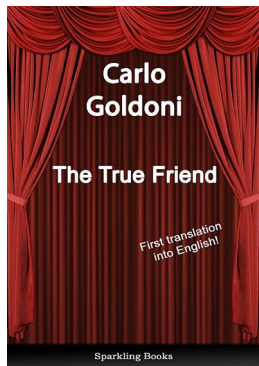


The True Friend

English translation of *Il vero amico*



True to Goldoni's mixture of comic wit and farce, the plot is a breathtakingly fast succession of twists and turns which only unravel in the very final lines with a surprise ending. Two friends are in love with the same young woman. Neither wants to place their friendship in jeopardy. How can love triumph without breaking off their friendship?

By Carlo Goldoni

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Carlo Goldoni was born in Venice in 1707. While studying Law in Pavia he was expelled from his College for having written a satirical tract about the people of Pavia. He continued his legal studies in Modena and finally graduated in Law in Padova. After practising this profession for a short while, he abandoned it in favour of the theatre. An extremely prolific theatrical career followed spanning over sixty years.

Goldoni was a prolific playwright, widely regarded as the Italian Moliere. He died in Paris in 1793.

About the book

Goldoni explores the conflicts brought about when Florindo has to choose between Lelio, his best friend, and Rosaura, his best friend's fiancée. Added to this conundrum are the issues of whether Ottavio, the old miser, will provide a dowry and the mature Beatrice's unashamed incessant pursuit of Florindo.

The play is set in Bologna in Lelio's house. Florindo is a guest along with his faithful manservant. From the opening of the play, Florindo seeks to return home to Venice in order not to damage his friend's relationship. However, his departure is obstructed time and again by his hosts, leading to one complication after another.

From the beginning, the plot is intense and fast-moving with inversions fed into the action in quick succession. This creates suspense which continues throughout the play as potential marriage partners are switched back and forth until the very ending when the audience finally discovers what the main characters' destiny will be. Will love or friendship prevail?

The Venetian element is brought into this play through Florindo and his manservant, both Venetians. Apart from these two characters, all the others are portrayed as self-seeking, selfish and sly - whether servants or masters. The tension is kept at a constantly high level by the struggles between the characters. These struggles are not just brought about through love and friendship but are also generational and social. Furthermore, there is the added complication in the contrast of the characters' ideas of reality as they deceive one another. This creates dramatic irony and humour as the audience know more than any of the characters on stage.

The Italian text is taken from: Carlo Goldoni, Tutte le opere, a cura di Giuseppe Ortolani, Mondadori, Milano, 1935.

Reviews

“a great gift for students of Italian/English, for students of Goldoni and Italian theatre, or for theatre-lovers. Or for a true friend.” - *Words to good effect*

Excerpt

THE TRUE FRIEND

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS IN PROSE

First produced in Venice for the Carnival of 1750.

Dramatis Personae

FLORINDO, friend and guest of LELIO

OTTAVIO, elderly miser, father of ROSAURA

ROSAURA, intended bride of LELIO

COLOMBINA, her maid

TRAPPOLA, OTTAVIO's butler

TRIVELLA, FLORINDO's servant

LELIO, intended husband of ROSAURA

BEATRICE, advanced in years, LELIO's aunt and in love with FLORINDO

The action takes place in Bologna.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

Scene. A room in Lelio's house.

Florindo is alone. He paces the room in a pensive mood and then speaks:

Yes, one must be armed with fortitude. An heroic solution must be found. Friendship must prevail, and to true friendship one must sacrifice one's passion, one's happiness and even one's own life, if necessary.

(Calls). Ah, Trivella!

SCENE II

Enter Trivella.

TRIVELLA. Sir.

FLORINDO. Quick, gather my belongings, go to the post-stage and order a gig for midday.

TRIVELLA. Where to? If I'm allowed to ask.

FLORINDO. I wish to return to Venice.

TRIVELLA. So suddenly? Has some instance of bad luck come upon you? Have you stumbled upon someone disagreeable?

FLORINDO. For the time being, I'll say no more. I'll tell you all about it during the journey.

TRIVELLA. My dear master, forgive me if, as a servant, I venture too far; but you know I'm worthy of trust. You no doubt remember that, for this trip, your esteemed signor uncle gave you his consent and me the honour of serving you, on the grounds of my long service at your household. He had the goodness to state that I was the only person he could rely on, and that he entrusted you to my faithful servitude. I pray you, for goodness' sake, to acquaint me with the reason for your discomfort, so that I may assure your signor uncle, that a sound cause is at the root of your hasty departure. If we leave now, it will certainly give rise to rumours.

FLORINDO. Dear Trivella, time gallops, and I cannot waste it in lengthy discussion about the reasons for my departure. Just for this time, be satisfied that I have acted upon my own good judgment. Go, order that gig.

TRIVELLA. Do the lady and gentleman of whom you are a guest know of your departure?

FLORINDO. They do not know, yet. I'll inform them succinctly, bid them goodbye, thank them and leave.

TRIVELLA. What do you suppose they'll say about your sudden decision?

FLORINDO. I'll say a letter from my uncle forces me to leave immediately.

TRIVELLA. Signora Beatrice will be upset by my master's departure...

FLORINDO. Signora Beatrice is worthy of my respect, and I hold her in reverence in the capacity of Lelio's aunt; but owing to her advanced age, her passion for me is ridiculous and embarrasses me infinitely.

TRIVELLA. But signor Lelio will be more upset than...

FLORINDO. Yes, Lelio is the dearest friend I have. It was for him, I came to Bologna. When he was my guest in my house in Venice, I treated him like a brother, and I swore true friendship to him. Now here I am in his house. I've been here nearly one month and he wants me to stay on, but I cannot remain. Quick, Trivella, go and order that gig.

TRIVELLA. But at least wait for signor Lelio to return home.

FLORINDO. Is he not at home now?

TRIVELLA. No, he isn't.

FLORINDO. Wherever can he be?

TRIVELLA. I heard that he has gone to show signora Rosaura a ring because she is to be his bride.

FLORINDO. (*Aside*). Ah, patience! (*To Trivella*). Go, waste no time. Quick, to the post-stage; it must be nearly midday.

TRIVELLA. Oh! It's three hours away. If you wish, you can go and visit signor Lelio at signora Rosaura's house.

FLORINDO. I don't have time. I can't stay.

TRIVELLA. To tell you the truth, signora Rosaura has shown the most courteous manners in your presence. In truth, she seemed in love with you, sir.

FLORINDO. Oh, heavens! Trivella, oh, heavens! Do not torment me further.

TRIVELLA. How? What do you mean?

FLORINDO. (*i>*(Restlessly). The gig, for goodness' sake.

TRIVELLA. Why do you have the fidgets? You keep changing colour! Signora Rosaura has a strange effect on you.

FLORINDO. Away, away, less tittle-tattle. When a master gives orders, they must be carried out.

TRIVELLA. (*Gravely, as he starts to leave*). Forgive me.

FLORINDO. Where are you going?

TRIVELLA. To order the gig.

FLORINDO. Come here.

TRIVELLA. At your command.

FLORINDO. I exhort you, get one with a good seat.

TRIVELLA. If there is one...

FLORINDO. If you see signor Lelio, inform him of my departure.

TRIVELLA. Of course.

FLORINDO. Where will you look for him?

TRIVELLA. At his betrothed's house.

FLORINDO. At signora Rosaura's?

TRIVELLA. At signora Rosaura's.

FLORINDO. (*Pathetically*). If you see her, tell her I am indebted to her.

TRIVELLA. Should I tell her of your departure?

FLORINDO. No.

TRIVELLA No?

FLORINDO. Yes, yes...

TRIVELLA. What should I say?

FLORINDO. Tell her... No, no, don't say anything.

TRIVELLA. So you want to leave without her knowing?

FLORINDO. We should... Signora Beatrice is coming.

TRIVELLA. What stance should I take?

FLORINDO. Stand still; don't go anywhere.

TRIVELLA. Do you not want the gig any more?

FLORINDO. The gig, yes, quickly.

TRIVELLA. So...

FLORINDO. Now go, do not torment me.

TRIVELLA. (*Aside*). I am afraid my master is in love with signora Rosaura and that, so as not to harm his friend, he has resolved to leave. (*He leaves*).

SCENE III

Florindo alone.

I shall not leave without seeing my friend. I shall await his return and embrace him. But shall I leave without seeing Rosaura? Without bidding goodbye? Yes, these two different passions must be treated differently. Friendship must be cultivated through great tact. Love must be overcome with strength and great force. Here is signora Beatrice; I must conceal my suffering and appear cheerful so as not to arouse suspicion.

SCENE IV

Enter Beatrice.

BEATRICE. Good morning, signor Florindo.

FLORINDO. Your humble servant, signora Beatrice. I wish to pay my respects to you.

BEATRICE. For what reason did you summon me?

FLORINDO. I entreat you to excuse the inconvenience I have caused during my long stay, and I thank you for the kind consideration you have shown towards me. It will be with great pleasure that I shall see to anything you might need from Venice.

BEATRICE. What? In Venice? When?

FLORINDO. Any moment now. I have sent for a gig.

BEATRICE. You can't be serious.

FLORINDO. It is the truth, signora.

BEATRICE. But why all this sudden haste?

FLORINDO. A letter from my uncle bids me to go home immediately.

BEATRICE. Does my nephew know?

FLORINDO. I haven't told him yet.

BEATRICE. He will not allow you to leave.

FLORINDO. I hope he will not prevent me from doing so.

BEATRICE. If my nephew allows you to leave, I shall personally do everything in my power to detain you here.

FLORINDO. I'm at a loss for words. You speak in a manner I don't understand. For what reason do you wish to detain me here?

BEATRICE. Oh, signor Florindo! The time for pretence is over. You know my heart, you know my passion.

FLORINDO. You make advances I don't deserve.

BEATRICE. You must requite my love.

FLORINDO. That's exactly what I find slightly difficult.

BEATRICE. Yes, you must requite my love. A woman who has passed blushing age and opens her heart up to her beloved, doesn't deserve to be treated villainously.

FLORINDO. I did not prompt you to speak.

BEATRICE. I've held my tongue for a month, and now I can no more.

FLORINDO. If you had held your tongue for a month and a day, it could hardly have taken much more effort.

BEATRICE. I do not regret having spoken.

FLORINDO. No? Why?

BEATRICE. Because I take the liberty of believing you may love me yet.

FLORINDO. Signora, I must leave.

BEATRICE. Here is my nephew.

FLORINDO. He has arrived just in time. The sooner I bid him farewell, the sooner I shall be able to leave.

SCENE V

Enter Lelio.

LELIO. My friend, I've just heard the most surprising news from your servant. You want to leave? You want to leave me?

FLORINDO. Dear signor Lelio, if you love me, let me go.

LELIO. I do not know what to say. I had better let you leave.

BEATRICE. *(To Lelio)*. And are you weak enough to let him go? Do you know why he is leaving us? For excessive civility. He told me that he has been our guest for a month now, and it is time he took his leave. Friends cannot treat each other so. Two months, four months, one year, what is the difference? You are master in our house. Is that not true?

LELIO. Yes, my dear Florindo, this is your home. Stay, I beseech you. Don't do me the wrong of believing you are the cause of inconvenience. You see, I am totally at ease in your presence.

FLORINDO. I can see that. Yes, I know that very well; but bear with me, I must leave.

LELIO. I am at a loss for words.

BEATRICE. *(To Lelio)*. You must coax the reason out of him.

LELIO. My dear friend, what is the reason for your sudden departure?

FLORINDO. My uncle is very ill, and I wish to see him again before he dies.

LELIO. I completely sympathise with you.

BEATRICE. Oh, you see it's a lie! He told me his uncle wrote asking him to return to Venice, and now he says that his uncle is dying.

FLORINDO. I must have said the letter was about my uncle and that it beckoned me back.

BEATRICE. Do not change the facts.

FLORINDO. It is as I say, I can assure you.

BEATRICE. Show us the letter, and we'll see if it is true.

FLORINDO. Signor Lelio believes me without seeing the letter, without my having to bring evidence.

BEATRICE. Don't you see, he is a liar? Don't you see? He wants to leave because he has become bored with our company.

LELIO. *(To Florindo)*. Can it be possible that our friendship bores you?

FLORINDO. Dear friend, you wrong me by speaking so.

BEATRICE. Signor Florindo, before leaving, I hope you'll at least let me speak to you in private.

FLORINDO. Do you need to ask me a favour?

BEATRICE. Yes, I wish to ask you about some business in Venice.

FLORINDO. I shall no doubt comply with your wishes before I leave.

BEATRICE. (*Aside*). If I can speak to him again in private, he may well surrender to my fervent love. He will not be able to say no. (*She leaves*).

SCENE VI

Florindo and Lelio.

FLORINDO. Dear signor Lelio, as I was saying, it is necessary for me to leave. It would be a sign of true friendship, if you allowed me to leave without further ado.

LELIO. I'm at a loss for words. Go, if you so please. But I wish to ask you a favour first.

FLORINDO. I'm at your complete disposal.

LELIO. Please wait until tomorrow before leaving.

FLORINDO. I can't refuse your request. However, it would be far better if you allowed me to leave now.

LELIO. No, please wait until tomorrow. I need your presence here today.

FLORINDO. I cannot refuse you anything. What can I do for you?

LELIO. You know that I shall soon marry signora Rosaura.

FLORINDO. (*Aside*). Ah! I do know, unfortunately.

LELIO. You know how poverty-stricken my family is. I hope to make amends with Rosaura's dowry. But, of course, apart from that, I like her because she is young, beautiful and charming.

FLORINDO. (*Aside*). He'll be the death of me!