

## NOVEL VI

*Madonna Isabella has with her Leonetto, her accepted lover, when she is surprised by one Messer Lambertuccio, by whom she is beloved: her husband coming home about the same time, she sends Messer Lambertuccio forth of the house drawn sword in hand, and the husband afterwards escorts Leonetto home.*

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Wondrous was the delight that all the company had of Fiammetta's story, nor was there any but affirmed that the lady had done excellent well, and dealt with her insensate husband as he deserved. However, it being ended, the king bade Pampinea follow suit; which she did on this wise:

Not a few there are that in their simplicity aver that Love deranges the mind, insomuch that whoso loves becomes as it were witless: the folly of which opinion, albeit I doubt it not, and deem it abundantly proven by what has been already said, I purpose once again to demonstrate.

In our city, rich in all manner of good things, there dwelt a young gentlewoman, fair exceedingly, and wedded to a most worthy and excellent gentleman. And as it not seldom happens that one cannot keep ever to the same diet, but would fain at times vary it, so this lady, finding her husband not altogether to her mind, became enamoured of a gallant, Leonetto by name, who, though of no high rank, was not a little debonair and courteous, and he in like manner fell in love with her; and (as you know that 'tis seldom that what is mutually desired fails to come about) 'twas not long before they had fruition of their love. Now the lady being, as I said, fair and winsome, it so befell that a gentleman, Messer Lambertuccio by name, grew mightily enamoured of her, but so tiresome and odious did she find him, that for the world she could not bring herself to love him. So, growing tired of fruitlessly soliciting her favour by ambassage, Messer Lambertuccio, who was a powerful signior, sent her at last another sort of message in which he threatened to defame her if she complied not with his wishes. Wherefore the lady, knowing her man, was terrified, and disposed herself to pleasure him.

Now it so chanced that Madonna Isabella, for such was the lady's name, being gone, as is our Florentine custom in the summer, to spend some time on a very goodly estate that she had in the contado, one morning finding herself alone, for her husband had ridden off to tarry some days elsewhere, she sent for Leonetto to come and keep her company; and Leonetto came forthwith in high glee. But while they were together, Messer Lambertuccio, who, having got wind that the husband was away, had mounted his horse and ridden thither quite alone, knocked at the door. Whereupon the lady's maid hied her forthwith to her mistress, who was alone with Leonetto, and called her, saying:

"Madam, Messer Lambertuccio is here below, quite alone." Whereat the lady was vexed beyond measure; and being also not a little dismayed, she said to Leonetto:

"Prithee, let it not irk thee to withdraw behind the curtain, and there keep close until Messer Lambertuccio be gone." Leonetto, who stood in no less fear of Messer Lambertuccio than did the lady, got into his hiding-place; and the lady bade the maid go open to Messer Lambertuccio: she did so; and having dismounted and fastened his palfrey to a pin, he ascended the stairs; at the head of which the lady received him with a smile and as gladsome a greeting as she could find words for, and asked him on what errand he was come. The gentleman embraced and kissed her, saying:

"My soul, I am informed that your husband is not here, and therefore I am come to stay a while with you." Which said, they went into the room, and locked them in, and Messer Lambertuccio fell a toying with her.

Now, while thus he sped the time with her, it befell that the lady's husband, albeit she nowise expected him, came home, and, as he drew nigh the palace, was observed by the maid, who forthwith ran to the lady's chamber, and said:

"Madam, the master will be here anon; I doubt he is already in the courtyard." Whereupon, for that she had two men in the house, and the knight's palfrey, that was in the courtyard, made it impossible to hide him, the lady gave herself up for dead. Nevertheless she made up her mind on the spur of the moment, and springing out of bed "Sir," quoth she to Messer Lambertuccio, "if you have any regard for me, and would save my life, you will do as I bid you: that is to say, you will draw your blade, and put on a fell and wrathful countenance, and hie you downstairs, saying: 'By God, he shall not escape me elsewhere.' And if my husband would stop you, or ask you aught, say nought but what I have told you, and get you on horseback and tarry with him on no account."

"To hear is to obey," quoth Messer Lambertuccio, who, with the flush of his recent exertion and the rage that he felt at the husband's return still on his face, and drawn sword in hand, did as she bade him. The lady's husband, being now dismounted in the courtyard, and not a little surprised to see the palfrey there, was about to go up the stairs, when he saw Messer Lambertuccio coming down them, and marvelling both at his words and at his mien:

“What means this, Sir?” quoth he. But Messer Lambertuccio clapped foot in stirrup, and mounted, saying nought but:

“Zounds, but I will meet him elsewhere;” and so he rode off.

The gentleman then ascended the stairs, at the head of which he found his lady distraught with terror, to whom he said:

“What manner of thing is this? After whom goes Messer Lambertuccio, so wrathful and menacing?” Whereto the lady, drawing nigher the room, that Leonetto might hear her, made answer:

“Never, Sir, had I such a fright as this. There came running in here a young man, who to me is quite a stranger, and at his heels Messer Lambertuccio with a drawn sword in his hand; and as it happened the young man found the door of this room open, and trembling in every limb, cried out:

‘Madam, your succour, for God’s sake, that I die not in your arms.’ So up I got, and would have asked him who he was, and how bested, when up came Messer Lambertuccio, exclaiming:

‘Where art thou, traitor?’ I planted myself in the doorway, and kept him from entering, and seeing that I was not minded to give him admittance, he was courteous enough, after not a little parley, to take himself off, as you saw.” Whereupon:

“Wife,” quoth the husband, “thou didst very right. Great indeed had been the scandal, had some one been slain here, and ’twas a gross affront on

Messer Lambertuccio’s part to pursue a fugitive within the house.” He then asked where the young man was. Whereto the lady answered:

“Nay, where he may be hiding, Sir, I wot not.” So:

“Where art thou?” quoth the knight. “Fear not to shew thyself.” Then forth of his hiding-place, all of a tremble, for in truth he had been thoroughly terrified, crept Leonetto, who had heard all that had passed. To whom:

“What hast thou to do with Messer Lambertuccio?” quoth the knight. “Nothing in the world,” replied the young man: “wherefore, I doubt he must either be out of his mind, or have mistaken me for another; for no sooner had he sight of me in the street hard by the palace, than he laid his hand on his sword, and exclaimed:

‘Traitor, thou art a dead man.’ Whereupon I sought not to know why, but fled with all speed, and got me here, and so, thanks to God and this gentlewoman, I escaped his hands.”

“Now away with thy fears,” quoth the knight; “I will see thee home safe and sound; and then ’twill be for thee to determine how thou shalt deal with him.” And so, when they had supped, he set him on horseback, and escorted him to Florence, and left him not until he was safe in his own house. And the very same evening, following the lady’s instructions, Leonetto spoke privily with Messer Lambertuccio, and so composed the affair with him, that, though it occasioned not a little talk, the knight never wist how he had been tricked by his wife.