



# Ririro

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## Patient Griselda

*F. J. H. Darton*

There is on the western side of Italy a large and fertile plain, wherein lie a tower and town founded long ago by the men of the olden days. The name of this noble country is Saluzzo. A worthy marquis called Walter was once lord of it, as his fathers had been before him. He was young, strong, and handsome, but he had several faults for which he was to blame; he took no thought for the future, but in his youth liked to do nothing but hawk and hunt all day, and let all other cares go unheeded. And the thing which seemed to the people of Saluzzo to be worst of all was that he would not marry.

At length his subjects came to him in a body to urge him to take a wife. The wisest of them spoke on behalf of the rest.

"Noble marquis," he said, "you are ever kind to us, and so we now dare to come to you and tell you our grief. Of your grace, my lord, listen to our complaint. Bethink you how quickly our lives pass, and that no man can stop the swift course of time. You are in your youth now, but age will creep upon you in a day which you cannot foresee. We pray you therefore to marry, that you may leave an heir to rule over us when you are gone. If you will do this, lord marquis, we will choose you a wife from among the noblest in the land. Grant our boon, and deliver us from our fears, for we could not live under a lord of a strange race."

Their distress and grief filled the marquis with pity. "My own dear people," he answered, "you are asking of me that which I thought never to do. I rejoice to be free, and like not to have my freedom cut short by marriage. But I see that your prayer is just and truly meant, and that it is my duty to take a wife. Therefore I consent to marry as soon as I may. But as for your offer to choose a wife for me, of that task I acquit you. The will of God must ordain what sort of an heir I shall have, and be your choice of a wife never so wise, the child may yet be amiss, for goodness is of God's gift alone. To Him, therefore, I trust to guide my choice. You must promise also to obey and reverence my wife, and not to rebel against her so long as she lives, whosoever she may be."

With hearty goodwill they promised to do as he bade them, and to obey his wife, but before they went away they begged him to fix a day for the wedding.

Walter appointed a day for his marriage, saying that this, too, he did because they wished it; and they fell on their knees and thanked him, and went away to

their homes again, while he gave orders to his knights and officers to prepare a great wedding-feast, with every kind of splendour and magnificence. But he told no one who was to be his bride.

Near the great palace of the marquis there stood a small village, where a number of poor folk dwelt. Among them lived a man called Janicola, the poorest of them all. Janicola had a daughter named Griselda, the fairest maiden under the sun, and the best. She had been brought up simply, knowing more of labour than of ease, and she worked hard to keep her father's old age in comfort. All day long she sat spinning and watching sheep in the fields; when she came home to their poor cottage in the evening she would bring with her a few herbs, which she would cut up and cook, to make herself a meal before she lay down to rest on her hard bed; and she had not a moment idle till she was asleep.

Walter had often seen this maiden as he rode out a-hunting, and he was filled with pleasure at the sight of her loveliness and her gentle, kindly life. In his heart he had vowed to marry none other than her, if ever he did marry.

The day appointed for the wedding came, but still no one knew who would be the bride. Men wondered and murmured and gossiped secretly, But the marquis had ordered all kinds of costly gems, brooches, and rings to be made ready, and rich dresses were prepared for the bride (for there was a maid in his service about Griselda's stature, so that they knew how to measure the cloth and silks and fine linen for the wedding garments). Yet still, when the very hour for the marriage arrived, no one but Walter knew who would be the bride.

All the palace was put in array, and the board set for the feast. The bridal procession started as if to fetch the bride, the marquis at its head, dressed in gay attire, and attended by all his lords and ladies.

They set out in all their pomp and magnificence, to the sound of joyful music, and rode until they came to the little village where Griselda lived.

Griselda, all ignorant of what was to happen, went that morning to the well to draw water, according to her wont, for she had heard of the procession which would take place in honour of the wedding.

"I will do my work as soon as I can, and go and stand at the door as the other maidens do," she thought, "to watch the marquis and his bride pass, if they come this way to the castle."

Just as she went to the door the procession reached the cottage, and the marquis called her. She set down her waterpot by the threshold of the ox's stall (for they were so poor that their one ox lived in the hut with them), and fell on her knees to hear what the marquis wished to say to her.

"Where is your father, Griselda?" he asked soberly and gravely.

"My lord, he is within," she answered humbly, and went in and brought Janicola before him.

Walter took the old man by the hand, and led him aside. "Janicola," he said, "I can no longer hide the desire of my heart. If you will grant me your daughter, I will take her with me to be my wife to my life's end. You are my faithful liege subject, and I know that you love and obey me. Will you, then, consent to have me for your son-in-law?"

The sudden question so amazed the old man that he turned red and confused, and stood trembling before the marquis. All he could say was: "My lord, my will is as your will, and you are my sovereign. Let it be as you wish."

"Let us talk privately a little," said the marquis, "and afterwards I will ask Griselda herself to be my wife, and we three will speak of the matter together." So they went apart to confer privately about it. Meanwhile the courtiers were in the yard of the mean little cottage, marvelling at the care and kindness which Griselda showed in tending her old father. But their wonder was not so great as hers, for she had never before seen so splendid a sight as these richly-dressed lords and ladies, nor received such noble guests; and she stood in their presence pale with astonishment.



But her father and the marquis called her. "Griselda," said Walter, "your father and I desire that you shall become my wife. I wish to ask you whether you give your consent now, or whether you would like to think further of it. If you marry me, will you be ready to love and obey me, and never to act against my will, even so much as by a word or a frown?"

"My lord," Griselda answered, fearing and wondering at his words, "I am all unworthy of so great an honour; but as you wish, so will I do. Here and now I promise that I will never willingly disobey you in deed or thought—no, not if I die for it."

"That is enough, my Griselda," said the marquis; and with that he went gravely to the door, with Griselda following him.

"This is my bride," he cried to all the people. "Honour and love her, I pray you, if you love me."

Then, that she might not enter his palace poorly dressed in her old clothes, he bade the women robe her fitly and honourably; and though these ladies did not like even to touch the old rags which Griselda wore, still, at his orders, they took them off her, and clad her afresh from head to foot. They combed her hair, and set a crown on her head, and decked her with precious stones and jewelled clasps, so that they hardly knew her again; and in this rich array she seemed more lovely than ever. The marquis put a ring on her finger, she was set on a snow-white horse, and they all rode to the palace, where they feasted and revelled till the sun set.

Thus Griselda was married to Walter. By her marriage her gentleness and beauty seemed only to increase, so that folk who had known her many a year would not believe that she was the same Griselda, the daughter of Janicola, who had lived in a mean hut in a poor village. Every one who looked on her loved her, and her fame spread all over Walter's realm, so that young and old used to come to Saluzzo merely to see her.

Thus for a time Walter and Griselda lived together in great happiness. At length Griselda had a daughter, and though they would have liked a son better, Walter and Griselda were very glad and joyful at the event, and so were all their subjects.

But when the child was still quite young a strange desire came upon the marquis to try his wife's goodness and obedience, though he had tested it in many ways times enough already, and had discovered no faults in her. It was cruel to put her to such pains for no need, but he could not rid himself of the wish, and he set about carrying it out.

One night, as she lay alone, he came to her with a stern, grave face. "Griselda," he said, "I think you have not forgotten the day when I took you from your poor home and set you high in rank and nobility. This present dignity which you now enjoy must not make you unmindful of your former low estate. Take heed to my words, therefore, now that we are alone, with none to hear what I am going to say. You must know that you are very dear to me, but not to my people. They say that it is shameful to be subjects of one of such mean birth; and since your daughter was born their grumbling has not grown less. Now, I wish to live my life with them in peace, as I have always done, and I cannot but give ear to their words. I must deal with your child as seems best, not for my own sake, but for my people's. Yet I am very loth to do what must be done, and I will not do it unless you consent. Show me, therefore, the obedience and patience which you promised at our marriage."

Griselda never moved when she heard of all this false tale. She did not reveal her grief in look or word, but simply answered: "My lord, it is in your power to do as you please; my child and I are yours. Do with us as you wish. Whatever you

do cannot displease me, for all my desire is to obey you, and no length of time can change it—no, not even death itself—nor move my heart from you."

Walter was filled with gladness at this gentle answer, but he hid his joy, and went mournfully out of her room. A little while after this he told his plan to a faithful servant, a harsh and fierce-looking officer, whom he had often before trusted greatly; and when this man understood what was to be done he went to Griselda, and stalked into her chamber, silent and grim.

"My lady," he said bluntly, "I must obey my lord, and you must forgive me for doing that which I am ordered to do. I am commanded to take away your daughter."

Not a word more did he say, but seized the child and made as if to slay it there and then. Griselda sat obedient to the commands which she thought to be those of her lord, and uttered no sound. At last she spoke, and gently prayed him to let her kiss her child before it was slain; and he granted her prayer. She clasped her little daughter to her bosom, kissing it and lulling it to rest, and saying softly, "Farewell, my child; never again shall I see you. May the kind Father above receive your soul!"

Then she spoke again to the officer, so meekly and humbly that it would have stirred any mother's heart to see her. "Take the little child and go and do whatever my lord has bidden you. Only one thing more I ask you—that, unless my lord forbid it, you bury the babe so that no birds of prey can reach her little body." But he would promise nothing. He took the child, and went his way again to Walter, and told him all that Griselda had said and done.

The marquis was touched a little by remorse when he heard of his wife's gentle obedience, but none the less he held to his cruel purpose like a man who is resolved to have his own way. He bade the officer take the babe with all care and secrecy to his sister, who was Countess of Bologna, and tell her the whole story, asking her to bring the child up honourably, without saying whose it was.

But Walter's mind was not yet softened from his wicked intent. He looked eagerly to see if what he had done would make his wife show in her face any signs of grief or anger. But Griselda did not seem to be changed in the least. She was always gentle and kind, and still as glad, as humble, as ready to obey him as she had ever been; and not a word either in jest or in earnest did she say of her little daughter.

Thus there passed four years or so more, until Griselda had a little son, at which Walter and all his subjects were overjoyed, giving thanks to God because now there was an heir to the kingdom.

But when the boy was some two years old Walter's heart again became cruel

and perverse, and he made up his mind to test his wife's patience once more. Her gentle obedience seemed only to make him wish to torment her still further.

"Wife," he said to her. "I have told you that my subjects did not like our marriage, but now, since our son was born, their murmuring has been worse than ever before, so that I am greatly afraid of what they may do. They speak openly of the matter. 'When Walter dies,' they say, 'we shall be ruled by Janicola's grandson.' I cannot but hear their words, and I fear them. So, in order to live in peace, I am resolved to serve our son as I did his sister before; and I warn you now, so that you may have patience to bear his loss when the time comes."

"I have always said, and always will say," answered Griselda, "that I will do nothing but what you wish. I am not grieved that both my son and my daughter are slain, if it is you who order it. You are my lord, and can do with me as you will. When I left my home and my poor rags I left there my freedom also, and took your clothing, and became obedient to your commands. Therefore do as you will; if I knew beforehand what you wished I would do it, and if my death would please you I would gladly die."

When Walter heard these words he cast down his eyes, wondering at the patience of his wife. Yet he went away from her with a stern and cruel face, though his heart was full of joy at her goodness.

The fierce officer came to her again in a little while, and seized her son. Again she prayed him to give the babe proper burial, and kissed its little face, and blessed it, without a word of complaint or bitterness. Again the child was taken to Bologna, to be brought up there. The marquis watched for signs of grief in his wife, but found none, and the more he regarded her the more he wondered.

Meanwhile rumours crept about among the people that Walter had murdered his two children secretly because their mother was nothing but a poor village maiden of low birth. The report spread far and wide, so that the marquis began to be hated by the subjects who had formerly loved him so well. Nevertheless, he did not change his purpose. He sent a secret message to Rome, asking that a decree from the Pope should be forged which would allow him, for the good of his subjects to put away his wife Griselda and wed another.

In due time the false decree arrived. It said that, since great strife had arisen between the Marquis of Saluzzo and his people because he had married a poor wife of humble birth, he was to put away this wife, and be free to marry another if he pleased. The common people believed these lying orders, but when the news came to Griselda her heart was full of woe. Yet she resolved to endure patiently whatever was done by the husband whom she loved so dearly.

Walter now sent a letter secretly to Bologna to the count who had married his

sister asking him to bring to Saluzzo Griselda's son and daughter, openly and in state, but without saying to any man whose children they really were, and to proclaim that the young maiden was soon to be married to the Marquis of Saluzzo.

The count did as he was asked. He set out with a great train of lords and ladies in rich array, bringing the girl with her brother riding beside her.

She was decked in bright jewelled robes, as if for marriage, and the boy, too, was nobly and fittingly dressed.

When all this plan was being carried out, the marquis, according to his wicked design, put yet another trial upon Griselda's patience by saying to her boisterously, before all his court: "Griselda, I was once glad to marry you for your goodness and obedience—not for your birth or your wealth. But now I know that great rulers have duties and hardships of many kinds; I am not free to do as every ploughman may, and marry whom I please. Every day my people urge me to take another wife, and now I have got leave to do so to stop the strife between me and them. I must tell you that even now my new wife is on her way hither. Be brave then, and give place to her, and I will restore to you again the dowry you brought me when I married you. Return again to your father's house; remember that no one is always happy, and bear steadfastly the buffeting of misfortune."

"My lord," answered Griselda patiently, "I knew always how great was the distance between your high rank and my poverty. I never deemed myself worthy to be your wife, nor even to be your servant. May Heaven be my witness that in this house whither you led me as your wife I have always tried to serve you faithfully, and ever will while my life lasts. I thank God and you that of your kindness you have so long held me in honour and dignity when I was so unworthy. I will go to my father gladly, and dwell with him to my life's end. May God of His grace grant you and your new wife happiness and prosperity! As for the dowry which you say I brought with me, I remember well what it was; it was my poor clothes that I wore in my father's house. Let me, then, go in my old smock back to him. Though I have lost your love, I will never in word or deed repent that I gave you my heart."

"You may take the old smock and go," said Walter. Scarcely another word could he speak, but went away with great pity in his heart.

Before them all Griselda stripped off her fine clothes, and went forth clad only in her smock, barefoot and bareheaded. The people followed her weeping and railing at her hard lot, but she made no complaint, and spoke never a word. Her father met her at his door, lamenting the day that he saw her cast off thus. So Griselda went home and lived for a while with Janicola as though she had never

left him.

At length the count drew near from Bologna with Griselda's son and daughter. The news spread among the people, and every one talked of the grand wife who was coming to be married to the marquis with such splendour as had never been seen in all West Lombardy.

When Walter heard of their approach he sent for Griselda. She came humbly and reverently, and knelt before him.

"Griselda," said he, "I desire that the lady whom I am to wed shall be received to-morrow as royally as may be. I have no woman who can make all the preparations for this, and arrange that every one shall be placed according to his proper rank, and I have sent for you to do it, since you know my ways of old. Your garments are poor and mean, but you will do your duty as well as you can."

"I am glad always to do your will, my lord," she answered. With that she turned to her task of setting the house in order for the guests of the marquis.

The next morning the Count of Bologna arrived with Griselda's son and daughter. All the people ran out to see the fine sight. She was younger and even fairer than Griselda, and the fickle people, ever changeable, as a weathercock, were full of praises for the choice of the marquis.

Griselda had made everything ready, and went into the courtyard of the palace with the other folk to greet the marquis and his bride. When the procession reached the banquet-hall, she took no shame in her torn old clothes, but went busily about her work with a cheerful face, showing the guests each to his appointed place.

At length, when they were all sitting down to the feast, Walter called out to her as she busied herself in the great hall. "Griselda," he cried, as if in jest, "what think you of my wife?"

"Never have I looked upon a fairer maiden, my lord," she answered. "I pray that you may have all prosperity to your lives' end. One thing only I ask of you—that you do not torment her as you did me; for she is tenderly brought up, and could not bear hardship as well as I, who was poorly bred."

When Walter heard her gentle answer, and saw that even now she had no discontent or malice for all the wrong he had done her, he relented at last, and blamed himself sorely for his cruelty.

"Enough, Griselda," he said; "be not ill at ease any longer. I have tried and tested your faithfulness and goodness, and I know your true heart, dear wife."

He took her in his arms and kissed her, but she was so filled with wonder that she hardly heard what he said till he spoke again.

"Griselda, you are my wife, and I will have no other. This is your daughter, who you thought was my new bride, and this your son, who shall be my heir; they have been kept and brought up secretly at Bologna. Take them again, and see for yourself that your children are safe. Let no one think evil of me for my cruelty; I did it but to make trial of my wife's goodness and show it the more brightly."

Griselda swooned for joy at his words. When she came to her senses again she thanked Heaven for restoring her children to her. "And I thank you, too, my lord. Now I fear nothing, not even death itself, since I have truly won your love. Dear children, God of His mercy has brought you back to me."

[Illustration: "This is my bride" he cried to all the people. From the drawing by Hugh Thomson.]

Suddenly she swooned again. Walter raised her up and comforted her till every one wept at the sight. Then the ladies of the court took her into a chamber apart, and dressed her in splendid robes again, and set a golden crown on her head, and brought her back into the banquet-hall, where she was honoured as she deserved with feasting and rejoicing that lasted all that day.

Full many a year Walter and Griselda lived together in happiness and peace. Janicola, too, was brought to the court, and dwelt there with them. Their daughter was married to one of the greatest lords in all Italy, and their son succeeded Walter at his death, and ruled well and prosperously.

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