

NOVEL IV

Chichibio, cook to Currado Gianfigliuzzi, owes his safety to a ready answer, whereby he converts Currado's wrath into laughter, and evades the evil fate with which Currado had threatened him.

Lauretta being now silent, all lauded Nonna to the skies; after which Neifile received the queen's command to follow suit, and thus began:

Albeit, loving ladies, ready wit not seldom ministers words apt and excellent and congruous with the circumstances of the speakers, 'tis also true that Fortune at times comes to the aid of the timid, and unexpectedly sets words upon the tongue, which in a quiet hour the speaker could never have found for himself: the which 'tis my purpose to shew you by my story.

Currado Gianfigliuzzi, as the eyes and ears of each of you may bear witness, has ever been a noble citizen of our city, open-handed and magnificent, and one that lived as a gentleman should with hounds and hawks, in which, to say nothing at present of more important matters, he found unfailling delight. Now, having one day hard by Peretola despatched a crane with one of his falcons, finding it young and plump, he sent it to his excellent cook, a Venetian, Chichibio by name, bidding him roast it for supper and make a dainty dish of it. Chichibio, who looked, as he was, a very green-head, had dressed the crane, and set it to the fire and was cooking it carefully, when, the bird being all but roasted, and the fumes of the cooking very strong, it so chanced that a girl, Brunetta by name, that lived in the same street, and of whom Chichibio was greatly enamoured, came into the kitchen, and perceiving the smell and seeing the bird, began coaxing Chichibio to give her a thigh. By way of answer Chichibio fell a singing:

"You get it not from me, Madam Brunetta, you get it not from me." Whereat Madam Brunetta was offended, and said to him:

"By God, if thou givest it me not, thou shalt never have aught from me to pleasure thee." In short there was not a little altercation; and in the end Chichibio, fain not to vex his mistress, cut off one of the crane's thighs, and gave it to her. So the bird was set before Currado and some strangers that he had at table with him, and Currado, observing that it had but one thigh, was surprised, and sent for Chichibio, and demanded of him what was become of the missing thigh. Whereto the mendacious Venetian answered readily:

"The crane, Sir, has but one thigh and one leg."

"What the devil?" rejoined Currado in a rage: "so the crane has but one thigh and one leg? thinkst thou I never saw crane before this?" But Chichibio continued:

"'Tis even so as I say, Sir; and, so please you, I will shew you that so it is in the living bird." Currado had too much respect for his guests to pursue the topic; he only said:

"Since thou promisest to shew me in the living bird what I have never seen or heard tell of, I bid thee do so to-morrow, and I shall be satisfied, but if thou fail, I swear to thee by the body of Christ that I will serve thee so that thou shalt ruefully remember my name for the rest of thy days."

No more was said of the matter that evening, but on the morrow, at daybreak, Currado, who had by no means slept off his wrath, got up still swelling therewith, and ordered his horses, mounted Chichibio on a hackney, and saying to him:

"We shall soon see which of us lied yesternight, thou or I," set off with him for a place where there was much water, beside which there were always cranes to be seen about dawn. Chichibio, observing that Currado's ire was unabated, and knowing not how to bolster up his lie, rode by Currado's side in a state of the utmost trepidation, and would gladly, had he been able, have taken to flight; but, as he might not, he glanced, now ahead, now aback, now aside, and saw everywhere nought but cranes standing on two feet. However, as they approached the river, the very first thing they saw upon the bank was a round dozen of cranes standing each and all on one foot, as is their wont, when asleep. Which Chichibio presently pointed out to Currado, saying:

"Now may you see well enough, Sir, that 'tis true as I said yesternight, that the crane has but one thigh and one leg; mark but how they stand over there." Whereupon Currado:

"Wait," quoth he, "and I will shew thee that they have each thighs and legs twain." So, having drawn a little nigher to them, he ejaculated, "Oho!" Which caused the cranes to bring each the other foot to the ground, and, after hopping a step or two, to take to flight. Currado then turned to Chichibio, saying:

"How now, rogue? art satisfied that the bird has thighs and legs twain?" Whereto Chichibio, all but beside himself with fear, made answer:

"Ay, Sir; but you cried not, oho! to our crane of yestereve: had you done so, it would have popped its other thigh and foot forth, as these have done." Which answer Currado so much relished, that, all his wrath changed to jollity and laughter:

"Chichibio," quoth he, "thou art right, indeed I ought to have so done."

Thus did Chichibio by his ready and jocund retort arrest impending evil, and make his peace with his master.