
The
FLAME
Gabriele D'Annunzio

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The Love and Art in Venice

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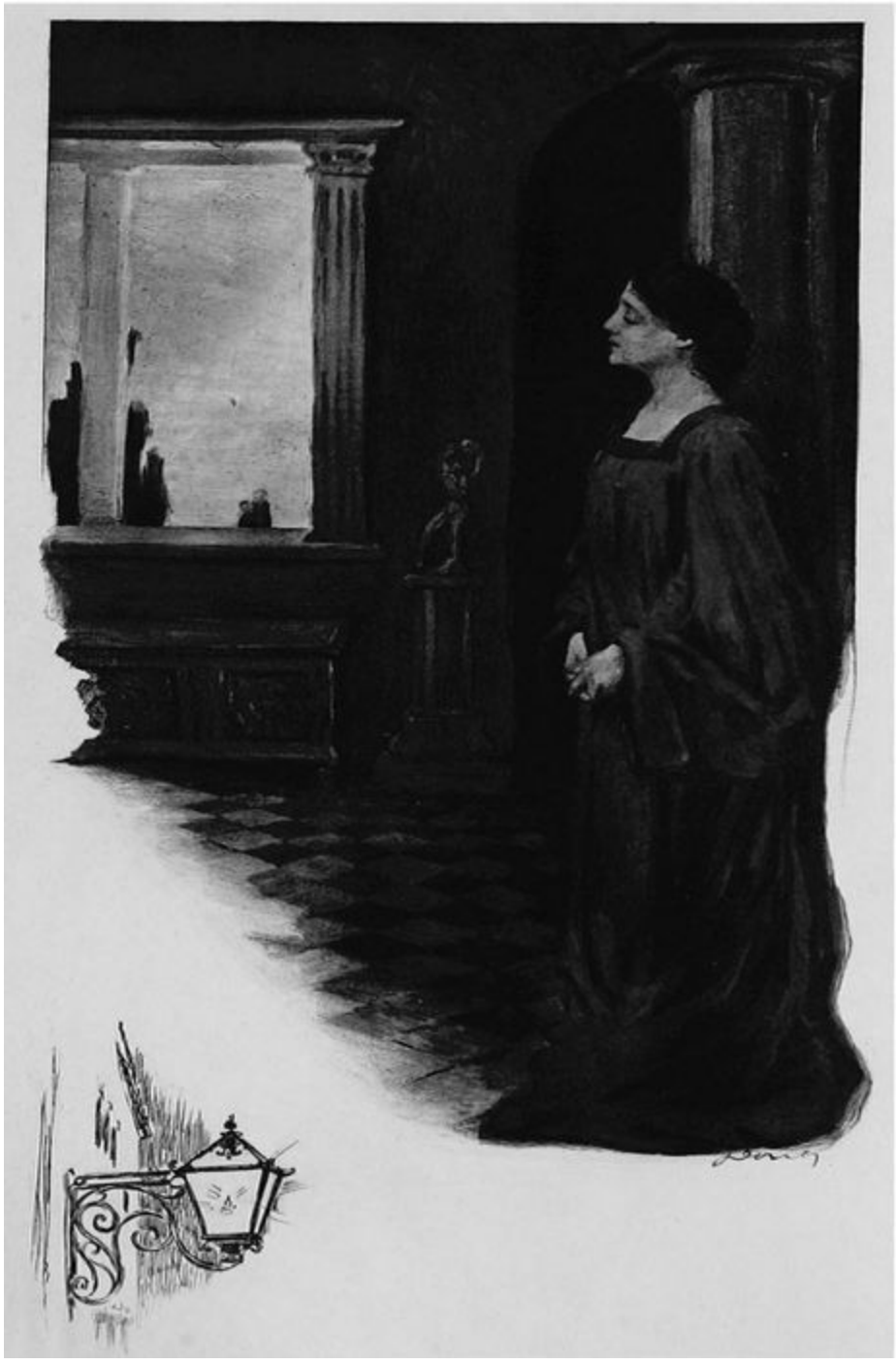

.... *fa come natura face in foco*.

—*DANTE*

INTRODUCTION

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Gabriele D'Annunzio, poet, novelist, and dramatist, was born in 1864, on the yacht *Irene* near Pescara in the Abruzzi, his mother being the Duchess Maria Galesse of Rome. His education was begun in the College of Prato, in Tuscany, and finished in the University of Rome. His mind early showed signs of extraordinary power and brilliant versatility; he studied art and produced very creditable work while a mere lad, and at the age of sixteen he published his first poem, *Primo Vere*, which attracted flattering attention and caused him to be hailed as an infant prodigy. In 1880 he went to Rome and became a contributor to the *Cronaca Bizantina*, a magazine of art and literature. He remained in Rome three years, producing in that time *Terra vergine* ("Virgin Soil"), *Canto novo* ("New Song"), and *Intermezzo di rime* ("Intervals of Rhyme"), all of which were received with admiration and amazement, and with not a little criticism for their unconventional boldness of expression.

D'Annunzio left Rome in 1884 and returned to his native hills, where he wrote *Il libro delle vergine* ("The Book of the Virgins") in 1884; *San Pantaleone* (1886), and *Isottèo Guttadauro*. Then, abandoning his revolutionary and realistic though splendid and intoxicating poetry for prose, the young genius next surprised his public with a novel, *Giovanni Episcopo*, followed by *Il Piacere* ("The Child of Pleasure"), in 1889. The former is a strong yet repelling story of crude brutalism, told by a victim of relentless fate; the latter is a kind of poem in prose, in which there is something above mere facility of literary touch; he shows the power of the

master poet or painter to see the world at a glance, and with a dextrous hand to draw for eyes less keen that world in all its changeful aspects.

His next important novel, *Il trionfo della morte* ("The Triumph of Death") was produced in 1896. This brought upon him a storm of mingled applause and criticism—admiration for its marvelous beauty of literary expression, condemnation of the realistic study of a degenerate whose sins lead him to suicide. But, with a proud defiance of criticism, with eyes fixed only on his art, he dared after this achievement to write the self-revelatory novel that is known as his masterpiece—*Il fuoco* ("The Flame"). In this great novel, which may fairly be called unique, we recognize the personification of a renascence of Latin genius. Under the thinnest veil of disguise, the author presents his own figure and that of one of the world's greatest tragic actresses, revealing the most intimate details of their well known friendship. On this picture of the most romantic of love-affairs, in Venice, the most romantic of cities, he has lavished his finest strokes of genius, writing of feminine nature with rare truth and skill, and an exquisite intuition as to the workings of a woman's mind and the throbbings of her heart.

Besides his poems and novels, D'Annunzio has written several plays, the best known being *La Gioconda* ("Joy"), *La Gloria* ("Glory"), *La morta città* ("The City of the Dead"), and *Francesca da Rimini*. He is unquestionably the greatest Italian writer of to-day, and few works of Italian fiction appear that do not show something of his influence. A European critic of keen discernment says: "Read his works, all ye men and women for whom life has no secrets and truth has no terror."

D. K. R.

BOOK I
THE EPIPHANY OF THE FLAME

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TO TIME AND TO HOPE

Without hope, it is impossible to find
the unhoped-for.

—HERACLITUS OF EPHESUS.

He who sings to the god a song of
hope shall see his wish accomplished.

—ÆSCHYLUS OF ELEUSIS.

Time is the father of miracles.

—HARIRI DI BASRA.

CHAPTER I
THE BELLS OF SAN MARCO

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"Stelio, does not your heart quail a little, for the first time?" inquired La Foscarina, with a fleeting smile, as she touched the hand of the taciturn friend seated beside her. "I see that you are pale and thoughtful. Yet this is a beautiful evening for the triumph of a great poet."

With an all-comprehensive glance, she looked around at all the beauty of this last twilight of September. In the dark wells of her eyes were reflected the circles of light made by the oar as it flashed in the water, which was illuminated by the glittering angels that shone from afar on the campaniles of San Marco and San Giorgio Maggiore.

"As always," she went on, in her sweetest tones, "as always, everything is in your favor. On such an evening as this, what mortal could shut out from his mind the dreams that you may choose to evoke by the magic of your words? Do you not feel already that the multitude is well disposed to receive your revelation?"

Thus, delicately, she flattered her friend; thus she pleased herself by exalting him with continual praise.

"It is impossible to imagine a more magnificent and unique festival than this, to persuade so disdainful a poet as you to come forth from his ivory tower. For you was reserved this rare joy; to communicate for the first time with the people in a sovereign place like the Hall of the Greater Council, from the platform where once the Doge harangued the assembled patricians, with the *Paradiso* of Tintoretto for a background, and overhead the *Gloria* of Veronese."

Stelio Effrena looked long and searchingly into her eyes.

"Do you wish to intoxicate me?" he said, with a sudden laugh. "Your words remind me of the soothing cup offered to a man on his way to the scaffold. Ah, well, my friend, it is true: I own that my heart quails a little."

The sound of applause rose from the Traghetto di San Gregorio, echoed through the Grand Canal, reverberating among the porphyry and serpentine discs ornamenting the ancient mansion of the Dario, which now leaned over slightly, like a decrepit courtesan loaded with her jewels.

The royal barge passed.

"There is the one person among your audience whom etiquette demands that you shall crown with some of your flowers of oratory," pursued the charming flatterer, alluding to the Queen. "I believe that, in one of your earlier books, you own to a taste and respect for ceremonials. One of your most extraordinary flights of fancy is that description of a day of Charles the Second, King of Spain."

When the royal barge passed the gondola, the man and the woman saluted it. The Queen, recognizing the poet, the author of *Persephone*, and the distinguished tragic actress, turned to gaze at them with a movement of instinctive curiosity. She was blonde and rosy, and her face was lighted by her ever-ready smile, as she looked out from the cloud of creamy Buranesi laces clinging around her shoulders. Beside her sat Andriana Duodo, the patroness of Burano, where, on that industrious little island, she cultivated flax, and raised the most marvelous old-fashioned flowers.

"Does it not seem to you that the smiles of those two women are so similar as to be twin-like?" said La Foscarina, gazing at the silvery ripples in the wake of the barge, wherein the double light seemed to prolong its self.

"The Countess has a magnificent and ingenuous soul—one of those rare Venetian spirits that preserve their warmth, as their ancient paintings retain their vivid color," said Stelio, earnestly, as if in gratitude. "I have an absolute devotion for her sensitive hands. They fairly quiver with pleasure when they touch rare lace or rich velvet, lingering over the texture with a grace that seems almost shy of betraying such voluptuous joy in mere touch. One day, when I had accompanied her to the gallery of the Academia, she stopped before the *Massacre des Innocents* by the first Bonifazio. You recollect, of course, the green robe of the prostrate woman that one of Herod's soldiers is about to kill—a thing impossible to forget! She paused long before it, seeming fairly to radiate from her own person the perfect joy that filled her senses; then she said to me, 'Let us leave this place now, Effrena! Take me away, but I must leave my eyes on that robe—I cannot look at anything more!' Ah, do not smile at her, dear friend! She was perfectly simple and sincere in saying that: she really did leave her spiritual vision behind her on that bit of canvas which Art, with a touch of color, has made the center of an infinitely pleasurable mystery. Besides, it was really a blind woman that I accompanied there, but I was suddenly seized with reverence for the privileged soul for whom the magic of color had power to abolish for the moment all memory of commonplace life, and to cut off all other worldly communication. What should you call such a state of mind? A filling of life's goblet to the brim, it seems to me. It is exactly what I should like to do to-night, if I were not discouraged."

A new clamor, louder and more prolonged, rose between the two guardian columns of granite, as the royal barge approached the bank of the Piazzetta, now black with the

waiting throng. During the slight pause that followed, the movement of the crowd shifted, like the changing of eddies in a current, and all the galleries of the Palace of the Doges were filled with a confused buzzing, like the mysterious murmur within a sea-shell. Suddenly the buzz rose to a shout, rending the clear air and finally dying away in the gathering twilight. The multitude seemed to realize the divinity of that poetic hour, amid those incomparable surroundings; and perhaps, in its acclaim to youthful royalty and beauty, it expressed a vague longing to forget its prosaic existence, and to revel in the gift of eternal poetry with which its storied walls and waters were endowed.

"Do you know, Perdita," Stelio suddenly exclaimed, "of any other place in the world that possesses, like Venice, at certain times, the power to stimulate all the forces of human life by the exaltation of all desires to a feverish intensity? Do you know of any more irresistible temptress?"

She whom he called Perdita did not reply; she bent her head as if from desire to concentrate her thoughts; but through all her being she felt the indefinable thrill always felt at the sound of the voice of her friend when it revealed the vehemence and passionate soul toward which this woman was drawn by a mingling of love and terror that had no limit.

"Peace! Oblivion! Do you find them down there, at the end of that deserted canal, when you go home exhausted and fevered after inhaling the commingled breath of the crowd that you are able to rouse to wild enthusiasm by a single gesture? As for myself, when I float on these dead waters, I feel my vital powers increase with bewildering rapidity; at certain times my brain seems on fire, as if I were in delirium."

"The flame and the power are within yourself, Stelio," said La Foscarina almost humbly, without raising her eyes.

He was silent, absorbed. Poetic imagery and impetuous music took form within his brain, as if by virtue of some magic fecundation; and his spirit reveled in the unexpected delight of that flood of inspiration.

It was still that hour which, in one of his books, he had called "Titian's hour," because all things glowed with a rich golden light, like the nude figures of that great painter, appearing almost to illumine the sky rather than to receive light from it.

"Perdita," said the poet, who, at the sight of so many things multiplying their beauties around him, was conscious of a kind of intellectual ecstasy, "does it not seem to you that we are following the funeral train of the dead Summer? There she lies in her funereal barge, robed in golden draperies, like a Doge's wife, like a Loredana, a Morosina, or a Soranza of the golden age; and her cortège conducts her toward the Isle of Murano, where some lord of the flames will place her in a coffin of opaline crystal, so that, submerged in the waters of the lagoon, she can, at least, through her transparent eyelids, behold the supple movement of the seaweed, and thus fancy herself enwrapped in the undulating tresses of her own hair, while waiting for the sun of resurrection to dawn."

A spontaneous smile spread over La Foscarina's face, born in her eyes, which glowed as if they really had beheld the vision of the beautiful dead.

"Do you know, Perdita," resumed Stelio, after a moment's pause, during which both gazed at a file of small boats filled with fruit, floating upon the water like great baskets, "do you know anything about a particularly pretty detail in the chronicles of the Doges? The Doge's wife, to meet the

expenses of her robes of ceremony, enjoyed a certain percentage of the tax on fruit. Does not this seem delightfully appropriate? The fruits of these isles clothed her in gold and crowned her with pearls! Pomona paying tribute to Arachne! an allegory that Paolo Veronese might well have painted on the dome of the Vestiario. When I conjure up the figure of the noble lady, tall and erect in her high, jeweled buskins, it pleases me to think that something fresh and rustic is connected with the rich folds of her heavy brocade: the tribute of the fruits. What a savor this seems to add to her magnificence! Only fancy, my friend, that these figs and grapes of the new-come Autumn are the price of the golden robe that covers the dead Summer."

"What delightful fancies, Stelio!" said La Foscarina, whose face became young again when she smiled, as a child to whom one shows a picture-book. "Who was it that once called you the Image-maker?"

"Ah—images!" said the poet, his fancy warming. "In Venice, just as one feels everything to a musical rhythm, so he thinks of everything in poetic imagery. They come to us from everywhere, innumerable, diverse, more real and living to our minds than the persons we elbow in these narrow streets. In studying them, we can lose ourselves in the depths of their haunting eyes, and divine, by the curve of their lips, what they would say to us. Some art tyrannical as imperious mistresses, and hold us long beneath the yoke of their power. Others are enfolded in a veil, like timid virgins, or are tightly swaddled, like infants; and only he that knows how to rend their veils can lead them to the perfect life. This morning, when I awakened, my soul was filled with images; it was like a beautiful tree with its branches laden with chrysalides."

He paused, with a laugh.

"If they come forth from their prison to-night," he added, "I am saved; if they do not, I am lost!"

"Lost?" said La Foscarina, gazing earnestly at him, with eyes so full of confidence that his heart went out to her in gratitude. "No, Stelio, you will not lose yourself. You are always sure of yourself; you bear your own destiny in your hands. I think your mother never could have felt any apprehension on your account, even in the most serious circumstances. Is not that true? Pride is the only thing that makes your heart falter."

"Ah, sweet friend, how I love you—how I thank you for saying that!" said the poet frankly, taking her hand. "You continually foster my pride and encourage me to believe that I have already acquired those virtues to which I never cease to aspire. Sometimes you seem to have the power of conferring I know not what divine quality on the things that are born in my soul, and of making them appear adorable in my own eyes. Sometimes, too, you fill me with the awe-struck wonder of the sculptor who, having in the evening borne to the sacred temple the marble gods still warm from his hands—I might say still clinging to the fingers that moulded them—the next day beholds them standing on their pedestals, surrounded by clouds of incense, and seeming to exhale divinity from every pore of the insensate matter from which he fashioned them with his perishable hands. And so, each time that Fortune grants me the favor of being near you, I realize that you are necessary to my life, although, during our long separations, I can live without you, and you without me, despite the fact that both of us well know what splendors would be born of the perfect union of our lives. Thus, knowing the full value of that which you give me, and, still more, of that which you could give me, I think of you as lost to me; and, by that name which it

pleases my fancy to call you, I try to express at the same time this consciousness and this regret."

He interrupted himself, because he felt a quiver of the hand he clasped in his own.

"When I call you 'Perdita,'" he resumed softly, after a pause, "I fancy that you can see my desire approaching you, with a deadly blade deep in its palpitating side. Even should it reach you, the chill of death has already touched its audacious hand."

The woman experienced an oft-felt suffering as she listened to the poetic words that flowed from her friend's lips with a spontaneity that proved them sincere. Again she felt an agitation and a terror that she knew not how to define. She felt that she was slipping out of her own life, and was transported into a kind of fictitious life, intense and hallucinating, where even to breathe was difficult. Drawn into that atmosphere, as fiery as the glow surrounding a lighted forge, she felt that she should be capable of passing through any transfigurations that it might please the master of her spirit to work in her to satisfy his continual craving for poetry and beauty. She comprehended that, in his idealistic mind, her own image resembled that of the dead Summer, wrapped in its opalescent cerements. She felt a childish desire to gaze into the poet's eyes as in a mirror, to contemplate the likeness of her real self.

That which rendered her melancholy most painful, was the recognition of a vague resemblance between this agitation and the anxiety that always possessed her when she sank her own personality in that of some sublime creation of dramatic art. Was not this man drawing her, in fact, into a similar region of higher but artificial life; and, that she might figure there without remembrance of her everyday self, did he not seek to cover her with a splendid

disguise? But, while she was unable to maintain so great a degree of intensity except by a painful effort, she knew that he dwelt within that state of exaltation with perfect ease, as if in his natural atmosphere, ceaselessly enjoying a marvelous world of fancy, which he could renew or change at his own pleasure.

He had come to realize in himself the intimate union of art and of life, thus finding, in the depths of his own soul, a source of perpetual harmony. He had become able to maintain within himself, without lapse, the mysterious psychological condition that engenders works of beauty, and thus, at a single stroke, to crystallize into ideal types the fleeting figures of his varied existence. It was to celebrate this conquest over his own mental powers that he put the following words into the mouth of one of his heroes: "I witnessed within myself the continual genesis of a higher life, wherein all appearances metamorphosed themselves as if reflected in a magic mirror." Endowed with an extraordinary linguistic facility, he could instantly translate into words the most complicated workings of his mind, with a precision so exact and vivid that sometimes, as soon as expressed, they seemed not to be his own, having been rendered objective by the isolating power of style. His clear and penetrating voice, which, so to speak, seemed to define each word as distinctly as if it were a note of music, enhanced still more this peculiar quality of his speech, so that those who heard him speak for the first time experienced an ambiguous feeling—a mingling of admiration and aversion, because he revealed his own personality in a manner so strongly marked that it seemed to denote an intention to demonstrate the existence of a profound and impassable difference between himself and his listeners. But as his sensibility equaled his intelligence, it

was easy for those that knew him well and liked him to absorb, through his crystalline speech, the glow of his vehement and passionate soul. These knew how illimitable was his power to feel and to dream, and from what fiery source sprang the beautiful images into which he converted the substance of his inner life.

She whom he called Perdita knew it well; and, as a pious soul awaits from God some supernatural help that shall work out its salvation, so she seemed to be waiting for him to put her into the state of grace necessary to enable her to elevate and maintain herself in those fiery regions toward which a mad desire to be consumed impelled her, despairing as she was at the thought of her vanished youth, and the fear of finding herself left alone at last in a desert of ashes.

"It is you now, Stelio," she said, with the slight smile she used to hide her sadness, "who wish to intoxicate me." She gently drew her hand from his. Then, to break the spell, she pointed to a loaded barge that was slowly approaching them, and said:

"Look! Look at your pomegranates!"

But her voice shook a little.

Then, in the dreamy twilight, on the water as silvery-green as the leaves of the willow, they watched the passing boat overflowing with that emblematic fruit which suggests things rich and hidden: caskets of red leather, surmounted by the crown of a royal donor; some closed, others half-open, revealing their close-packed gems.

In a low tone, the tragic actress repeated the words addressed by Hades to Persephone in the sacred drama, at the moment when the daughter of Demeter tastes the fatal pomegranate:

Quando tu coglierai il colchico in fiore su'l molle
Prato terrestre, presso la madre dal cerulo peplo.

"Ah, Perdita! how well you know how to throw a shadow into your voice!" interrupted the poet, feeling the harmony of the twilight that seemed to throw a mystic vagueness over the syllables of his lines. "How well you know how to become nocturnal, even before the evening is upon us! Do you recall the scene where Persephone is on the point of throwing herself into Erebus, to the wailing of the chorus of the Oceanides? Her face is like yours when a shadow passes over it. Her crowned head leans backward, as she stands rigidly erect in her saffron-colored peplum; and the very spirit of the night seems flowing into her bloodless flesh, deepening under her chin, in the hollows of her eyes and around her nostrils, giving her face the look of a tragic mask. It is your mask, Perdita! While I was composing my *Mystery*, the remembrance of you aided me in evoking her divine person. That little saffron-velvet ribbon you so often wear around your neck gave me the note for Persephone's peplum. And one evening at your house, when I was about to take leave of you at the threshold of a room where the lamps were not yet lighted—an agitated evening of last autumn, you remember?—you succeeded, with a single movement, in bringing to full light in my being the creature that had lain long there undeveloped; and then, without dreaming that you had brought about that sudden birth, you shut yourself again within the solitary obscurity of your own Erebus. Ah, I was certain that I could hear you sob, yet a torrent of uncontrollable joy ran through my veins. I never have spoken to you of this before, have I? I ought to have consecrated my work to you, as to an ideal Lucina."

She shrank under the eyes of the master of her spirit; she suffered because of that mask which he admired on her face, and because of that strange joy that she was aware was continually up-springing within him, like a perpetually playing fountain. She felt oppressed by her own personality; troubled because of her too-expressive face, the muscles of which possessed a strange power of mimicry; pained to think of that involuntary art which governed the significance of her gestures, and of that expressive shadow which sometimes on the stage, during a moment of anxious silence, she knew how to throw over her face like a veil of grief—that shadow which now threatened to remain among the lines traced by time on the face that was no longer young. She suffered cruelly by the hand she adored—that hand so delicate and noble which, even with a gift or a caress, had power to hurt her.

"Do you not believe, Perdita," Stelio continued after another pause, "in the occult beneficence of signs? I do not mean astral science or horoscopic signs. I mean that, like those that believe themselves under the influence of one planet or another, we can create an ideal correspondence between our own soul and some terrestrial object, in such a way that this object, becoming impregnated, little by little, with the essence of ourselves, and being magnified by our illusion, finally becomes for us the representative sign of our unknown destiny, and takes on an aspect of mystery when it appears to us in certain crises of our life. This is the secret whereby we may restore to our withering hearts something of their pristine freshness. I know by experience the beneficial effect we may derive from intense communion with some earthly object. From time to time it is necessary for our natures to become like a hamadryad, in order to feel within us the circulation of new energy drawn from the

source of life. Of course you understand that I am thinking of your words just now, when the boat passed. You expressed the same idea when you said 'Look at your pomegranates!' For you, and for everyone that loves me, the pomegranate never can be anything but *mine*. For you and for them, the idea of my personality is indissolubly linked to that fruit which I have chosen for an emblem, and which I have charged with significant ideals, more numerous than its seeds. Had I lived in the times when men excavated the Grecian marbles and found under the soil the still damp roots of ancient fables, no painter could have represented me on his canvas without putting in my hand the Punic apple. To sever from my person that symbol would have seemed to the ingenuous artist like the amputation of a living member, for, to his pagan imagination, the fruit would have seemed to grow to my hand as to its natural branch. In short, he would not have conceived me in any different way than he thought of Hyacinthus or Narcissus or Ciparissus, all three of whom would appear to him as youths symbolized by a plant. But, even in our day, a few lively and warm imaginations exist that comprehend all the meaning and enjoy all the savor of my invention.

"You, yourself, Perdita, do you not delight in cultivating in your garden a pomegranate, the beautiful 'Effrenian' tree, that you may every summer watch me blossom and bring forth fruit? In one of your letters, flying to me like a winged messenger, you described to me the graceful ceremony of decorating the tree with garlands the day you received the first copy of *Persephone*. So, for you, and for those that love me, I have in reality renewed an ancient myth when, in fancy, I have assimilated myself with a form of eternal Nature. And when I am dead (and may Nature grant that I am able to manifest my whole self in my work before I die!),

my disciples will honor me under a symbol of that tree; and in the sharp outline of the leaf, in the flame of the flower, and in the hidden treasure of the ripe fruit, they will recognize certain qualities of my art. By that leaf, by that flower and fruit, as if by a posthumous teaching of the master, their minds will be formed to a similar sharpness, flame-like intensity, and treasured richness.

"You will see now, Perdita, what is the real beneficence of symbols. By affinity, I am led to develop myself in accord with the magnificent genius of the plant which it pleases me to fancy as the symbol of my aspirations toward a full, rich life. This arboreous image of myself suffices to assure me that my powers should follow nature in order to attain naturally the end for which they were created. 'Nature has disposed me thus' is the epigraph of Leonardo da Vinci, which I placed on the title-page of my first book; and the pomegranate, as it continually blossoms and bears its fruit, repeats to me that simple phrase over and over again. We obey only the laws written in our own substance, and by reason of this we shall remain intact in the midst of dissolution, in the unity and plenitude that make our joy. No discord exists between my art and my life."

He spoke with perfect freedom, as if the mind of the listening woman were a chalice into which he poured his thoughts till it was full to the brim. An intellectual felicity filled him, blended with a vague consciousness of the mysterious action whereby his mind was preparing itself for the effort it was soon to make. From time to time, as if by a lightning flash, his mental vision beheld, as he bent toward his beloved friend and listened to the beat of the oar in the silence of the great estuary, the crowd, with its thousand faces, gathering in the vast hall; and he felt a rapid throbbing of his heart.

"It is a very singular thing, Perdita," said he, gazing at the pale distance of the waters, "to observe how readily chance aids our imagination in ascribing an element of mystery to the conjunction of certain appearances with the aim we have fancied. I do not understand the reason why the poets of to-day are so indignant at the vulgarity of the present, and complain that they were born either too late or too early. I am convinced that to-day, as always, every man of intelligence has power to create for himself his own beautiful fable of life. We should study the confused whirl of life with the same lively imagination that Leonardo encouraged in his disciples when he advised them to study the stains on the wall, the ashes on the hearth, the clouds, even mud, and similar objects, in order to find there 'wonderful inventions' and 'infinite things.' In the same way, he declared, one can find in the sound of bells every name and every word that can be imagined. That great master knew well that chance—as the sponge of Apelles had already shown—is always the friend of the ingenious artist. For example, I never cease to be astonished at the ease and grace with which chance favors the harmonious development of my inventions. Do you not believe that the dark god Hades forced his bride to eat the seven seeds of the pomegranate in order to furnish me with the subject of a masterpiece?"

He interrupted himself with one of the bursts of boyish laughter that revealed so clearly the persistence of natural joyousness in the depths of his heart.

"See, Perdita," he continued, still laughing, "whether I am not right. Early in October last year I was invited to Burano by Donna Andriana Duodo. We passed the morning in her flax-fields, and in the afternoon we went to visit Torcello. At that time I was beginning to saturate myself with the

mythical story of Persephone, and already my poem had begun to take shape in my brain, and it seemed to me that I was floating on the waters of the Styx, and that I should arrive at the abode of the Manes. Never had I experienced a purer and sweeter understanding of death, and this feeling seemed to render me so ethereal that I fancied I could tread the field of asphodel without leaving there the least trace of my footsteps. The air was damp, warm, the sky was gray; the canals wound between the banks covered with half-faded verdure. (You know Torcello only by sunlight, perhaps.) But all this time some one was talking, arguing, and declaiming in Charon's boat. The sound of praise roused me from my reverie. Francesco di Lizo was speaking of me, regretting that such an artist, so magnificently sensual—I quote his own words—should be obliged to live apart from the obtuse and hostile throng, and to celebrate the feast of sound, color, and form in the solitary palace of his dream. He abandoned himself to a lyric impulse, recalling the joyous and splendid life of the Venetian painters, the popular favor that swept them, like a whirlwind, up to the heights of the glory, beauty, strength and joy which they multiplied around them in producing countless images on walls and domes.

"Then Donna Andriana said: 'Well, I promise solemnly that Stelio Effrena shall have his triumphal feast in Venice.' The Dogaressa had spoken! At that moment I beheld, on the low, mossy bank, a pomegranate laden with fruit, which, like the hallucination of a vision, broke the infinite squalor of that place. Donna Orsetta Contarini, who was sitting beside me, uttered a cry of delight, and held out her hands, as impatient as her lips. Nothing pleases me so much as a frank, strong expression of desire. 'I adore pomegranates!' she cried, and she seemed fairly to be tasting its fine, sharp

flavor. She was as childish as her name is archaic. Her cry moved me; but Andrea Contarini appeared severely to disapprove of his wife's vivacity. He seemed to me like a Hades that has little faith in the mnemonic virtue of the seven seeds as applied to legitimate marriage. But the boatmen, too, were stirred with sympathy, and rowed toward the shore, approaching it so close that I was able to jump out first, and I began at once to despoil the tree, my brother. It was another case, albeit from the lips of a pagan of the words of the Last Supper: 'Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' How does this seem to you, Perdita? Do not think that I am inventing this story. I assure you it is true."

La Foscarina allowed herself to be fascinated by the free and elegant fancy whereby he exercised the quickness of his wit and his facility of expression. In his words was something intoxicating, variable, and vigorous, which suggested to her mind the double and diverse image of water and of fire.

"Now," he continued, "Donna Andriana has kept her promise. Guided by that hereditary taste for magnificence which she shows so plainly, she has prepared a truly ducal feast in the Palace of the Doges, in imitation of those that were held there toward the end of the sixteenth century. She conceived the idea of rescuing from oblivion the *Ariadne* of Benedetto Marcello, and of making her sigh in the same place where Tintoretto painted the daughter of Minos receiving the crown of stars from Aphrodite. Don't you recognize in the beauty of this idea the woman who wished to leave her dear eyes behind her on that ineffable green robe? Remember, too, that this *musicale* in the Hall of the Greater Council has a historic precedent. In fifteen hundred seventy-three, in this same Hall, was performed a

mythological composition by Cornelio Frangipani, with music by Claudio Merulo, in honor of his most Christian Majesty Henry Third. Own, Perdita, that my erudition astonishes you. Ah, if you only knew all that I have learned on that subject! I will read you my lecture on it, some day when you deserve a severe punishment!"

"What! Are you not to read it to-night at the festival?" inquired La Foscarina in surprise, fearing that, with his well known heedlessness of engagements, Effrena had resolved to disappoint the expectant public.

He understood her anxiety, and chose to amuse himself with it.

"This evening," he replied, with tranquil assurance, "I shall take a sherbet in your garden, and delight my eyes with the sight of the pomegranate, with its jewels gleaming in the starlight."

"Ah, Stelio! What do you mean?" she cried, half rising.

In her words and movement was so keen a regret, and at the same time so strange an evocation of the expectant gathering, that his mind was troubled. The image of the formidable monster with innumerable human faces amid the gold and somber purple of the vast hall reappeared before his mental vision; in fancy he felt its fixed regard and hot breath. He realized also the peril he had resolved to face in trusting only to the inspiration of the moment, and felt a horror of a possible sudden mental obscurity, an unexpected confusion of his thought.

"Reassure yourself," he said. "I was only jesting. I will go *ad bestias*, and I will go unarmed. Did you not see the sign reappear just now? Do you believe, after the miracle of Torcello, that it reappeared in vain? It has come to warn me again that the only attitude that suits me is the one to which Nature disposes me. Now, you well know, my friend, that I

do not know how to speak of anything but myself. And so, from the throne of the Doges, I must speak to my listeners only of my own soul, under the veil of some seductive allegory, with the charm of flowing musical cadences. I purpose to do this extemporaneously, if the fiery spirit of Tintoretto will only inspire me, from the heights of his Paradise, with sufficient ardor and audacity. The risk tempts me. But into what a strange error I was about to fall, Perdita! When the Dogaressa announced the feast to me, and begged me to do the honors, I undertook to compose a dignified discourse, a really ceremonious effort in prose, ample and solemn as one of those great robes of state behind glass in the Correr Museum; not without making in the exordium a profound genuflexion to the Queen; nor omitting to weave an impressive garland for the head of the most serene Andriana Duodo! And for several days it has given me a curious pleasure to dwell in spiritual communion with a Venetian patrician of the sixteenth century, a master of letters like Cardinal Bembo, a member of the Academy Uracini or Adorni, a frequent visitor to the gardens of Murano and the hills of Asolo. Certain it is that I felt a marked resemblance between the turn of my periods and the massive gold frames that surround the paintings on the ceiling of the Hall of Council. But, alas! yesterday morning, when I arrived here, and, in passing along the Grand Canal, when I wished to steep my weariness in the damp, transparent shade where the marble still exhales the spirit of the night, I had a sudden impression that my papers were worth much less than the dead seaweed tossed by the tide, and they seemed as strange to me as the *Trionfi* of Celio Magno and the *Favole Marittime* of Anton Maria Consalvi, quoted and commented on in them by me. What should I do, then?"