



100 Days of Italian Idioms ***(and much more)***

This document is the result of a couple of projects I did on Instagram. The first project about Italian idioms dates back to April, 2018 and it was so successful that I did another round of Italian idioms on Instagram beginning October, 2018. The projects included photos and Instagram stories, so if you want to check them out these are the links:

100 Days of Italian Idioms:

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/100daysofitalianidioms/>

100 Days of Italian idioms part 2:

https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/100daysofitalianidioms_part2/

In case you don't have Instagram or prefer using a different platform, you can find them on Pinterest as well. These are the links:

100 Days of Italian Idioms: <https://www.pinterest.it/InstantlyItaly/italian-language-100-days-of-italian-idioms/>

100 Days of Italian idioms part 2: <https://www.pinterest.it/InstantlyItaly/italian-language-100-days-of-italian-idioms-part-2/>

Since I have also written a few posts on my blog about other Italian idioms, which were not included in the Instagram projects, I decided to gather them all here. This is why I decided to list them in alphabetical order, to make them easier to be read.

For every idiom, I listed the meaning and an example of use. If you want to follow my projects or learn more about Italian language and culture, here are my social media accounts:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/instantlyitaly/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/instantlyitaly/>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.it/InstantlyItaly/>

If you reading this, you probably are a subscriber of my newsletter. In case you aren't, you can subscribe here: <http://eepurl.com/bd0q65>.

Abbassare le ali

Literally, it means to lower the wings and actually means to be more modest, less superb or pretentious. Another idiom with the same meaning is *volare più basso*.

Example: *“Ehi, abbassa le ali, chi ti credi di essere?”* (Hey, be more modest, who do you think you are?)

A casa del diavolo

It literally means ‘to the devil’s house’ and actually refers to a faraway place.

Example: *“Sono dovuto andare a casa del diavolo per trovare il libro che stavo cercando”* (I had to go quite far to find the book I was looking for)

A casaccio

Randomly, without care or attention.

Example: *“Ho fatto la spesa a casaccio e adesso non ho gli ingredienti che mi servono per cucinare la cena!”* (I did my shopping without care and now I don’t have the ingredients I need to cook dinner)

A caval donato non si guarda in bocca

Literally, it means you don’t have to look into the mouth of a horse who’s been gifted to you. So it refers to the fact that you don’t have to complain about the presents you get.

Example: *“Mamma, non mi piace la bambola che mi ha regalato la zia!” “Non lamentarti, a caval donato non si guarda in bocca!”* (Mom, I don’t like the doll aunt gave me! Don’t complain, you must not complain about presents)

Acqua in bocca

It literally can be translated as ‘water in mouth’ but actually means to keep one’s mouth shut, not to tell something to anybody, to keep a secret.

Example: *“Acqua in bocca, è un segreto”* (Don’t tell anybody, it’s a secret)

Affogare in un bicchier d’acqua

Literally, it means ‘to drown in a glass of water’ and refers to people who are not able to solve even the simplest issue and are easily panicked.

Example: *“È un problema difficile, lo facciamo risolvere a tua sorella? No, meglio di no, lei affoga in un bicchier d’acqua!”* (It’s a difficult problem, shall we ask your sister to solve it? No, it’s better not, she gets easily panicked)

A luci rosse

It literally means ‘red light’ and is referred to things that have to do with porn.

Example: *“Ho scoperto che mio fratello guarda i film a luci rosse”* (I have found out that my brother watches porn movies)

Andare a letto con le galline

It literally means ‘to go to bed with the hens’ and actually refers to going to be very early.

Example: *“Stasera devo andare a letto con le galline perché domattina devo alzarmi all'alba”* (I have to go to bed very early tonight because tomorrow I have to get up at dawn)

Andare in brodo di giuggiole

Its literal meaning is something like ‘to go in jujube broth’, while what it really means is to be really happy and excited, to be over the moon with joy.

Example: *“Quando ho detto a mamma che l'avrei portata all'opera, è andata in un brodo di giuggiole”* (When I told mom that I would bring her to the opera, she was over the moon with joy)

Andare liscio come l'olio

Its literal meaning is ‘to go smoothly like oil’ and it refers to when everything goes fine, without problems.

Example: *“Pensavo di avere problemi a passare la frontiera con il Messico, ma è andato tutto liscio come l'olio”* (I thought I would have problem in crossing the border with Mexico but everything went fine)

Andare per la maggiore

To be very popular.

Example: *“La cucina giapponese va per la maggiore in questo periodo”* (Japanese cuisine is very popular in this period)

Alla carlona

Something done without proper care, without thinking too much about it and putting the proper attention into it.

Example: *“Come ti sembra questo vestito, mamma?” “Mi sembra un po' fatto alla carlona”* (What do you think of this dress, mom? It seems to me that it's been done without care)

Alla chetichella

Secretly, furtively, sneakily.

Example: *“Mario e Paola se ne sono andati dalla festa alla chetichella, nessuno li ha visti”* (Mario and Paola left the party secretly, nobody saw them)

All'acqua di rose

Something superficial, something not done with care.

Example: *“Come ti è sembrata la lezione di filosofia?” “Secondo me è stata un po’ all’acqua di rose, il professore non ha spiegato molto in dettaglio”* (What do you think of the philosophy lesson? Uhm, it was a bit superficial, the teacher didn’t go into much detail in his explanation)

Allevare una serpe in seno

Literally, it means ‘to nurse a viper in one’s bosom’ and refers to the act of being good towards someone who might end up causing you pain or problems.

Example: *“Tuo figlio vuole che tu vada in pensione e gli lasci l’azienda” “Eh, ho allevato una serpe in seno”* (Your son would like you to retire and leave the company to him. Well, I nursed a viper in my bosom)

Altro giro, altro regalo

It is something you say when you have to do something over and over again. This idiom literally means ‘a new lap, a new gift’ and it is something that it is said to children on merry-go-rounds.

Example: *“Dai, forza, dobbiamo continuare a caricare il furgone” “Dai, altro giro, altro regalo”* (C’mon, we have to keep on loading the truck. Ok, let’s go on)

Alzare il gomito

Its literal meaning is ‘to raise one’s elbow’ and it actually means to drink too much.

Example: *“Tua sorella ha alzato un po’ il gomito, ieri sera” “Lo so, quando è arrivata a casa non riusciva a salire le scale”* (Your sister drank a lot yesterday evening. I know, when she got home she couldn’t walk up the stairs)

Alzare i tacchi

Literally, it means ‘to raise one’s heels’ and it means to leave, to go away.

Example: *“Non mi piace più questa festa, è meglio che alziamo i tacchi e andiamo a casa”* (I don’t like this party anymore, it’s better we leave and go home)

Alzarsi col piede sbagliato

The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘to get up with the wrong foot’, its actual meaning is to wake up in a very bad mood, to have a rough start.

Example: *“Mamma mia, come sei arrabbiato! Ti sei svegliato con il piede sbagliato stamattina?”* (Wow, how angry you are! Have you had a rough start, this morning?)

Andare a rotoli

This idiom means to go bad, it is usually referred to something that ends in a very bad way.

Example: *“Io e mio marito eravamo molto innamorati, ma il matrimonio è andato a rotoli dopo pochi mesi”* (My husband and I were very in love but the marriage ended after a few months)

Andare in bianco

The literal meaning of this idiom is something like ‘to go in white’ and it refers to when you try hitting on a girl or boy but you fail because she or he refuses you.

Example: *“Il mio amico Massimo ci prova con tutte le ragazze, ma va sempre in bianco”* (My friend Massimo always tries hitting on every girl but he gets always refused)

Andare in visibilio

To be over the moon with joy, to go into raptures

Example: *“Mia mamma è andata in visibilio quando le ho detto che ho preso dieci di matematica”* (My mom was over the moon with joy when I told her that I got an A in maths)

Arrampicarsi sugli specchi

This idiom literally means ‘to climb on mirrors’ and it refers to when you try to defend yourself for something, denying or ignoring the facts, or even telling lies.

Example: *“Smettila di arrampicarti sugli specchi e raccontami cosa è successo veramente”* (Stop trying to defend yourself telling lies and tell me what really happened)

Attaccare bottone

To start speaking with people you don’t know.

Example: *“Al parco c’era un tipo che voleva attaccare bottone e me ne sono andata”* (There was someone who wanted to speak with me at the park and so I left)

Avere il bernoccolo per...

To have a certain talent for something, to be very good at something.

Example: *“Mio fratello ha un’azienda di grande successo, ha proprio il bernoccolo per gli affari”* (My brother has a very successful company, he’s really good at doing business)

Avere il dente avvelenato

The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘to have a poisoned tooth’ and it means to be angry or rancorous against someone, to bear a grudge against someone.

Example: *“Non ce la faccio, ho il dente avvelenato contro chi indossa abiti con pellicce animali”* (I can't help it, I bear a grudge against those who wear dresses with animal fur)

Avere il magone

To be sad.

Example: *“Domani devo tornare al lavoro e ho il magone al pensiero!”* (I have to go back to work tomorrow and I am sad at the thought of it)

Avere il pollice verde

To be very good at growing plants, to have the green thumb.

Example: *“Che bel giardino che hai, hai proprio il pollice verde!”* (What a lovely garden you have, you really have the green thumb!)

Avere il sale in zucca

Literally, it could be translated as ‘to have salt in your head’ and it means to be wise.

Example: *“Non mi preoccupo quando esci con Marta perché lei ha sale in zucca e non fa sciocchezze”* (I don't worry when you go out with Marta because she is wise and doesn't do foolish things)

Avere il sangue blu

Literally, it means ‘to have blue blood’ and refers to aristocrats or people that belong to the monarchy.

Example: *“Ieri sono stato a una festa dove c'erano molte persone di sangue blu”* (Yesterday I went to a party where there were a lot of aristocrats)

Avere l'argento vivo addosso

Referred to someone who is lively and energetic, or to a kid who is always moving or doing something, without resting.

Example: *“All'asilo sono disperati perché Marco non sta mai fermo, ha l'argento vivo addosso!”* (They are desperate at the kindergarten because Marco is never still, he is super energetic)

Avere i grilli per la testa

The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘to have crickets in your head’ and it means to have lots of impossible ambitions, to always think about silly things.

Example: *“Mia sorella è una ragazza senza troppi grilli per la testa, pensa solo a lavorare”* (My sister is a very serious girl, the only thing she thinks of is her job)

Avere la memoria di un elefante

Literally, it means 'to have the memory of an elephant' and it means to have a very good memory.

Example: "*Mio nonno si ricorda moltissime cose, ha la memoria di un elefante*" (My grandfather remembers a lot of things, he really has a great memory)

Avere le braccine corte

Literally 'to have short arms', it means to be stingy. It could also be "*avere il braccino corto*".

Example: "*Non paghi mai da bere, hai proprio il braccino corto*" (You never pay for drinks, you are really stingy)

Avere le fette di prosciutto sugli occhi

Literally, it means 'to have slices of ham on the eyes'. It means not to see or pretend not to know something that is really obvious, something that everybody knows. Another way of phrasing it is "*avere gli occhi foderati di prosciutto*". There's also the version "*avere gli orecchi foderati di prosciutto*" which is referred to someone who does not hear or pretends not to hear something.

Example: "*Guarda che lo so che tua sorella non è innamorata di me, non ho mica le fette di prosciutto sugli occhi*" (Look, I know that your sister is not in love with me, it's not that I don't know it)

Avere orecchio

To be very good with music. To have a great musical ear.

Example: "*Sei bravissimo a suonare, hai proprio orecchio!*" (You are really good at playing, you really have a musical ear)

Avere una fame da lupi

To hungry like the wolf, to be really hungry.

Example: "*Mamma, cosa c'è per cena? Ho una fame da lupi!*" (What's for dinner, mom? I am really hungry!)

Avere una faccia da pesce bollito/lesso

To have a very inexpressive, blank, face

Example: "*Cosa c'è? Cos'è quella faccia da pesce bollito?*" (What's up? What's that blank face?)

Avere una gatta da pelare

Literally, it means 'to have a cat to peel'. Its actual meaning is to have a big problem, to have a big issue to solve.

Example: *"Oggi è stata una giornata difficile in ufficio, avevo un sacco di gatte da pelare!"* (It's been a very difficult day at the office today, I had a lot of big issues to solve)

Avere un occhio di lince

Literally, it means 'to have the eye of a lynx'. It means to have a very good eyesight.

Example: *"Hai letto cosa c'è scritto su quel cartello?" "Mamma mia, che occhi di lince, io non vedo neanche il cartello!"* (Have you read what is written on that sign? Wow, what a good eyesight, I can't even see the sign!)

Avere un tarlo in testa

Literally, this idiom means 'to have a woodworm in your head' and it refers to when you have something in your head and you can't think of something else. Other idioms with the same meaning are *"avere un chiodo in testa"* or *"avere un chiodo fisso"*.

Example: *"A cosa stai pensando?" "Penso sempre a come cambiare vita, ormai ho un tarlo in testa"* (What are you thinking of? I always think about how I can change my life, I can't think of anything else anymore)

Averne fin sopra i capelli

To be fed up with something, to not stand something anymore.

Example: *"Ne ho fin sopra i capelli della tua chitarra! Non fai altro che suonare e non ne posso più!"* (I am fed up with your guitar. You do nothing but play and I can't stand it anymore!)

Bagnato come un pulcino

To be wet as a chick, to be really wet

Example: *"Oggi pioveva fortissimo e sono arrivato a casa bagnato come un pulcino"* (It was raining very hard today and I came home wet as a chick)

Bastian contrario

It refers to someone who always has an opposing view, always goes against what other people think or do.

Example: *"Non ti va mai bene niente, sei proprio un bastian contrario"* (Nothing is fine for you, you always are against what other people want to do)

Battere la fiacca

To be lazy, to not work hard enough.

Example: *“Smettila di battere la fiacca e vieni ad aiutarmi. Dobbiamo preparare tutti gli ordini entro le cinque!”* (Stop being lazy and come help me. We have to prepare all the orders within five o'clock!)

Braccia rubate all'agricoltura

It is something you say to someone who is lazy and doesn't like to work.

Example: *“Come va tuo figlio sul lavoro? Bah, braccia rubate all'agricoltura”* (How's your son at work? Well, he's lazy)

Bruciare le tappe

To reach a goal very quickly, without taking the proper time.

Example: *“Mia mamma mi ha sempre detto di non bruciare le tappe e di godermi l'adolescenza senza aver fretta di diventare grande”* (My mom has always told me not to rush and to enjoy my teenage years without the hurry of growing up)

Brutto come la fame

To be ugly as hunger, to be really ugly. Another similar idiom is *“essere brutto come la botte”*, to be ugly as the night.

Example: *“Il nuovo insegnante è brutto come la fame!” “Smettila, non si dicono certe cose”* (The new teacher is really ugly! Stop it, you shouldn't say these things!)

Cadere dalle nuvole

Literally 'to fall from the clouds', it is when you either pretend you didn't know something or suddenly realize something everybody knows.

Example: *“Ho chiesto a Jane se fosse stata lei a rompere il piatto di porcellana, ma è caduta dalle nuvole”* (I asked Jane if it was her who broke the porcelain plate but she pretended she didn't know anything about it)

Cambiare le carte in tavola

Literally 'to change the cards on the table', it is when you suddenly change your idea or opinion about a certain topic.

Example: *“Io non ho voglia di fare Natale con i tuoi” “Adesso non cambiare le carte in tavola, avevi detto che eri d'accordo!”* (I don't feel like spending Christmas with your parents. Don't put things differently now, you said you were ok with it!)

Capire l'antifona

To understand something that was not so clear, something that someone doesn't want you to understand.

Example: *"Vieni alla festa domani?" "Eh, ho provato a far credere a Maria che rimanevo a lavorare fino a tardi, ma lei ha capito l'antifona e mi ha chiesto di tornare a casa per stare con i bambini"* (Will you come to the party tomorrow night? Well, I tried to convince Maria that I would work late but she understood everything and told me to come home to stay with the kids)

Capire rave per fave

Literally, it means 'to understand turnips instead or fava beans' and it means to misunderstand something.

Example: *"Eh, ma non è possibile! Capisci sempre rave per fave!"* (Well, it's not possible! You always misunderstand things!)

Capitare a fagiolo

When something happens just at the right moment.

Example: *"L'offerta di un nuovo lavoro è capitata a fagiolo, avevo proprio bisogno di un cambiamento"* (The offer of a new job arrived at the right moment, as I really needed a change)

Cascarci come una pera cotta

The literal meaning of this idiom is 'to fall like a baked pear' and it refers to when someone tells a lie and you instantly believe it.

Example: *"Mio marito mi ha raccontato di essere andato a trovare sua mamma a Roma e ci sono cascata come una pera cotta. Purtroppo, era una bugia"* (My husband told me he went to see his mom in Rome and I believed it completely, but it was a lie)

Cascare dal pero

This idiom literally means 'to fall from the pear tree' and it refers to when you become aware of something obvious you didn't comprehend before, or when you pretend you didn't know something.

Example: *"Quando gli ho detto che doveva fare ancora tre esami per potersi laureare, è cascato dal pero"* (When I told me he still had to take three exams before getting his degree, he behaved as if he didn't know it)

Cavare il sangue da una rapa

The literal meaning of this idiom is 'to take blood out of a turnip' and it refers to the fact that it is impossible to expect something from someone who does not have the ability to

do it. Usually, it is used in a negative way towards someone who doesn't want to do a certain thing or is not smart enough to do it.

Example: *“Ho chiesto ai miei alunni di comportarsi bene al museo, ma non mi ascoltano. Del resto, non si può cavare il sangue da una rapa ”* (I asked my students to behave well while we were at the museum, but they don't listen to me. After all, it is impossible to expect something from them)

Cavarsela a buon mercato

To get off lightly, to come out of a difficult situation without too many consequences.

Example: *“Pensavo di aver fatto molti danni alla mia macchina, quando ho fatto l'incidente, ma invece me la sono cavata a buon mercato ”* (I thought I had done a lot of damage to my car, when I had the accident, but I got off lightly)

Ce l'ho sulla punta della lingua

To have something on the tip of your tongue, when you know something but you cannot remember it.

Example: *“Come si chiama l'amica di Mary?” “Guarda, ce l'ho sulla punta della lingua, ma non mi viene in mente adesso ”* (What's the name of Mary's friend? I have got it on the tip of my tongue, but I can't remember it now)

C'entra come i cavoli a merenda!

Literally, it means 'something has to do with it like cabbages for afternoon snack'. It is referred to something that is out of place, something that doesn't have anything to do with something else.

Example: *“Come sta questa borsa con il mio outfit?” “C'entra come i cavoli a merenda ”* (How does this bag goes with my outfit? It doesn't have anything to do with it)

Cercare con il lanternino

Literally 'to search with the lantern', this idiom means to search very carefully.

Example: *“Non si trova un idraulico da nessuna parte. Bisogna proprio cercarlo con il lanternino”* (You can't find a plumber anywhere. You really have to search carefully)

Cercare il pelo nell'uovo

Literally, it means 'to look for the hair in the egg'. Its meaning is to be excessively meticulous or fussy.

Example: *“Secondo me, questo file non è formattato bene. Avrei scelto un carattere più grande” “Vabbè, adesso non cercare il pelo nell'uovo. Com'è il contenuto?”* (In my opinion, this file is not formatted well. I'd have chosen a bigger font. Well, don't be over meticulous. What do you think of its content?)

C'è un tempo da lupi

Literally, it is 'wolves' weather'. Obviously, it is used to describe terrible weather.

Example: *"Dove te ne vai con questo tempo da lupi?" "Devo andare a prendere mia mamma alla stazione"* (Where do you go with such a terrible weather? I have to pick up my mom at the station)

Che pizza che sei!

Literally, 'what a pizza you are!'. It is used to address someone who is being annoying.

Example: *"Mi sto annoiando, torniamo a casa?" "Mamma mia, che pizza che sei!"* (I am getting bored, can we go back home? My goodness, what a bore you are!)

Chi fa da sé, fa per tre

This idiom could be translated as 'who does it by himself, does it for three people' and it means that it is always better to do things on your own if you want to be sure of the result.

Example: *"Ho chiamato alcuni amici ad aiutarmi con il trasloco, ma hanno fatto un gran caos. Se avessi fatto da solo, sarebbe stato meglio" "Eh, chi fa da sé, fa per tre"* (I asked some friends to help me with the move but they made a mess. If I had done it by myself, it would have been better. It's always better to do things on your own)

Chi ha il pane, non ha i denti

The literal meaning of this idiom is 'those who have the bread does not have the teeth'. It is a saying that is used to describe someone who is very lucky (usually because he/she is rich) but is not aware of being so lucky, he/she doesn't seem to take advantage of it.

Example: *"Il papà del mio amico Massimo ha detto che gli lascia l'azienda, ma lui non la vuole" "È proprio vero che chi ha il pane non ha i denti"* (My friend Massimo's father told him that he wants to leave the company to him but he doesn't want it. Well, it's true that those who are lucky don't take advantage of it)

Cieco come una talpa

Blind as a mole (very blind).

Example: *"Scusa, cosa c'è scritto su quel cartello? Non vedo" "Sei proprio cieco come una talpa!"* (Excuse me, what's written on that sign? I can't see. You are really blind!)

Ci sono quattro gatti

Literally, 'there are four cats'. It is an expression used when a place is empty, when there's nobody around.

Example: *"Com'era la festa?" "Noiosa, c'erano quattro gatti"* (How was the party? Quite boring, there were very few people)

Ci sta come il cacio sui maccheroni!

Literally, 'it goes with it like cacio cheese on maccheroni'. The opposite of *c'entra come i cavoli a merenda*, this saying is used when something is perfect with something else, when a combination is perfect.

Example: "*Come ti sembra questo formaggio francese sulla pizza?*" "*Secondo me, ci sta come il cacio sui maccheroni*" (What do you think of this French cheese on the pizza? In my opinion, it goes perfectly with it!)

Ciucco come un asino

Drunk as a donkey (very drunk).

Example: "*Ieri sera mio fratello è tornato a casa ciucco come un asino e mia mamma si è infuriata*" (Yesterday evening, my brother came home very drunk and my mom went mad!)

Comprare a scatola chiusa

Drunk as a donkey (very drunk).

Example: "*Ieri sera mio fratello è tornato a casa ciucco come un asino e mia mamma si è infuriata*" (Yesterday evening, my brother came home very drunk and my mom went mad!)

Conosco i miei polli

It literally means 'I know my chickens' and actually refers to the fact that I know the persons I am dealing with.

Example: "*Stai attento ai tuoi vicini di casa, non ti fidare troppo*" "*Non ti preoccupare, conosco i miei polli*" ('be careful with your neighbors, I don't trust them' 'don't worry, I know who I am dealing with')

Contare come il due di picche a briscola

This idiom literally means 'to count like two of spades at *briscola*', which is a game of cards. It means to be of no importance.

Example: "*Ieri mia figlia è andata alla festa senza chiedermi il permesso. Conto proprio come il due di picche a briscola in casa mia*" (Yesterday my daughter went to the party without asking me for permission. I really don't mean anything in my house)

Contare fino a dieci

Literally, this idiom is 'to count until ten'. To think carefully before saying something, to calm down before replying to avoid saying something wrong or bad.

Example: "*Ero così arrabbiata con la professoressa che ho dovuto contare fino a dieci prima di parlare per evitare di insultarla*" (I was so mad with my teacher that I had to calm down before answering to avoid insulting her)

Costare quattro soldi

To cost very little, to be very cheap.

Example: *“Che bello il tuo vestito!” “Mah, è una roba da quattro soldi”* (What a nice dress! Well, it is something very cheap)

Costare un occhio della testa

Literally, it means something like ‘to cost an eye of the head’ and it means to cost a lot, to be very expensive.

Example: *“Questa borsa mi è costata un occhio della testa e si è già rotta!”* (This bag was super expensive and is already broken)

Cronaca nera

Literally ‘black news’, it refers to crime news.

Example: *“Lo sai che il ladro è stato arrestato?” “Sì, l’ho letto nella cronaca nera”* (Do you know that the thief has been arrested? Yes, I have read it in the crime news)

Cronaca rosa

Literally ‘pink news’, it refers to gossip news. Quite old fashioned, now commonly replaced by the word gossip.

Example: *“Mia nonna sa sempre quello che succede nella vita privata degli attori. È appassionata di cronaca rosa”* (My grandmother always knows what goes on in the private life of actors. She is really a fan of gossip)

Curioso come una scimmia

Curious as a monkey (very curious).

Example: *“Com’è andata ieri sera con Jessica?” “Ma sei proprio curioso come una scimmia!”* (How did it go with Jessica yesterday evening? You are really curious!)

Dare del filo da torcere

To give a hard time to someone.

Example: *“Che bello questo mobile, lo hai fatto tu?” “Sì, ma mi ha dato del filo da torcere. È stato difficile realizzarlo”* (What a lovely piece of furniture, have you made it yourself? Yes, but it gave me a hard time. It’s been difficult to make it)

Dare i numeri

Literally ‘to give the numbers’, this idiom means to be a bit crazy or mad or just a bit weird.

Example: *“Domani lascio il lavoro e comincio a fare il clown”. “Ma dai i numeri?”* (Tomorrow I quit my job and I start being a clown. Are you crazy?)

Dare un giro di vite

Literally ‘to turn the screw’ this idiom means to enforce laws, to crack down.

Example: *“La polizia ha deciso di dare un giro di vite allo spaccio di droga”* (The police has decided to crack down drug dealing)

Dare uno strappo

To give a ride.

Example: *“Devo andare in biblioteca, mi dai uno strappo?”* (I have to go to the library, can you give me a ride?)

Darsi alla macchia

To disappear, to go into hiding. It is usually referred to criminals or thieves.

Example: *“Il ladro che ha rapinato la banca si è dato alla macchia. La polizia lo sta cercando dappertutto”* (The thief who robbed the bank disappeared. The police is searching him everywhere)

Da un pero non nasce un melo

Literally, this idiom means ‘an apple cannot grow from a pear tree’ and it refers to the fact that children are quite similar to their parents.

Example: *“Marinella è una gran pettegola, proprio come sua mamma” “Da un pero non nasce un melo”* (Marinella is a real blabbermouth, just like her mother. Children are usually similar to their parents)

Di punto in bianco

All of a sudden.

Example: *“Di punto in bianco, Maria e Francesca si sono alzate e sono andate via”* (All of a sudden, Maria and Francesca got up and went away)

Dire pane al pane, vino al vino

Literally, this idiom could be translated as ‘to say bread to bread and wine to wine’. It means to speak frankly and openly.

Example: *“Mio papà è una persona sincera, dice sempre pane al pane e vino al vino”* (My father is a real sincere person, he always says what he thinks)

Dirlo cento volte

Literally 'to say something a hundred times', it means to repeat something over and over again.

Example: *"Vuoi smetterla di guardare la televisione? Ti ho detto cento volte che prima devi studiare!"* (Would you stop watching TV? I told you a hundred times that you have to study first)

Dirne quattro a qualcuno

Literally, it is 'to say four to someone' and it means to scold, to reprimand.

Example: *"Stamattina un ragazzo ha parcheggiato davanti al mio cancello. Ah, ma quando è arrivato gliene ho dette quattro!"* (This morning a guy parked his car in front of my gate. But when he came back I scolded him!)

Diventare rosso come un peperone

Literally 'to become red as a bell pepper', it means to be embarrassed, to feel ashamed.

Example: *"Quando Marina mi ha detto che le piaccio, sono diventato rosso come un peperone"* (When Marina told me she likes me, I was really embarrassed)

Dormire come un ghiro

To sleep as a dormouse, to sleep soundly.

Example: *"Fai piano, svegli papà!" "Dorme come un ghiro, non sente nulla"* (Be quiet, you'll wake up dad! He is sleeping soundly, he won't hear a thing)

Dormire tra due guanciali

Literally 'to sleep between two pillows', this idiom means to feel safe, not to worry.

Example: *"Quando mia suocera guarda mio figlio dormo tra due guanciali, lei è bravissima!"* (When my mother-in-law takes care of my son I never worry, she is really good at it!)

Dormire sugli allori

To do nothing after winning something or reaching certain goals.

Example: *"Lo so che hai appena fatto l'esame e sei stanco, ma è meglio che non dormi sugli allori e continui a studiare, se vuoi laurearti!"* (I know that you just took the exam and you're tired, but it is better you do something and keep studying, if you want to get your degree)

Due lati della stessa medaglia

Literally, it means 'two sides of the same coin' and it refers to when two things seem different and opposite but they cannot be separated as they are two different aspects of the same thing or topic.

Example: *"Politica e comunicazione sono due lati della stessa medaglia"* (Politics and communication are two sides of the same coin)

È acqua passata

Literally 'it's water gone', this idiom means it is all forgotten, it's a thing of the past.

Example: *"Ti chiedo scusa per essermi comportato male, mi spiace"* *"Non ti preoccupare, è acqua passata!"* ('I apologize for behaving bad, I am sorry' 'Don't worry, it's a thing of the past')

È un altro paio di maniche

Literally 'it is another pair of sleeves', this idiom means it's another story, it's something different, something that cannot be compared.

Example: *"Dici che non vuoi viaggiare, ma poi vai sempre via con i tuoi amici". "Quello è un altro paio di maniche"* (You say you don't want to travel, but you always go away with your friend. That's a whole different story)

Essere a cavallo

Literally 'to be on the horse', it refers to when you are doing great, when something happens and makes things great for you. I have done some research and it seems that the equivalent in English is to be golden.

Example: *"Ho sposato una donna ricca e sono a cavallo, posso smettere di lavorare"* (I have married a rich woman and I am golden, I can stop working)

Essere alla frutta

Literally something like 'to be at the fruit', it means to be exhausted, to have run out of energies, to be at the end of something.

Example: *"Mi sa che siamo alla frutta, il nostro matrimonio non può andare avanti così"* (I have the feeling that we are done, our marriage can't go on like this)

Essere al verde

To be broke.

Example: *"Puoi prestarmi i soldi per il biglietto del bus?" "Mi dispiace, ma non li ho. Sono al verde"* (Can you lend me the money for the bus ticket? I am sorry but I don't have them. I am broke)

Essere buono come il pane

Its literal meaning is 'to be as good as bread'. It is usually referred to someone who is very good at heart, honest and kind. Another similar idiom is *essere un pezzo di pane*. As a slang, *buono* is used as handsome, so this phrase also means to be really handsome.

Example: "*La mia vicina di casa aiuta sempre tutti, è buona come il pane*" (My neighbor always helps everybody, she is a very good person)

Essere come cane e gatto

It literally means 'to be like a cat and a dog' and is used to refer to two people who are always fighting.

Example: "*Marina, smettila di litigare sempre con tua sorella! Siete proprio come cane e gatto*" (Stop fighting with your sister, Marina! You are always fighting)

Essere come due gocce d'acqua

Literally 'to be like two drops of water', the actual meaning of this idiom is to be very similar.

Example: "*Si vede che Maria e Francesca sono sorelle: sono come sue gocce d'acqua!*" (You can tell that Maria and Francesca are sisters: they are so similar!)

Essere come il prezzemolo

Literally 'to be like parsley', this idiom means to be everywhere.

Example: "*Quell'attrice è in tutti i film usciti recentemente, è proprio come il prezzemolo!*" (That actress is in all the movies recently, she's really everywhere!)

Essere culo e camicia

This idiom could be translated literally as 'to be like ass and shirt', and it is something said of two people who are always together and get along super well.

Example: "*Certo che tu e Marco siete proprio culo e camicia, eh! Siete sempre insieme!*" (You and Marco get along very well! You two are always together!)

Essere dolce come il miele

To be as sweet as honey, to be really sweet.

Example: "*La mia cagnolina vuole sempre le coccole, è dolce come il miele*" (My dog always wants to be cuddled, she really is very sweet)

Essere d'umore nero

To be in a bad mood.

Example: *“Mio papà è sempre di umore nero, ultimamente. Non capisco cosa gli succeda!”*
(My father is always in a bad mood, lately. I don't understand what is happening to him!)

Essere in alto mare

Literally 'to be on the high seas', this idiom means to be stuck or to be nowhere done.

Example: *“Hai finito il lavoro per domani?” “No, purtroppo sono ancora in alto mare”* (Have you done with the work for tomorrow? No, I am nowhere done)

Essere incavolato nero

To be really angry.

Example: *“Quando torna dal lavoro, mia mamma è sempre incavolata nera”* (When my mom comes home from work, she is always very angry)

Essere in bolletta

To be broke.

Example: *“Vieni al concerto di Tiziano Ferro” “No, non posso. È un periodo in cui sono un po' in bolletta”*. (Will you come to Tiziano Ferro's concert? No, I can't. I am a bit broke lately)

Essere in una botte di ferro

Literally 'to be in an iron barrel', this idiom means to be safe, to be sure that nothing bad will happen.

Example: *“Sei sicuro che andrà tutto bene?” “Sì, tranquillo, siamo in una botte di ferro”*
(Are you sure that everything is going to be ok? Yes, don't worry, we are safe)

Essere in un mare di guai

Literally, 'to be in a sea of troubles', it means to be in deep trouble.

Example: *“Puoi aiutarmi? Sono in un mare di guai!”* (Can you help me? I am in deep trouble!)

Essere in rosso

Literally, 'to be in red', it refers to your bank account and it means to be broke, to have no money.

Example: *“Si è rotta la macchina e dovrei cambiarla, ma non posso. Purtroppo, sono in rosso”* (My car broke down and I should change it but I can't. Unfortunately, I have no money)

Essere in vena

To feel like doing something.

Example: *“Andiamo a ballare?” “No, stasera no, non sono proprio in vena di uscire”* (Shall we go dancing? No, not tonight, I don't feel like going out)

Essere la ciliegina sulla torta

The literal meaning of this idiom is 'to be the cherry on the cake', and it refers to something that is the perfect ending of a series of events (even in an ironic way).

Example: *“Ho avuto una giornata terribile e, come ciliegina sulla torta, mi hanno anche rubato la bicicletta”* (I have had a terrible day and to make thing worse I found out that my bike was stolen)

Essere l'ago della bilancia

This idiom could be translated literally as 'to be the scale needle', and it refers to a person or thing who is the determining element in a decision or situation.

Example: *“Spesso i piccoli partiti sono l'ago della bilancia nelle decisioni di governo”* (Often small parties are the determining element in government decisions)

Essere la pecora nera della famiglia

Literally, this idiom means 'to be the black sheep in the family' and it refers to someone who behaves bad while the rest of the family is serious and considerate.

Example: *“Invece di lavorare nell'azienda di famiglia, mio zio è scappato in India. È proprio la pecora nera della famiglia”* (Instead of working in the family company, my uncle went to India. He's really the black sheep in the family)

Essere sulle spine

Literally, it would be 'to be on thorns' and it means to be anxious, to be nervous, usually because you wait for something to happen.

Example: *“La mia amica Francesca mi ha detto che ha un segreto da raccontarmi e io sono sulle spine”* (My friend Francesca told me she has a secret to tell me and now I am really nervous)

Essere rosso dalla vergogna

The literal translation is 'to be red with shame' and it means to be embarrassed, to be ashamed.

Example: *“Quando la maestra ha scoperto cosa aveva fatto, Marco è diventato rosso dalla vergogna”* (When the teacher found out what Marco did, she was really ashamed)

Essere stipati come sardine

Literally, 'to be squashed like sardines', it means to be really squashed, to be in a very crowded place.

Example: *"Non ne posso più di tornare a casa in metro, siamo sempre stipati come le sardine"* (I can't stand coming back home by metro, it is always too crowded)

Essere su un binario morto

Literally 'to be on a dead track', this idiom refers to a situation where there is no evolution, where nothing happens and no solution can be found.

Example: *"Come va la trattativa con i sindacati?" "Siamo su un binario morto, nessuno vuole cedere"* (How's the negotiation with trade unions going? We are stuck, nobody wants to give up)

Essere tutto pepe

Literally 'to be all pepper', this idiom is referred to someone who is very lively, cheerful, sharp and fun. Another similar idiom is *"essere un peperino"*, which means the same.

Example: *"Tua sorella è molto vivace, è davvero tutto pepe"* (Your sister is very lively)

Essere una mosca bianca

This idiom literally means 'to be a white fly' and actually means to be different from the other people.

Example: *"Da giovane non amavo andare in discoteca, ero proprio una mosca bianca"* (When I was young, I didn't like going to the disco, I was really different from the others)

Essere una palla al piede

Literally 'to be a ball at the foot', it means to be a burden for someone.

Example: *"Quando mio fratello esce con noi si lamenta sempre, è proprio una palla al piede"* (When my brother goes out with us, he always complains. He's really a burden)

Essere una testa di rapa

The literal translation of this idiom is something like 'to have the head like a turnip' and it refers to someone who is dumb.

Example: *"La mia segretaria non capisce mai niente, è veramente una testa di rapa"* (My secretary never understands anything, she is really dumb)

Essere un coniglio

To be a rabbit, to be a coward

Example: *“Non essere un coniglio, vai e affronta il tuo nemico”* (Don't be a coward, go and face your enemy)

Essere un mattone

Literally 'to be a brick', this idiom means to be really boring.

Example: *“Com'era il film?” “Un mattone!”* (How was the movie? Really boring!)

Essere verde dall'invidia

To be green with envy, to be envious.

Example: *“Quando il mio vicino di casa ha visto la mia macchina nuova, è diventato verde dall'invidia!”* (When my neighbor saw my new car, he turned green with envy!)

È una gallina dalle uova d'oro

Literally, it means 'the hen that lays golden eggs' and it refers to someone or something which gives you a lot of money.

Example: *“Hai visto che successo il negozio di Marco? Ha proprio trovato la gallina dalle uova d'oro vendendo vecchi oggetti!”* (Have you seen how successful Marco's shop is? He is really making a lot of money selling old objects)

È una minestra riscaldata

Literally a 'reheated soup', it refers to when you return with an old boyfriend/girlfriend.

Example: *“Cosa ne pensi della storia di Maria e Paolo? Hai visto che sono tornati insieme?” “Mah, le minestre riscaldate non funzionano mica!”* (What do you think of Maria and Paolo's story? Have you seen that they have come back together? Well, this kind of things don't work for me!)

È un cane che si morde la coda

Literally, 'it is a dog that bites its tail', it refers to a situation that has no solution.

Example: *“Senza contratto non possiamo affittare la casa, ma senza casa non ci fanno i documenti che servono per il contratto. È un cane che si morde la coda, non si riesce a risolvere la situazione”* (Without a contract we can't rent a house, but without a house we can have the documents needed for the contract. We are stuck, there is no way to solve the issue)

Fare alla romana

Literally 'to do like the Romans do', it means to equally divide a bill of a restaurant among a group of people, to go Dutch basically.

Example: *“Ognuno paga per sè o facciamo alla romana?”* (Does everybody pay its own bill or do we share?)

Fare di tutta l'erba un fascio

Literally 'to make a bundle of all grass', it means to make generalizations, when speaking of a certain topic, to consider everything in the same way, without making proper distinctions.

Example: *"Gli studenti non hanno mai voglia di studiare, pensano solo a divertirsi" "Non bisogna fare di tutta l'erba un fascio, alcuni di loro sono molto bravi!"* (Students never want to study, they only think about having fun. We mustn't generalize, some of them are really good)

Fare due chiacchiere

To chat.

Example: *"Oggi ho incontrato la mia amica Marta e abbiamo fatto due chiacchiere"* (I met my friend Marta today and we had a little chat)

Fare due più due

Literally, 'two plus two', it refers to when you finally understand something, when you put things together and realize a certain thing.

Example: *"Ho fatto due più due e ho capito che Jessica non stava più con Marco"* (I put things together and finally understood that Jessica was not going out with Marco anymore)

Fare i salti mortali

Literally 'to make somersaults', this idiom means do everything to make something happen.

Example: *"Mia mamma ha fatto i salti mortali per farmi studiare"* (my mom did everything she could to make me study)

Fare la civetta

Literally, 'to play the owl', it means to be flirty.

Example: *"Francesca proprio non la sopporto, fa sempre la civetta con il mio fidanzato!"* (I can't stand Francesca, she is always being flirty with my fiancée)

Fare la commedia

Literally 'to make the comedy', it means to pretend, to fake something.

Example: *"Marco non vuole andare a scuola oggi. Dice che è malato, ma secondo me sta facendo la commedia"* (Marco doesn't want to go to school today. He says he is sick but I think he is just pretending)

Fare la cresta

To steal money from a sum that has been given to you in little amounts, so that it is difficult to notice it.

Example: *“Vado io a fare la spesa, mamma” “Sì, ma non fare la cresta”* (I will do the grocery shopping, mom. Ok, but don't take money for yourself, take me back the exact change)

Fare le ore piccole

Literally 'to make the little hours', it means to stay awake until the early morning.

Example: *“Stamattina sono stanchissimo, ieri sera ho fatto le ore piccole” “A che ora sei tornato a casa?” “Alle due”.* (I am very tired this morning, I stayed awake until late yesterday night. What time did you get back home? At two a.m.)

Fare mente locale

To focus and gather ideas to take a decision or to remember something.

Example: *“Non mi ricordo più dove ho messo le chiavi di casa” “Fai mente locale e cerca di ricordare quando le avevi l'ultima volta”* (I don't remember where I left the keys of the house. Try to focus and remember when you had them last time)

Fare orecchie da mercante

Literally, 'to have merchant's ears', it means to pretend not to listen or to understand something that is being said to you.

Example: *“Ho detto a tuo papà che sarebbe ora di cambiare il divano, ma lui ha fatto orecchie da mercante”* (I told your father that it is time to change the sofa, but he pretended not to hear)

Fare passi da gigante

To make big steps, big improvements in something.

Example: *“Il tuo italiano è molto migliorato, hai fatto passi da gigante negli ultimi mesi!”* (Your Italian has really improved, you have made big steps in the last months)

Fare una frittata

Literally 'to make a frittata/omelette' , this idiom means to make a mess, to create a problem.

Example: *“Ho detto a mia mamma che mio fratello ha preso un brutto voto e lei si è arrabbiata. Ho fatto proprio una bella frittata!”* (I told my mom that my brother got a bad mark and she went mad. I have really made a mess!)

Fare un quarantotto

Literally, 'to make a 48', it refers to a messy situation, something confused and chaotic. This idiom comes from the revolutionary riots that took place in Italy in 1948. You may also see it as *succedere un quarantotto*.

Example: *"In ufficio stamattina ho detto che lasciavo il lavoro ed è successo un quarantotto"* (This morning in the office I announced that I would quit my job and I caused a mess)

Farla in barba a qualcuno

To manage to do something despite the law or the authority.

Example: *"Ce l'ho fatta! Sono riuscito a entrare al concerto senza biglietto, in barba alla sicurezza!"* (I did it! I managed to sneak into the concert venue without the ticket despite security)

Farne di tutti i colori

Literally, it could be translated as 'to make things of every color', it means to do all sort of crazy things.

Example: *"Non ne posso proprio più del mio ragazzo, me ne ha fatte di tutti i colori"* (I can't stand my boyfriend anymore, he has really done all sorts of crazy things to me)

Farsene un baffo

Not to care, not to give a damn.

Example: *"Gli ho detto di spostare la macchina per farmi uscire dal parcheggio, ma se ne è fatto un baffo"* (I told him to move the car to let me out of the parking spot, but he didn't give a damn)

Farsi i cavoli propri

Literally 'to mind one's own cabbages', it means to mind one's own business.

Example: *"Dov'è tua sorella?" "Non lo so, io mi faccio i cavoli miei"* (Where's your sister? I don't know, I mind my own business)

Farsi in quattro

This idiom could literally be translated as 'to make oneself in four'. It means to do everything to help somebody.

Example: *"Sono proprio soddisfatta del customer service di Amazon, si sono fatti in quattro per risolvermi il problema"* (I am really satisfied with Amazon's customer service, they did everything they could to solve my problem)

Far venire il latte alle ginocchia

Almost impossible to translate it literally, this idiom means to be a bore, to be really boring or annoying.

Example: *“Francesca mi fa venire il latte alle ginocchia con le sue lamentele sul lavoro”* (Francesca annoys me when she complains about her job)

Fatto trenta, facciamo trentuno

Literally, this idiom means ‘if you have done thirty, you might as well do thirty-one’. It refers to the fact that to when you’re almost done with something, you might as well finish it or to when you have already done a lot, you can finish it to make it complete. Its origins date back in time, it is a phrase pronounced by Pope Leone X in 1517, when after nominating 30 cardinals he realized he had forgotten a very important one and decided to add it to the group.

Example: *“Cosa dite, andiamo a cena dopo l’aperitivo?” “Ma sì, fatto trenta, facciamo trentuno”* (What do you think? Shall we go to dinner after the *aperitivo*? Well, why not, let’s make this evening complete)

Fa un freddo cane!

Literally ‘to be dog cold’, you used this idiom when it is really cold.

Example: *“Fa proprio un freddo cane, oggi”* (It is really cold, today)

Felice come una Pasqua

Literally ‘to be happy as a Easter’, this idiom means to be really happy.

Example: *“Quando ho detto a mio figlio che lo avrei portato alla partita, era felice come una Pasqua”* (When I told my son that I would take him to see the match, he was really happy)

Finire a carte quarantotto

Quite impossible to translate literally, this idiom refers to when something ends really badly, to when a situation that seemed fine ends in a real mess.

Example: *“Sembrava che la festa andasse bene, poi è finita a carte quarantotto: hanno cominciato a litigare tutti!”* (The party seemed to be going fine, then it ended in a mess: everybody started fighting)

Finire a tarallucci e vino

Literally, ‘to end with cookies and wine’, it refers to when a situation seems to be going very bad but ends with everybody happy.

Example: *“I partiti continuavano a litigare e non sembravano trovare un accordo e invece è finita a tarallucci e vino”* (The parties kept on fighting and didn't seem to find an agreement and instead everything ended happily)

Fortunato come un cane in chiesa

Literally 'to be lucky as a dog in a church', it means to be really unlucky (dogs are not allowed in churches).

Example: *“Mi si è di nuovo rotta la macchina, è la terza volta questo mese” “Sei proprio fortunato come una cane in chiesa”* (My car broke down again, it's the third time this month. You're really unlucky)

Furbo come una volpe

Sly as a fox, to be really sly.

Example: *“Ho trovato il modo di entrare al concerto senza pagare” “Sei furbo come una volpe!”* (I've found a way to see the concert without paying. You are as sly as a fox!)

Gallina vecchia fa buon brodo

The literal meaning of this idiom is 'old hen makes good broth' and it means that an old lady is better than a younger one.

Example: *“Hai visto? Massimo si è sposato con una donna che ha vent'anni più di lui!” “Gallina vecchia fa buon brodo!”* (Did you see? Massimo has married a lady who is 20 years older than him! Old hen makes good broth!)

Gettare acqua sul fuoco

It literally means 'to throw water over fire' and means to downplay a problem or a situation.

Example: *“La gente è arrabbiata, ma il governo ha gettato acqua sul fuoco e ha detto che per il momento non aumenterà le tasse”* (People are angry but the government tried to minimize the situation and declared that for the moment the taxes won't be raised)

Gettare la spugna

Literally 'to throw the sponge', this idiom means to give up.

Example: *“Basta, getto la spugna, non riesco proprio a passare l'esame e lascio la scuola”* (I'm done, I give up, I can't pass the exam and I quit school)

Grattarsi la pancia

This idiom literally means 'to scratch one's belly' and it means to be lazy, to do nothing.

Example: *“Smettila di grattarti la pancia e vieni ad aiutarmi!”* (Stop doing nothing and come help me!)

Hai voluto la bicicletta?

This idiom means ‘did you want the bicycle?’ and it is something you say when someone complains about a situation he or she chose. It is usually followed by *“e allora pedala!”*, which means ‘then pedal’.

Example: *“Papà, non mi piace la scuola che ho scelto!” “Adesso non puoi cambiare. Hai voluto la bicicletta?”* (Dad, I don’t like the school I have chosen! Now you can’t change it. You wanted it and now you face the consequences!)

I conti non tornano!

This phrase means something like ‘the sum is not right, there is a mistake in the sum’ and it is something we say when there is something we don’t understand.

Example: *“Domani vado in vacanza con Jessica” “Aspetta, i conti non tornano. Non mi avevi detto che avresti lavorato tutta l’estate?”* (Tomorrow I’ll leave for the holidays with Jessica. Wait a moment, there is something I don’t understand, didn’t you tell me you would work all summer?)

Idem con patate

This idiom can be translated as ‘the same with potatoes’ and it means the same, nothing new.

Example: *“Domani devo studiare tutto il giorno!” “Idem con patate”* (I have to study all day tomorrow! Same here)

Il gioco non vale la candela

This idiom literally means ‘the game is not worth the candle’ and refers to something that is not worth the effort to get it.

Example: *“Mi hanno offerto una promozione, ma devo trasferirmi a Hong Kong” “Uhm, non so se il gioco vale la candela”* (I got offered a promotion, but I have to move to Hong Kong. Uhm, I don’t know if it is worth the effort)

Il principe azzurro

Literally, this phrase means ‘the light blue prince’, which refers to Prince Charming.

Example: *“Mia sorella continua a cercare il principe azzurro, ma è impossibile trovarlo!”* (My sister keeps on looking for prince charming but it’s impossible to find him!)

Il tal dei tali

Someone you don’t know or whose identity you don’t know.

Example: *“Alla festa c’era un sacco di gente importante, c’erano attrici, cantanti e quel regista Tal dei Tali”* (There were a lot of VIPs at the party, there were actresses, singers and a certain movie director)

Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio

The meaning of this phrase is ‘the wolf loses its hair but not its bad habit’ and it means that people don’t change.

Example: *“Il mio ragazzo mi ha tradita di nuovo” “Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio”* (My boyfriend has cheated on me again. People don’t change!)

In bocca al lupo!

It is a way to wish good luck. Literally, it means ‘in the mouth of the wolf’ and the proper way of replying to it is *“Crepì”* or *“Crepì il lupo”* (may the wolf die).

Example: *“Domani ho l’esame” “In bocca al lupo!” “Crepì!”* (I have my exam tomorrow. Good luck!)

In culo alla balena!

Another way to wish good luck. It is a bit more vulgar because it means ‘in the ass of the whale’ and the reply is quite vulgar as well, since it is *“Speriamo che non caghi”* (let’s hope it doesn’t poop). It is less used than *“In bocca al lupo”*.

Example: *“Domani ho l’esame” “In culo alla balena”* (I have my exam tomorrow. Good luck!)

Incavolata come una iena

Angry as a hyena, very angry.

Example: *“Mio fratello ha preso la mia macchina, sono incavolata come una iena!”* (My brother has taken my car, I am angry as a hyena)

Indorare la pillola

To make things nicer than they really are, to tell bad news to someone trying to make it look a bit better.

Example: *“Il mio capo mi ha ridotto l’orario e per indorarmi la pillola ha detto che lo fa per permettermi di stare con mio figlio”* (My boss reduced my hours and to make things nicer he told me that he does it to let me spend more time with my son)

In fretta e furia

Quickly, in a hurry.

Example: *“I miei amici sono partiti in fretta e furia e non sono neanche riuscito a salutarli!”* (My friends left in a hurry and I couldn’t even say goodbye to them!)

In quattro e quattr'otto

Very quickly, in no time, in a flash.

Example: *“Maria e Francesco si sono conosciuti e in quattro e quattr'otto hanno deciso di sposarsi!”* (Maria and Francesco met and decided to get married in no time!)

Invitare a nozze

Literally, it means to invite to a wedding. The actual meaning of this idiom is to ask someone to do something he/she really likes doing.

Example: *“Dobbiamo fare una ricerca sull'abitudine dell'aperitivo in Italia e mi devi aiutare” “Eh, ma così mi inviti a nozze!”* (We have to do a research on the habit of having aperitivo in Italy and you have to help me. Well, I'd love to do it!)

L'abito non fa il monaco

This phrase could be translated as 'the suit doesn't make the monk' and it means that you can't judge someone by his/her appearance or looks.

Example: *“Sembrava una persona così onesta, sempre così ben vestito, e invece è un ladro!” “Eh, guarda, l'abito non fa il monaco”* (He seemed such an honest person, he was always so nicely dressed, but he is a thief! Well, look, you can't judge someone by how he looks)

La figlia della serva

Literally, it means 'the daughter of the servant'. It is something we say when we think we are treated like we have no worth or considered less than other people.

Example: *“Ho aspettato un'ora e nessuno mi ha servito, mentre agli altri portavano da mangiare. Chi sono, la figlia della serva?”* (I have waited for an hour and nobody has served me, while the others got their food. Who am I? The daughter of the servant?)

Lamentarsi di gamba sana

Literally 'to complain with a healthy leg', this idiom means to complain for no reason.

Example: *“Tuo fratello è una persona molto fortunata, si lamenta di gamba sana!”* (Your brother is a very lucky person, he complains for no reason!)

La prima gallina che canta ha fatto l'uovo

Literally, it means 'the first hen that sings has laid the egg'. It means that when something happened, the first person who speaks and tried to defend himself/herself, probably is the culprit.

Example: *“Maestra, non sono stato io a rompere il vetro, ero in bagno” “Attento, guarda che la prima gallina che canta ha fatto l'uovo!”* (Teacher, it wasn't me who broke the

window, I was at the toilet. Be careful, keep in mind that the first hen that sings has laid the egg)

Lascialo/a cuocere nel suo brodo!

This phrase could be translated as 'let him/her boil in his broth' and means do not help him/her, let him/her solve things by himself.

Example: *"Mamma, Francesca si è arrabbiata e non mi parla più"* *"Lasciala cuocere nel suo brodo, così capisce che ha sbagliato!"* (Mom, Francesca got angry and is not speaking with me anymore. Let her be, so that she understands she was wrong)

Lavorare in nero

Literally 'to work in black', this sentence means to work illegally, without a contract or without paying taxes.

Example: *"Da giovane ho lavorato come cameriere, ma ero in nero e quindi non posso prendere la pensione"* (When I was young, I worked as waiter, but I was without a contract and I can't get my pension now)

Lento come una lumaca

Slow as a snail, very slow.

Example: *"Dai sbrigati, sei lento come una lumaca, se ti aspettiamo perdiamo il treno!"* (C'mon, hurry up, you're as slow as a snail, if we wait for you we will miss the train)

Lungo come la Quaresima

Usually referred to something that lasts very long.

Example: *"Com'era il film?"* *"Bello, ma lungo come la Quaresima!"* (How was the movie? Nice, but really long)

Mandare all'aria

To destroy, to ruin or to cause damage to a certain situation.

Example: *"Mio fratello ha mandato all'aria il suo matrimonio perché si è innamorato di una ragazza di vent'anni"* (My brother destroyed his marriage because he fell in love with a 20-year-old girl)

Mangiare come un uccellino

To eat like a little bird, to eat very little

Example: *"Che magra è tua sorella!"* *"Per forza, mangia come un uccellino"* (How thin is your sister! Of course, she eats very little)

Mangiare in bianco

Literally 'to eat in white', it means to eat very simply, without too many seasonings, usually to recover from an illness.

Example: *"Ho male allo stomaco, è meglio che stasera mangi in bianco"* (I've got pain in my stomach, it's better I eat lightly tonight)

Mangiare la foglia

Literally 'to eat the leaf', it is when you realize something that other people wanted to keep secret.

Example: *"Mi sa che Elisa ha mangiato la foglia e sa che c'è anche Marco alla festa! Improvvisamente, ha deciso di venire anche lei"* (I think Elisa realized that Marco will be at the party as well. All of a sudden, she decided to come too!)

Mani di fata

Literally, it means 'fairy's hands' and it is a way to describe someone who is very good at sewing or doing embroidery.

Example: *"Che bello, questo vestito! Te lo ha fatto tua mamma?" "Sì, ha davvero le mani di fata"* (What a nice dress you have! Has your mom made it? Yes, she's really great at sewing)

Magro come un'acciuga

Thin like an anchovy.

Example: *"Dovresti mangiare di più, sei magra come un'acciuga"* (You should eat more, you are as thin as an anchovy)

Matto come un cavallo

Crazy like a horse.

Example: *"Ieri sera tuo fratello ha litigato con tutti. È proprio matto come un cavallo!"* (Yesterday your brother argued with everybody. He's really as crazy as a horse)

Meglio un uovo oggi che una gallina domani

Literally, this phrase can be translated as 'it's better an egg today than a hen tomorrow' and it means that it is better to get something small now rather than a bigger thing later on.

Example: *"Perché hai svenduto la tua casa?" "Mah, meglio un uovo oggi che una gallina domani, non si sa mai"* (Why have you sold your house so cheaply? Well, it's better something small now than a bigger thing tomorrow, you never know)

Menare il can per l'aia

To beat around the bush.

Example: *“Non menare il can per l'aia e dimmi quello che vuoi dirmi veramente”* (Don't beat around the bush and tell me what you really want to tell me)

Metterci una croce sopra

To realize that something is not going to happen and to stop thinking about it.

Example: *“Non riesco a togliermi dalla testa tua sorella” “È meglio che tu ci metta una croce sopra, ormai è fidanzata”* (I can't take your sister out of my head. It's better you stop thinking about her, she's got a boyfriend now)

Mettere alla berlina

To mock, deride or laugh at someone.

Example: *“Il presidente è stato messo alla berlina per il suo discorso strampalato”* (The Prime Minister has been mocked for his weird speech)

Mettere bocca su tutto

To have something to say about everything.

Example: *“Non sopporto Francesca, mette sempre bocca su tutto!”* (I can't stand Francesca, she always has something to say about everything!)

Mettere i bastoni tra le ruote

Literally 'to put sticks in the wheels', it means to interfere, to try and prevent someone from doing something.

Example: *“La mia amica Maria è gelosa e cerca sempre di mettermi i bastoni tra le ruote quando conosco un ragazzo nuovo”* (My friend Maria is jealous and always tries to interfere when I meet a new guy)

Mettere i piedi in testa

Literally 'to put feet on one's head', it means to dominate, to abuse one's position over somebody

Example: *“Domani comincio un nuovo lavoro, sarò l'unica donna dell'ufficio” “Mi raccomando, non farti mettere i piedi in testa”* (Tomorrow I start with a new job, I'll be the only woman in the office. Be sure not to let them dominate you)

Mettere i puntini sulle i

Literally 'to put dots on the i', it means to specify something in detail to avoid any misunderstanding.

Example: *“Dov’è la tua fidanzata stasera?” “Se vogliamo mettere i puntini sulle i, non siamo fidanzati”* (Where’s your fiancé tonight? To make things clear, we are not engaged)

Mettere la pulce nell’orecchio

Literally, it means ‘to put the flea into the hear’ and it means to make someone have doubts about a certain situation.

Example: *“È meglio che torni a casa a vedere se mia figlia sta studiando” “Ti ho messo la pulce nell’orecchio, eh?”* (It’s better I go home to see if my daughter is studying. I have caused you some doubts, uhm?)

Mettere nero su bianco

This phrase could be translated as ‘to put black over white’ and it means to ratify a decision, to sign a contract about a certain thing.

Example: *“Allora siamo d’accordo così? La facciamo così casa tua?” “Sì, ma è meglio che mettiamo tutto nero su bianco, così siamo tranquilli”* (Do we agree? Shall we build your house like this? Yes, but it’s better we write everything down, so that we are safe)

Mordi e fuggi

Literally ‘bite and run’, it is something done quickly, something that doesn’t last long.

Example: *“Siete andati in vacanza quest’estate?” “Sì, ma abbiamo fatto una vacanza mordi e fuggi, siamo stati via solo due giorni”* (Have you been on holiday this summer? Yes, but we had a very short holiday, we have been away two days only)

Morto un Papa se ne fa un altro

This sentence means ‘when a Pope dies, a new Pope is nominated’. It is something you say to someone who has broken up with his girlfriend/her boyfriend and is sad about it.

Example: *“Come mai sei così triste?” “Marco mi ha lasciata” “Dai, non ti preoccupare, morto un Papa se ne fa un altro”* (Why are you so sad? Marco has left me. Don’t worry, somebody else will arrive in the future)

Muto come un pesce

Literally ‘dumb like a fish’, it means not to tell a secret.

Example: *“Per favore, non raccontare nulla a mia sorella della festa” “Tranquillo, sarò muto come un pesce”* (Please, don’t tell my sister anything about the party. Don’t worry, I’ll be dumb as a fish)

Nato con la camicia

Literally ‘born with the shirt’, this idiom means to be born lucky.

Example: *“Marco non ha mai dovuto lavorare un solo giorno nella sua vita. È proprio nato con la camicia”* (Marco never had to work a single day in his life. He’s really born lucky)

Neanche per sogno!

No way! A similar idiom is *“neanche per idea!”*.

Example: *“Mamma posso andare in discoteca lunedì sera?” “Neanche per sogno!”* (Mom, can I go to the disco on Monday? No way!)

Noioso come una mosca

Annoying like a fly, very annoying.

Example: *“Non riesci a stare zitto un minuto? Sei noioso come una mosca!”* (Can’t you shut up for a minute? You are as annoying as a fly)

Non avere peli sulla lingua

Literally, this idiom could be translated as ‘not to have hair on your tongue’ and means to be frank and open, to always say what you think.

Example: *“Mamma, ti sta malissimo quella gonna” “Certo che non hai peli sulla lingua !”* (Mom, this skirt does not look nice on you. Well, you say things as they are, don’t you?)

Non capire un’acca

Literally ‘to not understand an h’, it means to not understand anything.

Example: *“Mio papà non capisce un’acca di computer, ma crede di essere bravissimo”* (my father doesn’t understand anything about computers, but he thinks he is very good at them)

Non cavare un ragno dal buco

This idiom could be translated as ‘not to take a spider out of a hole’ and it means not to be able to do anything, not to be able to solve a problem.

Example: *“Tua sorella vuole sempre andare via di casa?” “Sì, ho provato a parlarle, ma non sono riuscito a cavare un ragno dal buco”* (Does your sister still want to leave the house? Yes, I tried to talk to her but I didn’t manage to solve anything)

Non c’è due senza tre (e il quattro vien da sé)

Literally, the translation of this idiom is ‘there is no two without three (and four comes on its own)’. It could be meant positively or negatively and it means that when something happens twice, it might as well happen again.

Example: *“È la seconda volta che vado a fare la spesa oggi, ma vedrai che devo tornare al supermercato. Non c’è due senza tre!”* (It’s the second time I buy groceries today but I

might have to go to the supermarket again. If something happens twice, it may happen again!)

Non c'è trippa per gatti

Literally, 'there is no tripe for cats', this idiom means that there is no chance, no possibility of doing something.

Example: "*Devo proprio rassegnarmi, con Jessica non c'è trippa per gatti!*" (I really have to give up, I have no chance with Jessica!)

Non dire gatto se non ce l'hai nel sacco

Literally, 'don't say cat if you don't have it in your sack', this idiom means that it is better to be careful before saying you have something before it is actually in your hands.

Example: "*Stavolta mi sa che ho trovato il lavoro giusto*" "*Non dire gatto se non ce l'hai nel sacco!*" (I think I have found the right job this time. Be careful before saying something)

Non è mica pizza e fichi!

This idiom could be translated as 'it's not like pizza and figs' and it means that something is important, that has a certain meaning, that it is not something silly or simple.

Example: "*Non pensavo che il tuo libro avesse un significato così profondo*" "*Ehi, non è mica pizza e fichi!*" (I didn't think your book had such a deep meaning. Well, it's not something silly!)

Non è farina del tuo sacco

Literally, this idiom means 'it's not flour from your sack' and it refers to something that hasn't been made or invented by you.

Example: "*Ma è una bellissima idea!*" "*Beh, non è farina del mio sacco, l'idea l'ha avuta mio marito*" (It is a great idea! Well, it doesn't come from me, it was my husband who had the idea)

Non essere né carne né pesce

The literal meaning of this idiom is to be 'neither meat nor fish' and it is used to describe something that cannot be easily categorized, that does not belong or fit well in a group or situation.

Example: "*Come ti senti a vivere in America da italiana?*" "*È difficile sentirsi a casa, non mi sento né carne né pesce*" (How is living in America as an Italian? It's difficult to feel at home, I don't feel neither Italian nor American)

Non essere uno stinco di santo

Literally 'to not be a shin of a saint', it is something referred to someone who is bad, who does not behave well.

Example: *"Il marito della mia amica non era proprio uno stinco di santo, ha avuto un'amante per vent'anni"* (my friend's husband didn't behave well, he had a lover for twenty years)

Non m'importa un fico secco

I don't give a damn.

Example: *"Smettila di urlare, cosa penserà la gente?! No, non m'importa un fico secco"* (Stop screaming, what would people think? No, I don't give a damn)

Non sapere che pesci prendere

Literally 'not knowing which fishes to catch', it means not knowing what to do.

Example: *"E adesso cosa facciamo? Come torniamo a casa? Boh, non so che pesci prendere"* (And what do we do now? How do we get home? I don't know)

Non tutte le ciambelle escono con il buco

Literally, this idiom means 'not all doughnuts come out with a hole' and it refers to the fact that when you make something it can't always be perfect.

Example: *"Non mi piace questo disegno che ho fatto, è bruttissimo!" "Dai, non arrabbiarti, non tutte le ciambelle escono col buco"* (I don't like this drawing I made, it is horrible. Don't be upset, not everything turns out perfect)

Non vedere l'ora

Literally 'to not see the hour', it means to look forward to.

Example: *"Non vedo l'ora di tornare a casa, è un anno che non vedo la mia famiglia"* (I am looking forward to going back home, I haven't seen my family in a year)

Non vola una mosca!

Literally, 'there is not a fly flying', it is something you say when there is complete silence.

Example: *"Che silenzio c'è stasera, non vola una mosca"* (What a silence tonight!)

Ogni due per tre

Literally, 'every two times three' and it means frequently.

Example: *"Lo vedo spessissimo, ogni due per tre passa davanti al mio negozio"* (I see him often, he frequently walks by my shop)

Ogni morte di papa

It very rarely, seldom. Literally, it means every time a Pope dies.

Example: *“Marco lavora sempre, va in vacanza ogni morte di Papa”* (Marco is always working, he seldom goes on holiday)

O mangi la minestra o salti dalla finestra!

The literal translation of this idiom is ‘eat the soup or jump out of the window’ and it is something you say when you tell somebody that there is no choice, no other option, he/she has to do something.

Example: *“C’è di nuovo la pasta per cena?” “O mangi la minestra o salti la finestra”* (Is there pasta again for dinner? There is no other option)

Parlare al vento

Literally, ‘to speak to the wind’, this idiom means to speak in vain.

Example: *“Cosa fai ancora lì, non avevo detto di rifare il letto? Parlo al vento?”* (What are you doing there, haven’t I told you to make your bed? Am I speaking in vain?)

Parlare fuori dai denti

To speak very openly and frankly.

Example: *“Parlando fuori dai denti, penso che i tuoi nuovi amici non siano molto simpatici”* (Speaking frankly, I don’t think your friends are so nice)

Partire in quarta

To start something with a lot of enthusiasm and energy.

Example: *“Che bello il tuo progetto! Potremmo affittare un ufficio e cominciare a lavorare insieme” “Aspetta, non partire in quarta, vediamo come vanno le cose prima”* (What a nice project! We could rent an office and start working together. Wait, slow down, let’s see how things go first)

Passare in cavalleria

It refers to when things get forgotten (usually on purpose) or when something is promised but not done.

Example: *“È meglio che ricordi al mio capo che mi deve dei soldi, altrimenti passa in cavalleria”* (It’s better I remind my boss that he owes me money otherwise it will be forgotten)

Passare la notte in bianco

Literally ‘to spend the night in white’, it means to spend the night without sleeping.

Example: *“Che faccia stanca che hai!” “Eh, lo so, ho passato la notte in bianco”* (What a tired face you have! I know, I haven’t slept at all tonight)

Passare parola

To spread the word.

Example: *“Sabato sera faccio una festa, passi parola tra i tuoi amici?”* (I’ll give a party on Saturday night, will you spread the word among your friends?)

Perdere il filo del discorso

To forget what you are saying while you are speaking.

Example: *“Cosa ti stavo raccontando? Ho perso il filo del discorso”* (What was I telling you? I forgot about it)

Perdere le staffe

To go mad, to lose one’s temper.

Example: *“Stamattina a scuola abbiamo fatto arrabbiare la maestra e lei ha perso le staffe”* (This morning at school we drove our teacher mad and she lost her temper)

Per filo e per segno

Very precisely, in detail.

Example: *“Sai come fare ad arrivare alla festa?” “Sì, sì, la mia amica mi ha spiegato tutto per filo e per segno”* (Do you know how to get to the party? Yes, my friend explained me everything in detail)

Per il rotto della cuffia

Literally untranslatable, this idiom means at the very last moment.

Example: *“Siete riusciti a partire ieri sera?” “Sì, siamo riusciti a prendere l’aereo per il rotto della cuffia”* (Did you manage to leave yesterday evening? Yes, we managed to catch our flight at the very last moment)

Per sentito dire

When you don’t know something through your direct experience, but because somebody – usually never specified – has told you about that.

Example: *“Come fai a sapere che l’Italia è bella se non ci sei mai stato?” “Lo so per sentito dire”* (How can you know that Italy is beautiful if you have never been there? I have heard it said)

Pesce d'aprile

April's fool.

Example: *"Oggi a scuola abbiamo fatto un pesce d'aprile alla maestra, ma lei non lo ha trovato divertente"* (Today at school we did April's fool to our teacher, but she didn't find it funny)

Pezzo da novanta

Someone who is very important, who has a lot of power.

Example: *"Come stai? Mi hanno detto che sei diventato un pezzo da novanta della finanza"* (How are you? I have been told that you became someone very important in finance)

Piangere sul latte versato

To cry over spilt milk, to express regret about something that has happened and cannot be changed.

Example: *"Mi sono sbagliata, non volevo buttar via il tuo libro"* *"Mi spiace, ormai è fatta, è inutile piangere sul latte versato"* (I made a mistake, I didn't mean to throw your book away. I am sorry, it's been done, it's no point crying over spilt milk)

Piantare in asso

To leave someone or something all of a sudden.

Example: *"Francesca mi ha piantato in asso nel bel mezzo della festa ed è andata a casa"* (Francesca left me in the middle of the party and went home)

Pietra miliare

Milestone or cornerstone, something very important, an event that marks an important step in a situation.

Example: *"Cime tempestose è una pietra miliare della letteratura inglese"* (Wuthering Heights is a milestone in English literature)

Piovere dal cielo

Literally 'to fall from the sky' it actually refers to something positive that happens to you and without any effort on your side

Example: *"Come sei riuscita a trovare questo lavoro? Per puro caso, è piovuto dal cielo!"* (How did you manage to find this job? By chance, I didn't do anything)

Piovere sul bagnato

When something nice happens to someone who already has a lot (usually referred to money).

Example: *“Il mio capo ha vinto alla lotteria” “Piove sempre sul bagnato”* (My boss has won the lottery. When it rains it pours)

Prendere due piccioni con una fava

Literally ‘to take two pigeons with one fava bean’, it is the Italian for ‘to kill two birds with one stone’ and it means to complete two actions in one, to reach two goals with just one action.

Example: *“Devo spedire una lettera e fare la spesa, ma non ho tempo” “Passa dalla posta prima di andare al supermercato, così prendi due piccioni con una fava”* (I have to mail a letter and buy some groceries, but I have no time. Stop by the post office while you go to the supermarket, so that you can kill two birds with one stone)

Prendere il due di picche

Literally, this idiom means ‘to get the two of spades’ and it is when someone turns you down, when someone either beats you in a game or competition or when someone refuses your offer to go out (in a sentimental way).

Example: *“Ho chiesto a Maria di uscire con me sabato sera, ma mi ha dato il due di picche”* (I have asked Maria to go out with me on Saturday evening but she turned me down)

Prendere in castagna

To catch someone while he/she is doing or saying something wrong.

Example: *“Pensavo che la maestra non si accorgesse che stavo copiando l’esame, ma mi ha preso in castagna!”* (I thought that the teacher wouldn’t realize that I was cheating on the exam, but she caught me!)

Prendere la palla al balzo

To get an opportunity, to take advantage of something.

Example: *“Ieri mia mamma parlava di vacanze e così ho preso la palla al balzo e le ho chiesto se posso andare a Parigi quest’estate”* (Yesterday my mom was talking of holidays and so I took the chance and asked her if I can go to Paris this summer)

Prendere lucciole per lanterne

Literally ‘to mistake fireflies for lanterns’, this idiom means to misunderstand something.

Example: *“Ma tu non lavori alla Fiat? Allora ho preso lucciole per lanterne, scusa!”* (Don’t you work at Fiat? I have misunderstood then!)

Prendere un granchio

Literally ‘to catch a crab’, this idiom has the same meaning of the one above, it means to misunderstand something.

Example: *“Esci con Jessica?” “No, non la conosco neanche!” “Oh, scusa, ho preso un granchio!”* (Do you go out with Jessica? No, I don’t even know her! Oh, sorry, I misunderstood!)

Promettere mari e monti

Literally ‘to promise seas and mountains’, this idiom means to promise a lot of things, to promise big things. Usually, it is said in retrospect to underline the fact that someone has promised you a lot of things but hasn’t kept his promises.

Example: *“Come mai hai cambiato lavoro?” “Mi avevano promesso mari e monti, ma non mi hanno mai aumentato lo stipendio!”* (Why have you changed jobs? They had promised a lot of things but never increased my salary)

Qualcosa bolle in pentola

Literally ‘something is boiling in the pot’, this idiom is used when you suspect something, when you have the feeling that something is going on but you are not sure about it.

Example: *“Vedo sempre Jessica e Maria insieme, mi sa che qualcosa bolle in pentola” “Credo stiano organizzando una festa a sorpresa per Francesca”* (I always see Jessica and Maria together, I have the feeling that something is going on. I think they are organizing a surprise party for Francesca)

Quando il gatto non c’è, i topi ballano

Literally ‘when the cat is away the mice will dance’, this idiom means that when there is no supervision people do as they please, disregarding or breaking rules. In English, ‘when the cat’s away, the mice will play’.

Example: *“Come mai non state lavorando? È proprio vero che quando il gatto non c’è, i topi ballano”* (Why aren’t you working? It’s really true that when the cat’s away, the mice will play)

Questione di lana caprina

Something that is not important and not so worth discussing but that is quite obscure and difficult at the same time.

Example: *“Oggi alla riunione abbiamo discusso per ore su una questione di lana caprina, che spreco di tempo!”* (Today at the meeting we spent hours discussing about a very futile topic, what a waste of time!)

Raccontare la rava e la fava

Literally, this idiom can be translated as ‘to tell the turnip and the fava bean’, it is usually referred to telling everything in detail, with a lot of a useless details.

Example: *“Sai tutto del viaggio a Parigi di Mario e Francesca!” “Sì, ho visto Francesca e mi ha raccontato la rava e la fava”* (You know everything about Mario and Francesca’s trip to Paris. I know, I have met Francesca and she told me everything about it)

Rendere pan per focaccia

Literally ‘to give back bread when you received *focaccia*’, this idiom means to pay back someone who has done something bad to you with something equally bad.

Example: *“Maria ha tradito Paolo, ma lui le ha reso pan per focaccia”* (Maria cheated on Paolo, but he did the same to her)

Restare col cerino in mano

The idiom can be translated literally as ‘to remain with the match in hand’ and it refers to the one in a group who is forced to do something he/she doesn’t want to do, while all the others manage to avoid doing it.

Example: *“Aiuti tu la mamma con il trasloco del suo ufficio?” “Eh, sì, tutti hanno trovato delle scuse e io sono rimasto con il cerino in mano”* (Is it you who helps mom with moving her office? Well, yes, everybody found excuses and I was the only one left)

Rigirare la frittata

Literally ‘to flip over the frittata’, this idiom means to change idea in a conversation, to start affirming something opposite to what you said before only because it is better for you, to turn things around.

Example: *“Mamma, guarda che è stata Francesca a raccontare una bugia” “Adesso non rigirare la frittata e dimmi perché non sei andato a scuola”* (Mom, it was Francesca who told a lie. Don’t change things now, tell me why you didn’t go to school)

Rimanere a bocca asciutta

This idiom can be translated literally as ‘to remain with a dry mouth’ and it means not to get something you thought you would get.

Example: *“Ero sicuro di vincere almeno un premio alla lotteria e invece sono rimasto a bocca asciutta”* (I was sure I would get at least a prize in the lottery but I didn’t get anything instead)

Rispondere per le rime

The literal translation of this idiom is ‘to reply in rhyme’ and it means to promptly reply to someone who insults or attacks you.

Example: *“Stamattina a scuola un ragazzo più grande mi ha preso insultata, ma io gli ho risposto per le rime”* (This morning at school an older kid insulted me but I promptly replied)

Roba da chiodi

Something that is unbelievable, absurd or bad.

Example: *“Mia sorella ha lasciato il marito all'improvviso ed è scappata a Parigi con l'amante” “Roba da chiodi”* (My sister left her husband all of a sudden and went to Paris with her lover. Unbelievable!)

Rodersi il fegato

To hold a grudge, to be annoyed.

Example: *“Questo governo mi fa proprio arrabbiare” “Smettila di roderti il fegato e goditi la vita!”* (This government drives me crazy. Stop being annoyed and enjoy life)

Romanzi (o film) gialli

Literally, 'yellow books/films', these are crime novels or movies.

Example: *“Che cosa ti piace leggere?” “Adoro i libri gialli”* (What do you like reading? I love crime novels!)

Rompere il ghiaccio

Literally 'to break the ice', this idiom means to start speaking with someone you don't know, to say something to stop the embarrassment of a new situation, to make people who have not met before feel more relaxed with each other.

Example: *“Ero solo in ascensore con Jessica ieri e per rompere il ghiaccio le ho detto che aveva delle belle scarpe”* (I was alone in the elevator with Jessica yesterday and, to break the ice, I told her I loved her shoes)

Rompere le scatole

Literally 'to break boxes', this idiom means to disturb or to annoy. Someone who disturbs or annoys is called *rompiscatole*

Example: *“Smettila di rompere le scatole, non ne posso più!”* (Stop disturbing me, I can't stand it anymore)

Rompere le uova nel paniere

The literal translation of this idiom is 'to break the eggs in the basket' and it means to do something that ruins somebody else's positive situation or that ruins somebody else's plans.

Example: *“Stavo quasi riuscendo a convincere mia mamma a mandarmi in discoteca, quando è arrivato mio fratello a rompermi le uova nel paniere”* (I was about to convince my mom to let me go to the disco, when my brother arrived and ruined my plans)

Saltare di palo in frasca

To suddenly change topic in a conversation.

Example: *“Sai, sono appena tornato da una bellissima vacanza in Francia” “Ah, interessante! Ma, saltando di palo in frasca, come sta tua sorella?”* (I have just returned from a lovely holiday in France. Oh, interesting but, changing topics, how is your sister?)

Salvare capra e cavoli

The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘to save the goat and the cabbages’. It means to be able to safeguard two interests or goals that are completely opposite.

Example: *“Mia moglie voleva andare al mare, mia figlia voleva visitare una città e allora siamo andati a Barcellona. Ho salvato capra e cavoli e nessuno si è arrabbiato”* (My wife wanted to go to the beach, my daughter wanted to visit a city, so we went to Barcellona. Both of them were happy and nobody got mad)

Saperci fare

To be smart.

Example: *“Ho visto tuo figlio sul lavoro, è bravissimo, è proprio uno che ci sa fare!”* (I have seen your son at work, he’s great, he’s a really smart guy)

Saper stare al mondo

To know how to behave in certain situations, to be well-mannered.

Example: *“Mio fratello mi fa fare sempre delle brutte figure quando lo porto fuori con me, è proprio uno che non sa stare al mondo!”* (My brother always embarrasses me when I take him out with me, he doesn’t know how to behave)

Sbandierare ai quattro venti

To tell everybody.

Example: *“Ti racconto una cosa, ma non andare subito a sbandiarla ai quattro venti!”* (I tell you one thing but don’t go tell everybody immediately)

Scavarsi la fossa

To be the cause of one’s own ruin.

Example: *“Ho sposato Maria e adesso mi tocca andare a pranzo dai suoceri ogni domenica” “Ti avevo avvisato, ti sei scavato la fossa da solo”* (I married Maria and now I have to have lunch with my parents-in-law every Sunday. I told you, you are the cause of your own’s ruin)

Scoprire gli altarini

Literally 'to discover little altars', this idiom means to discover a secret, to discover something that somebody wanted to keep hidden.

Example: *"Ho visto Marco abbracciato a Paola, mi sa che qui si scoprono gli altarini!"* (I have seen Marco hugging Paola, I think a secret has been revealed)

Scoprire l'acqua calda

Literally 'to discover warm water', this idiom means to pretend to discover something that is known to everybody.

Example: *"Ho capito che la matematica è una materia molto utile nella vita" "Bravo, hai scoperto l'acqua calda"* (I have realized that maths is very useful in life. Well, good, you really discovered something that nobody knew)

Se non è zuppa, è pan bagnato!

The literal translation of this idiom is 'if it is not a soup, it's wet bread'. It is used to refer to two things that are similar, that are basically the same.

Example: *"Ti sbagli, l'azienda non è in crisi, è solo che sta attraversando un momento difficile" "Beh, se non è zuppa, è pan bagnato!"* (You're wrong, the company is not undergoing a crisis, it's just going through a difficult period. Well, that's basically the same)

Segreto di Pulcinella

Literally 'Pulcinella's secret', it is something that you think is secret but which actually is not so secret, which actually everybody knows.

Example: *"Lo sai che a settembre mi sposo? Non l'ho detto a nessuno!" "Ma guarda che lo sanno tutti, è un segreto di Pulcinella"* (Do you know that I am getting married next September? I haven't told anybody! Look, everybody knows that, it's not a secret)

Senza infamia e senza lode

Neither really good nor especially bad.

Example: *"Com'era il film?" "Bah, senza infamia e senza lode"* (How was the movie? Well, neither good nor bad)

Sfondare una porta aperta

Literally 'to break an open door', this idiom means to say something to someone who already agrees with you.

Example: *"Secondo me dovremmo imparare a comprare meno e meglio" "Ah, con me sfondi una porta aperta, sono minimalista da anni!"* (In my opinion, we should all learn to buy less and better. Well, I totally agree with you, I have been a minimalist for years now)

Si chiama Pietro

Something you say as a joke when you lend something to someone. We use this phrase because it rhymes with “...e torna indietro”, which means ‘it comes back’, referring to the fact that you want your thing back.

Example: “*Mi presti il libro di inglese*” “*Sì, ma ricordati che si chiama Pietro!*” (Will you lend me the English book? Sure, but remember that his name is Pietro)

Simpatico come un riccio nelle mutande

Literally ‘nice like a hedgehog in your underwear’, it is a way to describe a jerk or a very unpleasant person.

Example: “*Non sopporto il fidanzato di Gloria*” “*Neanche io, è simpatico come un riccio nelle mutande!*” (I can’t stand Gloria’s boyfriend. Me neither, he’s a jerk)

Solo come un cane

Literally ‘alone like a dog’, it means to be alone.

Example: “*Non ho voglia di tornare a casa, sono solo come un cane e divento triste!*” (I don’t want to go back home, I am alone and I get sad)

Sordo come una campana

Literally ‘deaf like a bell’, it means to be really deaf.

Example: “*Mio nonno non capisce mai niente quando gli parlo, è sordo come una campana*” (My grandfather never understands anything when I speak to him, he is really deaf)

Spada di Damocle

Literally ‘Damocle’s sword’, this idiom refers to something bad that looms over you, an impending danger, something that can happen anytime (even if you don’t know when). The origin of this phrase goes way back in time. Damocle was a member of the court of Dionigi and was envious of Dionigi’s power and richness. Therefore, Dionigi wanted Damocle to see for himself how his life was: he invited Damocle to a superb dinner and then placed a sword over his head, hanging from the ceiling with a very thin thread. When Damocle realized that he had a sword over his head, he understood Dionigi’s position and asked him to let him go back to his simple life.

Example: “*Devono chiamarmi per il servizio militare, ma non so ancora la data. Ho questa spada di Damocle sulla testa e non posso prendere decisioni sulla mia vita*” (They should call me for the military service, but I still don’t know when. I have this Damocle’s sword over my head and I can’t take any decision about my life)

Specchietto per le allodole

Literally 'mirror for the lark', this idiom is used to describe something that has been created to attract people in order to deceive them.

Example: *"Mi sembra un lavoro molto bello e mi hanno promesso uno stipendio alto" "Guarda che quello è solo uno specchietto per le allodole, mi hanno detto che sfruttano i lavoratori!"* (It seems a very good job and they promised me a high salary. Be careful, this is only to attract you, I have been told that they exploit workers)

Spezzare una lancia

Literally 'to break a lance', this idiom means to defend someone, to say something in favour of someone or something.

Example: *"Non sono soddisfatto del lavoro di Massimo" "Se posso spezzare una lancia in suo favore, ha sempre lavorato in condizioni molto difficili!"* (I am not satisfied with Massimo's work. If I can say something in his favour, he has always worked under very difficult conditions)

Sputare il rospo

Literally 'to spit out the toad', it means to say something you are keeping for yourself for fear of hurting or annoying someone.

Example: *"Dai su, sputa il rospo, ti prometto che non mi arrabbio!"* (C'mon, tell me what is wrong, I promise I won't get annoyed)

Sputare nel piatto in cui si mangia

The literal translation of this idiom is 'to spit in the plate where you eat' and it means to say bad things or to despise something that makes you earn money.

Example: *"Non sopporto mio padre e il suo negozio, potessi farei chiudere tutto" ""Fossi in te non sputerei nel piatto in cui mangi, le cose potrebbero essere decisamente peggio!"* (I can't stand my father and his shop, if I could, I'd shut it down. If I were you, I wouldn't despise something that gives me money, things could be way worse for you)

Stare a pennello

To fit perfectly, mostly referred to clothing.

Example: *"Sei bellissima! Quel vestito ti sta a pennello!"* (You are beautiful! That dress is perfect on you!)

Stare in pancia

To do nothing.

Example: *“Che cosa fai oggi?” “Niente, me ne sto in pancia!”* (What are you doing today? Nothing, I won't do anything!)

Sudare sette camicie

Literally 'to sweat seven shirts', it means to work hard.

Example: *“Papà, voglio smettere di studiare” “Non se ne parla, ho sudato le sette camicie per farti andare in quella scuola, adesso vai avanti!”* (Dad, I want to stop studying. No way, I worked hard to let you attend that school, now you go on)

Su due piedi

Literally 'on two feet', it means suddenly, all of a sudden, immediately.

Example: *“Hai cambiato lavoro?” “Mi hanno fatto un'offerta e ho deciso su due piedi”* (Have you changed jobs? They made me an offer and I have immediately taken a decision)

Sul filo di lana

At the very last moment – usually referred to winning something at the last possible moment.

Example: *“Pensavo di perdere e invece ho vinto la corsa sul filo di lana!”* (I thought I would lose but I have won at the last possible moment)

Tagliare la corda

Literally 'to cut the cord', it means to run away, to cut and run.

Example: *“Dov'è andato Marco?” “Ha visto che è arrivata la sua ex-fidanzata e ha tagliato la corda”* (Where's Marco? He has seen that his ex-girlfriend was here and he cut and run)

Tagliare la testa al toro

Literally 'to cut the bull's head', it means to take a drastic decision. It is usually used in a conversation, when you can't find an agreement on something, so you propose a solution introducing your suggestion by saying *“tagliamo la testa al toro”*, meaning that it's time to stop discussing and take a decision.

Example: *“Mamma, non riusciamo a decidere dove andare in vacanza” “Senti, tagliamo la testa al toro, rimanete a casa”* (Mom, we can't decide where to go on holiday. Well, let's cut things short: you stay home)

Tallone d'Achille

Literally 'Achille's heel', it refers to someone's weak spot.

Example: *“Parlare in pubblico è il mio tallone d'Achille, sono troppo timido”* (Speaking in public is my weakness, I am too shy)

Tanto di cappello!

This is something you say to pay compliments to someone.

Example: *“Ho vinto i giochi nazionali di matematica!” “È molto difficile, tanto di cappello!”* (I won maths national games. Wow, it's really difficult, compliments!)

Tanto fumo e niente arrosto!

Literally 'a lot of smoke and no roast', it is usually said when a project or something in general is described as full of meaning and content and it turns out to be way less. It is also used to describe a person who behaves as if he/she is really important when he/she is not.

Example: *“Il tuo capo sembra davvero una persona molto importante” “Bah, tanto fumo e niente arrosto, non conta nulla in azienda!”* (Your boss seems a very important person. Well, it's just appearance, he doesn't count anything in the company)

Tempo di vacche magre

Literally 'thin cows time', it means hard times, when there is no money. It also has contrary, which is *“tempo di vacche grasse”*, which is when there is plenty of money!

Example: *“Perché vai a piedi? Non hai la macchina?” “L'ho venduta, è tempo di vacche magre”* (Why are you walking? Don't you have the car? I sold it, I am going through some hard times)

Tenere sott'occhio

To control, to pay attention to, to keep in sight.

Example: *“Giocate sulla spiaggia, ma non vi allontanate. Vi tengo d'occhio!”* (Play on the beach but don't go any further. I keep an eye on you)

Testa di legno

Literally 'head made of wood', it is used to describe someone who is not so smart, someone who doesn't understand, who is dumb.

Example: *“Ti devo sempre spiegare le cose cento volte, sei proprio una testa di legno!”* (I always have to explain things a hundred times, you are really dumb!)

Testardo come un mulo

Stubborn like a mule, really stubborn.

Example: *“Gli ho già detto che non può uscire tutte le sere, ma lui ci prova sempre. È testardo come un mulo!”* (I have already told him that he can't go out every evening, but he always tries. He is as stubborn as a mule)

Tirare il pacco

To cancel or fail to keep an appointment with someone.

Example: *“Sabato scorso dovevo andare al cinema con Maria, ma mi ha tirato il pacco all’ultimo momento”* (Last Saturday I was supposed to go to the cinema with Maria, but she canceled at the very last moment)

Tirare la cinghia

Literally ‘to tighten the belt’, it means to be forced to save money or to spend very little.

Example: *“Per qualche mese non lavorerò e quindi dovrò tirare la cinghia”* (I won’t be working for a few months and therefore I’ll have to be careful with money)

Togliere le castagne dal fuoco

Literally ‘to take the chestnuts out of fire’, it means to help somebody solve a serious issue, to rescue someone by doing something he or she was supposed to do.

Example: *“Non sapevo cosa fare, meno male che è arrivato Mario a togliermi le castagne dal fuoco”* (I didn’t know what to do, thank God, Mario arrived and helped me)

Tornare con le pive nel sacco

The literal translation of this idiom is ‘to return with the *pive* in the sack’, it means to return back disappointed from a challenge you were sure of winning. *Piva* is a very old instrument, quite similar to a bagpipe, used by military troops when they attacked the enemy. In case of a withdrawal, those instruments were carried in a sack, to avoid them making noise. So having them in the sack meant that soldiers didn’t succeed in their enterprise.

Example: *“Pensavo di passare l’esame senza problemi, ma sono tornato con le pive nel sacco”* (I thought I would pass the exam without problems but I came back disappointed)

Tra i due litiganti, il terzo gode

If two fight, it’s the third one who has a benefit.

Example: *“Io e Mario abbiamo litigato per uscire con Jessica, ma alla fine lei ha scelto Francesco” “Eh, tra i due litiganti, il terzo gode!”* (Mario and I had a fight to go out with Jessica, but then she went out with Francesco. Well, when two fight, it’s the third one who has a benefit)

Trovare pane per i propri denti

The literal translation of this idiom is ‘to find bread for one own’s teeth’ and it means to find someone as strong/smart as you are.

Example: *“Paola pensava di vincere la gara senza problemi, ma ha trovato pane per i propri denti. Maria è brava come lei”* (Paola thought she would win the race without problems but Maria is as good as her)

Tutto fa brodo

Literally ‘everything makes broth’, this idiom means anything goes.

Example: *“Cerco sempre di scegliere i cibi più buoni per mio marito, ma per lui tutto fa brodo!”* (I always try to choose the best food for my husband but anything goes for him)

Una giornata grigia

Literally ‘a gray day’, it is used to describe a very bad day.

Example: *“Oggi è una giornata davvero grigia, speriamo che le cose vadano meglio domani”* (It’s a very bad day today, let’s hope things will improve tomorrow)

Una mela non cade lontana dall’albero

This sentence could be translated as ‘an apple doesn’t fall far from its tree’ and it means that sons are not so different from their parents (usually in a negative way).

Example: *“Pensavo che Mario fosse diverso da suo padre e invece è cattivo come lui” “Eh, purtroppo una mela non cade lontana dall’albero”* (I thought Mario was different from his father but he is as bad as him. Well, unfortunately, sons are usually similar to their parents)

Una patata bollente

It literally means ‘a boiling hot potato’ but its real meaning is something really difficult, something hard to solve.

Example: *“Il mio capo è andato in vacanza e mi ha lasciato una bella patata bollente”* (My boss went on holiday and left me a very difficult issue to solve)

Uno scherzo da prete

Literally ‘a priest joke’, it refers to a bad joke, a joke that is not so well-accepted or liked. Why do we say *“Uno scherzo da prete”*? It refers to Pope IX, who first supported the Italian unification and then, all of a sudden, completely changed his mind.

Example: *“Che scherzo da prete che mi hai fatto, sono proprio arrabbiato”* (What a bad joke you did to me, I am really angry)

Un pezzo grosso

Literally ‘a big piece’, it is usually referred to someone who is very important.

Example: *“Come va il lavoro? Mi hanno detto che sei diventato un pezzo grosso!”* (How is work? They told me you’ve become a very important person!)

Uovo di Colombo

Literally 'Colombo's egg', it is a very simple solution to a problem which seemed impossible to solve.

Example: *"E se il problema lo risolvessimo così?" "Brava, hai trovato l'uovo di Colombo!"* (What if we solved the problem in this way? Very good, a simple solution to something that seemed impossible!)

Usare l'olio di gomito

Literally 'to use elbow's oil', it means to work physically hard.

Example: *"Che sporco che è questo mobile!" "Vedrai che con un po' di olio di gomito verrà bellissimo!"* (How dirty this piece of furniture is! Well, with some hard work, it will be beautiful again)

Uscire dal gregge

This idiom could be translated literally as 'to go out of the flock' and it means to be different, to something different from what others do.

Example: *"Paola è una bravissima artista" "Ha sempre avuto talento e ha saputo uscire dal gregge e fare un lavoro diverso"* (Paola is a very great artists. She has always been very talented and was able to do something different from the others)

Vedere i sorci verdi

Literally 'to see green rats', this idiom either means to go through bad times or to suffer a lot of pain.

Example: *"Ho visto che sei tornato insieme a Maria" "Sì, mi ha fatto vedere i sorci verdi, ma alla fine è tornata con me"* (I have seen that you are with Maria again. Yes, she gave me a very hard time but she finally came back with me)

Vedere lontano

To be forward-looking, to be able to see the big picture.

Example: *"Tuo fratello ha avuto successo nella vita" "Sì, è uno in gamba, ha sempre saputo vedere lontano"* (Your brother has had a very successful life. Yes, he's really smart, he has always been forward-looking)

Vedere rosa

Literally 'to see pink', this idiom means to be overly optimistic.

Example: *"Smettila di vedere tutto rosa, le persone non sono sempre buone come pensi tu!"* (Stop being so optimistic, people are not always as good as you think they are)

Vedere rosso

Literally 'to see red', this idiom means to be angry.

Example: *"Se ripenso a quello che mi ha detto mia sorella, vedo rosso! Mi fa sempre arrabbiare"* (if I think about what my sister told me, I go mad! She always annoys me)

Vedere tutto nero

Literally 'to see black', this idiom means to be pessimistic.

Example: *"Sono una persona molto pessimista, infatti vedo sempre tutto nero!"* (I am a very pessimistic person and I always see things in a negative way)

Veloce come una lepre

Fast like a hare, very fast.

Example: *"Il ciclista che ha vinto la gara è bravissimo, va veloce come una lepre!"* (The cyclist who won the race is great, he is as fast as a hare)

Venire spremuto come un limone

The literal translation of this idiom is 'to be squeezed like a lemon' and it means to be exploited or to be exhausted because someone has made you work hard.

Example: *"Com'è stato l'esame?" Molto difficile, la professoressa mi ha spremuto come un limone!"* (How was the exam? Very difficult, the teacher asked me a lot of questions and I am exhausted)

Versare lacrime di coccodrillo

Literally 'to cry crocodile's tears', this idiom means to pretend to be sorry for something you did and was your fault.

Example: *"Mi spiace tanto per quello che è successo" "Smettila di piangere lacrime di coccodrillo, dovevi pensarci prima!"* (I am so sorry for what happened. Stop crying crocodile's tears, you should have thought about it before)

Vestirsi a cipolla

This idiom literally means 'to dress like an onion' and it means to dress in layers.

Example: *"Il tempo è imprevedibile in primavera, è meglio vestirsi a cipolla!"* (The weather is unpredictable in spring, it is better to dress in layers)

Viscido come un serpente

Slimy like a snake.

Example: "*Non sopporto il mio capo, è viscido come un serpente!*" (I can't stand my boss, he is as slimy as a snake)