

Third Day, Fourth Story



Dom Felice teaches Friar Puccio how to attain sainthood by performing one of his penances; Friar Puccio does this, and by this means Dom Felice has a good time with the friar's wife.

WHEN Filomena, having come to the end of her story, fell silent and Dioneo with a few well-chosen words had praised the lady's ingenuity as well as Filomena's closing prayer, the Queen turned toward Panfilo, and, laughing, she said:

"And now, Panfilo, add to our delight with one of your amusing little stories."

Panfilo immediately replied that he would be delighted to do so and began:

My lady, there are many people who, while striving to get to Paradise, without knowing it manage to send someone else there instead of themselves; and this, as you are now about to hear, happened to a lady from our city not long ago.

There once lived, according to what I have heard, near the Convent of San Brancazio a good man, and rich too, called Puccio di Rinieri, who, as he was completely devoted to spiritual matters, became a tertiary of the Franciscan Order, taking the name of Friar Puccio: and in pursuing this spiritual life of his, since all the family he had consisted of a wife and a maidservant, which meant that there was no reason for him to go out and work, he would very often frequent the church. Since he was a rather thick-witted, simpleminded man, he always said his Our Fathers and went to Mass, attended sermons, and never failed to show up when lauds were being sung by laymen, and he fasted, and practiced other types of discipline. It was even rumored that he was a member of the Flagellants. His wife, whose name was Monna Isabetta, was still young, between twenty-eight and

thirty, and she looked as fresh and pretty and plump as an apple from Casole, but because of her husband's saintliness and perhaps his old age, she very often went on longer diets than she might otherwise have desired; and on those occasions when she might have wanted to sleep with him and fool around in bed, he would lecture her on the life of Christ, the preachings of Brother Nastagio, or the lament of the Magdalen, or other such things.

About this time a rather young and handsome monk named Dom Felice, sharp-witted and very learned, who was one of the conventual brothers at San Brancazio, happened to return from Paris, and Friar Puccio struck up a very close friendship with him. And because the monk was able to resolve many of his friend's religious questions and knowing the kind of person the friar was, he would make himself appear to be a very saintly man, so Friar Puccio began to bring him home from time to time and offer him lunch or dinner, depending on the time of day; and his wife, out of love for Friar Puccio, also became friendly with the monk and was happy to entertain him. And so, as the monk continued to visit Friar Puccio's home and took notice of his fresh and plump little wife, he guessed what it was that she lacked the most; and he thought to himself that in order to spare Friar Puccio the trouble he might just provide her with it himself. And he cleverly managed to give her the eye on one occasion or another in such a way that he ignited in her mind the same desire he had in his, and as soon as the monk realized this, the first chance he got he spoke to her of his desires. Although he found her well disposed to bringing his work to fruition, they could find no way to do so, for she would not risk being with the monk anywhere in the world except in her own home, and it was not possible in her house because Friar Puccio never left town—a fact that caused the monk great distress. But after much thought the idea came to him of how he could be with the woman in her own house and without arousing suspicion, notwithstanding the fact that Friar Puccio was at home all the while.

One day Friar Puccio came to see him, and he spoke to him in this way:

"I have often thought, Friar Puccio, that your one de-

sire was to become a saint, but it seems to me you are taking the longest route in that direction, whereas there is a much shorter one which the Pope and the other great prelates of his who, though they know and employ it themselves, do not wish to reveal to others, for the clergy, which lives for the most part on charity, would quickly fall into ruin because laymen would no longer support them by way of donations or other means. But since you are my friend and have been very good to me, if I could believe that you would never reveal this method to anyone else and that you were willing to try it, I would reveal it to you."

Having become anxious to learn it now, Friar Puccio began first by begging him with the greatest earnestness to show it to him and then swearing that he would never reveal it to anyone without Dom Felice's permission, and then affirming that if the method was one that he could manage to follow, he would put his mind to doing it.

"Since you have promised me in this manner," said the monk, "I shall reveal it to you. I want you to know that the holy Doctors of the Church maintain that anyone who wishes to become a saint should follow the penance you are now about to hear. But please understand: I am not saying that after doing the penance you will no longer be a sinner as you are now. For what happens is this: all the sins you have committed up until the hour of your penance will be completely purged and forgiven because of the said penance, and as for those you will commit afterward, they will not be written down to your damnation—no, on the contrary, they will be washed away with holy water as you do with your venial sins now. Then it is necessary, first of all, for the man to confess his sins with the greatest of diligence before beginning the penance; after this the penitent must begin a fast and a very strict abstinence which is to last forty days, during which time he must abstain from touching not only other women but even his own wife. In addition, the penitent must have in his own home some place where he can go at night to see the sky, and at the hour of compline he is to go to this place, where there should have been prepared a very wide plank set up in such a way that while the penitent is standing on his feet, he is

able, at the same time, to rest his back upon it, but always keeping his feet on the ground and his arms stretched out in the crucified position—and, ah yes, should you wish to rest your arms on some kind of supports, feel free to do so; and in this position, gazing at heaven, you must remain without moving an inch until matins. If you were a learned man, in this case you would have to learn certain prayers that I would give you to recite; but since you are not, it will suffice for you to say three hundred Our Fathers along with three hundred Hail Marys in honor of the Holy Trinity; and as you look up to the sky, always remember that God was the creator of heaven and earth and bear in mind the Passion of Christ as you are fixed in the same position in which He Himself was upon the cross. Then, when matins sounds, you may, if you wish, go dressed as you are to your bed and lie down and sleep. Later on in the morning you must go to church and hear at least three Masses and say fifty Our Fathers with as many Hail Marys; and after that you may humbly go about your own business, if you have any. Then, if you wish, you may eat lunch, but then you must be in church around vespers in order to recite certain prayers which I shall write down for you and without which this whole thing would never work; and then around compline you must start going through the entire process from the beginning. If you do this, just as I have already done, you should, before reaching the end of your penance, feel the wonderful effects of eternal blessedness, if you put enough devotion into it."

Friar Puccio then said:

"This is not such a difficult nor too long a task to perform, and I should easily be able to do it; therefore, in God's name, I shall begin on Sunday."

After leaving Dom Felice and returning home, having already obtained the monk's permission, he carefully explained every detail of it to his wife. The woman understood only too well what the monk meant with the part about his remaining still without moving until matins; since she thought it was a very good idea indeed, she told him that she was pleased about it, as she was about every other thing he did for the good of his soul, and in order that God might make his penance profitable, she would fast along with him, but more than this, no.

So they were agreed on this, and when Sunday came, Friar Puccio began his penance, and Messer Monk, having reached an understanding with the lady, would come most every evening at a time when he could not be seen to dine with her, always bringing with him lots of good food to eat and things to drink; then he would lie with her until the hour of matins, at which time he got up and left before Friar Puccio returned to his bed. The place which Friar Puccio had chosen to perform his penance was situated next to the bedroom in which the lady slept, and it was not divided from that room by anything but a very thin wall; one night while Messer Monk was frolicking a bit too wildly with the lady and she with him, Friar Puccio thought he felt the floor of the house shaking, and having just recited his one hundredth Our Father, he stopped at that point, and without moving, he called to the lady and asked her what she was doing. The lady, who could be very witty, and who, at that moment, was probably riding St. Benedict's ass, or better still, St. Giovanni Gualberto's, replied:

"Faith, husband, I am shaking all I can."

Friar Puccio then said:

"Shaking? What is all this shaking about?"

Laughing, the lady (who was a jolly and lively sort of woman who probably had good cause to laugh) replied:

"How is it you don't know what this is all about? I have heard you say a thousand times, 'Whoever does not at evening supper take, all through the night will truly shake.'"

Friar Puccio, who actually believed that her fasting was the reason why she was unable to sleep and therefore the cause of her shaking in bed, said to her in good faith:

"Lady, I have told you many times, 'Do not fast! But since you wanted to do so anyway, stop worrying about it and think about sleeping; you are tossing about in bed so much that you are making everything in the house shake.'"

Then the lady replied:

"Don't worry about it; I know very well what I'm doing. You just keep up your good work, and I will do the best I can with mine."

Friar Puccio said no more and returned to his Our Fathers, but from that night on, the lady and Messer Monk

had a bed set up in another part of the house and for as long as the period of Friar Puccio's penance lasted, they spent their time together there having a fine time; and when it was time for the monk to leave, the lady would return to her own bed, to which, shortly afterward, Friar Puccio would return from his penance. Thus while the friar carried on performing his penance in this way, the lady carried on to her delight with the monk, to whom she would, from time to time, make the quip:

"You make Friar Puccio do the penance but we are the ones who go to Paradise!" Since her husband had always kept her on a diet and now she had become accustomed to the monk's good food, she thought she never felt as good as this before, and so when Friar Puccio's penance was over, she found a means of dining with him elsewhere, and for a long time she discreetly had her fill of pleasure.

And so, to make my last words correspond to my first, this is how it happened that Friar Puccio thought he would get himself into Paradise by doing a penance, when instead he got the monk in, who had shown him the quick road there, as well as his wife, who lived with him but sorely lacked the thing which Messer Monk, charitable man that he was, managed to supply her with in great abundance.

Third Day, Fifth Story



Zima gives Messer Francesco Vergellesi one of his horses and in return for this he receives his permission to speak to his wife; she is unable to speak, and Zima replies on her behalf, and later on, things turn out according to his reply.

PANFILO came to the end of his story about Friar Puccio, and not without much laughter from the ladies, when the Queen graciously ordered Elissa to continue; and