

Thus, therefore, in the tragic manner I have described and within the space of a few days, the two young lovers met a violent end without ever having tasted the fruits of their love.

#### FIFTH STORY

*Lisabetta's brothers murder her lover. He appears to her in a dream and shows her where he is buried. She secretly disinters the head and places it in a pot of basil, over which she weeps for a long time every day. In the end her brothers take it away from her, and shortly thereafter she dies of grief.*

When Elisa's story came to an end, the king bestowed a few words of praise upon it and then called upon Filomena to speak next. Being quite overcome with compassion for the hapless Gerbino and his lady-love, she fetched a deep sigh, then began as follows:

This story of mine, fair ladies, will not be about people of so lofty a rank as those of whom Elisa has been speaking, but possibly it will prove to be no less touching; and I was reminded of it by the mention that has just been made of Messina, which was where it all happened.

In Messina, there once lived three brothers, all of them merchants who had been left very rich after the death of their father, whose native town was San Gimignano.<sup>2</sup> They had a sister called Lisabetta, but for some reason or other they had failed to bestow her in marriage, despite the fact that she was uncommonly gracious and beautiful.

In one of their trading establishments, the three brothers employed a young Pisan named Lorenzo, who planned and directed all their operations, and who, being rather dashing and handsomely proportioned, had often attracted the gaze of Lisabetta. Having noticed more than once that she had grown exceedingly fond of him, Lorenzo abandoned all his other amours and began in like fashion to set his own heart on winning Lisabetta. And since they were equally in love with each other, before very long they gratified their dearest wishes, taking care not to be discovered.

In this way, their love continued to prosper, much to their common enjoyment and pleasure. They did everything they could to keep the affair a secret, but one night, as Lisabetta was making her way to Lorenzo's sleeping-quarters, she was observed, without knowing it, by her eldest brother. The discovery greatly distressed him, but being a young man of some intelligence, and not wishing to do anything that would bring discredit upon his family, he neither spoke nor made a move, but spent the whole of the night applying his mind to various sides of the matter.

Next morning he described to his brothers what he had seen of Lisabetta and Lorenzo the night before, and the three of them talked the thing over at considerable length. Being determined that the affair should leave no strain upon the reputation either of themselves or of their sister, he decided that they must pass it over in silence and pretend to have neither seen nor heard anything until such time as it was safe and convenient for them to rid themselves of this ignominy before it got out of hand.

Abiding by this decision, the three brothers jested and chatted with Lorenzo in their usual manner, until one day they pretended they were all going off on a pleasure-trip to the country, and took Lorenzo with them. They bided their time, and on reaching a very remote and lonely spot, they took Lorenzo off his guard, murdered him, and buried his corpse. No one had witnessed the deed, and on their return to Messina they put it about that they had sent Lorenzo away on a trading assignment, being all the more readily believed as they had done this so often before.

Lorenzo's continued absence weighed heavily upon Lisabetta, who kept asking her brothers, in anxious tones, what had become of him, and eventually her questioning became so persistent that one of her brothers rounded on her, and said:

'What is the meaning of this? What business do you have with Lorenzo, that you should be asking so many questions about him? If you go on pestering us, we shall give you the answer you deserve.'

From then on, the young woman, who was sad and miserable and full of strange forebodings, refrained from asking questions. But at night she would repeatedly utter his name in a heart-rending voice and beseech him to come to her, and from time to time she

would burst into tears because of his failure to return. Nothing would restore her spirits, and meanwhile she simply went on waiting.

One night, however, after crying so much over Lorenzo's absence that she eventually cried herself off to sleep, he appeared to her in a dream, pallid-looking and all dishevelled, his clothes tattered and decaying, and it seemed to her that he said:

'Ah, Lisabetta, you do nothing but call to me and bemoan my long absence, and you cruelly reprove me with your tears. Hence I must tell you that I can never return, because on the day that you saw me for the last time, I was murdered by your brothers.'

He then described the place where they had buried him, told her not to call to him or wait for him any longer, and disappeared.

Having woken up, believing that what she had seen was true, the young woman wept bitterly. And when she arose next morning, she resolved to go to the place and seek confirmation of what she had seen in her sleep. She dared not mention the apparition to her brothers, but obtained their permission to make a brief trip to the country for pleasure, taking with her a maidservant who had once acted as her go-between and was privy to all her affairs. She immediately set out, and on reaching the spot, swept aside some dead leaves and started to excavate a section of the ground that appeared to have been disturbed. Nor did she have to dig very deep before she uncovered her poor lover's body, which, showing no sign as yet of decomposition or decay, proved all too clearly that her vision had been true. She was the saddest woman alive, but knowing that this was no time for weeping, and seeing that it was impossible for her to take away his whole body (as she would dearly have wished), she laid it to rest in a more appropriate spot, then severed the head from the shoulders as best she could and enveloped it in a towel. This she handed into her maidservant's keeping whilst she covered over the remainder of the corpse with soil, and then they returned home, having completed the whole of their task unobserved.

Taking the head to her room, she locked herself in and cried bitterly, weeping so profusely that she saturated it with her tears, at the same time implanting a thousand kisses upon it. Then she

wrapped the head in a piece of rich cloth, and laid it in a large and elegant pot, of the sort in which basil or marjoram is grown. She next covered it with soil, in which she planted several sprigs of the finest Salernitan basil,<sup>3</sup> and never watered them except with essence of roses or orange-blossom, or with her own teardrops. She took to sitting permanently beside this pot and gazing lovingly at it, concentrating the whole of her desire upon it because it was where her beloved Lorenzo lay concealed. And after gazing rapidly for a long while upon it, she would bend over it and begin to cry, and her weeping never ceased until the whole of the basil was wet with her tears.

Because of the long and unceasing care that was lavished upon it, and also because the soil was enriched by the decomposing head inside the pot, the basil grew very thick and exceedingly fragrant. The young woman constantly followed this same routine, and from time to time she attracted the attention of her neighbours. And as they had heard her brothers expressing their concern at the decline in her good looks and the way in which her eyes appeared to have sunk into their sockets, they told them what they had seen, adding:

'We have noticed that she follows the same routine every day.'

The brothers discovered for themselves that this was so, and having reproached her once or twice without the slightest effect, they caused the pot to be secretly removed from her room. When she found that it was missing, she kept asking for it over and over again, and because they would not restore it to her she sobbed and cried without a pause until eventually she fell seriously ill. And from her bed of sickness she would call for nothing else except her pot of basil.

The young men were astonished by the persistence of her entreaties, and decided to examine its contents. Having shaken out the soil, they saw the cloth and found the decomposing head inside it, still sufficiently intact for them to recognize it as Lorenzo's from the curls of his hair. This discovery greatly amazed them, and they were afraid lest people should come to know what had happened. So they buried the head, and without breathing a word to anyone, having wound up their affairs in Messina, they left the city and went to live in Naples.

The girl went on weeping and demanding her pot of basil, until eventually she cried herself to death, thus bringing her ill-fated love to an end. But after due process of time, many people came to know of the affair, and one of them composed the song which can still be heard to this day:

Whoever it was,  
Whoever the villain  
That stole my pot of herbs, etc.

### SIXTH STORY

*Andreuola loves Gabriotto. She tells him of a dream she has had, and he tells her of another. He dies suddenly in her arms, and whilst she and a maidservant of hers are carrying him back to his own house, they are arrested by the officers of the watch. She explains how matters stand, and the chief magistrate attempts to ravish her, but she wards him off. Her father is informed, her innocence is established, and he secures her release. Being determined not to go on living in the world, she enters a nunnery.*

The story related by Filomena was much appreciated by the ladies, for they had heard this song on a number of occasions without ever succeeding, for all their inquiries, in discovering why it had been written. It was now Panfilo's turn, and as soon as the king had heard the concluding words of the previous tale, he instructed him to proceed. Panfilo therefore began:

The dream referred to in the last story offers me a pretext for narrating a tale in which two dreams are mentioned, both of them relating to a future event as distinct from something, as in Lisbetta's case, that had already taken place. Moreover, no sooner were they described by the people who had experienced them than both dreams came true. For the fact is, dear ladies, that every living being suffers from the common affliction of seeing various things in his sleep. And although whilst he is asleep they all seem absolutely real, and after waking up he judges some to be real, others possible, and a portion of them totally incredible, nevertheless you will find that many of them come true in the end.

This explains why a lot of people have just as much faith in their dreams as they would have in the things they see when they are wide awake, and why their dreams are sufficient of themselves to make them cheerful if they have seen something encouraging, or sorrowful if they have been frightened. At the other extreme there are those who refuse to believe in dreams until they discover that they have fallen into the very predicament of which they were forewarned. In my opinion, neither of these attitudes is commendable, because dreams are neither true every time nor always false. That they are not all true, each of us has frequently had occasion to discover; that they are not all false has been demonstrated a little while ago in Filomena's story, and, as I said earlier, I intend to show it in my own. For I maintain that if one conducts one's life virtuously, there is no reason to be afraid of any dream that encourages one to behave differently or to abandon one's good intentions because of it: and if one harbours perverse and wicked intentions, however much one's dreams appear favourable to these and encourage one to pursue them by presenting auspicious omens, none of them should be believed, whilst full credence should be given to those which predict the opposite. But let us turn now to the story.

In the city of Brescia there once lived a nobleman called Messer Negro da Poncarraro. He had several children, including a daughter whose name was Andreuola, and although she was an exceedingly beautiful young woman, she was as yet unmarried. Andreuola chanced to fall in love with a neighbour of hers called Gabriotto, a man of low estate but full of admirable qualities, as well as being handsome and pleasing in appearance. Aided and abetted by her maidservant, the girl not only succeeded in apprising Gabriotto of her love but had him conveyed regularly into a beautiful garden in the grounds of her father's house, to the mutual joy of the two parties concerned. And so that this delectable love of theirs should never be torn asunder save by the hand of death, they secretly became husband and wife.

They continued to make love by this furtive means until one night, as she lay asleep, the girl had a dream in which she seemed to