

## NOVEL V

*Calandrino being enamoured of a damsel, Bruno gives him a scroll, averring that, if he but touch her therewith, she will go with him: he is found with her by his wife who subjects him to a most severe and vexatious examination.*

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So, at no great length, ended Neifile her story, which the company allowed to pass with none too much laughter or remark: whereupon the queen, turning to Fiammetta, bade her follow suit. Fiammetta, with mien most gladsome, made answer that she willingly obeyed, and thus began:

As I doubt not, ye know, ladies most debonair, be the topic of discourse never so well worn, it will still continue to please, if the speaker knows how to make due choice of time and occasion meet. Wherefore, considering the reason for which we are here (how that 'tis to make merry and speed the time gaily, and that merely), I deem that there is nought that may afford us mirth and solace but here may find time and occasion meet, and, after serving a thousand turns of discourse, should still prove not unpleasing for another thousand. Wherefore, notwithstanding that of Calandrino and his doings not a little has from time to time been said among us, yet, considering that, as a while ago Filostrato observed, there is nought that concerns him that is not entertaining, I will make bold to add to the preceding stories another, which I might well, had I been minded to deviate from the truth, have disguised, and so recounted it to you, under other names; but as whoso in telling a story diverges from the truth does thereby in no small measure diminish the delight of his hearers, I purpose for the reason aforesaid to give you the narrative in proper form.

Niccolo Cornacchini, one of our citizens, and a man of wealth, had among other estates a fine one at Camerata, on which he had a grand house built, and engaged Bruno and Buffalmacco to paint it throughout; in which task, for that 'twas by no means light, they associated with them Nello and Calandrino, and so set to work. There were a few rooms in the house provided with beds and other furniture, and an old female servant lived there as caretaker, but otherwise the house was unoccupied, for which cause Niccolo's son, Filippo, being a young man and a bachelor, was wont sometimes to bring thither a woman for his pleasure, and after keeping her there for a few days to escort her thence again. Now on one of these occasions it befell that he brought thither one Niccolosa, whom a vile fellow, named Mangione, kept in a house at Camaldoli as a common prostitute. And a fine piece of flesh she was, and wore fine clothes, and for one of her sort, knew how to comport herself becomingly and talk agreeably.

Now one day at high noon forth tripped the damsel from her chamber in a white gown, her locks braided about her head, to wash her hands and face at a well that was in the courtyard of the house, and, while she was so engaged, it befell that Calandrino came there for water, and greeted her familiarly. Having returned his salutation, she, rather because Calandrino struck her as something out of the

common, than for any other interest she felt in him, regarded him attentively. Calandrino did the like by her, and being smitten by her beauty, found reasons enough why he should not go back to his comrades with the water; but, as he knew not who she was, he made not bold to address her. She, upon whom his gaze was not lost, being minded to amuse herself at his expense, let her glance from time to time rest upon him, while she heaved a slight sigh or two. Whereby Calandrino was forthwith captivated, and tarried in the courtyard, until Filippo called her back into the chamber. Returned to his work, Calandrino sighed like a furnace: which Bruno, who was ever regardful of his doings for the diversion they afforded him, failed not to mark, and by and by:

"What the Devil is amiss with thee, comrade Calandrino?" quoth he. "Thou dost nought but puff and blow."

"Comrade," replied Calandrino, "I should be in luck, had I but one to help me."

"How so?" quoth Bruno. "Why," returned Calandrino, "'tis not to go farther, but there is a damsel below, fairer than a lamia, and so mightily in love with me that 'twould astonish thee. I observed it but now, when I went to fetch the water."

"Nay, but, Calandrino, make sure she be not Filippo's wife," quoth Bruno. "I doubt 'tis even so," replied Calandrino, "for he called her and she joined him in the chamber; but what signifies it? I would circumvent Christ Himself in such case, not to say Filippo. Of a truth, comrade, I tell thee she pleases me I could not say how."

"Comrade," returned Bruno, "I will find out for thee who she is, and if she be Filippo's wife, two words from me will make it all straight for thee, for she is much my friend. But how shall we prevent Buffalmacco knowing it? I can never have a word with her but he is with me."

"As to Buffalmacco," replied Calandrino: "I care not if he do know it; but let us make sure that it come not to Nello's ears, for he is of kin to Monna Tessa, and would spoil it all." Whereto:

"Thou art in the right," returned Bruno.

Now Bruno knew what the damsel was, for he had seen her arrive, and moreover Filippo had told him. So, Calandrino having given over working for a while, and betaken him to her, Bruno acquainted Nello and Buffalmacco with the whole story; and thereupon they privily concerted how to entreat him in regard of this love affair. Wherefore, upon his return, quoth Bruno softly:

“Didst see her?”

“Ay, woe’s me!” replied Calandrino: “she has stricken me to the death.” Quoth Bruno:

“I will go see if she be the lady I take her to be, and if I find that ’tis so, leave the rest to me.”

Whereupon down went Bruno, and found Filippo and the damsel, and fully apprised them what sort of fellow Calandrino was, and what he had told them, and concerted with them what each should do and say, that they might have a merry time together over Calandrino’s love affair. He then rejoined Calandrino, saying:

“’Tis the very same; and therefore the affair needs very delicate handling, for, if Filippo were but ware thereof, not all Arno’s waters would suffice to cleanse us. However, what should I say to her from thee, if by chance I should get speech of her?”

“I’faith,” replied Calandrino, “why, first, first of all, thou wilt tell her that I wish her a thousand bushels of the good seed of generation, and then that I am her servant, and if she is fain of—ought—thou tak’st me?”

“Ay,” quoth Bruno, “leave it to me.”

Supper-time came; and, the day’s work done, they went down into the courtyard, Filippo and Niccolosa being there, and there they tarried a while to advance Calandrino’s suit. Calandrino’s gaze was soon riveted on Niccolosa, and such and so strange and startling were the gestures that he made that they would have given sight to the blind. She on her part used all her arts to inflame his passion, primed as she had been by Bruno, and diverted beyond measure as she was by Calandrino’s antics, while Filippo, Buffalmacco and the rest feigned to be occupied in converse, and to see nought of what passed. However, after a while, to Calandrino’s extreme disgust, they took their leave; and as they bent their steps towards Florence:

“I warrant thee,” quoth Bruno to Calandrino, “she wastes away for thee like ice in the sunlight; by the body o’ God, if thou wert to bring thy rebeck, and sing her one or two of thy love-songs, she’d throw herself out of window to be with thee.” Quoth Calandrino:

“Think’st thou, comrade, think’st thou, ’twere well I brought it?”

“Ay, indeed,” returned Bruno. Whereupon:

“Ah! comrade,” quoth Calandrino, “so thou wouldst not believe me when I told thee to-day? Of a truth I perceive there’s ne’er another knows so well what he would be at as I. Who but I would have known how so soon to win the love of a lady like that? Lucky indeed might they deem themselves, if they did it, those young gallants that go about, day and night, up and down, a strumming on the one-stringed viol, and would not know how to gather a handful of nuts once in a millennium. Mayst thou be by to see when I bring her the rebeck! thou wilt see fine sport. List well what I say: I am not so old as I look; and she knows it right well: ay, and anyhow I will soon let her know it, when I come to grapple her. By the very body of Christ I will have such sport with her, that she will follow me as any love-sick maid follows her swain.”

“Oh!” quoth Bruno, “I doubt not thou wilt make her thy prey: and I seem to see thee bite her dainty vermeil mouth and her cheeks, that shew as twin roses, with thy teeth, that are as so many lute-pegs, and afterwards devour her bodily.” So encouraged, Calandrino fancied himself already in action, and went about singing and capering in such high glee that ’twas as if he would burst his skin. And so next day he brought the rebeck, and to the no small amusement of all the company sang several songs to her. And, in short, by frequently seeing her, he waxed so mad with passion that he gave over working; and a thousand times a day he would run now to the window, now to the door, and anon to the courtyard on the chance of catching sight of her; nor did she, astutely following Bruno’s instructions, fail to afford him abundance of opportunity. Bruno played the go-between, bearing him her answers to all his messages, and sometimes bringing him messages from her. When she was not at home, which was most frequently the case, he would send him letters from her, in which she gave great encouragement to his hopes, at the same time giving him to understand that she was at the house of her kinsfolk, where as yet he might not visit her.

On this wise Bruno and Buffalmacco so managed the affair as to divert themselves inordinately, causing him to send her, as at her request, now an ivory comb, now a purse, now a little knife, and other such dainty trifles; in return for which they brought him, now and again, a counterfeit ring of no value, with which Calandrino was marvellously pleased. And Calandrino, to stimulate their zeal in his interest, would entertain them hospitably at table, and otherwise flatter them. Now, when they had thus kept him in play for two good months, and the affair was just where it had been, Calandrino, seeing that the work was coming to an end, and bethinking him that, if it did so before he had brought his love affair to a successful issue, he must give up all hopes of ever so doing, began to be very instant and importunate with Bruno. So, in the presence of the damsel, and by preconcert with her and Filippo, quoth Bruno to Calandrino:

“Harkye, comrade, this lady has vowed to me a thousand times that she will do as thou wouldst have her, and as, for all that, she does nought to pleasure thee, I am of opinion that she leads thee by the nose: wherefore, as she keeps not her promises, we will make her do so, willy-nilly, if thou art so minded.”

“Nay, but, for the love of God, so be it,” replied Calandrino, “and that speedily.”

“Darest thou touch her, then, with a scroll that I shall give thee?” quoth Bruno. “I dare,” replied Calandrino. “Fetch me, then,” quoth Bruno, “a bit of the skin of an unborn lamb, a live bat, three grains of incense, and a blessed candle; and leave the rest to me.” To catch the bat taxed all Calandrino’s art and craft for the whole of the evening; but having at length taken him, he brought him with the other matters to Bruno: who, having withdrawn

into a room by himself, wrote on the skin some cabalistic jargon, and handed it to him, saying:

"Know, Calandrino, that, if thou touch her with this scroll, she will follow thee forthwith, and do whatever thou shalt wish. Wherefore, should Filippo go abroad to-day, get thee somehow up to her, and touch her; and then go into the barn that is hereby—'tis the best place we have, for never a soul goes there—and thou wilt see that she will come there too. When she is there, thou wottest well what to do." Calandrino, overjoyed as ne'er another, took the scroll, saying only:

"Comrade, leave that to me."

Now Nello, whom Calandrino mistrusted, entered with no less zest than the others into the affair, and was their confederate for Calandrino's discomfiture; accordingly by Bruno's direction he hied to Florence, and finding Monna Tessa:

"Thou hast scarce forgotten, Tessa," quoth he, "what a beating Calandrino gave thee, without the least cause, that day when he came home with the stones from Mugnone; for which I would have thee be avenged, and, so thou wilt not, call me no more kinsman or friend. He is fallen in love with a lady up there, who is abandoned enough to go closeting herself not seldom with him, and 'tis but a short while since they made assignation to forgather forthwith: so I would have thee go there, and surprise him in the act, and give him a sound trouncing." Which when the lady heard, she deemed it no laughing matter; but started up and broke out with:

"Alas, the arrant knave! is't thus he treats me? By the Holy Rood, never fear but I will pay him out!" And wrapping herself in her cloak, and taking a young woman with her for companion, she sped more at a run than at a walk, escorted by Nello, up to Camerata. Bruno, espying her from afar, said to Filippo:

"Lo, here comes our friend." Whereupon Filippo went to the place where Calandrino and the others were at work, and said:

"My masters, I must needs go at once to Florence; slacken not on that account." And so off he went, and hid himself where, unobserved, he might see what Calandrino would do. Calandrino waited only until he saw that Filippo was at some distance, and then he went down into the courtyard, where he found Niccolosa alone, and fell a talking with her. She, knowing well what she had to do, drew close to him, and shewed him a little more familiarity than she was wont: whereupon Calandrino touched her with the scroll, and having so done, saying never a word, bent his steps towards the barn, whither Niccolosa followed him, and being entered, shut the door, and forthwith embraced him, threw him down on the straw that lay there, and got astride of him, and holding him fast by the arms about the shoulders, suffered him not to approach his face to hers, but gazing upon him, as if he were the delight of her heart:

"O Calandrino, sweet my Calandrino," quoth she, "heart of my body, my very soul, my bliss, my

consolation, ah! how long have I yearned to hold thee in my arms and have thee all my own! Thy endearing ways have utterly disarmed me; thou hast made prize of my heart with thy rebeck. Do I indeed hold thee in mine embrace?" Calandrino, scarce able to move, murmured:

"Ah! sweet my soul, suffer me to kiss thee." Whereto:

"Nay, but thou art too hasty," replied Niccolosa. "Let me first feast mine eyes on thee; let me but sate them with this sweet face of thine."

Meanwhile Bruno and Buffalmacco had joined Filippo, so that what passed was seen and heard by all three. And while Calandrino was thus intent to kiss Niccolosa, lo, up came Nello with Monna Tessa. "By God, I swear they are both there," ejaculated Nello, as they entered the doorway; but the lady, now fairly furious, laid hold of him and thrust him aside, and rushing in, espied Niccolosa astride of Calandrino. Niccolosa no sooner caught sight of the lady, than up she jumped, and in a trice was beside Filippo. Monna Tessa fell upon Calandrino, who was still on the floor, planted her nails in his face, and scratched it all over: she then seized him by the hair, and hauling him to and fro about the barn:

"Foul, pestilent cur," quoth she, "is this the way thou treatest me? Thou old fool! A murrain on the love I have borne thee! Hast thou not enough to do at home, that thou must needs go falling in love with strange women? And a fine lover thou wouldst make! Dost not know thyself, knave? Dost not know thyself, wretch? Thou, from whose whole body 'twere not possible to wring enough sap for a sauce! God's faith, 'twas not Tessa that got thee with child: God's curse on her, whoever she was: verily she must be a poor creature to be enamoured of a jewel of thy rare quality." At sight of his wife, Calandrino, suspended, as it were, between life and death, ventured no defence; but, his face torn to shreds, his hair and clothes all disordered, fumbled about for his capuche, which having found, up he got, and humbly besought his wife not to publish the matter, unless she were minded that he should be cut to pieces, for that she that was with him was the wife of the master of the house. "Then God give her a bad year," replied the lady. Whereupon Bruno and Buffalmacco, who by this time had laughed their fill with Filippo and Niccolosa, came up as if attracted by the noise; and after not a little ado pacified the lady, and counselled Calandrino to go back to Florence, and stay there, lest Filippo should get wind of the affair, and do him a mischief. So Calandrino, crestfallen and weebegone, got him back to Florence with his face torn to shreds; where, daring not to shew himself at Camerata again, he endured day and night the grievous torment of his wife's vituperation. Such was the issue, to which, after ministering not a little mirth to his comrades, as also to Niccolosa and Filippo, this ardent lover brought his amour.