

## NOVEL IV

*Ricciardo Manardi is found by Messer Lizio da Valbona with his daughter, whom he marries, and remains at peace with her father.*

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In silence Elisa received the praise bestowed on her story by her fair companions; and then the queen called for a story from Filostrato, who with a laugh began on this wise:

Chidden have I been so often and by so many of you for the sore burden, which I laid upon you, of discourse harsh and meet for tears, that, as some compensation for such annoy, I deem myself bound to tell you somewhat that may cause you to laugh a little: wherefore my story, which will be of the briefest, shall be of a love, the course whereof, save for sighs and a brief passage of fear mingled with shame, ran smooth to a happy consummation.

Know then, noble ladies, that 'tis no long time since there dwelt in Romagna a right worthy and courteous knight, Messer Lizio da Valbona by name, who was already verging upon old age, when, as it happened, there was born to him of his wife, Madonna Giacomina, a daughter, who, as she grew up, became the fairest and most debonair of all the girls of those parts, and, for that she was the only daughter left to them, was most dearly loved and cherished by her father and mother, who guarded her with most jealous care, thinking to arrange some great match for her. Now there was frequently in Messer Lizio's house, and much in his company, a fine, lusty young man, one Ricciardo de' Manardi da Brettinoro, whom Messer Lizio and his wife would as little have thought of mistrusting as if he had been their own son: who, now and again taking note of the damsel, that she was very fair and graceful, and in bearing and behaviour most commendable, and of marriageable age, fell vehemently in love with her, which love he was very careful to conceal. The damsel detected it, however, and in like manner plunged headlong into love with him, to Ricciardo's no small satisfaction. Again and again he was on the point of speaking to her, but refrained for fear; at length, however, he summoned up his courage, and seizing his opportunity, thus addressed her:

"Caterina, I implore thee, suffer me not to die for love of thee." Whereto the damsel forthwith responded:

"Nay, God grant that it be not rather that I die for love of thee." Greatly exhilarated and encouraged, Ricciardo made answer:

"I will never be by default of mine that thou lackest aught that may pleasure thee; but it rests with thee to find the means to save thy life and mine." Then said the damsel:

"Thou seest, Ricciardo, how closely watched I am, insomuch that I see not how 'twere possible for thee to come to me; but if thou seest aught that I may do without dishonour, speak the word, and I will do it." Ricciardo was silent a while, pondering many matters: then, of a sudden, he said:

"Sweet my Caterina, there is but one way that I can see, to wit, that thou shouldst sleep either on or where thou mightst have access to the terrace by thy father's garden, where, so I but knew that thou wouldst be there at night, I would without fail contrive to meet thee, albeit 'tis very high."

"As for my sleeping there," replied Caterina, "I doubt not that it may be managed, if thou art sure that thou canst join me." Ricciardo answered in the affirmative. Whereupon they exchanged a furtive kiss, and parted.

On the morrow, it being now towards the close of May, the damsel began complaining to her mother that by reason of the excessive heat she had not been able to get any sleep during the night. "Daughter," said the lady, "what heat was there? Nay, there was no heat at all."

"Had you said, 'to my thinking,' mother," rejoined Caterina, "you would perhaps have said sooth; but you should bethink you how much more heat girls have in them than ladies that are advanced in years."

"True, my daughter," returned the lady, "but I cannot order that it shall be hot and cold, as thou perchance wouldst like; we must take the weather as we find it, and as the seasons provide it: perchance to-night it will be cooler, and thou wilt sleep better."

"God grant it be so," said Caterina, "but 'tis not wonted for the nights to grow cooler as the summer comes on."

"What then," said the lady, "wouldst thou have me do?"

"With your leave and my father's," answered Caterina, "I should like to have a little bed made up on the terrace by his room and over his garden, where, hearing the nightingales sing, and being in a much cooler place, I should sleep much better than in your room." Whereupon:

"Daughter, be of good cheer," said the mother; "I will speak to thy father, and we will do as he shall decide." So the lady told Messer Lizio what had passed between her and the damsel; but he, being old and perhaps for that reason a little morose, said:

"What nightingale is this, to whose chant she would fain sleep? I will see to it that the cicalas shall yet lull her to sleep." Which speech, coming to Caterina's ears, gave her such offence, that for anger, rather than by reason of the heat, she not only slept not herself that night, but suffered not her mother to sleep, keeping up a perpetual complaint of the great heat. Wherefore her mother

hied her in the morning to Messer Lizio, and said to him:

“Sir, you hold your daughter none too dear; what difference can it make to you that she lie on the terrace? She has tossed about all night long by reason of the heat; and besides, can you wonder that she, girl that she is, loves to hear the nightingale sing? Young folk naturally affect their likes.”

Whereto Messer Lizio made answer:

“Go, make her a bed there to your liking, and set a curtain round it, and let her sleep there, and hear the nightingale sing to her heart’s content.” Which the damsel no sooner learned, than she had a bed made there with intent to sleep there that same night; wherefore she watched until she saw Ricciardo, whom by a concerted sign she gave to understand what he was to do. Messer Lizio, as soon as he had heard the damsel go to bed, locked a door that led from his room to the terrace, and went to sleep himself. When all was quiet, Ricciardo with the help of a ladder got upon a wall, and standing thereon laid hold of certain toothings of another wall, and not without great exertion and risk, had he fallen, clambered up on to the terrace, where the damsel received him quietly with the heartiest of cheer. Many a kiss they exchanged; and then got them to bed, where well-nigh all night long they had solace and joyance of one another, and made the nightingale sing not a few times. But, brief being the night and great their pleasure, towards dawn, albeit they wist it not, they fell asleep, Caterina’s right arm encircling Ricciardo’s neck, while with her left hand she held him by that part of his person which your modesty, my ladies, is most averse to name in the company of men. So, peacefully they slept, and were still asleep when day broke and Messer Lizio rose; and calling to mind that his daughter slept on the terrace, softly opened the door, saying to himself:

Let me see what sort of night’s rest the nightingale has afforded our Caterina? And having entered, he gently raised the curtain that screened the bed, and saw Ricciardo asleep with her and in her embrace as described, both being quite naked and uncovered; and having taken note of Ricciardo, he went away, and hied him to his lady’s room, and called her, saying:

“Up, up, wife, come and see; for thy daughter has fancied the nightingale to such purpose that she has caught him, and holds him in her hand.”

“How can this be?” said the lady. “Come quickly, and thou shalt see,” replied Messer Lizio. So the lady huddled on her clothes, and silently followed Messer Lizio, and when they were come to the bed, and had raised the curtain, Madonna Giacomina saw plainly enough how her daughter had caught, and did hold the nightingale, whose song she had so longed to hear. Whereat the lady, deeming that Ricciardo had played her a cruel trick, would have cried out and upbraided him; but Messer Lizio said to her:

“Wife, as thou valuest my love, say not a word; for in good sooth, seeing that she has caught him, he shall be hers. Ricciardo is a gentleman and

wealthy; an alliance with him cannot but be to our advantage: if he would part from me on good terms, he must first marry her, so that the nightingale shall prove to have been put in his own cage and not in that of another.” Whereby the lady was reassured, seeing that her husband took the affair so quietly, and that her daughter had had a good night, and was rested, and had caught the nightingale. So she kept silence; nor had they long to wait before Ricciardo awoke; and, seeing that ’twas broad day, deemed that ’twas as much as his life was worth, and aroused Caterina, saying:

“Alas! my soul, what shall we do, now that day has come and surprised me here?” Which question Messer Lizio answered by coming forward, and saying:

“We shall do well.” At sight of him Ricciardo felt as if his heart were torn out of his body, and sate up in the bed, and said:

“My lord, I cry you mercy for God’s sake. I wot that my disloyalty and delinquency have merited death; wherefore deal with me even as it may seem best to you: however, I pray you, if so it may be, to spare my life, that I die not.”

“Ricciardo,” replied Messer Lizio, “the love I bore thee, and the faith I reposed in thee, merited a better return; but still, as so it is, and youth has seduced thee into such a transgression, redeem thy life, and preserve my honour, by making Caterina thy lawful spouse, that thine, as she has been for this past night, she may remain for the rest of her life. In this way thou mayst secure my peace and thy safety; otherwise commend thy soul to God.” Pending this colloquy, Caterina let go the nightingale, and having covered herself, began with many a tear to implore her father to forgive Ricciardo, and Ricciardo to do as Messer Lizio required, that thereby they might securely count upon a long continuance of such nights of delight. But there needed not much supplication; for, what with remorse for the wrong done, and the wish to make amends, and the fear of death, and the desire to escape it, and above all ardent love, and the craving to possess the beloved one, Ricciardo lost no time in making frank avowal of his readiness to do as Messer Lizio would have him. Wherefore Messer Lizio, having borrowed a ring from Madonna Giacomina, Ricciardo did there and then in their presence wed Caterina. Which done, Messer Lizio and the lady took their leave, saying:

“Now rest ye a while; for so perchance ’twere better for you than if ye rose.” And so they left the young folks, who forthwith embraced, and not having travelled more than six miles during the night, went two miles further before they rose, and so concluded their first day. When they were risen, Ricciardo and Messer Lizio discussed the matter with more formality; and some days afterwards Ricciardo, as was meet, married the damsel anew in presence of their friends and kinsfolk, and brought her home with great pomp, and celebrated his nuptials with due dignity and splendour. And so for many a year thereafter he lived with her in peace

and happiness, and snared the nightingales day and

night to his heart's content.