

*The wind blows my tale out the door
And takes it to the farthest shore.
May it bring back a hundred more.*

Chile | Juana González

6. Don Dinero and Doña Fortuna

Don Dinero and Doña Fortuna were having an argument. Don Dinero pressed his claim, "My money's the answer. Without it there's nothing." Doña Fortuna shook her head. "Without good fortune your money brings nothing but trouble. It's my luck that's the answer. Watch, I'll prove it."

Just then a poor man appeared and stood before Doña Fortuna. She asked him, "And how is your life?" He said, "Life? What life? I'm tired of working, and all they give me is four reales."

She filled his knapsack with money and said, "Now, see if this helps. Come back in a while and tell me how things are going."

The man threw the knapsack on his back and went off. On the way home he passed through a forest. He started to have thoughts, "Who does Doña Fortuna think she is? Why should I go back to her? With a sack full of money I don't need anyone."

He walked on. Then wouldn't you know, the knapsack got tangled in a vine. The vine pulled down a wasps' nest, and the wasps stung him. He ran out of the woods as fast as he could, but when he reached the cleared fields, he discovered the knapsack had fallen off somewhere. He went back but couldn't find it. Something he didn't know: the wasps were thieves in disguise.

He returned sadly to the lady and told her what had happened. She said, "Don't worry about losing the money. Just go home."

The man had a neighbor who was better off than he was, thanks to

Doña Fortuna, who took good care of him. After the poor man had left, the lady sent this neighbor a basket of bananas. Hidden under the bananas was the poor man's knapsack with all the money. Not realizing the money was there, and knowing that his neighbor was in need, the good man told the messenger to take the bananas to his friend. "He is worse off than I am," he said.

The poor man was pleased with the gift. And when he took out the bananas, there was the knapsack. He was amazed. He hid the money and said nothing to his family. He ran to Doña Fortuna. "Now I know there's a God. And you! You knew the truth. Without luck, there can't be money."

The lady looked at him kindly. "Since you are repentant, I am going to tell you something. Find yourself a piece of land, whatever it costs, and offer to buy it. When you've made a deal, come to me for the purchase price."

The man went to see a landowner who owned a finca worth fifteen thousand pesos. The owner said to him, "If you bring me the money this afternoon, I'll give you my land for five thousand." He only said it to mock the poor man. But the poor man said, "It's a deal." And in no time at all the man who had been poor became rich.

Don Dinero turned to Doña Fortuna and said, "That man was so poor, now he's so rich!"

"Yes," said Doña Fortuna, "but it was only to prove that without my good fortune your money is nothing."

Dominican Republic | José Guzmán Ribera

7. Mistress Lucía

Very well then. Here was a king who wished to marry the most beautiful woman in the world, and with that in mind he left his kingdom and took to the road. He looked everywhere and tried all the different

countries. But although he was shown the prettiest young women, he was quick to see their faults and kept putting off a decision. At last, tired of the traveling and the disappointments, he decided to go home and forget the whole matter.

After he had been back awhile, it happened that a peddler arrived in the kingdom selling picture postcards and all kinds of portraits. Down the street he came, wheeling his cart with the little portraits arranged under an open umbrella. And who but the king should be on hand to hear his cry:

“Get your portraits! Portraits here! Pretty faces ready to go, some not so pretty, and some so-so. Portraits! Get your portraits!”

The king called the man over, took a look at the portraits, and saw one that pleased him. The longer he looked at it, the more he liked it. Unable to take his eyes off it, he asked who the young woman was and where she lived.

“Sacred and Royal Majesty,” said the peddler, “she whom you admire is the mistress Lucía, who lives in the town of La Cañada. I must tell you, she’s an orphan, whose brother Juan watches over her closely. In fact he lets her come out on her balcony only one day a year. I myself have never seen her, but those who have spend the entire year waiting for the day to come round again.”

Hearing this, and already smitten by the portrait, the king suffered an attack of lovesickness and had to retire to his chambers, where he immediately dispatched messengers to find the young man named Juan and to ask him for the hand of his sister Lucía.

When Juan had been brought to the palace and had heard the king’s proposal, he said he had never felt so honored. He would be pleased to allow the marriage. But first he would have to have a private audience with the king. The king drew him aside.

“Majesty,” whispered the young man, “I must tell you this not because she’s my sister, but because it’s the honest truth. Beyond mere beauty she has three charms, and no one knows about them but me, and now you: when she brushes her hair, pearls fall to the ground; when she washes her hands, flowers drop from her fingers; and whenever she cries, it rains.”

The king, who had never heard such marvels, was now more impatient than before, if that is possible. He ordered a coach to be outfitted

and sent Juan with an escort to bring back Lucía at once, while he himself made arrangements for the wedding.

And now we will leave this king and turn to the mistress Lucía, shut up in her house and worrying her head over why in the world her brother had been summoned to the palace. She was torturing herself with first one idea and then another when Juan arrived and gave her the news that the king had decided to marry her.

Lucía, who was an obedient girl, made no objection to her brother’s plans and even began packing her things. But she did have one requirement: she must be allowed to bring her pet parakeet and her pet mockingbird. And for the occasion she prettied up each of the two cages with a bonnet of ribbons. While she busied herself with this work, one of her servant girls said to her, “Mistress Lucía, you should bring me with you to clean the cages.”

“Why not? Go ask your mother for permission.”

The girl returned with her mother and said, “I can go if my mother comes too. And she’ll do your laundry, just as always.”

“Very well, I’ll ask Juan, and if he says yes, you can both come.”

Juan thought, “What could be better?” This way his sister would not be homesick. Besides, there was a brush fire just at that moment and the neighbors needed Juan to help put it out. So he had no choice but to entrust Lucía to the maidservant and her mother. No doubt she’d be perfectly safe. And of course he didn’t want to keep the king waiting.

Up went the birdcages onto the luggage rack of the carriage. The two servants settled themselves comfortably. And Juan said good-bye to his sister, giving her many good counsels along with his blessing. Her carriage now ready, Lucía fluttered her handkerchief, saying:

Good-bye, dear Juan, who mothered and fathered me.

Good-bye, dear chapel, where I said my prayers.

Good-bye, dear pebbles, that I used to play with.

Good-bye, dear brook, where I used to bathe.

“Hush,” said Juan. “You’re making me weak.” With that the carriage rolled off, Lucía started to cry, and the heavens, need it be said, opened up and poured.

Well, they hadn't gone far when they came to a deep woods where berries were growing. The old servant woman called out, "Look here! What should it be but strawberries! Mistress Lucía, why don't we stop and pick these for the king, so we don't come empty-handed."

"Very well," said Lucía. She ordered the coachman to stop, and as the three of them were jumping down, the parakeet caught Lucía's eye and said, "Mama Lucía, bring me too." And Lucía, who could never say no to anyone, took the cage off the roof and tied it behind her back.

They had just begun picking the strawberries when the old woman said, "Mistress Lucía, look! They're plumper over that way," and she ran farther into the forest. "Oh, darling! Look! They're fresher over that way, and more fragrant!" But in her heart she had a deeper plan. As soon as they were far enough from the carriage to be out of sight, the old servant woman took hold of Lucía, wrenched her arms, and slapped her all over. She pulled off Lucía's outfit and put it on her own daughter. Leaving Lucía with the parakeet and the daughter's clothes, the two servants ran back to the carriage and shouted to the coachman, "To the palace and hurry!"

When they arrived, the king was waiting with his entire court. At a glance he could tell that his bride-to-be was no rarity. She didn't even look like the portrait. He'd been tricked. But what are mere appearances? He consoled himself with the thought of the young woman's three charms. Anyway, since the king's word is for keeps, as people say, he had no choice but to go ahead with the wedding.

As the nuptials drew to a close, the king ordered his guards to throw open the doors to a balcony that overlooked the main square. All the king's subjects were to gather at once to witness a spectacle never before seen in the world. The queen would display her three charms.

The square filled up in no time. The king and his court arranged themselves on the balcony. But can you imagine? When the moment arrived for the maidservant to brush her hair, what fell out but lice? She washed her hands, and nothing came off but grime. And when she started to cry, the clouds flew away and hid behind the hills.

The king was humiliated. He lashed out at the queen. When she told him she had no idea what he was talking about, he began to suspect Don Juan of treachery. He summoned him to the palace for questioning.

At this the alert-minded queen pleaded a migraine and dotted her temples with paper discs soaked in oil of *alacrán*. No one was to disturb her, and all for the purpose of avoiding Juan, who would naturally recognize her.

On arriving at the palace, Juan had to be told that his sister could not see him, and when the king charged him with the crime of fraud he had no defense. After the king had pronounced him guilty, the ministers in council sentenced him to death.

The trial was held on the balcony, and the execution and burial took place in the commons just below. The mockingbird, whose cage happened to hang on the balcony, saw it all.

And now we must leave the palace and turn to Lucía. The poor dear, she'd been left alone in the woods without the slightest idea where to go. What's more, it was getting dark, and the farther she walked the deeper the forest. Worn out, she sank under a pine tree, ready to spend the night as best she could, when the parakeet said,

Dear mama Lucía

Step it, stretch it!

And this gave her a second wind. Suddenly there in front of her was the edge of the woods and in the distance a light.

Dear mama Lucía,

Step it, stretch it!

And before she knew it she'd arrived at the hut of a woodcutter and his family. Such beauty the poor little family had never seen. The terrified father cried out, "In God's name, speak! Are you of this life or the next?"

"Flesh and blood, but lost in the woods," came the simple reply, and moved by pity they took her in. The next morning she combed a few pearls from her hair and gave them to the woodcutter's wife to sell in town, wherever that might be. Believe it or not, the nearest town was the king's royal seat, and when the wife returned from her errand she brought the news that the king was in need of a seamstress.

Following the wife's directions and with the parakeet's cage strapped

to her back, Lucía set off for town. No sooner had she arrived at the palace than a button popped off the king's shirt. He demanded a seamstress at once.

Lucía presented herself and was led to the king's balcony. Does it have to be said? The king was entranced. But the first one to speak was the mockingbird:

*Mistress Lucía, O Mistress Lucía,
Your brother Don Juan was done in,
And his grave lies in the commons.*

Such news! Lucía burst into tears, and the sky answered with a sudden shower.

Yet another interruption. It was the chocolate hour. In came the king's page with chocolate and muffins on a sterling salver. The king invited Lucía to join him, and when she insisted on first washing her hands, he ordered a basin and a towel of genuine linen with a pictorial border. No sooner had she dipped her hands in the water than the basin was filled with flowers.

The king now knew: this was none other than Lucía. "Tell him," said the parakeet. "Tell what happened." And she told her story, strawberries and all, whereupon the king gave orders for the old servant woman and her daughter to be hanged by the neck from the uppermost branches of the tallest tree on the highest hill.

As for Mistress Lucía, she was wed to the king in a ceremony followed by feasting. As soon as it was over, the doors to the balcony were thrown open and word went out that the queen would exhibit her three charms. The people gathered, this time however with rocks in their hands to stone the queen in case they were cheated again. But it was not to be.

Lucía combed her hair with an ivory comb, and so many pearls tumbled forth that the people, forgetting the stones they had brought, scrambled to snap up the pearls.

A silver basin with a plunger and fountain came forth on a tray. When Lucía washed her hands so many flowers spilled over the rail of the balcony that women caught them with their aprons and men with their hats.

So nothing was left but to see it rain. In a time of such happiness who could cry? But all at once the mockingbird sang its song,

*Mistress Lucía, O Mistress Lucía,
Your brother Don Juan was done in,
And his grave lies in the commons.*

At the first word Lucía began to weep. The heavens opened, and immediately the people ran for cover. They ran and couldn't stop.

And here we will leave them wearing out the soles of their shoes.

Mexico / Bárbara (surname not given)

⇒ 8. St. Peter's Wishes ⇐

St. Peter and a friend went out for a walk, and the exercise made them thirsty. St. Peter started asking for water. He got to a house, and when the woman came to the door and found out what he wanted, she took a glass, wiped it clean, and graciously gave him a drink.

St. Peter drank the water, and as he handed her the empty glass he said, "May God give you a bad husband."

The two friends continued down the road and came to another house. St. Peter asked for water, and the woman found a glass and scrubbed it until it was perfectly clean. Then she filled it with water and handed it to St. Peter with tender care.

He drained the glass and said, "May God give you a bad husband."

They came to another house, where an ill-tempered woman pushed a dirty glass of water in his face and said, "Drink it."

St. Peter drank it and said, "May God give you a good husband."

They walked on. The friend finally said, "How could you wish a good husband on that wretched woman after what you said to the women who were so good to you?"

are the lives of all the people on earth, and this one that's sputtering and about to go out is yours."

The man said, "All right, but just give me fifteen minutes and I'll tell you a story you'll like." Death agreed, and while the man was telling the story, he looked around him, found where the oil was kept, and poured enough of it into his own little lamp to keep it burning. Today that man is still alive. I know him.

Dominican Republic / Feyito Molina

15. What the Owls Said

It was in the old days. There was a hunter who told his wife to pack him a dinner bag so he could go out and bring back some game, and when it was ready he went.

The whole day he saw nothing. It started to get dark. He took cover in a woods where there were tall trees, rested his rifle against a tree trunk, and lay down next to it. Before long two owls flew into the tree and sat on a branch. The two began to talk, and this is what they said:

"You know, they're like that. We're the ones who can help, and what thanks do we get? They see us and chase us off."

"I know. They throw a hot coal to shoo you away."

"They throw stones. They try to hit you."

"They even pick up a rifle and try to kill you, when all you're doing is offering a little help. They don't seem to like it when somebody wants to do a favor."

"I know. They've got three doctors on the case already, and the patient isn't any better. They stick a needle in him, they give pills, and everything. But it doesn't work. Now, a good sorcerer would examine the patient and know there must be an animal under the bed and get rid of it and that would ease the sickness. All he'd have to do is throw a handful of kernels and one of them would roll to where the animal was."

"And after that he'd take an egg and roll it in paper."

"And then he'd put a little rum in a hollow reed and bury it in the earth and the sickness would go away. Any good sorcerer would do that."

Lying under the tree, the hunter could hear these instructions clearly. The next morning he went to the nearest ranch and asked what was happening. "Why are all these people standing around?"

"Ah!" they said. "The señor is gravely ill. Three doctors are in there right now, and still the patient is no better. The only thing that hasn't been tried is one of those witch doctors the Indians use. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Me? Oh, no," protested the man. "But let me ask one thing. Would it have to be someone who *looks* like a healer?"

And already they knew they had their man. The patient's little boy ran into the house to ask his father if it would be all right to let the man come in, and he came back to say the permission had been given.

The man said, "Well, how am I going to go in there and stand next to those doctors who know so much? They know everything, and here I am in short pants. If I could be fixed up like a regular doctor, I might be able to visit the patient."

The boy went back inside. When he returned, he was carrying a pair of long pants and a clean shirt, because the señor, being rich, had everything.

"This is good," said the man. "But what about a hat? Doctors have nice hats. And shoes and everything."

The boy went back to his father and said, "He needs shoes and a hat. He says he can't come in and talk to you until he's dressed right."

Then the boy came back with the shoes and the hat, and the man said, "Doctors charge by the minute, and I don't even have a watch. You have to hold it in your hand to see how many minutes are passing. So what am I going to see if I'm not holding anything?" The boy went off to explain this to his father, and when he came back he put a watch in the man's hands.

The man said, "Now I'm just like the doctors. We work by the minute, you know." He followed the boy into the sickroom and asked for an ear of corn and a cloth to spread out on the floor. A nice twelve-row ear was brought. He twisted it back and forth to shell the kernels from the

cob, all the while speaking under his breath the way sorcerers do, and when he had a handful he threw it across the cloth. One of the kernels bounced to the edge of the bed where the patient lay. He lifted the blanket that hung down from the bed, and there was a toad. He pulled it out and killed it.

Then he asked for an egg and a sheet of paper to wrap the egg in. After that, he put a few drops of rum into a reed, plugged it with a piece of cotton, and buried it outside in the yard, just as his friends the owls had said. Then the patient was cured.

The sorcerer did it all. The doctors did nothing. Who knows? That's what the story says. There, it's finished.

Mexico (Mazatec)

⇒ 16. Aunt Misery ⇐

Well, sir, there was an old woman up in her years whose only companion was a beautiful pear tree. It grew at the door to her cabin. But when the pears were ripe, the neighborhood boys came and taunted her and stole the fruit. They were driving her to the end of her wits.

One day a traveler stopped at the cabin and asked if he could spend the night. Aunt Misery, for that's what the boys and the whole neighborhood called her, said to the man, "Come in." The man went in and lay down to sleep. In the morning when he was ready to leave, he turned to the old woman and said, "Ask for whatever you want and your wish will be answered."

She said, "I wish for only one thing."

"Go ahead, ask for it."

"I wish whoever climbed in my tree would have to stay up there until I gave him permission to come back down."

"Your wish is granted."

So the next time the pears were ripe, the boys came to steal as usual,

but when they climbed to the top of the tree they got stuck. They pleaded with Aunt Misery to let them go. She wouldn't. Then at last she freed them, but on one condition, that they never come bothering her again.

The days went by, and one evening another traveler stopped at the cabin. He seemed to be out of breath. When Aunt Misery saw him, she asked what he wanted. He said, "I'm Death, and I've come to get you."

She answered, "All right! But before you take me, let me have some pears to bring along. Would you pick me a few?"

Death climbed up the tree to get the pears, but he couldn't get back down. Aunt Misery wouldn't let him go.

Years passed, and there were no deaths. Doctors, druggists, priests, undertakers, they all started to complain. They were losing business. Besides, there were old people who were tired of life and ready to leave for the other world.

When Aunt Misery learned of this, she made a trade with Death. In exchange for her freedom she'd let him come down. And that's why, to this day, people are dying, and Aunt Misery is still alive.

Puerto Rico

⇒ 17. Palm-tree Story ⇐

A pregnant woman went to fetch water. She filled her jar, but when she tried to put it on her head she strained herself and couldn't lift it. All at once she was giving birth, just as three men passed by, out seeking their fortune; and now, suddenly, she had a little boy. The child said, "Mama, I'll lift the jar for you. There! Now give me your blessing to follow those men." And off he went.

Running after the three travelers, he called out, "Good friends, wait up!" One of them said to the others, "Now look at this! There's a little boy following us." They caught him and tied him to an anthill.