

The Ricotta Dialogues : A Fairytale by Joanna Maitland

[In this version, the previously double-spaced paragraphs contain correctly punctuated dialogue. I hope!]

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4 ONCE UPON A TIME, in the rich and peaceful kingdom of Bel Paese, there ruled a good King, Bill, and his
5 beautiful and beloved Queen, Belle. Paese was full of sunlight and happiness. The people sang as they went
6 about their daily work.

7 But Queen Belle did not sing. Queen Belle was sad. For in the many years of their marriage, the King and
8 Queen had had no children of their own. And who would rule Bill and Belle's Paese when they were gone?

9 Queen Belle knew she had no choice; she consulted a witch. As it happened, she had one more or less to hand
10 since her faithful retainer, Slack-Britches, was well-connected on the witching front. His great-aunt Mascarpone
11 was the head of the local coven. Belle and Mascarpone put their heads together and came up with a foolproof
12 witcherly plan.

13 And lo! a year later, Queen Belle was cradling a baby daughter in her arms.

14
15 King Bill gazed proudly down at their first-born. "What shall we call her?"

16 "Ricotta Belle Paese," replied the Queen firmly. "It has a fine ring to it, don't you think, dear? Fit for a
17 princess. And fit for a queen, too—" she paused to allow herself to let out a soulful sigh "—one day. Long in the
18 future, of course," she added hastily at the sight of the King's frown.

19 The King ignored his wife's slur on his potential lifespan. "A queen has to have a husband, though."

20 "I fancy, my dear, that we can leave that for a while." The Queen stroked the baby's soft cheek. "Ricotta is
21 but two days old."

22 King Bill nodded. Then, "Perhaps," he said, brightening, "now that we have a girl child, we might hope for a
23 boy as well? To follow me as king? We've had one miracle." He beamed at her. "Might there not be another?"

24
25 Slack-Britches, standing in the shadows of the nursery, was suddenly overcome by a fit of coughing. Queen
26 Belle threw him a black look and he backed out of the presence, bowing low.

27
28 "We may always hope," said Queen Belle airily, "but I think we had best cherish the heir we have, since she
29 took so many years to appear." She smiled at her husband. "When she is old enough to marry, we can look for
30 the right kind of suitor. It goes without saying that he must be a prince. Blue blood is paramount in the reigning
31 business. And preferably a rich prince, though I suppose Ricotta will be rich enough to marry a poor one if
32 nothing better is on offer.

33 "Ricotta will be allowed to choose for herself, of course. We want her to be in love, as we were," she added,
34 gazing wistfully over King Bill's shoulder.

35 "But *we* will provide the candidates." The King was firm. Queen Belle knew better than to object.

36 ~ ~ ~
37 Eighteen years later, the search began in earnest, for there had been no second miracle. Ricotta Belle Paese was
38 definitely the heir, and a very fine catch indeed, for she wasn't really ugly and she was not as dim as either of her
39 parents. Crucially, she would one day be very, very rich; and a reigning queen. So, as far as any suitors were
40 concerned, Ricotta was *very* beautiful and *very* clever. It comes with the job description.

41 Soon, two ardent suitors appeared in Bel Paese: Prince Six-Pack and Prince Square-Jaw. Both filled the basic
42 job specification by being princes (though, sadly, not rich princes). Neither had two brain cells to rub together,
43 but both had splendid bodies which they did nothing to hide, being fond of parading up and down wearing only
44 an open leather waistcoat over tight riding breeches.

45
46 Mozarella, daughter of Slack-Britches and also Princess Ricotta's maid, watched the performance wide-eyed.
47 "Definitely fit," she said. "Either of them turn you on, Princess? If you chose one of them, that would leave the
48 other one for—"

49 "Square-Jaw is hairy," Ricotta announced, before Mozarella could finish, "and I don't like hairy men. Six-
50 Pack would be hairy too, except that he shaves his torso to show off his...er...six-pack."

51 "Ooh," breathed Mozarella, "how do you know that?"

52 "Mozarella—" Ricotta raised an admonishing finger "—there are some things that a minion should not ask."

53 ~ ~ ~
54 After a few weeks of watching the two princes in the full panoply of the Bel Paese court, Ricotta was permitted
55 to spend time alone with each of them to make her choice.
56

57 Six-Pack, much taken with the honour of having Ricotta to himself at last, bowed low and said, proudly,
58 “They call me ‘Six-Pack the Braw’.”
59 “Six-Pack the who?”
60 “It’s a *what*, no’ a who. *Braw*. Rhymes with *guffaw*. Means brave, where I come frae.”
61 “And where *is* that, exactly?”
62 Six-Pack jerked a thumb toward the window and the snowy mountains in the far distance. “North,” he said
63 laconically.
64
65 Ricotta decided that Six-Pack was a suitor of very few words. After seven more words – which took nearly
66 half an hour to emerge – she dismissed him to return to his strutting and exercising. She would not marry a man
67 who couldn’t talk to her.
68
69 “Might as well get it over with,” she said to herself. Raising her voice, she called out, “Mozarella, you may
70 send in the next—” She stopped in mid-sentence. No, that won’t do, she thought. Not princely at all. “Mozarella,
71 pray invite Prince Square-Jaw to join me here for wine and ‘elegant’ conversation.”
72
73 Prince Square-Jaw talked extremely elegantly for almost forty minutes. Ricotta could barely get a word in. As
74 soon as she said anything, he was off again, praising her beauty, her fine eyes, her seductive voice. Ricotta
75 wanted to ask how he knew anything about her voice since he had barely heard her speak a word. But manners
76 got the better of her. She maintained a fixed smile and tried to endure.
77
78 “Can’t you see I love you, you little fool?” Square-Jaw gritted out at last, pulling Ricotta into his manly
79 embrace and lowering his lips to hers.
80 “I *would* be a fool, if I believed a word you say,” Ricotta retorted acidly, kneeing him in the groin. “What you
81 love, Square-Jaw, is my money and my throne.” She sucked in a quick breath. “And the sound of your own
82 voice,” she snapped, glaring down at him.
83 For a moment, Square-Jaw was so shocked that he stopped writhing on the floor. “’s not true,” he gasped,
84 between groans.
85
86 Ricotta raised her foot as though she were about to add a kick to his earlier injury. Square-Jaw clutched his
87 genitals and curled into a ball, whimpering softly.
88
89 “Nuts!” Ricotta spat and grinned as Square-Jaw clutched and curled even tighter. “I won’t marry you,
90 Square-Jaw. And I won’t marry that other braw buffoon either. I’ve got a much better idea. Mozarella, come
91 here at once.”
92 Mozarella, who had of course been listening at the door, appeared in the blink of an eye. She curtsied more
93 demurely than she usually did and grinned up at her mistress.
94 “Get our horses saddled, Mozarella, and pack for a month. You and I are going husband hunting. And if I
95 don’t find a decent man in that time, I swear I’ll marry you instead.”
96 ~~~ENDS~~~

The Burthen of the Tale?

A feisty Princess called Ricotta
Refused to conform as she oughta;
So she kneed Prince Square-Jaw,
And spurned Six-Pack the Braw,
Then scarpered with Slack-Britches’ daughter.