

NOVEL VI

Bruno and Buffalmacco steal a pig from Calandrino, and induce him to essay its recovery by means of pills of ginger and vernaccia. Of the said pills they give him two, one after the other, made of dog-ginger compounded with aloes; and it then appearing as if he had had the pig himself, they constrain him to buy them off, if he would not have them tell his wife.

Filostrato's story, which elicited not a little laughter, was no sooner ended, than the queen bade Filomena follow suit. Wherefore thus Filomena began:

As, gracious ladies, 'twas the name of Maso del Saggio that prompted Filostrato to tell the story that you have but now heard, even so 'tis with me in regard of Calandrino and his comrades, of whom I am minded to tell you another story, which you will, I think, find entertaining. Who Calandrino, Bruno and Buffalmacco were, I need not explain; you know them well enough from the former story; and therefore I will tarry no longer than to say that Calandrino had a little estate not far from Florence, which his wife had brought him by way of dowry, and which yielded them yearly, among other matters, a pig; and 'twas his custom every year in the month of December to resort to the farm with his wife, there to see to the killing and salting of the said pig. Now, one of these years it so happened that his wife being unwell, Calandrino went thither alone to kill the pig. And Bruno and Buffalmacco learning that he was gone to the farm, and that his wife was not with him, betook them to the house of a priest that was their especial friend and a neighbour of Calandrino, there to tarry a while. Upon their arrival Calandrino, who had that very morning killed the pig, met them with the priest, and accosted them, saying:

"A hearty welcome to you. I should like you to see what an excellent manager I am;" and so he took them into his house, and shewed them the pig. They observed that 'twas a very fine pig; and learned from Calandrino that he was minded to salt it for household consumption. "Then thou art but a fool," quoth Bruno. "Sell it, man, and let us have a jolly time with the money; and tell thy wife that 'twas stolen."

"Not I," replied Calandrino: "she would never believe me, and would drive me out of the house. Urge me no further, for I will never do it." The others said a great deal more, but to no purpose; and Calandrino bade them to supper, but so coldly that they declined, and left him.

Presently:

"Should we not steal this pig from him to-night?" quoth Bruno to Buffalmacco. "Could we so?" returned Buffalmacco. "How?"

"Why, as to that," rejoined Bruno, "I have already marked how it may be done, if he bestow not the pig elsewhere."

"So be it, then," said Buffalmacco: "we will steal it; and then, perchance, our good host, Master Priest, will join us in doing honour to such good cheer?"

"That right gladly will I," quoth the priest. Whereupon:

"Some address, though," quoth Bruno, "will be needful: thou knowest, Buffalmacco, what a niggardly fellow Calandrino is, and how greedily he drinks at other folk's expense. Go we, therefore, and take him to the tavern, and there let the priest make as if, to do us honour, he would pay the whole score, and suffer Calandrino to pay never a soldo, and he will grow tipsy, and then we shall speed excellent well, because he is alone in the house."

As Bruno proposed, so they did: and Calandrino, finding that the priest would not suffer him to pay, drank amain, and took a great deal more aboard than he had need of; and the night being far spent when he left the tavern, he dispensed with supper, and went home, and thinking to have shut the door, got him to bed, leaving it open. Buffalmacco and Bruno went to sup with the priest; and after supper, taking with them certain implements with which to enter Calandrino's house, where Bruno thought it most feasible, they stealthily approached it; but finding the door open, they entered, and took down the pig, and carried it away to the priest's house, and having there bestowed it safely, went to bed. In the morning when Calandrino, his head at length quit of the fumes of the wine, got up, and came downstairs and found that his pig was nowhere to be seen, and that the door was open, he asked this, that, and the other man, whether they wist who had taken the pig away, and getting no answer, he began to make a great outcry:

"Alas, alas! luckless man that I am, that my pig should have been stolen from me!" Meanwhile Bruno and Buffalmacco, being also risen, made up to him, to hear what he would say touching the pig. Whom he no sooner saw, than well-nigh weeping he called them, saying:

"Alas! my friends! my pig is stolen from me." Bruno stepped up to him and said in a low tone:

"'Tis passing strange if thou art in the right for once."

"Alas!" returned Calandrino, "what I say is but too true."

"Why, then, out with it, man," quoth Bruno, "cry aloud, that all folk may know that 'tis so." Calandrino then raised his voice and said:

"By the body o' God I say of a truth that my pig has been stolen from me."

“So!” quoth Bruno, “but publish it, man, publish it; lift up thy voice, make thyself well heard, that all may believe thy report.”

“Thou art enough to make me give my soul to the Enemy,” replied Calandrino. “I say--dost not believe me?--that hang me by the neck if the pig is not stolen from me!”

“Nay, but,” quoth Bruno, “how can it be? I saw it here but yesterday. Dost think to make me believe that it has taken to itself wings and flown away?”

“All the same ’tis as I tell thee,” returned Calandrino. “Is it possible?” quoth Bruno. “Ay indeed,” replied Calandrino; “’tis even so: and I am undone, and know not how to go home. Never will my wife believe me; or if she do so, I shall know no peace this year.”

“Upon my hope of salvation,” quoth Bruno, “’tis indeed a bad business, if so it really is. But thou knowest, Calandrino, that ’twas but yesterday I counselled thee to make believe that ’twas so. I should be sorry to think thou didst befool thy wife and us at the same time.”

“Ah!” vociferated Calandrino, “wilt thou drive me to despair and provoke me to blaspheme God and the saints and all the company of heaven? I tell thee that the pig has been stolen from me in the night.” Whereupon:

“If so it be,” quoth Buffalmacco, “we must find a way, if we can, to recover it.”

“Find a way?” said Calandrino: “how can we compass that?”

“Why,” replied Buffalmacco, “’tis certain that no one has come from India to steal thy pig: it must have been one of thy neighbours, and if thou couldst bring them together, I warrant thee, I know how to make the assay with bread and cheese, and we will find out in a trice who has had the pig.”

“Ay,” struck in Bruno, “make thy assay with bread and cheese in the presence of these gentry hereabout, one of whom I am sure has had the pig! why, the thing would be seen through: and they would not come.”

“What shall we do, then?” said Buffalmacco. Whereunto Bruno made answer:

“It must be done with good pills of ginger and good vernaccia; and they must be bidden come drink with us. They will suspect nothing, and will come; and pills of ginger can be blessed just as well as bread and cheese.”

“Beyond a doubt, thou art right,” quoth Buffalmacco; “and thou Calandrino, what sayst thou? Shall we do as Bruno says?”

“Nay, I entreat you for the love of God,” quoth Calandrino, “do even so: for if I knew but who had had the pig, I should feel myself half consoled for my loss.”

“Go to, now,” quoth Bruno, “I am willing to do thy errand to Florence for these commodities, if thou givest me the money.”

Calandrino had some forty soldi upon him, which he gave to Bruno, who thereupon hied him to Florence to a friend of his that was an apothecary, and bought a pound of good pills of ginger, two of

which, being of dog-ginger, he caused to be compounded with fresh hepatic aloes, and then to be coated with sugar like the others; and lest they should be lost, or any of the others mistaken for them, he had a slight mark set upon them by which he might readily recognize them. He also bought a flask of good vernaccia, and, thus laden, returned to the farm, and said to Calandrino:

“To-morrow morning thou wilt bid those whom thou suspectest come hither to drink with thee: as ’twill be a saint’s day, they will all come readily enough; and to-night I and Buffalmacco will say the incantation over the pills, which in the morning I will bring to thee here, and for our friendship’s sake will administer them myself, and do and say all that needs to be said and done.” So Calandrino did as Bruno advised, and on the morrow a goodly company, as well of young men from Florence, that happened to be in the village, as of husbandmen, being assembled in front of the church around the elm, Bruno and Buffalmacco came, bearing a box containing the ginger, and the flask of wine, and ranged the folk in a circle. Whereupon: “Gentlemen,” said Bruno, “’tis meet I tell you the reason why you are gathered here, that if aught unpleasant to you should befall, you may have no ground for complaint against me. Calandrino here was the night before last robbed of a fine pig, and cannot discover who has had it; and, for that it must have been stolen by some one of us here, he would have each of you take and eat one of these pills and drink of this vernaccia. Wherefore I forthwith do you to wit, that whoso has had the pig will not be able to swallow the pill, but will find it more bitter than poison, and will spit it out; and so, rather, than he should suffer this shame in presence of so many, ’twere perhaps best that he that has had the pig should confess the fact to the priest, and I will wash my hands of the affair.”

All professed themselves ready enough to eat the pills; and so, having set them in a row with Calandrino among them, Bruno, beginning at one end, proceeded to give each a pill, and when he came to Calandrino he chose one of the pills of dog-ginger and put it in his hand. Calandrino thrust it forthwith between his teeth and began to chew it; but no sooner was his tongue acquainted with the aloes, than, finding the bitterness intolerable, he spat it out. Now, the eyes of all the company being fixed on one another to see who should spit out his pill, Bruno, who, not having finished the distribution, feigned to be concerned with nought else, heard some one in his rear say:

“Ha! Calandrino, what means this?” and at once turning round, and marking that Calandrino had spit out his pill:

“Wait a while,” quoth he, “perchance ’twas somewhat else that caused thee to spit: take another;” and thereupon whipping out the other pill of dog-ginger, he set it between Calandrino’s teeth, and finished the distribution. Bitter as Calandrino had found the former pill, he found this tenfold more so; but being ashamed to spit it out, he kept it a while in his mouth and chewed it, and, as he did

so, tears stood in his eyes that shewed as large as filberts, and at length, being unable to bear it any longer, he spat it out, as he had its predecessor. Which being observed by Buffalmacco and Bruno, who were then administering the wine, and by all the company, 'twas averred by common consent that Calandrino had committed the theft himself; for which cause certain of them took him severely to task.

However, the company being dispersed, and Bruno and Buffalmacco left alone with Calandrino, Buffalmacco began on this wise:

"I never doubted but that thou hadst had it thyself, and wast minded to make us believe that it had been stolen from thee, that we might not have of thee so much as a single drink out of the price which thou gottest for it." Calandrino, with the bitterness of the aloes still on his tongue, fell a swearing that he had not had it. Whereupon:

"Nay, but, comrade," quoth Buffalmacco, "upon thy honour, what did it fetch? Six florins?" Whereunto, Calandrino being now on the verge of desperation, Bruno added:

"Now be reasonable, Calandrino; among the company that ate and drank with us there was one

that told me that thou hadst up there a girl that thou didst keep for thy pleasure, giving her what by hook or by crook thou couldst get together, and that he held it for certain that thou hadst sent her this pig. And thou art grown expert in this sort of cozenage. Thou tookest us one while adown the Mugnone a gathering black stones, and having thus started us on a wild-goose chase, thou madest off; and then wouldst fain have us believe that thou hadst found the stone: and now, in like manner, thou thinkest by thine oaths to persuade us that this pig which thou hast given away or sold, has been stolen from thee. But we know thy tricks of old; never another couldst thou play us; and, to be round with thee, this spell has cost us some trouble: wherefore we mean that thou shalt give us two pair of capons, or we will let Monna Tessa know all." Seeing that he was not believed, and deeming his mortification ample without the addition of his wife's resentment, Calandrino gave them the two pair of capons, with which, when the pig was salted, they returned to Florence, leaving Calandrino with the loss and the laugh against him.