

manner with me, the less I put on mine. And I began sending my maid four and six times a day to beg him to deign to come and see me. The story spread all over town that I was madly in love with him, dying of it, if only for a cup of broth and the last rites. "That woman has been finally caught good and proper," people went around saying, "and who does she fall for? For a braggart whose mouth still stinks of his nurse's milk! Besides, he'll drive her crazy because he can't keep to one aim for an hour running." I didn't say a word, although I pretended I was wasting away because of him. Then I acted as if I couldn't eat or sleep, always brooding over him and calling for him. I acted this way so that people began to say that I would end up raving mad, picking stones, and dying for the sake of his beautiful eyes. The young man, who got a few nights with me out of it, plus a few good dinners, went about bragging and boasting, showing off a cheap turquoise I had given him. When he was with me, I kept telling him: "Don't worry about money—I'll take care of you—and don't waste your strength on any woman but me. Whatever I have is yours, for I too am completely yours." So then he'd go strutting down Via dei Banchi and watch the people point him out in the crowd. Now it turned out that one day when he was with me a great lord came by to visit me, and I made the young man hide in a closet and told my maid to open the door. The nobleman entered, sat down, and seeing white linen Rheims bedsheets, he exclaimed: "And who will devirginize them? Will it be your Canymedo?" (Or Ganymede—I can't recall the exact name he used). And I told him straight out: "He will devirginize them for sure, and I love him and adore him; I look up to him as a god, and I am his servant and slave and shall be for all eternity, caressing you other men only for your money." Now you can just imagine how that fool chortled with delight when he heard me say that. When the nobleman had left and I ran to open the closet, he

walked out and his shirt no longer touched his ass. He paraded through the house as though he owned me, my servants, and the whole house, and had taken us all over with a look. But let's get to the Amen of this Our Father of mine. One day when he wanted to screw me in his special style on top of a chest, I left him in the lurch, just when he was about to put it in, and locked myself in with another man. Not being accustomed to such pranks, he snatched up his cape, fired off a few nasty oaths, and went out, expecting me to call him back, as I usually did; but when he did not see the pigeon of peace arrive, he was seized by a diabolical fury, came back, and stood at the door. "The lady is accompanied," he was told. So he stood there like a mouse drenched in oil, his chin sagging to his chest, his mouth sour and his lips dry, his eyes aglitter with tears, his head unhinged and astray as if it were on somebody else's shoulders, and his heart pounding. He walked away very slowly, his legs wobbling under him as they wobble on a man who has just risen from a sick bed. Through the chinks in my blind I watched him hobble off, moving in jerks, halting and stumbling, and I laughed and laughed! Then he greeted someone—I don't know who—raising his hand feebly for an instant. He returned that evening; I let him in, and he found me chatting with a large company of men. When he saw that I didn't ask him to sit down, he extended the permission to himself, ensconced himself in a corner, and didn't seem to enjoy the quips and jokes he heard but remained there quietly until everyone had gone. When we were alone, he began to expostulate: "Is this your love? Are these your caresses? What are all your promises worth now?" "My dear brother," I answered, "thanks to you I have become the scandal of all the prostitutes in Rome: people are making fun of my nitwittedness, and what galls me even more is that now my lovers don't want to give me anything. 'We don't want to pay for the salt pork,' they say, 'so that

someone else can eat the tasty crouton.' But if you want me to become again what you very well know I was to you, there is one simple thing you can do." When I said this he lifted his head like a man about to be hanged lifts it at the cry: "Run away! Beat it!" He swore that for my sake he would drill holes in the eyes of fleas, and begged me to ask him for anything. So I said: "I'd like to have a silk bed, which, together with the fringes, the satin, and the frame, would cost about one hundred and ninety-nine ducats, not counting the work of making it; and just so my friends can see that you're being truly generous and are even hocking yourself to give me gifts, take it all on credit and when the time comes to pay, leave it to me. I'll make sure the others pay or croak." "It can't be done," he replied, "because my father has written all over telling people not to give me credit, and anyone who gives me credit does it at his own risk." Immediately showed him my back and sent him packing. Then, putting a day in between, I sent for him and said: "Go and see Solomon; he will supply you with the money just on your signature." So he went to him and Solomon yelled: "No money without a pledge"; and he came back to me, told me the story, and I said: "Go to so-and-so; he'll give you such-and-such jewels for such-and-such a sum of money, and the Jew will be happy to buy them from you." So he went, met the jeweler, came to an agreement with him for a two-months' pledge, carried the jewels to Solomon, sold them to him, and brought me the money.

*ANTONIA* What does all this add up to?

*NANNA* The jewels were mine: and when the Jew got his money, he brought them back to me. Then, after eight days had gone by, I summoned the man who had given him the jewels on his signature and told him: "Get that young man thrown into jail and swear that he was trying to run away." So he brought charges, the pimp was arrested, and before he could get them to

let him out he had to pay the fine twice over, since neither old tavernkeepers nor new ones have the habit of letting their customers eat on the cuff.

*ANTONIA* And I, who until now thought that I was pretty shrewd, admit that I was nothing but an idiot.

*NANNA* The time was coming for the carnival, which is always a moment of torment, death, and dissolution for poor horses, poor clothes, and poor dandies, starting with one of my customers who had more good intentions than the power to perform them. Anyway, it was just after Christmas, when the maskers begin strolling about the streets, though you didn't see too many of them. But day by day they went on multiplying like melons, which show up in batches of five or six every morning, then ten or twelve, and after that a whole basketful, then a pile, a heap, and finally you've got so many you feel like throwing them away. As I say, the maskers weren't coming down thick as yet when my friend All-Smoke-and-No-Roast, seeing me behave like a woman who intends to be understood without saying a word, said to me: "Don't you mean to get a costume?" "I'm a homebody," I answered, "a shutter-peeper. Let the pretty girls get costumes, and all those women who have gowns to put on their backs." "Sunday," he said, "I want you to go out in the most beautiful of costumes." I kept quiet for some time, and then I threw my arms around his neck and said: "My dear heart, how do you want me to make this lovely masquerade for you?" "On horseback," he said, "and dressed to the hilt. I shall procure the Cardinal's genet, because to tell the truth his chief groom has promised me the horse." After I told him that that suited me perfectly, I put him off for about seven days before the day on which I reckoned I would put on my costume, and getting him to come back on Monday, I said: "You must first provide me with a pair of stockings and a pair of pants, and so as not to put you to any expense, you can send me your pair of velvet pants; I'll

mend all the worn-out spots and fix them so I can wear them. As for the stockings, you can have them made for me for a pittance, and one of your doublets, not even a good one, will suit me fine after I've had it fitted on my back." When I had said all this, I saw him begin to grimace and twist his face, chewing on his unhappiness as though he almost regretted having put me up to all these extravagances. So I said to him: "You are doing all this grudgingly. Forget the whole thing; I no longer want to wear a costume." When I tried to leave the room, he stopped me and said: "Is that how much you trust me?" He sent his servant off immediately to get his clothes and also to get the tailor, who would refashion them to fit me, and that very day he bought the cloth for the stockings, which he had cut and brought to me two days later. He helped me dress and said: "They fit you as though they were painted on you." And when I was wearing my man's clothes, I let him try it with me as though I were a boy. "My dear soul," I said to him, "he who buys the broom can also purchase the handle. I should like to have a pair of velvet shoes." He didn't have any money, but he drew a ring off his finger and left it to be bartered for the velvet, giving it to a bootmaker who knew my measure and made the shoes for me in a jiffy. After this I managed to wheedle out of him a silk blouse embroidered with gold, not out of his chest but right off his back, and lacking a cap, I said to him: "Give me your cap, and I'll see to putting an ornament on it." And since he was quite anxious that I go in costume with him, he gave me his new cap and wore one which he had wanted to hand on to his manservant. Now the evening before the day I was to go on display arrived, and anyone seeing him bustling around me would have said to himself: "He's the Capitol Hill preparing things for the senator." At eleven o'clock that night I sent him out to buy a plume for my cap; then he went out again for a mask, and when he came back with a mask not

from Modena, I sent him out again for the Modena mask. Finally I made him rush out to buy about a dozen tagged points.

**ANTONIA** You should have had him take care of these things in one trip.

**NANNA** I should have, but I didn't want to.

**ANTONIA** Why not?

**NANNA** Because by ordering him around I felt like a lady, besides being one in name.

**ANTONIA** Did you sleep with him on the night before the festival?

**NANNA** After a thousand supplications, he got a quick turn in the hay; and I told him: "Tomorrow night you can do it to me twenty times in a row, if ten aren't enough for you." When morning came, I made him get out of bed before the sun rose and told him: "Go and have the horse groomed, so that as soon as I have eaten I can mount him." He got up, dressed, and left, and after he found the chief groom, said to him in his most beguiling manner: "Here I am." The groom stood there like a stick, neither denying nor affirming, and he began to exclaim: "What! Do you want to ruin me?" "Not I," answered the groom, "but my master, the Cardinal, loves his horses, and I know how whores behave; they have no consideration for God Almighty, much less a poor beast, and I wouldn't want his withers wrung or bruised or have him brought back to me broken-winded. I would be ruined then, and in quite a different way from how you will be if you don't get the horse." But my lover begged and pleaded with him so much that at last the head groom gave in. "I can't go back on my word; send somebody for the horse and it will be given to him." Having told the stableboy of this order, my lover dispatched his manservant to me; and the manservant told me the whole conversation, and we laughed over it together.

**ANTONIA** Those servants are great traitors. They certainly are their masters' greatest enemies.

**NANNA** No doubt. But now dinner time had come: I barely let my friend gulp down six mouthfuls when I said: "Have your boy eat quickly and send him for the horse." He obeyed, and the boy ate and went off. When I thought that he would come back with the horse, he returned empty-handed. "The stableboy doesn't want to hand him over," he said. "The chief groom wants to speak to you first." The poor boy had scarcely finished delivering this message when he was hit in the head with a dish.

**ANTONIA** Why did his master throw the dish at him?

**NANNA** He threw it because he would have preferred the manservant to call him aside and whisper the message in his ear so that I, who hadn't turned my back, would not have heard anything. But then I really turned on him, faced him squarely, and yelled: "Now I'm in a nice fix, and just because I wanted to have a prettier mask than the face my whore of a mother gave me. I was sure that this was going to happen. You'll never do it to me again--no sir! I was crazy to trust you and let myself get all worked up over such nonsense. What angers me even more than not having the horse is that people will say that I've been tricked." He tried to say: "Don't worry, you'll have the horse," but I broke in with a "Stop bothering me," and turned my back. Then he grabbed his cloak, flew to the stable, bowed and scraped to all the valets, and asked them to show him to the head groom, and he begged and pleaded with him so well that he got the blessed horse. All the while I was very nervous, running to the window at the slightest noise, thinking each time it was the horse. At last I saw a footman run up, sweating profusely, his cape wrapped around his neck. He said to me: "Lady, the horse will be here any minute." No sooner had he said this than along came a man leading the horse by hand and cursing heaven because of the horse's wild prancing and bucking, which filled the

entire street. When he got to my door, I stuck almost my entire body through the window so that bystanders could see who it was that was going to ride that beautiful horse. I was delighted when all the street urchins gathered at my house and started yelling to all who walked past: "The lady here is going to go in a masked costume!" My lover showed up soon after the horse and, panting, excited, and happy, said: "We must send the men ahead." I had ten men at my disposal. Then I kissed him and asked for the velvet cloak which his footman was supposed to bring that afternoon. No cloak, because the drunkard had forgotten it; and if I hadn't restrained his master, the fool would never have had the chance to forget again. In any case he rushed off for it, returned, and I put it on. As I was fastening my stockings, I happened to see that his garters were quite pretty and stole them from him with a little soft soap, loaning him mine, which weren't much to look at. After I was completely rigged out and adorned, having spent more time on it than it would take a person to become rich, and after a hundred fits and starts, I was finally on the horse. When I was at last in the saddle, my lover jumped on his nag and set off with me. He took me by the hand and would have liked all Rome to see him so kindly favored. And proceeding in this fashion we reached a place where they were selling eggs with shells that were full of rose water. I called a porter and bought all the eggs the peddler had in stock. My escort took off a chain he was sporting around his neck and left it in exchange for the eggs, which I tossed about at random and in the time it takes to recite a *Credo*. Then I clutched his hand again until we met a troop of people with and without masks, and plunging into the center of that mob, I left him in the middle of the road, struck silly and looking like a dummy! When I reached the Borgo or the Banchi, where the mud was deep and thick, I galloped around it twice at full speed, without the slightest consideration for the horse or the

fine silk cape. That day I bumped into him about five or six times and treated him with the same fondness one lavishes on people who are utter strangers—in other words, none. For some time he kept trotting after me, but at his faltering pace he could never catch up with me; so there he sat on his nag, looking like a man made of hemp, a scarecrow. When night had nearly come, I sang together with a thousand other whores and their pimps:

And I shiver in the middle of summer,  
burning for the winter . . .

Then I let him find me again and grab me by the hand like a desperate man; and after bidding the crew: "Good night, good night, my dear ladies and gentlemen," I turned with my mask in hand and said to my foolish lover: "Blessed is the person who can find you. Why, you just left me in the lurch, and I know why and what you did, and I'll do the same." The good dunce begged my forgiveness, and while he was trying to put the blame on me, we reached the Campo di Fiore. There I halted next to a chicken peddler, seized a brace of capons and two skewers of thrushes, and handing them to a man to carry to my house, told him curtly: "Go and pay for them." And so he had to leave behind a ruby which his mother had given him as a gift before his departure for Rome, and he was as fond of that ring as I was fond of rooking him. At my house we found no candles, no firewood, no bread or wine (perhaps because I had made sure that there wouldn't be any); and I flew into a rage and was only soothed when I saw him leave to buy all these items, since his footman wasn't on hand, having left to take back the horse (and the head groom, when he saw the state the horse was in, swore by all that's holy that he would never loan him out again, not even if Christ himself came to ask for him). I had stretched out on my bed

and was lying there for a moment when along he came his arms loaded with stuff. With my mother helping, we set the table, dinner was prepared quicker than you can ring a bell, and we sat down. Just as we were finishing the meal, I heard somebody coughing and spitting; coughs and spits that made my wretch suffer terribly. Running to the window, I recognized a lover, rushed to greet him, and went off with him, leaving my friend there all night, unable to sleep and pacing through the house, boasting and shouting about what he intended to say and do to me. But he had to sweat even to get back the silk cape he had loaned me; his footman came to the house eight days in a row before I handed it over.

**ANTONIA** You weren't being so polite then, before having that way toward someone who had done so much for you, and just to have you all to himself for a single night.

**NANNA** It was a whorish politeness, and was no less lovely than what I treated the sugar merchant to. This man even gave me his kegs for something sweeter than sugar; and as long as his lust for me lasted, we even put sugar on our salads. And when he tasted the honey that came from my you-know-what, he would swear that in comparison his sugar was as bitter as gall.

**ANTONIA** But still he threw it after you.

**NANNA** Ha! I remember how he used to go crazy when he looked at my thing. He would touch and fondle it and get stiff as a board just from handling it. He used to compare it to those pretty little mouths which those marble statues of women keep so tightly pursed and which can be seen here and there in Rome, and he would declare that it smiled the same sort of smile. And in truth he might well say so (though it's not nice to sing my own praises), for I had a truly lovely one, as delicate and neatly turned as is possible in this sad world. You could barely see the hairs that surrounded it, and it was so finely cleft that one could barely find the place where it was. It was not too

swollen up nor too sunken in, and I give you my word, that that sugar merchant gave me more kisses there, then he did on my mouth, sucking it as though it were a freshly laid egg.

*ANTONIA* The rascal.

*NANNA* Why rascal?

*ANTONIA* Because of the bad times which I hope God will visit on him.

*NANNA* Did He not visit them on him by making him fall in love with me?

*ANTONIA* Not to my way of thinking.

*NANNA* Now I can't give you a detailed account of all the swindles with which I stripped my lovers bare, nor how I carried them out without their ever seeing my hand in the intrigue. I used to use whore-master's jargon, so that whenever one of these suckers came to visit me, since they did not understand me when I said 'mesie' and meant 'me,' or 'peepers' and meant 'eyes,' or 'moola' and meant 'money,' or 'I am out of there' and meant 'get away fast,' they were slaughtered immediately, like some hick who tries to follow a doctor of philosophy when he spouts Latin. And thieves' jargon is certainly worthy of a thief, for a thousand swindles can be blamed on it; but let me tell you how I hoaxed (to use the Tuscan term) a simp from Siena—or at least I thought he was Sieneese.

*ANTONIA* He couldn't have come from anywhere else.

*NANNA* At any rate this Sieneese, who had just breezed into Rome, kept eating me up with his eyes; and every time he came across my maid he was sure to say something amusing. Once he said: "This heart in my breast belongs to your mistress"; on another occasion he asked: "Tell me, my pretty girl, what is your lady doing?" And she would reply: "She does quite well thank you, at your lordship's orders," and then would make faces behind his back. And once when I saw him one day walking about for quite a long time, I

told my maid: "Go down and make him pay street rent, since he is cluttering it up, walking back and forth at all hours." She went down to the doorway; and just as he was going to open his mouth and say hello, she began to yell at the top of her voice: "May he break a leg, so he can never come back here again. You hear me! That's right, I don't want to see hide nor hair of you again, you wretch, you lout!" The loafer, limp as a scarecrow on a seesaw, whined: "What's troubling you? Here I am, at your service. I am your lady's slave, I really am." She pretended that she didn't understand him and said: "It's four hours ago we sent that little thief to change a pistole to give a tip of a ducat to the porter who brought my lady two lengths of crimson satin as a gift from the Prince of Twisted Ballocks, and he's not back yet." The idiot, who wanted to get a reputation as a spender, since he was already known as a lunkhead, tore open his purse and cried: "Here, take them. Because I adore your mistress, I adore her." Then he placed four crowns in her hand, putting on a grand show. Then he whispered: "She likes me, isn't that so?" The maid, whom I'd just called, didn't tell him whether I did or didn't and shut the door in his face; so there he stood outside, like a man thrown out of a wedding banquet he tried to enter without an invitation.

*ANTONIA* He got what he deserved, the simpleton.

*NANNA* But let's go on to the story of the she-cats.

*ANTONIA* What sort of cats are these?

*NANNA* I owed a cloth dealer a debt of twenty-five ducats; and since I had the idea of never paying him, I suddenly thought of a good way to do him out of them. And what did I do? I had two very good-looking she-cats, and seeing him coming to my window for the money, I said to my maid: "Give me one of the cats and you take the other, and as soon as the cloth seller gets here, I'll begin to shout: 'I want you to

strangle her!" and you pretend you don't want to, and then I will make a show of strangling the cat I'm holding." No sooner had I said this than he appeared at the upstairs door.

**ANTONIA** Didn't he knock at the street door first?

**NANNA** No, because he found it open. When he got upstairs, I began to scream: "Strangle her, strangle her"; and my maid, almost crying, begged me not to, asking me to forgive them, promising me that never again would they eat our dinner. I looked enraged, wrapped my hands around my cat's throat, and exclaimed: "You'll never do that to me again." When he saw the cats, my creditor, to his cost, took pity on them and asked me to give them to him. "Not on your life!" I cried; and he said: "Please, my lady, leave them with me for eight days, and after that I will help you kill them, if you do not want to give them away as a gift or forgive them." And so saying, he took my cat while I put up a token resistance; then he tore the other cat out of my maid's hands, and after stowing them both in a bag, handed them to the errand boy whom he had with him and told him to carry them back to his house. "Make sure," I said, "that you return them after eight days, because I want to kill them, the traitors!" He promised he would and then asked me for his twenty-five ducats, and I made a holy vow to bring them to his shop within ten days, and so sent him away satisfied. Ten, fifteen days went by, and then he returned to ask me for the ducats. I had them in a kerchief, and jingling them ostentatiously, I said: "Gladly, but first I want my cats." "What do you mean, your cats," he retorted. "They ran away over the rooftops as soon as they were left alone in my house." When I heard what I knew very well before I was even told, I put on a stepmother's frown and said: "You better make sure those cats get back here, because if they don't it will cost you more than twenty-five ducats. You promised

the cats, and you'll bring them back if you have to go to Barbary to fetch them. My cats, my dear sir, have to return here; they have to be returned, you hear?" When the poor man, who was leaning against the window, saw that my shouting had gathered a crowd in the street below, he didn't say another word (it was the case of him), but ran down the stairs and declared: "You see, that's what you get when you trust a whore."

**ANTONIA** Nanna, I want to tell you a little thought of mine.

**NANNA** Tell me.

**ANTONIA** This cat swindle is so neat and charming that for its sake alone you will be forgiven four incommunicable sins.

**NANNA** Do you think so?

**ANTONIA** I'd bet my soul against a pistachio nut.

**NANNA** That would be no small thing. Achew, achew, achew—I've caught a chill. Achew, achew, achew—this fig tree has shaded me very badly from the sun. Now there won't be any chance of telling you stories about the many men to whom I talked so sweetly and cleverly that they believed that the Jewish synagogue rode in midair, just as, so we are told, Mohammed's tomb does—achew, achew. . . Oh, I can't breathe any more—my throat's already hoarse—the phlegm is drying up my whistle.

**ANTONIA** It's usually the walnut tree that casts an unhealthy shade, not the fig tree.

**NANNA** Now come, give me your opinion in three words, as you promised me you would, because I'm choking—achew, achew, achew. I really feel bad about not being able to tell you more about how I whipped my loving clients into shape, and I did it as though I were willing to lose almost anything in the bargain. I put on an act of great charity toward their purses and didn't let them strut about in embroidered suits or make a stupid display by throwing big banquets and other useless things. I did all this so that

their money would be kept to satisfy my appetites and desires, and the clods praised my discretion, and the loving manner in which I protected their interests. Oh my God, I'm dying—oh! And I'm also sad at not being able to tell you the story of my drapes, how I handled the man who pawned them, the man who took them in pawn, the man who bought them for me, the two other men who witnessed the deal, the man who brought them to my house, and the other man who dropped them just as I was having them hung up in my room.

*ANTONIA* Come, make an effort to tell me. Come Nanna, sweet Nanna, darling Nanna . . .

*NANNA* Well, it happened that a certain Messer . . . oh, help me say it . . . a Mess—Messer—oh, I'm dying . . . There's not a chance . . . Forgive me, I'll tell you some other time. And I'll even tell you about the monsignor who ran away bare-ass across all the roofs of the quarter . . . Oh, my Christ, I'm fainting, Antonia, my dear, what's the matter with me?

*ANTONIA* A curse on the phlegm that goes up and down, and a curse too on that gentle creature of a sun who has ruined our conversation. And I didn't want to say this, but perhaps it is a bit hard to believe that the first day you became a nun you actually saw so many strange events; nor do I believe that you became so friendly right from the start with the Bachelor.

*NANNA* But I swear it: I became a nun when I was still a demi-virgin. As for having seen so many capers all at one go, believe me, I saw much, much worse . . . Damn this nasty cough!

*ANTONIA* You do have it, don't you?

*NANNA* Yes, indeed I do. But now won't you tell me your opinion in three words, as you promised?

*ANTONIA* To go back to that promise I made you, I'll settle it in four: I can't keep it.

*NANNA* And why not? Achew . . . Oh, my heavens, what did I catch?

*ANTONIA* I might have kept my promise at the

moment I was making it simply because we women are without thought and foolish after thought. But I'll tell you my opinion, from which you can pluck the rose and leave the thorns.

*NANNA* Go ahead, tell me.

*ANTONIA* I say that after discarding some of all you have said and taking what is left on credit, since he always adds a few lies to the truth, and sometimes to adorn a story one tricks it out with baubles . . .

*NANNA* So you take me for a—achew, achew—a liar?

*ANTONIA* Not for a liar—rather for a person who is somewhat careless when she talks; and I believe that you have it in for nuns and married women for some other reason. Let me grant that there are more bad ones among them than there should be. As for the whores, I won't make any excuses.

*NANNA* I can't—achew, achew—answer you, and I'm afraid that this cough will really turn into a catarrh. So hurry up and give me your advice.

*ANTONIA* My opinion is that you should make a whore of your Pippa. The nun betrays her sacred vows and the married woman murders the holy bond of matrimony, but the whore violates neither her monastery nor her husband; indeed she acts like the soldier who is paid to do evil, and when doing it, she does not realize that she is, for her shop sells what it has to sell. The first day that a tavernkeeper opens his tavern, he does not have to put up a sign, for everyone knows that there one drinks, one eats, one gambles, one screws, one betrays, and cheats, and anyone who would go there to say his prayers or start a fast would find neither altars nor Lent. Gardeners sell vegetables, druggists sell drugs, and the bordellos sell curses, lies, slutish behavior, scandals, dishonesty, thievery, filth, hatred, cruelty, deaths, the French pox, betrayals, a bad name and poverty; but since the confessor is like the doctor who would rather cure the disease he can see on the palm of



your hand than the one which is hidden from him, go there freely with Pippa and make a whore of her right off; and afterward, with the petition of a little penance and two drops of holy water, all whorishness will leave her soul. Moreover, from what I have understood of your talk, a whore's vices are really virtues. Beyond all this, it is a fine thing to be called a lady, even by gentlemen, eating and dressing always like a lady, and continually attending banquets and wedding feasts, as you yourself, who have told me so much, know better than I do. What counts is to satisfy every whim and caprice, being able to be pleasant to each and all, because Rome always was and always will be—I won't go so far as to say the whore's plaything, so as not to have to say it again to my confessor.

*"You speak well, Antonia," Nanna said, "and I'll do just as you have advised." After saying this in a feeble voice, she roused her maid, who had slept while they were talking, set the basket on her head again and the wine bottle in her hand, gave Antonia the napkins which she had carried under her arm that morning, and went home. After sending out for some pieces of licorice for Nanna, who stayed away from vinegar because of her cough, they dined on bread sopped in warm water and tomato. But Nanna gave Antonia something else to eat and she remained there that night, and early the next morning returned to her little store, the small business by which she barely managed to survive. Poverty had begun to irk her, but she was comforted by Nanna's conversation and astounded by all the evil wrought by the world's whores, who are more numerous than the ants, flies, and mosquitoes of twenty summers put together. She was indebted to Nanna for so much enlightenment; yet Nanna had not told her the half of it.*

*And so ends the third and last day.*