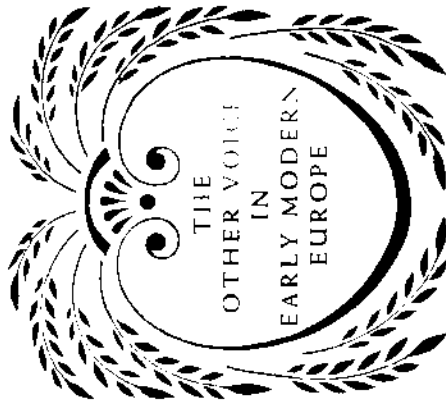




Series Editors
Margaret L. King and
Albert Rabil, Jr.

Cecilia Ferrazzi

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF AN
ASPIRING SAINT



Transcribed, Translated, and Edited
by
Anne Jacobson Schutte

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better and be less embarrassed, and then it can be taken to the Holy Office, and when the entire [manuscript] has been read in my presence, [I] confirm it."

Then the Most Holy Tribunal ruled that it was appropriate to make this opportunity available and selected for this office Father Antonio da Venezia, Reader [in theology] of the Order of Observant Friars Minor at the monastery of San Francesco della Vigna. This having been done, she was sent back to her place and signed, with silence imposed, etc.

[signed] Cecilia⁴²



AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CECILIA FERRAZZI

In the name of the Lord and of His Mother, the Most Holy Virgin Mary. On [Wednesday,] 9 July 1664, in the prison of the Holy Inquisition of Venice.

I, Cecilia Ferrazzi, depose as the truth the things written below, which happened to me from the age of five until the present time.

From the moment I was born until this very hour, I've always been sick—and to be precise, the illness began to develop when I was five, with very great pains and loss of consciousness.

At the same age, one day when I was asleep on my mother's lap, I awoke very frightened and said to my mother that at that very moment they were killing my father. And just then a crowd of people brought him home covered with knife wounds but not badly injured because only his skin was cut. And I've heard this recounted by my mother several times, though I don't remember having told her because I was so young.

Around the same time there came upon me a very great desire to love and enjoy Blessed God, acquired from the good example and teaching of my mother, whom I heard reading books of devotion, especially the lives of male and female saints, and saying the Rosary with her children, all of us little. And when she realized that I had that feeling toward God, she isolated me from my brothers, letting me have very little to do with them, so I felt as if I were out of this world, for she didn't even allow me to associate with the wet nurse employed in the house.

As I grew from six to seven to eight, my bodily pains grew, too, with fits and fainting spells. And my mother had me dressed in dark blue in honor of St. Valentine, saying that such fits and pains were convulsions.¹ And to

42. Ferrazzi's misspelled signature reveals her uncertain command of the written word, no doubt rendered even more tenuous by the stress of being interrogated.

1. Physiological psychologists link temporal lobe epilepsy with strong religious impulses and visionary experiences. Tempting as it may seem to label Ferrazzi an epileptic, her contemporaries

relieve me there appeared a beautiful creature in the form of a woman in a glowing dress that my eyes couldn't look at, who consoled me by saying that I must suffer these pains willingly for the love of God. From then on this young woman disappeared and returned both during the day and at night, once or twice a day and the same at night, and especially while I was in prayer reciting the Our Father and the Hail Mary and the Rosary, for these were the prayers I said in those days.

When I was twelve, despite the fact that I was unwell, my mother began to put me in charge of the housework. In [order to fulfill] this assignment, since I wasn't strong, I commended myself to the Most Holy Mother so that She would help me pay holy obedience to my mother and father. I offered myself to the Most Holy Mother Mary, begging that She give me grace to [gain] as much merit from serving my father as serving God, [from serving] my mother as [serving] the Most Holy Virgin, and [serving] my brothers as if they were angels and saints of paradise—although I was ashamed of serving my father and brothers, for it has always been my inclination to have nothing to do with men or even let them see me. And I tried to avoid my father and brothers as much as possible, retiring at night to say those few prayers, since during the day I was busy around the house.

And seeking to raise my brothers with the greatest possible purity and devotion, I delighted in talking with them of the greatness of Lord God. And a week before the feast days of male and female saints, I had them read their lives, inciting them to devotion toward them [the saints] so that they knelt with their bare knees on the ground and lashed themselves with whips made of rope. And on the vigil of the male or female saint, we didn't eat dinner in the evening, fasting on bread and water both on their vigils and on the feasts of the Most Holy Madonna, and we kept up these devotions throughout the octave²—all this, however, with the consent of our father and mother, who sometimes yelled at us but still let us do it.

Because of my infirmity, I ate little, and almost never any meat, for I was unable to hold food in my stomach, and I prayed the Most Holy Mother to bring me back to the condition of an ordinary person so that I could perform my housework better and suffer for the love of God. Having made this request to the Most Holy Mother, I heard an internal voice that told me, "Cecilia, you're born to obey and to let the will of Lord God be done, but it's your responsibility to command my dear Son." These words made me very fearful.

ies, who were very familiar with the symptoms of "the ugly sickness," never used the word or the euphemism in reference to her trances.

2 The week following a feast day

Since my mother confessed to a *pietano* in the *contrada* of Santa Marina, whose name I don't remember [Cesare Turana], she took me to him to confess when I was around seven, but rarely. When I became ill at that time, I asked him the favor of administering communion to me before I died, and he granted it, giving me communion in bed. And I think he was my first confessor, to whom I made eight or ten confessions. Then my mother took me to confess to the priest Pisani, confessor to the nuns of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, who from then on was my ordinary confessor, for it was my desire to become a nun in that convent. Until his death I always confessed to him, and he recommended that the nuns receive me. After that I didn't have a designated confessor, but where my mother went, I went too—but rarely, that is, once or twice a year.

Since my father was in trade, he kept many young men in the house,³ one of whom, called Pietro, became delirious. And one night, while I was praying and commending him to the Lord, I seemed to see that he intended to throw himself off the upper porch of the house. Hence I commended him even more fervently to God, and I saw great temptation surrounding that soul, for it appeared to me that the Devil wanted to push him down. And I believed that this was an illusion of the Devil meant to distract me from prayer. But the next day, two hours after sunrise, Pietro threw himself off the porch into the middle of the street. A priest from Santa Marina came running and, seeing that his bones and his head were all broken and he couldn't administer confession, declared him dead and left him that way. I started to pray, begging grace from God for the salvation of that soul. I was called to dinner by my father and mother, and while I was on my way, I heard Pietro, who had been laid on a table in a little chapel in our house, moaning. They called the priest, who confessed and anointed him, and at the hour of one he died.⁴ So I had this vision from the Lord—but it could be, however, that it was a temptation to pay heed to those things I've always abhorred. I've always held my actions suspect in the eyes of God, for I'm a sinner and have done evil, and the good, if there has been any, is derived from God.

In praying, I've had many battles with the Devil, who appeared to me visibly either in the form of a frightening animal or as an ugly man breathing fire from his mouth. He used to snatch the Office I was using⁵ and beat me, either with clubs or with iron rods, leaving my midsection battered. He

3 As apprentices or journeymen

4 The register of deaths in the parish of Santa Marina corroborates Terrazzi's account of Pietro's death, which occurred on 31 March 1627.

5 Probably the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin or a larger book of hours containing it.

kept telling me that it would be better to consent to marriage than to lead the kind of life I was leading and that I should leave alone what was his because I would come to a bad end, like so many others who have believed that they were serving God and were mistaken, and that he'd make me touch it all with my hand, and that I really should experience the taste of flesh. And I would respond naively—for I didn't know what he meant, except that I didn't like eating meat, and if I'd been able to eat it, I wouldn't have disobeyed my father and mother, who tried to force me to eat it—that not even for him would I eat it.⁶ And I'd do everything I could to get him away from me, and he'd disappear with a great noise and stench. At the time, aged thirteen or fourteen, I hadn't yet told my confessors about this.

When I was around fifteen, my father and mother pushed me toward marriage, but I never consented. I begged them to make me a nun in one of the strictest orders there was so that I'd be more separated from the world. After about nine months, I was at work decorating a chapel in our house, making various things with my own hands, including figures of male and female saints, and I asked that the Most Holy Mother design to console me by having my mother conceive a baby girl. A few days later she discovered that she was pregnant, at an age when she thought she wouldn't have any more children, having already given birth to twenty-two, boys and girls, all of whom are dead.⁷ And then she gave birth to a baby girl, who is my sister living at Santa Teresa. Now that they had this other daughter, they agreed to my becoming a nun as I desired. After my sister was weaned, I had complete charge of raising her. One day when she was about eight months old, she fell off a bed. When she turned black and appeared almost lifeless, I carried her before a Virgin painted in the Greek style⁸ and prayed on my knees that She bring my sister back to life, and I saw the Virgin spread Her arms and give her a benediction, after which the baby immediately recovered, unharmed. I took her to her cradle and said nothing to anyone. Then came the plague, from which everyone in the household (father,

6. Translation based on a conjectural reading of a difficult passage. Ferrazzi claims not to have known in her early adolescence that the word *carne* could mean "flesh" in the sexual sense as well as "meat." As she must have realized by the time she dictated her autobiography, the "all" the Devil wants her to touch must include his penis.

7. My search of baptismal registers in the parishes of San Lio and Santa Marina has turned up ten children of Alvise Ferrazzi and Maddalena Polis born between July 1604 and April 1617 four of whom died in infancy or early childhood. Since the register of Santa Marina covering the years 1619–35 is missing, the births of Maria and perhaps other siblings of Cecilia cannot be traced.

8. Some Venetian artists specialized in producing inexpensive Byzantine-style paintings of the Virgin Mary for devotional use in private homes.

mother, brothers, and all the servants) died," leaving me all alone with my sister, who must have been about three, and both of us had the plague, too. My sister was tended by Frenchmen, but I refused to be treated by anyone, and so I cured myself by putting herbs on my sores, one of them under my arm and the other on my breast.

When I was with my sister in the house of Signora Modesta Salandi at the Carmine (having survived many travails, as I've told the Holy Inquisition in the past few days), alone in my room, a dove appeared to me several times while I was praying to the Lord to give me a good female superior who would rule me in accordance with the will of God. To my great amazement and consolation, the dove delighted me by flying around me, alighting now on my shoulders, now on my head, and then hovering around my ears. And the Most Illustrious Signora Marietta Cappello, having come there to talk with me, took me to stay with her near the Carità and had me confessed by one of those fathers, Father Corner. When he wanted to know what kind of life I led, I told him among other things about this dove. And he told me that I must send it away by throwing holy water on it the next time it came. So I did, but it wouldn't go away, even when I spit in its face as the confessor ordered me to do. Then he told me that if it wouldn't leave, I should command it in the name of God and the Most Holy Virgin to go to him, as obedience dictated. And from what that confessor told me, the dove did go to him; he added that I should learn from this how much obedience pleased God. Into this incident I've put nothing of my own, not considering whether it was God or the Devil.⁹

When I was in the house of the said Signora Marietta Cappello, whose husband [Paolo Cappello] had contracted dysentery and was near death, she had to go to their villa¹⁰ on business, so she left me alone to care for the sick man. She sent from the villa a basket containing some thrushes, which I showed him to cheer him up, and he ordered me to prepare one of them for his dinner. But because I was so busy, being alone in the house, I forgot

9. In the great bubonic plague epidemic of 1630–31, some 46,000 Venetians died, approximately 30 percent of the city's population. See Paolo Preto, "Peste e demografia," in *Comune di Venezia. Assessorato alla Cultura, Venezia e la peste, 1448–1797* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), pp. 97–98. The death register of Santa Marina for this period confirms Ferrazzi's account of its impact on her family. Only two of her brothers, by then adults who probably resided outside the parish, are not listed there.

10. That is, she is trying to recount this incident without drawing theological conclusions about it.

11. Paolo Cappello's will indicates that the villa was at Pagnano, near Asolo, about 64 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of Venice.

to pluck and cook it. While I was feeding him, for he couldn't even put his hand to his mouth, he asked me whether the thrush was cooked, but so as not to disturb him, I didn't answer. But going into the kitchen, I knelt down in the middle of it, begging the Most Holy Mother's pardon for my negligence with tears running down my cheeks. And as I knelt there, he called me, asking whether the thrush was cooked. And I, not knowing what to say because I couldn't bear to tell him that it wasn't even plucked, told him, "Right away, sir." And at the entrance to the kitchen, I met a little boy, handsome and graceful, who held in his hand a skewer with a roast thrush—exactly what he had ordered. Taking the thrush from the boy, I immediately carried it to the sick man and put it in his mouth a little piece at a time. He ate it with the greatest pleasure, thanking the Lord because it was so good. And I considered myself unworthy of having received so great a favor from the Lord. When he had finished eating the thrush and I had taken care of him, I returned to the kitchen, to the same spot where I'd been given the thrush by the little boy, and kneeling down, I began to flagellate myself, thanking the Lord and praying that whether He Who was master had sent it to me or it was the Devil, that food not cause harm. And so the gentleman was immediately relieved and cured. A few days later he got out of bed, to the wonder and amazement of the doctors and his wife.

Once while I was rocking a baby girl, daughter of the said Signora Cappello's daughter, sitting on the floor near the door of the room with my foot outside the sill, the housekeeper came by. Not realizing that my foot was outside the door, she shut it on my ankle. I didn't feel the pain until after midnight because while I was rocking that baby I was in a trance,¹² praying and meditating on the purity of the Most Holy Virgin through the purity of that little girl. I was carried to bed by Signora Cappello herself, who on instructions from my confessor, Signor Father Alvise Zonati, always assisted me in all my troubles. And in the morning, while they were talking about summoning the barber to treat me, I found myself completely recovered, thanks to the prayer I had made after midnight, in which I begged the Lord to heal me so that I could pay obedience to my lady superior.

I couldn't take communion except when the confessor and Signora Cappello permitted it, even though my desire to receive His Most Holy Body was very great. And one day, standing at the fireplace to do some chore and thinking about the greatness of God, Who is concealed in the accidents of that consecrated Host, I fell headfirst into the fire. Signora Cappello, who happened by at that moment, discovered me there and, con-

12. Literally, "outside myself."

siderably upset, pulled me out, finding me without any injury at all from the fire.

One day, a work day, the same Signora Cappello had me go to church for Mass in an apron all covered with blood by the sausage makers who were making salami with her. At the door of the church, my confessor, Zonati, asked me brusquely what I was doing there and ordered me to go into the belltower to ring for the Mass. I obeyed, even though I didn't know where the belltower was or which was the right bell, since there were four ropes, and I found the tower without getting the wrong rope. And without reconciling me he gave me communion during Mass, as he had done many times before without reconciliation. After giving me communion, he had me go into the confessional and wanted to know what I felt about that humiliation Signora Cappello had inflicted by sending me to Mass in such a dirty apron. I replied that my pride required nothing other than mortifications, which were few in comparison to my faults, and that I prayed the Lord to send them to me in secret so that no one would know about them, and to protect me from these external things so that they would do no harm to my soul.

Concerning the Carmelite confessor Master Bonaventura, assigned to me by the priest Polacco, vicar of the nuns, beyond what I have already testified to the Holy Inquisition, I say now truthfully that I've never talked with him except in the confessions I made at his feet or else in times of illness when I was in bed, wounded all over my body from the Devil scratching me while fighting with me for entire nights—especially when I was praying for some particular soul or for sinners or the souls of the dead (asking the Lord whether some soul was in purgatory), or for my sinful self. I talked with him about everything that had happened to me, both with the Devil and when I went into a trance, not knowing where I was with my body, which occurred frequently, both in church and at home. While I was at work during a trance, I'd run the needle through my finger without feeling a thing. And many times, under pressure to finish and consign my work on time to the person to whom I owed it,¹³ I'd find it finished without knowing that I'd done so. Nor have I omitted on any count [to follow] his orders in everything he commanded in confession, during which he required me for the sake of obedience to tell him everything that had happened to me, in spite of some resistance on my part to speak because of the shame I felt. Never, while I was in his hands, did I do anything of my own free will. Since I couldn't take any food on account of that serious illness I had, I begged

13. Ferrazzo hints that she was supporting herself at least in part by doing needlework.

him to let me go for a few days without food, but he wouldn't permit that unless the physicians agreed. And he told me that I should choose death over disobedience. He always spoke harshly and reprimanded me, especially when I lost consciousness or went into a trance, commanding that I make a great effort not to do so.

And wishing to obey, I was overcome by a mortal illness, during which the physicians despaired of me because I had even lost the power of speech. In that condition, in the absence of the confessor, who had gone to say Mass, the Most Holy Virgin appeared with five saints¹⁴—the Carmelites St. Angelo [of Jerusalem], St. Albert [degli Abbat], and St. Elias, along with St. Ignatius the Martyr, to all of whom I was devoted—and stood around my bed. And the Most Holy Mother called me, telling me that it was time not for death, but for greater life. She took my right hand and told me that She had come with the saints to whom I was devoted in order to console me, and that I should promise to do what She asked. Furthermore, She showed me Her dear Son, whom I saw several times during the same illness, all cut and beaten up.

What She sought was this: that I stay in the world in order to suffer greater travails (those I'd experienced were nothing in comparison to those I had yet to survive) and that I remain firm for the greater pleasure and glory of Her dear Son. And that I promise to make in Her hands¹⁵ this vow that She required of me: that is, never to depart from obedience to my superiors, who would be assigned to me by the will of Her Son; to let myself be abused and harshly treated for the salvation of souls; to agree to found the convent of Santa Teresa here in Venice,¹⁶ which would be of great efficacy for the sins and salvation of the Republic; to regard those saints assisting Her as witnesses of the truth; to observe the life of St. Teresa with all the travails she had in this world, for I would have as many as she and even some more; to don immediately her habit, for God would give me more and more help; to prepare myself for hell and all its followers being open before me until the end of my life; and to ratify in the hands of my confessor the vow I had already made in the hands of the Holy and Most Blessed Virgin. Who told me that this convent would become the treasury of Her male and female

14. Ferrazzi names only four.

15. That is, placing her hands between those of the Virgin, as in the feudal ceremony of fealty.

16. Around 1638 Ferrazzi tried to establish a convent of Discalced Carmelites in Venice. She looked for assistance to a daughter of her protector Andriana Cuccina, named Francesca, a Carmelite in Bologna. This effort was blocked by her arch-antagonist Giorgio Polacco. Rome Archivio generale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, Plut. 202a. *Provincia Venetianum*. *Historia Provinciae*. *Historica narratio de rebus Provinciae Venetianum*.

servants, adding that there would also be a monastery here in Venice for Her male servants.¹⁷ I replied to Her with a mixture of great fear and consolation that since this was God's and Her will, I was content to have a longer life in order to do the holy will, even though I was a poor, miserable, ignorant sinner who didn't know what I was saying. When this was over, they disappeared with a most melodious sound, singing the *Te Deum Laudamus*,¹⁸ and I myself awoke singing, in good health.

When the confessor returned, he came to my bedside and told me that I should give thanks to the Lord that, dead as I had been, He had given me life for greater service to Him. I told the confessor what had happened with the company that had been with me, and about the vow that I had to ratify in his hands and the habit I must put on. He gathered what was needed to dress me. Coming to say Mass in the house, in which there was a chapel, he gave me communion and blessed the habit. I put it on (and always wore it under my clothes), and I ratified the vow in the confessor's hands. And later the priest Polacco made me take it off, and I through obedience removed it, nor has he ever allowed me to talk about it, and I have obeyed, never putting it on again.

After nine years of suffering following this occurrence, my sister decided to remove me from the house and obedience of Signora Marietta Capello, by force if necessary, for she didn't want me to be subjected any longer to such abuse and torments, and she decided to put me in the house of Santa Teresa, on which construction had begun, even though, following the priest Polacco's order, I was not involved in that project. And in that place, where I stayed a little more than a year, I was under the obedience of my sister, which seemed to me like a contradiction of obedience since the priest Polacco had ordered me not to observe this vow and I have always been assiduous about doing the will of God and that of my superiors. And in agreement with my sister, I went to a house near San Lorenzo, along with two servants.

A daughter of a gentleman of Ca' Lion at San Lorenzo [Paolo Lion], eight or nine years old, wanted to come stay with me, and I was glad to take her on condition that she not see her relatives except on rare occasions, for I didn't want her going anywhere or anyone coming to my house. And I, enjoying my holy poverty, did not get discouraged but had great confidence

17. Translation based on a conjectural reading of a difficult passage.

18. This hymn of praise, dating from the early fifth century, is sung every Sunday at matins when the liturgy includes the Gloria, as well as on such occasions for celebration as the ordination of a priest, the consecration of a bishop, or a military victory.

in God. Who has always provided for me, nor did I have any burden other than being head of the household, when before I had always lived as a subject under obedience. I found that I had nothing but a barrel of wine containing about four *secchie*, which my sister had given me when I left. And since she asked for the barrel back, I had to put that small amount of wine into a bottle left by certain merchants who had been in that house. Poured into the bottle, it turned out to be cloudy, so the serving women didn't want to drink it. But God's providence was so great that not only did that little bit of wine become good in that bottle, it multiplied to such an extent that it lasted seven or eight months for me, the serving women, and that girl until God sent me more. And when I reported that to Father Alvise, my confessor, he commanded that in holy obedience I not go to see whether there was a little or a lot.

In this period I got the disease of the stone, which sent me to bed suffering gravely. And my confessor made me take in a girl from Burano who was going around begging, telling me to keep her until the governors voted her admission to Santi Giovanni e Paolo, and I obeyed him. I kept that girl, who was always ill, for about four years, and then she died in my house. After that I took in three other girls for the sake of charity (with my confessor's consent, however)—very poor girls, sisters orphaned by the deaths of both father and mother, who were going around Venice seeking alms, and they too died in my house (in exemplary deaths, by the way).

Four or five months after I'd taken in those girls, I took in the little daughter of a prostitute, brought to me by a woman from the house of Signora [Andriana] Foscarini, who lives at San Trovaso. That woman snatched this girl from her own mother so that she wouldn't be ruined.¹⁹ After she'd been with me a month, her mother found out and came to see her, and I showed off the girl, well dressed and taken care of. The mother rejoiced, telling me that if I would convert her, too, she wouldn't lead a sinful life any more. She left and then came back to bring me gold (that is, bracelets, chains, and rings, along with quite a few doubloons), saying that she'd let me keep them if I'd let her daughter go home with her for two or three days, after which she herself would change her life. I wouldn't take anything nor give her the little girl, telling her that I had received no such order from my confessor, and she said that she was satisfied to have the girl stay and I should keep the gold and the money, all of which she gave me. Not wanting anything, I told her to keep it all for herself for her own maintenance.

19. That is, be forced into prostitution.

One day I took this girl, whose name was Orsetta, with me to Mass at San Severo, and during the adoration of the Host, she ran away without my noticing and stayed away for three days, from Fat Sunday to the first day of Lent. Those three days I wept continually, praying God and the Most Holy Mother to do me the favor of telling me where she was and promising to be good and change my life. The first day of Lent, I went to church at San Lorenzo, and as I was weeping there for the loss of this girl, a beautiful young woman came to me dressed in dark blue with a glowing veil on her head—seemingly a foreigner, and I really believed she was a foreigner. She asked me, "Cecilia, where is Orsetta?" I replied without thinking, "Madam, you tell me where Orsetta is, I don't know," and I began to cry very hard. And she responded, "Leave here immediately and go to Santa Maria Mater Domini into a street called Calle Sporca."²⁰ Right away I went to my confessor and said, "Sir, I'm going to find Orsetta," and he gave me communion immediately without even reconciling me and told me to go with the Lord's blessing. But in my great haste I didn't tell him about that woman who came to find me, since she had said that I must leave right away.

I got into a gondola and had myself taken to Calle Sporca, where I had one of my maids get off and ask some prostitutes there whether there was a girl named Orsetta around. Some of them said there was and asked who wanted her, and the maids told them that it was her mother. Hearing that, they denied that she was there. When the maids reported this, I got out of the gondola and asked those women to show me where she was, telling them that they were greatly offending God by hiding that girl. One of them replied, "Yesterday evening an old man called Calafao"²¹ took her away." I didn't lose heart—quite the contrary, for I had an internal inspiration that the girl was in one of those houses. And when I asked when that old man would be back, they said that he'd come an hour or two after dark. Telling them that I wouldn't leave until he arrived, I asked them to give me shelter at the door of the house.

At the stroke of none the old man appeared, and although I was calm inside, on seeing him I spoke harshly to put fear into him so that he'd give me that girl, for they had told me that he was supposed to take her to a nobleman's house. The old fellow denied having her, telling me that she'd gone away, and I ran up the stairs of the house with him after me. I gave the door at the top of the stairs a great push, and when it opened, I found the

20. The name means "Dirty Street."

21. Calafao means "ship catfish," perhaps a nickname derived from the procurers' primary occupation.

girl Orsetta with her hair all curled and dressed very showily, and the old man had come to take her away. Right away I hugged her and with loving words exhorted her to come back with me. She screamed that she didn't want to. And I, seeing her in that state, called my boatmen. When they scared her by saying that they'd take her by force, she yielded and came voluntarily into the gondola. Realizing that I had no money to pay the gondoliers, I found by chance a half-scudo on the ground in that street near that door. I had one of my maids pick it up and used it to pay the boatmen. And I took that girl home, where I locked her into a room so that she wouldn't escape again.

Getting back into the same boat, I went to the Zitelle to see the Most Illustrious Signora Marietta Barocci, who still lives there as superior, and I begged her on my knees to deign to take in that girl. I sent her [Orsetta] to the governors of the house, she was voted on, and the next morning the governesses came to my house to see her, and they took her to the Zitelle, where she still is. And her mother, instead of changing her life as she'd promised me, let herself be taken by a Jew and an Armenian onto a ship, on which they all died, and all that gold, along with the other things she insisted on giving me, was turned over to the girl in the Zitelle.

When my illness continued with excruciating pains, the physicians consulted and concluded that it might be the stone, for which they prescribed remedies that did no good. During the day, in the house at San Lorenzo where I lived, while I was praying the Lord to liberate me, a little friar appeared before me dressed as a Discalced Carmelite with that little white mantle. And I heard others, whom I couldn't see, say, "Don't worry, for this is Blessed Francis of the Baby Jesus, who has come to console you." And he, for whom I had particular devotion, showed me a winding road full of stones, down which he wanted me to walk. But since I couldn't make my way down the road with all its obstacles, he went ahead and broke up those stones with a little hatchet like the ones the Stradiots²² carry, saying, "It's by this road we must go to receive martyrdom for the benefit of souls." And while he split those rocks and enabled me to walk, he turned his face toward mine and showed me a city like Babylon, where a great number of people were doing bad things: men running after girls, looking as if they wanted to tear them to pieces; some of the girls fleeing and others running into the arms of the men, who undressed them immodestly. They looked more like devils than human beings. In my enormous anxiety I couldn't help exclaiming, "O Father, what dangers I see!" And when I said that, he replied,

22 Cavalry from Greece and Albania in the service of the Venetian Republic

"O daughter, this is the martyrdom God has prepared for you for the salvation of these souls. Don't be afraid, for you must fight in the midst of them with great suffering and humiliation, and you must even risk your life. Lord God and His dear Mother will defend and protect you, and on account of great poverty you'll find yourself in a sea of lions, but nothing will harm you." Then I was filled with a great deal of energy and desire to suffer in order to support and aid those souls with the strength I requested from the Lord, the male and female saints to whom I was devoted, and in particular St. Joseph—though I considered myself a miserable sinner, without any merit before His Divine Majesty.

And after this, those sharp pains grew more and more, so that I broke plates and glasses with my teeth when they gave me food and drink to relieve me and keep up my strength. Confessors, physicians, and barbers tied me to a prayer stool, on which I was seated where one puts one's knees, and then they held onto it as hard as they could because I was jumping around with loud cries on account of the great pain I was in—but the stone couldn't pass. My body was covered with the habit of the Virgin, from whom I requested the favor that if these pains weren't enough, She send me others, but that She make sure that my body was covered and my private parts protected so that the Enemy²³ couldn't get at them, and that I lose consciousness on account of the sharp pains from which I was suffering. When it pleased the Lord, the stone came out, after I'd suffered ten or twelve hours of torment, leaving lakes of blood on the ground (for it came out of my mouth, too), and because for half-hours and even hours I couldn't recover my strength, everyone—confessors, physicians, and other laypeople—gave me up for dead.

And for the next nine years, every six months or at least once a year, I passed this stone, and after having done so I felt immense consolation in my soul, along with sorrow because the suffering had stopped. And every time I put my affairs in order, preparing myself for a good death, giving all my instructions as if it were the last time and begging the pardon of all my little ones for the bad example I'd given them and asking them to commend me to the Lord so that He'd have mercy for my sins and for the time I'd trittered away. And my confessor was the *priano* of San Giovanni di Rialto, Antonio Grandi], and when I called him for assistance or to commend my soul to him, he would come and speak to me brusquely, saying that the Devil was tempting me in order to tempt him, too, and then he would speak gently, exhorting me to suffer.

After nine years, more or less, the problem got worse, so that I could neither sit nor stand nor walk. And if I sent for the said signor *pievano*, he couldn't come because he had so many important things to do, so that without this comfort, I was afraid that I'd fall into some temptation because the Devil was inveigling me, or that I'd throw myself out the window or kill myself. But I turned to the male and female saints to whom I was devoted. This torment lasted for two whole weeks because I couldn't pass the stone. And one morning at dawn, the Saturday of the Most Holy Mother,²⁴ I fell backward down a flight of stairs, the women of the house ran after me, and while I was at the foot of the stairs, Saints Francis Xavier and Anthony of Padua appeared to me and I had a great burst of energy.

I got into a boat with my women and had myself taken to San Giovanni di Rialto, went into the church, and asked that my confessor be called and that he come quickly because I was close to death. He sent a message saying that he was confessing the altar boys and to be patient because he would come. And instead, while I was waiting at his confessional, he had himself vested to say Mass. Then I prayed the Lord to give me enough strength to withstand the pains and asserted that for the sake of obedience I'd willingly die. And at this point one of those young altar boys came to read me the Passion of Jesus Christ, and if ever my pain was great, it was then, although it abated when I listened to the Passion of Christ. And at the elevation of the Most Holy Host, I made an offering to the Lord that through the authority of His servant,²⁵ either my pain lessen or I die if He wished, for I remained completely and in everything in holy obedience to Him.

All of a sudden I fell backward and cast out a mass of stones that would have filled a soup bowl, with a great deal of blood. And the signor *pievano*, after he took communion, brought the Most Holy Sacrament to me and gave me communion without reconciling me. As soon as he finished Mass, he came to find me, and I told him that I'd been dead but had been revived with the Most Holy Sacrament, but that I was a complete wreck. He went into his house and called for some handkerchiefs to wipe up those stones and the blood on the floor. He had me taken home in a boat and ordered me in virtue of holy obedience to pray to the Lord to give me the strength to go home. And so I went, in good health, and I've never suffered from or passed stones again.

Another time, when I was in the aforementioned church on St. Catherine's day,²⁶ that signor *pievano* called me into the confessional, but I didn't

hear him right away because I had gone into a trance. And he, angry, started yelling at me in the presence of other people, saying "Wretch, is this the place to go into ecstasy? Get out of this church!" And he threw me bodily out of the confessional, and I left the church. I begged the Most Holy Mother to deign to remove these ecstasies from me, at least in public, so that I could obey my confessor, but all that happened was that the Enemy ceased to bother me by tempting me not to go back there, for I had been ordered not to return. But since I felt great sweetness and mental calm in my soul, I couldn't help going back there three days later, even though the people in church were saying that I had committed some great sin. When I came back, I begged his pardon, and he refused to pardon me but began with harsh words to drive me away. And before I left, I threw myself at the feet of a crucifix, begging it to help me, for I had been abandoned by my confessor. I heard a voice inside that told me, "Go, and leave everything to me. Obey blindly." So I went home, showing no sign of being disturbed. After two days the confessor came to my house at noon—I was at San Giovanni Evangelista—and summoned the doorkeeper to call me and open the confessional. I came, and he told me that he'd come to turn over the keys of the confessional because he no longer wished to confess either me or the girls. I replied that he was right, for ungrateful and proud as I was, I deserved worse, but I begged him to confess me one more time so that I could beg God's pardon and his. After several refusals, he said that he'd decided to do violence to himself, and he confessed me. While he was confessing me, I admitted my fault: that the only thing I was sorry about was the scandal I'd caused in that church. He replied that he realized the error he had made by yelling at me and calling me "wretch," but not to worry because he would restore my honor. He gave me absolution with tender affection and charity, confessed the girls, and continued for more than a year to confess us.

But when he was named confessor of the nuns of San Lorenzo, he sent me a message telling me that I should go to a Jesuit father named Chiaromonte and tell him everything he wanted to know, and so I did. First this father asked me how I had gathered those girls; then, so that he could govern my soul, he interrogated me about [my previous] confessor's method. Then he said, "Daughter, if you remain with that confessor, he'll drive you crazy." I went back to the *pievano*, who commanded me by holy obedience to tell him everything Chiaromonte had told me and what I'd replied. And the *pievano* gave me new instructions: that I go back to Chiaromonte to obtain absolution; that if [the Jesuit] questioned me on other matters, I should inform him, and that if he had ordered me to do certain things and Chiaromonte prohibited them, I should obey Chiaromonte. In confession, the

24. Which of the many Marian feast days Ferrazzi is referring to here cannot be determined.

25. The priest celebrating Mass.

26. 25 November.