

# Day 3, Story 1



*Masetto da Lamporecchio pretends he is a deaf mute and becomes the gardener in a convent where the nuns all race one another to get to sleep with him.<sup>1</sup>*

Loveliest of ladies, there are many men and women who are so stupid as to really believe that when a young woman has the white veil placed on her head and the black cowl on her back, she is no longer a woman and no longer feels female cravings, as though when she became a nun, she was turned into a stone. And if they should hear anything that runs counter to this belief of theirs, they get as angry as they would if some enormous, horrific crime had been committed against Nature. They never stop to think about themselves and reflect on how they are never satisfied despite having complete freedom to do whatever they want, nor do they consider how potent the forces produced by idleness and confinement can be. Likewise, there are a whole lot of people who believe only too readily that the hoe and the spade, coarse food, and hard living eliminate all carnal desires in those who work the land and make them dim-witted and unperceptive. But now, since the Queen has ordered me to speak, I would like to tell you a tiny little story that is quite in keeping with the topic she has chosen and that will make it clear to you just how deluded all those people are who believe such things.

Here in this countryside of ours there was, and still is, a convent quite renowned for holiness, which I will not name in order not to diminish its reputation in anyway. Not so long ago it housed only eight nuns and their Abbess, all of them still young women, as well as a good little guy who tended their resplendent garden. Not content with his salary, he settled his accounts with the nuns' steward and returned to his native village of Lamporecchio.<sup>1</sup> Among the others who gave him a warm welcome home, there was a young laborer named Masetto who was strong and hardy and, for a peasant, quite handsome. He asked the good man, whose name was Nuto, where he had been for such a long time, and after Nuto told him, Masetto wanted to know how he was employed in the convent.

"I used to work in a great big beautiful garden of theirs," replied Nuto, "and besides that, I sometimes used to go to the forest for firewood, or

I'd draw water and do other little chores of that sort, but the women gave me such a small salary that I hardly had enough to pay for shoe leather. And another thing, they're all young and I think they all had the Devil inside them because no matter what I did, it never suited them. Sometimes when I was working in the vegetable garden, one of them would say, 'Put this here,' and another would say, 'Put that here,' and yet a third would snatch the hoe from my hand and tell me, 'You're doing it all wrong.' And they'd make themselves such a pain that I'd stop working and leave the garden. Well, what with one thing and another, I decided it was time to quit. As I was about to set off to come back here, their steward asked me to see whether I could find somebody who did that sort of work when I got home, and if so, he told me I should send the guy to him. Although I did promise him I'd do it, I'm not going to, because unless God gives the guy one heck of a constitution, you won't find me sending him there."<sup>3</sup>

As he listened to Nuto's story, Masetto was filled with such a desire to go and spend time with those nuns that it completely consumed him, for it was clear from what he had heard that he would have no difficulty in getting just what he wanted out of them. But realizing that his plan would go nowhere if he told Nuto anything about it, he said: "It sure was a good idea of yours to come back here. What kind of life can a man lead when he's surrounded by women? He'd be better off with a pack of devils. Six times out of seven they themselves don't know what they want."

Once they had finished talking, Masetto started thinking about what he needed to do in order to get to stay in the nunnery. Since he knew he was capable of doing the chores mentioned by Nuto, he had no worries about being rejected on that score, but he was afraid that he would not be hired because he was too young and attractive. After having pondered a number of options, an idea occurred to him: "The place is pretty far away, and no one there knows me. If I pretend I'm a deaf-mute, they'll take me on for sure."

Having settled on this plan, he dressed himself like a poor man, slung one of his axes over his shoulder, and without telling anyone where he was going, set off for the convent. When he arrived and entered the courtyard, he chanced to come upon the steward, and by using signs the way deafmutes do, made a show of asking him, for the love of God, to give him something to eat in return for which he would chop whatever wood they happened to need. The steward was perfectly willing to feed him, after which he presented him with a pile of logs that Nuto had not been able to split, but that Masetto, who was quite strong, managed to take care of in no time at all. The steward had to

go to the forest, and taking Masetto along with him, he had him cut some firewood, while he himself went to bring up the donkey and by making certain signs, got Masetto to understand that he was to haul it all back to the convent. Masetto acquitted himself so well that the steward kept him around for several more days in order to take care of some chores he needed to have done, and it was on one of those days that the Abbess saw him and asked the steward who he was.

“My lady,” said the steward, “he’s a poor deaf-mute, one of those who came here a day or two ago begging for alms, and not only did I give him some, but I’ve had him take care of a bunch of chores that needed doing. If he knew how to tend the garden and wanted to stay on, I’m convinced we’d get good work out of him, because he’s just what we need, a strong man who could be made to do our bidding. Besides, you wouldn’t have to worry about him joking around with these young ladies of yours.”

“I swear to God,” said the Abbess, “you’re telling the truth. Find out if he knows how to garden, and do your very best to make him stay here. Give him a pair of shoes plus some old hood or other, and be sure to flatter him and pamper him and give him plenty to eat.”

The steward said he would take care of it. Masetto was not very far away, and although he was pretending to sweep the courtyard, he was really eavesdropping on their entire conversation. “Once you put me inside there,” he said to himself gleefully, “I’m going to work your garden for you better than it’s ever been worked before.”

After the steward had confirmed that Masetto really knew how to do the work, he asked him by means of gestures if he wanted to stay on, and Masetto, using gestures to reply, said he would do whatever the steward wanted. The steward therefore hired him and ordered him to go and work in the garden, showing him what he needed to do there, after which he left Masetto alone and went to attend to other business for the convent.

As Masetto worked there day after day, the nuns started pestering him and making fun of him, something people frequently do with deafmutes, and since they were certain he could not understand them, they did not hesitate to use the worst language in the world in front of him. For her part, the Abbess paid little or no attention to what they were doing, perhaps because she was under the impression that Masetto had lost his tail just as he had lost his tongue.

One day, after he had been working hard and was taking a rest, two young nuns, who were walking through the garden, happened to approach the

spot where he was lying. Since he appeared to be asleep, they gave him a good looking over, and the bolder of the two said to the other: "If I thought you could keep a secret, I'd share an idea with you that's often crossed my mind and that might work out to our mutual benefit."

"Don't worry about telling me," the other replied, "because I'm certainly not going to reveal it to anybody else."

Then the bold one began: "I don't know if you've ever spent much time thinking about how strictly we're confined here and how the only men who ever dare to set foot inside the convent are the steward, who's elderly, and this deaf-mute. Now, I've often heard many of the women who come to visit us say that all the other pleasures in the world are a joke compared to the one women experience when they're with a man. That's why I've frequently thought about putting it to the test with this deaf-mute here, seeing as how nobody else is available. He's actually the best one in the world for it, because he couldn't reveal it even if he wanted to. In fact, he wouldn't even know how, since you can see he's just a big dumb clod whose body's grown a lot faster than his brain. Anyway, I'd be glad to know what you think about all this."

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

"Oh," replied the first, "think about how many promises are made to Him every day, and not one of them is ever kept. So what if we've made promises to Him? He can always find lots of others who will keep theirs."

"But what if we get pregnant?" said her companion. "What'll we do then?"

"You're beginning to worry about difficulties before they've even happened," replied the other. "If and when they occur, that'll be the time to think about them. And there are a thousand ways to keep people from getting wind of what's going on, provided we don't talk about it ourselves."

With every word, her companion's desire became ever greater to find out what sort of beast a man might be. "So, how will we do it?" she asked.

"As you see, it's just about nones," the other replied, "and I'm sure that all the sisters are sleeping except for us. Let's have a look around the garden to see if anyone's here, and if there isn't, all we have to do is to take him by the hand and lead him into this hut where he stays when he wants to get out of the rain. Then one of us can go inside with him while the other stands guard, and he's such a simpleton that he'll do whatever we want."

Having heard their entire conversation, Masetto was quite eager to obey and was only waiting for one of them to come and get him. Meanwhile, the nuns had a good look around, and when they were sure they could not be seen from any direction, the one who had initiated their conversation approached Masetto and woke him up. He got to his feet right away, at which point she seized his hand and with all sorts of seductive gestures led him, giggling like an idiot, to the hut, where he did not need an invitation to do her bidding. When she had gotten what she wanted, like the loyal friend she was, she made way for her companion, and Masetto, still playing the simpleton, did what they asked him to do. And before the two of them finally left, each one made additional trials of just how good a rider the deaf-mute was. Later on, talking it over with one another, they both agreed that the experience really was as sweet as people said it was, if not more so. And from then on, whenever the opportunity presented itself, they went and amused themselves with him.

One day it just so happened that one of their sisters saw what they were up to from a window of her cell and showed the spectacle to two others. At first they thought to denounce the pair to the Abbess, but then they changed their minds and worked out an arrangement with the first two nuns whereby they would all have a share in Masetto's farm. And at different times by a variety of routes the last three nuns came to join them.

Finally, on one particularly hot day, the Abbess, who was still unaware of these goings-on, was walking by herself through the garden when she came upon Masetto. Because of all the riding he had been doing at night, even the little bit of work he engaged in during the day was proving too much for him, and so there he lay, fast asleep, stretched out under the shade of an almond tree. The front part of his tunic was blown back by the wind, leaving him entirely exposed, and the Abbess, who found herself quite alone, kept staring at it, until she succumbed to the same carnal appetite that the first two nuns had experienced. Consequently, she awoke Masetto and took him with her back to her room, where she kept him for several days, thereby provoking serious complaints on the part of the nuns because the gardener had stopped coming to work in the garden.

After repeatedly sampling the very sweetness she used to criticize in other women before then, the Abbess finally sent Masetto back to his own room. Still, she wanted to have him return again and again and was getting more than her fair share out of him, until Masetto, who was unable to satisfy so many women, realized that his playing the deaf-mute could wind up

causing him irreparable damage if he continued to do so much longer. Consequently, one night, when he was with the Abbess, he untied his tongue and began to speak:

“My lady, it’s my understanding that one cock is enough for ten hens, but that ten men will have a hard time satisfying one woman, and yet, it’s my job to offer my services to no fewer than nine of them. Well, there’s no way in the world I can keep it up any longer, and as a matter of fact, from doing what I’ve been doing up to now, I’ve reached the point where I can’t do just about anything anymore. So, you should either say good-bye to me and let me go, or find some way to solve this problem.”

Since the Abbess had always thought he was a deaf-mute, she was completely dumbfounded when she heard him speak. “What’s all this?” she asked. “I thought you were a deaf mute.”

“I really was, my lady,” replied Masetto, “but I wasn’t born that way. I lost the ability to speak because of an illness, and I thank God from the bottom of my heart that on this very night, for the first time, I’ve managed to recover it.”

The Abbess believed his story and then asked him what he meant when he said he had to offer his services to nine of them. Masetto explained how things stood, and as the Abbess listened, she realized that all of her nuns were much smarter than she was. Being a prudent woman, she then decided that rather than let Masetto go, in which case he might say something damaging to the reputation of the convent, she would work out some sort of arrangement with her nuns.

Their old steward had recently died, and so, with Masetto’s consent, now that they all knew what they had all been doing in the past, the nuns decided unanimously to persuade the people living thereabouts that although Masetto had long been a deaf-mute, his speech had been restored through their prayers and through the intervention of the saint for whom the convent was named. Furthermore, they made Masetto their steward, but divided up his labors in such a way that he could take care of them all, and although he sired quite a few monklets and nunlets, the whole matter was handled with such discretion that no one heard anything about it until after the death of the Abbess, at a time when Masetto, now pretty well off, was approaching old age and was eager to return home. And once they knew what he wanted, he easily obtained their permission to go.

Thus, because he was clever and had figured out how he could put his youth to good use, Masetto, who had come from Lamporecchio with nothing

more than an axe on his shoulder, returned home a rich, old man who had fathered numerous children, but spared himself the trouble of feeding them and the expense of raising them. And this was the way, he maintained, that Christ treated anyone who set a pair of cuckold's horns on His crown.

## Day 3, Story 2



*A groom sleeps with the wife of King Agilulf. When the King finds out about it, he says nothing, but tracks down the guilty party and shears off some of his hair. The shorn one then shears all the others and thus escapes a terrible fate.<sup>1</sup>*

Some parts of Filostrato's tale caused the ladies to blush a bit, while others made them laugh. When he finished, it was the Queen's pleasure to have Pampinea continue the storytelling, and she, with a smile on her face, began as follows:

Some people are so lacking in discretion that when they have discovered or heard about things that they were better off not knowing, they feel compelled to reveal their knowledge at any cost, with the result that they sometimes censure faults in others no one else would have noticed, and although their goal in doing so is to lessen their own shame, they actually increase it out of all proportion. And now, pretty ladies, what I propose is to prove the truth of this to you by actually describing the contrary state of affairs in which the wisdom of a worthy king was matched by the cleverness of a man whose social position may have been even lower than Masetto's.

When he became the King of the Lombards, Agilulf followed the example of his ancestors and chose Pavia, a city in Lombardy, as the seat of his reign, having meanwhile married Theodolinda, who was the widow of Authari, the former Lombard ruler.<sup>2</sup> An exceptionally beautiful woman, Theodolinda was both wise and very honest, but she had a stroke of very bad luck with a man who had fallen in love with her.

At a time when Lombardy had been enjoying a long period of peace and prosperity, thanks to the valor and wisdom of King Agilulf, it just so happened that one of the Queen's grooms, a man who was as tall and handsome as the King himself, fell for her and loved her to distraction. Though of exceedingly low birth, the groom was in other respects vastly superior to his base occupation, and since his lowly condition did not prevent him from seeing that this love of his went well beyond the bounds of propriety, he wisely refrained from disclosing it to anyone and did not even dare to cast revealing glances in the lady's direction. Nevertheless, although he



lived without any hope of ever winning her favor, deep inside he gloried that he had raised his thoughts to such a lofty height.<sup>3</sup> Burning all over in Love's fire, he showed himself more zealous than any of his companions in doing whatever he thought would give the Queen pleasure. And thus it came about that because the Queen preferred to ride the palfrey that was in his care rather than any of the others whenever she was obliged to go out on horseback, on those occasions, the groom felt that she was doing him the greatest of favors and would stand close by her stirrup, thinking himself blessed if he was merely able to touch her clothing.

However, what we see all too often is that as hope diminishes, love increases, and that is what happened with the poor groom, to the extent that, without a shred of hope to sustain him, he had the utmost difficulty controlling the powerful desire he kept hidden inside him, and on more than one occasion, being unable to free himself from this passion, he felt like killing himself. As he pondered the ways and means to do just that, he concluded that the circumstances leading up to his death should be such as to make everyone understand that it was the result of the love he had always borne for the Queen. At the same time, he was resolved to try his luck and see if those circumstances might also offer him an opportunity to wholly, or at least partially, gratify his desires. He had no intention of saying anything to the Queen or declaring his love for her by means of letters, for he realized that speaking or writing to her would be in vain, and so, instead, he concentrated on getting into her bed by means of some stratagem or other. Since he knew that the King did not spend every single night with his wife, he concluded that the one and only stratagem with a chance of success was for him to find some way to impersonate the King so that he would be free to approach her and gain access to her bedroom.

With the aim of discovering how the King was dressed and the routine he followed when he visited the Queen, the groom hid himself for several nights in a great hall of the palace that was situated between the two royal bedchambers. On one of those nights he saw the King come out of his room wrapped up in a large cloak, carrying a small lighted torch in one hand and a rod in the other. He walked over to the Queen's chamber, and without saying a word, knocked once or twice at the entrance with the rod, whereupon the door was opened at once and the torch taken from his hand.

Having observed what the King had done, and having likewise seen him return to his room some time later, the groom decided he would adopt the very same procedure. He managed to acquire a cloak that resembled the

King's as well as a torch and a stick, and after first washing himself thoroughly in a hot bath so that the odor of dung would not repel the Queen or make her suspect a trick, he took his things to the great hall and hid himself in the usual place.

When the groom thought that everyone was asleep and that the time had come for him either to gratify his desires or to find a noble path to the death he had long sought, he used a piece of flint and steel he had brought with him to make a small fire by means of which he lit his torch. Then, wrapping himself up tightly in his cloak, he walked over to the entrance to the bedroom and knocked twice with his rod. The door was opened for him by a chambermaid who, more asleep than awake, took his light and covered it up, after which, without saying a thing, he stepped inside the curtains, took off his cloak, and got into the bed where the Queen lay sleeping. Knowing that it was not the King's habit to engage in conversation whenever he was angry about something, the groom made a show of being irritated as he took the Queen lustfully in his arms, and then, without either one of them ever uttering a single word, he had carnal knowledge of her over and over again. Although he was very loath to leave her, he was afraid that if he stayed there too long, the joy he had experienced might be turned into sorrow. Consequently, he got up, and after he had retrieved his cloak and his torch, he went away, still without saying a word, and returned to his bed as quickly as he could.

The groom could scarcely have reached it when, to the Queen's utter amazement, the King showed up in her chamber and gave her a cheerful greeting as he got into bed with her. "O my lord," she said, encouraged by his good humor, "what's the meaning of this change tonight? You've only just left me after having enjoyed me more than you usually do, and here you are, coming back for more. You should be careful what you're doing."

On hearing these words, the King immediately inferred that the Queen had been deceived by someone who had looked and behaved like him. He was a wise man, however, and since neither she nor anyone else had noticed the substitution, he decided on the spot that he would not reveal it to her. Many a fool would have acted differently and said: "That wasn't me. Who was the man who was here? What happened? Who was it who came? This would have given rise to a great many complications that would have upset the lady unnecessarily and might have given her a reason to want to repeat the experience she had just had. And besides, it allowed him to avoid disgracing himself by not talking about something that, as long as it remained unsaid, would never have been able to cause him shame.

Thus, giving no sign of his inner turmoil either by the way he spoke or by his facial expression, the King answered her: "Wife, don't you think I'm man enough to come back here a second time after having been with you once before?"

"Yes, my lord," the lady replied, "but nevertheless I beg you to be careful with your health." "I'm happy to follow your advice," said the King, "and so, this time I'll go away and won't bother you any further."

As he picked up his cloak and left the room, the King was seething with rage, indignant over what he saw had been done to him and determined to go quietly and search for the culprit, operating on the assumption that the man had to be a member of his household and that, no matter who he was, he would not have been able to get out of the palace. Taking a little lantern that shed only a very faint light, he went to a long dormitory located over the palace stables where almost all of his servants were asleep, each in his own bed. And since he surmised that neither the pulse nor the heart rate of whoever had done the deed reported by the Queen could have returned to normal after all his exertions, the King started at one end of the room and began quietly walking along, feeling everyone's chest to see if it was still throbbing.

Although all the others were sound asleep, the one who had been with the Queen was still awake, and when he saw the King coming and realized what he was looking for, he became so frightened that the terror he felt made his heart, which was already pounding because of his recent exercise, beat even harder. He was absolutely convinced that if the King noticed it, he would be instantly put to death, and thoughts about various possible courses of action went racing through his mind. Upon observing, however, that the King was unarmed, he decided to pretend he was asleep and wait to see what the King would do.

Having already examined a large number of the sleepers and concluded that none of them was the man he was seeking, the King finally reached the groom. When he discovered how hard the man's heart was beating, he said to himself, "This is the one." However, he did not want to let anybody know what his intentions were, and so, the only thing he did was to take a small pair of scissors he had brought with him and cut off a lock of hair on one side of the groom's head. Since people wore their hair very long in those days, that would be a sign by which the King would be able to recognize the culprit the next morning. Then, once he was done, he made his exit and returned to his own room.

Having witnessed everything that had happened, the groom, who was very shrewd, had no doubt as to why he had been marked in this manner. Therefore, he did not hesitate for a moment, but got up, and having located one of several pairs of scissors they happened to keep in the stables for tending to the horses, he went through the room from one man to the next as they lay sleeping and quietly cut off their hair just above the ear in the same way his own had been. Having finished what he was doing without having been observed by anyone, he returned to his bed and went to sleep.

The moment the King arose in the morning, he gave orders that the palace gates should remain closed until the members of his household were assembled before him. When they had all arrived and were standing bareheaded in his presence, he began looking them over with the intention of identifying the man whose hair he had cut off. To his amazement, however, he discovered that the vast majority of them had had their hair sheared in exactly the same way. “The man I’m looking for may well be low born,” he said to himself, “but he’s demonstrated that he has quite a lofty intellect.”

Then, since he realized that he could not achieve what he wanted without making a scene, he decided he would not expose himself to so great a disgrace in order to take his revenge on so petty a person. Instead, he contented himself with giving the man a stem word of warning to show him that his deed had not gone unobserved.

“Whoever did it,” he said, addressing the entire assembly, “he’d better not do it ever again. Now go, and may God be with you.”

Another man would have had them all put on the *strappado*, tortured, examined, and interrogated, but in doing so, he would have brought out into the open something that people should make every effort to conceal, for even if, by revealing the whole story, he had been able to revenge himself to the full, he would not have lessened his shame. On the contrary, he would have greatly increased it and would have sullied his lady’s reputation to boot.

Those who heard the King’s speech were amazed by it, and for a long time afterward they debated among themselves what he had meant. There was no one, however, who understood it except for the one person it really concerned, and he, wise man that he was, never revealed its meaning as long as the King was alive, nor did he ever put his life at risk by performing any such deed again.

## Day 3, Story 10



*Alibech becomes a recluse, and Rustico, a monk, teaches her how to put the Devil back in Hell. She is then led away from there and becomes the wife of Neerbale.<sup>1</sup>*

Dioneo had listened carefully to the Queen's story, and when he saw that it was finished and that he alone remained to speak, he smiled, and without waiting to be ordered to do so, he began:

Gracious ladies, perhaps you've never heard anyone explain how the Devil is put back in Hell, and therefore, without departing from the topic you've all been talking about today, I want to tell you how to do it. Perhaps you'll even be able to save your souls once you've learned it. You'll also learn that although Love prefers to dwell in gay palaces and voluptuous bedchambers more than in poor huts, for all that, he sometimes makes his powers felt in dense forests, on rugged mountains, and in desert caves—from which you'll be able to see that everything is subject to his power.

Now, to get to the point: let me tell you that there once lived in the city of Capsa in Barbary a very rich man who, among his many children, had a beautiful and graceful little daughter named Alibech.\* She was not a Christian, but having heard how greatly the Christian faith and the service of God were praised by the numerous Christians living in the city, one day she asked one of them how God could be served best and with the least difficulty. He replied that those served God best who fled farthest from the things of this world, as did the people who had gone to live in the desert around Thebes. The young girl of about fourteen was extremely naïve, and the following morning, moved not by a reasonable desire, but rather by a childish whim, she set out secretly for the Theban desert all by herself without letting anyone know what she was doing.

\*Barbary is the old name for Tunisia; Capsa was the name for the southern Tunisian town now called Gafsa. The desert around Thebes – mentioned later in the paragraph is the Sahara.

With great difficulty, but sustained by her desire, she reached that solitary place several days later. Catching sight of a hut in the distance, she went up to it and found a holy man on the threshold who was amazed to see

her there and asked her what she was looking for. She answered that, inspired by God, she wanted to enter His service and was seeking someone who would teach her how to do that. Seeing how young and very beautiful she was, and fearing that the Devil would tempt him if he kept her there, the worthy man praised her good intentions, and after giving her some roots of herbs and wild apples and dates to eat along with some water to drink, he said to her: “My daughter, not very far from here there is a holy man who is much more capable than I am of teaching you what you want to know. You should go to him.” And he sent her on her way.

When she reached the second man, she heard the same thing from him, and so she went farther on until she reached the cell of a young hermit, a truly good and devout person named Rustico, whom she asked the same question she had asked the others. Eager to put the firmness of his religious vow to a very demanding test, Rustico, unlike the first two, did not send her away or direct her to go farther on, but kept her with him in his cell. And when night came, he made her a little bed out of palm fronds on one side of it and told her to sleep there.

Once these things were done, temptations did not wait long before launching an attack on his powers, whose strength he found he had greatly overestimated, so that after a very few assaults, he turned tail and surrendered. Casting aside holy thoughts and prayers and penitential discipline, he began contemplating her youth and beauty, and beyond that, what ways and means he might employ in dealing with her so that she would not see just how dissolute he was as he went about getting what he wanted from her. After first testing her by asking certain questions that showed she had never had carnal knowledge of a man and was just as naive as she appeared to be, he came up with a plan by means of which, under the pretext of serving God, she would have to satisfy his desires. He started out with long speeches, demonstrating to her how great an enemy the Devil was to the Lord God, and finally giving her to understand that the most pleasing service she could offer Him would be to put the Devil back in the Hell to which the Lord God had damned him.

The young girl asked him how this might be done, and he replied: “You’ll soon find out. Just do whatever you see me do.” And he began to take off the few clothes he had on until he was completely naked, while the girl did the same thing. Then he knelt down as if he wanted to worship, and he made her position herself right in front of him. And as they knelt in this way, and Rustico felt his desire growing hotter than ever at the sight of her beauty, the resurrection of the flesh took place.<sup>2</sup> Staring at it in amazement, she said,

“Rustico, what’s that thing I see sticking out in front of you, the thing I don’t have?”

“O my daughter,” said Rustico, “this is the Devil I told you about, and now you can see for yourself how he’s tormenting me so much that I can scarcely endure it.”

Then the girl said, “Oh, praised be God, for I see I’m better off than you are, since I don’t have any such Devil.” “That’s the truth,” said Rustico, “but you do have something else I don’t have, and you have it in place of this.”

“Oh,” said Alibech, “what’s that?”

“You’ve got Hell there,” Rustico said to her. “And let me tell you, I believe God has sent you here for the salvation of my soul. For this Devil is giving me such pain that if you’ll take pity on me and allow me to put him back in Hell, you’ll give me the greatest relief. Plus, you’ll please God by performing an immense service, if you really came here to do that, as you say.”

“Oh, Father,” replied the young girl in good faith, “since I’ve got that Hell, just do it whenever you please.” . “Bless you, my daughter,” said Rustico. “Let’s go ahead and put him back in there so that he’ll finally leave me in peace:” And with those words, he led her up onto one of their little beds and taught her what she should do to incarcerate that evil spirit cursed by God. The young girl, who had never, ever put any Devil in Hell, felt a little pain the first time, and because of it she said to Rustico: “Surely, Father, this Devil must be a wicked thing and truly the enemy of God, for he not only hurts others, but he even hurts Hell when he’s put inside it.”

“My daughter,” said Rustico, “it won’t always be like that.” And to ensure that it would not be, they put the Devil back in there a good six times before they got out of the bed, so that, when they were done, they had forced him to lower his proud head, and he was content to be quiet a while.

The Devil’s pride often came right back up during the next few days, however, and the young girl, who was obedient and always willing to take it down for him, began to enjoy the game and would say to Rustico: “Now I certainly see that those worthy men in Capsa were telling the truth about how sweet a thing it is to serve God, for I’m sure I can’t recall any other thing I’ve done that has been so delightful or given me so much pleasure as putting the Devil back in Hell. And for that reason, in my judgment, anyone interested in doing something other than serving God is an ass.”

Repeatedly approaching Rustico with this purpose in mind, she would say to him, “Father, I’ve come here to serve God and not to remain

idle. Let's go and put the Devil back in Hell." While they were engaged in doing it, she would sometimes remark, "Rustico, I don't know why the Devil wants to escape from Hell, for if he liked being inside it as much as Hell likes taking him in and holding him there, he'd never want to leave."

Thus, by inviting Rustico to play the game over and over again, always encouraging him to serve God in this way, she took so much padding out of his doublet that he started feeling cold whereas anyone else would have been sweating. Consequently, he tried telling her that the Devil was only to be punished and put back in Hell when he raised his head in pride: "And we have so humiliated him, by the grace of God, that he is begging the Lord to be left in peace."

In this way he was able to keep the girl quiet for a while. But one day, when she realized that Rustico was no longer asking her to put the Devil back in Hell, she said to him, "Rustico, though your Devil has been punished and is no longer making you suffer, this Hell of mine is giving me no peace. So, you would do a good deed if you, with your Devil, helped to quench the fury of my Hell, just as I, with my Hell, helped you lower the pride of your Devil."

Now Rustico was living on the roots of herbs and spring water, so that her invitations could hardly get a rise out of him. He told her that it would take an awful lot of Devils to quench the fires of her Hell, but said that he would do what he could for her. Thus, he was sometimes able to satisfy her, but it was so seldom that it amounted to little more than tossing a bean into the mouth of a lion. Consequently, the young girl, feeling she was not getting to serve God as much as she wanted to, went around grumbling more often than not.

While this dispute went on between Rustico's Devil and Alibech's Hell, the result of too much desire on the one side and too little potency on the other, a fire happened to break out in Capsa that burned Alibech's father to death in his own house, together with all his children and the rest of his household, leaving Alibech the heir to his entire estate. Because of this, a youth named Neerbale, who had spent his entire substance in sumptuous living and who had heard that she was alive, set out in search of her and found her before the courts could confiscate her father's property because he had died without an heir. To the great relief of Rustico, though much against her will, Neerbale brought Alibech back to Capsa and took her as his wife, and together with her he became the heir to her enormous patrimony.

Before Neerbale slept with her, however, she was asked by some women how she used to serve God out in the desert. She replied that she



served' Him by putting the Devil back in Hell and that Neerbale had committed a great sin in taking her away from such a fine service. The women asked her how the Devil is put back in Hell, and when, between her words and her gestures, the girl showed them how, they laughed so much that they are still laughing to this day. 'Then they said, "Don't feel sad, child, no, for they do it pretty well here, too. Neerbale will serve the Lord God with you just fine."

Then one woman told this story to another throughout the city until they turned it into a common saying, namely that the most delightful service one could perform for God was to put the Devil back in Hell. This saying, which has crossed the sea from there, is still current. And so, young ladies, you who need God's grace, learn to put the Devil back in Hell, because this is greatly pleasing to God and a pleasure for those who are doing it, and much good may arise and come out of it.