THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF BENVENUTO CELLINI

Translated and with an Introduction by
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PENGUIN BOOKS
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unpleasant on account of the other things I had done in self-defence.

The Italians I mentioned were, first and dearest, Ascanio, from a
place called Tagliacozzo in the Kingdom of Naples; the other was a
Roman of very low birth, called Pagolo, who didn’t know who his
own father was. These two were the ones I had brought with me from
Rome, and who had been living with me in Rome. There was another
Roman, who had also left Rome on purpose to find me. His name too
was Pagolo, and he was the son of a poor Roman nobleman of the
Macaroni family: this young man did not know much about art,
but he was a courageous fighter. Then there was a Ferrarese called
Bartolomeo Chioccia. And then there was a Florentine called Pagolo
Miccieri.

He had a brother nicknamed Gatta who was a very competent clerk,
but had overspent when he was managing the property of Tommaso
Guadagni, an extremely wealthy merchant. This Gatta put in order the
books in which I kept the accounts of the great Christian King and of
various other people. Pagolo Miccieri, having learnt from his brother
how to do so, kept them up for me, and I gave him a generous allowance.
He appeared to be a very trustworthy young man, I remarked his
religious nature, I constantly heard him muttering prayers, and saw him
holding his rosary, and so I thought – trusting in his assumed piety –
that I could rely on him thoroughly.

I called him aside and said to him: ‘Pagolo, my dear brother, you
can see how well off you are with me, and you know that you had
nothing to begin with, and besides this you’re a Florentine. And I trust
you all the more because I can see how devout you are in practising
your religion, which pleases me very much. So I beg you to come to
my help, since I don’t trust any of the others overmuch. I beg you to
take care of two most important matters, both of which could give me
a great deal of anxiety. First, I want you to take good care of my
belongings so as to prevent anything being stolen: and don’t touch any
of them yourself. And as well as this; there’s the matter of that poor
young girl Caterina whom I keep chiefly to assist me in my art, and
whom I can’t do without. Besides this, since I’m a man I’ve used her
for enjoyment in bed, and it could be that she will give me a child. I
don’t want to bear the expense of other men’s children, and I certainly
won't stand such an injury being done me. In fact if anyone in this house were rash enough to do such a thing and I came to know about it, I can say for certain that I would kill both of them. So I beg you, my dear brother, to be of help to me, and if you see anything to tell me at once. If anything happened I'd have her and her mother hanged along with anyone who did such a thing. So first of all make sure you keep an eye on yourself.'

The rascal made a sign of the cross, from his head to his feet, and cried out:

'O blessed Jesus! God keep me from ever thinking of such a thing! first, because I'm not given to such evil ways, and then, don't you believe that I fully recognize the great debt I owe you?'

At these words, seeing that he said them in such a simple, affectionate way, I believed that everything was exactly as he said.

Two days later happened to be a feast day, and Mattio del Nazaro\textsuperscript{249} – who was also an Italian serving the King very ably in the same profession as myself – had invited me and my young men to enjoy the pleasures of a garden party. I thought that for the time being I had subdued all the clamour arising from that troublesome lawsuit, so I got myself ready and told Pagolo to come along as well and enjoy himself for a while.

The young man replied: 'Surely it would be a great mistake to leave the house alone like this: think how much gold and silver and jewellery you have here. Seeing that we're living in a city of thieves we ought to be on the alert day and night. I shall guard the house, and pass the time away saying my prayers: you can set your mind at rest, go off to enjoy yourself, and have a good time. Another occasion someone else can stay on duty.'

Thinking that I could leave without anxiety I set off for the garden, along with Pagolo, Ascanio, and Chioccia. We spent a good part of the day there very agreeably; and then, after midday, as the evening began to approach I became rather pensive, and I began brooding on the words which that wretch had said to me with such persuasive simplicity. I mounted my horse and returned to the castle with two of my servants where I all but caught Pagolo and that slut Caterina in the very act. As soon as I appeared on the scene that French
strumpet of a mother of hers screamed out: 'Pagolo, Caterina, the master's here.'

When I saw them coming forward, terrified and confused, hardly knowing what they were saying, or, in their panic, where they were going, it was clear what they had been up to. My anger got the better of me and I drew my sword, determined to kill both of them. Pagolo fled, and the girl threw herself on her knees, screaming to heaven for mercy. My first impulse was to let fly at the man, but I did not catch him at once, and when I did do so I had in the meantime made up my mind that the best thing would be to throw them both out of the house, seeing that if I killed them on top of all my other recent actions I would have difficulty escaping with my own life.

So I said to Pagolo: 'If I had seen with my own eyes, you wretch, what you force me to believe, I would have run this sword through your guts a dozen times. Now, get out of my sight, and if you ever say an Our Father make it St Julian's.'

Then very fiercely I drove the girl and her mother away, using both my feet and my fists. They planned to have their revenge on me and they consulted a Norman lawyer, who advised them that she should say I had used her in the Italian fashion, that is to say, unnaturally, like a sodomite.

'At least,' he said, 'when this Italian hears about it, knowing what a dangerous position he's in he'll be all too eager to give you a few hundred ducats to keep you quiet, seeing the terrible punishment that is meted out in France for such an offence.'

So they made their agreement: they lodged the accusation against me, and I was summoned.

The more I sought for rest, the more my tribulations increased. Every day I was assailed by various kinds of bad fortune, and I began to ponder which of two things I should do: either clear out and let France be damned; or really fight this battle as well and see what God had in store for me. I worried over the matter for a long time; then in the end I made up my mind to clear off and not tempt my bad luck too much in case I ended by coming a cropper. I made all possible preparations, took steps to dispose quickly of the property I could not take with me, and accommodated my small belongings, as best I could, on my own
person and on my servants: but I was taking my departure very unhappily. I remained by myself in my small study, having said to my young men who had advised me to flee the country that it would be as well for me to think matters over a little entirely by myself, although I realized that in great part they were talking sense. If I escaped imprisonment and allowed the storm a little while to blow over, I would be in a much better position to make my excuses to the King, letting him know by letter that this treacherous attack was only the result of spite. As I said, I had made up my mind that this was what I would do. Then, just as I made a move, I was seized by the shoulder and turned round, and I heard a voice say encouragingly:

'Benvenuto, behave as you usually do and have no fear.'

At once I completely reversed my decision; I said to my young Italians:

'Get hold of some good weapons and come along with me. Do whatever I order, and don't think of anything else, because I mean to fight it out. If I were to leave, the very next day you would all go up in smoke. So do what I say and come with me.'

In complete agreement those young men replied: 'Since we are here and owe our livelihood to him we ought to go along and help him to do what he proposes, as long as there's life in us. He has reached the truth better than us; as soon as he left this place our enemies would send us all packing. We ought to reflect seriously on the great works that have been begun here, and on their important nature. We're not up to the task of finishing them without him, and his enemies would say that he had left because he wasn't up to carrying such enterprises through to the finish.'

They made a good few other relevant observations besides these. The first to rouse their spirits was that young Roman of the Macaroni family; he also called in some of the Germans and Frenchmen who were fond of me. We were ten in all: I set out with my mind resolved, determined not to be taken alive.

When I appeared before the criminal judges I found there Caterina and her mother, and as I came up they were laughing with their lawyer. I marched in and called boldly for the judge, who was seated high above the others on his tribunal, swollen out, bulky, and fat. When
this man saw me he shook his head in a menacing way, and said in a lowered voice: ‘Although your name is Benvenuto this time you’re malvenuto.’

I heard what he said and I called out a second time: ‘Now be quick about it, tell me what I’m here for.’

Then the judge turned to Caterina and said: ‘Caterina, tell us about all that happened between you and Benvenuto.’

Caterina said that I had had intercourse with her in the way they did in Italy.

The judge turned to me and said: ‘You hear what Caterina says, Benvenuto.’

Then I said: ‘If I had had intercourse with her in the Italian way, I would have done so only in my desire to have a son, in the same way as you do.’

Then the judge replied: ‘She means that you did it by another way than the way for begetting children.’

To this I answered that such was not the Italian way, and that on the contrary it must be the French way, since she knew all about it and not I: and I said that I wanted her to explain exactly what I had done with her. Then that beastly whore without any shame said openly and clearly what was the filthy practice she accused me of. I made her repeat it three times in succession; and when she had finished, I said in a loud voice:

‘My lord judge, lord lieutenant of His Most Christian Majesty, I ask you for justice: I know that the laws of the Most Christian King punish such an offence with burning, for both active and passive partners. That woman confesses her sin; as for me, I have had no relations of any kind with her. Her strumpet of a mother is here too, and, for one crime or another, she deserves burning. I ask you for justice.’

I kept repeating these words in a loud voice, continually demanding that she and her mother be sent to the stake, and telling the judge that if he did not send her to prison in my presence I would run to the King and inform him of the injustice that his lieutenant in the criminal court was doing me. With my making this tremendous commotion, they began to lower their voices; then I raised mine higher, the little whore and her mother began to cry, and I roared at the judge: ‘Burn them! Burn them!’
All Bologna said was: 'If I behave in the way an upright man should then I shan't have a fear in the world.'

'You've spoken the truth,' I said, 'but if you do the contrary then you'll have cause to fear, because this is a serious matter.'

I left him at once, and went to see the King; and for a long time I discussed with his Majesty the making of his coinage. We were not very much in agreement about it, and his Council, which was present, persuaded him that the money should be made in the French style, as it had been up to that time. I retorted that his Majesty had had me come from Italy in order to produce good work for him, and if his Majesty were to order the contrary I would never have the heart to do it. At this the matter was postponed for discussion another time: I at once went back to Paris.

No sooner had I dismounted than one of those good people who enjoy finding evil came to tell me that Pagolo Miccieri had taken a house for that little whore Caterina and her mother, that he was always going there, and that when he spoke of me he always said with contempt:

'Benvenuto set the geese to guard the lettuce, and he thought I wouldn't eat it: now he's content to go around swaggering, and he thinks I'm afraid of him. But I've got this sword and dagger by my side to show him that my weapons too have a sharp edge, and I'm a Florentine as well as him—of the Miccieri family, a much better family than the Cellinis.'

The rogue who carried this story to me told it with such effect that I suddenly felt an attack of fever (I use the word fever, and not merely as a metaphor). Seeing that such a fierce passion might have been the death of me I followed my inclinations and found a remedy in giving it the outlet that was available. I told my Ferrarese workman, who was called Chiocciola, to come with me, and I had a servant follow on behind with my horse. When we arrived at the house where the villain was, finding the door ajar I went inside. I saw that he was wearing a sword and dagger, and he was sitting on a chest with his arms round Caterina's neck: just as I arrived I heard him and her mother joking about my affairs. I threw open the door and at the same time seized my sword and thrust the point at his throat, without giving him time to remember that he also had a sword. While I was doing this I shouted out:
‘You vile coward — say your prayers, for you’re as good as dead.’

He sat stock still and cried out a few times: ‘Dear mother! Help me!’

I had meant to kill him whatever happened, but when I heard him use these mawkish words half my anger subsided. Meanwhile I had ordered my workman, Chiocchia, to allow neither the girl nor her mother to leave the house, since when I had set about him I meant to do as much harm to those two whores. I kept the point of my sword steady at his throat (now and then giving him a slight prick), and I threatened him continually. Then, with his not making the least effort to defend himself and my not knowing what to do next, it looked as if my threatening would go on for ever: then the idea entered my head of making them get married, as the lesser evil and in order to have my revenge later on.

So, with my mind made up, I said:

‘Take off that ring you have on your finger, you coward, and marry her, so that then I can take my revenge the way you deserve.’

He said at once: ‘If you don’t kill me I’ll do anything.’

So then I told him to put the ring on her finger. I withdrew the sword a little from his throat and he put the ring on her.

And then I said: ‘That’s not enough. I want to have two notaries sent for so that this can be made into a contract.’

I told Chiocchia to go for the notaries, and straight away I turned to her and her mother and speaking in French I said:

‘The notaries and other witnesses are coming: the first one of you I hear say a word about what has happened I’ll kill without hesitation — I’ll kill all three of you, so don’t forget it.’

Then I said to him, in Italian: ‘If you make any objection to what I propose, just one word from you and I’ll stab you so many times that I’ll make you spill your guts.’

‘All I ask,’ he said, ‘is that you don’t kill me; and I’ll do what you want.’

The notaries and witnesses appeared on the scene, and a splendid, valid contract was drawn up; and then my rage and fever left me. I paid the notaries and left the house.

Next day, Bologna went out of his way to come to Paris and sent Mattio del Nazaro for me. I went along and found the man, who met
CELLINI TAKES 'EXTREME REVENGE'

me with a very cheerful face, and then begged me to look on him as a loving brother of mine and said he would never talk of the work again, as he realized perfectly well that I was in the right.

If when describing these events I did not admit that I know I was sometimes acting wrongly, it would not ring true when I treat of actions which I know were justified. I know I made a mistake in wanting such an extreme revenge on Pagolo Micciari. But if I had known he was a man of such weakness I would never have contemplated taking the humiliating revenge that I did. Not satisfied with having made him take such a shameless little whore as his wife, as well as this – to round off my revenge – I used to send for her to make use of her as my model. Every day I gave her thirty soldi; and I made her pose in the nude. First, she wanted to be paid in advance, and then she wanted to make a good meal, and then I had my revenge by having intercourse with her, mocking at her and her husband for the various horns I was giving him. The fourth thing I did was to make her pose in great discomfort for hours at a stretch. And, in her discomfort, she was as much annoyed as I was delighted, since she was very beautifully made and won me great honour.

When she realized that I did not treat her as considerately as I used to before her marriage, she grew tremendously angry and began to show off, bragging in her French way about her husband who had gone to serve the Prior of Capua, Piero Strozzi’s brother.255 As I said she began talking about her husband, and as soon as I heard her mention him I was overwhelmed with a choking fury. But I put up with it grudgingly, as best I could, reflecting that I could not find a more suitable model for my work than she was.

I said to myself: ‘I get two kinds of revenge out of this. First, she’s married, and so these horns are the real thing, unlike hers when she was playing the whore with me. So I’m taking an excellent revenge against him, and an extravagant one against her, by making her pose in such discomfort and so winning credit and profit for myself. What more can I want?’

While I was weighing matters up in this way, the slut redoubled her insults, besides talking about her husband. What she said and did nearly drove me out of my mind, and giving in to my rage I seized her by the
hair and dragged her up and down the room, beating and kicking her till I was exhausted. There was no one there who could come to her help. When I had given her a good pummelling, she swore that she would never come to me again; so for the first time I realized what a mistake I had made, since I was losing a splendid opportunity of winning honour. Besides this, with her all torn and bruised and swollen, I realized that even if she did come back it would be necessary to have her treated for a fortnight before I could make use of her.

To return to the girl: I sent one of my servants to help her dress. She was a very kindly old woman, called Ruberta, and when she went in to the little hussy she gave her something to eat and drink again; then she rubbed some bacon fat into the worst bruises I had given her, and what was left over they ate together. Having dressed, she went off abusing and cursing all Italians and the King who sheltered them. So, crying and muttering all the way, she walked home.

In fact this first time it seemed to me that I had done wrongly; and my Ruberta scolded me as well, saying:

‘You’re very cruel to treat such a beautiful young girl so roughly.’

I tried to make excuses to Ruberta, telling her how wickedly Caterina and her mother had treated me when they stayed with me; but she still told me off, insisting that this was nothing to complain of since it was the French custom, and that she knew for certain that there was no French husband who hadn’t got his pair of horns. At this I burst out laughing, and then I told Ruberta to go and see how Caterina was, since I would like to be able to use her in finishing my work.

My Ruberta scolded me, saying that I didn’t understand how to live, since as soon as day came Caterina would come of her own accord; ‘while if you send to ask how she is, or go to visit her, she’ll grow haughty and won’t come at all’.

The following day Caterina came to my door and started knocking on it furiously. I was downstairs, and I ran to see if this was a madman or someone living in the house. When I opened it the creature laughed, threw herself round my neck, hugging and kissing me, and asked if I was still furious with her. I said, no. She answered: ‘Give me a good breakfast then.’

I did so, and I ate with her as a sign of peace. Then I began to model
of the right depth and width and had a small bevel on which I had set four gold figures, executed in more than half relief, and representing Night, Day, Twilight, and Dawn. Besides these there were four other figures of the same size, representing the four chief winds, partly enamelled and finished off as exquisitely as can be imagined.

When I set this work before the King he gasped in amazement and could not take his eyes off it. Then he instructed me to take it back to my house, and said that in due course he would let me know what I was to do with it. I took it home, and at once invited in some of my close friends; and with them I dined very cheerfully, placing the salt-cellar in the middle of the table. We were the first to make use of it. Then I set out to finish the silver Jupiter and the large vase I have mentioned before that was charmingly ornamented with a host of figures.

About that time the painter Bologna, whom I’ve referred to above, gave the King to understand that it would be well worth his Majesty’s while to let him go to Rome, recommending him with letters of introduction, so that he could take casts of the foremost antiques, that is, the Laocoön, the Cleopatra, the Venus, the Commodus, the Zingara, and the Apollo. These certainly are the most beautiful works in all Rome.

He told the King that after his Majesty had set eyes on those marvellous objects, then he would really understand the art of design, since all the work he had seen come from the hands of us moderns was far removed from the craftsmanship of the ancients. The King was agreeable, and granted all his requests. So the beast shambled off on his own unlucky path. It was not in him to rival me with the work of his own hands, so he played the typical Lombard trick of seeking to discredit my work by making himself a copyist of antiques. And though he had his casts very well made, he ended up by producing quite the opposite result to what he had expected, as I shall describe later when the time comes.

I had chased that wretched girl Caterina right away, and that poor unfortunate husband of hers had cleared out of Paris. Then, as I wanted to put the finishing touches to my Fontainebleau which was already cast in bronze, and also to make a good job of the two Victories which were meant for the side angles in the half-circle of the door, I found myself a poor young girl, about fifteen years old. She was very beautifully
formed, and rather swarthy. Since she was inclined to be wild, spoke very little, was swift in her movements, and had brooding eyes, all this led me to give her the name Scorzone; her real name was Gianna. With the help of this delightful girl I finished the Fontainebleau to my satisfaction in bronze, as well as the two Victories for the door.

This young girl was untouched, and a virgin, and I got her pregnant. She bore me a daughter on the seventh of June, at the thirteenth hour of the day, 1544; and that was just the forty-fourth year of my own life. I gave her the name Costanza: she was held at her baptism by Guido Guidi, the King’s physician and, as I have written before, a very good friend of mine. He was the only godfather, since that is the custom in France, to have one godfather and two godmothers. One of these latter was Signora Maddalena, the wife of Luigi Alamanni, a Florentine gentleman and a marvellous poet. The other godmother was the wife of Ricciardo del Bene, one of our Florentine citizens and a substantial merchant in Paris. She was a high-ranking French lady. This, as far as I remember, was the first child I ever had. For her endowment I assigned the girl as much money as an aunt of hers — into whose care I gave her — would agree to: and that was the last I had to do with her.

I carried on working hard and made a great deal of progress: the Jupiter was nearing completion, and so was the vase, and the doorway was beginning to reveal its beauty. At that time the King arrived in Paris. Although I gave 1544 as the year when my daughter was born, we are still in 1543; there was a suitable opportunity for me to speak of my daughter here, and I did so in order not to distract from other, more important matters. I shall say nothing more of her till the proper time.

As I said, the King came to Paris. He at once paid me a visit, to find my work so well in hand that anyone would have been fully satisfied: and to tell the truth that splendid King was as pleased as one who had taken the pains I had taken could possibly desire. He immediately remembered of his own accord that the Cardinal of Ferrara had given me nothing — neither an allowance nor anything else — of what he had promised me: and he whispered to his Admiral that the Cardinal had behaved very badly in not giving me anything, but that he meant to remedy this unfitting state of affairs because he saw that I was not the