



Giovanni Boccaccio

*The Most Pleasant
and Delectable
Questions of Love*

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The Most Pleasant and Delectable Questions of Love (The Unabridged Original English Translation)

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The Booke to the Reader

Loke ere thou leap, dome not by view of face, Least hast
make wast, in misdoming the case: For I teach not to love,
ne yet his lore, Ne with what salve is cared such a sore, But I
the carke with cares that therby haps, The blis with joyes
the storms with thunderclaps, The curtesies where most his
force is shewede, The choise of best, be it of good or lewde,
Compare them so, as doomed is the dout, Thereof, and ay
the truth well sifted out: The which to reade such pleasure
thou shalt finde, As may content a well disposed minde.

Analytical Contents

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DEDICATION

CHAPTER ONE

The Argument

CHAPTER TWO

The First Question, Proposed by Philocopo. A young woman, asked to show which of two lovers she loves the more, each of whom claims to be the favoured one, places on the head of one her own garland, and taking from the other that which he wears, wears it herself. To which did she show the more favour?

CHAPTER THREE

The Second Question, proposed by Parmenio. A young gentleman in love with a young maiden takes as a go-between an old, wrinkled beggar-woman. She contrives to bring him to the maiden but all are taken together by the brothers of the maid, who condemn the young gentleman to stay both with their sister and the old woman each for a year and to have converse precisely alike with each. Only he

may choose which he will take first and which last. Then which should he have taken for the first year?

CHAPTER FOUR

The Third Question, proposed by a young gentlewoman. To which of three aspirants should a lady give her preference, to him who excels in valour, or to him who is most courteous and liberal, or to him who is wisest?

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fourth Question, proposed by Menedon. A story in which the question has to be resolved which of three persons, the husband, the lover or the magician has behaved most generously.

CHAPTER SIX

The Fifth Question, Proposed by Clonico. Which is the more unhappy, a lover who cannot obtain the favour of his mistress, or he who having obtained it has reason for jealousy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Sixth Question, proposed by a young gentlewoman. Two maidens in love with the same youth wish to induce him to choose between them. Agreed on this, one runs to him, embraces and kisses him; the other cannot but remains apart all shy and shameful. Which loved him better and more deserved his love?

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Seventh Question, proposed by Caleone. Is love a good or an evil? It is in this Question that Galeon, or, as the better reading is, Caleon, in a charming ballad, explains the sense of the name Fiammetta.

CHAPTER NINE

The Eighth Question, proposed by a young gentlewoman named Paola. Of two women whom he likes equally, ought a young man to prefer her who is superior to him by noble birth and parentage and riches, or her who is inferior to him in all these things? Fiammeta, who answers this question by saying that a young man should prefer her who is superior

in birth and station, was of course herself in this position in regard to Boccaccio.

CHAPTER TEN

The Ninth Question, proposed by Feramonte, Duke of Montorio. Which is it better that a young man should fall in love with, a maiden, a married woman or a widow?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Tenth Question, Proposed by Ascaleone. A beautiful and noble lady beloved of all but especially by two young knights, is falsely accused and condemned to the fire. The judge however in doubt leaves open a way of escape. If any knight could be found who would fight in defence of her honour against the first who should maintain the contrary and should overcome, she should be free, but if he should be beaten, she should be burned. The two lovers come forward and fight and one allows himself to be vanquished for her sake. Which should she have loved the better?

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Eleventh Question, proposed by a gentlewoman named Graciosa. Which is the greater delight to the lover, to see his mistress present, or not seeing her to think lovingly of her?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Twelfth Question, Proposed by Longano. Which is the more unhappy, the lady who after having tasted love, loves her lover, who must go into exile without hope of return; or she to whom fate has never allowed to taste with a lover the joys of love at all.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Thirteenth Question, Proposed by Massaline. Which, in the story told by Massaline, was the greater: the loyalty of the lover or the good fortune of the husband who got again his lost wife whom he thought dead and who had been brought out alive from her tomb by her lover who touched her not, but restored her to her husband?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Conclusion.

Dedication

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TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL M. WILLIAM RICE ESQUIRE, H.
G. WISHETH A HAPPY LONG LIFE, WITH INCREASE OF MUCH
WORSHIP

IN how much the thankfull sorte are desirous (as reason willeth and experience dailie teacheth) to gratifie such their dear frindes, as to whom sundrie good turnes and received benefits they are not a little beholding, the sundrie dealing of thousands dayly in use and apparent to the worlde, to the great prayse and commendation both of the one and the other, giveth a sufficient testimonie. So that, taking occasion thereby to shew the good will I have, to pay in parte the debt many yeares due, for that your bountie towards me (the least sparke whereof I am unable to satisfie:) I do give unto you this Italian Disport, the which I have turned out of his native attire into this our English habite to the ende the same may be no less familiar to you, and to such other (for your sake) as shall vouchsafe thereof, than it is either to the Italian or the Frenche, and desire that the same may marche abroad under your charge: to whom I recount the protection thereof. Not doubting but as the reading thereof shall bring plesure and delite: so the matter beeing there with all duely considered shal give sundry profitable lessons meet to be folowed. And bicause the name of the author (being of no small credit with the learned, for those his sundry well written workes) is of it selfe sufficient to cary greater commendation therewith, than my pen is able to write, I leave to labour therein, least my lacke may be an occasion to the leeing of his due praise. And untill fortune (the only hope of the unhappy) shall make me better able, I shall desire you thankfully to

accept this as a token and pledge of the good will I have to
performe that wherunto my abilitie is unable to stretch.
Thus taking my leave, I betake you to the tuition of
almightie God, who preserve you in health to his pleasure,
and after this life make you possessor of those joyes
whereof we all hope to be partakers.

6. Martij. 1566

Chapter 1

Questions of Love: The Argument

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FLORIO, surnamed Philocopo, accompanied with the duke Montorio, Ascaleon, Menedon and Massalina, in sailing to seek his friend Biancofiore, was through a very obscure and dark night by the fierce winds driven into great dangers. But the perils once passed, they were cast into the port of the ancient Parthenope, whereas the mariners (espying themselves in a haven) received comfort. Not knowing into what coast fortune had forced him they yielded thanks to the gods and so tarried the new day, the which after it once appeared the place was of the mariners descried, so that they all glad of suretie and of so acceptable arrival, came ashore, Philocopo with his companions. Who rather seemed to come forth new-risen again out of their sepulchres than disbarked from ship, looked back towards the wayward waters and repeating in themselves the passed perils of the spent night, could yet scarcely think themselves in suretie. They all then with one voice praised their gods that had guided them safe out of so crooked a course, offered their pitiful sacrifices, and began to receive comfort. They were by a friend of Ascaleon's honourably received into the city, whereas they caused their ship to be all new repaired and decked of mast, sail and better stern than were the others which they had lost. And so tarrying time for their further voyage, the which was much longer lengthened than they looked for; by occasion whereof Philocopo would many

times have taken his journey by land, but discouraged therein by Ascaleon, stayed, in tarrying a more prosperous hour in the aforesaid place, where he and his companions saw Phoebus five times round and as many times homed, before that Notus did abandon his violent forces.

And in so long a while they never almost saw time to be merry, whereupon Philocopo, who was very desirous to perform his deferred journey, one day called his companions unto him and said: "Let us go take the pleasant air and pass the time upon the salt sea shore, in reasoning and providing for our future voyage."

Thus he with the Duke Parmenion and the rest of his companions directed their walk with a mild pace (discoursing divers matters) towards that place where rested the reverend ashes of the most renowned poet Maro. They all thus talking a good space were not gone far from the city but that they came to the side of a garden, wherein they heard gracious and joyous feasting of young gentlemen, dames and damsels.

There the air did all resound with the noise of sundry instruments and as it were of angelical voices, entering with sweet delight into the hearts of them to whose ears it came. The which noise it pleased Philcopo to stay a while to hear, to the end his former melancholy through the sweetness thereof might by little and little depart away. Then Ascaleon restrained their talk.

And while fortune held thus Philocopo and his companions without the garden intently listening, a young gentleman coming forth thereof espied them and forthwith by sight, port and visage knew them to be noble gentlemen and worthy to be reverenced. Wherefor he without tarrying returned to his company and said "Come, let us go welcome certain young men, seeming to be gentlemen of great calling, the which perhaps bashful to enter herein, not being bidden, stay without, giving ear to our disport."

The companions then of this gentleman left the ladies at their pastime and went forth of the garden and came to Philocopo, whom by sight they knew to be chief of all the rest; to whom they spoke with that reverence their reason could devise and that was most convenient for the welcoming of such a guest, praying him that in honour and increase of this their feast it would please him and his companions to enter with them the garden, constraining him through many requests that he would in no wise deny them this courtesy.

These sweet prayers so pierced the gentle heart of Philocopo and no less the hearts of his companions, that he answered the entreaters in this sort: "Friends, of truth such a feast was of us neither sought for nor fled from. But like weather-beaten mates cast into your port, we to the end to flee drowsy thoughts which spring of idleness, did in reciting our adversities, pass by these sea banks. But how fortune has allured us to give ear unto you I know not, unless as we think, desirous to remove from us all pensiveness, she has of you in whom I know to be infinite courtesy, made us this offer. And therefor we will satisfy your desire, though peradventure in part we become somewhat lavish of the courtesy which otherwise towards others ought to proceed from us."

And thus talking they entered together into the garden, whereas they found many fair gentlewomen, of whom they were very graciously received and by them welcomed to their feast. After Philocopo had a good while beheld this their feasting and likewise had feasted with them, he thought it good to depart, and willed to take his leave of the young gentlemen and to give them thanks for the honour he had received. But one lady more honourable than the rest, endowed with marvelous beauty and virtue, came forth where he stood and thus said unto him: "Most noble sir, you have this morning through this your great courtesy shewed no small pleasure to these young gentlemen, for the which