



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE BETROTHED

Alessandro
Manzoni

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

This edition published 2023
by Living Book Press
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ISBN: 978-1-76153-020-3 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-021-0 (softcover)

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by

ALESSANDRO MANZONI





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Quant ie considere & pense
 en diuerses maneres les
 plourables malheurtez de
 nos predecesseurs. a celle
 fin que du grant nombre

de ceulx qui par fortune ont este trebuchez
 Je pensasse aucun commencement de ce
 liure aucun prince venen assez digne des
 premier entre les malheureux. Et voy cy. ij.
 vieillars seant seient deuant moy. si ay
 eamez et si anaens. quil sembloit que ilz
 ne peussent tui fier leurs membres tui
 blans. **Q**un de ces deux vieillars cest
 assauoir adam me auais forma & dist. Bau

CHAPTER I.

That branch of the Lake of Como, which turns toward the south between two unbroken chains of mountains, presenting to the eye a succession of bays and gulfs, formed by their jutting and retiring ridges, suddenly contracts itself between a headland to the right and an extended sloping bank on the left, and assumes the flow and appearance of a river. The bridge by which the two shores are here united, appears to render the transformation more apparent, and marks the point at which the lake ceases, and the Adda recommences, to resume, however, the name of *Lake* where the again receding banks allow the water to expand itself anew into bays and gulfs. The bank, formed by the deposit of three large mountain streams, descends from the bases of two contiguous mountains, the one called St. Martin, the other by a Lombard name, *Resegone*, from its long line of summits, which in truth give it the appearance of a saw; so that there is no one who would not at first sight, especially viewing it in front, from the ramparts of Milan that face the north, at once distinguish it in all that extensive range from other mountains of less name and more ordinary form. The bank, for a considerable distance, rises with a gentle and continual ascent, then breaks into hills and hollows, rugged or level land, according to the formation of the mountain rocks, and the action of the floods. Its extreme border, intersected by the mountain torrents, is composed almost entirely of sand and pebbles; the other parts of fields and vineyards, scattered farms, country seats, and villages, with here and there a wood which extends up the mountain side. Lecco, the largest of these villages, and which gives its name to the district, is situated at no great distance from the bridge, upon the margin of the lake; nay, often, at the rising of the waters, is partly embosomed within the lake itself; a large town at the present day, and likely soon to become a city. At the period of our story, this village was also fortified, and consequently had the honour to furnish

quarters to a governor, and the advantage of possessing a permanent garrison of Spanish soldiers, who gave lessons in modesty to the wives and daughters of the neighbourhood, and toward the close of summer never failed to scatter themselves through the vineyards, in order to thin the grapes, and lighten for the rustics the labours of the vintage. From village to village, from the heights down to the margin of the lake, there are innumerable roads and paths: these vary in their character; at times precipitous, at others level; now sunk and buried between two ivy-clad walls, from whose depth you can behold nothing but the sky, or some lofty mountain peak; then crossing high and level tracts, around the edges of which they sometimes wind, occasionally projecting beyond the face of the mountain, supported by prominent masses resembling bastions, whence the eye wanders over the most varied and delicious landscape. On the one side you behold the blue lake, with its boundaries broken by various promontories and necks of land, and reflecting the inverted images of the objects on its banks; on the other, the Adda, which, flowing beneath the arches of the bridge, expands into a small lake, then contracts again, and holds on its clear serpentine course to the distant horizon: above, are the ponderous masses of the shapeless rocks; beneath, the richly cultivated acclivity, the fair landscape, the bridge; in front, the opposite shore of the lake, and beyond this, the mountain, which bounds the view.

Towards evening, on the 7th day of November, 1628, Don Abbondio, curate of one of the villages before alluded to (but of the name of which, nor of the house and lineage of its curate, we are not informed), was returning slowly towards his home, by one of these pathways. He was repeating quietly his office; in the pauses of which he held his closed breviary in his hand behind his back; and as he went, with his foot he cast listlessly against the wall the stones that happened to impede his path; at the same time giving admittance to the idle thoughts that tempted the spirit, while the lips of the worthy man were mechanically performing their function; then raising his head and gazing idly around him, he fixed his eyes upon a mountain summit, where the rays of the setting sun, breaking through the openings of an opposite ridge, illumined its

projecting masses, which appeared like large and variously shaped spots of purple light. He then opened anew his breviary, and recited another portion at an angle of the lane, after which angle the road continued straight for perhaps seventy paces, and then branched like the letter Y into two narrow paths; the right-hand one ascended towards the mountain, and led to the parsonage (*Cura*); that on the left descended the valley towards a torrent, and on this side the wall rose out to the height of about two feet. The inner walls of the two narrow paths, instead of meeting at the angle, ended in a little chapel, upon which were depicted certain long, sinuous, pointed shapes, which, in the intention of the artist, and to the eyes of the neighbouring inhabitants, represented flames, and amidst these flames certain other forms, not to be described, that were meant for souls in purgatory; souls and flames of a brick colour, upon a ground of blackish grey, with here and there a bare spot of plaster. The curate, having turned the corner, directed, as was his wont, a look toward the little chapel, and there beheld what he little expected, and would not have desired to see. At the confluence, if we may so call it, of the two narrow lanes, there were two men: one of them sitting astride the low wall; his companion leaning against it, with his arms folded on his breast. The dress, the bearing, and what the curate could distinguish of the countenance of these men, left no doubt as to their profession. They wore upon their heads a green network, which, falling on the left shoulder, ended in a large tassel, from under which appeared upon the forehead an enormous lock of hair. Their mustachios were long, and curled at the extremities; the margin of their doublets confined by a belt of polished leather, from which were suspended, by hooks, two pistols; a little powder-horn hung like a locket on the breast; on the right-hand side of the wide and ample breeches was a pocket, out of which projected the handle of a knife, and on the other side they bore a long sword, of which the great hollow hilt was formed of bright plates of brass, combined into a cypher: by these characteristics they were, at a glance, recognised as individuals of the class of braves.

This species, now entirely extinct, flourished greatly at that time

in Lombardy. For those who have no knowledge of it, the following are a few authentic records, that may suffice to impart an idea of its principal characteristics, of the vigorous efforts made to extirpate it, and of its obstinate and rank vitality.

As early as the 8th of April, 1583, the most illustrious and most excellent lord Don Charles of Arragon, Prince of Castelvetrano, Duke of Terranova, Marquis of Avola, Count of Burgeto, High Admiral and High Constable of Sicily, Governor of Milan, and Captain General of His Catholic Majesty in Italy, "fully informed of the intolerable misery which the city of Milan has endured, and still endures, by reason of bravoës and vagabonds," publishes his decree against them, "declares and designates all those comprehended in this proclamation to be regarded as bravoës and vagabonds,—who, whether foreigners or natives, have no calling, or, having one, do not follow it,—but, either with or without wages, attach themselves to any knight, gentleman, officer, or merchant,—to uphold or favour him, or in any manner to molest others." All such he commands, within the space of six days, to leave the country; threatens the refractory with the galleys, and grants to all officers of justice the most ample and unlimited powers for the execution of his commands. But, in the following year, on the 12th of April, the said lord, having perceived "that this city still continues to be filled with bravoës, who have again resumed their former mode of life; their manners unchanged, and their number undiminished," puts forth another edict still more energetic and remarkable, in which, among other regulations, he directs "that any person whatsoever, whether of this city or from abroad, who shall, by the testimony of two witnesses, be shown to be regarded and commonly reputed as a bravo, even though no criminal act shall have been proved against him, may, nevertheless, upon the sole ground of his reputation, be condemned by the said judges to the rack for examination; and although he make no confession of guilt, he shall, notwithstanding, be sentenced to the galleys for the said term of three years, solely for that he is regarded as, and called a bravo, as above-mentioned;" and this "because His Excellency is resolved to enforce obedience to his commands."

One would suppose that at the sound of such denunciations from so powerful a source, all the bravoos must have disappeared for ever. But testimony, of no less authority, obliges us to believe directly the reverse. This testimony is the most illustrious and most excellent lord Juan Fernandez de Velasco, Constable of Castile, High Chamberlain of His Majesty, Duke of the city of Freas, Count of Haro and Castelnuovo, Lord of the house of Velasco, and of that of the Seven Infanti of Lara, Governor of the State of Milan, &c. On the 5th of June, 1593, he also, fully informed “how great an injury to the common weal, and how insulting to justice, is the existence of such a class of men,” requires them anew to quit the country within six days, repeating very nearly the same threats and injunctions as his predecessor. On the 23d of May, then, 1598, “having learnt, with no little displeasure, that the number of bravoos and vagabonds is increasing daily in this state and city, and that nothing is heard of them but wounds, murders, robberies, and every other crime, to the commission of which these bravoos are encouraged by the confidence that they will be sustained by their chiefs and abettors,” he prescribes again the same remedies, increasing the dose, as is usual in obstinate disorders. “Let every one, then,” he concludes, “carefully beware that he do not, in any wise, contravene this edict; since, in place of experiencing the mercy of His Excellency, he shall prove his rigour and his wrath—he being resolved and determined that this shall be a final and peremptory warning.”

But this again did not suffice; and the illustrious and most excellent lord, the Signor Don Pietro Enriquez de Acevedo, Count of Fuentes, Captain and Governor of the State of Milan, “fully informed of the wretched condition of this city and state, in consequence of the great number of bravoos that abound therein, and resolved wholly to extirpate them,” publishes, on the 5th of December, 1600, a new decree, full of the most rigorous provisions, and “with firm purpose that in all rigour, and without hope of remission, they shall be wholly carried into execution.”

We are obliged, however, to conclude that he did not, in this matter, exhibit the same zeal which he knew how to employ in contriving plots and exciting enemies against his powerful foe, Henry

IV., against whom history attests that he succeeded in arming the Duke of Savoy, whom he caused to lose more towns than one; and in engaging in a conspiracy the Duke of Biron, whom he caused to lose his head. But as regards the pestilent race of bravoos, it is very certain they continued to increase until the 22d day of September, 1612; on which day the most illustrious and most excellent lord Don Giovanni de Mendoza, Marchese de la Hynojosa, gentleman, &c., Governor, &c., thought seriously of their extirpation. He addressed to Pandolfo and Marco Tullio Malatesti, printers of the Royal Chamber, the customary edict, corrected and enlarged, that they might print it, to accomplish that end. But the bravoos still survived, to experience, on the 24th December, 1618, still more terrific denunciations from the most illustrious and most excellent lord, Don Gomez Suarez de Figueroa, Duke of Feria, Governor, &c.; yet, as they did not fall even under these blows, the most illustrious and most excellent lord Gonzalo Fernandez de Cordova, under whose government we are made acquainted with Don Abbondio, found himself obliged to republish the usual proclamation against the bravoos, on the 5th day of October, 1627, that is, a year, a month, and two days previous to the commencement of our story.

Nor was this the last publication; but of those that follow, as of matters not falling within the period of our history, we do not think it proper to make mention. The only one of them to which we shall refer, is that of the 13th day of February, 1632, in which the most illustrious and most excellent lord, the Duke of Feria, for the second time governor, informs us, "that the greatest and most heinous crimes are perpetrated by those styled bravoos." This will suffice to prove that, at the time of which we treat, the bravoos still existed.

It appeared evident to Don Abbondio that the two men above mentioned were waiting for some one, and he was alarmed at the conviction that it was for himself; for on his appearance, they exchanged a look, as if to say, "'tis he." Rising from the wall, they both advanced to meet him. He held his breviary open before him, as though he were employed in reading it; but, nevertheless, cast a

glance upward in order to espy their movements. Seeing that they came directly toward him, he was beset by a thousand different thoughts. He considered, in haste, whether between the bravoës and himself there were any outlet from the road, and he remembered there was none. He took a rapid survey of his conduct, to discover if he had given offence to any powerful or revengeful man; but in this matter, he was somewhat reassured by the consoling testimony of his conscience. The bravoës draw near, and kept their eyes upon him. He raised his hand to his collar, as if adjusting it, and at the same time turned his head round, to see if any one were coming; he could discover no one. He cast a glance across the low stone wall upon the fields; no one! another on the road that lay before him; no one, except the bravoës! What is to be done? Flight was impossible. Unable to avoid the danger, he hastened to encounter it, and to put an end to the torments of uncertainty. He quickened his pace, recited a stanza in a louder tone, did his utmost to assume a composed and cheerful countenance, and finding himself in front of the two gallants, stopped short. "Signor Curate," said one of them, fixing his eyes upon him,—

"Your pleasure, sir," suddenly raising his eyes from his book, which he continued to hold open before him.

"You intend," pursued the other, with the threatening and angry mien of one who has detected an inferior in an attempt to commit some villany, "you intend to-morrow to unite in marriage Renzo Tramaglino and Lucy Mondella."

"That is," said Don Abbondio with a faltering voice, "that is to say—you gentlemen, being men of the world, are very well aware how these things are managed: the poor curate neither meddles nor makes—they settle their affairs amongst themselves, and then—then, they come to us, as if to redeem a pledge; and we—we are the servants of the public."

"Mark now," said the bravo in a low voice, but in a tone of command, "this marriage is not to take place, neither to-morrow, nor at any other time."

"But, my good sirs," replied Don Abbondio, with the mild and

gentle tone of one who would persuade an impatient listener, "but, my good sirs, deign to put yourselves in my situation. If the thing depended on myself—you see plainly, that it does not in the least concern——"

"Hold there," said the bravo, interrupting him, "this matter is not to be settled by prating. We neither know nor care to know any more about it. A man once warned—you understand us."

"But, fair sirs, you are too just, too reasonable——"

"But," interrupted the other comrade, who had not before spoken, "but this marriage is not to be performed, or (with an oath) he who performs it will not repent of it, because he'll not have time" (with another oath).

"Hush, hush," resumed the first orator, "the Signor Curate knows the world, and we are gentlemen who have no wish to harm him if he conducts himself with judgment. Signor Curate, the most illustrious Signor Don Roderick, our patron, offers you his kind regards." As in the height of a midnight storm a vivid flash casts a momentary dazzling glare around and renders every object more fearful, so did this *name* increase the terror of Don Abbondio: as if by instinct, he bowed his head submissively, and said—

"If it could but be suggested to me."

"Oh! suggested to *you*, who understand Latin!" exclaimed the bravo, laughing; "it is for you to manage the matter. But, above all, be careful not to say a word concerning the hint that has been given you for your good; for if you do, ehem!—you understand—the consequences would be the same as if you performed the marriage ceremony. But say, what answer are we to carry in your name to the most illustrious Signor Don Roderick?"

"My respects——"

"Speak more clearly, Signor Curate."

"That I am disposed, ever disposed, to obedience." And as he spoke the words he was not very certain himself whether he gave a promise, or only uttered an ordinary compliment. The bravo took, or *appeared* to take them, in the more serious sense.

"'Tis very well; good night, Signor Curate," said one of them as

he retired, together with his companion. Don Abbondio, who a few minutes before would have given one of his eyes to avoid the ruffians, was now desirous to prolong the conversation.

“Gentlemen——” he began, as he shut his book. Without again noticing him, however, they passed on, singing a loose song, of which we will not transcribe the words. Poor Don Abbondio remained for a moment, as if spell-bound, and then with heavy and lagging steps took the path which led towards his home. The reader will better understand the state of his mind, when he shall have learned something more of his disposition, and of the condition of the times in which it was his lot to live.

Don Abbondio was not (as the reader may have perceived) endowed with the courage of a lion. But from his earliest years he had been sensible that the most embarrassing situation in those times was that of an animal, furnished with neither tusks nor talons, at the same time having no wish to be devoured. The arm of the law afforded no protection to a man of quiet, inoffensive habits, who had no means of making himself feared. Not that laws and penalties were wanting for the prevention of private violence: the laws were most express; the offences enumerated, and minutely particularised; the penalties sufficiently extravagant; and if that were not enough, the legislator himself, and, a hundred others to whom was committed the execution of the laws, had power to increase them. The proceedings were studiously contrived to free the judge from every thing that might prevent his passing sentence of condemnation; the passages we have cited from proclamations against the bravoës, may be taken as a faithful specimen of these decrees. Notwithstanding this, or, it may be, in *consequence* of this, these proclamations, reiterated and reinforced from time to time, served only to proclaim in pompous language the impotence of those who issued them; or, if they produced any immediate effect, it was *that* of adding to the vexations which the peaceful and feeble suffered from the disturbers of society. Impunity was organised and effected in so many ways as to render the proclamations powerless. Such was the consequence of the sanctuaries and asylums; and of

the privileges of certain classes, partly acknowledged by the legal power, partly tolerated in silence, or feebly opposed; but which, in *fact*, were sustained and guarded by almost every individual with interested activity and punctilious jealousy. Now this impunity, threatened and assailed, but not destroyed, by these proclamations, would naturally, at every new attack, employ fresh efforts and devices to maintain itself. The proclamations were efficient, it is true, in fettering and embarrassing the honest man, who had neither power in himself nor protection from others; inasmuch as, in order to reach every person, they subjected the movements of each private individual to the arbitrary will of a thousand magistrates and executive officers. But he, who before the commission of his crime had prepared himself a refuge in some convent or palace where bailiffs never dared to enter; or who simply wore a livery, which engaged in his defence the vanity or the interest of a powerful family; such a one was free in his actions, and could laugh to scorn every proclamation. Of those very persons whose part it was to ensure the execution of these decrees, some belonged by birth to the privileged class, others were its clients and dependants; and as the latter as well as the former had, from education, from habit, from imitation, embraced its maxims, they would be very careful not to violate them. Had they however, been bold as heroes, obedient as monks, and devoted as martyrs, they could never have accomplished the execution of the laws, inferior as they were in number to *those* with whom they must engage, and with the frequent probability of being abandoned, or even sacrificed, by him who, in a moment of theoretical abstraction, might require them to act. But, in addition to this, their office would be regarded as a base one in public opinion, and their name stamped with reproach. It was therefore very natural that, instead of risking, nay, throwing away, their lives in a fruitless attempt, they should sell their inaction, or, rather, their connivance, to the powerful; or, at least, exercise their authority only on those occasions when it might be done with safety to themselves; that is, in oppressing the peaceable and the defenceless.

The man who acts with violence, or who is constantly in fear of

violence from others, seeks companions and allies. Hence it happened that, during these times, individuals displayed so strong a tendency to combine themselves into classes, and to advance, as far as each one was able, the power of that to which he belonged. The clergy was vigilant in the defence and extension of its immunities; the nobility, of its privileges; the military, of its exemptions; the merchants and artisans were enrolled in companies and fraternities; the lawyers were united in leagues, and even the physicians formed a corporation. Each of these little oligarchies had its own appropriate power,—in each of them the individual found the advantage of employing for himself, in proportion to his influence and dexterity, the united force of numbers. The more honest availed themselves of this advantage merely for their defence; the crafty and the wicked profited by it to assure themselves of success in their rogueries, and impunity from their results. The strength, however, of these various combinations was far from being equal; and, especially in the country, the wealthy and overbearing nobleman, with a band of bravoes, and surrounded by peasants accustomed to regard themselves as subjects and soldiers of their lord, exercised an irresistible power, and set all laws at defiance.

Don Abbondio, neither noble, rich, nor valiant, had from early youth found himself alone and unaided in such a state of society, like an earthen vessel thrown amidst iron jars; he therefore readily obeyed his parents, who wished him to become a priest. He did, to say the truth, not regard the obligations and the noble ends of the ministry to which he dedicated himself, but was only desirous to secure the means of living, and to connect himself with a powerful and respected class. But no class provided for the individual, or secured his safety, *further* than to a certain point; none rendered it unnecessary for him to adopt for himself a system of his own. The system of Don Abbondio consisted chiefly in shunning all disputes; he maintained an unarmed neutrality in all the contests that broke out around him;—between the clergy and the civil power, between persons in office and nobles and magistrates, bravoes and soldiers, down to the squabbles of the peasantry themselves, terminated

by the fist or the knife. By keeping aloof from the overbearing, by affecting not to notice their acts of violence, by bowing low and with the most profound respect to all whom he met, the poor man had succeeded in passing over sixty years without encountering any violent storms; not but that he also had some small portion of gall in his composition; and this continual exercise of patience exacerbated it to such a degree, that, if he had not had it in his power occasionally to give it vent, his health must have suffered. But as there were a few persons in the world connected with himself whom he knew to be powerless, he could, from time to time, discharge on them his long pent-up ill-humour. He was, moreover, a severe censor of those who did not regulate their conduct by his example, provided he could censure without danger. According to his creed, the poor fellow who had been cudgelled had been a little imprudent; the murdered man had always been turbulent; the man who maintained his right against the powerful, and met with a broken head, must have been somewhat wrong; which is, perhaps, true enough, for in all disputes the line can never be drawn so finely as not to leave a little wrong on both sides. He especially declaimed against those of his confraternity, who, at their own risk, took part with the oppressed against a powerful oppressor. "This," he said, "was to purchase trouble with ready money, to kick at snarling dogs, and an intermeddling in profane things that lowered the dignity of the sacred ministry." He had, in short, a favourite maxim, that an honest man, who looked to himself and minded his own affairs, never met with any rough encounters.

From all that has been said, we may imagine the effect the meeting just described must have had upon the mind of poor Don Abbondio. Those fierce countenances, the threats of a lord who was well known not to speak idly, his plan of quiet life and patient endurance disconcerted in an instant, a difficulty before him from which he saw no possibility of extrication; all these thoughts rushed confusedly through his mind. "If Renzo could be quietly dismissed with a refusal, all would be well; but he will require reasons—and what can I say to him? he too has a head of his own; a lamb, if not

meddled with—but once attempt to cross him—— Oh!—and raving after that Lucy, as much enamoured as—— Young idiots! who, for want of something else to do, fall in love, and must be married, forsooth, thinking of nothing else, never concerning themselves about the trouble they bring upon an honest man like me. Wretch that I am! Why should those two scowling faces plant themselves exactly in my path, and pick a quarrel with me? What have I to do in the matter? Is it I that mean to wive? Why did they not rather go and speak—— Ah! truly, that which is to the purpose always occurs to me after the right time: if I had but thought of suggesting to them to go and bear their message——” But here he was disturbed by the reflection, that to repent of not having been the counsellor and abettor of evil, was too iniquitous a thing; and he therefore turned the rancour of his thoughts against the individual who had thus robbed him of his tranquillity. He did not know Don Roderick, except by sight and by report; his sole intercourse with him had been to touch chin to breast, and the ground with the corner of his hat, the few times he had met him on the road. He had, on more than one occasion, defended the reputation of that Signor against those who, in an under-tone, with sighs and looks raised to heaven, had execrated some one of his exploits. He had declared a hundred times that he was a respectable cavalier. But at this moment he, in his own heart, readily bestowed upon him all those titles to which he would never lend an ear from another. Having, amidst the tumult of these thoughts, reached the entrance of his house, which stood at the end of the little glebe, he unlocked the door, entered, and carefully secured it within. Anxious to find himself in society that he could trust, he called aloud, “Perpetua, Perpetua,” advancing towards the little parlour where she was, doubtless, employed in preparing the table for his supper. Perpetua was, as the reader must be aware, the housekeeper of Don Abbondio; an affectionate and faithful domestic, who knew how to obey or command as occasion served; to bear the grumbling and whims of her master at times, and at others to make him bear with hers. These were becoming every day more frequent; she had passed the age of forty in a single state;

the consequences, *she* said, of having refused all the offers that had been made her; her *female friends* asserted that she had never found any one willing to take her.

“Coming,” said Perpetua, as she set in its usual place on the little table the flask of Don Abbondio’s favourite wine, and moved slowly toward the parlour door: before she reached it he entered, with steps so disordered, looks so clouded, and a countenance so changed, that an eye less practised than that of Perpetua could have discovered at a glance that something unusual had befallen him.

“Mercy on me! What is it ails my master?”

“Nothing, nothing,” said Don Abbondio, as he sank upon his easy chair.

“How, nothing! Would you have me believe that, looking as you do? Some dreadful accident has happened.”

“Oh! for the love of Heaven! When I say nothing, it is either nothing, or something I cannot tell.”

“That you cannot tell, not even to me? Who will take care of your health? Who will give you advice?”

“Oh! peace, peace! Do not make matters worse. Give me a glass of my wine.”

“And you will still pretend to me that nothing is the matter?” said Perpetua, filling the glass, but retaining it in her hand, as if unwilling to present it except as the reward of confidence.

“Give here, give here,” said Don Abbondio, taking the glass with an unsteady hand, and hastily swallowing its contents.

“Would you oblige me then to go about, asking here and there what it is has happened to my master?” said Perpetua, standing upright before him, with her hands on her sides, and looking him steadfastly in the face, as if to extract the secret from his eyes.

“For the love of Heaven, do not worry me, do not kill me with your pother; this is a matter that concerns—concerns my life.”

“Your life!”

“My life.”

“You know well, that, when you have frankly confided in me, I have never——”

“Yes, forsooth, as when——”

Perpetua was sensible she had touched a false string; wherefore, changing suddenly her note, “My dear master,” said she, in a moving tone of voice, “I have always had a dutiful regard for you, and if I now wish to know this affair, it is from zeal, and a desire to assist you, to give you advice, to relieve your mind.”

The truth is, that Don Abbondio’s desire to disburden himself of his painful secret was as great as that of Perpetua to obtain a knowledge of it; so that, after having repulsed, more and more feebly, her renewed assaults; after having made her swear many times that she would not breathe a syllable of it, he, with frequent pauses and exclamations, related his miserable adventure. When it was necessary to pronounce the dread name of him from whom the prohibition came, he required from Perpetua another and more solemn oath: having uttered it, he threw himself back on his seat with a heavy sigh, and, in a tone of command, as well as supplication, exclaimed,—

“For the love of Heaven!”—

“Mercy upon me!” cried Perpetua, “what a wretch! what a tyrant! Does he not fear God?”

“Will you be silent? or do you want to ruin me completely?”

“Oh! we are here alone, no one can hear us. But what will my poor master do?”

“See there now,” said Don Abbondio, in a peevish tone, “see the fine advice you give me. To ask of me, what I’ll do? what I’ll do? as if you were the one in difficulty, and it was for me to help you out!”

“Nay, I could give you my own poor opinion; but then—”

“But—but then, let us know it.”

“My opinion would be, that, as every one says our archbishop is a saint, a man of courage, and not to be frightened by an ugly phiz, and who will take pleasure in upholding a curate against one of these tyrants; I should say, and do say, that you had better write him a handsome letter, to inform him as how——”

“Will you be silent! will you be silent! Is this advice to offer a poor man? When I get a pistol bullet in my side—God preserve me!—will the archbishop take it out?”

“Ah! pistol bullets are not given away like sugarplums; and it were woful if those dogs should bite every time they bark. If a man knows how to show his teeth, and make himself feared, they hold him in respect: we should not have been brought to such a pass, if you had stood upon your rights. Now, all come to us (by your good leave) to——”

“Will you be silent?”

“Certainly; but it is true though, that when the world sees one is always ready, in every encounter, to lower——”

“Will you be silent? Is this a time for such idle talk?”

“Well, well, you’ll think of it to-night; but in the meantime do not be the first to harm yourself; to destroy your own health: eat a mouthful.”

“I’ll think of it,” murmured Don Abbondio; “certainly I’ll think of it. I *must* think of it;” and he arose, continuing—“No! I’ll take nothing, nothing; I’ve something else to do. But, that this should have fallen upon me——”

“Swallow at least this other little drop,” said Perpetua, as she poured the wine. “You know it always restores your stomach.”

“Oh! there wants other medicine than that, other medicine than that, other medicine than that——”

So saying, he took the light, and muttering, “A pretty business this! To an honest man like me! And to-morrow, what is to be done?” with other like exclamations, he went towards his bedchamber. Having reached the door, he stopped a moment, and before he quitted the room, exclaimed, turning towards Perpetua, with his finger on his lips—“For the love of Heaven, be silent!”