

Giovanni Boccaccio

La Fiammetta

translated by

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Prologue

Beginneth the Book called Elegy of Madonna Fiammetta, sent by her to Ladies in Love.

When the wretched perceive or feel that their woes arouse compassion, their longing to give vent to their anguish is thereby increased. And so, since, from long usance, the cause of my anguish, instead of growing less, has become greater, the wish has come to me, noble ladies—in whose hearts, mayhap, abides a love more fortunate than mine—to win your pity, if I may, by telling the tale of my sorrows. Nor is it at all my intent that these my words should come to the ears of men. Nay, rather would I, so far as lies in my power, withhold my complaints from them; for, such bitterness has the discovery of the unkindness of one man stirred in me, that, imagining all other men to be like him, methinks I should be a witness of their mocking laughter rather than of their pitying tears. You alone do I entreat to peruse my story, knowing full well that you will feel with me, and that you have a pious concern for others' pangs. Here you will not find Grecian fables adorned with many lies, nor Trojan battles, foul with blood and gore, but amorous sentiments fed with torturing desires. Here will appear before your very eyes the dolorous tears, the impetuous sighs, the heart-breaking words, the stormy thoughts, which have harrowed me with an ever-recurring goad, and have torn away from me sleep and appetite and the pleasant times of old, and my much-loved beauty. When you behold these things, and behold them with the ardent feelings which ladies are wont to have, sure I am that the cheeks of each separately, and of all when brought together, will be bathed in tears, because of those ills which are alone the occasion of my never-ending misery. Do not, I beseech you, refuse me these tears, reflecting that your estate is unstable

as well as mine, and that, should it ever come to resemble mine (the which may God forbend!), the tears that others shed for you will be pleasing to you in return. And that the time may pass more rapidly in speaking than in weeping, I will do my best to fulfil my promise briefly, beginning with that love which was more happy than lasting, so that, by comparing that happiness with my present case, you may learn that I am now more unhappy than any woman ever has been. And afterward I will trace with mournful pen, as best I can, all the agonies which are justly the source of my lamentations. But first, if the prayers of the wretched are heard, if there is in Heaven any Deity whose holy mind can be touched with compassion for me, afflicted as I am, bathed in my own tears, Him I beseech to aid my despondent memory and support my trembling hand in its present task. So may the tortures which I have felt and still feel in my soul become fruitful, and the memory will suggest the words for them, and the hand, more eager than apt for such duty, will write them down.

Chapter I

Wherein the lady describes who she was, and by what signs her misfortunes were foreshadowed, and at what time, and where, and in what manner, and of whom she became enamored, with the description of the ensuing delight.

In the time when the newly-vestured earth appears more lovely than during all the rest of the year came I into the world, begotten of noble parents and born amid the unstinted gifts of benignant fortune. Accursed be the day, to me more hateful than any other, on which I was born! Oh, how far more befitting would it have been had I never been born, or had I been carried from that luckless womb to my grave, or had I possessed a life not longer than that of the teeth sown by Cadmus, or had Atropos cut the thread of my existence at the very hour when it had begun! Then, in earliest childhood would have been entombed the limitless woes that are the melancholy occasion of that which I am writing. But what boots it to complain of this now? I am here, beyond doubt; and it has pleased and even now pleases God that I should be here. Born and reared, then, amid boundless affluence, I learned under a venerable mistress whatever manners and refinements it beseems a demoiselle of high rank to know. And as my person grew and developed with my increasing years, so also grew and developed my beauty. Alas! even while a child, on hearing that beauty acclaimed of many, I gloried therein, and cultivated it by ingenious care and art. And when I had bidden farewell to childhood, and had attained a riper age, I soon discovered that this, my beauty—ill-fated gift for one who desires to live virtuously!—had power to kindle amorous sparks in youths of my own age, and other noble persons as well, being instructed thereupon by nature, and feeling that love can be quickened in young men by beauteous ladies. And by divers looks and actions, the sense of which I did but dimly discern at the time,

did these youths endeavor in numberless ways to kindle in my heart the fire wherewith their own hearts glowed fire that was destined, not to warm, but rather to consume me also in the future more than it ever has burned another woman; and by many of these young men was I sought in marriage with most fervid and passionate entreaty. But after I had chosen among them one who was in every respect congenial to me, this importunate crowd of suitors, being now almost hopeless, ceased to trouble me with their looks and attentions. I, therefore, being satisfied, as was meet, with such a husband, lived most happily, so long as fervid love, lighted by flames hitherto unfelt, found no entrance into my young soul. Alas! I had no wish unsatisfied; nothing that could please me or any other lady ever was denied me, even for a moment. I was the sole delight, the peculiar felicity of a youthful spouse, and, just as he loved me, so did I equally love him. Oh, how much happier should I have been than all other women, if the love for him that was then in my heart had endured!

It was, then, while I was living in sweet content, amid every kind of enjoyment, that Fortune, who quickly changes all things earthly, becoming envious of the very gifts which she herself had bestowed, withdrew her protecting hand. At first uncertain in what manner she could succeed in poisoning my happiness, she at length managed, with subtle craft, to make mine own very eyes traitors and so guide me into the path that led to disaster. But the gods were still propitious to me, nay, were even more concerned for my fate than I myself. Having seen through her veiled malice, they wished to supply me with weapons, had I but known how to avail me thereof, wherewith I might fend my breast, and not go unarmed to the battle wherein I was destined to fall. Yea, on the very night that preceded the day which was the beginning of all my woes, they revealed to me the future in my sleep by means of a clear and distinct vision, in such wise as follows:

While lying on my spacious couch, with all my limbs relaxed in deepest slumber, I seemed to be filled with greater joy than I had ever felt before, and wherefore I knew not. And the day whereon this happened was the brightest and loveliest of days. I was standing alone in

verdant grass, when, with the joy whereof I spoke, came the thought to me that it might be well for me to repose in a meadow that appeared to be shielded from the fervid rays of the sun by the shadows cast by various trees newly garbed in their glossy foliage. But first, gathering divers flowers, wherewith the whole sward was bejeweled, I placed them, with my white hands, in a corner of my robe, and then, sitting down and choosing flower after flower, I wove therefrom a fair garland, and adorned my head with it. And, being so adorned, I arose, and, like unto Proserpine at what time Pluto ravished her from her mother, I went along singing in this new springtime. Then, being perchance weary, I laid me down in a spot where the verdure was deepest and softest. But, just as the tender foot of Eurydice was pierced by the concealed viper, so meseemed that a hidden serpent came upon me, as I lay stretched on the grass, and pierced me under the left breast. The bite of the sharp fang, when it first entered, seemed to burn me. But afterward, feeling somewhat reassured, and yet afraid of something worse ensuing, I thought I clasped the cold serpent to my bosom, fancying that by communicating to it the warmth of that bosom, I should thereby render it more kindly disposed in my regard in return for such a service. But the viper, made bolder and more obdurate by that very favor, laid his hideous mouth on the wound he had given me, and after a long space, and after it had drunk much of my blood, methought that, despite my resistance, it drew forth my soul; and then, leaving my breast, departed with it. And at the very moment of the serpent's departure the day lost its brightness, and a thick shadow came behind me and covered me all over, and the farther the serpent crept, the more lowering grew the heavens, and it seemed almost as if the reptile dragged after it in its course the masses of thick, black clouds that appeared to follow in its wake. Not long afterward, just as a white stone flung into deep water gradually vanishes from the eyes of the beholder, so it, too, vanished from my sight. Then the heavens became darker and darker, and I thought that the sun had suddenly withdrawn and night had surely returned, as it had erstwhile returned to the Greeks because of the crime of Atreus. Next, flashes of lightning sped swiftly along the skies, and

peals of crashing thunder appalled the earth and me likewise. And through all, the wound made in my breast by the bite of the serpent remained with me still, and full of viperous poison; for no medicinal help was within my reach, so that my entire body appeared to have swollen in a most foul and disgusting manner. Whereupon I, who before this seemed to, be without life or motion—why, I do not know—feeling that the force of the venom was seeking to reach my heart in divers subtle ways, now tossed and rolled upon the cool grass, expecting death at any moment. But methought that when the hour of my doom arrived, I was struck with terror at its approach, and the anguish of my heart was so appalling, while looking forward to its coming, that my inert body was convulsed with horror, and so my deep slumber was suddenly broken. No sooner was I fully awake than, being still alarmed by the things I had seen, I felt with my right hand for the wound in my breast, searching at the present moment for that which was already being prepared for my future misery. Finding that no wound was there. I began to feel quite safe and even merry, and I made a mock of the folly of dreams and of those who believe in them, and so I rendered the work of the gods useless. Ah, wretched me! if I mocked them then, I had good reason to, believe in them afterward, to my bitter sorrow and with the shedding of useless tears; good reason had I also to complain of the gods, who reveal their secrets to mortals in such mystic guise that the things that are to happen in the future can hardly be said to be revealed at all. Being then fully awake, I raised my drowsy head, and, as soon as I saw the light of the new-risen sun enter my chamber, laying aside every other thought directly, I at once left my couch.

That day, too, was a day of the utmost solemnity for almost everyone. Therefore, attiring myself carefully in glittering cloth of gold, and adorning every part of my person with deft and cunning hand, I made ready to go to the August festival, appareled like unto the goddesses seen by Paris in the vale of Ida. And, while I was lost in admiration of myself, just as the peacock is of his plumage, imagining that the delight which I took in my own appearance would surely be shared by all who saw me, a flower from my wreath fell on the ground

near the curtain of my bed, I know not wherefore—perhaps plucked from my head by a celestial hand by me unseen. But I, careless of the occult signs by which the gods forewarn mortals, picked it up, replaced it on my head, and, as if nothing portentous had happened, I passed out from my abode. Alas! what clearer token of what was to befall me could the gods have given me? This should have served to prefigure to me that my soul, once free and sovereign of itself, was on that day to, lay aside its sovereignty and become a slave, as it betided. Oh, if my mind had not been distempered, I should have surely known that to me that day would be the blackest and direst of days, and I should have let it pass without ever crossing the threshold of my home! But although the gods usually hold forth signs whereby those against whom they are incensed may be warned, they often deprive them of due understanding; and thus, while pointing out the path they ought to follow, they at the same time sate their own anger. My ill fortune, then, thrust me forth from my house, vain and careless that I was; and, accompanied by several ladies, I moved with slow step to the sacred temple, in which the solemn function required by the day was already celebrating. Ancient custom, as well as my noble estate, had reserved for me a prominent place among the other ladies. When I was seated, my eyes, as was my habit of old, quickly wandered around the temple, and I saw that it was crowded with men and women, who were divided into separate groups. And no sooner was it observed that I was in the temple than (even while the sacred office was going on) that happened which had always happened at other times, and not only did the men turn their eyes to gaze upon me, but the women did the same, as if Venus or Minerva had newly descended from the skies, and would never again be seen by them in that spot where I was seated. Oh, how often I laughed within my own breast, being enraptured with myself, and taking glory unto myself because of such things, just as if I were a real goddess! And so, nearly all the young gentlemen left off admiring the other ladies, and took their station around me, and straightway encompassed me almost in the form of a complete circle; and, while speaking in divers ways of my beauty, each finished his praises thereof with well-nigh the same sentences. But I who,

by turning my eyes in another direction, showed that my mind was intent on other cares, kept my ears attentive to their discourse and received therefrom much delectable sweetness; and, as it seemed to me that I was beholden to them for such pleasure, I sometimes let my eyes rest on them more kindly and benignantly. And not once, but many times, did I perceive that some of them, puffed up with vain hopes because of this, boasted foolishly of it to their companions.

While I, then, in this way looked at a few, and that sparingly, I was myself looked at by many, and that exceedingly, and while I believed that my beauty was dazzling others, it came to pass that the beauty of another dazzled me, to my great tribulation. And now, being already close on the dolorous moment, which was fated to be the occasion either of a most assured death or of a life of such anguish that none before me has ever endured the like, prompted by I know not what spirit, I raised my eyes with decent gravity, and surveyed with penetrating look the crowds of young men who were standing near me. And I discerned, more plainly than I saw any of the others, a youth who stood directly in front of me, all alone, leaning against a marble column; and, being moved thereto by irresistible fate, I began to take thought within my mind of his bearing and manners, the which I had never before done in the case of anyone else. I say, then, that, according to my judgment, which was not at that time biased by love, he was most beautiful in form, most pleasing in deportment, and apparently of an honorable disposition. The soft and silky locks that fell in graceful curls beside his cheeks afforded manifest proof of his youthfulness. The look wherewith he eyed me seemed to beg for pity, and yet it was marked by the wariness and circumspection usual between man and man. Sure I am that I had still strength enough to turn away my eyes from his gaze, at least for a time; but no other occurrence had power to divert my attention from the things already mentioned, and upon which I had deeply pondered. And the image of his form, which was already in my mind, remained there, and this image I dwelt upon with silent delight, affirming within myself that those things were true which seemed to me to be true; and, pleased that he should look at me, I raised my eyes betimes to see whether he was still

looking at me. But anon I gazed at him more steadily, making no attempt to avoid amorous snares. And when I had fixed my eyes on his, more intently than was my wont, methought I could read in his eyes words which might be uttered in this wise:

“O lady, thou alone art mine only bliss!”

Certainly, if I should say that this idea was not pleasing to me, I should surely lie, for it drew forth a gentle sigh from my bosom, accompanied by these words: “And thou art mine!” unless, perchance, the words were but the echo of his, caught by my mind and remaining within it. But what availed it whether such words were spoken or not? The heart had good understanding within itself of that which was not expressed by the lips, and kept, too, within itself that which, if it had escaped outside, might, mayhap, have left me still free. And so, from that time forward, I gave more absolute liberty to my foolish eyes than ever they had possessed before, and they were well content withal. And surely, if the gods, who guide all things to a definite issue, had not deprived me of understanding, I could still have been mistress of myself. But, postponing every consideration to the last one that swayed me, I took delight in following my unruly passion, and having made myself meet, all at once, for such slavery, I became its thrall. For the fire that leaped forth from his eyes encountered the light in mine, flashing thereunto a most subtle ray. It did not remain content therewith, but, by what hidden ways I know not, penetrated directly into the deepest recesses of my heart; the which, affrighted by the sudden advent of this flame, recalled to its center its exterior forces and left me as pale as death, and also with the chill of death upon me. But not for long did this continue, rather it happened contrariwise; and I felt my heart not only glow with sudden heat, but its forces speeded back swiftly to their places, bringing with them a throbbing warmth that chased away my pallor and flushed my cheeks deeply; and, marveling wherefore this, should betide, I sighed heavily; nor thereafter was there other thought in my soul than how I might please him.

In like fashion, he, without changing his place, continued to scrutinize my features, but with the greatest caution; and, perhaps, having had much practice in amorous warfare, and knowing by what devices the longed-for prey might be captured, he showed himself every moment more humble, more desperate, and more fraught with tender yearning. Alas! how much guile did that seeming desperation hide, which, as the result has now shown, though it may have come from the heart, never afterward returned to the same, and made manifest later that its revealment on the face was only a lure and a delusion! And, not to mention all his deeds, each of which was full of most artful deception, he so, wrought upon me by his own craft, or else the fates willed it should so happen, that I straightway found myself enmeshed in the snares of sudden and unthought-of love, in a manner beyond all my powers of telling, and so I remain unto this very hour.

It was this one alone, therefore, most pitiful ladies, that my heart, in its mad infatuation, chose, not only among so many high-born, handsome and valiant youths then present, but even among all of the same degree having their abode in my own Parthenope, as first and last and sole lord of my life. It was this one alone that I loved, and loved more than any other. It was this one alone that was destined to be the beginning and source of my every ill, and also, as I fain would hope, the occasion of an ill-starred death. This, too, was that day whereon from a free woman I was changed unto a most abject slave. This, too, was that day whereon the poison of love first filled my pure and chaste bosom. Alas! woe is me! what anguish did that day bring into the world for me! Alas! woe is me! what pangs, what tortures should I have escaped, if that day had turned to blackest night! Alas and alas! and woe is me! how fatal and malign was that day to my honor! But what boots my complaining? The, past can be much more easily blamed than amended.

I was, then, enslaved, as has been said and, whether it was one of the hell-born Furies or malignant Fortune, who, envying my chaste estate, plotted to this end, I know not; but, whichever it was, she had good reason to exult in the prospect of the certain victory that was to crown her wiles. Surprised, then, by this new passion, bewildered, and almost

maddened, I sat among the other ladies, letting the sacred offices pass unnoticed, for I hardly heard, still less understood them; nor did I pay heed, either, to the different remarks my companions addressed to me. And yet, though this new and sudden love had taken a grip of my very soul, and my soul ever cleaved to the face of the beloved youth through the medium of my thoughts and of my eyes, within myself I knew not what was to be the issue I sought for such unextinguishable passion. Oh, how often, longing to see him nearer to me, did I blame him for remaining so far away, thinking that the caution he was careful to observe arose from indifference. And the youths who stood in front of him annoyed me also, since they, whenever my eyes sought my beloved, seemed to fancy that my glances rested on them, and perhaps imagined that it was they themselves who were the goal of my affections. But while my thoughts were thus engrossed, the solemn office came to an end, and my companions had already risen to depart before I was able to recall my thoughts from dwelling on the image of the charming youth, and perceived that it was time to leave. I stood up, therefore, along with the others, and, turning my eyes on him, I saw by his attitude that which I was ready to show forth by mine, and did, indeed, show forth; namely, that my going away in this fashion was very grievous to me. Then, though still unwitting who he was, with many a sigh, I passed out of the temple.

Alas! pitiful ladies, who would ever believe that a heart could so change in a single moment. Who can imagine that a person never beheld before could be loved, and that violently, at first sight? Who can believe that my desire to see that person became so fierce that, when he was no longer before me, I suffered the most bitter agony, and that my longing to see him again was inextinguishable? Who will credit that all things which had been pleasing to me heretofore were displeasing to me then? Certainly, no one who had not experienced, or does not experience, what I experience at present. Alas! just as Love uses me now with unheard-of cruelty, so when he first ensnared me, it pleased him to subject me to a new law, different from that which binds others. I have frequently heard that, in the case of others, pleasures are in the beginning very weak; but

that afterward, being fostered by the workings of the mind, they increase their force and become vigorous. But it was not so with me, for the very instant they made their lodgment in my heart they did so with that intensity wherewith they afterward abided and still abide in it. Yea, even from the beginning Love took entire possession of me. And, just as green wood catches fire with exceeding difficulty, but, having once caught, it retains it longer and with greater heat withal, so, in good sooth, did it befall me likewise. I, who had never hitherto been conquered by any pleasure, although often tempted, being at last vanquished, have burned and now burn in the fire which then first caught me. Omitting many thoughts that came into my mind, and many things that were told me, I will only say that, intoxicated by a new passion, I returned with a soul enslaved to that spot whence I had gone forth in freedom.

When I was in my chamber, alone and unoccupied, inflamed with various wild wishes, filled with new sensations and throbbing with many anxieties, all of which were concentrated on the image of the youth who pleased me, I argued within myself that if I could not banish love from my luckless bosom, I might at least be able to keep cautious and secret control of it therein; and how hard it is to do such a thing, no one can discover who does not make trial of the same. Surely do I believe that not even Love himself can cause so great anguish as such an attempt is certain to produce. Furthermore, I was arrested in my purpose by the fact that I had no acquaintance with him of whom I professed myself enamored. To relate all the thoughts that were engendered in me by this love, and of what nature they were, would take altogether too much time. But some few I must perforce declare, as well as certain things that were beginning to delight me more than usual. I say, then, that, everything else being neglected, the only thing that was dear to me was the thought of my beloved, and, when it occurred to my mind that, by persevering in this course, I might, mayhap, give occasion to some one to discover that which I wished to conceal, I often upbraided myself for my folly. But what availed it all? My upbraidings had to give way to my inordinate yearning for him, and dissolved uselessly into thin air.

For several days I longed exceedingly to learn who was the youth I loved, toward whom my thoughts were ever clearly leading me; and this I craftily learned, the which filled me with great content. In like manner, the ornaments for which I had before this in no way cared, as having but little need thereof, began to be dear to me, thinking that the more I was adorned the better should I please. Wherefore I prized more than hitherto my garments, gold, pearls, and my other precious things. Until the present moment it had been my custom to frequent churches, gardens, festivals, and seaside resorts, without other wish than the companionship of young friends of my own sex; now, I sought the aforesaid places with a new desire, believing that both to see and be seen would bring me great delectation. But, in sooth, the trust which I was wont to place in my beauty had deserted me, and now I never left my chamber, without first seeking the faithful counsel of my mirror: and my hands, newly instructed thereunto by I know not what cunning master, discovering each day some more elegant mode of adornment than the day before, and deftly adding artificial charms to my natural loveliness, thereby caused me to outshine all the other ladies in my surpassing splendor. Furthermore, I began to wish for the honors usually paid to me by ladies, because of their gracious courtesy, though, perhaps, they were rather the guerdon of my noble birth, being due to me therefor, thinking that if I appeared so magnificent to my beloved's eyes, he would take the more delight in beholding me. Avarice, too, which is inborn in women, fled from me, so that I became free and openhanded, and regarded my own possessions almost as if they were not my own. The sedateness that beseems a woman fell away from me somewhat, and I grew bolder in my ways; and, in addition to all this, my eyes, which until that day looked out on the world simply and naturally, entirely changed their manner of looking, and became so artful in their office that it was a marvel. And many other alterations appeared in me over and above these, all of which I do not care to relate, for besides that the report thereof would be too tedious, I ween full well that you, like me, also have been, or are, in love, and know what changes take place in those who are in such sad case.

He was a most wary and circumspect youth, whereunto my experience was able to bear witness frequently. Going very rarely, and always in the most decorous manner, to the places where I happened to be, he used to observe me, but ever with a cautious eye, so that it seemed as if he had planned as well as I to hide the tender flames that glowed in the breasts of both. Certainly, if I denied that love, although it had clutched every corner of my heart and taken violent possession of every recess of my soul, grew even more intense whenever it happened that my eyes encountered his, I should deny the truth; he added further fuel to the fires that consumed me, and rekindled such as might be expiring, if, mayhap, there were any such. But the beginning of all this was by no means so cheerful as the ending was joyless, as soon as I was deprived of the sight of this, my beloved, inasmuch as the eyes, being thus robbed of their delight, gave woful occasion of lamentation to the heart, the sighs whereof grew greater in quality as well as in quantity, and desire, as if seizing my every feeling, took me away from myself, and, as if I were not where I was, I frequently gave him who saw me cause for amazement by affording numberless pretexts for such happenings, being taught by love itself. In addition to this, the quiet of the night and the thoughts on which my fancy fed continuously, by taking me out of myself, sometimes moved me to actions more frantic than passionate and to the employment of unusual words.

But it happened that while my excess of ornaments, heartfelt sighs, lost rest, strange actions, frantic movements, and other effects of my recent love, attracted the notice of the other domestics of the household, they especially struck with wonder a nurse of mine, old in years and experienced, and of sound judgment, who, though well aware of the flames that tortured my breast, yet making show of not knowing thereof, frequently chided me for my altered manners. One day in particular, finding me lying disconsolate on my couch, seeing that my brow was charged with doleful thoughts, and believing that we were not likely to be interrupted by other company, she began to speak as follows:

“My dearest daughter, whom I love as my very self, tell me, I pray you, what are the sorrows that have for some time past been harassing

you? You who were wont to be so gay formerly, you whom I have never seen before with a mournful countenance, seem to me now to be the prey of grief and to let no moment pass without a sigh."

Then, having at first feigned to be asleep and not to have heard her, I heaved a deep sigh, and, my face, at one time flushing, at another turning pale, I tossed about on the couch, seeking what answer I should make, though, indeed, in my agitation, my tongue could hardly shape a perfect sentence. But, at length, I answered:

"Indeed, dear nurse, no fresh sorrows harass me; nor do I feel that I am in any way different from what I am wont to be. Perhaps some troubles I may have, but they are such as are incidental to all women."

"Most certainly, you are trying to deceive me, my child," returned the aged nurse, "and you seem not to reflect how serious a matter it is to attempt to lead persons of experience to believe one thing because it is couched in words and to disbelieve the opposite, although it is made plainly evident by deeds. There is no reason why you should hide from me a fact whereof I have had perfect knowledge since several days ago."

Alas! when I heard her speak thus, provoked and stung by her words, I said:

"If, then, thou wittest of all this, wherefore dost thou question me? All that thou hast to do now is to keep secret that which thou hast discovered."

"In good truth," she replied, "I will conceal all that which it is not meet that another should know, and may the earth open and engulf me in its bowels before I ever reveal aught that might turn to thy open shame! Therefore, do thou live assured of this, and guard thyself carefully from letting another know that which I, without either thyself or anyone else telling me, have learned from observing thy looks. As for myself, it is not now, but long ere now, that I have learned to keep hidden that which should not be disclosed. Therefore, do thou continue to feel secure as to this matter, and watch most carefully that thou lettest not another know that which I, not witting it from thee or from another, most surely have discovered from thine own face and from its changeful seeming. But, if thou art still the victim of that folly by which I know

thou hast been enslaved, if thou art as prone now as erewhile to indulge that feeling to which thou hast already given way, then know I right well that I must leave thee to thy own devices, for bootless will be my teachings and my warnings. Still, although this cruel tyrant, to whom in thy youthful simplicity being taken by surprise thou hast yielded thy freedom, appears to have deprived thee of understanding as well as of liberty, I will put thee in mind of many things, and entreat thee to fling off and banish wicked thoughts from thy chaste bosom, to quench that unholy fire, and not to make thyself the thrall of unworthy hopes. Now is the time, to, be strong in resistance; for whoso makes a stout fight in the beginning roots out an unhallowed affection, and bears securely the palm of victory; but whoso, with long and wishful fancies, fosters it, will try too late to resist a yoke that has been submitted to almost unresistingly."

"Alas!" I replied, "how far easier it is to say such things than to lead them to any good result."

"Albeit they be not easy of fulfilment," she said, "yet are they possible, and they are things that it beseems you to do. Take thou thought whether it would be fitting that for such a thing as this thou shouldst lose the luster of thy exalted parentage, the great fame of thy virtue, the flower of thy beauty, the honor in which thou art now held, and, above all, the favor of the spouse whom thou hast loved and by whom thou art loved: certainly, thou shouldst not wish for this; nor do I believe thou wouldst wish it, if thou didst but weigh the matter seriously in thine own mind. Wherefore, in the name of God, forbear, and drive from thy heart the false delights promised by a guilty hope, and, with them, the madness that has seized thee. By this aged breast, long harassed by many cares, from which thou didst take thy first nutriment, I humbly beseech thee to have the courage to aid thyself, to have a concern for thine own honor, and not to disdain my warnings. Bethink thee that the very desire to be healed is itself often productive of health."

Whereto I thus made answer:

"Only too well do I know, dear nurse, the truth of that which thou sayest. But a furious madness constrains me to, follow the worse course;

vainly does my heart, insatiable in its desires, long for strength to enable it to adopt thy advice; what reason enjoins is rendered of no avail by this soul-subduing passion. My mind is wholly possessed by Love, who rules every part thereof, in virtue of his all-embracing deity; and surely thou art aware that his power is absolute, and 't were useless to attempt to resist it."

Having said these words, I became almost unconscious, and fell into her arms. But she, now more agitated than before, in austere and rebuking tones, said:

"Yes, forsooth, well am I aware that you and a number of fond young women, inflamed and instigated thereunto by vain thoughts, have discovered Love to be a god, whereas a juster name for him would be that of demon; and you and they call him the son of Venus and say that his strength has come to him from the third heaven, wishing, seemingly, to offer necessity as an excuse for your foolishness. Oh, was ever woman so misled as thou? Truly, thou must be bereft entirely of understanding! What a thing thou sayest! Love a deity! Love is a madness, thrust forth from hell by some fury. He speeds across the earth in hasty flight, and they whom he visits soon discover that he brings no deity with him, but frenzy rather; yet none will he visit except those abounding overmuch in earthly felicity; for they, he knows, in their overweening conceit, are ready to afford him lodgment and shelter. This has been proven to us by many facts. Do we not see that Venus, the true, the heavenly Venus, often dwells in the humblest cot, her sole concern being the perpetuation of our race? But this god, whom some in their folly name Love, always hankering after things unholy, ministers only to those whose fortunes are prosperous. This one, recoiling from those whose food and raiment suffice to meet the demands of nature, uses his best efforts to win over the pampered and the splendidly attired, and with their food and their habiliments he mixes his poisons, and so gains the lordship of their wicked souls; and, for this reason, he gladly seeks a harborage in lofty palaces, and seldom, or rather never, enters the houses of the lowly, because this horrible plague always resorts by choice to scenes of elegance and refinement, well knowing that such places are best fitted

for the achievement of his fell purposes. It is easy for us to see that among the humble the affections are sane and well ordered; but the rich, on the other hand, everywhere pluming themselves on their riches, and being insatiable in their pursuit of other things as well as of wealth, always show more eagerness therein than is becoming; and they who can do much desire furthermore to have the power of doing that which they must not do: among whom I feel that thou hast placed thyself, O most hapless of women, seeing that thou hast already entered and traveled far on a path that will surely lead to guilt and misery."

After hearing which, I said:

"Be silent, old woman, and provoke not the wrath of the gods by thy speech. Now that thou art incapacitated from love by age and rejected by all the gods, thou railest against this one, blaspheming him in whom thou didst erstwhile take delight. If other ladies, far more puissant, famous, and wise: than I, have formerly called him by that name, it is not in my power to give him a name anew. By him am I now truly enslaved; whatever be the cause of this, and whether it be the occasion of my happiness, or misery, I am helpless. The strength wherewith I once opposed him has been vanquished and has abandoned me. Therefore either death or the youth for whom I languish can alone end my tortures. If thou art, then, as wise as I hold thee to be, bestow such counsel and help on me as may lighten my anguish, or, at least, abstain from exasperating it by censuring that to which my soul, unable to act differently, is inclined with all its energy."

Thereupon, she, being angry, and not without reason, making no answer, but muttering to herself, passed out of the chamber and left me alone.

When my dear nurse had departed without making further discourse, and I was again alone, I felt that I had acted ill in despising her advice. I revolved her sayings within, my restless breast; and, albeit my understanding was blinded, I perceived that what she had said was replete with wisdom, and, almost repenting of what I had uttered and of the course which I had declared I purposed taking, I was wavering in my mind. And, already beginning to have thoughts of abandoning that

course which was sure to be in every way most harmful, I was about to call her back to give me encouragement, when a new and unforeseen event suddenly changed my intention. For a most beautiful lady, come to my private chamber I know not whence, presented herself before my eyes, enveloped in such dazzling light that scarcely could my sight endure the brightness thereof. But while she, stood still and silent before me, the effulgent radiance that had almost blinded my vision, after a time left it unobscured, and I was able so to portray her every aspect to my mind, as her whole beauteous figure was impressed on my memory. I saw that she was nude, except for a thin and delicate drapery of purple, which, albeit in some parts it covered the milk-white body, yet no more concealed it from my ravished eyes than does the transparent glass conceal the portrait beneath it. Her head, the hair whereof as much surpassed gold in its luster as gold surpasses the yellowest tresses to be found among mortals, was garlanded with a wreath of green myrtle, beneath whose shadow I beheld two eyes of peerless splendor, so enchanting that I could have gazed on them forever; they flashed forth such luminous beams that it was a marvel; and all the rest of her countenance had such transcendent loveliness that the like never was seen here below. At first she spake no word, perchance content that I should look upon her, or perchance seeing me so content to look upon her. Then gradually through the translucent radiance, she revealed more clearly every hidden grace, for she was aware that I could not believe such beauty possible, except I beheld it with my eyes, and that even then words would fail me to picture it to mortals with my tongue. At last, when she observed that I had sated my eyes with gazing on her, and when she saw that her coming hither was as wondrous to me as her loveliness, with smiling face, and in a voice sweeter than can be conceived by minds like ours, she thus addressed me:

“Prithee, young woman, what art thou, the most fickle of thy sex, preparing to do in obedience to the late counsels of thy aged nurse? Knowest thou not that such counsels are far harder to follow than that very love which thou desirest to flee? Hast thou reflected on the dire and unendurable torments which compliance with them will entail on thee? O

most insensate one! dost thou then, who only a few hours ago wert my willing vassal, now wish to break away from my gentle rule, because, forsooth, of the words of an old woman, who is no longer vassal of mine, as if, like her, thou art now unwitting of what delights I am the source? O most witless of women! forbear, and reflect whether thou shouldst not find befitting happiness in that which makes the happiness of Heaven and earth. All things that Phœbus beholds during the bright day, from what time he emerges from Ganges, until he plunges with his tired steeds into the Hesperian waves, to seek due repose after his wearisome pilgrimage; all things that are confined between cold Arcturus and the red-hot pole, all own the absolute and authentic lordship of my wingèd son; and in Heaven not only is he esteemed a god, like the other deities, but he is so much more puissant than them all that not one remains who has not heretofore been vanquished by his darts. He, flying on golden plumage throughout his realms, with such swiftness that his passage can hardly be discerned, visits them all in turn, and, bending his strong bow, to the drawn string he fits the arrows forged by me and tempered in the fountains. sacred to my divinity. And when he elects anyone to his service, as being more worthy than others, that one he rules as it likes him. He kindles raging fires in the hearts of the young, fans the flames that are almost dead in the old, awakens the fever of passion in the chaste bosoms of virgins and instils a genial warmth into the breasts of wives and widows equally. He has even aforetime forced the gods, wrought up to a frenzy by his blazing torch, to forsake the heavens and dwell on earth under false appearances. Whereof the proofs are many. Was not Phœbus, though victor over huge Python and creator of the celestial strains that sound from the lyres of Parnassus, by him made the thrall, now of Daphne, now of Clymene, and again of Leucothea, and of many others withal? Certainly, this was so. And, finally, hiding his brightness under the form of a shepherd, did not Apollo tend the flocks of Admetus? Even Jove himself, who rules the skies, by this god coerced, molded his greatness into forms inferior to his own. Sometimes, in shape of a snow-white fowl, he gave voice to sounds sweeter than those of the dying swan, and anon, changing to a young

bull and fitting horns to his brow, he bellowed along the plains, and humbled his proud flanks to the touch of a virgin's knees, and, compelling his tired hoofs to do the office of oars, he breasted the waves of his brother's kingdom, yet sank not in its depths, but joyously bore away his prize. I shall not discourse unto you of his pursuit of Semele under his proper form, or of Alcmena, in guise of Amphitryon, or of Callisto, under the semblance of Diana, or of Danaë for whose sake he became a shower of gold, seeing that in the telling thereof I should waste too much time. Nay, even the savage god of war, whose strength appals the giants, repressed his wrathful bluster, being forced to such submission by this my son, and became gentle and loving. And the forger of Jupiter, and artificer of his three-pronged thunderbolts, though trained to handle fire, was smitten by a shaft more potent than he himself had ever wrought. Nay I, though I be his mother, have not been able to fend off his arrows: Witness the tears I have shed for the death of Adonis! But why weary myself and thee with the utterance of so many words? There is no deity in heaven who has passed unscathed from his assaults; except, perhaps, Diana only, who may have escaped him by fleeing to the woods; though some there be who tell that she did not flee, but rather concealed the wound. If haply, however, thou, in the hardness of thy unbelief, rejectest the testimony of heaven, and searchest rather for examples of those in this nether world who have felt his power, I affirm them to be so multitudinous that where to begin I know not. Yet this much may I tell thee truly: all who have confessed his sway have been men of might and valor. Consider attentively, in the first place, that undaunted son of Alcmena, who, laying aside his arrows and the formidable skin of the huge lion, was fain to adorn his fingers with green emeralds, and to smooth and adjust his bristling and rebellious hair. Nay, that hand which aforetime had wielded the terrific club, and slain therewith Antæus, and dragged the hound of hell from the lower world, was now content to draw the woollen threads spun from Omphale's distaff; and the shoulders whereon had rested the pillars of the heavens, from which he had for a time freed Atlas, were now clasped in Omphale's arms, and afterward, to do her pleasure, covered with a

diaphanous raiment of purple. Need I relate what Paris did in obedience to the great deity? or Helen? or Clytemnestra? or Ægisthus? These are things that are well known to all the world. Nor do I care to speak of Achilles, or of Scylla, of Ariadne, or Leander, of Dido, or of many others, of whom the same tale could be told, were there need to tell it. Believe me when I affirm that this fire is holy, and most potent as well. Thou hast heard that heaven and earth are subject to my son because of his lordship over gods and men. But what shall I say of the power that he exercises over irrational animals, whether celestial or terrene? It is through him that the turtle is fain to follow her mate; it is through him that my pigeons have learned to caress his ringdoves with fondest endearments. And there is no creeping or living creature, that has ever at any time attempted to escape from his puissance: in the woods the timid stag, made fierce by his touch, becomes brave for sake of the coveted hind and by bellowing and fighting, they prove how strong are the witcheries, of Love. The ferocious boars are made by Love to froth at the mouth and sharpen their ivory tusks; the African lions, when Love quickens them, shake their manes in fury. But leaving the groves and forests, I assert that even in the chilly waters the numberless divinities of the sea and of the flowing rivers are not safe from the bolts of my son. Neither can I for a moment believe that thou art ignorant of the testimony thereof which has been rendered by Neptune, Glaucus, Alpheus, and others too numerous to mention: not only were they unable to quench the flame with their dank waters, but they could not even moderate its fury, which, when it had made its might felt, both on the earth and in the waters, continued its onward course, and rested not until it had penetrated into the gloomy realms of Dis. Therefore Heaven and Earth and Ocean and Hell itself have had experience of the potency of his weapons. And, in order that thou mayest understand in a few words the power of the deity, I tell thee that, while everything succumbs to nature, and nothing can ever be emancipated from her dominion, Nature herself is but the servant of Love. When he commands, ancient hatreds perish, and angry moods, be they old or new, give place to his fires; and lastly, his sway has such far-reaching influence that even

stepmothers become gracious to their stepchildren, a thing which it is a marvel to behold. Therefore what seekest thou? Why dost thou hesitate? Why dost thou rashly avoid him? When so many gods, when so many men, when so many animals, have been vanquished by him, art ashamed to be vanquished by him also? In good sooth, thou weenest not what thou art doing. If thou fearest to be blamed for thy obedience to him, a blame so unmerited never can be thy portion. Greater sins than thou canst commit have been committed by thousands far greater than thou, and these sins would plead as thy excuse, shouldst thou pursue that course which others have pursued—others who far excel thee. Thou wilt have sinned but a little, seeing that thou hadst far less power of resistance than those aforementioned. But if my words move thee not, and thou wouldst still wish to withstand the god, bethink thee that thy power falls far short of that of Jove, and that in judgment thou canst not equal Phœbus, nor in wealth Juno, nor me in beauty; and yet, we all have been conquered. Thou art greatly deceived, and I fear me that thou must perish in the end, if thou persist in thy changed purpose. Let that which has erstwhile sufficed for the whole world, suffice for thee, nor try to render thyself cold-hearted, by saying: 'I have a husband, and the holy laws and the vowed faith forbid me this'; for bootless are such reasonings against the puissance of this god. He discards the laws of others scornfully, as thinking them of no account, and ordains his own. Pasiphæ had a husband, and Phædra, and I, too, even though I have loved. And it is these same husbands who most frequently fall in love with others, albeit they have wives of their own: witness Jason and Theseus and valiant Hector and Ulysses. Therefore to men we do no wrong if we apply to them the same laws that they apply to others; for to them no privilege has been granted which is not accorded to us withal. Banish, then, thy foolish thoughts, and, in all security, go on loving him whom thou hadst already begun to love. In good sooth, if thou refuseth to own the power of mighty Love, it behooves thee to fly; but whither canst thou fly? Knowest thou of any retreat where he will not follow and overtake thee? He has in all places equal puissance. Go wheresoever thou wilt, never canst thou pass across the borders of his realms, and within

these realms vain it is for mortals to try to hide themselves when he would smite them. But let it comfort thee to know, young woman, that no such odious passion shall trouble thee as erstwhile was the scourge of Myrrha, Semiramis, Byblis, Canace, and Cleopatra. Nothing strange or new will be wrought by my son in thy regard. He has, as have the other gods, his own special laws, which thou art not the first to obey, and shouldst not be the last to entertain hopes therefrom. If haply thou believest that thou art without companions in this, foolish is thy belief. Let us pass by the other world, which is fraught with such happenings; but observe attentively only thine own city! What an infinite number of ladies it can show who are in the same case with thyself! And remember that what is done by so many cannot be deemed unseemly. Therefore, be thou of our following, and return thanks to our beauty, which thou hast so closely examined. But return special thanks to our deity, which has sundered thee from the ranks of the simple, and persuaded thee to become acquainted with the delights that our gifts bestow."

Alas! alas! ye tender and compassionate ladies, if Love has been propitious to your desires, say what could I, what should I, answer to such and so great words uttered by so great a goddess, if not: "Be it done unto me according to thy pleasure"? And so, I affirm that as soon as she had closed her lips, having already harvested within my understanding all her words, and feeling that every word was charged with ample excuse for what I might do, and knowing now how mighty she was and how resistless, I resolved at once to submit to her guidance; and instantly rising from my couch, and kneeling on the ground, with humbled heart, I thus began, in abashed and tremulous accents:

"O peerless and eternal loveliness! O divinest of deities! O sole mistress of all my thoughts! whose power is felt to be most invincible by those who dare to try to withstand it, forgive the ill-timed obstinacy wherewith I, in my great folly, attempted to ward off from my breast the weapons of thy son, who was then to me an unknown divinity. Now, I repeat, be it done unto me according to thy pleasure, and according to thy promises withal. Surely, my faith merits a due reward in time and

space, seeing that I, taking delight in thee more than do all other women, wish to see the number of thy subjects increase forever and ever."

Hardly had I made an end of speaking these words, when she moved from the place where she was standing, and came toward me. Then, her face glowing with the most fervent expression of affection and sympathy, she embraced me, and touched my forehead with her divine lips. Next, just as the false Ascanius, when panting in the arms of Dido, breathed on her mouth, and thereby kindled the latent flame, so did she breathe on my mouth, and, in that wise, rendered the divine fire that slumbered in my heart more uncontrollable than ever, and this I felt at that very moment. Thereafter, opening a little her purple robe, she showed me, clasped in her arms against her ravishing breast, the very counterpart of the youth I loved, wrapped in the transparent folds of a Grecian mantle, and revealing in the lineaments of his countenance pangs that were not unlike those I suffered.

"O damsel," she said, "rivet thy gaze on the youth before thee: we have not given thee for lover a Lissa, a Geta, or a Birria, or anyone resembling them, but a person in every way worthy of being loved by every goddess in the heavens. Thee he loves more than himself, as we have ordained, and thee will he ever love; therefore do thou, joyfully and securely, abandon thyself to his love. Thy prayers have moved us to pity, as it is meet that prayers so deserving should, and so, be of good hope, and fear not that thou shalt be without the reward due thee in the future."

And thereafter she suddenly vanished from my eyes. *Oimè!* wretched me! I do not for a moment doubt now, after considering the things which followed, that this one who appeared unto me was not Venus, but rather Tisiphone, who, doffing from her head the horrid snakes that served it for hair, and assuming for the while the splendid form of the Goddess of Love, in this manner lured me with deceitful counsels to that disaster which at length overwhelmed me. Thus did Juno, but in different fashion, veiling the radiance of her deity and transforming herself for the occasion into the exact likeness of her aged nurse, persuaded Semele to her undoing. Woe is me! my resolve to be so advised was the cause—O

hallowed Modesty! O Chastity, most sacred of all the virtues! sole and most precious treasure of righteous women!—was the cause, I repeat, wherefore I drove ye from my bosom. Yet do I venture to pray unto ye for pardon, and surely the sinner who repents and perseveres in repentance should in due season obtain your forgiveness.

Although the goddess had disappeared from my sight, my whole soul, nevertheless, continued to crave her promised delights; and, albeit the ardor of the passion that vexed my soul deprived me of every other feeling, one piece of good fortune, for what deserving of mine I know not, remained to me out of so many that had been lost—namely, the power of knowing that seldom if ever has a smooth and happy ending been granted to love, if that love be divulged and blazed abroad. And for this reason, when influenced by my highest thoughts, I resolved, although it was a most serious thing to do so, not to set will above reason in carrying this my desire unto an ending. And assuredly, although I have often been most violently constrained by divers accidents to follow certain courses, yet so much grace was conceded to me that, sustained by my own firmness, I passed through these agonies without revealing the pangs that tortured me. And in sooth, I have still resolution enough to continue to follow out this my purpose; so that, although the things I write are most true, I have so disposed them that no one, however keen his sagacity, can ever discover who I am, except him who is as well acquainted with these matters as I, being, indeed, the occasion of them all. And I implore him, should this little book ever come into his hands, in the name of that love which he once bore me, to conceal that which, if disclosed, would turn neither to his profit nor honor. And, albeit he has deprived me of himself, and that through no fault of mine, let him not take it upon himself to deprive me of that honor which I still possess, although, perchance, undeservedly; for should he do so, he could never again give it back to me, any more than he can now give me back himself.

Having, therefore, formed my plans in this wise, I showed the most long-suffering patience in manifesting my keenest and most covetous yearnings, and I used my best efforts, but only in secret ways and when

opportunities were afforded me, to light in this young man's soul the same flames wherewith my own soul glowed, and to make him as circumspect as myself withal. Nor, in truth, was this for me a task of great difficulty; for, inasmuch as the lineaments of the face always bear most true witness to the qualities of the heart, it was not long before I became aware that my desire would have its full fruition. I perceived that, not only was he throbbing with amorous enthusiasm, but that he was also imbued with most perfect discretion, and this was exceedingly pleasing to me. He, being at once wishful to preserve my honor in all its luster, and, at the same time, to arrange convenient times and places for our meetings, employed many ingenious stratagems, which, methinks, must have cost him much toil and trouble. He used every subtle art to win the friendship of all who were related to me, and, at last, of my husband; and not only did he enjoy their friendship, but he possessed it in such a supreme degree that no pleasure was agreeable to them unless he shared it. How much all this delighted me you will understand without its being needful to me to set it down in words. And is there anyone so dull of wit as not to conclude that from the aforesaid friendship arose many opportunities for him and me of holding discourse together in public? But already had he bethought himself of acting in more subtle ways; and now he would speak to this one, now to that one, words whereby I, being most eager for such enlightenment, discovered that whatever he said to these was fraught with figurative and hidden meanings, intended to show forth his ardent affection for myself. When he was sensible that I had a clear perception of the occult significance of his questions and answers, he went still further, and by gestures, and mobile changes in the expression of his features, he would make known to me his thoughts and the various phases of his passion, which was to me a source of much delectation; and I strove so hard to comprehend it all and to make fitting response thereunto, that neither could he shadow forth anything to me, nor I to him, that either of us did not at once understand.

Nay, not satisfied even with this, he employed other symbols and metaphors, and labored earnestly to discipline me in such manner of

speech; and, to render me the more assured of his unalterable love, he named me Fiammetta, and himself Panfilo. Woe is me! How often, when warmed with love and wine, did we tell tales, in the presence of our dearest friends, of Fiammetta and Panfilo, feigning that they were Greeks of the days of old, I at one time, he at another; and the tales were all of ourselves; how we were first caught in the snares of Love, and of what tribulations we were long the victims, giving suitable names to the places and persons connected with the story! Certainly, I frequently laughed at it all, being made merry by the simplicity of the bystanders, as well as by his astuteness and sagacity. Yet betimes I dreaded that in the flush of his excitement he might thoughtlessly let his tongue wander in directions wherein it was not befitting it should venture. But he, being ever far wiser than I imagined, guarded himself craftily from any such blundering awkwardness.

Oimè! most compassionate ladies, what is there that Love will not teach to his subjects? and what is there that he is not able to render them skilful in learning? I, who of all young women was the most simple-minded, and ordinarily with barely power to loose my tongue, when among my companions, concerning the most trivial and ordinary affairs, now, because of this my affection, mastered so speedily all his modes of speech that, in a brief space, my aptness at feigning and inventing surpassed that of any poet! And there were few questions put to me in response to which, after meditating on their main points, I could not make up a pleasing tale: a thing, in my opinion, exceedingly difficult for a young woman to begin, and still more difficult to finish and relate afterward. But, if my actual situation required it, I might set down numerous details which might, perhaps, seem to you of little or no moment, as, for instance, the artful experiment whereby we tested the fidelity of my favorite maid to whom, and to whom alone, we meditated entrusting the secret of this hidden passion, considering that, should another share it, our uneasiness, lest it should not be kept, would be most grievous. Furthermore, it would weary you if I mentioned all the plans we adopted, in order to meet divers situations, plans that I do not believe were ever imagined by any before us; and albeit I am now well

aware that they all worked for my ultimate destruction, yet the remembrance of them does not displease me.

Unless, O ladies, my judgment be greatly at fault, the strength of our minds was by no means small, if it be but taken in account how hard a thing it is for youthful persons in love to resist long the rush of impetuous ardor without crossing the bounds set by reason: nay, it was so great and of such quality that the most valiant of men, by acting in such wise, would win high and worthy laud as a result thereof. But my pen is now about to depict the final ending to which love was guided, and, before I do so, I would appeal to your pity and to those soft sentiments which make their dwelling in your tender breasts, and incline your thoughts to a like termination.

Day succeeded day, and our wishes dragged along with them, kept alive by torturing anxiety, the full bitterness whereof each of us experienced; although the one manifested this to the other in disguised language, and the other showed herself over-discreet to an excessive degree; all of which you who know how ladies who are beloved behave in such circumstances will easily understand. Well, then, he, putting full trust in the veiled meaning of my words, and choosing the proper time and place, came to an experience of that which I desired as much as he, although I feigned the contrary. Certainly, if I were to say that this was the cause of the love I felt for him, I should also have to confess that every time it came back to my memory, it was the occasion to me of a sorrow like unto none other. But, I call God to witness, nothing that has happened between us had the slightest influence upon the love I bore him, nor has it now. Still, I will not deny that our close intimacy was then, and is now, most dear to me. And where is the woman so unwise as not to wish to have the object of her affection within reach rather than at a distance? How much more intensely does love enthrall us when it is brought so near us that we and it are made almost inseparable! I say, then, that after such an adventure, never afore willed or even thought of by me, not once, but many times did fortune and our adroit stratagems bring us good cheer and consolation, not indeed screened entirely from danger, for which I cared less than for the passing of the fleeing wind.

But while the time was being spent in such joyous fashion—and that it was joyous, Love, who alone may bear witness thereof, can truly say—yet sometimes his coming inspired me with not a little, natural apprehension, inasmuch as he was beginning to be indiscreet in the manner of his coming. But how dear to him was my own apartment, and with what gladness did it see him enter! Yet was he filled with more reverence for it than he ever had been for a sacred temple, and this I could at all times easily discern. Woe is me! what burning kisses, what tender embraces, what delicious moments we had there!

Why do I take such pleasure in the mere words which I am now setting down? It is, I say, because I am forced to express the gratitude I then felt to the holy goddess who was the promiser and bestower of Love's delights. Ah, how often did I visit her altars and offer incense, crowned with a garland of her favorite foliage! How often did I think scornfully of the counsels of my aged nurse! Nay, furthermore, being elated far more than all my other companions, how often did I disparage their loves, saying within myself: "No one is loved as I am loved, no one loves a youth as matchless as the youth I love, no one realizes such delights from love as I!" In short, I counted the world as nothing in comparison with my love. It seemed to me that my head touched the skies, and that nothing was lacking to the culmination of my ecstatic bliss. Betimes the idea flashed on my mind that I must disclose to others the occasion of my transports, for surely, I would reflect, it would be a delight to others to hear of that which has brought such delight to me! But thou, O Shame, on the one side, and thou, O Fear, on the other, did hold me back: the one threatening me with eternal infamy; the other with loss of that which hostile Fortune was soon afterward to tear from me. In such wise then, did I live for some time, for it was then pleasing to Love that I should live in this manner; and, in good sooth, so blithely and joyously were these days spent that I had little cause to envy any lady in the whole world, never imagining that the delight wherewith my heart was filled to overflowing, was to nourish the root and plant of my future misery, as I now know to my fruitless and never-ending sorrow.

Chapter II

Wherein Madonna Fiammetta describes the cause of her lover's departure, his departure, and the grief his departure occasioned her.

While, dearest ladies, I was leading the pleasant and jocund existence I have described above, little thinking of the future, hostile Fortune was stealthily brewing her poisons for me, and was pursuing me with relentless animosity, I being all the time unconscious of her enmity. It did not suffice her to have transformed me, who had aforesaid been mistress of myself, into the servant of Love; as soon as she perceived that such service had become to me most delectable, she strove with all her might to scourge me with biting scorpions.

It befell that we were sitting one night on a couch in my chamber; it was cold, dark and rainy outside, but there was a bright light in one part of the room, and we were content to gaze at each other in silence, his eyes made glad by quaffing deep draughts from my beauty; and mine made equally glad by riveting their looks on his. After a time I spoke of various things, but he never took his eyes away from my face, as if he were intoxicated with the sweetness of what he saw, until at length his eyelids closed and he fell into a short slumber. And as I was observing him lovingly as he slept, my ears caught the sound of plaintive murmurs uttered by the lips of the lover so dear to me. Suddenly feeling alarmed about his health, I was on the point of saying: "What ails thee?" But a new idea occurred to me; I yielded to its suggestion, and kept silent. Then, with eyes intent and ears strained to capture the faintest whisper, I turned round, and, gazing at him cautiously, I listened. But no word of his came to me, although I knew from the sobs that racked him and from the tears that bathed his face that he must be in terrible agony. Alas! how impossible it would be to express what anguish wrung my heart when I

saw him in such a state, and yet knew not the cause thereof! A thousand thoughts flashed through my mind in a moment, and they almost all centered in this one thing: he loves another lady, and it is against his will that he continues to visit me! The words leaped to my lips to ask him the occasion of his grief; but, afraid that he might be put to shame by discovering that I had found him in tears, I held my peace; and I also frequently turned away my eyes from looking at him, for I felt that the hot tears that rolled down my face and fell upon him would likewise, if he awoke suddenly, afford proof that I had seen him in such a state. Oh, what plans did I form, in my impatience, that he might not discover I had heard him, rejecting each as soon as formed! But at length, being overcome by the desire of knowing the cause of his affliction, just as those who, have been appalled in their dreams either by a fall from a great height or by a cruel beast, start up in terror, both sleep and dream being at once broken, so I straightway started up as it were in terror, and, while my voice trembled, I laid one of my arms on his shoulder. My artifice was successful, for he, at once stopping his tears, and turning to me with an expression of infinite joy on his countenance, said, in a voice full of pity:

“O soul of my soul! what has made thee afraid?” To which I responded:

“I fell asleep, and methought that I had lost thee.”

Woe is me! what an augury and what true foretellers of the future were these my words so suddenly thrust on my mind by some spirit from I know not where, and this I can now see plainly. But he made answer:

“O best and dearest of all women! death and death alone can make thee lose me.”

Hardly had he uttered these words when he heaved a deep sigh. When I asked the occasion of his sighing thus, hoping thereby to learn also the cause of his tears, he burst into such a fit of weeping that the tears began to gush from his eyes as from two fountains, and to fall upon his breast even more copiously than before. Such a spectacle filled me with painful misgivings, and the uncertainty and anxiety of which I had

for some time been the prey ended with me also in a burst of tears, while, on the other hand, his sobs prevented him from answering directly the question I had put to him. But, as soon as he felt that he had recovered somewhat from this excruciating spasm of emotion, in a voice choked and often rent with sobs, he thus replied:

“Dearest of women, loved by me beyond everything else in the world, if my tears merit any credit as witnesses of the truth, thou wilt surely believe that they are not shed without bitter cause, as the event which is about to happen must certainly prove to thee. The reason why my eyes pour forth their tears in such abundance, whenever the recollection of all the happiness that we have known together recurs to my memory, is that now this very recollection tortures me, with the added pang that I cannot make of myself two persons, as I would wish to do, so that I could at once satisfy my love by staying here, and the filial piety I owe to a father by going to a place whither the most stringent necessity summons me, together with all the force of paternal authority. Conceive, then, the anguish of my despairing heart! On the one hand, I am torn by filial piety from thine arms, and, on the other, I am retained therein by the soul-subduing might of love.”

These words made their way into my wounded heart, and with them torments never felt before. And albeit their meaning was not at first clearly grasped by my understanding, yet when they smote mine ears and thereby effected a passage into my soul, they became the source of most agonizing tears, which, though they found a way of escape through mine eyes, left behind them in my heart an unendurable sense of utter woe,. This was that hour when I felt that my pangs were more hostile to my pleasures than ever before; this was that hour which forced me to weep tears beyond measure, the like whereof had never by me been shed before, tears which neither his words nor his consolations could restrain. However, after I had wept most bitterly for a long time, I besought him, as well as I was able, to make clear to me, what was the nature of that filial piety which, he said, tore him from my arms. Whereupon he, not without many a burst of tears, made this answer:

“Inevitable death, the ultimate end of all things, has decreed that I should be at the present moment the only son of my father, who lately had many sons. He is now laden with years, wifeless, and without any near relative remaining to him who would attend to the comfort of his declining years. He has no hope of having any more children, and he insists on the presence of that only son whom he has not seen for so many years, and from whom he expects affection and some consolation. For months have I been trying to discover every manner of excuse which, by holding me blameless, would permit me to ignore his commands and not forsake thee. Finally, I could see how utterly baseless and worthless were all these excuses. Every motive that can sway a mortal urges me to fulfil this duty. The days of my childhood, when I climbed his knees and was nursed tenderly on his lap, the love which he never afterward ceased for a moment to show me, the just and proper filial obedience which I should always pay him, and other reasons more serious still, all conjure me not to defer my visit to him any longer. And, furthermore, the solemn entreaties and warnings of my friends and kindred have wrought upon me. They insist that, if I refuse to my father the solace of beholding me once more, I shall be the occasion of separating from his body his forlorn and disconsolate soul. Alas! how strong are the laws of nature! Mighty as is my love for thee, I have not been able, nor am I able, to allow it to replace entirely this filial piety. And so I have decided, with thy permission, to see him once more, and to afford him the consolation of my company for some little space of time, though I know not how I shall ever be able to live without thee, how brief soever the period of my absence may be; and, therefore, do my tears fall so fast when this I recall to mind.”

And, after these words, he kept silence. If there be any of you, O ladies, for whose benefit I am now writing, whom such a disaster has befallen at the very moment when love engrossed her every thought, her alone do I expect to have understanding of the pangs that tortured my soul, which had until then fed wholly upon his love, and by that love had been violently inflamed; to other ladies I do not speak, for unless they have been tried as I have been, useless would be my telling them of that

which nothing in their own lives has exemplified. I will say, then, in as brief fashion as possible, that when I heard these words, my soul sought to escape from me, and doubtless would have escaped, but that it was at the moment clasped in the arms of him it loved most on earth. But, nevertheless, it was so dazed with terror and smarting under such heavy affliction, that for a time I was bereft of the power of uttering a single word. But when, after a time, my mind had grown somewhat accustomed to the endurance of a sorrow such as never before had been my portion, this very sorrow restored a little faint courage to my spirit, and the eyes which had been strained and tearless overflowed with moisture, and the tongue at length was loosed and capable of utterance; and turning to him who was the lord of my life, I thus addressed him:

“O thou who art my only refuge, my final hope! may my words enter thy heart with sufficient force to alter thy new purpose; so wilt thou continue to love me as thou hast loved me, and they life and mine will not be exiled from this sad world before the hour appointed for our departure shall have come upon us. Thou, being drawn in different directions by filial piety and by love, art doubtful how thou shouldst act in the future. But surely, if the words were true in which thou didst formerly affirm, not once, but repeatedly, that I alone was loved by thee, no affection, filial or otherwise, should have power to withstand such love, or to take thee away elsewhere from my side; and now listen to the reason why this should be so. It must be clear to thee, if thou believest that which thou thyself sayest, to what peril thou must expose my life, if thou forsakest me, knowing, as thou dost, that I have been hardly able to endure any day heretofore upon which I was prevented from seeing thee. Therefore, thou mayest rest assured that, with thy absence, every comfort and pleasure of my life will vanish. And thinkest thou that this is the only calamity that shall befall me? Certainly, thou must be aware that every sorrow that can be imagined will beset me, and that these sorrows will, perhaps, or rather without any perhaps, surely slay me? Of a truth, thou must know how little strength there be in tender young women to endure such calamities with a firm mind. Shouldst thou haply wish to answer that I, when first I loved thee, had to endure things as heavy to

bear, I will in part agree with thee, but the cause of that was very different from this. As my hope depended on the exercise of my own will, that which could then be borne easily will press grievously on me when dependent on the will of another. Who has ever thwarted my desire when I wished eagerly for thy companionship, because I was enamored of thee as thou wert of me? Surely, no one. But things will shape themselves very differently when thou art far away from me. Moreover, at that time I knew only by sight who thou wert, although, even so, I set a high value on thee. But now that I know thee most intimately, because of the closeness of the ties we have formed, now that thou hast grown infinitely dearer to me than thou wert when only my imagination was engaged, surely thou hast become mine as certainly as any lover can be who owes as much to his lady as thou dost to me. And who doubts that it is heavier affliction to lose that which one has than to lose that which one hopes to have, even though there be a prospect of this hope being realized.

“For this reason, then, it must be plainly evident to thee, if thou givest the matter due consideration, that thy departure will be followed by my death. Art thou prepared, then, to bring about my destruction by placing thy affection for thine aged father higher than the affection which thou art bound to have for me? If thou actest in this wise, thou art not a lover, but an enemy. Shame upon thee! even if I consented to it, to set a higher value upon the few years reserved for an old parent than upon the many years which I may reasonably hope to enjoy! Alas! how iniquitous would be such filial piety as that! Is it not thy conviction, O Panfilo, that no one, however nearly related to thee by the ties of parentage or blood or friendship, is either willing or able to love thee as I love thee? If for a moment thou believest differently, thou believest wrongly; for, of a truth, no one loves thee as I do. If I, therefore, love thee more, than anyone else, do I not merit more affection? For this reason, then, do thou resolve to award me the preference, and in mercy to me, banish from thy bosom all that piety, as thou callest it, which may hamper the love thou owest me, and let thy father take his repose without thee. He has lived long without thee in the past; let him so live

hereafter, if it likes him, and, if not, let him die! He has for many years warded off the fatal stroke, if what I have heard be true, and his existence has been prolonged beyond the period at which it would be seemlier to die. Furthermore, if he live, as the aged are wont to live, weary and discontented, it will show greater filial piety in thee to let him die than to prolong a burdensome life by thy presence. But thou shouldst rather think of affording consolation to me, who have never been long away from thee since first we met, who cannot live without thee, and who, being still exceedingly youthful, may hope to spend many joyous years in thy society. In good sooth, if thou couldst work that change in thy father which the potent medicaments of Medea wrought in Æson, then should I say that this piety of thine was righteous, and, I would laud thy going for such a purpose, however grievous it might be to me. But such will not and could not be the result of thy departure, and that thou knowest well. Now surely thou art haply more cruel than I believe thee to be, if thou carest so little for me, whom thou hast loved and lovest now of thy own free election and not in any wise forced thereunto, as to prefer the indifferent affection of an old man whom chance has made thy parent. But, if thou takest no pity on me, at least take pity on thyself. Is it not true—unless, indeed, thy features first, and thy words afterward have deceived me—that, when I was away from thee even for a short space of time, my absence was almost like death to thee? Dost thou, then, now believe that thou canst live without seeing me during the long absence which this ill-starred piety of thine must entail? Oh, in God's name, consider the matter attentively and reflect whether it be not possible that this very journey may not bring about thine own death (if it be true that men, like women, die of a lasting sorrow). That thy absence from me will be very hard for thee to endure, thy tears and the throbbing of thy heart, the irregular and violent beating whereof I hear distinctly, afford plain demonstration. But should death fail to smite thee, a life far worse than death is the life that awaits thee.

“Alas! how my enamored heart is overflowing with pity for thee as well as for myself at the present moment! Be not so foolish, I beseech thee, as to let thy affection for any person, whosoever he may be, move

thee to expose thyself to a serious danger! Think that whoso loves not himself has the lordship of nothing in the world. Thy father, for whom thy affection is so intense, did not beget thee to the end that thou mightest do ill unto thyself. And who doubts but that he, inasmuch as he is wise, if it were allowed him to discover our condition, would say to thee: "Remain where thou art"? Nay, if his wisdom did not lead him to this decision, his compassion for thee assuredly should; and I am quite certain that thou knowest this thyself. Therefore do thou reason thus: Inasmuch as such is the judgment he would have given, had he known our case, we are bound to assume that he has known our case and that he has given this judgment; and so by his own very award, thou art, as it were, forced to abandon this journey, which would be equally hurtful to thee and to me. Certainly, dear my lord, I will not deny that thine aforesaid arguments are powerful enough to lead thee to imagine that it is thy duty to be guided by them and go to the place whither they would lead thee, considering that, if thou goest thither, thou goest to the spot where thou wert born, a spot naturally dearer than all others to everyone. And yet, from what I have heard thee often say, thou hast found this same place somewhat wearisome and uninteresting. The cause thereof, as thou thyself hast already and freely admitted, is that thy city is a city of ostentatious words and pusillanimous deeds, the slave, not of a thousand laws, but rather of as many different opinions as there are men therein, and its people are always at war, either with strangers or with one another, and that this same city of thine is inhabited by an arrogant, avaricious and envious race, and that its turbulence is the occasion of numberless anxieties to those who dwell therein—all which things are entirely out of harmony with thy cast of mind. And right well am I aware that, on the other hand, the city thou art so ready to forsake is known by thee to be peaceful, joyous, rich, magnificent, and under the rule of one king; all which things, if I be not very much mistaken, are exceedingly agreeable to thee. Furthermore, and more important than everything stated: I am here, and here only wilt thou find me, and nowhere else. Therefore, I beseech thee, abandon this most calamitous purpose of thine, and, by entirely changing thine intention and remaining

where thou art, prove that thou hast a care for my life and for thine own as well."

While I spoke, his agitation went on increasing, and his cheeks were bathed in tears. At length, after heaving many a heart-breaking sigh, he answered thus:

"O life and light of my soul, well assured I am that all the words thou hast uttered are true, and every peril which they unfold is to me as clear as day. But as I must answer, not as I should wish, but as the present necessity requires, I will say briefly that, inasmuch as I am now able to blot out a long and great debt at the cost of a short and trifling discomfort, I believe that thou thyself wilt acknowledge I ought to do so. Thou mayest rest assured that, while my affection for my aged father exercises over my mind its due and rightful power, I am not less, but much more, swayed by the love we feel for each other. Now, if it were lawful to make public this love, I might seem to have some excuse, assuming that what thou hast said were submitted to the judgment, not of my father only, but of anyone whatever; and in that case, I might allow my parent to die without seeing me. But, admitting that this love of ours must be concealed from the eyes of the world, I do not see how I could act as thou wishest without incurring the gravest censure and infamy. If I escape such censure and fulfil my duty, Fortune will, it is true, deprive us of three or four months of rapturous delight. Afterward, however, thou wilt see me return to thy presence without fail, and our happiness will only be the greater because of this separation. And if the place to which I am going be as disagreeable as thou makest it out to be, this should cheer thee greatly, for thou art sure to have this consolation: if no other cause should prompt me to move away from thence, the character of a place so offensive to my mind would alone be sufficient to compel me to abandon it and return here.

Therefore I will beg thy gracious permission to leave thee for a time; and as thou hast ever shown thyself hitherto solicitous for my honor and wellbeing, so now show thy patience; then shall I be sure, from the manner in which thou hast borne thyself during this most grievous

visitation, that my honor will be as safe with thee, no matter to what trial it may be exposed in the future, as my person is dear to thee, now."

When he had spoken these words, and was for a time silent, I thus resumed:

"It is very plain to my mind that thy resolution has been adopted with much reluctance and regret. And yet, methinks, that thou seemest to avoid reflecting on all the pangs and agonies that must torture my heart when thou art so far away. No day, no night, no hour, will creep past me unattended by a thousand fears; I shall be in continual alarm about thy life, which I beseech God to extend far beyond the limit of my days. Ah! why do I wish to dwell upon such things? Yet am I forced to enumerate some of them as briefly as may be. The seas are not as full of sands, nor the heavens of stars, as every day is of the countless dangers and disasters that may befall living creatures; and my forebodings of what may betide thee when thou hast left me will be the occasion of constant suffering to my heart, which will never cease trembling because of thee. I am ashamed to tell thee that which has now flashed across my mind, but since certain things I have heard force me to speak, I shall do so. Now, I have been told, and that frequently, that in thy native country there are an infinite number of most beautiful ladies, as graceful and refined as they are beautiful, in every way fit to love and be loved. If one of these should please thee, and if thou shouldst forget me for her sake, what sort of life dost thou imagine mine would be then? Ah, if thou truly lovest me, as thou sayest thou dost, bethink thee how thou wouldst feel if I changed thee for another lover? A thing, indeed, which never can be. Rather would I slay myself with my own hands than that that should betide me! But let us banish such thoughts, and not provoke the gods by gloomy predictions of that which neither of us would wish to happen. But if thou art still firmly determined to depart, inasmuch as nothing can ever please me which is not pleasing to thee also, I have resolved, constrained thereunto by necessity, to will what thou willest. Nevertheless, if it can be, I beseech thee that thou grant this one last prayer: delay thy going for a while; so shall I be able, by continual meditations on thy departure, to teach myself strength and endurance

when thou art no longer beside me. Surely this should not be a hard thing for thee to do; even the very weather, which at this season is most detestable, pleads in favor of my request. Seest thou not that the heavens are continually darkened and menace the earth with most baleful evils by means of water, snow, winds, and appalling thunder? Is there a man in the whole world so little careful of himself as to set out on a journey at such a horrible time? Therefore, in this, at least, indulge me, or, if thou refusest to do so, then do that which thy duty to thyself demands. Let this noxious season pass, and wait for the next, when thou canst travel with less peril; and I, though I may be consumed by melancholy thoughts, yet will look forward to thy return more patiently."

He made no delay in replying:

"O best and dearest of women! May the joyous hope of my return moderate the various anxieties and bitter pain in which I leave thee, greatly against my own desire, and may it also lighten the agonies I suffer because of this separation. But it is by no means wise of thee to let thy mind dwell on that which will most surely seize upon me, here or elsewhere, when my hour has come—namely, death. Nor shouldst thou trouble thyself anent future happenings, about which we know nothing, and which may be a help or a hurt to me. In what place soever the anger or the favor of God may light upon man, he must endure his fate, be it good or evil, because he has no power to do otherwise. Therefore, do not concern thyself about such things, but let them rest in the hands of Him who knows our needs better than we do ourselves, and simply implore Him so to order future events that they may turn out for our benefit. As to my belonging to any other lady except Fiammetta, not Jove himself could bring such a change to pass, even though I should desire it; for the chain wherewith Love has bound my heart under thy heavenly governance can never be rent asunder. And of this be well assured: sooner shall the earth give birth to stars, and the sky be plowed by oxen and bring forth the ripe corn, than Panfilo belong to other lady than thee. The time I have set for leaving would I postpone even with more eagerness than thou hast shown in asking me to do so, if I believed for a moment that such delay would be useful to thee and to me. But the

greater the delay, the greater would be our sorrow at parting. If I go away now, I shall have returned before the lapse of the very period which thou requirest in order that thou mayest prepare thyself for the suffering which my absence will entail. But the bitterness of knowing that the time was coming when I must leave thee would, in truth, be harder to bear than my going now. And against the inclemency of the weather I will take salutary precautions, although I was once accustomed to endure it. Fear not that God who watched over my coming hither will not also watch over my going hence. Therefore, with a brave heart, make up thy mind to this: when a thing must be done, it is better that it should be done at once than to look forward to the doing of it in fear and sadness."

My tears, which had almost ceased to flow when I was speaking myself, now burst forth with renewed violence on hearing a reply so different from what I expected; and, with my head resting heavily on his breast, I remained silent for a long time, revolving various matters in my mind, not knowing whether I should assent to the truth of what he said or deny it. But, alas! what reply could anyone have made to such words, except: "Do what it likes thee, but return soon?" And I, not without excessive anguish and the shedding of many tears, added that it would be undoubtedly a great marvel if he found me living on his return. These words having been said, we tried to comfort each other and dried each other's tears and then parted.

He came often to see me before his departure, which was to take place in a few days, finding me much altered in mind and appearance from what I had been when he saw me first. But when that fatal day arrived which was to be the end of all my happiness, we spent it in various discourse, not unmingled with abundant tears. At last I embraced him, and thus addressed him:

"Alas! my sweet lord, who is it that is thus taking thee away from me? What god wreaks his vengeance on me with such overwhelming force that it can be said, and I live to hear it: 'No longer is Panfilo in the spot where his Fiammetta abides?' I know nothing even of the place

whither thou goest! When shall I embrace thee again? My heart is wrung with direful forebodings, yet I wit not what they portend."

Then, somewhat soothed by his caresses, though still weeping bitterly, I kissed him. When he was about to give me the last tearful embrace, I arrested him, saying:

"Dearest my lord, lo, now thou goest away, but thou dost promise that in a short time thou wilt return. Pledge me for this, if it so please thee, thy most inviolable faith, so that, although I doubt not thy word, I may gain future strength and comfort therefrom."

Thereupon, he, mingling his tears with mine, hung on my neck, as I believe, from utter faintness, and said, in a weak voice.

"Lady, I swear to thee by Apollo, and by the indissoluble love I bear thee, and by that very piety which now separates us, that, before the fourth month has run its course, thou wilt surely, if God permit, see me at thy side."

Thereafter, taking my right hand in his, he turned to the place where the sacred images of our gods were displayed, and said:

"O ye holy gods, rulers of Earth and Heaven equally, be ye witness of my present vow and of the faith sanctioned by my right hand. And thou, O Love, who art conscious of all that has happened, be present, and thou, too, O sanctuary of love, dearer to me than the heavenly abodes of the gods, be ye all witnesses of this my vow! And, if I should sin in aught against my oath, then may God afflict me with a punishment as dire as that wherewith in past times Ceres pursued Erisichthon, or Diana, Actæon, or Juno, Semele."

Having spoken, he covered my face with kisses, and bade me farewell, in a voice that shook with agony. But when he had said these words, I felt so woebegone and so entirely exhausted with weeping that I could hardly utter a syllable. Yet made I a mighty effort, and a few words forced themselves from my pallid lips:

"May the vows which my ears have heard, and which thy hand in mine has confirmed, be ratified by Jove in Heaven, as were the prayers of Teletusa by Isis, and may they be as irrevocable on earth as thou demandest and as I desire."

After which, I accompanied him to the door of my palace, wishing there to bid him a last adieu, when suddenly my tongue failed to do its office, and the light of day fled from my eyes. Like a rose that had been cut level with the earth, and which loses its color when it feels the warmth of the solar rays, so did I fall, almost lifeless, into the arms of my faithful attendant; and not until the lapse of many moments was I recalled to this pitiless world by my devoted servant, who sprinkled cold water on my face and who exerted all her ingenuity to revive me. Then, hoping that he might still be at my door, like the maddened bull, which, when it has received the fatal stroke, wildly leaps into the air, so I, rising as if thunderstricken, and still almost blinded, rushed forward, and, with open arms, embraced my servant, believing that I had my lord within my arms, and, in a feeble voice, broken by sobs, I said:

“O soul of my soul, farewell!”

My servant spake not, witting my mistake; but I, when I had regained consciousness, and saw into what an error I had fallen, could hardly restrain myself from being beguiled into the same illusion afterward.

When I saw again myself in my chamber without my Panfilo, and not knowing how this could be so for such a length of time, asked my servant what had become of him, she, weeping, replied:

“It is now a long while since he tore himself from your arms, in spite of his tears and yours.”

To which I answered:

“Then, of a truth, is he gone?...”

“Yes,” replied the servant.

Thereupon, being anxious to learn more, I said:

“How looked he when he left?”

“Heartbroken, in good sooth,” she answered. Never in my life have I seen man so utterly disconsolate.”

“What were his gestures, what his movements, what the words he uttered at the time of his departure?”

“When you lay almost lifeless in my arms, uttering incoherent words about I know not what, he, as soon as he saw you, took you from me and clasped you in his arms with ineffable tenderness. Dismayed, lest your

trembling soul should have deserted its tenement, he laid his hand on your breast, and discovered by the wild throbbings of your heart that you lived. Then he kissed you, as if every kiss were the last, and, returning, kissed you again and again. But when he saw that you were seemingly as soulless as marble, he dreaded that the greatest of all afflictions had befallen him, and, with heartrending sobs, he showered kisses on your face, saying: 'O ye high gods, if there be any sin in my departure, let your vengeance fall on me, and not on this sweet lady! Bring back to its dwelling-place the wandering soul, so that it may enjoy the last consolation of seeing me before I leave and of giving me the farewell kiss, wherewith both she and I may be comforted.' But when he saw that you remained still unconscious, although his agitation was so extreme that he hardly knew what he was doing, he took you in his arms and placed you gently on the couch. Then, as the waves of the sea now retreat and now return to the shore, driven hither and thither by the resistless force of the winds, so he retreated, and then returned, and returned and retreated again and again, but always withdrawing slowly from the threshold of your chamber. Sometimes he looked up to the threatening skies, which warned him not to delay his going; then he turned and gazed upon you, repeatedly calling you by name and kissing your face again and again. But, after he had done so frequently, seeing that he could stay no longer with you, he embraced you and said: 'O sweetest of all women! Sole hope of my broken heart! I must leave thee for a time, although I know that, by doing so, I endanger thy life! Oh, may God relieve thee from the pain thou dost now suffer, and grant that we may see each other again with as much joy as we now feel sorrow at this bitter parting.' And, while he was speaking these words, his tears so often ended in convulsive sobs that I was alarmed lest he should be heard, not only by our own people, but by our neighbors. But, feeling that he must depart, he again said farewell, weeping the while more bitterly than ever. And, as if drawn thither by force, he would sometimes plant his foot on the threshold of your house, and anon rush wildly forth from it. And when he had gone a few paces, he would stop, and it seemed as if he could hardly go further; for at every step he

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would look back, apparently hoping that you had recovered and that I would call him back to look upon you again.”

Having said which, my servant held her peace. And, O ladies, what, think you, must have been my state after the departure of my lover, whose absence was to cause me so many bitter pangs!

Chapter III

Wherein are set forth the thoughts and deeds of this lady during the time at the end whereof she expected her lover to return.

In doleful plight did I remain after the departure of my Panfilo, and, day after day, the tears I shed, because of his absence, were very bitter. Nor did other words come to my lips—words never uttered withal—than these: “O my Panfilo! can it be that thou hast forsaken me?” Yet, amid all my anguish, the recollection of that name whereby he had taught me to address him, afforded me a little consolation. There was no part of my chamber which escaped the glance of my insatiate eyes: “Here,” I would say to myself, “my Panfilo was wont to sit; here he used to recline; here he vowed a speedy return to me; here I kissed him.” In short, there was not a spot in the room that was not dear to me. Sometimes I feigned to myself that he was coming to see me once more, having changed his purpose and turned back. Then, as if he were really come, I would suddenly gaze at the entrance, so cheated by my fancy that, because he was not there, I frequently fell into a rage, as if, though so near me, he had of a truth forsaken and deceived me.

As soon as the dull misery caused by his late departure began to be somewhat alleviated by the interposition of time, certain ideas of a more serious nature made their way into my mind, and, once they had entered, they asserted the lawfulness of their presence by much plausible reasoning. So, happening to be alone in my chamber, not long afterward, I began arguing with myself in the following fashion: “Behold thy lover has now gone from thy side, and thou, wretched woman that thou art, wert not only unable to bid him farewell, but even to return the kisses he bestowed on thy unconscious lips, or cast thine eyes upon him when, for the last time, he crossed the threshold of thy home; all which, should

aught of ill befall him, he may regard as the consequence of a fatal augury portentously forecast by thy silence, and on thee may lay the blame thereof." At first, this thought bore very heavily on my soul: but at length, it made way for another reflection, and, after deeply reconsidering the matter, I said to myself : "No, no blame can fall upon me by reason of this, inasmuch as he, being a person of great wisdom, will, on the contrary, deem the things that occurred to be of happy augury rather, saying: `She did not bid me the sort of adieu that one is wont to address to those who purpose to be absent for a long period, or haply not to return at all. But, by keeping silent, she showed she regarded my absence from her as being for such an exceedingly brief period as scarcely to be considered a separation. After I had turned this thought over and over in my mind, and gained therefrom a little comfort, I dismissed it entirely, and fixed my attention on various new ideas. Sometimes, when solitary and sad in my chamber, all my thoughts dwelling on him, I strode to and fro, and, fetching many a sigh, murmured: "Would that my Panfilo were here!"

In this way, torn now here, now there, by conflicting emotions, did I pass several days, yet ever hoping for his safe arrival in his native city, and of this I was afterward made certain by a letter from him, which yielded me the greatest delight on many accounts, and made known to me that he was inflamed with a love for me more ardent than ever; furthermore, the most solemn promises wherewith he bound himself quickened my hopes of his speedy return. Yet could I not help dreading what the future might portend. Nay, from that very hour, the thoughts which had grievously occupied my mind took their departure, and new ones suddenly sprang into existence in their place. "Now," I would sometimes say, "is Panfilo, sole surviving son of an aged father, welcomed with every species of jocund festivity by him who has not beheld him for many years. Haply, he may have not only banished me from his memory, but may even curse the months during which love retained him at my side. Now, being greatly honored by this friend, now by that friend, perchance he blames me for not having even known how to love him befittingly when he was here. Festive minds that keep high

holiday are apt to be easily persuaded to sever their connection with one place and bind themselves to another. Woe is me! What would become of me, if in such a manner I should lose him? But I will not believe that such a calamity can be possible." Often was my soul, as if prescient of its future woes, held prisoner by such a dreadful terror that it trembled to its very center, and this terror gave rise to such thoughts as these: Panfilo is now in his native city, a city enriched with many most sumptuous temples, and made gorgeous by its stately and magnificent festivals and pageants, at the which he is frequently present, and there no doubt he has become acquainted with a great number of ladies, who, as I have often heard, are beyond expression beautiful, and in grace and refinement surpass all others, so that there be none in the world so bounteously supplied with the snares and wiles wherewith hearts are caught. Alas! who is there that can so warily guard himself as not to be forcibly captured some time or other, no matter how strong be his resistance? Do I not know how I myself was captured as it were by main force? And over and above this withal, new things are wont to please more than the old: therefore, it would be no strange matter that he should please them, being new, and that they should please him for the like reason." How grievously did such imaginings depress me! And, albeit I believed that no such awful disaster would befall me, yet could I not drive these ideas from my mind, though often saying to myself:

"How could Panfilo, who loves thee more than himself, harbor in a heart, which thou dost entirely fill, another love? Knowest thou not that a certain lady in this city in every way worthy of him, used her utmost efforts to gain his affection, and yet could not succeed? Most assuredly, there are many ladies whom he might well have wooed before he became thine, as he has been now for a long time, and if he passed by those, who were regarded as goddesses because of their beauty and their many charms, certainly, he cannot be so soon enamored now of others as thou sayest. Furthermore, dost thou for a moment believe that he would break the faith so often pledged thee for another? Never would he do so; and, therefore, in his loyalty and prudence thou mayest have full confidence. If thou art reasonable thou must consider that he is

not so unwise as not to know that he acts like a madman who forsakes that which he has in order to gain that which he has not, unless, indeed, that which he had was of exceedingly little account, and, by forsaking it, he gained something of infinitely greater value. Now, if thou reflectest deeply on the matter, thou must conclude infallibly that such a thing could not happen in the present circumstance. For, in truth, if what thou hast heard men say be sooth, thou must be the loveliest among lovely ones, and among the wealthy one of the wealthiest, and among the nobly born, one of the noblest. And, in addition to this, whom could he ever find who would love him as thou dost love him? He, as having had great experience thereof, knows how exceeding hard it be to prevail on a lady, who may haply have become dear to a new lover, to allow herself to be loved; for ladies, even when they do love, are very coy, and will for a long time feign the opposite to that which is in their hearts. Nay, even if he did not love thee, he is at the present moment too much occupied with other weighty matters that are of the greatest moment to his interests to have leisure for forming intimacies with other ladies. Therefore, do thou cease troubling thyself about this, but rather esteem it as certain that thou art as deeply loved as thou lovest."

Few mornings passed that I did not, immediately after I had risen, ascend to the loftiest part of my palace, and thence, just as sailors, after climbing to the main topmast, cast their eyes round intently to learn whether there be a high rock, or land, or any other impediment to their course, did I carefully scan the entire heavens. Then, fixing my gaze steadily on the east, when the sun had risen above the horizon, I calculated how much of the new day had elapsed; and, the higher I saw him in the sky, "The nearer," I said, "does the term appointed for the return of my Panfilo approach." Sometimes as I eagerly watched his course, I told myself that he was going more leisurely than was his wont, and that he spent more days in Capricornus than he was used to do in Cancer; and so, in the same wise, when he had attained the middle point of his circuit, I fancied that he, of his own accord, stood still for the purpose of taking a view of the earth, and, how swiftly soever he sank in the west, meseemed that he progressed but slowly. When he had taken

away his light from the world, and when he permitted the stars to show forth their radiance, I, somewhat reconciled thereto, often numbering within myself the days that were passed, marked that one with a little stone, being minded thereunto by the custom of the ancients, who were in the habit of dividing their pleasant days from their irksome days by white and black pebbles.

Making a supreme effort to dispel these workings of my mind, I sometimes opened one of my chests, and took up the numerous letters he had sent me, and having read them all, I felt not a little comforted, for I could almost fancy that I was holding discourse with him.

When the day had guided the hours to their appointed end, fresh anxieties disquieted me. I, who since ever I was a child, could not remain alone in the dark unterrified, had felt safe and bold therein when love kept me company. And, just as I was wont to ascend to the highest part of my palace, long before the slumbers of my people were broken, and when the morning had first beheld the advent of the sun, so did I, like unto Arunte, when watching the celestial bodies and their motions amid the marble quarries of the Lucanian hills, so did I, I repeat, from that spot observe the heavens during the tedious and fear-inspiring hours of the night, because the various cares whereby I was pursued were most unfriendly to my yearning for repose; and I regarded the motions of the orbs I observed, however quick they might be, as exceeding tardy. And, night after night, turning my eyes on the horned moon, I deemed, not that she was approaching her fulness, but rather that her horns grew thinner one night after the other. And the more eager my anxiety, the more did I wish that she would sweep on apace and round out her four quarters. And oh, how often, even though chilled by her frosted beams, did I gaze long and steadily on her face, imagining that haply the eyes of Panfilo, were, like mine, riveted at that very moment on her pale disk! But now I doubt not, that, having banished every thought of me from his mind, he was so far from fixing his eyes on the moon, that he was, on the contrary, resting on his couch, his eyes closed in untroubled slumber. And I also remember that, being exasperated by the slowness of her course, I tried to hasten it by many supplications, being thereunto

instigated by my trust in various errors of ancient times, hoping that so she might attain her perfect roundness. When she had attained it, methought that she seemed not to care to return to her crescent form as rapidly as it behooved her, but rather, as if content with the fulness of her brightness, to wish to abide in that fulness; and yet for this I sometimes almost held her excused, deeming it must be pleasanter for her to stay with her mother than return to the dark realms of her spouse. Notwithstanding this, I remember that often my wasted prayers to her to hasten her course would turn into threats, and I would say:

“O Phœbe! ill dost thou reward the services thou receivest! I, with most piteous beseechings, am taking what pains I may to curtail thy labors, yet thou, by thy slothful delaying, carest not if thou increasest mine. If haply, however, thou needest more help from me to move away and return with thy horns only, then, of a truth, thou dost deem me to be as slothful as I surely discern that thou art. Now, knowest thou not that the sooner thou showest thyself four times crescent-shaped, and then in thy full roundness, the sooner will my Panfilo be with me again? In sooth, let him but return, and afterward thou mayest speed through thy circles as leisurely or as swiftly as it liketh thee!”

When blackest clouds obscured the skies and stormy tempests affrighted the air with their thunderous roar, I descended from my post, and, if nothing else occurred to me to do, I betook myself to my chamber. Thither I summoned my attendants, and passed the time in relating, or in having related, divers stories. And the farther the tales of my maidens were from the truth—a thing to be expected from most people of their condition—the greater seemed their power to drive away my sighs and bring some delectation to me as I listened; so that, occasionally, nathless all my melancholy, I laughed most joyously.

At other times, I feigned to myself that Panfilo was with me, and, so feigning, I said many things to him and asked him many questions; to these questions I replied, feigning to myself that the answers were from him and not from me; and it sometimes betided that, in the middle of such imagined discourse, I fell asleep. And certainly such sleep was much more welcome to me than wakefulness, inasmuch as I truly then beheld

him whom I had feigned to be with me when lying awake. Sometimes methought he had returned and I was wandering along with him in most beautiful gardens, adorned with the rarest of fruits, flowers, and foliage, as if unalarmed of aught, as we were wont to be of old; and there, while he held my hand and I his, I made him recount everything that had happened to him, and often, before he concluded a phrase, meseemed that I broke the words in two with a kiss, and, as if all that I saw was real, I said: "What! thou hast, in good sooth, returned, then? Certainly, thou hast, and now I hold thee forever!"

Oh, how vexatious it was to me when it betided that sleep forsook me! For it bore away with itself that which freely and of its own accord it had lent me. Yet though for a time I remained very sad; nor did I spend the remainder of the day following in such content, always looking forward to the return of night, to the end that I might have that, when asleep, which I could not have when awake. Still, albeit on some nights sleep was most gracious to me, on others it ordained that I should not enjoy the sweetness thereof unmixed with the bitterness of affliction, inasmuch as there were many of these nights in which meseemed to behold my lover garbed in the vilest sort of raiment, all stained with spots so black that I never knew the like. With features deadly pale, and quivering with anguish, he appeared to me to be running toward me and shrieking aloud: "Help me! help me!" At other times, methought I heard a number of persons speak of him as of one who was dead; and at others, it befell that I beheld him dead before my very eyes; at others, he assumed many and various forms that were to me singular. But at no time did my sleep have greater strength than my sorrow, so that, suddenly awaking and witting at once the vanity of my dreaming, I was content with my dream, and thanked God therefor.

In such manner did I pass the days and nights, anxiously expectant of an end to my sorrows. But when the time appointed for his return drew nearer, I judged it wise to change my mode of life, to take heart and be of good cheer, to the end that my beauties and graces, somewhat injured by my many and long-endured sufferings, might be restored to their due places, and that I, when he again beheld me, might not be displeasing to

him through any lack of comeliness. I found this not at all difficult to accomplish, seeing that, having been so long accustomed to troubles, I was now able to bear them, if not lightly, yet without much labor; and, furthermore, the hope of his promised return, having now become stronger, inspired me every day with an ever-increasing gladness to which I had long been a stranger. The festive entertainments which I had almost suspended, assigning as a cause thereof the inclement weather, I now resumed at the beginning of the new season. As the soul long engulfed in the bitterness of grievous woes expands when it exchanges a life of pain for a life of pleasure, so I seemed to my companions more beautiful now than I ever had seemed before. My costly attire and my precious ornaments I tried to render more magnificent than when I first wore them; and, like the valiant knight, who, when need requires, polishes and repairs his strong arms for the future combat, so I made ready to appear to him more splendidly vested and more nobly adorned on his return, a return for which I, the most deceived of women, was to wait in vain.

Woe is me! how often did I say: "As soon as he is within reach of my arms, I shall kiss him a hundred thousand times, and thereafter my kisses will be so multiplied that no word will they allow to pass his lips; and twice a hundred-fold will I return those which he showered on my face as I lay unconscious in his arms, without power to give him back a single one." Frequently I doubted in my thoughts, whether I should be able to restrain my insatiable longing to embrace him the very moment I perceived him, no matter who might then be present. But of all these things the gods had a care, and so ordered them that they should all work together for my greater desolation. Whenever I happened to be in my chamber, and some one entered, how often did I believe that she had come to say to me: "Panfilo, has returned!" Nay, never did I hear words uttered in any place that my ears were not at once bent to catch them, I thinking or hoping that they must in some way be concerned with the approaching arrival of Panfilo. When seated, I started up more than a hundred times, and, running to the window, pretending to be curious about something or other, I gazed up and down, saying to myself in my

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folly: "Panfilo has arrived and is coming now to see thee." And, after a while, discovering how vain was my hope, I returned to my room in confusion. Feigning that when he came back, he was to bring with him certain things for my husband of the greatest value, I often asked, and directed others to ask, whether he had returned, or whether he was expected, and when. But to these questions no comforting answer ever reached me, no more than if he were never more to come, as of a truth so it betided.

Chapter IV

Wherein this lady showeth what her thoughts were like and what her life was like, the appointed day having come and Panfilo not returned.

Tormented by these anxieties, compassionate ladies, I not only reached the much desired and long expected period, but passed beyond it by several days. Still was I uncertain whether I should blame him or not for this delay, although my former hopefulness was somewhat weakened, and I partly abandoned the cheerful thought which I had perhaps too amply entertained. Fresh ideas, which had not been there before, began to flit through my brain; and arresting for the time the tendency that was in my mind to learn what was or what could be the reason why Panfilo was delaying his return longer than he had solemnly promised, I began to have other conceptions. Above aught else, I discovered as many circumstances that should plead in his excuse as he himself would have been able to discover, were he present, and, perchance, more. I would sometimes say:

“O Fiammetta, for shame! Wherefore dost thou believe that thy Panfilo has other cause for staying away from thee and not returning, except that it is no longer in his power to act as he would wish? Unforeseen calamities are often visited on the heads of others as well as on thine; nor is it so possible to fulfil the conditions of a compact made for the future as some believe. Now, why should I doubt that he feels his affection for me here more binding than even the filial piety which has detained him yonder? Sure I am, and exceeding sure, that he loves me to excess, and is now thinking of the bitterness of my life, and has great ruth thereof; and incited by his love, has often wished to come away. But haply his aged parent has, by his tears and prayers, a little prolonged the

term, and, thwarting his desires, has retained him almost by force. He will come when he can."

And by these arguments and excuses I was frequently forced to admit into my mind other newer and more grievous ideas. Sometimes I said:

"Who knows but that he, more eager than he even ought to be for a sight of me, laying aside all his filial devotion and abandoning all his other affairs, may have long ago moved away from his native city? And then, perchance, not waiting until the tempestuous sea was becalmed, and credulous of the tales lying and foolhardy mariners tell in hope of gain, he has embarked on some boat, which, having incurred the wrath of the winds and of the waves, has perished amid the latter, and he with it. In no other way was the hapless Hero bereaved of her Leander. Or who can even tell but that he may have, perchance, been thrust by fortune on some inhospitable rock, and, having escaped thither from the fury of the waters, has died of famine or by the teeth of ferocious beasts? Or may he not be still upon that very rock, like another Achemenides, left there, perhaps because forgotten, and watching despairingly for some one to take him away and bring him hither? For who is there that is not aware of the manifold treacheries of the deep? But haply, on the other hand, he has fallen into the power of his enemies, or has been captured by pirates, and now languishes in some prison or other, loaded with fetters and shackles. For all such things can happen, and we have already perceived them to happen many a time."

Then I recollected that his journey might be no safer by land than by sea, and I saw that if he had adopted that mode of traveling, he might also have been detained by a thousand accidents. Thereupon my mind, as if with a rush, leaped upon the anticipation of still more fearful disasters, and my excuses for his absence grew the stronger in proportion to the perils by which I believed him surrounded.

Alas! while such imaginings absorbed my mind, a cold sweat covered my whole body, and, aghast at such fearful thoughts, I prayed God to take them away from me, for I saw him with my very eyes exposed to all the perils I had conjured up, neither more nor less than if they were real. And sometimes I remember that I wept bitterly, having undoubted faith

that I beheld him in some one of the evil straits which I had pictured to myself. Then, after a while, I would murmur:

“Wretched me! what horrible things are those which my wayward fancy presents to my vision? God forbid that any of them should ever turn out true! Rather would I desire that he should continue to dwell where he is now, and never again return to me, than that any of these misfortunes which I have falsely imagined, should befall him. And, in good sooth, I have deceived myself; seeing that, albeit such things are possible, it is not possible that such things can long be hidden; and certainly it is not possible that the death of such an illustrious person could be kept concealed, and from me most especially, who, by means of devices not a little adroit and subtle, have had such searching and continuous inquiries made about him in every direction. Who can doubt but that, if any of the calamities which I have been inventing were true, Fame, that most fleet-footed herald of all disasters, would have already brought tidings of it hither? Nay, if she halted in her course, would not Fortune, long my enemy, have hastened her flight, so that my despair might grow past bearing? No, no! I believe that he is plunged in the deepest affliction, as I am, because he is unable to come, and has to stay where he is, being kept there by main force. He will soon be with me, or, if not, he will send me a letter to console me, explaining the reason for his delay, and excusing it.”

Assuredly, although many such baneful thoughts as those already mentioned now and then still fiercely assailed me, yet were they repelled without much difficulty, and the hopes which had tried to, forsake me when the appointed term for his return had passed, I held to with all the force of my will. Ever keeping before my eyes the long-enduring love I had cherished for him and he for me, the mutually pledged faith, the oaths sworn to the gods, the infinite tears, I conceived it impossible that all this could be merely the deceptive mask of treachery. Yet eagerly as I grasped at these hopes, I could not always succeed in keeping them in the place left vacant by the thoughts described before, which, by slowly and silently thrusting these hopes from my heart, endeavored with all their might to resume their former seats and lead thereunto their baleful

auguries of ill. Nay, almost before I could perceive it clearly, I was possessed with the feeling that my hopes had well-nigh abandoned me, and that these thoughts had vanquished them. But of the pangs which I suffered, none (now that, day succeeding day, no word was brought me of Panfilo's return) tortured me to the same degree as jealousy. She mastered me, despite all my resistance. She set aside every excuse I had made for him, as if, forsooth, I was acquainted with his actions. Often with arguments, hitherto rejected, did she ply me, saying:

“Aha, indeed! Art thou, in sooth, so silly as to believe that filial love, or any business or pleasure, however urgent, could keep Panfilo away from thee, if he really loved thee as he said he did? Knowest thou not that Love conquers all things? Either he is strongly enamored of another, and has forgotten thee, or new pleasures have more potency over him where he now is, because of their newness, just as his passion for thee erstwhile had potency over him, because of its newness at the time. These ladies, as you have yourself already remarked, are in every way fit to love and be loved; and he likewise is by nature so inclined, and is, in all respects, worthy of being loved; therefore, just as he has won their hearts, it is beyond doubt that they have won his. Art thou not aware that other ladies have eyes in their heads as well as thou, and that they are quite as knowing in such matters as thou art? Yes, and they do well to be so. And dost thou also fancy that not more than one lady should please him? Certainly, I believe that, if he had thee in his sight, he would find it hard to love any except thee. But he cannot see thee now, and many months have slipped by since he last saw thee. Thou shouldst know that nothing on this earth is eternal; so, just as he was once taken with thee and thou didst charm him, so is it possible now that another has won him, and that he, forgetting his love for thee, loves another. New things are far more pleasing, and affect the mind more powerfully, than those with which we are familiar, and man is ever wont to yearn with greater avidity for that which he has not than for that which is in his possession. Things the most delectable grow tiresome if we are long used to them. And, tell me, is there any man on this earth who would not prefer to have a new sweetheart in his house rather than to have a

former one in another country? Nor are the tears he shed at parting by any means a token that he loves thee with all the fondness that thou hast fancied. Men even, who have known each other only a few days, are sometimes so deeply grieved at parting that they weep outright. Ay, and they make vows and give promises, which they have at the time the firm intention of fulfilling. But afterward, what with the vicissitudes of life and change of scene and new companionship, all these vows and promises vanish from their minds. And then—what are the tears, oaths and promises of young men to women but an earnest of future treachery? Such young men are usually far more apt in making such professions than in really loving. Their roving desires impel them to such courses. There is not a single one of them who would not rather change half a score of ladies every month than belong to a single lady for ten days. They flit from figure to figure, and glory in being able to say that they have had the love of many. Therefore what dost thou expect? Why dost thou permit thyself to be deceived into clutching vainly at vain hopes? Thou hast no power to wile him away from the city wherein he abides. Give over loving him, then; prove that, if he has deceived thee as to his sentiments, thou hast just as artfully deceived him as to thine.”

These words she followed with many others which inflamed my soul with such hot and raging fury that it was only with the utmost trouble I could hold myself back from almost committing acts that are born of madness and despair. But before I could give full rein to this impetuous frenzy, a shower of tears gushed forth from my eyes and flowed in streams down my cheeks; at the same time I heaved the most heart-breaking sighs that ever rent human heart. In this condition I continued for no inconsiderable time. Thereafter, eager for consolation in any shape or form, I disregarded those things whereof my prophetic mind had warned me, and, using many extravagant arguments, I sought, almost by force, to bring back the hopes that had just flown. And, in this wise, I now and then recovered my cheerfulness, so that I spent several more days in alternate hopefulness and despondency.

Chapter V

Wherein Fiammetta relates how it came to her ears that Panfilo had taken a wife and in how great anguish and despair she lived, being now hopeless of his return.

Soft were the tears that I shed at that period, and pleasant the sighs that I heaved, O compassionate ladies, if they be compared to those which my grieving and reluctant pen, slower to write than my heart to feel, is now making ready to depict before your eyes. And certainly, if the trials through which I had hitherto passed be rightly considered, they might be regarded as rather the little mishaps that befall a frolicsome young woman than serious calamities that bore very heavily upon her. But what follows will seem to you of a very different tenor. Therefore make strong your minds and hearts, and be not so alarmed by these introductory remarks as to decline reading what follows, on the ground that if what is to come is infinitely sadder than what was sad enough before, you do not care to hear of it. In good sooth, it is not my intent to work upon your feelings solely with no other end in view than that of arousing your pity; I have another purpose and a higher, namely that you, knowing thoroughly the iniquity of him through whom this has befallen me, may guard yourselves with more caution from becoming the prey of any young man whatsoever. And so, by inducing you to take warning from the misfortunes I have had to endure, I may be the means of curing you of an unhappy passion.

I say then, O ladies, that I was still the sport of many conflicting fancies, when, after more than a month had elapsed since the end of the appointed term, tidings of my lover reached me on a certain day and in the manner I am about to relate.

I had gone, on pious thoughts intent, to visit certain holy ladies, partly to persuade them to pray to God in my behalf that He might be graciously pleased either to restore me my Panfilo, or else, by banishing him from my heart, enable me to regain my lost tranquility. Now it befell that, while I was conversing discreetly and courteously with the said ladies, who were closely connected with me both by kinship and friendship, came there a merchant who began to exhibit, as Ulysses and Diomedes exhibited to Deidamia, divers and beautiful jewels (such as were likely to please ladies of the kind). He was—as, indeed, I understood from his words, as well as from the answers he gave to these ladies when they sought to know whence he had come—a native of my Panfilo’s country. Afterward, when he had shown all his wares, and when, after much bargaining, they had purchased some and rejected others, there was much lively talk and many a quip and jest between him and them. While he was waiting for payment, the youngest of them, equally renowned for her beauty, her birth, and her distinguished manners, the same who had before inquired who he was and whence he came, requested him to tell her whether he had ever known his countryman Panfilo. Oh, how pertinently this request comported with my most earnest inclination! Certainly, I was delighted with it, and my ears were keen to hear the answer. The merchant, without any delay, replied:

“And, prithee, who is there that should know him better than I?”

And the young lady, pretending that she also knew something of him, followed with this question:

“And how is he occupied at present?”

“Oh,” said the merchant, “he is occupied pleasantly enough. His father, having lost all his other sons, summoned him home, and now keeps him in the house with himself.”

Then the young lady put another question to him:

“How long is it since you have had tidings of him?”

“I have had none,” he returned, “since I saw him last, and that was, if I am not mistaken, about a fortnight ago.”

“And how was he then?” continued the lady. To which he answered: “Oh, very well, indeed! Perhaps I should inform you that I saw a most beautiful young lady entering the house on his arm on the very day I was leaving; there seemed to be great festivity and merrymaking going on for the occasion. From all I heard, she had just been married to him.”

Although I had been listening to these words in the bitterest anguish, yet did I keep my eyes fixed on the face of the young lady who was asking these questions, marveling exceedingly what cause could be leading her to require such particular information about a person whom I had believed to be unacquainted with any other young lady in the city, save me alone. I perceived that as soon as the news of Panfilo’s wedding reached her ears, her eyelids were lowered, her cheeks flushed crimson, and the words that had before come so quick died on her lips; and it was only by the greatest effort she refrained from shedding the tears that filled her eyes; all this, as I surmised, was caused by the tidings she had just learned about Panfilo. But I, although I was already crushed to the very earth by what I had heard, was soon after convulsed by a shock as violent as the first, and I could hardly restrain myself from falling foul upon her with the most rancorous abuse, because of her evident agitation, being envious and enraged that she should show forth her love for Panfilo by such open signs, and rightfully suspecting that she, as well as I, had but too legitimate cause for lamentation after what we had heard. But yet I did restrain myself, and with a self-control, the like of which I believe has never before been witnessed, I let not the anguish of my heart appear on my face, which never altered its expression, albeit indeed, I felt a greater desire to weep than to hear anything further.

Not so the young lady. Exerting, perchance, as much strength as I had exerted, to keep her sorrow hidden in her own heart, as if she were not the person who had been previously so excited, she went on with her questioning, though the answers which it brought forth served only to confirm more and more strongly what we had already learned, and grew more and more baleful to her desires and to mine. Then, when the merchant begged permission to bid us farewell and we had dismissed

him, masking our grief with a burst of laughter, we remained conversing for a much longer space than I should have wished.

At length, when the conversation began to languish and grow purposeless, we separated. Whereupon I, my soul flaming with wrath and anguish (like unto the Libyan lioness when she discovers the hunters from her ambuscade), at one time flushing crimson, at another, becoming pale as death, now with a slow gait, and now more hurriedly than beseemed womanly propriety, I returned to my palace.

When I had entered my chamber and was at liberty to do as I liked, I burst into a flood of tears. And when this had relieved me somewhat from the great oppression I felt at my heart, words came to me, although not yet freely, and, in a trembling voice, I began thus:

“Now, O wretched Fiammetta, thou knowest why Panfilo does not return; now thou knowest the reason of that delay which thou hast so greatly deplored; now thou knowest that for which thou madest such an anxious search. What more dost thou seek? What further inquiries, O hapless one, dost thou desire to pursue? This should suffice thee: Panfilo is no longer thine. Cast away henceforth all thy fond yearnings to have him with thee again; abandon thy useless hopes; lay aside thy burning love, drive, away from thee thine insensate thoughts; trust for the future the auguries of thy prophetic soul, and at length begin to try to gain some knowledge of the guile and treachery of men. Thou hast reached that pass which others as well as thou are wont to reach who are too confiding.”

After these words, I was still further fired with rage, which found a vent in streams of scalding tears. Thereafter I spake anew, but in words even fiercer and wilder:

“Ye gods, where are ye? On what spot are your eyes resting now? What has become of your anger? Why does it not fall upon the scorner of your power? O Jove, he has perjured himself before thine altar! What are thy thunderbolts doing? Where art thou now hurling them? Who has ever deserved them more than he by his horrible impiety? Why do they not descend upon the head of this most execrable of men, so that hereafter others may be appalled at the thought of perjuring themselves

before thee? And thou, O refulgent Phœbus, where are now the arrows that of old smote Python? Surely that monster of darkness merited not such wounds so much as does this vile miscreant who falsely called upon thee to bear witness to his perfidy! Swoop down upon him and tear from his eyes the light of thy rays. Show thyself not less his enemy than thou wert erstwhile to the ill-starred Œdipus. And all ye other gods and goddesses, and thou, O Love, whose power this false lover has despised, why show ye not now your might and your seasonable anger? Why do ye not turn heaven and earth against this new husband, so that he may no longer remain in the world to make ye a mock, a successful traitor and the triumphant repudiator of your authority? Much smaller crimes have heretofore moved you in your wrath to execute a vengeance less just. Therefore, why do you delay now? Though you inflicted the worst of tortures on him, you would not visit him with a punishment befitting his deserts. Ah, wretched me! would that you felt the effect of his treachery as I do, to the end that in you as in me there were the same insatiable desire to inflict on him a chastisement that would bear some proportion to his guilt! O ye gods, visit him with one, or with two, or with all those perils which I lately dreaded he might encounter! Slay him by whatever manner of death it may please ye to employ, so, that I may, at one and the same hour, feel the last sorrow I am ever to feel for him, and exact the vengeance due me as well. Let not me alone pay the penalty of his sins, and let him not, after laughing at both you and me, enjoy himself with his new spouse."

Then, not less inflamed with anger, but with a burst of tears and sobs that shook me even more cruelly than before, turning, as it were, to Panfilo, I thus addressed him:

"O Panfilo, now I know the cause of thy absence; now are all thy artifices plain to me; now do I see who kept thee away from me, and what was the nature of that 'piety,' forsooth, of which thou hast so often spoken. Now art thou celebrating the sacred rites of Hymen, while I, betrayed by thy flattering words, betrayed both by thee and by myself, am wasting away in tears, and by my tears am opening a path for death to reach me. Yes, death, the executioner of thy cruelty, will speedily cut

short my days, and of this thou alone art the cause. O most infamous of men, how prompt thou hast been in rendering my anguish unendurable! Now, tell me, what was thy purpose in espousing thy new bride? To deceive her as thou hast deceived me? With what eyes didst thou regard her? With those wherewith thou didst capture me, the most wretched of all women? What sort of fidelity didst thou promise her? That which thou hadst promised me? How couldst thou do that? Dost thou not remember that thou canst not bind thyself by the same bond twice in succession? By what gods hast thou sworn? Before what deities hast thou perjured thyself? Woe is me! I know not what countervailing pleasure has so blinded thee that, being mine, and mine only, thou couldst belong to another! Wretched me! for what fault of mine have I deserved to be of such little concern to thee? Whither has our hitherto unalloyed affection for each other fled so soon? Alas! that their melancholy fortunes should have such power over the heartbroken! Thou hast now cast to the winds the vowed faith, pledged to me by thy right hand, and the gods forsworn, by whom thou didst most solemnly and ardently swear to return, and thy fair-spoken words, whereof thou hadst a bountiful supply, and the tears wherewith thou didst bathe, not only thy face but mine also—all these, I say, thou hast cast to the winds, and, scornfully looking down on me, thou livest blithely with another woman. Alas and alas! who could ever have believed that such duplicity lay hidden beneath thy words? and that the tears that gushed so plentifully from thine eyes were a masterstroke of cunning ingenuity? Not I, certainly. Just as the words I spoke and the tears I shed were loyal words and tears, so did I accept thine own as equally loyal. And if, haply, thou shouldst say that, contrariwise, both the tears and the oaths were true, and that the faith pledged came from a pure heart, granted, at least for the moment.

“But what excuse wilt give for not having kept that faith as purely as thou didst pledge it? Wilt thou say that thy new love’s gentleness and sweetness of temper have been the cause of this? Such an admission would be a sign of thy weakness and a manifest proof of thy fickleness. And, over and above all this, will it be, therefore, satisfactory to me?

Certainly not. O thou abominable young man! Was not the ardent love I bore thee, and still bear thee, albeit much against my will, plain to thine eyes? Surely, it was; and that is the reason why it needed much less manoeuvring to deceive me than thou hast employed. But, in order that thou mightest prove how clever and subtle thou wert, thou didst decide to use all the arts of which thou wert possessed in discoursing with me. Now, hast thou ever thought of how little glory thou wert the gainer in deceiving a woman who trusted thee? My simplicity was deserving of more loyalty than thou hast shown it. But it were bootless to speak to thee of such things. Yet, as I believed not less in the gods, to whom thou hast perjured thyself, than I believed in thee, I will beseech them so to ordain that this may be the best part of thy renown in the future; that is, the fame of having deceived a young woman who loved thee more than she loved herself. Come now, Panfilo: have I committed any fault for which I deserved to be so skilfully betrayed by thee? Certainly not, None have I committed, except that of loving thee too well, but not wisely, and in always, besides loving thee overmuch, keeping the faith I had pledged to thee: but for such a sin, I, at least, did not merit such a penance. In sooth, one sin I fully admit I have committed, and that was the sin of abandoning myself so freely to a most wicked and merciless young man, O thou villain! And this befell me because of the wrath of the gods. Yet of this, as they themselves have clearly perceived, thou, not I, wert guilty. I resisted thee, and God knoweth this, as long as I was able. Woe is me! Would that the day which ushered in that fatal night had been my last; so, might I have died a virtuous woman! Oh, what bitter and heartrending pangs will be my portion henceforth! Now wilt thou amuse thy youthful bride with many a tale of thy past loves, and wilt speak of wretched me as in every way blamable, abasing my beauty and my manners, albeit thou didst once extol both as more worthy of laud and renown than those of all other ladies. But now thou wilt have praises only for her beauty and her manners, saying that our intercourse was the fruit, not of true love, but of a transitory passion. But among the many falsehoods thou art sure to relate, forget not to make mention also of, at least, some of thy true deceptions, which have left me woebegone and

forlorn. Tell her, too, of my most honorable estate, whereby she may perceive more clearly the extent of thy base ingratitude. Nor let it slip thy mind to record how many young men of the noblest rank and of the most exalted disposition and character sought to win my love, and their divers ways of seeking it, and their quarrels at night, and their many valiant encounters during the day, and the portals of my palace hung with garlands by them, and all for my sake. And yet could they not wile me away from loving thee and from the counterfeit love thou didst feign to have for me. Notwithstanding all this, thou hast in a moment forsaken me for a young girl whom thou hast scarcely known! Truly, if she be not as simple as I have been, she will always have a suspicion of thy kisses, and will be, on her guard against those sly manœuvres of thine from which I, alas! have not known how to guard myself. Oh, I beseech the avenging gods that she may deal with thee as the spouse of Atreus dealt with her husband, or as the daughters of Danaus did with their husbands, or as Clytemnestra did with Agamemnon; or, at the very least, may she treat thee as I have treated my husband, who has not merited such injury at my hands; and may she cause thee such harrowing anguish that I, yes, even I, may be forced to shed such tears for pity of thee, as I now shed for pity of myself. And if the gods have any true concern for ill-used mortals, this, as I hope and pray, will happen speedily."

Although I was almost maddened by my consuming wrongs, I recurred to them again and again, not only on that day, but on divers others that ensued; yet could I not help being disturbed also by the agitation I had noted on the face of the young lady already mentioned; and this gave birth to other feverish thoughts, now as it had at the time, and afterward.

"Wherefore," I would often say within my own mind, "should I grieve so deeply, O Panfilo, because thou art so far away from me, and at present enamored of another woman, seeing that even when thou wert here present, thou wert not entirely mine, but belonged to others also? O thou most hateful of men! Wilt thou not tell me into how many portions thy love was divided, or capable of being divided? I presume that, in addition to this lady and me (to whom thou hast now added a third)

thou hast loved numberless other ladies besides, and that, too, at the very time when I believed thee to belong to me alone! At the moment I imagined I had thee all to myself, I was but sharing thee with many others! And who knows (if this news has reached her already) but that some one of these, more worthy of the favor of the gods than I, has prevailed on them by dint of her prayers to render my lot as woful as hers, because of the wrongs inflicted on her? But whoever she may be, if, indeed, she exist at all, she should pardon me, for, if I sinned against her, I sinned from ignorance, and, because of my ignorance, merit pardon.

“But as for thee, pray answer this: What were the artifices whereby thou madest it appear that those things were which were not? Of what nature was that conscience of thine by whose promptings thou acted? By what sort of tenderness or love wert thou led on to do such things? I have often heard that it was not possible to love two persons at the same time; but, certainly, this rule does not apply to thee. No such idea has ever found a place in thy mind. In thy mind, indeed! Why, thou hast loved dozens, or at least pretended to love them! Come now! hast thou shared that pledged faith, those inviolable (O villain!) promises, those tears which thou didst shed so abundantly, with every lady of thy acquaintance or with this one only, who has been so unsuccessful in concealing that which thou hast concealed so well? If thou hast done so, thou mayest regard thyself as safe, being bound to no single lady, seeing that what has been given to everyone without distinction, cannot, apparently, be considered the possession of anyone in particular. Yet beware! How can it be that he who has seized on the hearts of so many can avoid having his own appropriated sometime or other? Narcissus, loved by many of the nymphs, and rejecting them all with scorn, was himself captured by his own image in the fountain. Atalanta, swifter than the wind, and a stern foe to love, vanquished all her lovers, until Hippomenes, by a masterly stratagem, outstripped her in the race and conquered her, she not unwilling. But what need of examples from the olden time? I, yea, I myself, whom none had ever before been able to lead captive, was enslaved by thee. How can it be, therefore, that among the many thou lightly woost there shall not be some one who will

enslave thee also? Nay, I believe, or rather I am sure, that thou wert already captured long before thou knewest me; and if such be the case, why shouldst thou not return to her who once had such power over thee as to effect thy capture? And if thou carest not to return to me, return to her who has not been able to hide the fact that thou hast loved her. And though thou mayest wish that fortune should continue hostile to me (a fate which, at least in thy opinion, I have perhaps deserved), let not my sins do harm to others. Therefore, return also to all the other ladies, and keep inviolate the faith which no doubt thou didst pledge to them before thou didst pledge the same to me. Do not, for the sake of not hurting my feelings, make up thy mind to offend those whom thou hast left here in a condition of anxious expectancy. Surely, the one lady in the place where thou art should not have a greater hold on thee than the many ladies here who long for a sight of thee. She is now thine beyond cavil, and could not leave thee, though she wished it never so much. But thou canst safely leave her. Therefore, do thou come hither, to, the end that thy presence may keep those, who can never be thine in the sense in which she is, thine still in affection and devotion."

After many such strange and useless questions and reproaches, useless, because neither did they move the ears of the gods, nor of the ungrateful youth to whom they were specially addressed, it betided that I sometimes changed the manner of my expostulations, saying:

"O hapless creature! dost thou really desire that Panfilo should return hither? Dost thou, in good sooth, believe that his near neighborhood would render thee less unhappy than his absence in a foreign land, by which thou art so exceedingly aggrieved now? If thou dost, thou art plotting thine own ruin. As the matter is at present, thou mayest have some faint doubt as to whether he loves thee or not. But, should he return, thou mightest then become certain that he returned, not for thy sake, but for that of another. Let the knowledge that thou art not alone in thy misery also bring thee some relief. The wretched are sometimes wont to be a little comforted by feeling that they have companions in their wretchedness."

It would be hard indeed, O ladies, to make plain to you the uncontrollable fury, the multitude of heartrending tears and groans and sobs which accompanied every one of these arguments and reflections. But, just as every other affliction reaches its highest degree of intensity, and then, in course of time, gradually becomes somewhat allayed, so it befell that when I had led this kind of life for very many days, and when it was evident that I could not attain to a higher pitch of anguish than that from which I then suffered, my despondency grew less excessive, and, after some time, if it did not wholly cease, it changed to a gentle melancholy that was endurable. Even this afterward lost its hold on my spirits, which were again warmed by the ardors of love and by some faint hopes withal; and they, having thrust sorrow from her seat, brought about an entire alteration in my purposes; so that now I was as eager to have my Panfilo back again as when he first left me. And the frailer my hopes that he would return, the more uncontrollable became my desire that he should return; and just as the flames, when worked upon by the winds coming from contrary directions, burst into ungovernable conflagration, so my love, awakened by opposing thoughts, became fiercer than ever, and I repented deeply of everything I had said before. Regarding all the things that I had been driven in my anger to speak as utterances that had actually, as it were, been heard by him, I was ashamed, and could find no expressions strong enough for my censure of that anger, which, when it first assails the soul, kindles therein such a fury that no truth has the slightest chance of making its presence felt. Yet the more vehement its rage, the more quickly does it become cold in course of time, and the more clearly does it show forth the evil it has caused. So, having recovered my former frame of mind, I began to hold the following discourse with myself:

“O silliest of all women! wherefore art thou so irritated? Why art thou so causelessly fired with resentment? Supposing even that what the merchant said be true (and thou hast no occasion to believe that it is) namely, that he has espoused another lady, is that so momentous or so novel an event that thou shouldst at once give over hoping? In such matters young men are helpless, and cannot escape doing the pleasure of

their parents. If his father insisted on his doing this, upon what ground could he refuse his consent? What reason hast thou for believing that everyone who takes a wife and lives with her, loves her as well as he may love some other women? The excessive coyness which such young wives show in granting any favors to their husbands is the source of speedy dissatisfaction, no matter how much they have pleased them in the beginning. Then, haply, Panfilo has taken her on compulsion, and, still far fonder of thee than he is of her, is disgusted at being compelled to live with her. Nay, even though she be pleasing to him at present, yet mayest thou hope that he will soon cease to take any delight in her. And surely, should he return to thee, thou canst have no fault to find either with his fidelity or with his oaths, seeing that by such return he has proved his loyalty to both. Pray, then, to God that Love, who is infinitely more puissant than faith promised or oaths sworn, may force him to return to thee. And, furthermore, what so foolish as to hold him in suspicion, because of the agitation of that other lady? Wittest thou not how many young gentlemen love thee in vain, and how fearfully agitated they must be, should they ever learn that thou hast given thy love to Panfilo? Thus thou oughtest to believe it to be possible that he has been loved by many, to each of whom it will be most distressing to hear of him that which has so much distressed thee, although each may grieve in a different manner and for different reasons."

In such wise, giving the lie to what I had so lately uttered, and becoming almost as hopeful as I was in the beginning, instead of the blasphemies which I had once spoken, I now addressed most suppliant prayers to the gods. Yet were not the hopes that had again taken possession of my soul altogether successful in renewing my cheerfulness; rather they brought with them a continual agitation and excitement which affected both my mind and my features, and I myself did not know what was the matter with me. It was true my first anxieties had taken flight. I had in the first rush of my anger thrown away the pebbles, which had been the significant witnesses of the days that had passed, had burned the letters received from him, and had destroyed many other tokens that I had before treasured. I no longer climbed the stairs of

my palace to watch the heavens; when I did so I was certain of his return, whereof I was by no means so assured now. The wish to hear and relate stories was gone from me, and I felt no desire to continue the custom, although it had much shortened the nights, all of which, or, at least, the greater part of them, I often spent now without sleep, and either in prolonged weeping or in dismal and self-torturing reflections; and, when I happened to fall asleep, I was visited by dreams, sometimes, indeed, pleasant, but frequently most sad and dreary. The churches and the festivals grew very tiresome to me, and I seldom went near them, except when I could not help doing so. The pallor of my countenance threw an air of gloom over the whole palace, and all within it discoursed in various wise on my altered appearance.

Thus I passed the time in great depression and melancholy, expectant of I knew not what. My uncertain thoughts drove me in contrary directions during the whole day, so that now I would burst into a fit of merriment, and anon sink into the greatest depression of spirits. One night, however, when I was alone in my chamber, after I had shed many bitter tears and uttered many vain words, I felt almost compelled, as it were by some divine power, to turn to Venus and address these orisons to her:

“O peerless Beauty of the heavens!” I said; “O most compassionate goddess! O most holy Venus! O thou whose sacred effigy adorned my chamber at the very beginning of my sorrows! comfort me, I beseech thee, in my heavy affliction, and, in the name of that most august and intimate love which thou didst bear to Adonis, alleviate my woes. See what pangs I suffer because of thee; see how often the horrible image of death has stood before my very eyes because of thee; see whether my pure faith has merited the awful ills I endure. I, a light-hearted young woman, entirely unwitting of thy darts, yet made myself the vassal of thy pleasure at once and without thought of disobedience. Thou knowest what precious favors thou didst promise to bestow upon me, and I, certainly, will not attempt to deny that in part I have enjoyed them. But, if thou wishest that these calamities, of which thou art the cause, should also be regarded as a part of those favors of thine, then, may Earth and

Heaven perish, and may they be rebuilt in a new universe which shall follow new laws. But if these calamities be an evil, as I feel sure they are, then, O gracious goddess, let the good thou hast promised light upon me, so that it may not be said that thy holy lips have learned to lie, as those of men do. Send thy son with his arrows and his torches to my Panfilo; send him speedily to the place where he abides, so far away from me, and (if, haply, his love for me has been chilled by absence or has been ravished from me by some other woman) let that love be rekindled in such wise that he, burning as I burn, can in no way be hindered from returning to me. Thus shall I be again comforted, and be saved from the certain death which my present hapless estate most undoubtedly portends. O sweetest and fairest of goddesses, incline thine ears unto my prayers! Or, if thou refuseth to fire his heart again with the passion that throbs in mine, at least pluck thy darts from my heart, so that I, as well as he, may pass my days relieved from the anguish that tortures me."

Although I afterward discerned how entirely vain and inefficacious were all such appeals, yet at the time, almost believing that they were listened to favorably and that the boon I sought would be granted, I felt a little consoled, and the new hopes that sprang up within me somewhat mitigated my pangs. Then, giving utterance to new lamentations, I said:

"O Panfilo, where art thou now? Ah, wilt thou not tell me what thou art doing? Does the silent night keep thee, too, sleepless, and dost thou then weep such floods of tears as I do? Or do thine eyelids close in happy and unbroken slumber, which no thought of me ever disturbs? Ah, how can it be that Love governs two lovers under laws so different, when each is a fervent lover, as I certainly am, and as, haply, you are also? I know not. But if it be so, and if the same thoughts possess thee that possess me, what prison could be so strong to hold thee, what chains could be so secure to bind thee, that thou wouldst not break through the one and shatter the other, in order to come to my side? As for me, I am well convinced that no power on earth could keep me away from thee now, if a sense of shame, because my person is so well known in so many places, did not keep me from thee. And now, about another matter.

La Fiammetta

Surely whatever affairs, whether business or something else, demanded thy care in the country where thou art staying, must have been long since brought to an end. Thy father also must have had more than enough of thee—that father of thine who (and only the gods know how often I have prayed for his death!), as I firmly believe, is the occasion of thy absence at present, or, if he be not, at least it was because of him that thou wert first torn from my arms. But indeed, why am I so foolish as to pray for his death? Should I not know full well that, by doing so, I adopt the surest way of prolonging his life, seeing how hostile and maliciously disposed toward me the gods are in everything? Ah, let thy love, if it still be such as it was wont to be, overcome every impediment thrown in thy way, whether by gods or by men, and come! Woe is me! dost thou never feel pity for my loneliness? Sure I am, if thou didst but recall our former happiness, there is no lady in the whole world who would ever succeed in taking thee away from me! And this belief of mine makes me surer than almost aught else that the tidings I have had of thy newly-wed wife are false. Yet, even if they were true, I have strong confidence that she never will be able to separate us, save for a time. Return, then, dearest. If the delight thou used to feel in my society be not enough to draw thee, let the desire to save from a most shameful death the woman who loves thee above all things in the world have force enough to hurry thee to my side. But alas! even if thou dost return, I fear me that thou wilt scarcely recognize me, so much has anguish altered my features. My sudden joy at beholding thy beautiful face will, I am sure, restore the charms ravished from mine by my infinite tears. Do not doubt, then, that thy Fiammetta shall again become all that she was when she first knew thee. Ah come! come! let thy heart plead for me—and come! Alas! I know not what curb will be strong enough to enable me to restrain my joy when thou returnest. I dread it may be so uncontrollable as to be made manifest to everyone who happens to be present at our meeting. Yea, I have good reason to be alarmed lest that love, so long, so sagaciously, and so patiently hidden, may not then be revealed to all. But come; do not let my youthfulness, in which thou didst once take such delight, perish utterly. Come, and then when thou art come, thou wilt

see whether, in adversity as well as in prosperity, ingenious falsehoods may not have power, now as before, to throw a veil over our loves. Ah, if thou wert here now, and it could not be helped, I would let everyone know who listed!"

When these words were said, I straightway rose from my couch, and, as if he had really heard me, ran to the window, having deceived myself into the fancy that I had heard what I had not heard. But when I had opened the window, and watched at the door, the deception became plain and evident to my eyes. Thus my vain joy turned to sudden confusion and dismay; as when the stout ship's mast, entangled in its sails, is borne by the resistless winds into the deep, whose waves cover the endangered and helpless bark.

Returning to my tears in the usual way, I wept miserably. Then, after a time, I tried to force myself to win some repose for my mind, and, wooing gentle Sleep, with closed eyes, I called to him within my mind, in this fashion.

"O restful Sleep, pleasantest of human things, true peace that calms the troubles of the years! O thou who fleest every care as 'twere thy foe! come hither, and make less the anxious cares that wring this tortured heart. O thou who dost renew the wasted body, and makest all human beings for a time forget their woes, and after toil dost give recovered strength, why comest thou not to me? Thou bestowest on others a passing but much desired relief—bestow it, then, on me, who lack it more than all the world beside. Withhold it from the eyes of happy lovers, who care not for thy gifts, but rather hate them, and enter into mine, suffused as they are with tears. Have pity on me, forsaken, on me, overcome by these heartrending sobs! O thou victor over human ills, and the best part of human life withal! console me now with thy gracious favors, but mind to keep far away from me when Panfilo delights my ears, which so long to hear him, with grateful converse. O drowsy brother of stern-visaged Death, thou who minglest the things that are true with the things that are not, enter mine eyes and soothe my careworn heart! Thou once didst shut the hundred eyes of Argus, although they were so fain to watch unceasingly. Ah, what lets thee then

from closing these eyes of mine, which crave such service at thy hands? O haven of life! O sweetest Sleep! who constrainest the generations of men, timorous of Death, to prepare for his advent by many and long respites, seize on me with all thy might, and banish the insane agitations that uselessly torment my soul!"

Albeit he put off granting the grace for which I sought with such earnest prayer, and came to me so slowly and after so long a time that he seemed to be forced to serve me, rather than to serve me of his own will, yet was he more compassionate than any other god to whom I had offered my supplications; for thereafter he crept insensibly into my wearied head, I being unconscious of his approach, and my mind, which had yearned for him, was soon enfolded by him completely. But with sleep did not come the ardently desired peace. Nay, in place of gloomy thoughts and of tears, a thousand visions, full of infinite and appalling terrors, were my constant visitants during the night.

I believe there was not a Fury in the horrid city of Dis that did not show herself to me, and often in divers and terrible forms; and sometimes my sleep apparently was broken for a moment, whereat I was the rather content that it looked to me then as if I no longer saw them.

In short, few, indeed, have been the nights, after I had heard the baneful news of Panfilo's marriage, during which my slumbers had brought me either rest or comfort, as before this the thought of him, although absent, had often done; though the recollection that this was the case is the cause of additional sorrow to me now.

My dear husband perceived all these things, my tears and my sorrows, clearly enough, though he had no idea of their cause. And when he saw the grief that was mirrored on my features, and the gradual change of my complexion, now marked by a ghastly paleness, and my glassy eyes, once so bright and roguish, now almost dead and surrounded with purple circles, he several times marveled why this should be so. When he observed that I did not eat, and could not rest, he would often ask what was the cause of this. I usually answered: "My stomach is at fault: I have no notion of the reason why it has caused me such injury; but I am sure it is the cause of the deadly paleness that

disfigures me." Alas! this was the occasion of still further trouble. For he not only believed me, but gave such entire good faith to my words that he had every kind of medicine prepared for me; all which I took, solely to satisfy him, and not for any benefit I expected to derive from them. And even if they had been salutary, what relief of the body can ever bring any relief to the passion of the soul? The only medicine that could be beneficial to my soul was far too distant from me to be of any help. When my betrayed husband perceived that all these medicines were of little, or rather, of no avail, he made every effort, being far tenderer in my regard than I deserved, to chase away my sadness by many divers and novel methods, hoping thus to, restore the joyous spirit I had lost. But all the changes and entertainments he planned for me were in vain. Sometimes he would address me in such words as these:

"Lady, as thou knowest, a little beyond pleasant Monte Falerno, midway between ancient Cumæ and Pozzuolo, stands charming Baiæ, on the seacoast. The sky looks down on no more delightful site than that which it views here. It is encircled by lovely hills, all clothed with trees and vines of divers sorts; and in the valleys that nestle among them, every beast whereof the hunting is a pleasure to the hunter is to be found. At no great distance is a very great and widely extended plain, and there, too, may one indulge in the chase of various birds of prey and birds of other kinds, withal. Close by are the islets of Pitacusa and Nisida, both abounding in coney; and near unto it also is the grave of the great Misenus, which opens a pathway to the realms of Pluto: here are the oracles of the Cumæan sibyl, the Lake of Avernus, and the Theater (the place where the games of old were held); here are the fish-ponds and the mouldering ruins along the slopes of Monte Barbaro, works of infamous Nero, who labored in vain. All these things, though most ancient, are yet new to modern minds, and are the source of no little delectation to those who go to view them. In addition to all this, are numberless health-giving baths, which cure all diseases. Besides, the mildness of the climate is a marvel, and should suffice, in such weather as this, to induce us to visit a region so wholesome. Need I add that the time will be spent in the constant companionship of cavaliers and noble

ladies, and will, therefore, be a daily round of merrymaking and festivity? Thou must see, then, why thou shouldst come, not only for the restoration of the health of the body, but also for the restoration of the health of the mind, weighed down by the gloomy dejectedness which I plainly discern. For both causes do I wish thee to go, and assuredly our going will not be without profit."

After hearing these words, thinking that, haply, my dear lover might return during my absence, and I should not see him, I delayed answering for a long time. But, after seeing that my husband had set his heart on this, and considering that if Panfilo came, he would soon learn where I was, I replied that I was ready to obey his will; and so we set out for Baia. But oh! how contrary to my husband's expectations was the effect of this remedy on me! Albeit, haply, bodily weaknesses may find relief in these places, seldom if ever do persons go thither with a sound mind, and afterward return with the same, even when they have regained their health. Either because it is so close to the foamy billows from which arose the goddess Venus, or because of the season in which it is most visited, namely the springtime, the season best fitted to produce such effects, it is certain, and a cause of wonder it has often appeared to me, that even the most virtuous ladies, abandoning somewhat for the while the modesty befitting women, behave in all matters with a license that they never show elsewhere. Nor am I the only one of this opinion; it is shared by all those who are in the habit of frequenting the place. Here the greater portion of the time is passed in indolence, and whenever this indolence is intermitted, the exercise consists in amorous discourse, either among the ladies themselves, or between them and the young men. Here none but the most delicate viands are used to gratify the palate; wines, albeit most noble because of the antiquity of their birth, are yet most puissant, not only in awaking the sleeping Venus, but in reviving her in those in whom she was already dead. And as to the wondrous divers ways in which the virtue of the various baths effects this, they know who have proved it: here the beaches, and the enchanting gardens, and every other beautiful spot, are constantly resounding with the echoes of various festivals, ever-changing sports, the

most graceful dancing, musical instruments past counting, love songs sung in unison, by young men and women, *sonate* and *cantate* of every description. Let them, then, that can, hold out, in the midst of such things, against the might of Cupid, who, as I have good reason for believing, has little need to use all his force, in this the main and most important quarter of his dominions. It was to this place, most compassionate ladies, that my husband insisted on conducting me, as if that were the best means of curing me of my amorous pains! When we arrived there, Love, in good sooth, employed just the, same methods in my case that he had used in that of other ladies; nay rather, my soul (it having been already captured, needed not to be taken again) which had been somewhat, though only in the very smallest degree, cooled by the long delay which Panfilo, made afar from me, and also by the floods of tears I had shed and the sorrows, I had had to support, now burst into such uncontrollable flames that, meseemed, I never had experienced the like before. And this not only proceeded from the causes already mentioned, but especially from the recollection that I had often before been accompanied to this very spot by Panfilo himself, and the memory of this it was, without any doubt, that increased to such an extreme pitch both my love and my anguish, now that I could not see him at my side. Such was my state of agitation, that I saw neither hills, nor mountains, nor valleys, which were not simply witnesses of my gladness and exultation and of his, when we were engaged in carrying the nets, letting slip the hounds in leash, setting the snares for the wild creatures of the forests, and sometimes catching them. Not a strand, not a rock, not an islet did I set my eyes on that I did not say: "There I was with Panfilo; it was yonder he said so and so, and it was yonder we did so and so."

In the same way, everything else that I saw again, while, in the first place, it was the occasion of recalling his memory more vividly than ever, in the second but increased my ardent longing to behold him once more, either here or elsewhere. As such was the pleasure of my dear husband, we at once began to wile away the time in many and various diversions. Sometimes, rising before the day appeared, arid mounting our ambling steeds, we rode, now with dogs, now with falcons, and now with both,

into the neighboring districts, which were especially rich in particular kinds of game; at other times, we pressed on eagerly through shady groves, or across the open fields. And here the sight of so many various sorts of game, which gladdened the hearts of our companions, in me alone produced but little diminution of my sorrow. And when I saw some fine flights of the falcons, or some notable race, the words leaped to my lips: "O Panfilo! if thou wert only here to see, as thou wert erstwhile!" Wretched me! up to that point I had somewhat, though poorly, succeeded in keeping my eyes and my body attentive to what was going on; but such memories and the effort to hide my grief brought me, as it were, to a standstill. Oh, how often, as I now remember, did the bow fall from me and the arrows drop from my hand, under the strain of this emotion! And yet, in all that pertains to the chase, in setting the snares and letting slip the dogs, no nymph that ever followed Diana had used to excel more than I. And now, not once, but many times, when I went a fowling after whatever birds were suitable for this purpose, it happened that I, having almost lost my senses, would forget to unleash the hounds, and the bird would rise and fly out of my very hands; and the marvel of this was that I, who was once most keen in such a matter, now cared almost nothing for my failure. After every valley and hill and the spacious plains had been thoroughly searched by us, my companions and I, laden with booty, returned to our house, which we found, as often as not, had been made gay and festive by those left behind. At other times, tables were spread beneath the loftiest cliffs that rise seaward, projecting so as to afford a grateful shade; and there on the sanded beach our invited guests, all noble youths and noble ladies, feasted most sumptuously. But no sooner was the banquet ended than all stood up, and, to the sounds of divers instruments, at once began dancing, the dances being of every variety. I was almost compelled to take some part in these occasionally, but not for long; for my soul was so out of harmony with this kind of amusement, and my body was so feeble, that only for a little space could I endure it. Besides, I always found myself, as it were, dragged away from the carpet spread beneath our feet, and I was always saying within myself: "Where art thou, O Panfilo?" Then I

retired, and sat down, with some other ladies. There, by listening to the sweet notes that entered my soul, and by thinking of Panfilo, I tried to conceal my weariness, and to revive in my heart every faint little ghost of love, and to recall the happy days of yore, when I was accustomed to accompany the music of such instruments, in the presence of my Panfilo, with some little song, and that in a style by no means disagreeable. But no Panfilo was here now, and I would gladly have passed the time in weeping, if this had appeared to me possible or seemly. But I listened intently to the different songs and ballads, desiring to learn such of them as bore on my own misfortunes, to the end that, by singing them afterward, I might be able to express my grief in a hidden sort of fashion in public, no one knowing what special reference to my special disaster was contained in the melody I repeated.

When the young ladies were tired out with dancing, which indeed they well might be, considering the frisking and gamboling they indulged in, and sat down beside us, it frequently befell that their attractive young partners, of their own accord, thronged around them, making for them a sort of garland; and I never could see them, here or elsewhere, without thinking of the first day when Panfilo embraced me, both of us remaining behind the company assembled on that occasion. I would often raise my eyes and fix them on these, almost expecting that I should again see Panfilo among them. And, while so fixing my eyes on them, I observed them with great keenness, watching the signs of love on their features; and, being very wise in such matters, I remarked everything, uneasily, but acutely, and soon discovered who loved and who scorned. Now and then I commended one youth, and, now and then another, and sometimes I said to myself, as I eyed the ladies, that it would have been better for me if I had done as I saw they were doing, that is, kept my own soul free, just as they kept their souls free by making dupes of their lovers. Afterward, condemning such thoughts, I would say to myself: "I am better pleased to have faithfully loved (if one can be pleased with having loved unwisely)." Then both my eyes and my thoughts would return to the expressive gestures of these young lovers, and I derived no little consolation from discerning those who loved

fervently, and having gazed at them for a long time, I gave them much praise within my own heart for this, saying to myself:

“O happy ye, who have not lost sight of each other, as I and Panfilo have! Woe is me! just as you are doing now, we were wont to do formerly. Long may your happiness endure, to the end that I alone may remain an example of misery to the world! At least, if Love, by overwhelming me with anguish because of my repining for that which I love, be the occasion of shortening my days, yet surely he will also, as in the case of Dido, cause the fame of my dolorous misadventure to become eternal!”

So saying, I turned my eyes and observed the different ways in which various persons were doing various things. Oh, how many youths have I seen formerly in similar places, just as I saw them now, who, after looking eagerly around in every direction, and not seeing the particular lady each fancied, regarded the festival in which they were taking part as of little or no account, and then left it, sad-visaged and melancholy! Thereupon, even in the midst of my sorrows, I could not help laughing, although weakly, seeing that I had fellow-sufferers in my pain, and that my own woes gave me so clear a sense of the woes of others.

Such, then, dearest ladies, were the results, as my words show, produced on me by the delicious baths, the fatiguing hunts, and the festive merrymakings of every imaginable kind on the seashore. Wherefore, when the pallor of my countenance, my continual sighs, my want of sleep and distaste for food, had convinced my deceived husband, as well as the physician, that my disease was incurable, he began almost to despair of my life, and we returned to the city we had abandoned. Then, as the state of the weather was favorable to many and divers entertainments, I had to be ready to take part in them, albeit they were but the sources of various sorts of trouble to me. It happened, not once, but many times, that I was invited to attend the nuptial celebrations of those who were near akin to me in blood, or were connected with me by ties of friendship or neighborhood, and frequently I was forced by my husband to go to them, he believing my presence at such festivals would somewhat relieve my melancholy. Wherefore, on

such occasions it became expedient to resume the ornaments I had abandoned, and to put in such order as I was able my neglected hair, once judged by every man to be woven of pure gold, now almost the color of ashes. And remembering, with a keener recollection than ever before, him whom my tresses, as well as all my other charms, were wont to please, I was agitated by this new tribulation to such a degree that, as I call to mind, I sometimes became altogether forgetful of myself; and awakened by my maids from a profound sleep, I picked up the comb that had fallen from my hand, and returned to my unremembered office. Then, desiring, as is the usance of young women, to take counsel with my mirror with regard to the jewels I should wear, all it answered was that I seemed a very sorry creature. Indeed, when I considered the beauty I had lost, methought it was not my face that was before me, but that some Fury from hell had turned her horrid eyes upon me. But, when I was fully adorned, I went, with the other ladies, to the joyous festivals—joyous, indeed, for the others, but not joyous for me, as He knows who knows all things, either then, or at any time since the departure of my Panfilo, but on the contrary, the occasion of every sort of sadness. Those who were present at the places appointed for the nuptials of various betrothed couples, held at different times and in different houses, always saw me with the same expression of countenance, that is, with features which wore the mask of sprightliness, but with a soul wholly attempered to sorrow, finding a fresh cause of misery equally in everything that pleased me and in everything that pained me. But, after I had been received with distinguished honors by the other ladies, eagerly did my eyes wander round, not for the purpose of dwelling on the magnificent ornaments that made all these places so resplendent, but with the illusive hope of, perchance, meeting the gaze of Panfilo, as they were wont to wander when I used to see him often on similar occasions. And when I did not see him now, becoming, as it were, most hopeless of that whereof I was lately hopeful, I went and took a seat among the other ladies, entirely prostrated, and thankless for the honors proffered me. What cared I for honors, when he whom they were wont to please was not there to see them? And when the bride had

come, and the wedding feast, after being celebrated with all the pomp and grandeur beseeming such occasions, had ended, and the tables had been taken away, and the dances, at one time, led by the voice of some fine singer, at another, to, the sound of divers instruments, had begun, when the entire nuptial dwelling resounded with joyous revelry, I, to the end that I might not appear proud and disdainful, but rather meek and courteous, took such part in the dancing and merrymaking as was expected of me. Afterward, when I had done my duty in this respect, I took a seat apart, and was soon buried in new thoughts. On one occasion, it recurred to my memory how inexpressibly stately and sumptuous had been that wedding feast—not altogether unlike the present one—which was given in my honor, not so very long ago, at which I, innocent and free, without a touch of sadness, nay, rather, in the highest spirits, was an exulting and triumphant bride. And, measuring those times with these and perceiving how different they were from each other, I had an almost uncontrollable desire to weep, and, if the place had permitted it, I would have cried out in my agony. Again came upon my mind, as it were, with a rush, another thought, as I perceived the young people entertaining one another, that I had often made such feasts for my Panfilo. Afterward I lent my ears to amorous quips, songs and melodies, and, remembering the past, I sighed, and I was most anxious that the festival should come to a close, for it began to weary me past bearing. Nevertheless, I took particular note of everything, and, perceiving the throng of youths who surrounded the ladies, now resting after their pleasant but fatiguing exercise, I saw that many of them, or rather all, were looking earnestly at me, now and then, and that they were, each in his own way, whispering to one another. But yet they did not altogether succeed in hiding from me what they said. For part of it I managed to hear, and what I did not hear I could glean some idea of by subtle imaginings and inferences. One said to another:

“Ye gods! do look at that lady! Why, for beauty she had not her equal in our city, and see what she is now! See how pale and thin she has grown! What, in Heaven’s name, can be the cause of it?”

Then, after gazing at me for some time, in the most respectful and humble manner, evidently feeling the utmost sympathy for my sad condition, they went away, but not without imbuing me with the notion that I had excited their deepest pity. Others would ask:

“Ah, prithee tell me, has that lady been ill?” And they would answer, each in his own way: “Yea, certainly; and she shows it by the plainest tokens. She appears so changed, worn, and discolored that it is most pitiful to see her, for she must be thinking of her lost beauty.”

Others, manifestly, had a profounder knowledge of things, the which grieved and alarmed me. For, after much discourse, they said:

“The pallor of this lady gives a plain indication that she is in love. And what ailment tends so much to make a person wasted and decayed as a too ardent love? Truly, she is enamored of some one, and if so it be, very cruel must he be who is the occasion of such great dolor to such a lady as to cause her to become so wasted and faded.”

When these things befell, I say that I could not refrain from sighing bitterly, seeing that others had much more compassion for me than had he who, if reason and justice had prevailed, should have more pity for me than all the world beside; and, when I had made an end of sighing, I humbly prayed the gods, not aloud, but silently in my own heart, to grant them every blessing. I call to mind that among those who thus discoursed was a mighty concern for my honor, and that some undertook my defense saying:

“May God forbend that it should ever be believed of this lady that Love has troubled her! She has had fame for virtue passing that of any other lady in our city; nor, albeit we have often heard lovers talking of their love passages, have we ever heard of any such with regard to her; and, certainly, love is a passion that cannot be kept hidden long.”

“Alas! alas!” I said to myself, when I heard these words, “how far are they from the truth! They think I be not in love, because, forsooth, I do not foolishly disclose my love, so that it may be revealed by the eyes and lips of every young man I meet, as so many other ladies do!”

Often, too, would stop in front of me some young men of most illustrious birth, beautiful in shape and pleasant of aspect, who had

formerly tempted mine eyes in divers ways, tasking all their ingenuity and subtlety to win me to their affection. They, having now eyed me for a little space, and perceiving how much I was disfigured, were, haply, well content that I had not loved them, and passed on, saying:

“Quite ruined is the beauty of that lady.”

Why should I hide from you, O ladies, a thing the hearing whereof is so unpleasant for all women? It certainly was unpleasant for me. I say, then, that, although my Panfilo, for whose sake my beauty was supremely dear to me, was not present, yet did I hear of its loss with the most heartrending distress.

Furthermore, do I remember that it befell me, at one of such festivals as I have described, to be one of a company of ladies engaged in amorous discourse. Eagerly did I listen to descriptions of various other loves, and easily did I discover that, among all these loves, never had there been a love so fervent, so skilfully concealed, and accompanied by so many misfortunes as mine; albeit of happier and less honorable the number was very great. And so, in this wise, at one time, seeing, at another, hearing what was passing around me, I let the fleeting hours slip by.

After the ladies had rested for a time, and, being recovered from their fatigue, had again risen to take part in the dancing, to make me join in which many useless attempts were made, both they and the young men grew so absorbed in the amusement as to be oblivious of everything else, intent on this alone, some, perhaps, from a desire to show that they were proficient in the art, others, thereunto impelled by fiery Venus. So, I remained almost alone, and, as I sat, I contemplated, with scornful mind, the gestures, manners and proclivities of many of the ladies. And, certainly, it betided that I blamed some severely, although I should have extremely desired, if, indeed, it could have been possible, to do just the things they were doing, had my Panfilo been present; and this also, as often as it has recurred or recurs to my mind, has been and is the occasion to me of fresh sorrow; for, as God well knows, he does not merit the great love which I have borne toward him and bear still. But, after I had excessively wearied myself with looking on for a long time at

these dances, which, for other reasons, were a worry to my mind, and being moved by other cares withal, I rose from the prominent seat which I occupied, and, eager to give vent to my grief, I modestly retired to the most solitary spot I could find. There I shed many willing tears, which relieved me, and seemed a sort of recompense for the foolish inanities mine eyes had just beheld.

It often happened that (as was natural, considering the season) the extreme sultriness of the weather induced me and many other ladies to endeavor to counteract the effects of the heat by embarking on some exceeding swift boats, supplied with a great number of oars. And, in this wise, we plowed the sea-green billows, and, timing our minstrelsy to the beat of the oars, we sought every remotest rock, and every cavern that, made by nature's hand, wound its tortuous way beneath the mountain cliffs, for there we were sure to find grateful shade and cooling breezes. When we had reached the points we were in search of, and taken possession of the spots most fitting for our pleasure, we rambled about here and there, selecting one place and another; so that soon every tiny little rocklet and shorelet that afforded any protection against the solar rays, was crowded. Here could be seen in several parts tables spread with the fairest linen, and so expensively and sumptuously adorned and decorated, and so beautiful altogether, that the very sight of them was amply sufficient to awaken an appetite in those who had lost it! Here and there, we could discern some of our companions, gayly engaged with their morning repast—and, indeed, it was now about the hour for partaking of it—whereunto we were merrily invited by all whom we approached or passed. Then, when we had all feasted to our hearts' desire, amid every sort of pleasantry, accompanied by peals of laughter, and when, after the tables were removed, we had, as our custom was, joined in the mazy undulations of the dance, we leaped again into our barks, and rowed wherever our fancy led us.

But why should I fatigue myself and you with retailing all the particular delights whereof this place was the theater? I should never come to an end if I did. Let those who have understanding think for themselves how enchanting these must have been, even if they have

never been there themselves, and if they care to go there, at the proper season, they are likely enough to come on similar scenes of youthfulness and joy. Such is the nature of the place that the minds of those who come hither are candid and free, and there are so many and such great occasions for this, that it betides almost everyone who asks here a question to receive a true answer. I must confess that, when in these places, I wore an air of false gayety, so as not to dampen the enjoyment of my companions, albeit my soul, for all that, was still plunged in its former gloom.

Not only does our city of Naples, abounding in every sort of most joyous festival beyond all the other Italian cities, enliven its citizens with its wedding feasts and its baths and its charming beaches, but, rich also in many and divers sports, it diverts its folk, now with one, now with another. Among those, however, in which it shows itself forth most magnificent, are its frequent tourneys. It has been the custom from the times of old, when muddy winter has departed, and spring, with its flowers and fresh verdure, has restored to earth her decayed beauty, for our young nobles, inflamed by the genial season, and quicker than usual in revealing their desire, to invite, during these high celebrations, to the galleries of the Knights the noble ladies who assemble on these occasions, adorned with their most precious jewels. I do not believe those whose good fortune it was to behold the daughters-in-law of King Priam when, with the other Phrygian dames they met to greet their husbands' father with festal entertainment, ever contemplated a spectacle more radiant and imposing than that afforded by the wives and daughters of our city at all such pageants. I doubt not that if any stranger, of quick apprehension, should suddenly come upon the spectacle of our ladies assembled in one of our theaters, where each of them is sure to make such a display of her charms as is possible and seemly, he would, after considering their stately deportment, their superb costumes, and their more than regal ornaments, judge them not to be modern ladies, but rather some of those magnificent dames of old, returned for the nonce to the upper world. He would say to himself:

“Truly that lady resembles Semiramis. After examining her jewels, I should believe that other to be Cleopatra. The lady yonder, considering her ravishing beauty, might be Helen; and, looking at the movements and gestures of that other, I cannot see that she differs in aught from Dido.”

Here, among such a numerous and noble company, very few kept sitting, or were silent, or complained. But, while the old men stood up to look on, the dear youths took the delicate hands of their ladies, and, all the time dancing, sang, in their loudest voices, of their loves; and, in this wise, and with every manner of *divertissement* that could be invented, did they spend the warm part of the day. When the rays of the sun began to lose somewhat of their ardent heat, came thither the august princes of our Ausonian kingdom, garbed with the splendor which their magnificence demands. They, after they had for a while contemplated both the beauty of the ladies and their dancing with high approval, went away, attended by all the youth, both knights and squires. Then, after no long interval, they returned in state, each with a brilliant retinue, and attired in apparel altogether different from that which they first wore. Is there any tongue in the whole world so rich in splendid eloquence, so fruitful of polished phrase, as to be altogether capable of describing raiment so gorgeous, so elegant, and so variegated? No, not even the Grecian Homer, not even the Latin Virgil, albeit they of old depicted so many pageants and ceremonies of Greeks, Trojans and Italians in their verses. Then will I task all my ingenuity in order, slightly and in some small degree, to give some notion of this to those who have not been able to see it.

These princes rode on steeds so fleet in their course that no other animals could outstrip them in the race. And the youthfulness, and enchanting beauty, and the shining virtues of these our princes rendered the sight of them especially pleasing to the on-lookers. They were clad in purple and fine raiment, woven by Indian hands with devices of various colors intermingled with gold; and, in addition to this, their vesture was inwrought with pearls and other precious stones. Their steeds, too, were caparisoned in marvelous wise, with their fair manes hanging from their

shoulders, and their heads encircled with thin gold hoops or garlands of fresh flowers. Soon these noble youths, with an exceeding light shield in their left hand, and a lance in their right, hearkening to the quick sounds of the imperative trumpet, close together and with numerous followings, all in such apparel as I have described, begin to show forth their skill in sport in presence of the ladies, those winning most praise who careered around the ring, the points of their lances almost grazing the ground, and their bodies well covered by their shields, and their chargers handled with the most graceful dexterity. These, in joyous procession, advanced at a slow pace round the lists, two or three times, so as to exhibit their grace and dexterity to the spectators, and afterward began the tournament, erect in their stirrups, covered by their shields, with the points of their light spears almost grazing, yet not touching, the ground, they set out at full gallop, on coursers fleeter than any breeze. The air resounded with the tinklings of the numberless bells, the shouts of the multitude, the clangor of trumpets and clarions, and the whistling of the whips that fell on the shoulders of the noble horses and made them sweep along faster and faster. And not once, but many times did the loud applause of the spectators attest the interest they took in the gallant riders; and, indeed, they were all well worthy of it. How many ladies did I also perceive, fairly beside themselves with joy, for some had seen among these a husband, some a lover, some a near kinsman. And not only they, but strange ladies who were present were deeply absorbed in the sport. I alone, although I saw my husband there among the knights and many goodly kinsmen of mine with him, looked on in sadness, for I did not perceive Panfilo, and I could think of nothing but of how far he was from me!

When the festival had come to a close, and I had departed, being filled with wrath against the false shows of earth, I said:

“How blest is he who dwells in his solitary abode amid scenes of rural life, beneath the open canopy of heaven! The snares and pitfalls he prepares are only for simple birds or savage beasts. No cares ever trouble his soul, and if, perchance, exceeding fatigue disturbs his body, he flings himself incontinent on the cool grass, and there reposing,

recruits his weakened strength. Now, he reclines on the bank of some rapid stream, now, beneath the shade of some bosky grove, and listens to the warbling of the woodland songsters and to the trembling leaves which, set a-quiver by the zephyrs, adjust, as it were, their whispering notes to, the melodious sounds. Such a life thou shouldst have bestowed on me, O Fortune, a life compared to which all thy vaunted boons are full of cares and most pernicious. Of what profit to me, are lofty palaces and rich couches and princely blood, if my ever restless mind has to be constantly wandering to distant countries in search of Panfilo, and if it never allows these wearied limbs to rest? Oh, what a sweet and charming thing it is to stretch oneself on the grassy margin of some swift-flowing stream, and there on the soft turf, fearing no peril, to close the eyes in gentle slumbers, lulled by the river's dulcet, murmuring sounds! Such delights are freely granted to the poor rustic, and withheld from those who need them more, being spoiled by flattery or wearied by civic troubles or exhausted by the tumultuous disorder of a roystering family.

“The homely swain, when hunger haply goads him, satisfies it with apples gathered in his faithful woods; and the fresh herbs that spring spontaneous from the soil, and grow on little mounds, minister to his wants with savory food. Oh, how sweet it is for him, to quench his thirst from fount or neighboring stream, and drink the liquid from his hollowed hands! Oh, most unhappy ye, and vexed with anxious cares, who, make the world your idol! Ye know not how simple are the things that nature provides for your wholesome sustenance! We believe the wants of the body can be satisfied only by a multitude of various dishes, and do not perceive that, because of them, the humors of the body are oftener vitiated than corrected. We behold also goblets, wrought of gold and set with jewels, made ready for artificial beverages, which are often deadly poisons, and, if they be not poisons, at least those who drink them drink Venus surely. Sometimes, too, quarrels arise therefrom, violence results, and, by words and deeds, a wretched life or a shameful death is purchased. But the rustic is content with the innocent society of the Fauns and Satyrs, the Dryads, Naiads and Nymphs. He knows not

who Venus is, and naught of her double-faced son. If haply he has become acquainted with her, the form under which she shows herself to him is rough and uncouth, not comely at all. Would it had been God's pleasure that my acquaintance with her had been of a similar kind, and that the company that visited me had been also rough and homely! Then should I have been kept far from the incurable agony which I have to endure! Then would my soul, the guardian of my sacred reputation, care little, indeed, to behold those worldly shows, as unsubstantial as the fleeting wind, and, if I did behold them, no such pangs would follow the sight as those which now afflict me. What recks the rustic of lofty towers, of battlemented castles, of patrician houses, of delicate couches, of splendid attire, of swift-footed coursers, or of the numberless other things that rob us of the best part of our lives and are the source of our most anxious concern? He need not dread the attacks of wicked men, and can abide in parts remote and solitary without fear. He never dreams of seeking in palatial mansions a doubtful repose; all he craves is air and light, and heaven itself is the witness of his life. Oh, how badly known is such a life to-day, kept far away from each of us, as if it were an enemy! And yet it should be sought by all, being the most precious thing on earth! Certainly, I am quite positive that this was the manner of life in the Golden Age, which gave birth to men and gods at the same time. *Oimè!* sure I am that never was a mode of life freer from guilt and marked by more innocence and contentment than that which the first men adopted, and which is still adopted to-day by him who flees from cities and dwells in sylvan scenes.

“Would that God had placed me in such a world whereof the folk were content with little and frightened of nought. If the sole thing left me out of all my possessions was the non-possession of this torturing love, and the absence of these heartrending sighs, should I not have been far happier in such an age as I have depicted than I am in the present, though it be full of all sorts of delights, jewels, ornaments and festivals? *Oimè!* that the impious, accursed thirst for gain, headlong anger, and minds inflamed with wicked desires, should have shattered the first holy compacts—compacts so easy to keep—between nature and her children!

Came the hankering for lordship over others, sin most provocative of bloodshed, and so the weak became the prey of the strong. Came Sardanapalus, the first to render Venus soft and effeminate, and to endow Ceres and Bacchus with qualities unknown to them hitherto. Came pitiless Mars, with new arts of destruction and a thousand different forms of death; and so the entire earth was stained with blood, and the sea made red with gore.

“Then did foulest crimes enter every household, and there was no sort of wickedness of which an example could not be found: brother was slain by brother, father by son, son by father. The husband lay stretched in death, smitten by his merciless spouse, and often did unnatural mothers make away with the offspring of their wombs. Of the cruelty of stepmothers to their stepchildren I do not speak—that is made manifest every day. Then riches, pride, envy, avarice, luxury, and every other vice that can be named, except one, burst in upon the world like a flood; and after them rushed in the lord and leader of the aforesaid vices, dissolute Love, for whose sake numberless cities have fallen and been reduced to ashes; for whose sake numberless sanguinary battles have been waged; for whose sake nations are even now crushed by nations. Speak not of all its other evil effects, monstrous though they be; speak rather of those it has caused in me, for no more wonderful example of its insatiable cruelty can be found anywhere than that which it wreaks on me, compelling me to keep my mind fixed on it alone, and refusing to allow me to divert my thoughts to anything else.”

After meditating a long time in this wise, I had sometimes an idea that haply the things done by me were very grievous in the eyes of God; and while I so considered, the chastisements inflicted on me, though distressing beyond comparison, had the effect of somewhat alleviating my anguish, especially as the trespasses wrought by others, being so much greater than mine, made me seem almost innocent, while the punishment endured by the same was nothing contrasted with that which I had to endure. Moreover, seeing that I was not the first nor the only one to bear such things, I hoped to have more strength to sustain

the burden of my miseries, whereunto I prayed God to make an end, either by sending me death, or sending me back Panfilo.

The life, then, of which I now tell you, was the life that I led, and how little consolation I have found in it ye have heard.

I was sometimes stung to the heart by the questions of these women who encompassed me in church, questions I had to satisfy, or rather pretend to satisfy. One of them, especially, goaded me with some such words as these:

“O Fiammetta! thou hast no idea of the amazement thou dost excite in me, and in the others here present! We shall never get over it, for we are entirely ignorant of the cause that has so suddenly led thee to abandon thy splendid attire, thy precious jewels, and all the other things that so beseeem thy rank and youth. Thou art not so childish as not to know that thou shouldst not be dressed in this wise on such occasions. Such very modest raiment is by no means appropriate to our festivals. As thou seest, albeit we be, each of us, much older than thee, yet do we wear our finest attire and our most valuable ornaments, as, of a truth, thou shouldst also.”

To her and to the others who were eagerly awaiting my answer, I replied, meekly and humbly, as follows:

“Ladies, we go to church either for the purpose of pleasing God or of pleasing men. If we go to please God, all that is required of us is that our souls be adorned with virtue, and it little matters whether our bodies be clad in silk or sackcloth. If we come here to please men, as the greater part of them are blinded by false opinions, and judge of internal sentiment by outward show, I confess that the ornaments worn by you, and by me formerly, may be deemed necessary. But I no longer care for such matters. Nay, rather, grieving over my past vanities, and desirous to amend and sanctify my life in the eyes of God, while asking His pardon for past sins, I wish to render myself as despicable as I can in your eyes.”

And, when I had spoken, I could no longer restrain my tears, which gushed forth from my eyes and bathed my whole face; and I spoke, but voicelessly, within myself:

“O God, searcher of hearts, let not the untrue words I have just uttered be imputed to me as a sin, seeing that they were not uttered with intent to deceive, but rather because necessity constrained me to hide my anguish from those women; nay, impute it to me even as a merit, inasmuch as, instead of giving a wicked example to Thy creatures, I have given a good one. It is a most grievous punishment to me to have to tell a lie, and it is most distasteful to my soul to have to support it. But I cannot help this.”

Then the women chided me again, reproving me for my excessive tears, and saying:

“O Fiammetta, what kind of behavior is this? Dost thou despair of God’s mercy? Dost thou not believe that He is compassionate enough to forgive thee all thy little trespasses without so much weeping on thy part? By this that thou art doing thou wouldst seem to be seeking death rather than pardon. Rise! dry thy tears, and heed piously the sacrifice offered to Jove supreme by our priests.”

At these words I raised my head, after thrusting back my tears; but I did not turn and gaze around, as I was wont to do. Why should I care to do so now, when I knew that I should not see my Panfilo? And I no longer cared whether others were looking at me, or who were looking at me, or to read in their eyes the opinions the spectators had of me. On the contrary, altogether mindful of Him who gave His life for our salvation, I prayed most piteously for my Panfilo and for his return, using these words:

“O Almighty Ruler of the highest heavens and universal Umpire over the whole world, bring to an end my grievous woes, give me some relief from my heavy afflictions. Behold, no day is for me secure. The ending of one calamity is but the beginning of another. I, who lately declared myself happy, not knowing the misery in store for me, first confess that I have offended Thee, though unwittingly, in my youth, by excessive and vain adornment, albeit nature had already adorned me more than was my due. For this offense Thou hast, by way of a penance, subjected me to this ungovernable love which tortures me; Thou hast also, filled my mind, not used to such cares, with fresh anxieties, and to crown all, Thou

hast separated me from him whom I love more than myself, wherefore infinite perils have flown in upon my life. If the wretched are sometimes heard by Thee, lend Thy merciful ears to my prayers, and, without glancing at the manifold faults I have committed against Thee, graciously regard only my few good deeds, if any I have ever done, and, as a reward for these, deign to grant my humble requests: a very slight thing for Thee to do, but to me an occasion of exceeding content, if Thou doest it. I do not ask Thee to restore to me my Panfilo. *Oimè!* well I can discern that such prayer, in the eyes of Thee, O most righteous judge, would be unrighteous. But even Thy justice must move thee to prefer a lesser evil to a greater. It is manifest to Thee, from whom nothing is hidden, that it is altogether impossible for me to drive this exquisite love from my mind. Nothing can do so—not even those past calamities, especially those at the time of his departure, and afterward. These have been so numerous and so overwhelming that I have a thousand times called upon death to release me from them. But I have had always some slender hope that Thou mightest relent and take pity on me. Therefore, if the return of my tender lover is the lesser evil, return him, I beseech Thee, and give him back to me. Let living sinners, who may yet repent and know Thee, be dearer to Thee than dead sinners, who are without hope of redemption. Above all, decide to lose only a part, rather than the whole, of the creatures by Thee created. And, if this be too great a boon to be granted to me, at least grant me that boon which is the ultimate end of every misery; for if thou dost not, I, unable any longer to bear the crushing burden of my anguish, am resolved to seize upon it with mine own hands. May these my words reach Thy presence; but, if they cannot move Thee, or any other of the gods who hold supreme power over the celestial regions, yet shall I appeal to such of the deities as once dwelt on earth and experienced the same amorous fires which I experience now. Do ye receive my orisons, and present them to him who would not take them from me. So, when ye have obtained for me this grace, may I be able to live joyously; at first, for a time here below, and afterward yonder above with Thee, when has closed for me this earthly life. Then,

too, will it be a pleasure for me to show sinners that I, too, can pardon and help them.”

When these words were said, I laid odorous incense and goodly offerings on the altars, to the end that I might obtain the graces for which I asked in my prayers, and also that God might give health and happiness to my Panfilo. When the sacred ceremonies were concluded, I left with the other ladies, and returned to my gloomy palace.

Chapter VI

Wherein Madonna Fiammetta, having heard that Panfilo has not married, but is in love with another lady, and will not return, shows how, all her hopes being crushed, she resolves to kill herself.

As you must have clearly understood, most compassionate ladies, from the things mentioned before, my life has been, and still is, most luckless in the field of love. Yet, if the past be compared with what was to follow, those who will consider it with due seriousness must regard my life before the period I am about to describe as relatively happy. I shrink with terror from describing the pass to which love ultimately conducted me, and I was inclined to put off depicting it, both because I was ashamed of my madness, and because, even though I be inclined to dwell on things less grievous and avoid the thought of it, yet does the madness ever seem to return when I write. Still, now that I can no longer avoid the subject, I will try to arrange my thoughts in some sort of order and enter into such details as are necessary for a complete understanding of my case.

But do thou, O most holy Pity, soft tenant of the hearts of ladies, keep a tighter rein on their compassion than thou hast done until now, lest, indulging in it overmuch, they may be so blinded by their tears as not to be able to read that which I purpose setting down.

The sun had again returned to that part of the heavens once so badly scorched when his presumptuous son dared to guide the father's steeds; and I knew that just a year had elapsed since the time of my parting from Panfilo. Miserable as I felt, I had from long usance become somewhat accustomed to the endurance of my woes, and my grief was less immoderate than it was wont to be. So overwhelming were the

calamities I had suffered that I had concluded it to be impossible for any more to be added to these, when Fortune, not satisfied with the ills wherewith she had visited me, decided to prove that she had still more bitter poisons in store for me.

It betided that a most faithful servitor of our house had just returned from the country where Panfilo was now dwelling; he was by all our household, and especially by me, most graciously received. After he had related all his adventures, some of them prosperous and others the reverse, it chanced that he remembered something that had occurred in connection with Panfilo. Him he praised exceedingly, and spoke gratefully of the high honors which my lover had paid him. I was so delighted at listening to these praises that only the strong control exerted by my reason prevented me from running up and embracing the speaker, and putting further questions to him, and even revealing the affection I felt for my Panfilo. I learned a great deal about Panfilo's present situation, his health and well being, from the answers our servitor gave to the numerous inquiries made by the others. Then, with feigned carelessness and gayety, I asked what he was doing at present, and whether he had any intention of returning. To these my questions he thus replied:

"Madonna, why should Panfilo care to return now, considering how matters stand with him? The fairest damsel in all his country, a land, too, peculiarly abounding in beautiful women, is in love with him, nay, as I have heard, loves him to distraction. I have reason to believe that he also loves her passionately. Indeed, if he did not, I should regard him as little better than a madman, whereas I have hitherto always esteemed him to be exceeding wise."

When these words smote upon my heart, it experienced the same change that must have come upon C enone's, when, from the lofty summit of Mount Ida, whither she had betaken herself to watch for her lover's return, she beheld Paris coming with his Grecian mistress in the Trojan ship. I could hardly prevent the anguish of my soul from appearing on my face, albeit I yet managed to do so, and, with a false laugh, I said:

“Certainly, what you say is very true. This country should not be at all pleasing to him, seeing that it was not able to provide him with a sweetheart commensurate with his merit. If he have found such a one there, he acts wisely in staying with her. But tell me, how does his newly wedded wife endure this? Does it not anger her?”

To which he answered:

“He has no wife. It is true that, not very long ago, a lady took up her dwelling in his house; but it was not as his wife, but as the wife of his father.”

No sooner were these words uttered than it seemed to me as if the torture I had hitherto endured had left me, and another, infinitely more unendurable, had taken its place. I was straightway pierced with anguish and anger, and my affrighted spirit quivered in every part of my body. I felt that all my strength was forsaking me, and, summoning whatever calmness and resolution I possessed, I retired from the company with such decorum as might prevent them from seeing anything strange in my demeanor, and sought refuge in my chamber.

As soon as I was alone and safe from the presence of every human being, mine eyes, like unto two full-laden springs that overflow in some humid valley, shed such streams of bitter tears that it seemed as if they should never cease. I cried aloud: “Panfilo,! why hast thou betrayed me?” Then I threw myself upon my couch, or rather fell thereon, helpless and supine. Words failed me, being lost as it were in the course of their journey to my lips, and suddenly all strength was wrested from my tongue, as well as from my other members. Then I lay like one dead, and dead I was believed to be by those who first saw me, and who watched by my bedside for a very long period, without discovering any sign which would indicate that my wandering soul had returned to its seat. But, after a time, it recalled its scattered and vanishing forces, and again took up its abode in my suffering body, and the lost light of life came back to my eyes. Then, raising my head, I saw bending over me several ladies who had bathed me all over with precious liquids, and, after rendering me this compassionate service, they were still weeping; and I perceived near me also several other appliances, intended to minister to

my recovery. And, seeing these things and the tears of the ladies, I did not a little marvel.

When the power of speech was at length restored to me, I inquired what was the occasion of these things being there. Whereupon one of them made this answer to my question: "These things were brought here for the purpose of recalling thy soul which, we thought for a time, had forsaken thee altogether."

After heaving a bitter sigh, I said:

"Alas! ye imagine yourselves pitiful, and yet what a most cruel service is this ye have rendered me! Believing that you were conferring a benefit upon me, you have harmed me exceedingly, and that, too, contrary to my wishes; and the soul which was ready to forsake the most wretched body that mortal ever possessed, you have by main force kept in its tenement. *Oimè!* was ever anything desired with such eager longing as that which you have denied me! Just as I was about to be freed from all my tribulations, you stepped in and deprived me of the boon I craved above everything else in the world!"

The ladies endeavored to comfort and console me in divers ways, after I had spoken these words. Vain, indeed, were their attempts. Yet did I feign to be somewhat soothed by their sympathy, to the end that, having got rid of them, I might indulge my sorrow by myself without their interference.

When one of them had taken her leave, and I had dismissed the others, assuming for the occasion an almost gay expression of countenance, I remained alone with my old nurse and with the maid who was privy to all my misfortunes. They at once began to apply such cooling remedies for my sickness as must have cured me of it, if it had not been mortal. But I, having my mind wholly fixed upon the words I had heard, and straightway having become the enemy of one of you, O ladies, I know not of which, proceeded at once to nurture thoughts of the most baneful description; and the grief which I could not entirely keep within myself, I forced out of my gloomy breast with furious words, speaking in some such wise as follows:

“O most false-hearted of men! O foe to all tenderness and good faith! O Panfilo!—baser than the basest!—who, having forgotten me, dost now abide with a new love! Accursed be the day that I first saw thee! Accursed be the hour, the instant, when thou didst first please me! Accursed be that goddess who, by appearing to me in visible form at the very moment when I was firmly resolved to resist the temptation of loving thee, caused me by her deceiving words to alter my righteous purpose! But, of a truth, I do not believe that she was Venus. Nay rather, she must have been one of the Furies of hell, who assumed the form of the goddess to drive me wild with madness, just as she did erstwhile to the wretched Athamas. O most cruel youth, perniciously chosen by me as being the best among so many others who were noble, valiant, and handsome! Where are now those prayers wherewith thou hast so often tearfully entreated me, declaring frequently that only by my kindness could thy life be saved, and that when thou wert dead, as thou soon must be, thy death would lie at my hands? Where are now, O wretch, those lugubrious and weeping eyes? Where is now that love for me which thou didst so violently exhibit? Where are now the perilous and bitter hardships thou wert ready to undergo in my service? Where are thy sweet words? Are they all blotted out now from thy memory? Or hast thou been using them again to entrap in thy snares the lady thou hast just captured? Ah, accursed be that pity of mine which rescued that life of thine from death!—that life which, though it render the life of another woman blithe and merry, will surely conduct mine to a gloomy death. Now are the eyes, which in my presence shed so many tears, smiling and laughing for the delectation of the new love; the sweet words, and the fickle heart are now all for her. Where now, Panfilo, are the gods thou hast forsworn? Where the promised faith? Where the infinite tears, which I sometimes drank, believing they were shed in compassion for me, and unwitting that they were but the outward and most positive signs of thy treachery? All these things which thou didst steal from me when thou didst steal away from me thyself, thou hast now entrusted to the new charmer.

“*Oimè!* what affliction I endured when I heard that thou hadst been united with another lady by the chaste and holy rites of Juno! But, as I felt that the vows pledged to me must take precedence of all others, and even of these, I bore this, albeit for a time overcome by my righteous anger and grief; or, at least, the anguish I had endured at first gradually diminished. Now, indeed, that I know thee to have bound thyself to another by the very same ties whereby thou wert bound to me—how can I ever support such intolerable and heartrending pain? Now I know the true cause of thy absence and now, too, do I know my own artless simplicity, which induced me to believe that thou wouldst return to me, if it were in thy power to do so.

“Now, Panfilo, were such cunning wiles really needed to deceive me? Why didst thou swear the most solemn oaths and pledge thy most inviolate faith (inviolate, indeed!) if it was all the time thine intention to deceive me in this manner? Why didst thou not depart without bidding me farewell and without any promise to return? Hadst thou done so, I should doubtless have forever despaired of thy love, but I should at once have been aware of thy treachery, and either death or oblivion would have put an end to my torments, which thou, by holding vain hopes before mine eyes, hast wished to keep alive, and hast succeeded in keeping alive, to the end that my sufferings for thy sake might be prolonged as much as possible. But I have not deserved this at thy hands. *Oimè!* how sweet were those tears of thine to me once! Now that I know what they meant, they have, indeed, become most bitter. If Love has been such a tyrant to thee as he has been to me, was it not enough that thou shouldst have been captured by him once, without allowing thyself to be trapped by him a second time? But what is this I am saying? Thou hast never loved! Nay rather, it has always been a delight to thee to show thy scorn for women. If thou hadst been capable of loving, thou wouldst have been still mine. And to whom couldst thou ever have belonged that would love thee more than I? Whoever thou mayst be, O lady, who hast taken him from me, though thou art mine enemy, I feel that mine own very anguish compels me to feel compassion for thee. Be on thy guard against his guile and duplicity, since—and that thou surely

knowest—he who has once deceived, has lost the sense of honest shame, and will continue to deceive ever afterward without having a consciousness of his guilt.

“How many prayers, how many offerings, O most base-hearted youth, have I brought to the altars of the gods for thy health and safety, for thee, in fine, who, all the time, wert planning to abandon me and give thyself to another! O ye gods! ye have, indeed, returned a favorable answer to my prayers, but for the profit of another woman! I have had the torture and the anguish; another is to have the happiness! Tell me, thou recreant, was not my form beautiful enough to content thee, and was not my noble birth at least equal to thine? Certainly it was, and much more than that, did I ever refuse thee a share of my wealth, or ask for a portion of thine? Certainly not. Has any other man except thee been loved by me, either in word, deed or appearance? None! And this thou wilt acknowledge, unless this new love of thine has entirely deprived thee of truthfulness. Has any fault of mine, then, has any just cause, or any greater loveliness, or more ardent love, bereft me of thee and bestowed thee on another? Certainly not. And let the gods be my witnesses that the only fault I ever have committed in thy regard has been in loving thee overmuch. Thou knowest whether this deserves the treachery which thou hast plotted against me. O ye gods! righteous avengers of the crimes of mortals! I call upon ye to inflict on him a punishment which shall not be unjust. I neither desire nor seek his death, which he has already escaped through my intervention, albeit he wishes mine; nor other harm do I wish him than this: if he loves his new sweetheart as I love him, may she betray him and give herself to another, as he has betrayed me; and may her desertion have the effect of forcing him to lead such a life as he has now forced me to lead.”

I then flung myself back on my bed, writhing and tossing about in unutterable agitation and ungovernable frenzy.

The whole of that day was passed in a state of excitement and paroxysm, varied by the utterance of such wild words as those above. When night had come—night more unpropitious than day to every sorrow, for darkness is more in harmony with misery than light—and I

lay beside my dear husband, I remained awake, indulging silently in my dolorous thoughts, turning over in my mind the days that were no more, both those that had been pleasant and those that had been painful. Above all, the thought that Panfilo was lost to me, because of this new love of his, increased my anguish to such a height that I could no longer curb it, and it found a vent in most lamentable moans and exclamations, albeit I succeeded in concealing the occasion of my woe. My weeping grew so loud that at length my husband, who had been wrapped in the profoundest slumber, awoke, and turning to me all bathed in tears, and taking me in his arms, he thus addressed me, in most compassionate and loving tones:

“Oh. sweetest soul of my soul, what cause leads thee to weep so inconsolably in the quiet night? I beseech thee to tell me why thou hast been so dejected and woebegone for such a length of time. Nothing that disquiets thee should be hidden from me. Is it that thy heart craves for something which I can procure for thee, and which I yet have not given thee, although thou hast asked for it? Knowest thou not that thou art my sole comfort and consolation, the only good that I prize? Knowest thou not that I love thee above all things else in the world? Of this thou art assured, not by one single proof, but by many. Why, then, dost thou weep? Why art thou afflicted with such extreme anguish? Do I not seem to thee to be in every way worthy of thy noble race? Or have I committed any offense against thee for which I am bound to make amends? Tell me! speak! reveal thy desire! thy every wish shall be fulfilled, if only the fulfilment be within my power. The change which I have witnessed in thy appearance, thy dress, and thy entire deportment, has for many months rendered my life utterly wretched; but never yet hast thou seemed to me so wasted, so broken hearted and so wholly altered as thou hast to-day. I was wont to think that bodily weakness was the reason of thy pallor; but now I am well aware that it is mental anguish that has brought thee to the condition in which I now behold thee. Why, then, shouldst thou not disclose to thy husband the source of the ills that trouble thee?”

Whereunto I, taking counsel with my sex's duplicity, resolved to answer by a lie, although lying was once an art entirely foreign to me:

"Husband, dearer to me than all the world beside, I lack nothing which thou couldst bestow on me, and I know that thou art in every way worthy of me, and that beyond any doubt. That which has reduced me to this state of sadness, both before and now, is the death of my beloved brother, of which thou art well aware. This it is that forces the tears from mine eyes every time his melancholy fate recurs to my memory. And certainly I do not weep so much because of his death, for I well know that to death we must all come at last, as because of the manner of it, which, as thou wittest, was most unfortunate and shameful. The things, too, which happened afterward were calculated to increase my sorrow. I cannot for a moment close my sad eyes in sleep that he does not appear unto me with features of ghastly pallor and with raiment all covered with blood, while, at the same time, he points to his hideous wounds. just now, when thou didst hear me weeping, he showed himself to me in my sleep, with a countenance so utterly weary and frightful, and looking so paralyzed with terror, that it was no wonder he could hardly utter the words he wished to speak. After a time, but only with the greatest effort, he said: 'O dearest sister, try to rid me of this shame, which causes me to wander dolefully among the other spirits with disturbed mind and downcast eyes.' Then, albeit I derived some consolation from seeing him, wretched though he was, I was so overcome with grief on account of his apparel and of his melancholy words that I was straightway aroused, and sleep fled from me. Afterward followed those tears—a tribute due from sisterly affection—which obtained thy loving and most soothing commiseration and sympathy. And well the gods understand that were arms suited to my woman's hands, I would have avenged him long before to-day, and enabled him to move among the other spirits with lofty brow. Now thou knowest, beloved husband, that not without reason am I depressed and unhappy."

Oh, what compassionate words did he thereupon employ to, mitigate a feigned sorrow, which, indeed, had once existed, but had been long allayed! What ingenious arguments did he use to engage me to moderate

my anguish! True and sincere arguments they were, forming a great contrast to my lies! When he believed he had somewhat consoled me, he again fell into a deep sleep; and I, affected by his exceeding pity for me, and weeping from still more intense desperation, resumed again the dismal discourse which I had before begun to utter within my heart, saying:

“O ye most cruel caverns that are the lairs of savage beasts! O Hell, thou noxious prison decreed before all time to be the eternal abode of the wicked! If there be any other place of torment hidden within the bowels of the earth, do thou seize me, the guilty one, and draw me down to the tortures I have deserved! O Jove supreme! whose wrath I have justly provoked, hurl thy thunderbolts against me with thine own unerring hand! O sacred Juno, whose most holy laws, I, vilest of women, have most foully violated, avenge thyself on my head! O ye Caucasian rocs, tear to pieces this wretched body! O ye swift winged birds of prey, and ye most ferocious beasts, devour me! O ye fleet-footed steeds that mangled the body of the innocent Hippolytus, come and tear me, sinfulest of women, into four quarters; and do thou, too-merciful spouse, plunge thy sword into this guilty bosom, and chase from it the sinful soul that has so long deceived thee. Let no pity, no mercy, be shown to me, who have preferred the faith of a stranger to the sanctity of the marriage tie. O thou wretch, depraved beyond all other women, and deserving of greater punishment than the most infamous of thy sex, what fury blinded thy chaste eyes on the day when Panfilo pleased thee? Where didst thou abandon the piety due to the holy laws of wedlock? Where didst thou fling aside chastity, that supreme crown of womanly honor, when thou didst forsake thy husband for Panfilo? Where is now the almost reverential affection which thou didst expect from the beloved youth? Where is the consolation in thy misery to which thou hadst such a claim? He lets the time slip by gayly in the society of another, and cares not for thee. And this is what should deservedly and reasonably happen to every woman who prefers to a lawful love an unlawful passion. Thy husband who, more than anybody else in the world, ought to harbor malice in thy regard, does his very best to comfort thee, and he who

ought to comfort thee heaps scorn upon thy head. Is not this husband of mine quite as handsome as Panfilo? Certainly he is. In virtue and nobility, and in every other distinguished quality, is he not far superior to Panfilo? Is there anyone on earth that doubts this? Then, why didst thou forsake him for another? What blindness, what heedlessness, what sin induced thee to commit such a folly? That is a thing of which I am wholly ignorant. The only reason I can discover is that we are wont to esteem whatever we can obtain easily and freely as of no account, although in reality it is most precious; while whatever we have the greatest trouble in getting, we reckon most precious, although in reality it is most vile. The excessive fondness of my husband for me, to which I sometimes refused to respond, did not give me the pleasure it should have given, and for this do I now bitterly lament.

“I should have gathered strength to resist Panfilo from the vision the gods showed me during the night and morning which preceded my ruin. Now that I cannot depart from loving, although I wish to do so, I know of what nature was the serpent that pierced me under the left breast, and then departed full of my blood; and, similarly, I see what the garland which fell from my unfortunate head was intended to signify; but too late has this warning reached me. The gods, whose wrath I must evidently have incurred, repented them of the warnings they had given me in visions, and therefore deprived me of the power of interpreting the signs they had shown me. In this wise, did Apollo, after he had conferred on his beloved Cassandra the gift of prophecy, deprive it of all value by attaching to it the condition that her predictions should never be believed. Wherefore it is not without reasonable cause that I have been foredoomed to misery, and destined to consume my life therein.”

In such complaints, then, did I pass the night, tossing about on my bed in restless agitation, unable to sleep; for even when sleep did enter my weary brain, its efforts to remain there were so feeble that every slightest change in my position expelled it.

When morning had dawned, my faithful nurse, from whom no part of my misfortunes was hidden, inasmuch as she had been the first to gather from the expression of my countenance the fact that love had stricken

me, and from it had predicted my future misery, entered my chamber as soon as she was aware that my husband had left it. She had been present when the news of Panfilo's love for another lady was imparted to me, and, being in great alarm about me, she was eager to render me whatever service was in her power. Seeing me lying almost dead from the anguish of the past night, she began with divers words to try to alleviate the sorrows that were maddening me, and, raising me with her arms, she began wiping away the tears from my wretched face with her trembling hand; and from time to time she spake such words as these:

“Sweet lady, thy woes afflict me beyond measure, and would afflict me more grievously still, if I had not erstwhile forewarned thee of what was sure to happen. But, thou, being self-willed rather than wise, didst spurn my counsels and pursue thine own pleasures, wherefore with sorrow do I perceive that thou hast come to the end to which such deeds as thine always bring the doer. But since we can all, provided we are willing, and as long as we are in this life, abandon the path of evil and return to the path of virtue, it is my fondest hope that thou wilt clear thine eyes of the darkness wherewith this foul tyrant has covered them, and let the bright light of truth shine upon them. How base he is, the brief delights and the long tortures, for which thou hast been, and art, indebted to him, must surely show thee. Thou hast loved, moved thereunto by thy will rather than by thy reason, as was natural in so young a woman; and, having loved, thou hast enjoyed that happiness which all who love desire from love. How brief is that delight thou well knowest; and more of that delight than thou hast had, thou canst not have nor desire to have.

“Even if thy Panfilo returned to thine arms, thou wouldst have the wonted delight no more. Love is inflamed by novelty, and, because a thing is new, it is believed to contain some hidden good, which, haply, it does not, and they who hoped for this and are disappointed soon become disgusted; but the things which are not hidden and are familiarly known are usually desired with more sobriety and moderation. But thou hast acted in quite a different fashion, being hurried away by thy ungoverned fancy and altogether bent on thine own destruction. Discreet

persons who happen to find themselves in places full of peril and difficulty, as soon as they perceive the dangers by which they are surrounded, at once turn back, not foolishly thinking that, as they have lost so much time in coming so far, they ought to go farther, but rather feeling that, by going farther, they surely incur the risk of death. Do thou, therefore, imitate the example I have set before thee; show more self-restraint than thou art wont to exhibit, and place thy reason above thy will. Free thyself from the danger and the anguish into which thou hast allowed thyself to be hurled, and prove that thou hast some wisdom. Fortune has been very gracious to thee, if thou but well consider the matter: she has not closed the path of retreat behind thee, so that thou canst easily return along the road which thou hast trodden until now, and be again the same Fiammetta thou wert wont to be. Thy reputation is untouched, and, inasmuch as anything thou mayest have done is unknown to the people, it has suffered no tainture in their minds. And this is fortunate, for the loss of reputation causes many young women to fall into the lowest depths of infamy. Do not thou advance any farther on this path, lest thou lose that which Fortune has reserved for thee. Try to comfort thyself with the thought that thou hast never seen Panfilo, or that thy husband is Panfilo. Fancy can adapt itself to any purpose, and a good imagination can be so, used as to effect wonders. This alone can restore thy cheerfulness, a thing which thou shouldst desire exceedingly if thy present anguish harms thee as much as all thy deeds and words show that it does."

To such phrases, or, at least, to phrases resembling them, did I listen, not once, but frequently, giving them my grave and earnest attention, and, albeit they troubled me much, yet did I know them to be, true; but still my badly disposed mind derived little profit from them. Indeed, after a time, I began tossing about in violent excitement, and it happened at last that I worked myself up to a state of furious irritation and, careless of the presence of my nurse, and, in a hoarse and raging voice (that most unseemly thing when it comes from a woman) which was frequently interrupted by floods of bitter tears, I said:

“Ye Furies of hell, Tisiphone, Megæra, Alecto! ye who pierce the souls of the sorrowful with your secret stings! make straight your appalling locks till every hair stands on end! To your ferocious serpents add new terrors! Then fly swiftly to the foul chamber of that shameless woman; light the abominable torches that shall witness her union with my stolen lover, wave them above the enamored pair as a sign of baneful augury to their most abominable loves! And all ye other denizens of the sunless abodes of Dis, and all ye gods of the immortal Stygian realm, be present there, and with your horrid moans strike terror into the breasts of these traitors! And thou, abhorred Owl, shriek thy bitterest cry above the ill omened roof! And ye, O Harpies, threaten them with future harm! Shades of the nether world, eternal Chaos, and Darkness, everlasting foes of light, do ye all seize on the accursed house, and let not their guilty eyes have comfort of the light of day. Ye wreak vengeance on the crimes ye hate. Let therefore this hatred of yours enter their minds; inspire them with mutual dislike, and engender between them relentless war!”

After this I heaved many bitter sighs, and, in a broken voice, I continued:

“O most iniquitous woman, whosoever thou may’st be, for to me thou art unknown, thou dost now possess the lover for whom I have so long waited, and I pine away in misery far apart from him. Thou holdest fast the guerdon of my toil, and I remain with empty hands, robbed of the fruit of all my prayers. I have addressed all the orisons and borne all the incense to the altars of the gods for the prosperity of him whom thou hast stealthily torn from me, and those prayers and this incense were graciously received by them, but for thy benefit. Now, I do not at all know by what art thou hast expelled me from his heart and taken thy place therein; but I know that so it is. May the time come when thou shalt be as satisfied with thy work as I am now! And, should it be difficult for him to fall in love with a third woman, may the gods divide him from thee in the manner in which they divided the judge of Mount Ida from his Grecian dame, or the youth of Abydos from lamenting Hero, or the

wretched sons of Æolus from their loves; and may their harshest judgment fall on thee, while he remains safe!

“O vilest of women, thou shouldst have known, when thou didst gaze on his face, that he belonged to another. If thou didst know this—and sure I am thou didst—what wickedness was thine to take for thyself that which was another’s? Certainly thou didst this with hostile intent; of that I am assured. Therefore, will I always pursue thee as my enemy and the purloiner of that which is mine. And I shall always, as long as I live, fondly entertain the hope of thy death. I shall always pray that thine be not an ordinary death; but rather, that thou mayest be, like a stone from a sling, hurled among thine enemies, and that neither sepulture nor funeral pyre be granted to thy mangled corpse, but that, rent and torn, it may satiate the greedy dogs. I pray that, when they have consumed thy soft flesh, they may fight ravenously for thy bones, tearing them from one another and gnawing them, thus demonstrating that, just as they rob one another, so thou, too, didst love to rob others when thou wert alive. No day, no hour, no moment, shall pass without my lips uttering a curse on thee; and to this there will never be an end. Sooner shall the heavenly Bear plunge into the Ocean, sooner shall the ravening waves of Sicilian Charybdis be still, and the dogs of Scylla be silent; and ripe corn spring from the Ionian sea, and dusky night give forth light out of her darkness, and water and fire, and death and life, and the sea and the winds, dwell together in most harmonious concord. So long as the Ganges is warm and the Ister cold, so long as the hills bear oaks and the meadows supply soft pasturage, shall my warfare with thee continue. Nor shall death end the conflict, for I will pursue thee among the spirits and task all my ingenuity to inflict on thee all the injuries and all the insults that lie within my power. If, haply, thou shouldst survive me, no matter what be the manner of my death, and no matter whither my miserable spirit may have taken flight, I shall make use of my strongest efforts to release it, so that it may enter into thee and drive thee raging mad, as happened to the virgins who were filled with the spirit of Apollo. Or thou wilt see me suddenly appear in thy presence and watch thee in such wise that thou wilt be stricken with horror. I will

often also appear to thee in most appalling dreams during the silent night; and, in short, whatever thou mayest be doing, thou canst not avoid seeing me pass before thine eyes. I will not leave thee a moment's quiet, wherever thou art, ever complaining of the bitter wrong thou hast done me. Thus, while thou livest, thou shalt always be made wretched by me, stung as it were by one of the Furies; and when thou art dead, I will be the occasion to thee of pangs more grievous still.

“*Oimè!* wretched creature that I am! of what avail are my words? I only threaten thee, while thou dost really injure me, and, as long as thou hast my lover in thy power, thou carest as little for my threats as does the most puissant monarch for those of his lowliest serf. Would that I had the genius of Dædalus, or the chariot of Medea, so that either by fabricating wings and fitting them to my shoulders, or by being borne rapidly through the air as she was, I might straightway find myself at the spot where thou dost hide thy theft! Oh, what bitter and terrible words should I hurl at the traitor youth and at thee, stealer of another's property! How my menacing and fear-inspiring face would appal ye! With what tremendous insults should I revile your deeds! With what exceeding shame should I fill ye for the sins committed both by thee and by him! Then, without any restraint or delay, would I proceed with my vengeance, O basest of women, tearing out thy hair in handfuls and mangling thy false face, dragging thee to and fro in thy lover's presence until I had satiated my anger! Nor should this suffice: I would rend thy garments into rags. Nor should this suffice: I would so plow thy pleasing countenance with my sharp nails that it should ever remain a testimony of my revenge to his false eyes. And thy tender body would I lacerate all over with my hungry teeth, and, leaving it to be healed by him who flatters thee, return to my sad dwelling.”

While I was hissing out these words, with gleaming eyes, through my clenched teeth, with my fists doubled, as if ready to strike, it almost seemed to me that I had executed a part of the longed-for revenge. But my old nurse, shedding many tears, said:

“O daughter, inasmuch as thou knowest the savage tyranny of that god who troubles thee, restrain thyself and moderate thy sorrow. And if

the pity thou owest to thyself does not move thee, let a care for thine own honor move thee, which, because of thy lightness and inconstancy, may receive a fresh stain, and so new shame be added to the old fault. At least, hold thy peace, lest, haply, thy husband learn of those things, and have a twofold reason to complain of thy misconduct."

Then, being thus put in mind of my betrayed spouse, and penetrated with a new affection for him, I wept more unrestrainedly than ever; and, revolving in my mind the violated faith and the badly kept laws, I thus addressed my nurse:

"O most faithful companion of my woes, of little can my husband complain. He who was the occasion of my sinfulness has been the most harsh cleanser of the same: I have received, and am receiving, the reward I deserve. No more terrible punishment can my husband inflict on me than that which I have suffered from my lover. Death alone is the sole punishment—if death be really as painful as it is said to be—which my husband could add to the chastisements I already endure. Let him come, then, and give me death. It will not be for me a punishment; nay rather, it will be a joy, because for it I yearn, and it will be more pleasing to me if it be inflicted by his hand than by mine own. But if he refuse to grant it, or if it does not come of its own accord, then have I sufficient ingenuity to find it for myself, seeing that I hope for it as the sole end of my every sorrow. Hell, the extremest infliction reserved for the miserable, has no tortures, even in its most fiery depths, that can compare with mine. Tityus is held up as an example of the severest punishment by the ancient authors, who tell us that his liver is always preyed upon by vultures, and that it grows again as fast as it is devoured. And certainly I do not esteem such a punishment as by any means slight; but it is slight if compared with mine. The vultures indeed tore that giant's liver, but a hundred thousand cares are constantly rending my heart asunder more ravenously than could the beak of any bird. Tantalus, they also tell us, is always parched with thirst and tortured with hunger, albeit he stands in the midst of water, and most delicious fruits are within his reach. Certainly I endure quite as frightful pangs as he, for I live in the midst of every sort of worldly delights, yet,

albeit I desire my lover with most violent longing, can I not have him, and the punishment I suffer is as great as those of Tantalus. Yea, greater: he has hopes that he may, sometime or other, quaff the neighboring waves or lay hold of the apples. But I have not even hope, and now altogether despair of that which might have been my consolation.

“But why should I weary myself with relating, one by one, all the other chastisements of hell, since the punishment I suffer is greater than them all jointly or separately? And, even if my anguish were not greater than theirs, yet the very necessity of concealing my sorrows, or, at least, the occasion of them. while they are at liberty to manifest theirs by loud shrieks and by gestures expressive of their pangs, would suffice to demonstrate that my sufferings must be deemed more immeasurable than theirs. *Oimè!* how infinitely more fiercely does a fire burn that is confined within a narrow space than that which has ample room for the spread of its flames! And how much more grievous and woful a thing it is not to be able to divulge one’s sorrows and spread abroad the cause of one’s anguish, but rather to be forced by a sense of seemliness to hide it deep down in the heart and mask its existence under the cheerful expression of the face! Therefore, death would not be a pain to me, but rather a release from pain. Let my beloved husband, then, come, and at the same moment avenge himself and relieve me from misery. Let him plunge his dagger into this wretched breast, and set free the joyless soul. Let him force out from my bosom both my love and its chastisement with the copious effusion of my blood; and, as the iniquity which I have committed deserves, let him tear to pieces that vile heart which has betrayed him and welcomed his enemy.”

Thereafter, when my old nurse perceived that I had made an end of speaking and was now bathed in tears, she, in a low voice, began as follows:

“O dear daughter, what things are these that thou utterest? Thy words are foolish, and more foolish still is thy meaning. I have grown very old in this world and have seen many things, and doubtless I have been a witness to the loves of many ladies; and, albeit I do not presume to rank myself with ladies like thee, nevertheless, I have not escaped

from the poison of love in my day; for it is as hurtful to humble folk as it is to the powerful, and sometimes much more so, inasmuch as to the poor the road to happiness is often closed, while to those who possess riches it is always open. Nor have I ever heard or felt that that which thou speakest of as being almost impossible, because it has been so disastrous to thee, is so hard to be borne as thou claimest. Thy anguish, great as it may be, is not so great that thou shouldst waste away on account of it as thou art doing or shouldst be forced by it to seek death, upon whom thou callest, being more wrathful than well advised. Well am I aware that the madness which is spurred on by fiery anger is blind, and reckes not to hide itself; neither does it endure any restraint, nor does it fear death; on the contrary, rushing forward of its own accord, it hastens to meet the deadly points of the sharpest swords. If it should allow itself to be somewhat chilled, I doubt not but the part of the soul which had been cooled would begin at once to perceive the folly of such extravagance. Therefore, my daughter, resist its grievous assaults, pay some little heed to my words, and fortify thy spirits with the examples I have held up before thee. Thou complainest (if I have well gathered the meaning of thy words) of the beloved youth who has parted from thee, of his broken pledges, of his new love, and of his new lady, and, in thy complaint, thou declarest that no punishment ever endured is equal to thine. Well, certainly, if thou art as wise as I wish thee to be, thou wilt take a useful and effective medicine for all these things; that is, if thou but give attention to what I say. The youth whom thou lovest should doubtless, according to the laws of love, love thee as thou lovest him; if he does not do so, he does ill. But there is no force which can constrain him to do so. Everyone can use the gift of his own liberty as it likes him. If thou love him so passionately that the loss of his love afflicts thee with intolerable anguish, that is not his fault, nor canst thou justly complain of him because of that: thou thyself art the chiefest cause of thine own anguish. Although Love be a most puissant lord, and his power inexpressibly great, yet, was he not, therefore, able to thrust this young man into thy heart against thy will. The idle bent of thy mind and thy predisposition to love him were the beginning of thy folly, and if thou

hadst stoutly resisted then, all this would not have happened, and thou wouldst have now been free and able to scorn him and everyone else, just as he, as thou sayest, now scorns thee, no longer caring for thee. When thou didst surrender thy liberty to him, it may have been needful for thee to regulate thine actions according to his good pleasure; it is his good pleasure now to remain far apart from thee, let it be thine to remain far apart from him without disturbing thyself. If he pledged thee his faith with tears, and swore to return, he did not do anything new or strange, but did what lovers have been wont to do since time began: such customs are those which are most used in the court of thy god. But if he has not kept his promise to thee, no judge will ever be found deciding that in this he has done wrong, nor will anyone ever be discovered who can say: 'He did ill.' He is not the first who has done such things, nor art thou the first to whom such things have happened.

"Furthermore, let us suppose for a moment that the gentle lady has caught him in her net by means of her words and acts. To-day it is the custom of the world that everyone should look out for his or her own advantage, and that all, without any concern for others, should take their pleasure wherever they find it, if they can. The good lady, haply not less wise than thee in matters of love, has decided to appropriate him to, herself. And what hinders thee from doing the like with some one else? Such a thing I, indeed, by no means approve. But yet, if thou canst not help thyself, and if thou art constrained to follow love elsewhere, because otherwise thou canst not redeem thy liberty from him, although thou wishest to do so, then there are numberless youths in this city, in every way superior to him, who would, as I believe, gladly become thy subjects. The delight thou wilt take in such noble persons will banish him from thy mind, just as, perhaps, the delight he takes in the new lady has banished thee from his. Abandon, then, the sorrows which thou hast of thine own will chosen, and live cheerfully, trusting to the gods. It has often happened that when persons supposed they were farthest removed from happiness they have at that very moment unthinkingly entered upon it. Many a bark that has sailed triumphantly through the deep seas has been wrecked at the very mouth of a secure haven; and many

another, which had altogether despaired of safety, has found itself at last riding unharmed in some land-locked port. Many a tree have I seen smitten by the flaming bolt of Jove; yet, after a few days, it was crowned with verdant foliage; and I have seen others, which, albeit tended with the greatest care, withered away from some unknown accident. Fortune has various methods of action; and, just as she has been the cause of thine anguish, so, if thou only feedest thy soul with hope, she will be the cause of thy joy."

Not once, but several times, did my sage nurse endeavor to persuade me with arguments like these, believing that she might in this wise chase away from me the pangs and the anxieties which, as I well knew, death alone could put an end to. But her words produced little fruit, or rather none at all. My mind was occupied with other things, and the greater part of her reasonings was lost in the air.

Daily did my misfortunes fill more and more my doleful soul, so that often, hiding my face with my arms, I lay supine upon my luxurious couch, and revolved divers and most important matters in my mind.

I am about to relate things so frightful that it would seem impossible for a woman even to think of them, if things still more frightful had not only been said but done in the past. I, feeling that my heart was overcome by unutterable sorrow, and being driven to desperation by the thought that my lover was so far away from me, spake to myself as follows:

"Lo, the same cause which Sidonian Dido, had for abandoning the world, Panfilo has given me, yea, even a cause far worse. It is his pleasure that I should forsake my country and seek a new region; and, as I am subject to him, I will do that which it is his pleasure I should do; and, at one and the same moment, I shall satisfy my love, atone for my guilt, and make reparation to my betrayed husband, in a manner befitting my dignity. And, if the spirits released from their corporeal prison have any freedom in their new world, I will rejoin him without delay, and where my body cannot be, my soul shall be instead. I will die. And, as no other hand would be so cruel as to execute the punishment I have merited, it is right and proper that I myself should execute it on

myself. I will, therefore, lay hold of death without delay; and, albeit the thought of it is most gloomy, yet do I expect more pleasure from it than I have found in life."

When I was finally fixed in my resolve, I deliberated within my own mind on the thousand different ways in which I might escape from life, and which one of them I should select. The first thought that occurred to me was to use the sword or dagger; they had helped many out of existence, and I reflected that it was by one of such weapons Dido sought her release. After this, I recollected the deaths of Byblis and Amata, and either mode of dying at first appealed to me as a suitable way of ending my life. But I was more tender of my reputation than I was of myself, and, having less fear of death than of the manner of dying, I concluded that the one mode was full of infamy, and the other excessively cruel, and so I resolved to reject both.

Then I fancied I should like to do as the people of Saguntum and of Abydos did. The former because, they feared Hannibal, and the latter because, they feared Philip of Macedon, flung all their possessions and themselves into the flames. But, seeing that if I did this, I should inflict a most serious loss upon my dear husband, who was guiltless of my misfortunes, I discarded this method of dying, as I had the two preceding ones. Came to my mind subsequently the poisonous juices which signalized the last day of Socrates, Sophonisba, and Hannibal, as well as of many other princes. But, seeing that it would take considerable time to gather the plants that produced them, and fearing that my purpose might change in the mean while, I rejected that plan also.

Next, I thought of swallowing live coals, like Portia; but, dreading that I could not do so unseen, I laid aside this idea likewise. Came to my mind then the deaths of Ino and Melicertes, and, similarly, that of Erisichthon. But the necessity of going such a long way in search of the one death, and the delay that must ensue before I achieved the other, made me pause; besides, I imagined in the latter case that it must be frightfully painful to have to feed for such a length of time on one's own body. After I had discussed within my own mind all these different modes of death, I bethought me of that of Perdix, who fell from the

loftiest tower in Crete. This manner of death pleased me best of all, for not only would my destruction be infallibly sure, but it would not entail any disgrace or infamy, and I said:

“I shall fling myself from the topmost tower of my palace; my body will be broken into a hundred pieces; then I shall surrender my unhappy soul to the gloomy gods of the under-world. Nor will there be anyone who shall think that rage or madness was the occasion of my death; rather will everyone be inclined to attribute it to an unlucky accident; all the people will curse Fortune, and shed piteous tears because of my fate.”

This resolution was firmly fixed in my mind, and it gratified me exceedingly to have determined to follow it, for I thought very great compassion would be felt for me, albeit I acted so inhumanly against myself.

My purpose was now unalterable, and I merely awaited the proper time for fulfilling it, when suddenly a chill seized on my bones, piercing each one of them, and making me tremble all over; and with the chill came these words, which I found myself uttering:

“Wretch, what art thou thinking of doing? Dost thou wish, through spite and anger, to become a thing of no account? Why, even if thou wert likely to die because of some serious illness, shouldst thou not make every effort to live, so that thou mightest have, at least, a chance of seeing Panfilo again before death? Knowest thou not that, being dead, thou, most assuredly, canst never see him? Will no affection toward thee on his part be able to effect anything? What availed it to the too impatient Phyllis the tardy return of Demophoön? She, covered with blossoms, felt his approach without any delight; yet, if she had but waited, a woman, and not a tree, would have received him. Live, therefore; he will return here, some time or other. Whether he return as thy lover or thy enemy, still thou wilt love him; haply, too, thou mayest be able to see him and to force him to feel some compassion for thine anguish. He is not made of oak, or hewn out of hard rock; he does not drink the milk of tigers or of other beasts more savage still. He has not a heart of adamant or of steel, and cannot be merciless or indifferent to thy

woes. If he be not overcome with pity when he beholdeth thee, then will it be more lawful for thee to die. Thou hast now endured thy dismal life for more than a year; surely thou canst endure it for more than another. At no time can death be lacking to those who wish it. It will reach thee much faster and with better augury than if it happened now; and thou wilt be able to depart with the hope that he—albeit to thee a most cruel enemy—may shed a few tears over thy lifeless body. Abandon, then, thy suddenly formed design; since they who do things in haste are often fain to rue their folly. This is a deed that cannot be followed by repentance; and even if it were followed by repentance, it would be out of thy power to undo what thou hadst done!

Although my mind was occupied by such thoughts yet was it long in suspense as to whether I should or should not execute my hasty resolution. But, being goaded by Megæra's sharp-pointed stings, I was moved to persevere in my intent, and I silently determined to carry it into effect. Speaking pleasantly to my nurse, who uttered not a word, I altered the gloomy expression of my countenance, assumed an air of cheerfulness, and, in hopes that I might prevail on her to leave me to myself, I said:

“Dearest mother, thy words, whereof every single one is pregnant with truth, have found a firm place in my breast. But, to the end that this wild madness may be banished from my foolish mind, prithee go away from here for a little while, and allow me to sleep, for of sleep I am most fain.”

She, being very sagacious and having a foreboding of my purpose, encouraged me to try to sleep, and, as if in obedience to my orders, removed from my bedside, but only for a little distance. But to all my entreaties she answered that she would not leave the chamber. Fearing that she might suspect my intention, I bore with her presence, albeit most reluctantly. However, I fancied that, when she saw me so quiet and undisturbed, she must retire before long. I closed my eyes, then, and feigned to be sunk in profoundest slumber. Yet when I thought of the deception I was practising, a deception which nothing in my features

revealed, and reflected that in a few short hours I must bid farewell to life, I was in reality exceeding sorrowful.

As I perceived that my old nurse persisted in remaining in my chamber, I began to fear that the necessity of postponing my death might at last result in the entire abandonment of my purpose, or that my death might be prevented by some accident. I spread out my arms on my couch, as if I would embrace it, and said, weeping:

“O couch, God be with thee! May He render thee more agreeable to her who will come after me than thou has been to me!”

Afterward, as I was casting my eyes around the chamber which I hoped I might never see again, a sudden pain seized me; I felt, as it were, a crushing weight on my breast, and every nerve in my body quivered. I tried to rise, but my limbs, overcome by some horrible dread, were unable to support me. Every time I attempted to rise, I fell upon my face. Then ensued a most fierce and terrible battle between my timorous spirits and my wrathful soul, the latter wishing to escape, and the former holding it fast where it was. But my soul at length conquered, and driving away from me the cold dread that had possessed me, resumed all its strength and inflamed me all over with frenzied anguish. And now, although the ghastly hues of death were depicted on my countenance, I rose impetuously, and like the strong bull which, after it has received the mortal stroke, with jumps and bounds rushes furiously hither and thither, so I leaped from my bed to the floor, and followed madly in the footsteps of Tisiphone, who ran before me, and I kept behind the Fury until she reached the stairs that led to the highest part of my palace. There turning round, and gazing wildly at such parts of the house, as were before me, I said, in accents faint and broken:

“O house, to me most unpropitious, farewell forever, and let my lover know of my disgrace, should he return; and thou, O dearest husband, be comforted, and seek for another Fiammetta with a wiser mind than I had. And ye, O darling sisters, and ye, my kindred, and all ye ladies who were my friends and companions, and all ye faithful servants, may the gods be with you all, and may they be gracious to you!”

Raging, and quite beside myself, I was about to resume my mad course after these words. But my old nurse, like one who had been suddenly aroused from sleep at the end of some frightful nightmare, was so astounded that she dropped the distaff from her hand. Then, recovering her senses, which such a sight had bewildered, she followed me with her weary limbs, at the same time crying as loud as she could. In a voice so changed that I could hardly have believed it to be hers, she screamed:

“Whither, O daughter, art thou running? What Fury drives thee before her? Is this the fruit of my words, which thou thyself didst declare had given thee the greatest comfort? Where art thou going? Wait for me!”

Then, in a voice, if possible, still louder, she shrieked:

“Hither, all ye within the palace! Seize this frenzied lady and restrain her madness.”

Her shouting was bootless, and still more futile was her attempt to come up with me. As for myself, meseemed that wings had grown on my shoulders, and, fleeter than the fleetest of winds, I rushed to my death. But one of those unforeseen occurrences that so often obstruct human purposes, whether they be virtuous or wicked, was the cause that resulted in my being alive to-day. The train of my robe, long as it was, did not of itself interfere with my intent, or in any wise check my course; but, while I was running my fastest, it happened to get entangled in a piece of wood shaped like a fork, and so put a stop to my impetuous flight. I attempted to pull it away, and had partly succeeded, although I left a considerable portion of it behind me, when my old nurse came up and pounced upon me. I remember that my face became crimson, and I screamed at her:

“O thou wretched old creature; fly from here, if thou carest for thy life! Thou mayest think that thou art serving me, whilst, in good sooth, thou art doing me the greatest disservice. Leave me to execute the deadly task to which I have devoted myself with the most determined resolution. He who prevents from dying a person who longs to die, really slays that person. Thou, therefore, hast become my murderess,

while thinking to rescue me from death; and thou art my bitterest enemy in trying to prolong the pangs that I suffer."

She continued screaming, and, at the same time, threw herself upon me, exhibiting a strength which I could hardly have believed she possessed. Little, however, would her strength have availed her, had not my maidens run up from every quarter, summoned by her cries, and held me prisoner. I managed to fling them off from me, nimbly slipping from their grasp, and, if my strength had been a little greater, I believe I could have freed myself from them entirely. But I was at last conquered, and, utterly exhausted by my struggles, I was led back to the chamber which I had hoped never to see again. How often did I say to them, with tearful voice:

"O ye vilest of slaves, what shameless audacity has led you to act thus? Who has given you power to use such violence to your mistress and make her a captive? What madness, ye wretches, has inspired ye to such a deed? And thou, most unworthy and heartless nurse of this miserable body, thou, the future reminder of all my woes, by what right hast thou prevented me from fulfilling my last and most earnest desire? Art thou not well aware that thou wouldst be doing me a greater kindness by bidding me die than by hindering me from dying? Let me execute the purpose which I have resolved to execute, and let me act as my own judgment prompts me, if, in good sooth, thou lovest me as well as I believe thou dost. If thou art as full of compassion for me as thy demeanor would imply, prove that compassion of thine by doing thy very best to defend my reputation, which will doubtless be attacked after my death, seeing that to prevent that death thy labor will be vain. Thinkest thou to keep away from my hands the sword and dagger, the keen points whereof I long to feel in my breast? Canst thou hinder me from having recourse to the dismal halter, or to fire, or to noxious plants? Knowest thou what thou hast done? By prolonging for a little space a most miserable life, and by delaying for a while a death that, but for thee, might, haply, have come to me without infamy, thou wilt to that death have added shame. Wretched woman that thou art, all thy watchfulness will not avail thee, seeing that death is to be found

everywhere and in all things. Let me, therefore, die now, lest my anguish becoming even more unendurable than it is at present, I seek a death more awful and hideous than that which thou hast frustrated."

While I was uttering these words, in a most lamentable voice, I could not keep my hands quiet, but throwing myself on my maids, I plucked out the hair of this one in handfuls, tore the face of that one with my nails, until streams of blood flowed down her cheeks, and pulled to pieces the garments of others so that they were a miserable spectacle to behold! But neither my old nurse nor my abused and lacerated servants ever made any reply; they showed the utmost pity for me, on the contrary, and, weeping, rendered me what services they could. I then tried to get the better of them by words; but my words were bootless. Thereupon I cried aloud, at the top of my voice, to, my hands:

"O ye wicked hands, hands powerful for every evil, hands so skilful in adorning and enhancing my beauty, that ye have been exceedingly instrumental in causing me to be desired of him whom I love beyond measure. Therefore, since your service has brought me such bane, in requital thereof mangle as cruelly as you like this body to which ye belong, tear it asunder, and release from it the stern and implacable soul that dwells therein, with much effusion of blood. Pluck out the heart that blind love has smitten, and, as all other weapons have been placed beyond your reach, ruthlessly rend it asunder with your nails!"

Oimè! how ready were my willing hands to execute my purpose, had not my nimble and watchful maids prevented it by holding them fast with their own! Thereupon did my afflicted and importunate nurse, in a sorrowful voice, address me, in some such words as these:

"O my dear daughter, I beseech thee, by this wretched breast from which thou didst receive thy first nutriment, to listen calmly to what I am about to say. I will not try by words to prevent thee from grieving, nor will I ask thee to banish from thy soul the anger which has impelled thee to this, or even to endure thy lot with a peaceful and submissive mind; I will only endeavor to impress on thy bewildered understanding that which concerns thy life and honor. Yet, surely it is befitting that a lady so famous as thou art for virtue should neither become the thrall of sorrow,

nor run away from misfortune, as if conquered by it. It is not a virtue to call for death or to fear life, as thou dost; but to withstand the ills that befall us and never to fly before them—that, in sooth, is the highest virtue. I cannot comprehend why those who overthrow their own destinies and fling away from them all the benefits, and advantages of their own lives, as thou hast done, should either seek death or fear life: to wish to do either is the inclination of the coward. If, then, it is thy desire, as it seems to be, to be supremely wretched, do not seek death, seeing that death is the ultimate expeller of all wretchedness. Banish from thy mind that insensate fury which, as it seems to me, leads thee at one and the same time to desire to have thy lover and not to have him. Dost thou believe thou wilt gain possession of him by becoming nothing thyself?"

To this I made no reply. But, meanwhile, the greatest commotion and excitement prevailed, not only through the spacious halls of the palace, but in the streets leading to it; and, just as when the howling of a wolf is heard, those in the neighborhood are wont to run together to the same spot, so everyone hastened from all the different quarters, and, in evident, anxiety and alarm, inquired what was the matter. I, however, had already forbidden those who were acquainted with what had occurred to reveal it, and ordered them to return such untrue answers as might satisfy those who questioned them, and yet give no hint of what had really happened. Ran up to me also my dear husband, and his sisters, and my beloved kinsmen and kinswomen, and my other friends; and, having led them astray as I had led the others, I was the object of their heartfelt pity, whereas my deceitfulness deserved their reprobation. They all, while blaming me for my excessive dolefulness, yet tasked their ingenuity to comfort me. It betided afterward, however, that some believed me to have been stung by one of the Furies, and these' almost sure that I was out of my senses, watched me closely; but others, more charitable, declaring grief, not madness, to be the cause of my present state, as was, indeed, the case, mocked at what the aforementioned people said about me, and showed exceeding sympathy with my situation. I was visited by a great many, but was for several days so

stupefied that I recognized nobody, and was silently and discreetly looked after by my sagacious nurse.

There is no sort of anger, how furious soever it be, that is not moderated and even chilled by the influence of time. After I had remained in the condition already described for several days, I recognized my errors, and saw clearly that every word spoken by my wise old nurse was true; and I wept bitterly when I thought of my past folly. But, albeit my rage and madness died away, being altogether consumed by time, yet did not my love experience any change, even in the slightest degree. Nor was there any diminution of my melancholy, and the thought that I had been forsaken for another continued to wring my heart with anguish. And often did I seek the advice of my prudent nurse, trying to discover some plan which would be effective in bringing my lover back to me. Sometimes we decided to send him a most piteous letter which would contain a full relation of my lamentable case; and again we concluded to announce to him the martyrdom I had so long endured by word of mouth, employing for this purpose a discreet messenger. Although my nurse was so old, and the journey so long and toilsome, yet did she express her willingness to go at once and meet my lover herself. After a profound and thorough consideration of all the circumstances, we judged that a letter, however touching and pitiful, would fail to remove his present love from Panfilo's heart, albeit I wrote one, for all that, and it had just the success we anticipated. To send my nurse to him I knew to be clearly out of the question, for she would never be able to reach him alive; nor did I judge it prudent to commit such a message to anyone else. All these plans being rejected as inadequate, I came to the conclusion that, if I was to obtain possession of Panfilo again, the only chance of success before me was to go for him myself. Various ideas passed through my mind, as to the manner in which this might be accomplished. But, when I laid them before my nurse, they were all put aside by her for good and lawful reasons. Sometimes I thought of donning the garb of a pilgrim, and, in company with one of my friends upon whom I could rely, wending my way to his distant country, and tracing him to his abode. But, although such a mode

of traveling seemed to me possible, I knew that it would be attended with very great peril to my honor, for I had learned how such pilgrims, especially if they be at all comely, are treated by wicked men. In addition to this, I was bound to consult my dear husband in such a matter, and I could not see how it was possible for me to go on such a journey without him, or, at least, without his permission; and this it was useless for me to think of expecting. I abandoned this notion, then, as being entirely futile.

Another thought suddenly flashed across my mind, a thought, too, somewhat roguish and malicious. And, albeit certain circumstances prevented this scheme from succeeding at the time, yet have I good hope of gathering some benefit from it in the future, provided that I be still living. Now, this was the scheme which I finally resolved on adopting. I feigned that I had made a certain vow, at the time when I was overwhelmed by the misfortunes already described, the which I would fulfil, if God rescued me from the same. To satisfy the conditions of this vow, it was necessary that I should pass through the country of Panfilo. Surely, I thought, if this plan of mine be crowned with success, I shall find no difficulty in communicating with my lover and showing him the real reason of my pilgrimage. My vow and my desire to accomplish it I declared to my dear husband, who, with much cheerfulness, promised to accompany me and supply me with every aid I needed for observing it duly. But, as I have hinted above, he did not consider the time convenient, and he told me that I must wait until a favorable opportunity arose. This delay was most grievous to me, and I began to fear that my scheme might fail, after all. Wherefore I invented various other devices; but they all came to naught. I bethought me then of the marvels that Hecate was said to accomplish by her enchantments, and I had many conversations with divers persons who boasted that they were well versed in all her sorceries, and that I might entrust my fate to the frightful spirits they could invoke with the utmost security; some promised to transport me in the twinkling of an eye to the spot where Panfilo was; others, to free his mind from every sort of love, except that which he erstwhile had felt for me and to bring him back to me at once; others said they would liberate me from him and restore me the freedom

I formerly enjoyed. I wished ardently that I might have fruition of some of these promises; but, after a while, I discovered that these people were more generous with words than with deeds. After they had several times deceived me with vain hopes, I dismissed them and their sorceries from my mind, and decided to wait until my dear husband was ready to assist me in the fulfilment of my fictitious vow.

Chapter VII

Wherein Madonna Fiammetta shows how another Panfilo, but not hers, came to the city; how, being told thereof, she was filled with a false delight, and how, at last discovering her error, she fell back again into her former doleful state.

My anguish continued, notwithstanding the hope of the journey in the future. The heavens revolved, carrying with them the sun in their course; one day followed another without change; and I, whose love and sorrow never showed any signs of waning, was worn out with waiting for the fulfilment of the hopes I had cherished, which, seemingly, were never to be realized. Already was that Bull who swam across the sea with Europa holding Phœbus and all his light within the boundaries of his realm, and the days, expelling the nights from a part of their domain, were expanding to their greatest length. And Zephyrus, his scarf all filled with flowers, had come unlooked-for, and with his gentle, perfumed breath, made cease the riotous strife that headstrong Boreas loves. The hazy darkness from the cold air he chased, and the bright snow from the frowning mountain peaks, and cleansed the meadows of the rain-drenched soil. Every flower and herb that lay drooping felt his soft touch and rose to greater beauty. The pallid whiteness wherewith the winter's cold had erst endued the stately trees was now exchanged for a green vesture that enrobed their limbs with its luxuriant growth. It was the season of the gracious Spring, who pours upon the earth her wealth of odorous flowers of every kind, violet and rose and star-eyed daisy, and all the blooms that in their loveliness vie with the flowers that spangled Paradise, and every meadow had its own Narcissus.

All our citizens were wiling away the time in every sort of blithe *divertissement* and merrymaking, which, in deed, were more numerous in

our city than any that had ever been held in Rome, our holy parent. The theaters, too, resounded with the music of songs and of all kinds of minstrelsy, and invited lovers to rejoice in their love. The young men, when they jostled with their glittering lances, when they dashed forward on their fleet coursers, or when, with masterly dexterity, they showed what a tight hand they could keep on their fiery steeds, as they champed the foaming bit, afforded a sight most wonderful to behold. The damsels, enchanted by what they saw, cast delighted glances, from under their brows garlanded with fresh leaves, at their lovers, now from lofty windows and now from lowly doors; and this one, by means of a new gift, that one, by means of words, comforted her lover with her love.

I alone, like a recluse, kept myself solitary and apart from all this revelry; I alone, depressed by the failure of my hopes, was only rendered the more disconsolate by the gayety around me. Nothing was pleasing to me; no amusement could bring me any relief; neither thoughts nor words could comfort me. Nor did I permit green leaf, or flower, or any pleasant thing to touch my hands, nor did I regard them with pleasure. I had grown envious of others' joys, and I longed with hungry eagerness to see every lady treated by love and fortune as I had been treated. *Oimè!* how often did I glean some consolation from hearing of the miseries and calamities in which certain lovers had been recently involved!

But while the gods were keeping me in this frame of mind, lo, I again became the victim of double-faced Fortune, who, sometimes, in order to afflict the wretched with keener pangs, shows for a time a changed and pleasant countenance to them in their misery, so, that they, abandoning themselves to her power, may afterward lose the transient joy and fall into deeper affliction. Should they then continue to lean upon her they find themselves flung down in the middle of their course, like unto that luckless Icarus, who, trusting too much to his wings, soared upward as if to reach the heavens, but fell eventually into the blue waters of the sea that thereafter bore his name.

This is how she managed, for some little time, to fill me with a vain and false delight that for the while restored my soul to peace. After more than four months had elapsed since I heard those woful words about my faithless lover, on a certain day, when I was more than usually despondent, my old nurse, with a quicker step than her age would lead one to believe possible, entered the chamber wherein I was sitting. Drops of perspiration hung thick on her aged countenance. She sank on a chair and began beating her breast with her trembling hand. There was, however, a joyful light in her eyes, and often did she try to speak, but failed; for her excitement affected her lungs, and she had to break off in the middle of a word. Marveling much at her state, I said:

“Dear nurse, what so great trouble is this which has laid hold of thee? What is it thou art in such a hurry to utter? Thou dost breathe with difficulty. Why not first give some repose to thy agitated spirit? Are the tidings thou bringest pleasant or painful? Am I to make ready to flee away from this place or to die? Prithee, what am I to do? Thy face, I do not know why or wherefore, somewhat revives my fading hopes. But yet everything has gone so contrary to them for such a length of time that I am ever in dread, as the wretched are always wont to be, lest worse mishaps may follow those already endured. Speak, therefore, at once. Do not keep me in suspense. What is the cause of the agility thou hast just displayed? Tell me whether debonair god or malignant Fury has driven thee hither.”

Thereupon the old woman, hardly recovered from her faintness, interrupted me, and, in a somewhat exultant tone, said:

“O my sweet daughter, be joyful. Thou wilt have no cause of fear because of the things I am about to relate. Cast away every sorrow, and let the gladness that once possessed thee be thine again. Thy lover has returned!”

As soon as these words entered my mind, my delight was for a moment unbounded, as the expression of mine eyes plainly proved; but the misery to which I had grown accustomed quickly resumed its empire, and I could not believe in such happiness. On the contrary, I burst into tears, and said:

“Dearest nurse, by thy many years and thine aged limbs, which must soon be entering into the eternal rest, do not mock wretched me, whose sorrows should be thine. Sooner shall the rivers return to their source, sooner shall Hesperus seek the companionship of the bright noonday; sooner shall Phoebe give brightness to the night with the rays of her brother, than my ungrateful lover return! Who does not know that he now spends the joyful hours with another, whom he loves more than ever? Wherever he might be, he would much more gladly go back to her from thence, than part from her now to come here.”

To which my nurse straightway made this answer:

“O Fiammetta, so may not the gods receive benignantly my soul when it leaves this old body, if I have uttered aught but the truth! Nor would it be seemly in one of my age to deceive anyone in such wise as thou dost accuse me of doing, and, least of all, thee, whom I love more than anything else in the whole world.”

“Then,” I returned, “how has this thing whereof thou speakest, come to thine ears? From whom hast thou learned it? Tell me quick, to the end that, if it be true, I may at once take delight from the happy tidings.”

And rising from the place where I was seated, I eagerly advanced toward the old woman, who said:

“Having some matters to attend to in connection with the affairs of the household, I went this morning to the seashore. I was walking along slowly, and then stood for a while, intent on the business I had in hand, with my back turned toward the sea, when a youth who, as I saw subsequently, had leaped from a bark, dashed rudely against me, being driven to do so by the force of the leap. When I angrily turned round and complained of the injury I had received, conjuring him to tell me, in the name of the immortal gods, why he treated me so roughly, he entreated my pardon and made the very humblest excuses. Then I examined him carefully, and both his face and his attire told me that he came from the country of thy Panfilo. I at once determined to question him upon the matter:

“‘Tell me, young man,’ I said, ‘and so may God be gracious to thee, if thou answerest truly, dost thou come from a faraway land?’

“‘Yes, lady,’ he replied.

“‘Prithee, from what land,’ I returned, ‘if I may make so bold as to ask?’

“And he answered: ‘From the land of Etruria do I come, and from its, noblest city, wherein I was born.’

“When I heard this, I knew he belonged to the country of thy Panfilo, and I asked whether he was acquainted with him, and, if he was, to tell me what had become of him. He replied that he was very well acquainted with him, and, furthermore, he said that Panfilo would have come with him, had he not been detained by an unforeseen obstacle, but that he would be here in a few days without fail. In the mean time, while we were conversing in this wise, his companions also landed with their chattels and his, and he and they departed thence immediately. Thereupon I, forgetting every other affair, made my way hither, almost fearing that I should not live long enough to bring thee the news. And that is the reason why you have seen me in such a state of weariness and agitation. And now, I say again: be joyful and banish grief.”

My heart leaped with delight at these words, and, taking her in my arms, I kissed her venerable brow. But a little after, being still doubtful, I made her repeat the tidings again and again, conjuring her to say whether she believed them true; yet at the same time fearful lest she might say they were not. Then, when she had sworn the most solemn oaths that everything she had told me was sooth, albeit my mind continued for a while to vacillate between a yes and a no, and now I believed, and now I believed not, yet at last I became so far convinced that I thanked the gods, in some such wise as follows:

“O Jove, best and greatest, supreme ruler of the heavens, and thou, O luminous Apollo, from whom nothing lies hidden, and thou, O gracious Venus, always compassionate of thy subjects, and thou, O holy boy who bearest the precious dart, be ye all praised forever! Verily they who place their hopes in ye cannot perish eternally! Lo, by your grace, and not by any merit of mine, Panfilo returns. I promise not to see him before I have honored your altars with most acceptable and precious incense—those altars before which I have hitherto uttered my most fervent prayers, and

which I have bathed with my most bitter tears. And to thee, O Fortune, who hast at length taken pity on my woful case, I solemnly vow that I shall at once erect the image I had promised thee as a gift. I beseech ye all, most humbly and most devoutly, to complete your benignant favors by removing every impediment that might hinder the speedy return of my Panfilo, and to lead him hither, safe and well, and such as he was wont to be."

No sooner was my prayer ended than I felt like the falcon released from the hood. I clapped my hands, and thus continued:

"O amorous heart, long weakened by misfortune, lay aside thine anxious cares forever, seeing that my beloved Panfilo has remembered me at last, and is returning, as he promised. Banish grief and fear and harmful shame, the fruitful cause of pangs innumerable; nor let thought of how Fortune has hitherto afflicted thee visit thee now; nay rather, chase away the gloomy mists of the cruel Fates, and let no memory of the wretched past disturb thee; turn a gladsome face to the joyous present, and let the former Fiammetta be clothed with a new mind, as with a new garment."

After saying these pleasant words, I broke off, for my soul had again become uncertain, and was, for some reason or other, I know not what, seized with a sudden icy chill. My will weakened in its resolution to be blithe and merry, and I, feeling, as it were, dazed, was unable to finish the words I desired to utter. *Oimè!* I was suffering from that calamity which always waits on the miserable: when a change in their condition occurs for the better, they cannot bring themselves to believe in it. When Fortune, therefore, becomes propitious to the afflicted, it usually betides that they are too weary to rejoice, and, as they believe that what they see is only a dream, they are afraid to trust to it. So I, almost bewildered, exclaimed:

"Who is it that revokes or forbids the pleasure I was beginning to feel? Is not my Panfilo returning? Certainly he is. Who, then, is it that commands me to weep? In no direction do I witness any occasion for melancholy. Who is it, therefore, that forbids me to adorn myself with new flowers and with rich robes? *Oimè!* I know not! Why is it that I

know not? I only know that this is forbidden me; but why or by whom, I know not."

And being almost beside myself, and not willing that the tears that surged to mine eyes should fall therefrom, yet could I not keep them back, and, in the midst of my words, I broke out weeping; and so my long afflicted breast could not contain within itself the tears I had grown into the habit of constantly shedding. My mind, as if prophetic of the future, sent forth those open signs of that which was destined to happen in the future, just as mariners are sure that a terrific storm impends from the swelling of the waves around them, although the weather be calm. Then, being eager to get the better of that which my heart refused to accept, I said:

"Wretched woman that thou art, what forebodings are these? What baleful mishaps dost thou imagine are about to betide thee, although there be no cause for such imagining? On the contrary, lend a believing mind and a credulous ear to the happiness which may betide thee! Whatever may happen, why fear it before it comes? What does it profit thee to anticipate misfortune?"

Influenced by such arguments, I began to reassume the cheerfulness I had felt before, and, as well as I could, I chased away gloomy thoughts from my mind; and, being urged thereunto by my aged nurse, who was sure of the return of my lover, I changed my poor raiment for gay apparel, and began to devote much care to my person, so that, after his arrival, I might not frighten him away again by my wretched appearance. My pale complexion gradually took on its former brilliant coloring, and the plumpness that once rounded my form was, after a time, renewed, and I ceased to weep, albeit the purple circles that had formerly surrounded mine eyes did not vanish with my tears. Still mine eyes lost their glassy dulness, and the full light that erstwhile had made them glorious was seen in them again. My cheeks, which had been roughened by the oceans of tears I had shed, grew smooth and soft, and my hair, although it did not all at once resume its golden sheen, when properly cared for, showed some remnants of its pristine beauty. Furthermore, my beloved and splendid, yet long abandoned, costumes enhanced whatever

charms were left me. What need of saying more? In short, I so amended myself and everything belonging to me, and was so nearly restored to my early beauty and estate, that the ladies in my neighborhood, and my kindred, and, especially, my dear husband, marveled greatly thereat; and they all said some such words as these in their own minds:

“What celestial influence can have thus emancipated this lady from the long sadness and despondency from which all our prayers and all our efforts and all our consolations have hitherto been unavailing to rescue her! In good sooth, this is a wonder there is no accounting for!”

Yet, albeit they marveled greatly, they were greatly delighted. So, too, my palace, long the abode of sorrow, because of my sorrow, became gay and lively, in sympathy with my gayety and liveliness. Thus, my heart being changed, all things, seemingly, changed too, and joyfulness took the place of dejectedness. But yet the days appeared to me to be very long because of my expectancy of Panfilo’s return, whereof I now entertained such buoyant hopes. Thinking of my past sorrows and of the thoughts to which these hopes gave birth, I frequently condemned myself severely for having entertained such calumnious ideas about my lover, saying:

“O what shameful things I have hitherto thought of my dear lover, and how unreasonably have I condemned him for his delay! How foolish it was of me to say that at any time he had belonged to another woman, and was not mine! Accursed be the liars who told me so! O ye gods, how can men tell such falsehoods and yet look as if nothing but truth could escape their lips? But surely I should have examined everything that was said more prudently and cautiously than I have done. I should have weighed the faith of my lover, which he had so often vowed to keep, with so many affectionate words, and with such an outpouring of tears, and with the proofs of love which he bore me then, and bears me now, against the words of those who, unpledged by oath, and without having investigated that whereof they spoke so confidently, adduced their own baseless and shallow opinions as authentic evidence of their statements. And that this is so must be manifest to all who care to study the facts. One person has seen a new bride entering Panfilo’s house, and jumps to

the conclusion that she belongs to the young man, being unaware of the amorous propensities of old men, and speaks of this woman as being the spouse of my Panfilo, thereby giving evident proof of his little concern for the anguish such a report must cause me! Another, because he has observed him in conversation with some lady, and has bantered him on his new acquaintance, who, haply, may have been a near relative, or, perchance, a virtuous servant, believed her to be his, and carelessly reported to others that such was the case. Oh, if I had only reflected on these things with judicious discernment, what tears, what sighs, what anguish I should have been spared! But have lovers ever been able to act with propriety or common sense? We are all the sport of the emotions of the moment, and our minds move in accord with its sudden caprices. Lovers believe everything, since they are ever anxiously on the lookout for disappointment, and ever fearful of the future. Being constantly exposed to perilous accidents, they are always ready to accept them as natural and to be expected. Much as they desire a happy issue for their hopes, yet they always fear that matters may turn out unpropitious to their aspirations, and have only a weak confidence in their good fortune. But I should find some excuse from the fact that I have always entreated the gods to enable me to disguise and hide from others my ardent love. And lo, my prayers have been heard. He will not know all the foolish things I have done, and should he know them, what can he say except this: *'She must have loved me very ardently to do such things'*?

“It should even be a gratification to him to hear of my anguish and of the danger I have encountered, since they were the surest proofs of my fidelity to him. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that one of the reasons for his long absence was to try me, to see whether I could wait for him with a firm and constant mind, and never think of changing him for another. Well, he can see now that I have waited for him with a firm and constant mind. Then, when he has discovered the misery in which I abided during this long waiting, and the tears that I was constantly shedding, surely a love not different from the old one must inflame his heart. O God! when shall I see him, and when will he see me? How can I curb my eager longing to kiss him, no matter who is present, when I first

behold him? Certainly I hardly believe that I can. When shall I be able, holding him strained to my breast, to return those kisses, which at his parting he showered on my inanimate face, and which it was not then in my power to return? Certainly the augury which I forecasted from the circumstance that he was unable to bid me farewell has proved to be a true augury, portending, as it did, his future return. When shall the hour come when I may tell him of all my anguish, of all my tears, and hear from his own lips the cause of his long absence? Shall I live until then? I can hardly believe it: Ah, may that day come speedily, for Death, whom I had formerly not only summoned but sought, now appals me. If it be possible that any prayer of mine may reach his ears, I beseech him to keep away from me, and allow me and my Panfilo to pass the rest of our youthful years in content and happiness."

I was anxious that no day should elapse during which I should not hear some tidings of the approaching return of my Panfilo. Frequently did my old nurse use her best efforts to discover again the herald of the joyful news, so that she might be more assured of the certainty of what she had told me; and she became still more eager in her search for him, when the time appointed for his return drew near. I not only looked forward expectantly to the promised arrival of my lover, but, anticipating it, I imagined it possible that he had already come. Every moment during the entire day was I running now to a window, now to a door, hurrying to and fro, in this direction and in that, gazing at the long highway in hopes that I might see him wending his way to my dwelling. Every man I saw journeying on the road I fancied to be Panfilo; and I awaited the approach of such a man with uncontrollable eagerness. Then, when he was close to me and I recognized that it was not he, great was my confusion. Others whom I saw at a distance kept me in much suspense, for as this or that one went on his way I could not tell but he might be my Panfilo. Sometimes, if, haply, I had to attend to household affairs, or, for some reason or other, had to go into the city, a thousand thoughts stung my soul, as an infinite number of dogs might have bitten my body, each thought saying:

“Haply he has passed just now, or he passed while thou wert not looking. Return!”

So I returned, and went through the same round again, doing little else except run from the window to the door and from the door to the window. Wretched me! what wearisome toil was mine, watching and waiting for what was never to happen! When at last came the day which my nurse had told me would surely be the day of his arrival, I, in imitation of Alcmena, when she heard that Amphitryon was approaching, arrayed myself in my finest apparel, wore my most precious ornaments, and, with dextrous hand, left nothing undone that might enhance the beauty of every part of my person. I was hardly able to restrain myself from rushing to the shore of the bay, so that I might obtain a sight of him at the earliest possible moment; for he would surely, as my nurse had informed me, be on one of the galleys which were to enter the harbor at that particular time. But, when I reflected that the very first thing he would be certain to do was to come to see me, I curbed my desire, albeit fain to gratify it. As he did not come on the day I imagined he had landed, I began to marvel exceedingly; and, notwithstanding all my hopeful cheerfulness, various doubts arose in my mind which my high spirits were unable to suppress entirely. So, after a little time, I again asked my old nurse what had become of him, and whether he had really arrived or not. She went out to make inquiries, but with such a slow and hesitating gait—or what appeared to me to be such—that I frequently imprecated curses on this tardy old age of hers. After a time spent in making the inquiries to which I have alluded, she returned one day with a very mournful countenance and with a gait slower than ever. *Oimè!* as soon as I fixed my eyes upon her, hardly any life was left in my melancholy bosom; straightway it flashed across my mind that my lover had died on the road, or had fallen sick on his arrival. In a moment my face changed from red to pale and from pale to red. Advancing toward the slow old woman, I said:

“Speak quickly. What tidings bringest thou? Is my lover alive?”

She did not move, she did not utter a word, but, sinking into a chair, she kept her eyes riveted on my countenance. I, all trembling, like some

new leaf fluttering in the wind, keeping back my tears, but only by an immense effort, pressed my hands to my breast to still the beatings of my heart, and said:

“Unless thou speakest quickly, and it would seem from thy gloomy air that thou art resolved not to do so, I will tear to rags every part of the apparel I am now wearing! What reason canst thou have for remaining silent, if not a wicked one? No longer try to hide thy news. Out with it; it cannot be worse than that which I imagine. Is my Panfilo living?”

Stung by my words, she answered, in a humble voice, keeping her eyes on the ground the while:

“He is living.”

“Well, then,” I returned, “why dost thou not tell me at once what accident has befallen him? Why holdest thou me in suspense, fancying a thousand divers disasters? Has he been attacked by a sudden fit of illness? What kept him from coming to see me as soon as he had landed from the galley?”

“I am not aware,” she replied, “that he has been the victim of any accident, or of any illness, either.”

“Therefore,” said I, “thou hast not seen Panfilo, and perchance he has not come?”

Thereupon she answered:

“Verily, I have seen him, and he, has come, but he is not the person we both expected.”

To which I replied:

“Prithee, who informed thee that he who has come is not the person we expected? Didst thou look at him carefully before, and hast thou examined attentively his features lately?”

“Verily,” said she, “I never have seen thy lover so closely that I should know him again. But, now being introduced to the man, who bore the same name as thy Panfilo., by the youth who had first spoken to me of his return, I said that I had frequently made inquiries about him, as I wished to speak to him. He thereupon requested me to tell him what I wished to know about him; to which I made answer that I wished to

learn of his health. I also requested him to, tell me how his aged father was, and in what position he was in other respects. Then I begged him to acquaint me with his reasons for his long absence. He answered that he had not known his father inasmuch as he was a posthumous child, and that, thanks to the favoring gods, all his affairs had had a prosperous issue. He had never been here before, and now he was resolved to stay here for as short a time as possible. At all this I marveled exceedingly; and doubting whether he was not making a mock of me, I asked him to, tell me his name. He straightforwardly made me acquainted with the same, and, no sooner had I heard it than I quickly perceived that, because of its resemblance to the name of thy lover, we had both been deceived."

As soon as I heard these words the light fled from mine eyes. Every sensation was deadened, and, as, I sank in a heap at the foot of the stairs I was about to ascend, the only strength that remained in my body merely sufficed to enable me to utter one sigh. The wretched old woman and the other attendants whom she had summoned with loud cries, bore me to, my chamber, and laid me on my luckless couch, fearing that I might be dead. Then, sprinkling cold water upon me, they at length brought back the wandering soul to its tenement, albeit some for a long space, were inclined to believe that I could not live, while others were sure that, with care, I might revive.

After much suffering, and many tears and sighs, I asked my unhappy nurse if what she had told me was really true. Moreover, remembering how cautious Panfilo was wont to be, and suspecting that he might have wished to conceal his identity from the nurse with whom he had never previously spoken, I insisted on her giving me a particular description of the features of that Panfilo with whom she had conversed. And she, first taking a solemn oath that everything was as she declared it to be, depicted in due order the lineaments, the stature, the fashion of the limbs, and, especially, that of the countenance and of the dress of him whom she had taken for Panfilo. This she did so convincingly that I had to give entire faith to her narrative, and believe that things were so as she declared them to be. Thus, all hope being banished from my heart, I

became as desperate and forlorn as I had been before. Rising furiously, I pulled off the gay attire wherewith I had just adorned myself; my precious jewels I laid aside; and my smoothly arranged hair I disheveled with mine own hands. Then, weeping bitterly, and feeling that now I was bereft of all consolation, I began to bewail, in harsh words, the hopes that had proved false and the mistaken delusions I had entertained with regard to my treacherous lover. In short, I felt that all my hopes were crushed, and I became as despondent as ever I had been since first Panfilo had forsaken me. I longed for death with a more fervent yearning that I had ever felt before. Not should I have avoided it, as I had lately done, were it not that the expectation of the journey in some sort restrained me.

Chapter VIII

Wherein Madonna Fiammetta, after comparing her own misfortunes with those of many ladies of ancient times, shows that hers are greater, and then brings to a close her lamentations.

The sort of life which I now led, O compassionate ladies, you can form some idea of from what you have already heard. And, the more Love, my ungrateful lord, was convinced that all hope had fled from me, the more he wrought additional ill unto me, and the more he rejoiced in adding fresh fuel to the fire that burned me, so that the flames of my unhappy passion now raged more furiously than ever. And as they increased, so did my pangs increase with them. Nothing that I could do to alleviate them succeeded. They became more baleful from hour to hour, and pressed more heavily on my tortured soul. Nor do I doubt that had I let them follow their natural course, they would have opened a pathway to that seemly death for which I had formerly yearned so strongly. But, as I have said, I still entertained the firm conviction that I should see again him who was the cause of all my woes, relying as I did on the future journey in which my dear husband had promised to accompany me. I did not try, indeed, to lessen my sorrows, but rather to endure them: One means only occurred to my mind of achieving the latter, albeit I had given deep consideration to several other plans for attaining this object, and that was to compare my afflictions with those that had been visited on so many ill-fated ladies in the past. Now two advantages accrued to me from this resolution of mine. One was that I could discern plainly, as my nurse had said with a view of consoling me, that I was by no means the first to suffer from such calamities. The second was that, after making a due comparison, I was enabled to

perceive that my misfortunes transcended those of all other ladies to an almost incredible degree. And this I considered to redound exceedingly to my glory, since I could truthfully say that I had sustained more cruel mishaps than had ever been sustained by any woman before me, and yet lived! I have spent the time until now in dolefully contemplating this glory, the consequence of my supreme misery, in such wise as you are about to hear.

In measuring my sorrows with the sorrows of others, I first bethought me of the daughter of Inachus, whom I have always imagined to have been a most delicate and voluptuous damsel, and to have been for a little while supremely happy, feeling that she was beloved of yore: and, in sooth, any lady would feel most joyful at the idea of being loved by so great a god, since no greater good could fall to her lot than this, whereof there can be no doubt. When she was afterward transformed into a heifer, and delivered over to Argus by Juno to be strictly watched, I am quite sure the pangs she endured were exceedingly harrowing. Certainly, I should be inclined to conclude that her woes were greater than mine, only that her divine lover was constantly at hand to protect her. Who for a moment can suppose that, if I had had my lover near me to aid me in bearing up against disaster, I should have considered any misfortune too heavy to endure? Moreover, her sorrows had such a fair ending that her past miseries must have seemed to her of little account; for, after the slaying of Argus, she was transported to Egypt, restored to her first form, and married to Osiris. Thus, all her troubles having vanished, she saw herself at last a most splendid and happy queen. Certainly if I were sure of the companionship of Panfilo, even though it were in my old age, I would regard my past torments as trivial when compared with my present joys, just as this lady did. But God alone knows whether this will ever be, or whether I am not again deceiving myself with false hopes!

Very close to the love of Io I have been inclined to set the love of the doomed and luckless Byblis, who forsook everything to follow stern Caunus. And I think I may place in the same category Myrrha, who, after the indulgence of her unlawful passion, had to fly from her enraged

father, being menaced by him with death, and was transformed into a myrtle.

Reflecting within mine own mind on the anguish that each must have suffered, I am well able to discern that it was exceeding great, albeit, perchance, deserved, for their loves were most abominable. But, after careful consideration, I perceive that their woes did not last long and were soon over; for the gods were propitious to the appeal of Myrrha, changing her at once into the tree which bears her name. Nor did she feel any further pain, albeit the aforesaid tree, as I have learned, immediately began to shed tears, as soon as she took its form, and sheds them still. Byblis, too, at least according to one report, got rid of her anguish by means of a halter; although another author (with whom I am inclined to agree) tells us that she was changed into the fountain that still bears her name, through the kindness of the nymphs, who took pity on her lamentable case. Am I not right then, in asserting that my punishment is much severer than that of those ladies, inasmuch as, however deplorable theirs may have been, it lasted but a short time, while mine has been prolonged beyond measure?

After I had duly meditated on the disastrous end of these lovers, came to me the remembrance of the piteous fate of the luckless Pyramus and his Thisbe, for whom I have always felt no small compassion, they were both so young and they had loved each other so fondly! I pitied them also because the effort to gratify fully their love became the occasion of their destruction. Oh, how woful must have been the despairing agony of that youth when, during the silent night, he reached that white mulberry-tree beside the cool fountain and beheld the veil of his Thisbe tossed and rent by the blood-stained jaws of the wild beast—a circumstance which naturally led him to believe the maiden to have been devoured by lions! He showed what his pangs must have been by slaying himself immediately afterward. Then I revolved within my breast what must have been the thoughts of the hapless Thisbe when she stole cautiously forth, and perceived her lover all covered with blood and struggling in the agonies of death! Yet, albeit I feel how agonizing were the tears and how burning were the thoughts of these two lovers, their

sufferings were less than mine, since they were ended almost as soon as they were begun. Oh, how blest must be their souls, if they love each other in the next life as fondly as they loved in this! No tortures endured by them here below can be viewed as of any importance, if balanced against the delights of this eternal companionship!

Came to me next, with greater force than even the sorrows of the others, the grief of forsaken Dido, because meseemed it bore a closer likeness to mine own than the combined sorrows of all the rest. I saw her, with my very eyes, building Carthage and, with stately ceremonial, giving laws to her people in the Temple of Juno. I saw her receiving the shipwrecked Æneas with kindness and hospitality; I saw how she grew daily more and more infatuated with his beauty, and how she was willing to entrust herself and all her power to the custody of the Trojan leader, who, after he had won her tenderest favors, deserted her and fled, albeit he perceived that her passion for him had become uncontrollable. Oh, how unparalleled must have been her misery when she gazed across the sea covered with the ships of her fugitive lover! But, after giving the subject serious consideration, I have finally come to the conclusion that she was more impatient than she was afflicted, as was shown by the manner of her death. Certainly, after my parting from Panfilo, I felt the very same pain she felt, after parting from Æneas. Oh, would that the gods had, at that time, when I had as yet suffered so little, put it into my mind to slay myself at once! Then, at least, I should, like unto her, have been liberated from my afflictions.

After I had for a time indulged in these melancholy musings, I began to reflect on the sad fate of Hero of Sestos, and I seemed to see her descending from her lofty tower and swiftly advancing to the shore where she was wont to receive the tired Leander in her arms. Methought I beheld her making most dolorous wailing over the dead body of her lover, which had been pushed thither by a dolphin, and lay there naked on the strand. And I imagined I could see her wiping the salt water from his face with her own robe, and at the same time bathing it with her tears! Ah, my very heart was wrung with pity for her lamentable case! In good sooth, I felt far more compassion for her than for the other ladies,

so much so, indeed, that I sometimes lost the sense of mine own sorrows, and shed most bitter tears for hers! When such a calamity as this betides, I know of only one of two things that can mitigate the pangs of the surviving lover: death or forgetfulness. In either case there is a cessation of sorrow. But may the gods forbend that I should ever forget Panfilo! Rather would I choose death! Moreover, so long as my Panfilo lives, whose life I beseech the gods to render as long as he himself may desire, I see no reason for choosing death; inasmuch as human affairs are always in a condition of constant fluctuation, I have many reasons for believing that he will return to me, some time or other, and be to me what he was of yore. Yet, because of this hope being so long delayed, my life is full of cares and anxieties, and the occasion of ever increasing grief.

I remember reading in the French romances concerning Tristan and Isolt, and how, if any faith is to be placed in these tales, they had loved each other more ardently than ever had lovers loved before them; and how with their pleasure was mingled exceedingly great pain, and how their loves had a most lamentable ending. And, in sooth, it must have been a great despite to them to have to abandon the delights of this world, both at the same time, if they believed that, after leaving the world, they could no longer enjoy the aforesaid delights elsewhere. But if they were of the opinion that they would be united there as they were here, then we are, bound to believe that they received the death inflicted on them with joy rather than with sadness; for although many hold that death, in all cases, is a most harsh and detestable thing, that opinion hold not I forsooth. Furthermore, how can anyone testify to the good or evil of that whereof he never has had experience? Certainly no one can. Tristan and his lady died in each other's arms, and if he had felt a pang when he held her clasped to his breast, he would have opened his arms and the pang would cease. Moreover, how can we rationally assert that there is any very grievous pain in that which happens only once and occupies such an exceeding small space of time? Certainly we cannot. So, both the griefs and the joys of Tristan and Isolt ended at one and the same moment. But, ah, the time I have spent in grief is out of all proportion in its duration to the time I have spent in joy!

Next, my thoughts turned to the sad destiny of the wretched Phædra, who, because of her own frantic passion, was the cause of a most agonizing death to him whom she most loved. I have no certainty of what befell her after she wrought this evil; but sure I am that if I had ever committed such a shameful deed, nothing but a violent death could purify me from such foulness. Yet, if she herself survived, she may have easily found consolation in that forgetfulness of which I have already spoken, for the dead are wont to be speedily buried in oblivion. To the grief which she may have suffered I would add that of many others, who were again consoled, either by death or necessary forgetfulness. What is the effect of fire and molten metals on those who suddenly dip a finger in them, and as suddenly withdraw it? I believe the effect to be painful, beyond a doubt. But it is nothing in comparison with the agony they would feel who had the whole body plunged in fire or molten metals, and that, too, for a very long space of time. Therefore, great as were the afflictions suffered by these ladies, which I have described, they were slight if placed side by side with those which I have endured and am enduring continually.

Such, then, have been the disasters brought about by amorous troubles. Yet there are other calamities that move me to weep even more, unrestrainedly than do these, for the baleful and unforeseen assaults which Fortune has made on those who were once in the enjoyment of supremest happiness and then suddenly plunged into extremest unhappiness, are surely calculated to arouse especial compassion. Such have been the frightful catastrophes which befell Jocasta, Hecuba, Sophonisba, Cornelia and Cleopatra. Oh, how great was the misery that beset the close of the days of Jocasta, we shall at once perceive, if we but investigate the matter duly—a misery so horrifying in its consequences that it might well drive to madness the firmest mind! She, having been married in her youth to Laius, the Theban King, agreed to let her husband expose her first offspring to be devoured by wild beasts, the miserable father thinking that thus he should avoid the fate which the gods in their implacable course had ordained! Oh, what anguish must we not imagine to have been hers who consented to such a sacrifice, if we

but consider her rank and condition! She, being afterward informed by the herdsman to whom her child had been committed, that he had done as he had been commanded, had no reason to repute that child as other than dead. After a certain number of years had elapsed, her husband was miserably slain by the youth himself to whom she had given birth, and she afterward became the spouse of her unknown son, and by him had four children! Thus, one and the same moment saw her the mother and the wife of her parricidal son! Afterward, when too late, he discovered his double crime, and depriving himself both of his eyes and of his kingdom, he made his guilt manifest to everyone. But what must have been the state of her mind, at a time, too, when she was advanced in years, and her condition demanded repose rather than anguish? We may well imagine it to have been most lamentable. Yet Fortune did not even then pardon her; she rather added further woes unto her misery. Jocasta saw her two sons agree to share the kingdom between them and reign alternately year by year; she saw one of her sons refusing to surrender the kingdom to the other when it was the turn of the latter to rule; she saw her city besieged by a great part of Greece under seven kings; and, at last, she saw her two sons dying by each other's hand, after numerous battles and conflagrations; she saw a new sovereignty in Thebes, and her husband-son banished; she saw the walls of that ancient city which were built of stones that moved to the sound of Amphion's lyre, crumble to the dust and her kingdom perish. Then she hanged herself and abandoned her two daughters to a most wretched destiny. What more could the gods, the world, and Fortune do to her? Though all hell were explored, I do not believe there could be found within its borders such unutterable agony as must have been hers. As she had had experience of every sort of guilt, so had she of every sort of anguish. Certainly everyone will be inclined to regard her wretchedness as far greater than mine. And I should adopt this opinion also, were it not that love, at least, was not added to her other miseries. Moreover, who doubts that, inasmuch as she was well aware that she herself, her house, and her husband had all provoked the wrath of the gods, she must have known also that her punishment was merited? Certainly there is no one who

would regard her as a wise and discreet woman. Furthermore, if she was out of her senses, she was likely to be unconscious of her misfortunes, and so, as she was unconscious of them, they did not particularly grieve her. Besides, even supposing she were conscious of them, we know that those who believe they have deserved the evils which they have to bear, support such evils with little or no discomfort. But I have never committed any offense that should justly excite the gods to wreak their vengeance on me. On the contrary I have constantly honored them, and have sought their favor by offering victims at their altars; nor have I ever scorned them, as the Thebans were wont to do. Oh, I know that someone will say:

“How dare you assert that you never have merited any punishment and that you never have sinned? Have you not broken the most sacred laws and by adultery violated your nuptial vows?” Certainly I have. But if the matter be weighed carefully, it will be discovered that that is the sole fault that can be found in me, and that it does not at all merit such a punishment as that which I have had to endure. It is not at all a matter of astonishment that I in my tender youth should not have been able to resist that which neither gods nor the strongest men have been able to resist. And in this I am not the first, nor shall I be the last, nor am I the only one. In this I have companions everywhere, and the laws which I have violated are inclined to deal mildly with such violation when an entire multitude of people combine to violate them. Moreover, my fault has been most carefully concealed; a circumstance that should be partly effective in saving me from punishment. And over and above all this, supposing that the gods should be angry with me and desire to wreak their vengeance on me for my fault, would it not be only common justice that they should first wreak their vengeance on him who has been the occasion of my sin? I do not wit very well who, in good sooth, has led me to break those holy laws, whether Love or Panfilo, because of the beauty of his form. Whichsoever of them it might be, he was certainly gifted with extraordinary power for tormenting me to an extreme degree. Therefore this did not befall me on account of any sin I had committed. If, indeed, it was the gods who visited me with such infinite

punishment for such a fault, they would be acting against their righteous judgment and their usual custom, for they would not be making the punishment to fit the sin, but rather inflicting a punishment that was beyond measure greater than the sin.

Whoever compares the sin of Jocasta and its punishment with my sin and its punishment, will surely come to the conclusion that her punishment was very light, and that mine will be notorious for its excessive severity. And let not any lady cling to a different opinion, saying:

“She lost her kingdom, her sons, and, finally, her life, while this lady lost only her lover.”

Certainly, I confess that all this is true. But, then, my fortunes were so bound up with this lover that when he forsook me all happiness forsook me as well. For everything that seemed to render me happy in the eyes of men was to me, on the contrary, a source of misery and not of happiness; seeing that my husband, kinsfolk, wealth, and other such things were all an exceedingly heavy weight on my spirits and the direct opposite to that for which I yearned. If my lover, as soon as he carried me off, had carried off all these things, there would yet remain to me a most open way to the satisfaction of my desire, and, if there were not, a thousand different modes of dying would have presented themselves to my mind, any one of which I could employ to end my woes. Therefore, I have proved that my punishment has been much more grievous than that of any of the afore-mentioned ladies, and this opinion of mine is based on sound judgment.

Then came to my mind Hecuba, and meseemed that her fate, too, was dolorous beyond measure. It was her ill-starred destiny to behold the ruined and most lamentable remains of a great kingdom; to behold an illustrious city become the abode of wretchedness; to behold a noble spouse slaughtered before her eyes, and many fair sons, and beautiful daughters, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren, all slain or taken captive; and to witness great wealth destroyed, and grandeur vanishing, and allied kings cut to pieces, and other cruel deeds, and her scattered people, and the falling temples, and the fugitive gods! How often must

she have recalled to her tortured mind in her old age the mighty Hector, and Troilus, and Deiphobus, and Polydorus, and many others of her brave sons! And what anguish must have been hers when she brooded over their fate, recollecting that she had seen them all die, that she had witnessed the blood of her husband bespattering her very bosom, had looked on while Troy, filled with lofty palaces and with a noble people, was being burned with Grecian fire and all leveled with the ground! Her daughter Polyxene was cruelly slaughtered by Pyrrhus on the tomb of his father! Oh, what a bleeding heart must she not be thought to have had when she surveyed all this! Certainly I am quite convinced her agony was extreme. Ay, but then it was brief. Her feeble and aged spirit, unable to endure such scenes, became disordered, and madness seized her, as might be plainly discerned from the fact that she coursed across the fields, barking like a dog. But I, on the contrary, have a firm and retentive memory, and, to my great misfortune, am in full possession of my judgment (*oimè!* would that I were not!), and so I can plainly discriminate between the causes of my disastrous condition. Now, in my judgment, an affliction that continues for a very long period, no matter how light that affliction may seem to be, is much more grievous—and this I have often said already—than any affliction, however heavy, which ends and is over in a short time; this I know to be true beyond any doubt.

Sophonisba, dazed between the gloom of her widowhood and the gayety of her nuptials, found herself at one and the same moment in sorrow and in joy, at once prisoner and spouse, despoiled of a kingdom and winning a kingdom, and yet withal, in a brief time, compelled to quaff the cup of poison sent her by her second husband. In sooth, she has always appeared to me to have had her full share of anguish. She saw herself at first a most glorious Numidian queen; then when the prospects of her kindred turned out disastrous, she saw her husband, Syphax, a captive in the hands of Masinissa, and, immediately after she had lost her royal state, behold that king at once restored it by making her his wife! Oh, how indignant must her soul have been as she gazed on these mutations of destiny! What changes must she not have imagined that

fickle Fortune had still in store for her when she celebrated that new marriage with a sad heart, not being at all sure of the future! And Io! a day had scarcely elapsed after her espousals, when, before she had time to become as habituated to the new love of Masinissa as she had been to the old love of Syphax, she received the fatal draught from a servant sent by her second spouse, and, first uttering a few scornful words, fearlessly drank it, breathing her last sigh after a few moments! How bitter would have been her sufferings if she had been allowed time to meditate upon them! But she was not: she had very little time given her for grieving. Now, if it be but considered that death came to her almost immediately and cut short her sadness, it must be admitted that her lot was far happier than mine, seeing that death has refused to come to me, albeit I have suffered such a length of time, and still refuses to come near me, and will continue to refuse to come near me, eagerly as I desire it, with the evident intent of protracting my sufferings.

Melancholy as was the case of Sophonisba, Cornelia seems to me to have approached her in misfortune. She had attained to a position of great dignity and splendor, being first the wife of Crassus and then of Pompey the Great, who by his surpassing worth had almost acquired the supreme governance of Rome. But, Fortune having changed her destiny, she had to fly, with her husband, first from Rome, then from all Italy, closely pursued by Cæsar; her wanderings involved her in many calamities. Finally he left her in Lesbos, and there she received him after that defeat in Thessaly wherein all his forces were utterly shattered by his adversary. Yet he, still in hopes of restoring his power with the aid of the conquered East, arrived in Egypt, after plowing the deep, and sought the help of its youthful King, who owed the kingdom to his kindness. And there his hapless spouse beheld his headless trunk tossed by the waves of the sea on the strand. All these things combined and all these things singly we must imagine to have afflicted her bitterly. But the sound advice of Cato of Utica, and the impossibility of ever having her Pompey with her again, in a short time greatly mitigated her grief. I, on the contrary, filled with vain hopes which I am unable to banish from my breast, do nothing but continue to weep, without counsel of comfort,

save what I may, haply, receive from my old nurse, who is conscious of my miseries. Her I now know to be more faithful than wise, for often when she fancies she is proposing a remedy for my misfortunes, she is really doing her best to add to my wretchedness.

There are many who may be inclined to believe that Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, suffered a greater punishment than mine, and that, indeed, her anguish must have been insupportable, especially when, after reigning in the enjoyment of ample power and wealth, she was deprived of these and shut up in prison by her brother. Such a calamitous downfall must certainly have occasioned her excessive grief. But her confident hope of that which eventually happened, no doubt helped her to bear up easily under that grief. Afterward, when she was liberated from her prison and became the mistress of Caesar for a while, and was then forsaken by him, there are those who think that her affliction at being so unworthily treated must have been exceeding bitter. But those who think thus forget that there was no steady affection in either to hinder them from growing tired of each other, and that she had no difficulty in withdrawing her love from one and giving it to another, as, indeed, she often afterward showed she was able to do with great facility. But God forbid that that sort of consolation should ever happen to me! There never has existed, and there never shall exist, a man who could say or who can say that I have belonged or belong now, to anyone, save and except Panfilo alone; for him I live and for him I will live; nor do I expect that any other love shall ever have strength to efface the love I have for him from my heart. Furthermore, even if she were disconsolate for a time at her parting from Caesar, they are mistaken who imagine that such sadness was likely to be lasting. Though she might have grieved at the moment he left her, yet there was in her heart a joy that far outstripped her grief and consoled her for her sorrow: she had a son by him and she had also her kingdom restored to her by him. Such joy as hers was amply sufficient to compensate a woman like her, whose love was so fleeting and unsteady, for greater evils than those which she suffered; and that her love was of that sort, I think I have already suggested. It was not her love for Caesar, but her marriage with Antony that brought her her most

poignant and heartrending misery. Him she spurred on by her blandishments and flatteries to engage in civil war with his brother-in-law. Apparently she hoped, in case he were victorious, that she might aspire to the governance of the Roman Empire. When, however, she was deprived of that hope and was also, at the same time, bereft of her husband by death, then I can readily believe that she was afflicted almost beyond what any other lady had ever been. And certainly, considering that her aspiration was so noble and lofty, to have missed it simply because of the vicissitudes of an unlucky battle, must have been to her exceeding painful, seeing that, if the battle had been won, she would have become mistress and lady of the whole round world; and, in addition to this, she lost a husband to whom she had become passionately devoted. But for her forlorn condition she speedily found the sole medicine that could relieve such pain as hers, that is, death, which, although a harsh antidote, did not make her suffer long, inasmuch as two asps, in a brief space of time, were able to suck from her breasts both her blood and her life. Oh, how often would I, whose anguish is at least as great as ever was hers, even were I to admit that I had less cause for it, have gladly acted exactly as she acted in seeking death, had I been permitted to do so, or had the dread of future infamy not held me back!

After meditating on the fatal doom of Cleopatra and of the afore-mentioned ladies, I reflected on the: calamities that befell many men and kingdoms of great renown. I thought of the funeral pyre of Cræsus, of Cyrus and the wealthy realm of Persia, of the magnificence of Pyrrhus, of the power of Darius, of the cruelty of Jugurtha, of the tyranny of Dionysius, of the arrogance of Agamemnon, and of many other things withal. Though these were the victims of misfortunes similar to those already described, yet were they not subjected to them for so long a period as to feel the full weight of the heavy afflictions that visited them, as I do. While I was recounting to myself all the woes that many of olden times were doomed to suffer, in what manner ye have heard, and while I was searching in my mind for such lamentable examples of wretchedness as might comfort me by showing that I had companions in

my misery, and so should give way less to despair, there came to me the recollection of Thyestes and of Tereus, who were both the hideous sepulchers of their own offspring! In very sooth, I cannot understand how they could be restrained from opening their own bodies with sharp-edged knives, and releasing from the paternal bowels their struggling children, who must have longed to get out, abominating, as they surely did, the place into which they had been forced to enter, and fearing still the cruel teeth that bit them, and not seeing how otherwise they were to escape such biting! But yet Thyestes and Tereus vented their anger as best they could on those who set before them such banquets, and they were besides regarded with great pity by their subjects; and they also must have felt that in this they were without blame; which has by no means happened to me. Everyone compassionates me for that wherein I do not want their compassion, nor do I dare to reveal unto them that for which I need compassion, namely the real cause of my grief. If I could venture to do so, I do not doubt that, just as some remedy was found for the grief of the others, so a similar remedy might be found for mine.

Came to my mind next the bitter tears shed by Lycurgus, as well as by all his house, when he learned that his son lay dead within the coils of the snake; also those of Atalanta, mother of Parthenopæus, as she bewailed her son, who had died on the Theban plain. Such sorrows touched me very nearly, and I had as deep a perception of them and experienced as profound sympathy with them as if they had affected myself. They are all so woful that it is impossible to imagine how their anguish could be exceeded; at least such is my opinion. And yet so much glory have those who had to endure these calamities gained forever and ever that their sorrows should almost be considered joys. The splendid obsequies which the seven kings performed around the remains of the child, and the grand athletic contests and games that followed were well calculated to alleviate the grief and anger of his parents; so, too, the noble life and victorious death of her son must have consoled Atalanta for his fall. But to me nothing has ever happened that could for a moment divert my attention from my anguish. If any such thing had

happened to me, I who now call myself, and, haply, am, the most unfortunate of women, would, perhaps, have felt inclined to affirm the opposite.

I have also contemplated the various deeds and divers wanderings of Ulysses, and I have perceived clearly that his wearisome journeys by land and sea, his mortal perils, and his excessive disasters could not have befallen him without causing him very great agony of soul. But, after repeatedly inquiring into the nature of the agony which I suffer, I cannot avoid inferring that it is much more grievous than his. Do ye listen and I will tell the reason why. In the first place, and over and above all, he was a man. Therefore, he had greater strength of endurance than have I, a tender young woman. He was vigorous and daring, always accustomed to dangers and afflictions, inured to them, as it were, and when he was exhausted, he could always enjoy a deep and restful sleep. I, on the other hand, having been reared with exceeding delicacy, and having been wont to toy in my chamber with wanton love, naturally felt every little annoyance to be distasteful and worrying. He indeed was harassed by Neptune and, after being driven from his course, was borne to many strange places, and was refused further assistance in his troubles by angry Æolus. But I am vexed by mischievous Love, the mighty lord who had aforetime plagued and conquered those who plagued Ulysses. Moreover, if deadly perils menaced him, he was always running to seek the same; and who has a right to grumble because he finds what he has sought? But I would gladly live in peace and tranquillity, if I could, and would have nothing to do with danger, unless it were thrust upon me. Furthermore, he had no fear of death, and therefore encountered it without reluctance. But I fear it greatly, albeit sometimes, being thereunto impelled by my miserable estate, I have rushed to embrace it. Again, he hoped eternal fame from his toils and perils. But I am apprehensive of disgrace and infamy, should my misfortunes happen to be discovered. So it is plain to be seen that his misfortunes were not worse than mine are; rather, in good sooth, is it evident that mine far outstrip his. In addition to all this, much more has been told of him than

actually occurred, while the woes that have depressed me are so numberless that I should never have time to relate them all.

I will now proceed to make some slight mention of the sorrows that afflicted Hypsipyle, Medea, CEnone and Ariadne; these I feel must have been very grievous; and, moreover, I judge their misadventures, and the pangs they suffered because of them, to bear a close likeness to mine own; seeing that each of these, being forsaken by her lover, just as I have been, poured forth showers of tears, heaved the bitterest sighs, and endured the heaviest kind of anguish, and all without avail. But, albeit they bewailed their fate, just as I have done and do, they at last beheld the end of their woes and had a just revenge for their tears. Now, no such requital have I had for my torments. Hypsipyle, although she had paid distinguished honor to Jason, and had been united to him by meet and binding laws, might well complain when she beheld him torn from her arms by Medea; just as I may, our cases being the same. But the providence of the gods which keeps a watchful and righteous eye on everything (save on the wrongs that I have endured!) gratified her with a sweet avengement, since she lived to see Medea, who had deprived her of Jason, abandoned by Jason for Creusa.

Certainly I do not say that all my unhappiness would vanish if I saw the same thing happen to her who has stolen away from me my Panfilo, unless I were the lady for whom he had forsaken her; but I do say that, in any case, such a turn of affairs would be a great comfort to me. Medea, too, must have taken much delight in her revenge, albeit she was as cruel to herself as she was to her ungrateful lover; for, not content with setting fire to the palace and burning the new loved one (as she ought to have been) she slew her own two children in the presence of their father. CEnone, also, after a long period of mourning, had at length the satisfaction of seeing her disloyal and felon lover pay the well-merited penalty of the laws he had broken; she beheld the land of his birth miserably wasted by fire and sword, and all because of the woman he had preferred to her. It was no doubt a glorious revenge; yet surely I should prefer to endure my sorrows, heavy as they are, to such a revenge as that in my case. Again, Ariadne saw from her station in

heaven, after she had become the spouse of Bacchus, the furious passion of Phædra for her stepson; and it was Phædra who had abetted the desertion of Ariadne by Theseus, because she wished to be the wife of the Athenian herself.

Thus, having examined carefully the misfortunes that befell these, I find that I alone am the most miserable woman that ever has been in the world, seeing that I am præëminent above them all because of the length and intensity of the agonies I have had to suffer. But if, haply, O ladies, ye are disposed to hold my arguments as insensate and incoherent, and coming from an insensate and incoherent lover, and if you judge them altogether trivial and worthy of no consideration, esteeming the misfortunes of those of olden times to be far more harrowing than are mine, to convince you of the truth of what I say, it should be necessary for me to add only this one single proof to all the others. If they who envy are more miserable than those they envy, I am more miserable than all the aforementioned persons; for I am envious of the calamities that befell them, because I regard those calamities as much less distressing than the calamities which have befallen me.

You may perceive now, O ladies, how unfortunate I have been rendered by the immemorial deceptions of Fortune. Furthermore, just as the lamp which is nigh being quenched is wont to flare up for a moment and to cast a brighter flame than that which it shed before, so she has filled me from time to time with a sudden joy only to plunge me in deeper darkness afterward. Thus has she seemingly now and then bestowed on me some consolation; but. it was with the plain intent to crush all my hopes and visit me with greater anguish later. Laying aside every other comparison, I will use my best endeavors to convince you of the overwhelming nature of my new misfortunes by one single comparison only. That the tortures which I suffer at present are infinitely more severe than those I endured before that vain and passing outburst of rejoicing which I have described, will be made manifest to you if you but consider how much more fatal to the sick who have had a relapse are second fevers, coming upon them, as they do, with intermittent heat and cold, than were the first. And, to the end that I may not weary you with

a too prolonged account of my woes, or force you to shed tears over-much, if, haply, any of you has wept, or weeps now, while reading the things I have set down here, also that I may not waste in words the time I need myself for cries and sobs, I have resolved to write nothing further. I have tried to make it clear to you that this narrative, most true though it be in all respects, no more represents what I actually feel withal, than does a painted fire represent a fire that really burns. Wherefore I humbly beseech God that, through your prayers or through mine, He send down His saving waters to quench that fire, either in the shape of a mournful death for me or of the welcome return of Panfilo.

Chapter IX

Wherein Madonna Fiammetta speaks to her book, telling it in what dress, and when, and to whom it ought to go, and from whom it ought to be kept; and makes an end.

My dear little book, drawn as it were from the tomb of thy mistress, thou hast now come to thine end, which pleases me well, with far greater speed than have my wrongs. Just as thou art written by mine own hand, and, in great part, blotted with mine own tears, do thou at once present thyself to the eyes of enamored ladies. And, if pity be thy companion, as I most firmly hope it may be, they will read thee most willingly, unless Love has altered his laws since the time when I became miserable. Be not in any wise ashamed, albeit clad in the mean apparel wherewith I have covered thee, to go to each, however noble she be, provided she refuse not to receive thee. No one will require that thou have a grander dress, even if I had consented to give thee such a one. Thou thyself shouldst be well content to mark thus thy similitude to the woful life I lead, which life, being most wretched, causes thee to be most wretchedly vested, as it does me. Therefore, let not any ornamenting be a concern unto thee, as it is wont to be to happier books; thou must not desire to have noble bindings of various colors, garish with tinting and ornature, and rejoicing in smooth and polished edges, or in gay miniatures, or in illuminated lettering. Such things beseem not the heavy sorrows which thou bearest with thee. Then, leave to more fortunate books all such devices, and also inks of divers brilliant hues, and paper rubbed with pumice-stone, and wide margins. For thee it is fitting to make thy visits to whatever places I send thee in disordered and disheveled guise, blotted, stained, and squalid, and so arouse compassion for my woful estate in the hearts of

those who may read thee. If thou behold signs of such compassion in the faces of lovely ladies, then requite them for the same as well as thou art able.

We are not—neither thou nor I—so depressed by fortune that we cannot render to ladies the greatest services. We can show forth many examples which ought to teach them, if they be happy, to set a limit to their desires and avoid becoming like unto us. Do thou prove to them—which thou canst easily do—that, however prudent they have been in their choice of lovers, they should always be on their guard against such disasters as have afflicted us and should, therefore, avoid the hidden snares laid for them by men. Go, then. I know not with what gait thou shouldst go, whether quick or slow; nor do I know how or by whom thou wilt be received. Still, proceed as Fortune directs thee. Thy course cannot be regulated to any great degree. From thee the clouded skies hide every star. Therefore murmur not if thou be tossed about hither and thither. Like unto a ship that has lost helm and sails, and must trust to the mercy of the waves, so do thou abandon thyself to fate, and do thou adopt various plans according to the nature of the places to which thou comest.

Shouldst thou haply reach the hands of one who is so much at ease in her loves that she mocks at our anguish, and, perchance, chides it as foolish, humbly submit to her sneers, which are, indeed a very slight part of our ills, and try to persuade her to meditate on the fickleness of Fortune, who may yet change our estate and hers. Then shall we, in our joyous condition, be able to return her mock for mock and jeer for jeer. And shouldst thou discover anyone who cannot read thee with dry eyes, and who, because of her dolor for our dolor, blots thee with infinite tears, these tears hold close to thyself as being most holy; and, showing forth unto her my woful affliction and distress, humbly beseech her to pray for me to Him who, in the twinkling of an eye, flies over the whole world on his golden wings. So may he, being entreated by lips more worthy than mine, and being more benign to others than to me, be graciously pleased to relieve mine anguish, And for her, whoever she be, I now do pray that she may never be as wretched as I am, that the gods

may ever be placable and benevolent in her regard, and that her loves may turn out propitious to her desires and may be lasting.

But if, perchance, changing from hand to hand among the amorous throngs of beautiful ladies, thou shouldst at last come to the dwelling of that most unfriendly lady who has plundered me of my rightful property, fly away incontinent from the accursed spot; show no part of thyself to her felonious eyes, so that, hearing of my tortures, she may not have a chance, the second time, to rejoice over the injury she has done me. But if it yet betide that, nathless everything, she has managed to gain possession of thee and has wished to read thee, then so conduct thyself that tears for my sorrows and not laughter shall come to her eyes, and that, her conscience stinging her, she may restore to me my lover. Oh, how blest would be the pity that had such a result as that! How fruitful would be thy labor then!

Fly the eyes of men, O little book! Yet, if haply thou be seen by them, say: "O ungrateful generation! O deriders of simple and innocent ladies!—it is not seemly that ye should even look at such pious things!" Shouldst thou, however, reach him who is the root of all my ills, rebuke him severely, and say: "O thou, harder than was ever oak, get thee away from here, and do not violate me with thy guilty hands! Thy broken faith is the occasion of all my pangs! Yet, if thou wishest to read me with a humane mind, thou mayest do so. Perchance thou mayest recognize the crime thou hast committed against her who is always ready to pardon thee, if thou returnest to her. But if thou dost not care to do this, then it would not be fitting that thou shouldst behold the tears whereof thou art the sole occasion."

And if haply some lady should marvel that these my writings are so rude and unpolished, say to her that it is natural for such to be the case, inasmuch as ornate speech can come only from minds undisturbed and from those whose lives are serene and tranquil. Thou wilt further tell her that she should rather marvel that there should be so little roughness and confusion in a work composed of such circumstances.

Thou canst now proceed on thy way, safe as I believe from every ambush, and knowing that envy will not bite thee with her malignant

tooth. But, if anyone more miserable than thee can be discovered (which I do not believe) and if he should bear thee envy, imagining that thou art happier than he, then allow thyself to be bitten. I do not know what part of thee can receive fresh hurt, inasmuch as I behold all parts of thee torn and lacerated by Fortune. Therefore he cannot injure thee much, or hurl thee from a high place to a low one, since thou art now as low as thou well canst be. And, seeing that Fortune has not only prostrated us in the dust, but has also sought to bury us under the earth, we have grown so accustomed to long-enduring disasters that with the same shoulders with which we have supported, and support, greater burdens, we shall support lesser ones; and therefore let her come when she wishes.

Live, then; for of life no one can deprive thee. Live as an eternal example to the happy and to the wretched of the anguish of thy mistress.

*Here endeth the book called: Elegy of the noble lady, Madonna Fiammetta,
sent by her to all ladies in love.*