

### NOVEL III

*Pietro Boccamazza runs away with Agnolella, and encounters a gang of robbers: the girl takes refuge in a wood, and is guided to a castle. Pietro is taken, but escapes out of the hands of the robbers, and after some adventures arrives at the castle where Agnolella is, marries her, and returns with her to Rome.*

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Ended Emilia's story, which none of the company spared to commend, the queen, turning to Elisa, bade her follow suit; and she, with glad obedience, thus began:

'Tis a story, sweet ladies, of a woeful night passed by two indiscreet young lovers that I have in mind; but, as thereon ensued not a few days of joy, 'tis not inapposite to our argument, and shall be narrated.

'Tis no long time since at Rome, which, albeit now the tail,<sup>(1)</sup> was of yore the head, of the world, there dwelt a young man, Pietro Boccamazza by name, a scion of one of the most illustrious of the Roman houses, who became enamoured of a damsel exceeding fair, and amorous withal – her name Agnolella – the daughter of one Gigliozzo Saullo, a plebeian, but in high repute among the Romans. Nor, loving thus, did Pietro lack the address to inspire in Agnolella a love as ardent as his own. Wherefore, overmastered by his passion, and minded no longer to endure the sore suffering that it caused him, he asked her in marriage. Whereof his kinsfolk were no sooner apprised, than with one accord they came to him and strongly urged him to desist from his purpose: they also gave Gigliozzo Saullo to understand that he were best to pay no sort of heed to Pietro's words, for that, if he so did, they would never acknowledge him as friend or relative. Thus to see himself debarred of the one way by which he deemed he might attain to his desire, Pietro was ready to die for grief, and, all his kinsfolk notwithstanding, he would have married Gigliozzo's daughter, had but the father consented. Wherefore at length he made up his mind that, if the girl were willing, nought should stand in the way; and having through a common friend sounded the damsel and found her apt, he brought her to consent to elope with him from Rome. The affair being arranged, Pietro and she took horse betimes one morning, and sallied forth for Anagni, where Pietro had certain friends, in whom he placed much trust; and as they rode, time not serving for full joyance of their love, for they feared pursuit, they held converse thereof, and from time to time exchanged a kiss. Now it so befell, that, the way being none too well known to Pietro, when, perhaps eight miles from Rome, they should have turned to the right, they took instead a leftward road. Whereon when they had ridden but little more than two miles, they found themselves close to a petty castle, whence, so soon as they were observed, there issued some dozen men at arms; and, as they drew near, the damsel, espying them, gave a cry, and said:

"We are attacked, Pietro, let us flee;" and guiding her nag as best she knew towards a great

forest, she planted the spurs in his sides, and so, holding on by the saddle-bow, was borne by the goaded creature into the forest at a gallop. Pietro, who had been too engrossed with her face to give due heed to the way, and thus had not been ware, as soon as she, of the approach of the men at arms, was still looking about to see whence they were coming, when they came up with him, and took him prisoner, and forced him to dismount. Then they asked who he was, and, when he told them, they conferred among themselves, saying:

"This is one of the friends of our enemies: what else can we do but relieve him of his nag and of his clothes, and hang him on one of these oaks in scorn of the Orsini?" To which proposal all agreeing, they bade Pietro strip himself: but while, already divining his fate, he was so doing, an ambuscade of full five-and-twenty men at arms fell suddenly upon them, crying:

"Death, death!" Thus surprised, they let Pietro go, and stood on the defensive; but, seeing that the enemy greatly outnumbered them, they took to their heels, the others giving chase. Whereupon Pietro hastily resumed his clothes, mounted his nag, and fled with all speed in the direction which he had seen the damsel take. But finding no road or path through the forest, nor discerning any trace of a horse's hooves, he was – for that he found not the damsel – albeit he deemed himself safe out of the clutches of his captors and their assailants, the most wretched man alive, and fell a weeping and wandering hither and thither about the forest, uttering Agnolella's name. None answered; but turn back he dared not: so on he went, not knowing whither he went; besides which, he was in mortal dread of the wild beasts that infest the forest, as well on account of himself as of the damsel, whom momentarily he seemed to see throttled by some bear or wolf. Thus did our unfortunate Pietro spend the whole day, wandering about the forest, making it to resound with his cries of Agnolella's name, and harking at times back, when he thought to go forward; until at last, what with his cries and his tears and his fears and his long fasting, he was so spent that he could go no further. 'twas then nightfall, and, as he knew not what else to do, he dismounted at the foot of an immense oak, and having tethered his nag to the trunk, climbed up into the branches, lest he should be devoured by the wild beasts during the night. Shortly afterwards the moon rose with a very clear sky, and Pietro, who dared not sleep, lest he should fall, and indeed, had

he been secure from that risk, his misery and his anxiety on account of the damsel would not have suffered him to sleep, kept watch, sighing and weeping and cursing his evil luck.

Now the damsel, who, as we said before, had fled she knew not whither, allowing her nag to carry her whithersoever he would, strayed so far into the forest that she lost sight of the place where she had entered it, and spent the whole day just as Pietro had done, wandering about the wilderness, pausing from time to time, and weeping, and uttering his name, and bewailing her evil fortune. At last, seeing that 'twas now the vesper hour and Pietro came not, she struck into a path, which the nag followed, until, after riding some two miles, she espied at some distance a cottage, for which she made with all speed, and found there a good man, well stricken in years, with his wife, who was likewise aged. Seeing her ride up alone, they said:

"Daughter, wherefore ridest thou thus alone at this hour in these parts?" Weeping, the damsel made answer that she had lost her companion in the forest, and asked how far might Anagni be from there? "My daughter," returned the good man, "this is not the road to Anagni; 'tis more than twelve miles away."

"And how far off," inquired the damsel, "are the nearest houses in which one might find lodging for the night?"

"There are none so near," replied the good man, "that thou canst reach them to-day."

"Then, so please you," said the damsel, "since go elsewhither I cannot, for God's sake let me pass the night here with you." Whereto the good man made answer:

"Damsel, welcome art thou to tarry the night with us; but still thou art to know that these parts are infested both by day and by night by bands, which, be they friends or be they foes, are alike ill to meet with, and not seldom do much despite and mischief, and if by misadventure one of these bands should visit us while thou wert here, and marking thy youth and beauty should do thee despite and dishonour, we should be unable to afford thee any succour. This we would have thee know, that if it should so come to pass, thou mayst not have cause to reproach us." The damsel heard not the old man's words without dismay; but, seeing that the hour was now late, she answered:

"God, if He be so pleased, will save both you and me from such molestation, and if not, 'tis a much lesser evil to be maltreated by men than to be torn in pieces by the wild beasts in the forest." So saying, she dismounted, and entered the cottage, where, having supped with the poor man and his wife on such humble fare as they had, she laid herself in her clothes beside them in their bed. She slept not, however; for her own evil plight and that of Pietro, for whom she knew not how to augur aught but evil, kept her sighing and weeping all night long. And towards matins she heard a great noise as of men that marched; so up she got and hied her into a large courtyard that was in rear of the cottage, and part of which was covered with a

great heap of hay, which she espied, hid herself therein, that, if the men came there, they might not so readily find her. Scarce had she done so than the men, who proved to be a strong company of marauders, were at the door of the cottage, which they forced open; and having entered, and found the damsel's nag, still saddled, they asked who was there. The damsel being out of sight, the good man answered:

"There is none here but my wife and I; but this nag, which has given some one the slip, found his way hither last night, and we housed him, lest he should be devoured by the wolves."

"Sol!" said the chief of the band, "as he has no owner, he will come in very handy for us."

Whereupon, in several parties, they ransacked the cottage from top to bottom; and one party went out into the courtyard, where, as they threw aside their lances and targets, it so befell that one of them, not knowing where else to bestow his lance, tossed it into the hay, and was within an ace of killing the damsel that lay hid there, as likewise she of betraying her whereabouts, for the lance all but grazing her left breast, insomuch that the head tore her apparel, she doubted she was wounded, and had given a great shriek, but that, remembering where she was, she refrained for fear. By and by the company cooked them a breakfast of kid's and other meat, and having eaten and drunken, dispersed in divers directions, as their affairs required, taking the girl's nag with them. And when they were gotten some little way off, the good man asked his wife:

"What became of the damsel, our guest of last night, that I have not seen her since we rose?" The good woman answered that she knew not where the damsel was, and went to look for her. The damsel, discovering that the men were gone, came forth of the hay, and the good man, seeing her, was overjoyed that she had not fallen into the hands of the ruffians, and, as day was breaking, said to her:

"Now that day is at hand, we will, so it like thee, escort thee to a castle, some five miles hence, where thou wilt be in safety; but thou must needs go afoot, because these villains, that are but just gone, have taken thy nag with them." The damsel, resigning herself to her loss, besought them for God's sake to take her to the castle: whereupon they set forth, and arrived there about half tierce. Now the castle belonged to one of the Orsini, Liello di Campo di Fiore by name, whose wife, as it chanced, was there. A most kindly and good woman she was, and, recognizing the damsel as soon as she saw her, gave her a hearty welcome and would fain have from her a particular account of how she came there. So the damsel told her the whole story. The lady, to whom Pietro was also known, as being a friend of her husband, was distressed to hear of his misadventure, and being told where he was taken, gave him up for dead. So she said to the damsel:

"Since so it is that thou knowest not how Pietro has fared, thou shalt stay here with me until such time as I may have opportunity to send thee safely back to Rome."

Meanwhile Pietro, perched on his oak in as woeful a plight as might be, had espied, when he should have been in his first sleep, a full score of wolves, that, as they prowled, caught sight of the nag, and straightway were upon him on all sides. The horse, as soon as he was ware of their approach, strained on the reins till they snapped, and tried to make good his escape; but, being hemmed in, was brought to bay, and made a long fight of it with his teeth and hooves; but in the end they bore him down and throttled him and forthwith eviscerated him, and, the whole pack falling upon him, devoured him to the bone before they had done with him. Whereat Pietro, who felt that in the nag he had lost a companion and a comfort in his travail, was sorely dismayed, and began to think that he should never get out of the forest. But towards dawn, he, perched there in the oak, almost dead with cold, looking around him as he frequently did, espied about a mile off a huge fire. Wherefore, as soon as 'twas broad day, he got down, not without trepidation, from the oak, and bent his steps towards the fire; and being come to it, he found, gathered about it, a company of shepherds, eating and making merry, who took pity on him and made him welcome. And when he had broken his fast and warmed himself, he told them the mishap that had befallen him, and how it was that he was come there alone, and asked them if there was a farm or castle in those parts, whither he might betake him. The shepherds said that about three miles away there was a castle belonging to Liello di Campo di Fiore, where his lady was then tarrying. Pietro, much comforted, requested to be guided thither by some of their company; whereupon two of them right gladly escorted him. So Pietro arrived at the castle, where he found some that knew him; and while he was endeavouring to set on foot a search for the damsel in the forest, the lady summoned him to her presence, and he, forthwith obeying, and seeing

Agnolella with her, was the happiest man that ever was. He yearned till he all but swooned to go and embrace her, but refrained, for bashfulness, in the lady's presence. And overjoyed as he was, the joy of the damsel was no less. The lady received him with great cheer, and though, when she had heard the story of his adventures from his own lips, she chid him not a little for having set at nought the wishes of his kinsfolk; yet, seeing that he was still of the same mind, and that the damsel was also constant, she said to herself:

To what purpose give I myself all this trouble? they love one another, they know one another; they love with equal ardour; their love is honourable, and I doubt not is well pleasing to God, seeing that the one has escaped the gallows and the other the lance, and both the wild beasts: wherefore be it as they would have it. Then, turning to them, she said:

"If 'tis your will to be joined in wedlock as man and wife, mine jumps with it: here shall your nuptials be solemnized and at Liello's charges, and for the rest I will see that your peace is made with your kinsfolk." So in the castle the pair were wedded, Pietro only less blithe than Agnolella, the lady ordering the nuptials as honourably as might be in her mountain-home, and there they had most sweet joyance of the first fruits of their love. So some days they tarried there, and then accompanied by the lady with a strong escort, they took horse and returned to Rome, where, very wroth though she found Pietro's kinsfolk for what he had done, the lady re-established solid peace between him and them; and so at Rome Pietro and Agnolella lived together to a good old age in great tranquillity and happiness.

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1 In reference to the forlorn condition of the city while the seat of the papacy was at Avignon, 1308-1377.