

# Putting the Devil into Hell

By Giovanni Boccaccio

In the city of Capsa in Barbary, there lived a very rich man who, among his other children, had a fair and winsome young daughter, by name Alibech. She, not being a Christian and hearing many Christians who abode in the town mightily extol the Christian faith and the service of God, one day questioned one of them in what manner one might avail to serve God with the least hindrance. The other answered that they best served God who most strictly eschewed the things of the world, as those did who had betaken them into the solitudes of the deserts of Thebaï s. The girl, who was maybe fourteen years old and very simple, moved by no ordered desire, but by some childish fancy, set off next morning by stealth and all alone to go to the desert of Thebaï s, without letting any know her intent. After some days, her desire persisting, she won, with no little toil, to the deserts in question and, seeing a hut afar off, went thither and found at the door a holy man, who marveled to see her there and asked her what she sought. She replied that, being inspired of God, she went seeking to enter into His service and was now in quest of one who should teach her how it behooved to serve Him.

The worthy man, seeing her young and very fair and fearing lest, an he entertained her, the devil should beguile him, commended her pious intent and, giving her somewhat to eat of roots of herbs and wild apples and dates and to drink of water, said to her, "Daughter mine, not far hence is a holy man, who is a much better master than I of that which thou goest seeking; do thou betake thyself to him;" and put her in the way. However, when she reached the man in question, she had of him the same answer and, faring farther, came to the cell of a young hermit, a very devout and good man, whose name was Rustico and to whom she made the same request as she had done to the others. He, having a mind to make a trial of his own constancy, sent her not away, as the others had done, but received her into his cell, and the night being come, he made her a little bed of palm fronds and bade her lie down to rest thereon. This done, temptations tarried not to give battle to his powers of resistance, and he, finding himself grossly deceived by these latter, turned tail, without awaiting many assaults, and confessed himself beaten; then, laying aside devout thoughts and orisons and mortifications, he fell to revolving in his memory the youth and beauty of the damsel and be-thinking himself what course he should take with her, so as to win to that which he desired of her, without her taking him for a debauched fellow.

Accordingly, having sounded her with sundry questions, he found that she had never known man and was in truth as simple as she seemed. Wherefore he bethought him how, under color of the service of God, he might bring her to his pleasure. In the first place he showed her with many words how great an enemy the devil was of God, and afterwards gave her to understand that the most acceptable service that could be rendered to God was to put the devil into hell, whereto He had condemned him. The girl asked him how this might be done; and he, "Thou shalt soon know that; do thou but as thou shalt see me do." So saying, he proceeded to put off the few garments he had and abode stark naked, as likewise did the girl, whereupon he fell on his knees, as he would pray, and caused her abide over against himself.

Matters standing thus and Rustico being more than ever inflamed in his desires to see her so fair, there came the resurrection of the flesh, which Alibech observing and marveling, "Rustico," quoth she, "what is that I see on thee which thrusteth forth thus and which I have not?" "Faith, daughter mine," answered he, "this is the devil thereof I bespoke thee; and see now he giveth me

such sore annoy that I can scarce put up with it." Then said the girl, "Now praised be God! I see I fare better than thou, in that I have none of yonder devil." "True," rejoined Rustico, "but thou hast otherwhat that I have not, and thou hast it instead of this." "What is that?" asked Alibech; and he, "Thou hast Hell, and I tell thee methinketh God hath sent thee hither for my soul's health, for that, whenas this devil doth me this annoy, an it please thee have so much compassion on me as to suffer me put him back into Hell, thou wilt give me the utmost solacement and wilt do God a very great pleasure and service, so indeed thou be come into these parts to do as thou sayst."

The girl answered in good faith, "Marry, father mine, since I have Hell be it whensoever it pleaseth thee;" whereupon quoth Rustico, "Daughter, blessed be thou; let us go then and put him back there, so he may after leave me in peace." So saying, he laid her on one of their little beds and taught her how she should do to imprison that accursed one of God. The girl, who had never yet put any devil in Hell, for the first time felt some little pain; wherefore she said to Rustico, "Certes, father mine, this same devil must be an ill thing and an enemy in very deed of God, for that it irketh hell itself, let be otherwhat, when he is put back therein." "Daughter," answered Rustico, "it will not always happen thus;" and to the end that this should not happen, six times, or ever they stirred from the bed, they put him in Hell again, insomuch that for the nonce they so took the conceit out of his head that he willingly abode at peace. But, it returning to him again and again the ensuing days and the obedient girl still lending herself to take it out of him, it befell that the sport began to please her and she said to Rustico, "I see now that those good people in Capsa spoke sooth, when they avouched that it was so sweet a thing to serve God; for, certes, I remember me not to have ever done aught that afforded me such pleasance and delight as putting the devil in Hell; wherefore methinketh that whoso applieth himself unto aught other than God His service is a fool."

Accordingly, she came oftentimes to Rustico and said to him, "Father mine, I came here to serve God and not to abide idle; let us go put the devil in Hell." Which doing, she said whiles, "Rustico, I know not why the devil fleeth away from Hell; for, an he abode there as willingly as Hell receiveth him and holdeth him, he would never come forth there-from." The girl, then, on this wise often inviting Rustico and exhorting him to the service of God, so took the bombast out of his doublet that he felt cold what time mother had sweated. Wherefore he fell to telling her that the devil was not to be chastised nor put into Hell, save whenas he should lift up his head for pride. "And we," added he, "by God's grace, have so baffled him that he prayeth our Lord to suffer him abide in peace;" and on this wise be for a while imposed silence on her. However, when she saw that he required her not of putting the devil into Hell, she said to him one day, "Rustico, even if thy devil be chastened and give thee no more annoy, my Hell letteth me not be. Wherefore thou wilt do well to aid me with thy devil in abating the raging of my Hell, even as with my Hell I have helped thee take the conceit out of thy devil."

Rustico, who lived on roots and water, could ill avail to answer her calls and told her that it would need overmany devils to appease Hell, but he would do what he might thereof. Accordingly, he satisfied her bytimes, but so seldom it was but casting a bean into the lion's mouth. Whereat the girl, believing she served not God as diligently as she would fain have done, murmured somewhat. Whilst this debate was going on between Rustico, his devil, and Alibech, her Hell, for overmuch desire on the one part and lack of power on the other, it befell that a fire broke out in Capsa and burnt Alibech's father in his own house, with as many children and other family as he had. By reason of this, she became heir to all his estate. Thereupon a young man called Neerbale, who had spent all his substance in gallantry, hearing that she was alive, set out

in search of her. Finding her, before the court had laid hands upon her father's estate, to Rustico's great satisfaction but against her own will, he brought her back to Capsa, where he took her to wife and succeeded, in her right, to the ample inheritance of her father.

There, being asked by the women at what she served God in the desert, she answered (Neerbale having not yet lain with her) that she served Him at putting the devil in Hell and that Neerbale had done a grievous sin in that he had taken her from such service. The ladies asked, "How putteth one the devil in Hell?" And the girl, what with words and what with gestures, expounded it to them; whereat they set up so great a laughing that they laugh yet and said, "Give yourself no concern, my child; nay, for that is done here also and Neerbale will serve our Lord full well with thee at this." Therefore, telling it from one to another throughout the city, they brought it to a common saying there that the most acceptable service one could render to God was to put the devil in Hell, which byword, having passed the sea hither, is yet current here. Wherefore do all you young ladies, who have need of God's grace, learn to put the devil in Hell, for that this is highly acceptable to Him and pleasing to both parties and much good may grow and ensue there-from.