

# *Giufà's Exploits*

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Italian

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*Easy*  
*11 min read*

After Giufà had scalded his little sister to death, his mother drove him from the house, and he entered the service of a priest. "What wages do you want?" asked the priest. "One egg a day, and as much bread as I can eat with it; and you must keep me in your service until the screech-owl cries in the ivy." The priest was satisfied and thought he could not find such a cheap servant again. The next morning Giufà received his egg and a loaf of bread. He opened the egg and ate it with a pin, and every time he licked off the pin he ate a great piece of bread. "Bring me a little more bread," he cried; "this is not enough;" and the priest had to get him a large basket of bread.

So it was every morning. "Alas for me!" cried the priest; "in a few weeks he will reduce me to beggary." It was winter then and would be several months until the screech-owl cried in the ivy. In despair the priest said to his mother: "This evening you must hide in the ivy and scream like an owl." The old woman did as she was told and began to cry: "Miu, miu!" "Do you hear, Giufà?" said the priest, "the screech-owl is crying in the ivy; we must part." So Giufà took his bundle and was going to return to his mother.

As he was going by the place where the priest's mother was still crying "Miu, miu," he exclaimed: "O you cursed screech-owl suffer punishment and sorrow!" and threw stones into the ivy and killed the old woman.

Giufà's mother would not allow him to remain at home, and made him take service as a swineherd with a

farmer, who sent him into the woods to keep the swine until they were fat and then drive them back. So Giufà lived several months in the woods until the swine were fat. As he was driving them home he met a butcher and said to him: "Would you like to buy these swine? I will sell them to you at half price if you will give me back the ears and tails." The butcher bought the whole herd, and paid Giufà the money, together with the ears and tails.

Giufà then went to a bog near by and planted two ears close together and three spans off a tail, and so with all of them. Then he ran in great trouble to the farmer and cried: "Sir, imagine what a great misfortune has happened to me. I had fattened your swine beautifully and was driving them home when they fell into a bog and are all swallowed up in it. The ears and tails only are still sticking out." The farmer hastened with all his people to the bog, where the ears and tails still stuck out. They tried to pull the swine out, but whenever they seized an ear or a tail it came right off and Giufà exclaimed: "You see how fat the swine were: they have disappeared in the marsh from pure fatness." The farmer was obliged to return home without his swine, while Giufà took the money home to his mother and remained a time with her.

One day his mother said to him: "Giufà, we have nothing to eat to-day; what shall we do?" "Leave it to me," said he, and went to a butcher. "Gossip, give me half a rotulu of meat; I will give you the money to-morrow." The butcher gave him the meat and he went in the same way to the baker, the oil-merchant, the wine-dealer, and the cheese-merchant and took home to his mother the meat, macaroni, bread, oil, wine, and cheese which he had bought on credit, and they ate together merrily.

The next day Giufà pretended he was dead and his mother wept and lamented. "My son is dead, my son is dead!" He was put in an open coffin and carried to the church and the priests sang the mass for the dead over him. When, however, every one in the city heard that Giufà was dead, the butcher, the baker, the oil-merchant, and the wine-dealer said: "What we gave him yesterday is as good as lost. Who will pay us for it now?" The cheese-dealer, however, thought: "Giufà, it is true, owes me only four grani but I will not give them to him. I will go and take his cap from him." So he crept into the church, but there was still a priest there praying over Giufà's coffin. "As long as the priest is there, it is not fitting for me to take his cap," thought the cheese-merchant, and hid himself behind the altar. When it was night the last priest departed and the cheese-merchant was on the point of coming out from his hiding-place when a band of thieves rushed into the church. They had stolen a large bag of money and were going to divide it in the dark church. They quarrelled over the division and began to cry out and make a noise. Thereupon Giufà sat up in his coffin and exclaimed: "Out with

you!" The thieves were greatly frightened when the dead man rose up, and believed he was calling to the other dead, so they ran out in terror, leaving the sack behind. As Giufà was picking up the sack, the cheese-merchant sprang from his hiding-place and claimed his share of the money. Giufà, however, kept crying: "Your share is four grani." The thieves outside thought he was dividing the money among the dead and said to each other: "How many he must have called if they receive but four grani apiece!" and ran away as fast as they could run. Giufà took the money home to his mother, after he had given the cheese-merchant a little to say nothing about what had happened.

Giufà's mother once bought a large stock of flax and said to her son: "Giufà, you can surely spin a little so as to be doing something." Giufà took a skein from time to time, and instead of spinning it put it in the fire and burned it. Then his mother became angry and beat him. What did Giufà do then? He took a bundle of twigs and wound it with flax like a distaff; then he took a broom for a spindle and sat himself on the roof and began to spin. While he was sitting there three fairies came by and said: "Just see how nicely Giufà is sitting there and spinning. Shall we not give him something?" The first fairy said: "I will enable him to spin as much flax in a night as he touches." The second said: "I will enable him to weave in a night as much yarn as he has spun." The third said: "I will enable him to bleach all the linen he has woven in one night." Giufà heard this and at night when his mother had gone to bed, he got behind her stock of flax, and as often as he touched a skein it was at once spun. When the flax was all gone he began to weave, and as soon as he touched the loom the linen began to roll from it. Finally he spread the linen out and had scarcely wet it a little when it was bleached. The next morning Giufà showed his mother the fine pieces of linen, and she sold them and earned much money. Giufà continued this for several nights; finally he grew tired and wanted to go out to service again.

He found a place with a smith, whose bellows he was to blow. He blew them so hard, however, that he put the fire out. The smith said: "Leave off blowing and hammer the iron on the anvil." But Giufà pounded on the anvil so hard that the iron flew into a thousand pieces. Then the smith became angry, but he could not send him away, for he had agreed to keep him a year. So he went to a poor man and said: "I will make you a handsome present if you will tell Giufà that you are Death, and that you have come to take him away." The poor man met Giufà one day, and said what the smith had told him. Giufà was not slow. "What, are you Death?" cried he, seized the poor man, put him in his sack, and carried him to the smithy. There he laid him on the anvil and began to hammer away on him. "How many years shall I yet live?" he asked, while he was hammering. "Twenty

years,” cried the man in the sack. “That is not near enough.” “Thirty years, forty years, as long as you will,” screamed the man; but Giufà kept on hammering until the poor man was dead.

The bishop once announced to the whole town that every goldsmith should make him a crucifix, and he would pay four hundred ounces for the most beautiful one. Whoever brought a crucifix that did not please him must lose his head. So a goldsmith came and brought him a handsome crucifix, but the bishop said it did not please him and had the poor man’s head cut off, but kept the crucifix. The next day a second goldsmith came, who brought a still handsomer crucifix, but it went no better with him than with the first. This lasted for some time and many a poor man lost his head. When Giufà heard of this he went to a goldsmith and said: “Master, you must make me a crucifix with a very thick body, but otherwise as fine as you can make it.” When the crucifix was done Giufà took it on his arm and carried it to the bishop. Scarcely had the bishop seen it when he cried out: “What are you thinking of, to bring me such a monster? Wait, you shall pay me for it!” “Ah, worthy sir,” said Giufà, “just hear me and learn what has happened to me. This crucifix was a model of beauty when I started with it; on the way it began to swell with anger and the nearer your house I came the more it swelled, most of all when I was mounting your stairs. The Lord is angry with you on account of the innocent blood that you have shed, and if you do not at once give me the four hundred ounces and an annuity to each of the goldsmiths’ widows, you, too, will swell in the same way, and God’s wrath will visit you.” The bishop was frightened and gave him the four hundred ounces, and bade him send all the widows to him so that he could give each of them a yearly pension. Giufà took the money and went to each widow and said: “What will you give me if I will procure you an annuity from the bishop?” Each gave him a handsome sum and Giufà took home to his mother a great heap of money.

One day Giufà’s mother sent him to another town, where there was a fair. On the way some children met him, who asked: “Where are you going, Giufà?” “To the fair.” “Will you bring me back a whistle?” “Yes!” “And me, too?” “Yes!” “Me, too?” “Me, too?” asked one after the other, and Giufà said “Yes” to all. At last there was a child who said: “Giufà, bring me a whistle, too. Here is a penny.” When Giufà came back from the fair, he brought one whistle only and gave it to the last boy. “Giufà, you promised each of us one,” cried the other children. “You did not give me a penny to buy it with,” answered Giufà.

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