



Piazza della Grammatica 1 • Antonella Olson & Eric Edwards, Presentatori e Capocomici

Gentili Ascoltatori, Dear Listeners,

Thanks for tuning in! Here is the transcript of our recent broadcast, "The One Where Arlecchino Visits the King," which you can hear by accessing the following link:

<http://tltc.la.utexas.edu/ra/episode.php?p=01>

## Transcript

**Arlecchino:** Una volta, tanto tempo fa, quando **ero** molto più giovane, **lavoravo** nella fattoria di una vecchia signora.

**C'erano** due altri servi che ci **lavoravano**, un tale Brighella, un Pedrolino, e **c'ero** pure io. La signora non **era** ricca. **Era** sempre gentile con noi, anche se lei mi **considerava** un po' scemo.

**Antonella:** Un giorno **abbiamo saputo** che il re **festeggiava** il suo compleanno, e tutte le case della zona, grandi e piccole, **volevano** mandare qualche regalo al monarca.

**Arlecchino:** La signora non **aveva** molto, come **ho** già **detto**, ma in un cestino **ha messo** quello che **poteva**: burro, pane, vino e una bella torta di mele, tutte cose fatte lì alla fattoria.

**Antonella:** Visto che Brighella **era** il più forte dei servi, la signora lo **ha chiamato** e gli **ha dato** il cestino. Gli **ha detto** di andare al castello del re per consegnargli il suo regalo.

Molto fiero di poter eseguire questo importantissimo compito, Brighella **è partito** subito la mattina dopo con il cestino. Per arrivare al castello del re

**Arlecchino:** Once upon a time, a long time ago, when I was much younger, I was working on the farm of an old lady. There were two other servants who were working there, a certain Brighella, one Pedrolino, and there was me. The lady wasn't rich. She was always kind to us, even though she thought of me as rather a dolt.

**Antonella:** One day we learned that the king was celebrating his birthday, and all the households thereabouts, great and small, wanted to send some gift to the monarch.

**Arlecchino:** The lady didn't have much, as I have said, but she put what she could into a basket: butter, bread, wine and a fine apple pie, all things made there on the farm.

**Antonella:** Since Brighella was the strongest of the servants, the lady called him and gave him the basket. She told him to go to the king's castle and offer him her gift.

Very proud of being able to carry out this very important task, Brighella set out right away on the following morning with the basket. To get to the king's castle he had to

**doveva** attraversare una grande foresta misteriosa, ma lui non **aveva** paura -- almeno così **diceva**.

**Arlecchino:** Nel mezzo del bosco **ha incontrato** una brutta strega che **è saltata** davanti a lui da dietro un albero.

**La strega:** Ehi, giovanotto --

**Arlecchino:** **ha detto** la strega --

**La strega:** Che cosa porti nel cestino?

**Arlecchino:** Brighella non **ha voluto** dire la verità alla strega. Quella brutta vecchia **era** capace di rubare le buone cose che lui **doveva** portare dal re.

**Antonella:** Quindi le **ha detto**:

**Brighella:** Davvero niente, signora... Sono bucce di patate, gusci di uova, grani di caffè e cespi di insalata marcia... li porto da mia nonna che li dà da mangiare alle galline.

**La strega:** Quelle cose non mi servono, giovanotto. Addio!

**Arlecchino:** **ha detto** la strega, e Brighella **ha ripreso** la strada.

**Antonella:** Quando Brighella **è arrivato** al castello, lo **hanno portato** davanti al re. Brighella si **è inginocchiato** e il re gli **ha domandato**:

**il Re:** Che cosa di bello mi **hai portato**? Qual è il tuo bel regalo?

**Antonella:** Brighella, tutto fiero e orgoglioso, **ha aperto** il cestino e l'**ha offerto** al re.

cross a great mysterious forest, but he was not afraid -- at least that's what he said.

**Arlecchino:** In the middle of the woods he met an ugly witch who jumped out at him from behind a tree.

**The witch:** Hey, young man --

**Arlecchino:** said the witch --

**The witch:** What are you carrying in your basket?

**Arlecchino:** Brighella didn't want to tell the truth to the witch. That ugly old crone was capable of stealing the good things he was supposed to take to the king.

**Antonella:** So he said to her:

**Brighella:** Nothing really, ma'am... They're potato peels, egg shells, coffee grounds and bits of wilted salad... I'm taking them to my granny who feeds them to the chickens.

**The witch:** I have no use for those things, young man. Farewell!

**Arlecchino:** said the witch. And Brighella set off again down the road.

**Antonella:** When Brighella arrived at the castle, they brought him before the king. Brighella knelt down and the king asked him:

**the King:** What nice things have you brought me? What is your fine gift?

**Antonella:** Brighella, all beaming with pride, opened the basket and offered it to the king.

**il Re:** Diavoli e demoni!

**Antonella:** **ha gridato** il sovrano.

**il Re:** Venite tutti a vedere le bucce di patate e e tutte le schifezze che questo mascalzone **ha osato** di portarmi!

**Antonella:** Brighella è **rimasto** stupito ma **era** vero: nel cestino non **c'erano** più le buone cose preparate dalla signora... ma tutte le brutte cose raccontate nella sua bugia alla strega.

**Arlecchino:** A calci nel sedere lo **hanno spinto** fuori del castello. Brighella mogio mogio se ne **è tornato** a casa, dove la signora lo **ha accolto** a bastonate.

**la vecchia signora:** Pedrolino --

**Arlecchino:** **ha urlato** la signora --

**la vecchia signora:** Ora tocca a te! Non ripetere la sciocchezza di Brighella! Eccoti un altro cestino...

**Arlecchino:** Mentre Pedrolino **attraversava** la foresta, di nuovo si è **presentata** la strega, sempre con la stessa richiesta.

**Antonella:** Anche Pedrolino le **ha mentito**, dicendo:

**Pedrolino:** Qui nel mio cestino c'è solo sterco, che porto da mia zia che vuole fertilizzare i suoi campi.

**La strega:** Uffa, che schifo!

**Arlecchino:** **ha risposto** la strega.

**La strega:** Lo sterco non mi serve. Addio,

**the King:** Devils and demons!

**Antonella:** cried the sovereign.

**the King:** Come all of you and behold the potato peels and all the rubbish this scoundrel has dared to bring me!

**Antonella:** Brighella was astounded but it was true: the good things prepared by the lady were no longer in the basket... only the ugly things described in his lie to the witch.

**Arlecchino:** They drove him out of the castle with kicks in his behind. Brighella sheepishly returned home, where the lady welcomed him with blows of her stick.

**The old lady:** Pedrolino --

**Arlecchino:** cried the lady --

**The old lady:** It's your turn now! Don't repeat any of Brighella's foolishness! Here's another basket for you...

**Arlecchino:** As Pedrolino crossed the forest, the witch appeared again, again with the same request.

**Antonella:** And Pedrolino lied to her as well, saying:

**Pedrolino:** Here in my basket there's nothing but manure, which I am taking to my aunt to fertilize her fields.

**The witch:** Ugh, how disgusting!

**Arlecchino:** answered the witch.

**The witch:** I have no use for manure.

giovanotto!

**Arlecchino:** E Pedrolino **ha ripreso** la strada.

**Antonella:** Potete immaginare la sorpresa e la disperazione del disgraziato Pedrolino quando il re **ha aperto** il suo bello e profumato regalo di sterco!

**Arlecchino:** Alla signora non **rimaneva** nient'altro da fare che chiamare me. Mi **ha dato** un terzo cestino e mi **ha implorato** di non farla vergognare ancora davanti al re.

Quando la vecchia del bosco mi **ha chiesto** cosa **portavo** nel mio cestino, **ho visto** non una strega ma una povera donna affamata, e le **ho detto**:

“Signora, nel mio cestino ho pane, burro, e una torta di mele, sono per fare un regalo al re, ma vedo che Lei ha fame... Prenda quello che vuole, tanto al re non manca certo il cibo...”

La strega mi **ha fissato** a lungo, ma non **ha preso** niente dal mio cestino.

**La strega:** Grazie, giovanotto, sei molto gentile, ma **ho** appena **pranzato** e non ho fame. Addio e buon viaggio!

**Arlecchino:** Dopo mi **sono inginocchiato** davanti al re, e gli **ho detto**: “Maestà, la mia padrona non è ricca, ma **ha mandato** del meglio della sua fattoria, solo...”

**Antonella:** Ma il re, che già **guardava** nel cestino, mi **ha interrotto**.

**il Re:** Angeli e cherubini!

**Antonella:** **ha esclamato**.

Farewell, young man!

**Arlecchino:** And Pedrolino set off again down the road.

**Antonella:** You can imagine wretched Pedrolino's surprise and despair when the king opened his fine fragrant gift of manure!

**Arlecchino:** There was nothing left for the lady to do but to call upon me. She gave me a third basket and implored me not to shame her again before the king.

When the old crone of the woods asked me what I was carrying in my basket, I saw not a witch but a poor starving woman, and I said to her:

“Ma'am, in my basket I have bread, butter, and an apple pie, they're to be a gift for the king, but I see that you are hungry... Take what you will, after all, the king surely doesn't want for food...”

The witch stared at me a good while, but she took nothing from my basket.

**The witch:** Thank you, young man, you are very kind, but I've just had lunch and I'm not hungry. Good-bye and farewell!

**Arlecchino:** Later I knelt before the king and said to him, “Your majesty, my mistress is not rich, but she has sent the best from her farm, only...”

**Antonella:** But the king, who was already looking in the basket, interrupted me.

**the King:** Angels and cherubim!

**Antonella:** he exclaimed.

**il Re:** Venite tutti a vedere i diamanti e le perle, l'oro e l'argento, che questo povero contadino è **riuscito** a portarmi!

**the King:** Come all of you and behold the pearls, the gold and the silver, that this poor peasant has managed to bring me!

**Antonella:** Scusa un attimo, caro Arlecchino... molto bella la tua storia, ma... sei sicuro che il protagonista sei proprio tu?

**Antonella:** Pardon me a moment, my dear Arlecchino... your story is lovely, but... are you sure that you yourself are really its hero?

**Arlecchino:** Eh'... il tuo Arlecchino è il servitore di tanti padroni, e il protagonista di tante storie...

**Arlecchino:** Ah, your Arlecchino is the servant of many a master, and the hero of many a tale...

## Nota Grammaticale

People learning Italian sometimes have a tough time with this issue of picking the right verb tense when they are narrating past events, but it doesn't have to be all that difficult.

**Events that occur in a sequence will be expressed with the **passato prossimo**.** One event takes place and is completed before the next one begins. **These are the events that move the plot forward.**

**Events that occur in the background, while others are taking place, are expressed with the **imperfetto**.** We rarely know (or care) when these events begin or when they end. They are in progress when another action begins, is carried out, and ends. **They are the events, or states of mind or being, that flesh out the story but do not move it forward.**

Arlecchino begins his account by describing the situation that was in existence at the moment his story began: I was much younger, I was working on a farm, there were two other servants there, the lady was not rich, she thought of me as a dolt, etc... Notice that in the first paragraph of Arlecchino's tale, nothing actually *happens* – we merely learn about the setting in which the real story will unfold. The verbs are in the **imperfetto**.

In the second paragraph, a series of completed actions begins that puts the story in motion and moves it forward. We found out...; the court requested... These verbs are in the **passato prossimo**.

As the story moves forward, sentences contain verbs in both the **passato prossimo** and the **imperfetto**. “La signora non **aveva** molto...” Not having much is not something that the lady **did** (we know neither when this condition began nor when it ended—and that's not the point), it's the situation she was in when the real story events took place. So the verb is in the **imperfetto**. Later in the same sentence, “in un cestino **ha messo**...,” “she put in a basket...” Now this is an event, a completed action, that moves the plot forward. She has to put the items in the basket before she sends Brighella off to the castle with it. It's an event in a sequence of events. The verb is in the **passato prossimo**.

“Visto che Brighella **era** il più forte dei servi, la signora lo **ha chiamato** e gli **ha dato** il cestino.” Brighella’s being the strongest of the servants is not an action he performed or completed. When did he start being the strongest? We don’t know and that’s not important. The statement is merely describing the situation that existed at the moment the lady called him. So, “**era** il più forte,” **imperfetto**. Then, “la signora lo **ha chiamato**.” This is an action completed by the lady before the next action was completed. First she called him, then she gave him the basket. Events in a sequence. **Passato prossimo**.

We encourage you to look at all the verbs in the **imperfetto** and the **passato prossimo** in Arlecchino’s tale and think about **why** it’s in the tense it’s in. Then when **you** tell a story or relate an anecdote in Italian, you can think about which verbs are supplying descriptions and background information, and which are relaying information about completed events that move the plot of your story forward.

For all the excruciating details about the **imperfetto** and the **passato prossimo**, we recommend that you consult a good dictionary or grammar reference book. Make sure you are familiar with the appendices of any textbook you might be using. *Buon divertimento!*

## Nota Culturale

As Antonella mentions, in fictional narrative such as fairy-tales, novels, and short stories, and in relatively formal non-fiction prose such as biographies and histories, the **passato remoto** is frequently used instead of **passato prossimo** to communicate events (“actions”) completed in the past.

The **passato remoto** is rarely used in conversation. However, in some Southern regions of Italy (particularly in Sicily) as well as in Tuscany, this tense may be heard in everyday conversation. In either context, the **passato remoto** is used in Italian only to mention changes and events, while the **imperfetto** remains the tense used for describing the setting, the atmosphere, an ongoing state of mind, or the general situation.

It can be great fun to see how Italian folk tales both resemble and are different from the ones we are familiar with. If you are interested in reading fairy tales in Italian, keep in mind Italo Calvino’s *Fiabe italiane* (1956). Calvino’s intent in this work was to represent all kinds of documented fables and folk tales existing in the various Italian dialects and regions. He collected and translated from dialects tales passed on through oral tradition by the Italian people. In Calvino’s collection, the majority of the tales belong to the regions of Tuscany and Sicily.

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Antonella Olson & Eric Edwards  
“*Out of our minds ... into your ears*”