

say that I am free of love) in exchange for what I received—if not to repay those who helped me (since their intelligence and their good fortune will perhaps make this unnecessary), then, at least, to assist those who may be in need of it. And however slight my support or comfort (if you wish) may be to those in need, nevertheless it seems to me that it should still be offered to those who are in most need of it, for it will be most useful and valuable to them.

And who will deny that such comfort, no matter how insufficient, is more fittingly bestowed on gracious ladies than on men? For they, in fear and shame, conceal the hidden flames of love within their delicate breasts, a love far stronger than one which is openly expressed, as those who have felt and suffered know; and besides this, restricted by the wishes, the pleasures, and the commands of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, they remain most of the time enclosed in the confines of their bedrooms where they sit in almost complete idleness, now wishing one thing and now wishing another, turning over in their minds various thoughts which cannot always be pleasant ones. And because of these thoughts, if melancholy brought on by burning desire should arise in their minds, they will be forced to suffer this serious pain unless it be replaced by other thoughts. What's more, they are less able than men to bear these discomforts; this does not happen with men in love, as we can plainly see. If men are afflicted by melancholy or heavy thoughts, they have many ways of alleviating or forgetting them, for if they wish, they can go out and hear and see many things; they can go hawking, hunting, or fishing; they can ride, gamble, or attend to their trades. Each of these pursuits has the power, either completely or in part, to occupy a man's mind and to remove from it a painful thought, even if only for a brief moment; and so, in one way or another, either consolation follows or the pain becomes less. Therefore, I wish to make up in part for the wrong done by Fortune, who is less generous with her support where there is less strength, as we witness in the case of our delicate ladies. As support and comfort for those ladies in love (to those others who are not I leave the needle, spindle, and wool winder), I intend to tell one hundred stories, or fables, or parables, or histories, or whatever you wish to call them, as they were told in ten days (as will become quite evident), by a gracious band of seven ladies and three young men who came together during the time of the plague (which just recently took so many lives) and I shall also include several songs sung for their delight by these same ladies. In these stories will be seen delightful as well as sad examples of love and other adventures, of both modern and ancient times. The ladies, just mentioned, will read them and perhaps derive from the delightful things that happen in these tales both pleasure and useful counsel, inasmuch as they will recognize what should be avoided

and what should be sought after. This, I believe, can only end in the soothing of their melancholy. And if this happens (and may God grant that it does), let them thank Love for it, who, in freeing me from his bonds, has given me the power to attend to their pleasure.

## The Author's Introduction

*Here begins the first day of The Decameron, in which, after the author has explained why certain people (soon to be introduced) have gathered together to tell stories, they speak on any subject that pleases them most, under the direction of Pamphinea.*

Whenever, gracious ladies, I consider how compassionate you are by nature, I realize that in your judgment the present work will seem to have had a serious and painful beginning, for it recalls in its opening the unhappy memory of the deadly plague just passed, dreadful and pitiful to all those who saw or heard about it. But I do not wish this to frighten you away from reading any further, as if you were going to pass all of your time sighing and weeping as you read. This horrible beginning will be like the ascent of a steep and rough mountainside, beyond which there lies a most beautiful and delightful plain, which seems more pleasurable to the climbers in proportion to the difficulty of their climb and their descent. And just as pain is the extreme limit of pleasure, so misery ends by unanticipated happiness. This brief pain (I say brief since it contains few words) will be quickly followed by the sweetness and the delight, which I promised you before, and which, had I not promised, might not be expected from such a beginning. To tell the truth, if I could have conveniently led you by any other way than this, which I know is a bitter one, I would have gladly done so; but since it is otherwise impossible to demonstrate how the stories you are about to read came to be told, I am almost obliged by necessity to write about it this way.

Let me say, then, that thirteen hundred and forty-eight years had already passed after the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God when into the distinguished city of Florence, more noble than any other Italian city, there came the deadly pestilence. It started in the East, [either because of the influence of heavenly bodies or because of God's just wrath as a punishment to mortals for our wicked deeds] and it killed an infinite number of people. Without pause it spread from one place and it stretched its miserable length over the West. And against this pestilence no human wisdom or foresight was of any avail; quantities of filth were removed from the

city by officials charged with this task; the entry of any sick person into the city was prohibited; and many directives were issued concerning the maintenance of good health. Nor were the humble supplications, rendered not once but many times to God by pious people, through public processions or by other means, efficacious; for almost at the beginning of springtime of the year in question the plague began to show its sorrowful effects in an extraordinary manner. It did not act as it had done in the East, where bleeding from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death, but it began in both men and women with certain swellings either in the groin or under the armpits, some of which grew to the size of a normal apple and others to the size of an egg (more or less), and the people called them *gavoccioli*.<sup>2</sup> And from the two parts of the body already mentioned, within a brief space of time, the said deadly *gavoccioli* began to spread indiscriminately over every part of the body; and after this, the symptoms of the illness changed to black or livid spots appearing on the arms and thighs, and on every part of the body, some large ones and sometimes many little ones scattered all around. And just as the *gavoccioli* were originally, and still are, a very certain indication of impending death, in like manner these spots came to mean the same thing for whoever had them. Neither a doctor's advice nor the strength of medicine could do anything to cure this illness; on the contrary, either the nature of the illness was such that it afforded no cure, or else the doctors were so ignorant that they did not recognize its cause and, as a result, could not prescribe the proper remedy (in fact, the number of doctors, other than the well-trained, was increased by a large number of men and women who had never had any medical training); at any rate, few of the sick were ever cured, and almost all died after the third day of the appearance of the previously described symptoms (some sooner, others later), and most of them died without fever or any other side effects.

This pestilence was so powerful that it was communicated to the healthy by contact with the sick, the way a fire close to dry or oily things will set them aflame. And the evil of the plague went even further: not only did talking to or being around the sick bring infection and a common death, but also touching the clothes of the sick or anything touched or used by them seemed to communicate this very disease to the person involved. What I am about to say

2. *Gavoccioli*—or *bubboni*, in modern Italian—are called "buboes" in English, the source of the phrase "bubonic plague." The plague of 1348 is often known as the Black Plague because of the black spots Boccaccio describes. One of the most important casualties of this plague in literature was Laura, the woman who inspired the many sonnets

and songs in the *Canzoniere* ("Songbook") by Boccaccio's friend and contemporary, Francesco Petrarca (1304–74). Both *The Decameron* and the *Canzoniere* deal with the experience of human love, and both are set against a stark background of plague, death, and earthly mutability.

is incredible to hear, and if I and others had not witnessed it with our own eyes, I should not dare believe it (let alone write about it), no matter how trustworthy a person I might have heard it from. Let me say, then, that the power of the plague described here was of such virulence in spreading from one person to another that not only did it pass from one man to the next, but, what's more, it was often transmitted from the garments of a sick or dead man to animals that not only became contaminated by the disease, but also died within a brief period of time. My own eyes, as I said earlier, witnessed such a thing one day: when the rags of a poor man who died of this disease were thrown into the public street, two pigs came upon them, as they are wont to do, and first with their snouts and then with their teeth they took the rags and shook them around; and within a short time, after a number of convulsions, both pigs fell dead upon the ill-fated rags, as if they had been poisoned. From these and many similar or worse occurrences there came about such fear and such fantastic notions among those who remained alive that almost all of them took a very cruel attitude in the matter; that is, they completely avoided the sick and their possessions; and in so doing, each one believed that he was protecting his good health.)

There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding all superfluity might help a great deal in resisting this disease, and so they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else. They shut themselves up in those houses where there were no sick people and where one could live well by eating the most delicate of foods and drinking the finest of wines (doing so always in moderation), allowing no one to speak about or listen to anything said about the sick and the dead outside; these people lived, spending their time with music and other pleasures that they could arrange.<sup>3</sup> Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking too much, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease; so they practiced to the fullest what they believed by going from one tavern to another all day and night, drinking to excess; and often they would make merry in private homes, doing everything that pleased or amused them the most. This they were able to do easily, for everyone felt he was doomed to die and, as a result, abandoned his property, so that most of the houses had become common property, and any stranger who came upon them used them as if he were their rightful owner. In addition to this bestial behavior, they always managed to avoid the sick as best they could. And in this great affliction and misery of our city the revered authority of the laws, both divine and human, had fallen and almost completely disappeared, for, like other men,

the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or sick or so short of help that it was impossible for them to fulfill their duties; as a result, everybody was free to do as he pleased.

Many others adopted a middle course between the two attitudes just described: neither did they restrict their food or drink so much as the first group nor did they fall into such dissoluteness and drunkenness as the second; rather, they satisfied their appetites to a moderate degree. They did not shut themselves up, but went around carrying in their hands flowers, or sweet-smelling herbs, or various kinds of spices; and often they would put these things to their noses, believing that such smells were a wonderful means of purifying the brain, for all the air seemed infected with the stench of dead bodies, sickness, and medicines.

Others were of a crueller opinion (though it was, perhaps, a safer one): they maintained that there was no better medicine against the plague than to flee from it; and convinced of this reasoning, not caring about anything but themselves, men and women in great numbers abandoned their city, their houses, their farms, their relatives, and their possessions and sought other places, and they went at least as far away as the Florentine countryside—as if the wrath of God could not pursue them with this pestilence wherever they went but would only strike those it found within the walls of the city! Or perhaps they thought that Florence's last hour had come and that no one in the city would remain alive.

And not all those who adopted these diverse opinions died, nor did they all escape with their lives; on the contrary, many of those who thought this way were falling sick everywhere, and since they had given, when they were healthy, the bad example of avoiding the sick, they, in turn, were abandoned and left to languish away without care. The fact was that one citizen avoided another, that almost no one cared for his neighbor, and that relatives rarely or hardly ever visited each other—they stayed far apart. This disaster had struck such fear into the hearts of men and women that brother abandoned brother, uncle abandoned nephew, sister left brother, and very often wife abandoned husband, and—even worse, almost unbelievable—fathers and mothers neglected to tend and care for their children, as if they were not their own.

Thus, for the countless multitude of men and women who fell sick, there remained no support except the charity of their friends (and these were few) or the avarice of servants, who worked for inflated salaries and indecent periods of time and who, in spite of this, were few and far between; and those few were men or women of little wit (most of them not trained for such service) who did little else but hand different things to the sick when requested to do so or watch over them while they died, and in this service, they very often lost their own lives and their profits. And since the sick

were abandoned by their neighbors, their parents, and their friends and there was a scarcity of servants, a practice that was almost unheard of before spread through the city: when a woman fell sick, no matter how attractive or beautiful or noble she might be, she did not mind having a manservant (whoever he might be, no matter how young or old he was), and she had no shame whatsoever in revealing any part of her body to him—the way she would have done to a woman—when the necessity of her sickness required her to do so. This practice was, perhaps, in the days that followed the pestilence, the cause of looser morals in the women who survived the plague. And so, many people died who, by chance, might have survived if they had been attended to; Between the lack of competent attendants, which the sick were unable to obtain, and the violence of the pestilence, there were so many, many people who died in the city both day and night that it was incredible just to hear this described, not to mention seeing it! Therefore, out of sheer necessity, there arose among those who remained alive customs which were contrary to the established practices of the time.

It was the custom, as it is again today, for the women, relatives, and neighbors to gather together in the house of a dead person and there to mourn with the women who had been dearest to him; on the other hand, in front of the deceased's home, his male relatives would gather together with his male neighbors and other citizens, and the clergy also came (many of them, or sometimes just a few) depending upon the social class of the dead man. Then, upon the shoulders of his equals, he was carried to the church chosen by him before death with the funeral pomp of candles and chants. With the fury of the pestilence increasing, this custom, for the most part, died out and other practices took its place. And so, not only did people die without having a number of women around them, but there were many who passed away without even having a single witness present, and very few were granted the piteous laments and bitter tears of their relatives; on the contrary, most relatives were somewhere else, laughing, joking, and amusing themselves; even the women learned this practice too well, having put aside, for the most part, their womanly compassion for their own safety. Very few were the dead whose bodies were accompanied to the church by more than ten or twelve of their neighbors, and these dead bodies were not even carried on the shoulders of honored and reputable citizens but rather by gravediggers from the lower classes that were called *becchini*. Working for pay, they would pick up the bier and hurry it off, not to the church the dead man had chosen before his death but, in most cases, to the church closest by, accompanied by four or six churchmen with just a few candles, and often none at all. With the help of these *becchini*, the churchmen would place the body as fast as they could in whatever unoccupied

grave they could find, without going to the trouble of saying long or solemn burial services.

The plight of the lower class and, perhaps, a large part of the middle class, was even more pathetic: most of them stayed in their homes or neighborhoods either because of their poverty or their hopes for remaining safe, and every day they fell sick by the thousands; and not having servants or attendants of any kind, they almost always died. Many ended their lives in the public streets, during the day or at night, while many others who died in their homes were discovered dead by their neighbors only by the smell of their decomposing bodies. The city was full of corpses. The dead were usually given the same treatment by their neighbors, who were moved more by the fear that the decomposing corpses would contaminate them than by any charity they might have felt towards the deceased: either by themselves or with the assistance of porters (when they were available), they would drag the corpse out of the home and place it in front of the doorstep where, usually in the morning, quantities of dead bodies could be seen by any passerby; then, they were laid out on biers, or for lack of biers, on a plank. Nor did a bier carry only one corpse; sometimes it was used for two or three at a time. More than once, a single bier would serve for a wife and husband, two or three brothers, a father or son, or other relatives, all at the same time. And countless times it happened that two priests, each with a cross, would be on their way to bury someone, when porters carrying three or four biers would just follow along behind them; and where these priests thought they had just one dead man to bury, they had, in fact, six or eight and sometimes more. Moreover, the dead were honored with no tears or candles or funeral mourners but worse: things had reached such a point that the people who died were cared for as we care for goats today. Thus, it became quite obvious that what the wise had not been able to endure with patience through the few calamities of everyday life now became a matter of indifference to even the most simple-minded people as a result of this colossal misfortune.)

So many corpses would arrive in front of a church every day and at every hour that the amount of holy ground for burials was certainly insufficient for the ancient custom of giving each body its individual place; when all the graves were full, huge trenches were dug in all of the cemeteries of the churches and into them the new arrivals were dumped by the hundreds; and they were packed in there with dirt, one on top of another, like a ship's cargo, until the trench was filled.

But instead of going over every detail of the past miseries which befell our city, let me say that the same unfriendly weather there did not, because of this, spare the surrounding countryside any evil; there, not to speak of the towns which, on a smaller scale,

were like the city, in the scattered villages and in the fields the poor, miserable peasants and their families, without any medical assistance or aid of servants, died on the roads and in their fields and in their homes, as many by day as by night, and they died not like men but more like wild animals. Because of this they, like the city dwellers, became careless in their ways and did not look after their possessions or their businesses; furthermore, when they saw that death was upon them, completely neglecting the future fruits of their past labors, their livestock, their property, they did their best to consume what they already had at hand. So, it came about that oxen, donkeys, sheep, pigs, chickens and even dogs, man's most faithful companion, were driven from their homes into the fields, where the wheat was left not only unharvested but also unreaped, and they were allowed to roam where they wished; and many of these animals, almost as if they were rational beings, returned at night to their homes without any guidance from a shepherd, satiated after a good day's meal.

Leaving the countryside and returning to the city, what more can one say, except that so great was the cruelty of Heaven, and, perhaps, also that of man, that from March to July of the same year, between the fury of the pestiferous sickness and the fact that many of the sick were badly treated or abandoned in need because of the fear that the healthy had, more than one hundred thousand human beings are believed to have lost their lives for certain inside the walls of the city of Florence whereas, before the deadly plague, one would not have estimated that there were actually that many people dwelling in that city.

Oh, how many great palaces, beautiful homes, and noble dwellings, once filled with families, gentlemen, and ladies, were now emptied, down to the last servant! How many notable families, vast domains, and famous fortunes remained without legitimate heir! How many valiant men, beautiful women, and charming young men, who might have been pronounced very healthy by Galen,<sup>3</sup> Hippocrates,<sup>4</sup> and Aesculapius<sup>5</sup> (not to mention lesser physicians), dined in the morning with their relatives, companions, and friends and then in the evening took supper with their ancestors in the other world!

Reflecting upon so many miseries makes me very sad; therefore, since I wish to pass over as many as I can, let me say that as our city was in this condition, almost emptied of inhabitants, it happened (as I heard it later from a person worthy of trust) that one Tuesday

3. Greek anatomist and physician (A.D. 130?-201?).

4. Greek physician (460?-377? B.C.), to whom the Hippocratic oath, administered to new physicians, is attributed.

5. The Roman god of medicine and healing, often identified with Asclepius, Apollo's son, who was the Greek god of medicine.

morning in the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella<sup>6</sup> there was hardly any congregation there to hear the holy services except for seven young women, all dressed in garments of mourning as the times demanded, each of whom was a friend, neighbor, or relative of the other, and none of whom had passed her twenty-eighth year, nor was any of them younger than eighteen; all were educated and of noble birth and beautiful to look at, well-mannered and gracefully modest. I would tell you their real names, if I did not have a good reason for not doing so, which is this: I do not wish any of them to be embarrassed in the future because of the things that they said to each other and what they listened to—all of which I shall later recount. Today the laws regarding pleasure are again strict, more so than at that time (for the reasons mentioned above when they were very lax), not only for women of their age but even for those who were older; nor would I wish to give an opportunity to the envious, who are always ready to attack every praiseworthy life, to diminish in any way with their indecent talk the dignity of these worthy ladies. But, so that you may understand clearly what each of them had to say, I intend to call them by names which are either completely or in part appropriate to their personalities. We shall call the first and the oldest Pampinea and the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena, and the fourth Emilia, and we shall name the fifth Laurètta and the sixth Neifile, and the last, not without reason, we shall call Elissa.<sup>7</sup> Not by prior agreement, but purely by chance, they gathered together in one part of the church and were seated almost in a circle, saying their rosaries; after many sighs, they began to discuss among themselves various matters concerning the nature of the times, and after a while, as the others fell silent, Pampinea began to speak in this manner:

“My dear ladies, you have often heard, as I have, how a proper use of one’s reason does harm to no one. It is only natural for everyone born on this earth to aid, preserve, and defend his own life to the best of his ability; this is a right so taken for granted that it has, at times, permitted men to kill each other without blame in order to defend their own lives. And if the laws dealing with the welfare of every human being permit such a thing, how much more lawful, and with no harm to anyone, is it for us, or anyone else, to take all possible precautions to preserve our own

6. This church, called “novella” or “new” because it replaced a preexisting structure, was begun in 1279 and was completed by Jacopo Talenti in 1348. An excellent example of Italian Gothic style, it is also noted for the Renaissance façade grafted onto its exterior by Leon Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century and for frescoes in its interior chapels done by various artists.

7. The qualities usually associated by

critics with these ladies are as follows: Pampinea (a wise and confident lady, often in love and the most mature of the group); Filomena (wise and discreet and full of desire); Elissa (very young and dominated by a violent passion); Neifile (also young but ingenuous); Emilia (in love with herself); Lauretta (a jealous lover); and Fiammetta (happy to love and to be loved but afraid that she will lose her love).

lives! When I consider what we have been doing this morning and in the past days and what we have spoken about, I understand, and you must understand too, that each one of us is afraid for her life; nor does this surprise me in the least—rather I am greatly amazed that since each of us has the natural feelings of a woman, we do not find some remedy for ourselves to cure what each one of us dreads. We live in the city, in my opinion, for no other reason than to bear witness to the number of dead bodies that are carried to burial, or to listen whether the friars (whose number has been reduced to almost nothing) chant their offices at the prescribed hours, or to demonstrate to anyone who comes here the quality and the quantity of our miseries by our garments of mourning. And if we leave the church, either we see dead or sick bodies being carried all about, or we see those who were once condemned to exile for their crimes by the authority of the public laws making sport of these laws, running about wildly through the city, because they know that the executors of these laws are either dead or dying; or we see the scum of our city, avid for our blood, who call themselves *becchini* and who ride about on horseback torturing us by deriding everything, making our losses more bitter with their disgusting songs. Nor do we hear anything but “So-and-so is dead,” and “So-and-so is dying”; and if there were anyone left to mourn, we should hear nothing but piteous laments everywhere. I do not know if what happens to me also happens to you in your homes, but when I go home I find no one there except my maid, and I become so afraid that my hair stands on end, and wherever I go or sit in my house, I seem to see the shadows of those who have passed away, not with the faces that I remember, but with horrible expressions that terrify me. For these reasons, I am uncomfortable here, outside, and in my home, and the more so since it appears that no one like ourselves, who is well off and who has some other place to go, has remained here except us. And if there are any who remain, according to what I hear and see, they do whatever their hearts desire, making no distinction between what is proper and what is not, whether they are alone or with others, by day or by night; and not only laymen but also those who are cloistered in convents have broken their vows of obedience and have given themselves over to carnal pleasures, for they have made themselves believe that these things are permissible for them and are improper for others, and thinking that they will escape with their lives in this fashion, they have become wanton and dissolute.

“If this is the case, and plainly it is, what are we doing here? What are we waiting for? What are we dreaming about? Why are we slower to protect our health than all the rest of the citizens? Do we hold ourselves less dear than all the others? Or do we believe that our own lives are tied by stronger chains to our bodies than

those of others and, therefore, that we need not worry about anything which might have the power to harm them? We are mistaken and deceived, and we are mad if we believe it. We shall have clear proof of this if we just call to mind how many young men and ladies have been struck down by this cruel pestilence. I do not know if you agree with me, but I think that, in order not to fall prey, out of laziness or presumption, to what we might well avoid, it might be a good idea for all of us to leave this city, just as many others before us have done and are still doing. [Let us avoid like death itself the ugly examples of others, and go to live in a more dignified fashion in our country houses (of which we all have several) and there let us take what enjoyment, what happiness, and what pleasure we can, without going beyond the rules of reason in any way.] There we can hear the birds sing, and we can see the hills and the pastures turning green, the wheat fields moving like the sea, and a thousand kinds of trees; and we shall be able to see the heavens more clearly which, though they still may be cruel, nonetheless will not deny to us their eternal beauties, which are much more pleasing to look at than the empty walls of our city. Besides all this, there in the country the air is much fresher, and the necessities for living in such times as these are plentiful there, and there are just fewer troubles in general; though the peasants are dying there even as the townspeople here, the displeasure is the less in that there are fewer houses and inhabitants than in the city. Here on the other hand, if I judge correctly, we would not be abandoning anyone; on the contrary, we can honestly say it is we ourselves that have been abandoned, for our loved ones are either dead or have fled and have left us alone in such affliction as though we did not belong to them. No reproach, therefore, can come to us if we follow this course of action, whereas sorrow, worry, and perhaps even death can come if we do not follow this course. So, whenever you like, I think it would be well to take our servants, have all our necessary things sent after us, and go from one place one day to another the next, enjoying what happiness and merriment these times permit; let us live in this manner (unless we are overtaken first by death) until we see what ending Heaven has reserved for these horrible times. And remember that it is no more forbidden for us to go away virtuously than it is for most other women to remain here dishonorably."

When they had listened to what Pampinea had said, the other women not only praised her advice but were so anxious to follow it that they had already begun discussing among themselves the details, as if they were going to leave that very instant. But Filomena, who was most discerning, said:

"Ladies, regardless of how convincing Pampinea's arguments are, that is no reason to rush into things, as you seem to wish to do.

Remember that we are all women, and any young girl can tell you that women do not know how to reason in a group when they are without the guidance of some man who knows how to control them. We are changeable, quarrelsome, suspicious, timid, and fearful, because of which I suspect that this company will soon break up without honor to any of us if we do not take a guide other than ourselves. We would do well to resolve this matter before we depart."

Then Elissa said:

"Men are truly the leaders of women, and without their guidance, our actions rarely end successfully. But how are we to find any men? We all know that the majority of our relatives are dead and those who remain alive are scattered here and there in various groups, not knowing where we are (they, too, are fleeing precisely what we seek to avoid), and since taking up with strangers would be unbecoming to us, we must, if we wish to leave for the sake of our health, find a means of arranging it so that while going for our own pleasure and repose, no trouble or scandal follow us."

While the ladies were discussing this, three young men came into the church, none of whom was less than twenty-five years of age. Neither the perversity of the times nor the loss of friends or parents, nor fear for their own lives had been able to cool, much less extinguish, the love those lovers bore in their hearts. One of them was called Panfilo, another Filostrato, and the last Dioneo, each one very charming and well-bred; and in those turbulent times they sought their greatest consolation in the sight of the ladies they loved, all three of whom happened to be among the seven ladies previously mentioned, while the others were close relatives of one or the other of the three men. No sooner had they sighted the ladies than they were seen by them, whereupon Pampinea smiled and said:

"See how Fortune favors our plans and has provided us with these discreet and virtuous young men, who would gladly be our guides and servants if we do not hesitate to accept them for such service."

Then Neifile's face blushed out of embarrassment, for she was one of those who was loved by one of the young men, and she said:

"Pampinea, for the love of God, be careful what you say! I realize very well that nothing but good can be said of any of them, and I believe that they are capable of doing much more than that task and, likewise, that their good and worthy company would be fitting not only for us but for ladies much more beautiful and attractive than we are, but it is quite obvious that some of them are in love with some of us who are here present, and I fear that if we take them with us, slander and disapproval will follow, through no fault of ours or of theirs."

Then Filomena said:

"That does not matter at all; as long as I live with dignity and have no remorse of conscience about anything, let anyone who wishes say what he likes to the contrary: God and Truth will take up arms in my defense. Now, if they were just prepared to come with us, as Pampinea says, we could truly say that Fortune was favorable to our departure."

When the others heard her speak in such a manner, the argument was ended, and they all agreed that the young men should be called over, told about their intentions, and asked if they would be so kind as to accompany the ladies on such a journey. Without further discussion, then, Pampinea, who was related to one of the men, rose to her feet and made her way to where they stood gazing at the ladies, and she greeted them with a cheerful expression, outlined their plan to them, and begged them, in everyone's name, to keep them company in the spirit of pure and brotherly affection.

At first the young men thought they were being mocked, but when they saw that the lady was speaking seriously, they gladly consented; and in order to start without delay and put the plan into action, before leaving the church they agreed upon what preparations must be made for their departure. And when everything had been arranged and word had been sent on to the place they intended to go, the following morning (that is, Wednesday) at the break of dawn the ladies with some of their servants and the three young men with three of their servants left the city and set out on their way; they had traveled no further than two short miles when they arrived at the first stop they had agreed upon.

The place was somewhere on a little mountain, at some distance away from our roads, full of various shrubs and plants with rich, green foliage—most pleasant to look at; at the top there was a country mansion with a beautiful large inner courtyard with open colonnades, halls, and bedrooms, all of them beautiful in themselves and decorated with cheerful and interesting paintings; it was surrounded by meadows and marvelous gardens, with wells of fresh water and cellars full of the most precious wines, the likes of which were more suitable for expert drinkers than for sober and dignified ladies. And the group discovered, to their delight, that the entire palace had been cleaned and the beds made in the bedchambers, and that fresh flowers and rushes had been strewn everywhere. Soon after they arrived and were resting, Dioneo, who was more attractive and wittier than either of the other young men, said:

"Ladies, more than our preparations, it was your intelligence that guided us here. I do not know what you intend to do with your thoughts, but I left mine inside the city walls when I passed through them in your company a little while ago; and so, you must either make up your minds to enjoy yourselves and laugh and sing with

me (as much, let me say, as your dignity permits), or you must give me leave to return to my worries and to remain in our troubled city."

To this Pampinea, who had driven away her sad thoughts in the same way, replied happily:

"Dioneo, you speak very well: let us live happily, for after all it was unhappiness that made us flee the city. But when things are not organized they cannot long endure, and since I began the discussions which brought this fine company together, and since I desire the continuation of our happiness, I think it is necessary that we choose a leader from among us, whom we shall honor and obey as our superior and whose every thought shall be to keep us living happily. And in order that each one of us may feel the weight of this responsibility together with the pleasure of its authority, so that no one of us who has not experienced it can envy the others, let me say that both the weight and the honor should be granted to each one of us in turn for a day; the first will be chosen by election; the others that follow will be whomever he or she that will have the rule for that day chooses as the hour of vespers<sup>8</sup> approaches; this ruler, as long as his reign endures, will organize and arrange the place and the manner in which we will spend our time."

These words greatly pleased everyone, and they unanimously elected Pampinea queen for the first day; Filomena quickly ran to a laurel bush, whose leaves she had always heard were worthy of praise and bestowed great honor upon those crowned with them; she plucked several branches from it and wove them into a handsome garland of honor. And when it would be placed upon the head of any one of them, it was to be to all in the group a clear symbol of royal rule and authority over the rest of them for as long as their company stayed together.<sup>9</sup>

After she had been chosen queen, Pampinea ordered everyone to refrain from talking; then, she sent for the four servants of the ladies and for those of the three young men, and as they stood before her in silence, she said:

"Since I must set the first example for you all in order that it may be bettered and thus allow our company to live in order and

8. According to church practice, special forms of prayers were prescribed by canon law for recitation at specified times during the day. As a result, people often told the time according to these seven canonical hours: matins (dawn); prime (about 6:00 A.M.); tierce (the third hour after sunrise, about 9:00 A.M.); sext (noon); nones (the ninth hour after sunrise, or about 3:00 P.M.); vespers (late afternoon); and compline (in the evening just before retiring).  
9. The leaves of the laurel bush were traditionally used in ancient times to

fashion crowns or garlands not only for warriors and heroes but also for outstanding poets, musicians, and artists. Laura, the inspiration of Petrarca's *Canzoniere*, was so named because of her association with the laurel and, therefore, with excellence in poetry. Most medieval and Renaissance illustrations of the great Italian poets Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio picture them with such laurel crowns, implying that they have equaled and perhaps even excelled the poets of classical antiquity.

in pleasure, and without any shame, and so that it may last as long as we wish, I first appoint Parmeno, Dioneo's servant, as my steward, and I commit to his care and management all our household and everything which pertains to the services of the dining hall. I wish Sirisco, the servant of Panfilo, to act as our buyer and treasurer and follow the orders of Parmeno. Tindaro, who is in the service of Filostrato, shall wait on Filostrato and Dioneo and Panfilo in their bedchambers when the other two are occupied with their other duties and cannot do so. Misia, my servant, and Licisca, Filomena's, will be occupied in the kitchen and will prepare those dishes which are ordered by Parmeno. Chimera, Lauretta's servant, and Stratilia, Fiametta's servant, will take care of the bedchambers of the ladies and the cleaning of those places we use. And in general, we desire and command each of you, if you value our favor and good graces, to be sure—no matter where you go or come from, no matter what you hear or see—to bring us back nothing but pleasant news."

And when these orders, praised by all present, were delivered, Pampinea rose happily to her feet and said:

"Here there are gardens and meadows and many other pleasant places, which all of us can wander about in and enjoy as we like; but at the hour of tierce let everyone be here so that we can eat in the cool of the morning."

After the merry group had been given the new queen's permission, the young men, together with the beautiful ladies, set off slowly through a garden, discussing pleasant matters, making themselves beautiful garlands, of various leaves and singing love songs. After the time granted them by the queen had elapsed, they returned home and found Parmeno busy carrying out the duties of his task; for as they entered a hall on the ground floor, they saw the tables set with the whitest of linens and with glasses that shone like silver and everything decorated with broom blossoms; then, they washed their hands and, at the queen's command, they all sat down in the places assigned them by Parmeno. The delicately cooked foods were brought in and very fine wines were served; the three servants in silence served the tables. Everyone was delighted to see everything so beautiful and well arranged, and they ate merrily and with pleasant conversation. Since all the ladies and young men knew how to dance (and some of them even knew how to play and sing very well), when the tables had been cleared, the queen ordered that instruments be brought, and on her command, Dioneo took a lute and Fiammetta a viola, and they began softly playing a dance tune. After the queen had sent the servants off to eat, she began to dance together with the other ladies and two of the young men; and when that was over, they all began to sing

carefree and gay songs. In this manner they continued until the queen felt that it was time to retire; therefore, at the queen's request, the three young men went off to their chambers (which were separate from those of the ladies), where they found their beds prepared and the rooms as full of flowers as the halls; the ladies, too, discovered their chambers decorated in like fashion. Then they all undressed and fell asleep.

Not long after the hour of nones, the queen arose and had the other ladies and young men awakened, stating that too much sleep in the daytime was harmful; then they went out onto a lawn of thick, green grass, where no ray of the sun could penetrate; and there, with a gentle breeze caressing them, they all sat in a circle upon the green grass, as was the wish of their queen. Then she spoke to them in this manner:

"As you see, the sun is high, the heat is great, and nothing can be heard except the cicadas in the olive groves; therefore, to wander about at this hour would be, indeed, foolish. Here it is cool and fresh and, as you see, there are games and chessboards with which all of you can amuse yourselves to your liking. But if you take my advice in this matter, I suggest we spend this hot part of the day not in playing games (a pastime which of necessity disturbs the player who loses without providing much pleasure either for his opponents or for those who watch) but rather in telling stories, for this way one person, by telling a story, can provide amusement for the entire company. In the time it takes for the sun to set and the heat to become less oppressive, you will each have told a little story, and then we can go wherever we like to amuse ourselves; so, if what I say pleases you (and in this I am willing to follow your pleasure), then, let us do it; if not, then let everyone do as he pleases until the hour of vespers."

The entire group of men and women liked the idea of telling stories.

"Then," said the queen, "if this is your wish, for this first day I order each of you to tell a story about any subject he likes."

And turning to Panfilo, who sat on her right, she ordered him in a gracious manner to begin with one of his tales; whereupon, hearing her command, Panfilo, while everyone listened, began at once as follows:

## First Day, First Story

*Ser Cepparello tricks a holy friar with a false confession and dies; although he was a most evil man during his lifetime, he is after death reputed to be a saint and is called Saint Ciappelletto.*

Dearest Ladies, it is fitting that everything done by man should begin with the marvelous and holy name of Him who was the Creator of all things; therefore, since I am to be the first to start our storytelling, I intend to begin with one of his marvelous deeds, so that when we have heard about it, our faith in him will remain as firm as ever and his name be ever praised by us.

It is clear that since earthly things are all transitory and mortal, they are in themselves full of wotries, anguish, and toil, and are subject to countless dangers which we, who live with them and are part of them, could neither bear nor defend ourselves from if strength and foresight were not granted to us by God's special grace. Nor should we believe that such special grace descends upon us and within us through any merit of our own, but rather it is sent by his own kindness and by the prayers of those who, like ourselves, were mortal and who have now become eternal and blessed with him, for they followed his will while they were alive. To these saints, as to advocates who from experience are aware of our weakness, we ourselves offer our prayers concerning those matters we deem desirable, because we are not brave enough to offer them to so great a judge directly. And yet in him we discern his generous mercy toward us, and since the human eye cannot gaze into the secrets of the divine mind in any way, it sometimes happens that, fooled by a false judgment, we choose as an advocate before his majesty one who is sentenced by him to eternal exile; nevertheless he, to whom nothing is hidden, pays more attention to the purity of the one who prays than to his ignorance or the damnation of his intercessor and answers those who pray to him just as if these advocates were blessed in his presence. All this will become most evident in the tale I am about to tell: I say evident, in accordance with the judgment of men and not that of God.

Now, there was a very rich man named Musciatto Franzesi; he was a famous merchant in France who had become a knight. He was obliged to come to Tuscany with Messer Charles Landless,<sup>1</sup>

1. Charles (1270-1325), count of Valois, Maine, and Anjou, and third son of Philip III, king of France. Upon the request of Pope Boniface VIII, Charles crossed the Alps in 1301 to assist Guelf

forces in Italy. When his eldest son ascended the French throne in 1328, he became the founder of the royal house of Valois.

the brother of the King of France, who had been sent for and encouraged to come by Pope Boniface.<sup>2</sup> Musciatto found that his affairs, like those of most merchants, were so entangled in every which way that he could not easily or quickly liquidate them, and he decided to entrust them to various people, and he found a means of disposing of everything. Only one difficult thing remained to be done: to find a person capable of recovering certain loans made to several people in Burgundy. The reason for his hesitation was that he had been informed the Burgundians were a quarrelsome lot, of evil disposition, and disloyal; and he could not think of an equally evil man (in whom he could place his trust) who might be able to match their wickedness with his own. After thinking about this matter for a long time, he remembered a certain Ser Cepparello from Prato, who had often been a guest in his home in Paris. This person was short and he dressed very elegantly; and the French, who did not know the meaning of the word "Cepparello" (believing that it meant "chapelet," in their tongue "garland"), used to call him not Ciappello but Ciappelletto, since he was short; and as Ciappelletto he was known to everyone, and few knew him as Ser Cepparello.<sup>3</sup>

Ciappelletto was, by profession, a notary; he was very much ashamed when any of his legal documents (of which he drew up many) was discovered to be anything but fraudulent. He would have drawn up, free of charge, as many false ones as would have been requested of him, and more willingly than another man might have done for a large sum of money. He gave false testimony with the greatest of pleasure, whether he was asked to give it or not; and since in those days in France great faith was placed in such oaths, and since he did not mind taking a false oath, he won a great many lawsuits by his wickedness every time he was called upon to swear, upon his life, to tell the truth. He took special pleasure and went to a great deal of trouble to stir up scandal, mischief, and enmities between friends, relatives, and anyone else, and the more evil that resulted from it, the happier he was. If he were asked to be present at a murder or at any other evil affair, he went there very gladly, never refusing, and he frequently found himself happily wounding or killing men with his very own hands. He was a great blasphemer of God and the saints, losing his temper on the slightest occasion, as if he were the most irascible man alive. He never went to church, and he made fun of all the church's sacraments,

2. Benedetto Caetani (1235?-1303), elected to the papacy as Boniface VIII on December 24, 1294. Because of his reputation for corruption and simony, Dante provided a place for him in hell (*Inferno*, Canto XIX) even before he passed away.

3. Messer(e) is the equivalent of Sir, Mister, or Master. It is also frequently found in the shortened form of Ser, as in Ser Cepparello. A similar expression commonly used to address women of a certain position is Madonna, meaning "my lady," also found in the shortened form Mona.

using abominable language to revile them; on the other hand, he frequented taverns and other dens of iniquity with great pleasure. He was as fond of women as dogs are of a beating with a stick; he was, in fact, more fond of men, more so than any other degenerate. He could rob and steal with a conscience as clean as a holy man making an offering. He was such a great glutton and big drinker that it would oftentimes produce bad effects on him: he was a gambler who often used loaded dice. But why am I wasting so many words on him? He was probably the worst man that ever lived! His cunning, for a long time, had served the wealth and the authority of Messer Musciatto, on whose behalf he was often spared both by private individuals (against whom he often committed crimes) and by the courts (against whom he always did).

When this Ser Cepparello came to the mind of Messer Musciatto, who was well acquainted with his life, he decided that he was just the man to deal with the evil nature of the Burgundians; and after summoning him, he spoke to him as follows:

"Ser Ciappelletto, as you know, I am about to leave here for good, and since, among others, I have to deal with these tricky Burgundians, I know of no one more qualified than yourself to recover my money from them; and since you are doing nothing else at the moment, if you look after this matter for me, I shall gain the favor of the court for you and I shall give you a just portion of what you manage to recover."

Ser Ciappelletto, then unemployed and in short supply of worldly goods, saw refuge and support about to depart, and without further delay, constrained, as it were, by necessity, made up his mind and announced that he would be happy to go. After they had made their agreement, and Ser Ciappelletto had received the power of attorney and necessary letters of recommendation from the king, Messer Musciatto departed and Ciappelletto went to Burgundy where hardly a soul knew him: and there, in a kind and gentle manner, unlike his nature, he began to collect the debts and to do what he had been sent to do—it was almost as though he were saving all his anger for the conclusion of his visit. And while he was doing this, he was lodged in the home of two Florentine brothers who lent money there at usurious rates and who showed him great respect (out of their love for Messer Musciatto); during this time he fell ill. The two brothers had doctors and nurses brought in immediately to care for him, and they bought everything necessary to restore his health. But all help was useless, for the good man (according to what the doctors said) was already old and had lived a disordered life, and every day his condition went from bad to worse, like someone with a fatal illness. The brothers were very sorry about this, and one day, standing rather close to the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto lay ill, they began talking to each other:

"What are we going to do with him?" said one to the other. "We're in a fine fix on his account! Sending him away, as sick as he is, would be a great source of reproach for us and an obvious sign of little sense, since people have seen how we received him at first, and then how we had him cared for and treated so well; and now, what will they say if they see him, at the point of death, being thrown out of our house all of a sudden without having done anything to displease us? On the other hand, he has been such a wicked man that he does not wish to confess himself or to receive any of the church's sacraments; and if he dies without confession, no church will wish to receive his body, and he will be thrown into a ditch just like a dead dog. And suppose he does confess? His sins are so many and so horrible that the same thing will happen, since neither friar nor priest will be willing or able to absolve him, and so, without absolution, he will be thrown into a ditch just the same. And if this happens, the people of this city, who already speak badly of us because of our profession (which they consider iniquitous) and who wish to rob us, will rise up in a mob when they see this and cry out: 'These Lombard dogs are not accepted by the church; we won't put up with them any longer!' They will run to our house and rob us not only of our property but of our lives as well; in any case, we are in trouble if he dies."

Ser Ciappelletto, who as we said was lying near where they were talking, had sharp ears, as is often the case with the sick, and he heard what they said about him. He had them summoned and told them:

"I don't want you to be afraid of receiving any harm on my account: I heard what you said about me, and I am very sure that things would happen as you say they would if everything went as you think it might; but things will turn out differently. Since I have committed so many offenses against God during my lifetime, committing one more against him now will make no difference. So find me the most holy and worthy priest that you can (if such a one exists), and leave everything to me, for I guarantee you that I shall set both your affairs and mine in order in a way that will please you."

Although the two brothers did not feel very hopeful about this, they went, nevertheless, to a monastery of friars and asked for some holy and wise priest to hear the confession of a Lombard who was ill in their home; and they were given an old friar who was a good and holy man, an expert in the Scriptures, and a most venerable man, for whom all the citizens had a very great and special devotion; and they took him with them. When the friar reached the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto was lying, he sat down at his side; first, he began to comfort him kindly, and then he asked him how long it had been since his last confession. To this question, Ser

Ciappelletto, who had never in his life made a confession, replied: "Father, I usually confess myself at least once a week, but there were many weeks that I confessed more often; and the truth is that since I have been ill—almost eight days now—I have not been to confession, so grave has been my illness."

Then the friar said:

"My son, you have done well, and you must continue to do so; and I see that since you have confessed so often, there will be little for me to ask or listen to."

Ser Ciappelletto replied:

"Father, don't say that; I have never confessed so many times or so often that I have not always wished to confess again all the sins I can remember from the day of my birth to the moment I am confessing; therefore, I beg you, my good father, that you ask me point by point about everything, as if I had never confessed before, and do not let my illness stand in your way, for I prefer to mortify this flesh of mine rather than, in treating it gently, to do something which might lead to the perdition of my soul which the Savior has redeemed with his precious blood."

These words pleased the holy man very much, and they seemed to him to be the sign of a well-disposed mind; and after he had commended Ser Ciappelletto highly for his practice, he began by asking him if he had ever sinned in lust with any woman. To this Ser Ciappelletto replied with a sigh:

"Father, on this account I am ashamed to tell you the truth for fear of sinning from pride."

To this the friar answered:

"Speak freely, for the truth was never a sin either in confession or elsewhere."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Since you assure me that this is the case, I shall tell you: I am as virgin today as when I came from my mother's womb."

"Oh, you are blessed by God!" said the friar, "how well you have done! And in so doing, you merit even more praise, for you have more freedom to do the contrary than we and others who are bound by religious rules have."

After this, he asked if he had displeased God through the sin of gluttony. To this, breathing a heavy sigh, Ser Ciappelletto replied that he had, and many times: for in addition to the periods of fasting which are observed during the year by the devout, he fasted every week for at least three days on bread and water, but he had drunk the water with the same delight and appetite as any great drinker of wine would—especially after he had worn himself out in prayer or in going on a pilgrimage; and he had often longed for those rough salads made of wild herbs such as women make when they are in the country, and on occasion eating had seemed better

to him than it should have seemed to someone like himself who fasted out of religious devotion. To this the friar replied:

"My son, these sins are natural ones and are very minor; therefore, I do not want you to burden your conscience with them more than necessary. No matter how very holy he may be, every man thinks that eating after a long fast and drinking after hard work is good."

"Oh, father," said Ser Ciappelletto, "don't say this just to console me; as you well know, things done in God's service should be done completely and without any hesitation; whoever does otherwise, sins."

The friar, who was most pleased to hear this, said:

"I am happy that you feel this way, and your pure and good conscience pleases me very much. But tell me, have you ever committed the sin of avarice by coveting more than was proper or by keeping what you should not have kept?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Father, do not suspect me of this because I am in the home of these usurers. I have nothing whatsoever to do with their profession; on the contrary, I came here to admonish and chastise them and to save them from this abominable kind of profit taking, and I believe that I might have accomplished this if God had not struck me down in this manner. But you should know that my father left me a rich man, and when he died, I gave the larger part of his inheritance to charity; then, to sustain my life and to enable me to aid Christ's poor, I carried on my small business affairs, and in my work I did wish to make a profit, but I always divided these profits with God's poor, giving one half to them and keeping the other half for my own needs; and my creator has aided me so well in this regard that my business affairs have always prospered."

"Well done!" replied the friar, "but have you not often become angry?"

"Oh," said Ser Ciappelletto, "that I have, and often. And who could keep himself from doing so, seeing all around me, every day, men doing evil deeds, disobeying God's commandments, and not fearing his judgments? Many times there have been days I would have rather been dead than to live to see young men chasing after the vanities of this world and to hear them swear and perjure themselves, to see them going to taverns, not visiting the churches, and following the ways of the world rather than those of God."

Then the friar said:

"My son, this is righteous anger, and I can impose no penance upon you for that. But, by any chance, did your wrath ever lead you to commit murder or to vilify anyone or to do any other kind of injury?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Alas, father! How could you say such things and be a man of God? If I had even so much as thought about doing any of those things you mentioned, do you believe that God would have done so much for me? These things are for criminals and evil men, and every time I met such a man, I always said: 'Begone! And may God convert you!'"

Then the friar said:

"May God bless you, my son! Have you ever given false testimony against anyone, or spoken ill of anyone, or taken their property without their permission?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Ser Ciappelletto, "I have spoken ill of others, for I once had a neighbor who did nothing but beat his wife unjustly, and one time I spoke badly about him to his wife's relatives, such was the pity I had for that poor creature; only God can tell you how he beat her every time he had had too much to drink."

Then the friar said:

"Now, you tell me you have been a merchant. Have you ever tricked anyone, as merchants are wont to do?"

"Of course," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "but I do not know who he was; all I know is that he was a man who brought me money which he owed me for some cloth I sold him, and I put it in my strongbox without counting it; a month later I discovered that he had given me four pieces more than he owed me, and since I saved the money for more than a year in order to return it to him but did not see him again, I finally donated it to charity."

"That was a small matter," said the friar, "and you did well in doing what you did with it."

And besides this, the holy friar asked him about many other matters, always receiving from him similar replies. And as he was about to give him absolution, Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Father, there is another sin which I have not mentioned."

The friar asked him what it was, and he answered:

"I recall that one Saturday after the hour of nones, I had my servant sweep the house and did, therefore, not show the proper reverence for the holy sabbath."

"Oh," said the friar, "that is a minor matter, my son."

"No," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "don't call it a minor matter. Sunday can never be honored too much, for on that day our Savior rose from the dead."

Then the friar asked:

"What else have you done?"

"Father," replied Ser Ciappelletto, "one time without thinking I spat in the house of God."

The friar began to smile and said:

"My son, that is nothing to worry about; we priests, who are

religious men, spit there all day long."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Then you do great harm, for no place should be kept as clean as a holy temple in which we give sacrifice to God."

And, in brief, he told the friar many things of this sort; and finally he began to sigh and then to weep loudly, which he was very good at doing whenever he wished. The holy friar asked:

"My son, what's the matter?"

Ser Ciappelletto replied:

"Alas, father, there is one remaining sin which I shall never confess, such is the shame I have of mentioning it, and every time I recall it, I cry as you see me doing now, and I feel sure that God will never have mercy on me for this."

Then the holy man said:

"Now there, my son, what's this you're saying? If all the sins which were ever committed by all men, or which will ever be committed as long as the world lasts, were all in one man, and he was as penitent and as contrite as I see you are, the kindness and mercy of God is so great that if he were to confess, God would freely forgive him of all those sins. Therefore, speak without fear."

Still crying loudly, Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Alas, father, mine is too great a sin, and I can hardly believe that God will forgive me unless your prayers are forthcoming."

To this the friar replied:

"Speak freely, for I promise to pray to God for you."

Ser Ciappelletto continued to cry without speaking, while the friar continued to exhort him to speak. But after Ser Ciappelletto had kept the friar in suspense with his extended weeping, he heaved a great sigh and said:

"Father, since you promise to pray to God on my behalf, I shall tell you: when I was a little boy, I cursed my mother one time."

And having said this, he began crying loudly again. The friar answered:

"Now there, my son, does this seem such a great sin to you? Oh! Men curse God all day, and he gladly forgives those who repent for having blasphemed against him; do you not believe that he will forgive you as well? Do not cry; take comfort, for he will surely forgive you with the contrition I see in you—even if you had been one of those who placed him upon the cross."

Then Ser Ciappelletto said:

"Alas, father! What are you saying? My sweet mother, who carried me in her womb nine months, day and night, and who took me in her arms more than a hundred times! Cursing her was too evil, and the sin was too great; and if you do not pray to God on my behalf, he will not forgive me."

When the friar saw that Ser Ciappelletto had nothing more to

say, he absolved him and gave him his blessing, thinking him to be a most holy man, just as he fully believed everything Ser Ciappelletto had told him. And who would not have believed it, seeing a man at the point of death confess in such a way? And then, after all this, he said to him:

"Ser Ciappelletto, with the help of God you will soon be well; but if it happens that God calls your blessed and well-disposed soul to himself, would it please you to have your body buried in our monastery?"

To this Ser Ciappelletto answered:

"Yes, father. Nor would I desire to be anywhere else, since you have promised to pray to God for me; moreover, I have always had a special devotion for your order. Therefore, when you return to your monastery, I beg you to send me that most true body of Christ which you consecrate each morning upon the altar—although I am not worthy of it—so that I may, with your permission, partake of it, and afterwards may I receive Holy Extreme Unction, for if I have lived as a sinner, at least I shall die as a Christian."

The holy man said that he would be pleased to do this and that he had spoken well and that he would arrange it so that the Sacrament should be brought to him immediately, which it was. The two brothers, who had strongly suspected that Ser Ciappelletto would trick them, had placed themselves near a partition which divided the bedchamber where Ser Ciappelletto was lying from another room, and as they listened, they could easily overhear and understand everything Ser Ciappelletto said to the friar; and at times they had such a desire to break out laughing that they would often say to each other:

"What kind of man is this? Neither old age nor illness, nor fear of death (which is so close), nor fear of God (before whose judgment he must soon stand), have been able to turn him from his wickedness, or make him wish to die differently from the manner in which he has lived!"

But when they heard it announced that he would be received for burial in the church, they did not worry about anything else. Shortly afterwards, Ser Ciappelletto took communion, and growing worse, without remedy, he received Extreme Unction; and just after vespers on the same day during which he had made his good confession, he died. Whereupon the two brothers, using his own money, took all the necessary measures to bury him honorably, and they sent word to the friars' monastery for them to watch over the body during the evening, according to custom, and to come for it in the morning. The holy friar that had confessed him, hearing that he had passed away, went with the prior of the monastery and had the assembly bell rung, and to the assembled friars he described what a holy man Ser Ciappelletto had been—according to

what he had been able to learn from his confession; and hoping that God might perform many miracles through him, he convinced his brothers that they ought to receive his body with the greatest reverence and devotion. The prior and all the other friars—all of them gullible—agreed to this, and in the evening, when they all went to where the body of Ser Ciappelletto was lying, they held a great and solemn vigil over it, and the following morning, chanting and all dressed in their vestments with their prayer books in hand, and preceded by their crosses, they sought his body out, and with the greatest ceremony and solemnity they carried it to their church, followed by almost all of the people in the city, both men and women; and when they had placed it in the church, the holy friar, who had confessed him, mounted the pulpit and began to preach marvelous things about him and his life, his fastings, his virginity, his simplicity, innocence, and holiness, recounting, among other things, what Ser Ciappelletto had tearfully confessed to him as his greatest sin, and describing to them how he was scarcely able to convince him that God might forgive him for it; from this he turned to reprove the people who were listening, and he said:

"And you, who are cursed by God, blaspheme against him, his Mother, and all the saints in paradise when a little blade of straw is caught under your feet!"

And besides this, he said a good deal more about his loyalty and his purity; in short, with his words, which were taken by the people of the countryside as absolute truth, he fixed Ser Ciappelletto so firmly in the minds and the devotions of all those who were present there that after the service was over, everyone pressed forward to kiss the hands and feet of the deceased, and all his garments were torn off his corpse, since anyone who could get a hold on a piece of them considered himself blessed. And it was necessary to keep his body there the entire day, so that all those who wished were able to look upon him. Then, the following night, he was honorably buried in a chapel within a marble tomb, and immediately, on the following morning, people began going there to light candles and to worship him and to make vows to him and to hang wax images as *ex votos*.<sup>4</sup> And meanwhile, the fame of his sanctity and the devotion in which he was held grew so much that no other saint received as many vows as he did from those poor people who found themselves in difficulty; and they called him and still continue to call him Saint Ciappelletto, and they claim that God has performed many miracles through him and continues to perform them to this day for anyone who seeks his intercession.

It was in this manner, then, that Ser Cepparello from Prato lived and died and became a saint, just as you have heard; nor do I wish to deny that it might be possible for him to be in the blessed

4. A votive offering, usually given or dedicated in fulfillment of a vow or pledge.

innkeeper advised him to leave Naples immediately; he did so at once and returned to Perugia, having invested his money in a ring when he had set out to buy horses.

\* \* \*

## Second Day, Seventh Story

*The sultan of Babylon sends one of his daughters as a wife for the king of Algarve;<sup>3</sup> in a series of misadventures, she passes through the hands of nine men in different lands in the space of four years; finally, she is returned to her father, who believes she is still a virgin and then continues on her way, as she had before, to the king of Algarve to marry him.*

\* \* \*

Quite a long time ago, there was a sultan of Babylon whose name was Beminedab and during his reign he was fortunate in all he did. Among his many children, both male and female, this man had a daughter named Alatiel who was, according to everyone who saw her, the most beautiful woman ever seen in the world in those times; now, the sultan had been attacked by a great army of Arabs, but with the timely assistance of the king of Algarve, he managed to rout them; in return, as a special favor to the king, who had asked for his daughter's hand, he promised her to him as his wife; and he put her on a well-armed and well-furnished vessel with an honorable escort of men and women and with many noble and rich gifts, and sent her on her way, commending her to God's protection.

The sailors saw that the weather was good, and setting their sails to the winds they left the port of Alexandria and sailed happily for many days; once they passed Sardinia, they felt their voyage was nearing its end, but one day there arose contrary winds which were so unusually strong that they buffeted the lady's ship, causing the sailors, more than once, to consider themselves lost. But, as the brave men that they were, they tried with all their strength and skill to withstand the beating of the heavy seas, and they did so for two days; the storm got progressively worse, and on the third night the tempest was at its peak; the sailors did not know where they were, and they could not determine their position by calculations or by sight, for the heavens were pitch-black from the clouds and

3. Italians of Boccaccio's day called the North Africa and a large section of Moorish kingdom, including most of Spain, by this name.

the night itself, and they were drifting not far from the coast of Majorca when they realized their boat had sprung a leak.

Seeing no other means of escape and everyone thinking only of himself, the officers launched a lifeboat and got into it, deciding to trust it more than the foundering ship; although the men already in the lifeboat tried with knives to fight off the others and prevent them from joining them, every last sailor on board managed to jump into the lifeboat, and thinking in this way to avoid death, they all met it: in such weather the lifeboat could not support so many passengers; it went under and everyone in it perished. Even though the ship was leaking and nearly full of water, it was swept by a gust of wind and driven swiftly onto the shore of the island of Majorca—and on board the vessel there were, by this time, no other passengers except the king's daughter and her ladies in waiting, all of whom were half-dead from fear and the tempest. The shock of the crash was so great that the ship lodged itself tightly in the sand about a stone's throw from the beach, and there it remained all night, battered by the sea, but resistant to the force of the wind.

By daybreak the tempest had calmed down a good deal, and the lady, half-dead and weak as she was, raised her head, and began calling now to one of her servants, now to another, but to no avail—all were too far away. Receiving no reply and seeing there was no one on board, she was greatly amazed and soon she began to feel frightened; as best she could, she got up and saw the other ladies lying all around her, and as she called to one and then another, she soon realized that most of them had died from seasickness and fear—this further increased the lady's terror. Finding herself completely alone there and not knowing where she was, she felt the need of advice and so she started shaking those who were still alive until she got them on their feet; and when she found out that none of her ladies knew where the men had gone and that the ship had struck land and was full of water, she began to weep bitterly with them.

It was already past the hour of noons before they saw anyone on the beach or anywhere else whom they might hope would help them. Around that time, returning from his estates, a gentleman whose name was Pericone da Visalgo happened to be passing by there on horseback with some of his servants; he spotted the ship and, immediately realizing what had occurred, he ordered one of his servants to try to climb aboard as quickly as possible and to report to him what he found there. The servant climbed aboard with much difficulty and found the young lady hiding in fear under the bowsprit with the few companions she had left. When they saw the man, they broke into tears and begged his mercy, but when they realized that they could not understand each other's language, they tried to explain their misadventure to him with sign language.

The servant checked over everything on board as best he could, and then told Pericone what he had found; Pericone immediately had the women brought down, along with their most precious belongings (those which were not waterlogged), and he had them taken to one of his castles where they were properly provided for with food and rest, and from Alatiel's elegant clothes and the honor paid her by the other women he concluded that she was of very noble birth. Although the lady was pale and disheveled as a result of her harrowing experience at sea, she nevertheless seemed most beautiful to Pericone; and because of this he immediately decided to take her for his wife, if she had no husband, or to have her as his mistress, if he could not have her as his wife.

Pericone was a very robust, bold-looking man. He saw to it that the lady was served in the best of fashions until, after several days, she was completely recovered; then he saw that she was even more beautiful than he had imagined, and he was most unhappy that they could not understand each other's language, for he was unable to learn who she was. But he remained moved beyond measure by her beauty, and with gracious and amorous deeds he kept trying to induce her to fulfill his desires without resistance. But all this was to no avail: she rejected all of his advances, and in so doing she increased all the more Pericone's passion for her—and the lady perceived this. After a few days, she guessed by the clothing worn by those around her that she was among Christians and approximately where she was; she realized that identifying herself was of little value and that sooner or later she would have to give in to Pericone's desires either by force or love; therefore, she proudly decided to rise above the misery of her fortune and ordered her three servants (for no more than three remained alive) never to tell anyone who they were unless they found themselves in a situation where revealing their identity offered a clear opportunity for obtaining their freedom; besides this, she advised them, above all else, to protect their chastity, declaring that she herself had decided never to let anyone but her husband enjoy her. Her women commended her for this and said they would do everything they could to obey her.

Burning with desire day by day, and burning even more when he saw the thing he craved so close and yet denied him, Pericone realized that his flattery was of no avail and turned to cunning and deceit, reserving force as a last resort. He had noticed on several occasions that the lady liked wine—as happens with those who are not accustomed to drinking it because their religion prohibits it—so he decided that he might be able to possess her by using wine as an assistant to Venus; and pretending not to care that she rejected him, one evening for a festive occasion he gave a sumptuous dinner to which the lady came; and, since the dinner provided many good

things to eat, Pericone ordered the man serving her to give her various mixed wines to drink. He did this very skillfully; and since she was not on her guard and was rather attracted by the pleasure of drinking, she had more than her decorum might have required; and forgetting her past misfortunes, she became happy, and seeing some women dancing in the fashion of Majorca, she began to dance in the Alexandrian style.

When Pericone saw this, he felt he was nearing his goal, and he prolonged the supper for much of the night by providing an abundance of food and drink. Finally, when the guests had left, he went to the lady's bedchamber where he was alone with her; she, being hotter with wine than tempered by chastity, stripped off her clothes without any hesitation of shame in his presence—almost as if Pericone were one of her servants—and got into bed. Pericone was not long following her; he put out all the lights and quickly lay down beside her, and taking her in his arms, with no resistance from her, he began to enjoy her amorously. When she felt what it was like, never before having felt the horn men use to butt, she repented of having rejected Pericone's previous advances; and without waiting to be beckoned to such sweet nights again, she often invited herself not with words, since she did not know how to make herself understood, but with actions.

While she and Pericone enjoyed each other, Fortune, not content to have made the wife of a king the mistress of a lord, prepared an even crueller love for the lady. Pericone had a brother named Marato who was twenty-five years old, handsome, and as fresh as a rose; when he saw the lady, he was immensely attracted to her, and judging from the signs he got from her, he saw that he was in her good graces. He decided that nothing stood in his way except the strict watch Pericone kept over her and he devised a cruel plan whose evil effects followed quickly its inception.

There was at that time, by chance, in the harbor of the city a ship which was loaded with merchandise to be taken to Chiarenza in the Morea<sup>4</sup> and which was owned by two young men from Genoa; it had already hoisted its sails in preparation to depart with the first favorable winds; Marato came to an agreement with its owners, arranging for them to take him aboard along with the lady the following night. When this was done, as soon as night fell, he decided how he would proceed: he went secretly to the home of Pericone, who was not at all suspicious of his brother, and he hid in the house according to the plan which he had made with some of his most trusted companions, to whom he had revealed what he intended to do. And in the middle of the night, he let his compan-

4. The Italian is *Romania*, a term which Italians of Boccaccio's day used for the Morea or the Greek Peloponnesus, the peninsula south of the Gulf of Corinth.

At the time Boccaccio composed *The Decameron*, this area was being contested by the Venetian republic, the Byzantine empire, and the Turks.

ions into the house and took them to where Pericone was sleeping with the lady; they went into the bedchamber and murdered Pericone in his sleep, and the lady, awake and weeping, they threatened with death if she made any noise as they took her away. With a large part of Pericone's valuable possessions they went quickly to the harbor unobserved, and there without delay Marato and the lady boarded the ship while his companions returned home. The sailors, with a good, fresh wind, set sail on their journey.

The lady grieved bitterly over her second misfortune as she did over her first; but with the assistance of the holy Stiff-in-hand God gave to man, Marato began to console her in such a way that she soon settled down with him, forgetting about Pericone; but she no sooner felt happy than Fortune, as if not content with her past woes, was preparing a new unhappiness for her: the lady, as was mentioned more than once, was extremely beautiful and most gracious, and the two young owners of the ship fell in love with her so passionately that they forgot every other problem on board and thought of nothing but how to serve and please her, always taking care that Marato would not notice anything.

Since each of them knew that the other was in love, they came to a secret agreement, deciding to share the lady's love between them—as if love could be shared like merchandise or money. The fact that she was well guarded by Marato created an obstacle to their plan, so one day, while the ship was sailing along at a good speed and Marato, unsuspecting, stood looking out to sea from the stern, the two men seized him quickly from behind and threw him into the sea; and they sailed over a mile before anyone noticed that Marato had fallen overboard. When the lady heard about this and saw no way of saving him, she began to bewail her new grief on the ship. The two lovers immediately came to comfort her with sweet words and great promises—none of which she really understood—but she was crying far more over her own misfortune than over the loss of Marato. And after they had talked with her on several occasions and tried to console her, they began to argue about who would be the first to sleep with her. Each one wanted to be the first, but neither could come to an agreement with the other, so they began to argue fiercely with strong words, and this grew into a rage, and finally they went at each other furiously with their knives in hand. Before the other men on board could separate them, they had given each other so many blows that one fell dead on the spot and the other, who was seriously wounded, remained alive; this displeased the lady very much, for she saw herself there alone without the aid or counsel of anyone, and she was very much afraid that the anger of the relatives and friends of the two shipowners might turn on her; but the pleas of the wounded man and their swift arrival at Chiarenza rescued her from the danger of death.

She got off the ship with the wounded man and went with him to an inn, and the reputation of her great beauty immediately spread throughout the city and reached the ears of the prince of Morea, who was at that time in Chiarenza; whereupon he wished to see her for himself, and when he did, he thought that her beauty was even greater than what he had heard, and, right then and there, he fell so passionately in love with her that he could think of nothing else; and when he heard how she arrived there, he thought that he ought to be able to have her.

When the relatives of the wounded man heard that the prince was looking for a way of possessing her, they quickly sent her to him; this pleased the prince a great deal as it also did the lady, since she felt that she had avoided one great danger. The prince saw that she had royal manners besides her beauty, and he guessed that she must be of noble birth (even though he was not otherwise able to learn who she was), and his love for her increased and was so great that he treated her more like his own wife than his mistress. The lady thought over her past misfortunes and now she considered herself to be quite well off; as she was consoled she became cheerful again, and her beauty flowered to such an extent that it seemed as if all of the Peloponnesus talked of nothing else. Because of this, the duke of Athens—a handsome and brave young man, and a friend and relative of the prince—desired to see her; and with the excuse that he had come to visit the prince, as he was accustomed to do on occasion, he arrived at Chiarenza with a numerous and honorable retinue, and he was received nobly and most cheerfully.

After a few days passed, the two men started discussing the charms of this lady, and the duke asked if she was as marvelous as people claimed; to this the prince replied:

"Far more so, but I want you to judge for yourself with your own eyes and not by my words."

On the prince's invitation, the two men went to where the lady was staying; their coming was announced previously, and the lady received them most respectfully and with a smile. She sat down between the two men, but they were not able to enjoy the pleasure of her conversation, for they understood little or nothing of her language; therefore, each of them stared at this marvelous creature, especially the duke, who could hardly believe that she was a mortal; and as he gazed at her, he did not realize that with his eyes he was drinking the poison of love, and thinking that he was merely satisfying his curiosity by looking at her, he found himself totally ensnared by her charms and fell deeply in love with her. After he left the lady with the prince and had time to think things over, he came to the conclusion that the prince was happier than any other man, having such a beautiful lady at his pleasure; and after many

and various thoughts, his burning love weighing upon him more than his sense of honor, he decided that no matter what, he had to deprive the prince of this happiness and to do what he could to make it his own.

Wishing to speed up matters, he put aside all reason and justice and turned all his thoughts to treachery: one day, in accordance with the evil plan he devised, together with a most trusted servant of the prince, whose name was Ciuriaci, he prepared all his horses and his belongings for departure, and that night, together with an armed accomplice, he was let quietly into the prince's bedchamber by the aforementioned Ciuriaci. It was a very hot night, and he found the lady asleep and the prince standing naked at a window facing the sea, enjoying a breeze blowing from that direction; his accomplice, who had been told earlier what he was to do, quietly crossed the bedchamber towards the window and stabbed the prince in the back with a knife that went all the way through his body, then he quickly grabbed him and threw him out the window.

The palace stood very high above the ocean, and the window where the prince had been standing looked over a group of houses which had been destroyed by the sea, and thus people rarely or never went there; therefore it happened, as the duke had foreseen earlier, that the fall of the prince's body was never heard by anyone. As soon as the duke's accomplice saw that the deed was done successfully, he quickly drew out a rope which he had secretly carried with him and, pretending to embrace Ciuriaci, he threw it around his neck and pulled hard enough to keep him from making a sound, and when the duke came in, they strangled Ciuriaci and threw his body down to join the prince's. When this was done, certain that they had not been heard by either the lady or anyone else, the duke took a light in his hand and carried it over to the bed and, silently uncovering the lady, who was deep in sleep, he examined all her body, praising it most highly; as she had pleased him clothed, naked she pleased him beyond all measure. Burning now with even more desire and unconcerned with the crime he had just committed, with his hands still bloody, he lay down beside the lady, and made love to her while she, half-asleep, mistook him for the prince.

After he had lain with her for some time, with the greatest of pleasure, he got up and had several of his attendants come in and take the lady quietly out through a secret door—the same one by which he entered—and put her on horseback as quietly as possible; then the duke, with all his men, set out for Athens. But since he already had a wife, the grieving lady was not taken to Athens but rather to one of his most beautiful villas situated just outside the city and above the sea, and there in secret he kept her and had her honorably served, satisfying her every need.

The following morning, the prince's courtiers waited until the

hour of nones for him to awaken, but hearing nothing, they opened the door of the bedchamber (which was only half-closed), and finding no one inside, they thought that he had gone somewhere in secret to spend a few pleasurable days with that beautiful lady of his, and they worried about it no more. The following day a madman happened to be wandering through the ruins where the bodies of the prince and Ciuriaci were lying, and he pulled Ciuriaci out by the rope around his neck, and went around dragging the dead man behind him. Many people recognized the body and were amazed; they managed to coax the madman into leading them back to where he had found the body and there, to the very great sorrow of the entire city, they discovered the body of the prince, which they buried most honorably. In attempting to find out who might be responsible for such a heinous crime, they found that the duke of Athens was no longer there but had departed in secret, and they judged, and rightly so, that he must have committed this crime and taken the lady away with him. They immediately took as their new ruler the brother of the dead man, and they strongly urged him to take revenge; when more evidence was found establishing as true what they had guessed to be correct, the prince called together his friends and relatives and vassals from various regions and quickly formed a very large and powerful army to wage war on the duke of Athens.

When the duke heard of this, he, too, made ready all his forces for his defense, and many noblemen came to his aid, and among them was the emperor's son Costanzo and Emanuel his nephew, sent by the emperor of Constantinople, together with a large body of men. These men were most honorably received by the duke and even more so by the duchess, who was Costanzo's sister. As the day of war came closer and closer, the duchess, at an appropriate moment, had both relatives brought to her bedchamber, and there with many tears and words she told them the whole story, explaining to them the reasons for the war and how offended she was by the duke, who thought she did not know that he was keeping that woman of his secretly; and complaining of all this most bitterly, she begged them, for the sake of the duke's honor and for her own consolation, to make amends as best they could. The young men already knew all about the matter and so, without asking too many questions, they comforted the duchess to the best of their ability, and renewing her hope, they departed, having learned from her where the lady was. And having often heard praised the marvelous beauty of the lady, wishing to see her, they begged the duke to show her to them; remembering very little of what had happened to the prince for allowing him to see her, he promised to do so: he had a magnificent banquet prepared in a beautiful garden where the lady lived, and he took them and a few other companions there

the following morning to dine with her.

Costanzo sat beside her, and looking at her in amazement, he told himself that he had never seen anything as beautiful as she and that one must certainly excuse the duke, or anyone else, for using any treacherous means possible in order to possess such a beautiful creature; and as he looked at her time and again, praising her more each time, something not unlike what happened to the duke happened to him: he was madly in love with her, and by the time he left her, he had completely abandoned all thought of war and gave himself over to thinking only about how he could take her from the duke, carefully concealing his love from anyone.

And while he was burning with this desire, the time came to march against the prince, who was already nearing the duke's territories; therefore the duke, Costanzo, and all the others marched from Athens, according to a previously established plan, to the border territories so that the prince might be prevented from advancing further. And all the time he was there, Costanzo's heart and thoughts were fixed upon that lady. Since the duke was away, he thought he could easily lead her to fulfill his desire; so, in order to have the chance to return to Athens, he pretended to be very ill; with the permission of the duke, he turned his command over to Emanuel, and returned to his sister in Athens. After he was there for several days, he brought up the topic of the insult which she felt she had received from the duke on account of the lady he kept, and he told her that he would gladly assist her in this matter, if she wished, by taking Alatiel away.

Thinking that Costanzo was doing this out of love for her and not for that lady, the duchess said that this would please her very much, if it could be done in such a way that the duke would never know she had consented to it. Costanzo gave his promise, and the duchess agreed that he should proceed in the manner which seemed best to him.

Costanzo secretly had a swift ship fitted out, and one evening he sent it to a place near the garden where the lady was living. The sailors aboard were given their instructions, and the duke with some friends went to the palace where the lady stayed, and there he was received cheerfully by those in her service and then by the lady herself; and then accompanied by her servants and by the companions of Costanzo, they all, at her request, went into the garden. And pretending to wish to speak to the lady privately on the duke's behalf, he walked with her alone toward a gate which opened out onto the sea; it had already been opened by one of his friends, and the ship signaled to come to that spot, when Costanzo quickly had the lady taken aboard. Then he turned to her servants and said:

"Let nobody move or make a sound unless he wants to die! I am not stealing the duke's mistress; I am removing the shame he has

inflicted upon my sister!"

No one dared reply to this, and Costanzo boarded the ship with his companions and sat beside the lady, who was weeping; then he gave orders for the oars to be placed in the water and the ship to set sail, and the oars were more like wings, for they arrived at Aegina<sup>5</sup> close to dawn the following day. There, they left the ship to rest on land, and Costanzo consoled the lady, who wept over her unfortunate beauty; then, they boarded the ship again and within a few days reached Chios.<sup>6</sup> Fearing his father's reprimands and that the lady might be taken away from him, he decided to remain there in a safe place; the beautiful lady continued to weep over her misfortune for some days, but as soon as she received the same comfort from Costanzo as she had from the others before him, she began to enjoy what Fortune had prepared for her.

While things were going as they were, Osbech, who at that time was king of the Turks and constantly at war with the emperor, came, by chance, to Smyrna;<sup>7</sup> and when he heard how Costanzo was living such a lascivious life on Chios with some woman he had stolen and how he was taking no precautions to protect himself, he went there one night with some lightly armed ships and men; he quietly landed at Chios with his men, and took by surprise many of Costanzo's men who were in their beds, unaware that the enemy was upon them; the others, those who did awaken, ran for their weapons and were killed; the entire city was burned, plunder and prisoners were placed aboard the ships, and all returned to Smyrna.

Osbech, who was a young man, discovered the beautiful lady while examining his plunder, and when he understood that this was the one who had been taken while asleep in bed with Costanzo, he was most happy to see her; without further delay, he made her his wife, celebrated the wedding, and slept with her happily for a number of months.

Before these events took place, the emperor had been negotiating with Basano, king of Cappadocia,<sup>8</sup> for him to attack Osbech from one side with his forces while he with his men would attack him from the other, but they had not yet completely come to an agreement, for the emperor did not wish to grant some of the demands which Basano was making, believing them to be somewhat excessive. But when he heard what had happened to his son, he was so grieved that without further delay, he granted what the king of Cappadocia had requested and asked him to attack Osbech as soon as he was able, while he would make ready to attack from the opposite side.

5. An island off the southeastern coast of Greece.

6. A Greek island off the western coast of Turkey in the Aegean Sea.

7. A port city now known as Izmir, lo-

cated on the Gulf of Izmir, an inlet of the Aegean extending into western Turkey.

8. An ancient part of eastern Asia Minor, now central Turkey.

When Osbech heard about this, he assembled his army in order to avoid being trapped between these two powerful rulers, and he proceeded to attack the king of Cappadocia, leaving his beautiful lady guarded by one of his friends and faithful vassals; after a time he met the king of Cappadocia in combat and his army was defeated and scattered, while he himself was killed. Victorious, Basano began to advance towards Smyrna, meeting little opposition, and as he approached, everyone paid homage to him as the conqueror.

Antioco, Osbech's vassal in whose care the lady had been left, saw how beautiful she was, and although he was an old man, he found himself unable to keep the trust he had pledged his friend and lord, and he fell in love with her. He knew her language (something which pleased her very much, for she had been forced to live many years almost like a deaf-mute, not understanding anyone and unable to make anyone understand her), and urged on by love, Antioco became so intimate with her in just a few days that not long afterwards, forgetting about their lord who was away at war, they made their intimacy more passionate than friendly, enjoying each other most exquisitely between the sheets.

But when they heard that Osbech had been defeated and killed and that Basano was seizing everything in his path, they both decided not to await his arrival there; they gathered up the greatest part of Osbech's most valuable possessions, and together they went secretly to Rhodes,<sup>9</sup> but they were there for but a short time before Antioco fell mortally ill. They had, by chance, gone to live with a Cypriot merchant who was a most beloved friend of Antioco, and when he felt that he was near death, he decided to leave all his belongings as well as his dear lady to his friend. About to die, he called them both to his side and said:

"There is no doubt I am coming to my end, and this grieves me, for living has never pleased me so much as it does now. There is one thing that, in truth, will allow me to die happy: if I must die, let me die in the arms of those two persons whom I love the most, more than any others in the world—in your arms, dear friend, and in those of this lady whom I have loved more than myself from the very day I met her. It truly grieves me to die and to leave her here, a foreigner without aid or counsel; it would be even more grievous if I did not know you were here, for I believe that, out of affection for me, you will care for her just as you would care for me; therefore, should I die, I beg you with all my strength to take charge of my possessions and of her, and do with them whatever you feel will serve as a consolation to my soul. And you, dearest lady, I beg you not to forget me after my death, so that I may boast in the hereafter that I was loved by the most beautiful woman that was ever

9. The capital of the largest of the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea.

created by Nature. If you will reassure me on these two matters, I shall be able to pass away with no doubts and in peace."

Hearing these words, the merchant friend and the lady began to weep, and when Antioco finished speaking, they comforted him, giving him their word of honor to do what he had asked in the event of his death; not long afterward he passed away and was buried honorably by them. Then, a few days later, the Cypriot merchant, having concluded his business in Rhodes, decided to return to Cyprus on a Catalan merchant ship which was already in port, and he asked the beautiful lady what she wished to do, since he had to go back to Cyprus. The lady replied that if he were willing, she would gladly go with him, and that she hoped she would be treated and regarded by him as a sister because of his love for Antioco. The merchant said that he would be happy to do anything she wished, and to protect her from any harm which might befall her before they reached Cyprus, he suggested that she pose as his wife.

They boarded the ship and were given a small cabin in the stern, and in order to keep up the pretense, the merchant and the lady slept together in a rather small bed; because of this, something happened which was not intended to happen by either one of them when they left Rhodes: the dark, the comfort, and the warmth of the bed (the power of which is by no means small) excited them, and they forgot about their friendship and love for the dead Antioco, and drawn together by mutual passion, they began to stimulate each other, and before they reached Paphos,<sup>1</sup> where the Cypriot lived, they had begun sleeping together as if they were married; after their arrival at Paphos, she stayed for some time with the merchant.

One day it happened by chance that a nobleman named Antigono came to Paphos on business; he was old and very wise but rather poor, and although he had served the king of Cyprus in many matters, Fortune had been unkind to him. One day, after the Cypriot merchant had gone to Armenia on a voyage of business, Antigono by chance happened to be passing the house where the lovely lady lived when he caught sight of her at one of the windows; because she was so beautiful, he stared at her and then remembered that he had seen her on another occasion, but no matter how hard he tried he could not recall where.

The beautiful lady who for so long had been Fortune's toy now saw the end of her misfortunes was approaching; when she saw Antigono, she remembered that he had held a position of no little importance among her father's servants in Alexandria; suddenly she was filled with the hope of returning to her royal position with his help; and since her merchant was not there, she sent for Antigono

1. A city on the island of Cyprus.

as soon as she could. He came and she asked timidly if he might not be Antigono of Famagusta,<sup>2</sup> as she believed he was. Antigono replied that he was and then he said:

"My lady, it seems that I recognize you, but I cannot remember where I saw you; I beg you, if you please, to recall to my memory who you are."

The lady knew from his words who he was, and breaking into tears, she embraced him—all of this amazed him—and then she asked him if he had ever seen her in Alexandria. When Antigono heard this question, he immediately recognized her as Alatiel, the daughter of the sultan, whom he believed to have died at sea; he tried to pay her the customary respect, but she would not hear of it, and asked him to sit with her for a while. Antigono did so, and he respectfully asked her how and when and from where she had come there, for all of Egypt was convinced that she had drowned at sea some years ago. To this the lady replied:

"I would prefer that my life had ended that way rather than to have led the life I have lived, and I think my father would wish the same thing if he ever found out about it."

And saying this, she began to weep profusely again, and Antigono said to her:

"My lady, do not give up hope before there is need to; if you will, tell me what happened to you and what your life has been like, and perhaps the matter can be treated in such a way that we can, with God's help, find a remedy."

"Antigono," said the beautiful lady, "it seems to me that as I see you here, I see my own father, and moved by that love and tenderness which I feel for him, I revealed my identity to you, although I could have kept it hidden, and there are few people whom I would be happier to see than you; therefore, I shall reveal to you, as if to my own father, all of my wretched misfortunes which I have always kept concealed from everyone. After you have heard them, if you see any means of restoring me to my rightful station, I beg you to make use of them; if not, I beseech you never to tell anyone that you have seen me or have heard anything about me."

After she had said this, she told him, continuing to weep, what had happened to her from the day when she was shipwrecked off the coast of Majorca to the present moment, and, out of pity, Antigono began to cry. After thinking for a while about what she had told him, he said:

"My lady, since you have always concealed your identity during your misfortunes, I shall, without a doubt, return you more beloved than ever to your father, and then you will become the wife of the king of Algarve."

When she asked him how, he explained in detail what she had

2. The leading seaport of Cyprus.

to do: and to avoid any more delays, Antigono returned at once to Famagusta and presented himself to the king, saying:

"My lord, if it please you, you can do great honor to yourself and be of inestimable service to me (who have become poor in your service) without great cost to yourself."

The king asked how this might be done, and Antigono answered:

"The beautiful young daughter of the sultan has arrived at Paphos, the one who was long thought to have been drowned at sea, and in preserving her chastity, she has long suffered the greatest of hardships; now she is poverty-stricken and wishes to return to her father. If it would please you to send her back to him in my care, you would do great honor to yourself and be of great help to me, nor do I believe that the sultan would ever forget such a favor."

The king, moved by royal decorum, immediately agreed; he sent for the lady and had her brought to Famagusta where he and the queen received her with great festivity and honor. When she was questioned about her misadventures, she answered, telling all, according to the instructions given to her by Antigono. At her own request a few days later, the king returned her to the sultan, with a handsome and honorable company of ladies and noblemen under the command of Antigono; no one need ask how well she or Antigono and the rest of her party were received. And after she had rested a while, the sultan wished to know how she managed to be still alive and where she had lived for so long a time without ever sending word concerning her condition. The young lady, who had memorized Antigono's instructions very well, began to speak to her father in this fashion:

"Father, about the twentieth day after my departure from you, our ship foundered in a fierce storm one night and was driven onto some western shores not far from a place called Aiguesmortes,<sup>3</sup> and what happened to the sailors who were aboard the ship I could not tell you; I only remember that when it was day and I came to life almost as if from the dead, the wrecked ship had already been spotted by peasants and they had run to plunder it from all over the countryside; I went ashore with two of my women servants, who were immediately seized by young men and taken off in different directions—what ever became of them, I never knew; then two young men seized me and dragged me off by my hair, and while I was resisting and weeping bitterly, it happened that as the men dragging me were crossing a road to get to a great forest, four men were passing by there at that moment on horse-

3. An important medieval town situated in the region of Provence in France, a major port during the Middle Ages. King Louis IX embarked from there for Egypt in 1248 and for Tunis in 1270

to begin the Seventh and Eighth Crusades. Today, the walled city no longer borders upon the ocean because of geographical changes which have left it landlocked.

back, and when my captors saw them, they immediately abandoned me and took to flight.

"When the four men, who seemed to be persons of authority, saw them flee, they galloped over to where I was and asked me many questions, and I answered but neither they nor I understood the other. After a long discussion, they put me on one of their horses and took me to a convent which was organized according to their religious laws, and there, because of whatever it was they said, I was most kindly received and honored by the nuns, and with great devotion I then joined them in serving St. Peter the Big in the Valley, for whom the women of that country had great love. After I had lived for some time with them and learned some of their language, they asked me who I was and where I came from, and since I knew where I was and feared, if I told the truth, that I might be driven away as an enemy of their religion, I replied that I was the daughter of a great nobleman from Cyprus who was sending me to Crete to be married when, unfortunately, we were driven ashore and shipwrecked.

"And many times in many ways, fearing the worst, I followed their customs; and when I was asked by the oldest of those women, whom they call "abbess," if I wanted to return to Cyprus, I answered that I desired no other thing as much; but since she was concerned for my honor, she never wanted to entrust me to anyone who was going towards Cyprus until about two months ago, when several French gentlemen arrived there with their ladies, among whom there was some relative of the abbess; when she heard that they were going to Jerusalem to visit the sepulcher where the man they consider their God<sup>4</sup> was buried after he was murdered by the Jews, she entrusted me to their care and begged them to take me to my father in Cyprus.

"It would be too long a story to recount how much these noblemen honored me and how cheerfully I was received by their ladies. We boarded the ship, and after some days we arrived at Paphos; I did not know anyone there, nor did I know what I should say to the noblemen who wished to return me to my father according to the instructions that the worthy abbess had given them; but God provided a way out for me, perhaps because he took pity on me, for just as we were disembarking at Paphos, there Antigono was on the shore; I called out to him at once, and so that I would not be understood by either the gentlemen or their ladies, I told him in our own language to welcome me as if I were his daughter. He understood me immediately, and after he had greeted me accordingly and had thanked those gentlemen and those ladies as his poverty permitted, he took me with him to the king of Cyprus, who received me and sent me on to you with such honor that I

could never describe it. If there is anything else left to tell, let Antigono tell you, for he has often heard me speak of my adventures."

Antigono then turned to the sultan and said:

"My lord, all she has told you here, she has many times told me, and those ladies and noblemen with whom she came have told me the same thing; she has only left out one part of her story, which I think she has omitted because she feels it is not appropriate for her to mention: that these noblemen and ladies with whom she came spoke very highly about the virtuous life she led with the nuns and about her praiseworthy behavior, and both the ladies and the men shed many tears and expressed their regrets when they had to leave her, handing her over to me. If I wished to tell you everything they said to me, not only the present day but the coming night would not be sufficient; let it suffice for me to say that according to their own words and what I was able to witness for myself, you certainly may boast of having the most beautiful, the most virtuous, and the most chaste daughter that any ruler who wears a crown today possesses."

The sultan was extremely pleased to hear these things and many times he prayed God to grant him the grace to be able to reward properly whoever had honored his daughter, and especially the king of Cyprus for having honorably returned her to him; and some days later, he presented Antigono with sumptuous gifts and gave him leave to return to Cyprus, bringing with him to the king by letter and by special ambassadors his deepest gratitude for the great kindness he had shown to his daughter. After this, he decided to carry out what he had originally planned to do, that is, to make his daughter the wife of the king of Algarve; so he wrote to him, telling him everything that had happened to her and said that if he still wished to marry her, he should send for her. This pleased the king of Algarve very much, and he sent an honorable escort for her and received her most happily. And she, who had lain with eight men perhaps ten thousand times, went to bed with the king as if she were a virgin, and she made him believe that she still was one. And from then on she lived happily with him as his queen. This is why it is said: "A mouth which is kissed does not lose its good fortune; on the contrary, it is renewed like the moon."<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

4. The narrator's ambiguous conclusion describing the reaction of the seven ladies to this story (found in the opening of the ninth tale of the same day) is well worth considering in analyzing Boccaccio's view of Alatiel: "The ladies breathed many a sigh over the beautiful

woman's various adventures; but who knows what was the cause which moved these sighs? Perhaps there were some of them who sighed no less because of their longing for such frequent embraces than because of their compassion for Alatiel."

## Third Day, First Story

*Masetto from Lamporecchio pretends to be a deaf-mute and becomes the gardener for a convent of nuns, who all compete to lie with him.*

\* \* \*

In this countryside of ours there was, and still is today, a nun's convent which is very famous for its sanctity and which I shall not name in order not to diminish to any degree its fame. Not long ago, there were only eight nuns and an abbess in the convent, all of whom were young women; there was also a good, sturdy man who took care of their very beautiful garden, but since he was not happy with his salary, he settled his accounts with the nun's steward and returned to Lamporecchio, from where he had come. There, among the others who cheerfully welcomed him back, was a young worker, strong and hardy, who was, for a peasant, a handsome man, and his name was Masetto. He asked the good man, whose name was Nuto, where he had been for so long a time, and Nuto told him, and when Masetto asked him what he did at the convent, Nuto answered:

"I worked in one of their beautiful, large gardens, and sometimes I went to the woods for firewood; I also would get the water from the well, and other such services, but the ladies gave me such a small salary that I could just barely buy shoes for myself. What's more, they were all young, and I thought they had the devil in their bodies, for there was nothing you could do to please them; in fact, when I would be in the orchard, sometimes one of them would tell me 'Put this here' and another would say 'Put this there,' and another would take the hoe from my hand and would say 'That's not the way.' They pestered me so much that I stopped working in the garden, and, for one reason or another, I decided I didn't want to work there any longer, and I came back here. When I left, their steward made me promise to send someone from here who knew how to garden, and I promised him, if I knew someone, I would send him. But his kidneys will turn into relics before I'll look for someone or send him anyone."

When Masetto heard what Nuto had to say, he was consumed with desire to be with these nuns, for he understood from Nuto's words that he would be able to do what he wished there; he also realized that things would not work out for him if he told Nuto about his plans, and so he said:

"Well, you did right to come home. What's a man reduced to when he's around women? He's better off around devils; six out of seven times even they don't know what they want!"

But later on after their conversation, Masetto began thinking about how he should act in order to get the job with the nuns. He knew he could do the work Nuto did just as well as Nuto himself, so he was not afraid of being turned away on that account; he was afraid, rather, of not being hired because he was too young and good-looking. After considering a number of plans, he thought to himself:

"The place is far away from here and no one knows me there; if I can pretend to be deaf and dumb, they'll certainly take me in."

With this in mind, he took up his ax and without telling anyone where he was going, he went to the convent dressed as a poor man; he arrived there and when inside the courtyard he found, by chance, the steward, to whom he made gestures as mutes do, asking him in sign language for a bite to eat for the love of God, and offering to chop some wood if they needed any.

The steward gladly gave him something to eat, and then he showed him some logs which Nuto had not been able to split, and he split them in no time at all, for he was very strong. Then the steward had to go to the forest, so he took Masetto with him, and there he had him cut some firewood, then load it on the donkey, and, by means of gestures, made him understand that he should carry it back to the convent. Masetto did this so well that the steward kept him around for several more days to do some important chores; one day the abbess happened to see him and she asked the steward who he was. He replied:

"My lady, he is a poor deaf and dumb man who came by here one day begging for alms, and I helped him out and, in return, made him do many of the chores that had to be done. If he knew how to work an orchard and wanted to remain here, I think we would have a good servant in him. He is just what we need: he's strong, and we can make him do what we wish, and besides this, you wouldn't have to worry about the possibility of his joking with your young ladies."

To this the abbess replied:

"By God's faith, you are speaking the truth; find out if he knows how to garden and try to keep him here; give him a pair of shoes, an old cloak, and praise him, pamper him, give him plenty to eat."

The steward said he would do so. Masetto, who was not far away, was pretending to clean the courtyard while he listened to everything that was said, and he said to himself with much delight:

"If you put me in there, I'll work your garden like it's never been worked before!"

Now, when the steward saw that he knew how to work very well,

he asked him with gestures if he would stay on, and Masetto, with gestures, answered that he was willing to do whatever the steward wanted; so the steward told him to work the orchard and showed him what he had to do; then he left him alone and went off to attend to the other chores of the convent. As Masetto worked day after day, the nuns began to pester him and to make fun of him, as often happens to deaf-mutes; they said the most vile words they knew to him, convinced as ever that he could not understand them; and the abbess thought little or nothing about it, perhaps because she thought that he was as much without a tail up front as he was without a tongue in his mouth. Now one day it happened that two young nuns walking through the garden approached him while he was resting after much hard work, and, as he pretended to be asleep, they began to stare at him; and one of them, the boldest of the two, said to the other:

"If I thought that you could keep a secret, I would tell you a thought that has passed through my mind many times, something which you might find profitable too."

The other nun replied:

"You can tell me, for I shall certainly tell no one else."

Then the bolder one began:

"I don't know if you have ever thought about how carefully we are watched here and how no man ever dares enter here except the steward, who is old, and this deaf-mute, and I have often heard it said by many of the women who come here that all the other pleasures of the world are a joke compared to what happens when a woman gets together with a man. Because of this I have been thinking about seeing if this could be true by trying it with this deaf-mute, since no one else is available; and he is the best person in the world for this purpose, since, even if he wanted to, he could not or would not know how to speak about it; as you can see, he is a stupid youth, mature in everything but his wits. I should very much like to hear what you think about the idea."

"Oh," said the other nun, "what are you saying? Don't you know that we have promised our virginity to God?"

"Oh," answered the first, "how many promises do we make him every day which we can't keep? If we have made him promises, let him find others to keep them for us!"

To this her companion said:

"But if we become pregnant, what'll we do?"

"You're beginning to worry about the worst before it ever happens," the bolder replied. "Worry about it when and if it happens; there are a thousand ways to keep it a secret, if we don't tell about it ourselves."

When her companion heard this, she wanted more than the other to find out what kind of beast a man was, and she said:

"Well, all right, how shall we proceed?"

The other answered her:

"As you see, it is almost none, and I think that all the sisters are asleep except for us; let's look to see if anyone is in the orchard, and if there is no one around, all we have to do is take him by the hand and lead him over to that hut where he goes when it rains, and one of us can stay inside with him while the other keeps watch. He is so stupid that he'll do whatever we wish."

Masetto heard all this and was ready to obey, waiting only for that moment when one of them would lead him off. Both nuns looked around carefully, and when they saw that they could not be seen by anyone from anywhere, the sister who had first made the suggestion approached Masetto and woke him; he rose immediately to his feet. Then, she took him by the hand, while he made ridiculous giggling noises, and with flattering gestures she led him to the hut, where Masetto did what she wished without waiting for an invitation. After she had what she wished, being a loyal friend, she gave her place to the other nun, and Masetto, still playing the fool, did what she wanted. And before they left, both sisters wished to see what it would be like to have the deaf-mute ride them once more; then later on, discussing it with each other, they decided that it really was as pleasant as they had heard, even more so; and so, whenever they found it convenient, from then on they would amuse themselves with the mute.

One day it happened that one of the other nuns saw what was going on from one of the windows of her cell, and she showed two others; at first they decided to denounce the two girls to the abbess, but then they changed their minds and came to an agreement with them instead: they became partners in Masetto's farm; and because of other various incidents, the convent's other remaining three nuns soon joined their company.

Finally the abbess, who still did not know about any of this, was walking in the garden one day all alone in the heat of the day when she came upon Masetto, who tired so easily during the day because of all the time he spent riding at night; he was stretched out in the shade of an almond tree, asleep, and the wind had blown the ends of his shirt up, leaving him quite exposed. Looking at it and realizing she was all alone, the abbess fell victim to the same lustful cravings that had taken her nuns; she woke Masetto and led him to her room where she kept him for several days, provoking much complaining from the nuns, for the gardener had not returned to work their garden, and the abbess over and over again enjoyed that sweetness which before she used to condemn in others. At last, she sent him back to his room, but she called on him very often and she took more than her share, so that eventually Masetto was not able to satisfy so many, and he realized that his being

mute might harm him too much if he allowed it to continue any longer; therefore, one night when he was with the abbess, he loosened his tongue and began to speak:

"My lady, I have heard that one cock is enough to satisfy ten hens, but that ten men can poorly, or with difficulty, satisfy one woman, and I have to satisfy nine of them; I can't stand it any longer; I have reached the point from doing what I've done of no longer being able to do anything! So, either let me go, in God's name, or find some solution to this problem."

When the lady heard the deaf-mute speak, she was completely dumbfounded, and she answered:

"What is this? I thought you were a mute."

"My lady," Masetto said, "I really was, not from birth but rather because of an illness that took my speech from me, and tonight, for the first time, it was restored to me, and for this I give all my thanks to God."

She believed him, and asked him what he meant when he said he had nine women to satisfy. Masetto told her everything, and when the abbess heard this, she realized that all of her nuns were wiser than she; but, being a discreet person, she decided to find a way, together with her nuns, to keep Masetto from leaving and prevent the convent from suffering any scandal. With Masetto's consent, they unanimously agreed (now that what everyone had done behind each other's backs was evident) to make the nearby inhabitants believe that by their prayers and the merits of the saint after whom the convent was named, the power of speech had been restored to Masetto, who had for a long time been mute, and, since their steward had passed away a few days earlier, they decided to give him that position; and his labors were shared in such a way that he was able to perform them. In performing them, he generated a large number of little monks and nuns, but the matter was so discreetly handled that no one heard anything about it until after the death of the abbess, when Masetto was nearing old age and was anxious to return home with the money he had made; he easily got what he wanted when his wishes became known.

So Masetto returned home old and rich and a father, without ever having to bear the expense of bringing up his children, for he had been smart enough to make good use of his youth: having left with an ax on his shoulder, he returned affirming that this was the way Christ treated anyone who put a pair of horns upon his head.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

5. The horns referred to here are those popularly linked to a cuckold. Thus, Boccaccio makes fun of the traditional belief that nuns are the brides of Christ,

implying that whoever makes love with them also makes Christ a cuckold and is, paradoxically, rewarded for his trouble by God.

## Third Day, Tenth Story

*Alibech becomes a recluse and a monk named Rustico teaches her how to put the Devil back into hell. Then, she is led away from there to become the wife of Neerbal.*

\* \* \*

Gracious ladies, perhaps you have never heard how the Devil can be put back into hell, and so, without diverging in the least from the topic that you will all discuss today, I shall tell you how this is possible. Perhaps when you learn how this may be accomplished, you may still be in time to save your souls; and you will also learn that while Love is more at home in delightful palaces and luxurious bedrooms rather than in poor huts, he, nevertheless, sometimes makes himself felt in dense woodlands, on rugged mountains, and in desert caves. It is not difficult to understand the reason for this, for, after all, there is nothing that is not subject to his power.

Getting to the point, then, let me tell you that there once lived in the town of Capsa in Tunisia a very wealthy man who had, in addition to several sons, a beautiful and gracious daughter whose name was Alibech. She was not a Christian, but because she heard so many Christians in her town praising their faith and the service of God, one day she asked one of these Christians how she could best and most quickly serve God. This person answered that those best served God who denied the things of this world, following the example of those who had gone to live in the Egyptian desert. The young girl was rather naive, for she was no more than fourteen years old. Moved by childish impulse rather than deliberate decision, she set out for the Egyptian desert all alone, without a word to anyone, the next morning. Spurred on by her desire and with great difficulty, she reached those solitary parts after several days, and from afar she saw a small hut towards which she went, and there she found a holy man on the threshold. Amazed to see her, the man asked her what she was doing there. The girl replied that she was inspired by God and that she wanted to enter his service, but that she had not yet met anyone who might teach her how to serve God. Seeing how young and beautiful she was and fearing how the Devil might tempt him if he kept her near him, the good man praised her fine intentions and after having given her a quantity of grass roots, wild apples, and dates to eat and some water to