

## THE STORY OF THE TURBAN

The next evening, after the lavish Christmas feast had been cleared, the men of the Marcucci household didn't even poke their noses out the door to predict the weather—there was no need. The wind howled furiously in the chimney, stirring up the ashes and sparks, and the snow struck against the glass panes of the two windows in the kitchen with such force that they cracked.

It was barely five o'clock in the afternoon but the big, smoky room was already dark and if it weren't for the flame in the fireplace and the six-burner oil lamp on the table, no one could have seen who was sitting next to them.

The men lit their pipes and moved in close to the fireplace to warm themselves; the women sat idly here and there, and the matriarch, Regina, worked the beads of her rosary. When the old woman finished praying, Annina said, "Nonna, have you forgotten what you promised us last night?"

"The story of the turban, that's what we want!" cried the other children in chorus.

"Be patient," replied the grandmother. "When your fathers go out, I'll tell you the story."

"Are you afraid of us?" asked Maso. "Since when aren't we worthy of your tales? Go ahead and tell the story, that way you'll help us pass the time."

"Go on, tell it, Mamma," said Cecco, squeezing in beside her. "I'll hang on your every word."

"So will we!" shouted the children.

And so she began...

Well, you must know that on the night of Christmas, when Turno left the cavern after having committed the theft, a terrible scene took place at Montecornioli in that beautiful underground chamber. When the angels returned, they found the old guardian of the treasure asleep, but all it took was a glance at the golden chest with the crystal lid to realize the jewels were gone.

They awakened the old man wearing the silk cloak and asked, "Who has come here?"

"No one," he replied. "Besides, how could I have opened the door if it's secured with a hundred locks and each of you has a key to one of them?"