

Novel X

[Voice: AUTHOR]

[1] Alibech turns hermit, and is taught by Rustico, a monk, how the Devil is put in hell. She is afterwards conveyed thence, and becomes the wife of Neerbale.

[Voice: AUTHOR]

[2] Dioneo, observing that the queen's story, which he had followed with the closest attention, was now ended, and that it only remained for him to speak, waited not to be bidden, but smilingly thus began:

[Voice: DIONEIO]

[3] Gracious ladies, perchance you have not yet heard how the Devil is put in hell; wherefore, without deviating far from the topic of which you have discoursed throughout the day, I will tell you how 'tis done; it may be the lesson will prove inspiring; besides which, you may learn therefrom that, albeit Love prefers the gay palace and the dainty chamber to the rude cabin, yet, for all that, he may at times manifest his might in wilds matted with forests, rugged with alps, and desolate with caverns: whereby it may be understood that all things are subject to his sway.

[Voice: DIONEIO]

[4] But--to come to my story--I say that in the city of Capsa in Barbary there was once a very rich man, who with other children had a fair and dainty little daughter, Alibech by name.

[5] Now Alibech, not being a Christian, and hearing many Christians, that were in the city, speak much in praise of the Christian Faith and the service of God, did one day inquire of one of them after what fashion it were possible to serve God with as few impediments as might be, and was informed that they served God best who most completely renounced the world and its affairs, like those who had fixed their abode in the wilds of the Thebaid desert.

[6] Whereupon, actuated by no sober predilection, but by childish impulse, the girl, who was very simple and about fourteen years of age, said never a word more of the matter, but stole away on the morrow, and quite alone set out to walk to the Thebaid desert; and, by force of resolution, albeit with no small suffering, she after some days reached those wilds; where, espying a cabin a great way off, she hied her thither, and found a holy man by the door, who, marvelling to see her there, asked her what she came there to seek.

[7] She answered that, guided by the spirit of God, she was come thither, seeking, if haply she might serve Him, and also find some one that might teach her how He ought to be served.

[8] Marking her youth and great beauty, the worthy man, fearing lest, if he suffered her to remain with him, he should be ensnared by the Devil, commended her good intention, set before her a frugal repast of roots of herbs, crab-apples and dates, with a little water to wash them down, and said to her: "My daughter, there is a holy man not far from here, who is much better able to teach thee that of which thou art in quest than I am; go to him, therefore;" and he shewed her the way.

[9] But when she was come whither she was directed, she met with the same answer as before, and so, setting forth again, she came at length to the cell of a young hermit, a worthy man and very devout--his name Rustico--whom she interrogated as she

had the others. Rustico, being minded to make severe trial of his constancy, did not send her away, as the others had done, but kept her with him in his cell, and when night came, made her a little bed of palmleaves; whereon he bade her compose herself to sleep.

[10] Hardly had she done so before the solicitations of the flesh joined battle with the powers of Rustico's spirit, and he, finding himself left in the lurch by the latter, endured not many assaults before he beat a retreat, and surrendered at discretion: wherefore he bade adieu to holy meditation and prayer and discipline, and fell a musing on the youth and beauty of his companion, and also how he might so order his conversation with her, that without seeming to her to be a libertine he might yet compass that which he craved of her.

[11] So, probing her by certain questions, he discovered that she was as yet entirely without cognizance of man, and as simple as she seemed: wherefore he excogitated a plan for bringing her to pleasure him under colour of serving God. He began by giving her a long lecture on the great enmity that subsists between God and the Devil; after which he gave her to understand that, God having condemned the Devil to hell, to put him there was of all services the most acceptable to God.

[12] The girl asking him how it might be done, Rustico answered: "Thou shalt know it in a trice; thou hast but to do that which thou seest me do." Then, having divested himself of his scanty clothing, he threw himself stark naked on his knees, as if he would pray; whereby he caused the girl, who followed his example, to confront him in the same posture.

[Voice: DIONEIO] ***The following

[13]-

[31] are untranslated ***

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[13] E così stando, essendo Rustico più che mai nel suo disidéro acceso per lo vederla così bella, venne la resurrezion della carne, la quale riguardando Alibech e maravigliatasi, disse: "Rustico, quella che cosa è, che io ti veggio, che così si pigne in fuori, e non l' ho io?"

[14] "O figliuola mia," disse Rustico, "questo è il Diavolo, di che io t' ho parlato: e vedi tu? ora egli mi dà grandissima molestia, tanta che io appena la posso sofferire."

[15] Allora disse la giovane: "Oh lodato sia Iddio, chè io veggio che io sto meglio che non stai tu, chè io non ho cotesto Diavolo io."

[16] Disse Rustico: "Tu di' vero, ma tu hai un' altra cosa che non la ho io, et háila in scambio di questo."

[17] Disse Alibech: "O che?"

[18] A cui Rustico disse: "Hai il ninferno; e dicoti che io mi credo che Iddio t' abbia qui mandata per la salute della anima mia, per ciò che se questo Diavolo pur mi darà questa noja, ove tu vogli aver di me tanta pietà, e sofferire che io in inferno il rimetta, tu mi darai grandissima consolazione, et a Dio farai grandissimo piacere e servizio, se tu per quello fare in queste parti venuta se', che tu di'."

[19] La giovane di buona fede rispose: "O padre mio, poscia che ho il ninferno, sia pure quando vi piacerà."

[20] Disse allora Rustico: "Figliuola mia, benedetta sia tu; andiamo dunque, e rimettiámlovi sì che egli poscia mi lasci stare."

[21] E così detto, menata la giovane sopra uno de' loro letticelli, le 'nsegnò come star si dovesse a dovere incarcerare quel maledetto da Dio.

[22] La giovane, che mai più non aveva in inferno messo diavolo alcuno, per la prima volta sentì un poco di noia, per che ella disse a Rustico: "Per certo, padre mio, mala cosa dee essere questo Diavolo, e veramente nimico di Dio, ch'è ancora al ninferno, non che altrui, duole quando egli v'è dentro rimesso."

[23] Disse Rustico: "Figliuola, egli non avverrà sempre così."

[24] E per fare che questo non avvenisse, da sei volte, anzi che di su il lettice si movessero, ve l'rimisero, tanto che per quella volta gli trasser sì la superbia del capo, che egli si stette volentieri in pace.

[25] Ma, ritornatagli poi nel seguente tempo più volte, e la giovane ubbidiente sempre a trargliele si disponesse, avvenne che il giuoco le cominciò a piacere, e cominciò a dire a Rustico: "Ben veggio che il ver dicevano que' valentuomini in Capsa, che il servire a Dio era così dolce cosa: e per certo io non mi ricordo che mai alcuna altra ne facessi, che di tanto diletto e piacer mi fosse, quanto è il rimettere il Diavolo in inferno; e per ciò io giudico ogn' altra persona, che ad altro che a servire a Dio attende, essere una bestia."

[26] Per la qual cosa essa spesse volte andava a Rustico, e gli dicea: "Padre mio, io son qui venuta per servire a Dio e non per istare oziosa; andiamo a rimettere il Diavolo in inferno."

[27] La qual cosa faccendo, diceva ella alcuna volta: "Rustico, io non so perchè il Diavolo si fugga di ninferno; ch'è s'egli vi stesse così volentieri come il ninferno il riceve e tiene, egli non se ne uscirebbe mai."

[28] Così adunque invitando spesso la giovane Rustico, et al servizio di Dio confortandolo sì la bambagia del farsetto tratta gli avea, che egli a tal ora sentiva freddo che un altro sarebbe sudato; e per ciò egli incominciò a dire alla giovane che il Diavolo non era da gastigare nè da rimettere in inferno, se non quando egli per superbia levasse il capo; e "noi per grazia di Dio l'abbiamo sì sgannato, che egli priega Iddio di starsi in pace": e così alquanto impose di silenzio alla giovane.

[29] La qual, poi che vide Rustico non la richiedeva a dovere il Diavolo rimettere in inferno, gli disse un giorno: "Rustico, se il Diavolo tuo è gastigato e più non ti dà noia, me il mio ninferno non lascia stare: per che tu farai bene che tu col tuo Diavolo ajuti attutare la rabbia al mio ninferno, com' io col mio ninferno ho ajutato a trarre la superbia al tuo Diavolo."

[30] Rustico, che di radici d'erba e d'acqua vivea, poteva male rispondere alle poste; e dissele che troppi diavoli vorrebbero essere a potere il ninferno attutare, ma che egli ne farebbe ciò che per lui si potesse; e così alcuna volta le sodisfaceva, ma sì era di rado che altro non era che gittare una fava in bocca al leone: di che la giovane, non parendole tanto servire a Dio quanto voleva, mormorava anzi che no.

[31] However, the case standing thus (deficiency of power against superfluity of desire) between Rustico's Devil and Alibech's hell, it chanced that a fire broke out in Capsa, whereby the house of Alibech's father was burned, and he and all his sons and the rest of his household perished; so that Alibech was left sole heiress of all his estate.

[32] And a young gallant, Neerbale by name, who by reckless munificence had wasted all his substance, having discovered that she was alive, addressed himself to the pursuit of her, and, having found her in time to prevent the confiscation of her father's estate as an escheat for failure of heirs, took her, much to Rustico's relief and against her own will, back to Capsa, and made her his wife, and shared with her her vast patrimony.

[33] But before he had lain with her, she was questioned by the ladies of the manner in which she had served God in the desert; whereto she answered, that she had been wont to serve Him by putting the Devil in hell, and that Neerbale had committed a great sin, when he took her out of such service.

[34] The ladies being curious to know how the Devil was put in hell, the girl satisfied them, partly by words, partly by signs. Whereat they laughed exorbitantly (and still laugh) and said to her: "Be not down-hearted, daughter; 'tis done here too; Neerbale will know well how to serve God with you in that way."

[35] And so the story passing from mouth to mouth throughout the city, it came at last to be a common proverb, that the most acceptable service that can be rendered to God is to put the Devil in hell; which proverb, having travelled hither across the sea, is still current. Wherefore, young ladies, you that have need of the grace of God, see to it that you learn how to put the Devil in hell, because 'tis mightily pleasing to God, and of great solace to both the parties, and much good may thereby be engendered and ensue.