

Pretty Poor Girl or Povira Bedda – A Sicilian legend

Once upon a time, so the story goes, there was an old man with a beautiful granddaughter. They were so poor that their survival depended on whatever people were willing to give them. The girl was called povira bedda, “ Pretty Poor Girl”.

One day a fortune-teller came along, one of those charlatans who travels around offering to tell the fortune to any woman who’d believe him, just to make some money. He was so insistent that Povira Bidda agreed to have her fortune told. The poor child had no money to give him, but he had noticed a little bed quilt spread out in the sun outside the house, and he agreed to take this as payment. He began making the usual sign of the cross in the girl’s palm and then he predicted she would get a king for a husband.

Povira Bidda’s first reaction was to laugh, but the idea stayed in her head, and she began thinking about it.

Well, it so happened that Povera Bedda’s house stood just below the king’s palace. At the very moment, the fortune-teller was reciting the future, the young prince happened to be looking out and listening. He was very amused, and as he laughed he called out to her:

“You lost the little quilt from your bed, but a prince like me you’ll never wed!”

Povira Bidda answer him: “Why should I worry?” “ There’s one that’s above and one that’s below, and I’ll be the prince’s wife I know, as I trust in the Lord divine the son of the king is sure to be mine. As I trust in God and saint alone, the prince will soon be very own. “

The prince chuckled at hearing this, but inside him a little love wound had open and would never heal. Now let’s turn to the old woman, who came back home and found her little quilt missing. She huttered such a hole and tore her hair so much that the prince had one of his own quilt sent over to appease her. But then, as the days passed, the prince found that he couldn’t take his mind off Povera Bidda and thought the ways how he might keep teasing her and recing the same taunt. Deep in his heart the flame of his love for her was burning more brightly every day. The prince’s mother, the queen, was fully aware of what was happening to her son. So she made the shewrd decision to ease his soul by having him marry. When she suggested this, he answerd that he would marry only when she brought him a young woman who was the exact image of Povera Bedda. Upon hearing this, the queen felt like someone caught in a thorn-bush, but she quickly thought a way to disentagle herself and came up with the following plan. She arranged to marry her son to a certain princess and brought her to the palace. Then she summoned the old grandmother and told her that she wanted Povera Bedda to come and be her son’s bride, in place of the intended spouse, since he insisted he would only marry a girl who was the exact image of Povera Bedda. When the old woman told this to her granddaughter the girl didn’t need any persuading! The following evening Povera Bidda, all dressed up as you can imagine, presented herself to the prince. At the site of her he was at a loss for words, and he married her on the spot. But Povera Bidda did not get dare into the marriage bed. The queen you see had ordered her to hide under neath the bed, so that the bride that she had selected for her son could lie in the bed. The prince of course did not understand what was happening. In the wink of an eye Povera Bedda vanished under the bed an – zoom – in a between the bed sheet slipped the princess. When the prince realized what have been done to him, he became enraged. “ I’ve been tricked! I’ve been betrayed! He kept shouting until all the palace servants came running. Now the queen had to admit had completly backfired and she had no choise to give her blessing to the marriage. And that’s the way Povera Bidda got the king’s son as very own.

Collected by Mattia Di Martino by an anonymous story-teller in Noto.