, beating them against her breasts. Hands outstretched, she shouted 'Oh, you savage. Oh, what an evil, cruel, thing you have done. Did you care nothing for my father's trust, sealed with holy tears, my sister's affection, my own virginity, your marriage vows? You have confounded everything. I have been forced to become my sister's rival. You are joined to both. Now Procne will be my enemy! Why not rob me of life as well, you traitor, so that no crime escapes you? If only you had done it before that impious act. Then my shade would have been free of guilt. Yet, if the gods above witness such things, if the powers of heaven mean anything, if all is not lost, as I am, then one day you will pay me for this! I, without shame, will tell what you have done. If I get the chance it will be in front of everyone. If I am kept imprisoned in these woods, I will fill the woods with it, and move the stones, that know of my guilt, to pity. The skies will hear of it, and any god that may be there!'

Bk VI:549-570 Philomela is mutilated

The king's anger was stirred by these words, and his fear also. Goaded by both, he freed the sword from its sheath by his side, and seizing her hair gathered it together, to use as a tie, to tether her arms behind her back. Philomela, seeing the sword, and hoping only for death, offered up her throat. But he severed her tongue with his savage blade, holding it with pincers, as she struggled to speak in her indignation, calling out her father's name repeatedly. Her tongue's root was left quivering, while the rest of it lay on the dark soil, vibrating and trembling, and, as though it were the tail of a mutilated snake moving, it writhed, as if, in dying, it was searching for some sign of her. They say (though I scarcely dare credit it) that even after this crime, he still assailed her wounded body, repeatedly, in his lust.

He controlled himself sufficiently to return to Procne, who, seeing him returned, asked where her sister was. He, with false mourning, told of a fictitious funeral, and tears gave it

credence. Procne tore her glistening clothes, with their gold hems, from her shoulders, and put on black robes, and built an empty tomb, and mistakenly brought offerings, and lamented the fate of a sister, not yet due to be lamented in that way.

Bk VI:571-619 The truth is revealed

The sun-god has circled the twelve signs, and a year is past. What can Philomela do? A guard prevents her escape; the thick walls of the building are made of solid stone; her mute mouth can yield no token of the facts. Great trouble is inventive, and ingenuity arises in difficult times. Cleverly, she fastens her thread to a barbarian's loom, and weaves purple designs on a white background, revealing the crime. She entrusts it, when complete, to a servant, and asks her, by means of gestures, to take it to her mistress. She, as she is asked, takes it to Procne, not knowing what it carries inside. The wife of the savage king unrolls the cloth, and reads her sister's terrible fate, and by a miracle keeps silent. Grief restrains her lips, her tongue seeking to form words adequate to her indignation, fails. She has no time for tears, but rushes off, in a confusion of right and wrong, her mind filled with thoughts of vengeance.

It was the time when the young Thracian women used to celebrate the triennial festival of Bacchus. (Night knew their holy rites: by night, Mount Rhodope rang with the high-pitched clashing of bronze). By night the queen left her palace, prepared herself for the rites of the god, and took up the weapons of that frenzied religion. Tendrils of vine wreathed her head; a deerskin was draped over her left side; a light javelin rested on her shoulder. Hurtling through the woods with a crowd of her companions, terrifying, driven by maddening grief, Procne embodies you, Bacchus. She comes at last to the building in the wilderness, and howls out loud, giving the ecstatic cry of Euhoe, breaks the door down, seizes her sister, disguises her with the tokens of a wild Bacchante, hides her face with ivy leaves, and dragging her along with her, frightened out of her wits, leads her inside the palace walls.

When Philomela realised that she had reached that accursed house, the wretched girl shuddered in horror, and her whole face grew deathly pale. Procne, once there, took off the religious trappings; uncovered the downcast face of her unhappy sister, and clutched her in her arms. But Philomela could not bear to lift her eyes, seeing herself as her sister's betrayer. With her face turned towards the ground, wanting to swear by the gods, and call them to witness, that her shame had been visited on her by force, she made signs with her hands in place of speech. Procne burned, and could not control her anger, reproaching her sister for weeping, saying 'Now is not the time for tears, but for the sword, or for what overcomes the sword, if you know of such a thing. I am prepared for any wickedness, sister; to set the palace alight with a torch, and throw Tereus, the author of this, into the midst of the flames; or to cut out his eyes and tongue, and the parts which brought shame to you; or to force out his guilty spirit through a thousand wounds! I am ready for any enormity: but what it should be, I still do not know yet.'

Bk VI:619-652 The pitiless feast

While Procne was going over these things, Itys came to his mother. His arrival suggested what she might do, and regarding him with a cold gaze, she said 'Ah! How like your father you are!' (...)

Without delay, she dragged Itys off, as a tigress does an unweaned fawn, in the dark forests of the Ganges. As they reached a remote part of the great palace, Procne, with an unchanging expression, struck him with a knife, in the side close to the heart, while he stretched out his hands, knowing his fate at the last, crying out 'Mother! Mother!', and reaching out for her neck. That one wound was probably enough to seal his fate, but Philomela opened his throat with the knife. While the limbs were still warm, and retained some life, they tore them to pieces. Part bubble in bronze cauldrons, part hiss on the spit: and the distant rooms drip with grease.

The wife invites the unsuspecting Tereus to the feast, and giving out that it is a sacred rite, practised in her country, where it is only lawful for the husband to be present, she sends away their followers and servants. Tereus eats by himself, seated in his tall ancestral chair, and fills his belly with his own child. And in the darkness of his understanding cries 'Fetch Ithys here'.

Bk VI:653-674 They are transformed into birds

Procne cannot hide her cruel exultation, and now, eager to be, herself, the messenger of destruction, she cries 'You have him there, inside, the one you ask for.' He looks around and questions where the boy is. And then while he is calling out and seeking him, Philomela, springs forward, her hair wet with the dew of that frenzied murder, and hurls the bloodstained head of Itys in his father's face. Nor was there a time when she wished more strongly to have the power of speech, and to declare her exultation in fitting words.

(...)

You might think the Athenian women have taken wing: they have taken wings. One of them, a nightingale, Procne, makes for the woods. The other, a swallow, Philomela, flies to the eaves of the palace, and even now her throat has not lost the stain of that murder, and the soft down bears witness to the blood. Tereus swift in his grief and desire for revenge, is himself changed to a bird, with a feathered crest on its head. An immoderate, elongated, beak juts out, like a long spear. The name of the bird is the hoopoe, and it looks as though it is armed.

—

The Women of Trachis and Philoctetes.
A new translation in verse by Robert Torrance.
Houghton Mifflin. 1966.
Ovid, Metamorphoses Book VI
(A. S. Kline's Version)

DEIANEIRA

Lichas, while you were speaking with the maidens
inside, I have been making ready for you
a long robe to take back to Heracles -
a gift for him which my own hands have woven.
Give it to him and tell him to allow
no other man to put it on before him.
He must not let the sunlight or the fire
beside the altar or the hearth shine on it
until he stands forth visible to all,

showing it to the gods while bulls are slaughtered.
This was my vow: that if I ever saw
or heard that he was coming, I would dress him
properly in this robe, and so present
a new man sacrificing in new garments.
Take him the seal stamped on this signet ring
as token - he will quickly recognize it.
Now go. Remember, first of all, the law
that messengers must not exceed their calling;
and then conduct yourself in such a way
that you may win my thanks as well as his.
(…)
He was gone far away from our city
at sea, while we waited for him
twelve long months, and heard nothing.

Meanwhile his loving wife
with an enduring heart
tearfully wasted away;
but now the furious god of war
has freed her from her time of sorrow.
May he come, may he come! May his vessel,
his many-oared ship, not tarry
until he has reached our city,
leaving the island altar
where he is sacrificing.

May he arrive full of longing,
all fused in one with his specious garb,
his robe smeared over with persuasion.
Deianeira returns from the palace.

Deianeira
My friends, I am afraid that I have gone
too far in everything I have just done.

Chorus
What is it, Deianeira, child of Oeneus?

Deianeira
I am not certain, yet I deeply fear
my hopes of good have brought about great harm.

Chorus
Does it concern your gift to Heracles?

Deianeira
It does. Oh, never recommend that any
be hasty when his action is uncertain!

Chorus
Tell me your worries, if they may be told.

Deianeira
So strange a thing has happened, friends, that if
I tell you, you will marvel at my words.
The tuft of white wool from a fleecy sheep
with which I smeared that stately robe just now,
has vanished - not consumed by anything
within the house; no, self-devoured it crumbled
down from the stone it lay on. I will tell you
more fully how this wonder came to pass.

None of the precepts which the savage Centaur
spoke when the bitter arrow pierced his side
did I forget, but held them in my mind
like words indelibly inscribed in bronze.
I did exactly as he told me to,
and kept the ointment in a hidden place
far from the warmth of sunlight or of fire
until the time should come to smear it on.
I did just so. And then, when I was ready,
I spread it secretly inside the palace
with wool which I had plucked from our own sheep,
and folded up the gift, and placed it in
a hollow, sunless casket, as you saw.

But when I went back in, I saw a sight
beyond the power of speech or understanding.
By chance I had thrown the piece of wool with which
I smeared the robe into the blazing heat
where sunlight fell; and as it warmed, it melted
away to nothing, crumbling into earth
exactly like the little particles
of sawdust which we see when trees are leveled.
It lies there still. And from the place it fell
a curdled clot of bubbling foam seethed up,
like the rich juice squeezed from the purple fruit
of Bacchus' vine, when poured upon the ground.

And so I know not what to think. I see
only that I have done a dreadful deed.
Why - for what reason - should the beast whose death
I caused have shown me kindness as he died?
It cannot be! No, wishing to destroy
his slayer, he deceived me. I have learned
too late, when learning can avail no longer!
For I alone - unless my mind deceives me -
I, to my grief, will bring about his ruin.
That very arrow, I am certain, wounded
Cheiron, a god; and it destroys whatever
creature it touches. The dark blood which flowed
from Nessus' wound contained that poison. Oh,
how can it not kill Heracles? It must!
And yet I am resolved, if he should fall,
to perish with him in the selfsame onslaught.
One who takes pride in being good by nature
will not endure a life marred by dishonor.
(…)

Hyllus
If you must know, then I shall tell you all.
After he plundered Eurytus's city
he carried off the choicest spoils of battle;
and, by a wave-washed headland of Euboea,
Cenaeum, he was dedicating altars
and woodland precincts to his father Zeus
when I, with joyous longing, first beheld him.
He was about to make great sacrifice
when his own herald Lichas came from home
bearing your gift to him, the robe of death.
He put it on as you had told him to,
and held and slaughtered twelve unblemished bulls,
the finest of the spoil; for he had brought
a hundred varied oxen to the altar.
At first - oh wretched man! - he prayed in calm
of mind, rejoicing in his lovely garment;
but when the gory flame began to blaze
up from the offerings on the sappy pine,
sweat covered all his body, and the robe
clung to his sides as if glued by a craftsman
to every joint; and from his very bones
shot up spasmodic, stinging pangs: the poison,
like some detested, bloody snake's, devoured him.
Then he cried out aloud for ill-starred Lichas,
who was in no way guilty of your crime,
to ask what treachery made him bring the robe;
but he, unlucky man! knew not, and answered
he had but brought the gift which you had given.
When Heracles heard this a penetrating
convulsive spasm clutched his lungs, and he
seized Lichas where the ankle joins the foot
and dashed him on a rock swept by the sea
so that the white brain seeped among his hairs,
and all his shattered skull was bloodied over.

—
Sophocles, Trachiniae
Robert Torrance, Ed.

(...)
MESSENGER
Medea, you have perpetrated a terrible, criminal act!
You must flee, flee at once. Take ship or chariot, but go.

MEDEA
What has happened that I need to take off in this way?

MESSENGER
The royal princess is dead just now
a victim of your poisons and her father, Creon, is dead too.

MEDEA
That's wonderful news.
You will have my eternal gratitude and I will call you my friend.

MESSENGER
What are you saying? Have you gone mad, woman?
You have destroyed the royal household,
and are glad to hear it and have no fear of the consequences?

MEDEA
I too have something to say in answer to your words.
But do not rush off, my friend, tell your tale.
How did they die?
You will give me twice as much pleasure
if they died horrible deaths.

MESSENGER
When your two children came in
with their father, and went to the bridal chambers
we slaves were glad, those of us who had been distressed before
by your troubles. From ear to ear talk spread quickly
that you and your husband had called a truce to your earlier quarrel.
One kisses a hand, another the blond heads of the children.
I was beside myself with joy
and followed along to the women's quarters with the children.
And our mistress, to whom we pay respect now instead of you,
before she caught sight of your two children
held her eyes fixed eagerly on Jason.
But then she covered up her face
and turned away her pale cheek,
sickened by the approach of the children.
But your husband was trying to assuage
the rancor and venom of the young woman
by telling her this: "Do not be angry at my family.
Won't you stifle your rage and turn back your face.
Hold your husband's loved ones as your own,
take the gifts, and ask your father to revoke

the sentence of exile from my children, for my sake?"
And she, when she saw the fine garments did not resist
but agreed with her husband in everything,
and before father and children were far from the house,
she scooped up the fine robe and put it on;
then she fitted the golden crown around her curls
and with a shimmering mirror arranged her hair,
smiling at the lifeless image of her face.
And then she gets up from her throne and walks
through the room, stepping lightly on her delicate feet
overjoyed with the gifts, again and again
casting an eye upon her arched foot.
Suddenly there was a terrible sight to see:
the color drains from her face; her step unsteady, she tries
to go back, trembling from head to foot, and barely manages
to stumble into her seat and avoid falling on the ground.
Then an old woman, one of her slaves, thinking a fit
from Pan or one of the gods had seized her,
let out a wail, before she saw white foam
streaming from her mouth and from her eyes
the pupils turned back; and the blood was drained from her skin.
Then there came a terrible cry in answer
to the wail. At once one slave ran to her father's
rooms, another to her new husband,
to tell them what was happening to the bride.
The whole house reverberated with the sound of running feet.
By now a fast walker turning the last lap
of the course would be reaching his goal.
And the poor woman, her eyes glazed over, stirred from her silence
and with a deep groan was trying to get up.
But a twofold trouble was warring against her:
the crown of gold around her head
was spewing out an eerie stream of ravenous fire,
and the fine robes, gifts from your children,
were eating away the poor girl's beautiful flesh.
She stands up and tries to escape, but she is on fire.
She shakes her head this way and that,
trying to throw off the crown, but all the more tightly
the gold holds its bonds; and the fire — when she shook her head —
burned twice as bright.
Overcome by the disaster she falls to the floor,
unrecognizable to the sight of anyone but a parent.
The condition of her eyes and her once lovely face
were murky, and blood dripped
from the top of her head with fire mixed in,
and the flesh was dripping from her bones like sap
from a pine, through the hidden gnawing of the poisons,
a terrible sight. We were all afraid to touch
the body. We had her fate to teach us.
But her poor father in ignorance of the tragedy
suddenly bursts into the room and throws himself on the body.

He cries out and enfolding her in his arms
he kisses her and speaks to her, “My poor child,
which of the gods has mangled you so horribly?
Who has made me an aged tomb, to grieve for you.
Ah me let me die with you, my child.”
And when he stopped his weeping and wailing
he wanted to raise up his old limbs
but was held back by the fine robes like ivy
by the shoots of laurel. The struggle was hair-raising.
He wanted to get up on his feet
but she held him fast. If he tried to use force
she tore the aged flesh from his bones.
After a time he was exhausted and the poor man
let go of life. He was not strong enough to fight the disaster.
They lie dead together, child and aged father
beside her. A tragedy that makes you want to cry.

—
Euripides
http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/medea.trans.print.shtml

The Marquis of Saluzzo, overborne by the entreaties of his vassals, consents to take a wife, but, being minded to please himself in the choice of her, takes a husbandman's daughter. He has two children by her, both of whom, he causes her to believe, he has put to death. Afterwards, feigning to be tired of her and to have taken another wife, he turns her out of doors in her shift and brings his daughter into the house in guise of his bride; but, finding her patient under it all, he brings her home again, and shews her their children, now grown up, and honours her, and causes her to be honoured, as Marchioness.

Ended the king's long story, with which all seemed to be very well pleased, quoth Dioneo with a laugh: -- "The good man that looked that night to cause the bogey's tail to droop, would scarce have contributed two pennyworth of all the praise you bestow on Messer Torello:" then, witting that it now only remained for him to tell, thus he began: --

Gentle my ladies, this day, meseems, is dedicate to Kings and Soldans and folk of the like quality; wherefore, that I stray not too far from you, I am minded to tell you somewhat of a Marquis; certes, nought magnificent, but a piece of mad folly, albeit there came good thereof to him in the end. The which I counsel none to copy, for that great pity 'twas that it turned out well with him.

There was in olden days a certain Marquis of Saluzzo, Gualtieri by name, a young man, but head of the house, who, having neither wife nor child, passed his time in nought else but in hawking and hunting, and of taking a wife and begetting children had no thought; wherein he should have been accounted very wise: but his vassals, brooking it ill, did oftentimes entreat him to take a wife, that he might not die without an heir, and they be left without a lord; offering to find him one of such a pattern, and of such parentage, that he might marry with good hope, and be well content with the sequel.

To whom: -- " My friends," replied Gualtieri, "you enforce me to that which I had resolved never to do, seeing how hard it is to find a wife, whose ways accord well with one's own, and how plentiful is the supply of such as run counter thereto, and how grievous a life he leads who chances upon a lady that matches ill with him. And to say that you think to know the daughters by the qualities of their fathers and mothers, and thereby you would argue to provide me with a wife to my liking, is but folly; for I wot not how you may penetrate the secrets of their mothers so as to know their fathers; and granted that you do know them, daughters oftentimes resemble neither of their parents.

"However, as you are minded to rivet these fetters upon me, I am content that so it be; and that I may have no cause to reproach any but myself, should it turn out ill, I am resolved that my wife shall be of my own choosing; but of this rest assured, that, no matter whom I choose, if she receive not from you the honour due to a lady, you shall prove to your great cost, how sorely I resent being thus constrained by your importunity to take a wife against my will."

The worthy men replied that they were well content, so only he would marry without more ado. And Gualtieri, who had long noted with approval the mien of a poor girl that dwelt on a farm hard by his house, and found her fair enough, deemed that with her he might pass a tolerably happy life. Wherefore he sought no further, but forthwith resolved to marry her; and having sent for her father, who was a very poor man, he contracted with him to take her to wife.

Which done, Gualtieri assembled all the friends he had in those parts, and: -- " My friends," quoth he, "you were and are minded that I should take a wife, and rather to comply with your wishes, than for any desire that I had to marry, I have made up my mind to do so. You remember the promise you gave me, to wit, that, whomsoever I should take, you would pay her the honour due to a lady. Which promise I now require you to keep, the time being come when I am to keep mine. I have found hard by here a maiden after mine own heart, whom I purpose to take to wife, and to bring hither to my house in the course of a few days. Wherefore bethink you, how you may make the nuptial feast splendid, and welcome her with all honour; that I may confess myself satisfied with your observance of your promise, as you will be with my observance of mine."

The worthy men, one and all, answered with alacrity that they were well content, and that, whoever she might be, they would entreat her as a lady, and pay her all due honour as such. After which, they all addressed them to make goodly and grand and gladsome celebration of the event, as did also Gualtieri. He arranged for a wedding most stately and fair, and bade thereto a goodly number of his friends and kinsfolk, and great gentlemen, and others, of the neighbourhood and therewithal he caused many a fine and costly robe to be cut and fashioned to the figure of a girl who seemed to him of the like proportions as the girl that he purposed to wed; and laid in store, besides, of girdles and rings, with a costly and beautiful crown, and all the other paraphernalia of a bride.

The day that he had appointed for the wedding being come, about half tierce he got him to horse with as many as had come to do him honour, and having made all needful dispositions: -- " Gentlemen," quoth he, "'tis time to go bring home the bride."

And so away he rode with his company to the village; where, being come to the house of the girl's father, they found her returning from the spring with a bucket of water, making all the haste she could, that she might afterwards go with the other women to see Gualtieri's bride come by. Whom Gualtieri no sooner saw, than he called her by her name, to wit, Griselda, and asked her where her father was.

To whom she modestly made answer: -- "My lord, he is in the house."

Whereupon Gualtieri dismounted, and having bidden the rest await him without, entered the cottage alone; and meeting her father, whose name was Giannucolo: -- "I am come," quoth he, "to wed Griselda, but first of all there are some matters I would learn from her own lips in thy presence."

He then asked her, whether, if he took her to wife, she would study to comply with his wishes, and be not wroth, no matter what he might say or do, and be obedient, with not a few other questions of a like sort to all which she answered, ay.

Whereupon Gualtieri took her by the hand, led her forth, and before the eyes of all his company, and as many other folk as were there, caused her to strip naked, and let bring the garments that he had had fashioned for her, and had her forthwith arrayed therein -- and upon her unkempt head let set a crown; and then, while all wondered: -- "Gentlemen," quoth he, "this is she whom I purpose to make my wife, so she be minded to have me for husband."

Then, she standing abashed and astonied, he turned to her, saying: -- "Griselda, wilt thou have me for thy husband?"

To whom: -- "Ay, my lord," answered she.

"And I will have thee to wife," said he, and married her before them all. And having set her upon a palfrey, he brought her home with pomp.

The wedding was fair and stately, and had he married a daughter of the King of France, the feast could not have been more splendid. It seemed as if, with the change of her garb, the bride had acquired a new dignity of mind and mien. She was, as we have said, fair of form and feature; and therewithal she was now grown so engaging and gracious and debonair, that she shewed no longer as the shepherdess, and the daughter of Giannucolo, but as the daughter of some noble lord, insomuch that she caused as many as had known her before to marvel. Moreover, she was so obedient and devoted to her husband, that he deemed himself the happiest and luckiest man in the world.

And likewise so gracious and kindly was she to her husband's vassals, that there was none of them but loved her more dearly than himself, and was zealous to do her honour, and prayed for her welfare and prosperity and aggrandisement, and instead of, as erstwhile, saying that Gualtieri had done foolishly to take her to wife, now averred that he had not his like in the world for wisdom and discernment, for that, save to him, her noble qualities would ever have remained hidden under her sorry apparel and the garb of the peasant girl. And in short she so comported herself as in no long time to bring it to pass that, not only in the marquisate, but far and wide besides, her virtues and her admirable conversation were matter of common talk, and, if aught had been said to the disadvantage of her husband, when he married her, the judgment was now altogether to the contrary effect.

She had not been long with Gualtieri before she conceived and in due time she was delivered of a girl; whereat Gualtieri made great cheer. But, soon after, a strange humour took possession of him, to wit, to put her patience to the proof by prolonged and intolerable hard usage; wherefore he began by afflicting her with his gibes, putting on a vexed air, and telling her that his vassals were most sorely dissatisfied with her by reason of her base condition, and all the more so since they saw that she was a mother, and that they did nought but most ruefully murmur at the birth of a daughter.

Whereto Griselda, without the least change of countenance or sign of discomposure, made answer: -- "My lord, do with me as thou mayst deem best for thine own honour and comfort, for well I wot that I am of less account than they, and unworthy of this honourable estate to which of thy courtesy thou hast advanced me." By which answer Gualtieri was well pleased, witting that she was in no degree puffed up with pride by his, or any other's, honourable entreatment of her.

A while afterwards, having in general terms given his wife to understand that the vassals could not endure her daughter, he sent her a message by a servant. So the servant came, and: -- "Madam," quoth he with a most dolorous mien, "so I value my life, I must needs do my lord's bidding. He has bidden me take your daughter," and he said no more, but the lady by what she heard, and read in his face, and remembered of her husband's words, understood that he was bidden to put the child to death.

Whereupon she presently took the child from the cradle, and having kissed and blessed her, albeit she was very sore at heart, she changed not countenance, but placed it in the servant's arms, saying: -- "See that thou leave nought undone that my lord and thine has charged thee to do, but leave her not so that the beasts and the birds devour her, unless he have so bidden thee."

So the servant took the child, and told Gualtieri what the lady had said; and Gualtieri, marvelling at her constancy, sent him with the child to Bologna, to one of his kinswomen, whom he besought to rear and educate the child with all care, but never to let it be known whose child she was.

Soon after it befell that the lady again conceived, and in due time was delivered of a son, whereat Gualtieri was overjoyed. But, not content with what he had done, he now even more poignantly afflicted the lady; and one day with a ruffled mien: -- "Wife," quoth he, "since thou gavest birth to this boy, I may on no wise live in peace with my vassals, so bitterly do they reproach me that a grandson of Giannucolo is to succeed me as their lord; and therefore I fear that, so I be not minded to be sent a-packing hence, I must even do herein as I did before, and in the end put thee away, and take another wife."

The lady heard him patiently, and answered only: "My lord, study how thou mayst content thee and best please thyself, and waste no thought upon me, for there is nought I desire save in so far as I know that 'tis thy pleasure."

Not many days after, Gualtieri, in like manner as he had sent for the daughter, sent for the son, and having made a shew of putting him to death, provided for his, as for the girl's, nurture at Bologna. Whereat the lady shewed no more discomposure of countenance or speech than at the loss of her daughter: which Gualtieri found passing strange, and inly affirmed that there was never another woman in the world that would have so done. And but that he had marked that she was most tenderly affectionate towards her children, while 'twas well pleasing to him, he had supposed that she was tired of them, whereas he knew that 'twas of her discretion that she so did.

His vassals, who believed that he had put the children to death, held him mightily to blame for his cruelty, and felt the utmost compassion for the lady. She, however, said never aught to the ladies that condoled with her on the death of her children, but that the pleasure of him that had begotten them was her pleasure likewise.

Years not a few had passed since the girl's birth, when Gualtieri at length deemed the time come to put his wife's patience to the final proof. Accordingly, in the presence of a great company of his vassals he declared that on no wise might he longer brook to have Griselda to wife, that he confessed that in taking her he had done a sorry thing and the act of a stripling, and that he therefore meant to do what he could to procure the Pope's dispensation to put Griselda away, and take another wife: for which cause being much upbraided by many worthy men, he made no other answer but only that needs must it so be.

Whereof the lady being apprised, and now deeming that she must look to go back to her father's house, and perchance tend the sheep, as she had aforetime, and see him, to whom she was utterly devoted, engrossed by another woman, did inly bewail herself right sorely but still with the same composed mien with which she had borne Fortune's former buffets, she set herself to endure this last outrage.

Nor was it long before Gualtieri by counterfeit letters, which he caused to be sent to him from Rome, made his vassals believe that the Pope had thereby given him a dispensation to put Griselda away, and take another wife. Wherefore, having caused her to be brought before him, he said to her in the presence of not a few: -- "Wife, by license granted me by the Pope, I am now free to put thee away, and take another wife; and, for that my forbears have always been great gentlemen and lords of these parts, whereas thine have ever been husbandman, I purpose that thou go back to Giannucolo's house with the dowry that thou broughtest me; whereupon I shall bring home a lady that I have found, and who is meet to be my wife."

'Twas not without travail most grievous that the lady, as she heard this announcement, got the better of her woman's nature, and suppressing her tears, made answer: -- "My lord, I ever knew that my low degree was on no wise congruous with your nobility, and acknowledged

that the rank I had with you was of your and God's bestowal, nor did I ever make as if it were mine by gift, or so esteem it, but still accounted it as a loan. 'Tis your pleasure to recall it, and therefore it should be, and is, my pleasure to render it up to you. So, here is your ring, with which you espoused me; take it back. You bid me take with me the dowry that I brought you; which to do will require neither paymaster on your part nor purse nor packhorse on mine; for I am not unmindful that naked was I when you first had me. And if you deem it seemly that that body in which I have borne children, by you begotten, be beheld of all, naked will I depart; but yet, I pray you, be pleased, in guerdon of the virginity that I brought you and take not away, to suffer me to bear hence upon my back a single shift -- I crave no more -- besides my dowry."

There was nought of which Gualtieri was so fain as to weep; but yet, setting his face as a flint, he made answer: -- "I allow thee a shift to thy back; so get thee hence." All that stood by besought him to give her a robe, that she, who had been his wife for thirteen years and more, might not be seen to quit his house in so sorry and shameful a plight, having nought on her but a shift. But their entreaties went for nothing: the lady in her shift, and barefoot and bareheaded, having bade them adieu, departed the house, and went back to her father amid the tears and lamentations of all that saw her.

Giannucolo, who had ever deemed it a thing incredible that Gualtieri should keep his daughter to wife, and had looked for this to happen every day, and had kept the clothes that she had put off on the morning that Gualtieri had wedded her, now brought them to her; and she, having resumed them, applied herself to the petty drudgery, of her father's house, as she had been wont, enduring with fortitude this cruel visitation of adverse Fortune.

Now no sooner had Gualtieri dismissed Griselda, than he gave his vassals to understand that he had taken to wife a daughter of one of the Counts of Panago. He accordingly made great preparations as for the nuptials, during which he sent for Griselda. To whom, being come, quoth he: -- "I am bringing hither my new bride, and in this her first home-coming I purpose to shew her honour; and thou knowest that women I have none in the house that know how to set chambers in due order, or attend to the many other matters that so joyful an event requires; wherefore do thou, that understandest these things better than another, see to all that needs be done, and bid hither such ladies as thou mayst see fit, and receive them, as if thou wert the lady of the house, and then, when the nuptials are ended, thou mayst go back to thy cottage."

Albeit each of these words pierced Griselda's heart like a knife, for that, in resigning her good fortune, she had not been able to renounce the love she bore Gualtieri, nevertheless: -- "My lord, she made answer, "I am ready and prompt to do your pleasure."

And so, clad in her sorry garments of coarse romagnole, she entered the house, which, but a little before, she had quitted in her shift, and addressed her to sweep the chambers, and arrange arras and cushions in the hall and make ready the kitchen, and set her hand to everything, as if she had been a paltry serving-wench: nor did she rest until she had brought all into such meet and seemly trim as the occasion demanded. This done, she invited in Gualtieri's name all the ladies of those parts to be present at his nuptials, and awaited the event.

The day being come, still wearing her sorry weeds, but in heart and soul and mien the lady, she received the ladies as they came, and gave each a gladsome greeting.

Now Gualtieri, as we said, had caused his children to be carefully nurtured and brought up by a kinswoman of his at Bologna, which kinswoman was married into the family of the Counts of Panago and, the girl being now twelve years old, and the loveliest creature that ever was seen, and the boy being about six years old, he had sent word to his kinswoman's husband at Bologna, praying him to be pleased to come with this girl and boy of his to Saluzzo, and to see that he brought a goodly and honourable company with him, and to give all to understand that he brought the girl to him to wife, and on no wise to disclose to any, who she really was.

The gentleman did as the Marquis bade him, and within a few days of his setting forth arrived at Saluzzo about breakfast-time with the girl and her brother, and a noble company, and found all the folk of those parts, and much people besides, gathered there in expectation of Gualtieri's new bride. Who, being received by the ladies, was no sooner come into the hall, where the tables were set, than Griselda advanced to meet her, saying with hearty cheer: -- "Welcome, my lady."

So the ladies, who had with much instance, but in vain, besought Gualtieri, either to let Griselda keep in another room, or at any rate to furnish her with one of the robes that had been hers, that she might not present herself in such a sorry guise before the strangers, sate down to table; and the service being begun, the eyes of all were set on the girl, and every one said that Gualtieri had made a good exchange, and Griselda joined with the rest in greatly commending her, and also her little brother.

And now Gualtieri, sated at last with all that he had seen of his wife's patience, marking that this new and strange turn made not the least alteration in her demeanor, and being well assured that 'twas not due to apathy, for he knew her to be of excellent understanding, deemed it time to relieve her of the suffering which he judged her to dissemble under a resolute front; and so, having called her to him in presence of them all he said with a smile: -- "And what thinkst thou of our bride? "

"My lord," replied Griselda, "I think mighty well of her; and if she be but as discreet as she is fair -- and so I deem her -- I make no doubt but you may reckon to lead with her a life of incomparable felicity; but with all earnestness I entreat you, that you spare her those tribulations which you did once inflict upon another that was yours, for I scarce think she would be able to bear them, as well because she is younger, as for that she has been delicately nurtured, whereas that other had known no respite of hardship since she was but a little child."

Marking that she made no doubt but that the girl was to be his wife, and yet spoke never a whit the less sweetly, Gualtieri caused her to sit down beside him, and: -- "Griselda," said he, ""'Tis now time that thou see the reward of thy long patience, and that those, who have deemed me cruel and unjust and insensate, should know that what I did was done of purpose aforethought, for that I was minded to give both thee and them a lesson, that thou mightst learn to be a wife, and they in like manner might learn how to take and keep a wife, and that I might beget me perpetual peace with thee for the rest of my life; whereof being in great fear, when I came to take a wife, lest I should be disappointed, I therefore, to put the matter to the proof, did, and how sorely thou knowest, harass and afflict thee. And since I never knew thee either by deed or by word to deviate from my will, I now, deeming myself to have of thee that assurance of happiness which I desired, am minded to restore to thee at once all that, step by step, I took from thee, and by extremity of joy to compensate the tribulations that I inflicted on thee.

"Receive, then, this girl whom thou supposest to be my bride, and her brother, with glad heart, as thy children and mine. These are they, whom by thee and many another it has long been supposed that I did ruthlessly to death, and I am thy husband, that loves thee more

dearly than aught else, deeming that other there is none that has the like good cause to be well content with his wife."

Which said, he embraced and kissed her; and then, while she wept for joy, they rose and hied them there where sate the daughter, all astonied to hear the news, whom, as also her brother, they tenderly embraced, and explained to them, and many others that stood by, the whole mystery. Whereat the ladies, transported with delight, rose from table and betook them with Griselda to a chamber, and, with better omen, divested her of her sorry garb, and arrayed her in one of her own robes of state; and so, in guise of a lady (howbeit in her rags she had shewed as no less) they led her back into the hall.

Wondrous was the cheer which there they made with the children; and, all overjoyed at the event, they revelled and made merry amain, and prolonged the festivities for several days; and very discreet they pronounced Gualtieri, albeit they censured as intolerably harsh the probation to which he had subjected Griselda, and most discreet beyond all compare they accounted Griselda.

Some days after, the Count of Panago returned to Bologna, and Gualtieri took Giannucolo from his husbandry, and established him in honour as his father-in-law, wherein to his great solace he lived for the rest of his days. Gualtieri himself, having mated his daughter with a husband of high degree, lived long and happily thereafter with Griselda, to whom he ever paid all honour.

Now what shall we say in this case but that even into the cots of the poor the heavens let fall at times spirits divine, as into the palaces of kings souls that are fitter to tend hogs than to exercise lordship over men? Who but Griselda had been able, with a countenance not only tearless, but cheerful, to endure the hard and unheard-of trials to which Gualtieri subjected her? Who perhaps might have deemed himself to have made no bad investment, had he chanced upon one, who, having been turned out of his house in her shift, had found means so to dust the pelisse of another as to get herself thereby a fine robe.

—
Giovanni Boccaccio
The Decameron,
Tenth Day, Tenth Tale
Tr. John Payne. London, 1906.
(Analogue of Chaucer's Clerk's Tale)

PENTAMERONE, FIFTH VERSION OF THE FIFTH DAY

There once lived a great lord who was blessed with the birth of a beautiful infant daughter, whom he named Talia. The lord sent for wise men and astrologers to foretell what fate had in store for his daughter, and after they had consulted together and cast her horoscope, they told the lord that Talia would be put in great danger by a splinter of flax. The lord then decreed that no flax or hemp, or anything of the kind, should be brought into the house; he thought that by doing so he could protect his daughter from her fate.

One day, after Talia had grown up into a beautiful young girl, she was looking out the window when she saw an old woman pass by, spinning on a spindle. Talia was so curious about the implement, having never seen one, that she called out to the old woman to stop and let her see it. Talia begged to be allowed to stretch the flax, but as soon as she did so, a splinter of flax went under her nail, and she dropped down dead. When the frightened old woman saw what had happened, she ran quickly out of the house.

When the unhappy father heard about this disastrous turn of events, he was devastated. He had Talia's body laid out in her most beautiful clothes, and placed upon a brocade-covered dais. Unable to bear the thought of committing her body to the ground, he had the throne placed in a palatial room in one of his country estates, and then abandoned the estate forever.

After some time had passed, a king was one day hunting in the forest near the estate, and his falcon escaped from him and flew in the window of the palace. It would not return when he called for it, so the king sent a servant to knock at the palace door, intending to ask for the bird's return. There was no answer at the door, and the house was locked fast, so the young king at last told his servants he himself would scale the wall and climb in at the window in order to retrieve the bird. So he climbed in and wandered the palace from room to room, but he found nothing and no one. At last he came to a large, beautiful drawing room, where he found an enchanting girl who seemed to be sleeping. He called to her, but she would not wake. As he looked at her, and tried to wake her, she seemed so incredibly lovely to him that he could not help desiring her, and he began to grow hot with lust. He gathered her in his arms and carried her to a bed, where he made love to her. Leaving her on the bed, he left the palace and returned to his own city, where pressing business for a long time made him think no more about the incident.

But Talia, who was not dead, but merely unconscious, had become pregnant, and after nine months she gave birth to twins, as beautiful a boy and girl as ever were born. Kindly fairies attended the birth, and put the babies to suck at their mother's breast. One day, one of the infants, not being able to find the nipple, began to suck at his mother's finger. He sucked with such force that he drew out the splinter of flax, and Talia awoke, just as if from a long sleep. When she saw the babies, she did not know what had happened or how they had come to her, but she embraced them with love, and nursed them until they were satisfied. She named the infants Sun and Moon. The kindly fairies continued to attend her, providing her with food and drink, which appeared as if delivered by unseen servants.

The king at last remembered Talia, and thought to himself that he would go again to the palace in the wood, to see if the lovely lady was still sleeping there. Saying he was going hunting, he journeyed to the place, and was overjoyed to find her awake, and with two charming little toddlers. He told Talia who he was, and what had happened, and how she had come to be a mother all unknowing. As they conversed, they both realized they were forming a stronger bond of friendship and love, and after a few days, when it came time for the young king to leave, he promised to return for her soon, and bring her to his kingdom. As he journeyed back, he found he was indeed desperately in love with Talia and his two children, and he could hardly sleep for thinking of them, and when he did sleep he called out their names in his dreams.

Now the young king already had a wife, who had become suspicious when he did not return for several days from the hunt, and hearing him call strange names in his sleep, she was overcome with anger and jealousy. She called the king's secretary to her, and said, "You are between a rock and a hard place, young man. If you will betray your king, and tell me who his lover is, I will give you riches beyond your wildest dreams. But if you do not tell me, your life will be worth nothing, for I will have you killed." The secretary was filled with fear, but in the end he valued his own life above honor, and he told her what the king had told him in confidence. The queen, once she had heard it, sent the secretary to Talia, with a supposed message from the king, saying, "Send the children to me now, for I miss them and want to see them." Talia, overjoyed that her lover loved his children so much, obeyed the summons, and sent the little ones back with the young man.

The queen, hating the children even more when she saw how beautiful they were, took them to the kitchen and told the cook to kill them, and to prepare them as tasty dishes for the king's supper. The cook was horrified at the suggestion, and though he agreed to it, he secretly took the children to his wife, and told her to hide them. Then he killed two newborn lambs and cooked them in a number of delicious ways. When the king came to the dinner table, the queen with great pleasure asked that the dishes be served to her husband, and when he ate with evident relish, her joy knew no bounds, and she kept pressing him to eat more, saying, "You are eating what is your own." After she had said this several times, the king began to get annoyed with her, not knowing her insinuation, and he finally said angrily, "I know very well I am eating what is my own, because you brought nothing with you into this house!" And he got up and stormed out, staying for several days in a nearby villa to get over his anger.

The queen meanwhile dispatched the secretary to fetch Talia herself, sending along a false message from the king that he longed for her and could no longer bear to be parted from her. Talia obeyed with pleasure, and she herself felt a great longing to be with her lord, who was so loving and kind to her, but imagine her horror when she was brought to the queen, whose very face was burning with passionate hatred. The queen said to her, "Are you the whore who has been enjoying my husband? Get ready to be welcomed in hell, because you will soon be going there." Talia tried to reason with her, telling her how it had come to pass that she had become the king's lover, while she was asleep, but the queen merely laughed in desbelief, and commanded that a huge fire be lit in the palace courtyard, and that Talia be cast into it.

Talia, stalling for time, knelt before the queen, and asked as a last request that she be allowed to take off her rich garments before she was cast into the fire. The queen felt no pity for poor Talia, but she had noticed that Talia's dress was very beautiful, and encrusted with jewels, so she agreed that Talia should be allowed to disrobe, thinking that she would keep the garments for herself afterward. Talia began very slowly to take off her clothes. As she removed each garment, she screamed, and tears rolled down her cheeks, thinking of the horrors she was about to endure, and with each garment, her screams grew louder and more heartrending. The king was just returning to the palace after his absence, and he heard the screaming. Following the sound, he came upon the queen and the weeping Talia, who had now removed all but her shift. He demanded an explanation, whereupon the queen reported that he had unknowingly eaten his own children, and that his mistress was about to be burned for a whore.

When the wretched king heard what had transpired, he was beside himself with grief, crying, “How could I have eaten my own sweet babes? Why didn’t my very veins cry out in recognition? You venomous, evil woman! How could you have done such a dreadful thing?” Saying this, he commanded that the queen herself should be cast into the fire that she had prepared for the innocent Talia, and his secretary with her, for his part in the wicked plot. The last to be burned was to be the cook, whom the king believed had willingly slaughtered his children, but when the cook was dragged forth, he protested, crying out, “Do not reward my faithfulness with this horrible punishment, Sire. I saved your children. They are not dead, for I hid them with my wife.” The joyful king replied, “If what you say is true, you will be rewarded as no man has ever been rewarded before.” The cook then called his wife to bring Sun and Moon to the king, who covered them with kisses and caresses; in fact, he could not get enough of kissing and embracing both the children and their mother, as he gathered them all into his arms. He gave the cook a rich reward, and made him a gentlemen. And of course he married Talia, who lived a long and happy life with her husband and children, always knowing full well that “The person who is favored by fortune has good luck even while sleeping.”

—
“Sun, Moon, and Talia”,
Pentamerone,
Fifth Diversion of the Fifth Day
Giambattista Basile

DONKEY-SKIN

TO THE MARQUISE DE LAMBERT

Some lofty persons seldom smile,
And cannot bear to give their time,
Regarding literary style,
To anything that's not sublime.
With views like theirs I can't agree.
The highest minds, it seems to me,
May sometimes condescend to go
To watch, let's say, a puppet-show,
Without incurring loss of face.
Given the proper time and place,
Sublimity may suit less well
Than some diverting bagatelle.
Nor should it cause us much surprise
That men of sense, at times oppressed
By hours of work, should think it wise
To free themselves from reason's bonds,
And pleasantly be lulled to rest
By some old tale of maids distressed,
Of ogres, spells, and magic wands.
Ignoring, then, the blame I may incur
For wasting time, I'll do as you prefer,
Madame; so let me now begin
The tale, in full, of Donkey-Skin.

There ruled a mighty king in days of yore,
Greater than any who had ruled before;
Well-loved in peace, in war arousing fear,
No other king could claim to be his peer.
With enemies subdued, his triumphs made
A shield for peaceful virtues, arts, and trade,
And brought prosperity in place of strife.
The charm and beauty of his faithful wife,
As gentle and as kind as she was fair,
Entranced him still: at home he had the air
Less of a king with consort at his side,
And more the bridegroom with his radiant bride.
The union of this loving pair
Produced no other child but one,
And that a daughter, not a son;
In virtue, though, beyond compare:
And so her parents did not much repine
That she alone would carry on their line.

Throughout the palace of this king
Magnificence was everything.
Footmen and courtiers by the score
Were swarming in each corridor;

Great stables had been built to hold
Each and every breed of horse,
In many sizes, all, of course,
Caparisoned in cloth of gold.
A truly striking sight was there:
The place of honour was reserved
For Donkey Ned with wagging ear.
You think this honour undeserved?
Then hear how justified it is
By Ned's amazing qualities.
Nature had made the beast so pure
That what he dropped was not manure,
But sovereigns and gold crowns instead
(Imprinted with the royal head)
Which every morning Master Ned
Left for collection on his bed.

But Heaven grows tired, now and then,
Of granting happiness to men,
And puts some sorrows in our way
Like rainstorms on a sunny day.
A sickness struck the King's beloved wife,
Grew worse and worse: it soon attacked her life.
Help was sought throughout the land,
Doctors arrived on every hand.
The Faculty of Medicine was consulted:
They looked in books by ancient Greeks,
While fashionable alternative techniques
Were counselled by the quacks: no cure resulted.
The patient worsened. Nothing could arrest
The malady which daily still progressed.

The Queen, then, feeling close to death,
Addressed, in solemn words, the King:
'Permit me with my dying breath
To ask of you, my dear, one thing:
That if you should desire to wed
When I am gone...' 'Alas!' her husband said,
'Have no anxieties of such a kind;
For never will I take another bride;
So please dismiss these worries from your mind.'
'That's what I thought you'd say, my dear,' replied
The Queen; 'of that your passion makes me sure;
But yet I'd like to feel still more secure:
I'd like to hear you swear an oath
(On which I know I can rely)
That only if you find a woman both
More lovely and more virtuous than I,
You may, upon this one condition,
Marry her with my permission.'
She thought, so certain of her charms was she,

That such an oath would be a guarantee
(Though got by cunning) that he would refrain
From ever marrying again.
The King burst into tears and vowed
To do whatever she desired.

She in his arms forthwith expired,
And never did a husband weep so loud.
By night and day his sobs came thick and fast.
The courtiers judged his sorrow could not last;
He wept, they said, as if he wished to see
The mourning done as promptly as might be.
The court proved right. Some months went past,
And then the King announced he thought it good
To choose another consort if he could.
He had a tricky problem now
Because he had to keep his vow;
And therefore any wife he found
Must be at least as fair of face,
As well endowed with wit and grace,
As was the first, now underground.

But not at court, though beauties there abound,
Nor in the towns or countryside,
Nor in neighbouring lands beside,
Was any other woman seen
As lovely as the former queen,
Except her daughter; she alone
With young and tender beauties of her own,
Possessed attractions that the Queen had lacked.
The King, now mad with love, observed the fact,
And got the crazy notion in his head
That he and the Princess should therefore wed.
An expert casuist* he found contended
That such a match, perhaps, could be defended.

But she was much disturbed, and had no rest
On hearing sentiments like these expressed;
She sobbed and wept by day and night.
She went, with sad and weary heart,
To tell her godmother about her plight.
This fairy's dwelling, set apart,
Was in a distant grotto, filled
With coral, pearls, and shells; in magic art
Her godmother was very skilled.

(What fairies were in olden times
You will not need to learn from me;
Your Grandma told you on her knee,
Along with tales and nursery rhymes.)

She said, on seeing her: 'My dear,
I know why you're so sad, and why you're here,
But now you're with me, have no fear.
Nothing will do you harm, provided
That you will let yourself be guided
By my advice. Your father, it is true,
Has said he wants to marry you.
To ask for such a thing is mad;
If you agree, that's just as bad.To thwart him,
while not seeming to refuse,
We'll circumvent his folly with a ruse.
You need to say you won't consent
To marry till you're quite content
With what you ask him now to give: a dress
The colour of the heavens*—something which,
However great he is, however rich,
Though Heaven has always given him success,
Will prove beyond his powers to do.'

The Princess, trembling through and through,
To give this message went her way.
The King, without the least delay,
Called dressmakers across the land,
And made them clearly understand
That what he wanted was a dress,
Sky-coloured, for the young Princess;
And further that they'd best not make him wait
More than a day before the job was done,
For if they did, as sure as fate,
He'd send them to the gallows, every one.
Before the sun rose on the second morn
The precious dress was ready to be worn:
Its sheer and splendid azure hue
Outshone the sky's most glorious blue
When clouds are strewn across it golden bright.

The Princess, with more sorrow than delight,
Is lost for words; she's very much afraid
She'll have to keep the bargain that she's made.
'You've got to ask him for another boon,'
She hears her fairy godmother declare:
'No common gift this time, but rare:
A dress the colour of the moon;
He cannot give it.' But her new demand
At once becomes the monarch's next command.
He calls embroiderers: 'Diana's globe
Will shine at night more dimly than this robe;
Within four days, the work must be complete,'
He says; and in four days, it's at his feet,
And just as beautiful as he'd required.
The moon when skies are clear, attired

In silver for her evening parade,
So bright she makes the stars and planets fade,
Is less superb and radiant than the dress.

Astonished and admiring, the Princess
Was almost ready to give in; but then,
Encouraged by her godmother again,
She asked another gift—a better one;
'My lord,' she said, 'with this I'll be content:
I want a dress the colour of the sun.'
In his excess of love, her father sent
To fetch the finest jeweller that there was.
'Make me this gleaming dress,' the man was told,
'In cloth all sewn with diamonds and gold;
And do it well,' the King went on, 'because,
If not, you'll die of torture, have no doubt.'
The threat was never carried out:
The man was disinclined to shirk.
He sent the precious piece of work
Within a week. So splendid was this dress
That bright-haired Phoebus, when across the skies
He drives his chariot of gold, is less
Ablaze with light, and dazzles less our eyes.

Dumbfounded by these gifts, the poor Princess
Finds no reply to thwart her king and lord.
Her godmother is close at hand: 'My dear,
You can't stop now,' she whispers in her ear;
'There's nothing that your father can't afford;
You know he has the donkey still,
Which while it's there will always fill
His treasury with crowns of gold.
Just ask him for the creature's skin.
Since that is what his wealth is in,
This gift, I'm sure, is one that he'll withhold.'

The fairy was extremely wise,
No doubt, but failed to realise
That lovers never count the cost
Of all the gold and silver lost
If once their passion gains its prize.
The monarch, therefore, gallantly complied
And met his daughter's wish; the donkey died.

They bring the skin to her: she's filled with dread,
And bitterly bewails the fate that lies ahead;
But then her godmother appears:
'Those who do good,' she says, 'need have no fears.
First you must lead your father to believe
That you will share with him the married state;
But on the wedding day, alone, you'll leave:
You must not risk so horrible a fate;
Go in disguise to some far distant place.
Here now,' she added, 'is your travelling case.
It's large enough to hold your dressing things,
Your brushes, mirror, rubies, diamond rings,
And all your clothes; moreover here's my wand
For you to use. The casket will respond
By following wherever you may go,
But secretly, deep in the ground below.
Then should you want to see the chest,
Just take the wand and keep it pressed
Against the earth, and then and there
The chest will magically appear.
To guard yourself from prying eyes,
The donkey-skin's a fine disguise,
For nobody could ever guess,
Seeing you in so foul a dress,
That such a filthy thing could hide
Someone so beautiful inside.

Thus camouflaged, the Princess went away,
Bidding the fairy many fond farewells,
In the cool air of morning. On that day
The King had hoped to hear the wedding bells
Ring out in joy; but he's bereft;
They tell him that his bride has left.

Each house, each street, each avenue
Was rigorously searched, and searched again;
But all the agitation was in vain,
For how or where she'd vanished, no one knew.
A sad, despondent mood spread all about:
No wedding meant no cakes, no sweets, no feast;
The ladies of the court were much put out,
And hardly ate a thing; as for the priest,
His meal was late and meagre; what was worse,
No church collection helped to fill his purse.

Journeying onwards all this time
Her face besmeared with dirt and grime,
The Princess begged from passers-by.
On coming to a house, she'd try
To get herself a servant's place,
But when they saw her grubby face,
Together with the skin she wore,
The wives she asked, however poor,
However coarse, would shut the door.
So on she trudged, and on and on, until
She reached a farmhouse where the wife required
A serving-girl with just sufficient skill
To do the lowest chores; and she was hired,

To wash the rags and keep the pig-trough clean.
A corner of the kitchen, dark and mean,
Became her home, and here she had to mix
With farmhands, oafs, and louts, who played her tricks
At every turn; they harassed her,
Tormented her, embarrassed her;
She was the butt of all their rustic fun,
Of every joke and every stupid pun.
She had on Sundays some few hours of rest.
She had a little work to do, no more;
Returning to her room, she barred the door.
She'd wash away the grime, and from the chest
Would take her toilet-cloth, and lots
Of creams and lotions neatly stored in pots.
The looking-glass she'd carefully arrange,
Then stood before it, happy, full of pride,
Wearing each dress in turn. The first she tried
Was like the moon, all silver. Then she'd change,
And wear the dress that brilliantly outshone
The sun itself; then finally put on
The azure dress whose gorgeous hue
Surpassed the heavens' purest blue.
The trouble was, the room could not contain
Each dress's generously flowing train.
It was a joy to gaze at her reflection
And see herself so beautifully dressed:
She thought that with her pure complexion
She must look finer than the rest,
Which kept her spirits up till next weekend.

Something I may have failed to mention
Is that the farmyard had a large extension
In which innumerable birds were penned:
An aviary; the King, who liked display,
Showed off his riches in this way,
With musk-fed geese* and cormorants and quails,
And little bustards, bantam hens, and rails,
Birds of a thousand kinds or more,
Each stranger than the one before,
Filling a dozen courtyards in their cages.
The monarch's son would come with friends and pages
To rest awhile in this delightful place
And take cool drinks, when thirsty from the chase.
This Prince's martial looks did not resemble
Those of the fair Adonis: regal his mien,
And fierce his glance; the bravest foes would tremble
Before him in the field. Thus was he seen
By Donkey-Skin, with tender admiration;
Watching afar, she knew that for her part,
Despite the dirt and squalor of her station,
Her feelings proved she had a royal heart.

'He truly has a prince's air,'
She thought, 'while seeming not to care
About his greatness. And how much
He merits love! Oh happy she
Whose beauty and whose love might touch
His heart and keep it hers! And as for me,
I'd sooner wear the meanest, poorest dress
That he might give, than any I possess.'

This Prince, when walking, came one day,
Among the courtyards where the birds were kept,
Upon a door along a passageway,
And this was where the Princess slept.
The keyhole as it chanced was at a height
Just right to look through. As it chanced,
The day was Sunday too; so when he glanced
Into her room, he saw a wondrous sight:
The diamonds lay round her neck; and spun
From gold, her dress was dazzling like the sun.
The Prince stood there transfixed in contemplation;
Scarce could he breathe, so great his admiration.
And yet, despite the gorgeous clothes she wore,
Her countenance attracted him much more:
Its perfect outline, full of grace,
Her young complexion, fresh and clear,
Gave sweet expression to her face;
Besides, so virtuous did she appear,
With dignity and modesty combined,
The outward signs of beauty in the mind,
That her demeanour played the greatest part
In making her the mistress of his heart.

Three times from sudden love he raised his fist
Against the door, but only to desist:
Three times respect made him withdraw;
It seemed a goddess that he saw.
Back to the palace he made his pensive way,
To sigh and languish there by night and day.
The Carnival has started: he rejects
All invitations to the dance; objects
To theatre; hunting he abominates;
The most alluring food he hates.
And as he mournfully repines,
He's lost in apathy, his health declines.
One day he asked the unknown beauty's name.
'Who can she be, this lovely nymph, whose room
Is in that nasty alley deep in gloom
Beyond the poultry-yard?' The answer came:
'It must be Donkey-Skin you mean,'
They said; 'but she's no nymph; and "Donkey-Skin"
She's called because it's what she dresses in.

An uglier brute you've never seen.
A she-wolf 's prettier than her, for sure;
If love's an illness, she's the perfect cure.'
Much else they say, but all in vain.
Her image now is deeply traced
Inside his mind, and cannot be effaced:
He's caught by love; he'll not be free again.

Meanwhile the Queen his mother cannot rest,
Seeing her son so gloomy and depressed.
The Prince, though plunged in grief, will not disclose
The reason for these most distressing woes,
And when she tenderly enquires
Says only this: what he desires
Is just that Donkey-Skin should bake,
For him and him alone, a cake.
His mother cannot take it in,
And asks: 'Who is this Donkey-Skin?'
'Oh Heavens!—her?' they said, 'oh dear!
Dear Madam, she's a miserable slut!
A dirtier beast you'll not find anywhere:
A proper slattern!'—'That's as may be; but,'
The Queen said, 'if my son desires a dish
Prepared by her, I'll see he gets his wish.'
(If he had asked, she loved him so, you see,
He would have had gold coins for tea.)

So Donkey-Skin became a cook.
Butter and salt and eggs she took,
Inside the hovel where she lived,
With flour most scrupulously sieved
(She knew that when it's sifted fine
The mixture's easy to combine),
And having washed herself she shed
From off her shoulders, arms, and head
Her dirty, shaggy camouflage,
And took instead a fine corsage
Of silver which she neatly laced
To wear around her slender waist,
And thus attired, began to cook.
By chance—some say she didn't look—
A ring she had of flawless gold,
And happened to be wearing, fell
Into the cake; though I've been told,
By those who know the story well,
That Donkey-Skin intended it to fall.
To me that's not impossible at all,
For speaking honestly I'm sure
That when the Prince, outside her door,
Had stood that time while peeping through,
She knew it; women always do.

A woman's senses are so keen,
She's so alert, that if your eye should chance
To rest on her a moment, then your glance
Will be observed; she'll sense that she's been seen.
And then there is another thing:
The Princess, when she dropped her ring—
Unless I'm very much deceived;
In fact I'd swear to it—believed
That what she'd hidden for her lover
He'd be most happy to discover.

And never did a woman make
A softer, more enticing cake.
He tasted it with much delight,
Then gobbled it; and truth to tell,
He nearly ate the ring as well,
So wolfish was his appetite.
But when he found it and beheld
Its gorgeous emerald stone, his bosom swelled
With greater joy: the little golden band
Seemed still to hold the beauty of her hand.
He put it by his pillow where he slept,
In order that his secret should be kept.
Yet visibly meanwhile his health declined,
And doctors of experience and skill,
As he grew thinner, with one voice opined
That it was love that made the Prince so ill.

Now touching marriage, hostile things are said;
But nonetheless, for maladies like this
The recommended cure is married bliss;
It was resolved, therefore, that he should wed.
He seemed a while reluctant, then replied:
'Upon this one condition, I'll agree:
That she whose finger fits this ring must be
The woman that you give me for my bride.'
The King's and Queen's surprise was very great,
But seeing that the Prince's state
Was sad indeed, they judged it best
Not to refuse his strange request.
At once a search is ordered by the King
To find the finger that will fit the ring,
And much improve its owner's situation,
However low or high her social station.

Each maiden's purpose now becomes the same;
All have to bring their fingers to be tried;
None thinks another has a better claim.
In order, though (so rumour says), to win
The Prince's heart and be his bride,
The finger needs to be extremely thin,

And charlatans sell recipes to render
The fingers of the buyers very slender.
One lady, by a monstrous whim,
Decides to make her fingers slim
By scraping them, as she might trim
Some carrots; while another snips
Small pieces from her finger-tips.
Then with a press another tries
By squeezing to reduce their size.
Another yet, to make them thin,
Obtains some acid, dips them in,
And lets it burn away the skin.
These ladies will try anything
To make a finger fit the ring.

The tests commence: first come the young princesses,
The duchesses, and then the marchionesses.
Fine hands they have, but just a little thick:
Not fine enough, it seems, to do the trick.
Daughters of barons next, of counts and earls,
Of lesser gentry too; to no avail:
Like others higher in the social scale,
Their fingers are too big. Then come the girls
Of lower birth and duller dress,
But not of less attractiveness.
Their fingers, though, at each attempt,
When shape and fit appear, this time, just right,
All fail; the ring appears to show contempt,
And slips or sticks: too loose, or else too tight.
So then they had to let the rest apply:
The servants and the maids, the lesser fry,
Whose hands are red and roughened by the tub,
Who have the clothes to wash, the floors to scrub,
The poultry-yard to clean—in fact the lot.
The prize is just as much for them to win,
They think, as for some miss with smoother skin.
Many a girl with fingers broad and squat
Made her appearance then to try
The prince's ring, with no more hope
Than if she thought to take a rope
And thread it through a needle's eye.
It seemed that nothing more could then be done,
For all had tried the ring, except for one:
Still working in the kitchen, quite neglected,
Was Donkey-Skin. 'And she can't be expected,'
They said, 'to wed the Prince and reign
As queen, that's absolutely plain.'
'Why not?' replied the Prince; 'let her appear.'
Then laughter spread among the crowd,
And everyone exclaimed aloud:
'What can he mean? Allow her here,
That filthy creature? What a joke!'
But when from underneath the cloak
Of rough and dirty skin she drew
A hand like ivory, shot through
With just a touch of rosy pink,
Then nobody knew what to think;
And next, before their unbelieving eyes,
Her finger slid into the fateful ring,
And fitted it; which caused no small surprise.
They thought they'd better take her to the King,
But first, she said, in order to appear
Before her royal master and her lord,
There was a single favour she implored:
To find herself some other clothes to wear.
And now the courtiers thought to mock,
And laugh their fill at Donkey-Skin's new frock;
But when, once in the palace, she proceeded
From room to room, and wore a splendid gown,
Superbly beautiful, which far exceeded
All dresses ever known in court or town,
With on her head the diamonds shining bright
Which made each golden hair a ray of light,
With azure eyes, whose sweet and noble fire,
Bewitching, proud, were certain to inspire
Love with every glance; and when her waist,
So slender that it might have been embraced
Between a man's two hands: when all, at last,
Was seen divinely fair, she far surpassed
The courtly ladies in their fine array;
Their beauties simply seemed to fade away.

Loudly the crowd rejoiced on every side;
The worthy King could scarce contain his glee
Seeing the beauty of the wife-to-be:
The Queen already doted on the bride.
As for the love-lorn Prince, their son and heir,
The passage in so short a time
From misery to joy sublime
Was almost more than he could bear.

Then all looked forward to the wedding day
And started to prepare without delay;
The kings and queens around had invitations:
Bedecked in ornaments of every kind,
Leaving their native lands behind
They rode to join the celebrations.
From far and wide they came; among them, some
Had journeyed from Aurora's distant lands*
Mounted on elephants; others had come
Out of Arabia's desert coasts and sands:
So dark and ugly that they made

The children very much afraid;
And all these guests, their numbers growing,
Soon filled the court to overflowing.

But none, of any prince or potentate,
Arrived in more resplendent state
Than did the father of the bride.
Though once in love, he'd cast aside
The passion burning up his soul like fire;
He'd banished any criminal desire,
And of those hateful wishes, now suppressed,
All that remained served only to inspire
Deeper devotion in his breast.
On seeing her he weeps: 'Now Heaven be blessed,
My dearest child,' he cries, 'that by its grace
We meet again, and that I am allowed
To see you here!' They joyously embrace:
Their joy is shared by all the crowd.
The groom is just as pleased and proud
That marriage to his love will bring
Alliance with a mighty king.
Just then the fairy godmother arrives,
To tell them all, in full, the story
Of Donkey-Skin, and thus contrives
To cover her with greater glory.

There are some lessons that a child may learn
From listening to this tale: they won't take long;
And first that sufferings, however stern,
Are preferable by far to doing wrong;
And next, whatever trials life may send
Virtue will always triumph in the end;
Also that love deranged defies all sense:
Against it, reason is a poor defence;
Lovers, extravagant beyond all measure,
Will give away for love their dearest treasure.
Again: young ladies may be fed
On nothing but the coarsest bread
Provided that, besides such fare,
They have some pretty clothes to wear;
And not a woman anywhere
Will not believe that she's as fair
As all the rest; and in addition
Has never dreamt that when of old
They held that famous competition
To win the apple made of gold,*
If she'd been there, as goddesses paraded,
She surely would have looked as good as they did,
Or better still, and would have been
Paris's choice as beauty queen.

This tale is hard to credit, to be sure,
But yet, as long as children dwell
Upon this earth, with mums and grans as well,
Its memory will stay secure.

—
Charles Perrault,
The Complete Fairy Tales
Translated by Chirstopher Betts,
Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2009

PHOEBUS AND BOREAS.

Old Boreas and the sun, one day
Espied a traveller on his way,
Whose dress did happily provide
Against whatever might betide.
The time was autumn, when, indeed,
All prudent travellers take heed.
The rains that then the sunshine dash,
And Iris with her splendid sash,
Warn one who does not like to soak
To wear abroad a good thick cloak.
Our man was therefore well bedight
With double mantle, strong and tight.
'This fellow,' said the wind, 'has meant
To guard from every ill event;
But little does he wot that I
Can blow him such a blast
That, not a button fast,
His cloak shall cleave the sky.
Come, here's a pleasant game, Sir Sun!
Wilt play?' Said Phoebus, 'Done!
We'll bet between us here
Which first will take the gear
From off this cavalier.
Begin, and shut away.
The brightness of my ray.'
'Enough.' Our blower, on the bet,
Swell'd out his pursy form
With all the stuff for storm—
The thunder, hail, and drenching wet,
And all the fury he could muster;
Then, with a very demon's bluster,
He whistled, whirl'd, and splash'd,
And down the torrents dash'd,
Full many a roof uptearing
He never did before,
Full many a vessel bearing
To wreck upon the shore,—
And all to doff a single cloak.
But vain the furious stroke;
The traveller was stout,
And kept the tempest out,
Defied the hurricane,
Defied the pelting rain;
And as the fiercer roar'd the blast,
His cloak the tighter held he fast.
The sun broke out, to win the bet;
He caused the clouds to disappear,
Refresh'd and warm'd the cavalier,
And through his mantle made him sweat,

Till off it came, of course,
In less than half an hour;
And yet the sun saved half his power.—
So much doth mildness more than force.

—

Book VI Fable 3
The Original Fables of La Fontaine (1913)
by Jean de La Fontaine,
translated by Frederick Colin Tilney
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THE ASS DRESSED IN THE LION'S SKIN.

Clad in a lion's shaggy hide,
An ass spread terror far and wide,
And, though himself a coward brute,
Put all the world to scampering rout:
But, by a piece of evil luck,
A portion of an ear outstuck,
Which soon reveal'd the error
Of all the panic–terror.
Old Martin did his office quick.
Surprised were all who did not know the trick,
To see that Martin,[28] at his will,
Was driving lions to the mill!
In France, the men are not a few
Of whom this fable proves too true;
Whose valour chiefly doth reside
In coat they wear and horse they ride.

—

Book V Fable 21
The Original Fables of La Fontaine (1913)
by Jean de La Fontaine,
translated by Frederick Colin Tilney
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A peacock moulted: soon a jay was seen
Bedeck'd with Argus tail of gold and green,
High strutting, with elated crest,
As much a peacock as the rest.
His trick was recognized and bruited,
His person jeer'd at, hiss'd, and hooted.
The peacock gentry flock'd together,
And pluck'd the fool of every feather.
Nay more, when back he sneak'd to join his race,
They shut their portals in his face.
There is another sort of jay,
The number of its legs the same,
Which makes of borrow'd plumes display,
And plagiary is its name.
But hush! the tribe I'll not offend;
'Tis not my work their ways to mend.

—

Book IV Fable 9
The Original Fables of La Fontaine (1913)
by Jean de La Fontaine,
translated by Frederick Colin Tilney
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Three impostors came to a king, and told him they were cloth-weavers, and could fabricate a cloth of so peculiar a nature that a legitimate son of his father could see the cloth; but if he were illegitimate, though believed to be legitimate, he could not see it.
Now the king was much pleased at this, thinking that by this means he would be able to distinguish the men in his kingdom who were legitimate sons of their supposed fathers from those who were not, and so be enabled to increase his treasures, for among the Moors only legitimate children inherit their father's property; and for this end he ordered a palace to be appropriated to the manufacture of this cloth. And these men, in order to convince him that they had no intention of deceiving him, agreed to be shut up in this palace until the cloth was manufactured, which satisfied the king.

When they were supplied with a large quantity of gold, silver, silk, and many other things, they entered the palace, and, putting their looms in order, gave it to be understood that they were working all day at the cloth.

After some days, one of them came to the king and told him the cloth was commenced, that it was the most curious thing in the world, describing the design and construction; he then prayed the king to favor them with a visit, but begged he would come alone.

The king was much pleased, but wishing to have the opinion of some one first, sent the lord chamberlain to see it, in order to know if they were deceiving him.

When the lord chamberlain saw the workmen, and heard all they had to say, he dared not admit he could not see the cloth, and when he returned to the king he stated that he had seen it; the king sent yet another, who gave the same report. When they whom he had sent declared that they had seen the cloth he determined to go himself.

On entering the palace and seeing the men at work, who began to describe the texture and relate the origin of the invention as also the design and color, in which they all appeared to agree, although in reality they were not working; when the king saw how they appeared to work, and heard the character of the cloth so minutely described, and yet could not see it, although those he had sent had seen it, he began to feel very uneasy, fearing he might not be the son of the king, who was supposed to be his father, and that if he acknowledged he could not see the cloth he might lose his kingdom; under this impression he commenced praising the fabric, describing its peculiarities after the manner of the workmen.

On the return to his palace he related to his people how good and marvelous was the cloth, yet at the same time suspected something wrong.

At the end of two or three days the king requested his Alguacil (or officer of justice) to go and see the cloth. When the Alguacil entered and saw the workmen, who, as before, described the figures and pattern of the cloth, knowing that the king had been to see it, and yet could not see it himself, he thought he certainly could not be the legitimate son of his father, and therefore could not see it. He, however, feared if he was to declare that he could not see it he would lose his honorable position; to avoid this mischance he commenced praising the cloth even more vehemently than the others.

When the Alguacil returned to the king and told him that he had seen the cloth, and that it was the most extraordinary production in the world, the king was much disconcerted; for he thought that if the Alguacil had seen the cloth, which he was unable to see, there could no longer be a doubt that he was not the legitimate son of the king, as was generally supposed, he therefore did not hesitate to praise the excellency of the cloth and the skill of the workmen who were able to make it.

On another day he sent one of his councillors, and it happened to him as to the king and the others of whom I have spoken; and in this manner and for this reason they deceived the king and many others, for no one dared to say he could not see the cloth.

Things went on thus until there came a great feast, when all requested the king to be dressed in some of the cloth; so the workmen, being ordered, brought some rolled up in a very fine linen and inquired of the king how much of it he wished them to cut off; so the king gave orders how much and how to make it up.

Now when the clothes were made and the feast day had arrived the weavers brought them to the king, informing his majesty that his dress was made of the cloth as he had directed, the king all this time not daring to say he could not see it.

When the king had professed to dress himself in this suit he mounted on horseback and rode into the city; but fortunately for him it was summertime. The people seeing his majesty come in this manner were much surprised; but knowing that those who could not see this cloth would be considered illegitimate sons of their fathers, kept their surprise to themselves, fearing the dishonor consequent upon such a declaration.

Not so, however, with a negro, who happened to notice the king thus equipped; for he, having nothing to lose, came to him and said, "Sire, to me it matters not whose son I am, therefore I tell you that you are riding without any clothes."

On this the king commenced beating him, saying that he was not the legitimate son of his supposed father, and therefore it was that he could not see the cloth. But no sooner had the negro said this, than others were convinced of its truth, and said the same; until, at last, the king and all with him lost their fear of declaring the truth, and saw through the trick of which these impostors had made them the victims.

When the weavers were sought for they were found to have fled, taking with them all they had received from the king by their imposition.

—

Don Juan Manuel, Count Lucanor; or,
The Fifty Pleasant Stories of Patronio,
written by the Prince Don Juan Manuel
and first done into English by James York, 1869
London: Gibbings and Company, 1899,
"The Fifty Pleasant Stories of Patronio"
is part the the Libro de los ejemplos del conde Lucanor y de Patronio,
written in 1335 by Juan Manuel, Prince of Villena

On earth people have to die; otherwise there would not be enough room for the young ones. It is no wonder then that once a little tailor got sick and died.
So the tailor died, and just like a needle pulling a thread, his soul went straight toward heaven. He found the door and knocked ever so politely. After he had knocked a while the window opened, and Saint Peter asked who was there.

The needle-hero said, "Hey, it is little tailor, who -- with permission -- would like to enter heaven, Mr. Peter."
"A little tailor?" said the latter. "An ironing-board finch? We can't use the likes of you in heaven." And with that Peter shut the window.

While the tailor was standing there just outside of heaven, sorrowing and complaining, he saw an old woman who had also been told that they could not use her in heaven. The two comforted one another while seated outside there in the darkness. Meanwhile a mighty hussar approached and called out that he would like admission to heaven. Saint Peter did not make him wait long, because the latter had told someone that he was a Spanish cavalryman.

The little tailor took note of this, quickly ran over to the little old woman, and said to her, "How would it be, my friend, if the two of us were to smuggle ourselves into heaven? Not a bad idea, I believe. Quick now, little woman, I have a clever plan. I will be a Spanish cavalryman, and you will carry me up to heaven's door. I'll take care of the rest. The important thing is that we will both get into heaven!"

No sooner said than done. The needle-knight climbed onto the little woman just outside of Saint Peter's gate. "Who is there?" the person with the keycalled out from inside.
"A Spanish cavalryman!" shouted the little tailor with all his might.
The door opened, and our Spanish knight proudly rode in and took his place with the other people in heaven.

So that is what the tailor did,
And everyone laughed at him,
And had a good time all around,
And they never had to leave again.

—

Otto Sutermeister, Kinder und Hausmärchen aus der Schweiz
Aarau: Druck und Verlag von H. R. Sauerländer, 1873,.
Sutermeister's source: Ernst Ludwig Rochholz,
"Es Mærli vom æ Schniderli,
wu en spanische Chasseur gspielt het"
Schweizersagen aus dem Aargau Aarau:
Druck und Verlag von H. R. Sauerländer, 1856, vol. 2.

Once upon a time there was a poor little maiden. Her mother and father had died, and she no longer had a house in which she could live, and a bed in which she could sleep. She had nothing more in the world than the clothes on her back, and she carried a small piece of bread in her hand that someone who had taken pity on her had given to her. Despite all this, the maiden was good and pious.

As she set out on her way, she encountered a poor man who asked her so desperately for something to eat that she gave him the piece of bread. Then she continued on her way and met a child who said to her: "My head is freezing. Please give me something that I can tie around it." So the maiden took off her cap and gave it to the child. And after she had walked a bit farther, she came across another child without a bodice. So she gave him hers. Further on she met another child who asked her for a little dress, and she took off her own dress and gave it to her. Finally, she came to a forest, and it had already become dark. Then, yet another child came and asked for her undershirt, and the pious maiden thought: "It's pitch black. You can certainly give away your undershirt," and so she gave it to the child. Al of a sudden the stars fell from heaven and turned into pure shining hard coins, and even though she had given away her undershirt, she had another one on her made from the finest linen. So she gathered the coins in the undershirt and became rich for the rest of her life.

—

The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
Translated & Edited by Jack Zipes
Princeton University Press,
Princeton and Oxford, October 2014

A young prince sat with his bride-to-be and said: “I’m going to give you a ring and my picture and want you to carry these things to remember me and to remain true to me. My father is deathly ill and has asked me to come to him. He wants to see me one more time before he dies and I become king. So I want you to go home now.”

Upon saying this the prince rode off and found his father on his deathbed. Right before he died, he asked his son to marry a particular princess after his death. The prince was so depressed and loved his father so much that, without thinking about it, he said yes, and right after that the king closed his eyes and died.

After he was acclaimed king and the mourning period ended, he had to keep his word and asked permission to court the other princess who had been promised to him. Meanwhile, the first bride had heard that the prince was courting another princess, and she grieved so much that she almost died. Her father asked her why she was so sad and told her all she had to do was to ask him for what she wanted and her wish would be granted. So the princess reflected for a moment, and then she asked for eleven young women who completely resembled her in size as well as in stature. So the king had his men search for the eleven young women throughout his entire kingdom, and when they were all together, she dressed herself in hunter’s clothes and had the eleven dressed the same way so that all twelve of them were completely alike.

Shortly thereafter, she rode to the king, her former bridegroom, and requested a position for herself and the others as hunters. The king didn’t recognise her, but because they were such handsome people, he gladly granted the request and welcomed them to his court.

Now the king had a lion, and nothing could be kept from him. This lion knew all the secrets of the court. One evening the lion said to the king: “You believe you’ve employed twelve hunters, but there actually twelve young women.”
The king refused to believe him, but the lion added: “Have peas spread out in your anteroom one time. Men have a heavy step, and if they walk over the peas, none of the peas will move. But women, they skip and shuffle, and the peas roll beneath their feet.”

The king liked this plan, but one of the king’s servants loved the hunters and had overheard all this. So he ran to the young women and said: “The lion thinks that you’re women and wants to have peas spread out in the anteroom to test you.”

Consequently, the princess ordered her eleven young ladies to use all their might and step firmly on the peas. When it turned morning and the peas were all spread out, the king summoned the twelve hunters, but they had such a firm and strong gait that not one single pea moved.

That evening the king reproached the lion and accused him of lying. In response the lion said: “They covered up who they really are. Now, just have twelve spinning wheels set up in the anteroom, and they’ll show how pleased they are. No man would ever do that.”

The king followed the lion’s advice one more time and had the spinning wheels set up in the room. However, the servant revealed to the hunters what was happening so that the princess ordered the young ladies once more not to look at the spinning wheels at all. So that’s what they did, and the king refused to believe the lion an more. He became more and more fond of the hunters, and when he went out hunting, they had to go along with him.

One time, when they were out in the forest, news arrived that the prince’s bride was coming and that she would soon be there. When the prince’s real bride heard this, she fainted. The king thought that something had happened to his dear hunter. He ran over and wanted to help him. As he took off his glove, he noticed that she was wearing the ring that he had given to his first bride, and moreover, when he saw the picture that she was carrying in her necklace, he recognised her and immediately notified the other bride to return to her realm because he already had a wife, and when one recovers an old key, one doesn’t need a new one. Soon after, the wedding was celebrated, and it was clear that the lion had not lied, and he once again found favour in the king’s eyes.

—

The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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Once upon a time there was a king who had the most beautiful wife in the world, and her hair was pure gold. They had a daughter together, and she was just as beautiful as her mother, and her hair was just as golden. One day the queen became sick, and when she felt she was about to die, she called the king to her and made a request: if after her death he wanted to marry again, he should only take someone who was as beautiful as she was and who had golden hair like hers. Once the king promised her that, she died.

For a long time the king was so distressed that didn't think about a second wife. Finally, his councillors urged him to remarry. So messengers were sent to all the princesses in the world, but none of them were as beautiful as the dead queen. Nor could they find such golden hair anywhere in the world.

Now one day the king cast his eyes on his daughter, and when he saw that her features were very similar to those of her mother and that she also had such golden hair, he thought, "Since you won't find anyone as beautiful in the world, you must marry your daughter." And right then he felt such a great love for her that he immediately informed his councillors and the princess of his decision.

The councillors wanted to talk him out of it, but it was in vain. The princess was totally horrified about his godless intention. However, since she was smart, she told the king that he first had to provide her with three dresses, one as golden as the sun, one as white as the moon, and one as bright as the stars and then a cloak made of a thousand kinds of pelts and furs, and each animal in the kingdom had to contribute a piece of its skin to it.

The king had such a passionate desire for her that everyone in his realm was ordered to work. His huntsmen had to catch all the animals and take a piece of their skin. Thus a cloak was made from their fur, and it didn't take long before the king brought the princess what she had demanded.

Now the princess said that she would marry him the next day. However, during the night, she collected the gifts that she had received from her fiancé from another kingdom: a golden ring, a little golden spinning wheel, and a little golden reel, and the three dresses, all of which she put into a nutshell. Then she blackened her face and hands with soot, put on the cloack made of all kinds of fur, and departed. She walked the whole night until she reached a great forest, where she was safe. Since she ws tired, she climbed into a hollow tree and fell asleep.

She continued to sleep until it became broad daylight. As it so happened, the king, her bridegroom, was out hunting in the forest. When his dogs came to the tree, they started to sniff and run around it. The king sent his huntsmen to see what kind of animal was hiding in the tree. When they returned to him, they said that there was a strange animal lying in it, and they had never seen anything like it in their lives. Its skin was made up of a thousand different kinds of fur, and I was lying there asleep. Then the king ordered them to catch it and tie it on the back of the wagon. The huntsmen did this, and as they pulled it from the tree, they saw it was a maiden. Then they tied her on the back of the wagon and drove home with her.

"All Fur," they said, "you'll do well to work in the kitchen. You can carry wood and water and sweep up the ashes."
Then they gave her a little stall beneath the steps.
"You can live and sleep there."

So she had to work in the kitchen, where she helped the cook, plucked the chickens, tended the fire, sorted the vegetables, and did all the dirty work. Since she did everything so diligently, the cook was good to her and sometimes called All Fur to him in the evening and gave her some of the leftovers to eat. Before the king went to bed, she had to go upstairs and pull off his boots, and as soon as she would pull one off, he would always throw it at her head. And so All Fur led a miserable life for a long time. Ah, you beautiful maiden, what shall become of you! At one time a ball was held in the castle, and All Fur though, "perhaps now I could see my dear bridegroom once again." So she went to the cook and asked him to allow her to go upstairs or a while to see the splendour from the doorway.

"Go ahead," said the cook, "but you can't stay longer than half an hour. You've got to sweep up the ashes tonight."

So All Fur took her little oil lamp, went into her little stall, and washed the soot off her so that her beauty came to light again like flowers in springtime. Then she took off the fur cloak, opened the nut, and took out the dress that shone like the sun. When she was fully dressed, she went upstairs, and everyone made way for her, for they believed that she was nothing less than a distinguished princess who had just come into the ballroom. The king immediately offered her his hand and led her forth to dance. And as he was dancing with her, he thought, "this unknown princess resembles my dear bride," and the longer he gazed at her, the more she resembled her so that he was almost certain it was her. When the dance ended, he wanted to ask her. However, as she finished the dance, she curtsied and disappeared before the king could begin to speak. Then he asked the guards, but nobody had seen the princess leave the castle. She had quickly run to her little stall, taken off her dress, blackened her face and hands, and put on the fur cloak one again. Then she went into the kitchen and started to sweep up the ashes.

"Let it be until morning," the cook said. "I want to go upstairs and take a look at the dance. Make a soup for the king, but don't let any hairs fall in, otherwise you'll get nothing more to eat."

All Fur cooked a bread soup for the king, and then at the end, she slipped the golden ring that the king had given to her as a present into the soup. When the ball came to an end, the king had his bread soup brought to him, and it tasted so good that he was convinced that he had never eaten one so good. However, when he had finished, he found the ring at the bottom of the bowl. As he looked at it carefully, he saw that it was his wedding ring and was puzzled. He couldn't grasp how the ring came to be there, and so he had the cook summoned, and the cook became angry with All Fur.

"You must have certainly let a hair fall into the soup. If that's true, you'll get a beating!" However, when the cook went upstairs, the king asked him wh had cooked the soup because it had been better than usual. So the cook had to confess that All Fur had made it, and the king ordered him to send All Fur up to him. When she came, the king said: "Who are you and what are you doing in my castle? Where did you get the ring that was in the soup?"

Then she replied:
"I'm nothing but a poor child whose mother and father are dead
I am nothing and am good for nothing except for having boots thrown at my head.
I also know nothing about the ring."
Upon saying that she ran away.
Some time later there was another ball, and once again All Fur asked the cook's permission to go upstairs. The cook allowed her but only for half an hour, and then she was to return and

cook the bread soup for the king. So, All Fur went to her little stall, washed herself clean, took out the dress as silvery as the moon and cleaner and more sparkling than fallen snow. When she appeared upstairs, the dance had already begun. The king offered his hand to her again and danced with her. He no longer doubted that she was his bride, for nobody in the world except her had such golden hair. However, when the dance was over, the princess had already departed once again, and despite all his efforts, the king couldn't find her, and he hadn't even spoken a single word with her.

Indeed, she was All Fur again swith blackened hands and face. She stood in the kitchen and cooked the bread soup for the king while the cook went upstairs to watch the dance. When the soup was done, she put the golden spinning wheel into the bowl. The king ate the soup, and it seemed even better this time. When he found the golden spinning wheel at the bottom, he was even more astounded because he had at one time sent it to his bride as a present. The cook was summoned, and then All Fur, but once again she replied that she knew nothing about it, and that she was only there to have boots thrown at her head.

When the king held a ball for the third time, he hoped his bride would come again, and he wanted to make sure to hold on to her. All Fur asked the cook again to let her go upstairs, but he scolded her and said: "You're a witch. You always put something in the soup and can cook it better than I do."

However, since she pleaded so passionately and promised to behave herself, he let her go upstairs again for half an hour. Thereupon she put on the dress that sparkled as bright as the stars in the night and went upstairs and danced with the king. He thought he had never seen her more beautiful. As they were dancing, however, he slipped a ring onto her finger and ordered the dance to last for a very long time. Nevertheless, he couldn't hod onto her, nor could speak a single word to her, for when the dance was over, she mingled with the people so quickly that she vanished before he turned around.

All Fur ran to her little stall, and since she had been away longer than half an hour, she undressed quickly. In her hurry she couldn't blacken herself completely so that a finger remained white. When she went into the kitchen, the cook was already upstairs, and she quickly cooked the bread soup and put the golden reel into it.

Just as he had found the ring and the golden spinning wheel, the king also found the reel. Now he knew for sure that his bride was nearby, for nobody else could have possessed the presents. All Fur was summoned and wanted once again to avoid the king and run away. However, as she tried to run off, the king caught sight of the white finger on her hand and held her tight. He found the ring that he had slipped onto her finger and tore off her fur cloak. Then her golden hair toppled down, and she was his dearly beloved bride. Now the cook was richly rewarded, and the king held the wedding and they lived happily until their death.

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The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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Once upon a time there was a king who decided to send his three sons off into the world. Whoever would bring him the fines woven linen was to take over the realm after his death. Consequently, he went outside in front of the castle and blew three feathers into the air so that they would know in what direction they should go, and he told each one to follow the flight of his feather.

One feather flew to the west and was followed by the eldest son. The next to the east was followed by the second son. However, the third feather flew and fell on a stone not far from the palace. So the third son, the Simpleton, had to remain behind. His two brothers made fun of him and said that he should search for the linen beneath the stone.

Meanwhile Simpleton sat down on the stone and wept, and as he swayed back and forth, the stone slid away, and beneath it was a marble slab with a ring on top. Simpleton lifted the slab and discovered some stairs that led below. So he went down and came to a subterranean vault, where he found a maiden sitting and weaving flax. She asked him why his eyes were so wet from tears, and he revealed his sorrows to her and told her that he had to find the finest woven linen and had not been able to set out and search for it. Then the maiden reeled off her yarn, and all at once he saw the most splendid woven linen, and she told him to bring it up to his father.

When he came up from the ground, he had already been gone for a long time, and his brothers had just returned and thought that they had surely brought the finest woven linen back to their father. However, after each one of them showed their linen, Simpleton's turned out to be much finer, and the realm would have been his, but the two brothers were not satisfied and insisted that their father set another condition. So the king demanded the most beautiful carpet and once again blew three feathers into the air, and the third fell on the stone again. So Simpleton was prevented from setting out while the others went to the east and the west.
Simpleton lifted the stone and went down to the vault again and found the maiden weaving a marvellously beautiful carpet out of blazing color, and when she was done, she said: "I made this for you. Carry it up to your father. No one in the world will have such a magnificent carpet."

So he appeared before his father and once again surpassed his brothers, who had brought the most beautiful carpets from many different countries. And they insisted again that their father set another condition as to who would inherit the realm, and the king now demanded that they must bring the most beautiful woman back home. The feathers were blown once more, and Simpleton's landed on the stone. So he went beneath the ground and complained to the maiden how his father had once more set a difficult condition. But the maiden said that she would gladly help him. All he had to do was to go farther into the vault, and he would find the most beautiful woman in the world.

Simpleton went down the vault and came to a room glimmering and flickering with gold and jewels, but instead of a beautiful woman, there was a nasty frog sitting in the middle. The frog called out to him: "Embrace me, and immerse yourself!"
But he didn't want to do this. So the frog called out a second time: "Embrace me, and immerse yourself!"

So Simpleton grabbed hold of the frog and carried it above to a pond where he jumped into the water with the frog. However, no sooner did they touch the water than he held the most beautiful woman in his arms. Then they climbed out of the water, and he brought her to his father, and she was a thousand times more beautiful than the women whom the other princes had brought with them. Once again the realm would have belonged to Simpleton, but the two brothers made a racket and demanded that whoever's beautiful woman could jump up to the ring that was hanging in the middle of the hall should inherit the realm. The eldest son's woman could jump only halfway; the second son's woman jumped a bit higher; but the third son's woman jumped right up to the ring. So the two elder brothers finally had to agree that Simpleton would inherit the realm after their father's death, and when the father died, Simpleton became king and ruled with wisdom for a long time.

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There was once a maiden all alone in the middle of a large forest. Suddenly, a swan came flying up to her. It had a ball of yarn and said: "I'm not a swan. I'm an enchanted prince, and if you unravel the yarn to which I'm attached, then I'll be released from a spell. But take care that you don't break it in two. Otherwise, I won't be able to return to my kingdom and won't be saved. If you unravel the yarn, you'll become my bride."

The maiden took the yarn, and the swan climbed into the sky. The maiden unraveled the yarn easily, and she unraveled and unraveled the entire day so that the end of the yarn could already be seen. However, just then it unfortunately became caught on a thorn bush and broke in two. The maiden was very distressed and wept. Since it was turning night, and the wind was blowing so loudly in the forest, she became afraid and began to run as fast as she could. And as she was running, she saw a small light and rushed toward it. There she found a house and knocked on the door. A little old woman came out and was astounded to see a maiden standing before her door.

"Oh, my child," she said. "Where are you coming from so late in the night?"
"Please, may I have a place to sleep for the night and also some food?" She asked. "I've lost my way in the forest."
"This is a difficult situation," the old woman replied. "I'd gladly give you what you want, but my husband is a cannibal. If he finds you, he'll eat you. There's no mercy. But if you remain outside, the wild animals will eat you. So I'll see if I can help you get through this."
The old woman let her enter, gave her some food to eat, and then hid her beneath the bed. The cannibal always came home before midnight right after the sun had fully set and left right before sunrise. So it wasn't long before he entered and said: "I smell, I smell human flesh!" And he searched around the room until he reached under the bed and dragged the maiden out. "Now this will make for a good snack!"

But the old woman pleaded and pleaded for the maiden's life until he promised to let her live overnight and to eat her for his breakfast. However, the old woman woke the maiden before sunrise.

"Hurry and get away before my husband awakes. Here's a golden spinning wheel for you as a gift you're to cherish. My name is Sun."
The maiden went away and in the evening she came to another house and the same thing happened there that happened the previous night. At her departure the second old woman gave her a golden spindle and said: "My name is Moon."
On the third evening she came to a third house, wehre the old woman gave her a golden reel and said: "My name is Star."

And she also informed her that even though the yarn hadn't been completely unraveled, enough had been unraveled so that Prince Swan had been able to reach his kingdom where he was the king. In fact, he was already married and lived in great splendour on the glass mountain. Then she said: "You'll reach the mountain this evening, but a dragon and a lion are lying in front and are protecting it. That's why you must take this bread and bacon to pacify them."
And everything happened just as she said. The maiden threw the bread and bacon into the jaws of the monsters, and they let her pass. When she came to the castle gate, however, the guards wouldn't let her enter. So she sat down in front of the gate and began to spin on her little golden wheel. The queen peered down from above and was pleased by the beautiful little wheel. So she went down and asked if she could have it. The maiden told her that she could have it if she could spend the night next to the king's bedroom. The queen agreed, and the maiden was led upstairs to a room. Now everything that was spoken in this room could be heard in the king's bedroom. So when it was night and the king was in his bed, the maiden sang:

"Doesn't King Swan still think of me?
His faithful Julianne, his bride to be?
She's come from afar where she's seen all three,
Sun, moon, and star, and faced two beasts.
Won't King Swan now wake up at least?"

But the king didn't hear her because the cunning queen had been afraid of the maiden and had given the king a sleeping potion. So he slept soundly and didn't hear the maiden and all that she had revealed. In the morning, all her efforts had been lost, and the maiden had to return to the gate and sit down and spin with her second spindle, which also pleased the queen. So the maiden gave it to her with the same condition that she would be allowed to spend the night next to the king's bedroom, where she once again sang:

"Doesn't King Swan still think of me?
His faithful Julianne, his bride to be?
She's come from afar where she's seen all three,
Sun, moon, and star, and faced two beasts.
Won't King Swan now wake up at least?"

But the king slept soundly due to the sleeping potion, and so the maiden lost her spindle. On the third morning she sat down with her golden reel and kept winding it. The queen wanted this precious object as well and promised the maiden that she could spend another night next to the king's bedroom. However, the maiden had discovered the queen's deception and asked the king's servant to give the king something else to drink that evening. Then she began to sing again:

"Doesn't King Swan still think of me?
His faithful Julianne, his bride to be?
She's come from afar where she's seen all three,
Sun, moon, and star, and faced two beasts.
Won't King Swan now wake up at least?"

Well, the king awoke when he heard her voice, and he recognised her and asked the queen: "If someone loses a key and then finds it again, which key does one keep, the old or the new?"
The queen replied: "Certainly, the old one."
"Well then," he said, "you can no longer be my wife. I've found my first bride again."

dThe next morning the queen had to return to her father's realm, and the king married his true bride, and they lived happily together until they died.

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Once upon a time there was a miller who was poor, but he had a beautiful daughter. Now, one day he happened to talk to the king and said, "I have a daughter who knows the art of transforming straw into gold."

So the king had the miller's daughter summoned to him right away and ordered her to spin all the straw into a room into gold in one night, and if she couldn't do this, she would die. Then she was locked in the room where she sat and wept. For the life of her, she didn't have the slightest inkling of how to spin straw into gold. All of a sudden a little man entered the rom and said, "What will you give me if I spin everything into gold?"

She took off her necklace and gave it to the little man, and he did what he promised. The next morning the king found the entire room filled with gold, but because of this, his heart grew even greedier, and he locked the miller's daughter in another room full of straw that was even larger than the first, and she was to spin it all into gold. Then the little man came again, and she gave him a ring from one of her fingers, and everything was spun into gold.

However, on the third night the king had her locked again in another room that was larger than the other two and filled with straw.

"If you succeed, you shall become my wife," he said.

Then the little man came again and spoke: "I'll do everything for you one more time, but you must promise me your firstborn child that you have with the king."
Out of desperation she promised him what he wanted, and when the king saw once again how the straw had been spun into gold, he took the miller's beautiful daughter for his wife.

Soon thereafter the queen gave birth, and the little man appeared before her and demanded the promised child. However, the queen offered the little man all that she could and all the treasures of the kingdom if he would let her keep her child, but it was all in vain. Then the little man said, "In three days I'll come again to fetch the child. But if you know my name by then, you shall keep your child."

During the first and second nights the queen tried to think of the little man's name, but she wasn't able to come up with a name and became completely depressed. On the third day, however, the king returned home from hunting and told her, "I was out hunting the day before yesterday, and when I went deep into the dark forest, I came upon a small cottage, and in front of the house there was a ridiculous little man, hopping around as if he had only one leg and screeching:

"Today I'll brew, tomorrow I'll bake.
Soon I'll have the queen's namesake.
Oh, how hard it is to play my game,
For Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"

When the queen heard this, she rejoiced, and when the dangerous little man came, he asked,

"What's my name, your Highness?" She responded first by guessing,
"Is your name Conrad?"
"No."
"Is your name Henry?"
"No."
"Is your name Rumpelstiltskin?"
"The devil told you that!" The little man screamed, and he ran off full of anger and never returned.

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A king and a queen couldn't have children, and they wanted very much to have one. Then one day, while the queen was bathing, a crab crawled out of the water, came onshore, and said: "Your wish will soon be filled, and you will give birth to a daughter."

Indeed, this is what happened, and the king was so delighted by the birth of the princess that he organised a great feast and also invited the fairies who were living in his realm. Since he had only twelve golden plates, however, there was one fairy who had to be excluded, for there were thirteen in all.

The fairies came to the feast, and at the end of the celebration they gave the child some gifts. One gave virtue; the second, beauty; and the others gave every splendid thing that one could possibly wish for in the world. But, just after the eleventh fairy had announced her gift, the thirteenth appeared, and she was quite angry she had not been invited to the festivities.

"Since you didn't ask me to attend this celebration," she cried out, "I say to you that when your daughter turns fifteen, she will prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead!"
The parents were horrified, but the twelfth fairy hadn't made her wish yet, and she said: "The girl will not die. She will fall into a deep sleep for one hundred years."

The king still hoped to save his dear child and issued an order that all spindles in his entire kingdom were to be banned. Meanwhile, the girl grew up and became marvellously beautiful. On the day she turned fifteen, the king and queen had gone out, and she was left completely alone in the palace. So she wandered all over the place just as she pleased and eventually came to an old tower where she found a narrow staircase. Since she was curious, she climbed the stairs and came to a small door with a yellow key stuck in the lock. When she turned it, the door sprang open, and she found herself in a little room where she saw an old woman spinning flax. She took a great liking to the old woman and joked with her and said she wanted to try spinning one time. So she took the spindle from the old woman's hand, and no sooner did she touch the spindle than she pricked herself and fell down into a deep sleep.

Just at that moment the king returned to the palace with his entire courtly retinue, and everybody and everything began to fall asleep - the horses in the stable, the pigeons on the roof, the dogs in the courtyard, and the flies on the wall. Even the fire flickering in the hearth became quiet and fell asleep. The roast stopped sizzling, and the cook, who was just about to pull the kitchen boy's hair, let him go, and the maid, who was plucking the feathers of a hen, let it drop and fell asleep. And a hedge of thorns sprouted around the entire castle and grew higher and higher until it was impossible to see the castle anymore.

There were princes who heard about the beautiful Briar Rose, and they came and wanted to rescue her, but they couldn't penetrate the hedge. It was as though the thorns clung tightly together like hands, and the princes got stuck there and died miserable deaths. All this continued for many, many years until one day a prince came riding through the country, and an old man told him that people believed that a castle was standing behind the hedge of thorns and that a gorgeous princess was sleeping inside with her entire royal household. His grandfather had told him that many princes had come and had wanted to penetrate the hedge. However, they got stuck hanging in the thorns and had died.

"That doesn't scare me," said the prince. "I'm going to make my way through the hedge and rescue the beautiful princess."

So off he went, and when he came to the hedge of thorns, there was nothing but flowers that separated and made a path for him, and as he went through them, the flowers turned back into thorns. After he reached the castle, the horses were lying asleep in the courtyard, and there was an assortment of hunting dogs. The pigeons were perched on the roof and had tucked their heads beneath their wings. When he entered the palace, the flies were sleeping, as was the fire in the kitchen along with the cook and the maid. The prince continued walking, and he saw the entire royal household with the king and queen lying asleep. Everything was so quiet that he could hear himself breathe.

Finally, he came to the old tower where Briar Rose was lying asleep. The prince was so astounded by her beauty that he leaned over and kissed her. Immediately after the kiss, she woke up, and the king and queen and the entire royal household and the horses and the dogs and the pigeons on the roof and the flies on the walls and the fire woke up. Indeed, the fire flared up and cooked the meat until it began to sizzle again, and the cook gave the kitchen boy a box on the ear, while the maid finished plucking the chicken. Then the wedding of the prince with Briar Rose was celebrated in great splendour, and they lived happily to the end of their days.

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A king went hunting in a vast forest, got lost, and couldn't find his way out. Finally, he came upon a witch and asked her to show him the way out of the forest. However, the witch told him she shouldn't do it. He had to remain there and would lose his life. He could only be saved if he married her daughter. The king cherished his life, and he was so frightened, he said yes. So the witch brought the maiden to him. Though she was young and beautiful, he couldn't look at her without getting the creeps and secretly shuddering. However, he intended to keep his promise. Then the old woman led both of them on the right path out of the forest, and once they were at the king's home, the witch's daughter became his wife.

Now the king still had seven children from his first wife, six boys and a girl, and since he was afraid the stepmother might harm them, he brought them to a castle in the middle of a forest. It lay so well concealed, nobody knew the way to it, and he himself would not have found it if a wise woman had not given him a ball of yarn. When he threw the ball before him, the yarn unwound itself and showed him the way.

Since the king loved his children very much, he frequently went to the castle. However, the queen became curious and wanted to know why he was going out into the forest all alone. She interrogated the servants, and they revealed the entire secret. The first thing she did was to use her cunning and acquire the ball of yarn. Then she took seven small shirts and went out into the forest. The ball of yarn showed her the way, and when the six little princes saw her coming from the distance, they were delighted because they thought their father was coming and ran out to her. But all at once she threw a shirt over each one of them, and as soon as they were touched by the shirts, they were turned into swans and flew away over the forest.

Now the queen thought that she had gotten rid of all her stepchildren and returned home. So the maiden, who had remained in her room, was saved. The next day the king went to the castle in the forest, and she told him what had happened and showed him the swan feathers that had fallen down from her six brothers into the courtyard. The king was horrified but couldn't believe that the queen had done such an evil deed. At the same time, he was worried that the princess might also be stolen away from him. So he wanted to take her with him. However, she was afraid of her stepmother and begged the king to allow her to spend one more night in the castle. Then, during the night, she fled and went deeper into the forest.

She walked the entire day, and toward evening she came to a hut. Once she entered, she found a room with six small beds. Since she was now tired, she lay herself down beneath one of the beds and wanted to spend the night there. Yet at sunset six swans came flying through the window, landed on the floor, and blew on one another until all their feathers were blown off as if some cloth had slipped off them, and there stood her six brothers. She crawled out from beneath the bed, and the brothers were both glad and distressed to see her again.

"You can't stay here," they said. "This is a robbers' den. When they come home from their marauding, they live here. We can take off our swan skins for only a quarter of an hour every evening and assume our human form during this time. Then it's all over. If you want to rescue us, you must sew six little shirts made out of asters, but during this time you're not allowed to speak or laugh. Otherwise all your work will be for naught."

As the brothers were speaking, the quarter of an hour expired, and once again they were transformed into swans. The next morning, however, the maiden gathered asters, perched herself on a branch of a tall tree, and began to sew. She didn't speak a single word or laugh. She just sat there and concentrated on her work.

After she had been there for some time, the king who owned this land went hunting and came to the tree where the maiden was perched. His hunters called to her and told her to come down. But because she was not permitted to answer them, she wanted to satisfy them by throwing them presents. So she threw them her golden necklace. Yet they continued to call out. So she threw them her girdle, and when this didn't work either, she threw down her garters and little by little everything that she had on and could do without until she had nothing left but her little shift. Still all this was not enough for the hunters. They climbed the tree, carried her down, and led her by force to the king, who was astonished by her beauty. He covered her with his cloak, lifted her onto his horse, and brought her to his home. Even though she was mute, he loved her with all his heart, and she became his wife.

Now the king's mother was angry about all of this and spoke ill of the young queen: nobody knew where the wench came from, and she wasn't worthy of the king. When the queen gave birth to her first child, the old mother-in-law took the child away and smeared the queen's mouth with blood while she was asleep. Then she accused the young queen of having eaten her own child and of being a sorceress. However, because of his great love for his wife, the king refused to believe this.

Some time later the queen gave birth to a second prince, and the godless mother-in-law played the same trick and accused the queen of cannibalism again. Since the queen wasn't allowed to talk and had to sit there mute and work on the six little shirts, she couldn't save herself and was sentenced to burn at the stake.

The day came when the sentence was to be carried out. It was exactly the last day of the six years, and she had managed to finish sewing the six shirts. Only the left sleeve of the last shirt was missing. When she was led to the stake, she took the six shirts with her, and when she stood on the pile of wood and the fire was about to be lit, she saw the six swans flying through the air until they descended right near her. So she threw the shirts over them, and as soon as the shirts touched them, the swan skins fell off, and her six brothers stood before her in the flesh. Only the sixth one was missing his left arm; instead, he had a swan's wing on his shoulder. Now she could speak one again and told everyone how her mother-in-law had slandered her in such a wicked way. Consequently, the old woman was tied to the stake and burned to death. However, the young queen lived with the king and her six brothers a long time in great joy.

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A tailor had a son who was small, not much larger than a thumb. Therefore, he was called Thumbling. However, he was filled with courage and said to his father: "Father, I want to go out wandering."
"Fine with me, my son," said the old man, and he took a darning needle and put a lump of sealing wx on it in the light. "Now you'll also have a dagger to take with you on your way."
The little tail set out into the world, and his first work was with a master tailor, but the food wasn't good enough.
"Mistress," Thumbling said to the maser's wife, "if you don't give us better food, I'll take some chalk tomorrow and write 'Too many potatoes, too little mead!' On the house door, and then I shall leave."

What do you want, you little grasshopper?!" Replied the wife, who became angry, grabbed a washcloth, and wanted to beat him with it. However, my little tailor crawled quickly under the thimble, looked out from beneath it, and stuck out his tongue. She picked up the thimble, but Thumbling hopped into a bunch of washcloths, and as the wife began separating the washcloths to search for him, he crawled into a crack in the table.
"Hey! Hey! My lady!" He cried out and raised his head from the crack.
As soon as the tailor's wife tried to hit him, he jumped into the drawers until she finally caught him and chased him out of the house.

Now, the little tailor continued wandering and came to a large forest, where he met a band of robbers, who wanted to steal the king's treasure. When they saw the little tailor, they thought he could be of great help to them. So they spoke to Thumbling and said that he was a good and able fellow and that he should come along with them to the treasure chamber, crawl inside, and throw the money outside to them. Well, Thumbling agreed. So he went to the treasure chamber and examined the door to see if there was a crack in it. Fortunately, he soon found one and wanted to climb through it, but one of the guards said to his companion, "Look at the nasty spider crawling over there! I'm going to stamp on it until I kill it!"
"Hey, leave the spider alone," the other guarder said. "It's done nothing to you."
This was how Thumbling fortunately made his way into the treasure chamber. Then he went to the window where the robbers were standing outside, and he threw one coin after another out the window. When the king examined his treasure chamber later, there was so much money missing that nobody could understand how it had been stolen because ll the locks had been well protected.

The king called for more guards, who heard something rattling in the coins. They went inside and wanted to grab hold of the thief. But the little tailor sat down in a corner beneath a coin and cried out: "Here I am!"
The guards ran over there, while Thumbling leaped to another corner, and when they were at the first corner, he cried out, "Here I am!"
The guards ran to the next corner, but Thumbling hopped to another corner once again and cried out: "Here I am!"

This way he kept making rolls out of them and kept doing this until they became tired and left the chamber. Now Thumbling gradually threw all the coins through the window. He sat himself down on the last one and went flying through the window. The robbers have him tremendous praise ans would have made him their captain if he had wanted that. Then they divided the loot, but Thumbing wouldn't take more than one coin because he couldn't carry more than that.

Afterwards he resumed walking, and finally, since he was not having much success with tailoring, he hired himself out as a servant at an inn. However, the maids weren't fond of him because he saw everything they did in secret without their noticing it. Then he reported them afterward. As a result, they wanted very much to play a prank on him.

So, one time, when he went for a walk in the meadow, where a maid was mowing the grass, she mowed him together with the grass and threw the grass and Thumbling to the cows when she returned home. Then the black cow swallowed Thumbling, and he was now cooped up inside the cow and heard that evening that the cow was to be slaughtered. Since his life was in danger, he cried out: "I'm here!"
"Where are you?"
"In the black cow!"

However, the people couldn't understand him, and the cow was slaughtered. Fortunately, he wasn't struck by the blows to the cow and became mixed with the sausage meat. When this meat was about to be chopped up, he cried out: "Don't chop too deeply! Don't chop too deeply! I'm stuck beneath the meat."

Because of all the noise, however, nobody heard him. So humbling jumped quickly between the chopping knives avoiding any harm, but he couldn't get completely away and was stuffed into a blood sausage that was hung in the chimney to be smoked until winter when the sausage was to be eaten. Well, when his lodging was eventually sliced dopen, he jumped out and ran away.

Now the little tailor wandered again. However, a fox came across his path and snatched him.
"Mister fox,", Thumbling cried, "you've got me! Let me go!"
"All right"; said the fox. "Since there's not very much of you, I'll let you go if you get your father to give me all the hens in the chicken yard."

So Thumbling swore that he'd do this, and the fox carried him to his home and was given all the hens in the chicken yard. Meanwhile, the little tailor brought his father the one coin that he had earned from all his wanderings.

"But why did the fox get all the poor little hens to eat?"
"Oh you fool, a father certainly loves his child more than he does his hens."

—
The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
Translated & Edited by Jack Zipes
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Hans' Trina was lazy and didn't want to do any work. She said to herself: "What should I do? Should I eat, sleep, or work? - Ahh! I think I'll eat first!"
After she had stuffed herself fully, she said to herself again: "What should I do? Work or sleep? - Ahh! I think I'll sleep a little first."
Then she lay down and slept, and when she woke up, it was night. So she could no longer go out and work.
One time Hans returned home at noon and found Trina sleeping again in their room. So he took his knife and cut off her dress at the knees. Trina awoke and thought: "It's time now to go to work." However, when she went outside to work and saw that the dress was so short she became frightened and wondered whether she really was Trina and said to herself: "Am I or am I not Trina?" She didn't know how to answer this question and stood there a while in doubt. Finally, she thought: "You should go home and ask if you are you. The'll know for sure."
So she returned home, knocked at the window, and called inside: "Is Hans' Trina inside?"
Since the others thought she was in her usual place, they answered: "Yes, she's lying down in her room and sleeping."
"Well, then I'm not me,", Trina said in delight. So she went off to the village and never returned, and this is how Hans god rid of his Trina.

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Once upon a time there was a rich man who lived happily with his wife for a long time, and they had one little girl together. Then the wife became ill, and as she became deathly, ill, she called her daughter and said, "Dear child, I must leave you, but when I am up in heaven, I shall look after you. Plant a little tree on my grave, and whenever you wish for something, shake it, and you'll have what you wish. And whenever you are otherwise in a predicament, then I'll send you help. Just stay good and pure."

After she said this, she closed her eyes and died. Her child wept and planted a little tree on her grave and didn't need to water it, for her tears were good enough.

The snow covered the mother's grave like a little white blanked, and by the time the sun had taken it off again and the little tree had become green for the second time, the man had married a second wife. However, the stepmother already had two daughters from her first husband. They had beautiful features but proud, nasty, and wicked hearts. After the wedding had now been celebrated, and all three entered the house, a difficult time began for the poor child. "What's this terrible and useless thing doing in our rooms?" The stepmother said. "Off with you into the kitchen. Whoever wants to eat bread must first earn it. She can be our maid."

The stepsisters took away her clothes and dressed her in an old grey smock.
"You look good in that!" They said, while mocking her and leading her to the kitchen, where the poor child had to do heavy work: she had to get up before dawn, carry the water into the house, make the fire, cook, and wash. Meanwhile her sisters did everything imaginable to cause her grief and make her look ridiculous. They poured peas and lentils into the ashes of the hearth so ehe had to sit there at the entire day and separate them. In the evening, when she was tired, there was no bed for her, and she had to lie next to the hearth in the ashes. Since she always rummaged in dust and looked dirty, they named her Cinderella.

At a certain time the king decided to organise a magnificent ball that was to last three days, and his son was supposed to choose a bride at this event. The two proud stepsisters were also invited to it.

"Cinderella," they called to her, "Come up here! Comb out our hair, brush our shoes, and fasten our buckles! We're going to see the prince at the ball."
Cinderella worked hard and cleaned and brushed as well as she could. However, the stepsisters continually scolded her, and when they had finished dressing, they asked her in a mocking tone: "Cinderella, wouldn't you like to go to the ball?"
"Oh yes," Cinderella replied. "But how can I go? I don't have any clothes."
"No," said the eldest daughter. "That's all we'd need for you show up there! If the people heard that you were our sister, we'd be ashamed. You belong in the kitchen where there's a bowl full of lentils. When we return, they must be sorted, and take care that we don't find a bad one among them. Otherwise, you know what will happen to you.

After that the stepsisters left, and Cinderella stood there and looked after them, and when she could no longer see them, she went sadly into the kitchen and shook the lentils on to the heath, and they formed a very large pile.
"Oh,", she sighed and said, "I'll have to sort them until midnight, and I won't be able to shut my eyes no matter how much they may hurt. If my mother knew about this!"

Then she knelt down in the ashes in front of the hearth and wanted to begin sorting. All at once two white pigeons flew through the window and landed next to the lentils on the hearth. They nodded with their little heads and said,

"Cinderella, would you like us to help you sort the lentils?"
"Yes," answered Cinderella:
"The good ones for the little pot,
The bad ones for your little crop."

And peck, peck! Peck, peck! They began and ate the bad ones and let the good ones remain. And in a quarter of an hour the lentils were so clean that there was not a bad one among them, and Cinderella could smooth them out in the little pot. Now the pigeons said to her, "Cinderella, if you want to see your sisters dance with the prince, then climb up to the pigeon coop." Cinderella followed them and climbed to the top of the ladder of the pigeon coop and could see the ballroom from there. Indeed, she could see her sisters dance with the prince, and a thousand chandeliers glittered and glistened before her eyes. And after she had seen enough, she climbed down the ladder. Her heart was heavy, and she laid herself down in the ashes and fell asleep.

The next morning the two sisters went into the kitchen, and when they saw that Cinderella had cleanly sorted the lentils, they were angry because they would have liked to have scolded her. Since they couldn't do that, they began to tell her about the ball and said, "Cinderella, that was so much fun, especially the dance. The prince, who's the most handsome in the world, led us out onto the dance floor, and one of us will become his bride."
"Yes," Cinderella, said. "I saw the chandeliers glimmer. That must have been splendid."
"What! How did you manage ghat?" The eldest sister asked.
"I climbed up to the pigeon coop."

When the sister heard this, she was filled with jealousy, and she immediately ordered the pigeon coop to be torn down. Now Cinderella had to comb and clean again, and the youngest sister, who had a little sympathy in her heart, said, "Cinderella, when it turns dark, you can go to the ball and look in through the windows."
"No," said the eldest. "That will only make her lazy. Here's a sack of sweet peas, Cinderella. Sort the good from the bad and work hard. If you don't have them sorted cleanly by tomorrow, then I'll spill them all into the ashes, and you'll have to starve until you've fished them out of the ashes."

Cinderella sat down on the hearth in distress and poured the peas out of the sack. Then the pigeons flew into the kitchen once again and asked in a friendly way:

"Cinderella, do you want us to sort the peas?"
"Yes."
"The good ones for the little pot,
The bad ones for your little crop."

Peck, peck! Peck, peck! It all went so quickly as if twelve hands were there. And when they were finished, the pigeons said: "Cinderella, do you want to go and dance at the ball?"
"Oh, my God!" She cried out. "But how can I go there in my dirty clothes?"
"Go to the little tree on your mother's grave. Shake it and wish for clothes. However, you must return before midnight."

So, Cinderella went to the grave, shook the little tree, and spoke:
"Shake and wobble, little tree!
Let beautiful clothes fall down on me."

No sooner had she said all this than a splendid dress lay right before her along with pearls, silk stockings, silver slippers, and everything else that belonged to her outfit. Cinderella carried everything into the house, and after she had washed herself and dressed herself she was as beautiful as a rose washed by the dew. And when she stepped outside, a carriage stood there drawn by six black horses adorned with feathers. There were also servants, dressed in blue and silver, who helped her inside. Then off they galloped to the king's castle.

When the prince saw the carriage come to a halt before the gate, he thought that a strange princess from afar had come traveling to the ball. So he himself went down the stairs, helped Cinderella out of the carriage, and led her into the ballroom. And when the glider of the four thousand chandeliers fell upon her, she was so beautiful that everyone there was amazed, and the sisters also stood there and were annoyed that some other young lady was more beautiful than they. However, they didn't think in the least that it might be Cinderella, who was presumably at home in the ashes.

Now, the prince danced with Cinderella and showed her royal honour. As he danced, he thought to himself, "I'm supposed to choose a bride, and I know she's the only one for me." On the other hand, Cinderella had lived for such a long time in the ashes and sadness, and now she was in splendour and joy. But when midnight came, before the clock stuck twelve, she stood up and bowed good-bye. Even though the prince begged and begged, she refused to remain any longer. So the prince led her down the stairs. The carriage was below and waiting for her, and it drove off in splendour as it had come.

When cinderella arrived home, she went once again to the little tree on her mother's grave.
"Shake and wobble, little tree!
Take these clothes back from me."
Then the tree took the clothes, and Cinderella had her grey smock on again. And she returned to the kitchen with it, put some dust on her face, and laid herself down to sleep.

In the morning the sisters came. They looked morose and kept quiet. Then Cinderella said, "You must have had an enjoyable time last night."
"No, a princess was there, and the prince almost always danced with her. Nobody had ever seen her or knew where she came from."
"Was it perhaps that lady who arrived in the splendid carriage pulled by six black horses?" Cinderella asked.
"How do you know this?"
"As I was standing in the entrance to the house, I saw her drive by."
"In the future stay inside working," said the eldest sister, who looked angrily at Cinderella. "What business do you have to stand in the entrance to the house?"

For a third time Cinderella had to dress up the two sisters, and as a reward they gave her a bowl with peas that she was to sort. "And don't you dare to leave your work!" The eldest daughter cried out to her.

Cinderella thought, "If only my pigeons will return!" And her heart beat anxiously until the pigeons came as they had the previous night and said,

"Cinderella, do you want us to sort the peas?"
"Yes."
"The good ones for the little pot,
The bad ones for your little crop."

Once more the pigeons pecked the bad ones out, and once they were finished, they said, "Cinderella, shake the little tree. It will throw down even more beautiful clothes. Go to the ball, but take care that you return before midnight."

Cinderella went to her mother's grave:
"Sake and wobble, little tree!
Let beautiful clothes fall down on me."

Then a dress fell down, and it was even more glorious and splendid than the previous one. It was made out of gold and precious gems. In addition there were golden gusseted stockings and gold slippers. And after Cinderella was completely dressed, she glistened really like the sun at midday. A carriage drawn by six white horses that had plumes on their heads stopped in front of the house, and the servants were dressed in red and gold. When Cinderella arrived, the prince was already on the stairs and led her into the ballroom. And if everyone had been astonished by here beauty the day before, they were even more astounded this evening, and the sisters stood in a corner and were pale with envy. If they had known that it was Cinderella, who was supposed to be at home in the ashes, they would have died of envy.

Now the prince wanted to know who the strange princess was, where she came from, and where she drove off to. So he had people stationed on the road, and they were to pay attention to here whereabouts. Moreover, he had the stairs painted with black pitch so that she wouldn't be able to run so fast. Cinderella danced and danced with the prince and was filled with so much joy that she didn't think about midnight. All of a sudden, as she was in the middle of a dance, she heard the clock begin to strike. She was reminded of the pigeons' warning and was terrified. So she sushed to the door and flew down the stairs. However, since they were covered with pitch, one of her golden slippers got caught, and Cinderella didn't stop to take it with her out of fear. Indeed, just as she reached the last step of the stairs, the clock stuck twelve.

Consequently, the carriage and horses disappeared, and Cinderella stood in her grey smock on the dark road. In the meantime, the prince had rushed after her, and he found the golden slipper on the steps. He pulled it from the pitch and carried it with him, but by the time he made it down the stairs, everything had disappeared. Even the people who had stood guard came and said that they had seen nothing.

Cinderella was glad that nothing worse had happened, and she went home. Once there she turned on her dim oil lamp, hung it in the chimney, and laid herself down in the ashes. It didn't take long before the two sisters also returned and call out: "Cinderella, get up and light the way."

Cinderella yawned and pretended that she had been wakened from her sleep. As she showed them the way, she heard one of the sisters say, "God knows who the presumable princess is. If she were only in her grave! The prince danced just with her alone, and after she had gone, he didn't want to remain, and the entire ball came to an end."
"It was really as if all the lights had suddenly been blown out," the older said.

Meanwhile, the prince was thinking, “If everything else has gone wrong for you, now the slipper will help you find your bride.” So he had a proclamation announced and declared that whichever maiden’s foot fit in the golden slipper was to become his wife. But the slipper was much to small for anyone who tried it on. Indeed, many couldn’t even slip their foot into the slipper and couldn’t have done so even if the single slipper were two. Finally, it was the turn of the two sisters to take the test. They were glad because they had small beautiful feet and believed that it couldn’t go wrong for them and that the prince should have gone to them right away.

“Listen,” said the mother secretly, “here’s a knife, and if the slipper is still too tight for you, then cut off a piece of your foot. It will hurt a bit. But what does that matter? It will soon pass, and one of you will become queen.”

So the eldest sister went into the chamber and tried on the slipper. Her toe slipped inside, but her heel was too large. So, she took the knife and cut off a part of her heel until she could force her foot into the slipper. Then she went out of the chamber to the prince, and when he saw that she had the slipper on her foot, he said that she was to be his bride. Then he led her to his carriage and wanted to drive off. However, when he came to the gate, the pigeons were above and called out:

“Looky, look, look
At the shoe that she took.
There’s blood all over, the shoe’s too small.
She’s not the bride that you met at the ball.”

The prince leaned over and saw that blood was spilling out of the slipper, and he realised that he had been deceived. So he brought the false bride back to the house. However, the mother said to her second daughter, “Take the slipper, and if it’s too short for you, then cut off one of your toes.”

So the sister took the slipper into her chamber, and sincere foot was too large, she bit her lips and cut off a large part of her toes. Then she quickly slipped her foot into the slipper and came out of her chamber. Since the prince thought she was the right bride, he wanted to drive off with her. However, when he came to the gate, the pigeons called out again:

“Looky, look, look
At the shoe that she took.
There’s blood all over, the shoe’s too small.
She’s not the bride that you met at the ball.”

The prince looked down and saw that the stockings of the bride were coloured red and that her blood was streaming out of the slipper. So the prince brought her to her mother and said, “She, too, is not the right bride. But is there another daughter in your house?”
“No,” said the mother, “there’s just a nasty Cinderella. She sits below in the ashes. I’m sure the slipper won’t fit her.”

The mother didn’t want to have her summoned, but the prince demanded that she do so. Therefore, Cinderella was alerted, and when she heard that the prince was there, she washed her face and hands quickly so that they were fresh and clean. When she entered the room, she curtsied. Then the prince handed her the golden slipper and said, “Try it on! If it fits, you’ll become my wife.”

So Cinderella took off the heavy shoe from her left foot and put this foot into the golden slipper, and after she pressed a bit, her foot fit as though the slipper had been made for her. Ana when she stood up, the prince looked at her face and recognised the beautiful princess once again and cried: “This is the right bride!”

The stepmother and the two haughty sisters were horrified and became pale, but the prince led Cinderella away. He helped her into the carriage, and as they drove off through the gate, the pigeons called out:

“Looky, look, look,
There’s no blood at all.
The golden shoe’s a perfect fit.
She’s truly the bride you met at the ball.”

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The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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Once in the little city of Romania a tailor was sitting and working, and he had an apple lying nearby. There were also many flies around the apple as was usual during the summer time. The tailor became angry, and he took a piece of cloth. Then he hit the flies on the apple and killed seven of them. When the simple-minded tailor saw this, he thought that he had taken care of the situation quite well, and he soon had a beautiful suit of arbor made for himself and also had golden letters inscribed that read: Seven with One Stroke. Then, dressed in his armour, he went on the street, and whoever saw him believed that he had killed seven men with one stroke. After that, everyone was very terrified of him.

Now in the same region there was a king whose praise resounded far and wide, and the lazy tailor made his way to king's court, lay down on the grass, and slept. The royal servants, who went in and out of the castle, saw the tailor in the splendid suit of arbor and read the inscription. They were very puzzled about what this warrior was doing in the king's courtyard during a time of peace. They thought he was undoubtedly a great lord. The king's councillors, who had also seen the tailor, informed his majesty that this man could be very useful whenever there might be a conflict. The king was very satisfied with their advice and soon summoned the well-armed tailor and asked him whether he wanted to enter his royal service. The tailor answered right away and told his majesty the king that this is why he had come and asked him to tell him where he might be of use to the king. The king immediately accepted him into his service and gave him special lodgings.

Now it didn't take long for the knights to show the good tailor their ill will. They wished the devil would cart him away. But they were afraid that, if ever they had differences, they wouldn't be able to stand up to him because he had killed seven with one stroke. So, they continually thought of ways to get rid of this warrior. Finally, they discussed the situation with one another and agreed that they would all go to the king and ask to be released from his service, and the king granted their wish.

The king was sad to lose all his knights on account of one man, and he wished he had never laid eyes on him. Indeed, he actually wanted to get rid of him, but he din't dare to discharge him for fear that the tailor might kill him and all his people and take over the his realm. The king pondered the situation for a long time, going back and forth in his mind, until he hit upon a plan. Since he needed such a strong and powerful warrior, he summoned the tailor and offered the following proposal: there were two giants living in a forest in the king's country, and they were causing great damage by robbing, murdering, and burning people. Nobody could get near them because they tore apart anyone who approached. Neither weapons nor anything else helped. However, if the tailor could conquer these two giants and kill them, the king promised him he would receive the king's only daughter for his wife and half the kingdom as dowry. Moreover, one hundred knights were to accompany him and lend him assistance.

The tailor felt good about this proposal, especially since he would become the king's son-in-law, and he replied that he'd like very much to kill the giants, but he didn't need the help of the knights, for he knew quite well how to kill the giants. Then he went to the forest, and after he left the knights at the edge of the woods, he entered and began looking to see if he could find the giants in the distance. After he searched for a long time, he found them sleeping and snoring beneath a tree. The tailor didn't have to think long about what to do. He quickly filled his shirt with stones and climbed up the tree under which they were sleeping. Then he threw one stone after another on the chest of one of the giants until he woke up. The giant became angry with his companion and asked him why he was hitting him. The other giant excused himself as best he could. Then they lay down to sleep again, and the tailor threw a stone at the other giant. He, too, became angry and asked his companion why he was throwing stones at him. They quarrelled for a while, but since they were tired, they let it pass, and their eyes closed again. Then the tailor threw a stone at the first giant again with all his might, and the giant couldn't tolerate his companion doing this anymore. So, he hit him violently because he thought that it was his companion who had struck him. Well the other giant didn't like this and stood up. They both became so furious that they ripped trees from the ground and began beating each other to death. Fortunately, they didn't tear up the tree that the tailor was siting in. When he saw what had happened, he summoned his courage, which he normally didn't have, and climbed cheerfully down the tree. Then he stabbed the giants with his sword a few times to create wounds and left the forest to meet the knights, who asked him whether he had seen the giants.

"Yes," he said. "I've slaughtered the two of them and have left them lying beneath a tree." The knights doubted very much that he could come away from the giants without being wounded. So they rode into the forest to inspect this miracle and found everything just as the tailor had said it was. While they all felt astonished, they also felt great horror. Indeed, they felt worse than ever. They feared that he might kill them all if he suspected that they were his enemy. So they rode home and told the king about the tailor's deed.

Now the tailor wished to have the king's daughter along with half the realm, bu when the king saw that he had killed the giants, he regretted that he had promised his daughter in marriage to the unknown warrior and began thinking of a way to break his promise, for he had no intention of giving his daughter to him. So he said to the tailor hat there was a unicorn in the forest that caused great damage by harming fish and people, and if the tailor captured the unicorn, the king would give him his daughter.

The tailor was satisfied with this proposal. So he took some rope, went to the forest, and ordered his escorts to remain outside. He wanted to enter alone, and as soon as he went into the forest, he was the unicorn charging at him and intent on killing him. However, the tailor was nimble, and he waited until the unicorn was very close before jumping behind a nearby tree. Meanwhile, the unicorn was running at full speed and couldn't turn, so that it thrust its horn into the tree so hard that it became stuck. When the tailor saw this, he went to the unicorn, put the rope around its neck. And tied it to the tree. Then he left the forest and announced his victory over the unicorn.

Once the king learned of the tailor's triumph, he became tremendously sad and didn't know what to do, for the tailor continued to desire his daughter. So once again the king demanded that he perform a task and capture a wild boar that was running around in the forest, and if he succeeded, the king would immediately give him his daughter. The king's huntsmen were to lend him a hand. So the tailor went off to the forest with the huntsmen, but he ordered them to stay outside, and they were pleased, for the wild boar had already given them such a rough treatment that they had no desire to chase it, and they thanked the tailor very much. Once the tailor entered the forest, the boar charged tat him, foaming at the mouth and gnashing its teeth, and sought to trample him to the ground. Fortunately, there was a chapel in the forest where people often rested, and it was nearby. When the tailor saw it, he ran inside and jumped right out again through one of the windows. The boar followed him inside, while the tailor ran around on the outside, slammed the door shut, and locked the boar in the little church. Then he went and announced to the huntsmen that he had captured the boar. In turn, they rode to the king and informed him of the tailor's deed.

It's not clear whether the king liked it or not, and that doesn't matter. He had to give his daughter to the tailor. However, I'm certain that if he had known that the hero was actually a tailor, he would have put a noose around his head instead of giving his daughter to him. As it was, the king had to give his daughter to this stranger but with grave concern. Thereafter, the tailor didn't ask much but just thought about becoming the king's son-in-law. So the wedding took place with little joy, and a king was made out of a tailor.

After he had spent some nights lying next to his bride, the tailor began talking in his sleep and said: "Boy, finish that jerkin and mend the trousers fast, or else I'll give you a whack on your head with my yardstick."

Well, his wife happened to hear all of this, and she went to her father to complain. She begged him to help her get rid of this husband who was nothing but a tailor. The king was cut to the heart when he heard that he had given his only daughter to a tailor. So he consoled her as best he could and told her to leave the door of her bedroom open that night. Then he would post some servants outside, and when the tailor began to talk, they would go inside and do away with him.

The king's daughter was content with this plan. However, the king had a weapons-bearer at his court who was Kindly disposed to the tailor, and he had overheard everything. So he went quickly to the young king and informed him about the plot against him and advised him to protect himself as best he could.

The tailor was very grateful and assured his friend that he knew how to take care of this matter. When night arrived, the tailor went to bed with his young queen and pretended to fall asleep, while she secretly got out of bed, went to the door, opened it, and then got back into bed. As soon as the tailor heard this he began to talk loudly as if he were talking in his sleep and so loudly that the servants outside the door could hear him.

"Boy, finish that jerking and mend the trousers fast, or else I'll give you a whack on your head with my yardstick! I've slain seven with one stroke, killed two giants, captured a unicorn, and trapped a wild boar. Do you think I'm afraid of those fellows waiting outside my door?" When the men heard the tailor's words, they fled as if the wild host of hell were after them, and nobody wanted to do anything to him after this. Thus the tailor remained a king for the rest of his life.

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In olden times there lived a king who loved flax spinning more than anything else, and his daughters had to spin the entire day. If he didn't hear the wheels humming he became angry. One time he had to take a trip, and before he said his farewell, he gave a large casket of flax to the queen and said: "All this must be spun by the time I return."
The princesses became distressed and wept.
"If we are to spin all of that flax, we'll have to sit the entire day, and we won't be able to get up at all."
But the queen replied: "Console yourselves. I'll certainly help you."
Now there were three especially ugly spinsters in the realm. The first had such a huge lower lip that it hung beneath her chin. The second had an index finger on her right hand that was so thick and wide that one could make three other fingers out of it. The third had a thick and wide flat foot that was as large as a kitchen board. The queen summoned the three spinsters to the castle, and on the day that the king was supposed to return home, she set them down next to one another in the room, gave each of them a spinning wheel, and ordered them to spin. Moreover, she told each of them what to answer when the king questioned them. As soon as the king arrived, he heard the humming of the wheels from a distance and was so glad that he intended to praise his daughters. However, upon entering the room and seeing the horrible spinsters sitting there, he was at first startled. Then he stepped toward them and asked the first woman how she got the hideously large lower lip.
"From licking, from licking!"
Then he asked the second where she got her thick finger from.
"From turning the thread, from turning the thread and twining it!"
As she said this, she let the thread run around her finger a couple of times.
Finally, he asked the third one where she got her flat foot from.
"From stamping, from stamping!"
When the king heard all this, he commanded the queen and the princesses never ever to touch a spinning wheel again, and this is how they rid themselves of their agony.

—
The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
Translated & Edited by Jack Zipes
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There was a man whose wife died, and he was undecided whether he wanted to marry again. Finally, he took off one of his boots and that had a hole in the sole and said to his daughter, his only child: “Take this boot and carry it up to the loft, where you’ll find a large nail. Hang the boot on the nail. Then fetch some water, and pour the water into the boot. If it holds the water, I’ll get married again. But if it leaks, I’ll let things remain as they are.”
The maiden did as she was told. The water drew the hole together, and the boot became full to the brim. The father checked to see for himself whether this was true. Then he said: “Well now I got to take a wife.”

So he went and courted a widow who brought a daughter from her first husband with her into the house. When she saw that her stepdaughter was beautiful and everyone was fond of her, and that her own daughter was ugly, she scolded the stepdaughter whenever she could and only thought of how she might torment her.

One day, in the middle of winter, when the snow was hight, the stepmother sewed her a dress made of paper, and when it was finished, she called her stepdaughter to her and said, “I’ve got a craving to eat strawberries. So put on this dress, go into the forest, and fetch me a basket of strawberries. And don’t you dare return home until the basket is full.”

The maiden wept bitter tears and said, “Strawberries don’t grow in the winter, and even if they were there, they’d be covered by the snow. How I am supposed to find them? It’s so cold outside that my breath will freeze. How can I go out in a paper dress? The wind will blow right through the dress, and the thorns will tear it right off my body.”
“Don’t say one more word!” The stepmother replied.
“Get going and look for the strawberries.”

In her jealous heart she thought that the maiden would freeze outside and never return. That’s why she had made the thin paper dress. Since the maiden was obedient, she put on the paper dress and went out into the forest. There was nothing but snow, not even a blade of green grass. So she kept going, and when she reached the middle of the forest, she saw a small cottage, and three little men were looking out of the window. She wished them a good day, and since she greeted them so politely, they asked her what she was looking for in the forest dressed in such a thin paper dress when it was wintertime.
“Oh,” she answered, “I’m supposed to look for strawberries, and I am not allowed to return home until I gather a basket full.”

The three little men responded: “Go behind our house and clear the snow away. The strawberries have been protected there and have grown. You’ll find enough to fill your basket.” The maiden thanked them and did as she was told. While she cleared away the snow and gathered the strawberries, the three little men began talking among themselves.
“Since she’s been so polite to us and is so beautiful, what gifts should we grant her?”
“I’ll make sure that she becomes even more beautiful than she is. This is my gift,” one of the little men said.
“Each time she speaks, golden coins will fall out of her mouth. That will be my gift,” said another one of the little men.
“I’ll grant her a king that will come and take her for his wife,” the third little man said.

When the maiden came back to them, they bestowed their gifts on her, and when she wanted to thank them, golden coins fell out of her mouth. Then she went home, and the stepmother was astonished by the strawberries that she had brought with her and was even more astonished when she saw the coins that fell from the girl’s mouth. Shortly thereafter, a king came, took the maiden with her, and made her his wife.

Now the mother thought about how she might provide her daughter with the same great fortune. So she sowed her a splendid fur coat and told her to go into the forest and ask the little men for a gift. But the men saw that she had a wicked heart, and instead of giving her good gifts, they gave her bad ones. The first wished that she would freeze in her fur coat as if it were made of paper. The second wished that she would grow uglier with each passing day. The third wished that she would die a miserable death. The girl returned home shivering, as if her fur coat had been made of paper, and told her mother what she had encountered, and when her mother saw that the curses of the three men were starting to take effect, she thought only of avenging herself. So she went to her stepdaughter, who was now the queen, and pretended to be friendly and charming. Consequently she was welcomed and given her own apartment. Shortly thereafter the queen gave birth to a prince, who one night, when she was alone and sick and weak, the wicked stepmother lifted her out of the bed with the help of her daughter, and they carried the queen outside to a river and threw her into it.

The next morning they told the king that the queen had died during the night.
The following night the kitchen boy saw a duck swimming through the drain into the kitchen, and it asked:

“Are all my guests now sound asleep?”

Then the kitchen boy answered:
“Yes, indeed you can’t hear a peep.”
“How about that baby of mine?”
“He’s asleep and doing just fine.”

Then the duck assumed the shape of the queen, went upstairs, suckled and nursed the baby, plumped up his little bed, covered him, and returned to the drain, where she swam away as a duck. This happened the next night too, and on the third night, she said to the kitchen boy, “go and tell the king to take his sword and swing it three times over my head on the threshold.”

The kitchen boy ran and told the king, and when he swung the sword three times, his wife appeared before him alive and well. The duplicity of the stepmother and her daughter was now clear as day, and they were cast into the forest to be devoured by wild animals.

—
The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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A man and his wife lived in a village, and the wife was so lazy that she never wanted to do any work. Whenever her husband gave her something to spin, she never finished it, and whatever she did spin, she didn't wind it but left tangled in the bobbin. If her husband scolded her, she used her quick tongue and said, "How can I wind the yarn if I don't have a reel? You go into the forest first and fetch me one." "If that's the problem," her husband replied, "then I'll go into the forest and get some wood for a reel."

Upon hearing this, his wife became anxious because she'd have to wind the yarn and start spinning again if he found the wood to make a reel. So she gave the matter some thought and came up with a good idea. She secretly followed her husband into the forest, and just as he climbed up a tree to choose and cut the wood, she crawled into some bushes below him where he couldn't see her, and cried out:

"He who chops wood for reels shall die.
She who winds yarn shall be ruined all her life."

The husband listened, laid down his axe for a moment, and wondered what all this could possibly mean. "Oh, well," he said. "I must have been hearing things. No need to get frightened. It's nothing." So he took his axe again and was about to begin chopping when he heard the voice from below once more:

"He who chops wood for reels shall die.
She who winds yarn shall be ruined all her life."

He stopped again, and in his ear and terror, he tried to grasp what was happening. After some time had passed, his courage returned. He reached for his axe a third time and was about to chop when he heard the voice cry out loudly for a third time:

"He who chops wood for reels shall die.
She who winds yarn shall be ruined all her life."

This was too much for him, and he lost all desire to chop the wood. He quickly climbed down the tree and made his way home. His wife ran as fast as she could ia the byways to get home before he did. When he entered the living room, she acted innocent, as if nothing had happened, and said,
"Well, did you bring me a nice piece of wood for a reel?"
"No," he said, "I've realised that it makes no sense to wind," and he told her what he had encountered in the forest, and from then on he left her in peace.

Yet some time later the husband began complaining again about the messy condition of the house. "Wife," he said, "It's a disgrace the way you just leave your spun wool on the bobbin."
"You know what?" she said. "Since we haven't managed to get a reel, you go up to the loft, and I'll stand here below. Then I'll throw the yarn up to you, and you throw it back down to me. That way we'll have a skein."
"Yes, that'll work," said her husband. So they did this, and when they were finished, he said, "We've got the yarn skeined, and now it needs to be boiled as well." His wife became uneasy again and said, "Yes, indeed, we'll boil it first thing tomorrow morning," but she was really thinking up a new trick.

Early the next morning she got up, made the fire, and set the kettle on it, but instead of putting the yarn in the kettle, she put in a clump of wool and let it boil. After this she went to her husband, who was still lying in bed and said do him, "I've got to go out awhile. So I want you to get up and look after the yarn that's in the kettle on the fire. Make sure you do this right away, and watch things closely, for if the cock crows and you're not taking care, the yarn will become wool."

The husband agreed since he certainly didn't want anything to go wrong. He got up as fast as he could and went into the kitchen. But when he reached the kettle and looked inside, he was horrified to discover nothing but a clump of wool. Then the husband was as quiet as a mouse, for he thought that he had done something wrong and was to blame. In the future he left his wife in peace when it came to yarn and spinning.

—
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THE BRIGHT SUN WILL BRING IT TO LIGHT 64.

A journeyman tailor was traveling around and practicing his trade. However, at one time he couldn't find any work and became so poverty-stricken that he didn't have a single cent left for food. Just at this point in his travels he met a Jew, who, he thought, probably had a lot of money with him. So he abandoned God, went straight toward the Jew, and said, "Give me your money, or I'll kill you."

"Spare my life!" said the Jew. "I don't have much money, just eight pennies."
"You've got more money than that! Out with it!" the tailor responded.
Then he used force and beat the Jew until he was nearly dead. Just as the Jew was on the point of death, he uttered his last words, "The bright sun will bring it to light!"
Upon saying this, he died.

The tailor searched the man's pockets for money but couldn't find anything more than the eight pennies that the Jew had told him about So he picked him up, carried him behind a bush, and continued on his travels, practicing his craft along the way. After he had been traveling a long time, he came to a place where he began working for a master tailor who had a beautiful daughter. He fell in love with her, married, her, and they had a good and happy marriage.

Some time later, after they already had two children, the father-in-law and the mother-in-law died, and the young couple had the house to themselves. One morning, as the man sat at the table in front of a window, his wife brought him some coffee. He pored it into the cup and was about to drink it when the sun shone upon coffee and cast a reflection on the wall so that little rings flickered here and there.

The tailor looked up and said, "Ah, the sun wants very much to bring it to light, but it can't"
"Good gracious, my dear husband!" said his wife. "What's that? What do you mean by that?"
"I can't tell you," he answered. But she said, "If you really love me, you must tell me,", and she spoke very sweetly, swore she would never tell a soul about it, and gave him no peace.

So he told her how, many years ago, he had been traveling around in rags and without money, when he had met a Jew and had killed him. Then the Jew had said in his death throes, "The bright sun will bring it to light!" Now the sun wanted to bring it to light and had cast its reflection on the wall, where it made rings. But it was not able to bring it to light.

After telling her this, he implored her not to tell anybody; otherwise he would lose his life. She promised him not to, but after he sat down to work, she went to her neighbour, told her the story in confidence, making her promise not to tell a should about it. Yet after three days had passed, the whole city knew the story, and the tailor was brought before the court and convicted.

So, after all, the bright sun did manage to bring it to light.

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Once upon a time there was a princess who was extremely proud. Whenever a suitor appears before her, she gave him a riddle to solve, and if he couldn't solve it, she would ridicule him and send him away. Indeed, she let it be known that whoever was able to solve her riddle would be allowed to marry her, no matter who the person might be.

After some time had passed, three tailors happened to meet. The two oldest thought that, because they had sewn many a fine stitch and had got them all right, they were sure to win the princess and would hit upon the right answer. The third tailor was a useless little thing, who knew next to nothing about his craft. So the other two tailors said to him, "You'd be better off staying at home. You won't get very far with your dense head."

However, the little tailor refused to let himself be confused and said that he had his mind set on it and knew how to take care of himself. So he tallied forth as if he owned the world.
Together the three of them announced themselves to the princess and asked her to give them the riddle. They told her that the right people had finally come, for they all had such fine minds that one could thread a needle with each one of them. So the princess said,

"I have two kinds of hair on my head. What are the colours?"
"If that's all there's to it," said the first tailor, "One's black, and the other's white, just like the cloth they call pepper and salt."
"Wrong," said the princess. "Let the second try."
Well, if it's not black and white," said the second tailor, "then it's got to be brown and red, like my father's fur coat."
"Wrong," said the princess. "Let the third try. I can tell by his face that he thinks he knows the answer."
The little tailor stepped forward boldly and said, "The princess has silver and golden hair on her head, and those are the two colours."

When the princess heard that, she turned pale and nearly fainted from fright, for the little tailor had guessed right, and she had been firmly convinced that nobody in the world would ever solve the riddle. When her heart began to beat again, she said, "You haven't won me yet, for you must do one more thing. Down in the stable there's a bear, and you must spend the night with him. If you're still alive when I get up in the morning, then I'll marry you."

She thought that she'd get rid of the tailor this way because the bear had never let anyone that he had got his paws on survive. But the little tailor was not about to let himself be frightened by this. Indeed, he was delighted and said, "I'll manage to complete this task as well."
When evening came, the little tailor was taken down to the bear, who immediately headed straight for the little fellow to give him a big welcome with his paws.
"Easy does it, easy does it," said the little tailor. "I'll calm you down soon enough."

Then, as though he had nothing in the world to worry about, he casually took some walnuts out of his pocket and began cracking them open with his teeth and eating the kernels. When the bear saw this, he began craving some nuts too. So the little tailor reached into his pocket and gave him a handful. However, these were not nuts but small stones. The bar put them into his mouth and could not crack any of them open, no matter how much he tried.
"Good gracious," thought the bear. "What a stupid oaf I am! I can't even crack open nuts."
And he said to the little tailor, "Will you crack open some nuts for me?"
"What kind of a fellow are you anyway?" Asked the little tailor. "You have such a big mouth, and yet you can't even crack open little nuts."
Then he took the stones and stealthily substituted a nut for them and cracked it in two in his mouth.
"I've got to try this thing once more," said the bear. "When I see you do it, I can't imagine why I can't do it, too."
Once again the little tailor gave him plain stones, and the bear worked at it and bit with all his might. God help the little tailor, if he had managed to bite it open!
After that was over, the little tailor took out a violin from under his coat and played a little tune. When the bear heard the music, he couldn't help but dance, and after he had danced for a while, he was so delighted that he said to the little tailor, "Is it hard to learn how to play the fiddle?"
"It's child's play. With me. I place the fingers of my left hand down here and move the bow with my right. Then you can have a merry old dime - whoop-de-doo and away we go!"
"I'd like to learn how to play the fiddle," said the bear. "Then I could dance as much as I liked. What do you think about that? Will you give me lessons?"
"Gladly," said the little tailor, "if you have talent for it. But show me your paws. There tremendously long. I'll have to cut your nails a bit"

So he went and fetched a vise, and the bear put his paws into it, then the tailor tightened the rise and said, "Now wait until I return with the scissors," and he let the bear growl as long as he liked, while the tailor lay down on a bundle of straw in the corner and fell asleep.

That night, when the princess heard the bear's tremendous growling, she thought that he had made an end of the tailor and was growling out of joy. The next morning she got up feeling quite at ease and happy, but when she glanced out the window towards the stable, she saw the little tailor standing outside, looking as cheerful and fresh as a fish in water. After this she couldn't break her agreement because she had given her promise in public. The king summoned a coach, and she had to drive to church with the little tailor to get married. When the couple climbed into the coach, the other two tailors, who were false-hearted and begrudged the little tailor his luck, went to the stable and set the bear free. Now, the bear ran after the coach in a great rage, and the princess heard him panting and growling. In her fright she cried out, "Ah, the bear's after us and wants to get you!"

The little tailor, alert as ever, immediately stood on his head, stuck his feet out the window, and shouted. "You see the rise? If you don't go away, then you'll soon be back in it!"
When the bear saw that, he turned and ran away. Our little tailor drove calmly to the church and was married to the princess. Thereafter, he lived as happily as a lark with her, and whoever doesn't believe me must give me a gold coin.

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The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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A mother had a little boy of seven who was handsome, and she loved him more than anything in the world. But, all of a sudden, he died. The mother couldn't stop grieving and wept day and night. Not long after the boy was buried, he began to appear at night in places where he had formerly sat and played when he had been alive. Then, whenever his mother wept, he would weep too, and when morning came, he would disappear. Since his mother wouldn't stop her weeping, he came one night clad in the little white shroud that he had worn in his coffin and with a wreath on his head. He sat down at her feet on the bed and said, "Oh, Mother, please stop weeping. Otherwise, I won't be able to get to sleep in my coffin. My little shroud is all wet from the tears you've been shedding on it."
Upon hearing this, his mother became frightened and stopped weeping. The next night, the child came again with a light in his hand and said, "You see, now my shroud is almost dry, and I can rest in my grave."
Then his mother commended her grief to the dear Lord and bore it silently and patiently. The child never returned after that but slept in his little bed beneath the ground.

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The queen receives three belts from a fairy, who tirelessly gives her help as an old wicked witch. As long as these belts are not broken in two, the queen can believe in the love and faithfulness of her absent husband. When two of the belts break, the queen disguises herself as a pilgrim and searches for her husband. As she walks through a large forest, three golden nuts fall to her feet one after the other. She picks them up and takes them with her She meets up with a miller and poses as his cousin and uses a false name. Then she finds the king, and without recognising the queen, he falls in love with her. She shows that she has affection for him, but when he wants to embrace her, the third belt breaks. She is horrified and asks him to close the doors of the house because she cannot stand the sound of their constant slamming. However, as soon as he closes one door, another springs open, and it continues this way throughout the night. The king can do nothing but close the doors, and because of this he becomes irritated and doesn't return. Instead, he marries a princess to whom he had become engaged. Now the queen opens her first golden nut and finds the most splendid sewing stuff in a casket. Then she takes the casket and goes to the castle and sits down across from the princess's windows and begins to sew. The princes sees her and takes a great liking to the sewing stuff. She bargains for the sewing stuff, and in exchange she must let the queen spend the first night in the king's bedchamber. The next day the queen opens the second nut and finds a precious spindle inside Then she spins with the spindle before the princess and exchanges it for the permission to spend the second night in the king's bedchamber. Finally, the queen exchanges the jewellery in the third box to spend the third night in the king's bedchamber. After the wedding with the princes take place the next day, the queen is led to the king, and she reveals to him that she is his wife. On the third morning the king summons the princess, the queen, and all the councillors and relates how he had lost the key to a golden padlock and then had found it again. Then he asks the princess, his new Wie, whether he should use the new key to the padlock or the old one. She advises him to use the old one, and by doing this, she passes a sentence on herself and must separate from the king.

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The Grimms state that his tale is similar to one about the three belts
in the anonymous Feen-Märchen (1801),
(Prinz Schwan). Source: Margarete Marianne Wild.

The farmers of a certain village hate Mr. Hands, the tailor because he is so smart. Out of jealousy they shut him in a baking oven. However, he takes the debris and ashes in a sack to a refined lady and asks her to keep the sack for him. He tells her that there are herbs, cinnamon, pepper, and little nails inside. Later he comes to fetch the sack and leads her astray by crying out she had robbed the contents of the sack. In this way he compels her to pay him 300 gold coins. The farmer see him counting his money and ask him how he had earned it. He tells them that he got it out of the debris and ashes of baking oven. So all the farmers smash their baking ovens to pieces and carry the debris and ashes into the city to sell. However, they are treated badly. Now the farmers want to kill Mr. Hands out of revenge. But he puts on his mother's clothes, and in this way he escapes them, and his mother is beaten to death. Then he puts his mother into a barrel and rolls her to a doctor and lets her stand there a while. When he returns, he accuses the doctor of having killed her and manages to extort a certain sum of money. He tells the farmers that he received the money for causing his mother's death. So the farmers beat their own mothers to death. Afterward there is the incident with the shepherd who trades places with him in the cask and drowns. At the end the farmers imitate him and jump into the water.

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Von dem Schneider, der bald reich wurde,
Hassenpflug family.
The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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A prince and his wife have a daughter; the wife dies, making he Prince promise never to marry unless it is a woman like herself. In due course he tells his daughter that he wants to marry her. She consults her godmother, who tells her to consent on condition only that he gives her a spinning-wheel which spins by itself. After a long search he finds one. The same happens when she asks for three dresses, like the stars, the sun, and the moon; and for a cabriolet drawn by four rats. The godmother tells her to leave in this, taking all the gifts with her; she will meet shepherds who will sell her a young donkey and skin it for her to war, when she must look for any kind of menial work. All this happens, and she is employed as a shepherdess, setting the wheel to spin meanwhile. The son and daughter of the estate where she works go to dances, laughing at her when she asks to go too, but the mother allows her to go, for each of three times, beating her beforehand first with a cloth, then a broom, then a poker, but permitting her on each occasion to stay longer. Each time she wars a different dress and is asked wehre she comes from, answering first 'the land of the cloth', then of the broom, then of the poker. Back home she is told about the beautiful, unknown girl and is mocked when she replies that the girl was no more beautiful than herself. At the last dance it is the King's son who asks her where she comes from; when she leaves, he follows the light of her dress in the darkness and sees her put on the donkey-skin. He falls in love and insists on having a cake made by the shepherdess. She comes to cook for him. While she does so he plucks at the donkey-skin; she pretends to think it is the cat. She puts her ring into the cake before leaving. Finding it, he announces that he will marry its owner. All others having failed to make it fit, she appears in the donkey-skin. When the ring is seen to fit her the Prince says he will wed her and removes the skin, to show her wearing the sun dress beneath. She writes to tell her father, who comes to the wedding.

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Delarue/Teneze ii. 256, conte-type,
"The Little Donkey's skin"),
recorded c. 1885 in east central France:
The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,
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A tailor heard that during the night between the last of April and the first of May witches gather on Glocker Mountain and there perform incredible dances. Being curious, on the preceding day he set forth and climbed Glocker Mountain. He hid himself among the branches of a willow tree and then saw how many hundred witches flew there through the air, had a lovely feast, and then danced joyfully.

One of the witches noticed him and shouted to another one, "See what a large burl that willow branch has. I'm going to drive my ax into it, so I can find it again next year." And she drove her ax into his back.

He only felt a single stab, but from that moment onward his back was very heavy, and when the sun came up he saw with terror from his shadow that he was now a hunchback.

Nevertheless, the following year when the first of May was approaching he could not restrain his desire to return to Glocker Mountain, because the dances had pleased him so much. Seated once again in the willow tree, the witch saw him, as before, and said, "I want to pull my ax out of the willow burl, so I won't lose it."

She reached for his back, and he felt a light stab. From that time onward his hump was gone. When the witch pulled her hand back, she was holding an ax.

—

Emil Sommer,
"Der Schneider auf dem Brocken,"
Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Sachsen und Thüringen
Halle: Eduard Anton, 1846, vol. 1
Sommer's source: "Oral from Halle."

Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2008.

It came to pass that one beautiful day God wished to take a stroll in the heavenly garden, and took all the apostles and saints with him, leaving no one in heaven but Saint Peter. The Lord had commanded him to allow no one to enter during his absence, so Peter stood by the gate and kept watch. Before long someone knocked. Peter asked who was there, and what he wanted. "I am a poor, honest tailor who is requesting admission," replied a pleasant voice.

"Honest indeed," said Peter. "Like the thief on the gallows. You have been sticky-fingered and have robbed people of their cloth. You will not get into heaven. The Lord has forbidden me to let anyone in as long he is out."
"Oh, please be merciful," cried the tailor. "Little scraps that fall off the table by themselves are not stolen, and are not worth mentioning. See here, I am limping and have blisters on my feet from walking here. I cannot possibly go back again. Just let me in, and I will do all the dirty work. I will tend the children, wash their diapers, wipe off and clean the benches on which they have been playing, and patch all their torn clothes."

Saint Peter let himself be moved by pity and opened heaven's gate just wide enough for the lame tailor to slip his lean body inside. He had to take a seat in a corner behind the door, and was told to stay there quietly and peacefully, so that the Lord would not notice him when he returned, and become angry.

The tailor obeyed, but one time when Saint Peter stepped outside the door, he got up, and full of curiosity, looked into every corner of heaven, seeing what was there. Finally he came to a place where there were many beautiful and costly chairs. At their center was a seat made entirely of gold and set with glistening precious stones. It stood much higher than the other chairs, and a golden footstool stood in front of it. This was the seat on which the Lord sat when he was at home, and from which he could see everything that was happening on earth.

The tailor stood still, and looked at the seat for a long time, for he liked it better than all the rest. Finally he could control his curiosity no longer, and he climbed up and sat down on it. From there he saw everything that was happening on earth.
He noticed an ugly old woman who was standing beside a stream doing the laundry. She secretly set two scarves aside. Seeing this made the tailor so angry that he took hold of the golden footstool and threw it at the old thief, through heaven down to earth. Unable to bring the stool back again, he quietly sneaked down from the seat, sat back down in his place behind the door, and pretended that he had done nothing at all.

When the Lord and Master returned with his heavenly attendants, he did not notice the tailor behind the door, but when he sat down on his seat, the footstool was missing. He asked Saint Peter what had become of the footstool, but he did not know. Then he asked if he had admitted anyone.

"I know of no one who has been here," answered Peter, "except for a lame tailor, who is still sitting behind the door."
Then the Lord had the tailor brought before him, and asked him if he had taken the footstool, and where he had put it.

"Oh, Lord," answered the tailor joyously, "In my anger I threw it down to earth at an old woman whom I saw stealing two scarves while doing the laundry."
"Oh, you scoundrel," said the Lord, "if I were to judge as you judge, how would it have gone with you? I would have long since had no chairs, benches, seats, no, not even a stove-poker, but would have thrown everything down at the sinners. You can no longer stay in heaven, but must go outside the gate again. From there watch where you are going. Here no one metes out punishment, except for me alone, the Lord."

Peter had to take the tailor out of heaven again, and because his shoes were worn out and his feet were covered with blisters, he took a stick in his hand and went to Wait-a-While, where the good soldiers sit and make merry.

—
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Der Schneider im Himmel,
Kinder und Hausmärchen
7th ed. (Berlin, 1857), no. 35.
Grimm source: Jörg Wickram, Rollwagenbüchlein (ca. 1555);
Jakob Frey, Gartengesellschaft (1556); and Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, Wendunmuth

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THE TAILOR IN HEAVEN II

When the first tailor was admitted into heaven everyone there was very happy, because such an event was so rare and unexpected. Therefore God sponsored a festive procession in the tailor's honor. Because tailors are an unusual type, and are especially vain, our tailor felt himself too good to participate in the procession; instead he remained at home and looked around heaven.
He came to the divine throne, climbed onto it, and sat down. At the side he noticed a window, which he opened and looked down onto earth. From here he could see everything that was happening on earth. There he saw another tailor seated at his window who was just about to steal a small hank of yarn. This angered our tailor so much that he broke off the leg of a chair and threw it at the tailor's head.
When God returned and saw the broken chair he asked the tailor what he had done, to which the tailor eagerly described everything he had seen.
But then God said, "If I had acted this way every time that you stole something, throwing a chair leg at your head, there would not be another one here at all."
Then the tailor was forced out of heaven, and -- so they say -- another one has never been admitted. I would like to know if that is true.

—
Ernst Meier, Deutsche Volksmärchen aus Schwaben:
Aus dem Munde des Volks gesammelt Stuttgart:
C. P. Scheitlin's Verlagshandlung, 1852

HOW A TAILOR CAME TO HEAVEN
AND THREW OUR LORD GOD'S FOOTSTOOL AT AN OLD WOMAN

It happened that one beautiful day our Lord God wanted to take a walk, and he took all of his apostles and saints with him, leaving only Saint Peter at home in heaven. Warning Saint Peter not to allow anyone into heaven while he was away, the Lord God left.

A tailor approached heaven and knocked at the gate. Saint Peter asked who was there and what he wanted. The tailor said, "I am a tailor, and I very much wanted to get into heaven." Saint Peter said, "I am not allowed to let anyone enter, for our Lord God is not at home, and he told me to be careful to not permit anyone inside while he is away.

But the tailor did not cease begging for admission, until finally Saint Peter gave in and allowed him to come in, but with the condition that he was to sit quietly and politely in a corner until our Lord God returned, so that no one would notice him and get angry.
The tailor promised to do this. He sat down in a corner behind the door, but as soon as Saint Peter left, he got up and began walking from one corner of heaven to another, looking at everything. Finally he came to some beautiful, expensive chairs surrounding a special chair set with many precious jewels. It stood much higher than the others. In front of it was a golden footstool. This was the chair where our Lord God sits when he is at home.

For a good while the tailor stood quietly before the chair, constantly looking at it, for he liked it better than any of the others. Finally he sat down on the chair. Seated there he could look down on the earth and see everything that was happening there.
Among other things he saw an old woman who was stealing a hank of yarn from her neighbor. This so angered the tailor that he picked up the golden footstool and threw it at the old woman down on earth.
No longer able to reach the footstool, the tailor crept down from the chair and returned to his old corner, remaining there as if he had gone nowhere else.

When our Lord God returned home he did not notice the tailor, but when he sat down in his chair he saw that the footstool was missing. He asked Saint Peter where his footstool was, and Saint Peter replied that he did not know.

"Who has been here? Did you allow anyone inside?" he asked further.
"I do not know of anyone who has been here, except for a tailor who is sitting over there behind the door." Then our Lord God asked the tailor, "What did you do with my footstool? Have you seen it?"

The frightened tailor answered with fear and trembling, "I was sitting in your chair when I saw an old woman down on earth stealing a hank of yarn from her neighbor. This made me so angry that I threw the footstool at her."

Our Lord God became angry at the tailor, and he said, "Hey, you rogue, if I had thrown a footstool at you every time that you cut off too much cloth and kept it for yourself, there would not be any chairs or benches left in heaven."

Thus the tailor, his own shortcomings and misdeeds having been revealed, was forced to leave heaven.

We should learn from this not to prosecute and punish the small sins of others, while we ourselves are guilty of much larger ones.

—
Jörg Wickram, Rollwagenbüchlein,
edited by Heinrich Kurz
Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. J. Weber, 1865

A tailor and a goldsmith were journeying together, and as evening approached they heard wonderful lovely music. It was so beautiful that they forgot how tired they were and took longer and longer steps to see who the musicians were. When they listened it was at first like the wind softly blowing in the linden trees along the pathway, then it was as though the bluebells in the meadow were ringing as they nodded in the wind.

The tailor thought about his dear fiancée, whom he had left at home, and sighed because he was so poor that the musicians would not be playing at their wedding dance.

As they walked along the music sounded nearer and nearer, and at last on a hill they saw many small figures, little men and little women, holding hands and dancing in a circle around an old man. They were singing (that was the music), and one after the other they bowed before the old man.

The old man was somewhat larger than the others, had a long ice-gray beard that hung down low over his chest, had a majestic appearance, and was magnificently dressed. The tailor and the goldsmith stood there amazed and could not see enough. Then the old man motioned to them; the dancers opened their circle; and the goldsmith, who was a small hunchbacked fellow, stepped inside. The frightened tailor stayed where he was, but when he saw how the little men and women welcomed his companion, he took heart and followed him into the circle. With the circle now closed, the little people continued to dance and to sing.

The old man took a long, broad knife, whetted it until it glistened brightly, and then shaved off the hair and the beards of the tailor and the goldsmith. They shook with fear that their heads would be next, but the old man patted them friendly on their shoulders, as if to say that it was good that they had not resisted. Afterward he pointed to a pile of coal that lay nearby, indicating to them with gestures that they should fill their pockets with it. The goldsmith, who was greedy by nature, took much more than did the tailor, even though the coal had no value.

Then the two of them walked down the hill to seek shelter for the night, looking back repeatedly at the tiny dancers. The music sounded more distant and more softly. The monastery bell in the valley struck twelve, and suddenly the hill was empty. Everything had disappeared.

Once at the inn the two wanderers covered themselves with their jackets, and because they were very tired, they forgot to take the coal out of their pockets. They awakened earlier than usual, because their jackets were pushing down on them like lead.

They reached into the pockets and could not believe their eyes when they saw that they contained pure gold instead of coal. The goldsmith estimated that his was worth thirty thousand thalers, and the tailor's fifteen thousand. Furthermore, their hair and beards had been restored as well.

They praised the old man on the mountain, and the goldsmith said, "Do you know what? Let's go back this evening and fill our pockets clear full."

But the tailor did not want to do this. "I have enough," he said, "and am satisfied. Now I can become a master tailor and marry my Margaret. We will manage beautifully."

The goldsmith did not want to journey onward, and because they had traveled together for a long time, as a favor the tailor spent the day with him at the inn. As evening approached, the goldsmith hung several bags over his shoulders and went back to the hill. He heard the music, as they had before, and saw the little dancers with the old man in the middle. And the old man again motioned to him, shaved him, indicating that he should take some coal. He gathered up as much as he could carry away, hurried back to the village inn, covered himself with his jacket, and could not fall asleep in anticipation that the pockets and bags, now filled with light coal, would be getting heavier and heavier.

But on earth not everything happens the way foolish people think it will. The pockets and bags remained light. As dawn approached he went to the window and looked at each piece of coal. It was ordinary coal, and it made his fingers black. Frightened, he fetched the gold from the previous day, but it no longer glistened. Everything had turned back into coal.

Then he awakened the tailor in order to share his sorrow with him. When the tailor saw him he was horrified. Only now did the goldsmith discover his entire misfortune. His hair and his beard had been shaved off completely, and they never grew back. But the worst thing was this: he had had a hump on his back, but now he had one of the same size on his chest, and would be unable to work.

He recognized this as punishment for his greed, and began to cry bitterly. However, the tailor comforted him, saying, "Since we have been good traveling companions for so long, and since we found the treasure ogether, from now on you can live with me and share my treasure."

The tailor soon became a master and married his Margaret. He had many pious children and always enough work; and he is still taking care of the goldsmith with the two humps and no hair.

—

Emil Sommer,
"Der Berggeister Geschenke,"
Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Sachsen und Thüringen
Halle: Eduard Anton, 1846, vol. 1.
Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2008.
Sommer's source: "Oral from Halle."

Many years ago there lived an emperor who loved beautiful new clothes so much that he spent all his money on being finely dressed. His only interest was in going to the theater or in riding about in his carriage where he could show off his new clothes. He had a different costume for every hour of the day. Indeed, where it was said of other kings that they were at court, it could only be said of him that he was in his dressing room!

One day two swindlers came to the emperor's city. They said that they were weavers, claiming that they knew how to make the finest cloth imaginable. Not only were the colors and the patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but in addition, this material had the amazing property that it was to be invisible to anyone who was incompetent or stupid.

"It would be wonderful to have clothes made from that cloth," thought the emperor. "Then I would know which of my men are unfit for their positions, and I'd also be able to tell clever people from stupid ones." So he immediately gave the two swindlers a great sum of money to weave their cloth for him.
They set up their looms and pretended to go to work, although there was nothing at all on the looms. They asked for the finest silk and the purest gold, all of which they hid away, continuing to work on the empty looms, often late into the night.

"I would really like to know how they are coming with the cloth!" thought the emperor, but he was a bit uneasy when he recalled that anyone who was unfit for his position or stupid would not be able to see the material. Of course, he himself had nothing to fear, but still he decided to send someone else to see how the work was progressing.
"I'll send my honest old minister to the weavers," thought the emperor. He's the best one to see how the material is coming. He is very sensible, and no one is more worthy of his position than he.

So the good old minister went into the hall where the two swindlers sat working at their empty looms. "Goodness!" thought the old minister, opening his eyes wide. "I cannot see a thing!" But he did not say so.

The two swindlers invited him to step closer, asking him if it wasn't a beautiful design and if the colors weren't magnificent. They pointed to the empty loom, and the poor old minister opened his eyes wider and wider. He still could see nothing, for nothing was there. "Gracious" he thought. "Is it possible that I am stupid? I have never thought so. Am I unfit for my position? No one must know this. No, it will never do for me to say that I was unable to see the material."
"You aren't saying anything!" said one of the weavers.
"Oh, it is magnificent! The very best!" said the old minister, peering through his glasses. "This pattern and these colors! Yes, I'll tell the emperor that I am very satisfied with it!"
"That makes us happy!" said the two weavers, and they called the colors and the unusual pattern by name. The old minister listened closely so that he would be able say the same things when he reported back to the emperor, and that is exactly what he did.

The swindlers now asked for more money, more silk, and more gold, all of which they hid away. Then they continued to weave away as before on the empty looms.

The emperor sent other officials as well to observe the weavers' progress. They too were startled when they saw nothing, and they too reported back to him how wonderful the material was, advising him to have it made into clothes that he could wear in a grand procession. The entire city was alive in praise of the cloth. "Magnifique! Nysseligt! Excellent!" they said, in all languages. The emperor awarded the swindlers with medals of honor, bestowing on each of them the title Lord Weaver.

The swindlers stayed up the entire night before the procession was to take place, burning more than sixteen candles. Everyone could see that they were in a great rush to finish the emperor's new clothes. They pretended to take the material from the looms. They cut in the air with large scissors. They sewed with needles but without any thread. Finally they announced, "Behold! The clothes are finished!"

The emperor came to them with his most distinguished cavaliers. The two swindlers raised their arms as though they were holding something and said, "Just look at these trousers! Here is the jacket! This is the cloak!" and so forth. "They are as light as spider webs! You might think that you didn't have a thing on, but that is the good thing about them."
"Yes," said the cavaliers, but they couldn't see a thing, for nothing was there.
"Would his imperial majesty, if it please his grace, kindly remove his clothes." said the swindlers. "Then we will fit you with the new ones, here in front of the large mirror."

The emperor took off all his clothes, and the swindlers pretended to dress him, piece by piece, with the new ones that were to be fitted. They took hold of his waist and pretended to tie something about him. It was the train. Then the emperor turned and looked into the mirror.
"Goodness, they suit you well! What a wonderful fit!" they all said. "What a pattern! What colors! Such luxurious clothes!" -- "The canopy to be carried above your majesty awaits outside," said the grandmaster of ceremonies. -- "Yes, I am ready!" said the emperor. "Don't they fit well?" He turned once again toward the mirror, because it had to appear as though he were admiring himself in all his glory.

The chamberlains who were to carry the train held their hands just above the floor as if they were picking up the train. As they walked they pretended to hold the train high, for they could not let anyone notice that they could see nothing.
The emperor walked beneath the beautiful canopy in the procession, and all the people in the street and in their windows said, "Goodness, the emperor's new clothes are incomparable! What a beautiful train on his jacket. What a perfect fit!" No one wanted it to be noticed that he could see nothing, for then it would be said that he was unfit for his position or that he was stupid. None of the emperor's clothes had ever before received such praise.

"But he doesn't have anything on!" said a small child.
"Good Lord, let us hear the voice of an innocent child!" said the father, and whispered to another what the child had said. "A small child said that he doesn't have anything on!"
Finally everyone was saying, "He doesn't have anything on!"
The emperor shuddered, for he knew that they were right, but he thought, "The procession must go on!" He carried himself even more proudly, and the chamberlains walked along behind carrying the train that wasn't there.

—

Hans Christian Andersen:
The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories
Translated from Danish by Erik Christian Haugaard
Copyright Anchor Books Doubleday, 1973

The wind is blowing through the branches of the old willow.
Listen, it sounds like a song; the wind is singing it, the tree is telling it. If you cannot understand the words, then ask old Johanna, who lives in the poorhouse. She was born in the village and has lived here all her life.
Many, many years ago, when the old King's Highway was still in use, the willow tree was already full grown. It stood where it stands now, near the tailor's whitewashed half-timbered cottage, close to the pond where the cows were watered and on warm summer days naked little peasant boys bathed. Next to the tree was a milestone, but it has fallen down and is covered by brambles now.
When the new King's Highway, which passes on the far side of the rich farmer's fields, was constructed, the old one became a path, then only a track, and now all sign of it is gone. The pond is overgrown with duckweed. When a frog jumps into it, the green surface parts and you can see the black water beneath. Reeds, cattails, and yellow irises grow along the shore.
The tailor's house became crooked with age. On the thatched roof moss grew. The pigeon coop was so dilapidated that the starlings took it over to build their home in. In the gables of the house, swallows' nests stood in a row, as if this were the most ideal place to live.
Once the house had been filled with life, but now it was silent and lonely. But it was still inhabited. Inside lived "poor Rasmus," as he was called. He had been born in the house, played there as a child, splashed in the pond, and climbed in the willow tree.
Then the tree lifted its great branches toward the sky as it does now, but a storm split and twisted its trunk. In the crevice the wind deposited dirt, then grass grew there, and finally a rowan tree planted itself.
In the spring when the swallows returned, they flew about busily repairing their old nests. "Poor Rasmus" had let his nest go to ruin; its walls were never repaired or whitewashed. "What is the use?" he would say. That was his proverb, as it had been his father's.
Every autumn the birds flew away, but Rasmus stayed at home. And the birds returned faithfully, once winter was over. The starlings whistled their songs. Once Rasmus had been able to whistle as loudly as they, but he neither whistled nor sang any more.
The wind blew through the branches of the old willow--and it blows through them still. It sounds as though the wind were singing a song. If you cannot understand the words, then go and ask old Johanna, who lives in the poorhouse. She is wise and knows what happened long ago; she is like an old story book: the keeper of memory.
Once, when it was new, it had been a good house. That was when the village tailor, Ivar Olse, had moved into it with his wife Maren. Hard-working and honest folk they were. Old Johanna had been only a child then. She was the daughter of the clogmaker, who was one of the poorest men in the village. Many a good sandwich did Maren give little Johanna, for although Ivar and Maren were poor they always had enough to eat, because Maren was on friendly terms with the noblewoman who was the mistress of the castle nearby. Maren was happy. She sang and talked all day long and always was cheerful, although she was never idle. She sewed almost as well as her husband, and kept both the house and her children neat and clean. She had almost a dozen of them: eleven to be exact, the twelfth never arrived.
"The poor have too many chicks in their nests," grumbled the noble owner of the castle. "If they could drown some of them, as one does with kittens, and only keep one or two of the strongest, they would be better off."
"God preserve us!" said Maren. "Why, children are a blessing sent by God. Every child is one more prayer rising to heaven. For each little new mouth to be fed, one works a little harder, tries a little more. God will not desert one if one does not desert Him."
The noble lady agreed with Maren, not with her husband. She nodded to Maren and held her hand. That she had done many times and kissed her as well, for Maren had been her nurse when she was small and that bound them together.
Every year at Christmas from the castle would come to the tailor's house a cart with winter supplies: a barrel of flour, a pig, two geese, butter, cheese, and apples. It almost filled the larder. Ivar the tailor would smile for a moment, and there was reason to rejoice, but that did not keep him from repeating his old slogan, "What's the use?"
The house was neat, the windows had curtains, and on the window sills were flowerpots with carnations and sweet peas. A framed sampler that Maren had embroidered herself hung on the wall. Next to it--and also framed--was a handwritten verse that Maren had composed when she became engaged. It rhymed at all the proper places. She had even found a rhyme for Olse; her married name was pronounced like the Danish word for sausage: polse. "It is always nice to possess something no one else has," she would say about her husband's odd name, and laugh. She never said, "What's the use?" Her motto was "Trust in God and yourself." And Maren did. It was she who held the family together. The children grew and flew from the nest. They traveled far and wide and did well. Rasmus was the youngest. He was such a beautiful child that one of the painters from Copenhagen hired him as a model. Rasmus was painted with the same amount of clothes on that he had had when he was born. The painting hangs in the castle of the king; the noble woman whom Maren had nursed saw it there and recognized Rasmus, even though he was naked.
As the years passed, their conditions grew worse. The tailor's hands grew stiff from rheumatism and he could no longer sew. No doctor could help him, nor could the old "wise woman," Stine, who was known to be so good it "doctoring."
"There is no point in crying," said Maren. "That has never helped anyone. If Father's hands cannot work, then mine will have to make up for it. Little Rasmus is so clever, he can learn to sew too."
Little Rasmus sat on the, table, cross-legged, with a needle in his hand. He whistled and sang. He was a happy little lad.
His mother would not keep him there all day. He, too, was sent outside to play like other children.
The daughter of the clogmaker, little Johanna, was his best friend. Her home was even poorer than Rasmus' was. Beautiful she was not. She was always barelegged, even in winter. She had never owned a pair of warm stockings. Her clothes hung in tatters. There was no one to fix them at home, but she was happy as a bird in the sunshine.
By the milestone, under the willow tree, the two of them played.
Rasmus' dreams flew high. He wanted to be a master tailor, like the ones in the capital who have ten journeymen working for them. He had heard about them from his father, and as soon as he was old enough he would apprentice himself to one of them. Then, in due time, he himself would become a master tailor, and then Johanna could come and visit him. She could make the food for all of them, and she would have a room for herself.
Johanna did not dare believe that all this would happen, but Rasmus felt certain that it would.
The wind played in the branches and leaves of the tree. It was as though the wind sang a song and the tree told a story.
Autumn came, and every leaf fell from the tree. The rain dripped from its naked branches.
"It will soon be green again," said Maren.
"What's the use?" replied her husband. "Another year will only bring more unhappiness."
"The larder is filled, thanks to the kindness of others. I am still well and can work. It is a sin to complain."
The noblewoman and her husband celebrated Christmas in their castle; then they were to move to Copenhagen for the winter. There they would go to dances and parties. They were even invited to the king's table.
The lady had sent for two dresses from France. They were of such fine material, of such elegant design, and so beautifully made that Maren had never seen anything like them before,

so she asked the gracious lady if her husband, Ivar, might see them, too, for it was rare that a village tailor ever saw such fine work.
Ivar was invited to examine the two fashionable Parisian dresses, but he didn't comment at all: neither up in the castle nor on the way home. Finally, when he again sat in his chair by the stove, he said his usual "What's the use?" This time, events proved his words to be correct. No sooner had the family arrived in Copenhagen and the season, with its balls and dinners, begun, than the master fell sick and died. Her ladyship never did get to wear her fancy dresses from France. Instead she was dressed in mourning from her black hat to her little black shoes. Not so much as a bit of white embroidery was to be seen. All the servants, too, were dressed in black, even the family coach was upholstered in black. That had never been seen in the district before.

Everybody talked about all the "mourning finery" the whole winter through.
It had been a really noble funeral. "It shows that if you are born well you are buried well," was the comment most often repeated.
"What's the use?" said Ivar. "Now he has neither his wealth nor his life. We, at least, have one of them."
"You mustn't say that!" said Maren, very disturbed. "He has an eternal life in paradise."
"And who told you that, Maren?" asked her husband. "Dead men are good fertilizer. But this one is too fine for that, he lies in a stone tomb."
"Don't talk like that; one would think you weren't a Christian." Maren's face grew red with anger. "I tell you he has an eternal life."
"And who told you that?" the tailor repeated.
Maren threw her apron over Rasmus' head. She didn't want him to hear talk like that.
Then she carried the child out to the woodshed, where she burst into tears.
"That was not your father speaking," she explained to the frightened boy. "That was the Devil who walked through the room, and he pretended to have your father's voice. Say the Lords Prayer. Come, we shall say it together." And both mother and child folded their hands and prayed.
"Now I am happy again," Maren said, and dried her eyes. "Trust in God and yourself."
The year of mourning was over. The widow now wore "half" mourning, but her heart was all happiness.
Some said that she had a suitor and was thinking about getting married again. Maren knew a little about it; the minister knew more.
On Palm Sunday, after the sermon, the banns were read for the widow and her suitor. He was a wood carver or a stone carver. Few of the people in the congregation had ever heard of a sculptor. He wasn't of the nobility, but he carried himself well. He was a "something"--though no one knew exactly what. He "carved pictures," they said, and did it well; besides, he was young and handsome.
"What's the use?" was all the good tailor said.
He had been in church with his family on Palm Sunday. Maren and Ivar had taken holy communion after the sermon, while Rasmus waited in the pew; he wasn't confirmed yet. For a long time the clothes of the family had been in very bad condition. There was hardly a place for any more patches. But that day they all three had new clothes on. They were dressed in black as if they were now in mourning. Ivar's new pants and jacket, Maren's high-necked dress, and even little Rasmus' clothes, which were a little too big, so that he would be able to use them for his confirmation, had all been made from the cloth that had covered the nobleman's carriage at the funeral. No one need have known where the material came from, but everyone did. Stine-the "wise woman," and a few other women who thought themselves wise, though they were not wise enough to earn a living by it, prophesied that the new wardrobe would bring sickness and death to the house of the tailor. "If one dresses in the curtains of a hearse, one is bound for the grave," Stine said.
Johanna cried when she heard it, for she feared for little Rasmus. But it was Ivar, his father, who got sick. And the old women nodded their heads. The tailor grew weaker and weaker.

On the first Sunday after Trinity, he died. Now Maren was alone; she had to take care of everything, and she needed both her faith in God and herself.
The next year Rasmus was confirmed and apprenticed to a tailor in the city, not so great a one that he employed ten journeymen, but he kept one and a half. Rasmus was the half. Rasmus was satisfied and he looked happy. Little Johanna wept. She cared for him even more than she knew herself. His mother stayed in the little house by the pond and carried on as before.
It was about that time that the new King's Highway was opened. The old one, which went past the tailor's house and the old willow tree, became just a field track. No cows came to drink from the pond and duckweed covered it. The milestone fell; there was no reason for it to stand any more. Only the willow tree remained as before and the wind sang through its leaves and its branches.
The swallows and the starlings flew away, but they came back in the spring. When they returned for the fourth time, Rasmus also came home. He had served his apprenticeship and was now a journeyman tailor. He was a handsome but delicately built lad; now he wanted to travel and see foreign lands. But Maren, his mother, kept him home. He was the last of her children; all the others were far away. He would inherit the house. As a journeyman tailor, there was enough work for him in the district. He could go from farm to farm, working a week or so at each; that, after all, was a kind of traveling, too. Rasmus followed his mother's advice and stayed.
Again he slept in the bed he had slept in as a child and sat under the willow tree and listened to the wind.
He was handsome and he could whistle like a bird, and sing the latest songs from the city. He was welcome wherever he went, but especially at Klaus Hansen's. He was the second richest farmer in the district.
His daughter Else was like a beautiful flower: gay, always laughing. Evil tongues said that she laughed just to show off her beautiful teeth. She was fan of fun and ready to play tricks on anyone.
She fell in love with Rasmus and he with her, but neither of them spoke of love to the other.
Rasmus grew melancholy, for he had more of his father's disposition than he had of his mother's. Only when he was together with Else did he laugh. Although he had many opportunities to talk to her of his love, he never did. He would think, "What's the use? Her parents will want her to marry well, and I am poor. It would have been better if I had never come to the farm."
But he could not keep away; it was as if Else held him on a string. He was a tame bird that had to sing and whistle to please his mistress when she demanded it.
Johanna, the clogmaker's daughter, was a servant on the farm; she did the most menial work. She drove the milk cart out to the field when it was milking time; she sometimes even had to cart manure when that was needed. Into the parlor of the farmhouse, where Rasmus and Else sat, she never came. She heard from the other servants that the two of them were almost engaged.
"Then Rasmus will be rich," she said. "That makes me happy." But her eyes got all glassy with tears as she spoke, though there was nothing to cry about.
There was a fair, on market day in the nearby town. Klaus Hansen was taking his family to it, and he invited Rasmus to join them. Both on the way to town and on the way home, he and Else sat close together. Never had Rasmus been so much in love, but he did not speak of it.
"He ought to say something to me. He must declare his feelings first," said the girl to a friend; and in that she was right. "If he doesn't do it soon, then I'll scare him into it." And she laid her plans.

Soon it was rumored that the richest farmer in the district had proposed marriage to Else; and this was true, but no one knew what her answer had been.
Poor Rasmus felt quite confused and did not know what to do.
One evening Else had a gold ring on her finger. She asked the young man if he knew what that meant.
"It means you are engaged!" Rasmus grew pale.
"And can you guess to whom?" Else asked.
"To the rich farmer," answered Rasmus.
"You guessed it," Else lied, and ran away.
But Rasmus ran away too, straight home to his mother's house. There he packed his knapsack. He was leaving and it did not matter how much his mother cried.
He cut a walking cane from a branch of the willow tree, and he whistled while he did it, as though he were happy to be going out into the world.
"For me this is a sorrowful moment," said his mother. "But maybe it is best for you to leave; and then, I will have to bear it. If you trust in God and yourself, I am sure you will come home again safe, sound, and happy."
He walked down to the new King's Highway. There he saw Johanna come driving with a load of dung. She had not seen him and he did not want to see her, so he hid behind the hedge and Johanna drove by.
Out into the wide, wide world he went; no one knew where he had gone. His mother thought that he would be home before the year was over. It would be good for him to see something new and different; it would give him something else to think about. But she was worried that there were "creases" in his soul that no amount of pressing could iron smooth. "There is too much of his father in him, poor boy!" she thought. "He should have been more like me. But he will come back; he won't forget his home or his mother."
His mother would wait patiently for years, but Else had not waited a month before she went secretly to the "wise woman," Stine Madsdaughter, who was not only good at "doctoring" but could read the future in coffee grounds and cards and knew other prayers besides the Lord's. She knew, too, where Rasmus was; she read it in the coffee grounds. He was in a foreign city, she couldn't quite make out the name. There were a lot of soldiers in the town and young girls; he was thinking about becoming a soldier and wondering which girl to choose for himself.
Else covered her ears with her hands; she didn't want to hear any more. If Rasmus had become a soldier, she would buy him free with her own savings, but no one was to know about it.
Old Stine promised that she would bring Rasmus back. She knew a remedy that was powerful, but it was also so dangerous that it was never used except as a last resort. She would put a caldron over the fire and cook him home. Wherever he was in the world, he would have to return. It might take a month, but he would come home to the boiling pot and the girl who loved him. He would not be able to rest, either night or day, and it would not matter whether the weather was fair or foul, he would continue on his way homeward and not stop, however tired he was, until he arrived.
The moon was in its first quarter, and that was just right, Stine declared. The wind blew a storm from the northeast and whipped the boughs of the old willow tree. Stine cut a twig from it and tied it into a knot, and put it in a caldron with some moss and thatch from the roof of his mother's house. They needed a leaf from a hymnbook. Else had torn the last page out; it was the one that listed the printer's errors, but Stine said that it didn't matter, for all the pages had equal power.
Stine's own rooster lost its red comb. Else's gold ring went into the vessel too--the old woman told the girl that she would never get it back. She was very wise, Stine. Many other things were dumped in that caldron, and there it stood over the fire, or over the glowing embers, or over the white-hot ash, but it did not stop boiling.
The moon was full and then again new. Each time Else went to Stine and asked, "When is he coming, do you see him?"
"Much do I know," answered Stine, looking very wise. "And much do I see. But how far away he is I cannot make out. He has traveled over the mountains and sailed across some stormy seas, but he has still to go through a great forest. He is tired and feverish and his feet are filled with blisters."
"No! No!" exclaimed Else. "I feel so sorry for him."
"We can't let him stop now," said Stine. "If we do, he will drop dead upon the road."
A year and a day went by, and then one night, when the moon was full and the wind played in the old willow tree, a rainbow appeared in the night sky.
"It is a sign, an affirmation!" cried Stine. "Now he is coming."
But Rasmus did not come.
"Time passes slowly when you are waiting for someone," Stine explained.
"Yes," said Else. And she visited Stine less and less, and she brought her no more gifts.
Her soul grew gay again and soon everyone in the district knew that Else had become engaged to the rich farmer.
She had visited him and looked at his fields and cows. Everything was in the best of order, there was no reason to wait with the wedding.
Three days they celebrated, and danced to the music of two violins and a clarinet. It was a grand party and no one in the county was forgotten. Maren was invited too. When, finally, the festivities were over and the trumpet had blown a last fanfare, she went home with a basket of leftovers on her arm.
She had latched the door when she left; now it was open. Inside sat Rasmus. He had come home that day, poor man. He was as thin as a scarecrow, his skin yellow and pale.
"Rasmus!" said the mother. "Is it you? How wretched you look! But I am glad that you have come home."
And she fed him with the food she had taken home from the feast. There was even a piece of wedding cake.
He told her that lately he had dreamed about her, the house, and the willow tree. It was strange how often in his sleep he had seen that tree and Johanna, with her bare feet.
Else he did not mention. He was sick and had to go to bed. We do not believe that it was the caldron that had called him home; only old Stine and Else believed that, but they told no one about it.
Rasmus' fever was high, and his illness was contagious, therefore, no one came to the tailor's cottage except Johanna. She cried when she saw how weak Rasmus was.
The doctor prescribed medicine but the patient wouldn't take it. "What's the use?" he would say.
"I will make you well." His mother sat by his bed. "You must trust in God and yourself. If only I could see you well again, whistling and singing, then I would gladly give my own life."
Rasmus did get well, but his mother caught the fever; it was she, not he, whom God called.
It was lonely in the house, and soon poverty and hopelessness sat at the table. "He is finished," they all agreed. "There's no hope for Rasmus," they said.
It was the wild life he had led on his journey that had drained his will power and strength, and not the caldron that had boiled them away. His hair became thin and gray. He would not work. "What's the use?" he would say. His legs carried him oftener to the inn than to the church.
One evening he was stumbling home from the inn. It was late autumn; the swallows and starlings had long since departed, and his mother had been dead for years. But Johanna, the clogmaker's daughter, was still there. It was raining and the wind was blowing. Johanna caught up with him.
"You should pull yourself together, Rasmus," she began.
Rasmus answered as he always did: "What's the use?"

Johanna shook her head. “That’s a harmful saying! It would be better to remember your mother’s words: ‘Trust in God and yourself.’ That’s what you should do and you never do it! Stop saying, ‘What’s the use?’ For then there’s no reason for doing anything. You pull up the roots of all the deeds you could ever do.”
She walked with him to his house and then she left. He did not go inside but staggered over to the willow tree and sat down on the old milestone.
The wind blew through the branches of the willow; it sounded as if someone were singing a song and telling a story. Rasmus listened and answered. He talked loudly, although no one heard him but the tree and the wind.
“I feel so cold, I must go in and go to bed,” he thought.
But he walked not toward the house but toward the pond. Near it he fell. It was raining hard now and the wind was cold. He didn’t feel it, he slept; but when the sun rose and the crows flew over the reeds he woke half dead. Had his head rested where his feet were, then he would never have risen again and the duckweed would have been his winding sheet.
At noon Johanna came to his house. She helped him. She called the doctor, and Rasmus was taken to the hospital.
“We have known each other since we were tiny tots. Many a meal has your mother given me when I was hungry and that I cannot repay her now. You will get well,” Johanna said, “God wants you to live.”
Rasmus came home from the hospital, but both his health and his mind had their ups and downs.
The starlings and the swallows came faithfully, and flew away again. Rasmus became old beyond his years. He lived alone in a house that more and more became a ruin. Now he was poorer than Johanna.
“You have no faith,” she would say when she visited him. “If we did not have God, how would it fare with us? You should go to communion, I am sure you haven’t been there since you were confirmed.”
“What’s the use? How can that help?” he would answer. And she would look away.
“If you feel that way, don’t go. An unwilling guest is not welcome at God’s table. Think of your mother and your youth, you were such a good boy. May I read a psalm for You?”
“And whats the use of that?” Rasmus said with a crooked smile.
“It always comforts me.” Johanna glanced at her hands.
“Have you become one of the pious ones?” Rasmus looked at Johanna; his eyes were dull and tired.
She read a psalm; that is, she did not read it, for she owned no hymnbook; she knew it by heart.
“They were lovely words,” Rasmus said slowly, “but I did not understand them. My head is so heavy. It feels as though there were a stone inside it.”
Rasmus had become an old man, but Else was not young either any more. We will mention her, but Rasmus never did. She was already a grandmother; her granddaughter was a sweet, talkative little girl. She was playing with the other children in the village. Rasmus came by, leaning on his stick; he stood watching them. She smiled to him. Memories of his childhood came to his mind. Else’s granddaughter pointed her finger at him and screamed, “Poor Rasmus!” as loudly as she could. The other children took up the cry and chased the old man all the way home.
Gray, dark days came, and more followed; but after gray, dark days, the sun comes out.
Finally, on Whitsunday, when the church was decorated with birch branches with tender green leaves, the sun shone through the great windows and the smell of the forest permeated the room. Communion was served. Johanna was among the guests. Rasmus was not. That very morning, God in His grace and mercy had called him to Him.

Many years have gone by. The tailor’s house still stands, though no one lives in it. It will fall during the first winter storm. The pond is overgrown with reeds and duckweed. The wind is blowing through the branches of the old willow; it is as if one were listening to a song: the wind is singing it, the tree is telling it. If you do not understand the words, then ask old Johanna, who lives in the poorhouse.
She is still alive. She still sings the old hymn that she sang for Rasmus. She thinks about him and prays for him. She is faithful. She can tell you about times past: the memories that the wind sings about in the old tree.

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Hans Christian Andersen:
The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories
Translated from Danish by Erik Christian Haugaard
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There was once a fine gentleman, all of whose moveables were a boot-jack and a hair-comb: but he had the finest false collars in the world; and it is about one of these collars that we are now to hear a story.

It was so old, that it began to think of marriage; and it happened that it came to be washed in company with a garter.

"Nay!" said the collar. "I never did see anything so slender and so fine, so soft and so neat. May I not ask your name?"
"That I shall not tell you!" said the garter.
"Where do you live?" asked the collar.

But the garter was so bashful, so modest, and thought it was a strange question to answer.
"You are certainly a girdle," said the collar; "that is to say an inside girdle. I see well that you are both for use and ornament, my dear young lady."
"I will thank you not to speak to me," said the garter. "I think I have not given the least occasion for it."
"Yes! When one is as handsome as you," said the collar, "that is occasion enough."
"Don't come so near me, I beg of you!" said the garter. "You look so much like those men-folks."
"I am also a fine gentleman," said the collar. "I have a bootjack and a hair-comb."

But that was not true, for it was his master who had them: but he boasted.
"Don't come so near me," said the garter: "I am not accustomed to it."
"Prude!" exclaimed the collar; and then it was taken out of the washing-tub. It was starched, hung over the back of a chair in the sunshine, and was then laid on the ironing-blanket; then came the warm box-iron. "Dear lady!" said the collar. "Dear widow-lady! I feel quite hot. I am quite changed. I begin to unfold myself. You will burn a hole in me. Oh! I offer you my hand."
"Rag!" said the box-iron; and went proudly over the collar: for she fancied she was a steam-engine, that would go on the railroad and draw the waggons. "Rag!" said the box-iron.

The collar was a little jagged at the edge, and so came the long scissors to cut off the jagged part. "Oh!" said the collar. "You are certainly the first opera dancer. How well you can stretch your legs out! It is the most graceful performance I have ever seen. No one can imitate you."
"I know it," said the scissors.
"You deserve to be a baroness," said the collar. "All that I have, is, a fine gentleman, a boot-jack, and a hair-comb. If I only had the barony!"
"Do you seek my hand?" said the scissors; for she was angry; and without more ado, she cut him, and then he was condemned.
"I shall now be obliged to ask the hair-comb. It is surprising how well you preserve your teeth, Miss," said the collar. "Have you never thought of being betrothed?"
"Yes, of course! you may be sure of that," said the hair-comb. "I am betrothed--to the boot-jack!"
"Betrothed!" exclaimed the collar. Now there was no other to court, and so he despised it.

A long time passed away, then the collar came into the rag chest at the paper mill; there was a large company of rags, the fine by themselves, and the coarse by themselves, just as it should be. They all had much to say, but the collar the most; for he was a real boaster.

"I have had such an immense number of sweethearts!" said the collar. "I could not be in peace! It is true, I was always a fine starched-up gentleman! I had both a boot-jack and a hair-comb, which I never used! You should have seen me then, you should have seen me when I lay down! I shall never forget my first love--she was a girdle, so fine, so soft, and so charming, she threw herself into a tub of water for my sake! There was also a widow, who became glowing hot, but I left her standing till she got black again; there was also the first opera dancer, she gave me that cut which I now go with, she was so ferocious! My own hair-comb was in love with me, she lost all her teeth from the heart-ache; yes, I have lived to see much of that sort of thing; but I am extremely sorry for the garter--I mean the girdle--that went into the water-tub. I have much on my conscience, I want to become white paper!"

And it became so, all the rags were turned into white paper; but the collar came to be just this very piece of white paper we here see, and on which the story is printed; and that was because it boasted so terribly afterwards of what had never happened to it. It would be well for us to beware, that we may not act in a similar manner, for we can never know if we may not, in the course of time, also come into the rag chest, and be made into white paper, and then have our whole life's history printed on it, even the most secret, and be obliged to run about and tell it ourselves, just like this collar.

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Once upon a time there was a darning needle who imagined she was so fine that she really was a sewing needle.
"Be careful and hold me tightly!" she warned the fingers that picked her up. "Don't drop me! If I fall on the floor you may never find me again; that's how fine I am!"
"That's what you think!" replied the fingers, and squeezed her around the waist.
"Look, here I come with my train!" said the darning needle, and she drew a long thread behind her, but there was no knot in the thread. The fingers aimed the needle straight at the cook's slipper, where the upper leather had burst and had to be sewed together.
"My! What vulgar work!" sniffed the darning needle. "I'll never get through! Look out! I'm breaking! I'm breaking in two." And just then she did break. "I told you so," she said. "I'm much too delicate!"
"Well, she's no good now," thought the fingers, but they had to hold on to her all the same. For the cook dropped a little sealing wax on the end of the needle to make a head, and then she pinned her kerchief together with it in front.

"Look! Now I'm a breastpin," said the needle. "I knew perfectly well I'd be honored. If you are something you always amount to something." Then she laughed, but it was inwardly, because no one can ever really see a darning needle laugh. There she sat on the cook's bosom, proud as if she were in a state coach, and looked all around her.

"May I be permitted to inquire if you're made of gold?" she very politely asked a little pin near her. "You look pretty, and you have a head of your own, but it's rather small. You must be careful to grow bigger. Not everyone can have sealing wax on one end like me!"
Then the darning needle drew herself up so proudly that she fell right out of the kerchief into the sink, at the very moment the cook was rinsing it out.

"Looks now as if we are off on a journey," she said to herself. "Let's hope I don't get lost." But she really was lost down the drain.
"I'm too fine for this world," she observed calmly as she lay in the gutter outside. "But I know who I am, and that's always a satisfaction." So the darning needle was still proud, and she never lost her good humor. She watched the many strange things floating above her-chips and straws and pieces of old newspapers.

"Look at them sail!" she said to herself. "They don't know what's down below them! Here I sit! I can sting! Look at that stick go, thinking of nothing in the world but himself-a stick! And that's exactly what he is! And there's a straw floating by; look at him twist and look how he turns! You'd better not think so much about yourself up there! You'll run into the curb! There goes a newspaper. Everybody has forgotten what was written on it, but still it spreads itself out, while I sit quietly down here below. I know who I am, and I shall never forget it!"

One day the darning needle saw something beside her that glittered splendidly in the sunbeams. It was only a bit of broken bottle, but because the darning needle was quite sure it was something valuable like a diamond she spoke to it, introducing herself as a breastpin.
"I suppose you're a diamond?" she asked.
"Yes, something like that," was the reply.
Then, since each thought the other was very important, they began talking about the world, and how conceited everyone was.

"I used to live in a lady's case," said the darning needle. "And this lady was a cook. On each hand she had five fingers, and you never saw anything so conceited as those five fingers! And yet they were only there so that they could hold me, take me out of my case, and put me back into it."
"Did they shine?" asked the bit of bottle glass.
"Shine? Not at all," said the darning needle. "They were arrogant. There were five brothers, all belonging to the Finger family, and they kept close together, although they were all of different lengths. The one on the outside, Thumbling, who walked out in front of the others, was short and fat and had only one joint in his back, so he could only make a single bow. But he insisted that if he were cut off a person's hand, that person could not be a soldier. Lickpot, the second one, pushed himself into sweet and sour, and pointed at the sun and the moon, and it was he who pressed on the pen when they wrote. Longman, the third, looked over the heads of the others. Guldbrand was the fourth-he always wore a golden belt around his waist. And little Peter Playfellow didn't do anything at all, and was very proud of it. They did nothing but brag all the time; that's why I went down the sink."
"And now we just sit here and glitter," said the bit of broken bottle. But just then a flood of water came rushing down the gutter so that it overflowed and swept the bottle glass away.
"See now! He's been promoted," remarked the darning needle, "but I'm still here. I'm too fine for that sort of thing. But that's my pride, and that is very commendable!" So she sat up straight, lost in many big thoughts. "I almost think I was born a sunbeam, I'm so fine; besides, the sunbeams always seem to be trying to get to me, under the water. I'm so fine that even my mother can't find me. If I had my old eye, the one that broke off, I think I might cry about that. But no! I think I wouldn't cry anyway; it's not at all refined to cry."

One day some street boys were grubbing in the gutter, looking for coins and things of that sort. It was filthy work, but they were having a wonderful time.
"Ouch!" one cried as he pricked himself on the darning needle. "You're a pretty sharp fellow!"
"I'm not a fellow; I'm a young lady," replied the darning needle. But of course they couldn't hear her.
Her sealing wax had come off, and she had turned black; but black always makes you look more slender, and she was sure she was even finer than before.
"Look!" cried the boys. "Here comes an eggshell sailing along," And they stuck the darning needle fast into the shell.

"White walls, and I am black myself!" cried the darning needle. "That's very becoming! People can really see me now! I only hope I'm not seasick; that would surely break me!" But she wasn't seasick, and she did not break. "It's a very good protection against seasickness to have a steel stomach and to remember that one is a little finer than ordinary human beings. Oh, yes! I'm all right. The finer you are, the more you can bear."
"Crack!" went the eggshell at that moment, for a heavily loaded wagon ran over it.
"Goodness, I'm being crushed!" cried the darning needle. "I'm going to get really seasick now! I'm breaking! I'm breaking!" But she didn't break, though the wagon went over her; she lay at full length along the cobblestones, and there we'll leave her.

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There was once an old woman who had an only daughter. The lass was good and amiable, and also extremely beautiful, but at the same time so indolent that she would hardly turn her hand to any work. This was a cause of great grief to the mother, who tried all sorts of ways to cure her daughter of so lamentable a failing. But there was no help. The old woman then thought no better plan could be devised than to set her daughter to spin on the roof of their cottage, in order that all the world might be witness of her sloth. But her plan brought her no nearer the mark. The girl continued as useless as before.

One day, as the king's son was going to the chase, he rode by the cottage where the old woman dwelt with her daughter. On seeing the fair spinner on the roof, he stopped and inquired why she sat spinning in such an unusual place.

The old woman answered, "Aye, she sits there to let all the world see how clever she is. She is so clever that she can spin gold out of clay and long straw."
At these words the prince was struck with wonder, for it never occurred to him that the old woman was ironically alluding to her daughter's sloth. He therefore said, "If what you say is true, that the young maiden can spin gold from clay and long straw, she shall no longer sit there, but shall accompany me to my palace and be my consort." The daughter thereupon descended from the roof and accompanied the prince to the royal residence, where, seated in her maiden-bower, she received a pail full of clay and a bundle of straw, by way of trial, whether she were so skillful as her mother had said.

The poor girl now found herself in a very uncomfortable state, knowing but too well that she could not spin flax, much less gold. So, sitting in her chamber, with her head resting on her hand, she wept bitterly. While she was thus sitting, the door was opened, and in walked a very little old man, who was both ugly and deformed. The old man greeted her in a friendly tone, and asked why she sat so lonely and afflicted.
"I may well be sorrowful," answered the girl. "The king's son has commanded me to spin gold from clay and long straw, and if it be not done before tomorrow's dawn, my life is at stake."

The old man then said, "Fair maiden, weep not, I will help you. Here is a pair of gloves. When you have then on you will be able to spin gold. Tomorrow night I will return, when, if you have not found out my name, you shall accompany me home and be my wife."
In her despair she agreed to the old man's condition, who then went his way. The maiden now sat and span, and by dawn she had already spun up all the clay and straw, which had become the finest gold it was possible to see.

Great was the joy throughout the whole palace, that the king's son had got a bride who was so skillful and, at the same time, so fair. But the young maiden did nothing but weep, and the more the time advanced the more she wept, for she thought of the frightful dwarf who was to come and fetch her. When evening drew nigh, the king's son returned from the chase, and went to converse with his bride. Observing that she appeared sorrowful, he strove to divert her in all sorts of ways, and said he would tell her of a curious adventure, provided only she would be cheerful. The girl entreated him to let her hear it.

Then said the prince, "While rambling about in the forest today I witness an odd sort of thing. I saw a very, very little old man dancing round a juniper bush and singing a singular song."
"What did he sing?" asked the maiden inquisitively, for she felt sure that the prince had met with the dwarf.

"He sang these words, answered the prince,
I dag skall jag maltet mala,
I morgon skall mitt bröllopp vara.
Och jungfrun sitter i buren och gråter;
Hon ver inte havad jag heter.
Jag heter Titteli Ture.
Jag heter Titteli Ture.

Today I the malt shall grind,
Tomorrow my wedding shall be.
And the maiden sits in her bower and weeps;
She knows not what I am called.
I am called Titteli Ture.
I am called Titteli Ture.

Was not the maiden now glad? She begged the prince to tell her over and over again what the dwarf had sung. He then repeated the wonderful song, until she had imprinted the old man's name firmly in her memory. She then conversed lovingly with her betrothed, and the prince could not sufficiently praise his young bride's beauty and understanding. But he wondered why she was so overjoyed, being like everyone else, ignorant of the cause of her past sorrow.

When it was night, and the maiden was sitting alone in her chamber, the door was opened, and the hideous dwarf again entered. On beholding him the girl sprang up, and said, "Titteli Ture! Titteli Ture! Here are your gloves."
When the dwarf heard his name pronounced, he was furiously angry, and hastened away through the air, taking with him the whole roof of the house.

The fair maiden now laughed to herself and was joyful beyond measure. She then lay down to sleep, and slept till the sun shone. The following day her marriage with the young prince was solemnized, and nothing more was ever heard of Titteli Ture.

BARAT

25/09/2017
My name is Barat. I was born fifty-one years ago in a small village close to Samsun, the Black Sea. My parents had a little house with a patch of land in which we would play all day long. My father worked at a local petrol station and my mother looked after my three brothers, my sister, myself, and twelve hens. We were poor and had no money for toys, so instead we played in the garden, skipping rope, paying hopscotch, hide-and-seek, and the such. Aged five, I became fascinated with cloth: I loved running my hands on it and feeling all the different textures. I began making dolls out of scraps my mother gave me. They didn't have any names, they were all called "Baba".

Sometimes, rarely, we would go to the Black Sea. We were only allowed to play on the beach. Swimming in this sea was too dangerous, because of the many whirlpools. I only learned to swim much later, I was already living in Germany. I went to an adult evening class at the communal swimming pool. Now I can swim, but still, I never go in the deep end, I always make sure my feet can touch the bottom.

After primary school, at ten, I enrolled in a special school where I learned sewing, along with the rest. At seventeen when school was over, I went to Istanbul to learn pattern-making at a private school.

After that I took a job at a textile factory. I started at the bottom of the ladder, ironing shirts, slowly working all the way up to cutting the patterns. This was a period of content in my life, I liked the atmosphere in the factory and I stayed there twelve years in all. I made good friends amongst my colleagues, my last day working there was really sad and I felt like crying. We didn't have a party or anything though, I just left.

Anyway, then I met my future husband, we fell love, but he lived in Berlin. Some months later I came to visit him in Berlin and I liked what I saw. I thought to myself, this is a quiet city, a peaceful city - suddenly it felt like the right place for me. Time went by and we got engaged, we had a big party in Istanbul, we got married shortly thereafter. Then came the day when I had to move to Berlin, which was hard because none of my family lived in Germany - this meant leaving everybody I knew, including my Istanbul girlfriends, for this one man.

At first, I couldn't speak a word of German - for the first eighteen months, I just went to school to learn the language. It was difficult to progress - I only spoke German outside of home. My husband is a romantic man and he often brought me flowers.
I couldn't work because I had to wait twenty-four months to get my work permit - anyway, my German was too poor to work. Meanwhile I spent my free time walking around the district of Neukölln, checking out the shopwindows of tailors, dreaming of opening my own, one day! One shop in particular seemed open and friendly. The owner was also Turkish, so one day I brought her some trousers. I just needed to get the zip replaced - I didn't have a sewing machine, I couldn't do it at home. We started chatting, I came back to the shop, bringing more items. Chatting along, I slowly got to know this seamstress. After some months, she asked me to help out on an urgent job. This was a beautiful day! The jobs came in more and more often. One day, she asked me to work for her part-time, and soon, full-time! We were very busy and had a lot of customers. We worked together for some years, it was a great time. After a while though she desired to retire and she offered me to buy the shop. This was a stressful time for me because I had to somehow find money, and I wasn't sure how things would turn out.
I have now been running the shop for sixteen years. At first I offered a bespoke service, but over the years I decided only to make alterations, custom-tailoring was too tricky, customers were complicated and complained too much.

I've been in my shop for nearly sixteen years now and I know everybody in the street. Every step of the way, wherever I go, I have to stop and say hello to somebody, to the great embarrassment of my two teenage sons. Every day I sew zips, I shorten skirts and iron blouses. I love silk and viscose, my favourite colour used to be pink but now is red.

I'm employing an apprentice. His name is Osama and he arrived from Syria four years ago. He can still only speak very little German, and obviously no Turkish. I really must go now, as a group of ladies just brought six ball-gowns to be altered by Friday.

23/10/2017
I walk in Barat's shop for the second interview, alone this time. I cannot impose more on my friend Sara-lena whom helped out last time. Barat has another person there, a little bit older, or the same age as hers? She's very friendly and has a ready smile. She follows us to the back of the shop, to a corner of the workshop, by the windowsill, next to the sewing machine table. Her name is Zachariah - I think. She has been in Berlin for a couple years and is also Turkish. I show Barat the story that I have written so far, I apologise, as it being in English, she can't read it. She chuckles and shakes her head dismissively, "Es ist kein Problem." Actually she doesn't seem really interested to read it. I ask the meaning or the origin of her name, Barat. It is the name of a holy evening, "Shab-e-Barat". Literally, it means "the night of salvation or the night of freedom from the fire of hell". People are shown grace on this auspicious night. Some spend the whole night awake and worship till daybreak. During this night, or so tells us "the tradition of the Messenger", Allah determines the destiny of all people, including whether a person is to live or die in the coming year. Barat happens to be born on that evening. I ask her on which day of the year "Barat" is. She explains that this holiday changes day every year. It can be before the Ramadan, or after it. I exclaim at the luck in being born precisely on this auspicious date, the fact that it changes date each year makes it seem all the more serendipitous.

Her "village" turns out to be on the outskirts of Samsun, two or three kilometre outside the city. She has four siblings, she is the second child, after her elder sister, the accountant. She has two more brothers, both of whom also became accountants. Her little sister is a housewife. When I ask her where she learned to sew, she tells me that she didn't learn from her mother, who didn't sew at all. Her grandmother did use to do some sewing, but overall they used to buy clothes, not make them. Her grandma did make pyjamas or night-things, but nothing to be worn in the daytime, nothing important. She used to stitch those by hand. She just started to sew on her own accord, by herself. She had no toys, so she started making herself chiffon dolls, "babas" as she calls them. I ask her how many she made, she thinks about five (maybe because they were five siblings?). None of them had names. Basically she made a structure out of wooden sticks, one for the body, one for both arms and one per leg. She'd make the head with some cotton wool. She used to bind this structure with strips of cloth and give it a body by wrapping more or less of it - then she'd sew a skin over these "innards". Finally, she dressed them with the first clothes that she ever made.

"In middle-school, boys and girls study together. They get separated when they reach high-school age. My high-school also trained its pupils to tailoring. The teachers in the sewing

section were all women, but not for the 'normal' lessons such as math or Turkish." When I ask her which was her favourite project, she doesn't seem to understand the meaning of my question; she replies that at the end of each year, they put up a final show. People would come and look at their work. She started ground-school at seven and this professional schooling at the age of thirteen. There, she started to learn sewing by making baby clothes! I'm supposing that they must have been a bit bigger than the doll-baba clothes? The garments apparently grew along her increasing knowledge of tailoring.

We are interrupted by a postman bringing a parcel - both ladies disappear for quite a while. Barat returns, alone this time. For the end-of-year show, they used to display clothes on tables, for all to see and inspect. The learning process went as such: the first year, they began by making baby clothes; the second year they graduated to making pyjamas and skirts, the third year would be dedicated to pants and jackets; and the fourth and last year, they got to make a big project like a wedding gown or an evening dress.

She made clothes for herself as well as for her mother and sisters, but mostly, she made clothes for her grandma - "because it was easy!" she laughs. "It's not difficult to make clothing for older ladies in Turkey: two elastics at the wrists and then everything else very wide and flowing." Still, sometimes her grandmother complained that the sleeves were too tight, and she would grumble that Barat had ruined all her cloth. Slowly, she learned. She doesn't remember her first interaction with the sewing machine. I had assumed it would be a roaring catastrophe, but she explains that this was not a problem because they used slow machines activated by foot pedals, very good for learning.

Right after finishing this school, Barat moved in with her older sister in Istanbul and enrolled at a private school to learn pattern-making. They never made a real size pattern. Instead they made mini patterns, mini pater garments, everything mini, never at one to one size. She explains how she made mini pleated skirts, cutting and folding paper, assembling it. Making things on a tiny scale is much harder, she says. "Mondays to Fridays, I worked at a large textile firm in the packing department, to make money to pay for my private school and support myself. I did ask my bosses if I could work a little less, as it was hard to work seven days a week (my school was on Saturday and Sunday - all day long), but they told me that it was not their problem: if I needed more time to myself, I could stop going to school. I worked 7/7."

She worked all weekdays at the factory packing clothes, and on the weekend, she manufactured tiny clothes out of paper, non-stop. She used to start her workday at seven thirty, work all day long, come home, eat, and sleep.
"I only kept my packing job for as long as I went to my pattern-making school. After getting my diploma I didn't have to look for long, an acquaintance found me a job right away. I had hoped to start making patterns, but at first, I basically used to do the ironing and observe the two or three women whom I worked with. I used to watch them and began to get experience that way. I changed jobs two or three times until I found the jersey company and I remained there for the rest of my years in Istanbul.

The layout of the factory - as far as I remember, it is so long ago now! – was as follows: on the ground floor, the canteen, on the first floor, the pattern-making department. On the second storey, huge tables stacked high with thick piles and piles of material ready to be cut. Men tended to do all the cutting, it's hard work. On the third floor, all the sewing and ironing took place. This floor was rather mixed, there were both men and women, the sewing machines and a lot of steam, but the ironing was done only by men - this also is a tough job. The controllers were on the top floor.

In Turkey, the men don't go to school to learn tailoring, they just go to the factory, helping out, and just get their experience by jumping in and sitting at the sewing machine whenever its rightful owner happens to have left it, very much left to their own devices. They get all of their experience straight from the factory, using only observation and stolen time.

My factory specialised in jersey pants and T-shirts. We only worked with this material, the company was equipped with machines specialised for this cloth, which is actually a knit. We always made one and only one type of clothing. Sometimes, I would wear the clothes that I made - the employees could buy the clothes that the controllers hadn't approved for quality, 'seconds' so to speak. Each worker – we were around five hundred in the factory – had a special number that would get stuck on the garment as it went through our many hands, so that the controllers were able to trace the culprits in case of errors. If a worker made too many mistakes, she had to go back and work extra hours. Sometimes a whole seam would be missing on the side of a T-shirt, that is a big blunder.

Once I made a very big mistake. My mistakes are especially bad because I make the patterns.: if those are wrong, thousands of items are going to be cut and sewn up wrong. As part of my job as a pattern-maker, I had to make tests on the cloth, for shrinkage for example. This consisted in washing the cloth, to calculate the rate of reduction. Normally, the shrinkage is about 4%. Once, I forgot to test a batch of jersey. Five thousand pairs of leggings were cut and assembled, too small. They were destined for Tchibo, but they did tests on their own end, discovered the shrinkage problem, and sent the whole lot back. They were all too short! Catastrophe! My boss was absolutely furious. Had I tested as I was supposed to, I would've sent this lot of jersey back to the manufacturer. It's a very big mistake. My boss was very angry - he told me that I'd have to pay for all of the five hundred short leggings, month by month. A colossal sum that seemed absolutely impossible to ever repay. But my boss has a good heart, and little by little, he forgave me, I didn't have to pay for the leggings!

For lunch, we didn't have to think about what to get, as there was a canteen with a nice warm lunch, the food was very good - every day. Some evenings after work, I used to go for long walks in Istanbul with my girlfriends from the factory. The shops remain open until ten at night, so we still had lots of time after work. We'd walk around the bazaars for hours. On the weekends I'd go to the cinema, on boat cruises - Istanbul is surrounded by water and there are many boats, it's beautiful. None of us were married then, we just hung out together in clumps of girls, going to cafés etc.

Everything was going pretty well for me - then one day I went for coffee in town with some of my colleagues, after lunch. I was sitting there and in comes this man, a friend of my colleague's. Our eyes met and liked each other immediately. We made small talk, I didn't know the first thing about him, only that I wanted to see him again. The next day we met for coffee, just the two of us, I fell in love on the spot. Unfortunately he had to fly back to Berlin the next day, where he had been living for some years already. Over the next few months we telephoned each-other frequently. He came back in the summer, our story grew and grew, and soon it became clear that if I wanted to make my life with this man, I would have to move to Berlin. This was a tough decision for me - leaving Istanbul, the bright lights, the hustle and bustle of the big city, all the people, the colours! The next time I saw him it was for Christmas,
I went to Berlin to visit him. We got married on the 9/9/99. We looked up the horoscope, it seemed like an auspicious date.
I didn't make my own wedding dress, I was not allowed to use the machines at the factory, and I didn't have one at home. I went to wedding dress outfitters, they confectioned a custom-made dress for me. I made all the preparations for the wedding alone, as he was work-

ing in Berlin. We got married at the register office, we didn't have a big religious wedding. We only had about thirty guests, in the evening we had invited even less people, we held a small party at a restaurant. We had to pay for everything from our own pocket and this is the best we could afford. We received many presents - in Turkey, the custom is to be covered in gold and money! I had a white dress, in the western style, not in our own tradition. We didn't dance, there was no music. At the time, Istanbul and all of Turkey was in mourning - all music and dance was forbidden for one whole month. In the middle of August, a massive earthquake had killed many many many people in a city close to Istanbul"*. It was a bit sad.

We left for Berlin together the day after the wedding. However just one month after I arrived in Berlin I had to go right back to Istanbul, because of all the paperwork in Germany. At first, I couldn't work because of my lack of work permit. A couple of years later, this law got abolished!" Barat dismisses this unfair administrative stroke of bad luck by shrugging a shoulder. "I moved into my husband's flat, a single room on the rooftop, fifty-five square meters! It was very romantic, a beautiful flat. When my first son was born, we had to move to our current flat, two and a half rooms. I sewed all my curtains with fabrics that I brought from Turkey. I also made cushions and tablecloths from the same fabric. Lastly, I made covers for my sofas, taken in at the edges with elastics.

"My German was still not so great, which caused me problems on several occasions. I will never forget what happened with the hotel manager. So embarrassing. That's the life of the foreigner!". She giggles. "I remember how he walked into my shop and ordered thirty-six pairs of matching curtains for his whole hotel house. This was a major job for me! We made an appointment to meet the next day. I waited and waited and waited in my shop, wondering why he didn't turn up. Only much later in the evening, someone called. I had misunderstood him, the appointment was in the hotel, not in the shop! I ran there, didn't meet the manager. I hectically measured all of the windows of the hotel, feeling really hot with embarrassment. I was humiliated to death. The hotel manager was also a foreigner, he even told my husband he understood how such mistakes could happen - still, I was mortified.

Once, a man came in with a jacket. I understood that he wanted me to take it in. I pinned him up for a tighter fit, he kept mum. When he came for his jacket, he was furious! He had meant for me to take in the lining, the lining had been too loose. He didn't want to make his jacket smaller! He yelled a lot, but he paid. I was crushed - Once more, I had misunderstood! Maybe he had said something, but I hadn't understood?"

We are interrupted by a phone call, she speaks in Turkish, except for the bit that she wants me to understand: "Ich komme gleich".
"Mein Mann", she says. She seems very eager to go now, so I speed through the last questions.
"The six ball gowns that I took over last time you came ended up being quite a stressful job, but I managed. I had to enlist extra help to be ready on time."
"Osama doesn't come so much anymore, he's too lazy! He never comes, he never answers my messages. I have a new intern."

I ask her, at last, to describe the house that her husband and herself built in Izmir. Very quickly, she explains "We bought land, built a two-storey house, it has a big "salon" and a kitchen downstairs, three bedrooms upstairs and three bathrooms, with three separate toilets. We also have a pool, and a garden with olive trees."
We both rush out into the night.

**(the 1999 Izmir earthquake killed more than 17000 people)*

01/12/2018
I just left Barat's shop. I consign our interaction to paper right away: I walk in the boutique - the bell rings, announcing my arrival. I came up with the pretext of getting curtains done, an excuse to talk to her some more and try to secure a third interview.

I mentally revisit her shop, two rooms entirely painted in sky blue. In the front window of the boutique, a few old toys from her kids are on display for sale, a few clothes presumably forgotten and left behind by clients are also on display for sale.

Further into the boutique, a magnificent, outlandish 1900 counter, all dark wood, mirror effects and bevelled glass, curving around itself - shaped like a key. In its round end is placed a whimsical sewing machine, all black and gold and swirls. A Singer, whose presence I only register now.

On the right-hand side is an opening into the workshop, which is also entirely bathed in baby blue. She has very professional machines, I think Yukis, three big white machines. She also has a complicated looking overlock machine studded with knobs, buttons and dials, several spools of thread. On the wall above her personal sewing machine, next to the window, two photographs of one person. She has rows upon rows of bobbins of thread neatly arranged according to their colours, it looks very decorative, this array of intense, saturated colours on the wall. Her shop is womanly, warm and inviting, one feels at ease in this environment. In the centre of the workshop, a very large table, on which she brought a rose-covered tray and Turkish coffee during the first interview.

I don't have time to observe much more as Barat arrives promptly. At my ritual "Wie get es Ihnen?", she replies that she is very busy -lot of orders at the moment, which I interpret as code for "Sorry but I have no more time for interviews!". On her face, a smile and a frown fight for space. I suppose she's wondering if I want to steal more of her time, and she happens to be quite right. As we shake hands, she gazes inquisitively at me and I dive in with my curtain story. Fortunately, I took the precaution of "forgetting" the lining - she is definitely not in the mood to give me more time - and I declare that I'll have to bring it later on. I describe what I have in mind and ask for her opinion. At first, she tells me it is up to me. I insist. She recommends the simpler option, because of the weight of the cloth. I like her advice, very sensible, and decide to follow it. She asks me whether I want two curtains. I had wanted a single curtain but she advises me to make two thinner ones, so they are easier to handle. Again, I follow her advice. She is very businesslike, with her measuring tape around her neck; she fills out a baby blue slip and gives it to me. She adds no deadline - I have yet to bring the lining. I ask her to calculate the price, I'm a bit nervous about that aspect, this is the first time I have curtains made. She quotes me forty Euro, she's knocked off four euro, after calculating the price according to the measurements: 290 cm times 150 cm times 2 + lining. It's quite a lot for my ever-dwindling purse, but it does seem like a fair price, and I smile my agreement. She grins back and exclaims her pleasure: a new customer!

19/12/2017
Finally, I worked up the nerve to telephone Barat and ask for a third interview, with an interpret this time. This apparently convinces her to give me some of her time, once more.
The discussion starts with profuse apologies from Barat for not understanding me very well and necessitating the presence of an interpreter. Sometimes, she can't understand foreigners very well, because of their accents - I have a tough French accent! She could understand my friend Sara-Lena who came the first time very well, because she speaks pure German. I

tell her to please not worry and forget about it. The interpreter, Rucken, also claims not to speak perfect German - it sound absolutely immaculate to me. “Slowly slowly it will come, slowly slowly it take real long!”, Barat concludes, we laugh.

Barat has made us coffee, she’s serving it around in small glasses with red roses silk-printed on them. I show Barat what I have typed up so far. She exclaims: ”Is this my story?”. I confirm, and add that there are still many holes: we are now going to attempt to fill them with new questions.

What is the most important gift or talent for a tailor? She answers: “Perfection! The work must be flawless.” I rephrase: which quality does one need as a tailor? “The most important quality is to have willpower. With real willpower, everything is possible. Nothing is impossible!”
I ask her which superpower she wishes she had, she replies a huge textile plant, manufacturing her own clothing line, with her own label. She would call it “Mxxx textile” for example. As this is her family name, I ask her if it means anything. She replies that it is a river that flows into Turkey from Bulgaria. Of course this river has another name in German. This was her husband’s name, what was her maiden name? She chortles: “It’s a much longer name, very hard to pronounce, “Sxxx”, it means “noble man””. “Maybe your great-great-great-grandparents were immensely rich!”. She teeters” My mother‘s family comes from Russia, Chechnya. They immigrated to Turkey because they were oppressed by the tsar. A lot of people died around the Black Sea at that time.” She estimates the time of the immigration to be 1914-1918. I understand that the communist revolution took place around that time, so could it be that they had to flee because they were aristocrats, or maybe because of a racial thing? Barat answers that they were not Russians, but Chechens. They all had to flee on boats and cross the Black Sea. It was mass immigration, some went to Turkey, some to Syria, many died in the Black Sea. She excuses herself, she has to let someone in. It’s her new colleague! “She comes once or twice a week. Her name is Güler.” She also comes from Samsun, the place where Barat was born. “It is a quiet and peaceful place to be nowadays.” She definitely feels Turkish, not Chechen. “On the other hand, my family still speaks the language perfectly. Actually, I don’t speak Turkish that great, I have an accent, my Chechen is much better”.

How did she feel on her first day in Berlin? As she was moving from lively busy bustling and loud Istanbul. What struck her the most? The calm and peace hovering over Berlin, how silent it is. She could hear the birds singing - all of a sudden! She found it easy to get around, she could find streets and street numbers easily, in Istanbul it was a lot more difficult. I find it very hard to find the street numbers in Berlin, she must have a good sense of orientation, I exclaim. She retorts: “Berlin is green and spaced out, unlike Istanbul, a city of fifteen million people.”
I then ask her to describe how she spent her time until she got her work permit.

Two weeks after arriving, she enrolled at a language school (the Volkshochschule on Boddinstraße); she remembers this time fondly and how it snowed when she started going to school - the teacher kept saying “Es schneit, es schneit”. None of the Turkish ladies, including herself, could understand what she meant. For days and days, the teacher went through a lot of trouble to try to make them understand the words. She said it again and again: “Es schneit, es schneit”, “but no matter how hard we tried, we never could understand her!”. She says now finally she knows, laughing.
“We were around eighteen or nineteen people in the classroom. This is where I made my first friends, I’m still in contact with some of them. One of them became a daycare teacher, one became a carer, one is a housewife. Everybody was looking for friends in the school, we had all just arrived. It is really important to have friends”, she states. All of these ladies came to Berlin for love, all of them fresh out of Turkey. Should I deduct that it is Turkish women’s love stories that make the world go round?

It transpires that the previous owner of this shop was a friend of Barat’s - in fact, she used to live right opposite. “I brought over some trousers that needed a new zipper, and casually, I let it be known that I was like her – ‘I’m also a tailor, by the way’”. She started working for the woman, every now and again. “She was a very nice person, but I don’t have any contact anymore.” Her mouth sets a little, she looks away. The friendship is over, and Barat won’t disclose why.

I ask her how she managed to buy her shop. Did she borrow money from a bank? Her husband had saved up around 10000 Euro, the amount needed to buy the business and the machines. Now I get it: she doesn’t own the real estate space, this was the price for taking over the business. She still has to pay rent every month. “The rent is OK, 520 Euro per month. It’s a good price, it’s getting expensive around here.”

A couple years after taking over the business, she replaced the old machines with new ones, investing a further five thousand Euro. She got these “new machines” secondhand from a shop in bankruptcy. The machines had only been used for one year, so they were like new. “Unfortunately, not everyone can be a success. I’m actually a little bit proud of myself, especially when I compare my success to that of other women who came from Turkey.” And she chuckles modestly. She adds: “When I first arrived, I met women who had been living in Germany for twenty years, yet still did not speak a word of German. That is sad.”

I ask what her dream factory would be making - this is replied to in enthusiastic, staccato tempo, long flowing Turkish rows of sentences. I wait patiently for my translation. She used to work for clients such as Tchibo and Esprit, making jackets and jeans, she says, but she wouldn’t like to do that anymore. What she actually wants to do is to make things from Jersey, such as T-shirts and leggings. I ask her why: is it because it is soft on the hands? She replies that it is because she has so much experience with this material, she knows she will be good at making things from that cloth. I ask her if it’s because she also thinks it’s nice to wear these clothes, but she says this has absolutely nothing to do with it, she just thinks it’s simple for her to sew that material. I ask for whom would she sew, women, men, children? Only for grown-ups, she says. What kind of style does she aim for? Sporty, for example? She replies that she used to make suits for Adidas. She enjoyed making those track-suits. I guess Barat is just a very practical person.

“Many interns come here, they tend to stay five or six months.“ It turns out her “colleague” Güler is in fact an intern, she’s training to become a full-fledged tailor, right now. It’s a new start for her, she’s around fifty-five, I’m guessing. She’s going to a school called “Bildungswerk Kreuzberg” in Cuvrystraße, it’s a school for adults.
A few minutes later, I understand what I believe is the final version of our truth here: this woman, Güler, has already been through the school, she’s just getting some experience at Barat’s, she is thinking about opening her own shop. The other woman, the one who started in January, is in the middle of the training at the BK. Barat enjoys having interns, she likes imparting knowledge.

“Actually, I worked as a sewing instructor in a school in Samsun. For two years… It was right after completing my professional high-school, before I went to Istanbul to learnt pattern-making. There were eighteen to twenty students per class.” She explains that she is a very patient and calm person - definitely an advantage in a classroom situation like this. It’s also very use-

ful for tailoring: one is always under a lot of stress! It's vital to remain calm and patient, this is a non-negotiable attribute of a tailor! In the classroom, each student had their own sewing machine. In the middle of the room, a very large wooden table. The machines were always getting broken or damaged, need some repair. This was a real problem, especially with so many beginners. On the other hand, from teaching in this school, Barat learned and became very good at fixing sewing machines herself, and quickly! A huge advantage now, which saved the day for her many a time. Well, she mitigates, she can handle easier repairs. She veritably is a multi-talented multi-tasker, I comment.

I then ask her to describe again the method of pattern-making of the "school of the mini", making entire wardrobes of paper: first, everything was shown to twenty pairs of curious, learning tailors's eyes, on a large paper board -at real size- then twenty pairs of hands learned to use a special "scale-ruler", to make twenty miniature versions of the original. They made all the many parts of for example, a dress, on paper. They would trace them, cut them out, join them together, until the dress was formed. She mentions that she has a folder brimming with examples of the mini paper clothing in it, but it's in Turkey. Equipped with this training, the real work in real places and at real size was really easy: making miniature paper clothing demanded much more dexterity and number crunching. She doesn't know why it was all miniature and paper, she never questioned the method. "It's possible that nowadays, they teach some other way, but at the time this was how the tailors of Turkey learnt to make patterns." I insist on seeing the miniature folder. "I'll call my mother in Turkey, and ask her if she still has the folder - or whether she threw it away." I gasp in horror at the thought, and hope fervently that it still exists.

I ask Barat what she thinks about sitting all day long before her machine, sewing, sewing, sewing away.
"I dream about many things at once. But mostly, I tend to wander about in my past, my parents… My best memories are back in 1988, the year I left the family and went to live with my sister in Istanbul. The freedom, the novelty, the discovery that there are other ways to do things than as they were done at home!"

Finally, I pop the fairy-question: "What would you ask from a fairy godmother, if she came now?
"To move to my house in Izmir, and that my sons finish school with good marks. The older one wants to study law, but I'm not sure wether he'll manage it yet". I ask what the younger son would like to do, and she says, giggling: "Right now he always wants to do what his older brother does. He follows him like a shadow, his role-model! He's still only just ten years old… And, I'd wish for a trip around the world". She laughs: "Well, where is the fairy godmother then?"

BARAT

25/09/2017
„Mein Name ist Barat. Ich wurde vor einundfünfzig Jahren in einem kleinen Dorf bei Samsun am Schwarzen Meer geboren. Meine Eltern hatten ein kleines Haus mit einem Flecken Land auf dem wir den ganzen Tag spielen konnten. Mein Vater arbeitete an der örtlichen Tankstelle und meine Mutter sah nach meinen drei Brüdern, meiner Schwester, mir selbst und zwölf Hühnern. Wir waren arm und hatten kein Geld für Spielzeug. Also spielten wir im Garten, Seilspringen, Himmel-und Hölle, Verstecken und so etwas. Mit fünf Jahren begann ich, von Stoffen fasziniert zu sein. Ich liebte es mit meinen Händen darüberzufahren und all die verschiedenen Texturen zu fühlen. Ich fing an Puppen aus Fetzen zu machen, die meine Mutter mir gab. Sie hatten keine Namen, wir nannten sie alle „Baba".

Manchmal, selten, fuhren wir ans Schwarze Meer. Wir durften nur am Strand spielen. Im Meer zu schwimmen war wegen der vielen Strudel zu gefährlich. Zu schwimmen lernte ich viel später, als ich schon in Deutschland lebte. Ich ging zu einem Erwachsenen Abendkurs im öffentlichen Schwimmbad. Jetzt kann ich schwimmen, aber ich gehe immer noch nicht ins Tiefe und achte darauf, dass meine Füße den Grund berühren können.

Nach der Grundschule, mit zehn, meldete ich mich an einer Schule an, an der ich, neben allem anderen, nähen lernte. Als die Schule mit siebzehn vorbei war, ging ich nach Istanbul , um Schnittmuster an einer privaten Schule zu lernen.

Danach arbeitete ich in einer Textilfabrik. Ich fing am Fuß der Leiter an, mit Hemden bügeln, und arbeitet mich langsam hoch bis zum Schneiden der Muster. Das war eine Phase von Zufriedenheit in meinem Leben. Ich mochte die Atmosphäre in der Fabrik und blieb alles in allem 12 Jahre. Ich machte gute Freundschaften unter den Kollegen. Mein letzter Arbeitstag war wirklich traurig und ich fühlte mich zum Heulen. Wir hatten keine Feier oder so etwas, ich ging einfach.

Wie auch immer, ich traf dann meine späteren Gatten, wir verliebten uns, aber er lebte in Berlin. Einige Monate später besuchte ich ihn in Berlin und ich mochte was ich sah. Ich dachte mir, das ist eine ruhige Stadt, eine friedliche Stadt – plötzlich fühlte es sich an wie der richtige Platz für mich. Die Zeit ging weiter, wir verlobten uns – wir hatten eine große Feier in Istanbul – und heirateten kurz darauf. Dann kam der Tag an dem ich nach Berlin ziehen musste, was schwer war, da niemand aus meiner Familie in Deutschland lebte. Es hieß, jeden den ich kannte für den einen Mann zu verlassen, eingeschlossen meine Freundinnen in Istanbul.

Am Anfang konnte ich kein Wort Deutsch sprechen – die ersten achtzehn Monate ging ich nur zur Schule, um die Sprache zu lernen. Es war schwierig Vorschritte zu machen. Ich sprach Deutsch nur außer Haus. Mein Ehemann ist ein romantischer Mann und er brachte mir oft Blumen.
Ich konnte nicht arbeiten, weil ich vierundzwanzig Monate auf meine Arbeitserlaubnis warten musste. Mein Deutsch war aber sowieso zu schlecht, um zu arbeiten. In der Zwischenzeit wanderte ich durch den Bezirk Neukölln, schaute mir die Schaufenster von Schneidereien an und träumte davon eines Tages selbst eine zu eröffnen!
Ein Laden schien besonders offen und freundlich zu sein. Die Besitzerin war auch Türkin, also brachte ich ihr eines Tages eine Hose. Ich musste nur den Reißverschluss ersetzten lassen. Ich hatte keine Nähmaschine und konnte es nicht zuhause machen. Wir fingen an uns zu unterhalten, ich kam zurück in den Laden und brachte mehr Sachen. Beim Plaudern lernte ich diese Näherin langsam kennen. Nach ein paar Monaten bat sie mich bei einem dringenden Auftrag auszuhelfen. Das war ein herrlicher Tag! Die Aufträge kamen öfter und öfter. Eines Tages fragte sie mich, ob ich Teilzeit arbeiten wollte, und bald Vollzeit! Wir waren sehr beschäftigt und hatten viele Kunden. Wir arbeiteten einige Jahre zusammen. Es war eine tolle Zeit. Nach einer Weile allerdings wollte sie sich zur Ruhe setzen und bot mir den Laden zum Kauf an. Das war eine stressige Zeit für mich, weil ich das Geld auftreiben musste und nicht wusste, wie die Sache ausgehen würde.
Ich betreibe den Laden jetzt seit 16 Jahren. Zuerst bot ich Maßschneiderei an, aber über die Jahre entschied ich mich, nur Änderungen zu machen. Für Kunden zu schneidern war zu schwierig, die Kunden waren kompliziert und beschwerten sich zu viel.

Ich bin jetzt seit fast 16 Jahren in meinem Laden und ich kenne jeden auf der Straße. Bei jedem Schritt, wo ich auch gehe, muss ich stehen bleiben und Hallo sagen – zur größten Pein für meine beiden Teenager-Söhne. Jeden Tag nähe ich Reißverschlüsse, kürze Röcke und bügele Blusen. Ich liebe Seide und Viskose. Meine Lieblingsfarbe war Pink, aber jetzt ist es Rot.

Ich beschäftige einen Lehrling. Sein Name ist Osama und er ist vor 4 Jahren aus Syrien gekommen. Er kann immer noch sehr wenig deutsch und natürlich kein Türkisch sprechen. Ich muss jetzt wirklich gehen. Eine Gruppe Damen hat 6 Ballkleider gebracht, die bis Freitag geändert werden müssen."

23/10/2017
Ich komme für das zweite Interview zurück in Barats Laden. Alleine dieses Mal, denn ich kann meiner Freundin Sara-Lena, die beim letzten Mal geholfen hat, nicht mehr zur Last fallen. Barat ist mit jemand anderem da, ein bisschen älter, oder im gleichen Alter wie sie?
Sie ist sehr freundlich und hat ein breites Lächeln. Sie folgt uns in den hinteren Teil des Ladens, in eine Ecke bei der Fensterbank, beim Nähmaschinentisch. Ihr Name ist Zachariah – denke ich. Sie ist seit einigen Jahren in Berlin und sie ist auch Türkin. Ich zeige Barat die Geschichte die ich bisher geschrieben habe und entschuldige mich, dass sie es nicht lesen kann, weil es auf Englisch ist. Sie schmunzelt und schüttelt wegwerfend den Kopf, „das ist kein Problem." Eigentlich scheint sie nicht besonders interessiert sie zu lesen. Ich frage nach der Herkunft, oder der Bedeutung ihres Namens, „Barat". Es ist der Name einer heiligen Nacht, „Shab-e-Barat". Wörtlich bedeutet er „Die Nacht der Errettung, oder die Nacht der Befreiung von den Feuern der Hölle". Den Menschen wird Gnade gewährt in dieser glücksverheißenden Nacht. Einige bleiben die ganze Nacht wach und beten bis zum Tagesanbruch. Während dieser Nacht, so sagt uns die „Überlieferung des Boten", entscheidet Allah das Schicksal aller Menschen, einschließlich, ob ein Mensch in den kommenden Jahren lebt oder stirbt. Barat wurde zufällig an diesem Abend geboren. Ich frage, welcher Tag des Jahres „Barat" ist. Sie erklärt, dass der Feiertag jedes Jahr den Tag wechselt. Er kann vor, oder auch nach Ramadan liegen. Ich bringe mein Entzücken zum Ausdruck über das Glück, genau an diesem vielversprechenden Datum geboren zu sein. Das sich das Datum ständig ändert lässt es noch mehr wie eine glückliche Fügung erscheinen.

Ihr „Dorf" stellt sich als Vorstadt von Samsun heraus, 2 oder 3 Kilometer außerhalb der Stadt. Sie hat vier Geschwister, sie ist das zweite Kind nach ihrer älteren Schwester, der Buchhalterin. Sie hat noch zwei Brüder die auch Buchhalter geworden sind. Ihre kleine Schwester ist Hausfrau. Als ich sie frage, wo sie nähen gelernt hat erzählt sie mir, dass sie es nicht von ihrer Mutter gelernt hat, die überhaupt nicht genäht hat. Ihre Großmutter nähte ein bisschen, aber alles in allem haben sie ihre Kleider gekauft und nicht gemacht. Ihre Großmutter machte

Pyjamas und andere Sachen für die Nacht, aber nichts was tagsüber getragen wurde, nichts Wichtiges. Sie nähte die Sachen mit der Hand.
Sie fing einfach aus eigenem Antrieb an zu nähen, alleine. Sie hatte kein Spielzeug, also fing sie an sich ihre eigenen Chiffon-Puppen zu machen, „Babas“ wie sie sie nannte. Ich frage, wie viele sie gemacht hat. Sie denk ungefähr fünf (Vielleicht, weil sie fünf Geschwister sind?). Keine von ihnen hatte einen Namen. Im Grunde machte sie eine Konstruktion aus Holzstöcken, einen für den Körper, einen für beide Arme und einen für jedes Bein. Den Kopf machte sie aus Baumwolle. Sie verband die Konstruktion mit Stoffstreifen und gab ihr einen Körper indem sie sie mit mehr oder weniger Streifen umwickelte – dann nähte sie eine Haut über diese „Innereien“. Am Schluss zog sie sie mit den ersten Kleidern die sie jemals machte an.
„In der Mittelschule lernen Jungen und Mädchen zusammen. Sie werden getrennt, wenn sie das Oberschulalter erreichen. Meine Oberschule hat die Schüler auch im Schneidern ausgebildet. Die Lehrer in der Abteilung Nähen waren alle Frauen, aber nicht in den „normalen“ Fächern wie Mathematik und Türkisch.“ Als ich sie frage, was ihr Lieblingsprojekt gewesen ist, scheint sie meine Frage nicht zu verstehen. Sie antwortet, dass sie am Ende jedes Jahres eine Abschlussschau veranstaltet haben. Leute kamen und schauten sich ihre Arbeiten an. Sie begann die Grundschule mit sieben und diesen beruflichen Unterricht mit dreizehn. Dort lernte sie Nähen mit dem Herstellen von Baby-Kleidung. Ich unterstelle, dass sie etwas größer waren als die Baba-Puppen-Kleider? Die Kleidungsstücke wuchsen anscheinend mit dem wachsenden Wissen um die Schneiderei.

Wir werden vom Briefträger der Pakete bringt unterbrochen. Die Damen verschwinden für eine ganze Weile. Barat kommt zurück, dieses Mal alleine. Für die Jahresabschlussausstellung präsentierten sie die Kleidung auf Tischen, wo sie jeder anschauen und prüfen konnte. Die Lernschritte gingen wie folgt: Im ersten Jahr fingen sie an mit Baby-Kleidung, im zweiten Jahr schritten sie fort zu Pyjamas und Röcken, das dritte Jahr war Hosen und Jacken gewidmet und im vierten Jahr mussten sie ein großes Projekt wie ein Hochzeitskleid oder einen Abendanzug machen.

Sie machte Kleidung für sich selbst wie auch für ihre Mutter und ihre Schwestern, aber hauptsächlich machte sie Kleider für ihre Großmutter. „Weil es einfach ist“, lacht sie. „Es ist nicht schwer, in der Türkei Kleidung für ältere Damen zu machen: zwei Gummis an den Handgelenken und alles andere sehr weit und fließend.“ Trotzdem beschwerte sich ihre Großmutter manchmal, dass die Ärmel zu eng seien und grummelte, dass Barat all ihren Stoff ruiniert hätte. Langsam lernte sie. Sie kann sich nicht an ihre erste Begegnung mit einer Nähmaschine erinnern. Ich hatte angenommen, dass es eine krachende Katastrophe war, aber sie erklärt, dass es kein Problem war, weil sie sehr langsame Maschinen benutzten die mit Fußpedalen angetrieben wurden, sehr gut zum Lernen.

Direkt nach Abschluss dieser Schule zog Barat zu ihrer älteren Schwester nach Istanbul und schrieb sich auf einer privaten Schule ein, um Schnittmuster zu lernen.
Sie machten nie Muster in Originalgröße. Stattdessen machten sie Miniatur-Muster, Miniatur-Priestergewänder, alles Miniatur, nie in Eins-zu-eins-Größe. Sie erklärt, wie sie Miniatur-Faltenröcke aus geschnittenem und gefalteten, zusammenmontiertem Papier gemacht hat. „Dinge in winzigem Maßstab zu machen ist viel schwerer.“ sagt sie. „Montags bis freitags arbeitete ich in einer großen Textilfirma in der Verpackungsabteilung, um meine private Schule zu bezahlen und mich selbst zu versorgen. Ich fragte meine Bosse, ob ich etwas weniger arbeiten könnte, denn es war hart, sieben Tage die Woche zu arbeiten (meine Schule war Samstag und Sonntag, den ganzen Tag), aber sie sagten, das sei nicht ihr Problem: Wenn ich mehr Zeit für mich brauchte, sollte ich aufhören zur Schule zu gehen. Ich arbeitete eine Siebentagewoche.

Sie verpackte an allen Wochentagen Kleidung in der Fabrik und an den Wochenenden stellte sie winzige Kleider aus Papier her, non-stop. Ihr Arbeitstag fing um 7.30 Uhr an, den ganzen Tag arbeiten, nach Hause kommen, essen, schlafen.

„Ich behielt den Verpackungs-Job nur solange ich auf die Schnittmuster-Schule ging. Nachdem ich mein Diplom hatte, musste ich nicht lange suchen; ein Bekannter fand sofort einen Job für mich. Ich hatte gehofft anzufangen Muster zu machen, aber zuerst habe ich im Wesentlichen gebügelt und die zwei oder drei Frauen beobachtet die mit mir arbeiteten. Ich schaute ihnen zu und gewann so an Erfahrung. Ich wechselte zwei oder drei Mal die Stelle, bis ich das Jersey-Unternehmen fand bei dem ich die restlichen meiner Istanbuler Jahre verbrachte.

Der Aufbau der Firma – soweit ich mich erinnere, es ist jetzt schon so lange her! – war wie folgt: Im Erdgeschoß, die Kantine, im ersten Stock, die Schnittmuster Abteilung. Im zweiten Stock, riesige Tische vollgepackt mit dicken Ballen Material, das darauf wartete geschnitten zu werden. Vorwiegend Männer erledigten das Schneiden, es ist schwere Arbeit. Im dritten Stock fand all das Nähen und Bügeln statt. Dieser Stock war ziemlich gemischt, es gab Männer und Frauen, die Nähmaschinen und eine Menge Dampf, aber das Bügeln wurde nur von Männern gemacht, auch ein harter Job. Die Kontrolleure waren im Obergeschoß.

In der Türkei gehen Männer nicht zur Schule um Schneidern zu lernen. Sie gehen einfach in die Fabrik, helfen aus, und machen ihre Erfahrungen beim Einspringen und Arbeiten an einer Nähmaschine deren eigentlicher Besitzer gerade nicht da ist. Sie sind sehr auf eigene Mittel angewiesen. Sie bekommen all ihre Erfahrung direkt von der Fabrik - durch Beobachtung und gestohlene Zeit.

Meine Firma war spezialisiert auf Hosen und T-Shirts aus Jersey. Wir arbeiteten nur mit diesem Material. Die Fabrik war mit Maschinen ausgestattet, die auf diesen Stoff spezialisiert waren, der eigentlich ein Strickgewebe ist. Wir machten immer eine, und nur eine, Sorte Kleidung. Manchmal trug ich die Sachen die ich machte – die Angestellten konnten Kleidung die die Kontrolleure beanstandet hatten kaufen, zweite Wahl sozusagen. Jeder Arbeiter – wir waren um die Fünfhundert in der Fabrik – hatte eine spezielle Nummer, die an ein Kleidungsstück geheftet wurde während es durch so viele Hände wanderte, damit die Kontrolleure bei einem Fehler den Schuldigen ermitteln konnten. Wenn eine Arbeiterin zu viele Fehler machte, musste sie zurück an die Arbeit und Extra-Stunden machen. Manchmal fehlte ein ganzer Saum an einer Seite eines T-Shirts. Das ist ein grober Pfusch.

Einmal machte ich einen Riesenfehler. Meine Fehler waren besonders schlimm, weil ich die Muster machte. Wenn die falsch sind, werden Tausende von Stücken falsch geschnitten und genäht. Teil meines Jobs als Mustermacherin war es, Tests mit dem Stoff zu machen – zum Beispiel auf Einlaufen. Der bestand daraus den Stoff zu waschen und den Grad der Reduzierung zu berechnen. Normalerweise liegt die Schrumpfung bei 4%. Einmal vergaß ich einen Ballen Jersey zu testen. Fünftausend Paar Leggins wurden zu klein geschnitten und zusammengefügt. Sie waren für Tchibo bestimmt. Sie machten Tests auf ihrer Seite, entdeckten das Problem mit dem Einlaufen und schickten die ganze Lieferung zurück. Sie waren alle zu kurz! Katastrophe! Mein Boss war absolut stinksauer. Wenn ich getestet hätte, wie es meine Aufgabe gewesen wäre, hätte ich die Lieferung Jersey an den Hersteller zurückgeschickt. Mein Boss war sehr verärgert. Er sagte mir ich müsse die ganzen zu kurzen Leggins bezahlen, Monat für Monat. Eine kolossale Summe, die scheinbar absolut unmöglich zurückzuzahlen war. Aber mein Boss hatte ein gutes Herz und nach und nach vergab er mir. Ich musste die Leggins nicht bezahlen!

Um das Mittagsessen mussten wir uns nicht kümmern, weil es die Kantine mit einer ordentlichen, warmen Mahlzeit gab. Das Essen war jeden Tag sehr gut. An manchen Abenden machte ich nach der Arbeit lange Spaziergänge durch Istanbul, mit meinen Kolleginnen aus der Fabrik. Die Läden blieben bis 10 Uhr geöffnet und so hatten wir noch eine Menge Zeit nach der Arbeit. Wir spazierten für Stunden durch die Basare. An den Wochenenden ging ich ins Kino, oder auf Bootsfahrten – Istanbul ist von Wasser umgeben und es gibt viele Boote, es ist wunderschön. Keine von uns war zu der Zeit verheiratet. Wir hingen einfach als Gruppen von Mädchen herum, gingen in Cafés, etc.

Alles lief recht gut für mich, dann ging ich eines Tages nach dem Essen mit ein paar Kolleginnen in die Stadt Kaffee trinken. Ich saß da und dieser Mann kam herein, ein Freund von einer Kollegin. Unsere Augen trafen sich und mochten sich sofort. Wir machten Small Talk, ich wusste nicht das Geringste von ihm, außer das ich ihn wiedersehen wollte. Am nächsten Tag trafen wir uns auf einen Kaffee, nur wir Beide, und ich verliebte mich auf der Stelle. Unglücklicherweise musste er am nächsten Tag nach Berlin zurückfliegen, wo er schon seit einigen Jahren lebte. Über die nächsten Monate riefen wir einander regelmäßig an. Im Sommer kam er zurück, unsere Geschichte wuchs und wuchs, und bald wurde klar, dass ich, wenn ich mit diesem Mann leben wollte, nach Berlin gehen musste. Das war eine harte Entscheidung für mich – Istanbul verlassen, die hellen Lichter, den Trubel der großen Stadt, all die Leute, die Farben! Das nächste Mal sah ich zu Weihnachten, als ich ihn in Berlin besuchte. Wir heirateten am 9.9.99. Wir sahen im Horoskop nach und es schien ein verheißungsvolles Datum.

Ich machte mein Hochzeitskleid nicht selbst. Wir durften die Maschinen in der Fabrik nicht benutzten und zuhause hatte ich keine. Ich ging zu einem Hochzeitskleid-Ausstatter und sie konfektionierten ein maßgeschneidertes Kleid für mich. Ich machte die ganzen Vorbereitungen für die Hochzeit alleine, da er in Berlin arbeitete. Wir heirateten am Standesamt. Wir hatten keine große, religiöse Hochzeit. Wir hatten nur etwa dreißig Gäste und am Abend hatten wir noch weniger eingeladen. Wir hatten eine kleine Feier in einem Restaurant. Wir mussten Alles aus eigener Tasche bezahlen und das war das Beste, das wir uns leisten konnten. Wir bekamen viele Geschenke – in der Türkei ist es Brauch, dass man mit Gold und Geld bedeckt wird! Ich hatte ein weißes Kleid im westlichen Stil, nicht nach unserer eigenen Tradition. Wir tanzten nicht, es gab keine Musik. Istanbul und die ganze Türkei waren zu der Zeit in Trauer – alle Musik und das Tanzen waren für einen ganzen Monat verboten. Mitte August hatte ein massives Erdbeben viele, viele Leute in einer Stadt bei Istanbul getötet. * Es war ein bisschen traurig.

Am Tag nach der Hochzeit brachen wir nach Berlin auf. Allerdings ging ich einen Monat nachdem ich Berlin angekommen war direkt wieder nach Istanbul, wegen der ganzen Formalitäten in Deutschland. Am Anfang durfte ich wegen meiner fehlenden Arbeitserlaubnis nicht arbeiten. Ein paar Jahre später wurde das Gesetz abgeschafft!“ Barat tut diesen unfairen administrativen Anfall von Pech mit einem Schulterzucken ab.

„Ich zog in die Wohnung meines Mannes, Einzelzimmer im Dachgeschoß, fünfundfünfzig Quadratmeter! Es war sehr romantisch, eine wunderschöne Wohnung. Als mein erster Sohn geboren wurde mussten wir in unsere jetzige Wohnung ziehen, 2 ½ Zimmer. Ich nähte meine Vorhänge aus Stoff den ich aus der Türkei mitgebracht hatte. Ich machte auch Kissen und Tischdecken aus demselben Stoff. Am Schluss machte ich Überzüge für meine Sofas mit eingenähten Gummis an den Kanten.

Dass mein Deutsch nicht so gut war machte mir bei mehreren Gelegenheiten Probleme. Ich werde nie vergessen, was mit dem Hotelmanager passierte. So peinlich. So ist das Leben einer Fremden!“ Sie kichert. „Ich erinnere mich, wie er in den Laden kommt und dreiundsechzig Paare zusammenpassende Vorhänge für sein ganzes Hotel bestellt. Das war ein Großauftrag für mich! Wir machten ein Treffen für den nächsten Tag aus. Ich wartete und wartete, verwundert, dass er nicht auftauchte. Erst viel später am Abend rief jemand an. Ich hatte ihn missverstanden. Das Treffen war im Hotel, nicht im Laden. Ich rannte dorthin und traf den Manager nicht an. Ich maß hektisch die ganzen Fenster aus und fühlte mich heiß vor Scham. Ich war tödlich erniedrigt. Der Manager war auch ein Ausländer und er sagte meinem Mann sogar, dass er verstände wie so ein Missverständnis zustande kommt – dennoch, ich war gedemütigt.

Einmal kam ein Mann mit einer Jacke. Ich verstand, dass ich sie abnähen sollte. Ich steckte sie ihm für einen engeren Sitz ab, er blieb still. Als er kam, um seine Jacke abzuholen war er wütend! Er hatte mir zu verstehen gegeben das Futter abzunähen, das Futter war zu lose. Er wollte nicht, dass seine Jacke kleiner gemacht wird! Er schrie viel herum, aber er zahlte. Ich war gebrochen – schon wieder hatte ich missverstanden! Vielleicht hatte er etwas gesagt und ich hatte es nicht verstanden?“

Wir werden von einem Anruf unterbrochen, sie spricht türkisch – außer ein paar Worten die ich verstehe soll: „Ich komme gleich.“
„Mein Mann“, sagt sie. Sie scheint ungeduldig zu gehen, also haste ich durch meine letzten Fragen.

„Die sechs Ballkleider die ich letztes Mal angenommen habe stellten sich als ziemlich stressiger Job heraus, aber ich habe es geschafft. Ich musste zeitweise zusätzliche Hilfe einstellen.“

„Osama kommt nicht mehr sehr oft, er ist zu faul. Er kommt nie, er beantwortet nie meine Nachrichten. Ich habe einen neuen Praktikanten.“

Ich frage sie zum Schluss nach dem Haus das sie und ihr Mann in Izmir bauen. Sehr hastig erklärt sie: „Wir haben Grund gekauft und ein zweigeschossiges Haus gebaut. Es hat einen großen „Salon“, unten eine Küche, oben drei Schlafzimmer und drei Badezimmer mit separaten Toiletten. Wir haben auch einen Pool und einen Garten mit Olivenbäumen.“

Wir eilen beide in die Nacht.

**(das 1999ziger Izmir Erdbeben tötete mehr als 17.000 Menschen)*

01/12/2018
Ich habe gerade Barats Laden verlassen. Ich übertrage unseren Austausch umgehend auf Papier: Ich betrete das Geschäft – die Glocke klingelt und kündigt mich an. Ich komme unter dem Vorwand, Vorhänge gemacht zu bekommen, als Entschuldigung, um mehr mit ihr zu sprechen und zu versuchen mir ein drittes Interview zu sichern.
Ich gehe im Geiste durch das Geschäft. Zwei Räume die vollständig himmelblau gestrichen sind. Im Schaufenster liegen einige alte Spielzeuge von ihren Kindern zum Verkauf aus. Einige Kleidungsstücke, wahrscheinlich von Kunden vergessen und zurückgelassen stehen auch zum Verkauf.

Tiefer im Geschäft ein wunderbarer, ausgefallener 19tes Jhd. Tresen, ganz schwarzes Holz, Spiegeleffekte und geschliffenes Glas, in sich gedreht – geformt wie ein Schlüssel. An seinem

runden Ende ist eine skurrile, mit schwarzen und goldenen Wirbeln verzierte Nähmaschine platziert. Eine Singer, deren Anwesenheit ich erst jetzt bemerke.

Auf der rechten Seite ist eine Öffnung zur Werkstatt, die auch in Himmelblau getaucht ist. Sie hat sehr professionelle Maschinen, ich denke Yukis, drei große, weiße Maschinen. Sie hat auch eine kompliziert aussehende Overlock-Maschine, die übersät ist mit Reglern, Knöpfen und Skalen und mehreren Spulen für Garn. An der Wand über ihrer persönlichen Nähmaschine, nächst zum Fenster, hängen zwei Fotos von einer Person. Sie hat Reihen über Reihen von Garnspulen sorgfältig nach Farben arrangiert. Das sieht sehr dekorativ aus, dieses Feld intensiver, satter Farben an der Wand. Ihr Laden ist fraulich, warm und einladend, man fühlt sich wohl in dieser Umgebung. Im Zentrum der Werkstatt ein großer Tisch, an dem sie bei unserem ersten Interview, auf einem rosenbedeckten Tablett, türkischen Kaffee servierte.

Ich habe nicht mehr Zeit für längere Beobachtungen, da Barat prompt erscheint. Auf meine rituelle Begrüßung, „Wie geht es Ihnen", antwortet sie, dass sie sehr beschäftigt ist, viele Aufträge im Moment, was ich als einen Code für „Entschuldigung, ich habe keine Zeit mehr für Interviews!" interpretiere. Auf ihrem Gesicht ein Lächeln und ein Stirnrunzeln das sich breitmacht. Ich nehme an, sie fragt sich, ob ich ihr noch mehr Zeit stehlen will, und sie hat ganz recht. Als wir uns die Hände schütteln starrt sie mich neugierig an und ich tauche in meine Vorhang-Geschichte ein. Glücklicherweise habe ich die Vorsichtsmaßnahme ergriffen das Futter „vergessen" zu haben - sie ist definitiv nicht in der Stimmung mir mehr Zeit zu geben - und erkläre, dass ich es später bringen muss. Ich beschreibe, was ich mir vorstelle und frage nach ihrer Meinung. Zuerst sagt sie, das sei meine Sache. Ich bestehe darauf. Wegen des Gewichts des Stoffes empfiehlt sie eine einfachere Lösung. Ich mag ihren Rat, sehr einfühlsam, und beschließe ihm zu folgen. Sie fragt, ob ich zwei Vorhänge möchte. Ich wollte einen einzelnen Vorhang, aber sie rät mir zu zwei dünneren Vorhängen die einfacher zu handhaben sind. Wieder folge ich ihrem Rat. Sie ist sehr geschäftsmäßig mit ihrem Maßband um den Hals. Sie füllt einen himmelblauen Schein aus und gibt ihn mir. Sie gibt keinen Termin – ich muss erst das Futter bringen. Ich bitte sie mir einen Preis auszurechnen. Ich bin ein bisschen nervös wegen diesem Aspekt, da es das erste Mal ist, dass ich Vorhänge anfertigen lasse. Sie berechnet mir vierzig Euro, sie hat vier Euro nachgelassen, nachdem sie den Preis nach den Maßen berechnet hatte: 290 cm mal 150 cm mal 2 plus Futter. Das ist ziemlich viel für meine ewig schrumpfende Geldbörse. Aber es scheint mir ein fairer Preis und ich lächele mein Einverständnis. Sie grinst zurück und gibt ihrer Freude Ausdruck: eine neue Kundin!

19/12/2017
Endlich habe ich meinen Mut zusammengenommen und Barat angerufen und um ein drittes Interview gebeten, dieses Mal mit einem Übersetzter. Das hat sie anscheinend überzeugt mir noch einmal etwas Zeit zu widmen.

Die Diskussion beginnt mit überreichlichen Entschuldigungen Barats, dass sie mich nicht sehr gut versteht und die Anwesenheit eines Übersetzers notwendig macht. Manchmal kann sie Ausländer wegen ihres Akzents schlecht verstehen – ich habe einen starken französischen Akzent! Sie konnte meine Freundin Sara-Lena, die beim ersten Mal dabei war, gut verstehen, weil sie reines Deutsch gesprochen hat. Ich bitte sie, sich nicht zu sorgen und es einfach zu vergessen. Der Übersetzter, Rucken, behauptet ebenfalls nicht perfekt Deutsch zu sprechen – für mich hört es sich makellos an. „Langsam, ganz langsam wird es kommen, langsam, ganz langsam braucht es echt viel Zeit!", schließt Barat ab, wir lachen.
Barat hat Kaffee für uns gemacht. Sie reicht ihn, in kleinen Gläsern mit Siebdrucken von roten Rosen darauf, herum. Ich zeige Barat was ich bisher getippt habe. Sie ruft aus: „Das ist meine Geschichte?". Ich bestätige das und ergänze, dass es noch viele Lücken gibt. Wir werden jetzt versuchen sie mit neuen Fragen zu füllen.

Was ist die wichtigste Gabe, oder das wichtigste Talent für eine Schneiderin? Sie antwortet: „Perfektion! Die Arbeit muss einwandfrei sein." Ich drücke es anders aus: "Welche Qualitäten braucht eine Schneiderin?" – „Die wichtigste Qualität ist Willenskraft. Mit wirklicher Willenskraft ist Alles möglich. Nichts ist unmöglich." Ich frage welche Superkräfte sie gerne hätte. Sie erwidert, sie hätte gerne eine große Textilfabrik die ihre eigene Kleidungskollektion herstellt, mit ihrem eigenen Label. Sie würde sie zum Beispiel „Mxxx Textile" nennen. Das ist ihr Familienname. Ich frage, ob er etwas bedeutet. Sie erwidert, dass das ein Fluss sei, der von Bulgarien aus in die Türkei fließt. Natürlich hat der Fluss auf deutsch einen anderen Namen. Das war der Name ihres Mannes, wie war ihr Mädchenname? Sie gluckst: „Das ist ein viel längerer Name, sehr schwer auszusprechen, „Sxxx", das heißt „Edelmann"." – „Vielleicht waren Ihre Vorfahren unglaublich reich!" Sie wippt mit dem Fuß: „Die Familie meiner Mutter kommt aus Russland, aus Tschetschenien. Sie wanderten in die Türkei aus, weil sie vom Zar unterdrückt wurden. Viele Leute starben zu der Zeit rund um das Schwarze Meer." Sie schätzt die Zeit der Auswanderung auf 1914 – 1918. Ich verstehe, dass zu der Zeit die russische Revolution stattfand. Könnte es sein, dass sie flüchten mußten weil sie Aristokraten waren, oder aus rassistischen Gründen? Barat antwortet, dass sie nicht Russen waren, sondern Tschetschenen. Sie mussten alle in Booten über das Schwarze Meer fliehen. Es war eine Massenwanderung. Einige gingen in die Türkei, andere nach Syrien, viele starben im Schwarzen Meer. Sie entschuldigt sich, sie muss jemanden hereinlassen. Es ist ihre neue Kollegin. „Sie kommt ein-oder zweimal die Woche. Ihr Name ist Güler." Sie kommt auch aus Samsun, wo Barat geboren wurde. „Das ist ein ruhiger und friedlicher Ort heutzutage." Sie fühlt sich auf jeden Fall türkisch, nicht tschetschenisch. „Andererseits spricht meine Familie noch perfekt die Sprache. Eigentlich ist mein Türkisch nicht so besonders, ich habe einen Akzent, mein Tschetschenisch ist viel besser."

Wie fühlte sie sich an ihrem ersten Tag in Berlin? Als sie aus dem lebhaften, turbulenten und lauten Istanbul kam? Was machte den stärksten Eindruck?
Die Ruhe und der Frieden der über der Stadt liegt, wie still es ist. Sie konnte plötzlich die Vögel singen hören! Sie konnte sich gut zurechtfinden, Straßen und Hausnummern leicht finden. Sie muss einen guten Orientierungssinn haben, rufe ich aus. Sie entgegnet: "Berlin ist grün und ausgedehnt, anders als Istanbul, eine Stadt von 15 Millionen Einwohnern."
Dann bitte ich sie zu beschreiben, wie sie ihre Zeit verbracht hat bis sie ihre Arbeitserlaubnis bekam.

Zwei Wochen nach ihrer Ankunft schrieb sie sich in einer Sprachschule ein (der Volkshochschule auf der Boddinstraße); sie erinnert sich liebevoll an die Zeit und wie es geschneit hat als sie anfing zur Schule zu gehen – die Lehrerin sagte immer wieder „es schneit, es schneit". Keine der türkischen Frauen, sie selbst eingeschlossen, konnten verstehen was sie meint. Viele Tage lang hatte die Lehrerin größte Mühe ihnen die Worte beizubringen. Sie sagte es wieder und wieder: „Es schneit, es schneit", aber so sehr wir uns auch anstrengten, wir konnten sie nicht verstehen. Lachend sagt sie, dass sie es jetzt endlich verstanden hat. „Wir waren um die achtzehn, neunzehn Leute in der Klasse. Das ist, wo ich meine ersten Freunde traf, mit einigen bin ich heute noch im Kontakt. Eine wurde Kita-Betreuerin, eine wurde Pflegerin, eine ist Hausfrau. Jeder suchte nach Freunden in der Schule, wir waren alle gerade erst angekommen. Es ist wichtig Freunde zu haben", stellt sie fest. Alle diese Frauen kamen wegen der Liebe nach Berlin, alle aus der Türkei.
Soll ich daraus schließen, dass es die Liebesgeschichte türkischer Frauen sind die die Welt in Gang halten?

Es stellt sich heraus, dass die frühere Eigentümerin eine Freundin von Barat war – tatsächlich lebte sie auf der anderen Straßenseite. „Ich brachte ihr eine Hose die einen neuen Reißverschluss brauchte, und bei Gelegenheit ließ ich sie wissen, dass ich wie sie war – „Ich bin übrigens auch Schneiderin.“ Sie fing an, ab und an für die Frau zu arbeiten. „Sie war eine nette Person, aber jetzt habe ich keinen Kontakt mehr.“ Sie verzieht ein bisschen den Mund und schaut weg. Die Freundschaft ist am Ende und Barat wird nicht preisgeben warum.

Ich frage sie, wie sie es geschafft hat den Laden zu kaufen. Hat sie Geld von einer Bank geliehen? Ihr Mann hatte 10000 Euro gespart, den Betrag den es brauchte, um den Laden und die Maschinen zu kaufen. Jetzt kapiere ich es: Ihr gehört nicht die Immobilie. Der Preis war für die Übernahme des Geschäfts. Sie muss immer noch jeden Monat Miete zahlen. „Die Miete ist ok, 520 Euro im Monat. Das ist ein guter Preis, es wird teuer in der Gegend.“

Ein paar Jahre nachdem sie den Laden übernommen hatte investierte sie noch einmal 5000 Euro in neue Maschinen. Sie bekam die „neuen Maschinen“ zweiter Hand von einer pleitegegangenen Schneiderei. Die Maschinen waren nur ein Jahr im Gebrauch und wie neu. „Unglücklicherweise kann nicht jeder Erfolg haben. Ich bin schon ein bisschen stolz auf mich, besonders, wenn ich meinen Erfolg mit den anderen Frauen aus der Türkei vergleiche.“ Sie schmunzelt zurückhaltend und ergänzt: „Als ich frisch ankam traf ich Frauen die seit zwanzig Jahren in Deutschland lebten und kein Wort Deutsch sprachen. Das ist traurig.“

Ich frage, was ihre Traumfabrik herstellen würde. Die Antwort kommt enthusiastisch, im Stakkato-Tempo, in einem langen Fluss türkischer Sätze. Ich warte geduldig auf meine Übersetzung. Sie hatte für Kunden wie Tchibo und Esprit Jacken und Jeans gemacht, sagt sie, aber so etwas würde sie nicht mehr machen. Eigentlich würde sie gerne Sachen wie T-Shirts oder Leggins aus Jersey machen. Ich frage warum: ist es, weil es weich in den Händen liegt? Sie erwidert, dass es wegen der vielen Erfahrung ist die sie mit dem Material hat. Sie weiß, sie könnte mit dem Stoff gute Sachen machen. Ich frage, ob sie auch daran denkt, dass es angenehm wäre diese Kleidung zu tragen, aber sie sagt, dass das absolut nichts damit zu tun hat. Sie denkt nur, dass das Material für sie einfach zu verarbeiten ist. Ich frage für wen sie nähen würde: Männer, Frauen, Kinder? Nur für Erwachsene, sagt sie. Auf welchen Stil würde sie abzielen? Sportlich, zum Beispiel? Sie gibt zurück, dass sie Anzüge für Adidas gemacht hat. Sie genoss es, diese Laufanzüge zu machen. Ich schätze, Barat ist eine sehr praktisch veranlagte Person.

„Viele Praktikanten kommen hierher. Üblicherweise bleiben sie fünf bis sechs Monate.“ Es zeigt sich das ihre „Kollegin“ Güler in Wahrheit eine Praktikantin ist. Sie übt gerade, um eine vollwertige Schneiderin zu werden. Es ist ein Neustart für sie. Ich schätze sie ist etwa Fünfundfünfzig. Sie geht auf eine Schule namens „Bildungswerk Kreuzberg“. Das ist eine Schule für Erwachsene.

Einige Minuten später sind wir bei dem angekommen, was glaube ich die finale Wahrheit in dieser Sache ist: Diese Frau, Güler, hat die Schule schon absolviert. Sie möchte nur ein bisschen Erfahrung bei Barat sammeln und denkt darüber nach, einen eigenen Laden zu eröffnen. Die andere Frau, die im Januar angefangen hat, ist mitten in der Ausbildung beim BK. Barat genießt es Praktikanten zu haben, sie mag es ihr Wissen zu vermitteln.

„Tatsächlich habe ich an einer Schule in Samsun als Ausbilderin für Nähen gearbeitet. Für zwei Jahre... Es war direkt nachdem ich meine berufliche Oberschule abgeschlossen hatte und bevor ich nach Istanbul ging, um Schnittmuster zu lernen. Da waren achtzehn bis zwanzig Schüler pro Klasse.“ Sie erklärt, dass sie eine ruhige und geduldige Person ist - sicher ein Vorteil in einer Klassenzimmersituation wie dieser. Es ist auch sehr nützlich für das Schneidern. Man steht immer unter einer Menge Stress! Es ist überlebenswichtig ruhig und geduldig zu bleiben, das ist eine nichtverhandelbare Eigenschaft von Schneidern! In dem Klassenzimmer hatte jeder Schüler eine eigene Nähmaschine. In der Mitte des Raums gab es einen großen Tisch. Die Maschinen waren immer kaputt oder beschädigt, brauchten eine Reparatur. Das war ein echtes Problem, gerade mit so vielen Anfängern. Andererseits lernte Barat vom Lehren an der Schule und wurde sehr gut im Selbstreparieren von Nähmaschinen, und schnell! Jetzt ein großer Vorteil, der ihr oft den Tag gerettet hat. Nun ja, schwächt sie ab, sie kann einfachere Reparaturen leisten. Sie ist wahrhaftig eine multi-talentierte Multi-Taskerin, kommentiere ich.
Ich bitte sie dann, noch einmal die Methode des Mustermachens an der „Schule der Miniaturen“ zu erklären, ganze Garderoben aus Papier zu machen: Zuerst wurde Alles den zwanzig Paaren neugierige, wissbegieriger Augen der angehenden Schneider auf einer großen Papp-Wand – in Originalgröße – gezeigt, dann lernten zwanzig Paare Hände den Umgang mit einem speziellen Maßstabsüberträger, um zwanzig Miniaturversionen des Originals zu machen. Sie machten all die vielen Bestandteile eines, zum Beispiel, Kleids. Sie pausten sie durch, schnitten sie aus, verbanden sie, bis das Kleid fertig war. Sie erwähnt, dass sie einen Ordner hat, der vor Miniatur-Papierkleidung aus allen Nähten platzt, aber er ist in der Türkei. Mit dieser Ausbildung versehen war die reale Arbeit, an realen Arbeitsstellen, in realen Größen leicht: Die Miniatur Papierkleider zu machen erforderte viel mehr Geschicklichkeit und Rechnerei. Sie weiß nicht warum in Miniatur und Papier, sie hat die Methode nie hinterfragt. „Möglicherweise unterrichten sie jetzt auf eine andere Art, aber zu der Zeit war das die Methode wie Schneider Schnittmuster lernten.“ Ich bestehe darauf den Ordner mit den Miniaturen sehen zu wollen. „Ich rufe meine Mutter in der Türkei an und frage, ob sie den Ordner noch hat – oder ob sie ihn weggeworfen hat.“ Ich schnappe nach Luft bei dem Gedanken und hoffe inständig, dass er noch existiert.

Ich frage Barat, was sie davon hält Tag für Tag an der Maschine zu sitzen und zu nähen, nähen, nähen. „Ich träume von vielen Dingen gleichzeitig. Aber meistens durchstreife ich meine Vergangenheit, meine Eltern... Meine besten Erinnerungen habe ich an 1988, als ich die Familie verließ und zu meiner Schwester nach Istanbul ging. Die Freiheit, das Neue, die Entdeckung, dass es andere Arten gibt Dinge zu tun als bei uns zuhause!“

Schlussendlich bringe ich die Märchenfrage: „Was würdest du dir von einer guten Fee wünschen, wenn sie jetzt erschiene?“
„In mein Haus nach Izmir zu ziehen und dass meine Söhne die Schule mit guten Noten beenden. Der Ältere möchte Jura studieren, aber ich bin noch nicht sicher, ob er das schafft.“ Ich frage, was der jüngere Sohn gerne machen würde und sie kichert: „Im Moment möchte er Alles machen was sein älterer Bruder macht. Er folgt ihm wie ein Schatten, seinem Vorbild! Er ist immer noch erst zehn Jahre alt... und, ich wünsche mir eine Weltreise!“. Sie lacht: „Nun ja, gibt es denn eine gute Fee?“

SULTAN

07/10/2018
In front of her shop she grows fire orange begonia. The shop window is very feminine and looks like a vintage clothes shop, messy in a charming way. As I arrive the place is bustling with noise, movement and voices. Sultan the seamstress greets me, however she is busy with something in a back-room and asks me to wait with some magazines to read, in a small waiting room area, just like at hairdressers. One of her relatives makes small talk with me; then, her nephew also comes out of the deeper recesses of the shop and starts chatting to me.

“My aunt was born in a small village, near Syria. This was a really remote village, there were few possibilities to travel to town, it was a big trip. Once or twice a year there is an Islamic fête, “Byram”. Around this time of the year, my mother always used to be swamped by all the people in the village asking her to make them clothes for the celebrations. These clothes would be made from remnants and old pieces of material found at home. At the time, we only wore these rubber sandals, no real shoes, it’s very hot in this region of Turkey.

The first sewing machines were brought to the village by the men who fought in the war, they’d found them on their way back from the front. They were very simple black machines, Singers I think, activated by hand. Still, it was a huge improvement to have those - much faster than hand-sewing. They even made some kind of contraption on the principle of the bike wheel, to make it faster. Every household always kept old remnants of material. It was the custom at the time because of the remoteness of the village and the scarcity of clothing – you never knew when you would be able to buy some more, it was always good to have stocks of fabric, to make all kinds of things.

When my aunt came to Berlin, she kept her old reflexes, and bought a huge stock of cloth, meters and meters of it, so excited was she by all the fabric flowing around in abundance. In her mind, it would become useful one day to have all these textiles. She hadn’t yet understood how plentiful and cheap clothes where in Germany; that here, people didn’t make their own clothes - they just bought them. Do you know, still today, she has piles and piles of ancient cloth that she bought for stock. When she was young, these remnants were a precious material, which could be used to barter, or given as presents.

As for myself, I am a carpenter by training, I started my working life at a furniture factory. There I saw the other employees not only working on wood and upholstery but also sewing all the finishing touches. I saw how they would make patterns, report them on the cloth, cut, and stitch all the pieces together into a beautifully fitting cover for the arm of a chair or the seat of a sofa. Slowly, I observed more and more things and took it all in, until one day, I thought I could sew! The first time I used a machine, I was alone, it was a catastrophe! It was for my first job as a freelancer - I had an order to make all of the furniture for a disco from start to finish - a lot of work - and my first time operating a sewing machine! Yet I wouldn’t give up, I tried and tried, until I managed. I never say no, I always try to learn by doing. I got some crazy jobs! For example, once, I was asked to make a costume entirely lit from within, a little bit like a lighthouse but in the format of a costume! I didn’t say no and learned a lot.”

Sultan walks back in and demands my immediate attention. She seems a bit peeved that her nephew did so much talking. She immediately starts spinning her tale, very fast.

Her husband used to write her from Germany - they were newlyweds, but she had to stay on in Turkey until they could sort out the immigration paperwork. In a long letter, he told her that it would be easier to come to Germany if she trained for a job - she was a housewife at the time. He suggested that she learns the profession of seamstress. Sultan liked the idea. Being a woman of many resources, out she went, to a tailor in the neighbourhood, just two streets from her house. The woman agreed on the spotto take her in as an apprentice - but after three days, Sultan realised that the tailor was not teaching her anything, she was not trying to impart her knowledge. Instead, she was just giving Sultan easy odd jobs, small things that anyone can do, just using her as a simple helper. It would take years to learn this way: really not to Sultan’s taste, whose agenda was to join her husband in Germany as soon as possible. Thus this first attempt to become a tailor failed.

When she arrived in Berlin in 1969, Sultan worked in a factory as a metal worker, putting machines together for companies like Siemens. After a few years of this, she became a caretaker at a hospital, she worked there for many years, part-time, so she could bring in a little bit of income and still be a good mother to her four children. All along she still nourished the desire to become a seamstress! She thought: “My mother can sew, my sister can sew, why can’t I? I want to learn to sew!”.
She took a sewing course for Turkish women, learned the basics. She started to practice at home, at night, after the children were in bed.

By and by, she met her masters. One would say: “Sultan, practice your collars, practice your arm seams!”. And so Sultan would sit, cutting and sewing, over and over and over again, it was so hard! In the beginning, she would cry, cry from frustration. With time, she learned how to feed the sleeve cunningly, giving and tugging the cloth at the same time, into the teeth of the sewing-machine. She was perseverant, up late every night practicing after her work at hospital and her household, practising collars or sleeves or buttonholes, over and over again. Over time, she befriended her mentors, thus she was lucky enough to have three masters in the art of sewing.

“The first year I made a lot of clothes - many for my children - dresses and trousers and little shirts, I made dozens and dozens of them. I wanted to be a good mother, so it was ideal for me to work from home, I could be there for my children and then do my work, make a little extra money for my family. I don’t like promising the moon to my clients, I like them to leave me alone and trust me with my instincts, this is when I do my best work! In order to find the best solution, the client has to cooperate and trust me. I was always very curious and I never said ‘I’m good!’, and this is why I always find a way to do things a little bit better. I always observed my masters and I was interested and fascinated by everything! I always wanted to go and see inside the factories, retail shops, the manufactures, the small outfits and the big, the textile shops, the markets everywhere! I was so curious! I practiced a lot, I would put the kids to bed, then work late in the night, night after night.

Now that I have experience, I’m always open to show people how to sew this or that, to give them advice on how to do it better. I always remember how good my masters were to me, I like to do it for others now. My three masters were all people that I knew, I would call them in the evening or the weekend, asking for advice. Nowadays, I spend all my free time in my shop - I always find something to do. My family and friends are always popping by, doing this or that, it’s a beehive here! I made a lot of young people very happy, making them clothes that made them look good, this is my joy! Now two of my masters are dead, only one is still alive. They all learned as children in Turkey, they were real professionals, the best”.

Here the nephew puts in: “People will always need a tailor because people are all different! Long thin arms, short fat arms, round bellies, tiny hips and massive busts, nobody is the same, that’s why they have to bring their clothes to the tailor, so they can be fitted to their bodies.”

When she opened the shop in 1984, she had no idea about business - “I kept calling my masters for help! I took over the shop from a tailor who was very fast and deft. She didn’t need a table to cut on, she did everything on the side of her sewing machine, that’s how she’d learn the trade. I asked the old seamstress to stay on and to keep on working with me. I used to pay her wages each day, intent on staying out of debt and keep things clean and clear. We had a lot of work then - clients coming in and out all day long, it was literally bustling with people. We would work the whole day long and then I would stay some more at night. I have a gift for this job - when I’m doing it, I am happy. I intended to keep on working with the old tailoress, but I found out that she was cheating me. She kept having a lot of orders from her family: her mother, her father, her uncles and aunts, brother sister children etcetera. She used to spend a lot of time working on those orders. Of course I didn’t have to pay her for these jobs, but she did it on the work time and in my shop, and I was OK about this because I thought it was her family. It turned out that she was not working for her family but stealing my customers, and doing the job right under my nose! She would go outside to talk to customers on her mobile phone, take orders and discuss prices, and come back and work as if. After I found out about the lying and cheating, we parted ways.”

Sultan explains that she has an acquaintance in Rudow who has two wardrobes that she wants to get rid of - she needs space. Sultan wants to bring the two wardrobes in her shop and use them to store her things of value - she needs to make order, she has so many odds and ends and things for sale in her shop - a real Ali Baba’s cave. She needs to be able to find things quickly so she can show them to clients. She noticed that nowadays, some young people like old clothes and things that her mother would have worn. The day before she stayed in the shop until two thirty in the morning, she had to repair four pairs of trousers, it was tough to find a way to make them look like new again. She usually closes her shop at four, yet she almost always stays on after closing time - there is always something to do - dusting, tidying, sewing, organising, decorating, and so on.

A girl walks in, she needs an emergency alteration, she bought this cheap, rather racy black dress, she wants it to be fitted to her as tightly as a sausage. Sultan is not really excited about the job, especially because what the client demands is clearly not to her advantage. The client insists and needs her dress to be transformed into a sausage right away. What’s more, she negotiates the price down from twenty euro to fifteen euro. This upsets Sultan who grumbles under her breath, “Clients, they want everything, always faster and cheaper! And they want it now!”.

Another friend of Sultan walks in, she is a somewhat older looking woman, around seventy I’m guessing, scraggly long yellowish grey hair and the typical “Berliner Schnauze”. She is a nurse by profession, Sultan’s friend of nearly thirty years. She informs me that Sultan’s husband died a year ago. Sultan is sixty-seven and her husband was seventy-six. “He was very sick”, she explains. When I ask her what he did for a living, she trumpets “NIX! - ZILCH! He was very lazy”, she cackles. “It’s the fate of Turkish women!” she adds. Sultan the seamstress did everything in their household - she looked after the four kids, ran the household and had to work to make money for the six of them. The nurse-friend takes her leave, she’d come to pick up a loo-seat which she now tries to conceal into a plastic bag “Sultan! Sultan”, she says, “give me a reasonable bag so I can take this away!”

By now Sultan is really stressed out, she doesn’t like hectic urgent things. This is the trouble with her job - people just walk in unannounced, suddenly and radically altering the course of a day. Recently she had a very tough job: making an Escada T-shirt dramatically smaller. It was a lot of work - all drapes and ruffles, she had to open up all the seams and keep all the extra material - so that the client would be able to make it bigger again in the future if she needed to. She only has twenty minutes to finish transforming the dress into sausage skin, so she kindly asks me to come again another time.

25/11/2018

I passed by Sultan‘s shop again, finally, she’s back! I walk in, the doorbell announces my arrival. She calls from the depths of the shop: “I’ll be right there!“. When she sees me, she smiles, she seems happy to see me, as if I were an old friend. She gives me both her hands, clapsed together, for me to hold. Still impeccably dressed, styled and made up, she plunges her lioness eyes into mine and immediately launches into telling me the sad tale of her nephew. The last time we met, she’d just learned about the accident, she’d left the next day. She arrived in Turkey, went straight to the hospital, where all the family had gathered since the accident. As he was in intensive care, only his wife and his closest sister were allowed to see him, Sultan only got a glimpse of him, gave him a furtive caress once in a corridor as he was being taken to radiology. “He died three days later, his cranium had broken into one million pieces” Sultan explains. “He slipped and fell backwards, in his home, that is all. The damage on his cranium was equivalent to that of a trauma from a car accident - he just fell on a tiled floor! The surgeon compared his X-rayed cranium to egg shells, his skull, unbeknownst to all, had been paper-thin”.

Between her arrival and his death, Sultan spent the majority of her days in the hospital with the rest of the family, traipsing along the huge complex, in its many halls, waiting rooms, parks and cafeterias, supporting each other and talking about him. All were particularly attentive with his young wife - they had gotten married just two years before, she’d just given birth to a baby one month before. “It’s even more tragic”, Sultan says, “when you think he had just built his life up again, he had already been through a lot, his previous wife died after a long illness. And of course finally, he was happy! You have everything, a job, a car, a house, a wife and a new baby, but it doesn’t help: when the day comes, God brings us all down in the end. You just go around and do a few things and then go back. There is no point in getting stressed about things and money, for in the end, we will go back to the ground.“
Sultan shakes her head and reiterates this information three times, in variations. “It is good to be back, to have a lot of work, it helps to attenuate the pain. Unfortunately, it is a part of life.“

Her shop is basically as cold as the street. My feet are like icicles. Sultan sits there, composed, with her perfect posture and natural elegance, leonine eyes. She doesn’t seem to feel the cold, one leg crossed over the other, she is impeccable, her hair flawlessly parted in the middle, styled to curve in just below the chin. At some point I need to go to the bathroom, and I am greeted with a brilliant yellow vision, the whole space covered in lemony tiles, equipped with matching mint green sink, toilet, and shower right behind the toilet, as often happens in the crazy narrow corridor-bathrooms of Berlin. Quickly I get back.

She asks me how I am, I bring her up to date about the project. She tries to help me, mentioning several other tailors of Neukölln, she doesn’t know that in the meantime I have become an absolute expert in the matter. I try to ask her if I could not meet one of her three masters, I know only one of them is still alive - I would love to meet him. She smiles vaguely and looks into the distance, she’s not willing to put me in contact with him.

“He came over just a few days ago, he needed a lot of alterations, eight suits! I did it myself. He used to be one of the best tailors I knew, he trained in Turkey”.
Abruptly, she shows me two small yellow brocade dresses, very pretty, two little Indian dresses, the bodice is too tight, she is putting a zipper to make them easier to put on and off. She agrees to see me for another interview, on Saturday, so we are not disturbed. She evokes that customer who wanted her dress to be so tight that it was really unflattering, ”She looked like some trust-up poultry!”, and she grumbles on. Apparently, when she came back, she still thought it was not tight enough, even though she had been pinned up under my very eyes, and had agreed to the pinning in place. Still, she wanted a second fitting, even tighter. Sultan was exasperated at this waste of her time, she had to stay on just for her, and for a very small price. And definitely zero satisfaction on the knowledge of a job well done.

08/12/2018
For the second interview, I combat my lousy Deutsch and formidable French accent, which hinder communication, by waltzing in with a Turkish translator, Rucken. They launch straight into ultra rapid cascades of sounds, meanwhile, I take stock to the situation.

It is a very cold winter day, we all huddle around the small oil radiator, which gives absolutely no heat whatsoever. We are all fully dressed, overcoats, scarves, and hats. The only thing I took off was my gloves, and I miss them. I do wonder how Sultan can work, basically immobile, hunched over a sewing machine all day long, in this freezing atmosphere. Sultan, all energy as always, jumps in straight into the subject, she wants to know where we were at the last time. I ask her the name of the village where she used to live, or rather where she comes from, but despite having a Turkish translator, this information comes out as a completely inaudible trailing sound. Undaunted, I proceed to ask where this village is in relationship to, say Syria? Close to the town of Adana, the translator tells me. The village is called “Hammam Kö”.

I ask once more how far the village was from the next town. The last time, I was given to think that it was very remote from anywhere. Again, information got distorted, now it turns out that Sultan’s village is only a one hour car ride away from Adana town. I press on - how often would one go to the town? I’d understood that women used to keep large amounts of textiles and scraps of any kind handy in the house, for it was hard to buy material, I believe. Sultan says that’s what her cousin said - she didn’t have this experience. As far as she’s concerned, the textiles were bought in the main town when they went. Also, an itinerant textile merchant would come every now and again. He used to stand on the street, calling the ladies, bellowing his harangues: “Ladies, ladies ladies! Here! Textiles! Come, come, come and see my cloth, cloth, cloth!”

We are interrupted by a customer, she starts talking to her for a while, chewing the fat and choosing some buttons I think. The customer leaves - thank god, I think privately, remembering the sausage lady incident. Sultan and my translator talk between themselves for what seems like aeons. These ladies talk so much more when they communicate between themselves in their native language. I’m spending a lot of time just sitting around, I really feel like I’m only getting about a third of this conversation. This is frustrating!

Sultan now exclaims that there is a very important story that she will never forget and that she now wants to tell. She used to be pretty poor, but she still always had clothes. Her father used to be an itinerant green grocer, used to have a little cart, selling mandarins and oranges in the winter, back home, the citrus fruit is really beautiful, delicious.

This memory provokes another and Sultan leaps forward in her thoughts - she had always dreamt to become a tailor, she interjects. As a child, she wanted to have clothes in every colour. In the village, there was a piece of land that the family was due to inherit, one day. Her grandmother told her that when she inherited the land, she could definitely have clothing in all the colours she could dream of. For her at the time, dressing was very important, it really was a dream. Clothing and tailoring are very closely associated in Sultan’s mind.

She’s had this shop since 1994. Before that, she had a shop two streets over, in Werbellinstraße. She got this first shop soon after the fall of the wall. The shop was small, she didn’t have that much experience at the time. For these reasons, the business didn’t go well. A shop assistant from Hertie - a department store which doesn’t exist anymore - told her she’d heard about another shop for rent, the one that we are sitting in now. The other shop was too small, too out of the way, there were not enough passers-by; she only rented it for about six months. She had to fight really hard to get this shop, to get the money, the seller wanted very many documents, a whole mountain of documents! Overcoming this administrative hurdle was an up-hill struggle for Sultan. At the time, she was also working as a cleaner. The boss of the cleaning company offered her a credit to buy the place, which cost then 30,000 Mark.

However she suspected that he was trying to trick her: “he’d put forward the cash, then sit back, not do anything, watch me work! Or maybe something to do with taxes, so he could get it off his taxes? I don’t know. He was actually not at all rich, he was always running after money himself. Anyway, this was really not my idea of starting a business. I sought and found a way to buy the shop alone. I could not get money from the bank, so I gathered all of my jewellery and took it to a pawnbrokers’, and I got my money, alone!”

In fact, the proprietor of the cleaning company had actually already sort of struck a deal with the seller, 3000 Marks down from the asking price, but this implied a dual ownership. Sultan went straight to the seller and offered the 3000 Marks - to buy it alone. “The seller suddenly got pretty emotional and decided to support me. I wanted that shop so badly, I fought for it really hard, that’s why I offered the extra 3000 Marks, to make sure that I would get it. That’s my way, when I see something I really want, and that I value, I’m ready to offer more money for the thing that I truly desire. I would never have given up! I had to fight hard for this place. That’s why this shop is really a part of me, it’s very important for me.” Sultan became the rightful proprietress of the place, and to this day she reigns over this shopdom.

She explains that she doesn’t have a proper diploma to be a tailor, she did take some evening classes for Turkish women in Kreuzberg, but that’s it. “Normally, you have to learn for at least three years to become a proper seamstress. I tried to get into the proper training course, I did ask the Job Centre about it. They gave me tests to know if I could speak good enough German. In the course, which was held in German of course, there was also mathematics - and other complicated things - for which you really need a very good command of German. Unfortunately, I didn’t pass the test, that’s why I couldn’t get in on the course.”

We are interrupted by a woman who walks in, she wants to know if the shop is open. I remain mum, too aware of what happened the time of the sausage-dress lady. Sultan answers kindly as ever, that she’s not open, and she will be back on Monday. She still encourages the lady to take a look around in the thrift-store part of the shop, maybe she find something. Never lose an opportunity for business, this is how Sultan ticks.

Instead of the course, Sultan found her three Turkish master tailors. The first master was called Ali Karador, he is also the most important one of them. He and the second master both

passed away, now. At the time she was taking her sewing course in Kreuzberg, he had a shop that sold sewing machines close by to the school. She would pop by and chat with him. Bit by bit, stitch by stitch, they got to know each other. She told him about what she was learning at the sewing course, he recommended her which machines she should buy to work from home. During the training, they used to get homework - for example: make a dress. The old man thought this was no way to learn. “First, you should learn about the different materials, then practice making parts: a sleeve, a collar, seams, each as many hundreds of time as you need to get it to perfection.” Sultan should be making many many, many repetitions, just as musicians practice arpeggios. He started to give her extra homework, she always listened to him very carefully and took his advice very seriously indeed. He showed her all kinds of tricks. For example, how one can properly join sleeves to a bodice, down to small details, finishing touches. He told her all of the small tweaks to do things faster, yet better. For example a sleeve should always allow a little extra room for the arm to move around. Fitting a sleeve beautifully is not easy.

At the time, there was a lot of offer to work from home as a textile worker. “I used to get jobs from designers, I’d take them home and execute the work in my kitchen or my living room, then bring it all back to the firm. For example, I got a pattern, and I’d have to make 50 items from it - I worked a lot with handbags.”

She worked for all kinds of companies, a lot of them situated on the Potsdamerstraße, or on Oranien Platz. She also made leather clothes for kids. She had to attach buttons to children’s dresses, this took a very long time - all the parts were so small, yet still had to be put together, this took a lot longer than for an adult piece of clothing. “The work was really badly paid. I was paid per item of course. Money was important, but it was not the most important thing, the most important thing was that I was learning to sew! And I was getting paid for it! I was so eager to learn, so curious! I was fascinated with all the fabrics, the patterns, I always wanted to buy new tools, learn new methods.”

This is also why she went to many different companies, she’d look around and learn so much from these visits. She would find the companies in the classifieds in the newspaper - at the time, there were always ads for work from home, for housewives. Nowadays, this doesn’t exist anymore. “I even worked for designers, making overcoats. Once, I got a job making dresses from silk, I was paid 13 Marks per item. The dress had many details, but to me it wasn’t important that I was badly paid, the point was, I was getting experience, and learning a lot too”.

On Stuttgarterplatz, there was an outfitters specialised in men’s shirts, they paid well, “I always went back to these outfitters on the square, really observe, try to take it al in: how to make men’s shirts. It is very hard to make. There is always something new to learn!” She tells us proudly how her husband and the old man complimented her on her success. How her curiosity and thirst for new knowledge paid off. I ask Sultan whether she bought a sewing machine from her master’s, she replies that, no, she didn’t buy her machine from him - but from a German shop owner.

The master also had been born in Sultan’s village, close by to Adana. Actually, the master did not own a sewing machine shop, he worked for an American company next-door to the shop that sold the sewing machine. He was just very often in there helping them out with cleaning or repairing the machines. “He was always helping out people for no money, just out of friendship.” This was a real chance meeting - they just happened to both be in the sewing machine shop at the same time; just chatting and talking shop, and step by step he started giving her homework, teaching her to be a tailor.

We now jump to another master whose name was Suwat. This master had his own tailoring shop. He’s given up his shop now, but he still comes over to Sultan’s place every now and again. He always checks on her sewing, still explains many things, gives her tips. Contrary to what I was previously given to understand, most of the advice was not provided through evening telephone conversations but always in person, which makes sense I guess, as one needs to see the work. He is the only one of the masters whom is still alive. He is long retired, and sick - he came to Sultan’s shop just a couple days before. He needed trousers altered! Despite my repeated questions, I never manage to hear a word about the third tailor.

“When I was a small girl, my mum used to sew all of my things. She had a machine, the type run with the hand. My sister also used to sew me things. I could ask my mum to sew whatever dresses I wanted, I only used to have homemade clothing. Nice memories! My mother didn’t make my wedding dress though. I was at my sister’s - this is where I met my future husband - the mother-in-law of my sister’s was actually related to the family of my future husband. My future husband’s parents had asked my sister’s sister-in-law whether she knew a girl whom they could marry their son to, because they couldn’t find any. The sister-in-law answered that yes, she did. This is how I was introduced to my future husband, it worked out!
My sister’s neighbour was a seamstress, and the two were really friendly. That neighbour’s sister had gotten married, left her dress marooned at the workshop. She decided to give it to me and to fit it to my measurements, as a present for my wedding.” Unfortunately, she has no pictures of it right now.

I make a small interruption because I really must visit the toilet. I enter, ravished, the graphically stunning bathroom, complete with cracking colours scheme of the seventies, its shower filled to the brim with shiny black coal which I do wish we were using right now!
Returned, I insist for an oral description. She only replies that it was white and very simple. I exclaim that it must have been very elegant, and ask if it was silk. She replies that no, it wasn’t, but it was a very good quality material.

I ask Sultan what was going on in Turkey politically, or socially, at the time of her marriage. She replies: “I can’t even remember what I ate yesterday!”. She says that in the meantime she started to read a lot of books, but back then she wasn’t really aware of what was going on and she doesn’t remember.
She got married in February 1969. She shows pictures of herself and her sisters. She points out her big sister who died recently, and whose son also passed away, a few weeks ago. She had two brothers and four sisters. The eldest and the youngest stayed in Turkey, all the others siblings live in Berlin. Sultan is now deeply plunged into her photos, I try hard to get her attention back. “I’m going to look at home for some photos and bring them over, they are somewhere at home, I can’t remember where I hid them.”
Her phone rings, it’s her daughter. Basically the interview is over, I thank Sultan. She says it’s no problem to come back for more precisions. She doesn’t know if I will find her here in six weeks, what will have happened in the shop - after all she hasn’t been here for weeks and weeks, she’s been in Turkey, looking after the bereaved wife of her nephew.
She offers once more to help me out, when I want to sew something. I definitely intend to bring something to alter, this will be a new experience with her, one I must indeed have. She says that she would also give me some bits and bobs - haberdashery and sewing paraphernalia - to take home.

JURAJ

22/11/18
I found Juraj's shop by chance: his services are not listed in the yellow pages - neither are the two other tailors on the Harzerstraße, all within a hundred meter of each-other: a sudden blossoming of tailors in an otherwise rather residential area.
I'd just visited my friend Ahmed at his café on the canal and grilled him for leads, as I often do when I need something in that line. Unsurprisingly, he knew of at least two tailors, one on the Sonnenallee, a Syrian with whom he didn't want to have any business with anymore (the man had apparently pushed his boundaries a little bit too far and expected too much of his time - he was looking for a flat, Ahmed tried to help, but there was after all no money, something like this) and a German lady whose name was Helena, an older lady he told me.

Ahmed was kind enough to take me to her shop to introduce me to her personally, but when we got there around twelve or one in the afternoon, the shop was closed. I'd been experiencing a string of bad luck so I did feel pretty disappointed, but Ahmed told me to come back the next week, so we could try again. I thanked him and walked in the direction of the Wildenbruchstrasse, and less than fifty meters on, I bumped into yet another unlisted tailor. With hope booming up, and anxiety too, I strode into the place, deserted for a moment, and excitedly examined the environment. The fitting cabin was, oddly, directly next to the street window, and a mirror of its exact size gave the illusion of this being a corridor into another room, it fooled me and then amused me. I was lost in my observation when the tailor walked in, a magnificently bearded Iranian (I think) man with piercing green eyes quizzically studying me and a razor-sharp, oversize smile which was hard to interpret.

Nervous, I pop the question, trying to make my request sound not too time consuming… He smiles and nods brightly while I uncertainly declaim my little discourse, encouraging me even, always smiling… Until, smile still flashing, he says "NEIN!". Weakly, I try to insist, but the grin begins to feels somewhat threatening, I retreat. As I leave, he tells me to try the tailor down the road, just over the Wildenbruchstrasse. Down the road? I never saw ANY tailors there - I go there sometimes because there is a small second-hand shop, I even photographed it: the sign spells its name, "Marion", in red tube lighting. How strange that I never registered the presence of the shop immediately to its left! A beautiful, authentic time-warp of a place, straight from the fifties! I can see the tailor bent over his machine, right there, behind the window. He looks up, our eyes lock, he smiles, he seems friendly! Again, a surge of optimism fills me with fresh courage and I walk in. An old man is sitting right next to the entrance, below a pinboard filled with multi-coloured postcards. He is cackling and ratting away, booming jokes with a charming, trembling old man's voice, the tailor is huffing and laughing while madly driving his sewing machine at top speed; the atmosphere here is really heart-warming. The tailor interrupts himself and asks me what I need. Once more I launch my little tirade, trying to convey the right impression. Kindly, he inclines his head to the side, nodding appreciatively. He seems interested in the sociological aspect of my little study, and down-right won over. Feeling encouraged, I tell him everything, Bangladesh, Lucky, the global economy… He's resumed his sewing on the machine, but keeps firing questions, he finds the whole idea very interesting he says! I end up staying about half an hour, the old boy keeps on bantering. A middle-aged man walks in and immediately deals cookies around. I smile my thanks and feel obliged to eat mine on the spot, but I see that Juraj and the old man are cleverer than me and put theirs away. The three of them laugh and laugh and laugh, I take the opportunity to secure a time-slot with Juraj. "Anytime, he says, just come!". He adds that he always closes at 6 o'clock, or at least he pulls the curtains down, but he still stays in the shop and works until at least 7.30. "This way, I can achieve more, I really have a lot of work!" Impossible to nail him to a time, so I just declare that I will come next week around the same time.

29/11/18
Juraj is a very lovely, lively person, who seems to be the heart of the "village", I feel. The same old man is sitting in the same chair as last time when I arrive, and they both seem really happy to see me! What a lovely welcome. They're still joking and bantering like the last time, they are both in excellent spirits. I ask the old man what his name is and he informs me that he is called Gerhardt. He looks at least eighty, wears glasses, has very white hair, is frail and thin and wears a black leather cap. He always smiles and makes suggestive jokes, invariably involving team sets of men and women. I ask the tailor if it would be okay for me to sit there too, so I can start my interview - "Kein problem, kein problem!", says he, all along never letting go of the work he's speeding through. I bring out my phone which is also my recording device, and inform Juraj of the fact that I will be recording the rest of the conversation, which doesn't seem to bother him and he gives his ascent with a grunt and a nod. Gerhardt cackles away, jokes "Oh boy oh boy, the 'interview' is going to end up in Playboy!". With him everything ends up with Playboy. The tailor laughs and laughs, heartily: "You're right, now we have to watch what we say!". I protest energetically: "I only want to keep it for myself" -- "Yeah, well that's what you're saying!"

But I don't even have time to pop my first question: in walks a woman, she's wearing a big electric blue overcoat, the anorak kind, "You have a great day!", the tailor greets her as Anja. Energetically, she whips out a pair of jeans. "What's up? I have only a small question: somebody gave me this pair of jeans as a present, but the button is missing! Do you know what I mean? This funny ones, the type that go on jeans?" Juraj responds "Yeah, I've better. A button is what you can use!" The old boy croons and laughs, he cackles away in the background. "So why should we not put in a normal button?", Anja says. "There is no way that I will have anything else on jeans, nothing else than the special metal button that's always on jeans! "You are my angel!" she keep saying, "My angel!" The tailor tries to convince her to use a normal button, but nope, she insists: she really wants the metal style. She doesn't know what it's called, she produces long strings of meandering descriptions. In the end she points to the tin button on my jeans.

Without further comment, our tailor sighs, gets up, and reaches to a box behind the shelf behind the curtain. He brings out his special metal buttons, exactly what she wanted. "You're right you are my angel, you are my most beloved!". "OK I can do it, but this will cost money!" -- "How much?" -- "Two euro!" -- "Two euro!" Disgusted, Anja shakes her head wildly. "No! It's just jeans that I was given! I want to send them to my family in Poland, I'm not paying that much for a button! Never mind, forget it!" -- "Give it to me now" says Juraj, wearing the resigned looks of a long-suffering man. She relaxes and smiles, knowing that the button would be put in exactly as she wished. She launches into a long monologue, only punctuated by a grunt here and a nod there.
"Do you know, I want to send it to Poland - someone gave me a bunch of clothes recently - I have a bit of family over there in Poland, and they are always so happy when I give them clothes. I have a small pension, I have a very small pension! We Germans, we get so very little money! The rich ones keep everything in the bank! It's so outrageous, I could cry! Poor pensioners, everywhere! I'm not going to run the streets collecting bottles, but I saw it a thousand times. Pensioners! Collecting bottles! I don't collect yet myself" - "If you want to know me neither, only plastic bottles, the ones that I have a twenty-five Cent return", retorts Juraj-

“Yeah,” says Anja now, “I do it when I see the metal ones on the street. Those metal cans fetch twenty-five Cents! I’ll tell you what honestly, I take those. But I see people with shopping carts going around and collecting the whole day in earnest.”
Juraj’s just finished hammering the rivet-style button. Anja looks well pleased, she declares: “This place is always like a party! I thank you from the bottom of my heart! Let me see if I find maybe one Euro or something” -- “Ja ja! You always tell me I’m a piece of gold but on the other hand , well!” -- “I can give you seventy Cents! You are my angel!” -- “Ja, ja.” -- “And where is your piggy bank? Without my glasses I can’t see anything! You are a piece of gold! You always help out people! My compliments, you have a good soul! Oh my angel, my angel! You angel! You are my angel!“. She tries to put the change in the piggy bank on the counter, but she can’t see it because she doesn’t have a glasses. Anja goes on to decline all the grammatical options on the word “angel” and then digresses to add: “This man is the nicest man ever, and if only he would get his wife to send a certificate that I’m allowed to kiss him, I would do it right now!”. Juraj is not buying it, he replies: “Anja, you’ve been saying that you wanted to kiss me for the last ten years, if you wanted to, you would’ve done it along time ago!”… Laughter… “Before I didn’t want to, ten years ago I didn’t want to at all! But you never got your wife to send the certificate that I may kiss you! I can’t do it without her approval! Imagine I go kiss you now and then Gerhardt goes and tells her all about it! We would be in a lot of trouble!“. Old boy says “I don’t even know who your wife is!“, and they all cackle with glee for quite a while. I’m giggling too on the sidelines.

As this cheeky exercise in wisecrack exchange tapers down to its dynamic end, Juraj dramatically raises an arm, points it to my recording device and says: “Ha! Ha! It’s all recorded now! We have it all in there! Everything you just told us has been recorded, next week everything will be public!”. She shakes her head, a little abashed: “I don’t mind! This is not a secret, I think that you’re the nicest man ever! We know each other since ten years, surely I can pay you a couple compliments! I will do it again!”. Yet the volume of her voice has decidedly dropped, she is looking in askance at Juraj. He now ducks his head towards me: “She’s going to write a story! With all we said on the recording!” -- “Well”, she tell me, “if you’re writing a story about him, you should definitely mention that he is the nicest, kindest tailor in the world, and that he has a really good soul and that he always wants to help out! You can put me in your novel, my relationship with Juraj is completely romantic, but you have to understand that this man here is the nicest kindest man on this earth. He’s always ready to help, and I know what I’m saying because I’ve known him for ten years already.” Anja takes her leave, and now back to full volume, bellows her parting shot: “This is a soul in a gold frame!”
“Ja, ja… She just talks a lot, she’s no customer, she only comes here to talk. To prattle around, like Gerhardt. A few come here regularly, it’s kind of a meeting point on the block. It was the same when I was an apprentice at my masters, back in Yugoslavia. I was born in a little village called Warasnin, it’s a small village in today’s Croatia, close to Hungary. We used to always go there to hear Mariza Karak. Ah, she was a wonderful actress, we’d bring her flowers. In my family we could speak German, more or less - but I really learned to speak properly here. I also met my wife here, even though she’s also a Croat, and from the village next to mine, go figure! I wanted to be a postman, at the time. At that age - I was about fifteen years old - young boys want to do things like that. Unfortunately I didn’t get in, they didn’t take me! This was during Tito‘s time. But I didn’t leave because of Tito, politics just didn’t reach us out in the countryside, where I was; I just went like that! With The work I had learned, I could not get around my place. I had a dream of the west, a dream to work. My neighbour, at my village, worked at the Croatian Job Centre, she offered me a job in Berlin. I got a place in Berlin, through the Croatian Job Centre, I got work at a textile factory. After that, the textile industry went through a crisis and all of the factories in Berlin went bankrupt. Then I didn’t have any work for a while. But that didn’t last long, I found work very fast in fact. I went to work for a small tailor.
At the time it was always possible to find work - it’s the same today really, the young ones are just too picky! Back then this social system where to get everything paid for, it didn’t exist! I met my wife around that time. My wife also worked all her life, now she’s a pensioner. In fact I am also a pensioner, but my pension is very small. And, also, I like working!

The sun never comes in the shop, not even in the summer - the summer is like the winter in my shop. See This cactus in the window? Its flowers come later each year, later and later! Nowadays they come in February. I got these three big cactus plants from the previous tailor, they were already sitting in the shop window when I fist walked into the shop! They were really small then, they have grown a lot. They have been in the shop longer than myself!
Before I took over the shop in the eighties, the shop was owned by a tailor. Before him, it used to be a greengrocer’s. Well, they would sell potatoes, it was a potato shop! And before that it used to be a butcher’s. My father and mother were real peasants, I don’t really miss it anymore - the countryside - it’s such a long time ago. It’s all remained exactly as it used to be in my childhood. They used to raise all kinds of animals, goats, cows, hens… A little bit of everything. They also had all kinds of cereals and vegetables. And a big orchard. The land was chopped up in little fields, they had all kinds of cultures. I have two sisters, they both stayed over there. I go back there each year in the summer for a whole month.

In the eighties - when the war started - everything became a little bit difficult. Well, our corner of the country was not really too involved, the media made it seem worse than it actually was - in most of the country. Obviously it was much worse in Bosnia and on the border with Serbia. When the war was declared, I was at home in my house in Croatia.” Juraj chuckles at this memory. “My neighbour came by, not a friend, just a neighbour, and he told me the war had broken out. He told me to leave the country right away. I was there with my kids. I said no, no way I’m going! We stayed anyway. Nothing much happened. Every now and again a couple of soldiers would come by just to see what’s going on. I always go to Croatia with my car, it takes me about 10 hours - I really love cars: I have an Opel Astra. I’m satisfied with it, I never had a big car. I’m not a big person, and the car fits me perfectly. (Giggles)

My grandparents were peasants, we always were peasants in the family. My sister inherited the house and the grounds, she looked after my parents in their old age and because of this, without any fights, we decided that she should get everything. My wife and I also got a house there, some way from my old village, a few miles away.” I ask Juraj how many children he has: “My wife, not myself! We have three children - they all speak Croatian. Two girls, forty-seven and thirty-seven, and one boy, he is thirty-three. I just have one grand-kid from the middle girl. I was born in the fifties, just after the war, in 1950. Then we would go hungry, we hadn’t enough to eat. My cousin used to look after us as children - she still tells how as kids we had to fight to find food. She used to take care of us. We used to eat all kinds of porridge, we’d just take any cereal, boil the hell out of it, and make porridge with it. Nowadays nobody eats like that! I don’t know what people would think of that kind of food.”

Juraj is now taking care of some clients, they burst in all at once. I take the opportunity to observe the space around me. The shop is magnificent! It is a complete time warp, everything in its original state, I estimate it to date from the fifties. Between myself and the tailor there is a yellow and black formica counter, very striking. Behind it are three sewing machines, all very old metal affairs, one Singer, one Pfaff and I can’t tell the make of the last. There’s one more sewing machine further down the shop. Juraj uses the machine sitting directly by the shop window, capitalising the scarce northern light and overlooking the street just beyond the lacy yellow netted curtains, draped open in a big arc. On the window casement, the three

gigantic Christmas cacti Juraj talked about, the biggest ones I've ever seen. None of them are in bloom right now, they really look ancient, dusty green, prehistoric tentacles. All the things they must have soon from the windowsill! The shop looks just as charming from the outside, the window frames are painted in a very warm and bright Nutella brown, the walls are covered with a wallpaper imitating ivy. There is a single photography of a person, black-and-white, hanging in the window. Back inside the shop, I spot a shelf that must contain all of the tools and knickknacks that a tailor needs; it is covered by a small curtain to hide all the utilitarian-ness of it. This shelf, about the height of Juraj, also serves as a partition to the fitting cabin, which is quite large: at least one meter by one meter, and equipped with a very large mirror. There are two doors, also painted in Nutella brown, that lead to the back and to the side of the shop, I don't know to what. On the wall below it, two chairs and a table - where the old boy usually sits. There are dozens of postcards from all over the world that clients have sent him from abroad, I found out. This tailor is obviously well-liked by his community. The clients leave and Juraj gives me the "Go!" sign:

"You told me that at first, a friend of yours helped you to find a master tailor to train with, is that right?" - "Yeah, it was a man from where I came from, he was also a tailor. He knew that I really wanted to learn something, get some kind of training, I didn't want to be a peasant like my parents and my grand-parents, too poor! He helped me a little, he talked to my father, persuaded him . He took me to the neighbouring town to a master tailor that he knew, and then he said: 'Well, now you have to stay here!'.

So I moved from my village to the town. Well, I didn't actually move - I still slept at my parents and every day I took a train to go to town. Every day, I worked from seven to seven. Today, this is unimaginable. For all of the apprentices of the time, working twelve hour-days was normal. We had to go to school in the morning, and to work in the afternoon, and the next week we would switch the schedule around. We also worked on Saturdays. It's the same with Gerhardt here, he trained as an electrician - he had the same experience. Today, it's unimaginable. And this went on for three years. By the time I finished with this training business, I was eighteen or nineteen. After three years like this, I had learned really well! I was twenty and I was really well-trained. It would have been nice, if I'd had opportunities to go further. Just like you, I would have liked to study. Then it was not possible. We didn't have that option. Because of my social background, it was not possible. Finding work at the time was not so easy. Studying is the key to life, if you don't study, you remain a peasant. In those days, the peasants were not supported, to get out of their condition. It was a hard life! The life of peasants today is not comparable to the life of the peasants in the old time. They worked really hard! Today, they even go to business school to run the farm. It's not the old way. Then people didn't go to school at all and we had no idea. It was like this at least until the First World War.

The very first step - to learn sewing? My master told me 'Sit very straight, right on the edge of your chair! This is your place for the remainder of your training!'. He was always coming back to correct our position, our backs had to be as straight as pin.
The first thing I had to do? To hold a needle! Then I had to slip on a little 'finger hat' (a thimble actually, but it sounds so much better in German: Fingerhut). Men have a special one, its end is cut off, because men use the side of the finger to push the needle through, whereas women have a complete hat, so they can use their fingertips." I feel intrigued and a bit confused by this and ask for more precisions. "Yup! Come here, I'll show you". We go to another spot of the shop, sitting on opposite sides of the counter, and he starts putting on little finger hats on my fingers. He exclaims: "Man! You have men-hands!". I laugh, men-hands! I have men-hands!

Then, Juraj shows me the exact technique to push a needle through textile. "We all got one needle, one 'finger hat', and one little piece of material - a scrap. Then for one entire week, we had to stitch without a thread. We would push the needle through the textile, just like I'm showing you, and exercise stitching, without a thread. It was called blind stitching. We would sew with an empty needle, twelve hours a day, without a break. First the straight stitch, then cross stitch, then other stitches that are not made by machines, used by upholstery for example. The cross-stitch is very important for trousers, for solidity", and he demonstrates at the same time. In two seconds he stitches a flawless line of crosses.

The bell rings, somebody just walked in. Last time's "third man"! Burly and jolly, he is carrying a big bouquet of flowers in his arms, almost as if he were carrying a baby. A soon as he walks in, he proceeds to distributing sweeties around, to Juraj the tailor, to Gerhardt the old man, and to myself. As per last time, I politely eat mine right away, but Gerhardt and Juraj know better: they tuck theirs away in their pockets. He explains " I always have flowers at home!". I comment on his bouquet, and he immediately gives me a rose. I am so touched! I thank him profusely. He shows me a picture of his kitchen windowsill, "See, instead of having a lot of decoration, a single bouquet transforms the place! One should think minimal, the Japanese way". Then he mentions feng shui. "I love lilies!" he proclaims, and on these words he promptly exits the shop. At this point, same time as the other day, the old man decides to leave as well. I guess it is his habit to come over and sit there and chat with the tailor every morning.

Somebody else walks into the shop, Juraj takes care of him. It's a teenager, he wants Juraj to take off the labels on his trousers. Juraj tells him to come and get them back on Saturday. I ask Juraj whether the man with the sweets and the flowers comes every day. He laughs. "Almost every day! He's very sweet." -- "You really are the heart and soul of this neighbourhood! Do you live around here?" -- "No I don't live here, I live in Schöneberg. I don't go back home for lunch, instead," and he points to the back of the shop, "I cook for myself here, have a little siesta, between one and three. When I first arrived in Berlin I worked in Kreuzberg in the textile fabric. Close to Anhalter Banhof. At the time there were many factories there. For the rest of my life I have always worked in Neukölln, right here. I work here since seventy-four. In those days, the border was right here, we could see right all the way to the soldiers. Ii was a bit sad, it was just the end, the border. All knew that it was the border. All we could see was the soldiers, and the wall. From above, one could see the other side, the East. You could see it from the 'Ringbahn', for example. On this side it was Americans and English soldiers driving around in jeeps. Right here in the street. But that was it. The wall was just right over there - in the middle of the street. My brother gave me a book, a documentation of these times, but I left it at home, in Croatia. My children took it there.

Back to my training! So we started by doing all the blind stitching, learning all kinds of stitches, for example, a special stitch for trousers and skirts. At the time, it was all done by hand, there were no overlock machines. At the time only very big factories had one - maybe - but definitely not smaller outfits. We always had Singers. The first time I got on the sewing machine - it was a Singer - we all got a little piece of scrap, and we started stitching! Without thread! It's crazy, when I think about it now. Back then, thread was really expensive, I think it was to save on the thread. Those were other times indeed! We kept making lines, straight line after straight line, the master wanted to see that the lines were dead straight. He would come and inspect each of our blind stitch. He waited until he could see that the holes corresponding to the stitches were really straight, only then did he give us the thread. Today one can get cheap thread, but it's no good. I use both polyester and cotton, depending on what

I'm doing. Mainly polyester though. For jeans, I'd rather use cotton. If you use synthetic on a cotton dress, and you wash it, the whole thing is ruined, because the thread shrinks - the worst is pure viscose."

Once more, The bells ring shrilly, a client walks in. He has one of these fluorescent jackets equipped with phosphorescent panels to make it visible in the night, the kind that airport workers use on the tarmac. He wants Juraj to take off the hood - too hard for him - (indeed the whole vestment looks as stiff as cardboard) and to make the sleeves shorter. I have to say this jacket looks extremely uncomfortable, very heavy and rough, a bit like something a turtle would wear. The radio is playing softly in the background. I muse around the shop, while the tailor measures up the client. I inspect the postcards, posted from all over the world. The three massive cacti. "To make them blossom, they need to be cared for like women!", comments Juraj in between two pins. The client leaves. No, another client walks in! She has some kind of purse she wants repaired. Actually, it's a soldier's hat, Second World War I think. He looks carefully at her handiwork and compliments her on her idea - turning this hat into a bag. Yet another client walks in, they all come in just before his closing time! It's almost one! "I went to the army for two years" mumbles Juraj at some point. The client wants to pay the requested fifteen Euro in advance but he tells her to pay afterwards. "Come and pick it up on Wednesday", he says. I really think it's time for me to go. He apologises for his interruptions! How silly, I am very grateful for all of this time, I tell him. I exit back into the street and I make my way to the canal feeling touched and inspired.

JURAJ

22/11/18
Ich fand Jurays Laden zufällig: seine Dienste sind nicht in den Gelben Seiten gelistet, genauso wenig wie die beiden anderen Schneider auf der Harzerstraße, alle zusammen auf hundert Metern: eine plötzliche Schneiderblüte in ehr einer Wohngegend.
Ich hatte gerade meinen Freund Ahmed in seinem Café am Ufer besucht und nach Hinweisen ausgequetscht - was ich des Öfteren tue wenn ich etwas in der Richtung brauche. Und wenig überraschend kannte er mindestens 2 Schneider, einen auf der Sonnenallee, einen Syrer mit dem nichts mehr zu tun haben wollte (der Mann hatte offensichtlich seine Grenzen überschritten und ihn zu sehr in Beschlag genommen – er suchte eine Wohnung, Ahmed wollte helfen, aber es war überhaupt kein Geld da, so was in der Art) und eine deutsche Frau namens Helena, eine ältere Dame wie er sagte. Amed war so freundlich mich zu ihrem Laden mitzunehmen, um mich persönlich vorzustellen. Aber als wir um mittags dort ankamen war der Laden geschlossen. Ich hatte gerade eine Pechsträhne und war ziemlich enttäuscht, aber Amed meinte, ich solle die kommende Woche wiederkommen und es nochmal versuchen. Ich dankte ihm, ging Richtung Wildenbruchstraße und weniger als 50 Meter weiter traf ich auf einen weiteren, nicht verzeichneten Schneiderladen. Mit aufkeimender Hoffnung, und ein bisschen ängstlich, betrat ich den Ort – der momentan verlassen war- und betrachtete entzückt die Umgebung. Die Ankleidekabine war, merkwürdigerweise, direkt neben dem Schaufenster und ein Spiegel von exakt gleicher Größe gab die Illusion eines Gangs in einen weiteren Raum. Er täuschte und amüsierte mich.
Ich war ganz verloren in meinen Betrachtungen, als der Schneider eintrat, ein prächtig bebarteter Iraner (glaube ich) mit durchdringenden grünen Augen die mich fragend ansahen und einem rasiermesserscharfen, übergroßen Lächeln das schwer zu deuten war.

Nervös platze ich mit meinem Anliegen heraus, versuche es nicht allzu zeitaufwendig klingen zu lassen... Er lächelt, nickt aufmunternd, während ich unsicher meine kleine Rede halte, ermutigt mich sogar, immer lächelnd... bis er, Lächeln immer noch angeknipst, sagt „NEIN!“. Ich versuche schwächlich zu beharren, aber das Grinsen fühlt sich langsam etwas bedrohlich an und ich gebe auf. Als ich gehe, rät er mir, es bei dem Schneider die Straße ´runter, gerade über die Wildenbruchstraße, zu versuchen. Die Straße ´runter? Ich habe da nie IRGENDEINEN Schneider gesehen – ich bin manchmal dort, weil es einen kleinen Second Hand Laden gibt, den ich sogar einmal fotografiert habe: das Ladenschild buchstabiert den Namen „Marion“ in roten Leuchtröhren. Wie seltsam, dass ich nie die Anwesenheit des Ladens direkt links daneben bemerkt habe. Eine wunderbare, authentische Zeitreise von einem Ort, direkt aus den Fünfzigern! Ich kann den über seine Maschine gebeugten Schneider da sehen, hinter dem Fenster. Er schaut auf, unsere Augen treffen sich, er lächelt, er scheint freundlich!
Und wieder, eine Welle von Optimismus erfüllt mich mit frischem Mut und ich trete ein. Ein alter Mann sitzt rechts neben dem Eingang unter einer Pinnwand mit bunten Postkarten. Er gackert und plappert dahin, Witze mit einer charmanten, zittrigen Altmännerstimme raushauend, der Schneider windet sich, lacht, während er seine Maschine wie verrückt in Höchstgeschwindigkeit laufen lässt; die Atmosphäre ist wirklich herzerwärmend.
Der Schneider unterbricht sich und fragt was ich brauche. Ich lasse wieder meine kleine Tirade vom Stapel, versuche den richtigen Eindruck zu vermitteln. Freundlich beugt er seinen Kopf zur Seite, nickt zustimmend. Da er an den soziologischen Aspekten meiner kleinen Untersuchung interessiert und regelrecht angetan zu seien scheint, fühle ich mich ermutigt und erzähle alles, Bangladesh, Lucky, die globale Wirtschaft... Er setzt sein Nähen an der Maschine fort, feuert aber weiter Fragen ab, findet die ganze Idee sehr interessant, sagt er! Letztlich bleibe ich eine halbe Stunde, der alte Knabe hört nicht auf zu scherzen. Ein mittelalter Mann taucht auf und verteilt sofort Kekse. Ich lächle meinen Dank und fühle mich verpflichtet, meine an Ort und Stelle zu essen, sehe aber, dass Juraj und der alte Mann cleverer sind und ihre weglegen. Die Drei lachen und lachen und lachen und ich nutze die Gelegenheit und versuche einen Zeitrahmen mit Juraj festzumachen. „Jeder Zeit,“ sagt er „komm einfach vorbei!“ Er ergänzt, dass er immer um 6 Uhr schließt, oder wenigstens die Vorhänge zuzieht, aber er bleibt im Laden und arbeitet bis halb acht. „So schaffe ich mehr, ich habe wirklich eine Menge Arbeit!“ Unmöglich ihn auf eine Zeit festzunageln, also erkläre ich, dass ich nächste Woche zur gleichen Zeit wieder vorbeikomme.

29/11/18
Juraj ist eine liebenswerte, lebhafte Person, die, so fühle ich, das Herz der „Dorfes“ zu sein scheint. Der gleiche alte Mann sitzt in dem gleichen Stuhl wie letztes Mal als ich ankomme und Beide scheinen sich wirklich zu freuen mich zu sehen! Was für ein nettes Willkommen.
Sie scherzen und necken noch immer, beide in bester Laune. Ich frage den alten Mann nach seinem Namen und er teilt mit, dass er Gerhardt heißt. Er sieh aus wie mindestens Achtzig, trägt Brille, hat sehr weißes Haar, ist gebrechlich und dünn und trägt eine schwarze Lederkappe. Er lächelt ständig und macht anzügliche Witze, die sich unveränderlich um Gruppen von Männern und Frauen drehen. Ich frage den Schneider, ob es in Ordnung ist, wenn ich mich auch setzte, damit ich mit Interview anfangen kann. „Kein Problem, kein Problem!“, sagt er, nie von der Arbeit ablassend durch die er rast. Ich hole mein Phone heraus, das auch mein Aufnahmegerät ist, und mache Juraj mit der Tatsache bekannt, dass ich unsere weitere Konversation aufnehmen werde, was ihn nicht weiter kümmert und er gibt seine Zustimmung mit einem Grunzen und einem Nicken. Gerhardt gackert vor sich, witzelt „Mann oh Mann, das Interview endet im Playboy!“ Bei ihm landet immer Alles im Playboy. Der Schneider lacht und lacht, herzlich: “Du hast Recht, ab jetzt müssen wir aufpassen was wir sagen!“ Ich protestiere energisch: „Ich will das nur für mich behalten!“ –„Ja, ja, das sagst du so!“
Aber ich habe nicht mal die Zeit meine erste Frage zu stellen: Eine Frau kommt herein, sie trägt einen großen, leuchtend blauen Mantel, eine Art Anorak. „Ihr habt ja eine tollen Tag“, der Schneider grüßt sie mit Anja. Energisch zückt sie eine Jeans. „Was los ist? Ich habe nur eine kleine Frage: jemand hat mir diese Jeans geschenkt, aber der Knopf fehlt! Weißt du, was ich meine? Diese Komischen, die zu Jeans passen?“ Juraj antwortet „Jaaa, ich hab` was Besseres.”
„Einen Knopf den du auch benutzen kannst!“ Der alte Knabe schmunzelt und lacht, gackert im Hintergrund. „Also, warum sollen wir nicht einen normalen Knopf nehmen?“ Anja sagt: “Auf keinen Fall trage ich irgendwas Anderes an einer Jeans, nichts außer den speziellen Metallknöpfen, die immer an Jeans sind!“ „Du bist mein Engel!“, sagt sie immer wieder, „Mein Engel!“ Der Schneider versucht sie von einem normalen Knopf zu überzeugen, aber nein, sie besteht darauf: sie möchte wirklich den Metallstil. Sie weiß nicht genau wie man es nennt, sie produziert lange, verschlungene Beschreibungen. Am Ende zeigt sie auf den Blechknopf an meiner Jeans.

Ohne weiteren Kommentar seufzt unser Schneider, greift nach einer Schachtel im Regal hinter dem Vorhang. Er holt seine speziellen Metallknöpfe heraus, genau die die sie wollte. „Du bist mein Engel, mein Liebling!“ -- „Okay, ich kann das machen, aber es kostet Geld!“ –
„Wie viel“ – „Zwei Euro!“ – „Zwei Euro?!“ Angeekelt schüttelt Anja wild den Kopf. „Nein! Das ist nur eine geschenkte Jeans! Ich will sie zu meiner Familie nach Polen schicken, ich zahle nicht so viel für einen Knopf! Macht nichts, vergiss es!“ – „Gib sie mir schon“ sagt Juraj mit dem resignierten Ausdruck eines ewig leidenden Mannes. Sie entspannt sich, lächelt und weiß, dass der Knopf genau so angebracht wird wie sie es wünscht. Sie hebt ab in einen langen Monolog,

der nur von einem gelegentlichen Grunzer hier und einem Nicken da akzentuiert wird.
„Weißt du, ich will sie nach Polen schicken – jemand hat mir gerade einen Haufen Kleidung gegeben – ich habe ein bisschen Familie drüben in Polen und die ist immer froh, wenn ich ihnen Kleidung schicke. Ich habe eine kleine Rente, eine sehr kleine Rente! Wir Deutschen, wir haben so wenig Geld! Die Reichen behalten Alles auf der Bank! Es ist so empörend, ich könnte heulen! Arme Rentner überall! Ich werde nicht die Straßen ablaufen und Flaschen sammeln, aber ich habe es tausendmal gesehen. Rentner! Sammeln Flaschen! Ich selbst sammle nicht.“ – „Wenn du es wissen willst, ich auch nicht, nur Plastikflaschen, für die 25 Cent zurückbekomme“, erwidert Juraj. – „Ja,“ sagt Anja jetzt, „ich mach es, wenn ich die aus Metall auf der Straße sehe. Die Metalldosen bringen 25 Cent! Ich sag dir ganz ehrlich, die nehme ich. Aber ich sehe Leute mit ganzen Einkaufwagen und die sammeln ernsthaft den ganzen Tag.“
Juraj ist gerade damit fertig den Nieten-Knopf zu hämmern. Anja sieht gut zufrieden aus, sie verkündet: „Dieser Ort ist immer wie eine Party! Ich danke dir von ganzem Herzen! Lass mich schauen, ob ich einen Euro oder so finde.“ – „Ja, ja! Du erzählst mir immer ich wäre ein Goldstück, aber andererseits, na ja!“ – „Ich kann dir 70 Cents geben! Du bist mein Engel!“ – „Ja, ja.“ – „Und wo ist dein Sparschwein? Ohne Brille kann ich nichts sehen! Du bist ein Goldstück! Du hilfst den Leuten immer aus! Mein Kompliment, du hast eine gute Seele! Oh mein Engel, mein Engel! Du Engel! Du bist mein Engel!“ Sie versucht das Kleingeld in das Sparschwein auf dem Tresen zu tun, aber sie kann nichts sehen, weil sie hat keine Brille. Anja fährt fort die grammatikalischen Möglichkeiten des Wortes „Engel“ durchzudeklinieren, schweift dann ab, um zu ergänzen: „Dieser Mann ist der netteste Mann auf Erden und wenn nur seine Frau eine Erlaubnis schicken würde, dass ich ihn küssen darf, würde ich es jetzt sofort tun!“ Juraj kauft es ihr nicht ab, er antwortet: „Anja, dass du mich küssen willst sagst du jetzt seit 10 Jahren. Wenn du gewollt hättest, hättest du es schon vor langer Zeit getan!“ ...Gelächter... „Vorher wollte ich nicht, vor 10 Jahren wollte ich überhaupt nicht! Aber du hast deine Frau nie eine Erlaubnis schicken lassen, dass ich dich küssen darf! Ich kann das ohne ihre Zustimmung nicht tun! Stell dir vor, ich küsse dich jetzt und Gerhardt geht los und erzählt ihr Alles! Wir hätten eine Menge Ärger!“. Der alte Knabe sagt: “Ich weiß nicht mal wer seine Frau ist!“, und sie gackern freudig für eine ganze Weile. Ich kichere auch - an der Seitenlinie. Als diese neckische Übung im Austausch von Witzeleien auf sein dynamisches Ende zuläuft, hebt Juraj dramatisch den Arm und sagt: „Haha! Das ist alles aufgenommen! Wir sind da alle drauf! Alles was du gesagt hast wurde aufgenommen, nächste Woche wird es veröffentlicht!“
Sie schüttelt den Kopf, ein bisschen verlegen: „Das macht mir nichts! Es ist kein Geheimnis, dass ich denke er ist der netteste Mann auf Erden! Wir kennen uns seit zehn Jahren, sicher kann ich ihm da ein paar Komplimente machen! Ich werde es wieder machen!“ Trotzdem ist die Lautstärke ihrer Stimme entschieden gefallen, sie schaut Juraj schief an. Er neigt jetzt seinen Kopf zu mir. „Sie wird eine Geschichte schreiben! Mit allem was wir auf der Aufnahme gesagt haben!“ „Naja“, sagt sie mir, „wenn du eine Geschichte über ihn schreibst, solltest du unbedingt erwähnen, dass er der netteste, liebste Schneider der Welt ist, und dass er eine wirklich gute Seele hat und immer aushelfen will! Du kannst mich in deine Geschichte tun, meine Beziehung zu Juraj ist rein romantisch, aber du musst verstehen, dass dieser Mann hier der netteste, liebste Mann auf Erden ist. Er ist immer bereit zu helfen und ich weiß was ich sage, denn ich kenne ihn schon seit zehn Jahren.“
Anja nimmt Abschied und, jetzt wieder in voller Lautstärke, fährt als Abschied ganz großes Geschütz auf: „Dies ist eine Seele in einem goldenen Rahmen!“

„Ja, Ja...Sie redet viel, sie ist keine Kundin, sie kommt nur her, um zu reden. Sie kommt nur, um zu plaudern - wie Gerhardt. Ein paar kommen regelmäßig, es ist eine Art Treffpunkt im Block. Es war genauso als ich Lehrling war bei meinem Meister, damals in Jugoslawien. Ich wurde in einem kleinen Dorf namens Warasin, ein Örtchen im heutigen Kroatien, nah bei Ungarn geboren. Wir gingen da immer hin, um Mariza Karak zu hören. Ah, sie war eine wunderbare Schauspielerin, wir brachten ihr Blumen. In meiner Familie konnten wir deutsch sprechen, mehr oder weniger – aber richtig sprechen habe ich hier gelernt. Meine Frau habe ich auch hier getroffen, obwohl sie auch Kroatin ist und aus dem gleichen Dorf stammt, stell dir das vor! In dem Alter – ich war ungefähr fünfzehn – wollte ich Briefträger werden – Jungs wollten solche Sachen machen. Blöderweise kam ich nicht rein, sie nahmen mich nicht! Das war zu Titos Zeiten. Aber ich bin nicht wegen Tito gegangen, Politik erreichte uns nicht auf dem Land, wo ich war. Ich bin einfach so gegangen! Mit der Arbeit, die ich gelernt hatte, kam ich in meinem Ort nicht aus. Ich hatte einen Traum vom Westen, von Arbeit. Meine Nachbarin im Dorf arbeitete bei der Kroatischen Arbeitsvermittlung. Sie vermittelte mir einen Job in Berlin. Kurz danach ging die Textilindustrie durch eine Krise und die ganzen Fabriken in Berlin gingen pleite. Dann hatte ich eine Weile keine Arbeit. Aber es dauerte nicht lange, eigentlich fand ich sehr schnell Arbeit. Ich fing an bei einem kleinen Schneider zu arbeiten.

Zu der Zeit war es immer möglich Arbeit zu finden - heute ist das wirklich auch so, die Jungen sind nur zu wählerisch! Damals hat dieses Sozialsystem, in dem Alles bezahlt wird, nicht existiert! Etwa zu der Zeit traf ich meine Frau. Meine Frau hat ihr Leben lang gearbeitet, jetzt ist sie Rentnerin. Eigentlich bin ich auch Rentner, aber meine Rente ist sehr klein. Und ich mag es auch zu arbeiten!

Die Sonne scheint nie in den Laden, nicht mal im Sommer – im Laden ist Sommer wie Winter. Siehst du die Kaktusse im Fenster? Ihre Blüten kommen jedes Jahr später, später und später! Mittlerweile kommen sie im Februar. Ich bekam diese drei großen Kaktusse von dem vorherigen Schneider, sie standen schon im Fenster, als ich zum ersten Mal in den Laden kam! Sie waren wirklich klein, sie sind eine Menge gewachsen. Sie sind länger im Laden als ich selbst! Bevor ich den Laden in den Achtzigern übernommen habe, gehörte er einem Schneider. Vor ihm ist es ein Gemüseladen gewesen. Naja, sie verkauften Kartoffeln, es war ein Kartoffelladen! Und davor war´s ein Schlachter. Mein Vater und meine Mutter waren echte Bauern. Ich vermisse es nicht mehr, das Landleben, es ist zu lange her. Alles blieb genauso wie in meiner Kindheit. Sie zogen alle Arten Tiere auf: Ziegen, Kühe, Hühner... ein bisschen von Allem. Sie hatten auch alle möglichen Getreide und Gemüse. Und einen großen Obstgarten. Das Land war in viele kleine Felder aufgeteilt, sie hatten alle möglichen Kulturen. Ich habe zwei Schwestern, die beide dageblieben sind. Jeden Sommer gehe ich für einen ganzen Monat zurück.

Als in den Achtzigern der Krieg ausbrach wurde alles ein bisschen schwierig. Naja, unsere Ecke des Landes war nicht wirklich betroffen, die Medien machten es schlimmer als es war – im größten Teil des Landes. Ganz klar war es schlimmer in Bosnien und an der Grenze zu Serbien. Als der Krieg erklärt wurde, war ich zuhause in meinem Haus in Kroatien.“ Juraj lächelt bei der Erinnerung in sich hinein. „Mein Nachbar kam vorbei, kein Freund, nur ein Nachbar, und erzählte mir, dass der Krieg ausgebrochen war. Er sagte, dass ich das Land sofort verlassen muss. Ich war mit meinen Kindern da. Ich sagte nein, auf keinen Fall gehe ich. Wir haben und rausgehalten. Viel ist nicht passiert. Ab und an kamen ein paar Soldaten vorbei, um zu schauen was so los ist. Ich fahre immer mit dem Auto nach Kroatien, kostet mich ungefähr zehn Stunden – ich liebe wirklich Autos: Ich habe eine Opel Astra. Ich bin zufrieden damit, ich hatte nie ein großes Auto. Ich bin keine große Person, und das Auto passt mir perfekt.“ (kichert)

„Meine Großeltern waren auch Bauern, wir waren immer Bauern in der Familie. Meine Schwester hat das Haus und das Land geerbt. Sie hat sich um meine Eltern im Alter gekümmert und deshalb haben wir, ohne jeden Streit, beschlossen, dass sie Alles bekommen sollte. Meine Frau und ich haben da auch ein Haus, ein bisschen weg von meinem alten Dorf, ein paar Kilometer.“ Ich frage Juraj wie viele Kinder er hat: „Meine Frau, nicht ich selbst!

Wir haben drei Kinder – sie sprechen alle kroatisch. Zwei Mädchen, siebenundvierzig und siebenunddreißig, und einen Jungen, er ist dreiunddreißig. Ich habe nur einen Enkel von dem mittleren Mädchen. Ich wurde in den Fünfzigern geboren, kurz nach dem Krieg, 1950. Damals haben wir gehungert, wir hatten nicht genug zu essen. Meine Cousine passte auf uns Kinder auf – sie erzählt immer noch wie wir kämpfen mussten, um Essen zu finden. Sie hat für uns gesorgt. Wir haben allen möglichen Brei gegessen, wir nahmen irgendein Getreide, kochten es aus bis zum Gehtnichtmehr und machten Brei daraus. Heutzutage isst keiner mehr so! Ich habe keine Ahnung, was die Leute von solchem Essen halten würden."

Juraj kümmert sich jetzt um einige Kunden die gemeinsam hereinplatzen. Ich nutze die Gelegenheit, mir den Raum um mich herum anzuschauen. Der Laden ist prachtvoll! Er ist eine vollständige Zeitreise, Alles in Originalzustand, ich schätze aus den fünfziger Jahren. Zwischen mir und dem Schneider steht ein schwarz und gelb laminierter Tresen, sehr eindrucksvoll. Dahinter sind drei Nähmaschinen, alles sehr alte Metalldinger, eine Singer, eine Pfaff und von der Letzten weiß ich nicht, von wem sie ist.
Da ist noch eine Maschine weiter hinten im Laden. Juraj benutzt die Maschine direkt am Fenster, das spärliche Nordlicht ausnutzend und die Straße hinter den spitzenartigen, gelben Maschenvorhängen, die in einem weiten Bogen drapiert sind, überblickend. Auf der Fensterrahmung, die drei gigantischen Weihnachtskaktusse von denen Juraj gesprochen hat. Keiner blüht gerade, sie sehen wirklich antik aus, staubig grüne, prähistorische Tentakel. Was müssen sie alles von ihrer Fensterbank aus gesehen haben! Der Laden sieht von außen genauso bezaubernd aus, die Fensterrahmen in einem warmen, leuchtenden Nutella-Braun lackiert, die Wände mit einer Efeu-Tapete bedeckt. Im Fenster hängt die einzelne Schwarz-Weiß-Fotografie einer Person. Zurück im Laden entdecke ich ein Regal, das wohl all die Werkzeuge und den Krimskrams den ein Schneider so braucht enthält; es ist mit einem kleinen Vorhang bedeckt um seine Zweckmäßigkeit zu tarnen. Dieses Regal, ungefähr so hoch wie Juraj, dient auch als Raumteiler zur Ankleidekabine, die ziemlich groß, mindestens einen Meter mal einen Meter, und mit einem sehr großen Spiegel ausgestattet ist. Es gibt zwei Türen, auch in Nutella-Braun lackiert, die in den hinteren Teil und zur Seite des Ladens führen, wohin weiß ich nicht. Unter der Pinnwand, zwei Stühle und ein Tisch – wo der alte Knabe zu sitzen pflegt. Es gibt Duzende von Postkarten die ihm, wie ich herausfand, Kunden aus aller Welt geschickt haben. Dieser Schneider wird offensichtlich von seiner Gemeinde sehr gemocht. Die Kunden gehen und Juraj gibt mir ein „Weiter!" Zeichen:

„Du hast mir erzählt, dass dir am Anfang ein Freund geholfen hat einen Meister zu finden bei dem du lernen kannst, richtig?" – „Ja, das war ein Mann von da wo ich herkomme, auch ein Schneider. Er wusste, dass ich etwas lernen wollte, eine Ausbildung bekommen wollte. Ich wollte kein Bauer sein wie meine Eltern und Großeltern, zu arm! Er half mir ein wenig, sprach mit meinem Vater, überzeugte ihn. Er nahm mich mit in die Nachbarstadt zu einem Schneidermeister den er kannte und sagte dann: „Nun ja, jetzt musst du hierbleiben!"

„So zog ich aus meinem Dorf in die Stadt. Naja, ich bin nicht wirklich umgezogen – ich schlief weiter bei meinen Eltern und nahm jeden Tag den Zug in die Stadt. Ich arbeitete jeden Tag von sieben Uhr morgens bis sieben Uhr abends. Das ist heute unvorstellbar. Für Lehrlinge war es zu der Zeit normal, Zwölf-Stunden-Tage zu arbeiten. Wir mussten morgens in die Schule und nachmittags arbeiten und in der nächsten Woche umgekehrt. Wir arbeiteten auch samstags. Es ist das gleiche mit Gerhardt hier, er ist ausgebildeter Elektriker – er hat die gleichen Erfahrungen. Heute unvorstellbar! Und das ging so für drei Jahre. Als ich mit diesem Ausbildungskram durch war, war ich achtzehn oder neunzehn. Nach drei Jahren wie denen hatte ich wirklich gut gelernt! Ich war zwanzig und wirklich gut ausgebildet. Es wäre schön gewesen, wenn ich die Möglichkeit gehabt hätte weiterzugehen. So wie du hätte ich gerne studiert. Das war damals nicht möglich. Wir hatten nicht die Wahl. Wegen meines sozialen Hintergrunds war es nicht möglich. Arbeit zu finden war zu der Zeit nicht leicht. Studieren ist der Schlüssel zum Leben. Wenn du nicht studierst bleibst du ein Bauer. In diesen Zeiten wurden Bauern nicht unterstützt, um sich aus ihrer Misere zu befreien. Es war ein hartes Leben! Das Leben der Bauern heute ist mit dem der Bauern früher nicht zu vergleichen. Sie arbeiteten wirklich hart! Heute gehen sie sogar zur Business School, um einen Hof zu führen. Das ist nicht die alte Art. Damals gingen die Leute überhaupt nicht zur Schule und wir hatten keine Ahnung. So war es zumindest bis zum ersten Weltkrieg.

Der allererste Schritt, um Schneidern zu lernen? Mein Meister sagte mir, „Sitz ganz gerade auf der Stuhlkante! Das ist der Platz auf dem für den Rest der Ausbildung bleibst!" Er kam immer wieder, um unsere Position zu korrigieren, unsere Rücken mussten bolzengerade sein. Das erste, das ich machen musste? Eine Nadel halten! Dann hatte ich einen kleinen „Finger Hut" anzuziehen. Männer haben besondere, ihr Ende ist offen, weil Männer die Seite des Fingers benutzen um die Nadel durchzustoßen, während Frauen einen kompletten Hut haben, weil sie ihre Fingerspitze benutzen können." Ich war fasziniert und etwas verwirrt und bat um genauere Auskunft. „Yup! Komm her, ich zeig es dir." Wir gehen an einen anderen Platz im Laden, sitzen uns am Tresen gegenüber und er fängt an kleine Fingerhüte auf meine Finger zu stülpen. Er ruft aus: „Mann! Du hast Männerhände!" Ich lache, Männerhände! Ich habe Männerhände!

Dann zeigt mir Juraj die exakte Technik, wie man eine Nadel durch ein Gewebe sticht. „Wir hatten alle eine Nadel, einen Fingerhut und ein Stückchen Stoff – einen Lappen. Dann mussten wir für eine ganze Woche ohne Faden nähen. Wir stachen die Nadel durch den Stoff, genau wie ich es dir zeige, und übten Stiche, ohne Faden. Das nannte man Blindnähen. Wir nähten mit leerer Nadel, zwölf Stunden am Tag, ohne Pause. Erst den geraden Stich, dann Kreuzstich, dann andere Stiche die die Maschine nicht macht, die zum Beispiel für Polsterungen gebraucht werden. Der Kreuzstich ist sehr wichtig für Hosen, für die Haltbarkeit." Und er demonstriert es während er redet. In zwei Sekunden näht er eine makellose Reihe von Kreuzstichen.

Die Glocke klingelt und jemand kommt herein. Der „Dritte Mann" vom letzten Mal! Stämmig und vergnügt trägt er ein großes Blumenbouquet in seinen Armen, fast als würde er ein Baby tragen. Sobald er drin ist, fängt er an Süßigkeiten zu verteilen, an Juraj, an Gerhardt, den alten Mann, und an mich. Wie beim letzten Mal, esse ich meine höflich sofort, aber Gerhardt und Juraj wissen es besser: sie verstauen ihre in ihren Taschen. Er erklärt: „Ich habe immer Blumen zuhause!" Ich kommentiere sein Bouquet und er gibt mir prompt eine Rose. Ich bin so gerührt! Ich danke ihm überschwänglich. Er zeigt mir ein Bild seiner Küchenfensterbank. „Schau, anstelle einer Menge Dekoration verändert ein einzelnes Bouquet den Raum. Man sollte minimal denken, die japanische Art." Dann erwähnt er Feng Shui. „Ich liebe Lilien!", verkündet er, und mit diesen Worten verlässt er unvermittelt den Laden. An diesem Punkt, zur gleichen Zeit wie am anderen Tag, entscheidet sich auch der alte Mann zu gehen. Ich denke, es ist seine Gewohnheit jeden Morgen herzukommen, zu sitzen und mit dem Schneider zu plaudern.

Jemand anderes kommt in den Laden, Juraj bedient ihn. Es ist ein Teenager, der möchte, dass Juraj die Label von seiner Hose trennt. Juraj sagt ihm, er kann am Samstag kommen und sie abholen. Ich frage Juraj, ob der Mann mit den Süßigkeiten und den Blumen jeden Tag kommt. Er lacht. "Fast jeden Tag! Er ist goldig." – „Du bist wirklich Herz und Seele dieser Nachbarschaft! Lebst du hier in der Nähe?" – „Nein, ich lebe in Schöneberg. Ich gehe mittags zum Essen nicht nachhause, stattdessen" - und er zeigt in den hinteren Teil des Ladens - „koche ich hier für mich und mache eine kleine Siesta, zwischen eins und drei. Als ich zum ersten Mal nach Berlin kam, habe ich in einer Textilfabrik in Kreuzberg gearbeitet. In der Nähe vom

Anhalter Bahnhof. Zu der Zeit gab es da mehrere Fabriken. Für den Rest meines Lebens habe ich in Neukölln gearbeitet, genau hier. Ich arbeite hier seit vierundsiebzig. In diesen Tagen war die Grenze direkt hier, wir konnten die ganze Strecke bis zu den Soldaten hinuntersehen. Das war ein bisschen traurig, es war das Ende, die Grenze. Allen war bewusst, das ist die Grenze. Alles was wir sehen konnten waren Soldaten, und die Mauer. Von oben konnte man die andere Seite sehen, den Osten. Man konnte es zum Beispiel von der „Ringbahn“ aus sehen. Auf dieser Seite waren es englische und amerikanische Soldaten, die in Jeeps herumfuhren. Aber das war´s. Die Mauer stand direkt hier, mitten auf der Straße. Mein Bruder hat mir ein Buch gegeben, Dokumentationen aus der Zeit, aber ich habe es zuhause in Kroatien gelassen. Meine Kinder haben es sich genommen.

Zurück zu meiner Ausbildung! Wir fingen also mit all diesem Blindnähen an, lernten alle möglichen Arten von Stichen, zum Beispiel spezielle Stiche für Hosen und Hemden. Zu der Zeit wurde Alles mit der Hand gemacht, es gab keine Overlock-Nähmaschinen. Zu der Zeit hatten vielleicht große Fabriken Eine, aber ganz sicher keine kleineren Läden. Wir hatten immer Singer-Nähmaschinen. Das erste Mal, dass ich an einer Nähmaschine war, war an einer Singer. Wir hatten alle kleine Fetzen und fingen an zu nähen. Ohne Garn! Es war verrückt, wenn man jetzt darüber nachdenkt. Aber damals war Garn sehr teuer, ich denke es war, um Garn zu sparen. Das waren in der Tat andere Zeiten! Wir machten weiter Reihen, gerade Reihe nach gerader Reihe, der Meister wollte die Reihen absolut gerade sehen, erst dann hat er uns Garn gegeben. Heute kann man billiges Garn bekommen, aber er ist nicht gut. Ich benutze Beides, Polyester und Baumwolle, kommt darauf an, was ich mache. Eigentlich meistens Polyester. Für Jeans würde ich ehr Baumwolle nehmen. Wenn man Synthetik bei einem Baumwollkleid benutzt und es wäscht, ist es ruiniert, weil die Nähte schrumpfen – am schlimmsten ist reine Viskose.“

Wieder einmal klingelt die Glocke schrill, ein Kunde tritt ein. Er hat eine von diesen fluoreszierenden Jacken, die mit phosphoreszierenden Felder ausgestattet sind, damit sie nachts sichtbar sind. Die Sorte die Flughafenarbeiter auf dem Rollfeld benutzen. Er möchte, dass Juraj die Kapuze abtrennt – zu steif für ihn – (das Gewand sieht tatsächlich steif aus wie Pappe) und die Ärmel kürzer macht. Ich muss sagen, diese Jacke sieht extrem unbequem aus, sehr schwer und rau, wie etwas, dass eine Schildkröte tragen würde. Das Radio spielt sanft im Hintergrund. Ich mache mir Gedanken über den Laden, während der Schneider die Maße des Kunden nimmt. Ich inspiziere die Postkarten, geschickt aus aller Welt. Die drei mächtigen Kaktusse. „Um sie zum Blühen zu bringen muss man sie behandeln wie Frauen!“, kommentiert Juraj zwischen zwei Nadeln. Der Kunde geht. Nein, ein anderer tritt ein! Sie hat eine Art Tasche die sie repariert haben möchte. Genau gesagt ist es eine Soldatenmütze, zweiter Weltkrieg schätze ich. Er schaut sich ihre Handarbeit sorgfältig an und gratuliert ihr zu ihrer Idee eine Soldatenmütze zu einer Tasche zu machen. Noch ein Kunde kommt herein, sie kommen alle kurz vor der Mittagspause! Es ist fast eins! „Ich bin zwei Jahre zur Armee gegangen“, murmelt Juraj zwischen durch. Die Kundin möchte die verlangten fünfzehn Euro im Voraus bezahlen, aber ihm ist es lieber bei Abholung. „Komm und hol sie Mittwoch ab“, sagt er. Ich denke für mich ist es Zeit zu gehen. Er entschuldigt sich für die Unterbrechungen!
Wie albern, ich bin sehr dankbar für all seine Zeit, sage ich. Ich gehe heraus auf die Straße und mache mich auf den Weg zum Kanal – berührt und inspiriert.

HELENA

05/12/2018
I just met Helena for the first time - beautiful smile, beautiful person, shining soul immediately visible. In her life thread, many detours and changes of direction. The shopfront is very bright. On the back wall, inbuilt shelving from another time. On the right wall, a giant sky-blue and pastel pink rose, wallpapered. One accesses the back of the shop through a small door on the left. The counter sits placidly in the middle of the room, it is quite large and also serves as a cutting table.

Helena was introduced to me by my friend Ahmed, whose little café is around the corner, on the canal. She has been his personal tailor for a while and according to him, she's a very nice lady who tends to chat a lot. She's also very good at taking in his trousers, he says, dead pan. As we come into the shop, Helena is all smiles; as she listen to me explaining my story, her face goes from a natural expression, to warmth, followed by complete enthusiasm. She says that she totally understands how tales hide in reality, and she wants to cooperate. I couldn't be more delighted. I am doubly lucky today, as her apprentice Mercedes happens to be here. Helena immediately introduces us, and takes the initiative to ask Mercedes whether she would like to be interviewed as well. Mercedes smiles happily, if mutely - her eyes say yes! Yes! Yes! We set up meeting dates right away, Helena on the following Wednesday, Mercedes on the Thursday, at two O'clock.

22/11/2018
The first thing I see as I enter Helena's boutique is a huge roll of Jacquard - or at least I declared it to be so the last time. I don't feel so sure anymore and ask Helena whether it is not, in fact, brocade.
She really doesn't know actually, "because it's so new, the material". We look closely at the pieces of material, cut to fit and cover her client's sofa snugly. She explains in detail how she made each piece, how she used the overlock machine, ran it twice to make sure those hems are really strong. I spot a piece of the old material, and I cannot help but gasping at how beautiful it is! Helena says that she likes it too, but it is really too old, it has to be replaced. She has to assemble all the pieces together by hand with a huge needle. Helena goes off to make me a coffee. She tells how she, little by little, made "dresses" for all of the furnishings at her friend's house. "First she wanted curtains by the mile, then some covers for the chairs, a bed spread, even something for some rug…", Helena chats away while we walk around the shop, in the back and in the front. She shows me a photo album filled with outlandish, eccentric black leather rocker jackets, inlaid with gruesome looking crocodile - unique! She is very proud of these photos, this is a project of hers: to develop this leather jacket line, together with a friend in Thailand who sends her crocodile. Her name is Carola, and she's the same woman who ordered a new "dress" for her sofa.

"In my shop, we are three women, and we are all some kinds of tailors!" ("Schneider", the word for "tailor" in German, means "cutter") "The first one, Kathy, is a podologist, she cuts nails. The second one, Carola, is a filmmaker: she cuts movies; the last one is me, Helena, and I cut fabric."
"I've known Carola for at least thirty years, and Kathy for about five years. I met Carola through my then boyfriend, she used to share a flat with him. They had bought the entire tenement building, and I joined forces with them to help restore the place.
I first met Kathy right here! Back when it was a tobacco shop. See those shelves, they are quite old, they were there already at the time of the tobacconist's. At the time I was teaching a big sewing group -eight Turkish women and one German man. I taught them all to sew. In the end I lost the job because I was too expensive, I was paid as a designer, that was my title. I went out searching for work. Someone at work told me that the lotto woman really needed help. I has noticed that woman, always alone in her shop! She was always alone, I could tell. I thought, I have to help this woman. So I went in and offered my help. And this is how I met Kathy!

In Germany, to work as Lotto seller, you need a special diploma: you have to train for a week and take an exam. You also need some kind of police certification, not everybody has this. I happen to have it because I had done this earlier in my life, back in the days. A friend had asked me, it was an emergency. She had a lotto/tobacco shop on the Sonnenallée. She'd asked me: 'Come on, come on, come on, can't you help me? I'm so lonely in my shop, I really need help!' This certificate actually costs around 250 Euro, but as she'd only run the business for about six months, there was an opportunity to get it for free. I took the exam and got all the paperwork sorted.

So, finally I get it: we are sitting in Kathy's shop, this used to be her lotto/tobacco shop, before she retrained as a podologist. Helena'd been looking for work, she saw this overwhelmed looking woman sitting by herself all day long, so she got the idea to go in and ask her if she needed help. "Before that I had - for very many years - a shop in the Oranienstraße, but I became very ill, so I had to give it up. Kathy had been all by herself because nobody has that special lotto certificate. "It's actually quite a rare thing to possess. That's because lotto is run by the state, that's why you need all this paperwork, you even need witnesses to prove that you are as innocent as you claim you are!

When I saw her in all her loneliness I said to myself 'Come on, you just do this for one year and then we'll see'. After a year, Kathy declared that she really couldn't handle it anymore, didn't want to have anything to do with that Lotto business ever again! She asked me if I didn't want to do something else instead. She wanted to retrain as a podologist. So we both started to share the rent of the shop. Suddenly, I had a shop! I called my friend Carola, who had been on this shop search with me for a long time, and she joined us in the venture. She turned the kitchen into her studio. For her it's enough! This is how three freelance "cutting" women work in one shop! We are all pretty proud - we managed to pull our resources together and do our thing in the shop! I'm also starting to sell jewellery designed by my friend Joe, but that is something else. This is an important mini-project with many heads!

I know Neukölln really well, I've lived here for a very long time. Before that, I lived in Kreuzberg. I moved to Berlin thirty-one years ago from my hometown in the Ruhrgebiet, in Nordrhein-Westfalen. I moved straight to Kreuzberg, I lived in a hood very close to the Chamissoplatz. Then I moved to a massive abandoned fabric on the Urbanstraße. This was a funny time, the factory had been a button making fabric! There wasn't a single button left in the space! Still, it was beautiful and nice to know that this used to be a place where buttons were made by the bucket. I lived there for a very long time. Then I stopped liking Kreuzberg, it was becoming too hip.

A funny machine noise interrupts our interview, it's really strange, it seems to come out of nowhere, it sounds a little bit like a dog growling. I laugh, Helena jokes: "It comes from the cellar - it has very thick walls, it's just below us through the trap, you could put anything in there, it's like an Ali Baba's cave. It's sealed up, no way you could get any harm from there!",

she chuckles.

"Anyway, I was pretty fed up with the district, and I decided to move to Neukölln. All my friends warned me against the idea. At the time, it was a pretty dreary, poverty-ridden place. But I could feel that this would change soon. Against the advice of my friends, I moved here fifteen years ago. I'm almost sixty years old, so I have experienced a lot of things. I found a beautiful flat, for a really low rent, it was perfect! It had a big garden, so lucky! The flat's right around the corner from here, on the Sonnenallee. The garden is huge! My dog Käthe can run around in it when I am sick and cannot take her out for walks. I can toss the ball across the garden, it's big enough for her to get her run. Käthe is a very old German name. My own name comes from Greek. My parents named me so after my godmother, my full name is Gabrielle-Helena. I didn't have that much contact with my godmother, but she didn't have any children, she was a master tailor for men's fashion. We also have Italian ancestors, and this is really crazy, most of the men in our family are tailors! I'm the only one on my side of the family. Unfortunately, I don't know my Italian side of the family very well, because my father ran away very early. And that's all right with me, if that's what he wanted. So I sort of know about them, but from a distance. I found out a bit more when I had my button shop.

My mother had also run away from her family, so I really know anybody in my extended family. My father didn't want to have anything to do with his family, would never talk about it; moreover, he died when I was twenty-four. As both my parents had run away from home early in their lives, I really knew nothing about my family, except for my grandma on my mother's side. From my father, and his Italian side of the family, I knew nothing. When my father died, my mother went through his papers, and made some interesting discoveries - all the things that he didn't tell us about! Discovering these papers launched a process, which took several years, at the end of which we all inherited a bit of money.

Years later, at my button shop, I had a long-standing client that always ordered the strangest things, like rare laces or unusual materials - he worked in theatre. He just needed ever more eccentric funny stuff. I always went out of my way to find the things he needed, he was a very special customer. Anyway, one day, he couldn't come himself to pick up his order, so a friend of his came instead. He mentioned the customer's name, including his family name - Herr so and so - and suddenly I realised that we had the same name, which is unusual in Germany, because it's an Italian name. And it did turn out in the end that we were actually related! Go figure! He had been my client for at least five years and, poof! A new relative, out of nowhere! This really felt like a fairy tale for me. We both'd had no idea because we'd only ever used first names. He also inherited some money from that mysterious aunt, so I am one thousand per cent sure that he is my relative! We all inherited from a woman called Olga Helena Spahn, she was a very rich lady. None of us knew at home, I'd been much too young when both my parents ran away from home. When we realised we were related, we talked. He told me a lot about the family that I never met, and he even knew a lot about my father, he knew everything! He was my treasure chest. He was really sweet, he told me I was the first nice Spahn he'd met. Apparently, my father'd had good reasons to run away. Yeah, he was really clever to run away. He told me that they were all absolutely horrid. I'd thought about going to visit them, but he told me, 'Please don't, it's not worth it!', so I never met them. He still lives here in Berlin."

I observe that Spahn is actually a German name, how did it happen that her father was Italian? "Please don't ask, it's very chaotic, it was an other generation, I don't really know. So, chronologically, I was born in Westfalen. My father was a gardener and my mother was a housewife, really normal. They had nothing to do with tailoring, but my grandmother, my mother's mother, was a tailoress. As a small child, I spent hours staring at her sewing. I told her that when I would be a grown-up, I would open a button shop. It really happened, in my shop there were at least fifteen thousand kinds of buttons.
Everybody tried to discourage me to open my button shop, my childhood dream. The money wouldn't be good they said. But I really wanted to, so I did it anyway. I still have photos of the shop, it really was a wonderful place. There were hundreds of boxes lined on shelves with rows of buttons fastened on their fronts, this made it easier to navigate between the fifteen thousand buttons. I had some in cloth, metal, mother-of-pearl, wood, metal. I had some really old buttons, some from the war, made of paper, from Paris, made of glass. I sold my entire stock in one go, to an artist, she wanted to make a button room out of it. I don't know if she will manage it, it's very interesting, I would love to see it when it's done. We spoke once since she bought it, she told she wasn't sure if she'd manage it. I told her not to worry, 'if you can't do it, I'll buy them back!'".
I make a small remark about all the buttons being like keys to life. Press this and out comes that press that and in comes this. "There is only one button shop left in Berlin. I think I was the only other one".

"Back to chronology. My grandma had a beautiful old Singer sewing machine, mounted on a wooden table, with a foot-pedal. I'd sit all day long next to her, observing what she did. She didn't make me so many clothes as a child, but as a teenager, I had her make me a pair of tiger-patterned pants, nobody else had them! I had so many compliments, people'd say 'I love your pants' and I would reply 'Yes, my grandma made them!'. That's the way it was! I was about fifteen or sixteen then. It was really funny, where we lived, there was a real "star-hair-dresser". I was his model, he cut my hair many times, in many styles. I had short hair, it suited me very well, which is rare. I had it dyed in all kinds of crazy colours. He could try all kinds of funky ideas on me, including shaving, anything goes. I was so young! I could do anything! All the people in my village really thought 'What kind of a girl is this!', I was a catastrophe, as far as they were concerned.

My first experience with sewing? As a little girl, I got a toy sewing machine for Christmas. It was tiny, to fit the hands of a child. It's what I had, I used it a lot, but it wasn't all that great, it would always get jammed, it was a constant struggle. If it had been better, I think I would've kept it and started my career with it. My grandmother taught me everything about knitting and crocheting, I know stitches that nobody else knows nowadays - except for old people. I used to make dresses for my dolls out of "crochet snakes", because my sewing machine didn't work well enough. It was forever kaput. I'd knit the snakes with a special contraption in the shape of a little doll, it would come out of its feet! I sowed up the snakes in the form of a spiral, and out of that I would make dresses. I was around eight years old then.

Then I left home. First I worked as a kindergarten care worker for little bit, but the kids were mistreated, psychologically it was horrible for me - I was still so young - so I left. I had a huge fight with the mother superior. It was a Catholic child care facility, to do with nuns, obviously. We had a fight about my T-shirt, which she claimed was indecent, and that all the boys could see... this was in 1977. I actually lived there too, in the home. Nuns, they all 'marry God' in the Catholic Church, I knew exactly what was going on, I got really sick of it. One day I said 'That's it, I'm leaving!'. I told them that they were way too evil to marry God. I threw my keys on the floor and left in a storm. It was a huge fight, they shouted so much! I was sixteen then. I lived in this orphanage for about half a year, it was really terrible, grim.

After the nuns orphanage, I took a small break, then I enrolled on a painter-decorator training program. Unfortunately, I got an allergy from a chemical product against rust. For a while

after that, I worked at a cabinet makers - I really needed money – so I did make a good living for a while. Then I got pregnant, got my daughter. I took her and left for Berlin. I just had to run away. My daughter's name is Anna Farina, she was very small then. I lived the life of a single mother, I didn't have any other kids". As if on cue, her dog comes and demands immediate attention, Helena tells her to sit with us, we will make room for her.

"After a while, I asked myself what was to be done: I could see there was no chance here! No work, no money, no chance. I searched for a tailor's apprentice place, and found one: a lady tailor and designer on the Diefenbachstraße. I was already very good at sewing, knitting and crochet, thanks to my grandma, I'd even had a sewing workshop at some point - a casual affair, but still. As a single mother, I didn't have time for a proper training course, so I wanted to find somebody who'd employ me and teach me at the same time, as an apprentice, and part-time, since I had to look after my little daughter. I brought her some of my handiwork to prove my knowledge, and upon seeing my work, she said "OK, you can start working for me." She showed me everything. How to make a good, flattering cut, how to assemble to best effect, things to know about materials, etc.

Now as I'm speaking, I remember that in the middle of all this, somehow, I also took a natural healing course. I knew herbs and natural medicine pretty well, also thanks to my grandma, with whom I always used to go and collect wild plants, I found this natural therapy very interesting and I wanted to know more about that. My grandma was very present in my life, she was a real wise woman, she was great.

During these two years working for the tailor, I didn't get paid, but I got to learn! Maybe sometimes she'd slip me a little something. I was at the Job Centre then, I'd agreed to take any jobs they had for me, but of course they didn't have any. So I could train for tailoring in peace. I'd train during while my daughter was at kindergarten. Her name was Renata, I apprenticed with her until she gave up her shop, when she got her second baby. In 1995, I got my diploma for therapeutic healing. Then I got the surprise inheritance! With that money, I opened my button shop on the Oranienstraße. At the same time I had opened up a sewing workshop with a friend - I went all over the place, I was very experimental.

How I found my shop on the Orannienstraße? There was a very beautiful boutique, a haberdasher, called "von Kragen". I went to that shop a lot, I used to buy things like zippers and the like. One of their staff was so bitterly disagreeable, I couldn't help but notice or think that the shop would do so much better without her. One day, she was so bad that I ended up talking to her boss about it. I told him that this employee was so unfriendly that it was really hard for customers, and that he really should have a chat with her - about her attitude, I mean. So he did, he had a chat with her. She snapped back: 'Right! Well I really don't feel like working here anymore anyway, I'm going!'. She slammed the door and left and that was that! She just left! She'd just had enough of the place I guess. The boss called me on the telephone, and asked me if I would like to take her position, work for him. I was really surprised, I still had my sewing workshop at the time. I wasn't prepared for this, I had thought about doing something more like being a proper master tailoress! Yet I thought to myself, 'two days a week could be very nice - a little money could definitely come in handy!'.

So I started working there two days a week, for about three years. At some point, they wanted to sell the boutique, it so happened that I just got this inheritance, and I bought the place. They had told me since long, that they wanted to sell the place; it made so sad, this was such a wonderful shop! I loved this place so much! Number 181 - now it's an outlet shop run by Turks - they sell shoes and things like that. It's quite a big place. The plan had been for me to also do some sewing, but it was all too much, I didn't have time for that unfortunately.

At some point, I had to give it up, I became sick. I was sick for ten years. And then I got this place." I ask if she's better now. "Yes, now I'm not so sick anymore, everything is OK. I was sick for years, because my child died. My child died. That's why I was sick. It was terrible for me. After my child went, I really did my best to pull my act together, after a year I was getting a little better… But then my partner also died. That was the end. I became really sick. First my child dies, then my partner. I felt like I had no existence anymore, it took all my strength. It felt like it was all for nothing. After that I just needed peace, and more peace, I just needed to be alone and quiet - I had no strength left, I was empty. I can't tell how I managed to get back to life, with patience I guess, I can't really say. I don't know why this had to happen to me in my story. This is the saddest part of my story. Probably all the healing therapies I had learnt helped me to get better.

At some point during my recovery - I had been jobless for ages, just hanging around at home - I heard about the job at the social project. It involved teaching people to sew. I thought I would try to take it on. It was very nice to work there. It was a project for socially challenged people, there was not much money, the idea was that they could either bring their clothing to be mended, or learn to fix it themselves. It was really good to get out of home, and make a little bit of money, I had been on the doll for a very long time by then. I didn't know if I really had the strength for the job, but it actually gave me strength. I worked there for about three years. I gradually regained my strength. Now I can even cook Turkish! We had so much fun, it was great. After a couple of months, all the people started to really trust me, tell me their stories, they confided in me. One woman lost her brother, and asked me if I could talk to the boss upstairs - she had been too scared to speak herself. Normally, Turkish women just hung out between themselves, I was the first German that she really trusted. Then the Job Centre decided to close the project, it cost them too much money.

14/12/2017

Last Thursday, I finally made it back to Helena's - my pretext: a screen for the window next to my bed, to protect me from the ice-cold air blowing in through the cracks. I brought three materials for the purpose, some of which are small heirlooms from my grandma: two lengths of pink cotton, one thin and one thick and fleecy, as well as a length of thick-weave natural white wool bought for the purpose. My plan is for the screen to be pink on one side and white on the other, using the thin pink to make a border just like on blankets. Helena picks up the material and looks into the matter in earnest. She explains exactly how she plans to do it, step by step. "This is a very complicated thing, it will take a lot of time", she says. She considers every detail, suggests many an option.

I really don't have a fortune to spend on that screen, I hadn't thought of this as a big project, so I hatch a second plan, which ditches the pale pink border, in favour of a single stitched line. As usual, it's better to stick to the strictly necessary. While we busy ourselves around all that material, Mercedes is dreamily looking at piles and piles of magazines from the fifties to the eighties. A lot of "Burdas", complete with patterns. To me they always look like mysterious magical maps. Thinking that this girl right here, can decipher this maze of confusing lines awes me completely. Mercedes is trying to decide on a design for a coat that she wants to make. I understand this is at the initiative of Helena's - to teach her something a little more complex. Helena shows me a length of handwoven wool, a grey affair embroidered with violet and mauve flowers - the material intended for the coat. It is now draped in the window, gracing it with its fuzzy flowery charm. Helena slept badly the day before, woke up barely time to

make it on time at her shop. The whole day has been sort of useless for her, she can't concentrate or think straight. We end up chatting on and on, she is definitely in a very chatty mood. Mercedes is a little quieter, she is very serious about picking the right design. After we leaf through the magazines, her eyes nearly pop out of her socket at a total syringe-like dress. A very feminine dress skirt following the contours of the body, topped by an extravagantly large collar. All in all it's a very dramatic dress, for super-divas, Ava Gardner, Marilyn Monroe, Rihanna. No sensible reality in this dress. She exclaims, "I'll make us each three a dress like this! When we walk down the street, all the heads will spin on us, 'what was that then?'. Everybody would be wowed by this vision", she muses: the three of us wearing identical dresses. Indeed, this dress is infused with much glamour, it literally has the power to transform any woman into a goddess, Helena and I giggle in agreement. "This is the magic about clothing! This is why it is such a massive industry! It has power to transform normal women into supernatural beings of beauty and mystery!", Helena peeps in. She chuckles, but she definitely has a very good point there. Mercedes nods her agreement earnestly.

I am about to leave the shop, then I see that it is pouring: sheets of water endlessly unfolding themselves, inundating the pavement. No way I can leave now, if I do now i'll surely drown, like Ophelia! Helena tells me to sit and wait for the rain to calm down. It's so nice here today, Helena is not in the mood for working. Even though I try to make myself discreet so that she can work, she keeps on chattering.

We joke about the buses, which keep flying by at the wrong times (I'm hoping to catch one to avoid getting completely soaked). We discuss which time I should pick up my screen. I'm leaving on the twenty-fourth - I would need it latest on the twenty-third. She declares: "Rubbish! I'll make you jump ahead in the line, I'll have it ready for the twenty-first, I think your job is more urgent than these other dresses I have here". Already I feel like a favourite customer. Helena does have a kind heart. I ask her how much she wants for the job. "OK for you… twenty-five! But please don't tell anyone, it's only because you're nice and I give you a special artist price". I am formally forbidden to tell anybody how much I paid for this, lest throngs of people should swamp her with the same request. "If I charged so little for everybody, I would soon have to put the key under the door! If anyone asks, say it cost fifty Euro!". All of these statements are crenelated with myriad riotous winks and cheeky smiles and we all laugh a lot. This whole auto-pilot price bargaining protocol is part of the deal I guess. Helena is standing at her shop's door looking out for the bus for me. "OK, it's not coming! You still have time". But I'm really eager to get that bus so I decide to wait outside and find some shelter somewhere. I thank her, leave, we're still all laughing as I walk away.

20/12/2018

This morning I got an anxious call from Helena: my screen idea was not going very well, she had already put in a lot of work, with no success. She sounded quite agitated, and asked me to come later on to see with her about the right solution. It needs to be simplified, otherwise the three layers kind of rub each other the wrong way and when hung, the screen looks a little wrinkly. This is no thrilling news, as I have a very busy day, and really, I thought making a flat screen would be a fairly simple affair. At the same time, I am impressed by her initiative to call me, she aims to please!

By the time I manage to go to her, it is already late at night - actually, it's four, but since we are one day before the equinox, the night comes very early indeed. I walk down the Harzerstraße from my end of the canal, which leads me past Juraj's shop. I can see his window shining brightly, a yellow jewel oozing its warmth into the darkness of the street. It looks so inviting, especially in this cold. I am still outside the shop with my hand on the door handle, Juraj's already spotted me. He's talking to a customer, he smiles at me. Such a bright smile, all of a sudden I don't feel cold anymore! I walk in, it really feels like I'm going to see an old friend. So here I am, I tell Juraj that I have just finished the transcript of his interview and he's back at his sewing machine, running it at great speed as always, yet he is listening very intently, attentively, he is highly interested.

I tell him that I want to come back in the new year to ask him a few more questions. He says, twinkling, "Well, what kind of questions?" - "Huhu, you will see, you will see!" I tease him back. It seems like the minute I walk into Juraj's, jokes explode all over the place - it really is a place of exceptionally good humour here. This time, Juraj interviews me, he asks me a lot of things about myself. He also wants to know if Christmas is as commercial in France as it is in Germany. "In my country, it never used to be like this, we didn't exchange any presents, it was only about tradition, going to church, and eating together around a nice meal. Zagreb's won the prize for 'best Christmas market in the world' for the third year in a row. OK great, but what does a Christmas market do for the poor? So, once a year you throw diamonds and rubies in their faces, give them a free meal, but what about the rest of the year? This really is no help at all." He is obviously in the mood for talking, and keeps me at his shop. He explains that what he's told me is only a tiny little part of his life, and I can quite believe him.

I tell him that I will come back in the new year and interview him again. He apologises for all the interruptions due to the customers, "Most of these customers, I know really well, some are the grandchildren of my first customers! And they all use the informal you, but sometimes I doesn't know the client so well, and then I can't talk to you about my life". I assure him that I completely understand. I wish him a merry Christmas and a happy new year. He laughs and enjoins me to have a merry Christmas with much wine and delicious food. I go away waving my hand as if I was leaving him at a train station or something!

I walk all the way to Helena's shop, her big black dog is sleeping on a rug, she is working on the sewing machine, with her back to the street. I knock and try to enter, but the door is locked. She gets up and lets me in. Again I am greeted like an old friend, I almost feel like kissing on the cheeks, and I can see is the same for her! How can people develop such sympathy for one another in such a short amount of time, I wonder. She's looking super beautiful today, her eyes are brighter than usual - radio waves emanate from there, she smiles constantly. She gets the screen out and lays it out on the big table, like a huge affair. She gives me a detailed rapport about the process and each and every small wrinkle and difficulty involved in the making of the screen. We discuss for quite a long time. I have to relinquish my initial idea, because it seems to be too difficult and unachievable.

She brings out an adorable piece of haberdashery to finish the screen, she really has thought about it. "You are using that pink brushed cotton from your grandmother, and the other side is a natural, wiry white wool from the 40s. So I thought about this ribbon for the ties, which is also a vintage piece of haberdashery." Helena really strives for everything to be perfect, I don't want to be a difficult customer, so I haste to agree to everything.

She also is in the mood for talking, and I'm really sweating in my thick oversize lamb pelisse. I'm really itching to go, I am so tired! The conversation turns to Mercedes. She talks so fondly of her, unprompted, she tells me how she met her. "A friend of mine is a social worker, and was looking after her. Mercedes was in all kinds of trouble, school, and everywhere". Helena is prudent and does not tell me what other kind of trouble, but she says that she's been through a lot, and that she was a very difficult kid until she met her. She was already at sewing-school,

but she'd wanted to leave. The friend brought Mercedes to the shop, there was talk of maybe coming for work experience there. "She is the only one I will ever take! I don't have time for apprentices! The day she comes, I never get anything done! I love her to bits and pieces, it's a pleasure to spend time with her, but really, I can't concentrate when she's around."

Maybe this is also because she doesn't treat Mercedes like an apprentice: she looks after her as if she were her fairy godmother. She shows me some buttons that they started making for the coat, the one we were looking at in a magazine last time. I tell her she is Mercedes' lucky star! Helena beams: "When she first started, she was a bit more difficult, always late! I persuaded her to be on time, I told her this was entirely up to her, how she used her time with me". She's an excellent psychologist and understands that there is no point in direct antagonism with Mercedes, and that it is better to use remorse…

I try to understand what happened to Mercedes, but Helena remains silent on the subject. "It's not Mercedes style to open up about problems. Every now and again, she mentions some hard stuff she went through, but then she lets it go, resumes her happy ways, she does not think too much about the negative past". She is really proud of Mercedes, she also tells me how they were going to throw her out of the school, but shortly after meeting her, Mercedes got her act gather and passed some exams with flying colours, a three, which is a good mark, compared to getting kicked out. "She showed them with what she was made of! Mercedes has the willpower of one thousand people. What she wants, she gets! It is a beautiful thing to see her growing and her ambition growing with her. Her dreams are getting bigger and bigger! She will be apprenticing with me until May, I already know I will miss her! I definitely don't want to have another apprentice after that". She's not doing it for the same reason as others I can see, this is more emotional than "just" an apprenticeship. I really have to go, I thank Helena and promise to be back the next day at 2 o'clock.

MERCEDES

I come into Helena's shop to interview Mercedes. Helena hands me a cup: "tea or coffee?", which is followed by a detailed discussion on the timing of tea and coffee. Mercedes nods her approval of my tea-coffee-tea, "Eine gute Kombination", she says. The perfect day starts with the gentleness of tea, is ignited with coffee in later morning, and tapers out in tea softness, we decide. Mercedes is a soft tea lady herself. She comes here as an intern "every Thursday, since the seventh of September 2017. As we are in December, that's already a little while", she muses. She wants to go on training here until May or June. She goes to a tailoring school, where she will qualify as an "alterations tailor". Her school is a large establishment that proffers instruction to youngsters in fashion and all the jobs it entails. I should pop over to the school and make a visit, I think to myself. Mercedes estimate the amount of students above one thousand, there are many students and many departments, such as: alteration, fashion sewing, fashion tailoring, fashion assisting, fashion design, and bespoke tailoring.

Helena walks in with a cup of coffee made with Nescafé and powdered creamer. She asks me if that's alright by me and as I nod my approval, she explains: "I don't do this all the time but well… sometimes it's practical". I open up about a weird addiction to powdered milk, a phase I went through in my early twenties. Helena pretend-warns me about rekindling my addiction with her cup.

Back to the school: it is located at checkpoint Charlie, right in front of the underground. I ask how many students to a sewing machine there are. To this, she answers that they are six pupils in the classroom. I exclaim: "Wow! Luxury conditions!". Mercedes then goes on to elaborate that in the beginning of the training, there were thirty pupils per class. They all went through a trial phase of six months, at the end of which they had an exam, which most people failed. "Then we were 10 left, then four more left because it was too much for them". I try to understand what makes this training so difficult. "We have a lot of theory - about materials for example, what cotton is, how it's produced, I mean there are lots more themes, it's a wide-reaching, comprehensive education." This is a very mirthful conversation, I misunderstand the word "umfangreich" for "Frankreich" - Mercedes has to repeat the word multiple times, she bursts into peals of laughter. We laugh about being foreigners, deaf, and complete air-heads to boot.

Because of the drastic reduction of students in her class, I ask again about the amount of students in the school: was it one thousand when she started and now only five hundred? She answers that, no, counting in the whole school, they must be between one and two thousand students. She says that there are all kinds of courses, two year courses, three year courses, diplomas of every level. There is also a section where one can repeat school after failing school. Her diploma takes two years to complete. If she remains on the course for an extra year, she would then qualify to be a bespoke tailor. Doesn't she want to go for that, I ask. "Maybe, but first I'll see how it goes with this diploma. I need to get more experience, get my hands on things!". I ask her what is the main thing that they do: isn't it actually sewing? "It depends which department you're in - in mine, we learn to alter things". She gives the example of lady trousers, describes how they first need to be undone, then re-sewn in the right places, and finished, all the seams neatly hidden and tucked in on the inside of the garment. "Some things are done by hand and some things are done on the machine. When I started school, I had no experience, none whatsoever! To become an alteration tailor was not at all my plan!". She first attended another professional school before this one. "I wanted to get another diploma, another qualification. But I failed that." She doesn't say which. I ask her to develop. It seems at first that she was trying to further her general school education, in fact she wanted to become a pastry-chef. She really loves cakes.

She did go through a three-week training at the school, which went quite well - after that, she got an internship at a bakery, "but I realised right away that this getting up super early in the morning was really not my thing, not for me!". She had to get up at two in the morning every day - that does sound taxing I think to myself. "It was awful, never again! I was seventeen". She explains: "we could enrol either on the department of textile or of catering. I wanted to go to the textile department but they had no place". Well, I interject: in any case it's good to have all this baking experience - I'll certainly invite her to my birthday.

I ask her to tell me what is the first thing that she learned at school, what she did exactly during her first week. She answers that they first had a ten week preparation course to learn the basics of sewing. "Such as straight stitch, hemming, to make them invisible - the basics! We all got a garment, which we had to alter. Sometimes we had to shorten it, sometimes lengthen it. That was in the introduction course. We first had to order the materials, and off we went, all thirty of us, into the basics of tailoring. I knew what a needle was, but I'd never seen a thimble in my life. I really had no plan, no idea. I had to interrupt frequently to ask a lot of questions. The teacher started to kind of lose her patience with me. The thing is, she never showed anything, she just explained it. I needed to actually see it to understand. She'd just sit there and say "do this, do that!" I almost always misunderstood and did it all wrong". I ask if there was not some kind of big film, or some books of pictures to see. Not even that. Astounded, I ask her: "What about the Internet?". Mercedes did try to search the internet and find things out by herself, but she was too clueless, she didn't know which pages she should look for. "I didn't know the very basics of sewing, not even that you have to cut textile with scissors, or how to use scissors on textile, I was really lost."

I try to get more details: how did she start, how does one learn from scratch, I'm really curious. Did she, like Juraj the Yugoslav tailor down the road, also start by making blind stitches with a naked needle? She replies, straight-faced, that no, she started with a very normal needle threaded with a basic cotton thread. "We were supposed to make a totally normal stitch, the straight stitch. Some in the classroom asked the teacher to show how to do it, and she showed them, so I got it from looking at her showing it to them. I felt like I was cheating! Like I should have been more prepared, I really had no idea, not a clue what I was doing. The system really is spoken instructions – words - which the pupils have to interpret into action. At the end of the ten week introduction course, we had to pass a test and achieve all of the things that the teacher had told us, but not shown. We got marked on our handiwork, and we failed or we passed.

For the exam, we had to make several items on the sewing machine. I didn't manage that too well. We got a dress that we had to alter, it had to be made smaller, it was hard because it was not just a simple dress, it had a lining that also had to be made smaller. I didn't do that well because I didn't know how to really. Then there was a simpler exercise, which I did better. I didn't pass the test because I didn't make the exercises well enough. They gave me a chance to take the test once more. I asked some other students to show me how it's done - thanks to their help, I managed better the second time. We were supposed to have learned all of this during the introduction course, but we only had one class a week, it's not enough. The other days, we had Math, German, all the normal school lessons. Things got better since I started coming to Helena's for my work experience. Also, after the 10 week course, we got a two-week more

intensive phase and the new teacher was kind to me. She showed me many more things, and wouldn't tell me 'do this, do that'. It was very helpful to have somebody believing in you and giving you exercises! This teacher told me that I was talented! I'm actually kind of talented!"

Mercedes goes over things once more: she was not really destined for a career in tailoring. She failed at school, they wanted to put her into some professional catering training, but she didn't want to do that. With the help of her big sister, she searched the internet to find something more appealing. "I found this tailoring school, I was into fashion, I thought this would be better for me. I applied for three programs: 'Fashion Designing', 'Fashion Tailoring', and 'Alteration Tailoring'. They only accepted me to the alteration tailoring, that's why I started with that."

I ask her if she already made some clothes, and she said yes, she's made a blouse. I ask her what it was like. She says it's just some simple blouse. Helena peeps up in the background: "Do you have a photo here?". We look at the picture, it's a beautiful thing! A lot of personality in this blouse. Modestly beaming, eyes cast down and shy smiles, Mercedes explains that her teacher cut the front and the back parts for her, and then she put them together. "The sleeves where really hard to put on," she chuckles, "I also put in the zipper by myself". She shows me the zipper. "I made this top for a colleague." She added a very large, dramatic ruffle.
She used a striking African block-printed cotton to stunning effect. She says the material is very good to work with because it's very stiff. I ask her if she bought the material close by on the market: "No, my colleague gave me the fabric. She wanted a second ruffle, but my teacher said it would be too much, and she was quite right."

Mercedes was born in Berlin Hellersdorf. "My parents and my big sister Carmen were born in Africa. In Mozambique, we speak Portuguese; there are many other kinds of languages such as Shanda and Massa. My Portuguese is getting better, but in Shanda I can only say a couple words - forget Massa! German is basically my first language, I went to Mozambique the first time when I was two years old. We go every other year, the whole family. We always stay for one month - it's not a lot, but it's something. We always stay at my grandma's. It was incredible to see something so poles apart. The atmosphere is totally different. The first time I went to Mozambique, I got scared, because I'd been used to living among very pale people - suddenly I was surrounded by people whom all looked like me, it was so strange!". We all laugh, I tell her about my own experience in Bangladesh, where I felt like some super white giant. "My grandma says that I was really scared of them, because I was just not used to black people." I mentioned that well, with both her parents also being black, she did have some experience of blackness, but it is true that living in a district such as the one she was born in, she definitely didn't get to see many black people.

We all remark that more and more black people are coming, thankfully bringing some cheer and colour to the grey grimness of Berlin. "Even in my district, there are more and more black people. Now we have a kind of network, there are people that I call 'aunt' or 'uncle', and that I consider to be real family. Since we couldn't take our own family over, we just created our own! (chuckles) My mum works as a secretary, and my dad is a car mechanic. He first came to Germany as a young boy, because he was such a good pupil at school in Africa, he got a grant to come and study here, through a program to bring young African school children to the DDR. My mum came when she was twenty-five, she spent a whole year in the Hartnack Schule, learning German full-time. She speaks German so well that she can be a secretary. People are often astounded and exclaim how well she speaks the language.

My mum and dad know each other since childhood, they were neighbours. My dad lived on the upper floor, my mum on the lower. As kids they didn't like each other that much - they were always fighting! My dad left for Germany at thirteen, and he only came back to Mozambique when he was eighteen: then he stayed one year long. This is when they got to know each-other better. My mum got pregnant with my sister, unfortunately my dad was already back in Germany when she found out. She wrote him a letter to tell him that she was expecting a child. The baby was born, she brought her up together with her sister. She lived without my dad for years. Then my dad wrote her a letter from Germany to tell her that she could come to Germany now, that he would pick her up! Well, he didn't pick her up himself, a friend of his was waiting for her at the airport, he flew with her to Germany.
She waited for him for seven years, and when the message finally came, she was absolutely overjoyed! She was so excited, so happy that she screamed and cried of happiness. The day she got the immigration approval letter, she went mad for joy, she leapt up and down and cried and laughed and sang and danced and told all her neighbours - the whole district was really happy!

During the seven year wait, she did meet one or two other men, but it's really my dad she was in love with, nobody could replace him. We still live in the same district, which is reachable with the S5, or the U5, all the way to the terminus. It takes me an hour to go to school, I have to change three times. My place is still quite far from the end station, I have to then take a tram and then a bus. Is not a village or anything, but there's a lot more greenery around there - from my bedroom window, I can see many playgrounds, I live in an area where there lots of playgrounds. We have a small balcony, we don't do much on it though, basically we use it to hang the linen to dry. We don't eat together every day - first of all I'm at school all day long, my dad works in shifts, sometimes early, sometimes late, and my mum too! Because of this, we only eat together at the weekend. During the week, either I make myself something, or more likely, I eat whatever is in the fridge, my mum always prepares a lot of food during the weekend. We eat both African dishes and German dishes. My sister Carmen is eight years older than me, she studies Spanish and German in Düsseldorf, where she lives with her boyfriend. She also works part-time to support herself.

My parents were both baptised as evangelical, protestant - but I don't really believe anymore. We definitely don't believe in having to pray or go to church or anything like that. Gott sei dank! My parents are not into this, it's way too strict for me. When I was little, we did use to go to church, it was so boring! All of a sudden we all decided to not go anymore."

I still have one more year before I finish school, then I'm going to Mozambique with my family. I also hope to visit a music festival with a friend, just for fun! Here in Germany. I would like to see more of the world, study abroad. I know a couple of organisations that maybe could help. 'Pfefferwerk' told me I could go to Spain, or Ireland, or Thailand. With 'Kids and Co.', I could go to Hungary or France. I just need to think what is best for me. This would be a three months stay.

One day, I'd love to make my own collection, or maybe work in a fashion company. I still don't have any idea how to design clothes, that's also why I want to do this training, to see how it's done. I've collected photos and things that I like, I have a scrapbook - photos from the internet. I want to design for both women and men."
She shows me the picture that she collected, she really has a lot of personality! Beautiful dresses, very feminine, sexy, often extravagant, always colourful, unique. "I love colour, I always did, since childhood, that's why I used to paint." I exclaim that she must continue to paint, that it's important for her fashion future! She shows me a drawing, it is very uptight, like the drawing of a twelve year old. I explain that she doesn't have to try to draw things exactly as

they are, one just needs to give an impression of a dress, rather than a detailed drawing. She should make more sketches, blotches, experimental things, I try to convince her. I tell her to forget about perfection, that perfection sucks. That really makes her laugh!

Helena also giggles, she points out that Mercedes has a teacher who's never happy with anything she does, she would look at something and state "not good enough!". Same with the rest of the classroom, this teacher is just always complaining about something. Apparently the woman focuses only on mistakes. "She is one mean teacher, never pleased with what I make, all nasty remarks, each time I shows her my work. She complains about each assignment that I work on. No matter how hard I try to satisfy her. She even told me that I would never qualify to become an assistant fashion designer. Gott sei dank, I only have her on Tuesdays this year - it's better than before. Tuesdays is mean-teacher-day, Thursdays, lovely Helena, and on Friday I get extra help from the sweet Frau Wunder, who patiently sits with me and re-explains all of the points that the mean teacher explained badly a few days before".
Helena puts in: "Mercedes made the nicest baggy trousers, they hung beautifully - yet the teacher just complained about a one millimetre offset in one place. Every time, she finds something to complain about. She's just a frustrated woman. I talked to her on the phone once, and I instantly knew we weren't going to get on. I never spoke to her again. She's just a frustrated lady - but then again, there is a lot of frustration involved in sewing, isn't there?".

Mercedes shows me a bunch of photos: bright, multi-coloured, large African motives, ultra feminine cuts, lots of dramatic trapeze cuts, drapés, plongeant decoltés, exacerbating curves of every kind. She also poses in various outfits, strutting her little self, really posing. In one shot, she's wearing a crazy gold chain, huge sunglasses and a ten centimetre high hat. She has a lot of attitude, she looks like a queen! It goes to show how clothing, to a certain extent, does make the monk. She can transcend her shyness to struttin' queen, decked out in her "sexyfying" cool-factor-nine outfits.

Mercedes shows me a drawing of a dress she wants to make. Helena pipes in and tells the story of the prickly soft blanket that had a thin waist. "There was a lady who crocheted a blanket in all colours. She found that it was too scratchy. Then, a friend gave her another blanket, which was softer than the air, but too thin. She asked me to sew them together into one blanket. It took me three whole days, the thin-waisted-blanket wouldn't fit the soft blanket. I charged 60 for that work. The lady gave it to a man as a present, he was ever so happy.

Another 'funny' job came in once, from Frau Holland. She ordered a custom-made coat - she was a tricky one! When I measured her up, she stayed mum doing the whole pinning, didn't say a word. After a lot of measuring, I had to ask her – 'Is it possible that one of your arms is 1.5 cm shorter than the other?' – 'Yeahah!', she exclaimed, 'Now I know that I can trust you!'. Frau Holland is a ninety-two years old lady, fit as a fiddle! She used to be a schoolteacher. I made the coat alright, but when it was time to sew in the buttons, came the trouble! Nothing helped, these buttonholes never matched with the other side. I couldn't get them to see eye to eye! I even sent the coat to a professional embroider - she was also dumbfounded with the fabric and did not manage to make nice holes". In the end, Helena resorted to making the buttonholes like traditional old style patches. Frau Holland was very pleased, and immediately asked for a vest in the same material, "thank God with a zipper though!".

AHMED

27/10/2017.
It's raining cats and dogs and I can see a little electrical garland glowing in Ahmed'd window, a good omen I think. Ahmed greets me with a smile, whilst driving material furiously fast on his roaring sewing machine. He's working on a black coat, very long, the kind worn by Muslim women. There are three women sitting in the shop, a push chair and a toddler - a little girl. They all smile brightly at me, ask me where I come from. Only one can speak German, she's been in Germany for two years, her friend only a few months, she can't speak the language yet. The third woman turns out to be a teenager, her daughter, the little girl too. She's waiting for the long coat. They speak between themselves in Arabic, they're all Syrian. They all wear a head-scarf, except the little girl. They are very friendly and curious to know about me.

A beautiful woman, super pale eyes and long luscious hair flying freely, pounces into the shop, like a tiger. At great speed, she says a few words to Ahmed, also in Arabic. She picks up a jacket from a rack, slams five Euro on Ahmed's sewing machine, leaves. A couple more guys walk in to pick things up; Ahmed tells them to come back later. His shop is the simplest I've seen yet, it's rather empty. There is just a sewing machine, an overlock machine, a small professional cloth-cutter and an iron on an ironing table. There is a cabin in the back, the woman uses it to try on her coat even though she's fully dressed. Her daughter walks in with her to help her. She discusses the work with her companions, sending smiles all around, pleased with the work. Very happy, she takes her leave, along with her entourage.

That leaves the two of us alone, I offer the cake that I brought, but I can see this is not going to be a tea-and-cake interview, it's all spontaneous and in the middle of the active day - no special time was set aside. So I leave it in the paper bag, so he can enjoy it later with his family. He thanks me kindly, and puts it on the sewing machine. He is taken aback by my recording device, and we spend the first ten minutes trying to work out what exactly it is I am here for, and what this machine is doing here. He ends up calling a woman who speaks German, to whom I clumsily try to explain what I'm trying to do. At the end of my lengthy explanations, she sums up quite nicely: "you just want to ask him a few questions." Finally Ahmed understands I'm here to ask him questions, and he seems quite happy to answer them. Without further ado, he dives straight in.

"My name is Ahmed, I'm forty-two, I come from Syria, I've been in Berlin for two and a half years and I am married." He looks kind of embarrassedly at me when he said he's married - I think there might be a little bit of a confusion here. "I am Ahmed, I'm a tailor, I'm a designer", he says, "since twenty-eight years. I used to work in Damascus, in the city where I was born. I used to design skirts and jackets and coats. I started learning the art of sewing when I was thirteen years old. My wife is a housewife, she stays at home to look after our children. Our children only arrived in Germany eight months ago. Damascus used to be a good place. Things were inexpensive - food, drink, accommodation, everything was affordable. Including my services: cheap. Because of the war, the prices went up.

I just got the shop, it's been five months. I'm a very good tailor. I make clothes for women, and men too. In Damascus, all the women wear the 'manteau', the long coat. I made my wife her dress for our wedding. Five years ago in Damascus I had a lot of work. It'd come in all day long, I used to make hundreds of clothes, custom-made. Now people just want alterations. 'Ahmed, shorten this , Ahmed, make this bigger, make it smaller, make it longer!'", he laughs good-naturedly. He adds that in Germany, made-to-measure clothes would be too expensive, because the material here is expensive. "And anyway, everybody buys cheap garments from China, much cheaper than a garment made by me of course." He shows me a roll of sticky hemming band, explaining: "Materials are expensive, the roll I'm holding in my hand costs fifteen Euro. For forty meter! That is really expensive. The offer on the Internet is also too expensive. I buy everything from the bazaar on Maybach Ufer - there I can find materials at affordable prices. That's why the tailors here are expensive, because of the high prices of the materials!".

He shows me a professional circular blade cloth-cutter: "I bought it secondhand, it cost me a hundred and fifty Euro. In Damascus, I had one that would cut through ten inches of materials at once. The one I have here can only manage half an inch. I have been going to German school for about a year, it's not easy to make progress. I feel very alone in my endeavour to start up my business. I asked the Job Centre for help, I asked them to lend me a thousand to help start out, but they said no. Five years ago in Damascus, this would've been no problem! I could've asked friends. I'd ask five friends, one thousand here, one thousand there, and get this money together easily. Anyway, I managed somehow and I did open up my shop. Now I make around fifty euro a day. I work really inexpensively. I hope to get more work as time passes by. I can make clothes for everyone, man, woman, for little money. If you don't have much money, it's no problem, I will do it cheap. I make all the clothes from my wife and my children. I can make a full coat in two days, lining included.

Before, I had six men working for me. Each'd make six coats a day, we'd work twelve hours long, every day. They worked on the sewing machines; I was at the cutting table, giving orders and measuring customers. I'd only take Friday off, to go pray, and take long walks with my wife and my children, enjoy time together. I have two daughters, they are so beautiful. The first one is called Zima, she's fifteen. My second daughter is called Zara, she is eleven, so small, so precious. I make clothes for all of my ladies, everything custom-made for them." He shows me a correspondence catalogue, on which are some suits, and he explains that he can make any of those models to the measurements of the wearer. Now I understand what he means by designer, he means that he is a master tailor, not just an alteration tailor. "My clients are always so happy and grateful when they get the clothes on! 'Oh Ahmed, thank you thank you Ahmed!' I can make a jacket - with the lining - in five hours. It's a lot of work! When I get home, my wife cooks for me".

He lives in Luckenwalde, about one hour away from here with the train. He lives in a house, I understand there is a garden. "The Job Centre helps me to pay. I make around 400-450 with my business, and the Job Centre gives me 400 on top of this, as well as paying for my house. The first four months in my shop, I had no work. No woman, no man, nobody came". This makes sense to me, when I came to Ahmed's shop about five weeks ago, I remember that he was kind and open, but he had a pretty sad smile; my friend Sara who'd accompanied me seemed to think he would be too sad for an interview.

"Every day, I get up at six, I drink a coffee and smoke two cigarettes. By six thirty I'm at the station". He changes the subjects abruptly, and asks me whether I have a house or a flat — a flat, I tell him. At this, he jumps in and asks me if I'm married too. I say yes, and for good measure, I add that I have two children. He asks me about my age. I try to cover my embarrassment by chuckling a little, then I tell him. Ahmed seems very happy about my age, chuckles and smiles. "It's a very good thing, we are the same age". Then he corrects himself, "No, it's not a good thing", chuckling all along and doing a lot of head shaking. He's very

respectful, but nonetheless I suspect a little bit of undercover flirting going on - I'm a little on my guards. He then informs me that his brother works as a chef on the "Champs Elisés" and his eyes sparkle like this is the Eden or something. Again, he swerves in his conversation and announces: "Germany is very good! Women come here and I alter their clothes. They tell me 'it's not expensive!'. You have to come, so I can alter your clothes for you too".

I show Ahmed my coat, a loose weave, mohair affair I have been meaning to get fixed for years. It's really beautiful and unique, but the mohair threads are falling apart around the buttons at the front and it looks rather scraggly. I've already shown it to other tailors, but untill now, none convinced me. Let's see what he offers. I explain to him my idea to revert the sides of the buttons so that the new piece of coat lays on top of the old piece. It seems like an easy and good solution to me. Ahmed is totally against it. "No way! This side is for women, this side is for men!". He proceeds to show me how he wants to take a piece of material from another part in my coat, and sew it in the front where the buttonholes are - like a giant patch running all the way from the collar to the hem. He assures me: "it's going to be completely invisible!", with much nodding to underscore his invisibility promise. I don't believe him, not for one second! I will not risk my beautiful precious coat to be ruined by a huge "cache-misère" on the front - I don't like the solution. I tell him laughingly "Ahmed, I don't like it! No! I don't want to do it this way: I want to swap the button side with the button-hole side. I don't care if women are supposed to be buttoned up on one side and men on the other, it's a silly convention!"
But Ahmed, still smiling and fussing over my coat, keeps on telling me how he will fix it, completely ignoring my wishes. Time and time again, he explains: "The right is for women, the left is for men." I give up. I can see there is no way Ahmed is going to challenge the rule. I'll have to find some other items to bring him, I shan't risk my coat.

"My German teacher tells me I'm very good for a 42-years old. She says 'Ahmed, you speak well! Good enough to understand and go about your business'. Every day, I listen to the radio for two or three hours, at work and then at home again. At home, my wife corrects my writing. She says 'Ahmed, why? Ahmed, what is this? Oh Ahmed, that's wrong! Do it again!'. He obviously really loves his wife, he speaks fondly of her. "My wife was very good at school, in Damascus. My children have managed to learn German fluently, Zima gets top marks." Although he is really open to talking to me and probably would speak longer, I decide to put an end to this interview, as it is very difficult to conduct it with our language barrier. I explain that I'll come back with some clothes to alter, "Then we can pursue our conversation!". He laughs and chuckles and seems very happy, and I take my leave. He walks out the door with me and brandishing a cigarette, he offers it to me. I decide to accept.
"Are you alone at home right now?" Poker-faced, I shake my head. "No no, I am not alone, I live with my family!" He nods uncertainly. He is visibly struggling to understand the situation. I think he's a little bit dumbfounded on the codes of relationship between men and women in Germany. "In Germany, nobody has a husband and everybody has a 'habibi'", he says as if to excuse himself.

He jumps to a completely different subject: "My wife's uncle is in Germany since fifteen years, he's a German now, he has grown-up kids who are also German. My wife is German". I feel very confused - I ask him "But I thought you knew her from Syria?". He replies "My wife's uncle's wife's name is Barbara. It's a German name. I'm Abu Ahmed. Here in Germany people go by their first names, Alex, Roland, but in Syria Ahmed is for a child. As a grown-up I am Abu Ahmed". With a gracious flourish, he points to the sign on this shop: beautiful Arabic lettering in golden yellow, very cheerful looking. "My colleague cut the design for me. Arabic script is very old, thousands of years old". He asks me where I got his number from, I explain I was at his shop some time ago and asked him for it. Still unsure, he asks me one last time: "Are you married?". I say yes yes yes! I smile, he smiles, we wave hands and I leave.

06/12/2017
Today, I went back to Ahmed's shop with a skirt whose zipper needs to be changed. I had attempted to do it myself: the skirt was too big for me, I tried to take it in and put in a new zipper by hand - I still remember, it was in Paris, before an opening. I did such a bad job that I had to wear a long trailing scarf to hide my bottom and the butchered zipper, it was pure massacre! This was over a year ago and I haven't worn it since, I totally ruined it. It looks so monstrous, I am afraid it is beyond repair. A trying test for Ahmed's virtuosity, at any rate.

I walk in, he smiles, busily going through some clothes on his sewing machine table. Right next to it, a nice old lady sits. She looks very traditional, has beautiful wrinkles and wears the traditional khôl around her mirthful eyes. She is dressed in dark clothes, but her head scarf is pink. I assume that all of the items that Ahmed is going through right now belong to her. There is a woman's cloak, the traditional kind, two short skirts, a short dress, and some grey fabric. The lady has a lot of sense of humour, and she keeps signing things to me, raising her eyes to the ceiling, grinning, nodding, raising her shoulders this way and that, and making all kinds of little gesticulations, all the while chuckling quietly. Not a sound comes from her lips though. She has a slight case of Parkinson's so this exaggerates the nodding and the hand shaking.

Ahmed doesn't make eye contact with either of us and steadfastly works through the items. First the jeans, which he takes in at the leg, on the sewing machine and then on the overlook machine.
It is totally silent in his shop, I've been patiently waiting, along with the nodding lady, for maybe twenty minutes or half an hour - time to observe the surroundings. Since the last time, Ahmed has made many improvements. For example, I am sitting on a new chocolate brown leather sofa. Now Ahmed begins to make wide motions with some grey material. The old lady signs to me: "Is it yours?" - "No", I sign back. "Nothing is?", she insists. "Only Allah knows I suppose!". She indicates this by raising her eyes to the ceiling and lifting her hands upwards while shaking her head to and fro. Meanwhile, Ahmed is successfully tracing a perfect circle using an intricate method of mounting squares and crisscrossing them, using a ruler, working very much without a net, it seems. He folds the material in four, cuts it into a quarter circle. He repeats the process three times, each time taking in the circle about one inch. I'm beginning to feel that this cover is going to be too small for its cushion.

A man walks in with some anthracite curtains to take in. He jumps the queue and goes straight to the top of the working line. I guess I should have been more forward and show Ahmed my job as soon as I came in. I inwardly decide to do it as soon as this man departs. I wonder what is up with the old lady? Could it be that she's a family member? Just killing time? It seems crazy that she's been waiting so long.

Under the worktable, piles of plastic carrier bags bursting with various cloths. Ahmed cuts the curtains. Oh no! Another man walks in, and another two men! I'm never going to get served now! Spurred on by the danger of imminent takeover, I spring in with my black skirt and the botched job zipper. I simply ask Ahmed if he would rather I came back another day. "Nein nein" he exclaims, "Wait a minute!".
Another man walks in, and a woman - the only German - and again another woman. We are so many in this tiny shop, I can't even count, I estimate we are over ten people. Ahmed looks at

my messed up skirt, he shakes his head, the other men laugh. “Terrible”, he points to the cabin: “Go and put the skirt on!”. I, the skirt butcher, sheepishly get into the cabin. When I exit the cabin, one of the customers calls to me “Sie sehen ganz chic aus!”. I twirl around and show the assistance my gaping zipper botch job. The whole shop laughs. Ahmed smiles benignly whilst clucking his tongue, examining pensively the disaster area from a respectful distance. He doesn’t measure anything, or even checks anything, he just says: “give me the skirt”. It now appears I have jumped to the head of the queue: immediately Ahmed begins to take out the old zipper with a razor blade. He declares ”zipper is no good, you need a new one.” I am surprised at this, and try to protest - but it is no use, the maestro has decided. The audience seems to agree, I quickly give up. I retire to the recesses of the room, standing around. There is a good atmosphere now, we are only about six left in the shop. The old lady does seem a little bit peeved, still sitting mum on the same chair. Ahmed is not paying any attention to her. Maybe he’s just granny-sitting. He doesn’t measure or pin up anything, inwardly I am terrified, I probably ruined my beautiful sixties pencil skirt forever, there can’t be enough material left. Ahmed performs a quick series of reversals, stitches and fast movements, royal roaring needle going back-and-forth. The seven spectators gape in silent, awed by the performance. We are all mesmerised by the hungry teeth of the machine, swallowing material and spitting it back out, in kind of a cruel ballet. After no time at all, Ahmed brandishes his handiwork and low and behold! This zip is impeccably mounted between two smooth seams. One man exclaims his amazement: ”It’s a new skirt!”.
I dive back into the cabin, slip back into it, exit the cabin to check with a quick twirl on the mirror, still attentively observed by an utterly captivated audience, silently expressing their admiration for the virtuoso. I am overwhelmed by gratitude, Ahmed has saved my skirt!!
We exchange a lot of smiles and “chukran bezefs” and I take the opportunity of this euphoric moment to claim a second interview. ”Kein Problem, kein Problem, Montag, Dienstag, zweidrei Uhr, kein Problem“, says he. He wants five Euro for the job: nothing, especially for such a miracle. Then I realise I have no money. Ahmed is impeccably gracious “Bring it on Monday or Tuesday, no problem, no problem.” I smile my thanks whilst reflecting inwardly that I’d better find an Arabic partner to accompany me this time.

On my way back from Ahmed’s, I pass by Sultan’s place. Still definitely empty. I fear that the news from Turkey ended up being really bad, she must’ve flown back there to support her nephew’s wife. I push further into Neukölln and try to meet the tailor whose shop I used to live above of, ten years ago, in the Pannierstraße, next to the canal. She’s not here, her shop closes at one o’clock on Saturdays, no luck there today. I check out her name on the door, it looks like Greek - funny, I’d always assumed this lady had far east origins, I thought she was Vietnamese. Goes to show - my sense of physiognomy could be improved.

11/12/2017
I enter Ahmed’s shop for the second interview, and the first thing I notice is that the charming sign in Arabic is gone, now it’s a bigger sign which spells “Schneider” in German in white letters. Most certainly, it’s a better communication tool, to a wider audience, but now I wish I’d taken a picture of the old sign, as this yellow sun of a sign in Arabic held much more charm to my eyes.
I’m accompanied by my friend Ahmed , who kindly agreed to be my translator. Rastas in the wind and a redhead to boot, Ahmed is Jordanian and has a small restaurant called Fish Tank, and a talent for flippant tongue lashing, to say the least. Honestly, I am a bit worried - he might be too impatient and just knock out the bits he doesn’t find interesting. I start by insisting on this, while Ahmed the tailor finishes with something. There is a man working in the shop, adding to the previous improvements. The sink opposite the cabin is now partitioned off, and a high shelf runs around the room, high above us, lots of storage space. Already, it is stuffed with many bundles of clothes and textile, bulging black bin liners. The place looks a lot more crowded, Ahmed is growing! Ahmed-of-the-rastas asks the man whether he likes fufu. The other replies, “Yes, I’m from Ghana, I eat fufu every day in my country. You, one day Turkish, one day Lebanese, another Italian!”. He starts using a very loud machine. Ahmed the tailor joins us, he laughs at my little recording device, now he’s really comfortable with it. We dive straight in.

Ahmed translating Ahmed: “I’ve been a tailor for twenty-eight years or so. The way it all started is this: I went straight to a tailor shop, my boss liked me, trusted me, and used to leave me to do things by myself. My boss taught me everything he knew, until I opened my own shop. I started when I was thirteen years old, I didn’t finish school. When I was little, I used to love ironing, I would hang around my mother, in Damascus, watching the iron, begging her to let me iron for her.” Ahmed-of-the Rastas comments that he is the first person he ever met who actually likes to iron. Then he picks up translating. “Slowly, I learned, my master was nice. By the time I was fifteen, my boss started leaving me to manage the show alone, act as commanding officer. I was very good at my job. He used to trust me more than most of my thirty years old colleagues, he would always tell them: ‘Ahmed is awesome and is going to learn faster than all of you guys!’“. I ask if his colleagues didn’t get jealous? Long-winded reply, which Ahmed the translator compresses into “It was no problem“. To the next question, Ahmed replies: “We used to make around one hundred and twenty trenchcoats a week. I worked on developing the quality of the garments, including the lining. Then I went to the army, between eighteen and twenty. In Syria, the army service lasts two and a half years. At twenty-one, I opened my shop in Damascus. I started making my own clothes. Sometimes, I’d buy a container of clothing and ‘improve’ it.” I ask for details about the improvements. “Making small alterations, adding extra finishings to make them more bankable. I’d then resell them for much more money. Used to make wedding dresses, ballgowns, all kinds of clothes - but my specialty really was the ‘manteau’“. The “manteau”, I understand, is basically a kind of long trench-coat.

“That was in 1999, roughly. Syria was not so expensive then, so it wasn’t too hard to open the shop, all I needed to do was to buy a sewing machine and that’s it. My father had a kind of stationery and press shop, he would sell all kinds of bits and bobs, really (Ahmed struggles to translate this). My mother was a homemaker. When I opened my shop, I was alone. The shop was located in the busy, bustling suburbs of Damascus, close-by to my father’s shop. I’d wanted to open the shop in the city-centre, but I didn’t get the permit. The shop grew and grew, I had six employees, a space of one hundred and fifty square metres! I made ready-to-wear collections, and sold them myself at the markets. I had one employee specialised in alterations and customising. I didn’t have time for this, I would get big orders for wedding dresses.”
Ahmed the redhead puts in: “In Syria it’s very common for small entrepreneurs to have a whole production line. Before the war, they were completely self-sufficient, they are known throughout the Arabic world for having super good hands, magic fingers, they’re so good at making things, carpentry, mechanics, engineering, clothe-making, good cotton, they produce good stuff in Syria, they have lots of trade with Iran. Everything is ‘Made in Syria’ there! For example, they didn’t have the chain of Pizza Hut, they just made their own Pizza Hut version. They were totally self-sufficient.”

Back to Ahmed-the-tailor: “I lost everything in the war, my shop was blown to dust, three years ago. On March 12, 2015, the war in Syria started. The war changed everything.” Ahmed’s voice deepens. “I lost my car, my job. Everything expensive, I had to sell. We stayed on in wartime Damascus for two and a half years, but when my shop was blown up, I realised

fleeing was the only option for me and my family. I sold my car and everything I had left to finance my escape. First, I flew to Turkey, from Turkey to Greece, and from Greece to here. I came alone at first. Only later was I able to bring my wife and daughters, as political asylum refugees. The procedure is called 'family reunion'. It took a year for them to arrive, the exact date of their arrival in Germany is March third". We are interrupted by Richard the "carpenter, electrician, everything you want brother", who has to go and get some wood. He greets us, "Maybe we meet again, maybe not, inshallah!"
Meanwhile Ahmed-the-read-head tells me, under his breath, to change questions. "You're embarrassing him, with clients here. It's to do with the culture, he would be more open with me alone." I ask how Ahmed managed to set up his shop here, but...

One more interruption, a new order. I observe Ahmed refusing money from the departing client. Puzzled, I raise an eyebrow. Ahmed-the-redhead explains: "For us Middle-Easterners, it's impossible to accept money before a job is done." — "It's bad luck!" adds Ahmed the tailor. "So strange how in Germany, people have to pay before the job is done! I found the shop because I heard about it from a friend. I went to see it, I negotiated the rent. I started by renovating it, slowly getting things to look better. I sat alone the whole first month, waiting for customers. Nobody came, no man, no woman! I had to pay the rent from my own pocket".

A few moments later, a very striking woman, eyes magnified with a halo of khôl, a large forehead and altogether striking features, strides in, she has a lot of presence. She is dressed entirely in black, short shiny leather pants, black boots, slate black tights, a trailing sheer scarf, her hair side parted and covering one half of her features. The combination makes for an outlandish look. She looks oriental, very sultry, lots of khôl, foundation, lipstick, much make-up. She greets us with her smoky eyes, Ahmed softly touches her bum. Although I'm a little surprised, I immediately jump to the conclusion that it must be his wife, a very modern wife! What convinces me is that she goes straight in to sit in on Ahmed's chair in front of the sewing machine: she's obvious used to seeing him often and this is a familiar environment to her. She sits there and gazes far into the horizon, waiting quietly.

Back to Ahmed. He had to borrow money from friends, he's probably in debt. The lady sitting at the sewing machine is kind of twinkling, almost winking me, there's something uncanny about her. She turns out to be one of Ahmed's investors. "I borrowed money from three friends."
Rasta-Ahmed is losing his Arabic", he says. I ask him to ask his namesake to name his worse tailoring misadventure: "Forget it, the tailor is way too proud to actually open up about something like this!" he pronounces. He's probably right, but it's a bit frustrating not being able to check this out for myself.
I rephrase my question and ask: "What is the most hilarious story you can tell us about in your tailoring career?". The answer comes with some delay between the two Ahmeds: "Once I got my hand cut right through with the roller blade cutter. All four fingers fell off. The Damascus surgeons, thank God, also had magic fingers and they sewed them all back on. I couldn't work for a month, I could just boss my staff around, not use my hands". I exclaim "How extraordinary! Only one month!", at which point Ahmed nods his agreement and adds: "I was cutting through a huge pile of cloth for coats with a massive roller blade cutter. The cutter that I have now in this shop is a baby!". I insist with my request for a funny story, as this last one was more gruesome than funny. It was apparently a funny question, to which I again get a weird answer. He starts chuckling and laughing somewhat embarrassedly: "I love it when ladies come into my shop!" Then he starts laughing like a school kid. "My" Ahmed was annoyingly right: the tailor will not confess to any mistakes, he's too proud to admit to any failure. "My" Ahmed comments: "If Arab ladies come to this place it definitely means that he's good, because Arab ladies are the toughest in the world." I laugh, he elaborates: "At home, the man runs around the house like a headless chicken executing his wife's orders. He goes to work, but she handles the salary. She reigns over home like a despot." "My" Ahmed asks for business cards to put in his restaurant, but Ahmed-the-tailor has none.

I insist with my mistake question, which "my" Ahmed just continues to dismiss. I am trying not to show that I'm rather frustrated with my translator, he is a friend, but he is not helping me out, imprinting his personality so strongly on this interview. Eventually he makes an effort and asks, I hope, the question again. Ahmed the tailor now tells me "To estimate if a woman is going to be a good customer, I look at her shoes, this is how I know if she has taste. I also work out how much I can charge her from looking at her shoes. I always try to make my customers happy. I'm not too impressed with the way women dress here. Ah, French women, the Champs Elysés! That's taste!". The woman sitting at the sewing machine pipes in and starts talking in Arabic. My Ahmed, whispering loudly in my ear, informs me that the woman is a man. She is a little bit too athletic to be a woman, it's true. It's always funny, this moment of doubt between the two genders. Anyway, she switches to German: "German people dress well, it's just here in Berlin that they don't, because it's not German people, but Polish people or Russian people... Berlin is too poor." Whoops, racist comments! I try to reframe the conversation. Her deep voice eradicates my last doubts, she is definitely a transvestite, which is unexpected in this context. "The Germans have no interest in fashion", says Ahmed "they are too practical minded for that."

A German-speaking client walks in, Ahmed talking to her in front of the shop. Meanwhile, Ahmed-of-the-red-rastas and I discuss heatedly our further questions, in hushed, half-swallowed words. Ahmed-the-tailor is already back. I ask him when he met his wife, it's not too clear for me yet. He turns his eyes to the ceiling, thinks a little: "Seventeen years ago." I ask him how old his daughters are. "The older one, Sara, is fifteen, my youngest daughter Zima is thirteen". I ask him to confirm that he makes all of the clothing for his family, his wife and his daughters. He confirms. "I make all of their clothes!" — "Ahmed's daughters and wife must be very happy women!" I exclaim. We all laugh. But Ahmed nods his head enthusiastically, he obviously really enjoys dressing his family. He then goes on to explain: "If I'm not interrupted by other jobs, I can make three pieces in one day." He is very proud of his velocity, that is something important to him.

I ask how it was to arrive in Berlin, how it went. "I was very stressed, it was a very stressful time. In the beginning, I'd cry from the stress. Now I feel much better. Of course there's still a war in Syria, but my family's here, I've a social network, clients, I feel almost like I'm in Damascus. My brothers and sisters are still there". I ask him to state where he lives with his family. "In Brandenburg. In a place called Lückenwalde. Close-by to Teltow" - "There's a lake there", "my" Ahmed tells me. Ahmed-the-tailor continues, "It takes me an hour to travel from home to work. There are many Germans, my wife is very good at talking with them, they visit each other, for ice cream, chats. We're quite happy there, we've really made friends. Basically, there's only old people there, they have lots of time - they are glad to be befriended by a new young family. We even have an eighty-years-old friend. She comes over to take my daughters for walks and outings. My daughters, especially Zima, are really starting to pick up German. They only arrived last March. They started going to school and that's going quite well."

I ask again to clarify whether they live in a house or a flat - it does turn out that they have an apartment. That makes more sense.
I ask Ahmed: "What is your dream, for yourself and your wife, your little daughters?". He talks for quite a while in Arab, I hear a lot of inshallas - he likes this question, I guess. "I'd

develop my shop, have a working business, eventually start a new clothing line. I'm already working on an idea: I buy clothes in Turkey, bring them here. Then I customise them, make them look fancier, and resell them in Berlin. Of course one day I'll go back to Syria, but as long as all the craziness goes on, I'm staying here!".
I realise both Ahmeds need to get back to work, so we start packing up our stuff and putting on our coats. I remind Ahmed the tailor I owe him money for the skirt job, which for some reason I still haven't paid for. "No problem, no problem, you don't have to pay now!". I have to protest to pay. This is a very oriental customer moment I guess. I slip money into his hand, but he gives me much of it back. "No, it's just five Euros. No discussing! How long have you been in Berlin?". I have to laugh "Oh, I have been here for a long time!". Ahmed asks again if I have any children. "TWO!" I exclaim. He also wants the names. "My son Balthazar is eighteen and my daughter Céleste is fifteen. Ahmed wants to know if they speak German. "Yes, as well as English and French. They were born in Hungary, so they also know some Hungarian." — "How often do you go to France?" - "Sometimes. We'll be going for Christmas". Now Ahmed-of-the-rastas is talking to Richard the electrician, carpenter, you name it, man. He wants his phone number, he says he has work to do in his restaurant, Richard would be perfect for this.

Richard: "Hey man, come on, you know I'm your man, definitely I can do anything you need". Ahmed then shows a new table, made by Richard, very strong and solid. "I need it to be very strong, to cut." Richard has brought many pieces of very strong wooden sticks, very thick, probably ten by tens. We start exiting the shop, I promise Ahmed to come back for more alterations. We're on the street now. Both Ahmeds are still chatting in very fast Arab, "Bislama!!!!" Ahmed-the-tailor returns to his shop and we amble down the street.

Rasta-Ahmed concludes "I mean, I think this Ahmed is very nice. I don't know about all the women talk and stuff. Oh yeah that woman at the sewing machine.. Yeah right that was a man." - "Indeed, it's a guy", I say. - "He talks too much about women!" - "That's why I always tell him that I'm married, to avoid any misunderstandings. He really loves women I guess", we laugh. He asks me to take a picture of the scribbled number written in my notebook, Richard's contact, and send it to him. "I always need a handyman, the one I have now is no good." A car drowns out our words and I take my leave.

08/01/2018
My phone just informed me that I have a new memory, which is too strange for words to describe. I've just left Ahmed's shop after picking up this she-bear coat that I'd brought him to line anew, with a fleshy pink satin. The job was done, the coat hanging primly on the rack. It was quite well-made, although - well - I did find it a little bit carelessly made, let's face it, disappointing. The un-ironed seams looked like folds of fat on a pink sun-burned belly. The most disturbing detail was the bottom seam, stitched in a zig-zagging line, really shoddy. Honestly, I don't think I can live with this hem. I'll have to redo it myself, by hand. Anyway, the rest is fine. Just needs a dash of ironing.

Ahmed studied my reaction, I think he could tell that I wasn't entirely over the moon. He asked me if I was happy with the lining. I mumbled "Yes, yes, just the hemline is disturbing me a little bit" He doesn't understand. Another man is here, with very large green pools for eyes on a round, very pale face. He is a nice fellow, and starts to help with translating. At first I think he speaks very good German so I explain everything. "I'm sorry for being so picky about details, I'm an artist, I tend to notice details, I feel bad to criticise, but well." The guy is nice, I can tell that he's a much better interpreter than my friend last week. He definitely spends as much time explaining what I said in Arabic as what I said in German.
After little while he tells me "Please do not speak so fast, my German is not very good". I bawl: "I see, so you are new too!" - "Yes, new! We are all new here!". He points happily towards Ahmed. "We arrived together, on the same plane." That is a very interesting piece of information. I ask him his name: "My name is Anas. We knew each other in Damascus, we planned our escape together. I like being in Berlin, but I think there's too many people!" - "Too many people!? But you should see Paris or London", I tell him. He looks bewildered. He points to his striking eyes, and makes arrows with his fingers: "Too many eyes around here. I keep bumping into other people's gazes. I live around the corner, on WerbellinStraße, in a two room flat."

It's a little difficult to communicate, but definitely much easier than with Ahmed. I understand that in his case, his family arrived before himself, a year ago, but that doesn't make any sense. It must be that he got here a year ago, and his family six months ago. He explains again: "There's really too many people in Berlin, especially people looking for flats, I've been looking for a bigger place - we're a large family - for six months. Every day I send seven emails, more or less. Each time the answer is the same: negative, another family already took the flat. I work at "The Hampton", a mobile shop around the corner, Boddinstraße. But only one hour a day, I cannot work much because I'm studying again!". And I find out that he just got his B1 diploma. He explains: "In Damascus, I could speak good English, but it's all gone now. I hadn't been to school for twenty-five years,I had to go back. In Damascus, I worked in cosmetics, I sold everything from Khôl to Hennah, anything for beauty", he says. "And there, I used to speak English with dozens of customers."

They laugh a lot and they seem to be very good friends, Anas has brought a big bag, a backliner, of stuff to be altered. Steadfastly, Ahmed works his way through it, he seems in a very good mood today! According to Anas, "Other towns are not so busy as Berlin. There are other cities with lots of flats, but then there is no work. Here, I find lots of work. I'm very happy to work at the mobile phone shop." He adds: "I'm never going back to Syria, not so long as Bashar al-Assad is there. We must stop this!", Ahmed nods his head enthusiastically, he goes on to say: "As soon as Bashar is gone, I'll be going back-and-forth between Germany and Syria." They both conclude: "Who's to know what will happen in the future, we just take it one day at a time".

Anas and Ahmad call each-other "habibi", it's cute to witness this sweet—naming. Anas leaves the shop and I ask Ahmed how much he wants for the lining of the coat. He only wants 10, an unbeatably good price. I tell him so, and thank him. I fish out a fifty Euro bill - I don't have anything smaller, but he can't change it. It is 13:50, he didn't get so much cash yet. He waves his hands, shrugs his shoulders: "Later later." - "OK I will pick up my coat later too", but he insists and thrusts the coat in my arms: "Later, later!". The trust aspect is very important in his shop. I sheepishly thank him and prepare to leave. Just as I have my hand on the door, our lady from the last time arrives: the same doddering head and permanent mumbling of the eyes. She doesn't say much, walks into the shop, this time she's dressed in light grey from head to toe, she seems a little bit more befuddled than the other day. Ahmed calls her mama, I ask him if it is indeed his mother. "No, she's just the neighbour, a Turkish lady.", he tells me. I think she wants to sit and I try to make space on the chair for her, but he shakes his head, and so does she. As usual I'm a little bit puzzled as to what to do so I just politely inquire with Ahmed about his closing time today: "I close at 19:30." - "That's very late, especially on a Saturday in Germany"." - "It's a good thing!" Amused, he points to about one million piles in his shop and says: "Here's work, Here's work, Here's work, lots of work! This is good! Good!". I smile and wave goodbye to both of them, and I take my leave in broken Arabic.

AHMED

27/10/2017

Es schüttet wie aus Eimern und ich kann die kleine elektrische Leuchtkette an Ahmeds Fenster leuchten sehen - ich denke ein gutes Omen. Ahmed begrüßt mich mit einem Lächeln, während er rasend schnell Material durch seine surrende Nähmaschine schiebt. Er arbeitet an einem sehr langen schwarzen Mantel, die Art die vom Musliminnen getragen wird. Drei Frauen sitzen in dem Laden, in einem Kindersitz ein Kleinkind – ein kleines Mädchen. Sie lächeln mich alle strahlend an, fragen woher ich komme. Nur eine kann Deutsch sprechen, sie lebt seit zwanzig Jahren in Deutschland, ihre Freundin erst seit ein paar Monaten, sie kann die Sprache noch nicht. Die dritte Frau stellt sich als Teenager heraus, ihre Tochter, wie auch das kleine Mädchen. Sie wartet auf den langen Mantel. Unter sich sprechen sie arabisch, sie sind aus Syrien. Sie tragen alle Kopftuch, außer dem kleinen Mädchen. Sie sind sehr freundlich und neugierig auf mich.

Eine schöne Frau, fantastisch helle Augen und langes, üppiges, frei fallendes Haar, entert den Laden, wie ein Tiger. In Höchstgeschwindigkeit sagt sie ein paar Worte zu Ahmed, auch in Arabisch. Sie nimmt eine Jacke vom Ständer, knallt fünf Euro auf Ahmeds Nähmaschine und verschwindet. Noch ein paar Typen kommen, um Sachen abzuholen; Ahmed sagt, sie sollen später wiederkommen. Sein Laden ist der einfachste den ich bisher gesehen habe, er ist recht leer. Es gibt nur eine Nähmaschine, eine Overlock-Maschine, einen kleinen professionellen Stoffschneider und ein Bügeleisen auf einem Bügelbrett. Im hinteren Teil ist eine Ankleidekabine. Die Frau benutzt sie um, obwohl voll bekleidet, ihren Mantel anzuprobieren. Ihre Tochter geht mit, um zu helfen. Sie diskutiert die Arbeit mit ihren Begleiterinnen, lächelt in die Runde und ist von der Arbeit sehr angetan. Sehr glücklich macht sie sich mit ihrem kleinen Hofstaat auf den Weg.

Wir beide bleiben alleine zurück. Ich biete den Kuchen an den ich mitgebracht habe, aber ich kann sehen, dass das kein Tee-und-Kuchen Interview wird, Alles ist spontan und mitten an einem Arbeitstag – keine besondere Zeit ist eingeräumt. Also lasse ich ihn in der Papiertüte, so dass er ihn zuhause mit seiner Familie genießen kann. Er dank freundlich und legt ihn auf die Nähmaschine. Er ist von meinem Aufnahmegerät abgeschreckt und wie verbringen die nächsten zehn Minuten damit herauszuarbeiten, weshalb ich genau hier bin und was das Gerät hier soll. Letztendlich ruft er eine Frau an die Deutsch spricht und der ich unbeholfen versuche zu erklären, was ich machen möchte. Am Ende meiner ausschweifenden Erklärungen fasst sie ganz nett zusammen: „du möchtest ihm ein paar Fragen stellen." Endlich versteht Ahmed, dass ich hier bin, um ihm Fragen zu stellen und erscheint erfreut sie zu beantworten. Ohne weitere Umstände legt er los.

„Mein Name ist Ahmed, ich bin zweiundvierzig, ich komme aus Syrien, ich bin seit zweieinhalb Jahren in Berlin und ich bin verheiratet." Er sieht ein bisschen verlegen aus, als er sagt er sei verheiratet – ich denke, da könnte ein kleines bisschen Wirrwarr sein, an dem Punkt. „Ich bin Ahmed, ich bin Schneider, ich bin Designer", sagt er, „seit achtundzwanzig Jahren. Ich habe in Damaskus gearbeitet, in der Stadt in der ich geboren wurde. Ich habe Röcke, Jacken und Mäntel entworfen. Ich habe mit dreizehn angefangen die Kunst des Nähens zu lernen. Meine Frau ist Hausfrau, sie bleibt zuhause und schaut nach den Kindern. Unsere Kinder sind erst vor acht Monaten in Deutschland angekommen. Damaskus war ein guter Ort. Die Dinge waren nicht teuer – Essen, Trinken, Wohnen, alles war bezahlbar. Meine Dienste eingeschlossen: preiswert. Wegen des Krieges stiegen die Preise.

Ich habe den Laden gerade erst bekommen, seit fünf Monaten. Ich bin ein sehr guter Schneider. Ich mache Kleidung für Frauen, und auch Männer. In Damaskus tragen alle Frauen „Manteau", den langen Mantel. Ich habe meiner Frau ihr Hochzeitskleid für unsere Hochzeit gemacht. Vor fünf Jahren, in Damaskus, hatte ich viel Arbeit. Sie kam den ganzen Tag über herein. Ich machte Hunderte von Kleidungsstücken, maßgeschneidert. Jetzt wollen die Leute nur Änderungen. „Ahmed, kürz das, Ahmed, mach das größer, mach es kleiner, mach es länger!"" er lacht gutmütig. Er ergänzt, dass in Deutschland maßgefertigte Kleidung zu teuer wäre, weil das Material hier so teuer ist. „Und sowieso, jeder kauft billige Bekleidung aus China, natürlich viel billiger, als Bekleidung die ich mache." Er zeigt mir eine Rolle haftendes Saumbündchen und erklärt: „Materialien sind teuer, die Rolle, die ich hier in Händen halte, kostet fünfzehn Euro. Für vierzig Meter! Das ist wirklich teuer. Die Angebote im Internet sind auch zu teuer. Ich kaufe Alles auf dem Markt am Maybachufer - da kann ich Material zu bezahlbaren Preisen finden. Das ist es, was die Schneider hier so teuer macht, die hohen Preise für das Material!"

Er zeigt mir einen professionellen Stoffschneider mit runder Klinge: „Ich habe ihn secondhand gekauft, er hat mich einhundertfünfzig Euro gekostet. In Damaskus hatte ich einen, der konnte 25 Zentimeter schneiden. Der hier schafft gerade einmal einen. Ich bin ein Jahr lang auf eine Deutschschule gegangen. Es ist nicht einfach Fortschritte zu machen. Ich fühle mich sehr alleingelassen mit meinem Unterfangen ein Geschäft aufzumachen. Ich habe das Job Center um Hilfe gebeten, ich bat sie mir eintausend Euro für den Start zu leihen, aber sie haben abgelehnt. Vor fünf Jahren in Damaskus wäre das kein Problem gewesen! Ich hätte einen Freund fragen können. Tausend hier und tausend da und das Geld wäre leicht zusammengekommen. Wie auch immer, ich habe es irgendwie geschafft und mein Geschäft eröffnet. Jetzt verdiene ich um die fünfzig Euro am Tag. Ich arbeite wirklich preiswert. Ich hoffe, ich bekomme im Lauf der Zeit mehr Arbeit. Ich kann für wenig Geld Kleidung für jeden machen, Mann, Frau, kleine Kinder. Wenn du viel Geld hast, ist das kein Problem. Ich will es billig machen. Ich mache die ganze Kleidung für meine Frau und meine Kinder. Ich kann einen Mantel in zwei Tagen machen, mit Futter.

Früher haben sechs Männer für mich gearbeitet. Jeder machte sechs Mäntel pro Tag, wir arbeiteten zwölf Stunden am Tag, jeden Tag. Sie arbeiteten an den Nähmaschinen; ich war am Schneidetisch, habe Anweisungen gegeben und bei den Kunden Maß genommen. Ich hatte nur freitags frei, um beten zu gehen und lange Spaziergänge mit meiner Frau und den Kindern zu machen, gemeinsame Zeit zu genießen. Ich habe zwei Töchter, sie sind so schön. Die erste heißt Zima, sie ist fünfzehn. Meine zweite Tochter heißt Zara, sie ist elf, so klein, so kostbar. Ich mache all die Kleidung für meine Damen, Alles für sie maßgeschneidert." Er zeigt mir einen Bestellkatalog, auf dem einige Anzüge abgebildet sind und erklärt, dass er jedes von diesen Modellen auf die Maße des Trägers schneidern kann. Jetzt verstehe ich, was er mit Designer meinte, er meint, dass er ein Schneidermeister ist und kein Änderungsschneider. „Meine Kunden sind immer so glücklich und dankbar, wenn sie meine Sachen anziehen! „Oh Ahmed, ich danke dir, ich danke dir, Ahmed!" Ich kann ein Sakko, mit Futter, in fünf Stunden machen. Das ist eine Menge Arbeit! Wenn ich nach Hause komme, kocht meine Frau für mich."

Er lebt in Luckenwalde, ungefähr eine Stunde mit dem Zug von hier. Er lebt in einem Haus, ich verstehe, dass es einen Garten gibt. Ich verdiene ungefähr 400 – 450 Euro mit meinem Geschäft. Das Job Center gibt 400 Euro obendrauf und bezahlt für das Haus. Die ersten vier Monate in meinem Laden hatte ich keine Arbeit. Niemand kam, keine Frau, kein Mann." Das

verstehe ich, denn als ich vor etwa fünf Wochen zu Ahmeds Laden kam, erinnere ich mich, dass er offen und freundlich war, aber mit einem ziemlich traurigen Lächeln. Meine Freundin Sara-Lena, die mich begleitete, schien zu denken, dass er zu traurig für ein Interview wäre.

„Ich stehe jeden Tag um sechs auf, trinke einen Kaffee und rauche zwei Zigaretten. Um 6.30 Uhr bin ich am Bahnhof." Er wechselt plötzlich das Thema und fragt, ob ich ein Haus oder eine Wohnung habe. Eine Wohnung, sage ich ihm. Von da springt er weiter und fragt mich, ob ich auch verheiratet bin. Ich sage ja und, um das zu klären, ergänze ich, dass ich zwei Kinder habe. Er fragt nach meinem Alter. Ich versuche meine peinliche Berührung zu überspielen und schmunzele ein bisschen, dann sage ich es ihm. Ahmed scheint sehr glücklich über mein Alter, er lacht in sich hinein und lächelt. „Das ist eine gute Sache, das wir gleich alt sind." Dann korrigiert er sich selbst, „Nein, das ist keine gute Sache", die ganze Zeit in sich hinein lächelnd und seinen Kopf schüttelnd. Er ist sehr respektvoll, aber nichts desto trotz vermute ich ein bisschen unterschwelliges Flirten – und bin auf Habacht.
Er informiert mich dann, dass sein Bruder Chefkoch auf dem „Champ Elisés" ist und seine Augen funkeln, als ob das der Garten Eden oder so etwas wäre. Wieder macht er einen Schwenk in der Unterhaltung und verkündet: „Deutschland ist sehr gut! Frauen kommen hier her und ich ändere ihre Kleider. Sie sagen, es ist nicht teuer. Du musst auch kommen, damit ich deine Kleider ändern kann."

Ich zeige Ahmed meinen Mantel, eine lose gewebte Angelegenheit aus Mohair, den ich schon seit Jahren ausbessern lassen will. Er ist wirklich schön und einzigartig, aber die Mohair-Fäden lösen sich um die Knöpfe an der Vorderseite herum auf und er sieht ziemlich mitgenommen aus. Ich habe ihn schon anderen Schneidern gezeigt, aber bisher hat mich noch keiner überzeugt. Mal sehen, was er anbietet. Ich erkläre ihm meine Idee, die Seite der Knöpfe zu tauschen, so dass das neue Stück Mantel über dem Abgenutzten liegt. Es erscheint mir eine einfache und gute Lösung. Ahmed ist total dagegen. „Auf keinen Fall! Diese Seite ist für Frauen, diese für Männer!" Er fährt fort, mir zu zeigen, wie er ein Stück Material aus einem anderen Teil des Mantels nehmen und an der Vorderseite, wo die Knöpfe sind, einnähen will – wie einen gigantischen Flicken der vom Kragen bis zum Saum reicht. Er versichert mir: „Es wird völlig unsichtbar sein!", mit vielem Kopfnicken, um sein Unsichtbarkeits-Versprechen zu unterstreichen. Ich glaube ihm nicht, keine Sekunde! Ich werde es nicht riskieren, meinen schönen, wertvollen Mantel von einem riesigen „Cache-misére" an der Vorderseite ruinieren zu lassen. Ich mag die Lösung überhaupt nicht. Ich erkläre lachend: „Ahmed, ich mag es so nicht! Nein! Ich will es so nicht machen. Ich möchte die Knopfleiste mit der Knopflochleiste tauschen. Es ist mir egal, ob Männer auf der einen und Frauen auf der anderen Seite zugeknöpft sein müssen, das ist eine alberne Konvention!"
Aber Ahmed, immer noch lächelnd und ein Riesentheater um meinen Mantel machend, erzählt mir weiter, wie er ihn ausbessern will, völlig meine Wünsche ignorierend. Wieder und wieder erklärt er: „Rechts ist für Frauen, links ist für Männer." Ich gebe auf. Ich kann sehen, dass Ahmed keinesfalls diese Regel in Frage stellen wird. Ich werde ein paar andere Teile finden müssen, die ich ihm bringen kann. Ich werde nicht meinen Mantel riskieren.

„Meine Deutschlehrerin lobt mich, dass ich sehr gut bin für einen Zweiundvierzigjährigen. Sie sagt „Ahmed, du sprichst gut! Gut genug, um zu verstehen und deinem Geschäft nachzugehen. Ich höre jeden Tag zwei oder drei Stunden Radio, zuhause und bei der Arbeit. Zuhause korrigiert meine Frau mein Schreiben. Sie sagt „Ahmed, warum? Ahmed, was ist das? Oh Ahmed, das ist falsch! Mach es noch einmal!". Offensichtlich liebt er seine Frau, er spricht zärtlich von ihr. „Meine Frau war sehr gut in der Schule in Damaskus. Meine Kinder haben es geschafft fließend Deutsch zu lernen, Zima bekommt Spitzennoten." Obwohl er offen mit mir spricht und wohl auch länger mit mir reden würde, entscheide ich dem Interview ein Ende zu machen, weil es mit unserer Sprachbarriere sehr schwierig durchzuführen ist. Ich erkläre, dass ich mit einigen Kleidungsstücken zum ändern wiederkommen werde. „Dann können wir unsere Unterhaltung fortsetzten." Er lacht und schmunzelt und scheint sehr zufrieden, und ich mache mich auf den Weg. Er kommt mit aus der Tür mit mir und bietet mir, sich selbst eine anzündend, eine Zigarette an. Ich beschließe zu akzeptieren.
„Bist du jetzt allein zuhause?" Mit meinem besten Pokerface schüttele ich den Kopf. „Nein, nein, ich bin nicht alleine, ich lebe mit meiner Familie!" Er nickt unsicher. Er kämpft sichtlich darum die Situation zu verstehen. Ich denke, er ist ein bisschen verblüfft von den Codes der Beziehungen von Mann und Frau in Deutschland. „In Deutschland hat niemand einen Ehemann und jeder hat einen „Habibi"", sagt er, wie um sich zu entschuldigen.

Er kommt auf ein völlig anderes Thema: „Der Onkel meiner Frau ist seit fünfzehn Jahren in Deutschland. Er ist jetzt Deutscher und er hat erwachsene Kinder die auch Deutsche sind. Meine Frau ist Deutsche." Ich bin sehr verwirrt. Ich frage ihn: „Aber ich dachte, du kennst deine Frau aus Syrien?" Er gibt zurück: „Die Frau des Onkels meiner Frau heißt Barbara. Das ist ein deutscher Name. Ich bin Abu Ahmed. Hier in Deutschland benutzen die Leute meist ihre Vornamen, Alex, Roland, aber in Syrien ist Ahmed ein Name für ein Kind. Als Erwachsener bin ich Abu Ahmed." Mit einer graziösen Geste zeigt er auf das Schild seines Ladens, ein wunderschöner arabischer Schriftzug, goldgelb, der sehr heiter aussieht. „Mein Kollege hat den Entwurf für mich geschnitten. Die arabische Schrift ist sehr alt, Tausende von Jahren alt." Er fragt mich, woher ich seine Telefonnummer habe und ich erkläre ihm, dass ich vor längerer Zeit in seinem Laden war und ihn gebeten habe, sie mir zu geben. Immer noch unsicher fragt er mich „Bist du verheiratet?" Ich sage ja, ja, ja! Ich lächele, er lächelt, wir winken und ich gehe.

06/12/2017
Heute gehe mit einem Rock, bei dem der Reißverschluss gewechselt werden muss, zurück zu Ahmeds Laden. Ich hatte versucht es selbst zu machen: der Rock war zu groß für mich. Ich versuchte in enger zu machen und ein neues Reißverschlussband einzunähen - ich erinnere mich noch, es war in Paris vor einer Eröffnung. Ich machte einen so miesen Job, dass ich einen langen Schal hinter mir her schleifen musste, um mein Hinterteil und den niedergemetzelten Reißverschluss zu verbergen, es war das reinste Massaker! Das ist über ein Jahr her und ich habe ihn seitdem nicht getragen, ich hatte ihn total ruiniert. Er sieht so monströs aus, dass ich befürchte er ist nicht zu retten. Ein Test, um Ahmeds Virtuosität auf die Probe zu stellen, zu jedem Preis.

Ich trete ein, er lächelt während er geschäftig einige Kleidungsstücke auf seinem Nähmaschinentisch durchsieht. Direkt daneben sitz eine nette ältere Dame. Sie sieht sehr traditionell aus, hat schöne Falten und trägt einen traditionellen „Khol" um ihre heiteren Augen. Sie ist dunkel gekleidet, aber ihr Kopftuch ist pink. Ich nehme an, dass die ganze Kleidung die Ahmed gerade durchsieht ihr gehört. Da ist ein Mantel, die traditionelle Art, zwei kurze Röcke, ein kurzes Kleid und etwas grauer Stoff. Die Dame hat einen guten Sinn für Humor, sie signalisiert mir ununterbrochen etwas, hebt die Augen zur Decke, grinst, nickt, hebt ihre Schulter mal so, mal so, und machte alle möglichen kleinen Gesten, die ganze Zeit leise schmunzelnd. Es kommt aber kein laut von ihren Lippen. Sie hat einen leichten Fall von Parkinson, was das Nicken und das Zittern der Hände verstärkt.

Ahmed macht keinen Augenkontakt zu einer von uns und arbeitet sich unerschütterlich durch die Teile. Zuerst die Jeans, deren eines Bein er auf die Nähmaschine gelegt hat, dann weiter an der Overlook-Maschine.
Es ist völlig still im Laden, ich warte, mit der nickenden Dame, seit vielleicht zwanzig Minuten

oder einer halbe Stunde – Zeit mir die Umgebung anzuschauen. Ahmed hat seit dem letzten Mal viele Verbesserung gemacht. Zum Beispiel sitze ich auf einem neuen, schokoladenbrauen Sofa. Jetzt beginnt Ahmed weite Bewegungen mit dem grauen Material zu machen. Die alte Dame signalisiert mir: „Ist das deins?“ – „Nein“, signalisiere ich zurück. „Nichts davon?“, fragt sie nach. „Ich nehme an, nur Allah weiß!“ Sie zeigt das an, indem sie ihre Hände hebt während sie ihren Kopf hin und her schüttelt. Zwischenzeitlich hat Ahmed einen perfekten Kreis angezeichnet. Er benutzt eine raffinierte Methode Quadrate zu stapeln, sie mit einem Lineal hin und her zu schieben. Er arbeitet anscheinend sehr frei. Er faltet das Material in vier Teile und schneidet es in Viertelkreise. Er wiederholt den Vorgang drei Mal und macht den Kreis jedes Mal um etwa 2 cm kleiner. Ich fange an zu glauben, dass dieser Bezug zu klein wird für das Kissen.

Ein Mann kommt mit einigen anthrazitfarbenen Vorhängen die abgenäht werden sollen herein. Er drängelt sich vor und geht direkt zur Spitze der Watreschlange. Ich schätze, ich hätte etwas forscher sein und Ahmed meinen Auftrag zeigen sollen sobald ich hereinkam. Innerlich entscheide ich, das zu machen sobald der Mann geht. Ich frage mich, was mit der alten Dame los ist. Könnte sie ein Familienmitglied sein? Schlägt sie nur die Zeit tot? Es scheint verrückt, dass sie so lange wartet.

Unter dem Arbeitstisch quillt ein Stapel Plastiktragetaschen über von verschiedener Kleidung. Ahmed schneidet die Vorhänge. Oh nein! Ein weiterer Mann kommt herein, und nochmal zwei Männer! Jetzt werde ich nie bedient werden! Angespornt von der Gefahr einer bevorstehenden Übernahme gehe ich mit meinem schwarzen Rock und dem verpfuschten Reißverschluss dazwischen. Ich frage Ahmed einfach, ob ich besser an einem anderen Tag wiederkommen soll. „Nein, Nein“, ruft er aus, „Warte eine Minute!“

Noch ein Mann kommt herein, und eine Frau - die einzige Deutsche – und noch eine Frau. Wir sind so Viele in dem winzigen Laden, dass ich nicht einmal mehr zählen kann. Ich schätze wir sind mehr als zehn Personen. Ahmed schaut sich meinen verhunzten Rock an, er schüttelt den Kopf, die Männer lachen. „Schrecklich“, er zeigt auf die Kabine: „Geh und zieh den Rock an!“ Ich, die Rock Schlächterin, verschwinde kleinlaut in der Kabine. Als ich wieder heraus komme ruft mir ein Kunde zu: „Sie sehen chic aus!“ Ich wirbele herum und zeige meinem Beistand meinen klaffenden Reißverschluss-Pfusch. Der ganze Laden lacht. Ahmed lächelt wohlwollend, während er mit der Zunge schnalzt und nachdenklich die Zone der Verheerung aus respektvollem Abstand begutachtet. Er misst nichts und prüft auch nichts, er sagt nur: „Gib mir den Rock.“ Jetzt stellt sich heraus, dass ich an die Spitze der Schlange gesprungen bin: unverzüglich fängt Ahmed an, meinen alten Reißverschluss mit einem Rasiermesser herauszutrennen. Er erklärt: „Der Reißverschluss ist nicht gut, du brauchst einen Neuen.“ Das überrascht mich und ich versuche zu protestieren – aber es hat keinen Zweck, der Meister hat entschieden. Das Publikum scheint zuzustimmen, ich gebe schnell auf. Ich ziehe mich in die Tiefen des Raums zurück, stehe herum. Die Atmosphäre ist jetzt gut, wir sind nur noch zu sechst im Laden. Die alte Dame scheint etwas verstimmt, wie sie da immer noch schweigend auf ihrem Stuhl sitzt. Ahmed widmet ihr keinerlei Aufmerksamkeit. Vielleicht ist er einfach der Oma-Sitter. Er nimmt nicht Maß, oder steckt irgendetwas fest, innerlich bin ich entsetzt, wahrscheinlich habe ich meinen wunderbaren sechziger Jahre Bleistift-Rock für immer ruiniert, da kann einfach nicht genug Stoff übrigbleiben. Ahmed vollzieht eine Reihe von Wendungen, Stichen und schnellen Bewegungen, die majestätisch surrende Nadel geht vor und zurück. Die sieben Zuschauer halten die Luft, hingerissen von der Vorführung. Wir alle sind hypnotisiert vom hungrigen Zahn der Maschine, die Material schluckt und wieder ausspuckt, in einer Art grausamen Ballett. Nach absolut keiner Zeit schwenkt Ahmed sein Werk und: Zeichen und Wunder! Der Reißverschluss sitzt tadellos zwischen zwei glatten Säumen. Ein Mann macht seiner Bewunderung Luft: „Das ist ein neuer Rock!“

Ich schlüpfe zurück in die Kabine, wieder in den Rock, verlasse die Kabine, prüfe mit einer raschen Drehung vor dem Spiegel, immer noch aufmerksam beobachtet von einem völlig hingerissenen Publikum, das still seiner Bewunderung für den Virtuosen Ausdruck verleiht. Ich bin überwältigt von Dankbarkeit, Ahmed hat meinen Rock gerettet!! Wir tauschen viele Lächeln und „chukran bezefs“ und ich nutze den euphorischen Moment, um ein zweites Interview einzufordern. „Kein Problem, kein Problem, Montag, Dienstag, zwei, drei Uhr, kein Problem“, sagt er. Er möchte fünf Euro für die Arbeit: Nichts, besonders für so ein Wunder. Dann stelle ich fest, dass ich kein Geld dabeihabe. Ahmed ist von untadeliger Güte: „Bring es Montag oder Dienstag, kein Problem, kein Problem.“ Ich lächele meinen Dank, während ich innerlich feststelle, dass ich dann wohl besser einen arabischen Partner finde, der mich begleitet.

Auf meinem Rückweg von Ahmed komme ich an Sultans Schneiderei vorbei, immer noch eindeutig leer. Ich fürchte, dass sich die Nachrichten aus der Türkei als wirklich schlimm herausgestellt haben. Sie muss zurückgeflogen sein, um die Frau ihres Neffen zu unterstützen. Ich dringe tiefer nach Neukölln ein und versuche die Schneiderin zu treffen über deren Laden ich vor zehn Jahren gewohnt habe, in der Pannierstraße, gleich beim Kanal. Sie ist nicht da. Ihr Laden schließt samstags um eins, kein Glück heute. Ich checke ihren Namen an der Klingel, er sieht griechisch aus – seltsam, ich hatte hätte ihre Wurzeln viel weiter östlich geortet, ich dacht sie sei Vietnamesin. Was zeigt: Mein Sinn für Physiognomie könnte verbessert werden.

11/22/2017

Ich komme zu Ahmeds Laden zurück für das zweite Interview und das Erste, das ich bemerke, ist, dass das charmante Schild auf arabisch verschwunden ist. Jetzt gibt es größeres Schild auf dem auf Deutsch „Schneider“ in weißen Buchstaben steht. Sicherlich ist das ein besser Kommunikationsinstrument, das ein größeres Publikum erreicht, aber jetzt wünschte ich, ein Bild von dem alten Schild gemacht zu haben. Diese gelbe, arabische Sonne von einem Schild war in meinen Augen weit reizvoller.
Ich werde von meinem Freund Ahmed begleitet, der sich freundlicherweise bereit erklärt hat mein Übersetzter zu sein. Die Dreadlocks im Wind und oberndrein rothaarig, ist Ahmed ein Jordanier mit einem Talent für spitzzüngige Bemerkungen, um es mild auszudrücken, der ein kleines Restaurant namens „Fish Tank“ führt. Ehrlich gesagt bin ich besorgt, er könnte zu ungeduldig sein und Sachen die ihm zu langweilig erscheinen einfach auslassen. Ich fange an ihm das klar zu machen, während der Schneider irgendetwas fertig macht. Ein Mann arbeitet im Laden und baut die bisherigen Verbesserungen weiter aus. Das Waschbecken gegenüber der Kabine ist jetzt abgeteilt und ein Regal zieht sich, hoch über uns, um den Raum; jede Menge Stauraum. Es ist schon mit vielen Bündeln Stoff und Kleidung vollgestopft, ausgebeulten schwarzen Mülltüten. Der Platz sieht viel voller aus, Ahmed wächst! Ahmed-von-den-Rastas fragt den Mann, ob er Fufu mag. Der antwortet: „Klar, ich komme aus Ghana. In meinem Land esse ich jeden Tag Fufu. Du, einen Tag türkisch, einen Tag libanesisch, einen anderen Tag italienisch!“ Er fängt, an mit einer sehr lauten Maschine zu arbeiten. Ahmed der Schneider gesellt sich zu uns. Er lacht über mein kleines Aufnahmegerät, er ist jetzt völlig einverstanden damit. Wir fangen direkt an.

Ahmed übersetzt Ahmed: „Ich bin seit achtundzwanzig Jahren Schneider, oder so. Wie das alles Anfing ist folgendermaßen: Ich ging ohne Umweg in einen Schneiderladen, mein Boss mochte mich, vertraute mir und überließ es mir, meine Sachen selbst zu machen. Mein Boss brachte mir Alles bei, was er wusste, bis ich meinen eigenen Laden aufmachte. Ich fing an als ich dreizehn war, die Schule habe ich nicht abgeschlossen. Als ich klein war habe ich Bügeln geliebt. Ich hing bei meiner Mutter, in Damaskus, herum, beobachtete das Bügeleisen und bettelte sie an, mich bügeln zu lassen.“ Ahmed-von-den-Rastas kommentiert, dass er der erste

Mensch sei den er je getroffenen hat der tatsächlich Bügeln mag. Dann nimmt er seine Übersetzung wieder auf. „Langsam begriff ich, dass mein Meister nett war. Als ich fünfzehn war begann er mich die ganze Show leiten zu lassen, aufzutreten wie ein kommandierender Offizier. Ich war sehr gut in meinem Job. Er vertraute mir mehr als den meisten meiner dreißigjährigen Kollegen. Er sagte ihnen immer: „Ahmed ist phantastisch und er wird schneller lernen als ihr anderen Jungs!“. Ich frage, ob seine Kollegen nicht eifersüchtig waren? Eine lange, gewundene Antwort, die Ahmed der Übersetzer zu „Es war kein Problem“ komprimiert. Auf die nächste Frage erwidert Ahmed: „Wir machten ungefähr einhundertzwanzig Trenchcoats die Woche. Ich arbeitete an der Entwicklung der Qualität der Kleidungsstücke, einschließlich des Futters. Dann ging ich von achtzehn bis zwanzig zur Armee. In Syrien dauert der Wehrdienst zweieinhalb Jahre. Mit einundzwanzig eröffnete ich meinen Laden in Damaskus. Ich fing an, meine eigene Kleidung zu machen. Manchmal kaufte ich einen Container Bekleidung und „verbesserte“ sie.“ Ich frage nach Details der Verbesserung. „Kleine Änderungen machen, Veredelungen anfügen, um sie mehr salonfähig zu machen. Ich habe sie dann für viel mehr Geld weiterverkauft. Ich machte Hochzeitkleider, Ballkleider, alle Arten von Kleider, aber meine Spezialität war der „Manteau“.“ Der „Manteau“, verstehe ich, ich eine Art langer Trenchcoat.

„Das war 1999, circa. Syrien war damals nicht teuer und so war es nicht allzu schwer einen Laden zu eröffnen. Alles was man machen musste war eine Nähmaschine kaufen und das war´s. Mein Vater hatte eine Art Schreibwaren-und Zeitungsladen. Er verkaufte allen möglichen Kram, wirklich (Ahmed kämpft mit der Übersetzung). Meine Mutter war Hausfrau. Als ich meine Laden eröffnete, war ich alleine. Der Laden lag in einer geschäftigen, quirligen Vorstadt von Damaskus, nah bei dem Laden meines Vaters. Ich wollte den Laden in der Innenstadt eröffnen, bekam aber keine Erlaubnis. Der Laden wuchs und wuchs. Ich hatte sechs Angestellte und einhundertfünfzig Quadratmeter Platz! Ich machte Stangenware-Kollektionen und verkaufte sie selbst auf den Märkten. Ich hatte einen Angestellten, der auf Änderungen und Kundenbetreuung spezialisiert war. Ich hatte dafür keine Zeit mehr, ich bekam Großaufträge für Hochzeitskleider.“

Ahmed-der Rotschopf wirft ein: „In Syrien ist es für kleine Unternehmer völlig normal ganze Produktionslinien zu entwickeln. Vor dem Krieg waren sie komplett unabhängig. Sie sind in der ganzen arabischen Welt für ihre guten Hände bekannt, für ihre magischen Finger. Sie sind so gut darin Dinge zu machen, Schreinerei, Mechanik, Ingenieurswesen, Bekleidung herstellen, gute Baumwolle, sie produzieren gutes Zeug in Syrien, sie handeln viel mit dem Iran. Da ist Alles „Made in Syria“! Sie hatten zum Beispiel keine Pizza Hut Filialen, sie haben einfach ihre eigene Version von Pizza Hut gemacht. Sie waren total unabhängig.“

Zurück zu Ahmed-dem-Schneider: „Ich habe Alles im Krieg verloren. Mein Geschäft wurde vor drei Jahren zu Staub gebombt. Am 12. März 2015 fing der Krieg in Syrien an. Der Krieg veränderte Alles.“ Ahmeds Stimme wird tiefer. „Ich verlor mein Auto, meine Arbeit. Alles was teuer war musste ich verkaufen. Wir blieben für zweieinhalb Kriegsjahre in Damaskus, aber als mein Laden gesprengt wurde realisierte ich, dass Flucht die einzige Möglichkeit für mich und meine Familie war. Ich floh zuerst in die Türkei, dann nach Griechenland und dann hierher. Ich kam zuerst alleine. Erst später konnte ich meine Frau und meine Töchter als Flüchtlinge mit politischen Asyl nachholen. Der Vorgang heißt „Familiennachzug“.
Sie brauchten ein Jahr um anzukommen, das genaue Datum ist der dritte März.“ Wir werden von Richard, dem „Schreiner, Elektriker, Alles was du braucht, Bruder“ unterbrochen, der los muss, um Holz zu besorgen. Er grüßt uns, „Vielleicht sehen wir uns wieder, vielleicht nicht, inshalla!“
Inzwischen erklärt mir Ahmed der Rotschopf flüsternd, dass ich meine Fragen ändern soll. „Du machst ihn verlegen vor den Kunden. Es hat mit der Kultur zu tun, er wäre offener, wenn ich alleine mit ihm wäre.“
Ich frage, wie Ahmed es geschafft hat hier seinen Laden zu gründen, aber ...

Eine weitere Unterbrechung, ein neuer Auftrag. Ich beobachte, dass Ahmed sich weigert Geld von dem scheidenden Kunden anzunehmen. Verwundert hebe ich eine Augenbraue. Ahmed der Rotschopf erklärt: „Für uns Leute aus dem Mittleren Osten ist es unmöglich Geld anzunehmen bevor die Arbeit getan ist.“ – „Es bringt Unglück!“ ergänzt Ahmed der Schneider. „So seltsam, wie die Leute in Deutschland bezahlen müssen. Bevor die Arbeit gemacht ist! Ich habe den Laden gefunden, weil ich über einen Freund von ihm gehört habe. Ich habe ihn mir angeschaut und die Miete verhandelt. Ich habe angefangen ihn zu renovieren und es langsam geschafft, dass die Dinge besser aussahen. Ich saß den ganzen ersten Monat alleine im Laden und wartet auf Kundschaft. Niemand kam, kein Mann, keine Frau! Ich musste die Miete aus der eigenen Tasche bezahlen.“

Einen Moment später schreiet eine sehr bemerkenswerte Frau herein, die Augen mit einem Halo von Kajal vergrößert, eine hohe Stirn und insgesamt beeindruckende Gesichtszüge, mit einer starken Präsenz. Sie ist ganz in Schwarz gekleidet, kurzer schwarzer Lederrock, schwarze Stiefel, schiefer-schwarze Strümpfe, ein hauchdünner, fallender Schal, das Haar seitengescheitelt, eine Hälfte ihres Gesichts verdeckend. Die Kombination gibt ihr einen fremdartigen Look. Sie wirkt orientalisch, sehr sinnlich, viel Kajal, Grundierung, Lippenstift, viel Make-up. Sie grüßt uns mit ihren rauchigen Augen, Ahmed berührt zart ihren Hintern. Ich komme sofort zu dem Schluss, dass das seine Frau seien muss - eine sehr moderne Frau! Was mich völlig überzeugt ist, dass sie direkt auf Ahmeds Stuhl an seiner Nähmaschine Platz nimmt: Sie ist offensichtlich gewohnt ihn zu sehen und die Umgebung ist ihr vertraut. Sie sitzt da, starrt zum Horizont, wartet in Ruhe.

Zurück zu Ahmed. Er hat Geld von einem Freund geliehen, er ist wahrscheinlich verschuldet. Die Dame an der Nähmaschine funkelt mich an, fast zwinkert sie mir zu. Da ist irgendetwas seltsam mit ihr. Es zeigt sich, dass sie eine von Ahmeds Investoren ist. „Ich habe Geld von drei Freunden geliehen.“ Rasta-Ahmed sagt, dass er sein Arabisch verliert. Ich bitte ihn, seinen Namensvetter nach seinem größten Missgeschick als Schneider zu fragen. „Vergiss es, der Schneider ist viel zu stolz, um sich wirklich für so etwas zu öffnen!“, verkündet er. Er hat wahrscheinlich recht, aber es ist ein bisschen frustrierend, dass nicht selbst feststellen zu können.

Ich formuliere meine Frage um: „Was ist die komischste Geschichte, die du uns über deine Schreinerkarriere erzählen kannst?“ Die Antwort kommt nach einer langen Verzögerung zwischen den beiden Ahmeds: „Einmal habe ich meine Hand mit einem Rollschneider glatt durchgeschnitten. Alle vier Finger fielen ab. Gott sei Dank, haben in Damaskus auch die Chirurgen magische Hände und sie nähten sie alle wieder an. Ich konnte einen Monat nicht arbeiten, nur meinen Stab herumkommandieren, meine Hände nicht benutzen.“ Ich rufe aus: „Wie ungewöhnlich! Nur einen Monat!“, woraufhin Ahmed zustimmend nickt und ergänzt: „Ich schnitt gerade durch einen Riesenstapel Stoff für Mäntel, mit einem massiven Rollschneider. Der Schneider den ich jetzt habe ist ein Baby!“ Ich bestehe auf meinem Wunsch nach einer lustigen Geschichte, da die letzte ehr grauenhaft als spaßig war. Das war anscheinend eine komische Frage, auf die ich wieder eine eigenartige Antwort bekomme. Er fängt an zu schmunzeln und zu lachen, irgendwie verlegen: „Ich liebe es, wenn Frauen in meinen Laden kommen!“ dann fängt er an zu lachen wie ein Schulknabe. „Mein“ Ahmed hat ärgerlicherweise recht: Der Schneider wird sich zu keinerlei Fehler bekennen, er ist zu stolz einen Fehler zuzugeben. „Mein“ Ahmed merkt an: „Wenn arabische Damen in den Laden kommen heißt es, er ist gut, denn arabische Damen sind die zähsten der Welt!“ Ich lache, er führt weiter aus:

„Zuhause läuft der Mann herum wie ein kopfloses Huhn und führt die Anweisungen seiner Frau aus. Er geht arbeite, aber sie verwaltet das Einkommen. Sie regiert das Haus wie ein Despot.“ „Mein“ Ahmed fragt nach Visitenkarten, die er in seinem Restaurant auslegen kann, aber Ahmed der Schneider hat keine.

Ich bestehe auf meiner fehlgegangenen Frage, die „mein“ Ahmed weiterhin ablehnt. Ich versuche nicht zu zeigen, dass ich von meinem Übersetzter ziemlich frustriert bin. Er ist ein Freund, aber er hilft mir nicht wirklich, wenn er dem Interview so deutlich seine Persönlichkeit aufdrückt. Letztendlich macht er einen Versuch und fragt, wie ich hoffe, die Frage noch einmal. Ahmed der Schneider erzählt mir jetzt: „Um einzuschätzen, ob eine Frau eine gute Kundin ist, achte ich auf die Schuhe, an ihnen erkenne ich, ob sie Geschmack hat. Ich lege auch fest wieviel ich ihr berechnen kann, wenn ich ihre Schuhe anschaue. Ich versuche meine Kunden immer glücklich zu machen. Ich bin nicht besonders beeindruckt davon, wie sich Frauen hier anziehen. Ah, französische Frauen, der Champ Elisés! Das ist Geschmack!“ Die Frau an der Nähmaschine mischt sich ein und fängt an arabisch zu reden. „Mein“ Ahmed wispert mir vernehmlich ins Ohr, informiert mich, dass diese Frau ein Mann ist. Sie ist bisschen zu athletisch für eine Frau, das ist wahr. Immer wieder seltsam, dieser Moment von Zweifel zwischen zwei Geschlechtern. Auf jeden Fall, sie wechselt zu Deutsch: „Deutsche Leute ziehen sich gut an, nur hier in Berlin tun sie es nicht, weil es keine Deutschen sind, sondern Polen oder Russen... Berlin ist zu arm.“ Ooops, rassistische Kommentare! Ich versuche die Konversation neu auszurichten. Ihre tiefe Stimme radiert meine letzten Zweifel aus, sie ist auf jeden Fall ein Transvestit, was in diesem Kontext unerwartet ist. „Die Deutschen haben kein Interesse an Mode“, sagt Ahmed „sie sind dafür zu praktisch veranlagt.“

Eine deutschsprachige Kundin kommt herein, Ahmed spricht mit ihr vor dem Laden. Währenddessen diskutieren Ahmed-von-den-roten-Rastas und ich hitzig, in gedämpften, halbverschluckten Worten meine weiteren Fragen. Ahmed der Schneider ist schon zurück. Ich frage ihn, wann er seine Frau getroffen hat, das ist mir noch nicht richtig klar. Er schaut zur Decke, denkt eine Weile nach: „Vor siebzehn Jahren.“ Ich frage ihn wie alt seine Töchter sind. „Die Ältere, Sara, ist fünfzehn, meine jüngste Tochter, Zima, ist dreizehn“. Ich bitte ihn, zu bestätigen, dass er die ganze Kleidung für seine Familie, sein Frau und seine Töchter macht, er bestätigt: „Ich mache alle ihre Kleidung!“ --„Ahmeds Töchter und seine Gattin müssen sehr glückliche Frauen sein!“ rufe ich aus. Wir lachen. Aber Ahmed nickt enthusiastisch mit dem Kopf, offensichtlich genießt es seine Familie anzuziehen. Er fährt dann fort zu erklären: „Wenn ich nicht von anderen Jobs unterbrochen werde, kann ich drei Teile am Tag machen.“ Er ist sehr stolz auf seine Schnelligkeit, das ist etwas das ihm wichtig ist.

Ich frage wie es war in Berlin anzukommen, wie es ging. „Ich war sehr gestresst, es war eine stressige Zeit. Am Anfang habe ich geheult vor Stress. Jetzt fühle ich mich viel besser. Natürlich ist immer noch Krieg in Syrien, aber meine Familie ist hier, ich habe ein soziales Netzwerk, Kunden, ich fühle mich fast, als wäre ich Damaskus. Meine Brüder und Schwestern sind noch da.“ Ich bitte ihn beschreiben, wo er mit seiner Familie lebt. „In Brandenburg. An einem Ort namens Luckenwalde, nah bei Teltow.“ – „Da gibt es eine See“, erzählt mir „mein“ Ahmed. Ahmed der Schneider fährt fort: „Ich brauche eine Stunde, um von zuhause zur Arbeit zu kommen. Da sind viele Deutsche, mein Frau ist gut darin mit ihnen zu reden. Sie besuchen sich, für Eiskrem, eine Plauderei. Wir sind recht glücklich da, wir haben wirklich Freunde gefunden. Im Grunde gibt es da nur alte Leute – sie sind froh, mit einer neuen, jungen Familie Freundschaft zu schließen. Wir haben eine achtzigjährige Freundin. Sie kommt rüber und holt unsere Töchter für Spaziergänge und Ausflüge ab. Meine Töchter, besonders Zima, fangen wirklich an, Deutsch aufzuschnappen. Sie sind erst im März gekommen. Sie gehen zur Schule und das läuft ziemlich gut.“

Ich bitte noch einmal zu klären, ob er in einem Haus oder in einer Wohnung lebt – es erweist sich, dass er in einem Apartment lebt. Das macht mehr Sinn.
Ich frage Ahmed: „Was ist dein Traum, für dich und deine Frau, für deine kleinen Töchter?“ Er spricht für eine ganze Weile auf arabisch, ich höre viele „Inshallahs“ – ich schätze er mag die Frage. „Ich würde gerne meinen Laden weiterentwickeln, einen funktionierenden Betrieb haben. Ich arbeite schon an einer Idee: Ich kaufe Kleidung in der Türkei und bringe sie her. Dann passe ich sie an, mache sie schicker, und verkaufe sie in Berlin weiter. Natürlich gehe ich eines Tages nach Syrien zurück, aber solange der Wahnsinn weitergeht, bleibe ich hier!“
Ich stelle fest, dass beide Ahmeds zurück an die Arbeit müssen. Also packen wir unsere Sachen und nehmen unsere Mäntel. Ich erinnere Ahmed den Schneider daran, dass ich ihm Geld für den Rock schulde das ich, aus welchen Gründen auch immer, noch nicht bezahlt habe. Ich muss protestieren, um zu zahlen. Das ist ein sehr orientalischer Kundenmoment, schätze ich. Ich lasse Geld in seine Hand gleiten, aber er gibt mir viel davon zurück. „Nein! Es macht nur fünf Euro. Keine Diskussion! Wie lang bis du schon in Berlin?“ Ich muss lachen. „Oh, ich bin noch nicht so lange hier!“ Ahmed fragt mich wieder, ob ich Kinder habe. „ZWEI“, mache ich überdeutlich Er will auch ihre Namen wissen. „Mein Sohn, Balthazar ist achtzehn und meine Tochter Céleste ist fünfzehn. Ahmed will wissen, ob sie Deutsch sprechen. „Ja, und auch Englisch und Französisch. Sie wurden in Ungarn geboren, also sprechen sie auch ein bisschen Ungarisch.“ – „Wie oft gehst du nach Frankreich?“ „Manchmal, wir werden zu Weihnachten hinfahren.“ Jetzt spricht Ahmed-von-den-Rastas mit Richard dem Elektriker, Schreiner, you name it, man. Er will seine Telefonnummer. Er sagt, er hat Arbeit im Restaurant, Richard wäre dafür perfekt.

Richard: „Hey Mann, na klar, du weißt, ich bin genau dein Mann, auf jeden Fall mache ich dir alles was du brauchst.“ Ahmed führt dann einen Tisch, made by Richard, vor, sehr solide, sehr stabil. „Ich brauchte einen sehr stabilen, zum Schneiden.“ Richard hat eine Menge sehr starke Holzlatten mitgebracht, wahrscheinlich zehn mal zehn. Wir machen uns auf den Laden zu verlassen. Ich verspreche Ahmed für mehr Änderungen zurückzukommen. Wir sind jetzt auf der Straße, die beiden Ahmeds plaudern noch in schnellem Arabisch, „Bislama!!!“ Ahmed der Schneider kehrt in seinen Laden zurück und wir schlendern die Straße hinunter.

Rasta-Ahmed zieht ein Fazit: „Ich meine, ich denke dieser Ahmed ist sehr nett. Ich weiß nicht genau, was es mit all dem Gerede über Frauen auf sich hat, und so. Oh ja, diese Frau an der Schreibmaschine ... Ja richtig, dass war ein Mann“ – „In der Tat, das war ein Typ“, sage ich. – „Er redet zu viel über Frauen!“ – „Deshalb erzähle ich ihm die ganze Zeit, dass ich verheiratet bin, um Missverständnisse zu vermeiden. Ich schätze, er liebt wohl wirklich Frauen“, wir lachen. Er bittet mich von der hingekritzelten Nummer in meinem Notizbuch, Richards Kontakt, ein Foto zu machen und ihm zu schicken. „Ich brauche ständig einen Handwerker. Der, den ich habe ist nicht gut.“ Ein Auto übertönt unsere Worte und ich nehme Abschied.

08/01/2018
Mein Telefon informiert mich über eine neue Nachricht, die so seltsam ist, dass sie jeder Beschreibung spottet. Ich habe gerade Ahmeds Laden verlassen, nachdem ich diesen Bärinnen-Mantel, den ich ihm gebracht hatte, um ihn neu, mit fleischigem, pinken Satin füttern zu lassen, abgeholt habe. Der Job war gemacht, der Mantel hing ordentlich auf dem Ständer. Es war ganz gut gemacht, obwohl – nun, ja – ich fand es ein bisschen nachlässig, seien wir ehrlich, enttäuschend. Die ungebügelten Säume sahen aus wie Fettfalten auf einem pinken, sonnenverbrannten Bauch. Das störendste Detail war die Bodennaht, in einer Zickzacklinie genäht, wirklich schlampig. Ehrlich, ich glaube nicht, dass ich mit dem Saum leben kann. Ich muss es selbst noch einmal machen, mit der Hand. Wie dem auch sei, der Rest ist in Ordnung,

braucht nur etwas Bügeln.

Ahmed studierte meine Reaktion. Ich denke, er konnte sehen, dass ich nicht völlig aus dem Häuschen war. Er fragte mich, ob ich mit dem Futter zufrieden wäre. Ich murmele: „Jaja, nur der Saum stört mich ein bisschen." Er versteht nicht. Da ist noch ein anderer Mann, mit großen, grünen Teichen als Augen in einem runden, sehr blassen Gesicht. Er ist ein netter Kerl und fängt an, sich als Übersetzter nützlich zu machen. Anfangs dachte ich sein Deutsch wäre sehr gut und erklärte Alles. „Es tut mir leid, das ich auf Details so viel Wert lege, ich bin Künstlerin, ich neige dazu Details zu bemerken, es ist nicht schön zu kritisieren, aber nun ja." Der Typ ist nett, ich bin sicher, dass er ein viel besserer Übersetzter ist als mein Freund letzte Woche. Auf jeden Fall braucht er genauso viel Zeit zu erklären was ich sage auf Arabisch wie ich auf Deutsch gebraucht habe.

Nach einer kurzen Weile bittet er mich: „Bitte sprich nicht so schnell, mein Deutsch ist nicht sehr gut." Ich plärre: „Ich verstehe, dann bist du auch neu hier!" – „Ja, neu! Wir sind alle neu hier!" Er zeigt glücklich auf Ahmed. „Wir sind zusammen angekommen, in dem gleichen Flugzeug." Das ist ein sehr interessantes Stückchen Information. Ich frage nach seinem Namen: „Mein Name ist Anas. Wir kennen uns aus Damaskus, wir haben unsere Flucht zusammen geplant. Ich mag es in Berlin zu sein, aber ich denke hier sind zu viele Leute." – „Zu viele Leute!? Dann solltest du Paris oder London sehen", erzähle ich ihm. Er wirkt verstört. Er zeigt auf seine bemerkenswerten Augen und macht Pfeile mit den Fingern: „Zu viele Augen hier. Ich kollidiere die ganze Zeit mit den Blicken anderer Leute. Ich lebe um die Ecke, auf der Werbellinerstraße, in einer Zweizimmerwohnung."

Es ist ein bisschen schwierig zu kommunizieren, aber auf jeden Fall einfacher als mit Ahmed. Ich verstehe in so, dass in seinem Fall seine Familie vor ihm angekommen ist, vor einem Jahr, aber das macht überhaupt keinen Sinn. Es muss so sein, dass er vor einem Jahr herkam und seine Familie vor sechs Monaten. Er erklärt noch einmal: „Da sind wirklich zu viele Leute in Berlin, besonders Leute die nach Wohnungen suchen. Ich habe sechs Monate nach einer größeren Wohnung gesucht – wir sind eine große Familie. Mehr oder weniger jeden Tag habe ich E-Mails verschickt. Jedes Mal die gleiche Antwort: negativ, eine andere Familie hat die Wohnung bekommen. Ich arbeite im „The Hampton", einem Handyladen um die Ecke, Boddinstraße. Aber nur eine Stunde am Tag. Ich kann nicht viel arbeiten, weil ich wieder zur Schule gehe!" Und ich finde heraus, dass er gerade sein B1 Diplom bekommen hat. Er führt aus: „In Damaskus konnte ich gut Englisch, aber jetzt ist alles weg. Ich war seit fünfundzwanzig Jahren nicht mehr in der Schule, jetzt musste ich zurück. In Damaskus habe ich mit Kosmetik gearbeitet, ich habe Alles verkauft, von Kajal bis Hennah, Alles für die Schönheit. Und da habe ich mit Duzenden von Kunden englisch gesprochen."

Sie lachen viel und scheinen sehr gute Freunde zu sein. Anas hat eine große Tasche, einen schwarzen Müllbeutel, voll Zeug zum Ändern gebracht. Ahmed arbeitet sich unerschütterlich hindurch, er scheint heute in guter Stimmung zu sein! Anas meint: „Andere Städte sind nicht so geschäftig wie Berlin. Es gibt andere Städte mit vielen Wohnungen, aber da gibt es keine Arbeit. Hier finde ich jede Menge Arbeit. Ich bin sehr froh in dem Handyladen zu arbeiten." Er ergänzt: „Ich gehe nicht zurück nach Syrien, nicht solange Bashar al-Assad noch da ist. Wir müssen das stoppen!", Ahmed nicht enthusiastisch mit dem Kopf und er fährt fort: „Sobald Bashar weg ist, werde ich zwischen Deutschland und Syrien pendeln." Beide schließen ab: „Wer weiß, was die Zukunft bringt, wir nehmen es von Tag zu Tag."

Anas und Ahmed nennen sich gegenseitig „Habibi" - niedlich, diesen Austausch von Kosenamen mitzuerleben. Anas verlässt den Laden und ich frage Ahmed, wie viel er für das Mantelfutter haben will. Er will nur 10 Euro, ein unschlagbar guter Preis. Ich sage ihm das und danke ihm. Ich fische einen fünfzig Euro Schein heraus, kleiner habe ich es nicht, aber er kann nicht wechseln. Es ist zehn vor zwei, er hat noch nicht so viel Bares gemacht. Er wedelt mit den Händen, zuckt mit den Achseln: „Später, später." – „OK, ich hole dann den Mantel auch später ab." Aber er besteht darauf, dass ich ihn mitnehme und wirft ihn mir in die Arme. „Später, später!" Der Vertrauensaspekt ist sehr wichtig in diesem Laden. Ich bedanke mich verlegen und mache mich fertig zum Aufbruch. Ich habe gerade die Klinke in der Hand, als unsere Dame vom ersten Mal ankommt: der gleiche tattrige Kopf und das ständige Rollen der Augen. Sie sagt nicht viel, kommt in den Laden. Dieses Mal ist sie von Kopf bis Fuß in hellgrau gekleidet, sie scheint verwirrter zu sein, als an dem anderen Tag. Ahmed nennt sie „Mama", ich frage ihn, ob sie tatsächlich seine Mutter ist. „Nein, sie ist nur eine Nachbarin, eine türkische Dame." Ich denke, das sie gerne sitzen würde und mache Platz, aber er schüttelt den Kopf, und sie auch. Wie üblich bin ich ratlos was ich machen soll und so erkundige ich mich höflich nach seiner heutigen Schließzeit: „Ich schließe um halb acht." –„Das ist sehr spät, gerade für eine Samstag in Deutschland." – „Das ist gut!" Erfreut zeigt er auf ungefähr eine Million Stapel in seinem Laden und sagt: „Hier gibt es Arbeit, Arbeit, Arbeit, jede Menge Arbeit! Das ist gut! Gut!" Ich lächele, winke auf Wiedersehen zu Beiden und nehme Abschied in gebrochenem Arabisch.

HILDE

I meet Hilde at the nursing home where she lives. Hilde is an elderly lady whom I met thanks to her niece, who had arranged our meeting. The nursing home is as always crowded with bored old people with too much time on their hands and not enough visitors. I can see Hilde waiting for me in the tea room area, she looks brightly at me, she has light grey hair, permed and coiffed neatly around her round face. What I notice straight away is how bright and petulantly curious her eyes look, they are practically popping out of their socket to examine me better. She also smiles brightly, this is a fun occasion for her - no doubt. After making the introductions, her niece departs and I explain my project again, as she's asked me to do. After that, I whip out my questionnaire and start firing away:

"Your name is Hilde, does it mean anything special?"
"Not that I know of, I think it's a traditional name, as I understand, I had an aunt, second-removed on my father's side, whom was called Hildegard, and she was rich. That's why they called me Hilde, Hildegard is my full name."
"Oh, is Hildegard a "rich" name?"
"No, my aunt was rich, that's why they gave me her name. They wanted her to be my godmother, but she refused!"
"She refused you as a goddaughter?"
"Yes, my parents were not rich, but the name stuck."
"Tell me more about your parents."
"They were not particularly well-off, but they both had some education. I was born on the second of July of the year 1935, my parents came from a long tradition of church people, for them education was important, but they were not well-off. I was born in Steglitz, my mother was a housewife, my father was a low-level civil servant - he worked in some office, I have no idea what he did in there exactly. He was a low-level civil servant, full stop. I remember walking the streets around our house and picking up horse dung to manure the radishes that my mum grew in flower pots, in front of our modest home.
"That's really beautiful!" I exclaim, "Did you have a small garden, or a balcony?"
"It was a very normal tenement house (a Mietskaserne), in Lichterfelde, we were on the third floor. We had a small balcony on which we grew radishes and smaller edible things. As well as this small gardening endeavour, mother used to keep the house, she cooked a lot. She also spent much of her time mending our clothes, she was really good at embroidery, we had place mats all over our little flat. As we couldn't afford to buy many garments, she also used to make a lot of my clothes, or alter hand-me-downs from my cousins to make them fit us. She spent all of her free time in a corner by the window, in the living room, bent over her Singer sewing machine, ceaselessly wiggling her foot to activate the pedal. I remember that machine well, it was impressive, gilded lettering, black metal and dark wood. It kind of scared me a little. When not in use, she used to cover it with an old bed sheet. As we only had minimal lighting in the night, it would make me afraid, it was like a ghost. I was fascinated with that machine and spent hours staring at the wheel. It was hypnotising - I think all this early staring, since babyhood, taught me a lot, even before I first touched a needle". She chuckles, twinkling, at this fond memory.

"Anyway, she spent a lot of time sewing. Her mother-in-law, my grandma, also lived with us for the last years of her life, she used to spend her days sitting in an armchair close by to my sewing mother. Sometimes, she and my mother spent time unravelling our old jumpers and making new balls of wool, often I paired up with my grandma and she used my hands to make skeins before turning them into woollen balls that could be reused. I really liked feeling so useful, I remember the lanolin from the wool moisturising my hands and the funny smell of damp wool. She must have been around seventy when she passed away. She also did many things by hand, and I started helping her on smaller projects, such as hemming handkerchiefs or fashioning dishtowels from old sheets. Nothing was ever thrown out, we kept everything. I think my mother saw my fascination. Really early, she'd started to introduce me to sewing, I'd have to arrange her pins and needles in size order and her threads according to their colours. So even before sewing, I used to play with the instruments of the trade, it was kind of a game for me, of course always under my mum's supervision. She'd sit at her machine and benevolently smile at me from time to time while I pinned up a hem for her, for example. We had no toys, so this was playtime for me.

We were four daughters, I was the second, the youngest of my sisters was born in 1942, during the war. The first years, we remained in Berlin. Then we took refuge in the countryside, but some pastor told my mum that it was impossible that Berlin would get bombarded, so we came back, to find our building had had its roof taken out by a bomb. So we went to another place, not as good as the first, in what is now Poland.

We couldn't live in Berlin, which had been bombed and was too dangerous, so we settled as refugees in a farm and country estate that belonged to a part of my mother's family. We had one room, where we all five of us lived and slept, between 1942 and 45".

I misunderstood somethings, so kindly, Hilde explains again: "It wasn't a pastor, but the ministry of war defence, Marshall Göring, who said that a bomb falling on Berlin was as likely as himself being called Schmidt. We'd returned because of that, my mum thought the situation was safe. My father was an officer in the battlefront, he was gone for the whole war.
The farm was in a little hamlet, in Hinterpommen, 50 km south of a city that used to be called "Kösslin". Everything was quite primitive, people lived like 200 years before there. The powerful owner of the estate behaved like a despot with his workers and tenants. Whenever he came in to a room, everyone had to greet him. We, as relatives, had to bow our heads and say: "Guten Morgen, Uncle Gustav". Once, my sister who was three, neglected to greet him, and he hit her with his horse-whip. He would go around in this riding boots, carrying the horse-whip everywhere with him, and everybody had to obey him. The social structures were very antiquated.

People were very poor, we were just subsisting, all my mother's time was devoted to helping out around the house and taking care of her four daughters, the only sewing she could do was darning and mending. The war ended in 1945, by then I was around nine.

We didn't have a tradition of tailoring in our family, but as far as I remember, most of the clothing was made by my mum, and not store-bought. The majority of her sewing consisted in altering, we all wore the same dresses, and we were all different shapes, so my mum fitted them to us each, as we grew into them. Of course, as time went by, the dresses had more and more patches, their colours all washed out by many, many a laundry. Laundry was a huge affair. We all had to help my mother, there was a kind of communal basin in the village. The water was ice cold, it was hard work to get the stains out. In the winter, my mum used to only wash the minimum items, she would boil things in a big caldron in the kitchen, it made a lot of steam. In the spring we had a huge laundry day, or days even, washing all the bigger things, such as bedsheets. I remember wringing sheets, we would team up - two to a sheet - the wet linen was so heavy.

I remember once, later when we lived in southern Germany, the wife of my husband's boss gave us a whole lot of black clothing for the whole family, they'd just finished mourning a son. My mum spent days and days refitting them to us, adding a touch of white or colour here and there so we wouldn't look so gloomy!
Anyway, back to Hinterpommern. It was nice enough there, but at some point it became clear that the Russians were coming, so we all got in horse-drawn carriages with our few ballots of belongings, and fled, trekking westwards. However, the landowner couldn't face leaving his estate. Each time he just traced a huge circle, our small caravan always ended up back in the farm, time and time again.

He gave up on the idea of leaving his homeland, he didn't know what to do, this farm was his life, so he and all "his" people returned. He offered my mother to shoot her and her four daughters, so they wouldn't have to face the Russians. My mother refused, for religious reasons. He organised the suicide of himself and his whole family, he shot them all and himself last. Only my mother and we remained. My mother started the trek westwards with us, it was very hard. The Russians caught us and sent us back to the place we'd come from.

Meanwhile, they had reorganised the place as a collective farm. My mother had to work the fields, together with my older sister. The younger children, including myself, were allowed to roam free. Those over ten had to work. To women deemed old enough, they would say "Frau, komm mit!" (Woman, come with me) and they had to "go along" with them. Then, I didn't realise about all the suffering my mother was going through - as far as I was concerned, this was a nice time. The only not so nice thing was that as we played with the hens a lot, my sisters and I frequently had to have our heads shaved to get rid of the lice.

It took a long time for my mother to convince the Russians that we were refugees from Berlin and not from that place. Then they brought us to a train station and boarded us on a train headed west. When we arrived in Stettin, we had to board another train but my mother, following all the hardship and the ill-treatment, fell ill with typhus, she weighed just forty kilos. We lost track of her there.

We children were put on other trains, we landed in a town close to Holland, at a train station, I remember. The people of that little town were all made to take children of the war as foster-children. My older sister and myself were placed in different homes, but my younger sister refused to be separated from the youngest sister, so they were kept together in one family. We were there for some month. I was with a couple, they were over eighty years old and not too pleased to have to deal with a child. I lost speech for an entire year, back then, not a sound would come out of my mouth.

My older sister had memorised the exact address of my grandparents in the city of Bremen, and wrote them a letter, telling them where we each were. So a few months later, my grandma came over to Emden, to look after us. My mother was released some time later and joined us there. My father was in prison for a year, in Holland; when he came back, we - reunited, at last - all moved to the back hut of a scavenger (he dealt in scrap metal). We experienced the most severe poverty then. My mother took years to recover from her own personal wartime effort, she was a shadow of her former self. After many hard years doing odd-jobs, my father got a job as a lawyer for the church, somewhere in southern Germany, so we all moved there. They gave us accommodation, we were still quite tight with money, but then again, at least we were together in one place".

I try to bring the theme of sewing back to the front of the conversation, I want to know how Hilde came to becoming a tailor.
She says that at her school, they had a class called "technical and manual education", its purpose was basically to teach girls how to sew. "I remember the first thing I made. My grandmother had given us some old curtains, which I turned into a dressing gown. We each made the same model, with whatever fabric we could get our hands on, there wasn't much fabric flying around in those times! Making that gown was quite and achievement as I saw it, I gave it to my mother. She always used to wear it, it made me feel proud.

I had to change school quite often - we moved often, because of the war. By the time we finally moved to our final destination, I was fifteen and I longed to go as far away as possible. There was an American program, the American Field Service, that organised for German youngsters to live with an American family for a year. They wanted German kids to learn the American way of life, show us that they were humans and not about to erase the country, as the propaganda ministry had been telling us at the time. I applied and got in the program. It was wonderful, I remember beautiful moments in Maine, sitting on rocks, eating watermelons and spitting the seeds into the sea. It was so different from my childhood. People drove cars, they had telephones, new clothes, even summer houses… As a child, all I had seen was Nazi Barbarei, chaos and poverty, my mother's daily rapes… We were very well treated, there was also a Japanese student there. My family was very nice - the father was a church minister - they had a summer house and a boat to go sailing on the ocean. It was worlds apart from my experience. I put my budding sewing skills to good use: the lady of the house gave me a whole bunch of old clothes which I altered to make them look more modern, and smaller, as she had been bigger than myself. I spent many a happy afternoon working on my new American dream wardrobe, it was like a treasure, in colours and materials of a great quality.

After this year in America, I came back to the town my parents lived in, finished school. Then I went to another city and enrolled to university with the plan to become an English teacher. I joined a religious group, which helped us to fund our studies by finding us jobs. We worked in a textile factory a few days per week. The factory, in Kassel, specialised in uniforms and professional attire. We all wore white blouses, only the colour of the collars differed according to our department. Ironing in grey, packers in baby blue, pattern-makers and textile testers in orange, the seamstresses in pink, controllers in red… I remember being mesmerised by the amount of clothes that came out of our machines, I'd never seen so many clothes! Working at the factory really taught me about sewing fast and accurately, it was a great school because of the repetitiveness of it. The first job they gave me however was not sewing, you had to prove that you deserved it first. So at first I was in the packing area, I had to fold the clothes around cardboard squares and pin them neatly to it so it'd look really pristine and geometrical, almost like paper clothing, so crease free it was! Slowly, I got to do more interesting things: the height of my glory was when I got assigned to sleeves. I made enough sleeves for an army! I didn't know it at the time, but these skills acquired as a student side-job really saved me later when I couldn't make ends meet otherwise.

At some point, my professors assessed that my English was too American, and it was arranged for me to be an exchange student in England, to modify my accent, the school funded me.
I was there for three months. I met a suitor who later became my husband. He courted me for about two years, very assiduously, he was Argentinian and finishing his studies in Cambridge. As I went back to Germany, he used to write me long romantic letters, he came to visit me in Germany on several occasions. It took him two years to convince me to become his wife. Meanwhile, I was also studying, and picked up working at the same factory as before, I remember making aprons by the kilometre by then. As employees, we were allowed to use the

machines for private use after hours, and buy the unused remnants, rolls of fabric or haberdashery, for almost nothing, so I started making things for my family, especially for my future husband. I think I made him a life supply of shirts back then!", she laughs.
"I also made him pyjamas and a dressing gown, I made myself many a summer dress. I didn't make any winter clothing, because our machines were set very specifically to handle thinner materials, and also, we only had a limited selection of materials, all I could use was the cottons. Polyester was all the rage for many uniforms, but that wouldn't do for my husband to wear polyester. Have you ever worn polyester?", she asks me, "It's like wearing a sauna filled with a thousand pins forever scratching you. Hate the stuff, even hated sewing with it, it used to make my hands burn. Working with the cotton was a treat compared to this.
Anyway, when I finally accepted to marry him, my heart was on fire, I immediately started to make my trousseau! As I knew we wouldn't have much money, at least in the beginning, I really made the most of it and made dozens of dish towels, sheets, pillow covers, table-cloths, I really started living this marriage dream through sewing at the factory. Then at home, my mother beautifully embroidered all my freshly made linen with my initials, I remember being shocked that she didn't do it with my future husband's name. Sadly, her caution proved to be a good idea. Her embroidery was a real labour of love though, to this day, they are still as beautiful.

We got married in the city where my grand-parents were living, in 1962, I was twenty-seven years old. I wore my mother's own wedding dress, which had been kept carefully starched and folded in a big box at my grandmother's. My mother entirely refitted the dress, we also made several alterations in the cut, to make it more contemporary. It was simple but beautiful, it had no train or lace or anything that frilly. It was a nice day, very simple, Bernardo my husband had just one friend from university as a witness, nobody could make the trip from Argentina, it was too expensive. Bernardo was so well educated, courteous, and elegant, it was in stark contrast with the plain, no-nonsense wisdom of my family.

Right away, we went to live in New-York, Bernardo got a job at the United Nations, as a low-level employee though, so we were quite strapped for cash, we lived in a minuscule apartment, so small that I used to fold our table in between meals, to make space. It was small, but light - my trousseau linen definitely brightened it up! I remember the blue table cloth I'd made, it matched both my eyes and Bernardo's, we both had the same eye colour, to a dot. I got pregnant with my first child almost right away so I was just a housewife then, spent hours making little baby bloomers and vests, knitting too. Since I still had time on my hands, as Bernardo worked all day long, I enrolled for a ladies' patterning and cutting class to learn the secret of the cut. I was very happy to be able to do that during my pregnancy. Of course, as soon as my son was born, that was over, but still I had learnt a lot, it turned out to be an excellent idea, later.

Then my husband got transferred to Geneva, so we moved to France on the border, my second daughter was born. The birth was catastrophic and I nearly died, the doctor told me to never have children again, that it would endanger my life. There are so many stories I could tell, well. We moved to Argentina: a new democratic government had just taken over and my husband got a promising job. That didn't last long! The government got overthrown and a new dictatorship took hold, my husband immediately lost his job. He'd gotten a place teaching at a private academy, together with some governmental work, he worked as a research fellow. His family also helped to support us, he wasn't making great money, and… Oh god, I really don't want to talk about this, sorry, it's too much for me to talk about this.

Anyway, unfortunately, in 1966, a military dictatorship came and many intellectuals had to flee, many even had to leave the country. This meant that the opportunities for my husband to make money really dwindled. He worked for international organisations but I had to step in more and more to bring in extra income. For some time I gave private German lessons, and thanks to my mother in law, who gave me an old machine that had just been gathering dust in some backroom, I started a small tailoring salon at my home. In the beginning, it was just my fellow parishioners - that really helped, belonging to a parish - the pastor put in a good word for me, and soon I was making dresses and children's clothing, every night after my normal day. Word of mouth spread quickly: I received my clients around teatime, all women, mothers often, in my small front-room, measure them up, and make the work at night. My favourite work was when I got to make a wedding dress. I loved the fittings with the future brides, some were really unconfident about their looks, I really felt like I helped them and made them happy, I put in extra care to make them shine on their special day. Sometime I thought the mothers were awful, some really thought of their daughters' wedding as their own!"
Hilde shoots me a meaningful look, eyebrow arched high up on her forehead. "Rarely, I got to do a pinning with the fiancée alone, this was my favourite, more than one future bride confided in me, I'm good listener. I tried to give them advice, to reassure them. I consoled more than one broken heart! One story was really awful, a young woman lost her husband-to-be. It was so sad, I never dared to ask for the money for my work, and they never came to claim the dress. I ended up giving it away at a charity sale at the parish, I didn't feel like giving it someone I knew, it felt doomed, that dress.

Slowly, my neighbours also found out about my sewing services, and I established myself as a small tailoring outfit, it was quite exhilarating, if exhausting, to become the main earner for my small family.
The situation in the country meanwhile grew more and more unstable, our situation untenable, my husband became severely depressed, and in 1972 I packed my suitcase and took my two children back home, to Germany, to Berlin, where I was born. My parents and my grandparents helped me to pay for our tickets, they were very unhappy with me and my situation, separation wasn't the done thing at the time, in our religious background. My Spanish hadn't ever gotten perfect, but it had been good. My children were nine and seven, they had been to a school that offered German classes, so it wasn't too hard for them to adapt to the German school system.

My first impression when I got in Berlin? Well the city was sleepy and poor, everything was very disconnected. It was relatively easy to find an apartment, I found a cheap apartment, a ground floor, in Neukölln, it was pretty rough but I liked the colourful popular shops, all the parks everywhere. It wasn't so bad, and I felt safe, and free, if poor. Thanks to a small loan from my parents, I bought a secondhand, professional home-worker sewing machine, at a shop on the first floor of a building of Kottbusserdamm. The man spent a long time advising me, and I tested it with many fabrics before making my choice. That man was so helpful, I called to the shop every time I got in trouble with my machine, he helped me out so many times! This was definitely the best investment I ever made. At the time, there were many textile factories in Berlin, they would advertise for jobs in the newspaper, it was paid by the piece, so it was a good thing that I'd had this experience as a student. It was ideal for me to work from home, I worked mainly in the morning and the night, the afternoon were spent with the children, and doing my housework. I also made a little extra cash by giving private lessons in English and in Spanish - even though my Spanish was far from perfect, it was still so much better than my students', they were never able to tell! (giggles)- also from my home, but this was too inconsistent: better money, but not reliable enough.

The tailoring jobs on the other hand never stopped coming in. Soon, again thanks to my par-

ish, I got private jobs, which were more interesting and varied than the work I got from the factories. However, I was really glad to get work from the factories, that was more reliable, I needed to be sure to be able to pay my bills each month. I never got a proper shopfront, I never made the step, I didn't really need to, and it suited me that way, I'm a proper home bird! I worked more or less like this until I got a small state pension. I started to work less, my eye sight didn't allow for night work anymore, not even with my special magnifier glass lamp, it was too tiring. My children soon got jobs, started to help support me. I did have to carry on working, the pension wasn't enough, but that was alright - I actually enjoyed the work. There was a lot of immigration at the time, so once a week, I went to a centre and gave German lessons to immigrant children, I helped with their homework. I did this for free, it was my pleasure".

I ask Hilde what her worse mistake ever was, and I mean tailoring mistake by that - she answers: "At some point, I was feeling lonely in Berlin, especially when my children were gone, and I joined the Winnetou Club. We'd go in some forests outside of Berlin and play-act scenes that involved the heroic Winnetou, an Apache Chef. It was all about honouring nature and recognising racial ill-treatment, we used to all dress up as Indians and camp out in Tipis. It was all the rage then in Germany. I went there several times. In hindsight it was pretty pathetic, how embarrassing!", she giggles, shaking her head in disbelief. "I haven't been able to sew for some years, my eyesight is too bad now, my hands are shaky. I still have my sewing box though, it's a nice souvenir." Just then an employee of the nursing home approaches us, Hilde has to go, the interview is over I fear. I promise to come back, she promises me more stories from her past, she watches me take my leave, and I can't help feeling a bit sad.

HILDE

Ich lerne Hilde in dem Altersheim kennen, in dem sie lebt. Hilde ist eine ältere Dame, die ich dank ihrer Nichte begegne, die unser Zusammentreffen arrangiert hat. Das Altersheim ist ständig von gelangweilten alten Menschen mit zu viel Zeit und zu wenig Besuch bevölkert. Ich kann Hilde sehen, wie sie im Teezimmer auf mich wartet, sie schaut mich strahlend an. Sie hat helles, graues Haar, dauergewellt und sorgfältig um ihr rundliches Gesicht frisiert. Was ich sofort bemerke sind ihre aufgeweckten, launisch neugierigen Augen, die förmlich aus ihren Höhlen springen, um mich genauestens zu betrachten. Auch ihr Lächeln ist strahlend. Dies ist, ohne Zweifel, ein erfreulicher Anlass für sie. Nachdem wir uns vorgestellt haben, und ihre Nichte sich verabschiedet hat, erkläre ich noch einmal, auf ihre Aufforderung hin, mein Vorhaben. Danach zücke ich meinen Fragekatalog und frage drauflos:

„Ihr Name ist Hilde, heißt das etwas Besonderes?“
„Nicht das ich wüsste, ich denke es ist ein traditioneller Name. Soweit ich weiß, hatte ich eine Tante, zweiten Grades väterlicherseits, die Hildegard hieß und die war reich. Deshalb haben sie mich Hilde genannt, Hildegard ist mein vollständiger Name.“
„Oh, dann ist Hildegard ein „reicher“ Name?“
„Nein, nur meine Tante war reich, deshalb gaben sie mir den Namen. Sie wollten, dass sie meine Patentante wird, aber sie hat sich geweigert.“
„Sie hat dich als Patenkind abgelehnt?“
„Ja, meine Eltern waren nicht reich, aber der Name blieb.“
„Erzähl Sie mir mehr über Ihre Eltern.“
„Sie waren nicht besonders gut dran, aber beide hatte einige Bildung. Ich wurde am zweiten Juli 1935 geboren, meine Eltern kamen aus einer langen Reihe von Kirchgängern. Bildung war für sie wichtig, aber sie standen nicht gut da. Ich wurde in Steglitz geboren, meine Mutter war Hausfrau und mein Vater ein kleiner Beamter – er arbeitete in irgendeiner Behörde, aber ich was er genau gemacht hat weiß ich leider nicht mehr. Er war ein kleiner Staatsbediensteter, das war´s. Ich erinnere mich, wie ich die Straßen um unser Haus abgegangen bin, um Pferdeäpfel zu sammeln mit denen wir die Radieschen gedüngt haben die meine Mutter vor unserem bescheidenen Haus in Töpfen gepflanzt hat.“
„Das ist wirklich schön!“, rief ich aus. „Hattet ihr einen kleinen Garten, oder einen Balkon?“
„Das war eine ganz normale Mietskaserne in Lichterfelde. Wir waren im dritten Stock. Wir hatten einen kleinen Balkon, auf dem wir Radieschen und kleine essbare Sachen zogen. Wie dieses kleine gärtnerische Unterfangen pflegte meine Mutter auch den Haushalt zu führen. Sie kochte eine Menge. Sie verbrachte auch viel Zeit damit unsere Kleidung zu flicken. Sie war wirklich gut im Sticken. Wir hatten Platzdeckchen überall in unserer kleinen Wohnung. Da wir uns nicht viele Kleidungsstücke leiten konnten, machte sie auch viele von meinen Kleidern, oder sie änderte abgelegte Kleidung von meinen Cousinen, damit sie mir passte. Sie verbrachte all ihre freie Zeit in einer Ecke beim Fenster, über ihre Singer Nähmaschine gebeugt, unablässig mit dem Fuß wippend, um die Pedale im Gang zu halten. Ich kann mich an die Maschine gut erinnern. Sie war eindrucksvoll, mit goldenem Schriftzug, aus schwarzem Metall und dunklem Holz. Auf eine Art machte sie mir ein bisschen Angst. Wenn sie nicht gebraucht wurde deckte meine Mutter sie mit einem alten Bettlaken ab. Wir hatten nur ganz wenig Licht in der Nacht und sie machte mir Angst, sie sah aus wie ein Geist. Ich war fasziniert von der Maschine und verbrachte Stunden damit auf das Rad zu starren. Es war hypnotisierend – Ich denke dieses frühe Daraufstarren, schon als Kleinkind, lehrte mich eine Menge. Schon bevor ich das erste Mal eine Nadel anfasste.“ Sie lacht in sich hinein, zwinkert, bei dieser liebevollen Erinnerung.
„Auf jeden Fall, sie verbrachte viel Zeit mit Nähen. Ihre Schwiegermutter, meine Großmutter, lebte in ihren letzten Jahren auch bei uns. Sie pflegte ihre Tage in einem Lehnstuhl nah bei meiner nähenden Mutter zu verbringen. Manchmal verbrachten sie und meine Mutter Zeit damit, unsere alten Pullover aufzuribbeln und neue Wollknäule zu machen. Ich gesellte mich oft zu meiner Großmutter und sie benutzte meine Hände, um Stränge zu machen bevor sie sie zu Knäulen drehte die man wiederverwenden konnte. Ich genoss es mich nützlich zu fühlen. Ich erinnere, wie das Lanolin aus der Wolle meine Hände eincremte und an den komischen Geruch von feuchter Wolle. Sie muss um die siebzig gewesen sein als sie dahinschied. Sie machte auch viele Handarbeiten und ich fing an, ihr bei kleineren Aufgaben zu helfen, wie Taschentücher säumen oder Geschirrtücher aus alten Bettlaken machen. Nichts wurde weggeworfen, alles wurde behalten. Ich denke meine Mutter bemerkte meine Faszination. Sie fing sehr früh an, mich in das Nähen einzuführen. Ich musste ihre Stecknadeln und Nadeln nach Größe ordnen und ihr Nähgarn nach Farben. Ich spielte als schon vor dem eigentlichen Nähen mit den Werkzeugen des Handwerks. Es war eine Art Spiel für mich, natürlich immer unter der Aufsicht meiner Mutter. Sie saß an ihrer Maschine und lächelte mich ab und an wohlwollend an, während ich zum Beispiel einen Saum für sie feststeckte. Wir hatten kein Spielzeug, für mich war das Spielzeit.

Wir waren vier Töchter. Ich war die Zweite. Die jüngste von meinen Schwestern wurde während des Kriegs, 1942, geboren. Dann flohen wir aufs Land, aber ein alter Pfarrer sagte uns, dass es unmöglich sei, dass Berlin bombardiert wird. Also kehrten wir zurück, um vorzufinden, dass das Dach von unserem Gebäude weggebombt war. Daraufhin gingen wir an einen anderen Ort, nicht so gut wie der Erste, im heutigen Polen.

Wir konnten in Berlin, das bombardiert wurde und zu gefährlich war, nicht leben. Wir ließen uns als Flüchtlinge auf einem Hof und Landbesitz nieder, der einem Teil der Familie meiner Mutter gehörte. Wir hatten ein Zimmer in dem wir fünf zwischen 1942 und 1945 lebten und schliefen.“

Ich hatte einiges missverstanden und Hilde erklärte es mir freundlicherweise noch einmal: „Es war kein Pfarrer, sondern der Minister für Kriegsverteidigung, Marschall Göring, der gesagt, dass eine Bombe auf Berlin so wahrscheinlich ist, wie das ihn jemand Schmidt nennt. Deshalb kehrten wir zurück. Meine Mutter dachte die Lage wäre sicher. Mein Vater war Offizier an der Front, er war den ganzen Krieg lang fort.
Der Hof lag in einem kleinen Weiler in Hinterpommern, fünfzig Kilometer südlich von der Stadt die wir „Kösslin“ nannten. Alles war sehr einfach, die Leute lebten wie vor 200 Jahren. Der mächtige Besitzer des Landes verhielt sich seinen Arbeitern und Mietern gegenüber wie ein Despot. Immer wenn er einen Raum betrat mussten alle ihn begrüßen. Wir, als Verwandte, mussten unseren Kopf senken und „Guten Tag, Onkel Gustav“ sagen. Einmal versäumte meine Schwester, die drei Jahre alt war, ihn zu grüßen und er schlug sie mit einer Reitgerte. Er stolzierte in seinen Reitstiefeln, seine Reitgerte immer dabei, herum und jeder musste ihm gehorchen. Die soziale Ordnung war sehr althergebracht.

Die Leute waren sehr arm, sie konnten sich gerade so ernähren. Meine Mutter widmete all ihre Zeit der Hilfe im Haus und ihren vier Töchtern. Die einzige Näharbeit die sie machen konnte war stopfen und flicken. Der Krieg endete 1945. Da war ich neun Jahre alt.

Wir haben in unserer Familie keine Schneidertradition. Aber soweit ich mich erinnern kann, waren das meiste unserer Kleidung von meiner Mutter gemacht und nicht gekauft. Hauptsächlich bestand ihre Näharbeit aus Änderungen. Wir trugen alle die gleichen Kleider, wir waren

verschieden groß und meine Mutter passte sie an während wir in sie hineinwuchsen. Natürlich hatten die Kleider mit der Zeit mehr und mehr Flicken und die Farben verblichen von vielen, vielen Wäschen. Die Wäsche war eine große Angelegenheit. Wir mussten alle meiner Mutter helfen. Im Dorf gab es eine Art Gemeinschaftsbecken. Das Wasser war eiskalt und es war harte Arbeit die Flecken herauszubekommen. Im Winter wusch meine Mutter nur die allernötigsten, kleinen Sachen. Sie kochte die Sachen in einem großen Kessel. Das machte eine Menge Dampf. Im Frühling hatten wir einen großen Waschtage, oder sogar Tage, an denen die großen Sachen, wie Bettwäsche, gewaschen wurden. Ich erinnere mich an das Auswringen. Wir arbeiteten zusammen, zwei für ein Laken, und das nasse Leinen war so schwer.

Ich erinnere mich, dass später, als wir in Süddeutschland lebten, die Frau vom Chef meines Mannes uns eine ganze Menge schwarzer Kleidung gab. Sie hatten gerade aufgehört ihren Sohn zu betrauern. Meine Mutter verbrachte Tage damit sie für uns passend zu machen und hier und da ein bisschen Weiß und Farben anzufügen, damit wir nicht so düster aussahen!
Wie auch immer, zurück nach Hinterpommern. Es war ganz in Ordnung da, aber irgendwann wurde klar, dass die Russen kamen. Also stiegen wir alle mit ein paar Bündeln Habseligkeiten in Pferdefuhrwerke und flohen Richtung Westen. Allerdings konnte der Landbesitzer es nicht ertragen seinen Besitz zu verlassen. Immer wieder führte er uns in einem großen Kreis und unsere kleine Karawane endete wieder und wieder zurück auf seinem Hof.

Er gab die Idee auf seine Heimat zu verlassen. Der Hof war sein Leben und er wusste nicht was er ohne ihn tun sollte. So kehrte er mit „seinen“ Leuten zurück. Er bot meiner Mutter an, sie und ihre vier Töchter zu erschießen, damit sie nicht den Russen in die Hände fielen. Meine Mutter weigerte sich aus religiösen Gründen. Er organisierte den Suizid für sich und seine ganze Familie. Er erschoss sie alle und am Schluss sich selbst. Nur meine Mutter und wir blieben übrig. Meine Mutter begann den Treck nach Westen mit uns. Es war sehr hart. Die Russen fingen uns ein und brachten uns zurück, woher wir kamen.

Mittlerweile hatten sie den Platz in einen kollektiven Hof umorganisiert. Meine Mutter musste mit meinen älteren Schwestern auf dem Feld arbeiten. Die kleineren Kinder, mich eingeschlossen, konnten machen was sie wollten. Die über zehn mussten arbeiten. Zu Frauen, die sie für alt genug hielten sagten sie „Frau, komm mit“ und sie mussten sie „begleiten“.
Damals habe ich das Leid, das meine Mutter erfahren musste nicht verstanden – soweit es mich betraf war es eine nette Zeit. Das einzige, das nicht so nett war, war, dass wir immer wieder die Köpfe geschoren bekamen. Weil wir viel mit den Hühnern spielten hatten wir Läuse.

Meine Mutter brauchte lange, um die Russen davon zu überzeugen, dass wir Flüchtlinge aus Berlin waren und nicht aus dem Ort. Aber dann brachten sie uns zu einem Bahnhof und setzten uns in einen Zug Richtung Westen. Als wir Stettin erreicht hatten, mussten wir den Zug wechseln. Aber meine Mutter war nach all den Mühsalen und Misshandlungen an Typhus erkrankt. Sie wog nur noch 40 Kilo. Wir verloren dort den Kontakt zu ihr.

Wir Kinder wurden in einen neuen Zug gesteckt und ich erinnere mich, dass wir in einer kleinen Stadt nah der holländischen Grenze landeten. Die Bewohner der kleinen Stadt sollten Alle Kinder als Pflegekinder aufnehmen. Meine ältere Schwester und ich kamen in verschiedene Familien, aber meine jüngere Schwester weigerte sich von der jüngsten Schwester getrennt zu werden und so blieben sie zusammen. Wir blieben da für einige Monate. Ich war bei einem Paar untergebracht, dass über achtzig Jahre alt war und nicht besonders erfreut darüber, sich um ein Kind kümmern zu müssen. Ich verlor für ein ganzes Jahr meine Sprache, damals kam kein Laut über meine Lippen.

Meine ältere Schwester hatte sich an die genaue Adresse unserer Großeltern in Bremen erinnert und ihnen in einem Brief geschrieben, wo wir alle waren. Einige Monate später kam meine Großmutter von Emden herüber, um nach uns zu sehen. Meine Mutter wurde etwas später entlassen und schloss sich uns an. Mein Vater war für ein Jahr in Gefangenschaft in Holland. Als er zurückkam, waren wir endlich wieder zusammen und zogen in die Bude eines Schrotthändlers. Dort erfuhren wir die bitterste Armut. Meine Mutter brauchte Jahre, um sich von ihren körperlichen Anstrengungen während des Krieges zu erholen. Sie war nur noch ein Schatten ihrer selbst. Nachdem er viele Jahre lang miese Jobs gemacht hatte, fand mein Vater irgendwo in Süddeutschland eine Stelle als Rechtsanwalt für die Kirche. Sie gaben uns Unterkunft, wir waren immer noch sehr knapp bei Kasse, aber auch da: Wir waren wenigstens wieder alle zusammen an einem Ort.“

Ich möchte das Thema „Nähen“ wieder in den Vordergrund bringen und möchte von Hilde wissen, wie es passierte, dass sie Schneiderin wurde. Sie sagt, dass sie an der Schule ein Fach „Technische und Handwerkliche Bildung“ hatten, dessen Aufgabe in erster Linie war Mädchen das Nähen beizubringen.
„Ich erinnere mich an die erste Sache die ich machte. Meine Großmutter gab uns ein paar alte Vorhänge aus denen ich einen Morgenmantel machte. Wir machten alle das gleiche Model, egal welches Material wir zur Hand hatten. Da flog nicht viel Stoff herum in diesen Zeiten! Den Morgenmantel zu machen sah ich als ziemlichen Fortschritt an. Ich gab ihn meiner Mutter. Sie trug ihn immer und das machte mich stolz.

Ich musste die Schule oft wechseln – wir zogen wegen des Krieges oft um. Als wir endlich an unserem Bestimmungsort angekommen waren, wollte ich so weit weg wie möglich. Es gab ein amerikanisches Programm, den „American Field Service“, das ein Jahr bei einer amerikanischen Familie für deutsche Jugendliche organisierte. Sie wollten, dass deutsche Kinder den „American Way of Life“ kennenlernten, dass sie Menschen waren und nicht vorhatten das Land auszulöschen, wie es uns unser Propagandaministerium erklärt hatte. Ich bewarb mich und kam in das Programm. Es war wundervoll. Ich erinnere mich an wunderschöne Momente in Maine; auf Felsen sitzen, Wassermelone essen und die Kerne ins Meer spucken. Es war so anders als meine Kindheit. Die Leute fuhren Autos, hatten Telefone und sogar Sommerhäuser ... Als Kind hatte ich nur die Nazi Barbarei gesehen, Chaos und Armut, die täglichen Vergewaltigungen meiner Mutter... Wir wurden gut behandelt. Es gab da auch einen japanischen Studenten. Meine Familie war sehr nett – der Vater war Geistlicher -. Sie hatten ein Sommerhaus und ein Boot, um auf dem Meer zu segeln. Es war Welten von meinen Erfahrungen entfernt. Ich brachte meine knospenden schneiderischen Fähigkeiten zu guter Anwendung: Die Dame des Hauses gab mir ein ganzes Bündel alter Kleidung die ich änderte, um sie moderner und kleiner zu machen – sie war größer als ich. Ich verbrachte viele glückliche Nachmittage mit meiner neuen amerikanischen Traum-Garderobe. Sie war wie ein Schatz in Farben und Material von großer Qualität.

Nach dem Jahr in Amerika ging ich in den Ort zurück in dem meine Eltern wohnten und schloss die Schule ab. Dann ging ich in eine andere Stadt und schrieb mich an der Universität ein mit dem Ziel Englischlehrerin zu werden. Ich schloss mich einer religiösen Gruppe an, die uns half unser Studium mit Jobs zu finanzieren. Wir arbeiteten ein paar Tage die Woche in einer Textilfabrik. Die Fabrik in Kassel war auf Uniformen und Arbeitskleidung spezialisiert. Wir trugen alle weiße Blusen. Nur die Farbe der Kragen variierte je nach Abteilung. Bügeln in Grau, Verpacker in Baby-blau, Mustermacher und Textilprüfer in Orange, Säumerinnen in Pink, Kontrolleure in Rot ... Ich erinnere mich, dass ich von der Menge der Kleidung die aus unseren Maschinen kam hypnotisiert war, ich hatte noch nie so viel Kleidung gesehen! Die Arbeit in der Fabrik schulte mich wirklich im schnellen und genauen Nähen. Es war eine

großartige Schule durch die ständigen Wiederholungen. Der erste Job den sie mir gaben war aber nicht nähen, das musste man sich erst verdienen. Zuerst war ich in der Verpackung. Ich musste Kleider um Pappquadrate falten und sorgfältig feststecken, so dass sie völlig makellos und geometrische aussahen, fast wir Papierkleidung, so knitterfrei waren sie! Langsam bekam ich interessantere Dinge zu tun. Der Höhepunkt meines Ruhmes war die Beförderung zu den Ärmeln. Ich machte genug Ärmel für eine Armee! Damals wusste ich es noch nicht, aber die Fähigkeiten die ich mir bei dem studentischen Nebenjob erworben hatte rette mich später, als ich anders nicht über dir Runden kam.

An einem Punkt beurteilten meine Professoren mein Englisch als zu amerikanisch und die Schule bezahlte mir einen Austausch nach England, um meinen Akzent zu ändern.
Ich war für 3 Monate dort. Ich hatte einen Verehrer, der später mein Mann wurde. Er umwarb mich sehr beharrlich für 2 Jahre. Er war Argentinier und hatte sein Studium in Cambridge abgeschlossen. Als ich nach Deutschland zurückging schrieb er mir lange, romantische Briefe und er besuchte mich zu mehreren Anlässen. Er brauchte 2 Jahre, um mich zu überzeugen seine Frau zu werden. Währenddessen habe ich auch studiert und meine Arbeit in der Fabrik wiederaufgenommen. Ich erinnere mich, dass wir dann kilometerweise Schürzen machten. Als Angestellte durften wir die Maschinen nach der Arbeit benutzen. Und wir konnten nicht genutzte Reste, Rollen von Stoff und Kurzwaren, für fast Nichts kaufen. Also fing ich an, Sachen für meine Familie zu machen, besonders für meinen Zukünftigen. Ich denke ich, ich habe ihm da einen lebenslangen Vorrat an Hemden gemacht!“, lacht sie.

„Ich machte ihm auch Pyjamas und einen Morgenmantel, mir selbst viele Sommerkleider. Ich machte keine Winterkleidung, da unsere Maschinen sehr speziell auf dünne Stoffe eingestellt waren. Und wir hatten auch nur eine sehr begrenzte Auswahl an Material. Das Einzige, das ich benutzen konnte war Baumwolle. Polyester war der letzte Schrei für Uniformen, aber das konnte mein Mann nicht tragen. Hast du schon einmal Polyester getragen?“, fragt sie mich, „Das ist als würde man eine Sauna anhaben, mit tausend Nadeln die einen kratzen. Ich hasse das Zeug, habe es sogar gehasst damit zu nähen. Es hat meine Hände brennen gemacht. Das Arbeiten mit Baumwolle war ein Leckerbissen dagegen.
Auf jeden Fall, als ich endlich einwilligt ihn zu heiraten stand mein Herz in Flammen und ich fing sofort an meine Aussteuer zu machen! Da ich wusste, dass wir zumindest am Anfang nicht viel Geld haben würden machte ich wirklich alles, duzende Geschirrtücher, Bettlaken, Kissenbezüge, Tischdecken. Ich fing wirklich an, den Traum von der Hochzeit beim Nähen in der Fabrik zu leben. Zuhause hat meine Mutter dann all mein frisch gemachtes Leinen mit meinen Initialen bestickt. Ich erinnere mich, dass ich schockiert war, dass sie meine Initialen und nicht die meines Mannes verwandte. Trauriger Weise erwies sich ihre Vorsicht als gute Idee. Ihre Stickerei war ein wahrer Liebesdienst und bis zum heutigen Tag ist sie wunderschön.

Wir haben 1962 in dem Ort an dem meine Großeltern lebten geheiratet. Ich war siebenundzwanzig. Ich trug das Hochzeitskleid meiner Mutter, das sorgfältig gestärkt und gefaltet in einer großen Schachtel bei meiner Großmutter aufbewahrt war. Meine Mutter hatte es komplett überholt und auch mehrere Änderungen am Schnitt gemacht, damit es mehr zeitgemäß aussah. Es war einfach aber schön. Es hatte keine Schleppe oder Spitze oder sonst etwas Aufgeputztes. Es war ein schöner Tag. Bernardo, mein Ehemann, hatte nur einen Freund von der Universität als Trauzeugen dabei. Aus Argentinien konnte niemand anreisen. Es war zu teuer. Bernardo war so gebildet, galant und elegant. Es war ein krasser Kontrast zu der schlichten, sachlichen Lebensweisheit meiner Familie.

Wir zogen sofort nach New York, wo Bernardo einen Job bei den Vereinten Nationen bekommen hatte. Wir waren knapp bei Kasse, lebten in einem winzigen Apartment. Es war so klein, dass wir unseren Tisch zwischen den Malzeiten zusammenklappten, um Platz zu haben. Es war klein, aber hell – mein Aussteuer-Leinen hübschte es eindeutig auf! Ich erinnere mich an die blaue Tischdecke die ich gemacht hatte. Sie passte auf den Punkt zu meinen und Bernardos Augen. Wir hatten die gleiche Augenfarbe. Ich wurde ziemlich sofort schwanger mit meinem ersten Kind. Ich war dann einfach Hausfrau, die Stunden damit verbrachte Strampelanzüge und Leibchen zu machen, auch mit stricken. Da ich trotzdem noch Zeit hatte, schrieb ich mich für einen Damenkurs für Muster und Schnitte ein, um die Geheimnisse des Zuschnitts zu lernen. Ich war sehr froh, das während meiner Schwangerschaft machen zu können. Natürlich war es mit der Geburt meines Sohnes damit vorbei, aber auch wenn ich noch viel zu lernen hatte, zeigte es sich später als eine hervorragende Idee.
Mein Mann wurde dann nach Genf versetzt. Wir zogen nach Frankreich an die Schweizer Grenze und meine Tochter wurde geboren. Die Geburt war katastrophal. Ich wäre fast gestorben, und der Arzt sagte mir, dass ich nie wieder ein Kind haben sollte, dass es mein Leben gefährden würde. Es gibt so viele Geschichten die erzählen könnte. Nun ja.

Dann zogen wir nach Argentinien: Eine neue, demokratische Regierung hatte übernommen und mein Mann hatte einen vielversprechenden Job. Das dauerte nicht lange! Die Regierung wurde gestürzt und eine neue Diktatur übernahm. Mein Mann verlor sofort seine Arbeit. Er hatte eine Stelle als Lehrer an einer privaten Akademie gefunden. Daneben arbeitete er als Forschungsassistent für die Regierung. Seine Familie hat uns auch unterstützt. Er verdiente kein großes Geld, aber... Oh Gott, ich möchte wirklich nicht darüber reden. Entschuldigung, aber es ist einfach zu viel für mich.

Auf jeden Fall kam 1966 eine Militärjunta und viele Intellektuelle mussten flüchten, viele mussten das Land verlassen. Das hieß, das für meinen Mann die Möglichkeiten etwas Geld zu verdienen schwanden. Er arbeitete für internationale Organisationen, aber ich musste mehr und mehr einspringen und für ein zusätzliches Einkommen sorgen. Für eine Weile gab ich privaten Deutschunterricht und, dank einer alten Maschine die mir meine Schwiegermutter gab, eröffnete ich einen kleinen Schneidersalon in unserer Wohnung. Am Anfang waren es nur meine Gemeindemitglieder – es half sehr, zu einer Gemeinde zu gehören – der Pfarrer legte ein gutes Wort für mich ein und bald machte ich jeden Abend, nach meinem normalen Tag, Kleider und Kinderkleidung. Die Mund zu Mund Propaganda lief schnell: Ich empfing die Kunden um die Teezeit, nur Frauen, viele Mütter, in meinem kleinen Vorderzimmer, nahm Maß und machte nachts die Arbeit. Meine Lieblingsarbeit war es Hochzeitskleider zu machen. Ich liebte die Anproben mit den zukünftigen Bräuten. Viele waren unsicher über ihr Aussehen und ich fühlte, dass ich ihnen wirklich helfen konnte und sie glücklich machte. Ich gab mir besondere Mühe, sie an ihrem großen Tag glänzen zu lassen. Manchmal dachte ich, dass die Mütter schrecklich sind. Manche von ihnen nahmen die Hochzeit ihrer Tochter als ihre eigene!“

Hilde wirft mir einen bedeutungsschweren Blick zu, die Augenbrauen hoch in die Stirn gezogen. „Selten bekam ich eine Anprobe allein mit einer Verlobten. Das mochte ich am meisten. Ich bin eine gute Zuhörerin und viele der zukünftigen Bräute vertrauten mir.
Ich versuchte ihnen Rat zu geben, sie zu beruhigen. Ich tröstete mehr als ein gebrochenes Herz! Eine Geschichte war besonders tragisch, eine junge Frau verlor ihren Ehemann in spe. Es war so traurig. Ich wagte nie nach meiner Bezahlung zu fragen und sie kamen nie um das Kleid abzuholen. Zuletzt gab ich es auf einem Wohltätigkeitsbazar der Gemeinde weg. Ich konnte es niemandem geben den ich kannte. Es fühlte sich verflucht an, das Kleid.

Langsam erfuhren auch meine Nachbarn von meinen Näherei-Diensten und so ließ ich mich als kleines Schneiderunternehmen nieder. Es war ziemlich spannend, wenn auch beschwer-

lich, der Hauptverdiener meiner kleinen Familie zu werden.

Die Situation im Land wurde derweil immer instabiler, unsere Situation unhaltbarer. Mein Mann wurde ernsthaft depressiv und 1972 packte ich meinen Koffer und ging mit meinen beiden Kindern zurück nach Deutschland, nach Berlin, wo ich geboren war. Meine Eltern und Großeltern halfen mir das Ticket zu bezahlen. Sie waren sehr unglücklich mit mir und meiner Situation. Trennungen waren nichts was man tat zu der Zeit und mit unserem religiösen Hintergrund. Mein Spanisch war nicht perfekt geworden, aber ich war gut. Meine Kinder waren neun und sieben. Sie waren auf eine Schule gegangen die Deutschklassen angeboten hatte. Es war also nicht zu schwer für sie, sich an das deutsche Schulsystem zu gewöhnen.

Der erste Eindruck den ich von Berlin hatte? Nun, die Stadt war schläfrig und arm, außer Betrieb. Es war relativ einfach, eine Wohnung zu finden. Ich fand eine billige Wohnung, Erdgeschoss, in Neukölln. Es war ziemlich rau, aber ich mochte die farbenfrohen Kramläden, die ganzen Parks überall. Es war nicht so schlecht und ich fühlte mich sicher und frei, wenn auch arm. Dank eines kleinen Darlehens meiner Eltern konnte ich eine professionelle Heimarbeiter-Nähmaschine in einem Laden im ersten Stock eines Gebäudes am Kottbusserdamm kaufen. Der Verkäufer verbrachte viel Zeit damit mich zu beraten und ich testete sie mit vielen Stoffen, bevor ich meine Entscheidung fällte. Der Mann war so hilfsbereit! Ich rief den Laden jedes Mal an, wenn ich Ärger mit der Maschine hatte und er half mir so oft aus! Das war eindeutig die beste Investition die ich je gemacht habe. Zu der Zeit gab es viele Textilfabriken in Berlin. Sie boten Jobs in den Zeitungen an. Es wurde pro Stück bezahlt, es war gut, dass ich meine Erfahrungen als Studentin gemacht hatte. Für mich war es ideal zuhause zu arbeiten. Ich arbeitete hauptsächlich morgens und nachts. Die Nachmittage verbrachte ich mit den Kindern und meiner Hausarbeit. Ich machte auch ein bisschen Extrageld mit privaten Englisch-und Spanischstunden – auch wenn mein Spanisch bei weitem nicht perfekt war, war es immer noch viel besser als das meiner Studenten, sie konnten das nie beurteilen! (sie kichert) -, auch zuhause, aber das war zu unregelmäßig, besser bezahlt, aber nicht verlässlich genug.

Die Schneiderarbeiten andererseits hörten nie auf hereinzukommen. Bald, wieder dank meiner Gemeinde, bekam ich private Aufträge die interessanter und abwechslungsreicher waren als die Arbeit für die Fabriken. Nichtsdestotrotz war ich wirklich froh, Arbeit von den Fabriken zu bekommen. Das war verlässlicher und ich musste sicher sein, dass ich jeden Monat meine Rechnungen bezahlen konnte. Ich hatte nie ein richtiges Schaufenster. Ich brauchte nie wirklich eins und mir passte es so. Ich ein bin ein echter Stubenhocker! So arbeitete ich mehr oder weniger, bis ich eine kleine Rente bekam. Ich fing an weniger zu arbeiten. Meine Augen erlaubten keine Nachtarbeit mehr, nicht einmal mit meiner speziellen Lupenlampe. Es war zu ermüdend. Meine Kinder hatten bald Arbeit und fingen an mich zu unterstützen. Ich musste weiterarbeiten, die Rente reichte nicht, aber das war in Ordnung – tatsächlich genieße ich die Arbeit. Zu der Zeit gab es viel Einwanderung, also bin ich einmal die Woche in ein Zentrum gegangen und habe Einwandererkindern Deutschstunden gegeben. Ich habe das umsonst gemacht, es war mir ein Vergnügen.“

Ich frage Hilde, was ihr größter Fehler war – und ich meinte einen Fehler bei der Schneiderei. Sie antwortet: “An einem Punkt fühlte ich einsam in Berlin, besonders als die Kinder aus dem Haus waren, und ich trat dem „Winnetou Klub“ bei. Wir gingen in die Wälder um Berlin und spielten Szenen mit dem heroischen Winnetou, Häuptling der Apatschen, nach. Es drehte sich alles um das Ehren der Natur und das Erkennen von rassistischer Misshandlung. Wir zogen uns wie Indianer an und kampierten in Tipis. Das war der letzte Schrei damals in Deutschland. Ich war ein paarmal da. Im Rückblick war das ziemlich erbärmlich, wie peinlich!“, kichert sie, ungläubig den Kopf schüttelnd. „Ich kann jetzt schon einige Jahre nicht mehr nähen, mein Sehvermögen ist jetzt zu schlecht und meine Hände zittern. Ich habe trotzdem noch meinen Nähkasten, er ist ein schönes Erinnerungsstück.“ Just in dem Moment kommt ein Angestellter des Altersheims zu uns. Hilde muss gehen, ich fürchte das Interview ist vorbei. Ich verspreche zurückzukommen, sie verspricht mir mehr Geschichten aus ihrer Vergangenheit. Sie beobachtet wie ich aufbreche und ich kann mir nicht helfen - ich bin ein bisschen traurig.