



I WEAR THE MASK OF THE MAGNIFICO

Every man must play a part, and mine a sad one, albeit few would believe it. My name precedes me; when I walk, all step aside.

None dare meet my eye but the winged stone lions of the Repubblica.

The Doge lends me his ear; he smiles when he hears I rival his generosity, yet his smile is always cold. Like me, he knows that gifts are but another way to conceal sadness behind the deep frown of a philosopher's bust.

I give too much confidence to my **Servitore**, a stray who wandered from some valley down to Venice, to die of hunger or get drunk on its beauties. When I had to choose a second for a clandestine duel, one outside the Doge's good grace, I had none to trust, but they who bring me food and clothing every day. My servant never asks, nor disappoints.

Yet there could have been a loyal soul, one of noble birth, one that had plenty of music in itself. If only the matter to wash away with blood were not between the two of us! I would have given all for the one who wears the mask of the **Innamorato**. All but my honour. All but my name. For what is left to give of those who no longer have themselves? If I have ever met the eye of a living soul, it was theirs. These masks will not conceal our eyes when the time comes. And if God wills their gaze to be my last sight, then so shall it be.

They walk with a **Capitano**, as good of a braggart as any other warrior, perhaps enough so to have inspired their latest excesses. Prepare to shed a tear for every time a soldier makes you laugh, they say. They would paint themselves our equals, starting with the duels, which once belonged to gentlemen alone. They would equate the blood they spill with the blood that binds a father to his son, till cruelty and nobility become one and the same.

But I fear we shall indeed become one and the same to the good **Giudice**. Villains and outlaws, though they have agreed to watch as we spit on the will of the Doge, so that our offence be carried out in the best possible manner. I admire they who build their fortune on knowledge. But if to do were as easy as to know what were good to do...

We asked they be inflexible, above the parties. I do not doubt they will be.