ANTONIO FOGAZZARO

THE PATRIOT (PICCOLO MONDO ANTICO)

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INTRODUCTION

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The Patriot (Piccolo Mondo Antico) was published in Milan in 1896, and has reached its forty-fourth edition, which is in itself sufficient proof of its popularity; for Italians do not purchase books largely, and one volume will often make the tour of a town, coming out of the campaign in rags and a newspaper cover.

Although *The Patriot* is not an historical novel in the true sense of the term, it certainly throws a wonderful side-light on those ten years of "deadly cold and awful silence," a silence broken only from time to time by the cries of the martyrs of Mantua, by the noise of inward strife in the Papal States, and by the weeping of mothers who saw their sons disappear behind the clanging doors of Austrian fortresses. These ten years stretched drearily from the disastrous field of Novara to the glorious days of Magenta, Solferino and San Martino (1849–59).

Antonio Fogazzaro, born in Vicenza in 1842, was a child when the battle of Novara was fought and lost; but when the French drove the Austrians from the bloody field of Magenta, he, a youth of seventeen, was ready to be fired with patriotic enthusiasm.

During those years, there was little the patriots could do save to feed the fire of hatred against the foreign oppressors, and prepare, as best they could, in secret and in constant danger of death, for the moment when Piedmont should once more give the signal of revolt.

In the night that succeeded the battle of Novara, King Carlo Alberto, who had risked all for the freedom of the rest of Italy—for it must be remembered that his own kingdom of Sardinia was independent of Austria—discouraged, mortified, and impoverished, abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emmanuel. It was no longer possible to continue hostilities, and Carlo Alberto hoped that his son, whose wife, Maria Adelaide, was the daughter of an Austrian grand-duke, might obtain more favourable conditions from Austria for his unhappy country. On the following day the young King and Field-Marshal Radetzky met, and a peace was signed, the conditions of which Victor Emmanuel found great difficulty in persuading his parliament to ratify. But in the end Piedmont paid Austria an indemnity of seventy-five million francs.

Victor Emmanuel had not, however, abandoned the idea of United Italy, and could say with Massimo D'Azeglio: We will begin over again, and do better! Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, one of the greatest statesmen of modern times, stood by the King from the first. They immediately turned their attention towards bettering the condition of their impoverished country, and soon succeeded in rendering the little capital, Turin, one of the brightest and most prosperous cities of the Continent. The patriots, the best men in Italy, flocked to Turin from all those states where Austria or her

tools held sway. The Piedmontese government granted subsidies to some of these refugees, and found employment for others, receiving all with open arms.

Meanwhile, Mazzini and Garibaldi were working, sometimes at home, sometimes in exile, while in Mantua brave patriots, among them several saintly priests, were suffering torture and death at the hands of the Austrians. The records of their trials revealed such palpable and flagrant violation of all justice, all law, that when the Austrians were at last expelled from Mantua, they were careful to remove these to Vienna, where they are still preserved. The aged mother of one of the priests who suffered execution appealed to the young Empress Elisabeth, begging that her son's body might be restored to her, and receive burial in consecrated ground. But Elisabeth was deaf to the unhappy woman's prayers. During the long and desolate years of her own affliction, how often must the unfortunate Empress have thought of the tears of blood the mothers of Italy had shed! It was Field-Marshal Haynau of inglorious memory, he who for his cruelties in that city had been dubbed the "hyena of Brescia," who tortured these martyrs of Mantua and signed their death-warrants.

All these things were happening during those ten years of heavy silence when Fogazzaro was a child. We can fancy how eagerly he listened to the accounts of these horrors, and to the long and animated discussions his father (Franco Maironi of *The Patriot*) and his uncle (Uncle Piero) held with the brilliant company that assembled at Casa Fogazzaro. His father took an active part in the defence of Vicenza in 1848, while his mother, whom he has portrayed for us in the lovely

character of Signora Luisa Rigey, busied herself with scraping lint and making cockades for the soldiers. These events and scenes, which so deeply impressed the child, were ever present to the mind of the man, and the long cherished project of immortalising those personages and places which were both familiar and dear to him, was at last realised in the pages of *The Patriot*, in which, evoking personal memories of the past, he gives us a stirring account of the petty persecutions and base meanness to which the mighty Austria stooped during that period of suspense and anxiety. The intrigues of the rogue Pasotti, the skirmishes of the wicked old Marchesa with the adjutant of the great Radetzky himself, fill us with indignation and contempt, while we thrill with patriotic emotion when Luisa raises her glass and whispers: "Hurrah for Cavour!"—*whispers* the words, because in those days the very walls had ears, and in her toast there breathed sedition!

As the years passed and peace and prosperity settled over United Italy, another question, that of the religious life, began to occupy the master-mind of Antonio Fogazzaro. Intensely but broadly religious himself, he could not fail to introduce into his work the burning question of belief or unbelief which, from long contemplation and study, had become, as it were, a part of himself. The artistic motive of the book, the struggle between an unbelieving wife and an intensely religious husband, came to the Italian reader as a new revelation. Had Fogazzaro been influenced by certain works which had already excited much comment and discussion in England and America? Perhaps so; but at all events he has treated the subject differently, and in his own

masterly fashion; he has spared us the long and tedious tirades of personages who are, after all, simply mouthpieces, and has given us instead two warm and palpitating human beings, who live and act in accordance with their opinions, and whose innermost souls are laid bare to us by their own deeds, their own actions. Franco and Luisa do not discuss and argue, they simply *feel*, feel intensely, and by a few burning words here, a few delicate touches there, our author leads us to feel with them, to understand and sympathise with their impulses, their passions, and their weaknesses.

We may not agree with Fogazzaro's conclusions, but we cannot but admire the masterly delineation of character, the unstudied and thoroughly artistic arrangement of the work, and the skilful handling of so many different elements.

The very simplicity and directness of his language give to his style a grandeur all its own, and lend a peculiar charm to his descriptions of nature, which form some of the most fascinating pages of *The Patriot*. With a few broad strokes, he spreads before us a landscape of ineffable beauty, or shows us the fury of the maddened elements. How marvellous in its solemn grandeur is the picture of the struggle between the sun and the fog, which Uncle Piero witnesses from the terrace at Oria! How wonderful in its awe-inspiring realism is the story of Franco's journey across the mountains, in the darkness of a moonless night! And that glorious picture of the sunrise, when Franco's crushed and tortured soul soars upwards again with the growing light, and, inspired and comforted, he once more squares his shoulders, and takes up his heavy burden of care!

Infinite sweetness breathes from the pages which deal with the short and sunny life of dear little Maria, and there are passages full of humour and whimsical reflections that must remind the English reader of Dickens.

Perhaps when Fogazzaro wrote *The Patriot*, he had already planned the trilogy of which it forms the first volume, but certainly the trilogy was rather evolved than planned, evolved from the union of two such characters as Franco and Luisa; and probably, while writing the first, the author was, to a certain extent, ignorant of what the second and third volumes would contain; for Luisa and Franco, Jeanne and Piero are not puppets which have been fitted into a story, but the story is in every particular the outcome of their personalities.

Certain it is that when we read the promise contained in the closing lines of *The Patriot*, we look forward eagerly to the succeeding volumes of the trilogy; and when, after that marvellous scene in the gardener's house, we reluctantly bid farewell to the Saint, our first thought is a hope that the master may soon resume his magic pen and continue the struggle for the purification and regeneration of the Faith, and, through the Faith, of Mankind.

MARY PRICHARD-AGNETTI.

BERCETO, ITALY,

October, 1906.

Part First

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CHAPTER I
RISOTTO AND TRUFFLES

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On the lake a cold *breva* [A] was blowing, striving to drive away the grey clouds which clung heavily about the dark mountain-tops. Indeed, when the Pasottis reached Casarico on their way down from Albogasio Superiore, it had not yet begun to rain. The waves beat and thundered on the shore, jostling the boats at their moorings, while flashing tongues of white foam showed, here and there, as far as the frowning banks of the Doi over yonder. But down in the west, at the end of the lake, a line of light could be seen, a sign of approaching calm, of the diminishing *breva*, and behind the gloomy Caprino hill appeared the first misty rain. Pasotti, in his full dress black overcoat, a tall hat on his head, his hand grasping a thick bamboo walking-stick, was pacing nervously along the shore, peering now in this direction, now in that, or stopping to beat his stick upon the ground, and to shout for that ass of a boatman, who had not yet appeared.

The little black boat, with its red cushions, its red and white awning, its movable seat, used only on special occasions, fixed crosswise in its place, the oars lying ready amidship, was struggling, buffeted by the waves, between two coal barges, which hardly moved.

"Pin!" shouted Pasotti, growing more and more angry. "Pin!"

The only answer was the regular, constant thundering of the waves on the shore, and the bumping of one boat

against another. At that moment one would have said there was not so much as a live dog in the whole of Casarico. Only a plaintive, old voice, like the husky falsetto of a ventriloquist, groaned from beneath the portico—

"Hadn't we better walk?"

At last Pin appeared in the direction of San Mamette.

"Hurry up, there!" shrieked Pasotti, raising his arms. The man began to run.

"Beast!" Pasotti roared. "It was with good reason they gave you the name of a dog!"

"Hadn't we better walk, Pasotti?" groaned the plaintive voice. "Let us walk!"

Pasotti continued to abuse the boatman, who was hastily unfastening the chain of his boat from a ring, fixed in the bank. Presently he turned towards the portico, with an authoritative air, and jerking his chin, motioned to some one to come forward.

"Let us walk, Pasotti!" the voice groaned once more.

He shrugged his shoulders, made a rough gesture of command with his hand, and started down towards the boat.

Then an old lady appeared under one of the arches of the portico, her lean person enveloped in an Indian shawl, below which a black silk skirt showed. Her head was surmounted by a fashionable bonnet, spindling, and lofty, trimmed with tiny yellow roses, and black lace. Two black curls framed the wrinkled face; the eyes were large and gentle, and the wide mouth was shaded by a faint moustache.

"Oh Pin!" she exclaimed, clasping her canary-coloured gloves, and pausing on the bank to gaze helplessly at the

boatman. "Can we really venture out with the lake in this state?"

Her husband made a still more imperious gesture, and his face assumed a still sourer expression. The poor woman slipped down to the boat in silence, and was helped in, trembling violently.

"I commend myself to Our Lady of Caravino, my good Pin!" she said. "What a dreadful lake!"

The boatman shook his head, smiling.

"By the way!" Pasotti exclaimed, "have you brought the sail along?"

"It is up at the house," Pin answered. "Shall I go for it? But perhaps the Signora here, might be frightened. Besides, here comes the rain!"

"Go and fetch it," said Pasotti.

The Signora, who was as deaf as a post, had not heard a word of this conversation, and, greatly amazed at seeing Pin run off, asked her husband where he was going.

"The sail!" Pasotti shouted into her face. She sat, bending forward, her mouth wide open, striving in vain, to catch, at least, the sound of his voice.

"The sail!" he repeated, still louder, his hands framing his mouth.

She began to think that she understood. Trembling with fright she drew a questioning hieroglyphic in the air with her finger. Pasotti answered by drawing an imaginary curve in the air, and blowing into it; then he silently nodded his head. His wife, convulsed with terror, started to leave the boat.

"I am going to get out!" said she in an agonised voice. "I am going to get out! I want to walk!"

Her husband seized her by the arm, and pulled her down into her seat, fixing two flaming eyes upon her.

Meanwhile the boatman had returned with the sail. The poor woman writhed and sighed; tears stood in her eyes, and she cast despairing glances at the shore, but she was silent. The mast was raised, the two lower ends of the sail were made fast, and the boat was about to put out, when a voice bellowed from the portico—

"Hallo! Hallo! The Signor Controllore!" and out popped a big, rubicund priest, with a glorious belly, a large, black straw hat, a cigar in his mouth, and an umbrella under his arm.

"Oh! Curatone!" Pasotti exclaimed. "Well done! Are you invited to the dinner also? Are you coming to Cressogno with us?"

"If you will take me," the curate of Puria answered, going down towards the boat. "Well, I never! The Signora Barborin is here also."

The expression of his big face became supremely amiable, his great voice became supremely sweet.

"She is devilish frightened, poor creature!" Pasotti grinned, while the curate was making a series of little bows, and smiling sweetly upon the lady, who was more terrified than ever at the prospect of this added weight. She began to gesticulate silently, as if the others had been more deaf than she herself. She pointed to the lake, to the sail, to the bulk of the enormous curate, raising her eyes to heaven, hiding her face in her hands, or pressing them to her heart.

"I don't weigh so very much," said the curate laughing. "Hold your tongue, will you?" he added, turning to Pin, who had murmured disrespectfully: "A good, big fish!"

"I'll tell you how we can cure her of her fright!" Pasotti exclaimed. "Pin, have you a little table, and a pack of *tarocchi* [B] cards?"

"I have a pack," Pin replied. "But they are rather greasy."

They had great difficulty in making Signora Barbara—generally called *Barborin*—understand the matter in hand. She would not understand, not even when her husband forced the pack of filthy cards into her hands.

For the present, however, playing was out of the question. The boat was being laboriously rowed forward towards the mouth of the river of San Mamette, where they would be able to hoist the sail. The surf, flung back from the shore, clashed with the in-coming waves, and the little boat was tossing about among the seething, foaming crests. The lady was weeping and Pasotti was swearing at Pin, who had not stood out into the lake far enough. At last the fat curate seized a couple of oars, and planting his big person firmly in the middle of the boat, bent to his work with such good will that a few strokes sufficed to send them forward and out of difficulty. Then the sail was hoisted, and the boat glided quietly and smoothly onward, rocking slowly and gently, while the water gurgled softly under its keel. Then the smiling priest sat down beside Signora Barborin, who had closed her eyes and was muttering. But Pasotti drummed impatiently on the table with the cards, and play they must.

Meanwhile the grey rain was creeping slowly towards them, veiling the mountains, and stifling the *breva*.

The lady's breath returned in proportion as the wind's breath diminished, and she played resignedly, calmly oblivious to her own gross mistakes, and her husband's consequent outbursts of rage. When the rain began to rustle on the boat's awning, on the lifeless waves, which in the now almost breathless atmosphere, were rolling in against the rocks of the Tentiòn; when the boatman, judging it best to lower the sail, took to the oars once more, then, at last, Signora Barborin breathed freely. "Pin, my good fellow!" she said tenderly, and began playing *tarocchi* with a zeal, an energy and an expression of beatitude, which neither mistakes nor scoldings could trouble.

Many days of *breva* and of rain, of sunshine and of storm have dawned and faded away over the Lake of Lugano, over the hills of Valsolda since that game of cards was played by Signora Pasotti, her husband, the retired controller of customs, and the big curate of Puria, in the boat which coasted slowly along the rocky shore between San Mamette and Cressogno in the misty rain.

The times were grey and sleepy, in keeping with the aspect of sky and lake, after the *breva* had subsided, the breeze which had so terrified Signora Pasotti. The great *breva* [C] of 1848, after bringing a few hours of sunshine, and striving awhile with the heavy clouds, had slumbered for three years, allowing one breathless, gloomy, silent day to follow another in those places where the scene of this humble tale of mine is laid.

The king and queens of *tarocchi*, the *mondo*, the *matto* and the *bagatto*, were imported personages at that time, and in those parts; minor powers tolerated benevolently by

the great, silent Austrian empire; and their antagonisms, their alliances, their wars, were the only political questions which might be freely discussed. Even Pin, as he rowed, eagerly poked his hooked and inquisitive nose into Signora Barborin's cards, withdrawing it reluctantly again. Once he paused in his rowing, and let his nose hover above the cards, to see how the poor woman would extricate herself from a difficult position; what she would do with a certain card it was dangerous to play, and equally dangerous to hold. Her husband thumped impatiently on the little table, the big curate sorted his cards with a blissful smile, while she clasped hers to her bosom, now laughing, now groaning, and rolling her eyes from one to the other of her companions.

"She holds the *matto*," the curate whispered.

"She always goes on like that when she has the *matto*," said Pasotti, and called to her, thumping the table one more —

"Out with the *matto*!"

"I will throw him into the lake!" said she. She cast a glance towards the prow, and, as an excuse, remarked that they were nearing Cressogno, and that it was time to stop playing.

Her husband fumed awhile, but finally resigned himself to putting on his gloves.

"Trout to-day, curate!" he observed, while his meek wife buttoned them for him. "White truffles, grouse, and wine from Ghemme."

"Then you know!" the curate exclaimed. "I know it also. The cook told me yesterday at Lugano."

"And besides, some ladies have been invited; the Carabellis, mother and daughter. Those Carabellis from Loveno, you know."

"Indeed!" the curate exclaimed. "Is there any scheme ——? There is Don Franco, now, in his boat. But what a strange flag the young man is flying! I never saw him with it before."

Pasotti raised the awning and looked out. At a little distance a boat flying a white and blue flag rose and fell in unison with the weary motion of the waves. In the stern, under the flag, sat Don Franco Maironi, the grandson of the old Marchesa Orsola, who was giving the dinner.

Pasotti saw him rise, grasp the oars, and pull away, rowing slowly towards the upper lake, towards the wild gulf of the Doi, the white and blue flag spread wide, and floating above the boat's trail.

"Where is that eccentric young man going?" said he. And he muttered between his teeth; in the strained and husky voice of a Milanese rough—"A surly fellow!"

"They say he has great talents," the priest observed.

"An empty head," the other declared. "Much arrogance, little learning, no manners!"

"And half rotten," he added. "If I were that young woman ——"

"Which?" the curate questioned.

"Why, Signorina Carabelli."

"Mark my words, Signor Controllore! If the grouse and white truffles are meant for that Carabelli girl, they are thrown away!"

"Do you know something?" Pasotti inquired, his eyes flaming with curiosity.

The priest did not answer because, at that point, the bow grated on the gravel, and touched the landing-stage. He got out first; Pasotti, with rapid and imperious gestures, gave his wife some orders of unknown purport. Then he himself left the boat. Last to get out was the poor woman, wrapped in her Indian shawl, bending under the tall, black bonnet with the little, yellow roses, staggering, and stretching out her big hands in the canary-coloured gloves. The two curls, hanging on either side of her meek ugliness, gave her a special air of resignation, under the umbrella of her husband, proprietor, inspector and jealous custodian of so much elegance.

The three went up to the portico, by means of which the little Villa Maironi spans the road leading from the landing-stage to the parish-church of Cressogno. Between two happy sighs, the curate and Pasotti sniffed an indistinct, warm odour, which floated out from the open vestibule of the villa.

"Ah! *risotto! risotto!*" the priest whispered, with a greedy glow on his face.

Pasotti, who had a keen nose, shook his head, knitting his brows in manifest contempt for that other nose.

"It is not *risotto*," said he.

"What do you mean by saying it is not *risotto*?" the priest exclaimed in vexation. "It *is risotto*; *risotto* with truffles. Don't you smell it?"

Both stopped half way across the vestibule, sniffing the air noisily like a couple of hounds.

"Do me the favour, my dear curate, to confine your remarks to *posciandra*," said Pasotti, after a long pause, alluding to a certain coarse dish the peasants prepare, with cabbage and sausages. "Truffles there are, but *risotto* there is not!"

"*Posciandra! posciandra!*" the other grumbled, somewhat offended. "As to that——"

The poor, meek lady understood that they were quarrelling, and, much alarmed, began pointing upward towards the ceiling, with her right forefinger, to warn them that they might be overheard up above. Her husband seized her uplifted arm, signed to her to sniff, and then blew into her wide open mouth the word: "*Risotto*."

She hesitated, not having heard distinctly. Pasotti shrugged his shoulders. "She don't understand anything," said he. "The weather is going to change," and he went up stairs, followed by his wife. The stout curate wished to take another look at Don Franco's boat. "The Carabellis, indeed!" he mused, but he was immediately recalled by Signora Barborin, who begged him to sit beside her at the table; she was so timid, poor creature!

The fumes of the pots and kettles filled the stairs with warm fragrance. "It is not *risotto*," the vanguard murmured. "It is *risotto*," the rearguard answered in the same tone. And thus they continued, ever more softly: "It is not *risotto*; it is *risotto*," until Pasotti pushed open the door of the red room, where the mistress of the house was usually to be found.

A hideous, lean, little dog trotted, barking, towards Signora Barborin, who was endeavouring to smile, while Pasotti was putting on his most obsequious expression, and

the curate, entering last, his big face all sweetness, was really, in his heart, consigning the cursed little beast to hell.

"Friend, come here, Friend!" the old Marchesa said placidly. "Dear Signora, dear Controllore, and the curate!"

Her gruff nasal voice was pitched in the same calm tone to the guests and to the dog. She had risen to receive Signora Barborin, but did not move a step from the sofa, and stood there, a squat figure, with dull, torpid eyes beneath her marble forehead, and her black wig, which rounded out over her temples in the shape of two big snails. Her face must once have been handsome, and still retained in its pallor, tinged with yellow like old marble, a certain cold majesty, which—like her glance and her voice—never varied with the varying emotions of her soul. The big curate, standing at a distance, made her two or three jerky bows, but Pasotti kissed her hand, while Signora Barborin, who felt her blood turn to ice under the old lady's lifeless glance, did not know how to move, nor what to say. Another lady had risen from the sofa when the Marchesa rose, and was staring with an insolent air at Signora Pasotti, at that poor little bundle, old within, and new without! "Signora Pasotti and her husband," said the Marchesa. "Donna Eugenia Carabelli."

Donna Eugenia hardly bowed her head. Her daughter, Donna Carolina, was standing at the window, talking with one of the Marchesa's favourites, the niece of the agent.

The Marchesa did not consider it necessary to disturb her in order to present the new arrivals, and when she had invited them to be seated, she resumed her quiet conversation with Donna Eugenia concerning mutual friends

in Milan, while Friend, sniffing and sneezing, circled slowly round Signora Barborin's shawl, which smelt of camphor, or rubbed himself against the curate's calves, studying Pasotti the while, with those pitiful, watery eyes of his, but never once touching him, as if he understood that the master of that Indian shawl, in spite of his amiable expression, would have liked to ring his—Friend's—neck!

And the Marchesa Orsola talked on in her usual guttural, sleepy voice, and Donna Carabelli, in answering, strove to give her loud, imperious voice an amiable ring. But to Pasotti's penetrating glance, and cunning shrewdness it was quite clear that the two old ladies were concealing a certain dissatisfaction, which was greater in the Marchesa Maironi than in Donna Eugenia. Every time the door opened the dim eyes of the one and the dark eyes of the other were turned in that direction. Once it admitted the prefect of the *Santuario della Caravina*, with little Signor Paolo Sala, called *el Paolin*—little Paul—and Signor Paolo Pozzi, called *el Paolon*—big Paul—who were inseparable companions. Again there entered the Marchese Bianchi, of Oria, a former officer of the kingdom of Italy, with his daughter. He was a noble type of the gallant, old soldier, as he stood beside the attractive and vivacious young girl.

On both occasions a shadow of vexation passed over Donna Carabelli's face. Her daughter also turned her eyes swiftly towards the door when it was thrown open, but presently she would begin chatting and laughing again, more gaily than ever.

"And Don Franco, Marchesa? How is Don Franco?" said the cunning Pasotti, in a mellifluous voice, as he offered his

open snuff-box to his hostess.

"Thank you," the Marchesa answered, bending forward a little and dipping her fingers into the snuff. "Franco? To tell the truth I am rather anxious about him. This morning he was not feeling very well, and he has not appeared yet. I trust——"

"Don Franco?" said the Marchese. "He is out in his boat. We saw him a few minutes ago, rowing like any boatman."

Donna Eugenia spread her fan open.

"Well done!" said she, fanning furiously. "A most delightful pastime." Then she closed the fan with a bang, and began biting at it with her lips.

"Probably he needed the air," the Marchesa observed, in her unruffled, nasal drawl.

"Probably he needed a wetting," the prefect of the Caravina murmured, his eyes sparkling with fun. "It is raining!"

"Don Franco is coming now, Signora Marchesa," said the agent's niece, after a glance at the lake.

"That is good," the sleepy, nasal drawl replied. "I hope he is feeling better. If not, he will not speak two words. He is a perfectly healthy boy, but very apprehensive about himself. By the way, Signor Controllore, why does not Signor Giacomo make his appearance?"

"*El sior Zacomo*," Pasotti began, in imitation of Signor Giacomo Puttini, an old bachelor from the Veneto, who had lived at Albogasio Superiore, near Villa Pasotti, for the last thirty years. "*El sior Zacomo*——"

"Tut, tut!" said the old lady, interrupting him. "I cannot allow you to make fun of the Venetians, and besides, it is

not true that they say *Zacomo* in the Veneto."

She herself was a native of Padua, and although she had lived in Brescia for half a century, still her Lombard accent was not entirely free from certain chronic suggestions of her Paduan origin. While Pasotti was protesting, with ceremonial horror, that he had only intended to imitate the voice of his beloved friend and neighbour, the door opened a third time. Donna Eugenia, well aware who was coming, did not condescend to look round, but the Marchesa allowed her dull eyes to rest on Don Franco with the greatest unconcern.

Don Franco, sole heir to the name of Maironi, was the son of the Marchesa's son who had died when only eight-and-twenty. He had lost his mother at his birth, and had always lived under the rule of his grandmother Maironi. He was tall and slender, and wore a tangle of rather long, dark hair, and this had procured for him the nickname of *el scovin d'i nivol*, "the cloud sweeper." He had eloquent, light blue eyes, a keen, animated and pleasing face, quick to blush or turn pale. Now that frowning face was saying very plainly: "Here I am, but I am much put out!"

"How do you feel, Franco?" his grandmother inquired, and added quickly, without waiting for an answer: "Donna Carolina is anxious to hear that piece by Kalkbrenner."

"Oh! not at all!" said the girl, turning to the young man with an air of indifference. "I did indeed say so, but then I am not fond of Kalkbrenner, I had much rather chat with the young ladies."

Franco seemed quite satisfied with the reception he had received and, without waiting for further remarks, went over to talk with the big curate about a fine old picture they were

to inspect together, in the church at Dasio. Donna Eugenia Carabelli was quivering with indignation. She had come from Loveno, with her daughter, after certain secret diplomatic transactions, in which other powers had had a hand. Should this visit be paid or not; would the dignity of the house of Carabelli permit it; did that probability of success which Donna Eugenia exacted, really exist? Such were the final questions, which diplomacy had been called upon to answer, for, notwithstanding the acquaintance of long standing which existed between Mamma Carabelli and Grandmamma Maironi, the young people had met only once or twice, and then but for a few minutes. They were being drawn together by their surroundings of wealth and nobility, of relationships and friendships, as a drop of salt water and a drop of fresh water are mutually drawn together, though the microscopic creatures, which have their being in the one and in the other be condemned to perish if the two drops mingle. The Marchesa had carried her point. It had been decided—apparently out of respect for her age, but really out of respect for her money—that the interview should take place at Cressogno; for, though Franco himself was possessed only of his mother's modest fortune, amounting to eighteen or twenty thousand Austrian *lire*, his grandmother was enthroned in all her calm dignity upon several millions. And now Donna Eugenia, observing the young man's conduct, was furious with the Marchesa, as well as with those who had exposed her daughter and herself to such humiliation. If, at a single blow, she could have swept away the old woman, her grandson, the gloomy house and the tiresome company, she would have done so

with joy; but she must hide her feelings, feign indifference, swallow the indignity and the dinner.

The Marchesa preserved her external, marble placidity, though her heart was filled with anger and rancour against her grandson. Two years before he had dared to ask her consent to his marriage with a young girl of Valsolda, of good family, but neither rich nor of noble birth. His grandmother's decided refusal had rendered the union impossible, and indeed the girl's mother had felt obliged to forbid Don Franco the house; but the Marchesa was convinced that those people still had their eyes on her millions. She had therefore determined to find a wife for Franco, at once, in order to avert all danger. She had sought for a girl who should be rich, but not too rich; of noble, but not too noble birth; intelligent, but not too intelligent. Having discovered one of the right sort, she suggested her to Franco who flew into a rage, and declared he had no desire to marry. The answer had a very suspicious ring, and she redoubled her vigilance, watching every movement of her grandson and of that "Madam Trap," that being the pleasing title she had bestowed upon Signorina Luisa Rigey.

The Rigey family, consisting of the two ladies only, lived at Castello, in Valsolda, so it was not difficult to watch their movements. Nevertheless the Marchesa could not discover anything. But one evening Pasotti told her, with much hypocritical hesitation and many horrified comments, that the prefect of the Caravina, while chatting with Pasotti himself, with Signor Giacomo Puttini and with Paolin and Paolon, in the chemist's shop at San Mamette, had made the following remark: "Don Franco is going to keep quiet

until the old lady is really dead!" The Marchesa having listened to this delicate piece of wit, answered: "A thousand thanks!" through her placid nose, and changed the subject. Later she learned that Signora Rigey—always more or less of an invalid—was suffering from hypertrophia of the heart, and it appeared to her that Franco's spirits were much affected by this illness. It was then that Signorina Carabelli was suggested to her. Carolina Carabelli was perhaps not entirely to her taste, but with that other danger threatening she could not hesitate. She spoke to Franco. This time he did not fly into a rage, but listened in an absent-minded way, and said he would think the matter over. This was perhaps the one act of hypocrisy of his whole life. Then the Marchesa boldly played a high card, and sent for the Carabellis.

She saw plainly enough now, that the game was lost. Don Franco had not been present when the ladies arrived, and later had appeared only once for a few minutes. During those few minutes his manner had been gracious, but not so his expression. As usual his face had spoken so plainly that—though the Marchesa immediately invented an indisposition for him—no one could have been deceived. But in spite of all this, the old lady was not convinced that she had played her cards unskilfully. Ever since she had reached the age of discretion it had been a rule with her never to recognise in herself a single defect or mistake, never wittingly to wound her own noble and beloved self. Now she preferred to believe that, after her sermon on matrimony, some honeyed but poisonous and ensnaring word had mysteriously reached her grandson. If her disappointment was somewhat mitigated, this was due to the conduct of

Signorina Carabelli, whose lively resentment was but ill concealed. This was not pleasing to the Marchesa. The prefect of the Caravina was not mistaken—though he perhaps erred slightly in the form of his discourse, when he said, softly, of her: "She is Austria itself." Like the old Austria of those days, the old Marchesa did not wish for any bold spirits in her empire. Her own iron will would not tolerate others in its neighbourhood. Such an indocile Lombardy-Venice as was Franco was already too much, and the Carabelli girl, who appeared to have a mind and a will of her own, would probably prove a troublesome subject of the house of Maironi, a species of turbulent Hungary.

Dinner was announced. The footman's shaven face, and ill-fitting, grey livery reflected the Marchesa's aristocratic tastes, which, however, had been tempered by habits of economy.

"And where is this Signor Giacomo, Controllore?" she said, without rising.

"I fear he is not coming, Marchesa," Pasotti replied. "I saw him this morning, and said to him: 'Then we shall meet at dinner, Signor Giacomo?' But he squirmed as if he had swallowed a snake. He twisted and turned and at last puffed out: 'Yes, probably. I don't know! Perhaps. I can't say!—Uff! uff. Well really now, my good Controllore, indeed I don't know!—Uff, uff!'—and I could get nothing more out of him."

The Marchesa summoned the footman to her side, and gave him an order in a low tone. He bowed and withdrew. In his longing for the risotto, the curate of Puria was rocking his body to and fro, and stroking his knees. But the