

The Tragedies of the Medici eBook

The Tragedies of the Medici

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of the Medici family is lost in the mists of the Middle Ages, and, only here and there, can the historian gain glimpses of the lives of early forbears. Still, there is sufficient data, to be had for the digging, upon which to transcribe, inferentially at least, an interesting narrative.

Away towards the end of the twelfth century,—exact dates are wholly beside the mark—there dwelt, under the shadow of one of the rugged castles of the robber-captains of the Mugello in Tuscany, a hard-working and trustworthy bonds-man—one Chiarissimo—"Old Honesty," as we may call him. He was married to an excellent helpmeet, and was by his lord permitted to till a small piece of land and rear his family.



In addition to intelligence in agriculture, it would seem that he, or perhaps his wife, possessed some knowledge of the virtues of roots and herbs, for, in one corner of his *podere*, he had a garden of “simples.” The few peaceable inhabitants of that warlike valley, and also many a wounded man-at-arms, sought “Old Honesty” and his wise mate for what we now call “kitchen remedies.”

Those, indeed, were happy days with respect to suffering human nature. “Kill or Cure” might have been the character of the healing art, but certainly specialists had not invented our appendicitis and other fashionable twentieth-century physical fashions! A little medical knowledge sufficed, and decoctions, pillules, poultices, and bleedings made up the simple pharmacopoeia.

All the same, the satirical rhyme, which an old chronicler put into the mouths of many a despairing patient, in later days, may have been true also of “Old Honesty” and his nostrums:

“There’s not a herb nor a root
Nor any remedy to boot
Which can stave death off by a foot!”

Of that good couple’s family only one name has been preserved—Gianbuono, “Good John.” Passerini says he was a priest—probably he means a hermit. Anyhow, he acquired more property in the Valle della Sieve and founded a church—Santa Maria dell’ Assunta—possibly the enlargement of his cell—upon Monte Senario, between the valley of the Arno and that of the Sieve.



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Ser Gianbuono—ecclesiastic or not—had two sons—Bonagiunto, “Lucky Lad,” and Chiarissimo II. In those primitive times nobody troubled about surnames—idiosyncrasy of any kind was a sufficient indication of individuality. The brothers were enterprising fellows, and both made tracks for Florence, which—risen Phoenix-like from barbarian ashes—was thriving marvellously as a mart for art and craft.

Ser Bonagiunto, in the first decade of the thirteenth century, was living in the Sestiere di Porta del Duomo, and working busily in wood and stone, the stalwart parent of a vigorous progeny. It was his great-grandson, Ardingo—a famous athlete in the *giostre* and a soldier of renown—who first of his family attained the rank of *Signore*.

Ser Chiarissimo, between 1201-1210, owned a tower near San Tommaso, at the north-east angle of the Mercato Vecchio—later, the family church of the Medici—and under it a *bottega*, or *canova*, for the sale of his grandmother’s recipes. Over the door he put up his sign—seven golden *Pillole di Speciale*—pills or balls, which were emblazoned upon the proud escutcheon of his descendants. He was called “*il Medico*”—“the doctor”—hence the family name “Medici.”

These were the days when the foundations of the fortunes of many great Florentine families were laid. The loaning of money was the royal road to affluence, and everybody who, by chance, had a spare gold florin or two, became *ipso facto* a “*Presto*” or bank. Next, after lending to one another with a moderate profit—a *dono di tempo* or a *merito*—“quick returns,” came the ambitious system of State loans, with the regulated *interesse* and the speculative dealings in *Cambio*—on ‘Change—with *boroccolo*—“unexpected gain,” and *ritravgola*—“sly advantage,” or, as we say, “sharp practice.”

Ser Filippo, or “Lippo”—the twin son, as the name implies, of Ser Chiarissimo II.—what happened to the other twin we do not know—was probably the first of his family of doctor-apothecaries to deliberately abandon his less lucrative profession and establish himself as a banker in the Mercato Nuovo. Anyhow, his two sons were born and baptised under the happy auspices of plenty of money!

The elder, the prosperous doctor-banker, was jubilantly called Averardo—“Blessed with good means,” and the younger was christened Chiarissimo III., to mark quite sententiously that, whilst his bank-balance was considerable, it had been accumulated by honest dealing!

True to the variable law of vicissitude, this Averardo I. failed to make any very great name for himself, as might have been expected in a lad of so much promise. He was shadowed doubtless by his more strenuous parent. Still, he added to the family possessions by acquiring the lay-patronage of the churches of San Pietro a Sieve and San Bartolommeo di Petrone. Near the latter he built a *castello*, or fortress, which was then considered a title to nobility. He made also a prosperous marriage with Donna Benricevuta de’ Sizi.



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Messer Averardo's son, Averardo II., was, in the crisscross nature of things, a man of stronger grit than his father. He came to great honour as well as to great riches. Elected Prior in 1304, he was chosen as *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* in 1314, and, between these dates, in 1311, Ser Teghia de' Sizi, his mother's brother, made him his heir, and gave him, besides full money-bags, much valuable property and ecclesiastical patronage. To his surname of Medici he added that of Sizi: he was the wealthiest citizen of his day in Florence. His wife, Donna Mandina di Filippo de' Arrigucci of Fiesole, gave him six sons—Giacopo, Giovenco, Francesco, Salvestro, Talento, and Conte. All of them rose to eminence in the State, but of one only can the story be told here—Salvestro.

Messer Salvestro de' Medici—who must not be confounded with his celebrated namesake and kinsman, the “Grand” Salvestro—married Donna Lisa de' Donati, of which union three sons were the issue—Talento, Giovenco, and Averardo III. Salvestro di Averardo II. bore another Christian name—Chiarissimo—the old-world cognomen of his family. Possibly his father thought it wise to stand well with the world and parade his honesty; for whatever ill-gotten gains other bankers acquired, he, at least, was an upright man, and his profits were just!

Anyhow, Messer Salvestro became popular for rectitude in his private life, and for his unselfish discharge of public duties. He was chosen to fill many responsible offices of State, and reached the goal of personal ambition as ambassador to Venice, in 1336. His youngest son, Averardo III., acquired the sobriquet of “Bicci”—the exact meaning of which is problematical—it may mean a “worthless fellow” or “one who lives in a castle!” Nothing indeed is related of him, but, perhaps, like Brer Fox, of a later epoch, he was content “to lie low” and enjoy, without much exertion, the good things his ancestors had provided for him.

Messer Averardo married twice—Giovanna de' Cavallini and Giovanna de' Spini. By the first he became the father of one of the very greatest of the Medici—Giovanni, the parent of a still more famous son—Cosimo.

At this period Florence was ruled by Whalter von Brienne—the so-called Duke of Athens—sagacious, treacherous and depraved. He sought to make himself Lord of Florence by skilfully playing the various political parties one against the other. The *Grandi* he kept in check by the *Popolo Minuto*, but ignored the *Popolo Grasso*, to which the Medici belonged. Under Giovanni de' Medici, Guglielmo degli Altoviti, and Bernardo de' Rucellai, the middle class rose against the usurper; but their plans miscarried, and the leaders were imprisoned and fined.

A Giovanni de' Medici was beheaded in 1342—the first recorded “Tragedy of the Medici.” As to who this unfortunate man was, it is difficult to say. He is called “the son of Bernardo de' Medici,” but no such name appears in the early records of the family. He was probably a descendant of Bonagiunto, a son of Ardingo de' Medici, who was a

violent enemy of the Ghibellines, and *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, in 1296 and 1307, and brother of Francesco, Captain of Pistoja in 1338, and one of the principal participants in the expulsion of the hated Duke.



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The first of the “Grand” Medici was Salvestro, son of Alamanno, of the line of Chiarissimo III., called “The German,” because of his alien Teutonic mother. Great-great-grandson of Ser Filippo, the last of the doctor-apothecaries, Salvestro does not appear to have gone in for the steady, unromantic life of a banker, but to have addressed his energies to the profession of arms. Nevertheless, he was chosen Prior in 1318, and contributed, during peace, to the advancement of his city’s interest. Upon the outbreak of war with the Visconti of Milan, in 1351, he was appointed commander of the Florentine forces.

His sterling grit made itself apparent in the vigour with which at the head of no more than one hundred men he relieved the town and fortress of Scarperia, on the Mugello hills, besieged by the invaders. For his bravery he was knighted by the *Signoria*. Cavaliere Salvestro de’ Medici sided with the aristocratic party, and proclaimed himself a Ghibelline—consorting with the noble families of Albizzi, Ricci, and Strozzi. Their aim was to convert the Republic into an oligarchy under Piero degli Albizzi.

The *Popolo Minuto*, thoroughly alarmed at this menace of liberty and popular government, appointed leaders, who approached Cavaliere Salvestro, in 1370, when he held the supreme office of *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, to safeguard the interests of the tradespeople and lower classes. He gave heed to their representations, for he cunningly perceived that he might ride into the undisputed leadership of the great popular party, the Guelphs, and so checkmate his other allies, the aristocrats! As head of a powerful branch of the rising family of Medici, members of the *Popolo Grasso*, or wealthy middle class, Cavaliere Salvestro became the champion of the people. All round his popularity was established, for people said, “He was born for the safety of the Republic.” He was tactful enough to conceal the personal bent of his policy, and acted upon the maxim, which he was never tired of repeating: “Never make a show before the people!” As *Gonfaloniere* he summoned a Parliament of representatives of all parties and classes at the Palazzo Vecchio, with a view to the composition of differences and the maintenance of public order.

The Ghibellines would have none of his proposals, but privately they were divided amongst themselves, seeing which, the Cavaliere astutely announced the resignation of his office. This had the effect he expected—the Palazzo and the Piazza outside rang with the old cry—“*Liberta!*” “*Liberta!*” “*Evviva il Popolo!*” “*Evviva il Gonfaloniere!*” Salvestro de’ Medici was master of the situation—the first of his family to attain the virtual, if not the real, control of the State.

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The revolution spread through the city; the palaces of the Ghibelline nobles were sacked and burnt. A period of discord and disaster followed, but, with the firm hand of Salvestro de' Medici upon the helm of the ship of the Republic, matters settled. In 1376 he was unanimously chosen *Capitano della Parte Guelfa*—an office of still more personal influence than the Gonfaloniership. No one questioned his authority. He was, as the historian, Michaele Bruto, has recorded, “The first of his family to show his successors how that by conciliating the middle and lower classes they could make their way to sovereignty.”

Another crisis in the history of Florence arose in 1378, during Cavaliere Salvestro de' Medici's second Gonfaloniership, when the *Ciampi*—“Wooden Shoes” they were called in derision—the wool-workers—rose *en masse*, and besieged the *Signoria* sitting at the Palazzo Vecchio. They claimed to rule the city and to abolish the nobles, and a second time Salvestro was “the man of the hour!”

Acting upon his advice, terms were arranged with the revolutionaries, and Michaele Lando—a common woolcarder by trade, but a born leader of men—was elected *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, and a new government was set up. Upon Salvestro, “the Champion of the People,” was again conferred by public acclamation the accolade of knighthood; moreover, as a further mark of popular estimation, to him were allocated the rents of the shops upon the Ponte Vecchio and other prerogatives.

The public spirit displayed by Cavaliere Salvestro gained for him not only personal distinction and reward, but obtained for his family recognition as the first in Florence. He married Donna Bartolommea, the daughter of Messer Oddo degli Altoviti, by whom he had many children. None of his sons seem to have added laurels to the family fame, but to have lived peacefully in the glamour of their father's renown. The Cavaliere retired into private life in 1380, and his death, which occurred in 1388, marked the establishment of Medicean domination in the affairs of Florence.

The second of the “Grand” Medici was Giovanni, the son of Averardo III.—called “Bicci”—and his first wife, Donna Giovanna de' Cavallini, born in 1360. He was just twenty-eight years of age when his popular relative, Cavaliere Salvestro de' Medici, died. His young manhood found him in the very forefront of party strife, and from the first he held unswervingly with the Guelphs.

Married, in 1384, to Donna Piccarda, daughter of Messer Odoardo de' Bueri, he was the father of four sons—Antonio, Damiano, Cosimo, and Lorenzo—the two former died in childhood. The choice of names for two of the boys is significant of the value Messer Giovanni placed upon his family's origin—Saints Damiano and Cosimo, of course, were patrons of doctors and apothecaries. Hence he was not ashamed of the golden pillules of his armorial bearings!

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Messer Giovanni developed extraordinary strength of character; he was a born ruler of men, and a passionate patriot. He gained the goodwill of his fellow-citizens by his unselfishness and generosity—truly not too common in the bearing of men of his time. He served the office of Prior in 1402, 1408, 1411; he was ambassador to Naples in 1406, and to Pope Alessandro V. in 1409; and, in 1407, he held the lucrative post of Podesta of Pistoja.

In 1421 Messer Giovanni de' Medici was elected *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, as the representative of the middle classes, and in opposition to Messeri Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Niccolo da Uzzano, the Ghibelline nominees. The Republic sighed for peace, the crafts for quietness; but the immense liabilities incurred by many costly military enterprises had to be met. Messer Giovanni proposed, in 1427, a tax which should not weigh too heavily upon anybody. Each citizen who was possessed of a capital of one hundred gold florins, or more, was mulcted in a payment to the State of half a gold florin (ten shillings *circa*). This tax, which was called "*Il Catasto*" was unanimously accepted—"it pleased the common people greatly." Messer Giovanni was taxed as heavily as anyone, namely, three hundred gold florins—indicative, incidentally, of his wealth and honesty.

Giovanni associated with himself another prominent man, Messer Agnolo de' Pandolfini, the leader of the "Peace-at-any-Price" party, who is remembered in the annals of Florence as "The Peaceful Citizen." The main points of their policy were:—(1) Peace abroad; (2) Prosperity at home; (3) Low taxation.

No combination of his opponents—and they were many and unscrupulous—was able to damage Messer Giovanni's reputation and power. He could, had he wished it, have proclaimed himself sole ruler of Florence and her territory; but self-control and prudence—which were so characteristic of the men of his family—never forsook him. He died universally regretted in 1429, and was buried in the church of San Lorenzo, which he, along with the Martelli, had restored and endowed. Giovanni di Averardo de' Medici was looked upon as the first banker in Italy, the controller of the credit of Florence and the prince of financiers. Cavalcanti, Macchiavelli, Ammirato, and almost all other historians, describe him as "Large-hearted, liberal-minded, courteous and charitable, dispensing munificent alms with delicate consideration of the feelings and wants of those whom he assisted. Never suing for honours, he gained them all. Hostile to public speculations he strove disinterestedly for the public good. He died rich in this world's goods, but richer still in the goodwill of his fellow citizens."

Many have sought, nevertheless, to belittle Messer Giovanni's reputation—attributing to him a motive for all his urbanity—that of the permanent domination of his house in the government of the Republic—not surely a fault. His old rival in the arena of politics, Niccolo da Uzzano, ever spoke of him after his death with unstinted praise and admiration.

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Messer Giovanni shares with Cavaliere Salvestro the undying fame of having raised, upon the excellent foundation laid by their ancestors, the massive supporting walls of that superb edifice, of which his son, Cosimo, formed the cupola, and his great-grandson, Lorenzo—the lantern—“the Light of Italy.”

The third and fourth “Grand” Medici were, of course, Cosimo, “*Il Padre della Patria*,” and Lorenzo, “*Il Magnifico*.” The stories of their lives and exploits are to be read in the stories, the literature and the arts of Florence. Of Cosimo, Niccolo Macchiavelli wrote as follows:

“He applied himself so strenuously to increase the political power of his house, that those who had rejoiced at Giovanni’s death now regretted it, perceiving what manner of man Cosimo was. Of consummate prudence, staid yet agreeable presence, he was liberal and humane. He never worked against his own party, or against the State, and was prompt in giving aid to all. His liberality gained him many partisans among the citizens.”

Born in 1389, he early evinced mercantile proclivities, and when a lad of no more than seventeen Messer Giovanni, his father, placed him in charge successively of several of the foreign agencies of the Medici bank. Young Cosimo used his opportunities so well that he was looked upon as a successful financier, and came to be called “The Great Merchant of Florence!”

He was jokingly wont to say: “Two yards of scarlet cloth are enough to make a citizen!” Nevertheless he had a deep regard for the opinions and privileges of his fellow Florentines. One of his constant sayings was: “One must always consult the will of the people”—and “the people” replied by acclaiming him “*Il Padre della Patria*.”

Cosimo has been called “a great merchant and a grand party-leader: the first of Florentines by birth and the first of Italians by culture.” He died in 1464. His father left in cash a fortune of nearly 180,000 gold florins, but Cosimo’s estate totalled upwards of 230,000—*circa* £100,000—a vast amount in those days!

After the strong personality of Cosimo and his masterful manipulation of commercial and political affairs, perhaps the unambitious rule of his son Piero was a necessary and healthful corollary. Piero de’ Medici maintained the ground his father had made his own, and gave away nothing of the predominance of his family, and he made way, after a brief exercise of authority, for his brilliant son, Lorenzo.

Piero’s character and career again prove the truth of the adage: “Ability rarely runs in two successive generations.” All the same, he died in 1409, leaving his sons the heirs to nearly 300,000 gold florins!



Lorenzo, "*Il Magnifico*," was the first of the "Grand" Medici to give up entirely all connection with commercial pursuits and banking interests. His tenure of office, by a curious paradox, marks the termination of the financial liberties of Florence! He was an all-round genius—there was nothing he could not do—and do well! "Whatever is worth doing at all," he was wont to say, "is worth doing well."

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With his death, in 1492, as Benedetto Dei said, “The Splendour, not of Tuscany only, but of all Italy, disappeared.”

With the beginning of the sixteenth century dawned a new era. Preliminary signs had appeared in the growth of wealth, in enfranchisement from primitive methods, and in the evolution of individualism. Love of country and the ties of family life were loosened by the universal craving for self-indulgence and personal distinction. Idleness, sensuality, and scepticism—three baneful sisters—gained the mastery, weakening the fabric of society, and leading on to the evil courses of tyrannicide.

“The gradual extinction of public spirit; the general deterioration of private character, and the exercise of unbridled lust and passion, are the livid hues which tinge with the purple of melancholy and the scarlet of tragedy the later pages of Florentine story.”

* * * * *

The direct line of Cosimo, “*Il Padre della Patria*,” the elder surviving son of Messer Giovanni di Averardo “Bicci” de’ Medici, ended with Caterina, Queen of France, the only legitimate child of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, and last *Capo della Repubblica* of Florence; and Alessandro the Bastard, first Duke of Florence, the illegitimate son of Pope Clement VII.

The sovereignty of the Medici was maintained in the person of Cosimo, the only son of Condottiere Giovanni, “delle Bande Nere,” the great-grandson of Lorenzo, the younger of the two surviving sons of Messer Giovanni di Averardo “Bicci” de’ Medici. The rule of the Medici Grand Dukes of Tuscany was carried on from Cosimo I. to Gian Gastone, seventh Grand Duke and last of his line, who died in 1737.

The Grand Duchy then passed to the house of Lorraine, and with a Napoleonic usurpation of eighteen years (1796-1814), it continued in the Lorraine family, as represented by the collateral Hapsburgs, till the year 1859. In that year, King Vittorio Emmanuele of Piedmont and Sardinia, entered Florence, which, with all Italy, was united under the Royal Crown of the House of Savoy.

THE TRAGEDIES OF THE MEDICI

CHAPTER I

LORENZO—“*Il Magnifico*.”

GIULIANO—“*Il Pensieroso*.”

“*Signori!*” “*Signori!*”

Such was the stirring cry which resounded through the lofty Council Chamber of the famous Palazzo Vecchio that dull December day in the year 1469.

Never had such a title been accorded to any one in Florence, where every man was as good as, if not better than, his neighbour. Foreign sovereigns, and their lieutenants, who, from time to time, visited the city and claimed toll and fealty from the citizens, had never been addressed as "*Signori*"—"Lords and Masters." The "*Spirito del Campanile*" as it was called, was nowhere more rampant than in the "City of the Lion and Lily," where everybody at all times seemed only too ready to disparage his fellow.



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The cry was as astounding as it was unanimous—“*Signori!*” “*Signori!*” “*Evviva i due Signori de’ Medici!*” “*Signori!*” “*Signori!*” “*Evviva i due figli della Domina Lucrezia.*” Thus it gathered strength—its importance was emphatic—it was epoch-marking.

“*Signori!*” “*Signori!*” was the acknowledgment of the sovereignty of the Medici, made quite freely and spontaneously by the dignified Lords of the Signory, in the name of the whole population of Florence and Tuscany.

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Piero de’ Medici died on 3rd December 1469, and his interment, which was conducted with marked simplicity, in accordance with his will, was completed that same evening. He had, during his short exercise of power as *Capo della Repubblica*, given a pageant—“The Triumph of Death,” he called it, by way of being his own funeral obsequies—a grim anticipation of the future indeed!

At midnight a secret meeting of citizens was convened, by the officials of the *Signoria*, within the Monastery of Sant’ Antonio by the old Porta Faenza, to debate the question of filling the vacant Headship of the State. Why such a remote locality was chosen is not stated, but it was in conformity with Florentine usage, which, for general and personal security, required secrecy in such gatherings.

More than six hundred—“the flower of the city” as Macchiavelli called them—attended, and upon the proposition of Ridolfo de’ Pandolfini, Messer Tommaso Soderini, by reason of seniority of years and priority of importance, was called upon to preside. “Being one of the first citizens and much superior to the others, his prudence and authority were recognised not only in Florence, but by all the rulers of Italy.”

The Soderini had, for three hundred years, held a leading position in the affairs of Florence; but they were rivals and enemies of the Medici. Indeed Messer Tommaso’s uncle—Ser Francesco—was one of the principal opponents in the city counsels of Cosimo—“*il Padre della Patria.*” Messer Niccolo, his brother, carried on the feud, and was, with Diotalvi Neroni, Agnolo Acciaiuolo, and others, banished in 1455, for their complicity in the abortive attempt to assassinate Piero de’ Medici.

Messer Tommaso, more prescient and prudent, threw in his lot with the Medici, and was chosen by Piero, not only as his own chief counsellor and intimate friend, but as the principal adviser of his two young sons—Lorenzo and Giuliano. He had, moreover, allied himself to the Medici by his marriage with Dianora de’ Tornabuoni, sister of Domina Lucrezia, Piero’s wife.

All the same, he kept his own counsel and took up a perfectly independent line of action, being quite remarkable for his display of that most pronounced characteristic of all good Florentines—the placing of Florence first—“*Firenze la prima!*”

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At the meeting, at Sant' Antonio, his rising to speak was the signal for general applause. In a few generous words he eulogised the gentle virtues of Piero and bemoaned his premature death. In a longer and more serious oration, on the conditions politically and socially of Florence and of the whole State, he put before his hearers two uncontroversial considerations, to guide them in the exercise of the selection of a new *Capo della Repubblica*,—first. The maintenance of unity and tranquillity; and second. The preservation of the *status quo*.

Many and friendly were the interruptions of the oration, and over and over again shouts were raised for "*Tommaso Soderini il Capo!*" Gracefully he bowed his acknowledgment, but, with much feeling, declined the rare honour offered him. Then he went on to say that as the supreme office had been worthily served by Cosimo and Piero de' Medici, it was but fitting that it should be continued in that illustrious family.

He expatiated upon the advantages which had accrued to Florence under the Headship of the Medici; and he urged upon the assembly to offer their allegiance to Piero's sons, and to give them the authority that their father and grandfather had possessed.

Keen debate followed Messer Tommaso's speech: some wished that he would reconsider his decision, others were in favour of trying a new man and of another family—Niccolo Soderini's name was freely mentioned, but gradually the meeting came to accept the proposal. It gained at all events the adhesion of such pronounced ante-Mediceans as Gianozzo de' Pitti and Domenico de' Martelli, and led to a fusion, there and then, of the two parties, "*del Poggio*" and "*del Piano*." Unanimity was the more readily reached when those who demurred perceived that Messer Tommaso would be the virtual ruler of the State in the personal direction of his two young nephews. A deputation was accordingly chosen to convey to Domina Lucrezia and her sons the condolences of the city, and to offer to Lorenzo the coveted Headship of the State.

At noon on the following day the deputation was honourably received at the Medici Palace. "The principal men of the State and of the City," wrote Lorenzo in his *Ricordi*, "came to our house to condole with us in our bereavement, and to offer me the direction of the Government in succession to my grandfather and father. I hesitated to accept the high honour on account of my youth and because of the danger and responsibility I should incur; and I only consented in order to safeguard our friends and our property."

A plenary Parliament was summoned by Tommaso Soderini and those associated with him in the conduct of public affairs during the interregnum. It was held in the great Council Chamber of the Palazzo Vecchio, and was attended by a full concourse of senators and other prominent citizens, deputations from the Guilds, and representatives of the Minor Orders. In the Piazza della Signoria and the adjoining streets, was assembled an immense crowd of people, the greater part being supporters of the Medici.

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Inside the Chamber again Messer Tommaso Soderini was unanimously elected president, and forthwith proceeded to report the result of the deputation. His speech was repeatedly interrupted by cries that he should reconsider his decision and accept then and there the Headship of the State. He again emphatically declined the honour his fellow-citizens desired to confer upon him, and proclaimed Lorenzo de' Medici *Capo della Repubblica Fiorentina*.

At a preconcerted signal the arras over the doorway leading to the private audience chamber was lifted, and there advanced Piero's widow with her two sons, clothed in the dark habiliments of mourning. Domina Lucrezia threw back her thick black veil, revealing upon her kindly face a sorrowful expression and her eyes suffused with tears. Making a lowly curtsy she drew herself up—a queenly figure—and holding the hands of Lorenzo and Giuliano, on either side, made her way to where Messer Tommaso Soderini was standing.

All eyes were bent upon the pathetic little group, and a sympathetic murmur moved the whole audience. Every man of them had for years regarded the Domina as the model of what a woman and a wife, a mother and a queen, should be. She had no rivals and no detractors. Hers had been the wise power behind the throne, for her tactful counsels had guided the actions of her husband unerringly.

Florence was greatly beholden to Domina Lucrezia—a debt which nothing could repay. Her influence for good upon the Court, her munificence in charity, and her unsparring unselfishness had not been without powerful effect upon every one of those hard-headed, hard-hearted citizens. They called to mind that well-known saying of the "Father of his Country"—"the great merchant"—Cosimo: "Why, Lucrezia is the best man among us!"

They reflected, too, upon the auspicious example set at the Palazzo Medici, where the mother's part was conspicuous in the wise training of her family and in the loving deference she received from her sons. And as they gazed upon Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici—"the hope of Florence"—they recognised in the former a statesman, already a ruler in the making. Young though he was, he had widely gained a reputation for shrewdness and energy, for Piero had taken his eldest son early into his confidence, and had entrusted to him much important State business. He had sent him with embassies to Rome, Venice, and Naples; he had despatched him upon a round of ceremonious visits to foreign courts; and had encouraged him to make himself acquainted with all Tuscany and the Tuscans.

Lorenzo's accomplishments in the school of letters were known to all. He was a scholar and a gentleman, and these points had great weight in Florentine opinion. In figure and physiognomy he very greatly resembled his grandfather. His dignified bearing greatly impressed the assembly, whilst his unaffected modesty, pleasant courtesy, and graceful oratory, gratified them all.

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In Giuliano they had a typical young courtier, handsome, athletic, accomplished, and enthusiastic. His physical charms appealed to every one, for most Florentines were Greeks of the Greeks. A precocious boy of sixteen years of age, he had the promise of a brilliant young manhood and a splendid maturity.

The personal equation is always a prominent factor in human ambitions, and nowhere was it more emphatically dominant than in the mutual jealousies of the men of Florence. The “x+y” sign of absolute assurance had its match and equal in the “x-y” sign of restrictive deference. If one *Messer* arrived at some degree of prominence, then the best way for him to attain his end was to pit himself against another of his class nearest to him in influence. If *he* was not to gain the guerdon, then his rival should not have it!

This was the spirit which permeated the *raison d’etre* of each noble lord in that great assembly. After the first wave of enthusiasm had passed, each man began to reflect that the best way, after all, for settling the contentious question of the Headship of the Republic, was to rule every one of the “magnificent six hundred” out of the running; and by taking the line of least resistance plump for the unassuming youths before them—Medici although they were.

“*Signori!*” “*Signori!*” again ran through the lofty chamber, “*I Signori di Firenze!*” Some cried out “Lorenzo,” and some “Giuliano,” and others “*I tutte due*”—but shouts for Lorenzo waxed the loudest. Thus by general acclamation was the new *Capo della Repubblica* elected.

Abashed by the vociferations of their elders and yet encouraged by the unanimity of the assembly, the two young men stood gravely bowing their acknowledgments, the heightened colour of their faces and the nervous tension of their frames indicating the fervency of their emotions. In a few well-chosen sentences Lorenzo expressed his pleasure and Giuliano’s, and the gratitude of their mother at this signal mark of confidence; and promised to uphold the traditions of the City and the State, as his forbears had done, craving from the noble lords their united sympathy and support.

Gently leading the now smiling Domina Lucrezia by the hand, the two brothers returned to the private Hall of Audience, while the great bell of the Palazzo boomed forth the news to the waiting crowd outside. The wool-workers had ceased their toil, the artists had left their *botteghe*, the markets were deserted, and all Florence forgathered in the Piazza to welcome “*I Signori di Firenze!*”

Loud plaudits greeted the noble matron and her sons—not the battle-cry “*Palle! Palle!*” indeed—but “*Evviva i Medici!*” “*Lorenzo!*” “*Giuliano!*” “*La buona Domina Magnifica!*” ... Their progress was a triumph, they could scarcely make their way, short as it was, to the Via Larga, for everybody pressed forward to kiss and stroke their hands. Never had there been anything like so popular an election in Florence; men and women shed tears

as they uttered rapturously their names; for were not “Lorenzo” and “Giuliano” the “pets of the people,” and was not the Domina Lucrezia beloved by everyone!

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The plenary Parliament, having completed its labours, broke up immediately, and the excellent lords and worthy citizens hied them to their palaces, their banks, and their offices, more or less pleased with the morning's work. Not a few reflected, rather grimly, that they had placed two young lives between themselves and the seat of supreme authority. Their sons might live to rule Florence, but their own chances had vanished for ever!

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Lorenzo was not backward in gripping, with a firm hand, the reins of power. Young as he was, he had already formed his ideals and laid out his plans as to the best government of the State. The yearly symposia in the Casentino had been productive of much good in the training of the youthful ruler. The direction of his opinions was signified in that saying of his: "He who would live in Florence must know how to govern!"

The repetition of this phrase was perhaps indiscreet, and it caused searchings of heart, as the meaning of it was borne in upon the comprehensions of the least friendly of the citizens. Lorenzo was clearly set upon the aggrandisement of his house and the dependence of all others. Allowance was made for a lad's impetuosity, but at the same time many a leader kept his hands tightly pressed upon the machinery of government.

Everyone perceived that the young *Capo della Repubblica* was in full possession of the solid grit of his pushful grandfather. He had not studied the careers of his famous ancestors, Salvestro, Giovanni, and Cosimo, for nothing. Indeed Piero, his father, in writing to his sons at Cafaggiuolo to acquaint them with the death of Cosimo, "*Il Padre della Patria*," in 1463, had pointedly said: "Your mother and I offer the character and example of your grandfather to our sons."

Besides these strong characteristics he had inherited, in a superlative degree, the shrewd common-sense of Piero, and his mother's passionate love of Florence, with all her enthusiasm for what was pure, cultured, philanthropic, and religious. Niccolò Macchiavelli, somewhat unwillingly, admitted that—"Lorenzo has all the high-mindedness and liberality which anybody could expect in one occupying such an exalted station."

Giuliano tacitly and contentedly accepted a less ambitious and responsible role. Whilst Lorenzo took the first place and occupied himself in questions of State policy and in the affairs of the family, Giuliano drew to himself all the younger men in physical exploit and mental effort. From boyhood addicted to sports and pastimes, he became *facile princeps* in all manly exercises.

"*Il bel Giulio!*" as he was called generally, was moreover the leader of fashion and the organiser of all the pageants and jousts with which Lorenzo and he delighted the

citizens. Whilst devoting most of his time to fun and frolic, the young prince was acknowledged as one of the chief *litterati*, and a conspicuous ornament of the Platonic Academy.



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The serious side to his character and his, studious disposition gained for him the gentle title of "*Il Pensieroso*." His mother's fond hope was that he should be named a Cardinal, not merely a Papal princeling, nor of course a religious reprobate—as, alas, most of the Cardinals were—but a devout wearer of the scarlet hat, and that one day he might even assume the triple tiara!

Anyhow Giuliano's youth was as spotless as it might be amid unchaste surroundings. His passion for the bewitching Simonetta, "The Star of Genoa," seems to have been the only serious romance of his life, and therein he never aroused Marco de' Vespucci's jealousy by his attentions to his young wife. Indeed the loves of "*Il bel Giulio*" and "*La bella Simonetta*" were the talk and the admiration of the whole city:—the Apollo or the Mercury of the New Athens with his Venus—Venus de' Medici!

The magnificent *Giostra*, or Tournament, which Lorenzo celebrated a year before his accession to the Headship of the Republic was but the prelude to the exhibition of lavish hospitality such as Florentines, and the strangers within their gates, had never witnessed. Banquets, ballets and pageants succeeded one another in rapid succession. Church and national festivals gained splendour and circumstance unrivalled in any other city. Indeed the citizens, from the highest to the meanest, lived in a whirl of festivities—and they liked it well!

The visits of friendly princes and other distinguished personages were hailed with enthusiasm. Apparently there was no bottom to the Medici purse; but actually the *Capo della Repubblica* was playing rather fast and loose with his opulent patrimony. There came a day when the strain grew excessive, and Lorenzo was unable, had he been willing, to make advances to princely suitors, and he lived to repent his prodigality.

The first notable visitors were Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan and his Duchess Bona, Princess of Savoy. The retinue which accompanied the sovereigns was gorgeous, and filled the people of Florence with amazement; but their wonder was tenfold greater when Lorenzo displayed still greater magnificence in their reception. Macchiavelli has attributed the vast increase in the luxurious habits of the citizens to this splendid hospitality.

Another remarkable demonstration was that which was made in 1471 upon the occasion of the succession of Cardinal Francesco delle Rovere to the Papal throne as Sixtus IV. Lorenzo, in person, headed the special embassy which was despatched from Florence to congratulate the new pontiff. The other principal members were Domenico de' Martelli, Agnolo della Stufa, Bongianio de' Gianfigliuzzi, and Donato de' Acciaiuolo. Whilst the mission and its wealth of offerings were received graciously by the Roman Court, Sixtus by no means extended a cordial welcome to Lorenzo. The request which he made for the bestowal of a Cardinal's hat upon his brother, Giuliano, was refused somewhat brusquely, although, to be sure, the Pope did agree to the transfer of the

custody of the finances of the Curia to the Medici bank, through the intervention of Messer Giovanni de' Tornabuoni—Lorenzo's uncle, a resident in Rome.



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Lorenzo appears to have made, however, rather a favourable impression upon Sixtus, for he entered into negotiations concerning the sale of the costly jewels which had been collected by Pope Paul II. In the end Lorenzo purchased the cabinet and its contents, and made thereby a very excellent bargain.

During his sojourn in the Eternal City, Lorenzo acquired a number of precious antiques, rare manuscripts, and valuable works of art. Sixtus, noting his artistic tastes, sent him many handsome gifts, and promised, at his solicitation, to prevent the destruction of ancient buildings and monuments. They parted apparently excellent friends.

Giuliano's *Giostra* was even more brilliant than that of Lorenzo, six years before. It was celebrated in honour of "La bella Simonetta," with whom the impressionable young prince became daily more and more madly in love. Whether his infatuation went at all beyond the bounds of Platonic affection is doubtful. His lovely *innamorata* was the wife of his best friend, and his honour went for much in the loyal estimation of Giuliano. Besides this, his good mother's influence in the cause of virtue and modesty was all-powerful with both her sons.

Strange to say, this romantic attachment stirred the jealousy of a very prominent citizen, no less a personage than Messer Francesco de' Pazzi. He and his brothers declined the invitation to the *Giostra*, and abstained from participation in the general festivities. It was a case of race rivalry and of personal jealousy, but it meant much in the relations of the two families.

The efforts which Lorenzo continually made "to gain a firm footing in Florence"—as Francesco de' Guicciardini has recorded—quite naturally were productive of opposition and animosity. The men who had placed him in power were again in two camps—those who were content with the *status quo*, and those who were not. The latter made less and less effort to conceal their real sentiments, and at length set about to question Lorenzo's motives, and defeat his projects. He was a *beau-ideal* citizen, for, with all his love of show and circumstance, even in the fulness of his dignity and dominion, he knew how to retain and exhibit certain homely and simple traits, which were quite after the Florentine manner.

He met criticisms and oppositions with the very characteristic statement: "I will," said he, "allow no man to put his foot on my throat!" This threat—for so it was accounted by those who wished to discredit him—was like a red gauntlet thrown down, and, later on, a hand—if not a foot—and a dagger, were at Lorenzo's throat!

The overstrain of desire, the feverishness of acquisitiveness, and the lust for power, often in their intensity defeat the purpose sought. The personality of Lorenzo waxed greater and mightier day by day in the nervously articulated constitution of Florence. The greatest genius of his age, he was not only the master of the Government, but the acknowledged chief of the Platonic Academy, the first of living poets, a most

distinguished classical scholar, and the greatest benefactor the city had ever known. Everything was within his grasp and everyone had to bow to his will; his aim was to be autocratic Prince of Tuscany.



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It was the mark of a “perfect gentleman” to unbend to plainer folk, and to mingle with them in moments of relaxation. As a youth he had, with Giuliano, frequented the village fairs in the Mugello, for amusement and good fellowship: indeed they brought him inspiration and popularity as well. When in residence in the Medici Palace he was wont to take his walks abroad quite freely, and to sit and chat with the habitués of the *osterie* by the Porta San Gallo, and other similar taverns.

Florentine of the Florentines, he loved tricks and jokes, and was never tired of making fun at the expense of others: be it said, too, he knew how to take as well as give. An amusing story is told of him: being at Pisa, he chanced to see among the students of the University—which, by the way, he was instrumental in re-establishing and re-endowing—a youth who squinted. He remarked with a laugh: “That lad should easily be the head of his class!” When questioned as to his meaning, he replied jocosely: “Because he will read at the same time both pages of his book, and so will learn double!”

Entering thus unostentatiously into the lives and habits of his fellow-citizens, it was perfectly natural that he should gain their esteem, friendship, and loyal support. He soon became out and away the most popular man in Florence, notwithstanding the unworthy sneer of that ill-conditioned and self-opinionated monk, Girolamo Savonarola. “Lorenzo,” he muttered, “occupies the people with feasts and shows in order that they may think more of their own amusement than of his ambitions.”

Lorenzo was under no delusion with respect to the permanence, in a more or less subjective degree, of the spirit of revolt which had rendered his father’s succession to the Headship of the Republic difficult. The very men who had, for their own ends, misguided Piero, of course were no longer powerful—such at least of them as were still alive were in banishment; but their sons and their adjoints were ready enough to question his authority.

Swiftly enough, Lorenzo took the measures of these men, and prepared to counteract their opposition. Naturally he sought the counsel of Domina Lucrezia, than whom nobody understood better the men of Florence, their manners and their moods. Long and serious were the deliberations of mother and son. With her pregnant assistance he roughed out a scheme, so warily conceived and so faithfully elaborated, that, on its presentation to the Lords of the Signory, it was accepted almost unanimously.

This measure touched citizens in their tenderest spot,—pride and love of display,—for it proclaimed the appointment of the leading *Signori* as ambassadors to foreign courts and communes. The one great absorbing ambition of all prominent Florentines was, through all their history, to head a foreign mission, with all its honours and emoluments.

With infinite grace and persuasiveness Lorenzo put before the Council the advisability of the despatch of envoys, incidentally to announce his succession to the Headship of



the State, but principally to proclaim the grandeur, the wealth, and the power, of the great Tuscan Republic. It was a master-stroke thus to appeal to the patriotism, no less than to the egotism, of their Excellencies, and, at the same time, to confirm his own supremacy!



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The bait, dangled before avaricious eyes, was eagerly snapped up, and when Lorenzo backed up his proposition by munificently mounting each embassy, and by the promise of knighthood upon the return of the ambassadors, scarcely a man of those nominated held back. The scheme worked splendidly, and Lorenzo had the supreme satisfaction of bidding courteous and thankful farewells to his most prominent rivals.

Among them were such distinguished leaders of public opinion as Bernardo de' Buongirolami, Cesare de' Petrucci, Bernardo del Nero, Agnolo de' Niccolini, and Piero Filippo de' Pandolfini. Their departure was the signal for the advancement of many less known men,—friends and proteges of the two brothers or of Domina Lucrezia. In this way Lorenzo greatly strengthened his hold upon the supreme power.

Two very prominent men, however, rejected the proposal—at once the most popular and most dangerous—Tommaso de' Soderini and Francesco de' Pazzi.

Tommaso de' Soderini added immensely to his popularity by his noble exhibition of self-abnegation. His prudence and ability had for long pointed him out as the most trustworthy and experienced of his peers. His whole-hearted loyalty to the cause of the Medici, and the consistency with which he maintained the position he had taken up, at the plenary Parliament in 1469, and subsequently, made him, by the contrariety of circumstances, the most redoubtable rival of the ambitious and impulsive *Capo della Repubblica*.

The trusty pilot, who had so effectively steered the ship of State through the troubled waters of the interregnum, was, quite unintentionally and unwillingly, the greatest obstacle in the way of the young captain! Everybody who had a grievance—real or imaginary—against the government of Lorenzo, sought Messer Tommaso's advice and sympathy, so that the situation became charged with difficulties and embarrassments. The very merest change in the whim of a fickle people might upset the Medici, and then the Soderini would be called upon to fill the vacancy. Messer Tommaso's presence in Florence was both a source of strength to Lorenzo and his house, and a menace.

When the subject of the embassy to Rome—the chief diplomatic appointment of the Republic—was broached, Messer Tommaso, with the utmost sincerity, expressed his fervent wish to meet Lorenzo's views in every respect, but he expressed, quite emphatically, his disinclination to undertake such an arduous duty. Not only did he plead the infirmities of age, but declared that his wife, Madonna Dianora, would never leave Florence. Her love of her own city and its people equalled that of her sister, the Domina Magnifica Lucrezia—their social, charitable and literary interests were alike and equal.

Here was a condition of affairs which called for the exercise of the greatest tact and ingenuity, and Lorenzo committed the task of overcoming the scruples of his uncle and aunt to his mother. Her efforts were entirely successful, and Lorenzo, with a deep sigh

of relief, handed Messer Tommaso his credentials, and personally conducted him and his suite to the Porta Romano, and thence speeded him upon his journey.



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Francesco de' Pazzi was cast in a very different sort of mould—the very antithesis in character, demeanour, and aspiration to Tommaso de Soderini—he has very appropriately been called “the Cataline of Florence.” Possessed of immense wealth, much of which had come to him from his father, Messer Antonio, he rapidly dissipated it by selfish extravagance: no man surpassed him in the virtue or the vice—which you will—of self-seeking.

In the bitterness of an overweening and mortified ambition he rejected, with the utmost discourtesy, Lorenzo's overtures, at the same time remorselessly exposing his intentions, and vowing that no Pazzo should “go round the corner” for a Medico! Messer Francesco displayed unreservedly the true character of his family: he was in truth the “Mirror of his race”—“*L'implacabile Pazzi*.”

The descent of the Pazzi was one of the most ancient among the noble families of Tuscany. The senior branch claimed Greek descent, and its members were early denizens of the hill-country about Fiesole. Leaders of men, they became adherents of the aristocratic party—the Ghibellines—and were consistent and energetic in their allegiance to the Emperor. The junior branch of the Pazzi were dwellers in the Vale of Arno—men of peaceful predilections in agriculture and commerce, throwing in their lot with the Guelphs—the democratic party of the Pope.

Giano della Bella's “*Ordinamenti di Giustizia*,” in 1293, led to the disqualification of the Pazzi and many other notable families from the exercise of the franchise, and, as a consequence, they were deprived of all share in the Government.

They recognised, even in those early days of the formation of the first of modern states, that the Medici were rivals and opponents not only in domestic and commercial enterprise, but also in political advancement, and no love was lost between the two families. Nevertheless, the Pazzi were beholden to their rivals for the restoration of their civil rights.

On the return of Cosimo de' Medici from exile in 1434, they were reinstated, and thenceforward maintained their position. Messer Andrea, next after Cosimo the most influential citizen of Florence, was elected to the Priorate in 1435, and in 1439 he was called upon to entertain no less a personage than King Rene of France. In 1441 he was *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*.

Messer Andrea left three sons—Piero, Giacopo and Antonio. Piero served the supreme office of *Gonfaloniere* in 1462. He was the father of a numerous family—some historians say he had nineteen children by his wife, Madonna Fiammetta de' Guigni! None of them, however, made their mark in the life and history of the city, except the

fourth son, Belforte Renato, who was a prominent man but suffered for the ill-doings of his relations.



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If Piero and his sons were unassuming citizens, Messer Andrea's second son, Giacopo, was of a very different disposition. A man of far greater ability and more vaulting ambition than his brother, he was looked upon as the head of the family. In appearance he was prematurely old and withered up, with a pallid face and palsied frame, with great restless, staring eyes. He perpetually tossed his head about from side to side, as though afflicted with St Vitus' dance. Giacopo was unmarried, a libertine, notorious as a gambler and a blasphemer, a spendthrift, and jealous—beyond bounds—of the popularity and pre-eminence of Piero and Lorenzo de' Medici. He was pointed at as the most immoral man in Florence. In the year of Lorenzo's succession to the place of *Capo della Repubblica*, he obtained by bribery the high office of *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* as a set-off, but, by an inconsistency as unexpected as it was transparent, he accepted, on vacating office, a knighthood at the hands of his rival.

Cavaliere Giacopo's relations with Lorenzo were fairly cordial, outwardly at least, for as late as 1474, when at Avignon, he wrote several letters to him, full of grateful expressions for favours received and of wishes for a continuance of a good understanding. None of Cavaliere Giacopo's illegitimate children arrived at maturity, and, on account of the failure of his elder brother's sons to achieve distinction, the proud banner of the family was clutched by the hands of the four boys of the youngest of Messer Andrea's sons—Guglielmo, Antonio, Giovanni, and Francesco. Their mother was Cosa degli Alessandri, a granddaughter of Alessandro degli Albizzi, who first adopted the new surname.

The brothers were very wealthy, they had amassed large fortunes in commerce, and their houses extended for a considerable distance along that most fashionable of streets—the Borgo degli Albizzi. The Palazzo de' Pazzi doubtless was commenced by their grandfather, whose emblem—a ship—is among the architectural enrichments. The building was finished by their uncle, Giacopo—it is in the Via del Proconsolo.

As bankers, the Pazzi were noted for their enterprise generally, and for their competition with the Medici in particular. They had agencies in all the chief cities of Europe and the East, but their reputation for avarice and sharp dealing was proverbial. Perhaps no family was quite so unpopular in Florence. Their traditions were aristocratic, whilst the Medici were champions of the people.

This distinction was referred to by Madonna Alessandra Macinghi di Matteo degli Strozzi, in one of her letters to her son Filippo, at Naples. "I must bid you remember," she wrote, "that those who are upon the side of the Medici have always done well, whilst those who belong to the Pazzi, the contrary. So I pray you be on your guard."

The growing importance of the Pazzi gave Piero and Lucrezia de' Medici much uneasiness, and it is quite certain that the marriage of their eldest daughter, Bianca—"Piero's tall daughter" as she was called—to the eldest of the three brothers, was a stroke of domestic policy by way of controlling the race for wealth and power.



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Lorenzo, very soon after his accession to the Headship of the State, “took the bull by the horns” and excluded the Pazzi from participation in public office. It was an extreme measure and not in accordance with his usual tact and circumspection, and of course it produced the greatest ill-will and resentment against him and his administration in every member of the proscribed family.

The situation became greatly embittered when, in 1477, Lorenzo interfered in a law-suit which concerned the marriage dower and inheritance of Beatrice, the daughter of Giovanni Buonromeo. By Florentine law the daughter should have inherited the fortune without demur, under the express will of her father, who died intestate; but, at Lorenzo’s command, the estate was passed on to Beatrice’s cousin, Carlo Buonromeo, who was the winner of the second prize in Lorenzo’s *Giostra* of 1468. This decision was in direct opposition to Giuliano de’ Medici’s opinion, and he did all he could to reassure Giovanni de’ Pazzi, Guglielmo’s brother, and Beatrice’s husband, of friendship and confidence.

These were not the only incidents which followed one another at the parting of the ways of the two families, but the affair of Giovanni and Beatrice was resented with peculiar bitterness by all the Pazzi. “Hence arose,” as Francesco de’ Guicciardini has testified, “the wronging of the Pazzi!”

In Francesco, the youngest of the brethren, was exhibited the most violent animosity and hatred. Blessed with superabundant self-conceit, which went so far as to cause him to spend hours a day having his unusually light-coloured hair dressed at the barber’s and his face salved and puffed at the apothecary’s to conceal his muddy complexion, he was reckoned, in the Mercato Nuovo, as little better than an ill-conditioned *braggadoccio*! His shortness of stature he sought to atone for by his accentuation of the Florentine pout and the Tuscan strut—he was well known, too, for his contemptuous jokes at the expense of others.

Francesco denounced Lorenzo and his Government with unmeasured scorn, and, careless of restraint, threatened that “he would be even with him, even though it cost him his life.” Macchiavelli says: “He was the most unscrupulous of his family.” “A man of blood,” Agnolo Poliziano called him, “who, when he meditated any design, went straight to his goal, regardless of morality, religion, reputation and consequences.”

Early in March he quitted Florence suddenly, giving out that his presence was required at Rome in connection with the affairs of the Pazzi bank. To say that his departure was a relief to Lorenzo is but half the truth, for he was greatly perturbed with respect to the influence which such a passionate and reckless rival would have upon his relations with the Holy See. Francesco was the subject of watchfulness upon the part of the Medici agents in Rome, where Giovanni de’ Tornabuoni set himself to thwart any hostile movement which might be made.



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Among prominent men with whom Francesco de' Pazzi was thrown into contact were Archbishop Francesco de' Salviati and Count Girolamo de' Riari. The Archbishop and Francesco were no strangers to one another; their families had risen to affluence and power side by side in Florence, actuated by like sentiments and engaged in like activities—hatred of the Medici was mutual.

Sixtus had proposed, in 1474, to bestow upon Francesco de' Salviati the Archbishopric of Florence, but the *Signoria*, instigated by Lorenzo, refused to confirm his appointment and declined to grant him the temporalities of the See. The Pope yielded very ungraciously to the representations of the Florentine Government and named Rinaldo d'Orsini, Lorenzo's brother-in-law, to the vacancy. This intervention was adduced by Sixtus afterwards as insubordination worthy of punishment, and he did not forget to take his revenge.

The following year Francesco de' Salviati was chosen as Archbishop-designate of Pisa, and again the Florentines objected—being joined by the Pisans, who conspired to prevent him taking possession. The Archbishop was, according to Agnolo Poliziano—the devoted historian and poet-laureate of Lorenzo il Magnifico—"An ignorant man, a contemner of all law—human and divine—a man steeped in crime, and a disgrace to his family and the whole State."

Count Girolamo de' Riari, accounted a nephew of Sixtus, was, like his elder brother Piero and Caterina his sister, a natural child of the Pope. The three were treated with parental affection by the pontiff, and had their home in his private apartments, being waited upon by their unrecognised mother in the guise of nurse and guardian.

Piero de' Riari was created a Cardinal when a spoilt boy, and became, as a man, infamous for his debauchery and villainy. Sixtus had the effrontery to select him as successor to Archbishop Orsini in Florence, but his action was prompted by a motive, which was firmly fixed in his heart. This was nothing less than the supplanting of Lorenzo de' Medici by Piero or Girolamo! So far, however, as Cardinal de' Riari was concerned, Sixtus' ambitions were wholly disappointed by his sudden death, due to violent excesses of all kinds.

Like his brother, Count Girolamo, the offspring of illicit lust, and brought up in the depraved atmosphere of the Papal court, was a reprobate; but Sixtus' vaulting ambition stopped not at character and reputation. He was bent upon the permanent aggrandisement of all the branches of the Delle Rovere family. Casting about for territorial dignity, the Pope set his heart upon the Lordship of Imola, where Taddeo Manfredi of Faenza, being in financial difficulties, had surrendered the fief to the Duke of Milan.

The proposal to bestow the Lordship upon Count Girolamo de' Riari by purchase was warmly resented by the Florentines. Sixtus approached the question in a most



underhand and suspicious manner. He knew perfectly well that negotiations were on foot for the acquisition of the property and title by Lorenzo, on behalf of the Florentine Government. Nevertheless he sent a secret mission to Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan, offering the handsome sum of fifty thousand gold ducats, with a proviso, that the Duke should bestow the hand of his illegitimate daughter Caterina upon Girolamo.



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By way of adding insult to injury, Sixtus impudently sought a loan from the Medici bank, with which to pay the Duke: this greatly offended Lorenzo and all the leading men in Florence. What made the Pope's conduct more despicable, was the knowledge that he regarded this matter as the first step in a line of policy which aimed at supersession of the Medici by the Riari in the direction of Tuscan affairs—himself being Over-Lord.

The Pope's demand was refused indignantly by Lorenzo, who, in the name of the *Signoria*, administered to his Holiness a severe rebuke for his interference in the affairs of Florence. The relations between the two Governments became strained, but Sixtus was perfectly indifferent to opposition where personal interests were concerned.

His next move was the withdrawal of the Duke of Urbino, his relative, from the military service of the Republic, and his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Papal forces. This manoeuvre was regarded with alarm by all the Italian States, and a league was formed by Florence, Venice, and Milan, to check Papal encroachments.

Sixtus made overtures to the Duke of Milan to detach him from the alliance, but, apparently, they failed of their object. The Duke was friendly with Lorenzo and had no wish to become embroiled with Florence.

All these plots and counterplots were exactly to the liking of Francesco de' Pazzi, and he laid himself out to make capital out of them. Not only did he encourage the Pope in his inimical policy, but he placed at his command the sum of money which had been refused by the Medici bank. Sixtus was delighted with his new and wealthy adherent, and forthwith gave the presidents of the Medici bank in Rome notice that they no longer retained his confidence as Papal bankers, and that, accordingly, he had transferred the accounts of the Curia to the care of the rival Pazzi house. Upon Francesco de' Pazzi he conferred the accolade of knighthood. This hostile action of course further estranged Lorenzo and the Government of Florence, and, quite naturally, a system of quarrelsome incidents was set up, with a very complete equipment of spies.

Sixtus never concealed his desire for the overthrow of Lorenzo and the subversion of the Florentine Government, and his hostility found a whole-hearted response in the persons of Count Girolamo de' Riari, Archbishop Francesco de' Salviati, and Cavaliere Francesco de' Pazzi. The Pope exulted openly in what capital he could make out of tales and gossip about Lorenzo and his entourage. Two prominent Florentines fomented this factious spirit. Giovanni Neroni—the Archbishop of Florence in succession to Archbishop d'Orsini, brother of the notorious Diotisalvi, who was banished in 1466—and Agnolo Acciaiuolo—also banished the same year, who resided in Rome and was an especial favourite at the Vatican.

Charges of opposition to the policy of the Pope were freely thrown in the teeth of Lorenzo, and some of them were true, for the actions of the Pope led all observant men to the conclusion that he proposed to assume the role of arbiter in the affairs of all the

Italian States. On the other hand, Lorenzo's policy was peaceful, his aim being the consolidation of Medicean domination in the affairs of the Republic.



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Causes such as these brought about the initiation of the dastardly plot known in history as “The Pazzi Conspiracy.” The name is somewhat open to criticism, for, although the Pazzi were the chief instruments employed, and exceeded all others in detestation of the Medici, the “forefront and head of the offending” was no less a personage than Pope Sixtus IV.

“His Holiness hates Lorenzo,” said Count Girolamo de’ Riari; this was the cue to all that followed. Doubtless the Pope was much in the power of sycophants and adventurers—all immoral rulers are. Each knew his man and held him in the palm of his left hand; and none were backward in impressing this knowledge upon him.

“We can always make our lord the Pope do as we please,” was Archbishop Salviati’s very apposite declaration! It was re-echoed by Francesco de’ Pazzi, who added significantly, “and we mean to rid Florence of the Medici.”

* * * * *

All through the year 1477 the three arch-conspirators were elaborating their plan of action. Possibly Sixtus—and we may give the miscreant the favour of the doubt—at first merely wished to upset the Government of Florence and banish Lorenzo and Giuliano by direct means. When, however, it was borne in upon him that the immense popularity of the Medici would, in the event of their supersession, only lead to their triumphant recall, he agreed that there was nothing for it but the removal of the two brothers in a more summary manner.

This association of Giuliano with Lorenzo was a miserable exhibition of personal spite. He had refused him the Cardinalate simply because he foresaw the succession of a Medici to the Papal throne, whilst he purposed handing over the triple tiara to his son, Cardinal Piero de’ Riari. Nevertheless, there was some idea in the mind of Sixtus, which he conveyed to his fellow-conspirators, of making an agreement with Giuliano, that if he would condone the exile of his brother, then his should be the reversion of the Popedom after Cardinal de’ Riari!

Some authorities say Giuliano lent a not unwilling ear to those overtures, but a saner view is that expressed by Agnolo Poliziano in an epigram:—

“Lorenzo—Giuliano—one spirit, love, and aim Animate you both—this, truly, I, your friend, proclaim.”

Giuliano’s love for Lorenzo was, like that of David and Jonathan, “a love surpassing that of women.” He consistently submitted his own ambitions to the exaltation of his brother’s magnificence.



The cogitations of the leaders of the conspiracy were disturbed by the fact that, however excellent their schemes might be, there was absolute necessity for the co-operation of other influences. Rome unaided could not cope with Florence, backed as she was by France, Venice, Milan, Ferrara, and Mantua. Sixtus consequently broached the subject of the suppression of the Medici to the King of Naples and to the Duke of Urbino—the support of Siena was always assured in any attack on her great rival.

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The king had a personal quarrel with Lorenzo, because he had married Clarice d'Orsini in preference to his daughter, whose hand he had, in a way, offered to the young prince. He at once acceded to the Pope's invitation, and, as good as his word, he despatched his son, the Duke of Calabria, at the head of an armed force, professedly to demand prompt payment by the Republic of arrears due to him for service rendered to Florence.

At the solicitation of Sixtus these troops were retained in Tuscany on the pretext that the Papal fief of Imola required protection. Of course the real purpose was a menace to Lorenzo: the force being at hand to strike a swift blow when necessary.

Duke Federigo of Urbino was made more or less conversant with the Papal policy, and with the special question of Lorenzo's removal. He at once rejected the proposition that resort should be had to violent or secret measures, and in disgust at Sixtus's conduct, he threw up his appointment as Commander of the Papal forces.

Whilst Sixtus was making all these military preparations for the furtherance of his intentions, his co-conspirators removed the scene of their activities to the neighbourhood of Florence, where the Pazzi and Salviati were at one in their readiness to lay down their lives for the undoing of the Medici. They first of all took into their confidence one of the Papal Condottieri, a man of undoubted courage and ability—Giovanni Battista da Montesicco, a native of the Roman Campagna—who was under heavy obligation to Count Girolamo de' Riari. Of course he was perfectly willing, as became his calling, to sell his sword for good payment: he further undertook to enlist his lieutenant, Hieronimo Comiti, in the cause.

The Condottiere was sent off to Florence to communicate to Cavaliere Giacopo de' Pazzi the "idea" of the three chief plotters, to test his feelings, and, if possible, secure his adherence. At first the old man was "as cold as ice"—so Montesicco said in his confession later on—and declined to take any part in the conspiracy. After hearing all that was put before him, he enquired whether Sixtus approved the scheme.

"Why, his Holiness," replied the Condottiere, "has sent me straight to your Honour to ask your support.... I speak for the Pope."

"Then," said Giacopo, "I am with you."

A few days later Archbishop Salviati and Francesco de' Pazzi joined Montesicco at Giacopo's country villa, at Montughi, just beyond the Porta Rosso, on the high road to Bologna. Consultations between the heads of the two families, Pazzi and Salviati—were held there, with the concurrence of a certain number of influential citizens inimical to the Medici.



These meetings were given out as hunting-parties and, to blind their eyes, overtures were made to both Lorenzo and Giuliano to honour the sport with their presence. Needless to say, Francesco de' Pazzi's return to Florence, in company with the unfriendly Archbishop, aroused Lorenzo's suspicions, but he does not appear to have taken any action.



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Montesicco was instructed to make himself and his lieutenant familiar with the stage upon which he was destined to play his part of the plot, and especially to observe the persons and the habits of the two Medici princes. Furthermore, he was directed to seek a personal interview with Lorenzo, on the pretence of submitting suggestions, propounded by Count Girolamo, with respect to the acquisition of some *poderi* near Faenza.

Lorenzo received his visitor with his usual courtesy and hospitality, and, whilst he wondered why Riario should depute such a redoubtable warrior to deal with peaceful matters, he never dreamt that foul play was intended. Montesicco was greatly impressed by the Magnifico's ingenuousness and nobility of character, and still more by the evident esteem and affection in which he was held by all classes of the population. He earnestly reconsidered the bargain he had made: "I resolved," he said in his confession, "that my sword should not slay that just man."

The counsels at Montughi were divergent and acrimonious. At length a resolution was agreed to, as offering a suitable and secure locality for the perpetration of the deed in contemplation, namely, to invite Lorenzo to Rome in the name of Sixtus. Such a step would be regarded as a proof that the Pope no longer opposed Lorenzo's government, but that a *modus vivendi* had been reached, agreeable to all parties. Giuliano was to be included in the invitation as well. Of course the hope was entertained that a favourable opportunity would be afforded, during the Papal hospitalities, for the murder of the two brothers.

The Archbishop took the lead in all these deliberations—he and Giacomo de' Pazzi were boon companions. "They made no profession of any virtue," wrote Ser Varillas, in his *Secret History of the Medici*, "either moral or Christian; they played perpetually at dice, swore confoundedly, and showed no respect for religion."

Confident in the general support of all the members of his family, in any demonstration against the hated Medici, he took into his personal confidence his brother, Giacomo de' Salviati—"an obscure, sordid man"—and his nephew, Giacomo—"a wastrel and a fanatical anti-Medicean."

Among the trustworthy Florentine confederates the Archbishop enrolled Giacomo, son of the famous scholar, Poggio Gucchio de' Bracciolini, originally a protegee of Lorenzo, but "dismissed his service for insolence and rapacity"; Giovanni Perugino, of San Gimignano, a physician attached to Cavaliere Giacomo's household; Giovanni Domenico, a bridle-maker and athlete, but "an idle sort of fellow"; and Napoleone de' Franzesi, a friend of Guglielmo de' Pazzi, Lorenzo's brother-in-law. Another adherent was Messer Giovanni da Pisa, a notary, but "a factious and bad man."



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Before leaving Rome, Francesco de' Pazzi and the Archbishop had agreed with Count Girolamo de' Riari to engage the services of two desperadoes in the pay of the Pope—Bernardo Bandino of the Florentine family of Baroncelli, “a reckless and a brutal man and a bankrupt to boot,” and Amerigo de' Corsi, “the renegade son of a worthy father,”—Messer Bernardo de' Corsi of the ancient Florentine house of that ilk. Two ill-living priests were also added to the roll of the conspirators—Frate Antonio, son of Gherardo de' Maffei of Volterra, and Frate Stefano, son of Niccolo Piovano da Bagnore. The former was exasperated against Lorenzo for the reckless sack of Volterra, and because he had taken possession of a valuable alum-pit belonging to his family. The latter was *Vicario* of Monte Murlo, an upstart Papal precis-writer, whose family was plebeian and employed upon Pazzi property in that locality; he was “a man steeped in crime and a creature of Cavaliere Giacomo de' Pazzi.”

So many having been admitted into the secret of the conspiracy, it became a matter of urgent importance that no delay should arise in the fulfilment of the design; the fear of espionage and leakage was ever present to the minds of the leaders. But what to do, and where, and how, baffled all their ingenuity. At last a lead came, quite unexpectedly from Sixtus himself.

At Pisa was a youth, studying law and philosophy—Raffaelle Sansoni—the son of Count Girolamo's only sister, just sixteen years of age, and “very tender in the heart of the Pope.” Early in 1478 Sixtus had preconised him Cardinal of San Giorgio, and added the honour of Legate for Archbishop Salviati's induction to that See—the richest, by the way, in all Italy.

The boy Cardinal, in April, was directed, by Sixtus, to make a progress to Imola on a visit to his uncle and aunt, and to take Florence on his way, for the purpose of paying his respects to Lorenzo. There was, of course, much more in this apparently innocent proceeding than appeared at first view. Francesco de' Pazzi at once obtained Cavaliere Giacomo's permission to offer the hospitality of his villa to his youthful eminence and his suite.

Montesicco was ordered to furnish an escort of cavalry in the name of the Pope—“men who were perfectly trustworthy and prepared to carry out whatever commands they received.”

After the cavalcade had set forth, Francesco sent a message to Lorenzo de' Medici, suggesting that it might be agreeable to all parties if he could see his way to entertain the Cardinal. Both he and the Archbishop, who was in the company of the Cardinal, knew very well that the proposition would be cordially entertained by the hospitable Magnifico.

As they had anticipated, no sooner had the news reached Florence that the distinguished visitors were approaching the city, than a dignified deputation of *Signori*

set out to meet them, conveying a courteous invitation to be Lorenzo's guests at Fiesole.



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A splendid reception was followed by a noble entertainment, whereat all the more notable dignitaries of the city and the principal members of the Platonic Academy assisted. Among the guests of honour were Archbishop Francesco de' Salviati, with the Ambassadors—Giovanni Morino, representing Ferrante, King of Naples; Filippo Sagramoro, the Duke of Milan; and Ercole di Bendio, the Duke of Ferrara. In special attendance upon Lorenzo, and of ambassadorial rank, were the Cavalieri Agnolo della Stufa, Luigi de' Guicciardini, Bernardo de' Buongirolami, and Buongiano de' Gianfigliuzzi, and others.

The conspirators were in a state of the highest expectation that Montesicco and his lieutenant would have no difficulty in finding opportunities to effect their dastardly purpose during the festivities. They were doomed to disappointment, for at the last moment, and when the banquet was in progress, it was remarked that Giuliano was absent—he was indisposed and unable to attend the function!

* * * * *

The Sunday following, 26th April, happened to be the name-day of the Cardinal, and he expressed a wish to hear High Mass in Santa Maria del Fiore. Lorenzo announced his intention of personally conducting his eminence to the Duomo, and requested him to honour the Domina Clarice and himself by attending a State dinner at the Medici Palace, in the Via Larga, at the conclusion of the ceremony.

This was much to the mind of the confederates, for, surely, there would be a favourable opportunity for the execution of the plot. In secret session it was arranged that, at the moment of the Elevation of the Host, Giovanni Battista da' Montesicco should stab Lorenzo, whilst Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandino should fall upon Giuliano.

The Condottiere, however, firmly refused to commit the double crime of sacrilege and murder, and, point-blank, declined all further share in the conspiracy. Here was an entirely unlooked-for situation, and an alternative plan was not easy to arrange. Francesco de' Pazzi seemed inclined to step into the breach, but detestation of Lorenzo checked his ardour—he would not soil his hands with the blood of such a contemptible tyrant, a menial should administer the blow! There was no lack of volunteers ready to take Montesicco's place, but excessive caution was requisite that no prominent Florentine conspirator should be chosen, lest suspicion should be aroused.

Finally the two clerical members of the conspiracy, Frati Antonio and Stefano, were entrusted with the grim duty. The appointment was quite the best that could be made, because, at the Cathedral, Lorenzo and his immediate entourage would be placed with the clergy, within the choir, whereas to the Pazzi and the other confederates places would be assigned outside the screen, among the unofficial congregation.



Everything was in order, the great bell of the Duomo was sounding its invitation, and the sacred building was packed with worshippers and spectators. In full state Lorenzo, accompanied by Domina Clarice and their Court, led Cardinal Sansoni to his chair of estate by the high altar.

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If, as he himself affirmed, Lorenzo was deprived of the pleasure of smell, he had compensation in the greater acuteness of the other four senses, and it must have struck his keen eyes, as he passed to his place, that there seemed to be an unusually large muster of adherents of the Pazzi and Salviati. Probably he reflected that they were there armed in honour of the Cardinal, who was the guest of Cavaliere Giacopo and under the guidance of Archbishop Francesco, as deputy of his Holiness the Pope.

In the vast congregation everybody of importance in Florence was assembled, with two notable exceptions—the mother and the only brother of Lorenzo il Magnifico. The Domina Lucrezia, who had suddenly retired from the prominent position she held at the Court of her son, remained at Careggi with the venerable Madonna Contessina, Cosimo's widow, upon whom she waited with the utmost devotion.

The other absentee was, once more, Giuliano! Consternation seized upon the conspirators, for the slaughter would not be complete without the shedding of his blood.

The preliminary anthems were being sung as the procession of the celebrant of the Mass, with his sacred ministers moved from the New Sacristy, and every head was bowed before the symbol of the cross. Hesitation on the part of the confederates meant ruin, and, perhaps, death: this no one knew better than Francesco de' Pazzi. Beckoning to Bernardo Bandino, he led the way to the north door of the Cathedral, and hurried off with him to the Medici Palace, not many yards away.

Asking to see the Lord Giuliano, the porter led them into the courtyard, and presently the groom of the chamber conducted them into the young prince's apartment. Giuliano was nearly dressed, and his valet was giving some final touches to his abundant brown hair and to his robes.

"Hasten, my lord, the Mass is in saying, or you will be too late," exclaimed Francesco, "we have come to conduct you to the Duomo." Giuliano was in a gleeful mood, and joked his visitors upon their unexpected attentions. At length he cried out: "Lead on, Pazzo—Medico will follow!"

Taking him in his humour, Francesco slipped his arm round Giuliano's waist—apparently as a mark of good-fellowship, but really for the purpose of feeling whether he was wearing armour under his blue velvet tunic. With Bandino on the other side, the three made the rest of their way through the dense crowd in the Via Larga, being greeted respectfully by old and young, though many wondered at "*Il bel Giulio's*" unwonted companions.

Entering the Duomo, the three stood a moment whilst a clear course was made for Giuliano to the centre of the congregation. Lorenzo and the clergy and dignitaries within the choir were already upon their knees, ready to prostrate themselves as the celebrant held aloft the Sacred Host. Near Lorenzo were Giovanni de' Tornabuoni, his uncle,—



famous for his wealth, influence at Rome, and his probity,—Antonio and Lorenzo de' Cavalcanti, Lorenzo de' Tornabuoni, Marco de' Vespucci, and Filippo degli Strozzi, Chamberlains of Honour, and other distinguished Florentines and the foreign ambassadors.



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No sooner had Giuliano reached the entrance to the choir and was about to genuflect, than Francesco de' Pazzi, who had followed him closely, whipped out his sword, at the very moment of the Elevation, and ran the devout prince, through the back! At the same time Bandino leaped upon him and stabbed him repeatedly in the breast!

It was all the work of an instant, and Giuliano fell over upon his side, his crimson life's blood ebbing swiftly out of nineteen gaping wounds and dyeing his scarlet robe deep purple. Francesco's frenzy was diabolical, for he leaped upon the still quivering body of his victim, and stabbed him again and again—wounding his own thigh in his fury!

Bandino next attacked Francesco Nori, a chief agent or manager of the Medici bank, a man of renown and honour, who vainly threw himself forward to shield his unhappy young patron, and he cut him down to the ground. With a filthy execration, he raised the dripping weapon in the air, prepared for yet another victim.

Meanwhile the two perjured priests, who, by the mock grace of their Order were placed within the choir, had taken up positions immediately behind Lorenzo, as though to render him assistance in the divine service, suddenly attacked him with daggers, but unskilfully. Lorenzo scrambled to his feet, and, casting his heavy mantle of State over his shoulders, drew his sword in self-defence. Turning to see who his opponents were, he received a scratch in the neck from Stefano's steel. Then, from the raised dais, he descried the tumult at the choir gates, whilst cries of "*Il Giuliano e morto*" reached his ears!

Desperadoes were struggling with the clergy and the acolytes by the great lectern, and calling out his name for vengeance. One, more murderous than the rest, was scaling the low sanctuary wall, holding his gory dagger in the air, and making for the chairs of estate—it was Bernardo Bandino. Commending the Domina Clarice to the care of his uncle, Lorenzo passed hurriedly up the steps of the altar and gained the New Sacristy, followed closely by the two Cavalcanti, who were battling with the infuriated Bandino and his confederates—"Abbasso il Lorenzo," they yelled.

Escaping through the doorway, Luca della Robbia's great bronze gates were slammed to, by Angelo Poliziano, almost crushing Antonio Cavalcanti, who fell with a deep wound in his shoulder, and actually flinging to the ground, outside in the aisle, the raging, baffled Bandino. "Then arose," wrote Filippo Strozzi, in his family *Ricordi*—he was an eye-witness of the tragedy—"a great tumult in the church. Messer Bongiano and other knights, with whom I was conversing, were stupefied, one fled hither and another thither, loud shouts filled the building, and the hands of friends of the Pazzi and Salviati all held gleaming weapons.... The young Cardinal remained alone, crouching by the high altar, until he was led away by some priests into the Old Sacristy, whence he was escorted by two of the 'Eight,' with a strong bodyguard, to the Palazzo del Podesta."



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Inside the New Sacristy it was discovered that Lorenzo's wound was serious enough to call for immediate treatment, and one of his devoted pages, young Antonio de' Ridolfi, sucked it for fear of poison. The great heavy metal doors were incessantly battered from without, but no one dared to open them, and Lorenzo remained where he was until the hubbub in the Duomo appeared to be abating. Then another page, Sismondo della Stufa, climbed up into the organ gallery, whence he could look into the church, and reported that none but friends of the Medici remained, and they were crying out for Lorenzo to accept their escort to the palace. So the Magnifico departed.

All the while the great bell of the Palazzo Vecchio was booming out its dread summons for the city trained bands and the armed members of the Guilds to assemble for the defence of the city and the maintenance of their liberties. Loud cries of "*Liberta!*" "*Liberta!*" rolled up the street, drowned by a great chorus of "*Evviva le Palle!*" "*Abasso i Traditori!*" The whole city was in an uproar and blood was being spilt on every side.

What had happened was tragically this. Whilst one half of the conspirators was told off to strike the fatal blow, the other half was directed to rally round Archbishop Salviati, who, by the way, made some excuse for not assisting ministerially at the Mass, but took up his station close to the north door of the Duomo. Directly they saw Giuliano struck to the ground, they made all haste to the Palazzo Vecchio, and demanded an interview with Messer Cesare de' Petrucci, the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, who had been detained by urgent matters in the Courts.

When Messer Petruccio enquired the nature of their business, the Archbishop replied: "We are come, all the family of Salviati, to pay our respects to the *Gonfaloniere*, as in duty bound." Messer Cesare was at lunch, but, rising from table, he welcomed the Archbishop, who entered the apartment alone. He asked him to be speedy, as he had to join the banquet to the Cardinal di San Giorgio almost immediately.

Salviati said he was the bearer of his family's greetings to the *Gonfaloniere*, and also of a private Brief to him from the Pope. His manner seemed so strange, and his errand so irregular, that Petruccio's suspicions were aroused, and raising the arras, he saw the passage was filled with armed men. At once he called the palace guard to arrest the intruders, and caused every door of exit to be locked.

The object, of course, of the Archbishop and those with him was to seize the person of the *Gonfaloniere* and possess themselves of the Banner of Justice—that they might rouse the citizens to fight in its defence.

On the contrary, the people were for the Medici, and "*Palle!*" "*Palle!*" prevailed. Noting that the Salviati did not leave the palace, and that the guards had been withdrawn from the gate and every door was bolted, the populace broke into the building, rescued the *Gonfaloniere*, and the *Signori* with him, and seized the persons of the intruders.



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Without more ado they ran the miscreants, Francesco, Giacopo, and Giacopo di Giacopo de' Salviati, Giacopo de' Bracciolini, and Giovanni da Perugia, up to the lantern of the Campanile, and, thrusting their bodies through the machicolations, hung them head downwards! Others of the party and some of the Cardinal's servants, who had accompanied the Archbishop, were flung from the windows.

Cavaliere Giacopo de' Pazzi was neither at the Duomo, nor did he accompany the Archbishop to the Palazzo Vecchio. His part was to await news from Salviati that he had seized the *Gonfaloniere* and the palace, and then to ride fully armed with a retinue of mercenaries and Montesicco's bodyguard of the Cardinal to the Piazza della Signoria. Without awaiting the signal he advanced, raising the cry "*Liberta!*" "*Liberta!*" but none rallied to his side.

Instead, he and his escort were pelted with stones and, on arriving in the Piazza, he beheld the gruesome human decoration of the Campanile. Without a moment's hesitation, spurring his horse, he rode swiftly towards the Porta della Croce, and set off into the open country—a fugitive!

Francesco de' Pazzi, after the slaughter of Giuliano, escaped to his uncle's house, and stripping himself, received attention to his wound, which was of a very serious nature. He was not, however, left very long in peace, for the cry had gone forth in the streets—"Death to the traitors!" "Down with the Pazzi and the Salviati!" "Fire their houses!" The sword, still reeking red with the bluest blood of Florence, was swiftly crossed by the sword of retribution. Francesco was dragged forth, naked as he was from his bed, buffeted, pelted, and spat upon, they thrust him with staves, weapons, hands and feet, right through the Piazza della Signoria; up they forced him to the giddy gallery of the Campanile, and then, flinging his bleeding, battered body out among his bloodthirsty comrades, they left him to dangle and to die with them there! The Archbishop, still in his gorgeous vestments, turned in fury, as he hung head downwards in that ghastly company, and, seizing his fiendish confederate, fixed his teeth in his bare breast, and so the guilty pair expiated their hellish rage—unlovely in their lives, revolting in their deaths!

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Poor Giuliano's corpse was left weltering in his blood, where he had been done to death, outside the choir screen of the Duomo. At length he was picked up tenderly by the good *Misericordia*. His terrible wounds were reverently washed and his godlike body prepared for sepulture. News of his assassination had been swiftly carried out to Careggi, and Domina Lucrezia, bracing herself for the afflicting sight, hastened to lay his fair head in her lap, a very real replica of "*La Pieta*"—Blessed Mary and her Son.



Ah! how she and the women who bore her company wept for the beloved dead. Ah! how with tender fingers they counted each gaping wound. Ah! how gently they cut off locks of his rich hair, as memorials of a sweet young life.



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They buried Giuliano that same evening, with all the honours due to his rank, amid the tears of an immense concourse of people—stayed for a while from their savage man-hunt. To the Medici shrine of San Lorenzo they bore him—the yellow light of the wax candles revealing the tombs of Cosimo and Piero.

“There was not a citizen,” says Macchiavelli, “who, armed or unarmed, did not go to the palace of Lorenzo in this time of trouble, to offer him his person and his property—such was the position and the affection that the Medici had acquired by their prudence and their liberality.”

Lorenzo came out on the loggia, and addressed the people massed in the street. He thanked them for their devotion and assistance, but entreated them, for his dear, dead brother’s sake, to abstain from further atrocities and to disperse to their homes in peace.

Nevertheless, all the Pazzi and Salviati were proclaimed “*Ammoniti*” and they were pursued from house to house, whilst the peasants took up the hue and cry in the *contado*. Bleeding heads and torn limbs were everywhere scattered in the streets; door-posts and curb-stones were dashed with gore; men and women and the children, too, were all relentless avengers of “*Il bel Giulio’s*” blood. It is said that one hundred and eighty stark corpses were borne away by the merciful *Misericordia* and buried secretly!

Cavaliere Giacopo, who had escaped into the hilly country of the Falterona, near the source of the Arno, was recognised by a couple of countrymen, who were frequenters of the markets in Florence. They seized him and took him to the city gate, where they sold him for fifty gold florins. His shrift was short, for his purchasers, adherents of the Medici, hacked off his head in the street, and carried it upon a pole to the Ponte Vecchio! Buried at Santa Croce, in the chapel of the Pazzi, his mutilated body was not left long in its grave. It was pulled up, denuded of the shroud, and, with a rope tied round the feet, dragged by men and women and even children to the Lung’ Arno, and pitched, like a load of refuse, into the dusky river!

Several of the arch-conspirators hid for a while in various places, mostly in convents, but their time came for punishment. The two priests, Antonio and Stefano, were, two days after the tragedy in the Duomo, brought out of the cellars of the *Badia* of the Benedictines at Santa Firenze, and killed, not swiftly and mercifully, but tortured and mutilated to the satisfaction of the rabble.

Bernard Bandino, after picking himself up at the New Sacristy doors, immediately realised the failure of the conspiracy, and, wise man that he was, put his own safety before all other considerations. He worked his way through the struggling crowd in the Cathedral and got out by the south portal. Luckily enough, the Cardinal’s horse had been left tethered by its affrighted groom hard by, so without awaiting news from the

Archbishop, he vaulted into the saddle and made off at a hand gallop to the Porta Santa Croce.



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With more cunning than Giacompo had shown, he made, not to the Tuscan hills, but to the Tuscan sea, and reached Corneto just in time to board a ship bound for the East, and at the point of weighing anchor. At Galata he went ashore and communicated with Sixtus, who sent him a goodly sum of money and sundry Papal safeguards, with his blessing!

There he lay hid for many weeks, but, as luck would have it, one day he came out of his lair in a Turkish divan, and encountered an agent of the Medici, who recognised him, followed him, and charged him before the Pasha. Put in irons by the Sultan's command, communication was made with Lorenzo. An envoy was despatched to Constantinople, to whom the wretch was handed, and, two months after his crimes in Santa Maria del Fiore, his living body was added to the string of stinking corpses, upon the side of the Campanile, which still dangled in their iron chains, betwixt earth and heaven, rained on and withered by the elements, and fed upon by carrion!

All the seven sons of Piero de' Pazzi were banished for life. They seem to have had no very intimate knowledge of the conspiracy; indeed, they were all away from Florence, except the fourth, Renato, and he was beheaded "for not having revealed the plot, he being privy to the treachery of his uncle Giacompo and his cousin Francesco."

Renato, indeed, tried to escape, knowing that he was implicated, although not engaged in the plot, but the garrison of Radicofani discovered him and his hiding-place, and he was despatched under guard to Florence. Giovanni de' Pazzi, Francesco's brother, who had married Beatrice Buonromeo, hid, for a time, in the monastery of Degli Angeli, and then, with his wife, was banished to the castle of Volterra, where he died in 1481. It does not appear that he took any active part in the plot, although his wronging by Lorenzo was the spark which fired the whole conspiracy.

Guglielmo de' Pazzi, the husband of Bianca de' Medici, Lorenzo and Giuliano's sister, was protected by *Il Magnifico*, and allowed to reside in a villa twelve miles outside Florence.

Napoleone de' Franzesi, alone of all the conspirators, effected his escape, but Piero de' Vespucci, father-in-law to "*La bella Simonetta*"—"Il bel Giulio's" *innamorata*,—who assisted him, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in the Stinche, with a heavy fine.

Giovanni Battista da Montesicco's fate was, perhaps, the only one which excited commiseration, even from the point of view of the Medici. A soldier of fortune, his weapon was at your command, did you but fill his pouch with ducats of Rome or florins of Florence. To him it mattered not whether the adventure partook of romance and espionage, or of intrigue and murder. Unlike many of his profession, he was a religious man, and just. He drew back from his bargain as soon as he had experience of Lorenzo's character, and he refused point-blank to slay him in



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a spot “where Christ could see him,” as he said. It does not appear that he was inside the Cathedral that dread April morning, but remained on watch to see what transpired. On the defeat of the conspiracy he fled, with many more, right out of Tuscany. Agents of the Medici, however, pursued him and, having captured him, dragged him back to Florence. Before the Lords of the *Signoria* he made confession of what he knew of the conspiracy and of his own part therein. On 4th May, just seven days after the tragedy, he paid the penalty of his misplaced devotion, and he was hanged within the Palace of the Podesta.

Two arch-conspirators are still to be accounted for, Pope Sixtus IV. and Count Girolamo de' Riari! The former never expressed the least regret or concern at the tragic occurrences in Florence, but openly deplored the failure of his scheme to replace Lorenzo by Girolamo. Furthermore, he issued a “Bull,” which began: “Iniquitatis filius et perditionis alumnus,” and ended by anathema of Lorenzo, whereby he was excommunicated, and all Florence placed under an Interdict!

Moreover, he laid violent hands upon Donato Acciaiuolo, the Florentine ambassador, and, but for the prompt intervention of the envoys of Venice and Milan, would have cast him, uncharged, into the dungeons of the castle of Sant Angelo. The majority of the Florentine merchants in Rome were arrested, their property confiscated, and, to add insult to injury, Sixtus demanded from the *Signoria* the immediate banishment of Lorenzo. He expressed his keen sorrow for the deaths of the Pazzi and Salviati, his “devoted sons and trusty counsellors.” He spoke of the execution of the Archbishop as “a foul murder caused by the tyranny of the Medici,” and he put a price upon the head of Cesare de' Petrucci, the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia!*

As for Count Girolamo, who had, coward-like, kept in the background—he was probably little more than a complacent tool in the hands of the pontiff—he was permitted to leave Florence in the train of the young Cardinal, immediately before the reception of the Interdict. He returned to Rome and abandoned himself to a life of profligacy; his palace became a brothel and a gambling hell, and there he lived for ten years, dishonoured and diseased. His retributive death was by the hand of an assassin in 1488.

The failure of the plot, whilst it added tremendously to the popularity of the Medici and strengthened still more Lorenzo's position, threw the Pope frantically into the arms of the King of Naples. He persuaded him to join in a combined and powerful invasion of Tuscany. At Ironto the Neapolitan troops crossed the frontier and encamped, whilst the Papal forces moved on from Perugia and Siena.



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Lorenzo at once called a Parliament to consider the position, and to take steps for the protection of the city and the defence of the State. He addressed the assembly as follows: "I know not, Most Excellent Lords and Most Worshipful Citizens, whether to mourn or to rejoice with you over what has happened. When I think of the treachery and hatred wherewith I have been attacked, and my brother slain, I cannot but grieve; but when I reflect with what eagerness and zeal, with what love and unanimity, on the part of the whole city, my brother has been avenged and myself defended, I am moved not merely to rejoice, but even to glory in what has transpired. For, if I have found that I have more enemies in Florence than I had thought I had, I have at the same time discovered that I have warmer and more devoted friends than I knew.... It lies with you, my Most Excellent Lords, to support me still, or to throw me over.... You are my fathers and protectors, and what you wish me to do, I shall do only too willingly...."

All the hearers were deeply affected by Lorenzo's oration, some indeed shed tears, but all vowed to support him in resisting the enemy at the gate. "Take courage," they cried, "it behoves thee, Lorenzo, to live and die for the Republic!"

At the same time they enrolled a bodyguard of twelve soldiers, whose duty it should be to accompany Lorenzo whenever he went abroad, and to protect him in his palace or at his villas. Doubtless they thought the Pope might resort to further secret measures for the slaughter of his enemy.

Thus ended the terrible "Conspiracy of the Pazzi."

CHAPTER II

IPPOLITO—"Il Cardinale."

ALESSANDRO—"Il Negro."

LORENZINO—"Il Terribile."

The First Tyrannicide

"Go at once, ye base-born bastards, or I will be the first to thrust you out—Begone!"

These were the passionate words of the proudest and most ambitious princess that ever bore the great name of Medici—Clarice, daughter of Piero di Lorenzo—"Il Magnifico," and wife of Filippo di Filippo degli Strozzi—"Il Primo Gentiluomo del Secolo."

They were spoken on 16th May 1527, in the Long Gallery of the Palazzo Medici in Florence, and were addressed to two youths—sixteen and thirteen years old respectively, who shrank with terror at the aspect and the vehemence of their contemner. Clarice was a virago, both in the Florentine sense of man's equal in ability



and action, and in the sense of the present day—a woman with a mighty will and endowed with physical strength to enforce it.

The two “bastards” were Ippolito, the natural son of Giuliano de’ Medici, Duke of Nemours, and Alessandro, the so-called illegitimate son of Lorenzo de’ Medici, Duke of Urbino, the virtual ruler of Florence. The lads were not alone in their exposure to the wrath of Madonna Clarice, for, sitting in his chair of estate, was Silvio Passerini, Cardinal of Cortona, their Governor, and Pope Clement VII.’s Regent of the Republic.



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“Begone”! Well had it been if the Cardinal had taken his charges right away from Florence never to return.

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“The splendour, not of Tuscany only, but of the whole of Italy has disappeared!” wrote Benedetto Dei, in his *Cronica*. “The Burial Confraternity of the Magi laid his body in the sacristy of San Lorenzo, and the next day the funeral obsequies were held without pomp—as is the custom of the *Signori*—but quite simply. Truly it may be said that however gorgeous the ceremonies might have been, they would have proved altogether too mean for so great a man.”

This relates to the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico, which occurred on 8th April 1492. That year is one of the most memorable in modern history: Columbus discovered America; Roderigo Borgia was elected Pope; Charles VIII. became the most prominent political figure in Europe; and the power of Florence had reached its zenith.

She was not only the Head of the Tuscan League and the chief Republic in Europe, but also the first of modern states. If the spirit of the Greeks inspired the physical prowess of the Romans, the enlightenment of the Florentines brought forth the renaissance of the arts and crafts of Italy and of the world.

Cosimo, “*Il Padre della Patria*,” laid the foundation-stone of Medici renown in the iron grip of his powerful personality, and Piero, his son, maintained unimpaired its eminence by his urbanity and good sense. To Lorenzo, however, was reserved the distinction of placing upon that mighty column its magnificent copestone, and he adorned it with the sevenfold balls of his escutcheon, whilst on the summit he held unfurled the great Red Cross Oriflamme of Florence.

Lorenzo left three sons and three daughters to uphold that ensign and to exhibit the glory of their house. To the first-born, Piero, came the great inheritance of his father’s place and power, and no man ever entered into a greater possession,—a possession, so firm, so unquestioned and so portentous, that nothing seemed likely to disturb its equilibrium or to sully its triumph.

But, “the son of his father is not always his father’s son,” and this quaint saying is perfectly true of Piero de’ Medici—a youth of twenty-one years of age—the exact age of his father on his succession to the Headship of the State. Physically the young prince was well favoured, he was cultured and, like his unfortunate uncle Giuliano, he was an adept in all gentlemanly exercises.

Alas, he took not the slightest interest in politics, nor in the business affairs of his house, and the proverbial urbanity and pushfulness of the Medici were alike absent. Whilst he lightly handed over to Piero Dorizzi di Bibbiena, his Chancellor, the conduct of public

affairs, he listened to the proud persuasions of his mother, to whom anything like commercial pursuits were abhorrent. Clarice d'Orsini's forbears had all been soldiers, Lorenzo's merchants, that made all the difference in Rome's degenerate days.



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Of course there was no Florentine girl good enough to be the bride of young Piero de' Medici—at least, Domina Clarice, his mother, decided so. She was the proudest of the proud, and as ignorant and prejudiced as she was haughty. Her son could only wed a Roman princess, and, by preference, a daughter of the Orsini; consequently Alfonsina, daughter of Roberto d'Orsini, Clarice's cousin, entered Florence in state on 22nd May 1488, for her magnificent nuptials with the young *Capo della Repubblica*.

The same year the Domina died. Her influence had not been for good, and her want of tact and her unpopularity caused Lorenzo much anxiety. Perhaps, however, a prince of his conspicuous and, in many ways, unique ability, was better mated with an unsympathetic spouse than with a woman who could, from parity of gifts, enter into his feelings and aspirations. He lived for the magnanimous renown of Florence—she for the selfish prominence of her family.

Francesco de' Guicciardini wrote of Piero de' Medici thus: “He was born of a foreign mother, whereby Florentine blood got mixed, and he acquired foreign manners and bearing, too haughty for our habits of life.” The prince gave up most of his time to pleasure and amusement with the young nobles of his court, and encouraged the aims and ambitions of the self-seeking scions of his mother's family. At a single bound the immense personal popularity of Lorenzo, his father, disappeared. Florentines took the young ruler's measure, and he was found wanting.

The imprisonment and threatened execution of his cousins, Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici, was a flagrant mistake. The three had quarrelled about Lorenzo il Magnifico's pretty daughter, Luigia, but it was a baseless rumour that she had been poisoned. Bad blood was made always in Florence by such romances and such interference.

In September 1494, Charles VIII. crossed the Alps, and, whilst Savonarola fanatically hailed his coming to Florence as “God's Captain of Chastisement,” politicians of all parties looked to Piero to show a bold front and resist the French invader as commander-in-chief of a united Italian army.

Piero made no sign, but went on playing *pallone* in the Piazza Santa Croce. The enemy seized the Florentine fortresses of Sargana, Sarzanello and Pietra Santa. The news sobered the headstrong, self-indulgent prince for the moment, and then craven fear seized his undisciplined mind. In a panic he mounted his horse and, attended only by two officers of the city guard, he galloped off to King Charles' camp.

In the royal tent Piero fell upon his knees, craved forgiveness for Florence's opposition, and pleaded for generous terms for himself and his fellow-countrymen. Charles demanded the cession absolutely of the three fortresses, with the cities of Pisa and Livorno, and with them the “loan” of 200,000 gold florins! Piero's report was listened to in solemn silence by the *Signoria*, but when its tenor was conveyed to the concourse of citizens, outside the Palazzo Vecchio, cries of “*Liberta!*” “*Liberta!*” rent the air.



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When Piero rode out of the Piazza, accompanied by an armed escort, he was met by an exasperated mob who assailed him with missiles and stones. The big bell, up in the Campanile, began to speak its ominous summons, and, in reply to faint cries of “*Palle!*” “*Palle!*” renewed shouts of “*Liberta!*” “*Liberta!*” proclaimed the abdication of the Medici.

A Parliament was convened and five ambassadors were appointed to treat with Charles and revoke Piero’s surrender. One of them, speaking for the rest, denounced him as “No longer fit to rule the State”—it was Piero de’ Capponi. The *Signoria* passed a sentence of expulsion upon Piero and his brothers, and placed a reward of two thousand gold florins upon his head, and five thousand more, if he and Giovanni, his Cardinal brother, were captured together.

Needless to say, before the decree was promulgated Piero and Giovanni flew precipitately through the Porta San Gallo, upon their way to Bologna, at the head of a few mercenaries, and with them went Piero’s chancellor.

An enraged mob of citizens rushed pell-mell into the Via Larga, sacked the Palazzo Medici, and scattered the treasures which Piero and Lorenzo had gathered together. The streets were strewn with costly furniture, carpets and tapestry, and priceless works of art were either burnt or broken in pieces. It was not a question of looting but of destruction, and for eighteen years the building was a mark for obscenities and imprecations.

The French army marched through the humiliated city, and terror filled the hearts of the people. Charles occupied a portion of the palace, which the *Signoria* hastily put into some sort of order, borrowing or buying furniture and other articles for his use.

On their knees, an entirely new experience for the proud Florentines, the *Signoria* besought the Emperor’s clemency. He took a high hand with them, demanding a huge indemnity and threatening to command his trumpets to sound for pillage. One man alone asserted his liberty, a man who throughout Piero’s short government had voiced the public discontent—Piero de’ Capponi—the most capable soldier Florence possessed. Boldly and alone he faced the Conqueror and denounced his demands. He tore in pieces the fatal document of Piero’s capitulation, flung the pieces in Charles’ face, and defied him, saying, “If you sound your trumpets we shall ring our bells!”

Charles was cowed, he signed a treaty of peace with honourable terms for Florence, and left the city, after a stormy scene with Savonarola. “Take heed,” the latter said, “not to bring ruin on this city and upon thyself the curse of God!”



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Piero outlived his cowardly surrender and shameful flight three years—an outcast from his country and a disgrace to his family. He found an asylum in the house of his wife Alfonsina's father, Roberto d'Orsini, Count of Tagliacozzo and Alba. In 1502 he entered the service of the King of France, the enemy of his country, against the Spanish conquerors of the kingdom of Naples. The French were worsted and took to their ships at Gaeta. Piero escaped, but his death followed shortly, for the boat in which he was crossing the River Garigliano, or Liri, near the famous stronghold of that name, was swamped by the fire of the Spanish artillery and he was drowned. Cambi, who relates the history, sententiously winds up his narrative with the apposite words, "Thanks be to God!"

After Savonarola's death in 1498, Piero de' Soderini was placed at the head of the Government as *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, whilst Piero's brother, Cardinal Giovanni, took up the leadership of his discredited party. The terrible sack of Prato in 1512 was an opportunity for the Medici, which they did not neglect to use to their advantage. In terror the Florentine Government paid 140,000 gold florins to the Spanish Viceroy and commander, who made it a condition of his evacuation of Tuscany, that the Medici should be recalled as private citizens, and be granted permission to purchase back their forfeited property. On 12th September of the same year, Giuliano, the third son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, with his young nephew, Lorenzo, Piero's son, entered Florence, attended by a small following. He was one of the noblest of his race, but he was wholly lacking in initiative and energy. He made no claim to political eminence, and his self-abnegation led to the return to Florence of his more pushful brother, the Cardinal, who was accompanied by Giulio de' Medici, the bastard son of the murdered Giuliano. They installed themselves in the restored palace, assumed much of the wonted state of their family in bygone days, and were accorded public recognition and honour.

The following year Cardinal Giovanni was elected Pope as Leo X., and, at the same time, Giuliano was created Duke of Nemours—a dignity bestowed by Francis I. of France—and Lorenzo became Duke of Urbino. The conferring of these titles stirred the rancour of a considerable number of ambitious *Signori*, and intrigue and plots to upset the rising fortunes of the Medici were rife. The very next day after the death of Pope Julius II., Bernardo de' Capponi and Pietro Papolo de' Boscoli were condemned to be hung within the Palace of the Podesta, for an attempt upon the lives of Giuliano, Lorenzo, and Giulio de' Medici. Eighteen accomplices were tortured and many others banished: Niccolo Macchiavelli was implicated in the conspiracy, but he appears to have escaped punishment.

Quietly but persistently the power of the great family was recovered. "The Pope and his Medici" became a proverb throughout Italy: all men noted their rising fortunes and their bids for power. Giulio was preconised Cardinal, Giuliano appointed *Gonfaloniere* of the Papal army, and Lorenzo became the virtual Head of the Florentine Republic. Giuliano died in 1516, Lorenzo in 1519, and Pope Leo X. in 1521. The first left no legitimate

offspring, and the second only one daughter, Caterina, besides a natural son, Alessandro.



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Upon the death of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici hastened to Florence, where he was permitted to assume almost autocratic control of State affairs. Possibly he was regarded in the light of Regent for Lorenzo's only legitimate child, Caterina. He had undoubtedly personal fitness for the post of Chief of the Republic. During the brief period, barely five months, of his administration, he did very much to place public interests upon a firm and practical basis.

Very adroitly he played off the "*Ottimati*," under Pietro de' Ridolfi, against the "*Frateschi*," led by Giacomo de' Salviati, without identifying himself with either party. Recalled to Rome on the death of Leo X., he left Cardinal Silvio Passerini of Cortona his deputy: a man useful as a tool but of no ability or judgment. Adrian VI., who succeeded to the Papacy, was a weak pontiff, and Rome became a hot-bed of intrigue and villainy.

A plot to assassinate Cardinal de' Medici failed, and, in 1523, he was, after many weeks of wrangling, elected Pope, with the title of Clement VII. In the Vatican, that "refuge for bastards and foundlings," room was found for two boys, cousins, each the offspring of a Medici father, but illegitimate. They were brought up under the immediate eye of the Pope, indeed one of them, the younger, was said to be the son of Clement.

Ippolito, just fourteen years old, was the bastard son of Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours. His mother was a noble lady of Urbino, Pacifica Brandini, but she permitted her child to be exposed in the streets, in a basket, where he was rescued, and taken into the foundling ward of the Confraternity of Santa Maria di Piano d'Urbino. There the kindly Religious gave him the name of "Pasqualino," indicative of the Church season of Easter, when he entered surreptitiously upon the world's stage.

When the child was less than two years old the nuns of Santa Maria were removed to Rome, and they took with them, along with other unfortunates, little Pasqualino. Upon a visit, which Pope Leo paid to the convent, he noticed the young boy, and as he smiled and tried to get at his Holiness, Leo was struck with his good looks and made enquiries about his origin. In the end, Leo undertook the little fellow's education and maintained his interest in him, and, moreover, ordered his name to be changed to Ippolito.

Alessandro—the younger boy—twelve years old, was the son of Lorenzo de' Medici, created Duke of Urbino in 1536, when the Pope annexed that principality to the pontifical estates, upon the excommunication of the rightful sovereign. His mother was a woman of colour, a Tartar slave-girl, who passed for the wife of a *vetterale* or courier, in the pay of the Duke. He was a native of Colle Vecchio, near Riete, in Umbria, and went by the name of Bizio da Collo, whilst the girl was simply called Anna. Alessandro, later on, was made to feel the baseness of his origin, for he was greeted contemptuously as "Alessandro da Colle Vecchio!" His supposed father, Bizio, died in 1519, but Cardinal Giulio de' Medici adopted him.

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The two boys grew up together at the Vatican, alike in one respect only, their mutual hatred of each other. They were, indeed, as unlike as two boys could be. Ippolito, as the child of gentle parents, had an aristocratic bearing. He was a clever lad and excelled especially in classical learning, in music and poetry. In appearance he became remarkably handsome, with polished manners and a fondness for spending money and for ostentation.

Alessandro, on the other hand, exhibited the attributes of his low-born mother. Physically well-made, he was dark of skin, with dark, curly hair, thick lips, and close-set Eastern eyes. His tastes were unrefined. He had none of Ippolito's gentleness and attractiveness, but in disposition he was morose, passionate, and cruel. His manners were marked by abruptness and vulgarity. He was no genius, and refused to receive the lessons of his masters, and set at defiance all who claimed authority. Alessandro was a shrewd lad all the same, and became Clement's inseparable companion—no doubt he was his son!

Everybody noticed the mutual affection between "uncle" and "nephew," which gave clear indication of a nearer relationship. Clement's word was Alessandro's law, and, when the cousins fell out, as they did many times a day, the interference of their uncle brought peace, but for Ippolito dissatisfaction, as he was usually ruled to be in the wrong. This boyish rivalry led to more considerable emulation and the proprieties of the Papal palace were rudely shaken by the quarrels and the struggles of the cousins.

They were parted and removed each to a remote portion of the palace, with separate suites of attendants, and their only meetings took place in the private apartments of the Pope, and rarely. Thus Ippolito and Alessandro entered upon their teens with no judicious, kindly, or formative influences around them. It was said that each boy threw in the other's face the fact of his illegitimacy, which fawning dependants had revealed to them. Their environment and associates were most undesirable, and nothing was done to instil and encourage sentiments of honour, self-control, truthfulness, and charity. Their initiation into the hypocrisies of spiritual life and ecclesiastical duty produced distaste and contempt for religious exercises.

There was yet another protegee of Clement's left upon the world of mutability and chance—an orphan child, the only issue of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino and his wife Maddalena, daughter of Jean de la Tour d'Auvergne et de Bourbon. Married in 1518, the delicate young mother died in childbirth the following year, leaving her sweet little baby girl, Caterina, to the care of her broken-hearted husband.

The future Queen of France was placed with the foundling nuns of the convent of Santa Lucia in the Via San Gallo. Thence she was removed to the convent of Santa Caterina di Siena, back to the nuns of Santa Lucia once more, and then handed over to the charge of the noble convent of S. Annunziata delle Murate until 1525, when her aunt,

Madonna Clarice de' Medici, wife of Messer Filippo negli Strozzi, was constituted her guardian and instructress.



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Right well the new *governante* carried out the instructions of Clement, and she only relinquished her charge when the Pope commanded the young girl, just eleven years old, to Rome. Apartments were provided for her and her suite in the Palazzo Medici, where Madonna Lucrezia, Lorenzo il Magnifico's daughter, and wife of Giacomo de' Salviati, was appointed her protectress.

Without a mother's care, and tossed about here and there, Caterina grew up devoid of high principles, and became the toy of every passing pleasure and indulgence. All the eligible princes of Europe were, in turn, supposed to be her admirers, and rivals for her hand and fortune. And truly the last legitimate descendant, as she was, of the great Cosimo, was a prize in the matrimonial market—if not for her beauty and her virtues, at all events for her wealth and rank. Indeed, there was a project, seriously entertained, seeing that the elder line of the Medici had failed to produce a male heir, of acknowledging Caterina as "*Domina di Firenze*," with a strong council of Regency to carry on the government in her name.

This proposal did not gain any favour outside the Papal cabinet: in Florence it was scouted with derision. Two violent politicians, if not more, lost their heads over the young girl's destiny—Battista Cei, for proposing that she should be placed in the lions' den, and Bernardo Castiglione, for demanding that she should be put upon the streets of Florence, wearing the yellow badge of woman's shame!

In Rome Caterina conceived at once an invincible repugnance for Alessandro—her father's son. His appearance, his manner, his language appalled her; probably she was not long before she knew the story of his birth. On no account would she speak to him, and, if he entered an apartment where she happened to be, she rushed out, crying, "*Negrello—Bastardo!*"

With Ippolito, on the contrary, she was the best of friends. She admired the good-looking boy, his talents for music, and his skill in gentlemanly exercises. The Venetian ambassador at the Vatican remarked, in a letter to his Government: "We have here a little Medici princess, Caterina, the only child of the late Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino. She and Don Ippolito, the bastard son of Duke Giuliano, are inseparable companions. The boy is very fond of his young cousin, whilst she is devoted to him. She has confidence in nobody else, and she asks him only for everything she wants." Ultimately, of course, Caterina de' Medici became Queen of France, as the consort of Henry II.

The trend of affairs in Florence gave Pope Clement grave anxiety, for, of course, his own personal control became less and less effective upon his elevation to the Papacy. Accredited representatives of the family were required to be in residence there for the maintenance of Medici supremacy. Alas, legitimate male heirs of the senior branch from Cosimo, "*Il Padre della Patria*," were non-existent, and Giovanni delle Bande Nere and his family would not, had he been chosen as *Capo della Repubblica*, consent to be dependent upon Rome.



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Clement took counsel with the Florentine ambassadors, who had been sent to congratulate him upon his elevation. Very adroitly he placed by his chair of state the two youths, who passed for Medici, and who were “as dear to him as sons”—Ippolito and Alessandro. In compliment to the Pope, and certainly not from conviction, the fourteen envoys agreed in asking him to send the two boys to Florence, under the charge of a worthy administrator, who should hold the reins of government in Clement’s name.

Delighted with the success of his stratagem, Clement chose the Cardinal of Cortona, one of his most obedient and faithful creatures, to accompany Ippolito, nearly sixteen years old, to Florence as quasi-Regent for the lad. With them went, as Ippolito’s chamberlains, four Florentine youths of good birth who were favourites of the Pope, Alessandro de’ Pucci, Pietro de’ Ridolfi, Luigi della Stufa, and Palla de’ Rucellai. The cortege was received in Florence without demonstrations of any kind; but certainly Ippolito made a very favourable impression by his good looks and gaiety. The Cardinal and his companions drew rein first at the Church of the SS. Annunziata, where they heard Mass, and they then rode on to the renovated Palazzo Medici. A meeting of the *Signoria* was convened, and by a narrow majority Ippolito was declared eligible for the offices of State.

The appointment of Passerini was unfortunate. “He was,” writes Benedetto Varchi, “like most prelates, extremely avaricious; he had neither the intellect to understand the Florentine character nor the judgment to manage it, had he understood it.” Ippolito assumed at once the style of “Il Magnifico,” and began to display a lust for power and a taste for extravagance quite unusual in so young a lad. The Cardinal yielded to every whim, and very soon a goodly number of courtiers rallied round the handsome youth.

Having launched one of his proteges successfully upon the troubled sea of Florentine politics, Clement despatched Alessandro, under the care of Rosso de’ Ridolfi, one of his most trustworthy attendants, with little Caterina de’ Medici. They were instructed to report themselves to Cardinal Passerini, and then without delay to proceed to the Villa Poggio a Caiano.

This was a very wise arrangement on the part of Clement, in view of the strenuous rivalry and emphatic dislike the two lads had for each other. The two were kept apart as they had been at the Vatican, but this led naturally to the creation of rival parties and rival courts, each of which acclaimed their respective young leaders as *Il Capo della Repubblica* and “*Il Signore di Firenze.*” Better far as matters turned out, had it been deemed sufficient to advance Ippolito alone. His splendid talents—although linked to fickleness and inconsistency—and his liberality, appealed to the Florentines, and he might have proved a second Lorenzo il Magnifico.

The sack of Rome in 1527 and the imprisonment of Clement VII. in the fortress of Sant Angelo, raised the spirits of the Republicans of Florence. Niccolo de’ Soderini,

Francesco de' Guicciardini and Pietro de' Salviati took up a strong position as leaders of a popular party, and once more the cry of "*Liberta!*" "*Liberta!*" was raised. Cardinal Passerini was advised to leave Florence and to take the two lads with him.



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Among those who escaped from Rome were Filippo negli Strozzi and his wife Clarice. They posted off to Florence, and whilst Filippo temporised with the Cardinal and with the party of reform on either hand, Clarice declared openly for the opponents of her own family.

She attended a specially convened meeting of the anti-Medicean party, and placed her services at their disposal. It was arranged that she should visit the Cardinal the following day. Dressed superbly, wearing the family jewels, and conveyed in a State sedan-chair, she proceeded to the Palazzo Medici—the house of her fathers. Ippolito and Alessandro, with their tutors and attendants, met her upon the grand staircase, and conducted her to the presence of the Cardinal.

Standing in the Long Gallery, she poured forth a torrent of scornful words upon the base-born scions of her family. “My Lord,” she cried, “my Lord, to what a pass has my family sunk. Do you think that any of my great ancestors would have borne you so long. Alas! that my race has none but female legitimate offspring.” Then turning to the astonished lads she continued: “You had better both look out for yourselves and go away before the Cardinal here destroys you and Florence!”

Some of the suite tried to interfere and to pacify the enraged woman, but to no avail, she went on vehemently to denounce the intrusion of the two bastards.

“Begone, you who are not of the blood of the Medici, both of you, from a house and from a city to which neither of you, nor your patron, Clement—wrongfully Pope and now justly a prisoner in Sant Angelo—have any legitimate claim, by reason of birth or of merit. Go at once, ye base-born bastards, or I will be the first to thrust you out!”

Her hearers quailed under her invective, and Passerini humbly promised to quit the palace, but when Clarice had gone, he sent for Filippo negli Strozzi and expostulated with him. Filippo’s apology was as quaint as it was effective. “Had she not been,” said he, “a woman and a Medici, he would have administered to her such a public chastisement as would have gone bad with her!” He, nevertheless, strongly advised the Cardinal to depart, and he conveyed the intelligence that the lives of the two lads were by no means secure, and that should anything happen to them, the Pope would demand them at his hands.

On 29th May 1527, Cardinal Passerini, with Ippolito and Alessandro and their suite, accompanied by Filippo, rode out to Poggio a Caiano, amid the execrations of the populace. Thence they departed for Rome, where the young men lived more or less quietly for two years in Clement’s private apartments at the Vatican.

* * * * *



In spite of Ippolito's superiority of appearance, manners and attainments, the Pope made no concealment of his preference for Alessandro. He created him Duke of Citta di Penna—a fief within the Papal States—and decided that the riches and greatness of the House of Medici should be continued in Alessandro and not in Ippolito.



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“Ippolito,” wrote Varillas, “was seized with incredible grief and indignation, and it seemed to him, that being older, a nearer relation to the Pope, and better endowed by nature, so rich an inheritance should rather be his ... either not knowing or not believing the rumours that Alessandro was Clement’s son.”

Goaded by what he conceived to be a legitimate ambition, Ippolito posted off to Florence with the idea of seizing the executive power. Clement despatched Baccio Valori after him, with entreaties and promises, and finding that he had no welcome among the Florentines, Ippolito returned quietly to Rome.

The Pope immediately, and without consulting him, preconised him Cardinal—greatly to his disgust. He had no wish for ecclesiastical preferment, he was a soldier at heart, and meant to be ruler of Florence. Clement noted the young man’s partialities—he was only just twenty years of age, and he encouraged him in his extravagant tastes by liberally endowing his Cardinalate. A Brief “*In commendam*” was bestowed upon him, whereby the revenue of all vacant benefices and Papal dignities, for six months, were transferred to his account. Moreover, in 1529, he was appointed Archbishop of Avignon, Legate of Perugia, and Administrator of the See of Casale. These fat endowments very considerably affected Ippolito’s position. In Rome he had a Court of three hundred notable personages of all nations; his most intimate friends were soldiers and statesmen of renown, and writers and artists of the highest abilities and fame.

Clement having placated Ippolito, set to work to carry out his plans for Alessandro. He wrote on his behalf to the Emperor Charles V. to invite him on his way from Flanders, whither he had travelled to avoid disputes with Ippolito, to visit the Imperial Court. Charles received Alessandro with great honour, and expressed his pleasure at greeting the near relative of the Pope.

A treaty was subsequently signed at Barcelona between Charles and Clement, whereby it was agreed that Alessandro should espouse Margaret, Charles’ illegitimate daughter, and that Clement should create Florence a Dukedom in favour of Alessandro. At the same time the Emperor was asked to intercede between the rival cousins but he naively replied, “Neither wants liberty but aggrandisement! Let them be.”

Alessandro entered Florence on 5th July 1531 accompanied by Giovanni Antonio Muscettola, envoy and chancellor of the Emperor. He proceeded to the Palazzo Vecchio, there he read aloud the injunction of Clement, countersigned by Charles, which established him as Duke of Florence. The office of *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* was abolished, and the *Signoria* restricted in their powers as merely consultative authorities. At the same time the Republic was superseded and the citizens allowed to exercise the franchise only in the election of civil magistrates.

The *coup d’etat* was complete and meekly enough the *Signoria* declared that—
“Considering the excellent qualities, life and habits of the most illustrious Duke

Alessandro de' Medici, son of the late Magnificent Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino; and in recognition of the many and great benefits received, both spiritual and temporal, from the House of Medici, he was eligible for all the offices of State."



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Alessandro at once began to follow the bent of his base inclinations. As supreme Head of the State he ruled autocratically, and set justice and decency at defiance. The Florentines abashed by the pass in which they found themselves, seemed powerless to oppose the Duke's aggression upon their liberties. That had come to pass against which they had striven for hundreds of years—Florence was subject to *Il governo d'un solo*.

Significantly enough, Alessandro took as his motto "*Un solo Signore, una sola Legge*," and this he stuck up all over Tuscany. He applied it quite autocratically by disarming the citizens, building fortresses, banishing the disaffected nobles, and confiscating all properties he coveted. These were but the beginnings of troubles.

Taxes were doubled, every office at court was held by a creature and toady of the Duke, bribery and corruption of all kinds ruled the State, and there appeared to be no limit to his lust and rapacity, and no barrier against the chicanery of his adherents.

Added to all this was the dislocation of public order. Florence became a hot-bed of immorality and a sink of iniquity. Women were openly ravished in the streets, the inmates of convents were not spared, men were wronged and removed suspiciously, the eyes and ears of the children were assailed by unblushing depravity. The *oubliettes* of the Bigallo had their fill of victims.

"Tyrant of Florence" was the designation which best fitted the new ruler. He destroyed the fabric of society and polluted the sanctity of family life. Dismay and revenge alternated in the feelings of the people. Those who dared, began to flock to Ippolito, who, with grim satisfaction, received at his palace in Rome all disaffected refugees. Meetings were held at Filippo negli Strozzi's house, and a movement was set on foot for the overthrow of Alessandro and his dissolute government. A deputation was sent to the Emperor Charles to complain of the tyranny of the Duke and to expose his immoral life. This sealed Ippolito's fate, for Alessandro at once took steps, not only to checkmate the action of the deputation, but to circumvent the destruction of his rival.

Clement had of course full knowledge of the condition of affairs in Florence, and of the increase of hostility between the cousins, but both he and Paul III., who succeeded him as Pope in 1534, kept Ippolito engaged in military and diplomatic duties away from Italy. Knowing his predilection for soldiering, he was despatched, at the head of eight thousand horsemen, to the assistance of the Emperor against the Turks who had invaded Hungary under the Sultan Soliman. His valour and ability were remarkable; and the dash with which he marched, later on, to the defence of Rome, marked him as a commander of rare distinction.

Returning once more to Rome, he abandoned himself to a career of debauchery and extravagance. Catillo, his castle-villa at Tivoli, became the resort of immoral and disreputable persons. The Pope sought to redress the disorder: he owed much to



Ippolito at the time of his election to the Papacy, which was in a great measure achieved by his keen advocacy, so he sent him on embassies to the Emperor at Barcelona, and to the King of Naples, under promise of rich revenues.



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At the castle of Fondi, near the little town of Itri in the Neapolitan province of Terra di Lavoro, eight miles from the fortress of Gaeta, and overlooking the high road from Rome to Naples, was living, in strict retirement, a girl greatly beloved by the Cardinal. Giulia Gonzaga, such was her name, was the attractive and clever daughter of Messer Vespasiano Colonna, whose brother, Cavaliere Stefano, had taken a prominent and honourable part in the defence of Florence during the memorable siege of 1529-1530.

Giulia was certainly only one of the many eligible maidens proposed at various times as a wife for the young ecclesiastic; but, in her case, the betrothal was all but effected, and with the approval of Pope Clement, whose conscience smote him when he saw that his handsome and gay young nephew was anything but disposed to observe the conventions of his Order.

Nevertheless, the lovers were parted, and Giulia was confined in the conventual fortress, and carefully guarded. Pope Paul, it appears, did not relax the imprisonment of the unfortunate girl, as he surely ought to have done, in recognition of the Cardinal's successful advocacy of his own advancement.

Naturally, poor Giulia pined and pined for her lover with whom, she was of course forbidden to correspond. At length her health gave way, and she appealed to her father to obtain just one interview with Ippolito before she died. Reluctantly permission was given by the Pope, and Ippolito, after the completion of his diplomatic duties in Naples, sought the neighbourhood of his *innamorata*; ostensibly upon the plea that his health needed the rest and change which the invigorating air of the *Foresteria*, a sanatorium at Itri, offered.

Among Giulia's attendants was an old retainer of Alessandro de' Medici, still devoted to his service, and mindful of youthful escapades together at the Vatican. Him Alessandro persuaded, by means of a heavy bribe and the promise of efficient protection, to undertake the removal of Ippolito. Whilst dallying with his former mistress, the Cardinal fell ill of malarial fever, common in the swampy plain of Garigliano, where he had gone shooting snipe.

Giovanni Andrea da Borgo San Sepolcro, the accomplice of his master, prepared some chicken broth, which he persuaded Ippolito to take. In spite of its bitter taste he partook largely, but during the night he was attacked with immoderate sickness. Before morning dawn the brilliant career of Ippolito, Cardinal de' Medici, ended, and the harvest sun of 10th August 1535 rose upon his rigid corpse in Giulia's chamber!

The poisoner fled to Florence, and was lodged safely in the Palazzo Medici, under the Duke's special protection. Alessandro received the news of Ippolito's death with the utmost satisfaction. "Now," said he, "the vile wasp is crushed at last!" The dead body of his victim was buried hurriedly at Itri, but, by Pope Paul's direction, it was exhumed and given honourable burial within the church of San Lorenzo-e-Damaso in Rome. Paul

lamented the tragedy which had removed his friend so cruelly, and he boldly accused Alessandro of having brought it about.



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No one died more regretted. All Rome was in deepest mourning, and great and small thronged to his burial. He had played the part of Lord Bountiful ungrudgingly and with indiscriminating liberality. Very fittingly it was remarked that he bore as his motto "*Inter omnes*." He had all the making of a great man, but fickleness, inconsistency, impatience, and self-indulgence, belittled his reputation. Nevertheless, his character shone resplendently when contrasted with that of his rival Alessandro.

Ippolito de' Medici left a son by his mistress, Asdrubale, who became a soldier and a knight of Malta.

Neither Pope nor Emperor made any very energetic protests to Alessandro, but were busy with anxious personal enterprises—and self-interests usually exclude any other. True, Charles wrote to the Duke and questioned him about the death of Ippolito, and required that all the facts of the case should be laid before him, but the matter ended there. Alessandro made no reply!

In six months the sensation had blown over, and the Emperor visited Florence in gorgeous State on 24th April. He was royally entertained by Alessandro, but he made no friends among the nobles, and departed without bestowing the usual honours. The Medici Palace had been redecorated, and it witnessed a revival of the lavish hospitality of Lorenzo il Magnifico.

Margaret of Austria entered the city for her marriage with Alessandro on 19th July 1536. She came from Naples accompanied by the Vice-Queen and Cardinals Santi Quattro and Cibo. The nuptial Mass was sung at San Lorenzo, and then the whole city was given over to feasting and debauchery. "The young Duchess was serenely happy, for the Duke paid her great court, and she knew not that he paid as much to other women of all grades!" Banquets, masked balls, street pageants, *Giostra*, and musical comedies crowded one upon another.

Among the wedding guests was Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, who held the Lordship of Piombino, the lineal descendant and heir of Cosimo, "*Il Padre della Patria's*" brother Lorenzo. His father died when he was an infant, but his mother, Maria de' Soderini—a woman possessed of all the prudence and culture of her family—devoted herself to his rearing and education. Just twenty-three years old, he was small of stature and slightly built, dark complexioned, and of a melancholy aspect. His health was indifferent, and he was liable to uncontrollable fits of passion: he was restless and dissatisfied, and the associate of low and evil companions.

In Rome—where he had lived in the Medici "happy family" of the Pope—he acquired the reputation of a coward and a provoker of disturbances. He was fond of defacing and mutilating ancient monuments, and became liable to pains and penalties from which Cardinal Ippolito rescued him. By his depraved and foolish habits he greatly incensed Clement, who at length dismissed him in disgrace.



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Lorenzo retired to Florence, where he was welcomed and entertained by Alessandro. In return for favours Lorenzo, nicknamed in Florence "*Lorenzino*," "Lorenzo the Little," became useful to the Duke and appointed himself spy-in-chief of the Florentine exiles. His studious character and his literary talent endowed him with another and a worthier sobriquet "*Filosofo*," and he carried out the role by dressing as a Greek and living as a sybarite. Devoted to the study of the classics and encouraged by his sensuous tutor, Giovanni Francesco Zeffi, when not engaged in vulgar orgies, he translated Plato and other writers, and even composed a comedy, which he called *L'Aridosio*.

Lorenzino entered fully into the Duke's life of profligacy and became his inseparable companion. Both of them admired physical charms and indulged in all physical passions: they set a base fashion in Florence, which degraded her men and women. They habitually made lewd jokes of everything human and divine, and were noted for their cruelty to animals. If Alessandro became execrated as "The Tyrant and Ravisher of Florence," Lorenzino was scouted as "A monster and a miracle," and his depreciative nickname underwent a new spelling—"Lorenzaccio,"—"Lorenzo the Terrible!"

* * * * *

Satiety of excesses produced a revulsion of feeling between the two debauchees. Alessandro began to show irritation at his companion's freedom. The latter refused to be corrected, and into his mind came once more the inspiration of classical heroes of liberty and foes of oppression. Why should he not be a Florentine "Brutus," and have his name engraved upon the pinnacle of fame as the "Saviour of his Country!" Lorenzino studied and studied well the part he now set himself to play.

Not a word did he breathe to man or woman of what was paramount in his mind, and he made not the slightest difference in his intercourse with Alessandro—indeed, he drew himself to him more intimately than ever. The Carnival of 1536 saw the maddest of all mad scenes, and everything and everybody ran wild riot. Disguised as country minstrels and mounted upon broken-down donkeys, the two comrades rode about the city, paying visits to their various mistresses and flatterers, and playing practical jokes upon the respectable citizens they encountered.

Returning one evening, weary with their follies, they supped together at the Palazzo Medici, and then Lorenzino inquired how they were to spend the night.

"I shall go to bed," replied Alessandro, "for I am worn out."

"Caterina?" whispered Lorenzino.

Alessandro rose abruptly and said, "Lead on, Lorenzo, I will follow."



Seeing his valet and confidant, Giustiniano da Sesena, he said: "We are going to Signore Lorenzino's, but what shall I put on?" Giustiniano handed him a crimson silk dressing-gown, and asked him whether he would wear his sword and steel gauntlets, or whether his cane and his scented kid gloves would not be more suitable.



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“Yes,” the Duke replied, “toss me over my lovers’ gloves, for I am about to see my lady!”

Snatching a cloak, lined with fur, and grasping a light sword in his hand, Alessandro left the palace by the garden wicket, followed by his valet and two secret guards, Giomo da Carpi, and an Hungarian wrestler nicknamed “Bobo.”

Meanwhile Lorenzino had sought the street, and at the corner he found his usual attendant, Michaele del Tovallaccino, a soldier possessed of a splendid physique, combining the soft contour of Apollo and the brute force of Hercules. His comrades called him “Scoronconcolo,” on account of his wild, lustful nature. “He could kiss and bite,” they said, “at the same time!”

“Michaele,” said Lorenzino, “I want you to kill the man who is my greatest enemy.”

“My lord,” replied the ruffian, “I am at your service. Tell me the name of the fellow who has wronged you and I will kill him right off. I would kill Jesus Christ himself if he hated you!”

“Stay at your post and I will return for you presently,” said Lorenzino, going on to his own house across the way.

In the Piazza San Marco he overtook Alessandro, who dismissed his attendants, and went on alone with his cousin. In Lorenzino’s chamber was a good fire, and Alessandro, complaining of the heat, loosened his attire and removed his sword, handing it to Lorenzino, who deftly entangled the sash and belt in the hilt and placed it upon the bed.

“Where is Caterina?” inquired the Duke. “Why is she not here?”

“She is quite ready,” was the reply, “and only awaits me to conduct her hither.”

“Go at once and delay not!” cried Alessandro.

Locking the door from without, and putting the key in his pocket, Lorenzino hastened to Michaele.

This “Caterina” was Caterina Ginori, Lorenzino’s mother’s sister. Forced by her father, Paolo d’Antonio de’ Soderini, to renounce her lover, Luigi degli Alamanni, and to marry Leonardo de’ Ginori—a disreputable spendthrift and gambler, who fled to Naples to escape his creditors—she attracted the notice of Duke Alessandro. She was as accomplished as she was beautiful and very commanding in appearance, the mother of Bartolommeo, the giant manhood model of Giovanni da Bologna for his famous “Youth, Manhood, and Age,” miscalled “The Rape of the Sabines,” in the Loggia de’ Lanzi.



At the rendezvous Lorenzino slapped Michaele upon the shoulder. “Brother,” he said, “the moment has arrived. I have locked my enemy in my room. Come on, now is your opportunity.” “March!” was the ruffian’s terse reply.

“Don’t fear to strike,” said Lorenzino, as they strode on side by side. “Strike hard, and if the man should seek to defend himself, strike still harder. I trust you.”

“Never you fear, my lord, were the man to swear he was the Duke or the Devil, it matters not. Strike I will, and hard.”

Mounting the stairs quietly, Lorenzino opened the door of his apartment softly, and there lay Alessandro, fast asleep upon the bed, with his face to the wall. Coward, as he was wont to call himself, he no longer feared to slay the “Tyrant of his People,” but whipping out his sword, not waiting for Michaele’s attack, he thrust it right through the Duke’s back!

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With a frantic yell Alessandro stumbled upon the floor. “Traitor! assassin!” he screamed. Then, turning his eyes full upon Lorenzino, he faintly added: “This from thee—my lover!”

Alessandro made as though to defend himself, and with the red blood gushing from his back, he threw himself upon his murderer and they struggled on the floor.

Michaele was powerless to strike: his weapon might have slashed his master. Alessandro, with dying energy, seized the hand of Lorenzino and bit two of his fingers to the bone, so that the miscreant yelled with agony. Then they parted—Lorenzino to bind up his broken bones and Alessandro to staunch his wound. “At him,” cried the madman, and Michaele struck at him with his sword, cutting off his right cheek and his nose, and then he got his dagger at his throat, and turned it round in the gaping wound, until he nearly decapitated his unhappy victim. Again Lorenzino heaved at him with his reeking weapon and fell upon him, covering himself with blood, and bit his face in savage rage! Alessandro fell away and lay, breathing heavily in a fearsome heap. Then Lorenzino, chuckling with fiendish glee, roared out, “See, Michaele, my brother, the wretch is dead!”

Raising the body of the still breathing Duke, his murderers threw it upon the bed and covered it with the sheets. Then Lorenzino opened a window and looked out upon the Via Larga, to see if anybody was about. Not a soul was there. It was early morning, and by the new light of day he tore off a piece of paper and scribbled upon it, with Alessandro’s blood, “*Vincit amor patriae laudumque immensa cupido,*” and pinned it over Alessandro’s heart!

Both he and Michaele washed their hands and their swords—their clothes they could not cleanse—and Lorenzino, having filled his pouch with the money and jewels he possessed, they picked up their cloaks and hats, and, locking the door behind them, departed. In the basement they encountered Fiaccio, Lorenzino’s faithful body-servant, groom and valet combined, and he was bidden to follow his master.

The three made their way with haste to the residence of Bishop Angelo Marzi, the chief custodian of the City Gates, of whom Lorenzino demanded post-horses, showing to the servant Alessandro’s signet-ring, which he had pulled off his victim’s finger. The Bishop made no demur, being well accustomed to the erratic ways of the cousins. They took the road to Bologna, where Lorenzino had the two broken fingers removed, and his hand dressed, and then on they posted without further halt.

Lorenzino made at once for the house of Filippo negli Strozzi, the leader of the exiled Florentines in that city, and rousing him from his slumbers, embraced him with emotion, and said: “See, this is the key of the chamber where lies the body of Alessandro. I have slain him. Look at my clothes, this blood is his, no more shall Florence suffer at his hands. Revenge is sweet, but freedom is sweeter!”

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Filippo could scarcely believe the glad tidings, and surveyed his visitor from head to foot. Lorenzino, noting his hesitation, called Michaele into the room crying, "Here is Scoronconcolo the Assassin, and I am Lorenzaccio the Terrible!"

"Thou art our Brutus, my Lord Lorenzino!" exclaimed Filippo, with tears running down his cheeks. "Tarry awhile, till I can summon our chief allies, and rest yourselves. Bravo! Bravissimo!"

Next day alarm spread through the Medici Palace when the Duke failed to make his appearance, especially as at noon he had summoned a meeting of his new Grand Council of Two Hundred. No one knew where he had gone. Lorenzino was gone too, at least he did not make his usual early morning call. All the houses of their mistresses and other boon-companions were searched in vain, but apparently no one dreamt of calling at Lorenzino's, across the way. Probably, it was thought, the two had gone off to Cafogginolo—their favourite haunt.

Madonna Maria, Messer Jacopo de' Salviati's daughter, the widow of Giovanni de' Medici, "delle Bande Nere," who resided near Lorenzino, certainly heard loud cries which terrified her, but it was not an unusual occurrence. Lorenzino had, in his villainous scheme, devised a cunning decoy to accustom neighbours and passers-by to noisy behaviour. He had repeatedly gathered in his house groups of young men with swords, whom he instructed to cross their weapons as in serious self-defence, and to cry out "Murder!" "Help!" and such like.

The first intimation of the tragedy was furnished by Lorenzino's porter, who kept his keys—that of the bedchamber was missing and the door was locked! The man sought an interview with Cardinal Cibo, then in Florence, and his former master, and told him his fears. The door was, by his order, forced and then, of course, the terrible truth was made clear.

Under the pain of losing their heads, the Cardinal commanded absolute secrecy on the part of the domestics and guards who had looked upon that gruesome corpse. At the same time he ordered the game of "Saracino" to be played in the *Piazza* close by, to remove the fears of a fast gathering crowd of citizens. When asked if he knew where the Duke was, he replied quite casually: "Oh, don't worry about the Duke, he's in bed of course, sleeping off the effects of last night's conviviality. He'll appear when he thinks fit. Go away and mind your own affairs."

Somehow or another at last the news leaked out that Alessandro was dead, and that Lorenzino had killed him. Cardinal Cibo convened the Council of Forty-eight to discuss the situation. To him full powers were accorded to administer the government for three days, until a settlement was reached. This decision was most unpopular with the citizens, who began to rise in opposition.



Just when another bloody revolution seemed imminent, Cosimo de' Medici, the young son of Giovanni "delle Bande Nere," rode into the city, accompanied by a few of his friends. Everywhere he was hailed with enthusiastic cries—"Evviva il Giovanni e il Cosimo."



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The young Duchess Margaret fled precipitately from the Via Larga to the fortress of San Giovanni, which Alessandro had only just built and fortified. With her went three young children—not her own indeed, for she had proved to be barren,—but children she found in her husband's house. By Florentine law they were recognised as belonging to the family, and no one troubled about their precise origin.

These little ones were probably the issue of the Duke by a handsome *contadina* employed in the palace, who went by the name of Anna da Massa. Francesco Guicciardini, however, says she was the Marchesa da Massa, a noble lady, one of Alessandro's chief favourites. Giulio, some five years old, became a soldier, and died Prior of the new military Order of St Stephen of Pisa; Porzia died an enclosed nun in Rome; and Giulia married Francesco de' Barthelemmi.

Margaret herself married Ottavio Farnese, Prince of Nepi and Camerino, a lad of sixteen years of age, and, a second time, being left a widow, she espoused the Duke of Parma, and died in 1586—fifty years after her ill-starred marriage with Alessandro de' Medici.

It was reputed that shortly before his assassination, a Greek soothsayer one day stopped the Duke's cortege in the street, and cried out, so that all might hear: "Alessandro, Duke of Florence, thou shall be slain by a relative, a thin man, small of stature, and dark of countenance. He will have one accomplice. Beware!"

As for Lorenzino, whilst no action was taken publicly in Florence against him—for, secretly all men, and openly the majority, praised his act—there was a party whose members were sworn to avenge Alessandro's blood. They enlisted a service of irreconcilables to track the murderer to his death.

For eleven long years Lorenzino traversed land and sea, pursued, not only by relentless foes, but tormented by an accusing conscience. He was no Brutus to himself, but relapsed once more into a craven, stalking coward. At length retribution overtook him, for two soldiers, devoted to Alessandro's memory, hunted him down in the waterways of Venice, to which he had returned. One day, in May 1548, Bedo da Volterra and Cecchino da Bibonna caught him by the Rialto, unattended and unarmed, and their daggers did the work as effectively for him as did his sword for Duke Alessandro!

What became of Lorenzino's body nobody knew and nobody cared, probably it was tossed by his assassins into the Grand Canal, and being washed out into the sea, will await that day when the deep shall yield up all that is therein.

Some authorities state that a reward of ten thousand gold florins was offered for his head, that his effigy was burnt with every mark of opprobrium in the Piazza della Signoria, and that the rabble pulled his house down and burnt out the site.



CHAPTER III

MARIA, GIOVANNI, AND GARZIA.



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A Father's Vengeance

"I will have no Cain in my family!" roared out Cosimo de' Medici—"Il Giovane," Duke of Florence, in the forest of Rosignano.

"A Medico of the Medici," prompt in action and suave in repose, his hand flew to his sword hilt, and the cruel, cold steel of a father's wrath flashed in the face of Heaven! Duchess Eleanora made one swift step forward, intent upon shielding her child, but she stood there transfixed with horror—her arms and hands outstretched to the wide horizon in silent supplication, her tongue paralysed!

The kneeling boy grasped his father's knees, weeping piteously, and crying aloud in vain for mercy. Thrusting him from him, and spurning him with his heavy hunting-boot, he plunged furiously his gleaming blade into his son's breast, until the point came out between his shoulderblades!

With one expiring yell of agony and terror, Garzia de' Medici yielded up his fair young life, the victim of inexorable fate. It was high moon, and the watchful stars, of course, could not behold the gruesome deed, but over the autumn sun was drawn a grey purple mist, and gloom settled upon the Maremma. And as the elements paled and were silent, a hush overspread wild nature, not a beast in the thicket, not a bird on the bough, stirred. Sighs siffled through the bracken and the heather, and the roar of the distant sea died away in moaning at the bar.

With a suffocating sob, as though stabbed to death herself, the Duchess swooned upon the ground, and, whilst the courtiers in the company hastened to her assistance, the huntsmen reverently covered the still quivering body of the young prince with their embroidered livery cloaks.

Not much more than a mile away another corpse was being gently borne by tender loving hands—it was Giovanni's, Garzia's elder brother, the young Cardinal.

Giovanni de' Medici was dead—Garzia was dead; and two virgin souls were winging their flight to join their murdered sister Maria in the Paradise of Peace.

* * * * *

Cosimo, Duke of Florence, was the son of Giovanni de' Medici—called "*delle Bande Nere*" and Maria de' Salviati. Born in 1498, at Forli, Giovanni—also known as "*Giovannino*" to distinguish him from his father Giovanni, "*Il Popolano*"—was destined from his cradle to a military career. With such a mother as Caterina, the natural daughter of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, he was bound to acquire with her milk the instincts of a pushful personality.



Pope Leo X., who was a Florentine of the Florentines, extended his zealous patronage to the rearing and the training of his youthful relative. If not a caster of horoscopes, he was a reader of character, and, son as he was of Lorenzo “Il Magnifico,” he foresaw a future for “*Giovannino*” fraught with immense importance to his family and his native city.

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After receiving his early training as a soldier in Rome, attached to the staff of one or other of the *Condottieri*, young Giovanni was appointed to a military command with the Papal army in Lombardy, when he was little more than out of his teens. His splendid physique and his prowess in friendly encounter, revealed the lion that was in him. The leader in all boyish pranks and rivalries, he displayed intrepid courage and unfailing resourcefulness when called upon to prove his metal. To strike quickly and to strike hard, he knew very well meant the battle half won—hence there was added to his sobriquet two significant appellations—“*L’Invincible*” and “*Il Gran Diabolo!*”

The troops under his command were, as was the rule in the Papal armies, composed of motley companies of alien mercenaries and forced levies, but, in addition, very many soldiers of fortune, attracted by his fame, rallied to his banner. Very soon the “*Bande Nere*,” as Giovanni’s force was called, gave evidence that they had no equals in equipment and efficiency. Their leader took as his models the infantry of Spain and the cavalry of Germany. Each man wore a black silk ribbon badge, and each lance bore its black pennon—hence the “*Bande Nere*.”

It has been said of Mars, the God of War, that he was susceptible to the wiles of Venus, even when intent on deeds of daring, so, too, was it true of Condottiere Giovanni de’ Medici. Although born outside the “City of the Lily,” and the child of a non-Florentine mother, he and his were always on terms of good relationship with the gentle Duke Lorenzo. His associations with Florence were of the closest nature, and “*Giovannino*” was quite content to look for his bride among the marriageable maidens there.

With an ever open eye to a goodly marriage portion, Messer Giovanni “*Il Popolano*” viewed the daughters of the Salviati with approval. That house was famous for its financial prominence—rivalling that of his own, and Messer Giacopo’s three girls were noted for good looks and clever brains. Whether love, or money, was the magnet, or whether the two ran together in double harness, young “*Giovannino*” took tight hold upon the reins, and he and Maria Salviati were betrothed in the autumn of 1517.

To be sure there was a difficulty about the new marital habitation, for a soldier upon active service has no settled home. Love, however, knows obstacles only to overcome them, and so, somehow or another, the young Madonna brought into the world, one wintry day in February—it was the nineteenth—1519, her first-born, a son. Cosimo they christened him, perhaps after his great ancestor Cosimo “*Padre della Patria*”—“*Cosimonino*.” When mother and child could be moved Giovanni sent them, for safety, into Florence, where they were lovingly welcomed by her parents, Messer Giacopo de’ Salviati and his wife Lucrezia, daughter of Lorenzo il Magnifico.



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Pope Leo X., who had in his heart ambitious desires for the predominance of his House, not alone in Tuscany but throughout Italy, regarded the young soldier as one of his most trusty lieutenants. Designing, as he did, to create Giuliano,—later Duke of Nemours,—King of Naples and Southern Italy, and Lorenzo,—Duke of Urbino,—King of Lombardy and Northern Italy, he made Giovanni “delle Bande Nere” Commandant of the Papal armies.

Leo spent much time in Florence, having the Condottiere by his side, and using him as an envoy,—first to the King of France, and, then to the Emperor, in matrimonial negotiations which concerned Giuliano and Lorenzo. The imbroglio about the Duchy of Milan found him at the head of the Papal contingent of the Imperial army, but his success as commander was checked by a disastrous peace concluded by the Pope. The early years of young Cosimo’s life were critical in the affairs of Tuscany; a fierce struggle for the suzerainty of all Italy was being fought out between Francis I. and Charles V. The Pope, Clement VII.—Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici—who had succeeded Adrian VI. in 1523, sided with either party as suited his ambitions best. When favourable to the French, he handed over one division of the Papal army to the king, who confirmed Condottiere Giovanni de’ Medici in his command.

At Borgoforte he was shot in the knee, and again at Pavia, where Francis was routed and taken prisoner. The campaign continued and Giovanni was always in the front rank of battle until, outside Mantua, he was mortally wounded and died within the fortress, on 30th November, 1526, at the early age of twenty-nine.

An interesting little story concerns the first anniversary of Cosimo’s birth. His father dreamed, on the eve of that day, that he saw his son asleep in his cradle, and over his head he beheld a royal crown! In the morning he did not tell Madonna Maria what he had seen in the night-watches, but something prompted him to test the will of Providence. Accordingly he told his wife to take the precious little babe up to the balcony on the second floor of the Palazzo Salviati, in the Via del Corso.

“Throw down the child,” he cried from the street below. The Madonna refused, and rated her husband for his madness, but he insisted, and threatened so vehemently, that at last, in abject terror, she let go her hold of her babe. The boy leaped from her arms into the air, and, whilst the distracted mother uttered a wail of anguish, Giovanni deftly caught his little son in his arms. The child chortled merrily, as if enjoying his weird experience, and, inasmuch as he never so much as uttered the slightest cry of fear, the intrepid Condottiere felt perfectly reassured as to the auspicious presage of his dream.

“That’s all right,” he exclaimed, “my vision was no fantastic picture—my bonnie boy will live to be a prince—Prince of Florence!”

Madonna Maria, left so young a widow—she was only twenty-five—consecrated her life to the care of her young son—just eight years old—and, under her parental roof in the

Via del Corso, she engaged some of the best teachers of the day to undertake his education. Cosimonino's aptitude for military affairs and his taste for chemical studies soon made themselves apparent.



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But the doting mother had a secret enemy, her child's enemy indeed, an enemy so powerful, and by all accounts so relentless, that her life became a burden in her efforts to shield her boy from peril. That enemy was no less a person than the Pope!

Clement, of course, knew very well of the existence of Giovanni delle Bande Nere's son and heir, and whilst he hailed the death of the father as a gain for his personal ambition, he feared the life of his child would peril his hopes for Alessandro, his own illegitimate son. Cosimo, Giovanni's boy, must be kept out of the way at all hazards, and Maria the widow was very soon well aware of the Pope's aims.

By every means in his power, Clement strove to obtain possession of little Cosimo, but his mother was as watchful as she was prudent, and, till her boy reached his twelfth year, she never let him go out of her sight and keeping. She took him away to remote parts of Italy with trusty attendants, that the Pope might not discover their whereabouts. Then she chose a faithful friend of her family, Maestro Pierfrancesco Riccio da Prato, to superintend his further education. If not the wisest of teachers, he was admirable for the exact discharge of his duties and inculcated the best traditions of the Medici.

Together tutor and pupil visited many parts of Central Italy and spent some time at Venice, the chief subject of their studies being the heroic doings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This was the usual curriculum for growing boys, and doubtless its observance induced that admiration of tyrannicide which marked the character of so many young Florentines.

In 1523, when Clement so artfully persuaded the Florentine ambassadors to request the despatch of the two bastards, Ippolito and Alessandro, to Florence, the only man who maintained his opposition was Messer Giacompo de' Salviati, and he again protested in person both to Clement in Rome and before the *Signoria* in Florence, against the creation of Alessandro as Head of the Republic. Once more this "loyal citizen" withstood the bastard Duke, when he put his hand to the building of the fortress of San Giovanni. Naturally, Messer Giacompo's opposition excited the animosity of Alessandro, who, if he did not actually inspire his assassination, was, at all events, privy to it.

But in spite of all, Cosimo grew and flourished, displaying his father's courage and his mother's prudence. At fifteen, his character appeared to be already formed. He was grave of aspect and severe in manner, very backward in forming friendships, and intolerant of familiarities.

In 1536, the Emperor Charles and his court were in residence at Bologna, and, hearing that young Cosimo de' Medici was also in the city, the monarch sent for him and received him with marked cordiality. Observing the young man's bearing and evident force of character, Charles took him by the arm and, placing his hand upon the lad's shoulder, said to him: "You are fortunate, young man, to have had for your father a soldier who made both France and Spain tremble!"



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Between fifteen and eighteen we have few records of Cosimo's life and no hint as to where he was during the terrible years of tyranny and debauchery in Florence. Anyhow, Duke Alessandro owed him no kindness, nor did he enter into any relations with him. What dealings he had with Lorenzino and Giuliano, his cousins, are unknown. They were nearer the succession to the ducal throne than himself—indeed, the former was regarded as next heir to Alessandro. In all probability the young man lived with his mother at the villa at Castello which had belonged to his father, and kept himself very much out of sight.

* * * * *

The news of Duke Alessandro's assassination very soon got about, and groups of citizens gathered in the Via Larga and also in the Piazza del Signoria. Although considerable excitement pervaded those assemblages, the people remained quiet and self-controlled. "Everybody," as Benedetto Varchi has recorded, "spoke out quite fully, as though no one doubted but that the Greater Council of the city would at once be summoned. They debated as to who would be chosen *Gonfaloniere*, and whether for life or not. Meanwhile the Council of Forty-eight had assembled at the Medici Palace at the call of the Cardinal (Cibo), and were in conference in the long gallery upstairs."

Cardinal Cibo was the son of Maddalena de' Medici, Lorenzo il Magnifico's eldest daughter. He with Francesco de' Guicciardini and Francesco de' Vettori had constituted themselves, in a sort of way, mentors and advisers to the murdered Duke, who was only too glad to free himself of some of the distasteful duties of State, and confide them to anyone who would relieve him of them.

As for a successor to Alessandro, the Cardinal at first suggested Giulio, the Duke's bastard son, a child of eight years of age. The Council scouted the idea of another regency, and intimated plainly their intention to seek an adult Head of the Government. Full powers were given to the triumvirate to carry on State business during the interregnum—a decision which greatly displeased the populace. On dispersing from the conference the councillors were greeted with derisive cries—"If you cannot make up your minds, we must do it for you!"

During the adjournment the Cardinal and his two successors took counsel with the Strozzi and other influential men in and beyond Florence, and called to their aid the four Florentine Cardinals, Salviati, Gaddi, Pucci, and Ridolfi. Paul III.—naturally anxious to have a finger in the pie—despatched Roberto negli Strozzi with fifteen hundred mounted men to hold Montepulciano, and at the same time directed the Cardinals to join him there. The Papal nominee was Giuliano, younger brother of Lorenzino, the Duke's murderer—an entirely impossible choice.

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Madonna Maria de' Medici was at her father's villa at Trebbio, but at once she despatched couriers to hasten her son's return from Bologna, whither he had gone for study and for pleasure. She invited Cibo and Guicciardini to meet him, and to take counsel with her concerning his claims on Florence. Instructed by his astute mother, the young man paid great court to the two visitors, and charmed them exceedingly. The Cardinal was at once converted to the Madonna's views. Both he and Messer Guicciardini were struck by Cosimo's appearance—tall, well-made, and good-looking, he had a manly carriage, and his assured yet courteous manner left nothing to be desired.

On the three councillors' return to Florence, they were met by Senor Ferrante de Silva, Conte de Cifuentes, the Spanish ambassador, who was commanded by his master to support the candidature of Cosimo de' Medici.

The Emperor, Charles V., moreover, sent Bernardino da Rieti as special envoy, to enforce his views upon the "Forty-eight," and with him went a force of two thousand Spanish troops from Lerici—where they were in garrison, partly with a view to overawe the Council, and partly for the protection of the widowed Duchess Margaret. It was concurrently reported that the Emperor had another project in view, namely to marry his daughter to young Cosimo. At any rate, Margaret was directed to remain in Florence and at the Medici Palace.

Conferences were held daily, both in the Medici Palace and in the Palazzo Vecchio. To Francesco de' Guicciardini was committed the duty of formally proposing Cosimo—commonly called "Cosimonino"—as Head of the State. At once Palla de' Rucellai rose in opposition, but his party in the Council was in the minority. The deliberations were disturbed by the entrance of the French ambassador, who came to press upon their lordships' attention the claims of little Duchess Caterina, Duke Lorenzo's only legitimate child. The proposition met with unanimous disapprobation, and fell to the ground.

Outside, in the Piazza, was a shouting, struggling crowd of citizens, something unusual was going on, and the cries of the people penetrated the windows of the Council Chamber—"Evviva il figlio di Giovanni delle Bande Nere!" "Evviva il Cosimonino!" "Evviva Cosimo il Duca di Firenze!"

The Council rose at once, without coming to a decision, but each member of it understood the import of that cry, and each was quite ready to accept the popular verdict. As they regained the street they saw a youthful cavalier, with a small mounted retinue, surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd of citizens. They had ridden fast from the Mugello and were covered with dust.

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“Signor Cosimo,” wrote Benedetto Varchi, “arrived in Florence with but a few followers. As the son of Signor Giovanni, of fair aspect and having always displayed a kindly disposition and a good understanding, he was liked greatly by the populace, and they hailed him as heir to Duke Alessandro, with marked affection. Affecting neither grief nor joy, he rode on with an air of serene importance, showing rather his merit for the throne than his wish for it. Dismounting at the palace, he visited Cardinal Cibo, and expressing his regret at the Duke’s sanguinary death, went on to say that like a good son of Florence he had come to place not only his fortunes but his life at the service of his country.”

Cosimo was named Head of the State, not Duke, on four conditions:—

1. To render justice indifferently to rich and poor.
2. Never to disagree with the policy of the Emperor.
3. To avenge the death of Duke Alessandro.
4. To treat his three illegitimate children with kindness.

Those who come to the front through their own genius or their destiny, upon the first step of the throne accept the conditions of their appointment, but, upon the last step, they commonly impose their own upon their makers. Consequently, although but a youth of nineteen years of age at the time of his opportune arrival in Florence, Cosimo at once showed his intention of assuming personally and untrammelled the government of the State. Cardinal Cibo and Francesco de’ Guicciardini, who had been the first to recognise not only his claim but his fitness to rule, were very tactfully set aside, and others, who might be expected to assert powers of direction and supervision, were quietly assigned to positions where they could not interfere with his freedom of action.

Within six months of his acclamation by the people as “Head of the State,” Cosimo obtained from the Emperor Charles V. the full recognition of his title of Duke of Florence.

There were great doings at the Palazzo Medici in the May of 1539, when Cosimo welcomed his bride, Donna Eleanora, second daughter of Don Pedro de Toledo, Duca d’Alba, the King of Spain’s Viceroy at Naples. She was certainly no beauty, but a woman of estimable qualities, and profoundly imbued with the spirit of devotion. Hardly, perhaps, the wife Cosimo would have chosen, had not reasons of State as usual guided him. Eleanora, nevertheless, proved herself a worthy spouse and an exemplary mother.

Within the palace Eleanora was shocked to find a little child, “*La Bia*”—short for “*Bambina*,” “Baby”—she was called, some two years old. No one seemed to know quite who was her mother. Some said she was a village girl of Trebbio, and others, a young gentlewoman of Florence. Only Cosimo’s mother, Madonna Maria, knew, and she



refused to reveal the girl's identity, but she admitted that "La Bia" was Cosimo's child. Eleanora would not tolerate her presence in the palace, so Cosimo sent her off with several attendants to the Villa del Castello, where, perhaps fortunately, she died on the last day of February the following year.



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The first years of Cosimo's government were years of unrest and peril throughout Tuscany. The adherents of the dead bastard Duke were neither few nor uninfluential. Encouraged by the Clementine coterie in Rome, the members of which had from the first opposed Cosimo's succession to the Headship of the Republic, they made the Florentine Court a hot-bed of intrigue and strife.

The party, not inconsiderable, which supported the claims of Giuliano, younger son of Pierfrancesco the Younger, and brother of Lorenzino, Alessandro's murderer, gave much trouble. Giuliano, who had been an associate of the Duke and an abettor of Lorenzino's "devilries," fled precipitately from Florence, and sought the protection of the Duke of Milan. Lorenzino's confession was written partly with a view of removing suspicion from his brother, and to leave unprejudiced the claims of his father's family. There were many other cliques and parties, great and small, each bent upon the other's destruction in particular and upon the undoing of the Republic in general.

By far the most formidable opposition to Cosimo's rule came from Venice, whence the Florentine exiles, under the command of Filippo negli Strozzi's two sons, Piero and Roberto, who had married Lorenzino's sisters, Laudomia and Maddalena, raised, with the assistance of the King of France, a strong force, and invaded Tuscany.

It needed not the persuasion of Madonna Maria to urge Cosimo to action, although her active representations to the Emperor—which obtained the Imperial sanction and promise of co-operation—were important factors in his resolution. Cosimo gathered together what men he could rely upon in Florence, and when once his battle-banner was unfurled with the black pennon of his redoubtable father, numbers of old campaigners hastened to his support.

On 31st July, 1537, the opposing forces met in the valley of Montemurlo. Cosimo displayed much of the daring and ability of his father, and victory was never in doubt. The Strozzi and Baccio Valori were taken prisoners to Florence, bound upon broken-down farm-horses, and their forces were dispersed. It was reported that in the heat of the battle Otto da Montanto, an Imperial officer, riding past Cosimo, lowered the point of his sword as he shouted, "Forward, Signore, to-day the fortunes of the Emperor and of Cosimo de' Medici will prevail!"

Cosimo wore no velvet gloves in dealing with his enemies, secret and pronounced. Arrest, confiscation, torture, banishment, and execution thinned once more the ranks of the noblest families of Tuscany. Filippo negli Strozzi, who was regarded as the leader of the anti-Cosimo party, was taken prisoner and cast into the fortress of San Giovanni. Apparently his aim was not a restoration of a Papal nominee to the Headship of the State, but his own advancement to that position. He was put on the rack, and eventually done to death by Cosimo's orders.



The years 1538, 1539 and 1540, are deeply dyed with the blood of victims. Florentine vengeance again proved itself satisfied only with wholesale annihilation. It has been computed that in the latter year alone, nearly five hundred men and women, chiefly of good family and high distinction, came by violent deaths. Of these, one hundred and forty-six were decapitated by Cosimo's express orders!



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Perhaps “The Terror” was inevitable, but it revealed in a lurid light the revengeful and implacable temper of the young ruler. If he had inherited, through many generations, the craft and pushfulness of the Medicis, he had also become possessed of some of the brutality of the Sforzas, through his grandmother Caterina, natural daughter, by the lovely but dissolute Lucrezia Landriani, of Galeazzo Maria, Duke of Milan. This prince possessed all the worst points of a Renaissance tyrant, and was “a monster of vices and virtues”: perhaps he was insane, at all events, Caterina was accustomed to speak of him as “*Uno Fantastico!*”

There was at least one ray of sunshine in that year of swift, dark deeds, for, in less than a month after poor little “*La Bia*” had flown back to Heaven, as lovely and as precious a gift as ever came to gladden the hearts of young parents was vouchsafed to Cosimo and Eleanora, in the birth of their first-born, a girl.

In the *Registri dei Battezzati dell’Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore* is the following record: “On April 13th, 1540, was baptised a female child of the Duke of Cosimo, born on the third day of the same month, and she was registered in the name of Maria Lucrezia.” Alas, the joy of that natal day was marred by the solicitude which the delicacy of the frail infant caused her father and mother. No one thought she could live, but Duchess Eleanora was a tender nurse, and her weaning caused the cradle to rock with hope as well as love.

Just twelve months later a baby brother came to keep little Maria company, a strong and vigorous boy, dark-haired and sallow like his Spanish mother. He was christened Francesco, after the patron saint of his day of birth. Cosimo was not in Florence at the time, he had gone to pay his respects to the Emperor Charles V. at Genoa.

The object of his visit to the Imperial Court was to thank Charles for the German bodyguard of *Landesnechte* which he had sent to Florence to defend the Medici Palace and its inmates during the three years of disorder and repression, and to ask for an extension of their services.

Florence was full of Spaniards who had occupied Tuscany in force under the Commendatore Raimondo da Cardona, and who had helped in the terrible sack of Prato. They were a menace to peace and order in the city, and brawls between them and the citizens were of daily occurrence.

Duchess Eleanora perhaps naturally held with her fellow-countrymen, certainly she made a poor attempt to conceal her dislike for Florence and its people. At Santa Maria Novella she endowed a chapel for Mass, which served as a rallying-point for the foreigners, and acquired thereby its name, *Cappella degli Spagnuoli*.

The Duchess had, however, other than quasi-patriotic duties to perform, for, in 1542, she again became the mother of a little daughter—Isabella Romola they called her, in

compliment to beloved Spain. She was, like Francesco, a healthy child, and she was fair, as “playful as a kitten,” and thoroughly Medici in temperament.



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Cosimo busied himself in peaceful pursuits. He greatly encouraged the arts and crafts, and set on foot sagacious reformation of the conditions and activities of the great Trade Guilds. The College of Science was due to his patronage; and, in 1540, he extended his special protection to the Florentine Academy—whence sprang the still more famous Accademia della Crusca.

Still due regard was paid to the exigencies of political peace and the maintenance of safeguards, Throughout Tuscany Cosimo raised forts and works of defence. All the more important towns were fortified, and entrenched camps and bastions were erected at San Martino in Mugello, and at Terra del Sole. He kept his hand upon the pulse of Florence: no slackening of restraint was possible. The men who had acclaimed him in 1537 were quite capable of crying out for his supersession at any time. Fickle indeed were the Florentines ever, but in Cosimo they had a master who would not let them go.

The Duke's family was growing fast, and each year as it passed gave him a precious hostage to love and to fortune. The Duchess, in 1543, brought forth her fourth child, another boy, called Giovanni, after his grandfather, and in honour of good St John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence. Lucrezia followed in 1544, and then there came and went in 1545 and 1546 Antonio and Piero. Garzia was born in 1547. A year sped by, and in 1549, Ernando or Ferdinando, made his appearance and then came a barren season, and when, perhaps, it had been concluded that the Duchess had ceased child-bearing, came a great surprise, one more little son, in 1554, Piero was his name.

Meanwhile, Maria had been growing fast along with her many brothers and sisters. At the age of eight or nine she was an attractive little damsel. "Tall for her age, with a face not only pretty, but intelligent, and as merry and as full of life as was possible. Her broad forehead was indicative of more than ordinary mental power." Her thirst for knowledge and her power of acquisition delighted her doting father and mother.

Maria was reared with all the care that love and hope could inspire, and at her mother's knee she learned her first lessons. The unhappy result of poor young Caterina's education proved to Duke Cosimo that the convent was no place for her, and, although he placed Alessandro's illegitimate little daughters, Giulia and Porczia, with the good nuns, he resolved that no such experience should be that of his own dear children. The common saying, "The cow that is kept in the stall gives the best milk" had for him a special significance!



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Florentine children were noted for precocity and cruelty. Perhaps the tragedy of Giacompo de' Pazzi, and the mauling of his mutilated body by the street urchins, had left their marks on succeeding generations of boys and girls. The most popular pastime was mimic warfare, wherein the actualities of wounds and even deaths were common constituents. Every dangerous sport was encouraged and, if by chance, or by intent, a boy killed his rival, nobody cared and few lamented. The spirit of revenge was openly cultivated, and cruelties of all kinds were not reprimanded. Whether Cosimo's children shared in the general juvenile depravity, it is impossible to say: they were, as they left the nursery, kept hard at work with their lessons—Maria certainly, and probably Isabella, shared the studies of their brothers. At first, Maestro Francesco Riccio, who had been their father's tutor also, grounded them all in Greek, Latin, grammar, music, and drawing; and then Maestro Antonio Angeli da Barga, a scholar and writer of considerable merit, took them through the higher subjects of composition, poetry, rhetoric, and geometry.

Foreign languages—at least French and Spanish—were not forgotten, for, before Donna Maria was eight years old, she spoke the latter tongue with fluency. The very learned Maestro Pietro Vettori, when he joined the household of the Duke as teacher of Greek and philosophy to Don Francesco, was greatly struck by the young girl's attainments, and so charmed was he by her sprightly manner, that he obtained permission for her to join her brother's lessons.

Donna Maria, before she was twelve, could read and quote Homer with ease. She composed elegantly in Greek and Latin, and, possessed of a remarkably sweet and sympathetic voice, she was able to recite from memory, and even to expound her own juvenile opinions, both in Latin and in Tuscan.

Cosimo and Eleanora inhabited the Medici Palace, in the Via Larga, just five years, and then he transferred his official residence to the Palazzo Vecchio. This he did to show that he was absolute ruler of Tuscany as well as head of the Medici family. With the skilled assistance of Tasso, the architect, and Vasari, the painter, he set about structural and decorative alterations and adornments, which rendered the old building more suitable as a residence for the Sovereign.

In 1549 Duchess Eleanora purchased the Pitti Palace from Buonaccorso Pitti, for 9000 gold florins, and laid out the adjacent gardens. There the Duke and Duchess took up their residence with their family and their suite.

* * * * *

Among young aspirants to fame and fortune, who enrolled themselves in the "*Bande Nere*," were several scions of the proud and warlike Rimini family of Malatesti. One branch of the family held the Marquisate of Roncofreddo, and their stronghold was the castle of Montecodruzzo. Marquis Leonida de' Malatesti was the happy father of many

sons and daughters. After the premature death of the Condottiere Giovanni de' Medici, his sons maintained their allegiance and devotion to the cause of his son Cosimonino.



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Giacopo and Lamberto, elder sons, became esquires of the young Medico, and were of the party which entered Florence on that memorable day in 1537. A younger boy, Malatesta, followed his brothers' example, for, in 1548, in the list of officers and men of the Ducal household in Florence, appears his name as a page, but of the tender age of ten.

The lad was possessed of the vigour and spirit of his race, and it required all the patience and tact of Frate Cammillo Selmi, the Master of the Pages, to keep him in order. His pugnacious disposition attracted the attention of the Duke, and his pretty looks and fair hair charmed the Duchess. One other recommendation the young boy had—his father's fidelity and worthy services, and he was looked upon as a pet of the palace, and became rather a playmate than an attendant of the Duke's family. Besides, his mother was a Florentine—she was Madonna Cassandra, the daughter of Messer Nattio de' Cini, a devoted adherent of the Medici.

Many were the escapades in which Francesco, Giovanni, Garzia, and Ernando, the Duke's sons, were joined by young Malatesta de' Malatesti and other pages of the household. One such boyish prank, when the Court was at Pisa, in the winter of 1550, had a tragic ending. In the pages' common room the lads were playing with shot-guns, which were supposed to be unloaded. Picking up one of these, by mere chance, Malatesta aimed it jokingly at his companions, when to his and their alarm the weapon exploded, and, sad to behold, poor young Francesco Brivio, a son of Signore Dionisio Brivio of Milan, a fellow page, fell to the ground mortally wounded.

Consternation reigned in the palace, the Duke's private physician, Maestro Andrea Pasquali, was sent for in all haste from Florence, and everything was done for the unfortunate lad, but, on the fourth day—it was just before Christmas—the promising young life passed away.

Malatesta, with his heart breaking, was confined in the guard-room, and there he remained pending the Duke's decision. Every one was grieved beyond measure at the tragic occurrence, but all took Malatesta's part. The young Medici were eager and united in their version of the affair, moreover Donne Maria and Isabella were filled with pity for the unhappy young prisoner. Indeed, the former regarded him with a sister's love: she was just ten and the lad thirteen, and she pleaded with the Duchess, her mother, to have the boy released.

The Duke sent for Signore Tommaso de' Medici, the Chamberlain of the Court, and gave him instructions to set the boy at liberty, after administering the useful punishment of twenty strokes with a birch rod, and giving him a severe reprimand and caution!

Signor Brivio and his wife, of course, were dreadfully cast down by their sad bereavement, and both wrote piteously to the Duke, and so did Marchese Leonida de' Malatesti. Cosimo sent very sympathetic letters in return: that to the Marchese was as

follows: "... Consideration has been given ... it has not been found that there was any malice between the boys.... Do not trouble yourself any further about the matter, for your boy remains in our service, in which we hope he will behave as he ought, and we hold you in the same esteem as we have ever done. May God preserve you."



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Young Malatesta grew to be a fine, high-spirited soldier of the Duke's bodyguard. Loyal to the core to his master, and ambitious for the honour of his family, no enterprise was beyond his scope, no obstacle insurmountable. Intercourse between the princes and princesses and himself became naturally less familiar, but the affections of early boy and girlhood are not easily dissipated; and so Malatesta de' Malatesti and Maria de' Medici found, but, alas, for their woe and not for their weal!

Whilst boys and young men in Florence were free to come and go as they liked, and to mix with all sorts and conditions of men and women, the case was precisely the opposite for girls. Very especially severe were the restrictions imposed upon the growing daughters of the Duchess Eleanora. Brought up amid all the austerity and fanaticism of the Spanish Court, Eleanora de Toledo viewed woman's early life from the conventual point of view.

Jealous of her children's honour, she fenced her three daughters around with precautions which rendered their lives irksome to themselves and troublesome to all who were about them. Maria and her younger sisters were literally shut up within the narrow limits of the apartments they occupied in the palace—happily for them it was not the Palazzo Vecchio but the more roomy Pitti, with its lovely Boboli Gardens.

With carefully chosen attendants and teachers, their lives were entirely absorbed by religious exercises, studies, and needlework. Rarely were they seen at Court functions, and rarer still in the city. If they were allowed a day's liberty in the country, they were jealously guarded, and every attempt at recognition and salutation, of such as they chanced to meet, was rigorously checked.

Beyond association with their brothers, and anxiously watched intercourse with the members of the Ducal suite, their knowledge of the sterner sex was absolutely wanting. It was in vain that Cosimo expostulated with his consort; she was inexorable, and, indeed, she stretched her system so far as to exclude the ladies of the Court. Perhaps she was right in this, for the Duke himself was the daily object of her watchfulness!

Cosimo was wont to meet her restrictions by some such remark as "Well, you see, Eleanora, Maria and Isabella are of the same complexion as myself; we have need of freedom at times to enjoy the pleasures of the world."

Love, we all know, cares neither for locks nor bars, and lovely young Maria de' Medici was surely made to love and to caress. She had many adorers, whose ardour was all the more fierce by reason of their inability to press her hand and kiss her lips. She was in 1556 betrothed to Prince Alfonso d'Este, eldest son of the Duke of Ferrara. He was certainly not in the category of lovers, even at sight, for he had never seen his bride to be. That was an entirely unimportant incident in matrimonial arrangements. The union was projected entirely for political reasons, and chiefly for the putting an end to the

protracted contest for precedence between the two families, which every now and again threatened to plunge all Italy into war.



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Alfonso d'Este was the heir of his father, Ercole II.—of his titles and wealth, but not of his good looks and polished manners: besides, his reputation for chastity and sobriety was not of the best. Directly Maria was told of the arrangement she expressed her disgust and her determination not to submit to parental dictation. Her reception of the Prince was cold in the extreme, she declined to see him apart from her sisters and attendants, and he returned to Ferrara in no amiable frame of mind.

Meanwhile love, true love, had peeped through the jealousies of Princess Maria's window, and his arrows had fled their dangerous course unseen by any but herself, and him whose heart was hers. No one suspected that a life so guarded could, by any means, be filched from its restraints; but so it was, and the first gossip sprang out of the mouth of a venerable Spanish retainer of the Duchess, the faithful *custode*, Mandriano, who guarded his mistress's door almost night and day.

Traversing one day an unfrequented part of the gardens of the Palace on the Hill, the old fellow thought he heard voices, and, approaching a grove of laurels, he descried the young Princess in the arms of Malatesta de' Malatesti!

The Duchess was furious when Mandriano told her, and immediately conveyed the portentous news to her husband. Cosimo reflected long and acted warily, for he made no move for many days. Stealthily he tracked the unsuspecting lovers to their trysting-place. Mandriano's story was quite correct.

He summoned the two young people to his private closet, he acquainted them with the fact that the *liaison* could not continue, and ordered Malatesta to prepare for immediate imprisonment—with the loss of all his honours and the confidence of his Sovereign. The boy pleaded in vain, and testified to the innocence of the love-making without effect, except to raise the Duke's anger to a dangerous pitch. Maria threw herself at her father's feet and appealed for mercy for her lover, asking that the parental vengeance should fall on her and not on Malatesta.

"That you shall have, base child of mine," Cosimo cried in a fierce tone; "see, you shall have the justice of a Roman father!" Then, plucking out his poignard from its hidden sheath, he stabbed his child to the heart! Drawing forth the gory weapon, he flung it at the head of the despairing youth, and, throwing his cloak around his shoulders, rushed out of the chamber slamming-to the door!

Malatesta must have fallen in a deadly swoon across the lovely form of his *innamorata*, incapable of speech and action, for, there they were found, both apparently dead, by brethren of the *Misericordia*, who had been summoned by the Duke. Malatesta was thrown into prison, and there he languished for seven long years, without anyone knowing of his existence. His parents had asked Cosimo repeatedly about the boy, but no answer was ever given—the Duke having forbidden the subject to be named.



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To the Duchess he prevaricated and hinted that the sudden death of the child was due to the malignant spotted fever, and that he had given personal instructions for the immediate removal and interment of her body. The brethren of the *Misericordia* might have enlightened the grief-stricken mother, only they were sworn to secrecy; they knew how the beautiful young girl had died. They laid her fair body to rest in a grave unknown even to her father, and not among her people in San Lorenzo.

Cosimo moved the Court immediately to Livorno, and thence to Pisa, and there they kept their Lenten fast in strict seclusion. There was universal grief in Florence where the unhappy Princess, though rarely seen in public, had become the favourite of the people, through her fresh young beauty and by what was known of the sweetness of her character and the brilliancy of her attainments.

Duchess Eleanora and her children mourned piteously for lovely Maria: there seemed to be no solace for their grief. As for the Duke, he was a changed man, the bitterness of remorse had turned his natural reserve into moroseness. He was like one beside himself, his wonted firmness and self-control, at times, failed to stay him, and he preferred to shut himself up alone in one of the towers of the castle at Livorno, venting his passionate despair in fits of weeping and in abject cries of self-reproach.

No one dared to go near to him, for to all who presumed to intrude upon his woes he was like a lion roused. That ever ready secret blade might be whipped out to another's undoing! Still, in calmer moments he reflected, as Muzio has suggestively written: "Maria was very beautiful, as beautiful as any child of earth, most courteous and gentle, her seriousness compelled everyone to respect her, her sprightliness, to love her. She was pleasing to Heaven, whither she had gone sinless to reinforce the angelic choir, and to wear the most fragrant coronal of roses among the companies of holy virgins."

As for the unfortunate young Malatesta, he pined in his dungeon within the keep of San Giovanni for a while, but "hope springeth ever in youthful hearts," and his one and consuming thought was of escape. His conduct seems to have been exemplary, and he gained the sympathy and friendship of his gaolers. At length he ventured to unbosom himself to a worthy sergeant of the guard, and this man assisted him, knowing well what great risk they both incurred.

One evening Malatesta unseen, save by his friend, scaled the prison wall, and made good his escape from Florence and Tuscany. He did not venture to seek sanctuary within his father's castle, but, flying to the coast, boarded a vessel bound for Candia, a fief of Venice, and outside Duke Cosimo's jurisdiction. Various tales are told of his future career—some affirm that assassins, in the pay of Duke Cosimo, tracked him to his doom, and others, that he fell, fighting against the Turks at Famagusta. Anyhow, the kindly sergeant was put to death by order of the Duke!



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Cosimo de' Medici was not the sort of man to brood very long over troubles, however prostrating and desperate. He was essentially a man of action, prompt, eager and able: probably no one ever had a more thorough confidence in his own ability. There were several questions of supreme importance, both public and private, which claimed his attention.

The everlasting disagreement between the aristocracy and the democracy was only partially healed by the alliance of the two against an autocracy. Cosimo was bent upon being absolute ruler of Tuscany, and the development of his will raised against him and his Government constant opposition. He meant to keep his hand tight hold of the bridle of his charger "Tyranny," and to spur him on where he willed.

The Mediceo-Este dispute still called for firmness and determination. Tuscany and Florence had certainly a better case than the Romagna and Ferrara, but intrigue and bribes could achieve what the sword and pen could not. Cosimo meant to keep on his steel gauntlets, although he covered them with the fragrant silk gloves of plausibility. With this idea ever present, he was bent upon retaining the advantage he had gained over Duke Ercole in the matter of poor young Donna Maria's betrothal, for he had other daughters to consider. Donna Isabella was provided for, for better or for worse—alas, that the latter was to be her sad fate—beautiful, fascinating Isabella de' Medici, but Donna Lucrezia, nearly fifteen years of age, was the forfeit her father paid in his gambit of Medicean aggrandisement.

In the July that followed Donna Maria's tragic death, with all the circumstances and pomp of state ceremonial, Lucrezia de' Medici was married to Alfonso II., Duke of Ferrara, the same prince who had been affianced to her sister Maria.

It was not without misgivings that this step was taken: Duchess Eleanora, in particular, expressed dissatisfaction with the match, and feared, perhaps superstitiously, the portent of a second unlucky alliance. Anyhow the preparations for the nuptial day, and the pageants which accompanied it, drew off the thoughts of all from the terrible event of Christmas.

Cosimo, however, had other and, from his own personal point of view, more attractive objects upon which to expend thought and action. As soon as the marriage festivities were over, he set out with a small suite of expert surveyors and agriculturists to the Maremma. It was a peculiarly unhealthy region, and had gone out of cultivation, and its former inhabitants had deserted it.

The Duke determined to drain the land by cutting a canal right through from the Arno to the sea. Next, he set to work to afforest the newly recovered ground, to carve it out in allotments suitable for agricultural pursuits, and to encourage the settlement of vigorous



working peasant-tenants. A certain portion of the estates he set apart to his own use for the preservation of wild game. He rebuilt and enlarged the ruined castle of Rosignano, ten miles from Livorno, for the occupation of himself and his family and for his hunting associates.

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At Pisa he had peculiar interests. The University, which Lorenzo “il Magnifico” had refounded, had been abandoned by his successors and was closed. Cosimo took the matter up: he re-established all that had been done by his illustrious predecessor, and endowed a number of professorial chairs—especially in chemistry, wherein he was himself an ardent student and sapient expert—and kindred sciences, and founded scholarships or apprenticeships for youths of every station.

The climate of Pisa suited Duchess Eleanora and young Don Giovanni—who was a delicate lad—better far than that of Florence; it was sedative and not so rigorous in winter as that of the higher Val d’Arno. Then, too, they were there within easy reach of their favourite seaside residence, Livorno, in whose harbour rode constantly galleons of war from Spain flying the Duchess’ own dear country’s ensign.

Cosimo and his family of course had many other distractions from the affairs of State. In addition to his attainments as a chemist, in which science he especially interested his eldest son, Francesco, he excelled in his knowledge of botany. With passionate devotion to an attractive subject he taught his children the nature and the use of all growing things. At the Pitti Palace he had his laboratories.

Printing and the printing-press found in Cosimo an ardent patron. Away in the grounds of the Casino di Cosimo—“*Il Padre della Patria*”—*within the confines of the monastery of San Marco, he printed, bound, and published, literary works of all kinds. Torrentino, Paolo Giovio, Scipione Ammirato, Benedetto Vasari, Filippo de’ Nerli, Vincenzo Borghini, and many other writers, printers, and critics, collectors, forgathered at the Ducal studios.*

Architecture and the embellishment of the city had also Cosimo’s active sympathy: piazzas, bridges, fountains, statues, still bear the marks of his supervision. Benvenuto Cellini, Michael Angelo Buonarroti, Baccio Bandinelli, Giovanni da Bologna, Bernardo Buonlatenti, Francesco Ferrucci, Tribolo, Giorgio Vasari, were among his proteges and personal friends.

In all these enterprises he shared his pleasures with his sons, and so the years passed on with rays of brilliant sunshine piercing the clouds of darkling deeds. Alexandre Dumas has well summed up the character of Cosimo de’ Medici: “He had,” he says, “all the vices which rendered his private life sombre, and all the virtues which made his life in public renowned for splendour; whilst his family experienced unexampled misfortune, his people rejoiced in prosperity and gladness.”

Perhaps in the delights of music and dancing and in the invigorating exercises of the chase, Cosimo found his best-loved relaxation. No Florentine valued more thoroughly, and shared more frequently than he, in the layman’s privilege of assisting in the choir of the Duomo at the singing of the “Hours.” Musical reunions in the gardens of the Pitti

Palace were of constant recurrence, where he and his children danced and sang to their hearts' content, amid the plaudits of the company.



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The Duke easily excelled all his courtiers and the many distinguished visitors who made Florence their rendezvous, in exploits in the hunting-field. No one rode faster than he, always in at the death, whether buck or boar, he was second to none as a falconer. He knew every piscatorial trick to take a basketful of fish, and in the game of water-polo, in the Arno, no swimmer gained more goals!

In the middle of October, 1562, the Duke and Duchess, with their four sons, Giovanni, Garzia, Ernando, and little Piero—only eight years old—accompanied by a limited suite, left the Palazzo Pitti for a progress through South Tuscany and the Maremma. At Fuicchio and Grosseto they made sojourns, that the Duke might inspect the new fortifications, which were nearing completion, and view the partly formed roads.

The cavalcade passed on to Castiglione della Pescaia, Massa Maritima, and thence to the Castello di Rosignano, where they went into residence for the hunting season. The members of the Ducal family were not in very robust health, and Maestro Stefano had “indicated” the healthy pastime of the chase as a cure for enfeebled constitutions. Don Giovanni, born 28th September, was just nineteen. He was of a gentle disposition, serious beyond his years, amenable to the dictates of conscience, and attracted by the offices of religion. In many ways he resembled his mother, and was physically more of a Spaniard than a Florentine. From his earliest years he evinced a remarkably docile submission to all who were placed over him as teachers or governors. He was gifted with great ability, for, sharing as he did, the studies and duties of his brothers, he very soon surpassed them all in polite accomplishments. Francesco Riccio, now the Duke’s Major-domo, noted the young prince’s cheerfulness, conscientiousness and diligence. The reports which Maestro Antonio da Barga made to his father of his son’s progress were full of praise of his young pupil’s aptitude and perseverance. Giovanni de’ Medici was, in many respects, a brilliant exponent of Count Baltazzare Castiglione’s *Cortegiano* or “Perfect Gentleman.”

Cosimo expected great things of his amiable and accomplished son, and, noting especially his sobriety and integrity, destined him for the service of the Church. Pius IV. succeeded to the Papal throne in 1559, and his election was in a great measure due to the advocacy of the Duke of Florence. In January of the following year, he invited young Giovanni to visit Rome, and immediately conceived an immense fancy for his charming visitor. Giovanni was preconised Cardinal-Deacon, with the title of Santa Maria in Domenica, and the Pope presented him his own private residence, with its appointments and household. The young Cardinal spent some weeks in the Eternal City, and gathered around him, by his courtesy and liberality, most of the Florentine exiles in Rome and its environs. They were generally in a woeful condition, and the young prince undertook to bring their misfortunes and their fervent wishes before his father.



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The Cardinal of Lorraine and the Cardinal Camerlengo Ascarno Sforza had previously visited the Tuscan Court, and had received Cosimo's consent to his son's acceptance of the biretta.

Giovanni Battista Adriani in his *Istorie di Suoi Tempe*, has placed on record that this youthful Prince of the Church was "of mature judgment and wise beyond his years, and of such a bearing that it would have been difficult to have found anyone more attractive, more seemly in his morals, and very sensible." In Rome Giovanni gave himself up especially to the study of antiquities, and he became a great favourite with the many pious, learned, and distinguished men who were gathered round the mild and religiously-minded Pontiff.

Cardinal de' Medici's secretary was the erudite and upright Abbot Felice Gualterio, who subsequently gathered together his letters and literary compositions, "wherein are noble and benevolent expressions of his affection for his father and mother and his brothers and sisters." Garzia, two years his junior, is often named with sincerest love and pleasure.

Pius, constant in his devotion to the young Cardinal, added to his honours and prerogatives by creating him, early in 1561, Archbishop of Pisa, but, inasmuch as he had not reached the age prescribed for holding ecclesiastical preferments, Canon Antonio da Catignano was appointed Administrator of the spiritualities of the See. However, in March, the young Archbishop made his ceremonial entry into Pisa, accompanied by the Duke and Duchess, with their family and court.

The Pope greatly desired that Cardinal Giovanni should enter Holy Order, and to this the young prince cordially and reverently acceded, but, for reasons of his own, Cosimo declined his consent, remarking that "a prince of his house was more distinguished than a consecrated prelate." As a set-off to this discourteous reply to Pius, the Duke, whilst at Pisa, founded the military order of San Stefano, as a thank-offering for the subjugation of Siena, much after the pattern of the Knights of Malta—constituting himself Grand Master and the Cardinal, Chancellor.

Giovanni actually undertook his duties as Archbishop by granting letters of appointment to benefices within his diocese. One is dated 24th October, 1562, and was addressed to the Bishop of Arezzo, about the presentation to a certain abbey which had become vacant upon the death of Cardinal della Cueva.

It was at this period that Pius wrote to Duke Cosimo, suggesting a matrimonial alliance between the Duke's eldest son, Don Francesco,—who was undertaking a princely tour of the chief European Courts for the double purpose of making himself known personally to the various Sovereigns, and of looking out for a suitable consort,—and the Princess Maria Garzia of Portugal. The proposition was backed up by an offer of the kingly title to the Duke. Both propositions fell to the ground, but Pius, in his eagerness

to render the Duke of Florence homage, and to prove his gratitude, asked his acceptance, for his young son Garzia, of the command of a Papal ship of war.



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Garzia, the third of Duke Cosimo's surviving sons, was born on 1st July, 1547. His baptism, for some unknown reason, was delayed three years, and not until 29th June, 1550, was he held at the ancient font in the Battisterio di San Giovanni, having for his sponsor Pope Julius III., who was represented by Jacopo Cortese da Prato, Bishop of Vaison, the writer of a curious letter descriptive of the ceremony.

The little fellow was a thorough Medico, full of spirit, frank, and daring. Blessed with the good looks of his father's family, he was the merriest among his brothers and sisters. Mischievous, and passionate too, at times, he endeared himself especially to his mother by his fascinating manners and his whole-hearted devotion.

Whilst regarding his brilliant son Giovanni, perhaps, with the keenest affection, Cosimo saw in his younger boy traits not unlike his own, and an instinctive love of arms. Garzia then was from the first years of boyhood destined for a military career, having placed before him the splendid example of his redoubtable grandfather, "Giovanni *L'Invincible*."

Upon his thirteenth birthday, the Duke appointed his gay young son Admiral of the Florentine fleet at Pisa, naming as his Vice Admiral, Baccio Martelli, the most valiant and best experienced naval commander in his forces, and the head of one of the most ancient Florentine families.

In spite of Cardinal Giovanni's expression of affection for his younger brother, there is no doubt that he was not a little jealous of his mother's partiality for Garzia. One would have thought that Duchess Eleanora would have regarded with special delight and love the son who most resembled herself in appearance and disposition; but perhaps the reason for her preference may be gathered by looking into the happy, radiant, laughing face of her bonnie little son, as painted by Angelo Bronzino at the Uffizi in Florence!

It would seem that when the Court reached Rosignano the Duchess, Giovanni, and Garzia complained of fever, and they were for a few days confined to the house. The good air and the charm of country life were specific, and the invalids regained their vigour and their good spirits, and all were eager for the sport. Each day had its particular rendezvous, and what form the pastime should take was agreed overnight by the chief huntsmen and falconers.

The Duchess Eleanora did not always accompany her husband, and Ernando—who was not quite thirteen—generally remained with his tutors at the Castle until afternoon, when they both sallied forth, with little Piero, to meet the returning-hunting party. Upon the ever-memorable twenty-sixth of November the Duchess had been persuaded by Don Giovanni to go with them, for there was to be a deer-drive in the forest between the castle and Livorno, and he expected to have a chance of exhibiting his skill as a marksman at a notable full-grown roebuck.



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Giovanni and Garzia were equally fearless riders, and very soon after the game had been rounded up, the special quarry they were after went off at a tremendous rate, out-distancing his pursuers until he was lost in the forest. The brothers separated and met again in an open glade, where both descried the buck, quietly browsing upon the fresh green grass. Garzia seems to have sighted the animal first, but whilst he was somewhat slow in bringing his weapon to his shoulder, the Cardinal aimed, fired, and dropped the game. He at once dismounted and ran to claim the prize. High words followed, and, when Giovanni made some insulting remark about his less mature station as a marksman, Garzia, over-heated by the chase, and aggravated by his brother's raillery, hastily drew his heavy hunting-knife and brandished it before Giovanni's face, threatening to do for him if he did not desist, and withdraw his claim to first shot.

Giovanni pushed the boy from him, perhaps somewhat roughly, and then Garzia, having entirely lost command of himself, struck a blow at his brother which wounded him severely in the groin. Giovanni fell to the ground, exclaiming, "And this from you, Garzia. May God in Heaven forgive you. Call help at once."

The blast of the horn soon gathered round the unhappy brothers courtiers and huntsmen. Giovanni was bleeding freely, his hose and buskins were saturated, and Garzia was weeping piteously, and crying out despondently, "Oh God, I have killed Giovanni! Oh God, I have killed Giovanni!" A huntsman snatched up the gory lethal weapon, lest the boy, in his despair, should turn it upon himself.

All that they could do to staunch Giovanni's wound they did, and having made a temporary stretcher with guns and hunting-cloaks, the little cavalcade was preparing to move on to seek further assistance. They had not proceeded very far when the Duke and his attendants rode upon the scene. Halting the bearers of his son he enquired who it was they carried. Before any one could make a reply, Don Garzia ran shrieking up to his father.

"It is me, your Garzia, I have killed Giovanni," he cried out in abject terror.

Cosimo motioned the sorrowful bearers to proceed, and they and their burden were no sooner out of sight than Duchess Eleanora came up in her sedan-chair, terribly agitated by the cries she had heard in the forest. She approached her husband and found him standing lost in thought, with that terrible expression upon his face which he exhibited once before when she had enquired for her first-born, Maria!

There, too, on the sward, was her favourite son, her Garzia, apparently in a swoon, and she advanced to aid him. Garzia heard his mother coming towards him and, rousing himself, he ran and threw himself into her arms, weeping bitterly.



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Then once more he turned to his father pleadingly, and kneeling to him, grasped his legs, imploring pardon for his crime—for neither father nor son doubted but that Giovanni was dead. Baring his head, and holding his arms wide apart to Heaven, the Duke appealed to God to direct his actions. Then, turning to his son, grovelling at his feet. “Behold, thy brother’s blood,” he cried with bitterness, “asks vengeance of God and of me, thy miserable father; and now I shall deal with thee alone. Certainly it is a heinous crime for a father to kill his son, but it would be a still more grievous sin to spare the life of a parricide, lest he went on to exterminate his family, and lay their name in the dirt, to be execrated of all men. I have now resolved what to do, for I would far rather live in history as a pitiless father than as an unjust Sovereign.”

The Duchess, judging that Cosimo actually intended to slay his son, and knowing how fruitless any efforts of hers would be to avert such a terrible calamity, fell upon her knees and prayed aloud to Heaven to save the poor, young boy, and spare her own broken heart. Shutting her eyes, and covering her ears, she awaited, more dead than alive, the fall of that hand, within which was convulsively grasped a flashing poignard!

Cosimo once more prayed most earnestly to God to approve the justice of his deed, to pardon him for so executing the Divine wrath, and for peace for the souls of his young sons. Then, bending towards the unconscious Garzia, he exclaimed, “I will have no Cain in my family,” and, at the same moment, he plunged his weapon into the heart of his boy.

With a last despairing shriek Garzia fell away, crying, as he expired, the one word “Mother!”

The Duchess also lay upon the grass, still as death; indeed, her heart had stopped its beat when Cosimo raised her, and bid her sternly to act the woman. She was speechless and demented, and at the sight of her dear son’s crimson blood colouring the fresh verdure where he had fallen, she lost her reason, and her cries and shrieks resounded through the forest.

From all sides courtiers and huntsmen appeared upon the scene. The Duke silently waved them away, and, beckoning four of the most trusty of his retainers, he bade them pick up the dead body of the young prince and bear it after him, whilst he commanded the lacqueys to carry back the Duchess in her sedan-chair to the Castle.

Asking which way the bearers of the murdered Giovanni had taken, he ordered his own cortege to follow on to Livorno. Arrived at the palace, the corpses of the two unfortunate young princes were arranged for burial. Upon baring Don Garzia’s body, a fresh wound was discovered *in his back*, but whether by the hand of Don Giovanni no one ever knew. This fact, however, was reported to the Duke and furnished him with a satisfactory reason for the double tragedy—for he deemed it wiser just then that the truth should not be published!



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Solemn obsequies were celebrated in the Duomo of Pisa. Don Giovanni was honoured with all the gorgeous ceremonies due to a Cardinal Archbishop, and some say his body was left there, whilst the burial of poor Don Garzia was completed by a simple service in San Lorenzo in Florence. The cause of the twofold lamentable occurrence was officially ascribed to malarial fever—the two young victims having contracted, as it was said, the fatal malady during the progress of the Court through Tuscany.

The Duchess Eleanora did not long survive her sons. She never left her bed in the Castle of Rosignano until she was carried for expert advice and treatment into Pisa. Prince Francesco returned in haste, from his tour of the Courts, and did much, by his loving sympathy, to revive his stricken mother. Still of no real avail were all the remedies, for she breathed her last one month after that terrible day in the forest, and her body was borne sorrowfully into Florence, and, within the octave of Christmas laid beside her dearly-loved Garzia.

As for Duke Cosimo, Don Francesco found him a changed man, aged by a good ten years, silent, morose, and indifferent to all that transpired around him.

News of the tragedy was current in the city of Trent, where the Aecumenical Council was in session, and it made a great impression upon the assembled prelates and assistants. Masses were offered for ten days for the repose of the souls of Giovanni and Garzia, and devotions were addressed to Heaven on behalf of the father who had—no one there for a moment doubted—been the avenger of one son's blood and the spiller of the other's.

Within two years Cosimo de' Medici—ever pursued by an accusing conscience and diverted only from suicide by indulging in every sensuality within his power, executed an instrument of abdication of his sovereignty, naming Don Francesco Regent of the Duchy, and retaining for himself no more than the title of Duke of Florence.

CHAPTER IV

LUCREZIA—ELEANORA—ISABELLA

Three Murdered Princesses

“Shall I go in, or shall I not?” asked Isabella de' Medici, Duchess of Bracciano, with a catch in her voice.

Donna Lucrezia de' Frescobaldi, her first Lady of Honour, made no reply, but grasped her mistress' arm convulsively. The two women stood pale and trembling at the door of the Duke's bedchamber, in their charming villa of Cerreto Guidi, a few miles out of Florence.



There was something uncanny in the air, which caused the Duchess and her lady instinctively to draw back. It was not the Duke's voice, for that was pitched in an unusually tender key, and yet, its very unusuality might have caused their trepidation. There was something indefinable in the situation, which produced apprehension and alarm.

Doubtless their nerves were overstrained by the terrible event at Cafaggiuolo. Eleanora, the Duchess's sister-in-law, had seen and felt the cold steel dagger, struck out from behind the arras, by her husband's hand—she was dead! Every titled woman, and many another too, felt instinctively that she was walking on dangerous ground: murder seemed to lurk everywhere, and marriage appeared to spell assassination!



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The remorse of Cosimo de' Medici for the murder of his dearly-loved child Maria, his first-born, did not hinder his policy of aggrandisement. He was determined to keep the whip-hand over Ferrara, and to maintain the precedence of his house over that of the Estensi. He had already sacrificed one daughter, not only to his parental passion but to his sovereign will, and one daughter still remained unbargained; he would use her to hold what he had got.

Lucrezia was no more than twelve years old when Maria passed to Paradise. Prince Alfonso was twenty-two, and his father, Duke Ercole II., had apparently no fiancée in view for him, and the lad seemed not to be in a marrying mood. At the moment Ferrara was isolated, but Cosimo, seizing a favourable opportunity, through his relationship with the King of Spain, contrived to arrange a treaty between that kingdom, Tuscany and Parma, which he adroitly extended to include Ferrara.

It was a powerful combination, and Cosimo had his price, and that price was the betrothal of Alfonso and Lucrezia. The Duke of Ferrara yielded, and in the same month, March 1558, the treaty of alliance was signed at Pisa, and the two young people were affianced there by proxy.

To be sure, there was trouble with Rome. Julius III., in 1552, had bespoken Lucrezia for his bastard nephew, Fabiano Conte Del Monte—a man without resources and of no recognised position nor of good character—it was just a selfish whim of the Pope—the children never saw each other. Cosimo, with his usual daring, brushed the whole project aside, and made a liberal contribution to Peter's Pence that year!

If Lucrezia was somewhat less fair and less clever than Maria, she was, all the same, an attractive girl. Thin in figure—as all growing girls—tall, well-formed, with the promise of a well-proportioned maturity, she had an oval face and a high forehead, well-clustered with curly auburn hair. There was a peculiarity about her eyes—black they were or a very dark brown—they had something of that cast of optic vision which was remarkable in Cosimo, "*Il Padre della Patria*" and in Lorenzo, "*Il Magnifico*," as well as in other members of the family.

"She had a pretty mouth and a dimpled chin, and always wore a pleasing expression indicative of good-nature and resolute affection. Very unlike her elder sisters, Maria and Isabella, she was somewhat reserved in manner; she spoke little, but expressed her opinion with flashes of her eyes." Her father admired her firmness of resolution greatly, and generally spoke of her as "*La Mia Sodana*," "my little strong-willed daughter."

"She is quite a chip of the old block," he was wont to say of her, "quite one of us—a Medico in frocks!" Lucrezia shared the lessons of her brother, and had been brought up

specially with the idea of a brilliant foreign marriage, and her maid was a girl from Modena who knew Ferrara well.

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One condition of the marriage-contract was most unusual—namely, that the bridegroom should be free to leave Florence upon the third day after the nuptials had been celebrated! This was necessary, the Prince averred, in order that he might keep an appointment he had made, with his father's consent, with the King of France—the enemy of the quadruple alliance!

Prince Alfonso troubled himself very little about his fiancée. He was devoted to selfish pleasures, and, when his energies were called into play, they were devoted to the service of arms. His betrothal to Maria de' Medici, without his consent, her untimely and suspicious death, and the character Duke Cosimo bore for tyranny, ambition, and greed, were undoubtedly deterrent to the young man's wish to cultivate another Medici alliance.

His own father, Duke Ercole, resembled his prospective father-in-law in many respects. The Estensi, with the Malatesti of Rimini and Pesaro, the Sforzai of Milan, and the Medici of Florence, were classed as "families of tyrants." Duke Ercole was a man of strong will and forceful action—a tyrant in his own family and cruel to his unhappy consort—he could not brook any disobedience to his behests. He commanded his son to set forth at once from Ferrara and claim his bride in Florence.

Accompanied by a glittering retinue, which included a dozen Lords of the Supreme Council, Prince Alfonso took his way over the Apennines, along the Bologna road. On 18th June the cavalcade was discerned from the heights of Olivets, wending its way through Boccaccio's country to the city walls.

He was received with great distinction by the Duke and Duchess, attended by the whole Court; and his welcome by the citizens was very cordial. Florentines always loved a spectacle. Everyone, however, remarked the Prince's haughty bearing, and the coldness with which he returned Cosimo's greeting. He bore himself as a man in presence of a foe whose every action must be watched intently. The Duchess, with all her Spanish sensibility, perceived at once the disfavour of their guest, and sought to interest him in the scene around him and in the happiness in prospect.

Alfonso was quite unmoved. He met Lucrezia's greeting with a cold handshake, and begged that the marriage ceremonies might be hurried forward, as "he had not much time to spare." Cosimo joined in the Duchess' entreaties that the uncanny condition, in the marriage-contract, might be observed in the breach.

"My word is pledged to the King of France," he replied disdainfully, "and go I must."

Duke Ercole, in a letter delivered to Cosimo by Alfonso, urged the former not in any way to dissuade his son from carrying out his intention. It was common knowledge, however, in Ferrara, and reported by members of the Prince's retinue to the courtiers of Florence, that Henry II. of France had made known to Duke Ercole his intention of



repaying the three hundred thousand gold ducats he owed Ferrara. A condition accompanied the proposal, namely, that the Duke should withdraw from the alliance, and despatch his son at once to Paris, to assure the *bona fides* of the new arrangement.



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Moreover, Henry hinted not only at the advisability of separating the too youthful couple, and of giving the Prince military employment until his young wife attained a more mature age; but suggested that some way should be found, even at the eleventh hour, of allying Alfonso to a French princess.

Nevertheless, Alfonso claimed his Florentine bride, whilst Lucrezia appears to have conceived an attachment for the warlike young Prince, who caused a courier to inform his father that the Princess “seemed to like” him. Duke Ercole replied as follows: “I am much pleased that your bride is satisfied with you. I would rather have heard your own state of mind in regard to the matter....”

Letters to the Duke from the chief members of the Prince’s suite assured him that the Prince really fell in love with the Princess at first sight, but there is no word of Alfonso’s extant which shows that he cared in the least for the bride State policy had assigned for him.

Duchess Eleanora was exceedingly provoked by the young Prince’s demeanour and his insistence upon the observance of the unnatural condition. Moreover, she protested to the Duke her wish that the marriage might at least be postponed, pointing out, with a woman’s intuition of trouble, that no good could come out of such an uncanny arrangement.

She, of course, was Spanish, and she seems to have forgotten that French blood flowed in Alfonso’s veins—his mother, Duchess Renata, or Renea, being a daughter of Louis XII. Duke Ercole added to the trouble by deeply wounding the Duchess’ susceptibilities with a suggestion that the young bride should be sent to Ferrara, immediately after the nuptial ceremony, under the care of chosen proxies for his son.

Haughtily she answered the Duke’s representative: “A married daughter of the Medici, and of Spain, remains at her parents’ palace until her husband, and no one else, takes her away.”

The day fixed for the marriage was 3rd July—a Sunday—and the wedding Mass was celebrated in the private chapel of the Palazzo Pitti, by the Bishop of Cortona. One hundred and one comely Florentine gentlewomen formed a beauteous guard of honour for the bride, each arrayed splendidly in silk brocade and covered with costly jewels. As many young nobles, with the accompaniment of music and dancing, performed a gorgeous pageant of Greeks, Indians and Florentines. In the Piazza di Santa Maria Novella a State exhibition of the popular Florentine game of *Il Calcio* (football), was given by sixty of the best-looking and most noble youths, attired in cloths of gold and silver.

The bride and bridegroom retired late at night to the Palazzo Medici in the Via Larga, set in order for them, but, on the third day, Prince Alfonso, as good as his word, set off



for France! Don Francesco, Lucrezia's eldest brother, accompanied him as far as Scarperia, on the Bologna road, and there bade him a not too friendly farewell. The young man had made a very bad impression in Florence; he had kept himself entirely to himself, and had gone through his part of the ceremonials like a puppet.



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Lucrezia moved like the fabled princess in a dream. Her eyes were wet with weeping, and, although she restrained her emotion, her disappointment and distress caused her silent and bitter suffering. Accustomed as she was to obey implicitly the commands of her autocratic father, she knew that she must submit to the harshness of her spouse, and make the best of a most unfortunate and embarrassing situation.

Alfonso had forbidden her to write to him, but appointed a faithful follower of his, Francesco da Susena, as confidential Chamberlain of the youthful Princess. He was to provide funds and disburse them for the expenses of the Princess, and to keep his master well posted in all that transpired, and, in particular, to inform him of every word and action of his forsaken girl-wife!

Ten days after the departure of the Prince from Florence, he wrote a letter to Lucrezia, which he bade da Susena read, and then give her. The Court was at Poggio a Caiano in *villeggiatura*, and the Chamberlain was in the company. He gave the Princess her husband's letter, and made the following report to his master:—

“I was taken to the slope of a hill, where Her Highness the Princess was walking with the Duchess Eleanora, who is always with her. I gave her the letter, which she took greedily, with exceeding joy, and retired apart with it. She read it over and over again, and then she questioned me about your Highness.... I told her that she had no occasion to fear, for your Highness would run no more risk than the king himself. She appeared much comforted, and told me to beg your Highness, in her name, to hasten your return to Florence.” Within six months of Lucrezia's ill-fated marriage, Duke Ercole died at Ferrara, and her husband succeeded as Alfonso II. The life of Ercole and his Duchess Renata had been anything but happy. He was as ambitious as he was unscrupulous: Lord of Modena and Reggio and Papal Vicar of Ferrara, his possessions stretched from the Adriatic to the Apennines. Extravagant and devoted to amusement, he spared neither time nor money in the full enjoyment of pleasure.

The Court of Ferrara became under him the most splendid Court in Europe—famous for the excellence of its music and its dancing and the superiority of its theatre—Carnival lasted from New Year's Day to Ash Wednesday. Duchess Renata never loved her husband nor his people. Until she fell under the influence of Calvin she was discontented, passionate, and bigoted. The Duke scouted her ill-humour and treated her cruelly.

“*Peu d'amys, qui conques est loing d'eulx*” was said of unhappy Renata. She gave her disposition to her son, but he did not follow her religious predilections. He enclosed her in a convent—the sanctuary of princely widows and orphans—where she died in 1597.



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Duke Alfonso sent to Florence for his consort early in 1560, but, true to her determination, Duchess Eleanora required him to come for Lucrezia in person! With perhaps less frigidity than he had exhibited the year before, but with very little more friendliness, Alfonso made his second appearance in Florence. He was accompanied by Cardinal de' Medici, his brother-in-law—so soon to come to a tragical and untimely end in the Maremma—and a princely escort of two thousand five hundred horsemen. The young Duchess, not yet sixteen, mounted upon a cream-white palfrey, rode out of the Porta San Gallo, by the side of her husband. The day was gloomy and the purple and white crocuses, which children scattered before her, betokened, so it was said, disaster.

Anyhow, it was a sorrowful parting with her parents, and with Florence. Never again was she destined to see them or it. The days of her childhood, spent happily enough with her brothers and sisters, were over: the fatigues and intrigues of a hostile Court were before her, and, already, trouble had marked her young life with scars—more were to follow.

The Duke and Duchess entered Ferrara in full State, on 21st February, but their reception was as cold as was the weather. The dynastic dispute, whilst ostensibly healed at its head, still affected the limbs of the Duchy. The people were, to a man, and perhaps to a woman, anti-Medicean, and showed their disapproval of their Sovereign's consort, by abstaining from taking their share in the festivities.

One's heart bleeds for this child-bride of seven months introduced unguarded to the gayest, maddest, and most corrupt Court in Italy. Of the Ferrarese it has been justly said: "By nature they are inclined only for pleasure and revenge." True enough, happiness and tragedy are close partners in life's story. No one loved Lucrezia de' Medici in Ferrara—least of all her husband.

Perhaps the position may be succinctly stated—"the bride of three nights was not *enceinte*! Had she only possessed the attributes of coming motherhood, Lucrezia's origin might have been condoned. But surely it was foul cruelty which fixed the fault on her alone. As it was, the poor young Duchess was accorded at her husband's court the position of a '*Cosa della lussuria*'—to be set aside as soon as the novelty had passed away!"

The Duchess determined, possessed as she undoubtedly was, though so young, of much of the force of character of her family, to put a good face upon things. Her letters to her parents, written during the Carnival, are full of pleasant details of her new life. She was enjoying, with girlish zest, the gaities around her, and entering fully into the merry prospects of the Court masquerades. Whether her expressions are quite sincere, is, perhaps, immaterial under the circumstances—she knew her father's disposition too well to make complaints.



The anniversary of her wedding came round to find her childless and devoid of any prospect of issue. Duke Alfonso was far too much engaged in politics and pleasure to give his due to his wife, who yearned in vain for the fulfilment of the conjugal vow. Duchess Renata had her party at Court, a party opposed, as she was, to anything and everything Florentine: her son gave heed to her cautions, and thus the breach widened.



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Alfonso's long absences from home, and his disinclination for his wife's society, left Lucrezia to seek necessary consolations elsewhere. She did not fail of admirers in that giddy Court: the wonder is that she maintained her dignity as well as she did. The Duke became jealous, of course, of his neglected wife—all faithless husbands are the same. He paid spies to report to him the daily occupations of the Duchess, with the names of her visitors and friends. Thus evil eyes and ears were opened, and evil tongues began to wag, until they caused the utter undoing of the innocent young Duchess.

Alfonso, in vain, tried to fix the lovers of his wife—she was as tactful as they were prudent—but he was not without means to his end. The Duchess early gave symptoms of ill-health. In Florence she was the strongest of all her father's family, but at Ferrara she became delicate and a victim to incessant sickness. What could it be?

The Court physician hinted at pregnancy, but the Duke knew that was impossible, so far as he was personally concerned, nevertheless it served its purpose. The winter came on and the Duchess was confined to her apartments in the palace, suffering from continual fever and nausea. Maestro Brassavola—of good report as a specialist in feminine ailments—treated her unsuccessfully. Unhappy Lucrezia—no mother to console her, no friend to speak to her, all alone in the big palace with unkindly attendants—nearly sobbed herself to death. Daily bleedings and cuppings further diminished her strength. Some say that Don Francesco, her brother, was urged, by his mother, to pay Lucrezia a visit, but the bad terms upon which he stood with Duke Alfonso was an effectual bar to his mission. Whether from craven fear or premeditated cruelty, the Duke never entered the sick-room, and seemed entirely indifferent to his poor young wife. Indeed, he continued his life of prodigality and self-indulgence unrebuked, as we must suppose, by his conscience.

At last the Duchess' condition became so critical that the physicians could no longer disguise the danger, and they intimated to the Duke the approach of death. Then, and then only, Alfonso found his way to his wife's bedside. With a sorrowful, stricken face she greeted him affectionately, and remorse seemed, at length, to have brought him to his senses. He became the most tender of nurses and watched by his dying wife day and night—but the *poison* had worked its cause!

At midnight, 21st April 1561, after months of cruel suffering, neglected, affronted, and wronged, the innocent soul of poor young Lucrezia, Duchess of Ferrara, passed into another world. She was not yet seventeen years old—in bitter experience of life's hardships she was seventy. At the autopsy of her body Maestro Pasquali of Florence declared that death was caused by putrid fever! Thus was the Duke's duplicity preserved.

Funeral honours due to her rank were rendered, and her shrunken little body was buried in the Estensi chapel of the convent church of Corpus Domini. A marble slab before the high altar reads thus:



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“*Lucretia de’ Medici—moglie di Alfonso II., Duca di Ferrara*”—and that is all—as curt and as cruel as possible. The Duke’s show of grief was as insincere and hypocritical as could be. He shut himself up in his palace with a few chosen cronies for seven days; meanwhile sending off Bishop Rossetto, a court chaplain, to Florence, to communicate the sad tidings to Duke Cosimo and Duchess Eleanora.

Very soon after the death of Lucrezia the Marchese Creole de’ Contrari, a prominent Ferrarese noble, was cast into prison upon an unstated charge, but it was given out by his jailor, that he had aspired to the hand of an Estensi princess. He was never seen alive again, for he was strangled in Duke Alfonso’s presence—who caused his name to be vilely linked with that of the poisoned Duchess! Cosimo and Eleanora made a show at least of grief, and a splendid *Requiem* was sung for Lucrezia at the Medici church of San Lorenzo. At the same time Cosimo made known, in most heartless fashion to Alfonso that, whilst he was resigned to the will of Heaven, he assured him of his sincere affection, and expressed a fervent wish that nothing should loosen their bonds of true and solid friendship! Devout Duchess Eleanora’s indifference is harder to explain than Duke Cosimo’s nonchalance. Perhaps in her case evil associations had corrupted good manners, or, more likely, the memory of her child Maria’s terrible death compelled discretion in her dealings with her husband—“Tyrant of tyrants.” It might be her turn next to feel that cold steel!

And what about Duke Alfonso? Well, very soon he forgot all about Lucrezia, and found consolation, though actually he needed none, in a second marriage. This union, however, led to the resurrection of the hatchet of discord, which Cosimo and Ercole had agreed to bury underground.

The new Duchess was Barbara d’Austria, sister of the Archduchess Giovanna, bride of Don Francesco, poor Lucrezia’s brother. A double wedding was fixed at Trento in August 1565, but a fracas occurred at the church doors between the Medici and Estensi suites for precedence. The two princely couples were married separately by the Emperor Maximilian’s command, each in the capital of the bridegroom’s dominions. Duke Alfonso died in 1597.

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One notable effect of the foreign marriages of the Medicean princes was the settling of aliens, in considerable numbers, in Florence. With Clarice and Alfonsina d’Orsini had come greedy Roman adventurers; with Margherita and Giovanna d’Austria many enterprising Germans; self-seeking Spaniards came with Eleanora de Toledo.

From one point of view this foreign immigration was advantageous—it tended to revive the falling fortunes of Florentine commerce. On the other hand aliens were introduced into prominent positions at the Court and in the city, whose speculations robbed the citizens of their fame and fortune.



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In the suite of Duchess Eleanora de Toledo were several young relatives, bound to her by ties of affection and looking to her for patronage and advancement. The ranks of these dependants were constantly being recruited by young people of noble birth, for whom the exceptional educational advantages obtainable in Florence were strong attractions.

One of these was the Duchess's niece and godchild—Donna Eleanora, the daughter of her brother, Don Garzia de Toledo. Born in 1553 in Naples, where her father kept his Court as Viceroy for the King of Spain, the child lost her mother when she was only seven years old. The Duchess Eleanora adopted her and sent to Naples for her, and little Eleanora de Garzia was brought up with the children of Cosimo and Eleanora, and she was regarded by them as their sister.

Upon the Duchess' melancholy death in 1562, her daughter Isabella, Duchess of Bracciano, acted the part of mother, young as she was, and only just two years married. She had no child of her own, and, apparently, no promise of one, anyhow by her husband; and the lively, pretty little Spanish girl, nestling upon her knee, much consoled her in her disappointment.

At fourteen, Eleanora de Garzia was, as Antonio Lapini has described her: "Beautiful, elegant, gracious, kindly, charming, affable, and, above all, possessed of two eyes rivalling the stars in brilliancy." She was also a clever girl, and her studies had been carried on in companionship with the younger children of her aunt—Garzia, Ferdinando, and Piero. The strictness of their control was loosened when the Duke became a widower, and he does not seem to have done anything to guard the morals of his young children.

The Court of Florence was not the place in which to rear, in ways of obedience and steadiness, young boys and girls, and Eleanora and her "brothers" were left pretty much to themselves, save for the indulgent guardianship of their tutors and attendants. To be sure, Don Ferdinando was sent off to Rome when he was fourteen, and was enrolled in the Sacred College. Don Garzia's tragic death in 1562 left Don Piero the sole playmate of little Eleanora—a strange act of Providence.

Duke Cosimo was not quite inconsolable for the loss of his Spanish wife; he had, during her lifetime, set an evil example in Florence for libertinage and unchastity. Every good-looking girl, in city or at Court, in one way or another, received his amorous attentions; and the halo which surrounded his first acclamation as Duke, and which he earned well, be it said, became dimmed by the execrations of many disgraced and suffering households. Men and women saw the bad days of Duke Alessandro revived, and Florence, after a temporary purgation, became once more the sink of iniquity.

When the Duke laid aside, in 1564, his sovereignty, it was that he might give reins to his passions, and, of the many girls he ruined, probably not one he loved better or longer



than Eleanora degli Albizzi. At Villa del Castello he had his harem. This was the example Cosimo de' Medici set his wayward, precocious son Piero, and the lad followed it to his heart's content, until his escapades became so notorious, and raised up such a storm of resentment amongst the citizens, that his father was forced to intervene.



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At fifteen, young Piero was sent off to Pisa and attached to the staff of the Admiral of the Florentine fleet, Cavaliere Cesare Cavanglia. In various encounters with Turkish galleons and the barques of buccaneers, the young Medico proved himself no coward—indeed the Admiral reported of him most favourably. Well for his fame had Piero remained before the mast and upon the quarter-deck.

The lad was practically his own master, and the memories of Florentine gallantries filled his mind with desires for their resumption. Two years of naval-military discipline were quite enough for him, and he returned home again. He found Donna Eleanora de Garzia a grown woman and a woman of the world; an arrant flirt, like her protectress, the Duchess Isabella; dividing her time between the Villa Poggio Baroncelli and his father's villa at Castello.

Rumours of illicit intercourse between her and the Grand Duke were current all over Florence, and evil gossips at Court affirmed that the *liaison* had been of long continuance, wherein, too, the Duchess Isabella was herself implicated. Cosimo seems to have been conversant with the tittle-tattle, and, fearing the evil effect it might have for all concerned, determined to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and to keep the scandal within the family.

His son Piero—who was walking closely in his father's footsteps, and leading a free and fast, wild life, heavily in debt and habitually intoxicated, and the companion of loose women and gamblers—should be his scapegoat. He would marry him to his cousin! At the beginning of the negotiations Piero refused stoutly his father's proposition, asserting his intention not to marry. By dint of ample offers of enlarged pecuniary emoluments and by tempting promises of exculpation from the consequences of his lustful extravagances, Piero at last yielded an unwilling assent to the betrothal. How far he was influenced by threats we can well imagine.

Piero de' Medici and Eleonora de Garzia de Toledo were married in the private chapel of the Pitti Palace on the morning of 21st April 1571. That very night his young wife revealed the fact that she was *enceinte*, and she named his father, Duke Cosimo, as her ravisher! The Prince was too much taken up with his own pleasure to care very much about this revelation: he would go his own way, and his wife might go hers—such was the morality of the day! Still, this discovery was the first page in the tragic history of beautiful Eleanora di Piero de' Medici.

Very shortly after the marriage Eleanora, who was then at Pisa, was delivered of a child, whom, in the absence of her husband, she named Cosimo—a significant nomenclature! She caused letters to be written to the Grand Duke Francesco, her brother-in-law, to acquaint him with the birth of the child, and to crave protection for *his father's son!*



Following the unhappy example of Paolo d'Orsini and Isabella de' Medici, and being absolutely their own masters, Piero and Eleanora agreed to live separate lives—he, a boy of seventeen and she just eighteen. What more disastrous beginning can be imagined for two young wedded lives, and yet it was inevitable. Piero did not care a bit for Eleanora, and Eleanora hated and despised Piero.



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The marriage was but a brief break in evil associations, for the boy returned to his boon-companions in the city, and the girl sought the solace of her lovers. It was in vain the Grand Duke pointed out the errors of their ways—Piero retorted with a “*Tu quoque frater!*” He had every bit as much right to console himself with a mistress, one or more, as Francesco did with his “*Cosa Bianca!*” Moreover, he became urgent in his demand for a still more liberal allowance, which the Grand Duke weakly conceded—as he had done in the case of his other grasping brother, the Cardinal.

Everything and everybody at the Court of Florence seemed to be demented. To enjoy the basest pleasures and to indulge in the foulest passions, such was the way of the world; and Eleanora was but a child in years, but a woman in experience—and that experience not for the honour of her life, alas! Sinned against, she sinned like the rest. How could a lovely, talented, warm-hearted girl, with the hot blood of Spanish passion coursing through her veins, resist the admiration, the flattery, and the embraces of the gay young cavaliers of the Court? She merely followed the vogue, she was no recluse; and when, in 1575, she was enrolled as a “Soul” in the *Accademia degli Elevati*, she assumed the name of “*Ardente*”—a true title—a correct epithet!

One of the captains of the palace guard—himself a remarkably handsome and gallant soldier—Francesco Gaci, had a prepossessing young son, Alessandro, a cadet of the same regiment, who fell violently in love with Don Piero’s fascinating young wife. Unable to restrain his boyish ardour, one day he seized Donna Eleanora’s hand, covered it with kisses, and professed himself ready to die for love of her. The Princess, pining for love, looked with favour upon her infatuated lover, and granted him something of what he wished.

Alas, for love’s young dream! The Grand Duke caught wind of it, and without making much ado, promptly stopped the intrigue. Alessandro Gaci was removed summarily from his commission and enclosed in the monastery of Camaldoli; whilst to the Princess was administered a smart rebuke and warning.

Eleanora’s haughty spirit rose at the interference of her brother-in-law in matters of her heart, and she determined to act in opposition to his commands. She had scarcely got off with the old love before she was on with the new. This time she appears to have made the first advance. At all events, in the entourage of the Grand Duchess Giovanna, was an attractive and youthful knight of the Order of St Stephen of Pisa—Duke Cosimo’s new naval-military order. He was a court chamberlain with the military rank of lieutenant—Bernardino, the son of Messer Sebastiano degl’ Antinori, who had translated Boccaccio’s works for Cosimo.

The young cavaliere had the misfortune to kill, quite accidentally, in a friendly game of “*Calcio*,” a great friend of his—Francesco de’ Ginori. The game was played in presence of Princess Eleanora and many ladies of the Court. Bernardino wore Eleanora’s favours, as he usually did, making no secret of his passion for Don Piero’s neglected,

beauteous wife, and of the return of his love by his fair *innamorata*—it was indeed the talk of the town.



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The Ginori, an ancient and lordly family, intimately connected with the Medici, claimed satisfaction at the hands of the Grand Duke for what they chose to call the assassination of their young relative. Francesco judged that the *liaison* between his sister-in-law and the so-called “assassin” required regulation, especially as she had failed to comply with his previous admonition. The two offences would be best judged by the banishment of the cavaliere, whose rank forbade his inclusion in a monastery. Consequently Bernardino was sent off, under guard, to a fortress in the Isle of Elba, and Princess Eleanora was confined, during the Grand Duke’s pleasure, to her apartments in the Medici Palace.

The old tale that “love laughs at locks” had now one fresh telling! An amorous correspondence began between the parted lovers, which was carried on for a considerable time without detection. At last there came a day when the secret was out, through the carelessness of Bernardino’s brother Filippo, the intermediary in the love affair. Watching his opportunity of dropping a letter into the hand of the Princess, as she passed through the corridor connecting the Pitti and the Uffizi—just completed by Duke Cosimo’s orders—Captain Filippo had the curiosity to read the *billet-doux* himself. He failed to notice that a brother officer was standing close by, who also glanced at the contents of the letter.

Captain Giulio Caccini was Master of Music and conductor of the palace orchestra, and when he had a favourable opportunity he confided to his master what he had seen—doubtless he considered himself well on towards the receipt of a reward for his mean services.

Francesco was furious: he might, as Sovereign, have his love passages with whom he willed—although be it said, truly, he had one and only one love, Bianca Cappello Buonaventuri—but he could not tolerate any amours between a princess of his house and a subaltern of his guard.

Captain Bernardino was ordered to be brought back to Florence immediately, and, after a stormy interview with the Grand Duke, he was consigned to the condemned-criminal dungeon of the Bargello.

The same night the prisoner’s cell was entered by a *Frate*—a confessor, who acquainted him that he had been sentenced to death! Expostulation was vain, and his asseverations of innocence and promises of submission to the Grand Duke’s will were rudely interrupted by the appearance of the headsman! Forced upon his knees, the unhappy young officer mumbled out his confession, and then the executioner, passing a stout cord about his throat, strangled him—struggling and crying out piteously for mercy!

When Antinorio was dead, Francesco was informed, and, sending for Eleanora, he told her what had become of her second lover, and warned her that a like fate might easily be hers if Don Piero was made acquainted with the intrigue—surely a fell prophecy of



coming tragedy! Piero, too, was sent for to the palace, and again reprimanded for his evil life and for his cruel desertion of his charming young wife. He took his brother's words in an entirely wrong sense, abused him soundly for his interference, and left his presence in a violent passion.



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At once he caused an intimation to be made to the Princess that he wished to see her about a matter which concerned them both intimately, and required her to meet him out at the Villa di Cafaggiuolo. It was the 20th of July, in the year 1576, that Eleanora received her husband's commands—just ten days after the brutal murder of her lover—during the course of which she gave way to uncontrolled grief. This summons she knew presaged dire consequences to herself, and she had no friend to seek for consolation and advice. The Grand Duke was out of the question, and Duchess Isabella d'Orsini, who had proved herself no friend of good omen, was in a plight very much like her own!

No, she had to fight the battle of her life and death alone, this girl of twenty-three. She replied that she was quite prepared to meet Piero, but she asked for a short delay. She spent it in weeping by the cradle of her little son, Cosimo, and arranging her worldly affairs—she was quite prepared for the worst.

Leaving Florence in the middle of a hot summer's day, the course to Cafaggiuolo was trying to her horses—one indeed fell and died on the way—an evil omen for poor Eleanora! As night was coming on she reached the villa, more dead than alive with fright, and accompanied only by two faithful ladies of her household. To their surprise the house appeared to be deserted: there were no lights in the windows, and no one seemed to be about.

The great doors were wide open, and with much trepidation the Princess mounted the marble steps. The door of every room also was open and the arras pulled aside, but nowhere could she see or hear her husband. Very uncanny everything felt, the silence was almost suffocating, and the darkness threw weird shadows athwart her and her companions.

At the entrance of the room, which she deemed to be Piero's—they had never cohabited there, or indeed anywhere, she knew not where he slept—Eleanora paused, affrighted. She had heard a rustle! she had seen something! it was a hand held beyond the arras!—and there was a poignard within its grasp!

E'er she could cry out or take a step backwards, a sudden, savage blow struck her breast—she fell!—stabbed to death! The hand was the hand of Piero de' Medici!

Eleanora was dead! Her life's blood crimsoned, in a gory stream, the marble lintel, and Piero gazed at the victim of his desertion, lust, and hate—he was mad!

Kneeling upon his knees in the hellish darkness, he tried to stanch that ruddy stream. Then he laved his hands in her hot blood and conveyed some to his raging lips! Reason presently asserted herself; and, throwing himself prostrate along the floor, he banged his head, thereupon calling out in a frenzy of remorse for mercy for his deed!

“God of Heaven,” he pleaded, “judge between my wife and me—I vow that I will do penance for my deed, and never wed again.”



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The short summer's night early gave place to the dawn—not rosy that sad morning, but overcast—gloom was in everything. Piero was still praying by his dead wife's side when the tramp of footsteps upon the gravel outside the house fell upon his ears. Swiftly he ran and closed the entrance-doors, and then calling in a creature of his—a base-born *medico*—he ordered him to make, there and then, an autopsy of the corpse, and report according to his express instructions.

“Death from heart failure and the rupture of an artery,” such ran the medical certificate of death! Miserable Eleanora di Piero de' Medici was buried ceremoniously in the family vault at San Lorenzo, and Piero made a full confession to his brother, the Grand Duke.

Francesco counselled him to leave Florence at once, and seek a temporary home at the Court of Madrid, where he might inform his kinsman by marriage—the King of Spain—of the truth about Eleanora's death. It was reported at the time that Piero gained possession of Eleanora's child, Cosimo, and took him away with him from Florence; but what became of the unfortunate little fellow no one ever knew—probably he went home to his mother in Paradise just to be out of the way!

Don Piero was appointed by King Philip to a command in the war with Portugal, but, whilst he distinguished himself by bravery and ability during the campaign, on his return to Madrid he began the evil life he had left behind in Florence. The religiously disposed courtiers were shocked and outraged by his enormities, and, at last, the King requested his unwelcome visitor to go back to Tuscany.

The Grand Duke very unwillingly allowed Piero to settle once more in Florence. His house in the Via Larga—it had been occupied by the scapegrace assassin, Lorenzino—again was a nursery of immorality, as well as the headquarters of the enemies of his brother. Piero became the ally of the scheming Cardinal Ferdinando, but his depraved and evil life was to the end given over to the basest uses of human nature, and he died miserably, as he well deserved, in 1604, having outlived his second wife—Beatrice, daughter of the Spanish Duke of Meneses—two years. Of legitimate offspring he left none, but there survived him eight natural children by two Spanish nuns in the grand ducal convent of the Santa Assunta delle Murate.

* * * * *

After the death of Maria, his eldest daughter, Duke Cosimo centred his paternal affection in his second daughter, Isabella Romola. She was born in 1542, just a year younger than his eldest son, Francesco Maria. Her Spanish name endeared her especially to the Duchess Eleanora, who built many “*Castelli en Espana*” for her child.

The young Princess was a bonnie, precocious little girl. At her christening it was said, greatly to his embarrassment, she kissed the ascetic bishop who held her at the font; this was taken as an omen of her success in the service of Prince Cupid! Brought up

with her two sisters and her brothers, Francesco and Giovanni, she very early gave evidence of charming and peculiar talent.



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Merry as a bird and playful as a kitten, the young girl was singing, singing the livelong day, and dancing with the utmost grace and freedom. She greatly astonished her parents by her musical gifts and by her talent as an *improvvisatrice*. She composed, when only ten years of age, some really excellent *canzone* and, more than this, she set them to her own tunes for the lute and pipe, and arranged a very graceful ballet.

At Court, Isabella was now known as "*Bianca la Seconda*," her attainments and her person recalling those of Bianca, "the tall daughter" of Piero and Lucrezia de' Medici. She had, as well, a remarkable taste for languages: she rivalled her sister Maria in Latin, which she wrote and spoke with ease. Spanish seemed to come to her naturally, greatly to the delight of her mother the Duchess, and French she acquired with similar success.

With her facile pen she could design and draw what she willed, with as great freedom as she applied to musical notation. Indeed, there seemed to be no art in which she could not distinguish herself, and she received encouragement from all the most famous artists of her father's Court. One of her panegyrists has written thus of Princess Isabella: "Suffice it to say, that she was esteemed by all—strangers as well as those about her—a perfect casket of virtue and knowledge. She was greatly beloved, not only by her parents, but by the whole of the people of Florence."

Added to her mental accomplishments, which developed with her physical growth, the Princess exhibited all the charm of a beautiful face and graceful figure, and, when she reached the ripe age,—for Florence,—of twelve, she was the most lovely and attractive young girl in Italy. Reports of her beauty and talent were current in all the Courts of Europe, and many princely fathers of eligible sons made inquiries about her fortune; whilst many an amorous young Prince found his way to Florence, to judge for himself of the charms of the fair young girl.

Duke Cosimo was not the man to give his comely daughter away at random: indeed he cherished the thought of keeping her in Florence and by his side, so courtly refusals of proffered hands, and hearts, and crowns, were dealt out to one and all the suitors. Pope Paul IV., who was on the best of terms with Duke Cosimo, and never forgot what he owed in his elevation to the Papal throne to his friend's influence, conceived a matrimonial project for youthful Isabella. At his Court was a young man of illustrious descent, good attainments, the heir to vast possessions, and a devoted adherent of the Holy See—Paolo Giordano d'Orsini.

The Orsini were split up into many branches, but the family was one of the most ancient and honourable in Rome. Signore Girolamo d'Orsini, father of Paolo Giordano, was lord of Bracciano and Anguillara, and of the country around Civita Vecchia. When only twelve years old, he had been named by Pope Leo X. to the honorary command of a Papal regiment of cavalry. When still in his teens the youth served with distinction in France and in the Neapolitan war; and, on attaining his majority, he was sent with a

detachment of troops to the assistance of the Emperor Charles V., in the devastating war against the Turks in Hungary.



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Created General and Marquis by the Emperor, the young commander returned to Rome in 1537, and took up his position as the acknowledged head of his family. He married Francesca, daughter of Bosso Sforza, heiress of the Counts of Anguillaria. Three sons and a daughter were born to them.

Paolo Giordano, born 1539, was adopted by his maternal uncle, Carlo, Cardinal Sforza da Santa Fiora, and became a protegee of Paul IV. Following his father's profession of arms, he saw military service in Spain, but was recalled to Rome by the death of both his parents. On succession to the family estates the Pope created the Lordship of Bracciano a Duchy, and sent a message to Duke Cosimo, commending the young soldier to his notice, and suggesting a matrimonial alliance with one of his daughters.

Cosimo looked with favour upon the Pope's proposition, and asked the young Duke to pay the Florentine Court a visit. The young people seemed made for one another: he was handsome, brave and rich, she was beautiful, talented, and lovable. Perhaps it was a case of love at first sight, anyhow they were betrothed in 1555, with the proviso that the nuptial knot should not be tied until Isabella had attained her sixteenth year.

In due course the marriage-contract was drawn up, signed and sealed, but it contained a condition which was as unnatural as it was impolitic. Duke Cosimo insisted that his dearly-beloved daughter should make his house her home for at least six months each year, and only pay occasional visits to her husband's palace in Rome! Duke Paolo, quite rightly, resented this questionable arrangement, and only agreed at last on pressure from the Pope.

Whatever made Cosimo take such a weird course no one can really say, although horrible rumours were indeed rife in Florence about the relations between father and child! It was, however, a fatal bar to all marital happiness, and led to the one and only possible *denouement*—tragedy. Certainly the Duke bestowed upon the young couple the splendid estate and villa of the Baroncelli, which had come into his hands, and which he enlarged and surrounded with a park. He added a munificent endowment and had the villa refurnished and redecorated throughout, according to his son-in-law's wishes.

The marriage was celebrated on 3rd September 1558 in the private chapel of the Pitti Palace,—a Saturday, always considered, in Florence, an unlucky day for a wedding,—a few months after that of Prince Alfonso d'Este's to Isabella's younger sister—Lucrezia. After a brief honeymoon spent at their villa the youthful bride and bridegroom separated—an ominous repetition of a fateful error. Truth to tell, Duke Paolo took an intense dislike to his father-in-law: he distrusted him both in relation to his affection for Isabella, and also with respect to his tyrannical character generally. Florence also and the Florentines were distasteful in their excesses of ill-living, cruelty, and chicanery—not that the Court of Rome was a Paradise, or the young man a St Anthony!



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The Duke went back to Rome and resumed his ordinary life there, without bearing with him any of the wholesome leaven of matrimony—a husband in name, and little more. Duchess Isabella, a mere child, wanton and wilful more than most, was thus left the uncontrolled mistress of a princely establishment, with no marital check to regulate her conduct. Surely as unstable a condition, and as conducive to infidelity, as can well be imagined.

Before leaving his wife at Poggio Baroncelli, Duke Paolo appointed her household, and made every provision for her comfort. A cousin of his, Cavaliere Troilo d'Orsini, was placed in charge of the Duchess as Chamberlain, or quasi-guardian—another false step, and embarrassing for all parties. He was a handsome and accomplished man, avowedly unmarried, young and of a sympathetic disposition, and manifestly not at all the sort of person to place upon terms of such close relationship with the attractive young Duchess.

Under its fascinating *Castellana* the Baroncelli villa became a busy little Court, the scene of constant festivities, gossip, and intrigue. Her mother's Court at the Pitti was quite second in attractiveness. Duchess Eleanora if virtuous and conscientious, was rather dull and uninteresting. She cared much more for her Spanish connections than for her Florentine courtiers: much of her time she spent in the Cappella degli Spagnoli at Santa Maria Novella. What time she spared from her devotions she occupied in the establishment and patronage of the *Accademia degli Elevati*—"Souls," for the encouragement of poetry.

Duchess Isabella d'Orsini was hailed as "*La Nuova Saffo*" by those who gathered round her. She was by nature an arrant flirt—as most pretty women are—for she inherited her father's amorous disposition; and she was impulsive,—an added charm where beauty reigns,—worldly-minded, and dreadfully extravagant; moreover, she dressed to perfection.

The Duke of Bracciano paid rare visits to Florence, but the Duchess, in compliance with her marriage-contract, spent a portion of each year with her husband in Rome. These visits were not occasions of happiness and satisfaction. The two had scarcely any interests in common, and the infrequency of intercourse entailed unfamiliarity and embarrassment. The good-byes were never unwelcome on either side!

The Duke took up, once more, his military duties, following in the footsteps of his father as commander, in 1566, of a division of the Imperial army against the Turks. For his bravery at the battle of Lepanto, he was made Field-Marshal of the Emperor and a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. In other respects he had his consolations for his enforced separation from his wife—and Isabella, naturally, had hers too!



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It was said that every man fell in love with her, and she, on her part, did not restrain her passion. There was no one to advise, no one to check, no one to help her to keep in the path of wifely fidelity. Reports of *liaisons* were made to the Duke by his Chamberlain from time to time, but these were couched in words which concealed his own part therein. He and the Duchess were accustomed to be much alone together. He was a musician and a linguist, a scholar and an artist like herself, and a most attractive companion. She helped him in his great literary work—*Lezione della Lingua Toscana*—perhaps the only serious occupation she ever undertook.

An intimacy, with such a similarity of tastes, ripened naturally into a romantic attachment—certainly quite in accord with the tenets of Platonic humanism, and perhaps something more! That Duke Paolo was conversant with the relations of his wife with his cousin was well known, but he made no complaint, and took no action to check them. Likely enough he had that “easy-going contempt of everything and everybody” which Niccolo Macchiavelli has stigmatised as the prevailing tone of Italian society.

Probably the sad deaths of Princess Maria and Duchess Lucrezia d’Este, and the tragic events in the Maremma of 1562, affected Isabella greatly, but they only tended to increase her husband’s detestation for everything Florentine. No doubt he judged that Cosimo’s hand slew both Maria and Garzia—might it not strike Isabella or himself! When a man, in an autocratic position such as that made by Cosimo I., yields to unguarded passion, reason and right alike are at a discount. Isabella’s husband had taken the measure of her father—alas, that he was destined to follow his example!

For Isabella a new interest was created when, in 1564, Bianca Buonaventuri became “*La cosa di Francesco*,”—her brother. She, so to speak, clasped the lovely young Venetian to her bosom. She entered into the romance of the elopement, and of her brother’s infatuation, with all her heart. Isabella de’ Medici and Bianca Cappello-Buonaventuri became inseparable friends.

During Duchess Eleanora’s life the gaities and the follies of the court had been kept within something like bounds, but she had hardly been laid in her tomb within San Lorenzo than Duke Cosimo gave reins to his passions, and the Palazzo Pitti and the various Medicean villas became the scenes of unbridled lust and depravity. In 1564 the Duke deputed most of his sovereign power to his son Francesco, who became Regent and virtual ruler of Tuscany.

The grave scandals which distracted Florentine society began to raise up in the minds of the people violent antipathy for a Sovereign whose private example was so abominable, and whose discharge of public duties was so basely marked by turpitude. A revolution of a drastic description seemed to be inevitable, and, really, Cosimo had no other course than abdication.



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The Florentine rendering and observance of Platonism favoured illicit connections between the sexes. The palaces of the nobles and of the wealthy merchants were nothing more or less than harems. The manners and traditions of the Orient took root, not only in Florence, but in all the other Italian States, and the normal strictness and restrictions of lawful married life had everywhere all but disappeared. Every household, not only of the noble but also of the middle class, had among its number a *cicisbeo*, or two or more,—“unofficial wives”—we may call them, possessed of almost equal rights and position as the lawful spouses.

* * * * *

The great event of the year 1562 was the marriage of Prince Francesco and the Archduchess Giovanna d’Austria. Quite certainly the Duke and Duchess of Bracciano were among the notable personages present at the nuptials. Indeed that year the Duke spent more of his time than usual in Florence, and was very busy buying and rebuilding the Villa Cerreto Guidi, and laying out the park and gardens—the former for the pursuit of deer-hunting, the latter by way of rivalry to Pratolino—Francesco and Bianca’s plaisance.

The Grand Duchess Giovanna was something like her predecessor, Duchess Eleanora, a serious-minded sort of woman, with no pretensions to beauty or ability, not at all the sort of sovereign for that gay and dissolute court. The *beau monde* took themselves off to the Orte Oricellari—to pay their devotions to the lovely Venetian mistress of their Sovereign; and to Poggio Baroncelli—where Duchess Isabella reigned as queen of fashion and frivolity.

Cosimo and Cammilla de’ Martelli—whom he married secretly and took away to his favourite Villa del Castello—lived in strict retreat, rarely came into Florence, and kept no sort of state. At the same time two sons of his were sources of keen anxiety.

Ferdinando, born 1549, was now wearing the Cardinal’s red hat, which hapless young Garzia’s hunting-knife had caused to fall from his brother Giovanni’s head in the Maremma. Ambitious, jealous, but, perhaps, less depraved than his father, the Cardinal de’ Medici made no secret of his dislike of his brother Francesco and his *innamorata*, Bianca Buonaventuri. He became a thorn in his father’s and brother’s sides on account of his extortionate and presumptuous demands. His young stepmother—only two years his senior—favoured his pretensions, and so brought trouble upon herself, as we shall see later on.

Piero, Cosimo’s youngest legitimate son, was but a boy of fourteen when his father married his second wife. Of course she was far too young and inexperienced to be of any use in guiding his growth and tastes.



The Court was thus divided: the two parties were headed respectively by the Grand Duchess Giovanna, the titular Grand Duchess-dowager,—so to call Camilla,—with the Cardinal de' Medici; and by Bianca Cappello di Pietro Buonaventuri and Duchess Isabella of Bracciano.



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With respect to the latter coterie, its influence was vastly augmented by the assassination of Pietro Buonaventuri in 1572. Duchess Isabella gave her whole heart's support to the beautiful young widow. She wrote to her the most affectionate letters, in one of which, if not in more, she says she loves Bianca "more than sister," and bids her retain her position as "the loving helper of my brother."

Bianca heartily returned her "more than a sister's" affection, and she repeatedly spoke of Duchess Isabella in her letters to her cousins in Venice. "I had," she says, for example, on 17th July 1574, "the illustrious Domina Isabella to dine with me in my garden, and with her came my good friends her brother Don Piero and his young wife...." Beautiful, accomplished, and light-hearted, Isabella and Bianca were the dearest and most constant of companions. They lived apparently only for admiration and adulation, but the Duchess' position was infinitely more free and unconventional than that of the Venetian: the latter lived for one man's love alone—Francesco—Isabella dispensed her favours where she willed!

Duke Paolo grew suspicious of his wife's liberty of action. His protests, at first couched in deprecatory language, were met with girlish *insouciance*; but, when he began to complain arrogantly, Isabella replied with spirit and determination. His jealous reprimands were met by like charges and, truth to tell, there was not a pin to choose between the two.

The Grand Duke Cosimo before his death in 1574, and the Grand Duke Francesco, were alike irritated by Bracciano's cool, calculating conduct; and both upheld Isabella against her husband's ill-humour and harsh judgments. Duke Paolo, however, kept his own counsel, and by means of spies discovered that Troilo d'Orsini's monthly reports were at least open to doubt as to their truthfulness with respect to his wife's conduct in private. Matters, however, drifted—he was too intent upon his own affairs in Rome and elsewhere to disturb rudely the state of things at Poggio Baroncelli.

His suspicions at length were brusquely confirmed, and the uneasy peace of evil deeds was broken by portentous news from Florence. A courier in his pay arrived one evening, in July 1576, breathless, at the Bracciano Palace, with the intelligence that the trusty chamberlain had stabbed to the heart an attractive young page, Lelio Torello, attached to the household of the Grand Duke; and had, moreover, at once taken flight precipitately from the Villa!

Bracciano knew exactly what this purported—young Torello was a lover of his wife as well as Troilo d'Orsini! Without a moment's delay, he started off for Florence to tax the Duchess with unfaithfulness. At the Porta Romana he was staggered by the news which greeted him—Piero de' Medici had killed his wife, Eleanora de Garzia de Toledo, at Cafaggiuolo!



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He tarried not to pay his respects to the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess at the Palazzo Pitti hard by, but galloped off post-haste to his wife's villa, and, unannounced, surprised Isabella in the midst of preparations for a sudden journey! If, as some maintained, she meant to follow her fleeing lover, Troilo, at all events she was determined to seek the Court of France, and throw herself upon the sympathy of Queen Caterina, her kinswoman, and crave her protection for herself and her babe!

Several letters had already passed between the two illustrious women. Isabella, on her part, says: "I have asked pardon of God for my sins, and have resolved to let things take their course"; but she implores Catherine to protect her little son. In the last of these letters she writes:—"Let your Majesty think of this letter as the last words of a person bound to you by the ties of blood, and consider them as the confidence of one who is about to die, resigned and repentant, who otherwise could only end her life in despair and desperation."

The Duke judged his wife guilty, before she had offered any explanation of the tragic doings at the Villa, and his impulse was to dishonour her before her whole household. The spirit of duplicity, which had haunted their married life, during eighteen random years of misunderstanding, distaste and estrangement, still ruled them both—but Bracciano restrained his passion for a while.

He noted the preparations for hasty flight—indicative of Isabella's guilt—but, what more than all else enraged him almost beyond the power of self-control, was the cry of an infant within Isabella's apartments! That child was not his. Whose was it?

Isabella met her husband perfectly unabashed, and, if she expected an immediate explosion, she was agreeably though somewhat misgivingly surprised at his cordial greeting. He asked her where she was going, and suggested that they should go away together. Isabella of course prevaricated—truth is a negative quality between those who doubt each other! Then, to her great surprise, Bracciano began to express himself in terms at once tender and apologetic.

"The faults, and faults there are, have been all on my side," he said, "but I wish to alter all this and begin a new course, happy, and well-regulated. I suggest that bygones be bygones, and that we mutually agree to bury the past. Let us, Isabella, begin an entirely new course of life and live henceforth only for each other." His fair words were matched by the mild expression he contrived to put into his face, and, although the Duchess distrusted them, or at least her sense of hearing, she met his advances handsomely.

The day passed over pleasantly, the *rapprochement* seemed to be real and sincere, and when the Duke invited her to accompany him upon a hunting expedition to Cerreto Guidi, on the morrow, his wife expressed her pleasure and acquiescence. He himself set off early in the day, it was 10th July, and he asked Isabella to follow with her maidens leisurely.



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Whether from innate distrustfulness, or presage of coming evil, the Duchess put off her journey till quite late, and only arrived there as night was coming on. At the entrance to the Villa the Duke met her, holding in a leash two splendid hare-hounds, which he begged her to accept and use on the morrow.

The dinner-party was numerous and merry, but not one of the company was gayer than the host. Isabella sat beside him, and he offered her many lover-like attentions. Everybody remarked these excellent and unusual relations between the Duke and Duchess, and wondered greatly thereat. After a very pleasant musical evening the company separated for the night, and the Duke, passing into his own bedchamber, invited his wife to enter with him.

Was it instinct or was it second sight, which caused Isabella's steps to falter on the threshold? She trembled as her husband held aside the arras, turned deadly pale, and, retreating for a moment, she whispered to her lady-in-waiting, Donna Lucrezia de' Frescobaldi—"Shall I enter, or shall I not?" Bracciano's voice again was raised in gentle persuasiveness, and taking her by her hand, clammy cold as it was, he asked her, laughingly, why she held back.

She bade Donna Lucrezia good-night very tremulously, and then the curtain fell, and Isabella was alone with her lord. The room was in its usual state, but truth to tell, she had not lain there for many a long night, and, as the Duke continued to talk affectionately, and to prepare for bed, she began to feel less alarm. Without more ado she flung herself into a deep lounging-chair and began to meditate and to chatter.

Seating himself by her side, Bracciano began to caress her hands and to fondle her in his arms, and when he noted that she had given herself entirely to his will and pleasure, as an amorous, faithful wife once more, he swiftly reached down for a *corda di collo*—a horse's halter—which he had placed behind the chair. Implanting an impassioned kiss upon those lovely lips, which had so long yearned for a husband's embrace, he adroitly threw the rope round his wife's neck, and pulling it taut in a wild access of rage, he strangled her—holding on until her struggles ceased!

Then he cast her fair body from him, and spurned it with his foot, as though it had been some foul and loathsome thing. Thus perished, in her thirty-sixth year, Isabella de' Medici, wife of Paolo Giordano d'Orsini—as sinful as she was lovely, but much more sinned against than sinning after all.

Before the dawn of day the Duke, accompanied by one attendant only, rode into Florence, and left at the Palazzo Pitti a heartless message for the Grand Duke, requesting him to despatch the brethren of the *Misericordia* to Cerreto Guidi, where was "something which required their attention"—then he continued his course straight on to Rome.



Florence was aghast at this horror, but the Grand Duke Francesco kept his own counsel, and no pursuit followed the murderer. An official announcement was made to the effect that "The Duchess of Bracciano died in a fit of apoplexy." This nobody for a moment believed: whether her brother was privy to the deed is perhaps open to doubt, for he and Isabella were devoted to one another.



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It has been said that it was due to Bianca Buonaventuri's persuasion that the Grand Duke took no steps to vindicate his sister's honour or dishonour. The punishment of assassins mostly leads to further assassinations, and the "*La cosa di Francesco*" had reason to fear for her own life, seeing that her husband and her two dearest friends in Florence had been done brutally to death.

What became of the child, whose cries the Duke of Bracciano had heard, at Villa Poggio Baroncelli, no one seems to have recorded, nor are there any statements extant as to who his father actually was—a boy he was anyhow, and, though his name is uncertain, he was spoken of by the Duchess as "*il mio becchino*," "my little kid."

We may father him as we like—and at least three claimants for that honour are known—Troilo d'Orsini, the Duke's cousin and the Duchess' companion; Lelio Torello, the comely young *Calcio* player, and the favourite page of the Grand Duke Francesco; and, be it said in terms of doubt and horror, the Grand Duke Cosimo! If the latter, then this "Tragedy" is the culmination of all the abominable orgies which have blackened the character of the greatest tyrant and monster of his epoch!

Another story affects the career of the Chamberlain Troilo d'Orsini. He sought sanctuary in France and was befriended by Queen Catherine, to whom his mistress, the unhappy Duchess of Bracciano, had commended "the little kid." Whether he accepted the role of father to save the fame of the defunct Grand Duke is not known, but the unfortunate, if guilty, fugitive was stabbed in the streets of Paris by bravoës sent after him in the pay of the Duke of Bracciano.

CHAPTER V

FRANCESCO—"*Il Virtuoso*"

BIANCA CAPPELLO—"*La Figlia di Venezia*"

PELLEGRINA—"*La Bella Bianchina*"

True Lovers—and False

"We'll have none of her among our dead!"

These were the brutal words of Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, at the villa of Poggio a Caiano on the morning of 21st October 1587. They formed the curt reply his Eminence vouchsafed to Bishop Abbioso of Ravenna, "her" confessor.

The bishop, looking to favours from Ferdinando, who succeeded Francesco as third Grand Duke of Tuscany, sent overnight, the following message to his new Sovereign:



“This moment at 8 p.m. Her Most Serene Highness the Grand Duchess passed to another life. The present messenger awaits your Highness’ orders as to the disposal of the body.”

“The body!”

Yes, it was “the body” of as loving a woman as ever lived in Florence. She had been the most faithful of wives, the most attractive of consorts, and one of the most generous of benefactresses. It was “the body” of as unselfish a sister-in-law as any man, high or low, ever had, who strove her utmost to propitiate, screen, and honour the self-seeking brother of her husband. It was “the body” of Bianca Cappello!



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Ferdinando had, for years, plotted her death, and now he had accomplished his dastardly design—a design which also made him the murderer of his brother, Francesco de' Medici.

To be sure, the double tragedy was adjudged no tragedy by such as waited for favours from the coming ruler, and the mysteriously sudden deaths of Francesco de' Medici and his wife Bianca were assigned to natural causes by well-paid dependants upon Ferdinando's bounty and favour. The bloodguiltiness of fratricidal Ferdinando was well whitewashed by his courtiers, and historians have painted him in colours that ill befit his character. So is history written oftentimes and again.

Pope Sixtus VI. had all the gruesome circumstances placed before him, and whilst he was too weak or too cunning—it matters not which—to charge the princely murderer with his deeds, he tacitly accepted the finding of his commission of inquiry:—
“Ferdinando de' Medici, Cardinal-Priest of San Giorgio, Grand Duke of Tuscany, poisoned his brother and his sister at Poggio a Caiano.”

Now must the story be told, gathered out of records, more or less reliable—more or less biased. It is a story which brings a blush to the cheek and a lump in the throat, and calls forth feelings of detestation for the murderer. At the same time it is a thrilling story of a love stronger than death.

* * * * *

Late one dark night, in November 1563, a gondola shot out from the deep shadow of the church of Sant' Appolinare, upon the Rio della Canonica, in Venice, dipped under the Ponte del Storto, and sped its way, swiftly propelled by two stalwart boatmen.

There was little use to cry out “*Lei!*” or “*Stali!*” for no other craft was afloat at that hour, and the gondola was unimpeded in its course. Crossing the Grand Canal the helmsman made for the Guidecca, and on past the Punta di Santa Maria, and on still, away across the wide and silent lagune, right on to Fusina, on the mainland.

In the herse were two persons—a boy and a girl—fast clasped in each other's arms: she sobbing upon his breast, he comforting her with hot kisses upon her lips. They were Pietro de' Buonaventuri and Bianca de' Cappelli. The elopement was complete, and all Pietro's manhood rose as he held his sweetheart in a strong embrace: he would guard her with his life, come what might. He knew they were safe from present pursuit, for to none had he revealed his plans; but he also knew that a price would be set upon their heads, and daggers dodge their course. Stepping lightly ashore with his sweetheart, the young man paid his boatmen and bade them not hurry back to Venice. Then the young couple took the road to Bologna, on their way to Florence. They had very little money between them, but Bianca had stuffed into her pocket her jewellery and Pietro had just received his quarter's salary.



At the Cappello mansion, on the morrow, was a scene of wild confusion. Messer Bartolommeo Cappello was like a madman; he demanded his daughter at the hand of her faithful maid, Maria del Longhi, and laid the matter at once before the Supreme Council. On enquiry, Pietro Buonaventuri, who had been for long Bianca's most favoured admirer, was neither at the Salviati bank, where he was occupied as a clerk, nor at his lodgings.



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The daughter of a Venetian patrician gone off with a banker's clerk! The idea maddened the old man—he would trace them, and punish them, and all who had assisted their flight. Messer Giovanni Battista Buonaventuri, Pietro's uncle, the manager of the bank; Bianca's maid and her parents; the two *gondolieri* and their wives; and ever so many others were cast into prison.

No news came of the erring couple, and now they were well ahead of pursuit. Two thousand ducats was the blood-money offered for Pietro, dead or alive. Assassins bought for gold followed on the road to Florence, but never caught up their quarry. Messer Bartolommeo's vengeance knew no bounds, and his new wife, Madonna Lucrezia de' Grimani-Contarini fanned the flames. She hated Bianca.

The winter sun had long ago set beyond the stone-pines of Monte Oliveto, and the deep blue Tuscan sky had turned to sober slate, purpled with the fading glow of northern crimson. It was a night near Christmas, and Ser Zenobio Buonaventuri sat at his table, in his modest little one-storied house on the Piazza San Marco, putting the finishing touches to his *precis* of the day's notarial work, in the Corte della Mercanzia. His worthy spouse, Madonna Costanza's weary fingers had just completed the stitching of the last of twelve pairs of kid gloves, for her employers, of the Guild of the Fur and Skin Merchants—the Salvetti, who were her relatives.

They had been talking, as was their wont, about their dashing, handsome son Pietro, the pride of their hearts, who was away in Venice, a clerk under his uncle, Giovanni Battista. They were a lonesome couple, and they deplored their four years' parting from their only boy. To be sure, he had often, indeed regularly, written to them happy, contented letters. Moreover, Messer Giovanni Battista had sent them very satisfactory reports of his application to business, but he named one subject, which filled the hearts of the doting parents with apprehension—it was, of course, a story of romance. Pietro had a sweetheart—that in itself caused little uneasiness; what healthy-minded young fellow had not! But Pietro had an unusually amorous nature, and his love escapades had not been few in Florence. In Venice, "the Court of Venus," he revelled in the fair beauty and the freedom of maidens, so much more lovely and so much less reserved, than the Florentine girls he knew. But when Messer Giovanni Battista named as his *innamorata* the young daughter of one of the proudest patricians of the Serene Republic, the worthy couple were in trepidation lest the lad's passion should lead to regrettable embarrassments.

No love was lost between the sister Republics, and the feeling of hostility in public matters was carried into private life. Pietro never named the romance, but Ser Zenobio, by way of meeting—as was his wont—his troubles half way, penned anxious cautions to his son. The Buonaventuri, though by no means an obscure family, were not *Grandi* like the Cappelli, Lords of Venice. Moreover, Bianca's father was a wealthy man and a member of the Supreme Council, whilst Ser Zenobio was merely a modest notary of no great fame or fortune.



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It was bedtime, but hark! at the door were shuffling steps and voices whispering; and presently there came a gentle tap—repeated once or twice. Ser Zenobio rose to see what was passing outside his house. Peering into the gloom he saw two figures—one a girl's—and a voice he knew full well said:

“Father, we have come to crave shelter and protection.”

“Who are you? My boy Pietro! And what are you doing here in Florence, and at this time of night?”

Madonna Costanza was peeping over his shoulder, and both of them were greatly agitated, and awaited with anxiety Pietro's reply.

“We have come from Venice and are very tired. See, father and mother, this is Bianca.”

Sternly answered Ser Zenobio. “What do you mean, Pietro? What shame is this you have done your parents? Who is Bianca, and what are you doing with her in Florence? You never said you were coming home. Explain yourself, or come not into your father's house.”

Heavy rain was falling, and Bianca was weeping as Pietro led her into the light of the candle his mother held.

“Let them come in anyhow, Zenobio, and we can hear what they have got to say, without the neighbours hearing us,” put in the tender-hearted woman.

With that, Ser Zenobio gave his hand to Bianca and drew her and Pietro within the door, and then, in sterner tones, he commanded his son to tell what he had done.

Briefly Pietro recounted the story of his love and how Bianca returned it. He spoke of Messer Bartolommeo's harshness and of the unkindness of Bianca's stepmother, Madonna Lucrezia de' Grimani-Contarini—the Patriarch's sister. He described their plight and the perils which threatened them. But, when he went on to hint at Bianca's condition, the loving heart of Madonna Costanza melted towards the beautiful, weeping girl, and she drew her to her bosom to embrace and comfort her.

Long and anxious vigil the four kept that winter's night. The outcome of their deliberations was the marriage of Pietro and Bianca, on 12th December, privately, at Ser Zenobio's, with the priestly blessing at San Marco's across the way.

It was deemed expedient that the young people should conceal themselves as much as possible, in view of the extreme measures taken by the Serene Republic. If caught, Pietro was to be slain and Bianca enclosed in a convent. The abduction of a noble Venetian was a capital offence, and the girl's dowry was confiscated by the State.



Soon the news of the elopement ran through Florence and set everybody talking. The reward of two thousand gold ducats was a tempting bait for desperadoes and others in need of coin. Everybody wished to see the beautiful Venetian and have a chat with bold Pietro, for, of course, no Florentine blamed them! Who could?

* * * * *

Don Francesco, Duke Cosimo's eldest son, was in Bavaria making believe-courtship with the Archduchess Joanne, the Emperor's daughter, when the gossip about Pietro and Bianca reached him. He, of course, knew nothing of the Buonaventuri, nor of the Cappelli, but romance is romance in every age and degree of human life! He determined on his return to Florence to find out the amorous young couple and judge for himself of the charms of the fair girl-bride.



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Away back, in the grounds of the monastery of San Marco, was the garden-casino of Cosimo, "*Padre della Patria*," a delightful retreat. Francesco received it as a gift from his father, and there he was accustomed to entertain his friends and familiars.

Passing, on his way thither—as he often did, with a frolicsome party of young bloods—the humble dwelling of the Buonaventuri, he chanced, one day, to look up at a half-open window—the jalousies were thrown back, and there, sitting at her needlework, was the very girl he sought!

There could be no manner of doubt who she was, no Florentine maiden was so fair, and no eyes in Florence were so bright. Casually asking a member of his suite whose house they were passing, Don Francesco tossed up his glove at the girl and passed on.

Another person witnessed this love passage, the Marchesa Anna Mondragone, wife of Francesco's old governor and his chamberlain—she was on the balcony of the house at the corner of the Piazza to make her usual curtsy to the Prince. When the Marchese came home that night, he told his wife that the Prince had seen Bianca Buonaventuri, and had enlisted his services to obtain an interview with the lovely Venetian.

Nothing does a woman of the world love more than to be a go-between where sentimental couples are concerned—be it for their weal or be it for their woe—and so the Marchesa sympathetically addressed herself to the diplomatic task of bringing the two young people together. She struck up a passing acquaintance with Madonna Costanza, and upon the plea that she wished for the opinion of her daughter-in-law upon the question of a Venetian costume she was about to wear at a reception at the palace, asked her to bring Bianca to the Mondragone mansion.

Accordingly, a few days after the affair of the kid glove, the three women were closeted in the Marchesa's boudoir, where the Marchese joined them. Calling off Bianca to look at some jewellery, she whisked her into another room, and presently, leaving her absorbed in the beauty of the gems, retired.

Bianca looked up, somewhat annoyed to find herself alone, and, as she did so, she detected a slight movement behind the arras over the door. The next moment it was raised, and there stepped into the apartment none other than Don Francesco de' Medici!

Bianca stood there, speechless and embarrassed, but the Prince, approaching, took her hand in his, kissed it, and placed her beside him on a couch. When she had recovered from her surprise, Bianca fell upon her knees and, weeping, besought Francesco to befriend her and Pietro. Raising her to the couch once more, he folded her in an impassioned embrace, and promised his protection and what she would besides!



Very greatly moved was the young man by Bianca's rare beauty of face and form, and by the tenderness of her voice, and, perhaps more than all, by the undoubting confidence she reposed in him. Bianca was such a very different sort of girl to cold, unattractive and ill-educated Giovanna.



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Immediate steps were taken to obtain the rescission of the punitive decrees of the Venetian Council, but they proved abortive, and nothing could be done in Venice for Bianca and Pietro. In Florence Don Francesco could do as he willed. His father, Cosimo, had already made over to him much of his sovereign authority.

In July 1564, Bianca Buonaventuri became the mother of a little girl, to whom the name Pellegrina—her own dear mother's name—was given. The days of convalescence quickly passed, and Francesco paid his *innamorata* increasing court. Upon Pietro and Bianca he bestowed a charming palace, on the Lung 'Arno, and provided them with ample means to maintain themselves and it. He appointed Pietro Keeper of his Wardrobe and Clerk of his Privy Closet, on condition that his fascinating girl-wife should be regarded pretty much as "*La cosa di Francesco.*"

The more the Prince saw of Bianca the stronger grew his passion. She was perfectly irresistible. After the fashion of the day, he poured forth his devotion in graceful madrigals—the first of which, began as follows:—

"A rich and shining Gem hath Dame Nature
Taken out of Heaven's treasury, and
Wrapping it in a lustrous human veil
Hath bestowed it on me, saying, 'To thee
I give this beauteous Flora for thine own.'"

Meanwhile preparations were going forward for the reception and marriage of the Austrian Archduchess, who reached Florence on 16th November 1565. Reports of her husband's infatuation for Bianca Buonaventuri had of course travelled to Vienna, and Giovanna had not long to wait for their verification. She could not brook the fouling of the marriage-bed nor permit the *liaison* to go on undenounced.

Francesco met her ill-humour with a frown. He pointed to the morals of her father's court, and to the Florentine cult of Platonism, and he bade her mind her own business and not make troubles. Her appeals to Duke Cosimo and to her brother the Emperor Maximilian were in vain. Francesco plainly hinted that she might go back to Vienna if she liked, for nothing that she could say or do would alter his admiration and his devotion for Bianca Buonaventuri. The strictness of married life had long ago disappeared from the conventions of Florentine society. Mutual relationships proved that men might live as they pleased, so long as they did not renounce the offspring, even when they were assured that it was not their own. The term "*Partiti*"—"Sharers" or "Partners"—perhaps less literally but more emphatically, "kindred souls," was bestowed upon this relationship. Still at no time was Francesco a sensuous man or a libertine like his father. His devotionally-affected mother, Eleanora de Toledo, had trained him in moral ways, and had called forth in him regard for religion and sympathy for charitable objects. Possessed of great self-command and reticence, he never betrayed himself in any way; passionate he was beyond the ordinary, but never revengeful. He loved one



woman, and only one, and to her he proved himself faithful until death took them away together; but she was not Giovanna, his political wife, she was Bianca, the wife of his heart and mind.



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Next to his love of Bianca was his love of money: no prince of his house was ever half so wealthy or so sparing. Avarice came to him through the rapacity of Giovanna's German followers and through her own extravagance.

The year after his marriage, Bianca Buonaventuri was introduced at Court as Bianca Cappello. The young Duchess of course was furious, and pointedly refused all intercourse with her rival. Bianca, on the other hand, laid herself out to propitiate the dour Austrian princess and to stifle slander. Still a mere girl, she was in full command of all the moves in woman's strategy. There was no school like that of Venice for the display of tact and fascination. To be sure, she was living in a crystal palace, but she was perfectly ready to repair all damages. Bianca was severely upon her guard, and her conduct was perfectly correct in every way.

Very rarely did young Cardinal Ferdinando visit Florence, but in 1569, Cosimo, his father, sent for him, that he might embrace him before he died, being, as he thought, on the point of death. At the magnificently immoral Court of the Vatican he had heard the gossip about the lovely Venetian girl who had so completely captured his brother Francesco. Quite naturally, the by no means ascetic young ecclesiastic desired greatly to see for himself the Venetian charmer, and he journeyed to Florence, bent upon judging for himself.

Francesco greeted Ferdinando quite affectionately—there was no reason why he should not—and unhesitatingly introduced him to Bianca. At the impressionable age of twenty, the young Prince fell at once under the spell of those bewitching eyes. Who could resist her? In the fulness of her womanhood Bianca Buonaventuri was without rival among the fair women of Florence, and the boy-Cardinal made, like all the rest, impassioned love to her.

Back again in Rome and busy with his plans for the great Medici Palace in the Eternal City he lost none of his admiration for his brother's "Flora," till evil tongues began to wag around him. Was not he, Ferdinando, Don Francesco's heir-presumptive? Duchess Giovanna had given her husband none but daughters; she, too, was in delicate health and might die without a son being born. What then? Why, of course, Francesco would marry Bianca Buonaventuri, and by her secure the succession. Whether he was destined for the Papacy or not, the Grand Duchy was his by inheritance, and it behoved him, they said, to guard his rights and further his expectations!

Ferdinando listened to this tittle-tattle and it caused ambitious distrust of Francesco and Bianca. As heir-presumptive to a temporal sovereignty, he began to surround himself with all the attributes and circumstances of his position. His palace was regal in its magnificence, his entertainments were upon a princely scale, and he assumed an overbearing demeanour in his relations with Francesco.



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Instigated by inveterate intriguers in his entourage, he quite hypocritically affected to be shocked at his brother's *liaison* with Bianca, although he made no demur at his father's relations with Eleanora degli Albizzi, Cammilla de' Martelli, and other *innamorate*. Giovanna was only too delighted to have the invaluable assistance of the young Cardinal in her campaign against "the hated Venetian." At length he took the bold step of expostulating with Francesco upon his intercourse with the captivating rival of Giovanna. The Prince was furious, and warned his brother never to name the subject again, and on no account to meddle with his private affairs.

Ferdinando replied that he was quite content to abstain at a price. The truth was, that his lavish extravagance had exhausted his revenue and restricted his powers of borrowing, and he was in lack of funds for the maintenance of his state in Rome.

In a weak moment Francesco gave heed to Ferdinando's stipulations, and provided him with funds and increased his family allowance. In gratitude, the Cardinal threw into his brother's teeth the fact of his position as heir-presumptive, and insisted upon the purchase of a piece of land at the confluence of the Pesa with the Arno. There he built his Villa Ambrogiana, which became the seat of an anti-Francesco cabal and the headquarters of an elaborate system of paid spies and toadies.

* * * * *

In September 1571, Francesco issued a decree which ennobled the family of Bianca's husband, and Ser Zenobio, unambitious, pottering notary that he was, and Pietro, and all their male kith and kin, were enrolled "*inter nobiles, inter agnationes et familias ceusetas et connumeratus*." Pietro was now a gentleman of Florence, and he at once assumed the airs of such, as he conceived they should be, but his bad manners and his arrogance brought upon him the contempt of the whole Court.

Francesco at first shielded his protege, but his overbearing conduct and his importunities at length alienated his regard, and he made no attempt to conceal his displeasure. Bianca pleaded with her husband in vain, success had turned his head, and now came "the parting of the ways."

Pietro had consented that Bianca should be "*La cosa di Francesco*"; he too would enjoy life, and he sought his compensation in the embraces of the most attractive and most scheming flirt in Florence, Madonna Cassandra, the wealthy widow of Messer Simone de' Borghiani—born a Riccio. Although well over thirty years of age, she was run after by all the young gallants of the Court and city. Two already had been done to death for love of her—mere boys—Pietro del Calca and Giovanni de' Cavalcanti.

Pietro Buonaventuri vowed he would marry her, but the Ricci would have none of him; and he fell, one summer's night, under the very windows of his wife's bedchamber, pierced with twenty-five savage dagger thrusts. That same night—it was 27th August



1572—Madonna Cassandra was stabbed, in her own apartment, also twenty-five times, and two stark, mutilated corpses were mercifully borne away, in the dawn, by the brethren of the *Misericordia*, and given burial.



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Bianca, widowed, demanded at the hand of her princely lover justice for the spilling of her husband's blood; but, for answer, Francesco drew her gently to his heart and said: "The best thing I can do now, my own Bianca, is to make you, before long, Grand Duchess of Tuscany!"

The Cardinal was keenly interested in this tragedy, not indeed that he took any part therein, but it had a distinct bearing upon his line of conduct, and he noted with apprehension the redoubling of Francesco's devotion to "the hated Venetian."

Bianca, of course, was perfectly aware that she was the real cause of Ferdinando's animosity, in spite of his protestations of admiration and the like. She set about to unmask his real intentions and to circumvent his hypocrisy. Her methods were at once original and full of tact, for she disarmed his aggression by playing to his personal vanity and by furthering his lust for money.

Not once, nor twice, but many times, did Bianca plead with Francesco for his brother, and always with success, and many a substantial sum of money was lodged in the Roman Medici bank at his disposal. Ferdinando began to realise that the only way to his brother's purse was by Bianca's favour, and he began to evince a distinctly amiable spirit in his relations with her.

As marking the improvement in the situation, the Cardinal accepted an invitation to a family gathering at Poggio a Caiano in the autumn of 1575. The Grand Duchess Giovanna quite properly was the hostess, but Bianca Buonaventuri, who was installed in a Casino in the park, which Francesco had given her, and called "Villetta Bini," was of the party, the life and soul of all the entertainments.

During the festivities Bianca managed to be *tete-a-tete* with her brother-in-law in a secluded summer-house. The fascination of three years before was again transcendent. "The Venetian is irresistible," he said afterwards, "I cannot hate her, try how I will!" The truth was, he was madly in love, and he owned it, but his love was, after all, like the hot fumes of a lurid fire.

The year 1576 was a black one in the annals of the Medici. Two beautiful and accomplished princesses of the ruling house were done to death by jealous, unfaithful husbands.

Bianca Buonaventuri was stunned by the terrible end of her dear sister-friends, Isabella de' Medici and Eleanora de Garzia de Toledo. Would her turn come next? The three had been called "The Three Graces of Florence," and certainly each had vied with the other in elegance and fascination, but to Bianca the golden apple had been accorded unanimously. Beauty and charm seemed to be magnets of destruction, and Bianca was upon her guard!



So far as she herself was concerned, she knew that at any time she might still fall a victim to a Venetian desperado, or to a Florentine assassin, and under every friendly guise she feared a foe.



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With respect to the Grand Duchess Giovanna and her detestation of Bianca, a story may be told which has all the appearance at least of probability. Giovanna expressed, not once, but often, her wish for Bianca's death. This, indeed, in those days, and in Florence, the "City of Assassins," was as good as a judicial sentence. The Grand Duchess, moreover, it was reputed, followed up her words by action. "One day," the story goes, "in the month of March 1576, her carriage chanced to meet that of Bianca's upon the Ponte SS. Trinita. She besought her coachman to try and upset her rival, hoping that she might fall into the river below and be drowned! Conte Eliodoro del Castello, her Chamberlain, saw the manoeuvre and prevented a deplorable fatality."

Be this as it may, the Grand Duke not only sympathised with Bianca's fears, but appointed certain of his own bodyguard to take up similar duties near the person of Madonna Buonaventuri, and her progresses henceforward were watched with as much circumstance as his own. At the same time his devotion to the woman he loved increased from day to day. The perils she was called upon to meet were incurred through her unquestioning love of him. This he knew well enough.

Writing on 29th March 1576, Carlo Zorzi, the Ambassador of the Serene Republic, and a warm adherent of his fascinating fellow-countrywoman, says: "I visited the Grand Duke's Villa Pratolino, and also Madonna Bianca Buonaventuri's charming retreat, the Orte Oricellari, and her pretty Villa della Tana, which he had lately given her, looking upon the Arno, and I observed Don Francesco's intimacy with the Madonna. I noted also her extraordinary influence for good upon him.... They appear to be made for one another, and to be absorbed in the same occupations and interests.... She had but to name an object for charity or patronage, and at once she had his hearty approval."

Francesco never concealed his concern at having no son. With his own physicians and the physicians of the Grand Duchess he held many consultations: not a few quacks and empirics also were sought to for nostrums and charms which should obtain by science what nature had so far withheld. He and Bianca held anxious counsel, for he knew that she would lay down her life for him, and would grant him every facility which it was in her loving power to supply.

Reflecting deeply, Bianca saw only one situation: Giovanna was barren of male issue, why should not she herself become once more a mother—the mother of a son, a son of Francesco!

This idea haunted her, but all the same she had no conception; and then a design presented itself to her weary brain—as natural as it was indefensible. For some time she had been getting stout—her age, her constitution, and her rich living were all conducive to that condition. If she was not to be the mother of his child by natural means, she could be so by a subterfuge, which her *embonpoint* would uphold!



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In the spring of 1576 Bianca Buonaventuri gave out that she was *enceinte* and began forthwith her preparations for *accouchement*. She left her palace in the Via Maggio, under the shadow of the Pitti Palace, and took up her abode in the Casino of the Orte Oricellari, which she had lately purchased from the family of Rucellai, and surrounded herself with confidential friends and attendants.

The *denouement* came on 29th August, when the Grand Duke was informed by Bianca's surgeon-accoucheur, that she had been delivered of a child—a boy! Francesco was almost frantic with delight, and he hastened to his beloved Bianca's bedside. Picking up *his* child, he fondled him tenderly and almost smothered him with kisses, and at once gave orders for a ceremonial baptism. Antonio, he called him—after the kindly patron saint of that auspicious day—when he personally handed the child to the Archbishop at the font.

The Grand Duchess was inexpressibly shocked, she refused to see her husband, shut herself up in her own apartments, and demanded an escort to Vienna! The news was not long in reaching Rome, and it made Cardinal Ferdinando furious. In a moment all the blandishments of “the Venetian” were dissipated; the better terms lately established in Florence were renounced, and the angry Prince, in unmeasured language, asserted that the child was not Francesco's.

He knew well enough that what had come to pass, unless unchallenged, would imperil his presumptive title. First it was sought to throw doubt upon Bianca's actual maternity, and next to secure the person of the little boy.

Bianca and Antonio, under a strong guard, were sent off to Pratolino, hers and Francesco's best-loved retreat—they had together planned its beauties. There, during her make-believe convalescence, she came to consider the very serious nature of her love's stratagem, and she determined to make a full confession to her lover. The Grand Duke was thunderstruck, but at once he recognised the emphatic importance of secrecy; for, as Vincenzo Borghini quaintly said: “Florence was the greatest market in the world for tissues and materials of *all* kinds, and full of evil eyes, and ears, and tongues!” Meanwhile Ferdinando had not let the water run under the Arno bridges for nothing. He discovered the surgeon-accoucheur who had attended Madonna Bianca—one Giovanni Gazzi. He maintained the fact of the confinement, but incidentally named the wet nurse, Giovanna Santi. This woman admitted that she had been instrumental in the introduction into Madonna Bianca's chamber of the newly-born son of a reputable woman, who lived with her husband behind the *Stinche*.

No trace could be found of these humble parents of Francesco's supposititious child, and all Ferdinando's enquiries were fruitless. Many were the tales rife, in and out of the palaces and markets, but neither the Grand Duke nor Bianca took any steps to refute them, and after being, as usual, a nine days' wonder, the subject dropped, apparently.



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The Grand Duchess Giovanna gave birth, on 19th May, the following year, to a son—a sickly child to be sure, but the undoubted heir of his father. Ferdinando's hopes were shattered, but he had not done with Bianca Buonaventuri. Within nine months, on 9th February, Giovanna died, somewhat suddenly, and the Cardinal failed not to intimate that Bianca was the cause thereof, and to name poison as her means! The truth is, that the Grand Duchess one day getting out of her sedan-chair, slipped upon the polished marble floor, and, being again near her confinement, a miscarriage resulted, from which she never recovered.

Within two months of the burial of sour-tempered, unlovable Giovanna, the Grand Duke married Bianca, Pietro Buonaventuri's widow, privately in the chapel of the Palazzo Vecchio.

One immediate result of this marriage was the quasi-legitimisation of the child Antonio—a vigorous youngster and certain to outlive frail little Filippo.

Reconciliation with Venice, public marriage, and Coronation were in due order celebrated, and Bianca Cappello, "the true and undoubted daughter of Venice," was enthroned in the Duomo, as the true and lawful Grand Duchess of Tuscany! Cardinal Ferdinando watched all these ceremonials from afar—the only one of his family who declined to honour the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess with his presence during the festivities.

Represented by an inferior official of his household, he remained in Rome, closely shut up in his palace, a spectacle to the world at large of ungovernable prejudice and foiled ambition. His cogitations, however, were very grateful, for he was working out in his intriguing brain a ready method for ridding himself, not alone of the two children, bars to his pretensions, but of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess also! Ferdinando was determined to succeed Francesco as Sovereign of Tuscany, come what might!

Never was a man more changed than the Grand Duke Francesco when he placed the new Grand Duchess beside him on his throne. Twelve years of gloom and disappointment gave way before the advent of the "Sun of Venice."

The best, happiest, and most popular years of his reign exactly synchronise with the period of Bianca's ascendancy. No strife of parties, no pestilence, no foreign war, black-marked those years. Arts and crafts revived with the increase of population and of confidence, and men began to agree that there was something after all to be said—and to be said heartily—for Macchiavelli's "Prince," and his idea of a "*Il Governo d'un solo*."

In this glorious eventide of the Renaissance were reproduced some of the magnificence of its heyday, under Lucrezia and Lorenzo de' Medici.



In the early days of Francesco's infatuation for Bianca he had given forth an impassioned madrigal, which once more he sang to her as his good angel-guardian:—

“Around my frail and battered barque
There is always serenely swimming,
And wakefully watching me,
Lest I perish, a beautiful and powerful Dolphin.
Warn'd and shielded from every buffet
Of the deadly wave, I feel secure.
Fierce winds no longer cause me fear.
I seek succour no more from oars and sails
Safely accompanied by my loving Guardian!”



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Francesco's devotion for Bianca continued as the years sped on their way, and he noted with supreme satisfaction that every word and action of hers were marked with unquestioning affection. The loves of Francesco and Bianca at Pratolino recalled those of Giuliano and Simonetta at Fiesole, whilst the wits, and beaux, and beauteous women who consorted there, revived the glories of the Platonic Academy.

Montaigne, who visited the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, both at the Pitti Palace and at Pratolino, in 1580, says: "I was surprised to see her take the place of honour above her husband.... She is very handsome ... and seems to have entirely subjugated the Prince."

The Cardinal was not unobservant of the trend of Florentine affairs. Plots and counterplots were quite to his liking. The Pucci conspiracy and the vengeance upon the Capponi affected him closely. Francesco was not ignorant of the patronage and encouragement vouchsafed to his secret enemies by his eminent brother in Rome—and he watched each move.

The peace and prosperity which marked the progress of the "City of the Lion and the Lily," after Bianca Buonaventuri mounted the Grand Ducal throne, were not regarded complacently by the uneasy Cardinal. The very fact that she was the admirable cause thereof, embittered his Eminence's soul, and his spleen was mightily enlarged by the creatures who pandered to his vicious ill-nature. The fascination of the Goddess engendered detestation as love was turned once more to hate in the crucible of his passions.

"She is nothing but a strumpet, and without a drop of royal blood," so he reasoned, and so he spoke; and he backed up his aphorism by conniving at the foul report in 1582, which accused "Bianca Buonaventuri"—as he always styled her—of causing poison to be administered to poor little Filippo—Giovanna's puny, sickly child! He even had the audacity to accuse Francesco of complicity, because he had ordered no elaborate court mourning, conveniently ignoring the fact that a gracious compliment was paid to Spanish custom and court etiquette, by the simplicity of the obsequies.

Plotters of other men's wrongs were ever inconsistent! One would have thought that Ferdinando would have hailed the removal of the only legitimate heir, before himself, to the Grand Duchy, but the delirium of jealousy and the fury of animosity in the Cardinal's evil heart, found a sort of culmination two years later. Bianca's daughter, Pellegrina, the only offspring of Pietro Buonaventuri, gave birth to a child. She had married, shortly after the public nuptials of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, Count Ulisse Bentivoglio di Magiola of Bologna—a by no means happy marriage as it turned out. This child, a boy, their first-born—indeed poor, pretty Pellegrina's love-child—the Cardinal affirmed "Bianca Buonaventuri" had tried to pass off as her own—another subterfuge confirmative of the first, and that his brother was conversant with the intrigue!



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The Grand Duke met the gossip with impassive silence—the wisest thing he could have done—and the Grand Duchess laid herself out to make Cardinal Ferdinando utterly ashamed of himself and his foul aspersions. The integrity of her conduct, and Francesco's sapient conduct of the Government were the admiration of all Italy.

So struck was the Pope with the peace and happiness of the Medicean rule, and the personal characteristics of "the good wife and beneficent consort," as he styled her, that he bestowed upon the Grand Duchess the rare distinction of the "Golden Rose"! At first his Holiness desired the Cardinal de' Medici to head the special mission as Legate, and talked seriously to his Eminence upon his relations with the Sovereigns of Tuscany. He pointed out quite clearly the line of conduct Ferdinando should pursue—the direct converse of the position he had taken up.

The Cardinal began to reflect that the death of little Prince Filippo, and the fact that Francesco had not proclaimed Antonio his heir-apparent, left him at all events the undoubted heir-presumptive. Consequently, when the Florentine Mission, under Archbishop Giuseppe Donzelle of Sorrento, returned to Rome, and the Legate conveyed to him a cordial invitation from the Tuscan Sovereigns to visit Florence, he accepted it with the best grace he could command—keeping, at the same time, his true feelings and intentions to himself.

* * * * *

Pageant and dirge trip up each other often enough in the course of human life! The lives especially of sovereigns, through the strong light ever beating upon their thrones, are always exposed to vicissitudes of fortune. The Papal Mission had scarcely passed out of recollection, and everything in Florence was happy and prosperous—sunshine is always brightest before eclipse—when the spectre of tragedy again cast its dark shadow over the path of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess.

A right merry party was that which set off from the Palazzo Pitti to the Villa Poggio a Caiano one bright morning in October 1587. The "hunter's moon was up," for the harvest had been gathered in, and the new luscious grapes were in the vat. Pheasant awaited the coming of the sportsmen in the home-coppices, wild boar in the thickets of Monte Ginestra, and other game was ready for the hawk-on-wrist and the dog-in-leash along the smiling valley of the Ombrone.

Hunting and sporting parties were now quite in the Grand Duchess' way. Unused to such exploits upon the canals and lagunes of Venice, she had, from the moment of her elevation, sympathetically entered into the joys of horsemanship and the pastimes of the countryside. Few could beat her in point-to-point—she feared no obstacle, nor dreaded accident, the charge of wild game terrified her not.



“Magnificent,” she wrote, on 15th November 1586, “was the sport.... I actually saw four very large boars fall dead at my feet.” The Grand Duke, of course, as became “a perfect gentleman,” was at one with Bianca in love for, and skill in, all exercises in the open air. His seat was firm, his aim was good, and he revelled in the chase.



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Still of Poggio a Caiano he had unpleasing memories, for there he met Giovanna of Austria, and had the first taste of her ill-humour as he rode by her side at her scornful entry into Florence, twelve years before. But Bianca had wrought a vast change in his disposition and environment. She had interwoven fancy and reality, and Francesco was now serenely happy. Often did he sing tender madrigals as they together sauntered in the woods and indulged in pastoral pursuits.

“Sing! sing! ye birds I am wide awake
Tho’ silent ’mid your tender harmony;
And yet I would fain join your sweet concert,
Whilst upon the face of fair Bianca,
'Mirror of Love'—I fix my yearning eyes.”

The Cardinal was one of this particular hunting party—indeed, the hunt had been arranged entirely in his honour, and he expressed himself as charmed with everything—and especially with the Grand Duchess. This was his first State visit to his brother’s Court and his affability knew no bounds. Bianca, on her part, laid herself out to entertain her brother-in-law, and made herself especially attractive and gracious. The presence of the Archbishop of Florence added greatly to her satisfaction and Francesco’s. Very wisely, young Antonio was sent to Pratolino with his governor and tutors, and in the merry company no personality could, in any way, recall unhappy incidents of the past. The days were passed in the exhilaration of sport, and the evening repasts were followed by animated conversation, ballets, music and recitations. All the brightest ornaments of the Court were present at the Grand Duchess’ behest.

Bianca, herself, in the highest spirits, dressed, sang, and danced, bewitchingly. The frolics of the Orte Oricellari were transferred to the delightful hunting-box, and everybody and everything was as gay as gay could be, and no one troubled about the morrow.

Alas, when the merriment was at its height, a sudden stop was put to all the festivities, for, during the night of 8th October, the Grand Duke was taken ill with severe spasms and violent sickness. The Grand Duchess was summoned to his side, and full of alarm and devotion, she at once despatched a mounted messenger into Florence to command the attendance of the Court physicians—Messeri Giulio Agnolo da Barga and Ferdinando Cino da Roma.

They assured her that their princely patient was merely suffering from an error in diet—the dish of mushrooms, of which he had partaken freely overnight, had not been well prepared—but they considered that all ill effects would disappear as suddenly as they had arisen. The report of Francesco’s illness reached the Vatican, and the Pope addressed a kindly letter to the Grand Duchess, conveying a good-natured homily to the Grand Duke upon the evils of gluttony!



Bianca cast aside her sparkling coryphean tinsel, and, putting on a quiet gown and natty little cap, appointed herself nurse-in-chief to her dear husband, and no one was better fitted for the post. Torquato Tasso, her Poet-Laureate, noted her tender, compassionate character and her sweet sympathy with human infirmities. In 1578 he had put forth the first of his *Cinquanta Madrigali*, with a pathetic dedication to the Grand Duchess.



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“Had your Highness,” he wrote, “not experienced yourself both good and evil fortune, you could not so perfectly understand, as you do, the misfortunes of others.” He goes on, in his *Rime*, to extol his patroness:

“Lady Bianca, a kindly refuge
Holds and cheers one in sad and weary pain.”

Matters assumed, however, a very different aspect on the morning of the tenth, for the Grand Duchess was seized with symptoms exactly similar to those of the Grand Duke, whose condition by no means warranted the confidence of the physicians. Alarm spread through the villa and the guests departed in the greatest anxiety. The Cardinal alone remained, and his lack of solicitude and general indifference gave the members of the suite occasion for remark and suspicion.

He assumed the air of the master of the place, and gave orders as he deemed well. Into the household he introduced some servants of his own, and ordered out his Florentine bodyguard. Urgent messages passed to and fro between him and his brother Piero de' Medici, and communications were opened with Domina Cammilla, the Cardinal's stepmother in the convent of Saint Monica. These did not allay the universal distrust.

Bianca's own physician failed to diagnose her indisposition, whilst the Court physicians scouted the idea—already being translated into words—that the sudden attacks of the Grand Ducal couple were due to *poison*. What else could it be? The symptoms pointed that way and no other!

On the third day tertiary fever intervened, with incessant thirst and fits of delirium, and Francesco's condition caused the gravest anxiety. Bianca was inconsolable. Unable to wait upon him, and suffering exactly as was he, she penned, propped up with pillows, a piteous appeal to the Pope, in which she craved his Holiness's prayers and benedictions, and also his fatherly protection for Francesco and herself. She said: “I do not feel at all sure of the Cardinal.” The pontiff replied sympathetically, and assured her that no wrong should be done her or the Grand Duke by anybody.

Francesco showed no signs of improvement, but gradually got weaker. When too late for any remedial measures to have effect, the physicians, in private conference, agreed that the cause of his seizure was poison, but—looking from the clenched hand of the dying prince to the open palm of his successor—they, in sordid self-interest, held their tongues. Who had administered the fatal drug, and when, and where, had better not be published! If by a fraternal hand, then it was no concern of theirs!

The Grand Duke expired in agony on the tenth day after his seizure. Bianca could not leave her couch to soothe his last moments. She was nearly as far gone as he, and her attendants waited upon her with the gloomiest forebodings. To her impassioned cries



for her husband, they returned deceptive answers. None of her kith and kin were near to comfort her. Her only brother, Vettor, had been dismissed the Tuscan Court in the year of her coronation for unseemly and presumptuous behaviour, and his wife went back with him to Venice. There was no time and no one to correspond with her favourite cousin Andrea. Her tenderly-loved daughter, Pellegrina was at Bologna, nursing her own little Bianca, lately born, and could not travel so far as Florence.



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Little Antonio would have been an affectionate companion in his loving foster-mother's illness, but the child was at Pratolino with Maria and Eleanora, unhappy Giovanna's daughters. The former, just fifteen years old, had been Bianca's special care. She was a precocious child, and her stepmother imparted to her some of her own delightful inspirations—the two were inseparable. What a comfort she would have been in gentle ministrations to the suffering Grand Duchess!

Perhaps, had pain-racked, dying Bianca imagined the splendid destiny of the attractive young Princess Maria, she might have gathered no little solace. Could she but have seen her own example and her precepts reincarnated in a Queen of France—for Maria became the consort of Henry II., and ruled him, his court and realm—she would have turned her face to the wall with greater equanimity.

Just before his death the Grand Duke sent for Ferdinando, told him he had been poisoned by no one but himself, and charged him with the double murder, for he had constant news, of course, of Bianca's illness. He asked him in that solemn hour to honour both of them in burial, to protect the little boy Antonio and his two young daughters, Maria and Eleanora, and to treat kindly all who had been faithful and true to Bianca and himself. Then he gave him the password for the Tuscan fortresses, and asked for his confessor, and so he passed away. As soon as Francesco was dead, Ferdinando demanded to be admitted to the bedside of Bianca. Concealing from her the fatal news, he intimated that Francesco had consigned to him the conduct of affairs, and in the most heartless, inhuman fashion possible, bade her prepare for death!

"See," he added, "I have brought your friend, Abbioso; you may as well make your confession to him as Francesco has done to Frate Confetti."

Bianca, though only partially conscious, knew exactly what the Cardinal meant, and railed at him for his cruelty. In delirium she made passionate appeals to Francesco, and wildly denounced her treacherous brother-in-law. Her cries resounded through the villa, but they stirred no feeling of regret or compunction in Ferdinando's breast. He gloated, fiend-like, over his victim's sufferings. It was not by chance he procured the potent poison he had used. The empiric-medico at Salerno had been well paid to furnish a potion that should, by its slow but deadly action, prolong the tortures of the sufferers! A less vindictive murderer would have secured his victim's quick release, but, during ten terrible days of sickness, delirium and agony, he witnessed the inevitable progress of his vengeance! If Cosimo, his father, had called his young son Garzia "Cain," what would not he have called the man, the bloodthirsty Ferdinando?

Bianca's illness followed precisely the course of the Grand Duke's. The tearful faces of her attendants, and the noise of preparations for his burial, conveyed to her in calmer moments the terrible truth, and she had no longer any wish to live—parted from Francesco. Bianca was already dead. She called the bishop and made a full confession of her whole life's story, hiding nothing, palliating nothing. Out of a full heart

she spoke—that heart which had been the source of all her love and her happiness, her misery and her sin.



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Antonio she commended to Bishop Abbioso's care, and begged him send the news of her death and Francesco's to Cavaliere Bartolommeo Cappello at Venice. After absolution and last communion, Bianca Cappello, "Daughter of Venice," Grand Duchess of Tuscany, breathed her last in peace—the delirium having abated—on the evening of 30th October, just two days after her husband.

A *post-mortem* examination, or at least the form of one, upon the Grand Duke revealed, it was said, advanced disease of the liver, the consequences of his unwisdom in the use of cordials and elixirs! With the connivance of the Court physicians, Ferdinando put out a proclamation that the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess—he was compelled to use the title then in speaking of Bianca—had died from "attacks of malarial fever, induced by the unhealthy atmosphere of Poggio a Caiano."

* * * * *

Francesco's obsequies were attended by all the stately ceremonies usual in the Medici family. Conveyed into Florence by the *Misericordia* on the evening of his death, his body was exposed for three days in state in the Palazzo Pitti, and then carried in solemn procession to the church of San Lorenzo for burial.

If merely to save appearances, or to conceal his real intention, the new Grand Duke ordered the body of the Grand Duchess to be placed beside that of her husband in the Cappella Medici of the church. For six brief hours it was suffered to remain, and then, at midnight, agents of Ferdinando, well paid for their profanity, deported all that was mortal of the brilliant "woman whom he hated" to an unknown grave in the paupers' burial plot beyond the city boundary! "For," said he, "we will have none of her among our dead!"

Such was the end of the beautiful and accomplished Bianca Cappello—"Bianca, so richly endowed," as wrote one of her panegyrists, "by nature, and so refined by discipline, able to sympathise with and help all who approached her—her fame for good will last for ever!" The wiles of the serpent and his cruel coils had crushed the "Daughter of Venice": it was the triumph of an unworthy man over a lovable woman. She was not the only victim Ferdinando's poison overpowered—Giovanni de' Pucci, whom the Pope was about to advance to the Cardinalate, an inoffensive ecclesiastic, incurred Cardinal Ferdinando's displeasure by his sympathy with the Grand Duchess. He died mysteriously after drinking a glass of wine which Ferdinando had poured out for him![A]

[Footnote A: In 1857, when the Medici graves at San Lorenzo were opened, the bodies of the Grand Duke Francesco and the Grand Duchess Giovanna were easily identified. The bodies also of Maria, the unhappy victim of her father, Cosimo, with the fatal wound; of Eleanora de Garzia de Toledo, Piero's murdered wife; and of Isabella, Duchess of Bracciano, were also recognised. All five were in wooden chests, but



robbed of the costly grave-clothes and jewels. *There was no trace of the body of the Grand Duchess Bianca!]*



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Bianca had not been many days buried when ominous reports began to be rife all over Florence and along the countryside. People asked each other why the body of the Grand Duchess had been snatched. "Was it," they said, "to hide the real culprit and to stifle awkward questions?" The tongues of the night-birds, who had thrown that precious body aside contemptuously, and had not been permitted to mark the grave in any way, were loosened, they gave the name of their employer—Ferdinando's major-domo.

That was quite enough to fix preferentially the guilt upon the guilty party, but when the medical advisers of the new Grand Duke admitted reluctantly that neither Francesco nor Bianca had died from malarial causes, the chitter-chatter of the villa and the palace became unmuzzled, and first one and then another domestic—more or less personal—contributed his piece of private knowledge of the facts of the double tragedy.

Putting these all together piecemeal, the story reads somewhat as follows: Cardinal Ferdinando had for a very long time determined that it was absolutely essential to his succession to the Grand Duchy that Don Francesco should not be permitted to have a child—a boy, by his second wife, Bianca.

Francesco's health was indifferent and he seemed likely not to live long, but, be that as it might, the Cardinal joined the hunting-party at Poggia a Caiano fully intent upon making an attempt upon the lives of both Francesco and Bianca. Among his suite was a valet, one Silvio, a man of fiendish ingenuity, who had made himself invaluable to his master in many an intrigue. To him Ferdinando committed the task of mixing the poison, which he procured from Salerno, in the food or beverage of the Grand Ducal couple.

Silvio made several attempts to accomplish his commission, but the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess did not touch the dishes—specially treated as they passed from the kitchen to the hall—whilst in their cooling wine cups, so much beloved of Francesco, the poison failed of its effect. To be sure, two days before the Grand Duke's actual seizure, he rejected a game-pasty which had a peculiar taste, and the Grand Duchess had, as she thought, detected her brother-in-law playing with the wine glasses, which she at once caused to be replaced by others.

Upon the evening when a ragout of mushrooms was served at the supper-table, it was observed that the Cardinal quite emphatically declined to partake of the dish, but that he pressed Francesco and Bianca to eat largely of it! Bianca ate sparingly, and advised her husband to follow her example; her intuition perceived danger in the delicacy, alas, it was in vain!

This was all, perhaps, that came out concerning the tragedy, but the Cardinal met the story with another. He caused it to be bruited about that Bianca had tried to circumvent *his* death! For this purpose she had herself made a cake, which she urged him to eat, but which Francesco insisted upon tasting, whereupon she consumed what he had left.

The Cardinal further put into the Grand Duchess's mouth the plausible lament; "We will die together if Ferdinando escapes!"



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Nobody believed this version, which merely confirmed the real truth, for neither Francesco or Bianca had ever expressed a wish for Ferdinando's death.

Within three hours of the death of Francesco, Ferdinando rode swiftly into Florence, accompanied by a suite of his own creatures—not a single officer of the Grand Ducal house accompanied him. His escort was fully armed and so was Ferdinando. Stopped at the gate by the guard, he gave, to the utter surprise of the subaltern, the Grand Ducal password, and was accorded the Sovereign's salute. Thence he passed at a gallop to the Palazzo Pitti, where he placed personally his seal upon the great doors, and then put up at the Palazzo Medici.

A messenger was despatched before dawn to the Dean of the Duomo to order the big bell to sound. This was the first intimation to Florence that the Grand Duke Francesco was dead. The Lords of the Council hastened from their beds to the Palazzo Vecchio, where Ferdinando joined them, and, there and then, required them to pay him their allegiance.

Thus Ferdinando de' Medici became third Grand Duke of Tuscany. His character as a ruler may not be discussed here at length, but of him it has been succinctly said: "He had as much talent for government as is compatible with the absence of all virtue, and as much pride as can exist without true nobility of mind."

* * * * *

When Pietro Buonaventuri so complacently resigned his bewitching young wife to be the plaything of Don Francesco de' Medici, he also yielded up the guardianship of his little daughter, Pellegrina, and she lived with her mother in the private mansion Bianca had received from the Prince near the Pitti Palace.

At the time of the assassination of Pietro the child was eight years old—a lovely girl, resembling, in person and manners, her attractive mother. The Prince took her under his special care, in fact adopted her, and treated her as if she was his own dear daughter. Naturally, the Duchess Giovanna resented this arrangement, and strictly forbade her own daughter, Eleanora—a year Pellegrina's junior—to have anything to do with the base-born child of her hated rival.

Nevertheless, the sparkling, merry little girl became the pet of the Court—where she was always greeted as "*La Bella Bianchina*." and no one dreamed of throwing her father's evil career in her face. At the public marriage of the Grand Duke and the widowed Bianca Buonaventuri, Pellegrina was, of course, a prominent figure. She had grown tall and had inherited the charming traits of her sweet mother. She was fourteen years old, and eligible as the bride of any acceptable suitor. Her dowry was considerable; equal indeed to that of the Princess Eleanora; and the Grand Duke was no less solicitous than the Grand Duchess about the choice of a husband.



At first it was hoped that a young Florentine might be the successful lover, and indeed such an one appeared to have been secured, when young Pietro Strozzi—the son of Messer Camillo di Matteo negli Strozzi—one of Pellegrina’s sponsors at her baptism—was judged worthy of the matrimonial prize. They were accordingly betrothed, but the inconstancy of Love was once more proved, for the young fellow was a wayward youth, and, although only seventeen, had fixed his affections elsewhere!



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The match was broken off, but within a year of Pietro's renunciation another aspirant for Pellegrina's hand and dowry appeared in the person of a distinguished young foreigner—Conte Ulisse Bentivoglio de' Magioli da Bologna. He was reputed to be the natural son of Signore Alessandro d'Ercole Bentivoglio, and had been adopted by his maternal uncle, Conte Giorgio de' Magioli. His mother's name was Isotta—a beautiful girl at the Court of the Lords of Bologna, who had romantic relations with both Signore Alessandro and Conte Giorgio. Which of the two was Conte Ulisse's father mattered far less, from a matrimonial point of view, than the fact that the prospective bridegroom was unusually wealthy and well-placed.

Conte Ulisse, twenty years of age, went to Florence along with the Bologna deputation to greet Grand Duke Francesco upon his marriage with Bianca Buonaventuri. Then it was that he first saw Pellegrina, and was accepted as her betrothed husband. He remained in Florence a considerable time, and took a leading part in the splendid festivities and the notable *giostre*, wherein he was hailed as a champion in the "Lists."

The marriage was celebrated three months after the Grand Ducal wedding, and, amid the tears of her mother, Pellegrina departed with her husband for Bologna. Everything went well for a time with the youthful Count and Countess. Grand Duchess Bianca paid them several visits, and Countess Pellegrina spent much time in Florence. For example, she took part in the marriage ceremonies of Virginia de' Medici, unhappy Signora Cammilla's child, in 1586, with Don Cesare d'Este. The year after her coronation the Grand Duchess went in state to Bologna, to assist at the accouchement of her daughter. A little son made his appearance, and as though to fix the real parentage of the Count, he was baptised Giorgio.

Two more sons came to seal the happiness of the young couple—Alessandro and Francesco—and two daughters—Bianca and Vittoria—and then the happy relations between the Count and Countess underwent a change, and her husband's love ceased to peep into Pellegrina's heart. The Count was much occupied with military matters, like most young nobles of his age; he also undertook diplomatic duties, and was sent, in 1585, as the special ambassador of Bologna, to congratulate Pope Sixtus V. upon his elevation to the Pontifical throne.

At the Roman Court he met Don Piero de' Medici—the Florentine envoy—and, through him, got into evil company. He returned to Bologna unsettled in his feelings, and looking for excitement and illicit intercourse. His passion for Pellegrina was passing away, and he sought not her couch but the company of a lovely girl of Bologna who had fascinated him.

By degrees his love for his sweet wife grew cold, and at length he had the effrontery to establish his *innamorata* in his own mansion. Pellegrina protested in vain, but the more she admonished her husband the more flagrant became the *liaison*. Cast off and even spurned in her own house, the poor young Countess longed for her dear, dead mother's

presence. She had now no one to counsel and comfort her. Left pretty much to herself, she yearned for companionship and love. She was only twenty-four, and still as attractive as could be.



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What she sought came at last, when young Antonio Riari took up his residence at Bologna as a student-in-law. He was the great-grandnephew of the infamous creature of reprobate Pope Sixtus IV.—Count Girolamo de' Riari—of the Pazzi Conspiracy a hundred years before. Good-looking, gay, amorous, and blessed with robust health and ample means, the young man was the lover of every pretty girl.

Attracted mutually to one another, the Countess Pellegrina yielded herself to her admirer's embraces—although Antonio was a mere lad of seventeen. The intimacy grew until news of it reached Count Ulisse's ears in the boudoir of his sweetheart! The gossip doubtless was garnished to the taste of the retailers and of the receiver.

The Count turned upon his wife—as he might have been expected to do, seeing that he had habitually been unfaithful, and taxed her with unfaithfulness! Innocently enough, Pellegrina told him exactly how matters stood, craved his forgiveness, and begged for the restitution of marital rights. Conscious of his own turpitude and irregularity of life, he met her protestations with scorn, and, seeing in the episode an opportunity of legalising his illicit lusts, he denounced her publicly and set spies to report her conduct.

These mercenaries, knowing the mind of their master, did not hesitate to translate his words into deeds; and very soon they were able to realise their dastardly purpose. Although the Countess had warned young Riario of the danger which menaced them both, and was, for a time, more circumspect in her intercourse with her lover, the fascination of mutual passion overbore the dictates of prudence.

Like a “bolt from the blue” fell the blow—or blows—which, if not delivered by Count Ulisse in person, were his *de jure*. Two paid assassins chanced upon the loving couple one day, clasped in each other's arms, in a summer-house in a remote part of the Bentivoglio gardens!

Swift and certain was the aim! Pellegrina and Antonio were discovered, late at night, each stabbed through the back, and strangled with cords—dead—with eyes of horror gazing wildly at the pale moon! No shrift had they, but bitter tears were shed by tender sympathisers, and accusing fingers were pointed at the Count.

What cared he! He merely shrugged his shoulders and sardonically hinted that as he had brought his wife from Florence—from Florence, too, had he learned how to take personal vengeance upon a faithless spouse and her accomplice! The dark deed was done on 21st September 1589, and Count Ulisse lived on with his evil conscience and his new wife till 1618, when he, too, fell in Bologna by an assassin's blade—just retribution for the foul murder of lovely Pellegrina Buonaventuri.



B O O K R A G S

CHAPTER VI

ELEANORA DEGLI ALBIZZI

SFORZA ALMENI



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CAMMILLA DE' MARTELLI

Pathetic Victims of Fateful Passion

“*Di fare il piacere di Cosimo*”—To serve for Cosimo’s pleasure! In such words, an immoral father condemned his lovely daughter to feed the unholy lust of the “Tyrant of Florence”—Moloch was never better served.

Eleanora and Cammilla, cousins after the flesh, were each dedicated as a *cosa di Cosimo*—the property of Cosimo. If he did not murder their bodies, he slew their souls—that was the manner of the man, the fashion of his time.

Romantic attachments, full of thrilling pathos, ran then like golden threads through the vulgar woof and web of woe and death. Someone has said that “Love and murder are next of kin”; true, indeed, was this what time Eleanora and Cammilla were fresh young girls in Florence. They were each made for love, and love they had; but that love was the embrace of a living death, selfish, cruel, and damning. Better, perhaps, had they died right out by sword or poison than suffer, as they did, the extremity of pathos—the shame of illicit love!

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The tragedy of Eleanora degli Albizzi was, perhaps, the most callous and the most pathetic of all those lurid domestic vicissitudes which traced their source to the “Tyrant of Florence,” Cosimo I., Grand Duke of Tuscany.

She was not the only Eleanora whose name as, alas, we know, spelled misfortune. Eleanora de Toledo of the broken heart, and Eleanora de Garzia de Toledo of the bleeding heart, awaited in Paradise Eleanora degli Albizzi of the heart of desertion.

“*Albizzi o Medici?*” had once and again divided the power of Florence, but in the course of high play in the game of politics the latter held the better hands, drew more trumps, and gained rubber after rubber. But what a splendid record the Albizzi had! When the Medici were only tentatively placing their feet upon the ladder of fame, Orlando, Filippo, Piero, Luca, and Maso—to name a few only of those leaders of men and women—had scored the name Albizzi as *Anziani, Priori, Gonfalonieri, and Capitani di Parte Guelfa*.

In fact that aristocratic family dominated Florence and the Florentines until Salvestro, Giovanni, and Cosimo, of the democratic Medici, disputed place and power, and built up their fortunes upon the ruins of their rivals’ faults and favours.

Eleanora was the daughter of Messer Luigi di Messer Maso degli Albizzi. This Messer Maso, a hundred years before, had not seen eye to eye with his masterful brother—the autocratic Rinaldo, but, noting the trend of political affairs, had, truth to tell, turned traitor to the traditions of his family, and had thrown in his lot with the rising house of Medici.



Messer Luigi was not a rich man, but in fairly comfortable circumstances, and slowly retrieving the shattered fortunes of his ancestors. His mansion was in the fashionable Borgo degli Albizzi, and he owned other town property and some farms in the *contado*. He held, too, several public offices, and was an aspirant to a Podestaship, as a stepping-stone to that most coveted of all State appointments, the rank of ambassador.



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In some way or another he gained the favourable notice of Duke Cosimo, and seems to have rendered him some acceptable service: at all events, he found himself at home in the entourage of the Sovereign. By his second wife, Madonna Nannina, daughter of Messer Niccolo de' Soderini—a lineal descendant of the self-seeking and notorious adviser of Don Piero de' Medici—he had two daughters, Constanza and Eleanora, named after her godmother, the Duchess Eleanora.

Constanza was married to Antonio de' Ridolfi, the same year that the poor broken-hearted Duchess sobbed herself to death at Pisa after the terrible tragedies of 1557 and 1562, and Messer Luigi was left with Eleanora, the pride of her father's heart, the joy of his home. As beautiful as any girl in Florence, she was just sixteen, highly accomplished, full of spirits, and endowed with some of that pride and haughty bearing which had distinguished her forbears. She had, in short, all the makings of a successful woman of the world.

Admitted to intimacy and companionship with the children of the Duke, he had noted the graceful development of the bright young girl's physical and mental charms; and he had given evidence of his interest in her by many pleasant courtesies, both to herself and to her parents.

Messer Luigi soon observed the partiality of his Sovereign for his fascinating young daughter, and being a man anxious, after the manner of a true Florentine, even in those degenerate days, to better himself and his family, he saw that something more than mere romance could be made out of the situation. The commercial assets of his daughter's person loomed large in his estimation, for if the Duke took a serious fancy to Eleanora, it was conceivable that she might one day become his consort!

When the girl told her father of the Duke's kindness to her, and of his embraces and tender words, he counselled her not to repel her admirer, for what he meant was all for her good and for the distinction of her family. The *liaison* went on unrebuked, encouraged by Cosimo's promises and Luigi's hopes. Nannina's tears of apprehension were brushed aside by Eleanora's kisses.

Very tactfully Messer Luigi let the Duke know that his attentions were acceptable, and that he and his good wife were vastly honoured by his condescension to their daughter. In view of favours to come, he plainly intimated that Eleanora was quite at his disposal, or, as he put it, quite courtier-like, *di fare il piacere di Cosimo!*

The Duke needed no encouragement as the universal lover and ravisher of the most comely maidens in Florence. He was only too pleased to carry off this charming young *druda* to his villa at Castello, and Eleanora was nothing loth to go—the prospect of a throne has always been an irresistible attraction to women in all ages!



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Cosimo's sons were well aware, as indeed, was the whole Court and the city too, of their father's love affairs. The Duke and the Prince-Regent Francesco were mutually suspicious, and fawning, faithless courtiers fanned the flame of jealousy and mistrust between them. The father threw Bianca Cappello into his son's face, and he, in exchange, flung back Eleanora degli Albizzi! At length, Cosimo desisted from the acrimonious warfare, content to let things be as they might be at the Pitti Palace and Pratolino, whilst he was left in seclusion with his *innamorata* at Castello. Cardinal Ferdinando, a boy of fifteen, lived in Rome, and Don Piero, only ten, was indifferent to such matters, but Duchess Isabella of Bracciano was intensely interested, an amiable go-between her father and Don Francesco. Cosimo did nothing with respect to removing the reproach attached to his intrigue with Eleanora degli Albizzi, and, consequently, when in December 1566, a little girl was born to him, the whole of Florence was conventionally shocked. Duchess Giovanna, Don Francesco's sanctimonious Austrian wife, offered a vigorous protest, and declined to have anything to do with the unfortunate young mother and her dissolute old lover. Her feeling ran so strongly, both with respect to the *liaison* of Cosimo and to her husband's intrigue with the "beautiful Venetian," that she made an urgent appeal to her brother, the Emperor Maximilian to intervene.

It was said that the young Duchess sent a copy of her letter to Duke Cosimo, who was furious at her conduct. He asked her by what right she had dared to stir up ill-will at the Imperial court, and advised her to mind her own business in the future. To the Emperor Cosimo, addressed a dignified reply to the Imperial censure: "I do not seek for quarrels," he said, "but I shall not avoid them if they are put in my way by members of my own family."

What Messer Luigi and Madonna Nannina degli Albizzi thought and said, no one has related. They could not say much by way of complaint, for they had foreseen, from the beginning of the Duke's intimacy with Eleanora, that an "accident," as they euphemistically called it, was to be expected. They had, in fact, sold their child to her seducer, and must be content with their bargain!

Cosimo, for his part, was delighted with his dear little daughter, come to cheer the autumn of his life. He loaded Eleanora with presents, watched by her bedside assiduously, and told her joyfully that he meant to marry her and so legitimatise their little child. Born at Messer Luigi's, the baby girl was anxiously watched lest emissaries from the Pitti Palace should try to get hold of her.

The Duke made indeed no secret of his pleasure, and moreover consulted with his most trusted personal attendant, Sforza Almeni, how the legitimatisation could be best effected, so as to secure for the little lady a goodly share in the Ducal patrimony, and also a pension in perpetuity for the mother, Eleanora.



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This Sforza Almeni, when quite a youth, had been attached to the household of Duke Alessandro. He was the son of Messer Vincenzo Almeni, a gentleman of Perugia, and, when the Duke was assassinated by Lorenzino de' Medici, he performed the first charitable offices of the dead upon the bleeding body. Moreover, young Almeni's father was a faithful friend and confidant of Madonna Maria de' Salviati, the mother of Cosimo. In consequence of the devotion of both father and son, Sforza was taken into the household of the new Duke and eventually became his private secretary.

With Duchess Eleanora, Sforza became a great favourite, for he was most sympathetic and helpful in her schemes for the advancement and protection of her Spanish proteges. Both Cosimo and his consort bestowed many benefactions upon their faithful servitor. Among them was a monopoly in the supply of fish from Perugia to Florence, a privilege which put, upon the average, a good six hundred gold florins per annum into Messer Sforza's pocket!

The Duke also conferred upon his fortunate and trusty counsellor valuable property in the parish of San Piero a Quintole, a farm and buildings at Fiesole, and lastly, in 1565, a very fertile estate at Peccioli, originally the property of Piero de' Salviati.

Had Messer Sforza Almeni only been content with these opulent benefactions, all might have gone well with him; but, alas, human ambition and the interests of self lead good men often enough astray, and the Duke's private secretary began to look for favours at the hands of the heir to the Ducal throne, the Prince-Regent Francesco. In short, he attempted to serve two masters.

With a view to obtain the good graces of Don Francesco, Almeni began a system of betraying confidences of a strictly private and familiar character. Blessed with the spirit of flattery, like all consummate courtiers, he conceived it to be a stroke of excellent personal policy to purvey for his Highness' appreciation or the reverse, his father's intimate concerns.

He repeated the conversation the old Duke and he had held about Eleanora degli Albizzi and her child, and advised the Prince, for his own advantage, to inform his father that any steps he might take to advance his *innamorata* or their bastard, would be resented by him as Regent of the Duchy. Apparently Almeni did not regard the young mother with lenient eyes, but viewed her ascendancy over the infatuated Duke with disfavour, as offering rivalry to his own position.

Francesco, smarting under his father's strictures in respect to his amours with Bianca Buonaventuri, and resenting his constant interference in his private affairs no less than in his public duties, was only too ready to give ear to any scandal which he might turn to good account. At first he kept his own counsel, but one day, being unusually exasperated with words of reproach uttered by his father, Francesco proclaimed his

displeasure at, and opposition to, the views of the Duke with respect to Eleanora degli Albizzi.



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Cosimo knew at once how his secret had been exposed, and by whom. He managed to control his passion, but indignantly retorted that there was a son's duty to a father which should have taught Francesco to disbelieve unfavourable rumours. He returned at once to Castello.

Sforza Almeni, of course, entirely ignorant that Prince Francesco had unwittingly betrayed him, presented himself as usual before the Duke to learn his pleasure. Cosimo addressed him sternly: "Almeni, you have betrayed my confidence. You, who of all men I trusted implicitly! Go, get out of my sight. Go at once anywhere you will—only go—never let me see your face again!"

Almeni, dumfounded, set off at once for Florence. He knew too well Cosimo's temper to bandy words, and sought interviews with Prince Francesco and the Duchess Isabella. With their knowledge he remained in the city, perhaps faintly hoping the Duke might relent and send for him back. A few days later Cosimo went into Florence, and passing through an ante-chamber at the Pitti Palace, he was astounded to see Almeni calmly standing in the recess of a window.

No one else was in the room, and, as Almeni saluted his master and proceeded to make an appeal for mercy, Cosimo became infuriated at his disobedience and impertinence, and, reaching up to a hunting-trophy on the wall, he seized a stout boar-spear, and cried out in a loud voice—"Traitor, base traitor, thou art not fit to live, thou hast slandered thy master and fouled thy nest! Die!"

With a sudden thrust he struck the affrighted Almeni to the heart. It was a fatal wound, for, with a shriek of agony, the unhappy man fell at his master's feet, the shaft of the weapon still fast in his wound. The day was Wednesday, 22nd May 1566, the Eve of the Annunciation. The corpse lay there for several hours, and no questions were asked as to how and by whom Almeni had been done to death. At nightfall the *Misericordia* brethren wound him to his burial in the secret vaults of the dismantled church of San Piero Scheraggio.

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In less than a month after the murder of Sforza Almeni, Cosimo's dearly-loved little daughter died in sudden convulsions, due, it was reported, to the administration of poison. Eleanora was inconsolable, and the Duke did all he could to comfort her. He organised fetes and hunting-parties for her, and both at Castello and, even in Florence, he drove with her quite openly, treating her as his lawful wife.

Early in the following year Eleanora was once more *enceinte* and, on 13th May, she became the mother of another child, a boy, whom Cosimo declared was a true likeness of his famous father, Giovanni "delle Bande Nere," and consequently that name was given him. The Duke's happiness knew no bounds, but the arrival of this second child,



born out of wedlock and in the face of the hot displeasure of Duke Francesco and Duchess Giovanna, was the disenchantment of Cosimo's love-dream. The *liaison* could not continue, and, truth to tell, Cosimo himself was the cause of its cessation. The lustful old man had seen another lovely girl in Florence, and Eleanora's star became dimmed in the new effulgence!



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Eleanora's recovery and convalescence were not this time marked by the devotion of her lover, he never so much as went near her, although she was at Castello all the time and Giovanni was born there. The disillusionment of them both was as immediate as it was dramatic. It was reported that the Pope had written a remonstrance to Cosimo, and hinted that the creation of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, which the Duke earnestly coveted, was entirely out of the question until he had put away his mistress, and had renounced the errors of his way.

It may have been court gossip, but one reason for Duke Cosimo's drastic treatment of his *innamorata*, was the intimacy which had sprung up between Eleanora and his own precocious and vivacious son, Piero. If the father had fouled his couch, he could not allow his own son access thereto as well.

Then it was that Duke Cosimo missed the intelligent services of faithful, faithless Sforza Almeni—he would have done the dirty work of extricating his master from his false position as well, or better, than any one else. Eleanora and he had from the first been rivals for the confidences of the Duke, and hated each other heartily. She had good grounds doubtless for her contempt and distrust, by reason of the heartless and mean insinuations affecting her manner of life, which the trusty private secretary poured into the perhaps too ready ears of his master.

The solution, however, of Cosimo's dilemma came quite suddenly from a perfectly unexpected quarter—from the Pitti Palace. Francesco and Giovanna had never ceased trying to detach the old debauchee from his lascivious entanglements. His conduct was fatal to the reputation and the authority of his successor.

On 17th July a party of young men of good family riding out of one of the gates of the city, encountered another like company. One of the former, Carlo de' Panciatichi, accidentally cannoned against Jacopo d'Antonio, and the latter dismounted and demanded satisfaction for the presumed insult. A duel was promptly arranged, in which young Panciatichi dealt his opponent a fatal blow with his dagger. D'Antonio fell and was carried to the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, where he died three days after.

By Duke Cosimo's recent enactment, such an occurrence was counted as a criminal offence, which required purgation by the payment of a heavy fine, failure to pay being punished by sentence of death. The *Otto di Guardia e Balia* met and deliberated the matter, and imposed a fine of four thousand gold lire. This sum Messer Bartolommeo de' Panciatichi, Carlo's father, was unable to pay, and, in consequence, the lad was required to surrender himself for incarceration in the dungeons of the Bargello.

Carlo de' Panciatichi failed to report himself, and his sentence bore the added punishment for contempt of court. The unhappy father appealed for mercy, and, because the law of the Ducal Court was superior to that of the State, threw himself upon the protection of Duke Francesco.



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It was woman's wit which now untied the knot twisted about the young man's throat. The Duchess Giovanna has, by some, been credited with the origination of the tactful expedient, but some say Bianca Buonaventuri was its inspiratrix. Anyhow, the solution came in a form agreeable to all parties concerned, namely, the full pardon of the criminal—on condition of his immediate marriage with Eleanora degli Albizzi!

Carlo de' Panciatichi was thus made the scapegoat for Duke Cosimo's intrigue. The sentence of the *Otto* was quashed by the payment by the Duke of the heavy fine imposed in the first case; and in response to Duke Francesco's request, the charge of contempt was withdrawn. Neither Carlo nor Eleanora were consulted in the matter, but she was laden with costly presents by Duke Cosimo, and ten thousand gold florins found their way into Carlo's empty pockets!

This timely arrangement was made on 20th July, and Carlo and Eleanora became man and wife the following month. Duke Cosimo on the same day caused little Giovanni to be legitimatised, and he was entered in the Register of Baptisms as "Giovanni de' Medici, undoubted son of Cosimo I. Duke of Florence and Siena." An ample provision was made for the child's maintenance by the Duke, and Carlo de' Panciatichi agreed to his being an inmate in his house along with his mother.

The marriage was celebrated privately in the presence of the two Dukes, in the chapel of the Pitti Palace, and the young couple at once took up their residence at the Panciatichi Palace in the Via Larga. Upon Carlo was conferred the order of "Knight of San Stefano," and Messer Bartolommeo, his father, was enrolled as a senator for life.

It would appear that Eleanora abandoned herself to her new life with exemplary fortitude and resignation. She certainly had exchanged "new lamps for old," and she made the best of an honourable marriage, in spite of the violent and arrogant manner of her husband, whose fame as a violent *braggadocio* was a safeguard against the advances of young Piero de' Medici. Three years after the marriage a child was born, to whom the name of Cosimo was given, a laconic compliment to the old libertine! A second son appeared in 1571, Bartolommeo, but he died within a twelvemonth of his birth, and then, in 1577, came a third child to the Panciatichi mansion, another Bartolommeo, so Eleanora decreed. This boy, however, brought with him ineffaceable trouble, for Cavaliere Carlo refused to acknowledge him, and angrily pointed to Don Piero de' Medici as his putative father!

Piero made light of this charge—he was well used to that sort of thing, but, with rare effrontery, he held the infant at the font, whilst Panciatichi absented himself, and Eleanora made a tacit avowal of his parentage. The relations between Carlo and his wife had quite naturally never been of the best, and as gradually fears of death, upon the scaffold faded, or by a retributive d'Antonio hand, and he found himself the untrammelled master of his actions, he began to resent the callousness of the arrangement with Duke Cosimo, after 1570, Grand Duke of Tuscany.



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Eleanora's intrigue with Don Piero clenched the matter of her cohabitation with her husband. Carlo refused her both bed and board, and, in the spring of 1578, he forced her into the Franciscan convent of San Onofrio da Foligno—a favourite place of sanctuary for dishonoured gentlewomen!

Poor, sinful, sinned-against Eleanora, the pathetic example of a young and beautiful life wasted and corrupted by the ill-conditioned lusts of a profligate lover and his libertine son! With her freedom of action absolutely curtailed, and her complete isolation from her family, the gay and attractive mistress of Castello and of the Medici Palace at Pisa, with countless admirers and many lovers, was indeed an object of sympathetic commiseration. To be sure, the Cavaliere made ample provision for his wife's maintenance, appointed a small suite of attendants, and permitted her to carry with her many cherished bits of furniture and *bric-a-brac*. He likewise committed to her charge both her children, and offered no objection to occasional visits to his mother of Don Giovanni de' Medici, now a growing boy of eleven.

The Grand Duke Francesco cordially approved this arrangement. With respect to certain jewels and personal effects which Eleanora retained, the Grand Duke made an order that, as they belonged to *Guardaroba* of the Sovereign, they should be deposited, during the period of her residence in the convent, in the State Treasury.

Then a thick veil was drawn over the life of Eleanora di Cavaliere Carlo de' Panciatichi, and the gates of the convent were closed upon her, never to be opened for her egress! Her beauty and her talents, and the gaiety of her manner were matured, cultivated and restrained in harmony with her melancholy surroundings. Youth gave way to middle age, and middle age to the crepuscule of life, and the seasons came, and the seasons went, and one life in that sanctuary seemed fated to go on for ever. Forgotten and unvisited, Eleanora, the *druda* of Cosimo I., cast off and spurned; the *innamorata* of Piero de' Medici, wronged and despised; the wife of Carlo de' Panciatichi, divorced and cloistered, lived on and on, far beyond the scriptural limit of threescore years and ten—the pathetic victim of a callous world.

In the *Libri di Ricordanze* of the convent is a notice for the year 1634, which startles the sympathetic reader of the tragedy of Eleanora degli Albizzi: "Upon 19th March of this year there passed to a better life the most illustrious Lady, Donna Eleanora degli Albizzi de' Panciatichi, who had resided in this monastery for fifty-six years, and had reached the ninetieth year of her age. She lived in the odour of sanctity with the devotion of a religious, and endowed the monastery with a goodly bequest." The *Cosa di Cosimo—per il piacere di Cosimo!* as time-serving, unfatherlike Messer Luigi degli Albizzi called the immolation of his fair young daughter, had become the Bride of Christ!



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And what of unsympathetic, violent Carlo de' Panciatichi? Well, he, too, got his deserts. The very year after he had put away his wife, he again made himself liable to execution for murder. One morning a servant of his, Sebastiano del Valdarno, who had not been paid wages due to him, ventured to remind his master of the circumstance. Cavaliere Carlo, who could never tolerate demands for money with equanimity, was enraged by the man's presumption, and, seizing hold of a heavy pouch full of bronze *denari*, he flung it at the unlucky fellow, saying—"Go to hell and take your money with you!"

The impact fractured the man's skull and he died in hospital! Again Panciatichi was condemned to a heavy fine, with the capital sentence *in contumacia*, by the *Otto di Guardia e Balia*. He was conveyed to prison, the old *Stinche*, until he paid the fine. Eleanora, in her convent, heard of his punishment, and actually rendered him good for evil, as a tender-hearted and suffering woman would quite naturally do. She pleaded with the Grand Duke Francesco for his deliverance, and joined her son, Don Giovanni de' Medici, in her appeal.

Cavaliere Carlo de' Panciatichi was not set free till November 1581, when he had fully paid all the claims preferred against him by the family of the man he had slain, which included a provision for a certain *contadina*. She was a superior domestic servant in the employment of the Panciatichi family, and a personal attendant upon Eleanora. Madonna Ginevra, she was called, and she had two little girls. Whether these children were the Cavaliere's, no one has related, but upon the death of their mother they, too, found asylum at the convent of Sant Onofrio, and were tenderly treated by sad and lonesome Madonna Eleanora—a sweet and pathetic action indeed!

The Cavaliere raised his head once more under the guilty rule of Grand Duke Francesco's murderer, the unscrupulous Cardinal Ferdinando, and by him was appointed a Gentleman of Honour and a member of the new Grand Ducal Council of Two-Hundred. He died long before his doubly-wronged, unhappy wife, Eleanora, on the 27th February 1620.

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With Cammilla de' Martelli came the end of the prosperous reign and the end of the profligate life of Cosimo de' Medici, last Duke of Florence and first Grand Duke of Tuscany. She was the youngest of the two daughters, the only children, of Messer Antonio di Domenico de' Martelli, and his wife, Madonna Fiammetta, the daughter of Messer Niccolo de' Soderini, a descendant of that earlier Niccolo, the self-seeking and unscrupulous adviser of Don Piero de' Medici.

The Martelli traced their origin through two lines of ancestry: to the Picciandoni of Pisa in the thirteenth century, and to the Stabbielli of the Val di Sieve in the fourteenth. They appear to have settled in the Via degli Spadai, and to have "hammered" among the

armourers there, so successfully, that their name was given to the street in lieu of its more ancient designation.



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Messer Domenico, Cammilla's great-grandfather, was one of Savonarola's keenest opponents, chiefly in the interests of the Medici, and the great Cosimo counted him among his most trusty friends, but he suffered for his fidelity by being assassinated in 1531, by one Paolo del Nero. Another relative of Cammilla died tragically, Lodovico, who was killed by Giovanni Bandini in a duel at Poggio Baroncelli in 1530—a duel fought for the hand and heart of the beautiful Marietta de' Ricci, a relative of that other fateful flirt, Cassandra, who was the cause of Pietro Buonaventuri's tragic death, and died by the knives of assassins.

The Martelli were associated with many of the pious works of the Medici: for example, they assisted munificently in the building and endowment of the great church of San Lorenzo. In some way or other Messer Antonio had lit on evil days, at all events he appears to have lost the banking business, which had been mainly operative in the raising of his house, and had reverted to the less lucrative but still honourable occupation of his family—the craft of sword-making. He carried on his business in a house which he rented under the shadow of the Palazzo Pitti.

Both Cammilla and her elder sister Maria were good-looking girls. The latter, in 1566, married a wealthy shoemaker from Siena, Gaspare Chinucci, but her husband divorced her; and then Duke Cosimo caused her father to marry her, in 1572, to an opulent foreign merchant—Messer Baldassarre Suarez, who had come over from Spain and was a protege of the Duchess Eleanora.

Cammilla, born in 1547, possessed all the personal attractiveness which distinguished her mother, whose sister, Nannina, the wife of Messer Luigi degli Albizzi, was mother of Eleanora, Duke Cosimo's *druda*.

“Tall and of a good figure, fair complexion, with light hair, and a pair of dark eyes like two brilliant stars, she was also most graceful in her carriage and manner, full of intelligence in conversation, and quite naturally fond of admiration and amours.” This is a contemporary word-picture of the physical and mental charms of one of the most lovely girls that ever tripped merrily along the Lung' Arno Acciaiuoli—in the footsteps of Beatrice de' Portinari.

That promenade of Prince Cupid was always thronged by the belles and beaux of Florentine society. There the young men, and old men too, could meet and salute their *innamorate*. Duke Cosimo had not observed for nothing the daily walk of his fascinating young neighbour, he never overlooked a pretty face and comely figure, and his heart was large enough to entertain the loves of many women! His experience was very much like that of Dante Alighieri, who one day saw his Beatrice “in quite a new and entrancing light.”

It was in May, in 1564, when all was gay and fresh in Florence, that Duke Cosimo chanced upon Cammilla de' Martelli, as he passed on his way from the Pitti Palace to



Castello, to dawdle with the lovely Eleanora degli Albizzi, her cousin. Something prompted the Duke to accost the maiden,—her blush and his own tremor revealed delightful possibilities quite in his way! Very warily he approached Messer Antonio. His idea was probably to keep Eleanora at the Villa del Castello, and to take Cammilla away to his favourite residence, the Palace at Pisa.



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If Don Francesco and Duchess Giovanna were aggrieved by the intrigue already going on, it was conceivable that the trouble would be greatly intensified by a second. Cosimo did not wish their increased displeasure nor publicity, so, for a while, he kept his hopes and his intentions to himself. At last, inflamed more and more by the fresh, unsullied beauty of Cammilla, he broached his proposition to Messer Antonio. Greatly in need of money, and hoping much from court patronage, the unnatural father determined to follow the example of his brother-in-law, and surrender, for a worthy consideration, his child as a "*Cosa di Cosimo il Duca.*"

The cast-off Eleanora was married, as we have read, to Cavaliere Carlo de' Panciatichi in September 1567, and on 28th May—eight months after—Cammilla de' Martelli gave birth, at Pisa, to a dear little girl, the latest child of Duke Cosimo! This was by no means to the mind of Duke Francesco, and news of the birth quickly reached the ears of the Pope. His Holiness at once despatched a courier to Duke Cosimo, urging him to legitimatise the child by his immediate marriage with the mother.

This was not at all what the Duke wanted; he preferred, of course, to be quite free to love any girl or woman that he might single out. Nevertheless the pressure was so great that he was compelled to yield; and, in January 1569, he took Cammilla to be his wedded wife, but not to share his Ducal title! That was forbidden by the emphatic opposition of the acting Duke and Duchess, and by the direct intervention of the Emperor Maximilian.

Messer Antonio de' Martelli was in ecstasies, and his unconcealed delight gained for him the nickname "*Il Balencio,*" "like Whalebone"! It is said that when his wife's kinsman, Alamanno de' Pazzi, ventured to congratulate him at his house in the Via Maggio, he found the place gaily decorated, and musicians playing before the door!

"What is this brave show for, Messer Antonio?" he asked.

"Why, Ser Alamanno, I have married my daughter to the Duke Cosimo. Rejoice with me to-day. We have now no relations but Emperors and Princes, what would you!"

Cosimo created his wife's father a Knight of the Order of San Stefano and endowed him with a good annual income. At the same time he advanced Madonna Maria di Baldassarre Suarez to the rank of a Gentlewoman of the Court, and caused unhappy Gaspare Chinucci to be banished out of Tuscany; some indeed say that he even instigated his assassination! Messer Suarez was promoted to an honourable place at Court, and his name was changed to Martelli. Two sons and a daughter blessed his union with Madonna Maria. Violante, as the girl was christened, grew up, as beautiful as her aunt Cammilla, with a pair of eyes like hers, and nothing could restrain the passion of that young libertine, Don Piero de' Medici, for love of her—he was indeed his father's son!



Nevertheless she was not to be his *innamorata* alone, for Cardinal Ferdinando also “came and saw and conquered,” and young Violante became his chief mistress in Florence—the rival in his affections of his father’s fascinating young wife, her aunt Cammilla.



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In 1570, Cosimo went in State to Rome to be crowned by the Pope as first Grand Duke of Tuscany. From his Holiness he obtained a reversion of the title in perpetuity for his descendants. The Easter of that year he spent at the Pitti Palace, and then he hurried off to Castello to pass the rest of his days with his dearly-loved and charming young wife.

Once there, he dismissed almost all the members of his suite, retaining only two secretaries, a chaplain (!) and two couriers, wishing to lead the quiet life of a country gentleman. He apportioned to his wife Cammilla four gentlewomen as maids of honour. Henceforward neither Cosimo nor Cammilla were seen but rarely in Florence. They spent their time together either at Castello, at Poggio a Caiano, or in Pisa.

December and May had been mated—the former had his consolations, but the latter pined quite naturally for young society. Love is cold and love is captious where age and temperament disagree. Cammilla sighed for the gaities, the pleasures, and gallantries of Florence. Love's young dream had not been hers, she had not chosen her ancient lover. But admiration for her sprang from a likely though an unexpected quarter, and her cavalier was not warned off by a jealous husband, as was poor Eleanora degli Albizzi's.

The Grand Duke Cosimo, to the very last, kept up the appearance of religion, if not its realities. The fact that a son of his was a member of the Sacred College, and a possible occupant of the chair of St Peter, covered a multitude of sins; not that Cardinal Ferdinando was a mirror of virtue or an example of sanctity.

Ferdinando's relations with Francesco and Bianca were as bad as could be. His arrogance and extortions rendered his presence at the Florentine court unwelcome and even dangerous. At Castello and Poggio a Caiano, on the other hand, he was an honoured guest, and, for lack of lovers, his young stepmother was not displeased by his attentions. Cosimo kept her strictly in seclusion, and she had not the courage, or, be it said, the impudence of her stepdaughter, the Duchess of Bracciano. The loves of the Cardinal and Cammilla were in secret and unprovocative; indeed, the Grand Duke encouraged the intrigue, as being "for Cammilla's good."

Here was a pretty state of affairs. One son, Piero, the seducer of his mistress, Eleanora degli Albizzi, the other, Ferdinando, the lover of his wife! It would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to exonerate Cosimo from the blame of Cammilla's unfaithfulness. If she sinned, she did so helplessly.

Alas, that she listened not only to the amorous vows of Ferdinando, but also gave credence to his views concerning the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess in Florence. She knew, of course, that there was no love lost between herself and them; and she was quite ready to entertain the evil insinuations which the late Duchess Giovanna had ventilated with reference to Bianca.



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This cabal was perfectly well known to the Grand Duke Cosimo, but he let matters take their course; all he cared for was the embraces of his attractive wife and the flatteries of his hypocritical son. The death of Duchess Giovanna threw Ferdinando and Cammilla more than ever into one another's arms. What, and if Francesco and Bianca died without male heir! Why, on the death of Cosimo, Ferdinando and Cammilla might succeed to the Grand Ducal throne. This was the temptation which the Cardinal placed, like a young bud, in Cammilla's bosom. She was but human—very human; she had been slighted by the non-allowance of rank as Grand Duchess. Perhaps Destiny had still that distinction in reserve. She would wait.

The pathos of Cammilla's life deepened during the last four years of Grand Duke Cosimo's life. He became a constant sufferer with many infirmities. The strenuous life he had lived, with its exercise of lustful love and lurid hate, tried to the breaking point his iron constitution. Gout was his direst torment, a malady productive of ill-humour at its worst, and poor Cammilla, lonely wife, nurse, companion, had none to share his impatience.

Her own health gave way under the strain, and her indisposition pointed to apoplexy and to mental trouble. But deliverance came at last. On 20th April 1574, Cosimo breathed his last at Poggio a Caiano, in his fifty-fifth year. By his death-bed there watched only his chastened wife and his sanctimonious son. Of his other surviving children, Isabella—once his favourite—had suffered for sixteen years the misunderstandings and the heartburnings which her heartless marriage-contract had imposed; she was estranged from him and from Cammilla, and from the Cardinal. Piero was a wastrel, the exponent of his father's worst passions—Piero, "*Il Scandalezzatore*" as he was rightly called. Francesco had borne ten years' embarrassment as quasi-ruler of the State, subject to ceaseless cautions and contradictions: he was, in no sensuous or homicidal sense, his father's son. All three stayed markedly away from Poggio a Caiano.

* * * * *

Almost the first act of the new Sovereign was the enclosure of his father's young widow in a convent! He placed her first with the Benedictine nuns of the Vergine dell' Annunziata delle Murate, and then in the noble sanctuary of Santa Monica, not with her poor cousin Eleanora degli Albizzi away at Foligno!

This certainly appears to the ordinary reader of romances a cruel and unjustifiable act, but to the student of diplomatic expediency, it was a foregone conclusion. The security of Francesco's rule depended entirely upon the suppression of dynastic intrigues. The person of Ferdinando was unassailable; as a Prince of the Church he had prerogatives which could not be removed by any temporal sovereign. All that Francesco could do was to forbid his presence upon Tuscan territory, and this he did.



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It does not appear that the unhappy Cammilla de' Medici was harshly used; indeed her residence within the convent was made as agreeable as possible, and she had the privilege of receiving visitors, other than political. Madonna Costanza de' Pazzi and eight other noble ladies were attached to her suite, with five Gentlemen of Honour and several domestics.

Cavaliere Antonio de' Martelli pleaded in vain his right as father of Cammilla to take her and her child back under the parental roof. The Grand Duke was immovable in his resolution, he counselled the father to let the matter rest, and gave him and Madonna Fiammetta free access to their daughter, but, on no account, was she to visit them.

As in the case of Eleanora degli Albizzi, an inventory of jewellery and other treasures was made, and whilst Cammilla was permitted to retain certain articles, such objects as were regarded as the property of the reigning Grand Duchess were transferred to the *Guardaroba* of Bianca. Apparently Francesco determined that no action of his against his father's widow should be construed into a menace against his Government.

Writing to the Grand Duke, on 7th August 1574, soon after Cammilla's reception, the Very Reverend Abbess of Santa Monica humbly thanked his Serene Highness "for the generous treatment of the young widow, and begs remembrance of his good offices for her and for the convent generally."

Trustees were appointed, under the presidency of Messer Roberto de' Adimari, the Chancellor of the Monte de' Pietà, for the administration of the one hundred and four thousand gold florins—the fortune left by Duke Cosimo to the Lady Cammilla, which produced an annual income of four thousand eight hundred gold florins a year, equal to about L2000.

Cammilla settled down as best she could to a life of leisured ease—a lonesome woman, a prisoner under close observation. News of the outside world she had, and when the report of the horrors of the year 1576 reached her, she was prostrated with grief. Indeed, her time seems to have been spent with repining, weeping and sickness—a piteous existence for a young woman of twenty-seven.

At length Cammilla braced herself to bear her disappointments, her trials, her imprisonment, with fortitude, and, like the good woman she really was, she set to work to occupy her time, and that of her suite, in useful and interesting occupations. Gardening and the care of flowers attracted her, and soon the cloisters of the convent were converted into bowers of roses and myrtles.

Her ladies and the nuns also, she encouraged in all elegant handicrafts—silk-embroidery, lace-making, and other stitchery. The results of their industry procured immediate custom, and the noble cloths and lustrous silks of Santa Monica, with the Lady Cammilla's initials attached, became famous far and near. These objects



consisted of pillow-cases, screens, portieres, decorative panels, banners, scarves, cushions, handkerchiefs, bodices and various other details of feminine attire, with rich vestments for the clergy, and sumptuous altar-cloths.



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The Grand Duchess Bianca, who, with characteristic sweetness and generosity, had all along sympathised with poor Lady Cammilla, was the best customer of the convent industries, and, moreover, she frequently visited the gentle prisoner, and showed her many charming attentions. For two Medici brides, also, Cammilla superintended the preparation of trousseaux—her own daughter Virginia, Duke Cosimo's child, and the Grand Duke's eldest daughter, Maria, who married King Henry IV. of France.

Another sort of employment found in the Lady Cammilla an earnest and skilful directress, namely, the manufacture of sweetmeats, preserves, compotes, pastries, and every sort of delectable confectionery. Perfumes and liqueurs—usually the piquant produce of monasteries—were also cunningly extracted by Cammilla's subtle formulas. These elegant specialities she gave away to old friends and visitors—enclosed in delicate little glass and porcelain bottles and jars of her own design.

The fame of the Lady Cammilla's skill and patronage reached foreign courts, and notable visitors to Florence did not fail to pay their courtesies to the great lady of the convent. Two of these, the Archpriest Monsignore Simone Fortuna, confessor of the Duke of Urbino, and Cavaliere Ercole Cortile, the ambassador of Ferrara, have recorded their visits and their pleasure at seeing "La Serena Signora" in genial company and philanthropically employed. The wily priest added, with sanctimonious admiration for female beauty: "La Martelli is as fascinating as ever!"

Still, liberty is liberty, and captivity—even when made as attractive and as unoppressive as possible—is still captivity. The Lady Cammilla never left the confines of her convent for twelve long years, and not till 4th February 1586 was she allowed a *conge*. Then a sumptuous cavalcade, with splendid sedan-chairs, halted at the main portal of Santa Monica, and out of one stepped the Grand Duchess Bianca, in gorgeous State robes. She had come to escort in person the Lady Cammilla, with every mark of respect and honour, to the marriage of her daughter, Virginia de' Medici!

The young girl was just eighteen, passably old for a sixteenth-century noble bride! In 1575, she had been assigned as the consort in prospect of Cavaliere Mario Sforza, General of the army of the Grand Duke Francesco. The match, however, was broken off, when Cardinal Alessandro Sforza died, and left an immense fortune, but not to his nephew Mario, as had been expected; and so Mario proved to be too poor a suitor for the girl's hand.

Mario, on his side, had cooled much in his ardour for Virginia. Reports of the Cardinal de' Medici's—Ferdinando's—familiarities, not only with the mother, but with the daughter also, were rife in Florence and in Rome. Sufficient grounds there were for him to accept the cancellation of the proposal with equanimity. The Marchese, for so he had been created, was not a whit more virtuous than the men of his day, but the sensuous are always the harshest judges of their kind!



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No, Virginia was, after all, married to Don Cesare d'Este, Duke of Modena. She had by the way, been promised, in 1581, to Francesco Sforza di Santa Fiora, but he changed his mind and renounced the world—conventionally of course—to accept the Cardinal's red hat and privileges from the hands of Pope Gregory XIII. So constantly were natural human instincts dulled by the contrariety of fashion in those degenerate days!

Of Virginia's marriage Torquato Tasso, the Grand Duchess Bianca's enamoured poet-laureate, sang:

“Cio che morte rallenta
Amore restringa!”

Virginia died in 1615—some said she was poisoned by her husband—the last of a degraded race. *Sic transit gloria Medici!*

The ceremonial of the nuptials was as splendid as a sumptuous Court could make it, and as became the union of a princess of the House of Medici with an ambitious foreign Sovereign. But whilst men and women gossiped delightedly about the charms of the beauteous young bride and the gallant bearing of the groom, every tongue expressed wonderment at the gracious, stately figure of the Lady Cammilla. The chorus of popular applause was hushed, however, when the pathos of her story struck sorrowful chords in every heart.

Upon the obverse of the medals struck for the Duke Cosimo for their wedding, twelve years before, the Signora is represented as a finely-developed woman, with the proud profile of a true daughter of Florence, a high brow, a shapely nose, full cheeks, and a dimpled chin. Her attire is rich, she wears costly jewels, and her hair is tastefully coiffured.

What Cammilla's feelings were, she only knew, and she told them to no one; she bore herself loftily, and made no one her confidante. After the solemnity and festivities she betook herself once more—she had no other choice—to her convent prison, the poorer for the loss of her cherished child, the richer in the estimation of all good people.

Henceforth, her inclusion among the Religious was to be more rigorous, and she never expected to be seen again in Florence: dolorous indeed must have been that parting with the world she loved, but so little knew. She viewed the coming years with apprehension and hopelessness. She had not reached the measure of her destiny, but for that, mercifully, she had not very long to wait, and yet there was to be another slight rift in the clouds of misery.

From time to time Cammilla had suffered from fainting fits and attacks of hysteria, but after her separation from Virginia, these increased greatly in frequency and intensity. Skilful medical treatment was of no avail, and at length her doctors appealed to the



Grand Duke for some relaxation of her imprisonment. Freedom from restraint and the benefit of urgently needed change, they knew, would work wonders in the way of recovery.

Don Francesco was immovable to all such representations; he had over and over again declined to reverse or modify his decision. His fully justified fear of the Cardinal's intrigues acted as a negative magnet to all his best propositions. He and she were bound together, he felt sure, in schemes for his own undoing, and Bianca's too.



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The Lady Cammilla's life became at last intolerable; sickness, suspicion, and discontent fastened their dire influences upon her. She neglected useful and ornamental pastimes, became morose and impatient, and gave way to fits of frenzied desperation. The Abbess, greatly alarmed, took counsel with her spiritual advisers, who judged that the unhappy lady was losing her reason, and, perchance, her soul. Her condition became so critical that in April 1587 the Tuscan ambassador in Rome applied to the Pope for permission for the chaplain of the convent to celebrate a Mass for the exorcism of the poor lady!

In October of that year the fell schemes of Cardinal Ferdinando had, at last, their fruition, and the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess died together at Poggio a Caiano, victims of his jealousy and hate. He obtained at last what he had striven for so unscrupulously for twenty years—the succession to the Tuscan throne.

Be it, however, in justice told, with respect to the Lady Cammilla, for, when he had spurned the dead body of the Grand Duchess, and hypocritically sad, had followed the remains of his poisoned brother to San Lorenzo, he went right off to the convent of Santa Monica, and acquainted her personally with the fact of delivery from a living tomb.

They had only met very occasionally during the last few years, and she had changed greatly—perhaps he had, too. Her terrible trials, her bodily sicknesses, and her mental derangements had made ineffaceable marks in the erstwhile beauteous girl, and Cammilla de' Medici was no longer possible as the wife of the renegade Cardinal. Marriage was out of the question for her; indeed, her very existence was at stake, and all that Ferdinando could do was to alleviate the sufferings of his *innamorata*, and to cheer her declining days.

Many years before, Ferdinando had purchased a piece of ground at the confluence of the Arno and Pesa, and, upon it, he built the Villa Ambrogiana, which he furnished in lavish style, boasting that "it will be handy when I come into my own!" This estate, with a sufficient household, he made over to the Lady Cammilla, for her own free use. Before, however, she took up her residence, Ferdinando, now, of course, Grand Duke of Tuscany, placed at her disposal a country villa in the Val d'Ema, to which the suffering Signora was taken, in the hope that the fresh air and pleasant outlook would assist the recovery of her health and spirits.

She improved wonderfully in every way—the fact that she was again her own mistress and free to come and go at will, fortified her immensely, and she determined to devote the residue of her life to the interests of Ferdinando. Called upon, at his succession to the throne, to renounce his spiritual character—it was a character, indeed, which ill-fitted him—the new Grand Duke devoted himself to the duties of his high station. The Lady Cammilla, who had been his confidante in days gone by, was still retained as counsellor and guide. Marriage was the most urgent necessity of the Grand Duke for the procreation of legitimate heirs.



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He was surrounded by heirs-presumptive and aspirants to the throne—Don Antonio, his brother's adopted son; Don Giovanni, his father's legitimatised son by Eleanora degli Albizzi; his brother Piero, and any one of his bastard sons, and several other scions of the house. The Lady Cammilla entered heartily into all her stepson's ideas, and quickly, though doubtlessly regretfully, agreed with him that a brilliant foreign alliance was an absolute necessity.

Together they passed in review the names of all the eligible princesses in Europe, and at last their choice fell upon Princess Christina, the young daughter of Charles, Duke of Lorraine, and nephew of Queen Caterina de' Medici. She was received in Florence with joy, and married to the Grand Duke in 1589. The Lady Cammilla graced the nuptials with her presence, laying aside the dark-hued garments of sorrow which she had assumed and worn so long.

That was the last time Cammilla was seen in public; she retired first to her villa on the Arno, and then, seeing that the symptoms of illness were returning, she voluntarily retired once more into what had been her prison and her home—the convent of Santa Monica, where she breathed her last on the 30th of May 1590, at the early age of forty-five, to the unutterable sorrow of the devoted ladies of her suite and her faithful attendants. In the *Libri de' Morti* (1577-1591) we read under that date: "La Signora Cammilla d'il Serenissimo Gran Duca Cosimo de' Medici, despositata in San Lorenzo." Some say she died imbecile.

Upon the reverse of one medal, which Cosimo had struck in honour of their nuptials, was cut around the heraldic emblazonment of an oak tree and a dragon, her legend: "*Uno avulso non deficit alter aureus.*" This may be the epitome of her life's history, and upon it one may moralise at will; and certainly readers of the "Tragedy of Cammilla de' Martelli" will admit that a spoilt life is as great a catastrophe as a violent death.

* * * * *

It requires no great stretch of the imagination to picture the morals and the manners of society in Tuscany during the last half of the sixteenth century. The superabundance of private riches and the enervation of idle leisure destroyed the framework of domestic economy; "*Di fare il Signore!*"—to play the gentleman—was the current mode. Everyone strove to surpass his neighbours in luxury and extravagance.

The example of the Court was felt in every grade of life: marital unfaithfulness, personal spleen, and family feuds divided every household. The worst of human passions ran riot, and life became a pandemonium, wherein the sharp poignard, the poison phial, and the strangling rope, played their part at the dastardly will of their owners.

Fair Florence was still—as she will ever be—"The City of the Lily"; but the blue and silver emblematic *giglio*—the modestly unfolding fragrant iris of the unsophisticated



countryside, drooped before the flaming, passionate tiger-lily of the formal garden of debauchery, with its pungent odour and its secretive, incurled scarlet petals—splashed with the blacks and yellows of crime and greed!



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“Nature ever
Finding discordant fortune, like all seed
Out of its proper climate, thrives but ill:
But were the world content to work,
And work on the foundation Nature lays,
It would not lack of excellence.” ...

IL PARADISO, *Canto viii*.

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Florence, *Ammoniti*
" "Il governo d'un solo"
" "Tyrant of"
" hot-bed of crime
" first of modern states
" office of Gonfaloniere
" Giustizia abolished
" "A monster"
" fortress of San Giovanni



- " tyrannicide studies
- " violent deaths in
- " patronage of Cosimo I.
- " Cappella degli Spagnuoli
- " Accademia della Crusca
- " " delle Elevati
- " training of children in
- " "Cicisbeo"
- " "Partiti"
- " "The Three Graces"
- " "City of Assassins"

Fondi, Castle of
Francis I., King of France
Franzese, Napoleone

G

Gaci, Alessandro
Gianfigliuzzi, Bongiano
Ginori, Caterina
" Francesco
Giovanni da Perugia
Guicciardini, Francesco
Guicciardini, Luigi
Gregory XIII., Pope

H



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Henry II., King of France

J

Julius II., Pope
" III, Pope

L

Lando, Michael, "Ciompi" rising
"La Simonetta"

M

Macchiavelli, Niccolo
Madrigals, Francesco de' Medici's
Maffei, Frate Antonio
Malatesti, Family of
" Jacopo
" Lamberto
" Leonida
" Malatesta
Martelli, Family of
" Antonio
" Baccio, Admiral
" Cammilla (see Medici)
" Domenico
" Maria
" Violante
Maximilian, Emperor
Medici, Alamanno
" Alessandro, First Duke of Florence
" Alfonsina d'Orsini
" Antonio, supposititious son of Bianca Cappello
" Ardingo
" Averardo I.
" " II.
" " III., "Bicci"
" Bianca Cappello-Buonaventuri
" Bianca, daughter of Piero "il Gottoso"
" Bonagiunto



" Cammilla de' Martelli
" Caterina, Queen of France
" Chiarissimo I.
" " II.
" " III.
" Clarice d'Orsini
" Clarice, wife of Filippo negli Strozzi
" Contessina (de' Bardi)
" Cosimo, "Il Padre della Patria"
" Cosimo I., First Grand Duke of Tuscany
" Cristina of Lorraine
" Eleonora de' Toledo
" Eleanora de' Garzia
" Ferdinando, son of Cosimo I., Cardinal
" Filippo or Lippo
" Filippo, son of Grand Duke Francesco
" Francesco, Second Grand Duke of Tuscany
" Garzia, son of Cosimo I.
" Gianbuono
" Giovanna of Austria
" Giovanni, First Tragedy
" " son of Averardo III.
" " son of Cosimo "Il Padre della Patria" (_ see_ Chart)
" " "Il Popolano"
" " son of "Il Magnifico"
" " "delle Bande Nere"
" " son of Cosimo I., Cardinal
" " son of Eleonora degli Albizzi
" " Second "Grand" Medici
" " Pope Leo X.
" Giuliano, "Il Pensieroso"
" " son of "Il Magnifico," Duke of Nemours
" " brother of Lorenzino
" Giulio, Pope Clement VII.
" Ippolito, Cardinal
" Isabella Romola, daughter of Cosimo I.
" "La Bia"
" Laudomia, daughter of Pierfrancesco II.
" Lorenzo, son of Giovanni, "Bicci"
" " "Il Magnifico"
" " Duke of Urbino
" " "Il Terribile"
" Luigia,, daughter of "Il Magnifico"
" Lucrezia, de' Tornabuoni
" " daughter of "Il Magnifico"



" " daughter of Cosimo I.

" Maddalena, daughter of "Il



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Magnifico”

- " Maddalena, daughter of Pierfrancesco II.
- " Margaret of Austria
- " Maria Lucrezia, daughter of Cosimo I.
- " Maria Lucrezia, Queen of France
- " Palace of Via Larga
- " Palace of Pitti
- " Pierfrancesco II.
- " Piero, “Il Gottoso”
- " " son of “Il Magnifico”
- " " son of Cosimo I.
- " Salvestro I.
- " " First “Grand” Medici
- " Tommaso, Court Chamberlain
- " Virginia, daughter of Cosimo I.

Montemurlo, battle of

Montesicco, Condottiere G.B. da
Mugello, valley of

N

Neroni, Giovanni

Nori, Francesco

O

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- " Alfonsina (see Medici)
- " Clarice (see Medici)
- " Paolo Giordano, Duke of Bracciano
- " Rinaldo, Archbishop
- " Roberto
- " Troilo

Orte Oricellari

P

Pandolfini, Agnolo

Panciatichi, Carlo



Passerini, Cardinal Silvio de'
Paul II., Pope
" III., Pope
" IV., Pope
Pazzi, Family of
" Andrea
" Antonio I.
" " II.
" " III.
" Constanza
" Francesco
" Giacopo
" Giovanni
" Guglielmo
" Piero
" Renato
" Wronging of the
" "Ordinamenti di Giustizia" and the
Pellegrina, daughter of Bianca Cappello
Perugino, Giovanni
Petrucci, Cesare de'
Philip, King of Spain
Pitti, Gianozzo
Pius IV., Pope
Platonic Academy
Poggio a Caiano, Villa of
Poliziano, Agnolo
Portinari, Beatrice
Poviano, Frate Stefano
Prato, sack of
Pratolino, Villa of
Pucci, Giovanni

R

Renata, Duchess of Ferrara
Riari, Antonio
" Caterina
" Girolamo, Count
" Piero, Cardinal
Ricci, Cassandra
Riccio, Pierfrancesco
Ridolfi, Antonio
" Piero
" Rosso
Rome, sack of



S

Salviati, Family of

" Francesco, Archbishop

" Giacomo

" Giacopo

" Giacopo di Giacopo

" Maria

" Pietro

Sansoni, Raffaele, Cardinal

Santa Monica, Convent of

San Onofrio, Convent of

Savonarola, Frate G.

Sforza, Almeni, Cosimo I.'s secretary

" Caterina

" Galeazzo Maria, Duke of Milan

Sixtus IV., Pope

Sixtus VI., Pope

Soderini, Family of

" Dianora (de' Tornabuoni)

" Francesco

" Maria

" Niccolo

" Piero

" Tommaso

Strozzi, Alessandra (de' Machingi)

" Filippo

" Roberto

Stufa, Agnolo della

" Luigi

" Sismondo



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Tana, Villa della

Tasso, Torquato

"The Golden Rose"

Torello, Lelio

Tornabuoni, Giovanni de'

" Lorenzo de'

" Lucrezia (see Medici)

" Dianora (see Soderini)

Tovallaccino, Michael

Tyrants, families of

"Tyrant of Tyrants"

U

Urbino, Federigo, Duke of

V

Varchi, Benedetto

Vespucci, Marco