

## Day 9, Story 2



*Arising hurriedly in the dark, an Abbess rushes out to catch one of her nuns who was reported to be in bed with her lover, but the Abbess herself was with a priest at the time and places his breeches on her head, thinking she is putting her veils there, with the result that when the accused nun sees them and points them out to the Abbess, she is acquitted and from then on is able to spend time with her lover at her leisure.<sup>1</sup>*

When Filomena was silent, the entire company praised the lady's intelligence in getting rid of the men she did not love, while, on the contrary, they all judged the men's daring presumption to be madness rather than love. Then, turning to Elissa, the Queen graciously said, "Continue, Elissa," and she promptly began speaking as follows:

My dearest ladies, as we have heard, Madonna Francesca certainly knew how to get rid of a nuisance by using her wits. Now, however, I am going to tell you about a young nun who, with Fortune's help, freed herself from imminent danger by means of a clever remark. You all know that there are plenty of very foolish people who take it upon themselves to instruct and correct others, but as you will learn from my story, from time to time Fortune justly puts them to shame—which is precisely what happened to the Abbess who was the superior of the nun I am going to tell you about.

You should know, then, that in Lombardy there used to be a convent, widely renowned for the holiness and religious zeal of its nuns, one of whom was a young woman of noble birth, endowed with wondrous beauty, who was named Isabetta. One day, having come to the grating to speak with a relative of hers, she fell in love with a handsome young man who was with him, and who, when he saw how very beautiful she

was and understood what she was feeling from the look in her eyes, began burning with just as fierce a passion for her.

The two of them suffered intense anguish for quite some time because of this unfulfilled love of theirs, but it kept spurring them on until, finally, the young man thought of a way he could get together with his nun in secret. From that time on, with her full consent, he visited her not once, but many, many times, always to their mutual delight.

Things went on in this manner until one night, unbeknownst to him or Isabetta, he happened to be spotted by one of the nuns after he had taken his leave and was going on his way. The nun communicated her discovery to several others, and their first thought was to denounce Isabetta to the Abbess, a certain Madonna Usimbalda, who was a good and pious woman in the opinion of the nuns and of everyone else who knew her.<sup>2</sup> On second thought, however, they decided to arrange for the Abbess to catch the girl with the young man so that there would be no room for her to deny it. Consequently, they held their peace and secretly took turns keeping her under close surveillance in the hope of taking her by surprise.

Now, Isabetta, who had no idea what was going on and was not on the lookout, happened to arrange one night for her lover to join her. The nuns who were keeping watch spotted him at once, but waited to act until the wee hours of the night. Then, when they thought the time was right, they divided themselves into two groups, the first standing guard by the entrance to Isabetta's cell while the second ran off to the Abbess's room. There they knocked on the door, and as soon as they heard her voice, they said: "Get up, Reverend Mother, and hurry. We've discovered Isabetta has a young man in her cell."

That night the Abbess was keeping company with a priest whom she often had brought to her inside a chest. When she heard all the racket, she was afraid that the nuns, in their haste and excessive zeal, would force the door open. Consequently, she got up in a rush and dressed herself as best she could in the dark. Thinking that she had picked up the pleated veils that nuns wear on their heads and are called psalters,\*

\* *Psalter* (It. *saltero*): an arrangement of veils worn by nuns on their heads that had a triangular shape like the musical instrument of the same name (also called a psaltery).

she happened to grab the priest's beeches, and she was in such a hurry that without realizing what she was doing, she clapped them onto her head in place of her veils. She exited the room, quickly locking the door behind her and exclaiming: "Where is that goddamned girl?"

Accompanied by the nuns, who were so fired up, so eager to see Isabetta caught in the act, that they took no notice of what the Abbess had on her head, she arrived at the entrance to the cell, and all of them together managed to push down the door. Upon entering the room, they found the two lovers in bed together, lying in one another's arms, so confused by this sudden and surprising turn of events that they had no idea what to do and just stayed where they were, unable to move.

The nuns immediately seized the girl and at the Abbess's orders led her to the chapterhouse. Meanwhile, the young man, who had stayed where he was, got dressed and waited to see what the outcome would be, fully resolved, if his young lady were harmed in any way, to make all the nuns he could get his hands on pay dearly for it, after which he would take her away with him.

Having assumed her seat in the chapterhouse surrounded by the nuns, all of whom had their eyes fixed on the accused, the Abbess launched into the severest scolding any woman has ever received, telling the girl that by her reprehensible, disgusting conduct—if people outside ever found out about it—she had sullied the sanctity, the honor, and the good reputation of the convent. And to these insults, the Abbess added the worst threats imaginable.

Knowing she was at fault, the girl had no idea how to respond, and as she stood there, fearful and ashamed, her silence was actually beginning to make the others feel sorry for her. After a while, however, as the Abbess went on and on multiplying her insults, the girl happened to raise her head and caught sight of what the Abbess had on her head, with its straps dangling down on either side. Realizing what was up, she completely recovered her composure and said: "God help you, Reverend Mother, would you tie up your cap, and then you may tell me whatever you want."

The Abbess had no idea what she meant and replied: "What cap, you

vile woman? Do you have the cheek to make jokes now? Does it really seem to you that what you've done is some laughing matter?"

"Reverend Mother, I beg you," said the girl a second time, "tie up your cap. Then you can say anything you please to me."

At this point, several of the nuns raised their eyes and looked in the direction of the Abbess's head, while she simultaneously raised her hands up to it. And then all of them realized just what it was Isabetta had been referring to.

Recognizing that she was equally guilty, and that there was no way for her to cover things up since everyone was staring at her, the Abbess changed her tune and began telling a very different story than she had before. When she reached the conclusion that it was impossible to defend oneself from the goadings of the flesh, she told them all that they should enjoy themselves whenever they could, provided it was done discreetly, as it had been up until then.

After setting Isabetta free, the Abbess returned to sleep with her priest, while the girl went off to rejoin her lover. And from then on, regardless of the envy felt by the nuns, Isabetta had him come back to see her at frequent intervals, and the others, who lacked lovers, did their best to find some sort of consolation for themselves in secret.

## Day 9, Story 3



*Egged on by Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello, Master Simone makes Calandrino believe he is pregnant. Calandrino then gives them all capons and money in return for medicine, and he is cured without having to give birth.<sup>1</sup>*

When Elissa had finished, everyone thanked God for the young nun's happy escape from the fangs of her envious companions. At that point the Queen ordered Filostrato to continue, and he, without waiting to be asked again, began:

Loveliest of ladies, that boorish judge from The Marches about whom I spoke to you yesterday took a story about Calandrino that I was all prepared to tell you and snatched it right out of my mouth. We have, to be sure, heard quite a bit about him and his comrades, but since everything we say about him can only serve to increase the fun we are having, I am going to recount the story now that I intended to tell you then.

From what was previously said, you should have a very clear picture of Calandrino and of the others who are going to be the subject of this story. Consequently, I will get right to the point and tell you that one of Calandrino's aunts happened to die and leave him two hundred lire in small change, which prompted him to start talking about how he was going to buy himself a farm.<sup>2</sup> Acting as if he had ten thousand gold florins to spend, he entered into negotiations with all the brokers in Florence, although the deals always fell through as soon as they mentioned the asking price for the property. Bruno and Buffalmacco, who knew what had happened, had told him many times that it would be better for him to use the money in order to have a good time with them than to go and buy just enough land to make mud pies out of it.<sup>3</sup> But

far from getting him to do what they proposed, they had never managed to persuade him to stand them to a single meal.

As they were griping about this one day, they were joined by a buddy of theirs, a painter named Nello, and the three of them decided they just had to find a way to stuff their snouts at Calandrino's expense.<sup>4</sup> It did not take them very long to work out a plan of action among themselves, and the next morning they were lying in wait for Calandrino as he left his house. Before he had gone even a short distance, Nello came up to him and said, "Good-day, Calandrino."

Calandrino replied by saying that God should give him a good day, and a good year, too, after which Nello paused for a moment and began looking Calandrino hard in the face.

"What are you staring at?" asked Calandrino.

"Did anything happen to you last night?" replied Nello. "You don't seem like your usual self."

Calandrino immediately started worrying and said, "Oh no! How's that? What do you think I've got?"

"Well, I'm not saying that you've got something," said Nello. "It's just that you look very different to me. Maybe it's nothing at all."

Nello let him go, and as Calandrino continued on his way, he was terribly upset, although he did not sense that there was anything at all wrong with him. Buffalmacco, however, was not far off, and when he saw Calandrino leave Nello, he walked up to him, greeted him, and asked him if he was feeling all right.

"I don't know," said Calandrino, "but just now Nello was telling me that I looked all different to him. Is it possible I could have come down with something?"

"Yes, you could well have a little something or other," replied Buffalmacco. "You look half dead."

Calandrino had already started to feel feverish when lo and behold, Bruno appeared on the scene, and the first words out of his mouth were, "Calandrino, what a face! You look like death itself! How are you feeling?"

Having heard all of them say the same thing, Calandrino was now

absolutely convinced that he was sick, and completely dismayed by the prospect, he asked them, "What shall I do?"

"In my opinion," said Bruno, "you should go right home, get into your bed, and cover yourself up good and tight. Then you should send a specimen of your urine to Master Simone who, as you know, is a very good buddy of ours and will soon tell you what you have to do.<sup>5</sup> Plus, we'll come with you, and if anything has to be done, we'll take care of it."

Nello soon joined them, and the three of them accompanied Calandrino back to his house where he made his way, utterly exhausted, to his bedroom. "Come and pile the covers over me," he said to his wife. "I'm feeling terribly ill."

After he got settled in his bed, he sent a serving girl with a specimen of his urine to Master Simone, who in those days had set up his practice in the Mercato Vecchio at the sign of the Melon.<sup>6</sup> Bruno turned to his buddies and said: "You stay here with him, while I go and see what the doctor has to say. If it's necessary, I'll escort him back here with me."

"Ah, yes, my friend," said Calandrino, "do go there and bring me back word about how things stand, because I'm feeling I've got something, I don't know what, inside me."

Bruno set off for Master Simone's, getting there ahead of the serving girl who was carrying the specimen, and explained to the doctor what they were up to. Thus, when the girl arrived, Master Simone examined the urine and said to her: "Go back and tell Calandrino that he should keep himself good and warm. I'm coming to see him right away to let him know what's wrong with him and what he has to do about it."

After the girl delivered the message, it was not long before the doctor, accompanied by Bruno, showed up. Sitting down beside Calandrino, he began taking his pulse, and then, after a pause, in the presence of Calandrino's wife, he said to him: "Look here, Calandrino, speaking to you as a friend, I'd say there's nothing wrong with you except for the fact that you're pregnant."

When Calandrino heard this, he began wailing in despair. "Oh no, Tessa," he exclaimed, "you did this to me. You always want to be on top, and I've told you clearly all along what would come of it." When she

heard him say this, Calandrino's wife, who was a very modest woman, turned scarlet with shame, and lowering her gaze, left the room without saying a word.

Meanwhile, Calandrino went on with his lament. "Oh, poor me," he said, "what shall I do? How am I going to give birth to this child? Where will he come out? Now I see only too clearly that this wife of mine, what with that insatiable lust of hers, has been the death of me. May God make her as miserable as I wish to be happy. If I were well—which I'm not—I'd get up and give her such a beating I'd break every bone in her body. It does serve me right, though, because I should never have let her get up on top. Anyway, one thing's for certain: if I manage to get out of this alive, she can die of frustration before she ever gets to do it that way again."

As they listened to Calandrino, Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello had such a desire to laugh that they were ready to explode. They managed to contain themselves, however, but Master Simonkey guffawed, opening his mouth so wide that you could have pulled out every one of his teeth.<sup>7</sup> After a long while, Calandrino finally threw himself on the doctor's mercy and begged him for his advice and assistance.

"Calandrino," Master Simone told him, "there's no reason for you to get upset. God be praised, we diagnosed the problem early enough for me to set you right quite easily in just a few days. However, you're going to have to spend a little money on it."

"Oh yes, doctor," said Calandrino, "do it, for the love of God. I've got two hundred *lire* here that I thought of using to buy a farm. If you need them, you can have them all, just so long as I don't have to give birth. I don't know how I'd manage it, because I hear women making so much noise when they're having a baby, despite the fact that they have such a great big thing to use for it to come through, that I'm afraid if I suffered so much pain, I'd die before I got it out."

"Don't give it another thought," said the doctor. "I'll have a certain potion made up for you, a distillation that's good for such cases and very pleasant to drink. It'll take care of everything by the third morning and make you as healthy as a horse.<sup>8</sup> But see to it that you're wiser in the future and don't get into such foolish situations. Now, to prepare



this medicine, we'll need three pairs of good, fat capons, and you must give one of your buddies here five of those *lire* to buy all the other ingredients that are needed. Then make sure that everything is taken around to my shop, and tomorrow morning, in God's name, I'll send you that distilled potion, which you should start drinking, a nice, big glassful at a time."

When Calandrino heard what Master Simone had to say, he declared, "Doctor, it's in your hands," and he gave Bruno the five *lire* as well as enough money for three pairs of capons, asking him to purchase everything and thanking him profusely for going to so much trouble on his behalf.

The doctor went away and had a little bit of spiced wine prepared, which he sent around to Calandrino.<sup>9</sup> As for Bruno, he went out and bought the capons as well as everything else necessary for a good meal, which he then proceeded to eat in the company of his two buddies and the doctor.

Calandrino drank the wine for three mornings in a row, after which the doctor came to see him, accompanied by his three comrades. Having taken Calandrino's pulse, he announced: "You're cured, Calandrino, no doubt about it. You may safely attend to your affairs today and don't have to stay home any longer."

The happy Calandrino got up and went about his business, and whenever he ran into anyone to talk to, he was full of praise for the wonderful way that Master Simone had cured him, because in just three days he had terminated his pregnancy with absolutely no pain at all. Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello were pleased to have found a clever plan to get around Calandrino's stinginess, but Monna Tessa had figured it out and did nothing but grumble to her husband about it.

## Day 9, Story 6



*Two young men find lodging overnight, and while one of them goes to bed with their host's daughter, the host's wife inadvertently sleeps with the other. Then the youth who was with the daughter gets into bed with her father, and thinking he is talking to his companion, tells him everything. A great commotion ensues, at which point the wife, realizing her mistake, gets into bed with her daughter and by means of a few choice words restores the peace.<sup>1</sup>*

Just as he had done before, Calandrino made the entire company laugh once again. Then, when the ladies finally stopped talking about his antics, the Queen ordered Panfilo to speak, and he said:

Praiseworthy ladies, the name of Calandrino's beloved has brought to mind a story about another Niccolosa that I would like to recount for you, because in it you will see how a good woman's presence of mind enabled her to avert a great scandal.

Not so long ago, in the valley of the Mugnone there lived a worthy man who earned money by supplying travelers with food and drink, and although he was poor and his house tiny, he would sometimes put them up, but only in cases of urgent need and only if he knew who they were. The man was married to a most attractive woman, who had borne him two children, a lovely, charming young girl fifteen or sixteen years old who was still unmarried, and a tiny baby boy not yet one whom his mother was breast-feeding herself.

The girl had caught the eye of a young gentleman from our city, a lively, attractive youth who spent a lot of time in the countryside, and he fell passionately, fervently, in love with her. For her part, she took great pride in having won the affection of such a young man, and making every effort to keep his love for her alive by behaving with the

greatest affability toward him, in the process she likewise fell in love with him. Now, on more than one occasion they would have consummated their love for one another, to the great delight of both parties, if Pinuccio—for that was the youth's name—had not been worried about exposing both the girl and himself to censure. His ardor, however, grew from day to day until he was simply overwhelmed by his desire to be with her. It therefore occurred to him that he just had to discover a way to find lodging at her father's house, for he knew its layout and thought that if he could just get inside, he and the girl could be together, and no one would be any the wiser. And in fact, no sooner did this idea enter his head than he promptly proceeded to put it into effect.

Late one evening, Pinuccio and a trusted companion of his named Adriano, who knew about his love for the girl, hired a couple of pack-horses, placed a pair of saddlebags on them, which may have been filled with straw, and set out from Florence. After riding around in a large circle, they arrived at the valley of the Mugnone, reaching it some time after nightfall. There, after turning their horses around as if they were returning from Romagna, they rode up to the worthy man's house and knocked on the door, which he opened right away since he was well acquainted with the pair.

"Look, you have to put us up for the night," Pinuccio told him. "We thought we would've reached Florence by this time, but as you can see, we couldn't ride fast enough to get any farther than here."

"Pinuccio," replied the host, "you must know how poorly provided I am to offer lodging to gentlemen like yourselves, but still, since you've been caught here at this hour, and there's no time for you to go anywhere else, I'm happy to do what I can to put you up for the night."

The two young men dismounted, and after having first seen to their horses, they entered the cottage where they got out the generous supper they had brought with them and ate it with their host. Now, the latter had only one tiny little bedroom, in which he had set up three small beds to the best of his ability, leaving so little space that it was a tight squeeze indeed to maneuver around them. Two of the beds were next to one of the walls, while the third one stood on the opposite side of the room. The host then had the least uncomfortable bed made up

for the two companions and invited them to sleep there. A little later, while the two of them were still wide awake, although they were pretending to be asleep, the host had his daughter settle down in one of the other beds, and he got into the third one with his wife, who placed the cradle holding their little baby son next to where she was sleeping.

After everything had been arranged in the room, Pinuccio made a mental note of it all and waited a little while until he thought everyone was asleep. At that point, he quietly got up, went over to the little bed where the girl he loved was sleeping, and lay down beside her. Although she was frightened, she gave him a joyous welcome, and there he stayed, taking his fill of that pleasure for which they had both been yearning for such a long time.

While Pinuccio was in bed with the girl, a cat happened to knock some things over. The noise woke up the wife, who was afraid that it was something else. She got out of bed in the dark, naked as she was, and headed for the place from which the sound had come.

By chance, Adriano also happened to get up, not for the same reason, but in response to a call of nature, and as he was going to take care of his business, he bumped into the cradle where the wife had placed it on the floor. Since he could not get past without moving it out of the way, he grabbed it, lifted it up from where the wife had set it, and put it down next to the bed in which he himself had been sleeping. Then, having finished what he had gotten up to do, he came back, and without giving any further thought to the cradle, climbed into bed.

After having searched the house for a while, the wife concluded that nothing of importance had fallen down, and having no desire to light a lamp in order to inspect things more closely, she yelled at the cat and then returned to the little bedroom, groping her way right up to the bed where her husband was sleeping. But when she failed to find the cradle there, she said to herself: "Oh no, stupid me! See what I was about to do! For God's sake, I was heading right for the bed where my guests are sleeping!" Moving forward a bit, she found the cradle, and then lay down with Adriano in the bed beside it, thinking she was lying down with her husband. Adriano had not yet gone back to sleep, and when he realized what had happened, he gave her a warm reception,

after which, without uttering a single sound in the process, he yanked his rope until it was taut and his sail was all swollen out, much to the wife's great satisfaction.<sup>2</sup>

This was how matters stood when Pinuccio, who had enjoyed himself with the girl as much as he had wanted, started worrying that sleep might surprise him there with her. Consequently, he rose from her side in order to go back and rest in his own bed. When he got there, however, only to run into the cradle, he moved on, thinking it was the host's bed, and wound up getting in beside the host himself, who was awakened by his arrival. Being under the impression that the man who lay beside him was Adriano, Pinuccio said: "About that Niccolosa, I have to say, there's nothing could be sweeter, in any way.<sup>3</sup> By God's body, I've had more fun with her than any man's ever had with a woman. And let me assure you, since I left here, I've managed to get into her country house six times."

When the host heard this bit of news, he was not exactly pleased. First, he asked himself: "What the devil is this guy doing here?" Then, allowing his anger to get the better of his prudence, he said: "Pinuccio, what you've done is shameful. I don't know why you had to do it to me, but by God's body, I'm going to pay you back for it."

Pinuccio was not the smartest young man in the world, and when he realized his mistake, instead of trying to find the best remedy he could for it, he replied: "How're you going to pay me back? What could you do to me?"

The host's wife, who thought she was sleeping with her husband, said to Adriano: "Uh-oh! Just listen to the way our guests are quarreling with one another."

"Let 'em go ahead," said Adriano, with a laugh, "and to Hell with 'em. They had too much to drink last night."

The wife was thinking it was her husband's voice when she heard him cursing them, but as soon as she heard Adriano's words, she immediately realized where she was and with whom. Wise woman that she was, however, she got up at once without saying another word and grabbed her baby son's cradle. Since there was absolutely no light in the room, she felt her way along, carrying the cradle to the side of the

bed in which her daughter was sleeping. There she put it down and got into the bed with her. Then, pretending to have been awakened by the noise her husband was making, she called to him and asked him what he was having words with Pinuccio about.

"Didn't you hear what he says he did to Niccolosa tonight?" her husband replied.

"He's lying through his teeth," she said. "He didn't sleep with Niccolosa, because I've been lying here all this time and haven't slept a wink since I got in. You're a fool to believe him. You men drink so much in the evening that at night you do nothing but dream and walk about all over the place in your sleep without knowing where you are and imagine you've performed all sorts of miracles. It's a pity you don't break your necks! But what's Pinuccio doing over there? Why isn't he in his own bed?"

For his part, seeing how adroitly the woman was covering up both her own shame and her daughter's, Adriano added: "Pinuccio, I've told you a hundred times that you shouldn't be wandering about, because this vice of yours of sleepwalking and then recounting the fantasies that you've dreamed as though they were true is going to get you into trouble one of these days. Come back here, goddamn you."

When the host heard what his wife and Adriano were both saying, he started to think that Pinuccio really was dreaming. Consequently, taking him by the shoulders, he began to shake him and yell at him. "Wake up, Pinuccio," he said. "Get back in your own bed."

Having taken in everything they had said, Pinuccio began raving like someone who was dreaming, provoking the host to the heartiest laugh in the world. Finally, as if in response to the shaking he was being given, Pinuccio pretended to wake up, and shouting over to Adriano, he said: "Why are you calling me? Is it day already?"

"Yes, it is," said Adriano. "Come over here."

Feigning ignorance of what had happened and acting as if he were very drowsy, Pinuccio finally left the host's side and went back to bed with Adriano. When day came and everyone was up, the host started laughing and making fun of Pinuccio and his dreaming. And so, between one jest and another, the two young men got their horses

ready and strapped on their saddlebags. Then, after having had a drink with the host, they mounted up and rode off to Florence, no less content with the way things happened than with the outcome of their night's adventures.

From then on, Pinuccio found other ways to spend time with Niccolosa, and since she swore to her mother that he had unquestionably been dreaming, her mother, who certainly recalled Adriano's embraces, was left with the conviction that she had been the only one awake that night.