



Trying Our Luck – Preparing for a Career and Navigating Through Life with Folk Tales

Guide for the use of the folk tale cards

Sfurtuna

Sicilian folktale

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The Tale – Sfurtuna

Once there lived a king and a queen. This king and queen had seven daughters. The youngest was called Sfurtuna. A terrible war broke out – and the king was defeated. His enemies took his throne and threw him in prison. Now that he was imprisoned, his family were very poor. The queen was forced to move out of the palace, and she and her seven daughters had to live in a run-down shack.

Things went from bad to worse for them. They were so poor, it was a wonder that they had anything to eat at all. One day, a man selling fruit walked past the shack. The queen invited him in and bought some figs. Just then, an old beggar woman appeared asking for a little money.

“Oh, Granny!” said the queen. “If I could, I’d give you as much as you wanted. But I can’t, because I’m poor too.”

“You’re poor too? How’s that?” asked the old woman.

“Oh, Granny! Don’t you know? I’m the Queen of Spain. They took my husband’s throne and I was left without a penny!”

“You poor dear! Now I understand. But do you know why things are going so badly for you? It’s because one of your daughters is cursed. As long as you live under the same roof, fortune will never smile on you.”

“So I have to send one of my daughters away?”

“Indeed you do, Your Majesty.”

“And which is the one who is cursed?”

“The one who sleeps with her hands crossed over her chest. Tonight, light a candle and watch over your daughters in their beds. One of them will have her hands crossed. You must drive her away. If you do, your country will be returned to you.”



At midnight, the queen lit a candle and took a look at her daughters. None of them seemed to have their hands crossed. But after a long time, she suddenly realized – one of them *was* sleeping with her hands crossed: the youngest of them all, Sfurtuna! “Oh, my sweet girl,” whispered the queen sadly. “Is it you I must drive away?”

As the queen said this, Sfurtuna woke up and saw that her mother’s eyes were filled with tears. “What’s wrong, mother?” she asked.

“Nothing, my sweet. But an old woman came. And she gave me a warning. She said that fortune will not smile on us until I drive away my cursed daughter, the one who sleeps with her hands crossed... And that cursed daughter is you!”

“Is that why you’re crying?” asked Sfurtuna. “Then I’ll get dressed and leave this minute.”

She put on her clothes, packed up a bundle, and set off. She walked and walked until she reached a lonely spot. There she found an old cottage. When she listened, she could hear that inside the cottage, some women were weaving. She peeped through the door. One of the weavers looked up, “Would you like to come in?”

“I’d like that very much, my lady,” answered Sfurtuna.

“And will you be our servant?”

“I will, my lady.”

And with that, Sfurtuna started cleaning the whole cottage. In the evening, the weavers said to her, “We’re going out now. We’ll lock the door from outside, and you must lock it from inside as well. When we get home, open the door for us, but watch out that nobody steals all the silk we have made!” And then they left.

Just around midnight, Sfurtuna woke up with a start. She could hear the snipping of scissors and she saw an old woman cutting all the silk the weavers had made into little pieces. This old woman was the girl’s Fate.



The next day, the weavers came home again. They unlocked the door from the outside and Sfurtuna unlocked it from the inside. But as soon as the women stepped into the cottage, scattered all over the floor, they saw a dreadful sight.

“Shame on you!” they cried. “This is how you thank us for our kindness? Get out!” And they chased her away, kicking her to make her run faster.

And so the poor cursed girl walked on. She passed through many villages, and in one she stopped at a shop and asked for a bite to eat. The shopkeeper’s wife took pity on her, and after giving Sfurtuna a piece of bread, a little cheese, and a glass of wine, she even made her a bed for the night among the sacks in the storeroom. When the shopkeeper came home, they all had dinner and then they went to bed. But in the middle of the night, the man and his wife awoke to a terrible noise. The barrels in the storeroom were lying on their sides and the wine was spilled all over the floor. The shopkeeper ran in and saw the girl lying in bed, groaning loudly.

“Shame on you!” he cried. “What have you done?” He grabbed a stick and beat her with it, and then he chased her away.

The poor girl ran off with tears in her eyes. She had no idea where to go or who to turn to for help. She walked and walked until one day she came to a village where she saw a washerwoman.

“What are you staring at?” asked the washerwoman.

“I’m just roaming the world,” replied Sfurtuna.

“Can you wash clothes?”

“I can, my lady.”

“Then you can stay here and help me. I’ll scrub, you’ll rinse.”

And with that, the poor girl started rinsing the soapy clothes. After that, she hung them up to dry. When the clothes were dry, she took them down. Then she patched them,



starched them, and finally ironed them. Well, these clothes belonged to a prince, and when the washerwoman returned them to the palace, he was delighted with them.

“Mother Francesca,” said the prince, “this is the finest work you have ever done for me. I will reward you for it!” And he gave the woman ten gold coins.

Mother Francesca went straight to the shop. With the ten gold coins, she bought a beautiful dress for Sfurtuna and a big bag of flour. When she got home, she baked a loaf of bread and two lovely aniseed pretzels. Just to look at those pretzels would make your mouth water!

The next day, the washerwoman said to Sfurtuna, “Take these two aniseed pretzels to the beach. That’s where my Fate lives. Shout out three times: ‘Hey, Mother Francesca’s Fate!’ After the third time, she will appear. When she does, give her my best wishes. And then ask where you can find your own Fate. She’s sure to tell you.”

As fast as she could, Sfurtuna hurried to the beach. “Hey, Mother Francesca’s Fate! Hey, Mother Francesca’s Fate! Hey, Mother Francesca’s Fate!” The next moment, Mother Francesca’s Fate appeared. The girl gave her the washerwoman’s best wishes and offered her one of the pretzels. Then she asked where she could find her own Fate.

“Listen well and I’ll tell you what to do,” replied Mother Francesca’s Fate. “Walk along that path. Follow it until you reach a river. On the riverbank, you will see an old witch. Greet her politely and give her your other pretzel. That witch is your evil Fate. She’ll be very unfriendly, but don’t let that bother you. Just give her the pretzel and then go back home.”

Sfurtuna set off along the path. When she reached the river, she saw a horrible old witch. The woman was the dirtiest, smelliest, ugliest old witch you can imagine. Sfurtuna felt sick, but she took out the aniseed pretzel and said, “Mother Fate, please accept my gift.”

“Leave me in peace!” snapped the witch. “I don’t want your pretzel.” And then she turned her back on the girl. Sfurtuna put the pretzel down on the riverbank and went back home.



The next day was Monday and there was more washing to do. Mother Francesca soaked the clothes and scrubbed them. Sfurtuna rinsed the clothes and hung them up to dry. When they were dry, she patched them and ironed them, and then Mother Francesca put them into a basket and took them to the palace. When the prince saw his clothes, he was even more delighted than before. "Mother Francesca," he smiled, "this is the finest work you have ever done for me!" And he gave her another ten gold coins.

Just like before, Mother Francesca bought a big bag of flour and baked two more aniseed pretzels. "Take these pretzels to your Fate, Sfurtuna. Then cut her nails, scrub her clean and comb her hair. If she struggles, hold her down!"

Well, before that there were still clothes to wash. When they were finished, Mother Francesca took them to the palace. The prince was about to get married, so he was very pleased to see that his clothes had been washed so nicely. As a reward, he now gave the washerwoman twenty gold coins.

Mother Francesca went back to the shop. She bought some more flour and then she chose a pretty dress, a petticoat, a fine shawl, a comb and many other nice things – all for Sfurtuna's Fate. Back home, she baked some more pretzels and when they were ready, Sfurtuna took them straight to the riverbank.

"Hey, Mother Fate," she shouted, "I've brought you some pretzels!" And when the witch appeared, the girl cut her nails, scrubbed her all over with a soapy sponge, and combed her hair.

"Listen, Sfurtuna," said the witch, "you've been very kind to me. In return, let me give you this." And she handed the girl a little box. Sfurtuna took the box and raced back home to Mother Francesca. But when they opened it, all they found was a pink ribbon.

"Ah! I should've guessed as much," cried Sfurtuna disappointedly, and she threw the box into the back of the cupboard.



The next week, they did the washing as usual and Mother Francesca took the basket of clothes to the palace. This time, however, the prince didn't look happy at all.

"What's wrong, Prince?" asked the washerwoman (she was on very good terms with him, you know).

"Everything's wrong!" he replied. "I wish to get married. But my fiancée wants a pink ribbon to wear on her wedding dress. I've sent men all over the country to buy a ribbon that is just the right colour, but they can't find a single one."

"Is that all you're upset about?" said Mother Francesca. "Don't worry. Leave it to me."

And what did she do? She hurried home, found Sfurtuna's ribbon at the back of the cupboard and took it to the palace. The prince's fiancée said that the ribbon was perfect and the prince was overjoyed. "You have saved my wedding, Mother Francesca! Your ribbon is worth its weight in gold – and I will give you exactly that much." He took out a set of scales, put the ribbon into one pan, and poured gold coins into the other one. But even when the second pan was overflowing with coins, the one with the ribbon in it still didn't rise.

"It's unbelievable!" cried the prince. "No ribbon could weigh as much as this. Where did you get it?" The question took Mother Francesca by surprise and she had no choice but to tell him the whole story.

After that, the prince naturally wanted to meet Sfurtuna. Mother Francesca dressed the girl in her best clothes and took her to the palace. When she entered the throne room, Sfurtuna bowed deeply (she'd always been polite, after all, she was a princess). The prince greeted her and offered her a seat. Then he asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Sfurtuna, the youngest daughter of the King of Spain. My father's enemies took his throne and threw him in prison. I was cursed by fate and I had to leave home. The people I met bullied me and beat me..." And she told him everything that had happened to her.

The prince immediately called for the weavers whose silk had been cut to pieces by Sfurtuna's evil Fate. "How much was that silk worth?"



“Two hundred gold coins, Your Highness.”

The prince took out two hundred gold coins and gave it to the women. Then he said, “This poor girl is a princess. And you beat her. Never forget: you should never hurt anyone. You may go.”

Then he called for the shopkeeper. “How much was that wine worth?”

“Three hundred gold coins, Your Highness.”

The prince gave the man three hundred gold coins and said, “You beat a princess. Don’t let it happen again! You may go.”

After that, he sent his fiancée away because he no longer liked her that much. He married Sfurtuna and made Mother Francesca a lady-in-waiting.

Let’s leave the prince to his happiness and see what happened to Sfurtuna’s mother...

As soon as Sfurtuna had left home, the queen’s fortunes improved. So much so that her brothers and cousins arrived with a huge army and drove their enemies away. The queen moved back into the palace with her other daughters, and they lived there very comfortably. But their hearts ached for Sfurtuna. They didn’t even know if she was still alive. They searched for her everywhere and asked everyone if they had seen the girl.

Finally, they found out where she was. How? Well, it was thanks to the prince. When he heard that Sfurtuna’s mother had got her country back, he sent a messenger, who told the queen everything. You can imagine how excited she was, and she immediately set off with her knights and ladies-in-waiting to visit her daughter.

As soon as the queen saw Sfurtuna, she threw her arms around the girl and hugged her and hugged her. After that, Sfurtuna’s sisters appeared. None of them had ever felt such joy. The whole country celebrated the family’s reunion. And they all lived happily ever after.



(Source: *Sfurtuna, az elátkozott lány – szicíliai népmesék* [*Sfurtuna, the Cursed Girl – Sicilian Folk Tales*]. Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1965. Selection and commentary by Zoltán Zsámboki. Retold by Paul Crowson.)



Guide to the tale

Sfurtuna's tale is not merely an attempt to show us how to come to terms with our fate. It offers us a much greater treasure: a scenario of how to feed, wash and care for the foul, old witch who is lurking by the river, so that she will eventually become the "Mother Fate" of our ascent to a higher quality of existence.

Sfurtuna's life has an easy start. Born into royalty, she has everything a person could want, including a secure future. But then war breaks out, her father is captured, and she is forced to flee with her mother and siblings. They are forced to live in squalid conditions, in hiding, and we might think that so much hardship would be more than enough for a hero – but this is only the beginning of the story. Very soon, a situation develops in which our protagonist's quality of life is radically changed and deteriorates through no fault of her own.

One night, Sfurtuna wakes up to find her mother standing by her bedside in tears, telling her that she is cursed, and that as long as she stays at home, the family's fate will never change for the better. She learns that she is to blame for something she neither caused nor wished for, and that her family's fate will not improve as long as she stays with them. We do not know who cursed the young princess or why, and the old beggar woman is unable to say how Sfurtuna can escape from this situation. All she knows is that the girl has to go.

Let's reflect on whether there has ever been a moment in our lives when we felt that we were cursed. What triggered that feeling? Did we have no control over events? Did something bad unexpectedly happen to us that we felt we didn't deserve? Did we try to achieve something, but fall short despite our best efforts? What can we do in such a situation? How can we change ourselves, regardless of the circumstances? It doesn't matter if Sfurtuna is a good person or if she has done something wrong – if she doesn't leave, she will never get to the end of her journey. She may be setting out for the sake of her family only, and not thinking of herself, we don't know.



She may even be initially angry – after all, why should anyone believe that she is cursed? We might think that she became cursed precisely because she was said (and believed) to be cursed – she marked herself out with her crossed hands. And it is precisely she who is believed to be cursed, when she is the smallest and most vulnerable member of the family!

She has every right to be angry at this unfair turn of events.

Whatever her motivation – the wish to protect her family, or defiance and anger – leaving home is ultimately the first step Sfurtuna can take to make herself happy.

On her journey, she first comes face to face with her “evil Fate” at the weavers’ cottage, and later at the shop. It is possible that we too encounter familiar situations and feelings at this point. Despite all our good intentions and efforts, we may cause pain, bad feelings, and harm to others. Of course, such life situations are often very complex, and it can be difficult to establish justice in such cases, but one thing we can be sure of is that as long as we do not deal with the difficulties and traumas brought from our past (even transgenerationally), they will certainly wreak havoc in our relationships. Sfurtuna, of course, has to move on in both episodes, but to add injury to insult, she is even beaten before she can get away. Can assertiveness be expected from weavers and shopkeepers? We may say that their behaviour is not irreproachable, but up to what point must we politely tolerate someone who causes us difficulties?

It’s also true that we don’t know who will come into our lives, and with what background and history. Many times, if we are familiar with someone’s difficulties, we are more forgiving of them than of a total stranger. But here again, the question arises as to how long we can support someone who is drifting rather than striving towards self-awareness and taking control of the problems in their life.

The weavers hire Sfurtuna as a servant; the shopkeepers give her the minimum of charity. How do we treat those who are exploited and in need of help? We can see that Mother Francesca’s strategy is the winning one, as she gives the girl a job that creates opportunities for her – and the promise of a desirable quality of life that being a servant or living off



handouts could never provide. But the washerwoman is different from the others in another way too: she knows that Sfurtuna's evil Fate is destroying her, and she has an idea of how the girl can change her life.

Now comes another important step for Sfurtuna: cooperation. Regardless of her previous bad experiences, she does her work diligently and thoroughly, and listens to Mother Francesca. She does not question the woman's knowledge or good intentions, but accepts help and, despite her disgust, carries out all the tasks that the washerwoman or Mother Francesca's Fate assign to her. Because let's face it: in the process of gaining self-knowledge and working through difficulties, sooner or later we will encounter things that make us feel bad. Whether we feel disgust, pity, disappointment, contempt, inferiority, guilt, or shame, one thing is for sure: that feeling won't change on its own – we have to do something about it. Everyone has to find a solution. And Sfurtuna's story shows us one possible way: caring – even if her Fate is a nasty, bad-tempered, disgusting, filthy witch. Caring is definitely an element of a woman's skill set for solving problems – and this tale shows that we must learn to care not only for others, but also for ourselves.

Sfurtuna does not rush headlong into things. First, she offers food to her Fate. She shows the witch (or we might say, herself) that she does not want to hurt her and that what she is offering is useful. She offers food – and not just any food. While naturally not forgetting that, to quote Freud freely, “an aniseed pretzel is sometimes just an aniseed pretzel”, it is worth lingering on this moment. That is because centuries ago, the first pretzels were made by Italian monks. At that time, they prayed with their hands crossed over their chests, which is how the pretzel acquired its unique shape. Remember how to identify which of the seven girls is cursed? She's none other than *“the one who sleeps with her hands crossed”*. (Although we have no knowledge of this, it might be an interesting thought experiment to consider whether this phrase could take on a new meaning: ‘the one who prays in her sleep’.) No less interesting is the aniseed, an extremely valuable commodity – so much so, that there was once a time when debts and taxes could be paid in aniseed if the debtor had



no money. In addition to its special flavour, aniseed was used as a medicinal herb, which is why it was so valuable. Nourishment is an important part of caring for one's Fate (as we know, in addition to staying alive, one of the elements of a quality life is proper nutrition). It is possible that the aniseed pretzels mean just that – proper food – and even this is a considerable step forward for Sfurtuna. They can also, however, represent an expression of an intention to heal, a certain ritual to express the need for a higher connection to her Mother Fate (continuing the previous train of thought, the aniseed pretzels may represent Sfurtuna's innate capacity for self-healing and connecting to the higher self, which she offers to her Fate).

But let's not get ahead of ourselves; in the meantime, other things are happening that are worth mentioning. The relationship between Sfurtuna and Mother Francesca is profitable for both of them.

In this relationship, Sfurtuna finds a helper who welcomes her, cares for her, and gives her direction and the opportunity to grow. The washerwoman has a close relationship with the prince and has probably been cleaning his clothes for a long time. She thus knows the quality of life that the prince represents and how to relate to it, yet Sfurtuna's appearance and her employment bring her rewards too. As the prince puts it, *"Mother Francesca, this is the finest work you have ever done for me."* What is this extra value that Sfurtuna can add to the laundry? It is at this point that we first realize that when Sfurtuna left the shack where she and her siblings sheltered, she was not entirely destitute. Even though she had lost her family and her accustomed quality of life, her royal origins and upbringing remained. She knows exactly how to make these clothes look their best, because she has her own experience of this quality. However dirty our Mother Fate is, however much we want to get rid of our past, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. What are the values we should preserve, wherever we have come from? Perhaps it is worth washing those clothes over and over again until we discover those values. The girl's persistent and conscientious work and the prince's rewards are paying off: everything necessary to bathe



Mother Fate and everything that Sfurtuna needs is slowly being gathered. When the time is right, Sfurtuna is not frightened. She doesn't hesitate and she doesn't pull any punches: she grabs the dirty witch and washes and brushes her thoroughly, then dresses her and cares for her. Empathy, caution, and gentleness are all very important, but sometimes it is decisive, practical action – and not focusing on emotions (such as the grumbling of Mother Fate) – that resolves a situation.

Sfurtuna's reward – apart from the fact that her Fate will not harm her any further – is a box with a ribbon in it. Even nowadays, ribbons are certainly not cheap, but we can understand Sfurtuna when she flings it into the cupboard. However much she has surpassed herself, however hard she has worked, in this box, she will not find her family, or a crown, or riches, or anything that is ready-made for her. What she has been given is raw material that is valuable, but also commonplace and of use only in her work. The girl's disappointment is understandable – for she is unaware that she has actually received a great treasure.

It is this ribbon and the ingenuity of Mother Francesca that allows Sfurtuna to meet the prince, who soon realizes that the ribbon is no ordinary one and thus deduces that the person who provided it is similarly special. The prince is the first character who is interested in the person of Sfurtuna herself. Since the start of the journey, he is the only one to ask her who she is. He listens to her story and understands the journey she has been on. He makes reparations, not only to Sfurtuna by seeking out her family, but also to those who have been wronged by her Fate. In the meantime, however, he does not forget to reprimand them for the way they treated the girl. And by marrying her, he gives Sfurtuna the opportunity to move forward according to her lineage and become a queen.

An interesting twist in the story is when the prince abruptly breaks off his engagement with his original fiancée. But it is clear from the background of the tale that the ribbon that Sfurtuna has acquired for herself cannot be worn by anyone else – everyone must achieve the state of becoming a king or queen, the unconditional master of their own life, by



themselves. That is how Sfurtuna becomes a queen. The way is then open for her to face her family without anger or blame, and for the long-awaited reunion to take place.

We mustn't forget: no matter how high our status is to begin with, if we don't face up to our destiny, to what needs to be laundered, our origins are worthless. But let's also remember that even the dirtiest Fate can be washed clean.



Working with the tale on our own

Working through a story on our own is an exciting experience, but it is not at all straightforward. In folk tales, order is restored by the end, the heroes go on a journey, and through that they develop.

This is our task too – to interpret the turns and ‘codes’ of the folk tale for our own lives, to find the steps that will help us to become better masters and mistresses of our own lives.

When we begin to work through ‘Sfurtuna’, we should first listen to or read the story and then sit back and let the mood of the tale wash over us. Even with our eyes closed, we can find a taste, a smell, or an image from the story. What would we take from the story if we could? Where in the story are we, and what role are we playing?

Then we should take a pencil and write down our answers to the questions (on the cards or in the text here). We should focus on the questions that speak to us the most. Not all questions may be relevant to us, but those that are, are worth thinking about at length, or even talking about with others – parents, friends, peers, or even helpers.

In what way does this happen? Probably some character, place, or object captures our imagination. The elements in a folk tale do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone, and in fact, when we work on the story on our own, we interpret the situations, characters, etc. that appear in it completely for ourselves.

The characters in the story.

Let us first look at the characters in the story. Each character has their own strengths, their own role, and their own message:

- ❖ The heroine of our story is Sfurtuna. She loses her father and thus also the life of a princess, finding herself living in poverty in a shack with her mother and six sisters.



When she is told that she is cursed, Sfurtuna does not fight this role, nor does she try to prove otherwise. She immediately sets off, leaving behind everyone and everything that remains of her royal past. It is not clear from the tale as to how she feels when she departs, but since she actually leaves without saying goodbye, we can guess that there is more defiance in her heart than a real desire to leave.

If we think about it, Sfurtuna has six sisters, all of whom are still living with their mother, so the girl is probably still very young when all this happens to her. The situation also gives her the opportunity to separate and keep her distance from her family – to start her own life. In this way, our tale is also a coming-of-age story. It is the story of when someone becomes able to take responsibility for their current life situation and circumstances, regardless of the difficulties of their past.

- ❖ It is also worth looking at the role of Sfurtuna's mother. Many folk tales end with the hero's arrival at their destination. Their fate turns out for the best; they settle down and live happily ever after. But the conclusion of Sfurtuna's story is only complete when we learn what happened to her mother and the relationship between them. The woman clearly loves and fears for Sfurtuna very much. When she realizes that she is the cursed daughter, she does not send her away, but she does not detain her either when, upon hearing the beggar's story, the girl declares that she will leave. One might ask, of course, why the mother believes that her daughter (and *that* daughter in particular) is cursed. Why doesn't she look for the root of the problems in herself? Perhaps it is because she understands more of the world and feels that this is reality – there are moments when, as a mother, she can no longer do any more for someone.

After Sfurtuna's departure, even though her fortunes and those of her other daughters improve, the mother's heart aches for her youngest daughter, and her happiness will only be complete when she sees the girl again. What can we learn from this woman? It is her ability to let Sfurtuna go. Are we capable of letting go of someone or something that we care about, that we love very much, that we may



have struggled to nurture for a long time if that someone or something is actually holding us back from improving our own lives? Or if we know that only then can they put their own lives in order?

- ❖ The weavers and the shopkeepers do not realize that Sfurtuna is really a princess. They suffer real harm when they encounter her, which the prince later compensates them for, and in fact they are fully justified in sending Sfurtuna away. It's just that it's not all the same how they do it. Because they don't only send the girl away, in their anger, they also humiliate and beat her. How do we react when someone harms us (either materially or emotionally)? Are there any situations in life where it is justified to treat someone as the weavers and shopkeepers treated Sfurtuna?
- ❖ Sfurtuna needs a helper to change her fate for the better. She finds this helper in Mother Francesca. More precisely, it is the washerwoman who realizes that Sfurtuna needs help. She takes her in and gives her a job. She does not hire the girl as a servant or give her charity, but offers her a real opportunity to earn a living. She also knows that Sfurtuna's Fate is causing trouble, but fortunately she is also aware of what needs to be done to change that. She uses her own benevolent "Mother Fate" to show her protégé what she needs to do. Mother Francesca does not use the extra income she receives from Sfurtuna's work for her own self-interest, but she invests it, so to speak, in paving the girl's way. It is also important that Mother Francesca is not just any washerwoman. She has a good relationship with the prince and is very familiar with the quality of life he represents. This will eventually be the way for Sfurtuna to achieve the position she deserves. And, ultimately, it benefits Mother Francesca as well.
- ❖ Mother Francesca's Fate is a well-kept Fate. The washerwoman can be a good mentor for Sfurtuna because she has already put her own destiny in order. She has cleaned it, fed it, and cared for it. She has found her own ideal place in the world. Sfurtuna must also face the fact that she cannot escape her destiny. The method of keeping her Fate at arm's length and ignoring her, does not work. We can't get rid of



our Fate just because it makes us feel sick, and if we ignore it, it will certainly become shabbier and even more neglected. Sfurtuna's life can only take a turn for the better if she realizes this, and, putting aside her repulsion and negative feelings, starts to care for her own Mother Fate and look after her until she is clean and well-fed.

- ❖ The prince immediately notices that his clothes have been laundered better than ever before, but he doesn't yet know that this is due to the appearance of Sfurtuna. When he repeatedly rewards Mother Francesca for the quality of her work, it is this financial support that ensures that Sfurtuna's Fate will be given a pretzel, followed by a thorough washing and a beautiful dress – and consequently it is also a reward for Sfurtuna. And when the prince wants to give a reward for the ribbon, he learns that it comes from no ordinary person. He is interested in Sfurtuna and her life. He reconciles past conflicts and reunites her with her family.

The locations in the story

We can also study the various locations in the tale. In which setting can we find ourselves? Each scene presents its own tasks, which we have to perform in order to arrive at the next way station.

- ❖ From her original home, the royal palace, Sfurtuna ends up in a shack with her mother and six sisters. She goes from wealth and security to poverty and precariousness. Here, she learns from her mother that she is cursed and her family's fate cannot change for the better as long as she is living with them. From where are we starting our journey? What are our original circumstances? Who surrounds us in this place? What is our relationship with them? Or if we have set off already, what circumstances, people, and relationships have we left behind?
- ❖ The weavers hire Sfurtuna as a servant. It is in their cottage where she first witnesses the damage caused by her Fate. Have we ever had an experience where we felt we had met our own destiny? Have we ever had the feeling that our life is not in our own



hands, but depends on circumstances beyond our control? How did we handle the situation?

- ❖ The shopkeepers take pity on Sfurtuna and give her a place to stay for the night. But when the girl's Fate wreaks havoc here too, they beat her and drive her away. Have we ever been in a situation where we have harmed someone who helped us? Have we ever needed help – and received it – from a place where we ended up being mistreated?
- ❖ Mother Francesca takes Sfurtuna into her home. She gives her a job, food to eat, and a place to sleep, and helps her to begin sorting out her life. Here, many positive and forward-looking events occur. Where do we feel safe? In what conditions can we grow and work on our self-discovery? What do we need to put our fate in order? Has anyone ever taken us in? What was the cost? What tasks did we have to fulfil in order to stay there?
- ❖ On the beach, Sfurtuna meets the Fate of Mother Francesca. The girl follows the washerwoman's instructions to the letter, and Francesca's Fate helps her. Have we ever learned from someone else's fate? Have we ever discovered a life story similar to our own? Has it helped us in how we live our life?
- ❖ Sfurtuna's evil Mother Fate lurks on a riverbank. It is here that she takes her first steps and later washes the old witch. What does our own Mother Fate look like? How old is she? What clothes is she wearing? What is her physical, mental, and emotional state? What can we do to connect with her in the way we find the most suitable?
- ❖ The palace is the home of the prince. It is where he receives his clothes from Mother Francesca, where he welcomes Sfurtuna, and where she finds a new home. Born into royalty, she returns to royal surroundings. Sfurtuna tells her life story to the prince. Who are we happy to share our story with? Are there people around us with a similar quality of life and outlook? Where do we belong?

When we work by ourselves with the tale, we can start from several directions, and there is no single, linear approach. Although the locations and the tasks that appear in the story



are presented in a deliberate order, we can work on the other themes in roughly any sequence.

Reaching the conclusion of a folk tale doesn't always happen that quickly. The processes and events that the protagonist goes through do not happen overnight. It is therefore important that we also respect our own personal pace. This is a tale that we can work with for years. The important thing is to revisit it from time to time and see how far we have come.



Working with the tale as a coach

When we want to work with the story as a coach, the first step is to work with the story ourselves – that is, to think through the steps detailed in the previous section.

Before we start working with the story as a coach, it is necessary to have a subjective interpretation of the tale, an interpretation of the story as it applies to our own personal life, because it is very important to avoid imposing our own interpretation on our clients. To do this, we need to know what our own interpretation is. On the other hand, it is also important to interpret the folk tale in relation to our own lives, so that we do not run into questions and topics that trigger an emotional reaction in us while working with the client.

At the same time, however, we also need to interpret the story objectively, and to think through the possible interpretations from the client's point of view.

Ildikó Boldizsár calls these two approaches the 'objective and subjective story matrix'. In the objective matrix, we interpret the story itself, while in the subjective matrix we examine ourselves in the light of the story.

The objective matrix of the tale 'Sfurtuna' is as follows:

- ❖ Who is the hero of the tale? – The hero is the one who develops, in this case Sfurtuna.
- ❖ What is the life situation? – Following a significant deterioration in her quality of life, and convinced that she is making things even worse for her loved ones, Sfurtuna sets out on a journey.
- ❖ What is the challenge of the tale? – Can Sfurtuna change her fate so that it begins to serve her interests instead of harming her?
- ❖ Who is the adversary? – At first, Sfurtuna just drifts helplessly along with external events. She leaves the place where she can no longer stay and endures her suffering, but she has no idea why it is happening to her. She has no purpose, no plan. At first



sight, we might say that her adversary is her Mother Fate, but if we look a little deeper, she actually has to overcome her lack of knowledge. She must realize that her fate is harming her and that she has the opportunity to take control.

- ❖ Who/what are the helpers? – Mother Francesca the washerwoman takes Sfurtuna in. She knows where Sfurtuna's Fate resides and that her life will only get better if she puts it in order. What's more, she has a plan as to how to make this happen.
- ❖ What is the solution? – Thanks to the help of Mother Francesca, Sfurtuna confronts her own evil Mother Fate. Francesca and her own Fate also help the girl to find a way to put her fate in order and turn it in her favour. But it's a long process that involves a lot of work.

The subjective matrix of the tale 'Sfurtuna' is as follows:

- ❖ Who am I in the story? – It's easy to identify with Sfurtuna. After all, we have all faced difficulties and challenges brought by fate. But it's also possible that we stand by others as helpers, to help them to sort out their lives. It may even be that we see things from the perspective of the mother, observing her child's struggle with the fate she has been given – partly by the mother herself. It's worth looking carefully at the roles and actions of all of the characters to see who we can identify with in order to get the most out of the story.
- ❖ Where am I in the story? – One thing is for sure: I can't be in a place where the character I identify with hasn't been. When I find the place I feel like I am in, it's worth looking around and thinking about the next question.
- ❖ What is my role here? – I may have to leave my mother's side, or escape from the shopkeepers who are beating me, or even wash my Mother Fate. But I may also have to recognize the Sfurtuna who comes to me, and to show her the way to raise her life to a higher quality of existence again.



- ❖ What is my own internal adversary that I must overcome in order to move forward?
 - I may be drifting with events and have not yet realized the need to find and wash my Fate, but I may also be struggling with my disgust for my Fate. As a helper, there is the need to rescue the ribbon that has been cast aside, to maintain a helping relationship, and to withdraw from it when necessary. Or as the mother, to just tolerate the state of helplessness and wait for her daughter to turn up. Recognizing and facing up to our inner adversaries or even the fact that we are stuck is often a tough and painful task. We can draw strength from Sfurtuna's story: even a dirty, repulsive, and hostile Fate can be put in order if we persevere and work hard at it.
- ❖ What is my inner help, my own resources for change? – To make a difference in our lives, we need resources. One of the first steps we should take is to look at what resources we need to make this change happen and to assess what we already have. We may also need to include a break in order to rest, recharge, and build up our resources before we begin to make the change. This is if we have the opportunity, of course. Because sometimes we are forced to set off in the condition we are in, even if that condition is not ideal for change – because there is no other option.
- ❖ What object would I take from the story for myself? – Magic objects have a certain helping function in folk tales. Not all folk tales feature such magic items, but that doesn't mean that the objects in the tale don't have magical powers for us personally. I may identify with Sfurtuna and already see that I need to wash my fate, but I don't feel equipped to do so. Entering the tale, I can bring out the soap and sponge that Sfurtuna uses to scrub her Mother Fate. Or I can bring out the aniseed pretzel she feeds the witch. Or the ribbon that was given to me as a gift, the tool that leads to me becoming a queen. So, among other things, I must look at what these objects represent to me and how I can get them.
- ❖ What is the very specific thing I need to do to move forward in this situation? – If we studied the above questions carefully, we probably have an outline of a possible way forward. But very often, that can make our situation even more daunting. We may



have to solve many tasks. How will I be able to do it all? How long will it take? I will definitely not be able to meet this challenge! These are all things we can say to ourselves and respond to. Before we panic, however, it is worth breaking down the journey ahead into individual steps and trusting that once we have taken one step, we will be capable of taking the next. In other words, the question is: Which step am I capable of taking now?

After a thorough reflection on the tale, we can begin to work on it with our clients. If we are working with a client in an individual process, the main question is really where to start, considering in what place and at what stage of development our client is. We might have already ascertained this during prior conversations, but we may give them the story, or they may listen to it and determine this for themselves.

Then, based on the client's interpretation and the interpretations made in previous sessions, we should go through the questions formulated in the previous sessions and on the cards during the facilitation process, which may sometimes take several sessions. Not all questions need to be worked with, some are relevant, others less so. It is possible that new questions will arise from the questions on the cards, and we will move on from there. The cards mainly feature questions, however sometimes there is a specific problem to solve.

Sometimes we may come across a topic that is no longer within the scope of the current story. We can then continue with another story and return to this one later.

The aim of the process is for the client to develop and apply effective coping strategies, to find the root cause of their anxiety, and – finally – to release it.

In the following are suggestions on how to engage with the story with young people in groups as well.



A possible scenario for a group activity

- ❖ **The purpose of the folk tale work group:** Dealing with the past, coming to terms with the past.
- ❖ **Target age group:** Young people aged 18-23 (possibly older), still only partially independent from their parents.
- ❖ **Duration:** 60 minutes.
- ❖ **Number of participants:** No more than 20.

Preparation of the venue:

The setting for the story group should be prepared according to the atmosphere of the tale. It is important that participants can sit in a circle – perhaps not on chairs, but on cushions. There should be a clear point of entry, which could be the door of the room, but if this is not possible, or if the room is too large, then a ‘gateway’ should be set up.

There should be sufficient but not too much lighting. If there are tables, we should place them by the wall; they can be useful for individual work later. If there are no tables, we need to bring drawing boards or folders for the participants to write or draw on.

Next to the ‘gateway’, already inside the space, we place symbol cards that the participants can choose from when they enter, before they sit down. These can be OH cards, Dixit cards, or even a personal collection of pictures or postcards – the main thing is that they depict different situations and feelings, and that there should be at least one and a half to two times more cards than participants so that everyone can choose freely.

In the centre of the circle, it is worth putting a colourful shawl, or perhaps a flower or a symbol related to the story. In the case of ‘Sfurtuna’, we could choose clothes, a ribbon, some pretzels, or even a crown.



Outside the circle, close to the group leader, we place any other desired props, including the folk tale cards, and the printed handouts for colouring and writing on.

If storytelling is done using video, the computer, projector, screen/wall surface, and speakers should also be prepared and tested so as not to hinder the process.

If the group is already in the room before we start, we should ask everyone to leave, and only lay out the symbol cards, shawl, symbols, etc. when the group is waiting outside.

Tools needed:

A shawl or piece of material for the centre of the circle, decorative items, symbol cards, drawing boards if needed, pens, coloured pencils, drawing equipment, the folk tale cards, and enough copies of the handouts for each participant.

Possibly: a computer, projector, screen/wall space, speakers.

Script:

(timings are approximate, being dependent on the size of the group)

Entrance

Duration: 5 minutes

We allow group members to enter, preferably one at a time, and give each of them the following task:

“Have you ever found yourself in a difficult situation for reasons beyond your control? Have you ever been told something about yourself that wasn’t true, but you couldn’t disprove it? Choose a card that represents this situation in your life.”

When everyone has made their choice and is seated, we can join in.



1. Getting in the mood

Duration: 10-15 minutes

We discuss the cards chosen by the participants. We shouldn't go round in a circle and not everyone necessarily has to share their card. When everyone who wishes to do so has spoken, we can discuss what 'learning from life' and 'developing' actually mean.

During the conversation, we can ask the following questions:

- What kind of difficult life situations are there? Do they tend to pile up on top of one another? Why should that be?
- To what extent do our family background and childhood determine how we cope in life at present?
- What can we learn from difficulties?

3. Storytelling

Duration: approx. 15 minutes

When similar stories have been told and we continue with this particular tale, we should provide the following introduction:

"Once there was a girl who was told she was cursed – and she found out that she really was! Would you like to hear her story?"

The storytelling should preferably be done by ourselves, in our own words, because in this way we can maintain contact with the participants. If we cannot tell the story personally, we can read it aloud or listen to a recording/watch a video of the tale.

If we are telling the story ourselves, before it begins, we might ask the participants to close their eyes and concentrate on their breathing. When everyone is focused, we can start.



We can also use a musical instrument (e.g. koshi chimes, a kalimba, or a sansula) to put the participants in the mood for the storytelling experience.

At the end of the story, we again ask the participants to close their eyes and, allowing enough time for their own internal imagery to be activated, we give them the following tasks:

- ❖ Pick a colour from the story!
- ❖ Pick a smell from the story!
- ❖ Pick an object from the story!
- ❖ Look around you, where are you in the story? What surrounds you, who is near you?

4. Processing

Duration: 35-40 minutes

After everyone has returned from the story, we discuss who has taken what from the story, what landscape they found themselves in. Answering is not obligatory; the participants can volunteer to speak if they wish to. Regarding the locations, we can ask the participants what the task in that particular place is.

Then (or in the meantime, as appropriate) we can talk with the participants about Sfurtuna herself:

- ❖ What are Sfurtuna's strengths and weaknesses?
- ❖ What does Sfurtuna do well and what not? Have they taken similar steps in their own lives?
- ❖ What does Mother Francesca do to help? Do they have such helpers?



Then we split the participants up into groups of three. The task of the groups is to discuss card 5:

Sfurtuna first meets her Fate at the weavers' cottage when she is locked up and left alone.

- ❖ Have you ever harmed or hurt someone against your will? Why did it happen?
- ❖ Have you ever regretted a sudden reaction to a situation and felt ashamed afterwards? What do you do when you feel ashamed in front of someone? How do you handle this situation?

We should give each group about 6-8 minutes to share their thoughts and then work with the whole group to brainstorm ways to prevent such situations or deal with them if they do occur.

The next topic is "Mother Fate" and confronting our own fate. We distribute the 'Wheel of Fate' handout and ask the participants to write the following in the appropriate places (while also colouring in the outline, or instead of colouring it):

- ❖ What have you been given from your background and your parents that you are satisfied with?
- ❖ What have you received from your parents that is negative for you?
- ❖ What have you achieved so far that you are satisfied with?
- ❖ What have you done so far that you regret?

We should leave time for individual work – perhaps up to 8-10 minutes. After that, the participants can share freely. Not everyone has to share or to speak about every question.



Each participant should choose a topic related to the above four questions that they think 'needs to be washed', like Mother Fate, or 'needs to be baked', like aniseed pretzels.

Task: The participants make an individual plan on how they would tackle this problem. We can ask them the following questions:

- ❖ What else do you want to do? Break down the path you want to take into separate steps! When will you take the first step?
- ❖ Who can help you? What do you need help with?

While they work, we can distribute the 'Washing' colouring handout.

Then, in pairs, the participants can share their thoughts with their partners.

5. Closing / Exit

When our time is up, some people will still be working. We conclude the session by asking everyone to leave the story space within a few minutes. We walk through the 'gateway' and meet whoever is ready to leave, one by one.

There, we ask the given person to tell us what their first step will be on the way to washing their own personal Mother Fate.