GOZZI CARLO

THE MEMOIRS OF COUNT CARLO GOZZI; VOLUME THE SECOND

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Содержание

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XXXI

Concerning my Physical and Mental Qualities

In the course of these Memoirs I have promised more than once to give an exact description of my external appearance and internal qualities, and also to narrate the story of my love-affairs.

In stature I am tall. Of this I am made conscious by the large amount of cloth needed for my cloaks, and by the frequent knocks I give my forehead on entering rooms with low doors. I have the good luck to be neither crook-backed, lame, blind, nor squint-eyed. I call this good luck; and yet if I were afflicted with one or other of these deformities, I should bear it with the same lightness of heart at Venice as Scarron put up with his deformities in Paris.

This is all I know or have to say about my physical frame. From early youth I have left to women the trouble of telling me that I was handsome with a view to flatter me, or that I was

ugly with a view to irritate, in neither of which attempts have they succeeded. Dirt and squalor I always loathed. Otherwise, if I ever chanced to wear clothes of a new cut, this was due to my tailor, and not to my orders. Ask Giuseppe Fornace, my rogue of a snip for over forty years, if I ever racked my brains about such matters, as so many do. From the year 1735 to 1780, at which date I am writing, I stuck to the same mode of dressing my hair with heroic constancy. Fashion has changed perhaps a hundred times during this period, yet I have never deviated from my adopted style of coiffure. In like manner I have worn the same type of buckles; except when I happened to break a pair, and was forced to change them from square to oval; and then I did so at the instance of the goldsmith, who made me take the lightest in his shop, because they would break sooner and give him more to do in mending them.

Men who talk little and think much, to which class, peradventure, I belong, being immersed in their own meditations, catch the habit of knitting their brows in the travail of reflection. This gives them an air of savagery, sternness, almost ferocity. Though I am gay by nature, as appears from my published writings, yet the innumerable thoughts which kept my brains in a turmoil, through anxieties about our family, lawsuits, schemes of economy, literary plans, and so forth, bred in me a trick of contracting my forehead and frowning, which, combined with my slow gait, taciturnity, and preference for solitary places, won me the reputation among those who were not my familiar

friends of being a surly, sullen, unapproachable fellow, perhaps even an enemy of mankind. Many who have come upon me, pondering, with knitted brows and gloomy downcast eyes, will have suspected that I was planning how to kill an enemy, while really I was constructing the plot of my *Green Bird*.

In the society of people new to me, I always appeared drowsy, stupid, silent, and lethargic, until I had studied their characters and ways of thinking. Afterwards I turned out quite the opposite; not, however, that I may not have remained a fool; but I was one of those fools who utter laconisms, less tiresome to the company than interminable flowery speeches.

I was not miserly, because I always loathed that vice, nor prodigal, for the sole reason that I was not rich. I cannot form any conception of the influence which wealth might have exercised over my imagination and my moral nature, both being doubtless not more free from foibles than in the case of other men and women.

I might have earned considerably by my numerous published works, but I made a present of them all to comedians and booksellers, or to persons who sought to profit by giving them to the press. Perhaps I shall not be believed when I say that I invariably refused such profit for myself. Yet this is the fact. Some who are aware that I was far from rich, will take me to task for my indifference to gain; they will attribute my generosity to vainglory or to stupidity. I had, however, my own reasons, which were as follows. My writings were always marked by freedom,

boldness, pungency, and satire upon public manners; at the same time, moral and playful in expression. Being unpaid, they gained the advantage of a certain decent independence, which secured for them toleration, appreciation, and applause on their own merits. Had I been paid for them, they would have lost their prestige; my antagonists might have stigmatised them as a parcel of insufferable mercenary calumnies, and I should have been exposed to universal odium.

In addition to this: there is no degradation for men of letters in Italy worse than that of writing for hire in the employ of publishers or of our wretched comedians. The publishers begin by caressing authors, with a view to getting hold of their works; then they turn round and cast their pretended losses in the author's teeth. To hear them, you would imagine that books for which they had begged on their knees before they sent them to press, were now a load of useless stones encumbering their shelves. The wretched pence they fling at a writer for some masterpiece on which he has distilled the best part of his brains, are doled out with the air of bestowing alms. More fuss is made about it, and it costs more effort, than if the money were being paid for masses for the dead, who have no need to clothe and feed themselves. All this is bad enough. But Apollo protect a poet from being reduced to serve a troop of our comedians at wages! There is not a galley-slave more abjectly condemned to servitude than he. There is not a stevedore who carries half the weight that he does; not an ass who gets more blows and fouler language, if

his drama fails to draw the whole world in a fever of excitement to the theatre.

For these reasons, I have always shrunk from letting out my pen to hire. On the frequent occasions when family affairs and litigation have emptied my purse, I always chose rather to borrow from friends than to plunge into the mire and rake up a few filthy stinking sequins. In the one case I incurred the pleasing burden of gratitude to my obligers; in the second I should have bent beneath the weight of shameful self-abasement.

Not even the brotherly terms on which I lived with comedians, nor my free gift to them through five-and-twenty years of all my writings for the stage, preserved me from the acts of ingratitude, and the annoyances which are described in the ensuing chapters of my Memoirs. Think then what would have become of me if I had been their salaried poet!

Italy lacks noblemen, to play the part of Mecænas, and to protect men of letters and the theatre. Had there been such, and had they thought me worthy of their munificence, I should not have blushed to receive it. Knowing my country, however, and Venice in particular, I never allowed myself to indulge flattering dreams of any such honourable patronage.

Sustained by my natural keen sense of the ludicrous, I have never even felt saddened by seeing the morality, which I held for sound and sought to diffuse through my writings, turned upside down by the insidious subtleties and sophisms of our century. On the contrary, it amused me vastly to notice how all the men

and all the women of this age believed in good faith that they had become philosophers. It has afforded me a constant source of indescribable recreation to study the fantastic jargons which have sprung up like mushrooms, the obscure and forced ways of expressing thoughts, spawned by misty self-styled science, invested with bombastic terms and phrases alien to the genius of our language. Not less have I diverted myself with the spectacle of all the various passions to which humanity is subject, suddenly unleashed, playing their parts with the freedom of emancipated imps, let loose from their hiding-place by famous discoverers – just like those devils in the tale of Bonaventura des Périers, whom Solomon sealed up in a caldron and buried beneath the ground until a pack of wiseacres dug them up and sent them scampering across the world again.[1]

The spectacle of women turned into men, men turned into women, and both men and women turned into monkeys; all of them immersed in discoveries and inventions and the kaleidoscopic whirligigs of fashion; corrupting and seducing one another with the eagerness of hounds upon the scent; vying in their lusts and ruinous extravagances; destroying the fortunes of their families by turns; laughing at Plato and Petrarch; leaving real sensibility to languish in disuse, and giving its respectable name to the thinly veiled brutality of the senses;

[1] Despériers lived in France between 1480 and 1544. He was servant to Marguerite de Navarre, and a writer of Rabelaisian humour. His two principal works are called *Cymbalum Mundi* and *Nouvelles, Récréations et Joyeux Dévis*.

turning indecency into decency; calling all who differ from them hypocrites, and burning incense with philosophical solemnity to Priapus: – these things ought perhaps to have presented themselves to my eyes in the form of a lamentable tragedy; yet I could never see in them more than a farce, which delighted while it stupefied me.

I have made but few intimate friendships, being of opinion that a man of many friends is the real friend of none. Neither time, nor distance, nor even occasional rudeness, interrupted the rare friendships which I contracted for life, and which are still as firm as ever.

Now and then, I have given way to angry impulses on sustaining affronts or injuries; and at such times men of phlegmatic temper are more decided in their action than the irascible. Reflection, however, always calmed me down; nor was I ever disposed to endure the wretchedness which comes from fostering rancour or meditating revenge.

I am inclined to laugh both at *esprits faibles*, who believe in everything, and at *esprits forts*, who pretend that they believe in nothing. Yet I hold that the latter are really weaker, and I am sure that they do more harm, than the former.

Notwithstanding my invincible habit of laughing, I am firmly persuaded that man is a sublimely noble animal, raised infinitely far above the brutes. Consequently I could not condescend to regard myself as a bit of dung or mud, a dog or a pig, in the humble manner of freethinkers. In spite of all the pernicious

systems generated by men of ambitious and seductive intellect, we are forced to believe ourselves higher in the scale of beings, and more perfect, than they are willing to admit. Although we may not be able to define with certainty what we are, we know at any rate beyond all contradiction what we are not. Let the freethinking pigs and hens rout in their mud and scratch in their midden; let us laugh and quiz them, or weep and pity them; but let us hold fast to the beliefs transmitted to us by an august line of philosophers, far wiser, far more worthy of attention, than these sages of the muck and dungheap. The modern caprice of turning all things topsy-turvy, which makes Epicure an honest man, Seneca an impostor; which holds up Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvetius, Mirabeau, &c., to our veneration, while it pours contempt upon the fathers of the Church; this and all the other impious doctrines scattered broadcast in our century by sensual fanatics, more fit for the madhouse than the university, have no fascination for my mind. I contemplate the disastrous influence exercised by atheism over whole nations. This confirms me still more in the faith of my forefathers. When I think of those fanatics, the sages of the muck and midden, when I think of mankind deceived by them, I repeat in their behoof the sacred words of Christ upon the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Finally, I assert that I have always kept alive in me the flame of our august religion, and that this has been for me my greatest stay and solace during every affliction. The philosophers of the moment may laugh at me; I am quite

contented for them to regard me as a dullard, besotted by what they choose to stigmatise as prejudice.

XXXII., XXXIII., XXXIV

Condensed by the Translator

[Gozzi having been accused by his adversary Gratarol of hypocrisy and covert libertinism, wished to make a full confession of his frailties to the world, while the witnesses of his life and conversation were still alive, and his statements could be challenged. With this object he related three love-passages of his early manhood. To omit these altogether from his Memoirs would be tantamount to doing him a grave injustice, since they were meant to illustrate his sentiments upon the delicate question of the relation between men and women in affairs of the heart. They are not, however, suited to the taste of the present century, being dictated with a frankness and a sense of humour which remind us of our own Fielding. Their tone is wholesome and manly, but some of their details are crude. It is the translator's duty in these circumstances to subordinate literary to ethical considerations. Repeating the stories, so far as possible, in Gozzi's own language, he must supply those parts which he feels bound to omit by a brief statement of fact. The portions of this chapter which are enclosed in brackets contain the translator's abstract. The rest is a more or less literal version

of the original text.]

(i.)

Story of my first love, with an unexpected termination

In order to relate the trifling stories of my love-adventures, I must return to the period of my early manhood. I ought indeed to blush while telling them, at the age which I have reached; but I promised the tales, and I shall give them with all candour, even though I have to blush the while.

Being a man, I felt the sympathy for women which all men feel. As soon as I could comprehend the difference between the sexes – and one arrives betimes at such discretion – women appeared to me a kind of earthly goddesses. I far preferred the society of a woman to that of a man. It happened, however, that education and religious principles were so deeply rooted in my nature, and acted on me so powerfully as checks to inclination, that they made me in those salad days extremely modest and reserved. I hardly know whether this modesty and this reserve of mine were quite agreeable to all the girls of my acquaintance during the years of my first manhood.

I can take my oath that I left my father's house, at the age of sixteen, on military service in Dalmatia, innocent – I will not say in thoughts – but most innocent as to the acts of love. The town

of Zara was the rock on which this frail bark of my innocency foundered; and since I hope to make my readers laugh at my peculiar bent in love-making, and also by the tales of my amours, I will first describe my character in this respect, and then proceed to the narratives.

I always preserved a tincture of romantic metaphysics with regard to love. The brutality of the senses had less to do with my peccadilloes than a delicate inclination and tenderness of heart. I cherished so lofty and respectful a conception of feminine honour and virtue that any women who abandoned themselves to facile pleasures were abhorrent to my taste. A *fille de joie*, as the voluptuaries say, appeared to me more frightful, more disgusting, than the Orc described by Boiardo.[2] Never have I employed the iniquitous art of seduction by suggestive language, nor have I ever allowed myself the slightest freedom which might stimulate desire. Languishing in soft and thrilling sentiments, I demanded from a woman sympathy and inclination of like nature with my own. If she fell, I thought that this should only happen through one of those blind and sudden transports which suppress our reason on both sides, the mutual violence of which admits of no control. Nothing could have been more charming to my fancy than the contemplation of a woman, blushing, terrified, with eyes cast down to earth, after yielding to the blind force of affection

[2] The Orco was a huge sea-monster, shaped like a gigantic crab. It first appeared in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (Bk. iii. Cant. 3), and was afterwards developed by Ariosto, *Orl. Fur.* (Cant. 17).

in self-abandonment to impulse. I should have remembered how she made for me the greatest of all sacrifices – that of honour and of virtue, on which I set so high a value. I should have worshipped her like a deity. I could have spent my life's blood in consoling her; and without swearing eternal constancy, I should have been most stable on my side in loving such a mistress. On the other hand, I could have safely defied all men alive upon the earth to take a more sudden, more resolute, and more irreversible step of separation than myself, however much it cost me, if only I discovered in that woman a character different from what I had imagined and conceived of her, while all the same I should have maintained her honour and good repute at the cost of my own life.

This delicate or eccentric way of mine in thinking about love exposed me to facile deceptions in my youthful years, when the blood boils, and self-love has some right to illusion, and the great acquirement of experience is yet to be made.

The narratives of my first loves will confer but little honour on the fair sex; but before I enter on them I must protest that I have always made allowance for the misfortune under which, perhaps, I suffered, of having had bad luck in love; which does not shake my conviction that many phœnixes may be alive with whom I was unworthy to consort.

After living through the mortal illness which I suffered during the first days of my residence at Zara – an illness undergone and overcome in that squalid room described by me in the first

part of these Memoirs – I moved into one of the so-called Quarterioni situated on the beautiful walls of Zara, and built for the use of officers. A very good room, which I furnished suitably to my moderate means, together with a kitchen, formed the whole of my apartment. I engaged a soldier for my service at a small remuneration. He had orders to retire in the evening to his quarters, leaving me a light burning. I remained alone; went to bed, with a book and a candle at my side; read, yawned, and fell asleep.

Now to attack the tale of my first love-adventure! Its details will perhaps prove tiresome, but they may yet be profitable to the inexperience of youngsters.

Opposite my windows, at a certain distance, rose the dwelling of three sisters, noble by birth, but sunk in poverty which had nothing to do with noble blood. An officer, their brother, sent them trifling monies from his foreign station, and they earned a little for their livelihood by various woman's work, with which I saw them occupied. The elder of these three Graces would not have been ugly, if her bloodshot eyes, rimmed round with scarlet, had not obscured the lustre of her countenance. The second was one of those bewitching rogues who are bound to please. Not tall, but well-made, and a brunette; her hair black and long; eyes very black and sparkling. Under her demure aspect there transpired a force of physique and a vivacity which were certainly seductive. The third was still a girl, lively, spirited, with possibilities of good or evil in her make.

I never saw these three nymphs except by accident, when I opened the window at which I used to wash my hands, and when their windows were also open, which happened seldom. They saluted me with a becoming bow. I answered with equal decorum and sobriety. Meanwhile, I did not fail, as time went on, to notice that whenever I opened my window to wash my hands, that little devil, the second sister, lost no time in opening her window too, and washed her hands precisely while I was washing mine; also, when she bent her lovely head to greet me, she kept those fine black eyes of hers fixed on my face in a sort of dream, and with a kind of languor well fitted to captivate a lad. I felt, indeed, a certain tickling at my heart-strings; but the austere thoughts to which I was accustomed, cured me of that weakness; and without failing in civility, I kept myself within the bounds of grave indifference.

A Genoese woman, to whom I paid a trifle for ironing my scanty linen, came one morning with some of my shirts in a basket. Upon the washing lay a very fine carnation. "Whose is that flower?" I asked. "It is sent to you," she answered, "and from the hands of a lovely girl, your neighbour, for whom you have the cruelty to take no heed." The carnation and the diplomatic message – and well knew I from whence both came – increased the itching at my heart-strings. Nevertheless, I answered the ambassadress in terms like these: "Thank that lovely damsel on my part; but do not fail to tell her that she is wasting her flowers to little purpose."

My head began to spin round and my heart to soften. At the same time, when I reflected that I had no wish to enter into matrimonial engagements, which were wholly excluded from my plan of life, nor yet to prejudice the reputation of a girl by traffic with her – furthermore, when I considered how little money I possessed, to be bestowed on one in whom I recognised so much of beauty – I stamped out all the sparks of sympathy which drew me toward her. I began by never washing my hands at the window, in order to escape the arrows of those thievish eyes. This act of retirement was ineffectual; indeed, it led to worse consequences.

One day I was called to attend upon my old friend, the officer Giovanni Apergi, who had been my master in military exercises, and who was now in bed, racked and afflicted with aches acquired in youthful dissipation. He had his lodging on the walls, not far away from mine, in the house of a woman well advanced in years, the wife of a notary. Thither then I went.

The elderly housekeeper began to twit me with my rustic manners. Gradually she passed to sharp but motherly reproof; in a youngster of from sixteen to seventeen, like myself, the sobriety of a man of fifty had all the effect of caricature; in particular, my treatment of well-bred handsome girls, devotedly in love with me, my driving them to desperation and tears by indifference and what appeared like scorn, did not deserve the name of prudence; it was nothing short of clownishness and tyranny. My friend, the officer, pulling wry faces and shrieking at the twinges of his gout,

chimed in with similar reproaches: I was a little simpleton, a fool who did not know his own good fortune. "Oh, if I only had your youth, your health, your opportunities!" Groans interrupted these broken exclamations.

Just when I was preparing to defend myself, some one knocked, and the dangerous beauty came into the room, under the pretext of inquiring after the health of the officer. Her entrance checked my speech and made my heart beat faster. The conversation turned on general and decorous topics. The girl discovered qualities of wit and understanding; she was not very talkative, but sensible and modest. Her eyes, which might in poetry have been called stars, told me clearly that I was an ingrate. Her visit to the sick man was really intended for the sound. At its close, she remarked that she had sent her servant back, because her elder sister was confined to bed by fever; might she beg for some one to conduct her home? "This gentleman," replied the elderly woman, pointing at once to me, "will be able to oblige you." "Oh, I do not wish to put him to trouble; I am not worthy of the honour." The cunning creature said this with ironical seriousness. I made the usual polite offer of my services, and rose to accompany her. We had not far to go, and during the brief journey both were silent. As she leant upon my arm, which was steadier than marble, I felt her tremble sensibly, and we were in the month of July. This tremor ran through my vitals, and made me tremble more than she did.

When we reached her dwelling, she begged me to step in

and to give her the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation. We went upstairs, and I beheld a home breathing of indigence in all its details. In the room which I was asked to enter, her elder sister (the one with the red eyes) lay sound asleep upon a decent bed, notably different from the rest of the furniture. She was really ill, and we did not wish to wake her; so our conversation proceeded in a low voice. My beauty began to knit a stocking, and made me sit upon a little wretched sofa at her side. She whispered, with downcast eyes, that some weeks ago she had conceived the greatest esteem for me, but that she feared she had not earned gratitude for her lively sentiments of regard. I answered in a whisper, but with raised eyes, that I believed in her sincerity; I did not suppose that she was flattering me; yet I was inquisitive to learn how she had come to entertain such partiality for a young man unknown to her, who was not worthy to excite the sentiments she had described. She replied, still whispering, but lifting her eyes a little, that she had told the simple truth. Her heart had first been touched when she saw me play the part of Luce, the *soubrette*, in the theatre. Afterwards, while watching me on the pallone-ground, this impression had been deepened. I listened with some repulsion to the motives of her passion, nor could I refrain from answering, with a laugh: "Surely modest girls are taken by the mental gifts and sterling qualities of a young man, not by such follies as you deign to mention." She dropped her fine eyes, mortified by this home-thrust. Then she replied with a finesse I hardly expected from a Dalmatian: "You cannot

deny that public exploits, universally applauded, in a young man, have some right to impress a girl's imagination. I could indeed have defended my heart against these promptings, if your person had not pleased me; if you had not shown yourself in private to be governed by principles of modesty, sobriety, and prudence; if the whole city were not edified by your behaviour, and ringing with perpetual eulogies of conduct rare indeed among those madcap fellows of the garrison. These reports confirmed my passion; and if now I find it scorned by you, I know not to what extremities despair will drive me." This speech flattered my *amour propre*. Tears, which she attempted to conceal, fell from her fine eyes, and stirred my sensibility. The beauty of the little devil had bewitched me. However, I summoned reason to my aid, and replied with gentle calmness: "Dear lady, I should be a monster if I were not grateful to you for your kind and precious sentiments. Still I am only a lad, dependent on my family, without the resources of fortune. Unable as I am to think of marriage, I should injure you and should commit a dishonourable action were I to frequent your society. The tenderness, which I feel only too deeply for you, might lead me also on my own side into some disaster. Precisely because I love you, it is my duty to shrink from anything which could be hurtful to you; and because you love me, it is your duty to shun what might prove disastrous to myself. Do not be hurt by what I have to say. I shall not cease to cherish in my breast an ardent affection for yourself; but from this hour forward I must avoid all opportunities of being in your company,

not less for my own than for your advantage."

The stocking she was knitting fell to the floor. She took one of my hands and clasped it to her bosom. Leaning her lovely cheek against my shoulder and shedding tears, she whispered, changing *you* to *thou* in the Dalmatian fashion: "Dear friend, how little dost thou know me! Thy prudent and ingenuous speech has only added to the ardour of my soul. Couldst thou suspect that my poverty was laying a trap for thy thrift? Couldst thou imagine that I was a dissolute girl, or that I was angling for a husband? Thou art mistaken. I make allowances for thy mistake. But, for pity's sake, learn to know me better. Grant me from time to time some moments of thy charming conversation. We will watch for these precious moments with discretion. Unless thou art a tiger of cruelty, do not abandon me to the unbearable torments of a burning heart." Her tears began to fall in showers. For my part, I remained deeply moved, confused, and, I confess, madly in love with this charming girl, who had so cleverly expressed a passion quite in harmony with my own idealistic tendencies. I promised to renew our meetings; and indeed this promise was made at least as much to my own heart as to hers. She showed the liveliest signs of satisfaction; but at this moment her sister woke. I explained the accident which brought me to their house; and then my innamorata led me to the staircase. There we shook and kissed hands. I departed, head over ears in love, a captivated blockhead.

We continued to find occasions for our meetings, and with

less of caution than we had agreed upon. During several days our conversations were playful, witty, piquant. It was an exchange of sentiments, of sighs, of little caressing epithets, of languors, pallors, trembling glances – of all those sweets, in short, which constitute the greatest charm, the most delicate, the most enduring delights of love. On my side, the restraint of modesty was not yet broken. On the girl's side, it did not seem to be so. One day, after playing pallone, I changed my shirt, and went to walk alone upon the ramparts. It was very hot, and I looked forward to the refreshment of the sea-breeze. Passing the house of the notary's wife, with whom my friend, the gouty officer, lodged, I heard my name called. Looking up, I saw the woman with my idol at the window. They asked me in, and I entered gladly. A walk upon the ramparts was proposed; and the officer, who happened to be better, wished to join our party. He gave his arm to the elderly dame; I offered mine to the blooming girl. He walked slowly, limping on his gouty toes. I walked slowly for a different reason; my heart, and not my toe, was smitten; besides, my sweetheart and I were more at liberty together, if we kept the other couple well in front. Meanwhile night began to fall. After taking a short turn, the officer complained of pain in his feet, and begged leave to go back with his elderly companion, adding that I could see my lady home when we had enjoyed enough of the evening cool together. The pair departed, while I remained with my innamorata, lost in the ecstasies of love.

[At this point Gozzi proceeds to relate how the liaison between

these two young people became most intimate. It had begun, as we have seen, with advances on the part of the girl, and now it was carried forward chiefly by her address and pertinacity.]

The intrigue continued for two months, with equal ardour on both sides. Blinded as we were by passion, we thought that it was hidden from all eyes; and yet perchance we were but playing the comedy of *Il Pubblico Secreto*.[3] At any rate, I must admit that I found in this girl a mistress exactly suited to my metaphysical ineptitude. She showed herself always tender, always in ecstasy, always afraid to lose me, always candid. Knowing how poor she was, I often wanted to divide my poverty with her. I used prayers, almost violence, to win her consent to this partition of my substance. But she took it as an unbearable insult, and broke into rage in her refusals, exclaiming with kisses which drew my soul forth to her crimson lips: "Thy heart is my true riches."

Certainly, a young man in his first love-passage sees awry, and makes mistakes through mere stupidity. The end of this amour, which seemed interminable, was brought about by an incident sufficiently absurd, and far removed from my delicate idealism. It happened that the Provveditore Generale was summoned to Bocche di Cataro, in order to settle some disputes between the tribe called Pastrovicchi and the Turks. I had to take sail with the Court. Good God! what agonies there were, what rendings of the heart, what tears, what vows of fidelity, at this cruel parting between two young creatures drowned in love! My absence lasted

[3] This was one of Gozzi's own comedies.

about forty days, which seemed to me as many years. Scarcely had I returned, and was rushing to my goddess, when a certain Count Vilio of Desenzano, master of the horse to the General, who had stayed behind at Zara (a man sufficiently dissolute in his amours, but a good and sincere friend), came up to me and spoke as follows: "Gozzi, I know that you are on the best of terms with such and such a girl. I should be acting wrongly if I did not inform you of what has happened in your absence, the truth of which I hold on sure foundations. You have a rival, one with whom it would ill become you to compete. I am certain that he has employed his time to good purpose. You have received my warning; rule yourself accordingly." These words were scorpions to my heart. Nevertheless, I chose to assume indifference, and put a bold face on the matter. So I forced myself to laugh, and answered, stammering perhaps a trifle, that it was quite true I knew the girl, but that my intercourse with her had always been blameless, and that I had no cause to fear. I had invariably found her so modest and reserved that I suspected he must have been taken in by a bragging impostor, to the infinite injury of the poor girl's character. "I am not mistaken, by gad," cried Vilio in his Brescian way. "You are of years to know the world. I have done my duty as a friend, and that is enough for me."

He left me with my head stunned, my spirit in confusion, staggering upon my feet. From my earliest boyhood, I have always made a point of exercising self-control. Accordingly, I now stifled the imperious impulse which urged me to embrace

my mistress. I did not merely postpone my visit, but I kept my windows shut, avoiding every opportunity of setting eyes on her. The Genoese laundress brought me diplomatic messages; to these I returned laconic and meaningless answers, without betraying the reason of my sudden coldness. Some notes were refused with heroic, or shall I call it asinine endurance. At the same time, I nourished in my breast a lively desire that my mistress might be innocent, and that the accusation of so base a fault might be proved a vile mendacious calumny. I hoped to arrive at the truth somehow, by adhering to severe and barbarous measures.

In course of time I obtained only too positive confirmation of my fears. Walking one day upon the ramparts, the elderly dame, of whom I have already spoken, called me from her window, and begged me to come up. She had a word or two to say to me. I assented, and entered the house. Divining that she wished to speak about my mistress, I armed myself with caution. My plan was to allege decent excuses for my conduct, without touching the repulsive wound. However, I had not divined the whole. She led me into a room, where, to my surprise, I beheld the idol of my first affections, seated and shedding tears. "What I wanted to say to you," exclaimed the dame, "you will hear from the lips of this afflicted damsel." On this, she left the room, while I remained like a statue before the beauty I had adored, and who was still supremely charming in my sight. She lifted her forehead, and began to load me with the bitterest reproaches. I

did not allow her to run on, but told her with resolute plainness that a young woman who, during my absence, had played so false was no longer worthy of my love. She turned pale, crying aloud: "What scoundrelly scandal-monger has dared…" Again I cut her speech short, adding: "Do not tire yourself by attempting the justification of your conduct. I know the whole truth from an infallible source. I am neither inconstant, nor a dreamer, nor ungrateful, nor unjust." The assurance with which I uttered these words made the poor girl lower her face, as though she was ashamed that I should look at her. Then bursting into a passion of tears, broken with sobs, she brought these incoherent phrases forth: "You are right … I am no longer worthy of you… Oh, cursed poverty, thrice-cursed poverty!" She was unable to continue, and I thought her tears would suffocate her. I was fit to drop to earth with the vertigo caused by this confession, which left no flattering hopes of innocence. My senses still painted a Venus in that desolated beauty. My romantic head and heart painted her a horrid Fury from the pit of hell. I kept silence. In my purse were some ducats, few indeed, but yet I had them. I took these coins out, and, speechless still, I let them gently drop into the loveliest bosom I have ever seen. Then I turned my back and fled. Half mad with grief, I bounded down the staircase like a greyhound, screaming with the ecstasy of one possessed by devils: "Cursed poverty! Cursed, thrice-cursed poverty!"

GOZZI AND HIS FIRST LOVE
Original Etching by Ad. Lalauze

Since then I never saw the object of my first love. I thought I must have died under the pressure of a passion which gnawed my entrails, but which, although I was but a boy, I had the cruel strength to subjugate. Soon afterwards I learned with satisfaction that the unhappy girl had married an officer, but I never sought to trace her out or to hear more about her history.

(ii.)

The story of my second love-affair, with fewer platonisms and a more comic ending than the last

About that time the Provveditore Generale found that he had need of my quarters for storing the appurtenances of his stables and of the coach-house, which were situated beneath the Quarterioni. Accordingly, I removed into a little pavilion, which my friend Signor Innocenzio Massimo and I had taken. It stood upon the ramparts. We could not occupy this dwelling long; for it was distant from the Court and from our place of duty. Moreover, when the winter season arrived, heavy rains, a terrible north-wind, and snowfalls made our nest uninhabitable. Massimo had some acquaintance with a shopkeeper and tradesman, who lived inside the town, and owned a house with rooms to spare and many conveniences. This man was married to a fine woman, plump and blooming; and God forgive me if I think it probable that Massimo was more intimate with the wife than the husband! Anyhow, he made arrangements with this excellent couple to rent two rooms, one for me, the other for himself, in close communication. We agreed for these rooms by the month, taking our meals with the masters; their table was homely but abundant, and the food excellent.

The couple were not blessed with children, but the man had adopted a poor girl, in order to perform an act of Christian charity. This child, who had scarcely reached her fourteenth year, dined and supped with us, as the adopted daughter of the house. Her behaviour betrayed nothing but the innocence belonging to her age. She had blonde hair, large blue eyes, an expression at once soft and languid, a pale complexion tinged with rose. She was rather thin than fleshy; but her figure was straight, lithe, and beautifully formed; in stature she promised to be tall, with something of majestic in her build. This girl came to dress me and arrange my hair for the part of Luce, whenever I played at the Court theatre. She joked and laughed, and turned me round to look at me. I made some harmless witticisms in reply. At this she laughed the louder. Such was our custom; but one evening, after she had done my hair for Luce, she suddenly gave me three or four kisses on my cheeks and lips. I was astonished. Yet I thought the girl so guileless, that I supposed she must have imagined she was kissing some one of her own sex, seeing me dressed like a female. This scene was repeated every evening with additions; and I began to perceive that her kisses were not as innocent as I supposed. Respect for my host's roof induced me to reprove her kindly but seriously, and so as not to rouse resentment in the girl. I warned her that such kisses between man and woman were forbidden by our confessors.

[Gozzi now describes the peculiar relations which subsisted between the several members of his host's family, and the

progress of his flirtation with the little serving-maid. He admits that she bewitched him by her fantastic and wayward coquetries – as of an elf, a sprite, an enchanted butterfly – which contrasted curiously with her demure and serious demeanour in public. "Her behaviour at table and about the house would have done credit to Santa Rosa." In private, she was a creature of whim, caprice, extravagant and reckless folly. He was on the point of losing his heart, or at least of trespassing beyond the bounds of prudence, when the following occurrences took place, which may be repeated in his own words.]

About a month remained before our Provveditore Generale Querini took sail for Venice. His successor was already at Zara; and I had arranged my own departure, to suit with that of my superior. I must admit, however, that I was so captivated by that little hussy's ways, that all my strength of mind could not prevent me from looking forward with real sadness to our parting.

A comic accident, which happened three days before I quitted Zara, cured me on the instant, and made me bless the hour of my embarkation for home. In order to make my narrative intelligible, I shall be obliged to describe the plan and the construction of the house we occupied. After ascending the first stone staircase, one entered a large hall. At the end of this hall, on the right hand, were two chambers, in one of which the married couple slept, while Massimo occupied the other. On the left of the staircase lay my bedroom, near the door of which another opening led to the foot of a long ladder of thirty or more wooden steps. By this

one mounted to a floor above. Just at the top of the ladder was a dormer window, looking out upon the roof, for the convenience of work-people, when tiles had to be replaced and other repairs made. At one side of this window you found a little chamber, the chaste cell in which my mistress slept.

The putative father of the girl, that charitable man, had conceived no suspicions with regard to me; her behaviour and mine in public was marked with indifference, so well sustained that it suggested nothing to arouse a doubt about us. He was furiously jealous, however, and had some inklings that a certain young man, who inhabited the next house, might crawl along the roof at night like a cat, and get in by the window, if his adopted daughter left it open. His working jealousy suggested the following device. How it was executed, I do not know. But he secretly attached a thick log to the dormer window by a slender cord, in such a way that it was impossible to open the window without snapping the twine, and letting the log fall headlong down the ladder with a fearful crash. This trap was meant to act as an alarm to the paternal guardian. One night while I was sweetly sleeping, an infernal uproar, as of something tumbling down the wooden stairs which ran along the boarding at my pillow's head, woke me up with an awful fright. I thought my sweetheart must have fallen, but it was only the log which went heavily lumbering down.

I jumped out of bed in my shirt, caught up a light, and sallied forth to give assistance to the wretched girl. While I was

opening my door, I spied the putative father in his shirt with a light in one hand and a long naked scimitar clenched in the other, running like mad and rushing up the stairs to execute summary vengeance. His wife in her shirt hurried after, shrieking to make him stop. Massimo in his shirt, with a light, and with his brandished sword, issued at the same time from his bedroom, judging by the din that thieves were in the house. The husband ran upstairs, swearing. The wife followed, howling. I followed the wife, in dumb bewilderment. Massimo followed me, shouting: "Who is it? What is it? Make room for me! Leave me to do the business!" The scene was quite dramatic. The dormer window stood wide open. The girl in her smock had fallen, huddled together, terrified, and trembling, just beneath it. Her crime was manifest. We had much ado, all three of us, to curb the rage of the so-called putative father, who had now become an Orlando Furioso, and was bent on cutting the throat of his adopted daughter. The row was terrible. During the long examinations which ensued, and in which, thanks to Heaven, no mention was made of me, it came out that this modest little damsel was very far from being the Santa Rosa that she seemed.

All these matters were finally made up with sermons, threats, entreaties for forgiveness, promises, vows to never do the like again, and a change of dormitory for the vestal. I left Zara, light of heart, three days after this event, horrified at the memory of my second love-affair.

(iii.)

Story of my third love-affair, which, though it is true history, women may, if they please, regard as fiction

After my return to Venice occurred the events which I shall now proceed to narrate. This third amour was also the last of any essential importance in my life. During its development the romance and idealism of my nature, the delicacy of my emotions, seemed to meet with perfect correspondence in a mistress whose sublime sentiments matched my own. Why I say *seemed*, will appear in the sequel of this story, out of which Boccaccio might have formed a first-rate novel. The recital must be lengthy; but I crave indulgence from my readers, feeling that the numerous episodes which it contains and the abundance of curious material deserve a careful handling.

I occupied some little rooms at the top of our house in Venice. Here I used to sleep, and pass whole days in study. From time to time, while I was working, an angel's voice arrested my attention, singing melancholy airs attuned to sad and plaintive melodies. This lovely voice came from a house which was only divided by a very narrow alley from my apartment. My windows opened on the house in question; and so it happened, as a matter of course, that one fine day I caught sight of its possessor sitting

at her window sewing. Leaning at one of my windows, I found myself so close to the lady that civility obliged me to salute her. She returned my bow with courteous gravity. It was a young woman of about seventeen, married, and endowed with all the charms which nature can confer. Her demeanour was stately; complexion, very white; stature, middle-sized; the look of her eyes gentle and modest. She was neither plump nor lean. Her bust presented an agreeable firmness; her arms were rounded, and she had the most beautiful hands. A scarlet riband bound her forehead, and was tied in a bow behind her thick and flowing tresses. On her countenance dwelt a fixed expression of profound sadness, which compelled attention. In spite of these distinguished qualities, I was far from engaging my romantic heart upon the spot. My adventures at Zara were too fresh in my memory, and had taught me some experience.

When one has a beautiful young woman for one's next-door neighbour, it is easy to pass by degrees from daily compliments and salutations to a certain sort of intimacy. One begins to ask: "How are you?" or "Did you sleep well last night?" One exchanges complaints upon the subject of the weather, the scirocco, the rain. At length, after some days passed in such inquiries on topics common to all stupid people, one is anxious to show that one is not as stupid as the rest of the world.

I asked her one morning why she invariably exercised her charming voice in mournful songs and plaintive music. She replied that her temperament inclined to melancholy; that she

sang to distract her thoughts, and that she only found relief in sadness. "But you are young," I said. "I see that you are well provided; I recognise that you have wit and understanding; you ought to overcome your temperament by wise reflections; and yet, I cannot deny it, there is always something in your eyes and in your face which betrays a chagrin unsuited to your years. I cannot comprehend it." She answered with much grace, and with a captivating half-smile, that "since she was not a man, she could not know what impression the affairs of this world make upon the minds of men, and since I was not a woman, I could not know what impression they make upon the minds of women." This reply, which had a flavour of philosophy, sent a little arrow to my heart. The modest demeanour, the seriousness, and the cultivation of this Venetian lady pictured her to me immeasurably different from the Dalmatian women I had known. I began to flatter myself that here perhaps I had discovered the virtuous mistress for whom my romantic, metaphysical, delicate heart was sighing. A crowd of reflections came to break the dream, and I contented myself with complimenting her upon her answer. Afterwards, I rather avoided occasions for seeing and talking with her.

Certainly she must have had plenty of work to finish; for I observed her every day seated at the same window sewing with melancholy seriousness. While shunning, so far as this was possible, the danger of conversing with her, my poor heart felt it would be less than civil not to speak a word from time to

time. Accordingly we now and then engaged in short dialogues. They turned upon philosophical and moral topics – absurdities in life, human nature, fashion. I tried to take a lively tone, and entered upon some innocent witticisms, in order to dispel her gloom. But I rarely succeeded in waking a smile on her fair lips. Her replies were always sensible, decorous, ingenious, and acute. While debating some knotty point which admitted controversy, she forgot to work, left her needle sticking in the stuff, looked me earnestly in the face and listened to my remarks as though she were reading a book which compelled her to concentrate her mind. Flattering suggestions filled my head. I sought to extinguish them, and grew still more abstemious in the indulgence of our colloquies.

More than a month had passed in this way, when I noticed, on opening a conversation of the usual kind, that the young woman gazed hard at me and blushed a little, without my being able to assign any cause for her blushes. A few indifferent sentences were exchanged. Still I perceived her to be restless and impatient, as though she were annoyed by my keeping to generalities and not saying something she was waiting for. I did not, and really could not, make it out. I might have imagined she was expecting a declaration. But she did not look like a woman of that sort, and I was neither bold nor eager enough to risk it. At length I thought it best to remark that I saw she had things to think over, and that I would not infringe upon her leisure further. I bowed, and was about to take my leave. "Please, do not go!" she exclaimed in

some distress, and rising at the same time from her chair: "Did you not receive, two days ago, a note from me in answer to one of yours, together with a miniature?" "What note? What answer? What miniature?" cried I in astonishment: "I know nothing about the matter." "Are you telling the truth?" she asked, turning pale as she spoke. I assured her on my honour that I did not know what she referred to. "Good God!" she said with a sigh, and sinking back half-fainting on her chair: "Unhappy me! I am betrayed." "But what is it all about?" continued I, in a low voice, from my window, truly grieved to be unable to assist her. Ultimately, after a pause of profound discouragement, she rose and said that in her position she had extreme need of advice. She had obtained her husband's permission to go that day after dinner to visit an aunt of hers, a nun, on the Giudecca. Therefore she begged me to repair at twenty-one o'clock to the *sotto portico* by the *ponte storto* at S. Apollinare.[4] There I should see, waiting or arriving, a gondola with a white handkerchief hung out of one of its windows. I was to get boldly into this gondola, and I should find her inside. "Then you will hear all about the circumstances in which my want of caution has involved me." This she spoke with continued

[4] These words have so much local colouring that they must be left in the text and explained in a note. A *sotto portico* at Venice is formed by the projection of houses over the narrow path which skirts a small canal or *rio*; the first floor of the houses rests on pillars at the water-side. A *ponte storto* is a bridge built askew across a *rio*, not at right angles to the water, but slanting. A *riva* is the quay of stone which runs along the canals of Venice, here and there broken by steps descending into the water and serving as landing-places.

agitation. "I have no one but you to go to for advice. If I deserve compassion, do not fail me. I believe enough in your discretion to confide in you." With these words she bowed and rapidly retired.

I remained fixed to the spot, like a man of plaster; my brains working, without detecting the least clue to the conundrum; firmly resolved, however, to seek out the *sotto portico*, the *ponte storto*, and the gondola. I took my dinner in haste, nearly choked myself, and alleging business of the last importance, flew off to the *ponte storto*. The gondola was in position at a *riva*, with the flag of the white handkerchief hung out. I entered it in haste, impelled perhaps by the desire to join the lovely woman, perhaps by curiosity to hear the explanation of the letters and the miniature. When I entered, there she was, resplendent with gems of price at her ears, her throat, her fingers, underneath the *zendado*.[5] She made room for me beside her, and gave orders to the gondolier that he should draw the curtain, and row toward the Giudecca to a monastery which she named.

She opened our conversation by apologising for having given me so much trouble, and by begging me not to form a sinister conception of her character. The invitation, it was true, exposed her to the risk of being taken for a light woman, considering her obligations as a wife. To this she added that she had already formed a flattering opinion of my discretion, prudence, honourable conduct, and upright ways of thinking. She proceeded to tell me that she found herself much embarrassed

[5] See above, vol. i. p. 299.

by circumstances. She asked me if I knew a woman and a man, a poor married couple, whom her husband lodged under his roof, renting them a room and kitchen on the ground-floor. I replied with the frankness of veracity that I was perfectly ignorant regarding the persons whom she indicated; far from being aware that they dwelt in her house, I did not know of their existence in the universe. At this answer, she closed her eyes and lips, as though in pain; then she resumed: "And yet the man assured me that he knew you perfectly, and possessed your thorough confidence; furthermore, he brought me this note from you, in the greatest secrecy; you can read it, and discover whether I am speaking true." Upon this she drew the billet from her bosom, and handed it to me.

I opened it with amazement, and saw at once that I had never written it. I read it through, and found in it the divagations of a most consummate lady-killer, full of panegyrics on the fair one's charms, oceans of nauseous adulation, stuffed out with verses filched from Metastasio. I was on the point of giving way to laughter. The concluding moral of the letter was that I (who was not I), being desperately in love with her, and forecasting the impossibility of keeping company with her, saw my only hope in the possession of her portrait; if I could obtain but this, and keep it close to a heart wounded by Cupid's dart, this would have been an immense relief to my intense passion.

"Is it conceivable, madam," said I, after reading this precious effusion, "that you have conceived a gracious inclination toward

me, grounded on my discretion, on my prudence, on my good principles, on my ways of thinking, and that after all this you have accepted such ridiculous and stupid stuff as a composition addressed by me to you?" "So it is," she answered: "we women cannot wholly divest us of a certain vanity, which makes us foolish and blind. Added to the letter, the man who brought it uttered words, as though they came from you, which betrayed me into an imprudence that will cost me many tears, I fear. I answered the letter with some civil sentiments, cordially expressed; and as I happened to have by me a miniature, set in jewels, and ordered by my husband, I consigned this to the man in question, together with my note, feeling sure that if I were obliged to show the picture to my husband, you would have returned it to me. It seems then that you have received neither the portrait nor my letter in reply?" "Is it possible," I answered, "that you are still in doubt about my having done this thing? Do you still believe me capable of such an action?" "No, no!" she said: "I see only too well that you have nothing to do with the affair. Poor wretched me! to what am I exposed then? A letter written by my hand … that portrait … in the keeping of that man … my husband!.. For heaven's sake, give me some good counsel!" She abandoned herself to tears.

I could do nothing but express my astonishment at the cleverness of the thief. I tried to tranquillise her; then I said that, if I had to give advice, it was necessary that I should be informed about the man and wife who occupied her house, and about the

intimacy she maintained with them. She replied that the husband seemed to be a good sort of fellow, who gained something by a transport-boat he kept. "The wife is a most excellent poor creature, and a devoted daughter of the Church. She is attached to me, and I to her. I often keep her in my company, have often helped her in her need, and she has shown herself amply grateful. You know that, between women, we exchange confidences which we do not communicate to men. She is aware of certain troubles which beset me, and which I need not speak to you about; and she feels sorry for me. She has heard me talking at the window with you, and has joked me on the subject. I made no secret to her of my inclination, adding however that I knew my duties as a wife, and that I had overcome the weakness. She laughed at me, and encouraged me to be a little less regardful on this point. That is really all I have to tell you, and I think I shall have said perhaps too much." So she spoke, and dropped her eyes. "You have not said enough," I put in: "That excellent Christian woman, your confidante – tell me, did she ever see your portrait set in jewels?" "Oh, yes! I often showed it to her." "Well, the excellent and so forth woman has told everything to her excellent husband. They have laid their heads together, and devised the roguery of the forged letter to abstract your jewelled miniature. The worst is that the excellent pair had some secretary to help them in their infernal conciliabulum." "Is it possible?" exclaimed she, like one bewitched. "You may be more than sure that it is so; and shortly you will obtain proof of this infallible certainty."

"But what can I do?" "Give me some hints about your husband's character, and how he treats you." "My husband adores me. I live upon the most loyal terms with him. He is austere, and does not wish to be visited at home. But whenever I ask leave to go and pay my compliments to relatives or female friends, he grants me permission without asking further questions." "I do not deny that your want of caution has placed you in a position of delicacy and danger. Nevertheless, I will give you the advice, which I think the only one under these uncomfortable circumstances. That excellent Christian woman, your confidante, does she know perhaps that I was going to meet you in the gondola to-day?" "No, sir! certainly not, because she was not at home." "I am glad to hear it. This, then, is my advice. Forget everything about the miniature, just as though you had never possessed it; bear the loss with patience, because there is no help for it. If you attempted to reclaim it, the villain of a thief and his devout wife and the secretary, finding their roguery exposed, might bring you into the most serious trouble. If your husband has a whim to see the miniature, you can always pretend to look for it and not to find it, affect despair, and insinuate a theft. Do not let yourself be seen henceforward at the window talking with me. Go even to the length of informing your confidante that you intend to subjugate an unbecoming inclination. Treat the pair of scoundrels with your customary friendliness, and be very cautious not to betray the least suspicion or the slightest sign of coolness. Should the impostor bring you another forged letter under the same cloak

of secrecy, as I think he is pretty sure to do, take and keep it, but tell him quietly that you do not mean to return an answer; nay, send a message through the knave to me, to this effect – that you beg me to cease troubling you with letters; that you have made wholesome reflections, remembering the duty which an honest woman owes her husband. You may add that you have discovered me to be a wild young fellow of the worst character, and that you are very sorry to have intrusted me with your miniature. Paint me as black as you can to the rascal; if he takes up the cudgels in my defence, as he is sure to do in order to seduce you, abide by your determination, without displaying any anger, but only asking him to break the thread of these communications which annoy you. You may, if matters take a turn in that direction, waste a ducat or two upon the ruffian, provided he swears that he will accept no further messages or notes from me. This is the best advice which I can give you in a matter of considerable peril to your reputation. Pray carry my directions out with caution and ability. Remember that your good name is in the hands of people who are diabolically capable of blackening it before your husband to defend themselves. I flatter myself that before many days are past you will find that my counsel was a sound one."

The young woman declared herself convinced by my reasoning. She promised to execute the plan which I had traced, and vowed that her esteem for me had been increased. At this point we reached the Giudecca, where she had to disembark. With a modest pressure of one of her soft hands on mine, she

thanked me for the trouble I had taken in her behalf, begging me to maintain my cordial feelings toward her, and assuring me that she prized our friendship among the great good fortunes of her life. I left her gondola, and reached Venice by another boat, considerably further gone in love, but with my brain confused and labouring. Love and the curious story I had heard kept me on the stretch.

A week or more passed before I saw her again. Yet I was always anxious to meet her, and to hear how she had managed with those sharpers. At last she showed herself one morning in her workroom; and while I was passing along by my open window, she threw a paper tied to a pebble into the room; then disappeared. I picked the missive up, and read the scroll, of which the purport was to this effect: "She had to pay a visit to a friend after dinner; her husband had given his permission; could I meet her at the former hour, and at the former *ponte storto*? There I should see a gondola waiting with the former ensign of the handkerchief. She begged me to jump into the boat; for she was sorely pressed to tell me something." I went accordingly, and found my lady at the rendezvous. She seemed more beautiful than I had ever seen her, because her face wore a certain look of cheerfulness which was not usual to it. She ordered the gondolier, who was not the same as on the previous occasion, to take a circuit by the Grand Canal, and afterwards to land her in a certain *rio* at Santa Margherita. Then she turned to me and said that I was a famous prophet of events to come. From her bosom she

drew forth another note and handed it to me. It was written in the same hand as the first. The caricature of passion was the same. I, who was not I, thanked her for the portrait; vowed that I kept it continually before my eyes or next my heart. I, who was not I, complained loudly that she had deserted the window; I was miserable, yet I comforted myself by thinking that she kept apart from prudent motives. I, who was not I, had no doubts of her kindness; as a proof of this, being obliged to wait for a draft, in order to meet certain payments, and the draft not having yet arrived, I, who was not I, begged for the loan of twenty sequins, to discharge my obligations. I promised to repay them religiously within the month. She might give the money to the bearer, a person known to me, a man of the most perfect confidence, &c., &c.

I confess, that I was angry after reading this. The lady laughed at my indignant outburst. "How did you deal with the impostor?" I cried. "Exactly as you counselled me," she answered: "excuse me if I painted you as black as possible to the fellow. He stood confused and wanted to explain; but on seeing that my mind was made up, he held his tongue, completely mortified. I ordered him to talk no more to me about you, and to accept no further messages or letters. Then I gave him a sequin, on the clear understanding that he should never utter a word again to me concerning you. I told him that I was resolved to break off all relations with you. To what extent our relations have been broken off, you can see for yourself now in this gondola; and they will

only come to an end when you reject my friendship, which event I should reckon as my great disaster. I swear this on my honour."

"I must report another favourable circumstance," she continued: "My husband surprised that rogue in the act of stealing some ducats from a secret drawer in his bureau. He told the man to pack out with his wife, threatening to send him to prison if they did not quit our premises at once." "Were you clever enough," I said, "to affect a great sorrow for those unfortunate robbers, sent about their business?" "I did indeed try to exhibit the signs of unaffected sorrow," she replied; "I even made them believe that I had sought to melt my husband's heart with prayers and tears, but that I found him firm as marble. I gave them some alms, and three days ago they dislodged."

"Well done!" I exclaimed: "the affair could not have gone better than it does. Now, even if your husband asks to see the portrait, it will be easy to persuade him that they stole it. You will incur no sin of falsehood; for steal it they did, in good sooth, the arrant pair of sharpers." "Ah!" cried she, "why cannot I enjoy the privilege of your society at home? What relief would my oppressed soul find in the company of such a friend! My sadness would assuredly be dissipated. Alas! it is impossible. My husband is too too strict upon the point of visitors. I must abandon this desire. Yet do not cease to love me; and believe that my sentiment for you exceeds the limits of mere esteem. Be sure that I shall find occasions for our meeting, if indeed these be not irksome to yourself. Your modesty and reserve embolden

me. I know my duties as a married woman, and would die sooner than prove myself disloyal to them." We had now arrived at Santa Margherita. She clasped my hand with one of the loveliest hands a woman ever had. I wished to lift it to my lips. She drew it back, and even deigned to bend as though to kiss my own. That I could not permit; but leapt from the gondola, a simpleton besotted and befooled by passion. Then she proceeded on her way to the house she meant to visit.

This heroine of seventeen summers, beautiful as an angel, had inflamed my Quixotic heart. It would be a crime, I reflected, not to give myself up to a Lucretia like her, so thoroughly in harmony with my own sentiments regarding love. "Yes, surely, surely I have found the phœnix I was yearning for!"

A few days afterwards the pebble was once more flung into my chamber. The paper wrapped around it spoke of *ponte storto*, gondola, a visit to a cousin in childbed. I flew to the assignation. Nor can I describe the exultation, the vivacity, the grace, with which I was welcomed. Our conversation was both lively and tender; an interchange of sentiments diversified by sallies of wit. Our caresses were confined to clasped hands and gentle pressure of the fingers at some mot which caught our fancy. She never let fall an equivocal word, or gave the slightest hint of impropriety. We were a pair of sweethearts madly in love with one another, yet respectful, and apparently contented with the ecstasies of mutual affection. The pebble and the scroll, the *ponte storto*, and the gondola were often put in requisition. I cannot say what

pretexts she discovered to explain her conduct to her husband. The truth was that her visits for the most part consisted in our rowing together to the Giudecca or to Murano, where we entered a garden of some lonely cottage, and ate a dish of salad with a slice of ham, always laughing, always swearing that we loved each other dearly, always well-behaved, and always melting into sighs at parting. I noticed that in all this innocent but stolen traffic she changed her gondola and gondolier each time. This did credit to her caution. We had reached the perfection of a guiltless friendship – to all appearances, I mean – the inner workings of imagination and desires are uncontrollable. *You* had become *thou*, and yet our love delights consisted merely in each other's company, exchanging thoughts, clasping hands, and listening now and then to hearts which beat like hammers.

One day I begged her to tell me the story of her marriage. She replied in a playful tone: "You will laugh; but you must know I am a countess. My father, Count so-and-so, had only two daughters. He is a spendthrift, and has wasted all his patrimony. Having no means to portion off us girls, he gave my sister in marriage to a corn-factor. A substantial merchant of about fifty years fell in love with me, and my father married me to him without a farthing of dowry. At that time I was only fifteen. Two years have passed since I became the wife of a man who, barring the austerity of his old-fashioned manners, is excellent, who maintains me in opulence, and who worships me." (I knew all about the Count her father, his prodigality and vicious living.) "But during the

two years of your marriage," said I, "have you had no children?" The young lady showed some displeasure at this question. She blushed deeply, and replied with a grave haughtiness: "Your curiosity leads you rather too far." I was stung by this rebuke, and begged her pardon for the question I had asked, although I could not perceive anything offensive in it. My mortification touched her sympathy, and pressing my hand, she continued as follows: "A friend like you has the right to be acquainted with the misfortune which I willingly endure, but which saddens and embitters my existence. Know then that my poor husband is far gone in lung-disease; consumed with fever, powerless; in fact, he is no husband. Nearly all night long he sheds bitter tears, entreating forgiveness for the sacrifice imposed upon me of my youth. His words are so ingenuous, so cordial, that they make me weep in my turn, less for my own than for his misfortune. I try to comfort him, to flatter him with the hope that he may yet recover. I assure you that if my blood could be of help, I would give it all to save his life. He has executed a legal instrument, recognising my marriage dowry at a sum of 8000 ducats, and is constantly trying to secure my toleration by generous gifts. One day he pours ducats into my lap, then sequins, then great golden medals; at another time it is a ring or a sprig of brilliants; now he brings stuffs for dresses or bales of the finest linen, always repeating: 'Put them by, dear girl. Before long you will be a widow. It is the desire of my soul that in the future you may enjoy happier days than those which now enchain you to a fatal

union.' There then is the story of my marriage. You now know what you wished to know about my circumstances." Soon after she resumed, changing her tone to one of pride and dignity: "I am afraid that this confession, which you extorted from me, may occasion you to form a wrong conception of my character. Do not indulge the suspicion that I have sought your friendship in order to obtain vile compensations. If I discovered the least sign in you of such dishonouring dirty thoughts, I should lose at once the feeling which drew me toward you, and our friendship would be irrevocably broken."

I need hardly say that this discovery of a Penelope in my mistress was exactly what thrilled my metaphysical heart with the most delicious ecstasy. Six months meanwhile had flown, and we were still at boiling-point. I used to write her tender and platonic sonnets, which she prized like gems, fully appreciating their sense and literary qualities. I also wrote songs for the tunes she knew; and these she used to sing at home, unseen by me, surpassing the most famous sirens of the stage by the truth and depth of her feeling. I am afraid that my readers will be fatigued by the long history of this semi-platonic amour. Yet the time has now arrived when I must confess that it degenerated at last into a mere vulgar *liaison*. It pains me; but truth demands that I should do so. Indeed, it was hardly to be expected that a young man of twenty and a girl of seventeen should carry on so romantic and ethereal a friendship for ever.

One day I saw my mistress seated with a very sad expression

at her window. I inquired what had happened. She answered in a low voice that she had things of importance to communicate, and begged me to be punctual at the gondola, the *ponte storto*. Nothing more. Her reserve made me tremble for the future which might lie before us.

She told me that she was much distressed about her husband. He was very ill. The doctors had recommended him to seek the temperate air of Padua and the advice of its physicians. He had departed in tears, leaving her alone with a somnolent old serving-woman. I was genuinely sorry for the cause of her distress; but the news relieved me of my worst fears. After expatiating on the sad occurrence and over-acting her grief, I thought, even to the extent of shedding tears, she entered into a discourse which presented a singular mixture of good sense, tenderness, and artifice. "My friend," she said, "it is certain that I must be left a widow after a few days. How can a widow in my youthful years exist alone, without protection? I shall only have my father's house to seek as an asylum. He is a man of broken fortunes, burdened with debts, enslaved to the vices of extravagance. My natural submission to him as a daughter will be the ruin of my fortune. After a short space of time I shall be left young, widowed, and in indigence. I have no one to confide in except yourself, to whom I have yielded up my heart, my virtue, and my reputation. In my closet I have stored a considerable sum of money, jewels, gold and silver objects of value. Will you oblige me by taking care of these things, so that my father may not lay his talons on them, under the

pretext of guarding my interests in the expected event of my poor husband's death? Should he succeed in doing so, I am certain that before two months are over the whole will be dissipated. You will not refuse me this favour? Little by little I will convey to your keeping all that I possess. I shall also place in your hands the deed by which my husband recognised the dowry of which I spoke to you upon another occasion. My father knows nothing of this document; and in the sad event of my husband's death it may well be possible that I shall need the assistance of some lawyer to prove my rights and the maintenance which they secure me. For the direction of these affairs I trust in you. You love me, and I doubt not that you will give me your assistance in these painful circumstances."

I saw clearly that the object of this speech was to bring me to a marriage without mentioning the subject. Now I was extremely averse to matrimony for two reasons. First, because I abhorred indissoluble ties of any sort. Secondly, because my brothers were married, with large families, and I could not stomach the prospect of charging our estate with jointures, and of procreating a brood of little Gozzis, all paupers. Nevertheless, I loved the young woman, felt sincerely grateful toward her, and in spite of what had happened between us, believed her to be virtuous and capable of making me a faithful wife. My heart adapted itself in quiet to the coming change, and conquered its aversion to a matrimonial bond.

A very surprising event, which I am about to describe, released

me from all obligations to my mistress, dispelled my dreams of marriage, and nearly broke my heart.

Well; I did my best to comfort the fair lady. I told her that perhaps her husband's case was not so desperate as she imagined. Next I firmly refused to become the depositary of her property. My reasons were as follows. In the first place, I had no receptacle to which the goods could be transferred with secrecy and safety. In the next place, her husband might survive and make inquiries. This would compromise the reputation of both her and me. I thanked her for the confidence she reposed in me, and vowed that she should always, at the hour of need, find me ready to support her as the guardian of her rights, her friend, and a man devoted to her person. She expressed herself satisfied with my decision; and once again we abandoned ourselves to the transports of a love which only grew in strength with its indulgence. She was an extraordinary woman; perfectly beautiful, always graceful, always new. Even in her hours of passion she preserved a modesty which overwhelmed my reason. Would that the six months of our platonic love had been prolonged into a lifetime, instead of yielding place to sensuality! In that case, the unexpected accident, which cut short our intercourse in a single moment, would not have inflicted the wound it did upon my feelings.

A friend of mine came about this time to Venice on business, and took up his quarters with me. He observed me exchanging some words with this young lady, and began to banter me, loudly

praising my good taste. I played the part of a prudish youngster, exaggerated the virtues of my neighbour, and protested that I had never so much as set foot in her house – which was indeed, the truth. It was not easy to deceive my friend in anything regarding the fair sex. He positively refused to believe me, swearing he was sure I was the favoured lover of the beauty, and that he had read our secret in the eyes of both. "You are a loyal friend to me," he added; "but in the matter of your love-affairs, I have always found you too reserved. Between comrades there ought to be perfect confidence; and you insult me by making a mystery of such trifles." "I can boast of no intimacy whatever with that respectable lady," I replied; "but in order to prove my sincerity toward my friend, I will inform you that even if I enjoyed such an intimacy as you suspect, I would rather cut my tongue out than reveal it to any man alive. For me the honour of women is like a sanctuary. Nothing can convince me that men are bound by friendship to expose the frailty and the shame of a mistress who has sacrificed her virtue, trusting that the man she loves will keep the secret of her fault; nor do I believe that such honourable reticence can be wounding to a friend." We argued a little on this point, I maintaining my position, he treating it with ridicule, and twitting me with holding the opinions of a musty Spanish romance.

Meanwhile he was always on the watch to catch sight of my goddess, and to exchange conversation with her at the window. He drenched her with fulsome compliments upon her beauty, her

elegance and her discretion, artfully interweaving his flatteries with references to the close friendship which had united himself and me for many years. To hear him, one would have thought that we were more than brothers. She soon began to listen with pleasure, entering deeper and deeper into the spirit of these dialogues. Though ready to die of irritation, I forced myself to appear indifferent. I knew the man to be an honourable and a cordial friend; but with regard to women, I knew that he was one of the most redoubtable pirates, the most energetic, the most fertile in resources, who ever ploughed the seas of Venus. He was older than I; a fine man, however, eloquent, sharp-witted, lively, resolute and expeditious.

Some days went by in these preliminaries, and the date of his departure was approaching. In other circumstances I should have been sorry at the prospect of parting from him. Now I looked forward to it with impatience. One morning I heard him telling her that he had taken a box at the theatre of San Luca, and that he was going there that evening with his beloved friend. He added that it would cheer her up to join our party, breathe the air, and divert her spirits at the play. She declined the invitation with civility. He insisted, and called on me to back him up. She looked me in the face, as though to say: "What do you think of the project?" My friend kept his eyes firmly fixed on mine, waiting to detect any sign which might suggest a *No*. I did not like to betray my uneasiness, and felt embarrassed. I thought it sufficient to remark that the lady knew her own mind best; she

had refused; therefore she must have good reasons for refusing; I could only approve her decision. "How!" cried my friend, "are you so barbarous as not to give this lady courage to escape for once from her sad solitude? Do you mean to say that we are not persons of honour, to whose protection she can safely confide herself? Answer me that question." "I cannot deny that we are," said I. "Well, then," interposed the coquette upon the moment, much to my surprise, "I am expecting a young woman of my acquaintance, who comes every evening to keep me company, and to sleep with me, during the absence of my husband. We will join you together, masked. Wait for us about two hours after nightfall at the opening of this *calle*."[6] "Excellent!" exclaimed my friend with exultation; "we will pass a merry evening. After the comedy we will go to sup at a restaurant. It will not be my fault if we do not shine to-night." I was more dead than alive at this discovery. Yet I tried to keep up the appearance of indifference. Can it be possible, I said in my own heart, that these few hours have sufficed to pervert a young lady whom I have so long known as virtuous? Can these few hours have robbed me of a mistress whom I esteem so highly, who loves me, and who is seeking to win my hand in marriage?

The bargain was concluded, and at the hour appointed we found the two women in masks at the opening of the *calle*. My friend swooped like a falcon on my mistress. I remained to man

[6] The narrow foot-paths between lines of houses at Venice are so called. They frequently have scarcely space enough for two men to walk abreast.

the other girl. She was a blonde, well in flesh, and far from ugly; but at that moment I did not take thought whether she was male or female. My friend in front kept pouring out a deluge of fine sentiments in whispers, without stopping to draw breath, except when he drew a long sigh. I sighed deeper than he did, and with better reason. Can it be possible, I thought, that yonder heroine will fall into his snare so lightly?

We reached the theatre and entered the box. The blonde gave her whole attention to the play. My friend did not suffer the idol of my heart to listen to a syllable. He kept on breathing into her ear a torrent of seductive poisonous trash. What it was all about I knew not, though I saw her turning red and losing self-control. I chafed with rage internally, but pretended to follow the comedy, of which I remember nothing but that it seemed to be interminable. When it was over, we repaired to the Luna – as before, in couples – my friend with my mistress, I with the blonde. I never caught a syllable of the stuff which he dribbled incessantly into his companion's ears. Supper was ordered; a room was placed at our disposal, and candles lighted. My friend, meanwhile, never interrupted his flood of eloquence.

[What ensued justified Gozzi in believing that the lady whom he loved was capable of misconducting herself, and that his friend was ready to take advantage of her levity. While he was chewing the bitter root of disillusionment, she provoked an outburst of jealousy which exposed the situation.]

The ruthless woman came up to me with friendly

demonstrations. One of those blind impulses, which it is impossible to control, made me send her reeling three steps backwards. She hung her head, confused with chagrin. My friend looked on in astonishment. The blonde opened her eyes and mouth as wide as she was able. I pulled myself together, ashamed perhaps at having shown my anger; then, as though nothing had happened, I began to complain of the host; "why did he not bring our supper? it was getting late, and the ladies ought to be going home." I noticed that my mistress shed some furtive tears. Just then the supper was served, and we sat down to table. For me it was nothing better than the banquet of Thyestes. Still I set myself to abusing the comedy, which I had not heard, and the host, and the viands, swallowing a morsel now and then, which tasted in my mouth like arsenic. My friend betrayed a certain perplexity of mind; yet he consumed the food without aversion. My mistress was gloomy, and scarcely raised a mouthful to her lips with trembling fingers. The blonde fell too with a good appetite, and partook of every dish. When the bill was paid, we conducted the ladies back to their house, and wished them good-night.

No sooner were we alone together, than my friend turned to me and said: "It is all your fault. You denied that you were intimate with that young woman. Had you confessed the truth to your friend, he would have respected your amour. It is your fault, and the loss is yours." "What I told you, was the truth," I answered: "but permit me now to tell you another truth. I am sure that she consented to join our company, relying upon me,

and on my guarantee – which I gave at your request – that we were honourable men, to whom she could commit herself with safety. I cannot regard it as honourable in a friend to wheedle his comrade into playing the ignoble part which you have thrust upon me." "What twaddle!" exclaimed he. "Between friends such things are not weighed in your romantic scales. True friendship has nothing to do with passing pleasures of this nature. You have far too sublime a conception of feminine virtue. My opinion is quite different. The most skilful arithmetician could not calculate the number of my conquests. I take my pastime, and let others take theirs." "If a ram could talk," I answered, "and if I were to question him about his love-affairs with the ewes of his flock, he would express precisely the same sentiments as yours." "Well, well!" he retorted: "you are young yet. A few years will teach you that, as regards the sex you reverence, I am a better philosopher than you are. That little blonde, by the way, has taken my fancy. The other woman told me where she lives. To-morrow I mean to attack the fortress, and I will duly report my victory to you." "Go where you like," I said: "but you won't catch me again with women at the play or in a restaurant."

He retired to sleep and dream of the blonde. I went to bed with thoughts gnawing and a tempest in my soul, which kept me wide-awake all night. Early next morning my friend took his walks abroad, and at dinner-time he returned to inform me with amazement that the blonde was an inhuman tigress; all his artifices had not succeeded in subduing her. "She may thank

heaven," he continued, "that I must quit Venice to-night. The prudish chatter-box has put me on my mettle. I should like to see two days pass before I stormed the citadel and made her my victim." He went away, leaving me to the tormenting thoughts which preyed upon my mind.

I was resolved to break at once and for ever with the woman who had been my one delight through a whole year. Yet the image of her beauty, her tenderness, our mutual transports, her modesty and virtue in the midst of self-abandonment to love, assailed my heart and sapped my resolution. I felt it would be some relief to cover her with reproaches. Then the remembrance of the folly to which she had stooped, almost before my very eyes, returned to my assistance, and I was on the point of hating her. Ten days passed in this contention of the spirit, which consumed my flesh. At last one morning the pebble flew into my chamber. I picked it up, without showing my head above the window, and read the scroll it carried. Among the many papers I have committed to the flames, I never had the heart to burn this. The novel and bizzarre self-defence which it contains made it too precious in my judgment. Here, then, I present it in full. Only the spelling has been corrected.

"You are right. I have done wrong, and do not deserve forgiveness. I cannot pretend to have wiped out my sin with ten days of incessant weeping. These tears are sufficiently explained by the sad state in which my husband has returned from Padua, reduced to the last extremity. They will therefore appear only

fitting and proper in the sight of those who may observe them. Alas! would that they were simply shed for my poor dying husband! I cannot say this; and so I have a double crime to make me loathe myself.

"Your friend is a demon, who carried me beyond my senses. He persuaded me that he was so entirely your friend, that if I did not listen to his suit I should affront *you*. You need not believe what seems incredible; yet I swear to God that he confused me so and filled my brain with such strange thoughts that I gave way in blindness, thinking I was paying you a courtesy, knowing not what I was doing, nor that I was plunging into the horrible abyss in which I woke to find myself the moment after I had fallen.

"Leave me to my wretchedness, and shun me. I am unworthy of you; I confess it. I deserve nothing but to die in my despair. Farewell – a terrible farewell! Farewell for ever!"

I could not have conceived it possible that any one should justify such conduct on such grounds. Yet the letter, though it did not change my mind, disturbed my heart. I reflected on her painful circumstances, with her husband at the point of death. It occurred to me that I could at least intervene as a friend, without playing the part of lover any more. Yet I dared not trust myself to meet the woman who for a whole year had been the object of my burning passion. At the cost of my life, I was resolved to stamp out all emotions for one who had proved herself alien to my way of thinking and of feeling about love. Moreover, I suspected that she might be exaggerating the illness of her husband, in order

to mollify me. I subdued my inclinations, and refrained from answering her letter or from seeing her.

The fact is that I soon beheld the funeral procession of her husband pass beneath my windows, with the man himself upon the bier. I could no longer refuse credence to her letter.

This revived my sympathy for the unhappy, desolate, neglected beauty. I was still hesitating, when I met a priest of my acquaintance who told me that he was going to pay a visit of condolence to the youthful widow. "You ought to come with me," said he. "It is an act of piety toward one of your neighbours." I seized the occasion offered, and joined company with the priest.

I found her plunged in affliction, pale, and weeping. No sooner did she set eyes upon me, than she bent her forehead and abandoned herself to tears. "With the escort of this minister of our religion," I began, "I have come to express my sincere sorrow for your loss, and to lay my services at your disposal." Her sobs redoubled; and without lifting her eyes to mine, she broke into these words: "I deserve nothing at your hands." Then a storm of crying and of sobs interrupted her utterance. My heart was touched. But reason, or hardness, came to my aid. After expressing a few commonplaces, such as are usually employed about the dead, and renewing my proffer of assistance, I departed with the priest.

A full month elapsed before I set eyes on her again. It chanced that I had commissioned a certain tailoress to make me a waistcoat. Meeting me in the road, this woman said that

she had lost my measure, and asked whether I would come that evening and let her measure me again. I went, and on entering a room, to which she introduced me, was stupefied to find my mistress sitting there in mourning raiment of black silk.[7] I swear that Andromache, the widow of Hector, was not so lovely as she looked. She rose on my approach, and began to speak: "I know that you have a right to be surprised at my boldness in seeking an occasion to meet with you. I hesitated whether I ought or ought not to communicate a certain matter to you. At last I thought that I should be doing wrong unless I told you. I have received offers of marriage from an honest merchant. You remember what I told you about my father; and now he is moving heaven and earth to get me under his protection with my little property. I sought this opportunity of speaking with you, merely that I might be able to swear to you by all that is most sacred, that I would gladly refuse any happiness in this life for the felicity of dying in the arms of such a friend as you are. I am well aware that I have forfeited this good fortune; how I hardly know, and by whose fault I could not say. I do not wish to affront you, nor yet the intriguer whom you call your friend; I am ready to take all the blame on my own shoulders. Accept, at any rate, the candid oath which I have uttered, and leave me to my remorseful reflections." Having spoken these words, she resumed her seat and wept.

[7] One of Pietro Longhi's pictures in the Museo Civico at Venice represents exactly such a scene as this in the workroom of a tailoress. The beau is there, and the woman prepared for flirtation.

Armed as I was with reason, I confess that she almost made me yield to her seductive graces. I sat down beside her, and taking one of her fair hands in mine, spoke as follows, with perfect kindness: "Think not, dear lady, that I am not deeply moved by your affliction. I am grateful to you for the stratagem by which you contrived this interview. What you have communicated to me with so much feeling not only lays down your line of action; it also suggests my answer. Let us relegate to the chapter of accidental mishaps that fatal occurrence, which will cause me lasting pain, and which remains fixed in my memory. Yet I must tell you that I cannot regard you, after what then happened, as I did formerly. Our union would only make two persons miserable for life. Your good repute with me is in a sanctuary. Accept this advice then from a young man who will be your good friend to his dying day. Strengthen your mind, and be upon your guard against seducers. The opportunity now offered is excellent; accept at once the proposals of the honest merchant you named to me, and place yourself in safety under his protection."

I did not wait for an answer; but kissed her hand, and took my leave, without speaking about my waistcoat to the tailoress. A few months after this interview she married the merchant. I saw her occasionally in the street together with her husband. She was always beautiful. On recognising me, she used to turn colour and drop her eyes. This is as much as I can relate concerning my third lady-love. It came indeed to my ears, from time to time, without instituting inquiries, that she was well-

conducted, discreet, exemplary in all her ways, and that she made an excellent wife to her second husband.

XXXV

Reflections on the matter contained in the last three chapters, which will be of use to no one

These three love-affairs, which I have related in all their details, and possibly with indiscreet minuteness, taught me some lessons in life. I experienced them before I had completed my twenty-second year. They transformed me into an Argus, all vigilance in regard to the fair sex. Meanwhile I possessed a heart in some ways differing from the ordinary; it had suffered by the repeated discovery of faithlessness in women – how much I will not say; it had suffered also by the brusque acts of disengagement, which my solid, resolute, and decided nature forced upon me. The result was that I took good care to keep myself free in the future from any such entanglements.

I was neither voluptuous by temperament nor vicious by habit. My reflective faculties controlled the promptings of appetite. Yet I took pleasure in female society, finding in it an invariable source of genuine refreshment. With the exception of some human weaknesses, of no great moment, to which I yielded in my years of manhood, I have always continued to be the friend and observer of women rather than their passion-blinded lover.

The net result of my observations upon women is this. The love which most of them pretend for men, springs mainly from their vanity or interest. They wish to be surrounded by admirers. They are ambitious to captivate the hearts and heads of people of importance, in order to reign as petty queens, to take the lead, to exercise power, to levy contributions. Or else they ensnare slaves devoted to them, free-handed managers of theatres, men who will give them the means at balls, at *petits soupers*, at country-houses, at great entertainments, to eclipse their rivals, to acquire new lovers, and to betray their faithful servant, their credulous accomplice in this game of fashion. Again, they are sometimes spreading nets to catch a complaisant husband, who will support them in their intrigues.

I was not born to pay court. My position in the world was not so eminent as to secure a woman's triumph by my influence. I was neither wealthy enough nor extravagant enough to satisfy a woman's whims in those ridiculous displays which make her the just object of disdainful satire. I had no inclination to ruin myself either in my fortune or in my health. I had conceived a sublime and romantic ideal of the possibilities of love. Matrimony was wholly alien to my views of liberty. The consequence was that, after these three earliest experiences, I regarded the sex with eyes of a philosopher.

I enjoyed the acquaintance of many women in private life, and of many actresses, remarkable for charm and beauty. Holding the principles I have described, I found them well contented

with my manners of behaviour. They showed themselves capable of honourable, grateful, and constant friendship through a long course of years. In truth, it is in the main to men – to men who flatter and caress the innate foibles of women, their vanity, their tenderness, their levity, that we must ascribe the frequency of female frailties.

In conclusion, I will lift my voice to affirm this truth about myself. Without denying that I have yielded, now and then, but rarely, to some trivial weakness of our human nature, I protest that I have never corrupted a woman's thoughts with sophisms. I have never sapped the principles of a sound education. I have never exposed the duties and obligations of their sex to ridicule, by clothing license with the name of liberty. I have never stigmatised the bonds of religion, the conjugal tie, modesty, chastity, decent self-respect, with the title of prejudice – reversing the real meaning of that word, as is the wont of self-styled philosophers, who are a very source of infection to the age we live in.

Here, then, I leave with you the candid and public confession of my loves.[8] I have related the circumstances of my birth, my education, my travels, my friendships, my engrossing occupations, my literary quarrels, my amorous adventures. It is

[8] Gozzi had a distinct object in writing these chapters on his love-affairs. Gratarol's accusation of his having been a hypocrite and covert libertine lay before him. He wished to make a clean breast of his frailties. To suppress this portion of his *apologia pro vitâ suâ* would have been to do him grave injustice. The Memorie must always be read as an answer to Gratarol's *Narrazione*. See Introduction, Part i.

for you to take them as you find them. I have written them down at the dictation of mere truth. They are *useless*, I know, and I only *publish* them in obedience to the virtue of *humility*.

XXXVI

On the absurdities and contrarieties to which my star has made me subject

I wrote the useless memoirs of my life in 1780, down to the age I had attained in that year; but now that I still find myself alive in 1797, the vice of scribbling being in my case incorrigible, I am wasting some more pages on useless memoirs subsequent to that date, and am giving these in their turn to the public from a motive of humility.

If I were to narrate all the whimsical absurdities and all the untoward accidents to which my luckless star exposed me, I should have a lengthy business on my hands. They were of almost daily occurrence. Those alone which I meekly endured through the behaviour of servants in my employ, would be enough to fill a volume, and the anecdotes would furnish matter for madness or laughter.

I will content myself with mentioning one singularity, which was annoying, dangerous, and absurd at the same time. Over and over again have I been mistaken by all sorts of people for some one not myself; and the drollest point is that, in spite of their obstinate persistence, I was not in the least like the persons they

took me for. One day I met an old artisan at San Pavolo, who ran to meet me, bent down and kissed the hem of my garment with tears, thanking me with all his heart for having been the cause of liberating his son from prison through my influence. I told him firmly that he did not know me, and that he was mistaking me for some one else. He maintained with great warmth and assurance that he knew me, and that I was his kind master Paruta. I perceived that he took me for a Venetian patrician of that name, but I vainly strove to disabuse him. The good man, thinking perhaps that I denied the title of Paruta in order to escape his thanks, followed me a long way with a perfect storm of blessings, vowing to pray to God until his dying day for my happiness and for that of the whole Paruta family. I asked a friend who knew the nobleman in question if I resembled him. He replied that Paruta was lean, tall, very lightly built, with thin legs and a pale face, and that he had not the least similarity to me.

Everybody knows or did know Michele dall'Agata, the celebrated impresario of the opera;[9] it is notorious that the fellow was a good span shorter than me, two palms broader, and wholly different in dress and personal appearance. Well, through a tedious course of years, as long as this man lived, it was my misfortune to be stopped upon the road almost every day, by singers and dancers of both sexes, by chapel-masters, tailors, painters, letter-carriers, &c., all of whom mistook me for Michele. I had to listen to interminable complaints, lengthy

[9] There is a good deal said about this man in Casanova's Memoirs.

expressions of gratitude, inquiries after lodgings, grumblings about meagre decorations and scanty wardrobes. From the letter-carriers I had, over and over again, to refuse letters and parcels addressed to Michele dall'Agata, screaming, protesting, swearing that I was not Michele. All these persons, when they reluctantly at last took leave, turned back from time to time and stared at me, like men bereft of sense, showing their firm conviction that I *was* Michele, who had reasons for not wishing to *appear* Michele. One summer, on reaching Padua, I learned that Signora Maria Canziani, an excellent and well-conducted dancer, and my good friend, had lately been confined. I wished to pay her a visit, and inquired from a woman at her lodgings if I might be introduced into her room. She responded with these words addressed to her mistress: "Madam, Signor Michele dall'Agata is waiting outside, and would like to offer his respects to you." When I entered the apartment, poor Canziani burst into such peals of laughter at the woman's blunder that I thought she must have died. Having paid this visit, I chanced to meet the celebrated professor of astronomy, Toaldo, on the bridge of San Lorenzo. He knew me perfectly, and I knew him as well. I bowed; he looked me in the face, lifted his hat with gravity, and passed onwards, saying: "Addio Michele!" The continual persistence of this error almost brought me to imagine that I was Michele. If Michele had earned the ill-will of brutal and revengeful enemies, this mistaken identity would certainly have been for me no laughing matter.

One very hot evening, when the splendour of the moon was turning night into day, I went abroad to take the air, and was conversing with the patrician Francesco Gritti on the piazza of San Marco. I heard a voice behind me saying: "What are you doing here at this hour? Why don't you go to bed and sleep, you ass?" These words were accompanied with two smart raps upon my back. I turned to resent the affront, and found myself facing the patrician Cavaliere Andrea Gradenigo, who gazed fixedly at me, and then exclaimed: "Pray pardon me! I could have sworn that you were Daniele Zanchi." Some explanations and excuses followed regarding the cuffs and the title of ass, which I had got through being taken for a Daniele. The cavaliere, it seems, was familiar enough with this fellow to call him ass and give him a couple of thwacks in sign of amicable pleasantry.

Not less whimsical was the following incident of the same description. I happened to be talking one very fine day with my friend Carlo Andrich on the Piazza di San Marco, when I observed a Greek, with mustachios, long coat, and red cap, who had with him a boy dressed in the same costume. When he saw me, the Greek ran up to us, exhibiting ecstatic signs of joy. After embracing and kissing me with rapture, he turned to the boy and said: "Come, lad, and kiss the hand here of your uncle Costantino." The boy seized and kissed my hand. Carlo Andrich stared at me; I stared at Carlo Andrich: we were like a pair of images. At length I asked the Greek for whom he took me. "What a joke!" said he; "aren't you my dear friend Costantino Zucalà?"

Andrich held his sides to save himself from bursting, and it took me seven minutes to persuade the Greek that I was not Signor Constantino Zucalà. On making inquiries with people who knew Signor Zucalà, I was assured that this worthy merchant was a short fat man, without one grain of resemblance to myself.

I shall probably have wearied out my readers by relating the hundredth part of such occurrences. I will now glance at the hundredth part of the contretemps which were continually annoying me.

In winter or in spring, in summer or in autumn, the same thing always happened. If I chanced to be caught by some sudden unexpected downpour, I might kick my heels as long as I liked under a colonnade or in a shop, waiting till the rain stopped and I could get home dry; but not on one single occasion did I ever have the consolation of seeing out the deluge; on the contrary, it invariably redoubled in fury, as though to spite me. Goaded at last by the nuisance of this eternal useless waiting, fretful and eager to find myself at home, I exposed myself in all meekness to the deluge, and reached my dwelling wet to the skin, dripping with water. But no sooner had I arrived in this pitiful plight, unlocked the door, and taken shelter, than the clouds rolled by and the sun began to show his face, just as though he meant to laugh at my discomfort.

Eight times out of ten, through the whole course of my life, when I hoped to be alone, and to occupy my leisure with reading or writing for my own distraction and amusement, letters or

unexpected visitors, more tiresome even than worrying thoughts or importunate letters, would come to interrupt me and put my patience on the rack. Eight times out of ten, since I began to shave, no sooner had I set myself before the looking-glass, than people arrived in urgent haste to speak with me on business, or persons of importance, whom I could not keep waiting in the ante-chamber. I had to wash the soap-suds from my face, and leave my room half-shaved, to listen to such folk on business, or to people of quality whom good manners forced me to oblige.

What I am going to relate is hardly decent, yet I shall tell it, because it is the simple truth, and furnishes a good example of these persecuting contrarieties. Almost every time when a sudden necessity has compelled me to seek some lonely corner in a street, a door is sure to open, and a couple of ladies appear. In a hurry I run up another blind alley, and lo and behold another pair of ladies make their entrance on the scene. The result is, that I am compelled to dodge from pillar to post, suffering the gravest inconveniences, to which my modesty exposes me. These, however, are but trifles, mere irritating gnat-bites.

Those who have the patience to read the remaining chapters of my insipid Memoirs, will admit that the evil star of these untoward circumstances never ceased to plague me. Certainly the troubles in which poor Pietro Antonio Gratarol, for whom I was sincerely sorry, involved me by his strange behaviour, were not slight or inconsiderable.

I think that the following incident is sufficiently comic to be

worth narration. I was living in the house of my ancestors, in the Calle della Regina at S. Cassiano. The house was very large, and I was its sole inhabitant; for my two brothers, Francesco and Almorò, had both married and settled in Friuli, leaving me this mansion as part of my inheritance. During the summer months, when people quit the city for the country, I used also to visit Friuli. I was in the habit of leaving the keys of my house with a corn-merchant, my neighbour, and a very honest man. It chanced one autumn, through one of the tricks my evil fortune never ceased to play, that rains and inundations kept me in Friuli longer than usual, far indeed into November. Snow upon the mountains, and the winds which brought fine weather, caused an intense cold. I travelled toward Venice, well enveloped in furs, traversing deep bogs, floundering through pitfalls in the road, and crossing streams in flood. At last, one hour after nightfall, I arrived, half dead with the discomforts of the journey, congealed, fatigued, and wanting sleep. I left my boat at the post-house near S. Cassiano, made a porter shoulder my portmanteau, and a servant take my hat-box under his arm. Then I set off home, wrapped up in my pelisse, all anxiety to put myself into a well-warmed bed. When we reached the Calle della Regina, we found it so crowded with people in masks and folk of all sexes, that it was quite impossible for my two attendants with their burdens to push a way to my house-door. "What the devil is the meaning of this crowd?" I asked a bystander. "The patrician Bragadino has been made Patriarch of Venice to-day," was the man's reply. "They

are illuminating and keeping open-house; doles of bread, wine, and money are being given to the people for three days. This is the reason of the enormous crowd." On reflecting that the door of my house was close to the bridge by which one passes to the Campo di Santa Maria Mater Domini, I thought that, by making a turn round the Calle called del Ravano, I might be able to get out into the Campo, then cross the bridge, and effect an entrance into my abode.[10] I accomplished this long detour together with the bearers of my luggage; but when I reached the Campo, I was struck dumb with astonishment at the sight of my windows thrown wide open, and my whole house adorned with lustres, ablaze with wax-candles, burning like the palace of the sun. After standing half a quarter of an hour agaze with my mouth open to contemplate this prodigy, I shook myself together, took heart of courage, crossed the bridge, and knocked loudly at my door. It opened, and two of the city guards presented themselves, pointing their spontoons at my breast, and crying, with fierceness written on their faces: "There is no road this way." "How!" exclaimed I, still more dumbfounded, and in a gentle tone of voice: "why can I not get in here?" "No, sir," the terrible fellows answered; "there is no approach by this door. Take the trouble to put on a mask, and seek an entrance by the great gate which you see there on the right hand, the gate of

[10] The translator of this narrative has taken the trouble to make this tedious detour on foot. The quarter in which Gozzi lived, remains exactly in the same condition as when he described it. His old palace has not altered; and the whole of the above scene can be vividly presented to the fancy by an inspection of the localities.

the Palazzo Bragadino. Wearing a mask you will be permitted to pass in by that door to the feast." "But supposing I were the master of this house, and had come home tired from a journey, half-frozen, and dropping with sleep, could I not get into my own house and lay myself down in my bed?" This I said with all the phlegm imaginable. "Ah! the master?" replied those truculent sentinels: "please to wait, and you will receive an answer." With these words they shut the door stormily in my face. I gazed, like a man deprived of his senses, at the porter and the servant. The porter, bending beneath his load, and the servant looked at me like men bewitched. At last the door opened again, and a majordomo, all laced with gold, appeared upon the threshold. Making many bows and inclinations of the body, he invited me to enter. I did so, and passing up the staircase, asked that reverend personage what was the enchantment which had fallen on my dwelling. "So! you know nothing then?" he answered. "My master, the patrician Gasparo Bragadino, foreseeing that his brother would be elected Patriarch, and wanting room for the usual public festival, was desirous of uniting this house to his own by a little bridge of communication thrown across the windows. The scheme was executed with your consent. It is here that a part of the feast is being celebrated, and bread and money thrown from the windows to the people. All the same, you need not fear lest the room in which you sleep has not been carefully reserved and closed with scrupulous attention. Come with me, come with me, and you shall soon see for yourself." I remained still more

confounded by this news of a permission, which no one had demanded, and which I had not given. However, I did not care to exchange words with a majordomo about that. When I came into the hall, I was dazzled by the huge wax-candles burning, and stunned by the servants and the masks hurrying to and fro and making a mighty tumult. The noise in the kitchen attracted me to that part of the house, and I saw a huge fire, at which pots, kettles, and pipkins were boiling, while a long spit loaded with turkeys, joints of veal, and other meats, was turning round. The majordomo ceremoniously kept entreating me, meanwhile, to visit my bedroom, which had been so carefully reserved and locked for me. "Please tell me, sir," I said, "how late into the night this din will last?" "To speak the truth," he answered, "it will be kept up till daybreak for three consecutive nights." "It is a great pleasure to me," I said, "to possess anything in the world which could be of service to the Bragadino family. This circumstance has conferred honour on me. Pray make my compliments to their Excellencies. I shall go at once to find a lodging for the three days and three consecutive nights, being terribly in need of rest and quiet." "Out upon it!" replied the majordomo, "you really must stay here, and take repose in your own house, in the room reserved with such great care for you." "No, certainly not," I said. "I thank you for your courteous pains in my behalf. But how would you have me sleep in the midst of this uproar? My slumber is somewhat of the lightest." Then, bidding the porter and the servant follow me, I went to spend the three days and the three

consecutive nights in patience at an inn.

Having slept off my fatigue that night, I paid a visit of congratulation to the Cavaliere Bragadino on the elevation of his brother to the Patriarchate. He received me with the utmost affability; expressed annoyance at what he had learned from his majordomo, and told me with the most open candour that the patrician Count Ignazio Barziza had positively dispatched a courier with a letter to me in Friuli, begging permission to use my mansion for the feast-days of the Patriarch, and that I had by my answer given full consent. To this I replied that in truth I had seen neither messenger nor letters, but that he had done me the greatest pleasure by making use of my poor dwelling. Wishing higher honours to his family, I added that if such should befall, without seeking the intervention of Count Barziza, he was at liberty to throw my doors and windows open and freely to avail himself of my abode. Take this affair as you choose, it earned for me the estimable good-will of the patrician Bragadino, caused me to sojourn three days and three nights in an inn, and gave me occasion to relate one of my innumerable contretemps.

If I were to expand this chapter with an account of all the contrarieties I suffered as a house-owner in Venice, it would grow into a volume.[11] Having to reside in the city, I judged it prudent to take our property there in exchange for some farms in Friuli. I very soon perceived that the advantage of this barter fell to my

[11] The following paragraphs, to the end of the chapter, are extracted and condensed from vol. iii. chap. v. of the *Memorie*.

brothers Francesco and Almorò. My tenants refused to pay their rents, and made perpetual demands for alterations and repairs. Masons, carpenters, glaziers, smiths, pavement-layers, emptiers of cesspools, ate up a third of my revenues. Lawsuits to recover arrears devoured a large part of the remaining two-thirds. Bad debts, empty houses, and taxes reduced the total to a bare fifth. Beside this annual loss to my pocket, I was driven to my wits' ends by the vagaries of the tenants.

I will select two examples. One day a woman of respectable appearance came, and asked for the lease of an empty house I had on the Giudecca. I granted her request, and she paid the first instalment of her rent. After this first payment, all my clamours, demands for arrears, and menaces were thrown to the winds. She actually inhabited my house for three years, and discharged her obligations with the coin of promises and sometimes insults. I offered to make her a free present of her debt if she would only decamp. This roused her to a state of fury. "Was she not a woman of honour?" she exclaimed: "she was wont to pay up punctually, and not to accept alms." At last I had recourse to the Avvogadori, one of whom sent for the woman, endured her chatter, and intimated that she must give the house up at the expiration of eight days. Accordingly, I went to take possession of my property; but no! – there was the woman, comfortably ensconced with her own family, as though the house belonged to her. Again I applied to the court. Bailiffs were dispatched, who turned my tenants with their furniture into the streets. The keys

of the house were placed in my hands, and I crossed over to the Giudecca to inspect the damaged tenement, of which, at last, I felt myself once more the owner. Vain error! That heroic woman, at the head of her family, had scaled the walls of the fortress by a ladder, entered through a window, and encamped herself in the middle of the conquered citadel. I need not add that I finally got rid of this tormenting gadfly. But what a state the house was in! No locks, no bolts, no doors, no windows; everything reduced to desolation.

On another occasion I happened to have a house empty at S. Maria Mater Domini. One morning a man, who had the dress and appearance of a gondolier, presented himself. He informed me that he was a gondolier in the service of a cittadino at S. Jacopo dall'Orio. His own abode was at S. Geremia; and the great distance from his master's dwelling made his service difficult. My house at S. Maria would exactly suit him; the money for the first instalment of the rent was ready, if I would take him as a tenant. "What is your name?" I asked. "Domenico Bianchi." "And your master's?" "Signor Colombo." "Very well," said I; "I shall make inquiries of your master; for I have so often got into hot water that I am even afraid of cold." He urged me not to postpone matters; his wife was expecting her confinement every hour; it was of the utmost importance that he should be able to install her at once in their new abode. "Well, well," said I, "you don't suppose that she will be laid-in this afternoon, do you? I will go to Signor Colombo after dinner; and if his report

of you is satisfactory, you may take the keys as early as you like to-morrow." "You are right," replied the fellow; "although I know myself to be an honest man, I do not pretend that you should not inquire into my character. Only pray be quick about the business."

With this he went away; but scarcely had I dined, when the gondolier reappeared, leading by the hand a young woman. Half in tears, he began as follows: "Here is my poor wife in the first pangs of labour. For the love of Jesus, let us into your house. I am afraid it is already too late, and that she will be confined upon the street." As a matter of fact, the young person showed by her figure, and by the extraordinary contortions of her face and body, that what he said was the truth. Mortally afraid that she might not be able to leave my mansion, I rushed to the writing-table, scribbled out an agreement, took the customary month's payment, and sent the couple off with the keys of my house.

Some weeks later on, the parish priest of S. Maria arrived all fuming with excitement, and cried out: "To whom the devil have you let your house in such-and-such a street?" "To a certain Domenico Bianchi, the gondolier of the Colombo family, whose wife was on the point of being confined." "What Domenico Bianchi? What Colombo? What gondolier? What wife?" exclaimed he in still greater heat. "The fellow keeps a disorderly house; and she is one of his hussies. When they came to you, she had a cushion stuffed beneath her clothes. They sell wine, draw all the disreputable people of the quarter together,

and are the scandal of my parish. If you do not immediately get rid of the nuisance, you will be guilty of a mortal sin." I calmed him down, and made him laugh by the account I gave him of my interview with the *soi-disant* married couple. Then I promised to dislodge the people on the spot.

This was sooner said than done. I first applied to the Avvogadori, who washed their hands of the affair. Then I begged the priest to lay an information before the Esecutori contro la Bestemmia.[12] He positively refused, telling me that loose women were only too powerfully protected at Venice, and that he had already burned his fingers on a previous occasion by proceeding against a notorious evil-liver. It was no business of his, and I must get out of the scrape as well as I could.

To cut the story short, I was eventually relieved by my friend Paolo Balbi, who applied the following summary but efficacious remedy. "I informed Messer Grande of your affair,"[13] said Balbi, while explaining his proceedings: "he, as you are well aware, commands the whole tribe of constables and tipstaves; and I begged him to find some way of ousting the *canaille* from your house. Messer Grande dispatched one of his myrmidons, one who knows these hussies, to tell them, under the pretext of a charitable warning, that the chief of the police had orders to

[12] A magistracy composed of four patricians, who controlled the manners of the town in matters of lawless and indecent living.

[13] Messer Grande corresponded to the Bargello at Rome, and was the chief of catchpoles and constables.

take them all up and send them handcuffed to prison. In their fright, the nest of rogues dispersed and left the quarter." After laughing heartily over the affair, and thanking my good friend, I walked home, reflecting deeply on red tape in public offices, perversions of legal justice, and the high-handed proceedings of that generous and expeditious judge, *Messer Grande*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.