

## NOVEL VII

*Lodovico discovers to Madonna Beatrice the love that he bears her: she sends Egano, her husband, into a garden disguised as herself, and lies with Lodovico; who thereafter, being risen, bies him to the garden and cudgels Egano.*

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This device of Madonna Isabella, thus recounted by Pampinea, was held nothing short of marvellous by all the company. But, being bidden by the king to tell the next story, thus spake Filomena:

Loving ladies, if I mistake not, the device, of which you shall presently hear from me, will prove to be no less excellent than the last.

You are to know, then, that there dwelt aforetime at Paris a Florentine gentleman, who, being by reason of poverty turned merchant, had prospered so well in his affairs that he was become very wealthy; and having by his lady an only son, Lodovico by name, whose nobility disrelished trade, he would not put him in any shop; but that he might be with other gentlemen, he caused him to enter the service of the King of France, whereby he acquired very fine manners and other accomplishments. Being in this service, Lodovico was one day with some other young gallants that talked of the fair ladies of France, and England, and other parts of the world, when they were joined by certain knights that were returned from the Holy Sepulchre; and hearing their discourse, one of the knights fell a saying, that of a surety in the whole world, so far as he had explored it, there was not any lady, of all that he had ever seen, that might compare for beauty with Madonna Beatrice, the wife of Egano de' Galluzzi, of Bologna: wherein all his companions, who in common with him had seen the lady at Bologna, concurred. Which report Lodovico, who was as yet fancy-free, no sooner heard, than he burned with such a yearning to see the lady that he was able to think of nought else: insomuch that he made up his mind to betake him to Bologna to see her, and if she pleased him, to remain there; to which end he gave his father to understand that he would fain visit the Holy Sepulchre, whereto his father after no little demur consented.

So to Bologna Anichino--for so he now called himself--came; and, as Fortune would have it, the very next day, he saw the lady at a festal gathering, and deemed her vastly more beautiful than he had expected: wherefore he waxed most ardently enamoured of her, and resolved never to quit Bologna, until he had gained her love. So, casting about how he should proceed, he could devise no other way but to enter her husband's service, which was the more easy that he kept not a few retainers: on this wise Lodovico surmised that, peradventure, he might compass his end. He therefore sold his horses and meetly bestowed his servants, bidding them make as if they knew him not; and being pretty familiar with his host, he told him that he was minded to take service with some worthy lord, it any such he might find. "Thou wouldst make," quoth the host, "the very sort of retainer to suit a

gentleman of this city, Egano by name, who keeps not a few of them, and will have all of them presentable like thee: I will mention the matter to him." And so he accordingly did, and before he took leave of Egano had placed Anichino with him, to Egano's complete satisfaction.

Being thus resident with Egano, and having abundant opportunities of seeing the fair lady, Anichino set himself to serve Egano with no little zeal; wherein he succeeded so well, that Egano was more than satisfied, insomuch that by and by there was nought he could do without his advice, and he entrusted to him the guidance not only of himself, but of all his affairs. Now it so befell that one day when Egano was gone a hawking, having left Anichino at home, Madonna Beatrice, who as yet wist not of his love, albeit she had from time to time taken note of him and his manners, and had not a little approved and commended them, sat herself down with him to a game of chess, which, to please her, Anichino most dexterously contrived to lose, to the lady's prodigious delight. After a while, the lady's women, one and all, gave over watching their play, and left them to it; whereupon Anichino heaved a mighty sigh. The lady, looking hard at him, said:

"What ails thee, Anichino? Is it, then, such a mortification to thee to be conquered by me?"

"Nay, Madam," replied Anichino, "my sigh was prompted by a much graver matter."

"Then, if thou hast any regard for me," quoth the lady, "tell me what it is." Hearing himself thus adjured by "any regard" he had for her whom he loved more than aught else, Anichino heaved a yet mightier sigh, which caused the lady to renew her request that he would be pleased to tell her the occasion of his sighs. Whereupon:

"Madam," said Anichino, "I greatly fear me, that, were I to tell it you, 'twould but vex you; and, moreover, I doubt you might repeat it to some one else."

"Rest assured," returned the lady, "that I shall neither be annoyed, nor, without thy leave, ever repeat to any other soul aught that thou mayst say."

"Then," said Anichino, "having this pledge from you, I will tell it you." And, while the tears all but stood in his eyes, he told her, who he was, the report he had heard of her, and where and how he had become enamoured of her, and with what intent he had taken service with her husband: after which, he humbly besought her, that, if it might be, she would have pity on him, and gratify this his secret and ardent desire; and that, if she were not

minded so to do, she would suffer him to retain his place there, and love her. Ah! Bologna! how sweetly mixed are the elements in thy women! How commendable in such a case are they all! No delight have they in sighs and tears, but are ever inclinable to prayers, and ready to yield to the solicitations of Love. Had I but words apt to praise them as they deserve, my eloquence were inexhaustible.

The gentlewoman's gaze was fixed on Anichino as he spoke; she made no doubt that all he said was true, and yielding to his appeal, she entertained his love within her heart in such measure that she too began to sigh, and after a sigh or two made answer:

"Sweet my Anichino, be of good cheer; neither presents nor promises, nor any courting by gentleman, or lord, or whoso else (for I have been and am still courted by not a few) was ever able to sway my soul to love any of them: but thou, by the few words that thou hast said, hast so wrought with me that, brief though the time has been, I am already in far greater measure thine than mine. My love I deem thee to have won right worthily; and so I give it thee, and vow to give thee joyance thereof before the coming night be past. To which end thou wilt come to my room about midnight; I will leave the door open; thou knowest the side of the bed on which I sleep; thou wilt come there; should I be asleep, thou hast but to touch me, and I shall awake, and give thee solace of thy long-pent desire. In earnest whereof I will even give thee a kiss." So saying, she threw her arms about his neck, and lovingly kissed him, as Anichino her.

Their colloquy thus ended, Anichino betook him elsewhere about some matters which he had to attend to, looking forward to midnight with boundless exultation. Egano came in from his hawking; and after supper, being weary, went straight to bed, whither the lady soon followed him, leaving, as she had promised, the door of the chamber open. Thither accordingly, at the appointed hour, came Anichino, and having softly entered the chamber, and closed the door behind him, stole up to where the lady lay, and laying his hand upon her breast, found that she was awake. Now, as soon as she wist that Anichino was come, she took his hand in both her own; and keeping fast hold of him, she turned about in the bed, until she awoke Egano; whereupon:

"Husband," quoth she, "I would not say aught of this to thee, yestereve, because I judged thou wast weary; but tell me, upon thy hope of salvation, Egano, whom deemest thou thy best and most loyal retainer, and the most attached to thee, of all that thou hast in the house?"

"What a question is this, wife?" returned Egano. "Dost not know him? Retainer I have none, nor ever had, so trusted, or loved, as Anichino. But wherefore put such a question?"

Now, when Anichino wist that Egano was awake, and heard them talk of himself, he more than once tried to withdraw his hand, being mightily afraid lest the lady meant to play him false; but she held it so tightly that he might not get free, while thus she made answer to Egano:

"I will tell thee what he is. I thought that he was all thou sayst, and that none was so loyal to thee as he, but he has undeceived me, for that yesterday, when thou wast out a hawking, he, being here, chose his time, and had the shamelessness to crave of me compliance with his wanton desires: and I, that I might not need other evidence than that of thine own senses to prove his guilt to thee, I made answer, that I was well content, and that to-night, after midnight, I would get me into the garden, and await him there at the foot of the pine. Now go thither I shall certainly not; but, if thou wouldst prove the loyalty of thy retainer, thou canst readily do so, if thou but slip on one of my loose robes, and cover thy face with a veil, and go down and attend his coming, for come, I doubt not, he will."

Whereto Egano:

"Meet indeed it is," quoth he, "that I should go see;" and straightway up he got, and, as best he might in the dark, he put on one of the lady's loose robes and veiled his face, and then hied him to the garden, and sate down at the foot of the pine to await Anichino. The lady no sooner wist that he was out of the room, than she rose, and locked the door. Anichino, who had never been so terrified in all his life, and had struggled with all his might to disengage his hand from the lady's clasp, and had inwardly cursed her and his love, and himself for trusting her, a hundred thousand times, was overjoyed beyond measure at this last turn that she had given the affair. And so, the lady having got her to bed again, and he, at her bidding, having stripped and laid him down beside her, they had solace and joyance of one another for a good while. Then, the lady, deeming it unmeet for Anichino to tarry longer with her, caused him to get up and resume his clothes, saying to him:

"Sweet my mouth, thou wilt take a stout cudgel, and get thee to the garden, and making as if I were there, and thy suit to me had been but to try me, thou wilt give Egano a sound rating with thy tongue and a sound belabouring with thy cudgel, the sequel whereof will be wondrously glad some and delightful." Whereupon Anichino hied him off to the garden, armed with a staff of wild willow; and as he drew nigh the pine, Egano saw him, and rose and came forward to meet him as if he would receive him with the heartiest of cheer. But:

"Ah! wicked woman!" quoth Anichino; "so thou art come! Thou didst verily believe, then, that I was, that I am, minded thus to wrong my lord? Foul fall thee a thousand times!" And therewith he raised his cudgel, and began to lay about him. Egano, however, had heard and seen enough, and without a word took to flight, while Anichino pursued him, crying out:

"Away with thee! God send thee a bad year, lewd woman that thou art; nor doubt that Egano shall hear of this to-morrow." Egano, having received sundry round knocks, got him back to his chamber with what speed he might; and being asked by the lady, whether Anichino had come into the garden:

“Would to God he had not!” quoth he, “for that, taking me for thee, he has beaten me black and blue with his cudgel, and rated me like the vilest woman that ever was: passing strange, indeed, it had seemed to me that he should have said those words to thee with intent to dishonour me; and now ’tis plain that ’twas but that, seeing thee so blithe and frolicsome, he was minded to prove thee.”

Whereto:

“God be praised,” returned the lady, “that he proved me by words, as thee by acts: and I doubt not he may say that I bear his words with more

patience than thou his acts. But since he is so loyal to thee, we must make much of him and do him honour.”

“Ay, indeed,” quoth Egano, “thou sayst sooth.”

Thus was Egano fortified in the belief that never had any gentleman wife so true, or retainer so loyal, as he; and many a hearty laugh had he with Anichino and his lady over this affair, which to them was the occasion that, with far less let than might else have been, they were able to have solace and joyance of one another, so long as it pleased Anichino to tarry at Bologna.