The Decameron was written by Giovanni Boccaccio in the 14th century, becoming the model for Italian prose and making Boccaccio one of the “three crowns” of the Italian language.

It opens in the church of Santa Maria Novella in the city of Florence during the time of the black plague. Seven young woman are in the church discussing the horrors of the plague and its effects on their families, friends, and neighbors, recounting the ways in which people have died, fled, or become reckless. One young woman, Pampinea, suggests that in order to save their health, the women must flee the city to the countryside for some time. Although her suggestions are initially met with the hesitance, particularly from Filomena and Elissa who claim that women are unable to rule themselves, the women decide that fleeing is the best option. They ask three men who come into the church to accompany them on this journey. The young women and men, collectively known as a “brigata,” go to the countryside and establish a makeshift society amongst themselves where they spend the days singing, dancing, and wandering, but telling stories during the evening.

The Decameron is set as a frame story: the “brigata” tells 100 stories during the span of a fortnight save for the holy days and two days set aside for chores. During the ten days of storytelling, there is a ruler for each day that dictates the theme for that day’s stories. The themes are generally about situations in which the characters used wit or clever language, deception, fortune (both good and bad), the mercantile class, and love.