

The Palace of Pleasure

William Painter

1566

The Text from the 1575 edition, in modernised spelling

The Thirty-Eighth Novel

Giletta a Physician's daughter of Narbon, healed the French King of a Fistula, for reward whereof she demanded Beltramo Count of Rossiglione to husband. The Count being married against his will, for despite fled to Florence and loved another. Giletta his wife, by policy found means to lie with her husband, in place of his lover, and was begotten with child of two sons: which known to her husband, he received her again, and afterwards he lived in great honour and felicity.

In France there was a gentleman called Isnardo, the Count of Rossiglione, who because he was sickly and diseased, kept always in his house a Physician, named maister Gerardo of Narbona. This Count had one only son called Beltramo, a very young child, amiable and fair. With whom there was nourished and brought up, many other children of his age: amongst whom one of the daughters of the said Physician, named Giletta, who fervently fell in love with Beltramo, more then was meet for a maiden of her age.

This Beltramo, when his father was dead, and left under the royal custody of the king, was sent to Paris, for whose departure the maiden was very pensive. A litle while after, her father being likewise dead, she was desirous to go to Paris, only to see the young Count, if for that purpose she could get any good occasion. But being diligently looked unto by her kinsfolk (because she was rich and fatherless) she could see no convenient way for her intended journey: and being now marriageable, the love she bare to the Count was never out of her remembrance, and refused many husbands with whom her kinsfolk would have matched her, without making them privy to the cause of her refusal.

Now it chanced that she burned more in love with Beltramo than ever she did before, because she heard tell that he was grown to the state of a goodly young gentleman. She heard by report, that the French king had a swelling upon his breast, which by reason of ill cure was grown to be a Fistula, which did put him to marvellous pain and grief, and that there was no Physician to be found (although many were proved) that could heal it, but rather did impair the grief and made it worse and worse. Wherefore the king, like one in despair, would take no more counsel or help. Whereof the young maiden was wonderful glad, thinking to have by this means, not only a lawful occasion to go to Paris, but if the disease were such as she supposed, easily to bring to pass that she might have the Count Beltramo to her husband.

Whereupon with such knowledge as she had learned at her father's hands before time, she made a powder of certain herbs, which she thought meet for that disease and rode to Paris.

And the first thing she went about when she came thither was to see the Count Beltramo. And then she repaired to the king, praying his grace to vouchsafe to show her his grief. The king perceiving her to be a faire young maiden and a comely, would not hide it, but opened the same unto her. So soon as she saw it she put him in comfort, that she was able to heal him, saying: "Sir, if it may please your grace, I trust in God, without any great pain unto your highnesse, within eight days to make you whole of this disease." The king hearing her say so, began to mock her, saying: "How is it possible for thee, being a young woman, to do that which the best renowned Physicians in the world can not?" He thanked her for her good will and made her a direct answer, that he was determined no more to follow the counsel of any Physician. Whereunto the maiden answered: "Sir, you despise my knowledge because I am young, and a woman, but I assure you that I do not minister Phisicke by profession, but by the aid and help of God: and with the cunning of maister Gerardo of Narbona, who was my father, and a Physician of great fame so long as he lived."

The king hearing those words, said to himself: "This woman peradventure, is sent unto me of God, and therefore why should I disdain to prove her cunning? for so much as she promiseth to heal me within a little space, without any offence or grief unto me." And being determined to prove her, he said: "Damosel, if thou dost not heal me, but make me to break my determination, what wilt thou shall follow thereof?" "Sir," said the maiden: "Let me be kept in what guard and keeping you list: and if I do not heal you within these eight days, let me be burnt: but if I do heal your grace what recompense shall I have then?" To whom the king answered: "Because thou art a maiden and unmarried, if thou heal me according to thy promise, I will bestow thee upon some gentleman, that shall be of right good worship and estimation." To whom she answered: "Sir, I am very well content that you bestow me in marriage: but I beseech your grace let me have such a husband as myself shall demand, without presumption to any of your children or other of your blood." Which request the king incontinently granted.

The young maiden began to minister her Phisicke, and in short space before her appointed time, she had thoroughly cured the king. And when the king perceived himself whole, he said unto her: "Thou hast well deserved a husband, Giletta, even such a one as thyself shalt choose." "I have then my Lord", quoth she, "deserved the Count Beltramo of Rossiglione, whom I have loved from my youth." The king was very loath to grant him unto her: but for that he had made a promise which he was loath to break, he caused him to be called forth, and said unto him: "Sir Count, knowing full well that you are a gentleman of great honour, our pleasure is, that you return home to your own house to order your estate according to your degree: and that you take with you a Damosell which I have appointed to be your wife." To whom the Count gave his humble thanks, and demanded what she was? "It is she", quoth the king, "that with her medicines hath healed me." The Count knew her well and had already seen her, although she was fair, yet knowing her not to be of a stock convenable to his nobility, scornfully said unto the king, "Will you then, sir, give me a Physician to wife? It is not the pleasure of God that ever I should in that wise bestow myself." To whom the king said: "Wilt thou then, that we should break our faith, which we to recover health have given to the damosel, who for a reward asked thee to husband?" "Sir", quoth Beltramo, "you may take from me all that I have, and give my person to whom you please because I am your subject: but I assure you I shall never be contented with that marriage." "Well, you shall have her," said the king, "for the maiden is fair and wise, and loveth you most entirely:

thinking verily you shall lead a more joyful life with her, then with a Lady of a greater house.”

The Count therewithal held his peace, and the king made great preparation for the marriage. And when the appointed day was come, the Count in the presence of the king (although it were against his will) married the maiden, who loved him better then her own self. Which done, the Count, determining before what he would do, prayed licence to return to his country to consummate the marriage. And when he was on horseback he went not thither but took his journey into Tuscany, where understanding that the Florentines and Senois were at wars, he determined to take the Florentines' part, and was willingly received and honourably entertained, and was made captain of a certain number of men, continuing in their service a long time.

The new married gentlewoman, scarce contented with his unkindness, hoping by her well doing to cause him to return into his country, went to Rossiglione, where she was received of all his subjects for their Lady. And perceiving that through the Count's absence all things were spoiled and out of order, she like a sage Lady, with great diligence and care, disposed his things in order again: whereof the subjects rejoiced very much, bearing to her their hearty love and affection, greatly blaming the Count because he could not content himself with her. This notable gentlewoman having restored all the country again to their ancient liberties, sent word to the Count her husband, by two knights, to signify unto him, that if it were for her sake that he had abandoned his country, upon return of answer, she to do him pleasure, would depart from thence. To whom he churlishly replied: “Let her do what she list: for I do purpose to dwell with her, when she shall have this ring (meaning a ring which he wore) upon her finger, and a son in her arms begotten by me.” He greatly loved that ring, and kept it very carefully, and never took it from his finger, for a certain vertue that he knew it had.

The knights hearing the hard condition of two things impossible: and seeing that by them he could not be removed from his determination, returned again to the Lady, telling her his answer: who, very sorrowfull, after she had a good while bethought her, purposed to find means to attain the two things, that thereby she might recover her husband. And having advised herself what to do, she assembled the noblest and chiefest of her Country, declaring unto them in lamentable wise what she had already done to win the love of the Count, showing them also what followed thereof. And in the end said unto them, that she was loathe the Count for her sake should dwell in perpetual exile: therefore she determined to spend the rest of her time in Pilgrimages and devotion, for preservation of her Soul, praying them to take the charge and government of the Country, and that they would let the Count understand, that she had forsaken his house, and was removed far from thence: with purpose never to return to Rossiglione again.

Many tears were shed by the people, as she was speaking those words, and divers supplications were made unto her to alter her opinion, but all in vain. Wherefore commending them all unto God, she took her way, with her maid, and one of her kinsmen, in the habit of a pilgrim, well furnished with silver and precious Jewels: telling no man whither she went, and never rested till she came to Florence: where arriving by Fortune at a poor widow's house, she contented herself with the state of a poor pilgrim, desirous to hear news of her Lord, whom by fortune she saw the next day passing by the house (where she lay) on horseback with his company. And although she knew him well enough, yet she

demanded of the good wife of the house what he was: who answered that he was a foreign gentleman, called the Count Beltramo of Rossiglione, a courteous knight, and well beloved in the City, and that he was marvellously in love with a neighbour of her's, that was a gentlewoman, very poor and of small substance, nevertheless of right honest life and good report, and by reason of her poverty was yet unmarried, and dwelt with her mother, that was a wise and honest Lady.

The Countess well noting these words, and by little and little debating every particular point thereof, comprehending the effect of those news, concluded what to do, and when she had well understood which was the house, and the name of the Lady, and of her daughter that was beloved of the Count, upon a day repaired to the house secretly in the habit of a pilgrim, where finding the mother and daughter in poor estate amongst their family, after she had saluted them, she told the mother that she had to say unto her. The gentlewoman rising vp, courteously entertained her, and being entered alone in a chamber, they sat down and the Countess began to speak unto her in this wise: "Madame, methink that ye be one upon whom Fortune doth frown, so well as upon me: but if you please, you may both comfort me and yourself." The lady answered, "That there was nothing in the world wherof she was more desirous then of honest comfort." The Countess proceeding in her talk, said unto her. "I have need now of your fidelity and trust, whereupon if I do stay, and you deceive me, you shall both undo me and your self." "Tell me then what it is boldly (said the gentlewoman:) for you shall never be deceived of me."

Then the Countess began to recite her whole estate of love: telling her what she was, and what had chanced to that present day, in such perfect order as the gentlewoman, believing her, because she had partly heard report before, began to have compassion upon her, and after that the Countess had rehearsed the whole circumstance, she continued her purpose, saying: "Now you have heard amongst other my troubles, what two things they be, which behoveth me to have, if I do recover my husband, which I know none can help me to obtain, but only you, if it be true that I hear, which is, that the Count my husband is far in love with your daughter." To whom the gentlewoman said: "Madame, if the Count love my daughter, I know not, albeit the likelihood is great: but what am I able to do, in that which you desire?" "Madame, answered the Countess, I will tell you: but first I will declare what I mean to do for you, if my purpose be brought to effect: I see your fair daughter of good age, ready to marry, but as I understand the cause, why she is unmarried, is the lack of substance to bestow her. Wherefore I purpose, for recompense of the pleasure which you shall do for me, to give so much ready money to marry her honourably, as you shall think sufficient."

The Countess' offer was very well liked of the Lady, because she was poor: yet having a noble heart, she said unto her, "Madam, tell me wherein I may do you service: and if it be a thing honest, I will gladly perform it, and the same being brought to pass, do as it shall please you." Then said the Countess, "I think it requisite, that by some one whom you trust, you give knowledge to the Count my husband, that your daughter is, and shall be at his commandement. And to the intent she may be well assured that he loveth her in deed above any other, she must pray him to send her a ring that he weareth upon his finger, which ring as she knoweth, he loveth very dearly: and when he sendeth the ring, you shall give it unto me, and afterwards send him word, that your daughter is ready to accomplish his pleasure, and then you shall cause him secretly to come hither, and place me by him (instead of your daughter). Peradventure God will give me the grace, that I may be with

child, and so having this ring on my finger, and the child in mine arms begotten by him, I may recover him, and by your means continue with him, as a wife ought to do with her husband.”

This thing seemed difficult unto the Gentlewoman, fearing that there would follow reproach unto her daughter. Notwithstanding, considering what an honest part it were, to be a mean that the good Lady might recover her husband, and that she might do it for a good purpose, having affiance in her honest affection, not only promised the Countess to bring this to pass, but in few days with great subtlety, following the order wherein she was instructed, she had gotten the ring, although it was with the Counts ill will, and took order that the Countess in stead of her daughter did lie with him. And at the first meeting, so effectuously desired by the Count, God so disposed the matter that the Countess was begotten with child, of two goodly sons, and her delivery chanced at the due time. Whereupon the gentlewoman not only contented the Countess at that time with the company of her husband, but at many other times so secretly as it was never known: the Count not thinking that he had lain with his wife, but with her whom he loved. To whom at his uprising in the morning, he used many courteous and amiable words, and gave divers fair and precious Jewels, which the Countess kept most carefully: and when she perceived herself with child, she determined no more to trouble the gentlewoman, but said unto her, “Madame, thanks be to God and you, I have the thing that I desire, and even so it is time to recompense your desert, that afterwards I may depart.”

The gentlewoman said unto her, that if she had done any pleasure agreeable to her mind, she was right glad thereof, which she did not for hope of reward, but because it appertained to her by well doing so to do. Whereunto the Countess said: “Your saying pleaseth me well, and for my part, I do not purpose to give unto you the thing you shall demand in reward, but for consideration of your well doing, which duty forceth me to do.” The gentlewoman then constrained with necessity, demanded of her with great bashfulness, an hundred pounds to marry her daughter. The Countess perceiving the shamefastness of the gentlewoman, and her courteous demand, gave her five hundred pounds, and so many fair and costly Jewels, as almost amounted to like valour. For which the gentlewoman more then contented, gave most hearty thanks to the Countess, who departed from the gentlewoman and returned to her lodging. The gentlewoman to take occasion from the Count of any farther repair, or sending to her house, took her daughter with her, and went into the country to her friends. The Count Beltramo, within few days after, being revoked home to his own house by his subjects, (hearing that the Countess was departed from thence) returned.

The Countess knowing that her husband was gone from Florence and returned home, was very glad, continuing in Florence till the time of her childbed, being brought abed of two sons, which were very like unto their father, and caused them carefully to be nursed and brought up, and when she saw time, she took her journey (unknown to any) and arrived at Montpellier, and resting herself there for certain days, hearing news of the Count, and where he was, and that upon the day of All Saints, he purposed to make a great feast, and assembly of Ladies and Knights, in her pilgrims weed she repaired thither. And knowing that they were all assembled, at the palace of the Count, ready to sit down at the table, she passed through the people without change of apparell, with her two sons in her arms: and when she was come up into the hall, even to the place where the Count sat, falling down

prostrate at his feet, weeping, saying unto him, "My Lord, I am thy poor unfortunate wife, who to th'intent thou mightest return and dwell in thine own house, have been a great while begging aboute the world. Therefore I now beseech thee, for the honour of God, that thou wilt observe the conditions, which the two knights that I sent unto thee did command me to do: for behold, here in mine arms, not only one son begotten by thee, but twain, and likewise thy Ring. It is now time then (if thou keep promise) that I should be received as thy wife."

The Count hearing this, was greatly astonished, and knew the Ring, and the children also, they were so like him. "But tell me (quod he) how is this come to pass?" The Countess to the great admiration of the Count, and of all those that were in presence, rehearsed unto them in order all that which had been done, and the whole discourse thereof. For which cause the Count knowing the things she had spoken to be true (and perceiving her constant mind and good wit, and the two fair young boys) to keep his promise made, and to please his subjects, and the Ladies that made suit unto him to accept her from that time forth as his lawful wife, and to honour her, abjected his obstinate rigour, causing her to rise up, and embraced and kissed her, acknowledging her again for his lawful wife. And after he had apparelled her according to her estate, to the great pleasure and contentation of those that were there, and of all his other friends not only that day, but many others, he kept great cheer, and from that time forth, he loved and honoured her, as his dear spouse and wife.

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