

# The Ottawa Free Press.

601/B/19/2  
OTFP

VOLUME II.

OTTAWA, AUGUST, 1867.

NUMBER 3

L'ORCO.\*

A TALE OF VENICE.

(Translated from the French for the Rural New-Yorker.)

WE were assembled as usual under the vine arbor. The evening was stormy, the air heavy, and the sky loaded with black clouds, furrowed by frequent flashes of lightning. We maintained a melancholy silence. One would have said that the sadness of the atmosphere had reached our hearts, and that we felt ourselves involuntarily disposed to tears. BEPPA above all seemed to have abandoned herself to painful thoughts. The Abbe, frightened at the disposition of the party, had tried in vain several times, and in all manner of ways, to re-animate the gaiety of our friend, ordinarily so lively. Neither questions, nor teasings, nor prayers, could draw her out of her reverie; but with her eyes fixed upon the heavens, and her fingers wandering casually over the trembling strings of her guitar, she seemed to have forgotten all that was passing around her, and to be interested only in the plaintive sounds she brought out of her instrument, and the capricious course of the clouds. The good PANORIO, discouraged by the bad success of his attempts, took the part of addressing himself to me.

"Come, dear ZORZINE," said he, "try the power of your friendship upon this capricious beauty. There exists a sort of magnetic sympathy between you two which is stronger than all my reasonings, and the sound of your voice always succeeds in drawing her from her most profound distraction."

"This magnetic sympathy of which you speak, my dear Abbe," replied I, "comes from the identity of our sentiments. We have suffered in the same manner, and thought the same things, and we know each other well enough to know what order of ideas certain external circumstances will recall to our minds. I will wager that I can divine, if not the object, at least the nature of her present reverie." And, turning towards BEPPA, I said quietly, "Carissima, of which of your sisters were you thinking?"

"Of the most beautiful, the most proud and the most unhappy," replied she, without turning her head.

"When did she die?" said I, already interesting myself in the fate of her who lived in the memory of my noble friend, and desiring to associate myself by my regrets with a destiny which ought not to be strange to me.

"She died at the end of last winter, on the night of the *bal masque* which was given at SEVILIO palace. She had resisted many sorrows and had come out victorious from many dangers; she had passed through terrible agonies without yielding, and yet she died all at once, without leaving any trace behind her—as if she had been carried away by a thunder-cloud.

Everybody here knew her more or less well, but no one so well as myself, for it was only in the proportion that she was beloved that she made herself known. Some people do not believe in her death, although she has never re-appeared since the night I speak of. They say that it often happens that people disappear in this way for a long time and afterwards return. But for myself I know she will never return, and that her *role* upon earth is finished. I would like to doubt it if I could, but she has taken care to acquaint me with the fatal truth by the very man, even, who was the cause of her death. And what a misfortune was this, my God?—the greatest misfortune of these unfortunate times! Her's was such a beautiful life!—so beautiful, so full of contrasts, so mysterious, so brilliant, so sad, so magnificent, so enthusiastic, so austere, so voluptuous, so complete in its relations to all things human! No, no life nor death have been like to her's. She had found the means, even in this prosaic age, of suppressing from her life all its miserable realities, leaving behind only its poesy. Faithful to the old customs of the national aristocracy, she never showed herself except at night-fall, masked, but never followed by any one.

There is not an inhabitant of the city who has not met her wandering about in the *places*, or in the streets; not one who has not seen her gondola fastened in some canal; but no one has ever seen her leave or enter it. Although the gondola was wholly unguarded, no one ever heard of any attempt at theft upon it. It was painted and equipped like all the other gondolas, and yet everybody knew it: and even the children would say on seeing it, "There is the gondola of the Mask." As to the manner in which it went, and the place from whence it brought its mistress in the evening, or returned her in the morning, no one ever suspected. The coast guard of customs had, indeed, often seen a dark shadow gliding over the lagunes, and taking it for the boat of a smuggler, had chased it into the open sea; but when daylight came they could never see anything on the waves that resembled the object of their pursuit. So, at length, they inquired themselves no more about it, and were content with saying whenever they saw it: "There is the gondola of the mask again." At night the mask would perambulate the whole city, in search of we know not what. It would be seen turn by turn in the greatest parks and in the narrowest and crookedest streets, on the bridges and under the archway of the grand palace, in the most frequented places and in the most deserted. Sometimes it went slowly, sometimes fast, without appearing to be inquired either by the crowd or by solitude, but never stopping. It appeared to contemplate the houses, the monuments, the canals, and even the sky of the city with impassioned curiosity, and to breathe with joy the air which circulated through it. Whenever it met a friend

it would make a sign to her to follow it, and would soon disappear with her. It has many times taken me thus from the midst of the crowd into some deserted place where it talked to me of the things we loved. I followed it with confidence because I well knew we were friends; but many of those to whom it made the sign dare not accept the invitation. Strange stories were circulated in regard to it which cooled the courage of the most intrepid.

It was said that many young men, believing they could discover a woman under this mask and this black robe, had become enamored with her, because of the singularity and mystery of her life, and her beautiful form and noble attractions, and having had the imprudence to follow her had never re-appeared. The police, too, having remarked that these young men were all Austrians, had used all the means in their power to find them again, and to capture the person who was accused of causing their disappearance. But the police were never more fortunate than the custom-house officers, and never could obtain any news of the young foreigners, nor lay hands upon her. An odd adventure had discouraged the most ardent spies of the Venetian inquisition. Seeing that it was impossible to overtake the mask in Venice at night, two of the most zealous of the officers resolved to wait for her in her own gondola, so as to seize her when she entered to leave the city. One evening, when they saw it fastened to the quay *des Es-lavours*, they descended into it and concealed themselves. They remained there all night without seeing any one, until about an hour before day, they thought they could perceive that somebody was untying the boat. They rose in silence and prepared to spring upon their prey; but at the same instant a terrible kick of the foot upset the gondola, and with it the unlucky agents of Austrian public order. One of them was drowned, and the other was only saved by the aid of the smugglers. The next morning there was no trace of the bark, and the police might have believed it to be sunk; but the next evening they saw it fastened in the same place, and in the same state as it was the night before. Then a superstitious terror took possession of all the *argousins* and not one cared to re-commence the attempt of the past night. Since that day the mask has never been troubled more, and continues its promenades as in the past.

At the beginning of last Autumn an Austrian officer named Count FRANZ LICHTENSTEIN came here in garrison. He was a passionate and enthusiastic young man, who had in him the germ of all the grand sentiments, and something like an instinct of the nobler thoughts. Notwithstanding his bad education as a nobleman, he had known how to preserve his mind from all prejudice, and to keep in his heart a place for liberty. His position forced him to dissimulate

(Continued on fourth page.)

\* A Hobgoblin, or Spirit.