

SAVE YOUR PRECIOUS HEART: A LETTER FROM LISABETTA TO CATERINA

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The Decameron, written by Boccaccio in the 14th century, explores ten characters as they escape the plague in Florence and enter into another reality. This reality includes tales of love, tragedy, pranks, fortune, and more. These stories, ten being told each day, for ten days, represent the human experience and include characters that represent our multi-faceted nature as humans interacting with ourselves, each other, and the natural world. Though written centuries ago, this piece of literature remains relevant in our modern world, as we, the readers, are able to interact with the text, bringing our own perspectives and experiences to the characters and stories within.

In this creative work, I am exploring the perspective of Lisabetta, a character from the fifth story, on the fourth day. Lisabetta falls desperately in love with a man, Lorenzo, only to lose him due to his murder by her brothers because of their forbidden love. Though *the Decameron* includes many love stories between man and woman, the female perspective is rarely vocalized, and in Lisabetta's story, she is never given a voice. Through this ballad, I hope to convey Lisabetta's wisdom in order to aid another woman, Caterina, from the fourth story from day five. Caterina also engages in a "forbidden love," as she engages in a pre-marital sexual relationship, similar to Lisabetta. In this ballad, the tragedy of lost love is explored, as Lisabetta attempts to save Caterina from such a pain.

Sweetest Caterina,
The name in which your lover calls you.
How dare you corrupt your virtuous spirit and entangle yourself in a
love such as this?

The sweet aroma of my green, lush leaves beside me may speak
another tale,
But love does not end with a sweet nightingale song.
In despair and with this sturdy clay pot of basil for a lover,
This is where my heart remains.

Beware, I tell you!
For my tale began no different than yours.

Oh, the beginning!
For my dear Lorenzo gave his whole heart to me and mine to him,
This gift was given, with no envy or malintent
This gift was given with innocence; a purity that only love can
provide.

But these men,
With their strong-headed whims and small wits
They meddle only with what gives life its worth: love.
Their spirits jealous and dark, absent of compassion or reason,
But instead full of misplaced pride and trivial matters that do not
concern them.

For if I have any advice for you, Caterina,
Do not play with these men,
Do not attempt to deceive
Or disobey their useless rules that maintain their own reputation.
They deal in blood.

For their passions lie in destruction, whereas ours, if left untouched,
end with fullest heart.

I also held a place for my lover, Lorenzo

We spent secret nights together, and never greater pleasure I have had than when in his arms.
I could not imagine myself without him near, his comfort and love a consistent source of joy in my life.

With strong love comes strong pain.
Unlike these deep roots within this clay pot,
Love cannot last forever.
Instead, like the leaves, we all must wither away and die.

Oh, my dearest Lorenzo!
Without him by my side, only the moon grants me solace
How I miss its light shining on his curly locks,
Whilst strong arms held me tighter and tighter.

Is it worth the loss?
Perhaps.

I still see his ghost, throughout my dreams and my waking-hours,
The roots of this plant give his spirit a place to reside and for this I know he never truly leaves my side.

But this ghost of his is chilling, haunting in a way,
Removed from this world far too soon as his curls remain deep in the earth, alongside the dirt and roots.
Surviving only through the tears of my ever-remaining love.

That is why I say to you now,
"Save your precious heart,"
Lest you hope to forever garden with your own tears.

Sincerely,
Lisabetta