

Marina Colasanti

Three Tales

Translated from Portuguese by Adria Frizzi

Through the Hoop

She began with a green thread. She did not know what to embroider, but she was sure about the green—bright green.

Grass. That's what appeared after the first few stitches. Tall grass, its tips bent as if it were looking at something.

It's looking at the flowers, she thought. And chose a red skein.

Thus, little by little, without an outline, a garden began to appear on the embroidery hoop. It obeyed her hands, it obeyed her fancy, and it grew as if the night dew made it sprout.

Every morning the girl ran to the hoop, looked at it, smiled, and added another bird, a bee, a cricket hidden behind a stem.

The sun shone on the girl's embroidery.

And the garden was so beautiful that she began to like it more than anything else.

It was on the day of the tree. The tree was finished, nothing seemed to be missing. But the girl knew it was time to add the fruit. She embroidered a shiny purple fruit, like nothing she had ever seen before. And then another, and another, until the tree was drooping, until the tree was bountiful, and her mouth filled with desire for that fruit never tasted before.

The girl did not know how it happened. When she looked again, she was sitting astride the highest branch of the tree, picking fruit and wiping the juice from her mouth.

It must have been through the thread, she thought when it was time to return home. She looked around, the last fruit was not ready yet, she touched the stitch where the thread ended. And there she was, back home.

Now that she knew the way, the girl went down into the embroidery every day. First she chose what she wanted to see—a butterfly, a praying mantis. She embroidered with care, then she followed the thread down onto the back of the insect, and flew with it, and came to rest on the flowers, and laughed and played and lay in the grass.

Além do bastidor



The embroidery was nearly done. Hardly any cloth showed through the brightly colored thread. Soon it would be finished.

It needs a heron, she thought. And she chose a white skein with pink hues. She embroidered each stitch with care, knowing, as she inserted the needle, how soft the feathers would be, how gentle the beak. Then she went down to meet her new friend.

It was like that, standing next to the heron, caressing its neck, that her older sister saw her when she leaned over the hoop. She was the only thing that hadn't been embroidered. And the design was so pretty that her sister picked up the needle, the basket of thread, and began to embroider.

She embroidered her hair, and the wind stopped blowing in it. She embroidered her skirt, and the pleats ceased to move. She embroidered her hands, forever frozen on the heron's neck. She wanted to embroider her feet, but they were hidden in the grass. She wanted to embroider her face, but it was hidden in the shadows. Then she embroidered the ribbon in her hair, finished the stitch, and very carefully cut the thread.

The One and Only

She was beautiful, she was the daughter, she was the one and only. The king's daughter. But what good was being a princess if she had no one to play with?

Alone in the palace, she cried and cried. She didn't want dolls, she didn't want toys. All she wanted was a friend.

At night the king heard his daughter's sobs. What good is a crown if your daughter cries at night? He decided to put an end to all that sadness. So he called the glazier and he called the frame maker. And secretly he had them make the largest mirror in the kingdom. And quietly he had them place it at the foot of his daughter's bed while she slept.

When the princess awoke, she was no longer alone. A beautiful girl, one and only, looked back at her in surprise, her hair still tousled from sleep. Quickly they both jumped out of bed. Quickly they approached each other. One smiled and said hello. The other said hello, smiling.

"Funny," one thought, "the other is left-handed."

And they both laughed.

They laughed a lot after that. Happy together, happy the same. One's play was the other's game. One's leap was the other's bounce. And when one was tired, the other slept.



The king, delighted with such cheer, had new toys made, which he gave his daughter in a basket. Animals, dolls, little houses, and a golden ball. The ball at the bottom of the basket. But so shiny it was the first toy they chose.

They rolled on the carpet with it, they flung it on the bed, they tossed it in the air. But when the princess decided to throw it into her friend's hands, the ball shattered game and friendship.

An empty frame, shards of mirror on the floor.

Sadness weighed in the eyes of the king's only daughter. She hung her head and began to cry. A tear welled up, was about to fall, when the princess saw the face she loved so much. Not just the face of one friend, but many faces of many friends. Not in the tear now falling, but in all the shards that covered the floor.

"Funny, they're all left-handed," she thought. And they laughed.

They laughed a good bit after that. It was different to play with so many friends. Now she could choose. One day she chose one, and then tired of her. The next day she preferred another, but quickly forgot about her. Then another and another yet, until she realized they were all still too few. Then she took one, threw her against the wall, and made two. She grew tired of both, stepped on them with her shoe and made four. No longer amused by the four, she smashed them with a hammer and made eight. Annoyed with the eight, she shattered them with a rock and made twelve.

But two were smaller than one, four smaller than two, eight smaller than four, twelve smaller than eight.

Smaller, each time smaller.

So much smaller that they no longer fit her, pieces of friends with whom she could no longer play. An eye, a smile, the side of a nose. Then not even that, just the glittery dust of friends scattered on the floor.

Alone again, the king's daughter.

Was she crying? I don't know.

She didn't want the dolls, she didn't want the toys.

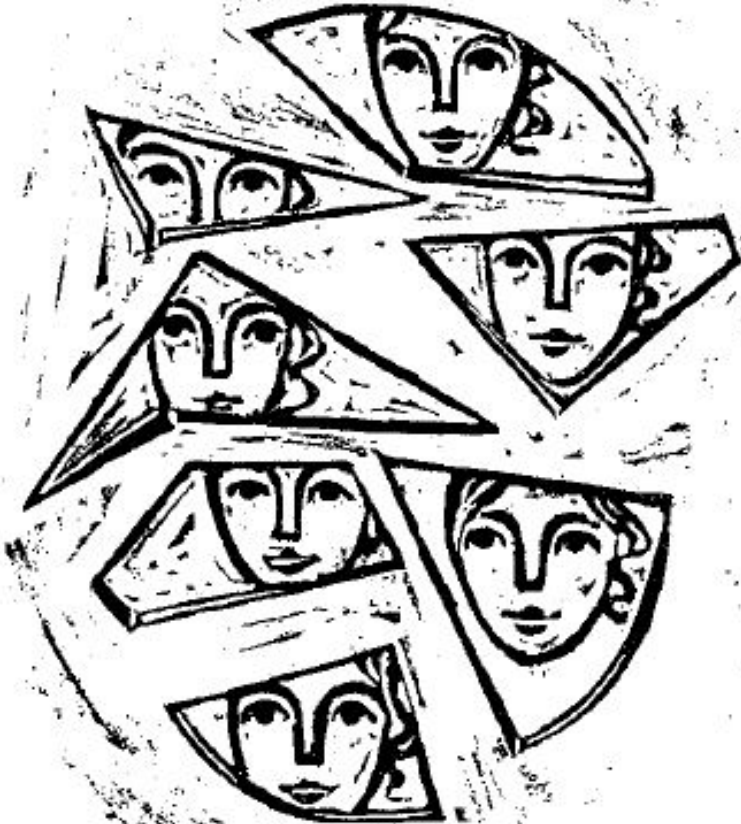
She left the palace and ran through the garden to wear out her sadness.

She ran and ran, but the sadness was still with her. She ran through the forest, she ran through the meadow. Then she stopped at the edge of the lake.

In the water's reflection, her friend awaited her.

But the princess no longer wanted only one friend, she wanted many, she wanted them all, those she had before and the new ones she would find. She blew on the water. The friend quavered but remained one. She threw a rock at her. The friend opened up in circles, but remained one.

Then the king's beautiful daughter threw herself into the water with her arms wide open, shattering the mirror into many shards, many friends that began to sink with her, disappearing beneath the ripples as the lake rearranged its surface.



The Girl Weaver

She woke when it was still dark, as if she had heard the sun coming from behind the edge of night.

And she immediately sat down at the loom.

A light-colored yarn, to start off the day.

A delicate thread the color of light, which she wove through the warp, while outside the morning glow outlined the horizon.

Later, brighter yarns, hot yarns, wove themselves away, hour by hour, in a long never-ending rug.

If the sun was too hot, and the petals drooped in the garden, the girl put thick grey yarns of the softest cotton in her shuttle. Shortly after, in the shadows brought on by the clouds, she chose a silver thread and embroidered long stitches across the fabric.

A light rain came to greet her at the window.

But if the wind and the cold quarreled with the leaves and scared the birds away for days, all the girl had to do was weave with her beautiful golden threads for the sun to return and quiet nature down.

Thus the girl spent her days, throwing the shuttle from side to side and moving the large beater forward and back.

She lacked for nothing. When she was hungry she wove a beautiful fish complete with scales. And there was the fish, on the table, ready to be eaten. If thirst came, soft was the milk-colored wool that ran through the rug.

And at night, after casting her thread of darkness, she slept peacefully. Weaving was all she did. Weaving was all she wanted to do.

But as she wove away, she herself brought about a time when she felt lonely, and for the first time she thought how nice it would be to have a husband by her side.

She did not wait another day.

With the care of someone attempting something never before experienced, she began to weave through the rug the yarns and colors that would give her company.

And little by little her desire began to emerge, plumed hat, bearded face, proud stance, polished boot. She was about to weave the last thread through the tip of his boots when there was a knock on the door.

She did not even need to open it. The youth put his hand on the door knob, took off his plumed hat, and walked right into her life.

That night, as she lay against his shoulder, the girl thought about the beautiful children she would weave to increase her happiness even more.

And happy she was, for a time. But if the man had thought about children, he soon forgot them. Because, after discovering the power of the loom, he thought of nothing else but all the things she could give him.

—A better house is in order, he told his wife. And it did seem to make sense, now that there were two of them. He demanded the most beautiful brick-colored yarns, green threads for the shutters, and haste for the house to happen.

But when the house was ready, it no longer seemed enough to him.

—Why have a house when we can have a palace? he asked.

Without waiting for an answer, he immediately ordered that it be made of stone with silver trim.

Day after day, week and month the girl toiled, weaving roofs and doors, and courtyards and staircases, and halls and wells. Outside the snow was falling, and she did not have time to call the sun. Night fell, and she did not have time to cast off the day. She'd weave and grieve, as the loom beat ceaselessly to the rhythm of the shuttle.

At last the palace was ready. And, from among so many rooms, the husband chose for her and her loom the highest room in the highest tower.

—So no one will know about the rug, he said.

And before locking the door, he warned her:

—You have yet to make the stables. And don't forget the horses!

The wife wove her husband's every whim without pause, filling the palace with luxury, the coffer with coins, the halls with servants. Weaving was all she did. Weaving was all she wanted to do.

And as she wove she herself brought about a time when her sadness seemed to her greater than the palace with all its treasures.

And for the first time she thought how nice it would be if she were on her own again.

She only waited until nightfall. She got up while her husband slept, dreaming of fresh demands. And barefoot, not to make any noise, she climbed the long staircase leading to the tower and sat down at the loom.

This time she did not need to choose a yarn. She grasped the shuttle and, throwing it quickly from side to side, she began to undo her weaving. She unwove the horses, the carriages, the stables, the gardens.

Next she unwove the servants and the palace and all the wonders it held.

And once again she found herself in her little house and smiled at the garden beyond the window.

The night was coming to an end when the husband, wondering at the hard bed, awoke and looked around, bewildered. He did not have time to get up. She was already undoing the dark outline of his boots, and he watched his feet disappear, his legs vanish. Swiftly, nothingness crept up his body and took his proud chest, his plumed hat.

Then, as if she had heard the sun coming, the girl chose a light-colored yarn. And slowly wove it through the threads, a delicate streak of light which the morning repeated in the line of the horizon.

Marina Colasanti (1937) is a writer, journalist, and artist. Born in Eritrea, she has lived in Libya, Italy, and Brazil, where she has resided since 1948. She is the author of over fifty books of short stories, poetry, essays, and children's literature. In addition to her activity as a writer and journalist, she is a translator and frequently the illustrator of her own books. Her works have been translated in several languages and recognized with numerous awards, most recently the prestigious Jabuti Dourado prize for best work of fiction of 2014.

Two of the stories presented here, ("The Hoop" and "The One and Only") come from *Uma idéia toda azul* [*A True Blue Idea*, 1979], a collection consisting of ten short and often dark tales beautifully illustrated by the author; we include here, with her permission, a few of the original ink resist paintings. "The Girl Weaver" ("A moça tecelã") was originally published

in *Doze reis e a moça no labirinto do vento* (Editora Nordica, Rio, 1982); an earlier version of this translation into English has been online for over a year at <http://exploringfictions.blogspot.com/2014/12/mariana-colasanti-girl-weaver-trans-by.html>

All the stories revisit traditional fairy tale characters and themes to challenge received ideas, question the relationship between the individual and society and recreate an alternate past and reality. The enormous popularity of Colasanti's tales, together with the numerous literary awards bestowed upon her work over the past decade and the multiple editions of many of her books (*Idéia* is now in its eighteenth edition) certainly support the critical claim that "fantasy combines entertainment with social critique to express utopian visions of political desire" (Peggy Sharpe).

A. F.

Note from *Delos*: The three illustrations accompanying the first two stories are the work of Maria Colasanti, the author. They were created by the technique of *nankim lavado*, or ink gouache resist. They were part of the 1979 publication *Uma idéia toda azul*, and are used with the author's kind permission.