

NOVEL VI

Two young men lodge at an inn, of whom the one lies with the host's daughter, his wife by inadvertence lying with the other. He that lay with the daughter afterwards gets into her father's bed and tells him all, taking him to be his comrade. They bandy words: whereupon the good woman, apprehending the circumstances, gets her to bed with her daughter, and by divers apt words re-establishes perfect accord.

Calandrino as on former occasions, so also on this, moved the company to laughter. However, when the ladies had done talking of his doings, the queen called for a story from Pamfilo, who thus spoke:

Worshipful ladies, this Niccolosa, that Calandrino loved, has brought to my mind a story of another Niccolosa; which I am minded to tell you, because 'twill shew you how a good woman by her quick apprehension avoided a great scandal.

In the plain of Mugnone there was not long ago a good man that furnished travellers with meat and drink for money, and, for that he was in poor circumstances, and had but a little house, gave not lodging to every comer, but only to a few that he knew, and if they were hard bested. Now the good man had to wife a very fine woman, and by her had two children, to wit, a pretty and winsome girl of some fifteen or sixteen summers, as yet unmarried, and a little boy, not yet one year old, whom the mother suckled at her own breast. The girl had found favour in the eyes of a goodly and mannerly young gentleman of our city, who was not seldom in those parts, and loved her to the point of passion. And she, being mightily flattered to be loved by such a gallant, studied how to comport herself so debonairly as to retain his regard, and while she did so, grew likewise enamoured of him; and divers times, by consent of both their love had had its fruition, but that Pinuccio--such was the gallant's name--shrank from the disgrace that 'twould bring upon the girl and himself alike. But, as his passion daily waxed apace, Pinuccio, yearning to find himself abed with her, bethought him that he were best contrive to lodge with her father, deeming, from what he knew of her father's economy, that, if he did so, he might effect his purpose, and never a soul be the wiser: which idea no sooner struck him, than he set about carrying it into effect.

So, late one evening Pinuccio and a trusty comrade, Adriano by name, to whom he had confided his love, hired two nags, and having set upon them two valises, filled with straw or such-like stuff, sallied forth of Florence, and rode by a circuitous route to the plain of Mugnone, which they reached after nightfall; and having fetched a compass, so that it might seem as if they were coming from Romagna, they rode up to the good man's house, and knocked at the door. The good man, knowing them both very well, opened to them forthwith: whereupon:

"Thou must even put us up to-night," quoth Pinuccio; "we thought to get into Florence, but, for all the speed we could make, we are but arrived here, as thou seest, at this hour."

"Pinuccio," replied the host, "thou well knowest that I can but make a sorry shift to lodge gentlemen like you; but yet, as night has overtaken you here, and time serves not to betake you elsewhere, I will gladly give you such accommodation as I may." The two gallants then dismounted and entered the inn, and having first looked to their horses, brought out some supper that they had carried with them, and supped with the host.

Now the host had but one little bedroom, in which were three beds, set, as conveniently as he could contrive, two on one side of the room, and the third on the opposite side, but, for all that, there was scarce room enough to pass through. The host had the least discomfortable of the three beds made up for the two friends; and having quartered them there, some little while afterwards, both being awake, but feigning to be asleep, he caused his daughter to get into one of the other two beds, while he and his wife took their places in the third, the good woman setting the cradle, in which was her little boy, beside the bed. Such, then, being the partition made of the beds, Pinuccio, who had taken exact note thereof, waited only until he deemed all but himself to be asleep, and then got softly up and stole to the bed in which lay his beloved, and laid himself beside her; and she according him albeit a timorous yet a gladsome welcome, he stayed there, taking with her that solace of which both were most fain.

Pinuccio being thus with the girl, it chanced that certain things, being overset by a cat, fell with a noise that aroused the good woman, who, fearing that it might be a matter of more consequence, got up as best she might in the dark, and betook her to the place whence the noise seemed to proceed. At the same time Adriano, not by reason of the noise, which he heeded not, but perchance to answer the call of nature, also got up, and questing about for a convenient place, came upon the cradle beside the good woman's bed; and not being able otherwise to go by, took it up, and set it beside his own bed, and when he had accomplished his purpose, went back, and giving never a thought to the cradle got him to bed. The good woman searched until she found that the accident was no such matter as she had supposed; so without troubling to strike a light to investigate it further, she reproved the cat, and returned to the room, and groped her way straight

to the bed in which her husband lay asleep; but not finding the cradle there, quoth she to herself:

Alas! blunderer that I am, what was I about? God's faith! I was going straight to the guests' bed; and proceeding a little further, she found the cradle, and laid herself down by Adriano in the bed that was beside it, taking Adriano for her husband; and Adriano, who was still awake, received her with all due benignity, and tackled her more than once to her no small delight.

Meanwhile Pinuccio fearing lest sleep should overtake him while he was yet with his mistress, and having satisfied his desire, got up and left her, to return to his bed; but when he got there, coming upon the cradle, he supposed that 'twas the host's bed; and so going a little further, he laid him down beside the host, who thereupon awoke. Supposing that he had Adriano beside him:

"I warrant thee," quoth Pinuccio to the host, "there was never so sweet a piece of flesh as Niccolosa: by the body of God, such delight have I had of her as never had man of woman; and, mark me, since I left thee, I have gotten me up to the farm some six times." Which tidings the host being none too well pleased to learn, said first of all to himself:

What the Devil does this fellow here? Then, his resentment getting the better of his prudence:

"'Tis a gross affront thou hast put upon me, Pinuccio," quoth he; "nor know I what occasion thou hast to do me such a wrong; but by the body of God I will pay thee out." Pinuccio, who was not the most discreet of gallants, albeit he was now apprised of his error, instead of doing his best to repair it, retorted:

"And how wilt thou pay me out? What canst thou do?"

"Hark what high words our guests are at together!" quoth meanwhile the host's wife to Adriano, deeming that she spoke to her husband. "Let them be," replied Adriano with a laugh:

"God give them a bad year: they drank too much yestereve." The good woman had already half recognized her husband's angry tones, and now that she heard Adriano's voice, she at once knew where she was and with whom. Accordingly, being a discreet woman, she started up, and saying never a word, took her child's cradle, and, though there was not a ray of light in the room, bore it, divining rather than feeling her way, to the side of the bed in which her daughter slept; and then, as if aroused by

the noise made by her husband, she called him, and asked what he and Pinuccio were bandying words about. "Hearest thou not," replied the husband, "what he says he has this very night done to Niccolosa?"

"Tush! he lies in the throat," returned the good woman: "he has not lain with Niccolosa; for what time he might have done so, I laid me beside her myself, and I have been wide awake ever since; and thou art a fool to believe him. You men take so many cups before going to bed that then you dream, and walk in your sleep, and imagine wonders. 'tis a great pity you do not break your necks. What does Pinuccio there? Why keeps he not in his own bed?"

Whereupon Adriano, in his turn, seeing how adroitly the good woman cloaked her own and her daughter's shame:

"Pinuccio," quoth he, "I have told thee a hundred times, that thou shouldst not walk about at night; for this thy bad habit of getting up in thy dreams and relating thy dreams for truth will get thee into a scrape some time or another: come back, and God send thee a bad night." Hearing Adriano thus confirm what his wife had said, the host began to think that Pinuccio must be really dreaming; so he took him by the shoulder, and fell a shaking him, and calling him by his name, saying:

"Pinuccio, wake up, and go back to thy bed." Pinuccio, taking his cue from what he had heard, began as a dreamer would be like to do, to talk wanderingly; whereat the host laughed amain. Then, feigning to be aroused by the shaking, Pinuccio uttered Adriano's name, saying:

"Is't already day, that thou callest me?"

"Ay, 'tis so," quoth Adriano: "come hither." Whereupon Pinuccio, making as if he were mighty drowsy, got him up from beside the host, and back to bed with Adriano. On the morrow, when they were risen, the host fell a laughing and making merry touching Pinuccio and his dreams. And so the jest passed from mouth to mouth, while the gallants' horses were groomed and saddled, and their valises adjusted: which done, they drank with the host, mounted and rode to Florence, no less pleased with the manner than with the matter of the night's adventure. Nor, afterwards, did Pinuccio fail to find other means of meeting Niccolosa, who assured her mother that he had unquestionably dreamed. For which cause the good woman, calling to mind Adriano's embrace, accounted herself the only one that had watched.