

FORBIDDEN LOVER

BY
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Forbidden Lover

I

THE stately Marcantonio frowned his disapproval of his younger brother.

"For no more than a whim, a caprice, you will confront this dreadful danger."

But Ottavio Sagrado merely laughed. Laughter came readily to him. "Have you never realized that the only possessions of which we are fully conscious, which we fully value, are those which are held precariously? We never really know the thrill of living until we place life in danger."

And there you have an honest expression of his nature: Ebullient, careless, romantic, loving phrases as much as he loved life, and loving beauty wherever and however met. As a result Ottavio was, himself, lovable, rather for these very qualities in him than for the undeniable attractions of his person.

He was a brave, lively figure as he stood revealed in the late-spring sunshine which poured through the tall windows of that handsome room in the Casa Veneta, as these exiles from the Most Serene Republic had named the palace which they had made their own in Pisa. From his fastidiously clubbed red-brown hair to the scarlet heels and paste buckles on his shoes of black lacquered leather, he was elegance incarnate. His whaleboned coat of apricot brocade, above black satin smalls and black silk stockings, had been made by Acier, the Paris tailor who enjoyed the patronage of the Dauphin.

Marcantonio, the elder brother by some five years, a man approaching thirty, matched him in fastidiousness, as did their sister Flavia, who was leaning upon the back of Marcantonio's chair. Like her brothers she was tall, and like them she was crowned with the same red-brown hair of a slightly darker shade than that which Titian loved to paint.

The spacious, lofty room, with its mosaic floor and frescoed ceiling, its portraits, marbles and gilded furniture, supplied a proper setting for them and announced that the sybaritism brought from Venice by their banished grandfather still endured in this the third generation since that involuntary exile.

Ottavio continued: "To me it is inconceivable that you should not share this desire of mine to see our Venice."

"It happens," said Marcantonio, "that I love my head. It has been accounted by several men and women of taste a head of some beauty. Fraschini implores me to let him paint it."

Flavia joined in: "Take that to heart, Ottavio. Your own head looks better on your shoulders than it will look between the Columns of the Piazzetta. You are merely inquisitive."

"Even that," Ottavio assured them, "were a nobler emotion than this apathy, this indifference of yours toward the cradle of our race. And such a cradle! A city that is the eighth wonder of the world, one of the marvels of the ages. A city in which honoured forbears of ours have reigned as doges. If you will not share my adventure, Marco, at least you should extend me a sympathetic understanding of my feelings."

"Oh, all the sympathy you please. But no understanding. If you persist I shall understand still less and perhaps come to sympathize still more. As Flavia says: Your head will look less decorative when it is exhibited between the Columns of St. Mark's. Take heed, child."

"I never yet took heed of bogies."

"This is no bogey. The Republic is intransigent where a ban is broken. The penalty is death."

"But first there must be discovery." Ottavio was impatient. "I shall travel in another name. None knows me in Venice."

"You think that will insure your safety? Poor fool, Ottavio. You should inform yourself better of how matters are conducted in that sweet cradle of our race. The Most Serene Republic watches with the eyes of Argus, and strikes with the hands of Briareus. The spies of the Inquisitors of State are everywhere, and strangers never fail to engage their close attention."

"It is a madness," Flavia told him in her languidly intolerant manner. "Pray the good God for sense, Ottavio, and dismiss the thought of so silly an adventure."

But Ottavio's longing to see the home of his forbears, the state over which some of them had ruled, of which he was by right of blood and birth a patrician, was not to be denied. The Sagradi were princes of Naxos, a title which in itself proclaimed their antiquity and distinction, announcing that the greatness of their house had been synchronous with the greatest days of Venice. And in Venice their name was at once famous and infamous, a name that had found place in the Golden Book, but had since been erased from it.

WHEN Flavia reminded him of this, it merely served to excite that ready laughter of his, tinged now with scorn. "I have said that I shall travel in a borrowed name; to suppose otherwise is to prove none foolish but yourself."

Marcantonio waved a delicate hand in a cloud of lace. "To adventure life in a worthy cause is the duty of a patrician. To hazard it from inquisitiveness, as Flavia rightly says, is merely ignoble. A vulgarity."

"If they take off your head, Ottavio, I shall not wear mourning for you," Flavia threatened him.

"I don't believe you, little hypocrite. You are too conscious that black becomes you."

Marcantonio sighed. "Useless, I see, to argue. I will order masses for the repose of your soul."

But it would have needed more than this to intimidate Ottavio. He departed in state, with a train such as became a patrician who was by right of birth a prince of Naxos. Expatriation to the Sagradi had not meant destitution. Their banished grandfather had carried with him the better part of his vast wealth when he removed himself from the Republic.

With young Ottavio—disposed in the three carriages that followed his own—travelled his chaplain, his physician, his secretary, his chamberlain, his cook and his valet. Ahead of him rode his courier, to make preparation for his reception at each halting place upon that tedious journey north.

With a lofty but perilous disregard of prudence, the young patrician brought this imposing train as far as Mestre. Here, however, his chaplain, the Abbé Dangers, who once had been his tutor and still exercised some influence over him, had a word of advice to offer. As a result Ottavio assumed the name of Malatesta, leaving it to be supposed that he was a member of that princely house of Rimini; and it was as Ottavio Malatesta that the plump, rosy-cheeked abbé presented him to a Dominican named Fra Gregorio, who was also on his way to Venice.

It was in the inn at Mestre that the chaplain had made the friar's acquaintance and the discovery of his destination; and he had been at pains to cultivate this chance acquaintance, so that, taking advantage of the freemasonry between clerics, he might contrive that Ottavio should enter Venice, as it were, under the protection of the Dominican's scapulary. Thus, the abbé thought, the young man's arrival would be less likely to attract hostile attention, since he would have the appearance of being sponsored by the Church.

He represented his charge as a young gentleman upon his travels, professed—without falsehood—that he was compelled by circumstances at this point to part company with him, and added—also without falsehood—that it would sensibly soften the reluctance with which he did so if he knew that Messer Ottavio might have, at least to his destination, so worthy a companion and guide as the most venerable Fra Gregorio.

Fra Gregorio, elderly, portly, rubicund and kindly, with a constant air of being in need of shaving and a constant dust of snuff upon his upper lip, very willingly accepted the charge of a young man so obviously and so very

pleasantly distinguished. He professed himself honoured by the abbé's request, and gave assurances that he would do all in his power to attend to Messer Ottavio's well-being upon what remained of the journey and upon his arrival in the city.

Thus accompanied, however, Messer Ottavio was constrained to travel in more modest fashion. His train was left behind at Mestre, to await there, on the mainland, his return at the end of the week to which his visit was to be delimited. Without attendants, he embarked with Fra Gregorio upon the common barge that plied along the canal from Mestre, a barge that was drawn by a horse until the lagoons were reached and oars became inevitable for the final stage of the journey.

HE was not, however, as inconspicuous as he supposed to the six or eight other occupants of the vessel. Not only was he an arresting figure in his modish black roquelaure, his black three-cornered hat with its gold lace, and his black travelling boots of finest leather, but the prodigious amount and quality of his luggage was in itself enough to proclaim him a person of consequence, and it contrasted oddly with the plain brown canvas sack in which his reverend companion carried all his belongings.

It was assumed that he was some young gentleman of family travelling with a clerical tutor, and his fellow passengers held themselves respectfully aloof as from a being of a superior race.

His first glimpse of the Campanile of St. Mark's, thrusting upward like a mammoth spear into the cobalt sky, so thrilled his poetical nature as to drive him to the very brink of tears. And when at last he had a clear view of Venice, looking in the afternoon sunlight like a city of ivory and gold, magically afloat upon the silver mirror of the sea, his emotions crossed that brink, and the tears, brimming over, trickled down his cheeks.

The friar's kindly eyes considered him with surprise.

"You are in some affliction, my son—" he was beginning. But Ottavio interrupted him with an unsteady laugh:

"Not in affliction, sir, but joy. Joy to behold this miracle of a city, worn like a glittering jewel upon the bosom of the earth."

The friar raised his eyebrows at the phrase. Then his eyes grew keener, and a smile, half benign, half caustic, broke upon his lips, to yield again to gravity. "Does the sight of beauty move you, then, so deeply?" He sighed. "You should beware, my son—"

But again he was interrupted. "Ah, but here is more than beauty to my eyes. There is—" He checked. Almost he had betrayed himself in his intoxication. Betimes he remembered that his life might pay for the incautious words that

were bubbling to his lips; and so he choked them down and fell abruptly silent. But the friar pressing him, he took refuge in an evasion that was yet no falsehood:

"There is—oh, what do I know? There is here something unearthly, a loveliness as of celestial regions, a beauty that is holy."

"Yet all is but the work of man. Beware these enthusiasms, my son. Beware the snares of the senses, which in a nature such as I perceive yours to be will constantly be spread to entangle you." And he proceeded to a little homily which had for object to persuade Ottavio to find an outlet for his æstheticism in the contemplation of divine and incorruptible, rather than of human and corruptible, beauty.

Because of what he thought that he perceived, and so as to preserve his young charge as far as possible from the temptations which in this city of pleasure must beset a temperament so obviously romantic and susceptible, Fra Gregorio offered to find accommodation for him in the Monastery of San Domenico, whither the friar was, himself, bound.

So persuasive was he that Ottavio began to wonder had his emotion betrayed him and did his companion desire to keep him under observation. He declined courteously but firmly. When, however, Fra Gregorio proposed as an alternative to find him a lodging with a pious family of his acquaintance, occupying part of a palace on the Rio of San Barnaba, Messer Ottavio did not dare to decline. Nor, really, did he wish to do so, for he perceived at once how preferable this must be to an inn and how much safer. At an inn he might be the subject of inquiries which would never arise in private lodgings.

THE barge brought up toward sunset alongside of the Piazzetta. The exile stepping at last upon that forbidden land, remained staring at the graceful columns surmounted by the Lion of St. Mark, between which his brother had predicted that he would leave his head. He shivered a little as the eyes of his imagination sought the spot of execution, there, amid all that beauty.

Thence, still in Fra Gregorio's care, he was conveyed in a gondola across the Basin of St. Mark, past the marble glory of Santa Maria della Salute, and up the Grand Canal with its painted palaces, which seemed all afloat, to the narrow channel between tall buildings that was known as the Rio of San Barnaba. A little way along this and the boat brought up at the steps of a house with a pink-washed façade upon which was frescoed a colossal figure of St. Michael with uplifted flaming sword, trampling the Dragon of Evil underfoot.

The piety which this decoration argued in the householders was confirmed by the reverently rapturous welcome accorded to Fra Gregorio by the grave,

elderly Antonelli, who was the inquiline of two stories of the palace, and by his comely and buxom dark-skinned wife. This rapture increased when the friar disclosed that in the illustrious, and, from his baggage and equipment, opulent young companion, he brought a lodger to their house.

THE discerning eyes of Messer Ottavio had already perceived that the glories of this Casa San Michele, or at least of that part of it tenanted by the Antonelli, were of a faded order, and he concluded that it was to befriend the host rather than himself that he had been brought there. But not on this account did he demur. The priest's introduction, by a sort of sponsorship, avoided for him all awkward questions such as must be asked elsewhere.

Two lofty rooms of the mezzanine were placed at his disposal, each with a stone balcony above the water. To these rooms his baggage was carried by the waterman and Antonelli's servant.

Curiosity, he thought, rather than a sincere desire to assist him, kept Antonelli and his wife, the Signora Laura, lingering in his room with Fra Gregorio for the unpacking. Partly to thwart this vulgarity, partly because Messer Ottavio was not in the habit of discharging such duties for himself, he was reminded now of the need to hire a servant. Fra Gregorio announced his instant ability to provide. He had the very man at San Domenico, a good, willing God-fearing lad, who had served a gentleman aforetime, was a skilful hairdresser, and for whose industry and honesty Fra Gregorio could answer. He gave Messer Ottavio no time in which to reply, but in a fever of solicitude bustled out at once to supply this want.

WITHIN an hour of the friar's departure the servant sent by him arrived at the Casa San Michele. He proved a slight, pallid, lantern-jawed lad, sly of manner and with dark shifty eyes. On a first inspection, Ottavio did not find him prepossessing. Still less was he prepossessed when better acquaintance with the lad, whose name was Zanetto, established the fact that of all the qualities Fra Gregorio had boasted in him, the only one to be discovered in him was piety, and this so abnormally developed that the only position in life he seemed fit to grace was that of a lay brother.

Sighing over the clumsiness with which the fellow went about the business of unpacking, Messer Ottavio concluded, however, that since he would require him for only seven days, it was hardly worth while to go to the trouble of replacing him.

Therefore he lent a hand in the disposal of his wardrobe, and himself removed and unpacked a case of books without which Ottavio, who was of a studious, bookish disposition, never moved from home.

It was a little collection of some eight volumes, and comprised among other works a copy of Suetonius, a copy of Petrarch's sonnets, a volume of the

Divina Commedia labelled *Inferno*, and three works on astronomy and mathematics, studies to which this versatile young man was oddly addicted. These included a volume on the Copernican system and a copy of Euclid.

WITH that passion for elegance in all his appointments, which distinguished their owner, the volumes composing this little library were richly bound in fine leather, handsomely tooled, and lettered with a profusion of gold and in accordance with his own fancy. The Copernicus, for instance, bound in red, bore on its cover a seven-pointed star set in a belt that carried the signs of the Zodiac; and on the cover of the Dante above the word "*Inferno*" brooded the horned head of the Lord of Malebolge.

Betimes on the morrow he set about becoming more closely acquainted with this city of which his house was native and which he regarded as his natural home. Fra Gregorio, he assumed, could be of as little social assistance to him as the impoverished Antonelli. Commanding no other acquaintances, and not daring to seek any, he must depend upon himself. Therefore he set out alone upon his exploration, and the more deeply he inhaled the breath of this wonderful city the more he sighed to realize that he was laying up for his future a store of nostalgia, which, at least in the past, he had been spared.

Although alone throughout the ensuing week and without companionship in all his wanderings, yet in the course of those days he penetrated every place accessible to a stranger; and by paying his way he was able to investigate almost every aspect of life in this Sybaris of Europe.

Thus he spent seven ecstatic days among the wonders of this far-sung Venice, each day of which proved more exhilarating than the last. Yet each day added something to the exile's heartache, akin to the bitterness tempering a lover's delight in the mistress from whom he knows that stern necessity must presently separate him.

If the days sped all too swiftly, at least they sped in such a manner as entirely to falsify Marcantonio's fears that there was danger in this excursion. In all that week the only disturbance was provided on the morning of Sunday by the piety of Zanetto. Ottavio had been at the Ridotto until near the hour of dawn. As a result he was peacefully asleep when Zanetto came to rouse him with the information, almost angrily delivered, that unless he instantly arose and made haste to dress he would be too late for the morning's last Mass.

Irritated by that rude awakening and by the lack of deference in his servant's manner, also perhaps because his head was aching, Ottavio answered in anger.

"To the devil with you and your Mass!"

The blank horror on Zanetto's face as he now shrank away before his master, crossing himself, made Ottavio aware of the blasphemy he had uttered. But he was too deeply annoyed to think of correcting it.

"To arouse me thus! By the Host, if I were not the most patient man in the world I should be breaking the bones of your body. Out of my room, and out of my sight until I summon you."

Zanetto, ever with that face of horror, repeated the sign of the cross, and then fled shuddering upon perceiving that his impious master was reaching for something to heave at him.

Knowing as he did that there is no rancour in the world like the rancour that has its source in piety, and aware of how deeply he had provoked it, Ottavio almost expected to find his servant gone when eventually he came to summon him.

But Zanetto was there, a silent, tight-lipped Zanetto who went about his duties with undisguised condemnation glaring from his shifty little eyes.

II

MESSER OTTAVIO had timed his visit so that his seventh and last day in Venice should fall upon Ascension Thursday, with its great annual carnival and the ceremony of the doge's annual casting of the wedding ring into the Adriatic, symbol of the great Republic's marriage with the sea and in token of dominion over it.

This day with its sumptuous celebrations, whose significance lay in the glorious past of the Most Serene Republic, was to provide a climax, a final ecstasy upon which to close his sojourn. Little did Ottavio dream as he dressed himself that morning in his bravest that the adventure, which he imagined to be ending, was, in fact, only just about to begin.

Had he suspected what was yet to come, his pulses might have throbbed even faster than they did when his gondola bore him into the Grand Canal, to join the throng of craft, thepeotas, galleys, barges, skiffs, feluccas and gondolas, all swathed in bunting, some of them trailing rich brocades through the water, all moving to the strains of music, gilded oars aflash in the brilliant May sunshine, gayety and laughter everywhere.

Towering above all came the great galley of the doge, the mighty bucentaur, plated in gold and manned by oarsmen in red velvet and gold lace, the lion standard of St. Mark floating aloft.

By skilful pilotage his gondola was insinuated through the press of boats until it was almost alongside of the princely galley, and then that happened to Ottavio which was completely to change his destiny. For it was then that he beheld her.

She was tall and nobly moulded; finely featured and dark of head and eye: and like a veil over all her loveliness there was an austerity, an aloofness, a calm assurance of her splendid worth before which trivial gallantry must be dumb. Desirable she was; but her beauty was not of the quality that invites pursuit. It imposed respect, demanded worship.

Thus, at least, did she appear to Messer Ottavio when looking up from his gondola he first beheld her at the doge's side, amid the splendid company in the prow of the great bucentaur.

The vision of her robbed him of his breath, and very nearly of his senses. It set a paralysis upon his faculties akin to that which the Medusa was fabled to dispense by different means. And just as they took their chance of death who gazed on the Medusa, so, as the sequel shows did he now take his chance of death in gazing upon her. For from the moment of beholding her, all notion of departing tomorrow from this city was abandoned and all notion of the peril of abiding was forgotten.

AN HOUR ago, when he had been dressing in his gayest for this festival, he had smiled into his mirror as he told himself how easily and safely he had accomplished his desire and spent his lovely audacious week in defiance of the ban, and how he would laugh tomorrow at those who awaited him at Mestre, and, anon, at Marcantonio and Flavia for their fears.

Now all notion of departure was occluded. He did not know what he was to achieve by remaining. He had not yet come to consider this, or indeed anything beyond the fact that to go, to leave a city that contained this lovely lady, was utterly impossible. At need, even he would remain until they discovered him and put him to death. It would be rather sweet and glorious, he thought in the exaltation of that moment, to suffer martyrdom in such a cause.

Having beheld her, he beheld nothing else that day of all the marvels spread before his eyes. And when presently the bucentaur under the drive of her forty oars—with four men to the oar—swept on toward the Port of Lido and the open sea, it was as if the sunlight had departed with it. The show had lost all interest for Messer Ottavio, and if it had not been for the thought that he might again rejoice his eyes with the sight of her when the bucentaur returned, he would have ordered his gondolier to bear him home.

Meanwhile there was obvious information that he craved.

"Matteo, the lovely lady on the prow of the bucentaur..."

"Ah! Aha! Lovely! lovely!" Thus Matteo, the gondolier, agreed with enthusiasm, in the lilting tones of Venetian speech. "None lovelier in Venice than Madonna Lucrezia Loredano, which is to say none lovelier in Italy. Your Excellency remarked her. There are only the blind who do not do so, and they have no greater cause to regret their blindness."

MATTEO, you observe, had the spirit proper to the service of Messer Ottavio. The young exile was conscious of a tightening at the heart.

"She is related to His Serenity?"

"His daughter, Excellency. Doge Loredano's only daughter."

Ottavio breathed freely again. For a moment he had feared she might be the doge's wife.

Long hours he waited, keeping Matteo fasting the while. But there was no reward for his patience. When at long last the bucentaur returned, Madonna Lucrezia was to be seen only in fleeting glimpses which betrayed rather than revealed her presence and served only to baffle his ardent questing gaze.

She stood beside the tall figure of her father, resplendent in the cloth of gold of his ducal robes; but she was eclipsed there by the cloud of patricians and prelates who encircled them.

Subjected thus to the agonies of the thirsting Tantalus, Messer Ottavio watched the great galley sweep majestically and swiftly on toward the Rialto, and since to attempt to follow with his single oar must be in vain, he desired Matteo, at last, to take him home.

He was out of humour, almost peevish, and in this mood he came earlier than he was expected to the Casa San Michele. Entering his room on the mezzanine, he checked in surprise to behold Zanetto seated at the ormolu-incrusted writing table, thumbing the volume of Copernicus above an open copy of Suetonius.

So intent was the rascal that he did not hear Messer Ottavio enter, nor move until Ottavio spoke, after a moment's frowning stare: "What's here?"

The little valet leaped up with an outcry of panic, sending the Copernicus crashing to the floor. Ottavio's annoyance swelled to anger at beholding his precious volume so maltreated. In four strides he crossed to Zanetto's side. He took the rascal by the ear without gentleness.

"So, so, Master Scholar! And, pray, who gave you leave to study here? To set your greasy paws upon my books!" By the ear he conducted him to the open door. "Here is something to remind you that it is well to keep to studies concerned with your office." And with a well-applied kick he lifted Zanetto across the threshold. Slamming the door upon him, he went tenderly to pick up, dust and restore the fallen book.

PRESENTLY growing calmer, and being naturally of a gentle, amiable disposition, he was ashamed of his violence. He recalled Zanetto, and when the fellow came, cringing, in answer, he proffered him two gold sequins.

"Here's an unguent for your bruise, my lad. We will forget the incident. Bear me no rancour and I'll bear you none."

Zanetto, who had been expecting something very different, displayed first astonishment. Then a furtive look of suspicion momentarily flashed from his little eyes. Finally a smile, false and fawning, broke on that lean, foxy face.

"It is not for such as I to bear rancour to such as Your Excellency." He took the sequins. "You are too good, Excellency."

"That is probably true. Another in my place would have dismissed you."

Fresh surprise appeared on Zanetto's face. "But since Your Excellency leaves tomorrow—"

"Not so. I have changed my mind."

"You are remaining, Excellency? Ah, but that is good. How long, Excellency? How long?"

"We shall see. I do not know."

In this he spoke more truly than he thought. Neither how long nor to what purpose he would remain could he have told you.

For a man in his position to hope to seek the acquaintance of the doge's daughter was so far beyond the bounds of possibility that it could not enter even into his dreams. And yet to go from the environment that held her was equally impossible. Though he might entertain no hope of ever speaking to her, yet, at least, he could behold her again; and behold her again he must. There was such joy for this lover of beauty in the mere sight of her that whatever the peril of lingering he must incur it.

AND so on the morrow he informed Antonelli that his departure was indefinitely postponed.

After that he haunted all public places that were affected by the fashionable—the theatres, the gardens, the Ridotto, Florian's and the arcades about St. Mark's Square. Since this, however, constituted no departure from the manner in which he had spent the first seven days of his visit, it supplied nothing that could be deemed suspicious.

One only addition did he make to established habit. His gondola would now patrol for hours that Grand Canal, and pass and re-pass before the Loredano Palace, just beyond the Bridge of the Rialto.

More than once when he saw her emerge and enter her gondola, or when he chanced to come upon her afloat, he would order Matteo, his gondolier, discreetly to follow; and if, as happened once or twice, she landed in a public place where he, too, might land, he would continue the pursuit afoot, but a pursuit which never aimed to overtake and was always careful not to be obtrusive.

In this fashion, and upon no more than just the noble sight of her, he nourished a mounting passion and consumed himself in longings which he perceived no remotest hope of gratifying.

IF HE was not questing abroad for the object of his humble, distant worship, he was shut up in his room in the Casa San Michele, seeking to find in rimed couplets expression of his absorbing passion.

He found in these poetical exercises a queer relief, an outlet for emotions which if pent up must end by stifling him. He would sit late into the night composing these little songs of heartbreak, for which, be it confessed, he borrowed a good deal from the Petrarchian sonnets.

Sometimes when he accomplished something that seemed to approach a true expression of his longings and despair, he would declaim it aloud in the dead of night, pacing his chamber, and allowing himself to imagine that she was within earshot of his burning utterances.

This until one night a sound on his threshold discovered to him that he had an audience indeed. Softly crossing the room and abruptly opening the door, he found Zanetto crouching there.

He was very angry, for he feared that if Zanetto had distinguished the actual words he had been uttering, he must have rendered himself ridiculous.

For the second time in their association he took the valet by the ear and drew him up from that crouching attitude. "Why do you spy on me?" he snarled at him.

The other grimacing at once from pain and fear protested fearfully.

"I was not spying, Excellency. I heard your voice. I thought you called. I thought you might be ill."

Ottavio loosed his hold. "Begone! Back to your bed, zany, and don't let me find you here again."

Consciousness of the fellow's obvious inquisitiveness, however, led Ottavio to exercise more care thereafter, and to lock away the reams he covered with writing and rewriting.

THUS a second week followed the first, and they were midway through the third week, when one morning, while Ottavio was lounging in a bedgown over his chocolate, the Abbé Daugers, introduced by Zanetto, stood suddenly before him.

"God be thanked!" was the abbé's greeting.

"For what, if you please?" demanded Ottavio coldly, taking no satisfaction in the sight of him.

"That I have found you, My Lord."

"Will you tell me how you performed the miracle?"

"I sought Fra Gregorio at San Domenico."

"I see." Ottavio rose at last, dusting crumbs from his lap. "And the reason for your presence?"

"The reason?" The abbé showed impatience at the question. "We have been in mortal anxiety for you. We feared that—"

Ottavio interrupted him. The valet was lingering deliberately by the door. "Why do you wait, Zanetto?"

"For your commands, Excellency."

"I have none. When I have I'll summon you."

As the door closed upon the departing servant, Ottavio addressed the abbé in French. "I begin to suspect that rascal of being a spy."

If the abbé sought an argument of persuasion it was ready to his hand. He was genuinely flung into a panic. "And suspecting this, knowing what discovery will cost you, have you still remained?"

"It is only a suspicion, after all."

"Will you wait to verify it? Will you wait to leave your head where your brother said you'd leave it? You must be mad, Ottavio; and you have all but driven us mad from fear on your account. I solemnly exhort you to come to your senses and depart with me while still you may. Your brother did not exaggerate when he told you that the eyes of the Serene Republic are as numerous as those of Argus. How much longer do you suppose you will go undetected here? You say, yourself, that you suspect your own servant of being a spy. It is more than likely. If he should come to have a doubt of your pretended identity, if he should—"

"Monsieur l'Abbé, I do not rule my life by ifs. I do not fret myself with vain conjecture. Understand, I pray, that it is my intention to remain awhile in Venice. From that intention you have no argument to move me."

NEVERTHELESS, the Abbé Dangers still did his best, as he conceived to be his duty. In the end, however, he departed baffled, out of temper.

Unperturbed, Messer Ottavio remained to continue the indulgence of this madness, to continue his mute distant worship at Madonna Lucrezia's shrine. And he continued it with an ever-increasing assiduity. Whenever and wherever she appeared in public it was rarely that he was not present; observing her, nourishing his ever-mounting passion upon no more than just the noble sight of her, oblivious of the attention this assiduity of his must attract and the danger of the inquiries into his identity which might follow.

In those weeks he grew pale and thin and even a little wild of aspect, and gradually there arose in him a still greater recklessness. Grown impatient of the reticence imposed upon him, and having, as a result of all his lucubrations, composed a little song that expressed his desperate case too perfectly to be suffered to remain unsung, he crept from his lodging just after day-break on a fair June morning armed with no more than a guitar.

He embarked alone in his gondola, himself took up the great yellow oar, and propelled the boat through the silence of rose-tinted dawn up the Grand Canal toward the Rialto and the great house above whose portals were carved in arabesques of stone the six five-leaved roses of Loredano.

HE LET his boat drift before the water-lapped marble steps, flanked by emblazoned piles; then he exchanged the oar for the guitar, and on the silence of the still sleeping city he loosed the song that he had made; the

Canzon d'Ottavio, as it has since come to be known, which has served the ends of many a less self-expressive lover since.

Sweetly its refrain throbbed upward:

I dare not pray, for prayer invites reply;

All that I ask of life is just that I

May breathe the air you breathe until I die.

On the third repetition of that tender refrain a slatted green shutter opened like an eye in the silent marble face of that house, and framed in the embrasure he beheld her, all in white, her hair unbound, like a sable cloak draped about her shoulders.

Beholding her there and grown conscious of her glance upon him, he fell suddenly mute, in a paralysis akin to that which he had known when first he had seen her on the bucentaur. An instant, in fascination, his face remained upturned. Then, panic robbing him of breath and urging flight, he dropped the guitar, snatched up the oar again and sent the long black boat racing over the still bosom of the water.

He felt as one who had been caught in an act of profanation. If ever she had noticed him before when he so constantly haunted her environment, what but contempt could so noble a creature entertain for him now, accounting him one who sought by such crude devices to bring himself to her attention.

He went home maddened by these thoughts, and coming there while all still slept, he quietly moored his boat and as quietly crept into the house so that he might disturb no one.

IT WAS as a result of this unheralded approach that he came for the second time upon Zanetto, in doublet and breeches, rummaging among his books. For Zanetto the moment could not have been more inauspicious. Messer Ottavio's ill-humour found here a ready channel for its venting. With an imprecation of annoyance he caught the trembling lackey by the scruff of the neck with one hand and by his waistband with the other. Holding him thus, and abusing him fiercely the while, he propelled him from the room and flung him bodily down the stairs. Zanetto rolled and bumped to a crumpled heap on the stone floor in the hall below, and there, after a moment's gasping for breath, set up a bellowing that threatened to rouse the house.

In pain and rage he screamed at Ottavio, who remained above surveying him.

"You've broken my leg! Holy Mother of Heaven! You've broken my leg!"

"It should have been your neck, you meddlesome rat. Then you would be making less noise. If you don't hold your foul tongue, I'll come down and throw you into the canal."

In terror of a ferocity which he nothing doubted would perform what it threatened, Zanetto's howls subsided into whimpers.

Messer Ottavio, however, was deeply perturbed. He remembered all his earlier vague suspicions that his valet spied upon him; he remembered in particular that phrase of Marcantonio's of which the Abbé Daugers had reminded him, that the Republic had as many eyes as Argus and that no stranger ever escaped her scrutiny, and the conviction grew upon him that the eyes of Zanetto were in the hire of the authorities, that Zanetto had been placed in his service precisely so as to observe him and report upon him.

BUT what, after all, could the fellow have discovered? The attraction of those books would be obvious. A book will so often bear witness to the identity of its owner. It is a common practice for an owner to inscribe his name in a book. Would this be what Zanetto was seeking? If so, then he must have some grounds for suspecting that Ottavio's identity was other than it was represented. What grounds? Searching his memory, it occurred to Ottavio at last that he had been addressed as "My Lord" by the Abbé Daugers within the hearing of Zanetto.

The more he considered, however, the quieter became his apprehensions. After all, there was nothing in those books that could betray him. He had not been such a fool as to bring any volume that contained his name. Of this he was quite sure. And yet, as men in his circumstance will, he went to verify the conviction.

But as he turned the books over he felt himself go suddenly cold. On the back of his copy of Petrarch, bound in dark brown calf, the arms of his house were stamped in gold. By what crass blindness had he overlooked this until now? Here was blatant advertisement of his identity. It was as if the book he held shouted his name aloud for all the world to hear it.

III

IN THE first shock of the discovery Ottavio was numb with apprehension. Then, reason gradually supervening, panic was thrust out. After all, Zanetto was a common, unlettered clown. It was unlikely that he was able to read a heraldic device. And if he were? What, then, after all? To have this book in his possession did not definitely prove that the arms it bore were Ottavio's own. But it might have to be explained. Suppose the volume were placed before the Inquisitors of State. What inquiries might it not set on foot?

Messer Ottavio stood considering for only another moment. Then he took his resolve. He went to lock the door. Next he sought flint and steel and tinder, and by these means lighted a taper which stood upon his writing table. Then he carried book and taper to the hearth, and with a sigh of regret watched the flames consume his beloved Petrarch. When only a heap of black ashes remained, he gathered them up carefully to the last flake and, going out on to the balcony, cast them from him and watched them borne away on the morning air to settle quietly in the waters of the canal.

Relieved, he re-entered his room. With that destruction of the only clear piece of evidence against him, he grew calm again.

A prudent man in Messer Ottavio's place would have considered that the event constituted a sufficient warning, and must at once have departed from surroundings of such peril to him. Even if we concede that a man in love is seldom prudent, and that a lover will incur appalling risks to attain his object, it still remains that Messer Ottavio aimed at the attaining of no object, had, in fact, no object to attain, and, therefore, that by sane canons it is impossible to condone the aimless obstinacy which still kept him fast in Venice. It is merely to be chronicled that remain he did.

When Antonelli came to inquire more closely into the reason of his violence, Messer Ottavio accounted that he had nothing to conceal. It was not the first time that he had caught Zanetto rummaging amongst his books and papers. Antonelli confessed that it was extremely odd, particularly considering Zanetto's illiteracy. What interest could books possibly possess for the clown?

"It is what I ask myself," said Ottavio.

"Perhaps the pictures attracted him," ventured Antonelli.

"Pictures!" Ottavio was scornful. He opened the Copernicus to display its astronomical figures, and the Euclid, so that Antonelli might gaze upon the geometrical designs. "Are those pictures to interest a clown?"

ANTONELLI considered them. Then he looked through the other volumes, in which there were no images of any kind Baffled, he asked at last: "Have you nothing else?"

"See for yourself," replied Ottavio, saying nothing about the Petrarch which he had destroyed.

Antonelli confessed that he could not understand. But he could understand Messer Ottavio's irritation. He hoped, however, that Zanetto was not so grievously injured as he represented.

It proved that he was not. A doctor summoned to examine his hurt pronounced him to be suffering from no more than a few bruises and a sprain. In three or four days he should be about again.

"When he is, he may go to the devil," said Ottavio. "I do not want him near me again. You may tell him so, Antonelli."

Thus, having dismissed him from his service, Messer Ottavio dismissed the rascal from his mind, and did not permit the thought of him to change his course of life.

He continued to haunt the resorts in which he might feast his eyes upon Lucrezia Loredano. He saw her twice in the next three days, each time at the opera. People had begun to notice him. After all, with his fine figure, rich apparel and great air, he was sufficiently remarkable. But while in any case his obsession must have left him unconscious of this general observation, he remained the more unconscious of it now since he saw signs which made him suspect that he was being observed by Madonna Lucrezia.

Was it possible that at last, aroused perhaps to consciousness of his worship by that aubade of his, her interest in him was awake? But if so, what could possibly ensue? Thus, with reflection, hope came to be stifled. But in the young and in the lover hope is of an obstinate, persistent growth. Messer Ottavio actually began at last to ply his wits to discover some means by which he might create a climax. And then a climax was created for him of quite another sort, the very climax which had been predicted for his adventure, and of which he had disregarded every warning.

Its author, of course, was the despised Zanetto.

Unbidden, the rascal came limping into Messer Ottavio's room one evening as dusk was falling.

In the failing light Messer Ottavio sat dreaming at his writing table, on which were spread before him the sheets of all his riming essays. But scant as was the light, he caught something of the leering insolence on the servant's lean face, sensed it in the fellow's very attitude of body. It was the

first time Ottavio had seen Zanetto since he had flung him down the stairs a week ago.

"What do you want here?" he asked him. "Were you not told that I have dismissed you?"

"Oh, I was told." There was an infinite mockery in the croaking voice, very odd in one whom hitherto Ottavio had known only and always of a fawning servility. "Oh, I was told. But it's my turn to tell you something. I've a score to settle with you, my fine lord."

Ottavio got up quickly, conceiving that he was about to be attacked and looking for weapons in the other's empty hands.

"Why, you rogue, what tone is this? Must I break the bones of your neck in earnest?"

ZANETTO laughed softly. "It's the bones of your own neck are in the greater danger now, my master. Last time you were violent with me, you thought you could buy me off with two sequins. You thought I'd be false to my duty for that paltry sum, didn't you? If you did, you wronged me. Your bribe only confirmed my suspicions of you. Not another day would I have remained in such service as yours, but that I needed proof of what you are. Let me tell you that I have that proof. When you threw me down those stairs you were already too late. I had seen all I needed to see; and I knew. I'll not say that if you had been less brutal with me I might not have had some pity on you. But I pay you back in your own coin, my lord. I have a duty to the Republic, and I've performed it. I've denounced you to the Inquisitors of State, my fine patrician. You'd have broken my neck, would you? Well, now, I've a notion I shall be there to see them do something of the kind to yours."

Ottavio stood as stiffly as if he had suddenly been frozen. The rage surging in him at this insufferable insolence, he contrived to stifle. This he realized was, in the circumstances, a trivial emotion which must not be permitted to obscure his wits. If he was denounced, but one thing remained: instant flight, thanking God that the meanness of this creature's soul and the desire to gloat should have betrayed him into uttering this timely warning.

But even as the determination took shape, Zanetto crushed it. "Look from your window, noble sir, and behold the stately arrival of Messer Grande," the rascal mocked him.

At the mention of that official name of the Republic's dread captain of justice, Messer Ottavio, who had been in the act of moving, was suddenly arrested.

Through the open window floated the gurgle of waters before a prow, the swish and wash of oars and a sound of voices.

An instant the young man paused, peering through the gloom at the white gleaming face of the vindictive valet, then without a word he stepped out upon the balcony and looked down.

The great black barge, unmistakable, with the shield of the Republic on the prow, for that of Messer Grande, was drawing alongside the steps of the Casa San Michele. Even as he looked, forth from it stepped the bulky figure of the captain of justice, all in black, followed by four of his pursuivants with their short halberds.

Instinctively Ottavio stepped back, and then his heart missed a beat when he heard the voice of Messer Grande announcing to the porter that he came in quest of a man named Ottavio Malatesta.

His recovery of his wits was instantaneous. After all, he possessed both courage and resource, and he carried them in a vigorous athletic body. It would take Messer Grande perhaps two minutes to ascend the stairs to the mezzanine. It was a meagre enough measure of time. Yet in less time than that, many a man had cheated fortune.

FROM an instant's reflection he passed to action, moving like a whirlwind; and like a whirlwind he descended upon Zanetto, so that Zanetto, caught up unawares, before he even conceived himself menaced, screamed first for assistance, then for mercy.

History was repeating itself for the valet. In that powerful grip he was swept from the room, borne across the threshold, and hurled down the staircase upon the ascending captain of justice. As if launched from a catapult he hurtled into Messer Grande, precariously balanced in the moment of impact. They went down together in a whirl of legs and arms and a storm of imprecations.

Thus were precious seconds added to the little margin of time upon which Messer Ottavio was depending. Having launched the valet upon that ballistic journey, he sprang back into his room, slammed the door and drove home the bolts. They would not hold long against a resolute attack. But they might hold long enough. From this room he passed into the next, likewise closing the door and bolting it; and before the halberds of the pursuivants had fallen upon the first of the two doors that now presented obstacles to pursuit, Messer Ottavio was on the balcony of that farther room, making fast to the rail of it the end of a sheet which he had hastily dragged from his bed. Under this balcony, tied to a mooring pile that was striped red and black, rode his own light gondola.

The barge of Messer Grande stood by the steps, held there by the boathook of one of the watermen, who squatted in the stern. The captain had placed a lieutenant and two men on guard there. These, however, had been drawn

into the house by the uproar caused by the flying descent of Zanetto, and only the watermen now remained. Ottavio could not hope that they would not observe his flight. But taken by surprise and under the necessity of recalling the pursuivants and turning their clumsy craft about before they could set out in pursuit, he seemed assured of a considerable start.

Luck and the dusk favoured him. The watermen, engaged in talk among themselves, were inattentive. He slid down the sheet, and swinging outward with it, he hooked his toes into the gunwale of his gondola, drawing it directly under him, and so dropped into it. To cast the boat loose was the work of a couple of seconds, and it was not until his oar smote the water that one of the watermen looked round. Even then, the dusk protecting the fugitive, that gondolier might have paid little heed to the receding boat but for the sight of the sheet dangling from the balcony in the gathering gloom.

Ottavio heard a shout go up behind him, and knew it for a view halloo. Without looking back, he thrust with all his weight upon his single oar and sent his gondola ripping through the water.

He had certainly gained a considerable start before the pursuit began. But the swift action of the others made it less than he had hoped. First, there was the promptitude of the watermen themselves. While bawling the news of the hunted man's flight they were swinging their boat about so as to be ready to follow the moment Messer Grande should return aboard. Then there was the promptitude of the lieutenant. Without waiting for his captain, who was battering down the door of an empty room above, he leaped aboard the black barge, followed by the two men who had remained with him and ordered the rowers to give chase.

Messer Ottavio, by now nearly two hundred yards down the narrow rio and heading for the Grand Canal, glanced over his shoulder, and in the lights gleaming from a house had a glimpse of the police boat under way. Perceiving that the hunt was up, he thrust yet more vigorously upon his oar so as to increase the distance. Although there were six oars to Messer Grande's barge, it was a ponderous, sluggish vessel. His own craft, after all, was a very light one, lightly laden with only himself, and he saw no reason to despair.

He shot recklessly from that narrow waterway into the Grand Canal, barely missing a collision with a passing peota. He paid no heed to the objurgations of her crew as he swung away to the left in the direction of the Rialto. It was his hope that in the labyrinth of narrow and tortuous channels thereabouts he would succeed in baffling the pursuit, and so reach the open lagoon to the north, whence he might head for Mestre and safety.

INEXPERIENCED waterman though he was, he nothing doubted his strength and endurance to push this boat all the way to Mestre if only he could get clear away. But while he might succeed in covering the journey at a leisurely pace, he certainly would never do it at the present rate of progress. A backward glance as he had been turning out of the Rio of San Barnaba had again shown him Messer Grande's barge, recognizable now by a great square lantern that had been lighted in the prow, and to his dismay it did not seem to him that the distance between them had been increased at all. He looked behind him now at every stroke for the reappearance of that square lantern, and when at last he saw it swing into the broad waters of the Grand Canal, he perceived that, in spite of the advantages upon which he was depending, his pursuers were already gaining on him.

Thus he was spurred, with a lessening hope, to greater effort. Very soon he began to find the pace too hot. He had none of the practiced gondolier's strength-saving science. He grew conscious in alarm of aching sinews and of laboured breathing. He glanced behind him again. From the position of the great square lantern he gathered that at least he was maintaining his distance, and by now, the darkness having deepened, he must be lost in the gloom to those on board her.

A festive galley travelling in the opposite direction was approaching him, aglow with lanterns and alive with music. Once that were past and the darkness again screened him, he would turn off into the first rio that presented itself, and hope thus to leave his pursuers questing and baffled.

With this intent he pushed vigorously on. On his right, a couple of boats' lengths away, he observed a two-oared gondola with a curtained felze which, strongly propelled, was sweeping parallel with him. Without slackening speed, he yet must wait until it had gone by before attempting to cross the canal.

Thus he came alongside of the brilliantly lighted galley, and for a moment was fully revealed in the blaze from her lanterns. Chatter and laughter seemed to perish aboard her when this happened. The impression upon him was as if the galley herself had paused to stare at him.

HE WAS in a suit of violet taffeta, the full skirts of his whaleboned coat with its rich gold lace standing out with fashionable stiffness. His lavender stockings, with fine gold embroidery at the sides, were modishly rolled above his knee, and the lacquered shoes in which he trod the little stern deck of the gondola were red-heeled and buckled with brilliant paste. His head was bare, revealing the careful clubbing of his luxuriant hair, and the hands grasping the oar were lost in lace.

The moment's silence on the galley was followed by an explosion of laughter, so oddly, incredibly incongruous did Messer Ottavio's modish figure appear in the rôle of a gondolier.

Nor was it only by the occupants of the galley that he had been observed. Momentarily revealed in that blaze of light, he had caught the attention of the occupant of the overtaking gondola on his right. One of the loose curtains of the felze was drawn aside, and—unobserved by him—a lady considered him in grave astonishment. She issued an order, the result of which was that her gondola instead of speeding ahead now kept parallel with that of the fugitive, and so thwarted him in his intention to cross and pass into one of the narrower channels.

REDUCED to despair by this, Messer Ottavio deliberately paused on his oar to let the other gondola go ahead, so that he might pass behind it.

To his dismay, however, the other gondola paused likewise. Perceiving this, he swung his boat to the right, and attempted to shoot ahead and so cross in front of the other. But the larger gondola moving at the same time, the result was that Messer Ottavio only just avoided colliding with it, and, as it was, he brought up against it with a glancing impact.

Before he could veer away again, the gondolier in the prow had laid hold of his gunwale. In a frenzy of despair he naturally imagined that here some busybody, perceiving the situation and volunteering assistance to the law, had come to hinder his flight. And then, suddenly, he heard himself addressed by a voice from the deep shadow of the felze:

"If you are pursued, sir, you would do well to step into my gondola and abandon your own. Your pursuers may then suppose you have fallen into the lagoon."

It was a woman's voice, richly musical, yet of a calm authority; and that voice as much as its message deeply moved the hunted man. If he was taken by surprise, at least the surprise did not check his action for more than a couple of heart-beats. The way of escape so suddenly and unexpectedly opened to him was not one over which he could afford to hesitate.

Messer Ottavio let his oar slide into the lagoon, and without awaiting any further invitation stepped from the stern of his own boat into the felze amidships of the other one. There he sank instantly upon one knee before his invisible rescuer, and in that moment felt the gondola under him leap forward away from his pursuers.

"LADY, as you discerned, I am a hunted man, although I swear to you that I am innocent of evil. Nevertheless, if I am taken it is certain that I shall lose my life. By this you may measure my gratitude for your very timely charity. If you will land me at the Rialto, I will not further trouble you."

He heard again that melodious voice, so calm and assured that it must belong to one whom fear had never touched.

"You are pursued, I think, by Messer Grande."

"By Messer Grande," he agreed.

"Yet you say that you have done no wrong; that you are innocent of evil."

"I swear it, madonna. By the Throne of Grace."

She did not answer him. From her silence he supposed that she accepted his sworn assurance. In that pause Messer Ottavio leaned out to look back. Faintly he could discern the great dancing lantern which proclaimed the whereabouts of his pursuers. He watched that lantern, what time he was recovering his breath; watched it until it came to a halt, beside his own abandoned craft. Then he saw other lights, the lights of torches held this way and that to tell him that they searched the waters. This moved him to a little sound of mirth.

"Do you laugh?" said his invisible protectress, on a note of surprise.

"I LAUGH to think that they must be supposing I have drowned myself." And then the mirth passed out of his voice. His tone became solemn. "But for your charity, madonna, it is what must have happened to me this night. I must have preferred the lagoon to the headsman."

He told her more than he supposed, declared by his words his patrician rank, since the axe as an instrument of death was reserved for patricians only.

"Is your plight so desperate?" that calm voice asked him, but it seemed now less calm. "What is your crime?"

"Faith, a very common one. I am my father's son."

"Ah! What, then, was his?"

"The same as mine. No more. He, too, was his father's son. His father suffered banishment from Venice for himself and all his line forever. To break that ban is death for any of us."

"Why, then, have you broken it?"

"So that I might see Venice. I swear, madonna, that I had no other purpose."

"What is your name?"

"Here I go by the name of Ottavio Malatesta," he answered cautiously, and there paused an instant, hesitating. Then reflecting that secrecy here was an ungenerous return to one who had dealt so generously with him, he added: "But my real name is Ottavio Sagrado."

"Sagrado!" She uttered it on a rising inflection. "You are, then, the grandson of a traitor."

"If that were true of Vincenzo Sagrado, it must still remain to be said for me that a man is not his own grandfather."

From her gentle answer he imagined a wistful smile upon that face which was no more than a pallid blur upon the all-encompassing gloom within the felze. "It is a law among men that we shall reap what our forbears have sown." On another incredulous note she added: "And you say that you came only so that you might see Venice?"

"Is it so very odd? I was moved, irresistibly moved, to come and see the city of my race. I desired to behold for myself her far-sung wonders. Above all, I desired to witness the wedding of the sea."

"It is a month since Ascension Thursday," she reminded him.

MESSER OTTAVIO considered. At first he was assailed by a natural hesitancy to disclose the truth. Then, be it because invention failed him, be it that he concluded that the truth, after all, was too fantastic to be accounted falsehood, he decided upon a full and frank avowal. After all, the occasion seemed to justify it.

"Why, no," he answered her. "I should have gone again on the day after Ascension. But it happened that on that day I saw here something which has kept me in bondage ever since, robbing me of the power to depart, however urgently prudence might command it. It is a madness, you will say, madonna. Judge it so if you will; but I must tell you of it, lest judging it perhaps otherwise you should account it your duty to surrender me to justice."

And so, sitting there in the darkness of the gondola's felze, at the feet of the woman he could not see, he related the story of his enchantment, painted a radiant portrait of the lady on the bucentaur, the lady at the palace window at the hour of dawn, the lady whose whereabouts for a month he had haunted to no other end but that he might nourish longings which he could never hope to allay.

And since the theme was undeniably poetical, poetical too became the phrases in which he found expression for it, and by the very glamour in which they wrapped the story compelled belief in it, fantastic though it was.

WHEN at last he had done, there fell a silence, broken only by the dip of the long oars and the gurgle of water against the gondola's prow.

He was aroused from it by the sound of a sigh from his companion. At last she spoke.

"And for this you have daily risked your head!" Her voice was so ineffably sweet and gentle that he judged he must deeply have moved her compassion. "By such a cobweb, by such a net, woven by moonbeams, you have suffered yourself to be held here in the very shadow of the axe! Almost it transcends belief. Are you real, or do you live in a romance?"

He sighed in his turn. "I have lived in a poem this month past, all the ugly verities of life forgotten until tonight."

"She is enviable who can inspire so spiritual, so ethereal a passion. Pity that Messer Grande should have come to awaken you so rudely from your dream."

"That, no," he answered firmly. "From that dream there is no awakening until the Great Awakening comes. I sought to put the very soul of my love, the very expression of this pure passion, into one of the songs I made in her honour. That song I sang to her, so greatly daring." And he recited the refrain, recited it in a voice that held a throb of awed devotion:

"I dare not pray, since prayer invites reply.

All that I ask of life is just that I

May breathe the air she breathes until I die."

There was no answer from his protectress. As the gondola swung inward toward the Rialto steps at which Messer Ottavio had begged he might be landed, the lady, raising the curtain of the felze, turned to look behind her to make sure that all was well. What she saw, however, drew from her an exclamation of dismay. The justiciary's barge, which had been almost entirely forgotten in these past moments, was not only following again, as was revealed by its swinging lantern, but was fairly close behind them.

"Messer Grande has resumed the chase," she announced. It was an exclamation of dismay, of dismay amounting to fear. "Someone must have seen you leave your gondola." She seemed to pant a moment. "If I land you here the lights of the bridge will betray the movement to them. Where shall you find shelter now?" And then, before he could answer her, her tone changed from distress to command.

"Straight on, Giannini," she called to the gondolier in the prow. "To the palace! With all speed!"

As the gondola darted forward Messer Ottavio protested. "Madonna! Madonna, I would not have you incur risks for me. Already I owe you too much. Land me here on the Rialto and let me shift for myself. To harbour me is a dangerous offence."

"Let be. Let be After all, need I know your name?" She was almost impatient. "Deep calls to deep; romance evokes romance. I give you your deserts, Messer Ottavio. Danger is joyously incurred in the service of so devout a lover."

IV

AHEAD of them on the right across the canal stood the Loredano Palace, its windows aglow, but a mere mist of light about its open portals. Ottavio's companion was giving him orders in a brisk, imperative voice.

"Leap out the moment we touch, and hasten indoors before the porter brings lights that might betray your landing. Thus I shall appear to land alone. And pray heaven Messer Grande's barge will not be through the bridge until after."

He perceived the shrewdness of her instructions and prepared to act upon them. But he was not prepared to accept the Loredano Palace for his haven.

He obeyed her, it is true, and so implicitly that he was no more than a shadow as he flashed across the wide threshold. But the obedience was mechanical. Action preceded thought. And not until he stood within that vast cavern of a hall, dimly lighted by a great ship's lantern swinging overhead, did he weigh the astonishment in his mind.

He was surely dreaming. If this was the Loredano Palace, then could the unseen lady who had rescued him, the lady whose voice had thrilled him so oddly, be Doge Loredano's daughter? Could it be Lucrezia Loredano at whose feet he had sat in the darkness of the felze, telling her the story of his love? It was too fantastic for belief. But if this woman who gave orders here was not Lucrezia Loredano, who could she be?

FROM the porter's lodge emerged a fellow in a livery of scarlet and gold, lantern in one hand and halberd in the other. But even as he began to challenge this intruder, the cry of the watermen at the steps drew his attention. He swung round to bawl an order, and from the lodge, bearing lanterns, came half a dozen lackeys.

Followed by them she swept regally into the hall, a tall figure cloaked in sapphire velvet that bulged over the hoops of a white satin gown beneath. The proud, pale face under its gold-laced three-cornered hat showed itself gently smiling to the panic-stricken gaze of Messer Ottavio. For beholding at last his saviour, he beheld, indeed, Lucrezia Loredano.

"Dismiss your fears," she bade him. "You are in the house of the doge, where Messer Grande's warrant does not run. Although my father is absent from Venice, no officer will dare to cross this threshold without my leave."

"Madonna, if I am afraid, it is not now of Messer Grande."

"Why? What else have you to fear?" Her voice held a gentle, caressing remonstrance, which served but further to startle him.

Observing her now, he found her subtly changed from the great lady he had worshiped from afar. The austerity in which he had ever seen her wrapped

was now discarded as if it had been a cloak. Before him, and so close to him that he must touch her if he but put forth his hand, stood a new Lucrezia Loredano, a woman as accessible as she was adorable.

He sighed as he surveyed her. "One fear you have dispelled," he said. "But the other still remains. Messer Grande's warrant may not run in the Palace of the Doge. But heavy consequences must be incurred by giving sanctuary to—"

In a flutter of panic she clutched his arm in a warning grip. "Will you be silent!" she muttered.

He obeyed, although it seemed to him to matter little that he should proclaim his identity, since it must very soon now be known to all the world.

"And in any case," she added, "Messer Grande may not know that you are here. There is a chance for you in that." And then: "What was your other fear?"

"The fear of your displeasure, of your anger even, with the tale I told you in the dark when neither of us guessed the identity of the other."

She smiled up into his grave face, and now there was something odd in her smile, something between shyness and mockery.

"As to that, you can speak only for yourself. You did not know me, it is true. But how can you say I did not know you?"

"You knew me!"

"Oh, but merely for one who in these past weeks had dogged my steps and haunted me with eyes of fearful worship, for one who had awakened me very early one morning with a song, a sweetly wistful and reverent aubade."

He was incredulous. "You knew me for that, and you did not resent my temerity! Do you say that you knew me for that before you offered me assistance?"

"I offered you assistance because of that. When the lights of the galley revealed you to me, I marvelled as they did on the galley to see a man of fashion playing the gondolier. But when I had recognized you I was not moved to laughter as they were. I sought the reason, and fancied I beheld it in the following barge of Messer Grande. I realized that you were urgently in need of help, and I went to offer it."

"Madonna!" he cried, as if he were uttering a prayer.

"Come now," she said. "Will that knowledge abate your pride, your obstinacy? Will you accept now the sanctuary I offer you?"

He bowed his head, almost ashamed. "I am in a miracle. I must let it work."

She set a hand upon his arm, and under the suasion of it he obediently turned, while she was issuing her orders, and with her followed the lackeys, who lighted them up the great marble staircase beside walls which Tiepolo had frescoed. At the head of this they were met by a chamberlain who conducted them into a lofty pillared library.

Here he might take his ease and rest awhile. Then they would consider by what means he was to be smuggled out of Venice. Whatever followed now, nothing could rob him of this hour; nothing could rob him of the rapture brought him by the knowledge that in discerning his worship of her she had not, herself, remained unresponsive.

But below-stairs that was happening which seemed effectively to promise that this ecstasy of his was to provide not merely the climax but the close of his amorous adventure.

The black barge of the law, emerging from the shadow of the Rialto Bridge, had swung without hesitation to the steps of the Loredano Palace, where madonna's gondola still lingered.

MESSER GRANDE, as we know, had been left at the Casa San Michele, but the lieutenant who had come in his stead was a brisk, competent fellow with a sharp sense of duty.

He stepped nimbly from the vessel as it glided along the marble steps, his two pursuivants following him, and he addressed himself to the first of Madonna Lucrezia's two red-hatted gondoliers who stood in the misty light that emerged from the palace.

"Now, my man, what has become of this fugitive rascal?"

"Fugitive rascal?" echoed the gondolier, faltering on the words and whipping up his wits to meet the occasion.

"Pay attention, my lad! Don't play the simpleton with me, or you may come to smart for it. What of the runagate you took aboard this side of the Basin of St. Mark? Is he in the palace with your mistress?"

Great was the gondolier's loyalty and devotion to his lady. But greater was his dread of Messer Grande, and therefore of this officer who represented him. All that the man reflected at the moment was that, after all, Madonna Lucrezia was the daughter of the Doge, and that, whoever might be threatened no harm could possibly touch her. This being so, it was not for him to incur a risk of imprisonment for the sake of the fugitive she had befriended. And so, sullenly, he answered:

"Where else should he be? What use to deny it?"

"So." The officer, whose name was Scalza, summoned his men to follow him, and briskly mounted the steps.

But at the head of them he was met by the liveried porter, a resolute Cerberus who knew his duty, and who handled now his halberd as if he would not hesitate to use it.

"Halt there! What may your business be, my master?"

"You know my business well enough. Let me pass."

The porter laughed at him. "I may know your business; but it would seem that you yourself don't know it; or else you don't know whose house this is, and that here you do not enter without the permission of His Serenity the Doge."

The officer displayed impatience. "His Serenity would never withhold that permission."

"I may not take your word for that."

"You are trifling with me." The officer began to lose his temper. "I warn you it is dangerous. In the absence of His Serenity, Madonna Lucrezia must permit me to enter."

"Must! Oho! Must, eh?"

"Don't stand there grinning, you impertinent. Convey my message to your lady. Tell her that I ask admission in the name of Messer Grande."

"For what purpose, sir?"

"To execute a warrant from the Inquisitors of State upon a runagate criminal who is sheltered here, a man who calls himself Ottavio Malatesta."

"I am to tell Madonna Lucrezia that you charge her with sheltering a criminal? You are oddly daring to send such a message to the daughter of His Serenity."

"For what I dare, the risk is mine. It cannot be that madonna is aware of the character of the man whom she is protecting. It is not for the daughter of the Doge to stand between the law and a criminal. Besides, it would be futile. We know that this man is in the palace. You may tell your lady that. I have no thought to violate the ducal privilege, but I shall report to Messer Grande, and meanwhile I guard the palace front and back, so that I must take this fellow when he comes forth again. Carry that message, fellow. About it."

The porter met peremptoriness with peremptoriness. "Stay you there," he bade the officer, and withdrew to dispatch the message.

Meanwhile Messer Scalza, fuming at the obstacle raised against him, took his measures. He hailed an empty gondola that was passing, and in it dispatched his two pursuivants to guard the rio behind the Doge's house. Himself with his bargemen he would watch the front. Further, appropriating

another gondola, he sent off one of his bargemen in it to the Casa San Michele to inform Messer Grande of what was happening.

The message transmitted by the porter was borne to Madonna Lucrezia by her chamberlain.

She heard it unperturbed. "This underling officer is insolent. It is not to be supposed that Messer Grande will venture to countenance his presumption."

But Messer Ottavio started up from the divan. "Madonna, it would be monstrous in me to continue—"

"A little calm, Messer Ottavio," she interrupted him, so calm herself that he could but contemplate her in ever deepening wonder. She addressed the chamberlain. "You will remind this impertinent fellow that the Doge's palace is outside the law, inviolate, and that it may not be entered by force, but only by the express permission of His Serenity. Say that in the absence of His Serenity this permission, obviously, cannot be obtained. That is all."

The chamberlain's grave countenance became graver. "If I might venture, madonna—"

"Venture nothing beyond the bearing of that message."

Her tone was sharp. The man bowed low and withdrew.

But Messer Ottavio restrained himself only until the fellow had departed.

"Madonna, this is most nobly generous. But it can avail me nothing, and there may be danger to you in this resistance. That I could not suffer. Besides, to what end? The game is played, and lost. Messer Grande holds the pass. Whether he invades the house or not, I am inevitably his prisoner. If not tonight, why, then, tomorrow or the next day. What does it matter? Shall I bring trouble upon you for no ultimate good to myself?"

"Give yourself peace," she begged him. "It is not all so clear as you suppose."

"ONLY your goodness makes you think so. The conclusion is foregone. So let me go now, madonna, before more harm is done, leaving behind me a thankfulness too deep for words. Ah, believe me, whatever may await me now will be a light matter. I am glorified by having known you, and spoken to you and deserved your dear protection. It is more, far, far more, than I have ever hoped to wrest from life. I may depart content."

He took her hand, bowed low over it, and pressed his lips upon it in farewell. But she would not yet hear of parting. Though pale, she smiled, and her tone was gently rallying.

"To protest so much, and to be in such haste to leave me!"

"To leave you? No!" His tone was almost violent. "In haste to deliver you."

"But to deliver me from what? From yourself? Sit down again, Messer Ottavio." Gently she thrust him back toward the divan from which he had risen. Yielding to her command he resumed his seat, despite the unuttered remonstrance in his mind. She sank down beside him and placed a hand upon his arm. "You take too much for granted sometimes, and sometimes too little, it seems. There are possibilities you have not reckoned. Be sure that until my father's return, none will dare to invade this house. So that until his return, in two or three days' time, you will be safe here—"

"But in the end, when he returns—" he was interrupting her, to be interrupted in his turn.

"Why will you be so impatient? When he returns I may persuade him in your favour. There is little that he will not do for me. At my prayer he might win from the Council for you a lifting of the ban. After all, he is the Doge, and his wish is no light thing."

HE STARED at her in white-faced wonder. His lips twitched oddly, so oddly that none could have said whether they threatened tears or laughter.

"You would do this for me? Oh, the miracle of having heard you say it!" Slowly the smile broke at last upon his face, but it was infinitely wistful. Slowly he shook his handsome head with the heavy clubbed hair that was of the colour of bronze.

"But not even the Doge's power would suffice to achieve so much. Do not let us deceive ourselves, madonna. All this might have been accomplished could I have enlisted your sweet interest before I violated the ban. But now it is impossible. The offence has been committed; the penalty incurred. Too well I know the laws of this Republic. I am beyond saving, madonna."

And then as holding her hands he looked into her face and beheld the dismay his words had summoned to it, his own countenance became transfigured and his eyes were aglow.

"Besides, for what should I be saved? Have I not this night touched the highest good, the loftiest bliss that life can give me? What more remains? What, indeed, could be tolerable hereafter?"

The tenderness deepened in her brown eyes, eyes which he had known so proud, but out of which all pride seemed now departed. Very tenderly they were pondering this romantic fellow who made of love an abstract piety.

"Do you ask what more? How do you know what more life may still hold for you? Already tonight, you say, more has been given to you than your hopes could ask. Perhaps it may be so again. If I were in your place I should cling desperately to life, so as to ascertain what it may yet offer."

"To ascertain?" He was staring at her, bewildered. "What can there be to ascertain?"

"That is, indeed, the question. The future alone can answer it. But if you turn your back upon the future, you will never know. Are you not curious?"

"Curious? Dear God!" He leaned a little nearer, staring ever and so intently that she grew confused.

She shook his grasp from her hands, drew back and rose. "Have patience, then, Messer Ottavio; patience and a little faith."

She moved to the bell rope and pulled it, and when presently Giovanni, the chamberlain, appeared in answer to that summons, she ordered food and wine to be served to them at once. Giovanni, vainly seeking to preserve his countenance mask-like so that his disapproval should not appear, passed out to obey her.

OVER the noble supper presently spread for them in the dining room they sat for fully an hour. Two lackeys waited upon them under Giovanni's quiet directions, so that their conversation was perforce of a restrained and general character. But this which might have troubled many another in his place troubled Messer Ottavio not at all. To sit with her in this intimacy, in her father's palace, at her own table; to consider her at close quarters in the soft golden candlelight; to pledge her silently, as he raised the gold cup to his lips, his soul in his eyes—here was a bliss such as three hours ago he could not in his wildest imaginings have supposed would ever be vouchsafed him. So wide of all earlier reasonable expectation did it seem, and so unreal did it appear, that again he was assailed by a suspicion that he was dreaming. A prayer shaped itself in his mind, so fervently that unconsciously he uttered it aloud:

"May it please God that I should never awaken."

She looked up quickly, smiling a question, and then there came a tap at the door to interrupt them.

They had been an hour and more at table, and in that time the bargeman dispatched by Scalza to Messer Grande had returned. As a result the lieutenant now sent a message to madonna. Giovanni received it at the door of the dining room. Impassive he came to bow before his mistress and deliver it.

"THE officer in charge below sends word, madonna, that Messer Grande has gone before the Inquisitors of State for a warrant to enter the palace in pursuit of the fugitive harboured here." And despite himself his eyes strayed to Messer Ottavio, and they were not friendly.

Madonna Lucrezia caught her breath, and then, breathless, scornful, laughed.

"He wastes his pains, this Messer Grande. For his office he should be better learned in the laws of Venice. The Inquisitors of State have no such power as he supposes. They will never dare to grant this warrant."

The chamberlain, grave and pale, raised a hand that shook a little.

"Madonna, I should do less than my duty if I did not warn you that what he says is true. The absence of the Doge cannot arrest the functions of the State. In a case of urgency his authority passes, be it to the Council of Ten, be it to the Inquisitors of State. So runs the law to everyone's knowledge, madonna. Can you suppose that Messer Grande would trouble, otherwise, to invoke it?"

Staring at him, suddenly convinced, she changed colour. "What can we do, Giovanni? What can we do?"

Messer Ottavio came forward. "The comedy is played. Let us ring down the curtain. I will go, madonna."

She was almost impatient with him. "How can you go when Messer Grande's men are before the house?"

"How can I remain when they may presently be within it? I must relieve you of further concern on my behalf."

HER lips parted to answer him. Then she checked, and dismissed Giovanni by a wave of the hand. When the two were at last alone, she turned to him.

"You will relieve me of further concern on your behalf? And you will do this by delivering yourself up. Will that end my concern for you? Your assumption does me little honour."

"Oh, never that, madonna. You are Charity incarnate. But I must not abuse your goodness."

"Then do not talk of surrendering. If surrender you must, it will be time enough to do so when the Council or the Inquisitors make this order. They have not made it yet, and they may not make it."

But Messer Ottavio shook his head.

"Madonna, it is idle to struggle. Let us bravely face the fact and bow to it."

"That I never shall."

"Patience, sweet lady! Listen. To resist this inevitable thing is merely to add to the present evil the further unnecessary evil of embarrassments for you. To what I must undergo, will you have me add the tormenting thought that through me you must suffer vexations, perhaps indignities? That would be

more than I could bear. As for this...why, dear madonna, let me say again that I have so much now for which to be thankful that I can meet my fate not only resigned but uplifted. That song of mine was so sincere—that prayer of mine—I asked but to breathe the air you breathe until I die. Behold how much more I have been accorded. I have spoken to you, which I had never hoped to do. I have moved your concern, aroused your interest in me. I may look upon you thus at close quarters, actually touch you. I have been the recipient of your sweetness. It is so much, so much, that it makes the brief little life I have lived a very full one."

HE SEEMED transfigured as he spoke. Silent before such an incredible, fantastic manifestation of devotion, she let him run on.

"Remember, madonna, hereafter the happiness you have brought one man. Forget all else. Compared with it there is nothing worth remembering—unless it be to say a prayer for me, afterward. Out there in eternity some echo of that prayer may reach me and bring to my poor soul a glow of pride and joy to be so remembered by you. If you will—"

But she would hear no more. She pressed her hand upon that poetical mouth, to silence its devastating, torturing eloquence.

"I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! Quiet, Ottavio! Do not talk so. You tear the soul from me. This must not be. It shall not be."

Gently he took the muffling hand from his mouth. He caught her other hand, and holding both in one clasp he bent to kiss them, finding no resistance.

"Are you real?" she asked him. "Are you real?"

"I am a lover, madonna; and sometimes a lover is above reality."

"How brave you are! And yet how timid! Had you faced love one-half so bravely as you face death, you might have avoided this and now be safely away."

He looked up, smiling. "I would not have avoided this for a hundred lives."

"Not this; not this moment, Ottavio; but all that may follow is what you might have escaped. And in life you might have found all that you could desire of it—that is, if you had faced love boldly.

"Why do you think I opened my shutter to you that morning when you sang beneath my window? Was it to display my indifference to you, or was I moved, did you suppose, by mere idle curiosity? Oh, Ottavio, I have told you that I had remarked you, your haunting presence and your hungry, worshiping eyes. Since it was this that urged me tonight to come to your rescue when I saw that you were being hunted, can you suppose that I had remained indifferent? And now, since I have heard your story, since I know

what danger you ran so that you might possess no more of me than your eyes could hold, do you conceive me indifferent still? You are facing death, Ottavio, and in a sense you are facing it for love; for love of me. And you face it calmly. You have the courage to die for a love which you had not the courage to utter."

"TO UTTER?" he echoed, and faltered even now that she had given him assurance. "To utter? How could I utter it, how approach you save under a false name, I, who am proscribed? Do you reproach me for that?"

"I do," she answered him, an anguish in her glance.

"It is unjust," he told her gently. "After all, if I have been foolish, it has been a sweet folly, and it is for me to pay."

"And what of me? Do I not pay with you if they take you? Not for lingering do I reproach you, but for your reticence. Don't you understand? It is because of this that you are caught, and being caught you are now to cheat us both."

She sank against him as she spoke, this woman so austere and inaccessible, and he, rid now of every hesitation, took her in his arms, and held her half swooning on his breast. Holding her thus he murmured endearments, tendernesses and words idly meant to hearten her in a voice that broke at last from the extremity of his emotion.

Time sped. Then a term was set to the matter by the arrival of Messer Grande himself.

He bowed low, hat in hand.

"Madonna, I am grieved to intrude upon you. But the matter is serious. I am authorized by this warrant from the Council." And he proffered a paper, which she disdained to take.

"What do you want here?" she demanded, breathing hard.

"THE man who calls himself Ottavio Malatesta, whom your compassion has foolishly betrayed you into sheltering, no doubt in ignorance of the gravity of the offence."

"It was in no such ignorance that I sheltered him," she answered proudly.

But before she could say more Messer Ottavio forestalled her.

"It would be inhuman and foolish in the Council to take any other view of Madonna Lucrezia's charity to an unknown." His eyes implored her not to contradict him. "I am the man you seek. Let us go, sir."

Messer Grande gravely inclined his head to him, bowed again to Madonna Lucrezia, and half turned, silently waving his prisoner to precede him from the room.

Messer Ottavio stayed but to take her hand, and as he bowed over it to utter a farewell that was in tune with the statement he had already made:

"Madonna, I have no words in which to utter all that is in my heart; my deep, deep gratitude to you for the sanctuary you sought to give me, and for all else. Believe and remember only that it sets a shining effulgence upon my last hours." He bore her slim hand to his lips, while a dry sob from her was his only answer.

V

CALMLY, with Messer Grande guarding him, he stood in the presence of the inquisitors, the inquisitor in red between the two inquisitors in black. On the table before them were piled some books and papers, which at a glance Messer Ottavio recognized for his own.

Near a window on his right, under guard of a sergeant-at-arms, stood the slight figure of Zanetto.

The red inquisitor, who presided, opened the proceedings by a question to Zanetto: "Do you identify the prisoner?"

"I do, excellency," said Zanetto meekly.

The inquisitor nodded. "Remove him. I will make known our decision presently."

Zanetto was led out, and Ottavio braced himself for whatever might now await him. Regarding himself as a man foredoomed, he supposed that the proceedings would be brief.

Erect of head and proud of eye he stood before the dread three. The lips of the red inquisitor seemed actually to smile.

"Messer Ottavio Malatesta," he said, "we are distressed that the spite and ignorance of a vindictive servant, whom it shall be our concern to punish, should render us guilty of having unjustly subjected you to a night in prison."

The inquisitor paused there, as if waiting for some word from the prisoner.

"With what am I charged, excellency?" asked Messer Ottavio.

GENTLY the inquisitor shook his head. "We have no charge to prefer," he answered. "The accusation laid against you by your servant was the grave one of practicing magic. We were promised proof of the accusation in these books and papers of yours. It is unfortunate only for your accuser that instead of damning you, these books acquit you." He took from the top of the pile the heavy red-bound tome of Copernicus. "This seven-pointed star on the cover was mistaken by him for the seal of Solomon; the zodiacal belt in which it is set was assumed by him to be a magic circle, for which, indeed, it has often served. The drawings it contains, and those in this copy of Euclid, appeared, not unnaturally to an ignorant and unlettered mind, to be cabalistic signs. And this image of Satan above the word 'Inferno' on your Dante made him assume it a work of infernal purport."

Ottavio was swept by indignation. He thought of the suffering and anxieties caused Madonna Lucrezia.

"Do you arrest men in Venice upon such foolish denunciations?"

One of the other inquisitors answered him gruffly in reproof: "The denunciation may be foolish, but it had to be investigated. It is not one that can ever be treated lightly. Moreover, your servant testified upon oath that you spent long hours of the night in study and in writing. This, while natural enough in the owner of such sober learned works, would be natural also in the case of one engaged in the dark practices for which he denounced you. He testified that once in the dead of night he heard you uttering incantations. He accused you further of having in his presence blasphemed the Mass, and he alleged that this it was which first aroused against you his suspicions."

"He did not suspect, of course," sneered Ottavio, "that it might be because I threw him out of my room for meddling with my books."

"It has occurred to us, sir," said the red inquisitor to pacify him. "Therefore, Messer Ottavio Malatesta, you are at liberty to depart, and you may take these books and papers with you. I trust, sir, that you will be generous and account yourself satisfied with the expression of our unlimited regrets. As for your servant, Zanetto, you are within your rights in prosecuting him as the spiteful cause of your unjust detention. If you do so, we must punish him."

BUT in that hour of ineffable thankfulness, with not only liberty restored to him but also the life with the infinite potentialities it now held which he had accounted forfeit, Messer Ottavio desired no man to suffer. Least of all could he have desired to make Zanetto suffer; for however evil toward him may have been the rogue's intentions, it remained that no man had ever rendered him, or was likely ever to render him, so inestimable a service. If Zanetto had not uttered against him this ridiculous denunciation, Ottavio would never have found his way into the presence of Lucrezia Loredano, and, consequently, would never have come into the kingdom of his love. When he could trust himself to speak in level accents, he made answer casually: "I shall need the rascal to carry home that parcel for me."

"Sir, the answer does you honour. You are very generous. The man, even if moved by spite, still believed himself to be discharging his duty to the State."

FOLLOWED by a very hangdog servant carrying that bundle of books and papers, Ottavio crossed the piazzetta and hailed a gondola.

"To the Loredano Palace," he commanded the gondolier.

And there very soon Madonna Lucrezia came to him, a pale Madonna Lucrezia, with deep shadows under feverishly lustrous eyes, but something of her old austerity clothing her once more.

"What is this?" she asked sternly. "How do you come to be here?"

"I am free, Lucrezia. Free!"

He would have taken her in his arms. But the frown between her eyes and that resumed austerity gave him sudden pause.

"So I perceive," she said, a queer restraint in her tone which chilled him. "But not how it happens. Did you play comedy with me last night? Are you other than you declared yourself?"

The question brought him understanding and relief. He poured out the amazing truth that he, who for the violation of the ban against his house owed his head to the Republic, had been arrested upon a vindictive servant's untenable silly accusation of practicing magic.

This by plunging her into a renewal of last night's fears melted on the instant her aloofness. "But, then you are still in danger of discovery here?"

"In danger? Pooh!" He snapped his fingers, and boldly took her in his arms.

But she broke out of their clasp, and stood away from him. "You will leave Venice tonight!" she commanded sternly.

He was aghast. "Leave Venice? Leave Venice now? Impossible!"

"You will leave today—at once—so soon as you can collect your belongings. You fool, Ottavio, will you wait until you lose your head in earnest?"

"I would sooner risk the loss of it than go into banishment again, now that Venice holds me by more than her own beauty."

"And I, then? Could I know peace while you are here in danger?"

"Shall you know it if I go? If you may never see me again?"

Before that dismay of face and tone the last vestige of her sternness melted. She came to him of her own will.

"After last night, my dear, there is no danger of that. Listen. My father returns either today or tomorrow. I will spare no effort to persuade him to move the Council of Ten to raise the ban against your house. But you must not be in Venice when this is done. Your violation of the ban, if it were discovered, could only lead to its perpetuation. Don't you see?"

"I see that. Yes. But—"

"Therefore, you must go. At once. And not return until we have succeeded."

"But if you should not succeed?"

"In that case it will rest with you to be insistent with me, my lord. If you are insistent enough I may come to you in Pisa. If I cannot determine your exile, I can share it—that is, if you are insistent."

"I shall be so insistent that if you do not come to me obediently at once, I shall return to fetch you, and so inevitably lose my head where I have lost my heart."

"So be it," she answered him. "Now haste away. God guard you, Ottavio."

Obediently he departed then, re-entered his gondola, and went to the Casa San Michele. Curtly he dispatched Zanetto to pack his belongings. "Bestir yourself, rogue. I must be away by noon."

Zanetto fled to obey, fearing terrible things at parting.

What actually happened was in a sense more terrible even than he feared.

"We have accounts to settle, Zanetto. There are wages due you," said Ottavio.

Zanetto deemed it probable that he would be flung into the canal.

"M-my lord—" he stammered.

Ottavio tossed a purse to him. "Pay yourself with this."

Zanetto caught it, and was almost scared by its weight: through the loose meshes of it he saw its contents were gold.

"Excellency!" was all he could say.

Messer Ottavio was smiling quizzically.

"He who deals in magic can afford to return good for evil, particularly since the evil you sought to do me was turned to good. You should have reflected, Zanetto, that it is not easy to injure a magician."

With that Messer Ottavio stepped into the gondola and started upon the journey to Mestre.

THE END