

## NOVEL VIII

*Biondello gulls Ciacco in the matter of a breakfast: for which prank Ciacco is cunningly avenged on Biondello, causing him to be shamefully beaten.*

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All the company by common consent pronounced it no dream but a vision that Talano had had in his sleep, so exactly, no circumstance lacking, had it fallen out according as he had seen it. However, as soon as all had done speaking, the queen bade Lauretta follow suit; which Lauretta did on this wise:

As, most discreet my ladies, those that have preceded me to-day have almost all taken their cue from somewhat that has been said before, so, prompted by the stern vengeance taken by the scholar in Pampinea's narrative of yesterday, I am minded to tell you of a vengeance that was indeed less savage, but for all that grievous enough to him on whom it was wreaked.

Wherefore I say that there was once at Florence one that all folk called Ciacco, a man second to none that ever lived for inordinate gluttony, who, lacking the means to support the expenditure which his gluttony demanded, and being, for the rest, well-mannered and well-furnished with excellent and merry jests, did, without turning exactly court jester, cultivate a somewhat biting wit, and loved to frequent the houses of the rich, and such as kept good tables; whither, bidden or unbidden, he not seldom resorted for breakfast or supper. There was also in those days at Florence one that was called Biondello, a man very short of stature, and not a little debonair, more trim than any fly, with his blond locks surmounted by a coif, and never a hair out of place; and he and Ciacco were two of a trade.

Now one morning in Lent Biondello, being in the fish-market purchasing two mighty fat lampreys for Messer Vieri de' Cerchi, was observed thus engaged by Ciacco, who came up to him, and:

"What means this?" quoth he. "Why," replied Biondello, "'tis that yestereve Messer Corso Donati had three lampreys much finer than these and a sturgeon sent to his house, but as they did not suffice for a breakfast that he is to give certain gentlemen, he has commissioned me to buy him these two beside. Wilt thou not be there?"

"Ay, marry, that will I," returned Ciacco. And in what he deemed due time he hied him to Messer Corso Donati's house, where he found him with some of his neighbours not yet gone to breakfast. And being asked by Messer Corso with what intent he was come, he answered:

"I am come, Sir, to breakfast with you and your company."

"And welcome art thou," returned Messer Corso, "go we then to breakfast, for 'tis now the time." So to table they went, where nought was set before them but pease and the inward part of the tunny salted, and afterwards the common fish of the Arno fried. Wherefore Ciacco, not a little wroth at the trick that he perceived Biondello had played him, resolved to pay him out. And not many days

after Biondello, who had meanwhile had many a laugh with his friends over Ciacco's discomfiture, met him, and after greeting him, asked him with a laugh what Messer Corso's lampreys had been like. "That question," replied Ciacco, "thou wilt be able to answer much better than I before eight days are gone by." And parting from Biondello upon the word, he went forthwith and hired a cozening rogue, and having thrust a glass bottle into his hand, brought him within sight of the Loggia de' Cavicciuli; and there, pointing to a knight, one Messer Filippo Argenti, a tall man and stout, and of a high courage, and haughty, choleric and cross-grained as ne'er another, he said to him:

"Thou wilt go, flask in hand, to Messer Filippo, and wilt say to him:

'I am sent to you, Sir, by Biondello, who entreats you to be pleased to colour this flask for him with some of your good red wine, for that he is minded to have a good time with his catamites.' And of all things have a care that he lay not hands upon thee, for he would make thee rue the day, and would spoil my sport."

"Have I aught else to say?" enquired the rogue. "Nothing more," returned Ciacco: "and now get thee gone, and when thou hast delivered the message, bring me back the flask, and I will pay thee."

So away went the rogue, and did the errand to Messer Filippo, who forthwith, being a hasty man, jumped to the conclusion that Biondello, whom he knew, was making mock of him, and while an angry flush overspread his face:

"Colour the flask, forsooth!" quoth he, "and 'Catamites! God send thee and him a bad year!' and therewith up he started, and reached forward to lay hold of the rogue, who, being on the alert, gave him the slip and was off, and reported Messer Filippo's answer to Ciacco, who had observed what had passed. Having paid the rogue, Ciacco rested not until he had found Biondello, to whom:

"Wast thou but now," quoth he, "at the Loggia de' Cavicciuli?"

"Indeed no," replied Biondello: "wherefore such a question?"

"Because," returned Ciacco, "I may tell thee that thou art sought for by Messer Filippo, for what cause I know not."

"Good," quoth Biondello, "I will go thither and speak with him." So away went Biondello, and Ciacco followed him to see what course the affair would take.

Now having failed to catch the rogue, Messer Filippo was still very wroth, and inly fumed and fretted, being unable to make out aught from what the rogue had said save that Biondello was set on by some one or another to flout him. And while thus he vexed his spirit, up came Biondello; whom he no sooner espied than he made for him, and dealt him a mighty blow in the face, and tore his hair and coif, and cast his capuche on the ground, and to his "Alas, Sir, what means this?" still beating him amain:

"Traitor," cried he; "I will give thee to know what it means to send me such a message. 'Colour the flask,' forsooth, and 'Catamites!' Dost take me for a stripling, to be befooled by thee?" And therewith he pummelled Biondello's face all over with a pair of fists that were liker to iron than aught else, until it was but a mass of bruises; he also tore and dishevelled all his hair, tumbled him in the mud, rent all his clothes upon his back, and that without allowing him breathing-space to ask why he thus used him, or so much as utter a word. "Colour me the flask!" and "Catamites!" rang in his ears; but what the words signified he knew not. In the end very badly beaten, and in very sorry and ragged trim, many folk having gathered around them, they, albeit not without the utmost difficulty, rescued him from

Messer Filippo's hands, and told him why Messer Filippo had thus used him, censuring him for sending him such a message, and adding that thenceforth he would know Messer Filippo better, and that he was not a man to be trifled with. Biondello told them in tearful exculpation that he had never sent for wine to Messer Filippo: then, when they had put him in a little better trim, crestfallen and woebegone, he went home imputing his misadventure to Ciaccio. And when, many days afterwards, the marks of his ill-usage being gone from his face, he began to go abroad again, it chanced that Ciaccio met him, and with a laugh:

"Biondello," quoth he, "how didst thou relish Messer Filippo's wine?"

"Why, as to that," replied Biondello, "would thou hadst relished the lampreys of Messer Corso as much!"

"So!" returned Ciaccio, "such meat as thou then gavest me, thou mayst henceforth give me, as often as thou art so minded; and I will give thee even such drink as I have given thee." So Biondello, witting that against Ciaccio his might was not equal to his spite, prayed God for his peace, and was careful never to flout him again.