



Cannetella

Stories From The Pentamerone

Italian

Intermediate
18 min read

It is an evil thing to seek for better than wheaten bread, for a man comes at last to desire what others throw away, and must content himself with honesty. He who loses all and walks on the tops of the trees has as much madness in his head as danger under his feet, as was the case with the daughter of a King whose story I have now to tell you.

There was once on a time a King of High-Hill who longed for children more than the porters do for a funeral that they may gather wax. And at last his wife presented him with a little girl, to whom he gave the name Cannetella.

The child grew by hands, and when she was as tall as a pole the King said to her, "My daughter, you are now grown as big as an oak, and it is full time to provide you with a husband worthy of that pretty face. Since, therefore, I love you as my own life and desire to please you, tell me, I pray, what sort of a husband you would like, what kind of a man would suit your fancy? Will you have him a scholar or a dunce? a boy, or man in years? brown or fair or ruddy? tall as a maypole or short as a peg? small in the waist or round as an ox? Do you choose, and I am satisfied."

Cannetella thanked her father for these generous offers, but told him that she would on no account encumber herself with a husband. However, being urged by the King again and again, she said, "Not to show myself ungrateful for so much love I am willing to comply with your wish, provided I have such a husband that he has no like in the world."

Her father, delighted beyond measure at hearing this, took his station at the window from morning till evening, looking out and surveying, measuring and examining every one that passed along the street. And one day, seeing a good-looking man go by, the King said to his daughter, "Run, Cannetella! see if yon man comes up to the measure of your wishes." Then she desired him to be brought up, and they made a most splendid banquet for him, at which there was everything he could desire. And as they were feasting an almond fell out of the youth's mouth, whereupon, stooping down, he picked it up dexterously from the ground and put it under the cloth, and when they had done eating he went away. Then the King said to Cannetella, "Well, my life, how does this youth please you?" "Take the fellow away," said she; "a man so tall and so big as he should never have let an almond drop out of his mouth."

When the King heard this he returned to his place at the window, and presently, seeing another well-shaped youth pass by, he called his daughter to hear whether this one pleased her. Then Cannetella desired him to be shown up; so he was called, and another entertainment made. And when they had done eating, and the man had gone away, the King asked his daughter whether he had pleased her, whereupon she replied, "What in the world should I do with such a miserable fellow who wants at least a couple of servants with him to take off his cloak?"

"If that be the case," said the King, "it is plain that these are merely excuses, and that you are only looking for pretexts to refuse me this pleasure. So resolve quickly, for I am determined to have you married." To these angry words Cannetella replied, "To tell you the truth plainly, dear father, I really feel that you are digging in the sea and making a wrong reckoning on your fingers. I will never subject myself to any man who has not a golden head and teeth." The poor King, seeing his daughter's head thus turned, issued a proclamation, bidding any one in his kingdom who should answer to Cannetella's wishes to appear, and he would give him his daughter and the kingdom.

Now this King had a mortal enemy named Fioravante, whom he could not bear to see so much as painted on a

wall. He, when he heard of this proclamation, being a cunning magician, called a parcel of that evil brood to him, and commanded them forthwith to make his head and teeth of gold. So they did as he desired, and when he saw himself with a head and teeth of pure gold he walked past under the window of the King, who, when he saw the very man he was looking for, called his daughter. As soon as Cannelella set eyes upon him she cried out, "Ay, that is he! he could not be better if I had kneaded him with my own hands."

When Fioravante was getting up to go away the King said to him, "Wait a little, brother; why in such a hurry! One would think you had quicksilver in your body! Fair and softly, I will give you my daughter and baggage and servants to accompany you, for I wish her to be your wife."

"I thank you," said Fioravante, "but there is no necessity; a single horse is enough if the beast will carry double, for at home I have servants and goods as many as the sands on the sea-shore." So, after arguing awhile, Fioravante at last prevailed, and, placing Cannelella behind him on a horse, he set out.

In the evening, when the red horses are taken away from the corn-mill of the sky and white oxen are yoked in their place, they came to a stable where some horses were feeding. Fioravante led Cannelella into it and said, "Listen! I have to make a journey to my own house, and it will take me seven years to get there. Mind, therefore, and wait for me in this stable and do not stir out, nor let yourself be seen by any living person, or else I will make you remember it as long as you live." Cannelella replied, "You are my lord and master, and I will carry out your commands exactly, but tell me what you will leave me to live upon in the meantime." And Fioravante answered, "What the horses leave of their own corn will be enough for you."

Only conceive how poor Cannelella now felt, and guess whether she did not curse the hour and moment she was born! Cold and frozen, she made up in tears what she wanted in food, bewailing her fate which had brought her down from a royal palace to a stable, from mattresses of Barbary wool to straw, from nice, delicate morsels to the leavings of horses. And she led this miserable life for several months, during which time corn was given to the horses by an unseen hand, and what they left supported her.

But at the end of this time, as she was standing one day looking through a hole, she saw a most beautiful garden, in which there were so many espaliers of lemons, and grottoes of citron, beds of flowers and fruit-trees and trellises of vines, that it was a joy to behold. At this sight a great longing seized her for a great bunch of grapes that caught her eye, and she said to herself, "Come what will and if the sky fall, I will go out silently

and softly and pluck it. What will it matter a hundred years hence? Who is there to tell my husband? And should he by chance hear of it, what will he do to me? Moreover, these grapes are none of the common sort." So saying, she went out and refreshed her spirits, which were weakened by hunger.

A little while after, and before the appointed time, her husband came back, and one of his horses accused Canneltella of having taken the grapes. Whereat, Fioravante in a rage, drawing his knife, was about to kill her, but, falling on her knees, she besought him to stay his hand, since hunger drives the wolf from the wood. And she begged so hard that Fioravante replied, "I forgive you this time, and grant you your life out of charity, but if ever again you are tempted to disobey me, and I find that you have let the sun see you, I will make mincemeat of you. Now, mind me; I am going away once more, and shall be gone seven years. So take care and plough straight, for you will not escape so easily again, but I shall pay you off the new and the old scores together."

So saying, he departed, and Canneltella shed a river of tears, and, wringing her hands, beating her breast, and tearing her hair, she cried, "Oh, that ever I was born into the world to be destined to this wretched fate! Oh, father, why have you ruined me? But why do I complain of my father when I have brought this ill upon myself? I alone am the cause of my misfortunes. I wished for a head of gold, only to come to grief and die by iron! This is the punishment of Fate, for I ought to have done my father's will, and not have had such whims and fancies. He who minds not what his father and mother say goes a road he does not know." And so she lamented every day, until her eyes became two fountains, and her face was so thin and sallow, that her own father would not have known her.

At the end of a year the King's locksmith, whom Canneltella knew, happening to pass by the stable, she called to him and went out. The smith heard his name, but did not recognise the poor girl, who was so much altered; but when he knew who she was, and how she had become thus changed, partly out of pity and partly to gain the King's favour, he put her into an empty cask he had with him on a pack-horse, and, trotting off towards High-Hill, he arrived at midnight at the King's palace. Then he knocked at the door, and at first the servants would not let him in, but roundly abused him for coming at such an hour to disturb the sleep of the whole house. The King, however, hearing the uproar, and being told by a chamberlain what was the matter, ordered the smith to be instantly admitted, for he knew that something unusual must have made him come at that hour. Then the smith, unloading his beast, knocked out the head of the cask, and forth came Canneltella, who needed more than words to make her father recognise her, and had it not been for a mole on her arm she might well have

been dismissed. But as soon as he was assured of the truth he embraced and kissed her a thousand times. Then he instantly commanded a warm bath to be got ready; when she was washed from head to foot, and had dressed herself, he ordered food to be brought, for she was faint with hunger. Then her father said to her, "Who would ever have told me, my child, that I should see you in this plight? Who has brought you to this sad condition?" And she answered, "Alas, my dear sire, that Barbary Turk has made me lead the life of a dog, so that I was nearly at death's door again and again. I cannot tell you what I have suffered, but, now that I am here, never more will I stir from your feet. Rather will I be a servant in your house than a queen in another. Rather will I wear sackcloth where you are than a golden mantle away from you. Rather will I turn a spit in your kitchen than hold a sceptre under the canopy of another."

Meanwhile Fioravante, returning home, was told by the horses that the locksmith had carried off Cannetella in the cask, on hearing which, burning with shame, and all on fire with rage, off he ran towards High-Hill, and, meeting an old woman who lived opposite to the palace, he said to her, "What will you charge, good mother, to let me see the King's daughter?" Then she asked a hundred ducats, and Fioravante, putting his hand in his purse, instantly counted them out, one a-top of the other. Thereupon the old woman took him up on the roof, where he saw Cannetella drying her hair on a balcony. But—just as if her heart had whispered to her—the maiden turned that way and saw the knave. She rushed downstairs and ran to her father, crying out, "My lord, if you do not this very instant make me a chamber with seven iron doors I am lost and undone!"

"I will not lose you for such a trifle," said her father; "I would pluck out an eye to gratify such a dear daughter!" So, no sooner said than done, the doors were instantly made.

When Fioravante heard of this he went again to the old woman and said to her, "What shall I give you now? Go to the King's house, under pretext of selling pots of rouge, and make your way to the chamber of the King's daughter. When you are there contrive to slip this little piece of paper between the bed-clothes, saying, in an undertone, as you place it there—

Let every one now soundly sleep,
But Cannetella awake shall keep."

So the old woman agreed for another hundred ducats, and she served him faithfully.

Now, as soon as she had done this trick, such a sound sleep fell on the people of the house that they seemed as

if they all were dead. Cannelella alone remained awake, and when she heard the doors bursting open she began to cry aloud as if she were burnt, but no one heard her, and there was no one to run to her aid. So Fioravante threw down all the seven doors, and, entering her room, seized up Cannelella, bed-clothes and all, to carry her off. But, as luck would have it, the paper the old woman had put there fell on the ground, and the spell was broken. All the people of the house awoke, and, hearing Cannelella's cries, they ran—cats, dogs, and all—and, laying hold on the ogre, quickly cut him in pieces like a pickled tunny. Thus he was caught in the trap he had laid for poor Cannelella, learning to his cost that—

“No one suffereth greater pain
Than he who by his own sword is slain.”

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