

## The Decameron

Decameron Web

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### [Voice: author]

[ 001 ] Beginneth here the book called Decameron, otherwise Prince Galeotto, wherein are contained one hundred novels told in ten days by seven ladies and three young men.

### PROEM.

#### [Voice: author ]

[ 002 ] 'Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; [ 003 ] seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure a flame with a most aspiring and noble love more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering, not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. [ 004 ] In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead. [ 005 ] But, as it pleased Him, who, being in finite, has assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful. [ 006 ] But the cessation of the pain has not banished the memory of the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death. [ 007 ] And as among the virtues gratitude is in my judgment most especially to be commended, and ingratitude in equal measure to be censured, therefore, that I show myself not ungrateful, I have resolved, now that I may call myself free, to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so far as in me lies, some solace, if not to those who succoured me, and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least to such as may be apt to receive it.

#### [Voice: author ]

[ 008 ] And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. [ 009 ] Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? [ 010 ] Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it. Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers, they live, so to say, a life of vacant ease, and, yearning and renouncing in the same moment, meditate divers matters which cannot all be cheerful. [ 011 ] If thereby a melancholy bred of amorous desire make entrance into their minds, it is like to tarry there to their sore distress, unless it be dispelled by a change of ideas. Besides which they have much less power to support such a weight than men. For, when men are enamoured, their case is very different, as we may readily perceive. [ 012 ] They, if they are afflicted by a melancholy and heaviness of mood, have many ways of relief and diversion; they may go where they will, may hear and see many things, may hawk, hunt, fish, ride, play or traffic. By which means all are able to compose their minds, either in whole or in part, and repair the ravage wrought by the dumpish mood, at least for some space of time; and shortly after, by one way or another, either solace ensues, or the dumps become less grievous. [ 013 ] Wherefore, in some measure to compensate the injustice of Fortune, which to those whose strength is least, as we see it to be in the delicate frames of ladies, has been most niggard of support, I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel), do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation. [ 014 ] In which pleasant novels will be found some passages of love rudely crossed, with other courses of events of which the issues are felicitous, in times as well modern as ancient: from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue. Which cannot, I believe, come to pass, unless the dumps be banished by diversion of mind. [ 015 ] And if it so happen (as God grant it may) let them give thanks to Love, who, liberating me from his fetters, has given me the power to devote myself to their gratification.

### First Day - Argument

#### [Voice: author]

[ 001 ] Beginneth here the first day of the Decameron, in which, when the author has set forth, how it came to pass that the persons, who appear hereafter, met together for interchange of discourse, they, under the rule of Pampinea, discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn.

### First Day - Introduction

#### [Voice: author ]

[ 002 ] As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eyewitnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. [ 003 ] But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. [ 004 ] This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to

wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; [ 005 ] for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. [ 006 ] To this brief exordium of woe--brief, I say, inasmuch as it can be put within the compass of a few letters--succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which I have promised you, and which, perhaps, had I not done so, were not to have been expected from it. [ 007 ] In truth, had it been honestly possible to guide you whither I would bring you by a road less rough than this will be, I would gladly have so done. But, because without this review of the past, it would not be in my power to shew how the matters, of which you will hereafter read, came to pass, I am almost bound of necessity to enter upon it, if I would write of them at all.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 008 ] I say, then, that the years of the beati fic incarnation of the Son of God had reached the tale of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when in the illustrious city of Florence, the fairest of all the cities of Italy, there made its appearance that deadly pestilence, which, whether diseminated by the influence of the celestial bodies, or sent upon us mortals by God in His just wrath by way of retribution for our iniquities, had had its origin some years before in the East, whence, after destroying an innumerable multitude of living beings, it had propagated itself without respite from place to place, and so, calamitously, had spread into the West.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 009 ] In Florence, despite all that human wisdom and forethought could devise to avert it, as the cleansing of the city from many impurities by officials appointed for the purpose, the refusal of entrance to all sick folk, and the adoption of many precautions for the preservation of health; despite also humble supplications addressed to God, and often repeated both in public procession and otherwise, by the devout; towards the beginning of the spring of the said year the doleful effects of the pestilence began to be horribly apparent by symptoms that shewed as if miraculous.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 010 ] Not such were they as in the East, where an issue of blood from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death; but in men and women alike it first betrayed itself by the emergence of certain tumours in the groin or the armpits, some of which grew as large as a common apple, others as an egg, some more, some less, which the common folk called gavoccioli. [ 011 ] From the two said parts of the body this deadly gavocciolo soon began to propagate and spread itself in all directions indifferently; after which the form of the malady began to change, black spots or livid making their appearance in many cases on the arm or the thigh or elsewhere, now few and large, now minute and numerous. [ 012 ] And as the gavocciolo had been and still was an infallible token of approaching death, such also were these spots on whomsoever they shewed themselves. [ 013 ] Which maladies seemed to set entirely at naught both the art of the physician and the virtues of physic; indeed, whether it was that the disorder was of a nature to defy such treatment, or that the physicians were at fault--besides the qualified there was now a multitude both of men and of women who practised without having received the slightest tincture of medical science--and, being in ignorance of its source, failed to apply the proper remedies; in either case, not merely were those that recovered few, but almost all within three days from the appearance of the said symptoms, sooner or later, died, and in most cases without any fever or other attendant malady.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 014 ] Moreover, the virulence of the pest was the greater by reason that intercourse was apt to convey it from the sick to the whole, just as fire devours things dry or greasy when they are brought close to it. [ 015 ] Nay, the evil went yet further, for not merely by speech or association with the sick was the malady communicated to the healthy with consequent peril of common death; but any that touched the clothes of the sick or aught else that had been touched or used by them, seemed thereby to contract the disease.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 016 ] So marvellous sounds that which I have now to relate, that, had not many, and I among them, observed it with their own eyes, I had hardly dared to credit it, much less to set it down in writing, though I had had it from the lips of a credible witness.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 017 ] I say, then, that such was the energy of the contagion of the said pestilence, that it was not merely propagated from man to man, but, what is much more startling, it was frequently observed, that things which had belonged to one sick or dead of the disease, if touched by some other living creature, not of the human species, were the occasion, not merely of sickening, but of an almost instantaneous death. [ 018 ] Whereof my own eyes (as I said a little before) had cognisance, one day among others, by the following experience. The rags of a poor man who had died of the disease being strewn about the open street, two hogs came thither, and after, as is their wont, no little trifling with their snouts, took the rags between their teeth and tossed them to and fro about their chaps; whereupon, almost immediately, they gave a few turns, and fell down dead, as if by poison, upon the rags which in an evil hour they had disturbed.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 019 ] In which circumstances, not to speak of many others of a similar or even graver complexion, divers apprehensions and imaginations were engendered in the minds of such as were left alive, inclining almost all of them to the same harsh resolution, to wit, to shun and abhor all contact with the sick and all that belonged to them, thinking thereby to make each his own health secure. [ 020 ] Among whom there were those who thought that to live temperately and avoid all excess would count for much as a preservative against seizures of this kind. Wherefore they banded together, and, dissociating themselves from all others, formed communities in houses where there were no sick, and lived a separate and secluded life, which they regulated with the utmost care, avoiding every kind of luxury, but eating and drinking very moderately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines, holding converse with none but one another, lest tidings of sickness or death should reach them, and diverting their minds with music and such other delights as they could devise. [ 021 ] Others, the bias of whose minds was in the opposite direction, maintained, that to drink freely, frequent places of public resort, and take their pleasure with song and revel, sparing to satisfy no appetite, and to laugh and mock at no event, was the sovereign remedy for so great an evil: and that which they affirmed they also put in practice, so far as they were able, resorting day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking with an entire disregard of rule or measure, and by preference making the houses of others, as it were, their inns, if they but saw in them aught that was particularly to their taste or liking; [ 022 ] which they were readily able to do, because the owners, seeing death imminent, had become as reckless of their property as of their lives; so that most of the houses were open to all comers, and no distinction was observed between the stranger who presented himself and the rightful lord. Thus, adhering ever to their inhuman determination to shun the sick, as far as possible, they ordered their life. [ 023 ] In this extremity of our city's suffering and tribulation the venerable authority of laws, human and divine, was abased and all but totally dissolved, for lack of those who should have administered and enforced them, most of whom, like the rest of the citizens, were either dead or sick, or so hard bested for servants that they were unable to execute any of fice; whereby every man was free to do what was right in his own eyes.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 024 ] Not a few there were who belonged to neither of the two said parties, but kept a middle course between them, neither laying the same restraint upon their diet as the former, nor allowing themselves the same license in drinking and other dissipations as the latter, but living with a degree of freedom sufficient to satisfy their appetites, and not as recluses. They therefore walked abroad, carrying in their hands flowers or fragrant herbs or divers sorts of spices, which they frequently raised to their noses, deeming it an excellent thing thus to comfort the brain with such perfumes, because the air seemed to be everywhere laden and reeking with the stench emitted by the dead and the dying, and the odours of drugs.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 025 ] Some again, the most sound, perhaps, in judgment, as they were also the most harsh in temper, of all, affirmed that there was no medicine for the disease superior or equal in efficacy to flight; following which prescription a multitude of men and women, negligent of all but themselves, deserted their city, their houses, their estates, their kinsfolk, their goods, and went into voluntary exile, or migrated to the country parts, as if God in visiting men with this pestilence in requital of their iniquities would not pursue them with His wrath wherever they might be, but intended the destruction of such alone as remained within the circuit of the walls of the city; or deeming, perchance, that it was now time for all to flee from it, and that its last hour was come.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 026 ] Of the adherents of these divers opinions not all died, neither did all escape; but rather there were, of each sort and in every place, many that sickened, and by those who retained their health were treated after the example which they themselves, while whole, had set, being everywhere left to languish in almost total neglect. [ 027 ] Tedious were it to recount, how citizen avoided citizen, how among neighbours was scarce found any that shewed fellow-feeling for another, how kinsfolk held aloof, and never met, or but rarely; enough that this sore affliction entered so deep into the minds of men and women, that in the horror thereof brother was forsaken by brother, nephew by uncle, brother by sister, and oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children, untended, unvisited, to their fate, as if they had been strangers. [ 028 ] Wherefore the sick of both sexes, whose number could not be estimated, were left without resource but in the charity of friends (and few such there were), or the interest of servants, who were hardly to be had at high rates and on unseemly terms, and being, moreover, one and all, men and women of gross understanding, and for the most part unused to such offices, concerned themselves no further than to supply the immediate and expressed wants of the sick, and to watch them die; in which service they themselves not seldom perished with their gains. [ 029 ] In consequence of which dearth of servants and dereliction of the sick by neighbours, kinsfolk and friends, it came to pass--a thing, perhaps, never before heard of--that no woman, however dainty, fair or well-born she might be, shrank, when stricken with the disease, from the ministrations of a man, no matter whether he were young or no, or scrupled to expose to him every part of her body, with no more shame than if he had been a woman, submitting of necessity to that which her malady required; wherefrom, perchance, there resulted in after time some loss of modesty in such as recovered. [ 030 ] Besides which many succumbed, who with proper attendance, would, perhaps, have escaped death; so that, what with the virulence of the plague and the lack of due tendance of the sick, the multitude of the deaths, that daily and nightly took place in the city, was such that those who heard the tale--not to say witnessed the fact--were struck dumb with amazement. [ 031 ] Whereby, practices contrary to the former habits of the citizens could hardly fail to grow up among the survivors.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 032 ] It had been, as to-day it still is, the custom for the women that were neighbours and of kin to the deceased to gather in his house with the women that were most closely connected with him, to wail with them in common, while on the other hand his male kinsfolk and neighbours, with not a few of the other citizens, and a due proportion of the clergy according to his quality, assembled without, in front of the house, to receive the corpse; and so the dead man was borne on the shoulders of his peers, with funeral pomp of taper and dirge, to the church selected by him before his death. [ 033 ] Which rites, as the pestilence waxed in fury, were either in whole or in great part disused, and gave way to others of a novel order. [ 034 ] For not only did no crowd of women surround the bed of the dying, but many passed from this life unregarded, and few indeed were they to whom were accorded the lamentations and bitter tears of sorrowing relations; nay, for the most part, their place was taken by the laugh, the jest, the festal gathering; observances which the women, domestic piety in large measure set aside, had adopted with very great advantage to their health. [ 035 ] Few also there were whose bodies were attended to the church by more than ten or twelve of their neighbours, and those not the honourable and respected citizens; but a sort of corpse-carriers drawn from the baser ranks, who called themselves becchini and performed such offices for hire, would shoulder the bier, and with hurried steps carry it, not to the church of the dead man's choice, but to that which was nearest at hand, with four or six priests in front and a candle or two, or, perhaps, none; nor did the priests distress themselves with too long and solemn an office, but with the aid of the becchini hastily consigned the corpse to the first tomb which they found untenanted. [ 036 ] The condition of the lower, and, perhaps, in great measure of the middle ranks, of the people shewed even worse and more deplorable; for, deluded by hope or constrained by poverty, they stayed in their quarters, in their houses, where they sickened by thousands a day, and, being without service or help of any kind, were, so to speak, irredeemably devoted to the death which overtook them. [ 037 ] Many died daily or nightly in the public streets; of many others, who died at home, the departure was hardly observed by their neighbours, until the stench of their putrefying bodies carried the tidings; and what with their corpses and the corpses of others who died on every hand the whole place was a sepulchre.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 038 ] It was the common practice of most of the neighbours, moved no less by fear of contamination by the putrefying bodies than by charity towards the deceased, [ 039 ] to drag the corpses out of the houses with their own hands, aided, perhaps, by a porter, if a porter was to be had, and to lay them in front of the doors, where any one who made the round might have seen, especially in the morning, more of them than he could count; afterwards they would have biers brought up, or, in default, planks, whereon they laid them. Nor was it once or twice only that one and the same bier carried two or three corpses at once; but quite a considerable number of such cases occurred, one bier sufficing for husband and wife, two or three brothers, father and son, and so forth. [ 040 ] And times without number it happened, that, as two priests, bearing the cross, were on their way to perform the last office for some one, three or four biers were brought up by the porters in rear of them, so that, whereas the priests supposed that they had but one corpse to bury, they discovered that there were six or eight, or sometimes more. [ 041 ] Nor, for all their number, were their obsequies honoured by either tears or lights or crowds of mourners; rather, it was come to this, that a dead man was then of no more account than a dead goat would be to-day. From all which it is abundantly manifest, that that lesson of patient resignation, which the sages were never able to learn from the slight and infrequent mishaps which occur in the natural course of events, was now brought home even to the minds of the simple by the magnitude of their disasters, so that they became indifferent to them.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 042 ] As consecrated ground there was not in extent sufficient to provide tombs for the vast multitude of corpses which day and night, and almost every hour, were brought in eager haste to the churches for interment, least of all, if ancient custom were to be observed and a separate resting-place assigned to each, they dug, for each graveyard, as soon as it was full, a huge trench, in which they laid the corpses as they arrived by hundreds at a time, piling them up as merchandise is stowed in the hold of a ship, tier upon tier, each covered with a little earth, until the trench would hold no more. [ 043 ] But I spare to rehearse with minute particularity each of the woes that came upon our city, and say in brief, that, harsh as was the tenor of her fortunes, the surrounding country knew no mitigation; for there--not to speak of the castles, each, as it were, a little city in itself--in sequestered village, or on the open champaign, by the wayside, on the farm, in the homestead, the poor hapless husbandmen and their families, forlorn of physicians' care or servants' tendance, perished day and night alike, not as men, but rather as beasts. [ 044 ] Wherefore, they too, like the citizens, abandoned all rule of life, all habit of industry, all counsel of prudence; nay, one and all, as if expecting each day to be their last, not merely ceased to aid Nature to yield her fruit in due season of their beasts and their lands and their past labours, but left no means unused, which ingenuity could devise, to waste their accumulated store; [ 045 ] denying shelter to their oxen, asses, sheep, goats, pigs, fowls, nay, even to their dogs, man's most faithful companions, and driving them out into the fields to roam at large amid the unsheaved, nay, unreaped corn. [ 046 ] Many of which, as if endowed with reason, took their fill during the day, and returned home at night without any guidance of herdsman. [ 047 ] But enough of the country! What need we add, but (reverting to the city) that such and so grievous was the harshness of heaven, and perhaps in some degree of man, that, what with the fury of the pestilence, the panic of those whom it spared, and their consequent neglect or desertion of not a few of the stricken in their need, it is believed without any manner of doubt, that between March and the ensuing July upwards of a hundred thousand human beings lost their lives within the walls of the city of Florence, which before the deadly visitation would not have been supposed to contain so many people! [ 048 ] How many grand palaces, how many stately homes, how many splendid residences, once full of retainers, of lords, of ladies, were now left desolate of all, even to the meanest servant! How many families of historic fame, of vast ancestral domains, and wealth proverbial, found now no scion to continue the succession! How many brave men, how many fair ladies, how many gallant youths, whom any physician, were he Galen, Hippocrates, or Æsculapius himself, would have pronounced in the soundest of health, broke fast with their kinsfolk, comrades and friends in the morning, and when evening came, supped with their forefathers in the other world!

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 049 ] Irksome it is to myself to rehearse in detail so sorrowful a history. Wherefore, being minded to pass over so much thereof as I fairly can, I say, that our city, being thus well-nigh depopulated, it so happened, as I afterwards learned from one worthy of credit, that on a Tuesday morning after Divine Service the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella was almost deserted save for the presence of seven young ladies habited sadly in keeping with the season. All were connected either by blood or at least as friends or neighbours; and fair and of good understanding were they all, as also of noble birth, gentle manners, and a modest sprightliness. In age none exceeded twenty-eight, or fell short of eighteen years. [ 050 ] Their names I would set down in due form, had I not good reason to withhold them, being solicitous lest the matters which here ensue, as told and heard by them, should in after time be occasion of reproach to any of them, in view of the ample indulgence which was then, for the reasons heretofore set forth, accorded to the lighter hours of persons of much riper years than they, but which the manners of to-day have somewhat restricted; nor would I furnish material to detractors, ever ready to bestow their bite where praise is due, to cast by invidious speech the least slur upon the honour of these noble ladies. [ 051 ] Wherefore, that what each says may be apprehended without confusion, I intend to give them names more or less appropriate to the character of each. The first, then, being the eldest of the seven, we will call Pampinea, the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena, the fourth Emilia, the fifth we will distinguish as Lauretta, the sixth as Nei file, and the last, not without reason, shall be named Elisa.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 052 ] 'Twas not of set purpose but by mere chance that these ladies met in the same part of the church; but at length grouping themselves into a sort of circle, after heaving a few sighs, they gave up saying paternosters, and began to converse (among other topics) on the times.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 053 ] So they continued for a while, and then Pampinea, the rest listening in silent attention, thus began: " Dear ladies mine, often have I heard it said, and you doubtless as well as I, that wrong is done to none by whoso but honestly uses his reason. And to fortify, preserve, and defend his life to the utmost of his power is the dictate of natural reason in every one that is born. Which right is accorded in such measure that in defence thereof men have been held blameless in taking life. [ 054 ] And if this be allowed by the laws, albeit on their stringency depends the well-being of every mortal, how much more exempt from censure should we, and all other honest folk, be in taking such means as we may for the preservation of our life? [ 055 ] As often as I bethink me how we have been occupied this morning, and not this morning only, and what has been the tenor of our conversation, I perceive--and you will readily do the like--that each of us is apprehensive on her own account; nor thereat do I marvel, but at this I do marvel greatly, that, though none of us lacks a woman's wit, yet none of us has recourse to any means to avert that which we all justly fear. [ 056 ] Here we tarry, as if, methinks, for no other purpose than to bear witness to the number of the corpses that are brought hither for interment, or to hearken if the brothers there within, whose number is now almost reduced to nought, chant their offices at the canonical hours, or, by our weeds of woe, to obtrude on the attention of every one that enters, the nature and degree of our sufferings. [ 057 ] And if we quit the church, we see dead or sick folk carried about, or we see those, who for their crimes were of late condemned to exile by the outraged majesty of the public laws, but who now, in contempt of those laws, well knowing that their ministers are a prey to death or disease, have returned, and traverse the city in packs, making it hideous with their riotous antics; or else we see the refuse of the people, fostered on our blood, becchini, as they call themselves, who for our torment go prancing about here and there and everywhere, making mock of our miseries in scurrilous songs. [ 058 ] Nor hear we aught but: Such and such are dead; or, Such and such are dying; and should hear dolorous wailing on every hand, were there but any to wail. [ 059 ] Or go we home, what see we there? I know not if you are in like case with me; but there, where once were servants in plenty, I find none left but my maid, and shudder with terror, and feel the very hairs of my head to stand on end; and turn or tarry where I may, I encounter the ghosts of the departed, not with their wonted mien, but with something horrible in their aspect that appalls me. [ 060 ] For which reasons church and street and home are alike distressful to me, and the more so that none, methinks, having means and place of retirement as we have, abides here save only we; [ 061 ] or if any such there be, they are of those, as my senses too often have borne witness, who make no distinction between things honourable and their opposites, so they but answer the cravings of appetite, and, alone or in company, do daily and nightly what things soever give promise of most gratification. [ 062 ] Nor are these secular persons alone; but such as live recluse in monasteries break their rule, and give themselves up to carnal pleasures, persuading themselves that they are permissible to them, and only forbidden to others, and,

thereby thinking to escape, are become unchaste and dissolute. [ 063 ] If such be our circumstances--and such most manifestly they are--what do we here? what wait we for? what dream we of? why are we less prompt to provide for our own safety than the rest of the citizens? Is life less dear to us than to all other women? or think we that the bond which unites soul and body is stronger in us than in others, so that there is no blow that may light upon it, of which we need be apprehensive? [ 064 ] If so, we err, we are deceived. What insensate folly were it in us so to believe! We have but to call to mind the number and condition of those, young as we, and of both sexes, who have succumbed to this cruel pestilence, to find therein conclusive evidence to the contrary. [ 065 ] And lest from lethargy or indolence we fall into the vain imagination that by some lucky accident we may in some way or another, when we would, escape--I know not if your opinion accord with mine--I should deem it most wise in us, our case being what it is, if, as many others have done before us, and are still doing, we were to quit this place, and, shunning like death the evil example of others, betake ourselves to the country, and there live as honourable women on one of the estates, of which none of us has any lack, with all cheer of festal gathering and other delights, so long as in no particular we overstep the bounds of reason. [ 066 ] There we shall hear the chant of birds, have sight of verdant hills and plains, of corn fields undulating like the sea, of trees of a thousand sorts; there also we shall have a larger view of the heavens, which, however harsh to usward, yet deny not their eternal beauty; things fairer far for eye to rest on than the desolate walls of our city. [ 067 ] Moreover, we shall there breathe a fresher air, find ampler store of things meet for such as live in these times, have fewer causes of annoy. [ 068 ] For, though the husbandmen die there, even as here the citizens, they are dispersed in scattered homesteads, and 'tis thus less painful to witness. [ 069 ] Nor, so far as I can see, is there a soul here whom we shall desert; rather we may truly say, that we are ourselves deserted; for, our kinsfolk being either dead or fled in fear of death, no more regardful of us than if we were strangers, we are left alone in our great affliction. [ 070 ] No censure, then, can fall on us if we do as I propose; and otherwise grievous suffering, perhaps death, may ensue. [ 071 ] Wherefore, if you agree, 'tis my advice, that, attended by our maids with al?? things needful, we sojourn, now on this, now on the other estate, and in such way of life continue, until we see--if death should not first overtake us--the end which Heaven reserves for these events. [ 072 ] And I remind you that it will be at least as seemly in us to leave with honour, as in others, of whom there are not a few, to stay with dishonour. ”

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 073 ] The other ladies praised Pampinea's plan, and indeed were so prompt to follow it, that they had already begun to discuss the manner in some detail, as if they were forthwith to rise from their seats and take the road, [ 074 ] when Filomena, whose judgment was excellent, interposed, saying: “ Ladies, though Pampinea has spoken to most excellent effect, yet it were not well to be so precipitate as you seem disposed to be. Bethink you that we are all women; nor is there any here so young, but she is of years to understand how women are minded towards one another, when they are alone together, and how ill they are able to rule themselves without the guidance of some man. [ 075 ] We are sensitive, perverse, suspicious, pusillanimous and timid; wherefore I much misdoubt, that, if we find no other guidance than our own, this company is like to break up sooner, and with less credit to us, than it should. Against which it were well to provide at the outset. ” [ 076 ] Said then Elisa: “ Without doubt man is woman's head, and, without man's governance, it is seldom that aught that we do is brought to a commendable conclusion. But how are we to come by the men? [ 077 ] Every one of us here knows that her kinsmen are for the most part dead, and that the survivors are dispersed, one here, one there, we know not where, bent each on escaping the same fate as ourselves; nor were it seemly to seek the aid of strangers; for, as we are in quest of health, we must find some means so to order matters that, wherever we seek diversion or repose, trouble and scandal do not follow us. ”

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 078 ] While the ladies were thus conversing, there came into the church three young men, young, I say, but not so young that the age of the youngest was less than twenty-five years; in whom neither the sinister course of events, nor the loss of friends or kinsfolk, nor fear for their own safety, had availed to quench, or even temper, the ardour of their love. [ 079 ] The first was called Pamfilo, the second Filostrato, and the third Dioneo. Very debonair and chivalrous were they all; and in this troublous time they were seeking if haply, to their exceeding great solace, they might have sight of their fair friends, all three of whom chanced to be among the said seven ladies, besides some that were of kin to the young men. [ 080 ] At one and the same moment they recognised the ladies and were recognised by them: wherefore, with a gracious smile, Pampinea thus began: “ Lo, fortune is propitious to our enterprise, having vouchsafed us the good offices of these young men, who are as gallant as they are discreet, and will gladly give us their guidance and escort, so we but take them into our service. ” [ 081 ] Whereupon Neifile, crimson from brow to neck with the blush of modesty, being one of those that had a lover among the young men, said: [ 082 ] “ For God's sake, Pampinea, have a care what you say. Well assured am I that nought but good can be said of any of them, and I deem them fit for office far more onerous than this which you propose for them, and their good and honourable company worthy of ladies fairer by far and more tenderly to be cherished than such as we. [ 083 ] But 'tis no secret that they love some of us here; wherefore I misdoubt that, if we take them with us, we may thereby give occasion for scandal and censure merited neither by us nor by them. ” [ 084 ] “ That, ” said Filomena, “ is of no consequence; so I but live honestly, my conscience gives me no disquietude; if others asperse me, God and the truth will take arms in my defence. [ 085 ] Now, should they be disposed to attend us, of a truth we might say with Pampinea, that fortune favours our enterprise. ” [ 086 ] The silence which followed betokened consent on the part of the other ladies, who then with one accord resolved to call the young men, and acquaint them with their purpose, and pray them to be of their company. [ 087 ] So without further parley Pampinea, who had a kinsman among the young men, rose and approached them where they stood intently regarding them; and greeting them gaily, she opened to them their plan, and besought them on the part of herself and her friends to join their company on terms of honourable and fraternal comradeship. [ 088 ] At first the young men thought she did but trifle with them; but when they saw that she was in earnest, they answered with alacrity that they were ready, and promptly, even before they left the church, set matters in train for their departure. [ 089 ] So all things meet being first sent forward in due order to their intended place of sojourn, the ladies with some of their maids, and the three young men, each attended by a man-servant, sallied forth of the city on the morrow, being Wednesday, about daybreak, and took the road; nor had they journeyed more than two short miles when they arrived at their destination. [ 090 ] The estate lay upon a little hill some distance from the nearest highway, and, embowered in shrubberies of divers hues, and other greenery, afforded the eye a pleasant prospect. [ 091 ] On the summit of the hill was a palace with galleries, halls and chambers, disposed around a fair and spacious court, each very fair in itself, and the goodlier to see for the gladsome pictures with which it was adorned; the whole set amidst meads and gardens laid out with marvellous art, wells of the coolest water, and vaults of the finest wines, things more suited to dainty drinkers than to sober and honourable women. On their arrival the company, to their no small delight, found their beds already made, the rooms well swept and garnished with flowers of every sort that the season could afford, and the floors carpeted with rushes. [ 092 ] When they were seated, Dioneo, a gallant who had not his match for courtesy and wit, spoke thus: “ My ladies, 'tis not our forethought so much as your own mother-wit that has guided us hither. [ 093 ] How you mean to dispose of your cares I know not; mine I left behind me within the citygate when I issued thence with you a brief while ago. Wherefore, I pray you, either address yourselves to make merry, to laugh and sing with me (so far, I mean, as may consist with your

dignity), or give me leave to hie me back to the stricken city, there to abide with my cares." [ 094 ] To whom blithely Pampinea replied, as if she too had cast off all her cares: " Well sayest thou, Dioneo, excellent well; gaily we mean to live; 'twas a refuge from sorrow that here we sought, nor had we other cause to come hither. [ 095 ] But, as no anarchy can long endure, I who initiated the deliberations of which this fair company is the fruit, do now, to the end that our joy may be lasting, deem it expedient, that there be one among us in chief authority, honoured and obeyed by us as our superior, whose exclusive care it shall be to devise how we may pass our time blithely. [ 096 ] And that each in turn may prove the weight of the care, as well as enjoy the pleasure, of sovereignty, and, no distinction being made of sex, envy be felt by none by reason of exclusion from the office; I propose, that the weight and honour be borne by each one for a day; and let the first to bear sway be chosen by us all, those that follow to be appointed towards the vesper hour by him or her who shall have had the signory for that day; and let each holder of the signory be, for the time, sole arbiter of the place and manner in which we are to pass our time. "

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 097 ] Pampinea's speech was received with the utmost applause, and with one accord she was chosen queen for the first day. Whereupon Filomena hied her lightly to a bay-tree, having often heard of the great honour in which its leaves, and such as were deservedly crowned therewith, were worthy to be holden; and having gathered a few sprays, she made thereof a goodly wreath of honour, and set it on Pampinea's head; which wreath was thenceforth, while their company endured, the visible sign of the wearer's sway and sovereignty.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 098 ] No sooner was Queen Pampinea crowned than she bade all be silent. She then caused summon to her presence their four maids, and the servants of the three young men, and, all keeping silence, said to them: " That I may shew you all at once, how, well still giving place to better, our company may flourish and endure, as long as it shall pleasure us, with order meet and assured delight and without reproach, I first of all constitute Dioneo's man, Parmeno, my seneschal, and entrust him with the care and control of all our household, and all that belongs to the service of the hall.[ 099 ] Pamfilo's man, Sirisco, I appoint treasurer and chancellor of our exchequer; and be he ever answerable to Parmeno. While Parmeno and Sirisco are too busy about their duties to serve their masters, let Filostrato's man, Tindaro, have charge of the chambers of all three. [ 100 ] My maid, Mísia, and Filomena's maid, Licisca, will keep in the kitchen, and with all due diligence prepare such dishes as Parmeno shall bid them. [ 101 ] Lauretta's maid, Chimera, and Fiammetta's maid, Stratilia we make answerable for the ladies' chambers, and wherever we may take up our quarters, let them see that all is spotless. And now we enjoin you, one and all alike, as you value our favour, that none of you, go where you may, return whence you may, hear or see what you may, bring us any tidings but such as be cheerful. " [ 102 ] These orders thus succinctly given were received with universal approval. Whereupon Pampinea rose, and said gaily: " Here are gardens, meads, and other places delightful enough, where you may wander at will, and take your pleasure; but on the stroke of tierce, let all be here to breakfast in the shade. "

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 103 ] Thus dismissed by their new queen the gay company sauntered gently through a garden, the young men saying sweet things to the fair ladies, who wove fair garlands of divers sorts of leaves and sang love-songs.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 104 ] Having thus spent the time allowed them by the queen, they returned to the house, where they found that Parmeno had entered on his office with zeal; for in a hall on the ground-floor they saw tables covered with the whitest of cloths, and beakers that shone like silver, and sprays of broom scattered everywhere. So, at the bidding of the queen, they washed their hands, and all took their places as marshalled by Parmeno. [ 105 ] Dishes, daintily prepared, were served, and the finest wines were at hand; the three serving-men did their office noiselessly; in a word all was fair and ordered in a seemly manner; [ 106 ] whereby the spirits of the company rose, and they seasoned their viands with pleasant jests and sprightly sallies. Breakfast done, the tables were removed, and the queen bade fetch instruments of music; for all, ladies and young men alike, knew how to tread a measure, and some of them played and sang with great skill: so, at her command, Dioneo having taken a lute, and Fiammetta a viol, they struck up a dance in sweet concert; [ 107 ] and, the servants being dismissed to their repast, the queen, attended by the other ladies and the two young men, led off a stately carol; which ended they fell to singing ditties dainty and gay. [ 108 ] Thus they diverted themselves until the queen, deeming it time to retire to rest, dismissed them all for the night. So the three young men and the ladies withdrew to their several quarters, which were in different parts of the palace. There they found the beds well made, and abundance of flowers, as in the hall; and so they undressed, and went to bed.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 109 ] Shortly after none the queen rose, and roused the rest of the ladies, as also the young men, averring that it was injurious to the health to sleep long in the daytime. They therefore hied them to a meadow, where the grass grew green and luxuriant, being nowhere scorched by the sun, and a light breeze gently fanned them. So at the queen's command they all ranged themselves in a circle on the grass, and hearkened while she thus spoke:

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 110 ] " You mark that the sun is high, the heat intense, and the silence unbroken save by the cicadas among the olive-trees. It were therefore the height of folly to quit this spot at present. Here the air is cool and the prospect fair, and here, observe, are dice and chess. Take, then, your pleasure as you may be severally minded; [ 111 ] but, if you take my advice, you will find pastime for the hot hours before us, not in play, in which the loser must needs be vexed, and neither the winner nor the onlooker much the better pleased, but in telling of stories, in which the invention of one may afford solace to all the company of his hearers. [ 112 ] You will not each have told a story before the sun will be low, and the heat abated, so that we shall be able to go and severally take our pleasure where it may seem best to each. Wherefore, if my proposal meet with your approval--for in this I am disposed to consult your pleasure--let us adopt it; if not, divert yourselves as best you may, until the vesper hour. "

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 113 ] The queen's proposal being approved by all, ladies and men alike, she added: [ 114 ] " So please you, then, I ordain, that for this first day, we be free to discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn. "[ 115 ] She then addressed Pamfilo, who sat on her right hand, bidding him with a gracious air to lead off with one of his stories. And prompt at the word of command, Pamfilo, while all listened intently, thus began:

First Day - Novel I

**[Voice: panfilo ]**

[ 001 ] Ser Ciappelletto cheats a holy friar by a false confession, and dies; and, having lived as a very bad man, is, on his death, reputed a saint, and called San Ciappelletto.

[Voice: panfilo ]

[ 002 ] A seemly thing it is, dearest ladies, that whatever we do, it be begun in the holy and awful name of Him who was the maker of all. Wherefore, as it falls to me to lead the way in this your enterprise of storytelling, I intend to begin with one of His wondrous works, that, by hearing thereof, our hopes in Him, in whom is no change, may be established, and His name be by us forever lauded. [ 003 ] 'Tis manifest that, as things temporal are all doomed to pass and perish, so within and without they abound with trouble and anguish and travail, and are subject to infinite perils; nor, save for the especial grace of God, should we, whose being is bound up with and forms part of theirs, have either the strength to endure or the wisdom to combat their adverse influences. [ 004 ] By which grace we are visited and penetrated (so we must believe) not by reason of any merit of our own, but solely out of the fulness of God's own goodness, and in answer to the prayers of those who, being mortal like ourselves, did faithfully observe His ordinances during their lives, and are now become blessed for ever with Him in heaven. To whom, as to advocates taught by experience all that belongs to our frailty, we, not daring, perchance, to present our petitions in the presence of so great a Judge, make known our requests for such things as we deem expedient for us. [ 005 ] And of His mercy richly abounding to usward we have further proof herein, that, no keenness of mortal vision being able in any degree to penetrate the secret counsels of the Divine mind, it sometimes, perchance, happens, that, in error of judgment, we make one our advocate before His Majesty, who is banished from His presence in eternal exile, and yet He to whom nothing is hidden, having regard rather to the sincerity of our prayers than to our ignorance or the banishment of the intercessor, hears us no less than if the intercessor were in truth one of the blest who enjoy the light of His countenance. [ 006 ] Which the story that I am about to relate may serve to make apparent; apparent, I mean, according to the standard of the judgment of man, not of God.

[Voice: panfilo ]

[ 007 ] The story goes, then, that Musciatto Franzesi, a great and wealthy merchant, being made a knight in France, and being to attend Charles Sansterre, brother of the King of France, when he came into Tuscany at the instance and with the support of Pope Boniface, found his affairs, as often happens to merchants, to be much involved in divers quarters, and neither easily nor suddenly to be adjusted; wherefore he determined to place them in the hands of commissioners, and found no difficulty except as to certain credits given to some Burgundians, for the recovery of which he doubted whether he could come by a competent agent; [ 008 ] for well he knew that the Burgundians were violent men and ill-conditioned and faithless; nor could he call to mind any man so bad that he could with confidence oppose his guile to theirs. [ 009 ] After long pondering the matter, he recollected one Ser Ciapperello da Prato, who most frequented his house in Paris. Who being short of stature and very affected, the French who knew not the meaning of Cepparello, but supposed that it meant the same as Cappello, i. e. garland, in their vernacular, called him not Cappello, but Ciappelletto by reason of his diminutive size; and as Ciappelletto he was known everywhere, whereas few people knew him as Ciapperello. [ 010 ] Now Ciappelletto's manner of life was thus. He was by profession a notary, and his pride was to make false documents; he would have made them as often as he was asked, and more readily without fee than another at a great price; few indeed he made that were not false, and great was his shame when they were discovered. [ 011 ] False witness he bore, solicited or unsolicited, with boundless delight; and, as oaths were in those days had in very great respect in France, he, scrupling not to forswear himself, corruptly carried the day in every case in which he was summoned faithfully to attest the truth. [ 012 ] He took inordinate delight, and bestirred himself with great zeal, in fomenting ill-feeling, enmities, dissensions between friends, kinsfolk and all other folk; and the more calamitous were the consequences the better he was pleased. [ 013 ] Set him on murder, or any other foul crime, and he never hesitated, but went about it with alacrity; he had been known on more than one occasion to inflict wounds or death by preference with his own hands. [ 014 ] He was a profuse blasphemer of God and His saints, and that on the most trifling occasions, being of all men the most irascible. He was never seen at church, held all the sacraments vile things, and derided them in language of horrible ribaldry. On the other hand he resorted readily to the tavern and other places of evil repute, and frequented them. He was as fond of women as a dog is of the stick: in the use against nature he had not his match among the most abandoned. He would have pilfered and stolen as a matter of conscience, as a holy man would make an oblation. Most gluttonous he was and inordinately fond of his cups, whereby he sometimes brought upon himself both shame and suffering. He was also a practised gamester and thrower of false dice. [ 015 ] But why enlarge so much upon him? Enough that he was, perhaps, the worst man that ever was born.

[Voice: panfilo ]

The rank and power of Musciatto Franzesi had long been this reprobate's mainstay, serving in many instances to secure him considerate treatment on the part of the private persons whom he frequently, and the court which he unremittingly, outraged. [ 016 ] So Musciatto, having bethought him of this Ser Cepparello, with whose way of life he was very well acquainted, judged him to be the very sort of person to cope with the guile of the Burgundians. He therefore sent for him, and thus addressed him: [ 017 ] " Ser Ciappelletto, I am, as thou knowest, about to leave this place for good; and among those with whom I have to settle accounts are certain Burgundians, very wily knaves; nor know I the man whom I could more fitly entrust with the recovery of my money than thyself. Wherefore, as thou hast nothing to do at present, if thou wilt undertake this business, I will procure thee the favour of the court, and give thee a reasonable part of what thou shalt recover. " [ 018 ] Ser Ciappelletto, being out of employment, and by no means in easy circumstances, and about to lose Musciatto, so long his mainstay and support, without the least demur, for in truth he had hardly any choice, made his mind up and answered that he was ready to go. So the bargain was struck. [ 019 ] Armed with the power of attorney and the royal letters commendatory, Ser Ciappelletto took leave of Messer Musciatto and hied him to Burgundy, where he was hardly known to a soul. He set about the business which had brought him thither, the recovery of the money, in a manner amicable and considerate, foreign to his nature, as if he were minded to reserve his severity to the last. [ 020 ] While thus occupied, he was frequently at the house of two Florentine usurers, who treated him with great distinction out of regard for Messer Musciatto; and there it so happened that he fell sick. The two brothers forthwith placed physicians and servants in attendance upon him, and omitted no means meet and apt for the restoration of his health. [ 021 ] But all remedies proved unavailing; for being now old, and having led, as the physicians reported, a disorderly life, he went daily from bad to worse like one stricken with a mortal disease. This greatly disconcerted the two brothers; [ 022 ] and one day, hard by the room in which Ser Ciappelletto lay sick, they began to talk about him; saying one to the other: [ 023 ] " What shall we do with this man? We are hard bested indeed on his account. If we turn him out of the house, sick as he is, we shall not only incur grave censure, but shall evince a signal want of sense; for folk must know the welcome we gave him in the first instance, the solicitude with which we have had him treated and tended since his illness, during which time he could not possibly do aught to displease us, and yet they would see him suddenly turned out of our house sick unto death. [ 024 ] On the other hand he has been so bad a man that he is sure not to confess or receive any of the Church's sacraments; and dying thus unconfessed, he will be denied burial in church, but will be cast out into some ditch like a dog; [ 025 ] nay, 'twill be all one if he do confess, for such and so horrible have been his crimes that no friar or priest either will or can absolve him; and so, dying without absolution, he will still be cast out into the ditch. [ 026 ] In which case the folk of these parts, who reprobate our trade as iniquitous and revile it all day long, and would fain rob us, will seize their opportunity, and raise a tumult, and make a raid



upon our houses, crying: 'A way with these Lombard dogs, whom the Church excludes from her pale;' and will certainly strip us of our goods, and perhaps take our lives also; so that in any case we stand to lose if this man die."

**[Voice: pan filo ]**

[ 027 ] Ser Ciappelletto, who, as we said, lay close at hand while they thus spoke, and whose hearing was sharpened, as is often the case, by his malady, overheard all that they said about him. So he called them to him, and said to them: " I would not have you disquiet yourselves in regard of me, or apprehend loss to befall you by my death. I have heard what you have said of me and have no doubt that 'twould be as you say, if matters took the course you anticipate; but I am minded that it shall be otherwise. [ 028 ] I have committed so many offences against God in the course of my life, that one more in the hour of my death will make no difference whatever to the account. [ 029 ] So seek out and bring hither the worthiest and most holy friar you can find, and leave me to settle your affairs and mine upon a sound and solid basis, with which you may rest satisfied. " [ 030 ] The two brothers had not much hope of the result, but yet they went to a friary and asked for a holy and discreet man to hear the confession of a Lombard that was sick in their house, and returned with an aged man of just and holy life, very learned in the Scriptures, and venerable and held in very great and especial reverence by all the citizens. [ 031 ] As soon as he had entered the room where Ser Ciappelletto was lying, and had taken his place by his side, he began gently to comfort him: then he asked him how long it was since he was confessed. [ 032 ] Whereto Ser Ciappelletto, who had never been confessed, answered: " Father, it is my constant practice to be confessed at least once a week, and many a week I am confessed more often; but true it is, that, since I have been sick, now eight days, I have made no confession, so sore has been my affliction. " [ 033 ] " Son, " said the friar, " thou hast well done, and well for thee, if so thou continue to do; as thou dost confess so often, I see that my labour of hearkening and questioning will be slight. " [ 034 ] " Nay but, master friar, " said Ser Ciappelletto, " say not so; I have not confessed so often but that I would fain make a general confession of all my sins that I have committed, so far as I can recall them, from the day of my birth to the present time; and therefore I pray you, my good father, to question me precisely in every particular just as if I had never been confessed. [ 035 ] And spare me not by reason of my sickness, for I had far rather do despite to my flesh than, sparing it, risk the perdition of my soul, which my Saviour redeemed with His precious blood. "

**[Voice: pan filo ]**

[ 036 ] The holy man was mightily delighted with these words, which seemed to him to betoken a soul in a state of grace. He therefore signified to Ser Ciappelletto his high approval of this practice; and then began by asking him whether he had ever sinned carnally with a woman. [ 037 ] Whereto Ser Ciappelletto answered with a sigh: " My father, I scruple to tell you the truth in this matter, fearing lest I sin in vain-glory. " [ 038 ] " Nay, but, " said the friar, " speak boldly; none ever sinned by telling the truth, either in confession or otherwise. " [ 039 ] " Then, " said Ser Ciappelletto, " as you bid me speak boldly, I will tell you the truth of this matter. I am virgin even as when I issued from my mother's womb. " [ 040 ] " Now God's blessing on thee, " said the friar, " well done; and the greater is thy merit in that, hadst thou so willed, thou mightest have done otherwise far more readily than we who are under constraint of rule. " [ 041 ] He then proceeded to ask, whether he had offended God by gluttony. Whereto Ser Ciappelletto, heaving a heavy sigh, answered that he had frequently so offended; for, being wont to fast not only in Lent like other devout persons, but at least three days in every week, taking nothing but bread and water, he had quaffed the water with as good a gusto and as much enjoyment, more particularly when fatigued by devotion or pilgrimage, as great drinkers quaff their wine; and oftentimes he had felt a craving for such dainty dishes of herbs as ladies make when they go into the country, and now and again he had relished his food more than seemed to him meet in one who fasted, as he did, for devotion. [ 042 ] " Son, " said the friar, " these sins are natural and very trifling; and therefore I would not have thee burden thy conscience too much with them. There is no man, however holy he may be, but must sometimes find it pleasant to eat after a long fast and to drink after exertion. " [ 043 ] " O, my father, " said Ser Ciappelletto, " say not this to comfort me. You know well that I know, that the things which are done in the service of God ought to be done in perfect purity of an unsullied spirit; and whoever does otherwise sins. " [ 044 ] The friar, well content, replied: " Glad I am that thou dost think so, and I am mightily pleased with thy pure and good conscience which therein appears; but tell me: hast thou sinned by avarice, coveting more than was reasonable, or withholding more than was right? " [ 045 ] " My father, " replied Ser Ciappelletto, " I would not have you disquiet yourself, because I am in the house of these usurers: no part have I in their concerns; nay, I did but come here to admonish and reprehend them, and wean them from this abominable traffic; and so, I believe, I had done, had not God sent me this visitation. [ 046 ] But you must know, that my father left me a fortune, of which I dedicated the greater part to God; and since then for my own support and the relief of Christ's poor I have done a little trading, whereof I have desired to make gain; and all that I have gotten I have shared with God's poor, reserving one half for my own needs and giving the other half to them; and so well has my Maker prospered me, that I have ever managed my affairs to better and better account. " [ 047 ] " Well done, " said the friar; " but how? hast thou often given way to anger? " [ 048 ] " Often indeed, I assure you, " said Ser Ciappelletto. " And who could refrain therefrom, seeing men doing frowardly all day long, breaking the commandments of God and recking nought of His judgments? [ 049 ] Many a time in the course of a single day I had rather be dead than alive, to see the young men going after vanity, swearing and forswearing themselves, haunting taverns, avoiding the churches, and in short walking in the way of the world rather than in God's way. " [ 050 ] " My son, " said the friar, " this is a righteous wrath; nor could I find occasion therein to lay a penance upon thee. But did anger ever by any chance betray thee into taking human life, or affronting or otherwise wronging any? " [ 051 ] " Alas, " replied Ser Ciappelletto, " alas, sir, man of God though you seem to me, how come you to speak after this manner? If I had had so much as the least thought of doing any of the things of which you speak, should I believe, think you, that I had been thus supported or God? These are the deeds of robbers and such like evil men, to whom I have ever said, when any I saw: 'Go, God change thy heart.' " [ 052 ] Said then the friar: " Now, my son, as thou hopest to be blest of God, tell me, hast thou never borne false witness against any, or spoken evil of another, or taken the goods of another without his leave? " [ 053 ] " Yes, master friar, " answered Ser Ciappelletto, " most true it is that I have spoken evil of another; for I had once a neighbour who without the least excuse in the world was ever beating his wife, and so great was my pity of the poor creature, whom, when he was in his cups, he would thrash as God alone knows how, that once I spoke evil of him to his wife's kinsfolk. " [ 054 ] " Well, well, " said the friar, " thou tellest me thou hast been a merchant; hast thou ever cheated any, as merchants use to do? " [ 055 ] " I'faith, yes, master friar, " said Ser Ciappelletto; " but I know not who he was; only that he brought me some money which he owed me for some cloth that I had sold him, and I put it in a box without counting it, where a month afterwards I found four farthings more than there should have been, which I kept for a year to return to him, but not seeing him again, I bestowed them in alms for the love of God. " [ 056 ] " This, " said the friar, " was a small matter; and thou didst well to bestow them as thou didst. " [ 057 ] The holy friar went on to ask him many other questions, to which he made answer in each case in this sort. Then, as the friar was about to give him absolution, Ser Ciappelletto interposed: " Sir, I have yet a sin to confess. " [ 058 ] " What? " asked the friar. " I remember, " he said, " that I once caused my servant to sweep my house on a Saturday after none; and that my observance of Sunday was less devout than it should have been. " [ 059 ] " O, my son, " said the friar, " this is a light matter. " [ 060 ] " No, " said Ser Ciappelletto, " say not a light matter; for Sunday is the more to be had in honour



because on that day our Lord rose from the dead.” [ 061 ] Then said the holy friar: “ Now is there aught else that thou hast done? ” [ 062 ] “ Yes, master friar, ” replied Ser Ciappelletto, “ once by inadvertence I spat in the church of God. ” [ 063 ] At this the friar began to smile, and said: “ My son, this is not a matter to trouble about; we, who are religious, spit there all day long. ” [ 064 ] “ And great impiety it is when you so do, ” replied Ser Ciappelletto, “ for there is nothing that is so worthy to be kept from all impurity as the holy temple in which sacrifice is offered to God. ” [ 065 ] More he said in the same strain, which I pass over; and then at last he began to sigh, and by and by to weep bitterly, as he was well able to do when he chose. [ 066 ] And the friar demanding: “ My son, why weepest thou? ” [ 067 ] “ Alas, master friar, ” answered Ser Ciappelletto, “ a sin yet remains, which I have never confessed, such shame were it to me to tell it; and as often as I call it to mind, I weep as you now see me weep, being well assured that God will never forgive me this sin. ” [ 068 ] Then said the holy friar: “ Come, come, son, what is this that thou sayst? If all the sins of all the men, that ever were or ever shall be, as long as the world shall endure, were concentrated in one man, so great is the goodness of God that He would freely pardon them all, were he but penitent and contrite as I see thou art, and confessed them: wherefore tell me thy sin with a good courage. ” [ 069 ] Then said Ser Ciappelletto, still weeping bitterly: “ Alas, my father, mine is too great a sin, and scarce can I believe, if your prayers do not co-operate, that God will ever grant me His pardon thereof. ” [ 070 ] “ Tell it with a good courage, ” said the friar; “ I promise thee to pray God for thee. ” [ 071 ] Ser Ciappelletto, however, continued to weep, and would not speak, for all the friar's encouragement. When he had kept him for a good while in suspense, he heaved a mighty sigh, and said: “ My father, as you promise me to pray God for me, I will tell it you. Know, then, that once, when I was a little child, I cursed my mother; ” and having so said he began again to weep bitterly. [ 072 ] “ O, my son, ” said the friar, “ does this seem to thee so great a sin? Men curse God all day long, and He pardons them freely, if they repent them of having so done; and thinkest thou He will not pardon thee this? Weep not, be comforted, for truly, hadst thou been one of them that set Him on the Cross, with the contrition that I see in thee, thou wouldst not fail of His pardon. ” [ 073 ] “ Alas! my father, ” rejoined Ser Ciappelletto, “ what is this you say? To curse my sweet mother that carried me in her womb for nine months day and night, and afterwards on her shoulder more than a hundred times! Heinous indeed was my offence; 'tis too great a sin; nor will it be pardoned, unless you pray God for me. ”

**[Voice: panfilo ]**

[ 074 ] The friar now perceiving that Ser Ciappelletto had nothing more to say, gave him absolution and his blessing, reputed him for a most holy man, fully believing that all that he had said was true. And who would not have so believed, hearing him so speak at the point of death? [ 075 ] Then, when all was done, he said: “ Ser Ciappelletto, if God so will, you will soon be well; but should it so come to pass that God call your blessed soul to Himself in this state of grace, is it well pleasing to you that your body be buried in our convent? ” [ 076 ] “ Yea, verily, master friar, ” replied Ser Ciappelletto; “ there would I be, and nowhere else, since you have promised to pray God for me; besides which I have ever had a special devotion to your order. Wherefore I pray you, that, on your return to your convent, you cause to be sent me that very Body of Christ, which you consecrate in the morning on the altar; because (unworthy though I be) I purpose with your leave to take it, and afterwards the holy and extreme unction, that, though I have lived as a sinner, I may die at any rate as a Christian. ” [ 077 ] The holy man said that he was greatly delighted, that it was well said of Ser Ciappelletto, and that he would cause the Host to be forthwith brought to him; and so it was.

**[Voice: panfilo ]**

[ 078 ] The two brothers, who much misdoubted Ser Ciappelletto's power to deceive the friar, had taken their stand on the other side of a wooden partition which divided the room in which Ser Ciappelletto lay from another, and hearkening there they readily heard and understood what Ser Ciappelletto said to the friar; and at times could scarce refrain their laughter as they followed his confession; and now and again they said one to another: [ 079 ] “ What manner of man is this, whom neither age nor sickness, nor fear of death, on the threshold of which he now stands, nor yet of God, before whose judgment-seat he must soon appear, has been able to turn from his wicked ways, that he die not even as he has lived? ” [ 080 ] But seeing that his confession had secured the interment of his body in church, they troubled themselves no further. [ 081 ] Ser Ciappelletto soon afterwards communicated, and growing immensely worse, received the extreme unction, and died shortly after vespers on the same day on which he had made his good confession. [ 082 ] So the two brothers, having from his own moneys provided the wherewith to procure him honourable sepulture, and sent word to the friars to come at even to observe the usual vigil, and in the morning to fetch the corpse, set all things in order accordingly. [ 083 ] The holy friar who had confessed him, hearing that he was dead, had audience of the prior of the friary; a chapter was convened and the assembled brothers heard from the confessor's own mouth how Ser Ciappelletto had been a holy man, as had appeared by his confession, and were exhorted to receive the body with the utmost veneration and pious care, as one by which there was good hope that God would work many miracles. [ 084 ] To this the prior and the rest of the credulous confraternity assenting, they went in a body in the evening to the place where the corpse of Ser Ciappelletto lay, and kept a great and solemn vigil over it; and in the morning they made a procession habited in their surplices and copes, with books in their hands and crosses in front; and chanting as they went, they fetched the corpse and brought it back to their church with the utmost pomp and solemnity, being followed by almost all the folk of the city, men and women alike. [ 085 ] So it was laid in the church, and then the holy friar who had heard the confession got up in the pulpit and began to preach marvellous things of Ser Ciappelletto's life, his fasts, his virginity, his simplicity and guilelessness and holiness; narrating among other matters that of which Ser Ciappelletto had made tearful confession as his greatest sin, and how he had hardly been able to make him conceive that God would pardon him; from which he took occasion to reprove his hearers; saying: “ And you, accursed of God, on the least pretext, blaspheme God and His Mother, and all the celestial court. ” [ 086 ] And much beside he told of his loyalty and purity; and, in short, so wrought upon the people by his words, to which they gave entire credence, that they all conceived a great veneration for Ser Ciappelletto, and at the close of the office came pressing forward with the utmost vehemence to kiss the feet and the hands of the corpse, from which they tore off the cerements, each thinking himself blessed to have but a scrap thereof in his possession; and so it was arranged that it should be kept there all day long, so as to be visible and accessible to all. [ 087 ] At nightfall it was honourably interred in a marble tomb in one of the chapels, where on the morrow, one by one, folk came and lit tapers and prayed and paid their vows, setting there the waxen images which they had dedicated. [ 088 ] And the fame of Ciappelletto's holiness and the devotion to him grew in such measure that scarce any there was that in any adversity would vow aught to any saint but he, and they called him and still call him San Ciappelletto, affirming that many miracles have been and daily are wrought by God through him for such as devoutly crave his intercession.

**[Voice: panfilo ]**

[ 089 ] So lived, so died Ser Cepperello da Prato, and came to be reputed a saint, as you have heard. Nor would I deny that it is possible that he is of the number of the blessed in the presence of God, seeing that, though his life was evil and depraved, yet he might in his last moments have made so complete an act of contrition that perchance God had mercy on him and received him into His kingdom. But, as this is hidden from us, I speak according to that which appears, and I say that he ought rather to be in the hands of the devil in hell than in Paradise. [ 090 ] Which, if so it be, is a manifest token of the superabundance of the goodness of God to usward, inasmuch as He regards not our error but the sincerity of our faith, and hearkens unto us when, mistaking one who is at

enmity with Him for a friend, we have recourse to him, as to one holy indeed, as our intercessor for His grace. [ 091 ] Wherefore, that we of this gay company may by His grace be preserved safe and sound throughout this time of adversity, commend we ourselves in our need to Him, whose name we began by invoking, with lauds and reverent devotion and good confidence that we shall be heard.

[Voice: author ]

[ 092 ] And so he was silent.

## First Day - Novel II

**[Voice: nei file ]**

[ 001 ] Abraham, a Jew, at the instance of Jehannot de Chevigny, goes to the court of Rome, and having marked the evil life of the clergy, returns to Paris, and becomes a Christian.

[Voice: author ]

[ 002 ] Pamfilo's story elicited the mirth of some of the ladies and the hearty commendation of all, who listened to it with close attention until the end. Whereupon the queen bade Nei file, who sat next her, to tell a story, that the commencement thus made of their diversions might have its sequel. Nei file, whose graces of mind matched the beauty of her person, consented with a gladsome goodwill, and thus began:

[Voice: nei file ]

[ 003 ] Pamfilo has shewn by his story that the goodness of God spares to regard our errors when they result from unavoidable ignorance; and in mine I mean to shew you how the same goodness, bearing patiently with the shortcomings of those who should be its faithful witness in deed and word, draws from them contrariwise evidence of His infallible truth; to the end that what we believe we may with more assured conviction follow.

**[Voice: nei file ]**

[ 004 ] In Paris, gracious ladies, as I have heard tell, there was once a great merchant, a large dealer in drapery, a good man, most loyal and righteous, his name Jehannot de Chevigny, between whom and a Jew, Abraham by name, also a merchant, and a man of great wealth, as also most loyal and righteous, there subsisted a very close friendship. [ 005 ] Now Jehannot, observing Abraham's loyalty and rectitude, began to be sorely vexed in spirit that the soul of one so worthy and wise and good should perish for want of faith. [ 006 ] Wherefore he began in a friendly manner to plead with him, that he should leave the errors of the Jewish faith and turn to the Christian verity, which, being sound and holy, he might see daily prospering and gaining ground, whereas, on the contrary, his own religion was dwindling and was almost come to nothing. [ 007 ] The Jew replied that he believed that there was no faith sound and holy except the Jewish faith, in which he was born, and in which he meant to live and die; nor would anything ever turn him therefrom. [ 008 ] Nothing daunted, however, Jehannot some days afterwards began again to ply Abraham with similar arguments, explaining to him in such crude fashion as merchants use the reasons why our faith is better than the Jewish. [ 009 ] And though the Jew was a great master in the Jewish law, yet, whether it was by reason of his friendship for Jehannot, or that the Holy Spirit dictated the words that the simple merchant used, at any rate the Jew began to be much interested in Jehannot's arguments, though still too staunch in his faith to suffer himself to be converted. [ 010 ] But Jehannot was no less assiduous in plying him with argument than he was obstinate in adhering to his law, insomuch that at length the Jew, overcome by such incessant appeals, said: " Well, well, Jehannot, thou wouldst have me become a Christian, and I am disposed to do so, provided I first go to Rome and there see him whom thou callest God's vicar on earth, and observe what manner of life he leads and his brother cardinals with him; [ 011 ] and if such it be that thereby, in conjunction with thy words, I may understand that thy faith is better than mine, as thou hast sought to shew me, I will do as I have said: otherwise, I will remain as I am a Jew. " [ 012 ] When Jehannot heard this, he was greatly distressed, saying to himself: " I thought to have converted him; but now I see that the pains which I took for so excellent a purpose are all in vain; for, if he goes to the court of Rome and sees the iniquitous and foul life which the clergy lead there, so far from turning Christian, had he been converted already, he would without doubt relapse into Judaism. " [ 013 ] Then turning to Abraham he said: " Nay, my friend, why wouldst thou be at all this labour and great expense of travelling from here to Rome? to say nothing of the risks both by sea and by land which a rich man like thee must needs run. [ 014 ] Thinkest thou not to find here one that can give thee baptism? And as for any doubts that thou mayst have touching the faith to which I point thee, where wilt thou find greater masters and sages therein than here, to resolve thee of any question thou mayst put to them? [ 015 ] Wherefore in my opinion this journey of thine is superfluous. Think that the prelates there are such as thou mayst have seen here, nay, as much better as they are nearer to the Chief Pastor. And so, by my advice thou wilt spare thy pains until some time of indulgence, when I, perhaps, may be able to bear thee company.

" [ 016 ] The Jew replied: " Jehannot, I doubt not that so it is as thou sayst; but once and for all I tell thee that I am minded to go there, and will never otherwise do that which thou wouldst have me and hast so earnestly besought me to do. " [ 017 ] " Go then, " said Jehannot, seeing that his mind was made up, " and good luck go with thee; " and so he gave up the contest because nothing would be lost, though he felt sure that he would never become a Christian after seeing the court of Rome. [ 018 ] The Jew took horse, and posted with all possible speed to Rome; where on his arrival he was honourably received by his fellow Jews. [ 019 ] He said nothing to any one of the purpose for which he had come; but began circumspectly to acquaint himself with the ways of the Pope and the cardinals and the other prelates and all the courtiers; and from what he saw for himself, being a man of great intelligence, or learned from others, he discovered that without distinction of rank they were all sunk in the most disgraceful lewdness, sinning not only in the way of nature but after the manner of the men of Sodom, without any restraint of remorse or shame, in such sort that, when any great favour was to be procured, the influence of the courtesans and boys was of no small moment. [ 020 ] Moreover he found them one and all gluttonous, wine-bibbers, drunkards, and next after lewdness, most addicted to the shameless service of the belly, like brute beasts. [ 021 ] And, as he probed the matter still further, he perceived that they were all so greedy and avaricious that human, nay Christian blood, and things sacred of what kind soever, spiritualities no less than temporalities, they bought and sold for money; which traffic was greater and employed more brokers than the drapery trade and all the other trades of Paris put together; open simony and gluttonous excess being glossed under such specious terms as " arrangement " and " moderate use of creature comforts, " as if God could not penetrate the thoughts of even the most corrupt hearts, to say nothing of the signification of words, and would suffer Himself to be misled after the manner of men by the names of things. [ 022 ] Which matters, with many others which are not to be mentioned, our modest and sober-minded Jew found by no means to his liking, so that, his curiosity being fully satisfied, he was minded to return to Paris; which accordingly he did. [ 023 ] There, on his arrival, he was met by Jehannot; and the two made great cheer together. Jehannot expected Abraham's conversion least of all things, and allowed him some days of rest before he asked what he thought of the Holy Father and the cardinals and the other courtiers. [ 024 ] To which the Jew forthwith replied: " I think God owes them all an evil

recompense: I tell thee, so far as I was able to carry my investigations, holiness, devotion, good works or exemplary living in any kind was nowhere to be found in any clerk; but only lewdness, avarice, gluttony, and the like, and worse, if worse may be, appeared to be held in such honour of all, that (to my thinking) the place is a centre of diabolical rather than of divine activities. [ 025 ] To the best of my judgment, your Pastor, and by consequence all that are about him devote all their zeal and ingenuity and subtlety to devise how best and most speedily they may bring the Christian religion to nought and banish it from the world. [ 026 ] And because I see that what they so zealously endeavour does not come to pass, but that on the contrary your religion continually grows, and shines more and more clear, therein I seem to discern a very evident token that it, rather than any other, as being more true and holy than any other, has the Holy Spirit for its foundation and support. [ 027 ] For which cause, whereas I met your exhortations in a harsh and obdurate temper, and would not become a Christian, now I frankly tell you that I would on no account omit to become such. Go we then to the church, and there according to the traditional rite of your holy faith let me receive baptism. ” [ 028 ] Jehannot, who had anticipated a diametrically opposite conclusion, as soon as he heard him so speak, was the best pleased man that ever was in the world. So taking Abraham with him to Notre Dame he prayed the clergy there to baptise him. [ 029 ] When they heard that it was his own wish, they forthwith did so, and Jehannot raised him from the sacred font, and named him Jean; and afterwards he caused teachers of great eminence thoroughly to instruct him in our faith, which he readily learned, and afterwards practised in a good, a virtuous, nay, a holy life.

## Second Day - Introduction

### [Voice: author ]

[ 002 ] The sun was already trailing the new day in his wake of light, and the birds, blithely chanting their lays among the green boughs, carried the tidings to the ear, when with one accord all the ladies and the three young men arose, and entered the gardens, where for no little time they found their delight in sauntering about the dewy meads, straying hither and thither, culling flowers, and weaving them into fair garlands. [ 003 ] The day passed like its predecessor; they breakfasted in the shade, and danced and slept until noon, when they rose, and, at their queen's behest, assembled in the cool meadow, and sat them down in a circle about her. [ 004 ] Fair and very debonair she shewed, crowned with her laurel wreath, as for a brief space she scanned the company, and then bade Nei file shew others the way with a story. Nei file made no excuse, and gaily thus began.

## Second Day - Novel I

### [Voice: nei file ]

[ 001 ] Martellino pretends to be a paralytic, and makes it appear as if he were cured by being placed upon the body of St. Arrigo. His trick is detected; he is beaten and arrested, and is in peril of hanging, but finally escapes.

### [Voice: nei file ]

[ 002 ] Often has it happened, dearest ladies, that one who has studied to raise a laugh at others' expense, especially in regard of things worthy to be had in reverence, has found the laugh turn against himself, and sometimes to his loss: as, in obedience to the queen's command, and by way of introducing our theme, I am about to shew you, by the narrative of an adventure which befell one of our own citizens, and after a course of evil fortune had an entirely unexpected and very felicitous issue.

### [Voice: nei file ]

[ 003 ] Not long ago there was at Treviso a German, named Arrigo, a poor man who got his living as a common hired porter, but, though of so humble a condition, was respected by all, being accounted not only an honest but a most holy man; [ 004 ] insomuch that, whether truly or falsely I know not, the Trevisans affirm, that on his decease all the bells of the cathedral of Treviso began to toll of their own accord. [ 005 ] Which being accounted a miracle, this Arrigo was generally reputed a saint; and all the people of the city gathered before the house where his body lay, and bore it, with a saint's honours, into the cathedral, and brought thither the halt and paralytic and blind, and others afflicted with disease or bodily defects, as hoping that by contact with this holy body they would all be healed. [ 006 ] The people thus tumultuously thronging the church, it so chanced that there arrived in Treviso three of our own citizens, of whom one was named Stecchi, another Martellino, and the third Marchese; all three being men whose habit it was to frequent the courts of the nobles and afford spectators amusement by assuming disguises and personating other men. Being entire strangers to the place, and seeing everybody running to and fro, they were much astonished, and having learned the why and wherefore, were curious to go see what was to be seen. [ 007 ] So at the inn, where they put up, Marchese began: “ We would fain go see this saint; but for my part I know not how we are to reach the spot, for I hear the piazza is full of Germans and other armed men, posted there by the Lord who rules here to prevent an uproar, and moreover the church, so far as one may learn, is so full of folk that scarce another soul may enter it. ” [ 008 ] Whereupon Martellino, who was bent on seeing what was to be seen, said: “ Let not this deter us; I will assuredly find a way of getting to the saint's body. ” [ 009 ] “ How? ” rejoined Marchese. [ 010 ] “ I will tell you, ” replied Martellino; “ I will counterfeit a paralytic, and thou wilt support me on one side and Stecchi on the other, as if I were not able to go alone, and so you will enter the church, making it appear as if you were leading me up to the body of the saint that he may heal me, and all that see will make way and give us free passage. ” [ 011 ] Marchese and Stecchi approved the plan; so all three forthwith left the inn and repaired to a lonely place, where Martellino distorted his hands, his fingers, his arms, his legs, and also his mouth and eyes and his entire face in a manner horrible to contemplate; so that no stranger that saw him could have doubted that he was impotent and paralysed in every part of his body. [ 012 ] In this guise Marchese and Stecchi laid hold of him, and led him towards the church, assuming a most piteous air, and humbly beseeching everybody for God's sake to make way for them. Their request was readily granted; and, in short, observed by all, and crying out at almost every step, “ make way, make way, ” they reached the place where St. Arrigo's body was laid. Whereupon some gentlemen who stood by hoisted Martellino on to the saint's body, that thereby he might receive the boon of health. [ 013 ] There he lay still for a while, the eyes of all in the church being riveted upon him in expectation of the result; then, being a very practised performer, he stretched, first, one of his fingers, next a hand, afterwards an arm, and so forth, making as if he gradually recovered the use of all his natural powers. Which the people observing raised such a clamour in honour of St. Arrigo that even thunder would have been inaudible. [ 014 ] Now it chanced that hard by stood a Florentine, who knew Martellino well, though he had failed to recognise him, when, in such strange guise, he was led into the church; but now, seeing him resume his natural shape, the Florentine recognised him, and at once said with a laugh: “ God's curse upon him. Who that saw him come but would have believed that he was really paralysed? ” [ 015 ] These words were overheard by some of the Trevisans, who began forthwith to question the Florentine. “ How? ” said they; “ was he then not paralysed? ” [ 016 ] “ No, by God! ” returned the Florentine; “ he has always been as straight as any of us; he has merely shewn you that he knows better than any man alive how to play this trick of putting on any counterfeit semblance that he chooses. ” [ 017 ] Thereupon the Trevisans, without further parley,

made a rush, clearing the way and crying out as they went: "Seize this traitor who mocks at God and His saints; who, being no paralytic, has come hither in the guise of a paralytic to deride our patron saint and us." [ 018 ] So saying, they laid hands on him, dragged him down from where he stood, seized him by the hair, tore the clothes from his back, and fell to beating and kicking him, so that it seemed to him as if all the world were upon him. [ 019 ] He cried out: "Pity, for God's sake," and defended himself as best he could: all in vain, however; the press became thicker and thicker moment by moment. [ 020 ] Which Stecchi and Marchese observing began to say one to the other that 'twas a bad business; yet, being apprehensive on their own account, they did not venture to come to his assistance, but cried out with the rest that he ought to die, at the same time, however, casting about how they might find the means to rescue him from the hands of the people, who would certainly have killed him, but for a diversion which Marchese hastily effected. [ 021 ] The entire posse of the signory being just outside, he ran off at full speed to the Podestà's lieutenant, and said to him: "Help, for God's sake; there is a villain here that has cut my purse with full a hundred florins of gold in it; prithee have him arrested that I may have my own again." [ 022 ] Whereupon, twelve sergeants or more ran forthwith to the place where hapless Martellino was being carded without a comb, and, forcing their way with the utmost difficulty through the throng, rescued him all bruised and battered from their hands, and led him to the palace; whither he was followed by many who, resenting what he had done, and hearing that he was arrested as a cutpurse, and lacking better pretext for harassing him, began one and all to charge him with having cut their purses. [ 023 ] All which the deputy of the Podestà had no sooner heard, than, being a harsh man, he straightway took Martellino aside and began to examine him. [ 024 ] Martellino answered his questions in a bantering tone, making light of the arrest; whereat the deputy, losing patience, had him bound to the strappado, and caused him to receive a few hints of the cord with intent to extort from him a confession of his guilt, by way of preliminary to hanging him. [ 025 ] Taken down from the strappado, and questioned by the deputy if what his accusers said were true, Martellino, as nothing was to be gained by denial, answered: "My lord, I am ready to confess the truth; let but my accusers say, each of them, when and where I cut his purse, and I will tell you what I have and what I have not done." [ 026 ] "So be it," said the deputy, and caused a few of them to be summoned. Whereupon Martellino, being charged with having cut this, that or the other man's purse eight, six or four days ago, while others averred that he had cut their purses that very day, [ 027 ] answered thus: "My lord, these men lie in the throat, and for token that I speak true, I tell you that, so far from having been here as long as they make out, it is but very lately that I came into these parts, where I never was before; and no sooner was I come, than, as my ill-luck would have it, I went to see the body of this saint, and so have been carded as you see; and that what I say is true, his Lordship's intendant of arrivals, and his book, and also my host may certify. [ 028 ] Wherefore, if you find that even so it is as I say, hearken not to these wicked men, and spare me the torture and death which they would have you inflict." [ 029 ] In this posture of affairs Marchese and Stecchi, learning that the Podestà's deputy was dealing rigorously with Martellino, and had already put him to the strappado, grew mightily alarmed. "We have made a mess of it," they said to themselves; "we have only taken him out of the frying-pan to toss him into the fire." [ 030 ] So, hurrying hither and thither with the utmost zeal, they made diligent search until they found their host, and told him how matters stood. The host had his laugh over the affair, and then brought them to one Sandro Agolanti, who dwelt in Treviso and had great interest with the Lord of the place. The host laid the whole matter before Sandro, and, backed by Marchese and Stecchi, besought him to undertake Martellino's cause. [ 031 ] Sandro, after many a hearty laugh, hied him to the Lord, who at his instance sent for Martellino. The messengers found Martellino still in his shirt before the deputy, at his wits' end, and all but beside himself with fear, because the deputy would hear nothing that he said in his defence. Indeed, the deputy, having a spite against Florentines, had quite made up his mind to have him hanged; he was therefore in the last degree reluctant to surrender him to the Lord, and only did so upon compulsion. [ 032 ] Brought at length before the Lord, Martellino detailed to him the whole affair, and prayed him as the greatest of favours to let him depart in peace. [ 033 ] The Lord had a hearty laugh over the adventure, and bestowed a tunic on each of the three. So, congratulating themselves on their unexpected deliverance from so great a peril, they returned home safe and sound.

### Third Day - Introduction

#### [Voice: author]

[ 002 ] The dawn of Sunday was already changing from vermilion to orange, as the sun hasted to the horizon, when the queen rose and roused all the company. The seneschal had early sent forward to their next place of sojourn ample store of things meet with folk to make all things ready, and now seeing the queen on the road, and the decampment, as it were, begun, he hastily completed the equipment of the baggage-train, and set off therewith, attended by the rest of the servants, in rear of the ladies and gentlemen. [ 003 ] So, to the chant of, perhaps, a score of nightingales and other birds, the queen, her ladies and the three young men trooping beside or after her, paced leisurely westward by a path little frequented and overgrown with herbage and flowers, which, as they caught the sunlight, began one and all to unfold their petals. So fared she on with her train, while the quirk and the jest and the laugh passed from mouth to mouth; nor had they completed more than two thousand paces when, well before half tierce, they arrived at a palace most fair and sumptuous, which stood out somewhat from the plain, being situate upon a low eminence. [ 004 ] On entering, they first traversed its great halls and dainty chambers furnished throughout with all brave and meet appointments; and finding all most commendable, they reputed its lord a magnifico. Then descending, they surveyed its spacious and cheerful court, its vaults of excellent wines and copious springs of most cool water, and found it still more commendable. After which, being fain of rest, they sat them down in a gallery which commanded the court, and was close imbosked with leafage and such flowers as the season afforded, and thither the discreet seneschal brought comfits and wines most choice and excellent, wherewith they were refreshed. [ 005 ] Whereupon they hied them to a walled garden adjoining the palace; which, the gate being opened, they entered, and wonder-struck by the beauty of the whole passed on to examine more attentively the several parts. [ 006 ] It was bordered and traversed in many parts by alleys, each very wide and straight as an arrow and roofed in with trellis of vines, which gave good promise of bearing clusters that year, and, being all in flower, seemed such fragrance throughout the garden as blended with that exhaled by many another plant that grew therein made the garden seem redolent of all the spices that ever grew in the East. The sides of the alleys were all, as it were, walled in with roses white and red and jasmine; insomuch that there was no part of the garden but one might walk there not merely in the morning but at high noon in grateful shade and fragrance, completely screened from the sun. [ 007 ] As for the plants that were in the garden, 'twere long to enumerate them, to specify their sorts, to describe the order of their arrangement; enough, in brief, that there was abundance of every rarer species that our climate allows. [ 008 ] In the middle of the garden, a thing not less but much more to be commended than aught else, was a lawn of the finest turf, and so green that it seemed almost black, pranked with flowers of, perhaps, a thousand sorts, and girt about with the richest living verdure of orange-trees and cedars, which shewed not only flowers but fruits both new and old, and were no less grateful to the smell by their fragrance than to the eye by their shade. [ 009 ] In the middle of the lawn was a basin of whitest marble, graven with marvellous art; in the centre whereof--whether the spring were natural or artificial I know not--rose a column supporting a figure which sent forth a jet of water of such volume and to such an altitude that it fell, not

without a delicious splash, into the basin in quantity amply sufficient to turn a mill-wheel. [ 010 ] The over flow was carried away from the lawn by a hidden conduit, and then, reemerging, was distributed through tiny channels, very fair and cunningly contrived, in such sort as to flow round the entire lawn, and by similar derivative channels to penetrate almost every part of the fair garden, until, reuniting at a certain point, it issued thence, and, clear as crystal, slid down towards the plain, turning by the way two mill-wheels with extreme velocity to the no small profit of the lord. [ 011 ] The aspect of this garden, its fair order, the plants and the fountain and the rivulets that flowed from it, so charmed the ladies and the three young men that with one accord they affirmed that they knew not how it could receive any accession of beauty, or what other form could be given to Paradise, if it were to be planted on earth. [ 012 ] So, excellently well pleased, they roved about it, plucking sprays from the trees, and weaving them into the fairest of garlands, while songsters of, perhaps, a score of different sorts warbled as if in mutual emulation, when suddenly a sight as fair and delightful as a novel, which, engrossed by the other beauties of the place, they had hitherto overlooked, met their eyes. [ 013 ] For the garden, they now saw, was peopled with a host of living creatures, fair and of, perhaps, a hundred sorts; and they pointed out to one another how here emerged a cony, or there scampered a hare, or couched a goat, or grazed a fawn, or many another harmless, all but domesticated, creature roved carelessly seeking his pleasure at his own sweet will. All which served immensely to reinforce their already abundant delight. [ 014 ] At length, however, they had enough of wandering about the garden and observing this thing and that: wherefore they repaired to the beautiful fountain, around which were ranged the tables, and there, after they had sung half-a-dozen songs and trod some measures, they sat them down, at the queen's command, to breakfast, which was served with all celerity and in fair and orderly manner, the viands being both good and delicate; whereby their spirits rose, and up they got, and betook themselves again to music and song and dance, and so sped the hours, until, as the heat increased, the queen deemed it time that whoso was so minded should go to sleep. [ 015 ] Some there were that did so; others were too charmed by the beauty of the place to think of leaving it; but tarried there, and, while the rest slept, amused themselves with reading romances or playing at chess or dice. [ 016 ] However, after none, there was a general levée; and, with faces laved and refreshed with cold water, they gathered by the queen's command upon the lawn, and, having sat them down in their wonted order by the fountain, waited for the story-telling to begin upon the theme assigned by the queen. With this duty the queen first charged Filostrato, who began on this wise.

### Third Day - Novel I

#### [Voice: filostrato ]

[ 001 ] Masetto da Lamporecchio feigns to be dumb, and obtains a gardener's place at a convent of women, who with one accord make haste to lie with him.

#### [Voice: filostrato ]

[ 002 ] Fairest ladies, not a few there are both of men and of women, who are so foolish as blindly to believe that, so soon as a young woman has been veiled in white and cowed in black, she ceases to be a woman, and is no more subject to the cravings proper to her sex, than if, in assuming the garb and profession of a nun, she had put on the nature of a stone: [ 003 ] and if, perchance, they hear of aught that is counter to this their faith, they are no less vehement in their censure than if some most heinous and unnatural crime had been committed; neither bethinking them of themselves, whom unrestricted liberty avails not to satisfy, nor making due allowance for the prepotent forces of idleness and solitude. [ 004 ] And likewise not a few there are that blindly believe that, what with the hoe and the spade and coarse fare and hardship, the carnal propensities are utterly eradicated from the tillers of the soil, and therewith all nimbleness of wit and understanding. [ 005 ] But how gross is the error of such as so suppose, I, on whom the queen has laid her commands, am minded, without deviating from the theme prescribed by her, to make manifest to you by a little story.

#### [Voice: filostrato ]

[ 006 ] In this very country-side of ours there was and yet is a convent of women of great repute for sanctity--name it I will not, lest I should in some measure diminish its repute--the nuns being at the time of which I speak but nine in number, including the abbess, and all young women. Their very beautiful garden was in charge of a foolish fellow, who, not being content with his wage, squared accounts with their steward, and hied him back to Lamporecchio, whence he came. [ 007 ] Among others who welcomed him home was a young husbandman, Masetto by name, a stout and hardy fellow, and handsome for a contadino, who asked him where he had been so long. Nuto, as our good friend was called, told him. Masetto then asked how he had been employed at the convent, [ 008 ] and Nuto answered: " I kept their large and beautiful garden in good trim, and, besides, I sometimes went to the wood to fetch the faggots, I drew water, and did some other trifling services; but the ladies gave so little wage that it scarce kept me in shoes. [ 009 ] And moreover they are all young, and, I think, they are one and all possessed of the devil, for 'tis impossible to do anything to their mind; indeed, when I would be at work in the kitchen-garden, 'put this here,' would say one, 'put that here,' would say another, and a third would snatch the hoe from my hand, and say, 'that is not as it should be'; and so they would worry me until I would give up working and go out of the garden; so that, what with this thing and that, I was minded to stay there no more, and so I am come hither. [ 010 ] The steward asked me before I left to send him any one whom on my return I might find fit for the work, and I promised; but God bless his loins, I shall be at no pains to find out and send him any one. "

#### [Voice: filostrato ]

[ 011 ] As Nuto thus ran on, Masetto was seized by such a desire to be with these nuns that he quite pined, as he gathered from what Nuto said that his desire might be gratified. And as that could not be, if he said nothing to Nuto, he remarked: " Ah! 'twas well done of thee to come hither. A man to live with women! he might as well live with so many devils: six times out of seven they know not themselves what they want. " [ 012 ] There the conversation ended; but Masetto began to cast about how he should proceed to get permission to live with them. He knew that he was quite competent for the services of which Nuto spoke, and had therefore no fear of failing on that score; but he doubted he should not be received, because he was too young and well-favoured. So, after much pondering, he fell into the following train of thought: The place is a long way off, and no one there knows me; if I make believe that I am dumb, doubtless I shall be admitted. [ 013 ] Whereupon he made his mind up, laid a hatchet across his shoulder, and saying not a word to any of his destination, set forth, intending to present himself at the convent in the character of a destitute man. Arrived there, he had no sooner entered than he chanced to encounter the steward in the courtyard, and making signs to him as dumb folk do, he let him know that of his charity he craved something to eat, and that, if need were, he would split firewood. [ 014 ] The steward promptly gave him to eat, and then set before him some logs which Nuto had not been able to split, all which Masetto, who was very strong, split in a very short time. [ 015 ] The steward, having occasion to go to the wood, took him with him, and there set him at work on the lopping; which done he placed the ass in front of him, and by signs made him understand that he was to take the loppings back to the convent. This he did so well that the steward kept him for some days to do one or two odd jobs. Whereby it so befell that one day the abbess saw him, and asked the steward who he was. [ 016 ] " Madam, " replied the steward, " 'tis a poor deaf mute that came here a day or two ago craving alms, so I have treated him kindly, and have let him make himself useful in many ways. If he knew how to do

the work of the kitchen-garden and would stay with us, I doubt not we should be well served; for we have need of him, and he is strong, and would be able for whatever he might turn his hand to; besides which you would have no cause to be apprehensive lest he should be cracking his jokes with your young women." [ 017 ] "As I trust in God," said the abbess, "thou sayst sooth; find out if he can do the garden work, and if he can, do all thou canst to keep him with us; give him a pair of shoes, an old hood, and speak him well, make much of him, and let him be well fed." [ 018 ] All which the steward promised to do.

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

Masetto, meanwhile, was close at hand, making as if he were sweeping the courtyard, and heard all that passed between the abbess and the steward, whereat he gleefully communed with himself on this wise: Put me once within there, and you will see that I will do the work of the kitchen-garden as it never was done before. [ 019 ] So the steward set him to work in the kitchen-garden, and finding that he knew his business excellently well, made signs to him to know whether he would stay, and he made answer by signs that he was ready to do whatever the steward wished. The steward then signified that he was engaged, told him to take charge of the kitchen-garden, and shewed him what he had to do there. Then, having other matters to attend to, he went away, and left him there. [ 020 ] Now, as Masetto worked there day by day, the nuns began to tease him, and make him their butt (as it commonly happens that folk serve the dumb) and used bad language to him, the worst they could think of, supposing that he could not understand them: all which passed scarce heeded by the abbess, who perhaps deemed him as destitute of virility as of speech. [ 021 ] Now it so befell that after a hard day's work he was taking a little rest, when two young nuns, who were walking in the garden, approached the spot where he lay, and stopped to look at him, while he pretended to be asleep. And so the bolder of the two said to the other: "If I thought thou wouldst keep the secret, I would tell thee what I have sometimes meditated, and which thou perhaps mightest also find agreeable." [ 022 ] The other replied: "Speak thy mind freely and be sure that I will never tell a soul." [ 023 ] Whereupon the bold one began: "I know not if thou hast ever considered how close we are kept here, and that within these precincts dare never enter any man, unless it be the old steward or this mute: and I have often heard from ladies that have come hither, that all the other sweets that the world has to offer signify not a jot in comparison of the pleasure that a woman has in connexion with a man. [ 024 ] Whereof I have more than once been minded to make experiment with this mute, no other man being available. Nor, indeed, could one find any man in the whole world so meet therefor; seeing that he could not blab if he would; thou seest that he is but a dull clownish lad, whose size has increased out of all proportion to his sense; wherefore I would fain hear what thou hast to say to it." [ 025 ] "Alas!" said the other, "what is 't thou sayst? Knowest thou not that we have vowed our virginity to God?" [ 026 ] "Oh," rejoined the first, "think but how many vows are made to Him all day long, and never a one performed: and so, for our vow, let Him find another or others to perform it." [ 027 ] "But," said her companion, "suppose that we conceived, how then?" [ 028 ] "Nay but," protested the first, "thou goest about to imagine evil before it befalls thee: time enough to think of that when it comes to pass; there will be a thousand ways to prevent its ever being known, so only we do not publish it ourselves." [ 029 ] Thus reassured, the other was now the more eager of the two to test the quality of the male human animal. "Well then," she said, "how shall we go about it?" [ 030 ] and was answered: "Thou seest 'tis past none; I make no doubt but all the sisters are asleep, except ourselves; search we through the kitchen-garden, to see if there be any there, and if there be none, we have but to take him by the hand and lead him hither to the hut where he takes shelter from the rain; and then one shall mount guard while the other has him with her inside. He is such a simpleton that he will do just whatever we bid him." [ 031 ] No word of this conversation escaped Masetto, who, being disposed to obey, hoped for nothing so much as that one of them should take him by the hand. They, meanwhile, looked carefully all about them, and satisfied themselves that they were secure from observation: then she that had broached the subject came close up to Masetto, and shook him; whereupon he started to his feet. So she took him by the hand with a blandishing air, to which he replied with some clownish grins. And then she led him into the hut, where he needed no pressing to do what she desired of him. [ 032 ] Which done, she changed places with the other, as loyal comradeship required; and Masetto, still keeping up the pretence of simplicity, did their pleasure. Wherefore before they left, each must needs make another assay of the mute's powers of riding; and afterwards, talking the matter over many times, they agreed that it was in truth not less but even more delightful than they had been given to understand; and so, as they found convenient opportunity, they continued to go and disport themselves with the mute.

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

[ 033 ] Now it so chanced that one of their gossips, looking out of the window of her cell, saw what they did, and imparted it to two others. The three held counsel together whether they should not denounce the offenders to the abbess, but soon changed their mind, and came to an understanding with them, whereby they became partners in Masetto. And in course of time by divers chances the remaining three nuns also entered the partnership. [ 034 ] Last of all the abbess, still witting nought of these doings, happened one very hot day, as she walked by herself through the garden, to find Masetto, who now rode so much by night that he could stand very little fatigue by day, stretched at full length asleep under the shade of an almond-tree, his person quite exposed in front by reason that the wind had disarranged his clothes. [ 035 ] Which the lady observing, and knowing that she was alone, fell a prey to the same appetite to which her nuns had yielded: she aroused Masetto, and took him with her to her chamber, where, for some days, though the nuns loudly complained that the gardener no longer came to work in the kitchen-garden, she kept him, tasting and re-tasting the sweetness of that indulgence which she was wont to be the first to censure in others. [ 036 ] And when at last she had sent him back from her chamber to his room, she must needs send for him again and again, and made such exorbitant demands upon him, that Masetto, not being able to satisfy so many women, bethought him that his part of mute, should he persist in it, might entail disastrous consequences. So one night, when he was with the abbess, he cut the tongue-string, and thus broke silence: [ 037 ] "Madam, I have understood that a cock may very well serve ten hens, but that ten men are sorely tasked to satisfy a single woman; and here am I expected to serve nine, a burden quite beyond my power to bear; nay, by what I have already undergone I am now so reduced that my strength is quite spent; wherefore either bid me Godspeed, or find some means to make matters tolerable." [ 038 ] Wonder-struck to hear the supposed mute thus speak, the lady exclaimed: "What means this? I took thee to be dumb." [ 039 ] "And in sooth, Madam, so was I," said Masetto, "not indeed from my birth, but through an illness which took from me the power of speech, which only this very night have I recovered; and so I praise God with all my heart." [ 040 ] The lady believed him; and asked him what he meant by saying that he had nine to serve. Masetto told her how things stood; whereby she perceived that of all her nuns there was not any but was much wiser than she; and lest, if Masetto were sent away, he should give the convent a bad name, she discreetly determined to arrange matters with the nuns in such sort that he might remain there. [ 041 ] So, the steward having died within the last few days, she assembled all the nuns; and their and her own past errors being fully avowed, they by common consent, and with Masetto's concurrence, resolved that the neighbours should be given to understand that by their prayers and the merits of their patron saint, Masetto, long mute, had recovered the power of speech; after which they made him steward, and so ordered matters among themselves that he was able to endure the burden of their service. [ 042 ] In the course of which, though he procreated not a few little monastics, yet 'twas all managed so discreetly that no breath of scandal stirred, until after the abbess's death, by which time Masetto was advanced in years and minded to return home with the wealth that he had gotten; which he was suffered to do as soon as he made

his desire known. [ 043 ] And so Masetto, who had left Lamporecchio with a hatchet on his shoulder, returned thither in his old age rich and a father, having by the wisdom with which he employed his youth, spared himself the pains and expense of rearing children, and averring that such was the measure that Christ meted out to the man that set horns on his cap.

### Third Day - Novel II

#### **[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 001 ] A groom lies with the wife of King Agilulf, who learns the fact, keeps his own counsel, finds out the groom and shears him. The shorn shears all his fellows, and so comes safe out of the scrape.

[Voice: author ]

[ 002 ] Filostrato's story, which the ladies had received now with blushes now with laughter, being ended, the queen bade Pampinea follow suit. Which behest Pampinea smilingly obeyed, and thus began:

[Voice: pampinea ]

[ 003 ] Some there are whose indiscretion is such that they must needs evince that they are fully cognizant of that which it were best they should not know, and censuring the covert misdeeds of others, augment beyond measure the disgrace which they would fain diminish. The truth whereof, fair ladies, I mean to shew you in the contrary case, wherein appears the astuteness of one that held, perhaps, an even lower place than would have been Masetto's in the esteem of a doughty king.

#### **[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 004 ] Agilulf, King of the Lombards, who like his predecessors made the city of Pavia in Lombardy the seat of his government, took to wife Theodelinde, the widow of Authari, likewise King of the Lombards, a lady very fair, wise and virtuous, but who was unfortunate in her lover. [ 005 ] For while the Lombards prospered in peace under the wise and firm rule of King Agilulf, it so befell that one of the Queen's grooms, a man born to very low estate, but in native worth far above his mean office, and moreover not a whit less tall and goodly of person than the King, became inordinately enamoured of her. [ 006 ] And as, for all his base condition, he had sense enough to recognize that his love was in the last degree presumptuous, he disclosed it to none, nay, he did not even venture to tell her the tale by the mute eloquence of his eyes. [ 007 ] And albeit he lived without hope that he should ever be able to win her favour, yet he inwardly gloried that he had fixed his affections in so high a place; and being all a flame with passion, he shewed himself zealous beyond any of his comrades to do whatever he thought was likely to please the Queen. [ 008 ] Whereby it came about, that, when the Queen had to take horse, she would mount the palfrey that he groomed rather than any other; and when she did so, he deemed himself most highly favoured, and never quitted her stirrup, esteeming himself happy if he might but touch her clothes. [ 009 ] But as 'tis frequently observed that love waxes as hope wanes, so was it with this poor groom, insomuch that the burden of this great hidden passion, alleviated by no hope, was most grievous to bear, and from time to time, not being able to shake it off, he purposed to die. [ 010 ] And meditating on the mode, he was minded that it should be of a kind to make it manifest that he died for the love which he had borne and bore to the Queen, and also to afford him an opportunity of trying his fortune whether his desire might in whole or in part be gratified. [ 011 ] He had no thought of speaking to the Queen, nor yet of declaring his love to her by letter, for he knew that 'twould be vain either to speak or to write; but he resolved to try to devise some means whereby he might lie with the Queen; which end might in no other way be compassed than by contriving to get access to her in her bedroom; which could only be by passing himself off as the King, who, as he knew, did not always lie with her. [ 012 ] Wherefore, that he might observe the carriage and dress of the King as he passed to her room, he contrived to conceal himself for several nights in a great hall of the King's palace which separated the King's room from that of the Queen: and on one of these nights he saw the King issue from his room, wrapped in a great mantle, with a lighted torch in one hand and a wand in the other, and cross the hall, and, saying nothing, tap the door of the Queen's room with the wand once or twice; whereupon the door was at once opened and the torch taken from his hand. [ 013 ] Having observed the King thus go and return, and being bent on doing likewise, he found means to come by a mantle like that which he had seen the King wear, and also a torch and a wand: he then took a warm bath, and having thoroughly cleansed himself, that the smell of the foul straw might not offend the lady, or discover to her the deceit, he in this guise concealed himself as he was wont in the great hall. [ 014 ] He waited only until all were asleep, and then, deeming the time come to accomplish his purpose, or by his presumption clear a way to the death which he coveted, he struck a light with the flint and steel which he had brought with him; and having kindled his torch and wrapped himself close in his mantle, he went to the door of the Queen's room, and tapped on it twice with his wand. [ 015 ] The door was opened by a very drowsy chambermaid, who took the torch and put it out of sight; whereupon without a word he passed within the curtain, laid aside the mantle, and got into the bed where the Queen lay asleep. [ 016 ] Then, taking her in his arms and straining her to him with ardour, making as if he were moody, because he knew that, when the King was in such a frame, he would never hear aught, in such wise, without word said either on his part or on hers, he had more than once carnal cognizance of the Queen. Loath indeed was he to leave her, but, fearing lest by too long tarrying his achieved delight might be converted into woe, he rose, resumed the mantle and the light, and leaving the room without a word, returned with all speed to his bed. [ 017 ] He was hardly there when the King got up and entered the Queen's room; whereat she wondered not a little; but, reassured by the gladsome greeting which he gave her as he got into bed, she said: " My lord, what a surprise is this to-night! 'Twas but now you left me after an unwanted measure of enjoyment, and do you now return so soon? consider what you do. " [ 018 ] From these words the King at once inferred that the Queen had been deceived by some one that had counterfeited his person and carriage; but, at the same time, bethinking himself that, as neither the Queen nor any other had detected the cheat, 'twas best to leave her in ignorance, he wisely kept silence. Which many a fool would not have done, but would have said: " Nay, 'twas not I that was here. Who was it that was here? How came it to pass? Who came hither? " [ 019 ] Whereby in the sequel he might have caused the lady needless chagrin, and given her occasion to desire another such experience as she had had; and so have brought disgrace upon himself by uttering that, from which, unuttered, no shame could have resulted. [ 020 ] Wherefore, betraying little, either by his mien or by his words, of the disquietude which he felt, the King replied: " Madam, seem I such to you that you cannot suppose that I should have been with you once, and returned to you immediately afterwards? " [ 021 ] " Nay, not so, my lord, " returned the lady, " but none the less I pray you to look to your health. " [ 022 ] Then said the King: " And I am minded to take your advice; wherefore, without giving you further trouble I will leave you. " [ 023 ] So, angered and incensed beyond measure by the trick which, he saw, had been played upon him, he resumed his mantle and quitted the room with the intention of privily detecting the offender, deeming that he must belong to the palace, and that, whoever he might be, he could not have quitted it. [ 024 ] So, taking with him a small lantern which shewed only a glimmer of light, he went into the dormitory which was over the palace-stables and was of great length, insomuch that well-nigh all the men-servants slept there in divers beds, and arguing that, by whomsoever that of which the Queen spoke was done, his heart and pulse could not after such a strain as yet have ceased to throb, he began cautiously with one of the head-grooms, and so went from bed to bed feeling at the heart of each man to see if it was thumping. [ 025 ] All were asleep, save only he that had been with the Queen,



who, seeing the King come, and guessing what he sought to discover, began to be mightily afraid, insomuch that to the agitation which his late exertion had communicated to his heart, terror now added one yet more violent; nor did he doubt that, should the King perceive it, he would kill him. [ 026 ] Divers alternatives of action thronged his mind; but at last, observing that the King was unarmed, he resolved to make as if he were asleep, and wait to see what the King would do. So, having tried many and found none that he deemed the culprit, the King came at last to the culprit himself, and marking the thumping of his heart, said to himself: This is he. [ 027 ] But being minded to afford no clue to his ulterior purpose, he did no more than with a pair of scissors which he had brought with him shear away on one side of the man's head a portion of his locks, which, as was then the fashion, he wore very long, that by this token he might recognize him on the morrow; and having so done, he departed and returned to his room. [ 028 ] The groom, who was fully sensible of what the King had done, and being a shrewd fellow understood very well to what end he was so marked, got up without a moment's delay; and, having found a pair of scissors--for, as it chanced, there were several pairs there belonging to the stables for use in grooming the horses--he went quietly through the dormitory and in like manner sheared the locks of each of the sleepers just above the ear; which done without disturbing any, he went back to bed.

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 029 ] On the morrow, as soon as the King was risen, and before the gates of the palace were opened, he summoned all his men-servants to his presence, and, as they stood bareheaded before him, scanned them closely to see whether the one whom he had sheared was there; and observing with surprise that the more part of them were all sheared in the same manner, said to himself: Of a surety this fellow, whom I go about to detect, evinces, for all his base condition, a high degree of sense. [ 030 ] Then, recognising that he could not compass his end without causing a bruit, and not being minded to brave so great a dishonour in order to be avenged upon so petty an offender, he was content by a single word of admonition to shew him that his offence had not escaped notice. Wherefore turning to them all, he said: " He that did it, let him do it no more, and get you hence in God's peace. " [ 031 ] Another would have put them to the strappado, the question, the torture, and thereby have brought to light that which one should rather be sedulously to cloak; and having so brought it to light, would, however complete the retribution which he exacted, have not lessened but vastly augmented his disgrace, and sullied the fair fame of his lady. Those who heard the King's parting admonition wondered, and made much question with one another, what the King might have meant to convey by it; but 'twas understood by none but him to whom it referred: who was discreet enough never to reveal the secret as long as the King lived, or again to stake his life on such a venture.

Fourth Day - Introduction

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 002 ] Dearest ladies, as well from what I heard in converse with the wise, as from matters that not seldom fell within my own observation and reading, I formed the opinion that the vehement and scorching blast of envy was apt to vent itself only upon lofty towers or the highest tree-tops: but therein I find that I misjudged; [ 003 ] for, whereas I ever sought and studied how best to elude the buffeting of that furious hurricane, and to that end kept a course not merely on the plain, but, by preference, in the depth of the valley; as should be abundantly clear to whoso looks at these little stories, written as they are not only in the vulgar Florentine, and in prose, and without dedicatory flourish, but also in as homely and simple a style as may be; [ 004 ] nevertheless all this has not stood me in such stead but that I have been shrewdly shaken, nay, all but uprooted by the blast, and altogether lacerated by the bite of this same envy. Whereby I may very well understand that 'tis true, what the sages aver, that only misery is exempt from envy in the present life. [ 005 ] Know then, discreet my ladies, that some there are, who, reading these little stories, have alleged that I am too fond of you, and that 'tis not a seemly thing that I should take so much pleasure in ministering to your gratification and solace; and some have found more fault with me for praising you as I do. [ 006 ] Others, affecting to deliver a more considered judgment, have said that it ill befits my time of life to ensue such matters, to wit, the discoursing of women, or endeavouring to pleasure them. And not a few, feigning a mighty tender regard to my fame, aver that I should do more wisely to keep ever with the Muses on Parnassus, than to forgather with you in such vain dalliance. [ 007 ] Those again there are, who, evincing less wisdom than despite, have told me that I should shew sounder sense if I bethought me how to get my daily bread, than, going after these idle toys, to nourish myself upon the wind; while certain others, in disparagement of my work, strive might and main to make it appear that the matters which I relate fell out otherwise than as I set them forth. [ 008 ] Such then, noble ladies, are the blasts, such the sharp and cruel fangs, by which, while I champion your cause, I am assailed, harassed and well-nigh pierced through and through. [ 009 ] Which censures I hear and mark, God knows, with equal mind: and, though to you belongs all my defence, yet I mean not to be niggard of my own powers, but rather, without dealing out to them the castigation they deserve, to give them such slight answer as may secure my ears some respite of their clamour; and that without delay; [ 010 ] seeing that, if already, though I have not completed the third part of my work, they are not a few and very presumptuous, I deem it possible, that before I have reached the end, should they receive no check, they may have grown so numerous, that 'twould scarce tax their powers to sink me; and that your forces, great though they be, would not suffice to withstand them. [ 011 ] However I am minded to answer none of them, until I have related in my behoof, not indeed an entire story, for I would not seem to foist my stories in among those of so honourable a company as that with which I have made you acquainted, but a part of one, that its very incompleteness may shew that it is not one of them: wherefore, addressing my assailants, I say: [ 012 ] That in our city there was in old time a citizen named Filippo Balducci, a man of quite low origin, but of good substance and well versed and expert in matters belonging to his condition, who had a wife that he most dearly loved, as did she him, so that their life passed in peace and concord, nor there was aught they studied so much as how to please each other perfectly. [ 013 ] Now it came to pass, as it does to every one, that the good lady departed this life, leaving Filippo nought of hers but an only son, that she had had by him, and who was then about two years old. [ 014 ] His wife's death left Filippo as disconsolate as ever was any man for the loss of a loved one: and sorely missing the companionship that was most dear to him, he resolved to have done with the world, and devote himself and his little son to the service of God. [ 015 ] Wherefore, having dedicated all his goods to charitable uses, he forthwith betook him to the summit of Monte Asinaio, where he installed himself with his son in a little cell, and living on alms, passed his days in fasting and prayer, being careful above all things to say nothing to the boy of any temporal matters, nor to let him see aught of the kind, lest they should distract his mind from his religious exercises, but discoursing with him continually of the glory of the life eternal and of God and the saints, and teaching him nought else but holy orisons: in which way of life he kept him not a few years, never suffering him to quit the cell or see aught but himself. [ 016 ] From time to time the worthy man would go Florence, where divers of the faithful would afford him relief according to his needs, and so he would return to his cell. [ 017 ] And thus it fell out that one day Filippo, now an aged man, being asked by the boy, who was about eighteen years old, whither he went, told him. Whereupon: " Father, " said the boy, " you are now old, and scarce able to support fatigue; why take you me not with you for once to Florence, and give me to know devout friends of God and you, so that I, who am young and fitter for such exertion than you, may thereafter go to Florence for our supplies at your pleasure, and you remain here? "

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 018 ] The worthy man, bethinking him that his son was now grown up, and so habituated to the service of God as hardly to be seduced by the things of the world, said to himself: " He says tell. " And so, as he must needs go to Florence, he took the boy with him. [ 019 ] Where, seeing the palaces, the houses, the churches, and all matters else with which the city abounds, and of which he had no more recollection than if he had never seen them, the boy found all passing strange, and questioned his father of not a few of them, what they were and how they were named; [ 020 ] his curiosity being no sooner satisfied in one particular than he plied his father with a further question. And so it befell that, while son and father were thus occupied in asking and answering questions, they encountered a bevy of damsels, fair and richly arrayed, being on their return from a wedding; whom the young man no sooner saw, than he asked his father what they might be. [ 021 ] " My son, " answered the father, " fix thy gaze on the ground, regard them not at all, for naughty things are they. " [ 022 ] " Oh! " said the son, " and what is their name? " [ 023 ] The father, fearing to awaken some mischievous craving of concupiscence in the young man, would not denote them truly, to wit, as women, but said: " They are called goslings. " [ 024 ] Whereupon, wonderful to tell! the lad who had never before set eyes on any woman, thought no more of the palaces, the oxen, the horses, the asses, the money, or aught else that he had seen, but exclaimed: " Prithee, father, let me have one of those goslings. " [ 025 ] " Alas, my son, " replied the father, " speak not of them; they are naughty things. " [ 026 ] " Oh! " questioned the son; " but are naughty things made like that? " [ 027 ] " Ay, " returned the father. [ 028 ] Whereupon the son: " I know not, " he said, " what you say, nor why they should be naughty things: for my part I have as yet seen nought that seemed to me so fair and delectable. They are fairer than the painted angels that you have so often shewn me. Oh! if you love me, do but let us take one of these goslings up there, and I will see that she have whereon to bill. " [ 029 ] " Nay, " said the father, " that will not I. Thou knowest not whereon they bill; " and straightway, being ware that nature was more potent than his art, he repented him that he had brought the boy to Florence.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 030 ] But enough of this story: 'tis time for me to cut it short, and return to those, for whose instruction 'tis told. They say then, some of these my censors, that I am too fond of you, young ladies, and am at too great pains to pleasure you. Now that I am fond of you, and am at pains to pleasure you, [ 031 ] I do most frankly and fully confess; and I ask them whether, considering only all that it means to have had, and to have continually, before one's eyes your debonair demeanour, your bewitching beauty and exquisite grace, and therewithal your modest womanliness, not to speak of having known the amorous kisses, the caressing embraces, the voluptuous comminglings, whereof our intercourse with you, ladies most sweet, not seldom is productive, they do verily marvel that I am fond of you, seeing that one who was nurtured, reared, and brought up on a savage and solitary mountain, within the narrow circuit of a cell, without other companion than his father, had no sooner seen you than 'twas you alone that he desired, that he demanded, that he sought with ardour? [ 032 ] Will they tear, will they lacerate me with their censures, if I, whose body Heaven fashioned all apt for love, whose soul from very boyhood was dedicate to you, am not insensible to the power of the light of your eyes, to the sweetness of your honeyed words, to the flame that is kindled by your gentle sighs, but am fond of you and sedulous to pleasure you; you, again I bid them remember, in whom a hermit, a rude, witless lad, liker to an animal than to a human being, found more to delight him than in aught else that he saw? Of a truth whose taxes me thus must be one that, feeling, knowing nought of the pleasure and power of natural affection, loves you not, nor craves your love; and such an one I hold in light esteem. [ 033 ] And as for those that go about to find ground of exception in my age, they do but shew that they ill understand that the leek, albeit its head is white, has a green tail. But jesting apart, thus I answer them, that never to the end of my life shall I deem it shameful to me to pleasure those to whom Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri in their old age, and Messer Cino da Pistoia in extreme old age, accounted it an honour and found it a delight to minister gratification. [ 034 ] And but that 'twere a deviation from the use and wont of discourse, I would call history to my aid, and shew it to abound with stories of noble men of old time, who in their ripest age studied above all things else to pleasure the ladies; whereof if they be ignorant, go they and get them to school. [ 035 ] To keep with the Muses on Parnassus is counsel I approve; but tarry with them always we cannot, nor they with us, nor is a man blameworthy, if, when he happen to part from them, he find his delight in those that resemble them. The Muses are ladies, and albeit ladies are not the peers of the Muses, yet they have their outward semblance; for which cause, if for no other, 'tis reasonable that I should be fond of them. Besides which, ladies have been to me the occasion of composing some thousand verses, but of never a verse that I made were the Muses the occasion. [ 036 ] Howbeit 'twas with their aid, 'twas under their influence that I composed those thousand verses, and perchance they have sometimes visited me to encourage me in my present task, humble indeed though it be, doing honour and paying, as it were, tribute, to the likeness which the ladies have to them; wherefore, while I weave these stories, I stray not so far from Mount Parnassus and the Muses as not a few perchance suppose. [ 037 ] But what shall we say to those, in whom my hunger excites such commiseration that they bid me get me bread? Verily I know not, save this: Suppose that in my need I were to beg bread of them, what would be their answer? I doubt not they would say: " Go seek it among the fables. " [ 038 ] And in sooth the poets have found more bread among their fables than many rich men among their treasures. And many that have gone after fables have crowned their days with splendour, while, on the other hand, not a few, in the endeavour to get them more bread than they needed, have perished miserably. But why waste more words on them? Let them send me packing, when I ask bread of them; not that, thank God, I have yet need of it, and should I ever come to be in need of it, I know, like the Apostle, how to abound and to be in want, and so am minded to be beholden to none but myself. [ 039 ] As for those who say that these matters fell out otherwise than as I relate them, I should account it no small favour, if they would produce the originals, and should what I write not accord with them, I would acknowledge the justice of their censure, and study to amend my ways; but, until better evidence is forthcoming than their words, I shall adhere to my own opinion without seeking to deprive them of theirs, and give them tit for tat. [ 040 ] And being minded that for this while this answer suffice, I say that with God and you, in whom I trust, most gentle ladies, to aid and protect me, and patience for my stay, I shall go forward with my work, turning my back on this tempest, however it may rage; for I see not that I can fare worse than the fine dust, which the blast of the whirlwind either leaves where it lies, or bears aloft, not seldom over the heads of men, over the crowns of kings, of emperors, and sometimes suffers to settle on the roofs of lofty palaces, and the summits of the tallest towers, whence if it fall, it cannot sink lower than the level from which it was raised. [ 041 ] And if I ever devoted myself and all my powers to minister in any wise to your gratification, I am now minded more than ever so to do, because I know that there is nought that any can justly say in regard thereof, but that I, and others who love you, follow the promptings of nature, whose laws whoso would withstand, has need of powers pre-eminent, and, even so, will oft-times labour not merely in vain but to his own most grievous disadvantage. [ 042 ] Such powers I own that I neither have, nor, to such end, desire to have; and had I them, I would rather leave them to another than use them myself. Wherefore let my detractors hold their peace, and if they cannot get heat, why, let them shiver their life away; and, while they remain addicted to their delights, or rather corrupt tastes, let them leave me to follow my own bent during the brief life that is accorded us. [ 043 ] But this has been a long digression, fair ladies, and 'tis time to retrace our steps to the point where we deviated, and continue in the course on which we started.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 044 ] The sun had chased every star from the sky, and lifted the dank murk of night from the earth, when, Filostrato being risen, and having roused all his company, they hied them to the fair garden, and there fell to disporting themselves: the time for breakfast being come, they took it where they had supped on the preceding evening. [ 045 ] and after they had slept they rose, when the sun was in his zenith, and seated themselves in their wonted manner by the beautiful fountain; where Fiammetta, being bidden by Filostrato to lead off the story-telling, awaited no second command, but debonairly thus began.

Fourth Day - Novel I

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 001 ] Tancred, Prince of Salerno, slays his daughter's lover, and sends her his heart in a golden cup: she pours upon it a poisonous distillation, which she drinks and dies.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 002 ] A direful theme has our king allotted us for to-day's discourse; seeing that, whereas we are here met for our common delectation, needs must we now tell of others' tears, whereby, whether telling or hearing, we cannot but be moved to pity. Perchance 'twas to temper in some degree the gaiety of the past days that he so ordained, but, whatever may have been his intent, his will must be to me immutable law; wherefore I will narrate to you a matter that befell piteously, nay woefully, and so as you may well weep thereat.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 003 ] Tancred, Prince of Salerno, a lord most humane and kind of heart, but that in his old age he imbrued his hands in the blood of a lover, had in the whole course of his life but one daughter; and had he not had her, he had been more fortunate.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 004 ] Never was daughter more tenderly beloved of father than she of the Prince, who, for that cause not knowing how to part with her, kept her unmarried for many a year after she had come of marriageable age: then at last he gave her to a son of the Duke of Capua, with whom she had lived but a short while, when he died and she returned to her father. [ 005 ] Most lovely was she of form and feature (never woman more so), and young and light of heart, and more knowing, perchance, than beseemed a woman. Dwelling thus with her loving father, as a great lady, in no small luxury, nor failing to see that the Prince, for the great love he bore her, was at no pains to provide her with another husband, and deeming it unseemly on her part to ask one of him, she cast about how she might come by a gallant to be her secret lover. [ 006 ] And seeing at her father's court not a few men, both gentle and simple, that resorted thither, as we know men use to frequent courts, and closely scanning their mien and manners, she preferred before all others the Prince's page, Guiscardo by name, a man of very humble origin, but pre-eminent for native worth and noble bearing; of whom, seeing him frequently, she became hotly enamoured, hourly extolling his qualities more and more highly. The young man, who for all his youth by no means lacked shrewdness, read her heart, and gave her his own on such wise that his love for her engrossed his mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. [ 007 ] While thus they burned in secret for one another, the lady, desiring of all things a meeting with Guiscardo, but being shy of making any her confidant, hit upon a novel expedient to concert the affair with him. She wrote him a letter containing her commands for the ensuing day, and thrust it into a cane in the space between two of the knots, which cane she gave to Guiscardo, saying: " Thou canst let thy servant have it for a bellows to blow thy fire up to night. " [ 008 ] Guiscardo took it, and feeling sure that 'twas not unadvisedly that she made him such a present, accompanied with such words, hied him straight home, where, carefully examining the cane, he observed that it was cleft, and, opening it, found the letter; which he had no sooner read, and learned what he was to do, than, pleased as ne'er another, he fell to devising how to set all in order that he might not fail to meet the lady on the following day, after the manner she had prescribed.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 009 ] Now hard by the Prince's palace was a grotto, hewn in days of old in the solid rock, and now long disused, so that an artificial orifice, by which it received a little light, was all but choked with brambles and plants that grew about and overspread it. From one of the ground-floor rooms of the palace, which room was part of the lady's suite, a secret stair led to the grotto, though the entrance was barred by a very strong door. [ 010 ] This stair, having been from time immemorial disused, had passed out of mind so completely that there was scarce any that remembered that it was there: but Love, whose eyes nothing, however secret, may escape, had brought it to the mind of the enamoured lady. [ 011 ] For many a day, using all secrecy, that none should discover her, she had wrought with her tools, until she had succeeded in opening the door; which done, she had gone down into the grotto alone, and having observed the orifice, had by her letter apprised Guiscardo of its apparent height above the floor of the grotto, and bidden him contrive some means of descending thereby. [ 012 ] Eager to carry the affair through, Guiscardo lost no time in rigging up a ladder of ropes, whereby he might ascend and descend; and having put on a suit of leather to protect him from the brambles, he hied him the following night (keeping the affair close from all) to the orifice, made the ladder fast by one of its ends to a massive trunk that was rooted in the mouth of the orifice, climbed down the ladder, and awaited the lady. [ 013 ] On the morrow, making as if she would fain sleep, the lady dismissed her damsels, and locked herself into her room: she then opened the door of the grotto, hied her down, and met Guiscardo, to their marvellous mutual satisfaction. The lovers then repaired to her room, where in exceeding great joyance they spent no small part of the day. [ 014 ] Nor were they neglectful of the precautions needful to prevent discovery of their amour; but in due time Guiscardo returned to the grotto; whereupon the lady locked the door and rejoined her damsels. At nightfall Guiscardo reascended his ladder, and, issuing forth of the orifice, hied him home; nor, knowing now the way, did he fail to revisit the grotto many a time thereafter.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 015 ] But Fortune, noting with envious eye a happiness of such degree and duration, gave to events a dolorous turn, whereby the joy of the two lovers was converted into bitter lamentation. [ 016 ] 'Twas Tancred's custom to come from time to time quite alone to his daughter's room, and tarry talking with her a while. [ 017 ] Whereby it so befell that he came down there one day after breakfast, while Ghismonda--such was the lady's name--was in her garden with her damsels; so that none saw or heard him enter; nor would he call his daughter, for he was minded that she should not forgo her pleasure. But, finding the windows closed and the bed-curtains drawn down, he seated himself on a divan that stood at one of the corners of the bed, rested his head on the bed, drew the curtain over him, and thus, hidden as if of set purpose, fell asleep. [ 018 ] As he slept Ghismonda, who, as it happened, had caused Guiscardo to come that day, left her damsels in the garden, softly entered the room, and having locked herself in, unwitting that there was another in the room, opened the door to Guiscardo, who was in waiting. Straightway they got them to bed, as was their wont; and, while they there solaced and disported them together, it so befell that Tancred awoke, and heard and saw what they did: [ 019 ] whereat he was troubled beyond measure, and at first was minded to upbraid them; but on second thoughts he deemed it best to hold his peace, and avoid discovery, if so he might with greater stealth and less dishonour carry out the design which was already in his mind. [ 020 ] The two

lovers continued long together, as they were wont, all unwitting of Tancred; but at length they saw fit to get out of bed, when Guiscardo went back to the grotto, and the lady hied her forth of the room. [ 021 ] Whereupon Tancred, old though he was, got out at one of the windows, clambered down into the garden, and, seen by none, returned sorely troubled to his room. [ 022 ] By his command two men took Guiscardo early that same night, as he issued forth of the orifice accoutred in his suit of leather, and brought him privily to Tancred; who, as he saw him, all but wept, and said: " Guiscardo, my kindness to thee is ill requited by the outrage and dishonour which thou hast done me in the person of my daughter, as to-day I have seen with my own eyes. " [ 023 ] To whom Guiscardo could answer nought but: " Love is more potent than either you or I. " [ 024 ] Tancred then gave order to keep him privily under watch and ward in a room within the palace; and so 'twas done. [ 025 ] Next day, while Ghismonda wotted nought of these matters, Tancred, after pondering divers novel expedients, hied him after breakfast, according to his wont, to his daughter's room, where, having called her to him and locked himself in with her, he began, not without tears, to speak on this wise: [ 026 ] " Ghismonda, conceiving that I knew thy virtue and honour, never, though it had been reported to me, would I have credited, had I not seen with my own eyes, that thou wouldst so much as in idea, not to say fact, have ever yielded thyself to any man but thy husband: wherefore, for the brief residue of life that my age has in store for me, the memory of thy fall will ever be grievous to me. [ 027 ] And would to God, as thou must needs demean thyself to such dishonour, thou hadst taken a man that matched thy nobility; but of all the men that frequent my court, thou must needs choose Guiscardo, a young man of the lowest condition, a fellow whom we brought up in charity from his tender years; for whose sake thou hast plunged me into the abyss of mental tribulation, insomuch that I know not what course to take in regard of thee. [ 028 ] As to Guiscardo, whom I caused to be arrested last night as he issued from the orifice, and keep in durance, my course is already taken, but how I am to deal with thee, God knows, I know not. [ 029 ] I am distraught between the love which I have ever borne thee, love such as no father ever bare to daughter, and the most just indignation evoked in me by thy signal folly; my love prompts me to pardon thee, my indignation bids me harden my heart against thee, though I do violence to my nature. But before I decide upon my course, I would fain hear what thou hast to say to this. " So saying, he bent his head, and wept as bitterly as any child that had been soundly thrashed.

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 030 ] Her father's words, and the tidings they conveyed that not only was her secret passion discovered, but Guiscardo taken, caused Ghismonda immeasurable grief, which she was again and again on the point of evincing, as most women do, by cries and tears; but her high spirit triumphed over this weakness; by a prodigious effort she composed her countenance, and taking it for granted that her Guiscardo was no more, she inly devoted herself to death rather than a single prayer for herself should escape her lips. [ 031 ] Wherefore, not as a woman stricken with grief or chidden for a fault, but unconcerned and unabashed, with tearless eyes, and frank and utterly dauntless mien, thus answered she her father: " Tancred, your accusation I shall not deny, neither will I cry you mercy, for nought should I gain by denial, nor aught would I gain by supplication: nay more; there is nought I will do to conciliate thy humanity and love; my only care is to confess the truth, to defend my honour by words of sound reason, and then by deeds most resolute to give effect to the promptings of my high soul. [ 032 ] True it is that I have loved and love Guiscardo, and during the brief while I have yet to live shall love him, nor after death, so there be then love, shall I cease to love him; but that I love him, is not imputable to my womanly frailty so much as to the little zeal thou shewedst for my bestowal in marriage, and to Guiscardo's own worth. [ 033 ] It should not have escaped thee, Tancred, creature of flesh and blood as thou art, that thy daughter was also a creature of flesh and blood, and not of stone or iron; it was, and is, thy duty to bear in mind (old though thou art) the nature and the might of the laws to which youth is subject; and, though thou hast spent part of thy best years in martial exercises, thou shouldst nevertheless have not been ignorant how potent is the influence even upon the aged--to say nothing of the young--of ease and luxury. [ 034 ] And not only am I, as being thy daughter, a creature of flesh and blood, but my life is not so far spent but that I am still young, and thus doubly fraught with fleshly appetite, the vehemence whereof is marvellously enhanced by reason that, having been married, I have known the pleasure that ensues upon the satisfaction of such desire. [ 035 ] Which forces being powerless to withstand, I did but act as was natural in a young woman, when I gave way to them, and yielded myself to love. Nor in sooth did I fail to the utmost of my power so to order the indulgence of my natural propensity that my sin should bring shame neither upon thee nor upon me. [ 036 ] To which end Love in his pity, and Fortune in a friendly mood, found and discovered to me a secret way, whereby, none witting, I attained my desire: this, from whomsoever thou hast learned it, howsoever thou comest to know it, I deny not. [ 037 ] 'Twas not at random, as many women do, that I loved Guiscardo; but by deliberate choice I preferred him before all other men, and of determinate forethought I lured him to my love, whereof, through his and my discretion and constancy, I have long had joyance. [ 038 ] Wherein 'twould seem that thou, following rather the opinion of the vulgar than the dictates of truth, find cause to chide me more severely than in my sinful love, for, as if thou wouldst not have been vexed, had my choice fallen on a nobleman, thou complainest that I have forgathered with a man of low condition; and dost not see that therein thou censurest not my fault but that of Fortune, which not seldom raises the unworthy to high place and leaves the worthiest in low estate. [ 039 ] But leave we this: consider a little the principles of things: thou seest that in regard of our flesh we are all moulded of the same substance, and that all souls are endowed by one and the same Creator with equal faculties, equal powers, equal virtues. [ 040 ] 'Twas merit that made the first distinction between us, born as we were, nay, as we are, all equal, and those whose merits were and were approved in act the greatest were called noble, and the rest were not so denoted. Which law, albeit overlaid by the contrary usage of after times, is not yet abrogated, nor so impaired but that it is still traceable in nature and good manners; for which cause whoso with merit acts, does plainly shew himself a gentleman; and if any denote him otherwise, the default is his own and not his whom he so denotes. [ 041 ] Pass in review all thy nobles, weigh their merits, their manners and bearing, and then compare Guiscardo's qualities with theirs: if thou wilt judge without prejudice, thou wilt pronounce him noble in the highest degree, and thy nobles one and all churls. As to Guiscardo's merits and worth I did but trust the verdict which thou thyself didst utter in words, and which mine own eyes confirmed. [ 042 ] Of whom had he such commendation as of thee for all those excellences whereby a good man and true merits commendation? And in sooth thou didst him but justice; for, unless mine eyes have played me false, there was nought for which thou didst commend him but I had seen him practise it, and that more admirably than words of thine might express; and had I been at all deceived in this matter, 'twould have been by thee. Wilt thou say then that I have forgathered with a man of low condition? If so, thou wilt not say true. [ 043 ] Didst thou say with a poor man, the impeachment might be allowed, to thy shame, that thou so ill hast known how to requite a good man and true that is thy servant; but poverty, though it take away all else, deprives no man of gentillesse. Many kings, many great princes, were once poor, and many a ditcher or herdsman has been and is very wealthy. [ 044 ] As for thy last perpended doubt, to wit, how thou shouldst deal with me, banish it utterly from thy thoughts. If in thy extreme old age thou art minded to manifest a harshness unwonted in thy youth, wreak thy harshness on me, resolved as I am to cry thee no mercy, prime cause as I am that this sin, if sin it be, has been committed; for of this I warrant thee, that as thou mayst have done or shalt do to Guiscardo, if to me thou do not the like, I with my own hands will do it. [ 045 ] Now get thee gone to shed thy tears with the women, and when thy melting mood is over, ruthlessly destroy Guiscardo and me, if such thou deem our merited doom, by one and the same blow. "

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 046 ] The loftiness of his daughter's spirit was not unknown to the Prince; but still he did not credit her with a resolve quite as firmly fixed as her words implied, to carry their purport into effect. So, parting from her without the least intention of using harshness towards her in her own person, he determined to quench the heat of her love by wreaking his vengeance on her lover, and bade the two men that had charge of Guiscardo to strangle him noiselessly that same night, take the heart out of the body, and send it to him. [ 047 ] The men did his bidding; and on the morrow the Prince had a large and beautiful cup of gold brought to him, and having put Guiscardo's heart therein, sent it by the hand of one of his most trusted servants to his daughter, charging the servant to say, as he gave it to her: " Thy father sends thee this to give thee joy of that which thou lovest best, even as thou hast given him joy of that which he loved best. "

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 048 ] Now when her father had left her, Ghismonda, wavering not a jot in her stern resolve, had sent for poisonous herbs and roots, and therefrom had distilled a water, to have it ready for use, if that which she apprehended should come to pass. [ 049 ] And when the servant appeared with the Prince's present and message, she took the cup unblenchingly, and having lifted the lid, and seen the heart, and apprehended the meaning of the words, and that the heart was beyond a doubt Guiscardo's, she raised her head, and looking straight at the servant, said: " Sepulture less honourable than of gold had ill be fitted heart such as this: herein has my father done wisely. " [ 050 ] Which said, she raised it to her lips, and kissed it, saying: " In all things and at all times, even to this last hour of my life, have I found my father most tender in his love, but now more so than ever before; wherefore I now render him the last thanks which will ever be due from me to him for this goodly present. " [ 051 ] So she spoke, and straining the cup to her, bowed her head over it, and gazing at the heart, said: " Ah! sojourn most sweet of all my joys, accursed be he by whose ruthless act I see thee with the bodily eye: 'twas enough that to the mind's eye thou wert hourly present. [ 052 ] Thou hast run thy course; thou hast closed the span that Fortune allotted thee; thou hast reached the goal of all; thou hast left behind thee the woes and weariness of the world; and thy enemy has himself granted thee sepulture accordant with thy deserts. [ 053 ] No circumstance was wanting to duly celebrate thy obsequies, save the tears of her whom, while thou livedst, thou didst so dearly love; which that thou shouldst not lack, my remorseless father was prompted of God to send thee to me, and, albeit my resolve was fixed to die with eyes unmoistened and front all unperturbed by fear, yet will I accord thee my tears; which done, my care shall be forthwith by thy means to join my soul to that most precious soul which thou didst once enshrine. [ 054 ] And is there other company than hers, in which with more of joy and peace I might fare to the abodes unknown? She is yet here within, I doubt not, contemplating the abodes of her and my delights, and--for sure I am that she loves me--awaiting my soul that loves her before all else. "

**[Voice: fiammetta ]**

[ 055 ] Having thus spoken, she bowed herself low over the cup; and, while no womanish cry escaped her, 'twas as if a fountain of water were unloosed within her head, so wondrous a flood of tears gushed from her eyes, while times without number she kissed the dead heart. [ 056 ] Her damsels that stood around her knew not whose the heart might be or what her words might mean, but melting in sympathy, they all wept, and compassionately, as vainly, enquired the cause of her lamentation, and in many other ways sought to comfort her to the best of their understanding and power. [ 057 ] When she had wept her fill, she raised her head, and dried her eyes. Then: " O heart, " said she, " much cherished heart, discharged is my every duty towards thee; nought now remains for me to do but to come and unite my soul with thine. " [ 058 ] So saying, she sent for the vase that held the water which the day before she had distilled, and emptied it into the cup where lay the heart bathed in her tears; then, nowise afraid, she set her mouth to the cup, and drained it dry, and so with the cup in her hand she got her upon her bed, and having there disposed her person in guise as seemly as she might, laid her dead lover's heart upon her own, and silently awaited death. [ 059 ] Meanwhile the damsels, seeing and hearing what passed, but knowing not what the water was that she had drunk, had sent word of each particular to Tancred; who, apprehensive of that which came to pass, came down with all haste to his daughter's room, where he arrived just as she got her upon her bed, and, now too late, addressed himself to comfort her with soft words, and seeing in what plight she was, burst into a flood of bitter tears. [ 060 ] To whom the lady: " Reserve thy tears, Tancred, till Fortune send thee hap less longed for than this: waste them not on me who care not for them. Whoever yet saw any but thee bewail the consummation of his desire? But, if of the love thou once didst bear me any spark still lives in thee, be it thy parting grace to me, that, as thou brookedst not that I should live with Guiscardo in privy and seclusion, so wherever thou mayst have caused Guiscardo's body to be cast, mine may be united with it in the common view of all. " [ 061 ] The Prince replied not for excess of grief; and the lady, feeling that her end was come, strained the dead heart to her bosom, saying: " Fare ye well; I take my leave of you; " and with eyelids drooped and every sense evanished departed this life of woe. [ 062 ] Such was the lamentable end of the loves of Guiscardo and Ghismonda; whom Tancred, tardily repentant of his harshness, mourned not a little, as did also all the folk of Salerno, and had honourably interred side by side in the same tomb.

Fourth Day - Novel II

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 001 ] Fra Alberto gives a lady to understand that she is beloved of the Angel Gabriel, in whose shape he lies with her sundry times; afterward, for fear of her kinsmen, he flings himself forth of her house, and finds shelter in the house of a poor man, who on the morrow leads him in the guise of a wild man into the piazza, where, being recognized, he is apprehended by his brethren and imprisoned.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 002 ] More than once had Fiammetta's story brought tears to the eyes of her fair companions; but now that it was ended the king said with an austere air: " I should esteem my life but a paltry price to pay for half the delight that Ghismonda had with Guiscardo: whereat no lady of you all should marvel, seeing that each hour that I live I die a thousand deaths; nor is there so much as a particle of compensating joy allotted me. [ 003 ] But a truce to my own concerns: I ordain that Pampinea do next ensue our direful argument, wherewith the tenor of my life in part accords, and if she follow in Fiammetta's footsteps, I doubt not I shall presently feel some drops of dew distill upon my fire. " [ 004 ] Pampinea received the king's command in a spirit more accordant with what from her own bent she divined to be the wishes of her fair gossips than with the king's words; wherefore, being minded rather to afford them some diversion, than, save as in duty bound, to satisfy the king, she made choice of a story which, without deviating from the prescribed theme, should move a laugh, and thus began:

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 005 ] 'Tis a proverb current among the vulgar, that: " Whoso, being wicked, is righteous reputed, May sin as he will, and 'twill ne'er be imputed. " Which proverb furnishes me with abundant matter of discourse, germane to our theme, besides occasion to exhibit the quality and degree of the hypocrisy of the religious, who flaunt it in ample flowing robes, and, with faces made pallid by art, with

voices low and gentle to beg alms, most loud and haughty to reprove in others their own sins, would make believe that their way of salvation lies in taking from us and ours in giving to them; [ 006 ] nay, more, as if they had not like us Paradise to win, but were already its lords and masters, assign therein to each that dies a place more or less exalted according to the amount of the money that he has bequeathed to them; which if they believe, 'tis by dint of self-delusion, and to the effect of deluding all that put faith in their words. [ 007 ] Of whose guile were it lawful for me to make as full exposure as were fitting, not a few simple folk should soon be enlightened as to what they cloak within the folds of their voluminous habits. But would to God all might have the like reward of their lies as a certain friar minor, no novice, but one that was reputed among their greatest at Venice; whose story, rather than aught else, I am minded to tell you, if so I may, perchance, by laughter and jollity relieve in some degree your souls that are heavy laden with pity for the death of Ghismonda.

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 008 ] Know then, noble ladies, that there was in Imola a man of evil and corrupt life, Berto della Massa by name, whose pestilent practices came at length to be so well known to the good folk of Imola that 'twas all one whether he lied or spoke the truth, for there was not a soul in Imola that believed a word he said: wherefore, seeing that his tricks would pass no longer there, he removed, as in despair, to Venice, that common sink of all abominations, thinking there to find other means than he had found elsewhere to the prosecution of his nefarious designs. [ 009 ] And, as if conscience-stricken for his past misdeeds, he assumed an air of the deepest humility, turned the best Catholic of them all, and went and made himself a friar minor, taking the name of Fra Alberto da Imola. With his habit he put on a shew of austerity, highly commending penitence and abstinence, and eating or drinking no sort of meat or wine but such as was to his taste. [ 010 ] And scarce a soul was there that wist that the thief, the pimp, the cheat, the assassin, had not been suddenly converted into a great preacher without continuing in the practice of the said iniquities, whensoever the same was privily possible. And withal, having got himself made priest, as often as he celebrated at the altar, he would weep over the passion of our Lord, so there were folk in plenty to see, for tears cost him little enough, when he had a mind to shed them. [ 011 ] In short, what with his sermons and his tears, he duped the folk of Venice to such a tune that scarce a will was there made but he was its executor and depository; nay, not a few made him trustee of their moneys, and most, or well-nigh most, men and women alike, their confessor and counsellor: in short, he had put off the wolf and put on the shepherd, and the fame of his holiness was such in those parts that St. Francis himself had never the like at Assisi.

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 012 ] Now it so befell that among the ladies that came to confess to this holy friar was one Monna Lisetta of Ca' Quirino, the young, silly, empty-headed wife of a great merchant, who was gone with the galleys to Flanders. Like a Venetian--for unstable are they all--though she placed herself at his feet, she told him but a part of her sins, and when Fra Alberto asked her whether she had a lover, [ 013 ] she replied with black looks: " How now, master friar? have you not eyes in your head? See you no difference between my charms and those of other women? Lovers in plenty might I have, so I would: but charms such as mine must not be cheapened: 'tis not every man that might presume to love me. How many ladies have you seen whose beauty is comparable to mine? I should adorn Paradise itself. " Whereto she added so much more in praise of her beauty that the friar could scarce hear her with patience. [ 014 ] Howbeit, discerning at a glance that she was none too well furnished with sense, he deemed the soil meet for his plough, and fell forthwith inordinately in love with her, though he deferred his blandishments to a more convenient season, and by way of supporting his character for holiness began instead to chide her, telling her (among other novelties) that this was vainglory: whereto the lady retorted that he was a blockhead, and could not distinguish one degree of beauty from another. Wherefore Fra Alberto, lest he should occasion her too much chagrin, cut short the confession, and suffered her to depart with the other ladies. [ 015 ] Some days after, accompanied by a single trusty friend, he hied him to Monna Lisetta's house, and having withdrawn with her alone into a saloon, where they were safe from observation, he fell on his knees at her feet, and said: " Madam, for the love of God I crave your pardon of that which I said to you on Sunday, when you spoke to me of your beauty, for so grievously was I chastised therefor that very night, that 'tis but to-day that I have been able to quit my bed. " [ 016 ] " And by whom, " quoth my Lady Battledore, " were you so chastised? " [ 017 ] " I will tell you, " returned Fra Alberto. " That night I was, as is ever my wont, at my orisons, when suddenly a great light shone in my cell, and before I could turn me to see what it was, I saw standing over me a right goodly youth with a stout cudgel in his hand, who seized me by the habit and threw me at his feet and belaboured me till I was bruised from head to foot. [ 018 ] And when I asked him why he used me thus, he answered: --"Tis because thou didst to-day presume to speak slightly of the celestial charms of Monna Lisetta, whom I love next to God Himself. " [ 019 ] Whereupon I asked: 'And who are you?' And he made answer that he was the Angel Gabriel. Then said I: 'O my lord, I pray you pardon me.' Whereto he answered: 'I pardon thee on condition that thou go to her, with what speed thou mayst, and obtain her pardon, which if she accord thee not, I shall come back hither and give thee belavourings enough with my cudgel to make thee a sad man for the rest of thy days.' What more he said, I dare not tell you, unless you first pardon me. " [ 020 ] Whereto our flimsy pumpkin-pated Lady Lackbrain was overjoyed, taking all the friar's words for gospel. So after a while she said: " And did I not tell you, Fra Alberto, that my charms were celestial? But, so help me God, I am moved to pity of you, and forthwith I pardon you, lest worse should befall you, so only you tell me what more the Angel said. " [ 021 ] " So will I gladly, Madam, " returned Fra Alberto, " now that I have your pardon; this only I bid you bear in mind, that you have a care that never a soul in the world hear from you a single word of what I shall say to you, if you would not spoil your good fortune, wherein there is not to-day in the whole world a lady that may compare with you. [ 022 ] Know then that the Angel Gabriel bade me tell you that you stand so high in his favour that again and again he would have come to pass the night with you, but that he doubted he should affright you. [ 023 ] So now he sends you word through me that he would fain come one night, and stay a while with you; and seeing that, being an angel, if he should visit you in his angelic shape, he might not be touched by you, he would, to pleasure you, present himself in human shape; and so he bids you send him word, when you would have him come, and in whose shape, and he will come; for which cause you may deem yourself more blessed than any other lady that lives. " [ 024 ] My Lady Vanity then said that she was highly flattered to be beloved of the Angel Gabriel; whom she herself loved so well that she had never grudged four soldi to burn a candle before his picture, wherever she saw it, and that he was welcome to visit her as often as he liked, and would always find her alone in her room; [ 025 ] on the understanding, however, that he should not desert her for the Virgin Mary, whom she had heard he did mightily affect, and indeed 'twould so appear, for, wherever she saw him, he was always on his knees at her feet: for the rest he might even come in what shape he pleased, so that it was not such as to terrify her. [ 026 ] Then said Fra Alberto: " Madam, 'tis wisely spoken; and I will arrange it all with him just as you say. But 'tis in your power to do me a great favour, which will cost you nothing; and this favour is that you be consenting that he visit you in my shape. Now hear wherein you will confer this favour: thus will it be: he will disembow my soul, and set it in Paradise, entering himself into my body; and, as long as he shall be with you, my soul will be in Paradise. " [ 027 ] Whereto my Lady Slenderwit: " So be it, " she said; " I am well pleased that you have this solace to salve the bruises that he gives you on my account. " [ 028 ] " Good, " said Fra Alberto; " then you will see to it that to-night he find, when he comes, your outer door unlatched, that he may have ingress; for, coming, as he will, in human shape, he will not be able to enter save

by the door. ” [ 029 ] “ It shall be done, ” replied the lady. Whereupon Fra Alberto took his leave, and the lady remained in such a state of exaltation that her nether end knew not her chemise, and it seemed to her a thousand years until the Angel Gabriel should come to visit her. [ 030 ] Fra Alberto, bethinking him that 'twas not as an angel, but as a cavalier that he must acquit himself that night, fell to fortifying himself with comfits and other dainties, that he might not lose his saddle for slight cause. Then, leave of absence gotten, he betook him at nightfall, with a single companion, to the house of a woman that was his friend, which house had served on former occasions as his base when he went a chasing the fillies; and having there disguised himself, he hied him, when he deemed 'twas time, to the house of the lady, where, donning the gewgaws he had brought with him, he transformed himself into an angel, and going up, entered the lady's chamber. [ 031 ] No sooner saw she this dazzling apparition than she fell on her knees before the Angel, who gave her his blessing, raised her to her feet, and motioned her to go to bed. She, nothing loath, obeyed forthwith, and the Angel lay down beside his devotee. [ 032 ] Now Fra Alberto was a stout, handsome fellow, whose legs bore themselves right bravely; and being bedded with Monna Lisetta, who was lusty and delicate, he covered her after another fashion than her husband had been wont, and took many a flight that night without wings, so that she heartily cried him content; and not a little therewithal did he tell her of the glory celestial. [ 033 ] Then towards daybreak, all being ready for his return, he hied him forth, and repaired, caparisoned as he was, to his friend, whom, lest he should be affrighted, sleeping alone, the good woman of the house had solaced with her company. [ 034 ] The lady, so soon as she had breakfasted, betook her to Fra Alberto, and reported the Angel Gabriel's visit, and what he had told her of the glory of the life eternal, describing his appearance, not without some added marvels of her own invention. [ 035 ] Whereto Fra Alberto replied: “ Madam, I know not how you fared with him; but this I know, that last night he came to me, and for that I had done his errand with you, he suddenly transported my soul among such a multitude of flowers and roses as was never seen here below, and my soul--what became of my body I know not--tarried in one of the most delightful places that ever was from that hour until matins. ” [ 036 ] “ As for your body, ” said the lady, “ do I not tell you whose it was? It lay all night long with the Angel Gabriel in my arms; and if you believe me not, you have but to look under your left pap, where I gave the Angel a mighty kiss, of which the mark will last for some days. ” [ 037 ] “ Why then, ” said Fra Alberto, “ I will even do to-day what 'tis long since I did, to wit, undress, that I may see if you say sooth. ” [ 038 ] So they fooled it a long while, and then the lady went home, where Fra Alberto afterwards paid her many a visit without any let. [ 039 ] However, one day it so befell that while Monna Lisetta was with one of her gossips canvassing beauties, she, being minded to exalt her own charms above all others, and having, as we know, none too much wit in her pumpkin-pate, observed: “ Did you but know by whom my charms are prized, then, for sure, you would have nought to say of the rest. ” [ 040 ] Her gossip, all agog to hear, for well she knew her foible, answered: “ Madam, it may be as you say, but still, while one knows not who he may be, one cannot alter one's mind so rapidly. ” [ 041 ] Whereupon my Lady Featherbrain: “ Gossip, ” said she, “ 'tis not for common talk, but he that I wot of is the Angel Gabriel, who loves me more dearly than himself, for that I am, so he tells me, the fairest lady in all the world, ay, and in the Maremma to boot. ” [ 042 ] Whereat her gossip would fain have laughed, but held herself in, being minded to hear more from her. Wherefore she said: “ God's faith, Madam, if 'tis the Angel Gabriel, and he tells you so, why, so of course it must needs be; but I wist not the angels meddled with such matters. ” [ 043 ] “ There you erred, gossip, ” said the lady: “ zounds, he does it better than my husband, and he tells me they do it above there too, but, as he rates my charms above any that are in heaven, he is enamoured of me, and not seldom visits me: so now dost see? ” [ 044 ] So away went the gossip so agog to tell the story, that it seemed to her a thousand years till she was where it might be done; and being met for recreation with a great company of ladies, she narrated it all in detail: whereby it passed to the ladies' husbands, and to other ladies, and from them to yet other ladies, so that in less than two days all Venice was full of it. But among others, whose ears it reached, were Monna Lisetta's brothers-in-law, who, keeping their own counsel, resolved to find this angel and make out whether he knew how to fly; to which end they kept watch for some nights. [ 045 ] Whereof no hint, as it happened, reached Fra Alberto's ears; and so, one night when he was come to enjoy the lady once more, he was scarce undressed when her brothers-in-law, who had seen him come, were at the door of the room and already opening it, when Fra Alberto, hearing the noise and apprehending the danger, started up, and having no other resource, threw open a window that looked on to the Grand Canal, and plunged into the water. [ 046 ] The depth was great, and he was an expert swimmer; so that he took no hurt, but, having reached the other bank, found a house open, and forthwith entered it, praying the good man that was within, for God's sake to save his life, and trumping up a story to account for his being there at so late an hour, and stripped to the skin. The good man took pity on him, and having occasion to go out, he put him in his own bed, bidding him stay there until his return; and so, having locked him in, he went about his business.

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 047 ] Now when the lady's brothers-in-law entered the room, and found that the Angel Gabriel had taken flight, leaving his wings behind him, being baulked of their prey, they roundly rated the lady, and then, leaving her disconsolate, betook themselves home with the Angel's spoils. [ 048 ] Whereby it befell, that, when 'twas broad day, the good man, being on the Rialto, heard tell how the Angel Gabriel had come to pass the night with Monna Lisetta, and, being surprised by her brothers-in-law, had taken fright, and thrown himself into the Canal, and none knew what was become of him. The good man guessed in a trice that the said Angel was no other than the man he had at home, whom on his return he recognized, and, after much chaffering, brought him to promise him fifty ducats that he might not be given up to the lady's brothers-in-law. [ 049 ] The bargain struck, Fra Alberto signified a desire to be going. Whereupon: “ There is no way, ” said the good man, “ but one, if you are minded to take it. To-day we hold a revel, wherein folk lead others about in various disguises; as, one man will present a bear, another a wild man, and so forth; and then in the piazza of San Marco there is a hunt, which done, the revel is ended; and then away they hie them, whither they will, each with the man he has led about. [ 050 ] If you are willing to be led by me in one or another of these disguises, before it can get wind that you are here, I can bring you whither you would go; otherwise I see not how you are to quit this place without being known; and the lady's brothers-in-law, reckoning that you must be lurking somewhere in this quarter, have set guards all about to take you. ” [ 051 ] Loath indeed was Fra Alberto to go in such a guise, but such was his fear of the lady's relations that he consented, and told the good man whither he desired to be taken, and that he was content to leave the choice of the disguise to him. [ 052 ] The good man then smeared him all over with honey, and covered him with down, set a chain on his neck and a vizard on his face, gave him a stout cudgel to carry in one hand, and two huge dogs, which he had brought from the shambles, to lead with the other, and sent a man to the Rialto to announce that whoso would see the Angel Gabriel should hie him to the piazza of San Marco; in all which he acted as a leal Venetian. [ 053 ] And so, after a while, he led him forth, and then, making him go before, held him by the chain behind, and through a great throng that clamoured: “ What manner of thing is this? what manner of thing is this? ” he brought him to the piazza, where, what with those that followed them, and those that had come from the Rialto on hearing the announcement, there were folk without end. [ 054 ] Arrived at the piazza, he fastened his wild man to a column in a high and exposed place, making as if he were minded to wait till the hunt should begin; whereby the flies and gadflies, attracted by the honey with which he was smeared, caused him most grievous distress. [ 055 ] However, the good man waited only until the piazza was thronged, and then, making as if he would unchain his wild man, he tore the vizard from Fra Alberto's face, saying: “ Gentlemen, as the boar comes not to the hunt, and the hunt does not take



place, that it be not for nothing that you are come hither, I am minded to give you a view of the Angel Gabriel, who comes down from heaven to earth by night to solace the ladies of Venice. ” [ 056 ] The vizard was no sooner withdrawn than all recognized Fra Alberto, and greeted him with hootings, rating him in language as offensive and opprobrious as ever rogue was abused withal, and pelting him in the face with every sort of filth that came to hand: [ 057 ] in which plight they kept him an exceeding great while, until by chance the bruit thereof reached his brethren, of whom some six thereupon put themselves in motion, and, arrived at the piazza, clapped a habit on his back, and unchained him, and amid an immense uproar led him off to their convent, where, after languishing a while in prison, 'tis believed that he died.

**[Voice: pampinea ]**

[ 058 ] So this man, by reason that, being reputed righteous, he did evil, and 'twas not imputed to him, presumed to counterfeit the Angel Gabriel, and, being transformed into a wild man, was in the end put to shame, as he deserved, and vainly bewailed his misdeeds. God grant that so it may betide all his likes.

Fourth Day - Conclusion

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 001 ] Heartsore as the gentle ladies had been made by the preceding stories, this last of Dioneo provoked them to such merriment, more especially the passage about the Stadic and the hook, that they lacked not relief of the piteous mood engendered by the others. [ 002 ] But the king observing that the sun was now taking a yellowish tinge, and that the end of his sovereignty was come, in terms most courtly made his excuse to the fair ladies, that he had made so direful a theme as lovers' infelicity the topic of their discourse; after which, he rose, took the laurel wreath from his head, and, while the ladies watched to see to whom he would give it, set it graciously upon the blond head of Fiammetta, saying: [ 003 ] “ Herewith I crown thee, as deeming that thou, better than any other, wilt know how to make to-morrow console our fair companions for the rude trials of to-day. ” [ 004 ] Fiammetta, whose wavy tresses fell in a flood of gold over her white and delicate shoulders, whose softly rounded face was all radiant with the very tints of the white lily blended with the red of the rose, who carried two eyes in her head that matched those of a peregrine falcon, while her tiny sweet mouth shewed a pair of lips that shone as rubies, replied with a smile: [ 005 ] “ And gladly take I the wreath, Filostrato, and that thou mayst more truly understand what thou hast done, 'tis my present will and pleasure that each make ready to discourse to-morrow of good fortune befalling lovers after divers direful or disastrous adventures. ” [ 006 ] The theme propounded was approved by all; whereupon the queen called the seneschal, and having made with him all meet arrangements, rose and gaily dismissed all the company until the supper hour; [ 007 ] wherefore, some straying about the garden, the beauties of which were not such as soon to pall, others bending their steps towards the mills that were grinding without, each, as and where it seemed best, they took meanwhile their several pleasures. [ 008 ] The supper hour come, they all gathered, in their wonted order, by the fair fountain, and in the gayest of spirits and well served they supped. Then rising they addressed them, as was their wont, to dance and song, and while Filomena led the dance: [ 009 ] “ Filostrato, ” said the queen, “ being minded to follow in the footsteps of our predecessors, and that, as by their, so by our command a song be sung; and well witting that thy songs are even as thy stories, to the end that no day but this be vexed with thy misfortunes, we ordain that thou give us one of them, whichever thou mayst prefer. ” [ 010 ] Filostrato answered that he would gladly do so; and without delay began to sing on this wise:

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

[ 011 ] Full well my tears attest, O traitor Love, with what just cause the heart,  
With which thou once hast broken faith, doth smart.

[ 012 ] Love, when thou first didst in my heart enshrine  
Her for whom still I sigh, alas! in vain,  
Nor any hope do know, A damsel so complete  
Thou didst me shew, That light as air I counted every pain,  
Wherewith behest of thine Condemned my soul to pine.  
Ah! but I gravely erred; the which to know Too late, alas! doth but enhance my woe.

[ 013 ] The cheat I knew not ere she did me leave,  
She, she, in whom alone my hopes were placed:  
For 'twas when I did most Flatter myself with hope,  
and proudly boast Myself her vassal lowliest and most graced,  
Nor thought Love might bereave, Nor dreamed he e'er might grieve,  
'Twas then I found that she another's worth Into her heart had ta'en, and me cast forth.

[ 014 ] A plant of pain, alas! my heart did bear,  
What time my hapless self cast forth I knew;  
And there it doth remain; And day and hour I curse and curse again,  
When first that front of love shone on my view  
That front so queenly fair, And bright beyond compare!  
Wherefore at once my faith, my hope, my fire  
My soul doth imprecate, ere she expire.

[ 015 ] My lord, thou knowest how comfortless my woe,  
Thou, Love, my lord, whom thus I supplicate  
With many a piteous moan, Telling thee how in anguish sore I groan,  
Yearning for death my pain to mitigate.  
Come death, and with one blow Cut short my span,  
and so With my curst life me of my frenzy ease;  
For wheresoe'er I go, 'twill sure decrease.

[ 016 ] Save death no way of comfort doth remain:  
No anodyne beside for this sore smart.  
The boon, then, Love bestow; And presently  
by death annul my woe, And from this abject life release my heart.  
Since from me joy is ta'en, And every solace, deign  
My prayer to grant, and let my death the cheer  
Complete, that she now hath of her new fere.

[ 017 ] Song, it may be that no one shall thee learn:  
Nor do I care; for none I wot, so well  
As I may chant thee; so, This one behest I lay  
upon thee, go Hie thee to Love, and him in secret tell,  
How I my life do spurn, My bitter life, and yearn,  
That to a better harbourage he bring  
Me, of all might and grace that own him king.

Full well my tears attest, etc.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 018 ] Filostrato's mood and its cause were made abundantly manifest by the words of this song; and perchance they had been made still more so by the looks of a lady that was among the dancers, had not the shades of night, which had now overtaken them, concealed the blush that suffused her face. Other songs followed until the hour for slumber arrived: whereupon at the behest of the queen all the ladies sought their several chambers.

Sixth Day - Introduction

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 002 ] Still in mid heaven, the moon had lost her radiance, nor was any part of our world unilluminated by the fresh splendour of the dawn, when, the queen being risen and having mustered her company, they hied them, gently sauntering, across the dewy mead some distance from the beautiful hill, conversing now of this, now of the other matter, canvassing the stories, their greater or less degree of beauty, and laughing afresh at divers of their incidents, until, the sun being now in his higher ascendant, they began to feel his heat, and turning back by common consent, retraced their steps to the palace, [ 003 ] where, the tables being already set, and fragrant herbs and fair flowers strewn all about, they by the queen's command, before it should grow hotter, addressed themselves to their meal. So,

having blithely breakfasted, they first of all sang some dainty and jocund ditties, and then, as they were severally minded, composed them to sleep or sat them down to chess or dice, while Dioneo and Lauretta fell a singing of Troilus and Cressida.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 004 ] The hour of session being come, they took their places, at the queen's summons, in their wonted order by the fountain; but, when the queen was about to call for the first story, that happened which had not happened before; to wit, there being a great uproar in the kitchen among the maids and men, the sound thereof reached the ears of the queen and all the company. [ 005 ] Whereupon the queen called the seneschal and asked him who bawled so loud, and what was the occasion of the uproar. The seneschal made answer that 'twas some contention between Licisca and Tindaro; but the occasion he knew not, having but just come to quiet them, when he received her summons. [ 006 ] The queen then bade him cause Licisca and Tindaro to come thither forthwith: so they came, and the queen enquired of them the cause of the uproar. [ 007 ] Tindaro was about to make answer, when Licisca, who was somewhat advanced in years, and disposed to give herself airs, and heated to the strife of words, turned to Tindaro, and scowling upon him said: " Unmannerly varlet that makest bold to speak before me; leave me to tell the story. " Then, turning to the queen, she said: [ 008 ] " Madam, this fellow would fain instruct me as to Sicofante's wife, and--neither more or less--as if I had not known her well--would have me believe that, the first night that Sicofante lay with her, 'twas by force and not without effusion of blood that Master Yard made his way into Dusky Hill; which I deny, averring that he met with no resistance, but, on the contrary, with a hearty welcome on the part of the garrison. [ 009 ] And such a numskull is he as fondly to believe that the girls are so simple as to let slip their opportunities, while they wait on the caprice of father or brothers, who six times out of seven delay to marry them for three or four years after they should. [ 010 ] Ay, ay indeed, doubtless they were well advised to tarry so long! Christ's faith! I should know the truth of what I swear; there is never a woman in my neighbour-hood whose husband had her virginity; and well I know how many and what manner of tricks our married dames play their husbands; and yet this booby would fain teach me to know women as if I were but born yesterday. "

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 011 ] While Licisca thus spoke, the ladies laughed till all their teeth were ready to start from their heads. Six times at least the queen bade her be silent: but all in vain; she halted not till she had said all that she had a mind to. [ 012 ] When she had done, the queen turned with a smile to Dioneo saying: " This is a question for thee to deal with, Dioneo; so hold thyself in readiness to give final judgment upon it, when our stories are ended. " [ 013 ] " Madam, " replied Dioneo forthwith, " I give judgment without more ado: I say that Licisca is in the right; I believe that 'tis even as she says, and that Tindaro is a fool. " [ 014 ] Whereupon Licisca burst out laughing, and turning to Tindaro: " Now did I not tell thee so? " quoth she. " Begone in God's name: dost think to know more than I, thou that art but a sucking babe? Thank God, I have not lived for nothing, not I. " [ 015 ] And had not the queen sternly bade her be silent, and make no more disturbance, unless she had a mind to be whipped, and sent both her and Tindaro back to the kitchen, the whole day would have been spent in nought but listening to her. [ 016 ] So Licisca and Tindaro having withdrawn, the queen charged Filomena to tell the first story: and gaily thus Filomena began.

Sixth Day - Novel I

**[Voice: filomena ]**

[ 001 ] A knight offers to carry Madonna Oretta a horseback with a story, but tells it so ill that she prays him to dismount her.

**[Voice: filomena ]**

[ 002 ] As stars are set for an ornament in the serene expanse of heaven, and likewise in springtime flowers and leafy shrubs in the green meadows, so, damsels, in the hour of rare and excellent discourse, is wit with its bright sallies. Which, being brief, are much more proper for ladies than for men, seeing that prolixity of speech, where brevity is possible, is much less allowable to them. [ 003 ] But for whatever cause, be it the sorry quality of our understanding, or some especial enmity that heaven bears to our generation, few ladies or none are left to-day that, when occasion prompts, are able to meet it with apt speech, ay, or if aught of the kind they hear, can understand it aright: to our common shame be it spoken! [ 004 ] But as, touching this matter, enough has already been said by Pampinea, I purpose not to enlarge thereon; but, that you may know what excellence resides in speech apt for the occasion, I am minded to tell you after how courteous a fashion a lady imposed silence upon a gentleman.

**[Voice: filomena ]**

[ 005 ] 'Tis no long time since there dwelt in our city a lady, noble, debonair and of excellent discourse, whom not a few of you may have seen or heard of, whose name--for such high qualities merit not oblivion--[ 006 ] was Madonna Oretta, her husband being Messer Geri Spina. Now this lady, happening to be, as we are, in the country, moving from place to place for pleasure with a company of ladies and gentlemen, whom she had entertained the day before at breakfast at her house, and the place of their next sojourn, whither they were to go afoot, being some considerable distance off, one of the gentlemen of the company said to her: [ 007 ] " Madonna Oretta, so please you, I will carry you great part of the way a horseback with one of the finest stories in the world. " [ 008 ] " Indeed, Sir, " replied the lady, " I pray you do so; and I shall deem it the greatest of favours. " [ 009 ] Whereupon the gentleman, who perhaps was no better master of his weapon than of his story, began a tale, which in itself was indeed excellent, but which, by repeating the same word three, four or six times, and now and again harking back, and saying: " I said not well " ; and erring not seldom in the names, setting one in place of another, he utterly spoiled; besides which, his mode of delivery accorded very ill with the character of the persons and incidents: [ 010 ] insomuch that Madonna Oretta, as she listened, did oft sweat, and was like to faint, as if she were ill and at the point of death. And being at length able to bear no more of it, witting that the gentleman had got into a mess and was not like to get out of it, she said pleasantly to him: [ 011 ] " Sir, this horse of yours trots too hard; I pray you be pleased to set me down. " [ 012 ] The gentleman, being perchance more quick of apprehension than he was skilful in narration, missed not the meaning of her sally, and took it in all good and gay humour. So, leaving unfinished the tale which he had begun, and so mishandled, he addressed himself to tell her other stories.

Sixth Day - Novel VII

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

[ 001 ] Madonna Filippa, being found by her husband with her lover, is cited before the court, and by a ready and jocund answer acquits herself, and brings about an alteration of the statute.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 002 ] Fiammetta had been silent some time, but Scalza's novel argument to prove the pre-eminent nobility of the Baronci kept all still laughing, when the queen called for a story from Filostrato, who thus began:

[Voice: filostrato ]

[ 003 ] Noble ladies, an excellent thing is apt speech on all occasions, but to be proficient therein I deem then most excellent when the occasion does most imperatively demand it. As was the case with a gentlewoman, of whom I purpose to speak to you, who not only ministered gaiety and merriment to her hearers, but extricated herself, as you shall hear, from the toils of an ignominious death.

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

[ 004 ] There was aforetime in the city of Prato a statute no less censurable than harsh, which, making no distinction between the wife whom her husband took in adultery with her lover, and the woman found pleasuring a stranger for money, condemned both alike to be burned. [ 005 ] While this statute was in force, it befell that a gentle-woman, fair and beyond measure enamoured, Madonna Filippa by name, was by her husband, Rinaldo de' Pugliesi, found in her own chamber one night in the arms of Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri, a handsome young noble of the same city, whom she loved even as herself. [ 006 ] Whereat Rinaldo, very wroth, scarce refrained from falling upon them and killing them on the spot; and indeed, but that he doubted how he should afterwards fare himself, he had given way to the vehemence of his anger, and so done. [ 007 ] Nor, though he so far mastered himself, could he forbear recourse to the statute, thereby to compass that which he might not otherwise lawfully compass, to wit, the death of his lady. [ 008 ] Wherefore, having all the evidence needful to prove her guilt, he took no further counsel; but, as soon as 'twas day, he charged the lady and had her summoned. [ 009 ] Like most ladies that are veritably enamoured, the lady was of a high courage; and, though not a few of her friends and kinsfolk sought to dissuade her, she resolved to appear to the summons, having liefer die bravely confessing the truth than basely flee and for defiance of the law live in exile, and shew herself unworthy of such a lover as had had her in his arms that night. [ 010 ] And so, attended by many ladies and gentlemen, who all exhorted her to deny the charge, she came before the Podestà, and with a composed air and unfaltering voice asked whereof he would interrogate her. [ 011 ] The Podestà, surveying her, and taking note of her extraordinary beauty, and exquisite manners, and the high courage that her words evinced, was touched with compassion for her, fearing she might make some admission, by reason whereof, to save his honour, he must needs do her to death. [ 012 ] But still, as he could not refrain from examining her of that which was laid to her charge, he said: " Madam, here, as you see, is your husband, Rinaldo, who prefers a charge against you, alleging that he has taken you in adultery, and so he demands that, pursuant to a statute which is in force here, I punish you with death: but this I may not do, except you confess; wherefore be very careful what you answer, and tell me if what your husband alleges against you be true. " [ 013 ] The lady, no wise dismayed, and in a tone not a little jocund, thus made answer: " True it is, Sir, that Rinaldo is my husband, and that last night he found me in the arms of Lazzarino, in whose arms for the whole-hearted love that I bear him I have oftentimes lain; nor shall I ever deny it; but, as well I wot you know, the laws ought to be common and enacted with the common consent of all that they affect; [ 014 ] which conditions are wanting to this law, inasmuch as it binds only us poor women, in whom to be liberal is much less reprehensible than it were in men; and furthermore the consent of no woman was--I say not had, but--so much as asked before 'twas made; for which reasons it justly deserves to be called a bad law. [ 015 ] However, if in scathe of my body and your own soul, you are minded to put it in force, 'tis your affair; but, I pray you, go not on to try this matter in any wise, until you have granted me this trifling grace, to wit, to ask my husband if I ever gainsaid him, but did not rather accord him, when and so often as he craved it, complete enjoyment of myself. " [ 016 ] Whereto Rinaldo, without awaiting the Podestà's question, forthwith answered, that assuredly the lady had ever granted him all that he had asked of her for his gratification. [ 017 ] " Then, " promptly continued the lady, " if he has ever had of me as much as sufficed for his solace, what was I or am I to do with the surplus? Am I to cast it to the dogs? Is it not much better to bestow it on a gentleman that loves me more dearly than himself, than to suffer it to come to nought or worse? " [ 018 ] Which jocund question being heard by well-nigh all the folk of Prato, who had flocked thither all agog to see a dame so fair and of such quality on her trial for such an offence, they laughed loud and long, and then all with one accord, and as with one voice, exclaimed that the lady was in the right and said well; nor left they the court until in concert with the Podestà they had so altered the harsh statute as that thenceforth only such women as should wrong their husbands for money should be within its purview.

**[Voice: filostrato ]**

[ 019 ] Wherefore Rinaldo left the court, discomfited of his foolish enterprise; and the lady blithe and free, as if rendered back to life from the burning, went home triumphant.

Sixth Day - Conclusion

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 001 ] Immense was the delight and diversion which this story afforded to all the company alike, and great and general was the laughter over Fra Cipolla, and more especially at his pilgrimage, and the relics, as well those that he had but seen as those that he had brought back with him. Which being ended, the queen, taking note that therewith the close of her sovereignty was come, stood up, took off the crown, and set it on Dioneo's head, saying with a laugh: [ 002 ] " 'Tis time, Dioneo, that thou prove the weight of the burden of having ladies to govern and guide. Be thou king then; and let thy rule be such that, when 'tis ended, we may have cause to commend it. " [ 003 ] Dioneo took the crown, and laughingly answered: " Kings worthier far than I you may well have seen many a time ere now--I speak of the kings in chess; but let me have of you that obedience which is due to a true king, and of a surety I will give you to taste of that solace, without which perfection of joy there may not be in any festivity. But enough of this: I will govern as best I may. " [ 004 ] Then, as was the wont, he sent for the seneschal, and gave him particular instruction how to order matters during the term of his sovereignty, which done, he said: " Noble ladies, such and so diverse has been our discourse of the ways of men and their various fortunes, that but for the visit that we had a while ago from Madam Licisca, who by what she said has furnished me with matter of discourse for to-morrow, I doubt I had been not a little put to it to find a theme. [ 005 ] You heard how she said that there was not a woman in her neighbourhood whose husband had her virginity; adding that well she knew how many and what manner of tricks they, after marriage, played their husbands. [ 006 ] The first count we may well leave to the girls whom it concerns; the second, methinks, should prove a diverting topic: wherefore I ordain that, taking our cue from Madam Licisca, we discourse to-morrow of the tricks that, either for love or for their deliverance from peril, ladies have heretofore played their husbands, and whether they were by the said husbands detected or no. " [ 007 ] To discourse of such a topic some of the ladies deemed unmeet for them, and besought the king to find another theme. But the king made answer: [ 008 ] " Ladies, what manner of theme I have prescribed I know as well as you, nor was I to be diverted from prescribing it by that which you now think to declare unto me, for I wot the times are such that, so only men and women have a care to do nought that is unseemly, 'tis allowable to them to discourse of what they please. [ 009 ] For in sooth, as you must know, so out of joint are the times that the judges have deserted the judgment-seat, the laws are silent, and ample licence to preserve his life as best he may is accorded to each and all. [ 010 ] Wherefore, if you are somewhat less strict of speech than is your wont, not that aught unseemly in act may follow, but that you may afford solace to yourselves and others, I see not how you can be open to reasonable censure on the part of any. [ 011 ] Furthermore, nought that has been said from the first day to the present

moment has, methinks, in any degree sullied the immaculate honour of your company, nor, God helping us, shall aught ever sully it. [ 012 ] Besides, who is there that knows not the quality of your honour? which were proof, I make no doubt, against not only the seductive influence of diverting discourse, but even the terror of death. [ 013 ] And, to tell you the truth, whoso wist that you refused to discourse of these light matters for a while, would be apt to suspect that 'twas but for that you had yourselves erred in like sort. [ 014 ] And truly a goodly honour would you confer upon me, obedient as I have ever been to you, if after making me your king and your lawgiver, you were to refuse to discourse of the theme which I prescribe. [ 015 ] Away, then, with this scruple fitter for low minds than yours, and let each study how she may give us a goodly story, and Fortune prosper her therein. ”

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 016 ] So spake the king, and the ladies, hearkening, said that, even as he would, so it should be: whereupon he gave all leave to do as they might be severally minded until the supper-hour. [ 017 ] The sun was still quite high in the heaven, for they had not enlarged in their discourse: wherefore, Dioneo with the other gallants being set to play at dice, Elisa called the other ladies apart, and said: [ 018 ] “ There is a nook hard by this place, where I think none of you has ever been: 'tis called the Ladies' Vale: whither, ever since we have been here, I have desired to take you, but time meet I have not found until today, when the sun is still so high: if, then, you are minded to visit it, I have no manner of doubt that, when you are there, you will be very glad you came. ” [ 019 ] The ladies answered that they were ready, and so, saying nought to the young men, they summoned one of their maids, and set forth; nor had they gone much more than a mile, when they arrived at the Vale of Ladies. They entered it by a very strait gorge, through which there issued a rivulet, clear as crystal, and a sight, than which nought more fair and pleasant, especially at that time when the heat was great, could be imagined, met their eyes. [ 020 ] Within the valley, as one of them afterwards told me, was a plain about half-a-mile in circumference, and so exactly circular that it might have been fashioned according to the compass, though it seemed a work of Nature's art, not man's: 'twas girdled about by six hills of no great height, each crowned with a palace that shewed as a goodly little castle. [ 021 ] The slopes of the hills were graduated from summit to base after the manner of the successive tiers, ever abridging their circle, that we see in our theatres; [ 022 ] and as many as fronted the southern rays were all planted so close with vines, olives, almond-trees, cherry-trees, fig-trees and other fruit-bearing trees not a few, that there was not a hand's-breadth of vacant space. [ 023 ] Those that fronted the north were in like manner covered with copses of oak saplings, ashes and other trees, as green and straight as might be. [ 024 ] Besides which, the plain, which was shut in on all sides save that on which the ladies had entered, was full of firs, cypresses, and bay-trees, with here and there a pine, in order and symmetry so meet and excellent as had they been planted by an artist, the best that might be found in that kind; wherethrough, even when the sun was in the zenith, scarce a ray of light might reach the ground, which was all one lawn of the finest turf, pranked with the hyacinth and divers other flowers. [ 025 ] Add to which--nor was there aught there more delightful--a rivulet that, issuing from one of the gorges between two of the hills, descended over ledges of living rock, making, as it fell, a murmur most gratifying to the ear, and, seen from a distance, shewed as a spray of finest, powdered quick-silver, [ 026 ] and no sooner reached the little plain, than 'twas gathered into a tiny channel, by which it sped with great velocity to the middle of the plain, where it formed a diminutive lake, like the fishponds that townfolk sometimes make in their gardens, when they have occasion for them. [ 027 ] The lake was not so deep but that a man might stand therein with his breast above the water; and so clear, so pellucid was the water that the bottom, which was of the finest gravel, shewed so distinct, that one, had he wished, who had nought better to do, might have counted the stones. Nor was it only the bottom that was to be seen, but such a multitude of fishes, glancing to and fro, as was at once a delight and a marvel to behold. [ 028 ] Bank it had none, but its margin was the lawn, to which it imparted a goodlier freshness. So much of the water as it might not contain was received by another tiny channel, through which, issuing from the vale, it glided swiftly to the plain below.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 029 ] To which pleasance the damsels being come surveyed it with roving glance, and finding it commendable, and marking the lake in front of them, did, as 'twas very hot, and they deemed themselves secure from observation, resolve to take a bath. [ 030 ] So, having bidden their maid wait and keep watch over the access to the vale, and give them warning, if haply any should approach it, they all seven undressed and got into the water, which to the whiteness of their flesh was even such a veil as fine glass is to the vermeil of the rose. [ 031 ] They, being thus in the water, the clearness of which was thereby in no wise affected, did presently begin to go hither and thither after the fish, which had much ado where to bestow themselves so as to escape out of their hands. [ 032 ] In which diversion they spent some time, and caught a few, and then they hid them out of the water and dressed them again, and bethinking them that 'twas time to return to the palace, they began slowly sauntering thither, dilating much as they went upon the beauty of the place, albeit they could not extol it more than they had already done. [ 033 ] 'Twas still quite early when they reached the palace, so that they found the gallants yet at play where they had left them. To whom quoth Pampinea with a smile: “ We have stolen a march upon you to-day. ” [ 034 ] “ So, ” replied Dioneo, “ 'tis with you do first and say after? ” [ 035 ] “ Ay, my lord, ” returned Pampinea, and told him at large whence they came, and what the place was like, and how far 'twas off, and what they had done. [ 036 ] What she said of the beauty of the spot begat in the king a desire to see it: wherefore he straightway ordered supper, whereof when all had gaily partaken, the three gallants parted from the ladies and hid them with their servants to the vale, where none of them had ever been before, and, having marked all its beauties, extolled it as scarce to be matched in all the world. [ 037 ] Then, as the hour was very late, they did but bathe, and as soon as they had resumed their clothes, returned to the ladies, whom they found dancing a carol to an air that Fiammetta sang, which done, they conversed of the Ladies' Vale, waxing eloquent in praise thereof: [ 038 ] insomuch that the king called the seneschal, and bade him have some beds made ready and carried thither on the morrow, that any that were so minded might there take their siesta. [ 039 ] He then had lights and wine and comfits brought; and when they had taken a slight refecton, he bade all address them to the dance. So at his behest Pamfilo led a dance, and then the king, turning with gracious mien to Elisa: [ 040 ] “ Fair damsel, ” quoth he, “ 'twas thou to-day didst me this honour of the crown; and 'tis my will that thine to-night be the honour or the song; wherefore sing us whatsoever thou hast most lief. ” [ 041 ] “ That gladly will I, ” replied Elisa smiling; and thus with dulcet voice began:

**[Voice: elissa ]**

[ 042 ] If of thy talons, Love, be quit I may, I deem it scarce can be  
But other fangs I may elude for aye.

[ 043 ] Service I took with thee, a tender maid, In thy war thinking perfect peace to find,  
And all my arms upon the ground I laid, Yielding myself to thee with trustful mind:  
Thou, harpy-tyrant, whom no faith may bind, Eftsoons didst swoop on me,  
And with thy cruel claws mad'st me thy prey.

[ 044 ] Then thy poor captive, bound with many a chain, Thou tookst, and gav'st to him, whom fate did call  
Hither my death to be; for that in pain And bitter tears I waste away, his thrall:  
Nor heave I e'er a sigh, or tear let fall, So harsh a lord is he,  
That him inclines a jot my grief to allay.

[ 045 ] My prayers upon the idle air are spent:He hears not, will not hear; wherefore in vainThe more each hour my soul doth her torment;Nor may I die, albeit to die were gain.Ah! Lord, have pity of my bitter pain!Help have I none but thee;Then take and bind and at my feet him lay.

[ 046 ] But if thou wilt not, do my soul but looseFrom hope, that her still binds with triple chain.Sure, O my Lord, this prayer thou'lt not refuse:The which so thou to grant me do but deign,I look my wonted beauty to regain,And banish miseryWith roses white and red bedecked and gay.

**[Voice: author ]**

[ 047 ] So with a most piteous sigh ended Elisa her song, whereat all wondered exceedingly, nor might any conjecture wherefore she so sang. [ 048 ] But the king, who was in a jolly humour, sent for Tindaro, and bade him out with his cornemuse, and caused them tread many a measure thereto, until, no small part of the night being thus spent, he gave leave to all to betake them to rest.