

Love In Isolation

What makes the croak of those wild, wise old elders of the fairytale, with their strange advices, dodderly hunches, and queer magic so soothing? Perhaps simply the knowledge they've seen it all before. Those funny Grandparents of story and verse.

As pandemonium descended upon this year, year twenty-twenty, I wonder how many failed their third-eye future-seeking test, blind to the oncoming chaos. I found myself by chance exiled in Germany, a land of forests and lakes well stuffed with its own rich heritage of fairytales, though none with a clue or teaching or tip for surviving a global plague. Then what should arrive in the post one day, but a book possessing just such powers...

Here began a journey with the oldest of all distractions - Love, in all its guises. My guide, a seven hundred year old randy Italian Grandad and his opus of one hundred treacle spun yarns; an affront to the darkness of the 14th century plague he himself lived through. Into *The Decameron* I plunge, to meet a group of friends, who attempted to outwit the down swirling drag of death, escaping the city and hiding in the Florentine hills, telling stories and singing songs to each other to pass the time. I suppose this would now be considered a 'social bubble'? A medieval social bubble. Did they know about bubbles then? Who did discover washing up liquid? Did Boccaccio really have nine friends with whom he absented the rat ridden streets of Florence? Who knows. Evidently he made it through with jouissance and fire in his belly enough to write this book, whether through luck or sacrifice to the Gods and Goddesses of Medicin, Hygiene and Healing; all grief-stricken, heavy hearted melancholia of his introduction aside.

Over these Decameron Nights, we seek in the wisdom of this companion an antidote to frowning. The methodology is uncomplicated. Ingest the full tome one hundred strong, extract all love stories, skin them and place together in a pot, stir, allow to simmer. Each night, sit by the pot, the worry pot, and call upon a storyteller to whisper a tale. Just one. At this moment, abundances of any kind seem to sit roughly on the stomach. Ask the storyteller what they know of love. Let us go a-gathering the wisdom of these spirit stitchers. Darning the holes of the soul.

Night the First... the page falls upon Day 5, Story 8.

I have always been known as somewhat of a lone-ranger. The story goes, I refused my suitor's advances causing him to fall upon his own sword, and owing to my arrogant and unrepentant haughtiness, I also died and went to hell. Until I was banished from there too.

Is that true? Banished from hell? Why?

Too haughty.

What happens if you're banished from hell?

You get sent to the woods as a ghost to perform durational twilight shows for gaggles of drunk Lords and Ladies with picnics and fizzy wine, while they guffaw your misfortune.

Short plot summary of the performance?

I say to him, am I the most beautiful thing you've ever gazed upon? He falls a weeping, clutching my hair to his breast and cries my dear sweet wench, I can stand it no longer, won't you be mine? I say pah, fat chance, knave. He says, how vain you are! I say, if a gal ain't got room for improvement she ain't worth her feathers. Then so sore chagrined as he is, he sees to it I am chased, naked as a nymph through the forest, with his big old mastiffs chomping at my heels. Oh, I yelp and holler, and run until I fall down, and with those dogs holding fast to both my wrists he makes quick a flick of his pulsating bicep, and slices me in two, laying bear my thumping heart, and plucking it from my chest on the tip of his sword.

Grisly. Do you find any pleasure in this perpetual run-around? Seems a strange sort of game to me?

Oh yes! We find it wonder-goodly fun. Just as soon as the dogs have chomped their way through my ventricles, I'm up and running again through the woods, he on the horse giddy upping behind me, bellowing CEASE! through the trees so he might ravish me. 'Nae, you shall not have of these olive paps!' I cry, all as lost-and-all-forlorn as I can muster.

But don't you get ever so tired of this victimhood?

It is without doubt the most wonderful of lover game chases! First one of us, then the other gets to play at maiden, while the second gets the horse and the knight's attire, and all the while the picnickers watch our epic love story played out again and again, munching on their scotch eggs, and sipping their apfelschorle.

What have you learnt from this experience?

Love is no picnic.

And she vanishes.

Like these two locked in their horrible game, and the young lad who walks around the garden underneath my window pushing an invisible friend on the swing, occasionally banging a pair of those blow-up clapping sticks you see at football matches together, days in lockdown are circular. On Mondays, the Hausmeister hoovers the hallways and hoses the bird shit off the quad. I hear about a friend who has taken to hiding in the car, escaping the sounds of her mother talking to men in the bath.

How best to serve the desires of the flesh without being able to touch or knead or pummel tangible matter? It was months before we could join the pandemic of baking and wild yeast cultivation, no flour on the shelves, no sugar in the shops to disguise those thigh seeking urges with diligent bread

making, or some such other delicacy - fruit cake, scones, the deep dark Baden-Württemberg delights of a black forest gateaux.

The second night arrives... Day 3, Story 10. I meet a hermit monk, who with many years of abstinence will surely have some words on our topic.

Rustico, will you tell me about agape?

Indeed, I had let sway an intrigue of mine into the goodly good of the world, carried off into asceticism with questions about the universe, about forever, about God and the fate of man, and who should stumble on my cave but a fine, inquisitive young traveller, of womanly statue though with the wide eyed innocence of a filly none too long cleaved of her childhood. I looked to finding her straw to sleep on, tired as she was from her long journey and insatiable curiosity. Whether capitalism is indeed fated to collapse, how come such and such a philosopher might say 'he who removes land from the common and encloses it, in order to improve it has given something, not taken it away.' She babbles on about gnosticism and alchemy and I stir a turnip stew and grind a little flour on the wheel to bake us some flat biscuits for supper. I watch her wild edged lips all askew and wonder how mine would be best placed on them, and I follow her talkative hands making up for the meaning lost in her foggy, ambiguous words. I imagine what they might do when placed upon my sagging...

Hold your little horses there...thought you said she was a 'young filly?'

A ripe fourteen years! With a budding bosom and a very inquisitive spirit!

Which I trust you entertained, discoursing with the girl on topics worldly and sound? Spiritual, mysterious. I noted in fact, there's a large chunk of your story in my 1886 printed edition that for a lack of 'tolerable English' the translators retained in the original Italian? I wonder if this was perhaps an ancient spell?

I found her chatter all rather exhausting actually so I taught her a little trick, which I like to call 'putting the devil in hell'. I showed her the way down to that bristly hell of hers, and then quick as a flash whipped out my devil and off to the fiery furnace he went! My description was perhaps unpalatable to the uppity English Victorian. Who was the translator?

Quick, somebody get Granny to spit on the girl. Keep the evil eye away. Dare I ask, what you learned about love in isolation from your time in the desert?

Love knows no bounds, but for cultural reasons might not always be deemed appropriate.

Thank you for your time. May good grace be upon you.

I test my memory of something like affection. A very innocent kind of sensory pleasure. I try to imagine a cheek on my cheek, without touching it. To imagine the velvety tickle of skin lightly

pressing mine. Plumpy, silky, caterpillar skin. It's calming. Somebody on the radio is talking about virtual reality. They say *before, real meant physical, now we can forget about the limits of the physical world*. I do not wholly agree.

The third night... Day 2, Story 8.

I heed your call for a tale of tender love.

Who are you?

The Count of Antwerp. Until the Princess of France accused me of molestation...

Oh now, listen, we had some contentious subject matter last night. Can we just have a nice story tonight? About a magic pear, or rocket boots. Just a story about a hat?

...When the lady cried wolf, I made haste from the castle with my young son and daughter, boarding a vessel to England. Exiled, I disguised us as vagabonds and begged our way to London, where a fine rich Lady took my daughter into service. I gave up my son to a Knight in Wales and crossed over to Ireland to live as a horseboy.

How unfortunate. And you never saw them again but carried them in your heart for all eternity until you died?

No. After 18 years I heard news on the wind. In the village where I'd abandoned my son, the pestilence killed every person save the daughter of the Lord. My son married this lady and they had lots of children and a house of gladness. In London, the son of the rich Lady had developed a terrible melancholia in light of the unremitting love he had for my daughter. To cure him, the Lady had betrothed my Violente, despite her servant's attire, to her lovesick offspring and mended his heart. They too had many children, and a house of gladness.

And you? When you heard you were so overcome with joy at the turn in their fortune, you died?

No. On her death bed, the Queen of France, my accuser, confessed to the Bishop her deceitful claim, and so it was that my lands and my title were restored unto me, my beard trimmed, new breeches fetched and I returned to live out my days in a house of gladness.

Well. How fortune favours the entitled! What do you want a pat on the back?

The Fourth night...Day 4, Story 2.

Do you have a name, spirit?

They call me Dame Littlewit.

For what reason?

If you were alone, and someone appeared in your bedroom, and called themselves the Angel Gabriel, and asked if he might take his pleasure with you, even if you weren't absolutely sure he was actually the Angel Gabriel, wouldn't you let him in just in case?

Probably not.

Ok. Well, I was flattered he'd chosen me.

With hindsight though, could you imagine now that perhaps you'd been duped?

If this apparition was not an angel, no doubt they were greatly favoured by a heavenly presence.

At the very least, no doubt... So, you fell in love with angel...

Like I say, he chose me. Through my gossip. I confess to a monk while my husband is at sea, and this monk tells me he's had a vision that the angel Gabriel has taken over his body, and wants to lie with me. So he comes regularly to my bed, Gabriel, in the form of this monk, and I make sure everybody knows I am beloved of a seraphim...

I mean... if you were an angel, would you really go through the rigamarole of dealing with the physical body... all the drawbacks that entails?

Maybe it was like Wings of Desire. Perhaps he missed the feminine form. Anyway, horror of horrors, we are embracing, we do things standing because of his wings... and in bursts my brothers-in-law! In the middle of the act. Gabriel cries out, flings off his wings from about his shoulders, and hurls himself out of the open window into the canal!

Flings off... sorry that part again?

His wings! He washes up downriver and an old man covers him in honey and feathers, and parades him around the town. And then they take him to prison.

A surprising twist. I suppose if we learned from this it would be to say, love disguised as an angel might smell sweet, but might fly away?

Yes.. but, I'm hopeful he'll return to me in another body. Perhaps the gardener. He's quite dishy.

I would have liked to question this Dame further, but sadly she disappears.

The week we moved into our flat, the theatres were shut. Hans Schreiber, from the internet shop at the end of the road, scoffed and assured us in Berlin the saying goes 'my life, my rules'. We'd asked if he'd still be open the next day, since we weren't sure we had the right cable for the installation. The following day, all shops closed. I think Hans went back to his a hammock on the beach in Tahiti, and we had no internet. So I made friends with the empty neighbourhood, running love loops in the shut-up streets.

I decide I love the dog turd outside the front door, the cherry blossom, the lingering smell of cinnamon from the coffee shop in Boxi. I love the muddy, doggy, sweaty smell in the park, the chin-up club. I wonder if they've got cleaning wipes for those bars. I love the glassy Spree, the birds sailing home, the ferris wheel in Planterwald, people sitting too close, others that leap across the path even if you're twenty feet away, the game of trying to place my foot exactly in the middle of each tile, the crunch as concrete becomes gravel. I love the garlic in the woods, scratching bear-like through half bare spring treelets I'm sticking to the uneven windy paths, branches catching my hair, blackbirds swallowing shredded worms, and a bulbous frayed fungus on upturned faces of tree trunks sawn in two. The giant Soviet soldier holding the little German child, leaning on his sword. I love the sword and caretaker. On Elsen bridge, overlooking the molecule men in their strange aggressive embrace, I stop to look at the orange dripping onto the river. The sun is melting over the half closed road. I try to fit the whole of Oberbaumbrücke in the window of the life-ring on the lookout for sinking souls. I wonder if love is forgetting to think. I wonder if love is a meeting place. I am high from all the endorphins. I love it. I'll probably be sick in a minute.

I am on the bridge again when a couple pass by on their bikes. 'Do you know Hoppetosse?' he says. 'The club?' she says. 'Yeah, it's just there,' he says. 'Yeah I've been to Hoppetosse,' she says. 'Oh, I just wondered if you knew it was here,' he says, pointing at the boat with the peep-hole window, 'the club, yeah I said I've been,' she says. She's not looking at it, she's looking the other way. He tuts and cycles off. She mutters *whatever*, under her breath. Things are getting spiky.

With story after story revealing the tricks and ingenuity of lovers finding ways to satisfy their thirst for the wonders of bodily pleasure, I am led to wonder about all those more illicit love affairs. The discreet and dignified affairs, and the bawdy medieval barnyard type, upon which any healthy marriage is built...

The Fifth night... Day 7, story 2. Musing upon the ones who see a lot, though normally stay quiet, I am enthralled to be presented with a shy but chatty water vat...

My master is a mason, my mistress a spinner. My mistress Peronella has a lover, Gianello. The day I was sold, oh we made a merry foursome. Peronella and Gianello pleasing themselves of each other at home, as they are like to do, when my Master all of a sudden was heard in the hallway. Quick as a flash, Peronella bids her lover hide in my belly.

How did you feel about this imposition?

Well yes, like that I suppose I am made accomplice. But what fun was about to play out! In comes the husband, she ploughs her startled eyes into a vigorous angry wrath, and up and starts on at him, 'how dare you be so bold as to absent yourself from your work! What will people think of me? Me, here, spinning away, trying to earn us a crust, meanwhile you taking off willy nilly to do your own bidding!' She is hot and panting seeming with disgust, when of course she's flushed only from

her endeavours with Gianello. 'My cheesy, honey sweet wife,' says my master, 'It's a holiday. I was only out selling our vat. The chap is here to pick it up - we'll get five florins for it.'

Sold like a cow at the fair. Were you not well attached to your master and mistress?

Why yes. So as luck would be my mistress replies quick-sticks 'I've already sold it. Seven florins I got from the fellow, and he's here looking at it now,' she adds. Over she comes and hauls out her lover from my belly. Gianello looking altogether very confuddled runs his hands around my rim as if he has been inspecting me. 'So', she asks Gianello, 'will you take it after all?' He nods and shakes and folds his eyes up in all sorts of shapes. 'Take'...he begins... 'the vat', my mistress helpfully finishes for him. 'Oh...er', he says, 'Terrific,' she cuts in, 'though deepest regrets, it's rather grubby'. At which point my master chips in - 'well for seven florins', he says, 'I'll give it a once over for you!' And into my belly the master climbs. My mistress leans into through hole to direct her husband, pointing here and there with instructions to scrape here - clean there - you missed a bit here - over -here - never have I been so closely inspected, nor so intricately or intimately cleaned and brushed. Meanwhile, and I have to admit, I almost missed the other side, I was having such a wonder-goodly time with the Master inside me, Gianello has seized the opportunity afforded by my mistress's welcoming posture, and a little direction from a hand gesture of hers, to take up her skirts, lower his breeches, and to make like an unbridled stallion assailing a mare!

Good gracious. Meanwhile your Master is none the wiser?

None at all! I am sold to Gianello and privy to a great number of exploits between he and the lady Peronella.

Bit voyeuristic but each to their own. Though you yourself do seem to live a solitary life - do you have any wisdom on the matter of love in isolation?

I am a clay pot. Love in my book is just container.

I thank the vat for its insight as it fades into obscurity.

The Sixth night...Day Three, Story six.

My name is Catella and I am here to teach you a cure for jealous love.

Lead the way Catella! Wouldn't it be a happy world if could all just find the one and settle happily.

Yes. My answer is, many lovers.

Excuse me?

Unconventional, not illogical. So, I was at the time very happy with my husband Filipello. Truth be told, I'd have my nails out for any she-devil who'd turn his head.

Ah. It was you who were a jealous wife?

Steadfastly so. But I was also beloved of one Ricciardo, whose love I obviously rebuffed but whose fawning affection I was much en-fluffed by.

En-fluffed?

I don't know the English. When a hen has her feathers all flounced and bouffed up, she likes very much to be looked at by one who thinks her handsome. Enfluffed. Anyway, one day, Ricciardo comes up to me and says, he doesn't love me anymore, which I am sore chagrined by. More, that my Filipello is in love with his wife! And more.. that Filipello tried to send a message to Ricciardo's wife, to meet him in a brothel later on that night!!

Outrageous.

Thankfully Ricciardo intercepted my husband's message to his wife, but he said if I was to go in place of her, I could catch my red blooded husband red handed. So I go to the brothel that night, he's already there when I arrive, and the room is dark and we busy ourselves with the business, until I can stand it no longer and I cry out - Husband! Cease this folly and this cozenage - for thou hast tilled thine own field!

Great line. Thanks to Boccaccio for that corker. And what did Filipello say?

Well. ...It wasn't Filipello.

Who was it?

...Ricciardo.

That scheming oaf!

It's true, I was sore provoked for a time - grievously, I'd go so far as to say. But, without this deception, I'd have never learned how he loved me so. After all, it was my own jealousy had brought me there in the first place...

Which you were right to bear! He had a wife, and you a husband!

Yes. Contracts. And, in truth, he did rather restrict my leaving, against my will...

How so?

Sort of held me down with his leg a bit and put a hand across my mouth to stop me crying out, anyway, after I calmed down and the affront had been watered with enough of his clips and kisses, my jealousy was cured and we met a great many times after that, and with the utmost discretion en-

joyed much joyance of our love. Love is to be enjoyed, not endured. I am no longer jealous of Filipello's lovers, since I have a lover of my own.

What if Filipello is very true to you?

Too bad for him?

The Seventh Night arrives without a pause... with it Day 4, story 1...

I have a story of tragic and fated love. My name is Tancred, Lord of Salerno.

Fancy.

Thank you. My daughter had returned to my house, a lonely young widow. In search of new love, she twisted desire into a letter concealed in a walking stick, and delivered it to my garden boy without my knowing. In the letter, were directions to a long forgotten grotto under the palace. I imagine he put some leathers chaps on to push his way through the briers and brambles. I could imagine he looked very well in a pair of leather chaps. He had that sort of physique. He climbed down a steep shaft into the tunnel leading through the grotto to a passageway and up through a disused door in the corner of my daughter's bedroom.

All this right under your nose?

Yes. He'd knock, and she would open, and they abode a great while together this way.

But tragedy befell these young lovers?

It's true. Though his character was rich and free, his means were meagre, and these two could not be earthbound lovers. Theirs was a romance of dreams.

Soon to be ended...?

Sadly, yes. After dinner one night I went to my daughter's room and what should I spy but those two at their game. I pluck the garden boy from the end of that shaft where he should emerge after his lovemaking. And strangle him noiselessly. Then I take out the boy's still beating heart and serve it to the Princess in a golden bowl.

...Right. Only... I thought you said it was ill-fated. Would sort of imply some interjection of the Fates - not so much human intervention...

Indeed. Fortune makes its own fun and did not look favourably on my actions. My daughter took one look in the bowl, knew it to be the heart of her love, and swallowed a cup of my apothecary's most virulent herbs.

Ah. That back-fired?

I do miss her some. Though now I have an alter-ego keeps me company - I call her Miss Fortune. Sometimes I put on my daughters old dresses and sing to myself in the mirror.

Wonderful... Shall we leave it there?

Wait! My name is Sir Guillaume de Roussillon, and I also have a story about a heart in a bowl!

Really? A less violent story? ...Though it is supposed to be just one story a night...

I am a Knight! ...Day Four, story nine...

Wait...I...

My best friend and fellow knight in shining, Sir Guillaume de Guardestraing did become enamoured of my wife. What was once brotherly love turned to mortal hatred. So I invited him to our house for dinner, and along the road, I pounced on him and plunged a lance into his chest. He fell down off his horse, dead.

Definitely still violent. And I didn't actually give you permission to speak...

That is the way of the warrior. Simple, direct. As soon as I mentioned to her he was coming to supper, I sensed the shift in my wife's countenance. Dry and dreary, dowdy wife machine to bright eyed bunny in a matter of seconds. She put on perfume, twisted her hair in a very pretty chignon, the like I had never seen and asks me when he's arriving. I inform her that he will not be joining us after all. Had I any pity I would have consoled her crestfallen state - instead it made me madder. I rushed to the kitchen where I slapped my friend's heart on the chopping board and had the chef cook up the tastiest ragoût he could muster, informing him it was the heart of a boar! Ha!. And which I served to my wife in a silver porringer.

It's quite over-the-top, Guillaume. Quite excessive, some might say, aggressive, behaviour.

I know. I know this. Sometimes I just can't keep it all in. She finished off the ragoût and when she asked me what was in it, I replied, the very heart of your lover Guillaume de Gaurdestraing. And she fell herself backwards out of the window and the bits of her were all over the ground for ages and ages.

I mean, what were you hoping would come of that? And now you're all alone.

Yes.

What are you going to do now?

Gallop around a bit, plough a few furrows 'til I fall off my horse or drown in ditch..

He looks at me with big sad eyes.

No.

Go on, please?

I look at this great big lumbering Knight with his rusty armour and his slumpy shoulders. So pathetic.

After some eye rolling, some tutting and harumphing, I tell him he can stay. I find him some wellies, stuff my feet in an old pair of boots, pull on a wooly hat, sling a duffel bag over my shoulder with a flask of coffee, a bit of hard cheese and two apples, and tell him we're going for a walk. Then I remember we can't go outside, so we picnic in my bedroom.

I tell him how post-brexit Britain chartered flights for fruit pickers from Europe and I said I'd wondered what it will be like if they refused, and England was left covered in rotten fruit and vegetables, houses full of starving bodies, heads departed, stuffed inside VR spectacles. I cackle but he doesn't know what VR or Brexit is and is more concerned about food waste.

As a Knight, I feel he lacks some sensory engagement, and set about schooling him. We spend 40 minutes mindfully eating a mango, closing our eyes and scraping the fruit from the skin with our teeth, sucking juice out of the rivulets they make and lick the sticky sap off our fingers. I buy us those cubes of jelly you mix with warm water, which he moulds into eyeballs and gobbles up. He says he wants to eat with his eyes closed, with no cutlery. I wonder if that actually makes a lot of sense, hygienically, if the food goes straight from plate to mouth. We tie up our hands and shove our faces in our dinner like crazy giants. I am ready to go the place where the vines are tied up with sausages and goose is had for a farthing. We watch *La Grande Bouffe*, a film about four friends who lock themselves in a house and eat themselves to death. I suggest we do something that doesn't involve eating. We plant some herbs in a window box.

...The Eighth Night falls... I have explained the procedure to Guillaume, described how we should wait quietly for the spirits to emerge but he's fidgeting around, anxiously.

What's the matter?

I have a story about a head in a pot.

We're waiting for the next spirit, Guillaume, ssh..

But I have a really good story, about a cut-off head in a flower pot...

Yes but you've told your story already. Now we're waiting.

...but I know another one! So, Lisabetta's three brothers kill her lover, and he arrives as a ghost and tells her where he's buried. And she digs him up and saws off his head and plants it in a pot of basil!

Very good. Now it's quiet time.

But he's right. Nobody comes. I look at him.

And say, You have to go back.

I don't want to! I just got here?

But you're ruining my research. This was an investigation into Love in Isolation, and now I'm not alone - my methodology is shot.

But I like it here. And I fed my best friend to my late-wife, so... empty nest.

Enough of this. I abandon Sir Guillaume de Rousillion to his basil and set off alone.

The Ninth Night descends...Day 5, story 2. I have made it as far as the open ocean in a bowl made of walnut, and I spy a young girl in a boat. She's laid out, supine, arms folded across her chest in an X over her heart, her skin ready-salted and crisped by the elements, her eyes shut fast against the afternoon sun.

Hey Missy! - I say.

She doesn't reply.

Miss Costanza? - I say again.

I paddle a little closer. Her nose twitches.

Excuse me, Miss? I have a message for you! - I call out. I kneel down on my board, pull myself against the boat, holding onto the side so I don't float off. Her lips break apart like a ziplock bag.

I'm dying.

I check her over. I am not so sure. Apart from light sunburn she looks relatively OK.

Which part?

ALL OF ME!

Steady on, you'll have that boat capsized and there's sharks down there.

Their's will be a regurgitated supper as love has already consumed me.

I do some diagnostics.

How long have you been dying?

Since I first laid eyes on him and knew he would never be mine.

Martuccio?

Don't say his name.

Just checking we're talking about the same person.

Well don't.

Bit difficult... (I approach this with caution) as that's really who I'm here to talk about...

What?

Well...Martuccio...

DON'T SAY HIS NAME!

Sorry! Sorry. Well, I have a message, about...Mmm...from the faery midwife, just to let you know, you're not dying, your lover has been taken hostage, and he is basically waiting for, for maturity, for the King to set him free, which will happen with a little test of ingenuity and the young lover's specialist knowledge of arrow making, which'll give the King a considerable advantage in his next battle. After which, the two of you will be reunited.

The girl is gobsmacked, and smacks herself in the gob with a flat hand.

I must go to him right away.

No.

But he's waiting?

No. I skipped ahead. First you need to wash up on shore, not dead, where you'll be discovered by a bi-lingual peasant woman, handy with a fishing net, who'll take you to a good Saracen lady, who'll teach you various crafts - silk, palm-fibre weaving, leather...

I don't want to do any of those things. I just want my Martuccio.

And she unhooks my fingers from her boat and floats off over the horizon.

There's not much you should know about me, except I believe Theatre is Love. In these times of no theatre, I thank Grandpa Boccaccio for the nutrition he left on the hob. It's hard to feel truly isolated with all the voices in this book. I wonder if perhaps all I need to know about keeping love alive in isolation, is how to keep the pot warm, while we slowly find a way to gather around it again.

The Last Night...Night the Tenth...Day 2, Story 2

I have the table set, a bath drawn, my good fitting dress on, my hair clean and coiled, waiting in readiness for my lover, who, once again has changed his mind at the last minute and is off doing business elsewhere. The evening brings snow. My maid hears a whimper at the bottom of the garden, and drags a rag of a man from the behind the wall into my kitchen. He's lost his horse and most of his clothes, and he's near blue with cold. Beneath his flapping undershirt I spy a solid thigh, and there's something in the arch of his brow. He glances hungrily at the supper rolls and goulash laid out, and looks longingly at the bath drawn hot and steaming by the fire. His eyes come to rest on the pillows in my warm bed...

In the words of Boccaccio - Long live love, and death to war and all its company!

- Berlin May 2020