

## NOVEL VII

*King Pedro, being apprised of the fervent love borne him by Lisa, who thereof is sick, comforts her, and forthwith gives her in marriage to a young gentleman, and having kissed her on the brow, ever after professes himself her knight.*

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When Fiammetta was come to the end of her story, and not a little praise had been accorded to the virile magnificence of King Charles, albeit one there was of the ladies, who, being a Ghibelline, joined not therein, Pampinea, having received the king's command, thus began:

None is there of discernment, worshipful my ladies, that would say otherwise than you have said touching good King Charles, unless for some other cause she bear him a grudge; however, for that there comes to my mind the, perchance no less honourable, entreatment of one of our Florentine girls by one of his adversaries, I am minded to recount the same to you.

What time the French were driven forth of Sicily there dwelt at Palermo one of our Florentines, that was an apothecary, Bernardo Puccini by name, a man of great wealth, that by his lady had an only and exceeding fair daughter, then of marriageable age. Now King Pedro of Arragon, being instated in the sovereignty of the island, did at Palermo make with his barons marvellous celebration thereof; during which, as he tilted after the Catalan fashion, it befell that Bernardo's daughter, Lisa by name, being with other ladies at a window, did thence espy him in the course, wherewith being prodigiously delighted, she regarded him again and again, and grew fervently enamoured of him; nor yet, when the festivities were ended, and she was at home with her father, was there aught she could think of but this her exalted and aspiring love. In regard whereof that which most irked her was her sense of her low rank, which scarce permitted her any hope of a happy issue; but, for all that, give over her love for the King she would not; nor yet, for fear of worse to come, dared she discover it. The King, meanwhile, recking, witting nothing of the matter, her suffering waxed immeasurable, intolerable; and her love ever growing with ever fresh accessions of melancholy, the fair maiden, overborne at last, fell sick, and visibly day by day wasted like snow in sunlight. Distraught with grief thereat, her father and mother afforded her such succour as they might with words of good cheer, and counsel of physicians, and physic; but all to no purpose; for that she in despair of her love was resolved no more to live.

Now her father assuring her that there was no whim of hers but should be gratified, the fancy took her that, if she might find apt means, she would, before she died, make her love and her resolve known to the King; wherefore one day she besought her father to cause Minuccio d'Arezzo, to come to her; which Minuccio, was a singer and musician of those days, reputed most skilful, and well seen of King Pedro. Bernardo, deeming that Lisa desired but to hear him play and sing a while, conveyed her message to him; and he, being an agreeable fellow,

came to her forthwith, and after giving her some words of loving cheer, sweetly discoursed some airs upon his viol, and then sang her some songs; whereby, while he thought to comfort her, he did but add fire and flame to her love. Presently the girl said that she would fain say a few words to him in private, and when all else were withdrawn from the chamber:

"Minuccio," quoth she, "thee have I chosen, deeming thee most trusty, to be the keeper of my secret, relying upon thee in the first place never to betray it to a soul, and next to lend me in regard thereof such aid as thou mayst be able; and so I pray thee to do. Thou must know, then, Minuccio mine, that on the day when our lord King Pedro held the great festival in celebration of his triumph, I, seeing him tilt, was so smitten with love of him that thereof was kindled within my soul the fire which has brought me, as thou seest, to this pass; and knowing how ill it beseems me to love a king, and being unable, I say not to banish it from my heart, but so much as to bring it within bounds, and finding it exceeding grievous to bear, I have made choice of death as the lesser pain; and die I shall. But should he wot not of my love before I die, sore disconsolate should I depart; and knowing not by whom more aptly than by thee I might give him to know this my frame, I am minded to entrust the communication thereof to thee; which office I entreat thee not to refuse, and having discharged it, to let me know, that dying thus consoled, I may depart this pain." Which said, she silently wept.

Marvelling at the loftiness of the girl's spirit and her desperate determination, Minuccio commiserated her not a little; and presently it occurred to him that there was a way in which he might honourably serve her: wherefore:

"Lisa," quoth he, "my faith I plight thee, wherein thou mayst place sure confidence that I shall never play thee false, and lauding thy high emprise, to wit, the setting thine affections upon so great a king, I proffer thee mine aid, whereby, so thou wilt be of good cheer, I hope, and believe, that, before thou shalt see the third day from now go by, I shall have brought thee tidings which will be to thee for an exceeding great joy; and, not to lose time, I will set to work at once." And so Lisa, assuring him that she would be of good cheer, and plying him afresh with instant obsecrations, bade him Godspeed; and Minuccio, having taken leave of her, hied him to one Mico da Siena, a very expert

rhymester of those days, who at his instant request made the ensuing song:

Hence hie thee, Love; and hasting to my King,  
Give him to know what torment dire I bear,  
How that to death I fare,  
Still close, for fear, my passion harbouring.

Lo, Love, to thee with clasped hands I turn,  
And pray thee seek him where he tarrieth,  
And tell him how I oft for him do yearn,  
So sweetly he my heart enamoureth;  
And of the fire, wherewith I throughly burn,  
I think to die, but may the hour uneth  
Say, when my grievous pain shall with my breath  
Surcease; till when, neither may fear nor shame  
The least abate the flame.  
Ah! to his ears my woeful story bring.

Since of him I was first enamoured,  
Never hast thou, O Love, my fearful heart  
With any such fond hope encouraged,  
As e'er its message to him to impart,  
To him, my lord, that me so sore bested  
Holds: dying thus, 'twere grievous to depart:  
Perchance, were he to know my cruel smart,  
'twould not displease him; might I but make  
bold  
My soul to him to unfold,  
And shew him all my woeful languishing.

Love, since 'twas not thy will me to accord  
Such boldness as that e'er unto my King  
I may discover my sad heart's full hoard,  
Or any word or sign thereof him bring:  
This all my prayer to thee, O sweet my Lord:  
Hie thee to him, and so him whispering  
Mind of the day I saw him tourneying  
With all his paladins environed,  
And grew enamoured  
Ev'n to my very heart's disrupting.

Which words Minuccio forthwith set to music after a soft and plaintive fashion befitting their sense; and on the third day thereafter hied him to court, while King Pedro was yet at breakfast. And being bidden by the King to sing something to the accompaniment of his viol, he gave them this song with such sweet concord of words and music that all the folk that were in the King's hall seemed, as it were, entranced, so intent and absorbed stood they to listen, and the King rather more than the rest. And when Minuccio had done singing, the King asked whence the song came, that, as far as he knew, he had never heard it before. "Sire," replied Minuccio, "'tis not yet three days since 'twas made, words and music alike." And being asked by the King in regard of whom 'twas made:

"I dare not," quoth he, "discover such a secret save to you alone." Bent on hearing the story, the King, when the tables were cleared, took Minuccio into his privy chamber; and there Minuccio told him everything exactly as he had heard it from Lisa's lips. Whereby the King was much gratified,

and lauded the maiden not a little, and said that a girl of such high spirit merited considerate treatment, and bade Minuccio be his envoy to her, and comfort her, and tell her that without fail that very day at vespers he would come to visit her. Overjoyed to bear the girl such gladsome tidings, Minuccio tarried not, but hied him back to the girl with his viol, and being closeted with her, told her all that had passed, and then sang the song to the accompaniment of his viol. Whereby the girl was so cheered and delighted that forthwith there appeared most marked and manifest signs of the amendment of her health, while with passionate longing (albeit none in the house knew or divined it) she awaited the vesper hour, when she was to see her lord.

Knowing the girl very well, and how fair she was, and pondering divers times on what Minuccio had told him, the King, being a prince of a liberal and kindly disposition, grew ever more compassionate. So, about vespers, he mounted his horse, and rode forth, as if for mere pleasure, and being come to the apothecary's house, demanded access to a very goodly garden that the apothecary had, and having dismounted, after a while enquired of Bernardo touching his daughter, and whether he had yet bestowed her in marriage. "Sire," replied Bernardo, "she is not yet married; and indeed she has been and still is very ill howbeit since none she is wonderfully amended." The significance of which amendment being forthwith apprehended by the King:

"In good faith," quoth he, "'twere a pity so fair a creature were reft from the world so early; we would go in and visit her." And presently, attended only by two of his lords and Bernardo, he betook him to her chamber, where being entered, he drew nigh the bed, whereon the girl half reclined, half sate in eager expectation of his coming; and taking her by the hand:

"Madonna," quoth he, "what means this? A maiden like you should be the comfort of others, and you suffer yourself to languish. We would entreat you that for love of us you be of good cheer, so as speedily to recover your health." To feel the touch of his hand whom she loved above all else, the girl, albeit somewhat shamefast, was so enraptured that 'twas as if she was in Paradise; and as soon as she was able:

"My lord," she said, "'twas the endeavour, weak as I am, to sustain a most grievous burden that brought this sickness upon me; but 'twill not be long ere you will see me quit thereof, thanks to your courtesy." The hidden meaning of which words was apprehended only by the King, who momentarily made more account of the girl, and again and again inly cursed Fortune, that had decreed that she should be the daughter of such a man. And yet a while he tarried with her, and comforted her, and so took his leave. Which gracious behaviour of the King was not a little commended, and accounted a signal honour to the apothecary and his daughter.

The girl, glad at heart as was ever lady of her lover, mended with reviving hope, and in a few days

recovered her health, and therewith more than all her wonted beauty. Whereupon the King, having taken counsel with the Queen how to reward so great a love, got him one day to horse with a great company of his barons, and hied him to the apothecary's house; and being come into the garden, he sent for the apothecary and his daughter; and there, being joined by the Queen with not a few ladies, who received the girl into their company, they made such cheer as 'twas a wonder to see. And after a while the King and Queen having called Lisa to them, quoth the King:

"Honourable damsel, by the great love that you have borne us we are moved greatly to honour you; and we trust that, for love of us, the honour that we design for you will be acceptable to you. Now 'tis thus we would honour you: to wit, that, seeing that you are of marriageable age, we would have you take for husband him that we shall give you; albeit 'tis none the less our purpose ever to call ourself your knight, demanding no other tribute of all your love but one sole kiss." Scarlet from brow to neck, the girl, making the King's pleasure her own, thus with a low voice replied:

"My lord, very sure am I that, should it come to be known that I was grown enamoured of you, most folk would hold me for a fool, deeming, perchance, that I was out of my mind, and witless alike of my own rank and yours; but God, who alone reads the hearts of us mortals, knows that even then, when first I did affect you, I wist that you were the King, and I but the daughter of Bernardo the apothecary, and that to suffer my passion to soar so high did ill become me; but, as you know far better than I, none loves of set and discreet purpose, but only according to the dictates of impulse and fancy; which law my forces, albeit not seldom opposed, being powerless to withstand, I loved and still love and shall ever love you. But as no sooner knew I myself subjugated to your love, than I vowed to have ever no will but yours; therefore not only am I compliant to take right gladly him whom you shall be pleased to give me for husband, thereby conferring upon me great honour and dignity; but if you should bid me tarry in the fire, delighted were I

to obey, so thereby I might pleasure you. How far it beseems me to have you, my King, for my knight, you best know; and therefore I say nought thereof; nor will the kiss which you crave as your sole tribute of my love be granted you save by leave of my Lady the Queen. Natheless, may you have of this great graciousness that you and my Lady the Queen have shewn me, and which I may not requite, abundant recompense in the blessing and favour of God;" and so she was silent.

The Queen was mightily delighted with the girl's answer, and deemed her as discreet as the King had said. The King then sent for the girl's father and mother, and being assured that his intention had their approval, summoned to his presence a young man, Perdicone by name, that was of gentle birth, but in poor circumstances, and put certain rings into his hand, and (he nowise gainsaying) wedded him to Lisa. Which done, besides jewels many and precious that he and the Queen gave the girl, he forthwith bestowed upon Perdicone two domains, right goodly and of ample revenues, to wit, Ceffalu and Calatabellotta, saying:

"We give them to thee for thy wife's dowry; what we have in store for thee thou wilt learn hereafter." Which said, he turned to the girl, and:

"Now," quoth he, "we are minded to cull that fruit which is due to us of thy love;" and so, taking her head between both his hands, he kissed her brow. Wherefore, great was the joy of Perdicone, and the father and mother of Lisa, and Lisa herself, and mighty the cheer they made, and gaily did they celebrate the nuptials. And, as many affirm, right well did the King keep his promise to the girl; for that ever, while he lived, he called himself her knight, nor went to any passage of arms bearing other device than that which he had from her.

Now 'tis by doing after this sort that sovereigns win the hearts of their subjects, give others occasion of well-doing, and gain for themselves an imperishable renown. At which mark few or none in our times have bent the bow of their understanding, the more part of the princes having become but cruel tyrants.