

READING ANCIENT FOLK LITERATURE THE OMANI STORY OF “ABU QAHIFA” IS AN EXAMPLE

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Abstract:

The research deals with a popular tale from the ancient Omani heritage. In our research, we tried to learn about the Omani heritage and the distinct Omani culture, especially its literary heritage.

We dealt with the story with literary criticism and analysis, and we focused on the characters of the story, the method of narration, the language, the presentation, the quality of the wording, the artistic plot, the fertile imagination, and the idea that derived its roots from the Omani culture and imagination. In our research, we followed the descriptive and analytical approach that is consistent with the subject of the folk tale.

Keywords: Folk – characters - “Abu Qahifa”- popular literature - popular literature - Omani environment – Emotion – Imagination – Magic – Ideas.

Popular culture is no less than world culture. For them, this is due to the colloquial language in which popular literature was created, because the popular language is also a literary language, as evidenced by the poems, proverbs, tales, and riddles that have reached us, and carry the highest levels and components of creative beauty.

The concept of popular literature.

The popular literature of any nation is defined as its colloquial literature. This brief definition, in its linguistic form and in its semantic structure, focused on one element and built around its vision and content, which is the element of language or the means of expression, and everyone who hears the word literature directs his thoughts directly to official literature, in While this word carries within it all the literary effects that man has produced, whether those spoken in Arabic or the colloquial language, both of them, as previously mentioned, carry all the elements of the literary language. Researching popular heritage through its intellectual and creative effects is enough to open the horizons for a broad humanitarian effort that played a distinguished role in enriching our Arab literature and giving Arab civilization its human identity.

“Thus, we had to reveal this heritage in its parts and in its entirety. Whoever reads the books of the ancients and their gatherings since the era of Al-Jahiz, Al-Tawhidi, Al-Isfahani, Al-Tha’alabi, Al-Hamawi and others will find them filled with the popular spirit in a clear and frank manner without distortion. Therefore, it is an art whose roots extend back thousands of years. It has become exposed In our current era, it is rapidly disappearing, which requires us to preserve and record it with all modern methods and means of recording and documenting, so that we leave material for future generations before human culture is interfered with by modern media and creates a neutral culture that does not represent anyone.

Thus, popular heritage is “what the people, through their individuals and groups, have produced over the generations and in various fields, by which they have affirmed their existence, their right to life, and their struggle for the best and the best, and demonstrated their ability to exercise reason, spirit, emotion, and taste. Thus, it is considered the document by which the people present themselves, highlighting the sum of their gains.” ; Whether that which he acquired through his own experiences and was the result of his environmental circumstances, or that which was transmitted to him as a result of his contact with others, so he took it as it is or developed it until it matched his temperament and nature, highlighting also the set of patterns that he practices in his feelings and unconsciousness, and in harmony with himself and his environment, and they are patterns linked to the earth. On which he lives or looks beyond space and time and beyond nature.

The concept of popular literature is a concept with complex meanings. Its name indicates that it is literature directed to the general public, that is, to the people, as opposed to literature directed to the elite, that is, to the educated group of society. When we say “popular literature,” we mean that literature that originates from the people. To return to him and thus embody his concerns, feelings and aspirations.

As is known, the most important thing that distinguishes popular literature is its reliance on oral traditions, so that it relies in its promotion and circulation on storytelling and narration, in special places such as public squares, markets,

and popular celebrations such as ceremonies and private festivals, and it relies in particular on the voice in transmitting and expressing it. It recognizes Mostly in the voice of its author or narrator, it attracts a broad segment of society thirsty for this literary genre.

However, this orality will lose its flavor due to its codification and the emergence of audio-visual media. Moreover, the real development of every society must take place through it, by developing this heritage after accurate knowledge. Our popular literature is rich and diverse according to the diversity of the nature of the land of Morocco, between lofty mountains, jutting plateaus, flowing rivers, and beaches. Flat, spacious plains, and vast sands. If we knew this, it would become clear to us the diversity that can prevail in our folk arts. So what are the types of popular literature? (1)

Types of popular literature

There are many types of popular literature, including:

The popular proverb, the popular story, the popular tale, the wondrous tale, the fairy tale, the funny tale, the popular riddle, the joke, and the popular song.

The study of popular literature must remain developed and continuous, in order to keep pace with cultural development and preserve cultural heritage.

Folk literature, or popular heritage, is an important branch of human knowledge that was born in the first half of the nineteenth century, to be concerned with the manifestations of civilization of a people. Because of the multiplicity of criteria from which one begins to look at its nature, function, and fields, the definitions that one falls upon are shrouded in a kind of ambiguity and confusion. In addition to the cultural criteria that confirm that folklore is the oral tradition and nothing else; There are standards. Sociological criteria include within this field of knowledge everything that belongs to the life and culture of the rural classes. Psycho-sociological criteria define the term "popular" based on psychological-social data. Popular life and popular culture, according to these criteria, always exist where the human being, as a bearer of culture, submits in his thinking, feeling, or actions to the authority of society and heritage. And ethnological criteria, which see that folklore is the knowledge that is transmitted socially from father to son, and from neighbor to neighbor, and exclude knowledge acquired mentally, whether acquired through individual effort, or through organized and documented knowledge that is acquired within official institutions such as schools, institutes, universities, and academies. And whatnot.

"Talking about popular literature is an urgent need imposed by the problem of research into authentic national cultural and intellectual values. Popular literature is one of the most important cultural pillars, and research in its field is considered original research linked to the cultural entity of any human nation.

This need is undoubtedly dictated by the duty and responsibility to prove oneself, define one's identity, and strengthen its survival and continued steadfastness in the midst of this intellectual, political, cultural, and ideological discord" (2).

Omani literature is like any other literature of other nations.

Folk Tales

Every human society has its own distinct culture, which includes popular culture, knowledge, perceptions, customs and traditions, and popular artistic expressions, Folk tales are one of the elements of the oral folklore, and they are an intellectual product produced by peoples throughout their long history. They were deposited with their stories and the events that passed through them, bringing back to the children's memory pictures of their fathers and grandfathers and their positions, and folk tales or as they are called in the local Omani dialect "Huzae'h".

It is one of the oral literary arts of societies since ancient times, and it is a kind of intellectual creativity for a person in an age in which there was no type of media communication(3), whether visible or reading. As for imagination, it plays an important role, as these stories embody for us the animals that speak as a story "Adaylhmi and his evil wife" and "Bedoor and the light of time". On the other hand, the aspect of magic and sorcery emerges through the control of supernatural powers, including the story of (Maryam) and the pebble of patience) and the tale of (the snake). Likewise, if we look at the general folk tales, we will find there are recurring themes such as raising the value of childbearing and mischievous women(4), all of which reflects the society's view of some of its groups, such as its view of the poor man, the son of adultery, and the handicapped child, as in the story of "Qhais" or as it has been called in other places by "Abu Qahifa."

These stories are represented in the nature of the relationships between family members, and some studies indicate that the folk story is a necessity for the vitality and continuity of customs and cultural values through the social implications it contains, including the daughter's love for her father, the son's love for his mother, the wife's calibration for her husband, and obedience to parents.

Some of the selected folk tales also reveal many aspects that reflect the image of women(5). Women occupied a clear position in the folk story, whether they were a young girl or a teenage girl and emerged through several topics

that reflect the reality of social life in the Omani environment, especially in the context of the living unit. Some forms of suffering and intrigues were recorded due to jealousy between wives(6). Indeed, popular stories reveal to us that the central character is mostly female, and we rarely find a popularity that is devoid of female characters and the story reflects images of antagonism between women. There are those who are characterized by kindness, tolerance, and generosity, and there are those who are accustomed to treachery, deceit and deception, or the use of magic to manage intrigues.

With the importance of the folk story in the continuation of the folklore, the heritage (7), throughout its historical process, passes through active stages in the social environment, which makes it beyond the boundaries of its historical stage. However, overcoming cannot be achieved except through interaction with new situations in various forms.

Through the following table, I will try to clarify some features of folk tales through the story of Abu Quhaifa:

Abu Quhaifa Story	Emotion	Imagination	Magic	Ideas
	<p>The emotion aspect emerged through the presence of the grandmother, who is the "kind", but her image differs by highlighting the image of the insidious woman to her grandchildren.</p> <p>- Abu Quhaifa's feeling of inferiority towards the two who were born with him, as a result of their behavior with him.</p>	<p>Imagination emerges in the narration of the story, particularly in the way of going, and the appearance of the valley that is of blood, the last of thorns, and the last of stones.</p>	<p>The magic or mythical aspect of the story, especially in its beginning, emerged, so linking eating whole or half of bananas to procreation reflects for us an important aspect of the beliefs and myths that It was common.</p>	<p>The story reflects the image of the intrigued woman (the grandmother and her daughters).</p> <p>-The story reflects the society's vision of a person with special needs.</p>

The folk story is considered one of the most prominent forms of expression in folk literature, thanks to its varied and surprising narrative style, which carries symbolic and declarative dimensions. The folk story is considered an ancient literary form, which human societies have known since ancient times occupied a distinguished position in its life due to its association with human life, and it exists until now in our society, it is characterized by orality without writing. It has been addressed by generations through oral narration. Omani folk tales have multiplied, folk tales that depend on reality and take their themes from the daily events and problems of life. There are stories that rely on folk imagination and magic tales. On the other hand, Omani folk tales reflect the lifestyle of the residents. There is a diversity in the stories about the Omani environment, both geographical and historical. Due to the spontaneous storytelling of folk tales it feels like a sense of belonging to the place. Usually stories are told by grandmothers and grandfathers, for the purpose of entertainment, interest, and education on good values. One of the most popular famous folk tale is: **Abo Qahifa Story**

These stories are not devoid of aspects of Omani life and the nature of its inhabitants, and among the most important benefits that these stories achieve:

- Some stories indicate the system of social values in the Omani society, revealing the nature of the relationship between family members and the mutual love between them, and the appreciation of the value of respect for parents.
- They contribute to the formation of life concepts among individuals, such as death versus life and success versus failure... - Directing to adhere to certain values such as patience over adversity.
- Folk tales in the context of Omani society have a vital role in supporting the system of values, customs, cultural traditions, and folklore. - Stories reveal the changes that society is exposed to, and refer to some widespread professions. - The imagination component in the folklore develops the audience's imagination, mixing fiction and reality.
- The humorous aspect of the Omani folk tale works to achieve social and psychological balance for the individual. The story of Abu Qahifa, an Omani folk tale that includes some aspects of life in the Omani environment, including:

- Drinking Omani coffee.
- Eating fruits, or what is paid locally by: Foul.
- Bringing ghee from the old woman on the night of Eid.
- AL Ursiah the meal that is prepared on the morning of the Eid.

Some values and principles:

- Hospitality.
- Visiting neighbors.
- Accompany and spend time with friends.

As for the imagination component, it is:

- The boy who is half a human being and half a banana.
- Valley of Blood.
- Abu Qahifa's extraordinary ability to help his friends.

The significance of the story:

The importance of folk stories is that they are part of peoples' beliefs, cultures and customs, invented by the popular imagination, to express its wisdom and experience in portraying life events and ways of life. It aims to achieve several educational, psychological and social goals, as it plays an important role in securing different life experiences, formulated in an elaborate narrative construction, rich in lessons and values, which human beings have given them a lot of imagination, magic and attraction.

The most important elements of the story of Abu Quhaifa:

- 1. Characters: The three mothers - Abu Qahifa and his friends - the grandmother and her three daughters.
- 2. The main event: Mothers send their boys to the grandmother to fetch ghee.
- 3. Location: An Omani village.
- 4. Time: The day before the Eid.

Language and emotion of the story:

We notice that the language of the story was simple and nice, it narrates events in sequence, uses short phrases, and uses direct verbs, so the events of the story seem quick, and its events are simple and short. The Omani folk tale is not only a way to entertain the individual, but also to indoctrinate him with the social norms of the group to which he belongs.

The folk tale is a style of folk stories, and it has roots in the depth of human life since ancient times. It originates from the lives of people and civilizations and their imagination as it is the birth of the beliefs of the civilizations. It is part of the remnants of their sensual reflections and intellectual powers and experiences. It is usually related to their legends and habits. People enjoy narrating and listening to it generation after generation through oral narration. The folk tale likely takes its events based on truth or fact. It is the common heritage of all categories and classes of the people, which is brought together by a single common culture. It is an expression of the culture of the whole society.

Highlights about the folk tale Abu Quhaifa:

- (There is no perfect human being), a dominant proverb that man tried to overcome with his wide imagination, which he employed in his folk tales in search of perfection, expressing this by employing symbols that indicate perfection. In the folk tale Abu Quhaifa, we find that the hero of the story, although he is not full-bodied, the tale showed him full of mind and wisdom. His mind works for the achievement of his goals and saving his full-bodied, healthy, and well-built colleagues. He is also the hero who saved the society from the Crone who harbors evil and malice to people and does not care about eating their meat.
- (The Third Is Fixed) famous saying and believed by many, and this tale embodied the sincerity of this saying, and that in the three times that Abu Quhaifa saved his colleagues. After Abu Quhaifa saved his colleagues in the first time from the valley of blood, the two colleagues reneged on the promise and refused to take him with them, and then reneged on the promise for the second time after he saved them from the valley of thorns, but they could not renege on their promise when he saved them from the valley of fire and they took him with them to their grandmother's house. Here we see the embodiment of the famous saying (The Third Is Fixed).
- This tale reflected some of the famous Omani customs, which is the custom of processing Omani ghee a day or two before Eid, to eat it with the Ersiya (a special Omani dish made by rice), which the Omani House is not without on the day of Eid. The scene of the old man's desire to slaughter the three boys also reflected the link

between the slaughter of livestock and the eating of meat in Omani society, as the Eid in Omani society is not without scenes of slaughter of sacrificial and cooking of meat.

- Contemporary societies' interest in instilling a culture of the importance of people with special needs - or as some call them people of resoluteness - in building societies, such as those of full strength and health, has its roots in ancient times. It is clear in the tale of Abu Quhaifa when the hero with the half-body saved his healthy and full-bodied Colleagues three times on the road and the fourth time from the Crone. The same idea was embodied also with the three-legged donkey of Abu Quhaifa, which appeared in the tale with supernatural powers despite his physical handicap.
- In the folk tale, the beautiful fate must be destined for the hero from the beginning of the tale, because, as mentioned above, it embodies the desire of man to achieve perfection, to fulfill the wishes that he cannot achieve in his simple society, and to turn to the imaginary world to achieve this. There must be external superpowers that help the hero and help him to his successes, and in the tale of Abu Quhaifa, this superpower represented in his donkey with only three-legged, who was assigned to help his colleagues, drinking blood in the valley of blood, eating thorns in the valley of thorns, and emptying the blood that he drank from the valley. That made Abu Quhaifa's colleagues regretting not taking him from the first time. Another implicit reference that is evident from the use of these supernatural powers in the folk tale is the desire inherent in the human soul and the desire within it to possess the supernatural to transcend time, space, and the simple reality that live in them.

Personal overview:

After studying the tale of Abu Quhaifa, and after the highlights that I mentioned about this tale, I conclude that when man weaved his folk tales, he did not weave them out of emptiness, but they were an expression of his intellectual, psychological, and social needs, and an attempt to achieve the imperfection that he lived in his simple life.

The legend that we read in class tells about a hero endowed with supernatural strength, but where did Abo Qahifa get this inexplicable power? In order to understand this issue, it is worth analyzing the hero himself: he was not like everyone else; he had only half of his body (a different anthropological sign). That is, he was deprived of what most people on Earth have. Moreover, science cannot always explain the origin of a particular disease. It is also necessary to take into account the time when the story appeared: if it appeared a long time ago, it means that people cannot find a scientific explanation for this or that deviation, which means that people begin to come up with possible explanations themselves. For example, some people believe that people who are physically different from others are also internally different; they have certain powers that ordinary people do not have. Then people share their values and views on next generation and it becomes a collective memory. In the folk story that we read, in my opinion, it was exactly like this: since the main character was disabled, he had supernatural abilities, with the help of which he saved two of his comrades.

I believe that the old woman is associated with evil in world literature due to one important biological reason. In some anthropological researches we can find information that women usually live longer than men: in the Stone Age, because men often hunted and died; in the Middle Ages, men worked and were more often in contact with other people and died from various infections; wars also took many men's lives. But people, as I noticed, always try to find a mythological explanation, people are more attracted to mystery in general. In addition, even if you compare the life expectancy of a man and a woman living in the same conditions, women most often live longer than men. Of course, people tried to find an explanation for this phenomenon, and apparently, not finding a logical explanation, they decided to declare old women witches. On the other hand, old lady villains are especially scary because, historically, the most influential person in a child's life was the mother. I had read some articles in sociology and they say that children are able to differentiate between an evil mother figure, who makes rules and regulations, controls your behavior, and gets angry at you, and a benevolent caregiver, the one who sacrifices, protects you, and ensures your survival.

Story of Abo Qahifa is an Omani folk story, which is talking about how a clever ten-year-old boy saved his companions for several times.

There were three women who gave birth to three babies after they ate bananas; however, the woman who ate the half banana gave a birth to a baby boy with a half human body, called "Abo Qahifa."

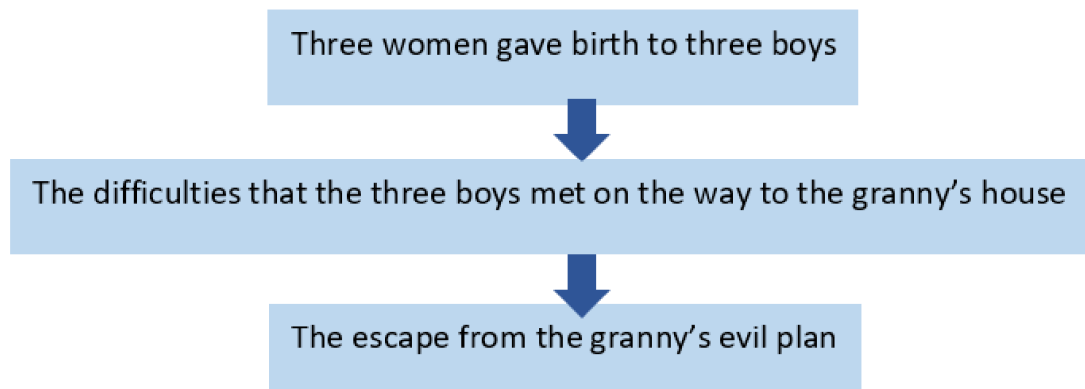
The three boys were asked to bring some margarine from an old granny who lives far from their houses. Nevertheless, the two boys did not want Abo Qahifa to follow them. Despite the fact that Abo Qahifa was frozen out by the two, he insisted on following them. On the way to the granny's home, Abo Qahifa rescued the two boys from valleys three times. Everytime they fell into the valley, they begged Abo Qahifa for his help and promised him that they would let him go with them. But they broke their words once they were rescued by Abo Qahifa. Finally, they arrived at the granny's home. They were astonished that the granny was planning to kill them for the upcoming

festival 'Orsiya' after the granny asked them to stay one night at her home. Fortunately, clever Abo Qahifa came up with a solution to the granny's evil plan, again helping all of them escape from the terrible trap in the end.

Characters in the story:

- Three women
- Abo Qahifa and two boys
- Granny
- Granny's daughters

Story line:



Plots (important events):

- In the beginning of the story, what makes readers feel amazed is that a woman gave a birth to a baby with a half human body after she ate a half banana. This weird thing could arouse readers' curiosity. Absolutely, we can expect that the boy will be the main character of the story due his distinctive appearance. However, we cannot know what is the implication of banana here. Does banana have any other meaning here hidden beyond the story?
- The main character is frozen out by other two boys so they are reluctant to let Abo Qahifa follow them to the granny's house. During the journey to the granny's home, Abo Qahifa warned the two boys of the valleys that they would encounter later and saved them three times from the valleys, including valley of blood, valley of thorns and valley of stones, but he did not receive any feedback or gratitude even the implement of the promise from the two boys. The interaction between the three boys during this trip depicts the difference of personalities among them, also indicating that Abo Qahifa's wisdom stands out from the two boys'. This becomes a setup for the upcoming plot, implying that Abo Qahifa may do something to rescue them again subsequently.
- They did not expect that the granny was really a bad guy until they were forced to stay one night more and heard about her wicked plan. Again, Abo Qahifa thought of a good way to save all of them. They exchanged their room with the girls' and pretended to dress as the girls' appearance. In the end, they successfully strung the granny along, making her kill her daughters mistakenly and feeling sorrowful but finding out that everything was too late to repent.

Analysis of characters:

The story does not describe personalities of all characters so much except the three boys and the granny. However, we can apparently know that the main character ‘

Abo Qahifa’ is a bright, kind and lenient boy. Even if he was looked down on by the two boys, he was still willing to help them regardless of what they had treated to him. Also, he never felt a sense of inferiority for his physical defects. He remained his kindness to the people around him and gave his hand to the other at the right time.

As for the two boys, they were ignorant in the beginning when Abo Qahifa warned them of the hazardous valleys ahead. They were so arrogant that they looked down on Abo Qahifa and disbelieved what he said to them. Not until they were trapped three times did they realize Abo Qahifa's warnings. Finally, they decided to cooperate with Abo Qahifa in order to escape from the granny's murder.

The reason why the granny thought of the horrible idea might result from her poverty. She is too conservative to celebrate the festival 'Orsiya' through other dishes or ways. Thus, she could not help thinking bad methods to achieve her desire. However, she killed her loved daughters in the end and paid a greatly aggrieved price for her ugly behavior.

Implications of the story:

From this story, we can learn some lessons as follows:

- Never look down on others.
- Never judge by appearances.
- Never feel inferior yourself.
- Forgive and forget.
- You reap what you sow.
- Do to others as you would be done by.
- A bad penny always comes back.

Conclusion:

The story starts from an anecdote, relating to eating a half banana and a boy born with a half human body. Then, the main character shows his cleverness and wisdom when boys encounter bad things. This Omani folk story is not only talking about the smart boy, but also makes us learn many life principles from it. For me, the most touching point that I learned from Abo Qahifa is his perseverance and kindness. He never feels guilty or inferior himself, but still keeps his mercy to the others. This is what I respect him the most.

Appendix Abo Qahifa Story

Once upon a time there were three women drinking Omani coffee and eating some fruit, in an Omani house. There were two bananas and a half on the fruit's plate. Two of them ate a whole banana, and the other ate the least half. After some months this woman was given birth to baby boy, who has a half human body, he was called "Abo qahifa". While the other two women were given birth to two babies boys, with normal bodies. They grew up together in the same environment.

When they became ten years old, on the day before Eid, one of the mothers sent them to bring margarine from an old granny. The two children with normal bodies went without telling "Abo qahifa". When he knew about that, he followed them. And when they saw him they said to him: "go back, because we are in a hurry, and we don't want you to delay us". But he said: "but I want to join you, and I won't delay you". They ignored him and went quickly, whereas he followed them and warned them that they will face a valley of blood. They laughed at him and they said: "there isn't any valley of blood. That is just in myths". Then, they went fast; suddenly they fall in the blood valley. They shouted to "Abo qahifa" to help them to get out of the valley. When he heard them, he said: "I will help you, if you promise to take me with you". They said unwillingly: "OK, we will take you with us, but first help us". He helped them in spite of his weakness. When they got out, they forgot their promise to him and they left him alone. He shouted at them: "if you didn't take me, you will face a valley of thorns". They laughed at him and they said: "there is no valley of thorns except in fiction stories". After that they fall in a valley of thorns and they screamed painfully and their only choice was to call Abo Qahifa to help them. The poor Abo qahifa helped them after their promise to take him with them. But they didn't fulfill their promise and they went quickly. He shouted at them "take me with you or you will face a valley of stones" but again they didn't believe him. After a while, they screamed loudly and begged him to help them, and they promise him faithfully to take him with them. Finally he rescued them and the continued their way to the granny house together.

They arrived the granny house in the evening. She allowed them to enter her home, and she insisted them to sleep this night in hers. They agreed when they saw her strong desire. And they didn't know what was hidden for them. After dinner, the three boys went to the room which was prepared to them. While she went to her daughters' room, who were in the same age of the boys, to make a devil plan to make the Eid "Orsiya" using the boys' fresh meat. But she didn't know that "Abo Qahifa" and his friends were listening to their conversation. A clever idea came out to "Abo Qahifa" mind, and they decided to do it at midnight.

At the midnight, the three boys started to implement their clever plan. They exchanged their room with girls' successfully; also they exchanged their clothes with girls'. Before morning, the granny started to implement her awful plan happily, and she didn't know what was waiting her.

At the morning, she went to the girls room and she woke them up with her ugly voice "wake up my daughters, to eat the "Orsiya" which I made it from "Abo Qahifa" and his friends' meat" the boys woke up quickly, and they replied

“ ok mum, we are coming now”. The old devil granny went to the kitchen and brought a dish of “Orsyia”, and then put it in front of them to eat. She didn’t recognize them yet because they wore her daughters’ scarves. The boys ate quickly, took the margarine, and wore their clothes. Before they go out of her house they saw at her happily “granny you didn’t kill us, you kill your daughters”. And they ran away. The granny was very sad about her mistake, and she cried sorrowfully because she was thinking badly about the others, and didn’t expect what she discovered at the end.

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