

# **THE HEPTAMERON: Eighth Day**

Marguerite de Navarre (d'Angoulême) Duchesse d'Alençon

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# THE HEPTAMERON: Eighth Day

## Marguerite de Navarre (d'Angoulême) Duchesse d'Alençon

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### EIGHTH DAY.

THE morning being come, they inquired how their bridge was getting on, and found that it might be completed in two or three days. This was not welcome news for some of the company, who would have been glad if the work had lasted longer, in order to protract the pleasure they enjoyed from so agreeable a mode of life. Seeing, then, that they had not more than two or three days left, they resolved to employ them well, and begged Madame Oisille to give them spiritual provender as was her wont. This she did, but detained them longer than usual, because she wished to finish the chronicle of St. John; and so well did she acquit herself of the task, that it seemed that the Holy Spirit, full of love and sweetness, spoke by her mouth. Warmed by that sacred fire they went to hear high mass. After dinner they talked of the past day, and doubted if the present one would be so well filled. They retired to their several chambers for reflection, until it was time to go to the meeting place, where they found the monks already stationed. When they were all seated, the question was asked who should begin. "As you have done me the honor," said Saffredent, "to make me begin two days, methinks it would be unjust to the ladies if any one of them did not also begin two."

"In that case," said Oisille, "we must either remain here a long while, or one of us ladies, or one of you gentlemen, would have to go without his or her day."

"For my part," said Dagoucin, "had I been chosen, I would have ceded my place to Saffredent."

"And I mine to Parlamente," said Nomerfide, "for I am so accustomed to serve that I know not how to command."

The company agreed to this, and Parlamente began thus: "Such good and wise tales have been told on the past days, ladies, that I should recommend our employing this one in relating the greatest follies we can think of, the same being really true. To set you all going, then, I will begin that way."

### NOVEL LXXI.

A woman at the point of death flew into such a violent passion at seeing her husband kiss her servant, that she recovered.

THERE was at Amboise a saddler named Brimbaudier, who worked for the Queen of Navarre. It was enough to see the man's red nose to be assured that he was more a servant to Bacchus than to Diana. He had married a worthy woman, with whom he was very well satisfied, and who managed his children and his household with great discretion. One day he was told that his good wife was very ill, at which he was greatly afflicted. He went

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home with speed, and found her so far gone that she had more need of a confessor than of a doctor, whereat he made the most doleful lamentations that ever were heard; but to report them properly one ought to speak thick like him; but it would be better still to paint one's face. After he had rendered her all the good offices he could, she asked for the cross, which was brought her. The good man, seeing this, threw himself on a bed howling and crying, and ejaculating with his thick tongue: "O Lord, I am losing my poor wife. Was there ever such a misfortune? What shall I do?" and so forth. At last, there being no one in the room but a young servant, rather a good-looking girl, he called her to him in a faint voice, and said, "I am dying, my dear, and worse than if I was dead all out, to see your mistress dying. I know not what to say or do, only that I look for help to you, and beg you to take care of my house and my children. Take the keys that hang at my side; do everything in the house for the best, for I am not in a condition to attend to such things.

The poor girl pitied and tried to comfort him, begging him not to be so cast down, lest besides losing her mistress she should lose her good master also. "It can't be, my dear," said he, "for I am dying. See how cold my face is; put your cheeks to mine to warm them." As she did so he put his hand on her bosom, whereat she offered to make some difficulty, but he begged her not to be alarmed, for they must by all means see each other more closely. Thereupon he laid hold of her and threw her on the bed. His wife, who was left alone with the cross and the holy water, and who had not spoken for two days, began to cry out as well as her feeble voice enabled her, "Ah! ah! ah! I am not dead yet!" And threatening them with her hand, she repeated, "Wicked wretches, I am not dead yet!"

The husband and the servant jumped up instantly, but the sick woman was so enraged with them that her anger consumed the catarrhal humor that hindered her from speaking, so that she poured out upon them all the abuse she could think of. From that moment she began to mend; but her husband had often to endure her reproaches for the little love he had shown for her. \*

You see, ladies, how hypocritical men are, and how little is needed to console them for the loss of their wives.

"How do you know," said Hircan, "but he had heard it was the best remedy for his wife's case? Not being able to cure her by his care and his kind offices, he wished to try if the contrary would not produced the desired effect. The experiment was a happy one; and I am astonished that, being a woman as you are, you have so frankly portrayed the spirit of your sex, who do for spite what they cannot be brought to do by kindness."

"Unquestionably, such provocation as that," said Longarine, "would make me rise not only from my bed but from my grave."

"What harm did he do her in consoling himself, since he thought she was dead?" said Saffredent. "Do we not know that marriage binds only as long as life lasts, and that death gives a man back his liberty?"

"Death releases a man from the obligation of his oath," said Oisille; "but a good heart never thinks itself dispensed from the obligation of loving. It was making great haste to console himself not to be able to wait until his wife had expired."

"What seems strangest to me," said Nomerfide, "is that having death and the cross before his eyes, those two objects were not capable of hindering him from offending God."

"That is a fine idea," said Simontault. "So, then, you would not be shocked at a naughty thing, provided it were done out of sight of the church and the cemetery?"

"Make game of me as much as you will," replied Nomerfide, "but by your leave I maintain that the contemplation of death is enough to chill the heart, however young and fiery it may be."

"I should think as you do," said Dagoucin, "had I not heard to the contrary from a princess."

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"That is as much as to say that she told you some tale to that effect," said Parlamente. "Such being the case, let us hear it."

Dagoucin began thus.

### NOVEL LXXII.

Continual repentance of a nun who had lost her virginity without violence and without love.

IN one of the best towns of France after Paris there was a hospital richly endowed—that is to say, with a prioress and fifteen or sixteen nuns, and a prior with seven or eight monks, who lived opposite in another building. The latter performed service every day, and the nuns contented themselves with saying their paternosters and the hours of Our Lady, because they had enough to do in attending the sick. One day there died a poor man, about whom all the nuns were assembled. After administering all the remedies for his bodily health, they sent for one of their monks to confess him. Then, seeing that he was sinking, they gave him extreme unction, and shortly afterwards he lost his speech. But as he was a long time dying, and it was thought he could still hear, each of the nuns busied herself in saying to him the best things she could. This continued so long that at last they grew tired, and, as it was night and late, they went to bed one after the other. One of the youngest alone remained to lay out the body, with a monk of whom she stood in more awe than of the prior or any other, on account of his great austerity both in life and in conversation. After these two had shouted three hours loud and long into the poor man's ear, they were sure he had breathed his last, and they laid him out.

Whilst performing this last act of charity the monk began to talk of the wretchedness of life and the blessedness of death; and half the night was spent in this pious discourse. The poor girl listened with great attention, and gazed at him with tears in her eyes. This gave him so much pleasure, that, whilst speaking of the life to come, he began to embrace her as if he would fain have carried her in his arms straightway to Paradise; she listening to him always with the same rapt spirit, and not venturing to gainsay one whom she believed to be the most devout man in the convent. The wicked monk seeing this, and talking always of God, accomplished the work which the devil had suddenly put into their hearts (for previously there had been no question of this), assuring her that a secret sin met with impunity before God; that two persons who have no ties cannot sin in that way, provided no scandal comes of it, and to avoid any she was to be careful not to confess to any one but himself.

They separated at last, and as she passed through a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, she wished to offer her orison as usual; but when she came to utter the words Virgin Mary, she recollected that she had lost her virginity without violence and without love, but through a stupid fear, and she burst into such a violent fit of tears, that it seemed as if her heart would break. The monk, who heard her sobs from a distance, suspected her conversion, and was afraid he should not again enjoy the same pleasure. To prevent that untoward contingency, he went up to her as she lay prostrate before the image, reproved her sharply, and told her if her conscience reproached her at all, she might confess to him and not repeat the act if she did not think proper, for she was free either to do it or not without sin. The silly nun, thinking to expiate her sin, confessed to the monk, and all the penance he imposed on her was to swear that it was no sin in her to love, and that some holy water would be sufficient to wash out so trifling a peccadillo.

She believed him rather than God, and relapsed some time after. Finally she became pregnant, and her remorse was so great that she entreated the prioress to have that monk expelled, for she knew he was so crafty that he would not fail to seduce her. The prioress and the prior, who agreed together, treated her with contempt, and told her she was big enough to defend herself against a man, and that he of whom she spoke was a most excellent man. Urged at last by her remorse, she earnestly implored their leave to go to Rome, where she believed she should recover her virginity by confessing her sin at the Pope's feet. The prior and the prioress very willingly granted her request, liking better she should be a pilgrim contrary to the rule of her order than cloistered with the scruples she

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had. Fearing, too, lest in a fit of despair she should reveal the sort of life that was led there, they gave her money for her journey.

Now God so ordered it that the nun arrived in Lyon at the time when the Duchess of Alençon, who was afterwards Queen of Navarre, was secretly performing a novaine in the church of St. John with some of her women. One evening after vespers when that princess was kneeling before the crucifix, she heard some one going up the steps, and perceiving by the light of the lamp that it was a nun, the duchess withdrew to the corner of the altar to hear her devotions. The nun, thinking herself alone, knelt down, and, beating her breast, began to weep most piteously, crying constantly, "Alas, my God! have pity on this poor sinner!" The duchess, wishing to know what was the matter, went up to her, and said, "What is the matter, my dear? Whence come you, and who brought you here?"

The poor nun, who did not know her, replied, "Alas, my dear! my misfortune is so great that I have recourse only to God, whom I beseech with all my heart to enable me to speak to Madame d'Alençon; for I can relate my misfortune to no one but her, being assured that if there be a remedy for it she will not fail to find it."

"My dear," said the duchess, "you may speak to me as you would to her, for I am a very great friend of hers."

"Pardon me," said the nun; "none but herself shall ever know my secret."

The duchess then told her she might speak out, for she had found the person she wanted. The poor woman then fell at her feet, and after many tears and cries related her whole story. The duchess consoled her so well, that, without weakening her repentance, she sent her back to the priory with letters to the bishop of the place, ordering him to have that scandalous monk expelled.

I had this story from the duchess herself; and you may see from it that Nomerfide's recipe is not good for all sorts of people, since this pair, who were touching and laying out a dead body, were not the more chaste for all that. \*

"Here was an invention," said Hircan, "of which I do not suppose any one ever availed himself before: to talk of death and perform the actions of life."

"Sinning is not an action of life," observed Oisille, "for we know that sin produces death."

"Rely upon it," said Saffredent, "those poor people did not think of that point of theology. But as Lot's daughters made their father drunk in hopes of perpetuating the human race, so these good people wished to repair what death had spoiled, and to make a new body to replace that which death had taken away. So I see no harm in the matter except the tears of the poor nun, who wept without ceasing, and always returned to the cause of her tears."

"I have known many like her," said Hircan: "weeping for the sin, and at the same time laughing over the pleasure."

"I believe I know the persons to whom you allude," said Parlamente. "They have laughed long enough, methinks, to begin to cry."

"Say no more," said Hircan; "the tragedy which began with laughter is not yet ended."

"To change the subject, then," rejoined Parlamente, "it strikes me that Dagoucin has not complied with the rule we laid down, which was to tell only laughable tales, whereas his is too piteous."

"You said," replied Dagoucin, "that we should relate only follies, and it seems to me I have not been unsuccessful in that way. But that we may hear a more agreeable one, I give my voice to Nomerfide, hoping that she will repair

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my fault."

"I have a tale ready," said Nomerfide, "which is worthy to follow yours, for it is about a monk and a dead body. Hearken then, if you please." \*

THE END.