

inscribe in your register, and then you can send me whatever you wish."

**ANTONIA** I see. That way you could pocket all the money your lovers gave to the doctor and druggist, who would be handing it back to you.

**NANNA** You're pretty smart. Anyway, it was a real belly laugh that evening at supper with my men when I acted as though I'd been badly taken and slumped right under the table. My mother, who was in on the scheme, loosened my bodice, looking terribly frightened, and helped by the men carried me to my bed, wailing and crying as if I were dead. Then I came to, let out a great sigh, and whispered: "Oh, my heart." All the men began crying: "Don't worry, it's nothing. They're just vapors that come from the brain." I said: "I feel all right as I am," fainted again, and began writhing in anguish, so much so that two of the men ran for the doctor. He came, held my wrist delicately between his two fingers like a player fingering the stops on the neck of the lute, revived me with rose-vinegar water, and declared: "Her pulse is still beating!" and left the room. Some of my credulous saps consoled my mama, who wanted to jump out of the window, while the others clustered around the doctor, who was writing his prescription for the druggist. As soon as he had dashed it off, one of them brought it himself to the druggist's shop and returned with his hands full of paper twists and phials. After this the doctor left, though first telling them what must be done for me. My mother had some difficulty getting rid of my lovers, because they all wanted to sit and watch at my bedside, without even taking off their clothes. The next morning they all returned, and the doctor too. When the good man heard how close I had come during the night to passing on, he told them to collect twenty-five Venetian ducats to pay for making a certain distillation. One of the dupes, not even concerned that, once boiled in the still, those ducats would melt away forever, gave them

to my mother, who stowed them carefully in our own little poor box; and no matter how much that idiot might have croaked, he would never have seen them again in this life. In short, what with medicines of rhubarb, syrups, cordials, enemas, juleps, *manuscripti*, payment for doctor's services, firewood, and candles, a purseful of coins poured into my hands.

**ANTONIA** Didn't you get bored stuck in bed even though you were healthy?

**NANNA** I would have if I had been all by myself; but one night the doctor would come to massage my back and the next night the druggist took over and rubbed me down thoroughly. When I was on my feet again and fully recovered, plucked, roasted capons and delicate wines showered down on me; my lovers had raped every prelate's cell to supply me.

**ANTONIA** Ha ha ha!

**NANNA** That merchant I mentioned before, though he didn't say a word, let me know quite clearly that he would love to have a child with me. So I began to loll around and look very sad and uncomfortable. I would twist and squirm from morning to night, and when I ate for every three mouthfuls I swallowed I would spit out the fourth and shriek: "What sort of bitter stuff is this?" then act as if I were going to vomit. The poor chump would comfort me and say: "Oh, I hope God wills it..." and fall silent. And I, who would eat like a field hand when he wasn't there, would lose my appetite and not even take a nibble. At last, after having staged many faints, swoonings, bellyaches, morning sicknesses, and stitches in the side, while constantly complaining that my periods didn't come on time, I told him, through my mother, that I was pregnant, and my confederate, the doctor, substantiated the statement. So the rag-shitter rushed off as happy as a lark to line up godmothers and godfathers, set aside capons, buy diapers, and even hire a wet-nurse. Not a bird, not a first fruit of the season, nor a freshblown

flower appeared that he didn't snatch for me, fearing that, if I felt the lack of it, the child might be marked by its rash. He could not even stand for me to bring my hands to my own mouth and filled my beak with his own, rushed to help me stand up and to support me when I sat down. The best laugh of all was to see him cry when he heard me say: "If I die in giving birth, please take care of my son." I drew up a will, making him heir to all my property on my death. He went everywhere showing it off and saying to each person he met: "Read what it says there and then tell me if I'm not right to adore her." Well, after having amused him with this comedy for some time, one day I let myself drop to the floor, doing it with real abandon. I behaved as though I were badly hurt and then had them bring in a basin of tepid water which contained the foetus of an unborn lamb, which you would have sworn was a human abortion. When he saw it, the tears poured down; he set up a great lament and redoubled his tears and cries when my mother told him that the child was a boy and looked exactly like him, and he spent a pile of money to bury it. We made him dress in black, and indeed he was in despair because the baby had died without being properly baptized.

*ANTONIA* Who was Pippa's father?

*NANNA* He was a marquis in the eyes of God, but as for the world, I cannot mention his name. Yes, we'd better talk about something else.

*ANTONIA* As you wish.

*NANNA* The fancy took me to strum a lute, not for the pleasure of it but in order to make a show of enjoying the arts. The truth is that the accomplishments whores acquire are only snares to catch the fools. They are more expensive than the fennel, olives, and jellies that innkeepers set out before a meal. Any whore who starts singing songs and can read music from a book at sight, stay away from her—in fact run away as fast as you can, even in your bare feet.

*ANTONIA* Everything in this world goes hand in hand with deception.

*NANNA* Above all I had a talent for turning every trifle to my advantage; I could even snare a kid's jack in my net, as Pulci's Margutte says. There wasn't a single man who slept with me who didn't part with a piece of his hide. And don't imagine that a shirt, a headdress, shoe, hat, or sword, the merest bagatelle which was left in my house, was ever seen again. Every little thing can be turned into cash. And since every item has its price on the market, all the water carriers, wood sellers, oil peddlers, mirror merchants, biscuit bargainers, soap salesmen, traders in milk and cheese or roasted and boiled chestnuts, right down to the shoeshiners and match sellers, were all my bosom pals; and they would compete among themselves to see who could waylay the most customers for me.

*ANTONIA* Why did they do it?

*NANNA* Because I would come to the window on every possible pretext, buying all sorts of things from them and forcing my lovers to pay through the nose; whoever came to court me had to spend a julio, a drachma, a baiocco. For instance, at a certain point my maid would step onto the stage. "The pillow cases," she would say, "are still too skimpy: you need at least a mile more of cloth," and I would kiss the first man to hand and ask him: "Give me a julio." And he would be marked down as a lousy cheapskate if he didn't hand it over. After my maid came my mother, her hands piled high with linen. "If you let this bargain slip through your fingers," she would squeal, "you'll never come across a better one." So I would dole out two more kisses to another fellow and he would fork out for the linen. When that group had left, a new batch showed up; but I had my maid tell them that I was in company and would let only one man in, provided he came by himself. After having cooked him like a meat sauce on the fire of my kisses and fondlings, I wheedled and

beguiled him so adeptly that that very day he sent an embroidered silk spread for my bed, a hanging, a painting, or some other expensive object which I knew he owned. In return for this gift I would promise him, even before he requested it, that he could come and spend the night with me. That night he would send me the most magnificent dinner, and when he himself arrived to eat it with me, I would have my servant tell him to go for a stroll and return after a while. The stroll over, he would be back at the door and the maid would tell him: "Just wait a little longer." He'd wait, knock again, get no answer, and start shouting and threatening: "You whore, you sow, you'll pay for this, I swear it by the body of the Immaculate and Consecrated One!" All the while I was gorging myself at his expense with another man, laughing and saying between fits of laughter: "Bang as much as you wish; you'll only become a laughing stock for your pains."

**ANTONIA** How did he forgive you afterward, if he was a man of any substance?

**NANNA** I don't care what he was. Usually he would sulk and fret for a couple of days and then, unable to hold his colt in check any longer, he would let me know that he wanted to have a word with me. "What do you mean one word? A thousand," I would reply. And when I opened the door for him, he would stalk in blustering: "I would never have believed it." "My soul," I would say, "if that's what you want to think, go right ahead. But the fact is that you're the only man I love, adore, and hold in my heart. If you only knew, if you only knew what it was that compelled me to leave the other evening, you would praise me to the skies. If I can't be sure of you, whom can I be sure of?" And you can bet on it I was able to invent plenty of excuses—for instance, that I had to visit some lawyer or official in connection with a court case I was involved in. Then I would swoop right down on him, fling my arms around his neck, and while he was

planting his lily in my garden plot, I was ripping the heart out of his body, not to mention his spirit's anger. And I didn't permit him to leave me until I had made him sing my song again through the entire register.

**ANTONIA** They should have made you a singing teacher at the Scuola Cantorum.

**NANNA** Thanks for the pretty compliment.

**ANTONIA** Thanks also to your great skill.

**NANNA** No, to your kindness. But listen now to how I nearly got rich one day. A certain gentleman, who was dying to have me, wanted me to accompany him to one of his estates and stay with him there for two months. This gave me the idea of getting it bruited about that I was going to marry God. I sent for a Jew and made a deal with him for all my furnishings and sold them, though not without making my lovers suffer the torments of the damned. After I had deposited the money I got in a bank, doing it on the sly, I left with the aforesaid gentleman.

**ANTONIA** Why did you sell your furnishings?

**NANNA** To get new things in their place. The truth is that when I came back my lovers rushed to buy them, like ants rushing for fresh new seeds.

**ANTONIA** Certainly it's the spells you cast on the poor wretches that made them believe you.

**NANNA** I won't deny that a whore uses every possible wile to blind and bedazzle them. We make them eat our excrement, and our periods too. There was one whore—I won't mention her name—who, in order to get her lover to pursue her even more passionately, gave him a flock of the French disease-crusts to gnaw on, since she had plenty to spare.

**ANTONIA** How awfull!

**NANNA** Now, just listen. With a candle made from the fat of a man burnt alive at the stake, I managed to heat up a nicely boiling cauldron of my little affairs. But after all, these bewitchments, such as herbs dried in the dark, ropes robbed from the necks of

hanged men, dead men's fingernails, diabolical incantations, and so on, are not worth a straw compared to the greatest bewitchment of all, which I would name if it were permissible.

**ANTONIA** Your conscience is as clean as Fra Capelletto's.

**NANNA** Well, not to look like a hypocrite, I shall tell you that a pair of luscious buttocks can accomplish more than all that the philosophers, astrologists, alchemists, and necromancers have ever wrought. I have tried as many herbs as two whole meadows can grow, and as many words as peddlers spout in ten market days; yet I could never move a finger of the heart of a certain man—his name must remain a secret—while with one little twist of my pretty little behind I drove him so crazy for me that all the whorehouses were astounded, and these are places which are used to seeing novelties every day and become so calloused that they are never amazed by anything.

**ANTONIA** You see, you see where the mysteries of enchantment are found!

**NANNA** They are found between the legs, in the crack, and that crack has just as much power to charm money out of shinbones as money has to lure the crack out of monasteries.

**ANTONIA** If the behind has as much power as money, then it has more prowess than the knight Ronceville, who slaughtered all the paladins.

**NANNA** Of course it has more prowess. But let's go on with our discussion and write down this bit of cunning, which really counts in a pinch. I had a lover as frenzied as a spendthrift who has nothing to spend. The first thing that got his goat he would fly off the handle and start to curse me, and when his anger had passed, he would kneel at my feet, his arms crossed over his chest, and beg for my forgiveness. It was my special graciousness to make his penance hit his purse. One day when I saw that he was going beyond all

bounds, I drove him into such a fit of desperation by sliding out of the bed and going downstairs to give myself to his rival that he walloped me. When he was in a good humor again, thinking that he would never be able to mollify me, for I pretended not to want to listen to another word, he gave me half of what he had on him. And so he made peace with me.

**ANTONIA** You treated him the way those scoundrels do who, after giving their oath to an enemy not to attack, goad him into using his fists so that he will be punished for it.

**NANNA** Exactly; that's the sort I was. Ha ha ha! I almost pee in my drawers when I think of the preacher who established only seven mortal sins for all the people in the world, whereas the lowliest whore that lives can provide him with at least one hundred. Or consider how many sins one of these women must have who strips a thousand churches bare in order to cover her own altar. My dear Antonia, gluttony, anger, pride, envy, sloth, and greed were born on the selfsame day as whoring; and if you wish to know how a whore stuffs herself, apply to those who feed on her; and if you wish to understand how wrathful a whore is in her anger, ask the father and mother of all the saints in the calendar. Learn this one thing: if whores could plunge the entire world into the abyss, they would do it in less time than it took Almighty God to create it.

**ANTONIA** It's an evil business.

**NANNA** The arrogance of a whore is far worse than that of some dress-up hick; the envy of a whore is so avid that it devours itself, like the French disease consumes those who have it in their bones. . . .

**ANTONIA** I beg you, don't remind me of it. I caught it, and I never could discover where it came from.

**NANNA** Forgive me for bringing it up; I had forgotten how it nearly murdered you. A whore's accidie is sharper and more troubling than the melan-

choly of a courtier who sees himself rotting away in his hovel without a cent of income. The greed of a whore is like the tasty mouthful which the usurer steals from his hunger, putting it away in his cupboard together with the other leftovers.

**ANTONIA** And where does that leave a whore's lust and love of lewdness?

**NANNA** Antonia, my dear Antonia, the man who drinks all the time is never very thirsty, and the person who sits all day at the table is rarely hungry. And if every now and then a whore does get a fleeting desire for a big prick, she gets it in much the way that a pregnant woman eats a clove of garlic or a green plum; it is but a passing whim. And I swear to you by the good fortune I wish for my darling Pippa that lust is the least of all the desires they have, because they are constantly thinking of ways and means to cut out men's hearts and feelings.

**ANTONIA** I believe you, and without your oath.

**NANNA** Take my word for it. But now take a pleasant sip of about a thousand clever swindles and hoaxes, which I shall tell you almost in one breath.

**ANTONIA** Go right ahead—tell me.

**NANNA** Among my many lovers there were three men, a painter and two courtiers, and theirs was the peace that exists between dogs and cats. One man was always spying on the other two, trying to come and see me when he thought the others wouldn't be there. So one evening the painter came at an odd hour and knocked at my door. He was admitted, and barely got up the stairs and started to sit down at my side when, hark, along came one of the courtiers and started banging. I knew who it was, so I got the painter to hide somewhere and then went down to meet the other man, who came up crying: "By the devil! I'd just like to get my hands on that painter of scoundrels' mitres for the whipped, if he's here," though the painter didn't hear a word of it. While this courtier was gabbing, I heard my

third lover cough and clear his throat, which was his signal to tell me he was there and to let him in. So I hid the fellow who hated the painter, and my third stud walked in, spitting. Even before he got upstairs, he said to me: "I came expecting to find one of those two wretches with you, and if I had, the least he would have paid for it would be the loss of an ear." Now don't imagine that since he talked so bravely he would have dared give the warrior Castruccio a kick in the arse. Just the opposite, for when this challenge was heard by the painter, who did not know the courtier was also hidden, and by the courtier, who knew nothing of the painter, they both jumped out to make the braggart eat his words. Seeing the two of them, he had a great urge to withdraw, ran to the head of the stairs, stumbled and rolled all the way down to the bottom, and his enemies, having in their rage lost all sense, jumped down on top of him. Then the three men, who mortally hated each other, were all piled up in a heap and started a brawl that drew a mob with their shouts, groans, and general uproar; but the onlookers couldn't get in the house to pull them apart, for their shoulders were rammed so tightly against the door that nobody could open it. As their shouts multiplied, and also the crowd on the street, a governor happened to pass by. He had the door forced and arrested all three of them. And battered and bloody as they were, he had them all put in the same prison cell; and they would never have been gotten out if they hadn't come to an agreement, as in fact they did.

**ANTONIA** That was surely a fine stunt.

**NANNA** It was so fine that I used to tell it to all the men from other cities. I was even on the point of having a poem written about it by Gian-Maria the Jew, but I didn't for fear of seeming a boastful woman.

**ANTONIA** God will reward you.

**NANNA** I hope He does. But if this story made everyone laugh, the story I'm going to tell you now

shocked them. When I was at the peak of the favor in which my lovers had brought me (thanks to my being such good merchandise), I decided that I would like to get myself walled up in the cemetery.

*ANTONIA* Why not in St. Peter's or St. John's?

*NANNA* Because I wanted to excite their pity even more deeply by having them put me among all those dead people's bones.

*ANTONIA* What a marvelous idea!

*NANNA* When the word had spread, I began to lead a holy life.

*ANTONIA* Before you go on with your story, tell me, why did this crazy idea of being walled up seize you?

*NANNA* To escape from my lovers, and at their expense.

*ANTONIA* Of course, of course.

*NANNA* I began to change my mode of life. The first thing I did was take down the hangings in my room; then I took out the bed and table, donned a skimpy gray woolen dress, removed my necklaces, rings, headresses, and all other finery. Each day I fasted, although I managed to eat plenty on the sly. I did not stop talking altogether, and I did not consent to doing everything with my lovers. From day to day I accustomed them to getting along without me, and this soon drove them absolutely wild. When I was sure that the story about my wanting to be walled up was on everyone's lips, I carted away everything of value in the house and, after storing it in a safe place, roamed about town distributing a few rags to the needy, for the love of God's mercy. When the time for the immurement came, I summoned my lovers, who expected to be widowed by me (and it would have been better for them if I had been lost entirely rather than simply strayed), and asked them to sit down. After we had sat like that for a time, turning over in my head a few sentences I had made up all by myself, I squeezed ten little teardrops out of my eyes, which I somehow

managed to hang on my cheeks, and said: "Brothers, fathers, and sons, he who doesn't think of his soul either doesn't have one or doesn't hold it dear. But I am very concerned about mine. It was converted by a preacher and by the legend of St. Chiepina, and it was also frightened by Hell, which I heard described in great detail and could clearly see; and that is why I made up my mind not to go to the abode of flames, which I have also seen depicted in a painting. And since my sins are somewhat less enormous than God's mercy itself, therefore, oh brothers and sons, I want to wall up this filthy flesh, this filthy body, and this wretched existence." When they heard this, the poor men's sobs gurgled in their throats just as sobs do in the throats of the faithful who cannot restrain their moans and sighs when the friars begin to tell the story of the Passion. Then I continued: "No more parties, no more displays, no more goods and property. My adorned room shall become a bare and narrow cell; my bed shall be an armful of straw spread on a plank; my food shall be the grace of God; my drink, rainwater; and my golden gown, this . . ." And I dragged out from under my seat a haircloth of the roughest variety and showed it to them. If you can recall the lamentations which good souls give vent to when they see the cross held aloft at the Colosseum, then you are seeing and hearing the tears and lamentations of my impassioned lovers, who, suffocated by sorrow and pain, could only speak with their tears. When I cried, "Brothers, forgive me!" they made the same sort of clamor they would make in Rome if the city were put to the sack again, God forbid! One of the men threw himself at my feet, and unable to soften me with his stream of eloquence, he got up and banged his head twenty times against the wall.

*ANTONIA* What a shame!

*NANNA* Well, the morning came when I was to be immured, and you would have sworn that all of

Rome had gathered in the graveyard chapel. If you rolled up in one heap all the crowds that collect to see Jews baptized you wouldn't even be close to a quarter of the mob I had brought into being. You can also be sure that neither men who are to be hanged in the morning, nor soldiers preparing to go into battle suffered more than my impassioned studs. But why lead you a chase over the treetops? I was walled up while moans and sighs rose from the whole population. "God has touched her heart," one man cried. "She will set a good example for other whores," yelled another; while others said in wonder: "Who would have ever believed it!" Some people wouldn't even credit their own eyes; some were amazed, and still others laughed and said: "If she holds out till the end of the month, you can crucify me!" And it was both a great pity and delight to see my miserable lovers sitting all day long in the chapel, competing with each other to speak to me, nor did the Pharisees watch over the Holy Sepulchre as well as they watched over me. After a couple of days had gone by, I began to heed the pleas they were showering on me at all hours, urging me to come out. "A person can save his soul anywhere," they cried over and over. And to tell you all in one word, they got me out and refurnished a whole new house for me. So I escaped from the walls, which were broken down in the same way they break down the Jubilee portal gate after the Pope has removed the first brick; and I became even more brazen than before; and all of Rome split its sides laughing, and those who had predicted my de-immurement went about saying to each other in ringing voices: "You see, what did I tell you?"

**ANTONIA** I can't imagine how a woman could have thought up what you thought up.

**NANNA** Whores are not women; they are whores. And that's why they think up and do what I thought up and did. But what should I say about that foresight of ours which would do honor to the ants, that is, of

providing in summer for the hard days of winter? Antonia, my dear sister, you should know that a whore always has a thorn in her heart which makes her uneasy and troubled: and it is the fear of begging on those church steps and selling those candles about which you spoke so knowingly just now—and I must confess that for one Nanna who knows how to have her land bathed by the fructifying sun, there are thousands of whores who end their days in the poorhouse. Indeed, Master Andrea used to say that whores and courtiers can be put in the same scales; in fact, you see most of them looking like defaced silver coins rather than bright gold pieces. And what does that thorn which not only pierces their spirit but also their heart and soul force them to do? It forces them to think of their old age. So then they go to the hospital and pick the prettiest little female baby they can find and bring her up as their daughter. They adopt her at the right age, so that the girl will begin to bloom just when they begin to wither and fade. And they give her the loveliest names you can hope to discover and keep changing them nearly every day, so that a stranger can never be sure which name is her right one. Today they're called Giulia, the next day Laura, Lucrezia, Cassandra, Portia, Virginia, Pantasilea, Prudenzia, or Cornelia. And for every girl who has a real mother, as I am really Pippa's, there are thousands who have been gotten from the hospitals. Besides, there is the difficulty of guessing who is the father of those children we actually give birth to, though we always claim that they are the daughters of noblemen and great monsignors. For so varied and diverse are the seeds sown in our gardens that it is well-nigh impossible to determine who planted the seed that actually impregnated our soil; and any whore who brags of knowing a particular wheat in a huge field sown with at least twenty different kinds of seed, which can't be distinguished in any shape or manner—well, that whore is both crazy and foolish.

**ANTONIA** There you are positively right!

**NANNA** Furthermore, the man who falls into the hands of a whore with a mother is in for real trouble. Woe to him, I say, who gets her halter tied around his neck! No matter how old the mothers may be, they still want their share of the gravy of pleasure. Thus they are led to mix a few thefts with their daughter's mean tricks, so that they can pay the fellows who fuck them royally. But the trouble is they always get a hankering for young men. In fact this is how old whores usually wind up, barely able to get credit even when they pay for it.

**ANTONIA** That is the living, shining truth.

**NANNA** Oh, the danger a poor wretch runs when a mother and daughter discuss him in the secrecy of their room. What thieving thoughts, what cruel counsels, what treacherous intrigues are hatched because of, and then performed on, his purse! A fencing master who lived next door to me never taught his pupils as many murderous thrusts and stabs as those postiche and non-postiche mothers teach their daughters. Then they tell them: "When your lover shows up, tell him so-and-so and ask him for such-and-such, leave him like this, caress him like that, fly into a rage in this fashion, and be sweet and pleasant to him so that he gives you this and that. Don't push him off too much and don't make love to him too much or stroke and caress him too fondly, and while you're bantering with him walk into the next room and stand there looking pensive. Promise and break your promise as it suits you, and always try to get hold of a bracelet, a ring, a necklace, or a chaplet; the worst that can happen is that you'll have to give them back to him." And that's just the way it goes, believe me.

**ANTONIA** I think I can almost believe you.

**NANNA** You can believe me, and not almost.

**ANTONIA** And were you so depraved?

**NANNA** He who pisses like the others is like the

others, and so while I lived like a whore, I was a whore; nor did I omit doing anything the whores habitually do, for I would never have become a whore if I did not have the lusts and desires of a whore. And if ever a woman deserved to be diplomaed as a whore, it was Nanna the whore, who was above all a genius in the art of always looking not a day more than twenty-five. For that matter, it would be easier to add up the number of glowworms in a series of ten summers than the true age of a whore. Today she will tell you: "I'm twenty," and six years later she will take the oath that she's only nineteen. But let us talk about important matters. Do you know how many wretches I have hacked to bits and wounded in my day?

**ANTONIA** I would like to see you after your day.

**NANNA** By the time that day comes I shall have made so many holy pilgrimages, bought so many indulgences, and traversed so many stations of the cross that my soul will not be the last in the next world, just as my body has not been the last in this one. No, by the Madonna, I shall not be counted among the stragglers, even though I have gotten great pleasure from getting men to kill each other over me. I did it from a feeling of grandeur, for it seemed to me only the proper praise of my beauty to hear swords clanging together night and day on my account. And anyone who gave me a mean, wry look was in for it; I would have offered myself to the public executioner himself to get revenge.

**ANTONIA** Evil is evil and good is good.

**NANNA** In the proper place. I have done evil and I've repented and haven't repented. But how can I possibly explain to you the talent I had for driving men mad with lust? Antonia, sometimes there were as many as ten suitors in my house, and I handed out kisses, caresses, sweet words, quick fondles, and squeezes so adroitly among them that they all thought they were in paradise; and they one day there showed up a new birdie all wrapped up in the Mantuan or Ferrarese



fashion, with tagged points, ribbons, and deckle hems. I welcomed him as a person welcomes a bearer of gifts. I would leave my beaus in the lurch (to put it in the Genovese style) and take him into my private bedroom. And that would take the bounce out of those I had left in the main living room, just as almonds drop with the frost and flowers before the blast of the wind. They would let out a great sigh, but without a word, and they looked like coerced people who shrugged their shoulders since they couldn't do anything else. After this they began to grumble softly, gnaw at their knuckles, tap on the tables, scratch their heads, and start pacing up and down, silently humming a few ragged tunes in order to work off their anger. When I took my sweet time about returning to them, they started down the stairs, and then, hoping that I might call them back, shouted a few words to the maid or the other men, and after taking a turn around the block, they would come back and find the door shut tight and then they would give way to the most anguished despair.

*ANTONIA* Ancroia was not so cruel.

*NANNA* Now you're letting pity run away with you.

*ANTONIA* I am and I want to be pitying.

*NANNA* Be as you wish, if that's how you are. As long as you listen to me, I'm satisfied.

*ANTONIA* I'm listening, you can be sure of that.

*NANNA* It was a real delight to see me, right in the middle of the pleasure a man was having of me, burst into tears without any reason, and when being asked "Why are you crying?" I would sob and sigh, my tears streaming down, my words coming in a gulping rush, and say: "I am terribly wounded. You don't appreciate me, but patience, since that's how my bad luck wishes it." Another time, when a man was leaving me for two hours, I cried and said: "Where are you going? To one of those whores who will treat you as you deserve?" Then the fathead would feel all puffed up with

pride because he had made a woman unhappy. I also often wept when I saw a man come to visit me who hadn't come for two days in a row, so as to make him think I was crying with joy at seeing him again.

*ANTONIA* You certainly had a great stock of tears on hand.

*NANNA* You can reckon it this way: I was a plot of land from which water spurted as soon as it was touched; indeed, it was one of those plots that do it even without being touched at all. But I never cried with more than one eye.

*ANTONIA* Oh, are there people who can do that?

*NANNA* Whores cry with one eye, married women with two, and nuns with four.

*ANTONIA* Now this is something worth knowing.

*NANNA* It could be, if I felt like explaining it. I will tell you, though, that whores cry with one eye and laugh with the other.

*ANTONIA* Now this is really exciting; but tell me how it works.

*NANNA* My poor woman, don't you know that we whores (I prefer that word for us) always have a smile in one eye and a tear in the other? The proof that this is true is that we laugh over every bit of nonsense and cry over every triviality; indeed, our eyes are like a sun surrounded by shifting clouds, which first shoots forth a beam and then is obscured. In the very middle of a bout of laughter, they will suddenly burst into tears. And when it came to such tears and laughter, I could manage it more neatly than any whore who ever arrived here from Spain. And with this arsenal of stunts, I murdered more men than those who die on straw throughout this most reverend realm. Nothing in fact is more necessary to our profession than the tears and laughter I refer to; but you must use them at the right moment, for if you let the opportunity slip past, they won't have any effect and are like damask roses, which, if not picked at dawn, lose their fragrance.

**ANTONIA** Every day I learn something new.

**NANNA** After the fake smiles and tears come their sisters, the lies, which I enjoyed telling more than a peasant enjoys wolfing down pancakes; and I told more lies than the Gospels tell the truth. And I walled them in so firmly with the cement of my oaths in order to obtain the trust and credence of others that you would have exclaimed: "That woman is speaking the words of God!" I invented the most treacherous lies imaginable about my connections and relations, my land holdings and estates, and a score of such idle fibs. I imagined all sorts of weird tales, and unraveling them to my benefit, I would claim I had dreamt them. I kept all the names of the men who ever were in love with me in a notebook, and I distributed the nights among them, posting the name of the man who was going to sleep with me. I arranged matters nicely, and if you've seen those priests who say Mass and are listed on certain boards hung in the sacristy, you see me.

**ANTONIA** I have seen those priests' lists, and I can almost see yours.

**NANNA** Well, that's fine then.

**ANTONIA** But what has this list of names got to do with the lies you told?

**NANNA** This is how it went: the idiotic young men, being assured after seeing their names on the board, which told them which night they had, were often deceived. Yes indeed, very often. For I would frequently make a change, as they do in the churches for the various masses.

**ANTONIA** Yes, in this way the lies have some connection with the board.

**NANNA** Now listen to this and save it for your honor and glory. I managed to grab hold of a very costly chain from one of the men who was so anxious to sleep with me that he had lost all sense of danger. He in turn had borrowed the chain from some nobleman, who had taken it from his wife to make use of it;

and the day I hung it around my neck was the very day that the Pope gives so many poor girls dowries in the Church of Minerva.

**ANTONIA** You mean Annunciation Day?

**NANNA** Just so, Annunciation Day. I hung it around my neck that very day, but I didn't hold onto it for long.

**ANTONIA** Why not?

**NANNA** Because as soon as I got to the church and saw the great crowd that was there, I thought of making it mine, and what did I do? I took the chain off my neck and gave it to someone who was more secretive than a confessor. Then I shoved my way into the thick of the crowd, though I was already in the middle of it, and let out a shriek like those people let out when some quack yanks a tooth in the Campo di Fiore. At my scream everybody turned to look, and behold! there is crafty Nanna shouting: "My chain! My chain! Thief! Traitor! Crook!" And as I shouted I began tearing out my hair and wailing. My shouting startled everyone, the entire church was in a tumult, and the story ran as far as the police; some poor wretch who seemed from his appearance to have stolen the chain was hauled bodily to the prison at Torre di Nona, and just missed being strung up there and then.

**ANTONIA** I don't want to hear any more.

**NANNA** Yes, you shall hear it.

**ANTONIA** I'd like to hear what the man who loaned you the chain had to say.

**NANNA** I left the church still crying, wringing my hands and beating my palms together, and went home, locked myself in my room, and told my maid: "I don't want anyone to bother me." Just then along came my lover, wanting to have a word with me. Not a chance. So then he began to bang at the door, thumping away, shouting my name: "Nanna, are you there? Say, Nanna, are you there? Open up, open up, I say; are you going to be upset by such a trifle?" I pretended

that I couldn't hear him and said neither softly nor loudly: "Unlucky, wretched woman that I am, hounded by troubles and misfortunes, I will enter the convent's nunnery. I will go and drown myself. I will become a hermitess." Then I rose from the bed I was lying in and, without opening the door of my room, called to my maid: "Go, my girl, and find a Jew, because I want to sell everything I own, and with the money I shall pay for the chain." And when the maid acted as though she were actually going to fetch the Jew, my good lover began yelling at the top of his voice: "Open the door. It's me. Open up." So I opened it, and when I laid eyes on him I began moaning: "Alas, I am ruined." And he said: "Don't fret. Even if I am left without a shirt to my back, I don't want you to suffer any more than I do when I tap myself like this with my finger." "No, no," I replied, "give me only two months' time." And he said: "Quiet, you fool, hold your tongue." That night I slept with him and gave him such a sweet time that he never mentioned the chain again.

*ANTONIA* Your shop came in handy then.

*NANNA* A gnarled, wrinkled, yellowed, tall, and thin old man developed a passion for me, and I developed a passion for his wallet; and since he could enjoy amorous pleasures as much as a toothless man enjoys a hard crust of bread, he worked off his passion by touching me, kissing me, fondling and sucking my tits. Nothing could get his pole to rise up stiff and straight, nothing, neither truffles nor artichokes nor electuaries. And even if it did stand up for a moment, it would soon droop down again like a wick that, just when you think it's catching fire, sputters out because of a lack of oil. Nor did it help at all to jerk and pull at it, to shove my finger in his blow-hole or tickle his balls. Well, I played all sorts of stupid stunts on the old codger. One time, having offered dinner, which he had to pay for, to a throng of courtiers, I stole four of the

my silver plates that he had borrowed for the banquet. And when he kicked up a fuss about them, I ran into his arms and cried: "Papa, Papa, don't scold me; don't become so angry because you know you get a bellyache when you do. Strip me of all my gowns and everything I own, and pay for them with that." He kept quiet, for I threw so many 'Papas' at his head that he behaved like a real father when his child's cry of 'Papa' strikes straight into his heart. He paid for the silver service out of his own pocket and limited himself to swearing that he would never borrow anything for anyone, no matter who begged him.

*ANTONIA* Oh, you were a subtle one.

*NANNA* I was so sweet and amiable at the start of my love affair that whoever spoke to me for the first time went around singing my praises to the skies; but when I got to know me better, the manna turned sour and became bitter aloes. And just as at the start I showed a deep distaste for all bad actions, so in the middle and at the end I evinced a dislike for all good ones; I behaved according to the habits of all good whores and took great delight in causing scandals, kindling feuds, breaking up friendships, rousing hatreds, goading men to curse each other and brawl. I was always dropping the names of princes and passing judgment on the Turks, the Emperor, the King, the famine of foodstuffs, the wealth of the Duke of Milan, and the future Pope. I declared that the stars were as large as the pineapple atop St. Peter's, but no larger, and that the moon was the bastard sister of the sun. I skipped from dukes to duchesses and talked about them as if I had trampled over them like doormats with my feet. I had all the haughty airs and manners of an empress, which would barely suit her and are in any case a swindle. I took as my example a certain noblewoman who always carried a silken pillow around with her and made whoever spoke to her kneel on it.

*ANTONIA* Oh, you mean the female Pope?

**NANNA** The lady Pope, so I am told, did not go on such high and mighty airs; by my oath, she did not. Nor did she give herself so bright a title as those whores did. One woman, for example, called herself the daughter of Duke Valentine, another the daughter of Cardinal Scanio, and Madrema signed herself "Lorenzina Portia, Roman patrician," and sealed her letters with a huge seal. And don't think for a moment that the illustrious titles they bestowed on themselves made them any better; in truth, they are so lacking in love, charity, and compassion that if all the saints from St. Rocco to St. Job and St. Anthony were to beg alms of them, they would not give them a thing, even though they are terribly afraid of them.

**ANTONIA** The lewd bitches!

**NANNA** And you can be sure that the things people fling into the river are better placed than if they were given to these whores. As soon as you give them anything, they despise you as much as they pretended to esteem you before the gift. The only thing that's good about them is their promise, which they keep as well as gypsies or the monks of India. In sum, whores have honey in their mouths and a razor in their hand: and you may see two of them lick each other from top to toe, and no sooner do they part than they say things about each other which would frighten Desiderio and the priests of the good wine, who frightened Death by laughing at him just when he was preparing to roast and dismember them. Backbiters without any restraint, they dig their barbed tongues into everyone; no matter who you are or what good you have done them they make no allowances and have no regard for anyone. You will think that they're crazy about one of their lovers, whom they keep as their favorite and regale to his face with a thousand "Yes, your lordships"; and if he leaves to make room for another man who has come to court them, on his way out they pay him a trillion honors with the head and tongue. But scarcely has he

started down the stairs then they begin deriding him; and the moment he is out the door he is cursed worse than a traitor, so that the man who has remained gets the notion that he is mama's little darling and the apple of her eye.

**ANTONIA** Why do they act like that?

**NANNA** Why? Because a whore would not be a real whore unless she behaved like a cheat from inner grace and outer privilege; and a whore who does not have all the traits and qualities of a whore would be like a kitchen without a cook, a meal without wine, a lamp without oil, or spaghetti without cheese.

**ANTONIA** I believe it must be a great solace to those men who have been ruined by whores to see one of them going past on the gallows cart, like the woman in that poem which says:

O Madrema doesn't want to, O Lorenzina,  
O Laura, O Cecilia, O Beatrice,  
Let this miserable woman be your model!

I know it by heart. I learned it, thinking it was by Maestro Andrea; I have since discovered that its author is the man who treats great lords as badly as this foul disease treats me: neither fumigations, unguents, ointments, nor medicaments cure me. Ah well, one must bear it.

**NANNA** But I no longer know what to tell you and I know that I have more to tell you than I have told you up till now: I'm trying to think. The truth is, my brain is all awash; it is simmering on the stove; it is only fit for shucking beans, due to my habit of hopping from topic to topic. Well anyway, let me tell you. . . . There came to Rome a rich young nobleman of twenty-two, who bore the title of merchant, just the sort of dough to be kneaded by a whore. Soon after his arrival he fell into my hands, and I acted as though I were passionately in love with him. And the loftier his