

Rice Cale Young

A Night in Avignon



Cale Rice
A Night in Avignon

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Содержание

A NIGHT IN AVIGNON	5
CHARACTERS	5
A NIGHT IN AVIGNON	6
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	11

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TO

DONALD ROBERTSON

A NIGHT IN AVIGNON

CHARACTERS

Francesco Petrarca	<i>A Young Poet and Scholar</i>
Gherardo	<i>His Brother, a Monk</i>
Lello	<i>His Friend</i>
Orso	<i>His Servant</i>
Filippa	} <i>Ladies of light life in Avignon</i>
Sancia	
Madonna Laura	

A NIGHT IN AVIGNON

Scene: A room in the chambers of Petrarca at Avignon. It opens on a loggia overlooking, on higher ground, the spired church of Santa Clara and the gray cloisters of a Carthusian monastery. Beyond lie the city walls under glamour of the blue Provençal night.

The room, faintly frescoed, is lighted with many candles; some glittering on a wine-table heavy with wines toward the right front. A door on the left leads to other rooms, and an arrased one opposite, down to the street. Bookshelves and a writing-desk strewn with a lute and writings are also on the left; a crimson couch is in the centre; and garlands of myrtle and laurel deck the wine-table.

Gherardo, the monk, is seated by the desk, following with severe looks the steps of Petrarca, who is walking feverishly to and fro.

Gherardo (after a pause). Listen. Another word, Francesco. Petrarca. Aih!

And then another – that will breed another.

Gherardo. Dote on this Laura still – if still you must: Woman's your destiny.

But quench these lights and set away that wine.

Petrarca. And to no other lips turn? hers denied me? Never, Gherardo!

Gherardo. Virtue bids you.

Petrarca. Vainly!

I've borne until I will not ... For it is

Two years now since in the aisles

Of Santa Clara yonder my heart first

Went from me on mad wings.

Two years this April morning

Since it fell fluttering before her feet ...

As she stood there beside our blessed Lady,

Gowned as young Spring in green and violets!..

Gherardo. And these two years have been inviolate;

Your life as pure as hers,

As virgin —

Save for the songs you've sung to her; those songs

This idle city echoes with. But now —

Petrarca. Now I will open all the gates to Pleasure!

To rosy Pleasure – warm, unspiritual,

Ready to spring

Into the arms of all

Whom bloodless Virtue pales.

For, of restraint and hoping, I have drunk

But a vintage of tears!

And what has been my gain?

Gherardo. Her chastity.

Petrarca. A chastity unchallenged of desire —

And therefore none!

Aih, none!

For, were it other;

Could I aver that once, that ever once

Her lids had fallen low in fear of love,
I'd bid the desert of my heart burn dry —
To the last oasis —
With resignation!
But never have they, never! and I'm mad.

(Pours out wine.)

Gherardo. And you will seek to cure it with more madness?
To cast the devil of love out of your veins
With other love and lower!

Petrarca. Yes, yes, yes! (*drinks.*)
With little Sancia's!

Whose soul is a sweet sin!
Who lives but for this life and asks of Death
Only a breath of time before he ends it,
To tell three beads and fill her mouth with *aves*.
Just for enough, she says,

"To tell God that He made me" – as He did.

Gherardo. And to blaspheme with! O obsessèd man.

(Has risen, flushed.)

But you will fail! For this vain revelry

Will ease not. And I see all love is base —
As say the Fathers —
All!.. and the body of woman
Is vile from the beginning.
Petrarca. Monkish lies!

(Drinks again for courage.)

The body of woman's born of bliss and beauty.
Only one thing is fairer – that's her soul.
Gherardo. And is that Word which says thou shalt not look
Upon another's wife a monkish lie?

(Silence.)

Your Laura is another's.
Petrarca (torn). As I found!
After my heart became a poison flame —
Within me!
A fierce inquisitor against my peace!
After I followed her from Santa Clara,
That mass-hour,
To an escutcheoned door!
After and not before ... And such another's!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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