

First Day, Fourth Story

A monk, having committed a sin deserving of the most severe punishment, saves himself by accusing his Abbot of the same sin and escapes punishment.

Having completed her story, Filomena fell silent and Dioneo, who was sitting close to her, without awaiting any further order from the Queen (for he realized by the order already begun that he was the next to speak), started speaking in the following manner:

Lovely ladies, if I have understood your intention correctly, we are here in order to amuse ourselves by telling stories, and therefore, as long as we do nothing contrary to this, I think that each one of us ought to be permitted (and just a moment ago our Queen said that we might) to tell whatever story he thinks is likely to be the most amusing. Therefore, having heard how the good advice of Giannotto di Civignò saved Abraham's soul and how Melchisedech defended his riches against the schemes of Saladin, I am going to tell you briefly, without fear of disapproval, how cleverly a monk saved his body from a most severe punishment.

In Lunigiana, a town not too far from here, there was a monastery (once more saintly and full of monks than it now is), in which there lived a young monk whose virility and youth could not be diminished by fasts or by vigils. One day around noon while the other monks were sleeping, he happened to be taking a solitary walk around the church—which was somewhat isolated—when he spotted a very beautiful young girl (perhaps the daughter of one of the local workers) who was going through the fields gathering various kinds of herbs. The moment he saw her, he was passionately attacked by carnal desire.

He went up to her and began a conversation. One subject led to another, and finally, they came to an understanding; he took the girl to his cell without anyone's noticing them. His excessive desire got the better of him while he was playing with the girl, and it happened that the Abbot, who had just got up from his nap, was passing quietly by the monk's cell when he heard the commotion the pair was making. So that he might better recognize the voices, he silently edged up to the entrance of the cell to listen, and it was clear to him that there was a woman inside. At first he was tempted to have them open the door, but then he thought of using a different tactic; so he returned to his room and waited for the monk to come out.

...than while ...  
the monk realized that the  
Abbot had heard him ...

Although the monk was, to his great pleasure and delight, quite occupied with this young lady, he nevertheless suspected something, for he thought he had heard some footsteps in the corridor. In fact, he had peeked out a small opening and had clearly seen the Abbot standing there and listening: he was well aware the Abbot must have realized that the young girl was in his cell, and knowing that he would be severely punished, he was very worried; but without revealing his anxiety to the girl, he immediately began to think of a number of alternative plans, in an attempt to come up with one which might save him. But then he thought of an original scheme which would achieve the exact end he had in mind, and pretending that he felt they had stayed together long enough, he said to the girl:

"I have to go and find a way for you to leave without being seen, so stay here until I come back."

Having left his cell and locked it with his key, he went immediately to the Abbot's room (as every monk must do before leaving the monastery) and with a straight face he said:

"Sir, this morning I could not bring in all of the firewood that was cut for me; with your permission, I should like to go to the forest to have it carried in."

The Abbot, thinking that the monk did not know he had been observed by him, was happy at this turn of events, and since this offered him the opportunity to get more firsthand information on the sin committed by the monk, he gladly took the monk's key and gave him permission to leave. And when he saw him go off, he began to plan what he would do first: either to open the monk's cell in the presence of all the monks in order to have them see what the sin was—and in doing so prevent any grumbling when he punished the monk—or to hear first from the girl how the affair had started. But then thinking that she might very well be the wife or the daughter of some person of importance and not wanting to shame such a person in front of all his monks, he decided first to see who the girl was and then to make his decision. And so he quietly went to the cell, opened it, entered the room, and closed the door.

When the young girl saw the Abbot come in, she became frightened and began to cry out of shame. Master Abbot gave her a quick look and found her to be beautiful and fresh, and although he was old, he immediately felt the warm desires of the flesh, which were no less demanding than those the young monk had felt, and he thought to himself:

"Well, now! Why shouldn't I have a little fun when I can get it?"

Troubles and worries I can get every day! This is a pretty young girl, and no one knows she's here. If I can persuade her to serve my pleasure, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't! Who will be the wiser? No one will ever know, and a sin that's hidden is half forgiven! This opportunity may never prevent itself again. I believe it is a sign of great wisdom for a man to profit from what God sends others."

Having thought all this and having completely changed the purpose of his visit, he drew nearer to the girl and gently began to comfort her, begging her not to cry; and, as one thing will lead to another, he eventually explained to her what he wanted.

The young girl, who was by no means as hard as iron or diamond, most willingly agreed to the Abbot's wishes. He took her in his arms and kissed her many times, then lay down on the monk's bed. And perhaps out of concern for the heavy weight of his dignified person and the tender age of the young girl (or perhaps just because he was afraid to lay too much weight on her) he did not lie on top of her but rather placed her on top of him, and there he amused himself with her for quite a while.

Meanwhile, pretending to have gone into the woods, the monk had concealed himself in the dormitory; when he saw the Abbot enter his cell alone, he was reassured that his plan would be successful. And when he saw the Abbot lock himself inside, he knew it for certain. Leaving his hiding place, he quietly crept up to an opening through which he could see and hear everything the Abbot did and said.

When the Abbot decided that he had stayed long enough with the girl, he locked her in the cell and returned to his own room. And after a while, having heard the monk return and believing that he had come back from the woods, he decided that it was time to give him a sound talking to—he would have him locked up in prison in order to enjoy by himself the spoils they had both gained. He had him summoned, and he reprimanded him very severely, and with a stern face he ordered that he be put into prison.

The monk promptly replied:

"But sir, I have not been a member of the Order of Saint Benedict long enough to have had the opportunity to learn every detail of the order's rules. And up until just a moment ago, you never showed me how monks were supposed to support the weight of women as well as fasts and vigils. But now that you have shown me how, I promise you that if you forgive me this time, I shall sin no more in this respect; on the contrary, I shall always behave as I have seen you behave."

The Abbot, who was a clever man, realized immediately that the

monk had outsmarted him: he had been witness to what he had done; because of this, and feeling remorse for his own sin, he was ashamed of inflicting upon the monk the same punishment that he himself deserved. And so he pardoned him and made him promise never to reveal what he had seen. They quickly got the young girl out of the monastery, and as one might well imagine, they often had her brought back in again.

## Second Day, Fifth Story

*Andreuccio from Perugia goes to Naples to buy horses, is caught up in three unfortunate adventures in one night, escapes from them all, and returns home with a ribby.*

The precious stones found by Landolfo—said Fiammetta, whose turn it was to tell the next tale—remind me of a story no less full of dangers than the one recounted by Lauretta, but it differs from hers in that these dangers all occur within the space of a single night, as you are about to hear, whereas in her story they happened over a period of several years.

There once lived in Perugia, according to what I have been told, a young man whose name was Andreuccio di Pietro, a dealer in horses who, when he heard that in Naples horses were being sold at a low price, put five hundred gold florins in his purse and, though he had never been outside of his own town before, set out for Naples with some other merchants and arrived there on Sunday evening around vespers, and at the advice of his landlord the following morning he went to the marketplace, where he saw many horses, a good number of which he liked, but he was not able to strike a bargain no matter how hard he tried; in fact, to show that he was really ready to do business, being the crass and incautious fool that he was, more than once he pulled out his purse full of florins in front of everyone who passed by. While he was in the midst of these dealings, with his purse on full display, a young and very beautiful Sicilian lady—one who, for a small price, would be happy to please any man—passed close to him, and without being seen by him, she caught a glimpse of his purse and immediately said to herself:

"Who would be better off than I if that money were mine?"—and she walked past.

With this young lady there was an old woman, also Sicilian, who, when she saw Andreuccio, let her young companion walk ahead while