

## Day 6, Story 4



*Chichibio, Currado Gianfigliuzzi's cook, saves himself by means of a prompt retort that converts his master's anger into laughter, allowing him to escape the unpleasant fate with which Currado had threatened him.<sup>1</sup>*

When Laretta was silent and everyone had heaped praise on Nonna, the Queen ordered Neifile to follow suit, and she said:

Affectionate ladies, although a ready wit will often supply a speaker with things to say that are useful, beautiful, and appropriate for the circumstances, it sometimes happens that Fortune will come to the aid of people who are scared and will suddenly put words in their mouths that they would never have been able to come up with if they were not under pressure—which is what I want to show you with this story of mine.

As all of you ladies will have heard and seen for yourselves, Currado Gianfigliuzzi has long been a noteworthy citizen of Florence, a generous and magnanimous individual who always led the life of a gentleman and delighted in hawks and hounds, to say nothing for the moment of his more significant activities. One day a falcon he owned brought down a crane in the vicinity of Peretola,<sup>2</sup> and finding it to be young and plump, he sent it to an accomplished cook of his, a Venetian named Chichibio, ordering him to dress it well and then roast it for supper.\*

Chichibio, who was as much of a birdbrain as he looked, prepared the crane, set it over the fire, and began to cook it with great care. When it

\*Chichibio's name is derived from an onomatopoeic Venetian word for the song of the chaffinch: *cicibío*. The implication is, of course, that he is a birdbrain.

was almost done and was giving off a most appetizing smell, a little gal from the country named Brunetta, with whom Chichibio was utterly infatuated, happened to come into the kitchen. On catching sight of the crane and sniffing its aroma, she pleaded lovingly with him to give her one of its thighs.

Chichibio replied to her in his singsong way and said: "You're not a-goin' a get it from me, Donna Brunetta, you're not a-goin' a get it from me."\*

Donna Brunetta was rather peeved and said, "I swear to God, if you don't give it to me, you'll never get what you want out of me ever again." In short, they went on exchanging words like this until finally Chichibio, not wishing to anger his ladylove, cut off one of the crane's legs and gave it to her.

A little later, when the crane was set before Currado and his guests, he was surprised to find that one of its legs was missing. He had Chichibio summoned and asked him what had happened to it, and the lying Venetian promptly replied: "My lord, cranes only have one thigh and one leg."

"What the devil do you mean they have only one thigh and one leg?" said Currado in a rage. "Do you think I've never seen any cranes except this one?"

"It's just the way I'm telling you it is, sir," continued Chichibio. "If you like, we can go and see some live ones, and I'll show you."

Out of consideration for his guests, Currado decided not to pursue the argument any further, but said: "I've never seen or even heard of any one-legged cranes, but since you've said you'll show me some live ones, I want to see them tomorrow morning for myself, and then I'll be satisfied. But I swear by the body of Christ that if you don't prove it,

\* Making fun of Chichibio's Venetian dialect, Boccaccio has him "sing" his response and use Venetian forms of Italian words, which must have made the dialect sound somewhat songlike to a Florentine. Chichibio is also satirized for his use of a courtly vocabulary with his ladylove: he uses *donna* for her, meaning "lady," calling her *donna Brunetta*, and addresses her as *voi*, employing the plural and more polite form for "you," rather than the singular, more familiar *tu*.

I'll have them take care of you in such a way that you'll feel sorry every time you call my name to mind for the rest of your life."

Thus, the discussion was closed for that evening, but the next morning, as soon as it was light, Currado, whose anger had not abated while he slept, got out of bed, and still seething with rage, ordered them to bring the horses. After making Chichibio mount an old nag, he led him toward a riverbank where cranes could always be spotted at daybreak, and said to him: "We'll soon see which one of us was lying last night."

Perceiving that Currado was still angry and that he was going to have to make good on his lie, Chichibio, who had no idea how to manage it, was in a state of absolute terror as he rode along behind his master. If he could have run away, he would have done so gladly, but since that was impossible, he kept looking ahead of him and behind him and on either side, and everywhere he turned, the cranes he saw all seemed to be standing on two legs.

But just as they were approaching the river, Chichibio spotted a dozen cranes or more on its bank well before anyone else did, and all of them were standing on one leg as they normally do when they are sleeping. Chichibio immediately pointed them out to Currado and announced: "Now, if you'll take a look at those cranes over there, sir, you can see quite clearly that I was telling you the truth last night when I said that they have only one thigh and one foot."

Currado looked at them and said, "Wait a bit, and I'll show you they have two." Then, moving a little closer to them, he shouted, "Ho, ho!" At this outburst, the cranes put down their other feet, and after taking a couple of steps, they all began flying away. After that, Currado turned to Chichibio and said: "What do you say to that, you gluttonous rogue?<sup>3</sup> Do they have two legs, or not?"

Chichibio was utterly confounded, but managed to come up with a reply even though he did not have the slightest idea where the words were coming from.

"They do indeed, sir," he said, "but you didn't cry 'Ho, ho!' to the one last night. Had you yelled like that, it would have stuck out its other thigh and its other foot just the way these here did."

Currado enjoyed this answer so much that all his anger was transformed into merry laughter.

“You’re right, Chichibio,” he said. “That’s exactly what I should have done.”

Thus, by means of his prompt and amusing reply, Chichibio made peace with his master and avoided an unpleasant fate.