

Sir Fiorante, Magician

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Italian

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A woodman had three daughters. Every morning one after the other, in turn, carried him his bread to the wood. The father and the daughters noticed in a thicket a large snake, which one day asked the old man for one of his daughters in marriage, threatening him with death if none of them would accept such an offer. The father told his daughters of the snake's offer, and the first and second immediately refused. If the third had refused too, there would have been no hope of salvation for the father; but for his sake she declared at once that snakes had always pleased her, and she thought the snake proposed by her father very handsome. At this the snake shook his tail in token of great joy, and making his bride mount it, carried her away to the midst of a beautiful meadow, where he caused a splendid palace to arise while he himself became a handsome man, and revealed himself as Sir Fiorante with the red and white stockings. But woe to her if she ever disclosed to any one his existence and name! She would lose him forever, unless, to obtain possession of him again, she wore out a pair of iron shoes, a staff and a hat, and filled with her tears seven bottles. The maiden promised; but she was a woman; she went to visit her sisters; one of them wished to know her husband's name, and was so cunning that at last her sister told her, but when the poor girl went back to see her husband, she found neither husband nor palace. To find him again, she was obliged in despair to do penance. She walked and walked and walked, and wept unceasingly. She had already filled one bottle with tears, when she met an old woman who gave her a fine walnut to crack in time of need, and disappeared. When she had filled four bottles, she met another old woman, who gave her a hazel-nut to crack in time of need, and disappeared. She had filled all seven bottles when a third old woman appeared to her, and left her an almond to be cracked in a third case of

need, and she, too, disappeared. At last the young girl reached the castle of Sir Fiorante, who had taken another wife. The girl broke first the walnut, and found in it a beautiful dress which the second wife wanted herself. The young girl said: "You may have it if you will let me sleep with Sir Fiorante." The second wife consented, but meanwhile she gave Sir Fiorante some opium. In the night, the young girl said: "Sir Fiorante with the red and white stockings, I have worn out a pair of iron shoes, the staff and the hat, and filled seven bottles with tears, wherefore you must recognize your first wife."

He made no answer, for he had taken opium. The next day the girl opened the hazel-nut, and out came a dress more beautiful than the first; Sir Fiorante's second wife wanted this, and obtained it on the same condition as the first, but took care that Sir Fiorante should take some opium before going to bed. The third day, a faithful servant asked Sir Fiorante if he had not heard in the night the cries that were uttered near him. Sir Fiorante replied, No, but was careful not to take any opium the third night, when, having broken the almond and found in it a dress of unapproachable beauty, the young girl obtained the second wife's consent to sleep anew with Sir Fiorante. The latter pretended this time to take the opium, but did not. Then he feigned to be asleep, but remained awake in order to hear the cries of his abandoned wife, which he could not resist, and began to embrace her. The next day they left that palace to the second wife, and departed together and went to live in happiness at another more wonderful castle.

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